CHAPTER VII

TAMASHA AND OTHER FOLK FORMS OF INDIA
VII. TAMASHA AND OTHER FOLK FORMS OF INDIA

70 — INTRODUCTION

The people of all countries in the world, for their entertainment have created some forms which suit their conditions. The educated urban society like classical forms, similarly rural people like folk forms. Among rural illiterates also, there are poets, performers, and the organizers of the folk forms. That is why the folk theatre became very popular in our country. Most of the population of our country is in rural areas and in villages and they treat these forms as pan of their day-to-day engagements.

There is a talk that folk forms with good literature only attract people but this is not true. The totally illiterate also can perform and it is the folk theatre that gives entertainment and comedy to most of the people.

The Tamasha theatre of Maharashtra is also called Lok Natya. This form attracted the people of the State and became the prime attraction of their entertainment. Romantic and comedy-based Tamasha type of folk forms can be seen in every part of our country. The most popular folk forms of such type are Yatra (Jatra), Swang, Nautanki, Veedhi Bhagavatham, etc.

71 — NAUTANKI AND TAMASHA

"Nautanki" is a famous folk form of Uttar Pradesh. This Nautanki is a very old traditional folk form of North India. In a Nautanki group, there are at least a minimum of fifty artists. Every Nautanki group will have its own infrastructure. Their performances are based on mythological, historical, social, folk tales, etc. subjects. In Nautanki, dance, music, songs are more. The acting style of this Nautanki form is different. Though the Tamasha production style differs, the performance begins with music so as in Nautanki also the performance starts with music. There is one big drum called ‘Nagara’ which they play before the beginning of Nautanki. On an open ground, the sound of this Nagara (drum) can be heard to far off distances rhythmically. Like this, in Tamasha, the sound of dholki and daph can be heard to far off places from the open air ground. Thousands of people gather in the grounds to witness the Nautanki performance. In Nautanki, acting part is less compared to music and dance.
TAMASHA FOLK THEATRE OF MAHARASHTRA

With its emphasis on music, acting has been completely neglected by Nautanki players. There is no movement of characters who become listless as soon as the singing is over. Even while singing, the emotional rendering is generally sacrificed in an attempt to reach higher notes. Having to play to large open air audiences of thousands, all the subtle nuances are wiped out. This is perhaps sought to be balanced by the vigour of the "Nakkara" (big drum) which is played at the end of each phrase in a song and also in-between the responses of conversing characters. Depending on the talent, skill and virtuosity of the "Nakkara" player, the drum dominates the production as a whole. In an attempt to create an aesthetically valid total impact, the "Nakkara" had to be made to serve the dramatic purpose of the play, subordinating itself to the needs of the moment when necessary. This meant controlling the frequency as well as the duration of interventions by the "Nakkara" player. As a result, the singers became more alive to the need of expressing requisite emotions through their own voices.

The acting style of Nautanki differs with those of other folk forms. The dance, song and in between some acting everything will be done to the beatings of Nagara (drum). Whereas in Tamasha, there is much scope for acting. Like Nautanki, in Tamasha also music, dance and song are there but these will not dominate the acting part of it whereas in Nautanki, music dominates the acting of the artists.

A new acting style had to be evolved which would be in harmony with the characteristic structure and at the same time be easily assimilated by professionals accustomed to just standing around with expressionless faces when they were not singing. I made them freeze in relevant poses while the "Nakkara" was playing in an attempt to create a series of pictures in the hundi style of miniature painting which was used as a reference in designing both the costumes and a simple transportable set for this play. With insistence on emotional rendering of the songs, interrelationship of the characters expressed through sustained responses and with the statuesque poses of the living fresco, made significantly elaborate at vital points, a coherent style of acting did seem to emerge, to which mobility was given by Ranga in his different roles.

Nautanki is an old traditional folk form which has more than hundred years of history like Jatra of Bengal.

