

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM NATIONAL FOLKLORE SUPPORT CENTRE

# INDIAN FOLK LIFE

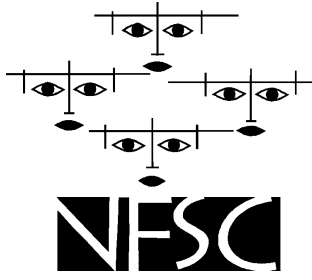
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## ARTS, CRAFTS, FOLKLIFÉ

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#### Cover Illustration:

Warli wall paintings from Maharashtra, India taken from *Folk Designs From India*, The Pepin Press BV, 1999

National Folklore Support Centre (NFSC) is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation, registered in Chennai dedicated to the promotion of Indian folklore research, education, training, networking and publications. The aim of the centre is to integrate scholarship with activism, aesthetic appreciation with community development, comparative folklore studies with cultural diversities and identities, dissemination of information with multi-disciplinary dialogues, folklore fieldwork with developmental issues and folklore advocacy with public programming events. Folklore is a tradition based on any expressive behaviour that brings a group together, creates a convention and commits it to cultural memory. NFSC aims to achieve its goals through cooperative and experimental activities at various levels. NFSC is supported by a grant from the Ford Foundation.



### INDIAN FOLKLIFE

In this issue, we have initiated discussion on *Arts, Crafts and Folklife*. The articles in this issue provide insights into the history of Indian arts, crafts and folklife's underlying strata and out present day concerns. We feel it is significant to present the diversity of contexts in which Indian arts and crafts thrive. Our attempt is to identify grassroot forces that determine the streams of cultural dynamics. Moreover these discussions might also exemplify and initiate a more deeper engagement and reflective discussions in the future issues of *Indian Folklife*. And we sincerely hope that it unfolds a possibility of new ways of seeing and interpreting our folklife.

We invite submissions of articles, illustrations, reports, reviews offering historical, fieldwork oriented, articles in English on works in other languages, multi-disciplinary and cultural approaches to folklore. Articles should conform to the latest edition of *MLA style manual*.



### NEXT ISSUE

Theme of the April issue of *Indian Folklife* is *Creativity, Folklife and Documentation*. Closing date for submission of articles for the next issue is April 15, 2001. All Communications should be addressed to:

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**Creolization of Self and Other: Thoughts on Creativity and Cultural Politics**

M.D.Muthukumaraswamy

**Once** William Blake<sup>1</sup> did fieldwork in hell in a *memorable fancy* and came back with a collection of proverbs. One of his proverbs that has mythical premonition and sweeping over the entire history of modern thought would be *The most sublime act is to set another before you*. The irony, stupor, pain, pleasure and helplessness contained in this proverb that is about the fundamentals of human existence, resurged again as a regrettable reversal in the cruellest Sartrean dictum *other is hell*. In Indian cultural studies and practices the metaphorical equivalences of self and other have been found in pairs such as orient and occident, mind and senses, folk and classical, local and global, urban and rural, casteism and linguistic chauvinism, nationalism and sub-regional linguistic chauvinism and man and woman with the hellishness of Blakean or Sartrean variety. With the impingement of hell pre-imposed on either of the binaries, the conceptual pairs set the limits and formation of discourses on arts and crafts situated in community life. In the present confluence of different streams of historical forces, is there a preferred option to see self and other as *fluid signs*<sup>2</sup> and their constant comingling and creolization as sites of life forms and cultural expressions? Fluidity offers not only subversive slippages out of *all* sorts of cultural politics but also glimpses of processes of creativity. Here I must add that treating these diverse historical forces of cultural politics inside an irreverential synchrony of present tense is a delightful discovery, for me. Adishakti's *Ganapati*, a play directed by Veenapani Chawla recently demonstrated the tantalising prospect of mediation between fluid self and melting other.

Performed in the Other Festival on December 3, 2000 in Chennai (Could I have asked for a more appropriate title for the festival?) *Ganapati*, a musical drama, conveyed what millions of words usually fail to communicate on creativity and freedom. While writing about *Ganapati* I aspire not to describe it but to call it into being. With the fallible light of recollection I belatedly accept the seductive invitation of the performance to explore the aesthetics of interaction: an aesthetics that rearticulates the religious faith towards the possibility of return to existence, expression, love and life after total destruction. Readers who hear the echoes of Nietzschean eternal recurrence are actually listening to the Dionysian drums of Veenapani Chawla's actors. Abandoning origins, the play like life begins in the middle of an unknown celebration. Using the

temporality of live musical gestures, the drumming actors suggest the ritual creation of an image of *Ganapati* with a drum signifying his potbelly. Temporal these musical gestures are the identities of actors depend only on the possibility of responsive rhythms of celebration. Thus establishing the plane of performance as if it were the plane of human existence that finds expression only in the unforeseen event of interaction, the play goes on to build narrative units of rhythm to tell the story of *Ganapati*. If life is theatre's double in Artaudian terms then rhythm is the best signifier for the collage and process of plurality. In sensuous terms, rhythm

institutes helpless response to every solicitation and thereby creates expressions of freedom against all abominable taboos. The performance uses recognisable and evocative bits of rhythm from varieties of folk traditions in a fine fusion to achieve its story telling.

Sparsely using words in English, the performance alludes to one of the myths of *Ganapati*. Ambiguously goddess *Parvati* on her own creates her son *Martanda*, out of her bodily dirt. The feminine dirt of a son angers the masculine god *Siva* when he desires consummation with his wife *Parvati*.

Beheading the gate keeping son *Martanda*, *Siva* enters into *Parvati's* chamber. The rigidity of masculine and feminine selves inevitably results in crime. After consummation, on *Parvati's* pleadings *Siva* gives life to the son with an elephant head. This birth story of *Ganapati* is again and again enacted in the performance from a variety of perspectives by raising the question what is this figure all about? Adishakti's actors refer to another myth where the identity of a person is decided by the transposed head and go on to ascertain *Ganapati's* identity needs to be determined by his head.

But then, what is in a head? Or better still, what is a head? In one of the sensuous retellings of the myth *Ganapati's* elephant trunk becomes a western saxophone and his belly an Indian drum. Initially the Indian drummer resists and ignores the invading saxophone but the interaction is so playfully seductive that they relate and create incredibly theatrical music and dance. Within the framework of *Ganapati* myth, is this an instance of the Lost Son in the unconscious ascertaining him in the concrete and conscious experience of hybridisation? After all, living is hybridisation. Living is creolization. In another retelling, opulent demonstration of the sensorial experience of an elephant



emerges theatrically: the flapping of the ears, endlessly shaking bottom and the majestic walk. One almost feels the mischievous twinkle of the tiny eyes of an elephant. Head, in this theatrical exploration becomes combination of senses. Appropriately. If innovative combination of senses enhances the aesthetic experience it also reveals how senses constitute the mind and contests the supremacy of mind over other senses. And so the performance identifies desire as the shared platform for self and other. By avoiding Aristotelian catharsis of musical ecstasy and by structuring the play to have cycles from different perspectives Veenapani Chawla keeps the affective dimension of the play within the conscious realm. In this process, the locus of creativity is rightfully in the collectivity. A collectivity that includes reflective participation of the audience. If it is so, one has to confront the performance's prominent question that bubbles with sarcasm, who owns the intellectual property right.

is an important constituent in the construction of the logic of Indian culture and civilisation. It becomes an imposition and exercise in power both for and by the state and for the popular consciousness when the notion of collective creativity or anonymous authorship is surreptitiously linked with notions of *authenticity*, *purity* and *the sacred heritage* of folk forms. Historical evidences are abounding in Indian legends and temple myths how exercises of such stately power lead to the cutting of tongues, thumbs and heads of innumerable artisans who created monumental expressions in sculpture, architecture and poetry among other arts. The twin cultural strategy of inculcating self-denial in the individual psychology of folk artists and then appropriating their works for the state in the name of purity of civilisation is a sinful blockade for understanding the real cultural processes at work. That is why intellectual property rights based on well defined notions of individual and collective authorships are important not only economically but also culturally. By the same token it is important to claim or accord authorship for specific moments, events and texts while ascertaining that not purity but creolization<sup>3</sup> is fundamental to creativity.

Were the cut off tongues, thumbs and heads of Indian artisans to narrate their story they would retell and perform Veenapani Chawla's *Ganapati*.

Notes

1. Blake, William: *Poems and Prophecies*, David Campbell publishers Ltd, London, 1991.
2. *Fluid Signs* is the title of a major anthropological study by Valentine Daniel. He uses Peircean semiotics effectively to theorise concept of a person in Tamil way. I borrow the title to establish a playful reference.
3. Creolization is a concept used in socio-linguistics. It refers to the social creation of mixed languages in the border areas where two or more languages co-exist.

4



*Ganapati: Veenapani Chawla and Adishakti (Pondicherry)*

Undoubtedly Veenapani Chawla's *Ganapati* is a radical breakthrough in the history of modern Indian theatre. I continue to refer to *Ganapati* as Veenapani Chawla's *Ganapati* because she has the modesty to admit that her play is a process of collective creativity. This is exactly the modesty and truth every Indian folklorist encounters whenever she meets with a folk artist. Undeniably Veenapani Chawla is true to the philosophy of her performance. But what disturbs me and prompts me to write about it in *Indian Folklife* is the genealogical rootedness of her refusal to claim authorship. As a consequence my askance for Veenapani Chawla's authorship for *Ganapati* stems from the field of folklore.

If the performance of *Ganapati* epitomizes the archetypal situation of folklore creativity embedded in community life, Veenapani Chawla's refusal parallels the self-effacement of folk artists. The ascetic value of self-denial



*Vinay Kumar in another Adishakti production, Brhnala*

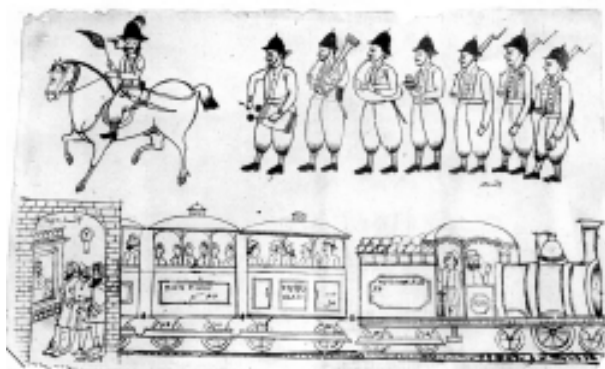
**Home of Folk and Tribal Arts: Museum of Rare Collection**

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**Home of Folk and Tribal Arts** is a unique museum of art objects of the rural and tribal flavour, collected by K.C. Aryan. The uniqueness of this museum is ascribable to the large number of art objects that have already become extinct. And no one is aware of their existence. To this category belong: the *pataka* paintings, the card puppets, a large set of clay pottery and toys shaped in the tradition of the Indus Valley culture, wooden masks, rare textiles, folk paintings mainly from Punjab, masterpieces of bronze icons, terracotta, wood and stone images. The list is too long and the space too short to permit us to enumerate all the objects. The folk paintings from Punjab belong to the Nineteenth century, and had been executed by *bazaar*

our books that classical / courtly arts that thrive on royal patronage owe much to the rural / tribal, that kept traditions alive over the centuries.

