

did it at Montmartre in Paris. Nearer home urban artists and performing groups operate in the streets in Calcutta and Bombay.

The traditional performing artists will continue to come to the cities. If we do not amputate their art, if you do not impose our city-bred ideas, we have a lot to learn and enjoy from traditional performances. It is a quest in search of our roots.

HYDERABAD

SUSIE J. THAW

Tughlaq

The DCH production of Karnad's *Tughlaq*.

The sun has just set. A warm summer evening. The day's fine dust still hangs in the air. A costumed attendant dabs attar on my wrist as I enter. I have time until the performance starts to let my eye wander over the hillock where the action is to take place. A large boulder towards the top marks what might be a fort (in this performance it will also double as a mosque). A few steps lower an ornate throne and a few bright stools indicate another space. Silhouetted against the evening sky, as enduring a part of the earth as the rock and the rubble, is a neem tree, aged through many parched summers. Its bearing is no loud or costumed proclamation, no intricate rhetoric, only a statement, no less, no more, of the rigour ground demands. Gnarled branches savour in calm celebration each slow gust of wind.

Against this landscape the play erupted. What we witnessed during the next three hours was a regal game of idea and manipulation, played against the truth of this ground. The natural set was able to state, through the contrast it provided, the violence done to a land and a people by the manic dreams of a liberal imperialist. In fact

a whole new dimension was added to the experience of the play, which on a traditional stage would have remained an existentialist lament on the human condition and its irrationality. Little wonder that so many of the spectators who watched the DCH production of Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq* felt it was the natural setting which made for a major part of the play's success. I would rate this production, directed by M Nagbhushan Sarma, as one of the best of DCH's recent efforts. The credit goes in the main to him and to the Associate Director, Polly Chenoy, for much of the play's effect was created through an orchestration of movement and pacing: no mean feat with a large, amateur cast. Tughlaq's (Nadir Chenoy) rich, commanding voice held one's attention, and gave a centre to the action always, but one would have liked a little more effort from him at *signifying*, through speech and act the complexity of Tughlaq's experience. Too much was left to saying what are undoubtedly, good lines. Mallavika Rao, as stepmother was also good, though it was difficult for her to mask, in this maternal role, her obvious and extreme youth! The only actors who attempted in some way to *build* a character, however, were Chakravarti Mamillapali (Aziz), G Rajgopal (Azam) and B.S. Prakash (Sardar Rattan Singh). Rama Mathew (Hindu woman) came alive in her nimble scaling of the rocky hillock. Altogether it certainly made for a pleasant evening.

Seeing *Tughlaq* in 1980, almost twenty years after it was written, one is struck by how much it has dated. Formally, the play verges on an over explicit tightness, its carefully woven structure and counterpoint, its symbolic cluster its obvious sense of the theatrical, its use of myth and of traditional folk theatre types, all make for what might be a modernist set piece. And the line between that and banality is often thin. In *Tughlaq*, formal virtuosi-

ty goes with a similar lack of probing, a too easy arrival at answers, at the thematic level. Writing in 1971 Karnad spoke of the play's contemporaneity: "the fact that here was the most idealistic, the most intelligent king ever to come on the throne of Delhi... and one of the greatest failures also. And within a span of twenty years this tremendously capable man had gone to pieces. This seemed to be both due to his idealism as well as the shortcomings within him, such as his impatience, his cruelty, his feeling that he had the only correct answer. And I felt in the early sixties India had also come very far in the same direction—the twenty-year period seemed to me very much a striking parallel". Later critics have also made much of the play's contemporary "relevance" the psychological complexity of Tughlaq's character, the irreducible haunting quality of the play, its symbolism and so on. Today it is not the psychological or ontological depth of Tughlaq's condition that haunts. It is the unquestioned acceptance in our landscapes of an existential episteme, and the unproblematic imaging of this historical phenomenon in terms that arise so totally from a western philosophic tradition, that amazes. A strange and disturbing world-view emerges in Karnad's play.

Everything is so simple there, it is a game of chess. But everything is also ironic, resigned, for sadly, it can be only that, no more. To think otherwise is to be like Tughlaq, but a sentimental dreamer, a dangerous visionary, but a realist. For "life is corrupt at its very source", and what may one do about the very nature of the human condition? One can only choose, the play would appear to say, between rulers, or between equally arbitrary world views. One chooses the brilliance and the humour of Tughlaq's liberal idealist inefficiency, or the brilliance and the cold ferocity of Ain-ul-Mulk's administrative prowess. Ain-

ul-Mulk, who not only solves, in minutes, chess problems that take Tughlaq days, but who, as Governor "crushed the rebels, restored law and order, and the people of Avadh think him a God almost". But one may not mourn either for him when in his last game he walks into a trap, for people are but pawns, or at best, knights, Sheikh's or Kings. Such is their fate: a death as arbitrary and irrational as their life.

What has this speech to do with the rock or the neem tree, with us today?

BALA KOTHANDARAMAN

The Crucible

After two major productions—"Twelfth Night" and "The Crucible" the Dramatic Circle, Hyderabad (DCH) rounded off this year's activities with a bill of three One-Act Plays on December 17th and 18th at the Rail Nilayam Auditorium. Comedies all, the two British plays (Shaw's *Augustus does his Bit* and Gertrude Jenning's *Five Birds in a Cage*) belong to the conventional type, the American *Constantinople Smith* by Charles L. Mee, Jr. represents Modern Theatre.

The two British plays rely largely on scintillating dialogue to develop situations and to reveal character. *Augustus* takes typically Shavian digs at War, Patriotism, Officialdom, the Aristocracy (personified in Lord Augustus Highcastle who assures the charming young lady that she need not fear danger for him in battle as the Highcastles have characteristically hard heads so that "nothing penetrates to the brains"). Typically Shavian, too, is the instrument of the satire: Horatio Floyd Beamish, the elderly, no-good, usually out-of-work representative of the Ordinary Classes who finds new importance because of the shortage of man-power during the War ("war brings out unknown powers in a man," of his newly-acquired capacity for getting sozzled

