

TAMASHA

THE DECAY OF A FOLK CULTURE

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Synopsis

As **Rabindra Nath Tagore**, in his famous “**Swadeshi Samaj**” speech on July 1904 advocated “**All traditional structure of art must have a sufficient degree of elasticity to allow it to respond to varied impulses of life, delicate or virile, to grow with its growth. To the traditional, performing art is an aesthetic object, the concept of belongingness and affinity in a cultural context**”

Folk art forms satisfy our innate need for self expression, for moral instruction combined with entertainment, and for the dramatic and the lyrical. The traditional forms preserve and disseminate in lively manners, the tradition and culture of our forefathers.

Indian society is a complex social system with different castes, classes, creeds and tribes. The high rate of illiteracy adds to the inadequacies of mass media to reach almost 80% of people who reside in the villages. In spite of the national literacy missions and campaigns, over 350 million remain illiterate and suspect anything in terms of modernity. To them mass media is too glamorous, impersonal and unbelievable.

Traditional folk forms in India can be effectively utilized for social development through communication. The communication potential of India through traditional performing art has been proved time and again by many instances of national importance

As most developing nations are essentially rural in nature, folk theatre has served as a means for spreading social messages for development, spreading awareness and knowledge among the rural audiences. Similarly Tamasha as a folk theatre carries a rich cultural history. Its performances date back to the Maratha period where the lower castes were the performing artistes. Later, as it gained in popularity, the higher castes set up Tamasha troupes as well. During the freedom movement Tamasha as a folk theatre served as a prominent agent in strengthening the nationalist spirit.

While some folk theatres have strengthened as the carriers of traditional folk cultures, some folk cultures have been neglected due to various factors such as modernisation, mass media and changing perceptions of audiences.

This research is an attempt to bring about awareness regarding the changing trends in the performance of Tamasha within the villages of Maharashtra. These changing trends have eaten into the essence of our folk traditions as they borrow from film songs, vulgarity and urban influences and commercialization as we cater to a new generation of audiences who no longer understand Tamasha as a part of our Indian cultural tradition.

We have various folk forms in our country, which are very much alive today. We can see it in our cultural heritage. All these need careful investigation, study and documentation. While electronic mass media has been constantly expanding, ‘Tamasha’ as traditional media has been underplayed and neglected over time. India should play a positive role in identifying folk media such as Tamasha for communicating to the rural and urban masses. The experience can be of good use in comparing mass communication techniques in both the developing and developed parts of Maharashtra through scientific methods.

In developing the hypothesis for this research, a good deal of literature was reviewed for the purpose. A number of interviews was conducted in order to gain an indepth insight into the problem areas. Most of the literature gathered on Tamasha was pertaining to the folk form as a traditional theatrical drama. Research on the social implications of Tamasha was limited and no special references have been made towards Tamasha as a dying traditional art form.

The methodology used for this study included a review of literature, observations, sampling, interviews, and content analysis.

From the primary sources gathered in this study, information was collected on the historical development of Tamasha from the time of it's inception into the state of Maharashtra. This data was necessary to analyze the actual period Tamasha began losing it's traditional form, thereby subverting it to a lower status that is now recognized as modern, commercial and riddled with vulgarity. The secondary data was supported by interviews that were recorded on a PD 170 camera. Interviews were conducted with Tamasha performers, troupe owners and members of the audience. The interviews revealed that this trend has also led to the creation of an audience that is unaware of the true essence of Tamasha as a folk tradition. All these influences together with the changing audience perceptions have led to the slow death of the traditional form of Tamasha as a folk art and as a carrier of the culture of the state of Maharashtra.

The study has also unveiled the issues and problems faced by Tamasha artistes, especially women and girl children.

Now that government and foundation funding for rural folk theatre has receded, the 'theatre of the roots' movement has more or less run out of steam today. The roots themselves, the agrarian economy and social structure, too are in the midst of an unprecedented crisis. Rural arts as a whole, not just theatre, cannot survive, let alone thrive, if the people that nourish it continue to die. The worst of it is that nobody seems to care about this fall in folk theatre.

This research brings to the forefront; the issues and challenges that Tamasha troupes in Maharashtra are facing today. Suggestions of stalwarts from the folk art fraternity; the youth and the audience have been recorded and considered for future interventions.

Introduction

The importance of communication in mobilizing people and seeking their willing participation in the development of a country is well recognized. In India, this concern above reaching people, communicating with them and equipping them with new skills has been emphasized repeatedly in the successive five year plans which provide the blue print of the country's planned development. No one would question the fact that India has made substantial progress since independence.

The development of rural India is certainly associated with the dialogue or communication that is being provided to the masses. Tradition plays an important role in the creative artistic processes particularly in the field of folk performing arts. Folk art is spontaneous and functional. Every village has its relevant music, dance or theatre. The folk performing arts has changed its structure continuously over centuries modifying itself to the needs of the changing situation making itself functionally relevant to the society.

According to the villagers, it is a medium that can only be seen or heard but cannot be touched. Therefore, it is unreachable. Traditional media, as folk theatre can be used to reach the masses in bringing about change and in the development of the country.

As India is a predominantly rural country, folk theatre can be used as a significant medium in bringing about social development. As the rural masses relate to folk forms more closely as compared to any other form of mass communication, it is imperative to delve deeply into the history, structure, reach and changing trends in folk forms. Greater attention paid in these areas, would contribute positively towards the nation's overall development.

Globalisation patterns around the world have emphasized upon the growth and development of the urban spaces and those who live within it. The divide between the the haves and the have nots, has grown simultaneously with this trend. As emphasis is being placed on privatisation and internationalization; the rural areas have been neglected from the development process.

One of the best ways to bring awareness into the rural areas about world situations, indirectly affecting them, whereby they lack basic access to water, electricity, health, sanitation and education, is to reach them through their very own folk traditions. As folk theatre is close to the hearts and minds of the rural masses, it is important to revive those folk cultures that are dying. Not much attention has been given to Tamasha, the folk theatre of Maharashtra, with regard to its decline and the social implications of this decline. People from theatre and literary circles from the urban areas have produced extensive work on the growth of Tamasha and the subsequent changes within it as an art form. The various influences that have moulded the content of its performances have been elaborately mentioned. However, very few have discussed the severe problems associated with this folk theatre, that is contributing to its steady decline. Not much has been written about the problems faced by the women in Tamasha troupes either. Moreover, most of the literature on Tamasha that describes its theatrical elements have been written in Marathi, thereby restricting knowledge about the problem from the international communities.

This research has been carried out in order to bring awareness about these concerns to a larger population around the world. This research represents an appeal to the global community to look beyond matters such as economic expansion, industrialization and information technology in the wake of globalization. Where the largest part of the population lives within the rural areas, real change can only be brought about if we focus on these areas.

The study was conducted within three areas namely Murbad, Dahiwad-Digwad and Sanaswadi. Murbad was selected as an area for study as it exists on the outskirts of Mumbai city and therefore comprising a financially stronger population than other villages. The Jatras (fairs) held in this village are lavish and the Tamasha troupes that are invited are popular and charge a higher price than the others. Dahiwad-Digwad, is an economically backward village comprising of a population of not more than five hundred people. The Tamasha troupes that perform in this village are paid less than others, are smaller in size and are economically backward. Sanaswadi, lies on the outskirts of Pune city. The place under study was the Loknatya Mandal, which is also a Sangeetbari. This Sangeetbari is a residential area housing Lavani dancers of all age groups. The study of this area gave insight into the challenges of female performers. Research was conducted within these areas as they were prime areas where Tamasha is performed. Villagers were also interviewed as they formed an audience for the Tamasha shows.

During the course of this research, the presence of girl children within Tamasha troupes uncovered another dimension of study. Girl children are prevalent in Tamasha troupes and feature in the performances as dancers. Most of these girls enter the troupe at the age of twelve and above. Being the most vulnerable of the lot, they are subjected to the perils of their tender age and gender.

Among the samples selected for interviews were troupe owners, performers, script writers and the villagers who formed the audience. Women were treated as a special category for the study as the problems they face are distinct as compared to their male counterparts.

The suggestions provided by stalwarts in the Tamasha circles comprising men and women from all age groups will be useful for considering further interventions into the problem.

A documentary film on this research reveals the story of Tamasha from the time of its inception and its subsequent degeneration through the years. This documentary also discloses, the suggestions made by eminent people from the field in reviving and upholding Tamasha in its traditional form

The outcome of this research would be a rich contribution to the literature that already exists on Tamasha. It has moved a step further in providing future researchers, government and non-government organizations, policy makers as well as fraternity from the performing arts

additional information focusing on the seriousness of the problems faced by Tamasha troupes today, leading to the decay of a folk culture.

Literature Review

Much of the literature that has been reviewed for the purpose of this study has been with regard to the historical aspects of Tamasha as a folk theatre. Some studies that have already been conducted by researchers in the past have also been considered as part of the literature that has been reviewed. As most of the literature available on Tamasha has been written in Marathi, very few books have been referred to as primary sources for data collection. Moreover, much of the literature on Tamasha has to do with Tamasha in a theatrical sense. Very little has been written on the social implications of Tamasha which has contributed to its diminishing traditional aspects over time.

Apart from books, a number of articles written in newspapers has also been referred to as these were the only sources providing insights into Tamasha in current times. The problems faced by Tamasha artistes as well as governmental negligence towards Tamasha has been explicitly written about in these articles.

A content analysis has also been conducted, whereby the researcher has viewed a few films and documentaries made on Tamasha. It was considered necessary to view these films as it depicts the perceptions of the wider audience including those in the urban areas, about Tamasha. Some of the documentaries have been made by researchers who have a keen interest in the subject of Tamasha.

Some of the books that have been referred to are:

1) *Folk Media and Rural Development*, Dr Harish Kumar

This book is the outcome of a Phd thesis written by Dr Harish Kumar, from the Hyderabad university. The book contributed to the research because of its rich descriptions on the historical aspects of Tamasha. It also mentions in detail the structure and the infrastructure that constitutes a Tamasha troupe. This information was necessary to provide the reader a clear description about what constitutes Tamasha which would later make it easier to understand the problems Tamasha is facing today.

2) *Tamāshā: Indian Theatre. Traditions of Performance*. Trevia Abrams: University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu 1990

This book has also been extremely useful in providing detailed insights into the history of Tamasha. Apart from this, the book also describes the theatrical form of Tamasha in its traditional form. Comparisons have been made in different time periods, describing the changing forms of Tamasha as folklore, over the years and due to various influences from other cultures.

3) **Communication and Society-Traditional Forms of Communication and the Mass Media in India, Madhu Malik, Unesco**

This book brings out a detailed explanation of the different forms of folk theatre that exist in India. One part of the book has provided descriptions about Tamasha. Similar to the book written by Trevia Abrams, this book also highlights various aspects of Tamasha that have been influenced over time, bringing about changes within it, in order to meet the demands of a changing society. As different authors mention various influences affecting the history of Tamasha, this book portrayed a unique dimension to the history of Tamasha.

4) **Mumbai Theatre Guide-article by Sandesh Bhandare**

This article was useful in contributing contemporary information about Tamasha. The author is a photo journalist, who has gathered extensive information on the issues and challenges facing Tamasha today. The article describes the various expenditures borne by Tamasha troupes in running Tamasha shows. The author critically analyses the part played by the government agencies in supporting Tamasha. He also emphasizes other problems and issues that Tamasha troupes are facing today. The article presents a grim picture of Tamasha as it exists today.

5) **'The Economics of Tamasha', The Economist Magazine,, Mumbai Theatre Guide.**

This article reflects the expenditures incurred by Tamasha troupes. The figures calculated provide evidence of the fact that Tamasha troupes are living on the brink of poverty. The article also touches upon similar problems faced by the Sangeetbari women (Lavani), as they have to strive to make ends meet in order to run their theatres.

This article is a direct attack on a society that has neglected Tamasha as a folk art form, contributing to its slow death.

6) **'Tamasha-Folk Art as a Business' Economic and Political Weekly, article by Anil Awachat**

This article speaks mainly about the diminishing culture of theatre today, that were once well known for staging Tamasha performances to audiences that took pride in the art form and respected it as an aspect of Maharashtrian traditional culture. An emphasis is made on the Aryabhushan theatre in Pune city, which once thronged with crowds of people, eager to witness a Tamasha show. However, today, the people who do visit the theatre belong to a crude category of spectators who no longer want to watch Tamasha, but rather come to the dilapidated unkempt theatre to watch women dance as they are looked upon as objects of desire. The Aryabhushan theatre has lost its once recognized pride and prestige and has fallen prey to a cheap display of crude drama .

7) **'In Search of Women in History of Marathi Theatre, 1843 to 1933'-Economic and political weekly Oct 26 1991, Neera Adarkar**

As women play a very important role in Tamasha performances, especially in performing Lavani and Mujras, it was considered imperative for the purpose of the research to focus on the study of women as Tamasha performers.

This article takes the reader back into the history of women as theatre artistes. It speaks about the various phases that women have passed through as Marathi theatre has grown over the years. This article speaks about the changing position of women as theatre artistes over time. The history of the position of female performers in theatre gives the reader a clear explanation as to how women have acquired a low status in Tamasha today.

8) **A Short Exploration of Abolition Debates- "Public Women and the Obscene Body-Practice" Nitya Vasudevan**

This article depicts the tragedy of women performers in Tamasha, namely the Lavani artists, wherein most of them bare the image of prostitutes. As most of the women who perform Lavani within the Tamasha belong to the lower castes, their dance form has also been looked down upon as much as their caste status. In spite of the fact that Lavani is a sensuous dance form that depicts womanhood in its essence, the Lavani dance has been criticized as depicting vulgar and erotic gestures. In reality, Lavani today is performed mainly to satisfy the crude tastes of an audience that is ignorant of the culture of Tamasha in its true essence. Aestheticism has been replaced by crudity and vulgarity as women's position in society has declined over time. The article takes us back to the British regime where comparisons were made between dances of the Victorian era with Indian folk forms. These comparisons eventually led to the labelling of Lavani as a crude dance form, leading to its decline in status and respect.

This article also explains the shift of Lavani dancers into bar dancers, and creates the potential for further research in the study of the changing role of Lavani dancers from the rural to the urban milieu.

9) **'Why Women Dancers are opting out of Tamasha', Sakaal Times, April 23, 2012**

In relation to the fact that a number of Lavani performers are opting out of Lavani to join the bars as bar dancers, many others are being lured by the film industry. This article reflects the plight of Lavani dancers, as they hail from below poverty line strata. As these women have been taught to perform Lavani since their childhood, they have no other means of subsistence. Due to this, many are forced to dance for marriage processions and orchestras as well.

Along with the social stigma attached to Lavani as a dance form, the meager income it provides is not sufficient for sustaining the Lavani dancers' families.

This article speaks about the crisis that Tamasha troupes are facing today as more and more women are opting out of Tamasha in order to earn a better livelihood.

Content analysis (review of films and documentaries)

Content analysis on the subject of Tamasha was useful in understanding the perceptions of film makers around Tamasha and the influence of films on the audience perceptions as well. As most of the rural audiences are greatly influenced by films, this was recorded as one of the key reasons for the commercialization of Tamasha and its changing form from a traditional folk art to a modern and crude copy of the film industry.

Therefore content analysis was used as a method due to its potential to identify trends over time from the perspective of a lay person who witnesses these changes as an outsider.

The two Marathi feature films that were analysed for the purpose of this research were 'Natrang' and 'Pinjara'. Among the documentary films analysed for the purpose of the study were 'Natale Tumchaa Saathi', and 'Dancing on the edge of extinction'.

Natrang

The film Natrang (meaning 'immersed in drama') was selected for content analysis as it depicted the lifestyle and the passion of the Tamasha artiste as closely as it exists. The main character of the film is a 'Naachi' (male actor performing the role of a female). The story depicts the struggles of a Tamasha artiste right from the time he sets up a Tamasha troupe. The society around him, rejects him as a man acting in the guise of a woman. Right from the start of the film, the protagonist, does not have the positive support of the villagers in starting a Tamasha troupe, as acting and running a Tamasha troupe is not considered, a dignified profession. The film also depicts the political intervention of local leaders into Tamasha as troupes are used to spread propaganda for the political parties. The survival and popularity of a Tamasha troupe is also dependant upon the support received from the political groups. Towards the end, the film depicts the tragic rejection of the protagonist of the film, as he is ridiculed by his society for the role that he plays as a male in the guise of a female. In the end, the protagonist continues to run his Tamasha troupe against all the odds, since acting is not just his profession, but rather, it is his passion.

