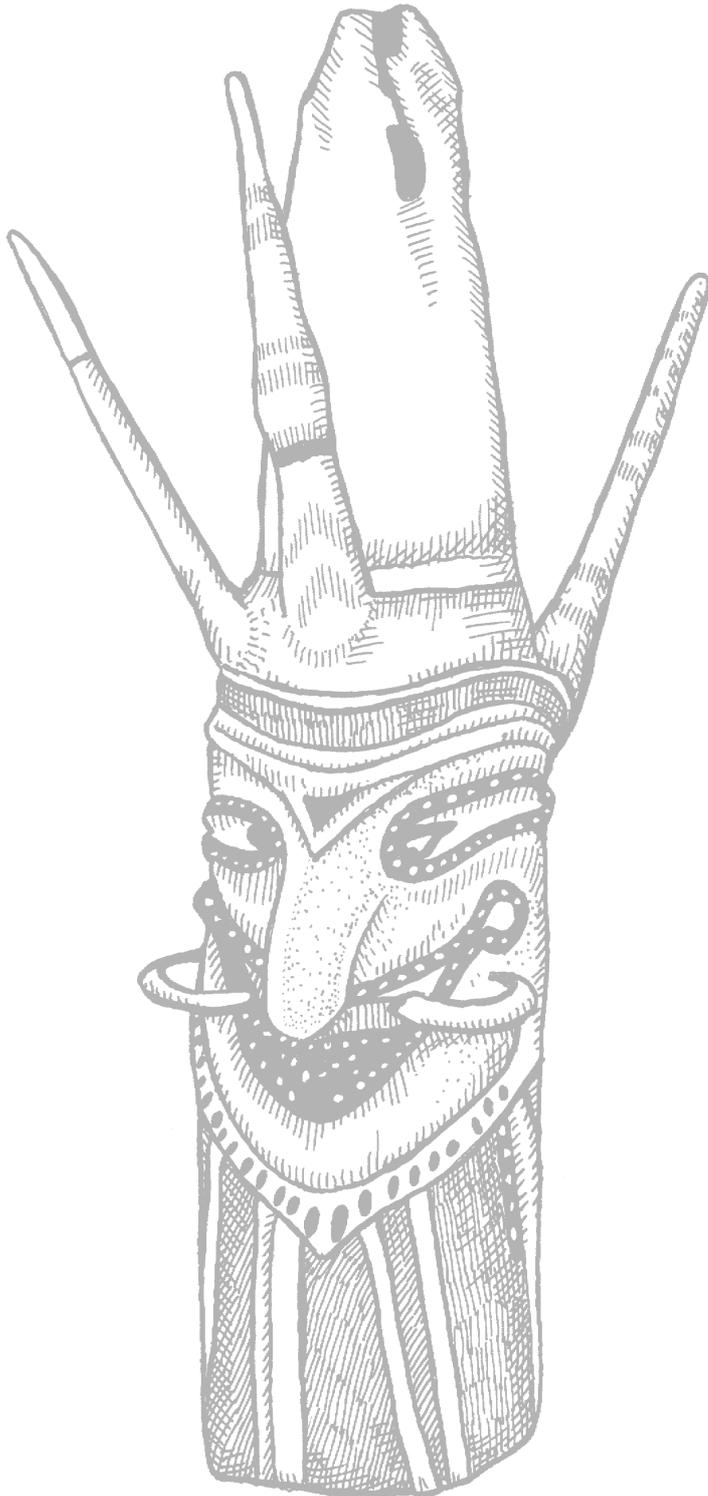


A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM NATIONAL FOLKLORE SUPPORT CENTRE

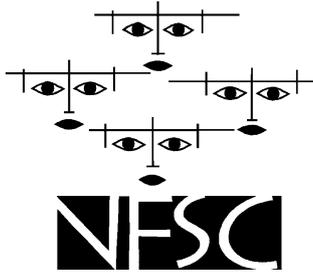
# INDIAN FOLK L I F E

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 1 APRIL 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. 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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We invite submissions of articles, illustrations, reports, reviews offering historical, fieldwork oriented, articles in English on works in other languages, multi-disciplinary and cultural approaches to folklore. Articles should conform to the latest edition of *MLA style manual*. In this issue, we have initiated discussion on syncretic processes of folklore through a wide variety of topics.

We believe these research notes will help us to articulate visions and philosophies on which NFSC can ground it and find guiding principles for the conduct of programmes. Moreover, these notes will change the popular misconceptions that folklore is casteist, non-changing thing of the past and non-accommodative in relation to other traditions. The theme of the July issue of our newsletter is *City Landscapes and Folklore*. The closing date for submission of articles for July issue is 30 May, 2000. All Communications should be addressed to:

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## Editor's Page

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M.D.Muthukumaraswamy

### LET US BREAK THE LINES

**The** term *folklore* provokes bewilderment when it is introduced as a disciplinary intrusion inside the realm of the philosophic that constructs the notions of and discourses on creativity, knowledge, culture, history, self and other. However, the renewed emphasis on the empirical and the anthropological in the humanities that are haunted by figures loosely termed as *folks* has come to recognise that it is no longer an intrusion but an order. Reign, I would say, reflecting over the range of disciplines and varieties of engagements folklore has been able to attract. Whether it is postcolonial studies or search for alternative health care, whether it is new aesthetics or rampage of globalisation, whether it is memory or identity, resources, subjects and theory would be impossible without folklore. Existential tools they are, folklore demand as many engagements as human life would demand. Tales and proverbs help us to negotiate real life situations. Rituals and jocular lore mediate rites of passage for us. Riddles and tongue twisters teach us that meaning is a product of differences. Legends and games usher us into the values of social jungles. Craft traditions offer instances of aesthetic impulses fuelling human will towards existential assertions even at the face of extreme circumstances. Folk speech, food and music create our sensorial taste buds, which we mistake for our identity. Ballads and oral epics provide enveloping narratives to our micro history. Myths and folk performing arts, of course, critique discourses of practical reason such as mine enumerated in the foregoing lines. If logic of a culture were to have textual boundaries, every instance of its discursive economy is a folk genre. In that case, folklore must have been in the centrespread of societal texts but we often encounter them as condescending footnotes to muddy pages of classicalism. In an era of academic radicalism where margins are sacred and centerfolds are ignorable, I plead for equitable cultural space for folklore that need not be justified as voices or voicelessness of subaltern.

My plea, no way, undermines the improvement in democratic prospects brought in by academic politics of subaltern studies. What I plead against is the artificial self-marginalisation that dovetailed such reasoning. An intense degree of self-reflexivity that would have pleased St. Loyola has come to mark our engagements with folklore and *anthropological subjects* so that we are compelled either to identify ourselves with *subjects* or to assert our freshly marginalised self.

The simulated distancing of folklorists from folk has resulted in viewing folklore research as a mere design for ethnographic aptitude and forcing the innocent and sensitive alike to produce moral speeches of guilt and responsibility. Such morals, positively, may initiate and produce projects within the development sector but they do lose sight of the fact that folklore as discipline is concerned with ethics of highest order, Ethics of Change. Let me cite a few examples: When Stuart Blackburn concludes that texts of Tamil bow song traditions have controlling power over the conduct of the performances and When Phillip B. Zarrilli says innovation occurs only in the periphery of Kathakali repertoire and complex—they are offering commentaries on specific societal attitudes towards change. In the same vein N. Muthuswamy's article in this newsletter offers different dimension to traditional actor's openness towards outside influences. Compilations of such commentaries are essential for charting, speculating and debating ethics of change in this country. If managing change is part of everyday creativity and making of livelihood and history, then folklore is the name for such process. If ethical enquiry of change falls within the realm of artistic then folklore is primarily an artistic discipline. Literary theory its resource, sociology its subject, ethnography its method, history and politics are its beneficiaries and so folklore is the new found domain of philosophy. If this is called desacralisation of rules of a discipline, then let us break the lines for the sake of understanding specific situations, specific decisions and specific dilemmas of Indian life.

And this is what NFSC is all about. This infant institution is a place for innovation and creativity. By its very existence NFSC strives to provide space for all positive energies to meet and enlighten folklore process in this country. With these fundamentals in our minds, the Centre's institutional engagement with folklore would be using all of its programmes to think through variety of issues relevant to this field. The theme of this issue of our newsletter *syncretism* is a case in point. How traditions, cultures, languages and practices freely mingle and leave traces for contemporary minds to articulate and review their own creative processes is an appealing vista for folklore research. From the bottom of my heart, I thank all the authors for contributing to this valuable beginning. I hope the thread of this argument will continue with your responses.

