



## 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.

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***"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".***  
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### 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 Puppetry at Kheratrambhat's house.

- 1400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Borbad, Dushambe, Tajikistan
- International Puppetry 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.