



festival

Bashanta Utsav

by Nadine Murshid

SPRING holds a special meaning in the lives of most, if not all, Bengali people. It gives them a scope to move away from the dreary, cold days of winter and start afresh, to enjoy the beauty of new life and look at everything with a positive outlook. Pahela Falgun, as they call it in Bengali, is not just a day to wear yellow saris and flowers; it is a day of celebration and exuberance, a day full of jubilation and exhilaration.

This year, the Bashanta Utsav was

held at the Art College (Institute of Fine Arts) premises to welcome the season, which promises to bring hope and happiness. The morning began with the melodious Sitar played by Emdadul Huq Shaikat accompanied by Fatematz Zohra Faria and Nirinjon Biswas. As the music filled the early morning air, people came piling in to commemorate the season along with the artists. Shekh Abu Zafar continued to draw a huge audience with his flute and by the time Bhashar Bangapaddhay recited his

poem and Abu Taher Jahangir and Arifa Nishat rendered their songs, a colourful and cheerful crowd had gathered at premises.

Anandadhami, a music organization, presented their songs next, under the supervision of eminent singer Mita Huq. They sang 'O chapa... o korobi...' and other songs to welcome Spring with such ebullience and zest that it touched the souls of those who were fortunate enough to be there. Then Rizwana

Chowdhury Bonnya's mesmerizing voice had everyone transfixed as she sang 'Monjuri o monjuri. Amer monjuri...'. Shaheen Samad's 'Bashanti Rang Shari Porey' was enchanting and she too, enthralled the audience. Shurer Dhara sang 'Biswa bina robe...' and 'Tomar bash kotha he pothik...' and 'Ja chilo kolo...' under Rizwana Chowdhury Bonnya's surveillance. Nataraj, Laila Hasan's dance group performed their dance routines with energy and youthfulness and Sharmila Bangapaddhay's

dance troop fascinated the audience with their graceful movements.

One of the best parts of the morning was the audience's participation, where they sang 'Aha ki anondo...' to welcome the season. As they sang and danced, it was the artists' turn to watch and listen! Another interesting part was where venerable poet Shamsur Rahman and distinguished singer Wahidul Huq exchanged rakhis to mark the beginning of the colorful season. The rakhis were

also distributed among the audience to exchange between them and their loved ones! Shamsur Rahman recited his poem 'Kakoli' which he had written for this occasion, after his eulogy where he paid a tribute to the glorious season.

The whole program came to an end with all the singers and dancers joining in a rally in which they paraded the Dhaka University campus, welcoming Spring with 'Orey grihobashi khol dar khol, laglo je dol, stholey joley bonotoley laglo je dol, dar khol, dar khol'.



award

The Multi-faceted Playwright

GIRISH Karnad gets the Jnanpith, the country's highest literary recognition, for his contributions to modern Indian drama.

Parvathi Menon in Bangalore IT seemed entirely fitting that Girish Karnad, this year's winner of the Jnanpith Award, should receive news of the award while shooting at Shimoga a teleserial based on the novel Kanuru Subbamma Heggadathi, written by Kuvempu (K.V. Puttappa), the first Jnanpith awardee from Karnataka. Karnad is the seventh Kannadiga and the second playwright to win the award, which is given each year for the best creative writing by an Indian citizen. The award carries a citation, a bronze image of Vagdevi, and a cash award of Rs.5 lakhs.

One of India's foremost modern playwrights, Girish Karnad gets the country's highest literary recognition for his contributions to modern Indian drama. Karnad's plays - all in Kannada - have received countrywide critical acclaim thanks to the translations he has made of his major plays into English. The comfortable adaptation of his plays into a Western language medium is a reflection at one level of his command of the two languages. More than that, however, it is Karnad's ability to universalise the individual and social predicament through the medium of drama that has given his works wide appeal and easy entry into other languages. His works have been translated into several Indian languages and staged by eminent directors

such as E. Alkazi, Satyadev Dubey, B.V. Karanth, Alyque Padamsee, Vijaya Mehta, Shyamanand Jalan and Amal Allana. They have also been translated and performed for audiences abroad. Karnad is in fact one of the most done Indian playwrights abroad. Girish Karnad has also made a substantial contribution to Indian cinema, having scripted for and directed a number of films in Hindi and Kannada, besides acting in many films.

