Chapter II

ACTS OF RECONCEPTUALISATION: BHAVAI IN HAATHI RAJA.

Thakar shakhe Yajurvedi audichya Siddhpur-nagar-nivas,
Brahman bharadvaji gotra na Asait bhoo ma prakhyat,
Unjha gaame patel Hemadani putri Ganga gunvant,
Shiyad rakshva shah-sabha ma bheda jamie ne rakhyo rang,
jamta e thakar thi upji nayak-targala ni gyaat,
transo saath Bhavai-vesho rachi aradhya Amba maat”

(Nayak, 5)

(The quote mentions the story of the Audichya Brahman Asait Thakar of Sidhpur who dines with Ganga the daughter of Hema Patel to save her and therefore creates a new caste of the Nayak –Targala thereby creating 360 vesas in devotion to Goddess Amba.)

India’s rich folk theatrical tradition, which seems to lose a footing in modern days finds revival at the hands of certain playwrights, more so not as a conscious effort but as a flexible means, articulating their ideas and emotions, of which *Haathi Raja* by Pravin Pandya is a case in the point. Woven into the cultural tradition of Gujarat, Pandya subtly amalgamates the folk with the modern, the present chapter attempts to provide a glimpse of the folk theatrical form of Bhavai and further explores the folk genres employed by the writer in his play *Haathi Raja*.

Literature regarding the folk form is abundant in terms of books in the regional language i.e. Gujarati, to name a few, *Rang Bhavai* and *Lokranjan Bhavai* by Janak Dave, *Bhavai Veshni Vartao* by Bharatram Mehta, *Aapnu Loktnaty: Bhavai* by Bhanukumar Nayak, *Lokbhavai* by Dina Sanghvi, *Bhavai Vesh: Gramin Natako* (Akashvani Parthi Raju...
It is rightly believed that one can get an inkling of the region particularly the culture through its four B’s

- Bhes
- Bhasa
- Bhajan
- Bhojan

Similarly one finds the manifestation of the customs and the culture of Gujarat in its very popular folk theatre Bhavai which is also performed in some parts of Rajasthan. The researcher limits the study of the present chapter to the Bhavai of Gujarat.

*The Gujarat State Gazetteers, Government of Gujarat, Mehsana District* while providing the survey of the castes, mentions about the ‘Targala’ caste as the ‘Bhavaiyas’, associating the history about the genesis of the Targala caste it mentions,
Alaudin Khilji, the Emperor of Delhi had appointed Subedars for administration of Gujarat. One such Subedar, Jahan Roz used to stay in the camp near Sidhpur. During the camp he managed to kidnap one Ganga, the daughter of Hema Patel of Unjha. In order to restore the girl to her parents one Asayit Audich Brahmin priest, priest of the Patidars went to Sidhpur. He posed as the father of Ganga and freed her from the clutches of Subedar. But during the process, Subedar suspected that Asayit was not a Patidar. In order to remove his suspicion, Asayit took meal with Ganga and returned to Unjha. On learning this, the Brahmins of Sidhpur excommunicated Asayit. Thereafter he left Sidhpur and settled in Unjha. He was a songster and made a living by singing and dancing. By the grace of Bechraji he composed 360 Bhavais and performed them with the help of his sons. His descendents followed this profession and formed a new caste. (Rajyagor 191)

The above mentioned story of the origin of Bhavai is the most popular and widely accepted one. Mahipatram Ruparam in Bhavai Sangrah gives us yet another story, he mentions that Bhavai originated around 300 years in Sitpur (today Siddhpur). The origin of the form was attributed to an Audichshahastra Brahmin and his name was Vyas Asait. He had two sons, all three of them were adept in singing. They with their musical instruments would sing regularly in the Mata’s (Goddess) temple. Once the Padshah along with his army camped for a few days in the village, he summoned for the best singers, wherein the soldiers picked up Vyas and presented him before him. The Padshah (emperor) was happy with his skills and awarded him wealth. Asait first refused the prize awarded but on the insistence of the Padshah accepted it, and as a result of his acceptance of wealth at the hands of a barbarian, a muslim emperor was excommunicated by his community members. He fasted for seven days when Godess Amba appeared before him, she dressed up his sons in all her finery and asked them to group up and perform Bhavai in Palodar a nearby village. She further
professed that now on it shall be their business, work and they will be very skilled in it and from that day onwards Asait was known as ‘Nayak’ the performance Bhavai.

M L Varadpande in his book History of Indian theatre: Lok Ranga Panorama of Indian Folk theatre narrates the legends and stories related to Rajasthan. He remarks, A jat name Nanga lived in a village called Phulya Kekadi. He loved to sing and dance and therefore was looked down and excommunicated from his own community. A plague breaks out in the village and his family also suffers from it. He goes to Shitala Matas temple and prays where the Goddess appears in his dream and asks him to worship her and perform plays in order to be free from it. He obeys her and everything is restored to normalcy. The people of the Jat community then honour him with drum (bhungal, Nagara), Spear (Bhal) and a carpel. While performing and worshipping Goddess Shitla the children would cry out ‘Bhua ayi Bhua ayi’ and hence the term Bhavai.

Kapila Vatsyayan in her book Traditional Indian Theatre: Multiple Streams offering the both versions of the story of Gujarat and Rajasthan, while mentioning the former she writes “ Asita or Asaita was a priest who was excommunicated for having rescued a Kanabi girl from a Muslim’s house and having later married her.” which is debatable issue.

The word Bhavai also termed as ‘Jatar’, has been interpreted differently by different scholars. Mahipat Ruparam opines that the word Bhavai is derived from Sanskrit and that “Bhav” refers to lord Shiva also known as Shiva’s play, Jaysankar Sundari terms it as “Bhav ni Vahi”, Rasiklal Cho Parikh associates it to the terms “Bhapko”, meaning pomp, gaiety, pageantry and “Sajavat” meaning decoration, taking recourse to the term “Bhavan” used in olden days he writes “ Rasoi karnar Rasoiyio, Gavai karnar Gavaiyio, tem Bhavai karnar Bhavaiyo” meaning one who cooks is called a cook, one who sings is called a singer and one who performs Bhavai is called a Bhavaiyo. Dr. Harivallabh Bhayani believes it to derived
from the word or a variant of the word “Bhrunkas” meaning “Stri-veshdhari Nat” meaning “one who adornes a female role”. Some relate it to Goddess Amba Bhavani who is believed to have taught the art to Asait and therefore is named Bhavai after her. According to Balwant Gargi, Bhav means “life”, bhava means “sentiment” and vahi means “carrier” or “a diary”. So bhavai to him could mean “carrier of life.” Some suggest that Ai the suffix can also mean mother therefore mean to be mother of life. Some relate it to goddess Bhavani. Dr Sudha Desai in her book Bhavai: A Medieval form of Ancient Indian Dramatic Art (Natya) as prevalent in Gujarat, explains it through the terms ‘Bhavna’, ‘Bhavan’, ‘Bhavak’, ‘Bhavaiyo’ and ‘Bhavai’ where ‘Bhavana’ means sentiment or expression, ‘Bhavan’ are the vesas, ‘Bhavak’ and ‘Bhavaiyo’ are the actors and ‘Bhavai’ is the enactment of the play.

Asait had two brothers Mavji Thakar and Bhemji Thakar and three sons viz. Gad Thakar, Pancha Thakar and Mandad Thakar. The tradition has been practiced, performed and carry forwarded by the Targalas, Nayaks and Bhojaks. Elaborating further on the castes as mentioned in The Gujarat State Gazetteers, Government of Gujarat, Mehsana District which says,

Asait had three sons and, therefore they were called owners of three houses, i.e. tran gharvala. In common parlance, they came to be called Targalas. Among Targalas there are three subcastes, Naik, Vyas and Bhojak. Because of these three subcastes, they might also have been called Targalas. Among them, Naiks and Vyas subcastes are Hindus. They follow Shaiva and Vaishnava religions. Some are devotees of Bechraji Maata also, but persons of the Bhojak subcaste are Jains. Despite these differences, hey inter-marry. In matters of social customs matters of social customs, they do not differ much from the rest of the Hindus. (Rajyagor 191)
Though with time other castes did join in but not as professionally as the Targalas which has more of a religious and ritualistic connotation attached to them.

Bhavai is usually performed on religious occasions specially in praise and devotion to Godess Amba, Bahuchraji, Shitla mata and also when invited by people on social as well as religious occasions. In the words of Dr. Sudha Desai “Bhavai is a series of independent playlets woven together. Each of these playlets is known as the Vesa or a Swang.” Vesas are nothing but small independent stories, episodes and acts dealing with the experiences, customs, legends, myths, superstitions, religious festivals, historical figures of the regions and social beliefs of the people. Vesas can be broadly categorised into three types,

- Religious
- Historical
- Social

Asait basically aimed at curbing the social evils, religious malpractices, the orthodox system of caste and religion, uplifting the status of women thereby reforming the society through Bhavai. The Vesas have time and again been researched, collected and preserved by different scholars no doubt today a lot of books are available on Bhavai but the initial arduous task collected has been delineated in Mahipatram’s Bhavai Sangrah. There are five editions of the mentioned book along with it the following list is made available,

*Bhavai Sangrah*

(1) First Edition: 1866

(2) Second Edition: 1879

Vesas: Above mentioned fifteen plus the following four (16) Jogani (17) Bavo (18) Sadhra Jaisang (19) Panch Chor amounting to nineteen.

