

Gieve Patel

COMPUTER CARD

Theatre Personality

Name	Gieve Patel
Bio-data	1
Photographs	53
Articles/clippings/ brochures/	8 clippings + 2 articles
Publicity material	Nil
Books by	2 scripts
Audio material	3
Video material	1

Bio-Data

<i>Name</i>	Dr. Gieve G. Patel
<i>Date of birth</i>	18th August 1940
<i>Birth Place</i>	Bombay
<i>Residential Address</i>	5 E Malabar Apartments Nepean Sea Road, Bombay 400 036
<i>Profession</i>	Physician
<i>Education</i>	M.B.B.S., Bombay
<i>Languages known</i>	English and Gujarati
<i>Language of theatre work</i>	English
<i>Awards/ honours</i>	Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, 1984 (Smithsonian Inst., Washington DC, U.S.A.) to research and write a new play. Second prize – Sultan Padamsee Award for <i>Princes</i> , 1969. Rockefeller Fellowship, University of Chicago, 1992.

Poetry Collections

Title	Publisher	Year of Publication
<i>Poems</i>	Nissim Ezekeil	1966
<i>How do you Withstand Body</i>	Clearing House	1976
<i>Mirrored Mirroring</i>	Oxford University Press	1991
<i>Plays Published</i>	<i>Mister Bebram</i> , Praxis, Bombay, 1988	
<i>Exhibitions</i>	Held between 1966 and 1992. Paintings displayed at the National Gallery, Delhi; Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal; and in some museums abroad.	

Plays performed

Title	First Performance	Group	No. of Shows
<i>Princes</i>	1971	Theatre Group	3
<i>Savaksa</i>	1982	Max Muller Bhavan	14
<i>Mr Bebram</i>	1987	Stage two	18

Excerpts of audio-video interview (23 October 1991)

Toni: I would like to know about your childhood, your education and the atmosphere in which you were born and brought up.

Gieve: I was born in Bombay, (August 1940) and I grew up in a place called Cusrow Baug which is a colony for Parsis, at Electric House near Colaba. My parents though, were not born in Bombay, they have both come from a small village in Gujarat called Nargole which is in Bulsar district, about three to four hours by train from Bombay. It's a seaside village and my father's father was a landowner and they had property in the Dahanu area. My mother's father was a village doctor at Nargole. And they were both married in Nargole but later on my father chose to study dentistry so he came to Bombay where I was born. All through my early childhood the contact with Nargole remained

Gieve Patel





*Nosherwan Jabangir
and Rajit Kapur
in Mr Behram.*

because of many of my cousins, uncles and aunts. We used to visit Nargole every vacation: December or Diwali and sometimes in between also. We used to stay there for long periods of time. Nargole is a very special village. Like all Indian villages, Nargole is divided into *wada-s*, you have a Parsi section and you have a Bhandari section and so on. At that time it had a large Parsi population and I think, some of the families, probably, have been settled there since generations. Then there were also people who came from Bombay and settled there and they had two or three generations who were born there.

Toni: I think also tangentially it is important to note the fact that your family, father's family were landlords, owners of large tracts of rice fields where they had Warli workers and so the interaction between Warlis and Parsis . . .

*Gieve: That's right. The land was in the Dahanu area which is about 14 miles from the village itself and the labour was Warli. So from a very early age I have been exposed to the Warli presence which has been very very important for me because the Parsi community is somewhat a closed community, like many others in India, and to me the Warli presence was like a breath of fresh air. So there is always the Warli presence in my plays, although in the first two plays it is a very muted presence, but it is a very important one. In the last play *Mr Behram*, one of the most important characters is a Warli.*

Toni: The village being in Gujarat, the language you spoke was Gujarati. This land which your father owned was on the border of Maharashtra and Gujarat and so you had a mixture of Gujarati and Marathi, a

dialect, so you were exposed to Marathi as well . . .
Gieve: I was . . .

Toni: What about your education, writing, painting etc.?