The forthcoming Shillong workshop in May is yet another case of NFSC's attempt to share our opportunities for reflection on folklore issues with a larger constituency of folklore scholars all over India. Collaborating with North Eastern Hill university, Shillong, NFSC is conducting a fifteen days workshop



on the theme *From fieldwork to public domain* from May 1-15, 2000. This workshop is envisioned as a serious academic opportunity and an advanced learning situation for mid career Indian folklorists to interact and network with while reflecting over newer currents and approaches in folklore theory and practice observed in different parts of India and elsewhere in the world. Dr Alan Jabbour, former Director and Senior Advisor, American Folklife Center, Washington DC, Dr Mary Hufford, Folklife specialist, American Folklife Center, Washington DC, Sri Komal Kothari, Chairman, NFSC and Director, Rupayan Sansthan, Rajasthani Institute of folklore, Jodhpur, Rajasthan and Dr Soumen Sen, former Director, Programme of Folklore Research and Archive, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong have consented to be the core faculty for the workshop. Trustees of NFSC, Jyothindra Jain, Birendranath Datta, Ashoke Chatterjee, Deborah Thiyagarajan and N. Bhakthavathsala Reddy have agreed to give lectures in the workshop. The choice of Shillong for this workshop emerged from NFSC's commitment towards providing opportunities for Indian folklore scholars to study relatively unknown parts of India. We look forward to reporting thoughts and practices discussed in the workshop in subsequent issues of this newsletter. Publication wing of NFSC plans to bring out two books a year and a multi-disciplinary scholarly journal in English. Public programming section plans to conduct informative monthly events on visual, musical and theatrical traditions of India with the aim of finding, educating and cultivating student audiences towards the values of folklore. Data banks on folklore scholars, institutions and publications available with NFSC have already proved to be of valuable help at least on two occasions; once when Dr Peter Claus asked me to suggest names of scholars whom he could approach for contributions for *Encyclopedia of South Asian Folklore*, I could browse through our databank and come up with suggestions. Another occasion was when Sri Siddarth Kak asked me to suggest names of scholars who would assist his team in fieldwork situations for making the television serial *Folk wisdom of India*. The information resources are growing and soon we would be able to share all of that in our efforts to promote folklore. Our research division has announced two fellowships for developing research models in folklore that would integrate developmental issues in fieldwork methods and readers can see the details elsewhere in this newsletter. Networking and public relations arm of NFSC is preparing its olive branches and soon we will hear about exciting collaborations. Our website [www.indianfolklore.org](http://www.indianfolklore.org) is still under construction and we plan to embed the issues of this newsletter on-line. A small reference library is growing at the Centre. We plan to initiate collection, documentation and translations of leading

to books, CD Roms and exhibitions. Preparations of tale type and motif indices for India remain one of the dreams we hope to realise in the years to come. We are open to collaborations and we welcome suggestions from individuals and institutions. All these would not have been possible without the generous grant from the Ford Foundation and I would like to express my profound gratitude to Dr Gowher Rizvi, Representative, Ms Sharada Ramanathan, Programme Officer, Ford Foundation, New Delhi for making this happen. Many officials at the Ford Foundation's New Delhi office have helped me in variety of ways to realise this institution and my thanks are also due to them. I gratefully recall opportunities I got to make presentations before the President of the Ford Foundation, Ms Susan Bressford, the Vice President, Dr Alison Bernstein and subsequently the trustees of the Ford Foundation as the occasions helped me to sharpen the goals of NFSC. Mr Naveen Kishore, Seagull Foundation for the Arts, Calcutta who initiated NFSC trust as settlor and Mr P Subramaniam, Centre for Development Research and Training, Chennai who guided me through the administrative procedures of establishing an institution deserve special thanks. Mr Anmol Vellani, Executive Director, India Foundation for the Arts, Bangalore, Ms Veenapani Chawla, Adishakthi Laboratory for Theatre Research, Pondicherry and Mr N Muthuswamy, Koothu-pattarai, Chennai have solidly stood behind me during all sorts of crises and troubles and I am permanently grateful to them.

My friends, Painter and artist Mr M Natesh, sculptor, Mr Shyam Kumar, Tamil film director, Mr K Rajeshwer, folklorist Mr S A Samy, Tamil writers, Mr Vikramathithyan Nambi, Mr Prem, Mr Ramesh, Mr Nagarjunan, Mr Charu Nivedita, Mr T Kannan, Mr Gouthama Siddharthan, Mr Gopikrishnan, Mr Mohammad Safi, film makers JD Jerry and Ravi, theatre director Mr Praveen and lawyer Mr T R Sivasubramaniam have helped me in various ways in establishing this organisation. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the valuable help I have received from them one-way or other.

I have an enviable support of distinguished board of trustees and wonderful new colleagues. All of them join me in thanking Professor K.S. Haridasa Bhat, Director, Regional Resource Centre for folk performing arts, M.G.M. College, Udupi for providing us a loan to tide over a period of crisis.



## Innovations INTERVENTION

Na.Muthuswamy is a playwright and founder of member Koothu-p-pattarai, Chennai.

Translated from Tamil by Dr K. Srilata

**The** purpose of this essay is to describe how Koothu-p-pattarai intervened in the *Theru-k-koothu* form and in what ways the form has benefited from such interventions. In 1976 we watched Natesa Thambiran and Kannappa Thambiran's troupe perform a *Koothu* in Chennai at the Kalaivanar Arangam. At that time, I was staying at a place on Wallajah road just across the Arangam. We noticed a poster announcement of a *Theru-k-koothu* performance by Natesa Thambiran. The performance was organised by the Iyal Isai Nataka Mandram. Seven of us - my wife, Ramakrishnan, Jaya who was one of the founders of Cre-A, painter Krishnamurthy, his sister, Veerasamy and I - watched the performance of *Karna Moksham*. The programme left us with the feeling that *Theru-k-koothu* was Tamil theatre. After the performance, we went backstage to meet Natesa Thambiran and Kannappa Thambiran. Kannappa Thambiran who had played the role of Karna, showed great enthusiasm in conversing with us. We got along very well. Later that year when we set up a theatre group, Veerasamy named it as Koothu-p-pattarai.

Kannappa Thambiran's eldest son Kasi had left his native place and come to Chennai in search of a job. Kasi's younger brother Sambandan followed suit. We sent Sambandan back to Purisai asking him to stay on in his native place. We took up the responsibility of providing for him. However, we did not want him to remain a mere *Theru-k-koothu* artiste. If he were to understand the greatness of the art form he had inherited, he had to be introduced to other theatrical traditions.

Therefore he was given a place in each of Koothu-p-pattarai's workshops. Other *Koothu* artistes were also involved in these workshops. The give and take between Purisai Duraisamy Kannappa Thambiran's *Theru-k-koothu* troupe and Koothu-p-pattarai continued.

Sambandan was also sent to Dhananjayan in order that he gain an insight into the refinement of *Koothu adavus* (steps) and Bharatanatyam. This was meant merely to serve as an introduction. In 1978, the National School of Drama and the Gandhigram Rural University jointly organised a seventy-day long theatre workshop in Gandhigram. Since we thought the workshop would be in English, we were not sure whether Sambandan could participate at all. Our friend Ramanujam was working in Gandhigram. Sankara Pillai was also a friend of ours. By the time the workshop drew to a close, we also got to know Bansi Kaul. When we asked Ramanujam whether or not to we could send Sambandan, he told us to go ahead and send him. He also informed us that Sankara Pillai was happy with this decision.

Bharatiar's *Panchali Sabatham-Pinam Thinnum Sathirangal*-was produced in that workshop. Bansi Kaul had borrowed *Theru-k-koothu* methods and ideas from Sambandan for this play. During this process, Sambandan became well versed in adapting a traditional form to suit the contemporary context. This experience proved useful when he was involved in an all-night performance of *Panchali Sabatham* staged as part of Bharatiar's centenary celebrations. For the first time, *Theru-k-koothu* acquired a new text. The songs in Bharatiar's *Panchali Sabatham* were adapted to suit the styles of the traditional *Koothu*, *Draupadi Vastrabharanam*. It seemed as though Bharatiar's work was written specifically to suit the *Koothu* form. The theatrical

S Y N C R E T I S M  
experience gained by Sambandan led to some changes in the scene in *Draupadi Tugil*, which depicts Dushashana disrobing Draupadi. I have watched Natesa Thambiran play the role of Dushashana. Great artiste that he is, he has acted according to the dictates of his innermost spirit. Sambandan transformed that particular section wonderfully into a great theatrical image. He had also given a specific structure to the rituals associated with it. Generally, we observe that the structure, which surrounds rituals at the beginning, breaks later. Both in *Theru-k-koothu* as well as in *Bhagavathamela*, there is much possessive energy generated at the time when Narasimhan kills Hiranyan. Therefore, the scene is left incomplete. There is some beauty in this. However, the actor should make creative use of the passion generated during the scene. Sambandan was a past master at this. Sometimes, he would also faint in the manner of a traditional *Theru-k-koothu* artiste. In those days, we used to think it was mere pretense on his part.

When we went to Thrissur to watch *kudiyattam*, we took Sambandan along with us. Sambandan therefore knew that both in *Koothu* as well as in *Kudiyattam*, the narrative would often move back in time. Sambandan and Kannappa Thambiran were thus in touch with developments outside.

When Kannappa Thambiran's relative Arumugam completed his studies and came to Chennai, we sent him to the Thrissur School of Drama. This school, which had Sankara Pillai as its Director and Ramanujam as its Assistant Director, had some excellent faculty. People like G Venu, Krishnan Namboodari were on the faculty. Krishnan Namboodari had worked with Grotovski. Trained in Kathakali, he had the capacity to train modern actors. Arumugam learnt a great deal about Kerala's traditional arts during the time he spent at Thrissur.



