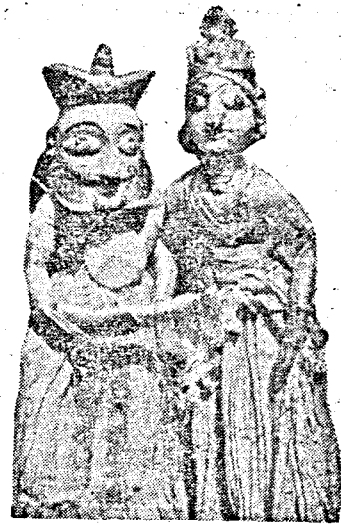


A Cultural Survey of
RAJASTHAN
FOLK ENTERTAINMENT

The research section of the Bharatiya Lok Kala Mandal, Udaipur recently conducted a survey of folk entertainments of Rajasthan with special emphasis on the art of tribal people. We give below a summary of their report.

—Editor



Kathputli Dance of Rajasthan

Rajasthan has for centuries been the repository of old traditions of classical arts, thanks to the patronage given by the Princes to some of the best musicians and dancers of the State. The atmosphere of the *Darbars* was quite congenial for the development of these arts and some of the most difficult experiments in music and dancing were conducted during the reign of Princely rulers. Though ruling families were quite conversant with these experiments in arts, the masses were ignorant of them, with the result that a wide gulf existed between the art of the court and that of the masses. Thus two types of entertainments came into vogue; one of the courtiers and the other of the masses. This divergence slowly got mixed up with the rigid caste system and the refined art became the property of the higher caste and the art and entertainments of the masses became the property of the low-caste, the downtrodden.

In this way the folk arts which were once the common property and a common medium of self-expression for all people became confined to the backward castes for entertaining the caste Hindus on special occasions.

Rajasthan can be divided into three parts as regards the folk entertainments are concerned.

1. Hill tracts of Udaipur, Dungarpur, Kotah, Jhalawar and Sirohi;
2. The desert areas of Jodhpur, Bikaner and Jaisalmer;
3. Eastern Rajasthan consisting of Shekhawati and Jaipur.

Hill tracts inhabited by Bhil, Mina, Banjara, Sahria and Karad tribes are rich in community entertainments. Natural surroundings give them a

mirthful and gay life and ample opportunity of expressing their feelings in the form of dance and music.

The desert areas have a very scanty population and because of the dearth of natural resources the average man has to engage himself more in earning his livelihood through hard and strenuous labour than in enjoying life through entertainment. They do not find much time for merry making and so community entertainments have very little place in their life. Most of the entertainments are provided by professional folk dancers like Sargaras, Nats, Mirasis Bhats and Bhands. The people of these tracts have great love for colour and they compensate the lack of colour in nature by the colours of their costumes.

The eastern part of Rajasthan particularly that of Shekhawati is rich in professional folk dancing. The people here have plenty of resources for earning their livelihood and nature too has not been so cruel as in the western desert areas of Barmer and Jaisalmer. People here have enough money to spend on entertainments and a number of classes of professional entertainers like the Kathputli Nats, the Kamads, the Kachighodiwala and Bopas are making a good income out of their profession.

The border areas of Rajasthan adjoining U. P. have the influence of Uttar Pradesh and entertainments like Ras Leelas, Ramleelas, Rasiyas and Nav-tankies are in vogue. The culture of the Braj-Bhumi has great influence over these areas.

THE FOLK ENTERTAINMENTS OF THE HILLY AREAS OF RAJASTHAN

Most of the dancing and singing prevalent in these areas are of a community type; The Bhils and Minas of this area lead almost a free life and are

much nearer to nature than the other people living in these areas. Music and dancing form a very important part of their life and on almost all ceremonial occasions, they dance and sing collectively. They have not yet developed any prejudice or inferiority complex about these arts. Men and women take part in almost all the dances. The following varieties of entertainments are popular among the Bhils of Dungarpur and Banswara.

1. **The Ghumra:** This particular dance is performed on all ceremonial occasions like marriages and festivals. Men and women form one full circle and dance together singing. The songs are often composed on the spot. There is no musical accompaniment with the dance. The rhythm is very simple but the movements are forceful and graceful.

2. **The Ger:** This dance is held during Holi and only men take part in it. A big dhol with thalis is played and the Bhils dance in a circular motion with sticks. This is a comparatively vigorous dance and at the same time it is graceful too.

3. **The ceremonial Ghumra:** This particular dance is performed during Holi when the Bhils and their women folk are in a gay mood. It is almost a combination of the Ger and Ghumra and it is by far the most fascinating dance of the Bhils and Meenas. Men and women are in their most attractive and gay dresses. The whole dance is really a feast for the eye.

4. **The marriage dance of Meenas and Bhils:** This particular dance is a part of a procession on the occasion of the departure of the bridegroom and the bride from the latter's home. Bhils dance with swords all the way with 'thali' and 'madal' and the aunts of the bride dance with baskets and a broom in their hands.

5. **The Neja:** It is a very interesting dance—game performed on the third day of Holi and is usually prevalent among the Meenas of Kherwara and Dungarpur. The tribes living in the interior of the hills do not have this variety. A big stick is fixed on the ground and on the top a coconut is tied. The women surround the stick in a circular fashion with small sticks and twisted cloth in their hands. The men who stand at some distance try to climb over the

stick and carry the coconut away. The women try to drive them away by thrashing them with sticks and twisted cloth. It is a very interesting game and thousands of people collect to see this rare sight.

6. **The Gouri dance of the Bhils living in the neighbourhood of Udaipur:** The Gouri is performed in the month of July and August in worship of their deity lord Bherav. This is a purely religious dance. The Bhils of a particular village leave their home and go out of their village in a ceremonial way to perform this drama based on the life of their deity. They are out for more than a month. The show lasts from morning till evening and displays the best talents of Bhils in a series of episodes connected with the life of Budia (the popular name for Lord Shiva). The dances are full of variety and colour and are vigorous and forceful in their rhythm. The whole show reminds us of the Kathakali dramas of the south. There is no monetary motive behind this dance and the Bhils join the dance-groups in order to perform their religious duty towards the Deity. Some of the most interesting episodes and dramas of the show are Bhinyavad, Banjara, Khadliya Bhut and the lion-boar fight. All these dramas are symbolic in their meaning.

