



NATYA SHODH SANSTHAN

An Interview of
‘Kavalam Narayana Panikkar’

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Kavalam Narayana Panikkar is an important personality in the world of theatre. He had experimented with the traditional forms and trying to make it relevant to the present day audience.

Pratibha Agrawal

Panikkar Saheb, we are very grateful to you for kindly coming to Calcutta with your troupe and giving us performance of 'Madhyam Vyayog' about which we have been hearing since a long time. We have been talking about Madhyam Vyayog and your style etc yesterday and day before also a little bit. I would first of all like to know something about you. How you got interested in theatre and how it came to your mind to combine tradition with the modern days and modern plays. Of course Madhyam Vyayog is a Sanskrit play, it is a classical play and traditional style goes very well with that but there must be something more than that in your mind. It must not be producing only classical plays in traditional style. Then of course there is not much for you to do there because that goes well or if you feel otherwise please tell, we would like to know. First of all, how you got interested in theatre and then how this idea came to you to combine tradition with modern theatre?

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

I belong to a village in Aleppi District in Kerala and that village is far away from the town and it is water-logged area. Water logged means you cannot go about without the help of some canoe, some boat. You cannot go out in a bus. There is no bus, no other road. There are small pieces of land separated with waters, canals. And it is mainly agricultural area. Agricultural activities are very hectic there. You know, we put up temporary bundhs, now of course there are permanent bundhs but we used to put bundhs and do cultivation. So, agricultural community and the working class, 'Pulayas' we call them, they are supposed to be down-trodden people in the old concept of gradation and all that of the society but they had a lot of art forms, musical forms. So we used to hear this. I used to hear this from my childhood, how they sing when they do their work in the fields. And we used to have lands. Of course not absentee landlords, we were actually doing cultivation, my uncle did. I belong to a Marumakkathayam Family that means your elder sister's sons will inherit the property.

Pratibha Agrawal

Does this custom still prevail now?

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

It is now lost. It is completely not there now. We have taken up to father and sons rule but you know, the Nair Community and certain other communities followed this Marumakkathayam and even now my sister's sons and children have got the birth-right on my sister's property because sister's property is partitioned and received from the family. This property got the Marumakkathayam incident. That is there but my property I got and I can inherit it to my sons. That was there in the law. Now of course, Hindu Law is there. So the whole family system was such that you know we all were living in a big family, joint family. My uncle Sardar K. M.

Panikkar, he passed away, he also lived in that village, but he went abroad for study and all that. For all his life, he was in the North as Minister of Patiala, Bikaner and he was responsible to form Narendra Mandal, the chamber of Princes and all that and later he became the ambassador to China. And when he died he was Mysore University's Vice Chancellor. He was a novelist, mainly a novelist. He used to write historical novels. He has written good historical novels. He was a poet also. He used to write poetry also. So our joint family was very big. We used to have contacts with the working class. That is very important because I got interested in collecting material for research in folk theatre right from my childhood when I got into contact with the musicians of the locality. So that was there going on and I used to write poems from my childhood.

Pratibha Agrawal

Accha, I never knew about it!

Bimal Lath

He is a very good film song writer.

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

I write songs in films. This poetry I have not left. I still continue and I have published a few books, collections of my poems. In fact, we render poetry in the public, some of our young poets and modern poets join us and we recite poems even in the market places and you travel around, go to villages and this is a part of my activity when I am free from theatre. Nowadays theatre takes much of my time so I don't go for this. We call this 'Kaviyarang'.

Pratibha Agrawal

We call it Kavi Sammelan, where a number of poets recite their own poems.

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

'Arang' means 'Ranga'. Arang is Dravidian word for Rang. That is how comes 'Thiruvarang', Thiru is Sree -

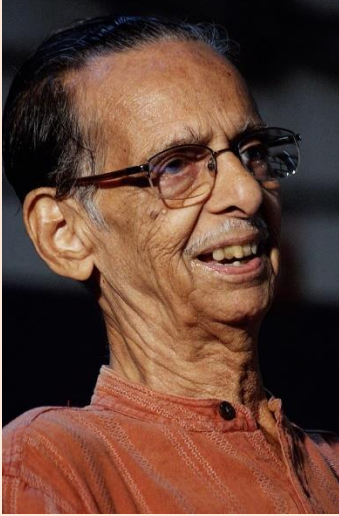
Bimal Lath

Aranya means jungle?

