

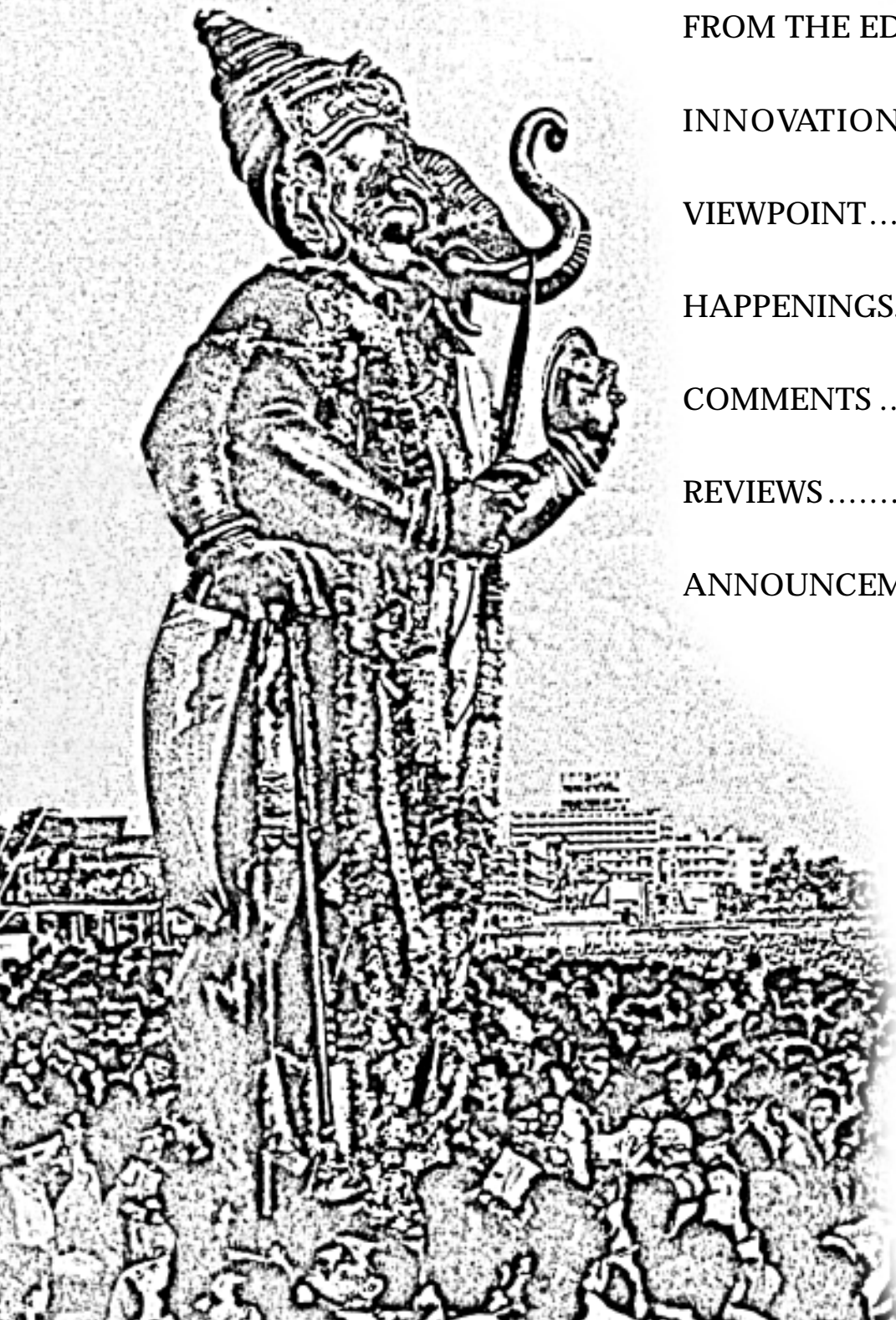
A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM NATIONAL FOLKLORE SUPPORT CENTRE

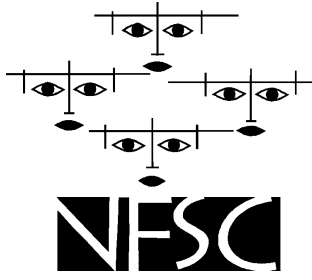
INDIAN FOLK LIFE

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 2 JULY 2000

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NATIONAL FOLKLORE SUPPORT CENTRE

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.

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NEXT ISSUE

Theme of the October issue of Indian Folklife is **Ecological Citizenship, Local Knowledge and Folklife**. Closing date for submission of articles for the next issue is 20 September, 2000. All Communications should be addressed to: *The Associate Editor, Indian Folklife, National Folklore Support Centre, No: 65, Fifth Cross Street, Rajalakshmi Nagar, Velachery, Chennai - 600 042. Ph: 044-2448589, Telefax: 044-2450553, email: venu@indianfolklore.org*

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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 confirm to the latest edition of *MLA style manual*.

In this issue, we have initiated discussion on vitality of city lore and our contemporary myths. We believe these exploratory notes will help us to articulate visions and philosophies on which NFSC can ground it and find guiding principles for the conduct of programmes. These studies will lend strength to identities by making them more visible. Folklore is a discipline with a future. With a dynamic new constituency to serve, we began to establish multi-disciplinary dialogue through this newsletter with people working in other areas of arts and culture.

Cover Illustration:

The city folk's immersion procession of Ganesha in Chowpatti beach, Mumbai

From the Editor

M.D.Muthukumaraswamy

OF URBAN POOR AND MULTIPLE ORDERINGS OF DIVERSITY

In the city of Chennai if we were to step out of our verandas – as Bronislaw Malinowski wanted the anthropologists to do- we cannot escape noticing urban poor settlements brutally referred to as *slums*. Dispossessed by the unyielding agriculture and betrayed monsoons thousands migrate to urban poor settlements in search of a dreamland that would offer them hope, employment and better quality of life. Has not the famous Tamil proverb advised them to reach a city even if they were to go low in their lives? Did not the great Tamil epics describe cities of Madurai and Puhar filled with colourful spring festivals?¹ Did not any city offer the hope of escaping the oppressive grid of kin, clan and caste and merge with the holy cosmopolitan *other*?

Belying all the hopes, cities have a way of symbolically ordering power and representations where the urban poor have no participation. Our landscapes, public buildings, houses, streets and public monuments individually and collectively convey a past and are central to order and authority in our society. The ordering of space does not merely reflect social relations and social structure, but is the part of actual constitution of the sociological order. Bourdieu and Thambiah have taught us that the Thai and Berber houses are both statements about and are replicated after cosmological ideas.²

Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), Tamil Nadu chapter has recently identified 39 new heritage sites to be added to the already existing list of 157 in the city of Chennai.³ Apart from the temples, mosques, churches, tombs of leaders and a few natural sites, most of these sites are legacy of the British and now have become seats of political, administrative, legal and commercial power. Only Bharathi Illam, Ramanujan's house, Vivekananda Illam and Valluvar kottam stand as sites of cultural significance that have emerged from this soil and have stood beyond political affiliation. In Chennai, like in any other postcolonial Indian cities the interpenetration of knowledge and power is mediated through English. It is yet another alienating agent for the urban poor.

The grapevine of Annasalai runs like a central spine through symbolic organisation of the city while the perpetually bad smelling rivers Couvam (including Buckingham Canal) and Adayar run almost invisibly like its political unconscious. North- South divide allots commerce to the former and culture to the latter both in popular belief and reality. Northern Chennai is the habitat for city's largest industrial manual labourers with Madras Port Trust topping the list. While the folklore

of these labourers warrants an in depth study the lore of the truck drivers entering this part of Chennai requires another.

Real estate economy classifies boat club road, certain parts of Nungambakkam, Kilpauk Garden, Gopalapuram, Poes Garden, Abiramipuram and Raja Annamalaipuram as *posh areas*; Kottivakkam and east coast road are meant for non-resident Indians' farmhouses. Parrys, Poondamalli high road, Pandy bazaar, Koyambedu, Annasalai, Ranganathan Street and Egmore are commercial centres. As popular belief would have it Kodambakkam and Vadapalani envelope the entire Tamil film industry whereas Thiruvanniyur, Kalakshetra colony, Annanagar, Besantnagar and Adayar are the areas where upper middle class and *officers* live. Triplicane, Mylapore, Thiruvanniyur, Velachery and Alandur are traditional *pockets* (villages) caught up within the city. Ethnicity defines Royapuram, Royapettah, Pudupet and Thousandlights as Muslim areas, Sowcarpet and Georgetown as north Indian ones and Perambur and Ambattur as Anglo-Indian settlements. Taramani is emerging as institutional space for software industry. Rest of the city is meant for large middle class and all areas including the beaches are permeated by urban poor settlements. Cultural memory would credit Marina beach, Island grounds and Chepauk stadium with historic moments that determined the emotions of millions through the political speeches made and cricket matches played. Ordered by class, commerce, power, religion, ethnicity and neutrality Chennai accommodates urban poor settlements as sites of cultural aspirations and economic deprivation.

Sacred geography created and maintained by the city's temple myths does offer an interconnected semantic platform for the urban poor to participate in many expressive behaviour patterns. Mediated by the Bhakthi industry of audio cassettes and middle class households (where the maids and mistresses share the traditions of popular Hinduism) temples invite and enjoy large-scale participation. Pilgrimages and observances dictated by the religious calendars further glue the networks. For instance, since the god of death, *Yama*, meditated at Dandeeswarer temple, Velachery but went for prayers to Marundeeswarer temple, Thiruvanniyur and Kapaleeswarer temple, Mylapore - it is a good idea for the pilgrim to visit all the three temples. Similar pilgrim networks exist for Vishnu and Amman temples in the city. Several tour operators including Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation offer one-day pilgrim tours to the different sets of connections for the local populace. While *Vishnu*, *Shiva* and *Murugan* temples can be said to belong to classical Hinduism, their festivals (*Prathosham*- monthly twice-conducted rite in *Shiva* temples, 63-saivite saints festival, Vaishnavite poet saints' festival- to name a few) have such widespread community participation that they become folk celebrations.

Very few temples like Kalikambal temple in Thambu Chetty Street, Yoganarasimhaswamy temple in Rajalakshmi Nagar and Venkatesaperumal temple of Bairagi Mutt belong to single communities although worshipped by all. Non-brahminical worship patterns dominate in the Amman temples and Melmaruvattur and Thiruvotriyur temples attract huge number of women pilgrims. St. Antony's church in Armenian street and Velankanni church in Besantnagar beach have worship patterns similar to Hindu Amman temples.

The expanding city has engulfed many small folk temples that used to be at the borders of villages and one encounters them rather at inappropriate and unexpected places. Ayyanar temple near Alandur railway gate is one such example. People of urban poor settlements adopt these anachronistic temples as their own and breath new life into them. Either by adoption or creation every settlement *owns* an Amman temple. A typical Amman temple resembles *Ankalaparameswari* temple of South and North Arcot districts of Tamil Nadu where only the head of the goddess is idolised and worshipped. Evelyn Masillamani Meyer's definitive study on Ankalaparameswari in the districts has little to do with these city goddesses.⁴ In most cases the myth is absent and worship patterns are irregular. In the Tamil month of *Adi* (July-August) on Tuesdays and Fridays the people of the settlements offer ritual cooking to the goddesses. On the last Tuesday or Friday a festival is organised in the night. In contrast to the *folk celebrations* of the classical Hindu temples where all the activities happen in the *precincts* these festivals happen by blocking the streets. Preparations for the festivals begin one week in advance. Youths of the settlements collect money from the neighbourhoods and the passing vehicles. The vehicles themselves have a way of signifying whether they would get the money or not. Tata Sumos may belong to the politicians and so it is not a good idea to stop them forcibly. If they stop on the first *request* itself then there is every chance of getting a fat donation. Maruti, Santro, Matiz and Fiat Uno belong to neo-rich and one can stop them to *persuade* to part with money. Ambassadors are official cars and they are best waved off. Maruti vans and Cielos may belong to gangster groups and so it is best not to notice them. All two wheelers can be stopped without hesitation.

Most of the money earned through this *fund raising effort* is spent on putting up a serial bulb figure of the goddess on a scaffolding across the street and lighting up the entire premises with tube lights. If it happens to be a Draupati Amman temple as in the case of Kovalam then *Theru-k-koothu* performance is arranged. *Tiger dance* and shadow puppet theatre performances also used to be regular features of the festival. Nowadays all these performances are replaced by roadside screenings of Tamil *devotional films*. Alternatively live *light music performance* is arranged. These festivals are really the public assertions of urban poor of their existence and solidarity.

Otherwise life in the urban poor settlements is full of hardships. A typical hut in a settlement consists of kitchen and one room. Radios, television sets and cable connections have found their way in selected houses. Mostly women sleep indoors but men and children sleep on the streets or open spaces. Asbestos or thatched roofing indicate slightly better dwelling places but in poor places roofing is plastic sheets or canvas clothes. Plastic pots and ever-silver vessels are the major household items. Water is a scarce and precious commodity. Kerosene (*Krishna* oil as it is called) eats up a major portion of the household income. Provisioning is done through the public distribution system and ration card is a precious document. Chennai Corporation's facilities, railway tracks and vacant plots with heavy shrubs are used as public toilets.

Normally life begins at four in the morning and the lucky settlements wake up to the chanting of *Koran* from the nearby mosques. Most of them hurry to catch up the morning bus service or electric train so that they can transport their goods like vegetables and flowers to the marketplace or to bring them to their neighbourhoods. Maids start their work at several middle class houses around six in the morning. Construction workers, rickshaw pullers, auto drivers, pushcart restaurant owners, hawkers, knife sharpeners, umbrella repairers, cobblers, plastic good vendors and tea shop assistants have different timings. There are no holidays. Men are irresponsible and they do not bring home their earnings. Among men consumption of alcohol is a widespread habit. School going children are blessed, as others become wanderers in the streets. Summer is cruel, as one has to wait for hours to get a pot of water from the corporation tap. Monsoon is crueller, as the rains would flood through the leaky roofs and make the entire settlements unbearably muddy. Government hospitals are the only resorts available for health care. Most of the childbirths occur at the settlements themselves as yet another household activity. Tuberculosis is still a widespread mortal disease.

Vibrant physical culture exists among youths. Beef eating and exercising at the roadside hand bars are considered to be luxuries. The lack of physical culture among the middle class is often ridiculed by referring to them as *curd rice bodies*. The consumers of pushcart restaurants often complain that because *curd rice fellows* have taken to the habit of eating beef secretly, beef price is going up considerably. Street corner *cliques* establish themselves at places such as telephone, milk and internet booths, public parks, barber shops, cycle stands, compound walls, carom playing spots, railway stations and auto stands. The friendship formed in these *cliques* is an important cultural value for the participants and it finds several expressions in the public arena. Several innovations in the spirited Chennai dialect of Tamil occur in these groups, travel to the student population and become standard ways of speaking throughout the city. When a member of the group dies others paste huge printed posters of *tearful homage* all

throughout the city and the passing by buses. The funeral procession is a folklore event in itself. Decorated with mounds of flowers the body is taken in a pushcart surrounded by grieving relatives. All the way through the procession, men dance in front of the pushcarts to the accompaniment of drums. Characterised by retrogressive steps, pelvic thrusts and lewd facial expressions in the context of overwhelming grief, these funeral dances may be seen as rebellious and liminal manifestation of imposed marginalisation.⁵

These dances share generic resemblances to *Gana pattu* performances organised at the events of deaths of leaders of a few violent settlements. Usually these performances start late in the night on the sixteenth day after the death of the leader. Burning a cycle tyre on the fires of which the *Gana* singers tan their drums lights the performance space. *Gana pattu* is sung in a melancholic but high-pitched voice. The melody stays the same and gives the song a meditative quality. The songs reflect over the impermanence of human life through metaphors such as *weaving bottomless baskets with rootless fibers, vessels that cannot hold and bags of air filled with fruitless dreams*. The songs weave the dead leader's heroic deeds that landed him up in jails, brought women and earned sympathy of the local populace. The narrative patterns share their roots with *Manikuravan* story from the southern districts of Tamil Nadu.⁶ For the songs, transsexuals dressed in the garb of women dance while a passive audience consisting of men, women and children watch a few youngsters joining the dancers in an animated silence. Among the fisher folk of Ayodhikuppam and Injambakkam another kind of *Gana pattu* exists without the dance performance. The fisherfolk *Gana* share its tune, tone, theme and philosophical orientation with the other *Gana* but its contents are from the sea faring life. In the mid eighties, *Gana pattu* became very famous with the college students and a few Tamil film directors. Nowadays the tunes of *Gana* are imitated in Tamil film songs and are becoming famous all over the Tamil-speaking world.

The rebellious vitality of *Gana pattu* is on the decline as the urban poor settlements are becoming more and more passive. The complicity between middle class and urban poor through several mediating spaces such as, households, beaches, public transports, temples and movie houses could have been further cemented through the percolation of middle class values of

passivity and contributed towards the decline. In fact inter-caste marriages and elopements among urban poor are also in the decline compared to the mid eighties and majority opt for safe *arranged marriages*.

Pongal in January, English New year and Tamil New year in April have become celebrations for all and the entire Chennai comes out on the streets and on the beaches teeming, bubbling and gushing to form a vast human expression of festivity and joy. English essayist G.K.Chesterton dreamed of a tree that devoured birds nesting on its branches and when spring came put out feathers instead of leaves. Perhaps the city of Chennai is one such tree...

I offer these observations as an apology for an editorial for this issue of *Indian Folklife* that is organised around the theme *City landscapes and folklore*.

References

1. See A.K. Ramanujan's brilliant essay, *Towards an Anthropology of City Images* in *The Collected Essays of A.K.Ramanujan*, edited by Vinay Dharwadker, New Delhi: Oxford, 1999, Pp. 53-73.
2. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Berber House* and Stanley J. Thambiah *Classification of Animals in Thailand* in Mary Douglas (ed) *Rules of Meaning* Pp.98-110, 127-66. For a classical discussion on signification of spatial orders see also Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, *Primitive Classifications*, London, 1963.
3. Report in *Madras Musings*, Vol. X, No.04, June 1-15, 2000.
4. Evelyn Masillamani Meyer's study on *Ankalapameswari* is a classic in the field of Indian folk religion.
5. Arnold Van Gennep's *Rites of passage* initiated the idea of liminality and Victor Turner enhanced its creative application to a wide variety of social situations.
6. For a discussion and analysis on *Manikuravan* story, see George Hart's essay on the subject in Stuart H. Blackburn and A.K. Ramanujan (eds.) *Another Harmony: New Essays on the Folklore of India*, Delhi: Oxford, 1986, Pp.233-63. Another book of related interest would be Alf Hiltebeitel's *Criminal gods and demon deities*.



Kalamkari Painting



Innovations

DAKSHINACHITRA A Living Museum

The Madras Craft Foundation's unique project, *DakshinaChitra* is conceived as an institution which will act as a catalyst for adapting traditional design and skills for a contemporary market through work with craftsmen and designers. The centre is concerned with authentically portraying traditional craft, architecture and folk performing arts so that visitors will gain an understanding and appreciation of the lifestyles which for centuries formed part of everyday living in South India. MCF anticipates that the centre will be a source of enjoyment and learning to many. It will also provoke questions about the future and the alternatives, emphasis and priorities available to us at this juncture in history. In today's swiftly changing environment the future of South India is likely to be very different from the past. *DakshinaChitra* will serve as a reminder, a bridge, as well as an archival centre for the fragile traditions of our times.

DakshinaChitra, literally a picture or a version of the south, is launched by the Madras Craft Foundation to be a visible expression of the living traditions of South India. It emanates from a culture conditioned by nature, by the belief system and attitudes of the people as also by the natural resources of the region to which they had access. The interaction created traditional arts and crafts. Their survival in the contemporary market of changing fashions and values depends on a mission that seeks to adapt traditional arts and skills without compromising their genius and spirit. The *DakshinaChitra* centre is conceived with such a mission.

