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The rebel poet and freedom fighter Qazi Nazrul Islam is the national poet of Bangladesh. But his works represent the whole sub-continent as freedom struggle was liberation movement for the whole region. Qazi Nazrul Islam was one of the strongest voices of our freedom struggle. His poem Rebel (Bidrohi) is as much our Composite Heritage as the poet himself. The poem also reflects how the history and mythology of sub-continent became composite of whole region cutting across religious boundaries. The poem was first published in 1922.

**The Rebel**

(Original: Bidrohi)  
**Kazi Nazrul Islam**

Say, Valiant,  
Say: High is my head!

Looking at my head  
Is cast down the great Himalayan peak!  
Say, Valiant,  
Say: Ripping apart the wide sky of the universe,  
Leaving behind the moon, the sun, the planets and the stars  
Piercing the earth and the heavens,  
Pushing through Almighty's sacred seat  
Have I risen,  
I, the perennial wonder of mother-earth!  
The angry God shines on my forehead  
Like some royal victory's gorgeous emblem.  
Say, Valiant,  
Ever high is my head!

I am irresponsible, cruel and arrogant,  
I am the king of the great upheaval,  
I am cyclone, I am destruction,  
I am the great fear, the curse of the universe.  
I have no mercy,  
I grind all to pieces.  
I am disorderly and lawless,  
I trample under my feet all rules and discipline!  
I am Durjati, I am the sudden tempest of ultimate summer,  
I am the rebel, the rebel-son of mother-earth!  
Say, Valiant,  
Ever high is my head!

I am the hurricane, I am the cyclone  
I destroy all that I find in the path!  
I am the dance-intoxicated rhythm,  
I dance at my own pleasure,  
I am the unfettered joy of life!  
I am Hambeer, I am Chhayanata, I am Hindole,  
I am ever restless,  
I caper and dance as I move!  
I do whatever appeals to me, whenever I like,

I embrace the enemy and wrestle with death,  
I am mad. I am the tornado!  
I am pestilence, the great fear,  
I am the death of all reigns of terror,  
I am full of a warm restlessness for ever!  
Say, Valiant,  
Ever high is my head!

I am creation, I am destruction,  
I am habitation, I am the grave-yard,  
I am the end, the end of night!  
I am the son of Indrani  
With the moon in my head  
And the sun on my temple  
In one hand of mine is the tender flute  
While in the other I hold the war bugle!  
I am the Bedouin, I am the Chengis,  
I salute none but me!  
I am thunder,  
I am Brahma's sound in the sky and on the earth,  
I am the mighty roar of Israfil's bugle,  
I am the great trident of Pinakpani,  
I am the staff of the king of truth,  
I am the Chakra and the great Shanka,  
I am the mighty primordial shout!  
I am Bishyamisra's pupil, Durbasha the furious,  
I am the fury of the wild fire,  
I burn to ashes this universe!  
I am the gay laughter of the generous heart,  
I am the enemy of creation, the mighty terror!  
I am the eclipse of the twelve suns,  
I herald the final destruction!  
Sometimes I am quiet and serene,  
I am in a frenzy at other times,  
I am the new youth of dawn,  
I crush under my feet the vain glory of the Almighty!

I am the fury of typhoon,  
I am the tumultuous roar of the ocean,  
I am ever effluent and bright,  
I trippingly flow like the gaily warbling brook.  
I am the maiden's dark glassy hair,  
I am the spark of fire in her blazing eyes.  
I am the tender love that lies  
In the sixteen year old's heart,  
I am the happy beyond measure!  
I am the pining soul of the lovesick,  
I am the bitter tears in the widow's heart,  
I am the piteous sighs of the unlucky!  
I am the pain and sorrow of all homeless sufferers,  
I am the anguish of the insulted heart,  
I am the burning pain and the madness of the jilted lover!

I am the unutterable grief,  
I am the trembling first touch of the virgin,  
I am the throbbing tenderness of her first stolen kiss.  
I am the fleeting glance of the veiled beloved,  
I am her constant surreptitious gaze.  
I am the gay gripping young girl's love,  
I am the jingling music of her bangles!  
I am the eternal-child, the adolescent of all times,  
I am the shy village maiden frightened by her own budding youth.  
I am the soothing breeze of the south,

I am the pensive gale of the east.  
I am the deep solemn song sung by the wondering bard,  
I am the soft music played on his lyre!  
I am the harsh unquenched mid-day thirst,  
I am the fierce blazing sun,  
I am the softly trilling desert spring,  
I am the cool shadowy greenery!  
Maddened with an intense joy I rush onward,  
I am insane! I am insane!  
Suddenly I have come to know myself,  
All the false barriers have crumbled today!  
I am the rising, I am the fall,  
I am consciousness in the unconscious soul,  
I am the flag of triumph at the gate of the world,  
I am the glorious sign of man's victory,  
Clapping my hands in exultation I rush like the hurricane,  
Traversing the earth and the sky.  
The mighty Borrak is the horse I ride.  
It neighs impatiently, drunk with delight!  
I am the burning volcano in the bosom of the earth,  
I am the wild fire of the woods,  
I am Hell's mad terrific sea of wrath!  
I ride on the wings of the lightning with joy and profound,  
I scatter misery and fear all around,  
I bring earth-quakes on this world!

I am Orpheus's flute,  
I bring sleep to the fevered world,  
I make the heaving hells temple in fear and die.  
I carry the message of revolt to the earth and the sky!  
I am the mighty flood,  
Sometimes I make the earth rich and fertile,  
At another times I cause colossal damage.  
I snatch from Bishnu's bosom the two girls!  
I am injustice, I am the shooting star,  
I am Saturn, I am the fire of the comet,  
I am the poisonous asp!  
I am Chandi the headless, I am ruinous Warlord,  
Sitting in the burning pit of Hell  
I smile as the innocent flower!  
I am the cruel axe of Parsurama,  
I shall kill warriors  
And bring peace and harmony in the universe!  
I am the plough on the shoulders of Balarama,  
I shall uproot this miserable earth effortlessly and with ease,  
And create a new universe of joy and peace.  
Weary of struggles, I, the great rebel,  
Shall rest in quiet only when I find  
The sky and the air free of the piteous groans of the oppressed.  
Only when the battle fields are cleared of jingling bloody sabres  
Shall I, weary of struggles, rest in quiet,  
I the great rebel.

I am the rebel eternal,  
I raise my head beyond this world,  
High, ever erect and alone!

*Translation : Kabir Chowdhury*

## A New Beginning

**Riaz Leghari**

*Christian Study Centre,  
Rawalpindi, Pakistan*

The Thal Development Organisation has been involved in development work in Muzzafargarh since 1994. In addition to its various schemes, it has also been carrying out different programs for women empowerment. There is a majority of Muslims in Muzzafargarh as compared to the non-Muslim Pakistanis.

We started a Sewing Centre for ladies, which would enable them to meet their daily household expenses as well as keep them busy in their spare time. We hired a lady instructor for stitching and embroidery, but because she lacked professional training we asked her to leave. A sewing teacher in Multan got to know that we were looking for an instructor, and when the organisation looked at her quality work, they were impressed and decided to employ her immediately.

She won the confidence of the girls at the center in a few days time. In turn as a sign of respect, the girls would address her as ‘Sister Zarina’.

One day, Zarina came to me after finishing her class and I could clearly observe that she was quite pale with worries.

“Mr. Leghari I want to tell you something,” she began.

“Please sit down Zarina. Tell me, what’s wrong,” I asked comforting her.

“My problem, Mr. Leghari is that I cannot stay anymore at the place where I have been residing. Kindly arrange a place for me to stay. I can put up here in the school if you permit me,” she said in an anxious tone.

“Helplessness really puts man in a state of complete dejection,” I thought to myself. “Moreover, at times one is compelled to leave friends, relatives, kith and kin. Zarina had completed her Fine Arts after which she took up a course in professional stitching and embroidery. Her father had died while she was only a little girl and being the eldest, she had to earn for the rest of her family as well as bear the educational expenses of her younger brother and sisters.”

“Yes?... Mr. Leghari!,” she questioned, bringing me out of my thoughts.

“Yes, Zarina, you may stay at my house with my mother, wife and father. I assure you that you will be safe and have no problem. That is only if you have no objection,” I said stating my quick yet final decision.

She went into a state of deep thought momentarily and then said,

“If you will have no problems...”

“Look, there is no better solution,” I cut her short.

“Right! I will bring my luggage tomorrow,” she said in a tone of contentment and satisfaction. “My mother is the more dominant of my parents, while my father is a loyal and passive personality. Our house runs according to my mother’s instructions. My father has never had any objection,” I explained to her.

In the evening, I informed my mother about Zarina’s arrival for stay with us and told her to prepare the room in the courtyard next to the entrance. She unexpectedly raised no objections and agreed. The very next day Zarina came with her meagre luggage and entered our house.

She won the hearts of my entire family by her charming personality and morals. Even my children became attached to her.

She would leave for her house in Multan every Friday and return on Sunday evening or Monday morning ready for the week.

Time slipped by quickly, and the sewing center became famous in Muzzafargarh and its environs. The number of ladies at the center increased and it progressed remarkably. But this happiness and peace was disturbed with the onset of the Holy month of Ramdhan<sup>1</sup>.

On the first of Ramdhan all the members of my family had woken up early in the morning for Sehri<sup>2</sup>, had offered prayers and had breakfast, when mother asked with anxiety,

“Zarina hasn’t come for sehri. Didn’t anyone wake her up?”

My wife and I remained quiet. My eldest son got up and returned quickly saying,

“Sister is asleep, she isn’t fasting.”

“Mother,” I interrupted diverting her attention, “we’ll talk about this during the day, now offer your prayers.”

I was quite worried and was unable to sleep till the crack of dawn. I could clearly see what would happen and matters would get out of control. I was lost in my thoughts when I heard Zarina pottering about in the kitchen to prepare her breakfast.

“Who is in the kitchen?” asked mother hearing the noise of the dishes.

“That’s Zarina, mother!” I quickly answered. Presently Zarina appeared carrying a dish towards the tap in the courtyard.

“Why didn’t you wake up for sehri?” asked

mother from her room.

Zarina froze in her tracks and stammered out, “Mother, I, I...”

“Mother, Zarina does not fast,” I quickly said before Zarina could say anything.

Mother got up.

“You said she doesn’t fast. But why?” mother inquired angrily.

“Mother, Zarina is Christian,” I answered and the sound of the empty dish slipping out from Zarina’s hands echoed throughout the house.

“You mean to say you gave refuge to a Christian, who stayed with us and ate in our dishes. Do you know that all our dishes have been soiled? Tell her to leave immediately!!!” Mother’s temper had reached its peak. “Take her away at this very moment! Why didn’t you tell me before! Villain! You’d better leave too! I knew something would happen since you started getting yourself involved with these organisations. You’ve alienated yourself from your religion! And to top it all off you brought this wretched Christian here!” Mother continued her invective in this state of anger. Zarina was about to pick up the fallen dish when mother stopped her, saying,

“Stop don’t touch our dishes!”

