Report: Seminar on Linguistic and Interdisciplinary Approaches as Critical Resources to Development

Jan Brouwer is Director of the Centre for Advanced Research on Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Mysore. He can be reached at e-mail: ikdfcar@eth.net

To celebrate its fifth birthday, the Centre for Advanced Research on Indigenous Knowledge Systems (CARIKS) at Mysore, India, had organised an international seminar on Linguistic and Interdisciplinary Approaches as critical resources to Development, jointly with the Centre for Co-operative Research in Social Science (CCRSS) at Pune and the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) at Mysore. The seminar recommended the incorporation of Folklore Studies in the Social Sciences and Development Studies. The goal of the seminar was to evolve a research methodology for the integrated study of oral traditions and development. The seminar was made possible by funding from the Indian Council of Social Science Research (New Delhi) and the Central Institute of Indian Languages (Mysore). In the opening session, the keynote address was delivered by Dr. D. P. Pattanayak, former Director of the CIIL and founding-father of CARIKS and three position papers were presented each relating to one of the three themes of the seminar. Dr. Jennifer Bayer's position paper (CIIL, Mysore) related to Session One: Linkages, Oral Tradition and Development. She made a strong case for finding the missing link between research and development. The participants debated on the relevance of a singularly economic definition of development. They agreed that folklore needs to be taken out of its isolation both in terms of a discipline and in terms of cultural ideologies and the need to evolve a research methodology based on cooperation between the producers of folklore and the analysts in order to do due justice to both the folklore authors and academic objectives.

Session two focused on: Critical Analysis of Oral Tradition and Specific Development Questions and was introduced by Dr Jan Brouwer (CARIKS, Mysore). He revisited a couple of major and minor development projects for artisans of Karnataka from the vantage point of Indigenous Knowledge Systems. In his critical analysis of these projects he compared the concepts behind the practices of the project designs with those behind the practices of the beneficiaries. The artisans' oral tradition was one of the main resources for his study. The papers of Mr. Alex Cisilin (CNRS, Paris) and Dr. Biswajit Das (Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi) looked at two different economic questions. Mr. Cisilin's study of Self Help Groups (SHG) in Kolar District of Karnataka State focused on indigenous versus modern economic concepts. He observed the Kannada concepts of gift, saving, and loan as being in conflict with their modern counterparts. Dr. Das's study of famine in Lanigagar of Kalahandi District in Orissa showed that the concepts of famine and hunger are alien constructions superimposed upon a situation in which the indigenous networks of survival have broken down under the impact of development. The participants agreed that the failure of relief measures is to be attributed to the Modern State's artificial distance from the indigenous knowledge systems in which the economic, social and ritual domains are intertwined. Two papers were concerned with identity. Dr. Somayaji's paper (University of Goa) considered various aspects of food as mediators of social relation and forms of cultural symbols and demonstrated as to how food is being intertwined with other domains while for the modern state food is an exclusive domain of reference. Mr. Maid's paper (CCRSS, Pune) discussed the identity of the Parit washermen of Maharashtra. He gave an excellent account of how myths function to bridge communication gaps observed by social workers. Dr. Tiwari raised the issue of the relation between belief, action and history in the context of oral tradition and development. Ms. Hema Rairkar (CCRSS, Pune) dealt with health, particularly reproductive health and the role of traditional midwives in Maharashtra. She powerfully argued that the ways of development based on human potentials need to be rooted in indigenous practices. The last paper of this session was entitled The Narmada Valley Damming Projects: Science, Indigenous Knowledge and Development in India presented by Mr. Ajay Gandhi. He brought out forcefully the contemporary development conflicts in India where the dichotomy between modern science and indigenous knowledge is a central theme in the negotiations. He also drew attention to contradictions and ambiguities present in the strategic employment of science and indigenous knowledge. Dr. Guy Poitevin (CCRSS, Pune) opined that the terms Scientific Knowledge and Indigenous Knowledge do not constitute a binary opposition but form a continuum.

