



Prime Minister With the Folk Dance Trophy Winners

Shanti Bardhan : IMPRESSIONS OF THE FOLK DANCE FESTIVAL

Holding of festivals is very essential as it has a great educative value for our people, who are cut off from folk art, so vital and rich in tradition. It is a beginning in the right direction. Our country is so big with its rich culture, heritage and tradition, that one finds a new form at the distance of practically every twenty miles. To assimilate all this, in future perhaps, we could have a few States represented in one particular year and study these forms intensively. The arrangements for the artists were very good, but the regimentation cramped the style and freedom of these village dancers. I felt the contrast when these very people sang and danced at the Prime Minister's party with supreme freedom and gusto in their own disciplined manner. What I wish to suggest is that these troupes should be allowed to dance and behave as if they were in their own village, only then can they exhibit the spirit of it and dance with com-

plete abandon. Otherwise the naturalness, sincerity and spontaneity of the folk form is lost, and it ceases to be folk art.

I feel that the venue too should not have been the Stadium. Delhi has enough open spaces with trees, monuments and slopes, which can easily be converted into a stage and auditorium.

The general impact of all the dances seen at the festival was in the form of one pattern, inherently beautiful, each form with its intrinsic value depicting a particular motif conforming to the traditions of the soil it represented.

The blending of the various patterns, unintentional and yet so powerful was an overwhelmingly beautiful sight which moved us to a feeling of profound thank-

ulness. Through this maze of dances came the whole varied life of India—the gigantic Himalayas, the graceful, flowing rivers, the tigers, the camels, the simple village folk and all that goes to make our motherland, so colourful and rich.

From the Kulu valley came the shadow of the white glistening Himalayas: the men in their white costumes and shimmering silver head-dresses seemed to be the snowy Himalayas with their gleaming sunlit summits. The huge silver trumpets (Narsingha) rising and swaying in the centre seemed to give the effect of that eternal light on those unending heights.

The sway of the white clothed men from Kulu-like the heights of the Himalayas—blended into the flowing movement of the Ravi—on the banks of which stands the little village of Chamba. The slow undulating movements of the women dancers of Chamba was so graceful as the flow of the most beautiful river.

Suddenly with a bang came the tiger from Behar. The warriors jumped and leapt as only a tiger can; and then with a tiger's watchful eyes, they took their stance, the tiger waiting for its prey. Oh! that mighty, magnificent and graceful animal with its piercing eyes and pouncing paws, was all but present on the stage where the Behari warriors performed the Tandava in a most tiger like acrobatic manner. Next came the jolting, jagged gait of a camel. The team from Madhya Pradesh gave us the impression of a line of slow moving, camels jolting along, in a pattern so broken and yet so graceful. It was a picture—an effective symbol.

A word about the winning group—Chamba. Although there were not a large variety of movements, yet we never felt the lack of it because each movement was beautiful in itself and the change from one to another was made smoothly without any break or jolt. It was like a composite painting with special panels each linked to the other in some imperceptible, and indescribable way. The team work was excellent and compact. The composition of the dance patterns was so wonderful and beautiful that it could only be compared to the flow of a picturesque river, ever flowing, ever changing. It is impossible to discern the countless changes that occur. Each single movement was conceived in relation to pattern so that each pattern obtained a distinct and decided advantage from the perfectly synchronising movement. The effect was like a series of paintings in an outstanding panel—so superb and overpowering was the effect that I felt as if I was one of them, as if I was part of the dance itself.

The compactness and team work of Madhya Pradesh was perfect and wonderful but the authentic *Gedi* on stilts was mixed up with other dances of the region—without stilts. This, to my mind, spoiled the beautiful pattern of the dance on stilts and destroyed the flow, the movement and the climax. This

dance would have been on the same level as Chamba had it been left in pure form and not marred by this alien intrusion.

It is important that the originality of folk forms must never be tampered with, by improvisation of any sort. If it is felt that these dances can be adapted to a new and modern conception thereby all means take the inspiration—create a fresh dance form, but never should an attempt be made to change the original. Both Madhya Pradesh and Hyderabad suffered on this account.

The Luri Sawro and Karma of Behar were extremely virile and vigorous and gave the effect of the movements of a fierce tiger. It scored very well under all heads and left a profound impression on me. The drumming and the sound effects created by the dancers and drummers were excellent and enhanced the beauty and virility of this magnificent dance.

Although this year there were very few folk dances based on the Tandava style yet it is advisable that this virile form be encouraged and judged separately. Perhaps the judging could be done under two heads: Tandava and Lasya.

It should be our endeavour to collect material on the historical background on which these forms are based, thus in the course of a few years we will have authentic written material on our folk forms. The memory of the festival will remain always to remind us of our rich heritage.