

A QUARTERLY NEWS LETTER FROM  
NATIONAL FOLKLORE SUPPORT CENTRE

Volume 3 Issue 3 Serial No.16 July 2004

Life and works of Padma Bhushan  
**Shri KOMAL KOTHARI**  
(1929 to 2004)

Indian

F  
O  
I  
K  
L  
I  
F  
E





## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

### CHAIRPERSON

Jyotindra Jain  
Professor and Dean, School of Arts and Aesthetics,  
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

### TRUSTEES

Ajay S. Mehta  
Executive Director, National Foundation for India, India Habitat Centre,  
Zone 4-A, UG Floor, Lodhi Road, New Delhi

Ashoke Chatterjee  
B-1002, Rushin Tower, Behind Someshwar 2, Satellite Road,  
Ahmedabad

N. Bhakthavathsala Reddy  
Dean, School of Folk and Tribal Lore, Warangal

Dadi D. Pudumjee  
Managing Trustee, The Ishara Puppet Theatre Trust,  
B2/2211 Vasant Kunj, New Delhi

Deborah Thiagarajan  
President, Madras Craft Foundation, Chennai

Molly Kaushal  
Associate Professor, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts,  
C.V. Mess, Janpath, New Delhi

Munira Sen  
Executive Director, Madhyam, Bangalore

K. Ramadas  
Deputy Director, Regional Resources Centre for Folk Performing  
Arts, Udupi

P. Subramaniam  
Director, Centre for Development Research and Training, Chennai

Y. A. Sudhakar Reddy  
Reader, Centre for Folk Culture Studies, S. N. School, Hyderabad

Veenapani Chawla  
Director, Adishakti Laboratory for Theatre Research, Pondicherry

### EXECUTIVE TRUSTEE AND DIRECTOR

M.D. Muthukumaraswamy

### STAFF

#### Assistant Director

T.R. Sivasubramaniam  
Administration

#### Programme Officer (Publications)

C. Kodhandaraman

#### Librarian

R. Murugan

#### Programme Assistant (Public Programmes)

V. Hari Saravanan

#### Archival Assistant

B. Jishamol

#### Support Staff

Y. Pavitra  
P.T. Devan  
P. Sivasakthivel  
V. Thennarasu  
C. Kannan

### REGIONAL RESOURCE PERSONS

V. Jayarajan  
Kuldeep Kothari  
Moji Riba  
K.V.S.L. Narasamamba  
Nima S. Gadhia  
Parag M. Sarma  
Sanat Kumar Mitra  
Satyabrata Ghosh  
Shikha Jhingan  
Susmita Poddar  
M.N. Venkatesha

### INDIAN FOLKLIFE EDITORIAL TEAM

M.D. Muthukumaraswamy  
Editor  
C. Kodhandaraman  
Associate Editor  
P. Sivasakthivel  
Page Layout & Design

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

### CONTENTS

Letter from Kuldeep Kothari.....	3
Tributes .....	4
Remembering Folklorist Komal Kothari.....	5
Copyright of folk and indigenous art forms.....	6
On Komal Kothari.....	8
Life and works of Shri Komal Kothari.....	11
On Folk Narratives .....	14
Here to Eternity, on a magic Jharu.....	21
Review Books .....	23
Our Publications.....	24

### COVER PAGE

Shri Komal Kothari receiving Sangeeth Natak Academy Fellowship Award from the Hon'ble president of India, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam.

### THIS ISSUE

The focus of this issue of *Indian Folklife* is on Life and Works of Shri Komal Kothari.

### NEXT ISSUE

Genre, Community, and Event for announcement see page.20.

All communications should be addressed to:

The Editor, *Indian Folklife*, National Folklore Support Centre, 7, 5<sup>th</sup> Cross Street, Rajalakshmi Nagar, Velachery, Chennai - 600 042 (India), Tele/Fax: 91-44-22448589 / 22450553, email: info@indianfolklore.org, muthu@md2.vsnl.net.in

Letter from KULDEEP KOTHARI,  
Secretary, *Rupayan Sansthan*, Rajsathani Institute of Folklore

Email: rajafolk\_jp1@sancharnet.in

Dear Friends,

It is a rather difficult task to talk about a person like Kaka (Komalji, my father) in the past tense. After a month, it still seems so unreal to all of us at Jodhpur - indeed, it must be so, to a lot you too. All of us do so very much, miss his overpowering but reassuring presence. One still feels he's out for a visit and will be back soon.

Many of you have visited our home at Jodhpur. Today, as you come into the driveway, you come face to face with a large pile of stones; Stones from the demolition of part of our old house. The ground opens up into an empty space where Kaka planned to build a hostel of some sort. The space is there, but the house which was for many years my grandparents' home is gone - You can feel the vacuum. Aptly, this also seems to be a physical manifestation of what has happened. Painstakingly, one will have to go about building the house again.

Last month, when I got a mail from David/Carol telling me about this program<sup>1</sup> I intended to try and attend it and meet all of you who have worked or dealt with my father at some point in time. While I share a close personal rapport with many of you, I would have liked this opportunity of meeting so many others who knew him.

All of us, especially my mother Indiraji, would like to thank you for this gesture and also for the numerous thoughtful messages of condolence that we received.

Komalji, as most of you refer to him was quite a repository of indigenous knowledge. He was one of the pioneers in the documentation of performing arts in India and a vocal exponent of the oral traditions of history. He did extensive work on Rajasthan's folk music and culture. Instrumental in making archival recordings of folk musicians of Rajasthan, he exposed them and their art internationally. How did he achieve this? Certainly not alone - he built on his own experience and knowledge through the numerous discussion that he had with colleagues like you. He was able to make the lateral connections that he was so famous for, by interacting with people of different disciplines and absorbing their know-how. It was such interactions that brought the familiar twinkle to his eyes.

Let me dwell briefly on the last few months of Kaka's life. It was in the summer of 2002 that Kaka discovered that his old tryst with cancer wasn't over. The disease

was back and there really wasn't much that could be done about it. At this point in time he was working on a fresh idea - that of setting up an ethnographic museum. He tried some chemotherapy and also a course of radiation which helped ease his pain a bit. He even tried some non-conventional remedies and was in and out of hospital a number of times. He really wanted to go a long way further. The museum had become his passion and he wanted to see his dream come true. Sometime last year, after following up with the Government for almost a year, we were allotted a piece of land to set up this museum. It is a very picturesque locale at the edge of a stony plateau with a small enclosed valley. Kaka was thrilled with the location. Every visitor who came to see him would be told about his plans for the museum and taken to the site. Without saying so, he was building up on his ideas for the project. He would sit late into the night jotting down points related to some aspect or the other of the project and be woe betied if anyone delayed anything related to it.

The museum of his dream aims at to have objects of daily use rather than curios. It will relate the story of the creative ingenuity of the common folk by tracing the history of tangible cultural objects and the role they play in their daily life. Kaka thought out a lot of what he wanted to achieve and uncharacteristically, documented it.

Kaka also in the last few months worked for creating a structure for the organization - Rupayan. He knew that it would be very difficult to take his plans to fruition in the absence of an organisation. In furtherance of this objective he created a new executive council of Rupayan comprising of some young energetic people. All of us now have a common objective to strive towards - the completion of his museum. We also realize that what we are trying to achieve is difficult because our effort lacks the benefit of the continuity of Kaka's intellectual output - but that is what makes it so much more of a challenge. We also intend to draw on the same resource base which helped hone his knowledge - all of you. To this end, we shall be circulating a brief concept note on the museum. We would like to invite expressions of interest towards involvement with the project. We would also like you to freely provide us, as feedback, your thoughts on the issue. □

<sup>1</sup> Memorial conference at Columbia University. For report see page. 5.

## Tributes

### Rustom Bharucha

I remember Komalda talking to me with matter-of-fact calm about his father's death rites and ceremonies, which he had observed with meticulous rigour. Acknowledging the family as a vital site for his research, he punctuated his observations with intimate details—for instance, if three people travelling by train are taking the ashes of a dead person to Hardwar, then they will always buy four cups of tea. One cup of tea for the dead person. However, when the relatives of the dead return back home, they will buy only three cups of tea. Measuring his words, Komalda said, 'If you are capable of treating a dead person as a living being immediately after his or her death, then he or she can live for eternity. The dead can be with you forever.'

These words resonate for me as I begin, with difficulty, to reflect on Komalda's death—a death that, on the one hand, was anticipated, but which has yet to sink in. The loss is immeasurable. In this context, how can one commemorate him today? No *shubraj* or panegyric verses, I can hear him mutter. Just get on with the work.

If we listen carefully, Komalda is still talking to us. He is urging us not to lose sight of ground realities as we theorize our respective disciplines. Above all, he is telling us to be serious but not to lose our sense of humour or the human dimensions of scholarly research. In our internalisation of his many hours of conversation, punctuated with his inimitable digressions and transitions, intuitive leaps and starting logic, I do believe that he is still with us. Like an oral epic, with no fixed beginning or end, Komalda will live forever.

### John Smith

This was not how the trip was planned. I had been due to spend some time with Komal in the Easter vacation, but had to cancel the visit when my wife fell ill; instead I managed to steal time for a week in Jodhpur in the middle of the teaching term. Komal was keen to see me: he was busy planning his latest project, a new ethnographic museum just outside Jodhpur, and he wanted my suggestions on the permanent Pabuji exhibition that he had decided on. We both knew time was short, but I hoped that I would be able to say my farewells to a remarkable man whom I have known almost all my adult life—and I hoped, too, to be able to contribute to his ideas on the museum, for I knew he would never allow the mere inconvenience of a terminal illness to prevent him from pursuing that goal with all his characteristic lively enthusiasm. After all, the last time I had spoken to him by phone, as he lay in a hospital bed in Jaipur the day after his final kidney surgery, his talk had all been of the museum: how many square metres would be allocated here, what themes would be emphasised there. He knew he would never see it; that only added to his urgency.

But, uncharacteristically, Komal has died.

None of us will sit again in Paota, watching him prepare the vegetables for the day's meal while he talks of migration patterns among Rebari herdsman, or Hindu

songs that only Muslims may sing, or the method of tuning the Sindhi Sarangi. None of us will see him fill yet another notebook with observations while he sits cross-legged, interviewing epic bards or puppeteers. None of us will travel with him to remote village where especially interesting types of performances may be heard; none of us will hear him distinguish between all the different types of desert we pass through on the way. None of us will meet him briefly in western cities through which he is passing with a touring troupe of Langas or Manganiyars. None of us will share a paan or a joke with him again.

