Veritas: A Multidisciplinary Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities
ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

Idiosyncratic Attributes of Audio Visual Maharashtra Theatre Folk Art Form '*Tamasha*': An In-Depth Analysis from the Social Anthropological Perspective

Dr.Rihana Sayyed, Assistant Professor
Institute of Indian and Foreign Languages, MGM University
Tanveer Ahemad, Associate Professor
College of Journalism and Mass Communication, MGM University

Abstract

Tamasha Folk Theater Art Form is a unique style of artistic expression that shows the real cultural traditions of the state of Maharashtra, India. The present comprehensive analysis will be helpful in exploring unique attributes of Tamasha art form with highlighting its unprecedented fusion of entertainment and social issues. Tamasha is known for its dynamic performances, narrative techniques, dance, singing, criticism on the contemporary social topics, innovative methodologies of storytelling, use of music etc. to showcase real portrayal of the society that deeply connected with not only ancient generations but still able to connect with current generations too but with minor development in the style of performances. The importance and endurance of Tamasha cannot be denied within the populous realm of Indian Performing Arts since the last many decades. With the help of the present research the readers will be able to comprehend the role of Tamasha in safeguarding the cultural heritage of the state of Maharashtra with some innovations and changes in current form of presentation. Based on the analysis of the Social Anthropological Perspective the study concludes that the Tamasha plays a role in the connectivity of the culture of Maharashtra and Maharashtrian society.

Keywords: *Tamasha, Folk, Anthropological, culture, Marathi, Attributes.*

Introduction

Maharashtra is popular for its cultural heritage in different segments. Society is the reflection of culture and culture can be reflected through different habits and actions of people. As far as common lives of people were concerned in ancient period, then people did not have various means of entertainment, hence from the same requirement of common folk, Tamasha, a traditional folk theatre form came into existence, which holds a great culture and historical significance in Maharashtra, which is actual fusion of music, dance, drama, humor and criticism. It is not only a thing of entertainment but also depicting a cultural identity of the state, by reflecting the ethos, traditions and everyday life of Maharashtrian people. It combined not only humor but also satire and even social and political messages with the moral or positive note for the society. This was the best medium in which one can find the essence of preservation of Marathi language, which is the regional language of the state Maharashtra.

Objectives of Research

- To understand the attributes of Maharashtra Tamasha Folk Theatre
- To analyse the challenges to the Tamasha folk theatre
- To analyze the role of Tamasha folk artists in preservation of culture

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

Research Methodology

Qualitative Research Methodology is implemented to carry out the research, where some interviews are conducted and analysis is done to achieve the objectives of the research.

Overview of Tamasha Folk Theatre

The word Tamasha has its origin in Persian language then it came in Urdu language and then became familiar in Marathi language. The exact year of origin of Tamasha cannot be stated but though it has not been proved but as per the opinion of Namdev Vhatkar, popular writer of Marathi language, Tamasha has originated in 1680 to 1707. During the span of 25 years in order to have entertainment of Mughal Armies. Tamasha flourished in 18th and 19th centuries in the courts of the Maratha rulers and in Peshwa period it flourished in 1796-1818.

There were many reasons of popularity of this art form like there were the rare means of entertainment then, important aspects include use of regional language to execute the message, entertainment essence added with the music, dance, comic narration of stories, acting, humorous characters, then criticism on some social issues, awareness about some essential social topics etc. It has been considered as the medium of the cultural gatherings of the society.

Key Attributes of Tamasha

1. **Gan**-Some researchers have the opinion that Tamasha was given the royal shelter in the Peshwa Period and from then only Gan was introduced in the Tamasha which marked the beginning of the performance by worshiping Ganpati (Lord Ganesha), but it may not be true because as per the ancient research it has been proved that from the 12th century only Bhedik Phad means Dafgane was there into existence, which was actually the worshiping of Lord Ganesha.