DakshinaChitra strives to become the cultural hub of the city of Madras radiating progressively to other parts of southern India. Situated on ten acres overlooking the Bay of Bengal, twenty one kilometres from Madras, on the Madras-Mahabalipuram road *DakshinaChitra* embodies the concept of a centre of living tradition. It authentically portrays the crafts, domestic architecture and spatial organisation, as well as the folk performing arts of South India.

DakshinaChitra is a project of importance to each of the states in South India and to the nation. The centre works as a symbol and a catalyst. With the swift changes occurring in society and the environment *DakshinaChitra* dramatically calls attention to what is being lost: traditional values, form and aesthetics rooted within Indian culture and the connection between culture and its environment. Practically, through extension, the centre highlights the continuing destruction of public and private buildings which tell the story of south India's cities and towns.

The Madras Craft Foundation's educational outreach programmes at *DakshinaChitra*, free to all corporation and village schools, currently reach over 15,000 students per year. The programmes attempt to bring an understanding of the traditional cultures and their rich diversity to the children, including interaction with craftspersons and performing artists.

The long term work of the centre is its least visible side. *DakshinaChitra's* work with craftspeople from the southern states is highlighted by the daily presence of weavers, stone carvers and potters at the centre. This is achieved through exhibitions and workshops, a craft shop, an archive, and a restaurant which offers regional fare.



Agriculturist house from Sattanur (Thanjavur Dist., Tamil Nadu)

ROJA MUTHIAH ARCHIVES

S.Theodore Bhaskaran is Director,
Roja Muthiah Research Library, Chennai

Only in recent years scholars have recognised the value of private collections of imprints in preserving the print heritage of a country and there are attempts at making them accessible to researchers. These collections could provide a new dimension to historiography and enable us to understand our society better. One such collection was in Kottaiyur, near Karaikudi in Tamil Nadu. Roja Muthiah Chettiar, an eccentric bibliophile who started his life as a painter of signs, began collecting books, magazines and other printed material. When he died in 1992, his collection had grown to nearly 100,000 items in Tamil, consisting of books, journals, and single sheet materials such as drama notices and wedding invitations. The Collection spans over a period of more than 150 years, the earliest being a book *Kandar Andhathi* published in 1804. It is a unique private collection reflecting the whole gamut of Tamil culture and heritage.

The University of Chicago came to know about this collection through scholars like C.S.Lakshmi (*Ambai*) and launched in 1992 a global effort to preserve this collection. In this effort, the University decided to collaborate with the Chennai-based *MOZHI* trust, an organisation set up to develop resources for language and culture. At the very beginning, the University of Chicago had decided that the collection will not be moved out of India and will remain in Tamil Nadu to form the nucleus for a research library of Tamil studies. The Roja Muthiah Research Library was established in Chennai in 1994. P.Sankaralingam, who was in the Department of Library Sciences of the Madras University, came to head the library and systematically developed it. A project was drawn up to catalogue and microfilm the collection. He created preliminary electronic catalogue records for all the titles. His dream was to provide under one roof research material and facilities for students of South Indian studies in fields spanning humanities and social sciences. Bibliographers have identified this as one of the world's two finest Tamil collections, the other being the Maraimalai Adigal Library in Chennai, specialising in literature. The subjects range from classical literature, indigenous medicine, religion and folklore to cinema, drama, women's studies and ballads. It includes non-book material such as drama handbills, film songbooks and even some of his private letters. After the library was set up, other collections have been added to the original collection. The strength of Roja Muthiah collection lies in the variety of subjects in which he collected books and the attention he paid to non-book materials. Handbills, invitations and other ephemera are still being added to the collection.

One important segment of the collection relates to folklore. With remarkable foresight, Roja Muthiah acquired the ballads that were published by the end of the nineteenth century, such as *Desingurajan Kathai* and *Nallathangal Kathai*. He collected different versions of

these well-known ballads published by different publishers. Titles such as these are not preserved by archives or libraries. In this way the holdings at *RMRL* acquire special significance. Ballads are now recognised as sources of historical and literary information. David Shulman has elaborated this point in an interview with him published in *Frontline*. He says that ballads are historiographical texts which are just one stage removed from the actual event. If one is sensitive to this, then one can discern history in many genres. Many versions of subjects of traditional drama, such as *Harichandran Kathai* are also preserved here. In addition to this, imprints on traditional medical practices have also been preserved. Of particular importance is the indigenous animal husbandry practices in titles such as *Mattuvakatam*.

New collections are being added to *RMRL*. Recently, A.K. Ramanujan's collections has been donated to this library by his wife. Similarly, a part of the collection of Milton Singer has been donated to the library. Recently, a collection of nearly 2000 titles from a private collector of Chennai whose passion was the chronology of *Sangam* works has been received. Almost complete collection of the published works on the Indus script is included in this collection. Part of the collection of Gift Sironmoney, including his publication on the language of the *Narikuravas*, the bird-trapping nomads of Tamil Nadu, has been received. We have also received generous donation of books relating to South Asian studies from scholars such as Kali Charan Bahl. In a major innovation *RMRL* has suitably adapted technologies developed by Centre for Development of 7
Advanced Computing, Pune, to create machine readable catalogue records conforming to international standards. The system is capable of generating a variety of catalogue outputs to meet different needs. At *RMRL* catalogue data for Tamil items are entered in Tamil scripts. The system in use here can display and print the catalogue in Tamil or Roman script. Transliterating the data into Roman, both for display and printing, is automatic. Catalogue records created in this library can be loaded into other database systems also. The vision of this library is to develop, on a systematic basis, a comprehensive facility that will acquire all varieties of printed material – both book and non-book – preserve and maintain through microfilming. The idea is to make it a depository of books and documents related to south Indian studies, particularly the cultural and social history of Tamil Nadu.

It is the long-term goal that this library will link up with all major centres of learning within the country and outside. The library will also offer a model to libraries in their regional languages; all of which share a valuable heritage; to develop similar facilities. In fact, *RMRL* serves as an archive for south asian cultures, which have a long and rich history.





View point

BODY LANDSCAPES

Tripura Kashyap is a dance/movement therapist and director of *Apoorva* dance theatre based in Bangalore.

Coincidences have shaped my life. One such occasion was when I travelled to America in late eighties to train as a dance therapist. This experience dramatically altered my perception of dance. I learnt how informal, non-traditional approaches in dance could help disabled people to evolve individualised styles of communication.

Back in Bangalore, I became aware that Indian physical traditions and movement practices offered a larger canvas for dance as therapy. I began extrapolating elements from Indian folk, and classical dances into mainstream dance therapy for people with mental, emotional or physical disabilities. Modification of music, movements and props to suit Indian needs and problems of specific disabilities were developed simultaneously.

For instance, with an autistic child, footwork for evolving structures of rhythm patterns, as used in *Kathak*, enhanced attention span. Initially she had exhibited self stimulatory behaviours like pinching or scratching herself. As rhythms were repeated several times, her focus shifted to mastering movements. Contact of feet with the floor in defined patterns also provided positive stimulation and grounding.

With hearing impaired children, modified movements from the technique of *Chhau* improved balance and concentration. Exploring stylised walks with partners, balancing on each leg, they were less hyperactive and more aware of their bodies in motion. As their range of movement increased, there was marked reduction in stereotypical movement patterns.

Hand gestures from classical dances (similar to sign language for the hearing impaired) were used to create movement poems or stories. Gradually they were sensitised to each other's communication skills in more ways than what they had experienced earlier. Various finger and wrist exercises with gestures were designed to improve their fine motor coordination. Facial expressions were also modified to reflect certain moods and feelings from their classroom situations.

A variety of movement props from Indian folk dances like *sticks*, *cymbals*, *scarves* and *bamboo poles* etc., were used with mentally challenged children. These were integrated in a variety of ways to solve movement puzzles, improve group coordination and enhance memory for movement. Individually, children improved their eye-hand coordination and imitation skills with pre-determined movements of the props.

With visually impaired adults, the *Karma* tribal dance form of Madhya Pradesh was used. It acted as contact dance, with participants holding hands in a line. They were given challenging tasks like moving backwards, making a circle and other geometric designs. This helped to heighten their spatial awareness hence reducing fear for space around them. Through other group dances they gained confidence to deal with their bodies in a more relaxed manner.

These experiences of working with therapeutics in dance and exploring its relationship with disabled people took me back to the basics of movement. I began to gather fresh inputs in terms of movement construction, composition, improvisation, and group dynamics which later fed into my personal creative work.

Apoorva Dance theatre founded in 1994 was another coincidence. Three of us spontaneously got together to experiment and choreograph works that were different from what we had seen or learnt. The group gradually evolved with an urge to go off the beaten track and find an unorthodox performance repertoire. The labels *contemporary* and *modern* came much later.

As time went by, notions of working with trained dancers disappeared. This happened as I watched two visual artistes in *Apoorva* with no prior dance training created unique pieces close to abstract expressionism. In fact classical dancers in the group got stuck with cliched movement styles and themes. I felt, here is a dance that is not necessarily technique bound, one has the freedom to adapt movements to suit one's body and thinking.

In *Chayaangika* our first production, shadows of different shapes and sizes were the medium of expression. There was no story, message of feeling to communicate. Explorations focused on translating body movements on to the two dimensional frame. A multiplicity of shadow images merged with geometry of body contours on a white screen.

Shadows became instrumental in dictating form and content of the dance. Perhaps they were mirrors that awakened our latent impulses. It was an exciting journey into magical qualities of what shadows could hide and surprisingly reveal.

In *Territory*, an art event conceived by a group of visual artists, installations were extended as artscape opposite an abandoned warehouse on the outskirts of Bangalore. The artistes juxtaposed natural sites with a range of scrap and conventional materials including wooden planks, corrugated metal sheets, gunny cloth, chicken wire mesh and rolls of barbed wire. The event was symbolic of the redundancy of man made boundaries.

Emerging from a deep pit, I performed movement scores incorporating elements specific to the site. Movement

designs were choreographed with materials like stones, sand, cloth, dry leaves and a hay stick fourteen feet long. Certain movement phrases conceived around a huge, lone tree were limited by its peculiar snake like branches, yet the experience enlarged the boundaries of dance.

Moving or being still with each site, challenged me to peel the decorative layers off dance. The narrow role of a dancer was broken down while interfacing dance with ambience of the architecture. In making dance an extension of the landscape, what emerged was the body of a child discovering movement.

Neha, an autobiographical piece, described an encounter with twenty army men on a Sunday evening near a lake in Bangalore. Escape from this near rape situation was a miracle. Based on the incident, the dance was constructed through word and movement, in the manner Bharatanatyam is presented today. Instead of using the mike on stage to talk about beauty, waiting for the lover god, moonlit nights and pangs of separation, I recollected the nightmare, elucidating the fragmented lives, ugly emotions, absurdity and paradox surrounding uniformed men.

After many years of rejecting facial expressions, I decided to consciously use the face in this piece. In Austria where it was choreographed I was told to keep the face as a dead pan. In India audiences constantly asked why the face did not emote. The point was to avoid making faces like in Bharatanatyam. Through this work I attempted to understand the borderline of expressive and dead faces, stylistic and natural expressions. I brought to surface textures of inner emotional landscapes breaking barriers between the artist and person.

A recent dance, *Short Story* was inspired by an anonymous Kannada folk poem, *Jaadara Muduki* about an old woman who eternally weaves threads that reach the edges of universe. The image of a giant web got etched in my mind. I designed a multi-layered cobweb using ropes, threads and elastic as an exploratory space. As I improvised under it, strong images of late Ranjabati Sircar came alive. She was a contemporary choreographer who committed suicide last year. She died at the age of 36. Her life too was a short story.

The person inside the web symbolised the conflict of a contemporary, urban woman, her lonesomeness and the urge to reach outside. The web was her refuge as well as prison. Initially, societal walls around her were friendly and protective, later they became oppressive and hostile. The dance in three sections explored varied emotions of a woman who battled with dark spaces within herself. Eventually frustrated, she destroyed herself using part of the web she loved the most.

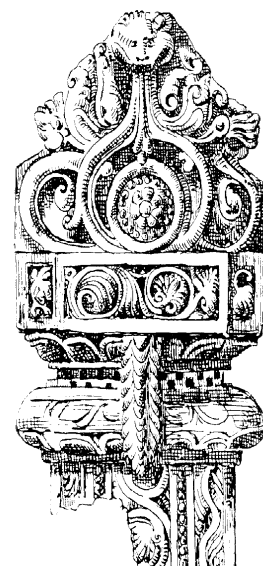
A basic way of evolving new works is to create an eclectic movement base that is an essence of what one has learnt

or not learnt. This is possible through improvisation that I consider as movement meditation. The body dances in an altered state having absorbed images of one's travels, relationships, meetings and cityscapes. Seemingly lost in movement, it reveals one's personality, politics and interaction with the environment. Seeped in perspiration and exhaustion the body becomes a fertile ground for fresh ideas, thoughts and forms. Gradually a personal movement language not defined or limited by codified forms or styles emerges.

I am curious about dances that are formless. It is interesting to watch work that has been created with the premise *the body comes from every where*. As a viewer I want to be challenged to guess which culture or era the dance has grown from. As multicultural textures, motifs, colours and gestures flow in to enrich a work, it looks as though it belongs to every culture on earth. Personally, I feel universalising dances rather than limiting them with a particular cultural specificity pushes the boundaries of creativity further.

In recent years, I had opportunities to interview other Indian modern dancers like, Jayachandran, Astad Deboo, Bharat Sharma, late Ranjabati Sircar and Shobana Jeyasingh etc., I understood better their journeys in terms of artistic beginnings, creative impulses, choreographic processes, training methods, artistic intentions and struggles. There has been a growing body of work dealing with contemporary themes in a fresh language that is as Indian as classical or folk form.

The world over modern dance has taken root in diverse ways in different countries. It has relentlessly asserted itself as celebration of rebellion. In India, new styles of expression have emerged despite non-existent schools or support systems. There seems to be an ongoing battle for co-existence of contemporary expressions and traditional forms. Despite odds, modern/contemporary dance movement in India continues its search





H a p p e n i n g s

FROM FIELDWORK TO PUBLIC DOMAIN: SHILLONG WORKSHOP (MAY 1-15,2000)

Participants report

M.K. Uthaman, Sunita Sharma, P.C. Pattnaik, Arupjyothi Saikia, and Yobin

List of Participants:

Amalados, Arupjyoti Saikia, T.Damodaram, Faneline K. Marak, Jayarajan, J.Joseph Antony Raj, S. Krishna Reddy, Lalita N Mirajkar, Parag Moni Sarma, P.C. Pattnaik, C. Pramodini Devi, K. Premananthan, K.R.Raja Ravi Varma, P. Rozario Dharmesh Fernandez, Sanatkumar Mitra, Sashinungla, Satyabrata Ghosh, Sucharitha, C. Sundaresan, Sunil Kumar Dutta, Sunita Sharma, Susmita Poddar, M.K. Uthaman, M.N. Venkatesha, Vinay Ranjan, Yusihay Yobin, Zhanuo Thakro, War, M.B. Jyrwa, Anil Kumar Boro, and R. Murugan

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We were glad to attend this workshop as participants. The workshop provided a good opportunity to question some of the prevalent ideas related to folklore studies and fieldwork. The workshop was conducted by NFSC in collaboration with North Eastern Hill University, Shillong. The PROFRA team members also helped the organisers

to make it a successful workshop. There were total of 32 participants and 7 eminent scholars from India and abroad. The participants discussed various issues related to documentation, methodology, preservation, transmission of knowledge, ecology, indigenous knowledge, and subtle theoretical issues involved in fieldwork during the fifteen-day workshop. Some of the participants focused on issues relating to the documentation of texts and contexts while others focused on the idea of documenting silence in folklife.

Professor Mrinal Miri inaugurated the workshop. In his inaugural speech, he remarked, *I am not a folklorist, but I enjoy reading folktales. Folklores are the result of collective creativity of a community. Tribal communities in the region have effective ways of transmitting cultural teachings or moral ideas to the younger generations through these folktales.* In the context of globalisation, he elaborated on the importance of epistemological approaches needed for understanding local knowledge systems. Later at a press conference, the eminent folklorists talked about the shifting boundaries between Anthropology and Folklore. Mary Hufford remarked, *Folklore helps in nation building, while anthropology could go much beyond one nation.* The concerns of the anthropologist do not confine to the geographical boundary of a nation state but it expands universally among the mankind.



At the Inauguration - from left - Soumen Sen, Komal Kothari, Mary Hufford, Mrinal Miri, Allan Jabbour, and B.L. Swer



Tripura Folk dance

Folklore goes into the aspirations, memories, dreams, life-patterns, and indigenous knowledge of various races. The folklorist needs to be attentive to the unknown. Participating in the discussion, M.D.Muthukumaraswamy pointed out that even national identities were created and built upon folklore. Finland is one such example.

The participants were divided into four groups. After each presentation the group assembled and with the help of a faculty member discussed the papers. Each of the group led by a leader and they produced group reports towards the end of the workshop. In addition to that participants also presented individual papers on the folklore of their own region. During the workshop, participants also visited *smit* village in Shillong, as part of their fieldwork and study to understand what kind of socio-political structures exist at village level. The visit to *Chirapunjee* water falls also known as *Sohra*, famous for being the wettest place, was an event in itself. It is the nature's beautiful creation leaping into deep gorges, the limestone caves, orange orchards and the birthplace of Khasi culture. On the way to sacred groves, we also observed the coal mining places. During the workshop, number of cultural programmes from all over the north eastern India took place at St. Antony's College auditorium: Seng Khasi's *Khasi* song and dance, Tripura student's union's *Hrangkhawl* post harvest dance, Arunachal Pardesh student's union's *Nishi* dance voice's song presentation, Naga students union's *Sema* dance, Manipuri dance by Manipuri students union, *Sukra* dance by Muswang village troupe and song and dance performance by Kiddies Corner. The trip to the museum at Don Bosco centre was also important. Alan Jabbour gave valuable insights on documenting the imperatives that went behind the services of an Afro-American church. Mary Hufford

highlighted the fact that religions also play a major role and her own catholic background had a decisive influence often manifesting itself even in jokes at times. The museum is an excellent example how tradition and modernity manifest itself and is subject to local conditions..

The workshop started with Alan Jabbour's paper on *Folklore and Folklorists in the Documentary Century*. In his paper, he traced the developments in ethnology and deployment of new documentation techniques. Unlike traditional documentary techniques based on drawing, manuscripts, new web based electronic documentation provide far greater impetus to the folklore fieldwork research, archiving, retrieval and dissemination of information. The arrival of photography, audio and video recording, and motion picture provided a new dimension for archiving and the way in which archiving is done. This also changed the relationship between the documentor and what is documented. The electronic archiving process is more interactive, context based, and explanatory. He also talked about the issues involved in capturing reality through photography. These new dimensions in documenting increased the accessibility/visibility of cultural past or memory. Folklore archive has become a cultural prism of the public domain. This also redefines or adds a new dimension to the work of the folklorist. These new processes also help the community as a whole in creating new circuits and multiplying channels of information across geographical and national boundaries. It helps the folklorist in seeing the life of her own work.

In a sense the uniqueness of the folk art and its reproducibility of it assumes political significance



Manipuri dance



in their new orientation. Indeed the new electronic documentation implies repositioning of the object as well as the subject who documents it in all its dimensions – ethical, epistemological, aesthetical and political. This provides a new dimension to the work of the folklorist as archivist.

