

## ART

## Paris — mother of new visions

By K. L. KAUL

**"SOUVENIRS d'en France:"** title of the exhibition of over 40 Indian artists' works jointly organized by the Embassy of France and Lalit Kala Akademi in the Akademi's galleries. In the foreword to the elegant catalogue brought out on the occasion, Pierre Barroux, the Cultural Counsellor of France, has placed his finger unerringly on the common denominator that offers an opportunity (or excuse!) for putting together such disparate creativities and artistic perceptions, i.e., their stay in France, in particular Paris, the duration ranging from a few weeks (Shail etc.) to a year, two years (as governed by the nature of the scholarship) or lifelong as it seems to be in the case of Raza, Sakti Burman, Vishwanadhan, Lakshmi Dutt, and lately Sujata Bajaj.

Those who are overwhelmed by physical properties of things and events alone may not read much in most of these stays, especially the short stays. The unthinking may even argue that the Mecca of modern art has shifted to New York. This is contrary to experience. It is possible that a new centre of pilgrimage may come up anywhere, but the old one never changes its spot. Inextricably interlinked to the spot are the historical experiences of man; over and above them the uni-

que opportunities for spiritual and mental growth offered by a place without let up. That place



**Jayashree Chakravarty's work in the exhibition Souvenirs d'en France on view in the Capital.**

is Paris.

Take a mental look at the last few centuries of Europe, you find Paris the nerve centre of enlightened reason, of socio-political thought, of breakthroughs in imagination. What Paris gave to life in terms of contemporary modernistic

thinking during the first two decades of the current century in the fields of literature and art was a new vision. Art began its act de novo with cubism, with impressionism, and with the frothy energy and liberated attitudes that Dada released into life, revolutionizing the basic concepts. Aesthetics was announced in new ways and the beautiful acquired a new meaning. When the poet-artist Hans Arp, one of the first Dadas, was asked by somebody what according to him was beautiful, the artist spat on the ground without raising his head. The questioner did not understand till another person who was in Arp's studio told him that his question had been answered. What Arp meant is that the whole created universe is beautiful. When you create a new space, you redefine the beautiful. It is this liberation of the mind that we find in Marcel Duchamp when he called his urinal, *The Fountain*. The Dadas liberated the vision beyond recognition ushering the contemporary individualistic era. Andre Breton tried to formalize Dada with his surrealism, but there was going to be no turning away. The truth is that all contemporary art derives from Dada: the pop, the op, the jazz, the conceptual, the constructionist, the action art (its counterpart in music being "let's be physical...").

The present offers a crowded, overlapping image and that is the meaning of Prajapati's sculpture. It offers a bloated upturned image and that is Valsan. The name of the game is vivification of an idea without a care for the material/materials. Shock therapy at times continues to be the central attitude. It is a revolt against the staid and stale. Shail takes the cue from miniatures and life as it exists on the ground to modulate the two into an integrated modernistic ambience. That is the forte of Basant Kashyap too. They as also some senior artists (seniors in the sense that they have been in the line for a longer duration; otherwise there is no such nomenclature applicable in modern art) show that growth and development are integrated inner processes. You could hold that view for Raza, Anjoli, Laxman, Braham, Narendra (his calligraphic attitude has shown remarkable consistency for change and adjustment), Shakti and Ram Kumar. But with some the shift is rather out of step with cognitive transition. In such an instance the attitude might fall back in time and then forge an inner linkup in image, as India is trying to achieve in its development process now! Such is the work of Sujata; a far cry from what she is known here for.