

Indian Folklife

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FOLKLORE OF THE NOMADS



NATIONAL FOLKLORE SUPPORT CENTRE

National Folklore Support Centre (NFSC) is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation, registered in Chennai dedicated to the promotion of Indian folklore research, education, training, networking and publications. The aim of the centre is to integrate scholarship with activism, aesthetic appreciation with community development, comparative folklore studies with cultural diversities and identities, dissemination of information with multi-disciplinary dialogues, folklore fieldwork with developmental issues and folklore advocacy with public programming events. Folklore is a tradition based on any expressive behaviour that brings a group together, creates a convention and commits it to cultural memory. NFSC aims to achieve its goals through cooperative and experimental activities at various levels. NFSC is supported by a grant from the Ford Foundation.

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THIS ISSUE

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NEXT ISSUE

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Editorial

Self, Language, Landscape and Lore

M.D. Muthukumaraswamy



Since all the interviews collected in this volume are set in the mode of personal narratives the introduction should also be in the same form. I undertook the travels for these interviews at a moment in my life that can be best described now as a spiritual catastrophe. The inner devastation every writer experiences at one point or other came as an avalanche in the year 2001 for me and it maimed and paralyzed my ability to write in Tamil. The injury caused eight years ago by the deaths of very dear ones in the family would not heal and I was completely emptied of life and its world of meaning. Eight years of struggle against inconsolable grief took away my language, my landscape and the possibility of beginning my life anew. Ironically I was successful professionally. The ordeal of parturition for establishing National Folklore Support Centre was over in 1999 itself and my attempt to find solace in excruciating work schedule was yielding rich benefits for the Centre. It is true that all these years I wrote occasional prose, poetry and short fiction in English and regularly published them in European little literary magazines but none of my colleagues at the Centre even knew anything about my writing except the editorial articles I wrote for "Indian Folklife". Neither do my friends nor my relatives. Many Tamil literary articles that appeared in the year 2001 mentioned about me as a young writer who had shown great promise but fell into silence and oblivion eventually. At sporadic literary gatherings I chose to attend I imagined that people were suppressing a smirk and tolerating my presence. I would spend harrowing hours night after night staring into the blank page, trying to compose a Tamil sentence and failing miserably. I felt like a sparrow that could still fly with borrowed wings but had lost its familiar sky. So the innermost reason for me to undertake these travels was to see whether 'life is elsewhere'.

My first stop, Singapore did not offer me any consolation despite the wonderful and dotting hosts. Although the material success of the city-state was visible for anyone to see, it did not have anything to offer me culturally. I read Kua Pao Kun's plays, visited Practice Performing Arts School and Singapore National Museum for the Arts and had the privilege of spending one afternoon with the visiting South Asian playwrights. In spite of these moments of respite I found Singapore to be nothing but a soulless shopping mall. For me, Singapore's suffocating humidity because of its geographical vicinity towards the equator was not only

literal but also metaphorical. Mandarin, Malay and Tamil are official languages of the city-state but I could hardly see any mixing of cultures. Television and press reflected the lack of critical thinking and the virtual absence of democratic opposition. Artificial landscaping, septic cleanliness, all pervasive technological surveillance, incredibly ruthless penal system and a powerful ruling oligarchy of Singapore are all traits drawn straight out of science fiction of 'Brave New World' variety and they make the country frighteningly panoptical. My attempts to see community life in the roadside music shows, collective cooking in Chinese apartment complexes, paper decorations and riverside nightlife soon met with unknown despair as I could not envision anything human behind the mechanical execution of deeds.

As I flew out of Singapore to Tokyo I had a sense of relief, normally experienced by frolicking Singaporeans who cross their borders to go into Malaysia essentially to litter in the name of weekend parties. Though I had established email contacts with Masatoshi Konishi, Shibuya Toshio, Yoshitaka Terada and Peter Knecht I had not met them before and so practically I knew nobody in Japan. Through Internet I made reservation in a hotel located in the Asakusa district of Tokyo. On the flight I had prepared a stream of conscious list of things I knew about Japan: Kabuki, Noh, Ikebana, tea ceremony, Geisha women, Sumo wrestlers, Samurai tradition, Japanese pottery, miniature world of electronic products, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Sake, Kimono and Haiku. In the heyday of the advent of Tamil modern poetry much of Haiku including Basho's had been translated into Tamil from English. Many of us who functioned within the Tamil little literary magazines had seen the films of Kurusowa and Ozu. My favorite Japanese author was Yasunari Kawabata and his Nobel Prize acceptance speech on 'Moon and Snow in Japanese literature' had given me clues about the landscape. Reading Kawabata had also introduced me to the wood cut prints of Yoshitoshi whose works I was determined to see. For the first time visitors Roland Barthes' travelogue on Japan "Empire of Signs" may not be a reliable guide but for me it gave the right orientation towards the country.

Beyond Narita airport nobody conversed in English and so except for the interviews I was effectively without any language. I walked through the streets of Tokyo with the help of maps and discovered the city to be of extraordinary charm. In the Asakusa area, in the vicinity of my hotel I chanced upon Sensui-ji Buddhist temple. Luckily it was the time of their annual festival. The whole

* The article published here is the introduction to the forthcoming book "Voicing Folklore Concerns, Careers and Issues", A Collection of Interviews with International Folklorists conducted and edited by M.D. Muthukumaraswamy.

temple compound had adorned the look of a village fair. Toys, Japanese fans, paper balloons, flowers and incense sticks sold by street hawkers created a colorful festive ambience. I wanted to learn more about the festival but all my questions in English were returned with overwhelmingly polite gestures. I visited the temples several times to observe the festival and its attendant rituals. On the third day when I was listening to the Buddhist chanting I suddenly I found myself reciting a passage from "Manimekalai", a Tamil Buddhist epic:

Prema Nandakumar's translation of "Manimekalai" renders the same passage as follows:

*"But when ignorance goes, action ceases;
When action is not, consciousness ceases;
When consciousness goes, name-form ceases too.
When name-form ceases, sense organs withdraw.
When sense organs cease, there is no contact.
Where contact goes, experience is not.
Where experience ceases, thirst is not.
When there is no thirst, attachment ceases
When there is no attachment, existence
Is not. Absence of existence leads to
Non-birth. With the cessation of birth forms
Rebirth is gone! and with this birth, sickness,
Old age, death, distress, lamentation and
Helplessness as also ceaseless sorrow
Will all be destroyed. This is cessation."*

What surprised me was my unexpected discovery of my inner Tamil voice and the compulsive urge to write. I was discovering that human memory could rise to an occasion with its available linguistic and cultural resources to create or make sense of the world. Ever since that moment in Sensui-ji temple through out my travels I was remembering, recalling and recollecting innumerable passages from Tamil literature, folk tales, folk songs, poetry and mythology according to the demands of the situations. Or in other words, I was behaving exactly like a Tamil verbal folk artist. This realization of my personal experience made me understand relations between self, cultural memory, language, identity and expression. I also understood migrations, Diasporas, exiles and displacements. I thought I knew how tales and tunes travel and freely mix. The copious notes I wrote in Tokyo charted out the kind of approach I was going to adopt for the interviews. I would abandon impressionistic acceptance of cultures and their expressions. No more stream of conscious lists. I would use personal narratives, literary texts, disciplinary engagements, artistic expressions, observations on landscape and national movements to understand folklore, other cultures, cultural practices and cultural studies in general. The idea was to see the full sweep of the discipline of folklore. When I started putting together pages and pages of notes I suddenly stopped for a while remembering the Jataka tale of the tortoise that talked too much.

At the remembrance of this tale I decided to be a man

of few words as an interviewer. My mission would be to bring out the artistic, scholarly and professional achievements of the interviewees. This is of special importance to the readers in India where respect for personal achievement stands considerably eroded.

Regardless of my plans for the interviews and the discovery of my inner voice, my fascination for Japan grew day by day. I traveled to Osaka and Kyoto, watched Kabuki Theater, participated in a tea ceremony, visited the museum of Japanese history and ethnology and went through an exhibition of 'Ghosts and apparitions in Japanese folk tales'. To my dismay I could not find the woodprints of Yoshitoshi. Instead I found people reading picture book novels almost everywhere- in the train stations, on the trains, in the bus stations, on the buses, in the airports and on the planes. Cell phone carrying schoolgirls, who seemed to be everywhere, were managing multiple tasks of traveling, talking through the cell phones, handling schoolbags and reading picture books. In my language less status the picture books came as great relief and I found them not to be simple comic books but serious novels. I managed to buy a picture book edition of Kawabata's novel "Beauty and Sadness" and imagined that the illustrations were historical derivatives of Yoshitoshi's works. Whenever I carried a picture book in my hands or leafed through one in public places people around me began to make eye contacts or smile. Slowly I began to make friends and soon discovered that despite its phenomenal economic growth Japan remained a mono cultural society. I was a total foreigner and my otherness was not even a matter of curiosity. Except from the interviewees I could not make headway in learning more about Japanese society. Japan remained a collection of fascinating but undecipherable signs.

To reach Santa Fe from Tokyo I had to make two stopovers: one at Seattle and another at Denver. America's South West introduced me to the incredible natural beauty of the land, Native American Indian population, their arts and culture. The expansive landscape, dramatic sky with wild clouds, virulent lightning and fearful thunders, rivers of great strength and rocks of mystic quality enraptured me completely. I read in the guidebooks "From coral reefs to glaciers, rain forests to high desert, grasslands to wetlands, sand dunes to snowfields, the grandeur of the landscape surpasses even American superlatives. A diversity of eco-systems, flowers, trees and creatures great and small await any naturalist who has ever dreamed of the American wilderness. For those who like their nature laced with adrenaline, the beaches, forests, mountains, deserts and rivers cater to every conceivable outdoor pursuit, from surfing to ice climbing, fly-fishing to competing in triathlons." I quote from a guidebook to demonstrate how commonplace, knowledge of natural beauty of American landscape should be. Nevertheless, the popular images of the United States outside the country, especially in India do not give a clue to the panoramic wealth of the country.