7. **The dances of the Banjara:** Banjara is a nomadic tribe and its chief profession is to carry heavy load from one place to another. These days due to the progressive increase of motor transport this tribe has almost been thrown out of employment. There was a time when some of these people used to earn Lakhs and were called Lakha Banjaras. Their nomadic nature too has changed considerably and most of them have settled down and have taken to other professions like road building, labour and construction work. This unfortunate change in their life has very much curbed their spirit of joy, mirth and playfulness. They usually dance in pairs and while dancing they almost forget themselves. Their dresses are very artistic and attractive, particularly those of ladies. The main instrument of accompaniment with the dance is generally dholak but some times in the

absence of it they improvise music with thalies and katories also. The chief occasion on which they dance is the Gangore festival during the month of March and April. The main areas where Banjaras have started settling down are that of Banswara, Kushalgarh and border area of Gujrat. The Banjaras have chosen these hilly tracts for their permanent



A Banjara Dance

settlement because they can still get some work for transporting load from one place to the other. The following are some of the villages where the Banjaras have settled down: Bada Ka Kheda near Fatehsagar, Kana Kheda near Bhopal Sagar, Baldeon ka Kheda, and Dariba near Fatehnagar.

Rupsingh Banjara was an important figure 50 years back. He was well-known for his heroic deeds. He died in Bara Bamnia six miles from Bhupalpura where a small memorial is built and hundreds of Banjaras collect every year to pay homage to their leader.

8. The Nats and their feats: There are generally three types of Nata: 1. Raj Nat, 2. Deccani Nat and 3. Bhat Nat. They originally belonged to one sect but on account of change of profession and professional jealousies they have separated from each other. The Raj Nata had the patronage of the princes and used to have royal engagements for their feats in the past; but since long that patronage has been shifted to other types of entertainers and they are almost thrown out of their employment. They have gradually become penniless and are in a deplorable condition these days. Jats are the only people who patronize them on ceremonial occasions. They are considered to be one of the most inferior castes and are allowed to live only on the outskirts of a village. The Nats these days have taken to begging and the Nats exhibit their art at a very low charge.



Kachighodi of Rajasthan

The chief feats are:

- (1) Walking on a rope in some of the most difficult poses.
- (2) Holding a man on the top of a bamboo, which rests on the body of the man walking on the rope, without any support.
- (3) Moving on the rope on ones head.
- (4) Walking on the rope both feet resting on one thali.
- (5) Balancing the body while sitting on a chair of which only two legs are resting on a loose rope.
- (6) Holding a heavy plough on the tongue without any support.
- (7) Somersault of various types.

All these feats create a curious sensation on the minds of the onlookers because of their unusual and

astonishing nature. Some of the feats are beyond human imagination. The drumming and singing which accompanies these feats are also fascinating.

Their social life: They are generally out for eight months in a year and for the rest of the months (that is in the rainy season) they almost sit idle in their homes. Their trips, these days, are not at all profitable and the general tendency is to seek some other method of livelihood. They have no land of their own for cultivation and they are also not allowed, socially to own land.

Sajan Khan Ka Kheda near Nimbaheda is the chief seat of Raj Nats of Rajasthan. Sajan Khan (A Hindu) who assumed a Muslim name only for fancy was one of their Chiefs nearly 400 years back. This particular village is named after him. The Nats have settled down in the hilly tracts long ago and some of the best performers are found in the following villages Kanadohi, Parchi, Canchdia, Banchad, Vagri, Chanlets, Mogiya, Bodina of the Madhya Bharat and Rajasthan border.

Chaman Singh was one of their greatest leaders fifty years ago and was very well-known for his physical feats.

The Deccani nats, who are also known as Gandia nats, are nats by name only. They do not have any trait of nats. They dance in a clumsy way, just for

begging. They lead a most miserable and deplorable life, because of their poverty. They get some work on the construction of roads in famine-stricken areas, otherwise their chief profession is begging for the men, and prostitution of the worst type for the women.

The Bhat nats about whom we shall deal in other pages are not found in the hilly areas. They have altogether a different occupation.

9. The Bagrias: They are generally found in almost all parts of Rajasthan but some of them have settled down in the hilly tracts, specially where date trees grow in abundance. Their chief profession is to make broom of date leaves, and sell them in the neighbouring villages. They have practically no home life and generally move from one village to another. They are considered one of the most inferior scheduled castes and besides broom-selling, begging has been their favourite profession recently. The women dance while begging. The chief musical

instrument they use while dancing is Chang. The men generally do not dance but they freely allow their ladies to become vulgar while dancing just because it would fetch them more money. The dances are very rhythmical and musical. Holi is the chief occasion when they dance and sing from door to door. Some of the permanent homes of Bagrias are Gogathala, Hakroda and Bagrion ki Batoli near Kuanria.

The Dances of Garasias: The Garasias are akin to the Bhils of Mewar and culturally they have the same traits as other aboriginals of Rajasthan. They are also rich in community dancing like Ghumar, Ger, and Garba. They have acquired some of the culture of Gujarat which is manifest in almost all their ceremonies.

Holi is the chief festival when they dance for days. Almost all their dances are mixed dances and are not very much associated with any particular festival. Very often after the day's hard labour they sing and dance for joy and mirth.

One of their most fascinating dance is Garba, in which only women participate. It is a little different from the garba of the middle class families of Gujarat. It is more forceful and has created variety of movements.

The Garasias mostly live in the jungle of Sirohi and Abu.

The dances of Karvelias: The karvelias (Snake Charmers) are one of the most interesting tribes from many points of view. Their life can be a separate subject for research and study. Both socially and culturally they have their peculiar traits. The technique of snake-charming itself can be a subject of study.

Snake-charming is based not only on their skill but their qualities of singing and dancing also. Only a good singer and player of the Pungi (pipe) can be a successful snake charmer. There are certain tunes like Panihari and Idoni which have special qualities of charming snakes. There are some particular tunes for charming different types of snakes. I had a chance of analysing such tunes and have tried to record them with our sound recording machine. The Pungi is a very fascinating instrument which they themselves make with a dried Tumba (gourd) or an oblong Loki. It is a great art to make a pungi. The gourd has to be prepared by a special technique.