Dr. Awasthi Mr. Alkazi rightly referred to the pressure of new content becoming the determining factor in changing the form and the structure of traditional drama. But it seems to me that for
example, now take “Nautanki” which is a similar form like Jatra. Nautanki also for more than hundred years has also communicated, projected new ideas, new themes of social change. But the change in the form really has happened only during the last two decades. Right from the Arva Samaj movement or Swadeshi movement. Nautanki always encouraged social currents. But it seems to me that this devastating change in the form, conventions, structure of the traditional theatre in different regions, both religious or ritualistic or secular theatre, this is because of certain extraneous elements, in Jatra, Nautanki or even Yakshagana.

Like Nautanki, the Tamasha people have also been performing, taking social elements as subjects during these days.

Nautanki also uses proscenium-type stage like that of Tamasha. Nautanki uses painted roller curtains in its performances. In Tamasha also, they use painted roller curtains and they use these curtains accordingly whenever the situation requires. It seems that the inspiration of Parsi theatre on these forms of Nautanki and Tamasha because in Parsi theatre also, they use this type of roller curtains.

In Nautanki, a roof should be there over the heads of the singers for the purpose of resounding of their voices. Where there is no such arrangement in an open air, they put some sort of a pandal over their heads. This type of special arrangement is not required in Tamasha performances because Tamasha is not a music-oriented form like that of Nautanki.

The socio-economic problems of both the Nautanki and Tamasha artists are same.

Nautanki was played during pre-independence days, basing on the values of feudalism. This Nautanki was being patronised by this type of people. But after Independence, there has been a change in the style of playing. They started projecting socially liberal and rational values, and succeeded in their efforts even though there was some opposition from a large section of people.

In the case of the professional Nautanki players, the problem was more deeply rooted in the socio-economic milieu of India. Nautanki is played and patronised by people who continue to cling to the feudal values of life even in independent India which professes to move towards modern scientific rationality. Traditional Nautanki plays continue to glorify feudal values. Through a change of emphasis, the reoriented version has attempted to project socially liberal and rational.
values. It took considerable time to overcome the resistance of professional actors with a rural background to these changes. Their resistance was stronger in the case of new social values than in the case of politico-economic values. However, they readily entered into the spirit of humanism with universally accepted human values, irrespective of the purposeful selectivity and juxtapositioning of these values. With the technical command over their voices the professional actors succeeded in projecting the values they themselves were not convinced of, with such powerful impact that they evoked enthusiastic response from the sophisticated as well as unsophisticated urban audiences who were deeply moved.

72 — BHAVAI (GUJARATI FOLK DRAMA) AND TAMASHA FOLK THEATRE

India is a vast country in which there are different regions and different languages existing. There is a culture attached to everybody's life. Like that, there exist various traditional forms at different areas. In Gujarat, a very famous folk drama "Bhavai." To witness this Bhavai folk drama, the village folk as well as the urban audience show very keen interest. Bhavai is the very popular and famous folk form of Gujarat.

As we know, Tamasha is a very famous folk form of Maharashtra. The popularity of Tamasha in the rural and urban areas spread all over the State of Maharashtra, similarly the popularity of Bhavai is spread all over the State of Gujarat irrespective of rural and urban.

Bhavai folk art form is very closely related to the way of life of Indians. In Indian life, spirituality, religion and culture are interrelated.

The concept of art in Indian way of life is a means to an end. The intentions and the purpose were always divine. It is a vehicle to take the artist nearer to God. Some of these art forms acquired over the years secular and social overtones in their content and intentions, retaining the structural characteristics of the original. One such art form is "Bhavai," the folk drama of Gujarat.

The classical forms that are in vogue in India are parallels of folk forms. There exists a traditional theatre to every region, which relates to those conditions. Some forms are classical by nature but which are folk forms. Tamasha theatre of Maharashtra, Nautanki of Uttar Pradesh, Veedhi Natakam of Andhra Pradesh, Terukoothu of Tamil Nadu, Maach of Madhya Pradesh, Swang of Punjab, and Bhavai of Gujarat are some of the examples of this type.
Bhavai is an entertainment-characterised folk form. In this we have dance, drama and dialogues. Bhavai, according to Dr. Sudha Desai (a scholar of traditional art forms) and Shri Uma Shankar Joshi (Chairman, Kendra Sahitya Akademi) originated as a ritual to propitiate “Shakti” (Devi) and later must have developed into a folk form. Dr. Sudha Desai in her thesis presented evidences in support of her theory. Poet Asait, who lived in fourteenth century, is believed to be the father of this tradition. Asait, who belonged to Siddhpur in North Gujarat, is believed to have composed 360 Bhavai vesh. Most of the earlier and contemporary Bhavai artists belong to the same region. Navaks and Bhojaks of Targala community in the initial stages took up Bhavai as a religious ritual but later adopted it as a profession.