The third edition is unavailable, the fourth (1894) and the fifth (1911) editions contain the same nineteen vesas as available in the second edition and the sixth edition (2003) by Gujarat Sahitya Akademi contains eighteen vesas. The other important works mentioned are Desi Bhavai no Bhomio by Mayashankar Jibhai Shukla (five editions) which contain twelve Veshas viz. Brahman, Natvo, Kerbo, Vanio, Bhoi, Pavi Puran, Kahan Gopi, Saraniyo, Shankar Parvati, Ramdev, Pathan, Sadhudi, Bhava ni Bhavai Prakash by Harimanishankar Dhanshankar Munshi contains twenty two veshas viz. Ganapati, Joothan Tarkadiyo, Maniyaar, Kansaro, Dehgam Padmani, Jogi Jogan, Tendo, Vanio, Kajodo, Vanjaro, Kachiya Kunjara, Dalit no Vesh, Ram Lakhman, Darji, Kabo, Purabiyo, Ramdev, Gujarati Natak yane Deshi Bhavai by Purushottam Gigabhai Shah contains twenty five veshas performed mainly in Saurashtra they are Kahan Gopi, Dakshini Stri, Mahadev, Faquir Nayaka, Marvadan, Bavo, Kajodo, Kabo, Pathan, Sadhudi, Chhelbatao, Paviya Puran, Ramdev, Jhanda Jhulan, Juthan, Kansaro, Mian Bibi, Lalji Maniyaar, Shuro Shamlo, Viko Sisodiyo, Dalit no Vesh, Bahuchraji, Raja Dehgam, Sadhra Jaisang, Paanch Chor. Sudha Desai’s Bhavai: A Medieval Form of Ancient Indian Dramatic Art (Natya) as Prevalent in Gujarat contains sixty vesas, she divides them as

(1) Vesas with Muslims as principal characters:

The Vesa of Juthan, Advo Vanio, Chhelbatao Lalbata, Pathan Bamni, Miyan Bibi, Maiyar, Faquir Nayaka.

(2) Vesas representing different Hindu communities:
The Vesa of Vanzaro, Kansaro, Darji, Kachhia Kunjara, Kumbhar, Bhoi Purabio, Goval Daglo, Saranio, Dedh, Mahiyar, Marwadan, Bavo or Jogi, Jogi Jogan, Sadhudi, Kabo, Panch chor, Kajodo, Mulchand.

(3) Vesas with Rajput princess as principal characters:

The Vesa of Suro, Viko, Tendo, Ramdeva, Sadhra Jesang, Jasma Odan, Raja Degham, Maniab Satee

(4) Mythological and Miscellaneous Vesas:

The Vesa of Patai Raval or Patai Raja, Kalka, Bechraji or Pavai Purana, Kan Gopi or Kanji Maharaj, Rama Laksman, Sankara Parvati, Mahadeva, Vadi or Lalvadi-Fulvadi, Karamat Bibi, Kerbo, Madari, Jogani, Daksanian, Vesa of Ratna Hamir.

A Vesa as the name suggests is not only about the character itself, the costume and the image but also incorporates the stories or incidents associated with the said character and therefore a small play or a skit in itself. The performance would begin at night and continue till dawn, hence, performing Bhavai would mean performing a number or veshas. The veshas mentioned above are the traditional ones though Asait created 360, out of which sixty could be preserved but only around ten to fifteen are performed today, moreover with times, the vesas are modified in sync with present social, political scenario and also changed according to the taste of the audiences. Since these playlets are individualistic in nature they can be added and omitted according to the need of the hour and the age. Hence with time the vesas have transformed imbibing the currents trends and material. Below is an excerpt of the Vesa of Juthan as provided by Sudha Desai in her book,

The vesa begins with an aavnu

aiye.. saiyu ka panth dohlaa baba

" " " " " " " "

allah allah valaah valaah
saïyu ka panth dohahah baba

..............................................................

JUTHAN. Khade ko khadi salaam
baithe to baithi salaam
bhai bhai bhale bhale aai aai
khade ko khadi salaam bhai
baithe ku baithi salaam bhai
ache ko achi salaam bhai
bure ko buri salaam bhai
haathhi becha ghoda becha
miya chala pardesh
Bhala khanjar chod diya
aur liya fakir ka bes

From here the Vesa breaks off into a side incident of a mere farce.

NAYAK. Miya tamare kevi bhes?
JUTHAN. Nayak tamare tya kevi bhes?
NAYAK. moti moti kaali kaali
aanchal ena char
donaari dova ne baise
paanch kalaake aave paar
en paado aave ke baachdi aave
baachdi aave to moti thayi ne dudh aape
ne paadi aave toh aa taari jem
haraya dhor jevo farya kare
JUTHAN: amare tya to naani bhes
kaali hoy, dhuli hoy, raati hoy
kaabarchitri hoy, be kaan jhule
ne laambi laamni anidaar vaakdiyaali shingdio
unth bhele aakdo to amari bhes bhele kankaro
ena aanchal be ne dafdu maaro toh
bein bein kare ne thekda maare.

NAYAK.  mua bakru che em kahe ne
JUTHAN.  na na, bhes hai bhes, tum kya samjho
NAYAK.  ab miya Juthan, jara nakal karo, kuch karamata dikhao.
Juthan performs some acrobatic tricks and mimics the general ways of walking and talking and makes everybody laugh. (Desai 210-211)

(The vesa begins with an aavnu which introduces the character, he wishes the audience in his characteristic manner, as the name suggests juthan means a liar through which he brings out the humour in the conversation with the nayak wherein talking about the characteristics of a buffalo he intermingles it with a goat thereby bringing out the fun and laughter).

Bhavai is usually performed in open air, near the temple or the village square, it does not require an elaborate stage for performance. The team, group, mandali or troupe is called a ‘tolu’ which has a headman called the ‘Nayak’. The manager of the team is also called the ‘Veshgore’. The number of the members of the group change according to the need of the performance and troupe, but the traditional ones would have around twenty one Nats. The selection of the players can best understood in the following lines,

Paanch tata, paanch mata,
paanch gata, paanch samata. (Janak Dave)
Which means the tolu would consist of ‘paanch tata’ five male actors performing male roles ‘paanch mata’ five male actors acting as female impersonators also known as ‘kanchaliya’, ‘paanch gaata’ five actors skilled in music and singing and ‘paanch smata’ five supporting and substituting actors. As mentioned the female role like other folk theatre is played by a male actor, who is young, slender with soft features who also specialises in singing and dancing, done so owing to the restrictions of the age, and the time and nature of the form. The most famous example, being that of Jaysankar Sundari.

Traditionally before beginning the performance the Nayak draws a large circular line on the ground with castor oil, the process being called ‘Chachar Antarvu’ literally meaning to set boundaries for the Chachar or the arena. The preliminary is performed with a view to drive away evil spirits from the area and to consecrate the area for the performance of Bhavai and also demarcating the area for the performance. A ritualistic performance of propitiating goddess Amba is done traditionally by consecrating the instruments and offering prayers simultaneously with songs and the blowing of the Bhungal. The invocation to the goddess can be seen in the following lines,

Jay Maateshwari, Jay Bhavani
sahu na dukh harti
sukh karti
Jay Ambika,
Jay Bahuchara. (Desai 168)

(praise be to Bhavani, Amba, Bahuchraji giver of joy and taker of all grief)

The prayers that are sung include

Mataji mujro lejo re

Mataji mujro lejo re

mujro lejo amne sukh dejo
Mataji mujro lejo re
mandir upar kalash biraaje
rattan jadya ene chhaaje re
aarasure Amba vase ne
       Pavagadh Mahakali re (Desai 169)
(here the goddess is requested to participate in the dance there by praising her)

Ma pava te gadh thi utarya
       ma kaali re
vasavyu Champaner pavavaali re
ma pava te gadh na char chota
       ma kaali re
ma Patai raja rakhvaal pavavaali re
ma uncho te dungro pava te gadh
       ma kaali re
ma tand kane taaro vaas pava vaali re (Desai 180)
       (the song is in praise of goddess Amba who resides and is the protector of Pavagadh)

A Bhavai performance starts with devotional songs known as ‘Garabi’ and ‘Marunapode’. The performance of the Vesas starts with the blowing of the Bhungal, the very first Vesa performed is that of Ganpati, followed by that of Brahman and Kali after which the other vesas are performed. Ganapti enters with a thali (plate) before his face with a swastika sign and dances to the tune, an ‘avnu’ is sung the following is the aavnu of Ganesh

Dundalo Dukhbhanjano Sadaye Baale Vesh;
Pratham pehlo smariye, Gauriputra Ganesh. (Ruparam 54)
(The lines introduce Ganesh as the first vesa, regarded the remover of all obstacles and hailed as the son of Gauri)

Aavnu of Brahman is as follows,

Chango mango baamadiyo aa ve re maharaj
rango chango baamadiyo aa ve re maharaj
agdam bagdam Sitaram
agdam bagdam jay bhagwaan ... (Dave 3)

( here comes the Brahman, the vesa is a satire on the Brahmins)

An avnu is an introductory song. An avnu functions as an introduction to the character to be introduced or the vesa to be performed. It prepares the audience for the act to follow. A vital element of the form is the character of the Ranglo, the buffoon, who satirizes the social evils prevalent in the society and also the human follies all with boisterous humour instored. The Daglo and Ranglo are an equivalent of Vidushak and the Nayak is the equivalent of Sutradhar of classical Sanskrit drama. As mentioned earlier the aim of Asait was to reform the society by performing Bhavai, which is manifested in the inclusion of the Muslim characters and vesa of Dalit, thereby uplifting it from any sort of caste indiscrimination.

The form caters to almost all the rasa’s as mentioned in the Natyashastra viz. Shringara (erotic), Raudra (terror), Karuna (pathos), Vira (heroic), Adhbhuta (wonder), Bhibhatsa (disgust), Bhayanaka (dread)and Hasya (humour). Though the form contains all the rasa’s the most prominent of them is the Hasya ras. The dialogues used are witty, satirical, humorous, some contain double meanings and in some the humour quotient stoops so low that is tends to become obscene and vulgar, which time and again for which it has been criticised for. The heterogeneity of the characters incorporated in the vesas along with
the open geographical boundaries brought in the linguistic variegation, the main languages that surface are,

- Gujarati
- Hindi-Urdu
- Marwadi

A glimpse of the mixed language that is usually found in Bhavai can be seen in the following lines.

