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PROLOGUE

It is 12 o’clock in the afternoon. We are now nearing Vansda. This is the moment when a subtle sense of the Dang area began to form around us. On both the sides of the road was some greenery that usually is not seen in Gujarat at this time of the year. We took our meal at Vansda and went on towards Vaghai. As we approached Vaghai, the greenery thickened. Soon we entered Dang and found ourselves in the forest of bamboo near Vaghai. Like the life of humans, these forests also display the symbols of ups and downs of life-experiences; there were young bamboos and also just next to them dried up old bamboos forming different colors for the forests. We felt that Dang had now entered our very breath; it had got under our skin.

The Dangs. A small district of south Gujarat. In 1994 we had collected a great deal of information of a number of lovely performing art forms of the Dangs in our study. Two of these art forms that are nearing extinction, ‘Thalivadan’ and ‘Madalya’, we have already documented. This time, we have taken up the task of documenting yet another such attractive art form of the Dangs, known as ‘BHAVADA’.

Performed for some days only in the months of April and May, this performing art form is very interesting. It is very popular in Maharashtra, the area neighboring the Dangs, and is called ‘Songimukhatya’ there.

On 30th April 2004 our Tata Sumo car reached Ahwa, the District HQ of the Dangs at about 2 o’clock. In spite of arrangements done beforehand, as usually happens, our schedule was upset. Our program was to reach the village of Ahardi to witness the performance of ‘Bhavada’ at first. But now, we were told to reach ’Songir’ for it; though even it was not guaranteed that it was holding Bhavada at that time. So, at about five in the evening, we started from Ahwa on the road to Saputara. This road also is very beautiful and passes through thick forests. After about 13 km the road took a turn for Songir, and after about some very steep road of about 3 km, our ‘Sumo’ entered Songiri. It is a small village, situated on the top of a mountain, and surrounded by forests. It seemed to have a population of only about 1000 to1500. Majority of the houses were built on two sides of the road. The valley was easily seen at the backside of these houses. Some parts of the valley seemed to have a few cultivated fields, though only the agricultural activities prior to rainy season were observed here.

Bhavada is a Festival of the People, or ‘Lokotsava’ in which people of surrounding villages also take part. Upon entering the village therefore we did not have to waste time in inquiring about the place for Bhavada. We directly found the hut or ‘zumpdi’, where no one but the owner of the masks was present. After some time we met one of the three persons who had taken financial responsibility of the festival. Sonubhai informed us about the Bhavada Festival and provided us all details. The last day of the festival is considered very important. On that day all the Mohra/Masks are taken out. Their procession takes place throughout the night on the main road of the village. At dawn the Mohra or Masks of ‘Narsinh’ and ‘Agya Vetal’ are taken out. By 7.30 to 8 a.m. they also take out a grand procession of the Mohra of Mother Goddess Bhavani.

There are two other persons besides Sonubhai who had joined hands in organizing the Festival. During the conversation we learned that the cost of this 5-day festival was about Rs. 50,000. The three persons who arrange it divide it among themselves. Besides, the income of bidding for the Mohras is also added in the expenses. No resident of Songir village was to pay any fee as rent for masks, though others who came to join it were charged.

During our discussion the owner of the Mohras, Dhavlu Jhopde had sat down for his meal so we had to wait for a while for an interview with him.

When he came for the interview, Dhavlu Jhopde was wearing a nice headdress (pagdi). He spread a thin mattress on the floor and sat on the ground before us. A man of nearly 80 summers, his face was full of wrinkles, and yet his eyes had a fine sparkle, a brightness that was attractive. We began our questionnaire.

He hailed from Chavshala, a village of the Nasik District of Maharashtra. His main occupation was agriculture; but since childhood he had great interest in Mohras. He would visit every place where Songimukhatya or Lilikhed (Bhavada) was performed. He himself would wear a number of Masks and dance. But his main interest that developed was making of the masks! He therefore used to follow Hari Bhoya, the maker of masks everywhere, and insisted that he be taught this craft. This Hari Bhoya used to circulate the masks on hire in those days.

From then, till today, Dhavlu Jhopde had been making masks for Bhavada. Whenever this Festival was celebrated, anywhere in the Dangs, mostly his masks were invited to that village. The large number of Mohras and ‘Tati’ in the hut where he sat gave evidence of his creativity.

Not just the basic shape of the Mohra, but its features, coloring and decorations, all were the details that Dhavlu attended himself. All these were also full of beauty. He would give the mask on hire for a week; and charge Rs. 5000 for it. He would also be provided with lodging and boarding for the duration. All his invitations were on this basis. Although this was not sufficient to continue the craft, it was not a business for him but a love, a hobby. His sons also have now joined him in his craft now.

After the interview with Jhopde, we decided to see the three hosts of the Festival at Songir. Thus we went first to that person in whose home the Mohra of Bhavani was housed. Unfortunately, however, electricity went off there at this time, and so we went to meet Mohanbhai, the other host, in whose home the Mohra of Narsinh was housed.

We left our shoes outside the verandah of the house and went in. In the room that we entered, we found a number of photographs and pictures of gods and goddesses. In the huge halogen light of our video camera we saw the big mask of Narasinh. We could see an extraordinary expression on the face of this mask. Next to it were the pictures of Saptashrungi Mata, Hanuman, Ram and Sita with Lakshman etc. Under this group a lamp-flame was burning an ’akhand jyot’ without a time-break. Mohanbhai himself seemed a very devoted and religious man. He is a Bhil whose family has been in Songir for generations. His elder brother used to host this Bhavada Festival since last four years to fulfill his wishes for happiness, peace, wealth and good health for himself and his family with the blessings of the gods and goddesses. After the death of his elder brother, as per the tradition, to complete five years of one family’s responsibility, Mohanbhai had hosted this year’s Festival. He was one of the three persons who were to bear the expenses of the Festival in Songir this year. His share of the expenses would be around 15 to 20 thousand rupees, he estimated. Although a Bhil, his family is vegetarian. The room with a large number of pictures and photographs of gods and goddesses seemed like a temple actually, and ‘puja’ was also performed here every morning, we were informed. The deep faith in the form of Bhavada was evident and clear from out talks with Mohanbhai.

Then we again went to the host in whose home the Mohra of Bhavani was kept. But he was reluctant that the Mohra that had been given the rite of Infusing Life i.e. ‘pran pratishtha’, and made into a sacred idol, be exposed to video shooting. As he seemed to be under some other tension too, we could not talk much to him.

We returned on the main road now and found that the festivities had begun. A small group of children carrying twigs of trees passed us by. Then followed dancing masks of Jay-Vijay, Ganesh, and Jumlad or group of demons (Rakshas).

The next day at Songir, i.e. the 1st May was the last day of Bhavada. We were advised that next day all the Mohras would be participating and the festival would continue for the whole night, and after that the procession of Bhavani Mata would be taken out. We were also told that ‘Sapatni’ i.e. the Compere/Narrator who tells the congregation the stories of the Mohras would also be coming only for the next day. We therefore decided to return the next day, and went on to Ahwa for the night.

On 1st may 2004 at about 5 p.m. we reached Songir once again. We watched all the beautiful sights of the area around the village before we came to it, and then reached ‘Chandani’ for our study of Bhavada.

Generally, ‘Chandani’ is a hut built temporarily; in its center a picture of Hanuman is placed, and given a ritual for turning it sacred. This place, ‘Chandani’, is ordinarily at the distant end of the main road of the village. Here sit the ‘Sapatni’ and his companion ‘Hokarnar’ or Announcer for telling their stories. Sapatni is knows all ‘shastras’ or scriptures as well as the characters of the Hindu mythology.

However, at Songir the usual structure of ‘Chandani’ was not available this time. At one end of the road one wooden bench was placed and a picture of Hanumanji was put there; a lighted lamp and incense sticks were placed at its foot. We took our seats on the broken chairs brought from nearby homes for us and from very near ‘Chandani’ our video shooting equipment began its work with the help of an electric line drawn from one home nearby.

The person who was to do the role of ‘Sapatni’ was hailing from a village called ‘Bhurapani’. He was also a priest at the temple at the village of Shamgahan. His name was Shri Somabhai Pandubhai Bhoto and we began with a conversation with him first.

He told us that a ‘Sapatni’ is Brahman by birth; one who has all the ‘Puranas’ by heart, knows the scriptures and can tell the stories well to the public. Answering our question about ‘Bhavadas’ he said that it is a Festival to celebrate the Meeting/ Gathering of all 33 crore gods and goddesses. By such gatherings of divine beings our Earth is blessed with peace and happiness. By good rainfall the crops grow well and all types of epidemics are removed. Ordinarily ‘Sapatni’ also knows black magic and some medical tricks. Superstitious Adivasi people flock to him for help to remove their troubles of body and mind. On the last day of the Bhavada, Sapatni tells the story of each Mohra or Mask. For this he receives the honorarium of Rs.251.

As this conversation was taking place we came to hear some musical notes, and dancing to the beats of Sambal, carrying twigs of trees, some children came to stand near us. ‘Sapatni’ informed us that these were the ‘ganas’, or Attendants of Indradev; and that they had come to make arrangements of the ‘Mandap’ or the Pavillion for this gathering of the gods and goddesses.

Thus began the Festival of BHAVADA at Songir village that night.

THE STORIES OF THE MASKS

THE ATTENDENTS OF INDRADEV

Some eight young boys are seen approaching us with dancing steps, carrying a few green twigs in their hands. They are dancing to the tunes of Sur, Kahalya and Sambal. Beginning at the hut where all the Mohras (Masks) are housed, they dance towards the main street of a village called Songir, and arrive at a place called ‘Chandani’ at the other end of the village. At this place, the photograph of Hanumanji has been set up ceremoniously. All the children are welcomed by Sapatni the Compere and his companion Hokarnar, the Announcer. Then the

Hokarnar sprinkles rice on their heads, and smears vermilion or ‘kumkum’ on their foreheads. Thus begins the Spectacle, i.e. BHAVADA.

\* Hokarnar: Gurudev, Who are these ‘Dev’s (gods)?

Sapatni: These children are the Ganas (Attendants) or soldiers of Indradev. One Sendrasur demon is now terrorizing a great deal, so Indradev is scared and so has summoned the 33 crore devatas or gods (‘Tetris koti devata’) for consultation on this matter. At Mahataopvan, where this conference is to be held, these Attendants have brought leaves of the Asopalav Trees so that a pavilion can be made out of these.

Once again the children move out of Chandani dancing in tune with Sur, Kahalya and Sambal.

JAY – VIJAY

As the children are returning with their twigs and leaves, at the next moment two young men are seen. They are wearing old-style headgear called ‘bal pagdi’. They are holding in their hands the weapon called ‘gada’ or mace made out of paper, as they danced. As they neared Chandani, the music stopped. At once Hokarnar welcomed them with rice, spread vermilion on their foreheads and then put the question,

\* Hokarnar: Maharaj! Who are these ‘Dev’s?

Sapatni: They are the soldiers of Amarapuri of Indradev. They have been summoned by Indradev to make all arrangements for the conference of the 33 crore gods. They are to make seating arrangements and the pavilion too, and see that everything is well planned. Their names are Jay and Vijay.

BRAHMAN / BRAHMADEV

Just as Jay and Vijay withdraw, a Brahman is seen, wearing a white ‘Dhoti’ and white mask, holding a metal-pot, coconut and a staff. Hokarnar once again welcomes him with rice and vermilion ands puts up a question,

Hokarnar: O Gurudev! Who is this ‘Dev’?

Sapatni: By his penance, the demon Sendrasur had pleased Lord Shiva. He asked for a boon that except for the son of Lord Shiva, no one would be able to kill him. By this boon, he has obtained a deathless state. Worried by this, Brahmadev has arrived here. He declares in this gathering of gods that this demon has acquired immortality through the boon granted by Lord Shiva, and this has endangered all the three ‘Lok’ or worlds. Out of my three children named Narayan Swami (Narad?), Ahalya and Sarasvati, I am to get Sarasvati married to anyone who kills this demon, he says.

SENDRASUR

With music accompanying him, the Brahmadev returns. Just then we find a huge mask entering. This Mask has orange background, with big black eyebrows, huge demonic white teeth, dark moustaches, large eyes. He is holding two sticks in both hands. Some attendants, doing a vibrating dance like this demon himself, accompany him. We could find a great deal of vigor and forcefulness in their dance. This mask is also welcomed with rice and vermilion, and again Hokarnar puts the question’:

Hokarnar: O Gurudev! Who is this ‘Dev’?