Trained in the milieu of little Tamil literary magazines, I have always mistrusted popular and commercial mainstream strands of any culture and their modes of representations. On the other hand I tend to think lore and literature of a land construct and define the inner lives of the people and give significance to otherwise meaningless nature. Without William Faulkner I will not understand America's South. Without Mark Twain, Mississippi will not make any sense to me. Without Ernest Hemingway, Tennessee Williams, Emily Dickinson, Thomas Pynchon, Donald Barthelme, Ronald Sukenik, Jack Kerouac, Henry Miller, Alan Ginsberg and Tony Morrison –to name only a few of my most favorite authors- American consciousness, its history and its relationship to the landscape will be elusive to me. But America's South West, its Hispanic heritage and Native American Indian life were underrepresented in the literature I knew of and I was really struggling to understand the experience I was going through. In this context I should express my eternal gratitude to Peter Mattair who with his generous hospitality and brilliant conversations introduced me to the folklore, people and institutions of the region. With his generous help, I was able to see an opera, a Broadway musical, Pow-wow festival, Pueblo pottery, Museum of International Folk Art and meet with a wide range people in Santa Fe. Thanks to his guidance I could see an exhibition of Yoshitoshi's woodprints (which I failed to find in Japan) on the "One hundred faces of the moon" at the Museum of International Folk Art. It was a sheer coincidence that the Yoshitoshi exhibition was opening on the very next day I was in Santa Fe. It was an immensely satisfying experience to go through the exhibition and to listen to informative lectures especially after being in Japan only 48 hours ago. Why did I think that Japan was a collection of undecipherable signs when I do not actually need any meaning beyond lore and literature?

Santa Fe experience brought me into focus the limitations of my attempt to grasp a country and its culture only through its lore and literature- the limitations imposed by the disciplinary constraints of my own reading on the one hand- and my inability to grasp anything further even if there had been an opportunity. For instance, I never wanted to know how the United States had become the wealthiest nation in the world although I was all the time observing from the west coast to the east coast its telling signs of material success. Since I left Washington DC in 1993 the changes that had come about in terms of its phenomenal economic growth in the United States were also clearly evident. Moreover, the economic depression of the 1930s, end of cold war era, new world order, business at the speed of light and Internet commerce were some of the topics that were all the time there as an underlying layer of any discourse regardless of the fact whether it is literary or not. My mind failed to make sense of these details.

Reflecting back now, I realize that my sensibilities are severely conditioned by classical Tamil poetics that

intimately links up human emotion, landscape and expression. Added to that there was a persistent and incantatory Tamil dialogue with my inner most self all through out the travels. These features ordered the way I carried out these interviews. I kept my understanding of the relationship between land, lore and literature always at the background and elicited responses in order to see the connections between personal histories and disciplinary engagements. I never questioned the ideological basis of the concepts discussed. One of the topics that enormously interested me especially in the United States was the public presentation of folklore and the monumental efforts that had gone into it. So I constantly pursued in my interviews the ways the public sector folklorists functioned. In a way these interviews need to be seen as products of instances and contexts rather than well carried out research projects. Because of such flexibility it deemed necessary to include interviews of personalities who are not folklorists per se, but whose views illuminated certain important topics of concern. Although products of contexts and instances these interviews are nonetheless ultimately artifacts of reflections on what it means to do folklore or to be engaged in the broad field of culture. Conjuring the promise of personal histories intersecting with national histories and disciplinary engagements of their time, these interviews chart out an alternative cartography of the discipline. Set in the mode of personal narratives public programming, engagement with other cultures, multiculturalism, intellectual foundations of folklore, cultural identity, issues of cultural funding, nation building and negotiating cultural otherness become issues of current interests in these interviews. As colleagues in conversation the interviewees expand the discipline of folklore to have valuable bearing on cultural studies. Perhaps this volume will stand as an eclectic testimony to the fact that the folklorists are the new public intellectuals of the twenty-first century addressing issues of integrity and representation, cultural freedom and justice, aesthetics of tradition and change and contributing to the development of civic republicanism.

England and France were holidaying when I landed there in August 2001. So I could not carry out as many interviews as I initially planned. Since notes on my travels to these countries do not seem to be relevant to the present collection of interviews I avoid presenting them now. I have also avoided presenting folklore discussions in these pages of introduction, as the interviews are full of them.

Because of these travels and interviews, my consciousness has become nomadic, my inner voice has become awakened and I have become acutely aware of the importance of folklore and its practices in the public domain. I have not yet started writing in Tamil again but I am no longer anxious about it.



*Voicing Folklore
Concerns, Careers and Issues*

Biography



**R. Murugan is Librarian
at National Folklore
Support Centre**

Philo Irudhayanath (1916 – 1992)

Ethnographic writing on the tribal cultures of India had its beginnings in the Colonial period. Missionaries, Government officials and amateur diarists wrote about the indigenous peoples in

an attitude oscillating between amusement and horror. As far as the southern states are concerned figures like Edgar Thurston and Father Chandler have written long texts on the customs of various communities. In the regional languages such accounts however, were few and far between. It was in this context that a Tamil school teacher began publishing articles on the customs, manners and traditions of tribal and nomadic communities in the columns of Tamil periodicals in the post independence period. So prolific was his output that to many Tamilians of a previous generation, the name Philo Irudhayanath still evokes the adivasis. Although there were government agencies collecting information on the Adivasis at that time, it was Philo Irudhayanath, motivated by a personal obsession, who was able to reach remote areas in which these communities lived. He wrote on them with an unparalleled empathy and a certain romanticism.

Philo Irudhayanath was born in 1916 in Mysore and studied in Santhome high school in Madras. Even as a student he had been interested in the collection of articles and pictures on the adivasis. His dream then was to meet these people and write about them himself. It was much later when he began working as a schoolteacher that his ambition came to be realised. It was a chance incident with a Kurivikaari (a tribal group in Tamil Nadu) that set Philo Irudhayanath on his travels in search of the nomadic and the remote. In his *Kaatil en prayanam* ('My journeys in the jungle') he recounts the day when he was yet to begin his projects, how he had been bitten by an insect and had developed a bald patch. Anxious for days and unable to go to the doctors, a Kurivikaari came begging at his door. When he stooped to give her the food, the woman noticed the patch and provided him with her indigenous medicine. After using it and in three days, Irudhayanath writes, his hair had grown back. This reinforced early ambition to understand their secrets.

The writings of Philo Irudhayanath are typically cast in the genre of the travelogue. Narratives of personal experiences presented in a way that appealed to the general reader, taking him or her through to locations, which for any reader must have been exotic. It is recommended that anyone seeking to do research on the tribes of the South Indian jungles read "Kaatil En Praayanam". In this book Irudhayanath describes the

ways of the Indian jungle, the precautions to be taken there and warns the reader of the dangers one may encounter, along with information and strategies for the beginner adventurer.

An influential figure in Irudhayanath's life was Mylai Seeni Venkatasamy, the legendary Tamil literary scholar, who encouraged him to write on the Adivasis. Invoking Sangam literature as a reference, where all the tribes of the south are mentioned, Irudhayanath began his "field trips" on his bicycle.

One must remember that when Philo Irudhayanath began his work it was a period when the tribes of India had been 'denotified' but still carried the stigma of criminality. He interacted extensively with many tribes and nomads and was to be loved by them. The nomadic acrobats Kalai Kuthadikal, Kudukudupukararkal, Kuruvikararkal, Therukuthadikal, Narikuravarkal, Paliyarkal, Hosur Kasavas, Nilagiri Todas, Badagars, Kadars, Irulas, Eravalars, Vil Vedargal, Yennadhiyas, Marathiar, Pillars, Villiers, Kurumbars, Uuraliars were all studied and written about by Irudhayanath.

By the time of his death in 1992, Irudhayanath had published more than five thousand articles in English and Tamil in more than sixty magazines on the different tribes of the country. He wrote prolifically in the pages of *Manjari*, *Ananda Vikatan*, *Amudha Surabhi*, *The Hindu*, *Puudumai*, *Ponni*, *Kalkandu*, *Kalai*, *Sakthi*, *Shanthi*, *Chandraolli*, *Thendral*, *Suudeshamitran*, *Tamizhagam*, *Illustrated weekly of India*, *Radio*, *Ravi*, *Thuupakki*, *Thiru Irudhya Thoodhan*. Indeed, in periods of enormous financial difficulties it was the support given by these publications that stopped Irudhayanath from giving up his work altogether.

Irudhayanath recounts how for years his readers were unable to fix his identity. Many wrote to the editors of the magazines he wrote for asking to be told who this writer was. It was when the editor of *Kalai* magazine published an autobiography of Philo Irudhayanath that readers came to know that he was Tamil. This brought recognition and Irudhayanath began being invited to schools and associations to deliver lectures based on his research. In the late sixties he came to be recognised at the state level when he was awarded the Tamil Nadu state award for teachers. In 1978 he won a national award.

Today his collection of photographs, albums, unpublished essays, and research notes have dispersed into numerous hands. Although not considered to be an academic, his works are still referred to in the anthropological departments of Tamil Nadu. A concerted evaluation of the man and his work, however is pending.