BIBI. Haste haste hui ladai. Karam teri burai.

kaatu ku silaaie, ruthe ko manai e.

jyu tyu karke apne, garibda de la

chala tu, mia ban raha nahi jata !- (Ruparam 76)

(In the above lines from the vesa of Miya Bibi, the Bibi is trying to persuade coax and pacify the miya who is offended)

A study of the vesas, bring us to the fact that it makes use of dialects rather than languages as such and is colloquial in nature. The dialogues are lyrical, rhythmical and poetic so as to be attuned to music. The costume and make up is simple in terms of elaborate dressing and heavy ornamentation, but are flashy and vibrant in colour so as to gather the audience’s attention. The very term vesa means dressing which is identifiable with the characteristic features of the character. Folk dance of Gujarat viz. Garba, Raas is employed. One concludes that Bhavai uses dance not only as an embellishment but with a dramatic purpose. The dialogues are spoken rhythmically or sung to music along with dance or specific body movements and steps.

Music and dance are the integral part of the Vesas and are of paramount importance. Musical instruments used are Bhungal, Pakhvaj, Dholak, Vansari, Tabla, Cymbals,
Kansijoda, Ektaro, harmonium etc, of which the Bhungal is unique to the form. Janak Dave in “Bhavai-Regional folk form of Gujarat” mentions that Bhungals are of two types one ‘Nar’ which is played with low notes and ‘Mada’ played at a higher pitch.

The Ragas used as mentioned by Sudha Desai are Bilaval, Veradi, Baro, Ramagri, Desa, Sorath, Sameri, Asa or Asavri, Mevado, Todi, Malar, Godi, Purvi, Sarang, Bihag, Prabhat, Khamac, Ramkali, Bhervi, Madh and Paraj.

The Talas mentioned by Janak Dave are Ek Tal, Trital, Dadra, Jap Tal, Choutal, Adochotal, Ulato, Zumro, Dipchandi and Kerbo as the main talas of Bhavai along with mentioned the other mentioned by Sudha Desai are Khemto, Kervo, Hinc, Jetman, Tragado, Ulalo.

The form is passed on orally from one generation to another, sometimes an actor performs a certain character for his entire life. Hasmukh Baradi in his book History of Gujarati Theatre mentions,

Bhavai, always being performed under the patronage of the village folk, has remained an inherited event, be it from father to son, from one performing group to its second-generation group or from teacher to disciple. One of the reasons for this is that Bhavai is a character-orientated theatre form. An actor playing a particular role (Jhando or Juthan for instance) would coach other actors on all its aspects (body language, locution, movement, costume and make-up and related techniques) in a true Guru-shishya (mentor disciple) tradition. To begin with, the disciple would emulate. Later, he would improvise and evolve the act in his own style. To put it in a nutshell, the characters would be actor-oriented; “Jhando or Advo played by so and so actor!” [the spectators would exclaim]. More than one actor playing the same role could draw admiration and the spectators would swarm to watch them play the role.
Apart from each Bhavai play having its own steps, each of the texts would mostly have unique steps of its own; the disposition might dominate the character. The narrative of the entire Bhavai play is a theatrical rather than a dramatic rendering.

(Baradi 11-12)

In modern day the vocation is not economically viable therefore the actors associate themselves with other professions along with acting. Bhavai aims to entertain, educate and reform. Humour and satire is the forte of Bhavai. It has been criticised for its obscenity and vulgarity what Ranchhod Udayram calls it as “boorish vulgarism”. Bhavai in its present state is a dying form of art, even the training school set at Visnagar is not functional in the proper sense. Government has come out with several schemes and perks for the artists but the funds fail to reach the deserving. The form is passed on orally from one generation to another but the younger generation hardly has any interest in it moreover the traditional artists are reluctant to teach and pass on the art to other artists therefore for more reasons than one the form is gradually perishing.

On the other hand Ranchhod Udayram, a scholarly playwright persuaded the public to give up watching Bhavai plays which actually turned him to writing which resulted into the following,

Firstly, the so called juni (old) Gujarati theatre began and ended its quest for the element of drama in the European Theatre rather than in this traditional folk-theatre at home. That was not all; it entirely ignored the plays (like Mithyabhiman by Kavi Dalpatram) that incorporated the elements of Bhavai. Secondly, dramatists and literary pundits developed prejudices against Bhavai resulting in the tightening of the stranglehold of European writing and performing styles on the play-writing and acting at home. And thirdly, although Bhavai groups continued being nurtured at viiage level.
its popularity waned owing to urbanisation and spread of education, and consequently
the ‘players’ and their family members were compelled to be dragged into ‘acting’ in
the juni Gujarati plays. (Baradi 13)

With the onset of urbanisation and a city bred refined and sophisticated audience and
establishment of theatres, plays started being performed and written leaving the folk theatre
behind. At juncture of the modern era when the form seems to be on verge of extinction there
has arisen a need to preserve and revive it. Though the form had been looked down on
account of obscenity still many playwrights have been employing it in their plays down the
ages. According to Mahesh Champaklal there are two kinds of revival of Bhavai. There is
one set of writers and actors 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. some of the plays using the
elements of Bhavai are Tulji Vaidhya Chitra (1859) by Narmad, Mithyabhimaan (1870) by
Dalpatram, Mena Gurjari (1930) by Rasiklal cho Parikh, Mena Popat (1949) and Hoholika
Bakul Tripathi, Rai no Parvat by Nilkanth Ramanbhai, Jalaka (1985) by Chinu Modi, Rai no
Darpanray (1986) by Hasmukh Baradi, , Kem Makanji kya Chalya by Shitanshu

Bhavai was revived after post independence period going back to their roots 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.

Thakkar Govindji Dhramshi of Kutch Mandvi published an advertisement that “Even if there is not even a single virtue of wisdom/education, wealth or quality, but pretends to have one is called Mithyabimani (pretentious)”. He announced a prized of Rs 100 to whoever writes a fifty page essay in the form of a play on the topic mithyabhiman (vanity) in five months and the prize money to be awarded to the best essay. (essay should be taken as writing). He felt that a play was more effective a form in communicating to the audience and reaching their hearts which forms not even a story could do. It was during that time Bhavai was very popular, an only source of entertainment in the rural areas but as such he felt that the plays by the Bhavaiyas used obscene language which the new urban, educated refined audience would not prefer watching or reading and therefore there arose a need for good plays to be written in Gujarati language. With this aim he started writing plays. The playwright successfully weaves the moral through humour in the play, the poet has called it “Bhungal vina ni Bhavai”, (a Bhavai without a Bhungal).

Mithya abhimani manush, thali kare thagai,
Te thi teni thay che, Bhungal vina ni Bhavai. (Mithyabhimman 81)

Ketkar in his PhD thesis mentions that Vinod Adhvaryu remarks in support of the above statement that “This statement draws the attention towards two points. First point is that the dramatic form of Bhavai is adopted and secondly, in the process, the Bhavai form is created without making use of “Bhungal”. It means Bhavai form is not used as it is but some of the distinctive traditional characteristics of Bhavai are removed in the process of cleansing.” Very characteristic to traditional Sanskrit form the play begins with a Nandi or a Mangalacharan.

Nandi- Mangalacharan
Sagdhra Vrut

Sambharu snehbhave, sakal pargane, sarvada Siddhidaata,
Vidyavanivilasi, biraddhar vadi, vighnahartavidhata;
sarvey na ek swami, sukhad mujh shire, het thi haath dharo,
Natyarambhe navin, trigunpati tame, vigna sarvey nivaro

Upjati Vrut

Vichitra dekhav vichitra vaani, vichitra poshak, vichitra prani;
Vichitra aa Natak vishwa naam, paida karyu te prabu ne pranam. (Mithyabhiman, 57)
(The above mentioned lines are an invocation to gods to bless them and take away all
the obstacles faced during the performance, and thanks and worships god for creating
the form of Natak i.e. a play).

Like the traditional Bhavai each of the characters are introduced with a charactersite

aadnu. The introduction of Jivram Bhatt through the aadnu is as follows, song on entrance
of Jivaram Bhatt

Jivaram bhatt avya, jo jo bhai Jivaram Bhatt avya,
Lakdi kar lavya, jojo bhai Jivaram Bhatt avya , ( Mithyabhiman 61)
(the aadnu, look look Jivaram Bhatt has come)

The play written in five acts, is about the central character Jivaram Bhatt who is a
Brahman and makes a pretence of being very wise, scholarly and sophisticated, it is this
pretence that brings out humour in the play. At the age of forty eight he married a sixteen
year old girl. A social evil prevalent at the time and somewhere affects the modern day, the
pitiable condition of the young girl is lampooned in the following lines,

Mithyabhimani var jene madyo,
Te manuni no avatar toh badyo (Mithyabhiman 76)
(A girl who gets a pretentious groom her birth is spoiled)
Jivaram Bhatt is unable to see at night, though everyone is aware of the fact he refuses to accept it and at the end almost loses his life to this conceitedness. Ranglo is another important character of the play which Mahesh Champaklal mentions acts as the alter ego. He is witty, sarcastic, makes fun and in all these satirizes the nature of Jivram and through tries to reveal the hypocrisy and the snobbery of the character all with subtle humour. Whatever the playwright cannot say directly to the audience he says it through the Ranglo, in a nutshell he is the ‘Other self’ of Dalpatram. His function in the classical Sanskrit tradition as the Vidushak, folk theatrical tradition and the present play is defined in the following lines,

SUTRADHAR. Taaru naam shu? Bhabo rajgar, ke Radiyo Ghadvi
RANGLO. Are sutradhar, nayak, maaru nam toh vidhushak che, pan Gujarat ma mane sau Ranglo kahe che.

