CHAPTER -3

A STRUGGLE FOR DIGNITY – THE KALAPATHAK

KALAKAAR SANGATHANA / THE LOKNATYA

TAMASHA MANDAL

Participant observation indeed means precisely to try to become a (very) (semi) insider. This chapter deals with the Tamasha and Lavani artists whom I met and observed and who grew very close to me over the years. Sometimes I was asked questions, sometimes I was asked for various kinds of help; I was asked about my family, whether I had any children. One lady, who was a Lavani dancer even told me that next year when you return, ensure you bring a child in your arms! I had almost started dressing like the Marathi women - wearing their typical saree (though not the nine yard one); putting on green bangles (that signify marriage) and these kalavanteen women enjoyed decorating my hair with flowers and my forehead with kumkum.\(^{115}\)

Presently, Dalit women in Kolhapur, especially women artists (kalavanteen women) who perform Tamasha and Lavani and various other folk arts have skilfully used their body that is used to exploit them as a tool in deriving a sense of power and authority and in turn dignity and agency in their lives. They have realised that the only weapon that can quench their undying hunger and extinguish the pangs of poverty from their lives is their body. For the women artists, their body is a tool that they can use to empower themselves and earn their livelihood.

---

\(^{115}\) A red dot made of vermillion, a sign of marriage.
The body is another area where the Dalit woman can trace a sense of agency for herself. Patriarchy, according to Evangeline Anderson Rajkumar\textsuperscript{116}, unfolds its influence on the social body of the community as well as on the female body and a Dalit body. But in Kolhapur today, a reverse phenomenon is taking place. The body of the woman is degrading her to the lowest level possible and then serving as an agency in as much as it is an instrument that they apply in fending for themselves. Regarding the body politic Mor Coorilos says that whereas “body is generally despised and condemned in the Vedic traditions, bodies of people belonging to certain castes and sections are loathed even more” One can see the same ideology of the “hatred of the body of the ‘other’ in the rape of women from minority, Dalit and tribal communities.”\textsuperscript{117}

While discussing the sex worker’s manifesto, in her article “Elusive Choice and agency – A re-reading of the Sex Worker’s Manifesto”, Swati Ghosh\textsuperscript{118} says that women have to cover up their bodies to protect themselves from male gaze and at the same time, bare themselves for male gratification. The same can be said of the female folk-artistes of Maharashtra who are engaged in a three-fold process of a) Protecting themselves from male gratification ; b) baring themselves for male gratification and finally, c) protecting their decaying folk art forms. This chapter looks at the Dalit women engaged in pursuing various forms of Maharashtrian folk-arts – Lavani, Tamasha and Kalapathak alongside the two organisations - The Kalapathak Kalakaar Sangathana and the Loknatya Tamasha Mandal that comprises of women who are trying to make ends meet working as Lavani dancers and Tamasha artistes.


\textsuperscript{117} Geevarghese Mor Coorilos “Dalit Theology and its Future Course” in Sathianathan Clarke, Deenabandhu Manchala and Philip Vinod Peacock Ibid, p. 172

\textsuperscript{118} Swati Ghosh “Elusive Choice and agency – A feminist re-reading of the sex worker’s manifesto” in Rohini Sahni, V. Kalyan Shankar and Hemant Apte (2008) (ed) Prostitution and Beyond – An Analysis of Sex Work in India New Delhi : Sage, p.58
Since time immemorial, Marathi folk dances, songs and theatre acquires a place of honour in the panorama of fine arts in this land. In fact, whatever the Maharashtrians lost in the sphere of the art of painting during the medieval and Maratha times, it gained on the colourful drama stage from 1843. Marathi theatre and particularly the musical stage known as ‘Sangeet Rangabhoomi’ has no precedent or parallel in India. Western thought and modes of Western art made an impact on the Indian way of life and various art forms. The stimuli of Renaissance spread from Mumbai to Pune, Nagpur, Amravati, Kolhapur and then to Nasik and Khandesh. It was but natural that the Renaissance should have made a deep impact on Marathi drama and literature.

Thus, the entire orientation behind Marathi drama began to undergo a massive transformation. It was argued that Marathi drama should possess a social content and a purpose, besides literary values. Apart from having intentness, it should possess a meaning and an aim for regeneration of a better society.

However, the rise of cinema in the 1930’s was highly detrimental to Marathi stage as a profession. Many noted stage artists deserted the drama stage to the movie screen. The theatre coined a new path for itself by the 1950’s, when the ‘Mumbai Marathi Sahitya Sangh’ established its own drama wing under the leadership of Anant Narayan Bhalerao. New vistas were opened for the performance of plays new as well as for retaining the old. From the 1950’s to the 1970’s, several new playwrights came up, who kept up the glorious tradition of Marathi theatre. Along with this, the government of Maharashtra has also encouraged the dramatic talents in all branches of theatrical art since the creation of the State. Annual competitions of dramatic troupes were organised all over the State with a final competition amongst the winners at Mumbai under the aegis of the Directorate of Cultural Affairs. Amateur troupes of actors were given great encouragement from these efforts. Later these amateurs became trained for the greater stage. Thus, in spite of the mortal blows dealt by cinema and television, the theatre has been thriving in Maharashtra. Singing legends like Asha Bhonsle and Lata Mangeshkar, too were associated with Marathi theatre at one point of
time. Lata Mangeshkar made her debut on Marathi stage at an early age, while Asha Bhonsle produced a few gramophone discs of Natya Sangeet sung in the style of her father.\footnote{Information obtained from Dhananjay Pandit of Kalapathak Kalakaar Sangathana, Interview dated - 2/05/09}

However, activities such as Jalsa (traditional music concerts) and Tamasha (traditional folk plays), Lawani (dance ballads) and Pawada (panegyric poetry) continued even as part of the Dalit cultural movement, in much later times.

**TAMASHA : AN INSEPARABLE PART OF MARATHI THEATRE**

The word Tamasha is of Persian/Urdu origin. The word means ‘anand, khel, hansi-mazaak, dikhaava’ translated as ‘happiness, games, laughter-fun, and show’. Different scholars hold widely differing views as to the origin of the Tamasha. According to Ra. Chi. Dhere,\footnote{Rustam Achalkhamb, (2006) *Tamasha Lokrangbhumi*, Pune: Sugawa Prakashan, p.1} during the Peshwai days, mainly in Maharashtra and Karnataka, there was a tradition of ‘radha-naach’\footnote{Radha-naach refers to the dance of Lord Krishna’s consort and lover Radha} and songs. This ‘radha-naach’ used to be done by male performers who were known as ‘shahir’\footnote{Shahirs are Tamasha and kalapathak script writers, ballad composers, even today widely prevalent all over Maharashtra, including Kolhapur. The word Shahir is said to come from the word Shayar meaning a poem cum ballad.}. Apart from this, people from the backward classes, notably from dalit castes like Mahar, Mang, Gondhari, Bharadi, Waghe started performing songs and dances related to the praise of Gods and Goddesses and cultural heroes. It came to be known as ‘khel Tamasha’ and today, it is simply the Tamasha. Namdev Whatkar\footnote{Ibid, pp. 1-2} opines that the period from 1680 to 1707 was the period of the Mughals and Marathas. These warriors used to fight far away from their families. As such, some form of entertainment was needed for them. Men and women from the Dalit and backward classes were summoned to entertain them by donning colourful costumes and singing for them. It was termed as Tamasha by the warriors and soldiers.

According to Dr. Prabhakar Mande, it is known by a different name in Nagpur, Akola and Amaravati districts of Maharashtra. There this form of entertainment is commonly
referred to as ‘gammat’ or ‘khadi gammat’. There are a total of nine artists in the ‘khadi gammat’ form of Tamasha. The main artist is the shahir or ballad writer. He plays on a musical instrument called the duff. This form of entertainment consists of a question-answer session by two shahirs. This is popularly called ‘duyyam’. If the answers are witty and humorous, the audience seems to enjoy them and ask for more of it.

Namdev Whatkar, in his famous book, “Tamasha”, retales the origin of various forms of cultural art forms; the ‘dhol’ emerged from a mixture of the monkey-performers drum and the nandi waalas style of showing plays. The ‘gondhari’ people used to sing ‘gondhar’ during weddings. From the ‘fhouji’ people, the tapha was learnt. From the ‘bharud’ the art of speaking in style evolved. From the ‘waghya murli’ came the style of manipulating the voice. Then developed the practice of narrating tales of kings and queens together with ‘wagh’ or short stories. The ‘gondhari’ people were the first to earn a living by singing and dancing. There was a time when the madari or kolharni (a typical caste) used to dance to the beats of the ‘dholak’, jhanj and the tuntuna (musical instruments). It was an ancient ‘banjara’ style. These people used to set up their camps outside the villages. The menfolk used to show their acrobatics with the monkeys, and the women folk used to sing and dance in accompaniment. On completion, they used to load their donkeys with their goods and leave; travelling throughout the districts. Some people link the origins of Tamasha to the colourful festival of Holi. In some villages of Maharashtra, even today, people burn the ‘holika’ and begin the Tamasha performances with much pomp and show.

---

124 Ibid, pp. 4-5
126 Holi is the Indian festival of colours and it commences with the burning of Holika. According to Hindu mythology, there was a king named Hiranyakashipu whose desire was to be seen as a great man. To fulfill his desire he did the required Tapas (penance) and was granted a boon by Brahma. Once Brahma was pleased by devotion of Hiranyakashyapu, he blessed the King with a boon. Accordingly, as this wish was granted, it was completely impossible to kill Hiranyakashyapu by any means and this made him invincible. Hiranyakashyapu ordered people in his kingdom to worship him as a God. Everyone obeyed with the exception of his son Prahlad. Prahlad refused to see his father as a god and stayed devoted to Vishnu. This made Hiranyakashipu very angry and he made various attempts to kill Prahlad. During a particular attempt on Prahlad’s life, King Hiranyakashyapu called upon his sister Holika for help. Holika had a special gift that prevented her from being harmed by fire. Hiranyakashyapu asked her to sit on a bonfire with Prahlad on her lap in the hope that this would kill Prahlad. But as Prahlad chanted Vishnu’s name, Holika was burnt to her death and Prahlad was spared. For many traditions in Hinduism, Holi celebrates the death of Holika in order to save Prahlad and we see where Holi gets its name. The night before Holi pyres are burnt in North India in keeping with this tradition. It should also be noted that in some parts of India the day is actually called Holika.
Thus *Tamasha* was influenced by ‘lok rangbhumi’ and ‘lokparampara’, since time immemorial, i.e folk-arts and folk-culture and tradition. Gradually, mythology came to play an important role in the composition of these songs and dances. Tales of *Radha* and *Krishna*’s *leela* (love) the union of a man and his lover, ‘sattwik’ (love), the role of ‘shringaar’ (make-up), ‘virah’ (separation) and its pains, reunison were some of the popular themes in these love-separation oriented songs and plays. In the north ‘peshwai’, *shahir* used to do the work of building up entertaining acts and ‘rangbhumi’ by writing witty and fascinating dialogues and ballads.