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Some covers of Philo Irudayanath's publications

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Bhavai: Gujarat's Folk Drama of Nomads



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legislative measure, the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) in 1871 and as a result of which nearly 200 such communities stood 'notified' as criminal.

The *Targalas* or *Nayaks* have been itinerant drama troupes in Gujarat who moved from village to village to perform 'Bhavai', a folk dance theatre form. These performers too carry the stigma of criminality. There are numerous folk tales of 'the skillful thefts' allegedly committed by Bhavai troupe members. And if a burglary had taken place in a village where Bhavai had been performed, members of the troupe would be arrested and interrogated. The itinerant Bhavai players have always been expected to report their entry, stay and exit to the village headman.

The folk dance drama of Bhavai probably originated in the then Anart Pradesh (now North Gujarat). It then spread over other parts of Gujarat, Saurashtra, Kutch and Marvad (now Rajasthan). It has been a popular form of entertainment among the rural and the town-folk from the 14th century through to the 19th century in the North-west region of India. Although its origin are in the worship of the Mother Goddess, Bhavani, it has gathered secular elements with the passage of time and come to embrace the whole range of human emotions of the rural community. It is to Gujarat what Yashagana is to Andhra Pradesh, Nautanki to Uttar Pradesh, Tamasha and Lalit to Maharashtra - a veritable folk dance drama.

The performing Targalas are believed to be the descendents of the poet Asait Thakar of Unjha who lived in the 14th century. As the legend goes, Asait was a Audichhya Brahmin of Unjha in North Gujarat. His host Hemala Patel's daughter Ganga was kidnapped by a Khiljl, Sardar Jahan Roz. Hemala Patel urged Asait Thakar to use his artistic skills to help liberate his daughter from the Sardar. Asait told the Sardar, after pleasing him with his performance and songs that he should liberate the girl, who he claimed was his

daughter. The Sardar then asked him to dine with the girl in the same plate to prove this claim. Asait dined with her and had her freed but the Brahmins excommunicated him for his 'unholy dinner'. Asait chose to stay out with his three sons and live by his art - the performance of Bhavai. He is said to have composed three hundred and sixty *veshas* (performances) of which about twenty *veshas* survive in the repertoire of the performers today.

Perhaps, there was a living tradition, which Asait picked up on and improved to survive after his excommunication. We know that the classical Sanskrit theatre was active till the 13th century. Perhaps, Bhavai had developed alongside. It may be the case that due to the decadence of the Sanskrit drama during the Mughal rule, the audiences for Bhavai performances had become wider. The typical mixture of Apabhramsha, Hindi, Urdu, Marvadi is sufficient testimony of Bhavai being an entertainment of the *desi* tradition.

Bhavai is a performance that presents a series of events, that are autonomous from one another. Each of these playlets has its own plot. There are usually no structural connection between one playlet and the other, except that all of them are played, one after other, on the same playground during a night or for longer duration of time.

The first nine days of *Ashwin* (*Navratri*) are usually the days of the performances. Janmashtami, Shivratri, Ekddashi of the Hindu month are appropriately sacred for a Bhavai performance. The Targalas perform it on an advance Invitation or without invitation in places and villages where their right of performance or *Griis* ('morsel'), is traditionally fixed. On a particular date or a *Tithi*, sacred to Mother Goddess the Bhavaiyas rightfully come to propitiate Bhavani to a village on invitation.

The Bhavai players herald their entry into the village with the playing of a long Bhungal in the afternoon. Villagers gather as darkness descends. The Bhavai players place the picture of the Mother Goddess in the centre and the Bhavaiyas begin to sing Garbis of Mata Song. The place where Bhavai is performed should be delimited and sanctified by invocation as the establishment of the Mother Goddess, symbolised by a burning torch (*Masha*) kept ablaze throughout the performance. The space is called *Chachar* or *Phoda*. The songs sung to settle the audience and are not just for entertainment but they are prayers in honour of the Mother Goddess.

Each of the playlet that comprises a night of performance is called a *vesha*. It refers to the costume and the make up of a character. On a typical night six to ten *Veshas* may be enacted. A *Vesha* may take fifteen minutes to five hours to complete and it prescribes to a particular pattern. An introductory song called *Avanu* or "entry" is sung. It unfolds the general trend of the *Vesha*. The *Avanu* gives us the clue as to what might be the original plot. Life, with its lapses and heroism as actually lived is depicted in *Bhavai*. The Mother Goddess is to be pleased by presenting such events. The origin of *Bhavai* may be religious but the content is extraordinarily social.

The performers add and subtract, as per the need of audiences while performing a *Vesha*. *Bhavai* is full of literary, social and political references and engages with the compositions of Mira, Kabir, Tulsidas, Gang, Narsingh, Premanand, Dayaram, Shamal, Bhojo, Mandan and Asait. The *Veshas* depict a society that is feudal and the custom of Sati, beliefs

about omens, hobbies, festivals, opium, liquor and wine rituals are portrayed. Many *Veshas* also depict the influence of Muslim cultural influence on the life of the people. Love affairs between Muslim men and Hindu women are represented. The overall message is of communal harmony.

Dance plays a very important part in *Bhavai*. Mostly the *Veshas* begin and end with a dance. Very often the dance is a connecting link between two *Veshas*. Romantic, tragic and humorous or heroic situations may lead to a dance. In some *Veshas* the typical Gujarati folk dance of *Garba* is employed.

Anglicisation of Gujarati drama and the urbanised *desi natakat* dealt a severe blow to *Bhavai*. Television, too has taken away *Bhavai's* place in rural society. Efforts to reenergize and revive this theatre form seem to be of little use as entertainment has become an industry in our times.



*Bhavai Images Courtesy:
Educational Media Research Centre
Ahmedabad.*

carnaticstudent.org

A new website has just been launched for the benefit of music lovers, students, musicians and teachers of South Indian classical music: www.carnaticstudent.org. Its foremost objective is to contribute to a meaningful exchange of ideas, expertise and resources in the field of South Indian classical music through e-learning. To achieve this objective, participants from different cultural backgrounds are being encouraged to explore various aspects of Carnatic music, its traditions and present role in world music with an open mind. No opinion or theory is taken for granted; instead, queries about specific aspects of this music will be presented to renowned musicians, scholars and educationists who graciously agree to share their expertise based on their own research, publications and experience as performers.

E-learning opens new avenues for interaction and collaboration across national borders. It is therefore highly suited to fostering involvement in Carnatic music irrespective of one's own place of residence or institutional affiliation. There is a concessional fee which applies to seminar groups of 10 or more students enrolled in courses held at any recognized educational institution or cultural association.

Courses will start in October 2002 and are given independently in English and German in collaboration with the Chair of Indology of the University of Wuerzburg and the Distance Education Center of the University of Lueneburg in Germany.

The course author and tutor, Ludwig Pesch, is a practicing musician and educationist. His publications on Indian music include the "The Illustrated Companion to South Indian Classical Music" published by Oxford University Press in 1999 which has been re-printed four times since 1999. In India he is widely known for several cultural projects and symposia on Indian music. In 2000 he was decorated with the Cross of the Order of Merit on the Ribbon of the Federal Republic of Germany "in recognition of his outstanding contributions to Indo-German relations".



Lambani embroidery in Chennai

Meera Mohanty is Programme Assistant (Public Programme) at National Folklore Support Centre.

The visit of gypsies to any village brought with it a celebration of colour through their music and art. They came, selling their skills in embroidery and leatherwork and acrobatics and singing. These visits were not purely cultural but also served an economical purpose. Tied onto their donkeys' backs were spices, honey, grains and medicinal herbs that did not grow in the area. However, when India was networked a 150 years ago, the roads that linked the towns and villages of India made inroads into the business of these nomads. They were now forced to walk further in search of villages that were still remote. Now that their visits ceased fulfilling their traditional purpose to the villagers, these wandering visitors began to be looked at with suspicion.

Officially tainted under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 during British rule, "denotifying" them in 1952 however has not removed the stigma of being tribal. Their image in popular consciousness has been made worse by the tendency of our national dailies to sensationalise crimes committed by them.

One such tribe is the Lambani of North Karnataka. The Lambanis are said to be of the same origin as that of the Banjarans (also known as Lavan, Lambadi, Laman and Vanjara) *Banjara* translates as *Ban* or jungle and *Jara* or wanderer and *Lavan* comes from the word for salt; the gypsies earned their livelihood from minor forest produce and the salt they sold to the villagers.

The Banjaras, who under all their

names total to a population of 30 million in India, are believed to be descendants of the Roma gypsies of Europe who migrated through Afghanistan and settled in Rajasthan. They moved south to the Deccan in the 14th century with Aurangzeb's invading armies. With each tribe owning as many as 50,000 to 60,000 cattle, finding work with the mogul army, transporting provisions and arms was easy. When the wars ended, the gypsies stayed south of the Vindhya. Later they found work with the British too, selling grains to the armies of Lord Cornwallis besides helping Comte de Bussy with stores and cattle. They are also said to have been hired as spies, first by the British then by Tipu Sultan.

First the roads, then the laws and finally the droughts of the nineteenth century greatly affected the gypsy way of life. These nomads settled down in "tandas", named after places next to which they stood and adopted agriculture as their main occupation. Today, they also work as coolies and some earn a living from their handicraft.

The Lambanis have developed their own political system called "Goar Panchayat" which is lead by a headman, the Nayak. Their language "Goar Boli" belongs to the Indo-Aryan family of languages and has borrowed words from Sanskrit, Hindi, Rajasthani, Marathi, Gujarati, Kannada, Telugu and even Persian. They worship the Goddess Shakti in her various incarnations, their own god Sevabaya and other Hindu gods like Siva, Vishnu and Krishna. They are also keepers of a rich folk dance tradition of Teej, Lengi, Kikli, marriage and rain dances.