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

No. Aranya is jungle, but this is Arang. Thiru is Sree. Thiruvarang means Sree Rang. So that is how I started. And then my theatre activities came only afterwards. In the seventies, in '74, I wrote a poetic play, Sakshi, which is now selected as a text for B.A. course. This first work when it was produced it was a combination of western technique. You know, usually it comes to you when you start because you are; you were in that mould, in that line. So it was continued but a lot of padya bhas was there, I don't say it is poetry but for rendering came and I used a lot of lines, poetry also

in that play. Gadya was also there, poetry was also there. How to mix Gadya and Padya – this problem came in the production of first play ‘Sakshi’. After that jointly with another friend from NSD, Kumar Verma who came after completing his course in NSD, he was Alkazi’s student. We jointly worked in the Folk Theatre. With my knowledge, with my work in Folk Theatre, Folk Arts, I collected a lot of songs. I have big personal collection of about say 20/25 hours of folk and



classical music of Kerala. Of course, I don’t have enough funds. I had my funds spent for collection. But how to preserve it is a problem. But still I have, not very fresh, some of the recordings have been lost but still this was there right from the beginning. Collecting music on the tape recorder was a hobby for me. As well as it was useful also. I used to learn most of the songs myself, how to sing those songs as it is done in the original. So this came easy for me, this experience was useful for me when I worked with Kumar Verma in the folk theatre with some of the folk artists also in doing a play called ‘Kakarsham’. ‘Kakarsham’ is a traditional drama, folk drama. I went with the troupe to several places just to know the reactions of the people how they take it. How music used in this play, how they take and how it is received by them – the audience. It was practically an experiment with

the audience because we used to go to even temple festivals where large crowd assembled.

Pratibha Agrawal

How many of them assembled normally?

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

Thousands. You see, five thousand people, because that is very good experiment. A traditional play, of course, with slight modification here and there to suit the time, the audience’s taste and all that. This was purely an experiment, out and out experiment. We never intended to continue that but only to know how people take it and how to use this element of Geet, Vadya and Nritya. Even in contemporary situation, how we can use this that was the problem. So afterwards, I also worked with Kumar Verma on the tradition of Bhagavata – Ajjugiyam done by me, the translation was done by me. That also is a text in Calicut University in Kerala, now, this year. Incidentally, I say this. Because this was produced several times. I did the production again after the first production in 1971 we produced jointly with Kumar Verma this Bhagavata Ajjugiyam. But later –

Pratibha Agrawal

You did this in Malayalam not in Sanskrit?

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

Later I did the production in a different style, in a different way with the experience which I gathered by doing the other plays. I did this 'Bhagavata Ajjugiyam' with another group in a different way, quite different. And they could show some progress also in the next production.

Bimal Lath

Why 'Bhagavata Ajjugiyam' is so exciting to you because it is a simple farce?

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

Because you know, there is enough scope for combining Natyadharmi and Lokdharmi. You see when the problem of acting comes and the problem of production comes, this gives you enough scope to combine Natyadharmi and Lokdharmi. Actually the theme itself is a conflict between the spiritual and the temporal. That is there. Shandilya represents you know, he is in search of food. He wants to get food from whichever source it comes to him. So he goes from one Guru to another Guru and everywhere he finds the people have Ekadashi. People are there, you know, they cook once in a day, one meal in a day. He wants to keep his belly full always so he is in search of Gurus. Finally he gets a Guru who can make the things from air, he is so powerful. So he likes him very much because here he finds the best fulfillment. Whereas this Guru thinks that I can teach this fellow the efficacy of the spirit and all that - what spiritualism is? So this is there and then the armllet is introduced there, you get whole life you know. These things give you theoretical possibilities and Shishya's attachment to that to combine Natyadharmi and Lokdharmi, to what extent Lokdharmi can be used in a character, in the representation of the character and all that. I got the help of the Chakyars also. They used to have regular theatre manuals. Some portions are lost but still whatever is available, you know, 'Bhagavata Ajjugiyam' theatre manual is comparatively voluminous. It is very very big. But most of it is lost. But whatever is left was explained to me, I could see the original palm-leaf Granth from Mr. Narayan Pisharoty who is an authority on the Kudiattam. He gave me some hints, of course, with the help of this. Of course this is not done these days by the Chakyars – this 'Bhagavata Ajjugiyam'.

Pratibha Agrawal

I would like to know how do you differentiate between Natyadharmi and Lokdharmi? The moment the Lokdharmi develops the Grammar of its own then if it does – don't you think it becomes Natyadharmi in the sense used traditionally? Or do you mean just to say that anything you do out of this tradition is Lokdharmi? Please explain this.