2. **Gavlan**- Act of pin- off on the Krishnalila in which two villagers take on the role of Krishna and his accomplice Pendia, along with the character of Mavshi. The major characters are Gavalani, Mavshi, Pendia and Shrikrishna. Here the situation is created that Mavshi is going to market of Mathura along with all gavlani where they were stopped by Shrikrishna and Pendia, Pendia is the friend of Srikrishna, then their conversation, how gavlani requesting Shrikrishna to let them go to market etc, portrayed so beautifully.

3. **Batavani**-The main motive of batavani is to make the audience laugh by adding some lie and pretending something in a humorous manner. Songadya is the character who disguises himself in various characters for dramatic representation.

4. **Fars**-This word is having resemblance with the English word Farce, it is the humorous narrative of 30-45 minutes presented in Tamasha.It is also considered as the comic relief in the performance. This term can be understood with the help of the example of Hamlet written by William Shakespeare, as he is known as the master of comic relief:

> Hamlet: But what is your affair in Elsinore?
>
> Horatio: My lord, I came to see your father's funeral.
>
> Hamlet: I pray thee, do not mock me, fellow student; I think it was to see my mother's wedding.
>
> Horatio:Indeed, my lord, it follow'd upon.

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

> Hamlet: Thrift, thrift Horatio! the funeral baked-meats did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables. (William Shakespeare, Hamlet)

From the above example, which is the scene from Hamlet, though it is a dark tragedy full of murder, betrayal, madness and lust, Hamlet makes a dry joke about his mother's marriage, his father died recently and Hamlet is offended by the fact that his mother is remarrying so quickly. The character of Hamlet feels intense pain but still he makes joke about the situation and commenting that his mother is just trying to save money by serving the same food at both the funeral and the wedding.

The manner in which the humor is being used, one can identify the comic relief for some time in order to get relief from tragic story, here in Tamasha also in the same manner comic relief is used in order to make people feel comfortable from their everyday stressful lives.

Sopan Khude, the Marathi language writer has mentioned in his book titled "Tamshatil Farsa" that the charitable person in Mumbai Nana Shankarshet had built the theatre at Grant Road in Mumbai where many English theatre troupes used to perform their plays, and people had started performances in Parsee and English languages in Oct 1853 with the establishment of Parsee theatre. Many people had imitated these performances and from there only on 19 January 1856 Amarchand Wadikar from Mumbai presented the first Fars in Marathi Language, that can be considered as the first Fars in Marathi language though the details about the topic of this Fars is not available. As per the opinion of V.K.Joshi in his book titled "*Loknatyachi Parampara"* he has mentioned that Fars is used as the comic relief in the drama when there are no any comic elements in it as well the drama is short. The remarkable contribution of Patthe Bapurao (his real name was Shridhar Krushnarao Kulkarni) in the development of Fars is unforgettable. Patthe Bapurao had composed various Fars including Sasu Jawayacha Farsa, Nokarikarita Alelya Shur Shipayacha Farsa, Mugnyachi Lavni Farsa, Patkyacha Farsa etc. These compositions were actually the portrayal of contemporary social issues.

5. **Rangbaji-**To add flavored colors in Tamasha, main Nachi and Songadya are the characters in it and their humorous conversation is there along with the presentations of songs including lawani, chakkad, jhagda. As per the opinion of Sopan Khude written in his Marathi book titled "Tamshatil Farsa", the fusion of music, drama, dance, humor is there in Rangbaji.

6. **Lavani-**It is the genre of music in Maharashtra performed on the beats of Dholki, a percussion instrument. There are two major types of Lavni, first is *Baithakichi Lavani* and second is *Phadachi Lavani*. This is an integral part of Tamasha. This is performed by lavani artists, specifically female characters, in the state of Maharashtra as far as the Tamasha is concerned, the great history of lavani artists can be seen in the form of many characters, those are called as "Lavani Samradni". The famous names include Vithabai Bhau Mang Narangaonkar, Mangala Bansode, Malati Inamdar, Madhu Kambikar, Surekha Punekar,Kantabai Satarkar and many more.