Since Arumugam hailed from the *Theru-k-koothu* tradition, Sankara Pillai reposed great confidence in him. In those days, Kasi and Sambandan were regular visitors to Thrissur. Our friend S.S Rajagopalan was also based in Thrissur. Ramanjum had always displayed interest in our activities. All these factors proved helpful to Arumugam. It also helped those who went to visit him. When Koothu-p-pattarai received a grant from the Ford Foundation, we recorded *Theru-k-koothu*'s steps and rhythms on video. Arumugam undertook this work. This was the first time such a thing had been done. It was then that it became clear to us just how many steps and rhythms were used in *Koothu*. It is not in the least bit surprising that we became more adept and skillful. Instead of merely jumping around as we used to, we began to use proper steps. Initially, Arumugam danced with Koothu artistes.

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Knowingly or unknowingly, rituals really affect a *Koothu* artiste's abilities. Kannappa Thambiran's troupe was liberated from this right at the beginning. This was a major contradiction. For the recording, Kannappa Thambiran had performed the scene, killing of Hiranyan. It was only much later that the skillfulness of the performance began to affect the rest of his troupe. I still remember what he had to say at that point - that rituals had a certain elegance but that one developed a habit of looking down on them. Kannappa Thambiran was very keen on resurrecting features of *Koothu* which had been lost.

It was easy for us to get in touch with Kasi. He works in the postal department. As a resident of Wallajah road, I was able to board a bus right outside my house and reach Kasi's house. Kasi was then staying near the Murugan temple at Vadapalani. One night Kasi, Kannappa Thambiran and I went to watch a performance that was held

behind the Vadapalani temple. During that performance, Duryodhana looks at the *kattiakaran* (the narrator/the herald) and asks him to fetch Sakuni mama. The *kattiakaran* immediately removes his headgear, places it between his legs, and pretending as if it is his horse, begins to move keeping it between two legs. This particular action was later incorporated into the performances by Kannappa Thambiran's troupe. It has also been incorporated into Koothu-p pattarai's street plays.

Amaldas of Ulundurpettai wanted to use the *Theru-k-koothu* form to promote and facilitate social development. He therefore invited *Koothu* troupes from South Arcot district and conducted two workshops at Vizhupuram and Cuddalore. The Ganesha idol crafted at one of these workshops has become very popular now. All troupes use the trunk of Ganesha. But none of them actually makes idols of Ganesha. During *Koothu* performances at Thanjavur for instance, two children are made to sit in as Ganesha. Out here, the *kattiakaran* also takes on the role of Ganesha. A piece of cloth borrowed from someone makes up his trunk and he is made to stand with the palm of his hand facing the audience, in the manner of a God. The Ganesha idol that was sculpted during the workshops conducted by Amaldas is popularly used by Kannappa Thambiran's troupe.

Kannappa Thambiran had been eager to experiment with different forms since his youth. Following some differences of opinion with Natesa Thambiran, he had formed his own troupe and begun staging performances. This experience proved useful to us later when we began to include new stories in our *Koothu* performances. This involved the use of new tunes. In order to adapt steps borrowed from drama to suit the *Koothu* form, new songs were composed.

Kannappa Thambiran would complain that Sambandan was not learning fast enough. How could Sambandan have the kind of experience that Kannappa Thambiran had had in his youth? Sambandan, however, had managed to learn the intricacies of *Koothu*. He had had the required exposure.

Richard Frasca's research on *Theru-k-koothu* was undertaken with help from Kannappa Thambiran's troupe. It was Sambandan who used to take him to different performances. Frasca experienced the styles of different troupes. Veerasamy and I had introduced Kannappa Thambiran to Frasca. At that point, Frasca was staying in Hotel Maris. Later, he began to stay with Kannappa Thambiran and recorded all *Theru-k-koothu* performances. This was the first time that such a thing had been done. Songs, which had not been clear before suddenly acquired a new clarity. It became necessary to pay attention to the structure of *Theru-k-koothu*. Unfortunately, owing to a misunderstanding that arose between Kannappa Thambiran's troupe and Frasca, Thambiran's role in Frasca's thesis went unacknowledged. Perhaps Frasca felt that since Kannappa Thambiran had been compensated financially, he did not have to feel grateful to the latter.

Exposure and a natural inclination had helped Kannappa Thambiran. The battle scenes in Kathakali and *Kudiyattam* might have enriched scenes in *Theru-k-koothu*. Maybe the battle scenes depicted in the temple sculptures we had recorded on film helped as well. These sculptures were used even when Arumugam conducted a training programme in bodybuilding for contemporary actors with the help of a grant from the Ford Foundation. The sculptures, which we had filmed, were from our Punjai temple. The temple itself had been built by Raja Raja Chola's elder brother

Adithya Karikalan. It was constructed earlier to the Thanjavur temple. It seemed to me that the two *munnadiyans* (guards) in front of our Ayyanar temple resembled the characters of *Koothu*. Kasi had heard from the elders of Punjai that senior *Koothu* artistes from the village had enacted the story of Prahalada. We went in search of Narasimhan's mask. Was it possible that these impulses would not be reflected in Purisai's *Koothu*?

Kasi and I select suitable stories for new *Koothu* performances. Before selecting the story of the slaying of Vali, we had watched Madhavachakaiyar's play based on the same story. Sambandan had watched it as well. Would our performance remain unaffected by Madhavachakaiyar's play? The idea of getting the character of Hanuman to sing and dance from behind the branch of a tree was borrowed from Kathakali. In a Kathakali performance which Govindan and I went to watch Hanuman dances from behind the branch of a tree. Since a senior Kathakali artiste played the role of Hanuman in *Lava Kusa*, the character of Hanuman dominated the play. However, the performance was excellent.

One was able to witness Sambandan's growth at a recent workshop. We had conducted a *Kattiakaran* workshop at Cheyyar for the Centre for Development Research and Training. *Kattiakarans* from seven troupes participated in the workshop. Sambandan enacted a scene from *Rajasuyayagam* in which Jarasandhan's birth is depicted. Two pregnant women, two *kattiakarans* and a midwife are present on stage. This scene, which was wonderfully presented, has a clear beginning, a middle and an end.

Nothing about the performance was uninteresting. The dialogues of Munusami who played the roles of *kattiakaran* and Thathi were wonderful. The performance might have been influenced by the Thanjavur styles of *Narthevan*

*Kudikadu* and *Arusuthippattu*. Prahalada's birth has been depicted wonderfully in these styles.

The performance by Aakkur's troupe was also very accurate and clear. Arumugam is working with this troupe. They conduct workshops in collaboration with drama troupes from other states. Without exposure to the world outside, it is difficult to feel inspired, to understand the form that one is practicing. The inspiration that comes from within is very weak when it comes to *Koothu* because of the circumstances under which it is performed. Before concluding, I would like to touch on something else. Kannappa Thambiran's troupe has performed Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings*. The theatre group Mapa wanted to enter the fifth international theatre festival, which was to be held in Bogota, Columbia. They came down to Purisai and worked with Kannappa Thambiran's

troupe for four months. Eventually, they staged Marquez's work as a *koothu*. The director Ralph teaches at Columbia university and he is a theatre person. Usually, *koothu* performers do not rehearse regularly. During this period however, they began to have regular rehearsals and experienced a discipline that was totally alien to them. The *kattiakaran* was given dialogues in Spanish. All the traditional features present in European theatre are present in the *kattiakaran*. Munusami, who performed with great gusto, was widely admired in Bogot. He was praised for speaking the Caribbean dialect. Kannappa Thambiran's troupe has therefore had many different kinds of experiences. Due to the activities of *Koothu-p-pattarai*, these experiences have been spreading to other troupes as well.

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## S p o t l i g h t

### A DESCENDANT OF THE BUNGALOW

Yash Srivastava is an architect from Thane

**The** Dominican Republic is a tiny island nation in the Caribbean of less consequence to global geo-politics today as it did five hundred years ago. Allegedly, when the Dominican dictator declared war on Germany in the 1940's, Hitler didn't even blink. It is so low profile that even its neighbor, Haiti, has hogged more attention in recent years. And from all accounts, the Dominicans are very pleased about it, preferring obscurity to notoriety. However, this obscurity has not been the Dominican Republic's permanent condition.

In the 1500's, it was the threshold to South America, the last *civilised* frontier. Columbus landed on this island in 1492 and made it his home, even as wars raged on the main South American continent in search of God, gold and glory. The Spanish guarded this little frontier post doggedly as their armies conquered the Aztecs and Incas. Within the first fifty years of colonising the island, the native population of Tainos was made extinct along with their *primitive* architecture and culture. In its place came the cathedrals, sanitariums, casas, universities and convents. All the trappings of a little Spain on a trans-Atlantic island they naively thought was India.

The military engineers who sailed on these expeditions resorted to constructing buildings as they knew best. Contemporaneous building technology imported from Spain was applied directly with scant regard for natural or cultural parameters that usually shape all architecture.



This is clearly reflected in the early colonial architecture in the Dominican Republic.

