

performing art

An interview of Madhavi Mudgal

GROWING UP WITH MUSIC

by Lubna Marium

'When Krishna pleads tenderly, you react harshly, when he is loving you are quarrelsome, when he approaches you expectantly you turn away rejecting him. O Radha - it is for this reason that even the sandalbalm seems like poison to you, the soothing moonbeam and the joys of loveplay torment you. O friend - give up this baseless pride'

The audience watch entranced, as the petite lotus-eyed dancer portrays Radhika's agony with exquisite sensitivity. Soon, one transcends the realm of lyrics and movements and is overwhelmed with the emotions portrayed. The mind goes from the 'container to that which is contained'.

That is the power of Madhavi Mudgal's dance. One of the finest exponents of the Odissi style of Indian Classical dance, Madhavi is, rightly, known for her refined sensibilities and subtlety, and for perfection in stagecraft and presentation.

Born into a family of musicians devoted to furthering the arts, from childhood she was nurtured in the highest values of classicism. Her father Vinay Chandra Maudgalia and mother Padma Devi, both musicians, came from Pune in 1939 and set up the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya with the intention of spreading the message of music in the, then, stark environs of Delhi. Madhavi speaks of her childhood as 'Just music, music, and music all around. Musicians living, eating discussing music...raags and bandishes. That's how I grew up. Besides the school, there used to be concerts. I've heard everybody. Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, Gangubai...I mean name any artiste they all were there. We never sat down seriously (to learn music)...it used to be great fun. You know...the shamianas and flowers...all that we remember and food of course. I remember, musicians love eating good food'

Now the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya is an institution to be reckoned with. With its own four storeyed building it can boast of a present count of 1500 students. The Vidyalyaya conducts classes for vocal music, sitar, flute, tabla and dance. The exams, conducted country-wide by the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya Mandal are officially recognized. So how did all this happen? 'It was difficult. Our home and school were the same. You know, during the day the rooms where we stayed would be classrooms and at night the same rooms would be our rooms or the musicians guest rooms. Our whole house...in fact, we never had a private bedroom till much, much later. My mother used to sing, but I think with four children she had to give it up. Of course, she was teaching...looking after all these musicians. I don't remember eating a single meal just with our own family. There were always people'

Eyes brimming with unshed tears, Madhavi fondly reminisces her father's untiring efforts. 'What my father has done...now we can comprehend. Any part of the world we go, someone will come and say we learnt with your father'. The school has nurtured talents like Madhup Mudgal, her renowned singer brother, Prakash Vadra the flautist, Vinay Kumar, et al. 'Its not the known musicians like that, but most of

them are music teachers. In terms of music education and music listening....., you know, education to understand music, his contribution is immense. He used to say, 'I'm not making Tansens, I'm making Kaansens.' And how right he was. Well, the world certainly is in need of a few more dedicated souls like the Mudgal family.

Of her own chosen style Madhavi, smiles and says, 'Its the lyricism of Odissi that I love. The flow in it. That's why I chose to do it'. Starting Kathak, at age four to reach professional status by the time she was fourteen, Madhavi switched to Odissi. This, after training under Guru Hare Krishna Behera and later under the outstanding maestro, Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, who has contributed vastly to the revival of this dance form. 'It was a difficult choice. Musically, in Kathak I had more choices...more access to musicians. But, I found Odissi had more scope for expression. The basic Odissi bhangis and how the movements flow into the other. It connects very nicely. The angahara, literally, the beading of one karana (movement) with another... the process of reaching one movement with a certain span of time. That is the most beautiful. And it is so subtle. I was of course privileged to come under the tutelage of Guruji (Kelucharan Mahapatra). The insights that he gives you in terms of the essence and beauty of the style....I was very fortunate'.

Madhavi Mudgal says it is the sanskaras, values, learnt from her parents which have helped her to come where she is today. And a long way she has come. She is credited with contributing to her chosen art form a distinctive and unique flavour. Through the years she has received numerous awards and honours, including the Sanskriti Award in 1984, the Padma Shri in 1990 and the Orissa State Sangeet Natak Academy Award in 1996.

The music lovers in Dhaka have savoured Madhavi Mudgal's Odissi recitals twice. Her performances scheduled for the 1st and 2nd of March, 1998 are being looked forward to, eagerly. This time Madhavi, also a sometime student of Architecture, will be presenting her group choreography within the traditional art of Odissi, proving that contrary to popular belief, the intricately structured framework provides immense possibilities for new concepts and ideas.

Her training in Architecture gives her the love of forms and shapes. 'I love choreography. Because, when I teach I have, you know, more girls dancing at the same time and you see certain possibilities of movement in terms of group work...in terms of treatment of space. Solo dancing is of course more fulfilling....gives emotional nourishment...but its an individual interpretation. Certain things cannot be done. You know, in a group, the multiplicity of it gives it a dimension that is not possible otherwise. Shapes and forms. Its to bring out that dimension that is absent in our normal repertoire. You feel the space and take the whole space in it is entirety. I'm so surprised that...when you are teaching...very few students go beyond their bodies. Its a very lovely thing to make them feel that space...they have to reach out. It does not finish there. That kind of fun thing...they also suddenly see,they



see something else, when they feel the centre of the stage. When you take a movement in certain direction the whole space, whole line should be visible to the audience. This is what I make

them feel. I love to teach. I teach little ones. This commitment, teaching....is what I get from my father.'

