

worshipped by the older races. With the fusion of races, they reemerged under other names and different associations as the gods and goddesses of the new Indo-Aryan pantheon. In the Rigveda, the goddesses Prithvi and Aditi, Usha and Sarasvati were worshipped. When the non-Aryan cults were elevated into the Shiva and Shakti cults, the Mother Goddess became Amba, the Mother, and Lalita, the Charmer, of the Shakti cult.

From out of this popular consciousness rose the concept of the great god Shiva and his equally great spouse; of the eternal male and female principles, the inseparable powers representing creation in its dual aspect.

The effigy of the Mother Goddess, as known to pre-Aryan India, was adopted to represent some Vedic deity--perhaps Aditi. Material evidence to support this belief, however, has not been found so far. The gold repousse image of the nude goddess, recovered from the Vedic mound at Lauria

Nandangadh, has the unmistakable characteristics of the Harappan Mother Goddess, the predominant breasts, the large rounded hips and the girdle, *mekhala*, which had already come to be recognised as sacred in the *Atharva-Veda*. She is the beginning of the dream of fair women which inspired Indian artists for over two thousand years.

This effigy is placed between 700, and 800 B.C. It may be of a later date; it is difficult to say. Similar images have been found in the *stupa* at Piprawa (c. 400 B.C.) and Tilpat, near Delhi.

We find from the terracottas that the ancestral forms of the sculpture of the later Maurya, Shunga and Andhra periods were also in vogue in post-Vedic and pre-Mauryan times, about 600 B.C.

The Harappa culture was, therefore, related on the one hand to that of the early Sumerian and Babylonian and, on the other, to the Mauryan Art of India.

From the Bhavan's President
Rukmini Devi:
More than a
Great Personality

R. Venkataraman



A dedicated being, a true and fine artist, a great educationist, and above all, a loving humanist, Rukmini Devi was more than a great personality: she was a phenomenon.

Rukmini Devi was born at a time when our society was in a ferment. Colonial rule had led to the decay of traditional institutions and cultural mores. Where once the study of Sanskrit and music, the playing of *vadyams* and the rendering of *nritya* had been an integral and creative part of life, there occurred a cultural vacuum and, a characterless hybridization between East and West.

Rukmini Devi was stirred to

seek a solution to this cultural crisis. She could not see the artistic heritage of India suffer a slow death. But she was also realistic enough to see that an atavistic revival of our past was not what India needed. She knew that what India needed was a new and dynamic synthesis.

Rukmini Devi was uniquely suited to play this role. She had inherited a firm-rootedness in tradition from her traditional, deeply pious and gifted mother. At the same time she had inherited an open-mindedness to other cultures from her father Nilakanta Sastri, who had combined Sanskrit scholarship with Theosophy. For Nilakanta Sastri, the Theosophist message

of universal brotherhood and a higher spiritualism seemed to supplement *Vedanta*. And he made sure that Rukmini Devi imbibed both influences.

This combination was encouraged later by Rukmini Devi's mentor Dr. Annie Besant and her distinguished husband Dr. Arundale. Both Dr. Arundale and Dr. Besant had the deepest respect for India's cultural heritage and yet were aware of the need for this heritage to shed its anachronistic beliefs and blind superstition, if it had to regain its past glory.

Rukmini Devi entered the world of Theosophy with the much needed ability and spirit to assist this process. She became, at the age of 21, President of the All-India Federation of Young Theosophists and President of the World Federation of Young Theosophists. Touring the world with her husband, she was hailed

for her inherent authenticity, her Indianness, her fidelity to her roots, for her adaptability and urbanity. Theosophists found in her a living embodiment of the culture of India, which Dr. Besant venerated and wished to protect against debasement, internal or otherwise.

Rukmini Devi saw life as something that can either be lived crudely, violently, devoid of any higher impulse or as something that can be lived beautifully, creatively and in harmony with nature and its

Divine Maker. Rukmini Devi was one of those few persons born at the beginning of this century, whom destiny used as its instrument for progress.

It was 'given' to Rukmini Devi to bring music, literature and dance out of the tawdry half-lights of decay and decadence into the fresh air and sunshine



Rukmini Devi

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of the Theatre Arts. In doing this, Rukmini Devi was doubtless the instrument of destiny and her founding of Kalakshetra at the age of 32 marked the turning point. It brought to fruition all her inspirations, Eastern and Western. The influences of Anna Pavlova and Meenakshisundaram Pillai mingled to produce a new approach to dance as did those of Madame Montessori and Mahatma Gandhi, to produce a new approach to education.

In the realm of dance, Bharatanatyam as an art form had lost the pedestal on which it had been placed. It came to be regarded as an accomplishment of Devadasis only.

The long years of hard and

dedicated single-minded effort with which she served this cause is part of our current cultural history made radiant by her rich, colourful creative genius.

Rukmini Devi's genius, however, was not one that could be content with the presentation of dance alone. She felt that an effort should be made to enable artistes to find creative fulfilment on stage as also individual fulfilment in life. This could only be achieved if they were provided with the right environment, physical, cultural and spiritual. It is from that conviction that Kalakshetra was born. The atrophying roots of our culture in all its dimensions came once again to live in this Kshetra. Working like a lapidarist, with great patience and care, polishing and refining, Rukmini Devi created a cluster of sparkling gems and arranged them in a pattern of great beauty like a necklace of which each piece had an individuality but also a mutuality.

Thus she choreographed the life of Bhishma as well as of the

Buddha and Kalidasa's epics. Kalakshetra ballets soon became a major cultural event in themselves, with the *Ramayana* series becoming a veritable festival. After seeing one of the *Ramayana* presentations, Rajaji who had entertained a scepticism about producing the sacred epic on stage, wrote: "I am unable to overcome the wonder that it was possible to create such a marvellous thing. What ability, imagination, effort and the grace of God have combined to produce this!... I am surprised that this has been achieved in our lifetime."

