

**Adieu Jaisalmer: 19 February 2001**

**Komal Kothari** gave the welcome speech and remarked that the workshop was a unique learning experience for him and it would be definitely reflect in his future work.

**Chief guest address: Sharada Ramanathan**

I just had a few thoughts in the last four days that I have been here. I have heard few words; I have heard some people express themselves in different ways. One such word is complexity and I was thinking to myself – and I have used the word myself a lot in the last four days – thinking that this field is completely unique because it is subtly complex. No one has really been terribly worried about the *them and us* and if they have been worried about the *them and us* then it has been very *anti-us and them*.

In my little experience in the field of folklore, my own sense is that folklorists are complex people, complex human beings and therefore the field itself is complex.



Valedictory: Jasmine K. Dharod

There has been a lot of discourse around who is a folklorist; everyone sitting in this room is a folklorist, starting from the musicians and then the storytellers, the scholars, practitioners, the experienced, the not so experienced, intellectually and emotionally and spiritually, everyone sitting here is a folklorist. So the situation itself represents the complexity that is what I am trying to articulate.

The second word that I have heard, particularly from people like Murugan, is *pain* and *sadness*. And I actually don't understand it as a simple notion of pain – it is a kind of pain that comes through a certain kind of struggle which is very cultural, philosophical, spiritual – the struggle of being a folklorist, the struggle with the field of folklore and the pain that emerges from that struggle is a creative one. So folklore is also an extraordinarily creative field that comes out of a certain pain and struggle. And I have sensed this when Henry Glassie has spoken, when participants have expressed themselves, when artists performed and then when Murugan sort of captures it all in that one word *pain*.

The third word that got articulated in different ways but not quite in the way that I understood it is the

word *synergy*. It has been very jargonised and synergy in this field is not always inside the conference hall but a lot of it can be outside of the conference hall too. So I am just illustrating some of the characteristics of being a folklorist or being in the field of folklore. And these are not terms that are commonly or easily used in a lot of other disciplines. So I think there are actually three or four important directions for the field and therefore for the folklorist. One is to sustain the complexity of the *homosapiens*. We must never attempt at sameness, attempt at homogeneity that is causing conflicts everywhere in the world whether in the caste problems of Tamil Nadu or the problems in Zimbabwe or the Kashmir issue or Bosnia or wherever. Conflict resolution can happen only with the acceptance of complexity and diversity, so that's one of the roles of folklore.

The second is therefore to serve as a resource for several other disciplines – sociology, anthropology, linguistics, language studies, history, the development of historicity and multiple perspectives in historicity and even one of my new favourite subjects, civilisational studies. So I don't see people like Komal, Glassie and Haring and several others here as just folklorists; I see them as resources for the evolution of multiple disciplines across the board, cross-sectorally, cross-regionally, trans-boundary, in every possible way. So I would love to see these people not only in folklore conferences but also at other kinds of thinking forums.

The third thing that I think we should continue to struggle with, which is an issue not just for folklorists but people across disciplines, is the connections or the gaps between the development of thought and development of action. This is something we should continue to struggle with.

Since I haven't been here for all the fifteen days, I want to illustrate the discussion yesterday on dissemination and the kind of perspectives that could develop around that; and the discussions about archives – what are archives? Some of us continued to talk about it outside of the hall, when we said multimedia means different things in different contexts. Multimedia here means literally different media, it does not mean different buttons within the same media, for example; it is not just about computers, not just about websites, and its not about an either or. It's about many ands. That's the other balance that we should continue to try to strike.

I think the last point that I want to make in this fairly unprepared speech is something that a lot of contemporary thinkers and intellectuals within these disciplines such as sociology, folklore and anthropology – they say how can you talk about the humanities without engaging with the human being? I have heard Henry reminded us about this and Komal also reminded us about this many times, over the last four days.

So I have been somewhat at the level of first principles, but sometimes we tend to move so much away from first principles that we forget why we started; like all good fundamentalist movements they forget where they started and why they started— we should not become one of them.

Last but not the least, much as I hate clichés, I want to thank all of those participants who did not say, *I thank the Ford Foundation*. The Ford Foundation is not sponsoring this event. The Ford Foundation is a resource and a philanthropy that supports certain organisations who represent certain causes; I would like to believe that that's where we are. I would like to thank Muthu, Venu, Rola, Jasmine, Henry, Lee and Komalda of course. I want to thank all the participants because I have learnt tremendously over the last four days from everything that everybody has said.

### **Concluding remarks: Henry Glassie**

... What is folklore? It is the moment; and there are number of such moments that I remember from Jaisalmer. I remember walking in the streets, the sun going down, the sandstone blessed with the gold of the sunset and the intricacy of the carving that reminded me of people now dead who blessed this city with their talent.

It is this moment – the instant when Zakar Khan placed the bow on the strings of the *Kamaicha* and was able to accomplish a tone, a sound, a depth and a beauty that I have rarely experienced in any musical performance. That moment is the moment I remember – that's the moment that folklorists talk about; that's the moment when the human being engages the world in sincerity. Zakar Khan sitting in his village, placing the bow on the strings of his *Kamaicha* brought forth everything that we would need to think of what it is to be human.