Many critics during the period of development of lavani, commented on the composition of lavani from their own perspectives. Many criticized lavani being vulgar composition but if it is so, then the ancient people would not have presentations of such kind of lavani's as a part of folk

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

art, instead they all supported by giving positive response to all compositions and that's why today we have treasure of beautiful compositions in the form of lavani.

Many lavani compositions are famous and known to people but many were unknown to people, hence Marathi language writer Y.N. Kelkar compiled all such kind of lavanis in the book titled Andharatil Lavanya in 1956, and tried to compile various lavanis which were in Modi script and his efforts are visible in his book, which is one of the best sources in order to understand and get the details about such kind of unknown lavanis. He has compiled lavanis composed by Honaji Bala, Saganbhau, Vishwanath, Shaikh bhau, Balunaru and many more.

Lavani may have any kind of theme to showcase such as social,political, love, religious, friendship, attachment, affection etc. Vithabai Narayangaonkar is the most famous name in the history of Tamasha, she was associated with Bhau Bapu (Mang) Narayangaonkar Tamasha Mandal, which was the first troupe to receive the first President's Award in this field. As stated in the book titled "Tamasha: Vithabaichya Ayshyacha" written by Yogiraj Bagul, she was felicitated with the two reputed awards in the year 1990 , first was "Sangeet Natak Academy Puraskar" and second was "Maharashtra Gaurav Puraskar",by considering the dedication and contribution in the field of preservation of Tamasha Folk art form of Maharashtra, her story can be taken as the real inspiration for female, though one belongs to any field but the attributes Vitahbai was having, are reflecting her love, passion, dedication, perseverance and real hard work in her field. The story of her performance when she performed on the stage on demand of the public after begetting a child behind the stage, is really heart touching and inspirational for all of us. The life learning lessons can be taken from such kinds of characters. It is possible only when one is able to empathize with these kinds of characters.

7. **Vag-** Vag is the integral part of the Tamasha, it is based on different topics like ancient history of kings, professions, historical, religious, social, contemporary issues, etc. As per the research done by Sopan Khude it has been stated in his book titled "Tamashatil Farsa" that in the Era of Peshwa there was no Vag in Tamasha. As per stated in the book "Tamsha Loknatyatil Abhinay" written by D.Sheshrao Pathade, in the year 1869 Uma Sawalajkar had composed a first vag entitled Mohna Batao, and it was the first Marathi vag , then Patthe Bapurao had composed Mittharani, then further many additions done by different writers.There are two parts of Tamasha i.e Purvarang and Uttarrang. Gan, Gavlan, Batavani, Farsa, Rangbaji are included in the Purvarang and Vag is the part of Uttarrang.The Vagnatya has played an important role in the social reformation, which is the part of development at mental and social level. Vagnatya is the small dramatic script in Tamasha performance, which is being considered as the means of spreading social messages in a positive manner. In the ancient period oral vag were there, where without preparation artists used to perform the vag and those were so lengthy, some of the famous vags including Dhanya Pavankhind Jhali, Adhi Lagin Kondanyach, Manvat Khun Khatla, Kalyugacha Bhagvan etc. these all were also based on contemporary social issues but the presentation was for proper formation of ideology of the people about those topics.

The Vag is initiated by Shilkar, which is actual summary of the upcoming happenings in the vag, following is the example of the Shilkar of the Vag entitled "Domyanag":

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

"gavgund wadi moth guljar
gavamadhye hota ati vichar
pan pudhe ghadla motha prakar
gavamadhye shirla nivadnukicha vara
tat jhale don ale vradalivar
ranuji boke mahabilandar
mhane jo koni domya nagachya nadi lagnar
tyacha mi karin bechirakh sansar dav takla
paha kasa bhau bahinichya dhanawar tapla ..ji..ji..."

