APPENDICES

Pravin Pandya the Playwright, *Haathi Raja*
INTERVIEW 1

Interview with Pravin Pandya the Playwright of *Haathi Raja*

RESEARCHER. Can you throw some light on your works

P PANDYA. Three plays *Haathi Raaja, Sattadhish*, and *Ek Divas* collected in volume *Haathi Raja ane Bija Natak*, apart from that four full length plays which have been performed but not published, around 20 one act plays and currently am experimenting and exploring the Akhyan parampara of Premanand which I am drawn to and fascinated about.

RESEARCHER. Tell us something about the use of folk theatre in your play.

P PANDYA. At the very outset I would like to clarify that folk theatre and folk forms are two different things. Anyone can use and perform folk form, but only traditional artists perform folk theatre. So what I do is not folk theatre but I make use of the folk form creatively that is what I have done in *Haathi Raja*.

RESEARCHER. What inspired you to write the play?

P PANDYA. I wanted to have a play which has mass appeal, which was challenging, a play which appeals to the entire country and if I intend to do that I have to take recourse to mythology and history. I perfectly remember that in 1985 a big debate was held in Ahmedabad. I was a student studying theatre and at that time, Vijay Tendulkar had come here. I was working at ISRO where I had the opportunity to meet him. I thought folk form has been used in Ghashiram but its background is historical. Then I had Tughlaq in front of me and many other plays apart from it, so my question to Tendulkar was “If I want to write a play with mass appeal why do we have to go to mythology and
History.” He remarked that mythology and history have a limitation, a common man does not have its complete knowledge, if he doesn’t understand how Karnad has related Thuglaq to Nehru era everything will go above his head. Such plays are made for a particular class of people. As a youngsters at that time I would say that I am a slave of History and Mythology. So Tendulkar said that you try to do something different, something new, and Haathi Raja was the result.

RESEARCHER. Why did you employ of a folk form in your play Haathi Raja?

P PANDYA. One question that always lingered in my mind was what is democracy? We have had many long discussions, articles written everything is there but we are not able to easily understand it nor can it be easily explained to others. This democratic setup has an ambiguity attached to it, so what can I do about it, how can I write a play about it. Many political plays were written at that point of time in Gujarati and at the national level but I hardly have any idea of a play written on democracy which talks about the voters who are they, how does the system work etc. During that time street theatre was quite prevalent, I started my carrier through street theatre. Two national street theatre festivals were held at that time one in Ahmedabad and one in Baroda. Street theatre artists from around the world had come here. Different types of plays were performed in Hindi, Gujarati etc. I wondered how would I communicate with people at a farther point, a person living in the streets, the vegetable vendor or one who pulls the lorry, and if I did communicate what kind of language would I use, what kind of theatrical device would I use. One thing that I dawned on me and I understood perfectly, that a thing presented though singing can be easily understood than a two page dialogue, moreover the couplet is composed, enacted and danced to so is all the more effective. Therefore I was drawn towards the folk form. I had a lot of reservations regarding Bhavai every
government scheme would employ it and was in a terrible state. I was always clear of
the thought that it was necessary to revive Bhavai, that one should come out the
traditional ta thaiya thaiya ta thai and the characters of Ranglo and Rangli and the tihai.
I was studying dramatics and it was seen in the same manner and I wanted to change it.
Moreover it is very flexible and therefore can make most, of the creative inputs, which
Jabbar Patel also mentions in the director’s note to Ghashiram Kotwal.

RESEARCHER. Which other folk genres have been used in the play

P PANDYA. An interesting part about Haathi Raja is that it has not only used a folk form but
also folk tale. I read a lot about democracy and had a lot of influence of Marx, but I
thought if it is intellectualized a lot then it will become complicated for a common man
to understand. So suddenly I was reminded of a folk tale told by my mother, that there
was a Prince who was exiled from his country and take refuge in other state. It was
already evening and the gates were already closed so he sleeps near them at night. He
gets up in the morning and the door opens as Elephant comes with an urn in the trunk
and spills water from it on him and he is made the king of the place. Therefore ‘Haathi
Kalash Dhole te Raja kehvay’ became the take of point of the play. So I had a motif
with me, I already had the symbol of democracy and the Elephant and the things fell in
place.

I discussed the play with a few friends in the beginning some of them commented that
it was very simple. I told them I want to simplify it further. During 1995 the language
of the plays would be very difficult. Hence the folk form and folk tale meet merge
together and a modern thought democracy the play is written but in very simple
language.
Researcher: The play is a political satire did you have and party of government in mind to hit at?

P PANDYA. No not at all, it is just the system in general that I write about. There are two very clear things in the play, one that the elephant makes the king so it she who should be important, instead of that the king becomes important, people run after the king shouting his praises and no one is bothered about elephant and the second why a democratic system? so that a person even at the last at the end benefits but that does not happen at all, such a democratic system moves with money and muscle power both, the irony and tragedy of which is visible in the play.

Research: Can you throw some light on the language used?

P PANDYA. I have used simple Gujarati, innumerable songs are used written in couplets along with prose and poetry. As discussed earlier songs have a stronger appeal and with my experience with street theatre I was aware in what kind of song will fit into a particular situation, where it is to be put, the tune, wordings etc. The theatre person within me helped me write the play and influenced my language. So I believe if you want to write a play you have to do theatre, without doing theatre, the play cannot be written. Novel, poetry in a particular style as it is meant to be read but if you want to write a play than you have to understand what theatre is as the final destination of any play is to be performed and staged. It is very difficult because when you think, your thoughts change location every five minutes, and then you don’t change the location much, and if you change them then you have to change it through a dramatic technique and it has a language for it, the language of the play is different from the language of simple literature. What is seen is not to be spoken and what can be seen and what goes on inside to the character has to be replicated in dialogues in some way or the other. So
the language of theatre is this, it is the visual and the spoken language that merge or confront each other to create a meaning, so the language becomes completely different. Apart from talking of language my mother has been a major source, though she was illiterate yet her language was very rich, all the quotations and proverbs that I have used in the play comes from my mother, my father learnt Vedant from Kashi so the language for my poetry is influenced by my father.

RESEARCHER. What is the response of the audience to such plays?

P PANDYA. If some one tells you a fairy tale would you not like it? you would rather prefer to reading Arabian nights rather than reading a post modern novel because they are timeless, and the biggest reason behind using the folk form is that I wanted to go into a timeless period hence they audience thoroughly enjoys it.

Researcher : How is your play different from other playwrights who have used the same form?

P PANDYA. Baradi into Rai no Darpanray goes into alientation, he uses the Brechtian theory and modern techniques in his play, I have put my play in modern time itself. The biggest experiment was to bring Asait and Mandad as characters which was opposed, saying it was not possible, people remarked how could I do it, you are bringing the originator of Bhavai as a character, the audience will never accept it, which was successfully achieved through allegory. I go into allegory, Baradi goes into history, the folk tale has the same treatment. Mena Gujri is also based on a folk tale but he gives it a classical touch, when Parikh wrote Mena Gujri he had Jayshankar Sundri by his side, Shantaben had National School of Drama. I have nothing but young actors like you’ll to work with and I must say to write simply is the most difficult. Mostly as in Bhavai
all characters are introduced through their aavnu, but I have used one single aavnu which gives the audience an introduction to the entire play in short.

RESEARCHER. Why is there a paucity of translations from Gujarati to English?

P PANDYA. The question will lead you to the politics of literature, literature has its own politics, plays like these challenge the established system then why would they be translated more over I feel if the play hadn’t the recognition of Sangeet Natak Academy you wouldn’t be even working on it that’s a hardcore reality.

Researcher : Any concluding lines Sir?

P PANDYA. Those who have roots in the villages have a different experience, cognition and language of a different kind from that of the cities. While writing the play one thing got clear that what is Indian theatre? a very clear outline can be given it consists of Sanskrit tradition, Folk tradition or modern tradition that is what Indian theatre is all about. Mere modernity does not provide much if we go back to the roots with it then it will be all the more exhilarating.
Prof. Janak Dave, renowned Bhavai Artist
INTERVIEW 2

Prof. Janak Dave, Ex. Dean, Dramatics Department, Gujarat college and renowned Bhavai Artist.

RESEARCHER. Can you throw some light on the exponents of Bhavai?

