

INDIAN FINE ARTS
Folk Tradition and Westernization

By
Dr PRABHAKAR MACHWE

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Dr Prabhakar Machwe is presently Director of Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad, Calcutta. Before that he was Secretary of the Sahitya Akadami New Delhi for many years. He was invited to deliver Shri B P Wadia Memorial Address in 1979, and this he did on October 16, 1979 at our auditorium in Bangalore.

The topic, INDIAN FOLK ARTS: Folk Tradition and Westernization, provides a review of the folk tradition in the literary, performing and visual arts as it persists in various parts of India and the western influence which merits serious consideration of all.

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Indian Fine Arts: Folk-Tradition and Westernization

Dr. PRABHAKAR MACHWE

To begin with, let me propitiate VINAYAKA, without whom there is no Siddhi. He is not only a hero but a special kind of hero (VI-NAYAKA). I must start with this land and this moment. Dr. Shivaram Karant wrote Yakshagana-bayalata, for which he deservedly received the Sahitya Akademi Award. A three hundred year old tradition of folk-dance and folk drama was revived and preserved by him. All glory to his pen.

Masti Venkatesh Iyengar wrote in *Popular Culture of Karnataka* the necessity of collecting folk songs. And D. R. Bendre did this Gram-gita-sangraha in Garatiya hadu, L. Gundappa in Halliya padagalu, B. N. Rangaswami, Goruru Ramaswami Iyengar in Halliya hadugalu, Matigatta Krishnamurthy in Halliya padagalu, Iyengar Ka-ra-kru (K. R. Krishna swami) formed a Janapada Sahitya Akademi which published folk-lore in several volumes and collected manuscripts, Prof. H. M. Nayak of Mysore University laid the foundation of the Ethnic Museum in that University AJP these are very commendable efforts of the *Purvasuris* (old guards) and titans in this field.

Collection and compilation of folklore is a difficult art and science, fraught with many obstacles. It is a very important key to the understanding of modern art-criticism and literary criticism, which is becoming more bio-anthropological. We won't know that a *morer-angadi* is a reminder of the Mauryan tiled roof, without such linguistic research. It was stated in *Kavirajamarga* that people understand poetry, though they cannot read it. It was in Rashtrakuta Nrupatunga Amogha-varsha's times. It is in that early text that courtiers are divided in four types: Kavi, Gayaki, Vadi, Vagmi (Poets, Musicians, Debators, Orators).

ADARALLE-NIDEYAPPA, ADENU DASARATA VALLA DOSAVA OTA VALLA (O friend, It is neither Dasrata — play by Dasas, nor feast of the Dosas). For a Kannadiga, these are the two things never worth missing in life. In Dasarata female roles were taken by males, who were called Nayikas. Goddi Bhimanna was one constant Nayika. Jawari was the Vidusheka accompanying him. It started with invocation to gods. Then followed the *Hasigar* (the clown's songs and dances) mimicry. There was no taboo on the themes of songs. Much improvisation and impromptu dialogue was there. Dasrata became Radhanat, Rajanat. The counterpart of such dance-drama was Tamasha in Maharashtra. Atada Mela (travelling troupes in South Kanara) after rainy season is common. Bhagavat Rat or Tal-maddale (Prasanga) was equally popular. YAKSHAGANA was a verse-drama and dance-drama all combined. To the refrain of! *Aduttadutta Banda Ram* the story is narrated, the *talas* are expounded and so on. Bayalat came from *Bayalu* (*maidan* or open lawn/court-yard), more popular in western Karnataka. Fisher-folk in Gunda- wale in Karwar do it for months together. They are accompanied with *Bannada Vesha* (fearful masked forms of Rakshasas and Kiratas, devils and hunters). *Doddatta* was its reformed or vulgarized version. *Sutradatta* and *Goleatta* are puppet shows. It is shadow-play or *Chahya-nataka*.

My claim to choose this subject for this evening is that I am an old student of this vast and absorbing subject. Two years ago my dear student the late Dr. Shyam Parmar and an eminent folklorist in his' own right, got a book written by me entitled CREATIVE ARTS AND COMMUNICATION and published it just before his untimely death. In that connection I furthered my enquiry into this subject and I am placing before you some of my problems.

I begin with a poem by Carl Sandburg (1878-1967), the author of *The American Songbag* (1927) and *The People, Yes* (1936). This is a poem written in the New World, sixty-

five years ago:

I am the people - the mob - the crowd - the mass

Do you know that all the great work of the world is done through me?

I am the workingman, the inventor, the maker of the world's food and clothes.

I am the audience that witnesses history. The Napoleons come from me and the Lincolns - They die. And then I send forth more Napoleons and Lincolns.

