Chapter 4

Narratives in Performance

The aesthetics of any performance is relished, not because it produces an intellection as in ‘identifying’ life in its imitation on stage, but because it enables the soul, the enjoyment (Bhoga) of experience. In this relishing of experience, even the painful is transformed into positive experience, as in the case of the experience of a great tragic drama, because the attitude is detached (Chaitanya 1965). Stressing on the concept of ‘imagined community’, once again, we bring it into the realm of performance. Recollecting the earlier observations on Identity, it is to be highlighted here in view of the fact that the performance is not to be considered a Tradition, frozen in time and history. There is, of course, a history of the form, like that of the Zagor, but it also responds to the changing contexts. History, along with its contemporary needs, helps one to view forms in a dynamic process of change.
Performing The Known and The Unknown

Looking at Zagor, or any other cultural form in Goa, in this light will help us to gain ground on understanding the sensibilities of the participating communities at large. Moreover, we need to understand our traditions in the context of generalized changes in our society and not slot them as some exotic remnants of the past. In a highly influential account of the Ramlila, Kapur (1992) talks of such experiences as that interactive, intersubjective moment between spectator, actor and the social milieu, because of which performance acquires its social and phenomenological meanings. This can be elaborated upon, by recalling the distinction between, a ‘dramatic text’ and a ‘performance text’, which is essentially that of between what is expected and what is not and comes only at the final moment of actual performance. There is a certain immediacy to every performance, rendering it the quality of an ever-changing present. There are constant improvisations even after the rehearsals, and hence what we actually see, the performance that is, is a new experience which depends upon the presentational mode. As a result, everything takes on, a new meaning – the language, the features, the costumes the performance arena, etc..

The known aspect of the performance can be understood in terms of Kapur’s concept of a ‘pre-text’. The pre-text in the Goan cultural performances is in the Narrative life-scripts which allows the groups to see the events as cohesive. These Narratives are the present needs of society, assimilated into existing forms, possessing mythical histories. Authenticity of forms in such cases, needs to be captured, as
Kapur would argue, in the sphere of constant slippage of meaning and not in invariant forms which rely on a defined scheme of presentation. In chapter II, we presented the concerns of performance theories which believe that the text, in its presentational mode, is an altogether new experience markedly more dynamic than in its non-presentational form. There exists considerable ambiguity of meanings and actions, the multiple resonances, the postponement of meaning and the open-endedness of meaning in performances. For such a slippage of meaning to be grasped, there has to be, according to Kapur, an active imagination on the spectator's part. And this can take place only in non-naturalistic, ritual performances and not in a proscenium theatre, she affirms.

She further introduces the concepts of 'complicity' and 'collaboration'. The folk culture of Goa can be described in these terms. Stressing on the performer-audience relationship, Kapur describes 'complicity' as allowing for, both partial and faulty vision. Where, you see what others also see. And the collaborative aspect brings the two together, in that crucial moment of rasa, when all the latent cognitive impulses are aroused. While there is enough reason to celebrate the cohesive state of these events, we also need to go beyond it and observe the structuring of the ritual. For, it is believed, that behind the imagined cohesion, lies a well documented set of differences, highlighted in the spatial allocation of different groups in the ritual performances. It is difficult to disengage concrete social relations in which people in their normal day-to-day lives live, from the organisation of the ritual
structure. One might even say, that these liminal spaces signifying cohesion, actually celebrate their social structure.

Imagined spaces in Goa are in a direct relationship with the concrete social reality. A change in the existing social hierarchy could give rise to new performances, like in the village Naveshim mentioned earlier, leading to a collapse of the existing performance. Also, the fact that, there is an overwhelming presence of myths and legends which give rise to a symbolic discourse, indicates a collective desire, which can be broken only when it is replaced by individual thinking, the refusal to collaborate. The folk culture in Goa, different from the learned art forms of the great tradition, was governed by a different set of codes. The stylization of this kind of folk forms was different. There was a spontaneity in these performances, and they breathed of life in its present as is always the case in a folk tradition. This is the very extreme of a performance style; "there is a kind of non-expressive, representational acting that one finds in children's theatre. Matter-of-fact gestures, with no embellishments whatsoever." The survival of these performances depends upon the crucial participatory aspect. The codes are decoded at a general level. The cause for the success of these events, lies elsewhere, in the larger constructs of love, devotion etc, essentially in the pre-text, as Kapur calls it.

In the light of these observations, we will proceed to highlight the following in this chapter:- 1. In an imagined world, the perceptions of the audience and the performers come together and produce determinate meanings; 2. The Ritual Structure; 3. The dominant
presentational mode-comedy; 4. Multiple telling through the drama-
tis personae; 4. Collaboration and Complicity which produces the
dominant mood, the Rasa.

Before moving on to the analysis of the final performance, we
briefly look at the basic tenets of the Rasa theory. Indian theory of
Rasa.

