

O Jaisalmer!

M.D. Muthukumaraswamy

Like the Shillong workshop we conducted in May 2000, the recently concluded Jaisalmer workshop in February 2001 has also become a landmark event in the history of Indian folklore studies. This is mainly because both the workshops clearly articulated the intellectual underpinnings of the field of folklore by placing the burden of meaning of arts, culture, education,



Sarangi

tradition and change on the ways creative processes of folklore are transmitted either on their own or with the aiding intervention of the folklorists. Both the workshops complemented each other in many ways: thematically the Shillong one was on the public presentations of folklore with the theme *From fieldwork to public domain* and the Jaisalmer one was on how to achieve the primary goals of documenting creative processes of folklore, location wise Shillong is in north eastern India and Jaisalmer is in north western India and in terms of participation Shillong had young academics while Jaisalmer brought together experienced cultural activists. What we could not achieve after the Shillong workshop was to bring out a special issue like the one you are holding in your hands. We regretted the loss so much that we made sure from the beginning that the thoughts and practices discussed in Jaisalmer would make up this special number. The aim of this expensive publication is not only to disseminate the ideas of Jaisalmer workshop to a wider audience but also to use this as a precursor for a possible future monograph on both the workshops.

When we conceived of this workshop on fieldwork and documentary techniques in 1997 we were thinking only in terms of effectively using technology for the purposes of folklore documentation. But as we went on refining the concept of the workshop it became clear to us that a theoretical reorientation towards the subjects of documentation would be of utmost importance as defining moments in the history of folklore studies all over the world have always been made with that focus. A theoretical orientation that would not lose sight of empirical evidences in the name of theory, history of Indian folklore in the name of global conversations and

cultural convergences in the name of sense of a locale. The delicate and daunting task of balancing would not have been achieved without the dedicated efforts of the faculty members of the workshop. With his admirable rhetorical skills Henry Glassie presented the quintessence of twentieth century North American folklore scholarship in addition to his fieldwork projects that took him to Ireland, Turkey, Bangladesh and Japan. With an amazing variety of examples he was able to demonstrate how transcendental ideology of exceptional individuals serves as nourishing platform for folk creativity and how folklorists *bearing honourable witness* to that human aspect of life can document it with simple tools like a notebook and a pen. With a gentleness masking his density of thought Lee Haring explored folkloric processes of cultural convergences in Trinidad and Mauritius. His lectures amply made clear that the essential nature of creativity is to function through syncretic processes. The legendary Komal Kothari presented a wide array of empirical evidences from Rajasthani folklore to reveal that creative expressions of folklore are embedded in the larger local knowledge systems that connect social life and environment intimately.

Folk musicians and other artists were continuously visiting the workshop venue to meet with him and such meetings inevitably resulted in brilliant performances. Komal Kothari's phenomenal knowledge of Rajasthan's landscape and its people was evident in all the field trips he guided us and all the performances he introduced us. Pravina Shukla offered new ways of looking at bodily adornments and perceptively made us discover how the remaking of the world would be composed of such self-expressions. Kapila Vatsyayan, who spent two valuable days in the workshop, through a very fine heuristic method, taught the participants ways of verbalising their fieldwork experiences and the ways of interpreting them.

We had the rare privilege of having Aruna Roy for the inaugural and Susan Bean, Deborah Thiagarajan, Munira Sen, Sharada Ramanathan, Rukmini Shekar and Adarsh kumar for a few days at the workshop.



Sharada Ramanathan distributing Sarangi and Kamaicha to young musicians of Rajasthan: Kaju Khan, Sadqe Khan, Bundu Khan, Iidu Khan, Barkat Khan, Sikandar Khan, Habib Khan (all Sarangi players), Kaloo Khan, Sachu Khan, Bakshu Khan (all Kamaicha players)

All of them vigorously participated in the discussions and enriched the learning process enormously.

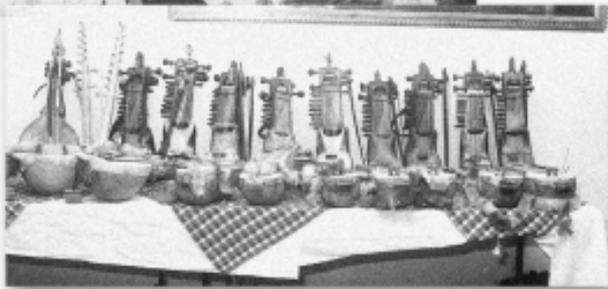
Reflecting back I am inclined to think that Jaisalmer itself contributed to the spirit and dynamism of the workshop. As the westernmost town inside India's border Jaisalmer has an extraordinarily medieval and Middle Eastern feel, with its crenulated golden sandstone walls and narrow streets lined with exquisitely carved buildings. With four major gateways to the town and founded by Prince Jaisal in 1156, Jaisalmer grew to be a major staging post on the famous *silk route*. On the roughly triangular shaped Trikuta hill, the Golden Fort (called so because of the colour of the sandstone) stands 76 meters above the town enclosed by a 9-meter wall with 99 bastions. When you walk through the narrow streets within the fort you often get blocked by an odd goat, cow or a camel cart and it

of lack of rain. He shared with us a wealth of information on how the desert supports a variety of plant, animal and bird lives. After his lecture it was very easy to perceive hardships of living in the desert as well as to appreciate human ingenuity in the built water ways and conservation systems (in Khuldara villages), artificial lakes, city plans, food habits, cow and camel herding, grass growing and indigenous medicinal systems. Komal Kothari has been presenting this perception about Rajasthani life all through out the workshop through innumerable instances and living in Jaisalmer for fifteen days made us realise that folklore studies go beyond studies of expressive behaviour to gain insights into life situations. Folklore as a discipline holds a vision of human life in existential terms beyond the corridors of power and it is important to maintain that vision while addressing the questions of art and creativity also.