Sapatni: This is no god or ‘Dev’. This is that highly sinful demon Sendrasur himself. He performed great penance in the forests and pleased Lord Shiva. He asked for a boon from the pleased Lord Shiva that ‘except for your son, no one can kill me’. In asking for such a boon was is illusion that Lord Shiva and Parvati had no son, and so no one in the Three Worlds would then be able to kill him, so he would be immortal. Having been granted this boon he broke all limits in harassing the gods who were now highly disturbed as to what to do about him. Thus finally when the demon was planning to defeat Indradev himself and rule the gods from his throne of Amarapuri, as his throne or ‘Indrasan’ was threatened now, Indradev has summoned the 33 crore ‘devatas’ for consultation here today.

GANAPATI - SARAJA

At this juncture the large-sized demons leave, and immediately two other Masks are seen dancing. But, why two masks of Ganesh? Both the masks appear to be the same! However, a close scrutiny reveals some differences. One of them is very tender in its looks and wears a crown; the other is also like the head of an elephant but has very large, angry and fiery eyes that evoke fear among the onlookers and this mask has no crown on its head.

Both the mask-wearers carry lighted up incense sticks in their hands. Two women also dance in front of them, carrying a lighted lamps in plates, walking backwards and facing the two masks. As they reach Chandani, the music stops. Hokarnar bows with great respect to the masks and welcomes with sprinkling of rice, and puts a ‘tilak’ on their foreheads with vermilion and rice.

The Adivasis (tribals) believe that goddess Sarasvati is the wife of Lord Ganesh, and hence all three are offered worship simultaneously. Thus, saying that they would have to wait until the arrival of the Mask of Sarasvati, the two masks of Ganesh are requested to stand aside. But at that moment a person appears nearby, with a crown on the head and wearing a red ’sari’, and a mask of a peacock tied on her waist. In both her hands are scarves, and she is dancing with Sur, Kahalya and Sambal. As she approaches nearer, Hokarnar stands up for welcome with rice and vermilion. The mask of Ganesh also stands near now and Hokarnar puts up the question,

Hokarnar: O Gurudev! Who is this ‘Dev’?

Sapatni: These are the sons of Lord Shiva, Ganesh and Gajarasur. Although living on Kailash, Lord Shiva has decided to perform his penances in the dark forests. But before leaving, he gave some ash to Parvati and told her, “Even when I would not be with you, you can get a gem of a son from this ash.’ He then left for the forests. Here Parvati uses the ash and does get a son, who came to be called Ganesh, who is worshipped in entire world. Lord Shiva had given Parvati this ash with the intention of having a son who would get rid of Sendrasur in future.

After a number of years of penance, Shivji returns to his abode. He sees a very handsome, tender-faced young person, who stops him from going into his own cave! Parvati had assigned the responsibility of guarding the entrance to her son, but Lord Shiva does not know or recognize him. The young Sukumar and he have a lot of verbal fight, but Sukumar does not allow him to enter. This makes Lord Shiva lose his temper. Highly angry, he cuts off the head of Sukumar with his ‘Trishul” and then enters the cave. Finding him so incensed, Parvati is scared and she runs out of the cave. Here she sees that her son has been beheaded, his head lying at a distance from his body. This makes her cry out in grief, and in her agitation she informs her husband, “What have you done? Sukumar is our own son! You have ended the life of our own son?! I want him back, alive. You must return my son back to me, alive, somehow. Do something!” Lord Shiva is confused, perplexed. What is to be done? He comes out of the cave and meets an elephant the first thing. With one stroke of his ‘Trishul’, he takes off the head of that elephant and puts it on the body of his son, bringing him back to life. Handing him to Parvati he assures her, “This son of yours will be worshipped at the beginning of all good actions.” The body of the elephant that was thus cut off, asks Lord Shiva, “What about me, then, o good Lord? What is my fault? Have I committed some big mistake that I have to be punished with death? If you can enliven your son again, can you not do the same for me as well?” Lord Shiva then goes into the forests and kills a demon named Gajarasur, who is the brother of the demon Sendrasur. He brings back the head of that Gajarasur and makes the elephant come to life as well. He tells him that the world will also worship him along with Ganesh. That is why the mask of Gajarasur also comes in with that of Ganesh in the drama of Bhavada.

The 33 crore devatas or gods that got together in this conference made a plea to the son of Lord Shiva, Ganesh, to kill the harassing demon Sendrasur. Therefore Ganesh fought with the demon and finally killed him.

\*Hokarnar:

Gurudev, Ganeshji killed off Sendrasur and freed all the Three Worlds from his harassment, is something that gives us great joy. Well then, tell me, did or did not Brahmadev fulfill the promise he had declared?

Sapatni:

Oh yes indeed. When Ganeshji finished off Sendrasur, he gave his daughter Saraja, i.e. Sarasvati in marriage to Ganeshji. That is why in the Bhavad even today both are offered worshipped together.

KHAPRYO CHOR

When we see Ganeshji, Sarasvati and Gajarasur going away dancing, we also see a green colored torch coming towards us from a little distance. As it is approaching nearer, a huge mask is gradually getting clearer to see in the light of the torch The mask is of yellow color and has black spots. It has huge demonic eyes, thick moustaches and a long tongue hanging out of the mouth, giving it a fearsome appearance. This mask-wearer also dances very vigorously. One young man also dances along, with a bow made of bamboo in his hands. As the masks neared, the music stopped. Hokarnar welcomed it with the ritual of rice and vermilion, and then put the question,

Hokarnar: O Maharaj, who is this ‘Dev’?

Sapatni:

This no ‘Dev; he is the son of Khandesur, and his name is Khaparyasur. He is not merely a demon but also a great thief and cunning cheat too. He has robbed off many gods’ invaluable treasures. This includes the theft of the four invaluable gems of Indradev himself. He cannot be caught by anyone; he does not obey anyone. He even took away the ‘Kamdhenu’ cow of Rishi Vashistha. That is why Arjun worshipped his divine bow and arrow, and after killing this slippery robber, Khapryo Chor, brought back that cow to the Rishi.

TAMASHA

Just as the mask of Khapryo Chor left dancing vigorously again, a crowd of 10 to12 persons seemed to be approaching. These were not dancing in any systematic way. Besides music, some cacophony also was going on. As these people neared, calling out with loud cries and uproars were heard. And, one strange thing could be seen with them. One big cane basket was tied with a long bamboo. From the top end of the bamboo a string was tied, and holding this string, a man was dancing or rather jumping. He wore a cone-shaped cap. Another man had a rolled mat of grass, and he was beating it pretending that it was a drum. He also wore a strip of cloth around his head and had a tassel on top. One person had worn a sky-blue colored ‘sari’ as well. As they came nearer, Hokarnar gave them the welcome with rice and vermilion, and put the question,

Hokarnar: O Gurudev! Who are these ‘Dev’s?

Sapatni: They look like a group of performers of the ‘Tamasha’ drama; but actually they are the gods of the Indra’s court. They have taken this role up to attend the ‘Svayamvara’, i.e. marriage of Damayanti. Their instruments Chonkya and Dholki are singing that ‘you have started your journey to attend the marriage of Damayanti, but not one of you is going to get her hand in marriage. You will all be unsuccessful and be drowned. Hearing this the gods took the form of the King Nala, for Damayanti wanted to wed only Nala. Her confusion was removed by Narada’s word. Narada told her that she may see large number of Nalas in the gathering, but except for the real King Nala, everyone’s feet will look askew in shape. This would help her find the real King Nala so that she can give him the garland of wedding, and chose her husband to her own liking.

Among the performing arts of the Dangs, ‘Tamasha’ is an important form. It has come from Maharashtra influence and was once a very popular form of entertainment in the area. Even today we find that Tamasha is presented in some of its new forms here.

Generally in the Bhavadas one or two masks are used. In ‘Tamashas’, this is not possible. But as Tamasha is very popular on its own, some young people use it also in a mixed form. As Bhavadas are associated with gods and demons, in this instance, the story of King Nala and Damayanti is also brought in and with it, the popular theatrical form of Tamasha is also included into Bhavada.

At Chandani, near the photograph of Hanuman, the group cracks the coconut it has brought. Half of it is returned and the group returns dancing happily.

NANDISHWAR

After the ‘Tamasha’ group left, a glimpse of another person could be seen. He had an orange ‘pagdi’ headdress with a little flag-like feather in it. He held an artificial saber, made of bamboo, and a cow’s structure is tied around his waist. It looks as if someone is riding a cow. The structure is beautiful and well decorated with colorful papers. Like a cow from Dang, this cow also displays straight horns; on its forehead is tied a strip of red cloth. Thus dressed up, the man approached dancing to the tunes of Sur, Kahalya and Sambal. As soon as he nears, he is welcomed with the ritual of rice and vermilion, and Hokarnar puts the question:

Hokarnar: O Gurudev! Who is this ‘Dev’?

Sapatni: This is Nandishwar, the son of Shethmuni (Rishi). This Shethmuni is a great devotee of Lord Shiva and performed severe penances to please him. He requested Lord Shiva to grant him the boon of a son. When Shiva is pleased with him, he grants this boon, and asked him, ‘Tell me, are you married?’ Shethmuni said, “No, O Lord. I am unmarried.’ At the same time he appealed to Him, ‘O Bhagvant! You are a great devotee and a powerful God. Just as you have created the Seven Rishis from your long matted hair, create my son also in such (unconventional) manner and satisfy my wish.’ Upon the insistence of this sage, Lord Shiva also created a son form his matted hair for Shethmuni, who came to be known as Nandishwar. He had a strange appearance. He had two horns, four legs and a mane. This strange appearance frightened the ascetics and munis. Nandishwar, observing how he puts fear into others, becomes proud of his power and form. So full he is with this feeling that he quarrels with anyone who crosses his path and begins harassing the gods. By this behavior, the gods are disgusted. They think about how to remove this thorn, and then appeal to Brahma and Vishnu for it. First Vishnu tries to placate Nandishwar, who is however too full of pride and declares a war against Vishnu instead. A war between them takes place, and during this fight Vishnu strikes the face of Nandishwar who then loses eight of his front teeth. These teeth land into the sea and at once turn into eight gems. Although Vishnu is fighting him to near defeat, Nandishwar does not let go of his pride. Now Vishnu approaches Lord Shiva and requests him to free everyone of the harassment from Nandishwar. Now Shiva and Nandishwar join in a battle. During the fight Shiva realizes that this Nandishwar is none other than the son he had created from his own matted hair. He informs Nandishwar of the fact, and the war ends; there is a compromise. Lord Shiva tells him to ask for a boon; so Nandishwar asks a question instead, “O Lord! Who has won in this battle?’ To that proud creature, Lord Shiva answers, “You.” Very highly pleased by such an answer, Nandishwar tells Lord Shiva to ask for a boon! Lord Shiva takes full advantage of this invaluable moment. He says, “O Nandishwar! You should become my carrier (Vahan), and serve me.” This is what then happens and Nandishwar also is rid of his great pride. Thus we find that at every temple of Lord Shiva the image of Nandi is placed outside the sanctorum and those who come to worship Shiva also first offer worship to Nandi.

Finally, Sapatni cracks a coconut before Hanumanji, sprinkles its water around saying, “Nandishwar Maharaj ki Jay!” The onlookers repeat this after him. Then the ‘dev’ leaves.

PUNDALIK

As soon as Nandishwar leaves, a strange vision is seen in the light of bamboo torch. Until now, different people used to come wearing masks. But now a person is dancing with a statue tied on his waist. On his head is a Maratha-style headwear (pagdi) of orange color, his shirt (‘kediyu’) is blue and his pant (‘surval’) is white. He has worn shoes tapering to a point painted yellow. A statue was tied to his waist and it was in the posture of a person sitting on floor. AS this person approached Chandani, Hokarnar welcomed him with rice and vermilion, and put the question,

Hokarnar: Maharaj ! Who is this ‘Dev’?

Sapatni: This is a ‘Dev’ all right, but he is a very great saint too. He is the great devotee of Vitthaldev, Pundalik. Just as Mirabai and Sant Tukaram are great saints, so is this Sant Pundalik whose name has become immortal among great devotees.

This Pundalik was very much in love with his wife. So he never allowed her to do any work. He used to do all the household work. Not only that, he would even wash the clothes of his wife! Thus, he did everything his wife asked him to do. He did not devote any time to his aged parents even. One day a group of pilgrims passed by his house. Pundalik and his wife saw them. The wife questioned them, “Where are you all headed?” The people of the group answered, ‘We are going on a pilgrimage to Pandharpur.’ Hearing this, Pundalik’s wife also thought of joining them. But she put one condition to him: “ I would not be able to walk all the way to Pandharpur. So you would have to carry me there.” So involved was Pundarik in his love and devotion to his wife that he agreed. His aged parents came to know of this and appealed to him, ‘you are the hope of our last days of life. If you go away leaving us now, where shall we go without you?’ But Pundalik did not lend them an ear at all. He left them to the care of gods and taking up his wife, he left with the pilgrims’ group (sangh) for Pandharpur.