An average snake charmer has a great musical talent. He has to go from door to door and village to village and so this wandering habit has taught him great skill in attracting people. The Karvelia women are also clever enough to earn their livelihood through singing and dancing. Sometimes the men also join their dances and add to their earnings. The following are their favourite dances:

1. Indoni. 2. Panihari. 3. Shankaria.

The Indoni and Panihari are two very popular songs of Rajasthan which are sung in almost all parts of the state. The Indoni is a mixed dance and is performed in a circular fashion. The main instruments accompanying are Pungi and Khanjari. The ladies are artistically dressed in their original skirts and cholis with embroidery of beads and other indigenous stuff. The males also look well in their original turbans twisted in red and white.

The Shankaria: The Shankaria is one of the most fascinating duet dances I have ever seen. It depicts the story of a young man making love to a young woman who is already in love with another young man. The tunes of the song sung with this dance is charming. The steps and the movements of the dance are very graceful. The general effect of the dance is rather erotic but there is great art in it.

The Panihari: This dance is based on a very famous song known as Panihari. It is also a duet and has a fascinating effect on the onlookers. The karvelias, in fact, are really art minded and have a highly developed imagination.

The following are some of the villages where Karvelias have found a permanent home.

1. Ghuti near Kuanria. 2. Rekmanganj near Kotharia and 3. Agaria near Sardar Garh.

Holi is their chief festival when Karvelia women go from door to door with their Chang for singing and dancing.

The dances of Adbhopas or Rangaswamies: The adbhopas are traditional palmists and it is said that once they were masters of their art. But these days because of their precarious financial condition they have to beg for their livelihood. They are almost dressed in rags but they have great talent in music. They possess many varieties of tunes and have a fine voice also. The ladies dance while singing but they don't feel any joy in this art as they have to do for their livelihood. Their condition is very deplorable. Most of them have no home and find shelter under some trees or some shade in the remote corner of a village.

The following are some of the villages where they have found shelter:

- Rajiyavas and Bhatiya Gaon near Kankroli.
Gunjol and Vagundda near Nathdwara and Kankroli respectively.

THE FOLK ENTERTAINMENTS OF THE DESERT AREAS

The desert areas are not rich in community entertainments except on ceremonial occasions like Holi,

when almost all the classes celebrate Holi collectively. In Bikaner Holi has very special significance. People almost forget themselves when they play with colours and sing and dance without any distinction of caste and creed. Singing has more importance than dancing and very artistic processions are taken out with lot of mirth and play in them. Except this collective entertainment no other type exists in this area except in some communities about which special mention will be made below.

The Jhumar or Ghumar :

The Jhumar or the Ghumar is one of the most popular dances of Rajasthan and is prevalent in almost all the families in different forms. It is purely a feminine dance and is generally performed in the middle class families on ceremonial occasions like Gangore, Holi and Diwali. It is similar to the Garba dance of Gujerat and has a soft and soothing effect. It also takes the form of a duet at some places when both men and women dance together. There are three distinctive types of this dance. One is prevalent in Udaipur the other in Jodhpur and the third near Kotah and Bundi. The Ghumar of Udaipur is more akin to the Garba of Gujerat with all its musical and rhythmic qualities. The Jhumra of Jodhpur too is artistic but there is not much of unity and uniformity in the movements. The Ghumar of Kotah and Bundi is very colourful and mirthful. Very rich traditions of Ghumar still exist round about the royal families.

The Ghumar of Rajasthan can be considered a national dance for the ladies of Rajasthan. It is a community dance for ladies and hundreds of them can join together with some set songs. The ladies move in a circular fashion. The movements are simple but graceful.

Besides the three types of Ghumar mentioned above there are some more varieties. The one is the Ghumar done with small sticks. The other is done in pairs. The third one is done with veils on and with circular motions of terrific speed. In Bikaner and the distant desert areas this dance is purely confined to royal families and aristocratic people. It is a somewhat sophisticated dance but at the same time it has great cultural value. There is generally no musical instrument used with the dance. It is accompanied with some of the most fascinating songs. The Ghumar songs have a special significance in the life of Rajasthan. Kotah and Bundi



Ghumar Dance by members of Lok Kala Mandal

have a rich treasure of Ghumar songs in Hadoti.

The fire dancers of Bikaner : In the remotest part of the Thar desert there lives a sturdy tribe known as Sidh Jats. They are the disciples of the famous Guru Gorakhnath and follow the Gorakh Panthi religion. This particular sect is well-known for its Yogic feats. One of the latest Gurus in this line was Guru Jasnath. His Samadhi still exists in the suburb of Binaker. The Sidh Jats are staunch followers of the Guru. They all put on Bhagwa brown clothes and observe the discipline of their religion very strictly. Along with many other Yogic feats, one of the most astonishing feat is that of dancing on fire. According to the interpretation offered by them, this particular trait is acquired by them through some mysterious power.

They light a huge fire, using a few hundred maunds of fire wood. Big drums with pipes are played and a typical song with humming sound is sung. As soon as they are inspired by the accompanying music a group of these people, consisting of old men and children jump into the fire and dance perfectly in normal way. Their dance grows more and more vigorous as they get into the spirit of the whole environment. While dancing they pick up a few pieces of burning charcoal and throw them on each other without damaging anybody in any way. The whole dance does not take more than an hour but it presents a sensational sight. I have witnessed this dance in the course of my study tour and tried to examine the after-effects of the dance on their body but I was surprised to find that they are not the least damaged on this account.

They don't put on any special dress for this dance and only men take part in it. The dance itself has not much artistic value.

This dance is performed in the month of March and April on the occasion of a mela held in memory of Guru Jasnath. It is a community dance, which sometimes takes the form of a professional dance also. The late Maharaja of Bikaner Shri Gangasinghji was one of the greatest patrons of this dance and paid the dancers handsomely by inviting them on special ceremonial occasions. The villages where these fire-dancers mostly reside are Katariasar, Bhamlu, Dikamdesar, Poonerasar and Likhamdesar. Some of the prominent leaders of this sect are Chettanath, Bholanath and Baunanath.