His profession was his own invention: a folklorist who was based not in a university department but in the very society he studied. He immersed himself in the culture of people who at the time were still regarded with contempt by most educated folk; he won their respect and their trust, and as times changed he suggested how they might manage their traditions to their own best advantage. Remarkably, he also slowly won over the educated folk, so that now - unlike, say, thirty years ago - it is perfectly respectable to appreciate the traditional skills of the rural poor. To visiting students and scholars he was unfailingly, amazingly generous with his time and his knowledge. I know that without his help my own work on Rajasthan and Rajasthani would never have advanced as far as it did, and I am sure that many, many others would say the same.

### Jasleen Dhamija

It was in the late 50's that I met Komal da with Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya when he was Secretary, Rajasthan Sangeet Natak Akademi. He showed us his collection of Folk Musical instruments. We were both beginning our work experiences. For the first time, we heard the Langas and it was an unforgettable experience. Over years we met often, and each meeting was so enriching. He revealed new perceptions and deep insights in the study of folk culture.

He generously shared his deep knowledge with everyone and his rich insights helped many a scholar to discover themselves.

### Kishore Saint

Our last two meetings were this year at times of severe bodily stress for him. On both occasions as soon as he emerged from intensive treatment and saw familiar faces of friends and family, his eyes lit up and each one of us he took up shared concerns with precision and without the least hint of being constrained. As he put it 'My body is with the doctors but my mind and my speech are mine for conversing with my friends'.

Komalda's body has rejoined the 'panchmahabhoot' but the strains of music and the traditions, tales and artefacts of folk life in Rajasthan will continue to inspire and challenge us in our search for patterns of living in harmony with nature. ■

Tributes received from *Rupayan Sansthan* and published with permission from Kuldeep Kothari.



## Remembering Folklorist Komal Kothari: A Conference on Intellectual Contributions to Scholarship on Rajasthan

(NEW YORK, June 17, 2004) The Area Studies Division of the Columbia University Libraries and colleagues in South Asian Studies organized and hosted a conference in the South Asian Studies Graduate Reading Room, Butler Library, on May 20, 2004, dedicated to the memory of Komal Kothari. Kothari, who died April 20, 2004, distinguished himself as a folklorist not only in India but throughout the world.

During his long career, he researched and documented the performing arts of Rajasthan. He made notable contributions to the study of folklore and in particular to the study of musical instruments, regional oral traditions, and puppetry. A pioneer in folklore, Kothari founded the Rupayan Sansthan in the 1960s and served as a consultant to several institutions and research scholars from around the globe. He received several national and international awards including Padmashri and Padma Bhushan, the highest civil award bestowed by the President of India.

The conference drew a large group of students, scholars, and researchers who gathered to honor Kothari. Maxine Weisgrau, a visiting professor in the Department of Anthropology at Barnard College, welcomed the attendees to the conference. Speakers at the conference included: Frances Taft,

President, Rajasthan Studies Group, Carol Henderson of Rutgers University, Christi Merrill, University of Michigan, Nandita Sahai, Hindu College, University of Delhi, and David Magier, Director of Area Studies at Columbia Libraries. Magier, who has a Ph.D. in South Asian linguistics, conducted his Fulbright dissertation fieldwork in Rajasthan in 1980 under the close guidance of Kothari.

Ann Grodzins Gold, a member of the Religion faculty at Syracuse University delivered the keynote address "Komalda, Goddess Shrines, Breathing Space." In tribute to Kothari, Manish Kothari spoke about family remembrances.

A post-conference reception was held at the Southern Asian Institute at the International Affairs Building on the Columbia campus. Magier gave a slide presentation documenting his fieldwork in rural Rajasthan. A 1979 documentary film on Kothari's ethnomusicology work was shown, along with another, entitled *Komal Da*, on the life and works of Kothari, which was produced in April, 2004, in his memory. Both films have been donated to Columbia Libraries for archiving. ☞

*Courtesy:* [www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/news/libraries/2004/2004-06-17.kothari.html](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/news/libraries/2004/2004-06-17.kothari.html)



Komal Kothari with Vijay Dan Detha, founders of Rupayan Sansthan, Rajasthani Institute of Folklore.



## Copyright of folk and indigenous art forms

### Need for accountability

KOMAL KOTHARI

It is high time serious thought was given to the legal problems of copy-right in the field of folk performing arts and creation of folk artefacts by indigenous crafts' persons.

The practitioners in these fields mostly come from illiterate as well as socially backward groups or occupational communities. They will lose their right to various traditional creations before they even become aware of the new realities.

The present situation has arisen due to a mushrooming of new electronic media like cassettes, CDs, film, videos, albums, multimedia programmes, digital photography, television, radio, and many other replicable scientific gadgets. All these are linked to the global market.

Unscrupulous businessmen who are able to cheaply or illegally acquire and replicate original creations, are doing so and are thus depriving creative people of their just due. Millions of cassettes on folk music are being produced, and thousands of audio recording shops operate from practically every big city and town in the country. Such cassettes are produced and sold at low cost on very bad quality tapes with bad recording. Such reproductions do not represent the best quality of the performers, and also display folk culture in its crudest form. New commercial organizations have been set up in the guise of promoting handicraft and indigenous designs, and traditional artefacts. Most of the time such creations have their own social, religion and philosophic context and significance.

In the name of entertainment, folk music of regional cultures has become a source of piracy without any regard for legal, ethical or moral responsibility. The powerful film industry is exploiting the field either by lifting the melody (independent of text) or tune. Sometimes, the lyrics are also copied.

Who owns folk music? The answer is that it belongs to different cultural regions, cultural groups, and small ethnic identities; to the people who know it well, where it comes from and who has composed it. It is true that no individual can have legal right to such cultural

expressions but the given group or region has its own right. If India, as a nation, can claim *neem*, *haldi* and *basmati* as its right, why can't the smaller regional cultures demand the same right.

Recently, a song from Rajasthan was adopted in a film and became popular the world over. This song '*Nimbuda*' was composed and set to tune by Gazi Khan Manganiar of Haduwa village, and is now sung by many Langa and Manganiar singers. It became popular in hundreds of schools in Rajasthan. This movement of folk songs is a natural and normal course. But it is a very different situation when a film, supported by the music industry, picks up a melody and some text, puts in additional lines, adds orchestration and start claiming the credit of composition as well as legal rights over the song. Here the lyricist and music director do not even have the courtesy to acknowledge the source. In the case of '*Nimbuda*' it is not only the source but the whole material that has been lifted. The so-called pop music, popular music of today, holds no bar to 'pirate picking'!

All great classical musicians respectfully refer to their *guru* or *ustad* at a performance. There is a sense of ethics and humility involved in acknowledging reality. But, the situation is quite the opposite in the field of folk music where the adaptation of a folksong renders it a new creative composition with the appropriation of all the benefits that come with it.



Shri Komal Kothari interacting with Rajasthani folk musicians.



At NFSC workshop in Jaisalmer.

Traditionally, Indian folk music was always treated as 'anonymous' as far as composition was concerned. But on close scrutiny, we do find that there has been a regular tradition of individuals creating new songs. For the old songs, we have no reference, but in our times we can carefully identify creative individuals. The important point is that the songs should be accepted as the expression of a given cultural region. Until a song does not get the stamp of society it cannot be designated a folksong.

Once, such a folksong is lifted by a big commercial venture, a new situation arises. It is then owned by a fake composer and a wealthy director of the industry, and they acquire copyright and legal ownership. Rendering of the same melody publicly will be, or can be, treated as infringement by law. The poor folk singer would be abused by experts in the field as rendering film songs. This has happened to hundreds of folk songs in the long history of recorded music. The whole question of compensating the creativity of ordinary people

may be a very small question but stealing the melody and assigning it as one's own composition is a travesty of truth.

This situation is receiving attention at the international legal level. The issue is being raised by developing countries as their micro-level cultures are being exploited by the developed world through its superior technology of informatics. There is a huge risk to the cultural heritage of small countries to be wiped out on the one hand and lose the opportunity to strengthen their own artistic endeavours due to paucity of funds and poverty on the other. It is now recognized that the cultural material of any community, tribe, group, ethnic, region or nation should be respected and legally protected. They should have the 'right' to be recognized, acknowledged and compensated or share the profits earned through royalty. The financial gain should go to the different institutional organizations who are devoted to the subject concerned. This type of cognisance is now known as 'class action'.

An option is that any commercial venture undertaken, based on a specific traditions like the *Ramayan* or *Mahabharata*, should deposit specific royalty from the profits to cultural organizations who receive the last priority from government funding.

A populist commercial view is that, by patronizing traditional forms of arts and crafts, they are obliging the society through the mass media. The society demands that a proper commercial share should come to it in concrete form. The present proliferation of TV (satellite or DTH), cable lines, FM and AM radio stations, flourishing industry of audio-video recording, web and internet, need to be answerable to traditional cultures of the people. ❖

First published in *Sutradhar* (Unima India), a newsletter of Bharatiya Putli Sangh, Numbers 10 & 11 March 2000.

## Shri Komal Kothari Memorial Endowment Fund

The board of trustees of *National Folklore Support Centre* has created Shri Komal Kothari Memorial Endowment fund for making Awards in his name to deserving creative folk artists of India. The goal of the endowment fund is to honour folk artists, encourage and present those artists' creative expression to a wider public.

We request donors to contribute to Shri Komal Kothari Memorial Endowment Fund. Donations can be paid by cheque or DD in the name of *National Folklore Support Centre* payable at Chennai. For further details please contact:

M.D. Muthukumaraswamy, Director, NFSC, # 7, Fifth Cross Street, Rajalakshmi Nagar, Velachery, Chennai - 600 042. Ph: 044-22448589 Telefax: 044-22450553, 22448589 Email: info@indianfolklore.org, muthu@md2.vsnl.net.in www.indianfolklore.org

*All donations to National Folklore Support Centre are exempt from income tax under section 80(G) of Income Tax Act.*

# On Komal Kothari

Shail Mayaram, Senior Fellow, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 29 Rajpur Road, Delhi 110054.

(Revised version of an article first published as "Komal Kothari: Rooted in the oral tradition," Sunday Magazine, *The Hindu*, June 20, 2004. I am truly grateful for the enormous response this piece generated. I believe they are symptomatic of a response to Komalda's own life and work).



In each human life there are fortuitous encounters with persons who turn out to shape one's life, its purpose and destiny. Komal Kothari was one such person not only for me but also for many others.

I had met him as a school and college going girl in Jaipur, but my first real encounter with him was in 1983 at a Mela of Folk Performers from all over Rajasthan in Ajmer organised by the Social Work and Research Centre, Tilonia. We were living in Ajmer that year and I watched him with his recorder, interviewing,

talking to and listening intently to musicians who performed through the day. What could be so interesting about these ordinary village-based musicians?

