

# CHAPTER - III

## **ORIGIN OF TAMASHA FOLK THEATRE**

## TAMASHA FOLK THEATRE OF MAHARASHTRA



### III. ORIGIN OF TAMASHA FOLK THEATRE

#### 3.0 — INTRODUCTION

Although some form or the other of a folk theatre rooted in the rural soil has existed in Maharashtra for the last seven centuries, it is not clear exactly at what stage the Tamasha as we know it today had its first distinct beginnings. The work of the Marathi saint-poets, spread between the thirteenth and the seventeenth centuries, is replete with references to a variety of forms of folk entertainment. Indeed, saint-poets like Eknath and Namdev have themselves made extensive contributions to the verse compositions which were utilised for this entertainment.

These entertainments were presented by itinerant professional troupes and subsidised by the village authorities. Certain hereditary professions, such as those of the barber, the dhobi, the potter, and the oil miller, also annually presented a performance characterised by song, dance and mimicry. In what was called the *Khel-Tamasha* (*Khel* means "play"), the various assignments on and off stage were given traditionally to members of particular professions. The barber, for instance, would be in charge of make up; the butcher, a Muslim, would play the *dholki* (a percussion instrument resembling the *mridangam*); the carpenter would play the *daf* (a kind of drum), and among those who supplied verse compositions would be the Brahmins of the village.

#### 3.1 — WHEN AND HOW?

The folk art form which is called Lok Natya these days (previously known as Tamasha) is a traditional folk art form.

Today Tamasha is being known as Lok Natya. There is a difference between Tamasha and Lok Natya. There is a difference in their presentation style. Villagers of Maharashtra have not recognised Tamasha as Lok Natya. The present form of Lok Natya is the traditionally continuing form of Tamasha. The name "Lok Natya" came into existence during the late 1970s. The cultured and educated-society named the Tamasha form as Lok Natya, but the traditional rural people still treat this form by its old name. All the Tamasha companies are prefixed by Lok Natya Tamasha Mandal and this has become a tradition. In rural areas of Maharashtra, the dance type of folk forms which are performed on stage are also known as Lok Natya.



### 3.2 — ORIGIN OF THE WORD TAMASHA

The word Tamasha IS derived through mixing of two words — Tam + Asha = Tamasha. The form Tamasha was a very blamed form in those olden days. High cultured and upper caste people never used to witness the form and treated witnessing the form as a sin. Hearing the sound of the instrument tuntune and dholki was also treated as a sin by the women of some upper castes.

### 3.3 — ORIGIN OF THE WORD TAMASHA IN MARATHI LANGUAGE

Tamasha (masculine gender), Drushya (vision), Pradarshan (enactment), Manoranjan ka dekhva (to witness the entertainment), Samarambh (beginning), Gammath (fun), Majedar drushya (interesting features), Kusthi (wrestling), Ladai (fighting), Natak (drama).

In Turkistan, the word Tamasha is a well known and famous word. Marathi language has borrowed this word from Urdu and the meaning has also been changed in Marathi. Tamasha in Marathi means "a specialised performance which is the mixture of dance, different types of roles by girls, participation of ladies, singing of lavnis, etc."<sup>5</sup>

The main objective of this form was to entertain the rural folk. The meaning of the word Tamasha has come from Tamashgir. The meaning of the word Tamasha in Urdu and Persian languages is "entertainment, wonderful scening."

In the dictionary of Indian languages (Bharatiya Kosh), the meaning of Tamasha is given as "an Arabic word — Darshaneeya drushya — visualised scenes."