Although they possess a rich cultural life the Lambanis have been marginalised and have been reduced to poverty. Many of the Lambanis today are struggling to make a living. Rackets have been uncovered where Lambani girl children were sold for as little as Rs.1000. That is how much Lakshmi Bai earns in a month - embroidering.

Lakshmi Bai (35) and her cousin Devi Bai (24) were in Chennai to promote their craft at an exhibition organised by Manasthala. The weeklong exhibition had an assorted collection of *kurtas*, soft furnishings, bags and spectacle cases among other embroidered pieces. According to Mrs.Kalyani Pramod of Manasthala, professional designers had worked with the craftsmen to choose colours and designs to suit urban tastes, modernising traditional bags with zippers for example. To ensure that visitors and interested buyers placed future orders with the craftsmen themselves, eliminating any place for the middle man, the organisers had "Sandur Kushala Kala Kendra" written in big bold letters at the exhibition entrance.

The Kendra was set up by the Sandur Manganese and Iron Ore Company to preserve the traditional craft and mobilise the Lambani women towards economic independence. The success of the society was taken to greater heights with marketing advice and administrative tips from Dastkar. Today it is counted among the best examples of development project in Indian craft.

Lakshmi Bai and Devi Bai both make as much as their husbands doubling their household incomes. This is exclusive of the ration worth about 400 rupees that they receive from the Kendra at a price of Rupees seventy. Lakshmi Bai has even bought herself a sewing machine worth 950 rupees from her savings. They are happy to hand their earnings over to their husbands who are in no way associated in the embroidery work and earn a living from farming or as labourers. The Lambani society is patrimonial; the son moves out of the house with his share of the property after marriage. Marriage occurs strictly across clans (*Rathorkar*, *Mood*, *Vaarchyaa*, *Brukyaa*, *Kelutth* among others) as two people from the same clan are considered brother and sister.

An elaborate affair among the lambanis, marriage ceremonies nowadays takes a week but in the



Stitching Tassles

Meera Mohanty

plastic ones have replaced the ivory and stag horn bangles. Tattoo which adorned the faces of both men and women are a little more discreet.

Lakshmi Bai complained at the weight of her skirts and Devi Bai showed me their saris tucked into a bag. Mrs.Kalyani Pramod explained

olden days, the celebrations were conducted over months. Among the important rituals are *phavalo* and *haveli*. The bride's trousseau also plays an important part. The *phetiya* or traditional Lambani dress is made up of a skirt, a blouse, and a dupatta; all richly embroidered with mirrors, coins, ropes of cowri shells and woollen tassels on a cloth that is usually in shades of pink or red. So elaborate is the traditional outfit, that it takes a Lambani women about a whole year to complete a set. The dresses were traditionally begun with the birth of a daughter since her dowry consisted of at least three skirt sets, bags and other embroidered pieces for her and her in laws.

Today most brides bring saris for their dowry. Even Lakshmi Bai and Devi Bai dressed in their finest traditional outfit were wearing borrowed clothes. Such elaborate pieces are not stitched anymore. What they wear for their festive days like Dussera and Diwali is much simpler and much lighter. Flat



An embroidered skirt

Meera Mohanty

why she would not like them to return to their lodges dressed as they were. Seeing the two ladies in their colourful attire, a crowd had gathered outside Manasthala on the first day of the exhibition to watch what it presumed was a film shooting. It is not a surprise then that the Lambani women are more than willing to bargain their traditional clothing for acceptance in our society. Their embroidery skills however will hopefully live and thrive in such urbane fairs, festivals, and exhibitions that take up their cause.

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Lakshmi Bai & Devi Bai



Meera Mohanty

Just Published



Voicing Folklore Concerns, Careers and Issues

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African Nomadic Architecture

Labelle Prussin is a practising architect in New York. She has researched extensively in the vernacular architecture of Africa. Her book on the subject "African Nomadic Architecture: Space Place And Gender" was published in 1997. Email: lprussin@aol.com

Over the centuries, many semi-nomadic and nomadic cultures have inhabited the desert environments which stretch across the African continent. Pastoral peoples continue to live in these harsh habitats. Their inventive architectural responses reflect timeless, sophisticated thought processes and involve cultural strategies:

- Spatial mobility is the key to their viability;
- Women are the primary producers, owners and users of the domicile;
- The architectural process unfolds in the context of marriage ritual.



Hassaniya tent. South West Morocco: airfoil design for the desert winds.
Photo: Peter A. Andrews.



Fabrication of bent acacia arches.
Northern Kenya. Photo: Labelle Prussin.



Early rock painting at Ayou, Tibesti, Tassili: a nomadic herder, followed by his wife in her palanquin-litter.
Photo: Karl Striedter.



Map of Africa showing some of the nomadic habitats. Prussin.

The wedding ceremony invokes and involves long distances, and transport technology. The technology of transport interfaces with the technology of building. Their knowledge of the physical properties of wood and aerodynamic design result in the creation of geodesic and tensile structures.

A mahria wedding camel in the Sudan, elaborately decorated, in which the bride will travel.
Photo: Uta Holter.



Gabra women who load their pack camels have a basic knowledge of balance and the principles of tension and compression.
Northern Kenya.
Photo: Labelle Prussin.

Gabra women rebuilding a tent on a new site.
Photo: Labelle Prussin



House is a feminine noun among the nomads, and the language of both technology and architecture is spoken in a woman's voice. House and marriage are synonymous, architecture unfolds through collective creativity and the nomadic aesthetic is expressed in womens' song.

The interior, with its rich color and detail, communicates the woman's self-identity and sense of place. Metaphor and iconography link furnishings to the tent's structure.

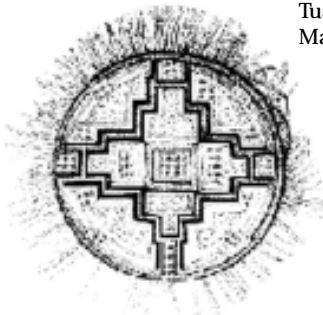


Menfolk sit and watch as a gabra wife packs up her complete household.

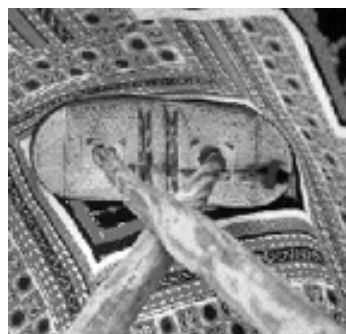
Photo: Labelle Prussin



Tuareg women singing. Timbuktu, Mali. Photo: Labelle Prussin



The design on a hassaniya wedding pillow with its sexually overt symbols mirrors the design of the apex of the hassaniya tent. Drawing after Odette du Puigaudeau.

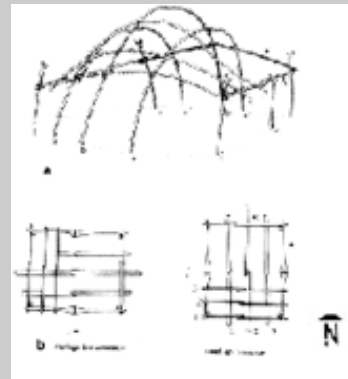


Interior apex of a hassaniya tent, Rosso, Mauritania. Photo: Labelle Prussin.

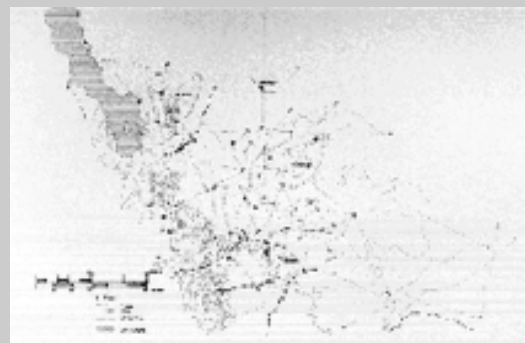


The reinforced wall opposite the entrance, designed to resist the strong desert winds, is also the focus of the wedding ceremony. Within, directly behind it, the wedding milk containers are hung. Photo: Labelle Prussin.

Spatial organization is structured by mobility and transhumance. Spatial acuity is critical to survival. Orientation in space, symbolically expressed both on the interior and exterior, reflects and reinforces behavioral and social patterns.



Tuareg *kel ferwan* tents are rotated in space during the extended wedding, emphasizing the relationship between ritual and space. Drawing after Dominique Cazajus.



Documented migration of a rendile camp over a seventy five- year span. Drawing after Anders Grum.

The settlement plan of a nomadic camp is clearly dictated by extended family relationships, environmental responses, herd ownership and pastoral needs. The same underlying physical structure in space, reflecting hierarchies of male and female, agnate and cognate geneology, is maintained at each new site. The pattern of movement over time, rational not random, is dictated by a unique knowledge of the habitat.



Research Project

Stuart Blackburn is professor in the South Asian Department at the School of African and Oriental Studies. He has published widely on the Oral traditions of Tamil Nadu. His most recent book published by the FF Fellows is *Moral tales*. He can be reached at: SB12@soas.ac.uk

Tribal Transitions: Cultural Innovation in Arunachal Pradesh, India. Challenging the Romance of Tribal Cultures

A new research project has just been launched to document and analyse cultural change in Arunachal Pradesh. Starting from the premise that tribal people are not only guardians of culture but also initiators of change, the project will undertake extensive fieldwork in this state, which is home to about twenty-five separate groups who speak Tibeto-Burman languages.