THE DRUM DANCERS OF JALORE

The other professional folk dance which is well-known in the desert area of Rajasthan, is the drum dance of Jalore District. The credit for bringing this powerful dance to light goes to our Chief Minister Shri Jai Narain Vyas. He, in the course of his official tour, saw this dance in the remotest corner of Jalore district and took a few shots with the help of his film unit. When he came over to Udaipur, he was very much delighted to give information about this unique dance to me. Since then I had been looking forward to seeing this dance personally. With my group of dancers I was invited to participate in the Republic Day Celebration at Delhi and was given charge by the Government of Rajasthan to train and present these dancers to the public of Delhi.

This particular dance is not confined to one class only ; but it is performed by a group of people consisting of nearly four castes namely "SARGARAS," "DHOLIES", "PALIES" and "BHILS." It is a professional folk dance and is performed, specially on the occasion of marriage. It is purely a male dance and is a combination of three or four varieties of dances of similar types. The drumming is done by "Sargaras" who are akin to Dholies of Udaipur. There are usually four or five drums played together. The leader of the drum starts playing it in a particular style known as "Thakna". As soon as this "Thakna" concludes, the other dancers, one with a sword in his mouth, the second with sticks in his hand, the third with hanging kerchiefs on his arms and the rest in simple rhythmic movements start dancing in a picturesque style.

The "Sargaras" and the "Dholies" are professional folk singers and drummers of Rajasthan. Though they belong to the Backward classes still they are masters of their art and have maintained the best traditions of folk art. Their main profession is singing and drumming and they earn their livelihood by it. The rest of the participants of these dances are not professional folk dancers but they casually join these professional group to earn extra income.

This particular dance is prevalent in Jalore and its neighbouring area of Surana, Bagra and Ane. Some of the main dancers are Nena Sargara, Bhabuta, Sona Sargara, Dholi Kesra ; Mirasi Akbaria and Bhil Bagalia.

THE TERAH TALI OF DIDWANA AND POKHRAN

This particular technique is more of a physical feat than a folk-dance. The Kamads are the entertainers of Bhomias also known as Balais. Once they also belonged to the Bhomia community, but because of the change of their profession they preferred to be called Kamad. Their chief occupation is to maintain historical records of the Bhomia families and sing and dance for them on special occasions of night vigil before their deity Shri Ramdev. The whole group of Kamad entertainers consist of two men and two women generally belonging to one family. The men play on 'Iktara' and the women on 'Majiras' tied all over the body in a peculiar manner. The men do only the singing part of the whole show and the women play on Majira in some of the most unimaginable and difficult poses. Some of the actions that they perform through the playing of Majiras are as follows :

1. Cleaning corn.
2. Thrashing corn.
3. Cutting corn.
4. Grinding corn.
5. Cleaning the flour.
6. Mixing the flour of wheat with water.
7. Preparing Chapati of wheat flour.
8. Mixing the Bajra flour with water.
9. Preparing Bajra roti.
10. Preparing Ghee out of curds.
11. Separating butter from curds.
12. Spinning on Charkha.
13. Winding the yarn.

The Kamads earn a lot by making engagements of Terah Tali during night vigils, arranged by some of their Yajmans (patronisers) in connection with the fulfilment of their obligations towards their beloved deity.

Kamads are found in almost all parts of Rajasthan but all of them are not equally talented. The Kamads of Didwana and Pokhran need special mention as regards their art of playing Terah Tali. My Research Unit came across many such people but the Kamads living in Didwana and Pokhran belonging to the sub-caste of 'Gokhi' and "Dhanka" are by far the best of the whole lot. Their financial condition is comparatively sound and they own their own land, given to them by some of the local Jagirdars.

MIRASIS OF JAISALMER

Jaisalmer situated in the remotest part of Rajasthan far away from the influences of modern life

has very little of folk art worth the name, except a few musicians and dancers patronised by the Ruler. Some of them are Mirasis. We had the opportunity of meeting and seeing their work. They have maintained the best traditions and types of "Mand Singing". We had the occasion of hearing nearly six such types dealing with the luxuries of princely life. This particular style of singing, though little akin to classical style, comes in the category of folk-music. The female folk of Mirasis are also good at singing and it is their profession to entertain aristocratic families on ceremonial occasions. They are Muslims by caste but have acquired all the traits of Hindu Dholies. The ladies are good at dancing too. The dance though a little obscene has the beauty and the vigour of a folk dance. Jaisalmer, as we all know, is very thinly populated and the population is engaged more in earning their bread rather than singing and dancing, except a few stray individualistic dance here and there. The whole of the desert area including the district of Barmer is without any mirthful activity worth mentioning.

THE KACHIGHODI OF MARWAR

Quite unlike the other desert towns Kuchhaman, Parbatsar, Didwana and Nimbod are rich in professional folk entertainment. One of them is "Kachighodi" of Marwar. This peculiar dance is danced by Bavrias, Kumhars and Sargaras of the backward classes. Kachighodi means the mare of Cutch which is well-known. The Kachighodi is an art by itself. Two bamboos are tied with two baskets with some space left between them. An artificially made head of a horse is fixed on top of one of the baskets and a bunch of flax fibre is tied over the other. The head of the horse is decorated with embroidery. The dancers, lavishly dressed in the dress of bridegrooms adjust the Kachighodi in between their legs and cover the two baskets with their loose garments. The whole adjustment looks like a real horse with its owner riding over it. The dancers have swords in their hands and dance with the accompaniment of a Dhol and Turohi in such a way that the whole dance presents a picturesque sight of horse riding. There are usually four or five such pairs and the dance is performed on the occasion of marriages.

The Bavrias used to be traditional robbers in the past and were a great nuisance to the society. The Government had to spend a considerable amount of money in encircling them. They have, since a couple of years settled down to normal life and have taken to farming and keeping watch.

The dance of Kachighodi is prevalent in almost all the parts of eastern Rajasthan. It is also in a decaying condition and when I went in those areas with my unit for a survey I found this dance almost extinct. I had to persuade all these three castes to perform for me on payment and with great difficulty only the Bavrias accepted my request.