I am the seed ground. I am a prairie that will stand for much ploughing. Terrible storms pass over me. I forget the best of me is sucked out and washed. I forget everything but Death comes to me and makes me work and give up what I have. And I forget.

Sometimes I growl, shake myself and spatter a few red drops for history to remember. Then-I forget.

When I, the People, learn to remember, when I, the People, use the lessons of yesterday and no longer forget who robbed me last year, who played for a fool, then there will be no speaker in all the world say the name: "The People", with any fleck of a Sneer in his voice of any far-off smile of derision.

The mob - the crowd - the mass - will arrive then.

Poetry is one of the oldest fine arts and here is a folk-tradition, so eloquently underlined by a modern poet from the technology - tortured west.

Premendra Mitra's *Ami Kabi Kamarir Am Kabi Muth-majurer* (I am the poet of the workers and the artisans) or Vinda Karandikar's *Svedaganga* are later. In the industrial age, in the wake of rapid urbanization and consequent more and more 'deserted villages'¹ and dying crafts, what is the value and importance of a folk-tradition. One extreme school of thought would advocate that the old has to be rung out. *June jau dya maranalagun* as Keshavasut put it. Or more vehemently Tagore, hailed the destroyer "*Bhdnganik Jaidhyani Kar Jirna Puratan Jak bheshe Jak*" (Let the destroyer be hailed the old and decadent has to be broken, let it go). Iqbal advocated the building of a new Shiva-temple, as the old idols had become stale:

Sach keh dm ai birahman ghar tu bura na mane
Tere sanamkade ke but ho gaye purane

This has been the law of the world and law of life. Old order changeth, yielding place to the new. But that is not the whole truth in the field of fine arts, which is a continuum, an everflowing river. *Samskara* and *Sanskriti* go together.

In 1910, Ananda K, Coomaraswamy's book *Art and Swadeshi* was published by Ganesh and Co., Madras, in which he lamented: "The creative power of the craftsman has long been destroyed by commercialism in the West, it remained alive with us till yesterday, and even today some part of it survives. Indian design is an inexhaustible treasure-house of fine invention. But have you ever reflected that all this invention belongs to the past, that modern India, anglicized India, has produced no beauty and romance, but has gone far to destroy the beauty and romance which are our heritage from the past.. Try to believe in the regeneration of India through art and not by politics or economics alone. A purely material idea will never give to us the lacking strength to build up a great enduring nation." It was Coomaraswamy who had warned in that book that "industry without art is brutality,"

But tradition can be bigotry, a binding, a barrier and even a bondage. Tagore was aware of it when he said "All traditional structures of art must have a sufficient degree of elasticity

to allow it to respond to various impulses of life, delicate or virile to grow with its growth, to dance with its rhythm. There are traditions which, in alliance with rigid prescriptions of rhetoric, establish their slave dynasty, dethroning their master, the life-urge that revels in endless freedom of expression.”

Traditions in fine arts can be studied from various viewpoints, aesthetic, linguistic, social, anthropological, ethical, cultural and so on. For the sake of convenience folk-tradition shall be discussed in this lecture in its three aspects: literary arts, performing arts, visual arts. As we were talking of poetry and oral literature it will be interesting to note how the face of modern life has also affected it, howsoever subtly. A Nimari folk-tale is only of three lines:

The tiger asks the goat
“Would you like to eat meat?”
The goat said, “If I could only save mine, that’s all”

Another story which is a sharp comment of the exploiter-exploited relationship, from the same region in Central India, runs thus:

“A peasant took some loan from a money lender. Slowly the money lender grabbed the peasant’s field, cattle, house, utensils, foodgrains and even clothes, as interest. Only a piece of loincloth was left. The peasant afraid of the moneylender’s intentions, ran for his life, to a temple and hid himself behind god’s image. He touched the 'backside of the idol and realized that there was not even a remnant of cloth left on the Lord’s image. The peasant whispered in the ears of the idol: “O God! Have you also taken some loan from the moneylender? He at least left a loin-cloth with me; on your body he has left not even a piece of cloth,”

Another interesting proverb is a sad memory of bonded labour. “The poor man’s boy slaves free even in the heaven; who will serve drinking water to gods?”

The Eskimo folk-song composer Kilime had told the Dutch ethnologist Knut Rasmussen: "All songs come to man when he is alone in the great solitude. They come to him in the wake of tears, of tears that spring from the deep recesses of the heart or they come to him suddenly accompanied by joy and laughter which wells up within us, we know not how, as we ponder upon life and look out upon the wonders of the world around us. Then, without our volition, without our knowledge, words come to us in songs that do not belong to everyday speech.”