Alan Jabbour's second presentation was on *Omaha Indian Music, working with a community in the presentation of its traditions. Without songs you don't really have a culture. If you listen to the words of them, they mean involvement with nature and our being and our surroundings. It's a tie, a connection to everything* remarked Omaha tribal archivist, Dennis Hastings way back in 1984. Continuing the argument Alan Jabbour remarked that, *Fletcher and La Flesche were rigorous contextualists, continually stressing the inseparability of music and culture in all of their publications (including the one on The Omaha Tribe), and with their rich descriptions of social and ceremonial life providing us a window into the Omaha past.* After the meticulous documentation, it is equally important to share what has been documented with the community as a whole. It reaffirms a kind of new friendship between the documented community and the folklorist. The dynamic community also would like to share their experiences with the archivist. In a way the documentation helps the community to continue tradition within it or outside

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In his third presentation, *Fiddle tunes of the old frontier, the Henry Reed collection; the dynamics of cultural revival in the modern world*, Alan Jabbour discussed the dynamics of cultural revival in our familiar and unfamiliar landscapes around. He talked about the cultural integration, evolution of music and the existence of divergent traditions in a single landscape. As an accomplished fiddle player, he demonstrated different techniques involved in playing different tunes. He explained his own experiences of ploughing back into the community a tradition that they lost, through a detailed sketch of James Henry Neel Reed's life. *During most of his life, Henry Reed's influence was confined to his family and community.... But although his children and friends admired his music and his musicianship, they were also drawn to the more popular with their own generation.... A new pattern of influence began with my visits in 1966-67. Our band, the Hollow Rock String Band, performed dozens of Henry Reed tunes as a core element in the band's repertory, and the tunes were regularly identified as coming from Henry Reed.... A number of tunes from Henry Reed are now in wide circulation among younger American fiddlers.... It is but one of many cases where Henry Reed was the narrow neck in the hour glass of tradition,*

through which tunes were guided back out into the wider currents of circulation. In his presentation Alan Jabbour stressed the importance of cultural mediation.

Three of Mary Hufford's presentations were indicative of extending the boundary limit of folklore as a discipline. In her first presentation on *Stalking the forest co-eval: Fieldwork at the site of clashing epistemologies*, she tried to map the growth of two epistemological domains in the mountain region of West Virginia. In their growth the two domains were juxtaposed to each other. She argued in detail about how the penetration of capitalist institution had subjected the mountain region to new knowledge categories that was in complete contrast to native commoner's imagination. The natives were exposed to the use of a variety of new epistemological categories that is quite different from the mental and ecological landscape of the natives.

In her subsequent presentations, she focused mainly on the question of how commons articulated their anxiety and apprehension. She stressed the importance of body lore and eco-lore and using case studies showed the political dynamics of mass protest. Using Mikhail Bakhtin's theoretical tools she analysed the complexities of competing imaginary spaces. To create their own dominant cultural sphere, the *commons* were actively engaged in the world of lies, laughter and production of local memories and dreams. She remarked that the mind may forget but the body remembers its roots. She pointed out that, *There is a story in these figures of a vernacular cultural domain that transcends state boundaries. Anchoring this domain is a geographical space-a de facto commons roughly congruent with two physiographic regions recognised in national discourse. One is the coal fields underlying the ginseng, most of which are controlled by absentee landholders. The other is the mixed mesophytic forest, known among ecologist as the world's biologically richest temperate-zone hardwood system.... Ginseng may be a powerful tool for resolving some very thorny dilemmas. A touchstone for economic, cultural, and environmental interests, ginseng provides a tangible link between ecology and economy. Given ginseng's predilection for native hardwood forest and rich soils, national recognition of its cultural value would be a way to begin safeguarding both a globally significant hardwood forest and the cultural landscape to which it belongs... An alternative view-of biodiversity flourishing in the context of community life- is rehearsed in stories and jaunts that map the commons back onto the land.*

In his presentation on *collecting tales and tunes in Rajasthan oral epics and music*, Komal Kothari



focused on how oral epics are representative of a social imaginary of a given context. Drawing from his vast experience of working with and documenting the oral epics in Rajasthan, he argued that the study of oral epics also open up the possibility of studying the social context, cultural fabric and living patterns of the people. Moreover it is also an important indicator of ethnography. He felt that we need to explore further the social composition of



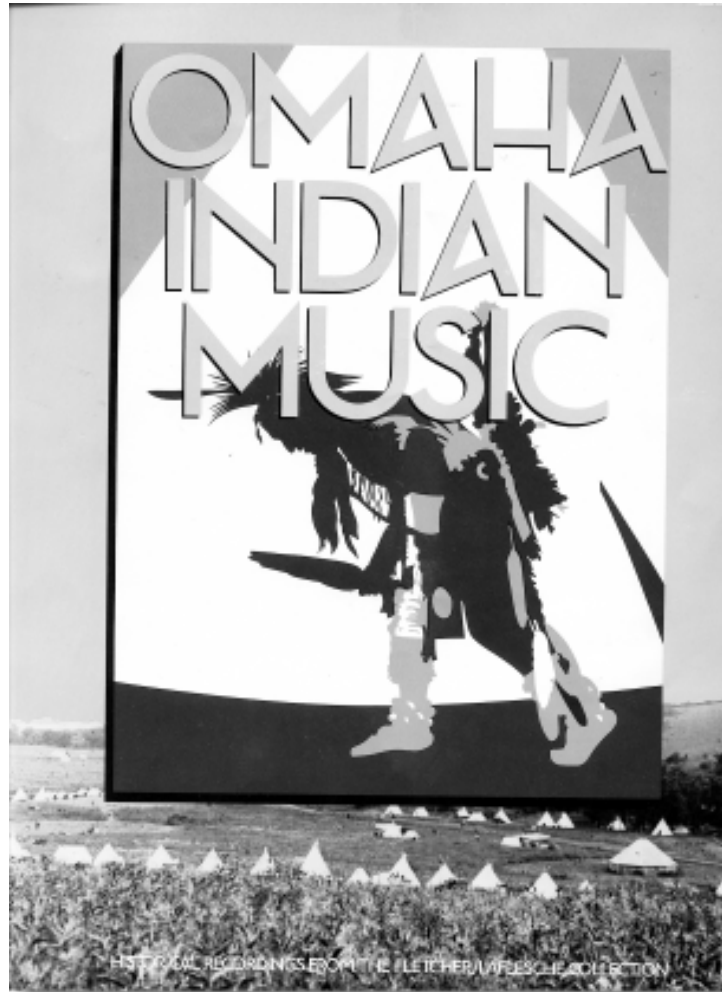
the audience, performance space, time, musical instruments associated with it, the level of gender sensitivity within the community, participation of different age groups. Elaborating on the visual narrative presented in a Rajasthani scroll painting Komal Kothari took us on a voyage into the desert life. In his second presentation on *Rajasthani folk music* Komal Kothari explained the intricacies of *Banaa* wedding songs, compositions of Meera and folk instrumental music of Rajasthan. In his third presentation on *Reviving lost musical instruments*, he talked about how he worked with communities to document Rajasthani folk music. It was a collective effort and done with the modern electronic tools. Among the folk performers, there are two categories – professional and non-professional groups. The non-professional groups are mostly women groups without any prominent musical instruments and they perform only for the selected groups. But the professional music singers are mostly men and used variety of instruments also. They also received a lot more support from their agencies. He also raised concern about the dying musical instruments in Rajasthan and the enormous task involved in reviving the musical instrument production such as the components design and the socio-historical milieu of the production of that instrument. He expressed his

anxiety about the disappearing traditions of musical instrument makers.

Birendranath Datta presented a talk on the myriad diversity of folklore of North-Eastern India. He also talked about the trends in folklore study in the north east. In his presentation he stressed more on the specificity of the region as well as their shared universal characteristics. The idea of togetherness is the core of north east folklore fabric. He also spoke about the use of folklore in our various contemporary life practices from myth to metaphors. It also constitutes the plane of ethnicity. The whole of northeastern India is also bound by common ecology and geography.

Ashoke chatterjee took a detour from the tempo of the workshop to talk about the use of folk crafts in present day industrial design and the need to develop adequate, long-term sustainable strategies. In concluding his presentation he pointed out that, *Market success has to be at the heart of this effort, for unless the craftsman can be assured a decent quality of life through sustained earning, nothing will keep the next generations loyal to their heritage. The only sustainable assurance can come from buyers. Understanding their future needs, wherever they may be located, demands the market research upon which India has spent nothing all these years. It is the ability to manage the market that will ultimately decide whether India's unique commitment to crafts, as an expression of its identity and of its well being, is to flourish in the millennium just ahead. Perhaps it is a new understanding of swadeshi that we need, not as an archaic slogan but as a vigorous, contemporary understanding of our real needs and prospects in an interdependent world.*





While reflecting on her own work with *DakshinaChitra* and *Madras Craft Foundation*, Deborah Thiagarajan talked about various issues of presenting folk forms which originally are part of ritual contexts associated with them. She specifically talked about *Devarattam*, which is a ritualistic and social dance of the kambala Nayakar community of Tamil Nadu, whose primary occupation was hunting. The significant features of the *dance traces the hunting movements of the human body to which have been added the movements that reflect household, agricultural and festive activities. These movements have been abstracted and stylised to fit into single beats in a cyclic rhythm given by the percussion instrument, Devadundubhi*. It is generally performed on ritual occasions. She assured that the realm of the public domain and creating a new space for folk art is a creative task as well as a challenge.

Soumen Sen presented two papers in the seminar, *Tradition, Folklore and Ethnicity: The key issues* and *Folklore in Modern World*. He attempted to situate folklore fieldwork and study in the light of new

developments and talked about the need to rearticulate the shifting cultural studies paradigms. He argued that folklore is a dynamic discipline and has the potentiality to accommodate diverse elements and new strands. He remarked, *Tradition is a dynamic system that flows through culture and culture in turn flows through tradition. Culture, like several terms in history, has a history. Tradition is this history, with spaces in time and societal growth and in the process develops as a dynamic system. It will be wrong to define culture as civilisation and refinement with an elevated status, leaving out the so-called uncivilised and crude categories. Culture includes both since they are linked by tradition. Tradition is not simply a survival as it is usually perceived.*

He argued that if we talk about tradition as a qualitative marker, it is then a dynamic process involving a way of feeling and acting, which characterises the group throughout generations. The horizontal and vertical flow along with ethnic variation is a common element in pan-Indian tradition. There is an urgency to approach folklore as a context-sensitive system.

In his second presentation, Soumen Sen stressed the importance of diachronic study of the proverb in a particular culture and the relationship of the proverb and social change provides a useful model for folklore studies in changing times. He also talked about the growing importance and utilisation of folk genres particularly the narratives, ritual events, cultural symbols, and folk metaphors in this assertion of ethnicity. Ethnic identity recurrently emphasised to achieve both structural and functional cohesion through both ritual and mythic performances. He also talked about the need to review the earlier conceptual categories and methodologies of folklore studies and look for new paradigms. Participating in the final three days of the workshop, Sharada Ramnathan, Programme officer, the Ford Foundation explained to the participants the programme development at the foundation for projects related to Indian folklore.

The workshop ended with the distribution of certificates to participants by H.W.T. Syiem, Secretary, North Eastern council. We are equally grateful for the warmth and support of A.K. Nongkynrih, Co-ordinator, PROFRA and his colleagues, Yobin and Sashinungla, Fr. Sebastian of DBCIC and staff of Hotel Polo Towers.

Indeed, the workshop was an intense creative experience for any folklorist. Informal meetings with resource persons were also mutually complimentary. It was a kind of workshop, folklorists will aspire to attend any day.

Out of the ninety applications received, NFSC staff selected twenty-five participants on the basis of their previous work, experience, regional representation and ability to contribute to the future of Indian Folklore studies. Opportunity to participate was extended to seven more local participants.



H.W.T. Syiem, Secretary, North Eastern Council, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, Distributing Certificates to Participants

During the workshop, the board of Trustees also met and decided to follow-up and strengthen work in the following areas, a) to sustain NFSC's relationship with north-eastern India, b) to identify specific areas and themes for folklore research fellowship c) to create new networks for dissemination of information, d) to explore various focal points related to all aspects of human development, e) to explore possibilities for collaborative publication programme, f) to make musical instruments which are on the verge of extinction and give them back to the communities, g) to create E-mail discussion list on environment and folklore, h) to focus research fellowship programmes towards development of manuscripts and research on sacred groves, i) to select some participants from the Shillong group for Jaisalmer workshop, j) to initiate scholar network, and k) to initiate a global convention on Indian folklore. Also, during the workshop representatives of twenty non-governmental organisations from different parts of north-eastern India met the board members. — Editor

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<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/hrhtml/hrpres04.html>

Henry Reed: His Life, Influence, and Art

Introduction / Early Life / Midlife Trials / From Generation to Generation

Radiating Influence / Understanding Henry Reed's Art / Cultural Threads in Henry Reed's Fiddling Style Tradition and Individual Talent in Henry Reed's Art

Radiating Influence

Other bands developed in the Durham/Chapel Hill area after 1968, notably the Fuzzy Mountain String Band, the New Deal String Band, and the Red Clay Ramblers. Though each had its own style and focus, they all helped promulgate old-time music in general and Henry Reed tunes in particular to a wider circle of musicians and music lovers. In 1972 Tommy Thompson and I joined together with Jim Watson, a younger member of the Durham/Chapel Hill musical revival, to release another Hollow Rock String Band record (Rounder 0024, released in 1974), and there were occasional performances at the folk festivals that sprouted up around the country in the 1970s. But in essence the radiation of Henry Reed's influence, both in the tunes that he played and in the style in which he played them, was less a matter of wide public visibility than a musician-to-musician process.



H a p p e n i n g s

NFSC Public Programme: Special Report

Series on Visual Art Traditions of India : Workshop on Thanjavur painting, May 21 - 26, 2000 in collaboration with Government Museum, Chennai

Aparna Srinivasan is doing her doctoral research in Post colonial literature at Madras University

[NFSC'S Public Programming division started conducting a series of fieldwork based workshops on Visual Art Traditions of India from May, 2000 onwards. Each workshop is organised after extensive fieldwork and research. Before the commencement of the workshop, a brochure is prepared and distributed to educate the participants as well as those who are interested in the trajectory of these folk art forms. The lecture-cum-hands on experience given to the participants during the workshop creates awareness about the context of the art form, sensitise about the community elements, complexities, variations involved in the evolution and development of the art forms. ————— Editor]

When one hears of the NFSC, the first question that occurs to most people is what comprises culture and why its emphasis on trying to know more about the roots of what we do and practice, everyday. In short, what does the word culture mean? For the people at NFSC almost everything comprises culture. So the raw material that they work with comprises of virtually every aspect of life.

16 As part of their objective to make people aware of the culture around them they collaborated with the Government Museum of Chennai to organise a workshop on Thanjavur painting. This was different from the various other workshops that teach Thanjavur painting in the sense that the participants were told about the history of the art form as well as given hands on experience by being taught to make one themselves. It was a balance between theoretical and the practical knowledge. It was a five day workshop conducted between, 21 - 26 May, 2000. The course was designed such that the mornings were devoted to lectures and the afternoons to doing the actual painting. To quote Muthukumaraswamy, Director, NFSC, the workshop was specially designed in this way so as to, ... *recover its fold roots through an analysis of its history and evolution.* And in doing so they wanted the participants to *reclaim the common in the public sphere* and see that the form is saved from the gross commercialisation that we are seeing now.

The workshop was inaugurated by Dr. R. Kannan, Commissioner, Government Museum, Chennai, The lectures at the workshop by Mr. Lakshminarayanan, Mr. Jayaraj and Mr. Mohan (all from Government Museum, Chennai) encouraged the participants to explore questions such as: Where did Thanjavur painting originate? Which period did it flourish in? What were the influences in terms of techniques? Who were the patrons? Did it start as a folk art? How and when

did it gain the status of being a classical art form? What folk elements has it retained, what classical features has it incorporated into its style?

The lectures were meant to help the participants to think along these lines and find answers for themselves. It was to help the participants to place this art form in a broader cultural context. The participants were also introduced to new techniques available about how to conserve the paintings.

Most of the participants came to know of the workshop through the papers and they were all registered on the morning of the first day of the workshop. It is a measure of their keen interest that they dropped everything else, almost at the last minute and chose instead to spend the rest of the week at the workshop. There were in all eleven participants, ranging in age from a school going student to the wife of a retired Government officer. They also came from varied backgrounds. One of them was a *Hata yoga* teacher, one a student of Dentistry, and one was a theatre artist. They were all unanimous in their praise for the organisational abilities of staff of NFSC and Government Museum. The participants' every need was looked after by NFSC staff. They were also lavish in their praise for their teacher Muthukrishnan. They all mentioned that it was a joy to have such a patient teacher as him. He was very appreciative of the fact that what would take a professional artist four full days; the students managed to complete in half that time.

The 8th standard student *Lalitha* joined the course to keep herself occupied in the summer. She thought that this was better than most of the summer classes held for children. Also she felt that the detailed work that in making the painting involved increased her ability to concentrate. She understood the importance of focusing her energies on a single project.

Vijayalakshmi, a housewife joined the course, because this was something she had always wanted to do. On reading the advertisement she simply enrolled herself. She liked the fact the workshop was a mixture of lecture and demonstration.

Palani is a theatre artist part of the *Koothu-p-Pattarai* troupe. He came to know of this workshop through someone associated with the troupe. He joined the course out of curiosity about what such a workshop might evolve. He liked the concentration and the single minded focus that making a Thanjavur painting entailed. It was an experience unlike his theatre experience, which by its nature involved a lot of distraction, in terms of spatial movement. Making the painting meant that he had to sit in one place till he completed it. This was a different kind of experience for him. He also mentioned the fact that the use of colours and paints was same as that of making traditional masks where the face is painted. He found parallels between painting and applying make-up.



Artist Muthukrishnan and Thanjavur workshop participants

not only how to make a painting but also how to maintain it as well. She was appreciative of the patience and interest exhibited by the artist and his family in teaching them the various aspects of the painting.

Mrs.Dandapani has all praise for the master and his family. Their dedication not just to the art form itself but also the dedication shown to the process of teaching and keeping the art form alive particularly impressed her. In spite of the students mistakes there was never a frown or any other sign of impatience shown by him. She also said that NFSC had done a wonderful job of organising the workshop. Their

meals and every requirement was taken care of and they were able to work without a care in the world.

Giridhar is a student who is studying for his BDA. He was interested in knowing about Thanjavur paintings. He enjoyed meeting and working with people from other backgrounds. He said that he learnt to be patient. And he also realised that being patient had its own kind of reward.

K Sharada is always interested in learning about Thanjavur paintings. She liked the way the workshop combined both theory and practice. She particularly liked the Thanjavur style of painting because it included not just painting but craft work also. She had to cut and paste to make the different layers. She liked the fact that she had to use different materials in the making of this painting.

Gunashankara is a signboard painter by profession. Since the advent of the computers, computer graphics has been used for advertising and as well as the making of signboards. Therefore his business was being affected by this newer technology. He said that he wanted to acquire a new skill to supplement his income. This was just the beginning for him as he intended to work on this skill so that he may improve the quality and speed of his work. For him the whole process was fascinating, preparing the colour wash, the *muttee* layer, and the gold leaf layer and embedding the stones. And this whole process was what made the Thanjavur painting unique.

All the participants enjoyed the workshop and mentioned a desire to attend more workshops. They went home not only with their own masterpiece but also with some knowledge about the background of this art form. They also said that they would definitely want to attend many more such workshops about the visual art traditions of India.

Malini is a History teacher, who resides in Lucknow. She enjoyed the discipline, which the making of the painting involved. Being a teacher herself she particularly appreciated the patience with which the teachers took them through the whole process in a systematic step by step manner. This experience would definitely enrich her and she felt that her colleagues in Lucknow would appreciate it. She also felt that she could use this experience in the classroom and help the students develop themselves.