Thick plastered brick walls, also called mamposteria perforated with a colonnade of arches which in fact were the structural supports for the roof. In the mixed commercial and residential areas the heavy masonry arches mark the openings in the building that also double up for shop-windows. The residential portion of the building is located to the rear or on the upper floor of the house. The front is often ornamented with eclectic cornices or pediments and the doors are now coloured characteristically in the Caribbean Style—strongly contrasting colours juxtaposed with each other. The walls are punctuated with small grilled openings—very unsuitable in a hot tropical maritime climate. Almost always, the walls are plastered and whitewashed. The roofs were generally flat. The early colonial architecture adheres strictly to the stereotypical images we associate with Spain. The institutional buildings were modeled verbatim after similar buildings in the home country. The stylistic input belonged to the high Baroque era with Mannerist or Plateresque ornamentation on the facades, as was the rage in Spain at the time. It was inevitable that the fashionable architectural styles in Spain made their way to the Dominican Republic as quickly as a state-of-the-art sailing ship from continental Europe could land on her shores. As a standard, the prevailing Spanish architectural style governed Dominican architecture for at least three centuries affecting building typologies across the board including the living quarters.

Even the dwellings for the resident Spaniards were modeled after their counter parts in Spain. Small balcony projections with ornate balustrades and pretty wrought iron lamps flanking monumental doorways on the tall street walls characterised the early homes. Arranged around a lush courtyard and opening directly off the street they used mamposteria, flat roofs with small windows covered by heavy steel grills. The buildings look robust and solid, in many ways similar to the buildings in old Pondicherry, (a former French colony in south east India) minus the French sophistication. Ideally suited to a warm, dry Mediterranean climate these buildings seemed to be an oddity in a land accustomed to a coastal climate akin to Mumbai's. The imagery of the streetscape is typical of Spain and it is hardly surprising that today, in the evenings you can see Flamenco performances to Gipsy Kings on the conserved streets of Santo Domingo- the Dominican capital. In a country known for it's highly developed music and dance- Merengue, Flamenco is a complete incongruity. Despite the many pressures that the architects faced, architecture in the Dominican Republic maintained status quo for a couple of centuries - unchanging, inflexible and uninspired.

By the 1700's, other colonial powers were beginning to consolidate themselves in different parts of the world. The British, in particular, showed an ingenuity for working with the local populace as opposed to annihilating them. This may have been on account of their motive of trade in contrast to Spain's of plunder and conquest. By the 1800's their motives had changed. This necessitated the white man to live on, protect and govern the lands he had conquered. It then became necessary to invent a house suitable for a white man to live in a tropical country. And so the Bungalow was born in India.

At first, the bungalow was patterned around an English country house and the typical Bengal hut belonging to that time-Bengal, was the first territory that the British occupied on Indian soil and it is always remained strategically important territory thereafter. This quaint hybrid had high roofs with ventilators and a wide shaded verandah that ran the circumference of the building to adapt to Bengal's warm and humid climate. The choice of a sloping tiled roof over a flat roof had more to do with the local climatic conditions than with style. It was a working man's house where functionality and comfort scored over social pretensions- at least to start with. The shape and form of the bungalow constantly underwent change and adaptation out of functional necessity. Over time, the stylistic elements also came to play a part in the development of the bungalow. Even though the stylistic transfers were parallel to architectonic movements in Britain and similar in that sense to early Dominican colonial architecture, there was always the need to adapt to local conditions of climate, materials, technology and perhaps Raj (a term popularly used to describe the days of British imperialism in India) culture. Most often the transfers were superficial and almost nostalgic. Amongst the popular styles was the Victorian Bungalow.

As the name suggests, the Victorian bungalow developed during Queen Victoria's reign in the late 1800's. Wood was extremely popular in England especially the factory engineered wooden sections. Siding and shingles were in vogue and were used extensively in the walls. Along with Arts and Crafts Movement, prefabrication had become an important element in the British construction industry. Additionally, in England, several books with ready made designs for bungalows had started to surface. Built of a strong timber-frame, wooden floors, the roofing was galvanised corrugated iron sheeting. The entire building usually rested on a brickwork foundation. This style of bungalow came to be popular with the affluent as beach houses. Prefabricated bungalows for beaches were being shipped around the globe - typically consisting of a central room, living room, 4 bed rooms and a servant's room. It's easy, then to see why the Victorian Bungalow become the

pragmatic choice of design for bungalows in British colonies in the Caribbean. The ease of erection and its suitability to climate must have convincingly won its case. The Victorian bungalow traveled far and wide on British ships and in their magazines and handbooks.

At around the same time as the prefabricated bungalow was getting popular in the Caribbean and in New Orleans, the Spanish regent government turned to that faithful pool of human resource - Africa. Slaves for the sugarcane fields were brought onto the island. They came with their cultural baggage from Africa. This affected not only the racial mix of the country but went on to having wider repercussions on the culture of the country. From a country that was dependent entirely on Spain for its cultural directions, it was moving into a more cosmopolitan realm. It was now developing a hybrid culture and therefore an identity all its own. Simultaneously, the political environment in Latin America was getting nationalistic. Even the Dominican Republic was asserting its identity, seeking to break away from the Spanish Crown. It was beginning to feel a solidarity with its neighbouring islands and nations in the Caribbean and on the mainland of the Americas. The time for breakaway was right.

The adaptation of the Victorian Bungalow in the Dominican Republic was a natural act of rebellion. Building a British-designed bungalow in a Spanish colony was tantamount to a display of determination to guide national destiny. Puerto Plata, the second largest port on the northern end of the island was the town that took the lead. Even today Puerto Plata - The country's sugar bowl has the largest number of these adapted bungalows. However, the adaptation and transfer was not direct.

The Dominican version of the beach-specific Victorian bungalow was an adaptation for the city. The land around the buildings was jettisoned. The bungalows stood directly on the street. The wide shaded verandahs acted as an interface between streets and houses. The plans were borrowed from the available prefabricated design manuals at first. Even these were being constantly upgraded and adapted for lifestyle changes. Good wood is a scarcity on the island, even more so was factory engineered wood necessary for the Victorian bungalow. The Dominicans turned to the next best material available in abundance- the royal palm. The trunk of the palm was cut into strips and used for siding. The irregular trunk and rough finish of the siding added another dimension to the bungalow- the bungalow looked hand-crafted now. Apart from this visual digression, the bungalow had moved from the sophisticated weekend dwelling to the mundane urban home for the common man. The entire system of construction was internalised. Many versions of the bungalow appeared as a result of this. The construction

technique was used extensively- from little shanties to small village chapels. The staid British pastels for colour schemes were abandoned for what would make diehard Modernists sick. Final patterns were altered and often you might see designs distinctly Baroque harking back to another era, to another culture. Adapted Victorian architecture came to be known as Republican architecture, coinciding with the emergence of the Dominican Republic. Suddenly the towns had taken on a new look. The buildings looked airy and they sat lightly on the ground after the heavy load-bearing masonry style of the colonial era. The massing of the buildings is antipodal but it lends a richness to the cityscape. The Victorian style dwelling is a symbol of Dominican sovereignty and it ironically was a descendant of the Indian bungalow - which for its own part has perennially been a symbol of Imperialism for the Indian people.

The Victorian Bungalow made its appearance in the Dominican Republic at just the right time. Or perhaps, it slipped into Dominican architectural consciousness when the time was right. Whatever be the circumstances, it is always a mix of events outside architecture and the arrival of symbolic ships on the shores of human consciousness that inevitably result in architecture's inspired manifestations. The monoculture of British Imperialism has had its low-points but it has also had its glorious moments when it mingled with other cultures outside their own. In the Dominican Republic, it fired the imagination of its vibrant people. It helped the Dominicans break free from their colonial shackles. Along with Merengue, Republican architecture became a proud symbol of Dominican sovereignty - appropriate and of its people.

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## *V i e w p o i n t* AESTHETIC EXPLORATIONS

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**My** aesthetic position has been getting defined through the choices I have made regarding the texts of Adishakti's theatre productions.

In 1979 Adishakti produced Snehalata Reddy's *Sita*. It was an interpretation of the character from the epic *Ramayana*. From the point of view of feminist discourse in India, it was a significant play. But the singular focus of the play compelled me to question the quality of its intervention into a work that resonated with multiple significance. The interesting



discovery of this questioning was that the traditional Indian literature tended towards allegory, metaphor and the symbolic as it was non-representational.

In the production following *Sita* in 1981, Adishakti turned to Greek Tragedy: Sophocles' *Oedipus*. This production came out of my personal spiritual quest and therefore reflected my spiritual readings of the Greek text.

In Greek aesthetic, an act of bodily mutilation is perceived to be an unforgivable crime; and yet Oedipus tells the populace that it was Apollo, his daemon/ divine spirit, who had directed him to put out his eyes. And at the end of the play he says that he knows that there was a more *awful* destiny in store for him. The word for *awful* in the original classical Greek is a synonym for awe-inspiring.

In my interpretation, the act of blinding was perceived to be a psychological turning of the eyes from the outside to the inside in search for Truth. In the old Vedic tradition the Sun is a symbol of Truth; Apollo is the Sun god. The interpretation was that Oedipus prompted by Teiresius the blind prophet, turns his eyes and becomes a sacred figure. In the last play of the trilogy: *Oedipus at Colonus*, he is perceived to be a sacred figure, like Teiresius, whose presence confers sanctity to a situation and endorses its correctness.