From this Shilkar one can identify that people were altogether at the place Gavgund but the election departed people in two parts, then the beginning of actual vag is there.

In the Rajvadi Vag sometimes shilkar are used which are not related to the theme of vag. Following is the vag presented with the help of shilkar and Lavani of Takni:

"mandali ka basla dnyani pandit
ratnanchya khani hiryachi jyot
mhanun tumhala jodito hat
laksh dya majhya shabdanvarat
kaliyugar jhali ashi kashi maat eka dakhla
shetkaryacha bhag rajala krodh chadhla ....
rajala krodh far jhala
dhamkaun bole shipayala
ghevun yave shetkaryala !!!
Raja -(shipayala) ja attachya ata tyana rajwadyat gheun ya ja pahu lavkar
Shipai- ho maharaj jato. tyana gheun yeto . (shipai nighun jato)
(pravesh shetkaryancha)
Rambhau- balya kal aapan sabha ghetli ki velevar paus jhala nahitar patti kashi dyavi.
Balya- baba apan jar rajapashi orad neli nahi tar kas chalel. ekle tar pahu nahitar pudhchi vaat. (itkyat shipai yetat)
Shipai- rambhau kolte patil, tumhala maharajani attachya atta bolavle ahe.
Rambhau- shipai dadano, amhi yeto mhanun sanga rajala chala, pudhe amhi aloch. (taknichi lavni) ..."

From the presentation of this type of vag, one can understand how the theme on social relevance has been portrayed.

8. **Mujra-** At the end of the Tamasha all Tamasha Artists express their gratitude to God, great Saints, Gurus, Mahatme who have inspired them to perform and preserve the culture. Tamasha Artists consider saint Dnyaneshvar as their spiritual Guru, as he was the one who played an important role in giving proper place to Marathi language.

9. **Powada-** Powada (ballads)is the aspect of Tamasha where one can glorify the contribution of historical heroes.

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

10. **Potraj-**Potraj is a nomadic tribe in the state of Maharashtra. They present a story in the Tamasha as per the theme of Tamasha. Their stories are not comic in all respects but sometimes humour is being added as per the situation. As per the details given in the book "Tamsahatil Farsa" by Sopan Khude there are two different types of Potraj, from Andhra Pradesh and from Maharashtra. They both worship the goddess Mariaai but still are different from each other.

11. **Bahurupi-**(Songadya-clown attendant) The humorous character in Tamasha. He used to take various forms to entertain tired people and is the favorite of all people, his improvised humor is one of the reasons for the popularity of Tamasha. A kind of comic relief is added with the help of this character.

12. **Attire of Various Characters:**

Various artists who perform Tamasha are named as "Kalavanat". As per the roles assigned their attire is different and associated with their respective roles. The company where they work is known as Tamasha Phad. The first character of female who performs lavani , wear Navvar Saree (nine yard saree) with zari lines,which is the identity of Maharashtrian culture, it is bright red or green or of any bright color saree with heavy jewelry including Nath (nose ring), Bangles, Ghoongroos while performance. Their Ghoongroos are too heavy, it is 5kg or more than that too.



Fig 1: Preparations at Shivkanya Bade Tamasha Mandal.