Bhavai, till recently, was being performed during Navaratri festival and this form is related to the female deities (Shakti) and even now in the rural parts of Gujarat, people are following this tradition.

Bhavai once was a ritual folk form connected to religion, gradually changed and they are performing all types of subjects like mythological, historical, emotional lives of rural folk and on the subjects of social events. Bhavai, as already mentioned, is the combination of music, dance, drama, romance and farce through which it attracts the rural and urban audience even today.

Performing Style of Bhavai

In Bhavai performance, the main thing is narration. The characters enter the stage and narrate the subject. There are also songs in between. These songs are very rhythmic and attract the audience. The audience listen to the comedy-based narration with utmost interest like that they show some interest in the melodious songs of Bhavai. After that, based on the plot, drama will also be there. In drama, the main thing is dramatic element. In accordance to the dramatic elements, they perform Bhavai folk drama. The dramas they perform contain independent incidents. In all these incidents, music, dance, humour, mimicry, narration are the parts. In Tamasha also, music, dance, humour, narration, etc. exist. The presentation style of Tamasha differs with that of Bhavai.

The performing style of Tamasha have been discussed in detail in the earlier chapters.
Performance of Bhavai combines narration, incs and drama. It presents several independent incidents woven together in a pattern. Each of these acts has its own plot and atmosphere. Each act is known as a vesh (costume - here the part stands for the whole). Duration of a vesh and the number of characters in it vary. Each performance consists of several such vesh. But there is no fixed number of vesh to a performance. It largely depends on the repertoire of the troupe and the preference of the audiences.

Bhavai folk drama is a very powerful folk drama in Gujarat. This folk form contains all the nine rasas (navrasas), humour (jokes), satire, social comments, etc. Most of the performances are of mythological based subjects.

This bhavai performance is generally performed in the open places of temple premises and in the villages at the junctions (cross roads where four roads meet). The Bhavai performances are held during the nights only. Veedhi-Bhagavatham, Bayelata, Nautanki, Yatra and lamasha performances also begin during the evening hours and continue throughout the night but this Bhavai begins in the evening and ends at around midnight. The village audience after having taken meals, they come leisurely to witness the Bhavai folk drama. No audience leaves the place in between the performance. This shows the popularity and the interest of the audience towards Bhavai folk forms. This trend is being continued till today and hence, the Bhavai art form and its artists are having fame and name in the society of Gujarat.

There is some sort of difference between the popularity of Tamasha and Bhavai. The upper caste people did not accept the Tamasha form, but Bhavai art form was and is being accepted by all communities of people. Spiritual subjects are very less in the performance of Tamasha, whereas Bhavai is totally dependent on spiritual based subjects.

Most of the acts used to be anecdotes from epics and mythology. Among the mythological themes, Ram-Lakshman, Mahadev, Shankar-Parvathi, Kan-Gopi are well known. Over the years Bhavai acquired several other themes into its repertoire. Jasma-odon, Sudhra-Jesang, Ratna-Hamir are partly historical and partly legendary. There are others which reflect the Muslim rule over the Gujarat region, like Pathan-Bhammi, Zenda-Jhulhan, Chel Batav-Lal Batav. Some of these acts depict the socio-political conditions of those times.
Some others deal with common experiences and characters one comes across in rural life. These depict various aspects of the society like customs, beliefs, and superstitions. Social evils are depicted in these acts through imitation and mimicry. Typical among them are "Bania" (merchant), "Kansaro" (Tinker), "Sarana" (knife sharpener), "Dari" (tailor) and "Maniar" (bangle seller). Such acts provide the audience a peep into the lives of craftsmen and artisans, and often give a chance to get a laugh. Some of the acts like "Achhooth" and "Kajado" are trades against the prevalent social evils. They are presented satirically and the practices are ridiculed. For instance, in "Achhooth," the barbaric practice of untouchability is criticised. "Kajado" depicts the ridiculous practice of marriage between couples with wide age differences and denounces it.