Through this production and the next production of Adishakti, I was groping towards a response to the aesthetic dilemmas posed by our postcolonial situation. In 1984 Adishakti produced Euripedes' *The Trojan Women*. This production reflected an Indian philosophical concept that the absolute manifests itself progressively in the universe. And as it manifests itself in history the older *dharma*/values, customs etc., give way to the new, for with the progress of terrestrial evolution these lose their truth and value.

Adishakti's attempt at finding itself through non-Indian texts came to an end with this production. The time had now come to see if it could sit inside the Indian tradition and radiate outward from it.

It took the first step in this direction when it worked to produce Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* in 1991. Through certain linguistic clues, which Sri Aurobindo found in this folk tale of conjugal love, elements which connected itself to the tradition of the Vedic cycle, which then transformed it into a symbol of psychological and spiritual experiences.

Taking its cue from Sri Aurobindo, Adishakti started exploring the most living expression of the tradition accessible to it—the folklore. In fact, for Adishakti, folklore is identified in terms of the accessible. With this definition as its tool it discovered that by moving backward in time through the literary history of the culture it could accumulate the layers of meaning or the different perspectives through which particular ideas unpacked and expressed themselves.

In 1999, folklore and its resonance in the *Veda* were explored in Adishakti's *Impressions of Bhima*. In this production, Adishakti looked at the story of Bhima, a hero from the *Mahabharata*, as a man who mirrors power and physical strength. The personification of Bhima in the *Mahabharata* is based on the Vedic archetype *Vāyu*; who incidentally figures as Bhima's father in the epic.

All Vedic personifications are symbols of psychological and spiritual states. These states are never perceived as static. On the contrary they are in a constant state of evolution. In fact, the motive of the *Veda* is to encourage and support the evolution of these psychological states from one level to the other in an ever-ascending order. The march from height to a greater height.

Thus *Vāyu* the lord of Life was considered to be the force which pervaded all material existence and was the condition for its activities. All nervous and emotional activities of the human being belong to the domain of *Vāyu*. In the *Purana*, *Vāyu* was formulated as *Prana*, the universal breath of life. From the evolutionary standpoint this mechanical force gives way to volitional behavior or the Will. *Vāyu* gives way to *Agni*, the master of *Tapas* or inner energy.

This Vedic, symbolic, psychological and spiritual reading of Bhima was contextualised within the material provided by numerous folk tales about him from different parts of the country. What emerged was a deconstruction of the epic hero of the *Mahabharata*. In this age of the non-hero, the man of physical power and strength was recreated into a psychological hero. The lineage of *Vāyu* gave way to that of *Agni*. Therefore, in its resolution the production transferred the warrior's battle field to the area where alone, complete victory is possible. Instead of a struggle for an ambiguous victory in a war, the warrior at the end wants nothing less than the conquest of Nature and the world itself, through a spiritual struggle and an inner victory.

For Adishakti's next production, *Brhannala* in 1998 I turned to the folklore surrounding the Draupadi Worship in Tamil Nadu and followed it backward in time to the *Veda* and related it forward in time to neo-physics and theories of brain lateralisation. The Draupadi worship relates Arjuna as a female impersonator/ *Brhannala*, to *Ardhnarishwara*: the Vedic image of *Siva* as the lord who is half woman and half man. For, according to the *Veda*, the polarities of the male and female symbolise other cosmic polarities. *Ardhanarishwara* was therefore a metaphor for healing the perceived schism between objective and subjective reality, of matter and spirit, time and space, through the organic whole of the male and the female.

The Worship of Draupadi also related Arjuna to *Siva* through Arjuna's name as *Savyasachin*: which means one

who is ambidextrous. For Arjuna as *Savyasachin* knows how to use both his left hand, which is feminine and his right hand which is masculine. Hence both *Brhannala/Savyasachin* and *Ardhnarishwara* are great dancers, both are also great archers, both combine the feminine and masculine elements, both have extremely erotic natures, but can be ascetics; both have strong cerebral characteristics as well as the warrior moods.

Modern day brain lateralisation theories talk of the right hand as male and the left hand as female, and divide functions, capacities and processes of knowledge to different sides of the brain--right and left. Hence art, intuition, metaphor, music are the functions of the left hand because they process information in spatial terms; and physics, rationality, words, logic, war are functions of the right hand as they process information through time.

Also the discoveries of contemporary scientists and philosophers: Einstein's space/time continuum, Bohr's theory of complementarity, Sri Aurobindo's Gnosis: support the metaphor for the union of polarities which these traditional, symbolic figures represent; and suggest that these images from the traditions are merely forerunners of a new way to think about reality.

*Brhannala* as a production emerged out of the research and thought processes that went into this material. It was an allegory concerned with polarities and their union, elliptically imaged through events in Arjuna's life.

It is important to mention here that after *The Trojan Women*, I was no longer interested in representational

theatre which reflected every-day reality. Influenced by evolutions within traditional Indian thought and physics, both of which questioned the nature of perceived reality, I departed from the use of realism in the content of Adishakti's productions.

And now it is this syncretic nature of folklore, that draws Adishakti to it, particularly after its experience with the processes of the production *Brhannala*. It is interested in releasing the multiple voices which have contributed to the plurality of folklore in general. Within the lore surrounding the Draupadi Worship for instance there is accommodation for diverse elements which reflect the plurality of reality : The Islamic element in the region find representation in this lore. Adishakti is interested in allowing voices such as these to express themselves along with others in a multi-layered way in the text of its productions.

The language that Adishakti has performed its productions in has been English. This has facilitated in reaching a wider global audience awareness for Adishakti. However ,so as to locate the English within an Indian context, it has been exploring the languages of Tamil and Malayalam; a work that it plans now to deepen. The turn of phrase of these languages when literally translated into English displaces them and not only reveals their original sense in a startling manner, but it also enriches our use of the English language. For example a daily exchange of greeting in Tamil, which I hear every morning from my balcony, translates as: *And how are you I hope?* Response: *Somewhat, I think*. One can only marvel at the layers of meaning packed into this greeting released by the translation.

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*H o m a g e*

THOTTAKADU RAMAKRISHNAPILLAI : A LOVER OF FOLKLORE

*Thottakadu Ramakrishnapillai* (1854-1920) was born in Chengelpet and studied at the Free Church of Scotland Mission school at Kancheepuram. When Ramakrishnapillai was twelve, his parents sent him to Chennai for higher studies. He traveled all the way by bullock cart, singing folk songs and narrating folk tales along with his travel companions. This new experience was to leave a lasting impression on him. Ramakrishnapillai went on to study at the Madras Chirstian College. After passing the martriculation examination in 1870, he joined the F.A. programme and his main subject was Logic. His classmate Lazarus, the translator of *Thirukural*, often played the role of critic to Ramakrishnapillai's poetry.

With a Bachelor's degree in Philosophy, Pillai worked as Chief Librarian at the Madras Literary Society where he came into contact with 20,000 books. It was then that he began to research various folk beliefs, tales and superstitions : the lines on the squirrel's back, the sounds made by the wall-lizard and so on. In simple and lucid English, Pillai explicated the customs and manners of villagers and the various heroic tales popular amongst them.

Pillai went on to head the committee incharge of the Tamil Lexicon published by the University of Madras. He was closely associated with other folklore scholars such as Selva Kesavaraya Mudaliar, Namasivaya Mudaliar and S.Bhavanandam Pillai. He authored many books of prose and poetry in English, most of which are concerned with the epics and folk traditions of India. He was known for his excellent command of the English language as well as for his simple, straightforward prose style.

His books include *Life in an Indian Village*, *Tales of Ind and Padmini* (an Indian romance). *Life in an Indian Village* is an amusing and clear portrayal of the manners and customs of the inhabitants of a village in the Indian presidency. It gives a sketch of Indian village society from the inside. *Tales of Ind* is a collection of epic narratives in English. The epics themselves are of Indian origin : *Seeta and Rama*, *The Story of Prince Desing*, *The Story of Rudra*, *The Korathy's Lullaby* and so on. He was also the author of several essays and articles on Indian tradition in the journal published by the Madras Christian College.

The world of folklore scholarship is indebted to Ramakrishnapillai. In more ways than one, we could call him a lover of folklore.

## C o m m e n t s

# MENTAL TEXT

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In one sense, the idea of a mental text is not new to contemporary scholarship on India's oral epic traditions. One of the things that makes India such a marvelous place to study oral epics is that one can trace their numerous thematic threads through a vast network of intertextual linkages, and through every conceivable performance context, both within a given tradition and between them. My own research on a Tulu oral epic tradition called *paddana* revealed to me some of the subtle kinds of links village traditions entail. The Tulu epics are at once both a macro-genre and a performance tradition. That is, within the genre there are not only a number of distinct stories, but many of the stories exist in context-sensitive variants. Furthermore, the stories and their variants make frequent intertextual reference to one another. Contemplating the relationship between distinct, named epic traditions in Tulunad, it became clear to me that there was a larger *epic* which "exists in the minds of the performers and audience," (1989, p. 57).