The Tangibility of Experience: The Rasa Theory

In India, Poetics evolved out of dramaturgy. This is due to a re-
markable and historically very important accident: the early advent
of an aesthetcian who felt that the dramatic form was the most per-
fected fruition of aesthetic creativity, the most generalised definition of
the function of which is, that it is the embodiment of feeling in sensu-
ous tissue. The aesthetcian, Bharata Muni, conceived of drama as a
synthesis of all arts and in his 'Natyasastra”, he gave to India a mon-
umental treatise full of detailed suggestions for integrating libretto,
stage effects, music, dance, and histrionics into an organism, the soul
of which is aesthetically experiences emotion.(Rasa) The Rasa theory,
it is said is more than a theory of aesthetics. It is a structural anal-
ysis of the totality of human experience and behaviour, and is based
in particular conceptions of experience, being, knowledge and cogni-
tive mechanism. The Bhavas, springing from an interaction of per-
sons and events constitute experience. Experience is believed to filter
into our self through a four-fold cognitive mechanism of mana-buddhi,
citta, anta:karana, as various forms of vrttis (movements, actions) the
sanskaras, which both determines and is shaped by our responses to
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*bhavas* (*rasas*) resulting in a tension between experience and being. *Rasa-bodha* is *jnana*, knowledge. This knowledge arises out of verbal and non-verbal symbolisms.

In order to understand the Goan cultural discourse in terms of the *Rasa* theory, it is important to elaborate upon the specificity of these texts. As stated earlier, these performances have been influenced by a series of historical interventions. And they are still in the process of 'becoming'. In this situation, then there exists, the ever-changing present, which Kapur talks about. On the one hand, we witness the seemingly unchanged forms of worship, and festivals, when people from all walks of life attend them, cutting across all barriers. On the other hand, there is evidence of change, of shifting meanings, of interpolations and of what Barthes calls 'focalization'.

Another important aspect of the Goan culture is the identity at the micro levels starting from groups, to villages, to a larger Goan identity. Every event gains significance geographically, and among different communities. There is a close sense of belonging to the events, making them very personalised forms of worship and gaiety. This is the most important contributing factor to the secular forms of worship, particularly for those which cut the class and religious barriers. Every event is identified by the village in which it is performed. To Goans themselves, this identity reads like an information about the nature of the event. Festivals are attended on the basis of the village in which they are performed. The feeling of community, brings people together in all these events. As Newman says, they also
bring about change in rules. All barriers come down, and new ones are erected.

In Kakra, a village adjoining the village Naveshim, the Christians and Hindus come together on the day of Zagor, while on normal days there is a divided living space and different forms of worship pertaining to their respective religions. In terms of the Rasa theory, this is not possible unless, as Kapur says, there is an active imaginative collaboration by the audience. Collaboration according to her, alludes to a state of mind, a consciousness, the mental and emotional adjustment or accomodation that the spectator enters into willingly in order to sustain a narrative. In order, for this kind of collaboration, referred to in aesthetic theory as, the ‘willing suspension of disbelief’, to occur, the spectators have not only, to be sympathetic, but also be able to see and feel creatively with the actors quite like kindred spirits. In rituals, the spectators, unlike the proscenium theatre goers, enter into a tacit transaction with the actors, in that moment of informed collaboration. Which is to say, that spectators do not passively receive what the actors give (Kapur, ibid).

Ritual Spaces

During the ritual, the villagers walk with the procession, they respond with intense reverence to the invoked deities, stand outside their homes to greet the procession or join in it, announce the onset of a performance by bursting crackers, laughing and adoring the comic character, Garasher. When the procession reaches the Mand the people gather in large numbers to pay respects to the deities, to
the invoked spirits of the dead, thus participating and sharing with the performers. It is at this moment, when normal day-to-day life is transformed into a special occassion, a special community feeling, that the *Rasa* is invoked. Things, people, events are transformed instantly, without recourse to realism, says Kapur, and it is this imagination that facilitates these transformations. The 'Mand', interestingly, becomes the central signifier of social, cultural and economic aspects of the community. It becomes, a 'living space' on that particular day. Any indicators of change in this performance, like exclusion of the traditional texts to include the more recent, popular Hindi film songs the change in the dance steps, new themes, inclusion of non-traditional musical instruments like the Harmonium along with the existing traditional ones, is possible due to the significance given to the Mand. Though the beginning of such changes takes place during the rehearsals, a month before the actual event, it is on the day of the Zagor, at the mand and during the rituals that the community responds with renewed enthusiasm.

The performance text, clearly, differs from the dramatic text in that there is a far greater suspense and excitement over the final reception of the performance. In an oral tradition, repetition plays a major role in entrenching the text into the minds of the people. Apart from the various kinds of fears that grip the community and forces them to think and act towards the well-being of their village, there are two other aspects of the ritual that helps to realise the desired effect.
Peopling the Ritual: The Players

From the Natyasstra onwards, it has been said that the make-up and costumes along with the creative imagination of the audience enables a particular kind of seeing in order to savour the 'Rasa'. In Zagor for instance, the ‘foreign lady’, the Portuguese soldiers, the romeo, the nari(woman), parpati (the headman) etc., have been made to rely on elaborate costumes and make-up. The foreign lady sports a western costume, dark-glasses, a flashy hand-bag, equally flashy shoes and gaudy make-up. The Portuguese soldiers are made to wear white uniforms with a weapon in their hand and their faces are painted pink to display their European origin. Garasher, the romeo has a very interesting costume. He wears an elaborate head-dress with innumerable number of flowers made out of paper. He is the most awaited and loved of all the characters. His costumes attracts the attention of the audience and children, particularly, eagerly await his entry, which he does often. Parpati comes on stilts, perhaps signifying a higher social status as a headman, towering over the rest.

