

Beginnings in Theater

KK - My theater helped me a lot. Yeah, because from the age of 8 or 9 years I started working in theater. See, there was an old actor who was in Mehboob Khan Sahib's *Roti*. His name was Ashraf Khan, a very famous actor. He was making a play, *Wamaq Azra*, like *Romeo and Juliet*. There was a need of a young prince – small. He was a main character. So how can you find a boy of eight or nine who can jot down about 40 pages and then speak the lines in front of a live audience?

In those days, I belonged to a very, very, very poor family from the slums. My mother used to send me to mosque for prayers. I used to bunk and sit in a graveyard alone, in between two graves. I used to yell out. Maybe if I saw somebody, *kissii ko dekhtaa thaa maiNne ki ye aadmii ne ye kaam achchhaa kiyaa, yaa ye lafz achchhaa bolaa*, (I saw somebody who did something well or used words with skill) I used to copy him. . . .*aur phir vo ek DeRh ghanTe ke baad jab namaaz khatm hotii thii*, (and when prayer time had finished an hour and a half later) I used to go back to my house. And most of the time I was caught by my mum. Because I never wore chappals, right? I used to go bare-footed. She would catch me because we would make *vazuu* (ritual cleansing) at the mosque, and she would look and say, ‘Your feet are dirty. That means you didn’t go to mosque at all.’

CH - You played hooky.

KK - *kyaa kareN? Revolution by birth hotaa hai insaan ke andar*. Man is born revolutionary. So some people went and told Mr. Ashraf Khan that there is a boy; he's sitting in the night alone between the two graves, and he yells and shouts. So he watched me a number of nights, and then one night, he just turned the light of a torch on me. (He said,) ‘*idhaar aao. tum ye kyaa bolte rahte ho yahaan baiThke?*’ (Come here. What are you sitting there saying?)

‘*kuchh nahiiN. aisii hii, jo achchhaa lagtaa hai, boltaa huuN maiN.*’ (Nothing. Just like that. I say whatever sounds good.)

He stared at me. ‘*Drame meN kaam karoge?*’ (Would you like to work in drama?)

maiN: ‘Dramaa kyaa hai?’ (Me: What is drama?)

ye jo tum kar rahe the, isiiko gar joR kar bolaa jaaye, Dramaa kahlaataa hai.’ (What you were doing. That’s called drama.)

‘*nahiiN, maiNne kabhii kiyaa nahiiN ye.*’ *kah rahaa thaa maiN.* (No, I’ve never done that, I said.)

He told his collector to bring this boy the next day to his small bungalow in the town itself. I went there. He started training me. And with his guidance and his love and affection, fatherly love, I picked up the role in one month. And after one and a half months, the show was staged. And I got a standing ovation from the audience. And when an old man came on the stage, he gave me a hundred rupees’ note. He said, “This is a very big sum for you at this age. This is a certificate for you. Always remember that you got this certificate at a very young age. I wish you all the best.” He just put his hand on my head and disappeared. I don't know who he was. That hundred rupee note was with me for a number of years. But in poverty people sell laurels and trophies as well. My

circumstances made me spend that money and buy some food for the house.

Then I started writing and directing too. I did my schooling in a technical school. My principal was very good. He used to love me doing theater. Then I went to another college. I did lots of plays there. In two or three years I was so popular among the college students that it was said in Bombay that if nobody had performed in Kader Khan's play, that means he had not been to college anywhere in Bombay. Students from other colleges used to come and take my autograph. So that popularity I got from very early in life.

And then I started teaching. Basically, by education I'm a civil engineer. I used to teach Theory of Structure, Hydraulics, Strength of Material, RCC Steel, but my subjects which I used to like were theater, Stanislavsky, Maxim Gorky, Chekhov, Dostoevsky – these are my other teachers. So my life was split into two.

Kamathipura

Basically, I belonged to a staunch Muslim family, born in Kabul. My parents were very poor, no food. Before me, there were three brothers of mine. By the age of eight, they had all died. When I was born, my mother said, “No, this place is not for my son.” My mother got frightened that the land and the climate of Kabul were not favorable for her children. She said, “I must migrate from here.” They didn't know where to go. They started from there, and, knowing nobody, landed in Bombay. Unknown place. Unknown country. Unknown city. Nowhere to go. No money. They came to the worst slums of this city, Kamathipura. The building workers, they all stayed there, but it's a very bad slum. All the brothel houses. Any bad thing you think of, it is there. It is called the worst slum in Asia. Dharavi is only a slum, but Kamathipura was worse than that. Dharavi is just a hutments area, but this hutment is not only hutments – prostitutes, *afim*, *gaanJaa*, (opium, marijuana), everything. If anyone wants to spoil his life, he can just go there, and he gets whatever he wants. From the age of one till I completed my diploma in civil engineering, I was there.