Isolated both by terrain and official policy, Arunachal provides a unique location to study such change; its cultures were recorded in archives made during the colonial period, and augmented by research during the 1950s and 1960s, but fieldwork in the past fifty years has been patchy. By combining contemporary documentation with a study of historic archives, the project the research will analyse innovation in historical perspective.

'Tribal Transitions' is a collaborative project between the School of Oriental and African Studies, The British Museum, Arunachal University, the Government of Arunachal Pradesh, the Centre for Cultural Research and Documentation (Arunachal Pradesh) and the British Council in New Delhi., The project Director is Dr. S. Blackburn (SOAS), supported by Richard Blurton (The British Museum), Dr. Sarit Chaudhuri (Arunachal University), Mr. Moji Riba (CCRD), Mr. Michael Tarr (USA) and Prof. T. Subba (Shillong). The consultants are Prof. Tamo Mibang (Arunachal University), Dr. Chris Pinney (University College, London) and Dr. Brian Durrans (The British Museum). The project, which is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, UK, runs from October 2002 to October 2007.

The main aims of the project are:

- analysis of cultural innovation among tribes in Arunachal Pradesh through the documentation of contemporary culture and the comparison of this data with historical data in the UK and India
- collaboration between public and academic institutions in India and the UK
- public dissemination of research results in both countries

· contribution to public debates about the place of tribal cultures in contemporary India.

Part of the old North-East Frontier Agency, Arunachal Pradesh has been isolated both by mountainous terrain and official policy. In 1873, the British authorities established the 'inner line' of control to prevent raids on tea plantations, and in 1914 the McMahon Line was drawn to separate the NEFA from Tibet/China. This policy of isolation has been in force ever since. After Independence, Prime Minister Nehru endorsed it in order to prevent the pauperisation of tribes evident elsewhere in India; today the 'inner line of control' is the state's southern boundary, which even Indian citizens, who cannot own land or businesses in Arunachal Pradesh, require permission to cross. Foreigners are not permitted to enter, except for a few days as tourists or NGO workers.

Although this policy of isolation (or 'gradual integration' as Elwin preferred) has prevented Arunachal tribes from absorption into mainstream culture, trade links with Tibet and the plains have always brought new objects and ideas; and today they are brought by television, education and better roads. Cultural change is everywhere apparent: textile designs of one tribe are borrowed by others; local festivals are centralised and refashioned as community events; oral traditions are printed and discussed as 'cultural heritage'. One tribe regularly holds a 'Fashion Show' in which young men and women display the latest innovation of traditional dress. Some traditional practices (such as tattooing) have been banned by tribal organisations, while others (woodcarving, for example) are undergoing expansion. Perhaps the most fundamental change is that animistic beliefs and rituals are undergoing formalisation into a 'religion', with new visual images, places of worship and a formal theology. This systematisation of the worship of Donyi-Polo (Sun-Moon) places it alongside the other religions known in the area: Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism; ritual practitioners have also formed a state-wide association of shamans. These changes are fast-paced but largely undocumented.

The twin pillars of research on tribal cultures in Arunachal Pradesh are Elwin's collections of oral literature and Haimendorf's ethnographic work; however, Elwin's last tour was completed in the late 1950s and Haimendorf's major research was conducted in the 1940s (followed by brief visits thereafter). Moreover, the anthropologist did not study oral traditions, and the folklorist did not study the context of storytelling; and neither studied ritual performance. Since the 1960s, research on cultures in the state has been limited to a series of descriptive studies, many of

them sponsored by the Anthropological Survey of India, who also published a survey volume (Singh 1995); Arunachal University, however, is now beginning to sponsor fieldwork (Behera and Chaudhuri 1998). If most Indian scholars regard the region as peripheral, foreign scholars have been prevented from entering altogether: two long-term research projects on Tibeto-Burman languages (at Berkeley and at Leiden) have been unable to work in Arunachal Pradesh, and a recent doctoral dissertation at Berkeley on Arunachal languages had to be completed without actually entering the state. The best anthropological study in recent years is a book on the Nagas (Jacobs 1990), but it relies of necessity on historical material and only touches on Arunachal Pradesh (see also Singh 1985).

This limited research on contemporary culture stands in sharp contrast to the substantial historical collections in the UK and India. From the late nineteenth century, colonial officials, anthropologists and folklorists collected hundreds of artefacts, shot approximately 3000 feet of film and took over 4,000 photographs (including several hundred glass lantern slides) of tribes in the state; most of this historical material remains unstudied and, in some locations, uncatalogued. The combination of substantial historical collections, relatively intact cultures and lack of contemporary documentation presents a unique context for the study of change among tribal societies. The proposed research would thus be the first major study of tribal culture in the state for half a century, and the first ever to analyse cultural change over time.

In pursuing a new analysis of innovation, the research will first challenge deep-rooted perceptions of tribal cultures as antidotes to modernity. The impulse to romanticise 'indigenous peoples' is still a powerful force in scholarship and public debate, and not only in the West but also in urban India, where *adivasi* textiles are fashionable, tribal dances grace government parades and publishing on tribal cultures is big business. Two very recent large-format books of tribal life in India (Baldizonne 1999; Stirn and van Ham 2000), for example, only perpetuate images of tribal people as guardians of culture by conflating historical and contemporary contexts.

Second, in order to shift the focus from preservation to innovation, the research will draw upon a range of writings that historicise tribal culture and theorise tradition as reinvention.

Primary among these are anthropological critiques of notions of the 'primitive' which locate tribal culture either in a timeless present or a vanished past (Fabian 1983; Clifford 1988).

Also valuable are studies of historical change in tribal cultures, either from participation in regional networks of trade or from adaptation to economic and

environmental conditions. While these factors are present in Arunachal Pradesh, too (Haimendorf 1962), the research will approach change not as passive adaptation but as innovation, especially in expressive culture. Here we will utilise the concept of the 'invention of tradition', first described by historians (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983); although typically applied to public traditions in large states, we believe the concept is applicable to small-scale societies, as well, where traditions are invented and reinvented. Folklorists have likewise contributed to this reinterpretation of tradition and to the emphasis on the inventiveness of culture by developing the concept of 'second-hand folklore' to describe conscious manipulations of tradition (Bausinger 1990); oral traditions are now understood less as representations of collective authenticity and more as products of individual creativity (Bendix 1997; Honko 2000). Although these theoretical developments have yet to significantly influence the study of tribal cultures in India, new directions are evident in Gell (1986) on consumption and ritual and in Skaria (1999) on oral genres.

We will also be guided by new research in material culture that views objects not as static artefacts or bearers of meaning but as sites of cultural practice and history (Tilley 1999); in a study similar to the proposed research, for example, Gosden and Knowles (2001) have demonstrated that the juxtaposition of museum collections and fieldwork yields original insights into cultural change over time. New research on material culture in India has produced important studies (Breckenridge 1995; Tarlo 1996), but has not yet engaged with tribal communities. Finally, we will draw selectively from the growing literature on 'indigenous peoples'; although this literature often sacrifices accuracy for advocacy, it does contain valuable case studies of change among tribal groups (Bodley 1988).

Research design and methods

The project requires both fieldwork and the study of historical material. Fieldwork will concentrate on three domains (religion, oral narrative, material culture) among four tribes (Apatani, Adi, Monpa, Idu Mishmi) using a variety of methods. By observation, photography, filmmaking and audiotaping, we will document current practices; by interviewing and by showing (copies of) archival photos, we will elicit commentary on change. We will also produce a series of four films, one on each tribe, documenting the ways in which each group defines and displays its identity; the specific subject of each film will be decided through consultation between the filmmakers and local people. Whenever possible, we will study events and objects already documented in the historical record: a festival filmed in 1953, for example, may be filmed again in 2003. Festivals will be a major focus during fieldwork

since these events often involve interaction between all three cultural domains (ritual performance, storytelling and making artefacts). Preliminary fieldwork was carried out by Blackburn in 2001 and again by Blackburn, Tarr and Blurton in Spring 2002.

Fieldwork will have the following emphases:

Religion: In addition to festivals, we will document less elaborate ritual performances. In both contexts, the role of the shaman will be studied; shamans will be interviewed at length, shown photos of earlier practices and asked to comment. The research will also study the process of formalisation of religion now underway among many tribes; we will visit the towns, which are centres for the new religion, where we will document practices and interview participants.

Oral narrative: The research will collect, translate and analyse two kinds of texts: myths about a trickster/ancestor figure and historical legends. The trickster stories will be compared with similar narratives told elsewhere in the subcontinent, in other Tibeto-Burman cultures and in other tribal societies. The historical legends are long narratives that trace the migration of the tribes from Tibet or Burma approximately 400-500 years ago. A preliminary study has shown significant variation within these legends, as well as differences to the versions recorded fifty (or more) years ago.

Material culture: We will study the making, uses and social meanings of objects which each tribes considers as a marker of its identity: for the Apatani: woven shawls and baskets; for the Adi, woven skirts and baskets; for the Sherdukpen, masks and jewellery; for the Wancho, woodcarving and jewellery. In addition to documenting production and use, we will interview and show historical photos of these same objects to elicit commentary on change. While production and use typically remain within a family, objects are sometimes sold in government craft centres in the district headquarters and the state capital, where textiles, in particular, are bought by all tribes and worn in a variety of ways.