The *Tamasha* that we find today is a curious melting pot of various forms of art and culture that traces its roots to ancient Maharashtra. The following features are intrinsic to the modern day *Tamasha* in Maharashtra:

a) *Gan* or the prayer of Lord Ganesh  
b) *Gaauran* ballet consisting of a girl and a boy enacting as the love-lorn couple *Radha* and *Krishna*, some others enacting the roles of the friends of *Radha* and *Krishna* along with a typical character called ‘maavashi bai’ (*an aunt, she generally is a man, who speaks as a woman*)  
c) *Lavani* dance performances by the dancing girls  
d) *Bhedik-Kavan* or the question-answer sessions (*Sawaal-jawaab*)  
e) *Mujraa* or the farewell session

**TAMASHA AND ITS ASSOCIATION WITH LOWER CASTE WOMEN:**

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, the Mughal Emperor Aurangazeb began his Deccan campaign to pursue the Marathas. It was at this point of time that Maharashtra got introduced to a different culture within the military camps. To provide the soldiers with cheap entertainment, the Mughals kept bands of courtesans. Since the common soldiers could not afford these dancing girls, they had to look for such talent among the locally available artists. The forms of entertainment could never match the far superior talent and taste of the

---

127 Sandesh Gyaneshwara Bhandare, op. cit, pp. 30-32
The Making Of The Dalit Woman’s Agenda: A Study Of Their Organisations And Culture In Kolhapur District, Maharashtra

Mughals. So, there was only one alternative open to them; they decided to lure the lower castes and some tribesmen into the profession of dancing. Among the lower castes, a wandering tribe named the *Kolhatis* did have some proficiency. In fact, these women catered to the needs of the Maharashtrian males even before the coming of the Mughals. Their temporarily erected huts were a common feature during village fairs. Some of these women entered the profession of dancing as per the requirement of the cantonment.

Shahu, Sambhaji’s son became the King of Satara in Western Maharashtra, adjacent to the State of Kolhapur. A patron of music and dance, he tried to get the best singers, actors and *naikins* from all over India. However, he failed to persuade the parents of *Kunbi* and other upper caste girls to employ them as performing artists. Thereafter, he too began to patronise the women of lower castes and mould them into artists. This policy contributed to the popularity of *Tamasha* among the lower caste women. King Shahu, not being satisfied with the local dancers, wrote to the Peshwas who went on Northern and Southern campaigns to bring the artists. ‘*Kalawantin*’ was the name given to a woman artist. Naroshankar, a Marathi Sardar appointed in the North sent three dancing girls to the Peshwa from Sironji128. Nanasaheb Peshwa, the successor of BajiRao I despatched his court-writer Lakshman to get the dancing troupe from Aurangabad. During the later Peshwa rule too, especially during the rule of Sawai Madhavrao, singers and dancers were especially invited for the celebration of the *Ganesh* festival. In 1791, Captain Moore, a British Resident of Poona is recorded to have seen the dance of a hundred *naikins* in the Ganesh Rangmahal of the Shaniwarwada in Poona.

**TAMASHA AND ITS ASSOCIATION WITH LAVANI:—**

Since the time of Nanasaheb Peshwa, the *Tamashaa* started incorporating the dance form of *Lavani*. The word *Lavani* is derived from Lavanya and means beauty. This form is a combination of dance and music, and deals with different and varied topics such as society,

---

128 The romantic attachment of Peshwa BajiRao I (1720-1740) with Mastani, a female dancer, is a famous episode in Maratha history. She was presented by the Raja of Bundelkhand. According to the *Tarikh-i-Muhammadshahi*, Mastani was proficient in music, dance, horse-riding and swordsmanship.
religion, politics and romance. Attractive women wearing nine-yard saris typically perform the dance with the captivating rhythm of dholak. These women synchronized sensually to a catching tune and teasing lyrics.

Maharashtra was once a battle torn state, and Lavani dance served as mode of entertainment and morale booster to the tired soldiers during the 18th and 19th century. The dance reached peak popularity during the Peshwai (a dynasty seated in Pune) rule, when it was given royal support by the ruling elite. Marathi poets like Honaji Bala, Ramjoshi and Prabhakar took Lavani to new heights. In the recent times, Lavani has become passé, mainly confined to sensual entertainment often presented in a stereotyped and cheap form in Marathi films. The contact of the Marathas with the Mughals had an impact on their simple lifestyle too. The Mughals were noted for living in pomp and splendour. The grand and lavish Mughal lifestyle started to cast its influence on the simple Marathas. This in a way prepared the ground for the ‘exposition of the erotic sentiment’ in music and dance through the dance form of Lavani. The Maharashtra State Gazeteer states :-

“...Initially, Lavani was not erotic in nature. In Tamasha, if the conversation of the characters appeared boring to the audience, it was necessary to enliven the atmosphere with the help of a sensational song. If such a song was filled with erotics, it was believed, it would create more liveliness among the audience and also enhance the popularity of Tamasha. With this view Lavani was dipped in erotic sentiment.”

Peshwas like Sawai MadhavRao and Bajirao II gave patronage to the shahirs or ballad-composers and encouraged them to compose Lavani. Earlier, the Lavani were presented only within the framework of the Tamasha; gradually, things changed. The kalawantin’s started getting attracted to the Lavani and started singing and dancing them. Thus, the Lavani appeared to have established a connection between the women dancers of the Court and Tamasha, the form of entertainment of the commoners.

Honaji Bala was a very famous shahir. Many kalawantins started singing the Lavani of Honaji Bala and from this, a form of Lavani called ‘Baithakichi Lavani’ is said to have originated. The Tamasha of the Peshwa period was known as the ‘Dholkicha Tamasha’. In general, a Tamasha group was comprised of the following :-
The Making Of The Dalit Woman’s Agenda: A Study Of Their Organisations And Culture In Kolhapur District, Maharashtra

i) Sardar or the leader
ii) Drum beater
iii) Person playing a ring
iv) Songadya
v) An effeminate dancer with a melodious voice.

Till the time of the noted shahir Patthe Bapurao (who is discussed in details below) the male dancer performed the dance of Lavani. A new phase was inaugurated in the history of the Tamasha by Patthe Bapurao, because in his troupe, Putala was the first woman dancer to perform the Lavani dance.

**TAMASHA AND ITS ASSOCIATION WITH VAG AND BATAWANI:**

Vag is a kind of drama which forms the core of the Tamasha. It originated sometime after 1860 from the need to avoid boredom among the spectators and to maintain the spice and flavour in the Tamasha till its very end. The speech of the sutradhar or Director is enveloped in the vag along with interjections of subtle humour. His speech is called the batawani (narration) or the saptani and it maintains continuity with the subject-matter of the Tamasha. Uma Savalajkar, a tamasgir (or Tamasha performer) performed the first vag in the year 1865 and it was called Mohana Batav. Patthe Bapurao’s Vag of Mittharani also gained huge popularity, later on. Around 1930, Tamasha also included sangeetbari, which was the dance of the Kolhati or the Dombari women.

**TAMASHA AND OTHER ART FORMS:**

Tamasha is linked to various other art and cultural forms. It is needed to understand these diverse art forms in order to be able to grasp their actual significance.

---

129 One who assumes various disguises or personates various characters; as in a dramatic representation

130 Sangeetbari is also known as Sangeet Jalsa. Prominent women artists of Sangeet Bari were Vithabal Narayangaonkar (she is discussed in details), Leela and Kala Yevalekar, Yamuna Waikar, Heera Satarkar and Kausalya Kopargaonkar.
The Making Of The Dalit Woman’s Agenda: A Study Of Their Organisations And Culture In Kolhapur District, Maharashtra

a) Powada – Powadas are ballads sung by men called shahir. The word shahir, though derived from the Persian ‘shayar’ (poet), may be understood as a bard. They are mainly sung in praise of kings and great warriors like Shivaji and Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur. The troupe performing Powada generally comprised of artists, the chief amongst whom was the main shahir and his assistant. The shahir narrated the story and was like a director. Even though his narration was in prose form, at times, he took to poetry and started enacting the brave actions of the contemporary leaders. By the beginning of King Shahu’s rule (in Kolhapur), Powada had established itself as a folk-ballet in Maharashtra. However Powadas deal with a wide range of issues such as anti-superstition, value of science, search for truth and so on. For example, Shahir Parshuram of Vidarbha in Maharashtra sang ballads in praise of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and his religious conversion ceremony at Nagpur. At places in the district of Bhandara, even today shahirs write ballads on social issues like anti-alcoholism, dowry deaths, superstition, ignorance, Gods and Goddesses and so on.

b) Kalgi-tura – The artists in Tamasha are of two groups representing two sects of religious beliefs – viz. Kalgiwale and Turewale. The followers of Maya or Lord Shiva are called Kalgiwale: whereas, the followers of Lord Brahma or Lord Vishnu are called Turewale. Competitions are often held during the exciting session of sawaal-jawaab or poetic riddles. During these competitions, the symbols of these two sects are carved on their drums. Kalgiwale have Kalgi which is like the blossom of the Tulsi plant while Turewale have Tura which is like the ear of maize corn. The group which emerges as the victor in these competitions snatches the symbol of the other group and thus establishes its supremacy. In the region of Vidarbha, during jatras and bullock-cart races, this form of entertainment is quite common. The songs that are mainly sung in Kalgi-Tura are usually related to adhyatma, bhakti and vairagya i.e asceticism, devotion and salvation. Holy messages too are conveyed through them. An effort is made to portray the stories of epics and books like the

131 Shahir Parshuram started a troupe by the name of ‘piley nishaan’ or yellow marks. He did it with the intention of educating the common man. According to him, sun rays are yellow in colour. From these yellow sun rays, we get life, life fulfilling capabilities. These rays do away with a lot of evil and darkness in society. Similarly, he wanted to write ballads to educate the villagers and do away with the evil and darkness in society.