Rukmini Devi broke old habits of thought and practice, in the process, by introducing courses in the arts and crafts of India for her students, giving to women a sense of equality that was novel in those times.

If Anna Pavlova had danced the 'Dying Swan' as a great ballerina, Rukmini Devi danced it not merely as an artiste but as someone for whom the dying of the swan became a matter of personal anguish. Rukmini Devi interiorized in herself the

sufferings of the Animal World.

Rukmini Devi's Bill, a Private Member of Parliament's Bill for the prevention of cruelty to animals is now part of our legislative history.

Her speech in the Rajya Sabha with Dr. Radhakrishnan in the Chair and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru facing her from the Treasury benches, is one of the most outstanding pieces of parliamentary eloquence. To her great passion of the subject, Rukmini Devi brought to bear a logician's forensic skill and the debating talents of long-standing legislators.

One could not, I suppose, have expected anything less from one who had been trained by Dr. Besant. Giving instance upon instance of cruelty, sparing no one, rich or poor; giving examples of legislation in other countries; referring to India's own traditions of *ahimsa* in the past as reiterated in our times by Gandhiji; going on to the *Vedas* and the *Koran*; and examining the socio-economic compulsions of our

communities, Rukmini Devi challenged the nation to rise above itself and place her Bill for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals on the statute book.

That speech of Smt. Rukmini Devi is so comprehensive that it can relate to any discipline, not excluding psychology.

She observed during the course of this speech.

"After all, what does an animal ask for? It does not ask for money or name; it asks only for our affection and nothing else. If you ill-treat a dog, but afterwards you pat him on the head with affection, he will forget all your cruelties. Animals are grateful, more grateful than human beings. If someone ill-treats us we forget all but this one act, whereas animals forget the cruelties quickly but seldom the kindness. This is the difference between the animals and most of us".

Speaking immediately after her, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said: "I entirely agree with the Hon. Member, the mover, that one test of

civilisation--a very major test--is the growth of this feeling and practice of compassion." At his instance, Rukmini Devi's Bill came to be referred to a Select Committee and later became law.

I once approached Rukmini Devi with a proposal for the establishment of a women's college at the Kalakshetra grounds. While welcoming the idea, she stipulated that Zoology which entailed cutting of frogs and other beings must be tabooed. So strong was her conviction that she was prepared to forgo another scheme dear to her heart, namely, women's education, for the sake of preventing cruelty to animals.

Rukmini Devi had a horror of the tawdry--even in matters like personal attire. When our handwoven fabrics are so beautiful, she would ask, why should we go in for foreign stuff? She always wore the most beautifully designed sarees and made it possible for others to do so by arranging for traditional patterns to be revived on looms at Kalakshetra.

The Padma Bhushan, Santiniketan's *Desikottama* award, the Kalidasa Samman and many other awards came naturally to her. She never sought them and even if they had not come her way Rukmini Devi would not have noticed or bothered about the omission. When the office of the President of India was offered to her, Sri Sankara Menon telephoned to me. I asked Sankara Menon what was Rukmini Devi's own reaction. He said Rukmini Devi felt that she was not cut out for any political office and was not inclined to accept. Later, when she spoke to me about it, she said with quiet dignity that her realm of activity was different. I am not aware of any other instance, where the highest office of the land was just passed by. She was much higher than the mundane offices of the earth.

Rukmini Devi was totally self-reliant. Her self-reliance was often mistaken for self-centredness. Her inner self had, as I said earlier, a centre to it. But that, of course, is not the same

thing as being self-centred. Rukmini Devi's self-reliance stemmed from her knowledge that she was on the right path. Her conscience was her best--often her sole--companion. Her *sadhana* was, therefore, an uninterrupted progression.

Kalakshetra is not merely an Institution; it is an Inspiration. It is not merely a College, it is a Culture; it is not merely a Theatre, it is a Theme, of which the message is simple and clear: The springs of creativity do not well-up as before in our people as a whole. We can boast of more painters, musicians and dancers than before.

But, as a society, we seem to be less sensitive than earlier generations to the appeal of the aesthetics. The quiet beauty of our traditional arts and crafts, the gentle repose and tranquillity they engendered, are at a discount. A non-aesthetic life can all too easily degenerate into a violent and strife-torn life.

That eventuality must be prevented.

This was her message.

Editorial Mahatma, Thou Shouldst Be Living At This Hour



St Augustine once told the story of Alexander the Great carrying a massive fleet of ships with soldiers and weapons on a world conquest venture. On the way the fleet came across a pirate's ship crossing the emperor's path. An angry emperor told the pirate that he would be punished for disturbing the waves. The frightened pirate mildly pointed out that he had only one small ship disturbing the waves but the emperor had 2,000 large ships doing the same. Nevertheless the pirate had to be punished.

Substitute George Bush for Alexander and Saddam Hussein for the pirate and we have the current world situation. The emperor decides what is right on the solid premise that he is never

wrong. In Alexander's days there was no principle of national frontiers and there was no U.N. Charter declaring all nations to be sovereign and equal. Two millennia and a couple of centuries later the new emperor of the world has also declared that for him there are no sovereign equals or inviolable national boundaries.

The post Iraq war challenge to the world community as well as to the militarily insecure nations – compared to the USA almost all countries of the world are militarily insecure — is how to cope with the world's most powerful country. Most nations would settle for the line of least resistance, out of a sheer sense of survival; a few pragmatic nations would choose to join the