THE KATPUTLI OF MARWAR

According to the Indian Sashtras the modern drama owes its origin to Katputhli. It is one of the oldest dance techniques of India, and it was once popular both among the masses and the ruling families. A hundred years ago, the Katputliwala had no home and used to move from place to place as a nomadic tribe for earning his livelihood. With the increase of modern entertainment, this dance became less popular and the puppet dancers had to find some permanent home at Kuchhaman, Parbatsar, Begsu, Rasal, Barvali, Davara, Nimod, Lunicha and Kakholi of the eastern desert area. The chief reason for their choosing these places was perhaps the interest shown by the Bhomias of these towns in their art. They are the permanent Yajmans (Patronisers) of puppet dancers and pay them annually for their show.

The art of puppet dancing lies in the skill of the puppet dancer's fingers. Two cots are placed in vertical position nearly six feet apart, on which an artistically embroidered curtain is tied horizontally. Behind this curtain another plain curtain is fixed as a background for the show. The Katputliwala stands behind that curtain and holds a bunch of threads tied over his fingers by which he controls the movements of the puppets. The show invariably takes place during the night and takes nearly two hours. The Katputliwala and his wife are the only two performers in this play. The female plays on the Dholak and sings the story of the puppet dance while the play is going on. There is an interesting discussion, which goes on throughout the play as a running commentary for the show. The story of Amarsingh Rathore which they present through the puppet dance is very hackneyed and needs immediate alterations for its survival.

The puppets were generally made and adorned by the puppet dancers themselves but now they are made by professional carpenters of Basi, a place near Chittorgarh.

The puppet dancers move out from their permanent settlement for eight months and return in the rainy season. They go as far as the borders of Assam and U. P. and return with a handsome collection. Previously these visits were restricted to the neighbouring villages only on account of transport difficulties, when almost all the families of puppet dancers used to move together and share their profits equally. The Katputliwala arranges shows for all people freely. It is obligatory for the puppet dancers to pay a visit at least once in a year to Bhomia families.

The average earning of the puppet dancer ranges from Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 4,000 per year, but because of his expensive habits and lack of education he does not save a single pie.

One of the veteran puppet dancers whom I met in Kuchhaman was Nathu, a tall sturdy figure, with white beard and orange coloured turban. He had recently returned from Assam with a handsome income and refused my offer for giving a show on remuneration. He, however, agreed to perform for me and furnished me with all possible information about his art. From inquiry I came to know that inspite of his busy engagements inside and outside Rajasthan, he is left bankrupt after his return and has to mortgage his puppets for his daily maintenance.

The puppet dancers are good musicians also and have preserved the best traditions of Rajasthani songs like "Dholā Maru", "Hir Ranjha" and "Savar langa". The veteran Nathu sang for us in a very fascinating manner and was very much impressed by the recording of his songs and photographs of his play by my unit.

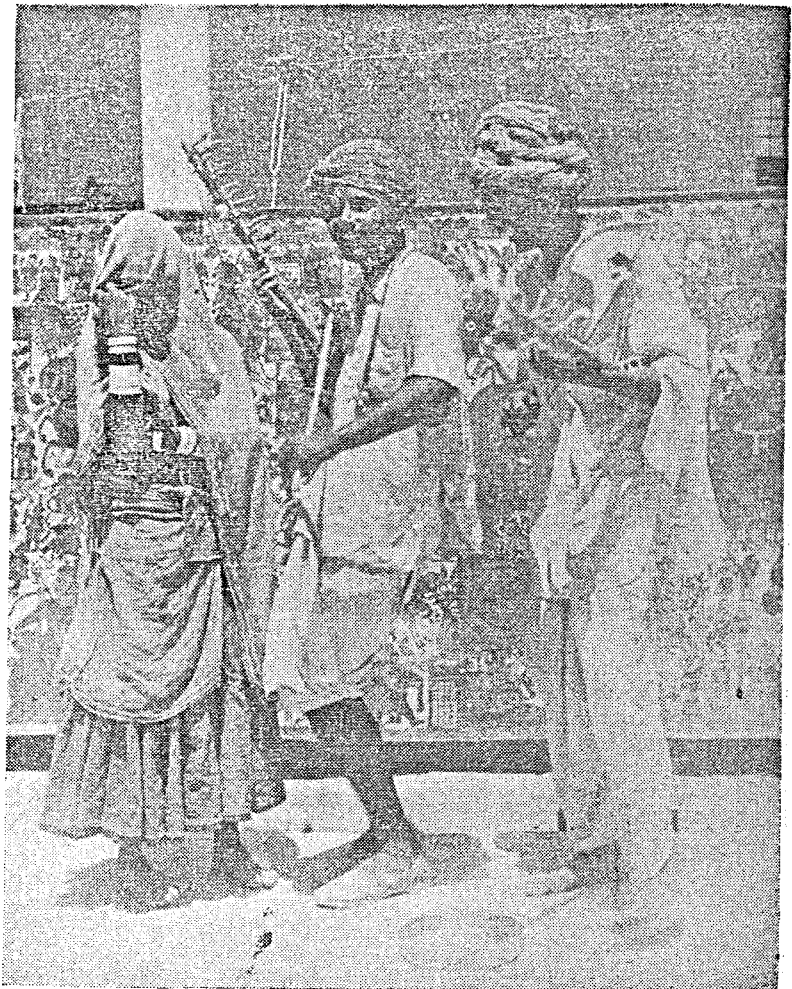
PABUJI KA PAD

Pabuji has been a great Rathore hero nearly 400 years back. His memories are still cherished in the hearts of hundreds of his followers in Rajasthan. He is worshipped as a family deity and the songs of his heroic deeds are sung by bards and Bhats.

The Bhopas of Marwar have specially composed hundreds of songs in praise of Pabuji and carried the tradition of heroic poetry till to-day. A special class of Bhopas has evolved an interesting method of reciting this poetry with action.

A curtain commonly known as Pabuji ka Pad nearly 30 feet in length and five feet in height profusely painted with picture on the life of Pabuji and rolled on a thick bamboo is carried by these Bhopas from one place to the other. The believers in the mysterious power of Pabuji invite these Bhopas to read the Pad for them for the recovery of their child from illness or removal of any evil influence which might have affected their family.