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

No, it is not that. Lokdharmi is that which pertains to life, so life is the basis and from life naturally Lokdharmi comes. It is not the real thing but it is Dharma, the Lokdharm which should be shown on the stage. So here comes the concept of stage, from the reality to the stage-reality, the reality on the stage. The Dharma has the meaning otherwise Dharma need not be there. Lokdharm

becomes Lokdharmi when it is. It is this Lokdharmi is nearer to actual life. This is how I have understood and conceived in my productions also. So from Lokdharmi, Lokdharmi is made the spring-board for Natyadharmi. And so, I personally believe after reading the text and all that, I believe that Natyadharmi is something which cannot be done normally on the stage. It is made possible on the stage. Which is impossible to be done on the stage is made possible on the stage with the help of Natya.

Pratibha Agrawal

Very nice explanation that Lokdharmi relates to something that we have to do in everyday life and that should be presented on the stage, we present there. And then something which normally cannot be done on stage and which we want to express, which we want to convey, we convey through Natyadharmi.

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

Natya, of course includes the rhythm, dance, Nritya everything is included in Natya. So inevitably the elements will come when you work. For example, I will tell you an example, I need not tell you but I will speak about that to explain the point that I would like to tell you. Suppose Dushyanta is entering the stage as if on a chariot. The chariot is not there. In Natyadharmi inevitably it should come. The moment the King enters, it has to be there, making the people believes the make-belief that he is travelling in great speed in a Ratha, it has to be put with the help of Natyadharmi, which cannot be done on the stage means unless you carry a Ratha on the stage, and you cannot do it.

Pratibha Agrawal

Even in the modern times, we are suggesting in different ways a number of things. Of course, even the sets are not used, the dresses are not used and then either by words or by gestures or just the thing is left to the imagination of the audience and going through the dialogues and all that just they can make out everything. Of course, in Natyadharmi strictly speaking, perhaps you make the whole thing visually present.

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

Yes, that is one aspect. Another point which I always feel about Natyadharmi is that in Western mind; take western mind for example, my friend, and one gentleman was there, he was doing mime. Say a glass is there. He can give the impression that there is a glass there by your movement. This can be a realistic mime. You can call it realistic because the outer aspect of the glass or glassiness or whatever it is that there is a glass that he is conveying with the movement of hand. Gestural mimes or mimes created with the help of gestures will take you a little further where you have to imagine certain things and you don't get the outer layer of the thing which is portrayed only. In gesture or in Natyadharmi, there comes Natyadharmi, Natyadharmi is not only interpreting outer level of something but it goes to the inner of what is portrayed.

Pratibha Agrawal

Do you think the use of Natyadharmi is inevitable and it must be done in the theatre?

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

I feel that this is inevitable because art is not something which is stated directly. Poetry gives certain gaps in your mind. When you read a poem, you get certain poetic gaps in your mind. That gap is very important. That gap is that which is not directly stated. It is the imagination that works to fill-up this gap. So this Natyadharmi is very essential even if you present a modern theme like say a factory, there you can have Natyadharmi if you want to do it in an artistic way.

Pratibha Agrawal

Do you feel, of course our traditional Natyadharmi style has got its own language, a language of Mudras and all that, movements and Mudras. Now, how can we present a factory or a modern idea or things or concept through that or should we develop a new Grammar for the modern plays wherever we need? Of course, in every play you don't need the use of imagination or use of Natyadharmi style. It can be a realistic play.

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

There can be realistic plays also. They should exist side by side with this development. The other stage also exists. But to do Natyadharmi, this question is very important, whether we can do a modern theme, say factory life can be presented in Natyadharmi? We have not grown to that level because we have no basis or norms. Taking India as a whole the whole country even doesn't have that basic set-up because we are cut off from the past for the last so many years. We have been cut off from our tradition. So there is no point in thinking immediately in planning to do that way. Natyadharmi that way has to develop.

Pratibha Agrawal

Mr. Panikkar, you must have seen Badal Sarkar's productions?

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

No, I have not seen.

Pratibha Agrawal

You haven't seen? What do you say Bimal? I think that modern Natyadharmi style is being used or conceived there when a plane must be shown by a combination of people, bridge is created by a number of people and their movements, the river is there, machines –

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

This is all possible.

Bimal Lath

The basic difference lies in the fact that whereas in the Natyadharmi, the traditional style, they show the thing by gestures of the single man, whereas in the modern Natyadharmi as you say of Badal Babu, it is through formation of the figures by different people together. They have to create.