On the way, a cobbler gave him a coin of one rupee and said, “As you are going on a pilgrimage, when you bow to Lord Vitthal, put this coin in my name in the river too. Then the pilgrims arrived at their destination. At Vaikunthdham, Pundalk put the coin into the River Chandrabhaga, who was pleased. So Pundalik put her a question, “Mother, you are pleased with this small gift from a cobbler, but I have not received any fruits of my long and painful travel for this pilgrimage of 2 ½ months, how is it so?” Then Mother Chandrabhaga replied, “All this is because of the service to his parents. That cobbler has always served his mother and father, and so has gathered merit. On the other hand, you have left no stone unturned in harassing your parents. So, how can you deserve any fruits of you pilgrimage?” Pundalik understood his mistake; his eyes were now opened. He left serving his wife and turned to serve his parents. As fruit of his devoted service, Lord Pandurang was pleased and personally came to him! Pundalik was busy doing some work for his parents, and so asked Him to wait for a while. He gave Him two bricks on which to stand while waiting. Both the bricks turned into gold. Even today we can see these two bricks preserved at Pandharpur.

Sapatni called out, “Vithoba ki Jay!’ and Pundalik returns.

KHANDERAO

As Pundalik left, a person comes dancing, with a statue of a horse tied to his waist. The horse is silvery, with a feather on the head, and made colorful with decorations from paper. The person, wearing this structure, danced ahead and back, on both its sides, and turned also around to the music. He held two twigs of a tree in his hands. One person was walking backwards, facing him and carrying an ‘arti’ plate with a lighted lamp.

The structure of the horse was only his upper body, for it had no legs. For dancing, the legs of the person wearing it were enough. As the dancer approached Chandani, the music stopped. Hokarnar and Sapatni welcomed him with rice and put ‘tilak’ with vermilion on his head and gave blessings.

The Hokarnar asked his usual question, ‘O Gurudev! Who is this ‘Dev’?

Sapatni: This is Khanderdev, an incarnation of Lord Shiva. When the gods and demons were churning the ocean in their battle, suddenly a great storm arose. The gods and the demons became invisible. This created great fear in the minds of the humans of the Earth. Scared, they began thinking, ‘if these gods and demons are not there, what will happen to us? Who will protect us without the gods? And whom shall we worship too?’ At this time then the humans appealed to Lord Shiva and prayed, “O Bhagvant! You are the only one who can save us when all the gods have disappeared. Please come to our help and protect us.” Lord Shiva took pity on the poor humans and took an incarnation on Earth in the form of Khanderdev. As Khanderdev Lord Shiva served the human beings a dreat deal. He used to traverse all over the universe on his horse. And so, his ‘Vahana’ (carrier) is also seen in the Bhavada performances.

Sapatni then loudly cheered, “ Shri Khanderdev ki Jay!”

TATIKA

As yet the dancing horse has not left our sight and we find a fearsome and huge mask approaching. Black in color, it is decorated with silvery patches. The red lips are parted and a red tongue hangs out. Big white teeth on the upper lip, and a flat nose, with red nostrils are scary. The ears are small in proportion, but are red in color. It has black eyes, silvery eyelids, golden brow, and a silver strip tied around the head with red strips hanging. The colorful bows or plaits are hanging and moving with wind and movement around the ears. The mask is dancing very vigorously as in ‘Tandava’ dance and making noise with loud cries and is accompanied by the music of Sur, Kahalya and Sambal. It is so huge that it is tied with a big piece of cloth through its mouth on the head of its wearer. With a stick of incense in one hand and a wooden stick in the other, the dancer approaches Chandani, and creates a cacophony as it performs a dance here. Three other vigorous dancers accompany it also. Finally the music stops. Hokarnar and Sapatnik welcome them with rice, smear vermilion on foreheads and Hokarnar puts the question,

Hokarnar: “O Maharaj! Who is this strange and fearsome ‘Dev’?

Sapatni: No, no. This is no ‘dev’ or god. It is a demonic woman. She is the sister of Ravan and Surpankha (Supakarna), named Ashadin (Tatik or Tadika). She has an army of 10,000 demons under her command. Rishi Vishvamitra is performing a sacrifice (yagna) to bring about the fall of the Danavas. Due to this Ravan is afraid. He orders his sister Tatika to take her army of 10,000 demons and stop that sacrifice of Vishvamitra. Tatika tries to accomplish this by harassing Vishvamitra in this performance of the sacrifice with help of her demons. Her wicked demons create a lot of obstacles here and there and constantly create nuisance by their mischief at the site of the sacrifice. They throw bones and other defiling objects into sacred alters.

This made Vishvamitra thoroughly disgusted. He then went to Ayodhya and approached King Dashrath. The King welcomed the sage and enquired about the reason of his visit. The sage Vishvamitra narrated the difficulties he was facing in the performance of the sacrifice, and described how Tatika and her demons had made life hell for them by their mischief. Hearing this, King Dashrath was angry and he said, “O Honorable Sage! What can I do to help you in this matter? I shall do whatever you say.” Then Vishvamitra replied, “O King! Please send your young princes Ram and Lakshman with me to the forests. They will protect us from the harassment of the demons.”

Thus Ram and his brother accompany Vishvamitra to the place of sacrifice. Once again, fresh arrangements are made and sacrifice resumed. At that time Tatika comes again with her demonic troops and begins to harass them. But now Ram and Lakshman fight her; and at the end, all the demons are destroyed along with Tatika. Thus, finally the sacrifice undertaken by Vishvamitra is completed without further undue interruptions.

PRAVAR

After cracking up a coconut and distributing the ‘prasad’ or blessed share, and resuming the music, Tatika and her attendants return, and at a little distance, yet another strange vision appears. This dancer carries a mask of a boar or pig on his face. Over his ordinary daily clothes, he has worn a dress (‘angarkhun’) made of plastic bags. The usual twig of a tree, and incense stick are not seen. The dancer is able to look from the slit of the mouth of the mask. He is dancing like a pig along with music and running here and there. His dance stops as soon as he reaches Chandani. Hokarnar and Sapatnik welcome him ritually with rice and vermilion. Hokarnar makes a ‘tilak’ on his forehead and puts the question,

Hokarnar: O Gurudev! Who is this ‘Dev’?

Sapatnik: This is no ‘Dev’. He is one of the incarnations of the great Lord Narayan who has taken Ten Avatars or forms like a Fish, Tortoise and Prewar. There were two very wicked demon kings who were brothers, viz. Hiranyakashyap and Hiranyakashyap. Of them the latter, i.e. Hiranyakashyap, with help of his tortures and power took possession of the Earth for himself. He was so powerful that he drowned the Earth into the Ocean. Brahmadev was worried by this occurrence. He expressed to Lord Vishnu his anxiety and worries, and informed him that Hiranynashyap has drowned Earth into the Ocean, and He should help. Therefore, Lord Vishnu took the Form of Pravar (Boar or Pig) and pulled out the Earth from the Ocean and handed it over to Brahmadev.

TUGU

After accepting the ‘prasad’ of coconut, the dancers with masks of boars, take leave. At that time we see at a little distance, a woman wearing a dress of ‘chaniya and choli’ (or, a long skirt and a blouse), running all over the place. She and the people around her were letting out fearful screams and the audience also was afraid. She has a mask of an ordinary size made of silver with dark eyebrows, red ears and cheeks, and the chin has yellow color of turmeric. She is holding a mask in right hand. Although it is a man, his dress is of a woman, with long sleeves of her blouse. Her skirt is black. The dancer has three other persons dancing with her. People accompanying the main dancer ordinarily face him and not the audience as they dance. But these are other dancers who dance along with the main mask. One person is dressed like a Fozdar or a police officer. He has worn a cap of an Inspector, a khaki coat and even artificial moustaches and a beard. With two sticks in hand he is also running here and there as he dances. He teases the people sitting or sleeping on the sides of the path, by poking at them with his sticks. He then jumps around as he comes near ‘Chandani’ and as he faces Hokarnar. The music stops and so do the pranks. As usual, the whole group is welcomed with rice and vermilion on the head, and the Hokarnar put up his question:

Hokarnar: “O Maharaj! Who are these? They do not look like gods, nor do they appear to be devils! Then who are they? Who is this lady?”

Sapatni: “She is Tugu. That means the woman is an old hack, an ugly old woman, as she seems just now. But actually, this is the form adopted by Mother Sati Parvati, the Adi Maya, in order to destroy two demons, by the names of Mahishasur and Bhasasur. These wicked demons have been giving trouble to each and every god and goddess. The divine beings are totally exasperated. Therefore, they approached Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh to save them from these Asuras. The three of them fight with the two demons but are defeated! Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh are worried that they had to suffer this defeat, so they think of taking help of Parvati. Then Parvati took the form of Tugu and along with two ‘gana’ (or assistants) goes on a pilgrimage of 68 sacred places (Tirtha). During the pilgrimage of Char Dham they meet the sages and Rishis also. After completing the holy festivals of the month of Shravan, Lord Shiva grants a boon to Parvati so that she is now having as many as 18 hands! Now Parvati, with her 18 hands comes forward for the destruction of Mahishasur and Bhasasur. Parvati has requested Lord Shiva to take the form of lion, and then she rides him to fight the demons. Ultimately, she is able to kill the two demons.”

 RAVANA

After the tale of Tugu is over, a new scene emerges from the backside. We can now see nine golden masks that are tied together by a half-circle or a shape of crescent above the head. The one who wears it has his face in the center and can be easily seen. On one side of his face are four masks and on the other are five masks. All are of normal human face size. On top of the masks big cone shaped structure can be seen. Most of it is covered with paper with color- prints. Above it pieces of shining paper with colors are stuck. On the top is affixed a ‘sun’ made from green color. And on the very top of the half-circled edge long paper ribbons are placed. This entire structure is kept together by iron strips and made so that it can be placed on the shoulders of the wearer of the masks. From its appearance it seems to be a very heavy structure. A structure that has more than one mask is called ‘Tati’. The dancer wearing this ‘Tati’ now enters along with music, and dances to the tune. At first he takes turns with great enthusiasm, then he dances in one place; but soon appears to be tired. He removes the structure at a little distance from ‘Chandani’ and now another dancer accompanying him wears it and begins to dance. The first man has gone in a corner and goes to sleep. It seems that he has had a number of drinks. The dance ends as they near the “Chandani’. They are welcomed by rice and vermilion on the forehead, as usual.

Hokarnar: ”O Guruvar! Who is this ‘Dev’ with so many faces?”

Sapatnik: “This is no god, but is the King of Lanka, Ravan. He is the son of the sage named Visarava. One day a demon named Sumari takes a look at the Earth from his ‘Patal’ or Nether world, and at once his attention is drawn by the city of Lanka. He then wants to rule both this city and the Earth. He then thinks of an evil way to accomplish this. He calls his sister Kaikasi who is living in the Netherworld or ‘Patal’ and tells her about his wish. Sumari then makes his sister take on the form of a human and he too assumes the form of a Brahman. Visrav Muni does not know that Kaikasi is a demon in human form. Attracted to her for her beauty, Visrav married Kaikasi. Thus Sumari and Kaikasi play a fraud on him. But soon their fraud is revealed and Visrav comes to know that he has been cheated, and that his wife is a Rakshasa and not a Brahman woman. He gets terribly angry with her and curses her, “Your children will be absolutely wicked, nefarious, and sinful.” To her are born Ravan and Kumbhakarna. Later on Kaikasi appeals to Visrav to withdraw his curse, so that the third child she was expecting can be a best person like himself. Visarava takes pity on her and removes the curse. That is why the third son, Vibhishan, is a good person.”

HANUMAN

This structure of decorated masks of more than one head is known as ‘Tati’. The ‘Tati’ of Ravan is now standing on one side of ‘Chandani’ and we see before us a totally new kind of scene. Now comes forward the mask of a character from the ancient stories, named Hanuman. However, not one person but two have this mask. With music that is remarkable different from that in earlier scenes, these masks enter dancing slowly. Both people are wearing colorful but short ‘dhoti’ cloth below waist, like a ‘kachchha’. One of them holds a ‘gada’ or a club made from paper in his hand. The color of the mask is the color of ‘sindur’, or dark orange. A golden crown sits on the head and in his left hand are incense sticks. The slow dance movement creates a very different atmosphere. Behind the mask of Hanuman is a ‘Tati’ of Hanuman too. In front of the two Hanuman masks one person is shouting in very high pitch voice. The atmosphere is charged with frenzy and seems mystic. The onlookers also begin to shake in their bodies. The person who is shouting holds a whip made of thin jute rope with which he hits himself time and again. One of the Hanuman has worn a ‘dhoti’ of blue color and the other’s is of dark pink color. The latter sports a tail made from an iron wire wrapped in cloth. He is ‘Hanuman’. The other one has no tail, and is called ‘Makardhwaj’. The “Tati’ has four masks of Hanuman on the face of a person, and is called ‘Panchmukhi Hanuman’. In a grave atmosphere when they approach ‘Chandani’, the music stops. Hokarnar and Sapatni bow to it with great respect. With great love and awe they welcome it with rice and vermilion on its forehead and vindication they extend welcome. Two girls bring ‘arti’ with lighted lamp for them and walk backwards facing the masks, until they come to the forefront. Then they stand aside.