“Abida go and pick up the dish,” mother ordered my wife. A little later Zarina appeared at the doorway with a few of her belongings and uttered,

“Mother I am really sorry that I have hurt you. Please forgive me and don’t be angry. I’m going back.”

A little while later, she was on the bus to Multan never to be seen again. With her departure the center closed down permanently while everyone asked anxiously about Sister Zarina.

I avoided talking to mother for a few days; the children were missing her; and mother kept scolding them.

“Mother your act of turning out a homeless is quite unforgivable. After all she is a human being. She became one of us and if she ate in our dishes what unforgivable sin did she commit? Does Islam teach us hatred? Islam engenders, love, peace and well being of others in us. Don’t you remember the incident of migration of the Muslims to **Habsha**, a Christian state. Don’t you remember that non-Muslims were allowed to pray in the Masjid-e-Nabvi? Weren’t those the followers of the revealed religion too?” I literally spilled out all that had been brewing in me for a week.

Mother listened with astonishment to all that I had to say. I was shocked at how I had said all this in front of mother, because never before had I argued with her, not even regarding my own children. There was complete silence after I had uttered these words. Both the children and elders were quiet. To escape

from this utter silence and without pausing for mother’s answer, I walked out of the house. When I returned in the evening there was plenty of time for Iftar. Mother was sitting in the courtyard perhaps waiting for me. As soon as she saw me she called out to me. I sat beside her. She patted my head and lovingly asked, “Where did you learn all that you just said, because you’ve never spoken such things before.”

She then took my hand in hers and calmly spoke again, “Son I have been thinking deeply over what you have said and have concluded that the Christian treatment of the Muslims during the Hijrat to Habsha has deeply indebted us to them. They are our benefactors. I have committed a deep sin today by turning out one of our friends. The Christians were given a clear and undefiled place such as Masjid-e-Nabvi to offer their prayers and here I have turned out a Christian believing her to be impure and defiled. I have erred in the Holy Month of Ramdhan. I have done wrong! I have sinned!” Thus uttering these words tears began to flow from mother’s eyes.

After a while she addressed me again saying, “My son.”

“Yes mother...” I answered in a choked voice.

“Son, you have opened my eyes. **No one has ever told us these things. All that we have been told was not to eat and drink with non-Muslims. We were told that we belong to a superior class, the ‘Baloch’ tribe. They — the non-Muslims — are not up to our standard and thus should not mingle with us. But today I have had the revelation that all men are equal.**”

“Son,” she continued, “Whatever has been ingrained into us for years cannot be expected to end within a few days!

Anyway, come let us take the initiative from our own house. Go and bring back Zarina,” said my mother in her usual domineering tone with a glowing expression on her face.

Thus it seemed as if happiness began to prevail once more in our house. Every face was sparkling, the children were happy at the anticipated return of Zarina. My wife started, sweeping and cleaning out Zarina’s room.

My mother told me once again, “There is still plenty of time for Iftar<sup>3</sup>, hurry and bring her! I will not break my fast today without Zarina”.

#### FOOTNOTE :

1. The holy fasting month in Islam.
2. Customary breakfast at dawn to start the fasting day
3. Time for breaking the fast.

## The First May Day

Alan Maass

**ALAN MAASS looks at how the 19th-century struggle of a largely immigrant working class in the U.S. for the eight-hour day is honored by the international workers' holiday on May 1.**

THE EFFORT to win “eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, and eight hours for what we will” became a crusade for U.S. labor in the years after the Civil War of 1861-65.

Many people hoped to win shorter hours through reform laws, and by the 1870s, several states and a number of cities had passed eight-hour legislation. But these were routinely ignored by employers, leaving workers with nowhere to turn to get them enforced.

Under the influence of the growing socialist movement in the U.S., labor turned to more militant tactics. “The way to get [the eight-hour day],” Peter McGuire of the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners wrote in 1882, “is by organisation... We want an enactment by the workingmen themselves that on a given day, eight hours should constitute a day’s work, and they ought to enforce it themselves.”

In 1884, McGuire’s proposal was adopted by the newly formed Federation of Organised Trades and Labor Unions—the forerunner of the American Federation of Labor—which set May 1, 1886, as the date that “eight hours shall constitute a legal day’s labor.”

The idea caught on, especially after a successful strike in 1885 against robber baron Jay Gould’s railroad empire. Unions and labor assemblies across the country committed to “a massive work stoppage” to begin on May 1.

Everywhere, workers joined the campaign. Historian Philip Foner describes workers smoking “Eight-Hour Tobacco” and wearing “Eight-Hour Shoes”—as products produced in shops that already had the shorter working day were known—and singing the “Eight-Hour Song”:

*We want to feel the sunshine; we want to smell the flowers;*

*We’re sure that God has willed it, and we mean to have eight hours.*

*We’re summoning our forces from shipyard, shop and mill:*

*Eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, eight hours for what we will.*

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MAY 1 was a huge success. About 200,000 workers went on strike across the country, and nearly that number won shorter hours just by threatening to strike.

The heart of the eight-hour day movement—and the political center of the left in the U.S.—was Chicago. On the first day of the strike, some 80,000 strikers and supporters—almost one in every six people living in the city at the time—paraded down Michigan Avenue.

Chicago’s ruling class had identified the eight-hour movement as a threat. In an editorial naming two anarchist leaders of the struggle, Albert Parsons and August Spies, the *Chicago Mail* declared: “There are two dangerous ruffians at large in this city; two skulking cowards who are trying to create trouble. One of them is named Parsons; the other is named Spies...Make an example of them if trouble does occur.”

The employers did strike back. On May 3, thousands of lumber workers gathered for an eight-hour-day rally on Chicago’s South Side. Nearby stood the McCormick reaper plant—owned by one of the ruling families of the city, and the site of a bitter lockout and strike that had dragged on for months.

When scabs from the reaper plant started leaving work while the rally was in progress, several hundred lumber workers broke off to demonstrate against them. Without warning, police opened fired, killing four workers and injuring many more.

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Bitterness at the police—already notorious for their brutality in the service of Chicago’s wealthy—exploded in demonstrations across the city.

One rally was called for the next evening at Haymarket Square. With rain threatening and other meetings underway elsewhere, the turnout was smaller than expected, and the rally began without incident.

Spies spoke as a representative of the city’s Central Labor Council and a leading member of the anarchist International Working People’s Association. He was joined by Parsons, who had to be called away from another meeting to address the crowd at Haymarket.

When a thunderstorm broke out, most people left the demonstration. Only a few hundred were left when a column of armed police marched to the square. After demanding that the meeting disperse, the cops began advancing on the speakers’ stand.

At that point, someone threw a bomb that exploded in front of the police. One officer was killed, and six more later died of wounds—though historian Paul Avrich concluded that most of these fatal injuries were caused by fellow officers opening fire indiscriminately after the blast.

No one knows who threw the bomb. It might have been a worker angry at police violence, or it could have been the act of a provocateur, to provide an excuse for a crackdown—which it did. The city’s rulers responded instantly. Newspapers blamed the “Dynamarchists.” “There are no good anarchists except dead anarchists,” bellowed the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*.

Chicago’s elite donated more than \$100,000 to aid the war on radicals. Police took the opportunity to raid newspaper offices, invade meeting halls and enter the homes of radicals, in order to beat and arrest them. State’s Attorney Julius Grinnel issued the order: “Make the raids first, and look up the law afterward.”

The authorities finally settled on eight defendants for the Haymarket bombing, each a leader of the city’s working-class movement—Spies, Parsons, Samuel Fielden, George Engel, Adolph Fischer, Louis Lingg, Oscar Neebe and Michael Schwab. Most weren’t even present at Haymarket on May 4, and those who did attend had either left before the explosion or weren’t in a position to have thrown the bomb.

But they were charged with murder, anyway. Judge Joseph Gary dispensed with normal procedures

to make sure the jury would be prejudiced against the defendants—one juror was even a relative of a victim of the Haymarket bomb.

The Haymarket defendants were accused because they were radicals. As Grinnel, the prosecutor, said in his closing argument: “These men have been selected, picked out by the grand jury and indicted because they are the leaders. They are no more guilty than those thousands who follow them. Gentlemen of the jury: convict these men, make examples of them, hang them, and you save our institutions, our society.”

In short, the Haymarket trial was a deliberate attempt to single out and murder the leaders of the Chicago radical movement.

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THE HAYMARKET Eight were found guilty, and all but one sentenced to die. As national attention focused on the trial, sympathy and solidarity for the Haymarket Eight grew, with protests taking place around the country and the world against the injustice of the verdict.

Eventually, the governor of Illinois commuted two of the death sentences. But the employers wanted blood. On November 11, 1887, five of Haymarket Eight were killed—one committing suicide in his prison cell, the others hung.

As he was led to his death, August Spies called out: “There will come a time when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today!”

He was right. At first, the wave of repression halted the struggle for the eight-hour day and pushed unions back on the defensive. But Haymarket became a cornerstone of labor’s future struggles. Future revolutionaries like Eugene Debs cited the murder of the Haymarket Martyrs as a turning point in their political development.

This legacy survives to this day—as Spies predicted in his speech to the court after the eight were found guilty.

“If you think that by hanging us, you can stamp out the labor movement...the movement from which the downtrodden millions, the millions who toil in want and misery expect salvation—if this is your opinion, then hang us!” Spies said. “Here you will tread upon a spark, but there and there, behind you and in front of you, and everywhere, flames blaze up. It is a subterranean fire. You cannot put it out.”

*Courtesy : Socialist worker online*

## Silence or Survival : The Gendering of Creative Writing

Vasanth Kannabiran  
Volga

*Asmita Resource Centre for Women  
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The Women and Censorship project evolved from, and is informally part of, a worldwide initiative launched by Women's WORLD (Women's World Organisation for Rights, Literature and Development), an international free speech network that seeks to catalyse global feminist work on the right to free expression.

This presentation draws on the findings of a three year research project involving ten language-specific workshops across the country from 1999 to 2001 with writers culminating in a national colloquium to explore the insidious and indirect forms of gender based censorship that are more problematic than overt official suppression.

Women writers from across the world who belong to Women's WORLD (a spin-off from the International PEN Women Writer's Committee) believe that gender-based censorship is a major threat to women's freedom of expression. The term, coined in 1993 by Filipina writer, Ninotchka Rosca, refers to the historic, worldwide silencing of women's voices through various means which subtly, but effectively, obstruct the achievement of equality, sustainable livelihoods and peace by women.