Session three was on: Research Methodology and was introduced by Dr Guy Poitevin (CCRSS, Pune). He emphasised the need to ground development processes upon people's own intangible heritage of oral traditions. He raised a few fundamental questions in relation to an envisaged interdisciplinary research methodology. One of them is the apparent contradiction of a discourse of continuity legitimising and carrying through changes within tradition itself: what could be the status of concepts of social or cultural transformation when change occurs in continuity and in the name of tradition? In this regard, he suggested two lines of reflection. The first is a conceptual distinction between remembrance - oral tradition as records and memories - and the work of Memory. The second one is an approach in terms of cultural interbreeding based on a hermeneutics of the
Dr Bernard Bel (CNRS-Laboratoire Parole et Langage, France) presented an extraordinary paper on prosodic patterns and rhetoric’s in the performance of folk songs, notably the grind mill songs presented by Ms. Rairkar earlier. His fieldwork based experiments, with among other aids the multi-platform Praat software (developed by the University of Amsterdam) prompt to new questions about the rhetoric of singing. These questions, he concluded, arise from the observation of almost unnoticeable aspects of the performance (of songs and ballads) in which one may reach new layers of meanings not explicitly conveyed by the lyrics. This is a domain of hidden knowledge, which feed back new insights to both the analysts and the informants.

Dr Guy Poitevin’s paper (CCRSS, Pune) analysed two Marathi myths as an example of an interdisciplinary method. Having stated that an oral tradition is a form of symbolic communication, his approach finds accordingly its starting point and legitimacy in the linguistic status of the oral narrative as discourse. Understanding ourselves through a confrontation of our condition with the vision and intentionality of the text is achieved in practices of cultural action, social transformation or development programmes undertaken among the same communities to whom the narratives belong. He stressed that such cultural practices must be critically grounded in the objective semantic structure of the text itself. The seminar concluded with a panel discussion on the position papers and the reports presented by the session rapporteurs. The panel considered that the various levels of linguistic analysis contribute directly or indirectly to development; that the analysis of oral tradition taking narrative, speech, objects and actions as text complements the findings in social sciences; that such knowledge and understanding can only be reached through forms of co-operative and interdisciplinary research; and that a beginning of development of an integrated research methodology for this purpose can now be made; and recommended that a volume on research methodology should be published on the basis of the seminar proceedings; that a series of seminars be planned focusing on critical areas that the seminar identified; and that future research projects should include participation of people concerned at the research level itself in order to bridge the rift between experts and informants. The seminar was a fine example of collaboration between governmental and non-governmental agencies. The organisers have to be complimented for their efforts that made this interdisciplinary meet a good success.

Identity: Gender, Nation, Diaspora

This series of seminars, an initiative from the Women on Ireland Research Network in association with the Gender Institute of the London School of Economics, aims to bring together academics and PhD students to consider some theoretical and analytical issues related to the study of identity.

Programme


8th February 2001 Stateless Identities: Diasporan Politics and Nationalism Dr. Razmik Panossian (Government, LSE).

22nd February 2001 Jewish Women and Cultural Representation in Victorian England Dr. Nadia Valman (Southampton).


Time: 6-8 p.m, Venue: London School of Economics, Room E304 (East Building); Location: http://www.lse.ac.uk/School/maps/map1.htm
**Series on Visual Art Traditions of India: Workshop on Warli**

Athrongla Sangtam is Programme Assistant, Public Programme unit of National Folklore Support Centre