Ritual, Memory and Performance

Training through repeated participation is the other factor of participating in rituals. A repeated participation in the Zagor trains the audience to see the ritual in a particular manner. They are trained through memorized responses. Thus, the antics of the comic character, garasher, in the zagor remains entrenched in the memory of the audience, particularly the children. The difference between this kind of training and the creative imagination we talked about earlier, is,
that the former takes place in a contextual space, while the latter becomes part of the pre-text with each performance.

The final moment of a fulfilled experience arrives not only due to the commonality or identifiable narrative structures, but also in the actual 'performance' of these structures. Each tale, story, narrative is altered in each 'telling'. The variable introduced by the context of each particular hearer, interacting with both the context of the teller and that of the telling, are in shifting interplay with the repeated features of the text (Smith, 1978). Oral telling for instance involves a stock of motifs (Thompson, 1955: 8), formulae and rhetorical traditions which are drawn upon to produce a performance text, to borrow a term from the theatre. The audience with their demands and the memory of the narrator provide the stability to a text.

In the previous chapter, we discussed the religious discourse in Goa as essentially a cohesive device towards a common identity. This cohesion is achieved by marshalling the narrative communication towards stability. These narratives conform to an exact formula as noted earlier. In these kinds of cohesive situations, one acts as audience for one's own performance as in the mirror-stage when one proceeds to recognise the Self as Other. The telling is matched with that of the reception. In such a context, the listeners are one with the telling. They are actively involved in keeping away any disturbance to the existing details. One can never call this kind of aggregative and conservative form a defense against transgressive energies. It goes without saying that two kinds of forces are always present - assimilative and destruc-
tive. The latter, however, need not necessarily refer to a complete lawlessness, but in a relational sense, where it breaks out of the existing law only to conform to another law that it seeks. This kind of transgressive possibility is far from being a mere hypothesis. The shifting contexts make such desires come true. A reversal of the existing situation occurs when the performer may be encouraged to break the rules of society, of decorum, of the narrative, in an outpouring of anarchic energy matched by that of the hearers (Bakhtin 1968). Thus it leads to renewed creativity.

**Meaning in Ritual Performances**

What are the essential ingredients for a traditional performance? The primary prerequisite would be a tacit agreement between the performers and the audience, which implies that all that is included and excluded requires to be agreed upon. Perhaps no other genre as the oral narrative displays such a powerful dynamics. The energy of the narrative works towards gaining a delicate balance and preserve the basic fabric from forces of dispersion. Every narrative is context-dependent, a basic quality highlighted as early as in the Indian tradition.

We are here reminded of Saussure's claim that in a given context, the ambiguity inherent in the sign is disambiguated to produce fixed, determinate meanings. The 'symbol' (which is one type of a 'sign' [see Pierce 1931]) has been described as collapsing contradictions. In this important sense, it is different from the sign, which seeks motility. We saw in an earlier chapter, how, by suppressing details
which give away an obviously lower status the Gawadas have sought an uplifted religious identity with the help of narratives and the symbolic discourse. The narrative is prohibitive says Kristeva. It submits to the rule of law, of God. In it, opposing elements are implied or articulated, only to be resolved. It is the space which allows for intersubjective relation of the signs. The final closure of the symbolic domain takes place in the ritual, where the narratives, once dramatised, are sealed and can be recreated everytime the ritual is enacted. The discourse is 'Monologic' in the sense Kristeva and Bakhtin have described it.

The symbolic discourse is reaffirmed not just in the narrative life-script, but in the rituals as well. The symbol, is potentially ambiguous or inconsistent (Kapferer 1984) as a consequence of linking ambiguous and alternative contexts. The indeterminate meanings are directed towards a determinate semantics by the structuring of the ritual. The ritual spaces are important markers of social stratification, apart from generating 'liminal' meanings. This analysis has three objectives: (1) To highlight the inherent multivocality of symbols and their relationship with each other in a ritual. (2) The meanings of these symbols are dependent on the actual participation of the audience. (3) To show how the symbol is also dependent on the structure of the ritual and the positioning of the performers and audience is relative to it.

Recent anthropological theory on the lines of Turner and Geertz's (1972) analysis has stressed on the reflexive nature of public rituals. Turner's (1984) public rituals are 'those marking a whole groups passage from one culturally defined season to another in the annual cy-
cle, where solar, lunar, planetary, and stellar cycles may be involved. Such sites may be extended to include collective response to hazards such as war, famines, drought, plague, earthquake, volcanic eruption and other natural or man-made disasters'. Public rituals according to Turner have their liminality in public places. The village is ritually transformed into the subjunctive mood for a privileged period of time - the time. Public liminality is governed by public subjunctivity, of 'were' in if I were you. For a while almost anything goes: taboos are lifted, fantasies are enacted, the low are exalted and the mighty abased: indicative mood behaviour is reversed. Yet there are some controls: crime is still illicit; drunken bodies may be moved off sidewalks. And ritual forms still constrain the order and often the style of ritual events (ibid). Calling public rituals ambiguous, where conventional and shared values in the form of sacred objects emerge along with skeptical views on existing social structure.