The ingenuity of Bhavai lies in the way the message is conveyed without sermonising.

Like other folk forms, Bhavai performance is also very flexible. In accordance with time, place, and situation, changes can be made in the performances. Scenes are improvised according to the situation prevailing at that time. Bhavai productions are very simple. There is no need of stage, curtains, backdrops for this Bhavai performances, which are very essential for Tamasha theatre. Special effects, special lights are also not needed for the performance of Bhavai production. Almost all the play is covered by narration, humour and music only, but the artists wear colourful dresses (costumes).

There is a certain pattern for the performance of Bhavai form. The chief person of the bhavai performance is called the Nayak. The Nayak pours castor oil into the ground in a round circle shape, and the audience sit around that circle on one side they place a torch (mashal). They treat this mashal as the symbol of Devi. They form this circle with castor oil to safeguard themselves from evil spirits. After this, the Nayak spreads flowers onto the audience, artists and onto the instruments, and makes the announcement of the play. But in Tamasha production, the beginning is different. It is like proscenium theatre and begins with the beating of dholki and daph instruments.

Bhavai performance commences with the playing of musical instruments like Bhungals, Pakhawaj and Cymbals. To the tune of these instruments they render the prayer of Devi and then sing a folk song. Then the Nayak announces the entry of Lord Ganesha. Ganesha character enters with the accompaniment of music and leaves the stage from the other side followed by the
character of Kalika (Devi), and after her exit the main performance begins. The introduction of the characters by Nayaks, the music, dance, the entry of characters creates a kind of mood in the audience, in a very short time which is possible only in Bhavai and not in theatre, where it takes some time for the audience to adjust, and understand the situation. In between two acts (vesh), male and female characters "Ranglo-Rangli" create humour to fill the gap.

Music and dance play key roles in Bhavai. Well known ragas and talas of North India are being used in these performances with the accompaniment of special musical instruments.

Bhungal, Pakhawaj, Paro, Vansali and Cymbals are the essential instruments used in Bhavai performances. Bhungal is a pair of wind instruments which are four feet long horns. They are known as Nara and Mada. They give out a shrill drone with one or two variations. The former is high pitched while the latter has a low pitch. Sounding of Bhungals heralds the commencement of a Bhavai performance. Pakhawaj is a percussion instrument. Paro and Vansali are wind instruments similar to flute. The former is made of metal, while the latter is made of bamboo. Cymbals are metallic instruments which produce resonant sound to keep time.

Like music, dance also plays a vital role. Each act of the Bhavai commences and closes with dance.

In this way, the Bhavai folk form is entertaining the audience of Gujarat irrespective of rural and urban, as is done by the Tamasha form in Maharashtra.

YATRA (JATRA) AND TAMASHA

From very ancient times, the style of drama took birth in India. For the entertainment of common people, the drama was introduced. There is a saying in Sanskrit "Kavyeshu Natakam Ramyam" which means Theatre (drama) is the beautiful and greatest of all Kavyas.

Like this, for the entertainment of people, Jatra Theatre also came into existence. This folk form was born in Bengal and is a very popular form in that State. Jatra and Tamasha, both are very old forms.

The performances of Jatra are done in open grounds. In a big open ground, they erect a stage. On one side of the stage they spread mats or carpets on the ground to enable the audience
to sit. On the other side of the stage, they arrange green rooms and for the passage onto the stage they leave some place •• small path from green room to the stage.