It needs to be stressed that our museum has a collection of art objects not only from Punjab, Himachal and Haryana, but also from all Indian provinces down to South India. Equal justice has been done to diverse rural and tribal regions, each one vying with the other in the creation of magnificent art objects. Exquisite silver ornaments, silver *hookah*, mouth pieces, elbow rests, handwritten manuscripts, glass paintings, original examples of Madhubani paintings from Mithila in Bihar, extremely rare embroidered textiles from Bhadrawah-Kishtavar in the vicinity of Chamba district in Himachal Pradesh, and *Swat*, ritual objects from diverse provinces, sculptures *bhang* (hemp) filters made of iron from Jodhpur in Rajasthan, richly carved doorways and tiny windows from Rajasthan, applique embroidered pieces from Gujarat and Himachal, figurative embroidered *phulkaris* of Punjab and Haryana, traditional playing cards known as *Gaujita*, lacquered ware from Hoshiarpur in Punjab, and *Sankheda* in Gujarat, traditional shoes made of diverse materials from different provinces, objects made for votive offerings, architectural brackets, and a large number of utilitarian artefacts enrich the collection of K.C.Aryan. The museum is housed presently in his personal residence. In spite of persistent efforts, the institution has not received much needed help from Governmental agencies. Institutional sustainability is what we are striving for. So that our institution can function as a proper museum, with research, display, lectures, craft demonstrations, conservation and the similar facilities. Our vast collection has been declared as a national treasure.



Rare litho print, Punjab, late 19 century (Home of Folk Art)

artists. In this respect, Aryan has done for Punjab and Himachal Pradesh what W.G. Archer had done for Bengal and Bihar by collecting and writing on popular paintings from there. The *patakas* are paintings executed by the *tantrik siddhas* for personal *sadhana* and attainment of spiritual / *tantrik siddhis*. Our museum has not only the largest collection of *patakas*, but also that are not seen in any collection in the world.

The same is true of priceless/bronze icons from rural and tribal pockets. Aryan started collecting all these art objects more than sixty years ago. Initially, his aim was to bring to limelight the rural and tribal artistic heritage of Punjab, Himachal and Haryana, provinces usually dismissed as being completely bereft of artistic expression worth the name. Aryan proved through his collection as well as his art historical books that the three provinces named above not only have artistic and cultural traditions as rich as any other Indian province, but they are living traditions till the present times, the sole credit for which is ascribable to the rural / tribal artists. Both K.C. Aryan and myself have proved in



Folk depiction of Hanuman, Rajasthan, 19 century (Home of Folk Art)

## The Tradition in Crafts

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**The last decade** of the nineties has been the apogee of the Craft Fair. This nationwide State and NGO (non-governmental organisation) sponsored peripatetic phenomenon has fixed locales (fair grounds, community centres and the like) in every city of visitation and has its own bureaucratic apparatus governing selection of crafts and their representatives who are not necessarily craftspeople themselves. They are the well known handloom and handicraft expositions and large scale fairs featuring leather, food and agriculture, popular art<sup>1</sup>, traditional sciences and technologies<sup>2</sup> and the like. Held periodically to coincide with important annual seasons and festivals, mass events such as these aim to attract the wider public with *craft* information and products from *all India* in an atmosphere of family entertainment at an affordable price. Indeed the *national fair*, ever willing to showcase lesser known and still unknown aspects of India's tradition, is the emerging genre of public outreach where values and products are experienced (sampled rather) and exchanged in an overall spirit of nationwide unity in diversity.

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The present concern is not to conduct a critical inquiry into the phenomenon of the Craft Fair<sup>3</sup> but rather an occasion to reflect upon what do we really mean when we say we are engaged in the exposition, preservation, promotion and development of *traditional crafts* at the national level. In order to understand this, it is necessary to go into the genealogy of the notion of the *traditional craftsman*. Stella Kramrisch, Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy and Soetsu Yanagi are important figures responsible for the scholarly discourse on the notion of the craftsman - as an aspect of *tradition*. In what follows I shall briefly show how the concept of *tradition* as understood by the three scholars has indeed shaped our present understanding of the *traditional craftsman*. While a detailed discussion on the individual works of the three scholars is beyond the scope of the present piece, I take this opportunity to nevertheless put the three on a common platform in order to shed some insight into the twentieth century understanding of *traditional crafts*.

Exposed to the cultural severity of the encounters between the East and the West in early part of the twentieth century, all three employed religious principles in their explanation for the continued existence of crafts in countries like India and Japan. A nostalgia for the handicraft mode of production that had perished in the west, prompted the three to promote the idea of the *traditional craftsman* (along the lines of the medieval guild) as an exemplary alternative to the industrial *factory hand*. Their idealism opposed the growing moral and material degradation in the Occident and therefore encouraged pride in a *national* culture reclassified on the basis of an overall unity of principles of oriental philosophy and wisdom.

Coomaraswamy in fact employed the term *tradition* as a key orientalist idea to characterise ancient civilisations like India as being essentially spiritual. He developed it as an attack on western materialism and as a political critique on the evils of modern society in particular those wrought by industrial production. By conjoining Hindu, Buddhist, medieval Christian and Muslim art as the art of *traditional* cultures, whose conceptions of *truth* were basically similar even if expressed differently, Coomaraswamy was able to use *tradition* as a synthesis of culture. His first hand experience among craftsmen in Ceylon, association with the Arts and Crafts Circle in Britain and continued involvement with the nationalist struggle for self-government in India, culminated in a series of essays published in 1909 in the books *Essays in National Idealism* and *The Indian Craftsman* (cf. Lipsey 1977).

Kramrisch sought to understand Indian art and craft through its literary traditions of myth and philosophy. Her usage of *tradition* however is not merely that of metaphysical symbolism but grounded in concrete practice and manifest form. In her article, *Traditions of the Indian Craftsman*, the craftsman is denoted as a *practitioner of Tradition*, one who is indeed the link between the Divine Principle and the worshiper or patron. In her view, ... *awareness of Tradition is active on all the levels of the craftsman's being. If he infringes on Tradition, if the composition of a painting has no wholeness, the painter shows himself not as a poor artist but he becomes, thereby, an unholy person* (Kramrisch 1958, 1994: 62).

Yanagi equally highlighted the importance of a unified *tradition* in the work of Japanese craftsmen. The Japanese government's policies of overt westernisation during the Meiji period had gradually led to the rise of a cultural nationalism promoting Japanese values and practices reoriented as *tradition*. Yanagi sought to discover the beauty of handiwork in the *power of tradition* itself viewed as the accumulated wisdom of generations and known as the *Given Power* among the Buddhists. According to him, *To the craftsman, tradition is both the savior and the benefactor. When he follows it, the distinction between talented and untalented individuals all but disappears: any craftsman can unfailingly produce a beautiful work of art* (Yanagi 1972, 1989). Through out his life Yanagi worked hard to blur the indigenous distinction between *jotemono* i.e. refined works created by individual artists and *getemono* or objects of everyday life made by anonymous craftsmen<sup>4</sup>. For him the non-individualism of tradition was the true marker of beauty rather than knowledge of the identity of individual genius. Indeed his book *The Unknown Craftsman* is subtitled *A Japanese Insight into Beauty*.

By viewing the practice of a craft or creativity itself as spiritual revelation embodied in oral and literary religious texts Coomaraswamy, Kramrisch and Yanagi

were able to provide the basis for the unity of culture redefined as a *national heritage* and thereby conceptually oppose it to that of the Occident. Yet in the later years of their life all three sought refuge in the modern institution of the Museum rather than with the *Indian, Traditional* or *Unknown* craftsman they were at pains to understand and know. Their concern, a critique of industrialism, although appropriate for the times, is now interpreted both as nostalgia for the handicraft mode of production and a revival of a *tradition* now in steady decline. The almost elitist abdication of machine reproduction by all three scholars<sup>5</sup> prevented them from envisioning the present day reality of contemporary craftspersons who may belong to a family or community of practitioners but not actually have anything to do with *traditional crafts*. Or designers who may have no *traditional* background in craft and yet work with *traditional crafts* employing modern techniques and practices for different markets.

In the present situation *tradition* is not seen as a bound category symbolising *nation* or *civilisation*. For it is no longer possible to speak of nations without border disputes and regional cooperation and civilisations without exchanges and influences. It is time perhaps to re-examine the manner in which one perceives the blurring of *tradition* in crafts outside private and museum collections, and particularly at National Craft Fairs. For it is here that the *classic* original competes with its cheap copy, where hand crafted objects jostle for space along with those that are machine made and where the remote and unknown meets the neighbouring and the familiar. National Craft Fairs are also the breeding grounds for newer products and still newer markets as it is here that local and regional characteristics and products are viewed, borrowed, disguised and even transformed.

This union of *tradition* and *modernity* (however impure) is indeed the contemporary reality. The question is where do we go from here? In Japan the State in fact is clear about the preservation of its *national heritage* and the institution of the Museum is strongly entrenched in the public life of the people. Moreover the issue of the craftsman both *known* and *unknown* is also not ambiguous. The individual artists among them are celebrated designers of craft products whereas Yanagi's *unknown* craftsmen are now officially recognised and supported as *national living treasures*. In India the Museum is yet to become a popular institution for the dissemination of culture, *master craftsman* awards are not exclusive enough and designers continue to occupy an ambivalent position between fine art and not so fine craft.

The *clash* between tradition and modernity continues only if one views the two concepts as static. Artisans have historically always been known to respond to new technologies and materials and to expand their markets wherever possible. Labeling crafts as an example of India's *living traditions* against the backdrop of the modern museum displaying extinct ones, or viewing them as *traditional crafts* vis a vis contemporary arts

and crafts is no longer the crucial issue here. Regardless of nomenclature, the present scenario as exemplified in the National Craft Fair is such that it is now imperative to take cognisance of the changed situation of the *Indian Craftsman* on the one hand and the emerging role of the Indian Designer on the other.