*Gieve: I did my schooling at St. Xavier's School in Bombay and did my college also again in Bombay, St. Xavier's College, and later on Grant Medical College which is attached to J. J. Hospital. At St. Xavier's College I studied upto B.Sc. with Microbiology. I finished my medical studies in 1966 and then I was appointed Medical Officer at the Primary Health Centre in Sanjar which is about 7 miles from my village, Nargole. I chose to go back because I wanted to do a little work there and also as I was feeling a bit lost in Bombay. I wanted time to myself, to think about my work as a writer, painter. . . . My father was not particularly interested in literature or in painting. My mother used to paint and she was generally interested in things like gardening which I . . . I mean . . . we had a kind of a bond in that area. And my grandfather, i.e. her father who was the village doctor, was very interested in classical Hindustani music. He used to play the *dilruba*. I remember this village when we used to go and stay with him, there used to be travelling musicians at that time who'd pass through the village and he would invite them to stay with him for a few days. So I remember listening to music in his presence. One doesn't see these travelling musicians these days very much.*

Toni: When you say the village doctor, was he a medical practitioner, a qualified doctor?

Gieve: Yes, yes, he was not a witch doctor though,

was not a *bbagat*. He was a Bombay person who came and settled in Nargole. On my father's side they were really village people.

Kendre: *When did you decide to do something in theatre or painting or poetry?*

Gieve: In school we were constantly exposed to the usual school concerts and drama and things like that and I used to take part in them. I also used to contribute poems to the school magazine and that sort of interest slowly grew over a period of time. I was not interested in painting at all and in fact, you know, rather disliked the drawing classes. I think it was really in college that all these interests found a more mature and more definite focus, when I met specific people who were interested in these things in a serious kind of a way. Well . . . there was a very important influence of a friend, a person called Suleman Karim, who was a pianist, a musician. I used to write poems and show them to him and he would give me his critical appreciation or condemnation of them. I also was introduced to Western classical music through him, by listening to his own performances or by listening to records with him.

Datar: *Was this in Xavier's College?*

Gieve: Yes, Xavier's College.

Datar: *And about theatre?*

Gieve: My interest in theatre, which had started in school because of our school plays, continued through college, but I was fairly very timid about joining the dramatics in St. Xavier's College. Xavier's College was full of rather rich, spoilt brats and I have a peasant background, so to speak, so I was a bit frightened of them quite frankly. But I used to look at things that were done.

Toni: *Which were what? The usual College one-acts?*

Gieve: Yes.

Toni: *And that may be one reason why you didn't join it.*

Gieve: I don't think I had a very developed critical sense so I don't think that that would have been my reason for rejecting them. I think, basically, I was just damn frightened of them.

Toni: *Describe some of the dramatics you used to do in your village.*

Gieve: Well yes, let me mention a very important influence. I had an elder cousin whose name was Noshir and he was my father's sister's son and he must have been around seventeen, when I was about ten. He had rheumatic heart disease so it was very difficult for him to have a normal active life, but he was very, very inventive mentally. He used to do carpentry at home, fretwork and he was very interested in disguises, you

know, moustaches and beards and all that kind of thing. Once in a while he would visit us in Bombay and we would see some Hindi films or some English films together. Then during the next vacation I'd go back to Nargole, we would re-enact those films on the huge big beds, using them as stages and using the mosquito nets as curtains, to open and shut.

Datar: *What about the audience?*

Gieve: Well, other cousins.

Kendre: *Did you have any sort of formal or informal training in theatre?*

Gieve: Well, some time after I finished St. Xavier's College and got into medical college or even just a little before when I was studying for my B.Sc., I saw Alkazi's productions, one or two of them. I also attended a few lectures which he gave in Bombay on painting and on theatre. He gave a lecture on *Hamlet*, I remember. He gave a lecture on the painters: Giotto, Piero Della Francesca and I was absolutely magnetised by these. So then I met him, he laughed and then he said, 'The reason why I gave these lectures was to have people like you come and ask me more about theatre and painting'. So in a way he was looking out for people who could join him in his work. Then I worked with him for about three years or so. After that he went to Delhi as the Director of the National School of Drama. Those three years were, I mean, intensive education for me in theatre. I did just one or two very minor roles in his plays and I helped him backstage though very badly.