Apa Tani priest narrating a legend, April 2002 (sitting on veranda, outside)



Apa Tani priest narrating a legend, March 2002 (sitting on stool, in house)



Monpa masked dancer, February 2002

The study of historical material in the UK and India will require identification and analysis of objects, photographs, slides and films from Arunachal Pradesh. The collections to be studied in the UK are held at SOAS, The British Museum, the Dept. of Social Anthropology, Cambridge University, Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Pitt Rivers Museum, Royal Anthropological Institute, British Library, Royal Asiatic Society and Royal Geographical Society. In India, we will examine material primarily in the State Museum in Arunachal Pradesh and the National Museum in New Delhi. By a study of these collections, we will build up a picture of tribal life as documented during the colonial period, which is essential to our analysis of historical change; however, rather than view objects only as reflections of change in other domains, we will explore their changing uses in ritual and everyday contexts as acts of cultural innovation. We will also repatriate (copies of) approximately 500 photographs from the UK to appropriate individuals and organisations in Arunachal Pradesh.

The planned outcomes of the research are:

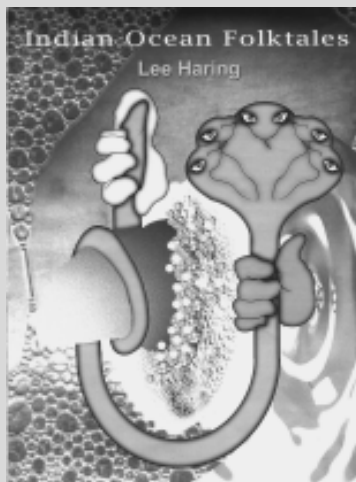
- an exhibition in India, originating in Arunachal Pradesh and travelling to other cities (possibly Calcutta, New Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai)
- an exhibition at The British Museum
- four documentary films
- extensive collection of photographs
- monographs on oral traditions, religious life and material culture in Arunachal Pradesh
- a photographic essay on cultural change in the state
- a volume of essays from an international conference at Arunachal University.

The project will soon have a website (probably 'tribaltransitions' on the main SOAS website).

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Book Review



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Picture Showmen. Insights into the Narrative Tradition in Indian Art.

Edited by Jyotindra Jain. Mumbai: Marg Publications, 1998.

The articles in the Marg Issue on Picture Showmen have been brought together under the umbrella of “visual narration” in Indian art and society. The jacket blurb posits the book as “one of the first comprehensive historical surveys of the manifold tradition of pictorial narration in India from ancient times to the present day.” An examination of the table of contents not only reveals an impressive list of contributors but also an adherence to chronology in the arrangement of articles.

Broadly, the edited volume is conceptually divided (although the chapterisation is not explicit on this) into the first section which looks at narration in Indian art history, while the pieces contained in the second half deal with Indian narrative paintings from the contemporary past.

The first contribution is an account of the ancient Buddhist devotee-viewer’s narrative experience at the Bharhut Stupa by Vidya Dehejia. The second by B.N. Goswamy looks at narrative devices in miniature painting using examples from the sixteenth to eighteenth century. This is followed by an article by T. Richard Blurton on the Murshidabad scroll paintings dated around the 1800’s. Jagdish Mittal’s piece deals with Deccani Scrolls of the seventeenth to nineteenth century and Anna L. Dallapiccola’s is on the Paithan paintings of mid nineteenth to late nineteenth century. Of the last four articles, the seventh, eighth and ninth are themselves narrative accounts of field work conducted among “picture showmen” from Gujarat, Telangana, Bengal and Rajasthan by Jyotindra Jain, Kirtana Thangavelu and Kavita Singh respectively. The last article by Geeta Kapur, “The persistence of Romance in the Paintings of Gulammohammed Sheikh” looks at biographical narrativity in the work of a contemporary modern Indian painter.

It is interesting to see a single book cover such a wide expanse in terms of genre, otherwise compartmentalised into neat art historical categories. “Pictorial Narration” is a trope that at once lends the diverse pieces in this volume into a common platform for a meaningful dialogue. Indeed the scholarly intent of the collection is emphasised by editor Jyotindra Jain (who is himself both art historian and anthropologist) – “The idea is not to make a comprehensive catalogue of narrative situations in Indian art but to touch upon the basic typology...”. Crucial to the understanding of the visual narrative is the distinctive cultural performance associated with each of the showings - “... facial and bodily gestures and postures, singing with or without

the accompaniment of musical instruments, dance, theatrical rendering of scenes, and even audience participation” – thereby amplifying the experience of the narrative for the viewer/participant.

The Introduction provides a brief sketch of the various narrative techniques and devices discussed in the volume and elaborates upon the complex structure of pictorial devices found in Rajasthani scrolls dedicated to the legend of Pabuji and Dev Narayan as a means to explicate the same. In the linear format of the Bengal and Telangana Scrolls, the various episodes of the narrative are arranged in chronological order from top to bottom and which gradually lead to the concluding climactic scene revealed with the unfolding of the scroll. According to Jain, in the Garoda scrolls which are relatively narrow and consist of nineteen compartments, the last three are devoted to the depiction of scenes from heaven and hell while the remaining deal with popular myths and legends, with only a single panel devoted to each legend. Here each of the registers or panels, owing to the limited space available in the narrow vertical format, is highly abbreviated and usually depicts only the climactic episode of the mythic narrative. Non continuous rectangular panels are the format used by the Chitrakathis of Paithan. The performance is not dictated by the placement of the episode on a running scroll and instead is more fluid in its structure of narration. The thread of the story is held by the performer/narrator who employs each compact panel depicting different pictorial situations to his advantage, often re-using one panel in different contextual situations within the narrative. The Rajasthan Phad has a more “scattered” structural placement on a largely horizontal format wherein “often two sequentially interconnected painted episodes are at quite a distance from one another.” Jain also presents a brief account of other compositional devices such as scene dividers, windows, postures etc, found in the different narrative art traditions discussed in the volume although a schematic representation of the same could have further enhanced the value of the typology presented.

A concluding piece on the category of the “picture showmen” would also have further tightened the collection from the point of view of its stated conceptual objective. For even though the term has its limitations, its use is significant in that it allows one to look at artistic expression both from the point of view of its “viewing” as well as its “showing”. The subject matter of all the works discussed is mythic but what is more important is the unique cultural practice associated with the various art traditions which posits the itinerant bard/artist as narrator/interlocutor straddling different worlds. The scroll reading tours of the Garoda picture showmen are pilgrimages (yatras), the Santhal Pata carries with it the blind spirit of the ancestor whose sight will be restored

only after alms are paid to the *Jadu Patua*, the painter of the scroll. The *Yama Patas* referred to in classical Sanskrit literature are a visual account of the rewards and punishments found in the abode of *Yama*, the God of death for the benefit of the inhabitants on earth. The experience of the narrative for the audience of the *bhopas* of Rajasthan is a *phad-banchana*. The scroll itself is a shrine of the deity and as such life affirming in each of its readings or tellings. The *Padma Saliyar* weavers' community identity is embodied in the Myth of Origin of their ancestor *Bhavana Rishi* depicted in scrolls and performed especially for them as a reaffirmation of their distinctiveness in society. The "picture showman" as inhabiting a region betwixt and between worlds is alluded to even in the work of modern painter *Sheikh* who as narrator, according to *Geeta Kapur*, alternates "the roles of the stranger-outsider with

that of the inquisitive-insider". "The structure of *Sheikh's* paintings is based on the high and low, above and below, ground and sky ...". And the list of possibilities goes on.

Picture Showmen is rich with analytical potential not just of Indian narrative folk painting styles brought together for the first time but also from the point of view of their myriad epistemic interpretations. The book serves as a very important landmark among the increasing body of literature that aims to transcend conventional boundaries between "art" and "folk craft". The fact that *Bharhut* sculptures share scholarly space with *Santhal patas* and *Cherial wood* and cloth figurines in this book points to the welcome new trend among scholars to look at structural devices common to works of art across periods in cultural time and space.

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(The Ishara puppet theatre trust is supported by the Ford Foundation)

- Dadi D. Pudumjee, Managing trustee TIPTT.

Calendar of events

22 September 2002, Lanka Dhan from the Ramayana: *Sri Ganesha Yakshagana Gombeyata Mandali* - Karnataka / Direction: Bhaskar Kamath

23 September 2002, Taming of the wild: *Dolls theatre* - Kolkata / Design & Direction: Sudip Gupta.

24 September 2002, Chandigarh Puppet Masala Mix: *Centre for Education and Voluntary Action (CEVA)* / Direction: Dadi D. Pudumjee

25 September 2002, Untitled *Theatre World* - N.Delhi / Direction: Arvind Gaur

26 September 2002, Almost Twelfth Night: *Kat-Katha* ; Anamm: *Kat-Katha* / Direction: Anurupa Roy

27 September 2002, Valentino: *Figure theatre Vlinders & Co. (Butterflies & Co.)* - Belgium. / Direction: Karel Van Ransbeeck & Sonja Vandermaelen

28 September 2002, Journeys inspired from *Violeta Parra's "Gracias a la Vida"* The *Ishara Puppet Theatre Trust* - N.Delhi / Concept & Direction: Dadi D. Pudumjee

29 September 2002, Saranga Puppeteers *Institute of Gamini Theatrical Arts* - Sri Lanka / Direction: G. Premin

Folk Religion



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Bauls of Bengal

Etymologically the word 'Baul' derives from the Sanskrit *Vatula* meaning mad or running amok or from *vyakula* meaning impatiently eager. During the last phase of the 15th century A.D. (in *Srikrishnavijaya* of Maladhar Basu) or nearly the end of 16th century (in *Chaitnyacharitamrta* of Krishnadasa Kaviraj) 'Baul' entered into Bengali

literature, when it indicated an individual who was spiritually ecstatic or mad. It is generally accepted that from the first half of the 17th century A.D. it began to be applied to an esoteric sect of religious mendicants whose faith has much in common with both Sufism and Vaishnavism.