Study – *paRh!*

I saw other boys who used to go and work and get money for the food for their houses. I also felt sometimes, when there wasn't anything to eat in our house, I should also go and work in some tin workshop, some garage, or some hotel. One day I was about to go down, and I felt a hand on my shoulder. My mother was standing there. She said, “I know where you are going. I can make you out. You were talking to some boys. You are going to make two rupees or three rupees a day. But the poverty of our house can't be wiped out by the three rupees a day you'll earn. For those two or three rupees you'll be stranded there all your life. *saarii zindagii tiin rupayaa chaar rupayaa tu kamaataa rahegaa. agar tu is ghar kii poverty uThaane hai*, you have to study. *tu paRh.*”

Now the way she said *paRh*, worked like a mercury drop. It dropped on my head and went into my veins. I can feel it now. My whole body started shivering. And then I decided I wouldn't ditch my mother. And I started studying. We didn't have two rooms, so in mathematics when lots of calculations were required, I used to buy a box of chalks. I had no paper, so I used to write on the whole floor of the room and then wipe it out. My mother used to sit in a corner all night while I would study. She would wake me at

midnight, "Come on; start studying."

CH - Where did she get this desire for studying?

KK - I don't know. She was an angel for me. I wish every son could have a mother like her. She gave me everything in life, not material things, but whatever I am today, whatever I have become, it's because of my mother, and my father. My father was a very weak person. Very poor. He was very well educated. He knew ten types of Persian, eight types of Arabic.

CH - Where did he learn?

KK - He learned in Kabul. He joined some school there. He had a tremendous art of handwriting. But educated people don't make money. When he came to Bombay he was in a mosque as a *maulana*, a *maulvi*. And he used to teach Arabic to others. Arabic grammar, Persian, Urdu. But he used to get nothing – four, five, six rupees a month.

The Stepfather

My parents, because of poverty, could not continue. My father could not give the requirements of life to our family. There was always a tension in the house. So my parents got separated. I was about four when my parents divorced. Then my *naanaa* came with my mother's brother, and they said, "A young woman cannot stay without a husband in such dirty surroundings. You have to get married." And they made her marry again. So I started from the age of eight with one mother and two fathers, a stepfather and a real father. My father and mother, they were separated, but they had sympathy for each other. Everybody knew that they were separated because of poverty. The atmosphere made them separate. Otherwise, there was no reason for them being separated. I got a great amount of affection from my mother, an equal amount of hatred from my stepfather. He was a stepfather like in dramas or screenplays, a severe character. Once with my drama, *Local Train*, we went to a state competition. We won the best play, best writer, best actor award. I came home with the award to show it to my mum. My stepfather was not in a mood to talk to me that day, and when he saw the trophy, he started abusing me and started beating me till I was black and blue and just kicked me out of the house. I went to the institution, sat there at the door, talked to my principal, and he said, "If you want, you can stay in the staff's quarters." And he gave me a bed, a *khaTiyaa*, made of bamboo and a blanket and a pillow. "That's how I can help you." And I started living there.

CH - How old were you then?

Hard Times

KK - I was about 24. Then I used to go and meet my mother in the daytime. She used to tell me to come back. I said no. For your love, I do come. Still, some self respect is there; respect stops me. I don't want to come here to get insulted by that person. When he insults me, that means he's insulting you. For a number of years I was out. Then the day

of my marriage came. This man also never used to work. He was a very good carpenter. If he'd wanted, he could've made money, but he was in the company of bad people. They used to take him to bars. *sharaab piitaa thaa, aataa thaa, hangaama kartaa thaa, maaN ko martaa thaa, sab gaaliyaaN kartaa thaa.* (He would drink, come back, raise a commotion, beat my mother, curse.) And many a time when I was young, he used to tell me, "Go and bring money from your father." And sometimes I used to go and stand in front of my father's mosque.

"*kyaa hai?*" (What is it?)

"*do rupayaa chaahiye.*" (I want a couple of rupees.)

"*maiN kahaaN se laaUN? maiN mushkil se chhai rupayaa* - six or eight rupees I earn." (Where will I get them? It's hard for me to make six rupees.)

