



Surekha Sikri as Savitri in Mohan Rakesh's *Adhe Adhure*,
dir. Amal Allana, NSD Rep. Co., Delhi, 1976.





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In love with acting for what it's worth

By Jyotsana Kapoor

Pleasant and charming, Mrs Surekha Sikri is a well known theatre artiste of Delhi and has won many laurels for her down-to-earth and natural acting in various plays put up by National School of Drama Repertory Company. She also got an opportunity last year to do an important role in the second version of the controversial political film 'Kissa Kursi Ka', and says that she would like to act in more films but only if they are made by well known people and not in the usual commercial films dished out by Bombay film makers.

In fact I was offered a good role in Shyam Benegal's latest 'Junoon', but had to refuse it as a drama festival was going on here and I just couldn't get away," she says with regret in her voice. "I would have simply loved to do it as it would have been a dream come true. Moreover, it would have also given me a chance to gain more experience in film acting. But it was just not possible."

Surekha, who must have been with natural acting talent, says she had never thought of acting in plays till she was in college and happened to see a play put up by the National School of Drama in Algarh. "I was so impressed by the thoroughly professional production put up by the group that I decided to join the school and learn acting. But even then I did not give acting serious thought as a possible profession as dramas were not a regular thing and not many people regarded acting in them as a profession."

After finishing her three-year course in the National School of

Drama, Delhi, Surekha acted in plays put up by various amateur theatre groups. But she was not very satisfied with the roles she got.

"In free lancing one has to make lot of compromises in terms of professional standards as one cannot be choosy about the roles if one wants to work regularly," she says. "Moreover, it is not much fun to work with people who are not very serious about their work, because most of the people working in these plays are office employees and cannot devote enough time and attention to rehearsals. I decided to go back to the National School of Drama Repertory Company mainly for two reasons, one was to act in plays regularly and the other was to maintain a certain standard in my acting," she says.

National School of Drama Repertory Company is the only professional theatre group in Delhi and has about 20 paid artistes working for it regularly. They all take their work very seriously and put in many hours doing rehearsals every day as they have to maintain a certain professional standard and put up as many plays as they can in a year. All the artistes are taken on a yearly contract, with a monthly salary depending on seniority. Most of the good artistes get their contracts renewed every year. Surekha has been working with the National School of Drama for the last six years.

Surekha feels that theatre artistes need more encouragement and recognition by the Government as well as the public. "For the amount of work one puts in, working for 12 hours or sometimes ever more than that in a day, one is still underpaid. The Government doesn't take this

profession seriously. Moreover, the people of Delhi are not very theatre-minded. In fact there is no tradition of theatre in Delhi. It is very popular in Bombay and other big cities, and folk theatre is popular in the villages of India."

Surekha says that it would be very difficult for a person to live well or maintain a family with what one earned as a theatre artiste. "One has to be really committed to this profession to join it. If one is looking for money and security, this is not the right profession. For me, personally, I love acting and I enjoy it. I find it very absorbing. It teaches me something new everyday."

Surekha prefers to act in small theatres and in plays which are detailed and complex, dealing with human problems on human level. Two of her latest plays 'Sandhya Chava' and 'Adhe-Adhure' gave her a lot of scope to bring out her talent and she says that she enjoyed doing them immensely. These roles brought her a lot of appreciation too. "But," she says, "I still feel nervous before going to the stage. First 10 to 15 minutes are sheer agony, but once I enter the stage I become immediately cool and calm."

Talking about her experience in films, Surekha says that working in 'Kissa Kursi Ka' was her first encounter with the camera and she found it very interesting. "On stage one has to deal directly with the audience but in films the audience is the camera, and for me it was all very exciting. But I feel definitely more at home on stage than in front of a camera, though I am keen on acting in films. I do not want to leave my base here and go to Bombay."