



THE PLAY OF MEMORY AND IMAGINATION IN THE ARENA OF PERFORMANCE

**An Attempt to Contextualize the History and Legend of Amar Singh
Rathore as taken forward by various Performing Arts**

TRIPURARI SHARMA

Submission of Final Compiled Report
Tagore National Fellowship for Cultural Research

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INTRODUCTION

Amar Singh Rathore has been celebrated as a character in several Dramatic Folk Forms like Nautanki, Khayal and Puppetry. There are also songs and ballads about him and some other characters who are part of his narrative. Bards also tell his story and each telling is a distinct version and interpretation of him and his actions. As his presence expands through various cultural expressions of Folklore, spanning centuries, geographical terrains and psychological frames of audiences, it seems that the popular stage has been largely instrumental in creating this space for him. It is true, that at the core lies the historical story of Amar Singh Rathore, that has taken on legendary proportions. However, he is not the only one. There are many heroes whose deeds are narrated, remembered and thus kept alive for posterity. But not all of them have acquired such significance in the culture and tradition of Performing Arts. This is what compels or calls for exploring the various dimensions that could have contributed towards such a process.

The stage, by its very existence creates an interactive space between the subject of performance and its audience. The subject could be mythological or historical, but for the audience it is there at the time they are engaged with the performance. The subject of performance may be significant in itself, but the audience can grasp it, only if it finds the performance meaningful. The content then must be able to lend itself to a Dramatic Construct, in order to achieve this impact successfully.

In his introduction to the Natyashastra, eminent writer Adya Rangacharya says, 'The traditional stage has been an attraction for our people for over thousands of years. Drama represents the ways of the world, the picture of our people's speech and manners, it is the Veda accessible to all castes in society. However, unlike the four Vedas, it is not confined to the realm of wisdom alone, it provides entertainment too. A dramatist, a popular theme, actors-actresses-director-producer, and the audience-these are the four essential ingredients of the Theatre. There should be no weakness in any of these. The playwright should have the capacity to grasp the speech and manners of the people and represent them in an interesting way. The story should hold the attention of the audience. Physical fitness, control over the voice, clarity of speech and pronunciation are indispensable requirements for an actor. And lastly, the audience should be one accustomed to understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of performance. These have been described as the essential elements of stage craft, thousands of years ago, by the Natysastra. '

The theme must have elements in it that can reach out. Only then can it be popular. A cohesive structure or the Dramatic Construct enables clarity of flow. Accomplished performers engage the audience and an appreciative audience assimilates the experience and retains it. A well-known story may provide a base, but the stage sets its own demands and experts of a performance genre chisel it accordingly. There is no one way to tell all stories. Performers devise styles to highlight the essence of the content. That is why some Forms are

identified with certain stories. 'Alha' is known to be connected with the story of Alha-Udal. The singing of this Narrative is both popular and challenging. Professional singers create the saga of Veer Rasa through the singing and some incorporate enactment too. But impersonation of characters by various actors and enactment of scenes as in Nautanki or Khayal creates another kind of presentation dynamics. Certain portions of the Alha story have been dramatized in Nautanki, but they are crafted very differently from the Narrative singing. This treatment, then, defines the telling in that Form. The same content, then would be re-shaped as different Forms take it forward. The practitioners would look at suitability. There are also certain conventions laid by Tradition that are also necessarily observed. Amar Singh Rathore has been successfully performed on stage, but the Phad narrator and artist have refrained from either painting or telling his story. The reason is, that the Phad is the space for those tellings whose pivotal characters have acquired the status of deity. Thus is true for Pabuji and Tejaji and the implication indicates that the story of Amar Singh constitutes something else. All these stories may be popular, but still could be categorised differently, falling into separate narrative modes or traditions. So, they are not told in an identical manner. Specific narrators tell specific stories. And even if they tell stories of the same hero, their telling is distinct and the impact specific-either to the situation or the emotions concerned. The impact of the Alha singing is different from the dramatized piece in Nautanki. Similarly, the ballad and the drama of Amar Singh are distinct in nature and aesthetics. This does not seem to be accidental and to understand the discerning process means to look beyond skill, howsoever compelling the telling might be. Which it is because the canvas of the legend is huge-much larger than life or becomes so through the telling.