JANAK DAVE. Keeping in view the structure of Asait Thakkar, I am the first person to workout “Vesh evi varta, ane varta evo vesh” following the style, narration, music and bandish attuned to it. Another name worth mentioning is Chimanbhai Nayak, who passed away before two years, who can be termed as the real teacher of Bhavai. Having performed innumerable roles, both male and female characters, he is responsible raising Darpana in the field of Bhavai loknatya, other names associated are Kailash Pandya, Damini Mehta, Nisarg Trivedi, Archan Trivedi, Shubha etc. I have penned a book on the origin, state and decline of Bhavai, which will be published in Hindi from Bhopal in the near future.

RESEARCHER. How did Bhavai originate?

JANAK DAVE. Asait was a priest of Patel Cast. His nearest friend and disciple was Hema Patel, whose daughter Ganga, was kidnapped by Sardar Jahanrose’s army. Hema Patel received this news and lost his temper, but he was helpless, and requested Asait to free his daughter, Asait therefore approached the Sardar, through his emotional and melodious singing style he pleased Sardar. Sardar offered him gold coins but he refused and asked the freedom of his daughter Ganga. To prove his friend’s daughter as his own Asait took meal with Ganga and therefore the Sidhpuri Brahmans outcasted him. Instead of taking revenge against them he subsided his anger and used his inner force
for creation of 360 Bhavai playlets, vesas on varied subjects of which on seventeen or eighteen are performed today.

RESEARCHER. How was Bhavai looked at, in the past?

JANAK DAVE. The Bhavaiya’s were invited on various functions like birth of a child, the would be welcomed by the Nagarpati and Nagarsheth, with music and fanfare and brought to the Chachar or the Chowk (village square). The people gave money to tie and untie the turbans. The Stage manager or the Veshgore visits the place in advance for selling of the tickets, and checking for the facilities. The Veshgore “Chachar pure” (sanctify the place) by sprinkling a mixture of Urad, Oil, Gau mutra (cow’s urine) and cow dung, in the four corners and centre of the demarcated area to ward off all the evils. To talk of an interesting incident, an artist portraying the vesha of a Madari was very popular and people offered him lots of money, another artist became jealous of his popularity and used black magic on him, as result of which he could not utter a sound, the people were superstitious, one of them says that they employ young boys, around fourteen to fifteen years of age, they perform such rituals to protect them from an evil eye, as they would not be able to perform without them.

RESEARCHER. Can you tell me something about the performances?

JANAK DAVE. Asait had three sons, Naran, Mandad and Jairaj. After being outcasted, he settled in Unjha with his sons, Mandad persevered the tradition of Bhavai of which Jhanda Jhulan is one of the popular ones. Before the performers, two Bhungaliyas, play the Bhungals, one a “Nar” (male) Bhungal, played with low notes and “Mada” Bhungal for the higher pitch. The dance like Bharatnatyam and Kathak depends on footwork and
is so graceful, it feels as if the water flowing beneath our feet on a river bed. Then there’s the invocation of Goddess Amba, he sings

Aave j mata mujh thaki, aa
ane paaye jhanjhar no jhankar
e taara khela chaachar khelse
aaj jaine tu kare shaiyari..

It is followed by the invocation and vesha of Ganesh which he sings,

Dundado Dukh Bhanjano
Ane sadaye baal vesh
Pratham pehlo smariye
Gauri Putra Ganesh.

The one used by Nisarg and Archan Trivedi’s troupe is,

Pratham Ganpati nu Dhyan tame Dharjo re (2)
Maa no mujro karine chaachar ramjo re

Since Ganpati has arrived on stage, a Brahman is required to do the pooja, therefore it is followed by the vesha of Brahman. Bhavai is mostly in verse form, it hardly is in prose form, and even it is prosaic it will be replete with music and songs. Bhavai originated around the 14th century, in a very conservative and orthodox society, but if you look at the Bhavai veshas, every third vesha has a Muslim characters, for e.g. the vesha of Juthan has Chatki batik who is Brahman, which goes to show the secular nature of the form and also provided a mirror to the social evils of the time, it reflected the marital problems, social and political the status of women in the society etc. and therefore exhibited a reformist tendency and Asait can be considered as a social reformer.

RESEARCHER. Can you throw some light on music used?
JANAK DAVE. The traditional vesha’s use the following taal’s, Chetvan, Dodhiyo, Targalo, Lavani, Dipchandi, Kervo, Jagtaal, Halo Chotal, the steps are synchronized on the beats of the taals, then we have Ulano used in wedding songs and also have used in many films, the Chautaal is basically used for female characters, the women characters light a diya to the goddesses, and place a Mashal on a nearby tree. In olden times they would use Mashals, diya Moon light as their lighting props, they would hold “Kakda” (type of diya) and perform. It is through it that they would express themselves.

RESEARCHER. Why were the female roles donned by men in Bhavai?

JANAK DAVE. The performances would continue up till midnight or sometimes dawn, moreover they would have to travel to different places at odd times and odd hours and that too we are talking of the fourteenth to the eighteenth century which was a very conservative society, therefore women were never employed.

RESEARCHER. What is the status of Bhavai today?

JANAK DAVE. The dogs and cats deface the place where Bhavai is said to have originated, none of the governments have paid any heed to it, worth mentioning are the efforts of Vinayak Raval from Uttar Gujarat who established the Asait Sahitya Sabha and went from one village to another to and collected preserved the written manuscripts. The emergence of Natak, films, TV was responsible for its decline. It is almost dying. Recently a college in Mansa held a national seminar on Bhavai, it was a pathetic show, the artists of north Gujarat could not play the bhungal also properly. Moreover the social stigma was such that the parents would not marry their children to these Bhavaiya’s, they belong basically three castes Nayak, Bhojak and Vyas. The Bhojak would sing in the Jain Dersars, you would find many Bhojaks working in Akashwaani,
they basically relate to music. One would find the Vyas around Kathiyavad, around villages of Viramgam and Porbandar.

You will find people making Bhungal in Visnagar, but there’s hardly anyone to play it. Around 1962, Jayshankarbhai remarked that somehow we should preserve the form and therefore proper training should be imparted, with this intention a Bhavai school was started in Visnagar. He would send Kailashbhai every fifteen days, Archan and Nisarg would teach the students Ganesh Vandana, even Chinubhai Nayak who was the principal at H K worked very hard for it, but there’s nothing left now, in his words that “Galudia remade che” meaning puppies play there, it also desolated. Dinkar Bhojak mentioned that instead of the government, school should be given to an intuition which work towards uplifting and preserving the form.

Moreover the professors today lack research sensibility, they themselves are not acquainted with the current trends, therefore the tradition is difficult to be maintained.
INTERVIEW 3

Dr. Mahesh Champaklal is the Ex. Dean, Faculty of Performing Arts, MSU, litterateur, Critic and Actor,

RESEARCHER. Your comments on Bhavai and its state today.

M CHAMPAKLAL. Bhavai is definitely the traditional theatre form of Gujarat and in India you will find different kinds of tradition or theatre forms – most of the southern traditional theatre forms are dance oriented, the northern ones are music oriented. In Bhavai there is the predominance of the Hasya and satire, in a way Bhavai and Tamasha belong to the same genre because there is political and social satire. The forms that I find identical are Tamasha, Bhavai and Maach as they comment on social life rather than religious and therefore termed as secular forms. We find different languages Hindi and Urdu, different cultures we have Muslim characters a Hindu wife and Muslim Husband such kind of secularism you won’t find in other forms therefore it differs from the rest of the forms.

RESEARCHER. Can you throw some light on the revival of the Bhavai.

M CHAMPAKLAL. There are two kinds of revival, of Bhavai. There is one set of writers like Janak Dave who compose new vesas but the form remains the same so there is no experimentation with the form, but the experimentation is with the content so Janak Dave and others they continue writing new Bhavai vesha, but then there are other writers who make creative use of the elements of Bhavai. Chinu modi in Jalaka uses Bhavai as the Purvaranga to the original plot through which the psychology of the characters is revealed through it, introduces his characters before the enactment of the main play called the Avnu which is an integral part of Bhavai, but he does not use it
exactly as in the traditional form of Bhavai. *Rai no Parvat* written in 1911 bases his play on the story from Bhavai but does not employ elements of Bhavai in it, because in Pandit Yug it was considered as obscene.