Anyway, he gave me two rupees. I used to buy some wheat flour, some daal, some ghee or oil. And my mother used to cook daal and rotii for us, and we used to eat. *buukhaa rahnaa faaqaa karte the.* Starve! *is zindagii meN sab kuchh dekh liyaa hai maiN ne.* (I have seen everything in this life.) And these things made me a revolutionary, and I started writing without learning the literature from anywhere.

And I was awarded as a good teacher because everything I used to do, I used to do with love. I never got love except from the mother and father. So that area of love was empty. I studied in a school in college where there were no girls. So no affection, no love. Everybody wants love and affection from the parent. That's true. But it has some devils. You get affection from your Almighty also. That is the top level. But *insaan* (humanity) is not at the top level. He lives in the valley, not at the top of the mountain. So a human being wants love. But there was no love. So all that love I devoted to revolution. I used to write. Pungent lines I used to write. Pungent plays.

From Teaching to Cinema and Back

CH - What about your work in cinema?

KK - I wrote in films for about 28 years. I got fed up. Basically, my father made me into a teacher. I was really at home in my teaching. I went to the glamour world. I earned a very good name and place and money also. But at heart I was not at ease. I could feel somewhere my students were waiting for me. My class is waiting for me. And that's why one day when I saw the new generation arriving in Bollywood and taking over – some new boys, and those boys who used to work under my director's assistant, not even chief assistant but fourth assistant, fifth assistant. They became heroes and they became directors. So there was a generation gap. There was a gap of thoughts and feelings. I worked with one or two but could not continue. So gradually, I started receding, and that's how I went out of the industry by 70% or 80% because directors and producers and actors of my days are mostly gone. And it becomes very difficult to discuss with them. *unke thoughts vo saare imported haiN.* They're all imported thoughts. I belong to this soil. I belong to Kamathipura. Unless I find an atmosphere of that, Kamathipura, I can't act or I can't write. And the modern generation, they're conversant with computer science, business management. These subjects were not there in our times at all. The management is very good. The technique is very much advanced. But the literature, they've lost. There are no writers here. They don't write. Because to become a writer, you have to pass

through some boiling episodes of your life.

CH - So you think the new generation hasn't suffered enough to write well.

KK - See, the intensity of suffering – they call suffering something else. If a boy falls in love with a girl and he's waiting for her for four hours, that they call suffering. No, that's not suffering. Suffering is something else, something which should go to your subconscious and it should be written there, recorded there. At any time of life, you can find yourself in a crying mood. Why do you feel like crying? Because all the bad things rise (evaporate), and you forget them, but there is one camera in the subconscious which records everything. And one day there is a projection room also, and that camera becomes like a projector and projects that old episode which the eyes saw. And that was a dramatic scene or an emotional scene, and you feel like crying. That's how it happens actually. That's how one human being is not one, but is divided into departments. And the most governing department in the body is the subconscious. We call it heart or brain, but it's the supreme power of the subconscious.

CH - What was the moment when you went from teaching and writing and acting on the side, and then, whish!, suddenly you were in cinema?

KK - People from the film industry used to come see the theater regularly. And they heard my name. They saw me on the theater stage. They saw me performing. They saw my writings. They saw my direction as well. So they were saying, “Why is this idiot not coming to the film industry? He's a talented man. He should be in the film industry.” So when I won the award for my *Local Train*, one of the producers and directors and some writers came the next day and said, “Why don't you join films?” And it was a joke for me. “You should be a writer; you should be an actor. You could be anything you want because you know everything.” I had never thought of going into films because in those days film was looked down upon. One of the producers, Mr. Ramesh Behl, said he was making a film *Jawani Diwani* (1972).

“I want you to write the dialogues for that film.

I said, “I don't know how to write dialogues.”

He said, “Whatever you wrote in the play, those are called dialogues.”

So I went there, and they gave me a chance. They said they wanted to shoot the next week. I didn't have a place. I went to Cross Maidan where people play football. I sat in the corner and would be hit by footballs. I wrote the script in four hours

CH - *urduu meN?* (In Urdu?)

KK - *urduu meN. maiN gayaa vaapas. to mujhko dekhkar* (I came back. Seeing me,) they were tipsy, ‘*ye ulluu ke paTThe ko, vo scene samajh meN nahiiN aayaa.*’ This idiot writer has not understood. I could read their lips; they were talking badly about me. And I said, “*is ulluu ke paTThe ko subject samajh meN aayaa hai, is ulluu kaa paTThaa likhke laayaa hai.*” (This idiot has understood the subject, and has done the writing, and has brought it.)