The writer of Tamasha form is known as Shahir, which is also an Arabic word. Some intellectuals feel that this art form Tamasha was begun during the reign of Adil Shahi, thereby the form was known as Tamasha and the writers of these forms are known as Shahirs, both are Urdu words and the impact of Urdu is more on Tamasha form. "Gammath," a part of Tamasha, is also an Urdu word. This form Gammath was well received and appreciated by the kings, high cultured people and also by the common folk. Gammath has become Khel Tamasha in the later periods. Perhaps this Tamasha form has entered into Maharashtra with the entry of Muslim rulers. During the thirteenth century (1290 AD), Santh Gnaneshwar gave a mention of this form in his literature. During the period of the development of drama, Gondhal, Lalit and Swang were the famous folk art forms.<sup>6</sup>

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According to an old man connected to a Tamasha Company

"Tamasha is a Parsi word. This word came to Northern India with the entry of Muslims. In those days, merchants from Arabia used to visit India for their business and they might have seen this form and would have named the form as Tamasha, for the first time."

Though the Indians are familiar with this word, the same is not in common use.

As per the writings of the twelfth century, it can be known that the Lok Natyas which were performed during fairs and festivals were called as Gammath. After that period, the name Gammath has been changed into Khel Tamasha.

There were two folk forms — Gondhal and Jagaran, from which the present form Tamasha has been evolved. Why because in Gondhal form also, the artists sing songs for entertainment, create humorous scenes by asking questions. The same trend was followed in Tamasha also. Further, in Tamasha the performers sing Lavni songs and girls dance in different types to entertain village folk. This is nothing but the tradition of Gondhal. In this way, it can be seen that the Tamasha form is a very old one.<sup>8</sup>

There is a mention of Tamasha in the book *Gadha Saptasathi*, in which in the ninth story it was mentioned about Ranga bhoomi and Purva rang. The dance, dramas performed on stages were of the descriptions of the then society. There was also mention of participation of women in the performances. By this book, it can be known that women were actively participating in playing roles in those days itself.<sup>9</sup>

After the entry of Muslim culture into Maharashtra, the whole trend of the form has changed and this name Tamasha was also given by them.

According to Sri Lakshman Maha Jadhav, the author of the book *Marathi Rangbhoomichi Jadan Ghadan*, "the meaning of Tamasha is the performance of different characters, to perform puppetry, circus feats, singing lavnis and dances by girls etc."<sup>10</sup>

According to Marathi Viswa Kosh, "the origin of the word Tamasha is from Urdu and migrated to Marathi and can be had from the beginning of Muslim rule in South India in 13th and 14th centuries A.D."

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In the book *Eknathke Ek Bharood* (art form), there is a mention of Tamasha in a line "bade bade Tamasha dekhe."

Some Tamasha performers say that this Tamasha form was taken from Holi festivals which were in vogue during the times of Shivaji. There is a tradition of worshipping Gods during the days Holi festival in the whole nights, which is still in existence, and to entertain the devotees, they used to perform dances. The same tradition is being followed since the period of Shivaji till todate.

There is a community Mahar and Mang. The children of these communities are asked to give performances on these days. Even after the festival season, the children of these communities continued to give performances for their livelihood. After some time, girls have occupied the places of boys and began giving the performances.<sup>12</sup>

Tamasha form might have had its origin by this way.

### 3.4 — TAMASHA DURING THE PERIOD OF PEESHWAS

There is no historical data accurately known to date but in Maharashtra it is believed that Tamasha was started during the period of Peshwas. By this, it can be known that this art form has began in the seventh century A.D.<sup>13</sup>

According to Namdev,

Tamasha was started between the period from 1689 and 1707 A.D. During this period, Muslim soldiers entered into the soil of Maharashtra and occupied several places. These soldiers who left their homes long ago were feeling lonely and bored and they needed some sort of entertainment. So they invited the local artists and arranged to give performances for the soldiers. The main item was the Nayakin ka natch (the dance of the heroine) and this type of dance might have developed into Tamasha form. But there is no documentary proof for this argument. But one thing is sure, that the Tamasha form has its birth from the ancient traditional folk forms of Maharashtra, why because there is more similarity of the olden folk forms in Tamasha.<sup>14</sup>

During the festivals, different types of folk forms were being presented in Maharashtra and Karnataka States. They are called "Radha Natch" in Maharashtra and "Radhan Aya" in the State of Karnataka. In this Radha Natch, the dance is performed in accordance to the tunes of dolak

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and the songs. It is said that on witnessing this type of dance, the Peeshwa kings have encouraged the Tamasha form.