SUTRADHAR. tu koi Vidhya Jaane che Ke?
RANGLO. Haan, hoon Hasya ras ne Pushti karvani vidhya jaanu chu.

(Mithyabhiman 59)

( The Sutradhar asks Ranglo his name to which he answers that his name is vidushak but people in Gujarat call him Ranglo, he further asks him about any knowledge that he possesses to which he answers of having the knowledge of Hasya Ras)

His satirical vein is visible in the following lines,

RANGLO. Ena bapa ni holi kari.
DEVBAI. tamare kaya Isht ni sadhna che?
RANGLO. Paisadev ni. (Mithyabhiman 136)

(Ranglo is asked by Devbai which god does he worship he answers the god of money)

The play was intended to remove the vulgarity and obscenity prevalent in the folk form, though the language used is simple but at some places in the hands of the Ranglo becomes more rural, dialectic, coarse, uncouth, impolite, terse, curt, sometimes vulgar and obscene
which stoops him to level of a saddist. Hence one can say that playwright fails at places in that sense and example for the same is as follows,

DEVBAI. Atyare paghdi kya leva jay? savare aapishu.

RANGLO. Tyare Tamaor Saalo ke Ghagrho Kahadi ne aapo. (Mithyabhian 96)

(Devbai remarks from where can I get a Paghadi (type of turban) at this moment, will give it to you in the morning to which the Ranglo tells to remove her saree (dress) or skirt and ang give)

The play clearly mentions the chands and the vruts used, Indravraja vrut, Upjaati vrut, Shradulvikridit vrut, shlok, Chabola chand, Upendravraja Vrut, Dohro, Vanshstha vrut, padakul chand, Vasantlika Vrut, Malini vrut, etc are used. Music and song play a pivotal role.
The play ends with a moral in the following lines

Mitra nathi Abhiman gun, E toh ugra ariv;
Mithyaabhimaanne gayo, Jivram no jiv. (Mithyabhiman 140)

(play ends with a moral Jivaram lost his life due to Mithyabhiman)

A master piece and based on the most famous, popular garba of Mena Gujri is the play titled *Mena Gujri* by Rasiklal ch Parikh which he came across at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune, in an article titled “The Ballad of Gujri” which finds the Garba in Gujarati and its translated version in English. It is found in the Indian Antiquary Vol. XVIII August 1889 researched by Putlibai Vadia- Mrs. Kabraji who is well known in Folklore research.

Performed for the first time at the 17th All India Oriental Conference Ahmedabad, on 31st October 1953, the General President, Suniti Kumar Chatterji remarks,

The theme is built on a charming little ballad of Gujar and Rajput heroism and self-abnegation which has been dramatised in the setting of old Gujarati folk-songs and dances by Professor Rasiklal Parikh... The gorgeous dressed of the Gujar women and
men presented a wonderful feast of colour, heightened up by the exquisite folk-dances and popular melodies which come down from the heroic middle ages of India. The set-up was rare and unique and crystallised the joie de-vivre as well as the chivalry and austerity of a simple society has been fully retained with all its subtlety and idealism and its naïveté and passion. Seldom have I seen anything equally beautiful and enrapturing as the performance of the ‘Mena Gurjari’, and I was constantly reminded of the high artistic skill which suffused the Shantiketan performance inspired as they used to be the genius of Rabindranath Tagore. (Mena Gujri 7)

The play opens with an introduction to the origin of Natya and gives an introduction to the play, followed by an invocation to the goddess in Sanskrit. Mena is introduced to us going to temple and then worshippind the the goddess as in,

Mena: Sona na thal ma rattan Kankavati

Kumkum kesar gholiya, saheli!
mata mahakaali ni puja e aavya
maadi na mahatma foray, saheli!
rup rup nu bhandar mahakali

(tej tej no ambar ... sona na (Mena Gujri 23)

(with vermilion in a salver made of gold we have come to worship goddess Mahakaali who is a treasure of beauty)

A classic example of the use a variety of folk genres also very characteristic of the traditional folk forms one finds the use of riddles, a part of folk literature in the play. Riddles amusing recreational activity aiming to entertain and check and sharpen ones intellect. Here in the play it is a sharp witty intelligent yet a romantic contest between the Gujjars of different genders. One finds the following,

ek GURJAR-
Ek uge ne bij aathme
     ek khile ne biju vilay
     eno bhed sho jaano, gujjari!
     toh aapu laakh passay!

MITHA – Suraj uge ne Chando aathme
     kamal khile ne poynu pilaay
     pan haiyani vaatdi
     tam thi shu samjay? (Mena Gujri 27)
     (One rises the other sets one blooms and the other withers, can you solve the mystery
to which Mitha answers that the sun rises and sets and a lotus bloos and withers (closes)
but you will never understand feelings instored in the heart)

An abundant use of folk songs is made in the song danced to the Raas the folk dance of
Gujarat employed by the traditional folk theatre also. The lyrical, musical songs have both an
entertainment as well as a dramatic value. Mena is to leave for Mandavgadh an therefore
they get together and play the Raas,

     Ugyo ugyo chandaliyo ughyo re
     jaame jamna ne kaanthe raas...
     chandaliyo ugyo re...
     gopgopi na tola umtiya
     jai ubhi che natvar paas... (Mena Gujri 29)
     (the moon has risen, on the banks of Jamna is the raas, the gop and gopis have
gathered in groups/multiude and is standing near the Natvar)

Sona-indhoni rupa-bedlu
     gyata talav ne paar...
     talav ne pale khelto,
maaro ladlo diyar tokhar ...

diyar maaro laadko, shura no sardar!

bhabhi ne dekhi aaviyo, karto laad apaar... (Mena Gujri 38)

(with a pot of rupa we went across the lake, the beloved brother in law and the leader of the group, saw the bhabhi (sister in law) and came an act of endearment)

The language used is Rekhtah, ‘zabaani rekhtaa’ means mixed language and Urdu is one such language that finds place in the play. Mena and Shehzaada use their own language but both can understand each other.

SHEHZADA. Ajib naari lage pyari jalave ishq ka aatish!

chipe kaise hamari yah tadapte dil ki khwaish!

kah kis desh se aai, kah kis gaav mein rehna?

kah kis kom ki naari, kahj naam kya naam kya aapna?

MENA. Mandavgadh ni dikri, bad Gujar ni jaat

ghadh-gokul ma paraniya, revat Gujjar naat!

Chanda purush na gharni naari, Mena maaru naam

samajh samajh ke Badshaah, baat karo na haram.

Sahiyaar maari aavi che, mahi bechan ke kaaj

manbhar paachi karo, chaavani maathi aaj! (Mena Gujri 51)

(The shehzaada remarks that Mena has inflamed the spirit of love which cannot be extinguished, from which country and village have you come from and which caste do you belong to and what is your name to which Mena replies that she is daughter of Mandavgadh, caste Gujjar, wife of chanda , Mena is my name, and to return her friends from the camp)
Originally divided in five acts and to the recent into eight but each act is differentiated through a ‘Javanika’ that is the curtain, introducing the characters, and their exits when pulled through instructions gives locale time and characters.

The play Ho Holika by Chandravdan Mehta is a satire on the judicial system of India. It is a very short play of around twenty pages with no division into acts. Like Bhavai the play consists of small incidents put together to which though follow each other but can be added and subtracted. Mahesh Champaklal remarks that Chandravadan Mehta’s Hoholika, keeps the traditional form intact and is a satire on the judicial system, it 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. Again Hasya ras is the most important, he satrizies through the character of kajiji and its none other than the Ranglo who brings out the humour and satire. The very beginning of the play introduces us to the characters an provides a brief introduction to the plot both of which is very characterstic of the folk tradition as seen in,

JIJIBHAI. Guru Maharaj! Jara Dandyu pitvu hamna bandh rakho.

HOLAGURU. Halo Jjibhai! Aaj rang mata no orchav. Maru naam holaguru, pan aa kalu biladu te shu kehvay.

JIJIBHAI. Are aagha raho, ado nahi, Hola guru mahajan,

Aa kalyug no kaan ce, ethi sambhde shrotajan

HOLAGURU. Asal ma hoon Ranglo, aa Rangli thi odkhay

Mara vala sasuji nu naak e kardh khay.

JIJIBHAI. Aaj natak che, ho holika, tya Kajiji no vesh

ame che pehreyu angrakhu, pan khovai gayo che khes.

HOLAGURU. Aa natak name Ho Holika, je kone lakhyu kehvay?

JIJIBHAI : Chandravadan Mehta ne name, je dar vaate vankaya
HOLAGURU. Ho Holika ho, ho holika, te che chokri nu naam?

JIJIBHAI. Na Guru, mul ma toh ho holika, pan vaat thayi che aam chandravadan Mehta,
enu aankh nu jara kaachu
Te nakal karta baitha, te khota nu thayi gayu saachu. (Hoholika, 3)

( In the above lines the characters of Ranglo and Rangli are introduced and the reader and audience are provided information about the play, it is said Chandravadan Mehta was partially blind in one eye and therefore instead of Ha Ha it became Ho Holika)

The Hologuru here satirises inefficiency of the Kazi to provide proper and correct, accurate and timely judgement which is a direct satire on the Indian Judicial system.

