



Photo: R. C. Nigaum.

authority that filled the room Mirdha talked as if he was exploring. When a man's truth stems from the land his perspectives even whilst they move, remain unhinged.

In the mud villages of his childhood homes continue to have the mobility of spaces that are not contrived. They force themselves out of the patterns of everyday living. Men crown their heads with turbans of colour, answering back with radiance to a barrenness that is their landscape. And women sing as a matter of habit to mark a season, a changed mood, a new arrival. "Our women do not invite outsiders to sing for them. Celebration is not observed by proxy. Singing comes naturally to women in the desert. It is an expression of joy, of sorrow, perhaps even a release," said Mirdha, his voice dipping down as if in deference to all those hidden voices who sing behind veils.

But what about the new Pushkar? All those disco sounds that drown those of the cattle?

"There is a dichotomy in our lives today," said Mirdha as if he had read the question. "We

# A black sun burns in his mind

## Theme Song

Anees Jung

In a studio, large, airy, white-washed, in a small house built under the plane trees of Southern France, Raza continues to paint guided by the bindu which a wise teacher in a thatched home taught a six-year-old boy to meditate on.

IT was a different sort of affair. It had colour, movement and a spring like luminosity. Had the season turned or was it the people present who lent the event this other dimension? Dressed in the shades of an exaggerated rainbow they had emerged, as if after a long, grey hibernation, painters, potters, scribes, peddlars, watchers with trained eyes, birds of a feather it seemed. Each though had a distinctive plumage, carried a sense of his own presence.

On a luminous Indian evening the sounds and colours of far continents came alive. The occasion was the opening of the Triennale that happens after every three years when art makes a self-conscious comeback in the capital and artists, instead of politicians, are seen, talked about, even celebrated.

Amidst men as rare as the

birds of Paradise moved a tall man with a head of grey and a beaming boyish face. His looks set him apart from them. Breezily as he walked through the exhibits a few men in khaki scrambled after him. Could a man really look at a painting with a policeman breathing down his neck? What was Ram Nivas Mirdha, a politician, doing at an art event? Had he been invited to lend the event an official distinction, perhaps even a larger credibility? Was he there as a friend of the art world, one who knew how to crack a joke, have fun amidst artistic harangues and extend a hand when it was needed? Or was his presence a natural way of diffusing barriers that separated artists from "lesser" men, and art from life? "Most artists see the whole of India in the context of what is happening in the art world. Mirdha's presence brings into focus the fact that art is a part of a larger reality" said Kekoo Gandhi, a long-time watcher of the art scene.

"If art is a part of life it need not be on walls alone. It need not be expensive. It should be inside as well as outside," said Mirdha in a voice so gentle that it did not seem to emerge from his tower-like frame. For he is a Jat of stern peasant stock, made strong in the desert of Nagore, a district in Rajasthan, known for its sturdy men and sturdier cattle.

## A Man's Truth

The stronger a man, the gentler is his manner goes a dictum in the old country. And that seems true of Mirdha, essentially a man of the earth. "Land is tangible. You can hold it," he said seated behind a massive table of polished wood with a row of several coloured telephones watching him from the right. Oblivious to the aura of

face today, even our villagers, an invasion of an alien technological culture. A new class born out of quick money is raising demands that are not organic to our roots nor our reality. A tradition which was naturally artistic is slowly labouring under strain, is disappearing, may even dwindle out. We can't stop it. All we can do is try and preserve it, encourage its tangible memory."

"An Indian can never be undone," said Syed Haider Raza whose presence at the Triennale revived once again the fragrance of the land, one that he had chosen to leave physically but not mentally, emotionally nor creatively. In a studio, large, airy, white-washed, in a small house built under the plane trees of southern France, Raza continues to paint with the memory of a black sun burning in his mind, guided by the bindu which a wise teacher in a thatched home taught a six-year-old boy to meditate on.

Freed of obsessions, the boy now 63, remembers... "The most tenacious memory of my childhood is the fear and fascination of the Indian forest. We lived near the source of the Narmada River in the centre of the densest forests of Madhya Pradesh. Nights in the forests were hallucinating; sometimes the only humanising influence was the dancing of the Gond tribes. Daybreak brought back a sentiment of security and well-being. On market day, under the radiant sun, the village was a fair-land of colours. And then the night again. Even today I find that these two aspects of my life dominate me and are an integral part of my painting. There are a multitude of variations, but it has its departure point in an experienced feeling, even if the real problems are of a plastic nature."