#### Notes

1. The Kala Mela or *art fair* held in Calcutta, hosted by the Lalit Kala Akademi is a case in point. It is a mass art event ... *drawing on groups and regions that lie outside the metropolitan elite circles ... [and] over the years, become an integral feature of our national public life* (cf. Tapati Guha-Thakurta 1996:35).

2. An important component of National Congresses on Traditional Sciences and Technologies organised by the PPST Foundation has been the representation of the voice and work of the artisan/practitioner that includes both a visual documentation and sale of their craft products.

3. There is nothing new about the traveling fair. Like the weekly market (the *haat* or the *sandai*) and other local and regional level fairs and festivals, the National Craft Fair is yet another expression of cultural and commercial exchange.

4. In his later years he set up the Japan Folkcraft Museum (*Nihon Mingeikan*) dedicated to the arts and crafts of the common people.

5. It is interesting that Yanagi had in fact met American industrial designer Charles Eames in 1954 and also explored bridging the gap between hand work and machine work through contemporary design. It is also well known that the charter of the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad, is to a large part influenced by The Eames Report of 1958. In this report, Charles and Ray Eames believed that India is a *tradition oriented society* and therefore recommended a learning from *tradition* as a way of promoting small scale industry and at the same time prevent the rapid deterioration of consumer products in the country.

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## ***Wings of Imagination: Juang Architecture***

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**By architecture we** usually mean Urban architecture, Temple architecture, Buddhist or Jain architecture or else Gothic architecture, but many will not be aware of Tribal architecture. Therefore, a visit to the Indian Village is educative in many ways. If it is highly populated, there is the chance to perceive the variety, elegance and the simple dignity of the dwellings. There is a riddle in this as there are never any specialised architects amongst dwellers. From whence then those splendid designs, the ideas thereof and the skill to execute it? This is interesting aspect of tribal building practices. Although there is generally speaking the presence of a common style in the dwellings taken as a whole, each of them demands individual attention on account of their careful construction. The houses of *Juang* peoples in Keonjhar of Orissa are a fine example of the innate building skills of forest dwellers. In their structures we encounter yet another skill-decorative designs, which enhance considerably the visual appeal of dwellings.

**8** In the process of observing *Juang* architecture, I was fortunate enough to be a spectator to an unusual architectural event. Under the shade of a thatched roof, sheltered from a rather hot sun, and looking at the village, I noticed a child playing. But there was nothing childish about her diligence and concentration. I strolled over to take a closer look at what she was making with some mud. That was sufficient to scare her and she fled. The mud structure remained, and I could not at once gauge its purpose, although it was very symmetrical and filled with purpose. A little later it dawned to me that here was a perfect replica of the floor plan of a *Juang* hut made by a four-year-old girl, as an act of play.

Building activity is of course at a larger scale as well and a *Juang* village are rebuilt on a new location every eight or ten years or so. These shifts in residence are due to shortage of agricultural land near the village, continued disease or calamities like house catching fire, failure of crops and cases of sorcery and witchcraft leading to quarrels and conflicts between village members. Economically this span of time is what it takes for the carrying capacity of land to get exhausted. This makes village shift necessary. Yet change of the village location is a major event in the life style of a *Juang* and this is preceded by ritual-based decision-making, which must precede settlement re-location. The first step for this is to locate a new site, which is most suitable in terms of access to cultivation plots, water and such economic criteria as necessary. When the economy is just about at subsistence level, as the *Juangs* have, and the tribe has little contact with other cultures,

one generally finds that, unlike our own society, it rarely values novelty and innovation, rather regarding them undesirable. The force of tradition provides the stabilising element binding one generation to another.

*Juang* houses are small in size, varying from 5 by 2 to 6 by 4 metres. The walls of the houses are made of wooden pillars struck vertically close to each other and these are plastered with cow dung and mud mixed together. The roof is thatched with wild grass of the hills, and of dried stalks in the plain villages. Each married couple has a house of its own, the group of children sleep in a dormitory, and the cattle are kept in a separate shed built for them close to the sleeping room. Pigs and goat are kept in separate sheds made of wooden planks. The houses of *Juang* are almost uniform. Joint families are rarely found, as the huts are too small for that purpose. All sorts of fenestration are conspicuous by their total absence. Doors are of small sizes. Inside the house, a platform is erected on the side of the door. This is considered to be the store of the family the other side remains open with a fireplace in one corner. Three small stone pillars are erected to construct an oven. This is used for cooking. Also they lie down on the ground in front of the fireplace which is kept burning in winter. In the centre of the room there is a cylindrical cavity plastered with cow dung and used as mortar for pounding and husking paddy and other grains.

Men, women and grown up children respectively contribute in the construction of houses. Men usually do the heavy work like getting the wood from the forest, erecting the posts and laying the foundation whereas women and children do the plastering work. Decoration, both inside and out, is customarily a woman's job. Colour is added to the mud walled exterior as well as the richly draped interior. The *Mandaghar* or the dormitory is a special architectural unit of the *Juang* system. It is also known as the *Majang*. It is the impressive and imposing structure in the entire village. It is often a big comfortable house open all along on one side, with a high *veranda*. Once this is done only then are smaller residential structures built around it. Not all the building materials are new and often doors and posts from older structures are recycled for use. The labour input for the construction of the *Mandaghar* is high and every detail is attended. The exterior is painted with fine geometric designs and the interior is one better since it contains animal motifs; clay friezes, carved posts and most of the musical instruments of the village are kept here. In the dormitory, the older and the adolescents socialise as matter of daily practice and younger boys visit as often as they like.



This institution of *Juangs* has manifold services for people of all age groups. It is a school of dancing; it is an expression of the communal art of the people. It is social, economic, political and magic-religious base for the *Juangs*. The *Mandaghar* comes to life in the night. There is a fire around which the men sit and share experiences and conversations may take many turns from problem solving to storytelling to the youngsters interested. Women are usually not allowed there, as the dormitory is a male preserve. This happens, therefore, to be an architectural means of regulating male and female activity in that society. Most of the male's life is spent around the *Mandaghar* rather than at home where they return only occasionally.

A woman's leisure time is spent at home or just outside it. A public structure such as this also performs the function of providing the link with the outside. All visitors to the village can be found a berth here and there is a special stock of grain, which is kept for entertaining them. The example of *Juang* architectural system and its role as an agent of life suggest that there is in small-scale society a system of learning and skill dissemination which is at the basis of a vernacular lifestyle. Clearly the built forms and spaces produced in the forest are integrated with the ecology and they preserve it with greater care. Our urban systems of architecture could learn a lot from *Juang's* lifestyle.

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**Eleventh Annual Kattaikkuttu Festival**

The Tamil Nadu *Kattaikkuttu* Kalai Valarchi Munnetra Sangam kindly invites you to attend the Eleventh Annual *Kattaikkuttu* Festival. The festival will be held during the first three Saturday nights of February 2001 at Shengottah, Gingee, and Kanchipuram. The aim of the Annual *Kattaikkuttu* Festival is to demonstrate the richness and vitality of the *Kattaikkuttu* tradition, to reinforce the alliances between professional performers and village audiences, and to provide professional *Kattaikkuttu* performers with a platform where they can present and witness performances in different styles. This year's festival features *Kattaikkuttu* performances in Tamil and Telugu by guest companies from the Viluppuram, Dharmapuri, and Chittoor Districts, and by collective companies of the *Kattaikkuttu* Sangam working together for the occasion.

**3 February**

Venue: Shri Draupadi Amman Temple, Shengottah (near Katpadi), Vellore District  
 Jeyavijayan by the *Kattaikkuttu* Sangam, Kanchipuram (Author-director: P. Rajagopal); The Killing of Kicakan by the Shri Venkatesvara Nattiya Mandali, Chittoor (in Telugu); The Eighteenth Battle by the Dharmapuri District Terukkuttu Training Association, Krishnagiri

**10 February**

Venue: Shri Kamalakanni Amman Ground, Gingee, Viluppuram District  
 Krishna's Water sports (Jalakiritai) by the Om Saravanan Nataka Manram, Aramedu; Jeyavijayan by the *Kattaikkuttu* Sangam, Kanchipuram; Aravan's Battle by the Gingee Branch of the Tamil Nadu *Kattaikkuttu* Kalai Valarchi Munnetra Sangam, Gingee

**17 February**

Venue: Flower Bazaar, East Raja Street, Kanchipuram  
 Jeyavijayan by the *Kattaikkuttu* Sangam, Kanchipuram; Dice and Disrobing by the Shri Venkatesvara Nataka Mandali, Chittoor (in Telugu); Krishna's Embassy' by the Tamil Nadu *Kattaikkuttu* Kalai Valarchi Munnetra Sangam, Kanchipuram

The Tamil Nadu *Kattaikkuttu* Kalai Valarchi Munnetra Sangam is a grassroot level association which promotes *Kattaikkuttu* (Terukkuttu) as a theatre in its own right and which serves the interests of professional *Kattaikkuttu* actors, actresses, and musicians. The Sangam has a head office in Kanchipuram and a branch office in Gingee. Address is: #31, Selva Vinayakar Koil Street, Vedasala Nagar, Sevilimedu Post Kanchipuram-631 502, India Tel. +91-(0) 4112-24517/26525, Email: kattaiku@md3.vsnl.net.in

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**Highway Performance Circuit for Contemporary Dance**

CHAALI is an initiative to establish Highway Performance Circuits for contemporary dance. The aim of this project is to showcase new directions in dance for audiences in the cities, small towns and villages and offer a range of workshops in different disciplines. Dancers/groups will travel in a mini-bus through the states of Goa, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu to offer performances, lecture/demonstrations and workshops. The first round will begin from Panjim on January 28, 2001 and end in Bangalore on March 3, 2001. During this tour, internationally and nationally acclaimed dancers/groups - Dancer's Guild (Calcutta); Samudra, (Thiruvanthapuram); Bhoorang (Bangalore) and soloists Bharat Sharma and Tripura Kashyap will present their dance productions and offer workshops. This project has been initiated by Bharat Sharma. For further information regarding invitations / venues / dates and time of events, contact: tripdance@usa.net

## ***A Bridge Between Many Worlds: The Velar Makers of Ritual Terracotta***

Radhika Vaidyanathan is a Ceramicist and Installation Artist lives in Chennai

**Anyone** who has driven through the countryside in Tamil Nadu will have noticed large, imposing clay figures clustered around village shrines. My first encounter with these figures was during a stay at the Golden Bridge Pottery, Pondicherry. Ray Meeker organised a trip to see some Chola temples in the Thanjavur area. In the villages on the way, we saw many shrines surrounded by terracotta figures. Many were new; others were half ruined, weather stained and broken, all arrayed in rows around the shrines. I was curious as to how these large, hollow clay sculptures were built and kept the interest alive. In 1988, I was funded by the National Institute of Design to document the process of making these figures.



