

# TALKS IN CUFFE PARADE

By MULK RAJ ANAND

**A**CTUALLY I am partial to a communication of ideas, an activity popularly described as talk. For, like H. G. Wells, I believe that it is the gift of the gab that distinguishes human beings from the other species. I realise, of course, that, on many occasions, I indulge in it to cover up my kind of shyness as other people keep mum to cover their brand of self-consciousness.

## An Art

George Moore, the Irish writer, confessed to a similar failing in order to explain away the "Conversations in Ebury Street." Only, I would go further and say that I even consider writing to be mostly a remainder from talk; and I believe the art of talking to be at least the equal of the art of writing, if not its superior.

So I had imagined that lunch on that Friday would supply the necessary opportunity, because, at the end of the week everyone is in a relaxed mood. And the problems of the Five-Year Plan seem urgent enough to all and sundry. And there were at least two distinguished guests coming, a seasoned diplomat and a scientist, the latter being somewhat of an economist. And there were to be two journalist friends, a shy one who knows many things but always seems reluctant to speak, and a young one who thinks he knows every-

thing and holds forth on all occasions.

The food was long in coming. Not for that reason, however, but from the very inherent propulsion of motor power, held taut in overstrained nerves, things began to go wrong from the start.

The scientist, on the basis of his amateur economics, made a challenging statement about the inevitability of a crisis in America which neither Colin Clark, nor Galbraith, nor Varga would have dared to make so easily nowadays. The diplomat, who is an historian, and can out-talk most people in the world, analysed the proposition like Chanakya, defining words to sound like laws, plausible enough in wordly terms not to sound divinely ordained.

## Voices Clash

For a while, the two contending voices rose and fell in sharp encounter as in all controversies of the cold war. Only the scientist became more and more impassioned, playing the role of the historian who regards Cleo to be a muse, and the historian tended to become more and more scientific.

As I listened fascinated, unable to put a word in edgeways, in the role of the polite host, I was surprised to find that it was not the aggressive young journalist, who intervened in the

argument, but the hitherto reticent one, who insinuated his voice into the discussion, soon got hold of it—all for himself. I had never seen him affected by the love of argument quite like that. For, soon, this dark horse out-shouted the two contenders.

Though the young journalist and myself tried to derail the talk by commenting on a point here and a point there, the shy one would not listen but delivered his judgments in stentorian accents forgetting even his own ears. A very blunt question put in a louder voice by the scientist did go across to him, but he took that in his stride as though the pent-up learning of months had waited in him for just this occasion.

The meal was announced after all. And the young journalist made up by the alacrity of his jaws chewing for the lack of exercise in speaking. The need to get away to the engagements kept the two chief contenders concentrated over their food. The shy one is a vegetarian who did not seem to relish our kind of hospitality.

## Misconception

I, who have never been known to keep silent for so long, tried to adjust myself to the fact that my own notoriety for out-talking others is certainly based on a very large misconception.