Swati is an art student from Bangalore who got to know of the workshop through the paper. She enjoyed the different approach to art from her regular curriculum. She like the use of soft and minute lines and detailed work that making a painting of this sort entailed. She said that there were many differences between the work that was expected out of her course work and at this workshop. Traditional work entailed the use of particular themes, motifs and colours and even shapes. It was quite different from the western approach with its emphasis on individual freedom of expression. This kind of work needed more patience than the routine classroom work.

Kalpana is an enthusiastic housewife who has always wants to learn about Thanjavur painting. She like a particular technique used to make a Thanjavur painting. It involved preparing various layers and each layer revealed a different aspect of the painting. She liked the use of the bright colours, the gold sheet and the stones, which gave the painting a different and ethnic look.

Lavanya is a nursery teacher working in Bangalore and interested in Thanjavur paintings. She liked the method employed to teach them about it, i.e. lectures as well as demonstration. She was specially impressed by the lecture on the conservation of paintings. She felt that made the workshop unique, because it taught

Scharada Bail is currently working as an internet consultant, interested in cultural studies

Things that squeak and rattle, that jump or whirl or spin, and eventually break. The streets of Indian cities are host to millions of salesmen. While most sell functional articles needed in urban homes, there are those who sell toys they have crafted themselves. These noisy, coloured, breakable objects have fascinated generations of children, but their continued availability is in question. As the effects of a technology driven culture begin to sweep into the farthest reaches of our country, and society, the existence of the individuals who make hand crafted toys becomes as fragile and precariously poised as their creations.

This was the starting point for a study of these toymakers, their lives, work and experience, the toys they make, the traditions that sustain them, and the market forces that threaten them. I undertook to study these toymakers through a sustained personal interaction with these people. This was to take place in a two year project, enabled by a grant from the India Foundation for the Arts, Bangalore. The project began on February 1, 2000. While the project is still in its preliminary stage, some discernible features can be shared here.

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While setting certain guidelines for the study to follow, such as ensuring its national coverage by visiting cities in diverse regions, I did not speculate about the eventual findings. I was conscious that I could be in for many surprises, both from the standpoint of personal experience, as well as from a more ideological perspective. In effect, I attempted to be prepared (or unprepared) for anything.

The very first thing that becomes apparent in the lives of these toymakers is that the rhythms of their work are tied to festivals, melas and carnivals, and other events with strong religious overtones. One is most likely to encounter a good gathering of them, with a variety of toys on display, at the chariot festivals of the Kapaleeswar and Parthasarathy temples in Chennai, than on an average evening on Marina beach.

At Varanasi, the *Chaith Navadurga* days were being celebrated in April, just prior to *Ram Navami*. These are nine days devoted to *Durga*, similar to the *Navaratri* that falls in a later part of the year. There are significant *Devi* temples, both in Varanasi, and in surrounding areas, where fairs were held for all the nine days. In the city itself, the fair venue changed to a different temple everyday – the first day was at the Shailputri temple, the second day was at the Brahmacharini temple on the Lalita Ghat, and so on.

An itinerant community of vendors, astrologers, instant *mehndi* printers, fast food hawkers, balloon and toy sellers moves every day, and tries to earn what is possible from the hordes of local pilgrims. Apart from this, famous temples like the Vindhya Vasini Devi near Mirzapur, and the Kashi Viswanath temple also have a sizeable population of regular street sellers, some of whom are toy makers.

The business calendar of the toy makers was similarly found to be tied to religion in Hyderabad, too. All the people interviewed named the Mankali temple festival, *Diwali*, and *Dussehra* as their main sales periods. At Allahabad, which I visited for a day's scouting trip after *Ram Navami*, the grounds around the sacred *sangam* area had just been vacated by sellers and craftsmen who had returned to their villages after camping in the area for ten days.

There is a very dynamic version of secularism at work among the toymakers who sell their wares at religious festivals. It is a deep appreciation of another's religion, even if one's own faith is different. This is in evidence at each place. While Mohammed Tyab, and his sons Gulab Mohammad and Banarasi at Varanasi, shared with me what Dashashwamedh Ghat, Kashi Viswanath, and the Hindu festivals meant to them and their work, it was Azmath Khan, Asif and Mohammed Khan who expressed similar views in Hyderabad. At Mylapore, Chennai, the most ingenious toys at the Kapaleeswar Chariot Festival were made by Abraham of Vyasarpadi.

While religious practice as it exists in people's homes and hearts sustains the efforts of the toymakers, its glamourised projection by the media has also brought them dividends. In many conversations, the looming effect of films and TV became apparent. *Serials like Mahabharat, Ramayana, and the Sword of Tipu Sultan have helped us by making tinsel bow and arrows, Hanumanji's gada and tinsel swords very popular*, says Azmath Khan. His wife, five children, and a host of extended family members survive on these shiny weapons, artefacts of ages gone by, that have suddenly acquired a modern currency through their being featured on TV.

Elsewhere too, the film and TV connection is referred to. *My ustad (the man who taught him the craft) had sold his toys to film producers on numerous occasions*, says Mohammed Tyab. He remembers a Sanjeev Kumar film in which an entire scene was decorated with the paper windmills that his *ustad* had made. In Hyderabad, balloon seller Shaik Baba counts the film industry as a major client, often requiring hundreds of balloons for a few minutes of film. However, the sobering flip side of this clientele is that it can sometimes leave the impoverished seller deprived of his due.

The beach is my shop. My toys are stuck in the sand, attracting passers by with their movement. On more than one occasion, film crews have come, shot their scenes against my windmills, grabbed a few, then gone away, without giving me anything says Nagalingam, of Elliot's beach, Chennai.

Since toymakers come from a social background that often precludes high levels of education or formal vocational training, many have tried their hand at other things before settling into this way of life. Some have been watchmen, some painters, balloon sellers, labourers. At some point in their lives, there is a shift, wherein they decide to take their survival literally into the skill of their own hands. As one holds a fragile contraption of paper, glue, paint, cardboard and tinsel in one's hand, it is difficult to imagine the brave leap it must have meant for someone to entrust their own, and their family's survival to it.

And yet, it seems to have worked for most of them. A fierce self respect, a feeling of pride that they can choose to lie down when they wish, that they have no critical and carping superiors, is found in conversations with them.

They have received help along the way. Although only two of the people I met have ever been offered institutional help, (and both are craftsmen tied to an identifiable tradition – Laxmi Nath Lakhera, lacquer toy maker from Rewa, and Mohammed Husain, wooden toymaker from Hyderabad) most can point to at least one other person who has guided them, taught them skills, set them on the path to being their own masters.

Undoubtedly the most depressed, a pessimist who dare not even dream for his children, Arun Kumar Jaiswal of Varanasi fashions fearsome looking crocodiles out of newspaper, clay spindles, black and red ink, and string. As you share his time and ask him about his life, his eyes often fill up behind his spectacles as he recounts how his own parents have cut him out of the family plastics business. But even he admits receiving help from a toymaker friend from Calcutta, the man who first showed him how to make the crocodile. Arun Jaiswal began as a salesman of these toys, till he learnt to skilfully make them himself. Since then, he has added to his repertoire through his own ingenuity. He makes parachutes out of sticks, plastic packets, rubber bands and string.

The crocodile is very authentic, and succeeds in scaring the unwary. As an ethnic artefact, it has deep roots. Similar creations were undoubtedly present in the folk toys of several generations back. By imbibing his skills from the Calcutta toymaker, Arun Jaiswal has demonstrated the reach of urban folklore – its extension through the transfer of survival skills. Just below the surface of the global culture currently sweeping our metros, many such examples exist.

For some, the folk identity is very much visible on the surface, it has not been rubbed away by the anonymity of sharing living space with a million poor in some part of a city. The most touching encounter has been with the poorest toymakers of all – the gypsies or *pardis* that live under a bus shelter next to the Paradise cinema flyover in Hyderabad. An entire community sleeps

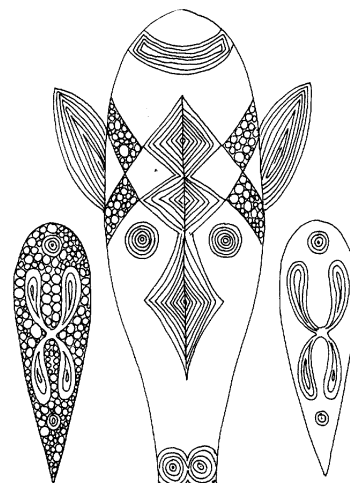
several months of the year under the stars around this bus shelter. Ragged, unkempt, presenting the classic picture of the poor and dispossessed, these people speak a mixture of Gujarati, Kannada, Marathi, Hindi and Urdu. They belong to Gulbarga, in Karnataka.

The oldest among them, a militant old man with few teeth intact, remembers his mother and father coming as labourers to Hyderabad to work on the dams being built by the Nizam. Perhaps that was the beginning for their annual migration to Hyderabad from their homes, he says. But why do they choose to live like this? It is a sad sight indeed to see their infants in the most abject conditions next to brightly coloured plastic balls, and shiny bow and arrows for sale.

Yet, among the subjects themselves, there does not seem to be much bemoaning their lot. When they leave home, they do not put down roots, they say. This suffices till they go back to Gulbarga. Children being deprived and missing an education do not disturb them unduly. But ask them what they miss about home, and they turn emotional. The womenfolk, with little urging raise their voices in a song praising the Goddess of their particular village. The oldest man joins in a long, quavering shout that is reminiscent of a Gujarat peasant.

These are clearly people outside the pale of all institutional help and intervention. Their future even as urban toymakers seems extremely precarious. Will such skills as they have acquired be enough to sustain the whole community? And then, as you express some of these thoughts aloud, one of the men says reassuringly, *We come under the Scheduled Tribe list*, whatever that means to him.

Walking the road with toymakers in Indian cities has already brought me much to think about. Most of the work under this project is still ahead of me, but in the little I have seen and experienced are some of the themes that define life in urban India. We know about the displacement of people, the gradual fading away of folk skills, the pervasive influence of the media. But seeing it in human faces – is both more profound, and more painful.



FOLK TOYS: ALWAYS ROOM FOR PLAY

Deeya Nayar is Editor, Tulika Publishers, Chennai

Is it the charm of creating, the earthy allure of the unsophisticated, or just the novelty of something different that makes simple homespun toys so fascinating? Difficult to pinpoint, but there is clearly an enduring quality to folk style toys which has ensured their survival for hundreds of years. Their origin can be traced back five thousand years to the Indus Valley civilisation of Mohenjodaro and Harappa. Excavations there have produced clay toys, some with moveable heads, some with wheels, remarkably innovative.

Endured so far, yes. How much longer they will last is a question that worries toymakers themselves, as well as people and organisations who are working to keep these skills alive. Flooded as the markets are with machine made toys, traditional streetside ones seem to be drowning, gasping for breath. The irony is that the competition is not always from terribly superior products. Some of the less expensive factory made plastic toys are dismally shoddy. For with the unchecked cutting of trees, traditional toymakers are finding it increasingly difficult to obtain raw material such as special woods and lac directly from forests. They are now forced to buy them from the market, which shoots up costs and makes them less accessible as regular toys for children to play with. At the other end of the scale, the urban affluent who can afford them tend to display them as decorative pieces of rural handicraft - their idea of toys would perhaps be on the lines of Lego sets, the latest remote-controlled cars or other hi-tech toys.

The latter are probably inevitable in today's urban world, where the ubiquitous chip holds centre stage. But strange as it may seem, technology-based toymakers the world over (including toy-giant Mattel of America) are now pulling in the reins and doing a rethink after sales figures have registered a steady decline. The toys that are still hot-selling items even in the techno-savvy west are the old-fashioned ones or board games, where play value is high.

The message is clear: a child's imagination has to be stimulated to hold attention in play. Open-ended toys encourage this, while toys with a built-in agenda, too much of flashing lights and gadgetry can often choke it. As Christopher Byrne, editor of the newsletter, *Toy Report*, says: *The essential nature of play occurs in the child's mind.*

This is where folk toys score. Their very lack of sophistication is fertile breeding ground for fantasy. Discussing productive play for children at the

conference *Playing for Keeps 2000: A Conference on the Future of Play* held this year at Wheelock College, Boston, America, experts categorically stressed the importance of creative play. It was observed that the sense of competence and confidence it fosters spills over into academic learning and their ability to cope with life in general.

The case here is not for glorifying traditional folk toys to the complete exclusion of all else; rather, it is to awaken us to their value and correct the balance which is increasingly swinging against them. Or we could lose a precious heritage of craft skills, and also some of the principles buried under the seeming simplicity of the toys. Isn't it amazing, for instance, how rural craftspeople seem to have always known the importance of using environment-friendly and biodegradable materials, much advocated now after extensive research?

Equally interesting is how rural toymakers create mobile toys that work on proper scientific principles. Professor Sudarshan Khanna highlights this aspect. A designer from the National Institute of Design who has made a lifelong study of Dynamic Toys - the fun ones which spin or whistle or fly - he finds them both ingenious and educative, making a child aware of the elementary laws of physics through imaginative play. *When I looked around for examples of the creative and intelligent use of everyday materials, the perfect example seemed to be folk toys made by artisans and sold at fairs all over India*, he says.

Use of everyday materials: this is perhaps the key to the relevance of folk toys in any age or region. Toymakers of yore used what they found around them to transform into imaginative playthings - earth, wood, rags, straw, the juice of local plants and herbs to colour, the paste of tamarind seeds as glue, and so on. Adaptiveness is thus inherent in the folk style, and it is this flexibility that must be utilised in reinventing the tradition to keep it alive and relevant in a modern, urban milieu.

To demonstrate this point Professor Khanna and others have reconstructed several traditional toys using *everyday materials* easily available to today's city children, while explaining what makes the toy tick; that is, the simple scientific principles involved. Arvind Gupta - an engineer who has devoted himself to popularising science for children and worked with organisations such as *Ekalavya* - goes a step further. *It is an irony of modern consumerism that junk products are packed in tough cartons . . . These new raw materials offer innumerable possibilities for use in low-cost science experiments and in making dynamic toys*, he says.

And sure enough, compiled in his book, *Little Toys* are a number of engaging creations made primarily out of urban junk. An old cigarette packet is made into a mouth organ, based on Bernoulli's principle that

when air blows at high speed between two strips it creates a low pressure zone; this makes the strips vibrate which produces sound. Using a film roll case, thick straw, wire and card he fashions a *Cranky Doll* which jumps up and down when the handle of a little mechanism is rotated - like the pistons of a car engine that move up and down. The wind from a ceiling fan pushes a *Small Sail Car* (whose sails are of used postcard, wheels of plastic buttons) away each time it is pulled close with a string - never-ending fun for children, which also shows them the power of wind, why it can be harnessed to produce electricity. The children of Mirambika School in Delhi actually made and tested these creations for five years. They were also serialised in the magazine *Science Reporter*.

Tulika Publishers, too, has on its forthcoming list a book to rouse children's interest in such toys. *Simple Wonders: Indian Toys and Tales* was conceived by sculptor Paramasivam, who was fascinated by folk toys since he was a child. He gives step-by-step drawings and instructions on how children can make a range of clever toys using scraps - a piece of cardboard, a bit of bamboo, and old tin can . . . Just as folk toys encourage children to imagine and invent, so do stories, and his wife and professional storyteller Cathy Spagnoli weaves one around each toy to further stimulate creative juices.

The special experience of creating and learning skills / lessons through play is one of the most valuable bequests of the tradition of folk toys. In its project *Utsah*, *Chetna* (an Ahmedabad-based NGO) made a pleasant discovery of the positive effects of making and using folk puppets on disabled children. It seemed to work wonders as a creative medium which developed their latent capacities - as was pointed out by the group at Wheelock. It gave them a chance to express their feelings and function in a group while developing the confidence of learning skills such as drawing, stitching and embroidering. *Chetna*, whose main aim is educating women on health awareness, has also found these puppets a useful medium when sensitive or private issues like sex education or contraception are discussed with shy, hesitant participants, or for use in hospitals for explaining health and hygiene.

The strength of folk toys, then, is their creative base. Not being mass-churned out of factories in fixed moulds, the maker is free to improvise for whichever purpose, in any cultural context. To imagine that modern toys have forced their folk predecessors to become anachronisms is a misconception. However, we have to make a conscious effort to propagate them, as is being done, for example, by *Sutradhar* of Bangalore who source and retail toys from villages. Another organisation also based in Bangalore is *Mrichakattika*, a co-operative society which trains women in terracotta

toymaking. A designer works with these women, to teach the basics and to encourage innovation. *Naika*, Delhi, also trains craftsmen who produce some toys but specialises in ornaments, costumes, masks and accessories connected with folk theatre.

Training craftsmen and providing them visibility are vital boost for traditional toymakers. It upholds their art while encouraging them to experiment and adjust to the changing culture of rapid urbanisation. The onus is now on us to recognise the potential of folk toys, the strength behind their continuing relevance and their exciting potential in diverse fields and cultures. We as consumers must actually buy them for what they are, use them as toys for our children to play with everyday - not remand them to emporia and showcases, or to history.





Comments

TEXTUALISING THE SIRI EPIC

John Miles Foley is Director, Centre for Studies in Oral Tradition, University of Missouri, Columbia

Publication of *Siri epic volumes* marks an important stage in the study of Indian oral epics. In the last issue of *Indian Folklife* newsletter we published an article by Peter Claus hoping to initiate a discussion on this vital topic. Peter Claus' article referred to John Foley's review published in FF Network For The Folklore Fellows, No.17, June 1999, Pp.13-23. We reproduce John Foley's article here with the author's permission in order to make oral epics central to our scholarship, research, fieldwork projects and debate. In the context of *Siri epic volumes* Indian folklorists may have to refocus their attention on already existing scholarship on Indian oral epics as well. NFSC's publication division has called for manuscripts on the theme, *Identity and oral narratives*; its public programming division plans to conduct a festival on the theme *oral narratives and string instruments*. Reproducing John Foley's article furthers our efforts to achieve coherence between our programmes also. We invite articles / reviews on Brenda Beck's *Annamar epic*, Gene Roghair's *Palnaadu epic*, Stuart Blackburn's (ed.) *Oral epics in India* and Joe Miller's recent study of *Rajasthani oral epics* (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, UMI dissertation service). More than internationalising the genre for the purposes of comparative analyses, the wealth of oral epics in India holds the key to the creative processes communities are engaged in to construct and perfect the role of memory in shaping Indian folklife. Irawati Karve's imaginative interpretation of *Mahabharata* laid the foundations for finding the ecological basis of social conflict in ancient India. Similar approaches can be extended to oral epics also. Komal Kothari has always been arguing for viewing Rajasthani oral epics as great chronicles of knowledge systems evolved through intelligence of the people living in desert. Several directions, approaches and interpretations of oral epics are needed to excavate the hidden foundations of Indian civilisation. We currently solicit the participation of all the scholars to use this forum offered by *Indian Folklife* to debate the dynamics of Indian oral epics.— Editor]

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Performing the *Siri Epic* took six days; during that period Gopala Naika, a possession priest and agriculturalist from Machar in southern Karnataka, India, composed a narrative of 15,683 lines, only five lines shorter than the most magisterial of Western epics, Homer's *Iliad*. That performance was acoustically recorded and videotaped by a team of Finnish and Tulu researchers and is presented here in its entirety. The appearance of Naika's poem in a bilingual, facing-page format ideal for consumption by specialist and nonspecialist alike is a triumph in itself, opening a window onto a world of living oral epic unglimped by many contemporary scholars and, more specifically, providing an opportunity to become acquainted with a moving and dynamic mythic universe and performance tradition that deserve attention in their own right. But the richness of the experience available in these three volumes is deeper yet. Also included are complete histories of the eight-year fieldwork project that led to this performance and its eventual codification, a cultural and religious context for its reception, and an evaluative chronicle of eleven other fieldwork projects and resultant publications on oral epic from various parts of the world. In discussing a few salient aspects of the three-volume

series, I will naturally have a few queries or criticisms to bring forward, based on my own experience with South Slavic oral epic (both from the Milman Parry Collection and in my own fieldwork), as well as with oral-derived epic in ancient Greek and medieval English. But there is no question in my mind that the composite presentation of the *Siri Epic* in FFC 264-66 constitutes the single most thorough and most important resource of its kind. As an entrée into the complex, resonant experience of an oral epic tradition, it is unmatched.