Thus public liminality involves cultural codes which are both in them and about them. Ritual aesthetics lies in the orchestration of the sensory codes as Turner refers to them. Speech, music, singing, presentation with masks, dance, etc., even if it is fully embodied in daily living. Thus it contains according to Turner, plastic and labile phases and episodes as well as fixed and formal ones. However, the prohibitive nature of rituals allow only 'presentational symbolism' to use Langer's (1951) term, whereby symbolic acts and objects are tightly interwoven so that each imparts a similar sense and meaning to the other. These symbolic forms as Kapferer (1984) says 'resolve con-
The symbolic ritual, with its integral presentational moulds capture the 'monologic discourse' that we talked about earlier. Illustrating these observations in the context of Goan ritual performance, we focus on Zagor which is performed by a Gawada community in the village of Naveshim.

4.1 Ritual Performances: The Zagor

The History

We now take up Zagor for analysis. The word Zagor means 'staying awake' or 'awakening'. This ritual performance has pre-Portuguese origins. It is said that the original Zagor used to be performed with much more gaiety and splendour. But during the 'Inquisition' in the Portuguese regime, attempts were made to suppress these celebrations. The repercussions were bad. The religiosity of the people having suffered, the Hindus and Christians started fighting. The dispute over who would perform the most in these rituals became an acute problem. In the end, with the intervention of the priests, the performances were divided among the two groups. The disputes stopped and the two religious communities till today meet on a common ground on the day
of Zagor. See Khedekar (1980). This is evidence enough to show the frustrating and futile attempts by the Portuguese to suppress existing ‘essential’ See Kale (1986) performances. The commonly held values of the people continued unabated despite conversions to Christianity.

Zagor was, and is, performed in most parts of Goa. Prominent among these, are the Siolim Zagor, Perni Zagor, and the Siridao Zagor. Apart from these, Zagors are performed in Naveshim, Kakra, and many other villages. Each village performs a Zagor in its own style. There is a basic, episodic ritual structure common to all of these, but they are also variants of this form. In a Levi-Straussian sense, one can hope to locate contextual details, as these forms draw from the local context itself. A shifting context is reflected in these variants, like in the shift of the theatrical form in Zagor to the modern Tiatr.

Zagor is performed at the time of certain village feasts and church festivals sponsored by the village community as a whole. The expenses for these performances come from the common village funds. The audience and the performers of a Zagor are co-celebrants and not buyers and sellers of patrons and beneficiaries (Kale ibid.). Zagors can be purely Hindu, purely Christian, or both. In the Bardez district for example, the Zagor is very popular among the Christians. The Perni Zagor is predominantly Hindu and is performed in a temple though the Catholics of the village can be co-celebrants (of honourable status), like in the village Siolim, where the pop singer Remo Fernandes is one of the honoured celebrants of the main ritual invocation as he belongs to the village.
Preparing for the Ritual: The Players

The Zagor we are looking at is performed in Naveshim in the Tiswadi taluka. One day in the month of April or May is reserved for the Zagor. It is an all-night performance. On the evening of the performance the prominent members of the village gather at the Zolmi’s (chosen one) residence. The Zolmi’s house has an inner sanctum which is inaccessible to the general public. Only the Zolmi, his family, and the few respected gentry of the village are allowed to go inside to light the sacred lamp, marking the initiation of the Zagor. The Zolmi’s house presented a picture of syncretic religion with idols of Hindu gods kept along with the cross and an idol of Mother Mary. The Zagor has always been initiated from the Zolmi’s house. Another significant event that goes on here in the evening is the dressing up and the make-up of the performers, who range from old and seasoned Zagor performers to small children. Crude make-up materials are used and the costumes are hired from local theatres. The costumes are outlandish with garrish details like golden lace and bright colours. The style of the costumes refer back to a bygone era of princely rule. The overall effect is rather exaggerated in an effort to be eye-catching.

Most of the performers, particularly the experienced ones, do their own make-up while the rest of the villagers drop in from time to time to witness this dressing. The younger performers in particular are excited and on being teased by their friends from the village, show an indignant irritation. The gleam in their eyes, we noticed, made quite a few of their peer group envious. One of them even justified why he
wasn't taking part that year and proceeded to describe his role in the Zagor the previous year. The youngest of the performers was a small child aged between four to five years. He is to be presented as Lord Krishna as his costume suggests. The atmosphere in this ceremonial dressing is so charged, that the performers seem to get transformed into their roles. All the teasing, jeering and laughter at the peer group subsides once the performers are ready. A strange sense of awe and admiration distances the village children from their performer friends. Also one noticed a sense of pride in them. Clearly, one was here to witness an event which was so central to the people of Naveshim. They spend the entire year waiting for this day, planning months in advance and rehearsing at least one month ahead.