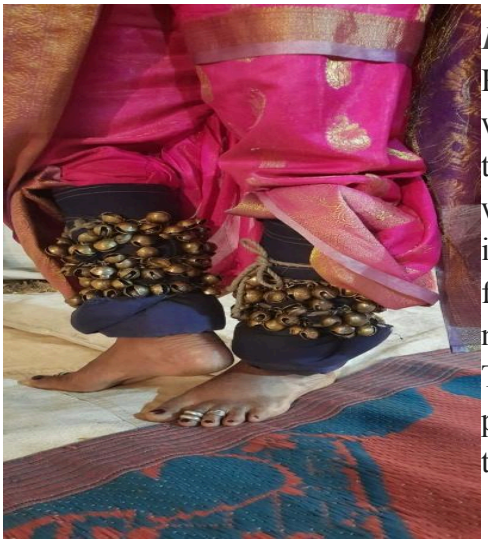

Fig2: Folk Artists Bearing the weight of 4-5kg in each foot

Krishna's costume is a colorful dhoti, an embellished crown with peacock feathers and flute is his identity, as depicted in the Hindu mythology too. He is the real symbol of love, wisdom and righteousness in the mythology. His presence itself creates a kind of positivity in the environment, usually females get attracted to him very easily due to his loving nature and style of dealing with them.

Then Songadya is the character who is there to entertain people, hence his dress and makeup is also bright and funny to create a comic relief in the performance.

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

The Significant Role of Patthe Bapurao in the development of Shahiri:

The full name of Patthe Bapurao is Shridhar Krushnarao Kulkarni, he was born on 11November 1866 at Rethre-Hranaksh, Tq. Walva, Dist Sangli. After taking education in Aundh Sansthan, he did job in Badoda Sansthan but not interested in the that job hence came back to village in search of any other means of earning after the death of his father, from there only he started to spent some time with Tamasha Artists at village and he started to provide the script for these people, hence people developed disliking for him but they also he did not stop, rather he was on the same path and became too much popular. He himself started to write his name as Patthe Bapurao at the end of his creation. His contribution in the field of Tamasha is remarkable and memorable too.

An Analysis from the Anthropological Perspectives

As far as the detailed structure and an analysis of Tamasha is concerned, it is clear that from the need of entertainment, livelihood and preservation of culture only one can find out the emergence of Tamasha in the history of Maharashtra, India. Scheduled castes in Maharashtra, India, including Kolhati, Mahar, Mang etc, were actual Traditional Tamasha Practitioners from rural regions. The team of Tamasha comprises singers, dancers, makeup artists, cooks, workers, actors, comedians, composers (shahir) etc. but it has been observed that there isa fusion of many roles in one artist. The composer is a keen observer of society and humankind, because of this observation power only one can find out the best compositions in the history of Tamasha, which was related to human behavior, different characters in the society and even social issues. In order to spread awareness about certain social issues also some compositions and their performances were there.Influential performances of artists were the reason to create an influence on human mind; hence one cannot avoid the Anthropological Perspectives of Tamasha Performances.

Pankaj Kanti Karmakar highlighted some different phases of development of Tamasha in different eras in his research paper entitled "Distinctive Qualities of Tamasha Folk Theatre in India: An In-depth Analysis". The periods from ancient to modern were taken into consideration by him to demonstrate changes in the pattern of Tamasha.

The Role of Tamasha in Cultural Context

The village fair is one of the oldest cultures of Maharashtra, India. Tamasha was to bring communities together during festivals and fairs, where their performances were staged. Tamasha was an integral part of rural festivals like Jatras (village fairs), it was not only the form of entertainment but a vibrant experience of Maharashtrian rich cultural heritage. Its enduring appeal lies in its ability to adopt and resonate with audiences while staying rooted in tradition. This form emerged in the state of Maharashtra in the 16th century and evolved as a popular literary expression. During the Peshwa era, in the 18th century, Tamasha flourished as it received patronage from all corners of the society. The traditional attire of Maharashtra which is Dhoti and Pheta for men while choli and nine-yard saree (nawvar saree) for women is shown through the performances, regional language Marathi is the medium of conversation in Tamasha etc are the part of culture of Maharashtra, hence it is proved that this was and is the medium of preservation of culture.