Modern poets are now getting inspiration from such tribal and other folk songs. Sitakant Mahapatra has done excellent translations of Savara and other songs from Orissa. He writes in a recent article on “Tradition and the Modern. Artist”: “A tradition is not merely a repetitive behavioral pattern of some persistent symbol or motif in community culture. Behavioral and symbolic repetition through tradition is only an assertion of identity, a revival and re-generation of the life- force of the community. It is a song that raises echoes in the mind, links the past to the present through invisible bridges and often leads to stability in the individual psyche and the social structure.”

In the same article comparing the situation of the tribal or the traditional artist with the *avant-garde* artist he quotes Antonin Artaud who described Van Gogh, in his biography, as a “Suicide of Society”, or Mallarme, using a political idiom, declared that in a period and culture like ours the artist finds himself “on strike against society,” and reiterates Baudelaire’s dictum “the man of letters is the enemy of the world.” In traditional societies, like the Indian, in modern times, communication becomes more and more complicated, because while art began with the incantatory element with the purpose of art as prayer or a ritual offering in the hands of the shaman, it is no more so. The artist is getting more and

more alienated from the receiving-end. Hence communication, both verbal or non-verbal, is not that easy and smooth. In traditional societies, there was no real difference between art and life, action and dream, applied and fine arts, but with the onslaught of mass-culture the differentiation grows, specialization and dehumanization grows. Hence the emphasis on traditional values acts as a curious alchemy. In the words of St. John Perse, “it is action, it is passion, it is power and always the innovation that extends borders. Love is its hearth fire; insurrection its law, its place is everywhere, in anticipation. It wants neither to deny nor to keep along; it expects no benefits from the advantages of its time. Attached to its own destiny and free from any ideology, it clasps both past and future in the present, the human with the superhuman”.

Manis Kumar Raha has given a Santal folk song describing the ‘hul’ or revolt of 1855 against the British rule:

Saheb rule is troublesome
 Shall we go or shall we stay?
 Eating, drinking, clothing
 For everything we trouble
 Shall we go or shall we stay?
 Sido, why are you bathed in blood?
 Kanhu, why do you cry, Hul Hul?
 For our people we have bathed in blood,
 For the trader thieves
 Have robbed us of our land.

In 1933 Jasimuddin wrote an article in Bengali in Biehrtra on the ‘Decline of the Folk Songs’ and gave seven reasons of this fading oral tradition in poetry. In his own words:

- (1) Popular taste has undergone a transformation.
- (2) Those who go from villages to towns are unable to shape or influence urban tastes.
- (3) Foreign domination has harmed Bengal most. Artists in Calcutta are more concerned with Japanese art, Italian art, Moghul art. There is no interest in Bengal art.
- (4) Bengalis as a race are forgetful of themselves. A Bengali thinks himself superior than persons from other provinces on the strength of having imitated the Europeans to a greater extent.
- (5) Adulterated products, like khaddar made in Japan, are passed off as genuine folk-songs.
- (6) Bigotry of Muslim priests has been responsible for the decline and disappearance of folk-songs. Similarly Sri Dinesh Chandra Sen has written in his preface to *Mymensingh Gitita* that the Brahmanic influence has harmed the folk-music of Bengal considerably. *Gajan* festivals, *Dhupti* songs, *Kali* dance, *Dasavatar* dance is fast vanishing.
- (7) Folk singers were encouraged by landlords and rich people. Now they do not get such encouragements. Most of the songs were associated with one kind or other of religious rites. At present people are losing faith in such rites.

So the main cause of the decline in the oral tradition of poetry and folksongs is general ‘loss of innocence’ in the modern scientific age. Here is a Jhumur, a fertility song, which has

travelled from the adivasis to the sophisticated crust, from south Radh, in Bengal:

O Amar Bhangha Ghore Ke Mare Bantul
O Amar Pok Potiye Udei Gelo Kunkda Katul
My house is a broken house
 In it there is no mirth
Who is that who slings at it
 Stones and pellets of earth?
My cockerel flies away
 Growing loud in pain
Nor does the cuckoo want
 To stay to sing again

About a hundred years or more ago the famous German Indologist Benfey published a translation of the Panchatantra and wrote the commentary on it. He believed in the idea that all the folktales of Germany or France or Italy were derived from Indian folktales. Discussion still goes on in the field of folktale-research. Heinze Mode gives the theory that all folktales are based on man-animal relationship. 'Men were considered as animals and animals as men.' Some people believe that folktales originated from myths about gods and goddesses. But Mode does not accept it. Mythology and metaphor came to man much later. These early folktales have one common point, they all end in the victory of the just cause and a happy ending. They were all healthy optimists.