The ideal of freedom has fired the human imagination from time immemorial. Enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Indian Constitution, the right to freedom of opinion and expression and the right to receive or impart ideas through any media, regardless of frontiers, is guarded fiercely and passionately. Any infringement of that right is perceived as an assault on human freedom and on the values of modern civilization. Literature being a powerful instrument of social change, a large number of writers have been exiled, imprisoned and banned during critical moments in history because of the threat they present to established regimes and social order. Leading Telugu writer and Marxist intellectual, Kodavatiganti Kutumba Rao once said, "The thing I can do with utmost freedom in my life is writing. No material or emotional limitations can prevent me—there is no other work I can do with such freedom." Krishna Sastri said, "I will flood the world so that it streams with songs of freedom." Writers across the world have seized a pen to change the world they inhabit and their writings are filled with their vision of the perfect society, of a heaven of

freedom. They believe it is their duty to expose and dismantle every custom or institution that has abridged and inhibited human freedom, but the reality is that one reads "male" for "human", and the practice of literature has been a purely male activity. Women *have* featured in literature, but as subjects, and as they gradually began to write it became evident that notions of both writing and freedom are gendered. Returning to the gendered nature of freedom itself, it is obvious that while the quest for freedom and its celebration are the prerogative of men who write, women are often left with, "A bird invited me to fly with it – how do I convince the bird that I have no wings?" (Bano Tahera) or "Alas! I've forgotten how to float, how to fly." (Krishna Basu).

And so the leitmotif seems to be that of disconnection: the disconnection between what women say and what they write; between their spoken words and their silences; between their fathers' and husbands' apparent encouragement and support, and their explicit, disapproving silence when a norm is violated. Between women as the subject-matter of writing, and women as subjects and writers. Between language, literature and social movements, and the emergence of women's voices. Between language and gender, gender and genre<sup>1</sup>.

Discussions on censorship, like discussions on human and fundamental rights, have by and large dealt with political and civil rights and censorship by the state. The contours of gender-based censorship are far more pervasive and far more difficult to define than official suppression. Denied by men, and internalized by women, gender-based censorship protects an order that is difficult to define as one that is oppressive. As K.P. Sudheera puts it, 'gender-based censorship serves as yet another watchdog to sustain an androcentric world.' Free speech is essential to bring down the tyrannies that rear their head with frightening regularity, but a speech that dwells on the tyranny of the household, marriage, family and motherhood is too subversive to be tolerated. While political systems can be demolished with ease, the preservation of the purity of familial and gendered systems seems to be fundamental to the defence of social integrity, which is supranational in character. Political structures can be changed with no risk to society, but any change that threatens

relationships and familial institutions seems fraught with the dangers of anarchy, chaos and destructive licentiousness. The arena of the family and marriage is closed to discussion and debate.

Why should women's freedom to express their experience of their intimate relationships constitute such a threat to society?

What is it that makes the family so fundamental to social security? And why is a woman's identity embedded so firmly in the family? More importantly, why is the ideology of the family and of motherhood so central to the maintenance of social order? Why is it that the obstacles that confront women writers are not perceived as deserving serious social concern? And why are these difficulties dismissed as personal or trivial? The reluctance to recognize women's subordination as systemic in nature, therefore denying its political content and seriousness, is one problem. The other is the perception, deeply ingrained, of society as divided into public and private arenas and the implicit assumption that private is inferior to, and isolated from, the public. This division serves to invisibilise and delegitimise the oppression that women suffer. Resting on a gender division of labour, which insulates the private and devalues and renders invisible the range of reproductive labour (that includes the care of children, the sick and the elderly) the public/private divide ensures that women's citizenship remains rooted in various institutions of civil society. Never grasped in totality or exercised effectively as the male citizen's rights are, women have yet to appropriate their legitimate space as citizens regardless of the right to vote. Citizenship has to do with the nation-state and the individual's rights within the state, over-riding the claims of family, clan or community. Women, bearing as they do the responsibility of preserving the culture and traditions of their community, continue to be daughters, wives, sisters, mothers and mistresses, defined in relationship to men but denied effective citizenship.

*The fact that citizenship is purely a male domain with women firmly embedded in the family and community masks the fact that the political institutions of the law and citizenship are regulated by state mechanisms. What is the existential reality of citizenship experienced by women beyond the traditional questions of obligations and privileges? How significant is the gendering of citizenship in providing identity and right? How does the insufficiency of rights combined with the mockery of having them define citizenship for women? Does the equality conferred by constitutional fiat that guarantees the right to vote also guarantee*

*freedom of speech and assembly?*

Searching for the mechanisms and regimes of censorship one finds that the family takes the foreground. Marathi writer, Mangala Godbole says, "For me creativity is like a raincoat. When I enter my house I hang the raincoat outside the front door."

The clear segregation and exclusion of any critical area of the family from reaching the public realm seems crucial to maintaining of the purity of that site. Why is the family, generally assumed to be a supportive structure that provides physical and emotional security, so inimical to creativity? What is the line that differentiates the security of an institution like the prison from that of the home?

Malayalam writer Geetha Hiranyan says that her love is like a bonsai pipal whose natural growth has been stunted.

*The sharp knife of ethics  
frequently cuts off  
the tap root ....  
By way of warning  
Branches are trimmed  
each day*

The family, signaling the maintenance of honour and dignity, is sacrosanct. The pillars of the community-marriage, motherhood, control of sexuality and tradition-must be kept secure in the interests of preserving the culture of that community. When a male writer questions and attempts to reveal the paradoxes and contradictions in the public sphere it is recognized as a legitimate exercise, because power in the public domain can be challenged and overthrown in the interests of setting up another regime that is less oppressive, more equitable and therefore democratic. Creative writing then is, simultaneously, a chronicle of the times and an instrument of change. But when women begin to write, the subversive nature of the act begins to shatter a rigorous silence that is the ideological, maintained through force and consent, a silence that is invisible and inexorable. Their writing is perceived as anarchic and dangerously destabilizing. To name or define the source of oppression itself becomes a struggle for sanity and survival. As Hindi poet Anamika put it, a woman's life is censored from start to finish, and if not censored then severely edited. Anuradha Marwah Roy said that instead of censoring her writing she censors her life.

The family and marriage are ideological and cultural institutions, and an individual's psycho-social and sexual selves are gendered. It is difficult to escape from this construction of a self into a neutral domain, which itself is a fiction. Women who dare to trespass have to grapple with accusations of being

unfeminine and destructive, a process both traumatic and emotionally crippling.

“Love is an agent of censorship” said Chandramathi, and Anamika echoed this with, “Scissors to cut with, a needle and thread to sew my lips with. If I write my subconscious, the earth will be covered with paper.” About an act as simple as writing an autobiography, Marathi writer Urmila Pawar says, “Then I have to strip myself naked. Can I do that? The truth is that there are so many levels of censorship that I curb my writing and restrain my hand.” This raises the question of what the meaning of self is for men and women. Why does a woman’s self have to be cloaked? Is her self limited to the physical body, while a man’s self transcends the body to range over community, nation and history? For men, the journey that is recorded is linear and public; for women it becomes an exploration of their most intimate relationships and deepest emotions which make up the warp of their lives.

***Often suffocated by the claustrophobic nature of the conjugal household women seek escape through writing.***

*I remain, converting  
urgent needs  
into poems*

says Suganthi Subramaniam. Women write to survive. They write to break the silence, they write in anger, they write to avenge themselves, and they write to tell their stories. Satyavathi says, “We avenge the censorship we face in reality through our writing.” A serious endeavour that carries a price. Sometimes manuscripts are hidden, forgotten, destroyed in the anxiety. Whether this act of hiding and destruction is an act of self-censorship or an aspect of family and community censorship, needs to be explored.

Even writers who are sensitive to the gendering of informal censorship find it difficult to acknowledge that spaces are gendered and that discrimination exists. There is great resistance (from them) to the idea that censorship can be gendered. This may be because accepting and actuating that reality would make it more difficult to articulate and negotiate it, to confront. Naming a problem and identifying an issue entails action and responsibility. Writers as atomized, solitary individuals seldom find support for this; it is far easier to somehow continue with the act of writing, negotiating spaces, relationships and other inhibiting factors. Anamika spoke of how all the women in her family, aunts and great-aunts, furiously wrote letters, which they never posted. One even wrote to god! The values of forbearance, restraint,

patience and refinement paralysed them. “I was caught in a plot not of my making, acculturated to believe that it is only the second-rate, the underclass who ‘speak’-the very young, the aged, prostitutes, writers and slave girls.”

Class, while disempowering, also censors; so does caste. It is important to see how class and caste complicate issues of gendered censorship, altering its manifestations. Women and Sudras were not allowed to read the Vedas; tongues were to be cut and molten lead poured into the ears of those who transgressed. Why is important to cut off access to knowledge for some sections of society and ensure that they are voiceless? Women are prevented from speaking of a world free of pain, violence and exploitation; and while “upper” caste women are censored in the interests of tradition and culture, “lower” caste women are censored in the cause of caste identity. (That more than 50 per cent of our writers are upper caste and Brahmin reflects the larger aspects of censorship in society. It is worth recalling that it was a few upper caste women who converted to Christianity in the last century who actually spoke openly against caste and brahminism.) Dalit women writers are subjected to several levels of oppression which operate as agents of censorship: poverty, lack of access to education, exposure to a wider world and, finally, the control of their own community. Pradnya Lokhande writing in Marathi, speaks of how dalit writers find it difficult to expose patriarchal attitudes within dalit society and the movement. Praised and encouraged when they speak about caste and class oppression they are accused of disloyalty and betrayal when they speak about the patriarchy that operates within the community. “If your sari catches fire can you take it off in public?” is a popular saying in certain dalit circles, demonstrating the pervasive and absolute hegemony of patriarchy. Brahmanical notions of modesty and honour which are criticized and attacked by dalit men in all other matters are adopted uncritically and totally with regard to women.

On censorship of subject matter by the community, women writing in Urdu indicated that religion, politics and sex are outside their realm. For Muslim women this is a form of direct censorship by the community, but almost all women writers confirmed that these subjects are difficult to write about, due to fear of acceptability, lack of competence and time, and the facility for research. Just as the sexual division of labour confines women to certain tasks and inhibits their access to more skills and resources, the nature of women’s lived reality, the domesticity,

the denial of mobility and a strict code of conduct that pursues them into the public realm, produces a real gendering of subject matter. This raises some critical questions: if the private domain is important and fundamental to human society then the lived reality of that domain with its compulsions and contradictions must be fit subject matter for writing. Reading the “private” with the same seriousness of attention that we read the “public” could provide the stimulus for genuine change. What happens, however, is that every possible strategy is brought into play to prevent women from “telling it straight” to borrow Shashi Deshpande’s phrase; if they still insist on writing, then their writing is neither read nor acknowledged. The division between genders seems irreversible. As Rukmini Bhaya Nair says,

*A woman is a thing apart.  
She is bracketed off, a  
Comma, semicolon, at most  
A lower case letter, lost  
In the literate circus.  
She wants, she badly wants  
**Not a fresh lover, strongman**  
Or clown, but a new language  
In which to hold her own.*

Political censorship, or gendered censoring within political groups, is yet another contentious issue. A woman writing politically of poverty, caste and social oppression is accepted and applauded. Attempts to raise patriarchal attitudes, democratic functioning and subjective experiences within political groups are discouraged, corrected or punished. Telugu writer, Volga, recalls how even tabling a resolution contrary to the wishes of the high command can lead to trivializing the issues and humiliating the individual. When Vasanth Kannabiran was about to publish her poem “Waiting”, describing the emotional vacuum of the wife of an imprisoned revolutionary, she was advised to write instead about the countless tribal and adivasi women who were sacrificing their lives for the movement.