Pinjara

The next film 'Pinjara' (meaning 'cage') is about a school teacher who believes that Tamasha is a derogatory form of entertainment which is destructive to the moral and ethical orientations of the villagers. The heroine of the film, is a beautiful dancer, who dances for the sake of survival and in pursuit of her talent which is acting and dancing. In adding another dimension to the film, the school teacher is unable to maintain his morals and breaks his ethical orientations towards the dancer. The film speaks very clearly about the fact that the female lavani dancers in a Tamasha troupe are looked upon as women who lure men into immoralistic actions and thoughts.

Natale Tumchaa Saathi

The documentary film 'Natale Tumchaa Saathi' (meaning 'I danced for you') directed by Savitri Medhatul, is a film about the life, talent, survival and passion of the Lavani dancers of Maharashtra, for the art form. The film speaks very clearly about the hard work that goes into

becoming a Lavani artiste. It also depicts the appalling conditions that the Lavani dancers perform in. Most lavani artistes do not allow their daughters to become dancers as they have not received social acceptance.

Dancing on the Edge of Extinction

The documentary film 'Dancing on the edge of Extinction' depicts Tamasha as well as Lavani as art forms which are diminishing in today's day and age because it has been neglected by the government and by society at large. It also reveals the meagre attempts made by educational institutions and established Lavani dancers in trying to revive the dying art form. Some Lavani dancers have also taken the dance form to America where it has been appreciated. However, these attempts are weak in comparison to the magnitude of the problem that exists

Methodology

Review of Literature

During the process of collecting data about Tamasha, it became imperative for the purpose of the research to review literature on all the aspects of Tamasha, as a folk art. Most of the literature reviewed placed emphasis upon the theatrical content, form and structure of Tamasha. In order to gain clarity on the diminishing aspects of Tamasha as it moved from a traditional folk form to a modern version greatly influenced by commercial cinema, an understanding of its historical passage and its five part structure is important. A relevant amount of written content is available in these areas, adding to a greater understanding of the art form. This information was also necessary to the study as comparisons had to be made between the traditional forms of Tamasha and its contemporary forms during the course of the research

Hypothesis

The methodology used for this research began with the development of a hypothesis. This research is an attempt to bring about awareness regarding the changing trends in the performance of Tamasha within the villages of Maharashtra. There are serious problems facing Tamasha that is leading to its gradual decay. These changing trends have eaten into the essence of our folk traditions as they borrow from film songs, vulgarity and urban influences and commercialization as we cater to a new generation of audiences who no longer understand Tamasha as a part of our Indian cultural tradition. As this was seen as a serious issue affecting the authenticity of Tamasha performances, it also became a crucial aspect of the hypothesis of this study.

Testing the Hypothesis (Methods of Collecting Data)

1) Observation

Field observation was conducted in this study wherein regular trips were made to the areas where Tamasha was being performed. All observations were recorded on a PD 170 camera as a study of the Tamasha performance in current times.

Overt observation was the methodology used on the field, as this study did not require participant observation on the part of the researcher. As this study required observation of the types of Tamasha performances in the villages, it was suitable for the purpose of the research to observe the performances as a part of a regular audience. Other observations were made on the lifestyle of the villagers and their interest in the Tamasha performances.

2) Sampling

Samples were drawn from populations within the state of Maharashtra. Members of these sample groups were the villagers and the Tamasha artistes. Simple random samples and purposive samples were selected for the purpose of the study. Simple random samples were selected in the initial stages of observation and recordings on the camera. Purposive samples were selected according to criteria such as age, gender, education and residential area.

Samples were selected from among various troupes performing Tamasha depending on criteria such as size, composition, popularity, and auspicious occasions for performances eg. Festivals. Samples were also selected from among the villagers as audiences depending upon criteria such as age, gender and education. Age was selected as criteria for sampling as opinions were required from younger as well as older generations to understand the changing trends of Tamasha over the years.

The samples were limited to the study of two troupes ,namely Raghuveer Khedkar and Sopankar.A study of Lavani dancers was also considered as important,since Lavani is an important part of the Tamasha performances.For this purpose,Sanaswadi,was used as a sample,as it depicted a fascinating culture of the Lavani dancers.

3) Interviews

Interviews were conducted with Tamasha artistes and villagers who viewed Tamasha.Some of the interviews were structured, whereas others were unstructured. The structured interviews were meant for those who functioned within the administrative system of Tamasha troupes. Structured questions were mainly pertaining to infrastructure, government intervention, laws and policies affecting Tamasha,.Other structured questions were with reference to the external and internal hindrances faced by Tamasha performers. These questions were necessary to gauge the causes and consequences which led to the changing trends in Tamasha performances.

Structured interviews were administered to Mr Raghuveer Khedkar,the owner of a well established and renowned Tamasha troupe, Mr Sopankar,the owner of a smaller,less prosperous Tamasha troupe,(performing in the remote villages of Maharashtra) ,Mr Santosh Khedlekar,who has a Phd degree on the study of Tamasha.Mr Khedlekar has also written a book on the life of Mrs Kantabai Satarkar,mother of Raghuveer Khedkar.Kantabai Satarkar,is one among the few women who has single handedly run her Tamasha troupe after the demise of her husband. Shri Shantaram Mirane, a senior citizen from Shirdi, Nashik, was interviewed for his vast knowledge on the changing trends of Tamasha over the seventy one years of his life span. Other interviewees,who yielded to structured interviews were,Mr Natharam Master,a school teacher and a script writer for ‘Vag Natyas’ of the Tamasha performances,Mr Raju Bagul,a new age educated youth who runs a Tamasha troupe,and Shri Anantgiri Maharaj.a priest who revered Tamasha for it’s spiritual content.

Structured interviews were also administered to the women Lavani dancers who performed in Tamasha.This was important to gather insights into the woman’s perspective about Tamasha. Varsha Paritekar,a renowned Lavani dancer from Sanaswadi and Lata were a part of the interviews conducted at Sanaswadi. Shakuntala and Asha maushi were among the senior Lavani dancers interviewed for the study.

Content Analysis

Content analysis involves, examining the content of information recorded on film, books, journals, articles and any other sources where information has been recorded. As most of the books written on Tamasha were in the Marathi language, very few books could be found for the purpose of the study that was written in English.

Apart from books, information on the various aspects of Tamasha was also collected from articles in journals and magazines. A useful amount of information was collected by carrying out a content analysis of documentary films, feature films and online interviews with people associated with Tamasha.

The feature films that were analysed for their content were 'Natrang' and 'Pinjara'. Among the documentary films analysed for the purpose of the study were 'Natale Tumchaa Saathi', and 'Dancing on the edge of extinction'.

A Brief Historical Account on the Development of Tamasha

¹In the absence of primary sources concerning the roots and origins of the Tamasha form, we are forced to rely upon recent theories and findings by indologists and Marathi scholars. One suggestion which is disputed because no factual proof maybe found to support it concerns a line of development of popular, low class entertainment which ran parallel to the refined and esoteric sanskrit theatre tradition and which emerged as ‘Tamasha’ after certain formal segments were yoked into the itinerant troupe system created by the Moghuls for the entertainment of their military forces.

The second principle account explaining the roots of ‘Tamasha’ is based on more factual information that Tamasha developed among the Marathas in the late 16th and early 17th centuries from the decaying remnants of the literary sanskrit dramatic and linguistic traditions which had been very strong in the Deccan region and which had been declining steadily following the invasions by the Moghul armies from the 11th century onward.

To strengthen the substance of the second theory, we must add to the decayed remnants of the Sanskrit traditions, the influences of indigenously Maharashtrian forms of entertainment. The northern Indian kathak dances and the pure Moghul forms (the kavvaali and the ghazal songs) were brought to Maharashtra. Indigenous Maharashtrian elements are largely folk entertainments, most of which were religiously inspired, while others were purely secular. Some survive today in their own right, although performances are rare occurrences. It is important to describe a number of these elements to demonstrate how they contributed to the formal structure of Tamasha.

The ‘Kal Sutri’ puppet shows, the ‘Dashavtar’ musical operas, the ‘Bharud’, dramatic poetry recitals, and the ‘Lalit’ and ‘Gondhal’ festival entertainments represent the oldest folk forms known to Maharashtrians. The most ancient is believed to be puppet shows. Dashavtar literally means the ten incarnations of the God ‘Vishnu’. The dramatic material comes from Hindu mythology.

Dashavtar itself declined in popularity over the centuries and it all disappeared after the early 18th century, about the time the Maratha Peshwas (prime ministers) became involved in the fatal series of wars that culminated in defeat (1818) at the hands of the British. More secular Tamasha entertainments quickly filled the vacuum such as the ‘Gaulan’, the ‘Povada’, heroic ballads and the ‘Lavani’ love songs.

There is no historical record of the actual emergence of Tamasha as a discrete form because it is part of an unwritten story of the lives of the untouchable class and the outcaste communities in Maharashtra who joined with Muslim artists to entertain the Moghul armies and subsequently the rural populace

¹ Trevia Abrams: *Tamāshā*. In: Farley P. Richmond, Darius L. Swann, Phillip B. Zarrilli (Hrsg.): *Indian Theatre. Traditions of Performance*. University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu 1990, S. 275–304

The Tamasha Troupe(Phad)

²In Traditional Tamasha, the troupes are called 'Tamasha Phads'. Some others call this as 'Paramparik Tamasha Loknatya Mandal.' In the Marathi language 'Phad' means a 'group' or 'a company'. As the performance of any drama requires an infrastructure, the infrastructure of a Tamasha troupe is almost the same as that which is required in a modern theatre. For staging a performance, many have to work on the stage as well as off the stage. Those working off stage include the scene designer, the lighting specialist, the costume designer, the make up in charge, carpenters, electricians, helpers, floor assistants, lighting assistants, green room in-charge etc. A producer looks after the needs of all the people and oversees the performance of the play, a director looks after all the stage activities. It also involves a stage manager, musicians, choreographers, publicity in charge and transportation in charge. Some of the Tamasha Phads have more expensive infrastructure whereas most others have poorer facilities. The infrastructure of the Phad depends upon how rich the owner is. If the owner is a rich man, he provides the latest, modern stage equipment, acquires a big size tent and trucks for transport. He would also run a number of jeeps for propaganda. He would also use imported audio systems. Maintenance, advances and payments to the artists are also made promptly in these Tamasha troupes. The more prosperous Tamasha troupes have a complete orchestra with the latest musical instruments. There is strength in unity among the members of the Tamasha troupes. They cooperate with one another in their day to day lives as they work together. In spite of lack of funds in the smaller Tamasha troupes, the members of the Tamasha troupes protect one another in difficult situations in a manner that, no member ever goes hungry or needy.

The Five Part Structure of Tamasha

To show how Tamasha was formed, scholars have noted that it is built by taking one good part out of all other folk arts of Maharashtra. Tamasha was born by adapting one or more specialties from each of the folk arts such as Gondhal, Murki and Shahiri which were predominant earlier. The romantic ballads were taken from Shahiri whereas the Nachi, or the female dancer was taken from Murki and Kolhatin. The fusion of the drums of the Nandibhailvala and the Kolhatin gave birth to the drum of the Tamasha.

Although there are two main types of Tamasha : Dholkicha Tamasha and Sangeet Tamasha , there are several varieties such as Khandeshi Tamasha, Vaaydeshi Tamasha , Khadi Tamasha, Kolhatanicha Tamasha and Takhti Tamasha. Each type has its own way of performing, but the structure is uniform.

Gan

After a prayer is offered with respect to the stage, all artists come onto the stage to pray to the Lord Ganesh, for the success of the program.

² Tamasha Folk Theatre of Maharashtra, Dr Pradeep Kumar, Osmania University , Hyderabad

Gavlan

After the Gan, comes the Gavlan. The Gavlans are the herdswomen who are dressed in their finery and are heading to the market of Mathura. This act is performed by the presence of an old aunt accompanying the gavlans. The male artist dressed as an aunt speaks a different dialect than the rest. He is referred to as 'Maushi'. His general chatter carries dual overtones. Krishna and his friend Pendya stop these herdswomen. Since they are herdswomen, they are asked to worship the goddess and thus begin the gavlan, songs venerating the goddess.

Lavani(Rangbaaji)

This is the most colorful aspect of the Tamasha. This is enacted as the village head is going to meet the Tamasha troupe in order to organize a Tamasha in his village. He meets the heroine of the Tamasha troupe and they start talking. This banter causes much laughter and then, the Lavani begins, Jokes are interspersed in between the songs. The village chief and the Tamasha artists are unable to fix a payment term and their bargains elicit much curiosity among the audience.

Vag Natya

Vag Natya means the dramatizations of true or fictitious stories. Vishnu Bala (Baby Vishnu) is a famous VagNatya. Gadhvacha Lagna (A donkey's wedding) is also an important and popular VagNatya. These VagNatyas are normally based on rural life, relationships and contemporary politics. Vag Natya is a crucial aspect of Tamasha as important social messages are presented here. The audience sits through these right upto the wee hours of the morning. After this, the Mujra is performed and the Tamasha ends.

Mujra

The Mujra is a dance in which the performers call upon the saints and great *shahirs* (poets) of the past to bless them.

The strong musical accompaniment for the entire performance is provided by the *dholki* (two-faced drum), the *tuntuney* (one-stringed drone), the *sambal* (tambourine), and, at times, the harmonium.

The Hypothesis

'Tamasha'-A Diminishing Folk Culture

³It is not clear that at which point in time Tamasha of Maharashtra came to exist in its present form. Tamasha was popular in the 18th century during the rule of the Peshwas, but did not at that time contain plays or 'Vags' that Tamasha does now. A full length contemporary Tamasha typically contains an invocation or gan; gowlan; a song on the theme of Krishna and the milkmaid; lavanis, narrative poetical compositions with a high erotic content; 'Sawal Jawab' or 'Jagra' during which Shiva and Parvati, or some other celestial pair pose and answer intricate riddles; the Vag or play; and the Mujra, or homage to saints and gifted writers. Lavanis form the highlight of the performance. Earlier, these were strung together and loosely linked by extempore dialogue from the main characters, including Tamasha's version of the Sutradhar and the Vidushak. This extempore dialogue came to be replaced by the Vag, which does not allow the same flexibility that the earlier extempore dialogue did. However, there is still ample room for improvisation even within the changed format to Tamasha. Themes are sometimes drawn from mythology, but they eventually end up as Tamasha's characteristic blend of satire, farce and ribaldry, as do the secular themes. Lavanis, the heart of Tamasha performance, are song and dance routines, and are now performed by women rather than by young boys. In Jatra, men still specialize in playing female roles. Tamasha has been criticized for its vulgarity and efforts are being made to clean it up, with the institution of a certificate of approval by the government of Maharashtra.

As most developing nations are essentially rural in nature, folk theatre has served as a means for spreading social messages for development, spreading awareness and knowledge among the rural audiences. Similarly Tamasha as a folk theatre carries a rich cultural history. Its performances date back to the Maratha period where the lower castes were the performing artistes. Later, as it gained in popularity, the higher castes set up Tamasha troupes as well. During the freedom movement Tamasha as a folk theatre served as a prominent agent in strengthening the nationalist spirit.

While some folk theatres have strengthened as the carriers of traditional folk cultures, some folk cultures have been neglected due to various factors such as modernisation, mass media and changing perceptions of audiences. This research is an attempt to bring about awareness regarding the changing trends in the performance of Tamasha within the villages of Maharashtra. These changing trends have eaten into the essence of our folk traditions as they borrow from film songs, vulgarity and urban influences and commercialization as we cater to a new generation of audiences who no longer understand Tamasha as a part of our Indian cultural tradition.

³ Communication and Society-Traditional Forms of Communication and the Mass Media in India, Madhu Malik, Unesco

Folk media in India seems to be used as a supplement to electronic mass media rather than as the centre of communication efforts to reach 80% of India's total population who live in the villages. We have various folk forms in our country, which are very much alive today. We can see it in our cultural heritage. All these need careful investigation, study and documentation.

While electronic mass media has been constantly expanding, 'Tamasha' as traditional media has been underplayed and neglected over time. India should play a positive role in identifying folk media such as Tamasha for communicating to the rural and urban masses. The experience can be of good use in comparing mass communication techniques in both the developing and developed parts of Maharashtra through scientific methods.