On interviewing the Tamasha Company organisers, it was told that the Tamasha form was introduced during the period of Peeshwas.

“Nachya Ponyacha Tamasha.”<sup>15</sup>

Tamasha during the period of Peeshwas was also being started with the prayers of Cian. The prayers were on Lord Ganesha and on other Devi, Devatas. After prayers, Radha-Krishna love songs were being sung by Goulan, i.e., by the women singers. After that different styles of Lavnis were sung to entertain Peeshwas. Lavnis contain a theme and story.

The following names were given to the characters during the period of Peeshwas in Tamasha form.

Sardar (kudari) (Sutradhara), Songadia (comedian), Natchya (dancers), Dholkia (drummer), Surne (singer). Like this, there were only limited artists who took part in the performance of Tamasha. All these characters form a Tamasha group. Shahir Parasuram's Phad was very famous during the period of Peeshwas. There were thirteen artists in that Phad.<sup>16</sup>

The popular Shahirs (poets) of Tamasha during the period of Peeshwas were: Bhaginaji Bhad, Parasuram Sagan Bhau, Anand Padi, and Ramjoshi.

This type of Tamasha companies were mostly located in Kolhapuri area.

The Tamasha artists were giving priority to entertain Peeshwas rather than the common people. Almost all, they were treated as Asthana Kalakars (artists who were appointed in palaces by kings). The Tamasha artists of Peeshwas period were having their livelihood, safety and all sorts of facilities through Peeshwas. The present day Tamasha artists are roamers, they move from one village to another for their livelihood by giving performances.<sup>17</sup>

### 3.5 — TAMASHA STRUCTURE

Villages are the heart of India. There are more villages than towns and cities in our country. The common people of villages perform the folk art forms. Those who do not give any of the performances enjoy themselves by witnessing these performances.

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The villagers do hard work throughout the day and while taking rest during the evenings or in the nights, they gather in the middle of the village and witness the performances and forget their tiredness.

On the occasion of festivals, fairs, while working in the fields, while driving their carts, while bringing water by women folk, at the time of births, at the time of marriages, on the occasion of death, various types of folk songs are being sung on different occasions. In addition, at the time of fairs of the village deities, these folk songs are sung and dances performed<sup>18</sup>

In Maharashtra, in almost all the villages, the festivals and fairs of village deities are occasionally being held. In these fairs, villagers participate with enthusiasm. The head of the village forms a committee, with the help of governments, and conducts the festivals. The finances for the conduct of these festivals are collected depending on the status of the villagers and the festivals are organised very richly. At the site of the festival or worship, to entertain the devotees, the heads of the village arrange cultural programmes. Importantly, they prefer to arrange Tamasha programmes.

The village heads go to the Tamasha parties, pay advance to the Tamasha organisers and fix the programmes in advance. The Tamasha parties arrange their performance requirements as decided by the village head such as the nature of Tamasha to be performed, duration etc and participate in the festivals. Moreover, Tamasha performances are being conducted to entertain the villagers.<sup>19</sup>

Tamasha companies visit various villages and as per the wish of the villagers decide the subject and arrange to give the performances. They charge between ten to thirty thousand rupees per show. As the form Tamasha stands first in entertaining the village folk, it has popularity among common folk.<sup>20</sup>

Like Gondhal, Vaghya Murali che Jagaran, Dashavatar, Dhandar, Kalgi-tura etc, Tamasha also can be divided into two parts — poorvang and uttarang. In poorvang, gan, goulan and batavani's meeting is held. In uttarang, Vag Natya is being performed. Indian traditional art forms begin with the prayers of God, like that in Tamasha also, the prayer of Lord Shankara is held at the beginning (Gan and Lavni).