One caveat before turning to my remarks. It is a commonplace in this genre of critical commentary that one cannot begin to do justice to the work under consideration in so limited a space. This is especially true for the *Siri Epic* series, of course. Rather than range widely and shallowly, then, I will be concentrating on a few prominent features of the first volume (*Textualising*) and then directing the remainder of this review where I believe it most clearly belongs - to the epic itself as viewed within a comparative context. I leave additional remarks and emphasis to other reviewers and, at longer range, to the research and scholarship that will doubtless arise in spirited conversation with the entire project.

Textualising the Siri Epic (FFC 264) comprises four parts: *The Enigma of Long Epic* (A), which amounts to a comparative poetics of oral epic; *Textualisation of Oral Epics: Antecedents* (B), a history of fieldwork and publication; *Textualisation of Oral Epics: The Present Case* (C), focused on Gopala Naika's performance in its traditional cultural context; and *The Siri Epic: A Synopsis* (D), a helpful overview of the main action of the tale. Early in section A, Honko rapidly establishes some of the most crucial dimensions of the frame within which the 1990 performance took place. We learn of the singer's illiteracy and, more significantly, the positive advantage that his devotion to oral tradition entails. We start to get a sense of the bard's religious status as the leader of the local *Siri* possession-cult, a connection that enlivens every last fibre of the song from individual lines and phrases to the overall performance arena.¹ Not least, we read that it was Gopala Naika himself who initiated the textualisation of his epic, first by declaring *his willingness to dictate the epic* (264: 13; see further C.6) and then by following through with actual dictation in 1985-86, a prior textualisation of 8,538 lines that Honko labels *Homeric* because of the medium in which it was composed and taken down. In this and many other ways, the first of the three volumes enlarges and productively complicates prevailing views of long epic. In the process it weans us away from the parochial examples of Western narrative and provides firsthand evidence that oral epics can be and are created wholly without the technology of writing - in a word, that oral composition is a much more complex and many-sided process than has heretofore been appreciated.

DEFINING THE EPIC

One step on the path toward a more realistically complex view of oral epic - an awareness of their differences as well as similarities - is the formulation of a definition that opens the door to as many narratives as possible while still maintaining the outlines of a generic model that will support comparison. Just such a comparative poetics is at the basis of Foley, *Traditional Oral Epic: The Odyssey, Beowulf, and the Serbo-Croatian Return Song* (Berkeley: UCP, 1990), which advocates attention to incongruities as well as congruities in prosody, phraseology, and narrative patterning. Here is Honko's definition (264: 28):

Epics are great narratives about exemplars, originally performed by specialised singers as superstories which excel in length, power of expression and significance of content over other narratives and function as a source of identity representations in the traditional community or group receiving the epic.

As a test of this perspective, let us apply it to two well-studied traditions, one of them ancient and the other contemporary. Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* certainly fulfill the first criterion, with *Achilleus* and *Odysseus* (as well as many other characters) serving as exemplars. Their contemporary expressive power and significance are manifest from the literature and commentaries of the ancient world, where, according to Xenophanes of Colophon, *from the beginning all have learned according to Homer*. Plato's philosophical writings, even as they often contest against Homer for dominance in worldview, constantly cite the epics as a cultural encyclopedia. The grip exerted by the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* on the evolution of European culture - and, very importantly, on the concept of epic itself - has been obvious for centuries. Although our knowledge of *specialised singers* in ancient Greece is fragmentary and sometimes contradictory, and although the rest of the epic tradition has vanished except for a few lines and summaries here and there, Honko's definition generally fits what we know about Homer and his tradition. When we add the general consensus that the ancient Greek poems

emerged from an oral tradition, though again in what particular manner we cannot say, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* can be meaningfully approached via Honko's model.

How about the living tradition of South Slavic Moslem epic?² Once again there is little doubt about the role of exemplars; although the cast of characters from the glory days of the Ottoman Empire will be less familiar to Western ears than the celebrated figures of Greek mythology, a wide array of heroes and heroic women are prominent in the songs. Moreover, in this well collected tradition, the identity of the songs as *superstories* is more evident and compelling than it can ever be in the long-dead, partially extant traditions of the ancient and medieval worlds. The performances are complete in themselves, of course, but because of the

resonant context in which they take place, they always imply more than they denote. In a sense they have no real boundaries, no absolute textual singularity, just as they are not repeated syllable for syllable in every version. Both their position in the overall network of oral epic tradition and their multiformity, a quality to which Honko returns again and again in these volumes, are fundamental aspects of their identity as *superstories*. Performed by specialised bards, called *guslari*, the Moslem songs demonstrate considerable if not overwhelming length (an average of perhaps 2500 lines, though master-singer Avdo Medjedovic's performances reached 13,000-18,000 lines on two occasions), a power of expression that has been shown to be highly idiomatic and foundational for its interlocutors, and a significance of content that can be traced to the role of professional singers in Ottoman courts and until recently mirrored in the continuing activity of singers

and audiences in Bosnia and Montenegro. Even the modern (and decidedly nonprofessional) singers of tales in these regions, whose first allegiance was to practical occupations such as farming, craftsmanship, and small-scale trade, preserved the heritage of South Slavic Moslem epic, keeping its encoded history and group-centered identity alive for themselves and their audiences. Once again, with allowance made for the

The Siri Epic

as performed by Gopala Naika



Lauri Honko in collaboration with
Chinnappa Gowda, Anneli Honko and Viveka Rai
Part I

ACADEMIA SCIENTIARUM FENNICA

Lauri Honko in collaboration with Chinnappa Gowda, Anneli Honko and Viveka Rai, *The Siri Epic as performed by Gopala Naika. Part I. Folklore Fellows' Communications No. 265. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia (Academia Scientiarum Fennica), 1998. lxx + 492 pp. Hard (ISBN 951-41-0814-0), FIM 250,-Soft (ISBN 951-41-0815-9), FIM 225,-*



idiosyncrasies of the individual tradition, Honko's model applies reasonably well to this living epic tradition.

EPIC REGISTER AND EPIC IDIOLECT

With such parameters in mind, Honko goes on to explore numerous aspects of performance and composition that deserve much more extended commentary than can be offered in the present format. I will concentrate here on three of them that are of primary importance for comparative studies: *epic idiolect and epic register* (A.7), modes of performance and dictation versus singing (A.9-10), and the concept of the *mental text* (A.12).

With the terms register and idiolect, Honko establishes perspectives on composition and reception that promise greater fidelity to oral epic because they promote the understanding of its performed instances on their own terms. (On the application of these terms to various traditions and genres, see e.g. Foley, *Singer of Tales in Performance*, pp. 49-53, 82-92.) Honko is careful to explain that he uses the term *register* in Dell Hymes's sense of *major speech styles associated with recurrent types of situations*, thus identifying a specialised epic language that the singer learns to speak and in which the audience also (and crucially) gains a fluency. By transacting the verbal exchange within this medium, then, *what the performance brings about is essentially a community of reception* (264: 64). Within the shared dialect of the epic register, Honko also locates an individualized level of traditional language, the *idiolect*. Just as speakers of everyday language in any society share a dialect but develop their own personal versions of that more generalised language, so the individual epic singer carves out his own working language from the more generalised epic dialect. By directing our attention toward idiolect, and construing it as a flexible, multiform linguistic instrument, Honko is able to have the best of both worlds: he can speak of the traditional structure and meaning that are so much a part of the Siri Epic context, and he can describe Gopala Naika's individual (and by definition inimitable) creation within that tradition.

This stereoscopic view - paying due attention to both individual and tradition - was precisely the original intent of applying such concepts to oral traditional performance. For further evidence of the necessarily paired contributions of individual and tradition, see Foley, *Individual Poet and Epic Tradition: Homer as Legendary Singer, Arethusa*, 31 (1998): 149-78 and, more generally, Foley, *Homer's Traditional Art* (University Park: Penn. State Univ. Press, 1999).

MODES OF PERFORMANCE

Especially informative for scholars whose main research area centers on Western epic is the discussion of modes of performance (A.9). Whereas

many conceive of oral epic (on the model of Homer) as an extended, single-channel narration by the singer, Honko points out that worldwide epic must be more broadly conceived, taking into account such variations as the presence or absence of musical accompaniment, prose and poetry, dance, group rendition, drama, and other performative modes. Moreover, the mode may shift within a single performance, and the *same* epic may be realised in numerous different ways. As an example, he details four distinct modes of Siri Epic performance: *monovoiced singing with slow body sway and linear narration of the epic* (264: 76); a dialogue between the main singer and his male assistants; *the polyphonic overlapping solo singing by the male and female singers without any observable synchronising of expression* (264: 77); and alternating performance by two or three female cult members with back-channel reinforcement by the rest of the group. All of these may be responsibly and accurately understood as the Siri Epic, but each of them engages a different context and produces a different result. Such is the natural heterogeneity of oral epic in this Dravidian tradition, a quality that should encourage us to press for plurality in our idea of oral epic, no matter what our particular specialties may be, and perhaps to be aware of signals within oral-derived texts that may point in similar directions.

One is reminded, for example, of the poet's invocations before the epic action begins (Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; also the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*), of the interruptions of his story in the *Iliad* (before the *Catalogue of Ships and Men* in Book 2; thanks to Aaron Tate for this example) and the medieval English *Andreas* (lines 1478-91), or of the vocative address of the swineherd Eumaios in the *Odyssey* (e.g., 14.55), where the poet seems to speaking to one of his characters (on which subject, cf. Plato's *dialogue, Ion*). Modes and performance styles of various kinds may persist into written texts as signals to be activated during the process of reception (see Foley, *The Singer of Tales in Performance*, chap. 3).

Just as an epic may be performed differently, so too it can be recorded in quite diverse media environments: dictation and singing. Here Honko's analysis of the two possibilities via his research team's experience with the Siri Epic plays out with special significance (A.10), and not only because of the light it sheds on the performance at hand. Since Albert Lord initially broached the subject in 1953, claiming a superiority in length and quality for the dictated text, Homerists and other scholars have jostled over the nature of ancient and medieval texts - artifacts that could not have been fashioned except by dictation for technological reasons - and the comparability of acoustically recorded and dictated performances from various parts of the world. Contrary to Lord's findings, Honko demonstrates the artistic and structural superiority of the sung Siri Epic, and traces it to the greater elaboration of narrative multiforms in the

sung as opposed to the dictated versions. As a parallel Honko notes that *Brenda Beck found the dictated version of the Tamil epic... contentwise and stylistically impoverished and much shorter than the sung version* (264: 82). To some extent, the question of sung versus dictated will rest on the individual properties of the given oral epic tradition (the variety of modes and performance styles, for example) and the particular circumstances that characterise the time and place of its recording (wax tablets, vellum, or paper; one or a team of scribes or various methods of acoustic and video recording). But Honko's hard evidence makes it clear that we should not automatically privilege the medium nearest to our everyday experience. In the Tulu case, the esteemed technology of writing is a positive impediment to the best epic performance.

MENTAL TEXT

In section A.12 we come to one of Honko's most suggestive and powerful concepts, the so-called *mental text*. It is also destined to be one of the most controversial features of his impressive composite theory - not, I must stress, because of its considerable explicative potential but rather because of the basic terminology employed. Working from the ideas of register, idiolect, and *pool of tradition* (espec. A8), he starts by shifting the perspective from the collective tradition, as instanced in song-performances by a variety of bards, to the individual performer. This redistribution of emphasis is apparent in the following summary of what the mental text contains:

... (1) *storylines*, (2) *textual elements*, i.e., *episodic patterns*, *images of epic situations*, *multiforms*, etc., and (3) *their generic rules of reproduction as well as* (4) *contextual frames such as remembrances of earlier performances, yet not as a haphazard collection of traditional knowledge but, in the case of distinct epics of the active repertoire, a prearranged set of elements internalised by the individual singer.* (264: 94.)

Few would argue with the gist of this description. *Storylines* correspond to the story-patterns and thematic sequences of oral-formulaic theory; what he calls *textual elements* are mirrored in various approaches to folklore and oral tradition; and *rules for reproduction* have been suggested as a way to rationalise repeated items as the products of a rule-governed process. (Cf. the concept of traditional rules as described in Foley, *Traditional Oral Epic*, chs. 3, 5, 8.) Once the transfer from collective tradition to individual singer is made, the organising role of *contextual frames* becomes an inevitability. With these sound analytic principles it is hard to argue.

But one can argue with the choice of the critical term *text*. With all of its virtually inescapable overtones of fixity, literacy, and the technology of writing, text seems a risky label to employ in describing so central, and

intangible, a concept. Given how much has to be overcome in pressing *text* into service for what may seem a counterintuitive purpose, would it not have been easier to use a less loaded word? On the one hand, I understand and admire Honko's strategy: he seeks to explain the Siri Epic from this performance outward, through the composition of a single bard who harnesses a traditional register to his own idiolectal purposes. He seeks to show how the pool of tradition has taken shape within the mind of Gopala Naika, and his theoretical approach succeeds brilliantly in opening the epic to appreciation on its own terms. My only criticism is the choice of the term *text*, which presents a problem in reception for folklorists and general readers alike.

Section B of *Textualising the Siri Epic* begins with a discussion of Elias Lönnrot and the Finnish Kalevala, and continues with outlines of ten additional projects: the *Manas* epic and Wilhelm Radloff, the *Mohave* epic and Alfred Kroeber, the *South Slavic epic* and Milman Parry and Albert Lord, the *Sunjata* epic and Gordon Innes, the *Anggun Nan Tungga* epic and Nigel Phillips, the *Annanmaar* epic and Brenda Beck, the *Palnaadu* epic and Gene Roghair, the *Son-Jara* epic and Charles Bird and John Johnson, the *Siirat Bani Hilaal* epic and Susan Slyomovics, and the *Paabuujii* epic and John Smith. Each episode in the larger tale of oral epic projects includes comments on the idiosyncrasies of the given performance tradition and the circumstances of its collection, and offers evaluative consideration of the conclusions drawn by the investigator. This section needs little comment; by presenting a meticulous and fair-minded account of these other fieldwork projects on oral epic, Honko has compiled a unique resource that will undoubtedly prove extremely useful in itself even as it acts as a ready companion to the Siri Epic documented in these volumes.

For the record, I note that, contrary to the claim made here (264: 187), the Parry Collection's major strength has always been the epic genre in *South Slavic*. Women's songs (*zenske pjesme*) are quite numerous, it is true, but they are normally extremely short (in the range of 10-30 lines) and entirely lyric (non-narrative) in nature. The hundreds of epics collected in 1933-35 and 1950-51 from six geographically distinct epic centers in the former Yugoslavia, on the other hand, are more than sufficient to provide a rich, multiform context for individual singers, individual regions, and so on; see the full accounting in Matthew W. Kay, *The Index of the Milman Parry Collection 1933-35: Heroic Songs, Conversations, and Stories* (New York: Garland, 1995). In addition, the extended conversations with *guslari*, conducted by Parry's native assistant Nikola Vujnovic (himself an epic singer), help the investigator toward what Honko calls a *thick corpus* (264: 39, 512-13).



EPIC ARCHAEOLOGY

Section C combines a rich cultural contextualisation of the epic performance with an insider's history of the fieldwork. Instead of attempting to survey the twenty separate parts of this section, I will focus on one activity that links context and fieldwork: what Honko and his team call *epic archaeology* (C.10). On the practical level, the two-day pause in Gopala Naika's performance, necessary to help the bard heal a throat and vocal apparatus overextended by singing, presented an opportunity to explore the dimensions of myth and reality in the Siri Epic. The team had already become well aware that the epic story was not simply entertainment or a reflection of ritual, but living truth for its practitioners. As Honko puts it (264: 322),

It was not a matter of ideological stance or mythical narrative only but the continuous construction of a tangible world in which you as a Siri-devotee or Kumara-devotee could, with the help of your prayer and epic song, touch and move the heroes-turned-into-gods and summon them to your festival, where in turn these could occupy your body and use it as their vehicle in the human sphere making you, a human being, a true Siri or Kumara for a transient moment.

26

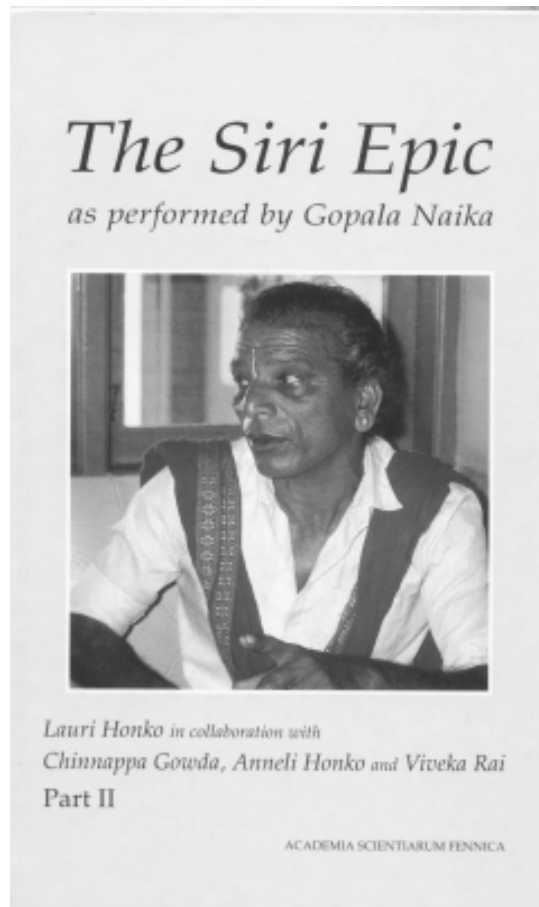
This amounts to participation or epic co-creation at a much deeper level than Western epics seem to license, touching the sphere of religious identity in a personally important way. One aspect of epic archaeology was then the realisation that the Siri Epic functions for those who perform and listen to it as a recurring rite of passage between two worlds, a retraceable path leading toward direct communication with divinity, a means by which gods enter the earthly realm and possess willing participants.

Moreover, this entry and possession constitutes not symbolic but literal truth. The events of the epic were considered historical, and the places where they occurred geographically real. The researchers were thus able to visit locations said to be those mentioned in the epic, bringing along with them the singer Gopala Naika, who had never before visited the actual sites himself.

One example was the *fairly large, quiet pond called kandadi kaaya and known as the place where Siri took her bath and washed clothes* (264: 325). This modest body of water had taken on a legendary character as a taboo site, so that neither fishing nor bathing was permitted; its depth could not be measured and people said it never dried up. Local people even pointed out a particular tree near the pond's edge as marking the spot where Siri gave birth to Sonne. In certain ways the more-than-mythic geography associated with the Siri narrative resembles the system of Western Apache place-names, which, far from simply indexing this or that topographical feature, encode traditional stories as embedded and emergent implications of the names. (See Keith Basso, *Western Apache Language and Culture: Essays in Linguistic Anthropology* (Tucson: UAP, 1990), pp. 138-73.)