Thiru Ganeshan sculpting the head of the Gramathu Kuthirai (village horse)  
Photo - Sagarmoy Paul

Many villages have a shrine dedicated to the local powerful deity. The terracotta is votive offerings given to appease the deity, which have either malevolent or benevolent dispositions. *The worship of the village deity, or grama devata, as it is called in Sanskrit and Tamil, forms an important part of the conglomerate of religious beliefs, customs and ceremonies, which are generally classed together under the term Hinduism... The origin of this form of Hinduism is lost in antiquity, but it represents a pre- Aryan cult of the Dravidian peoples, more or less modified in various parts of Tamil Nadu by Brahmanical influence.... The shrines of Iyenar are distinguished by horses great and small, on which he is supposed to ride around the village every night to chase away the evil spirits.*<sup>1</sup>

The figures are built during the annual festival, which is celebrated collectively by the village. This is during the Tamil months of *Panguni, Chitrai* and *Vaikasi* (roughly

March, April and June). The shrines are usually dedicated to *Aiyandar*, with most of the other *grama-devatas* represented. The terracotta figures are called *nertikattan* and are offered for prayers answered by the deity. The villagers offer the *Gramathu Kutirai* collectively. The smaller bulls, elephants and horses are personal offerings from individuals. In any shrine, successive rows of heaps of terracotta show the passage of time, as each festival adds to a new row of *nertikattan* figures. The rows of terracotta stand as silent witness to the bygone festivity.

In my study, I had focused on the process of making the large terracotta figures. Their techniques, tools and skills, were of interest to me as information on building large sculptures in clay. I subsequently used many of the techniques I observed. Many of the figures made as ritual offerings to the village deities are more than 8-9 ft in height. Making a clay wall that spans a large volume is a specialised skill- knowledge of what to add to the clay, wall thickness and drying techniques are important. Although this was the thrust of my study, some other aspects of their work started to interest me as I observed them at work. The interconnectedness of the maker/ artefact/ location/ environment/ ritual village worship/ season/ local economic activity and materials used, were like a microcosm of harmonious relationships.

The potters work as a team to produce the terracotta for the village festival. The village where I made most of my observations was Kanjarampettai, just outside of Madurai city. Here a team consisting of a father and his three sons built the figures. They worked with mutual understanding and many bodies with a single mind. The basic raw material, clay, was mixed with paddy husk from the recent harvest and river sand from the Periyar River nearby.

All the tools were made of natural materials, a small stone hand turned pottery wheel, bamboo pottery tools, rope, a wooden paddle and a stone anvil (for beating the walls thin) and *yerkelai* (a kind of a leaf), for keeping the rims of clay moist. With these materials they produced amazing figures of village deities, horses, bulls, *nertikattan* (offerings given for prayers answered by the deity), and other smaller figures commissioned

by the villagers. All the figures were made partially on the wheel and then sculpted into desired forms by hand.

In this article, I wish to explore how the makers of these artefacts become like a bridge between many worlds, in the process of carrying out their various roles in society. All the observations are based on my documentation of the process of making ritual terracotta in Madurai district of Tamil Nadu (1988).

The potter and his art have played a significant role in many traditional societies since ancient times. Pots and ritual images serve as an important example of how nature can be rearranged to embody value. The process of making pottery exemplifies the transformation of nature into culture. Clay from the earth blends with water from the sky is dried by the wind and fired to hardness using wood or other fuel to produce useful pottery or sculpted ritual images. One of the castes associated with the rituals performed at village temples is the *Velar*. They are potters by caste. They have many roles in the community, which relate to their role as makers of *divine vessels*. *The Velar potters of Madurai district in Tamil Nadu are a community with an active tradition of possession rituals and are acknowledged possession specialists in their region.*<sup>2</sup> Stephen Ingliss, in his studies on this community, has probed the nature of the affinity between becoming possessed by a deity and creating its image in clay. He suggests a basis for the fitness of the *Velar* to perform these tasks. He also explores the special relationship between the *Velar* and the deities to whom they give form through both images and their own bodies. I have understood a great deal through his study and have quoted him extensively here.

Possession rituals among Tamil communities show a variety of forms and meaning. *First, in the case of the Velar we are dealing with examples of spirit possession rather than with shamanism; that is, the human is a receptacle for the spirits rather than a master of them... Second, the possession we are here referring to involves spirit medium ship (in the sense used by Peter Claus), the legitimate, controlled possession of a specialist by a deity within the context of a specific ritual... Third, this form of possession is a ritual institution which is meaningful within the context of traditional caste or community privileges. The name for this institution and its officers in the Madurai area is Camiyati (god dancer).*<sup>3</sup> The best known functions of the *camiyati* are to become possessed and to serve as a mouthpiece for the deity during festivals. The ascetic feats performed by the *Velar camiyati* attest to the power of the deity to protect the *camiyati* from pain or injury. *Among the Velar, the rights to serve a deity as camiyati are rigorously controlled*

*by patrilineal descent groups, as are indeed the rights to supply images and even pottery. Moreover, the rituals of possession in which members of a lineage participate as camiyatis are directed toward the deities of their particular lineage deity (kula teyvam). Velar not only act as camiyatis at the annual festivals of these deities, but also serve as pujaris (priests), often on a more regular basis.... Most Velar men who live close to Madurai city are mill workers, labourers or pot makers, and for these, priestly duties are a part time responsibility undertaken during particular festivals or in lineages. The role of camiyati and pujari are integrated. The significance of the Velar rituals of possession to a wider group of south Indian communities lies in the fact that the deities which Velar lineages identify as their kula teyvam may also be lineage deities for other communities. Members of a wide range of landlord, farmer and service communities participate in the deity's festival... The possession of specialists such as the Velar, during major festivals at local temples in the Madurai area is one means by which a cult involving a cross section of local*



Thiru Iyyaswami Velar with the figure of Aiyandar made by him  
Photo - Sagarmoy Paul

*communities lays claim to legitimacy, by which patrons of the temple, often communities other than the Velar, also claim privileges. Local communities recognise the skills of the Velar camiyatis in manifesting deities as part of an overall set of rights and privileges.*<sup>4</sup> The image-making specialty of the *Velar* is another aspect of the community, which complements their role as *camiyati*.

The tradition of making clay images in south India received scant attention from writers, in spite of their scale and role in village ritual. As such, there are few sources of information regarding these sculptures. The figures are made by the *Velar* for the annual village festival. The patrons of the temple send the date of the festival to the *Velar* through a messenger, along with a detailed request, small gifts and a handful of earth (*pitiman*) from the temple floor. This *pitiman* will be mixed

with the clay, which will be used to make the new figures. The figures are made over a 3-4 weeks period. Major deities worshipped at the temple are made large, while others are made small.

Villagers as votive offerings commission personal pleas or bargains with the deity figures of children, body parts, and animals. In the Madurai area, horses and bulls are offered to the equestrian deities. When the figures have been fired and painted, a *puja* is performed to the deities before the arrival of the patrons of the temple, as a thanksgiving for the successful completion of the figures.

On the day of the festival, when the patrons and devotees from the village arrive amidst much fanfare, a full *puja* is performed and the *Velar* performs the *kanthirattal* (eye opening ritual), by touching the bloodied toe of a cock to the eyes of the image. The deity descends at this moment of great intensity and the images are hoisted onto the head and shoulders of the male devotees, by tying the figures to long bamboo poles, and are taken in procession to the *mantai* (village square) where they are worshipped and then installed in the temple. Some of these images are destroyed at the end of the festival, while others disintegrate gradually. Whatever the material life of an image, after the festival it never is the exclusive locus of divinity.

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Both the *camiyati* and image making functions of the *Velar* communities have symbolic associations. *Both the hereditarily sanctioned body of the camiyati and the clay image are viewed as indispensable vessels that are inhabited by the deity during his festival. In each case an otherwise ephemeral being is being given a temporary locus to manifest itself. In all sacred matters the line between chaos and control is fine. The local deities are most active on the boundary of the village. They repel intruders, fight evil forces and live in constant contact with darkness and pain. They also straddle the boundary between life and death; they are masters of ambivalent power over the creative cycle. The Velar believe that their work involves a similar dilemma. It has been suggested that South Indian craftspeople derive their sacred power from their medial position between nature and society. The Velar themselves express the idea that they turn natural materials into useful cultural products which then return to an unformed state. The pursuit of this work necessitates a constant passage across a boundary, one with many parallels to that between chaos and control.*<sup>5</sup>

In the opinion of the *Velar*, the Brahmanical gods (who are responsible for the cosmos) may well be content with worship directed towards images made of permanent materials. On the other hand the village deities who direct the bloody and painful business of birth, the necessity of growth and the danger of evil demand a vessel whose fragile nature reminds all of the immediacy of their problems and responsibilities.

*This vessel must be a living, breathing body which can communicate messages in the street.*<sup>6</sup>

Craftsmen who work with stone and metal take pride in the stability, durability and permanence of their creations. The *Velar*, and many other craftsmen who work with the immediate and ever changing, are in contrast, specialists of impermanence. *Rather than trying to overcome problems of alteration by creating objects outside temporality, the work of the Velar directs itself toward the entire issue of alteration.*<sup>7</sup>

When looked at in this way, the fragility of earthenware becomes not a technical liability, but an integral part of the meaning of the craft and in fact a source of strength. The *Velar* use this quality, as they use their bodies as divine vessels, bridge many aspects involved in the village ritual.

#### Notes

1. Ingliss, Stephen
2. Ingliss, Stephen
3. Ingliss, Stephen
4. Ingliss, Stephen
5. Ingliss, Stephen
6. Ingliss, Stephen
7. Ingliss, Stephen

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Krishna, Kanudo, Kutch, Gujarat

## Folk Music from Mustard Fields

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**We never know** who wrote the lyrics or tune of a folk song. The most succinct comment on the authorship of folk songs comes from an aging *baul* (a wandering minstrel of West Bengal). He simply pointed to the swollen river and the many boats sailing its meandering course and then showed the almost dry canal where boats stood docked in slush and mud. He asked: *Do boats in full sail leave any trace of their passage? On the other hand, the track of the boat being pushed along the muddy docks is plainly marked in the mud.* The simple and natural move nimbly along in the current, the laboured creations get mired. *Leaving footprints is artificial and unimportant.* he said. The anonymity of the folk song is its great asset. Compositions are passed down generations through individual singers or groups whom add and innovate. The same composition may be played and sung in a radically different way after incorporating local colour. However, all folk singers of the traditional ilk stick to some austere rules and regulations concerning folk compositions. In Punjab there are compositions like the *dulla* which will not be sung in any other way but in the given tempo and meter. The *mirza* is to be normally sung in the evening since the tune is based on the *Tilang*, and evening *raag*.