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### 3.6 - KHANDANI TAMASHA

The Tamasha artists prospered well during the period of Peeshwas, socially as well as economically. In Rajasthan, the Rajput kings used to appoint Chandra Varadayi and some other artists as their Asthana Vidwans, like that Peeshwa kings also appointed Tamasha artists in their Asthanas. With the change of Maharashtra rule, the kingdom of Peeshwas also came to an end. Almost all the Peeshwa kingdoms came to an end and this effected the Tamasha artists. It has become necessary for the artists to come over to society and give performances for their livelihood. However, as a needbase, they have adjusted to the new style of life and started giving performances to the common folk. **This** type of Tamasha was called Khandani Tamasha. In other words, the tradition of Tamasha took birth from then only.<sup>21</sup>

The first performance of this kind (Khandani Tamasha) was given by Umababu Sawaljakar, Patthe Bapurao, Bhaupakkad, Heeru Sanu, Shiva Sabha, Kaulapurkar, Dagdubaba Sali Shirolikar, Bhau Babu Naraingaonkar, Rama Kumbhar Vardhan Gadkar, Bapurao Kupwadkar, Naik Kemrikar, Bapurao Purankar, Sawla Aurangapurkar, Nana Dhulwadikar, Pandurang Kurkumbhkar, Namdev Lavlekar, Shankar Ausarikar, Tukaram Khedkar, etc.<sup>22</sup>

After the beginning of Khandani parampara of Tamasha and after going into public, the form has gained popularity. To attract audience, Tamasha phad organisers have mixed various folk forms available in Maharashtra and performed the Tamasha with new vigour. Comedy was given most importance in the Tamasha. Cheap and vulgar (double meaning) dialogues were also used and for this purpose they have created a role — Songadia — to entertain the audience.

A number of Kalavanths enacted the role of Songadia (comedian) since the Khandani Tamasha was born and have become very famous and gained popularity. The main artists who performed the role of Songadia were Dadu Indurikar, Kalu-Balu, Datta Mahadeek, Vitthal Weldode. These names have become very popular among the common folk. In addition to these, Danoba Tambe, Vitthabhai Naraingaonkar, Haribhau Ancheerkar, Rasulbhai Pinjari also gained popularity in enacting the role of Songadia in the entire Maharashtra.<sup>23</sup>

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### 3.7 - TAMASHA AFTER THE FALL OF THE PEESHIWA DYNASTY

Tamasha form has changed its form during the coming years. In the beginning there were only ten or twelve artists taking part in the performances of which only two or three were lady performers. The subject was mostly based on mythological or historical events. As the Tamasha artists became very poor after the fall of the Peeshwas Dynasty, the costume and make up that was used by them also became very poor and of cheap quality. They were using bullock carts as the mode of transport to move from one village to another to give performances. There was no safety for their lives and were living under self protection. They were having very meagre income through the productions, even though the Khandani Tamasha artists continued their performances and for doing justice to their profession and developed the form Tamasha.<sup>24</sup>

The number of performers have increased manifold in the Tamasha Phad in the coming generations. During its beginning periods of Tamasha, the performances were being given by the downtrodden people, but later on all corners of people began giving the performances. In the beginning days of Tamasha, the audience of Tamasha were treated as unwanted persons by the upper caste people, and Brahmins made it a rule not to witness the Tamasha performances. Like Brahmins, women of other communities were also prohibited from even going to the places where the Tamasha performances were going on. With the change of time, all types of society people of Maharashtra began treating Tamasha with high standards. During fairs, the Tamasha Phads were being invited to give performances. It is to be noticed that the number of Tamasha phads which were very limited in the beginning have increased manifold these days. After gaining popularity, the income of the phads have also increased.

The Tamasha phads have procured several modern things for their comfort. Buses for the Kalavanths, lorries, trucks for lifting stage materials, jeeps for their publicity, cars for the use of owners of the phads.

As the financial position of the Tamasha phad owners became sound, they have begun imitating movies. They started copying the setting, musical instruments, orchestra, costumes mainly of ladies from movies. Circus type of tents were being maintained which can accommodate about three thousand audience at a time.

