

**Executive summary of the Report on the Minor Research Grant awarded by the University Grants Commission.[2012-14]**

Title of the Project- *Sampradayik Lalits- A Study of Ritual performances in Western India.*

Amount sanctioned- Rs. 75,000

File No: 23-2770/11(WRO)

Principal Investigator- Dr. Nivedita Rao.

At the outset of the project I undertook a field visit to Ambad, in Jalna district to see two performances of lalit that takes place annually during April, on the occasion of the day after the Ramnavmi i.e. on dashmi in the temple of Ramanand Svami and on Hanuman Jayanti in the temple of Hanuman also called as the nirgun math. The field work was conducted from the 2<sup>nd</sup> April to 7<sup>th</sup> April 2012. Some of the observations of the field visit are as following-

Ramanand Svami's lalit is held on the Dashmi in Ambad i.e on the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2012. The Deshmukh family is the chief organizer of the lalit. Anandrao Bapu Deshmukh was a watandar Deshmukh and the earliest to accept the discipleship of Ramanand swami and his family carries on the tradition. Mr. Ramakantrao Deshmukh from the lineage of Anandrao Bapu Deshmukh from Nava wada is today in charge of the celebrations. He is also the head of the Samsthan. The deshmukh family worked as watandar Deshmukhs for the Nizam state in premodern India. Dr. Sanjay Deshmukh, whom I contacted in Aurangabad, is a student of Marathi Literature and has written a work on the folk performances of Marathvada and Khandesh. He has been very helpful in making me understand the performance, its origins and

The lalit takes place in front of the Ram mandir where the statue of Ram was brought by Ramanand svami. No one remembers as to who built the temple. The tentative date of Ramanand's samadhi is 1806. This is evident in the arti of Ahyutashram where the date, day and year in the saka era is mentioned. The Ram temple does bear Maratha period architectural resemblance, however there are no inscriptions on the temple. The temple is

situated flanking the Deshmukh galli, a straight road from the bus stand up to the old wada [junawada]. This small road is flanked by many wadas and recently a Jain temple has been built near the Ram mandir. In the temple itself, the arti to Ramanand by his disciple Achyutashram states that Ramanand started a lalit in Gondi, on the dvadash and kala on the traiyodashi of the Ramnavami. He also made Gondi like Pandharpur. The arti is a good example of biographical devices used in premodern India. Such artis are eulogistic and generally written by the disciple recording the guru parampara of the godman and his main acts ending with the nature of Samadhi the godman takes. The Prasad in Gondi on the paush vadh dvadashi is an interesting phenomenon...the bhagvat Brahmin goes to every household of every caste and religion and collects bhakri comes home, has a bath [purifies himself ?] and then is brought and mixed together and then given as Prasad. This was a practice set up by Ramanand swami.

The lalit itself lacks any conscious organization. As Mr. Dattopant Deshmukh says earlier on members of the Deshmukh family came on foot from various places in the morning and then perform at night. But there are some impersonations which are done as part of the navas and hence require prior notice. The prior day there is the palkhi procession which is done barefoot along the environs of what may have constituted the limits of the Deshmukh family houses. Most performers believe that what they do is a form of 'sewa' and take pride in the fact that such a long tradition is kept alive even today. [after the performance balukaka asks 'amchi sewa kashi vatli tumhala'- note that he does not refer to the performance as a program but rather as 'sewa'] but many even voice concern that this may not be continued by the next generation. However the presence of many young members seems to suggest otherwise. Many start at a very young age, the practice being that the young son accompanies the father and learns the songs. There are also small parts of impersonation in which children are required where this participation may start. Sanjay's father Mr. Dattopant Deshmukh started

very early and so did Sanjay, almost at the age of 8 and has done so religiously every year. Some other members include Krishnarao Deshmukh who is the overall in charge of the makeup since 1948 and Shankarrao Deshmukh who is the makeup man for over 50 years now. Both remain in the green room throughout the entire performance after the anointing of the tilak after the arti. I did see some women in the makeup room getting young men dressed as women. But apart from this they are not present in the temple for the arti nor are they allowed participation either as singers or impersonators. Women are also absent from the mankari group that has a special place in the performance. Unlike the village jatras or utsavs this lalit had no popular participation, no shops or fairs came up. This further points to its ritual exclusivity for a particular caste group.