In both cases, mythic history is mapped onto real territory, which in turn takes on sacred dimensions. Epic archaeology also culminated in increased awareness of another kind of context: the non-epic genres that subtend various aspects of the Siri story. Honko mentions a host of traditional forms that populate the epic universe: in addition to place-names, he identifies *belief legends, aetiological narratives, historical legends, prayers and incantations, proverbs and phrases, omens and taboos, rituals and customs* (264: 322) and the like, all of which cluster around the epic but were not part of the core narration as performed by Gopala Naika in 1990 and presented in these volumes. Such ancillary sources, some directly linked to geography and some not, are clearly important threads in the overall fabric of the Siri story, and their mention highlights the dangers inherent in isolating the epic performance from its natural context. Likewise, the whole networked constellation

of genres begs the question of how to deal with oral-derived traditional texts from the ancient and medieval worlds, where there is no opportunity for ethnographic research to establish a *thick corpus*. At the very least, this aspect of epic archaeology should underline the recognised fact that traditional genres leak; that is, there is more interplay among and interpenetration between different genres than our analytical practices customarily



Lauri Honko in collaboration with Chinnappa Gowda, Anneli Honko and Viveka Rai, *The Siri Epic as performed by Gopala Naika. Part II. Folklore Fellows' Communications No. 266. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia (Academia Scientiarum Fennica), 1998. x + 400 pp. Hard (ISBN 951-41-0814-0), FIM 185,- Soft (ISBN 951-41-0815-9), FIM 160,-*

assume. If a traditional phrase belonging to an Old English riddle turns up in *Beowulf*, if a story-pattern associated with the *Odyssey* also underlies the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, then perhaps this sharing of traditional forms, strategies, and content is the natural course of events. Only the peculiar and parochial text-centrism of Western scholarship, epitomised in the one-dimensional Homeric model for comparative epic investigation, has kept us from making these connections and hearing their resonance. Expanding the idea of epic Against the monumental background of Textualising the Siri Epic emerges its raison d'être - the epic itself (nos. 265-66). Several things strike the reader immediately. First, this is an enormous production on almost any scale: 15,683 lines performed over six days by a single bard, Gopala Naika. It puts the lie to untutored speculations that the achievement of epic length must involve the technology of writing. Second, it is a woman's story, featuring a female divinity at its center and highlighting the activities and behaviour of women and female deities throughout its course. Not coincidentally, it is a song of peace, social custom and rite, and the chain of creation. For those of us accustomed to the heroic contests of war - with male heroes competing for cities, women, and most of all for glory - as the major and defining activities of epic, this steady focus on the female world is an education in itself. From the very start, the subjects and dramatis personae of the Siri Epic force an enlargement or pluralisation of our narrow view of epic; when we add the religious reality of the epic as a rite, we are truly in a different world from that of the Homeric epics, the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*, the Old French *chansons de geste*, the medieval Spanish *Poema de Mio Cid*, or even the *South Slavic Moslem* epics. The idea of oral epic begins to assume a realistic and engaging complexity. Third, this is a remarkable artistic achievement, and by that I mean a paragon of traditional art. Even for a non-Tulu speaker lacking a great deal of the cultural apparatus, the poetics of implication - the poem's traditional referentiality - makes reading this epic a richly rewarding experience. Some attention to performance units may help to place the Siri Epic in a comparative context (See *Textualising*, C. 9, for a detailed study of the segmentation of the oral performance.) On the emic side, the singer himself separated his performance into 36 segments, each of these defined by the researchers as a *sequence of lines sung mainly without interruption* (265: xliv). On the etic

side, the editors and translators decided to represent the text in some 56 cantos, primarily on the basis of textual logic and consistency. Here as elsewhere their intention to provide a readable poem remained foremost in their thinking; although no performance feature goes unreported or unexplained, their loyalty to a text that will stand on its own two feet is the operative policy. Although there is no opportunity to discuss these matters here, I recommend that comparatists scrutinize Honko's comments on the discontinuation and resumption of singing and the *correction of errors* (265: xlv-lv). (On the former, see also Foley, *Traditional Oral Epic*, pp. 284-88.)

Mr Gopala Naika of Mapala, in Machal village near Ujre, Belthangadi Taluk is one of the many talented singers of oral epics in Tulunadu, Karnataka. The Finnish- Indian team documented his 15,683 line performance of the Siri epic on audio and video tape way back in 1990 December. This documentation is a seminal contribution and tribute to the rich oral poetry in Tulu and the vicissitudes of oral epic traditions still to be found in many other Indian states.

At the micro level, lines were established on the basis of the singer's breath groups, very much an emic measure that mirrors what Dell Hymes has proposed in *measuring* verses in Native American narrative. Honko states straightforwardly that the metrical structure of the lines is not completely solved, and that an adequate analysis will require the expertise of an ethnomusicologist. Until such time as the inner prosody of the epic is established, one may observe that the emic lineation and the editors' bias toward a readable segmentation of the text insure a worth while experience for the Tulu-less reader. The Finnish-Tulu team offers some extremely interesting remarks about the decisions they made in adopting an overall style of translation. From the facing-page bilingual format through the insertion of punctuation, the aim at verbal equivalence in simple English, the handling of repeating phrases, and the discussion of particular challenges created by the idiosyncrasies of Tulu and/or the lack of parallel words or constructions in English, the investigators evolved a method based on clear choices about priorities. Furthermore, as Honko notes, the translation of long epic has its own special problems, with consistency of rendering (over the 15,683 lines) high on the list of attainable but difficult goals. I would note that, however one may feel about the particular choices made and the results achieved, the English version of the Siri Epic reveals what might be called an *interactive* quality. That is, because the formulaic phrases are rendered exactly and consistently, the bilingual presentation allows the reader to track phraseology in both languages, whether he is fluent in Tulu or merely able to sound out the language. Similarly, the decision to leave the metaphors in their literal form - *the head's fire* rather than *bad headache*, for example (265: lxiii) -



allows the poem to echo memorably as the reader proceeds from canto to canto, promoting a more genuine experience of networked meaning, of traditional referentiality. Not unrelatedly, the policies about punctuation bring out the adding or paratactic style of Gopala Naika's composition. A final feature of the translation strategy that also deserves mention is the uncluttered presentation of the text: in place of a cumbersome and distracting scholarly apparatus at the bottom of the page or at the back of the translation volume, the researchers depend chiefly on the freestanding commentary in section C of *Textualising the Siri Epic* (264). A brief glossary of proper names, place-names, and a few items of material culture appears in the last pages of the third volume, but otherwise the epic itself dominates the presentation in volumes 265-66. In my opinion, the discussion of translation (265: lxi-lxix) should be required reading for all those involved in translating oral epic. Even if they choose other methods than the Finnish team selected, they would profit immensely from a careful examination and weighing of the alternatives. Creating the narrative map in order to convey an idea of the overall narrative shape of what I again emphasise is very much a woman's epic, let me outline some of the major action in the first of five parts of the Siri Epic. The division into four *subepics* and a conclusion is of course the etic imposition of the editors rather than Gopala Naika's own segmentation, but it makes sound narrative sense and increases readability for a non-native audience. We will be sketching the broad superstructure of *The Ajjeru Subepic* (lines 1-3811). This section covers the events leading up to the birth of the principal character and namesake of the epic, Siri herself. The narrative opens with a cosmic and etiological initiative - the creation of a Tulu story, as ordered by the god *Iisvara* and carried out by the god *Naagaberamma*, who starts the process by sending a serious illness to an aged widower, *Ajjeru*; *Aarya Bannaaru Birmu Paalava*. It is characteristic of this epic to maintain a variety of names, some simplex and some composite, for many of its characters. One soon becomes accustomed to this variety, however, much as one learns to navigate the approved noun-epithet

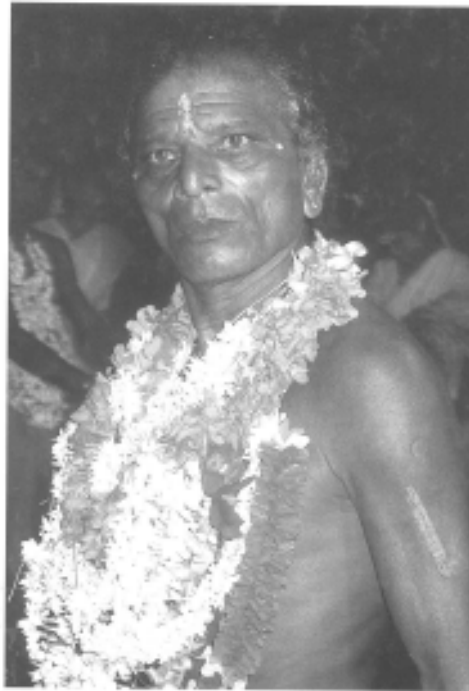
pathways for naming people and deities in western European traditions like the Homeric poems. In the highly lyrical fashion that frequently plays a role in this performance, the old man's suffering is epitomised in a tear that drops from his eye and eventually reaches the temple of the trinity gods. *Naagaberamma* then takes pity on *Ajjeru* and decides to visit him in the disguise of a *poor Brahmin man*. Even for the reader wholly unacquainted with the Siri epic tradition, this figure, who appears many times, will begin to take on certain implications, signalling some kind of unexpected change in the status quo. After all, he amounts to a disguised god entering the earthly realm. Note that the formulaic, indexical phrase *poor Brahmin man* idiomatically identifies this figure together with the generic outline of the role

he is to play. (For parallels to this kind of indexical phraseology in other oral epic traditions, see Foley, *The Singer of Tales in Performance*, chs. 4-6 and *Homer's Traditional Art*, chs. 4, 7.) After the temple at *Lookanaadu* is restored and ritual worship as stipulated by the *poor Brahmin man* is established, the infant Siri is born - parthogenetically and without direct agency, it appears, since her father *Ajjeru* simply finds her crying in the siri-shoot areca-bud that provides her name. Even as an infant, she inspires a suit by *Kaantu Puunja*, and *Ajjeru*, seeking a male caretaker for his beloved home at *Satyanapura*, accedes to the would-be bridegroom's (and bridegroom's mother's) proposal. Before the wedding can be arranged, however, they must consult the astrologer about the propitiousness of the marriage and the most auspicious day for the actual wedding ceremony. This pattern of visiting the astrologer is another frequently recurring scene in the Siri Epic, a *theme* or

typical scene in the terminology of the oral-formulaic theory; it follows a regular sequence of constituent actions and portrays them in formulaic language. Things proceed in an expectable order on each occasion: once the principals arrive, the astrologer asks why they have come and is answered straightforwardly. He then consults his almanac and determines the time at which the stars will be in the most promising position, whatever the actual event may be. The interlocutors, in

Textualising the Siri Epic

Lauri Honko



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the present case *Kaantu Puunja* and his mother, then return to report the happy news to others concerned, in this instance to *Ajjeru*. Like the entry of the *poor Brahmin man*, the consultation of the astrologer is not only a predictable but, more significantly, an idiomatic sequence of actions: it *slots* the unique moment within a traditional frame of reference. Again, even the reader from outside the epic tradition grows familiar with the narrative map and configures his or her expectation accordingly. Imagine how powerful an effect is achieved, then, when in a single, unparalleled instance the map provided by this typical scene leads not to propitiousness but to foretold disaster. (See further the discussion of *Abbaya* and *Daaraya* below.) All proceeds in a promising way with Siri's wedding, however, and a pattern of events with which the reader will become familiar emerges: the procession, ceremony, onset of puberty (with attendant ritual), and pregnancy. In contrast to the usual and natural sequence, Siri's puberty is delayed; she seems barren for a time (perhaps a measure of her *special* status), but eventually she comes of age and is able to bear her first child, *Kumara*. As in her epic traditions, delay in the development of a traditional pattern causes its own kind of suspense (cf. the interruption of the Feast multiform in the *Odyssey*, as discussed in Foley, *Homer's Traditional Art*, pp. 180-81). The puberty rite is itself traditional in its structure, with the bride's passage into adulthood celebrated by a feast at her paternal home, the same place

to which she will return for the actual birth. Between these crucial signposts on a woman's anticipated life-path, the epic register places another significant event: the so-called *desire-feast*. Held at the husband's home, this gathering has the ostensible purpose of soothing the unborn child's hunger, but given the elaborate preparations (including a trip to the astrologer), we may also see it as another occasion for cementing the linkage between wife and husband and their families. Or so it customarily goes. In this unusual case, the wayward husband and father-to-be, *Kaantu Puunja*, strays into an encounter with Harlot *Siddu*. Siri later recognises her unwanted intervention by refusing to wear the sari and ornaments that *Kaantu Puunja* had brought her, on the grounds that Harlot *Siddu* had tried them on first. When Siri dismisses her husband and wears another sari to the desire-feast, the reasonably well prepared reader cannot be surprised: in consorting with Harlot *Siddu*, *Kaantu Puunja* has violated both his marital vow and the predictable pattern of the ritual. Cultural expectation and traditional referentiality are shattered by his actions. Such is the impact of wholesale reversal

on the poetics of implication in the Siri Epic. In due course Siri's child is born, given the name of *Kooti Kumara*, and discovered to have divine characteristics. *Ajjeru*, the grandfather, builds a cradle for the infant and hangs it; with the assistance of maidens from four lineages, he spreads silk and deposits the child within. This sequence of actions forms a small unit in itself, helping to *slot* each instance of the care of and initial ministrations to a newborn throughout the Siri Epic. Meanwhile, a visit to the astrologer has established more than the usual details: in addition to the most suitable name for the new arrival, *Ajjeru* has been warned that if he looks at the child's face he will die. Like all other such predictions, which invariably come true (with an idiomatic, traditional certainty), this prophecy is realised. Out of concern for the distraught infant *Kumara*, and with Siri off washing clothes with her

servant maid *Daaru*, *Ajjeru* attempts to stop his crying: when the old man happens to catch sight of the child's face, he immediately faints. Siri senses trouble from afar and hurries back to *Satyanapura*, but she can do nothing except comfort her father as he passes away. His last words consist of advice to his daughter to remain free, whatever the cost. A poetics of implication The remainder of the poem, which the editors divide into *The Siri Subepic* (lines 3812-9028), *The Sonne, Gindye Subepic* (lines 9029-12279), *The Abbaya, Daaraya Subepic* (lines 12280-15063), and *The Kumara Conclusion* (15064-15683), present a rich and diverse array of characters

and events. Part of this richness, however, stems from the recurrence of traditionally significant features and actions: births, betrothals, weddings, puberty rites, desire-feasts, and funerals unify the overall narrative in more than a linear fashion, causing each *new* moment to resonate against the audience's or reader's prior experience. The genius of the traditional narrative lies not only in its impressive expanse and the epic scope of its concerns, but also - and perhaps most fundamentally - in the networked associations that enlarge its impact beyond any single text, no matter how lengthy or elaborate. For all that Gopala Naika actually manages to say during his performance of the Siri Epic, he implies a great deal more. The same poetics of implication, the same traditional referentiality, can be glimpsed and heard at the level of individual lines or groups of lines. (Here one is especially grateful to the translators for their policies as outlined above.) In addition to such commonplaces as expelling the evil eye, normally accomplished in the same or similar language, and short catalogues that document building, digging, and the like, we come upon numerous smaller

Epics

are great narratives about exemplars, originally performed by specialised singers as super stories which excel in length, power of expression and significance of content over other narratives and function as a source of identity representations in the traditional community or group receiving the epic.



units of recurrent utterance. One common example is the speech introduction, which can also follow the speech in question. Here are two instances of a frequently used phrase: To the reply a reply, to the response a response the Brahmin gives: (5213; speech follows) Thus to the reply a reply, to the response, a response, Siri of Satyamalooka is giving in the assembly court. (4372-73; speech precedes)

Just as with analogues in ancient Greek, Anglo-Saxon, and South Slavic epic, this brief sentence has two parts: one provides the predicate in a stable, repeatable form and the other, variable part names the particular speaker. In such a case the recurrent phrase performs a basic, rather modest function by marking the onset of speech in a memorable, idiomatic way. It is perhaps among the simplest of signs at the phraseological level, bearing no apparent implication about the nature of the speech.

One clear proof of this emphasis on function over resonance is the fact that this same phrase introduces both the most elevated speeches as well as Siri's complaint to her mother-in-law *Sankaru Puunjedi*, at the close of which Siri asks the following about her husband *Kaantu Puunja*: *Has he gone to the end of town to watch Harlot Siddu's bottom?* (4839). (On the semantic leavening involved in such introductory lines in other epic traditions, see the discussion of *traditional punctuation* in Foley, *Homer's Traditional Art*, pp. 221-23.) In the same category of small verbal signs with limited resonance we may place a phrase that signals the arrival of a person from another locale. With great regularity Gopala Naika describes *the beauty of his/her coming*, using this modest phrase as a kind of traditional index. Once again, there seems to be no special overtone associated with what we might understand as a composite *word*, a single unit; it is applied to a full spectrum of characters and events regardless of the nature and purpose of the journey. We read it best, that is, as neither merely literal nor simply structural, but rather as the modest traditional idiom it is. (For a similar kind of phrase in Homeric epic tradition, see Foley, *Homer's Traditional Art*, p. 218 on *wine-dark sea*.) More resonant than these first few examples are phrases or *words* such as *fire of the child's mouth* (3020, e.g.) and the exclamation *Alas, what a sin! Alas, what a shame!* The former indexes the ravenous hunger felt by a pregnant woman due to the metabolic strain of gestation, as well as looks forward to the desire-feast that is socially prescribed as its ritual remedy. As such, the phrase also implicates the reality of pregnancy and the woman's life-pattern of birth, betrothal, puberty rite, wedding, and childbirth in a powerfully economical way. Gopala Naika *speaks volumes* through these few

syllables, drawn from the wordboard of the traditional register. The same can be said for the latter couplet - *Alas, what a sin! Alas, what a shame!* - that recurs throughout the Siri Epic to signal cataclysmic changes of fortune. In the *Ajjeru* subepic, for example, Siri, returning from her clothes-washing to find *Kumara's* cradle empty, marks the seriousness of the situation with this phraseological sign (3700). She repeats the same indexical exclamation a few lines later when she cannot locate *Ajjeru*, her child's caretaker while she is gone, in his customary place on a sleeping cot (3714). Indeed, this formula recurs dozens of times in many different narrative situations, as when Siri's co-wife *Saamu Alvedi* bemoans her *sister's* lack of a place to give birth to her second child (7753). Whatever the particular circumstance, *Alas, what a sin! Alas, what a shame!* frames

the problem as a life-threatening or at least socially disastrous one, embedding the uniqueness of the individual moment in a timeless traditional context. We could pause over many additional phraseological signs, all with greater or lesser proverbial force in this traditional epic register and performance. Also deserving of study are the many and frequently deployed similes, comparable in their periodic profusion to the famous Homeric trade mark. In speaking of *Saamu*

and Siri, co-wives to *Kodsaara Alva*, the singer lyrically pictures them as follows (7941-45); here *Naaraayina* is a *name of Vishnu*, also used as a frequent refrain line (266: 884)....*Saamu* and Siri were, *Naraayina*, like twin stars arisen in the sky, like two young serpents born in a serpent-dwelling. *Naraayina oo Naaraayina oo*. Like *Raama*, *Lakshmana*, like the children born in the belly of one mother. Or we might explore slightly larger units, multi-line descriptions shorter than a full-blown typical scene, such as the summoning of a postman and delivery of a letter. Like the South Slavic oral epic tradition, the Siri Epic depends quite regularly on such loosely configured sequences, consisting in the Tulu case of engaging the services of the postman and sending him off, followed by the arrival at the prescribed destination only to require three calls to gain the attention of the person to whom he is to deliver the message, and finally his untying of the hem in which he keeps the letter, e.g., 10421-78. Expectable phraseology accompanies this small and familiar schema, assisting in the process of traditional indexing. The game of fate but, at least for this review essay, we must be content with a single last example of Gopala Naika's mastery of the register that supports his epic tradition, one final feature of his epic idiolect. Late in the narrative, two girls named *Abbaya* and *Daaraya*, twin