Bhavai was revived after post independence period going back to their roots it started with two stalwarts Rasiklal Parikh’s *Mena Gujri* wherein you find couplets based on Bhavai and Chandravadan Mehta’s *Hoholika*, he keeps the traditional form intact and is a satire on the Judicial system and is highly influenced by Brecht’s *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* where the central character the comic character Azdak is also found in the form Kaazi in Hoholika. In traditional theatre music and dance play a central role which has been brought back by these writers. Chinu modi has creatively used both the elements, the original meter is found intact in Jalaka. The themes are contemporary Rai no Parvat is a political play, Jalaka is more about motherhood, Rai no Darpanray is about the emancipation of women etc.

The actors having a direct conversation with the audience or the Ranglo directly addressing the audience has also been utilized in a different manner. Baradi consciously uses the device of alienation his play, the original scenes from *Rai no Parvat* are performed and there is another set of characters who comment upon it which is a kind of alienation which is present in Bhavai but the performers are not conscious about it. For example an actor named Ganpat who plays the role of Ganpat then steps out of the character and says I am Ganpat, he smokes and then next moment he is Ganpat, so that stepping in and stepping out is nothing but alienation.

Even in *Haathi Raja*, Asait is one of the characters in Chinu Modi’s Asait no vesh, Asait himself becomes a character, that flexibility is there. Brecht says his construction of plot is episodic which is also the case with Bhavai, which are independent episodes
in itself and differs from Aristotle’s concept of organic unity. This organic unity is not found in epic theatre as it is episodic. Similarly in Bhavai you can add a vesa or remove it as an when time permits.

RESEARCHER. Can one associate IPTA also with revival of traditional forms.

M CHAMPAKLAL. They started the movement and it’s a part of freedom fight and struggle for freedom. IPTA tried to have social plays having the issues of Indian society, they also tried to revive the traditional forms. Shanta Gandhi was a part and parcel of IPTA she saw the possibility of the revival of Bhavai, in Jasma so the traditional vesh of Jasma and Jasma as composed by Shanta Gandhi is totally different. Jasma here in the traditional theatre form is Sati, and she is the symbol of spirituality, so what fundamental change is made by Shanta Gandhi is that she is a labour class woman and strengthening the inner qualities of a woman, she is an empowered woman. Highly influenced by the leftist ideology and the movement her Jasma is not Sati but a ‘Mehnat Kash’ woman. Even the portrayal of Ganpati is different, the Ganpati her is Ganpati meaning leader of the people he no longer remains the divine character. So there is a change in the original characterization. The character of Rangli is also one of her important contributions.

RESEARCHER. Does the concept of revival do justice to the form?

M CHAMPAKLAL. One finds a genuine recreation and a pseudo recreation, so many attempts were by playwrights, without understanding the elements and the traditional folk theatre forms on the whole. In Bhavai the Sutrdhar or the Ranglo takes the narrative forward, we have the Ranglo in Mithyabhiman but it is the alter ego so that’s a different kind of Vidushak. Similarly the use of Puppets or dolls in Hayavadana they
do not perform the role as in the traditional puppet theatre by the reveal the psychology of Padmini. The use of half curtain is traditional theatrical technique. You bring back these elements in a new text then there’s a problem about performance. My point is Ramlila, Raslila, Yakshagana these are purely traditional theatre forms. what you are writing is a literary form when you take the elements then when it is performed it more or less becomes the form , Bhavai when performed more or less becomes Bhavai, Hayavadana becomes when Yakshagana when directed by Vijaya Mehta and B V Karanth where they used the performance tradition and not the literary tradition. A Reasearch scholar is always at a loss whether you should evaluate as text only or you have to take into consideration some performance.

Researcher : While watching a few performances I found that there is a lot difference between the text and the performance.

M CHAMPAKLAL. See when Kailash Pandya or Janak Dave uses the elements of the tradition he cannot discard it, and that the issue- the text which you read and visualize it gets totally different so when Jabbar Patel directs Ghashiram Kotwal he goes back to the living tradition what Vijay Tendulkar does is that he gives signals that here there is a scope now to concretize these things on the stage he has to goes back to the tradition Tendulkar simply gives a stage instruction that the Brahmins form a curtain and he is inspired by the use of human curtain from the traditional theatre form so what he has to do is to visit the past and come back to the present which is paradoxical, in case of Pravin Pandya he may be or not may be well versed in Bhavai but the director has to be so when it is performed on the stage he will add something from his side which is not there in the text so there is a constant conflict between the text and performance. The writer provides you the text and the theatre is brought about by the director.
RESEARCHER. How do the audience perceive such plays?

Champklal: First of all they are attracted because of the elements of the traditional theatre and gradually the watch and find it amazing because the form is traditional and the message is different. While performing Hayavadana with Bhavai, the Sutradhar while singing the famous traditional song the audience was so engrossed that we actors utilized the opportunity to our advantage and took up the transposition and when the song finishes the audience realizes the change, they enjoy the performance a serious critical analysis is seldom found. In the case of the text you can read it reread it, reevaluate it and reinterpret it but when it is performed this advantage is not there, one is your individual interpretation and the other is interpreted by others for you. So as a reader you have your interpretation which you try to find in the performance, if you find its ok with you, when you don’t find you don’t accept it. so that leads us to a point of text driven criticism and performance driven criticism.

RESEARCHER. Is a there a difference between a play script and the text?

M CHAMPAKLAL. A play script is nothing but a documentation of what is performed it a collaborative work of the actor and the director whereas the text is the playwrights text.

RESEARCHER. The reasons for paucity of translations from Gujarati into English?

M CHAMPAKLAL. There is a lacuna on the part of the literary world of Gujarat, because they don’t translate or the writers are not interested in getting it translated into the languages. This is one way traffic, we translate many things but our works are not translated, the thing is that, it’s a tragedy on our part that we are not taking any initiative, the writers themselves take initiative, Rabindranath Tagore himself took the initiative and saw that his *Gitanjali* is translated into English, initiative was taken by
him and Yeats and other poets appreciated when it got translated Rajendra Shah who
got Jnanpith award he was denied it initially because his works were not translated once
his works were translated into Hindi next year he was awarded it. Had *Haathi Raja*
been translated into Hindi and performed by some alumni of NSD it would become a
national issue. So it is a neglect on our part, we don’t care about it, one is to be held
responsible for that, others are not going to translate it, why others should get it
translated you have to make an effort to get it translated.

Why people outside Gujarat know Sudha Desai and why is Shanta Gandhi so popular?
so for recognition either your play should be translated into English for international
audience and Hindi for the national audience. South Indians though they oppose Hindi,
their plays became popular, as they were translated and performed in Hindi. Girish
Karnad’s play is done in Hindi, *Jokumaraswamy* is done in Hindi when they become
popular, they get national recognition. When B V Karanth performed *Hayavadana* it is
after that, Karnard got recognition. Many works are being translated and Sahitya
Akademi is taking it into consideration.

RESEARCHER. Any concluding lines?

M CHAMPAKLAL. Your research deals with not only text but also a performance tradition
therefore you can incorporate and explore the performance angle also.
Kali Kala Mandal, Bhavai Troupe
INTERVIEW 4

Interview with a Traditional Bhavai Troupe From Unjha

Shri Kali Kala Natak Mandal, Unjha

ADDRESS: Shri Kali kala Natak Mandal, Unjha

Nayak vaas, Nr. Rushat Chaura

Unjha – 384170

Name of the Artists of the Troupe

1. Shri. Jayeshbhai Nayak
2. Shri. Laljibhai Nayak
3. Shri. Bharatbhai Nayak
4. Shri. Komalbhai Nayak
5. Shri. Rajubhai Nayak
6. Shri. Vikrambhai Nayak
7. Shri. Piyushbhai Nayak
8. Dr. Ajay Nayak
9. Shri. Hiteshbhai Nayak
10. Shri. Girishbhai Nayak
11. Shri. Vijaybhai Nayak
12. Shri. Kiritbhai Nayak
13. Shri. Bhargavbhai Nayak
14. Shri. Umangbhai Nayak
15. Shri. Tejasbhai Nayak
16. Shri. Akshaybai Nayak
17. Shri. Bhanubhai Nayak

The Regular Profession of the Artists apart from Bhavai

- Doctor
- Teacher
- Business
- Student
- Government Jobs

RESEARCHER. How long have you been performing Bhavai?