A question is generally asked, if the early primitive man was a hunter, how did he develop such compassion about birds and animals. Was it the triumph of the agricultural state of society on the early nomadic cave-dwellers' life-style that fostered such folktales and folksongs? In the Pahari Kalam paintings we see Rama with the *churidars* and long *achkan*, a Moghul dress, his crown is also adorned with the late medieval pearl-tassels and so on. The development of the story of *Ramayana* shows this interesting change in the folk-imagination, and its domination over the Sanskritic tradition. In *Hanumannataka* there is a *shloka* which means, "Stones sink in water, they being heavy take others with them to the bottom. But here in Rama's bridge, the floating of the stones and carrying the hero-monkeys was possible not because of the special quality of the stone, or of the ocean, or of the monkeyes. It is the greatness of the name of Rama which is manifest." In a folksong from Saurashtra the story is carried further: "After the conquest of Lanka, Rama, questioned himself: "Can a stone float on water, by my miraculous power?" So, he goes to the shore of the ocean, picks up a stone and throws it into the water and it sinks. The lord is terribly perturbed. Hanuman, who was always with Rama, counter-questioned Rama: "O God, you don't test yourself anymore. Only the *Bhakta* (devotee) knows what is *Bhakti* (devotion). He gets that power from you. You are beyond it. Look at that stone which had the great fortune of not only getting your touch, but also a lift from you, should be so unluckly as to be thrown away by you - what else will be its destiny than to get sunk in the ocean?"

Ramayana is a mythopoetic memory. In Kumaon hills Ramlila is presented at the time of the beginning of ploughing the fields in summer. Rama is a word which means a field. Sita is a furrow. Hanuman — of bended knees — is the plough. Janaka is the first tiller. Ravana comes from the root Ryu, 'one who makes everyone weep' — terrible drought. Kumbakarna, Indrajita, Meghananda are all names associated with rains. Even 'A-halya' means an unploughed field. In the Persian translation of *Ramayana*, done in Shahajahan's times, Sita's entering mother earth is poetically described as "life entering the earth and making it living." Amongst many tribals, Nagas and Marias, in *Jhoom* harvesting, the field is subjected to a

‘fire-ordeal’ like Sita. The entire allegory of Ramayana is the triumph of the agricultural society on the culture of the *Kravyada* (raw meat-eating monsters) or Rakshasas. People have found even similarity in the hunter’s killing a Krauncha bird, and Valmiki’s compassion for the couple of birds, with Ravana’s act of separating Sita from Rama.

One can talk indefinitely about poetry, so I would request you to turn your attention to folk-music. In a seminar at the Institute of Advanced Studies, Simla, experts on folk-music of Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh had expressed their views as follows: Sri A. K. Sen from Indira Devi Music University, Khairagarh said “Though the values of life are changing rapidly on account of the growing industrialization, yet the heritage of our folk-musk and community singing and dancing are still integral elements of our tribal and rural inhabitants.”

Pandit Amarnath said about Punjabi folk-music, “folk-songs require no deliberate effort. There is no *arohi-avarohi*, no *vadi-samvadi*. The note with which you start is the *graha suar* (home note). .. Music, in fact, lends itself to everything — to word, to touch, even to silence. For every condition of life there is a song. So there are folk-songs on the problems of love, of fear, of anger, of birth, of marriage, and even of death.”

Prof. R. C. Mehta underlined the ethno-musicality of Gujarat. “In folk-music and all traditional music, an element called mass-fecall of the past plays a very decisive part. Such recalls result into regional or social or communal characteristics, and in characterising tunes, simply put this in an association of words, music and rhythm born out of the womb of the soil We find several folk-tunes which are indicative of individual efforts, later altered and filtered through community acceptance.” According to Prof. Mehta, through Gujarati folk-music, the culture of man in Gujarat can be discovered and analyzed.

Somnath Batu talked of the songs of Himachal Pradesh. “Tragedy remains the basic human situation in most of the Himachali folk-melodies. Melodies from Chamba give us an insight into the folk-life in feudal times. People, although, are very docile and simple, but at times when any chieften commits excesses, they speak out their resentment through songs. A few of them give an optimistic view of life and evidence of values attached to it Some folk-songs of Himachal Pradesh violate established orthodox institutions and retaliate while striving for freedom and uninhibited love....The concept of Viprabambha Nayika, which we come across in *Chaita*, *Kunjri* and *Malhar*, is parallel to the concept which we find in Bhojpuri, Rajasthani and Gujarati folk music.”