Punjab is multi-layered cultural region and its music tradition stretches back for thousands of years to the Vedic period. Lying between the Gangetic Plain with its agricultural riches and the steppes of Central Asia, this region has been exposed to many cultures, each with their own musical modes. It is this unrelenting exposure to the new that has given Punjab's folk music a remarkable sophistication. With repeated invasions and conquests, Punjab's cultural traditions, instead of crumbling were further enriched. People assimilated the prevailing influences and bounced back from cultural shocks with their diversity enhanced. Within the existing forms, Punjabi folk music absorbed, imbibed and added to its repertoire.

Folk, devotional and classical music have flourished side by side here for centuries. While it may prove a difficult exercise to try to trace the affinity of the more refined *raags* to cruder folk tunes, in many cases the *raag* and *Taal* are obvious. It must not be forgotten that classical music has often drawn on folk forms, resulting in a shared musical vocabulary. Also, many folk artists spend

their youth with a *guru* who teaches them the basic *raags* and regains and grounds them in utilising the various *raags* for composition.

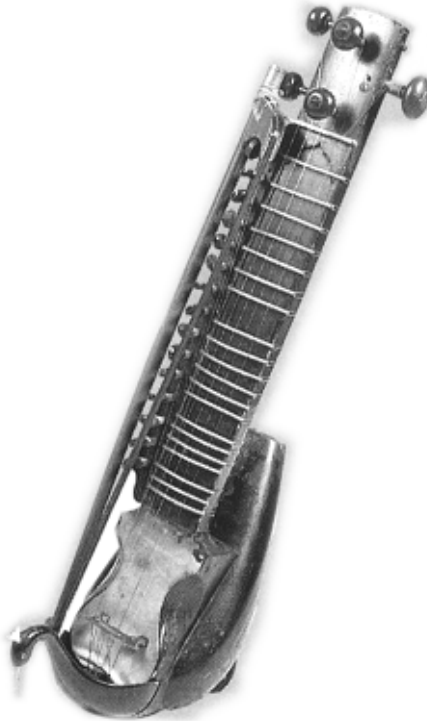
Today the situation is changing rapidly. As I crisscrossed the state time and again, I marvelled at the way music lives in rural Punjab-but just barely. The industrious Punjabi woman still works shoulder to shoulder with the men and it cannot be said that hard work has stifled her inherent aesthetic sensibility. She sings, dances,

weaves, does embroider and paints fashions of everyday objects adorning each with some motif of the agricultural society.

At the same time, modernisation and development have taken their toll and one of the first casualties has been the folk art. I found very few young women who were familiar with the crafts of their mothers. Village children no longer play *rassa-kassi*, *gulli danda*, *lukka-meechi*, *bhand-bhandar*, *kotlachupaki* or even *kabaddi*. Even the *ghoul*, a form of wrestling, has disappeared from the village. Village fairs have lost their power to attract. I saw no *kathputli-wallahs*, no *baazigars*, *nat-nati*, and *madaris*. Likewise, the *lok gathawans*, the *lok khedan* and *tamashas* were unknown to the young of modern Punjabi village—they were however completely up-to-date on the music channels

broadcast on satellite television. Gas stoves, washing machines and microwaves had completely overshadowed the *choler* (cooking stove), the *chapatti* (urn used to setmilk) and the *khoo* (well) where the women of the village would sit together and weave their dreams and aspirations. Water flows from taps, washing machines, videos and television has become the source of entertainment. Songs that accompanied domestic chores in olden days are sung-but one is more likely to hear them on a college or university stage than in a village courtyard.

The large community of entertainers have lost their source of livelihood. The maker of toys is now a daily wager, and the traditional instrument-maker has become a carpenter, even as a carpenter he is really not able to eke out a living, for the handicrafts of Punjab are singing their own dirges. At the Kartarpur *algoza* market, there were two old men who were undoubtedly making



*algozas*, (flutes) but for the sheer love of it. *My son gives me the wood, and some pocket money to live, for I cannot even earn my own living. I will keep making them till I die*, said Piaru Lal who had dozens of *algozas* in his little shed. He gave me two pairs of *algozas* happy that a city slicker had bothered to speak to him. Piaru Lal makes *algozas*, which are hardly bought. There are hundreds of Piaru Lal's in the villages of Punjab, who in the evening of their lives are silently crying over the loss of their craft and the accompanying traditions. Fifty years ago, the instrument-maker was a busy man, keeping his clients waiting for their orders. Today if they get a customer it is an occasion to celebrate.

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*Algoza is a complex wind instrument that uses two flutes with many embellishments*  
Photo - ARTIMES, 1998

The *guru-sishya parampara* (teacher-student tradition of affiliation and service) is extremely important to folk performers and they adhere to it strictly. The student swears allegiance to his guru and serves him devotedly for years till he is blessed with the gift of a talented performance. Puran Shahkoti and his student, Hans Raj Hans, at Jalandhar provide an example of this relationship. Hans served his master diligently and sang along with his guru at *mazaars* and local melas. Shahkoti was rich in talent and knowledge but materially impoverished. The fruits of success started trickling into Hans's life after he was given a chance to perform on television. Hans realised that he would have to

modify his performance to make it a saleable act. Shedding the black raiment and austere style of the Sufi singer, he took to colourful even, gaudy, attire and enlivened his performance with dance movement. To his regret, he had to short-change folk compositions and folk instruments and adapt to the technological sounds and fast paced composition. But the change paid off. Today he is one of the most sought after stars whose booking charts reads like a who's who. Hans is travelling all over the world and commanding his own price.

Whereas Hans's guru Shahkoti has to work at other jobs to survive. They may get little time, but they devote it to the pursuit of excellence in their particular musical tradition.

The situation of Naratta Ram of Patiala is also symptomatic of the same malaise. This renowned and talented *sarangi* player has five disciples who come to his home one or twice a week to learn the *sarangi* and folk compositions which Naratta Ram in turn imbibed from his guru as a youth. Knowledge passed down orally from generation to generation. But the teacher and the students cannot have regular practice sessions because they are all busy earning to eke out a living. Naratta Ram is now worried about the *health* of his *sarangi*. The instruments tend to dry out and become raspy if it is not played regularly. His son, Ranjit Singh, has taken to the *douroo* as he feels that the instrument needs little maintenance beyond being loosened and tightened regularly.

The need of the hour is documentation. The folk tradition is not a codified genre. Even the most modern of *ustads* do not write down either the poetry or the melodies they compose. Instead folk music is transmitted from *guru* to *sishya*; a student may spend years training under a master. This old fashioned human element may turn out to be the folk musician's saviour.

*[This essay has been culled out by the author from her book, From Mustard Fields to Disco Lights published by Mapin. The book is also accompanied with a CD of some traditional folk tunes. — Editor]*



*Ganesh, Goalpara, Assam*

**Report: Seminar on Linguistic and Interdisciplinary Approaches as Critical Resources to Development**

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**To celebrate its** fifth birthday, the Centre for Advanced Research on Indigenous Knowledge Systems (CARIKS) at Mysore, India, had organised an international seminar on Linguistic and Interdisciplinary Approaches as critical resources to Development, jointly with the Centre for Co-operative Research in Social Science (CCRSS) at Pune and the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) at Mysore. The seminar recommended the incorporation of Folklore Studies in the Social Sciences and Development Studies. The goal of the seminar was to evolve a research methodology for the integrated study of oral traditions and development. The seminar was made possible by funding from the Indian Council of Social Science Research (New Delhi) and the Central Institute of Indian Languages (Mysore). In the opening session, the keynote address was delivered by Dr D.P.Pattanayak, former Director of the CIIL and founding-father of CARIKS and three position papers were presented each relating to one of the three themes of the seminar. Dr Jennifer Bayer's position paper (CIIL, Mysore) related to Session One: *Linkages, Oral Tradition and Development*. She made a strong case for finding the missing link between research and development. The participants debated on the relevance of a singularly economic definition of *development*. They agreed that folklore needs to be taken out of its isolation both in terms of a discipline and in terms of cultural ideologies and the need to evolve a research methodology based on co-operation between the producers of *folklore* and the analysts in order to do due justice to both the *folklore authors* and academic objectives.

Session two focused on: *Critical Analysis of Oral Tradition and Specific Development Questions* and was introduced by Dr Jan Brouwer (CARIKS, Mysore). He revisited a couple of major and minor development projects for artisans of Karnataka from the vantage point of Indigenous Knowledge Systems. In his critical analysis of these projects he compared the concepts behind the practices of the project designs with those behind the practices of the beneficiaries. The artisans' oral tradition was one of the main resources for his study. The papers of Mr Alex Cisilin (CNRS, Paris) and Dr Biswajit Das (Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi) looked at two different economic questions. Mr Cisilin's study of Self Help Groups (SHG) in Kolar District of Karnataka State focused on indigenous versus modern economic concepts. He observed the Kannada concepts of gift, saving, and loan as being in conflict with their modern counterparts. Dr Das's study of famine in Lanjigarh of Kalahandi District in Orissa showed that the concepts of famine and hunger are alien constructions

superimposed upon a situation in which the indigenous networks of survival have broken down under the impact of *development*. The participants agreed that the failure of relief measures is to be attributed to the *Modern State's* artificial distance from the indigenous knowledge systems in which the economic, social and ritual domains are intertwined. Two papers were concerned with identity. Dr Somayaji's paper (University of Goa) considered various aspects of food as mediators of social relation and forms of cultural symbols and demonstrated as to how food is being intertwined with other domains while for the modern state food is an exclusive domain of reference. Mr. Maid's paper (CCRSS, Pune) discussed the identity of the *Parit* washermen of Maharashtra. He gave an excellent account of how myths function to bridge communication gaps observed by social workers. Dr Tiwari raised the issue of the relation between belief, action and history in the context of oral tradition and development. Ms. Hema Rairkar (CCRSS, Pune) dealt with health, particularly reproductive health and the role of traditional midwives in Maharashtra. She powerfully argued that the ways of development based on human potentials need to be rooted in indigenous practices. The last paper of this session was entitled *The Narmada Valley Damming Projects: Science, Indigenous Knowledge and Development in India* presented by Mr. Ajay Gandhi. He brought out forcefully the contemporary development conflicts in India where the dichotomy between modern science and indigenous knowledge is a central theme in the negotiations. He also drew attention to contradictions and ambiguities present in the strategic employment of science and indigenous knowledge. Dr Guy Poitevin (CCRSS, Pune) opined that the terms Scientific Knowledge and Indigenous Knowledge do not constitute a binary opposition but form a continuum.