Toni: *You used to forget the cues . . . You mentioned that you've attended a lecture on painting—Giotto and others. So was that the starting point of your interest in painting or was that earlier?*

Gieve: No, I became interested in painting just a little while earlier when somebody gave me a book on the painter, Peter Paul Reubens. I started copying those pictures and then I found that at the back of the book there's a list, a long list of other books which were available so I started buying those and looking at more and more paintings.

Toni: *Those small series of reproductions?*

Gieve: That's right.

Toni: *And when you say you copied, you copied . . .*

Gieve: In pencil.

Toni: *Not paint?*

Gieve: No. And then of course, when I heard Alkazi, my interest in painting became more concentrated.

Datar: *But was that training related to theatre alone or also to painting?*

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flict of two family groups for the possession of a male child. And it progresses to the point of . . . you know the child being more or less torn apart between the two groups. The child dies at the end, neither of the family group gets him. This is the theme.

Toni: *It is said that the first work of an author is usually autobiographical.*

Gieve: In all my works autobiography does play an important role. But I think that with most writer's autobiography is used in a very cunning way. One tends to take a snippet from here or there, actual facts, things that you have experienced, but you also change it, sometimes unrecognisably. However, it is true what you say, I mean *Princes* is located in the village from where my parents come. This particular incident that I talk about in the play is something that I personally did witness happening . . . I was a very young person at that time so, you know, it was a very painful experience. *Princes* is really an autobiographical account of Noshir (my cousin) and his death around the age of 18 of rheumatic heart disease. I must have been about 11 when I saw him die. And during those days we didn't have all the medical facilities that we have today, specially not in a village. So it was a fairly prolonged and agonising death which was made more terrible by these family-fights around the death-bed.

Datar: *Have you written anything before Princes?*

Gieve: Ah, yes. Before that I wrote a play called *A Ritual for Two People* and this play is in verse, has three choruses and is about the meeting of two races: a race which is indigenous and another race which comes from abroad and the clash between the two. It is a very young man's play and I think there are some interesting things in it. But I would definitely not wish to publish it. It is juvenilia. It is heavily influenced by Keats, W. B. Yeats, Eliot and it has something like three rapes, two murders and one suicide.

Toni: *In Princes you laid to rest a certain biographical thing that was disturbing you and in the same way in this play, possibly, something was laid to rest, some worry.*

Gieve: Yes, you are quite right because I did see these two races. I did see the indigenous race as my idealization of the Warli race and the race that comes from abroad is obviously the Parsi and this conflict . . .

Toni: *Could be some guilt?*

Gieve: Certainly, yes, that too was something that I went through, laid to rest in that play, but in an extremely immature fashion and I think that it is in the subsequent plays that my . . . internalization of my association with the Warli gets some more mature voicing.

Kendre: *What is your process of writing?*

Gieve: Something sparks off—a first thought or idea, or even a physical sensation. In the case of *Princes* it was obviously Noshir's death which was a great psychological burden which I was carrying from school days onwards, totally undissolved, and which had shattered me internally. So that at a certain point I felt that I had to some extent master that tragedy inside my self. I felt then that now I am capable of doing this last act of writing about it which will hopefully free me from it forever. In the case of *Savaksa* what started off was not an idea, not a person, not a theme but a physical sensation. I worked as a medical officer in Sanjan. It is a very very small town, almost a village, but trying to become a small town and it is very close to the railway station. There is a scruffy bazar, there are these mangy dogs all over the place, pigs, the influential landlords around whose life is somewhat dessicated power-struggle in the local area. Now working in this kind of a set-up for about three or four years and then coming back to Bombay at one point is a physical sensation of an itch, a skin itch is what remained with me of that experience of working in Sanjan. That is the first sense. It just came as a sensation. Something dry and scaly and that gave me the first central image of the play which is of a man who has a large eczema on his arm and who is the central character, Savaksa. He says that the eczema is a mat on which all his possessions have been noticed. After I wrote that paragraph, I intended to carry on writing the rest of the play. I think almost two years went by before I picked it up again. That one paragraph remained and I could not proceed because I had no clear idea of a character or a situation and later on when I re-wrote the play, this first paragraph remained as it had been written first. Then two years later, slowly, the situation and the characters came in and I could connect the two.