Tamasha, as a folk theatre has been instrumental in representing the people in their natural habitat, with all their contradictions and multifarious activities. It gives a glimpse of their style of speech, music, dance, dress and wisdom. It contains a rich store of mythological heroes, medieval romances, chivalric tales, social customs, beliefs, and legends. In order to understand the colorful diversity and unity of India, it is important to study folk theatre in its natural settings. It is true that if we want to penetrate the message of development among the rural masses we would have to opt for the folk forms of our country in a more planned manner.

In spite of modernization in India, traditional folk forms maintain their validity, particularly when used to influence attitudes, instigate action and promote change. Extensive experience shows that traditional forms of communication can be effective in dispelling superstitions, archaic perceptions and unscientific thought that people have inherited as part of their traditions. Practitioners of the traditional folk theatre use a subtle form of persuasion by presenting the required message in locally popular artistic forms. This cannot be rivalled by any other means of communication.

Hypothesis Testing

During the process of collecting data about Tamasha, it became imperative for the purpose of the research to review literature on all the aspects of Tamasha, as a folk art. Most of the literature reviewed placed emphasis upon the theatrical content, form and structure of Tamasha.

In order to gain clarity on the diminishing aspects of Tamasha as it moved from a traditional folk form to a modern version greatly influenced by commercial cinema, an understanding of its historical passage and its five part structure is important. A relevant amount of written content is available in these areas, adding to a greater understanding of the art form. This information is also necessary to this study as comparisons have to be made between the traditional forms of Tamasha and its contemporary forms during the course of the research.

In developing the hypothesis, primary and secondary data was collected for this study. Although a great deal of primary data was available on 'Tamasha', most of the literature was pertaining to the folk form as a traditional theatrical drama. Research on the social implications of Tamasha was limited and no special references have been made towards Tamasha as a dying traditional art form.

From the primary sources gathered in this study, information was collected on the historical development of Tamasha from the time of its inception into the state of Maharashtra. This data was necessary to analyze the actual period Tamasha began losing its traditional form, thereby subverting it to a lower status that is now recognized as modern, commercial and riddled with vulgarity. This trend has also led to the creation of an audience that is unaware of the true essence of Tamasha as a folk tradition. All these influences together with the changing audience perceptions have led to the slow death of the traditional form of Tamasha as a folk art and as a carrier of the culture of the state of Maharashtra.

Observation

It was observed that most Tamashas took place in the villages during auspicious occasions over the year. Dates were set according to the Hindu religious calendar for these events. During this time a fair, which is also called a 'Jatra' is set up in each village.

A study of Tamasha performances in the Murbad village, bordering Maharashtra, revealed that along with the religious fervor within the villages, the fairs introduce a variety of festivities as a market is set with entertainment for children and adults. Roller coaster rides, ferris wheels, games, magic shows for children and music playing continuously throughout the streets is a common observation during the time of the 'Jatras'. A market is set, selling everything from household items, jewellery for women, snacks clothes etc. for all ages. This market is thronging with crowds of people filling every nook and corner of the ceremonious village. The village temple is also lit up with bright lights, as worship sessions are conducted by the priests and offerings are collected for the deities. On the whole, the 'Jatra' is a colourful and magical occasion which changes a small, quiet, sleeping village into a hub of colours, loud music, crowds and festivities.

It is in the midst of this energetic fervor, that the Tamasha performances take place. If a village is more prosperous than the others, such a village would invite more than one Tamasha troupe at a time to perform. In that case, villagers have a choice to visit either one of the Tamasha performances or all at one time. The larger, more prosperous villages follow a ticketing system for their performances, where the audience has to buy the ticket from a ticket counter, just before the show begins. The smaller, less prosperous villages, make a collection from all the villagers where each one pays a specific amount. A lump sum is then paid to the Tamasha troupe performing in that village.

The smaller villages, cannot afford lavish Jatras, and the entertainment that the larger villages accommodate. The scene is a quieter one, as greater attention is paid to the rituals performed to the deities. Villagers decorate their homes with 'Rangolis' (powdered colour designs) and the women folk dress in their refineries, as much as they can afford. A visit to the temple is crucial, where, villagers sing and dance their way to the temple to pay homage to deities such as Khandoba or Dhairoba and the goddess Bhavani. A procession is formed as coconuts are broken, drums are played and loud "band" music adds energy to the rituals and religiosity of the people.

The Dahivad Digvad village displayed a pleasant amalgamation of Hindu and Muslim cultures, as villagers of both religions payed homage to the Hindu gods, worshipped during the Jatra. Eventually the procession ended at a Mosque, where the Hindus and the Muslims worshipped the deities of both religions within the Mosque. This was, a unique observation, adding weight to the fact that, India is truly united in all its diversity.

Sanaswadi, bordering Pune city, is a residential area, housing Lavani (a dance form) artistes from different parts of Maharashtra. Although, this area is described as a house of talent, where Lavani performances are held, recorded visuals about this place revealed findings, quite contrary to what it has been described as. The approach road leading to the area has a board bearing the name 'Loknatya Mandal'. To any lay person, the name would suggest 'an institute' associated with teaching and learning the dance form. However, on entering, the observer's sense of perception is betrayed by the reality that presents itself. Sanaswadi, is inhabited mainly by women 'Lavani' performers, filtering in from the neighbouring villages. Some of these women, hail from families where 'Lavani' has been carried forward through generations from mothers to daughters. Many others have come to Sanaswadi to learn the art form.

During the course of recording observations about Sanaswadi, it became very clear that, 'Lavani' as an ancient art form, emerging from the Peshwa and Mughal regime, carrying forward the traditions of Shahirs (literary poets, writers), has now turned into a 'dance for survival'. As most of the 'Lavani dancers hail from the lower castes and live below poverty line, they dance their 'Lavanis' to entertain men in closed rooms. Loud filmy music and the sound of ghungroos (anklets) haunt the place. Men, drive into Sanaswadi in swanky cars, hiding their faces from the cameras, in order to keep up their untarnished images. Pune city describes 'Sanaswadi' as a brothel where 'Lavani' dancers are picked up by men, after a performance at different rates, depending on the age of the performer.

Sampling

The samples were limited to the study of two troupes ,namely Raghuv eer Khedkar and Sopankar.A study of Lavani dancers was also considered as important,since Lavani is an important part of the Tamasha performances.For this purpose,Sanaswadi,was used as a sample,as it depicted a fascinating culture of the Lavani dancers.

Raghuv eer Khedkar's troupe is a more prosperous and well known troupe performing in the larger villages of Maharashtra.As this troupe has had greater exposure to almost all the villages of Maharashtra,it was important to study this troupe for the purpose of the research as it gave greater insights into the experiences of Tamasha troupes in several villages.It also exposed the relationship of the Tamasha troupe with the government,changing trends in the audiences and also the politics behind Tamasha performances.This troupe has experienced the longest lifespan of performances from the time of it's inception.It has also had the privilege of performing at the recently held Commonwealth games in the country.As Raghuv eer Khedkar's mother,namely Kantabai Satarkar has also run the troupe prior to Raghuv eer,this troupe has had a long and rich history as well.

Sopankar's troupe was a smaller, less prosperous troupe, holding it's performances in the smaller villages of Maharashtra.There was a marked difference in the performances and the infrastructure of both the troupes.However, in spite of these differences, the problems faced by both troupes were similar.This added to the initial hypothesis of the study that Tamasha is facing serious problems which is leading to it's downfall.

Educational background was also considered to be an important criteria for studying a sample as changing audience perceptions about Tamasha are age relevant.A relevant finding was that the audience played an important role in the survival of Tamasha.As the audience is largely rural in nature,educational levels of the viewers was found to be very low.As a result of this,the audiences were not aware of the cultural deterioration of Tamasha performances.The new generation is impressed by commercial cinema and film songs and demands the same from the Tamasha performances.At the same time,as most Tamasha artistes belong to poor ,lower caste backgrounds,they perform to satisfy their survival needs.Lack of education ,among the artistes is another reason for the deterioration of Tamasha in contemporary times.

During the course of the study, it was also realized that a new genre of Tamasha troupes is emerging as they are being led by a more educated leadership. This information was important as it provided insights into how Tamasha could be brought back to it's traditional form, in carrying out the task of spreading social messages to the villagers, thereby bringing about concrete changes within the society.

Gender was also an important criterion for the selection of a sample as women's perceptions and reactions towards Tamasha performances differed greatly from that of men. Most women looked down upon Tamasha as cheap, vulgar and distasteful.

Areas selected for data collection for the first half of the study were the outskirts of Pune city (Sanaswadi),lokmatya mandal,outskirts of Maharashtra(Murbad in Mhasa district),outskirts of Nashik city(Dahiwad-Digwad,Chandwad district).These areas were selected for the purpose of the study based upon specific criteria like proximity to metropolitan cities like Pune and Mumbai. Similarly, the size of the Tamasha troupe and popularity were also criteria used for sampling as comparisons could be made between different Tamasha troupes accordingly.

Interviews

Smt. Kantabai Satarkar

Shrimati Kantabai Satarkar, has been a stalwart in the Tamasha circles. At seventy five years of age, her performances date back to the 1950s, where she began her career as a Tamasha artiste from the age of nine. She has acted, sung, directed and run her own Tamasha troupe. She is the first recipient of the 'Jeevan Gaurav' award (lifetime achievement award) presented by the government of Maharashtra.

Kantabai's story is an interesting one as she drew our attention to the start of her early career. She mentioned that she used to travel from one village to another on bullock cart and sometimes even walk miles to perform. At the age of sixteen, her talent was appreciated by the famous, Baburao Punekar. From here, she began performing at the once renowned Aryabhushan theatre in Pune. She also mentioned that the Tamasha of the 1950s had various parts such as 'Bataavni' (comedy) and 'Sawaal Jawaab' (dialogues related to social issues). It was surprising to learn that the songs played during the Lavani performances were those of Pathe Bapurao, who was from the Maharashtrian literati, an educated elite. This is in contrast to the new generation of film songs that have contributed to the extent of vulgarity displayed in Lavani today. The 'Vag Natyas' were depicted around historical figures such as Raja Harischandra and Taramati. The 'Nachas' (men in the guise of women) performed the female roles as female were few in number.

Kantabai Satarkar, a grand woman of stature, a mother of five children and a grandmother, agreed that Tamasha has changed over the years. She believes that the change is towards the negative. She took us back to the good old days, when Tamasha was performed for an audience that appreciated the art form and the talent of the artistes. She also mentioned that, Tamasha was respected as an art form in times gone by. She mentions proudly that she performed at the once prestigious Hanuman Theatre in Mumbai where famous Tamasha artistes such as Baburao Indurikar, Tukaram Khedkar and Madhurao Nagarkar held their shows. These were the most popular Tamasha troupes of her times. She worked with these troupes because she believed that her growth as a performer would be a positive one, as these Tamasha troupes focussed on historical themes in their shows. She stated that these were troupes of a high calibre of performance, which is no longer found today. As a performer, she has played the roles of Shivaji and other historical figures, dressed as a male. She has also played the role of 'Naradmuni' (an important male character in Hindu mythology), in the famous historical play 'Satyavaan Savitri'. She is convincing, as she upholds her status as a woman who performed in the guise of a man, as audiences appreciated her talent more than her looks.

It was disheartening to learn from her, that the male artistes of the troupe she performed in, felt challenged at her ease in performing male roles. As a result of this, they made circumstances difficult for her and eventually she was forced to change troupes, where she faced other challenges as a woman. She is one of the few women within Tamasha who decided to single handedly begin her own Tamasha troupe after the demise of her husband, with a meager insurance amount of Rs 10,000, that her husband invested for the family. It is encouraging to learn, that even as a woman, she set up the Tamasha tent, cooked meals, performed on stage and looked after her four children, only because of her undying passion for Tamasha.

She stated that Tamasha performances have been facing hardships since the past twenty years. Even as performers and artistes bear the brunt of this downfall, it is the female artistes who are the most affected. She also mentioned that most villages do not provide security to the Tamasha troupes. There are riots and troupes fall prey to vandalism. Members of the audience do

not spare the female performers. They enter the stage and the changing rooms of the women. Due to this women require greater security as performers which is a totally neglected area. However, she is disheartened at the way Tamasha is looked down upon today. She is against the commercialization of Tamasha which has introduced film songs and cheap dances into its performances.

Sir Shantaram Mirane

A visit to Mr Shantaram Mirane's home, just a few metres away from the famous Sai Baba temple was an experience to remember. As Mirane revealed that Sai Baba himself was a patron of the art form; this interview gave unique insights into the research.

Shri Shantaram Mirane, along with his previous generations have been ardent viewers and patrons of the art form. Being the head clerk of a school called 'Sainath Vidyalaya', Shantaram is closely associated with the educated class. He is also a trustee of the 'Sainath Sanstha' in Shirdi. He has been offering his support and patronage to Tamasha over the years. This trend has continued within his family over three generations.

As we talked to Mirane, we learnt that Tamasha, was an art form that was appreciated and respected by both men and women in the past. It was interesting to learn that Sai Baba offered patronage to the Tamasha artistes including the Lavani dancers. Tamasha performances were held in the vicinity of the Sai Baba temple at Shirdi. The audience included men, women and children. As the research team interacted with Mirane Sir, in his home, he proudly mentioned that, his great grandfather was the first disciple of Sai Baba. Sai Baba visited Mirane's home to rest as well as for meals. He also mentioned that, Tamasha was performed in Shirdi from the time of Sai Baba. He states that Sai Baba encouraged Tamasha as an art form. Every time a performer, performed before him, he expressed his appreciation by rewarding the performance with a one rupee coin.

He narrates one incident where a female Tamasha artiste once came to Shirdi with her family. She was eager to perform before Sai Baba. However, her husband did not approve of this. In spite of the opposition that came on behalf of her husband, she performed a Lavani song before Sai Baba. At that time, her husband who was sitting in the audience, saw the Hindu deity 'Ram', in Sai Baba's form, as he was a devotee of Ram.

Mirane's father and grandfather played the dholki (drum) for Tamasha performances. Although Mirane had been a school teacher, he also played the dholki for Tamasha performances. He did this out of a sheer reverence for the art form. He showed us posters of a particular kind of Tamasha that is held even today on rare occasions. It is called 'Bin Baayka Cha Tamaasha' which literally means 'Tamasha without Women'. This poster displayed the pictures of beautiful women wearing colourful sarees and professionally applied make up. These beautiful women were actually men. We had not guessed this until we were told. Mr Mirane has been instrumental in hosting a performance of this kind, without a single female performer. He states that the beauty of this kind of Tamasha lay in the fact that, the men played the part of women so well, that one would not be able to tell the difference. This was owing to the fact that, performances of the past carried pizzazz and perfection. The audience appreciated the male performers, even more than the females. The contribution made for this show, came especially from women. These performances are held for the entertainment of men, women and children. The male artistes are appreciated for their performance in the guise of women, even more than their female counterparts. These

performances have always been a complete hit with the audiences, even on the rare occasions that it has been staged.

Mirane points out that the 'Lavani' performed by the male performers was one of a kind. He remembers, Jagannath Shivnekar, a well known 'Songadya' (Joker) of his times, who came on stage as people applauded for his act, that spoke more than words, in the true sense. His performances date back thirty years to the 1980's.

Mirane expressed his disappointment at the way Tamasha is being neglected today. He also mentioned that members of the educated classes must come forward and protest against the deteriorating condition of Tamasha, as he has also been a faithful patron of the art form.

Mirane Sir mentioned with a degree of sadness, that, earlier where Tamasha in its original form played out all the parts, ie 'Gan Gavlan', 'RangBaazi' and 'Vag', today the trend has changed due to the changing audience preferences. The length of the 'Gan Gavlan' performance has shortened leaving the audience devoid of wholesome spiritual knowledge of our past ancestors. The 'Rangbaazi' which was earlier infused with intelligent satirical black comedy along with the 'Mujras' where the Lavani dancers presented invocations to the saints and poets of the past, has now been replaced by vulgar and cheap dances to the beats of filmy music. The 'Vag' which is the part carrying social messages, earlier used to bring about social reform in the villages. This part has almost disappeared from new age Tamasha performances. Mirane has not watched Tamasha, since the past twenty years for these reasons.