Mridula Garg points out there are four forms or genres of censorship—state censorship, societal, familial censorship and, finally, self-censorship.

In state censorship, both men and women writers may be persecuted for deviating from the dominant political ideology or religious diktat in the guise of ideology. But there is a third plank which is used to condemn women more than men, and that is a nebulous concept of “public morality” and “cultural heritage”. This is particularly so in the kind of democracy we profess to practice. If there is a clearly spelt out law of blasphemy or political ideology,

at least a writer knows what is likely to be censored or censured. In India, we do not know when and why any work will suddenly be declared inimical to public morals and therefore come up for censure. Since women have been looked upon as the custodians of public morality, any expression of non-hypocritical private conduct can be judged fit for censorship. Cases of direct arrest and legal trials being rare in our country the matter is just handed over to the mob and the media, and a trial by witch-hunt takes place. The state may not participate directly, but by withdrawing protection tacitly approving of the street taking over. Societal and state censorship thus merge through the street and the media.

The literary establishment is exposed again and again as being gender biased by overtly ignoring the works of writers who are women and not according due literary assessment to them. And covertly by clubbing them together and refusing to acknowledge that different women writers subscribe to totally different ideas and styles.

Ideas mark the beginning of subversion while ideology can be used to prevent people from thinking on their own. So a few women who commit themselves to a particular group’s code, are recognized while those who insist on asking questions and seeking the truth on their own.

As a result, while women are pushed into the margin a lot of invisible margins are created within the visible one, where a host of non-conformist, thinking women are pushed and forgotten. This includes all those women who do not conform to the current politically correct form of non-conformity. That is one reason why established critics and gullible readers are so ready to see a feminist discourse in every woman’s work, and every work of each of them, what ever the content or theme may be. This herding together of writers takes away the very freedom of thought and experimentation inherent in writing.

The significant question then is: What does the establishment, political, cultural, religious and literary, seek to accomplish by censoring a work here and a work there, at random? The point is to make writers practice self-censorship. Self-censorship, we can say is the magnum opus of censorship. The masterpiece. Once writers start practicing self-censorship, nothing more needs to be done.<sup>2</sup>

#### FOOTNOTE :

1. Speaking in Tongues, The Power of the Word III, Women’s World, Asmita 2002
2. The Tongue Set Free, Women Writers Speak about Censorship, Women’s World, Asmita 2002

It is generally believed that fairs and festivals in South Asia have a predominantly religious base. This however is not entirely true. Whereas religion continues to be a major source of fairs and festivals in South Asia, they are also connected with **folklore, local customs, changing seasons, harvest**, etc. These often cut across religious differences.

South Asian fairs and festivals are as varied in origin as they are in number. They also constitute the essence of South Asia's cultural life. Both the features of South Asia's cultural life – its unity and plurality – can be seen in the manner in which fairs and festivals are observed throughout the sub-continent. Following are some characteristics of South Asia's fairs and festivals.

1. Even though not entirely governed by the doctrinal dictates of high religious traditions, all the festivals have a socio-religious content. Every traditional festival has two aspects-worship and festive participation. Worship tends to be exclusive and confined to a particular religion. For example in Holi, Diwali and Ram Navmi, Hindus worship their Gods and Goddesses at the individual or family level. In Eid Muslims go to the mosque to offer *namaaz* as part of collective worship. On Christmas, Christians go to church for their religious services. However participation in most of these festivals is not restricted to a particular community. Members of all communities participate in the festivities attached to the festival. Holi, Diwali, Eid, Baisakhi and Christmas involve all the local people at some level or the other. Therefore in spite of a strong religious content, these festivals also represent a certain commonness and social bonding among people of different religions.
2. Most of the festivals are seasonal in nature. They represent the change in harvesting season. All the seasonal festivals are celebrated during two harvesting seasons, **Kharif** (August-October) and **Rabi** (March-April). And so different regional festivals like **Bihu** (mid-January), **Onam** (September-October), **Pongal** (mid-January), **Vasant Panchmi** (February), **Makar Sankranti** (January), **Lohri** (January), **Baisakhi** (April) have an agricultural base linked to the harvesting season. Thus a certain commonness can be observed in all such festivals.
3. Being linked to agriculture and harvest in all seasons these festivals have a strong non-religious or secular aspect at the level of

activities. For example, kite-flying is a special feature of Makar Sankranti. *Bihu* dance constitutes the biggest attraction during Bihu festivals. *Kathakali* dance, which is among the classical dances of India, is the chief attraction during Onam festival. Onam is also marked by boat races or *Vallumkali*, where special boats are rowed by about 100 men to the accompaniment of songs and drums. During the Lohri festival, the whole of Punjab comes to life and dances to the tune of *bhangra*. Likewise *garba* dance constitutes the core of Navratri in Gujarat. These instances can be multiplied (Durga Puja in Bengal, Dussehra celebrations in most of north India, Holi in Braj area, Ganesh Chaturthi in Maharashtra). If the forms of celebration of most of these festivals are studied, it will be found that non-religious, i.e., non-devotional, non-doctrinal and non-exclusive activities occupy the centre-stage in all of them.

4. The fairs, in most cases, are devoid of religious content, except probably the Kumbh Mela which is mainly a religious congregation. The fairs are characterised by buying and selling of cattle, goats, handicrafts and a variety of other activities. We can say that these fairs represent the cultural-commercial life of traditional South Asia. Although in some fairs religious rites do take place, they are mostly peripheral to the commercial aspects.

It can thus be seen that the pattern of South Asia's fairs and festivals corresponds to the major features of its cultural life. The festivals are largely religious but not in the doctrinal or exclusivist sense. They are religious only to the extent that their origin is related to a particular religion. In the method of their celebration, religion ceases to be of utmost importance. Moreover, the great diversity and variety of religions can be reduced to some elementary commonness. Many festivals may appear different in name and forms of participation but they all share the same spirit and origin. Fairs are only superficially religious and are a product of South Asia's cultural-commercial traditions. On the whole, it can be said that even when the festivals have a religious or doctrinal content, the forms are invariably non-religious. In the fairs often the content too is non-religious. All the regional cultural patterns are clearly visible in most of the festivals yet their basic similarities are never in doubt. South Asia's fairs and festivals are indeed a compliment to the Composite Heritage, syncretism and the plurality of the sub-continent.

Sushil C. Joshi

*Star T.V., India*

In times when the fundamentalist forces are mostly in the headlines for their hooliganism in the name of religion, when religion is used to divide the society and people and when even media persons and their offices are not spared, there is another world, the world of *Amir Khusro*. Here, there is a feeling of peace and harmony. This other world belongs to love where there is no place for caste and religious biases. *Amir Khusro* rules here.

*Jahan-e-Khusro* is an international programme organised every year in the honour of *Hazrat Amir Khusro*. As the name suggests this programme is a token of respect in remembrance of *Khusro*. The reason why present generation who may not know the nuances of sufi music, relates to him. *Khusro* was not confined to sufi music or poetry. The puzzles that he made are part of society even today.

It has been seven years now that *Jahan-e-Khusro* started. Eminent filmmaker *Muzaffar Ali* started it in year 2000. According to *Muzaffar Ali* – “the words of sufi poetry speak about society and heart, that touch the soul. Even though full swing sufi movement belonged to a particular period, but Sufism has the strength that its need is felt in every period.” Therefore, this programme has been going on a continuous basis since past seven years.

In the remembrance of *Hazrat Amir Khusro*, this programme is organised every year in the months of April-May. Since structures of historical and archeological importance are chosen for the event, this time the programme was organised at the tomb of *Quli Khan* near *Qutub Minar*.

*Jahan-e-Khusro* has now become an event at the world level as it was organised last year in the month of October at Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Moreover, this time the programme was special as UNESCO has declared 2007 as International Rumi year, the formal announcement was already done in March 2006 by UNESCO and Tourism and Culture Ministry of Turkey.

*Di dan de gar aamuz  
shan-e-dan degar aamuz*

(Seeing and thinking is the only way.)

These lines by *Maulana Rumi* are apt reply to those people who want to sell off and divide everything in the name religion.

One may even ask who is *Maulana Rumi*?

*Rumi* was not just a great poet and philosopher but also great intellectual with belief in Islam as well (he used to go for *Haj*). However, he always had one message for everybody including himself that ‘neither am I Jew nor Christian nor Muslim’. All he wanted to say was that we all are children of one God and we should think beyond caste and religious constraints. Same was the case with *Khusro*.

*Mun tu shudam tu mun shudi,  
mun tun shudam tu jaan shudi  
Taakas na guyad baad azeen,  
Mun deegaram tu deegari*

(I have become you, and you me,  
I am the body, you soul;

So that no one can say hereafter,

That you are someone, and me someone else.)

This couplet of *Amir Khusro* in some way or the other justifies the above said. *Khusro* was a person of multiple talents. His areas of interests were not just confined to poetry and music but also political scenario. It is said that Indian classical music and Qawwali was the created by *Khusro*. He is also known as father of *Sitar*, *Tabla* and *Hindavi* language.

There is a lot of variety in *Khusro*’s poetry. He wrote both in Persian and Indian Languages. Apart from this he was at ease with Sanskrit, Turkish and Arabic languages. One example of *Khusro*’s poetry is:

*Zehal-e-miskin makun taghaful,  
duraye naina banaye batiyan;  
ki taab-e-hijran nadaram ay jaan,  
na leho kaahe lagaye chhatiyan,*

(Do not overlook my misery by blandishing your eyes,

and weaving tales; My patience has overbrimmed,

O sweetheart, why do you not take me to your bosom.)

The first line of this poem by *Khusro*, ‘*Zehal-e-miskin*’ is in Persian language while in second line the poet has used *Braj Bhasha*. The third line again is in Persian and the fourth in *Braj*. Rightly said that rarely will one find so much variety anywhere other than *Khusro*.

Similarly, *Jahan-e-Khusro* is a unique effort towards celebration of variety, where artist from all

over the world come together on a common platform to perform and exhibit their art. Each time this festival is organised, it seems that the effort to protect, spread and enrich our values, traditions and heritage is getting success.

This time the theme of this event was – voice of women. The main attractions of the programme were – Nizami brothers (Delhi), Aadil Husaini and Group (Hyderabad) and Shoukat Ali and Group (Ludhiana). Among the foreign artists – Abida Parveen (Sufi singer, Pakistan), Wendy Jehlen (Dancer, Choreographer, USA), Suzain Dehim (Composer, Singer, America) and Iranian musicians.