Poetry, Music, Drama, Puppetry, may stem from the same source and yet impact us differently. They possess distinct properties that lend their hue to the basic content, the format being both conveyor and comment. The overall purpose is to find connections between the aesthetic and the sociological-cultural milieu thereby understanding the processes by which they manifest and imbibe each other. A legend becomes a legend because it is made and cultivated by society. A Dramatic Construct is a substantial addition to its spread and longevity. The attempt is to know more about the nature of Art Forms, so that processes that are its manifestation, can be examined in that context. The values that the legend could be the carrier of and the social milieu that enables their enforcement are linked to the role that actors and audiences play in extending it. These areas require attention, significant depth and engagement with the cultural, philosophical, aesthetic, literary and performative traditions that have accumulated around a reality for over centuries.

The real is not forgotten. It has perhaps been enhanced by several inputs which could have also shadowed part of the core. What are the elements that make a legend? What does society, rather its cultural consciousness seek to emphasize by its sustenance? Amar Singh, the person as he lived and the hero of the legend may or may not be identical, while, the protagonist of a drama, would by necessity of being in performance, develop another trajectory. A performance, by its very nature, cannot and is not meant to capture a lifetime. But does it need to repeat what happened? Who can know and how to know what happened? For even when there are witnesses, their versions tend to vary.

The ambivalence of truth has been a subject of much debate. It has a lot to do with points of views, but it is also about remembrance-what we remember, how we remember, and in the

first place, choose to remember. It may not be about memory alone, but also of desire-the desire to create someone or something, a fantasy or a notional remembrance, made real by each repetition.

What would be the distinction between the treatment of a hero of a legend and the central character of what we normally refer to as a historical play? Playwright Indira Parthasarathy says that you do not visit history to create the past, but because it is representing what is happening today. Can we say the same for the hero of a legend? For, unlike the character of a historical play, he/she does not stand alone, he/she is not the creation of a single writer, but is held by a community, carved by it and soaked in a certain identification held precious by the collective. Of course, as society moves, communities too shed or modify belief systems and this in turn could affect the relationship with the legend and perhaps evolve readings into the layers which could lead to tempering of the tale as handled by the Performing Arts.

Legend, narrative, story, ballad, song, drama-may all access the same source and material, but they weave it differently and each one creates a different impact. They work with words and yet the language is handled in ways that are not similar.

The relationship between the Legend and the Dramatic Construct is intrinsically linked to the nature of performance. It almost defines it. And yet, it is highly complex and intricate. Both have their foundation in poetry. They are born of words... created by words. It is not about adapting the words for stage, but of the vision that sets the action on stage and gives dimension to the impersonation.

'The Poetics' of Aristotle sheds considerable light on this area as it also discusses the attributes and qualities that could be considered essential for constructing Drama.

Aristotle is of the view, that both Epic poetry and Tragedy use language, but the manner or mode of imitation is distinct in each case. Even when the medium (language) is same and the objects (men) same, the manner of imitate may be different. The poet may imitate by narration-in which case he can take on another personality or speak, unchanged, in his own person. The characters then are part of his narrative. Or, the poet may present all his characters as living and moving before us. (They) imitate persons acting and doing, 'hence, some say, the name of 'drama' is given to such poems, as representing action... '

The Impact of action as part of narration is different than when it is placed independent of the narrative flow. It probably accorded more agency to the character (being freed of the narrator). The Epic poets were succeeded by Tragedians, since the drama was a larger and higher form of art.' Tragedy gradually evolved out of the Narrative epic and established certain dimensions of aesthetics.'

Aristotle sees Tragedy as stemming from Epic poetry. They differ again in their length... (for) the Epic action has no limits of time.... Of their constituent parts some are common to both, some peculiar to Tragedy. All the elements of an Epic poem are found in Tragedy, but the elements of Tragedy are not all found in the Epic poem. '

As an Art Form, Tragedy assimilates the components of the Narrative poem, while qualitatively enhancing it with focus and chiselling it for the desired effect. The Tragedian may not even dramatize the entire Narrative. Rather, he is advised to be selective. And in what he selects, he can carry the perception of the rest. His skill lies in weaving a complete whole from the part that he has chosen to work with.