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### 3.8 — TEXT OF MODERN VAG NATYA (TAMASHA)

The text used was poetic in traditional Tamasha but in Vag Natya (modern Tamasha), the text has been converted into prose form. This change has brought more dramatic elements in Tamasha performances. They have adopted the dramatic elements unknowingly. Besides this, modern dance, modern music, modern scenic design, special effects, sound techniques etc. have also been adopted in modern Vag Natya.<sup>25</sup>

Prior to 1950, there was a tradition of Sardar in Tamasha but from 1950 onwards, the tradition of Sardar has vanished totally. In modern Vag Natya, after the introduction of prose in texts, a lady by name Pavla joined the Tamasha. "Mausi" was the character that was portrayed by that lady and the role has gained more popularity.<sup>26</sup>

From then onwards, all the phads have started introducing this type of role in their performances.

### 3.9 — INFLUENCE OF CINEMA ON TAMASHA

Cinema in India was started in 1913. The initial stages of cinema was of mookie type without sound and dialogues. Though there was no sound and dialogue in them, the Indians gave preference to cinema. By that time, the traditional Tamasha was there in many parts of Maharashtra. But there was no effect of mookie cinemas on the Tamasha phads. The Tamasha phads have adopted only the costumes from those cinemas then. In 1932, the cinema started with sound. After the invention of talkie cinema, songs, dialogues and other types of special effects were started to be used in cinemas. With the change of cinema from mookie to talkie, there was a change in Tamasha phads also. Traditional Tamasha has changed into Vag Natya (modern Tamasha).<sup>27</sup>

Like movies, the modern Tamasha organisers also started singing songs, dancing, adopting cinema music and developing their own songs based on cinematic rhythms, in their Tamasha performances. The acting styles were also changed and the artists started imitating cine actors. Though they have adopted movie styles, they often use the mixture or combination of olden traditional forms like Gondhal, Dhandar, Vaghya Murali che Jagaran, Dashavatar etc. to give their performances. By mixing all the olden folk forms, the Tamasha has lost its originality.

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The Kalavanths had full freedom in acting during their performances in olden Maharashtrian folk forms but later on, after the introduction of modern Tamasha, some limitations were fixed to Kalavanths in their acting. They have to act as per the directions of the particular phad director. Though the Kalavanths in olden days had full freedom in their acting they used to take their elder artists' suggestions required in creating and development of their roles.

### 3.10— BAN ON TAMASHA

After Independence, at the time of the then Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Sri Kher, received a number of complaints from all sections of society about the increased vulgarity that was being used in Tamasha and after going through these complaints and after finding the reality, he has imposed a ban on the performances of Tamasha. After the imposition of ban, all the Tamasha phad owners were distressed and became nervous and helpless. By that time, several hundreds of Tamasha phads were giving performances. By this ban, thousands of kalavanths became unemployed. As the kalavanths were not aware of any other work except performing Tamasha, they became helpless and had to struggle for their livelihood. The imposition of ban not only threw the kalavanths onto the roads but it also had an effect on their families.<sup>29</sup>

After seeing the condition of the kalavanths, some of the well wishers, senior phad organisers, senior artists have appealed to the government to lift the ban, keeping in view the poor condition of the Kalavanths. The persons who took active participation in the lifting of ban were Obasahib Mujumdar, Bapusahib Jintikar, Popatlal Saha, Ahmed Seth Tambe etc. who tried their maximum to lift the ban on Tamasha.<sup>30</sup>

In April 1949, a Maha Sabha was held on Tamasha at Aryabhushan Theatre in which all the Tamasha people (Tamashgirs) assembled. The senior Tamashgirs stressed the need of lifting the ban on Tamasha. After the Mahasabha, all the participants have passed a resolution for lifting the ban and to save the Tamasha Kalavanths.<sup>31</sup>

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### 3.11 — TAMASHA SUDHAR SAMITHI

After the Maha Sabha at Aryabhushan Theatre in 1940, Balasaheb Kher formed a Samithi called "Tamasha Sudhar Samithi." Datto Vaman Potdar was its President. The other members of the Samithi were N. R. Pathak, Mama Warekar, Sopandev Choudary, G. L. Thokal etc.<sup>32</sup>