Amongst the performing arts folk-music and folk-dance are interlinked with folk-drama. Dr. Vasudevasharan Agarwal wrote: “*Loka* or folk is the ocean of Indian life. It contains the past, present and future. The cultivation of all knowledge and sciences is found in it. For the modern man Lok is the highest Prajapati. *Loka-dhatri*, Mother Earth, is the metaphysics of the new life. Folk, land and the individual man is the trinity containing the all-pervasive human goodness.” The important milestones in the study of folklore in India are as follows:

- 1784 A.D. — Asiatic Society, Calcutta
- 1804 A.D. — Literary Society, Bombay
- 1829 A.D. — Asiatic Society, Bombay
- 1868 A.D. — ‘Old Deccan Days’ by Mary Friere
- 1872 A.D. — Publication of ‘Indian Antiquary,’ Bombay
- 1880 A.D. — Folktales of Oudh by Miss Stokes
- 1883 A.D. — Legends of Punjab by Sir Richard Temple

1886 A.D. — ‘Anthropological Society Journal’, Bombay
1921 A.D. — ‘Man in India’, Calcutta
1938 A.D. — Publication of ‘New Indian Antiquary’, Poona.

Detailed studies in folklore in various Indian languages followed. Gandhi’s call ‘Back to Villages’, and the nationalist movement gave it further encouragement in the twentieth century. Tagore wrote a book of essays on *Lok Sahitya* in Bengali (translated in Marathi by Durga Bhagavat). Shankar Sengupta edits a quarterly ‘Folklore’ from Calcutta. For last ten years, I am one of the honorary members in its Editorial Consultants.

Folk-dances are either tribal (both forest-dwellers and hill tribals) or with a rural base. They are mostly collective dances, imitating certain animals, like dragons, tigers, vultures, elephants, etc. The folk-dances of the rural areas are based on harvesting seasons as religious festivals. They are not always very simple but are complicated and even sophisticated in their own ways. *Ras-garba* of Saurashtra, *Ghumar* and *Bhavai* of Rajasthan, *Garasias’ Valor*, *Bhumra* of *Bhils* and *Lai-haroba* from Manipur are very intricate and full of stylization. In Rajasthan and Punjab women do not dance with men in such folk-dances. In Holi and other occasions males don themselves as females. That has affected the folk-drama forms of *Nautanki*, *Bhandjashan*, and *Swang* and so on. Some folk-dancers were ostracized from their communities and treated as outcastes. In Buddhist texts a folk-artist was derisively called *Jaya-jiva* (one who lives on the earnings of his wife).

In South, it was not so; as folk-music and folk-dance were tied to religion. In Kerala dance was respectable even in a Nambudari Brahmin family. There brahmanic and shudra dance-forms developed separately. Kathakali and Kuchipudi were once based on folk-dances — now they have assumed classical importance; just as Odissi has done in Orissa. Southern male folk-dancers do not put on elaborate dresses as their counterparts do in the north. Instead, they wear garlands, beads; decorate their foreheads and arms with sandal marks. A brief survey of various folk-dance forms in India will give a glimpse of the infinite variety and the necessity to do further research in these various forms, particularly in view of modern needs and pressures:

Kashmir

Bachchanaghm — Harvest dance with young adolescents dressed as females
Dumhal — Watal caste male dance with triangular caps and flags
Pather — Male dance of Bhands (Mimicry men)
Chhajja — winter dance, with a peacock in the centre and merry-go-round
Gaddi — Shepherd’s dance in Wasuki Nag fair

Punjab

Kaulri Diyali — Mixed dance, with songs for Hidimba devi at the time of Diwali
Lahaladi — Winter time mixed dance, with question-and-answer session
Nati — Starts as solo, but ends as collective dance
Jhumar — Moonlit-night dance. Only married women can take part in this mixed dance.
Couples imitate waving of harvest
Bhangra — any festive occasion is fit for this gay, abandoned loud dance with drum accompaniment
Giddha — Female counterpart of Bhangra

Himachal Pradesh

Sangla — Mixed dance to appease local gods: Bakyang, Dakyang, Kagyang are three forms *Kheda* — Harvest song in groups of men and women

Dipak — Chamba and Kangra shepherd dances; *Ghumati* and *Shrikhandan sure* two forms *Chancheri* — Mixed dances

Zoda — Couples dance in it

There are many songs in Garhwal like *Jhumailo*, *Chauphuta*, *Chhopati*, *Tandi*, *Thadya*, *Laman*, *Jagar*, *Baradi nati*

Bihar

Ramlila, *Kirtaniya*, *Kunjvasi*, *Bhagata*, *Bidepat*, *Baravo*, *Brajavasi*, *Vanshilila*, *Kadambalila*, *Nag lila*, etc.

Jadur — Santal dance

Sarahul — Oraon dance

Karma — Munda dance

Idati—Khadia dance

Chhau — Dance with masks

Bengal

Dhali and Raibanshe — Miming battle, *Kathi*, *Jhumar Bo IS*, *Baul*.