Aristotle addresses the poet and clarifies to, 'not make an Epic structure into a Tragedy. By an Epic structure, I mean one with a multiplicity of plots-as if, for instance you were to make a tragedy out of the entire story of the Iliad. In the Epic poem, owing to its length, each part assumes its proper magnitude. In the drama, the result is far from answering to the poet's expectation. The proof is that the poets who have dramatised the whole story of the Fall of Troy instead of selecting portions... either fail utterly or meet with poor success on the stage'.

Drama brings with it, the added components of time and space, as concepts and reality to be handled on stage and in relation to the audience.

This structure of incidents is pivotal to the cohesiveness of the Drama and the rendering of its conclusion, that deals with the fall of a hero and the reversal of his fortunes, evoking fear and pity.

The emphasis laid on action and subsequently on plot, also creates another significant point of departure from the Narrative. Aristotle again directly advises the poet that, 'In constructing the plot and working it out with the proper diction, the poet should place the scene as far as possible before his eyes. In this way seeing everything with the utmost vividness, as if he were a spectator of the action, he will discover what is in keeping with it and be most unlikely to overlook inconsistencies. 'The poet of drama needs to see, to visualise. The emphasis has shifted from the word to the scene. It is no longer about building the scene through the word (as would happen in the Narrative), but of diction as part of scene. It is also not about seeing by listening (to the words of the narrative), but viewing action as an entity in itself and the chief element of the Drama. The visualization claims attention here. Aristotle goes on to say, that the maker of Drama needs to be a poet of plots rather than of verse. Stringing together speeches, even if expressive of character, will not create the essential effect as a plot of artistically constructed incidents.

The six elements of Tragedy as described by Aristotle are-

1. Plot
2. Character
3. Diction
4. Thought
5. Spectacle
6. Song

While all the elements are connected by the intent of the Drama, Aristotle considers the structure of the incidents to be of primary importance. 'For,' he says, 'Tragedy is an imitation not of men, but of an action and of life and life consists in action, and its end is made of action, not a quality.' So action is that which is seen, known, experienced, authenticated. It is that which is visible.

Shri Ugamraj Khilari-the famous Khayal exponent - used to say, that the action of a person/character determines his status as a hero of Khayal. He evaluated action as an exemplary deed to be remembered as placed before society.

Aristotle, on the other hand does not look at Dramatic Action with the view of projecting aspects of the character or his thoughts, for they are to remain in the context of the unravelling of incidents leading to the fall of the hero.

Aristotle does not approve of multiple plots or plots that are episodic, wherein episodes succeed one another without probable or natural sequence. Aristotle sees Tragedy as an 'imitation of an action that is complete, whole and of a certain magnitude....' And a 'whole' in Aristotelian aesthetics, implies that which has a Beginning, Middle and End.

'A Beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity. But after which something naturally is or comes to be.'

It sets the tone of the plot and provides for the immediate reason for the unfolding of events. It gives a definite start to a new happening, hitherto unconceived and unknown. It marks its base (though the base in itself may collapse, but that is not anticipated) and scope for revelations.

'An End is that which itself naturally follows some other thing either by necessity or as a rule, but has nothing following it'. It is the conclusion and logical outcome of all that has gone or happened before it, with the reasoning of circumstances, paving the way to it. It is the final word, the final truth, the final destiny of the character. There is nothing or can be beyond it. It is the finality of it that establishes and seals it.

'A Middle is that which follows something as some other thing follows it.' It emerges out of that which precedes it and it creates the foundation for that which is to follow. It gradually sets the steps and modulates the indicators that progressively pitch the action towards a decisive definite conclusion.

The Beginning and End hold the plot together and there can be no loose ends or anything haphazard at these corners. This also means that there is acceptance of the conclusion and acknowledgement of its power. Unity then is binding factor in Aristotelian aesthetics and the plot cements it.