**In continuation with** the Visual Art Traditions of India Series, the Public Programme Unit of NFSC organised another workshop on Warli. Organised jointly with the Government Museum, the Warli Painting Workshop was held at the Centenary exhibition hall in the museum premises from November 15-19, 2000 with sixty participants. The artists, Smt. Kusum Shyam Kharpade and Smt. Reena Santhya Umbersada from Maharashtra explored the creativity associated with this art in detail. Inaugurated by Mr. Jitendranath, Officer in Charge, Sahitya Akademi, the workshop started off with an introductory lecture by Muthukumaraswamy on *Art and Lives of the Warlis*. The lecture introduced the participants to the social activities of the Warlis that attribute highly to the art form and prepared them to accept the art and appreciate it. The first day ended with the participants learning to sketch and draw the different type of motifs like trees, birds, houses, men in varied daily activities and dance scenes. It is interesting to note that the Warlis do not narrate mythology or any great epic. Simply painted on mud, charcoal and cow dung based surface with rice paste for the colour white, the art form deals with themes that narrate their social lifestyle and activities. The loose rhythmic movement that each painting suggests adds life to the painting. With an eager hand each participant merged into the lives of the Warlis and encountered them with total skill and adaptability.

The second day started with the actual painting with an afternoon lecture by K. Lakshminarayan on *Indian tribal painting with special reference to Warli painting*. The third, fourth and fifth day saw the steady maturity into near perfection as the participants concluded their third painting with absolute patience. It was obvious that they had a different experience altogether in this workshop. Mr. N. Muthusamy, Director, Koothupattur, delivered the valedictory address. The artists also exhibited their works at the Lalit Kala Akademi. Warli is the name of the tribe, which resides in Thane district in Maharashtra on the northern outskirts of Mumbai and extend up to the Gujarat border. The origin of the Warlis is yet unknown and no records of this art are found, but many scholars and folklorists believe that it can be traced to as early as tenth century AD. This art was eventually rediscovered in the early seventies, and became popular for its unique simplicity and fervour for life.

Usually the Warli paintings are done during the marriage ceremony and they call them as *Lagnace citra* meaning marriage paintings. The painting is sacred and without it the marriage cannot take place. Their respect for nature is from the most gigantic to the smallest creature and plant. The figures and traditional motives are repetitive and highly symbolic. They communicate through their paintings and their life style and passion for nature are depicted with utmost details. Triangular humans and animals with stick-like hands and legs, geometrical designs with rows of dots and dashes are drawn on the mud walls of the huts of Warlis. In Warli paintings it is rare to see a straight line. A series of dots and dashes make one line. The artists have recently started to draw straight lines in their paintings. From the depths of the painting spring a variety of activities with humans, animals, and trees. The subjects found in these paintings are wedding scenes, various animals, birds, trees, men, women, children, descriptive harvest scene, group of men dancing around a person playing the music, dancing peacocks, and many more. One of the famous Warli painting is the *marriage chowkatt* – a painting made at the time of marriage. The Warli women called Savasini meaning married women whose husbands are alive, paint a chauk or a square on their walls of their kitchen.
**Participant Report on Warli workshop**

Priya Balasubramanian is a student of National Institute of Fashion Technology, Chennai

**On authentic** earthen backgrounds, little figurative drawings in contrasting white! Well, the first impression on the whole is one that is more than awesome! Brings out the basics in you somewhere! Until a month back, my reaction to Warli art with their curious little stick figures was a deep breath at the beautiful contrast of the colours and the subtle yet wonderful simplicity of the figures that strike the eye creating on the whole an attractive harmonising blend. But little did I realise how much a five day workshop could turn the way one relates to one’s own tradition.

A day dawned on which a small announcement in a leading newspaper caught my eye; where an organisation called the National Folklore Support Centre announced yet another programme on their scheduled Visual Art Traditions of India series. The advertisement announced a five-day workshop on folk painting from the state of Maharashtra which is popularly known as Warli Art. Just a phone call assured me a friendly ambience of the Co-ordinators. Further on a visit to the organisation reassured me of the same and after completing the formalities, I found myself really looking to the commencement of the workshop and plunge into details and insights of this art form, the schedules promised to furnish the participants with.