Komalda-as he was universally called- had by then established his partnership with Vijay Dan Detha, the writer, social commentator and collector of folktales from Rajasthan. The partnership had resulted in the establishment of Rupayan Sansthan, an Institute of Folklore. It functioned not from Jaipur or Jodhpur or any other urban centre, as is the case with most folklore institutes, but from the village of Borunda, in the heart of Marwar, the Marusthal, and the Thar. The location was more than symbolic as it allowed them to remain rooted in the cultures that watered their work and writing, as it were.

An interest in musical instruments had launched a lifetime's work. Questions relating to the instruments took him to their materiality and ecology- the wood, the trees, the crops, water- and thereon to sociology, the complex world of castes, their cultures, politics and practices. The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts that was quick then to recognise talent had involved him in a project on *bajra*, millet around which so much of desert culture revolves.

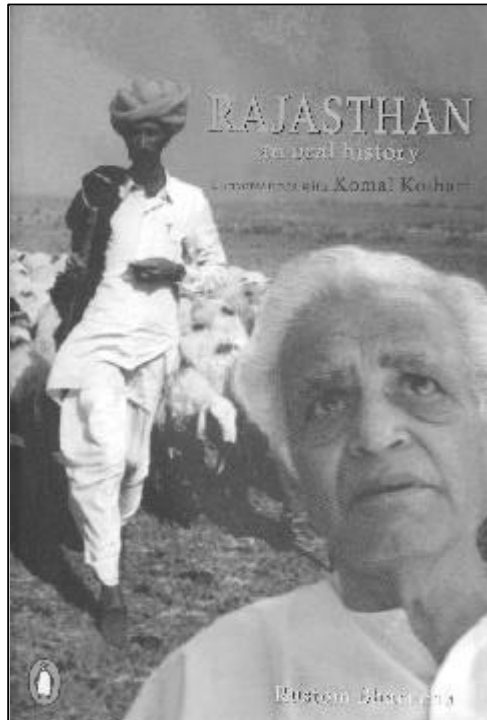
In a couple of years my own biography intersected with his leading to what were for me dramatic transitions. I had interrupted, somewhat scandalously for my parents, a promising academic career, leaving an M.Phil thesis on the Marxist theorist, Nicos Poulantzas and his Theory of the State unfinished as also immediate plans for a Ph.D. All this and a lecturer's job had been abandoned for marriage and domesticity. By the mid80s, however,

the constraint of being a District Collector's wife was beginning to tell on me. Inhibited by the colonial culture of the civil services and insulated from the lived world, spouses entertained themselves by the twin games of rummy and housie typical of that great sub continental institution, the officers' wives ladies club. This was, after all, how many English memsahibs had bided their time!

Our children were now crawling and walking but my mind was restless. A chance meeting with Komalda and I was involved in his project on Folk Epics (funded by the Ford Foundation). He had already spent a month or so in Lacchmangarh in Alwar District recording a Mewati Mahabharata from Musalman Yogis. I still have buried in my notes sheets of Komalda's handwritten comments detailing the culture and music of a series of castes in and around that little area of Lacchmangarh. My standard urban, middle class disparagement of rural life changed. The ordinary, illiterate village musician I now saw was often the bearer of an extraordinary literary and musical tradition as also capable of constant improvisation, change and creativity. This became for me the beginning of what has been more than a decade long attempt to understand the complex universes of Indian Islam and of Hindu-Muslim interaction. The world of

the Indian Muslim clearly was far from the monolith implicit when one speaks the word, "Muslim" or "Musalman."

I learnt more from the short trips I made with Komalda than from regional ethnographies. I still recollect a memorable trip to Tijara when we spoke to the last few performers of the Ali Baksh *khyals*. Ali Baksh had been a Muslim who lived in Behror and authored a series of *khyals* (best translated as a folk equivalent of opera) including *Nal Damayanti*, *Radha-Krishna*. The *khyals* meant an extensive knowledge of both Indian mythology and classical music. I still have buried in my papers the texts of several Ali Baksh *khyals*. But up to partition they were performed extensively in the Braj language region. These performances would often continue through the night with the *raga-ragini* changing as the night unfolded.





This was the period of a new interest in what was called "ethnomusicology"-a coded downgrading premised on the idea that the west has music and the rest have only "ethno music" "ethno food," "ethno geography," and ethno whatever. Nonetheless, people's and subaltern knowledges were being taken seriously and postmodernism was coming into its own. It was the reigning moment of what the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins with his usual panache calls "postmodernism, post structuralism and other variants of 'afterological studies'!"

Undeterred and uninspired by academic fashions, Komalda carved out his own universe and understanding. By now both western and Indian scholars recognised his quite encyclopaedic grasp of lived culture and many conducted fieldwork interspersed with conversations with him. He was, to my knowledge, one of the persons with the deepest comprehension of the lives and ritual practices of Indian Muslim and Hindu castes.

The 1980s was also the era of the state sponsorship of culture. The cultural bonanza called the Festivals of India and the setting up of Regional Cultural Centres marketed Indian Cultures, Crafts and "Heritage" domestically and the world over. Komalda himself had moved into decision making circuits at both the national and state levels, the Academies of Sangeet Natak and Sahitya. But I recall his pronounced scepticism of the state sponsorship of culture. I first heard it at a talk he gave at a small Workshop of scholars and Mirasis and Musalman Yogi Performers that I had put together at Alwar on the Oral Tradition of Mewat. Only the community could sustain living oral traditions, he argued. For a state to patronise them would be to museumise and ossify them, sap them of their vitality and capacity for critique. I had myself been contending with the question of the retreat of community's patronage for oral traditions, the marginality and impoverishment of performers in the face of newer modes of electronic entertainment. After I heard Komalda I forever abandoned the idea that the state could be or ought to be a possible alternative patron of the arts, visual or performing. Komalda received the state awards of Padmashri and Padmabhushan but characteristically preferred to ignore the honorific.

Komalda himself remained of and rooted in the oral tradition. Conversations with him resonate in the research of many persons on subjects ranging from methods of indigenous water harvesting to Hinduism. Historian Rashmi Patni worked with him on republishing one of the earliest ethnographies published in Hindi called the *Mardumashumari Raj Marwar* in three volumes (Jodhpur: Vidyapeeth, 1895). It has been reprinted in English translation with an introduction by Komal Kothari. It is from this work that I learnt a good deal about funerary and other practices of castes that are today referred to as dalit; of the closeness of dalit and Muslim ritual life; that the Muslim section of Bhatia and Chauhan Rajputs came to be known as Sindhi Sipahis and Kayamkhanis after their conversion.



Komalda wrote several essays in Hindi but there is little that the English reader can access. It is to Rustom Bharucha that we owe the trouble of actually sitting with, recording, transcribing and publishing detailed interviews with Komal Kothari in the book, *Rajasthan: an oral history* (Delhi: Penguin, 2003).

Komalda battled cancer for several years before finally succumbing to it. I met him intermittently during this period always promising myself to go back and spend more time with him. Once when I was visiting his home in Jodhpur I found some eighty Langas and Manganiyars collected. Malika Sarabhai had got him to organise a performance at his home. This was to help Vikram Oberoi select the cream of musical talent for his new hotel in Jaipur called Rajvilas (advertised today as the place where Bill Clinton stayed!). Through the evening they sang and played, singly, in groups and in chorus. This was nothing less than an ocean of sound and it left me completely drenched after the performance Komalda and I sat and went through a range of subjects. These feasts were followed an actual dinner cooked with non-hybrid indigenous millet and vegetables grown without pesticide and fertilizer (that the west now markets as "organic"). But there was more to come to make that day so memorable. Komalda's house includes a huge hall where musicians are always welcome to stay and sleep. I sat up with these desert musicians through the night. There was no audience then. For them this opportunity where so many of them were together was rare and they sang and sang and sang...till it was time for breakfast and the bus homewards. There were little Manganiyar boys ranging from four years of age through early adolescence with the purist of voices as also the more mature voices of their fathers that demolish any dichotomisation of the folk and the classical. The performers' enormous repertoire included songs associated with Kabir, Mira, Shah Abdul Latif and Lal Shahbaz Qalandar and relating to Radha and Krishna, Ali and the Prophet Muhammad, heroes, saints and satis....

There were other times that I met Komalda in Jaipur. Once when we discussed the phenomenon of the possession of spirit, he held forth on non Sanskrit Mahabharata. Strange, how he had already travelled intensively in areas that I had just begun to journey. On one of my last meetings with him he said he had recovered substantially. I had become interested in the

mythic and musical connections between northwest India, Afghanistan and Iran. As we waited for Shubha Mudgal to sing at a performance at the City Palace, Komalda shared with me some extraordinary insights into the exchanges across this frontier and right up to Tibet and Nepal. Little wonder that when I hear the Persian singer, Sima Bina, I recall Shubh Mathur telling me, "This music sounds so much like ours." His explanation reverberates as I listen to the score of the Iranian film directed by Samira Makhmalbaf *At five in the afternoon* (2004) that has been filmed in Afghanistan.

When I was in Jaipur last I learnt that Komalda was in the Intensive Care Unit at the hospital. The cancer had spread. I knew I had to see him for it might be a last time. An advance copy of my book had just arrived and I took it along to show him. It was the culmination for me of a pilgrimage begun a decade ago with the project on oral epics.

I could not see him, I was told. Doctor's instructions. For just one minute? I promise not to let him talk. Ok.

The face with its silver white hair was familiar, if drawn. The solid girth of his body became frail.

He looked at me and his eyes lit up at a familiar face. I grasped his hands.

*Bahut thak gaya hun*, said that man of untiring energy.

I held up my book.

I like the title, he said, his eyes glinting, giving a fleeting glimpse of the sparkle and ready laughter that had been so characteristic of him.

Little wonder, I thought. For the title is, *Against history, against state: counter perspectives from the margins*. Those familiar with Bijji's (Vijay Dan Detha's) stories-that every educated Indian should read-and Komalda's ideas will recall that "the folk" for them is not the German Romanticist idea of the *volk* that potentially constitutes the national culture. For them the folk is the idea of *loka* that has to do with community, but that which can also be potentially subversive of power, of the patriarchal and patrilineal authority of family, caste, clan, kingdom, and



Komal Kothari with Vijay Dan Detha

modern state. I have a hazy recall of a story Komalda once told at the launch of the National Campaign of the Right to Information meeting at Beawar, Rajasthan. It is of the tiger that began to be called *sher* because he devoured the *patwari*, the much maligned land revenue record keeper and the bane of poor villagers! Aruna Roy writes that at the Tilonia meeting when someone commented on the importance of the right hand in Hinduism, Komalda explained that in the potter's art and in the work of the artisan and performer, in general, it is the left hand that is the more important hand, while the right is merely used for the gesture of denial (*Ujala chari*, 10 May 2004).