Rehearsing the Ritual

The rehearsals themselves had a sacred quality. Every night after dinner the performers gathered in an appointed place and rehearsed for four to five hours with such intensity that they failed to notice our presence as strangers to the gathering. Improvisations take place every day, which indicated that these ritual performances are not just fixed symbolic activity, but as Turner says, they are also an orchestration of the sensory codes. New songs are introduced, particularly the ones from the latest Hindi films and dance steps are improvised to suit the new rhythm. Such changes baffle the older generation who find it difficult to relate to such changes. It was here that we witnessed the close relationship between the energy of a folk performer and the context in which he performs. The older performers (easily above
sixty years of age) displayed amazingly vibrant energy and far greater enthusiasm than the younger performers. The energetic body movements came to them effortlessly to the beat of the traditional rhythm and traditional lyrics. They seemed to be locked to it by an invisible bond and the dance was a spontaneous reaction to the beat. In this fascinating combination of tradition, feelings and physical energies we saw the essence of a traditional event like the Zagor.

Influencing the Ritual: Zagor and Multiculturalism

Interestingly, these same energies seemed to slacken when the older performers were asked to dance to the beat of the Hindi film song. They couldn’t relate to it and openly expressed their dismay. Some old men even laughed at the whole situation. The younger performers were intent on including the latest film song, and on being asked to dance to it, displayed an amazing amount of enthusiasm. In fact, some old men even remarked that the younger generation was losing its sense of tradition. Another example of this was the fact that there was no young performer available to perform the role of Parpati, the dancer on stilts, who is an integral part of all Zagors. The old man who had been doing it for a long time needed a break. But not being able to find a replacement he was forced to take on the role that year again. This was happening because Zagor was opening out to newer experiences and the tradition seemed to be undergoing a modernization process, with the increasing influx of catchy Hindi film tunes and the Marathi theatre.

Another change which was being thought of, was in the sphere of
acting. The flat, folk-like acting was to be replaced by intense acting like in other theatres. A particularly enthusiastic young playwright informed me of this. But on his numerous attempts doomed to failure, he began experimenting with teatric forms on non-ritual days, with moderate success.

Performing the Ritual: A Community in Play

On the day of Zagor, the main performance arena, the Mand, is decorated elaborately and fenced off from the space to be occupied by the audience. The open area surrounded by the Mand is occupied by vendors selling ice-cream,groundnuts, popcorn, balloons, candy, etc. The local bar, is doing roaring business with people consuming alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks at random, marking the general festive mood. In fact quite a few of the men are drunk even before the event begins. The women, who have been preparing well in advance, dress in new clothes to be ‘seen’ at the event. Apart from the actual ritual, many other transactions are an integral part of the Zagor. Economic activity, gossip, exchanging news, sometimes even looking out for suitable match for their sons and daughters. Despite the physical distance from the ritual space (they are ‘fenced of) they wait eagerly for the performers to arrive at the Mand. The Mand impregnates the people surrounding it with an impending excitement.

It was at this point, waiting equally breathlessly for the procession to arrive, that we realized how much an actual live performance helps to create the surreal atmosphere. It was not enough to have a knowledge of abstract narrative forms, one had to know ‘how’ to tell
it. For, here we discovered, lay the Centre, in actually doing what you believe in. If you cannot perform, then you are no longer part of the code, like the younger performers. You had to experience the Zagor, absorb it completely, to be able to perform in it, both as a performer and as the audience.

It is around 9 p.m. that the villagers watch the route which the performers will take to reach the Mand rather impatiently. Suddenly, there is a burst of crackers - 'they are coming', the children shout excitedly and run towards the incoming procession. This procession begins at the Zolmi's house after the initiation rites and the dressing-up of the performers. Carrying sacred ceremonial objects, the procession, comprising of the exalted gentry of Zagor, the performers and all those excited children and villagers, slowly reaches the Mand. A ceremonial lamp is lit and the group of singers along with the Mand-Guru, the priest, stand and ask for blessings from their deities. All the traditional instruments are placed there. The Mand-Guru offers flowers to these instruments and blesses them by keeping them in front of the incensed coal. The group of singers along with others place these blessed flowers behind their ears. The audience gathers as close as it can to the Mand and responds to this ritual with equal religious fervour. They pray with folded hands or watch in awed silence. Once they are through with this ritual, the singers get ready to sing the first set of prayers.

The musical accompaniment consists of the indigenous Ghumot, a quasi semi-circular earthen vessel, the front portion of which, is
covered with the skin of a reptile of the lizard family, and the bottom is like an open tube; Madlen, a cylindrical earthenware; drums, harmonium, Nagara, etc. For a long time the performance relied on local instruments, but with the changing times, even cassette players are used as part of the ritual.