The first day began with a general introductory lecture on the life of these tribe – the Warlis and their close association with Nature. The lecture proved to give us a satisfying insight of their lifestyle, their environment and the ritualistic practices, their faiths, beliefs etc. A list ranging from festive joys to their primal fears which as we later came to comprehend had a lot to relate with this art. From the lecture, we came to understand that this folk art symbolically represents a lot more than what just catches the eye and is so closely ornamented with details of an intricately woven narrative art! In the schedules that followed, there was one module on sketching these figures with pencil to get familiar with them and what they symbolise. In the next four days that followed, with the constant one to one guidance and interaction with the artists themselves and perfect co-ordination by the NFSC staff, we were able to complete three pieces of this narrative folk art with sheer pride and total satisfaction of first hand experience! The three pieces that ranged from the simple village, harvest scene to the marriage Chowkatt with all its exuberance and the nocturnal charm of the festive Tharpa dance; all this what we individually painted through this folk art left each one of us appalled by, the simple expertise and charm of our own hands! The direct interaction with the artists Smt. Reena and Smt. Kusum was indeed a pleasant experience. The sheer exuberance and enthusiasm of the art loving participants was a boost to the best and passion to learn this art form. The well organised, timely and thoughtfull schedules so well co-ordinated keeping in mind the necessities in making such a workshop, a learning experience, to one that was so wholesome, calls for a pat on the back to the NFSC staff.
Series on Visual Art Traditions of India: Workshop on Pattachitra

NFSC in keeping with its on going programmes / workshops on the various folk arts of India conducted a five day workshop in collaboration with the Govt. Museum, Chennai. The theme of the workshop held from Dec 18 – 22, 2000 was Pattachitra from Orissa. This workshop was presided by Dr R. Kannan, Commissioner of Museums and inaugurated by A.K. Mohanty, Asst. Director, Govt. of Orissa Tourist office, Chennai. The workshops by the NFSC is a by word in teaching and exposing the citizens/ artists of Chennai to authentic methods and themes unique to the programme so much so that the required number of fifty participants was filled in a jiffy.

Many of the participants of the Pattachitra workshop had attended all the previous workshops. On speaking with them, it was noted that they found it useful and knowledgeable and in turn they have been in a position to share this wealth of information as teacher to other interested students. Also one participant at the workshop who quit his job as an accountant six years ago to fully explore the world of Tanjore art which he then began teaching others. Today his repertoire extends to many more areas both in history and executing of the craft forms of our country. A sculpture student from the Mahabalipuram School of sculpture was another participant who has been a regular. He is clear that the crafts should be used in their authentic form and the idea of artists/painters using these expressions in their indigenous contemporary works of art was unacceptable. Another aspect of the workshop is the mixed crowd of both sexes coming together and sharing a common platform. The artists from Orissa Shri. Rabindranath Sahu and Shri. Ram Chandra Moharana were trained under Guru Bhendhrao Mohapatra and Guru Bhagwat Maharana. Rabindranath comes from a family of weavers of Tussar silk. During the festival in his village Dihirakul, Rabindranath has acted as a child in his fathers productions at the rasalilla. He was the first member of his family to venture out of the weaving business and enter a new field. He chose this as an early age he would draw constantly and found himself attracted by Pattachitra themes. He is also trained in the art of toymaking / boxes and palm leaf engraving. He has used the pattachitra motifs on his boxes and toys. He also says ideas for his paintings of this style are greatly influenced by the street dramas that he was exposed to as a child. Rabindranath has also written a book on the tribal arts of Orissa in Oriya and this book has also been published in Hindi. Now his current book on Pattachitra is ready in vernacular but with lack of funds he is unable to publish the same.