The performance is a night long affair both at the dashmi and at the Hanuman jayanti. First the impersonation comes dancing/walking from the green room [songacha wada] followed by the singers. They halt before the temple, face the deity and salute the deity. Then the songs begin... the number of songs as well as their sequence is determined by the composer of the lalit. Deshmukh gives one example- of the bharadi- first the gana then the stavan and then other padas. There are two sets of singers ones who begin with one line and the others who follow. The entire pada is sung so giving the song a cyclical structure. During the refrain [dhruvapada] the impersonators dance with quick footwork with each pair going in half circle such that the back is not projected to the deity. There are 3 impersonations that are considered those for navas- that of ganapati, bairagi and murli. [ I found one of the singers prodding an old man as bairagi- he yashvantrao was told not to take this song but he insisted that he wanted to dance but could not. Hence the prodder kept telling him to move/ dance fast and if he could not why did he take such a responsibility. The group does exert its power on members who are not up to the mark. Balukaka similarly would halt the sampadani if the

team did not take the right meter. And make them begin again. The performance as training is thus integral to its learning.]

### **Hanuman Jayanti lalit-**

The lalit performed in the Hanuman jayanti is under the control of the Deshpande family, while the pujaris of the hanuman mandir is controlled by the Kalbande family. The Gosavi family control the Balaji math. The Kalbandes and Gosavis are related- the kalbande from the sister's family while the Gosavi is from the brother's. Both families are householder families. The hanuman temple is called Nirgun math even though it has a *murti* of hanuman – this is because Achyutashram being a Nath follower made a aniconic temple but later fashioned a *Murti* with his nails since people need a *sagun rupa* to worship. The Deshpandes have taken the gurumantra of this svami.

The sequence of impersonations in the hanuman jayanti is as follows- Haridas- Ganapati- Gosavi-Bhat bharadi-Nanakshahi- Vasudev- Gondhali- Aradhi- Vaghya murli-Bairagi. Two impersonations bhat and nanakshahi are dialogue impersonations which gives some relief to the singers. In the vasudev song the various akhyanas are sung – in Hanuman Jayanti-shravan Bala, ram lakshman. In Dashmi- shravan Bala, Bhakt Prahlad, Sati sulochana.

Lavnis are sung in the lalit, the theme are on women who reach puberty. The Kanphati impersonation has been stopped in both the lalit. Anandrao says that till his father's time this impersonation did take place and in this he says two men walk from opposite directions shouting loudly [Anandrao says that the impersonation has been dropped because the need for a loud voice] in Gondi, the impersonations are divided between 32 families. They perform these and then leave, the singers remain till dawn. Compositions are of the sant parampara of the math and only a few of Ramanand svami are sung. The text is different from the Ambad one.

In hanuman jayanti the compositions sung repeated with the dashmi one and the meter was also the same for most of them. Which may suggest that both traditions may have been set by one person? Or the compositions yield to certain particular meters?

Both the performances have been partially recorded and digitized version of the sampadanis of Ramanand svami have been acquired, since these are not available in print form. Similarly the Balaji Math has published Achyutashram's Entire literature which has been acquired by me during this field visit. Apart from the field visit I have made numerous visits to the libraries of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathvada Library in Aurangabad as well as the Jayakar Library in the University of Pune. In Mumbai I have been working at the Asiatic library as well as the Fort Library, of the university of Mumbai to understand the structure of both bhakti performances as well as those emerging from a puranic backgrounds. Two lectures were delivered on my on going project at the Refresher courses held in the dept of political science in the Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathvada University and the dept of English in the University of Mumbai.