Hokarnar: O Gurudev! Of which God are theses two masks?

Sapatnik: This is ‘Rudra-avatar’ Hanumanji. Ravan had performed great penance to please Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva is pleased with his efforts and tells him to ask a boon. When Ravan asks for Immortality, Shiva grants it, but adds that except for Lord Vishnu no one would be able to make him die. Now Ravan was so pleased he became absolutely arrogant with his fortune and he troubled every one in Trilok. When his behavior began to cross limits, the gods went to Lord Vishnu and requested that “O Bhagvant! Save us from Ravana’s wicked behavior. You must make another incarnation as a human and be born on the Earth, so that you may destroy that depraved Ravan.” Knowing about the great powers of Ravan, Vishnu approached Lord Shiva for consultation. ‘Ravan has immeasurable prowess; no ordinary god or goddess can kill him. So you should join this venture yourself.’ Vishnu pleaded. Lord Shiva agreed on condition that he will remain a celibate character, a ‘brahmachari’; and then takes the form of Hanuman. But Parvati is confused when this point of celibacy entered. She asks Shiva, ”What about my powers if you are celibate?” so he replies that ‘You will be my power in that character and thus be with me.’

When Ram was living in the forest (vanvas), Ravan kidnaps Sita. When Ram moves from forest to forest in search for her, he and Lakshman meet with hanuman. Now Hanuman also joins their search of Sita. Hanuman arrives in Lanka in his search, burns the city and during the war of Ram with Ravan, the King of Lanka Hanuman remains with Ram all the time, assisting in various ways.

Makardhwaj:

When Hanuman is returning after burning Lanka and flying over the ocean, one she-crocodile is traveling under him in the waters to protect him. In this flight, a drop of sweat from Hanuman’s body falls down which lands in the mouth of that crocodile. This leads to her giving birth to a son, who comes to be known as Makardhwaj.

The burning of Lanka by Hanuman is symbolically represented here. A bamboo is covered with some hay behind ‘Chandani’, and this is burnt, giving a glow of a city burning.

Then Sapatnik cheers for hanuman, Makardhwaj and Panchmukhi Hanuman. They then return from the stage.

DATTATREYA

When Hanumanji is gone, one more ‘Tati’ is seen. It is smaller than the ‘Tati’ of Ravan. The face of the person holding it is open in the center. On left side is a mask of blue color and on the right side is the mask of pink color. The crown is on the head of the person wearing ‘Tati’. This ‘Tati’ is a half round, and decorated with colorful papers and ribbons. On the top of the round are triangles of color paper. His hands have nothing to carry. He comes up dancing and is welcomed as usual with rice. Hokarnar puts his usual question.

Hokarnar: O Maharaj! Who is this ‘Dev’?

Sapatnik: This is a combined form of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh, which is known as Dattatreya. This is the son of Rishi Atri and Devi Anasuya.

Once Rishi Narada come to the ‘ashram’ of Rishi Atri. The Rishi asks his wife to prepare meal for the guest. To his surprise, Anasuya cooks stones in a vessel for Narada’s meal. After this meal, Narada does not get hungry for the next 12 months.

Upon returning to Vaikunth, Narada tells the wives of Brahma Vishnu and Shiva, “The purity (sat) of Anasuya is higher than all of you. Only then such a thing can be possible.” All three of them are angry with this, and complain to their respective husbands that they want them to test the purity of Anasuya. All three gods do not want them to do this, but the goddesses have become adamant. Finally they arrive on earth for testing the purity of Anasuya. The three gods also make a visit to her ashram raking the form of Rishis. Anasuya prepares the meal for the guests. But now the guests put up a condition that she should serve them without wearing any clothes; only then will they take their meals. Hearing such strange condition, Devi Anasuya is confused some\what. She thinks on what can be done in such a delicate situation. Then by her prowess, she turns the guests into very young children and then serves them the meal. The gods who have turned into children now cannot return to their abodes. Their wives wait for a while but then come to Earth to look for them. They arrive at the ashram of Rishi Atri and meet Anasuya. Devi Anasuya shows them the children and tells them, “Find your own husbands from them and take them back with you.” Now however she puts her own condition that if you do not find your right husband, you would be committing a great sin.” All the three goddesses were now worried, and asks for forgiveness from Devi Anasuya. She forgives them but creates a symbolic form of all the three gods in one body of Dattatreya. Now Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh also return with their wives to their respective abodes taking her leave.

SHARVAN

A coconut is cracked near ‘Chandani’, and its broken pieces are distributed as ‘prasad’. Taking it, the ‘Tati of Dattatreya returns and from the opposite side a person enters with a bamboo on his shoulders at both ends of which are baskets hanging with ropes, to carry pots. This contraption is called ‘kavad’. In this one however, on left basket sits the statue of a man and on the right basket that of a woman. The person, on whose shoulders the ‘kavad’ is resting, has a pink ‘pagdi’ or twisted cloth on his head, and one of its long ends is hanging at his chest. He has worn a shawl on that shoulder and a white ‘dhoti’. With music playing he enters dancing in both directions. As he nears ‘Chandani’, Hokarnar welcomes him with rice and vermilion, and puts his question.

Hokarnar: “O Gurudev! Who is this ‘Dev’?

Sapatni: This is the great saint Shravan. He is the son of Vasudev and Rukmini. They were without any offspring and they performed a great deal of penances and vows to get a child. Then god was pleased with their efforts and gave a boon that they would get a son. However, he also informs them that they will turn into cripples on his birth. They will lose the use of their legs and sight too, he said. Even when they were to suffer if their boon was realized, they chose to give birth to a son. This son is Shravan. He worships his parents and never stops to serve them. When they declare that they desire to perform a pilgrimage to 68 sacred places, Shravan considers it as his sacred duty to fulfill this wish. Thus, he makes a comfortable ‘kavad’ and makes them sit in each basket. Then with one basket carrying his father and the other his mother, he picks up the bamboo on his own shoulder and begins the journey walking. They visit one place after other. Every village they visit talk of his devotion to parents; people come to look at him and pay him respect. One such day when Shravan is passing through a forest, his father asks him to fetch water since they both are thirsty and their water pot is now empty. At that time Shravan sees a big pond nearby. He puts his parents down, and taking his pot with him goes to fill it from the pond. While he is doing this, the pot makes queer noises as it fills up. At that time King Dasharath of Ayodhya was also in that forest where he had come for a hunting game. Hearing that queer noise, he throws its arrow in that direction, thinking it was a deer drinking the water. But it pierces the chest of Shravan actually, as he sees when he nears his prey. He realizes that it is no deer but a young man! Frightened, he goes near him and asks for forgiveness. Shravan tells him while breathing his last, “I cannot live any more. But I would be obliged if you help me.” The King agrees. Then he informs them, “I have been taking my parents for the pilgrimage of 68 sacred places. I came to collect water, as they were thirsty. I was to fill up the water-pot. Now I cannot go and give them this water. I beg that you go to them and fulfill this last wish of mine buy giving them this water to drink. But as my parents are crippled and sightless, they know me only by my voice; so do not utter a word until they finish, as they are very thirsty.” Saying this, Shravan dies.

Then King Dasharath takes the water-pot to his parents, and as he had said, does not speak one word when they were drinking the water by his hand. However, his touch seems different to them and so they come to realize that this is not the hand of their son. Both ask him together, “Who is this? Who are you? Where is our son Shravan? Why isn’t he here? Why doesn’t he come to give us water?” Reluctantly King Dasharath gives them his identity and informs them that their son is no more due to his arrow that hit him by mistake. He requests, “Drink the water at my hand and quench your thirst, please.” Then Shravan’s father replies, “We shall not accept one drop of water at the hands of one who murdered our son. O King Dasharath! You will have the sin of killing not just one but three people now. We shall give up food and water after our son’s death and die ourselves.” Shrvan’s mother cursed him: ”O King Dasharath! Just as we are going to die suffering separation from our son, you too will have to suffer separation from your son and you will die because of it. Your son will not be with you at the time you breathe your last.” King Dasharath was unhappy at the whole episode, and asked for forgiveness. But the souls of Shravan’s parents gave up their bodies as they sat in the baskets of ‘kavad’, there and then. Thus, Shravan will always be worshipped as a real devotee to his father and mother.

AGYA VETAL

As soon as Shravan departs, we find a fearsome Mask approaching. It is a very big one too. It must be nearly 4 to 5 feet. On its head is a 3 ft. high colorful paper ‘Tati’. Its face is of light orange color. It has large dark eyebrows, big round eyes, huge nose with big and flaring nostrils, big and shaped moustaches, big white teeth and a lolling red tongue hanging out of the mouth truly are frightening. On its forehead are a silvery spot and a silvery crown on the head, really making the mask very impressive. As the mask and ‘Tati’ are very big in size, that person wears it with a thick cloth wound around his chest and neck to bear the weight and avoid any hurt to any part of the body. He also holds it with both his hands to keep it on level. A very weird music is provided in the background as it now approaches dancing with vigor. The music stops when it arrives at the ‘Chandani’. Sapatni and Hokarnar welcome it with rice and vermilion, and then Hokarnar puts his usual question.

Hokarnar: O Gurudev! Who is this ‘Dev’?

Sapatni: The Fire that had emanated from the third Eye of Lord Shiva had gone all the way down to ‘Patal’, the lowest of nether regions, but it was not accepted even there, so it returned to the Earth. That Fire-god is named Agya Vetal. This god is one to kill the insects and animals that damage food crops such as rats, bugs, and worms that spread diseases in the crops. Agya Vetal does not just protect the crops, he also controls such frightening creatures as ‘Rakshas’, ‘Palit’, ‘Bhoot’ (ghosts) and ‘Dakan’ (witches) in his control, and thus he also protects mankind. As he is created from Fire, his pomp is great. His form is similar to ‘Asura’ or a demon. Yet, he is very useful to the earth and man. To calm down Agya Vetal, Jyotingdev came out of the matted hair of Lord Shiva, and although both Agya Vetal and Jyotingdev were basically on the side of the gods, a long war was also fought between them. As there was no final winner, a compromise was made between him and her. Even today, on the day of “Akha Trij’, both these gods are offered worship.

THE PARROT (POPAT)

The mask of Agya Vetal retreats dancing vigorously, and from the opposite side a boy approaches dancing and he is wearing the mask of a bird on his waist. This bird has a deep orange beak, its face is blue; its eyes are orange, while its body is red. The paper mask shows that the beak is very big in proportion to its body. It also has a black line going around its neck. As it nears ‘Chandani’, Hokarnar welcomes it with rice and vermilion and puts his question.

Hokarnar: O Maharaj! Who is this ‘Dev’?

Sapatni: Adivasi people are very close to Nature. That is why we can see the impact of animals and birds in their daily lives. We also see their dancing steps often imitating the walking styles of the birds, and the movements their bodies make are also copied. Also, in the ‘Bhavadas’ we find that parrot, eagle, tortoise, fish, cow, horse etc. are also made a part of the performance in some form. Among these some are connected with mythological stories, while some indicate the closeness of the Adivasi societies with Nature. The parrot is a symbol of this kind.

‘GARUDA’ (EAGLE)

On return of the Parrot Mask, we can see the approaching mask of another bird dancing in the background. It turns out to be a bird of sky blue color and has the form of a god. From its wings hang some decorative paper strings. In one hand of the wearer is a tricolor flag as the other hand holds the mask in place. The face is god-like and the bird god wears a silvery crown on its head. Its beak is that of an eagle, and a sun is made from silver paper that is hung at its neck for decoration. As it arrives at ‘Chandani’, the music stops. Hokarnar welcomes it ritually with rice and puts his usual question.

Hokarnar: O Gurudev! Who is this ‘Dev’?

Sapatni: This is the Eagle or Garuda who is the Carrier or ‘Vahana’ of Lord Vishnu in stories of the Puranas. In this mask that is shown, you can see Lord Vishnu riding on it.