When our friend, B.D. Soni showed us the brand new image of *Ganesha* that he had made out of gold such a moment occurred. That piece of gold captured the sun for an instant, allowing us to know how beautifully he had, with what sincerity he had created his piece of the world.

Or the night when accidentally the light flashed behind Kharati Ram Bhat in this very place and we could see that he was playing and dancing those puppets. When in the dark we see the puppets dance it was interesting but when the light came behind him and we could see his body gracefully moving like the most elegant of ballet dancers, that was another such moment.

The moments that we are searching for are the moments that seem simple, not because they are simple but because they have perfect and complete integrity. It is for that reason that people frequently describe folklore as being simple but Sharada is right in describing it as the ultimate complexity. Because it is the place where the individual and the collective fuse; it is the place

where the mundane and the transcendent fuse; it is the place where the useful and the beautiful fuse; it is the place where the sorrowful and the joyous fuse. When we can feel that melancholy surge up in the midst of joy, that's the moment when we understand the fullness of human sincerity has been engaged or addressed.

And if anyone would like, as a folklorist, to understand what it is that we must do, the first thing that we must do is to say when we have seen, to say when we have heard, to say when we have felt, to say that we have understood those instances in which the whole of the human complexity had been brought into perfect focus at the very end of the bow, touching the strings of the *kamaicha* in the hands of Zakar Khan. It is that I honour, it is that has brought me half way around the world, it is that which I lead you, the next generation of folklorists, that's your responsibility, to note, to preserve, to document, to transfer, to teach others about those moments in which our fellow human beings had



Sharada Ramanathan: Valedictory address

given the absolute completeness, the absolute fullness of their humanity into the world for us to experience.

### **Concluding remarks: Lee Haring**

I have been something like a folklorist for over fifty years, beginning with the Irish folk songs that were sung to me by my mother as I sat under the piano, carrying on with the American folk songs that I myself sang with my friends, on into the study of American songs and tales and the teaching of these, through involvement with the peoples of East Africa, subsequently Madagascar, subsequently other islands in that region, including multicultural and multilingual Mauritius, and Seychelles. You would think I wouldn't have much to learn—I have had a great deal to learn in these fifteen days. And after this workshop, I am a better folklorist than I was before.

As our time together comes to an end, I express my gratitude for having been invited to Rajasthan, the land

of the kings with its battle-scarred forts, its palaces of amazing luxury, its riotous colours and its deep, enduring traditions of honour. The workshop has given to me, an emissary from the decadent west, a new vision of folklore as the vital centre as we have visited the desert villages and come to have insight into the central role of expressive culture in the lives of so many people in this part of India.

Henceforth, I will always have before me the image of Komalda sharing an inexhaustible store of information about puppeteers, singers, instrumentalists and other artists. I will hear the music of the *manganiyars* who, before I came here, were only characters in a scholarly article but now who are to me some of the most distinguished artists of the world. I will cherish the memory of all of you who are dedicated preservers of what is most valuable in the life of India. For all these things, I thank the NFSC and its director, I thank my dear colleague Henry Glassie and I even thank the Ford Foundation. Thank you.



*Certificate distribution ceremony: Moji Riba with Komalda*

28

### ***Vote of thanks: M.D. Muthukumaraswamy***

Komal Kothari, Henry Glassie, Sharada Ramanathan and Lee Haring, distinguished participants and the great musicians of Jaisalmer, it is my pleasure to be with you today to thank all of you on behalf of NFSC.

As Henry Glassie spoke to you, this is a moment, a very important moment of conversation, of folklore. We at the NFSC all the time believe in extending our conversations beyond the centre, beyond a region, beyond the national boundaries. We all the time yearn to have conversation – it is a very important term for us – conversations that are held within the strict norms of dialogue, the dialogue that presupposes the equality of all the people concerned. Henry Glassie all the time stressed in all his lectures here that we should meet another person as if we would be meeting another fellow human being on the surface of this planet. And that is the exact moment of folklore we believe in.

We have been doing these workshops to extend these conversational possibilities, to extend our dialogue to our colleagues who are working in this field, not only in the universities but also in other non-governmental organisations and people who are engaged with folklore in so many different ways – to offer them a common platform, to come together for fifteen days in a place like Jaisalmer – this means a lot to us. It is a conversation that will not end with today's valedictory function. It is a conversation we would extend all the time to be with us and to be with you.

We have achieved a visibility not only within India but also in the international arena. It is all the time difficult for us to achieve the norms of dialogue that I talked so gloriously a few minutes ago. To engage with a region-specific scholar, to bring in a national scholar, to bring in an international scholar and from people who are engaged in diverse ways with folklore, to bring them for a conversation is a difficult task. It has its own moments of difficulty, it has its own moments of challenges, and it has its own moments of reward. The reward is always the friendship, the emotions that go along with friendship. It is important that we continue to nurture those friendships and emotions and build collaborations of work, build a camaraderie that would cut across regions, language and other invisible borders all the time blocking the conversations.