Among the Indian Artists apart from famous Qawwals there were many other names - Meeta Pandit from Gwalior Gharana, Malini Avasthi, Rekha Bhardwaj, Javed Jafri and Sunita Tandon. This three day festival was organised by Rumi Foundation, Delhi Tourism and Government of Delhi.

Wendy Jehlen, who has been trying to get into the depth of Sufism since past twelve years now, opened the programme with her amazing dance

‘Sama’. Dervish dance is called ‘Sama’. In this the dancers keep moving in circles in four directions, forgetting everything and trying to reach the ultimate. Maulana Rumi is known for this Dervish dance, song and music.

In the 13th century when religiosity and fundamentalism were at its peak, there was sufi movement. As it is said that history repeats itself, in this context it is right to a great extent. Today large number of people are appreciating and following sufi music and *Jahan-e-Khusro*.

In the contemporary times *Jahan-e-Khusro* seems to be much more relevant. If the youth, society at large or any class of the society is able to absorb its essence then *Jahan-e-Khusro* will be seen as successful because it not only brings out Sufi music but also acts as an international platform to celebrate the diversities and bringing together cultural activities. On one hand, we get cultural expressions from foreign artists while on the other hand artists from India try to keep us rooted to our culture. All we need is to feel it and make it relevant.

## Statement by Asmita and Women’s (India) on Attack on Taslima Nasrin

We hereby condemn the vulgar attack on Taslima Nasrin by vandals in the name of Islam. We reiterate the right of every individual to freely express their opinions and beliefs. Threat to the life of the writer is a dangerous trend that must be opposed vehemently by all sections of society. While the state increasingly abdicates its role leaving the control of morality and speech to the mobs one finds that spaces for free speech are rapidly decreasing.

Films cleared by the censor board are prevented from being screened. Art galleries are vandalized. And right wing forces of every religious colour take control of thought and speech. Let us not forget that in Gujarat the people were not allowed to speak about the genocide. This attack is part of the same syndrome. Hyderabad is a city that has a range of communities and religions. And a history we are proud of. We cannot allow the appropriation of our city and our communities by the moral police.

It is necessary for political parties to conduct

themselves with control and dignity. And to maintain the dignity of elected representatives.

We must fight to keep our city sane and safe.

*Women’s WORLD (World Organisation on Rights, Literature and Development) International* network of feminist writers that addresses issues of gender-based Censorship.

*Women’s WORLD (India)* is a national network of women writers that deals with diverse issues in women’s writing, in all Indian languages and all genres, through workshops and discussion groups and with other organizations of women writers.

### **Signatories**

Kalpna Kannabiran  
Volga  
Vasanth Kannabiran  
Beena  
Ritu Menon  
Ammu Joseph  
Sharifa Siddiqui  
Meera Deepak  
Asmita Collective

## Communalism : Resistance vs. Secular Movement

Institute for Social Democracy

*New Delhi, India*

Generally, when we use the word ‘communalism’ an image of arson, bloodshed and riots takes shape in our mind. The common masses too have similar perception. The intelligentsia keeps interpreting communalism in various ways. But this understanding and its conceptualisation remains in the books or at the most becomes a matter of discussion in a confined circle. Communalism, in general, is understood by a common Indian or even by the committed and honest social workers as riots, looting, arson, murders, rapes etc. In a way, it can also be interpreted that in the absence of such situation, there is no communalism in the society or if it is there, it is passive. Many of us may call this a childish or illogical analysis because majority of us are associated with academics and in many ways consider ourselves intellectuals. Anything that crosses the parameters and boundaries set by our academics runs the risk of being branded as childish.

Heart rendering communal violence took place in Gujarat in 2002. All sections of the people in the country concerned with the issue of communalism had been involved for a year in the anti-communal activities round the clock from the day the violence started. Many forums came into existence in the country. Some of them were developed in the name of anti-communalism and others for creating peace and unity. Then, gradually there was a reduction in the incidents of arson and blood shed—violence and rapes and on the same pace, the activists started becoming passive. Then, there was a change in the Union Government and this change was celebrated by the people. It is not because the rule came in the hands of UPA but because the NDA government could be removed from the Centre. Suddenly the issue of the communalism was deleted from the list of the majority of the activists and if it was not deleted, it had reached to the bottom of their preference. Nowadays, such debates are hardly found in the air. Perhaps, we have presumed that this is phase of peace but is it not possible that it is the similar phase of peace which was seen before the Gujarat violence. Even six months earlier to February 27, 2002 nobody would have dreamt that an extraordinary incident might take place in Gujarat. But, after six months, Gujarat did not witness riot but massacre. We may say that Gujarat has its own

history of riots. Very often, communal violence used to be witnessed in the cities like Surat, Ahmedabad and Barauda. But the history of riots is also found in other parts of the country. May it be Mumbai or Bhagalpur, Bhivandi or Muradabad, Kanpur or Muzaffarnagar, Merut or Mulayana—countless riots are registered in the history of these cities. Whole Uttar Pradesh and Bihar remained the battlefield of the riots. It is possible that the peace which we are witnessing in these areas is similar to the peace which was seen in Gujarat in 2001.

### **We, the Guardians of Peace**

In fact, our mentality has become anti-communal. We do sing “The guardians of peace are united” but, perhaps, we do not wish to waste our time for providing constant guardianship of peace. Hence, after opposing every incidence of the communal violence, we involve ourselves in other activities inadvertently and become suddenly active when another phase of communalism starts.

### **Dialogue of Harmony after Violence**

Generally, the action plan for the process of maintaining harmony after communal violence adopts approximately the following pattern:

‘Take out rallies in support of peace

‘Organise sittings against the violence

‘Establish a dialogue of harmony between the conflicting groups.

All of these efforts have its own importance but sometimes, these steps prove to be insufficient. Suppose, a big incidence of communal violence took place, what would be the mentality of the conflicting groups is not difficult to guess. Can a dialogue for harmony yield any proper result when there is a doubt on the integrity, anger, complaint, and attack on each other? It is possible that seeing the sensitivity of the situation, all groups will be ready to stop violence but will that remove those feelings which have made space in their mind? In fact, the experiences reveal this fact that at such time, neither one is ready to listen nor is one mentally prepared to accept such suggestions. Sometimes, during the dialogue, there is a rise in emotions. And, at the time when people are physically and mentally prepared to listen each other, we treat it as a phase of peace and become inactive.

Let us have a look at the communal incidents

of this year. This should be borne in mind that the incidents given below took place during the last one year whereas the period of peace which we announced on the commencement of the UPA Government has almost passed 3 years.

Mau, Uttar Pradesh ..... January, 2006  
 Bhojshala, Madhya Pradesh ..... January-February, 06  
 Indore, Madhya Pradesh ..... January, 2006  
 Jaipur, Rajasthan ..... January, 2006  
 Faizabad, Uttar Pradesh ..... January, 2006  
 Merut, Uttar Pradesh ..... February, 2006  
 Alapooja, Kerala ..... February, 2006  
 Leh, Jammu and Kashmir ..... February, 2006  
 Goa ..... March, 2006  
 Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh ..... March, 2006  
 Mujaffar Nagar, Uttar Pradesh . March, 2006  
 Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh ..... April, 2006  
 Bangalore, Karnataka ..... April, 2006  
 Marad, Kerala ..... April, 2006  
 Khandva, madhya Pradesh ..... April, 2006  
 Pali, Rajasthan ..... April, 2006  
 Ahmedpur, madhya Pradesh ..... May, 2006  
 Barauda, Gujarat ..... May, 2006  
 Pratapgarh, Uttar Pradesh ..... June 7, 2006  
 Baharampur, Orissa ..... July, 2006  
 Bhivandi, Maharashtra ..... July, 2006  
 Manglore, Karnataka ..... October, 2006  
 Gorakhpur-Mau, U.P. .... January-February, 07

Despite the fact that on the directions of Yogi Adityanath, whole Uttar Pradesh is passing through the phase of communal conflict, yet the supporters of peace are passive. Are they waiting for another Gujarat episode after which they will break their silence?

#### **‘Their Agenda’—Our Reaction**

We will have to bring thoughtful changes in the strategies to fight against the communalism. All of us know that there is a need of secular movement in lieu of opposing the communalism. This may continue even after the action of the communal forces is over and compel us to perform this duty. If we do not want these forces to succeed, we have to make use of that time which is treated as the phase of peace. The way feminist movement and dalit movement has prepared its agenda during the last few decades, we will have to prepare a secular movement in the same way and prepare its own agenda. Certainly, feminist movement and dalit movement has gained success during last few decades. And this success can be made possible because these movements have not only raised its voice against the exploitation of the women and castes but, through their constant and rigorous movement, they have also been raising their voice

with an agenda in the society. These movements have not only remained the movements against the exploitation of the women or dalits but have become feminist and dalit movement. The society now gets influenced by the calls of these movements. Same is needed in the context of the communalism. Whatever name is given to it but we will have to follow the same way as is followed by other movements in terms of its agenda and course of action.

#### **Our Role**

The tools which are used by the communal forces to strengthen its roots Mary Anderson, in her book ‘Do No Harm’ in the context of conflicts, has classified as under:

- Systems and Institutions**
- Attitudes and Actions**
- Different Values and Interests**
- Different Experiences**
- Symbols and Occasions**

In the same book, she also agreed that the society in which these above mentioned 5 elements are used to spread hatred amongst the people, there are local capacities for peace in the same society. These are as under:

- Systems and Institutions**
- Attitudes and Actions**
- Shared Values and Interests**
- Shared Experiences**
- Symbols and Occasions**

According to Mary Anderson, in the context of all conflicts we have the role to strengthen constantly above mentioned connectors and local capabilities of peace and weaken all dividers before they develop their stronghold. Such systems and institutions; attitudes and actions; shared values and interests; shared experiences, symbols and occasions have been in existence since the inception of the Indian society which have been performing the role of connecting it. This is our *composite heritage*. It is our duty to identify this *composite heritage* and pool all resources to strengthen it. If we want to establish a strong secular movement then before communal forces use systems and institutions, attitudes and actions, different values and interests, different experiences and symbols and occasions that work as dividers in order to destroy our *composite heritage*, we will have to initiate and use *composite heritage* as a tool of our secular movement and enter into a new phase to establish peace and harmony like the feminist and dalit movements.

## 1857 : A Symbol of Composite Heritage

Salil Misra

Quite often discussions on Composite Heritage tend to focus more on monuments, culture, traditions and other abstract ideas and less on concrete political events. If we were to focus on the history of South Asia, the rebellion of 1857 stands out as a prime example of a composite struggle waged by a substantial section of the people of Indian subcontinent against the mightiest imperial power of the world in the 19th century. The rebellion was one of the most powerful resistance offered to any imperialist in any other part of the world in the 19th century. For the people of north India it represented an unprecedented example of Hindu-Muslim unity. The heights of Hindu-Muslim unity reached during the struggle of 1857 remained untouched in all the subsequent political events.