The main group of singers have a fixed space in the Mand. They are present throughout the performance and, between individual renderings even provide a chorus-like support. There, singers begin Zagor with the Naman (prayers) and this invocation includes deities from the Hindu, Christian, and even their original Gawada world when they were primarily nature-worshippers. Some of the deities and divine symbols of this invocation are as follows:-

\begin{align*}
\textit{bappa} & \quad \text{Father}^1 \\
\textit{Ispirit} & \quad \text{Holy Spirit} \\
\textit{Putra} & \quad \text{Son of the Holy Father} \\
\textit{Santakuris} & \quad \text{St. Cruz} \\
\textit{Manda Guru} & \quad \text{The holy teacher, a symbolic reference to divine teaching} \\
\textit{Manda Puta} & \quad \text{Son of the Mand. There is no evidence regarding the identity of this reference.} \\
\textit{Santeri Maye} & \quad \text{Mother Shanta Durga, the most revered deity in Goa. She takes different forms and names in different villages.} \\
\textit{Mati devchara} & \quad \text{An evil spirit (devil) believed to inhabit the earth.} \\
\textit{Nagesh deva} & \quad \text{The snake-God.}
\end{align*}
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*Mha!sa Maye* A local village goddess also referred to as 'Mother'.

*Sobe bastelya loka* The audience in the Sabha (gathering).

*Vetala deva* The Phantom God.

*Chuklya-maklya deva* literally means all the forgotten ones. The unnamed deities are taken care of by this reference.

*Igarz mata* Church Mother – the presiding deity or saint of the local church.

*Mori* Mary, the divine virgin mother of Christ

*St. Julian* A missionary

*Krsna* Krishna

The most elaborate aspects of Zagor and Naman (prayers). It is characterized by offering prayers to ghosts, demons, deities and deceased ancestors. The villagers believe that by going through the ritual, they and their village is absolved of any impending calamities. All the unresolved social tensions are brought at the level of presentational symbolism. Ritual Space in Zagor:

**Ritual and Unification: Zagor and Syncretism**

The celebrations of Zagor contradict and are inconsistent with the normal understandings and cultural typifications of the people of Naveshim. On normal days the differences between the two religions are maintained. And even on the day of Zagor, the Catholics are not the main celebrants, but it is the Hindus. Clearly, then, the prayers to Jesus, Mary and other Christian saints is extraordinary events. There
are two possible reasons for this kind of syncretism. One is that, it is very important to keep up traditions in order to maintain an identity. Secondly, even if there is a reluctant acceptance of the traditional form by a section of the society, the ritual itself provides comfort. Ritual is prominent in all areas of anxiety, uncertainty, impotence, and disorder. By its repetitive character, it provides a message of pattern and predictability. As Myerhoff (1984) observes, in requiring enactments involving symbols, it bids us to participate in its message, even enacting meanings we cannot conceive or believe - our actions lull our critical faculties, persuading us with evidence from our own physiological experience until we are convinced. In ritual, he says, doing is believing. Ritual dramas especially are staged, and use presentational rather than discursive symbols. So that our senses are aroused and flood us with phenomenological proof of the symbolic reality which the ritual is portraying. By dramatizing abstract, invisible conceptions, it makes vivid and palpable, our ideas and wishes, and as Geertz has observed, the lived-in-order merges with the dreamed-of-order. The ritual requires no further legitimization.

But how this is achieved is crucial. What is problematic in Zagor is that it must perform in a context where everyday understandings already dominate. While people do come with individual motivations, the rules of performance are such that at crucial moments they produce determinate meanings, with a closure effect. Evidence of differences of opinion could be found during the rehearsals and on casual conversation with some of the younger generation. A particularly am-
bitious young poet of the village wanted to do away with Christianity as they were Neo-Hindus today and change the lyrics to pure Marathi. A few of the villagers shared his sentiments, but most of them preferred to continue with the traditional celebrations lest they displease the gods and spirits. But it cannot be denied that such sentiments are growing among the villagers. And yet, on the day of the Zagor, such sentiments are obliterated by the very structuring of the ritual itself.

At this juncture, one is reminded of the paradoxical nature of rituals as Barbara Myerhoff (1979) argues, that they are so because they are conspicuously artificial and theatrical yet designed to suggest the inevitability and absolute truth of their messages. [They are] dangerous because when we are not convinced by a ritual, we may become aware of ourselves as having made them up thence on to the paralyzing realization that we have made up all our truths. By anchoring in tradition and making the participant a part of the enacted text, there can be no turning back for the community. Even if moments of hesitation were to occur, as in the case of the young man and others in the village, the very nature of the ritual moment affirms the efficacy of the text. The tradition of the Zagor and the spiritual help along with it demonstrate (in the present at least), the momentary weakness of some of the members. The Zagor consoles, directs, infuses with meaning, leading the people back to significance. In this sense, the ritual cannot become the object of its own discourse (which is the privilege of literature proper according to Morgan [1984]). But
if the ritual does become an object of analysis, then it is a pointer towards a drastic change in traditional values, a complete shift to modernization.