Karnad was born in 1938 in Maharashtra. His initial schooling was in Marathi. He did his B.A. at Karnatak University, Dharwad in mathematics and statistics, and his M.A. in philosophy, politics and economics at Magdalen College, Oxford, where he was a Rhodes scholar. After his return to India Karnad worked with the Oxford University Press in Chennai for seven years. He left the job in 1970 to become a full-time writer. Karnad has written ten plays, of which he has translated five into English. Although rooted in Indian mythology and history, his plays at the same time convey a strong and unmistakable Western philosophical sensibility. The existentialist crisis of modern man is conveyed through strong individuals who are locked in intense psychological and philosophical conflicts. "Karnad has been accused of escaping into the past," said Lakshmi Chandrashekar, an academic and an active figure in Kannada theatre. "But the use of mythology in most modern literature validates individual experience and universalises it. And I think

Karnad has been able to do that."

Yayati, Karnad's first play, was written in 1961 and won the Mysore State Award in 1962. It is based on an episode in the Mahabharata, where Yayati, one of the ancestors of the Pandavas, is given the curse of premature old age by his father-in-law, Shukracharya, who is incensed by Yayati's infidelity. Yayati could redeem this curse only if someone was willing to exchange his youth with him. It is his son, Puru, who finally offers to do this for his father. The play examines the moment of crisis that Puru's decision sparks, and the dilemma it presents for Yayati, Puru and Puru's young wife.

Girish Karnad. His plays have received countrywide critical acclaim. Tughlaq, Karnad's second play, written in 1964, is perhaps his best known. Tughlaq was directed by E. Alkazi and presented in London by the National School of Drama for the Festival of India in 1982. The play shows the transformation of the character of the medieval ruler Mohammad bin Tughlaq. From a sensitive and intelligent ruler who sets out to do the best for his people, Tughlaq, misunderstood and maligned, suffers an increasing sense of alienation and is forced to abandon his earlier idealism and end up as a tyrant.

Karnad won the Kamaladevi Award of the Bharatiya Natya Sangh in 1972 for his play Hayavadana, the theme of which was drawn from "Transposed Heads", a story by Thomas Mann. In it

Karnad used the folk art form of yakshagana to examine the modern problem of the body/intellect divide. The character Padmini's search for the complete man who must have the best attributes of mind and body is frustrated in spite of her best efforts, and she realises that it is the intellect that is supreme and always determines what a man is and will become. The play was directed in German by Vijaya Mehta as part of the repertoire of the Deutsches National Theatre, Weimar. In 1988 and 1990 Karnad wrote Naga-Mandala and Taledanda respectively, both of which received critical acclaim. Both of them were translated into English. Taledanda brought Karnad the "Writer of the Year" award, instituted by the Karnataka Nataka Academy Award for the best play of 1990-91. He also received the Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award in 1993 and the Sahitya Akademi (National Academy of the Letters) Award in 1994, both for Taledanda. The play deals with the rise of Veerashaivism, a radical protest and reform movement in 12th century Karnataka, and the struggle between the forces of reaction and protest. It is seen as Karnad's first play that deals explicitly with the influence of the larger social and intellectual milieu on individual action. "I get the impression that from Taledanda onwards Karnad's plays begin to turn outward in a more obvious way," said Lakshmi Chandrashekar.

"He foregrounds the social context

of individual conflict, something that is further developed in Agni Mattu Male (The Fire and the Rain), his most recent play. The modern relevance is unmistakable." Naga-Mandala (Play with Cobra) was based on a folk tale related by A.K. Ramanujam to Karnad. It gave him the Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award for the Most Creative Work of 1989. It was directed by J. Garland Wright, as part of the celebrations of the 30th anniversary of Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis. Agni Mattu Male was premiered in English recently in Bangalore. Karnad has acted, directed and scripted a number of films and documentaries. He scripted Samskara, the award-winning novel by U.R. Ananthamurthy, and played its lead role. The film was initially banned on grounds that its bold anti-caste message would spark tensions, but it went on to win the President's Gold Medal for the Best Indian Film in 1970. He scripted and acted in Vamsha Vriksha (Kannada), Kaadu (Kannada), Godhuli (Hindi), Ondanondu Kaaladalli (Kannada), Utsav (Hindi) and Cheluvu (Kannada). He has made three documentaries: a film on the Kannada poet D.R. Bendre in 1973, Kanaka-Purandara (English) in 1988 on two medieval Bhakti poets of Karnataka, and The Lamp in the Niche (English) in 1989, on Sufism and the Bhakti movement. A number of his films and documentaries won awards and have been shown at film festivals all over the world. Karnad has also acted in several Hindi and Kannada feature films, for well-known directors

such as Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen and Shyam Benegal. He has also contributed substantially to the literature on Indian theatre and cinema.