So why has the rebellion received so little attention as a symbol of Composite Heritage? Part of the explanation is that as a political event it failed. The rebellion was not successful in achieving the objectives for which it was fought. Failed projects are generally not invoked as symbols for positive, desirable values like those of Composite Heritage. But the tragedy of 1857 was that it failed twice over – historically and historiographically. The first failure was that of the event; the second, of the attempts to understand the reality of 1857. Both the failures are instructive for us and need to be understood.

Till the end of the 19th century, the British officials continued to look upon the rebellion primarily as a ‘sepoj mutiny’. The reasons for the mutiny were seen, not in any deep and pervasive discontent, but merely in the use of the newly arrived enfield greased cartridges that contained the meat of cows and pigs. Cow was considered sacred by Hindus; pig was considered impure by Muslims. The cartridge had to be bitten by the mouth before loading. This practice was resented by both Hindus and Muslim sepoys who ‘mutineed’ against their masters. This in short was the favourite British explanation for why the soldiers rebelled. Yet another British tendency was to look upon the event as a ‘Muslim’ reaction. Upon this view, British had taken over power from the Muslims who made the last consolidated effort to regain their lost power and glory through the revolt of 1857. Thus ‘sepoj mutiny’ and ‘Muslim reaction’ were the main components of the way in which the

British chose to understand the reality of 1857. Leading 19th century Muslim reformer and the founder of the Aligarh Muslim University, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, tried to dispel the myth of the revolt being a Muslim conspiracy, in his book *Asbaab-e-Baghawat-e-Hind* (Causes of the Indian Rebellion). But by then the Muslim tag had come to be strongly glued to the rebellion and it appeared unlikely that the tag would be removed.

It was at the beginning of the 20th century that the rebellion was taken out of the Muslim domain and established firmly in the national domain. This was done by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, who called the rebellion the first war of Indian independence, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the event. Quite ironically Savarkar was to later emerge as the leader of the Hindu Mahasabha and lead a narrow and exclusivist Hindu communal movement in the 1930s and 1940s.

Savarkar’s was the first attempt to establish the rebellion as a nationalist event. A group of the Indian revolutionaries active in North America were also inspired by the event and named their party *Ghadar* (rebellion) party. But the attitude of the mainstream leadership of the Indian National Movement remained somewhat ambivalent towards the rebellion. On the one hand, the nationalist historians acknowledged the popular and radical character of the rebellion and saw its roots in the exploitative character of the British rule and the deep Indian discontent against it. But on the other hand, they saw the leadership of the rebellion in the hands of feudal elements and the princes. On the basis of the leadership of the rebellion they tended to characterise it as feudal and backward. It was indeed unfortunate that just as the ‘Muslim tag’ was removed, the ‘feudal tag’ was stuck to the rebellion. Jawaharlal Nehru praised the revolt for its popular character, militancy and fierce anti-imperialism in his famous book *Discovery of India*, he too looked upon it as the last serious effort by the old aristocratic and feudal elements to reestablish the old order. According to Nehru the leadership of the rebellion was in the hands of those people who had played out their historical innings and there was no role left for them in history. This was also the perspective of the dominant Marxian historians in India who considered the leadership of the rebellion

as a spent force.

This ambivalence continued to characterise the major historical writings on 1857. In spite of all its militancy and anti-imperialism, it was considered as revivalist and anti-modern. It was generally not seen as a forerunner to modern Indian nationalism. It was considered the last major traditional rebellion, not the first major modern rebellion. Its connections with the Indian National movement were not explored and it was readily assumed that these connections did not exist. At the same time leading historian R.C. Majumdar tried to retrieve and restore the Muslim tag by

considering the rebellion a mere Muslim reaction. Taking a dig at Savarkar's characterisation of the revolt as the first war of independence, Majumdar dismissed the rebellion as neither *first*, nor

a *war*, nor for *independence*. This was a paraphrasing of Voltair's description of the Holy Roman Empire as neither *Holy*, nor *Roman*, nor indeed an *Empire*. Majumdar saw 1857 as an attempt by the old ruling groups, displaced from power, to reclaim their lost power.

It was interestingly in 1957, the year of the hundredth anniversary of the event that some of these misgivings came to be questioned and demolished. New researches initiated on the occasion of the anniversary of the rebellion were able to establish it not just as popular and militant, but a prime example of a Composite Heritage of the people of the Indian subcontinent. It has now become clear that it was not just a sepoy revolt but a huge mass upheaval against British imperialism involving peasants, artisans and other poor sections of the population. Feudal and princely elements may have joined it, but there was nothing exclusively feudal about it. It was a civil rebellion, along with a military one. It was also not confined to North India. The new researches have established that large parts of the subcontinent (north, east, west and parts of south) had been engulfed by the fires of the rebellion. Moreover, the rebellion also stood out as a shining example of Hindu-Muslim unity. The spirit of

comraderie displayed by the Hindu and Muslim rebels was seldom seen before the revolt, or indeed after. Waging of common struggles, Muslim generals leading Hindu soldiers and vice-versa, banning of cow slaughter by Muslim rulers in their areas of control exemplified Hindu-Muslim solidarity in unprecedented ways.

And perhaps the most important point in the end. The rebellion may not have been entirely nationalist, but it contained some vital elements of modern Indian nationalism. In this sense 1857 should be remembered not just as the last major traditional

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resistance against British imperialism, but also as the precursor to the Indian National Movement fought under the leadership of Mahatma

Gandhi. The connections between the two need to be explored and brought out. One example from Allahabad city of North India should illustrate this connection. After 1857 the British had hanged many rebels by trees in their retaliatory violence. The people of Allahabad had identified many such trees symbolizing the courage of the rebels and the brutality of the British rulers. They also started worshipping these trees. This practice however discontinued after a few years. Then many years later and quite a distance away from Allahabad, the brutality of British imperialism was displayed in 1919 in Punjab, at Jallianwalla Bagh in Amritsar where hundreds of innocent people were gunned down in a cruel massacre. Responding to the Jallainwalla Bagh massacre, the people of Allahabad, without any mediation or instructions of political leaders, started worshipping the same trees which were associated with 1857 in their collective consciousness. Thus the people of the subcontinent had established the connection between 1857 and the national movement in their own innovative and spontaneous ways. It is therefore necessary for historians to recognise this connection and grant it historical legitimacy.

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## Folk Art, Music, Dance and Drama

FOLK ART differs from primitive art in its outlook and character. Primitive art is an early art, simple and crude. Folk art is said to be a later development. It comes into being after a culture begins to sophisticate, taking shape in various styles and techniques. Folk art is a higher form of culture in comparison to primitive art.

The primitive beliefs and superstitions, the ingenious solutions to the manifold problems of life are bound to differ from those of the folk. Primitive man makes a trap for evil spirits, propitiates revengeful gods who visit disasters on men, finds a charm against diseases, ghosts or ferocious animals, prays to the guardian spirit to protect his hearth and home, decorates his shield to terrify the enemy, puts a spell on beasts of prey, prays to benevolent spirits to give fertility to his lands and forestalls disasters like floods, famines and virulent diseases. Such needs find an outlet and answer in his art.

We find specimens of primitive art drawn or painted on the bark of trees, cliffs, on pebbles, woven rags and fine feather works. Their painting on tanned hides and pots is also quite attractive.

The needs and peculiar problems of the village people's life find an expression in folk art. Their daily life is full of religious customs and ceremonies. Myths and legends are required to be illustrated interestingly and conveyed to the public. Children require toys and dolls to play with. Changing tastes of women are to be satisfied with new types of ornaments. Shrines and idols are to be built. While satisfying the needs of the people, folk art attains a certain aesthetic level.

Various materials and processes are used in the fashioning of folk art and often it is a traditional hereditary profession with certain classes of people. The material used most extensively is clay. Clay images and figures are made by a special class of artists. Wooden figures are carved by the carpenters. The stone cutter preserves the art of carving statues.

Folk art is divided into two classes, viz. hand-made and moulded. The hand-made type is of a primitive pattern. Heads, eyes, eye-brows, lips, breasts of the figures are shown, but the legs are left out. In the moulded type a full human or animal figure is fashioned.

Folk art although dwindling is still a living reality in Orissa. Varieties of interesting figures sold in the fair are made of clay, cotton, pith, wood or brass. Great skill is displayed in the making of dolls, toys, puppets, carvings on soapstone, wooden vessels, gate doorways, chests, palanquins, musical instruments, images, bridal costumes, etc.

Temple walls and walls of certain private houses are still painted. Figures of Ram Krishna, Jagannath, Narsimha, Mahabira, Bhairaba, Naga (a hero in martial dress and dancing postures), Nabagunjara (parts of bodies of nine birds and beasts like tiger, bull, peacock, king of snakes, parrot, cock, lion, elephant and man linked together to make a strange animal), Kama Kunjara (cupid's elephant young women form parts of its bodies) are drawn on the white surface of the walls.

Drawing on canvas is still a practice in Orissa. Orissa's 'Patachitras' are famous in India and outside. Bowers of pith flowers with figures of charming women are made on the occasion of 'Jhulana' (swinging festival of Radha and Krishna) on the full moon day of Shravna. Brassfishes, horn toys, filigree ornaments, a painted 'Farua' (a temple-like wooden pot in which vermilion is kept), textile and soapstone work and 'ganjapa' (traditional play cards on which coloured figures of gods, men and animals are drawn) of Orissa still draw wide attention.

Tattooing on the body is now outmoded. A woman of the scheduled caste well versed in music and art and of good humour, tattoos a bower of mango trees full of blossoms with cuckoos cooing on the arms, a nutmeg bud on the chin, a garland of flowers on the breast, five arrows of Cupid on the forehead, figure of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra on the right hand, five bees on the five fingers or seat of the goddess of wealth and Sita on the same arm, etc. Palm leaf as a writing material is now out of use except on some ceremonial occasion. Temples, chariots drawn by horses, figures of heroes fighting lovers and the beloved, Krishna stealing away clothes of bathing women, fighting with giants or dancing on the hoods of the Kaliya, the giant snake, merchants sailing the seas, Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarsan, dancing girls, Radha learning to play the flute from Krishna, festivals like the chariot festival, raja Doli and Chandan Jatra all these are drawn and painted on palm leaves. Sometimes a book of poetry of hundreds of pages is illustrated. Some palm leaf manuscripts are carefully preserved in the museum at Bhubaneswar as specimens of traditional drawings and paintings.

Every woman in the village is more or less acquainted with 'chita' (painting on wall and floor with rice paste). The floor is painted with the feet of the goddess Lakshmi and the mud walls are decorated with paddy plants, finger-tips, store-houses, elephants, birds and beasts, lotus creepers, bowers and creepers,

on Thursdays in the month of Margashira.

The south-facing doors are decorated with paddy stores, ornaments, lotuses and lilies, Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra and cotton clinging on the turmeric paste and worshipped on the occasion of the sun moving southwards on the Samkranti day of the month of Shravana.