ARTIST. We have been performing Bhavai from a long time, it was initiated at the
Vanagata Mahakali Mandir, Unjha.

RESEARCHER. Which castes do the artists belong to?

ARTIST. Most of the artists belong to the Nayak castes, believed to be the descendants of
Asait.

RESEARCHER. On which occasions do you’ll perform Bhavai?

ARTIST. Bhavai can be performed all round the year, the one performed in the month of
Chaitra (March/Apri) is called ‘Jatar’ which is a compulsory ritual. During the
ritualistic performances only the Nayaks perform the Bhavai.
RESEARCHER. Can you throw some light on the origin of Bhavai.

ARTIST. Around 1300 in the village Umapur which is now known as Unjha, there lived a Hema Patel whose daughter’s name was Ganga, who was very beautiful. Allauddin Khilji ruled it. The Subedar Khajanroz had come to Unjha, he saw Ganga filling water, and was enamored by her beauty. He decided that he would marry her and kidnapped Ganga. His father was a bit tensed. They went to Hema Patel’s house who was a Auudichya Brahmin and told him the story, he tells him that Ganga is like his daughter also and will bring her back, saying this he went to Khajanroz to set her free, wherein he was asked by Khajanroz that if she was his daughter then he must dine with her. During that time the Brahmins would not eat with any one from other caste but Asait eats with her to save her and returns her to Hema Patel the father. Asait thought that he would be praised for the act instead he was rebuked for having dinned with a lower caste and was excommunicated from his community. Asait came to Unjha with his three sons. But when patel came to know about it he asked him to stay at his place but he refused. He decided to stay put at Umiya Mata’s temple and poured out his heart before the goddess and became unconscious. Umiya mata, Bahuchar mata, Amba mata and Mahakali mata appeared before him and gave him a boon, “son take this chunri, bangles, bindi and said “Ja Bhavsagar Tar … ja…tar” therefore it is called Jatar. He said “mother I have become alone”, then the goddess took out a round instrument from and said whenever you it will be played by him all the 51 shaktipith gods and goddess will be appear and be with you and support you. She said “Go Nayak, perform the vesas all the Gods and Godess are with you.”
Sarsawati resided on Asait’s Tongue and within a night he wrote 360 vesas. He started giving wisdom to the orthodox and the superstitious who believed in blind beliefs. and they began to be called Nayaks. The three brothers came of three houses and therefore “Tran Ghar Vaada” which later came to be known as Targala.

Beliefs related to Bhavai Bhavai:

- At the place where the Bhavai is performed and the Bhungal is played it is believed that 51 shaktipith’s goddesses are present.
- Whoever puts the Gunghroos (musical anklets) on their laps after the completion of the Bhavai vesas worn during the performance their wishes are fulfilled.
- On performing Bhavai 51 havan blessings are received.
- If in bhavai a halardu (lullby) is sung then they never fall ill.

RESEARCHER. What is the response of the audience?

ARTIST. It is good and motivating. They enjoy a lot. The young, old, children, women all enjoy watching Bhavai.

RESEARCHER. Is there a difference in the reaction of the rural and the urban audience?

ARTIST. It is similar, rural or urban the audience is equally enthusiastic about the performance, there is hardly any difference.

RESEARCHER. What other professions are the artists linked to, apart from Bhavai?

ARTIST. Some of them are government servants one of them is a doctor, we have a lecturer, businessman etc. It is difficult to get an affordable income through Bhavai so the artists have to resort to other professions.
RESEARCHER. Has Bhavai now become professionalized? If yes then its effect on the traditional performances.

ARTIST. Yes it has been professionalized. There are certain government schemes/plans which are offered only to a few people. The government has come out with a CD on Bhavai in which we have contributed but we haven’t received any help from the government in terms of any incentives for the preservation of the folk form.

RESEARCHER. What according to you is the status of Bhavai today?

ARTIST. The importance and the popularity of Bhavai is decreasing day by day. People believe that performing a Bhavai is a mockery, it demeans and brings down the social status of a person, people look down on it and therefore people refrain from joining it and as a result the number of Bhavai artists is decreasing day by day. Moreover people like us are enthusiastic and keen to learn about the form but the traditional artists are not ready to teach or pass it on to the newer artists may be because of jealousy and therefore the state of Bhavai is deteriorating.

RESEARCHER. What steps should be taken for the propagation and preservation of Bhavai?

ARTIST. A day in commemoration of Bhavai should be celebrated so that the people come to know about it and spreads awareness about it.

RESEARCHER. Which are the Vesas performed by your troupe?

ARTIST. The Vesas performed by the troupe are

- Ganpati no Vesa
- Mahakali no Vesa
- Juthan no Vesa
• Jasma Odan no Vesa
• Miya Bibi no Vesa
• Seth Sagdasa no Vesa
• Umiya na Varas
• Kajoda no Vesa
• Bhagat Piyaji no Vesa
• Bava No Vesa
• Chosath Jogni no Vesa
• Dosi no Vesa
• Madari no Vesa
• Lakha ni Katar (Lakha’s Scissors)
• Abhimanyu no Vesa
• Khodal no Aamkarro
• Ram Sita no Vesa
• Ravana no Vesa
• Vanshvaali
• Karan Ghelo no Vesa
• Bharthari no Vesa
• Paniyaari no Vesa

RESEARCHER. Any message for the future artists

ARTIST. That they should come forward in persevering and performing the form and not look down upon it.
Keremane Shivanand Hegde, Renowned Yakshagana Artist

Photo Courtesy: Shivanand Hegde
INTERVIEW 5

Keremane Shivananda Hegde is a renowned Yakshagana artist, a recipient of various awards and runs the Shreemaya Yakshagana Ranga Shikshana Kendra, Keremane.

RESEARCHER. Can you tell me something about yourself.

S HEGDE. We are professional Yakshagana artists, my father, grandfather, I am the sixth generation artist. We have a troupe and training centre. From the last thirty two years we have been providing Yakshagana training, free training without any fees like a gurukul, so that students from all walks of life can come and stay here and take the benefit. We have an auditorium, a small school building. We offer a one year course for Yakshagana, we have a troupe of fifteen members, our Yakshagana group is eighty to eighty two years old. We perform on invitation, we conduct certain festivals with an aim to promote art and culture.

RESEARCHER. Can you throw some light on Yakshagana folk theatre?

S HEGDE. First of all, I would like to clarify that it is a traditional art form and not a folk art form. If you have seen Kathakkali, it would be that way, it starts with the Purvaranga, earlier it was called Bayalata, open air theatre, “ata” means a play. The performance goes for the entire night, usually in temple premises or different places, now a days everywhere in the auditorium, open air etc. The beginning of Yakshagana will be from the green room, starting with the Ganesh Puja, by singing songs and arti and then move towards the stage, with two women actors, means men playing women roles, Balagopala, young, heroic, both gopalas, Krishna and Balarama. The young Krishna
and Balrama will dance in praise of God, Visnu or Ganapati. After this the story will start, at the beginning, the character will introduce himself, there is dialogue, dance, system of Bhagavata, the Madhyama or the Chande, the three kings will be there behind the stage.

RESEARCHER. Can you elaborate on the characters and the dramatic performance?

S HEGDE. In the case of the story, we always take the story from Ramayana, Mahabharata and Bhagvata Purana. So if the story is from Ramayana, the story will be begin with Rama and Laxmana. If it is from the Mahabharata, it will begin with Pandava’s entry. So the main thing is that the story will start with a good character. That is the concept, so then the character introduces itself, nature and the purpose of situation, everything in dialogue. There will be a song or two, and will be attuned to a different “Taala”. There are seven taal’s like Triputa, Eka, Poora, Astha, Aadi etc, it will be based on anyone of the tala, and then there are Raaga’s like Moona, Kabodi, Aravi, Sanyasi etc, there are about 30 ragas present now.

So the performance, all the with dance, abhinaya, dialogues, the four major elements as explained in the Natyashastra, viz. Angika, Vachika, Aharya, Sattvika. So the story is told through, dance, dialogues, costume and in a narrative way. There are some typical dances, there is a Journey dance, Hunting dance, Moddologa, five Pandavas will start this, it means an introductory dance. There are hundreds of stories in Mahabharata and Ramayana, traditionally the play goes till Dawn, it starts at nine or ten in the night and goes till the morning, but now a days it is cut short to two or three hours.