132 Sandesh Gyaneshwra Bhandare, op. cit, pp.161-162
The Making Of The Dalit Woman’s Agenda: A Study Of Their Organisations And Culture In Kolhapur District, Maharashtra

Ramayana, Mahabharata and Bhagavad Gita along with the greatness of mythological characters like Ram, Krishna, Shankar and Dashavatar\(^\text{133}\).

c) **Gondhal** – The tradition of ‘Gondhal’ has been existing among the Deshastha Brahmans and some other castes of Maharashtra. Established somewhere around the tenth century A.D, it was popularly known as ‘Gondhal Ghalne’. Gondhalis are specially invited to perform their dance on festive occasions such as a marriage; they dance and worship the deity in thanksgiving. They generally worship Goddesses like Renuka and Bhavani. Musical instruments that they carry with them are Mridang, Cymbal, Veena and the Conch. They display their skill in moving the torches in their hands. In fact, the tradition continues even today.

d) **Bharud** – After the Tamasha, Bharud is the next favourite form of folk-art in Maharashtra in the rural areas. Bharud is an important part of annual fairs, it consists of recital of Saint Dynaneshwar’s interpretation of the Bhagawad Gita or the recital of Saint Tukaram’s collection of abhangs\(^\text{134}\). This art form is as educative as it is enjoyable and a favourite among the people. Saint Eknath is said to be its originator and is a medium to spread spirituality through elocution, drama and music. The bharud begins with the praise of Lord Vithoba and then, the bharudkar, or singer goes on to describe the village. It is not only an educative art form, at the same time it is impressive. Many bharudkars today are carrying out this difficult job of keeping the tradition of bharuds alive. Bharuds are usually performed in the Marathi month of Chaitra\(^\text{135}\) during the Bhairavnath\(^\text{136}\) fair. However today, in order to attract people, the bharud composers include Hindi film songs, Lavani dances and women artists of various ages\(^\text{137}\).

e) **Dashavatar** – The Dashavatar is a presentation of the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu. It is also called ‘bohada’. It was traditionally associated with the religio-cultural and social

\(^{133}\) Ibid, p. 156

\(^{134}\) Abhang or abhanga is a form of devotional poetry sung in praise of the Hindu god Vitthala, also known as Vithoba

\(^{135}\) A month in the Hindu calendar; generally March-April.

\(^{136}\) Bhairavnath is a fierce manifestation of the Lord Shiva

\(^{137}\) Ibid, p. 195
framework of the villages. It is a combination of dance and dramatics and therefore may be called the folk-ballet of Maharashtra. The Sutradhar or director narrates the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu which is depicted by the dancers through their performances.

f) Vidhi-natyā - Today, Tamasha has taken on a new form, but the original base of vidhi-natyā persists even today. Gan-gouran is prevalent in the Tamasha even today. Usually an aarti\textsuperscript{138} is done at the end of vidhi-natyā. In the case of Tamasha, the place of aarti is taken by the ‘mujraa’. The folk-art of Tamashas survived with élan and glamour as long as the Peshwas had supported it.

f) Kalapathak – Popularly known as street plays, Kalapathak are a wonderful medium of mass education. The rural population has very few means of entertainment, television being out of reach of a large chunk of people. Kalapathak which involves songs, dances, dramas is loved as a means of entertainment and deals with social issues like alcoholism, child-marriage and issues relating to violence on women.

\textbf{SECTION B –}

\textbf{TRACING ITS EVOLUTION}

- Satyashodhak Tamasha / Jalsa :

From the time of Jyotiba Phule, the art of performing Lavani and Tamasha was the responsibility of downtrodden and Dalit castes like Mahar, Mang, Gondhari and Dombari; in fact, Phule used the form of Tamasha to propagate his message. His ‘Powada’ on Shivaji Maharaj is very notable and popular. Before that, Tamasha consisted of gan-gouran, batavani, vaghnatya\textsuperscript{139} etc. He paid importance to gan and paid homage to those great people who had laid down their lives for the society and state. In this way, the foundation of Satyashodhak Tamasha was established. Shahiri and Tamasha’s became the medium of communicating his thoughts. Some of the issues that were dealt with here were, exploitation

\textsuperscript{138} Aarti, also spelled arathi, aarthi is a Hindu religious ritual of worship, a part of puja, in which light from wicks soaked in ghee or camphor is offered to one or more deities. Aartis also refer to the songs sung in praise of the deity, when lamps are being offered.

\textsuperscript{139} Gan gouran –Batavani –Vagh natya These are the different stages of a tamasha, where worship of a God used to be the beginning ritual; even today, it is followed at the beginning.
The Making Of The Dalit Woman’s Agenda: A Study Of Their Organisations And Culture In Kolhapur District, Maharashtra

of the Brahmans, atrocities on womenfolk, importance of education, social inequality etc. Whenever he used to speak of the exploitation of the Brahmans, Jyotiba’s tone used to drip with sarcasm. The Tamasha and shahiris were a form of vehicle for transmitting thoughts and social messages among the people.

According to Dangle,

“In Mahatma Phule’s Satyashodhak movement and later at the beginning of our movement, Tamasha artistes used folk theatre to bring about a great social awakening” 140

Since the days of the Peshwa, people from the untouchable castes such as mahar and mang also became Lavanikaar’s. Also, women from Dalit communities were historically associated with the traditions of courtly performance, especially the ‘erotic’ Lavani. Nowadays, the word ‘erotic’ is used to indicate the dance form of Lavani. There have been innumerable efforts to erase the ‘erotic’ aspect of the dance form of Lavani that is usually linked to Tamasha. In later years, the Ambedkari Jalsas too made similar attempts to break the sexual promiscuity between Tamasha and its female performers, who were largely dalit.

Anupama Rao 141 too, emphasises on the role of the Satyashodhak Jalsa as the main vehicle for spreading the message of the Satyashodhak Samaj 142. The Satyashodhak Jalsas, she opines, changed the pattern of the traditional Tamashas. Where the traditional Tamashas used to begin with an invocation to Lord Ganpati and were particularly known for their sexual innuendo and word play; the Satyashodhak Jalsas invoked the ganpati as the people who were leaders, taken as, the gana (the people) and the pati (as the leaders). Some issues were directly related to the plight of women, as for example a Satyashodhak Jalsa had

---

140 Arjun Dangle op. cit, p. 331
142 Not only did the Satyashodhak Samaj attack the Brahmin class through their tamashas and jalsas, they altered the very style of marriages.
focussed on a broader critique of enforced widowhood by portraying a dialogue between a widow and her father and depicted the widow’s physical disfiguration.\footnote{143}{Ibid, p. 51}

- Ambedkari Jalsa – One of the most important temple-entry Satyagrahas was organised by Dr. B.R.Ambedkar at Kalaram Temple, near Nasik from 1930-1935. Anupama Rao shows that\footnote{144}{Ibid, pp. 96-99} the Ambedkari Jalsas played a crucial role in mobilising people for the Nasik Satyagraha. The Satyashodhak Jalsas were considered to be the predecessor of the Ambedkari Jalsas, where the theme was different than in a usual Tamasha performance. These Jalsas dealt with the problems of the Mahar community and with political events. The Mahars were subjected to a host of problems such as, drinking and gambling, illiteracy and most importantly, the performance of maharki.\footnote{145}{The mahars used to get a sort of patrimony, a land grant as well as a hereditary office known as a vatan and the holder of such a vatan was called a vatandar. Their duties were extensive and varied, from ruling on boundary disputes and running personal errands for the village elite, to performing defiling labour such as removing carcasses. They also used to announce news of the dead in the villages. They were one of the twelve village servants also known as bara balutedaars. By paying a share of the harvest to him, the village remunerated the vatandar on an annual basis. However, he and his family were entitled to a customary daily share of inedible food, used clothing and the occasional handful of grain. This was called baluto. This degraded caste labour which was also a source of stigma was known as maharki. Between 1923 and 1928, abolition of vatan became an important issue in the Bombay legislative Council. What is surprising is that vatan abolition produced great resistance even among the Mahar community. Babasaheb Ambedkar had also repeatedly asked the Mahars to give up this sort of degraded practice. He had even demanded that the Mahar vatandar be recognized as a salaried government servant. Finally, the passage of the 1959 Bombay Inferior Village Vatan Abolition Act eliminated the Mahar vatan.} There were certain common features between the popular Tamashas and these Jalsas, such as dialogues or question-answers interspersed with songs. However says Rao,\footnote{146}{Ibid, pp. 96} these dialogues were rescripted with political rather than erotic content. Also, encounters were staged between a maushi (maternal aunt, who was the symbol of illiteracy, a familiar Tamasha figure) and a social reformer also called a sudharak. For example, Rao describes a question-answer session of such a Jalsa where the aunt is shown to be asking the social reformer, “Is this Satyagraha long or short, round or square? Is it something to eat? I still don’t know, so tell me……” This shows that important political issues were framed in a manner so that it would evoke fun and laughter along with serving as a medium for educating the ignorant villagers and asking them to participate. Another famous Jalsa was staged on this Satyagraha issue by Bhimrao Kardak.
and Dadasaheb Pagare. Bhimrao Kardak was born in Kasabe Sukene in Niphad taluka in Nasik district in Maharashtra in a Mahar family. In 1930, he had formed the Yuvak Sangeet Jalsa Sangh and he used this organisation to promote the messages of Babasaheb through his Jalsas. During 1931-1945, he had presented close to three hundred and seventy eight (378) Jalsa programmes. He had taken part in the Nasik Satyagraha and in one of the Dharmantar (conversion\textsuperscript{147}) Jalsa, a resistant maushi (maternal aunt) is featured who has to be convinced that Hinduism was hell and that Buddhism was the ‘religion of equal respect’.\textsuperscript{148}

A very interesting account of the manner in which the spirit of Ambedkar entered the body of a dalit Tamasha artist is very skilfully narrated by Ritambhara Hebbar\textsuperscript{149}. In her article, the life of Pattuguruji is narrated - a dalit who spent his entire life struggling for social justice within the village. “Pattuguruji was the ideologue for his people, Ambedkar found another voice through him.” He took on social activism to an altogether new level; he introduced it on to the stage. In the plays that he staged in his village, in writing poems and single-handedly organising the plays involving Dalits, he gave the Ambedkarite movement a voice – the movement gets a voice through a socially and historically situated individual...

Comments about Pattuguruji ran thus,

“He’s doing plays against us, also making up his own poems. The style is also Ambedkar’s, shouting in a loud voice, with forty-fifty people around him doing the same thing. This needs to be stopped.”

Tracing the evolution of Tamasha down the ages entails enlisting the contributions made by some notable names who left their mark in this field.

It is ironic that Tamasha artistes, who lent their voice to highlight the problems of society, have themselves remained voiceless.