At Syracuse later that month I broke the news to Nancy Martin who had perhaps been one of the scholars closest to him over the later years. Nancy had been helping him to systematise and consolidate the Rupayan Sansthan archive drawing from what is perhaps the best collection of Mira songs for her own book. We both knew that he did not have long. The end for him came when I was buried in the 1820s records in the British Library. I learnt of it only when I returned a month later. I could do little then, but dedicated a piece I penned for a forthcoming volume on *Muslim portraits* that is titled, "Poor, Untouchable, Muslim and Mirasi: Abdul, the storyteller" to Komal Kothari (1929-2004) "the storyteller of the storytellers."

Far away at Columbia University in May 2004 his American "family" met to pay tribute to him. Ann Gold, anthropologist, folklorist and religionist recalls that Komalda was the reason for her making Rajasthan her fieldwork base. This was at a time when most American scholars would be headed towards either Uttar Pradesh or Tamil Nadu. Ann had met him at Chicago where his conversation beckoned her into possible worlds.

In Hindu cremation ritual the ashes of the body sans *atma* are scattered allowing them to mix with the elements that enable the regeneration of life, water and earth. In the case of Komalda his presence continues in so much of our reflection and writing, contributing to the constant regeneration of the world of ideas. □



Shri Komal Kothari with musicians.



## Life and works of Shri Komal Kothari

**K**omal Kothari (March 4, 1929 - April 20, 2004) is affectionately known to many as *Komalda*. He was an authority on Rajasthani folk traditions. Komal Kothari had multi-disciplinary academic interests, ranging from folk music to Rajasthani cuisine.

Komal Kothari's academic training and early work was in Hindi literature, but soon he developed his interest in folk forms of poetry and narratives. He became the secretary of the Rajasthan Academy of Dance, Drama, and Music. It was here he began his study and collection of folk musical instruments. In 1960, Komal with the help of his friend Vijay Dan Detha founded Rupayan Sansthan in Borunda village, Western Rajasthan.

The aim of their first academic venture relating to folk traditions in Rajasthan, was to explore all aspects of folk life in Borunda village. For the first time in folklore research, Komal Kothari and Vijay Dan Detha set out to develop a holistic understanding of people's lives. They examined not only narratives, epics, songs, riddles, music, drama, and crafts but also religious beliefs and practices, caste compositions, economics, government interactions, village power structures, community desires for development, agricultural practices, land and water use, and much more. Some of their findings were published in the journal *Lok Samskriti*, co-edited by Komal Kothari and Vijay Dan Detha for many years.

Since 1962, a beeline of researchers started camping in Borunda village seeking the assistance and expertise of Rupayan Sansthan. Only in 1971 foreign scholars and researchers from Europe, America, Asia and Australia, equipped with much needed resources encouraged Rupayan Sansthan to expand across Rajasthan.

Komal Kothari meticulously pursued his study on folk music and instruments, oral epics, and folk gods and goddesses. He moved beyond the boundary of his research to explore into the traditional ways of understanding the world.

More importantly Komal Kothari was interested in the process by which oral knowledge is learned, remembered and passed from generation to generation, which is outside formal education systems. Komal Kothari had particularly been interested in documentation, preservation and development of folk music, working with traditional musicians. In order to create awareness

among the new generation and cultivate interest in their native folk tradition, he organised a number of camps and helped them to develop their inherent musical potential.

He also created opportunities for the folk musicians, singers and dancers to perform abroad which indeed drew the attention of the world. This was encouraged by ethnomusicologists, working with Rupayan Sansthan. Their interests were initially academic, which soon transcended to public arena, providing additional forms of patronage for traditional musicians in this 'consumerist' world. This outside exposure has generated a number of collaborative commercial recording and films released in Europe, Japan and India.

.....  
***"All said and done, my work now is related to ethno-mind i.e. how a given society derives generational knowledge without any structural format through practice and experience. This covers all aspects of human life from religion to social organisation, family to society, agriculture to craft and so on. Folklore is a window through which I try to visualise the complexities of human existence based on wisdom and practical life".***  
 .....

### Awards:

- Nehru Fellowship (1977-79)
- Padmashri (April 2, 1983), National Award by President of India
- Fellow of National Academy of Dance, Drama and Music; New Delhi.
- Hakim Khan Suri Award (1989), Mewar Foundation, Udaipur.
- Fie Foundation Award (1990), Ichalkaranji.
- Shrthi Mandal (1992), Jaipur.
- Seropaw (1995), by His Highness of Jodhpur.
- Nahar Samman Puraskar (1996), Rajasthan Welfare Association, Mumbai.
- Padma Bhushan (2004), New Delhi.

### Publications:

- 1972. *Monograph on Langas: a folk musician caste of Rajasthan*. Borunda: Rupayan Press.
- 1977. *Folk Musical Instruments of Rajasthan: a folio*. Borunda: Rupayan Press.

- 1982. The shrine: an expression of social needs. In *Gods of byways: wayside shrines of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat*. Eds. Julia Elliott and David Elliot, 5–31. Oxford: Museum of Modern Art.
- 1989. Performers, gods, and heroes in the oral epics of Rajasthan. In *Oral epics in India*, eds. Stuart H. Blackburn, Peter J. Claus, Joyce B. Flueckiger, and Susan S. Wadley, 102-117. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 1994. Musicians for the people: the Manganiyars of western Rajasthan. In *The Idea of Rajasthan: explorations in regional identity*. Vol. 1, eds. Karine Schomer, Joan L. Erdman, Deryck O. Lodrick, and Lloyd I. Rudolph, 205–237. Columbia, Mo.: South Asia Publications.
- 1995. Patronage and performance. In *Folk, faith, and feudalism: Rajasthan studies*, eds. N.K. Singhi and Rajendra Joshi, 55–66. Jaipur: Rawat publications.
- 1954-55. Editor – *Prerna*, Hindi monthly.
- 1958-60. *Rupam Quarterly* (4 issues), Research Journal.
- 1960-72. *Vain / Lok Samskriti*, Journal on Folk literature.

#### Memberships:

- National Academy of Literature, New Delhi (Member Executive)
- National Academy of Dance, Drama and Music, New Delhi (Member Executive)
- Rajasthan Sangheet Natak Academy, Jodhpur (Chairman)
- Lok Jumbish, Jaipur (Member), Primary Education
- National Folklore Support Centre, Chennai (Chairman)
- Indian Institute of Crafts and Design, Jaipur (Member)
- Key person in Rajasthan Study Group – A cross-cultural and Interdisciplinary research association.
- International Seminars Teaching and Tutoring:
- Folk music: Durham University, UK
- International Music Council, Berkeley, USA
- International Seminar on Oral-epics, Madison, USA
- Commonwealth Institute's Music Village, London
- Exhibition and Lectures on Gods and Goddesses at Museum of Modern art Oxford (1982)
- Folklore of Gulf countries, Doha, Qatar
- SAARC Seminar on documentation, Islamabad, Pakistan (1987)



Shri Komal Kothari demonstrating Rajasthani Pupperty at Kheratrambhat's house.

- 1400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Borbad, Dushambe, Tajikistan
- International Pupperty conference, by ICCR and SNA, New Delhi
- International Seminar of Flautist (ICCR and SNA), New Delhi
- South-East Asian seminar on audio-video documentation, Japan Foundation, New Delhi (2000)
- Two of Rajasthani (Jaipur) study group-1992 and 1995. Tutoring numerous scholars and students in Ph.D level – visiting from in and outside India.

#### Folk music performances/concerts:

- Holland Festival, Amsterdam with Puppeteers and Epic Singers
- Musee Guimet, Paris with folk musicians
- Edinburgh Festival, UK with folk musicians (Twice)
- International Puppet Festival, Washington, USA
- Soviet Russia (USSR) with folk musicians and dancers (4 times)
- Art Worldwide, UK with folk musicians
- Asian Music Circuit, UK more than 6 times
- Ethnomusicology Dept. of University, UCLA, USA
- Royal Institute of Music, Dublin & Cork, University, Cork, Ireland
- India Festival held in UK, France, USA, USSR and Japan with folk-musicians and dancers etc.
- Music of Royal Courts, BBC, London with musicians, Live performance
- Folk Festival, Islamabad, Pakistan (1989)
- National Centre for Performing Arts, Bombay (1989)
- Asian Music Festival, Hongkong (1990)
- France: Practically every year from 1997-2000
- Participated for three years with ZINGARO, Equestrian Show directed by Bartabas
- UK, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Brazil, Switzerland, Holland etc. from 1999-2000.
- Participated in Yehudi Menuhin foundation program in Belgium with Pandit Ravi Shankarji, 1998
- Visited nearly 30 countries abroad and performed in more than 200 towns abroad



Shri Komal Kothari in the International Workshop on "Documenting Creative Processes of Folklore" Jaisalmer.

#### Academic visits:

- Taught a semester- University of California, Berkeley, USA on oral literature.
- Consultant for committee of folklore for Gulf countries, Doha, Qatar.
- Rajasthan study group, Chicago, USA and Jaipur.
- Music and Costume work for production of Mahabharata by Peter Brook, Paris, France.
- Musical instruments collected by Metropolitan Museum, New York
- "Craftsmen Instruments and Masters of Music" (Embassy of France & Craft Museum, Delhi 1-6 December 2000)
- Bruhaddesi (Festival of Regional music and Seminar- jointly organised by Sangeet Natak Academy and Bhimsen Joshi Chair, Lalit Kala Kandra, University of Pune and Kalachhaya, Pune; 26-30 November 2000)

#### Represented India as folklorist in foreign countries:

- Bulgaria, Poland, France, Hungary and Checkoslovakia – 1973.
- Greece – 1978 (ICCR)
- China (official delegation of music academician) – 1984
- Pakistan: Workshop on preservation on oral traditional SAARC countries (1987)
- USSR: International Symposium in Memory of Borbad – 1990

#### Workshops and Seminars organised by Rupayan Sansthan:

- Professional caste musicians children camp (100 children + 15 young people + 10 senior musicians) in

the year 1987 under the auspicious of CCRT, New Delhi)

- Children Camp – Dec 1999 (60 child musicians + 15 seniors)
- Sarangi and Kamaicha meet with 208 folk instrumentalists in Borunda under the auspicious of NZCC Patiala – 1989
- Bajara Zone Life style Seminar under the auspicious of IGNCA, New Delhi – 1989

#### Documentaries:

- Pabu Story (Walter Story for BBC)
- Oral Epic (George Luneau, France)
- Pabu (Nazrath for BBC)
- LATCHO DORM (Tony Gatlif – Paris)

#### Collaborations:

- Four long play gramophone records with Musee de 'la homme, Paris.
- Two Compact discs with Navras, UK
- Two compact discs with Kings Record, Japan

#### Discography and Cassettes, CD's:

- Langa Musicians with monograph (6 records)
- Manganiar musicians (6 records)
- BANAA Traditional Wedding songs by Langa
- BANAA Traditional Wedding songs by Manganiar
- Tunes and Dunes Vol.I (String Instruments)
- Tunes and Dunes Vol.II (Aero phones)
- Mystic Love (Composition of Meera) Vol.I
- Meera (Composition by Meera) Vol.II ❖



Shri Komal Kothari with his family.