Toni: *What is the theme?*

Gieve: A wealthy Parsi landlord from a small town in Gujarat, comes to Bombay and sees an impoverished Parsi girl from Grant Road. He follows her. She is eighteen, he is about sixty and he proposes marriage to the mother. He says, 'May I marry this girl and as a preparation for this, would you come and visit my country home, to see if you like the place?' And then the mother and the daughter come to this little village and they meet Savaksa's family and then a kind of a series of dramatic-incidents happen which explores both the life of this landlord in the little town and this young girl from Bombay.

Toni: *You use language in order to get the local flavour. How does it differ in Princes and in Savaksa?*

Gieve: It would be very difficult to tell. But first let me



Roger Pereira in Savaksa.

tell you what I attempted. I used English because it's the language I am familiar with. But it is an English which I have moulded, it is ungrammatical, it is not correct English. At the same time I was not interested in merely reproducing the errors that Indians normally make when they speak English. I wanted to recreate a language. The language of theatre is an artifice, not artificial. It is something created and so I would change syntax, I would change grammar, in order to, ultimately I think, get the thought-rhythms of these characters. As though one were pushing the language through their bodies and then seeing what would come out.

Toni: *What you've done is you've bent the language. It is not incorrect and not even ungrammatical as*

you say it.

Gieve: But it is certainly not King's English.

Toni: *But it is an English which is clear, poetic and even lyrical.*

Gieve: Yes, I have attempted that. In both plays there are characters who come from Bombay, who speak more normal Bombay English.

Toni: *You've used violence in your plays. In Prince there are a lot of words which are almost impossible to believe that come from a character and say things like 'We'll break your mouth'.*

Gieve: I don't want to quote, but all I can say is that a very slight acquaintance with a dignified old woman anywhere in the world will tell you that they can come out with some pretty nasty things to say. It is really the emotional drive behind that character that makes her say these things. I'd like to say just one word that my short period of working with Alkazi was very important to me also, because certain seminal things that he said I have never forgotten. For instance, suddenly at one point he said, 'Theatre is about bad people'. I think this is an extraordinary statement and I have never forgotten it. And to this day I don't know exactly what it means. But I know what it means when I am writing the play. I think that as one explores character after character and one goes deeper and deeper into the dredges, it is there that drama is born.

Toni: *In Savaksa you do not use this kind of language. In fact everybody speaks very courteously to each other.*

Gieve: But the knife is under the courtesy.

Datar: *And what about Mr Behram?*

Gieve: The inception of *Mr Bebram* was again an incident. I was talking to an elderly woman, who must be in her sixties or seventies. And she was telling me about the tragedy of her life and about how her husband was. Though she was seventy, she was still talking about her husband's affairs and how her whole life was a waste because of that. I happened to know the whole background and I knew that actually the husband had had no affairs and I said, 'My God, what a family and what a life!' Now the whole life is a delusion, a tragedy which is absolutely pointless. And I went away shaking my head and then a peculiar thought entered my head. I said, 'Can I think of something which is even crazier than this? Some situation which is so ridiculous that its tragedy is unspeakable?' And then another thought crossed my head and I said, 'Supposing a man were to develop an obsession for his own son-in-law, what would happen?' I said, 'It would affect his relationship with his wife, it would affect his relationship with his daughter and the whole kind of fabric of the family would be shattered for something that is an impossi-