\textsuperscript{147} Dharmantar or conversion refered to the religious conversion of Babasaheb Ambedkar at Nagpur on 14\textsuperscript{th} October 1956

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid, p. 183

\textsuperscript{149} Ritambhara Hebbar “The Category ‘Rural revisited : A Dalit Perspective from a Village in Maharashtra” in Imtiaz Ahmad and Shashi Bhushan Upadhyay op. cit, pp. 78, 85
Annabhau Sathe

Annabhau Sathe (1920-1969) – Born in the village of Wategaon in Sangli district adjoining Kolhapur, in the Dalit Matang community, Sathe (originally called Tukaram) was unable to obtain a formal education due to extreme poverty. Even though he started primary education at the age of 14, this did not deter him from writing thirty-five (35) novels in Marathi out of which ‘Fakira’ bagged the State Government Award in the year 1961. Anna had dedicated this novel to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Most of his writings are based on his real-life experiences and they portray his characters determination and grit to fight all odds to achieve their goal and place in society. His main motive was to create social awareness among the rural people chiefly through the cultural medium of staging Powadas and Tamashas. During his stay in Mumbai, he used to portray the realities in the lives of the mill workers, their pain and trauma through his Powadas. This earned him the love and respect of the mill workers. Not only that his untiring writing for the exploited masses earned him the epithet of “Dalito ke shahir”, i.e : Writer of the Dalits”. He wanted to raise the standard of living of the Dalits and this was possible by educating them through the medium of Tamasha and Kalapathak. He used his ‘shahiri’ to awaken the common masses. Anna was a highly active member of the Communist Party in Maharashtra, this in turn earned him the title of ‘Anna’ (elder brother). When he entered the world of Tamasha as an artist his sharp voice, ability to memorise, skill in playing various instruments made him instantly famous. In all, he wrote three hundred (300) stories and produced fourteen-fifteen (14-15) Tamashas, approximately two hundred and fifty (250) songs and Lavani. Using his pen as a weapon, he brought about a revolutionary change in Marathi literature. During the late 1940’s, Morarji Desai, the then Home Minister of the Bombay State Government had banned Tamashas, wrecking the lives of Tamasha artistes. It was Sathe who bravely defied the ban and renamed Tamasha as ‘lokнатya’. Even in the Samyukta Maharashtra movement, in which he played an active role, he used the medium of Powada to reach out to the people. Sathe was also a founder member of the ‘Lal Bawra Kalapathak’ of the Communist Party in Maharashtra.150 This Kalapathak had to face many difficulties due to the low remuneration

150 The Laal Bawra Kalapathak was founded by Annabhau together with two other notable artists Shahir Gavhankar and Amar Sekh.
that they got in the form of ‘maandhan’ (stipend). However, the subjects and themes that were presented in these shows included the messages of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. The newspapers of that time were not giving due attention to the movement of Dr. Ambedkar. To top it all, the Government had declared a ban on Tamasha’s. Anna helped the dying Tamasha to regenerate itself by giving the name of “Loknatya” to the Tamasha. A large amount of credit goes to Annabhou for making the genre of Tamasha popular in Maharashtra. What is of outstanding significance here is that Anna imbued the Tamasha form with a lot of respect. He dignified the dance form by eradicating all sorts of vulgarity and obscene postures. He took up the challenge of changing the ‘sexy’ version of the Tamasha form and established it as an exhibition of the pristine beauty of a woman.\footnote{V. Da. Pingle (2006) Lokshahir Annabhau Sathe, Pune: Bhakti Sugandh Prakashan.} Not only that, he also became the member of the “Matang Samaj Kaminty” at Satara and Sangli districts. Many cultural organisations (for instance, The Annabhou Sathe Foundation, Amaravati that works for the upliftment of the Matang Community) and roads are named after him, he is popularly known as ‘lokshahir’. Ramnath Chavan, head of Lokshahir Annabhau Sathe chair in the University of Pune comments,

“Sathe, Sheikh, Gawankar and Atmaram Patil had a big role in the Samyukta Maharashtra movement. These were activist artistes who devoted their lives and art for the movement. The state must not ignore their contribution when we are celebrating the golden jubilee of the state”.

**Patthe Bapu Rao**

Patthe Bapu Rao (1868 – 1941) – was a Marathi singer-poet in the Tamasha genre; Bapu Rao, himself being a Brahmin married a courtesan, a woman of a low caste, by the name of Pavlabai. Later, Pavlabai joined Patthe’s troupe and became his companion. Says Anupama Rao,\footnote{Anupama Rao op. cit, p. 63} though she was a famous performer, Pavlabai’s career mirrored the reduced significance of traditional popular culture to an emergent Dalit politics and the growing presence of a reformist critique of (Dalit) female sexuality. A distinguished performer, Bapu Rao has a movie made in his honour in the year 1950 by Raja Nene. Nene
himself played the role of Patthe Bapu Rao who has several streets named after him in Mumbai and some other cities in Maharashtra.

**Vithabai Narayangaonkar**

The name Vithabai Bhau Mang Narayangaonkar works magic in Maharashtra even today. A gifted *Tamasha* artiste, she entranced Marathi audiences for several decades with her rustic voice, robust repartee and earthy charm. Vithabai Narayangaonkar was a *Tamasha* artiste famous for her songs, dance and plays. Everyone knew her in Maharashtra and the media had given her extensive coverage. However for the woman hailed as the ‘Queen of *Tamasha*’ for six decades, honoured with the President’s gold medal, the Sangeet Natak Academy award and the Maharashtra *Gaurav* title for contribution to her chosen art form, it was not much of a life.

A third generation *Tamasha* artiste, Vithabai was born in the temple town of Pandharpur as the youngest of 13 children. Hence the name Vitha after Maharashtra’s popular deity Vithoba. She was born into a ‘*Tamasha* family’ where her father and uncle together ran a *Tamasha* troupe known as ‘Bhau-Bapu Mang Narayangaonkar *Tamasha*’ group. Vitha said that her father had put her in school but she was not interested in studies and was constantly standing and taking various poses as if she was dancing. Although she could not grasp any of her school texts she could understand how to perform on the stage, how to sing and how to speak with no effort at all. Vithabai constantly referred to herself as a *kalaakar*, an artiste, who has performed from her childhood. But it was not an easy process. There was no permanent place to stay put any time. They were constantly on the move and often, in villages where they performed, Vithabai was sent with a basket to go around and ask people for food and other things. *"My parents have come to do the Tamasha for you; give us something,"* the child Vitha would beg and people would give. And after her father's death, the responsibility of seeing to it that the show went on fell on the tiny shoulders of Vithabai, whose uncle was there to support her. But this uncle had not initially approved of her father bringing her into *Tamasha*. Now, the two of them had to carry on the show. Making her debut at the age of eleven, she rose to fame through popular songs and stage shows across the state. She brought elegance to the *Tamasha* form and used it as a tool for public education.
and social reform. She also had a small stint with Marathi films. But success and happiness eluded the dancer and singer in her personal life. Her marriage to Maruti Sawant was a failure, and she spent her last years in Narayangaon in acute poverty. On one occasion, her husband had booked her to perform when she was nine months pregnant. The nine-month pregnant Vithabai took the stage as usual. She was performing together with her two teenage daughters so when she felt the labour pains coming, she conveyed to them that they should prolong their part of the performance, and quickly went to the makeshift green room where she delivered a baby boy. The delivery was quick, she said, and so she just wrapped the newborn in an old sari after cutting the umbilical cord with a sharp stone, had a bath with cold water, wrapped her traditional nine yard saree tightly around her waist and within an hour was back on stage to entertain the audience, whose lusty whistles compelled her to continue the performance. The audience burst into applause wanting to know what baby she had delivered. When she told them it was a boy they began throwing money on the stage. "No water, no doctor, no mid-wife, no mattress, no facilities at all — that is how I delivered all my children," Vithabai said in a dry voice and suddenly the tears came and she said, "But now when the mother cannot perform, what is the worth of that mother? One life as an artiste will do for me. No more, no more." But it is the artiste within her who had kept her alive, giving her the strength to overcome all kinds of obstacles including an abusive and violent husband.

SECTION C–

ATTEMPTS AT RESTORATION & REVIVAL

Padma Velaskar153 is of the view that in contrast to the idealised upper caste wife/mother, the low caste woman’s sexuality is constructed as easily transgressable and the woman herself is constructed as sexually more promiscuous. This is exactly the case with the women engaged in Tamasha and Kalapathak. These women are branded as bad, loose and easily available. Anagha Tambe believes that feminism must change to include both ‘bad’ girls and ‘good’ girls. Now the question that arises here is why does the society bracket some women as good and others as bad? Though Tambe refers to ‘sex workers’ when she means ‘bad’ girls, in Maharashtra today, women involved in rural folk art forms are generally looked down upon. A very significant way in which Svati Shah has described this attitude is,

153 Padma Velaskar “Exploring Dalit Women’s Oppression” in Imtiaz Ahmad and Shashi Bhushan Upadhyay op. cit, p. 35
‘Patriarchy is identified as the institutional monolith that shapes the sexuality discourse.’

The role of caste is crucial at this juncture. What I believe is that patriarchy and caste together shape the sexuality discourse. It is often said that Dalit women from the lower castes are involved in occupations like singing, dancing Lavani, Kalapathak and Tamasha and that they are largely promiscuous, vulgar and prostitutes. \(^{154}\) It is all the more evident when we look at the survey of words for ‘prostitution’ in Marathi vocabulary. \(^{155}\) Apte and Sahni reiterate that performing arts, including singing, dancing and acting, were not considered occupations desirable for women of honour. These women who performed and entertained were available for sexual pleasures, but rarely married. Some of the words that were used to denote them were ‘kalavantee, kanchanee, kasbee, nartakee, natee, kalaapaatra, sajindee, naachan, naachanghugaree, naachantiparee, chhataaki, chhatel’ \(^{156}\). While some of these words are used to refer to women who sell their body for livelihood, others refer to coquettish women. In fact, the Tamasha folk art is an art largely for the poor, of the poor and by the poor. People who are involved with it belong to dalit castes such as Kolhati, Kunbi, Dholki, Matang and so on.

On a similar note, Lata Singh mentions that re-definition of the female was a crucial feature of the hegemony that brought the middle class into power and superiority. A new and ideal woman was being constructed in the middle class discourse, which was subject to a new patriarchy. \(^{157}\) Not only were performing women excluded from the middle class hegemonic discourse, but female performers were stigmatized as prostitutes. Singh goes on further to explain that since the social construction of gender places good women in seclusion, women who appear in public spaces (such as on stage) are defined as ‘bad’ i.e as, prostitutes. Normally, the audience, the paying public consumes the images on stage. Now when the image is that of a performing woman, she will be consumed with greedy/hungry eyes, her

\(^{154}\) Rohini Sahni, V. Kalyan Shankar and Hemant Apte (2008) (ed) Prostitution and Beyond – An Analysis of Sex Work in India Sage, New Delhi p. 91

\(^{155}\) Ibid, pg. 305

\(^{156}\) All these are words used for derogatory women

\(^{157}\) Ibid, p. 316
body parts too, are exposed to male glances, she has to attract them, as such; she cannot be expected to be chaste.

Here, we are reminded of the famous Marathi novel, ‘Kolhatyacha Por’ by Kishor Kale. The Kolhati women perform the Tamasha to entertain the upper caste landlords. Kale’s mother was one such lady and he himself was an illegitimate ‘kolhati’ child, thus the name of the novel is ‘Kolhatyacha Por’ – meaning the son of a Kolhati. It is the story of Kale’s struggle to become a doctor and the resultant trauma that he experiences. The novel goes on to describe how the Dalit woman’s sexuality is manipulated in the Dalit and non-Dalit society. To quote Smita Patil

“the agency of Kolhati women becomes part of the cyclical deprivation due to their stigmatised labour. The minimal capital they acquire through their performances do not get converted to the autonomy of their agency”.