In the present context the villagers are striving towards maintaining the traditional Zagor. Earlier, we mentioned that the spaces occupied by the audience and the participants were distinct at times and merged at other times. We see this as a means to be able to stand back and reflect at times, and at others become one with it. The main purpose of the Mand is to create a surreal atmosphere to which people relate to as something as unusually desirable. To do that, the performance must shift between reflexive and non-reflexive modes. When the event is initiated at the Zolmi’s house, the sanctity distances the rest of the villagers making it all the more desirable. Soon after this, the procession towards the Mand allows for equal participation and intermingling allowing a sense of togetherness and a feeling of pride in associating themselves with an event of such significance. At the Mand, the performers are again given an exclusivity to recreate the dream-like atmosphere. The exclusive space magnifies the sense of the other, which is not part of their day-to-day lives, and yet is meant to be a guiding force in their lives.

A critical element in the recognition of another's experience as authentic is the understanding that this other's experience is potentially a part of one's own. But first, in order to understand how this potential is aroused, we must look at the focusing of the ritual. The formation of symbolic types produces a suspension or denial of other
meanings. This is done by a reduction and drawing together of all the elements in the mould. The magical atmosphere created by singing ritual formulae to the hypnotizing beat of the Ghumot is a significant aspect of the early stages of the rite. Words, music, dance, objects, all coalesce to construct a unity of meaning. The participants and the audience are to be brought together by relating to the common cognitive system. The tradition of the village is threatened by external influences. By the discursive mode of the performers, the village exercises its own means of control. The aim is present, both, existing and alternative forms of reality, in order to create an awareness and reaffirm the sense of law and order. The repetitive style of the singers, the repetitive dance-steps, the traditional costumes, the Mand, the objects used, all these produce a confirmatory effect and reinforce a traditional belonging. One is reminded of Genette's use of 'focalization'. In theatre he says, one sees only that which is presented to us. And on stage as Eco says, 'everything signifies'.

What are the essential ingredients for a traditional performance? The primary prerequisite would be, a tacit agreement between the performers and the audience, which implies, that all that is included and excluded requires a mutual consent. Perhaps no other genre as that of the oral narrative and its subsequent performance displays such a powerful intersubjective dynamics. The energy of the performance works towards a delicate balance and to preserve the basic fabric from the possible digressive forces. Every narrative is context-sensitive, a basic quality highlighted as early as in the Indian tradition.
Hence, the basic form of the Zagor, though contains an invariant, it varies with each telling in different contexts. The Perni Zagor differs from its counterparts in say, Siridao or Naveshim. For example, they are all subject to territorial restrictions. The Naveshim Zagor is performed in a public space called Mand, which is used for other public events as well whereas the Siridao Zagor is performed in a temple. Restrictions abound within each of such territories. They are restrictions of life-cycle rituals, restrictions which implicate the audience - women are not allowed inside the sacred performing arena - the Mand in most rituals particularly the Zagor; in other instances women are the main tellers like the songs of the dhallo, which are sung to the pounding of husk. Restrictions of a different kind occur when the teller exercise ownership rights over the rituals, the Zolmi, for example. Thus every variant contains invariant elements. But these invariant features are themselves the outcome of context-sensitivity. One could then show, how when texts are appropriated, the earlier restrictions are either retained, or are adapted to suit the needs of the community. For instance, the general rule that women are to be given restricted entry, could be transgressed in favour of them participating and playing their gender roles. In the Naveshim Zagor, all the feminine roles were acted out by men.

The variations in the performances, reflect the social stratification in the villages in Goa. Apart from restrictions of gender, religious and class boundaries are well defined. For example in a village adjoining Naveshim, called Kakra, there are two separate Zagors performed each
CHAPTER 4. NARRATIVES IN PERFORMANCE

by the Hindus and the Catholics. Intruz, the two religious groups take separate paths during the celebration. In Naveshim the main celebrants are Hindus and even while invoking the Christian saints, the Catholics are not permitted to take part in it.

Let us now, take up the performance of Zagor. From the description so far, it is evident that the actual performance provides the final authority and legitimacy. The relationship between the speaking subject (sujet del’enonciation) the saying, and the spoken subject (sujet del’enonce) as Benveniste (1971, 1974) has established, is crucial to the flexibility of the narrative. The narrative as mentioned in an earlier chapter is a voice of the whole social context and of tradition. The teller who has an imposing text to tell, interpolates himself into the saying in a performance, which further has to present itself through the multiple voices of the different performers. Propp (1928) called them ‘dramatis personae’, and Greimas (1966) referred to them as ‘actants’. The Performing Zagor: We established earlier that the narrative of Zagor establishes pragmatic rules as illustrated by Lyotard - ‘know-how’, ‘knowing what-to-do’, etc. This is achieved through the Proppian ‘dramatis personae’. The performance consists of a set of performers who elaborate on various aspects of the discourse allotted to them. Through the performance the community can be said to practise its own set of restriction and assimilation rules. The central space opens out the discourse for scrutiny. Through the performers, different voices speak in what is said, sometimes in the form of dialogue, sometimes in the form of quotation in, for example, the
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‘formulaic utterances of oral narrative’ (Bakhtin 1981, 50).