bility'. It was such a strange thought that I shrugged it off and said, 'Well, for one thing I don't know if I'd ever have the technical capacity to write about a situation like this.' But then the thought would keep coming back to me over a period of time and then slowly I said, 'Well, even if I fail, this play has to be written'. *Mr Bebram* is set in the 19th century. He is a very well-known lawyer and reformist. He has adopted a young Warli orphan boy. As the boy grows, he realises that he has got a brilliant child on his hands. So he sends the boy to school. Later on the boy becomes a lawyer, comes back from England and marries his daughter. As the young man begins to show his talents the older man feels threatened. He feels that he wants to grab on to his creation and the tragedy begins there. The language here is extremely sophisticated because these are very learned people and I wanted them to be able to articulate every last emotion that they felt with great clarity. Again there is an artifice, because I have used a so-called 19th century English which is extremely formal and so it has given a certain classical distance to this particular play.

Toni: *So when you say formal can you tell me what playwrights you have in mind?*

Gieve: Well, the French writer Jean Racine has always been very important to me but that has been the case all through, not only with just *Mr Bebram*.

Toni: *But has there been an influence with language or in the formal structure?*

Gieve: Language . . . very difficult to say because I cannot read French. But Racine has the crystalline quality in the structure of his plays, in the emotional patterning of it, in the entry and exits of characters and in what one gets of the language through English translation. I want to say just one thing, we've been stressing on the Parsi ethos of these plays. I want to say that the more faithful it is to its local origin the more universal a play becomes and all three of my plays have been seen by a wide range of Indian audiences and I have been always very happy and gratified by the fact that the people come back to me and say, 'Oh but, you know, this is a Parsi setting but it could've happened to me. It could have happened to my brother, my family situation or to the place where I come from.'

Toni: *Would you like to say anything more about the way in which these plays have been performed and produced in Bombay?*

Gieve: Well, they have been given one performance each, I mean, several evenings. But I would like to see these plays in the hands of different directors at some

stage if possible.

Kendre: *Whether your profession as a doctor, you as a poet or a painter had to do anything with your writing? Has it helped your writing?*

Gieve: Yes, the painting and poetry first. Only in the sense that all arts are inter-connected and, I don't know who the person is who said it, that all arts aspire to the quality of music. I may be slightly misquoting, but basically to me music is the touchstone for all the arts. And although I am not a practising musician, I listen to a lot of music, both Western and Indian. And to me a playscript, for instance, is like a musical score. What I look for when I see a production, aside from the fact of whether the director has been able to tackle this actor to bring out a certain character or not, is whether the sets are fine or the movements . . . Basically the musicality of the production, does it have a sense of rhythm, of phrasing, of the relationship of one little scene with the next, of the intonation between what two actors say to each other, because this is very important to me in my writing as well, and in my painting and in my poetry. It is also, I mean, I can look at a painting and say this painter is no good because whatever else he may have, he has no sense of rhythm. So it is not painting and poetry that have influenced my theatre-work, it is music that has influenced all the three of them.

Kendre: *And what about your profession?*

Gieve: Yes, it is terribly important to me. Firstly, it is important to me because it keeps me sane. Every evening when I go to the clinic, I come back at night, healed. I go there in fragments and I come back cured, temporarily, so as a human being it is important to me and it is certainly important to me in my writing because of its constant meeting with people and things they say about themselves and their lives. I can give you another little example: there was a family I used to visit for medical reasons. I was looking after the father, and I sort of noticed that there was a very depressed gloom over that family. There was a daughter, there was a mother and at that time I was just thinking about *Savaksa* and I was writing a little bit about it. Then evening after evening, as I was looking after them, they would tell me about themselves. One day the daughter said that her father was retired but that he used to be a projectionist in a cinema hall. Suddenly it struck me that one never realises that there are human beings who live their whole life projecting films on a screen and something of the horror kind of came to me and I could read a little more into the dullness and the depression in that house. When I was writing this little thing came back to me.

Datar: *What about language in poetry and language*

in plays?

Gieve: Well, one obvious thing is that in theatre it is human beings who are talking so that you know, your words come through the mouth of a character. This would not happen in poetry unless you are writing narrative dramatic poetry, which I don't. So that in poetry it is my voice, more nakedly so, all the time. Also the use of English in my poetry is straight. I mean it is English which could . . . I mean it is not English which goes through the bowels of a person who is living in a Gujarat village. It is myself. This is the one difference I can think of.