‘What?? *itnii jaldii?* (So fast?) Same day?!’

'merii life aisii hai, jo decide kartaa huuN, us hii din kar detaa huuN. aaj hii faislaa ho jaayie. (This is the way my life is; if I decide to do something, I do it the same day. So make up your minds today.) If you want to take me, you take me, or you let me go because I've got my students waiting for me.'

And I narrated the subject to them, the scenes. They jumped. They said, 'Again!' I narrated again three or four times, and they recorded, and within three days the shooting started. And that's how my script was taken into a film. That was a film which was to be shot after one week or ten days, but it started shooting just after three days because of the completion of the script. Now during that shooting I got extra publicity. There was a rumor in the industry that a new writer has come. He writes very colloquial language. Sometimes it becomes difficult for the artiste to perform the way he narrates the scenes. I got Rs.1500 for that initial film, and that was big money because I had never seen more than Rs.500 before. I was on the verge of going back to my institution after seven weeks. Then someone came and said, 'I'm a producer, and I'm thinking of making a film. *merii film kaa naam* (The name of the film is) '*Khel Khel Mein*' hai. This is the screenplay. I would like you to write the dialogues for this film.' He just gave me an envelope. It was a thick one. I went and counted. It was over Rs.10,000. I completed the script. I got another offer.

Manmohan Desai's Khetwadi home: Kader Khan's "alma mater"

Now in six months time I was called by Manmohan Desai. Manmohan Desai was searching for a writer to finish *Roti*. The producer suggested me. Now Manmohan Desai was fed up with Urdu writers. He said, 'I hate this language. These writers, they write all proverbs and *mahavarahs* and similes. I want my colloquial language. A Muslim. I'm fed up, and you're bringing another one?' He met me, and he said, '*dekho, miyaaN, maiN bahut straight boltaa aadmii huuN. tumhaarii story pasand aayegaa, tumhaaraa dialogue achchhaa lagegaa, to Thiik hai.* Otherwise, *Dhakkaa maarke baahar nikaal duuNгаа.*' (Look, Mister, I'm a straight-talking man. If I like your story and your dialogue, great. If not, I'll kick you out.) That was the first time in my six or eight months that somebody'd talked to me that way. '*agar achchhaa lagaa to, kahtaa hai, 'maiN tere ko leke ganpatii kii tarah naachuuNгаа.*' (If I like it, he said, I'll dance with you like Ganapati.)

He narrated the complete climax. He used to stay at Khetwadi. That was my alma mater. After two or three days, I went back there. He was playing cricket with the street boys. He saw me, '*kyaa hai?*' (What's up?)

'subject-scenes sunaane ke liye.' (I came to tell you the subject and scenes.)

'sunaane? matlab, likhke laayaa?' He left his cricket. '*chal, jhaT paT.*' (To tell me? That means you've brought your writing? Okay, let's go!)

He took me inside. First time. A giant of a person. Before that all the crews and directors were in tune with me, you know? It was my first time sitting in front of a big director and narrating scenes. Anyway, the actor in me helped me a lot. So actually, that's why the actor and writer and teacher, they were always in tune with one another. The actor would help me. The writer would help the actor. I narrated the scene, and he started jumping. He said, 'Again! *phir se sunno.*' (Tell me again.) He started yelling, 'Jeevan!' His wife's name was Jeevan. '*idhar aa.*' (Come here.)

'kaayko bulaayaa hai?' she asked. (Why did you call me?)

‘Listen what he has written.’

I narrated. She was in tears, ‘This man is dying for the last six months for this sort of scene. You’ve done more than that.’

He said, ‘Again.’ I narrated the whole episode about ten times. I didn’t know he had put it on tape and recorded everything. And then he went inside to his other room. He brought a small Panasonic TV. He said, ‘This is a gift from me.’ It was a golden bracelet and Rs.25,000 cash. ‘This is a token from me.’ Such a big man he was. If he used to love somebody, he used to love with his heart. He was not a stingy man. He was brave hearted. He just dialed all the writers and directors and producers and said, ‘You be careful. One man has come who will just rule your industry.’ He was a crack. He phoned the writers also, ‘Throw away your pens. You don’t know how to write!’ He said, ‘How much have you been getting for writing?’