PANDAVAS

As soon as the music begins, the Garuda returns to the background dancing. From a little distance a ‘Tati’ can be seen now. Its shape is like a half circle. We then see five faces in the ‘Tati’. It is decorated with colorful papers; its wearer dons a golden crown on the head, which is a part of the ‘Tati’. The rest of the heads have silver bodies have golden crowns. The wearer holds the ‘Tati’ with both hands. As it reaches the ‘Chandani’, music stops. Hokarnar welcomes the newcomer with rice and vermilion, performs ‘arti’, and then asks the question.

Hokarnar: O Maharaj! Who is this?

Sapatni: these are the Five Pandava brothers. They are the sons of King Pandu and Kunti. Their names are Yudhishthir, Bhim, Arjun, Nakul and Sahadev. As the Mahabharat epic says, they fought the Kauravas and Lord Krishna was with them in this great battle, and finally the Dharma or Good Element won a victory over the Adharma or the Bad Element.

(Note:

Besides the usual Mask (Mohra), in Bhavada performances a ’Tati’ is also often brought to view. “Tati’ is a combination of more than one mask. Here, instead of five separate masks, one ‘Tati’ is brought to indicate the Five Pandava brothers, and a very brief account of their story is narrated. )

MASA AND KASAV (Fish and Tortoise)

As the Pandavas return, two young boys enter dancing from a distance. On their waists are two statues. One is of a fish of orange color and it is decorated with colorful papers, its face is pink and its mouth is open. The boy holds this statue with strings in his fingers. The fish has round eyes and a golden tail. Sky blue paper decorations are seen on its body.

The other boy has a statue of a tortoise with him. Its body is round like a saucer, color is violet, its face is black, eyes are round and white, and its eyebrows also are white. The lips are also red. Yellow and red color paper cuttings decorate the body. From the strings in all five of his fingers, the boy is holding it. As it nears ‘Chandani’, Hokarnar welcomes it with rice and vermilion, and puts his question.

Hokarnar: O Gurudev1 Who are these two?

Sapatni: The first incarnation of Lord Vishnu was ‘Masa’ or the Fish. A demon called ‘Shankasur’ had hidden in the lowest of nether regions after stealing the Four Vedas. When Brahmadev or Brahma woke up after his meditation, he came to know that the Four Vedas were not in place. He thereupon approached Lord Vishnu and informed him about it. Both gods were worried as to the whereabouts of the Vedas, and so approached Lord Shiva for help. Lord Shiva informed them that it was a demon called Shankasur who was the culprit for this misdeed, and has retreated to ‘Patal’. He advised Lord Vishnu, “You now take the form of a Matsya (fish) and bring back the Vedas from ‘Patal’” Lord Vishnu therefore adopted the form of a ‘Masa’ or fish, went to the nether regions, destroyed Shankasur and retrieved the Four Vedas.

When the Demons and the Gods decided to churn the great ocean, they made the Nandarachal Mountain as the churning staff; Shesh Nag was to work as the rope for moving the staff; and Lord Vishnu himself became the base of the Mountain by taking the form of a Kasava or Tortoise, to hold the Mountain on its back. As the ocean was churning thus, the first thing to emerge was Poison (vish) that would have poisoned both the demons and the gods. To be saved from such an impact, Lord Shiva was appealed to and he drank all the poison and thus saved both the demons and the gods. The churning of the ocean then continued, but the ocean began to turn thicker and thicker and both the parties were stuck in it. At that stage Lord Vishnu in the form of Kasava saved them miraculously and brought out 14 ‘ratna’ or gems from the bottom of the Ocean.

NAGIN

With the return of Masa and Kasava, we come to notice a ‘Tati’ approaching. But here there is no ‘face’ on the front side i.e. on the face of the dancer. At the back of the ’Tati’ a rounding strip is seen and a little statue is seen at its head. It looks like a statue of a woman. Mostly the ‘Tati is of pale blue color decorated with some colored cuts of triangles with one end curved into half circle. These are the scales on a skin of a snake. As the mask nears, we find that a silver crown sits on the head of the goddess’ statue that really reveals the shape of a snake. Hokarnar and Sapatni welcome the ‘Tati’ with the usual rice and vermilion, and Hokarnar puts up the question.

Hokarnar: O Gurudev! Who is this ‘Dev’?

Sapatni: This is the Wife of Sheshnag, called Nagin. During the stay of the Pandavas in forests, a fire had broken out in ‘Khandavavan’ forest. At that time this Nagin swallowed up 99 young serpents in order to save them from the fire and then took a flight into skies. But at that time the ‘Sudarshan Chakra’ of Lord Krishna moved and the head of the Nagin was cut off. Unfortunately, all the young serpents in her belly also were cut up. While dying, Nagin cursed Arjun and Krishna that since you have cut off my children, in the same manner your children also would be destroyed. She gave two arrows to Karna; one was to kill Arjun, and the other to kill Krishna. However, the first arrow from Karna did not kill Arjun who was saved. A hunter, who unknowingly shot it into the foot of a resting Lord Krishna, used the second, and this killed him.

VIRAT

Just as Sapatni is completes his story and the ‘Tati’ returns dancing with music, we can see another big ‘Tati’ coming nearer. This ‘Tati’ is also of a shape of half circle. This ‘Tati’ has seven faces, each of silver color. Each has big eyes, small yet thick eyebrows, black moustache and red lips. On their heads the ‘tilak’ is drawn and a silver crown is atop the head, with a golden border. This ‘Tati’ also decorated with colored paper strips with the edges stuck with paper flowers. The wearer holds the ‘Tati’ with both hands and he has a crown that is part of the ’Tati’ structure. For balance, the ‘Tati’ is tied to his shoulders as well. Hokarnar welcomes it with rice as it nears ‘Chandani’ and asks the question.

Hokarnar: ‘O Gurudev! Who is this ‘Dev’?

Sapatni: This is the ‘Virat Svarup’, the Great Form of the Creator of the Universe, which Lord Krishna had displayed to Arjun when the Pandavas and Kauravas are about to begin their great Battle of Mahabharat. The battle was about to begin when Arjun realized that on the opposite side were Bhishma and Guru Drona who were like his own father, and the other cousins and near and dear ones only. He became nervous with depression at the idea that he would be instrumental in their deaths. He told Krishna, who was his charioteer at the time that he had now no wish to put up a fight, for he would have to kill his own family members, and how could he do such a thing? He sat down and confessed that he would not be able to raise his weapons against them. At this juncture, Lord Krishna gave him the Knowledge of Gita, and told him, “Who are your own or otherwise in this world? This world is too vast – Virat – and I am the holder of this Universe, have a look if you have to.’ Saying this he opened his mouth in which he displayed the Great Form of God to Arjun. Arjun could view in it a collection of vast and different Forms, the illusions of this-worldly attachments and the real connections or relations among persons. After this he recovered his senses and was ready to fight the battle as destined. This ‘Tati’ is a symbol of the Great From or ‘Virat Svarup’ of God.

JHUMBAD

As the ‘Tati’ of Virat returned, we find 10 or 12 young demons dancing and jumping. Actually they are young boys of 5 to 12 years age and have donned a variety of demonic masks, holding which they run around in frolic. As they come to ‘Chandani’ Hokarnar readily welcomes them with rice and puts his question.

Hokarnar: O Gurudev! Who are these?

Sapatni: These are some of the demonic army of Tatika, such as Tadakasur, Bhasmasur and Bakasur etc. This group of the demons or ‘Rakshas’ is preparing to disturb the gathering of the gods in the Upavan. But the soldiers (gana) of Indra are fighting with them and driving them away. This entire group of Rakshas is known as Jhumbad.

BAHURUPI

With the Jhumbad leaving the ground, we now see a very huge ‘Tati’. Its main color is red, and over it are decorative paper-strips of blue, golden, green and other shining colors are stuck. The face of the wearer of ‘Tati’ can be seen, and there are 10 parallel masks alongside. Of these some are of animals too, such as elephant, pig, lion and monkey. Others are masks of human face expressing different emotions, such as laughter, fear, disgust, and anger etc. The ‘Tati’ looks very heavy indeed. It has so many masks in front as well as the back. With accompanying music the wearer of ‘Tati’ dances with abandon and moves ‘Tati’ around several times. The music stops as it enters ‘Chandani’. Hokarnar and Sapatni welcome it with rice and vermilion, and Hokarnar puts the question.

Hokarnar: O Gurudev! Who is this one?

Saptni: This is BAHURUPI, one with Various Forms. There is an interesting story behind it. Once there was a king named Vishvarath. One day he went to the forest for hunting. As he was a person who himself performed penance some time and he was also a generous ruler, he was respected even by the Rishis and sages in the forest. Returning from hunting, Vishvarath became thirsty, and as the ashram of sage Vasishtha was nearby, he went to him. He bowed to the sage by joining his hands and requested for water to quench his thirst. But, for some reason, there was no water in the ashram at that time! So, the sage Vasishtha said, “Rajan, to quench your thirst, please drink milk. Our ashram has milk in vast quantities.’ Sage Vasishtha possessed a divine cow called Kamadhenu, and her udder was always flowing with milk. That was the reason why the ashram was never short of milk. The King and his men quenched their thirst with milk this time. But they were surprised as to how fresh milk of such big quantity was readily available at the ashram. So they inquired about it. Sage Vasishtha informed them about the divine cow. Now, the King was tempted to get the possession of such a valuable cow! He therefore asked the Sage to give it to him straight away. Vasishtha informed him that this cow is meant only for this Ashram and therefore it cannot be given away. The King insisted that he be given the cow, and the sage continued to refuse. There were a lot of such talks between them, but the sage did not agree. The King now was so angry that he made a plan to even attack the ashram if necessary. However, each and every single occupant of the ashram fought against him, and finally King Vishvarath lost the battle. He hid behind the door of the ‘Kutir’ (hut) of Vasishtha and planned to kill the Sage, as he would emerge from his hut. But, instead of the sage, his eight sons came out and Vishvarath killed them. The wife of Vasishtha was enraged at this and said to her husband, “O Muni! Why have you granted refuge to such a heartless king in your ashram?” Then the sage replied, “King Vishvarath is still a great warrior and the best of kings on earth.” She said, “He has killed our sons and still you have praises for him? That really means that there is no king on earth as good as him.” Hearing all this, King Vishvarath came out of his hiding and fell at his feet. He said, “O Munivar! Even when I have killed your sons, you praise me? So, from now on you are my Guru!” Later on, this King Vishvarath became sage Visvamitra Rishi, and his form was of a Bahurupi. These forms included those of Brahma, Kamdhenu, Virat, Adishakti Maya and Shiva. That is how these Five Forms have become well known in the world. The ‘Tati’ that we saw was of this ‘Bahurupi’.

GAVLAN

With the story narrated by Sapatni getting over, the ’Tati’ of Bahurupi left, and we now see three girls dancing their way here. These girls are wearing the masks of three goddesses. The masks are decorated beautifully. The first mask has a face of golden color and red tufts encircle it. It has a silver crown and a big red dot on its forehead. The second mask has a face of green color and a silver crown on its head. It too has a big red spot on the forehead, and it has a small jewel, called ‘nath’, or a nose-ring. It is decorated with colorful papers stuck with silver paper tufts. The third mask is of yellow color and a crown of light brown color is seen on its head. It is decorated with silvery and pink colors, with a nose-ring of a pearl. On its forehead are two parallel lines and a round dot. As soon as they come near ‘Chandani’, Hokarnar welcomes them with rice and vermilion, and puts his question.

Hokarnar: O Gurudev! Who are these?

Sapatni: These are the wives of those soldiers who served in the army of Ravan, the King of Lanka. These are born as ‘Galvan’ in their next birth and numbered 16360. As ‘Galvan’ or milkmaids, they are considered as wives of Lord Krishna. As you know, at first in the battle with the soldiers of Ravan, Lord Ram had to make a retreat. Although he used great powers, the Rakshas army was not destroyed. So, Hanuman thought of finding out the secret of their survival. He found that the wives of these soldiers were great as they were highly devoted to their husbands (‘pativrata’), and only due to their religious merit the demon (Rakshas) soldiers were able to withstand the attack. After having discovered this, Hanuman went to these wives, and praised Lord Ram and Lakshman to the skies. This made the women get enamored of the two brothers. Then, in reply to Hanuman’s question they replied that they would like to get married to such good men indeed. So Hanuman said, “You can get married to them right now, but first tell me the secret of the survival of the Rakshas so that they could be killed and sent out of the way. The women agreed and informed him of the secret that would kill the demons. But they made a condition with Hanuman that the first approach to them would be from Ram himself and they would not approach him first. Hanuman assured them. “He would definitely approach you all first. Keep your beds ready, but remember! If once Ram gets up from this bed, he would not return to it.” The women agreed.