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

Not only that, Badal Babu's case I agree, but you have been asking about me. You have to go further in this field in the sense that you have to create Rasikas for this. This is not done. Then only the theatre will be complete. For example, what I show, we should be able to communicate because these are special Mudras for example it is a specialized art.....art should be specialized.

Bimal Lath

How do you say that because 10 people forming a spring or flowing water, the Rasika is getting that idea that this is the flowing water, that he has created a door from which one man comes out.

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

Gramya Mudras can easily convey. One man was asking me on the road, showing an address in Hindi just to direct him. I don't know what the place is. So I said (Mudra) – he understood this Mudra. So Gramya Mudras are there, we have not developed or codified these. Each director is using in his own way and of course conveying to the audience but totally speaking in Kerala we have a lot of Mudras developed and rigid Mudras in Kathakali and also Kathakali artists gets freedom to show. I told you yesterday about improvisation. During improvisation he can show many things, you know, he need not be very rigid.

Pratibha Agrawal

Do you feel that in near future, they will have this Natyadharmi style being used more and more in the modern plays and productions?

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

I think this is possible. Lokdharmi and Natyadharmi combination may take us to a point where there will be a language for the theatre, quite different from the spoken language, the Deshi languages like Malayalam or Bengali. Whatever the language used in theatre, that language will be there, but along with that language a parallel language can be developed, the language of gestures, the Natyadharmi language, and the Lokdharmi language which will help the theatre to grow.

Pratibha Agrawal

Very good. One more thing, in the beginning you just said that Indian Theatre and Western Theatre and we all think in terms of western theatre –

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

I said of my experience.

Pratibha Agrawal

Yes, but this is something which bothers me at times and I am unable to understand very clearly that what are the salient features of western theatre and Indian theatre. There are a lot of common things, common elements there, what are the special features which keep them apart – use of songs, dances, music, rasa or something more than that – what is that? At times I feel baffled.

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

Now, Westerners also have started taking our elements. They have started. Only thing is Western realism. See, even for the Westerners realism has become a thing of the past. Modern producers, directors in the West do experiments. They don't take realism. They don't –



Pratibha Agrawal

Is it only the realism? Is realism the main factor, main difference between our Indian concept of theatre and Western Theatre?

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

That is one thing. See, even our realism is only Lokdharmi realism. Western realism took a different line. Say for example, a play like MricchaKatik, there is actually you know, there is the touch of life there.

Pratibha Agrawal

Very much.....very much....

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

But there is a possibility of creating in presenting life in a different way. What I mean is, characters can speak in music, even in Lokdharmi style it the requirement is there. And that requirement is there. You can feel when you read even the Sutradhar and Nati; a large portion is there in Shudrak's play MricchaKatik.

Pratibha Agrawal

Then should we say that this use of dance, music and again this Natyadharmi style codified in a way, we may say the language of the theatre are the main features which keep us apart or give us individual entity? Should we interpret it that way?

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

Yes, we can say that, that is there. Mainly the Rasa theory, the Bhava being converted into Rasa, in the mind of the Prekshaka, that theory is our basic theory of Indian aesthetics. It is not in the west.

Pratibha Agrawal

That theory might not be there but the effect is there.

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

You know, the Mukhavinaya, the Bhava of the actor is there in the western actor.

Pratibha Agrawal

Bhava is there, but the concept is not there.

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

This Nava Rasa and Rasa theory is not there.

Pratibha Agrawal

What other productions you are doing at the moment Panikkar Saheb?

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

After this I was just telling you about the ...After 'Bhagavata Ajjugiyam' I did 'Sakshi'. I wrote a play 'Devata' very much contemporary and with this style with dance, music and the problem was the life in a village; there they want to make a human being a God. And they you know, there is a quarrel amongst them as who should become the God. Shakta, the physically mighty man claims that he is the man to be made the God. Everybody, even the Komali or the jester has a claim for Godhood. Finally they make Shakta the God and they fail. When terrible bad times fall on the village, villagers don't get water, they suffer and all that and then they say Shakta cannot help us. Let us make this poor Buddha, the lean man just roaming around the temple. That happens in a village, temple.....

Pratibha Agrawal

By Buddha you mean intellectual Buddha or a fool?

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

Buddha is intellectual.

Pratibha Agrawal

Yes, one who has got 'Buddhi'.