Session three was on: *Research Methodology* and was introduced by Dr Guy Poitevin (CCRSS, Pune). He emphasised the need to ground development processes upon people's own intangible heritage of oral traditions. He raised a few fundamental questions in relation to an envisaged interdisciplinary research methodology. One of them is the apparent contradiction of a discourse of continuity legitimising and carrying through changes within tradition itself: what could be the status of concepts of social or cultural transformation when change occurs in continuity and in the name of tradition? In this regard, he suggested two lines of reflection. The first is a conceptual distinction between remembrance - oral tradition as records and memories - and the work of *Memory*. The second one is an approach in terms of cultural interbreeding based on a hermeneutics of the

heritage of oral traditions welcome as presence of the *Other*. Assuming as a rule of method in human sciences that only an alien onlooker cannot appropriately assess the living consciousness and statements of a human subject, it follows that the incorporation of the human subject's performances and pronouncements cannot be dispensed with in the analytical research process. Dr Bernard Bel (CNRS-Laboratoire Parole et Langage, France) presented an extraordinary paper on prosodic patterns and rhetoric's in the performance of *folk* songs, notably the grind mill songs presented by Ms. Rairkar earlier. His fieldwork based experiments, with among other aids the multi-platform *praat* software (developed by the University of Amsterdam) prompt to new questions about the rhetoric of singing. These questions, he concluded, arise from the observation of almost unnoticeable aspects of the performance (of songs and ballads) in which one may reach new layers of meanings not explicitly conveyed by the lyrics. This is a domain of *hidden* knowledge, which feed back new insights to both the analysts and the informants.

*achieved in practices of cultural action, social transformation or development programmes undertaken among the same communities to whom the narratives belong.* He stressed that such cultural practices must be critically grounded in the objective semantic structure of the text itself. The seminar concluded with a panel discussion on the position papers and the reports presented by the session rapporteurs. The panel considered that the various levels of linguistic analysis contribute directly or indirectly to development; that the analysis of oral tradition taking narrative, speech, objects and actions as text complements the findings in social sciences; that such knowledge and understanding can only be reached through forms of co-operative and interdisciplinary research; and that a beginning of development of an integrated research methodology for this purpose can now be made; and recommended that a volume on research methodology should be published on the basis of the seminar proceedings; that a series of seminars be planned focusing on critical areas that the seminar identified; and that future research projects should include participation of people concerned at the research level itself in order to bridge the rift between experts and informants. The seminar was a fine example of collaboration between governmental and non-governmental agencies. The organisers have to be complimented for their efforts that made this interdisciplinary meet a good success.

**16** *Understanding ourselves through a confrontation of our condition with the vision and intentionality of the text is*

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**Identity: Gender, Nation, Diaspora**

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This series of seminars, an initiative from the Women on Ireland Research Network in association with the Gender Institute of the London School of Economics, aims to bring together academics and PhD students to consider some theoretical and analytical issues related to the study of identity.

Programme

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|--------------------|--|
| 25th January 2001  | Rethinking Sociology After Diana: Sociology, Psychoanalysis and the Work of Mourning<br>Mike Brennan (Sociology, Warwick). |
| 8th February 2001  | <i>Stateless</i> Identities: Diasporan Politics and Nationalism Dr. Razmik Panossian<br>(Government, LSE).                 |
| 22nd February 2001 | Jewish Women and Cultural Representation in Victorian England Dr. Nadia Valman<br>(Southampton).                           |
| 8th March 2001     | Diasporic Spaces: Sites for Mixed Race Identities? Dr. Suki Ali (Sociology, Goldsmiths).                                   |

Time: 6-8 p.m, Venue: London School of Economics, Room E304 (East Building);  
 Location: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/School/maps/map1.htm>



## Series on Visual Art Traditions of India: Workshop on Warli

Athrongla Sangtam is Programme Assistant, Public Programme unit of National Folklore Support Centre

**In continuation with** the Visual Art Traditions of India Series, the Public Programme Unit of NFSC organised another workshop on *Warli*. Organised jointly with the Government Museum, the Warli Painting Workshop was held at the Centenary exhibition hall in the museum premises from November 15-19, 2000 with sixty participants. The artists, Smt. Kusum Shyam Kharpade and Smt. Reena Santhya Umbersada from Maharashtra explored the creativity associated with this art in detail. Inaugurated by Mr. Jitendranath, Officer in Charge, Sahitya Akademi, the workshop started off



Warli Wall painting

with an introductory lecture by Muthukumaraswamy on *Art and Lives of the Warlis*. The lecture introduced the participants to the social activities of the Warlis that attribute highly to the art form and prepared them to accept the art and appreciate it. The first day ended with the participants learning to sketch and draw the different type of motifs like trees, birds, houses, men in varied daily activities and dance scenes. It is interesting to note that the *Warlis* do not narrate mythology or any great epic. Simply painted on mud, charcoal and cow dung based surface with rice paste for the colour white, the art form deals with themes that narrate their social lifestyle and activities. The loose rhythmic movement that each painting suggests adds life to the painting. With an eager hand each participant merged into the lives of the *Warlis* and encountered them with total skill and adaptability.

The second day started with the actual painting with an afternoon lecture by K. Lakshminarayan on *Indian tribal painting with special reference to Warli painting*. The third, fourth and fifth day saw the steady maturity into near perfection as the participants concluded their third painting with absolute patience. It was obvious that they had a different experience altogether in this workshop. Mr.N. Muthusamy, Director, *Koothupattarai*, delivered the valedictory address. The artists also exhibited their works at the Lalit Kala Akademi. *Warli* is the name of the tribe, which resides in Thane district in Maharashtra on the northern outskirts of Mumbai and extend up to the Gujarat border. The origin of the *Warlis* is yet unknown and no records of this art are found, but many scholars and folklorists believe that it can be traced to as early as tenth century AD. This art was eventually rediscovered in the early seventies, and became popular for its unique simplicity and fervour for life.

Usually the *Warli* paintings are done during the marriage ceremony and they call them as *Lagnace citra* meaning marriage paintings. The painting is sacred and without it the marriage cannot take place. Their respect for nature is from the most gigantic to the smallest creature and plant. The figures and traditional motives are repetitive and highly symbolic. They communicate through their paintings and their life style and passion for nature are depicted with utmost details. Triangular humans and animals with stick-like hands and legs, geometrical designs with rows of dots and dashes are drawn on the mud walls of the huts of *Warlis*. In *Warli* paintings it is rare to see a straight line. A series of dots and dashes make one line. The artists have recently started to draw straight lines in their paintings. From the depths of the painting spring a variety of activities with humans, animals, and trees. The subjects found in these paintings are wedding scenes, various animals, birds, trees, men, women, children, descriptive harvest scene, group of men dancing around a person playing the music, dancing peacocks, and many more. One of the famous *Warli* painting is the *marriage chowkatt* – a painting made at the time of marriage. The *Warli* women called *Savasini* meaning married women whose husbands are alive, paint a *chauk* or a square on their walls of their kitchen.

## Participant Report on Warli workshop

Priya Balasubramanian is a student of National Institute of Fashion Technology, Chennai

**On authentic** earthen backgrounds, little figurative drawings in contrasting white! Well, the first impression on the whole is one that is more than awesome! Brings out the basics in you somewhere! Until a month back, my reaction to Warli art with their curious little stick figures was a deep breath at the beautiful contrast of



Warli artist at work

the colours and the subtle yet wonderful simplicity of the figures that strike the eye creating on the whole an attractive harmonising blend. But little did I realise how much a five day workshop could turn the way one relates to one's own tradition.

A day dawned on which a small announcement in a leading newspaper caught my eye; where an organisation called the National Folklore Support Centre announced yet another programme on their scheduled *Visual Art Traditions of India* series. The advertisement announced a five-day workshop on folk painting from the state of Maharashtra which is popularly known as *Warli Art*. Just a phone call assured me a friendly ambience of the Co-ordinators. Further on a visit to the organisation reassured me of the same and after completing the formalities, I found myself really looking to the commencement of the workshop and plunge into details and insights of this art form, the schedules promised to furnish the participants with.

The first day began with a general introductory lecture on the life of these tribe – the *Warlis* and their close association with Nature. The lecture proved to give us a satisfying insight of their lifestyle, their environment and the ritualistic practices, their faiths, beliefs etc. A list ranging from festive joys to their primal fears which as we later came to comprehend had a lot to relate with this art. From the lecture, we came to understand that this folk art symbolically represents a lot more than what just catches the eye and is so closely ornamented with details of an intricately woven narrative art! In the schedules that followed, there was one module on sketching these figures with pencil to get familiar with them and what they symbolise. In the next four days that followed, with the constant one to one guidance and interaction with the artists themselves and perfect co-ordination by the NFSC staff, we were able to complete three pieces of this narrative folk art with sheer pride and total satisfaction of first hand experience! The three pieces that ranged from the *simple village, harvest scene* to the marriage *Chowkatt* with all its exuberance and the nocturnal charm of the festive *Tharpa* dance; all this what we individually painted through this folk art left each one of us appalled by, the simple expertise and charm of our own hands! The direct interaction with the artists Smt. Reena and Smt. Kusum was indeed a pleasant experience. The sheer exuberance and enthusiasm of the art loving participants was a boost to the best and passion to learn this art form. The well organised, timely and thoughtful schedules so well co-ordinated keeping in mind the necessities in making such a workshop, a learning experience, to one that was so wholesome, calls for a pat on the back to the NFSC staff.



Participants at the workshop

## Series on Visual Art Traditions of India: Workshop on Pattachitra

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**NFSC in keeping with** its on going programmes / workshops on the various folk arts of India conducted a five day workshop in collaboration with the Govt. Museum, Chennai. The theme of the workshop held from Dec 18 - 22, 2000 was *Pattachitra* from Orissa. This workshop was presided by Dr R. Kannan, Commissioner of Museums and inaugurated by A.K. Mohanty, Asst. Director, Govt. of Orissa Tourist office, Chennai. The workshops by the NFSC is a by word in teaching and exposing the citizens/ artists of Chennai to authentic methods and themes unique to the programme so much so that the required number of fifty participants was filled in a jiffy.