Assam

Bihu, *Nong Krom (Khasi)*, *Boi Sankhu* and *Mosanglong Nai (Bondo)*, *Khullam (Mizo)* *Suttalam* (Mizo and Kuki dance), *Khambalim (Bondo)* and *Brudura Lim (Jham)*, *Dimasa Kachari*, *Huchari* and so on.

Orissa

Baiga Banjara, Birhor, Bondo, Santal, Savar Lave many cances. *Jadura Dhumura*, *Paik*.

The Hindi-speaking belt has not many varieties of dances except for the tribal ones in Madhya Pradesh of the Gond Marias, or Oraon *Sarus*, or *Langi* or Banjaras. In Rajasthan, the hill areas have Bhils, Mina, Banjara, Garasia. They dance *Gair*, *Ghumar*, *Neja*, *Gauri Walar*, *Chang*, *Shankariya*, *Gindad*, *Pinihari* etc.

In Gujarat the *Ras-dandiya*, *Garba*, *Kuchhadi* (Mahir peasants), *Pandher* (Saurashtra fisher- folk), and in Maharashtra the fisherfolk's *Koli* dance, the *Gaja* of the Dhangar or shepherds and the *Kath* or *Tipari* and *Goph* of Konkan are well known. In Goa *Jagar* are danced by Gavadas, *Romat* is a heroic dance with false swords, *Radha* (a dance in which a boy becomes Krishna and another acts as Radha), *Dhalo* (mainly a collective dance of females) are popular.

In the South, the variety of folkdances is so much that mere mention of names would not be enough. But let me enumerate a few:

Andhra

Dappuvadyam, *Madhuri nritya*, *Bali nritya* (Kond tribals), *Mayur* (Male dance)

Karnataka

Balkat (Dodava dance), *Puja Kulit* (Mariamma goddess annual fair dance), *Bhata*

nriya

Tamil Nadu

Kargham, *Qyil Attam*, Chendu (Gypsy hunting tribe's dance), *Pinned Attam* (Pondicherry)

Kerala

Kaliattam, *Velakali* (war dance), *Kolkali* (Mappila Muslim dance) All these dances can be classified into four kinds of collective movements

- (1) Merry-go-round like movement
- (2) Movements like soldiers stepping forward and backward
- (3) Dancing in the form of a procession
- (4) Abandoned dance without any rules, expressing ecstasy.

Almost all folkdances are accompanied with songs which are sung in a chorus. Their tempo increased with the dance movements. Some of the songs are heroic and are accompanied with sticks or weapons. But others are generally dependent mostly on gestures of hands and feet.

Folk drama is another important aspect of Indian fine arts which is facing the challenge of modernization. The traditional folk drama forms are being used for political propaganda and even for family planning drive. So the original earthiness of this form is gone and merely artificiality has survived. Habib Tanveer transplanted a Nacha party from Chattisgarh and exploited it for *Indraloka-Sabha*, a propaganda play for Indira Gandhi's elections. The result: Habib Tanveer received a nominated M.P.-ship in the Rajya Sabha, but it did not improve the conditions and situation of the Chhattisgarh dance troupe. The same thing is true of all such other 'usage' of folk - techniques to modern advantage, by however talented dramatists and producers in Bengal, Maharashtra, Andhra or Karnataka.

I have seen many Bengali plays, traditional and off-beat. The productions by great names like Shambhu Mitra, Badal Sarkar and Utpal Dutt to mention only a few. The successful use of folk-drama forms like *Jatra*, led to Lenin *Jatra*, Mao *Jatra* and the Che Guevara *Jatra*. Badal Sarkar has adopted some of the techniques of the traditional drama-forms to the best of modernist advantage. But what happens is that the traditional theatre and its audience more or less remain constant and the same, like the poverty-line in post-independence India.

About Oriya theatre Surendra Mohanty commented "monosyllabic dialogues, disjointed situations and deliberate obscurity without a philosophical concern, these alone do not constitute absurd drama. Women's liberty is advocated in K. K. Ghose's *Barabadhu*". Modernism adopted more-or-less like a fashionable imitation, did not reach the masses. Even folk-forms were used as mere fashion, as it is ridiculed by the common derisive word "folksy".