Each episode in the larger tale of oral epic projects includes comments on the idiosyncrasies of the given performance tradition and the circumstances of its collection, and offers evaluative consideration of the conclusions drawn by the investigator.

daughters of Siri's second child *Sonne*, petition their father *Guru Marla* to be trained in the book-learning that oral epic so often celebrates but never itself employs. (See the discussion of the famous tablet of *Bellerophon*, mentioned by Homer, *Iliad*, 6.166- 80, in Foley, *Homer's Traditional Art*, pp. 1-5.) Here are three short passages describing their request, its fulfillment, and their rejoicing over the success of the process. First comes their plea (12404-07): *Naraayini Naaraayina, father, we must now learn reading, writing, knowledge, wisdom, we must learn! Such a desire we have, father, father! Guru Marla then provides the necessary materials and sets the tutorial in motion (12411-13; 12416-17; 12421-22; 12429): Guru Marla had slates, books brought, see. He had bags, bags prepared. The children's bags he filled with books, slates... Taking the children for reading, writing to the gallery, to the writing hall,... In the gallery, in the writing hall The children now learn knowledge, wisdom... with reading, writing the children filled their bellies. Their education completed in an instant of narrative time, Abbaya and Daaraya happily celebrate their achievement (12444-49, italics added): we are, father, in four kingdoms, in four regions, in reading, writing, in knowledge, wisdom, in playing cenne, today, we are very skilful, skilful. Thus they say in four kingdoms, in four regions, father!* A traditional audience - and the reader attuned to the inimitable

contribution of the epic register and idiolect - will hear the formulaic echoes among these passages, a resonance that indexes each of them in a larger frame of reference. As in other oral epic traditions, for the native audience this resonance presumably stems primarily from a deep fluency in the traditional language and an understanding of Gopala Naika's personal use of it, and not simply from parallel instances within the linear expanse of a single performance-text. The twin girls ask for *reading, writing, knowledge, wisdom*, in short, and that is precisely what they receive and rejoice over once they have acquired it. But the art of Gopala Naika does not end with function and structure. In the third passage an added detail (italicised here) is appended to the formulaic description of their learning: a surpassing skill at playing cenne, a type of board game with pebble counters. At first sight this seems an innocent enough discrepancy, especially within a multiform medium whose lifeblood is variation within limits. But consider the fact that soon *Abbaya* and *Daaraya* will beg their doting father for a silver cenne-board with golden pebbles, and that his ready compliance - which entails special forging of precious metals by the smith *Ciinkrooji*

- will eventually lead to the twins' death via the intercession of a *poor Brahmin man* begging alms. In a fit of pique, and encouraged by the Brahmin, *Abbaya* uses the board to strike her sister on the head, fatally as it turns out; later she commits suicide by throwing herself into the same well where she disposed of *Daaraya's* corpse. These events are, however, not as final or disastrous as they first seem, (though the initial discovery that they are missing is indexed with the *Alas, what a sin! Alas, what a shame!* sign, 14092; 14106), since they allow the girls, who were never meant for this earth, to enter *maaya*, the other world (14047-52). In the end it is the telltale detail of expertise in cenne-playing, woven into the the otherwise entirely expectable tapestry of phrases documenting the girls'

learning, that signals their transformation-to-come. Gopala Naika has used the traditional medium to highlight that crucial detail, to put it into relief, to underline the modest-seeming discrepancy that forecasts the plot some 1,500 lines ahead. An oral epic in traditional and scholarly context. In summary, any scholar interested in the worldwide phenomenon of oral epic, from the manuscript-based narratives of the ancient and medieval worlds to the still extant traditions around the globe today, must be extraordinarily grateful to Lauri

When Siri dismisses her husband and wears another sari to the desire-feast, the reasonably well prepared reader cannot be surprised: in consorting with Harlot Siddu, Kaantu Puuñja has violated both his marital vow and the predictable pattern of the ritual. Cultural expectation and traditional referentiality are shattered by his actions. Such is the impact of wholesale reversal on the poetics of implication in the Siri Epic.

Honko and the Tulu-Finnish team for their efforts. Thanks to their imagination and sustained work, the Siri Epic comes to us embedded in both its own traditional context and a unique scholarly context. For those familiar with the Siri stories and ritual from an insider's point of view, this project offers an opportunity to study and share a remarkable heritage. For those who must adopt the outsider's perspective (surely the far greater percentage of those who read these three volumes), there exists an unprecedented opportunity to enlarge one's comparative vision. With this publication of the Siri Epic, specialists in oral-derived traditional narrative can juxtapose their theories of composition and reception, of phraseological and narrative multiformity, of the roles of individual and tradition to real, viable, meticulously documented analogues. Regardless of what our specialties may be, we owe a great deal to the research team, and not least to Gopala Naika himself, whose 1990 performance of the Siri Epic his fellow bard Homer might well have characterised heroically as *far the best of all things*.

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1. The term performance arena designates a virtual (rather than a geographical) space defined by the speech-act. Every time an oral traditional performance takes place, in other words, it occurs in what may be understood as *the same place*, in that the same or a similar context is summoned, the same or a similar form of the language is employed for communication, and therefore the same or a similar set of implications is active. See Foley, *The Singer of Tales in Performance* (Bloomington: IUP, 1995), pp. 47-49, 79-82.

2. I here focus on the Moslem epic because of its relative length, elaboration, and general *fit* in genre with the kind of narrative that Honko is studying. The Christian songs from this same area (sometimes from the same singer), while in certain cases treating the same or cognate stories, are typically much shorter (100-400 lines on average) and display different characteristics. See Foley, *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* (Bloomington: IUP, 1991), chaps. 3-4.



EXTEND A HELPING HAND

We the members of Melattur Bhagavata Mela Natya Vidya Sangam, sorry to bring to your kind notice that as we were about to commence the 36th year *Bhagavata Mela – Sri Lakshmi Narashimha Jayanthi* – the Divine Varshika Dance-Drama Mahotsav, there was a huge fire accident which gutted down the entire stage and costly equipment's kept ready for the function. The loss is heavy and estimated at Rs. 3 lacs.

As you may be aware Melattur is the centre for the *Bhagavata Mela*, which is a rare and unique style of dance and welcomed by all connoisseurs world over. Immediately after the calamity we went to the deity (at the Varadaraja perumal Temple) and prayed for his orders. We got his orders immediately that the function should be conducted at the very next auspicious occasion. We therefore, appeal to you to contribute liberally in view of the heavy loss, so that the function is conducted atleast at a modest scale. As the function is to be conducted at short notice, your contribution may be given by cash and those who are residing outside may send demand draft in favour of *Melattur Bhagavata Mela Natya Vidya Sangam*, payable at Thanjavur address to The President, Melattur Bhagavata Mela Natya Vidya Sangam, 17, North Street, Melattur- 614 301, Thanjavur Dist.



This is an appeal for donations towards keeping the Yakshagana Gombeyatta tradition alive. Please contribute in any way possible. Anyone who has seen a production of this group will realise the quality of these puppets, their manipulation and performance. Being a puppeteer anywhere in the world is not easy-and especially so for a young person who has the mammoth task of keeping his ancestors' tradition-a living tradition-alive even in the very area it comes from.

Please Help Bhaskar Kogga Kamath.

DADI PUDUMJEE

The Ganesh Yakshagana Gombeyata mandali of Upinakudru (Karnataka, in south India) is the best-known puppet theatre group in Karnataka. It has introduced the Yakshagana puppet theatre tradition to several foreign countries. The tradition was maintained and supported by the late Devanna Kamath (1888-1971) and continued by his son Kogga Kamath 1971 onwards. With Kogga Kamath's son Bhaskar Kamath the tradition has entered the third generation stage. The tradition had an earlier history when Denanna Kamath's ancestors used to practise it, but it was the late Devanna Kamath who revived it after a lapse of several years when the puppets had almost been forgotten. The puppet show resembles the traditional Yakshagana (Badagu tittu) style of the northern tradition, Karnataka, India.

String puppets of Kogga Kamath: Shri Ganesha Yakshagana Gombeyata is based on an ancient folk art. Three brothers, by name Laxman, Narasimha, and Manjappa Kamath, some three centuries ago founded it in a small village Uppinkuduru, Kundapur Taluk, Udupi district. Even today this house is

remembered as the house of Bhagavatas. But the marionette form is known as Kogga Kamath received the prestigious Tulasi Samman of the Madhya Pradesh government in 1995. Kogga Kamath's son, Bhaskar Kamath is a young creative artist now working as the spirit behind the art form. He authored a book on the complete history of the Uppina Kuduru Kamath's string puppet art. The troupe is able to give new and traditional performances by means of marionettes or string puppets in the Badagu thittu yakshagana style and also staged a performance in Konkani as well as in Kannada. The troupe has worldwide recognition and has travelled extensively in India and abroad.

Kogga Kamath's son Bhaskar Kamath works in a financial institution nearby for self-sustenance and attends to shows, training programmes after working hours (Kogga Kamath we hear is almost paralysed and cannot move). However, he has already purchased 20-cent land to build a little there for his puppets. He is looking for institutes/individuals who are willing to give financial support to promote this art form so that he can give up his job (which at present helps in supporting his family) and dedicate himself wholly to the art and training of puppetry. Estimate for constructing one storied building that would house a museum and library would be Rs.32,00,000 only. Please send you contributions to Bhaskar Kogga Kamath's postal address: Sri Ganesha Yakshagana Gombeyata mandali, Post Uppina Kuduru 576 230, Kundapur Taluk, Udupi District, Karnataka, India.

R e v i e w s

Semiotics of Yakshagana

Dr. Guru Rao Bapat

Udupi : Regional Resources Centre for Folk Performing Arts, 1998, Pp.304, Rs.120

Dr. Purushothama Bilimale is Deputy director (Research), Archives and Research Centre for Ethnomusicology, American Institute of Indian studies, New Delhi

Kedage mundasu in Badagutittu Yakshagana

Among the various forms of folk theatre in Karnataka, *Yakshagana* is the richest and most popular. It is deeply rooted in the districts of Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, Uttara Kannada, and Shimoga of Karnataka State and in the Kasaragod district of Kerala State. At present there are 32 professional and more than 700 amateur troupes performing *Yakshagana* between November and May every year. According to a survey conducted by me in the year 1996, there were more than 5000 performances in a year (Bilimale, 1997). There are more than 20000 artists actively involved in this tremendous theatre. More than five lakh people watch *Yakshagana* throughout the night in six months. There is approximately 14 crore rupees turnover in a year. This

statistics however not included another variation of *Yakshagana* called *Talamaddale* or *Koota*. As Martha and Christie pointed out, *With inexpensive light-weight materials, and incorporating natural or simple man-made products, Yakshagana artists create convincing effects of marked dramatic intensity, the equal of the world's most advanced theatre arts* (1977:71). I doubt if there are any other folk forms, which have such a huge following.

This great theatre is rapidly changing now. The professional troupes are now aimed at making money and thus organising on a commercial basis. New themes were introduced. *Tulu*, one of the Dravidian languages, is getting more popularity than Kannada. New experiments are being made in different aspects such as music, dance, text, costumes, stage, style etc., However, there are no serious studies about *Yakshagana*. True, Shivarama Karanta(1957), Chandrashekhara Kambara(1965,1972), D.K.Rajendra(1984), M. Prabhakara Joshi(1984, 1990), Amritha Someshwara(1978), Chinnappa Gowda(1990) and others have studied various aspects of this theatre. All these studies are descriptive and historical in nature. They do not treat *Yakshagana* as a performance. Although, as I mentioned earlier there are more than five thousand performances in a year, you cannot see a single review on them. More than that, whoever writes on *Yakshagana* always concentrates on the northern style of *Yakshagana* which is regionally called as *Badagu Tittu*. As an exception, Guru Rao Bapat in his latest book has taken a departure from such studies. He concentrated on to the southern style of *Yakshagana*, which is popularly known as *Tenku Tittu* and tried to *analyse the signficatory process of Yakshagana and its relation to the structure and ideology of the society in which this form of performance exists and communicates* (Page 5).

Bapat's study centers round the basic question of how meaning is generated and communicated in *Yakshagana*. Semiotics is his theoretical backdrop; which is very useful for the study of meaning systems and communicative processes. The signals of *Yakshagana* are both verbal and non-verbal. To analyse these he has looked in to the structure of the performance also. As we all generally know, the structure functions in a cultural context that is conditioned by social, political, economic and other constraints as such. For the understanding of this social context, Bapat leans towards performance theory that has emerged as 'one of the major modern approaches to the study of performance in folkloristics (Claus and Korom, 1991).

Bapat begins his study with a brief introduction to the theoretical approach used in this book. Then he makes an inquiry into the etymology and meaning of the term *Yakshagana*. A brief explanation has been given about the land, life, and culture of the people where *Yakshagana* has flourished. Then he focused his attention on the performances where he studied the performance text from the perspective of its structure and its convergence and divergence from the structure of the written text. His syntagmatic analysis unfolds the linear and temporal structure of the *Yakshagana* performance and his paradigmatic analysis unfolds the function and meaning of each unit. In syntagmatic analysis, he analyses the preliminaries before the performance (the musical interlude, rituals performed in the *cauki* etc.), preliminaries performed on the stage (*Balagopala, Strivesha, Oddolaga* etc.), the *prasanga* or episode and its performance, the oral conventions, performance text, the closing prayer, and the concluding prayer. Bapat has made a fascinating study of the *Kicaka Vadha* episode to show the difference between the written text and the performance text.

The second section of the chapter three deals with paradigmatic analysis of *Yakshagana*. Here he makes an extensive study of *Sabhalakshana*, *Oddolaga*, and the narratology of the episode (the influence of *Harikatha* etc.), the structure of the organisation (open air performance, commercial performance and contract system), condition of the artists and the structure of audience. The concept of space in *Yakshagana* is also discussed in detail. In the fourth chapter, Bapat analyses the communicative methods of *Yakshagana*. In *Yakshagana*, different channels of communication like dance, language, both written and improvised text, make-up, music, costume etc., are utilised. Each one of these are a different sign system and makes use of different signifiatory process. In the performance, all these disparate messages converge into one. Bapat's analysis explains us how do all these channels work together to create one unified message and a single aesthetic experience.

The symbolic significance of *Yakshagana* has been discussed and examined in chapter five. Decoding of symbols necessarily involves the task of interpretation. Sometimes the act of interpretation gives the impression of imposing the meaning on the cultural form.

According to Clifford Geertz, it is not imposing the meaning rather *gaining access to it* (1973). Bapat agrees with Geertz and tries to interpret the *Yakshagana* in relation to the social semantics of the society where *Yakshagana* has flourished. According to him, *Yakshagana always provides a sanction for a property owner, his position and power. The themes of Yakshagana were always about divine personages and so the sponsorship of the performance provides symbolically a divine sanction for the landlord or a rich person to continue his exercise of authority over the people. The rest of the audience, having witnessed the performance by the courtesy of the property owner,*

would unconsciously imbibe the message regarding the power and position of the patron (Page: 196). He also tried to find out the official and unofficial ideologies of *Yakshagana*.

This methodology and approach to the art forms sometime looks simple and traditional. In recent days, big industrialists, professors, property owners and other rich people watch *Yakshagana* regularly. Why it happens? Bapat's framework is unable to explain the current trends of this theatre.

If you see it carefully, many folk performances that are performed during night are opposed to the very principles and ethos of broad daylight. Just as night is opposed to day, even their values are contradictory to each other. In fact, it is through their contradiction itself that they protect their exclusive characters. One can notice that in the *Bhuta Worship* (which is also very popular in Coastal Karnataka) the whole value system is reversed. Here, in the nighttime performance, a man belonging to an *untouchable* community would become a deity and commands the rest of the villagers. The man, who is suppressed and exploited in the real day life, glorifies himself by becoming god and thus controls the property owners and upper castes. This is a temporary deliverance for the downtrodden. The landowning class and the *Brahminical* system may have accepted this temporary subjugation only because it is purely transitory and may not harm the daytime real life. *Siddavesha*, another night time performance of the same region records the rejection of the *Dasayya* and the *Brahmana*. There is also the rejection of *Vaishnava* and the priestly hegemony and traditions. Thus, it is the festive voice of the common person at night against the ruling class and their religious hegemony. However, this is not so in *Yakshagana*, which is always performed at night and advocates, the day time values. This art form

is heavily slanted towards royalty and *Brahmins*. In this sense *Yakshagana* is different from other performing folk arts, and is also opposed to the generally accepted principles of nature. Bapat has not raised such fundamental questions. This deficiency has prevented him from firmly establishing the uniqueness of this art form. Therefore, he has not been able to go deep into the social consequences of *Yakshagana*.

The interpretation of the masculine qualities of *Yakshagana* is also debatable. Bapat writes, *The most overt sign of the assertion of masculinity is perhaps the waist ornament of the male heroic characters. It is clear that this is an exaggerated iconic sign of the male genital organ* (Page 206). This statement of Bapat also sounds like an irony on the real essence of *Yakshagana*. If this argument is accepted, one might as well consider the headgear, jingle, weapons, and all such materials to be *genital organs*. More than that the basic question is who heeds this type of thinking? Neither the artistes nor the audience. If any critic or a researcher tries to impose this kind of meaning on the art form which does not mean much to the general public, such critique may not benefit anyone much. More over, such psychological approaches have, of late, become antiquated.

The sixth chapter deals extensively with the recent developments in the field of *Yakshagana*. Bapat discusses various issues like the organisational structure, emergence of commercial tent troupes, composition of new episodes, the new interpretations for old episodes, and the process of secularisation. Bapat's presentation in this context regarding the status of *Tulu Yakshagana* is very valuable. He gives a microscopic analysis of the choice of subject, the use of language, use of costumes, the differences found between various shows of the same episode and like. He boldly dwells

upon the caste related issues that are inherent in *Tulu Yakshagana* performances. According to him, *It was not a simple question of replacing one language with other (Tulu in the place of Kannada). Tulu Yakshagana became the vehicle of expression of the assertion of linguistics, ethnic and religious (of non-Brahminical) identity. The form of Yakshagana was retained but the discourse of traditional Yakshagana was rejected. The new Tulu prasangas were about the folk deities and heroes of Tulu culture (Page 239).* Such analysis tends to develop the healthy discussion of Yakshagana. Bapat has distinguished himself by taking up modern experiments in *Yakshagana* for evaluation while most others tend to talk only of the tradition of *Yakshagana*. This way Bapat leaves a distinct impression for his unique kind of treatment of the subject.

In this sense, the work of Bapat is a very valuable publication in the context of evaluation and reevaluation of *Yakshagana*. It is unique compared to the rest as he has viewed with equilibrium both traditional and modern *Yakshagana* forms.

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In Light Of India:

Octavio paz
Translated by Elist weinberger,
India: Harper Collins, Pp.210, Rs 150

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Living languages are hybrid and impure says Octavio Paz in his *In Light of India*. *India is an ethnographic and historical museum. But it is a living museum, one in which modernity coexists with anarchicisms that have survived for millennia...* says Paz. His poetic insights are fascinating. He says he confronted *unimaginable reality* when he landed in Bombay docks to work in the Mexican embassy. What does he do when he checks into the hotel? Just take a quick bath and take a long walk. Just listen to the sheer poetry

of his first images of India: *Waves of heat, huge gray and red buildings, a Victorian/London growing among palm trees and banyans like a /Recurrent nightmare, leprous walls, wide and beautiful - Avenues, huge unfamiliar trees, stinking alleyways/Torrents of cars, people coming and going, skeletal/ Cows with no owners, beggars, creaking cars drawn by Enervated oxen, rivers of bicycles, /...turning the corner, the apparition of a girl like a half /opened flower, /gusts of stench, decomposing matter, whiffs of pure/And fresh perfumes, /... The laughter of a young girl, slender as a lily stalk, a/Leper sitting under the statue of an eminent Parsi/In the doorway of a shack, watching everyone with/Indifference, an old man with a noble face, /... The gold and black grillwork of a luxurious villa with/a contemptuous inscription, EASY MONEY, more grilles....*

Paz goes on and in those simple and impressionistic words brings the essence of India to us readers. The sheer simplicity of what Paz says is breath taking...Let me begin with Paz's own words to describe his work *To read these poems is to experience clarity. Their language is complex but never confusing, their ideas are limited but bright and sharply delineated, and their forms are harmonious and rich. The poetry of ancient India contained an enormous richness of vocabulary, a complex syntax, the ability and flexibility to combine various words and ideas into a single word, much like German but with greater amplitude and complexity...* Paz brought home to me a bird's eye view of India's landscape, culture and history. Insights that are extraordinary, observations not coloured by passion of love or belonging but by sheer interest and dispassionate understanding and empathy.