I said, ‘Rs.25,000.’

He said, ‘Now your price is one lakh rupees.’ And that’s how I came into the class of a lakh rupees. I was taken from the ground floor to the hundredth floor, and my missile took off from the hundredth floor. From there, there was no point of return. He could not make any film without my being there. I used to sit with him in screenplay discussions, story discussion, choosing of the songs, everything.

But in those days there was a line of division, a line of demarcation. There were two movie heads: Manmohan Desai and Prakash Mehra. I was working with Prakash Mehra as well. I wrote for him *Khoon Pasina*, *Lawaaris*, *Muqaddar ka Sikandar*. That was a second rocket. *ab in do logoN meN se kyaa manaahii hai. jo uskii film meN kaam karega, idhar nahiiN kar saktaa; jo udhar kartaa hai, idhar nahiiN kar saktaa.* (Now between these two there was a rift. If someone worked in one camp, they couldn’t work in the other.) But they could not order me. Amitabh Bachchan said, ‘Come along with me; where I work, you will work.’ Manmohan Desai made *Roti*. Then he said, ‘I want to produce now.’ And he made *Amar Akbar Anthony*. He made *Naseeb*. Then he made *Coolie*. Twists and turns he used to have. He believed in that. Prakash Mehra had straight narrations, depending most on the dialogues and the performance. He was a good songwriter as well, Mr. Prakash Mehra.

The South

One day I was shooting at R.K. Studio. Jeetendra came and told me, ‘Sorry, this one producer is trying to meet you for the last two years, but he doesn’t have the courage to come to you and talk.’

Then the producer came. I asked, ‘From where have you got the idea that I’m a big writer or a big man? I’m just an ordinary man.’

‘No sir. Anyway, my brother wants to talk to you.’ So I talked to his brother Hanumant Rao, the producer of *Padmalaya*, another very big-hearted man, very nice people. He said, ‘I’m thinking of making a remake from Kannada to Hindi.’ He gave me the script.

I said, ‘See, in South India it has been said that when you remake some film, you go step by step, word by word and follow the original one. I can’t do that. I’ll rewrite it.’

He said, ‘Do whatever you like.’

I wrote; then I recorded the whole script. Jeetendra worked there. Hema Malini

worked there. And that film was *Meri Awaz Suno*. With that film I entered into the South. It ran into controversy with the Censor Board, but it was passed. When some film is banned, it gets a lot of publicity. It was a big blockbuster. I got the Best Writer Award. And that's how I entered into the South.

Tension: "A Mirror Broken into Pieces"

Now I was divided into three: Manmohan Desai, Prakash Mehra and the South. In the South they are very punctual people. They give you complete money. So I was working there. I was working here. That was my life. But there was always a tension in my house, "You're not giving us time." I came up from the slum. My wife and my kid, I gave them flats and bungalows and everything. But one trouble above all others, I was not giving them time. So instead of two lines, there were three lines. Between Prakash Mehra and Manmohan Desai, there was one line. Between Prakash Mehra and Manmohan Desai and the South, the second line. And between the family and Prakash Mehra and Manmohan Desai and the South a third line. And that line exists still. I was divided into portions. And once a piece of bread is cut into portions, it can't be rejoined. It's like a mirror broken into pieces. I was also broken into pieces. No regrets. Whatever I am, I am. I know that I'm still working hard. Maybe people don't recognize me at the moment, my own people, but one day they will miss me. The love and affection, my father used to tell me, the happiness of the home, the affection of the family . . . Same thing with my great grandfather. He was separated from his family. Same thing happened with my grandfather. Same thing with my father. What is a family bond? The affection and love are the glue of the family. If those things are not there, they won't stay together.

Father, Son, and the Muslim Community

My father was a very qualified person. He used to come and visit my lectures when I used to teach my class. In the evenings he used to come and sit at the last period. And I asked, "Why do you come to my classes?"

He said, "To learn, age is not a limit. You can go anywhere and learn anything. I'm learning from you how to teach. You're a very good teacher."

My father said, "You can help the Muslim community; you can teach them."

And I said, "I don't know anything."

And he said, "You didn't know film writing either. You didn't know theatre writing either. You can learn everything. You have the capacity to."

In his last days he went to Holland and started his education center there, a center of Arabic, Persian, Urdu. When he was on his deathbed, he told me, "You remember you promised me something?"

I said, "I didn't promise, but I will try."