In Tamil, the obsession of the plays seems to be either upper or lower caste conflict or aryan- non-aryan controversy. This is not my subjective opinion. I am only quoting a scholar like T. P. Meenakshi Sundaram who says that "actors like T.K.S., M.G.R., Shivaji Ganesan were more important than the literary content of the plays. Bharatidasan wrote a play where aryan non-aryan conflict was brought to the fore. Annadurai wrote One Night. He wrote satire on mythologies and himself acted in those plays. M. R. Radha with his *Rakta Kannir* (Tears

of Blood) and *Nava Ramayana* (banned because it hurt orthodox hindu feelings) and Karunanidhi's election propaganda play *Kagitappu* are typical examples of topical plays." Indira Parthasarathi's plays like *Aurangzeb* exploit mentally abnormal characters not properly understood by the society. S. Sivapatha Sundaram remarked in a survey "nothing much seems to have been achieved in the field of drama in Tamil during 1975-76, except a lone collection of one-act plays by P. V. Subramanian entitled *Velli Valakku*." Cho. Ramaswamy has achieved remarkable success by adopting some of the folk-drama techniques of slapstick comedy.

In Malayalam in 1949 N. Krishna Pillai wrote a play *Kanyaka* in which a frustrated working woman elopes with a peon in the office. E. Govindan Nair wrote *Kuttukrishhi* (collective farming, 1958) which advocated hindu-muslim unity. Toppil Bhasi wrote *Ningalenna Communistakki* (you made me a communist) in 1952. Pat came the reply from P. Keshavadeva *Janippan Communistavum* (I will become a communist now) in 1953. Kerala people's Art Club staged Bhasi's play thousand times. Some of the folk-drama characteristics are seen in certain playwrights who write, act, produce, direct the plays and manage their traveling family troupes also.

In Telugu, politics and social change were the main subjects handled by the playwrights, beginning from *Ma Bhumi* to Acharya Atreya's *Clerk*, to V. R. Narla's one-act plays about rural life. Some experiments were done by Anisetti Subba Rao, P. V. Rajmanner, N. R. Nandi and others. But conscious or unconscious imitation of Ibsen, Shaw, Wilde and Chekhov did not produce an authentic prototype.

Modern Kannada drama has been more experimental and original. Beginning with a versatile genius like Kailasam, it lingered in Adya Rangacharya's hands with deliberate social satires. Now it has found in bold and devoted writers and producers like Girish Karnad, Lankesh, Kambar and others, not only a very sophisticated sensibility but linking of the classical with folk-traditions of this art. Keertinathe Kurtakosti's *Aa Manx* and Lankesh's *T. Prasanna Grahastashrama* are two high watermarks of post-independence Kannada drama.

In Marathi, in spite of the enrichment of the stage by geniuses like P. L. Deshpande, Vijay Tendulkar, Vasant Kanetkar, late C. T. Khanolkar and others, according to Dnyaneshwar Nadkarmi, "the traditional indigenous genre and the western oriented, experimental counterpart are at conflict. Unfortunately this is yet to be reconciled." Mahesh Elkunchwar, Govind Deshpande, Anil Bawe, Sai Paranjpe are trying to break the barriers of conventional drama. In Gujarati, the folk-forms like *Bhavai* and others were successfully exploited by Chandrabadan Mehta in his *Hoholika* and Shanta Gandhi's *Jasma Odan*. At the other extreme Suresh Dalai, referring to Labhshankar's absurd play on *The Mouse and Jaganmtha* and Adil Mansuri's play *Hands and feet are tied*, commented, "the theatre of the absurd turns into mere comic by bad handling and professional stage is even more dismal, as it Jives only on crumbs from translation of Marathi, Bengali and English stage. Jazzy production of Broadway and West End box office hits cannot register anything original in Gujarati." Sindhi has a worse story to tell. Only four or five original full-length plays were written in this language after partition. One-act plays and radio plays have run into hundreds. Govind Malhi wrote about Sindhi plays in last two years: "Till 1975, there were only two full length plays in Sindhi after independence. But in 1976, three full length plays were published. They depict conflict between superficial eastern and western values and the pressure of commercialism on art."

In the north, Dr. Mohamed Hasan wrote in a survey: "By and large Urdu playwrights have failed anything to match Mohan Rakesh's plays." In Punjabi, Attar Singh complained,

“drama remains the weakest link. The achievements and potentials of the Punjabi drama are best illustrated by the fact that there is not a single Punjabi playwright of whatsoever grade, less than forty years of age. Consequently old masters continue to dominate the scene.” In Hindi, conscious attempt to implant the folk-tradition in urban drama was done by Habib Tanweer. Jagdishchandra Mathur had tried to use the dialect and also the puppet form in his experiments, but the condition of play-writing is much backward. The names which are taken with respect and fondly are the late Mohan Rakesh or Lakshmi Narain Lai, Surendra Varma or Mudrarakshas, Shesh or Hamidullah. They do not hit beyond a certain range. The Hindi drama has not come of age and has yet to mature.