# On Folk Narratives

Komal Kothari

A study of folk narratives can have many, many different directions. One could study the problem of folk motives, or study tale types to internationally put up the narrative into a particular socket – one should choose one direction to work. One works in the field of folk narratives to gather interesting stories, to write and publish them; another decides folktales are very interesting lessons in our jobs as teachers; yet another wants to collect stories and see who tells the story, why, and for whom, as well as the type of social significance or social message it contains. So, there are hundred of ways in which folk narratives can be studied, there is no one fixed way. Some people do not work with folk narratives as a distinct discipline. Rather, they collect whatever folk narratives they find interesting and integrate them in their work.

I believe that whatever one studies, one should try to get the whole out of the whole and from what remains, which is also a whole. This is apparent in folk narratives where even after studying it any number of ways, what will remain is a total whole. There would still be things to be told about it. What I shall talk about folk narratives here is the sum of my experiences after entering the world of folk narratives. The first important factor for me is: who is the narrator? Who is the teller of the tale? I shall list out people of different types of folk narratives with whom we worked in Rajasthan and collected stories. I begin with professional storytellers. They expect some remuneration, some fee, and are professionally engaged in the *job* of storytelling. Shifting from this description, we have an entire class of people known as *bhat*, the genealogists. The role of these people is to keep track of your family line, specifically the male line. There are two types of *bhats* – *mukhavancha bhat* and *pothibancha bhat*. The *mukhavancha bhat* maintain genealogy records orally, not in writing. The *pothibancha bhat* keep a *bahi* or record in which they write down names.

Each family has to pay the *pothibancha bhat* for the writing of their names, without which their names will not be entered into his *bahi* or into the *bhat's* memory. The practice in Rajasthan is that the *bhats* visit families every three years and record in the *bahi* the names of children born, if any, in the families in the interim years. People think that this kind of record of family history is kept only for kings and *jagirdars* and such, but that is not true. Any group in Rajasthan that claims a caste status has to have a genealogist. Today, this institution of recording genealogy is strong in the so-called low caste groups. Most of the art forms, too, are alive today because of this system which somehow or the other, has kept many traditions alive for us.

During their visit, the *bhats* stay for two or three days with a family or in the village and go from house to house. In the evenings, they tell stories. This is actually a full performance – they sit at a designated place, there is an audience comprising men and women, and they use highly ornate speech. There are also various formulae in the storytelling – for example, when they talk about a king, there is a lot of material about the king's appearance, the way he sat on his horse, about what happened to him, the ornaments that he wore. When they talk about a



queen or a heroine, they use many formulae to describe her beauty. There are also ornamented descriptions of horses, camels, of drinking and of the elements.

The *mukhavancha bhats* are only available within the low caste groups. They are generally *nats* or acrobats. All the acrobats that we see on the streets are oral genealogists of other caste groups in Rajasthan. In their practice of genealogy, these *bhats* start with stories about how the birth of the Sun, the Moon and the Trees, how the various activities in society came into existence and how natural phenomena occur. We have recordings of some *mukhavancha bhats* and one can see a relation to the organisation of the *puranas*. *Puranas* have five chapters and the oral genealogists follow exactly the same format while narrating stories. As no society or group will survive without their own mythology, these stories are about low caste people.

Our problem while working was finding the mythology of the low caste people in society. Can their mythology be the same as classical mythology? They too survive on their mythology. Our general reaction was that it would be difficult for them to survive on classical mythology, so what do they have with them? This led us to the institution of the *mukhavancha bhats*. These *mukhavancha*

*bhats* have hundreds of stories to tell in the course of telling the genealogy of people. I shall tell you one about a tribe known as the *rauts*, a small group in the Mewad region. We heard the story inadvertently while passing through the area. There was this acrobatic group reciting the genealogy of the *rauts*. There was a crowd of about five hundred men and women. The story went thus: there was a person named Punia. At that time, nobody knew agriculture. For the first time, Punia sowed the seeds of corn and it turned out to be a success. When he was to harvest his crop, the Sun and the Moon came and said, *Punia, you have grown something and it has turned out well. But would you have been able to do it without us?* Punia says, *No, I would not have been able to.* So they asked for their share in the yield. Punia told them that the whole field was theirs. They moved through the field and saw the beautiful flowers at the top of the corn plant. They also had not seen agriculture; they said they shall take the upper part and the lower part shall belong to Punia. So the sun and the moon got nothing and Punia got the full crop as the corn grows on the middle part of the plants.

Next year, Punia sowed sorghum or *jowar*. Again, the Sun and the Moon came by. They said this time they would take the middle part and Punia can take the upper part. Punia again got all the grain and the Sun and the Moon got none. At this part of the story, the storyteller beat his drum very vigorously and asked if anybody could tell him who is Surya (the Sun) and Chandra (the Moon)? The audience answered in one voice that they were Chandravanshi and Suryavanshi. These were the rulers of that place. In the twelve hours of recording that we have (at Rupayan Sansthan), there are many such tales – if the high caste people listen to them, they will be angry and unhappy. So, one way or the other, a type of a big narrative lore of very important life aspect of lot of people is available at this point. We consider both types of *bhats* as professional storytellers – they prepare themselves for the job, the particular way of storytelling is transmitted to them, they learn it, and narrate it. So, *bhats* form one group of storytellers. The second group is made up of the known professional storytellers. But we found in

Rajasthan that these people mostly work at night – they have to work for the entire night and they have a lot of free time in between. When the people gather before them, they tell stories to pass the time. Not everybody can tell these stories, there are a few people in the village who specialise in narrating them. And they are always long – the stories last for an hour or two. Similarly, when people in the villages are sitting and doing nothing, waiting for something or the other, they will ask the storyteller from that place to narrate a story and he would do so. These are very compact stories. Again, these storytellers also use heightened speech as well as theatricality, a sort of organised performing situation.

The third situation is when we ask any person to tell a story, he says that he does not know. Have you listened to something? He says no, I have not. But the same person, if some occasion happens, would tell a story to establish his point. Out of many stories that came to mind, I tell you this story.

.....

***Every child hears stories. As far as rural Rajasthan is concerned, no child grows up without stories.***

.....

Somebody has taken a loan from another person and he was unable to repay. In Indian situations, when a person takes a private loan, it is repaid even in fourteen generations or twenty generations; they do not feel totally free until they repay the loan. The loan, indigenously given, is on exorbitant interest. I might have taken a loan of Rs. 200 and I might have paid Rs. 2,000 or Rs. 20,000 on interest but yet another Rs. 2,000 might be left to repay. This is the situation today, I do not know about any other parts of India, but it is so in Rajasthan. So, people feel that if we have taken a loan from you, we would repay by washing in the milk, and this would be the expression they use.

So, this is the situation for the person who has taken the loan. And then, somebody would come up with a story. The story would be: a person who took a loan died and the person who gave the loan also died. The person who took the loan was reborn as an elephant and the person who gave the loan was reborn as a bull. Both of them are in the same kingdom. It so happened that one day, the elephant became mad and started killing people and rummaging through the kingdom. So, the king offered half of the kingdom to any person who would be able to tame this elephant. Everybody was afraid of the mad elephant but the bull told the peasant who owned him, *Let me go. I shall go and defeat him.* The peasant was sceptical but allowed the bull to try. As soon as the elephant saw the person who had given him the loan in the form of a bull, he ran away. A number of stories are told in this





Shri Komal Kothari showing bowed instrument to his friend Mr. Yassar Numan, folklorist and ethnomusicologist from Islamabad.

way to establish some point or the other. But these stories will never come to us if you ask them to tell a story. Most of our collections are from my friend who works, writes and publishes folktales – he has published fourteen volumes of folktales collected from various places. Most

.....

***Most of the time when I am in my village, I do not wear a watch. I do not even know the date or the day. It is not needed there. But when I come to Jodhpur, date does matter.***

.....

stories actually come from situations where the storytellers try to make a point. When we were living with them in the village, such situations would arise. We see a lot of proverbs used in similar situations. Most of the proverbs actually have stories behind them – we call them proverbial tales. Let me tell you a story that comes to mind: there is a proverb in Rajasthani that translates to, *I am the person who can say no, who are you to say no*. This is used in a number of situations. Proverbs, like words, don't have a single meaning, and they are used according to the context and give meaning to that particular situation and the context is never the same. The story in this case is that of an old woman who had gone to the jungle to collect firewood. As she was coming home with a heavy load on her head, a *sadhu* passing that way saw her and said, *you are an old lady and you are carrying so much weight. Give me the load; I shall carry it to your home*. She appreciated his gesture and said, *carry it for me, and when we reach home, I shall give you something for it*. When they reached her place, she went inside and did not come out because then she would have to give him something for helping her bring the wood. Meanwhile, the old woman's daughter-in-law came out and the *sadhu* asked her for something. She said, *No, we*

*would not give you anything*. Then the angry mother-in-law came out and asked, *what right did you have to say no? Only I have the right to say no*. Hence the above-mentioned proverb.

There is another proverb, *Even when a doomani weeps, there is some melody in it*. (A *doomani* is a woman from the musician community). But the proverb is not restricted to women and musicians. For example, somebody meets me and I immediately start talking about folklore, and even if he or she talks about something else, I bring the conversation back to folklore. The person might recount that whenever you meet Komal, he talks about one thing only. And then the person might quote this proverb. Then there are the jokes that are prevalent in hundreds of ways in the villages. Some are honourable; some can't be talked about freely. These again fall into the category of narrative. And then we have the women's narratives of stories. The women tell stories to their children. In this way, we work a little more in detail. Again the problem that comes up is about who is the bearer of the tradition, as was discussed in our first lecture by Henry Glassie. In my childhood, too, I heard stories – if I stress my memory, I might be able to remember a few, may be in a skeletal form. Every child hears stories. As far as rural Rajasthan is concerned, no child grows up without stories. It is as important as mother's milk. But a child who never retells these stories is not the bearer of the tale. The other important thing to remember is that when women tell stories to their children, it is an adult addressing a child. The format of the story is adult format, not children's format. Therefore, the child would never be able to express himself or herself through that story. Up to the age of seven, we found that children never tell stories to other children or to anybody else, so they never become the bearers of the stories.

What I tell you now is absolutely personal. Whenever I try to work in any particular field, whether it is folk narratives, or songs or gods and goddesses, the first thing I do is to do it in my family and try to see the situation there and try to ascertain because I can ask them hundreds of questions in hundreds of ways and I would get some kind of reply or no reply at all. I started trying to remember stories I'd heard in my childhood. I was brought up in my maternal family. I mostly grew there and it was in the Mewad and Udaipur region.