From specimens of art now available like the baked terracotta horses with a goddess under some big tree, the figure of the Puranic Brundabati bearing the basil (Tulsi) plant on the head, painted wooden cover of a palm leaf manuscript, seats of Gods, cash boxes, betel and lime cases, scabbards, shields, utensils and pottery, we know how vividly art was integrated with ancient Orissan life

Folk art is produced primarily for the artist's own use. It is not commercialised. Women do thread embroidery, and make fans out of grass roots. They make use of home-made articles.

Rural art cannot be said to be a rustic offshoot of the higher art. Folk art has its own individuality and character and it exists by its intrinsic merit, i.e. flight of fancy of the artist, its symmetrical form, rhythm of design and efficient workmanship. Rural art may imitate higher art as higher art imitates folk art. Both the arts do not always run on parallel lines.

Materials used in folk art are local and not imported from outside. Sophisticated art develops round urban centres, patronised by the wealthy and tends to get commercialised, while folk art is closely connected with the soil, linked up with the customs and beliefs of the people. It is in no way art for art's sake. It is utilitarian in outlook and based on the socio-religious life of the people. It is anonymous and its origin cannot be traced to any particular period of time.

### **Folk Music**

The boy herds buffaloes, sits on the back of a buffalo and sings on a high pitch. The cartman sings while driving a cart, the beggar while begging. The maidens sing on the swing and the children do so while playing. There are songs to tease someone. Women sing songs while spinning, husking corn, or grinding wheat. Lullabies are of course there. Humorous, teasing and mocking songs, ballads, romantic and lyrical songs are sometimes sung for mere entertainment. Sometimes they play an important part in the turning point of life, viz. birth, marriage, when the daughter leaves her father's house for the mother-in-law's house or death. Songs are sung to teach the child to walk, to dance, to drink milk, to eat food, to play, to count, to be industrious and good-natured. The child receives home education through folk songs which are unforgettable and everlasting. The songful atmosphere at home and in

the village helps him, even indirectly, to become a musician, an artist, or a litterateur and a good-natured man.

The spirit of singing is the source of folk poetry and music is its very soul. The intensity of emotion which the oral repetition imparts to the folk song is its heart-beat. A folk poem unsung is obliterated or, if collected, becomes dead museum material.

A folk song is inherited and perpetuated by oral tradition from one generation to another. In course of transmission the name of the original creator is lost in oblivion. The singer knows nothing about the poet or how the song changes in its course through history or how it branches out into different tunes and melodies. He simply listens to it from his forefathers and learns to love it and sings it usually for his own entertainment.

The peculiarity of the folk song lies in the fact that every member of a community takes a more or less active part in its ceremonial function. Though everyone may not exactly sing the song, the song is known to and enjoyed by all to their heart's content. Their active participation is in contrast to the passive hearing of an audience assembled in a musical and literary gathering in a city nowadays.

In poetry, we have the poet and the reading public. In formal music we have the composer, the singer, the player of the musical instruments and the audience. But in a folk song we have the singer only. He may sing alone or in group with or without the accompaniment of musical instruments.

It is believed that the folk feeling and melody are inseparably intermingled in a folk song. This is felt by a collector at the time of his collection when the folk singer is unable to recite what he sings except in his natural surrounding. A highland lass whose folk songs Sir Walter Scott was collecting said to him, "They are made for singing, not for reading.

But actually the text of the song and its melody do not form an integral unit and the bond may be broken. The same song may be sung in different tunes in different parts of the country or even in the same locality. This is corroborated by the fact that the singer forgets the basic melody and sets the song to his own melody. The tunes may change from age to age or from one person to another. For there is no fixed notation of music or a set tune. Under the circumstances, it becomes difficult to find out the basic melodies. A few melodies in comparison with a large number of texts testify to this fact. Scholars like the Hungarian composer Bela Bartok believe that "in some stages of folk music development, there may have been a limited number of tunes branching out later like tune families." That means there is no distinct setting for a distinct text in folk

practice. We find different versions of the text and melody prevalent in a country. One tune of the text expresses joy and another tune of the same text sounds sad and depressing. The tie of the musical features with the emotional aspect of the song seems strong. But it is not always inseparable. Folk people are unable to express a mood or emotion unless they make use of musical terms of city usage.

Again, folk people rarely modulate their voice. It is restrained and expressive devices are not clear. The music is performed in one voice without a harmonic setting. The scales may have melodic relationships but there may be no harmonic relationships. So instances of harmony (single melodic line supported by subordinate voices) or polyphony (a number of more or less independent melodic lines performed together) are comparatively rare. Harmony or polyphony arises when musical instruments accompany singing. Musical instruments play only a subordinate part in folk songs.

In Orissa as well as in some other parts of the country folk music is both vocal and instrumental. Work songs, game songs, round songs, swing songs, spinning songs, teasing songs, songs of fasts and festivals are vocal.

Beggars who sing mostly ballads sometimes come in twos. When one sings a line, his companion repeats it. A 'dhuduki', flute, lyre, 'dungdunga', 'khanjani', etc., accompany their singing. The begging monk may play on a lyre or 'ektara'. The snake-charmer plays on 'Nageswara' and sings 'padmatola' (a song regarding plucking of lotuses from lake Kalindi by Krishna). The man with a herd of buffaloes on the embankment of a tank spends sleepless nights in heavy rains and sings songs to the accompaniment of the one-string instrument, 'dhuduki'. It may be noted that the guitar, the mandolin, the tamburine, the harmonium and the 'saptaswara' were recently introduced to raise harmonic and polyphonic effects in folk music. These city musical instruments are used to accompany folk songs in radio programmes or professional performances.

In marriage ceremonies we see drummers dancing while beating drums. In 'Pala', 'Patua', 'Chaitighoda', 'Karma', and 'Dandanata' of Orissa the drummer also dances. 'Naga' and 'Paika' dances are mute dances. Drums like 'Dhumsâ', 'Pakhâuja', 'Nagarâ' and 'Dholki' accompany them. But no songs are sung. In 'Humo', 'Dalkhai', 'Rasarkeli', 'Gunjikata', 'Mailajar', 'Jamudali' and 'Bankijhulaki' dances of Sambalpur, and in 'Chaitaparva' dances of Koraput and Bastar, songs usually accompany the dances. There is usually coordination in a folk song between the rhythms of song and dance. In the words of Philip Berry, it may be said that, "There is

no hard and fast line drawn between song music and dance music." To know the relation between the dance music and the text of the song is no easy job. We should make a deep study and research before they are wiped out under the impact of industrialisation. Sound and film recordings may facilitate such study and interesting facts may be brought to light.

Folk music is known as 'Deshi Sangit' which is not always standardised and may vary in scale, interval, tonality, etc., from region to region, even though the same tune is identifiable. The rhythms of the folk music, like the tunes, come almost naturally to the people, and devoid of any sophistication, they appeal to the heart directly. Folk music rhythms have been noted to be admirably adapted to some types of monotonous work. Folk music may find an entrance into the factory with the prospect of the emancipation of man from slavery to the machine and to preserve his essential human dignity.

### Folk Dance

'Odissi,' the traditional dance of Orissa, has been accepted as an important classical form of Indian dance for its exquisite beauty and charm. Among the folk dances of Orissa, 'Chhau' has earned world-wide reputation.

**Chhau Dance :** Much has been said about the martial origin of Chhau. The basic postures and stance no doubt resemble the postures of a combatant in a traditional fight. This is perhaps why in its rudimentary form it is generally referred to as Phari Khanda Khela (the game of sword and shield) or Rookmar Nacha (the dance of offence and defence). It is needless to enter into the arid controversy as to its probable origin, since evidence, either documentary or collateral, is extremely meagre. But even if its original source is military tradition, there is little doubt that there has been quite a lot of co-mingling of folk, tribal and religious-ritual traditions in the process of its evolution. Mayurbhanj and Seraikela are inhabited by substantially large groups of tribals-the 'Santhals', 'Mundas' and 'Oraons', whose autonomous cultures are quite significant.

The basic postures, the accompanying music and the aesthetic mood of Chhau quite often resemble different dances and songs of these tribes. Further, a very important additional source is perhaps the Shiva cult which was prevalent in this area for a long time. During the Chaitra Parva, Bhairav is worshipped both as a god and a goddess. As a matter of fact, Bhairav is supposed to be the presiding deity of the dance. The ritual element involved in the 'bhokta cult' has an intimate bearing on the growth of the dance. The 'bhoktas' observe a day-long fast and pray to Shiva and Shakti. For them a rigid code of conduct is laid down incorporating essential elements

of yogic discipline. They are dressed in flashing red or ochre and wear the sacred thread. They put on garlands of flowers mainly of champak and mallika and carry canes. The 'bhoktas' visit the dance pandal during the 'Chaitra Parva' carrying 'Jatra Ghata' and 'Nisha Ghata' on their heads. The dance is brief and the accompanying songs are in praise of Lord Shiva and Shakti and generally wishing the audience well. As a matter of fact, during the festival the artistes practising the 'bhokta cult' are supposed to be transformed into different persons altogether. For example, it is believed that they lose their original 'gotras' and are changed into 'Shiva Gotra' for the period of the festival. It is not possible to enter into the details of the ritualistic significance of 'bhokta'; it is sufficient to indicate that during the evolution of Chhau, tribal and religious-ritualistic elements have entered into the choreography and basic postures of the dance and their importance can not be minimised.

Thematically, Chhau draws substantially from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Themes drawn from the Krishna legend are also many. Most of the themes are Puranic episodes like the fight of 'Abhimanyu' with the 'Sapta Rathis', the killing of 'Mahishasura', 'Shiva Tandav', 'Kirat Arjuna', 'Jambab', 'Garuda Bahana', etc. The Krishna themes like 'Bastraharan', 'Kalanka Bhanjan', 'Nisitha Milan', 'Banshi Chori' and 'Tamudia Krishna' are predominantly erotic in mood and draw heavily on the local folk tradition. They seek to combine the best in folk tradition, with the essentials of Vaishnav cult. There are also significant tribal themes like 'Sabara Toka', 'Kala Chakra', 'Sabara Sabaruni'. As a matter of fact, most of the Krishna themes are significantly erotic in inspiration. 'Nisitha Milan', for example, celebrates the union of Lord Krishna with Radha and her patient waiting for Krishna, the symbolic gesture of the gopis inviting Krishna to the tryst of the lonely cottage and the general atmosphere of subdued mellifluousness and romantic agony make this one of the most charming items. In 'Tamudia Krishna' and 'Banshi Chori', this play element of love between Radha and Krishna is equally well celebrated. In 'Banshi Chori', the flutes of Krishna and the cowherd boys are stolen by the gopis. Then the cowherd boys and Krishna make many patient and pathetic entreaties for their return, all the while carrying the baskets of Radha and the gopis on their head. In items like 'Kala Chakra', 'maya Sabrari' and 'Sabara-Sabaruni', the erotic element gets identified with the *joie de vivre* and tremendous élan of the folk tradition and the tribal tradition. In 'Kala Chakra', for example, eight men and eight women dressed as hunters perform a very fast gyration of intricate movements, the

men holding stringed instruments in their hands. In a solo dance like 'Sabara Toka', all the elements of lying in wait for a prey, the actual killing and the final postscript of the hunters' agony and delight are superbly delineated. The themes of Chhau are thus largely drawn from the Puranas and combine elements of tremendous kinetic fury and very fast footwork with mellowed elegance and lyricism which is at times indistinguishable from visual poetry. New items are sought to be improvised each year, but they are not yet either very large in number or significance. It is likely that with the passing of years more and more social and secular themes will find place in the repertoire of the dance. (cf. "Aspects of Mayurbhanj Chhau" by Sitakant Mahapatra.).