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

They are very interesting characters. For example washerwoman, she claims that she is responsible for keeping the village always white. They wear white because of me so I have the right to become the God. This problem and of course at least undertone of the politics that was there. And that first play in which we utilized a lot of folk rhythm and folk instruments on the stage and folk traditions.

Pratibha Agrawal

That came out well in the stage?

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

It was received well. We did that play on several occasions.

Pratibha Agrawal

Has it been translated in any other language?

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

No, that is not done.

Pratibha Agrawal

Because the theme seems to be very interesting and quite giving lot of scope to the director for imagination.



Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

A lot of satire is there.

Pratibha Agrawal

Why don't you get it translated? Ask somebody to do it and that would be lovely.

Bimal Lath

When you write a play in this tradition using this style and all that, the script is rather small because the Vachika is small. You have to use a lot of time for Mudras and Talas and Sangeet. That means if anybody tries to do that play in the realistic style, it becomes one act play.

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

Yes, it becomes just a 20 minute play or 30 minute play. Then it becomes a Vachika play.

Pratibha Agrawal

What do you say about the possibility of your play being done in a realistic style?

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

You have to work on how it can be elaborated and how the Vachika can be interpreted. That is there. In theatre it is very

Pratibha Agrawal

I think he is very clear about what he is writing. He is writing for this particular style of production, particular form and that is there. So if anybody else wants to do it in any other form, then all these problems will be there – interpretations etc. Either he has to accept that this will be done in this much of time or may be that it is not possible at all to do. Just as he said, you have to show the entry. Now either you don't show it, let Dushyanta come on the stage directly, fine, but then what about the dialogues given to him by the Dramatist which he says while sitting in the chariot? Now either you change all that or if you want to have them then you have to show. Just as in Madhyam Vyayog, you wanted to show he is standing on two hills. No hills can be there on the stage so you have to improvise it some way.

Bimal Lath

Yesterday you made only one hill.

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

No. Two.....two.....

Bimal Lath

He could not stand on them. They are quite far.

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

No, no, not on the top. Down....down. Since that was available there I asked him to stand on that. Next play was – 'Kadamba' which I wanted to do here. 'Kadamba' is only one's own style, one's own barrier. Everybody has a barrier, selfishness or whatever it is. And here also it is contemporary. Because a group of village dancers and musicians proceed for a temple festival. They are on their way. They experience on the way. And you know there is a stile to be crossed to reach the temple. That stile is there. It is not built there. The barrier is not to be seen. They inform in rhythm. They all fall on this Kadamba or barrier and how to cross this is the problem. While they discuss about the village politics, immediately they speak about the murder which has been committed just now and the dead body the head was floating in the river which goes around the village and you know one man in the group gets possessed of the dead man's soul. And he becomes the dead man. And to that dead man is a money lender. The money lender is killed. And the murderer himself comes the stage with the sword in his hand. Like that it goes. It is very contemporary that way. And you know the chief of the village comes to make the trial, to do the trial. See, the murderer is there and the chief comes only to inquire who has done this and to give the punishment and all that. He comes and asks these musicians and dancers to come and give the

evidence. And he asks them all to go away because he wants to do a private trial of this man. And in the private trial they just think about their old days when they were friends. So he says – “Let us play for sometimes. Let them go. Let us play as we used to play in our childhood.” This is all simply for eyewash. This trial is like that and while the trial goes on these people come and ask “should we also be not there? If we are there we can enact certain things to help you. We can be of help to you”. No, no, no, no. This is serious trial going on. You are all ordinary people. You all go away. You have no business here. And the trial continues, the play continues. And as the play gains momentum, the murderer wants to take vengeance on this fellow. He does not like him. Like that the whole thing is contemporary and it keeps reflection of modern contemporary events to the audience. But full of music and dance and satire.

Pratibha Agrawal

You are doing your own plays only?

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

In Malayalam I have done my own play only.

Pratibha Agrawal

Don't you feel it is a limitation for the director to do his own plays because in the normal course whatever the writer says, the director again uses his imagination and he adds one more dimension to the script whereas, whenever the director is the writer also, he has just that whole thing is preconceived and whatever he writes he just produces that.

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

This is a very pertinent question. I should say that it is difficult for a playwright to direct his own plays but in a style of this type, you have to re-think or keep away. You should be able to do it in an objective way what is done in the capacity as a playwright and rethink or re-imagine whole thing for the production which is.....which of course was possible for me. I should not say that successful or all that but it becomes how the audience takes it. Usually it is very difficult. I agree with you. It is very difficult. But do you exhaust every possibility as a creative artist when you write the play is the question. As a playwright you might be exhausting all possibilities that a playwright has but as a director the balance may be in you to re-imagine the whole thing.