The plot is limited to being an Imitation of one action of the protagonist and so cannot cover the entire range of events that he may have experienced that may be there. 'Unity of plot, does not, as some think, consist in the unity of the hero.... For, infinitely various are the incidents in a man's life which cannot be reduced to unity and so too they are many actions

of one man out of which we cannot make one action. Poets often treat the hero as the unifying factor and assemble his many actions and adventures around him, but that does not lead to a cohesive structure. Experienced makers of Drama exclude that which is not necessary and whose absence does not make a visible difference to the organic whole'... Even when the subject is historical and aspects of his life are known, the poet is not bound by it. 'It is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen-what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity. The poet and historian differ... '

The Drama of 'Amar Singh Rathore' does not bring in references to his earlier life as the prince of Jodhpur. It leaves out details of the past and establishes a definite Beginning at the Mughal Court from where the action builds up to the Tragic point. In this way, it does not get trapped in trying to depict the entire life story of Amar Singh. It selects that which provides a Beginning to the Drama.

This then leads to the Middle or the main action-that of Annihilation by Amar Singh. The logical outcome of this is the fall and end of the protagonist. At one level the play maintains this unified plot structure. And yet it transcends it by maintaining Amar Singh as a hero.

Having sourced his material, the poet frames it within the plot structure and leads it towards the conclusion. As the prevalence and power of the moral code is established, the protagonist tends to get isolated in Greek Tragedy. Despite traits of nobility that are revealed in the character and are admired by the chorus, the latter too is bound by its position. Whether it be against the ethical norms by an act of forbidden alliance as in 'Oedipus' or against the state as in 'Antigone', the character stands to suffer the consequences of having violated the accepted moral line of conduct. It is by identifying with the characters and experiencing a catharsis, that the audience learns the rules of citizenship. This implies a salient understanding of what is to be refrained from, what is not to be done.

However, when Ugamraj ji talked of action as an example, he implied exemplary action, one that becomes an ideal and ought to be emulated. A daunting task that is the test of courage. And it brings the inner mettle to the fore. The consequences are foreseen. At the moment of occurrence in the performance, the action carries with it elements of Tragedy, but seems to take it in its stride. Even if the hero is isolated, it does not become a permanent or a binding feature. While, the Chorus in Aristotelian tragedy, may be moved by events, it largely remains a witness at edge. Rural communities, on the other hand, tend to take active initiative in certain circumstances. They become participants and mould the action. Evidently, different cultures carve their artistic and aesthetic pathways differently. Their role and purpose may also not be the same. Yet, it may be worth examining the two not in isolation, but as systems that have conceptual points of convergence and divergence. It is for this reason that the Aristotelian system of Aesthetics has been discussed here. It examines the Narrative and the Dramatic construct in relation to each other.

Where Aristotle sees the, 'Fall' of the hero as imminent, Actor-philosopher-Khilari Ugamraj could probably see the 'rise' of the hero in moral terms and in the context of community. (In the Greek play, 'Oedipus at Colonus', Oedipus questions his destiny and is restored as a saint - but it happens in the second part/play of the trilogy. Here, it may happen in the next unit!) Aristotle sees fall as punishment for a deed of the past. An alternate view is to see it as

sacrifice. Today, Antigone is celebrated by the world for her courage and sacrifice. The character has become a permanent marker, of which the action is an action. The punishment does not seem deserved and the character has crossed the Aesthetics that created her.

The Folk Dramatic traditions of India, have evolved independently of these principles. It is widely believed, that have drawn from Desi, Videsi and Parampara sources The Natyasastra has been a constant influence on the overall Form, story, spectacle, song and music. For the presentation of Tragedy and tragic characters, they probably formulated devices or adapted them from other sources to serve their purpose. They have probably also created their principles based on their experiences of regular performances, interactions with the audience and subsequent reflections. There is not much material available on the systems on which the dramaturgs of the rural stage based their work, but the sophistication in their craft reveals a deep understanding not only of the medium of Theatre, but also of society and the purpose they assign to Drama.

The two systems are being seen as parallels with some intersections that could also be coincidental. However, they may provide indicators that draw attention to some of the salient features of the Folk Dramatic Tradition. This is not to ascertain whether Tragedy as defined by Aristotle exists in the Folk Dramatic Tradition, because that is unnecessary and would be an imposition. What might be interesting to observe is, that if certain common principles do emerge, then how do they operate in two separate cultural streams that are geographically and historically far apart. But, they are both systems of Theatre, born from Theatre, sharp and sensitive to the interaction between audience and performance. Their practitioners have looked for answers through the ages, that are valid not just for study, but the Theatre practice of today.