In 1951, Octavio Paz, the Mexican poet who would win the Nobel Prize in 1990, was leading a romantic twentieth century artistic existence: Posted to his country's embassy in Paris, the minor diplomat and self-described *young barbarian poet* had

plenty of time to write and immerse himself in the artistic and philosophical milieu of the city's cafes and bars. And his superiors blessedly forgot him. The usual two-year call to transfer posts never came, as six wonderful years passed by. Then someone in the Foreign office lightly shuffled a file, and Paz found himself abruptly transferred to the New Mexican mission in India. His brief stay in this country (he was soon transferred again, to Tokyo) and his later stint as ambassador to India, from 1962 to 1968, formed the basis for a cultural relationship he explores in this book. It is a precise, learned and lucid series of essays.

Paz takes great pains to remind his readers that this book is not a memoir, *but rather an essay that attempts ... to answer a question that goes beyond personal anecdotes: How does a Mexican writer, at the end of the Twentieth Century, view the immense reality of India?* Paz's reflection is a subtle introduction, a sort of intellectual guidebook for any westerner or an Indian who even within his own culture has not seen it such encapsulated manner. He does this with a well-balanced examination of both the strange and the familiar, finding commonalities between Mexico and India in the everyday realm of food — the simple *chilli*, so crucial to both cuisines — and the more complicated arena of politics, where both India and Mexico have thrown off colonial rule and struggled to build a nation.

Paz saves his most heartfelt writing for Indian art, where the precision and feeling of a poet shine through in, for instance, descriptions of Hindu carvings: *Shiva smiles from a beyond where time is a small drifting cloud.*

This collection of essays remains a slightly removed construct, a well-paved passage to the mind of India; but lacks personal anecdotes and incidents that could have taken us into its immense heart.

On caste he has this to say, *This whole complex knot of relations turns around two other axes. The first is trade or profession and the other axis is territory, each caste is rooted in a certain place, whether a small village or a neighborhood in a metropolis. And place, ultimately implies language. In sum, this fabric of religious, economic, political, territorial, linguistic and familial relations gives castes their extraordinary solidity. Otherwise their survival for two thousand years would be inexplicable...*

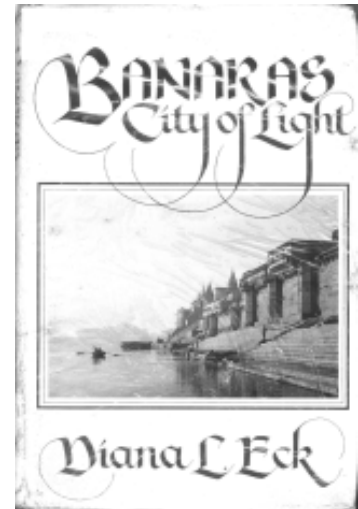
There is a controversial paragraph about the creation of the English class. Lord Macaulay, a young officer of the British Raj had stated that there was a need to *form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, opinions, morals and in intellect.* This class he added says Paz, would gradually extend modern knowledge to the great mass of the population!

Paz's comments about music is sensuous: *I heard it slipping into my room like a sinuous river, sometimes dark and sometimes sparkling. Ragas are soliloquies and meditations, passionate melodies that draw circles and triangles in a mental space, a geometry of sounds that can turn a room into a fountain, a spring, a pool....*

It is not by chance that India discovered Zero says Paz nor that it was seen simultaneously as a mathematical concept and a metaphysical reality... Every page has some extraordinary insight and some simple comments to make.

I could go on quoting Paz on Indian cuisine, language, art, religion etc but I guess just one phrase describing the poetry of Dharmakirithi is enough to describe the book *In light of India*

...It exchanges a wink of intelligence with the reader...



Banaras: City of Light

Diana L. Eck

*London: Routledge and Kegan Paul
1983, Pp.440, £ 14.95,*

ISBN 0 7100 94302

Mahalakshmi Jayaram is a freelance researcher based in Chennai working in the area of cultural studies.

In this detailed and minutely researched volume, Diana Eck shows how the sacred and immortal city of Kashi/Banaras has become a lens through which the Hindu vision of the world is precisely focused. Eck, Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies at Harvard University and Director of the Pluralism Project, is a scholar of the religious traditions of India. Besides the volume under review she has published *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* and *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras*. The latter is about inter-religious dialogue and the Christian faith in a world of many faiths.

In *The City of Light*, her first book, Eck explores the present city of Kashi/Varanasi/Banaras with the help of ancient Sanskrit texts – the *Kashi Khanda* and *Kashi Rahasya* – translated for the first time by Eck herself. In using these ancient texts as her guides to understand the sacred life and rhythms of modern day Banaras, the author goes

beyond a study of text and context to a study of *classical Sanskrit texts and the text of the city, brought together so that we may see this city and understand its sacred structure and meaning as it has been seen and understood by Hindus*. (Preface xiv) However, while these texts are her primary guides, Eck's vast knowledge and extensive research into Hindu religion and its sacred texts, interviews with the priests and scholars of Banaras and the lay people of the city provide the dense detail and matrix, which throws into relief her scholarly interpretations. Thus, through her account of the sacred history, geography and art of the city, its elaborate and thriving rituals and its importance to pilgrims and seekers, Eck uses her scholarship to make the Hindu tradition come alive. The book offers a fascinating framework to explore and interpret the cultures and folklore of present day cities. Seen thus, the present reflects and refracts a past, which it ignores at its peril. Such a framework assumes greater importance in the study of several Indian cities where past and present merge into a seamless whole in the daily processes of life. This merger is never more visible than in the sacred cities like Banaras, Haridwar, Madurai or Kanchipuram, where pilgrims and devotees follow paths laid down over aeons. While the sacred rituals of these devotees/pilgrims can and has been interpreted as a throwback, it also represents a perspective of the present as a part of a continuum that includes the past. It is this aspect that is extensively described in the present volume, interrogating the significance of Banaras to the life of its present day inhabitants and visitors.

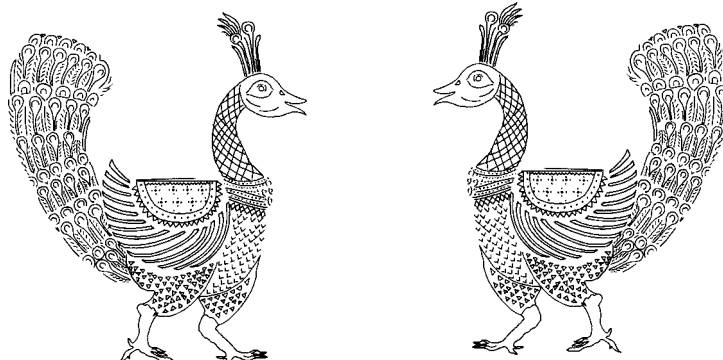
The sacred nature of the city with its myriad temples, shrines and other places of significance to the Hindu religious visitor or *tirthyatri* are set in detail in chapters that in turn explore the meaning of its various names, look at it as a region

sacred to Lord *Shiva*, as a city which also hosts several other gods of the Hindu pantheon such as *Vishnu*, *Ganesha* and the Goddess in her many manifestations as *Sheetala* and *Visalakshi*, the importance of the *Ganga*, as a place of special and seasonal pilgrimage, as a city of the good life and finally as a city of death and *moksha*. In following the entire gamut of human emotions and activities through the significance accorded them in religion and therefore, their place in the city of Banaras, Eck offers an interpretive framework that inextricably links religion and lived experience, both past and present. These links have been accepted as timeless, the *way things are done* for the average Hindu – the *samskaras* of birth and death, of devotion and expiation.

Eck's formidable scholarship however, provides an extra layer of meaning when she traces these rituals and the subtle changes through the centuries or their varied interpretations in different texts. The processes of liberation, *moksha*, virtually guaranteed by a death in Banaras is one such aspect explored at length which this reviewer found near metaphysical. As a participant observer in her study, Eck nevertheless confronts the essential Hindu-ness of Banaras and its consequent significance to the millions who throng its streets in the crucial analysis of death and its meaning in/to life. How does dying in Banaras liberate one from the endless circle of birth and death? If merely dying in the holy city

guarantees such liberation, what of justice – is the scoundrel, the Muslim and the Christian also part of this liberation? The interrogation of these questions point once again to the book's luminosity as well as her ability to link present experience to myth and tradition and to explore the disjuncture in ritual explanations.

Though more than a decade old, *Banaras: City of Light* still remains a seminal work of interpretation, both in its scholarship and framework. However, the passage of time highlights certain shortcomings in the book that are glaring in the present politico-religious climate. While one cannot hold Eck responsible for these conditions, it becomes painfully obvious that her focus on Banaras as a specifically Hindu city leaves little room to explore the positive, syncretic aspects of its contact with Muslims and Christians such as its exquisite silk weaving or brassware. The repeated mention of temples destroyed by various Mughal rulers and the construction of mosques in their place, while perhaps historically accurate, is sure to trigger sentiments of base revenge today. Indeed, in the library volume under review, such sections had been underlined and marked out by previous readers, with remarks in the margins. While it is unfortunate that such fine scholarship can be co-opted for the most regressive causes, it should serve as a cautionary tale for scholars in the field.



O n t h e s h e l f

Exhibiting Gender

by Sarah Hyde

Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997, pp. 180,
£ 17.99 ISBN 0 7190 4243 7



Exhibiting gender examines the ways in which women's art and representations of women are collected and

presented in museums and art galleries today. It presents readers with full colour reproductions of pairs of unidentified works, one by a man and one by a woman, and asks, *Can you tell which is the woman's work?* Readers are encouraged to examine their own expectations of, and preconceptions about, art by women, and the ways in which women are represented in art; the text will reveal both the answer and a further discussion of the issues raised.

India Disasters Report: Towards a Policy Initiative

edited by S. Parasuraman, New Delhi: Oxford, 2000, pp. 394, Rs 345, ISBN 0 19 565 0298



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The *India Disasters Report* provides a complete and comprehensive profile of disasters in the Indian subcontinent within the larger context of the globalisation of the world economy. The report contains detailed chapters on disasters, which are broadly classified as natural, human-made, and others. It shows that significant advances in health and social and economic development have been repeatedly interrupted and reversed by disasters.



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Critical Vehicles: Writings, Projects, Interviews

by Krzysztof Wodiczko

Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998, pp. 100, \$30, ISBN 0 262 73122 3

Krzysztof Wodiczko, one of the most original avant-garde artists of our time, is perhaps best known for the politically charged images he has projected onto buildings and monuments from New York to Warsaw—images of rockets projected onto triumphal arches, the image of handcuffed wrists projected onto a courthouse façade, images of homeless people in bandages and wheelchairs projected onto statues in a park from which they had been evicted.

In projects such as the *Homeless Vehicle*, which he designed through discussions with homeless people, Wodiczko has helped to make public space a place where marginalised people can speak, establish their presence, and assert their rights.



Metamorphoses of Indian Gods

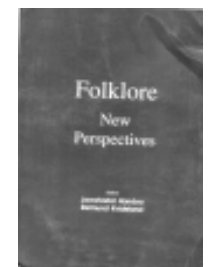
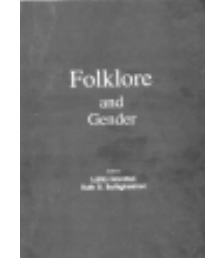
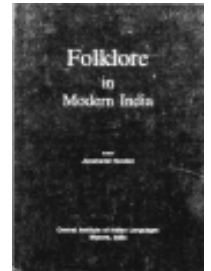
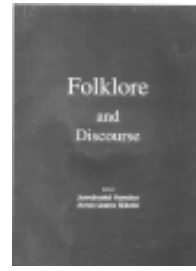
by Marta Jakimowicz-Shah

Calcutta: Seagull books, pp. 195, Rs 300, ISBN 81 7046 029 8

Painted in gouache on hand-made paper before the middle of the eighteenth century somewhere in the present State of Andhra, the paintings cover the major Hindu pantheon, and some of the local divinities, often breaking into narrative sequences.



Marta Jakomiwicz-Shah, Indologist and art historian, reproduces almost all of these paintings, about a quarter of them in colour, with elaborate annotations, and a scholarly introduction underlining the characteristics of this little-known school of art and the setting that produced these paintings. The paintings are the product of a mature tradition and a highly sophisticated style that draws on several conventions, folk, Mughal, and old Vijayanagar included.



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**FOLKLORE FELLOWS' SUMMER SCHOOL 2001 - MEMORY, RECOLLECTION AND CREATIVITY
THE VI INTERNATIONAL TRAINING COURSE FOR THE STUDY OF FOLKLORE AND TRADITIONAL CULTURE**

The sixth international training course for the study of folklore and traditional culture, the Folklore Fellows' Summer School, will be held on August 1-14, 2001 at the Lammi Research Station of the University of Helsinki. The course will provide training in theory and methodology of folklore studies and is intended for scholars, doctoral students, university teachers and archivists in folklore institutions and elsewhere. The general topic of the Folklore Fellows' Summer School 2001 is : *MEMORY, RECOLLECTION AND CREATIVITY*. The main theme refers to the significance of folklore as the art of memory, its recollection and reinvention in performance. Contemporary cultural processes emphasise the importance of research on cultural diversity and creativity in all parts of the world. The continuity of traditions, cultural practices and values, and the traditional poetic languages are still of interest, but numerous transitions are taking place in the world at the same time, in most cases due to the emergence of new economic and political regimes. This also involves rapid advances in intercultural communication, especially in the changing environments of multilingual and multicultural processes. In addition to lectures focusing on the theory and methods of folklore studies, the summer school will concentrate on the means and substance provided by folklore for the evaluation and transmission of individual and common experiences. Special attention will be paid to the creation of the self and the inventiveness of tradition in the shifting contexts of multicultural and multilingual localities. Discussion of these questions leads to the problems of responsibility and ethics in folklore studies.

One further topic for discussion is the cultural division of labour. This concept underlines the systematic differences in competence and uses of folklore in society. The programme also includes a visit to the Folklore Archive of the Finnish Literature Society, the main folklore archive in Finland, for an introduction to new forms of documentation and taxonomy. As in previous years, the recruitment for the course will be global. There will be 30 participants, divided into four groups according to interests, 8-10 lecturers and 4 group leaders. The work in groups will be intensive, consisting of discussions, exercises and a group report. The course is open to both established and younger scholars, including persons who are writing their doctoral dissertations. All participants will receive a course certificate and associate membership of the Folklore Fellows. This will allow them to follow future developments in scholarly training and to hear about publications, etc. In other words, the contacts between FFSS and participants will continue after the course. The participation fee is USD 500, including board and lodging at Lammi. Participants may in limited cases apply for travel grants if unable to secure support in their home country. The teaching language will be English. The deadline for applications on the form given below is October 31, 2000. Applications should be sent to: Folklore Fellows' Summer School, Department of Folklore, P.O. Box 59, FIN-00014 Helsinki University, Finland, telefax (intl.) 358-9-19122970, Anna-Leena Siikala, Academy Professor FFSS 2001, Chair — Lauri Harvilahti, Professor FFSS 2001, Secretary General

FOLKLORE FELLOWS' SUMMER SCHOOL 2001 APPLICATION FORM - Secretary General: phone 358-9-19124312, e-mail lauri.harvilahti@helsinki.fi, Course Secretary: phone 358-9-1917828, e-mail pauliina.latvala@helsinki.fi, Telefax number (intl.) 358-9-19122970

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NB: On a separate sheet write about 200 words in English on the subject "Why am I interested in participating in this scholarly training course?" and send it with your application.

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Indian Folklore Research Journal



Periodicity -Annual (January every year)

150 Pages

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Please send articles (not more than 5000 words) in a double spaced (A4 size), single-sided typescript or Microsoft word 95. The articles should be original, unpublished and not submitted for publication elsewhere. The copyright in any form of the article shall rest with the publisher, if it is accepted. References and footnotes should be included at the end of the file or typescript. Also it can be e-mailed to Associate Editor at venu@indianfolklore.org. Articles should confirm to the latest edition of *MLA style manual*. Line drawings or illustrations should be provided in camera-ready form. It could be either at 100% or 50%. For figures the maximum display area is 4.5"x7.25". For more information write to: M.D. Muthukumaraswamy, Editor, IFRJ, National Folklore Support Centre, No.65, Fifth Cross Street, Rajalakshmi Nagar, Velachery, Chennai-600 042. E-mail: muthu@indianfolklore.org or muthu@md2.vsnl.net.in.

We welcome Articles, Field work oriented reports, Research reports, Inter -disciplinary studies and Book reviews.

Closing date for submission of articles for January 2001 is November 15, 2000.

A n n o u n c e m e n t s

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CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

National Folklore Support Centre (NFSC) calls for full-length, completed manuscripts in the area *Identity and Oral Narratives in India*. Related sub-themes would include: Formation of gender identities • Caste myths • Oral narratives of diaspora • Narratives of displacement and migration • Narratives of self and other.

Research based on fieldwork will be accorded priority. NFSC proposes to publish selected manuscripts either in-house or in collaboration with leading publishers. Applicants are requested to send in an abstract of their work (maximum length: six double space typed pages) along with a curriculum vitae and a letter of interest. All Correspondence should be addressed to: *Publications Officer, NFSC, 65, Fifth Cross Street, Rajalakshmi Nagar, Chennai-600 042.*

Closing date: 15 October 2000

TWO RESEARCH FELLOWSHIPS

An exciting fellowship opportunity exists for a person having a doctoral degree in folklore or related social science subject or excellent published work ; you have the ability to analyse and communicate subtle issues succinctly and effectively both orally and in writing. Proven ability to do independent fieldwork research is essential. An understanding or experience of Indian folk tradition would be an advantage. Selected scholars will be paid a monthly stipend of

Rs.7500/- for a period of two years apart from the travel reimbursement which is according to the centre's rules. The awardees need to travel extensively for fieldwork research and solely responsible for developing the integrated research model which can be replicated fruitfully. They will have access to centre's collection. Please send your curriculum vitae along with a note, why you think you are the right candidate. All Correspondence should be addressed to: *Director, NFSC, 65, Fifth Cross Street, Rajalakshmi Nagar, Chennai-600 042.*

Closing date: 31 October 2000

INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME

A whole new way of working for those who have Master's degree or equivalent. NFSC internship in folklore is now accepting applications for the annual internship programme through August 2000. Interviews for final select candidates will be held in Chennai in early September. Candidate should submit a resume, a one-page statement of personal goals, and anticipated benefits of the internship and one letter of recommendation. The selected interns will begin their work in mid-October. The NFSC internship offers a unique working experience to young enthusiasts. A small monthly stipend is provided in addition to travel expenses. To submit an application or further information, contact: *Administrative Officer, NFSC, 65, Fifth Cross Street, Rajalakshmi Nagar, Chennai-600 042.*

Closing date: 31 August 2000