HOLA GURU:

Ho Ho Ho Ho Ho Ho ho
Ta ta thai thai tat a thai thai tha
Duniyabhar na hame musafir,
Shak bi khaya bhaji ka
Bahut kacheri dekhi humne nayay to kajjal kaaji ka,
jo nyay toh kajjal kaji ka. ( Hoholika 12)

After every judgement he has a novel wity remark

Duniya mein kayi sauda dekha, akkal haraji ka
Kai kacheri dekhi humne, nyay ot kajjal kaji ka
aji nyay ot kajjal kaaji ka. (Hoholika 15)

(The Ranglo here means that he has travelled a lot and seen the entire world but nothing as stupid as the judgement of the Kaazi)
Truly a perfect example of the employment of Bhavai can be seen just as a set of vesas.

A string of plays based on the vesas of Lalji Maniyaar is Ramanbhai Nilkanth’s *Rai no Parvat* (1913) which draws inspiration from the doha which is mentioned on its title page

Saiaa se sab kuch hot hai, mujh bande se kyu naahi;
raiku parbat kare, parbat bagej maahi. (Rai no Parvat 186).
( The above lines mention that if every thing is possible by god then why not by me, its possible for him to make a mountain of a mole)

Apart from the base of the storyline the play hardly employs the traditional form. Based on the same theme is Chinu Modi’s *Jalaka*. Modi’s play is centred around the character of Jalaka, published by Asait Sahitya Sabha which endeavoured to preserve Bhavai.
The play opens with traditional introduction of the play wherein the Veshgore synonymous to the Nayak proclaims that they are going to perform the vesa of Rai.

**VESHGORE.** Alya, aaje aapne Rai no vesh karvana chiyee,

Rai no.

**RANGLI.** ...... Taare Rai no vesh karvo hoy toh Rai no vesh kar ane Methi no vesh karvo hoy

toh Methi no vesh kar, pan ame toh –

Desh tyaji ne, Vesh tyaji ne, jaishu bije gaam,

haal, Rangla bije gaam.

.................................................................

**VESHGORE.** Rangla vagar kai bhavai bhaali che?

**RANGLO.** Have Bhavai kare che maaro bhuto bhai. Na, na, maari bairi same jovanu?

Kharaab najare jovanu?

**RANGLI.** Parki naari game tetli rupadi hoy, toy he veshgor! eni Kaamna thay?
VESHGORE. aa munjhvan bharya sawaal no jawaab ek j manas ne aavde che, ane te che Rai ... (Jalaka 24)

(The veshgore eyes the Rangli in a wrong manner and therefore she is irritated with him. The Veshgore tell her that they have to vesa of Rai, so with a pun she retorts that you perform what ever you want rai (mustard) or methi(Fenugreek), leaing everything we will go to another village. Veshgore tries to pacify him him by saying how can a Bhavai be performed without a Rangla. She further reiterates that however a woman would be beautiful one should not look at her with greedy eyes, to which the Veshgore replies that it can be best answered by none other than Rai)

At very beginning we are introduced to the characters of Vesgore, Ranglo and Rangli and the other characters are slowly introduced to us with their characterstic aavnus,

Avnu: Ave che, ave che, Maali no chokro aave che.

lave che, lave che, e phulo no gajro laave che

..........................................................

Avnu: Ave che, ave che, ek chatur Malan ave che. (2) (Jalaka 24)

(Here comes the son of a gardener who brings a garland of flowers with him, here comes the female gardner)

Modi mentions in his introduction that he has woven Duha (couplets), songs and some Harigeet into his verse, a very example can be seen in Mohini’s thoughts

Mohini: Kevi chu hoon hathbhaagi naari, kevi chu durbhagi?

very saathe vahaal karya ni icha kyat hi jaagi? (Jalaka 56)

( how unlucky am I to fall in love with my enemy)

The playwright uses Bhungal, Kansi joda the traditional ins truments used in Bhavai. He makes use of chorus which also lend a helping hand in moving the plot forward. The playwright has modified the theme to his convenience. In the introduction to the play he says
that he has kept the songs, dialogues, narration all according to native indigenous style. Nimesh Desai in ‘Dirsdarshak in Kaifiyat’ (Directors acceptance) he mentions that while staging the play that with the least amount of material and props, and without any fancy the play can be still presented.

A look at the titles of the above mentioned plays suggest that the plays have been written with Rai as the central character, drawing inspiration from the same vesa as well as the play *Rai no Parvat* is Hasmukh Baradi’s *Rai no Darpanray* (1986). The common theme that runs through all the plays is of political intrigue and revenge but is treated differently at different hands. Baradi draws heavily from *Rai no Darpanray*, he himself says ten to fifteen percent of play is kept as it is. The play is about King Parvatray who kills king Ratnadeep through deceit and usurps his kingdom. He has married Lilavati who is very young and beautiful, suffering from an inferiority complex the king aspires to gain back his youth to enjoy marital bliss. He has pact with Jalka that he would give her one fourth of his kingdom if she is successful in bringing back his youth. While entering Kisalwadi he is shot with an arrow mistaking him for an animal and is killed by Rai. Jalaka decides to present Rai as young Parvatray and make him the ruler which Rai is a bit hesitant about wherein she reveals that she is the Queen Amrut devi and he the prince Jagdeep whose father was killed by Parvatray and therefore a he is a deserving successor to the throne. The very essence of the play is revealed in the following lines as in the traditional theatre forms introduced to the audience,

VRUND. Mul katha lai bhavai vesh ni, aath dayka pehla

Ramanbhai nilkanthe enu natak kidhu rudu;

‘Rai no parvat’ na name bhajvayu e thodu;

pustak be putha vacche sangrayu e jahaju;

Rai, Jalaka, Lilavati na patro naval rupe;
’Rai no darpanray na naame avtarta aa manche... (Rai no Darpanray 2)

( based on a original Bhavai vesh, Ramanbhai nilkanth created a play by the name Rai no Parvat was preserved between the covers of a book, the characters of Rai, Jalaka and Lilavati are brought back in a totally in a new form on the stage in the form of Rai no Darpanray)

Like the traditional Bhavai it presents the readers with the avnu and introduction of the characters and also titled as Patro nu Avnu.

Patro nu Avnu

NAT, NATI. Rai aave, Rai aave, Rai aave....

(banne rai no pravesh)

RAI. Parakram praktya nu karva dharyo deh!

aolakh khud ni pamva (maare) dharva kai kai vesh!

...............................................................&nbsp; .............................................................

NAT, NATI. Lilavati aave, Lilavati aave. Lilavati aave.

(Lilavati no pravesh)

LILAVATI. Nirnay chata man thaki, karva nahi adhikar,

munga-bhola lok ni pratik shi hu nar!

...............................................................&nbsp; .............................................................

NAT, NATI. Jalka aave, Jalka aave, Jalka aave

(Jalka no pravesh)

JALKA. Dakshin chede bag chutyu ochintu teer,

Sadhan, Sadhya ne karm na parkhaya tya heer!... (Rai no Darpanray 2-3)
(Here all the characters are introduced one by one, Rai for an act of bravery assumes a vesa, Lilavati is a symbol of a helpless woman, mistakingly an arrow was shot from the south, where devotion, devotee and the deeds are tested)

Two important elements of the play are the Darpan Panthi who mirror the reality and the Darshak Vrund (a group of spectators/viewers) who at times follow the traditional and at some times dare to question, at times employing music and dance, as it says,

DARPAN PANTHIO. Ame toh Darpanpanthi !...
ramiye, bhamiye nagar jano ne rasto chindhi
Ame toh Darpanpanthi !...
Jaat Jaat na, bhaat bhaat na darpandhari,
Geet nartan ne vaat sahu ne daiye dhaali!
ramta, bhamta loklok ma karta sandhi,
Ame toh Darpanpanthi !... (Rai no Darpanray 5)

(We are Darpanpanthis, we play, move show the right direction to people, we Darpanpanti are of different types, we weave and project everything through dance and music and try to create harmony)

The characters themselves assume different vesas at different stages, Jalaka acts as a gardner, a magician as queen Amrutdevi, Rai as price jagdeep and later on assumes the form of Darpanay. The play is interspersed with music, songs and dance and at later stage the dialogues are almost lyrical. Mahesh Champaklal opines that “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 Ganpati 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.” Irrespective of any theory the play transfers us to the traditional Bhavai through its performance.

Bakul Tripati says “Leela to me, is a search for a free plastic form of Gujarati Theatre Bhawai provides ample inspiration.” Leela subtitled as Dhan lalsa ni Bhavai meaning a Bhavai of greed for money, is a play amalgamating the traditional Bhavai elements and modern settings. A play in three acts laced with humour, satire, farce, mock heroism it lampoons the society for its materialism and corruption. The play begins with an invocation to Ganesha

Ha ha re dundalo re Ganpat...
pratham pehla jene smariye dev dundala
laksh, labh no datar dev maram te tha thai ta thai ta thai.... (Leela 23)
(Very first we worship lord Ganesha who helps make profit)

It is followed by the avnu and the javnu. Rangili enters from the audience similar to Bhavai. It is interspersed with song and dance, use of chorus, dialogues and language according to the character vesa of contractor, politician, spiritual guru etc. Each vesa has an avnu example of contractor

RANGLAL. Hoon toh Contractor
Rangeel contractor
Hu toh Contractor
Baarobaar jamin levi
baarobaar vechvi. (Leela 45)
(I am a contractor, I buy land and sell land)

A glimpse of the song employed,
Kok ni mudi ko na daam,
aapna haath ma dalali!
Kok ni mehnat ne kok nu naam,
   aapna haath ma dalali!.... (Leela 44)
(Someone’s capital, someone’s price, but the brokerage is in my hands, someone’s toil
and some one’s name, but the brokerage is in my hands)

*Kem Makanji Kya Chalya* (1976) by Shitanshu Yashchandra originally written as a
Radio play to be performed at Akashwani Mumbai, is a search by Makanji for his friend
Amthaji at the literal level, a search for the inner self and existence at the deeper level, a play
with social, political and philosophical underlying themes. An interesting part about the play
was that the character of Makanji was to be played by an actress called Saritaben in lieu of a
male actor in reversal and revival of the Bhavai tradition where males used to don female
roles. The play begins with an invocation to goddess Saraswati, Natraja and Ganapati.