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

Ancient Tamasha Performances in Maharashtra India

As per the interview of Shivkanya Bade, the owner of Shivkanya Bade Loknatya Mandal, conducted in the month of August 2022 at Jamkhe, there is a drastic change in Ancient Tamasha performances and modern Tamasha performances. In the ancient period it was the real means of entertainment for people, where the maximum number of people coming to watch was the same but nowadays the number of audience is less as compared to the ancient period. Then the ticket was Rs.2/- only. In ancient times the whole group was travelling in bullock carts and were spending 15 -20 days at one place. In the ancient period there was patience among the audience to listen to batavani and *vag* which were actually the soul of Tamasha.

Contemporary Tamasha Performances in Maharashtra India

Today the ticket charge is only Rs.80/- but still people are finding out the various ways to take free entries. Now modern vehicles are used to travel from one place to another but the expenditure is too high as compared to the income, because for each artist near about Rs.16-17000/- payment is there, so it seems very difficult to manage these things. Apart from this the involvement and problems created by political parties and police departments at the place are not at all positive to preserve the culture of Maharashtra. Now people are not having patience to listen to Batavani and Vag,rather they are interested in orchestral, filmy songs, they are creating problems for artists if their request is not taken into consideration. The pathetic plight of each artist has been taken into view and one of the findings was that in this phase only the mother and daughter are performing on the same stage.

Furthermore, Shivkanya Bade highlighted that the perception of society totally changes towards Tamasha artists because of the two movies, first is "*Pinjra*" and second is "Natrang". In these both movies negative portrayal of Tamasha artists, especially of women has been shown.

Conclusion

The thorough analysis of an idiosyncratic attribute of Tamasha Folk Art form of Maharashtra, India, uncovers that Tamasha folk art form has been playing an important role in safeguarding the cultural heritage of the state of Maharashtra with some innovations and changes in current status of its presentation. The part and the role of Tamasha from Anthropological Perspectives is also remarkable in the overall development of the society, it may continue in future too if the proper cooperation and support will be provided by the society and the government. Furthermore, there is a great need to change the perspective of these Tamasha artists. Until and unless respect will not be given for these people, the culture of Maharashtra will not get respect worldwide. An effort should be taken from all in order to get government schemes back in the lives of these Tamasha artists, preservation of Tamasha folk art form is based on perpetuation of Tamasha artists. Today, instead of adopting various western methods of social awareness, the society can put emphasis on the same art form in order to make children aware about cultural heritage of the country, then only the next generation will be able to inculcate the same in upcoming generations. The attributes of Tamasha, roles of various characters, themes, music, dance style everything has an Indian essence, which is to be preserved by all.

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

References:

Adharkar, Nandini. "In Search of Women in the History of Marathi Theatre 1843-1933" *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 43, no. 26, 1991, pp. 87-90.

Bhandare Sandesh, *Tamasha:Ek Rangadi Gammat*. Mumbai: Dimple Publication, 2018.

Karmakar Pankaj. "Distinctive Qualities of Tamasha Folk Theatre in India: An In-depth Analysis". *International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education (INT-JECSE)* ISSN:1308-5581 Vol 14, Spl Issue 01, 2022

Kidd, Ross. "The Performing Arts and Development in India: Three Case Studies and a Comparative Analysis." *Continuity and Change in Communication Systems*, edited by G. Wang and W. Dissanayake, Ablax, 1984, pp. 95-125.

Kolhalkar, Sopan. *Tamasha : Maharashtrachi Lokkala*. Pune: Deshmukh and Company Private Limited, 2015.

Mande Prabhakar, *Loksahityache Swaroop*. Ahemadnagar : Godavari Prakashan, 2017.

Nayak Umesh. "Mughal Tamasha (insolvent specimen of folk theater at Bhadrak district, Odisha)". *International Journal of Current Research* Vol. 14, Issue, 05, May 2022 pp.21431-21434 doi: https://doi.org/10.24941/ijcr.43538.05.2022

Pathade Sheshrao, *Tamasha Loknatyatil Abhinay.* Aurangabad: Saurav Prakashan, 2020.