**Naga Dance** : 'Naga' also reminds us of the glorious past when Orissa had a great empire extending from the Ganga to the Kaveri and when the Oriyas were heroic people fighting against Muslim inroads for centuries. The dancer has a heroic feature and wears a special dress. He dances with a heavy load of weapons to the sound of the battle drums. He has ten main requirements, viz.: (1) A shield of the hide of the rhinoceros, (2) a sword, (3) a kukri, (4) a gun, (5) a horn used as a whistle, (6) an iron shield, (7) a toilet box, (8) bow and arrows, (9) tiger skin, and (10) a bell. He now bears the face of a tiger and looks awesome. He possesses a long crown with a big flower at the end decorated with glittering peacock feathers. He has a string of beads on the neck, feathers of 'ara' (a bird with brown feathers found in lake Chilka) on his arms, a mirror and a string of beads on his wrist, golden rings on the fingers, tiger's skin on the chest and waist, flags on the arrows, handkerchiefs tied to the hands, a small bell attached to the thigh. He smears his body with 'rama raja' (a powder of yellow colour) to save himself from the scorching heat of summer. He decorates his forehead with vermilion. He wears an artificial beard and moustache. Dressed up he looks very ferocious. This dance is not accompanied by any song.

The Jatra is held on the birthday of Narsimha (the man and lion incarnation of Vishnu). Tradition has it that it commemorates the victory procession of the Puranic Nagarjuna after his victory over Arjuna, his father. To us it appears to be nothing else but remnants of the old 'Paik' dance preserved through ages not only among the warrior class but among all classes of people from among whom soldiers were recruited to the army.

**Ghumra Dance** : the 'Ghumra' — a kind of drum of the size of a pitcher—produces a deep musical sound. The drummer ties the rope of the ghumra round his neck, makes it hang and plays on it,

sings and dances to its tune at social functions like marriages or any religious festival. Sometimes a competition is held between two parties. Each party consists of twenty to twenty-five men and the dance goes on the whole night. Ghumra is prevalent among the 'Sahara' and other aborigines and Harijans and the songs have love as their main theme. But as with other folk dancing, the gods and goddesses are invoked in the beginning of the song.

The other forms of folk dance like 'Humo,' Bâuli,' 'Bânki,' 'Jhulki,' 'Jâ mudâli,' 'Mayalajar,' 'Gunjikata,' 'Rasarkeli,' and 'Puchi' are prevalent among the Oriyas and aborigines of Orissa.

**Folk Drama** : There is more dance and less acting, more song and less dialogue in folk drama. The joker dances, the queen dances, her attendants dance, the drummer dances, the chief singer of 'Dâskâthiâ' dances. But the dance has little peculiarity. It is monotonous. Too much singing is also tiresome.

The following kinds of folk paly deserve mention : The 'Jatra,' the 'Pâlâ,' the 'Pâtuâ,' the 'Dâskâthiâ,' the 'Mughal Tamasa,' the 'Karmâ,' the 'Dandanâta' and the 'Chaitighodâ Nâta'.

The 'Jatra' or opera still attracts thousands of people from far and near. No advertising is necessary. Nobody is invited or required to buy a ticket. Word of mouth attracts so many persons that it is impossible to accommodate them in a hall, however spacious. So the Jatra is held in the open field. The rectangular stage is set in the centre of the audience with orchestra sitting adjacent to the stage.

Beginning with items on the 'harmonium,' 'clarinet,' 'bugle,' 'mridanga,' 'jhanja,' 'dubi tabla,' 'dholki,' etc., by the experts of the party, the opera starts with a party of dancing and singing boys appearing in female garbs.

The king generally appears in a stereotyped dress and the themes are often historical or mythological. The male actors dressed up as females look artificial. The 'Duâri' or 'Dagara' (the messenger of the king) and the joker are the most interesting characters in the Jatra. In general, the Jatra in the villages far off from the town still belongs to the Middle Ages, and deals with gods, goddesses, sages, kings and courtiers and has very little reference to real life and its problems. The jatra parties adjoining the cities are trying to reform the Jatra on the model of the theatre and the cinema. They avoid too many songs in the play and its sing-song manner and the hackneyed dresses. They select their characters from the social novels and use simple prose in the dialogue. In their zeal for reform, they often kill this ancient form of individuality.

**Pâlâ** : Pâlâ is a popular cultural institution

responsible for the popularisation of ancient Oriya literature. It consists of five or six persons. The drummer plays on the 'mridanga'. Others play on the cymbals, dance and help the chief singer—'Gâyaka'—to sing and explain the meaning to the audience. Depth of knowledge, sharpness of intelligence, oratory and keen memory power are put to a severe test when two well-matched groups challenge each other in a 'pala' competition. Nothing but unreserved admiration is due to the singers for their inexhaustible energy to continue the competition every night stretching over a month. The drummer displays the skill of his fingers and relates humorous stories to please the audience. The dialogue between the singer and one of the attendants breaks the monotony of long speeches and jugglery of words in the song. Pala owes its origin to attempts at Hindu-Muslim unity.

**Pâtuâ** : Patuas sing songs, composed by the village poets who pick up the subject matter from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Puranas and more recently from novels. Some of the songs are simple in thought and language, while others have a deeper meaning and are shrouded in a jumble of words.

'Pâtuâ s' are of four kinds though all of them worship the same deity under different names. The difference lies in religious rituals and not in the aims and objects of worship.

The 'Ghata Patua' dances, sings and performs physical exercises in different villages. Villagers pay him in cash or kind for worship of the goddess. The best of the devotees leads a party of Patuas to walk on a fire of burning charcoal.

**Dâskâthiâ** : 'Dâskâthiâ', once a popular performance of Ganjam, has spread to all other districts of Orissa. 'Dasa' means a devotee. 'Katha' means two wooden pieces played in tune with the prayer of the devotee.

The party consists of two persons. One is the chief singer, the other is the 'Palia' who helps him in all respects in singing and acting. The two persons stage a whole drama, act all the parts, change their tone hour after hour. They introduce humorous stories to break the monotony.

**Mughal Tâmasâ** : 'Tamasa' is a form of opera which reminds us of the 'Mughal' administration prevalent in Orissa and is a symbol of their culture. The songs are composed in both Persian and Oriya. Dialogue is quite amusing. The 'Tamasa is peculiar to the Bhadrak area in the district of Balasore and is not performed in any other part of Orissa.

**Karmâ** : The Karma is a famous autumn festival which starts from the eleventh day of the bright fortnight of the month of Bhadrab and continues for

some days in the month of Ashwina. The festival is celebrated in most of Orissa's villages in Sambalpur and Phulabani districts.

The story behind this celebration goes : Six sons of a rich merchant set sail in a ship for trade, leaving the youngest brother at home. When they returned they saw to their amazement that their wives danced in the 'Karma' festival, while the youngest brother was playing on the drum. Being enraged, they drove away their wives. At this, 'Karma' (the God of fortune) got angry and all their wealth vanished. They repented for their folly of driving out the Goddess of Wealth along with their wives. With the counsel of their wives they went in search of the God of fortune and met a milkman on the way. The latter requested them to ascertain from the God why the number of his cows fast decreasing. After some time they saw a strange man bearing on his head a piece of broken earthen pot with fire burning in it, and another man carrying a husking paddle on the shoulder. The next man they met was shivering in the cold. They came to know the causes of suffering of these persons from the God and the means of getting free from them. The god after due worship was kind to them and on return they found that their houses was filled with gold and jewels.

Karma dancers and singers have their professional party. They deal with Puranic events or events in folk tales. Love songs are sung in the form of questions and answers between parties of young men and women.

**Puppet Play** : This one of the most ancient forms of folk art. The skilful movement of the inanimate puppets in the hands of the artistes holds the audience's attention. Like actors and actresses of flesh and blood, the puppets look lively.

Expenses in stage arrangements are negligible. These do not require a 'screen' in the true sense of the term. But in order to hide the secrets and tricks of the play, only one curtain is hung up and another one is propped up from the ground. Behind these two curtains the artistes perform their manipulations. They send out the actors and actresses of the play through the dividing line. The puppets are made of wood and carved and painted by village carpenters. In Orissa puppet-making has developed as a family art down the centuries. The artistes of Jaipur village in Cuttack are famous for puppet-making. The puppets are kept unclothed in a basket, but beautifully dressed up before they are introduced in a performance.

In the villages of Orissa the villagers construct a stage with black-boards, bedsteads, etc., as directed by the puppet players. It is not as wide as a theatrical

stage, because the puppets are not more than three or four feet in height. The stage is usually four feet long, two feet wide and three feet high. In three directions of the stage, eight poles are placed standing. The puppets are kept dangling on these poles, stitched with a silken thread which is made smoother with oil. Neither the silken thread nor the thread-holder is seen from a distance. So it seems as though the puppets dance naturally without the help of any person.

Only four persons are required to stage a puppet play, namely, Sutradhara, two singers and the drummer. It is interesting to note that unlike other plays in Orissa, members of only a single family participate in the puppet show. They represent the inanimate puppets and as such talk and sing for them.

*It is noteworthy that no special play befitting the puppet-stage has yet been written in Orissa. Therefore the puppet artiste makes use of the opera plays (lila, suanga, farce). But these plays are subject to necessary changes, so that they may suit the puppet-stage. Besides, popular songs and charming dialogues befitting the time and the place are added. Similarly, old and antiquated portions are also excluded. In such a process, gradually the spirit of the plays of the earlier period is lost and it takes on a peculiar shape with a conglomeration of songs of many folk poets and a synthesis of dialogues of a number of folk plays.*

The dialogue of a puppet play is really very interesting. In the beginning the drummer sits in front of the stage and beats his drum. This is an invitation to people to witness the performance. When the people have gathered in large number, the performance begins. The woman recites the dialogue of the queen or the attendant. She sits behind the screen. But this is not the case with the male singer who sits outside the stage. He recites for the king, minister, police officer or messenger. Each of them sings about twenty-five to thirty songs a night. Two people memorise the entire play.

As a family art, it has its advantages. It is self-dependent, self-supporting and remains under the strict control and management of the guardian of the concerned family. Thus, this form of play goes on developing for generations as a traditional and professional art. For development of this art, no rich patronage was necessary. The support of the village folk helped it to flourish.

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