RESEARCHER. At the beginning you said that you consider it as a traditional art for, so is it not a folk form?
S HEGDE. If you see the structure, codification we can’t call this folk, it has a proper Raga, proper dance, there is a lot of codification, there are written texts and there are many other things, it is neither classical nor folk, it is a combination of the folk as well as the classical elements.

RESEARCHER. Can you throw some light on the other forms of Yakshagana.

S HEGDE. Yakshagana originated around the 15th century, in Vijaynagar kingdom and after the collapse of the kingdom it spread out in three to four states, like you have the Melatur Bhagavata Mela, which is very similar to Yakshagana, it was one of the piece of Yakshagana, there is what they call Chindu Yakshagana, Kochipodi Yakshagana, there is the Dashavatara, some years back it was called Dashavatara, there are numerous forms in the in Tamilnadu. So all these are South Indian forms, that come under Yakshagana, there are three to four other forms but their quality is different. Here in Karnataka there is Moodalpaya and Padvulopaya, moodal means East, therefore it is an eastern form, Padvulam, means Paschima, meaning west. East and West there are two diversions, in the west Padvulopaya there are three other varities, Tenkutittu and Badakutittu, again in Badagutittu there are two styles, tittu means style. In the belt of Arravali, the belt of Karnataka, there are three varities of Yakshagana, on the eastern side there is the Modalpaya Yakshagana and Gattakakore Yakshagana, all these Yakshagana you can call them folk as they are not much developed. So the term Yakshagana fits the whole of South India.

RESEARCHER. What is the state of the form today, is it still living form of art or a dying form of art?
S HEGDE. In one way if you look at the adage arts for arts sake it is declining, lot of troupes have adapted the cinematic way of presentation and popular trends, they do not give consideration to hard work and deep study, there are immense number of performances specially from the season of November to May till the rains come, there will be hundreds of troupes out there. Every event, the people want to have a Yakshagana, but if you look at the quality it is not so good, I mean it’s very disappointing. There’s a dilemma, it’s a good time commercially and bad time traditionally.

RESEARCHER. If I talk of Bhavai, the folk theatre of Gujarat, the art is dying and there are hardly any traditional artists left, is this the case with Yakshagana?

S HEGDE. The art and the quality is declining, but the structure I mean is completely moulding itself into a kind. Some forms of Yakshagana like Gattakore are facing the same problem, they have completely vanished, its difficult to find troupes, but on the other side Yakshagana has hundreds of troupes and that is amazing.

RESEARCHER. Do you receive any support from the government?

S HEGDE. Government has schemes for supporting Art and Culture, but the subgroups get the benefit that’s all, but there is no specific support like they have in Kerala. But there are a lot of Industrialists, temples, the temples itself conducts Yakshagana, as people will offer Yakshagana for the fulfillment of their wishes and the thanksgiving. So there are nearly 30 to 35 groups run by the temple, sometimes when people offer Yakshagana, their turn will come after 3, 4, or 5 years. There is one troupe Dharamshala very famous temple, if you book your show your turn comes after 13 years, what I mean is that many bookings are there as it is a kind of offering also.

RESEARCHER. Which is prominent Rasa in Yakshagana.
S HEGDE. One finds almost all the rasa here, there is Hasya, Shringara, Bhibhatsa, Veera, all will be used in different stories, sometimes some stories emphasize on some particular Rasa’s, for e.g. Karna’s story will have the Karuna Rasa, similarly there are lot of other stories, Harishchandra, Kichakvadha, Kalyana, Subhdhara etc.

RESEARCHER. Is it a totally religious form or has secular connotation attached to it, is the form performed by specific castes?

S HEGDE. Actually it will not do much advocacy like untouchability etc, but some troupes are very conscious about presenting the Yakshagna, they want to present a good aesthetic show that’s all. No there are no caste restrictions, everyone can perform it, there are Muslim and Christian artists also. Olden days there may be some restrictions but not now a days.

RESEARCHER. Make up is important element of Yakshagana, what sort of things go into the makeup of the artists.

S HEGDE. Earlier it was made out of natural colour, but now, whatever we get in the market, commercial market, some oxide, like red oxide, yellow oxide, we mainly use red, yellow, black, white colours. The colours are purchased from the market and mixed with coconut oil, so it doesn’t harm the skin and the face, we can use it upto eighteen years without having any skin problem, the other materials are local, cotton costumes etc. are used.

RESEARCHER. Can you throw some light on the use of curtain in Yakshagana.

S HEGDE. Curtain always introduces the characters, that is the major use is for entry and exit of characters, sometimes, in war between Bhima and Kaurava, Kaurava falls down than
he can’t go off stage without the curtain. Somebody will bring the curtain and from the
behind of the curtain, he will be removed from stage.

RESEARCHER. What do you think about the use of Yakshagana by modern Indian
dramatists?

S HEGDE. I think there are a lot of them who use it, directors like Jambe, Chandrashekhar
Kambara, etc have used it to some extent. Now every drama school in Karnataka wants
Yakshagana training for one month, they invite us for a course so it is widely utilized
by them. It is good that they use certain elements of the form, and why not it we have
such a good art form, let them explore, but they do not give anything to the Yakshagana
form. They use less of classical elements as they are difficult, but traditional elements
like costume, dance, songs, style of music etc. can be easily adapted.
Abdul Majid Tambe, Manager Aryabhusan Theatre
INTERVIEW 6

Abdul Majid Tambe is the Manager of Aryabhushan Theatre, Pune.

RESEARCHER. Hello Sir. Could you please tell me something about yourself?

A MAJID. My name is Mr. Abdul Majid Tambe, I am of 60 years of age, belonging to Kolhati caste.

RESEARCHER. Tell us something about the Aryabhushan Theatre?

A MAJID.

*Origin:* This theatre was founded by my father Mr. Ahmed Seth Tambe in the year 1927. He was a visionary, he wanted to promote and sustain the Marathi Folk Art, viz. Tamasha through the theatre. He was also a socialist, in that he wanted to do something for the betterment and upliftment for the artists and other people who wanted to become artists, who wanted to dedicate their life to the art. He was a reformist too, as in those times during 1960’s, the government decided to put forward the Entertainment Tax Bill which was to be levied on these type of theatres also, performing folk art, but owing to incessant efforts and agitation against this rule, he finally won in exempting the Folk Theatre from under the Entertainment Tax Bill, which is still the same now. He endeavoured to do so, because he believed that Folk theatres are the modalities, playing major role in helping us know about our culture and heritage and therefore wanted to take it forward to future generations.

*Popularity:* Aryabhushan theatre is not only popular in Pune or Maharashtra but also in whole of India and even worldwide. I can very proudly say that Aryabhushan theatre is the only one of its kind in Pune or whole of Maharashtra. I don’t mean that there are no
other theatres, there are about approximately 40 to 50 theatres in Maharashtra at various places viz Kohlapur, Sangli, Solapur, Vai, Morali, but all of these have lost their essence and become a type of Kala Mandir. We have a lot of Phd candidates visiting us from all over India to get to know about the art of Tamasha to witness and have a glimpse of it. Moreover we have a lot of foreigners who study Indian Culture and Theatre Art forms, coming to us throughout the year to have deeper idea and first hand experience. It gives me immense joy to say that looking at the rich history, popularity and the contribution of the Aryabhushan theatre in Tamasha Art Form, Oxford University has cited its name in one of the chapters describing Tamasha and Indian Theatrical Art Forms.

RESEARCHER. Tell us something about the Artists Groups/ Troupes.

A MAJID. Here we have about 7 to 8 groups working tirelessly. Each group further consists of 8 to 10 people each. Thus Aryabhushan throughout the years hosts about 100 to 150 people in all. These people live, work here and consider Aryabhushan as their habitat. People are happy living and working here. Most of the portion what they earn they send it to their families in their villages, thereby helping their child’s education and taking care of other basic needs of their family there. This had helped many of their children to excel in the life and become engineers, doctors, police officers and so on.

RESEARCHER. What about the performances?