Only one story comes to mind, and my maternal aunt told me that one. I remember we were a lot of boys of the same age in my group and we would ask her to tell the story again and again and therefore it might have remained in my memory. The story was simple and short. There was a pair of birds. They decided to put up a swing on a well. The birds used to swing on it. But it was made of very thin thread and the thin thread broke. She never said anything more than that. But we always felt sorry for this pair of birds. After a very long time, when I was working on folktales, this story came back to me. By this time I was about fifty-five years old. When I retold the



story to myself, I realised that the birds did not fall in the well but they flew away. As soon as I realised that the birds flew, it was as if a great burden had been taken off my heart.

I enquired why people who tell the story do not immediately tell the moral of the story. This puts up a very different attitude to the women's storytelling. They would never, never tell the moral of story to the child – they will leave it to the child to grow and understand not only one moral but different shades of meaning out of a story. This is what was happening in the traditional society. But when we tried to bring these stories to the schools, we found that we begin with the moral of the story, and then tell the story. Or after telling the story, we try to explain the moral. Not only that, the children never retold the stories they had been told. The format was such that it was not possible for the child to come out with the story; like the lullaby that is sung to the child by an adult and cannot be sung by a child to another child. Nowadays, we tell a child a story in the night before sleeping and in the morning, at breakfast, we ask the child what the lion did and what the fox did. If the child is able to answer, we feel very happy that the child has learnt the story. But this was not the purpose in traditional society – to examine whether the child knows the story or not. Now, we learned that no child under the age of eight or nine ever gets a story that has to do with religion. It may appear in some families – may be in Brahmin families. But, in general, only after the child is seven does religion appear in stories. The child never retells the story. So, again, who is the bearer of the tale? In the case of the professional and other storytellers, they have a particular type of recruitment for particular types of tradition. They learn the stories from those sources. But these stories that women narrate, how do they move on?

We found that mothers in rural areas are never storytellers. We also found that the grandmother does not tell stories if the grandfather is alive. Then we looked into the way of life in which the mother is engaged for the evening – prepare food, wash things, ready the beds, do the things necessary for the next morning and so on. This is the time when children would sleep and she had no time to attend to the child. So, she never told stories. Most adults, when asked to remember bedtime stories they'd heard in their childhood, would say, *who will tell us stories? Mother would give us a good slap and ask us to go to sleep.* But this is not true. They were told stories. They need to be goaded again and again to remember something.

In such a situation in rural areas, we found that if there was a widow in the family, she is the one who tells the stories. She is usually the one who looks after the children in the family after the husband's death. She is in contact with the children all the time. Any family we visit, we learn about the family members. If there is a widow, we ask her to tell us stories. She is able to tell us many,

many tales. So, here is the bearer of a very different generic type of a story. We ask these widows the source of these stories. They say they heard the stories from their families. But they had also collected stories later on. When asked if she told the stories when her husband was alive, the answer is no. Another thing becomes important: when a professional storyteller talks to other people, he is professionally prepared and tells the story to many people. But it is different in stories narrated in houses. For example, if a mother tells a story to her five children – say, three daughters and two sons– all five may not come and listen to the story. They may be of different ages. And even if all of them are present, only one or two might be listening. And it is a personal, conversational mode of storytelling. A different type of language is used – the theme, the way of talking, how the story begins and ends. This is the type of stories children hear from women in the family.

Then there is another genre of stories narrated by women. These are the *vrat kathas*. There are certain fasting days in a year, certain time cycles, in which they eat only once a day or not eat throughout the day. They have to observe

.....

***Unfortunately, in Indian folklore studies, we do not see the proper understanding of the ballad type. People only talk about the epic type where there is a long narration and the canvas is bigger.***

.....

certain rituals, such as they'd eat only after the moon rises. The *vrat* stories are told on these occasions. The same story is narrated every year for that particular *vrat*, but there are variations according to the region. This type of storytelling led us to another type of problem. How is



Shri Komal Kothari discussing with senior Langa and Manganiar folk musicians.



time divided in a given society or group? My wife and I use different calendars. In her calendar, it does not hold that one has to get the salary on the first day of the month or that Sundays or second Saturdays are holidays. She is always working and there are no holidays for her. She lives according to the Indian calendar, which is the *tithi*. She has to have a calendar of her own in which she sees the eighth, ninth days of the fortnight or that the eleventh is cut off, only twelfth day is there and on these calculations, the *vrat* day is determined.

The format of *vrat* stories is that a situation arises in which a family gets into difficulty because somebody in the family was not observing this *vrat*. They have to face a lot of tragedies, but finally the gods would come when this particular *vrat* is observed, and everything would be alright. So the *vrat* is something to please the deity. The factor that became important for us in the study of the *vrats* is the time divided among the women's groups of Indian society? They might have a weekly *vrat*, a Monday *vrat* or a Saturday *vrat* – it will appear every week. Some *vrats* are done, say, on the eleventh of every fortnight, so

.....

***Most of the time, I feel that what is our world but a narrative. Can we survive without stories?***

.....

there would be two *vrats* in a month. Others are observed on *amavasya* or the night of no moon. Then, the *vrat* would be once a month. Then we have *vrats* that move in two-monthly, three-monthly, four-monthly, six-monthly or yearly cycle. Finally, we found that the *vrat* is the absolute clue to the working timeframe for the women. It is this that keeps them aware of what we call *date*. Most of the time when I am in my village, I do not wear a watch. I do not even know the date or the day. It is not needed there. But when I come to Jodhpur, date does matter. So, the *vrat* stories are to be looked into in conjunction with the *tithis*. There are also many folktales that refer to this type of time division in people's lives.

So far, the narratives I have been talking about are the prose narratives and normal speech. There are sung narratives, as well. There are ballads. Unfortunately, in Indian folklore studies, we do not see the proper understanding of the ballad type. People only talk about the epic type where there is a long narration and the canvas is bigger. But, ballads receive the least possible cognisance. Among the women's songs are hundreds of ballads. In one of the studies we are conducting now about women's songs, we came across a particular ceremony called night-wake (*ratijaga*) done in families at childbirth, marriage and death, in which these songs are sung. Some of the songs are lyrical, but some are total narratives. These songs contain a story line, but there is no mention of the name of the place, or names of characters and there is no time prescribed in the story.

One of the most popular songs is the *panihari*. Anywhere in Rajasthan, if you request, he or she would sing this song. *Panihari* is a narrative song. The story line is something like this: A man riding a camel came to a water hole, *nadi* as we call it, where anyone could come and drink water. A girl is also drinking water there, and the camel rider asks her some questions and praises her beauty. The girl gets angry that a stranger should talk to her in this manner and goes home ruffled. The man follows her. Reaching home, she complains to her mother that the man has been harassing her. Her mother comes out, sees the man and finally says that this is the man to whom the girl has been betrothed. This is the story – no place is mentioned, no names of the persons.

We asked the people what other songs they sing about in the *night-wake* (*ratijaga*) ceremony, and they said they sing about gods and goddesses. We came across sixteen songs about gods and goddesses. We didn't get into these gods and goddesses, but we went into the details of the whole-night sessions. We found that right up to midnight, people would sing songs related to gods and goddesses. After that, they would sing *singar* songs, or songs of romance. One story comes in here: A girl is being married off. Her father wants to give her *dahej* (dowry). He tells her to take gold, take cattle, take buffaloes, take ornaments or take money. All the time, the girl says she would not take any of these, that she wants only one thing. When the father asks her what it is, she asks for her beautiful maidservant who works for the family, with whom the father had got involved. So, to save her mother and to give her mother a good life, the girl asks for the maidservant. The father says okay but warns her that she has to be careful. The girl insists, and so she takes the maidservant along with her. The new bride prescribed a lot of rules for the maidservant; the maid was not allowed to take a bath everyday, she could not wear good clothes or ornaments nor could she wear any makeup. And she kept a strict watch on the maid to see that the maid followed all this. But one day she was invited to attend a *night-wake* (*ratijaga*) ceremony that she could not avoid. Before going, she again instructed the maid not to do anything that would

make her look beautiful. At the ceremony at around midnight when she looked at her palace she saw lights in the part of the palace where she slept. She rushed back immediately and found her husband involved with the maidservant.

These types of stories come in the nature of a ballad. Why are they sung? What is their message? This is difficult for me to discuss now.

In another situation, another story is about a girl who gets married and goes to her in-laws' house. The next morning she goes to a small lake near her house to fetch water and she sees a peacock. When she tries to fill her pot, the peacock comes and puts its feathers at that spot and does not allow her to fill water, and says, *you are a beautiful bride. Why don't you come with me? I, too, am beautiful.* The bride decides to elope with the peacock. But her younger sister-in-law, who has come with the bride, goes back and tells everyone that the bride has eloped with the peacock. The people pursue her, kill the peacock, and bring the new bride back home. In the evening, she is served food. After she finishes eating, they inform her that she has eaten the peacock's meat. This is another *night-wake (ratijaga)* song. We now have more than forty songs in our archive. As far as the narrative part is concerned, these ballad types have not been studied generically in any part of India.

We have hundreds and hundreds of ballads. In our collection, we would have five hundred. Otherwise, most of the time, these stories rarely get into folk songs and they fall into categories other than merely folk songs. The narrative element starts guiding them in a different way.

Lets come to oral epics, again narrative. There are different types of oral epics. We have oral epics where there is a long scroll, nearly two hundred episodes of the epic painted on it – a man and woman sing before the particular scroll and tells the story of *Pabu*. The musical instrument played along with it is the *Ravanhatha*. Then there is another scroll that goes by the name of Bagdawat or Dev Narayan, and the instrument played with it is the *jantar*. These stories are very long. In our recordings, we have about five, six versions of the *Pabu* story. None of them moves for less than twenty to thirty two hours. The Bagdawat moves from thirty to forty eight hours.

There is this particular epic of Heer and Ranjha, sung in the eastern parts of Rajasthan like Alwar and Bharatpur. It is also found in Haryana, in Agra and in Manipur. As soon as I say Heer Ranjha, everybody thinks of a romantic tale. A Sufi poet Wajid Ali Shah took this story and wrote it in the Sufi mould. That is the Heer-Ranjha story that became famous from Punjab. It is sung for not spreading the cattle epidemic. There is a particular disease that affects cattle, buffaloes and horses, in which the foot splits into two. It is contagious and moves quickly like an epidemic and affects thousands of animals. In this region, the people would say that when such an epidemic occurs, we do the *patha* of Heer-Ranjha. Now this *patha* is very peculiar.