As Mirane Sir, reminisced upon a past that took us back a hundred years, he told us that, at a time when commercial cinema and television did not exist, Tamasha was the only source of entertainment in Maharashtra. Therefore, it was highly revered by the audience. Tamasha came into Shirdi during the 'Ramnaomi' festival. He mentioned famous names associated with Tamasha at that time such as Dattoba Tambe and Ranga Lohar (who took on female as well as male roles). During the Ramnaomi festival, crowds accumulated, mainly to watch the Tamasha show, which would be held at night. He recollects the dignity of female artistes on the stage, as they dressed as decently as housewives, during their performances. He compares this situation to the vulgarity and indecency that is portrayed in the present performances.

Mirane Sir also spoke about the 'Sangeet Barees' of the yesteryears which were referred to as 'Chawli Pawli' Tamasha.

Santosh Khedlekar, who accompanied the research team for this interview, added his views, by comparing 'Sangeet Barees' of the past to those of the present times. He stated that in the olden days, 'Baithaki' form of 'Sangeet Barees' were more popular. In this form, the dancer was also the singer. This form of 'Bari' portrayed a blend of talent, beauty and dignity, which is no longer the case in present times. 'Sangeet Barees' of today are interspersed with malpractices, such as prostitution, which has lowered the dignity of this ancient traditional art form.

Adding to the statements made by Khedlekar about 'Sangeet Barees' of today, Mirane Sir mentioned that, the 'Sangeet Barees' of the past, were performed with a certain degree of quality and class. As his father played the 'Tabla' for a 'Sangeet Baree', he had a great deal of knowledge to share on this aspect. Sangeet Baris would travel from one place to another, to perform for the 'Jatras' in different villages, unlike today, where Sangeet Baris have established permanently in specific locations.

Mirane Sir, has been a drama artiste, and a director too. He has also performed for an association called 'Dr Rasik Sanchak' from 1975-1995. As an artist, he has travelled from one village to another, performing two dramas every year, during the festivals of 'Ganeshotsav' and

‘Navratri’. He has never performed for the money, but rather to prove to the world, that even in a spiritual place like Shirdi, good performers exist.

He mentioned the plight of Tamasha artistes of today, who lack medical facilities, education and a pension to support them in their old age. He spoke about the contribution he has made towards uplifting the cause of senior Tamasha artistes. He also mentioned his efforts at organizing a ‘Lavani’ programme for ladies in Shirdi. He had once invited a famous Lavani dancer, by the name of Sulochana Chavan to perform at this programme. At this programme, he felicitated Gulab Bai Sangamnerkar, a renowned senior Lavani artiste of her times. He proudly admitted that he is contributing to uplift the folk form in small ways, within his capacity. He states that members of society should come forward to offer patronage to Tamasha. Only if such efforts are made, can Tamasha survive.

Shri Anantgiri Maharaj

Anantgiri Maharaj is a Brahmin priest carrying a rich spiritual background and knowledge of the Indian culture from the religious texts. At seventy eight years of age, he has also been an ardent viewer of Tamasha as he has contributed to the spiritual content that Tamasha is meant to present to the audience through the ‘Gan Gavlan’. He has contributed his inputs towards the spiritual content in Tamasha over the years.

Anantgiri Maharaj believes that there are two ways by which we can bring about social change. The first type of change occurs through the propagation of religion and the second type occurs through the staging of drama, namely Tamasha in rural Maharashtra. He states emphatically that the priest in the village takes a hefty sum from the villagers, after conducting a ‘Pravachan’ (religious lecture). Yet, his efforts are applied for about two hours. However, the Tamasha performances put in greater effort and time in presenting their social messages to the audience. Therefore, Tamasha must be given impetus by society at large.

When asked whether he felt ashamed at being so closely associated with Tamasha, in spite of being a Brahmin priest, he stood his ground with a proud conviction concerning Tamasha. He states that Tamasha has always begun with invocations to the Gods, symbolizing the fact that, it is meant to be presented for the upliftment of humanity.

As Anantgiri Maharaj has been closely associated with Raghuvveer Khedkar and his family, he states that there are a few Tamasha troupes such as that of Khedkar’s that continue to portray Tamasha in its original traditional form. He stated that, there are times Raghuvveer takes on the part, he plays as a priest in reality, and delivers lectures to the audience as a Tamasha artist. In this way, Raghuvveer has been able to reach out to the masses with religious messages, in a more impactful manner through Tamasha.

Due to time constraints, an important aspect of Tamasha namely the ‘Vag Natyas’ that had been used as a vehicle in bringing about social change in the past is slowly disappearing. This is resulting in the downfall of Tamasha in the traditional sense.

Natharam Godegaokar Master

Natharam Master, a primary school teacher and a writer, has been writing scripts for Tamasha since fifteen years. A man in his forties, he decided to direct his talent to the upliftment of Tamasha. As a school teacher, his scripts carry socially useful messages. His scripts are utilized in the performance of the ‘Vag Natyas’, the part of Tamasha, which carries social messages.

Natharam Master has been writing for Raghuveer Khedkar's Tamasha over fifteen years. He has stopped writing for other Tamasha troupes, as he believes that the quality of Tamasha performances in these troupes has fallen considerably over the years. Natharam, belonging to the educated fraternity, wants to maintain a standard of quality in his scripts. A few troupes such as Raghuveer's have continued to support the work of script writers like Natharam, thereby maintaining a high standard in their performances.

He mentioned that there are different kinds of 'Vag Natyas' which carry socially useful messages to the audience. These 'Vag Natyas' fall in the categories of religious, historical, and social. Natharam stated that the 1950s was the genre for the spread of social messages. During this time, he wrote a script called 'Dove Naag' which became very popular in Sangamner. The 'Vag Natya' began with a proclamation of the good values that should be followed by humans which would contribute to better living within society. As a result of the popularity acclaimed by these 'Vag Natyas', the owners of prestigious Tamasha troupes wanted Natharam to write their scripts for them as well. Among these people were Dattoba Tambe Shirolekar, Chandrakant Dabalbolekar, Datta Mahadip and also Kantabai Satarkar. Natharam has written around thirty five Vag Natyas so far carrying strong social messages to the rural audiences. He said that there are a few others like himself, who have been writing Vag Natyas of this kind.

When asked about how he felt about the Vag Natyas scripted today and the changes among the audiences over the years, he stated that the Tamasha troupes of today, do not want to change the traditional aspects of Tamasha. However, the change has come in due to changing preferences of the audience. He mentioned that the world is changing at a rapid pace. Similarly, changes have occurred in Tamasha as well.

The Tamasha troupes of today, have three generations of audience sitting in front of them. The audience comprises of a young generation, in the age group of 18-35, a middle generation in the age group of 35-50 and an older generation of people above the age of 50. The dilemma that Tamasha troupes are facing today, is to do with, what category of audience to please and how. The older generation prefers traditional 'Paramparik' Tamasha. The younger generation wants to watch glimpses of commercial new age cinema in the Tamasha performances. The middle generation is constantly looking for change in Tamasha.

In trying to satisfy the preferences of a diverse audience, of illiterate villagers, most Tamasha troupes have failed miserably in their efforts. As a result of this dilemma, many Tamasha troupes are now becoming a diminishing Maharashtrian culture, while few continue to survive as traditional troupes popularly acclaimed.

Adding to this, there is fierce competition between Tamasha troupes, because of which some troupes are willing to present anything in the name of Tamasha to an audience in order to lure in greater crowds. As this pattern has grown in magnitude over the years, the audience have been heavily influenced by cheap, non traditional depictions of Tamasha. This cut throat competition among the Tamasha troupes has left Tamasha with a bad reputation today.

However, there are few like Natharam Master, privileged with education and oriented towards the social good.

Raghuveer Khedkar

Hailing from Sangamner, which is also considered to be the heart of Tamasha performances in Maharashtra. Raghuveer Khedkar has a vast extent of knowledge on Tamasha, as he has been performing since the age of four. The son of Kantabai Satarkar, Raghuveer has watched the growth of Tamasha, ever since his mother performed and ran a Tamasha troupe single

handedly. Today, Raghuv eer is one of the most renowned owners of a Tamasha troupe in Maharashtra, that has continued to survive against all the odds that Tamasha troupes are facing today. Raghuv eer's troupe also had the privilege to perform at the recently held Commonwealth games at Delhi. It is important to mention here that Khedkar's troupe is one of the few surviving troupes in Maharashtra, that continues to maintain a standard of high quality in its Tamasha performances. By adhering to this standard, Khedkar's troupe boasts of maintaining the traditional aspects of Tamasha, which is rapidly disappearing among other troupes.

Raghuv eer mentioned that due to efforts made by a few troupes like his, the government has begun to provide some support to the Tamasha troupes since the past one year. As Raghuv eer's troupe is one of the largest, he has received financial support called 'Anudaan' amounting to Rs 6 lakhs and 'Bhaag Bhagwad' amounting to Rs 2 lakhs. However, this financial support has come only once.

He also states that, he used to have twenty two Tamasha 'Phads' (tents). Today, he is left with only nine. Among the other problems faced by Tamasha troupes is that the amount of money generated is much less than the amount of money spent. In spite of Tamasha being the folk culture of the people of Maharashtra, it is treated shabbily by the government officials. Permission to hold a performance is never granted easily. Tamasha troupe owners have to pay hefty amounts to the legislative authorities as bribes. The demand is usually for Rs 25,000 and above for a performance. The village authorities also demand sums equivalent to Rs 10,000 and above. Others ask for services from the members of the troupe for tasks around the village. Sometimes, Raghuv eer, has had to let go of fifty of his troupe members in adhering to the villagers demands. Eventually, he is left with less hands to work with him during a show. Therefore, the financial losses that Tamasha performances incur as they move from one village to another are great and many.

He mentioned that the village 'Panchayats' also fail to respect Tamasha as a folk culture, and as an important identity which must be maintained and retained.

While commercial media continues to uphold 'bollywood' films, by sending good films to the Oscars, the Maharashtrian media has never attempted to give Tamasha an identity within the nation or even around the world. He suggested that, even if such initiatives are taken by modern media, towards the upliftment of Tamasha, we would be able to save a dying folk form.

Even though Raghuv eer and his troupe had the privilege and honor of performing at the commonwealth games, yet, they have not received a payment for their performance there. The only compensation they were given was for the airfare and accommodation in Delhi. In spite of not receiving any payment from the government for their outstanding performance at the commonwealth games, they were satisfied with the rich reward of grand compliments and accolades that they received from the various international communities present at the occasion. He mentioned proudly, that, even though his troupe presented their act to the president and the prime minister of the country along with the many Indians in the audience, they were touched by the fact that, the international audience that did not understand the language, appreciated their show the most. The foreign audience was in awe of the fact that a Lavani dancer wears ghungroos (anklets) weighing 3-4 kilos around each foot. They were surprised at the effort a Tamasha artist puts in for each performance.

In all his simplicity, Raghuv eer mentioned that a Tamasha artiste does not require the luxuries of a lavish life. All an artist actually requires is the audience appreciation in the form of their compliments and applause. This is what actually creates an artist and helps him/her to evolve to the next higher level of their creativity.

The interviews with Raghuveer Khedkar revealed that Tamasha troupes lack support from government agencies. Although the government has recently begun to finance Tamasha performances, this amount is insufficient to sustain Tamasha troupes today. Among other reasons, Tamasha troupes have been borrowing money from money lenders at high rates of interest for their sustenance. As a result, most of them are heavily indebted. Adding to this, as Tamasha troupes lack police protection and general social security, sometimes they fall prey to vandalism, leading to the destruction of their equipment and infrastructure. This is a common occurrence, causing added expenditure to the maintenance of the troupe. Eventually Tamasha troupes are losing their standing due to poor infrastructural facilities.

Sopankar

Sopankar runs a Khandeshi Tamasha troupe on a smaller scale than that of Raghuveer Khedkar. His troupe performs at the smaller, more remote villages of Maharashtra. As these villages comprise of a lesser number of people, the fees for Tamasha performances generated by his troupe is much lesser than the others. Through the interviews and observations with this troupe, it was realized that Sopankar's troupe was among the economically more backward Tamasha troupes of Maharashtra.

Sopankar has been running his troupe for eighteen years. During his eighteen years of experience, he states that, no efforts have been made by the government to uplift the deteriorating state of Tamasha in Maharashtra. Similar to Raghuveer's statements, he mentioned that the government has stepped forward a year ago, to provide help to Tamasha troupes by way of finances. The government has come out with a scheme, wherein Tamasha troupes must stage at least twenty performances in a year to avail of the 'help money', called 'Anudaan'. The government has pledged to compensate the Tamasha troupes with Rs 2 lakhs as 'help' on an annual basis.

However Sopankar has worked out the benefits of the 'Anudaan' and states that, this money just about suffices to maintain the dying art form, with regard to infrastructure. It does not provide lifetime security to the artistes. In spite of this help from the government, artistes still continue to live a hand to mouth existence. This is because the liabilities borne for each show is far greater than what the government is offering as 'Anudaan'. Most of the shows have to incur the losses of damages which occur due to anti-social elements who break equipment and infrastructure during the show. Therefore, he suggested that the government should provide troupes with police protection for the female artistes as well as for the protection of their equipment.

Sometimes, the villagers do not pay the money promised as fees. This is because, smaller troupes like Sopankar's have to accept an invitation from a village without an advance. Contracts are finalised, by faith, rather than on paper. As a result of this, a troupe may get cheated as the money promised is not handed over. At such times, the troupe sacrifices their salaries as the expenses for performances are paid from the pocket of the owner.

He says that in all the eighteen years that he has run a Tamasha troupe, he has not managed to save anything for his future. The shows are carried forward due to the love for the art form. He states that the Tamasha runs on the basis of humanity, as the artistes cater to society's need for entertainment and their own need, which is to entertain. The artistes want nothing more than to leave behind their talent for their future generations, as they believe that performing is their ultimate passion and not just a means to a livelihood.

Sopankar mentioned that, as expenses are increasing, maintaining a Tamasha troupe today has become more difficult. Not only do Tamasha troupes have to bear the expenses for damages, but

they also have to take loans from money lenders who charge exorbitant rates of interest. At the same time, artistes are also diminishing in numbers. Even if he appoints fifty hands to help, at some point, the members leave and he is left with barely twenty hands.

With regard to contribution of girls in Tamasha, Sopankar is headstrong on not letting his daughters join the profession. He believes that women in Tamasha belong to the lower castes, and are not respected. He states that men do not want to marry Tamasha girls, because of which many of the girls in his troupe are unwed mothers.

On observing Sopankar's troupe, it was found that, there were girls as young as twelve years of age, performing the Lavanis (erotic dances). This observation opened up another dimension to the research. The possible dangers that girl children maybe subjected to as Tamasha performers.

Santosh Khedlekar

Santosh Khedlekar, has been closely associated with the Khedkar family. Hailing from Sangamner, the centre of Tamasha performances, he holds Tamasha close to his heart. While interviewing him, one could sense the grief that he was experiencing as we discussed the deteriorating condition of Tamasha. As a true patron of the art form, he tried to defend Tamasha, as he continued to hold it up as a respectable tradition of the Maharashtrian culture. He believes that the greatest change has been brought on by the new generation of audiences. He also mentioned, that it is very difficult to change the perceptions and needs of an audience. He states that the number of Tamasha troupes is also gradually diminishing in number due to the indebtedness faced by the Tamasha performers. Not only that, the number of artistes are also decreasing rapidly as the number of audiences decrease simultaneously. It is difficult to find artistes who can play the 'Dholki' (traditional drum) and the 'Halgi'. The dancers are 'adivasi' (tribal) girls who do not actually hail from the original Tamasha communities. Earlier the girls hailed from Sangli, Pune and Kolhapur districts and could speak good Marathi. The adivasi girls today, do not suit requirements of the professional Lavani. Today, one even finds performers from Bengal within Tamasha as a result of poverty. He predicts a dying future for traditional Tamasha in the next twenty years if some serious steps are not taken to revive it.

Mandatai

An interview with Raghuveer's sister, Mandatai (as she is fondly called), threw light on the position of women in Tamasha troupes today. In spite of the fact that Mandatai performs in one of the more prestigious, well established troupes in Maharashtra, with her brother, she admitted, that women in Tamasha have no status in society. Her dedication to Tamasha has led her to perform with snakes, after spending months of practicing with them. She proudly spoke of the days she has spent living with the snakes, feeding them and nurturing them, even as she was preparing to dance with them in her shows. Even as she described her dance with the snakes, she lamented the fact that the audiences today are only interested in watching her as an object of lust, and not for her talent. The audience is not interested in the long hours of effort she puts into her performances.