The Folk Dramatic Tradition has received a lot from its own roots and that has become an inherent part of its performing nature. The flexibility of dealing with space and time comes to it from the Natyasastra and is ingrained in its very base. Restrictiveness for the sake of unity might be an alien concept for practitioners who may find it stifling. The Folk performers have also received the rich legacy of Rasa, specially its rendering through the intricacies of music and singing. Their foundation of performance thus has firm and recognizable attributes. However, as this Tradition has grown out of the complex social milieu, the subjects and themes that it takes up are such that would engage the common person and also relate with the nature of his life experience. Contrary to the notion that Folk drama is light-hearted, rural audiences often grapple with serious themes, intense drama and tragic overtones. This is often close to their life and through Drama it becomes visible.

Even mythological subjects acquire their own shade of realism when performed in the midst of a village. 'Satya Harishchandra' is still one of the most popular plays. It is not a Tragedy, because it is well known to all, that the fortunes of Raja Harishchandra will be restored to him. And yet, the reversal of fortunes, brought about by his own act of generosity, is so startling, that the audience is deeply affected. The king is subjected to the vicissitudes of fortune through penury, hardship and patience, even as his wife, Taramati, is forced to beg. This does not come at the end, but almost at the beginning and the audience, absorbing the initial shock, grows to identify with the (tragic) plight of the character and his suffering. And probably their own. Since it carries on uninterrupted, it becomes the cycle of the character's

destiny-the only cycle he can be destined to, and none other. He is not the image of suffering, but in the passage of suffering and as fortunes fall, his moral stature increases, because, he maintains his integrity. He is not being condemned, but allowed to be on trial. The blessings of the Gods, that restore Harishchandra to his original status, is for the audience, the desired relief for mustering their resilience.

'Satya Harishchandra is unique in many ways. It is part of mythology, but embedded in harsh events and dissects the irony of self-worth when split between feeling and doing the duty. And in many ways epitomises the psyche of a culture.

There are however, many other Indian Tragedies that have been popular on the Folk stage. These include, 'Laila Majnu', 'Shirin Farhad' etc. Apart from these, there are others that deal with the warrior hero saints who were part of battle or committed for the protection of their cattle. Tejaji is one such example. Laudable Courage, and the cross currents of domesticity that enmesh it, brings alive, the pastoral-agricultural way of life. Sacrifice is seen as the tragedy of life unlived. This is what the fall of a hero implies but it is also his rise in moral terms.

Danger and duty make their demands and take their toll on the protagonist. Then there are others that are based on the lives of historical characters like Amar Singh Rathore. This has been highly successful on the stage and continues to be popular. It is carefully crafted and certain principles of the craft can be elaborated.

The Drama of, 'Amar Singh Rathore' is derived from a narrative, but is so constructed that the unity of action is maintained. The incidents are so arranged that they lead up to the slaying of Salavat Khan in court and subsequent action in relation to Amar Singh can be seen as a consequence of that. Within the framework of a single issue, the action is coherent, logical and revealing of the choices made by the character. The very opening, sets the tone of a Beginning. Amar Singh, in the service of the emperor, applies for leave to get married and bring his wife home. The emperor is reluctant and hopes that the Mir Bakshi would handle it, but Amar Singh has less faith in the Mir Bakshi and has greater comfort with the emperor. A situation with many contradictions comes to the fore in this initial setting.

The makers of Drama have selected this moment to be the starting from where the performance can take off. As mentioned above, they have not taken into consideration aspects of Amar Singh's life that existed before this moment. The Narrative songs and stories of Amar Singh often include details of early life. He was the elder son of Gaj Singh, king of Jodhpur, but his right to succession to the throne was denied by his father, for though, he won laurels in war, he was considered too headstrong to be heir apparent. That honour went to the second son and Amar Singh was sent in exile. Oral narratives created by the bards remember this incident as an integral part of the story. As James Tod recalls, the sequence of Amar Singh's banishment is highly condensed and poignant. It is as follows-

"As soon as the sentence was pronounced, that his birth right was forfeited and assigned to his younger brother, and that he had ceased to be a subject of Maroo, the khelat of banishment was brought forth, consisting of sable vestments, in which he was clad., a sable shield was hung upon his back, and a sword of the same hue girded round him., a black horse

was then led out, being mounted on which, he was commanded, though not in anger to depart whither he listed beyond the limits of Maroo.