The presentation of stories are based on mythological basis and hence they put silk cloths over the chairs and use them for the purpose of thrones. The stage properties are arranged by the stage boys of the Jatra teams. They fulfill the scene of king going on elephants or horses through announcements as it is impossible to perform such scenes on stage. Change of scene if any were also being done through announcements. Sometimes, the same person used to do both the roles of male and female, they wear the costume of female and he also keeps his mustache. Even still, the audience treat that character as a female character.

For the Tamasha theatre performance, they need a big ground, at the end of the ground they put the dais, the face of the dais is towards east. On the back side of the dais are the green rooms. The dais and the green rooms are built with the help of tents. Behind the green looms, they put tents for cooking and dining purposes. The place where the audience sit are covered by a circus-type tent or can be left open. The transport facilities of Jatra and Tamasha companies are similar.

The presentation styles of Tamasha were discussed in detail in the earlier chapters. Though the presentation styles of Tamasha and Jatra are different, but the main aim of both the forms is to entertain the people.

7.3.1 YATRA THEMES

A form of Yatra known as Puranic Yatras, composed on the basis of themes derived from the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, the two great Indian epics, and the various major and minor Puranas appeared during that age. In 1872, a public stage was established in Calcutta. Mythological dramas preaching high ethical, moral and spiritual qualities in human life were in great demand and used to be staged during that time in Calcutta. The contemporary Yatra generally drew inspiration from the Calcutta stage, and therefore, when the mythological or Puranic dramas were being performed there, the Yatras also adopted identical themes and were successful in preaching the same ideals among the population of the country. The Yatra played
the role of a moving theatre. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the ideas as preached by the Yatra exercised a tremendous influence on the life of the people of Bengal specially living in the rural areas. Traditional forms of narrative songs and music all came under the influence of the technique and form of Yatra. As a result, the traditional narrative of the Ramayana was also to a very great extent transformed into Yatra, and it was known as the Ram-Yatra. Other traditional narratives also had undergone similar change of form, and thus we find Chandi Yatra or the folk drama on the episodes of popular Chandi, Bhushan-Yatra on the folk drama on the narrative of the serpent goddess Manasa, so called because Bhushan in Bengali means floating down the river. Inasmuch as the legend of Manasa describes the floating down of the body of Lakhindar with the heroine Behula in the river, it is known as Bhushan-Yatra.

7 3 2 — YATRA — IT’S ORIGIN

Yatra means juloos — a religious procession. The relationship of Jatra performances are connected with religious nature only. In the beginning, they might have played a type of form while taking the idol of their deity into procession and the form might have been named as Jatra. The procession might have given importance to music and dance while worshipping their deities. Like this, the devotees were taking such processions by way of mixing music, dance and dramatic element. The combination of all these formed the Jatra.

There are differences in fixing the period of origin of Jatra. Some say that Jatra was in vogue since Vedic times. This form is related to the procession of idols of (iods and hence can be treated as a very old form.

It can be seen from the history of Musaputania also that way back in 4000 B.C., the Sumer caste people were also taking processions of their Gods by playing music, through singing songs, etc.

There is nothing wrong in accepting the above principle. The same thing was said by Mr. E. P. Harwitz:

Even the Vedic age knew Jatras, memorable heirloom of Aryan antiquity. The (iods of the Rigveda were hymned in choral processions. Some of the Samaveda hymns reached the rude mirth of the primitive Jatra dances.
TAMASHA FOLK THEATRE OF MAHARASHTRA

Tamasha is also an ancient folk form. Before the birth of Gyanmargi Kabirdas, the Tamasha form was very popular. Kabirdas narrated in his dohas about Tamasha.

"Everyone sleeps when a story is being narrated but when this Swang and Tamasha are performed, no audience can be seen sleeping (means they watch the performance very interestingly)."

Though Tamasha is treated as an old traditional form, there is no evidence of proof of its origin to decide the period.

7.3.3 — IMPACT OF MUSIC

Before the beginning of Tamasha presentation, Dappu, dholki and jugalbandi are arranged. The jugalbandi and playing of instruments are started half an hour before the beginning of the performance. After that, gan, goul and singing of lavni songs are performed. The Tamasha performance concludes with Vag Natya. Music plays the key role throughout the process. In one word, without music there is no performance.