The battle was raging fiercely when Hanuman reached the battleground. Now He had come to know that Black Bees were gathering Nectar from the nether world and brought them on the battlefield for the demons as they fought. This drink of the nectar was the reason why they were not being destroyed or even hurt. He looked for and found the hive from which the Bees were coming out for the battlefield. He sat down there and began to kill those who flew out of the hive. The Bees were scared and requested him not to do this. He told them, “I will not kill you if you do what I say. You will have to stop bringing the nectar for the demons. Also, you must carve hollow from within all the beds prepared by the wives of these demons.” The Black bees agreed and carried out his instructions. Now, the demon soldiers, deprived of the nectar, began to fall very quickly by Ram’s attacks, and finally Ram became the victor in the battle. Now Ram went to the wives of the demons as Hanuman had asked him to do, and sat on the beds prepared by them. But, as soon as he took his seat, the hollowed out beds collapsed at once, and Lord Ram left them, never to come back again. The demon wives were very angry at this trick played on them and were ready to curse Hanuman. But, Lord Ram was able to calm them down and he informed them that in their next birth they would be born as the ‘Gavlan’ or milkmaids at Vrindavan and would be famous as his wives. In this manner the demon ladies became the women of shepherd households of Vrindavan and Gokul in their next birth and the three that we see here are the amours of Lord Krishna, i.e. Radha, Rukmini and Satyabhama.

NARASINH

As the ‘Gavlans’ leave, we find a huge mask coming our way. It has huge moustaches, from two red lips hangs a pink tongue, big nostrils and heavy eyebrows add to its scary appearance. His eyes are huge and lined red with black pupils; the forehead is smeared with the sign of ‘Tripund’ (i.e. three lines of ash and a red vermilion dot in the center) and it sports huge ears of blue color. A ‘Tati’ of colored shining papers is set like a crown. He is coming towards us accompanied by equally scary music in the background. One person is carrying a brass plate and going in a back step before the main mask. On his face also is a mask of silver color. Its black eyebrows and long black moustaches make the mask look very ugly. On its forehead is the red vermilion dot known as ‘tilak’. A golden crown is sitting on his head. One woman is carrying the material for ‘arti’ and is walking along doing the ‘arti’ of the mask. When they arrive at ‘Chandani’ Hokarnar welcomes the mask with rice and vermilion and asks the usual question.

Hokarnar: O Maharaj! Who is this ‘Dev’?

Sapatni: This is the fourth Incarnation of Lord Vishnu, in the form of Narasinh. A king called Hiranyakashyap, by performing great penance, obtained a boon that no man or animal or weapon could kill him. He now, therefore, had no fear of Death. Being a powerful ruler, this situation made him a very proud and egoistic king. He even began to oppress his own subjects just for fun of it. Full of arrogance and pride, Hiranyakashyap ordered his people that now they should not worship God but only him, their king. In the meantime a child was born to him, who was given the name ‘Prahlad’. This child was a devotee of God from a very young age; he was always engaged in deep meditation and worship of the God. This made his father very angry, and he even harassed his own son. The king’s sister was ‘Holika’ who offered to help him destroy the disobedient child. For this purpose she took him in her lap and Hiranyakashyap arranged a circle of fire around them. In this fire Holika died and turned to ashes, while chanting the name of the God, Prahlad emerged unhurt! This enraged his father even more.

Then he took Prahlad to an iron pillar that was heated up to a very high temperature. He told the child, “If as you say God is everywhere, go and embrace this pillar; if your God is present even there, he will see to it that you are unharmed.” The devotee, Bhakt Prahlad, cheerfully agreed to do as he was told; and went on to embrace the hot iron pillar. But the pillar split up with a big noise as he approached and from within the pillar a frightening form emerged. It is a form of half-man and half-animal. The hands are of a beast, with long sharp nails. Shouting high-pitched cries, this man-animal creature attacked Hiranyakashyap, and putting him on his lap, tore him up with his big sharp nails. To destroy the terror of this king, Lord Vishnu had taken this form of Man-Lion or Narsinh so that the boon he had could be overcome, and the terrorized earth be free form his oppression. The Form was neither of a man nor of an animal, not were the nails any ‘weapon’ against which the boon had made him secured. Thus the Earth was free once more. Narasinh Bhagvan ki Jai.

BHAVANI MATA

By now it is nearly six o’clock in the early morning. The dawn is already here and the day has begun. The mask of Narsinh has just turned back, and quietness has descended in the audience. Since 10 p.m. last night, several Masks have come and gone from ‘Chandani’. The entire night was spent in music and dance, with some dramatic movements too. Now it seems that the festival is over.

We asked Sapatni, “Now what is next? Is any other mask still to appear? Or does this mean that the worship of Bhavani Ma is now completed?”

Sapatni answered, “The real Mask, the real passion of the festival is yet to come. It is the height of this festival, but not at once. After about a break of an hour and a half, a procession of the Mask of Bhavani Mata would be taken out, and only after that the Festival can be over. Since last five days different masks were taken out at night, but the masks of Agya Vetal, Narsinh and Bhavani Ma had been placed in three different households. These were the homes of those persons who had organized the Bhavada Festival and kept the Masks at their homes and offered worship to them. Today i.e. on the last day of Bhavada these are brought out of the houses, then a procession takes them through the streets of the village and then they arrive at the Chandani’. The procession of Bhavani Ma is taken out with great pomp; but, for this you will have to wait for about an hour.”

Since we did not want to miss the greatest moments of the Festival, we decided to wait there.

At about 7.30 am some movement could be made out at the end of the street. Then we came to hear the notes of a large number of ‘Kahalyas’ playing all at once. We nearly ran to that place. The procession of Bhavani Ma had begun. We could see a crowd of 50-60 people at a distance. Behind them was a colorful scene. The mask of Bhavani Ma, nearly 4 to 4 ½ feet in size was seen. On the top was ‘Sheshnag’ the great Shesh Serpent displayed. The wearer of the mask had worn a green colored ‘sari’, carried a sword in one hand with a lemon pierced by its top point. As a part of the mask were ten hands on each of its sides. The body had the armor in blue color, with a picture of a demon displayed on it. The mask had a big nose-ring similar in design to those worn by Maharashtra women. A big necklace of golden beads with red tufts adorned her neck. Bhavani was sitting in the center of a bullock cart. The mask was so huge that one person was standing behind holding it. On its left side sat a person with golden mask and on the right side sat a person with a silver mask. A flag of orange color was stuck on the front-side. The gold mask was of the Sun and silver mask of the Moon, we were told. Behind the mask of Moon a mask of Hanuman with his club (gada) in one hand was also sitting. The whole cart was given a look of a Temple. Ten to twelve persons pulled the cart, while about 15 to 20 people surrounded it as moved, shouting cheers. One Sur, three Kahalyas and Sambal were playing music and facing the cart, moved backwards. 12 to 15 women walked behind the musicians, with a plate in their hands that had a lighted lamp and flowers and were performing ‘Arti’ of the Goddess, again moving by back steps and all coming towards the “Chandani’. One person with the mask of a buffalo also moved with the cart, walking backwards. Powder of ‘Gulal’ was thrown all around in every direction. A large number of people carried incense sticks in their hands to offer worship to the Goddess. All the people of the village now seem to have gathered here on the street to observe the festive procession of Bhavani Mata.

The atmosphere of intense devotion soon turned mystic. Every now and then, two or three people seemed overcome with excitement and their bodies began to tremble a little. Those who were pulling the cart were shouting a great deal, moving a little ahead and then going back a few steps again. The people were so emotional that they seem to think the Goddess had arrived here in person, and they bowed with great devotion to Her. The procession was slowly coming towards ‘Chandani’ and as it reached it, Hokarnar and Sapatni welcomed it with rice as usual. Then the procession turned back and went its way.

We inquired of Sapatni about this. “Please tell us the story of the Mask of Bhavani Ma.” The he told us the story thus, “Once upon a time, the terror of two demons named Mahishasur and Bhasmasur had crossed limits on this Earth. The people were highly oppressed and they cried for help. To destroy Mahishasur, Mata Durga Bhavani came to the Earth in person, and Lord Shiva turned a lion to help her in this mission. Ma Bhavani had 18 hands and she fought with Mahishasur for nine long days. Finally, on the ninth day, Ma Bhavani kills Mahishasur with her weapon of ‘Trishul’. As this fight lasted for nine days, ordinarily the duration of a Bhavada also used to be of nine days. But due to many reasons, nowadays the Bhavada festival is held for five or at the most for seven days. While Ma Bhavani destroys Mahishasur, her carrier (Vahana), the Lion, or Lord Shiva in that form destroys Bhasmasur. Mahishasur, before breathing his last, begs for a promise from Ma Bhavani: Although he has troubled men and gods alike for a number of years, he deserves to be severely punished after death, but Ma should promise him that as he is dying at Her hands, he will be achieving ‘Moksha’ instead; and whenever a worship is being offered to Ma Durga Bhavani, sacrifice also must be made in his name. As the Goddess grants him these promises, even today we find that when Ma Bhavani is being worshipped anywhere, a sacrifice (‘bali’) is also offered in the name of Mahishasur in that worship.

RATIONALE OF ‘BHAVADA’

The instinct of Man that has the element of Awe and Faith towards the Creator of the Universe in which he lives, and sometimes the Fear of the Unknown also compel him towards performing certain Rituals. The ‘BHAVADA’ that is performed in the lush forests of Dang area too have these roots in Man’s psyche. The driving force behind Bhavada is Faith, or what one may term as even Blind Faith. However, in this form of worship, instead of giving it a form of gross or material offer of worship, it is connected with many other emotions that reside in human mind. Man himself often wants to take the form of God. On the other hand, he also often feels the power of devilish emotions within his nature. All these are his ‘fantasies’ that need expression. The mythological stories can fulfill this need to some extent. The art of Bhavada, using masks, seems appropriate here. The masks are expressive of inner emotions, and yet they are masks, to be worn on the body, not mind, and so the mind, and accordingly the emotion, is both expressed as well as masked. In order to highlight the emotions, loud music and quick or slow rhythm also accompany the performer. In this manner BHAVADA is a confluence of arts of Music, Dance and Dramatic element.

However, in BHAVADA there is a little difference from other folk arts. Ordinarily, the performer in a folk art performance, be it music, dance or drama, the artist is paid some money for his efforts, thus satisfying his material craving besides applause form people. In Bhavada, however, the artist gives money to the organizer to be able to participate by wearing the mask! Although thus Bhavada is a part of life here, it is slightly different from other folk arts of dance and drama.

Yet other interesting performing art forms of the Dangs are I) Kahalya Dance, II) Thakrya Dance and III) Bhaya Dance and others. These are dances for self-expression, while the ‘Tamasha’, ‘Thali vadan’, ‘Madalya’, etc. are more of less professional or commercial art forms. But Bhavada has nothing used in commercial or professional manner except the hiring out of the Masks from the mask-makers, and the musicians playing Sur, Kahalya and Sambal in the background, accompanying the performers. The person who wears the mask, however, has a very different approach; for bids are invited to pay the rent of the mask and after the bid is final, he is able to wear the mask and dance with it on this occasion, offering his worship.

Thus, while BHAVADA is not just a ritual performing art, it also fulfills to a considerable extent the commercial and other fantasies of man’s mind.

THE MYTH AND STORY OF BHAVADA

Whatever Man undertakes, he creates ’LOGIC’ to back it. For any action/event or whatever he does/performs, Man takes some help from ‘non-human’ element to support it. That is the reason why we find a large number of mythological stories existing in all cultures.

The Adivasis of Dang also use such logic behind their forms of performing arts, using for support the mythological stories accepted traditionally. Especially in their ‘Street Theatre’ – ‘’Madalya “, “ Bhavada” and the “Bhaya” dance of ‘Dungardev’ we find several mythological stories associated with them.

‘Dungardev’ and ‘Bhavada’ are a kind of rituals. They are performed to celebrate the gains after the vows etc. that indicate their superstitious nature.

The stories behind Bhavada are woven around the characters of Hindu Puranas. The main cause of this is that migrant people of Maharashtra coming into Dang area have brought this form of art. The story is something like this in its local version:

An evil demon named Sendrasur had been worshipping Lord Shiva in order to get the boon of eternal life. Lord Shiva, after his prolonged penances, is pleased; and he grants the demon the boon he asked. Now, without any fear of Death, the demon Sendrasur creates havoc in all the three ’lok’ or worlds, and harasses the inhabitants no end. The people are thoroughly disgusted and even scared. Indradev of Amarapuri i.e. Heaven, also is now afraid and fears that his own headship is under threat.

Indradev then invites 33 crore ‘devatas’ (or gods) to a conference in order to think as to how to destroy this Sendrasur and relieve the people of all the three ‘Lok’.

This conference or gathering that takes place is the main theme of ‘Bhavada’.