Toni: But the subject-matter in your first book of poems largely had a lot of poems about Nargole.

Gieve: This continues all through even in the second and third. I mean my background in Gujarat is very important and keeps coming up in various ways. But also my stay in Bombay. These two – Bombay and small town Gujarat are the two locales from which all the poetry comes.

Toni: So the use of language is definitely different in the poetry?

Gieve: Yes, it is.

Datar: Now the other aspects of the playwriting . . .

Gieve: Once the first spark has been lit then what happens is that at unexpected moments during the day I may get a snatch of dialogue or I may get a sudden insight into a possible development of a character. These are generally brief and short things which I note down on any piece of paper which is around. I try to keep paper around but I don't always succeed for sometimes it can be a brown paper bag or whatever and make a quick note. At most these notes could come to, at the largest to, two or three foolscap sheets or, at the least, it could be a little slip of paper. Then I just keep them all in one place, either in a file or a drawer, just dumping them and this can go on for about a year or sometimes two years. . . .

Toni: The same process for all the plays?

Gieve: Yes, then there'll be also little instructions about language or little kind of warnings to myself saying 'no clichés please' and things like that.

Toni: And sometimes in the middle of a meal or something he'll rush off. So Avaan and I both say, 'Ah! we know what he is doing'.

Gieve: Well, that's when you are in a good mood. When you are in a bad mood you say sharper things! And then at one point I feel that I am now ready to think of beginning. So at that point I start sorting out these notes and then I make them into sections like one section character, one section structure, one section

language, vaguely. And then at some point again I start to write. The writing of it can be the first draft as little as four lines a day or as much as two or four pages a day, but rarely more than that. And the first draft is always handwritten and I may be restless all through the morning until I have written those four lines and after that I feel free. That way the first draft may take up to about six months to write . . . And then the subsequent drafts I type and all the time I refer back to those chits and little notes and things like that, which helps a great deal. So generally a play goes through at least 4-5 drafts before I feel that it is complete. I feel very, very confident of it and I feel very certain that I will allow little or no interference from any actor or director to tell me to change this or that . . .

Toni: Or wife!

Gieve: Since she happens to be a director.

Kendre: Any incident where you have re-written some scene or reconsidered . . .

Gieve: In all the three plays I have, after much bullying I agreed to cut out a maximum of four pages from a finished script.

Toni: I want to remind you that you did it in Princes. You said something about Pearl asking you to cut out some scene she did not want, she did not feel happy with . . .

Gieve: Yes. But then we had a conflict over that and it is Pearl Padamsee who directed *Princes* and she wanted to end the play, at a certain point, much before my end. And we worked very amicably all through. In fact she was very close to the play and she had a very fine understanding of it. But there was at the end, a very difficult thing to manage which she was drawing back from and she wanted to end the play before that. And she said, 'This is such a nice point to end it on.' So I said, 'I don't want to end it on a nice point. I want to end it after that difficult patch.' And we had a conflict about that and then we talked a great deal with the actors and with the producer. She was generous enough, finally, to agree to my demand and she did do the play to its end and I think that helped. As far as *Savaksa* is concerned there were no problems about cuts. I had given her a finished play and Pearl accepted it.

Toni: What kind of books, plays as well as novels have affected your writing?

Gieve: I think there are two or three things which I tend to read again and again and they help me a great deal in my playwriting. One of them is definitely Racine. I read Racine's *Phaedra* (Phédre) and I read Racine's *Andromaque* repeatedly, *Britannicus* also and I have never seen them performed on the stage. What draws

me to Racine is the distillation of passion. I think that there are no playwrights who distill human passion almost into an essence which you could pour into a glass and put in front of a little wine glass and you say this is human passion, that's Racine. It has that kind of crystalline clarity and that kind of fire in it. And so I have always read him. And each time I write a play I re-read him. There are certain novelists, novelists like Henry James, the American novelist, who has affected me very deeply. Incidentally James started his career as a playwright, he failed as a playwright and then he started writing novels. So there is a kind of theatre-feel to many of the episodes in his novels. And you feel, for instance, that there are certain exchanges between one or two characters or two or three characters which could actually be taking place on a stage. What I learnt from him is elliptical statement of which he is a great master, which is that two people are talking about something on the surface but they are actually talking about the third thing which is not stated. And he does this again and again in all kinds of ways and so much of human drama is really like that, between friends, between enemies, between rivals, in the family. What is not said is the real drama and this is something that fascinates me and which I have employed from time to time in my plays.