When I was about to visit these ‘performing ladies’, I was apprehensive, surely not about their chastity, perhaps anticipation would be a better word; anticipation about their reaction towards me, their attitude to a person from a vastly different background than theirs. I met three such ladies in Kolhapur and over the years, they had no hesitation in bonding with me, an outsider. Their behaviour as well as their struggle against all odds to live a life of dignity inspires my respect and admiration for them. Most importantly, they were struggling to protect themselves and their age-old dying folk-art. They are - Babita Kakde of Mahalaxmi Productions, Shobha and Sandhya Davale of LOKNATYA TAMASHA MANDAL, Kolhapur.

LOKNATYA TAMASHA MANDAL, KOLHAPUR

“Itne din baad humko yaad kiya...” translated as, “Remembered us after so many days…” smiled Sandhya Davale, warmly as I entered their home in House No: - 1308, E-Ward of Rajashri Shahu Vasahat, on my second trip to Kolhapur. Sandhya Shankar Davale

---

and Shobha Davale were the co-producers of “Loknatiya Tamasha Mandal”, Rajarshi Shahu Vasahat, Main Road, Yadavnagar, Kolhapur.

The ‘Loknatiya Tamasha Mandal’, Kolhapur is a Tamasha Organisational Unit that is headed by Smt. Sandhya Shankar Davale and her husband Shri. Shankar Davale. Located at Rajarshi Shahu Vasahat, Yadavnagar Main Road, E-Ward, Number – 1307, Kolhapur, the Tamasha Unit is quite popular among the low castes. Basically, the lady who is in charge herself is a woman of a very low caste, the Kolhateen caste. In Maharashtra, generally speaking, women of such singing and dancing castes are looked down upon and are considered to be of loose character. Born in the year 1968, in a poor dancing family of Kolhapur, Sandhya Davale studied till the seventh standard only. A heavily-built lady, she was very out-spoken and articulate. Though she did not have children of her own, she had adopted a boy and named him Vaibhav. Currently, her production unit was called “Gayatri Sandhya Kolhapurkar”. Together with her husband, they were the recipients of many awards. In the year 2010, Shri. Shankar Davale received the “Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Fellowship Samman – 2010” from the Bharatiya Dalit Sahitya Academy, Delhi while Sandhya ji herself had received the “Virangana Savitribai Phule Fellowship Samman – 2010”.

The Tamasha Unit organised Tamasha in and around Kolhapur and the structure of its organisation was as follows :-

- Management – Sadashiv Arjunvaadkar, Samadhan Tarsamblekar
- Writer – Subhash Maane
- Sound arrangements – Sandip Shinde
- Light Effects – Rashid
- Organising Department – Babasou Kamble
- Singers – Jagadish Kandgaavkar, Suresh kamble, Sachin Kamble.
- Song Composing – Vaibhav Davale
- Dholki Samraat – Sudhaaker Saarokhe, Hindurao, Suresh kamble
The Making Of The Dalit Woman’s Agenda: A Study Of Their Organisations And Culture In Kolhapur District, Maharashtra

- Haalgi – Shamrao Kerlikar
- Drums set – Tanaji Sathe
- Organ / Coronet – Papesh Saarokhe
- Harminium – Ananda Master
- Triple Congo – Ananda Buchde

OBJECTIVES:

Established in the year 2001, the Unit had a two fold objective, firstly, lokranjan i.e entertainment and secondly, lokshikshan i.e social education. Two of the most important topics on which people were educated dealt with dowry and anti-alcoholism. The women get beaten by their husbands after consumption of liquor. And then, they demand dowry and cash from these poor women and their families, which of course, they are unable to provide. In these Tamashas, men are taught about such social evils and the harm that it casts on the family.

PROGRAMMES:

The Tamasha Programmes do not take place throughout the year. They are limited to just a few months of the year, said Sandhya ji. The winter months of November – January and the rainy season were the periods in which they suffered a lot, due to the absence of shows. The main Tamashaseason is usually from January to April. During this time period, an artist bags a contract for a sum of a thousand to four thousand rupees. If the artist is female, young and good-looking, she may bag five hundred more. Outside this time period, if a show has to be organised, an artist has to be paid a daily wage of a hundred to one hundred and fifty rupees. That is why the producers aren’t so keen on organising shows during ‘off-season’. Moreover, a lot of expenses like conveyance allowance and equipment cost have to be borne out by the producer herself/himself. However, Tamashas do take place throughout the year in the district of Kolhapur and mainly in its outskirts – Kaagal, Gaargoti, Gadhinglaj, Aajra, Radhanagri, Jaysinghpur, Shiroli and Hathkanangale.
The Marathi month of Ashwin\textsuperscript{159} is a significant one for the \textit{Loknatya Tamasha Mandal}. This is the time when the \textit{mela} (fair) of Mohtaadevi\textsuperscript{160} takes place. The day before Dussehra\textsuperscript{161}, all the artists accumulate at a town on the outskirts of Kolhapur. The artists are given dekaar, a form of donation. The villagers of the village where the \textit{Tamasha} will take place usually give this donation. After that, the artists go to a nearby temple, take the blessings of the local Goddess and leave to make preparations for the performance. Right from the day of Dussehra till Akshaya Tritiya\textsuperscript{162}, a contract is made with the unit and advance payments are made accordingly. Sometimes, the responsibility of organising the \textit{Tamashashows} rest with the Panchayat of the village where the \textit{Tamasha} is to be organised. In that case, the expenses are a lot lesser. This is because food expenses, police permission, stage setup, electricity and other knick-knacks are dealt with by the village Panchayat. When a particular village is planning to bag a contract with a \textit{Tamasha} unit, certain things have to be borne in mind – such as the fame of the troupe, the number of artists involved, the theme of the \textit{vagh} or the short story to be recited, the theme of the \textit{Tamasha} and the nature of the actor who will be the \textit{bahrupia} or the joker who takes on different roles to mimic. Other crucial facts are the name and fame of the main dancer, the musicians accompanying the dancers and so on. On the day of RamNavami\textsuperscript{163}, Hanuman Jayanti\textsuperscript{164} and Akshaya Tritiya, the price value of the contract can be as high as ten thousand rupees.

\textsuperscript{159} Overlapping September and October, it is a month in the Hindu calendar

\textsuperscript{160} Mohtaa devi temple is located at Pathardi, Ahmednagar, Maharashtra.

\textsuperscript{161} Vijayadashami also known as Dasara, Dashahara, Dussehra, Navratri or Durgotsav is one of the most important Hindu festivals celebrated in various forms, across Nepal, India and Bangladesh. The day marks the victory of Goddess Durga over the demons Mahishasur.

\textsuperscript{162} Akshaya Tritiya, also known as Akha Teej, is a holy day for Hindus and Jains. It falls on the third day of the pan-Indian month of Vaishakha and is an auspicious day of the birthday of Lord Parasurama who is the sixth incarnation of Lord Vishnu. On this day Veda Vyas and Lord Ganesha began to write Mahabharata. The meaning of the word Akshaya is infinite that which never recede.

\textsuperscript{163} Rama Navami is a Hindu festival, celebrating the birth of Lord Rama to King Dasharatha and Queen Kausalya of Ayodhya. Ram is the seventh incarnation of the Dashavatara of Vishnu. The Rama Navami festival falls in the Shukla Paksha on the Navami, the ninth day of the month of Chaitra in the Hindu calendar.

\textsuperscript{164} Hanuman Jayanti is celebrated to commemorate the birth of Hanuman, the Vanara god, widely venerated throughout India. It is celebrated on the fifteenth day of the Shukla Paksha during the Hindu calendar month of Chaitra (the Chaitra Pournima).
Some other occasions where there had been Tamasha programmes were on the days of Hanuman Jayanti, Raamnavami, and ChaitraPurnima\textsuperscript{165}. Every year, the people demanded a novel form of ‘vagh’ at these Tamasha events. For example in the district of Kolhapur and its outskirts, there were demands for Tamashas on patriotism and on issues such as the Kargil War, the hanging of Bhagat Singh etc; in the district of Pune, social issues based themes were in vogue; the districts of Satara and Sangli adjoining Kolhapur appreciated Tamashas on historical events; and in the Konkan areas there was a demand for Tamashas related to the King and his ministers and so on.

FACING CHALLENGES AND OVERCOMING THEM:-

A Dalit lady, belonging to the lowest of the low Kolhateen caste, Sandhya Davale\textsuperscript{166} had seen a lot of ups and downs in her life. In conversation with me, her emotions were giving way as she kept referring to the myriad troubles and grievances that plagued the lives of her and other Tamasha artistes like her. The upper caste men, and in general, all men, never ever allowed the women to go and see the Tamashas, because foul language was used. However, these ladies performed solely to male audiences who jeered and enjoyed themselves at the show. The Dalit women producers feel that they are being used only for entertainment, like toys and dolls. I saw the van that was to take them to the Tamashasite (about 20-22 kms. away). It seemed like a pigeon cage or animal carrying partitioned van.

“Ghar ki paristhithi ki wajah se bachpan se yeh dhandaan hai mera”, recollected Sandhya ji, when I asked to know the reason for her being here. The financial condition of our house compelled me to take up this profession right from childhood. Though she had a smaller brother and was her parents’ only daughter, it was difficult to make ends meet. Failing to continue education beyond the seventh standard, she entered into the entertainment industry seeking an alternative there. When I asked her about her future plans and would she

\textsuperscript{165} Full moon day of the Chaitra masa is known as Chaitra purnima or Maha Chaitri. Hindu lunar calender starts with Chaitra month.

\textsuperscript{166} Sandhya Davale of Loknatya Tamasha Mandal was interviewed on 1/5/09
like to be engaged in any kind of gainful employment, she smiled and claimed that she had never heard of the word ‘service’. So, what service could a lady like her engage in?

“Aaj kal ladki log tape lagaake khud dance karte hai, seekhne ka kuch nahi”, Sandhya ji mentioned when I wanted to know about the next generation of female dancers in their community. Young girls were acclimatised to the environment and they play on the tape recorder and simply begin dancing, she stated. There was nothing to teach them. Most importantly, skills in dancing were of absolutely no use to these Kolhateen ladies. All that they needed to do was entertain, and that they could easily accomplish with their bodies. When I asked her about her son and his education, there too her face clouded over with worry. An artist’s child does not get proper education, she replied. This was because as a mother, she had no time for her son. Not only that, she didn’t even have the money to provide for her son’s education. Her son too, instead of attending school wishes to roam with the Tamasha troupe; this indirectly hampers her son’s education. Nevertheless, though illiterate, her son has mastered a large part of the performances and seems to like them. Overall, life for an artist’s son or daughter is very difficult, she claimed. Ordinary people will find it difficult to comprehend the pain in their lives. How they live, what they eat, where do they go out to play – these are petty matters, nonetheless significant in the lives of these children. When it is time for a child to sleep, it is time for his mother to dress up for the show; when it is time for the child to wake up and get ready for school, it is time for his mother to take rest; this kind of an erratic lifestyle hampers the child’s upbringing and future. Most importantly, a large part of the women artists do not feel the need to educate their children – this results in the next generation too being illiterate.