A MAJID. In a day we have performances for about 2 to 3 hours mostly in the evenings daily. Each group gets its own time period of about 20 to 25 minutes in which they perform according to their own likings. Then sometimes we organize private show in our own theatre for the sponsorers. We are also invited by various corporate firms,
political parties, NGO’s, in different cities of Maharashtra and India to perform our shows. Such shows which we perform can last for 6 to 8 hours depending upon the demand and the interest of the public. Our groups go to different villages also to perform during various mela’s that is Jatras and in such shows the time period can range from dusk to dawn. They also go to weddings for rendering their performances on demand. Thus in short the artist go on working whole year around except for a month near the Diwali and Dashera period.

RESEARCHER. How do you define the audience and its reaction?

A MAJID. Generally we have audiences consisting to about 15 to 20 people. The age of the people coming range from 20 to 60 years. Generally people who are interested watching or knowing about a local art form visit us. Sometimes people who are poor and who can afford modern entertainment modalities like multiplex, auditorium plays, sports competitions come here and get entertained as this is a cheap. Thus the interest of a person varies according to his economical condition, to his thoughtfulness. But one thing is sure, that almost anyone who comes to this theatre, it would hardly be difficult for anyone, not to get awe struck. So in the end everyone is surprised and enchanted by the efficiency and the talents of the artists, which is the thing which attracts them, luring them and also helping to bring others along with them. But with the evolvement of time the interests of the people have changed and now people like to see more of commercials songs and music as compared to traditional art, which is a sad thing.

RESEARCHER. Do people a regular audience for the shows economically viable?

A MAJID. Frankly speaking, just the people paying for ticket for watching the show do not however help in all the economical needs, but it is just a part of the entire thing. What
mainly helps in providing economic support are the private plays which some people ask us to perform. The plays to which we are invited to, be it from political groups, villages, weddings, or corporate firms. Moreover, some artists who perform exceptionally well and manage to enchant the public, they themselves are gifted by the public in form or kind or cash which boosts up the monetary gain in general.

RESEARCHER. Do you or the artists or the theatre get any help from the government?

A MAJID. I as a folk theatre manager do not receive any monetary aid or benefit from the government. However government does provide some monetary help to the artists with exceptional talents, but that too is not a major amount. And sometimes to our bad luck even if the government tries and helps, and somehow the aids or help, it does not reach us in the same proportion which the government would have intended to give.

RESEARCHER. Do you need any help from the government?

A MAJID. Yes indeed. It would be very helpful if the government helps in any way be it monetary or any other. And I think it should be the duty of the government to do something to provide favourable conditions for us to thrive and move forwards, because in the end the things which we do are for preserving and promoting our culture and heritage.

RESEARCHER Sir please tell us something about Tamasha?

A MAJID. Tamasha is an ancient folk theatre art form particularly from the Maharashtra region. In the ancient times it all started as a sort of entertainment form for the Kings. The Kings after coming from various wars and battles would be welcomed and entertained with this Tamasha. Thus this became the part and parcel of the local folk culture. But during those times and until the late 1900’s the whole Tamasha was done
by only the male artists, which was called the “Magnatya”. All the role even of the females if required were played by the males, the males artists would dress up in female attire and do the required role. All this information has been passed to me from my ancestors down the generations.

Now there are two main forms of Tamasha, Dholakbari and Sangeetbari. Dolakbari is the art form which was more prevalent during ancient times in King’s rule. This was done mainly for the Kings and Royal people first and than for the commoners. Dolakbari is done in the open and not confined in walls. It also is very long in its duration, that is, it can start in the evening and last upto morning. It consists of various stories, dance, natya, songs done in continuous harmony. Its on a decreasing trend now a days, but that does not mean that it is completely obsolete. It is still being performed in Jatras or the Village mela’s, where a huge crowds does gather, to cherish and enjoy the said art form. We too in our own theatre very rarely perform Dholakbari, but when we peform, the strength of people turning out for the programme is unbelievable. Even the group itself performing dholakbari is very large in itself consisting of dolak players, singers, dancers, actors etc. It may constitute upto 100 people in one group performing Dolakbari.

Sangeetbhari is the more commoner form of Tamasha. It is more of a theatrical form of Tamasha, meaning almost always done in theatre in closed walls. It mainly consists of singing songs and dancing as may also be called as Lavani. We at our theatre almost always perform the Sangeetbari. There about 8 to 10 people in such groups performing Sangeetbari.

Now there are certains sub forms or some importants terms related to Tamasha like:
1. GAN: It is a type of prayer song sung at the initiation of the act of the Tamasha. Generally it’s a song or devotion to Ganeshji, as he is considered as the God for auspicious start.

2. GAULAN: This is the Tamasha related to Radha and Krishna plays, matkidhari or mausi.

3. BATVANI/ FARE/ RANGBAZI: This is the part after Gan in which the mood of the audience is intended to change after the act. It can be a comic line, or some nakhara or satire.

4. VAG: This mainly contains stories in its whole part. It is of a longer duration than all the other parts.

5. LAVANI: It is the folk art dance form in the traditional way.

RESEARCHER What according to you is the current state of Tamasha today?

A MAJID. Today with advancement in technology and due developments of various entertainments modalities for people like multiplexes, televisions, auditoriums, sports complexes, it is very hard and difficult for people to get attracted to this ancient art form. Thus now a days there is decline in the interest of the people for Tamasha. However some people do keep a keen interest in this, also it is still popular at the village level as there may not be any other source of entertainment there, this is the reason that this art form is still surviving.

RESEARCHER Words of motivation for upcoming artists?

A MAJID. Unfortunately now a days there are very few people who have their interest in Tamasha. However the relatives and the villagers of the artists themselves show their interest and come and join Tamasha. And also there are many villager who are poor,
who need to money, so join this, which helps them to earn their daily livelihood and thereby helping their family and sustaining their lives.

I however hope and pray that many people may develop interest and join this Tamasha, because in the end its what we are, our culture, our heritage, which should be carried down the generations in the same manner, as which has been done till today, or else we may see it going to a dead end.
INTERVIEW 7

Suniv Baburao Jvale and Raima Kale are Tamasha folk artists.

RESEARCHER. Tell us something about your selves.

S JVALE. My name is Suniv Baburao Javde. I am 37 years of age. I hail from Jejuri village, near Pune in Maharahtra. I belong to Kolhati caste.

R KALE. My name is Raema Kale. I am of 35 years of age. I hail from Nerla village from Solapur district in Maharastra. I belong to Kolhati caste.

RESEARCHER. What is your basic education? Is there any other profession you do apart from this? How long have you been in Tamasha?

S JVALE. I have completed my studies upto standard nine. After that I joined this profession, and right now I am not involved in any other profession apart from this. Overall I have been associated with this Tamasha since past 20 years.

R KALE. I completed my studies upto standard sixth, after which I joined Tamasha. Infact I started performing as early as when I was 13 years old. So it has been about 25 years since I have been doing this, and I don’t feel like doing anything else apart from this now.

RESEARCHER. What kind of Tamasha you perform and what is your role in it?

S JVALE. We over here perform Sangeetbari. I play table or dholak in all of the plays.

R KALE. The Tamasha performed here by us is Sangeetbari. I am the leader of my group and mostly perform dance as in Lavani.
RESEARCHER. How many groups you have? How many people are there in each group especially yours? How many male and female artists are there in any given group?

S JVALE. We at Aryabhushan theater have about 8 to 10 groups. Each group has to 15 number of members in it, of which about 6 to 10 are females while the rest of them are males. In my group there are about 15 members of which 8 to 10 are ladies, while 5 to 7 members are male.

R KALE. My group has approximately 12 to 16 number of members, of which 10 are females while the rest males.

RESEARCHER. How long does the group perform? And how many groups perform in day?

S JVALE. The whole show is about 2 – 3 hours and each of the groups are given equal divided time out of the whole total time duration for their own performances. So in a day almost every group gets a chance to perform.

RESEARCHER. Do the artist belong to any particular caste or creed?

S JVALE. There are no any boundaries or restrictions as supposed to who can join Tamasha. But it is secular and open for all people, irrespective of their race, caste, religion or colour.

RESEARCHER. How long do you stay in the theatre doing the shows? And how many leaves or vacation do you get?

R KALE. We are here throughout the year doing performances. We are given leaves from our owner of about 8 days a month, so we can utilize them for going back to our villages to meet our spouse and children. Moreover during Diwali and Dashera festivals we are given about 15 o 20 days of leaves. But this does not mean that the
show stops. Actually the leaves are given on turn by turn basis so that the show goes on and is not postponed. This means that even if I was on leave, some other person would join my group and complete the play, so the play does not suffer. And that when I arrive, other people get their turn after I arrive.