THE MASKS (MUKHOTYA) OF BHAVADA

Each and every mask used in Bhavada is made in a particular method, different from each other. There are two kinds of Mohras or Masks. One is the main mask, i.e. one facemask; and the other is of more than one faced mask, which is known as ‘Tati’. Here we found that an old man of 80 summers had prepared these masks. His name is Dhavlu Jopde. He hails from Chavshala village of Dhindhori sub-district of the Nasik District of Maharastra State. He had learned the art of making Mohras from a man named Hari Bhoya.

A small mask also takes at least three days to complete, and additional two days for coloring etc.

Rough papers are soaked for a long time in water, and a pulp is made out of it. This is ground very fine. Then glue is added to this pulp. Mud moulds are already prepared, with required features. The pulp and gum mixture is stuffed and layered into the moulds. These can be easily worn on face after sufficient drying out. Ordinarily for the face of a man or a little larger dimension, this method of using mud moulds is quite sufficient. But, for bigger masks, such as the masks of ‘Sendriyasur’, or ‘Narasinh’ etc. that are bigger than 4’ to 5’, another method is used. Within the mould a structure of bamboo strips is woven and then the mixture of paper pulp with gum stuffed within. Then this is allowed to dry out well. It is this structure that actually holds the big masks together without breaking up.

The masks are dried in the sun. The mud part dries and falls off; and then the paper pulp also dries and holds the features molded underneath. Then begins the process of decoration. Different colors are applied. A mask looks gentle, pleasing or handsome; or fearsome and ferocious, wild or brutal, all because of the coloring it gets. For wearing the mask, a seat of iron or bamboo is also attached. The size of masks ranges from an ordinary person’s face to 3-4 or even 5 feet big structure. The masks of demons or destructive characters are especially huge in size. The masks of gentle character, such as a god or a goddess are of normal size.

The coloring of the mask is really a big task. The work requires the hand of a very experienced and expert painter. Only then can the character of the mask can be well expressed. The study of different masks reveals that the masks need a very imaginative and creative painting for really good effect.

Then comes the decoration of the mask with other things such as colored paper strips or bits and tufts etc. Some of the masks carry big structures on the heads that require color-printed papers, shining paper strips with a special design of rounds or half circles etc. Some tufts of color paper are also used in the decorations. This structure is like a half circle in shape; we can view it in masks of Agya Vetal, Narsinh and others.

Based on the stories from the Puranas, some characters have more than one face, such as Dattareya, Ravana, Bahurupi and Virat. To highlight these masks, ordinary facemasks are made first, and then joined above a structure to hold them together. One part in the center is left open so that the wearer’s face is seen without a mask, and is able to hold the structure. Actually this structure is usually quite huge, even of a length of 7’ to 10’ at times. This structure is also made from thin strips of bamboo. Thick bamboo sticks hold the outer part together. The entire structure is covered by colored paper. These papers may be ordinary plain or printed. Triangular and other shapes made out of the paper also decorate it. The upper edge, usually a shape of a half circle, also has tufts made of thin paper strips. The entire structure is called a ‘Tati’. It is easy to see that such a structure would be very heavy indeed. An iron tripod is therefore attached to it for balance. This tripod is then placed on the shoulder of the person that carries it. When, in an atmosphere of loud, rhythmic and devotional music, the person carries such a ‘Tati’ into the arena, dancing to the tune, going in rounds, the scene is indeed extraordinary.

In Bhavada, sometimes there are no masks but statues of persons, animals or birds are carried for certain characters. For instance, in the story of Sarja i.e. Saraswati, or Eagle or Garuda, and Tortoise or Kasava, statues show Fish or Masa, Pundalik, or the parents of Shravan, etc. These statues are to represent the characters, but the masks are much better and more beautiful representation. The statues are lower in their standard in comparison with masks or Mohras. Sometimes the painting made on the statues also seems to be unnatural.

In the festival of Bhavada, the Maker of Masks also has a special importance. The masks are kept in the village that is hosting the festival for the duration. The masks are provided on hire. The usual hiring charges are Rs. 5000 a day. The Maker of the Mohra also lives in that particular village for those days, is provided food and shelter by the organizers. It is important that this person prepare a number of Mohras for the festival; for at times they break. In case of a little damage, he repairs them. The masks also travel from a village to another and there is a risk of them getting badly damaged or broken on the way. The Maker then has the responsibility to repair and replace them. The masks and ‘Tati’ are totally under his control only. Some enthusiastic local youth too often help him in his work for decorating. However, mostly the masks are readily available from the border villages of Surgana and Chavshala of Maharashtra. From the amount paid for the hiring of the mask, however indicates that this activity is difficult to undertake as a commercial venture. If the work has been done since generations and there are artists in the family, then it might be possible to make it a commercial venture. Otherwise the masks can be prepared and housed only due to one’s personal interest in the tradition of Bhavada.

THE PATTERNS OF PERFORMANCE:

The performance of Bhavada is not confined to a stage or a limited and marked area, or a junction of any crossroads either. The area of Bhavada stretches from one end to another of the main road of the village. The performer and his associate/s perform their dance all along that stretch of the road, and then return. At one end is built a temporary hut that also alternates as the temporary boarding home for the owner of the Mohras hired out for the festival.

Ordinarily the people of the village want to wear the Mohra in their individual capacity and participate in the dancing. Those who want to wear the Mohra or participate in the performance of the Bhavada, have to bid for the Mohra, and the one who bids highest, is given the Mohra he has selected. Once the persons have selected all the Mohras, a certain order is fixed for performance so that one Mohra follows another in an orderly fashion. The distance between two Mohras is so maintained that they are not in the way of each other.

To accompany the dancing and moving ahead of the artists, the music is played on Kahalya, Sur and Sambal trio or ‘mandali’. One or more of such ‘mandali’s accompany the Bhavada performers depending on the monetary strength of the organizers, so that five to seven Mohras can simultaneously move along the road. The distance is of about 1 km from the place of collection of the Mohras (the temporary hut), or at the last stop of the village road. It is named ‘Chandani’ for the purpose, and a photograph of Lord Hanuman is kept there. Here stand ‘Sapatni’ or Compere and his assistant ‘Hokaryo’ or ‘Hokarnar’, the Announcer.

With every Mohra, usually the musicians and a two or three other persons also dance along. This helps the person wearing the Mohra to increase and maintain his dance and enthusiasm. For every Mohra, one person carries a burning Torch of green bamboo, and walks before the Mohra, as his helmsman. Sometimes other people also steer the Mohra. For example, in the Mohra of Shravan or Saint Pundalik, etc. a lady who is related as, mother, sister or wife to the person wearing the Mohra accompany him with a plate on which a lighted lamp is placed, performing the ‘arti’ of the Mohra she escorts, walking backwards. After this ceremony is over, then only the Mohra is brought out into the street for performance. It takes its steps and moves up to the “Chandani’ where ‘Sapatni’ and ‘Hokarnar’ welcome it along with the accompanying people with rice and vermilion.

Then in answer to the question put up by Hokarnar, Sapatni narrates very dramatically the story of the Mohra present. When the narration is over, the persons accompanying it or the lady with the ‘arti’ hands over a ‘Shrifal’ (coconut) to it. It is then broken at the feet of the picture of Hanumanji and parts of it are distributed as ‘prasad’ among the people around. Once again their music begins and the Mohra resumes the performance, this time going in the other direction, to return on the same road to the spot where he began.

There are different ‘theka’ or ‘chala’ (movements) for each Mohra. The Kahalya and Sambal plays tunes and beats that suit their beats and movements. The ‘theka’ for most of the Mohras is the same, which is known as ‘Bhavada Chala”. However, the Chala of some Mohras, like Bahmadev, Sarja, Hanuman, Narsinh, etc. are indeed very different. The music played for them also creates a very different atmosphere. It is such as to create a kind of frenzy in the participant and his accompanying people.

The Bhavada Festival lasts from 5 to 7 days. During first 3 to 4 days, not all Mohras are brought out. They are added to gradually day-by-day, and on the last day all the Mohras are bought out, while in the early morning Bhavani Mata is brought out with great ceremony, accompanied by a procession.

DANCING MOVEMENTS OR DIFFERENT ‘CHALAS’ OF BHAVADA.

Bhavad Chalo (Bhavada Movement):

All the characters use this movement except as described otherwise.

1. Left foot slides on the ground clockwise for ¼ scale of a circle and the right moves with the left with its palm and toes up, and is put down in a springing action on the floor as it moves.
2. Immediately, the right foot is picked up and moving half a circle ahead the palm and toes of the right foot up for a springing action, and the left foot slides up with it.
3. To make the full circle now ¼ scale is to be covered backwards in clockwise direction, while the palm of the right foot does the springing action and left foot slides with it to complete ¾ circle.
4. In the last step, the right foot reaches the spot where the circle began and as described above, with its springing action, sliding the left foot on ground, completes the movement of one full circle. The face of the dancer is always towards the audience / spectators and does not move with the body as it moves in the circle.

Brahman or Brahmadev:

1. Right foot moves in a clockwise direction, crosses the left foot ¼ circle ahead and stops at 1.
2. At that time the left toot also is lifted up in front and crossing the right completes ½ circle and stops at 2.
3. Right foot comes back in original position at 3.
4. Left foot comes back in original position at 4.

Even here the dancer faces audience / spectators and his face or body does not move in the directions of the motion.

Sarja:

To begin with, tapping is done with the right foot, moved in straight line in left direction and the left foot slides along with it. With each beat four such taps, the next movements would move in left direction when the left foot slides along. After tapping four times, it is to be reversed, though right foot is tapping as the left foot slides along. Thus this set of movement takes the dancer in one line in both directions, but when the round is completed he is again in the same spot where he began. After one such set, he makes one turn-around on the spot; and then goes on for the next set of movement.

Khaparyo Chor:

1. Pick up the right foot above knee level, move clockwise for ¼ circle and then tap the floor, as the left foot reaches there.
2. Similarly, picking up the left foot, moving it clockwise for ¼ circle, above the knee level, tap the floor, bringing the right foot along, completing ½ circle.
3. Once more pick up the right foot, turning the face, make ¼ circle at the backside, and tap the floor, bring left foot sliding up, completing ¾ circle.
4. Now to complete the circle lifting the left foot, put it on the spot where the movement began, while right foot slides along.

Moving clockwise, the dancer’s face and body move in the direction of movement and so does the mask.

Nandishwar:

Movement 1: Linear

Constantly hopping movement is done. Right foot is picked up, doing springing action on ground, and left remains in the air. Immediately the left foot is lifted with a springing action on the floor and right foot is in the air. This alternate hopping (langdi) is done continuously to move in one line on the same spot, swinging from right to left and left to right.

Movement 2: Circular

1. Lifting up the left foot turning anti-clockwise ¼ circle taps it down on the floor, and doing the springing action, as the right foot is in the air all the time.
2. Immediately then on the next beat, the right foot moves a little ahead completing half a circle, doing a springing action by a tap on the ground, as left foot remains in air.
3. On the next beat, completing ¾ circle, left foot taps on ground with a springing action, while right foot remains in air.
4. Now completing the circle, the dancer puts the right foot on the spot where he began, and with a springing action returns to that spot as the left foot is in the air.

Then these set of movements are to be repeated to move forward.

Khanderao:

1. First lifting the right foot to move in a straight line ahead and tapping the floor, three springing actions are done, when left foot slides along. After three such tapping on three beats, right foot is lifted in the air. The body of the dancer is stretched upward along with this movement, as also the structure of horse that he is wearing stretches with him. The steps resemble the walk of a horse.
2. When returning in the direction from where he has come, the dancer turns to the left, taps the floor three times with springing action and reaches the original spot on the left, as right foot slides along. Once again he lifts his left foot as in step 1. The dancer’s body stretches as well.

These movements are done in both directions, taking three steps in either direction every time; and copying the walk of a horse by tossing his feet right and left.

Pravar:

1. Lifting up the right foot dancer puts its toes on floor, keeping heel held up, tapping hard on the floor, again picks up right foot and taps with full foot, and left foot stays in its place.
2. Similarly, lifting left foot, touching floor with toes, holding heel up, tap floor and lifting it again, tap floor with full foot, keeping right foot in its place only.

These movements are done one after another and the body also moves up and down with the movement.

Hanuman:

1. Lifting right foot up to the knee level, the dancer slowly puts it on floor, at the same time the left rises up and when the left touches floor, the right lifts up. The movement flows into each other as right-left, right-left three or four times.
2. Then the dancer lifting his left foot turns half a circle, and repeats that movement four times now as left - right, left - right. Then he turns another half circle, to repeat step – 1.

During the movements he moves ahead too. He carries a ‘Gada’ (club-like weapon), and his hands naturally move in front and back of the body along with his body movements.