“Graahak aate hai, daaru peete hai, naach-gaana suntey hai, aur kya?” described Sandhya ji, described her daily life thus. Her latest performance was at Kaagal, just last week, where she along with a few other ladies danced in accompaniment with an orchestra. Men/customers would enter the large hall like room, sit at one side, drink as long as they wanted to, and enjoy the song/dance shows and performances. At the request of the audience, they would have to repeat a particular performance, show off their bodies seductively and ultimately mesmerize them.
“Humko buri nazar se dekha jaata hai” rued Sandhya ji, i.e women working in these communities are looked upon as prostitutes and derogatory women. They had no future. Even the Government did not do anything for them. So, the condition of these women was very pitiable and deplorable. Even after enduring all kinds of hardships, their condition has not changed. Even if they acquire education, there is no use, as they will not get any work, and they will continue to be humiliated by menfolk. Then commenting on their lives during performances she mentioned that even during undressing, there was no respite from the eyes of men. The issue of privacy was totally absent; in fact some men would be wandering around the tents just to have a glimpse of these ladies undressing. In fact, the majority of people in our society consider the ladies working in Tamashas to be prostitutes, she continued. This is the reason why in some villages the female artists and even the lady producers like Sandhya ji, are insulted and harassed by the village goons. There are some men who have two wives – one is a ‘kept lady’ who works in a Tamasha and the other is his housewife. Often women are ditched and betrayed by their husbands – and these women ultimately make their way to the Tamashastage.

“Kala ki pehle jo keemat thi, who aaj nahi hai. Kalavant logo ki koi maandhan (stipend) nahi hota, koi shaasan ya anushaasan nahi hota”, mourned Sandhya ji. In other words, the value of folk art forms like the Tamasha has gone down; artists do not get any stipend, there is no disciplinary system on the part of the Government to keep a track of their whereabouts. In the Tamasha, the people used to get money, but the kalakaar never used to get their value. Not only that, she continued to say that as an artist they may be getting accolades and praises for a particular performance, but as a human being, there was no value for their lives. There were places where on asking for water, people would treat them as untouchables and refuse to have any bodily contact with them. Our Tamasha is considered a shudra-kala, i.e. an art form of the low castes, for the low castes and by the low castes, observed Sandhya ji sadly.

“Paitees varsh tak hi koi Tamasha me kaam kar sakta hai. Uske baad unke naseeb me garibi hi hai. Isliye shaasan ke dwaara kuch to hona chahiye.” sighed Sandhya ji. It meant that the upper age limit for a female Tamasha artist was thirty-five tears only. This was because, though there was no hard and fast rule, after attaining the age of thirty-five, it was
generally held that a woman’s attraction and beauty would begin to fade. Consequently, her customers and her audience would start to lose an interest in her, and before she could save anything for her old age, she would be facing stark poverty; despite working so hard throughout her life. Therefore the Government should take active steps. To top this, there were some practical problems that she had to deal with on a day-to-day basis. These included the increasing expenditure of equipments, high rise in prices of diesel, decrease in the audience, lack of any form of security (be it social security or old age security or security of their lives and honour) and finally, the hassles associated with issues like provision of police permission in the villages where they perform. In other professions, people get perks, bonus, raises etc. The artistes do not even dream of such luxuries, grieved Sandhya ji. A life spent in great distress, without pure drinking water, without two square meals a day, without a proper place to wash, bathe or even sleep would end in such poverty, she feared.

“Hamari shuruaat jhaadakhalaacha Tamashase hui thi”, remembered Sandhya ji, when I asked her to describe the beginnings of her unit. Very graphically, she narrated how a Jhaadakhalaacha Tamasha or a Tamasha under a tree takes place. At around nine ‘o’ clock in the morning, drums called halgi and dholki are beaten to convey to the villagers that a Tamasha is about to take place. Small children, barely able to contain their excitement rush out into the streets wearing new clothes that had been stitched for the annual fairs and pujas. Under the tree the stage is set up and the audience sits on three sides. There is not even a curtain between the audience and the people. The activities begin in the following way:-

First, there is the gan, (which refers to the invocation of the God or Goddess to seek his/her blessings so that the Tamasha can be a success.) The gan is mainly sung by the menfolk. Then comes the gauran, followed by the batavaani. The bahurupia or joker who takes on different roles begins the programme with mimicry of the Sarpanch or head of the village, or the local leader or some other notable society member. Right in front of the stage sit the children, followed by the young guys, with the old men seated behind them. Generally women do not watch these shows, but in a few villages, very rarely, do they watch. The mimicry is followed by the Powada or ballad of a famous warrior like Shivaji or Shahu Maharaj. After that, the dances and Lavani’s begin. As the dances begin, there is an increasing demand for the latest dances and titillating numbers. With the increase in dances,
The old begin to make way for the young; the youth begin to enjoy the dances with an increasing fervency. The dancers dress according to the latest Bollywood numbers. Following this dance session for a period of two-three hours, the short-story or vagh begins. These short stories deal with mythological, historical and social issues. Once again, at this session, the old replace the youth as they are the ones who are keener on hearing these ballads. As the show progresses, the artists go behind the tree under which the Tamasha is organised and start taking their meals. The villagers have no compulsion to provide their meals; if they do not, they make provisions for their meals themselves. As the Tamasha ends, they manage to take some rest and as evening draws near, they begin to make preparations for the night show. For the night show, attractive lights of various colours are fitted; similarly the women begin to put on very loud and gaudy make-up. The presence of modern equipments like disco lights, drum sets and banjo give the appearance of an orchestra. This show goes on till the wee hours of the morning. As soon as everything gets over, people start loading the truck with their equipments. The rest of the place in the truck is accompanied by the bleary-eyed, tired artists, who begin to doze off as soon as the truck carrying them and their lifeworlds begin to move. This sort of Tamasha is more popular in Western Maharashtra notably in the districts of Satara, Sangli, Kolhapur and Karad. The artists who worked in these shows in the beginning went on to make great names for themselves in larger Tamasha units, recalled Sandhya ji. The Tamasha offices are set up in neighbouring Ichalkaranji, a commercial town in Kolhapur district, apart from those at Satara, Sangli and Karad.

THE KALAPATHAK KALAKAAR SANGATHANA

The word ‘Kalapathak’ comes from Kala-art and Pathak-road. In other words it is the defined as the way to knowing all arts translated as ‘sari kalao se avgat hone waala path’. The Kalapathak starts with the festival of ‘Ganesh-Chaturthi’ i.e around the months of August-September. It is followed by the Tamasha that takes place in the month of October and November. Both Tamasahas and Kalapathaks then continue from January (after Makar-Sankranti) till the beginning of May.
Headed by Mr. Dhananjay Pandit, the Kalapathak Kalakaar Sangathana is an organisation of Kalapathak groups in Kolhapur. Its origins can be traced as far back as 1995 – an unfortunate accident of an orchestra had led to its formation. A musical night orchestra had been organised in the year 1995 in Kolhapur city. Artistes from various parts of Maharashtra came to perform and on its completion, they were returning in a group. The vehicle in which they were returning met with an accident. Many artists were injured, one even succumbed to injuries. The name of the orchestra was “Lavkaar Orchestra”. Pandit ji recalled the after-effects of that tragic incident. Nobody cared for the dead or injured; following the response of the state and civil society towards these artistes, they decided to do something for themselves. They decided to create their own organisation, held a meeting and ultimately the Kalapathak Kalakaar Sangathana was created.

With a total of five hundred and fifty (550) members, it has eleven (11) sanchalaks or co-ordinators. Among the total number of artist members, 30% are women and 70% are men. The musicians, sound and light men, writers are all included in these five hundred and fifty. There were two Vice-President’s or Upa-Adhyaksha’s namely, Amit Kr. Shikalgaar and Prakash Powar along with two Programme Organisers or Karya-Vaahak’s. Pandit ji claimed that these preliminary artists are called ‘prathamik kalakaar’; largely because this Kalapathak stage acts as a sort of training ground for the cine-kalakaar’s or movie stars. These prathamik kalakaar’s later go on to the larger screen in larger cities like Mumbai and Pune and establish themselves in Marathi cinema as heroes, heroines, villains and so on.

OBJECTIVES:

The main objective of the Kalapathak is education. Mentioned Babita Kakde, director cum producer of a Kalapathak programme,

---

167 Dhananjay Pandit of Kalapathak Kalakaar Sangathana was interviewed on 2/05/09

168 Babita Kakde, Lavani Dancer and Organiser of Mahalaxmi productions, Kolhapur was interviewed on 1/5/09
‘dhej yeh saari umra tiknewaali cheej nahi hai, ghar me bahu aane se, uspar kaisa vyavahaar hona chahiye, yeh sab manoranjan ke madhyam se hum Kalapathak me dikhaate hai’

Which means, dowry is not going to last for a lifetime; once a newly wedded wife comes home, the manner in which she is to be treated, we show this to the people in a lively manner through our Kalapathak. Some other areas in which a Kalapathak seeks to educate the masses are anti-alcoholism and even sensitive issues like AIDS.

Commented Pandit ji,

“AIDS rog par upchaar nahi hota. Sharir wah vichaaro se is rog se kaise dur rahe yeh hum samaj ko sikhaatey hai. Bataane ka prayatna kartey hai. Samaj mein jo accha hai woh le, aur buraiya ko tyag kar de, is tarah ki seekh detey hai”.

In other words, he is of the opinion that AIDS is a disease on which much is not said. This is a disease that affects the body and soul, we try to teach the society how to stay away from this disease. We try to tell them, what is good for the society; we hope the society takes it and discards the evil- that is what we teach through our Kalapathak. Often, historical, social, monarchical and mythological themes are used in these Kalapathak programmes.

**ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMMES :-**

To organise a programme, the Kalapathak meets once a month at Papchi Tikti, which is their head office at Mahadwaar Road, Papachi Tikti, Kumbhar Galli, Kolhapur. In order to host a show, they make a contract with the cultural committee of a village, for a particular amount.

Among some of the notable activities that they undertake is felicitation of senior artistes, award-giving to best artistes, lifetime achievement awards to the retired artistes etc. After the “Kalapathak Ratna” is awarded, all the artistes get together to perform an entertainment programme. In the last two to three years, Pandit ji proudly mentioned that their organisation had shown respect to and awarded almost two hundred and fifty senior artistes. Some of the Kalapathak’s that they organise deal with student issues and they do
visit educational institutions on their Annual Days to perform. On the second of January, 2011, they had performed at an educational institution at Rajnewaari. Again, on the 15th of September, 2011, there was an artistes meet or a ‘Kalakaar Mela’ where a famous artist by the name of Ramesh Dev was present and he had presided over the occasion.