The Pad is spread tight in a vertical position and the wife of the Bhopa directs light on the different pictures of the Pad while singing and dancing. The Bhopa plays on his favourite instrument known as "Rawan Hatha" and sings the songs in chorus.



Pabuji ka Pad

The audience is highly impressed by the show and expect happy results for the good of their family. The Pabuji ki Pad has more of poetic value than that of dancing. The poetry is superb and bears witness to the talent of the composers. The painting of the Pad is in Rajput style. If preserved they can be of great documentary value.

A similar type of pad known as Devji ki Pad is also prevalent in some areas of Marwar. Devji was also a Rajput hero of Solanki clan, chivalrous like Pabuji. The songs of Devji ki Pad are not so interesting as those of Pabuji ki Pad. The technique is the same but the dances and the music too are not so impressive.

These Bhopas, who originally belonged to the Bhomias of the scheduled class, now disown their caste and take pleasure in being called as Solanki Rajput. There are many types of Bhopas spread all

over-Rajasthan doing all sorts of professions like singing, dancing and playing on instruments like Ravan Hatha and Apang. The main patronizers of Pabuji ka Pad are Nayaks, Rebaries and Bhomias. They don't have their own land for cultivation and have to depend on the singing of this pad for their livelihood.

A big mela during Dashara is held every year in village 'Kodumand', near Runicha, the original home of Pabuji, where thousands of his devotees collect and pay homage to their hero. On this occasion hundreds of Pad singers of all varieties assemble and sing the songs of Pabuji the Great, collectively.

The movements of the pad players from one place to the other are so fast that it had almost become impossible for my unit to contact them. It was with great difficulty that I could find Parshuram Bhopa a well-known pad singer at Kuchhman and heard a part of this pad.

THE KANGUJRI

The Kangujri is a class by himself. He, with a conical cap, a flowing skirt, a Churidar Payjama and a Ravan Hatha in his hands presents a peculiar sight. He assumes the shape of a woman and man combined and when asked, he describes himself as an incarnation of Radha and Krishna both. He is Gujar by caste and sings and dances at every door. His movements are graceful and artistic and the songs very fascinating. The Kangujries are found in all parts of Rajasthan; they sing the songs of Radha and Krishna in their own language and are satisfied with even the smallest quantity of flour given to them as a token of love.

THE DANCES OF SHEKHAVATI

The eastern desert area of Rajasthan, adjoining Jaipur and the border areas of Uttar Pradesh is known as Shekhavati. Though the rainfall is scanty and there are few natural resources, this area has been quite rich in folk dancing. The main reason is the influence of Braj Bhumi, the birth place of Lord Krishna, where numerous mirthful activities like Raslila, Ramlila and Nautanki still exist. The southern part of Shekhavati consisting of Sikar, Navalgarh, Laxmangarh, Chirawa and Mandava have preserved some very interesting dances of Rajasthan. The people of Shekhavati, particularly living in these cities, have great taste for collective entertainments. My unit went to these areas for study and research. Some of the dances of Shekhavati are as follows:

THE GINDAD

This is a community dance, of which Rajasthan can rightly be proud. I have rarely found a dance other than this in which people of all caste and creed irrespective of social and official status, join and dance together. It starts a fortnight before Holi. In every Mohalla a big 'manch' (a raised platform) is erected for the drummers. People clad in attractive dresses and with sticks in their hands flock together for a

collective dance. The movements of the dancers are rhythmic and swift and the drumming is simple and sharp. All the groups of the Gindad dancers pay a visit to each others' Mohalla for participation in dance. This dance has great educational and social value, in the sense that it provides opportunity for all the communities to come nearer to each other without any distinction of caste and creed. During Holi the whole of Shekhavati is gay with the activities of Gindad and people look upon the festival as a great event of the year.

THE DANCES OF SANSIS

The Sansis are an ex-criminal tribe and have no permanent home. Their chief profession used to be robbery. They were a great menace to the people for some time but now they have settled at one place. They have no permanent profession for their livelihood and have to adopt any kind of menial work which may fall to their fate, such as repairing of shoes, cleaning of roads and begging. They move with their family from one place to another in search of work. The women folk are lethargic and are no good for any work except dancing which they do even for a penny. Their dances are erotic, unorganised and individualistic in nature. Their movements are graceful and swift and music generally very vulgar. They are accompanied by Dholak and Thali. Their usual dress used to be attractive but now on account of their precarious financial position they are semi-naked and the women too have to put on rags.

THE DANCES OF KANJARS

The Kanjars are similar to Sansis but are financially better placed due to better family relations and community organisation. The men are used to hard labour and find work on roads, railways and buildings. The women look after the home and the family and command considerable respect from their husbands. The Kanjars are Hindus by caste though in habits and appearance they look like Muslims. The women are attractively dressed with lots of ornaments of coarse metal and beads. They are very good at dancing and singing. The males play on instruments like Chang and Dholak and the females dance in varied styles. One of them is dancing on sticks. Most of their dancing is for their own enjoyments but on special occasions like Holi and Dewali, they dance for a living also. The main reason given about the style of the women's dress was that they have to dance very often and they feel comfortable in Muslim dress.

THE DANCES OF NAYAKS, CHAMARS AND MEHTARS

I had a chance of studying these people from very close quarters. After the day's hard labour each of these communities, in their own circle, gather and sing and dance for fun. Women also used to participate in the festivities but now due to lack of imagination on the part of the modern social reformer

they have altogether stopped their women from participating in the dance. Their dances were of communal nature and were full of vigour and mirth. Now-a-days modern reforms and the misguided enthusiasm of the reformer have changed these types of festivities and fun into Bhajans and Kathas.

Similar dances and entertainments were also prevalent in Regars, Bhalbardars, Dhanukas, Balais, Gaverias, Gokhis, Doms, and Thories and they were all meant for self-expression and self-enjoyment.

It is very interesting to note that in these so-called inferior classes devotional singing has been very popular. Great saints like Kabir, Raidas and Dadu belonged to these downtrodden people and spread their gospel of social equality and devotional life among these classes. Those centuries old traditions still survive and have a powerful influence on the life of these people. It was with great difficulty that I could induce them to dance for me.