Narsinh:

1. Putting right foot in front, the left foot is raised in its place a little and put back in that spot again. Once more the right foot comes a step ahead and left is lifted a little and put back on original spot. The body moves accordingly in front and then at the back.
2. After this movement at the same place for eight times, he picks up left foot and puts it in front. He then repeats the movement of Step 1 in reverse.
3. After three such cycles, the dancer moves forward. The copper Thali (plate) is in the hands of Hiranyakashyap. Narsinh clashes with it a copper wristlet in his left hand and a brass one in his right hand.
4. Once again the eight cycles on the same spot and following three cycles are repeated to move forward.

Bhavani Mata:

The person wearing the Mohra of Bhavani Mata does not dance. However, the person who organizes the Bhavada festival, or his brother, or his son, wear the mask of Bhavani Mata, and sits in the middle of a cart. At his feet a mask of a Tiger is kept, for tiger is the Vahana (carrier) of the Goddess. The Goddess is surrounded in the cart by the gods like Sun, Moon, Hanuman etc. The cart is moved in accompaniment with a fixed tune and beats. Eight to ten persons pull the cart. However, this is not an ordinary pulling, for those who pull it move ahead by seven steps and move back by five small steps and ultimately advancing in the show via the main road all the way to ‘Chandani’.

THE MUSIC OF BHAVADA

In one sense Bhavada is a complete Performing Art Form. In other words, all three Arts – Dance, Drama and Music – are beautifully interwoven into its performance.

As we have seen in the section of Patterns of Performance, the notes and rhythm from Kahalya (a kind of shehnai), Sur and Sambal accompany each person wearing the Mask. Actually an expert group or ‘Mandali’ is widely engaged in the Dangs for the purpose of playing Kahalya, Sur and Sambal. For Rhythm, a variety of instruments are also used. As the origin of Bhavada is in Maharashtra, the use of Sambal is quite obviously natural. For the person that hosts the Festival this is the most expensive head. For, he has to maintain four to five such ‘Mandalis’ with members that play the Sur, Kahalya, Sambal, etc.

The music, tune and rhythm are composed in keeping with the character of each mask, and arranged for appropriate expression. Of course, in present age, we can see sometimes film music or music of “Tamasha’ also intruding into the rhythm or tunes in these performances.

On the night that we witnessed and observed the Bhavada Festival, the Masks were not taken out in accordance with the traditional order. Also, sometimes the music accompanying a few masks and ’Tati’s was not very clear to the ear. That is why, while the total Masks taken out were 31, we have been able to complete the notations and de-coding of the music for only 21 of them.

THE COSTUMES OF BHAVADA

Observing the Bhavada in the village of Songir in the Dangs in 2004, we again viewed the recorded videotapes we had made in 1994 at Dang’s Supdahad and Ambapada during our documentation of performing arts of Dangli tribals. This would make our observations of the art of Bhavada more objective and realistic.

This objectivity of our comparative study drew our attention to the Costumes worn by the participants of the Bhavada. It is easy to see that with passage of time, there are a few changes occurring in their dresses and costumes. It is observed that in 1994 the dresses of the artists were quite in keeping with the Mohras i.e. the character they played. But this cannot be said true for the Bhavada artists of Songir.

The character of Brahman or Brahmadev, however, has worn a white ‘dhoti’, with his upper body bare at all the three places, i.e. Ambapada, Supdahad and Songir. At Supdahad there were two characters of Gavlan. One of these girls had a white sari, and the other girl had a bright yellow color sari. Also, it was worn in the ‘Dakshini’ style. They clutched colored scarves in the hands. At Songir the Gavlan was performed by person wearing usual or everyday clothes. One girl had salwar-kameez; another had a skirt and blouse combination, while one girl wore a frock.

At Supdahad, the persons donning the Mohras of Ganapati and Gajrasur wore a long coat that looked like ‘angarkha’ and a ‘surval’. But at Ambapada both the men with Mohra wore yellow saris using them like a ‘dhoti’. On the upper body they wore a usual shirt, with a colored piece of cloth tied like a sash around the waist. After ten years, the artists at Songir wearing these masks have not worn any costumes pertaining to their character but only their daily dress.

The person wearing the Mohra of Sarja i.e. Sarasvati, at Supdahad was simply dressed while at Ambapada the man had donned a blue sari in ‘Dangi’ or Maharashtra style, and also worn a blouse of green color as women do. At Songir also the person with Sarja Mohra had worn a red color sari.

Tadika is the sister of Ravan, and a demon herself. The person wearing her Mohra at Supdahad tied a colored sari below waist and a blouse on the torso. But an aesthetic sense could be made out in the Mohra of Tadika at Ambapada. The person wearing this Mohra had matched the black color of the mask with a black shirt and a black skirt with a little design of colors. At Songir the person with the mask of Tadika is in ordinary daily clothes.

The Mohra of Hanuman is very important in Bhavada, it seems. All the persons who had worn the Mohras of Hanumanji in Supdahad or Ambapada or Songir, had worn saris or colored cloth-pieces tied around the waist like a ‘kutchha’.

In Supdahad, the ‘Tati’ of Virat was on a person wearing a wide salwar called ‘jama’ and ‘surval’ with golden border. But at Ambapada and Songir the artists wore only routine clothes.

The importance of the Mohra of Narsinh is considerable. In Ambapada the dancer had worn a ‘jama’, at Supdahad wore everyday dress.

The head of the household wears the Mohra of Bhavani where it has been placed for the duration of the Festival. He wears a green colored sari when he dons the venerable Mohra of Bhavani Mata.

Thus, after the study of very different places, we can make a general conclusion that with fast change in time, the enthusiasm for participating in the Festival of Bhavada seems waning a little; and this is indicated by the carelessness of the participants in not wearing dresses that are appropriate with the Mohras they wear. Another point is that the wish to wear any Mohra in Bhavada is dependent on the person concerned. However, in the Bhavada only a decade ago, in 1994, held at Ambapada and Supdahad the enthusiasm of the participants is more evident than the enthusiasm at Songir.

THE PROPERTIES (PROPS)

Besides the Mohra and costume, there are number of things that support the performance of the participants in Bhavada. Apart from the general props, there are things specially needed to suit the Mohra for the performance.

Firstly, the ’Ganas’ or attendants of Indradev are children who carry small branches of green trees in their hands, and these are symbolic materials for the Pavillion or Mandap under which the gods are to sit for deliberation. Then enter Jay and Vijay who are the main soldiers of Indradev. They carry ‘Gada’ or clubs made of paper pulp. Brahmadev carries a metal vessel for water and a stick. Sendrasur, Khaparya Chor, Tatika and such demonic elements also carry sticks of wood in both hands. Sarja or Sarasvati and Gavlan have scarves in their hands. At Songir, to indicate ‘Chonkya,’ a musical instrument used in ‘Tamasha’, as a broad expression, a dummy of a long bamboo tied with a string to a big cane basket was carried by a person and another musical instrument, ‘Dholak’ or ‘Naal’ is exhibited through a rolled up mat of bamboo strips.

The Mohra do not symbolize the characters of Nandishwar and Khanderao. For Nandishwar, the person carries a structure of bullock made from colored papers, while Khanderao is a similarly made structured horse. In the hands of Hanumanji, a ‘Gada’ or club is placed, and it is made of paper. One person moves along with the Mohras of Hanumanji and Makardhwaj, brandishing thin jute strings into the air, sometimes whipping their own bodies with it.

When Hanumanji reaches Chandani and his story gets over, a sheaf of hay that has been tied to a bamboo and placed behind Chandani pushed into the ground, is put to blaze. This is the symbolic recall for the burning of Lanka that Hanuman had undertaken in the story of Ramayana.

The ‘Kavad’ that he carries on his shoulders symbolizes the character of Shravan. The two baskets on each end of the stick on his shoulders carry statues of his parents, and a ‘loto’ (metal water vessel) is also tied on it with a string.

The person wearing the Mohra of Narsinh has a copper wristlet in his right hand and a brass one on his left hand. Hiranyakashyap who gets killed holds a brass plate on which the wristlets are to be banged repeatedly.

Two persons walk backward facing the Mohra of Agya Vetal. They carry in their hands tender wheat/corn plants in an earthen vessel. Also a low fire is so carried in big earthen vessel before Agya Vetal. The Mohra of Bhavani Mata is not just a mask; it is almost a full statue. It is worn on the body of the person. He also carries in his right hand a sword of tin, with its sharp tip piercing a lemon. This Mohra does not move in the procession dancing and walking the road. With great dignity the person wearing it is to sit in the cart and a procession is taken out for it. In the procession at Songir, we found that besides the mask of Bhavani Mata, those of Surya, Chandra, Hanumanji, etc also accompanied her in the cart.

We could see a large number of people dancing along in Bhavada, and they carried incense sticks in their hands. Many dancers joined too, wearing ‘ghoongharoo’ or bells on their feet. Thus a large number of related things that would suit the different characters of the Mohras were used to enhance the significance and enjoyment of the entire performance of Bhavada.

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

From Paleolithic Ages, human beings have given expression to their innermost emotions and aspirations. Indeed there have been spectacular changes in the forms of expression down the ages and the variety is mind-boggling all over the world. When, billions of years ago, after having successfully made his hunt, the savage human must have jumped with joy, shouting and shrieking, he must have performed the world’s first dance and music show! Today, in a highly civilized world, the expression in music and dance has taken classical forms, and so these may be still expressing human emotions, yet they have turned into visual and audible forms of Performing Arts.

The ‘folk arts’ like the ‘folk music’ and ‘folk dance’ or ‘Adivasi dance’ may still be mediums of expressing emotions of heart, but even these have turned into visible performing art forms. ‘Bhavada’, in that sense, is true ‘folk’ art form. Wearing the ‘Masks’ the person is giving expression to his own innermost emotions of the heart. He pours his heart into that character, whether it is “Khapryo Chor’, or ‘Tatika’, ‘Hanuman’ or ‘Narsinh’. This oneness with the character is not a type of ‘spectacle’, but it is actually the ‘fantasy’ within his heart that gets identified with the character portrayed. He does not dance to ‘show’ the others, but ‘lives’ that character for that duration.

“Bhavada’ is another form of ‘Sonmukhtya’ art form prevalent in Maharashtra. This is the reason that the music accompanying the Masks is very similar to the music of ‘Marathi’ style. However, most of the ‘movements’ or ‘Chalas’ are of local flavor. The people who attend the Festival, consider the person donning the mask as the real God Almighty, or the character he displays, and they offer worship accordingly. They offer ‘arti’ as well during their worship as to a God in a temple. The performers are welcomed with auspicious rice and vermilion, and their feet are also touched to get blessings. That is why ‘Bhavada’ does not remain a mere Spectacular Festival or an Art Form, but a live and divine expression. That explains why it has not been presented on the ‘stage’ so far, and remains with ‘people’ in direct contact.

The ‘Mohras’ or Masks we find in Bhavada are attractive in their own right. This is a unique performing art in the whole of India, when masks are worn in this fashion. The entire characterization is done with these Masks, and these are created with special characteristic of the character portrayed. For example, the masks of demonic characters like Sendrasur, Tatika, Khapryo Chor, and Bakasur etc. and of characters with strong and unique powers, such as Hanuman, Narsinh and Agya Vetal etc. are made in a large or very large size. This makes them very impressive and sometimes fearsome too. For some characters, like Shravan and Pundalik, statues are used while dancing. For characters like Sarja (Sarasvati), Khanderao, Nandishwar, etc, their ‘carriers’ or Vahanas like the peacock, horse or ox, are portrayed with the help of dummies. Thus, Bhavada does not remain a mere ‘Mask Dance’ either. However, on the whole, this is the expression of the Maker of masks and dummies, one may say.

Yet another type of expression is found in ‘Tati’s, such as Ravan, Virat, Bahurupi, Pandavas, Panchmulkhi Hanuman, etc. These also express different feelings and emotions of their makers.

The expenditure of hosting a Bhavada is indeed very high, and so gradually now this ritualistic Festival is being performed less and less. I can see easily that the degree of the sense of ‘devotion’ in the Bhavada of 1994 was much more than that we saw in this one in the persons who wore the Masks. As ‘Faith’ is also ‘Faith’ even when ’blind’, one may say, so we cannot deny the possibility of this art form continuing in its original form still.

The question here arises, should or should not any effort be made to make this art form presentable on stage? By now, nearly all the ‘Adivasi’ dances have already arrived on stage, and sometimes even Bhavada has been so presented. So it seems appropriate that by providing systematic training, and performed by the artists from the Dangs, if the efforts are indeed made to present this art form on stage, not only the art form would be preserved for the future generations, the skills and art of making the Mask or Mohras also would be given a new life.