FACING CHALLENGES AND OVERCOMING THEM:-

“Aisi laagi lagan… Meera ho gayi magan… who toh gali gali hari gungunaney lagi… Mahlo me pali… Banke jogan chali… Meera Raani diwaani kahaney lagi…”

(Meera Bai fell in love with Lord Krishna, she started wandering the streets and singing songs in praise of the Lord Krishna. Though she was born and brought up in a palace, she quit everything to become a saint; so people called her crazy in love)

echoed the melodious voice of Dhananjay Pandit as he sat before us and sang a devotional song, a bhajan of the famous Bhakti saint Meera Bai.

We were sitting at Dhananjay Pandit’s house\textsuperscript{169}, at Yadavnagar, on the outskirts of the proper city. When one leaves the busy city and enters an area of less developed houses, with a suburban atmosphere, one enters Shivaji Udhyam Nagar. The entire locality is a maze of narrow lanes and alleyways bisecting each other. Crossing Shivaji Udhyam Nagar, we entered Yadavnagar, crossed Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Chowk and Shri KalBhairav Mandir and reached Pandit ji’s house.

At fifty-eight, Pandit ji was an interesting personality. Though he had inherited singing from his father and music ran in his blood; he had opted for a different profession to make ends meet, he joined the police as a Constable (though he would be retiring in just two years time). His father, he rather pompously claimed was a bhajan-kaar – a singer of bhajans. In comparing himself with the legendary singer Anup Jalota\textsuperscript{170}, he told us that the famous singer Anup Jalota’s father too was a notable singer; in fact, Jalota had learnt from

\textsuperscript{169} Dhananjay Pandit of Kalapathak Kalakaar Sangathana was interviewed on 2/05/09

\textsuperscript{170} Anup Jalota is an Indian singer and musician, best known for his performances in the Hindu devotional music bhajan and the Urdu form of poetry, ghazal.
his father; in the same way he too learnt from his father. His mother too sang very well. Though singing is exactly not his forte, he does compose music (at a local Recording studio called DIGITECH run by a young guy called Dheeraj) and writes a few occasional songs. When I asked him about his time management, he smiled and told us that music was his passion; one needn’t find time for it, it comes normally.

“Kalapathak me gan, gouran, mujraa aur Lavani ek sequence me hotaa hai.. Tamasha me aaisa kuch nahi hota..” explained Pandit ji. While Kalapathak followed a particular sequence i.e there would be a gan, gouran, mujhra and then Lavani, Tamashas did not have any such structured sequence.

“Kalapathak me bhi, Tamasha ki tarah samay ke saath saath badlaav aaya…” explained Pandit ji. Like the Tamasha, the Kalapathak too, has started changing with the changing vicissitudes of time. These changes however depended on various factors, such as the changing times, the attitude of the artists, the demand of the audience and the script writers’ dispositions.

“Aaj yeh kala sirf lokashray per avalambit hai... kalakaaro ko sirf apna pagaar par jeevan nirvaah karna parta hai” grieved Pandit ji. The artist today had to depend on the earnings from the show alone. Unlike in Western countries, here, the Government did not give them any sort of help for the upliftment of their art. The fate of the art and that of the artists was entirely dependent on the audience. In fact, in comparison with the Drama people and the Marathi Film people, Pandit ji went on to comment that whatever respect the drama and film artists get, the Kalapathak artists do not even get that. The artists of the Akhil Bharatiya Chitrapath Mahamandal (Marathi Film Industry) and Akhil Bharatiya Natya Parishad (The Drama Company People) get a form of maandhan i.e. stipend from the Government, but the Kalapathak artistes do not get anything. What is extremely disheartening is that all are artists – yet some are discriminated, while others aren’t.

On retirement at the age of fifty-five to sixty, these theatre, film and drama artistes get a stipend. In view of all these difficulties, Pandit ji and his organisation have decided to form a sort of funding to aid Kalapathak artistes in distress. For example, when any member
falls sick, when there is a medical emergency, when there is a marriage or an illness in the family, the Organisation comes to their aide and provides financial help.

“Kalakaaro ki apni ghar nahi hoti. Unhe sarkar ki taraf se madad milni chahiye” alleged Pandit ji. The artistes do not have their own accommodation. They do not even get any sort of financial assistance from the State government, which they demand. However, the artists are selected after a long process of selection – they are tested in their skills in singing, dancing and acting. If they are not perfect, then they are given training. The funds required to acquire this training is given from their own pocket. Apart from this, the artists face some major problems:

a) In the rainy season they take advance from the owner and after that they have to refund it. Till that time, deduction is made from their payment.

b) They do not have their own house.

c) They depend on their art alone for their livelihood; so they face lots of financial problems.

d) Women are facing more problems in the months of June and July. They have to practice and when the time of school of their children start, they have to admit their wards in school. They have to take care of their children. For that they have to again take advance.

e) There is no organisation to solve their problem.

Though some people in Pandit ji’s organisation are working for them, they do look up to the Government so that it starts some small skill programme for women in the hope that they can earn some money.

“Pehle Tamasha me kaam karne waali mahilaao ko bahut atyachaar sahna parta tha. Jo gaon ke Jahangir (landlord) hai, woh in mahilao ko rakhail rakhtey they. Woh aapatti kartey they, lekin woh unka dekhbhaal kartey they, isliye sab kuch sahan kartey they. Woh khilounaa jaise inko istemaal kartey they” explained Pandit ji, when we spoke about Tamashas. In the beginning, the women who worked in the Tamashas had to bear a lot of pain and humiliation. The landlord of the village used to keep these women for their sexual use. Even if they objected to it, there was no way out, as these landlords used to take care of
these women, provide for them and maintain their households. In other words, in exchange for all this, they used to treat these women as their toys. If it was a girl aged fifteen to sixteen years old, she would be asked to sleep with a man aged seventy years. And after satisfying their patrons, these girls would be given some money to start their own Tamasha. These women had no other option but to marry men who worked in the Tamasha. The husbands also had to bear a lot of humiliation, but they had no other option, they knew that this was the fate of their women. Today the condition of the Tamasha is slowly evolving “from darkness to light”. However, the fate of Kalapathak women artists was not so bad - they were slightly better off, in the sense that they were a bit educated.

“Saare kalakaaro ko duur-duur programme karne ki samay police ki protection ki zarurat hai”, Pandit ji asserted. The artistes, especially ladies go to far off places and perform late into the night. They have to confront a drunk, bawdry crowd which can tend to get unruly at times. Under such circumstances, police protection is an absolute necessity for these artistes, which is largely absent.

“Hum jo kehtey hai who saamne baithey prekshako ko manzoor hona chahiye, pasand aana chahiye, kyonki who hi hamaare mai baap hai” Our audiences are our mother and father-whatever we do has to get the acceptance of the audience.

BABITA KAKDE – A LAVANI DANCER AND PRODUCER OF A KALAPATHAK ORCHESTRA

From Pandit ji, we came to know of Babita Rajkumar Pandit (Kakde)171, a Lavani dancer as well as the producer of a Kalapathak show – Mahalaxmi Productions.

Off the main road, at Mangalvaar Peth, were many alleyways. One of them is Jassod Galli, where a modest looking house called Anandi Balwant Nivas is located. The resident of the house, Babita Kakde, was a middle-aged, kind-looking lady with a dignified aura about her. Babita ji was the producer of Mahalaxmi Productions – a well-known orchestra group of

---

171 Babita Kakde, Lavani Dancer and Organiser of Mahalaxmi productions, Kolhapur was interviewed on 01/05/09 and 05/05/10
Kolhapur that staged Kalapathak shows. A Lavani dancer, Babita ji was born in Kolhapur in a modest family. Educated till the S.S.C level, Babita ji had entered this profession in a very unique manner. It so happened that while washing utensils at a person’s house (she used to work as a domestic help), she was humming and singing to herself. The lady of the house heard her singing and was impressed with it. She took her to a teacher and helped her financially in her training for music and dance. Gradually, she realised that her income from singing and dancing would be more than her income as a domestic help. And the rest, she smiles, is history.

Babita ji’s son and daughter were studying in Kolhapur itself. Offering us chairs to sit she asked her daughter to serve us water in the traditional Marathi style, in a lotaa i.e a steel tumbler. Her room was adorned with posters of her Kalapathak and Orchestra production Unit. There were many awards and trophies that she had received as a Lavani dancer. Musical instruments of all sorts were on display throughout the small room.

Like Pandit ji, Babita ji too told us that the Kalapathak groups were not getting any funds from the Government. Her production unit comprised of twenty-five members, out of whom ten were women and the rest were male artistes. Usually, their Kalapathak began in the month of March and April, during the time of Chaitra-Pournima. There were around five to ten programmes in a month. She, being the producer of the show, it was her duty to pay the artistes after each show.

Some of their leaders like Mr. Dhananjay Pandit were fighting for these artistes. But this was not enough, she mentioned. “Akela Dhanajay Pandit ji kya karega?” What will Pandit ji alone accomplish? There are a whole lot of problems for the artistes in Kolhapur. With the government doing absolutely nothing and people showing more interest towards the Marathi and Hindi film industry, the artists were in dire straits. “Jaane ke time koi nahi aata” when the time comes to organise and approach the Government or local-level bureaucracy, then nobody comes forward. Most importantly, “Kalakaar me ek juti nahi hai” the artists are not at all united, she felt. The big Kalapathak producers do not care for them, neither do they look to them for producing shows. They are keener on selecting top artistes from Pune and Mumbai. “Kalakaar log aage ki sochtey nahi, ki aage kya hoga” the artists do not think
about the future, it seems as if they aren’t bothered as to what will happen to their next generation, she expressed her anxiety at this situation. Their careers would last only till the age of thirty-five, at the most, after that, nobody seemed concerned, Babita ji felt. Moreover, after a certain age, it was really difficult for these women to make ends meet; when their youth, vitality and beauty would no longer exist, their audience too would gradually start declining and so would their popularity. But then, practical problems like a home to manage and children to feed were things that would never cease to exist.

Today, per show the female artists get around a thousand rupees, while the menfolk earn a meagre sum of three to five hundred. The artists take an advance from the producer, at times, the advance can be a huge sum, it can vary from fifty thousand to almost one lakh. Later on, as the show season commences, instead of being paid the full amount for each show, the producer pays the artists half his / her due. This is because against each show the artists gets something less, this sum is deducted to cover up the advance that the artist had already taken as advance in the off-season. As a result, the artist gets less for each show that he/she performs. Again, during the next off-season, the artist lands up in an economic crisis, again he/she has to approach the producer. Often, there are producers who exploit the illiterate artists and keep them in a perpetual debt trap.