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What is characteristic of the many regional epics is also writ large in the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, the flagships of Indian civilisation. Both are compilations of what had at one time been many independent story traditions which throughout history performers and literati alike have reworked in innumerable versions. Ramanujan identifies these *Many Ramayanas* as a "pool of signifiers" (1991, p.46), while Narayana Rao characterises the *Ramayana* as "... not just a story, but a language with which a host of (ideological) statements may be made." (Narayana Rao, 1991, p.114). Blackburn sees it as a oral tradition containing many forms: "...the diversity of the tradition—the *many Ramayanas*—is a function of the many genres, the many languages, and the many occasions on which the Rama story is orally performed."

The exact phrase, *mental text*, however, is linked to Lauri Honko's publication of the three volume *Siri Epic* and his use of this concept is somewhat different in important respects from those mentioned above, and it is especially on these differences I devote the rest of my comments.

Honko links the idea of a mental text to several lines of research and practice in the history of folkloristic text collection. One is in the early practice of folklorists to publish separately collected items as a unified text, giving the impression that it was so in the tradition

of, or even in the minds of, the singers. The famous example is of this was the Finnish national epic, the [New] *Kalavala*, as published by Elias Lönnrot in 1849. A second line of research Honko identifies as the *literary model of texts*, linked to the Finnish historical geographic school, which had as its ultimate goal the reconstruction of an original text, a *first telling*. The vast archives this approach would require make its goals unachievable. A third approach emphasises the epic performance and the general relationship of a raconteur to his tradition on one hand and his audience on the other. For this a greatly expanded notion of *text* is needed: words accompanied by a host of other features of communication must necessarily be conveyed. Honko himself recognises that only a combination of audio-video documentation to accompany transcribed, translated written text can approach the necessary standard. And even then, what we have is only one performance at one time and context. This then leads him to such questions as "How are oral *text* preserved in the singer's mind?" and "Is performance just a way to cut a *text* into a presentable shape, adequate in one particular situation but totally inadequate in others?"

These are indeed the issues with which all who are inspired by oral poetry are confronted, myself included. While I admire Honko's solutions I find his use of the term *mental text* troubling in several respects. Foley takes exception to the word *text* in the phrase: "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." (Foley, 1999, p.16) I take objection to the word *mental*. The phenomenon and the concepts it purports to describe, are knowable only when they are *out there*, manifest in the real world of a publically produced performance: there is nothing mental about them. The attribution of *mental* is merely heuristic, meant to embody a hypothesized realm of investigation. But like many other heuristic devices invented by social scientists such as Durkheim's collective consciousness, or the anthropologists' culture, they beg precise definition and only inspire endless, usually pointlessly self-reflexive, debate.

Should we take seriously the *mental text* as a psychological phenomenon? Granting that the performance is produced from within the performer, are we prepared, in fact, to investigate the performer's brain, memory, mind, or heart? I suspect we are not well enough equipped either technologically or by discipline to investigate these realms. The brain is best left to the neuro-psychologist, production from memory to cognitive psychologists, and the heart to students of religion and morality. If we really were seeking to discover the mental dimensions of text production in doing this kind of work we would

compose teams of collaborators such as these, set up in situ experiments of a very different nature, and probably use the more modern concepts of the cognitive sciences. While admittedly these terms are not much better defined than the ones we folklorists use, at least we would be talking the same language as our other colleagues working on similar mental phenomena.

Instead, the methodology which inform the concept of a *mental text* are in the line of text analysis carried on through over a century in folkloristics and in a rather obscure, specialised area of literary studies.

And it is from these two lines, as outlined above, that the concept of *mental text* is derived as a heuristic device to explain matters of individual production which amaze and fascinate the western investigator. In my experience, the singer and his audience are certainly not amazed or fascinated with these aspects of a performance, but they do recognise virtuosity and *truth* when they hear it. At the same time, they recognise appropriate contextual variation and individual competency, and although perhaps under most circumstances a virtuoso is the performer they seek out, someone who is far less so usually suffices. In the *paddana* tradition it what is in the heart that matters most and the *truthfulness* of the recitation. My suspicion is that as long as foreigners fail to appreciate a performer on the same grounds as the native, the two lines of interest will remain largely independent of one another.

Most of the basic concepts of text analysis employed by Honko have previously been applied by others elsewhere in the world, in India, and even within the *Tulu paddana* corpus (Claus, 1993a). And as Foley says of the basic concept, "Few would argue with the gist of this [the concept of a mental text] description." (Foley, 1999, p.16)

Although Honko takes some pains to qualify the representativeness of Naika's recitation and delineate its relationship to other recitations in other contexts by means of such concepts as idelect, register, pool of tradition, genre, and *epic archaeology*, the scope of this recitation's interparticipation with the tradition to which it belongs is not as fully addressed as it could have been. From the first page of the book we are told, "The personal owner of the epic is Mr Gopala Naika, an agriculturalist in Machar village near the town of Ujire in the Belthangady district, and a renowned singer of oral epics." The instantiated *epic* linked to the concept of the *mental text* is something of a distortion of the tradition in favor of the individual singer and the collected *text qua text*. However valuable it may be to have even such a richly documented and analysed single instance of what is an epic performance tradition, the scholar should not be satisfied until a

representative range of instances have been similarly collected and compared. The real utility of text analysis within performance study is not in delving into the mind of an individual artist (and it is questionable whether the concept of the mental text even does this), but rather to indicate the dynamic quality of its performance dimensions as it is produced by many participating performers in varying contexts.

Foley suggests a similar need to recognise that traditional genres *leak*: "... that is, there is more interplay among and interpenetration between different genres than our analytical practices customarily assume.... 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." (NFF, 1999, pp.17-8).

What Foley is left unaware of is that initial strides have already been taken in this regard to the *Siri paddana* tradition (Claus 1993b) because Honko so utterly focuses his investigations on an individual singer, and one *text*. An more complete understanding requires that more than even a single story from within the genre (*paddana* in this case) be similarly studied in its range of distribution across the landscape and the different categories of singers who maintain them (see, for example, the research project described in Claus, 1988 and reported in Claus 1991 and 1993a). This kind of research allows us to situate any given epic recitation within local, regional, Indian and worldwide epic traditions in the sense outlined in the first two paragraphs of this note..

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## HYBRIDITY IN POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND LITERATURE

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**Through** the early part of the 1990's, analyses of the postcolonial were poised in a theoretical impasse between the competing claims of *identity* and situatedness, on the one hand, and *hybridity* and dispersal, on the other. Of late, this impasse appears to have been resolved in favour of the latter, which has achieved a new ascendancy under the flag of a distinctly *metropolitan* protectorship. As it happens, however, canonicity has had a somewhat unfavourable effect on the heart and soul of hybridity. Shifting places from an oppositional to an enlightened perspective, hybridity now stands charged, within some sections of the postcolonial academy, as a metropolitan affectation: more aesthetics than ethics, more theoretically than politically driven.

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While I share in this general scepticism, my objections to the discourse of metropolitan syncretism are somewhat differently motivated. In the main, I am troubled by the fact that in its canonical manifestation, hybridity or creolisation is only seen as an effect of the colonial encounter, and so, as a symptom of modernity. As a further consequence, syncretism has also been captured as the prize of a strictly secular imagination. Within *postcolonial* literature, this set of associations is most readily elaborated in the work of Salman Rushdie. Not only does Rushdie insist that hybridity is exclusively an effect of East-West migration, but also upon the fact that an aesthetics or ideology of hybridity is constitutively opposed to the domain of the sacred. Here, hybridity is postulated as a carnivalesque poetics of irreverence, doggedly committed to the practice of demystification.

I do not wish to discredit the literary and-to an extent-political benefits of Rushdie's position: his demystification of extreme nationalism and specifically of the rise of religious nationalism in India is pertinent and often interesting. However, it seems worthwhile to also seek out forms of syncretism which are not exclusively predicated upon an encounter with the West, and which might, accordingly, be found outside of a strictly modern or secular imaginary. I believe that this quest might take two directions.

First, it might be expressed as a search for local cosmopolitanisms and pluralisms that bypass Europe. Second, it might reconsider the sacred—or the experience of the sacred—as another means for the elaboration of hybridity within the self, within culture. Amitav Ghosh's, *In An Antique Land* (1992) remains the most powerful exploration of local cosmopolitanisms. Pankaj Mishra's new novel, *The Romantics* (2000) is also relevant here for its attempt to imagine forms of self-division within India. Mukul Keshavan's *Looking Through Glass* (1995) is another exemplary exploration of the tensions of inter-communal inter-subjectivity in postcolonial India. While each of these writers attempt, with varying degrees of success, to imagine local syncretism and creolisation, Ghosh is alone in extending his search beyond the protocols of modernity. Accordingly his book stands out as a search for the possibility of non-secular hybridities. There is a great deal to recommend in a re-association of syncretism and the sacred. Not only is this task imaginatively urgent, but is politically expedient as well in a milieu where the *sacred* has been turned into a poor caricature of itself.