RESEARCHER. Please share your views regarding Tamasha.

S JVALE Tamasha is an ancient form of folk art, which initially began as a source of entertainment for the Kings and the Royal, but now a days, is even for the common people. It is the culture and heritage of India specially of the Maharashtra, so all possible methods should be done to carry forward this rich heritage down to our future generations.

RESEARCHER. What is the state of Tamasha today?

S JVALE. It is very unfortunate that now a days, people have lost interest in the authentic traditional Tamasha, and are now looking for modern songs and dance forms to be done in Tamasha. So it is imperative that Tamasha goes into reformation for the good and keep its heritage intact.

RESEARCHER. Are you satisfied with the remuneration you get? Does the Government help in any way?

S JVALE. I am happy with what I get, but it would really be a blessing if I could earn a bit more, as it would be easy to make my ends meet. The thing is that the amount which we get just from Aryabhushan Theater is less, however we earn better from various private shows which are conducted in various cities and villages. Government does help us and pays us the artist, though it may be a meagre amount. Sometimes it takes too long to receive that aid, or sometimes the aid reaching us is very less than the amount
intended by the government due to several reasons. I help my family and kids at my village from what I earn. And by God’s grace both my children have been excellent in their studies. I am looking for a bright future for them.

R KALE. I too agree with him. Now a days due to all the inflations and high costs, it is better that we get good remuneration from the government and also from the shows which we do. I through my earning from here, have helped, not only my own family but my brother’s too. So if at any point I decide to quit I know that my family and my brother would take care of me then.

RESEARCHER. How many people attend your performances? What is the reaction of the audience to your play/

R KALE. On an average about 10 to 15 people visit the theatre. The audience is of different group ranging from 18 to 60. People almost always are happy with our performances which attracts them time and again to come back, also compelling them to bring other people too. Some people are art lovers and enjoy our shows and in the end are so happy with our performances that they give gifts may be in cash or kind. However sometimes we have people who are drunkards and who just visit for fun and create nuisance during shows.

RESEARCHER. How does society look towards you? And is there is bias or apprehension from the society or surrounding people?

R KALE. We have our own respect in the society. We are not looked upon or given names. We too are not ashamed of anything. All this is because we ourselves know that we are not doing anything wrong. We know that the things we do enhances and promotes our ancient legacy, and that makes us proud and not ashamed of anything. And people of
very high posts in various organizations, politicians, private famous theatres and many more always invite us to perform and praise us for our work, all this makes us going and prevents us from looking back.

RESEARCHER. Would you like to join commercial theatre or drama or any film industry instead of Tamasha?

R KALE. No not at all. I and all of us have toiled and earned our prestigious position here in Tamasha and we love what we do. Than why would we leave such a good position and life and go in search of other things which just are a lure on the outside but empty from inside. I am contended and happy where I am. If at all I get bored in future than I would prefer to stay and spend time with my family than.

RESEARCHER. What would you like to say for the upliftment of the art and the artist?

S JVALE. I think that the first and foremost thing which can be done is proper promotion and propagation of Tamasha to the masses, particularly the youth of today. Government should help and encourage new theatrical institutions where such Tamasha plays could both learnt as an art form and be performed on routine basis. Also they should provide good aid for the artists so that more and more people can get attracted to this which would help Tamasha to flourish in the future.
Onkar Das is renowned Nacha Folk Artist and Actor
INTERVIEW 8

Onkar Das Manikpuri is an Indian theatre and film actor and a folk artist. He has been a member of HabibTanvir's, the Naya Theatre company since 1999, and he has been playing the main character of the play ‘Charandas Chor’ since 2006.

Naya theatre had been founded by Mr.HabibTanvir, and after his death, it is run by his daughter NaginTanvir.

RESEARCHER. Can you tell us something about yourself and throw some light on your association with NACHA.

ONKAR DAS. I was born in 1969, in the village Mahuabhata, Rajnandgaon district, Chhattisgarh, and brought up over there. It was my mama’s home. The village was very small. Our traditional occupation was farming and cattle care. We were small land owners. The farming was limited during monsoon only, because of lack of rain/water. Agriculture depended on rainy season only. So during winter and summer seasons the villagers used to migrate to the cities to earn their livelihood.

When I was 3-4 years old, our family shifted to Bhilai. I did my education and got married over there. So, at that time there was no medium of entertainment. There was only radio. I was interested in singing from the beginning. Nacha was the prominent form of entertainment in our lives. In every village Nacha used to be performed. It was performed during the Ganesh Chaturthi and Navaratri festivals. It started around 11 pm-12 pm and continued till early morning. We children, always rushed early to occupy the front rows, so we could watch it easily and could enjoy it. I used to watch Nacha on a daily basis during the season. My father didn’t like me watching Nacha for the entire
night. I always wanted to be a part of Nacha. I was so eager to perform actually. Radio and Nacha are the reasons, I became an actor.

RESEARCHER. What is Nacha?

ONKAR DAS. Nacha begins with a filmi song. A male dancer in a female attire called “Pari” enters and dances along with singing a song. People give her money. They demand for another song, the Pari will fulfil their demand and she will dance on that song. 5 to 6 dancers (PARI) will be there to perform continuously for an hour. People will demand song after song and one after another, the dancers will perform to keep up the continuity. Thus they get money from the audience. Then dancer will announce the name of a person who gave money.

This is then followed by the ‘Joker’/Gammat. This will take around 40 to 90 minutes. Joker will narrate/dramatize the stories in funny way. Stories like ‘Raja Harishchandra’ or stories of ‘SaansBahu’, or brothers fight for father’s property etc is performed.

Then again, dancer will come.

In Nacha one person will be standing there with a torch (mashaal) in his hand. The reason behind it was that that in those times there was no light no electricity, so with the help of torch they can show their faces and performances at night. The costumes to be worn had to be brought by the artist himself. The female roles were played by the male actors.

RESEARCHER. Which are the musical instruments used in the form?

ONKAR DAS. I was brought up watching ‘Tabla-peti’ (Harmonium) being played by an artist who would sit on the corner/aside, and Tabala, and Chikara (Ravanhatta type
instrument). But they say that in earlier days there was a ‘Khadisaajwala Nacha’, wherein artists used to tie these instruments to their waists and perform Nacha. The performance was accompanied with dance, music and drama. Then banjo, dholak, manjira were also used.

RESEARCHER. How many artists did a troupe in Nacha consist of?

ONKAR DAS. Around 12 to 15 artists, some were musicians, some dancers, and some were comedians.

RESEARCHER. What kind of Music used in the performance?

ONKAR DAS.- In Nacha a filmi song is often played. The filmi songs are practised and performed in their distinct style. As I talked about Khadisaaj, which involved folk songs to be sung. In Chhattisgarh there is a ‘Satanami samaj’, which is responsible for the origin of Khadisaajwala Nacha. The Khadisaaj used dholak, table, manjira, and chikara, they danced, sang and enjoyed, that was their folk Nacha. Nowadays, there is a different nacha all together. They sing filmi songs, or their own composed songs, they have the Karma dance, which was often employed. But Khadisaaj was the real Nacha.

One also comes across the ‘Dadariya’ styled singing, which was composed extemporaneously, at the spur of them of the moment, according to the need of the time. For example it is raining now, so it would be like this;

pani re aaye pawan sang me

Tohar manawaa milaale hamare sang me…

RESEARCHER. Can you throw some light on the use of dance in the form?
ONKAR DAS. Nacha itself came from the word Naach meaning dance. The artists have developed their own style of dancing in Nacha, we can say a folk style.

RESEARCHER. Can you tell us about your journey of becoming an actor?