Usually it is the *patha* of Ramayan or the *patha* of Mahabharat or the *patha* of Geeta – only religious treatises are known as *paths*. But here, they talk about the *patha* of Heer Ranjha. This story is sung for this purpose by professional musicians of a particular caste of that region as well as by peasants. An important group of this kind is the *jogi*. This leads to another problem. The area that I am talking about is Mathura, Brindavan, Bharatpur and Alwar. This is the area of the cows, the area of Krishna. But for curing the cows today, Krishna is not the effective god. So, who can cure a cow or a buffalo today? It is Ranjha. Ranjha was Mahiwal, which means *mahish paal*, the buffalo-keeper. He became the saviour of cows and buffaloes. He is also a flute player like Krishna. Then there is another situation. Which are the societies that consume the milk of buffaloes. If you go to Manipur, Meghalaya, China or Tibet, the people there do not consume buffalo milk. Here, the buffalo is mainly a sacrificial animal. Gradually, we found that we can divide even the peasant groups depending on whether they rear cows or buffaloes. Now, we have started talking about buffalo culture and cow culture. So, this Heer-Ranjha is sung in a particular way and this version is not well known. It is very different from the Wajid Ali Shah's version.

In the same category comes the tradition of Dewal or Pandav or Mahabharat stories. But except for the names and characters, the stories have nothing to do with the Mahabharat. All stories of Dewal or Garath or Pandav actually begin after the end of Mahabharat. A new situation turns up, a new story unfolds, while the characters remain the same. These type of stories are called *Pandavon ki Katha*, *Pandavon ki Phaliyan* and *Pandun ke Kade*. They run absolutely parallel to Mahabharat situations.

One story is known as the *Draupad Puran*. The Great War is finished. The Pandavas are in one camp and the Kauravas in the other, and everything is fine. In the Pandava camp, Draupadi arrives. As soon as she enters, Yudhishtra gets up and touches her feet. Bheema gets angry and says that whatever Draupadi is, Yudhishtra is her husband. Why does he touch her feet? Yudhishtra tries to calm him down. But Bheema wants an explanation. Knowing Bheema's anger, Yudhishtra does not want to get into an argument. Instead, he asks Bhima if he has heard that in a particular forest there is a demon that comes every night and destroys the people there. Bheema immediately gets interested and wants to know where the demon is. Yudhishtra tells him where the forest is and tells him that the demon would come at midnight and that Bheema was to destroy it. Bheema goes to the forest, climbs a tall, thick tree and waits for the demon. But at midnight, he sees a big group of people who clean a spot, spread beautiful, costly carpets and arrange chairs made of gold, silver and precious stones. All the gods and goddesses start coming and they take their respective places. Bheema, who is watching from the tree, sees that a lady arrives and occupies the main chair. The lady is none other than Draupadi.

As soon as Draupadi takes her seat, the gods start complaining that she had taken birth in the world to destroy the Pandavas. But the Mahabharat is over and the Pandavas are still alive. She had taken a vow in Vaikunt to eliminate the Pandavas. Draupadi admits this fact and says that she could not do it because whenever she said anything, the five brothers accepted it like a law. So, she did not get a chance to be angry with them or do anything to them. But she asks the gods and goddesses not to worry and says that only that morning, Bheema tried to question Yudhishtra for the first time. Now the time has come for her to destroy them. The story goes on – it's a long story. But it adds a whole frame of such a story to the Pandava tale that moves on a very different line. The narratives that I describe are what I could remember at this moment. There are many other ways in which

narratives are told. Most of the time, I feel that what is our world but a narrative. Can we survive without stories?

To conclude, let me tell you a story. There was a king and he wanted to be told a story that would tire him of saying *yes*, what we call the *hoonkara*. He promised half of his kingdom to any storyteller who could do this to him. One storyteller approached. He started by saying that a peasant had a big house and grain was stored in one part. The king said yes. Then a bird came and took one seed and went off. The king said yes. Then he said the bird came and took another seed, and then another. The king said alright the bird came and took away all the seeds. The storyteller said the bird came and took away all the grain in the granary and I shall proceed with the story. So, I end here – the story would never end. □

## The theme of October 2004 issue of *Indian Folklife* is Genre, Community, and Event

**GUEST EDITOR — Dr. ROMA CHATTERJI**

Department of Sociology,  
Delhi University, Delhi - 110 007.  
Email: chatterjiroma@hotmail.com

Since Bakhtin wrote his classic essay 'genre', it has become one of the key concepts in the analysis of culture (Bakhtin 1986). Thus Flueckiger (1996) shows that how gendered claims over particular musical genres may create alternate forms of community defined on the basis of their performative traditions. In a somewhat different vein Raheja and Gold (1994) problematize the notion of domestic community through a study of women's songs that subvert patriarchal relationships within the kinship domain. Expressive genres offer particular perspectives on the world – not only in terms of the content of the utterance but also in the style in which it is enunciated. The concept of genre allows us to problematize the view that culture emerges within a consensual community that demands obedience to a set of norms and procedures. By using the concept of genre in his analysis of language Bakhtin emphasizes the active role of speakers as agents in the selection, use and institutionalization of language. Genres, therefore, are self-conscious institutions mediating between individual intention and collective tradition. Also, since different expressive genres embody specific ideological positions and reach out to a virtual public, performers, through their choice of genre, stake their claims to membership in particular communities.

However, the enactment of a genre – the event of performance – also functions as a counterpoint to community, breaking its boundaries, reversing stable relationships of tradition and power. The intention that motivates the choice of a particular genre often functions as an 'originary event' creating new possibilities for community formation by appropriating the voice and vocabulary of those who claim to speak on behalf of tradition and community and turning it against them.

By juxtaposing the terms from different discursive contexts - genre, community and event – we may be able to reveal unexpected dimensions of social life and culture. Culture not as a given but as a making in which we all participate, whether as scholars or as members of society.

(Articles for October 2004, *Indian Folklife*, are most welcome, which can be sent to Dr. Roma Chatterji, Guest Editor and copied to the Editor: [info@indianfolklore.org](mailto:info@indianfolklore.org) / [muthu@md2.vsnl.net.in](mailto:muthu@md2.vsnl.net.in))



# Here to Eternity, on a magic Jharu

By Shikha Jhingan

Shikha Jhingan is an independent documentary film maker based in Delhi. Email: shikhaj@vsnl.com

\*\*\*\*\*

I met Komal Kothari in a conference in Delhi only in 2000. But this brief meeting was to be followed soon by a much more intense interaction during a fifteen day workshop in Jaisalmer on *Documenting Creative Processes of Folklore* organized by the National Folklore Support Centre. Though the workshop was being conducted by well known academics in the discipline of folklore, Komal Da, a non-academic stood tall amongst them. Armed with his phenomenal knowledge of Rajasthan and its oral traditions, Komal Da would often intersperse his sessions with folk tales, personal memoirs and anecdotes. The breadth of his knowledge ranged from oral epics, folk instruments, puppeteers, folk gods and goddesses to women's songs, water harvesting and cultural geography of Rajasthan.

At that time, I was working on a film on the Mirasans of Punjab, women of the Mirasi community who sing songs on life cycle rituals for their patrons. I was carrying a rough cut of my documentary film 'Born to Sing' and was looking for an opportunity to show it to him. When I mentioned this to Komal Da on the second last day of the workshop he insisted that he would like to see it that night. I was quite sure that he would have forgotten all about it but when I went to his room that night, the VCR had been hooked up and he was waiting for me. Komal Da loved the songs sung by the Mirasans. We could see the similarities in the tradition of the Mirasis and the Manganiar caste musicians. Both were Muslim communities and while the patrons of Mirasis were Sikhs, that of the Manganiars were Hindus. I had worked on my film with perhaps the last of the Mirasans who could sing professionally. In Rajasthan too there was a retreat of professional women caste musicians from the public sphere.

I told him that what amazed me is the fact that none of the Mirasans are trained musicians and some of them often go *besura* yet their music is so rich and sounds so

different from the music of other women. I had recorded songs sung by many non-Mirasi women during my field trips to Malwa region of Punjab. Sometimes the repertoire of the two overlapped but the Mirasans' style was breathtakingly different. This was despite the fact that Sugran, the leading protagonist of my film had never received formal training. 'It is the control over their breathing that makes all the difference to the quality of their music' said Komal Da.

Komal Da's sustained work with the Langas and Manganiars had brought them to the international festival circuits and he was keen to ensure the continuation of this tradition by organizing camps for the younger boys of the community. Interestingly, Langas and Manganiars did not follow any formal system of training for the younger generation. This is unlike the gharana tradition in classical music which is based on a formal *guru shishya parampara*. Despite this, the Langas and Manganiars have been carrying on this tradition for so many generations. 'So, the transmission occurs in a strangely non pedagogical manner'. To illustrate this Komal Da gave me the example of Shamsu, who had learnt to play the *Jadi ki Sarangi* from the great Lakha Khan Manganiyar. Shamsu's training was facilitated by a Sangeet Natak Academy Scholarship and the young Manganiar boy was to learn from Lakha by living with him for a year. But it was soon felt that this training would be a complete waste of time, for both the teacher and the pupil. Shamsu didn't really turn out to be an ideal student and to add to his woes Lakha had no patience with him. He would often lose his cool and beat up the boy for not following what he was trying to teach on the instrument.

Many years later, a strange twist of events had a big surprise in store for Komal Da. He needed a Sarangi player for a program and the only person available was Shamsu. Reluctantly, Komal Da sent for him and asked him to perform. That evening Shamsu's Sarangi played magic, and too in Lakha's inimitable style! Shamsu had become Shamsu Khan Manganiyar, who would carry on

with the tradition of Lakha and pass on the baton to many more Shamsu's in the near future.

Komal Da spent years trekking villages on foot with a meager budget documenting folk songs, oral epics, story tellers, oral genealogists and professional caste musicians. Most notable amongst these are the rare recordings with dalit and tribal musicians like the Meghwals and Bhils and the nomadic communities of Rajasthan. The Rupayan Sansthan boasts of five thousand hours of recordings deeply embedded in the cultural memory of these diverse communities. Through this rigorous process of documentation Komal Da was able to recover the narrative lore of the lower caste communities' often carrying expressions of biting satire and irreverence towards the powerful ruling castes of Rajasthan, in a live performative context.

Komal Da had spread the word that if anyone came across good musicians/performers in their region they should bring them to Rupayan with their instruments. But one of the instruments that Komal Da disliked immensely was the harmonium. For him the harmonium symbolized the demise of the traditional instruments heralding the onset of standardized, uniform musical expression. This was at a time when folk instruments like the *Kamaicha*, *Jadi Ki Sarangi* and *Sindhi Sarangi* were slowly getting eclipsed, only to be found in folklore museums and antique collectors. Those that were available were in a state of disrepair and skilled craftsmen who made these instruments were no longer available. He realized that his work with the younger Langa and Manganiar boys would hold no meaning without the revival of these instruments. This became a major concern and finally Komal Da was instrumental in getting together a group of skilled carpenters, musicians and musicologists to successfully devise the construction of these instruments.