Datar: *What about films and music?*

Gieve: In music I have an extremely wide taste. I listen to the Romanticists, the Classicists, the Baroque. I listen to all the *gharana-s* in Hindustani music and since I am not myself a musician, I have this . . . I can take in anything.

Datar: *Particularly which artiste do you like the most?*

Gieve: I listen a lot to Amir Khan, I listen to the one record of Kesarbai that I have, again and again, Bade Ghulam. I must say that I have a greater fondness for vocalists than for instrumentalists. I find more and more, unhappily so, that our instrumentalists are becoming cowboys. They are riding a horse and going tha-dang-tha-dang . . . In Western music, I listen to all periods of Western music but not the most modern, the electronic music and things like that. I don't have a taste for that.

Toni: *But specifically you are very fond of what?*

Gieve: Mozart, I listen to him a great deal. I think that although there are very many Western composers who are as great as Mozart and, some might even say, others who are greater than Mozart, I find that Mozart has the capacity to take human pain and sorrow and transform it into peace and perhaps even joy which is very rare. There are other musicians who are grander and more loftier, perhaps, but this particular quality in Mozart is something I value.

Toni: *I think that you have a rather cookie taste in films.*

Gieve: You sure are talking about Hollywood, of course?

Toni: *Hollywood, yes.*

Gieve: Well, I was brought up in the 40's and the 50's. If you are 10 years old or 14 years old in 1954 then you know there is Rita Hayworth and Lana Turner and all of that, the glamour of Hollywood films. I think the melodrama is something that I enjoy.

Datar: *You mentioned about Hindi films also.*

Gieve: Yes, but then in Hindi films again the earlier ones. I don't like the current ones.

Kendre: *And what about theatre? Say English theatre, Marathi, Hindi, Gujarati whatever and your reaction to contemporary theatre?*

Gieve: I'll come back to that but just for a brief moment I was talking about melodrama. This thing, I don't know who said it again, but this instruction to a writer, 'Don't be ashamed of tears, don't be frightened of tears.' It means a great deal to me and this is where melodrama comes in. Melodrama is a form of drama which is manufactured in order to make you churn out tears. But one can use that selectively for one's own ends and that is why my viewing of Hollywood melodrama is important to me. In the same way Western Opera is basically, they all are melodramatic stories, kind of lovers who are torn apart and who fling themselves down from the castle walls and all kinds of things like that. But what carries it, is the music and the music of the opera is charged with that kind of melodramatic weeping and one can use that selectively. So I listen to a lot of operas also when I am writing a play and there are certain passages where I want the emotion to be pushed as far as I can, I may even think of a musical passage while I am writing that. Sorry, to come back to you . . . I was taken to see Gujarati plays when I was young, Adi Marzban and people like that. I don't think that . . . I mean I have sat through it and I have even enjoyed it, but I don't think it has made a lasting impression on me. As I grew older, in fact, I had a growing distaste for Adi Marzban and his theatre. I felt that the way the Parsis were depicted by Adi Marzban was degrading. He made them out to be clowns and jokers and the dignity of their sorrows and their joys was nowhere touched upon. So that today the stereotype of the Parsi even in Hindi films comes from Adi Marzban and when I wrote my first play *Princes* I actually saw Adi Marzban's plays as opposition, as something that I am writing against. But I remember certain other little childhood episodes of seeing theatre. Persons I saw are, I remember, I must have been about seven or eight when I saw a little drama, I don't know what

