

THE SWEET-VENDOR

By R. K. Narayan

For a long time, though I have read several of his books, I was not able to make out the kind of person Mr. R. K. Narayan actually was. With his cool objectivity (his biggest asset as a novelist, according to an old admirer, Mr. Graham Greene) Mr. Narayan had succeeded in keeping his own identity well concealed, submerging himself in his characters. One could not even make out where he approved and where he did not, where he laughed with joy or where he was merely poking fun. In fact, Mr. Narayan neither sermonized nor did he pity. He simply held up a mirror in which we could see ourselves and many of our fellow beings, if we only cared to look at it.

And then one day, a few years ago, I came across a paperback, brought out in 1960, a Diary of his few ("dangerous") weeks in the U.S.A. And there he was: a delightful man, that rare being who could be both gentle and perceptive and also critical, somebody whom it would be a pleasure and an experience to talk and laugh and travel. At the same time you felt, that were you to be with him in the same room he'd probably be too shy to do anything about your becoming tongue-tied in his presence while all along noticing everything about you. I think Mr. Narayan is equipped (gifted would be a more appropriate word) with a sharp-lensed and high-powered camera and tape-recorder tucked away some where within his brain.

The other day I read an article by him in magazine (Life, May 1967), in which he describes the "tangled path from his novel (Guide) to the screen", the film version of which, incidentally, was written by Pearl Buck. The photographs show him to be a slim and young looking man (he is 61, born in Madras), wearing heavy spectacles and carrying himself with ease and grace in his western clothes. When I looked closely I

saw (or imagined I saw) on his smiling face a combination of asceticism and something that could be pixie good humour. Like his younger brother R. K. Laxman, our popular and beloved cartoonist, Mr. Narayan has the ability to jibe without offending. I've often wondered if he really lost his temper and then how would he put it. The article itself makes fascinating reading. I doubt if Mr. Narayan will allow himself a repeat performance with the film moguls who, he says "could solve mankind's problems on a global scale with the casual confidence of demi-gods"; which, indeed, is a pity, because most of Mr. Narayan's novels could become prestige films if put in the hands of an expert (of the class and genius of Satyajit Ray). Our country is the loser for lack of such films from South India.

Mr. Narayan is a true-born artist, dedicated, hardworking, inspired and like all truly great men, humble within. The story of the sweet-vendor (who is a graduate) is in line with his other books, describing in detail Jagan's day, unhurried and peaceful on the outside, full of turmoil and self-questioning within. Hiding an inner loneliness and a few disappointments he sits on his throne in his shop, calm-faced, piously reading the Gita. Eventually he translates his frustration at his son's indifference to him and to the business of selling sweets by a strange act of defeatism. He further reduces the price of his quality-products, selling each packet at the flat rate of 25 paise. Unfortunately Mali continues to be totally un-interested in anything that the father does or thinks. Jagan is stoic and will not give in easily. His wife is dead; he does not miss her, only very occasionally recalling (in a most tender and vivid flashback) the attractive and spirited Ambika that she used to be, when he himself was also so bashful and full of dreams and uncertainty.

Jagan had financed Mali's trip abroad, but the fellow comes back from the U.S.A. qualified only in a hare-brained scheme to make a fast buck, to use an Americanism, and accompanied by a part Chinese woman called Grace who becomes a devoted daughter-in-law, alas, for a very short period of time.

The end comes suddenly, as most dramatic ends do. As a Gandhian (he had gone to jail during the Non-cooperation Movement) and a Hindu, to whom renunciation of worldly pursuits comes without undue effort, Jagan cuts his bonds loose. Taking with himself a small bag of bare necessities, he announces lightly "If I don't like the place I will go away somewhere else. I am a free man..."

Mr. Narayan is not a romantic, Nor is he a bitter or cruel satirist. He is a realist and not afraid to look at the truth. How many of us have strength to quit or even see the arrival of that golden moment when if we stand up our shackles will drop?

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PAINS AND PAINTS

By: PEN

January proved to be a busy month for the ART WORLD in general and painters in particular. Many one-man/woman exhibitions were held in the city. Painters BENDRE, JATIN DASS, PRABHA V DONGRE, ILA PAL, SANTOSH, KUMAUD KUMARI, KRISHNA SHANKAR, INDU PATWA, SALIM DIWAN and BIHARI BARBHAIYA exhibited their works. Few were brilliant exhibitions.

However, art lovers had the privilege of witnessing two collections, one at the ARTIST'S CENTRE and the other at CONVOCATION HALL. Mr. Rudy Von Leydon and Smt. Ambika M. Dhurandhar genuinely deserve our compliments. The huge Dhurandhar collection proved that the late painter MAHADEV VISHWANATH DHURANDHAR (1867-1944) had been an all rounder.

Bombay had the pleasure of welcoming its own RAZA after his long stay abroad for 17 years. We are keenly looking forward to his painting exhibition. Indeed, it was a



KRISHNA SHANKAR

moment of satisfaction to listen to him while speaking during the sale-inauguration of the Rudy Von Leydon collection comprising the works of ARA, SHEILA ANDEN, CONTRACTOR, CHAWDA, GADE, HUS-SAIN, KRISHEN KHANNA, LANGHAMMER, NENA LEYDEN, MAN-SARAM, ANAND MOHAN NAIK, TYEB MEHTA, RAIBA, SOUZA, ZAREMBA, KATCHDORIAN and RAZA.

As the final appeal of art lies in a region where beauty, goodness and truth unite, the Batik exhibition of BIHARI BARBHAIYA was comparatively more appealing. A few paintings were remarkable.

The progress made by KRISHNA SHANKAR in her 4th exhibition was appreciable. She has started evol-

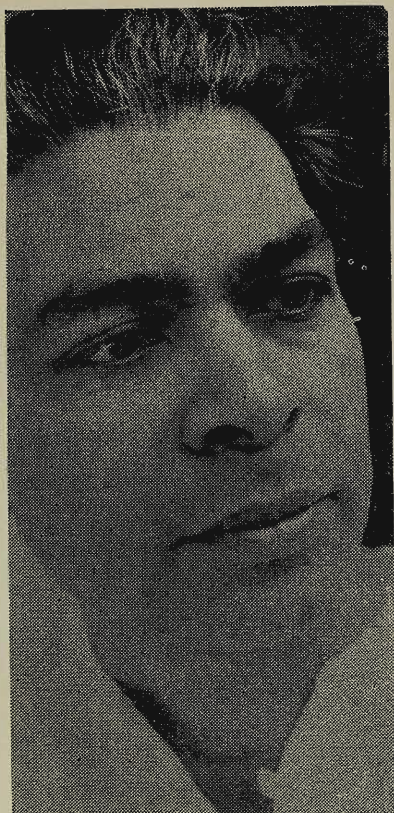
ing a style yet much is expected of her to become a distinguished painter in her own rights.

I cannot but help admiring the courage and capacity of 24 year young SALIM DIWAN, still a student at



RAZA

J. J. School of Art, inviting severe criticism for his multi-phased exhibition. If he is able to maintain his basic honesty of painting then definitely his critics will see him emerging as a powerful painter of tomorrow. Of course, it pains one to point out that almost all the painters who keep on exhibiting their works do not take enough pains to paint. Sometimes it seems as if they paint just to make people faint before them. Perhaps many painters believe in shock therapy? Even then we do not deny them their right to sell their stuff. But should they paint only to sell? For then there will be no difference between the COMMERCIAL and FINE arts. Probably they forget that one has the immediate value and the other lasting one. Is it that they want only immediate gains?



BIHARI BARBHANA



SALIM DIWAN