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Function for distributing musical instruments to young folk musicians of Rajasthan



is amazing to see even today how about a 1000 turban clad men, veiled but bejewelled women and school going children live in tiny houses inside the fort often with beautiful carvings on doors and balconies. Through a mere walk through the town you meet with musicians, puppeteers, weavers, jewellers, potters, toy makers and ironsmiths. With an abandoned aircraft kept as a public museum piece on a roadside park with a piles of pots on the opposite side, the puppeteers dwellings two streets away, *havelis* with their beautifully carved facades, *jali* screens and oriel windows visible at the other end of street, the camel carts pushing their way through and the fort in the background when you sip a cup of tea at the roadside shop you tend to think Jaisalmer defies time.

It was astounding to learn from Ramsingh Mertia's lecture that the entire Thar Desert must have been underneath the sea ages ago and the desert was a result

The same vision made us understand that while desert is both a metaphor and reality Rajasthani folk music is not only an artistic expression but also more of an existential necessity. It was not at all difficult for us to see why music and so Sarangi and Kamaicha are central to Rajasthani folk life. It was not at all difficult for us to understand why Komal Kothari was lamenting that these two musical instruments had not been made in the last one century. I am most grateful and most delighted that the board of National Folklore Support Centre and the Ford Foundation approved making of these two musical instruments with the little excess money we had for the workshops and distribution of them to the child musicians of traditional communities. The making of these musical instruments was not as easy as it appeared to be. Despite Komal Kothari's four decades of research in musicology and easy access to traditional communities it was difficult to make the instruments as it called for knowledge of the woods

and carpentry skills apart from a collaboration between folklorist, carpenter and traditional musicians. The strenuous and adventurous collaboration headed by Komal Kothari lasted for several months and just before the workshop they were able to complete only seven *sarangies* and three *kamaichas*. As I am writing these lines the project is still going on to achieve the target of one hundred instruments.

What a grand finale the distribution ceremony turned out to be! All the musicians, who were performing all these days for us either at Hotel Dhola Maru or in the villages, were all present. By then we had realised that Zakar Khan, Anwar, Barkat, Gazi, Sagar, Ghewar, Perupa, Buchi, Mehra, Mayat and Gazi Barner were all world-class musicians. The scintillating performance of the child musicians, Yassin, Mehboob, Abdul Rashid, Sikander, Kutla, Shankara, kheta, Darra and Roshan was lingering in the memory.

We were remembering the haunting voice of Rukma Devi, Kherati Ram Bhatt's skillful puppetry, *Kalvelia* dance of Sukmi Devi, *Teratali* dance of Chanda, Kamala, Rukmani and Gazi Khan's institute of music in the village of Bharna. In the midst of a sudden avalanche of powerful evocations, Sharada Ramanathan of the Ford Foundation began distributing musical instruments to the child musicians. They were historic moments filled

with unknown emotions and sentiments. Those were the moments one normally feels contentment, fulfilment and satisfaction.

My colleagues, Athrongla, Jasmine, Murugan and Venu join me in thanking the Ford Foundation, the faculty members, the participants, all the artists (including B.D.Soni, the jeweller), Kuldeep Kothari and the staff of Rupayan Sansthan our collaborative partner for this workshop, Naval Kishore Sharma of Jaisalmer museum, *Rajasthani Patrika* which carried the news of the workshop everyday, Major General Bhandari, his family and the staff of hotel Dhola Maru and the administrative staff of NFSC who stayed back home to give us background support.

We are especially grateful to Gowher Rizvi, Representative of the Ford Foundation's New Delhi office without whose help we would not have identified three participants from other Asian countries and expanded the scope of this workshop. Although I feel the sense of an ending for this introductory essay, I do not have the satisfaction of having said everything. Let me say in exasperation: O Jaisalmer!



Kamaicha

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In a time warp

Henry Glassie

The musical instruments that are lined on the table today set the mood. The mood is one of transfer, of making it possible for people to continue to do what it is that they wish to do. We should have no desire to make people continue to do what they don't wish but if musicians want to make music, if they want to celebrate the universe through sound then we should make it possible for them. Our giving musical instruments to the next generation, allowing that generation to accomplish its own world in its own way, today establish the mood. So think of those musical instruments as the proper metaphor for everything that's happened in this workshop.

This is the moment of conclusion, it's a moment of transfer, it's a moment of gift; it's a moment when another generation rises to receive, rises to go forward, rises to make possible the continuity of culture. So just as we are making it possible for a group of young musicians, by the possession of musical instruments, to carry forward the beautiful, astonishing and deep music of Rajasthan, so too has this workshop worked in exactly the same way. The idea being a group of elders transferring to a new generation a hope for possibility for a new idea of folklore research; and so just as the musicians will be able to make such music as they want, we hope we who have been teaching in this workshop that we have transferred to you the instruments with which you can make the music that you choose to make, not it is to be hoped the music that we made, but better and more beautiful music.

But at the core of that act of transfer there is the hope for a kind of continuity, a kind of continuity that can be expressed in this very simple way—echoing in reverse, as point of complexity. And that it's what could be simpler and what at the same time more complex than the idea of folklore. I would say that the idea of folklore is nothing more or less than this – it is that time when a human being elects to act with sincerity, nothing more. Meaning that a human being will inevitably work towards the expression of the self, will work towards the preservation of the society, will work towards the preservation of the world, and will work towards honouring whatever sense of the transcendent visits that individual...(these excerpts were taken from Henry Glassie's concluding remarks...Editor)

Henry Glassie