*Krishna killing Bakasura (demon in disguise)*

Many of the participants of the *Pattachitra* workshop had attended all the previous workshops. On speaking with them, it was noted that they found it useful and knowledgeable and in turn they have been in a position to share this wealth of information as teacher to other interested students. Also one participant at the workshop had quit his job as an accountant six years ago to fully explore the world of Tanjore art which he then began teaching others. Today his repertoire extends to many more areas both in history and executing of other craft forms of our country. A sculpture student from the Mahabalipuram School of sculpture was another participant who has been a regular. He is clear that the crafts should be used in their authentic form and the idea of artists/painters using these expressions in their indigenous contemporary works of art was unacceptable. Another aspect of the workshop is the mixed crowd of both sexes coming together and sharing a common platform. The artists from Orissa

Shri. Rabindranath Sahu and Shri. Ram Chandra Moharana were trained under Guru Bhendhrao Mohapatra and Guru Bhagwat Maharana. Rabindranath comes from a family of weavers of *Tussar* silk. During the festival in his village Dihirakul, Rabindranth has acted as a child in his fathers productios at the *rasalilla*. He was the first member of his family to venture out of the weaving business and enter a new field. He chose this as from an early age he would draw constantly and found himself attracted by *Pattachitra* themes. He is also trained in the art of toymaking / boxes and palm leaf engraving. He has used the pattachitra motifs on his boxes and toys. He also says ideas for his paintings of this style are greatly influenced by the street dramas that he was exposed to as a child. Rabindranath has also written a book on the tribal arts of Orissa in Oriya and this book has also been published in Hindi. Now his current book on *Pattachitra* is ready in vernacular but with lack of funds he is unable to publish the same.

Orissa is known as *Utakala* or the land of exquisite arts. One of the arts, which have retained its essential character of pre-Islamic nature, is *Pattachitra*. As Muthukumaraswamy, Director, NFSC, mentioned in his address *Seclusion and Expression* to the participants of the workshop, *Pattachitra* has remained without any influence from outside, though at a later date it influenced other arts outside, such as the Kalighat paintings of Bengal. Their exclusiveness is marked by stylisation of forms, the almond-shaped eyes, the special type of moustache etc. *Pattachitra* is the earliest known form of paintings of Orissa except for a few cave murals of the sixth century AD at Udayagiri, Khandagiri and Sitabhinji.

These paintings, according to Lakshminarayanan, Curator of the Museum, combine both folk and religious aspects; they are linked mainly to the temple at Puri and originally they copied the figures of Lord *Jagannath*, *Baladev* and *Subadhra* in the temple, which are made of wood and are extremely simplified in design typical to folk arts. These began as mementos for the devotees visiting the *Puri* temple with images of the deities in the temple and slowly the artists began to represent scenes from *Bhagavatapurana*, *Ramayana* etc. The *Chitrakars* (artists) do not aim at realism but the human and animals forms are stylised, though they do express feelings through neat patterns and designs. Kalinga's (Orissa) invasion of *Kanchi* was a favourite theme of the artists, who believed Lord *Jagannath* aided their king in his war efforts. Still later they began adding themes from day-to-day life of common people and were similar

to Company paintings. Though traditionally themes from the legends of *Krishna* are the most preferred, according to Shri. Sahu, social themes are quite common now, though stylistically and technically the work remains the same.

As far as possible colours are still produced from natural sources like plants, roots and stones, though on a purely commercial basis chemical colours are also used these days. The borders around the main subjects form an integral part and offer scope for the imagination of the individual artists. Even in the workshop, though the participants were all given the same picture to paint, they could let their imagination play with the border. The outline of the figures are first drawn with white, after which the bodies of the figures are painted with the specific colours meant for them, such as blue or black for *Krishna*, yellow for *Radha* and so on. Then follows the clothes and then the ornaments are coloured. Finally the outlines are drawn with black and decorative motifs in white. The sense of movement is made

approach to this work is that it begins with white lines and ends with it also. The preparation of the canvas is a long and strenuous affair, whereby fine tamarind seed paste is prepared, this is mixed in water in an earthen pot and heated into a paste. Then two equal sized pieces of cloth are stuck together with the paste to hold it. Then soft caly stone is mixed in the paste and a couple of coating on both sides are applied, when dried it is polished with a rough stone and then polished with a smooth stone or wood which gives the *patti* a leathery finish and ready for painting. The preparation is done by women using natural pigments like *hingulal* or redstone / yellow from *hartala* or yellow stone/ blue is derived from indigo etc., All colours are mixed in coconut shells and brushes made from mouses hair on wooden handles.

During the workshop another version of *Pattachitra* also was displayed – engraving on palm leaves, which are generally illustrations for manuscripts. In this type, the picture is drawn with a stylus on the palm leaf; when black colour is applied on the leaf, the fluid gets into the engraved lines; rest of the colour on the leaf is wiped off, leaving the design in sharp black lines against the light background of the palm leaf. These days *Pattachitra* is painted on tussar silk also to be used as wall hangings. The workshop was actually only an introduction to the difficult art. Many of the participants felt that further coaching would be useful. Since the teachers and participants could not speak the same language, that also proved to be little difficult for interaction and further gain of information. Participant Srinivasn, himself a Tanjore painting artist, felt there were some similarities between Mysore painting and *Pattachitra*, such as the curved forms. He also preferred a discussion at the end of the workshop between the teachers, participants and organisers. The discussion which had during the classes were fragmentary and disjointed and doubts raised were often not answered properly. Perhaps it would have been useful to have given information about the aesthetics of the art, particularly in relation to the indigenous literature, legends etc., so that the participants could have a better idea of the spirit of the art. However much one is taught, one can only copy the pictures or simulate a similar style and technique. One has to be part of the culture to be able to understand the subconscious feeling that permeates the creation of the artwork; it is not just the patterns, colours and the technique, but an unseen *something* which lends the *Pattachitra* its life.

Today the motifs of *Pattachita* can be found on saris/ wall hangings / and decorative pieces etc. The artists also showcased their work at the Amethyst lifestyle outlet at Sundar Mahal, Gopalapuram, Chennai. Khudos to NFSC for opening up so many new visitas of our folklife, as with a country as large and as rich in heritage, we now have an avenue to explore and gather knowledge on our past as Steven Spielberg movie title says *BACK TO THE FUTURE*.



Participants at the workshop

possible by the fluid lines, which make up the figures, which are most often in *Dwibhanga* or *Tribhanga* poses; no one is shown standing straight or static. In the workshop all the participants were given the same picture drawn in white on the canvas, which they were taught to colour and use their imagination in the borders and decorations. They were also taught the methods of preparing the colours and the tamarind paste and the canvas.

In Sanskrit the word *patta* is canvas and *chitra* is picture. Rich colours, creative motifs and portrayal of pure simple themes from Hindu mythology form the fulcrum of this art base. The most repeated themes are of Sri *Jagannath*, *Balabhadra* and *Subhadra*, the divine triad of Sri Jagannath Patti. The pictures do not emphasis on realism but on expression of feeling and emotion with neat border patterns. The painting begins with the borders and then the outlines of the figures are drawn with thin white lines. Body colours are added followed by attire and at last the adornments. The important

**Symbols of Culture**

The Life of Form in Indian Sculpture: Text and photographs, Carmel Berkson, New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, Pp.524, 2000, ISBN 817017 376 0

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**What creative** processes were utilised for the ancient and medieval stone sculptures of India? What challenges did the *sthapati* or chief architect and his team of sculptors face in realising these time-tested works? This photograph-studded study by sculptor-photographer Carmel Berkson sets out to redress our ignorance about the artist's role in traditional Indian sculpture, while tracing the inter-relationships between artist, statue, temple and devotee. He roams far and deep in his search-and his findings are both revealing and rewarding. For instance, as he studies the abstract/organic equations latent in these sculptures, he notes, *fortunately for the investigator, in rare instances the frieze carving was left unfinished. We can therefore take the opportunity of following the sculptor's technical procedures. He first draws the essential outlines on the surface of the dressed stone, and then proceeds to slowly carve into the higher plane and then into the background to create three-dimensional effects.*

Berkson's mind is open and curious, excavating facts, relating them to the *Chitrasutra*, and reinventing the lives of these talented people so seldom recognised by history, which focuses mainly on their patrons. The author's attitude is captured by the dedication of his book: *to the ancient architects, sculptors and unskilled labourers-women and men. They live on in their great works.* They do, as Berkson delves into and comprehends *how the sthapatis were able to stay in touch with internally generated visions and to project these visions onto gross material.* In excavating and demystifying the art,

he shares with the reader an *exhilarating experience.* At the very outset, Berkson lauds the western instinct to collect, describe, measure and categorise this art that had evolved independent of western traditions. However, he quickly points out that despite this invaluable direction, the nineteenth century chroniclers were largely ignorant of Indian metaphysics and failed to appreciate the inherent divergences of a system so alien to their own.

It is from this standpoint that this student of Indian sculpture states his case. Sculpture is an inextricable and integral component of Indian temples, evident on their walls, ceilings, and towers. As any visitor to a temple realises, it is only within the *sanctum sanctorum* that the statue is isolated and solitary. But in what context did devotees then relate to these statues? It was not from religious texts, but probably from these statues, that the worshipper intuited meanings that imbued their devotion. And where did these sculptors draw their guidance? From canons such as the *Chitrasutra*, descriptions of the deities in myths, and poetic accounts in religious scriptures.