THE GANESH CHATURTHI DANCE

This particular dance is done by the boys and girls of all castes on the occasion of Ganesh Chaturthi. A big procession is taken out in the main markets of Shekhavati with a big idol of Ganeshji in the centre. Boys and girls with small sticks in hands and funny masks on their faces dance in a circle. This particular occasion is marked for its mirth and community enjoyment.

THE DANCE DRAMAS OF RAJASTHAN

Rajasthan has developed, in centuries, varieties of dance-dramas known as Khyals. These dramas have been helpful to the historian in recording the history of the state and they have maintained cultural and social traditions for more than 400 years. More than 200 Khyals have come to the notice of my Research Section and we are in possession of quite a number of them. The first Khyal was written and played 400 years back; and the whole series of such Khyals were written from time to time. These Khyals have been a powerful medium of free entertainment to thousands of our people. In remotest parts of Rajasthan where no modern entertainments have reached, this popular style has been a great source of cultural and social education till to-day.

The following styles of Khyals are existing in Rajasthan to-day:

1. The Khyals of Kuchaman Marwar.
2. The Khyals of Shekhavati.
3. The Tura Kalgi of Chittor.
4. The Rasdharies of Mewar.
5. The Bhawai dances of Rajasthan and Madhya Bharat.

THE KUCHAMANI KHYALS

Lachiram, the originator of this style and a great exponent of Khyals evolved his own style in colla-

boration with the existing ones. The common features in his and other styles are (i) Drama in the form of dances, (ii) Predominance of singing, (iii) Difficult technique of instrumental music, (iv) playing and dancing on a big platform known as mach.

The characteristic features of Lachiram's style are (i) Simplicity of language used in songs, (ii) Use of new and refreshing tunes, (iii) Intricate expressions while acting, (iv) The use of new themes for the drama.

Lachiram himself was a good dancer and a writer of repute. He is the author of nearly 10 Khyals, prominent among them being Chand Milagari, Ridmal and Meera Mangal. He had his own team of dancers, which he used for professional performances. The performance lasts from evening till morning and hundreds of people assemble from distant villages to witness this great open air show. Though Lachiram died 15 years back, his Khyals are still played all over Rajasthan. The female roles were invariably played by the males. Musical accompaniment is provided by drummers Shahnaiwala and Dholak and Sarangi-wala. The songs are usually very shrill and are also sung by the dancers themselves. The musicians in the background give support to the dancers in singing the rest of the lines for them.

The mach (platform) is elaborately decorated and the cost of the construction is borne by the hosts themselves. These Kuchamani dancers used to visit almost all parts of Rajasthan. But now the people are not very enthusiastic about their shows because of their length and monotonous themes.

In the course of my study tour I had the occasion of meeting Lachi Ram's younger brother who narrated the story of the tragic death of his brother with tears in his eyes. He told me that he was in possession of some unpublished Khyals written by his brother, but he did not want to part with them on sentimental grounds.

THE KHYALS OF SHEKHAVATI

Nanu Ram, the greatest exponent of this style died a few years back leaving behind a few popular Khyals of great beauty. Some of the important ones are (1) Heera Ranjha, (2) Harichand, (3) Bhartrihar, (4) Jaydev Kankali, (5) Dhola Marvan, (6) Ahaldeo.

He belonged to Chidawa and was a Muslim. He was loved by all and even now he is remembered by people with respect and love. His greatest disciple these days is Dulia. I had the opportunity of meeting him and seeing his famous play "Heera Ranjha." The main characteristic of his plays are as follows:

1. Intricate foot work.
2. Difficult style of singing.

3. Elaborate orchestral music consisting of Harmonium, Sarangi, Shahnai, Flute, Nakkara and Dholak.
4. Low height of the stage and absence of elaborate decoration.

Dulia has his own party of performers these days and is out for almost eight months in the year. He is nearly 70 years old but plays the role of a female very effectively. I saw him playing the role of Heera and his son that of Ranjha in one of his plays at Jhunjhunu. He is also the author of many Khyals and takes great pride in staging them. Dulias' Khyals are very popular in the whole of Shekhavati and the play-songs have great literary value. Hundreds of people witness his shows almost free of charge. The main host who invites Dulias Mandli bears all expenses of his show and remunerates the artists. The participants of these Khyals are generally from Mirasi, Dholi and Sargara communities but there is no restriction for others who wish to make Khyal dancing as their profession.

Nanus' and Dulias' Khyals are also played by other non-professional groups who undertake such play only for self-expression and fun.

THE TURA KALGI OF CHITOR

Shah Ali and Tukun Giri were two great saints, 400 years back, who gave birth to this cult of Tura Kalgi. Tura was considered to be the symbol of Shiva and Kalgi that of his Shakti (Parvati). Tukun Giri belonged to Tura sect and Shah Ali to Kalgi. Both these cults propagated the philosophy of Shiva and Shakti respectively in their own way. The chief medium of theirs, was poetic competitions, popularly known as Dangals, where the followers of both sects would solve intricate philosophical problems through the medium of poetry. These dangals have produced the best poetry of the time.

The Tura Kalgi sect became very popular at that time and spread over the border of Rajasthan and Madhya Bharat.

The centuries old dangals of Tura Kalgi, gradually turned into stage shows, first in Ghosunda nearly 50 years back. Inspired by the Khyals of Shekhavati and Rasdhari, the Tura Kalgi Dangals composed and produced some dance dramas on the style of the popular Khyal. The first composer of this style belonged to Ghosunda in Mewar. These dance dramas had nothing to do with Tura and Kalgi and were written on altogether different subjects already prevalent that time. The style of singing the poetry was of course taken from Tura Kalgi.

The rest of the characteristics of Tura Kalgi being the same as those of other Khyals, the following are some of its main features.

1. Its non-professional nature.
2. Elaborate stage decorations.

3. Simplicity of foot-steps.
4. Predominance of Poetic singing.
5. Quality of community entertainment.

The chief centres of activities of Tura Kalgi are Ghosunda, Chitore, Nimbhaera and Neemuch. These places have given birth to some of the best Tura Kalgi composers like Chain Ram, Hamid Beg of Ghosunda, Jaydayal, Tara Chand and Thakur Onkar Singh. Among these the most outstanding one is Soni Jay Dayal. He was really a saint. His Khyals are most popular even now. After his death people remember his works with great esteem.