This rapid survey will give an idea of how our folk-tradition is at crossroads and westernization has arrived much sooner than the audience was prepared to receive it.

In the visual arts the confusion is still more glaring. While some of our artists have learnt something from the classic fresco-painter (Abanindranath Tagore and Nandlal Bose imitated many Ajantan themes and medieval miniature painters,) both Moghul and Rajput (Ahiwasi to Almelkar), the folk-tradition of the Madhubani and the Kalighat Pats, the Orissan and Jain illustrated-and illuminated manuscripts, remained more-or-less neglected for a long time. It was for a Jamini Roy to rediscover it, Srinivasulu to go to Lepakshi, or a modern Maratha artist to find out the vitality of the outline and figure-modelling in wall paintings, or a Ghulam Rasool Santosh to go to the Tantra art with folded hands and knees. Such attempts are now being done to find new meaning in the Alpanas and Rangolis, the Kollams and the tribal art-motifs of birds and beasts, trees and flowers.

But it is a strange phenomenon that this discovery of rural and hilly India is also done after the westerner had added a new respectability to it, after a Verrier Elwin or a Stella Kramrich, has pointed the way. We begin to study our *Barahmasa* poems and songs after Charlotte Vaudeville conducts her researches into it; we begin to see deeper meaning in our folk-paintings after the foreigner starts buying the *Madhubanis*, the Rajasthani *Palbuji-di-pad*, the Gujarati *Manavatis*, and so on.

The last point which I want to make is that when we talk of westernization in the context of folk-tradition in fine arts, the challenges of technology should not be kept out of sight. They have a tremendous power to pollute and also to proliferate. Newspapers, films, radio, television have all their constructive or negative part to play. Fortunately or unfortunately broadcasting and telecasting are a government monopoly in our country and hence not much can be done there, except educating the public opinion and waiting for the better masters to emerge out of our free, frank and fearless voting. Till then all suffrage has to be suffered in silence. As I do not want to touch politics, I would only hint that here our failure is the greatest. Our masters do not know their own minds. They talk of folk-traditions and westernization in the same breath. Here was box-office news published in a Calcutta Hindi daily on the day the Charan Singh ministry resigned. There was much mirth and merry-making at Raj Narain's house. A folk-singer sang a Hariyani song at which the news-reporter reported Shri Charan Singh had a hearty laugh. The song was like this: “The Jat's wife was seriously ill. The Jat's friends asked him to call a doctor. The Jat asked “How much shall a doctor cost?” The reply was “1500 rupees”. The Jat said — “Let the Jatni die. A new Jatni can be had for 500 rupees only.” I think no comments are necessary on one who appreciates such a song.

As far as the films are concerned, they do take special care to please their rural spectators' and audiences. There is a definite slant in Indian films to go back to villages, after 'Pather Panchali' upto 'Chommanna Dudi', one can witness so many which depict in full

colour the village festivals as well as the villagers' festivals and sorrows in all languages. The slick commercial cinema produced in Bombay and Madras caters to a special urbanized rural population, and so is after miracles — *Jai Santoshi Maa!* and *Dikkatra Parvati*. Even social realistic films like *Chemmeen* or *Swayamvaram*, *Ankur* or *Nishant*, *Samana* or *Eka Oru Katha* and so on have also used the folk-traditions, locale and motifs to their own advantage, very artistically.

Westernization poses five challenges to the folk-traditions in fine arts;

(1) the danger of extinction. It may be pushed into oblivion.

(2) the danger of its mutation into a travesty or a complete caricature of the original. Many serious traditions have ended into mockeries.

(3) the danger of its becoming merely a lifeless ritual. Cut off from the context and time-space validity it may appear as mere decoration, a meaningless mumbo-jumbo, at best a fringe arabesque.

(4) the danger of its being commercialized. The vulgar or the undesirable parts of the tradition be revived with the ulterior motive of earning a fast buck.

(5) The danger of its being interpreted in a different context and overburdened with intellectual super-interpretations, never dreamt of by the simple original folk.

Some of these changes are inevitable, some can be stemmed and some regulated. It is the duty of the art-critics, musicologists, drama-specialists, literary analysts to ponder over these problems. Our cultural crisis is deepening. Shall we allow it to take any shape and let the rich and variegated wealth of folk-media be squandered or permit it to be systematically vandalized, is the burning question. I do not have facile answers. It is for this learned audience to think and find out solutions, if any.

I conclude with a poem from Kuo Mo Jo, the Chinese poet and general:

I like my *Chuang-Tzu*
He made string sandals
But he was a humanist

I like Spaniard *Spinoza*
He grinded glasses
But he was a humanist

I like Indian *Kabir*
He used to weave fishing nets
But he was a humanist.

PRABHAKAR MACHWE