He said, "Yes, you must try. If a man like you says, 'I will try', that is his promise. So you have promised me. The word 'try' means promise. And your try will definitely be a genuine try." And then he died. The day he died, I became a genuine orphan. I wish I had him today. He died at the age of 95. He was strong, never used to wear glasses. Half of the beard was black and half was white. He used to walk, had his own teeth. A strong man with his own timetable. A very affectionate man. Most of his students were from all

castes and religions, Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Jews; they used to come and learn from him. In Holland, also, Dutch people, Turkish, Arabs. So whenever I used to go, I used to look into his diary to see when I could meet my father. I used to go and meet him in the mosque. He was a friend, a philosopher, a guide, a teacher, everything for me. I'm such a lucky man. Wherever I went in life, there were teachers. Manmohan Desai was more than a teacher to me. He taught me the commercial cinema. He made me work like that. He used to give me a drop. I used to convert that into an ocean. Prakash Mehra. The South people. That luck was there from my own father. But when that atmosphere started ending, and the sun started setting in the world of knowledge, I said, no I can't go on, and that's why I'm sitting here with my staff working on literature and Arabic and Urdu and Persian. In the learning that I will give to the Muslim community, they will understand their religion very well. They will understand it better and they will practice it in a nice way.

On Writing

CH – Tell me more about your writing for the movies.

KK - Twists and turns, Manmohan Desai believed in that. Manmohan Desai used to give me the outlines, and I used to fit in my lines. And I came to know his weaknesses. He wanted the clap-clap dialogues. *“talvaar kaa vaar jisse maar naa sake, vo amar hai. aag ko jalaakar jo khaak kar Daale, vo akbar hai.”* Then he says, *“apun public boltaa hai, anhonii ko jo honii banaa Daale, vo Anthony hai.”* (He who cannot be killed by a sword is immortal. He who reduces fire to ashes is undefeatable. I tell the world, he who makes the impossible possible is Anthony.) So I knew Manmohan Desai's weakness. I used to keep Manmohan Desai in the frame. I could see his reaction before going to his house, whether he would clap on these lines or not. He was my audience. And he knew the nerves of the audience.

CH – I was going to ask about your image of the audience. So you had Manmohan Desai in mind.

KK - Like, I used to write plays. I started in the inter-college dramatic competition. There was a very bad dramatic competition called Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan at Chowpatty. My God, what sort of audience used to come there – very dangerous. The moment the actor came on stage, they'd say, *“aao. Come.”* And the actor would just get frightened. *“baitho.”* (Sit down.) He sat. He took the receiver of the phone. The audience said, *“Hello,”* and this man started talking without even dialing the number, and he was booted out. So I learned a lesson from that audience. It was an auditorium of 400 people. When my play was there, I used to get 1700-1800 in the audience. And I used to make them clap for every line. I used to imagine them sitting in the gallery. Every line should keep them busy. After 10 applauses, you've got the audience. And then you give your ideas, but go on giving the applauses and your ideas. I used to move the audience. That taught me. So from Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, I shifted my focus onto Manmohan Desai.

On Writing and Acting:

Writers should always sketch. Writers should always act. Most writers come from the stage. Oration is part of acting also. When you speak, you take the audience in your clutches. The choice of the word, the fluctuation of your voice, the selection of the words and the gestures. That is what an actor is. . . . We do act in our personal lives many times when we speak lies. At that time, the expression acts as make-up. It covers your face.

Manto was a writer that inspired me a lot. What I got from Manto was that to have a good idea, you have to have good words. People use a big vocabulary to narrate a big idea, whereas he said that the ideas should be big and the sentences should be simple, and that I followed, and that was the reason for my success. Ghalib gave me the ideas in the form of screenplays. You should have some imagination in your scene. And you should describe that all in a few words. And those words should be bound together so that the audience who's listening to it will be tied to it. If you can tie the audience to your script, you're successful. That tying is very difficult.

CH - What is the trick in the tying.

KK - The trick is you should know all. You should be a jack of everything. If you're a carpenter, you should know how to select the best wood, cut it in a nice shape; it should accommodate the complete space, and the design should also be good. Designing and accommodation, that is what script-writing is. Sometimes you accommodate everything, but it looks like a box. It should look good also.

C - When do you know that the line is right?

KK - After the reaction. Sometimes in the auditorium you get a response from those lines that you'd never have thought of. And many times you think that this line is going to blow the audience away, and nothing happens. There are three reactions. There's your reaction, your director's reaction and the audience reaction, three reactions in three different zones, three different islands. You should travel to all three islands. It's an imaginary world.