Among the various problems she has seen over the years of her experience as a Tamasha artist, she mentioned that the audience's preferences have changed. Instead of appreciating the art form, they appreciate the female performer as an object of desire. Where lewd comments are being

thrown at the performers by an indisciplined audience given to alcohol, it has become more difficult for female performers to appear on stage fearlessly.

Among other changes in the form of Tamasha, Mandatai also mentioned that the number of instruments played have increased. In earlier times, the only instruments played were the Halgi, the Tuntuney, the Dholki and the Taal. Today the new instruments that have been introduced are the drum sets, the electropad, and the keyboards. This has brought a tremendous change to the ambience against which, Tamasha is set. She stated that, the songs that were played in earlier times for the Lavani were meaningful and melodious. Today, the songs that are played for the Lavanis have obscene double meanings, destroying the essence of the traditional sensuousness that Lavani once stood for.

It was disheartening to hear from Mandatai, that society at large has not accepted the women in Tamasha. Society looks upon Tamasha women as cheap and characterless. This misconception about female performers in Tamasha, has brought down the status of these women. Tamasha women rarely have the privilege of marriage, as nobody wants to settle down with them. She has to make serious compromises, in terms of accepting the position of a 'mistress' to a married man. She also spoke about the destiny of the daughters of Tamasha artistes. In spite of acquiring education, nobody wants to marry Tamasha girls. She narrated some stories about her own relatives who have been educated with degrees. Yet, nobody wants to marry them because they hail from the families of Tamasha artistes. Eventually, they have to turn to Tamasha, to earn their livelihood.

The plight of the elderly in Tamasha is also disturbing. Once a female artist grows old, her next option is to sing in the temples and live off the charity of the temple trusts. When she is young, she provides for her family members through her performances. Once she grows old, she is abandoned by the same family members, who do not want to associate with a Tamasha artist, as society looks upon it as a disgraceful profession. Most of these women are removed from their homes and have nowhere to go for shelter. Many of them, sing in the temples and live off the temple trusts. As these senior artistes have no provision for their old age, the government is supposed to provide Rs600 a month to such artistes. Unfortunately the money is disbursed as a lump sum after a period of six months, which hardly serves the purpose of the amount. Mandatai, revealed her noble intention of starting an 'Ashram' (sanatorium for senior female artistes) as they have nobody to care about them in their old age.

Considering the number of 'Nachas' (males in the roles of females) present in Tamasha, a special mention was made by Mandatai, about the position of these performers in society. She stated that, most Nachas lead difficult lives, as they are stigmatized and rejected by society. Many of them fall prey to homosexuality and develop similar identities sooner or later. Most Nachas, were once happily married men with children, but once they begin to wear the attire of a woman, they gradually turn into homosexuals, resulting in broken families and a life subjected to loneliness.

Raju Bagul

Raju Bagul, was the youngest person to be interviewed in this study. This interview provided a perspective of the educated youth involved in Tamasha today. Raju, has been running his own Tamasha troupe since the past ten years under the guidance of Raghuvver Khedkar. A graduate with a B.A degree, he belongs to a family of farmers. As a child, he nurtured a desire to perform in Tamasha. Sometimes, he also performed at weddings, religious functions and school gatherings, in order to satisfy his need for expression through drama. He hailed from a poor farming household, where his father performed in Tamasha sometimes. He watched his father practice at home and

imitated him when alone. Unfortunately, his father never encouraged him as a child to perform as a Tamasha artiste. This was because during this time, Tamasha had lost the aura and the respect it carried during the yesteryears. In spite of this opposition, Raju would attend Tamasha programmes that his father performed in, on the sly. This helped him to connect with people involved with Tamasha and it also gave him a pedestal to perform later. The Tamasha people he associated with welcomed him lovingly as he was the son of a performer. He remembers fondly, a day when his father's performing troupe came to a village nearby. Since his father was unwell, he did not perform. True to his dedication, Raju reached the troupe. To his luck, the troupe required a boy to dance. The role was offered to Raju, as he was keen to do the part. He performed to the best that he felt from his heart. His journey as an artist began from here. Initially, he helped in setting up the stage with props for the Tamasha performances.

Today, Raju, runs his own Tamasha troupe. He picked up a neglected and dying Tamasha troupe and revived it once again, partnering with his wife. His Tamasha troupe consists of experienced Tamasha artistes who performed during his father's times. He also mentioned that while his Tamasha troupe earns about Rs 45000-50000, per show, what he earns individually, in hand eventually is a meager Rs 5000-6000. He added to his statement by saying that, he does not run his Tamasha troupe for the money, but rather for the passion of the art.

Interviews at Sanaswadi with Lavani Dancers

Sanaswadi seems to the outsider, a place thronging with the activity of women dancers, dressed in colourful attire and bright make-up. The sound of ghungroos and music surround the place, creating an atmosphere of cheer and laughter, as women are seen moving in and around the place adorned in all their finery.

The research team could enter into Sanaswadi, only because of the efforts of Varsha Paritekar as she made it convenient for us to document our observations here. During our excursion into Sanaswadi, it became apparent after a while, that this place was frequented by businessmen and politicians who came into this run down structure in their swanky cars. Most of these men did not want to be captured by the camera, and immediately covered their faces or moved away from the camera as we approached them. Later on, through our discussions with our driver and other locals from the area, it came to light that these men took their pick of women after the Lavani performances, thereby rendering the place nothing less than a brothel of sorts.

As the research team, moved around Sanaswadi, capturing the ambience on a camera, the reality of this mysterious, yet mesmerizing place came forth gradually.

Lata

An interview with Lata, who is also a young Lavani artiste, bedecked in a shimmering red saree and heavy make up, revealed that she wanted to become an actress. She had prepared a portfolio with professionally photographed pictures of herself in the hope, that some enterprising director might spot her, during one of her nightly lavani performances and give her a break in films. She has made appearances in some television serials and her goal is to become a famous actress. As she spoke about her aspirations, she mentioned that there were many other young girls like her, who came in from the neighbouring villages into Sanaswadi. These girls hailed from families of Lavani artistes, but when they came to Sanaswadi, a taste of the city life lured them into the

glamour of filmdom. Lata wants to join films because she believes it would give her respect and a better status in society than the Loknatya Mandal at Sanaswadi could offer her.

Varsha Paritekar

Varsha Paritekar is an aspiring thirty two year old Lavani dancer. She gave us a rich understanding of Lavani as a dance form. She mentioned the various dimensions that Lavani has taken on in recent times.

Varsha, who has been performing for fifteen years; spoke about the grim picture that Lavani presents as an art form to the general public at large. She broke the reality of this place to us as she spoke about the plight of the Lavani dancers performing in this place. She stated that, at Sanaswadi, Lavani dancers begin their day early in the morning to practice for their performances which begin at 7.30 in the evening, and continues throughout the night. The dancers work hard as they wear ghungroos weighing five kilos on each foot. In spite of their efforts to keep the tradition alive, she mentioned that the audiences prefer to watch the dancers dancing to the beats of filmy music, thereby robbing the traditional folk culture from the Lavani performances. She also mentioned that many young Lavani artistes are getting lured into films and television, as they earn more money in these places. At the same time film and television appearances give them a more respectable position in a society, which looks down upon the Lavani dancer as cheap and vulgar.

Varsha Paritekar, has also been visiting the Mumbai University to share her experiences as a Lavani artist with the students of the department of Theatre. The Mumbai University has taken an initiative in bringing in the folk theatre of the remote village areas to the students of their theatre department. This symbolizes the attempts made by the university to amalgamate the urban and the rural spaces to achieve a better understanding between the two.

Senior Lavani performers

An interview with two senior Lavani dancers, brought out an interesting comparison of Lavani performances in the past and in recent times. From this interview, it became evident that audiences were more dignified in the yesteryears, appreciating the talent and the dedication Lavani presented. In contrast, the audience today, does not understand the aesthetics that contribute to the dance form. The Lavani dancers are forced to provide the audience, with what they demand. The demand is for filmy songs and dances, as the audience hoots and whistles at the performer, as an object of lust.

Both the senior Lavani performers, sang Lavani songs from the poetic versions of Moropant and Ram Joshi (renowned literary figures of the Maharashtrian culture). The songs were mesmerizing, taking us back to the days of the Peshwas and the Mughals. They had depth and meaning and were sung melodiously by the two senior artistes, depicting the richness of Lavani in the days of yore.

Lata Maushi, having had fifty years of experience as a Lavani performer, revealed that some attempts are being made by government bodies in order to uplift Lavani. Shibirs (meetings) are held off and on, but the turnout of Lavani artistes is less during the meetings. The reason for this being that Lavani artistes themselves are losing interest in the traditional form of this ancient dance form. She also mentioned that, among the few dedicated Lavani girls who would like to

learn Lavani, there is nobody to teach them. While there are teachers to propagate dance forms like Kathak and Bharatnatyam, there are no teachers to teach Lavani.

She also stated that if she was given an opportunity to put forth her requests related to Lavani to the government, she would ask for protection of the female dancers, and financial security as most Lavani dancers earn paltry sums of money which just about meets their sustenance needs. Once again, she mentioned the financial help that is disbursed by the government to the senior, elderly artistes. She took us back to similar statements made by Mandatai, from Raghuveer Khedkar's troupe mentioning that the money for the aged is disbursed once in six months although it is a paltry amount. Sometimes the condition of these senior artistes is so bad that they don't even have the money to buy medicines when they are sick.

When asked about her views about Lavani in the yesteryears in comparison to Lavani in today's times, she said that Lavani of the past was very different from today. This is mainly because, the audiences understood and appreciated the traditional forms of Lavani. It was a pleasure to perform in front of such audiences.

Lata Maushi's look saddened, at the mention of the survival of Lavani in today's times. She mentioned Lavani may not survive as an art form, if the present state of affairs continues.

When asked about suggestions she could give to society on uplifting a dying dance form, she mentioned that among the many girls from the rural areas who want to learn Lavani, they do not have opportunities available to them in these areas. She emphasized the part played by the University of Mumbai in trying to uplift Lavani and praised its noble intentions. However, the fact remains, that educated girls from the city can now learn Lavani, but this privilege has not yet reached the rural areas. She suggested that the government should start colleges in the rural areas where Tamasha is taught systematically to the villagers. Only such attempts can save Lavani from disappearing.

Interviews with Performers

At Murbad, nearer to Mumbai, interviews were conducted among the performers as they were getting ready for their performance. In order to develop a level of comfort with the rest of the members of the troupe, long hours were spent with the troupe members where meals were shared together with experiences. The performers start wearing their make up at least two hours prior to the show. Each member owned their own makeup kits which mostly comprised of crude colour palates which could also be extremely harmful to the skin. However, the performers continued their interviews throughout the time they were preparing for the performance with a convenience that could only come forth after years of practice. The interviews with the troupe members revealed that the art of wearing makeup is a talent developed after years of training, which few of us have accomplished so far.

An interview with some of the regular female performers also revealed that, in many of the economically backward troupes, medical aid was a necessity that was seriously lacking. During a performance, if a mishap occurred, an artiste would be sent back home with a meager amount of money for immediate care. However, there was no guarantee that the artiste would be supported, financially, during a time of illness or accidents on stage.

In one of the interviews, the research team found that, a female artiste had developed a swelling on her leg, as a result of a mishap that had occurred on the stage during a performance. She spoke to the research team while she nursed her injured leg. She mentioned that she would be packing

up to leave for home as the troupe did not require her services anymore. Unfortunately, the troupe could not compensate for the mishap. This interview revealed that Tamasha artistes, especially women had an insecure future within the Tamasha troupes and they had no financial guarantees to look forward to.

Interviews with villagers as audience

Interviews were conducted with the villagers who were also dedicated audiences. As most of the villagers were uneducated and required translation to their comments, free flow conversations were most suitable for the purpose of the study. Most of the interviews were conducted amongst a group of villagers, holding discussions together on various issues pertaining to Tamasha. Questions were asked, pertaining to the lifestyles of the audiences and villagers and also with reference to the personal likes and dislikes of these audiences in relation to Tamasha. Among the villagers, key leaders of the community, the youth, senior members and women were interviewed.

Most of the villagers said that they looked forward to the Tamasha performances year after year. The day of the Tamasha performance is also a day of the 'Jatra' or the village festival. Once the festivities are over, the Tamasha performance marks the end of the festival for the day. The villagers attend the Tamasha for the sole purpose of entertainment, as other forms of entertainment are few in the village. The Tamasha performance goes on throughout the night. The audience comprises mostly of men as women find it difficult to sit through the erotic Lavani dances and vulgar content of the performances.

Our interviews with the villagers began with Sunita, who was kind enough to offer the research team, her humble home along with meals as we conducted a day long research in the village of Dahiwad Digwad, a distance away from the city of Nashik. As Sunita runs a refreshment shop, right next to the place where the Tamasha performances are held (which is a bus stop), she enhanced our knowledge, about the Tamasha performances in her village. She mentioned that, most of the times, it was inappropriate for women to sit through the Tamasha performances as the Tamasha girls wore indecent clothes and the language used, was vulgar, carrying double meanings. Women sat through the first half of the Tamasha performance, as it comprised of invocation to the Gods (Gan and Gavlan). However, they walked out during the second half, which comprised of the Mujra and Lavani performances. Both these parts of the Tamasha involved erotic dances by the female performers of the Tamasha.

The other interviews were held with the males of the village. Since, Tamasha is more popularly viewed by the men, than the women, the men as a sample were divided into three groups. These groups were formed on the basis of the age of the male audience. Among the middle group, were men in their late thirties and forties, who had been watching Tamasha over a period of time. Most of the men in this age bracket stated that Tamasha was a much awaited event as the audience enjoyed the performances. It also became evident through the interviews, that most of the men drank through the performances while women must not sit through the entire event. When asked about the changing trends of the Tamasha performances, they mentioned that, today's Tamasha has done away with an important part of its original structure, which is the 'Vag Natya' (the part that spreads social messages). They also stated that the 'Lavani' performances consisted mainly of 'filmy' songs taken from new age films, revealing that the essence of a truly Maharashtrian traditional culture was fading away.

Interviews were also conducted with an older generation of men in their fifties and above. These men as an audience had fond memories of the Tamasha of yesteryears. They mentioned that the 'Vag Natya' of the Tamasha performances of the past, made a very strong impact on the audiences. Vag Natyas were centred around issues of the village related to poverty, water, agriculture, hygiene, family planning etc. The older audience also enjoyed the 'Lavani' performances of the yesteryears, where the dancers danced to the tunes of traditional Maharashtrian folk songs. The women also dressed in traditional attire, unlike today's Lavani dancers who also wear jeans and skirts, sometimes revealing outfits, which has changed the traditional concept of Tamasha. Most of the older generation of audience stated that they did not understand the Tamasha performances of today as it has lost its social and cultural character, which was the original purpose of its performance in the past.

Interviews conducted with a younger audience included youngsters in the age bracket of 18-25 years. Most of the youth interviewed in this category had no idea about the original traditional form of Tamasha. Many of them were blank about the different parts of the Tamasha structure. 'Vag Natya' was a concept that was hardly heard of by the rural youth. The favorite part of the Tamasha which was recognized and appreciated by the youth was the 'Lavani'. The boys stated that they watched Tamasha because they found the Lavani dancers attractive and liked to watch them dance to filmy music on the stage.

These interviews with the village audience revealed the hard facts about the fate of Tamasha in the villages today. As most of the interviews were conducted in the more remote villages, with an economically backward population of villagers, it was disheartening to learn that, where Tamasha could really bring about constructive change, on the contrary, it is creating an audience that is inclined to crude vulgarity and cheap entertainment.

Most of the interviews in the rural areas required the help of a translator. Here, mention must be made of a student of the researcher namely 'Miss Shubhangi Kedare', who was kind enough to accompany the research team and provide translations wherever necessary.

As the sample comprised of a rural, illiterate audience, most interviews were face to face and personal in nature. Apart from this, the samples used were small in number, which rendered face to face, personal interviews as suitable for the purpose of the study.

All interviews were recorded on film, using a PD 170 camera. Some interviews needed a translator as most of the locals could not correspond in the language of communication which was 'Hindi'. Most of the respondents spoke in different dialects of Marathi.