To understand these, Berkson studies statues against the *panjara* or linear grid into which they fit, besides evaluating them within the context of the pertinent temple. This results in a rather unusual perspective on these works, delineating their fundamental geometry, evaluating how the illusion of movement was incorporated into the stillness of

stone, commenting on how deeply the sculptor was in accord with shades of human psychology through depicted interactions and interpretations of the human-animal connections. His pictorial data which encourages the reader towards direct encounters at the original sites ranges from Ellora to Amravathi, from Markanda in Maharashtra to Kumaon in Uttar Pradesh, from Hoshiarpur in Punjab to Khajuraho, with other major sites in between. It is both extensive and unusually comprehensive. Historically observant, Berkson notes, *Stone carving first appears in Indian art history at a late and already complex stage of development The art of hewing rock out of the quarry, cutting it into blocks, transporting these to the building site, drawing linear contours to establish the grid, and during the process of creating three dimensions in the reliefs and statues, to round out edges and carve into receding plane levels, are only laboriously learned over periods of centuries.*

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What was it that the *sthapati* learnt over the centuries? Perhaps the complex figures and configurations of being that were captured, reflected his personal experience in intrinsic ways. In this context, the author muses, *Everyone in India dances. People dance at festivals and weddings, temple dancers dance before the gods, devotees dance, warriors dance on the field of battle and the gods dance. No doubt the sculptor himself danced and was thus prepared to see and feel the movements he would depict in statues of dancers. This personal experience helped him to arrange the body and limbs of the statue into a fixed abstraction-the abbreviated integration of many poses.* These observations assume their true dimensions when one is face to face with *Siva dancing in Lalita* at the Badami cave in Karnataka or *Ravana shakes Mount Kailasa* at Ellora. For, as Berkson delineates out, *flowing waves of energies break confines. When the intensity is increased to an accelerated, fervent pace (tandava), arms are thrust outward; they bend, circulate, create sub-patterns and move in all directions. When the dance is inspired by the*

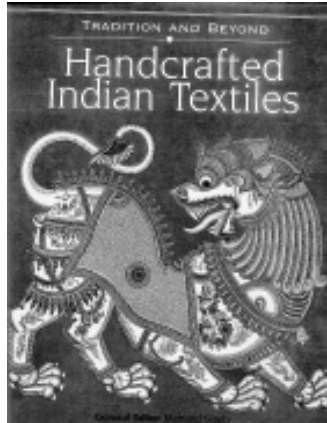
*Art of wart and weft*

whirling dervish, to convey the idea of mobility, the waist is unnaturally twisted in contrapposto showing chest and buttocks simultaneously, with head cocked to the side in convoluted positions no human would actually be able to assume.

Berkson provides insights that link unlikely traditions while comparing Durga's victory in the Mahisasuramardini context at Aihole with the Roman sun god Mithras' slaying of a bull. In Rome, the external sheath of buffalo muscles, bone structure and skin, and other visually perceived surface details are the defining elements of style... Victory or god and bull are two individual volumes; each has the qualities of its own species, he points out. In contrast, the parts of Durga's body at Aihole are reduced each to its geometrical shape. Her power is the power of rock and mass in compression.

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In this compressed account of a subject whose depths Berkson has delved, whose previous studies include the Elephanta, Aurangabad and Ellora cave temples and an analysis of the Mahisasuramardini myth sets out to prove an unusual theory with grit and resource. But it does seem a pity that, despite his scholarly attributes and field of knowledge, the production of the volume works to Berkson's disadvantage. The text is unevenly spaced around the photographs, often with barely a few lines to a page. This is disturbing to the reader, who has to keep flipping backwards and forwards to keep up with Berkson's trends of thought. However, this is a minor drawback in a book that is a positive addition to the annals on Indian art. Judging by current trends and our neglect of priceless monuments, it does seem unlikely though that Berkson's wish will be realised that the primarily active tourist attractions will once again acquire the sacred value they once held for the people of previous eras, when many did in fact achieve ananda during confrontation with the monuments.



Tradition and Beyond: Handcrafted Indian Textiles, General Editor: Martand Singh, Text: Rita Kapur Chishti and Rahul Jain, New Delhi: Roli Books, 2000, Pp.149, ISBN 81 7436 084 0

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**Handcrafted Indian Textiles**

has been based from a selection of a series of exhibitions held both in India and outside. This series of seven exhibitions were held during the period 1980-1990 and were called the Visvakarma series after the Hindu deity ascribed to be the originator of the arts and crafts. These exhibitions were categorised as master weavers, the new warp, the evoking of variant moods, the use of lines, trellis, exploring new fields, birds and animals in Indian textiles. With regard to the book itself the content gives a birds eye view of the pigment painted textiles/ dye painted textiles/ resist dye textiles/ printed textiles and woven textiles.

The interesting value of this book is the interview that the authors had with Martand Singh, which gives the book the authentic passion of the coming together of minds on the myriad of our rich heritage of textile. The authors have called these interviews very aptly as *Recollections*. Each chapter ends on this note. The difference between this book and others is the details on each subject and the history behind each.

The chapter on Pigment painted textiles explains the origins of the practice of painting on cloth, palm leaf, leather and wood and the constant reference to it in Sanskrit literature in India. The cloth *patas* have survived the ravages of time

for which the centres were Gujarat and Rajasthan. Though from the fourteenth century cloth was replaced by paper predominantly with the advent of the mural miniatures, the significance of cloth as a measure of conveying popular folklore are still practiced in the rural areas of Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh. Pigments were derived from a variety of mineral compounds and vegetable extracts. The book also highlights the way cloth is used during particular festivals and auspicious days to evoking the seasons and the spirit of the same.

India has always been renowned for its cotton cloth with luminous, permanent dyes The chapter on Dye Painted Textiles discusses the earliest surviving specimens date to the seventh century and are few in number one example being the distinctive Islamic idiom of *rumals* (handkerchiefs) and *qanats* (floor spreads) and prayer mats at Buranpur, Agra, Sironji and Golconda.

The most popular of the themes used for wall hangings and bed hangings were the oft-repeated theme of the tree of life during the eighteenth century. This subject is a unique amalgam of Indian, European and Chinese influences. The tree of life metamorphosed itself as the time's changes and evolved. The modalities of the process of

painting on cotton cloth with fast dyes are exceedingly complex. Vegetable dyes adhere permanently to cotton only in the presence of a bonding agent or mordant: a metallic salt, which combines with the dye to create an insoluble, colouring matter on the fibre.

The chapter on Resist Dyed Textiles deals primarily with the resist techniques of *ikat*, *bandhini*, *chundari* and *leheria*. *Ikat* and *bandhini* hail from Gujarat. *Ikat* is done on silk and important for ceremonial rituals. *Bandhini* on the other hand is done on a variety of cloths from cotton to wool. The other significant reference is to the huge popular *patola* pattern. This again is associated with the rich and the affluent. The variety of the kind of design and pattern used by these three techniques is explained in detail and is a eye opener into a world of ancient and contemporary approaches.

Block printing is evident from the fifth century BC as the chapter on Printed Textiles suggest. Block printing is by and large based on

geometrical patterns, scrolling foliage, the occasional bird/ animal or human figure. The sophistication of India's printed textiles is most evident in the eighteenth century canopies/ coats/ sashes and other apparel. Also the trade between the south of Asia and Japan are proof of this skills. The Coromandel Coast is generally identified with coloured cottons. Today the printing tradition has changed though in some areas like Sanganer, the art is still widely practiced.

The art of block printing is another area that we read about and its ancient history. The art of block printing varied from place to place based on the type wood available and the water of the area also played a role. Further this chapter is informative on the styles adapted from the Coromandel Coast to the rest of the country. Each style is distinctive from the next, so much so that if an array of different styles were put together one can point out which region it comes from. In this way the author has given us

in-depth information about variant patterns.

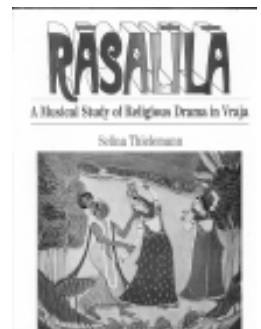
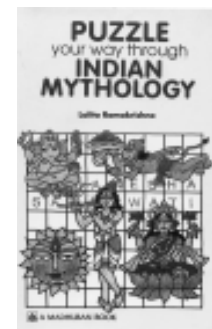
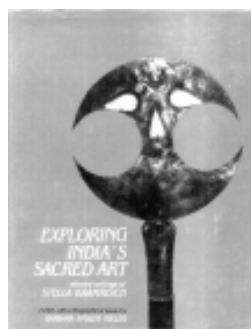
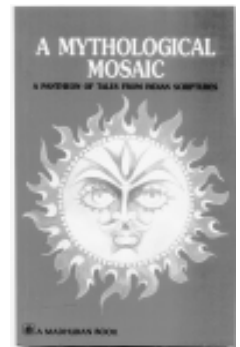
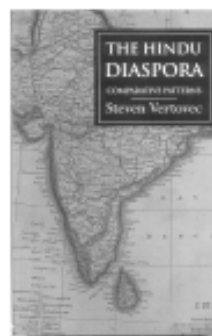
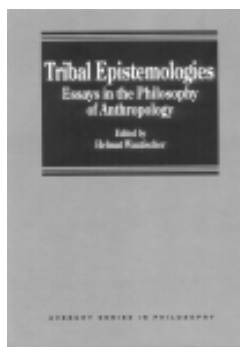
The last chapter on Woven Textiles is rich in details. The earliest dated piece of a fragment of spun yarn dates back to 1750 BC. Woven textiles was never exclusive to any particular region, all across the country cotton was being spun. Even today high quality hand spun fabric is produced in Bengal.

India's tribal communities still weave as their ancestors did a heavier richly textured cotton cloth. This chapter also describes in detail of the geometric / floral patterns/ used in silk saris and bedspreads and panel designs. It explains the significance of the various patterns used and the relevance of colour.

To sum up this book of insights into the textile world of India one must quotes Singh: *The future, if at all, is really to get the basic texture of a fabric back in terms of its usage. There are infinite possibilities, whether by machine or hand.*



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**Review Shelf: Books Received**



**NFSC Announcements**

**Endowment Fund News**

We decided to create Endowment funds at NFSC (Public Charitable Trust) for making grants to creative (disadvantaged) folk artists of India. The goal of the endowment fund is to honour folk artists, encourage and present those artists' creative expression and practice that reflect the myriad cultural traditions that make up our nation by strengthening the infrastructure of support for the folk artists / groups. Folk artists / groups often intentionally / dynamically fracture the derisive boundaries between disciplines and which in turn creates new linkages between experience, travel and perception. The aim is to be attentive to the vibrancy of Indian folklife as well as these endowment awards give artists national recognition and invaluable validation of their talent.

We have already created Professor K.S. Haridasa Bhat Memorial Endowment Fund for making awards to deserving Kannada folk artists. We request Indian nationals to contribute or create new endowment funds of their choice. Donations can be paid by cheque or DD in the name of National Folklore Support Centre. For further details and tax exemption please contact: M.D. Muthukumaraswamy, Director, NFSC, # 7, Fifth Cross Street, Rajalakshmi Nagar, Velachery, Chennai-600 042. Ph: 044-2448589, Telefax: 044-2450553, 2448589, E-mail: info@indianfolklore.org, muthu@md2.vsnl.net.in

P A S T I S S U E S



On Syncretism  
April, 2000



On City Landscapes  
and Folklore  
July, 2000



On Ecological  
Citizenship, Local  
Knowledge and Folklife  
October, 2000

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