The Human Voice

What I've learned from theater: for an actor, when he comes on the stage, that should be very important. His entry should be extraordinary, and there should be some sound so the audience's minds are diverted because a human being is a human being, so just to divert. Then when he speaks, his every word should be audible to the last man. And an actor is also a singer. A singer sings the lines of the lyrics. An actor sings the lines of the dialogues. He has to sing in verse, in the dialogue form. It should have its own melody. It should be pleasant to the ears. *maiNne ye analysis kiyaa hai ki mard kii aavaaz meN thoRii sii echo aur garaj honaa chaahie, thoRaa saa base honaa chaahie, thoRii sii nasal honaa chaahie. ye combination jo hai, ye sound ko aisaa banaa detii hai jaise ki kisii gumbad ke andar koi ghuNgaruu giraa ho.* (I made an analysis. In a man's voice there should be some echo, some thunder-like roar, some base, some nasal sound. With this combination the sound that is made is like a bangle falling inside a dome.) Like a dome!

You drop a *ghuNgaruu*. (bangle) The sound which is produced and the echo, that sort of sound should be there, audible from the actor's mouth. So when you speak in that tone, people get mesmerized. Then they forget about your performance because words are very powerful, and the narration and the audition of the actor, if he has got the right way of dialogue delivery, he can mesmerize the audience. And then if he's got good gestures and good facial expressions and a good style, he can take away the audience; he can just call them to his house.

On Present Work:

I am writing books now. I keep uneducated people, people who are not qualified, in the foreground. If someone talks to them in that language, will they understand it? So I write books mostly in the form of question and answer. How will he ask me a question? And in what language should I answer him so that he can understand it?

CH - What are you writing about?

KK – I'm working on Ghalib. I narrate those ghazals, explain, word by word: what is the meaning of this word, this word, this word? And what is the correct meaning of this verse? And what is the advanced meaning and what is the in-depth meaning? What is the idea of this shade? About 100 ghazals I've done already. My books will be ready in about 6 months. Then I'll make my own CDs to show how to recite the ghazals. Also Iqbal and Kabir, and I'm thinking of doing the same type of book on *giit* also. And Arabic and Koran and *hadith*.

CH: That's another two or three lifetimes of work?

KK: We have written 250 books already. 1 lakh 20,000 pages we have already typed. Gradually, I'll start distributing every book. I'll give lectures on the books and then distribute them. . . I'm also making a CD, an animated story about HIV. If you talk of Aids, people will find it very boring. I'm really afraid of boring the audience or getting bored myself.

Educating the Muslim Community

In the whole world there is a cry against the Muslim community. I'm also a Muslim. If you go and sit with this community, in their houses and their societies -- people say they have spoiled the peace of the world, but to be frank, there is no peace in their own houses. Poverty. Illiteracy. No respect for each other. In the house the father doesn't respect the son. The son doesn't listen to the mother. The mother doesn't listen to the husband. Nobody has got respect for anybody. There's always a tension in the house because there's no money. When they come out, they find hatred in the eyes of the world. So out of vengeance – like if you want to hire somebody as a killer, you won't do it yourself. You want a killer for that. You'll pay him Rs. 8000, or if he's agreeing to kill, you'll pay him Rs. 5000. Okay. Those people are needy people, who need money, who are crazed, who are violent. There are 3-4% of people doing these jobs. And there's no

one to stop them. How can you stop them? If this whole generation of Muslims or community of Muslims have been tied together with one rope. Among Muslims there is no high command. There are high commands. Every section has got a high command. These high commands should get united and they should decide: I am not doing this terrorism or killing; my son is not doing it; my brother is not doing it. *Some* people are doing it. But how to stop it. If every area is controlled by some high command, if there is a disturbance in the area, then they can be responsible. That is the bond I'm trying to create. As a film actor, they will not listen to me. I'm going as a teacher. I'll start educating them. Listening to them in their miseries, helping them in their problems, gradually entering into their houses and then into their hearts, in their families, into their thoughts. It will take time, but I think I will be successful.

Islamic law has come into this world in the holy book that is in Arabic. Yet Muslims don't know Arabic. They don't know how to read the literature. They will not understand the law. Whatever they read is a translation done by somebody else. As a translator, I could tell you anything, and you will follow because (you think) it's the Almighty's words. But when you know the language, then tomorrow if some clergyman says you should do this or that or Muslims should unite and do something bad, I will teach them to say, "You just tell us where it is written in the book." Then he has to prove it. If he doesn't, then nobody will listen to him. That is my plan.