Their unusual approach to life has earned them this nomenclature. Baul i.e., mad or different from others. The Bauls are apparently a godless sect, seemingly overwhelmed with emotions to attain a state of the sublime, which they describe as the abode of the *sain* or Lord. They do not observe rituals of any sort.

The Baul cult developed in the 17th century among the lower echelons of the social ladder. The idea of attaining the 'sublime' is somewhat similar to the Sufi principle of *Fana* or the 'ultimate', which could be obtained through *Sama* or 'meditations', songs and dances. This is known as 'Ulta sadhan' or the obverse way of meditation.

Bauls believe that Lord Chaitanya was their first spiritual preceptor or guru but there are fundamental differences between Gaudia Vaisnavism and the ideas of the Bauls. For they have look to *adhara moner manus* ('the intangible beloved') as their Lord or *Sain*, who does not exist in any temple or mosque, but in the innermost core of the devotee. To him, he is the 'neighbour', living in the mirror-town ('arshi nagarer parshi'), which in other words, is the reflection of one's own self.

To the Baul, the human body is the highest temple of the Sain. In this temple lives their 'moner manus' [the 'eternal beloved']. For this reason they attain divine grace by converting the communion between woman and man (*prakriti and purus*) through the medium of love, which is abstract and divine. According to the Baul philosophy the woman is not just an object of desire but akin to Radha, symbolising eternal love.

The devotees belonging to this sect always seem to be absorbed in a mystic state. Their understanding is always with themselves i.e. union with the Supreme Source [*moner manus*]. Many Baul songs refer to this union and

speak of this mystic love.

There are Bauls who adopt asceticism – they are mendicants, though some lead a family life. Neither sects forsake womenfolk but see them as 'prakriti' or spiritual associates. Of course, the *Grhi* Bauls (or those living with their wives and children) are in no other way different from the mendicants. The form and philosophy is the same for both. Sometimes, the whole family may belong to this sect.

Bauls attach supreme importance to their Guru. They do not chant mantras have any nor any scriptures of their own. Their religious doctrines are traditionally received in an oral form from their guru through songs and dances which refer to particular secret practices.

In Bengal, people from both the major religious communities of Hindu and Muslim are converted into Bauls. When someone enters the Baul sect, tearing off his previous socio-religious bonds of Hinduism or Mohammadanism, he becomes a man without a cast or creed.

Though most of the Bauls are unlettered their lyrics are extraordinarily poetic. Spontaneous, metaphoric verses express intense devotion and a metaphysical philosophy. Let me cite a lyric composition composed by the famous Baul poet Lalon Fakir to end this short note;

I didn't see him even for a day
Close to my place is the mirror-city
where lives this neighbour of mine.
Encircling the city is bottomless water
without any limit, and there is no boat
at this end.
I long to see him.
But tell me how can I go to that village?
What can I tell of this neighbour?
Hands or legs or shoulders or head
He has none.
Now he is up in the air,
Now deep in the water,
If that neighbour touches me
all my mortal anguish will end.
He and Lalon are close neighbours
But between them lies a wide gulf.

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Book Review



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The Hindu Diaspora: Comparative Patterns

by Steven Vertovec, London and New York: Routledge, 2000.

Steven Vertovec, the director of the Economic and Social Research Council's Research Programme on Transnational Communities in England, is the author of a new impressive book on the general trends of Hindu identity among Indians living abroad, entitled *The Hindu Diaspora: Comparative Patterns*. By looking at the conceptualizations of Hinduism over time and space, in India and in the diaspora, Vertovec demonstrates the highly contextual dimension of Hindu identity as illustrated by the migration and remigration of Indian people throughout the world. Some interesting points of inquiry are the creation of a concept of Hinduism as a single religion in India, the complex relationship between foreign-born Indians to the homeland as a source of spiritual and religious authority, and the suggestion of a diaspora population defined by religion – Hinduism — as opposed to national or ethnic identity, Indian or Gujarati, for example. Vertovec examines these and other theoretical questions, centering largely on communal identities, in the focused chapters of his book.

In the first chapter, Vertovec examines the emergence of a united notion of Hinduism among the people of India, a defensive position influenced directly by the external forces of Christian missionaries, the struggle by Orientalist scholars to understand India, and the ubiquitous British Raj. Chapter 2 concentrates on populations that have left India in search of upward mobility, often realized by migrations to the Caribbean and Africa by means of indentured servitude. This chapter offers general historical comparative patterns among people in Surinam, Trinidad and Guyana, by looking at worship and Hindu identity negotiated and recreated in each locality. The next chapter concentrates on the youth movement's resurgent Hinduism as a way of forging a cohesive collective in Trinidad, Vertovec's area of specialization.

Chapters 4 and 5 both investigate one of the main components of the Hindu Diaspora, Great Britain. Here Vertovec first looks at the roughly 50% of Indians in Great Britain who are Hindus, further subdivided into regional categories — Punjabis and Gujaratis being the largest populations. Adding to the complexities of these Indian-born migrants to the UK, Vertovec highlights in Chapter 5 the increasing number of Indo-Caribbeans who have moved to Britain, these people exemplifying the complicated category of 'twice migrants,' doubly removed from the homeland. This chapter is the most lively as Vertovec is working with his own research, including a presentation of general statements from (anonymous) informants in response to his interview questions.

In Chapter 6, the last case study of the book, Vertovec

explores three *mandirs* in London, showing natural divisions that arise between Hindus. Among people of the same religion, he argues, community forms on the basis of regional identity, for example, Gujaratis, Punjabis and Indo-Caribbeans. Vertovec calls this 'vis-à-vis dynamics', showing how people define themselves in relation to others. For example, amid all the people of Britain, Indians shape into one group. Within this core, Hindus and Muslims further separate. Among all Hindus, distinctions of regional and linguistic identity become highlighted. Among Indo-Caribbeans, for example, Vertovec sees a separation not only between Indo-Caribbeans and other Hindus in Britain, but within the group, they divide into Trinidadian and Guyanese. Culture — language, food, music, gestures — become foregrounded among populations already segregated by religion. The book concludes with a general inquiry into the definitions of diaspora among different disciplines and by different scholars. The summary found in Chapter 7 can be of great use for those not already familiar with the current scholarship on diaspora history and politics.

Steven Vertovec accomplishes his goals well. He looks at history and at broad patterns of immigration to understand the current reproduction and representation of Indian culture and religion in the diaspora. His study, rooted in sociological methodology, looks at general trends of large populations. This type of inquiry does not provide the kind of information and analysis folklorists would find useful. It would be interesting to consider a comparable investigation using the perspective of folkloristic inquiry. The data painstakingly gathered by Vertovec would undoubtedly provide a setting against which specific folklore phenomenon could be examined. As the focus shifted away from broad statements to detailed observations, we would look at particular events and examples, taking care to note nuanced variations to an established tradition. A folklorist could utilize the 'vis-à-vis dynamic' model to break the core from religious identity to regional association, all the way down to the individual level. Besides a Hindu Indo-Caribbean identity in England, for example, how are individual Trinidadian men and women defining themselves in relation to India, Britain, Trinidad, and also vis-à-vis their family and friends? A concentration on real people, with names, histories and personalities, would further clarify the complexities of constructing a strong community in the diaspora. Were we to take over this examination of identity within the Hindu diaspora, we would study particular events, explicit instances of creativity, performance and intent, taking care to document specific individuals and not stop at the level of the larger populations that they come together to form.

In *The Hindu Diaspora*, Vertovec provides us with the necessary historical and theoretical background against which folklorists could foreground the particular localities, performances and individuals that comprise the Hindu population of the world, nine million people strong, and growing.

Research Project



Susmita Poddar is an Independent researcher in Folklore. She was awarded a one-year fellowship to study the sacred groves of Bengal by NFSC.

Sacred grove : Abode of God and Ecological Saviour

Sacred groves are places of community worship in tribal communities. Such groves contain one or more species of trees that are specific to that geo-climatic region and at the same time signify certain values in the cultural life of the indigeneous people of that region. In India the

forest tribes have developed a multifarious man-tree complex for the sake of their own environmental safeguards (Mann 1981). Out of this complex arose tree worship, tree-spirits, tree-based totem and taboos and sacred groves. For ages in East central India the Santals have maintained their 'Jaherthan' or sacred groves of the *sal* tree (*Shorea Robusta*). The area is mainly occupied by fairly dense sal forest and so naturally they make their socio-cultural and religious domain centred on the tree. For the last six months I have visited this area to work on these sacred grove for my research project. I like to share some of my experiences in this essay.

The original homeland of the Santal is identified to be around the Chhotanagpur plateau. The Kolarian group of tribes among whom Santals are the major group, occupy nearly 7000 sq. mile area of the plateau. Their earliest settlement could be traced to the districts of Ahiri Pipri and Chai Champa, which lie on the western frontier of Hazaribagh (Risley: 1891: p226). Because of the ill treatment of Hindu rulers they were forced to come down to the 'Santal Pargana', which gave them shelter. From there some of them migrated towards the western frontier of Bengal and the adjoining states of Bihar and Orissa. Later, a part of this tribe dispersed into the southernmost part of Bengal i.e. in Sundarban and in some northern districts of Bengal. Primarily their shift from their original homeland was due to their oppression by the Bengali rulers, moneylenders and upcountry merchants. These grievances accumulated only to find its outburst in the Santal insurrection of 1855-57 (Datta: 1940). The revolt reflected the solidarity and unity of the tribe to protect their identity. Sacred grove worshipping cements community and provides identity to the Santals even today.