NAYAK: E Saraswati mata ni Jay!
   Jay saamb sadashiva Natraja, jay Ganpati dundala
   Jay  Jay Jay Jay Saraswati ma, ho am par kirpala.....

(Kem Makanji Kya Chalya 1)
(Praise be to lord Saraswati, Natraja and Ganapati, keep us under you mercy)

The traditional element of Bhavai of the actors addressing audience directly and
introducing them to the characters as well as the theme of the play is seen in the following
lines,

CHOKRO: Avo kayo natak hoy?
NAYAK: Sambhadvu che enu naam?
CHOKRO: Jaroor.
NAYAK: (andar jaine) alya, Desai saheb, Nimeshbhai sahib,mota, thava do jaherat ,
bhungla ma!
(natak nu naam, dirgdeshak, lekhakh, nat-nati o, nepathaya kalakar, sanstha vagar rabeta mujab jaheraat thay che) (Kem Makanji Kya Chalya, 5)

(What kind of a play is it, do you want to know the name, of course, the Nayak calls on to Desai, Nimesh for bringing out the advertisement wheren a the banner of the play is displayed to the audience.)

The references provided by the playwright in the text helps us comprehend the fact that it has been performed in traditional style. He mentions that the steps of Bhavai are used, traditional as well new instruments are used. Songs are unique and have been extensively used in play which highlights facts and takes the action forward, the chorus is also used,

VRUND.  gup che, gup che, gup che, gup che,
GAYAK 1.  amne aapo tadhak, aa toh navi tadap che!
VRUND.  gup che, gup che, gup che, gup che, gup che,
GAYAK 2.  gup che, gup che, gup che, gup che, gup che,
   manas mude mushkeli che,
   ne uparthi valagi Ishwar naam ni lap che.

.................................................................

EK GAYAK.  kya che paani? paani paani?
BADHA GAYAK. paani paani paani paani-
EK GAYAK.  kya che paani? tarsya ne aa
   aa khali khoba ni kap che?   (Kem Makanji Kya Chalya, 21

(The wife of Makanji doubts whether Amthabhai exists in reality and the song highlights and hammers the point whether its a reality or just a rumour)

Another interesting element worth mentioning in the play is the used of English words which appear in abundance in the play words used are interrupt, plot, side role, main role, thank you, comedy, tragedy, plot, dialogue, class, type, modern, hot hot, company, of course,
realistic, first class, sorry, try, name plate, celebrate, compound tower etc phrase like trouble never comes singly is used moreover a song also contains reference to Wordsworthian poem that can be seen,

Makanji: (lalkaari ne) are daaba! are jamna!

are daba jamna,
daba jamna, daba jamna bhai!

Rainbow in the sky!
pelo Sundargadh dekhay-
he pelo Sundargadh dekhay-
A Rainbow in the sky.
are! kanak kot chalkara kare... pure gold!
when I behold a rainbow in the sky!
my heart leaps up!
.......................................

(bolchal ma) saalu, Premanand ane Wordsworth bey mara beta! samata aaje yaad aave
che...... (Kem Makanji Kya chalya 86)

*Haathi Raja* by Pravin Pandya is one such experiment in the direction. In the introduction to his collection of plays *Haathi Raja ane Bija Natako* the playwright mentions that he was fascinated by the Khels performed during Navrati at his native. The Khels of Prithviraj Chauhan, Rana Pratap Singh, Patai Raja would be performed on the nine days till dawn which with his other friends would copy and enact during the day. These Khels were nothing but Bhavai performances and the seeds of which were sown from his childhood. His association with drama continued during his college says as well as while working with ISRO as a scriptwriter. *Haathi Raaja* was first published in Kumar. The Central Academy
experienced a paucity of full length plays at the national level therefore the academy invited plays from Gujarati playwrights under the scheme “Playwright workshop in Indian Languages”. The play *Haathi Raja* was accepted under the scheme. The play was selected but was written in the realistic form, the academy insisted on a non realistic form, therefore the play was written in the realistic as well as the non realistic form of Bhavai.

The play is a political satire portrayed efficiently through the characters of the play. The king Kanaknandan of Bharatpur is brought to power through a ritual, though appointed by the people he turns a blind eye to the woes of his people whom he is indebted to and segregates all wealth and help for the rich greedy flatterers he is surrounded with. Pandya creates two characters Asait, , the originator and the father of Bhavai and Mandad his son both revolt against the tyranny of the king. This theme of the play is interwoven into cultural fabric of Bhavai, the folk theatre of Gujarat.

On talking about the thought and idea on using the elements of Bhavai, the playwright reminisces, he always wondered that if one has to write a play with a mass appeal one has to take recourse to History or Mythology which he didn’t want to, as youngster he would also comment that “we are slaves of History and Mythology”. Inspiration for the same flowed through Vijay Tendulkar’s remark to try to do something different which inturn paved a way for an exploration. Democracy he opines is a very ambiguous term difficult to understand and explain as well. Many political plays were written during the time but he hardly remembers any which discussed the concept of Democracy, moreover his association with dramatics and street theatre dawned on him the realization of the theatrical devices easily understood by the common masses and the folks in the streets. He believed that a couplet was powerful in communicating with the audience than a two page dialogue and therefore he was drawn to the rich folk theatrical tradition despite the fact that initially he had some reservations on employing the elements of Bhavai.
Like Tanvir’s *Charandas Chor*, Pandya’s *Haathi Raja* is also based on a folktale “Haathni kalash dhole te raja” meaning Elephant (cow) that spills water from the kalash (urn/pitcher) on the head of a person becomes the king which he heard from his mother. According to the tale a prince is exiled, banished from his kingdom travels to another kingdom, state but it is already evening by the time he reaches and the gates to it are closed. He spends his night sleeping near the gate and in morning when the door opens and he enters an Elephant (cow) enters and spills water from the kalash on the prince and he is made the king of that kingdom. This becomes the ‘take off point’ of the play.

The play begins with traditional Ganesh Vandana by Asait and Mandad,

Partham Ganpati namiye tamne vighna jagat na harjo.

Bhavai karshu ame hriday thi siddh tame karjo.

ame chahiye Uday subhno and ashubh thi mukti.

Bharatpur na Janmangan ne dejo Subh ni Shakti.

Vinayak dejo Shubh ni Shakti. (Haathi Raja 5)

(Firstly we bown before you Ganpati to remove our obstacles, we would perform the Bhavai from our hearts make it succesfull, let the good and auspicious rise and freedom from harm, give the people of Bharatpur the strength of the good Vinayak give them the strength of good)

The references on the performance after the Ganesh vandana suggest the playing of Bhungal and other musical instruments, very characterstic of Bhavai. Though Pandya has used the folk form he is quite innovative in style, instead of applying the traditional style of having a separate aavanu for each character of the play, he has woven the entire story in brief so there’s an aavanu for the entire story rather than individual characters. S D Desai comments “The play ‘will make you laugh like mad’, the aavanu of the play based on the bhavai form assures the spectators and adds ‘and it will make you weep silently.’ It unfolds,
satirically with a tinge of pain, the tragic-comic drama our political leaders enact. People bestow power upon these leaders and they do little more than hold out a carrot to them. The bumptious, impudent king (Janak) and the henchmen licking his boots in the play are dated by people under the leadership of a common man.” (Desai, 169) The aavanu sung is as follows,

Haathi Raja no vesh lavya, Bhavaiya
Haathi Raja no vesh lavya ... ... ...
Kalash dholi ne nime, raja je Hatni.
loko gane che ene, bacchadi bapadi.
eni katha ne vani lavya, Bhavaiya... ... ...
.........................................................

Khad Khad hasvanu laine avya Bhavaiya
Chanu rovanu laine aavya...
Haathi Raja no vesh lavya, Bhavaiya
Haathi Raja no vesh lavya ... ... ... (Haathi Raja 5)
(The Bhavays have brought the vesa of Haathi Raja, the Haathni that ordains the king by spilling the kalash, people sympathise with her, her story is brought about, the Bhavaiya have brought laughter and tears both, have brought the vesa od Haathi raja)

Though the playwright wanted to revive the form of Bhavai he wanted come out of the usual form of the Ranglo and Rangli and the tihai of Ta thaiya thaiya ta thai, he therefore creates two characters Asait the originator of Bhavai and his son Mandad, both of whom perform Bhavai and at a latter stage use it as a weapon to dethrone the king. Though Democracy prevails in the state both father and son are prevented from performing it what they are asked for is a necessary permit to do so. At the later stage when they revolt against the king a complete ban is announced on performing Bhavai which actually is very
paradoxical to the existent form of government which advocates freedom. The King announces the ban saying,

KANAKNANDAN. Kalakar chu?

Bhavai na jore te balva no agni phukayo che.
te thi taari Bhavai maathe pratibandh mukayo che.
aaje pratibandh mukayo che. (Haathi Raaja 45)

(The king says that under the shield of Bhavai you have revolted against the king therefore Bhavai has been banned)

These words act as catalyst to the strengthening their faith to restore democracy, they reply,

MANDAD. Bhavai maathe rok lagavi chindhiyo che te rasto,
amo vadshu javaab eno bhavai thi sansanto.
pran lau chu ke bhavai bhaivi taro gadh hoon todish,
tane ukhadi ne paayo hoon lokraj no kholish. (Haathi Raja 45)

(By banning Bhavai you have showed us a direction and we will give you a scathing reply, Mandad takes a vow to break the kings fort into pieces and established the people’s rule)

Almost an allegory the playwright very wisely and skilfully brings in the image of a carrot and the bull using it as tool to lampoon and criticise modern corrupt society. The king Kanaknandan is brought to power by the nexus of the carrot and the Bull what he terms in the play as the Carrot and Bull politics. The Carrot here symbolises the offers, schemes and plans that a party doles out just before the election which lures the people to vote for them, so they come to power not on the basis of their achievements or contribution to the society but by a corrupt means, similarly the king distributes carrots in entire Bharatpur as a result of which the people sing praises of the king, the Elephant (cow) still would not spill the water from the kalash on the king had not she be compelled by the ferocious Bull that was set after her, so
she did so not by will but by force, which is actually very relevant point depicting the present state and condition of Indian politics and which further in the play develops on the line of black humour. This bitter truth finds brought out subtlely in the following lines

ASAIT. Gaajar ane sandh ni rajneeti.