That is Madhavi Mudgal, the dancer, for you.

Then again there is Madhavi serving delicious vegetarian food in her starkly beautiful, grass carpeted, terraced New Delhi apartment; Madhavi briskly maneuvering the streets of the capital city

in her tiny Maruti; and of course, Madhavi, with her discerning eye for the best and the beautiful, helping friends do their saree shopping - but then all that has to be left for another day. ■

profile

William Golding: A Nobel Prize Winning English Novelist

By ASM Nurunnabi

WILLIAM Golding won Nobel Prize for literature in 1983. He established his reputation as a novelist during the decade between 1954 and 1964. His first book, 'Lord of the Flies', won him both critical and popular acclaim and is still the work with which he is most often associated. The story of the reversion of English schoolboys to state of savagery on a deserted island contains many of the themes and questions that have continued to dominate the rest of Golding's canon; they revolve around the concepts of man's fall, the nature of evil, and the possibility of redemption.

Each of the five novels Golding produced in his first decade of fictional publication examined these concepts in different times and places and from

different viewpoints.

'The Inheritors', a novel the author once called his best, reverts to pre-history and depicts the eradication of Neanderthalensis by a supposedly superior tribe of Homosapiens who already show all the traits of inherent evil. 'Pincher Martin', a first person singular novel set during World War II, is narrated by a selfish, grabbing, murderous naval officer who imagines himself staying alive on a rock-tooth of an island, like a modern Prometheus rebelling against a Christian God. 'Free Fall' features one of those artistic questions who appear in many of Golding's works.

In addition to a fine style that was poetic without being ostentatious, his first five novels displayed a passionate intensity, a singularly fine eye for detail, a distaste for the contemporary, and the ability to produce mythic and allegorical effects from exciting stories. Numerous critics pointed out that he

owed much to earlier writers, particularly RM Ballantyne, HG Wells, Albert Camus and St. Augustine. But despite the many influences, allusions, borrowings echoes, and almost paradoxical contradictions that pervaded Gold's fiction, by the mid-1960s, he had emerged as perhaps the most original of post-war English novelists, and certainly the one who had gained the widest of audiences outside his native land.

Then for the next 15 years, Golding remained almost completely fallow. However, his three earlier novellas his publishers gathered together in 1971 under the title of the lead piece 'The Scorpion God' were considered better. These socio-economic tales reflect several of Golding's most rewarding interests: Egyptology, prehistory, and classical Roman times. 'Clonk Clonk,' like 'The Inheritors', deals with the adventures of early men and women. And the etiology of names in a cave society dom-

inated by women. 'The Scorpion God' centres on the death of a pharaoh from the Middle Kingdom and the efforts of his jester to become the new pharaoh. Filling out the collection was they story of ancient Rome.

Since Golding published no other fiction until 1979, this second period of his career seemed to be token not simply waning powers but perhaps an early literary demise. Some critics wondered whether he had died or was "the stunned victim of future shock". 'Darkness Visible' in 1979 provided a fairly reassuring answer. Here the author resurfaced with enough force and skill to depict some of the ways in which the modern world was going to hell with itself. 'Darkness Visible' is told partly in dairy form by a wildly prophetic protagonist called Matty Septimus Windrove. The antagonists are twin sisters: Sophy Stanhope, a brilliant, beautiful young woman, and evil incarnate, and her sister, Toni, a

professional terrorist trained by Arabs. In addition, there are three old men (a bookstore owner, a former headmaster, and a former teacher of Matty's) who act as something of a Greek chorus in the book. Behind the cries of these old men, the author's own voice can be heard crying out in a modern wilderness, as though he had lost his way and, to some extent, his sense of an audience.

Golding's sense of audience was soon reinforced by awards and honours that followed publication of 'Rites of Passage'. It won the prestigious Booker prize in 1980 and aided greatly in Golding's being named Noble laureate in 1983. Moreover, it was the lead novel in what proved to be a trilogy — including eventually 'Close Quarters' and 'Fire Down Below' — which some critics look upon a Golding's masterpiece.

'The Rites of Passage' is something of a tour de force set in something other than the present day. In this instance,

the story is told in the form of a travel memoir, and is set during the last stages of the Napoleonic wars. 'The Rites of Passage' surpasses anything else Golding has written.

Golding's chief novelistic weakness is his inability to create realistic characters in a contemporary setting; as indicated in 'The Pyramid' and 'The Paper Man'. His true strength lies in the imaginative presentation of times and other places with figures that are potentially allegorical. It is probably in his ability to visualise in clearly poetic prose, in mystic form, with a sense of holy and profane wit, that he surpassed other modern novelists. 'Lord of the Flies' and 'The Inheritors' along with the 'Rites of Passage' perhaps best demonstrate the qualities mentioned by the Swedish Academy in awarding the Nobel prize to Golding for a series of novels that "with the diversity and universality of myth illuminate the human condition in the world today." ■