The chief reason of the decay of this style is the advent of the modern cinema. The Tura and Kalgi dangals started with the pious aim of creating healthy interest and competition in the sphere of poetry and drama, gradually turned into a regular fight for pulling each other down. Sometimes the help of the police was also sought for maintaining peace and order. On account of keen competition between the cult of Tura and Kalgi heavy expenses were incurred on the erection and decoration of the stage. This practice could not continue very long because of the all round economic crisis.

THE BHAVAI DANCE OF RAJASTHAN

400 years back there was a general decline in the art of the masses on account of the foreign influence. Art was no longer considered to be a medium of joy and salvation. It got detached from the temple and the home, and became a monopoly of a few professionals. Even in the village where this art of dancing and singing flourished so well, it became extinct.

This reaction was noticed among the Jats who owned hundreds of acres of land and were virtually the head of the village community. One of these jats, Nagaji by name, had great interest in dancing and singing. He acquired proficiency in this art, which unfortunately the Jat community as a whole did not encourage and approve. They turned him out of their community after giving him the privilege of forming his own group of dancers for entertaining them every year. This group was known as Bhavais and many other Jats interested in dancing also joined. This creation of a separate community of dancers among Jats had a very bad influence on other communities with the result that every community superior or inferior excommunicated all those interested in the art of dancing and induced them to form their separate community for entertaining them on special occasions. Gradually all these Bhavai groups from different communities formed one separate community irrespective of caste or creed.

Bhavais of the following communities exist in Rajasthan these days:

Jat, Dhakad, Bola, Bhil, Dangi, Mina Kumbar,

Nayak, Teli, Chamar, Balai, Gujar, Malis and Lodha.

Their headquarters are Chitor, Nimbahera, Ghosunda, Kinota, Jhintia and other neighbouring villages on the border of M. Bharat and Rajasthan.

The chief characteristics of their dances are: Fast speed of their dances and extraordinary movements of the body. They practise dancing from their very childhood and acquire great proficiency in their art. It is altogether a folk technique but it has all the qualities of a classical dance. The dances are presented in the form of dance-dramas and are devoid of any religious sentiment. The themes are based on the daily life of a village community. They are very humorous, though sometimes obscene. Women are not allowed to take part in the dances. The female roles are played by men. The main themes of Bhavai dances are as follows:

1. Bora and Bori.....depicting a humorous caricature of a village Baniya and his miserly wife
2. Surdas.....Depicting the life of a blind Sadhu with a romantic temperament.
3. Odi Vadi..... depicting the life of a man having two wives.
4. Dokri.....depicting the ill fate of an old woman.
5. Shankaria.....The caricature of a village youth making love to a young lady.
6. Bikaji..... depicting the life of Bikaji the founder of the State of Bikaner.
7. Dhola Maru.....depicting the eternal love story of Dhola and Maru.

The eight months tour of the Bhavais:

Immediately after the rainy season the Bhavais with their group of dancers move out of their villages for earning a living. They move in the form of a caravan of camels gorgeously decorated. The Bhavai women also accompany them to look after their comforts. Their visits sometimes extend to distant parts of Gujarat and Saurashtra. The Bhavais come in the category of the backward class people, but economically, they are pretty well off. The average income of the head of the Bhavais is not less than Rs. 6,000 per year. The Bhavais are usually artistically dressed and are adorned with gold ornaments of considerable value. They also own acres of land, which they usually let out. The Bhavais are hospitable and good-natured and take special care of their employees.

The Bhavai Dance is a professional folk dance and has many technical qualities. The Bhavais visit their patrons (Yajmans) every year and are received by them cordially.

The influence of modern times has not spared this style also. The Bhavais, due to their contact of the city have taken to cinema tunes and cheap themes.

THE RASDHARIS OF RAJASTHAN

The Rasdharis, originally meant the Raslila of

Lord Krishna and depicted the different phases of his life. But later on it included other themes, also. The first Rasdhari drama was written by one Motilal Jat of Mewar nearly 40 years ago. The style is altogether different from the other khyals prevalent then. Motilal is 80 years old and is still alive. This particular technique prevalent in Udaipur and its neighbourhood has spread in Marwar also. Some of the Rasdharis in Marwari were composed by Marwari composers.

The chief participants of this style are Vairagi sadhus but there is no restriction on others joining it. Rasdhari originally was a community folk dance drama in which all used to take part for joy and mirth, but later on it became the monopoly of a selected few, who took it up as a means of livelihood and formed their own group for professional earning.

The Rasdhari differs from other styles in many ways. One of the main differences is that no stage is required for the display of dance drama. Most of the themes like Ramlila, Harishchandra, Nagji, and Moradhvaj are religious ones. The technique adopted for the depiction of the themes is mostly singing and dancing. The dancing is technically superior to that of the Khyals prevalent in Rajasthan.

The lyrics generally sung with this drama are all unpublished and have been handed down to us from mouth to mouth. Hundreds of village folk gather round the village choraha to witness this fascinating dance-drama almost free of charge. The village community has to contribute at least Rs. 20 for these artists and arrange free meals by inviting them individually.

THE DANCES OF THE GANDHARVAS

The Gandharvas are Vaishyas by caste and enjoy all the privileges of that community. They are professional dancers but quite unlike Bhavais they command good respect among their community. They originally belonged to Marwar and move out for nearly eight months for the performance of their dance dramas "Anjana Sundari" and "Mena Sundari". These are well-known Jain themes and almost all the Jain followers witness these dramas with great interest. This particular style has not much dancing in it, but is prominently a musical drama. It is also an open air drama but is a bit modernised in the sense that painted curtains are used for its display. The Gandharvas have become very rare these days and it seems the advent of the modern entertainment has had an adverse effect on their traditional occupation. The Gandharvas play this drama for monetary purposes but they have religious motives also. The artists are generally cultured and educated and do this work as a mission of their life.

(Photos by Karnik: Courtesy Bhartiya Lok Kala Mandal)