Indeed, insofar as the *sacred* has been constricted within the straitjacket of national and religious purity, it might be worthwhile not merely to reject it, but rather to recast it as the scene of mixture and confusion: a theatre for the creolisation of self and other.



# H a p p e n i n g s

## VILLU-P-PATTU

S. Venkatraman is Director (Research),  
CFDRT, Chennai

**Villu-p-pattu** literally means the bow song. This oral narrative form acquired its name probably due to the use of a big bow by the main narrator as a lead instrument for maintaining the rhythm when he/she sang a song as an interlace during the course of the performance. It is believed to have had its early origins in the southern area of Tirunelveli in Tamilnadu which can be taken as roughly comprising the present areas of Tirunelveli, Tutukudi, Virudhunagar and Nagerkovil districts. In earlier days, it used to be restricted to performances in temples, dedicated to village deities. Stories of local legendary heroes/heroines used to form the main theme of such narrations. The form relied on folk tunes, folk songs, folk percussions and group singing as well as a dialogue and mode of narration. What was more important was the facility it provided for audience interaction.

It was in the 1940's that this folk art form was first introduced to the rest of the state, thanks to the pioneering efforts of the great and inimitable Tamil film comedian Kalaivanar N. S. Krishnan. This has been a turning point in the history of this art form. The art form has gained in popularity in the rest of the state as well. But in the process it has undergone some changes, notably the element of humour. Today, it is quite popular in semi-urban and urban areas in its adapted format since it has imbibed the so-called *classicism* in singing and evolved to incorporate contemporary issues in its themes. It has also entered the electronic media.

Somewhere around the late 1970's and early 1980's, the form was used in communicating development messages on a significant scale. Much had to be covered before serious attempts could be made to integrate messages into select storylines without altering its structure. CFDRT attempted this successfully in its mid-90 project in Tamilnadu and conveyed environment related messages to select rural audience. Encouraged by this, the organisation continued to refine this innovation in subsequent projects to convey maternal, child health and nutrition related messages. It also systematically measured behaviour changes that occurred as a result of this innovation.

When CFDRT approached Ford Foundation for implementing a project to use local cultural expressions in development communication, the latter asked them to form a separate Trust so that they could provide such support. Accordingly, in 1997, that is, after 13 years of formation of CFDRT, the CFDRT Trust was formed as a separate organisation. The grant came

towards the end of 1998. The project implemented by the Trust employs the services of certain professional agencies for carrying out certain assigned tasks. One such agency, namely, Subbu Arumugam's *Villu-p-pattu* Troupe, was assigned the task of training volunteers in the art of performing *Villu-p-pattu*. Incidentally, Mr. Subbu Arumugam was a close associate of the famous Tamil film comedian Kalaivanar N. S. Krishnan and an acknowledged contemporary Tamil poet.

The idea behind this innovation was to test whether it is possible to create new *Villu-p-pattu* troupes through formal training. If successful, it would be beneficial to replicate this popular oral narrative form to communicate messages on a wider scale in the state. The project has been going on for a year. Ten volunteers have been trained under this project.

The successful trainees were awarded certificates of completion of training and merit in a formal convocation function on January 4, 2000 at the Srinivasa sastri Hall, Mylapore, Chennai. Mr V. Karuppan, a former IAS officer presided over the function. Mrs J. Uma Maheswari, Joint Director, School Education, gave away the certificates. There were several eminent persons who spoke on the occasion. At the end of the function, the trained volunteers held a short performance.

Interestingly, two groups have already received a number of invitations for public performance on different messages from organisations such as the All India Radio, Tamilnadu Government, Sri Sivananda Gurukulam, to name a few. This is encouraging news for the sustainability of the trained troupes. In the convocation address, the Director of CFDRT, (which monitors the overall project and lends technical support to the agencies) requested the trained volunteers to go out into the rural areas and propagate development messages to the poorer groups who are in need of such information. He also exhorted them to ensure that such efforts result in changes in patterns of behaviour among the target audience which in its turn would improve their living conditions.

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### SEMINAR REPORT

**A** National Seminar on *Peoples Culture in Twenty First Century* was held on 26-27 February, 2000 at Indira Gandhi Centre for National Integration Viswabharati, Shantiniketan. It was sponsored by Centre for Communication and Cultural Action (CCCA) in collaboration with Palli Charcha Kendra - Sriniketan, Shantiniketan. Ten tribal artists from Gurkata, Birbhum performed a traditional dance to welcome the dignitaries and all the delegates. Dr D K Sinha, Vice-Chancellor of Viswabharati University and the Chief Guest in the Seminar lit up the ceremonial lamp.

In the Inaugural Session of the Seminar Professor G C Khan and Dr Onker Prasad, Principal and Head of Palli Charcha Kendra - Sriniketan, Santiniketan respectively, Shti Dilip Mukheiyee, Director, Indira Gandhi Centre for National Integration, Dr Barun Chakroborty, Head of Folklore Dept, Kalyani University and many others participated. At the First session Sanjib Sarcar, Director CCCA spoke on the theme of the Seminar and hoped that new insights will be gathered in the process. Dr Soumen Sen, Head of Folklore Department, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong presented a paper on *Culture and Tradition*. He dealt with the analytical categories of culture and tradition by following the concept of *our culture* and *their culture*. In his response to the paper Dr R.S. Mukherjee of Sociology and Anthropology Dept. North Bengal University claimed that at this new millennium a transition has been made from modernism to post-modernism. K.Venkatesh, Managing Trustee of Chandana Art Foundation International, Bangalore presented his paper on Art and Cultural Heritage with audio-visual aids. He emphasised on the possibilities of a confluence of Indian cultures and maintained the view that a false

dichotomy exists between arts and crafts, folk and classical, traditional and contemporary.

Shanta representing CIEDS, Bangalore presented a paper on Media and Culture on the next day. She observed the manner how western lifestyles are being depicted in the media debasing the traditional wisdom adhered to Indian culture. The paper triggered some dynamic responses from the scholars and cultural workers like Subodh Patnaik from Orissa, Ashutosh Dwivedi from Uttar Pradesh, Shyamali Khastagir from Shantiniketan and others. A Panel Discussion on the issues raised in the Seminar followed next. In it Dr Reboti Mohan Sarkar, Prof Arati Ganguly, Professor Ashim Adhikary, Dr R.S. Mukhedee along with some students of Palli Charcha Kendra, Shriniketan discussed about the possible features of people's culture in the coming days. Professor Amlan Dutta in his Valedictory Address reiterated the fact that culture is man-made. He asked to take up the cultural measures based on our traditions as well as our education that Tagore has experimented to rebuild the village, family and the society. The Seminar ended with the Vote of Thanks given by Professor Haren Ghosh.

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

### 16 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 June 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 July 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 May 2000. Interviews for final select candidates will be held in Chennai in early June. 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 in mid-July. 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 May 2000**

# R e v i e w s

## KARNA'S DEATH

(A Play by Pukalentippulavar)

Translated by Hanne M. de Bruin.  
Pondicherry: Institut francais de  
Pondicherry, 1998, Price not mentioned,  
pp. 296

K. Srilata is working as Programme  
Officer, NFSC



Hanne M. de Bruin's transcription and translation of the twelfth century play *Karna Moksam* or Karna's Death performed in the Kattaikkuttu theatre

tradition is at once sensitive and scholarly. It reflects her deep involvement not merely with the Kattaikkuttu theatre tradition but also with oral traditions and the complexities of performance. The book is the result of painstaking and meticulous fieldwork and research. Though *Karna Moksam* is usually attributed to the poet Pukalenti, de Bruin points out in her extremely informative introduction that the name Pukalenti and Pukalentippulavar has been attached to many epic plays and folk ballads which have most probably been written by different authors. The identity of the author of the particular play is therefore unclear but several contributions from earlier generations of Kattaikkuttu actors, says de Bruin, were doubtless used in the performance she has transcribed and translated.

The version of the play presented here belongs to the performance tradition of the *Perunkattur Ponnucami Nataka Manram*, a Kattaikkuttu company based in the village of Perunkattur near Kanchipuram. Typically, the play *Karna Moksam* is performed on two occasions - during the *karumantaram* ceremony (the funerary rite observed by non-Brahmin communities on the sixteenth day after a person's death marking the end of the funeral

obsequies) and during the *paratam* festival cycle of plays. Kattaikkuttu is a form that is staged all night, has an elaborate cast and a vast repertoire of stories. The play itself revolves around the themes of familial relationships and death—of Karna's troubled relationship with his wife Ponnuruvi who he had kidnapped and married—Karna's flawed lineage, his illegitimate birth which sometimes makes him an object of contempt, his legendary his legendary generosity even in death and the manner in which an ultimate act of generosity on his part wins him *moksam* or liberation from the endless cycle of birth and death.