Girish Karnad was awarded the Padma Shri in 1974 and the Padma Bhushan in 1992. He was President of the Karnataka Nataka Academy (1976-78) and Chairman of the Sangeet Natak Academy and the National Academy of the Performing Arts (1988-93). He was a Visiting Professor and Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence at the University of Chicago during 1987-88. He was made Doctor of Letters by Karnataka University in 1994.

Karnad has been a bitter critic in recent years of the rise of religious fundamentalism in India. He publicly condemned the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992; he uses all public platforms to warn of the threat Hindutva poses to secularism, multi-culturalism and the freedom of expression.

When religious fundamentalists tried to whip up communal tensions over the controversy about the Idgah Maidan in Hubli, Karnad (who hails from Dharwad) strongly opposed them. More recently, he has publicly opposed the threats made by the Sangh Parivar of stopping the Tipu Bicentennial celebrations.

Karnad lives in Bangalore with his wife Dr. Saraswathy Ganapathy and two children, Shalmali Radha and Raghu Amay.

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profile

Gao Xingjian: "For Me, France Means Rebirth"

by Sylvie Thomas

GAO Xingjian, who was invited to Europe in 1987 for a creative visit, never went back to China. His condemnation of the Tiananmen Square massacre, in 1989, made it impossible for him to return to his native land. In fact, it was the last straw. "Already before, I had a lot of difficulties and hindrances to my work, in my country", the writer, who is banned in China but now free of all censorship and self-censorship, points out.

Gao Xingjian is a political refugee and lives in Bagnole in the near suburbs of Paris, but he travels all over France for fairs, lectures, the production of his plays and exhibitions of his paintings. "I do not feel a stranger in France. I have a lot of friends and activities. It is a rebirth for me and for my literary creation". "Without France, I would never have done all that". Gao Xingjian adds, astonished himself at this overflowing creativity, six plays, a novel and four books of short stories and conversations.

With exile, together with creative fertility, he found recognition. He is now acclaimed as a great painter and sales from his paintings free him from material cares. His latest novel, "La Montagne de l'Ame" (the mountain of the soul), received a warm welcome. His plays written in France are banned in China and next year, two of his works, "Le Fuite (the flight)" and "Le Somnambule" (the sleepwalker) will be produced.

His publisher (Editions de l'Aube), his translator (his friend Noël Dutrait) and his acquaintances bear off the Chinese writer in the whirlwind of French cultural life. Gao Xingjian is greatly sought after, sometimes even too much, but he knows how to turn away from his work. "When you work, you have to distance yourself from life. So I address myself, in solitude, in a kind of meditation or monologue which enables me to attain the necessary depth".

At the moment, he is thinking about writing an art book based on his paintings and he recently completed a

Gao Xingjian, the Chinese painter and writer, has found the conditions for great fertility in France. For him, freedom and creativity go together.



Gao Xingjian

new novel. There is a development in his inspiration. The short stories in the collection called "Une bicyclette pour mon grand-père" (a bicycle for my grandfather) feeds on nostalgic memories of China, of his childhood and of the sufferings of contemporary China. "La Montagne de l'Ame" also takes the reader from the high plateaux of Tibet to the Szechwan basin, but China gradually fades into the background. "My next book already combines memories of my native land with my presence in France. The following one should logically take place entirely in the West".

An important fact is that his latest plays, written in French and played as far away as in Africa, have so far never been taken up by Chinese theatre troupes in Taiwan or Hong Kong. "They are probably far removed from China". Yet Gao translates them into Chinese "to leave a trace", but he asserts that "Writers in exile often live off nostalgia. I want to get away from it as fast as possible".

— Actualité En France