Rustom Bharucha

I remember Komalda talking to me with matter-of-fact calm about his father’s death rites and ceremonies, which he had observed with meticulous rigour. Acknowledging the family as a vital site for his research, he punctuated his observations with intimate details—for instance, if three people travelling by train are taking the ashes of a dead person to Hardwar, then they will always buy four cups of tea. One cup of tea for the dead person. However, when the relatives of the dead return back home, they will buy only three cups of tea. Measuring his words, Komalda said, ‘If you are capable of treating a dead person as a living being immediately after his or her death, then he or she can live for eternity. The dead can be with you forever.’

These words resonate for me as I begin, with difficulty, to reflect on Komalda’s death—a death that, on the one hand, was anticipated, but which has yet to sink in. The loss is immeasurable. In this context, how can one commemorate him today? No shubraj or panegyric verses, I can hear him mutter. Just get on with the work.

If we listen carefully, Komalda is still talking to us. He is urging us not to lose sight of ground realities as we theorize our respective disciplines. Above all, he is telling us to be serious but not to lose our sense of humour or the human dimensions of scholarly research. In our internalisation of his many hours of conversation, punctuated with his inimitable digressions and transitions, intuitive leaps and starting logic, I do believe that he is still with us. Like an oral epic, with no fixed beginning or end, Komalda will live forever.

Tributes

Jasleen Dhamija

It was in the late 50’s that I met Komal da with Kamaladevi Chattopadhaya when he was Secretary, Rajasthan Sangeet Natak Akademi. He showed us his collection of Folk Musical instruments. We were both beginning our work experiences. For the first time, we heard the Langas and it was an unforgettable experience. Over years we met often, and each meeting was so enriching. He revealed new perceptions and deep insights in the study of folk culture.

He generously shared his deep knowledge with everyone and his rich insights helped many a scholar to discover themselves.

Kishore Saint

Our last two meetings were this year at times of severe bodily stress for him. On both occasions as soon as he emerged from intensive treatment and saw familiar faces of friends and family, his eyes lit up and each one of us he took up shared concerns with precision and without the least hint of being constrained. As he put it ‘My body is with the doctors but my mind and my speech are mine for conversing with my friends’.

Komalda’s body has rejoined the ‘panchmahabhoot’ but the strains of music and the traditions, tales and artefacts of folk life in Rajasthan will continue to inspire and challenge us in our search for patterns of living in harmony with nature.

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