Results

Analysis of Data

Data was analysed on the basis of the interviews conducted and the suggestions made by those who were interviewed.

As most of the data was collected on the basis of interviews,, towards the end of the research,it was realized that Tamasha as a folk theatre has been facing major upheavals over the last twenty years..Some of the problem areas which have led to the decline in authentic and traditional Tamasha performances is the changing audience perceptions towards Tamasha.It is realized that the new generation of audience do not have a real understanding of Tamasha as it used to exist in former times.Today, Tamasha is looked upon as a cheap and vulgar display of crude drama.

It was disheartening to learn that most of the Tamasha artistes live in appalling conditions of poverty.Most of them are not even entitled to basic security such as medical aid in times of injury or mishap.In such circumstances .they are expected to leave the troupe and return to their villages.Among those who bear the brunt of the degradation that Tamasha is facing as an art form are the women performers.These women performers lack protection during the performances and are subjected to the dangers of vandalism and anti social behaviours that come forth from the audiences.Almost eighty percent of Tamasha women are unwed mothers bearing children as early as the age of fourteen and sixteen.These women have low status in society and are looked upon as sex objects rather than as women who carry a talent that has been brought down through the ages.The elderly Lavani performers are almost ostracized from society as they are left to fend for themselves in their old age.Most of the elderly women eventually sing in the temples and live off a meager sustenance from the temple trusts.Although the government does provide them a small amount of help money which is about Rs 600 per month,this money reaches the women once in six months as a lump sum.

Interviews with women in the Sangeetbaris also posed a grim picture of the state of performing artistes in today's times.The Loknatya Mandal at Sanaswadi, Pune city,is an unkempt,dirty,dilapidated place presenting a poor picture about the lifestyle of Lavani artistes.Through an indepth study of the Sangeetbaris,it was realized that,most of these places were dens where prostitution flourished as a trade.

The research also brought forth another dimension of study which presents the hidden story of the 'girl child'in Tamasha.The presence of girl children within the age groups of 12-14 yrs was a shocking revelation to the research.The interviews with girl children revealed that as dancers performing on stage they were subjected to lewd comments and obscene gestures by drunken men in the audience.The girl child,being the most vulnerable to exploitation among Tamasha artistes requires greater protection.

It was interesting to note that there are a few educated youngsters who are now coming into Tamasha, owning and running their own Tamasha troupes.An interview with Raju Bagul, a young enterprising Tamasha troupe owner revealed that the entry of such educated youth into Tamasha would surely be a positive step toward uplifting a dying art form.Raju Bagul, wants to present his Tamasha performances in the authentic and traditional manner, thereby reviving it's aesthetic value.

Tamasha Today

⁴The viewing of a Tamasha is an integral part of life in small cities, towns and villages of Maharashtra. People from different villages invite Tamasha troupes for their annual 'Jatra' (fair) be it for deities such as Khandoba or Dhairoba or for the goddess Bhavani. It is common to see both Tamasha during the Jatra and often villagers will give prime importance to the performances. Their savings for entertainment purposes would be spent on Tamasha. The Tamasha which the villagers in western Maharashtra enjoy watching with their families is quite different from the Tamasha of well-known theatre companies like 'ChauPhula' and from its political counterparts. Entire families complete with girls and young children watch these performances. In such a social context, it becomes imperative to know more about this regional art form which could have different meanings in different contexts.

From the days when Tamasha shows ran to packed houses, to times when barely 40 out of its 400 seats are occupied, Aryabhushan, Pune's only surviving Tamasha theatre, has come a long way, and not in the direction it would have wanted to.

Majidseth Tambe, the owner of Aryabhushan says that the theatre is just managing to survive as this theatre continues to remain one of the few in the state of Pune. The theatre hall on Laxmi Road is symbolic of the decline of the Tamasha folk dance of Maharashtra. The Aryabhushan theatre was established in 1933 by Majidseth's father, Amarsheikh. Tambe. One of the causes for the decline of Tamasha is its neglect by the middle class as the educated elite look down upon them.

The 6,000-sq.ft theatre, which has shows every night, can house around 400 people on its old-style benches. The theatre features nine phads (troupes), with each troupe comprising 10-15 people. Tickets are priced at a modest Rs 25. The 'Bakshish' (extra money) money given to artistes by fans during performances is shared equally among the members of a troupe. Tambe says that the artistes' income is just enough to meet their daily expenses. The theatre is run on an almost no-profit, no-loss basis. However, the Tamasha staged today at the Aryabhushan theatre is far different from the traditional form. Modern masala has taken over and the artistes have to dance to the beats of hindi film songs. The traditional Vags are performed only occasionally. Unfortunately, people often walk out of the hall as soon as the Vags begin. This makes the Tamasha artistes feel neglected and unappreciated.

The main problem is the lack of finances as banks refuse loans to them. Many Phads borrow from private moneylenders at exorbitant rates. As a result, they are trapped under a ballooning debt burden

⁴ Sandesh Bhandare, interview with Mumbai Theatre Guide

Folk Art as a Business

⁵What is the condition of 'Folk Theatre' at its social roots today? How does it reflect the conditions of our times? The 'Tamasha' has been a major folk form in Maharashtra having thrived under the Maratha rule. It was renowned for its spontaneity and repartee. The Aryabhushan theatre in Pune is said to be the place today for its authentic Tamasha.

Aryabhushan Theatre has a generally depressing atmosphere. It is situated in the central area of the old city and has a seedy neighbourhood. Its façade is not that of a theatre at all. It looks more like an old fashioned dilapidated dwelling place—a 'Wada' which has declined in worldly ways. There is a 'Paan' shop at the gate filled with pictures of movie stars, a 'mutton plate' house a little beyond. People hang around strongly smelling of liquor. Inside, there is a passage leading to the auditorium. On the right, there are a number of tumble down latrines with the stench of urine permeating. The auditorium itself is a covered yard with rows of benches. The benches and the platforms are filled with people. An old faded and torn blue curtain hangs behind the stage. The wings on the two sides are equally worn out. On one side of the stage sits an organ player with an old organ; on the other side a tabla player with a drummer or a dholki player below him.

At the sound of a shrill whistle, half a dozen women appear on the stage wearing gaudy nine yard saris in assorted colours, bright with plastic zari work. Strings of ankle bells around their ankles and glittering in costume jewellery, they have their faces covered with layers of paint. They are from the elderly to the very young.

During a performance, a man from the audience walked up and stood at the other side of the stage. His clothes were torn and dirty. He took out a rupee note. A dancing girl danced her way to him. As he handed the rupee to her, he whispered something in her ear. She went back, covered her head with her saree, put a finger to her cheek and started miming the actions of a shy maiden, throwing coy, sidelong glances at her patron. The man gave her another rupee and probably asked her for a special song. When she began, he went back into his seat.

A middle aged man clad in a bush shirt now stood up by the stage. He gave a Rs 20 note. The girl returned Rs 19 in change. The patron then began to give one rupee notes. He began to spread them around. The other girls also joined the trips to and from the organ. As many as four of them were involved in the activity at the same time. The atmosphere on the stage became charged with life. Nobody pretended to dance anymore. They made the runs between the organ and the patrons as fast as they could. All of them were now soaked in perspiration. But the 'Seth' (rich man) was pleased and smiling. The others too appreciated his generosity and cheered him loudly.

Song followed song on the stage, mostly film songs such as *mehbuba mehbuba* from the blockbuster film 'Sholay'. Now and then a *lavani* (erotic song) would be heard but these too were from popular Marathi films.

Every twenty minutes or so a shrill whistle sounded to mark the end of each troupe's turn and another troupe appeared on stage. Some troupes were obviously better off than other troupes. They had gaudier clothes, the girls were smarter and the dancing tolerable. In the visibly

⁵ Tamasha-Folk Art as a Business, Economic and Political Weekly, Anil Awachat

worse off troupes, the women were older, less good looking, the clothes were ordinary. When the better off troupe performed, the audience showered money on them.

Among the audience were vegetable vendors, tradesmen, both small and big, hamaals etc. Others looked like recent arrivals from the rural areas. Those that had the money to give to the dancers sat in the front row or stood by the stage.

From Baramati to Saswad, the new rich farmers and vegetable gardeners ride in on their bullet motorbikes for these evenings. Some troupes are especially favoured among wealthier patrons who compete with each other for the principal dancer. The large number of helpers and assistants in the troupes play willing pawns in these games. The women and the men of these troupes help conjure up this totally artificial atmosphere of competition in order to get a higher price. Competitive bidding is beneficial to the prosperous troupes, whereas the ordinary troupes are left high and dry in this mock battle.

Therefore, from the looks of it, folk art, such as the *lavani* has surely turned into a business, where performers dance for the sake of a few notes. The art form is now robbed of its traditional culture, and talent has turned into a dance for survival. Neither are the audiences aware of the slow death of what used to be the traditional cultural form of the state of Maharashtra and neither are the performers aware of the true value that their talent has brought down through the course of history.

The Facts and Figures

⁶During the Tamasha season which begins post-monsoon from *Dashera* (October) till May, Tamasha companies (*Dholkicha Phad*) travel through Maharashtra for seven months (Approximately 210 days of the year). They perform in the nights. There are approximately 15 big companies. (One of the most famous companies is one by Raghuvir Khedkar which performed a few years ago under a huge tent on the Mumbai University grounds at Kalina). This performance truly was a rare privilege for a Tamasha company.

Tamasha companies such as that of Raghuvir Khedkar's have one or two owners and all the artists get remuneration on a monthly basis. So for seven months these theatre companies are away from home. Theatre is their livelihood. During these 210 days, they cover approximately eight jattras (fairs) and about 30 invited shows. An invitation to such a show is known as *suparee*. Here, *suparee* stands as a symbol of respect implying 'come and entertain us'. This 'suparee' is different in origin and purpose from the *suparee* accepted by Mumbai's underworld. Apart from this, there are an additional 172 performances at different places. Each Tamasha show starts at 9 or 9.30 pm and ends early in the morning by 5 or 6 am. Now they have lost this privilege of performing at these times because the high court has banned all shows after 10 pm.

Each company has 50/60 artistes: 15 female dancers and singers and 35 male artistes and accompanists. They work on a cooperative basis. They tour for four months (120 days). Calculating these statistics we find the crux of Tamasha economics.

For touring across the state, each company needs buses, trucks and diesel. A big company has seven to eight hired vehicles and needs 200 litres of diesel. A small company has two hired vehicles which require 50 litres of diesel. Calculating the cost of diesel required for one season:

$$200 \times 15 \times 210 = 630000 \text{ litres of diesel}$$
$$50 \times 150 \times 120 = 900000 \text{ litres of diesel}$$

The total amount of expenditure on diesel = more than Rs six crore.

Calculating further, as most of the Tamasha vehicles are hired;

Rs 1,000 per day per vehicle for the big companies.
 $1000 \times 8 \times 15 \times 210 = \text{Rs } 25200000 \text{ (C)}$.

And Rs 750 for the small companies:
 $750 \times 2 \times 150 \times 120 = \text{Rs } 27000000 \text{ (D)}$.

C+ D= Approximately Rs 5 crore.

Most of this money goes to the transportation business which can easily get loans from banks and security of insurance. Adding to this, the cost of hiring light and sound equipments and generators. The big companies pay Rs 5,000 to the female artistes and Rs 4,000 to the male artists. Yes, this is one sector where men do not earn more than women.

⁶ The Economics of Tamasha, The Economist Magazine, Mumbai Theatre Guide

5000 x 15 x 15 x 7= Rs 7875000(E)

4000 x 35 x 15 x 7= Rs 14700000(F)

Total E + F= Rs 2 crore approximately.

In the face of removal of subsidies and support from the Government of Maharashtra, these statistics portray very clearly the difficulties that Tamasha troupes face in their endeavour to uphold an ancient art form, in their basic mode of survival.

The small companies work on a cooperative basis. They work on the principle of an equal division of earnings we do not even find such examples in the world of Marathi commercial theatre, where each one shares the profit and deficit equally. Small companies do not have tents. But each big company has gates and tents. The approximate investment of each company is Rs five lakhs or more. Since these tents are made up of cloth, a touch of a blade can cause major damage to the infrastructural requirements of the Tamasha companies. Such tents cannot be insured either. There have also never been any cases where someone would sponsor fireproof or weightless tents.

In addition to all these expenses all the artistes are paid Rs 10,000 as an advance (Uchal) so that they can fend for themselves and their families take care of their land if they have any. Since owners do not have great savings, they borrow money from *Sahukars* (money-lenders) at the rate of 6% per month. The advance is deducted at the rate of Rs 1000 per month from their salaries. But, in the end, the owner has to pay the interest.

The question here is: why do they perform? Why do they entertain people? And why do they live and die in debts?

Madhukar Nerale, manager of the erstwhile Hanuman Theatre stated at an interview that the Tamasha artistes have no understanding of the management of finances as most of them are uneducated and therefore ignorant. As a result of this, they mismanage everything

Even fishermen get subsidies on diesel, but the Tamasha artistes have yet not availed of these generousities on behalf of the government. Tamasha troupes never get loans from banks because they have nothing to offer as a security. Their property includes ghungaroes (anklets), harmoniums, tablas, dholkis which they have to offer as security.

One might even ask the question as to whether they are capable of earning their livelihood in other ways. Perhaps the answer lies in the caste system. They do not belong to *Uchha Varna* (upper caste). They have been deprived of education for ages and neglected by the political system for more than 63 years of independence. As a result of this, they continue as Tamasha artistes in order to earn their livelihood and to fulfill their passion as artistes and performers.

The license fee charged for one of the most fragile industries run by the uneducated rural folk is as high as Rs 2000 for Pune city, Rs 1300 for Sangli, Solapur, Satara and Kolhapur, Rs 250 for Nagar, Rs 1700 for Nandurbar. These license fees are charged for the same show of the same company at the same ticket rate. The fact is that there is no difference in the license fees for films like 'Sholay' and 'Delhi Belly' in two multiplex theatres of two different cities.

When a senior officer in the revenue department was asked about this, he said that it is at the discretion of tahsiladars (district head) and collectors to decide or waive off these fees. When asked about the rule that one has to apply three months in advance for a license, the answer was that these were old rules that needed to be changed. The senior officer also said that there were few performing art forms like magic which had no license fee. However, reality speaks that, Marathi commercial plays are not planned three months in advance in Mumbai. The question arises as to how the Tamasha artistes are expected to plan three months in advance. This also goes to show the discriminatory practices followed by authorities in providing levies to folk artistes as against the commercial theatre of the cities.

Economics plays a very crucial role in Tamasha. Most of the people who are involved with the form are landless labourers. Again barring few names like Patthe Bapurao, most of the people who practice the form are not Brahmins but low caste people. Opportunities to a better life are rarely made available to these people. A supari (commission) for a Tamasha performance can range between Rs. 40,000 to Rs. 1, 00,000 for a night. Sometimes it can be as low as Rs. 8,000 or 10,000. The Tamasha groups themselves are structured along price differences. Adding to this, these artistes do not perform for the whole year. There are dry spells, which makes it difficult for them to sustain their livelihood. On an average they must do about 200 to 250 shows in a period of seven months. Their minimum expenses are Rs. 20,000 for a show. In commissioned performances for the Jatra, a fixed amount is assured but for ticketed shows, it is not the same. The risk is more. There are also auspicious days in the year when there are not enough Tamasha companies to fulfill all Jatras. The highest bidders get the performances they want. In the 'Chaitra' (auspicious) month alone companies can make more than they would be able to in six months. But these opportunities are few and far between. For the most part it is a difficult journey as there are very little savings.

A closer look at the socio-economic factors that govern Tamasha show that there are complex problems that exist within the system. Most Tamasha artistes work as bonded labourers under a contractor. The contractor himself is exploited by the system. But at least under him the artistes manage to earn their day to day living.

Sangitbari women meet a similar fate. They rent out theatres and earn paltry sums from the sales of cheap tickets. However, 50% of what they make must go to the theatre owners. Their community either forbids marriage for the women or they fail to find husbands due to stigmatization and are left alone to support large families.

Without being sentimental about issues such as the preservation of indigenous, folk art forms, what is more important is that people should lead better lives, have access to better education, health facilities etc. The art form is important but it should not become its own victim. It perhaps pleases our cultural vanity to moan the death of the jester (songadya) in Tamasha but how many of us want to accept that these jesters simply missed out on things like primary education in their real lives.