On Being Human

A human being is a human being. How can you call this man a name?! What is a Hindu, what is a Muslim, what is a Christian? Every human being is divided into two. One is his relation with his Almighty. That is between him and him. I've got no right to ask you what you do and you've got no right to ask me what I do, whether I pray or not. The second half is my relation with you, how I behave with you. Like somebody is married to a woman, and he loves that woman. That affair in love is his personal problem. He doesn't bring that problem to society. He won't like to discuss that in society. But the religious problem, he discusses in society. That is a weakness. Iqbal has written a very good line: *dard-e-dil ke vaaste paidaa kiyaa insaan ko, dard-e-dil ke vaaste paidaa kiyaa insaan ko, varnaa taa'at ke liye kuchh kaam naa the karubiyaan*. If God had wanted to be worshiped, there are lots of angels for that. Why should he have created a man? If man was created, it was because man was given a heart, and a high heart is to take pain. And that pain should be shared, *to aapas meN dukh baaNT leN, to insaan ko dukh baaNTne ke liye paidaa kiyaa gayaa duniyaa meN*. (So share pain among you. Human beings were born into this world to share each other's pain.)

CH - And not share the joys also? *sukh nahiin, sirf dukh?*

KK - *dukh bahut achchhii chiiz hai.*

As if to further emphasize the value of sorrow and suffering, Kader Khan, when asked about his favorite lines, chose the following scene from *Muqaddar ka Sikandar*. He recited in a mesmerizing voice, without notes, and explained as a teacher:

I played the role of a beggar. I go to a graveyard, and I see the small Amitabh Bachchan, sitting around a grave and crying.



Kader Khan as the faqir in *Muqaddar ka Sikandar*, opposite Mayur Verma

Faqir: kiskii qabar par baithe ho, bachchoN?

Bachchaa: hamaarii maaN mar gaii hai.

Faqir: uTho. Get up. aao mere saath. chaaroN taraf dekho. yahaan bhii koi kisii kii bahan hai. koi kisii kaa bhaii hai. koi kisii kii maaN hai. is shahr-e-khaamoshioN meN, is khamosh shahr meN, is miTTii ke Dher ke niiche, sab dabe paRe haiN. maut se kisko rastagaarii hai? inheN? maut se kaun chhuuT saktaa hai? You can't avoid death. Who can avoid death? aaj unkii, to kal hamaarii baarii hai. If they die today, tomorrow it's our turn. par ek merii baat yaad rakhnaa. is faqir kii baat yaad rakhnaa. is zindagii meN bahut kaam aayegii. ki agar sukh meN muskuraate ho to dukh meN qahqah lagaaao. You smile at happiness. At the time of sorrow you should take a laughter. kyoNki zindaa haiN vo log jo maut se Takkaaraate haiN, aur murdoN se badtar haiN vo log jo maut se ghabaraate haiN. sukh to bevafaa hai. chand dinoN ke liye hai, tavaaef kii tarah aataa hai. duniyaa ko bahlaataa hai, dil bahlaataa hai aur chale jaataa hai, magar dukh to apnaa hameshaa kaa saathii hai. ek baar aataa hai, to kabhii lauTke nahiiN jaataa hai. isliye sukh ko Thokar maar. dukh ko gale lagaa. taqdiir tere qadamoN meN hogii aur tuu muqaddar kaa baadshah hogaa.

(-Whose grave are you sitting beside, children?

- Our mother died.

- Get up. Come with me. Look all around. Here too is someone's sister, someone's brother, someone's mother. They are all buried under mounds of dirt in this city of silence. Who can avoid death? Today it is their turn; tomorrow it will be ours. But listen to these words. Remember the words of this fakir. They will take you far in life. If you smile at happiness, then laugh out loud at sorrow. Because it is those who confront death who are truly alive, and those who fear death are worse than the dead themselves.

Happiness is unfaithful. It is fleeting. It comes like a dancing girl, beguiling the world, deceiving the heart, and then it goes. But sorrow is always your companion. Once it comes, it never leaves. So spurn happiness. Embrace sorrow. Fortune will be with you every step of the way, and you shall rule Fate!)

Many thanks to Uttam Bharthare and to Shilpa Parnami for help in verifying the Hindi-Urdu transcriptions.