HAATHNI. Ha Asait, Gaajar ane sandh ni rajneeti. shu aa Kanaknandan ne kalash dholi ne raja banavyo che?

ASAIT. To e raja banyo kevi rite?

HAATHNI. Asait je diveshe hoon kalash dholva ni hati e divase Kanaknand ne aakha Bharatpur ma gaajar vehchiya hata gaajar. Praja gaajar keif ma mast hati ane Kanaknandan no jay jay kar karti hati. Toy hoon toh ena par kalash na dholat.

pan... pan..

ASAIT. Pan shu Haathnimaata!

HAATHNI. Ene hinsak sashakat madaand saandh ne mara par chodi mukyo, e saandhe mane vivash kari. Aa badha jota rahya, ene bal purvak potana maathe kalash dholavyo ane raja thayo!

ASAIT. hoy nahi mata, shu vaat karo cho?

HAATHNI. Ha asait, aache Haathipratha nu kadvu satya! (Haathi Raja 35-36)

(The Haathni tells the story to Asait how Kanaknandan was made the king by luring people by distributing the Carrots and by set the Bull after her so she panicked and spilled the water from the kalash on him)

Moreover after coming to power the king is surrounded by the rich and the flatteres who praise him and extract preferential treatment. Elated with false praises, the king is ready to shower them with undue favours, when Gajadhar says that inorder to implement his schemes he wants nothing except ten fifteen thousand acres of land, free electricity, water and money to import machinery from abroad, the king is very liberal towards him and tells his
minister to provide him with everything and still asks him if he wants something more, on the
other hand the common mass who are responsible for making him the king and who require
government assistance are totally neglected. Bhago representing the common people wails
that we made you king so that you solve all our problems but we don’t even have the basic
necessities of food clothing and shelter to which he is asked by Vidhyadhar to forgo all
materialistic and earthly wishes. Bhimji a farmer raises his voice against the king, he reminds
him of the promise made by the king to built a stairwell, he says we don’t even have enough
water to drink. Unlike his attitude towards Gajadhar where he freely gives away all help, here
the minister informs and advices the king that the state treasure is almost empty hence they
do not have much money for this scheme they will have to accept donations and ask the
people also to contribute, as after all the scheme was meant for them. He therefore advises
the king to levy a well tax on the people. Another instance when Bhago tells that king has
come out with the scheme of distributing a pehran (shirt) to the poor he received just a button.
The minister tells him on the account of meagre funds in the treasury it was decided to
provide them atleast with collars if they are unable to provide the full shirt, the king inquires
that Bhago just got button not even collar to which the minister tells the king in private that
the princes have got coats stitched for them and utilized the cloth. So here again corruption
peeps in. Another scheme by the state is of providing money to buy a cow to the poor
Brahmins when Asait tries to avail benefit of it Akalsen and Sakalsen find many faults with,
about his appearance, status and finally come to a conclusion that he nowhere near resembles
to be a poor Brahmin and therefore he is rejected of the benefits which then Mandad is
succesfull to avail off. But here still we get a glimpse of the corrupt officials who demand
something in return of the money given to him. They themselves proclaim that they don’t sit
in the offices so that the people don’t find them and that in a way they are helping them
preserve the treasury and working for the benefit of the state. It is when the father and son are
discussing of the corruption and the cheating that is going on they come across the Haathni mata revered by the people and responsible for making Kanaknandan the king. The Haathni mata is in a very sorry condition wherein she is troubled by the blood sucking bugs on her body. She narrates her ordeal to them that she has been completely neglected once she ordained the king just like the king’s subjects. It is here that Mandad decides to restore the spirit of democracy by rebelling against the overthrow the king. S D Desai rightly remarks that “Pravin Pandya has a theme with a strong conflict of contemporary relevance and spectacular possibilities. The charcters, including that of the symbolic Hastini (Uma), have fairly clear outlines with comically elongated edges. The dialogue, at times in the verse, picks up a good rhythm besides being at times, meaningful and lyrical.”

This idea and act of rebellion, revolt and protest is subtley brought out through songs and dance in the play. Music, songs and dance are very characteristic of folk theatre, they are the pillars on which any folk theatre rests. The playwright has employed these folk theatrical elements in his play. Songs play a pivotal role in drama, they are not mere embellishments for attracting the audience but have a specific role to play. Winkler remarks,

Drama has always derived much of its popular appeal from the intermingling of visual, mimetic, aural and linguistic resources in live performance. The dramatic song can be showstopping in impact. Thorugh the shift in medium from the verbal to the combined musical and verbal, the playwright immediately captures audience attention. A dramatic song often provides a concentrated expression of the essence of the surrounding scene. It frequently represents the emotional and lyrical highlight of the entire play, a moment that can instantly epitomize its feeling. Very often in modern drama, songs may also contain condensed intellectual or political statements, reaching out in an alienating fashion to shake the audience’s consciousness. Within a few bars songs can evoke a huge cultural complexes for a listener. Through strategic positioning
in the play’s structure, especially at the beginning or end of scenes or in the final moments of the entire drama, they create a sense of opening or closure. Songs are particularly effective in helping to establish a community of viewers and listeners participating in live theatre performance as an age-old cultural ritual. (Winkler 13)

Pandya delightfully interfuses songs at regular intervals which function in creating a certain mood and putting forward certain facts and opinions. Pandya opines that he has used innumerable songs written in couplets along with prose and poetry, he has a strong belief in the power of songs and that they had a stronger appeal than dialogues, his fascination for the song emanates itself from his association and experience with street theatre, he says that he was completely aware and confident of the kind of song to be used in a particular situation the tune to be set, the wordings to be used etc. At the very outset when Kanaknadan is made the king and the subjects do have high hopes from him they sing of his praises

Raja Kanaknandan no jay ho, jay ho.
raja Kannaknandan no jay ho, jay ho.
Adharm no kshyay ho, paap no naash ho.
such ho chotaraf, chortaraf hash ho.
Raja Kanaknandan no jay ho, jay ho... ... ... (Haathi Raja 11)
(Praises to the king Kanaknandan let all evil be destroyed)

The nexus between the king and Vidhyadhar who try to please each other is quite evident in following song accompanied by Raas the folk dance of Gujarat.

Taari ne maari jodi Vidhyadhar
Taari ne maari jodi re lol.. ... ...
amne sambhado tame Vidhyadhar,
Tamne sambhadiye ame re lol... Taari ne maari ... (Haathi Raja 16)
(Both Vidhyadhar and the King celebrate their pairing and togetherness)
The politics of the state and the deplorable condition of the poor in this filthy game of politics finds mention in the following lines of the song,

Hastinipaal
ame Hastinipaal
..................................
Sajjan je thase, bhukhe mari jase,
pindharo thase, e shiro puri khase.
ahi chal ne kapat
e j raaj ni ramat
kon hoy sidhusat... Hastinipaal ame.. (Haathi Raja 27)
(we are Hastinipaal, one who will try to be good will die of hunger, one who will be a bandit will eat delicacies, here’s planning and plotting, who is simple and straight?)
The dichotomy of the state and subject wherein the former flourishing and enjoying and the latter subjugated and exploited is subtly woven in this song.

Gadh ma raja aish kare che
raiyat dukh ma sabde.
Bhitar bhad bhad salge saghda
ane hoth ma babde.
sahu ne vahlo svaarth banyo che
jay Bharatpur khade.
He juth aniti paap vahe che
lohi bani ne naade.
sahu ma lohi bani ne naade
re sahu ma lohi bani ne naade. (Haathi Raja 31)
(the King is enjoying in the fort and the subjects are sad, and the people inside are murmuring that everyone is selfish, let Bharatpur go to the dogs, lies, injustice and sin is flowing in the veins of people in the form of blood)

At a later stage in the play the entire dialogue or conversation that takes place between Kanaknandan and Mandad. The verbal duel is put forth lyrically as,

KANAKNANDAN.  lok gane che jane tu e kathputli che maari,
          jena romrom vahe che swarth ane lachari.
          svakendri aa loko tane deshe sheno aadhar?
          raaj tantra ni shakti che ke unchke taaro bhar.
                          .................................................................
          taari paase matra Bhavaiya kevi rite ladshe?
          te ribashe tu ribashe mauj badha ne padse.
                          .................................................................
KANAKNADAN. ....
          aabh faat ta kahe thigdu kem kari devase?
          hakikatoh thi nathi thayu te Bhavai thi shu thaase?
MANDAD.  Bhavai maari dhal che raja, Bhavai che hatiyaar.
          Bhavai ni paase che raja, loko no aadhar.
          loko ni vache aa mandad, jom bani felaashe.
          ek divas tara aa gadh no bharbhar bhuko thaase.
          Raja tara bhuko thase,
          Tara gadh no bhuko thase. (Haathi Raja 39)

(The king says that the people are self centred and you just have the Bhavaiyas on your side how will you fight? and you will suffer, What can Bhavai do? Mandad replies that}
Bhavai is his shield and weapon both and Bhavai has the support of the people and your fort will turn to dust

The very action of play is portrayed in the couplets that appear in latter part of the play right from awakening the people to gathering them and inviting the Haathni to break the fort which the king has shielded himself in and at the end broken by her. The very climax or the end of the play is brought about whereby the spirit of democracy is upheld.