We are also talking about the Tamasha performer who, because he/she belongs to the class of untouchables is not allowed to enter a temple. If we are to glorify the art form, then we must take into consideration the necessary steps required to facilitate it, financially as well as socially.

Women in Marathi Theatre

A Look into the History

⁷In July 1990, 'Expressions' women's cultural festival was organised by some women from various women's groups. Since the focal point of the festival was 'theatre' an effort was made to invite some of the first generation stage actresses of the 1930s to share their experiences. It was soon realized that the task undertaken was rather difficult as very few women of that generation were alive and amongst those who were, most were confined to the house because of their age. The third important factor was that actresses from the upper caste background were comparatively easier to contact than the actresses of 'Devdasi' (temple prostitutes) origin. Access to them was denied by their family members who were rather ashamed of their past. From the study of the available material it is seen that the actual contribution of women to theatre is marginalized, in the otherwise comprehensive analysis of the theatre. Thus an important component of women's cultural tradition is missing. On the other hand one can find extensive material to show how women in the context of their 'use' to the theatre were viewed by the patriarchal society.

Women as performers, as theatre company owners, as playwrights are practically invisible as only a brief mention of the names of a few of these women is made through history. This stands out starkly against the backdrop of glorious accounts of the contribution made to the theatre by men, especially those who performed female characters on stage. It is interesting to note that historians of different periods have given the same information about women theatre companies while male theatre is reviewed with a revised analysis over the years.

The earliest record of women performers is of 1865. Women performed in theatre companies which were very often owned and founded by women. Although specific information about their background is not available, one can conclude from their names that these were prostitutes or from the low caste communities perhaps earlier associated with 'Tamasha'. These theatre companies were 'all women' theatre companies and the female as well as male roles were enacted by women. There is not a single mixed theatre company mentioned till 1929 which was founded by the well known classical singer Hirabai Badodekar, although Kamlabai Gokhale performed both female and male roles in the company owned by her husband and later managed by her. Barring these exceptions, women actresses were not part of mainstream theatre.

⁷ In Search of Women in History of Marathi Theatre, 1843 to 1933- Neera Adarkar

The Recasting of Lavani in Maharashtra

⁸The Lavani Tamasha is a performance that is wholly carried out by women, usually of the lower castes. Sharmila Rege, writing about the lavani performers of Maharashtra, points to the major changes that took place in the 1850s in the Deccan as a result of colonialism and British market forces - two new social categories, the middlemen and the middle classes, came into being, affecting “the face of the ‘Lavani Tamasha’ and its construction of “female sexuality”. She argues that the first Marathi play by Vishnudas Bhawe of the court of the Raja of Sangli was popular among the audiences of Bombay and Pune and “with this, the middle class, upper caste theatre was placed in opposition to the folk *tamasha*: “Bhawe’s plays are of native origin, from the early classic dramas of Hindustan. They are void of *everything approaching licentiousness and indecorum and are images of the moralities in which the Christian Church in older times used to rejoice* (Bombay Times, Tuesday, 8 March 1853; emphasis added).” This had its impact on existing forms of theatre and performance - “the classical drama...was portrayed as ‘moral’ whereas the *tamasha* (folk theatre) and its *lavani* were condemned as licentious and immoral. The female roles in the plays were performed by males dressed as females.

The patrons of the theatre were the new, Western-educated middle classes, modelling themselves on the lifestyles of the British officers. Between 1860 and 1880, several English and Sanskrit plays were translated into Marathi. The *Nachee* (dancing girl)/*Nartaki* (dancer), *Tamasgir* (performer)/*Kalakaar* (artist) dichotomies intensified as the upper castes displaced the lower castes from their hereditary sphere of the performing arts.” According to Rege, there was a hierarchy that was established, with Victorian theatre being the most highly respected, followed by Marathi theatre and then by the form of the *Tamasha*. The Tamasha troupes then sought to desexualize the form, giving pride of place to the *vag* (*social messages*), Rege says, “The *lavani*, by contrast, is a public performance (as against the exclusive performance of *Thumri*, for instance), and comes closer to the *Nautanki* in that the performers are generally of the untouchable castes, the female performers being seen as no better than prostitutes. Viewed within the overall perspective of the intersection of caste and gender...the *Shringarik Lavani* became one of the modes of constructing the bodies of lower caste women as constantly either arousing, or satiating, male desire. This construction was crucial to the pre-colonial Peshwa state’s appropriation of the labour of lower caste women through the institution of slavery. With the embourgeoisement that followed the establishment of colonial domination in Maharashtra, the *Tamasha* of the Mahar and Mang castes began to centre around the *Vag* or spontaneous folk theatre, thereby marginalizing the performance of *Shringarik Lavani*. New kinds of troupes emerged, composed of women of the Kolhati caste and devoted to the performance of the *Lavani*. These troupes, known as *Sangeet Barees*, soon came to be labelled as obscene and immoral.” The Lavani tradition again was supported by certain social conditions - the Kolhati women were the bread-winners of their families, dancing and prostitution being their caste-based profession. They were nomadic, which meant that they constantly engaged with public spaces in ways that other women (and even men) did not. They did not marry and the men of the community depended on the women for sustenance. The women were also reputed as possessing

⁸ “Public Women” and the “Obscene” Body-Practice: A Short Exploration of Abolition Debates- Nitya Vasudevan

knowledge of cures for sexually transmitted diseases and impotency. So, again, it was not an isolated 'obscene' practice that was involved in this shift, it was a certain kind of social formation with a unique relationship to the public domain, which was appropriated

The viewing of the Lavani Tamasha as obscene and immoral led to the Bombay State imposing a ban on *Lavani Tamasha* in the 1940s, on the basis that it was simply a veil for prostitution and therefore a danger to public morality. A curious development that took place was that while the Lavani troupes were being marginalised, the Tamasha became a popular form in the new Marathi cinema that was trying to compete with the new national form of the Hindi cinema. In this cinema, Lavani was a packaged representation, using the skills of the actual Lavani performers in order to produce representations of them as lascivious and titillating objects of male desire. It was a form of appropriating their skill, the form of the Lavani, and the sexuality of the performers. They had no control over these representations, which seemed to necessitate their marginalisation as women who previously actively occupied the public sphere and public spaces. This curiously mirrors the dance bar debate, in which the dancers drew on the example of the Bollywood "item numbers" that they were simply imitating in their dances. This is a case in which the representations are deemed acceptable to the public's morality, but the dancer's performances are charged with obscenity and the ability to deprave or corrupt. It is also that in the case of the dancers, the practice is seen as closely linked to and in fact leading to "realized" sexual behaviour, in the form of prostitution, whereas the cinematic representations of them were seen as controlled by censorship and therefore not tied directly to commercial sex. Therefore, the "Lavangi Mirchees" (red hot lavani chillis) in the dance bar case, the accusation thrown at the dancers and the bar owners is that the kind of dance performed requires no skill and cannot be considered an art form like other classical dances. Films were deemed desirable at the same point of time at which the actual troupes were being deemed obscene. In fact, as the troupes fell into the hands of middlemen contractors, the women were expected to imitate the dances and movements and songs found in the films in order to please crowds. This resulted in their alienation from their own art form.

The case of the Lavani performers and the 2005 dance bar case are both located in Maharashtra. There seem to be several links between the two, historically. One obvious link that draws our attention and refers to the above de-sexualisation of the Tamasha theatres or troupes through the marginalisation of the 'obscene' *Sangeet Baris* - the dance bar ban did not apply to Tamasha theatres. The rules were made, for licensing and regulating places of public amusement other than cinema and performance of public amusement including Melas (fairs) and Tamasha. They were meant to uphold public decency, morality and public order. Regulating performance by licensing it was an essential part of public order.

To quote Section 33B, "nothing in section 33A shall apply to the holding of a dance performance in a drama theatre, cinema theatre and auditorium; or sports club or gymkhana, where entry is restricted to its members only, or a three starred or above hotel or in any other establishment or class of establishments, which, having regard to (a) the tourism policy of the Central or State Government for promoting the tourism activities in the State; or (b) Cultural activities, the State Government may, by special or general order..." By this time, Tamasha theatres had gained enough respectability to be considered a site for cultural activities by the State Government. Trevia Abrams notes that "It emerged as a discrete form in the late sixteenth century from a variety of earlier entertainments.... Although the "raw" strain of the form is still

popular today, a certain refinement was effected in recent years to bring *Tamasha*, as more wholesome “family” entertainment, closer to the tastes of the middle and upper classes. This refinement has led to the development of a sophisticated variety of *Tamasha* called *Loknatya* or people’s theatre. And here, in the state’s efforts to refine what was previously a “bawdy” form of entertainment in order for it to then serve the purposes of nation-building, lies the crucial idea of publicness. The “lokmatya” was a “people’s theatre”, which was meant to access the Indian public and spread socio-cultural messages. The lawyers arguing against the ban stressed this point – Section 33A discriminates between artists i.e. girls dancing in bars and Tamasha theatres and at the same time discriminates between viewers visiting dance bars and Tamasha performances. Although the performance of dance is prohibited in dance bars such an activity, howsoever vulgar and indecent, can go on in Tamasha theatres. Dance in three starred and above hotels and discos are not prohibited. The same girl may dance either in a Tamasha theatre or any other exempted place.

It is clear from the above extracts that the dance bar is then placed in a category separate from cinema, mela and Tamasha theatre, as a place of public amusement. Erotic dancing was therefore no longer formally associated with the Tamasha theatre, or, rather, the central commercial element in the Tamasha was no longer the Lavani or any other form of dancing that was the prerogative of women. As the drive to national liberation developed, more *Shahirs* and their *Tamasha* troupes began to include appropriate patriotic themes in their songs and dramatic *vags*. By the 1930s, *tamasha* had become a viable medium for anti-British propaganda, especially after the British authorities had banned the current urban Marathi theatre productions which were, for the most part, quasi-historical plays containing subtle messages of dissent. The folk form was exempt from precensorship because it was the least suspect of all vehicles.

The other historical link between the Lavani and today's dance bars is the fact that there was migration of women to the cities in search of livelihood and employment after the delegitimation and ban imposed on several of the older forms of dancing. Historically, the setting up of dance bars in Maharashtra, specifically Mumbai city, to serve the purposes of entertaining the large labour force of migrants, which included the traders, sailors, dockworkers, construction labourers and the mill hands, seems to coincide with the gradual decline in patronage suffered by established communities of dancers such as the Kolhati women, over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As the demand grew, women from traditional dancing/performance communities of different parts of India, who were facing a decline in patronage of their age-old profession, flocked to Mumbai (and later to the smaller cities) to work in dance bars. These women from traditional communities have been victims of the conflicting forces of modernization. Women are the primary breadwinners in these communities. But after the Zamindari system introduced by the British was abolished, they lost their Zamindar patrons and were reduced to penury. Even the few developmental schemes and welfare policies of the government bypassed many of these communities. The dance bars provided women from these communities an opportunity to adapt their strategies to suit the demands of the new economy .

Diminishing Number of Women in Tamasha

⁹Today, owners of Tamasha troupes are in a fix. They are unable to find women dancers, who are willing to perform in public shows.

Women are an essential part of a Tamasha show, as their appearance is required at every part of a traditional show, namely the 'gan, gawlan, and vag' (singing, dancing and drama)

The demand for a troupe is proportionate to the number of women dancers it has, which leads to the increasing need of women performers. At present, the number of artistes hailing from Karad, Islampur, Ashta, and Umbraj areas, is around 150. They need to sign a three-month contract with the owner of a troupe and are free to perform wherever they wish during the remaining nine months of the year.

The payment for a day and a night ranges between Rs 500 and Rs 800, an amount that although looks good, squeezes out every ounce of energy from the artistes. They are required to travel to various parts of the state in a truck, with low-quality food and frugal arrangements for stay, in addition to being looked down upon by society. This has led to women folk shying away from working in these troupes.

These women are now turning to dancing at marriage processions and orchestras. The payment there is much better (around Rs 2,000), and the need to work overtime hardly ever arises. In addition, the food they get is of a better quality and they receive far more respect than as Tamasha artistes.

These changing preferences have taken a toll on the livelihood of Tamasha troupe owners.

Speaking about the changing preferences of female artistes, a Tamasha troupe owner, Kamal Dhalewadikar, said, "People no longer look at Tamasha as an art. It has now become a means for men to oggle at women dancers. Young men are clueless about the intricacies of the art and concentrate on feasting their eyes on the artists. This has led to many women shying away from performing. This, along with the hectic work hours, has discouraged women from opting for such performances."

¹⁰The social stigma attached to the performing art is bewildering. Lavani can be sensuous in nature but in the end it is a literary folk art. Instead of being given the kind of respect classical dancers and theatre actors get, they are often likened to prostitutes and bar-dancers. Mohona Mahandrekar who runs a Pune based company, rues the stigma, "I have seen my mother perform and have been performing myself since I was a teenager. But sometimes even now when I am walking on the road with my daughters in a great mood, a man passing by will point and tell another and the way in which they will look at us is enough to kill all joys." This kind of an image also prevents women and children from coming to the theatres to watch performances

⁹ 'Why Women Dancers are opting out of Tamasha' Sakaal Times, Monday, April 23, 2012

¹⁰ Tamasha-The Sunday Read, *Mumbai Mirror, Sunday, April 1, 2007*, posted by Pragya Tiwari

even though they flock to enjoy Lavani when it is occasionally brought to regular prosceniums like during the recent Mahotsavs in Mumbai. Adding to the marginalization is the fact that most of the artistes are from lower castes. For the few who are from the higher classes, the situation can get worse. Jyoti Patil, Tamasha artiste and theatre owner explains, “I am from the Maratha Samaj but its worse for me. I am a Lavani dancer so Marathas don’t accept me. Nor am I entitled to reservation and privileges available to the scheduled castes.”

The onslaught of pop-culture has also led to the deterioration of the art form. Leering men often request Lavani singers to perform item numbers from films and they must comply to earn their nightly wages. Mohona agrees that compliance with such requests is at times necessary but she also believes they must put up a fight to win the audience over with traditional lavanis before acceding to their demands. True to her beliefs when Mohona is asked to sing a filmy item number, she does so in the traditional style complete with facial expressions associated with Lavani.

The Girl Child in Tamasha

During the course of this research, it became very clear, that women are an essential part of Tamasha .Without the presence of women as performers, Tamasha would not have existed, inspite of the difficulties that it is facing with regard to it's survival today.

Women do not possess a respectable position within Tamasha troupes.This is evident from the observations made through this study and interviews conducted with female artistes,where almost 95% of the women studied were in illicit relationships with men.Most of the women were unwed mothers,having children at the tender age of 15 years.Since most of these women look upon their role within the Tamasha troupes as a 'passion for the art form'they continue to accept the derogatory conditions that a male dominated society has to offer them.

Since most of these women hail from families where the tradition of performing in Tamasha troupes has been carried down from generation to generation, they have no other livelihood to turn to.Since the time of their birth, they have been brought up to inculcate and acculturate themselves to Tamasha as a means of expressing themselves through talent and as the only means for their survival.

An interview with 'Bandhan' a 12 year old girl,brought a serious turn to the dimensions of this research.Bandhan is a Tamasha artiste from the Sopankar troupe,which is among the economically less fortunate troupes in Maharashtra.The interview with Bandhan was truly touching as we realized the fate of many little girls who have been lured into this art form for the sake of survival.As Bandhan spoke about the part she played in the Tamasha troupe she danced for,she was ignorant of the perils that lay ahead of her in the business of dance.As any growing adolescent,she mentioned with a mischievous smile that the men in the audience wink at her and jeer at her ,with cheap sounds whenever she appeared on the stage.Men whistle at her and call her to them ,with signs. Bandhan is now quite used to these gestures, since she has been dancing since the last four years.She believes it is all a part of the performance,and just as most of the female Tamasha artistes have learnt to accept the fact that they are 'sex objects'to every man in the audience,Bandhan also considers herself to be one of the lot.

As the research team continued with the observations and interviews, the stark reality came forth, stronger than ever before.The reality that, Bandhan is not the only 'girl child'subjected to the dangerous intentions of the men in an audience.There were many more little girls like Bandhan, smiling through the ignorance of the perils they were being subjected to show after show, night after night.