In the same way, in Jatra folk form also, before beginning of Jatra, they start beating dhol and tala half an hour before the proceedings. With the hearing of these noise, the audience gathers there. Then the introduction of the particular story is narrated.

Jatra is the combination of nritya (dance), song, music, and dialogues through which they give the performance. The process of laughing, weeping and dialogues, everything is done through songs only.

7.3.4 — INFLUENCE OF JATRA ON SANSKRIT NATAKS

Keith says about the influence of Jatra on Sanskrit drama that:

The dramas of ritual, therefore, are in a sense somewhat out of the main development of the drama. and the popular side has survived through ages in a rough way in the Jatras, well known in Bengal. while the refined and sacredotalised Vedic drama passed away without a direct descendant.

By the above examples, it can be seen that Jatra is the very oldest traditional dramatic form.
With the change of period from time to time, the Jatra form has also had its development. The Jatra performances were held on Sakti Yatra, Shiv Yatra, Rama Yatra, Krishna Yatra. These are the very famous Yatra forms in Bengal.

The influence of Jatra fell on Sanskrit dramas and on the scholars of other languages. "Geet Govind" was written by following the same style of Jatra. N. Vidya Bhusan says that "Shakti Yatra." It is said that there were Yatras before the birth of Shri Chaitanya, but those Yatras were about them as concerned with Shakti. At that time there were no Krishna Yatras.

During the period of Chaitanya, the "Krishna Leela" was very popular. The influence of Krishna Leela was such that if there were any other Yatra being performed, the same was also heated and was called as "Kaliya Daman Yatra." This Kaliya Daman Yatra was popular among audience for about four hundred years.

The influence of Tamasha was not there on Sanskrit drama or on any other folk forms of India.

73.5 - NINETEENTH CENTURY JATRA NATAK

During the nineteenth century, the Yatra was influenced by other various Indian dramas. The popular dramas that influenced Yatra were Rama Narain's "Ratnavali," Kali Prasanna Singh's "Savitri-Satyavan," Madhusudan's "Padmavathi." Most of the writers wrote literary Yatra dramas. But Babu Kalidas Sanyal wrote a drama "Nala Damayanti" in Yatra style and this drama was performed in Uttar Pradesh, instead of West Bengal and this drama was very popular among the audience of Uttar Pradesh, though the Yatra is a new form to Uttar Pradesh audience.

Tamasha and Yatra forms, though the production style varies, but both the forms are moving folk forms. They move from village to village to give their performances.

With the cooperation of artists, common people, through entertainment of people of remote villages, these forms have overpowered the most popular "drama form," which is very famous and popular among the urban community.

The social life of Tamasha artists and that of Jatra artists are similar. Their social and economic conditions are also same. The artists of both Tamasha and Yatra are very dedicated.
ones and perform their duties with dedication and with great care. All the artists are from remote villages and devoted themselves to these forms. The artists do not think about their past and future. What is happening at present is important for them.

All the artists of Tamasha and Yatra work on salary basis. The organisers of Yatra Natak and Tamasha Phad arrange free meals and accommodation to the artists and pay a fixed amount per year. The life of these artists is detached with the other society people because there is no stability for them and they have to move from one place to another for giving their performances. There is no job guarantee and pensionary benefits in their old age, for these artists from the organisers. The artists are not allowed to leave their jobs whenever they wish. The presentation purely depends on the will and wish of the villagers. They have to perform the dramas which the villagers demand. Government give protection for their performances.

REFERENCES

2. ibidem p. 57.
6. ibidem p. 21.
7. ibidem p. 21.
8. ibidem p. 22.
12 ibidem p 54
13 ibidem p 54
14 *The Indian Theatre*, p 178
15 Dr Dasarath Ojha, *Hindi Nalak Udhhav aur Vikas*, p 53
16 Dr Dasarath Ojha, *Hindi Nalak Udhhav aur Vikas*, p 53
17 Dr Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama*, p 16
18 D N Vidya Bhushan, *Soma Prakash*
19 *The Bangalkrishan* (Phalgun - No 1289).