As far as the future of the folk-art of Kalapathak was concerned, Babita ji expressed concern about it too. She felt that the new generation was no longer interested in the Kalapathak, so much was the Westernisation process permeating into the society. These age-old forms of music and dance were suffering, according to her. So, Babita ji had devised a scheme – she had started giving ‘Lavani’ dance classes. It was a way of earning as well as a way of keeping alive her talents. Today, Babita ji had a total of ten students who came to learn Lavani from her. When I went to meet her the next year, she was smiling and composed as usual; only a year had added a few more lines and wrinkles on her face and a few more shades of grey in her hair. Speaking about the fate of Lavani dance in Kolhapur and Maharashtra, she sadly told us that today Lavani has been far more distorted and far more erotic than before.
“Aajkal kalakaar ke naam se dhandaa hotaa hai” Babita ji’e eyes had a sadness in them. Today, in the name of the artist, people are carrying on ‘business’. Our daughters go into it; they become ‘business’. What she actually meant was that the dancing profession had degraded into dirty businesses, in the form of ‘dancing bars’ and ‘sleazy discos’ at metropolises like Mumbai and Pune. But, the bright side of it all was that the Government was trying to revitalise the Lavani dance today. Lavani competitions were being organised at places like Mumbai, Nagpur, Pune and Goa. Moreover, nowadays, the show organisers are making arrangements of keeping recordings of shows, which was a faraway dream previously. Thus, times are changing and with it, the style, nature, purpose and technique behind these folk-arts too were changing.

SECTION D –

THE BODY AS A SOURCE OF AGENCY

a) The concept of the ‘daulatjaada’ –

A person who throws money at a dancing lady is called a ‘daulatjaada’. This is the class of the ‘born rich’; they used to see/watch Lavani and Tamashashows in the privacy of their homes. Neither did they want the shows to be made public, nor did they want these women to be made public.

There was a time when people used to throw off their turbans and gold wristlets on these dancing women. Not only was this a show of wealth, but this was also an attempt to flirt with the danceuse. It was said that these ‘daulatjaadas’ had one main intention – that of touching the danceuses. In fact, to touch the dancers, they could spend any amount of money. There were instances when the dancers were interrupted in the middle of a dance and asked to dance to the ‘daulatjaada’s’ preferred song. If the dancer is endowed with youth and beauty, she will attract more customers. Finally, if she gives him a paan (a betel leaf), it is an indication that she is willing to give him more time in lieu of more money. With this indication, she will move away, only to come a bit closer, after he rewards her accordingly. This process continues till he finishes all his money. Thus, the body of the danceuse is used as an agent for her power over her customer.
b) The stage –

_Tamasha_ and _Kalapathak_ stage is a multi-faceted one. The stage is an arena where an audience is directly connected with an artist; unlike in a movie or Television screen where there are retakes and the audience will not be able to contact the artist directly. In a stage performance, as in a _Tamasha_ or a _Kalapathak_, an artist has to work very hard to ensure the liveliness of the performances. Only when the audience and the performer are intimately connected in the entire process of ‘production of enjoyment’ can a performance attain true success. Dilip Chitre rightly asks a question about the future of the artist, he wants to know whether the future will witness the audience as a worshipper/admirer of folk-arts or as a customer of the female body. Here, I feel, the role of the ‘body’ of an actor is very significant. It is through her body that the _Tamasha_ artist or _Lavani_ dancer exercises control over the entire audience. At this point, it will be interesting to recall the words of the famous _Lavani_ and _Tamasha_ danceuse, Vithabai,

“She was always in control of her audience, whom she referred to as "the public", and did not brook any nonsense from them. During one performance, her daughter Mangala came in complaining that the audience was throwing stones and things at her. Vithabai consoled her saying, "But this is the public," and then she came on the stage and gave the audience a "lecture". She told them that they were artistes and the audience must treat them so. She also told the audience that it was full of real idiots. "You don't even realise that the stones you throw at us are fortunate enough to touch our bodies; you can't even do that." The audience fell silent. If anyone in the audience dared to come up to her or one of her daughters, Vithabai held him by the collar and set him straight.”

However, today, the stage is undergoing a change. A different version of the stage, which is much more colourful, vibrant and raunchy has gradually replaced the erstwhile stage. The songs and scripts also are being written with a more appealing touch; so that it appeals to the coming generation. As Sandesh Bhandare\(^{172}\) mentions, _Tamasha_ especially is being interlaced with ‘sexual innuendoes’. Due to the influence of the West, new societal,

\(^{172}\) Sandesh Gyaneshwar Bhandare op. cit, p. 37
c) The dress –

The ladies who perform generally wear a Maharashtrian style saree which goes between the legs and wraps up to the knees. Not only is it provocative, but it is elusive at the same time. A woman artist may keep the audience on the edge of their seats with an elusive movement of their sarees and the design of their blouses. The beautiful kamar-patta (waist-girdle), the mesmerising jewellery and the scented flowers in their hair coupled with the heavy make-up is definitely a way in which these ladies feel empowered. They have the lever of control in their hands, says Bhandare\textsuperscript{173},

\begin{quote}
the lady will hold the edge of her saree with one hand, tap her feet in an alluring manner, thrust her shoulders in the direction of the audience with an incendiary and confrontational look and inch forward towards the audience with a drag of the feet. At times, she will deliberately let the edge of her saree fall to her navel and then as if highly embarrassed place it properly.
\end{quote}

\textit{Tamasha} and \textit{Kalapathak} is a great leveller. Without differentiating between classes, religions, young and old, high and low, \textit{Tamasha} and \textit{Kalapathak} unites people from diverse backgrounds. Various reasons can be ascertained towards the decline of these folk-art forms. Mention can be made of the following :-

i) The \textit{Tamasha} and \textit{Kalapathak} arts began to be entangled in the complex web of business and entertainment. The Marathi and Hindi film industry started extracting the ‘entertainment formula’ from the \textit{Tamasha} and \textit{Kalapathak} and vice versa. This led to the \textit{Tamasha} and

\textsuperscript{173} Ibid p. 38
Kalapathak losing its originality. The film industry started draining out the life-blood out of these already decaying rural entertainment forms.

ii) Tamasha and Kalapathak are the life support system of the rural entertainment scenario. For this life support system to survive, the support of the common people is needed. The people have to realise that if they demand huge sound systems, ‘bollywood style’ numbers and dances, expensive lights, it will be difficult for the Show Organisers to make ends meet. Income under such circumstances will be less than the expenditure. Gradually, as has been happening, the organisers will fall into debt, will be unable to pay the artists, and gradually the show will close down.

iii) The new generation of the Tamasha and Kalapathak artistes are unwilling to participate in these shows as their parents. They are not showing a keen interest in carrying on the tradition of their families. Education, modernisation and westernisation are to a large extent responsible.

Tamashas and Kalapathak have always tried to keep up with the changing times. They have shown an ever-readiness to adapt to changes, to incorporate the ‘MacDonald, MTV and Macintosh’ culture. However, the future will only tell; whatever be the case, one thing is certain; village fairs, jatras, melas, will remain incomplete without the Tamashas and Kalapathak. It is true that the State Government of Maharashtra is organising camps and seminars on Tamashas and Kalapathak and trying to educate the youth about their moral and aesthetic value. In western Maharashtra, particularly, Jalgaon, Pune, Kolhapur, Aurangabad, Sholapur and Mumbai, ‘Lavani’ competitions are being organised in a bid to create an interest among the new generation. Efforts are definitely on to rehabilitate the Tamasha and enliven the Kalapathak. It needs to be seen whether the future generation will have the time, money and energy to spend on these rural art-forms.

For example, the noted ‘lavani’ dancer Surekha Punekar mixed the ‘lavani’ and ‘kathak’ (a North-Indian dance form). Though she did this to revive the lavani dance, the ultimate result was that the originality of the Lavani and Tamasha got lost.

However, an organisation named Pathfinder International (established in the year 1957) is trying to help these tamasha artistes fight HIV AIDS. Though not located in Kolhapur, it does cater to the district. From its base in Pune, Maharashtra, Pathfinder International, a non-profit international and non-governmental organisation is one of the pioneers to successfully integrate HIV/AIDS programs into existing reproductive health and family planning programmes. It has also
Finally, I would like to state that viewing a stage performance or a Tamasha as an audience does not convey anything at all about the pains and pleasures, travails and journeys of the performers.

**SECTION E – CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS**

Both the organisations that I visited, namely the *Kalapathak Kalakaar Sangathana* and the *Loknatya Tamasha Mandal* are struggling to make life for these artistes worthwhile. Yet sadly enough, I did not see any real initiative on their part to systematise things. It will actually require a huge amount of dedication and will to mobilise these artistes to unite. Without a basic unity, it is going to be really difficult to fight for their rights. An artist’s life and career gets over very fast; the future looms large; without any alternate ways and means of survival, life is certainly very difficult for them as well as for their next generation. Sandhya ji very rightfully remarked that their children hardly get any scope to study; because either their parents are travelling from village to village during the show season; or there are no funds available to sustain a prolonged period of schooling. When its time to get up for school, its time for the mother to go to bed, after a whole night’s show. Another very significant aspect is that most of the people who are heading these organisations are men – their ability to come up with a systematic career plan for the lady artists after retirement from active show life is questionable. The entire show business is largely controlled by menfolk – women are merely pawns and ‘objetcs for entertainment’ – this makes things even more difficult.

In recent years, however, apart from facing the the problem of making ends meet, the Tamasha artists are facing a new threat- a new virus, a new disease, that of HIV-AIDS. **Pathfinder International** has been successful in community home based care and adolescent sexual and reproductive health around the world. The organization is headquartered in Boston, USA and has locally staffed field offices in all the regions where they have programmes. Pathfinder International’s MUKTA PROJECT is a targeted intervention in 10 high prevalence districts of Maharashtra (Ahmednagar, Beed, Jalgaon, Kolhapur, Latur, Nandurbar, Nashik, Parbhani, Pune and Yavatmal) to reduce the prevalence of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) among sex workers (including Tamasha Artistes and Male Sex Workers) and thus control the spread of HIV/AIDS. The project is part of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation’s Avahan Initiative, which supports HIV/AIDS prevention work in six states of India.
"People like us on stage, but consider us as prostitutes away from it. The art form is going down day by day," said a Tamasha artiste in Sandhya ji’s troupe. "Our ancestors were royal entertainers. The Marathas were our patrons but things have changed over the years. Less money, social discrimination and poor health of Tamasha artistes have cast a shadow of uncertainty on the future of the art; many of our members have turned to flesh trade because of money. I have seen many artistes with HIV. And sometimes, we starve because we have no money. Our dance and drama requires physical strength. We are often taken ill; we don't get government support and authorities deny us even ration cards. Schools do not admit our children and ask for their father's name." She said women artistes from the Kolhati community do not get married. "It's humiliating and that is why many children drop out of schools."

Thus, we see that the lives of the women engaged in Tamasha, Lavani and other folk arts are riddled with difficulties; nevertheless, they are struggling to derive an agency for themselves; within their own means, they are managing to make ends meet. It is their undying spirit that needs recognition that is a story worth telling, their inner strength is a secret worth unravelling. We turn to yet another segment of degraded women whose lives are being riddled with caste-based discrimination, poverty and torment since time immemorial – the devadasis in our next chapter.