The members of Tamasha Sudhar Samithi have framed some rules, regulations, aims and objectives that are to be followed while performing the Tamasha. The aims and objectives are -

- 1 The heroine of the Tamasha should not sit in front of the gate for the purpose of publicity
- 2 Vulgar and double meaning songs and dialogues should be removed from the performances
- 3 Vulgar and double meaning dialogues should be removed
- 4 Vag Natya (modern Tamasha) should be censored by the Censor Committee, before presentation.
5. Audience are prohibited from touching the heroines, women characters while giving any rewards or money.<sup>33</sup>

All the Tamasha phads have accepted the rules and regulations, aims and objectives that were framed by the Tamasha Sudhar Samithi and have promised to keep their word. The members of the Samithi submitted these rules and aims to the government and after going through all these carefully, the government lifted the ban on Tamasha. Sri Morarji Desai, the then Home Minister of Maharashtra, also played a key role in lifting the ban on Tamasha.

After enforcing the rules of Tamasha Sudhar Samithi, the Tamasha phad organisers have faced great difficulties in giving performances. Because of non availability of vulgarity and other vulgar dialogues, the audience were creating problems during the performances and the phad organisers were facing trouble in controlling these audience.

The Vag Natyas produced after 1953, the complete script of which should have been sent to the Censor Board and after scrutiny, the Board was giving a certificate for the performances. After the introduction of the above rules and because of censorship, the Tamasha phad organisers have made a number of changes in their production. Like this, Vag Natya came under the purview of the Censor Board. The independence of Tamasha phad organisers and the Kalavanthas came to a standstill.<sup>34</sup>

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After the introduction of censorship on Tamasha, the permission of the area Tahsildar and the local police personnel was made compulsory before the performance of Tamasha. The written permission of the owner of the site where the Tamasha is being performed was also made compulsory.<sup>35</sup>

### 3.12 - • DEVELOPMENT OF TAMASHA

After 1953, Tamasha phad organisers were following the rules and regulations framed by the Tamasha Sudhar Samithi scrupulously and were searching for various ways of attracting the public.

Shahir Baburao Poonekar started the methods followed in movies such as music, song, design and have written the scripts accordingly for the performance of Vag Natya. The number of members of phads have gone up manifold from five to six members before that. Though the Tamasha has developed in many ways, they have been following the old traditions and that is the reason for the popularity among village folk. As they are following the olden traditions in Vag Natya and hence Vag Natya is also called Tamasha, otherwise the name Tamasha might have vanished from the scene. The traditional Tamasha forms of Maharashtra are of two kinds. One is Khandesh Tamasha (Dhule and Jalgaon areas) and the other is Vayedesh Tamasha (Marathwada and Vidarbha areas).

### 3.13 — KHANDESH TAMASHA

This form is very popular in the areas of Jalgaon, Dhulia to Khandesh. In this type of Tamasha, at the beginning of the performance, there is a tradition of singing by a group of seven gans. In the end they present Vag Natya. The speciality in Khandesh Tamasha is that the Lavni is in the form of verse and the dialogues are of prose form.<sup>36</sup>

The works of this Khandesh Tamasha can also be available in Hindi. There is also a difference in the use of musical instruments in Khandesh Tamasha.

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In Khandesh Tamasha, seven members (gans) sing the song at the beginning whereas in Vayedesh Tamasha only five gans participate in the singing. The raga, tala and pallavi of this Tamasha is very systematic. Though the artists are not trained in classical music, they sing very well. This type of Vayedesh Tamasha is prevalent in Western zones of Maharashtra only.<sup>17</sup>

The presentation of text is in prose and verse form. At the beginning of Vag Natya, the gan sings a song in which the whole of the meaning of the Vag Natya is being explained. Moreover, in between the Vag Natya, they present colourful lavni dances. These lavnis are called "Takni Lavnis." In Vayedesh traditional Tamasha, Gan, Goulan, Batavani (farce), Vag Natya and all such elements exist.

The social life of both the Khandesh Tamasha artists and that of Vayedesh Tamasha artists is almost identical.

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