Pratibha Agrawal

Yes. And of course there are a number of people on the Indian stage who are the playwright and directors also. They are writing and they are directing. And perhaps it is very difficult to say that what they imagine at the level of playwrighting and what they have added at the level of production. It is very difficult.

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

Yes. At the level of production, he gets help from so many artists who are participating. You made them work and you get inspired from their imagination also. It is a total work. I for myself, I am not that way rigid director who decides things without consulting others. I don't do that nor we do, we make any paper or drawing for movements before we enter the area of acting. We do the whole thing as a creative work with the artists who participate as actors and the director also. So it is a sort of ensemble work.

Pratibha Agrawal

You have all the amateur artists working with you or they are professionals? They get some money also?

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

From this work?

Pratibha Agrawal

Yes.

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

No. We just distribute some amount which we get as balance after spending for our travel and all that.

Pratibha Agrawal

All of them are working somewhere else for their livelihood?

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

Some of them are working. A few of them are regular theatre people not doing anything else. They have something to fall back so they come for theatre work.

Pratibha Agrawal

So basically you will call your group an amateur group?

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

The bad sense of amateurishness is not there.

Pratibha Agrawal

No, not that. I mean amateur and not amateurishness. Non-professional.

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

You see, we have some difficulty. If we are called amateur group, there is every possibility of – you see in our place amateur person having a job in evening time, he wants something, some work.

Of course, the theatre work he likes. So as a matter of convenience, he goes for the theatre work. That way our group is not amateur.

Pratibha Agrawal

They are basically working for the theatre the whole day?

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

Yes. Not the whole day, but major part of it. Those who have work say our Jagannathan who is doing the role of Ghatotkach, he is a teacher. So after his working hours in the school he will come to our theatre of his own. He spends money from his pocket. He has a bike. He comes there. He does not expect anything back.

Pratibha Agrawal

So it means we should find out another word for this amateur theatre. Non-professional is of course a negative term. We should not use that. Let us all think over which can be the most suitable because that problem is always there. Amateur is often taken amateurish which many a groups are often not.

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

It is not a pass-time for them.

Pratibha Agrawal

Of course, one big difference here we find that must be there in Kerala also that clear cut difference between the professional or let us say the artists are commercial and amateur and the stage is commercial and non-profit making. I don't know. So commercial theatre.....

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

We have profit making theatre there which we may call commercial but some of our artist, actors and playwright may not like that they are called commercial. They like themselves to be called as professionals.

Pratibha Agrawal

Actually I think the artist will always be professional that means he is taking it as a profession. And the whole idea and the whole economic part of it is planned commercially for the commercial success.

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

There is nothing wrong if one is commercial. The only thing is here, the commercial is for money making, the main factor. That is not there in our theatre, not at all. We would like ourselves to be called professionals rather than amateurs or commercial.

Pratibha Agrawal

Good, very good.

Bimal Lath

Please say something about your latest production of Ottayan.

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

Ottayan is a play about play acting which came to my mind. Of course, I myself cannot write a play like Ottayan because it is specially meant play for acting alone, technique of acting. How the technique of acting the Natyadharmi succeeds and helps a Chakyar, a traditional actor, to escape from some danger. So this is just a – and also there is a myth about Chakyars. The Chakyar was caught by robbers and he escaped with the help of his art. So this is eulogizing the art, the delicacy of the art. That is all. So it is an experimental play which is meant for the very small audience. Of course, in a large audience also we can hold them tight but the question is, it does not give you anything apart from if there is something you can imagine but totally story wise, it is only the experience of the Chakyar.

Pratibha Agrawal

Can you recite one of your poems? Do you remember them?

Recitation by Kavalam Narayana Panikkar , [To listen click here](#)

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

The poem is about the sorrow of the gold. The gold is complaining to the goldsmith how he has treated the gold after taking the gold happily to make profit after the sale, to make ornaments and to sell it. He has done many things with the gold. He has beaten the gold to give shape and you know, this gold is imaging how this can work as tally for marriage, Mangalsutra for marriage – so many shapes it could get all by getting the beat. Alright, gold is ready to bear the brunt but finally when gold feels very sorry when he is sold to somebody against the Chirmi or Ghumchi which has a black face. Why did you sell me finally after doing all this?

Pratibha Agrawal

Thank you Panikkar Saheb for this nice, interesting and useful discussion.