ONKAR DAS. In Bhilai, in our community there was a very good folk singer Baitalram Sahu, people used to call him Kishor Kumar, one day I went to watch his program. Where the very first time I saw female artists performing along with male the male artists. They were lip-synching and singers were separately singing. I was so amazed watching Baitalram and other artists. I therefore decided to pursue this field. I asked my father, I asked my father for the permission and readily agreed to. My brother was an announcer in one of the Mandali’s, he brought me to Navaldas Manikpuri’s team, in front of whom I sung a song, he said ok, but did not give me any work for a year. Then one of my friend’s took me to another mandali which used to have the ‘Karma’ dance wherein after a year I got an opportunity to perform in front of the audience. But there was no money I could get. But I was firm to be in this line. Thus in 1999 I became a member of ‘Nukkad’ nakat. At that time we had done a play based on leprosy disease in 200 villages to spread the awareness about that disease. At the time of closing ceremony when we were performing that play for last time, HabibTanvir saab with his wife (maaji) and daughter had come as chief guest. We had also performed another comedy play ‘Nalpanke Bihao’ (child marriage) before him. Habib saab liked it very much, we received award and a certificate from him. He selected us for his Play SunnBehari on leprosy only. We did a workshop and performed for that drama. Habib saab asked us to come to Bhopal and join him. We were so happy that such a big theatre personality wanted us to be a part of his team. We joined him and thus I became an actor.
RESEARCHER. Tell us something about HabibTanvir’s theatre experiment ‘Naya Theatre’

ONKAR DAS. Habib Tanvir had brought together Mumbai, Delhi theatre artists and folk artists of Chhattisgarh along with Bhopal theatre artists and some from foreign countries also and made many memorable theatre plays like ‘Agara Bazar’, ‘Jis Lahora Dekhiya’, ‘Zaharili Hawa’. He always used to admire those who came from the grass roots, from the basic rural settings.

RESEARCHER. Your experience on playing Charandas Chor.

ONKAR DAS. He directed this play first time in 1975. I was associated with this play from 2000. It was often a case when, after Diwali or holi, the artists would not return to the theatre. In 2006 the artist who was performing Charandas’s role, went to his home town and didn’t come back. So Habib saab asked me to play this role. I was like super happy, because I was a part of this play for last 6 years, and except mantri, sadhu and hawaldar I had played all the roles from this play, but after 6 years I was going to play the role of Charandas Chor, the central character of the play, at ‘Bharat Bhawan’ Bhopal, it was a hit, and everyone admired me. Till date I play this character.

I am the 7th generation artist of Charandas Chor. From 2006 to 2017 I have performed this character more than 30 times. Govindram Nirmalkar was the first artist who had played Charandas Chor.

RESEARCHER. How do you feel as an actor by performing this character?

ONKAR DAS. I had listened to this play on audio record for many times before joining Habib saab. Since then it was my dream to play this role. And look at the destiny! it came true!. I am so fortunate. Habibsaab thought about theatre in the true sense. The
play itself gives a very good message. While performing I always feel that it’s all happening to me in real. Even today, every time I cry, at the end of the play.

RESEARCHER. What about Habib saab as a director?

ONKAR DAS. Honestly speaking I have never seen such a great Director like him in my entire life. He is my Guru. He had that skill to manage every type of artist. Senior artists remarked many a times that, in Delhi Habib saab lived in humility, in a severe conditions. he built a dome/tent and facilitated the artists to live there. They used to rehearse, cook in the same place. He used to do a job and half of his salary he used to give to theatre artists as their salary. Thus in such a way he built his group. He used to take-care of each and every artist. He used to solve artist’s eternal fights which were never ending. After his death in 2009 his daughter, Naagin Tanvir runs the theatre and still she employs rural artists of Chhattisgarh for this play. This play manages to maintain the dignity of the great Director called Habib Tanvir. It still runs houseful.

RESEARCHER. Do you think Nacha as a form has changed with time? if yes, then as an audience what is your voice on such change?

ONKAR DAS. Technology ate this form. If they are performing according to their comfort, what they are doing is ok, because they will eventually serve what audiences like and ask for, but that’s not the true story. It is something like Videshi maal. They are using modern instruments. Our traditional instruments, which I have already mentioned before, for e.g. Bajaniya community from in our village would prepare the Dafala (Dafali- Tambourine), Gudumb, Mohari (Shehanai), Damaau, Tasa, these were our traditional handmade folk instruments. And they brought with itself a different feeling
all together. Now, the instruments being used are all modern, copied from filmi world I can say.

For example previously we used Chikara to get the sur (musical sur). Thus, many traditional things have been vanished in Chhattisgarh as time passes. So, the soul is not there even though there are so many modern things to attract the audiences.

RESEARCHER. Was Nacha the only source of livelihood of its artists or it was a part time activity?

ONKAR DAS. Nacha’s origin was for entertainment only in the beginning. The purpose was to be entertained by performing it. Otherwise the main occupation of its artists was either farming or labour work or small business. I was factory worker by profession, after finishing my job; I used to go to Mandali to perform in Nacha, and later on Nukkad natak with one of the local theatre groups.

RESEARCHER. Does the government offer any help?

ONKAR DAS. I don’t know.

RESEARCHER. Can you throw some light on use of elements of Nacha in Charandas Chor?

ONKAR DAS. The whole play is in Nacha style. The technicality is from theatre, the script and direction is bound within theatre format. Other than that Nacha’s style as a traditional folk form has been used. Right from the beginning there is a group song + dance is a folk dance of Satanami community, its called PANTHI dance. Dadariya singing style, Suva karma dance, and mainly the funny style Nacha form has been applied in Charandas Chor. If you have seen, the Chor in the beginning comes out and doing something is the Joker dance of Nacha form. In the end the Jay Sthambh- Janda-
flag, from satanami Samaj has been used. The attire, clothes of all characters is the Chhattisgarhi traditional dress.

RESEARCHER. Do you know what is the reason that Habib sir choose Chhattisgarhi folk artists for this play? Has he ever shared his intention behind such selection?

ONKAR DAS. Habibsaaab was from Raipur, Chhattisgarh. Then he had been educated from Nagpur and further in London. He came back to India and first he had directed Shakuntalam with Delhi actors. As per my knowledge that was not that much appreciated. Then he came to Chattisgarh and saw Nacha, he was impressed by this folk form. I have heard him saying that when he saw folk artists performing folk theatre, he could not believe that uneducated people from grass roots, who don’t have any formal training in theatre can act so well, and naturally! He then decided to tap in the talent.

RESEARCHER. Sir, your move towards ‘Peepli live’, your views.

ONKAR DAS. Anusha Rizvi as a journalist often came to Habibsaaab to take his interview, and to meet him, whenever he was in Delhi. Habib saab never allowed anyone from film industry to take his artist for acting in film. But Anusha was a familiar person from the beginning. He permitted her to invite his artists for her film. I had gone to give an audition for a very small role with 1 or 2 dialogues, but got selected for the main character ‘Nathha’.

Almost all the rural characters in ‘Peepli Live’ are the Naya Theatre’s artists.
MAIL: Girish Karnad

1/5/2018

Gmail - Request for an Interview through mail

Bindia Meowan <bindiamewan@gmail.com>

Request for an Interview through mail
3 messages

Bindia Meowan <bindiamewan@gmail.com>                        Wed, Sep 6, 2017 at 5:03 PM
To: karnad.girish@gmail.com

Dear Sir

My name is Bindia Meowan. I am pursuing my PhD on the topic Folk Genres and Indian Drama: An Interface from Gujarat University, Gujarat. I managed to get your email id from the Sahitya Akademi’s Website.

Hayavadana is one of the primary sources selected by me for my research. The research aims to explore the use of Folk forms in modern Indian drama viz. Yakshagana in Hayavadana, Tamasha in Ghaashikem Kolwe, Naach/Nachya in Charandas Chor and Bhavai in Haathi Raja (Text is not translated in English).

I herewith attach a Questionnaire to be answered, it is a kind request to provide your views regarding the same and send it me on bindiamewan@gmail.com.

It is a humble request to provide your views, you may omit or add as per your convenience

Hoping for a favoured reply

Thanking you

Bindia Meowan

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Girish Karnad <karnad.girish@gmail.com>                        Mon, Sep 11, 2017 at 12:22 PM
To: Bindia Meowan <bindiamewan@gmail.com>

Hayavadana used the idea of a liftable front curtain from Yakshagana, but apart from calling the Stage Manager ‘Bhagavata’, rather than ‘Sutradhara’, the play has no connection whatever with the form of Yakshagana.

Best,

Girish Karnad

[Quoted text hidden]

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Bindia Meowan <bindiamewan@gmail.com>                        Mon, Sep 11, 2017 at 12:30 PM
To: Girish Karnad <karnad.girish@gmail.com>

Thkn u very much sir for your reply

[Quoted text hidden]