#### 1. Collection of research material from libraries and documentation centers.

The libraries of various institution and universities were referred to, to collect information on oral / folk traditions of India. Of primary importance were the libraries of the School of Arts and Aesthetics, JNU. New Delhi, Centre of Historical Studies J.N.U. New Delhi, Mumbai University library, Mumbai, and The Asiatic Society library, Mumbai, The main areas of research in these libraries consisted of locating books that dealt with how performances are studied within the disciplines of history and anthropology. The library of the school of Arts and Aesthetics was most useful since they have various important series on performance studies. Many books were Xeroxed as study material. While in JNU I was able to interact with some of

the professors of the School of Arts and Aesthetics. Dr. S. Chaudhary and Dr. Brahmaprakash were especially helpful in giving their inputs on similar ritual dramas in other parts of India. I presented a lecture demonstration on my ongoing research at the Centre in October 2014 to the post graduate and M. Phil students.

2- A note on method seems important here since I have in my study tried to combine both methods from history as well as those of performance studies. I propose that it is only in a performance that we can detect ways in which the text is used and interpreted and how the audience reacts to the various representations. As Certeau would argue 'a way of thinking invested in a way of acting, an art of combination which cannot be dissociated from an art of using'. It is only in the enactment or the performance that we can understand lalits were appropriated by the upper castes. This study therefore moves away from considering lalits as merely literary/ normative towards a study of the performance wherein it's more complex and contested 'use' emerges.

3. I have also attempted to contextualize the study of lalits within a larger frame work of bhakti tradition involved reading of works which have primarily dealt with the pan- Indian focus of bhakti tradition as well as its regional manifestations. Similarly I have tried to show how the lalits were themselves derived from the varkari literary form of the bharuds. Studying the textual form of the sampadanis also led me to enquire into the the philosophy of the Nath yogis who inhabited western India from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Thus influence of Nirgun bhakti and Hatha yoga was also felt on the literature of the lalits.

4-Preparation of bibliographic details on the area of ritual drama and lalits in western India from the various libraries is underway.

5-Some of the main propositions of that have emerged from various discussion and readings are stated below.

A] The lalits are a derived tradition, its form is influenced by the varkari literary form of the Bharuds. However it is reworked into a brahmanical ritual by its proponents. My paper tries to understand this notion of ritual transfer. According to scholars of performance studies there is a need to understand the subtle or obvious ways in which a ritual or ritual element is transferred or 'translated', from one context into another. 'Transfer' refers to the fluidity of time, space and context. In the course of such transfers, rituals usually undergo significant changes and transformations. Thus such transfers must be seen in relation to new social, economic and religious contexts. Therefore the section on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century changes in western india following the rise of the Marathas and the brahmanising of temples and bhakti tradition.

B]-It is important to understand the social dynamics of a ritual such as the identity of the group that performs the ritual, notions of power, hierarchy, solidarity, control and efficacy. Ritual often serves as a means of establishing group identity, it is also a means of excluding others. In this study I look into how the Brahmins of Ambad have hierarchised the entire ritual along caste and gender lines dividing the tasks of various aspects of the ritual but at the same time involving the entire community.

C]-the paper also seeks to locate the various effects of the ritual in term of the physical, psychological or social effects. i.e what constitutes the success of the ritual and who benefits from its success. Why does it continue even today and what are the various needs that the ritual fulfils.

D]- it is also important to note that some ritual performances help connect to a shared cultural heritage. Lalits to a larger extent also imagine social and historical continuities and rootedness in an ancient past where caste and patriarchal distinctions were upheld. They also simultaneously respond to and legitimize change. This is very cleverly done in the dialogue part of the lalit which interestingly does not belong to the fixed ritual structure.

E]- Scholars of performance studies state that psychologically the repeatability of ritual is supposed to give its participants a sense of security and stability in times of change. It also has the potential of healing, and providing a secure space for extreme or otherwise socially not approved emotions, a sounding board for various kinds of desires and fears. Given the nature of brahmanical rigidity with caste and gender roles, the lalits I argue must offer release to the performers to relive experiences other than those enjoined by caste and gender rules. The ritual itself I argue offers a 'frame' to legitimize such felt experiences through the enactment of an impersonation.

D- lastly I enquire into the relationship of lalits with money that is how economic conditions effect changes in the performance and perception of ritual. I was told by some of the performers that since a decade now donations have increased such that donors have to wait for their turn to announce a donation. Some scholars argue that ritual is an occasion when major transactions and economic activities take place. Participation in rituals or right to participate is also seen as a kind of property.