This is a very important event to have in Rajasthan and I believe that in last fifteen days I learnt a lot. I learnt a lot from Komalda, from Henry, from Pravina, Lee and every one of you. This is a moment of gratitude, which I would take back home, which I would publish, which I would talk about, which I would use as a conversational tool to bring in more colleagues in our work.

I would like to thank several other people who helped us here in Jaisalmer -Y.K. Sharma from Government College, Prem Jalani, Nand Kishore Sharma, Vyas, Director of All India Radio, Chand, Ram Singh Mertia who came and gave us a wonderful lecture on the Thar desert, Bhandari and his family and the musicians Ghazi Khan, Zakar, Anwar, Hayad, Mehrudeen, Bhagad, Anjar, Rana Khan, Pampa Khan, Sambadar Khan, Suva, Sugini, Ajay, Anwar Khan and Jaitley.

The most important people in my life are the colleagues I work with – I am extremely fond of them, I make no secret about it and I work towards their growth, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. And I remain thankful to my colleagues Venu, Jasmine, Rola and Murugan who have all the time been with me. I have been continuously telling you that the NFSC is an egalitarian space– we do not believe in hierarchies – hierarchies do not exist in our mind, not in our practice and we work in the spirit of collegiality. I remain thankful to them because they make my life easier, happier and they bring to me the pleasure of working, of working in the field of folklore. I hope that they

have socialised well with you so that even if I did not – I tend to keep myself aloof, not because of anything else but that is how I am; my aloofness is for my own reflections, my own growth – but I have wonderful colleagues and then if it is not possible for me to continue the conversations I am talking about, you can always continue the conversations with my colleagues.

Having a conversation with them is as good as having a conversation with me; it is this I want to make clear to each and every one of you, because if I have not spent time with you, if I have not followed a conversation further, please excuse me – you can all the time continue them with all my colleagues – they are my equals, I am only the first among my equals.

I should also thank Sharada who has been with us, with NFSC in all our endeavours, in all our moments of crises, moments of challenges and moments of happiness. She is a great friend to have in the Ford Foundation. I remain personally grateful to Sharada for all the support she has been extending to the NFSC and to us personally.

Thanking Komalda – it is like thanking myself. Komalda, apart from being the Director of Rupayan Sansthan, is the Chairman of National Folklore Support Centre. As the Chairman, Komalda brings with him a vision, a way of working and also a way of guiding young people like us. We remain grateful to him all the time for all the work he has done, for the kind of vision he brings along with him – this has rightly made him a legendary figure in the field of Indian folklore. And I am most grateful, most honoured and privileged to be living in the time of Komalda.

So, thank you so much, thank you Henry, thank you Lee, thank you Pravina, please carry our words of heartfelt gratitude to Pravina also. Kapilaji is not here; the moments she shared with us were wonderful. I thank everyone of you for taking time to come over here to spend fifteen days of your life with us. Thank you all.



**Announcement**

**NFSC Festival on Musical Instruments and Oral Narratives**

**December 8-18, 2001 (tentative), Chennai**

NFSC is organising a folk arts festival on the theme: Musical Instruments and Oral Narratives from 8 – 18 December, 2001 in Chennai. Throughout India oral narratives are being performed along with music and occasionally with dance. This festival will bring together their unique cultures, religious diversities, different traditions and languages. Ten different troupes of folk artists will be invited from various parts of India to perform in the festival. This festival will feature ten major oral narratives and thematically the oral narratives can be of heroic, romantic and/or historical in nature. Along with the festival there will also be three museum exhibits:

- Collection of various musical instruments associated with oral narratives
- Objects like jewellery, costumes, weapons, and other properties associated with the performance of heroic oral narratives
- Photographic exhibition of historical places connected to the historical oral narratives performed during the festival

Variety of other activities will be taking place during the ten-day festival. There will be lecture demonstrations by artists, screening of ethnographic films / documentaries, puppet shows, stalls of folklore books, regional folk crafts and paintings, folk music, and ethnic food. The festival will also facilitate artists' collaboration-a platform where all the invited folk artists could meet and explore collaborative opportunities. NFSC is planning to bring out a brochure soon, which will have more detailed information. The aims of the festival are to bring awareness to people about the existing folk arts of India by bringing various performing artists from different parts of India, especially from relatively unknown regions. This will enrich our knowledge about the various regions of India and their history and also create an avenue for sharing community values in our new urban milieu. The festival is an effort to cultivate genuine appreciation for diverse cultures. Like all other programmes of NFSC, the festival will also be a collaborative venture between several folklore scholars and allied institutions. NFSC would be happy to receive your suggestions and help in making this festival a success. We look forward to your suggestions for participation either individually or institutionally. For further information please contact Jasmine / Rola. If you are interested to become a volunteer, please send your curriculum vitae with a letter of interest to Director, National Folklore Support Centre, New No.7, Fifth Cross Street, Rajalakshmi Nagar, Velachery, Chennai-42. Tele-fax-044-2450553, 2448589, E-mail: muthu@md2.vsnl.net.in / info@indianfolklore.org