you call them, on Meerabai and I don't even know who did it, what are they called? Yes, are they called pantomime or tableau? Yes, they are called tableaux, i.e. all the characters are still and they are shown in silhouette or something and then the light falls suddenly on one character and he or she starts moving, saying something or dancing and then becomes still again. Then the light falls on another character and then he or she moves. I remember seeing the story of Meerabai done like that and that affected me a great deal. Contemporary Gujarati theatre . . . to start with I've seen little of it. But what little of it I have seen, I have not liked. I find that the production values are very slick and the actors are very well-trained in a certain superficial kind of a way and I miss a real theatre of any depth. I think that Mahendra Joshi is the one person who is trying to do something useful in Gujarati theatre and I would certainly want to see more of his work.

I have seen a certain amount of contemporary Marathi theatre and most recently *Begum Barve* at Ravindra Natya Mandir. I liked it immensely. I liked both the play and the production very much. I think the Marathi theatre shows a wide range of things from small difficult plays for small audiences to large plays, larger set-ups for larger audiences and there is a range of things, things that one can condemn, things that one can praise very highly. I think that one of the things that makes me uncomfortable is, in certain kinds of Marathi theatre, this stopping at the naturalistic level of performance. I don't necessarily want what is wrongly called stylised theatre, which also is quite awful very often. But I think that something has to be found which is a right way of tackling each particular play and in contemporary English theatre a great deal of it is just awful. Firstly the choice of plays themselves which are really kind of second-rate and third-rate plays from abroad. This in itself puts me off. And I wouldn't even want to go and see those damn plays.

Kendre: *But why is it so?*

Gieve: I think that every cultural scene educates itself or should. This education either happens or does not happen. I think that the people who are working on the English stage in Bombay don't read enough. Many of them may not be aware of the world classics so that their model remains either some Broadway thing that they have heard about or seen on a video. Even when it comes to people who perform, what one would call slightly more serious plays like Naseeruddin Shah's, for instance, his choice of the plays he produces is extremely unadventurous. I don't get the feeling of somebody who is taking on really serious, difficult and important works from the West. Now what does one mean by serious? Just because a play has to do with, say, the

problem of ageing people in a society, that does not make it serious by itself. It is ultimately the dramatic depth of the play which is important. So in that sense the choice of plays here is very poor and unadventurous.

Datar: *Production values of English theatre . . . ?*

Gieve: I think, again it can often be superficial polish which does not appeal to me. When more important things are lacking. Like once again a play with a difficult theme, a real important dramatic theme done with a bare minimum of necessary props and sets, but given all the full internal working is very valuable to me rather than one with a plush set. However, again, I am not applauding the other extreme which I feel one sees sometimes in Satyadev Dubey's case where the stage is so denuded that one feels that he has taken the easy way out again. In his case I feel now that there should be something of a set, there should be something of props, because you cannot constantly have a bare set and think that only the actors will be able to carry it

Kendre: *And how do you react to this wave in English theatre using Indian English?*

Gieve: There is only one Indian English playwright there is not much work done incidentally in this area. Cyrus Mistry has written one play called *Doongaj House*. I think it's a very important play. It's quite a super play. It was written when he was twenty-one years old and it was not given any production for years and years, until now when he must be about . . . almost for 12-15 years the play was not produced and this play is a landmark. I think that Nissim Ezekiel has written some fine plays but they tend to be small and limited in scope. The best of these though do have a sharpness which carries them through. There is another young playwright called Raj Rao who has been writing for the last five years or so and, again although his plays are short, they have a lot of point to them and, hopefully he is something to look forward to. Well, these are the plays that I consider as Indian English plays. The other I don't consider as plays at all. I think that there is a definite trend of younger people now writing in English like Raj Rao, whom I mentioned. I know one or two others but they have just barely started, so one has to wait and see their work. But definitely more than there was ten years ago, twenty years ago. On the other hand this other kind of thing which is vulgarisation of Indian English and kind of popularisation of it. This is all getting a big market but we are not talking about that. I don't even go and see those damn things!

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