As the camera roved through the Tamasha troupes ,the sight of young girls ,as Tamasha a rtistes was a common occurrence.Just as Tamasha is dying a slow death,as a traditional ,cultural art form,we also find the slow death of innocence and a respectable future in the eyes of these young girls,who have been trapped into the lure of the deceptive world of art , culture and tradition under the banner of 'Tamasha'

Recommendations

Reforming a Dying Art

Through the interviews conducted with people from all walks of life including those who have been directly involved with 'Tamasha' as artistes, and also those stalwarts who have offered their undying support to uplift the cause that Tamasha actually stands for, suggestions came forth with regard to the different ways by which Tamasha can retain its respect and traditionality.

Shri Shantaram Mirane, one of the most elderly to be interviewed by the research team, urges the government to provide facilities like old age homes for senior citizens who have retired from Tamasha, as they remain homeless, at the mercy of society. These positive steps, would provide Tamasha artistes a sense of self respect and prestige in the eyes of society.

Among the suggestions given by Mirane Sir, to keep Tamasha alive, he mentioned that Tamasha should be handed down to the future generations through 'scientific training'. Just as other folk art forms such as 'Kathakali', 'Bharatnatyam', 'Bhangda' etc have been popularized and continue to survive, similarly, if Tamasha is given greater attention by its patrons, it can be revived to a status of recognition. Even the part played by the 'Songadya' (Joker) in the Tamasha, requires spontaneity in thought and action as the humour is satirical as well as intellectual, sending a message across to the audience.

He reminded us of the 'Padmashree' achievement award which has been given to a renowned Tamasha artist, namely 'Yamunabai Waikar' who is now touching the age of 80 years. He fondly remembered her noteworthy performances which was cherished by many in her time. He remembered other artistes who have delivered the same calibre of performances in their times, who are leading miserable lives today.

Santosh Khedlekar, a reverant of the art form, has completed his Phd on the topic of Tamasha. As he was born and brought up in the heart of the place where Tamasha performances are held, namely Sangamner, Aurangabad, he fondly reminisced on his memories of Tamasha as a child, through his growing years. Just like the others who have been interviewed, he states that audiences have changed in their attitudes towards Tamasha. He attributes this change in attitudes to commercial cinema and television, which has influenced the minds of the audiences over the years. The new breed of audience expects to see in a live Tamasha performance, what they would watch on television and in the films. However, this is an expectation that is hard to fulfill by the tradition bound Tamasha troupes. The result of satisfying the unreasonable demands of the audience is the slow death of authentic, traditional Tamasha.

Santosh Khedlekar has been watching Tamasha since the past 35 years, but it was in the year 2004 that he grew more attached to the art form. This was mainly because it was during this time that he began writing his book on 'Kantabai Satarkar', who is Raghuvveer Khedkar's mother. He has also written articles, books and magazines about Tamasha, in order to erase the misconceptions people have about Tamasha. In his book and articles, he mentions, that Tamasha continues to cater to an audience of families and women, even as long standing Tamasha companies like that of Raghuvveer Khaedkar's continues to host Tamasha shows solely for women and families. He reiterates the fact that, if one strives towards the good cause, Tamasha can be taken over by troupes as a responsibility for the cause of the social good. He also mentions that Tamasha is now being performed to enhance the knowledge and entertainment of students within the urban areas. In 2011, Mumbai University, provided a platform to Tamasha artistes, so

that they can reach the educated masses as well. This has been a positive step in the direction of uplifting Tamasha.

He suggests that the government of Maharashtra must take concrete steps in the direction of supporting Tamasha as an art form. He believes that 'Mahotsavs' that stage Tamasha performances must be presented to an elite audience from the educated fraternity. Such an audience must also comprise of writers, poets and theatre artistes, who truly understand art in its aesthetic sense. It is these people who will be able to provide constructive solutions to the problems that exist. He also stated that, during the 'Natya Sammelans' (meeting place for different forms of theatre) which are held every year, only renowned contemporary theatre artistes are invited to perform their act. Tamasha performers are not invited to these annual gatherings, which occur on a grand scale. There has never been a gathering that has ever invited script writers of Tamasha either. Tamasha troupes have been marginalized among the performing arts. Therefore, it is imperative to give Tamasha, a position of respect and recognition in mainstream theatre to improve the quality of its performances.

Among the many organizations that function at the district level of every village in Maharashtra, that are meant to support the performing arts, very few attempts have been made to uplift Tamasha. If these agencies, divert their attention to Tamasha, by supporting its cause, this would make a relevant difference to the status of the art form.

Recently, attempts are being made by 'Lavani' artistes to spread the art form, by running classes, where women from the upper strata of society, can also learn the dance. According to Khedlekar, if children are taught about the Tamasha as an art form of the nation, this would definitely bring in a change in mindset, at a very young age. This would also encourage our youth to learn the art form in the traditional sense.

Raghuveer Khedkar's troupe is one of the only Tamasha troupes that has tried to spread awareness about the rich cultural traditions of Tamasha. He states emphatically, that in his early years as a performer, men and women watched Tamasha together. 'Vag Natyas' which spread social messages, were a predominant feature in every Tamasha performance. However today, this is not the case. He says that the public looks at Tamasha from the 'bottom to the top'. On the other hand, Tamasha looks at the public from the 'top to the bottom'. He emphasizes that Tamasha has always respected the needs of the audience. However this has not been the case, otherwise. He upholds the fact that even today female artistes constitute a larger number as compared to men in the Tamasha troupes, mainly because they have been able to make a greater impact on the audiences over time. He suggests that, if Tamasha troupes divert their resources in the right direction, which is towards the social good, women will have more respect in our society. Tamasha will also be looked upon as an important aspect of our Indian tradition.

As most of the literature on Tamasha presents it as an art form, containing cheap and vulgar modes of entertainment, this misconception was cancelled out by an interview with Sri Anantgiri Maharaj. As a priest and a learned Sanskrit scholar, he pointed out to the spiritual content of Tamasha. He spoke about the 'Gan' and the 'Gavlan' which are invocations to the lord 'Ganpati'. They also depict the colourful tales of Radha and Krishna, the mythological characters of the Hindu religion. He mentioned that, if these forms were portrayed in the right manner, they would instill spirituality among the audiences and a better knowledge of our religion and cultural traditions.

However, the audience has changed as they are influenced by modern commercial entertainment, mainly taken from films. Tamasha continues to exist as it caters to the preferences of this new wave of audience who do not understand the spiritual and aesthetic culture of this traditional folk form. Sri Anantgiri Maharaj's suggestions broadened our views towards the potential of Tamasha in carrying spiritual messages to its audience.

According to Raju Bagul, representing the new generation of youth who run Tamasha troupes today, the government carries out its duties to a certain extent through schemes by way of 'Thanta Mukti Abhiyan' (to resolve conflicts between villagers), 'Hunda Mukti Abhiyan' (to resolve the dowry problem), 'Swacchata Abhiyaan' (schemes to improve sanitation and hygiene) and efforts to eliminate the problem of 'Female Foeticide'. However, the villagers don't read the newspapers regularly as many of them are semi-literate and illiterate. In such cases it is the Tamasha performance that brings a positive change and social awareness into the community at large.

It was encouraging to hear from Raju, that the motto that he applies for his Tamasha performances, which he refers to as his 'Dharma' (duty) is 'Lok Kala Tun, Jan Jagruti Karnara Tamasha'. This means that his Tamasha performances are meant to focus on issues that will lead to the social good.

Although Raju agreed that Tamasha must cater to the needs of the changing audience, he also adds that, this theory also works the other way around. Unless Tamasha troupes decide to improvise on the content of the Tamasha performances, the audience will never have a healthy exposure and attitude towards Tamasha. It is as much the responsibility of Tamasha troupes to present clean entertainment and informative shows to the audience, as the audience who would appreciate authentic traditional Tamasha, contributing to social welfare.

He mentioned that, there are a few other performers like himself, who are educated and have received formal training in drama and dance. There are also a few script writers, writing scripts for 'Vag Natyas' of relevance and meaning. If such people get a better pay, and if conditions for Tamasha performances improve, the rural and urban audience will have the pleasure of watching Tamasha of a higher quality and standard.

There was a touch of pride in his words as he said that there are only three types of people who can make a difference within society. They are the saints, the politicians and the stage performers. He claimed to retain the authenticity and purity of the traditional art form in the Tamasha performances of his troupe. He wants to reach out to the masses with social messages that will benefit the rural audience. His wife is also a Tamasha artiste which signifies his respect for women in Tamasha. When questioned about the derogatory position of female Tamasha artistes, he defended the position of female artistes, stating that their performances should be attributed to their dedication to the art form and talent.

He pledged to support the cause of the elderly retired performers of Tamasha, as he believes that, once they stop performing, they are forgotten by the public. He is aware of the fact that the government does not provide substantial benefits to those performers who have retired from Tamasha. He wished to establish an organisation, that will provide recognition to such people and safeguard their future towards a dignified existence.

All these positive implications made by the members of Tamasha troupes, including those who associate with Tamasha in some way or the other, also contributed positively as suggestions for improvement in Tamasha. However, there were only a handful of people who were inclined towards the upliftment of Tamasha in directing it towards the social good. Most of the Tamasha troupes in Maharashtra are struggling with poverty, trying to make ends meet. As they hail from

Tamasha families,they have no other means for subsistence.They continue to perform in Tamasha,providing crude presentations of Tamasha to an audience that does not appreciate the aesthetic value of the art form.In catering to the needs of the masses,Tamasha performances around Maharashtra have truly lost their identity.

What is to be Undone

With our modernity coming into its own, the question now is: does theatre without a political purpose have any right to exist? For the theatre practitioner of our times, this may appear a rather strange question. But the past is a foreign country, and they spoke a different language there. What appears to us as signifying a terrible colonial authoritarianism could simply be an effort to grapple with the very difficult questions that the colonial encounter posed for a subject people as they embarked on their own quite complex (and often contradictory) transition to modernity. During the colonial period, journals and periodicals were full of writing that expressed a certain anxiety about theatre and its social role. This anxiety was not purely 'political', but had something to say about dramatic forms. Incidentally after Independence, there is a noticeable shift away from social and political criticism to what might be called theoretical and speculative criticism.

Then there is the question of the 'folk'. The Sangeet Natak Akademi organized a round table on the contemporary relevance of folk theatre in 1971. The impetus came from Suresh Awasthi, who had become Secretary of the Akademi in 1965 and who, along with Nemichandra Jain, was the chief ideologue of the 'theatre of the roots' movement. Of course, the ideologue tends to be more puritanical than the practitioner, and the participants at the round table – Badal Sircar, Utpal Dutt, Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Ebrahim Alkazi, to name a few – were more circumspect about adopting the 'theatre of the roots' slogan.

In the early 1980s, the Ford Foundation began funding projects to document the vanishing folk forms so that they could be used by contemporary theatre persons in their work. The Sangeet Natak Akademi in 1984 initiated an annual scheme to assist young directors to develop productions using stylistic conventions drawn from folk theatre. In 1992, the Ford Foundation initiated its Theatre Laboratory Project which sought to counter the growing regional chauvinism in India by encouraging close to a dozen theatre 'laboratories' to experiment with folk theatre. While the Sangeet Natak Akademi's folk thrust has been written about – though not adequately – there is not a single book-length study of Ford's interventions in theatre or in the area of culture more generally. Even Vasudha Dalmia's recent work, *Poetics, Plays and Performances*, which discusses the Sangeet Natak Akademi at some length in the section 'The Nation and its "Folk",' fails to make a single mention of Ford. This is indeed, a shocking revelation.

Now that government and foundation funding for it has receded, the 'theatre of the roots' movement has more or less run out of steam today. The roots themselves, the agrarian economy and social structure, too are in the midst of an unprecedented crisis. Rural arts as a whole, not just theatre, cannot survive, let alone thrive, if the people that nourish it continue to die. The worst of it is that nobody seems to care about this fall in folk theatre.

In Conclusion

From the interviews that have been conducted in this study, it was recognized that Tamasha continues to be performed in the villages of Maharashtra despite all the hurdles and the pitfalls that it has been encountering over the years. The Tamasha artistes mentioned fervently that they will continue to dance till the end of time. Their persistence to continue the tradition of Tamasha revealed their passion for the art form. When asked if they would prefer to change professions, most of the artistes answered in the negative. The reason was clear. They would not stop performing, as performing was in their blood. For the villagers, Tamasha is not only a means to a livelihood, it is also an expression of one's identity through drama. In spite of the fact that Tamasha is losing its traditional aesthetic culture, it will continue to exist, even in the crude and vulgar form in which it is represented today.

However, one cannot ignore the fact, that in spite of the fervor to keep the show going, Tamasha is losing out on its traditional essence. As Raghuvver Khedkar and Varsha Paritekar, announced, that if this state of affairs continues, in the next few years, Tamasha will cease to exist. What we will witness on the stage will be nothing close to what was once remembered as Tamasha. As people are witnessing variations of Tamasha, we are slowly giving rise to an audience that has had no exposure to real authentic Tamasha.

Shantaram Mirane, a connoisseur of respectable and traditional Tamasha stated that he has not watched Tamasha in the last twenty years, as today's Tamasha is nowhere close to the real traditional Tamasha that once existed.

Tamasha is slowly declining as it is satisfying the demands of a new age generation of audience that is illiterate about the real art form. Therefore, it was suggested that the concept of folk theatre should be introduced in schools. Children should be taught about the history of Tamasha, so that they achieve a better understanding about its roots and tradition. In addition to this Tamasha should be taught to the artistes in a more 'scientific' manner. By scientific, is meant, that Tamasha should be taught in schools by artistes who have been performing Tamasha in the traditional way. The message of the social good should be highlighted in the scientific teaching of Tamasha. Only if these steps are taken, will our future generations derive the right understanding of Tamasha. This will also help in moulding the tastes of a new age audience, creating within them, an appreciation for the traditional, pure and aesthetically inclined Tamasha.

If more educated youth like Raju Bagul, enter into the realm of managing and running Tamasha troupes, this would be a positive step in diverting the Tamasha performances in the right direction. Tamasha performances must emphasise the social good through their 'Vag Natyas' which was the original purpose of authentic Tamasha.

Natharam Godegaokar Master brought a new hope to this study as it was realized that he is one among the few educated script writers existing in Tamasha circles. Although, he has stopped writing since the last ten years, it was encouraging to hear that his scripts were always centred around socially useful messages. Script writers, like Natharam are few, and those who survive are also slowly fading away, unrecognized and neglected by a society that no longer respects aestheticism and scholarly writing. If the state government gives due recognition to stalwarts like Natharam in folk theatre, not only will the state of Maharashtra boast of a rich cultural folk

heritage, but will also breed a new generation of such stalwarts, who would make the nation proud.

Speaking of stalwarts, seventy two year old, Kanatabai Satarkar, is an epitome of strong moral conviction to upholding Tamasha. Kantabai, has single handedly run a Tamasha troupe, acted the parts of Shivaji and Raja Harishchandra, proving her prowess as a dedicated actress. Her passion for Tamasha has contributed to her troupe gaining in fame and popularity, at the commonwealth games. As Kantabai's troupe is now run by her son Raghuvveer Khedkar, it is recognized as one that presents the most traditional forms of Tamasha in Maharashtra. However, troupes like that of Raghuvveer Khedkar's are few in number and slowly diminishing.

Raghuvveer Khedkar is unhappy with the government's negligence towards Tamasha troupes. Although, the government of Maharashtra has begun to provide some compensation to the troupes, the amount offered is only sufficient to maintain their overheads and cover the damages. Renowned troupes like Raghuvveer's are also indebted heavily to moneylenders as they have been borrowing money at high interest rates from them. As banks refuse to give loans to Tamasha troupes, as they have nothing much to offer by way of security, the vicious cycle continues. If financial support is provided to Tamasha troupes by government agencies, it would ease the burden of debt that the troupes have been reeling under since generations.

As women have always been victims of exploitation and control in a male dominated society, the Tamasha women are not spared the ordeals of their circumstances as artistes. The price paid in order to pursue a passion is high and sacrificial. The Tamasha women are not respected by society. Many a times, they are looked upon as prostitutes. Due to this, they are subjected to the lewd remarks and obscene gestures of a predominantly male audience. Police protection for children and women becomes a must in these circumstances. Moreover, most Lavani dancers have turned into bar dancers and prostitutes in order to survive.

Considering the fate of Tamasha as well as that of the women performers, unless the government, NGO's, and academic fraternities take concrete steps towards saving it, Maharashtra, will soon experience the loss of one of its oldest folk tradition and indigenous culture.

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