Lokshai na mulyo sahu ni bhitar ugshe jyaare,
lokshahi e vidhi mati ne aachar banshee tyare,
janman Gaumukh, lokshahi che tya thi vehti Ganga.
Gaumukh swachchh hase toh chokhi rehse aakhi Ganga. (Haathhi Raja 54)

A song performing different functions at different intervals performs a dual role, one of being solely of the performance tradition and secondly as a part of the text an entirely literary tradition. This duality is well explained by Winkler,

The dramatic song, course, participates in the duality of drama itself as both script and performance, literar text and public event. The best of dramas and the best of dramatic songs can be reread as literature and are usually written for a literate audience. A major argument... is that dramatic song in the contemporary period is indeed an integral element in the play as literature. Although song words themselves may employ a simpler patterning than that of a sophisticated poem, they gain their full literary dimensions through the context in which they are placed. The ironies and the multiplicities of meaning they evoke can be extremely subtle and complex. Certainly not all these dimensions can be perceived by an audience during performance. When sung on stage, a dramatic song will have a more immediate, emotional effect. When reread in leisure it will participate in the literary structure of the entire drama and contribute to the aesthetic patterning of the whole.
newer performance theory sees theater as pluralistic art, in which such elements as acting, gesture, lighting, space, sound effects, and voice do not merge but confront each other; the spectator is charged with performing the semiotic act of creating the meaning of the whole. Thus performance is no longer seen merely as a translation of the text, just as music is no longer seen as translation of song lyrics. The theater experience is seen as a creative process, a dynamic continuum in which the meaning is established during the performance as the spectator filters the various signs and stimuli and decides which embodies the message of meaning. (Winkler 20)

Apart from songs and the Raas, the playwright makes a skillful use of curtain, mask and chorus. The Haathni is symbolically portrayed on the stage with a mask held by a stick. It serves a purpose to the dramatic function wherein the king is seeking shelter and protection in the fort, the chorus comes on the stage with the placards representing the Haathni come on to the stage, a bull comes forward from the fort from behind the king and takes away all the placards, scares them away with his ferocious horns and a gives the placard to the king who uses them as keys which symbolises the strength and success of evil and exploitation of the mass. This flexibility of the form has been a major cause of the playwrights attention towards the folk. The chorus performs varied function it may comment on the action, or just reiterate and emphasize certain point or idea. At regular intervals the chorus can be heard chanting from the curtain “Maharaj Mandad no jay ho”, praise to the King Mandad in support to Mandad’s dream of becoming the king. When people blindly follow the king praise him the chorus as the herd joins in singing “Raja Kanaknandan no Jay ho” praise to the king Kanaknandan, to emphasize the point to bring forth the schemes they echo the idea “Yojana raju Karu”. A dramatic quality is attributed where singing they form a fort surrounding the king. More over to increases the degree of cruelty when it echos the sadist laughter of the king. Desai rightly remarks that when “one looks for full-thorated bursts of group singing ....
a stronger musical accompaniment and freer movement. Contrasts in scenes like the one in which a royal cleberation gets broken with a poor man’s cry of pain can add to the dramatic quality of the presentation. Judging by the script, the playwright’s conception of Hastini is more imaginative and spectacular.”

Language in the cultural domain is an expression of their beliefs, social traditions and customs, it helps interpret the societal codes, conducts and values, it help comprehend the social system. The language used is simple Gujarati in the matter of dialogues but the songs, poetry, couplets used have a regional and dialectic flavour attached to it. On commenting on the language of the playwright says that the theatre person within him helped him write the play. So he believe if one want’s to write a play one has to do theatre, without a theatrical experience a play is difficult to be written. This doesn’t hold true for novel or poetry as they are meant to read but the final aim of any play is to be staged therefore one has to aware of the creative and practical use and understand the nuances of theatre. He opines that “it is very difficult to write 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 a visual and a spoken language that merge or confront each other to create a meaning, so its language is different.” He mentions that his mother has been a major source the richness of his language, though she was illiterate her language was very rich, the quotations and proverbs that he has made use of in the play comes his mother, his father learnt Vedant from kashi so the language for his poetry is indebted to his father. Desai remarks,
Pravin Pandya has a theme with a strong conflict of contemporary relevance and spectacular possibilities. The characters, including that of the symbolic Hastini (Uma), have fairly clear outlines with comically elongated edges. The dialogue, at times in verses, picks up a good rhythm besides now being meaningful, now lyrical. It is with subtlety and tangents, however, that a satire, even with its cutting edge, assumes depth, not with loud contemporary references like ‘an humble farmer’.

The stage presentation, which essays distinctiveness in its aural and visual appeal with a strong undercurrent of meaning, sustains interest. It, however, fully comes alive sporadically and remains uneven in its momentum. (Desai 170)

On the whole, the play is a satirical allegory, raising an issue that is very relevant in the time when the thesis is being written, whether the present state of politics upholds the spirit of democracy and nationalism. That the people need to be awaken to their rights of freedom of free speech and free will, that power is vested in hands of the common people who elect them and transmit power to them. The playwright employs the form more as vehicle for the dramatization of the theme rather than a mere revival strategy. The creative use of the folk form can be best understood from the performance than the literary text. Commenting on the noteworthy aspect of the stage version, S D Desai remarks “Pravin adapts improvises and subdues bhavai in such a way that it does not hog the limelight as mere popular entertainment. Instead, it becomes a vehicle of dramatic action, which abounds here in elements like comic climax, anti-climax, mock heroism, mime, light action cues, farce and the like. It also carries communication, ever if rather casually, which embraces matters as serious as a ruler’s duty, people’s rights, justice and means to an end.”

Apart from the writers, actors and artists have contributed to the revival of Bhavai. Artists like Archan Trivedi, Nisarag Trivedi etc strive to keep the form alive, Darpana Academy also is working towards the revival of Bhavai. On the attempts of revival made
Panchal remarks “All attempts to rejuvenate the Bhavai must be made. But any attempts to meddle with its basic character and vital elements and its environment cannot but lead to disaster… This new contemporary Indian theatre has freely drawn from the traditional regional theatre and herein lies the value of that theatre.”

WORKS CITED


Mehta, Chandravadan. Ho Holika. Gandev Sahitya Mandir. 1957


Photo Courtesy Janak Dave: C C Mehta’s Hoholika
Photo Courtesy Janak Dave: C C Mehta’s Hoholika

Photo Courtesy Janak Dave: C C Mehta’s Hoholika
Photo Courtesy Janak Dave, teaching new artists

The Pooja ritual before the performance
Bhungal at the Vadnagar Museum
Artists getting ready for the performance

The vesa of Ganesh
The vesa of Juthan

Worshiping Goddess Amba through Raas and the candles specific to the form
The Vesa of Mahakali

The Vesa of Patai Raja
The artists of the troupe

Jyashankar Sundari and Bapulal Nayak, Photgraph at Vadnagar Museum
The Hall devoted to Bhavai Artists at the Vadnagar Museum
Review of *Haathi Raja* in The Times of India, Janak Dave as Asait

**Courtsey Pravin Pandya**
Haathi Raja has strong visual appeal

Theatre

By S D Desai

Garage Studio Theatre’s Haathi Raja, staged at Natrang during the week, is a modest but significant happening of Gujarati theatre today, which has of late been in a state of slumber. It's an original play written by Pravin Pandya at and following a playwrights' workshop organized by the national Sangeet Natak Akademi, and directed by Kailash Pandya, one of the experts at the workshop.

The play “will make you laugh like mad,” the arrangement of the play being based on the bhavai form, assures a member of the audience and adds, “and it will make you weep silently.”

It unfolds, satirically, with a tinge of pain, the tragic-comic drama over political leaders exact. People bestow power upon these leaders and they do little more than hold out a carrot to them. The bumptious, impudent king (Janak) and his henchmen licking his boots in the play are dared by people under the leadership of a common man.

Pravin Pandya has a theme with a strong conflict of contemporary relevance and spectacular possibilities. The characters, including that of the symbollic Hastini (Una), have fairly clear outlines with comically elongated edges. The dialogue, at times in verse, picks up a good rhythm besides being, at times, meaningful and lyrical.

It is with subtlety, however, that a satire, even with its cutting edge, assumes depth, not with foul contemporary references like “a humble farmer.”

The stage presentation, which essays distinctiveness in its aural and visual appeal with a strong undercurrent of meaning, sustains interest. It, however, comes fully alive only sporadically and remains uneven in its momentum. Much of the vitality of the play hinges on a vigorous portrayal of Mandan by Archi Trivedi, who delightfully restrains his movement and speech. In his abandon and defiance of authority, he modestly sneaks into the company of Pranulik Nayak and Dina Gandhi (now Pathak).

The production is close to being an absolute success and yet remains far from it. The pool of historic ability required for an effort in this format is inadequate here. The inadequacy stands out in the face because talented performers in the bhavai form are not totally unavailable.

With all his sincerity and dedication, Janak Raval is not cut out for the character of Kanukandian in the play. The character can fit someone with a rich range of vocal abilities and resourcefulness of action, someone like Nilesh Desai. The comic action conceived for the two sentries (Vimal and Devang) has hilarious potential, which doesn’t get realized for want of finish. A little polish can serve to make the play’s choreography more effective.

One looks for full-throated bursts of group singing (individually, Sanbhav, for example, demonstrates it), a stronger musical accomplishment and freer movement.

Contrasts in scenes like the one in which the royal celebration gets broken with a poor man’s cry of pain can add to the dramatic quality of the presentation. Judging by the script, the playwright’s conception of Hastini is more imaginative and spectacular.

Review by S D Desai, Courtesy Pravin Pandya