Thus, the tribal communities have been able to preserve a considerable part of the forest of east central India. The sacred grove is "Jaherthan" to the Santals, "Baramthan" to the Lodhas and "Sarna" to the Mundas. In the Santal villages of Midnapur and Bakura districts,

typical sacred groves are constituted with the dominating species of Sal, locally called as 'Sarjom'. In the sacred groves, besides Sarjom, Sal Mahuya (*Bassia Latifolia*) trees are often found, whose flower, the 'Matkom' is one of the most important source for their indigenous beer.

During the flower blossoming months of March and April ('phagumbonga') the Santals celebrate the Baha festival at their sacred grove. The festival may be regarded as a ritual offering of the first flowers of Sarjom or Sal, Matkom or Mahua, other flowers and fruits. 'Baha', is a Santali word, which means 'flower'

'Mak More', which is a similar festival is celebrated after the harvest. The whole ritualistic performances of Baha Parab at the sacred grove are performed by the Naike, the chief priest of the Santal community. In every village the Naike fixes the date of the festival with the consent of the village leaders. On the holy day he takes a dip in the river and the community meet together at his house and proceed to the grove led by the priest. By the time the procession arrives at the grove unmarried young boys would have decorated the place with flowers, and this is called 'Jahersarim'. The procession towards Jahersarim is accompanied with music men (*gaynahara*) and the village women, who perform the ritualistic song and dance. After arriving there, the Naike purifies the sitting places of the different gods and goddesses at the Jaherthan with water, cow dung and sindur. Then he offers derivative objects (terracotta horses and elephants) in the 'thans' of the gods. He then draws some small courts ('khond') on the ground with rice and methi powder, within which he places rice, flowers, green mango and vermilion. Three courts are drawn representing the three major deities, Marangburu, Jaherera and Monreko-Turuiko.

At this stage of the Baha Parab in Midnapur district, I saw a striking feature. Men become possessed and periodically run towards the forest to collect the flowers of Sal and Mahua and return within a short time. The Naike feeds ritualistic food to the goats and one by one they are sacrificed in the name of the Marangburu (white goat), the Jaherera (brown she-goat) and the Monreko-Turuiko (brown goat) in this order. As soon as the goats are sacrificed, the possessed persons suck the blood and are offered to the 'khond' in the name of the deities. Sacrificed hens are then offered to the gods.

The Naike then prepares 'Khichri' by mixing rice with the heads of the sacrificed goats and hens. By consuming this food he breaks his fast. Only males are allowed to take this food offering. Before this festival members of the community cannot use new flowers and fruits, they cannot participate in the colour festival of Holi. They

do not prepare beer from Mahua (*matkom poudre*) before Baha Parab. They can take older stock but can neither touch new ones nor keep it into their house. Even the person, who touches the flowers of the Mahua, has to purify himself or herself with water and only then is allowed to enter the house. Santals come from distant villages and meet together at the Jaherthan. Processions from all the villages arrive at the grove for the worship. All return to their villages in the night.



Santhal Dance

The other festivals, which they observe in the year, have a close relation with the concept of tree worship. The New Year celebration festival, 'Magh-Sim' takes place on the first day of the month of *magh* (January/February). This festival is similar to Baha but is not observed at the Jaherthan, although it is related to the Santal's forest habitat. On this occasion, fowls (*sim*) are sacrificed. Before these hunter-gatherers enter the forest they have to satisfy the evil powers and dedicate their offerings to the deities of the sacred grove. The sacrificed fowls are offered to the sacred grove-deities.

Through tree worship forest dwellers express their gratitude to the trees, which has provided food and shelter to them and to protect themselves from the evil spirits of the Sacred grove. Moreover by the practice of tree worship they also preserve their forest habitat - Sacred groves act as environmental safeguards and maintain biodiversity. For many scholars the positive co-relation between the sacred groves and preservation of the environmental niche is incidental (Misra and Rangad 2000). Moreover according to them, it is an attempt by scholars to romanticise the cultural practices of the people (Ibid). On the contrary it may be true that the pre- modern man created all of his social and religious customs in reference to his existence of life on the earth. Santali creation myths tell the story of Pilchu Haram and Pilchu Buri, their first ancestral parents who gave birth to seven boys and girls at the bottom of a Sal tree. These seven pairs created seven basic clans of the race. I have collected more than one version of the Santali creation myth from several Santal villages. In all these versions the Sal stands for their primitive shelter. Of course, in other areas where Sal is not available, migrated Santal communities make their sacred groves with other species. As it is found in the Santal villages of Shibdaspur area in North 24 Parganas of West Bengal, Jaherthan constitutes mango trees

(*magnifera indica*) and lichi (*nephelium litchi*).

As mentioned earlier, most community festivals of the Santal have a relation to forest worship and the biggest annual hunting festival of "Sendrabir" also falls within this type, where brave Santal hunters offer their worship to the deities of forest. On the eve of the lunar day of 'Baisakhi Purnima' (the full moon day of the

Bengali month 'Baishakh'), Santal hunters from different regions come in groups to the Ayodhya Hills in Purulia and take part in the festival. Although it has no relation with the sacred grove but before entering into the forest, the hunters must offer worship to Marangburu, Jaherera and Monreko - Turuiko, the major deities who are worshipped at the sacred grove. It is a belief of the Santals that the forest is the original abode of these deities and act as the guardian spirits of the villages. The rituals performed at the sacred groves to reflect fertility beliefs and express their concern for the preservation of the forest.

The Chhotanagpur Plateau area is the core of the industrial belt of eastern India. Industrialism causes destruction of vast areas of the sacred forest. Many endangered species of trees have been destroyed because of reckless deforestation. Clearly, it is time for the government to take initiatives in the preparation of cultural mapping, in which sacred groves must be one of the important criteria for measurement of the value of a place. Through the comparative study of sacred grove worship in different communities we can also define the cultural continuum, which can help us to identify properly the cultural milieu of this country.

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Kurumba Painting Workshop

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(Public Programme) at
NFSC

National Folklore Support Centre had invited two artists of the Kurumba tribe of the Nilgiris to conduct a painting workshop in Chennai. It was as part of the Visual Arts Traditions of India series. Organised in collaboration with the Government College of Fine Arts, Chennai the five-day workshop of Kurumba painting also featured an ethnographic exhibition on the Kurumba way of life.

The artists, Mr. Raghavan Krishnan, and Mr. Chinnon are members of the Alu Kurumba sub-tribe of the Kurumbas. They are from *vellarikombai* and *Bavi ur* villages. The workshop commenced with the artists teaching the traditional style of Kurumba painting. And over the following days the participants learned to paint in the original style and in the new style. They learnt to draw various motifs of trees, and baskets, musical instruments, and each completed a painting in the new style. The paintings were made on a large sheet of hand made paper, which was pasted on a wall simulate painting in the traditional way on the walls on the interiors of caves. At the end of the workshop. The participants were also introduced to the Kurumba dance of *gandesattam*, which is traditionally performed

Participants at the workshop



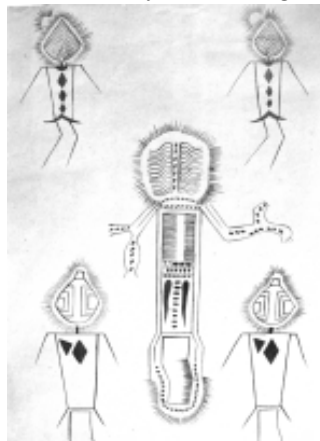
only by men and *yennattam*, performed only by women.

The Kurumba art form plays an important role in the life of the community. Apart from the painting of border motifs on cow dung treated hut walls, in which women also participate, the priests or *jattikaras* of the tribe paint the temple walls and the insides of caves as a religious practice. The temple and house walls are painted on festive occasions like *pongal*, the harvest festival, marriages ceremonies, and other festivities.

The traditional style of Kurumba painting are typically single line based figures standing on unpainted ground. The heads of these figures are given great visual importance, and are usually based geometric shapes. The figures are always represented carrying ritual objects. The Kurumba use colours made from different types of sand and from plants that are found in the forests. The new art form, which has recently been revived, is very distinct from the traditional one. The stick figures give way to flat monochromatic ones with circular heads, reminiscent of Warli paintings, and are painted into a background that contextualises them in their tribal environment. The new version depicts day-to-day scenes and events of village life, whereas the original style depicted figures, those that represented their gods and the Kurumba man.

In the Art Gallery of the Fine Arts College, an ethnographic exhibition

The old style Kurumba figures



on the Kurumbas with photographs and several of their objects, mostly ornaments were exhibited. Along with these were displayed both the traditional and new paintings. The ethnography contained information on their history, geography, and their social and political organisations. There was a healthy response from art students and visitors in regard to the exhibition, which helped people to understand the Kurumba culture and appreciate their art form. A slide show was also presented based on the fieldwork undertaken by the Public Programme team at NFSC.

The workshop brought together important cultural figures of the city. Dr. Sudarshan, Head of the Anthropology department at the University of Madras delivered the inaugural lecture. He called for an understanding of tribal art that took the social life of the tribe into consideration. Mr.Chandu, Senior lecturer at the Government College of Fine Arts spoke on the theme of Primitive and pre-historic tribal paintings with special reference to Kurumba art. The workshop and the exhibition concluded with a valedictory function. The chief guest Ms.P. Sivakami, I.A.S., Commissioner of Government Data Centre in Chennai presented the certificates to the participants.

The new style Kurumba painting