Orissa is known as Utakala or the land of exquisite arts. One of the arts, which have retained its essential character of pre-Islamic nature, is Pattachitra. As Muthukumaraswamy, Director, NFSC, mentioned in his address Seclusion and Expression to the participants of the workshop, Pattachitra has remained without any influence from outside, though at a later date it influenced other arts outside, such as the Kalighat paintings of Bengal. Their exclusiveness is marked by stylisation of forms, the almond-shaped eyes, the special type of moustache etc. Pattachitra is the earliest known form of paintings of Orissa except for a few cave murals of the sixth century AD at Udayagiri, Khandagiri and Sitabhinji. These paintings, according to Lakshminarayanan, Curator of the Museum, combine both folk and religious aspects; they are linked mainly to the temple at Puri and originally they copied the figures of Lord Jagannath, Baladev and Subadhra in the temple, which are made of wood and are extremely simplified in design typical to folk arts. These began as mementos for the devotees visiting the Puri temple with images of the deities in the temple and slowly the artists began to represent scenes from Bhagavatapurana, Ramayana etc. The Chitrakars (artists) do not aim at realism but the human and animal’s forms are stylised, though they do express feelings through neat patterns and designs. Kalinga’s (Orissa) invasion of Kanchi was a favourite theme of the artists, who believed Lord Jagannath aided their king in his war efforts. Still later they began adding themes from day-to-day life of common people and were similar.
to Company paintings. Though traditionally themes from the legends of Krishna are the most preferred, according to Shri. Sahu, social themes are quite common now, though stylistically and technically the work remains the same.

As far as possible colours are still produced from natural sources like plants, roots and stones, though on a purely commercial basis chemical colours are also used these days. The borders around the main subjects form an integral part and offer scope for the imagination of the individual artists. Even in the workshop, though the participants were all given the same picture to paint, they could let their imagination play with the border. The outline of the figures are first drawn with white, after which the bodies of the figures are painted with the specific colours meant for them, such as blue or black for Krishna, yellow for Radha and so on. Then follows the clothes and then the ornaments are coloured. Finally the outlines are drawn with black and decorative motifs in white. The sense of movement is made possible by the fluid lines, which make up the figures, which are most often in Dwibhanga or Tribhanga poses; no one is shown standing straight or static. In the workshop all the participants were given the same picture to paint, which they were taught to colour and use their imagination in the borders and decorations. They were also taught the methods of preparing the colours and the tamarind paste and the canvas. The outline of the figures are first drawn with white, followed by black which lends the artwork; it is not just the patterns, colours and the technique, but an unseen something which lends the Pattachitra its life.

During the workshop another version of Pattachitra also was displayed – engraving on palm leaves, which are generally illustrations for manuscripts. In this type, the picture is drawn with a stylus on the palm leaf; when black colour is applied on the leaf, the fluid gets into the engraved lines; rest of the colour on the leaf is wiped off, leaving the design in sharp black lines against the light background of the palm leaf. These days Pattachitra is painted on tussar silk also to be used as wall hangings. The workshop was actually only an introduction to the difficult art. Many of the participants felt that further coaching would be useful. Since the teachers and participants could not speak the same language, that also proved to be little difficult for interaction and further gain of information. Participant Srinivasan, himself a Tanjore painting artist, felt there were some similarities between Mysore painting and Pattachitra, such as the curved forms. He also preferred a discussion at the end of the workshop between the teachers, participants and organisers. The discussion which had during the classes were fragmentary and disjointed and doubts raised were often not answered properly. Perhaps it would have been useful to have given information about the aesthetics of the art, particularly in relation to the indigenous literature, legends etc., so that the participants could have a better idea of the spirit of the art. However much one is taught, one can only copy the pictures or simulate a similar style and technique. One has to be part of the culture to be able to understand the subconscious feeling that permeates the creation of the artwork; it is not just the patterns, colours and the technique, but an unseen something which lends the Pattachitra its life.

Today the motifs of Pattachita can be found on saris/ wall hangings / and decorative pieces etc. The artists also showcased their work at the Amethyst lifestyle outlet at Sundar Mahal, Gopalapuram, Chennai. Khudos to NFSC for opening up so many new visitas of our folklife, as with a country as large and as rich in heritage, we now have an avenue to explore and gather knowledge on out past as Steven Spielberg movie title says BACK TO THE FUTURE.