Hanne de Bruin has helpfully provided us with the original performance text in Tamil (culled from her tapes) alongside her translated version. Where faithfulness to the original is concerned she has, I think, done a commendable job. Her translation does not lost out on the flavour and the oral rhythms of the original performance text even as it remains extremely readable in English. Let us, for instance, consider this passage from the entrance song of Kattiyakkaran (the Herald, King's guardian and clown):

*Like a tripping goat catching  
a glimpse of a bear's fur;  
The court jester comes to the court.  
Like a goat - to the court (chorus)  
Like a goat - to the court (chorus)  
Takita takita takitatom  
Takita takita takitatom  
Takitatom takitatom  
Takitatom takitatom  
Tataiya tom tarikita...*

The passage conveys a clear sense of the performance context and flows with the same ease that one would imagine the original would during the performance. Other passages are almost lyrical like the one containing Ponnuruvi's narration of her dream:

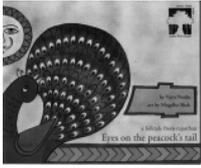
*What dream did I have, O friends?  
What shall I say to you?  
Placed I was  
Upon a palanquin of last honour,  
Beautified and decked with flowers...*

While the play itself serves as a rich anthropological document of local folk customs and traditions, the translation therefore being of immense use to scholars of folklore and anthropology, de Bruin's introduction provides the right context and framework within which to read, visualise and understand the play. Not only does she give us valuable information on the social and historical background of the Kattaikkuttu tradition, she also discusses the context in which the play is performed, elements such as music, stock narrative elements or *building blocks*, the cast, costumes and make-up and the difficulties involved not only in translating from Tamil to English but also in presenting a performance as a written text for a largely western audience unfamiliar with local knowledge systems and frameworks. The book makes interesting reading for all those interested in exploring oral traditions, folklore, theatre and performance traditions.

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TULIKA - A CULTURAL PUBLISHING HOUSE FOR CHILDREN

Anuradha Shyam is Programme Assistant, NFSC

**There** was a time when it was the grandmother who told the tale or a time even before when evenings would see an enthralled audience watching and listening to the shadow plays of imagination under the spreading roots of the Banyan Tree. To most children (rural or urban), these symbols themselves would be part of a fantastic folktale. Oral traditions have found themselves competing for space with the onslaught of textual, and audio-visual and technological advancements. Some Publishing Houses seem to be filling in the



gap by weaving tales with a contemporary ethos in mind. Availing latest methods in printing and design, they have managed to retain the essence of the story-telling traditions.

In the future issues of this newsletter, we hope to highlight *Cultural Publications* that work to promote folklore. We hope to give you an insight into some of the issues raised and the processes by which the text, tale and visual design are integrated to form an aesthetic presentation.

In this issue we begin with Tulika, a Chennai - based Publishing house that specifically works with children and children's books. The vision outlined suggests that Tulika aspires to present *Culture* as a living and exciting part of life. By presenting children images of India which are not static but are constantly evolving, there seems to be a committed desire to erode the notion that our treasury of stories are outdated. The catalogue presents a spectrum of books that vary both in content and design. I would like to particularly highlight the *Under the Banyan Tree*, a continuing series of folktales from different parts of the region. This review attempt to explore how the story, language and design integrate to create the magic of a storyteller.

Tulika uses a wide variety of sources for material. Collaboration with leading folk storytellers has lead to an interesting collection. Dr Vayu Naidu has been involved in many of the projects. A writer, storyteller and performer she is the founder member of Brumhalata, an intercultural storytelling company based in United Kigndom. Her wide experiences in the field of storytelling clearly shine through in the quality of the presentation. The stories are written in a style that is reminiscent of a performance. The text flows smoothly and the tone adopted

is not one of preaching from a higher moral ground.

Sources also seem to stem from grandmother's tales lurking somewhere in our childhood experiences. Sandhya Rao retells a popular Marathi folktale *Ekki Dokki*, which she recalls from her own childhood. The stories therefore retain a certain childlike innocence and honesty which appeals to both the young people and adults alike. While resource persons are excellent avenues for discovering forgotten tales, it is also becoming increasingly important to document and record narratives.

The collaboration with storytellers has added a performance-like quality to the text. The language used is simple and the sentences are short and punctuated with *sound* words, which are effective, both when reading aloud or alone.

In a folkstory from Bihar called *The curly tale*, the Elephant *Hhrrumphs* and the Lion *Hraaws*. Adopting the use of such *sound* words adds to the magic of the tale. One can almost hear the sounds of the jungle. What is interesting is that the text never uses words that convey a sense of finality. It leaves it to the reader to form his/her impressions of the tale.

The tales presented are also not language-specific. The word-bird series features cross-cultural, cross-lingual stories that are published simultaneously in English, Kannada, Malayalam and Tamil. Thus, there is an attempt made in trying to reduce the effect of alienating certain socio-economic groups. It also provides children an opportunity to experience the multi-cultural heritage of India beyond the geographical and cultural boundaries.

The visual presentation is extremely important especially at a time when we are competing with slick MTV like programmes. The books produced by Tulika reveal a high quality of presentation and

attention to detail. Each Folkstory is presented in the folkstyle of that particular region. A Rajasthani folktale is illustrated by adapting illustrations from the traditional *Parh* cloth. The kalighat style of painting is adapted to illustrate a Bengali Folk tale. The danger using folk forms is that their role can become reduced to that of becoming mere accessory figures. However, the designers have sensitively adapted these folk tales and the effect is that of the illustrations merging with the tale. While the list is certainly not comprehensive, I wish to highlight the two books designed by Mugdha shah and Uma krishnaswamy are good.

*Magic Vessels*, designed by Mugdha Shah, uses the Ayyanar style of sculpture in depicting characters that come from a Tamil Nadu village. Bright earthy colours are judiciously used and the characters have a beautiful dreamlike, doll-like quality in the landscapes they emerge from in. The huge eyes are used for both the animal and human characters and are representative of the terracotta figures that guard villages even today. The visuals never stand apart from the text and merge well with it.

*And the land was born*, illustrated by Uma krishnaswamy, adapts from the original paintings done by the Bhilalas on the mud-washed walls of their homes. The figures are evocative and charmingly tell the story of creation according to the Bhilala tribe who live in central India. The designer is sensitive in adapting the figures without ever reducing them to caricatures. The illustrations maintain the humorous (sometimes politically incorrect!) tone of the story. Reading the visual presentation is in itself a unique experience. Children are thus exposed to various art forms and folk traditions. Art appreciation is introduced at an early age.. Children are given the opportunity to experience various forms of representation. In the tale, *who will be ningthou?*, The designer AV Ilango, uses almost abstract, free-flowing lines to depict a Manipuri folktale. These styles of presentation are a welcome departure from the usual illustrations which are sometimes crude



conventional categories such as the useful and the decorative or even the divide between sexes. The ubiquitous water pot or *kalshi* made by most often by Hindu potters can be both wheel and mould-made, the former by men and the latter by women. Yet in its final form of perfect symmetry and balance, the pot reflects the essential characteristic of all Bangladeshi art - symmetry, smooth surfaces and a certain luminosity. In its detail, the pot appears decorated at the narrow neck, which, however, is part of the very process in the coil method adopted by the women, who form the narrow neck with coils pressed together. What appears merely decorative to the observer is a part of the process for the women and, therefore, is functional and is echoed in the pots thrown on the wheel by the men.

The book records several instances of artistic resolution of religious dichotomies: the painting of Islamic images such as the Taj Mahal or other mosques in Dhaka , on rickshaws by middleclass educated Hindu women, the casting of bronze images of deities in the workshop of a Muslim woman entrepreneur, a Muslim potter having learnt from a Hindu master, the use of the lotus as an image of prosperity and the intriguing

adaptation of the tale of Abraham's sacrifice of his son to the Hindu cosmology wherein it is danvir Karna who sacrifices his son to Krishna, only to have him restored to life. According to Glassie, he was unable to trace this episode in any other version of the *Mahabharata* and concludes it is of local origin.

In addition to the syncretism in religion, Glassie also records the resolution of other binaries such as the conflict between utility and decoration (as in the *kalshis* or the pottery piggy-banks), modernity and tradition (potter Maran Chand Paul's changing repertoire) change and revitalization (Maran Chand Paul's return to traditional/classical Bengali sculptures for inspiration for his export market), the secular and the sacred in potter Haripada Pal's murtis or the cane mats of Chittagong.

Glassie concludes with a model for understanding art in Bangladesh. While making clear that he does not intend to postulate a universal model for art in every culture, Glassie does emphasise that his model offers a better option than conventional western models so 'contaminated by class and gender prejudices endemic in industrial capitalism that... art has nearly become identified with objects made by educated males for consumption by the rich.' (p.371)

In his circular model, rather like a colour wheel , Glassie uses the apparent opposition between the useful and the decorative, the sacred and the secular, the representational and the non-representational to derive a series of stages which mediate between these oppositions whereby categories merge even as the processes and creators themselves defy neat parcelling in the creation of art in Bangladesh.

Even as he presents the successes of syncretism and resolution via art as lived experience in Bangladesh, a low murmur of unease echoes through the book as Glassie records the breakdown in traditional relations between artist and buyer/patron with increasing industrialisation and the inexorable move toward a market economy. With the ties between supplier of raw material, potter/weaver engraver/ painter and the ultimate consumer increasingly dictated by nascent class, commercial considerations and hardening religious positions, the isolation of the artist as creator seems inevitable. In a context where lived experience as a totality of history, religion, social and familial relations has played a major role in shaping and nurturing art, its impact is likely to be devastating.



BOOK POST



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