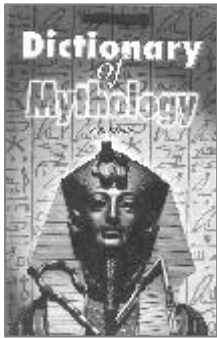
Komal Da's multi layered work in the field of folklore, ethnomusicology and social history was based on his deep understanding of people's knowledge systems. I often noticed a certain anxiety he had for pedagogical learning. Even though he never spoke against the need for formal schooling or education, his experience led him to believe that formal education leads to a deep loss of a certain kind of knowledge based on cultural and ecological diversity. "You go to a village, ask a young school going lad to name the variety of grasses that one can find in his village. At the most, he will be able to name two or three. But in the same village, you ask a

boy who has never been to school and he will be able to name at least nine or ten. My grand mother could identify about ninety-five colours while today we can hardly name about twenty with the seven primaries remaining as the core." Perhaps these concerns led him to conceptualise the setting up of a unique ethnographic museum in Jodhpur.

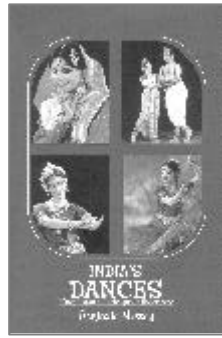
In his last days, Komal Da was intensely involved in the setting up of this museum of his dream that aims to have objects of daily use rather than those of historic or exotic significance. The museum has been designed to relate stories of the creative ingenuity of the common folk by tracing the history of tangible cultural objects and the role they played in their daily life. The first object that is being explored in this unique effort is the *jharu* or broom stick. Komal Da's eyes were smiling when he explained the concept behind this museum once again drawing connections between land, water, agriculture, objects, social hierarchies and forms of expression. He spoke at length about the different varieties of grass that the brooms are made of. What is the caste identity of people who make these *jharus*? What about the women? Who collects the grass and who makes the *jharus* in the family? What about the brooms that are used by the municipality sweepers? What are the tools that are used to tame the wild grass and mould it to the form of a *jharu*? Where are these *jharus* sold? How much time is required to make each *jharu*? Each question brought us to the social, cultural and economic fabric of Rajasthan. A simple *jharu* had created a fascinating labyrinth in Komal Da's mind!

In January 2004, I heard that Komal Da was not keeping too well and wanted to see me. As his health kept deteriorating, he was shifted to a hospital in Jaipur. I decided to take the morning Shatabdi and visit him. His hospital suite had been turned into a virtual office. I could see that a DVD player had been hooked up to the television. There were six acrobat groups in Rajasthan and he was keen that the Rupayan Sansthan should make films on each of them exploring issues of patronage, transmission and performance in a public sphere. He wanted me to steer the project and showed me the video documentation of two of them that afternoon. "I do not have so much time, we should finish this by September," said Komal Da. But September was too far. On April 20 Komal Da breathed his last. ❖

First Published in Tehelka, June 5, 2004



*Dictionary of Mythology*  
Compiled by Manish Bhatia  
& Geeta Saxena  
Edited by S.K. Bhatia  
New Delhi:  
Gita Enterprises,  
2002, Pages 182  
ISBN 81-87877-02-2



*India's Dances: Their History,  
Technique & Repertoire*  
by Reginald Massey  
New Delhi:  
Abhinav Publications  
2004, Pages 316  
ISBN 81-7017-434-1



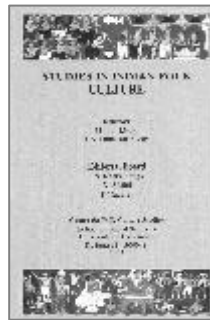
*Oorthaiva Vazhipadam  
Vizhiakaloom (Worship and  
Festivals of Village Deities)*  
(Collection of Research Papers)  
Editors Sheela Asirvatham  
and A. Papa  
Madurai: Project on Gender  
- Folklore and Tribals  
Katie Wilcox Educational  
Association, Lady Doak  
College Campus,  
Page 183 + 9



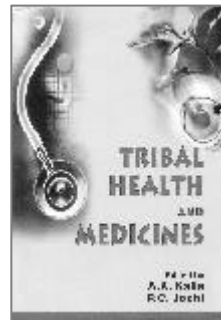
*Tamilzha Natupura Kaivinai  
Kalaigal*  
(Folk Crafts of Tamilnadu)  
(Collection of Research Papers)  
Editors Sheela Asirvatham and  
A. Papa  
Madurai: Centafore Publication,  
Madurai Kamaraj University  
Page 143 + 17



*Religion and Subaltern  
Agency*  
by G Patrick  
Chennai: Department of  
Christian Studies,  
University of Madras  
2003, Pages xiii + 223



*Studies in Indian Folk  
Culture (Journal)*  
Editors M.L.K. Murty  
Y.A. Sudhakar Reddy  
Hyderabad:  
Centre for Folk Culture  
Studies, School of Social  
Sciences, University of  
Hyderabad, 2004



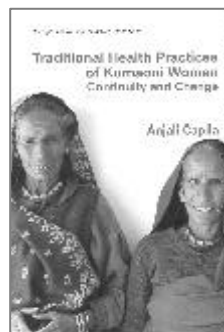
*Tribal Health and Medicines*  
Edited by  
A.K. Kalla and P.C. Joshi  
New Delhi: Concept  
Publishing Company  
2004, Pages xxi + 447  
ISBN 81-8069-139-X



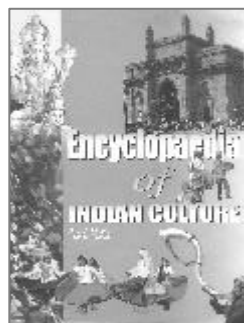
*Paŷŷle Paŷamé  
Kodava Culture-Folksongs  
and Traditions*  
Compiled by Nadikerianda  
Chinnappa  
Translated by Boverianda  
Nanjamma and Chinnappa  
New Delhi: Rupa & Co  
2003, Pages xxxviii + 718  
ISBN 81-291-0240-4



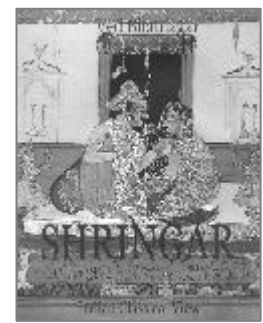
*Proverbs and Folklore of  
Kumaun and Garhwal*  
Edited by  
Pandit Ganga Datt Upreti  
New Delhi: IGNC, A,  
Concept Publishing  
Company  
2003, Pages xxviii + 400  
ISBN 81-7022-894-8



*Traditional Health Practices of  
Kumaoni Women  
Continuity and Changes*  
by Anjali Capila  
New Delhi: IGNC, A,  
Concept Publishing  
Company  
2003, Pages xxiii + 362  
ISBN 81-8069-146-2



*Encyclopaedia of Indian  
Culture*  
Edited by  
Dr. P.N. Chopra and  
Dr. Prabha Chopra  
New Delhi: Reliance  
Publishing House,  
2003, Pages xx + 398  
ISBN 81-7510-157-1



*Shringar—The Ras Raj  
(A Classical Indian View)*  
by Ved Bhatnagar  
New Delhi: Abhinav  
Publication  
2004, Pages 119  
ISBN 81-70174-25-2

**Indian Ocean Folktales:**  
Madagascar, Comoros, Mauritius,  
Reunion, Seychelles  
- Lee Haring



vi + 146 pages, Paperback  
Rs. 200 (India) / US \$ 07.00  
(Other Countries)  
ISBN 81-901481-0-9

**Folklore and Historiography:**  
Some Theoretical Implications in the Context of  
Medieval and Modern History of North-East India  
Birendranath Datta



x + 132 pages, Appendices,  
Bibliography, Paperback Rs. 200  
(India) / US \$ 07.00 (Other Countries)  
ISBN 81-901481-1-7

**Voicing Folklore: Careers,  
Concerns and Issues:**  
Interviewed and Edited by  
M.D.Muthukumaraswamy



xii + 257 pages, Paperback  
Rs. 400 (India) / US \$ 20  
(Other Countries)  
ISBN 81-901481-2-5

**NFSC  
Folk Festival 2002**



Rs. 150 (India)  
US \$ 07.00  
(Other Countries)

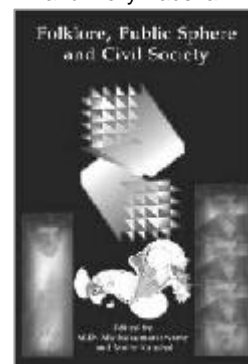
**Khasi Jaintia Folklore  
(Context, Discourse and History)**  
by Soumen Sen



152 pages, Appendices, Bibliography,  
Paperback Rs. 200 (India) US \$ 07.00  
(Other Countries) ISBN 81-901481-3-3

**Folklore, Public Sphere and  
Civil Society**

Edited by M.D. Muthukumaraswamy  
and Molly Kaushal



327 pages, Paperback Rs.400 (India)  
US \$ 20 (Other Countries)  
ISBN 81-901481-4-1

**INDIAN FOLKLORE RESEARCH JOURNAL (IFRJ)**



Volume 1, Issue 1, December 2001

Contributors: Soumen Sen,  
Susan S. Wadley, Nita Mathur,  
Pravina Shukla, Ileana Citaristi,  
Desmond L. Kharmawphlang,  
V. Bharathi Harishankar, Lee Haring,  
Guy Poitevin, Aarti Kawlra,  
Ludwig Pesch  
ISSN 0972-6462



Volume 1, Issue 2, December 2002

Contributors:  
Betsy Taylor,  
D.K. Bora, Heda Jason,  
Paul D. Greene, Balvant Jani,  
Guy Poitevin, Sabita Radhakrishna,  
Anita Cherian, S.Theodore Baskaran  
ISSN 0972-6462



Volume 1, Issue 3, December 2003

Contributors:  
Hanne M. de Bruin, Mathew  
Varghese, Bindu Ramachandran,  
Manjunatha Bevinakatti, Guy  
Poitevin, Harald Tams-Lyche,  
Kailash Kumar Mishra  
ISSN 0972-6462

**Subscription**  
India: Rs. 150 for  
single issue  
(Rs.450 for 3  
issues)  
Other Countries:  
US \$ 10  
(\$ 30 for 3 issues)

**TO GET OUR  
PUBLICATIONS  
send DD / IMO  
drawn in favour  
of  
NATIONAL FOLKLORE  
SUPPORT CENTRE,  
payable at  
Chennai (India)**