In this motivated performance like Zagor several issues are raised linking them mainly to the comic need. Land disputes, unfaithful wives, husband-beating, widespread migration to the Gulf, the ever-failing Romeo. All these could be considered as part of a wish-fulfilment. Also a lot of non-native characters are brought in more as exhibits - the Portuguese soldiers, the Negro pair (*khapurlo, khapurli*). The Negro pair are representatives of the African slaves who were brought by the Portuguese. Over the years these slaves became part of the Goan social class, due to the considerable marital relations with the local, lower classes, a ‘foreign lady’, a doctor, Syed (a non-descript Muslim). There are other characters who narrate their roles - like the self-appointed policeman, Nikhandar, the child who pronounces his determination to educate himself and become a ‘dottor’ (doctor, in Portuguese), there are also, the group of children who voice nationalist sentiments and adorn costumes of different kinds, more akin to the general Indian mode of dressing; in a more serious mode, the relative of a recently deceased member of the community as a respectful gesture narrates the good deeds of the dead relative, and promises to fulfil the wishes of the dear one. Photographs of the deceased are usually hung on the canvas which frames the Mand. Sentiments varying from satire, mockery, laughter, cruelties, to serious feeling like reverence, empathy are displayed during the entire, all-night event. This is the ‘multiple-telling’ of the performance. Through these characters, the narrative life-script strives
to arouse the audience. It is a self-perpetuate means of educating the people about all that goes on around themselves. The response of the audience gives the performance the much-needed interactive relationship.

The Comic Mode: Comedy in Zagor is its major component. It even boils down to crude vulgarity in some of the actions of the characters. But we intend to highlight the comic mode as a form of heightened awareness. The widespread opinion on Zagor is that it is cheap, vulgar and inappropriate for religious celebrations and contemplative moments. It is regarded as subversive and diabolical. But this is not the case with the participants in Zagor where a sanctioned, even prescribed relation is maintained between the serious and the ludic; where joking or clowning occurs in the most sacred moments of ritual ( ).

In an illuminating essay Eco, outlines the situation when a comic effect is realized - (1) there is a violation of a rule (preferably, but not necessarily, a minor one, like an etiquette rule); (2) the violation is committed by someone with whom we do not sympathize because he is ignoble, inferior, and repulsive (animal-like character); (3) therefore we feel superior to his misbehaviour and to his sorrow for having broken the rule; (4) however, in recognising that the rule has been broken, we do not feel concern, on the contrary we in some way welcome the violation; we are, so to speak, revenged by the comic character who has challenged the repressive power of the rule (which involves no risk to us, since we commit the violation only vicariously); (5) our
pleasure is a mixed one because we enjoy not only the breaking of the rule but also the disgrace of an animal-like individual; (6) at the same time we are neither concerned with the defense of the rule nor compelled towards compassion for such an inferior being. Comic is always racist; only the others, the barbarians, are supposed to pay (1984, 3). At the point when the whole world is turned upside down, Eco says, we feel 'free', first for sadistic reasons (comic is diabolic, as Baudelaire reminded us), and second, because we are liberated from the fear imposed by the existence of the rule (which produces anxiety) (Eco, ibid). The comic can best be spoken of as residing in contradiction. The being and non-being, the law and the possibility of the violation of it. The ultimate comic representative in Zagor, the Garasher is just this - a bundle of contradictions. He is both human and animal-like in his desires. He borders between rationality and irrationality. He is (the) worshipper of women, lives for love (the ultimate Romeo), a perfectly rational thought given his characterisation. But his irrationality exists in desiring every other woman, and hence is punished when he gets beaten up by a 'foreigner's' brothers. The depiction of the 'foreign lady' could also be a warning to the audience. She is in the no-trespassing zone!

In the Indian context, comedy may be simply defined as that artistic form, regardless of genre, which has, as its dominant aesthetic sentiment, the theoretically codified and culturally conventionalized comic flavour, the hasya-rasa. The comic sentiment is not understood in India as a dichotomous principle in relation to a tragic one; it is
rather a mood which arises out of an opposition to, or parody of, any of the aesthetic flavours. It is realized through sentimental travesty, through the intentional failure or breakdown of one or more of the codified moods of art. The comic *rasa* is experienced when something tastes funny, when representations of the emotions of love or courage or sadness fail to produce the corresponding and expected amorous heroic or tragic *rasas*. The comic ganas are born out of the ashes of the sublime. They mock heroes and lovers, sages and saints. (Siegel 1987). In an earlier section, we discussed the Indian philosophical concept of *Maya*, a hoax, which is said to be the centre of a phenomenal world. Extending this concept to a joke, comedy, it is just that- an illusory delight which does not offer liberation, but keeps one rooted well within the world. In Zagor, the people not only share in the religiosity, but also by laughing together share in the comic mode. Complicity in the Zagor is then created by the structuring of the ritual itself, and by a willingness on the part of the audience to allow for a shared vision.

In the final analysis, the Performance achieves what a text without it does not. It actually brings the people together, resolves tensions, dissolves differences, lightens up the atmosphere of day-to-day problems, entertains and reaffirms a co-existence within a shared set of codes and makes them all feel one in all those moments of *rasa*. At the same time, it reminds them of the differences among them and yet coerces them into a unity. That is the power of a performance, of a ritual and of the final experience of aesthetics.