He went not alone, numbers of each clan, who had always regarded him as their future lord, voluntarily partook of his exile.”

This is clearly the work of a poet. Etched to be remembered. A visual crafted with words. The headstrong Amar Singh almost stoically accepts his predicament. It is the silence of obedience, that pervades and makes emotion redundant. There is no crease-not even a last look backwards. A sombre moment for him and his countrymen. This is the telling of a bard, the making of a story. Amar Singh rode out of Maroo, into the horizons of the bards. The banishment remains unexplained and as many followed him, it is evident that he was not unloved by the people. The bards sang of him and probably parts of those renderings made up the legend.

This moment is dramatic and were it to be included in a performance, it would have left an impact on the audience. It may have even given insights into his headstrong temperament that remained consistent. However, the makers of Drama, refrained from accommodating these aspects and instead of projecting the unity of the man, they maintained unity in the structure of the plot.

Had the opening been about picking earlier threads, then probably a loop of events would be required to connect Amar Singh with Salavat Khan. In the present structure, the equation among these three major characters, King Shah Jahan, Salavat Khan and Amar Singh is established right at the start. It builds the premises for the action to develop further.

The Folk stage, however, does introduce a parallel plot. As, Amar Singh returns from Bundi, he meets a thirsty man in the desert and offers him water. The man is Narshebaaz, a Pathan, who, in gratitude, promises his blood in lieu of the water. The scene not only brings in a new character, but also marks a new chapter, a new relationship and atmosphere different from the court. This sequence, however, begins as a consequence of the first scene, where Amar Singh is granted leave. At the start, it seems a logical outcome of the previous event. Once, the scene progresses, it establishes itself as a counter point. And then it seems to have transgressed from the action initiated in the previous scene. However, it connects well with the upcoming scene, where Amar not yet reported to the court. Since unity of place is not an issue in this structure, this scene has been constructed so as to maintain the continuity of story. As the character of Narshebaaz leaves a strong impact, but does not appear for again for a long time, the audience may wonder about the purpose of the scene. By placing this scene early in the play, the foundation for the second part of the performance has been laid out. The promise of Narshebaaz has been told and this leads beyond the structure of Tragedy. Aristotle valued the unity of action to achieve the aesthetic impact of tragedy, but the Folk stage has its own priorities and purpose of drama. In a planned way, it wants to include other aspects of community and social life that are significant in themselves.

Amar Singh does not report to the court on the stipulated day and seems to have the intention of extending the leave indefinitely. This could be seen as an Error on his part. It is a choice that he makes. It gives Salavat Khan opportunity to provoke the king against Amar Singh and

the king has to comply, though it is against his will. Events fall in sequence, almost anticipating the cause and consequence paradigm. This happens in Amar Singh's absence and it is through a messenger that the latter comes to know, that the king's stance towards him has shifted. The relationships are altering and Recognition of that seeps into the protagonist. He feels humiliated and decides to avenge it by the Action which is central to the Tragedy, i.e., the Deed of Annihilation, which would eventually lead to his own descent and Fall. He is not unaware of this and brings in the element of stature connected with sacrifice. (This is a recurring and significant feature of Indian Tragedy. An outstanding example is, that of, Tejaji, who kept his promise to the Snake God, and returned to him after a battle, so wounded, that he offered the only unwounded spot on his body- the tongue, to receive the fang and venom of the Snake God. His act and state of body becomes the epitome of Sacrifice.)

When he reaches the Court, Salavat Khan humiliates him and this brings about a major shift in the intent of the Deed that is to be performed. While several regular conventions are till this point operational, certain shifts worked in now, add dimensions to the Tragedy and reframe its impact. The maker of Drama, now makes it into an Action to reclaim self-respect or honour. It gives the protagonist a moral and self-righteous justification of the act, though at that moment he stands isolated in court. The king is afraid of him and no courtier supports him. This isolation is the truth of the situation. He is attacked at the king's instructions, but he is victorious. This victory sustains his image as a hero, even after the Deed of Annihilation has been committed. The fall is yet to come and it comes through the Family.

Arjun Gaur, the brother in law, lies to him that the king wants peace and takes him alone for a meeting. De-armoured and isolated, Amar Singh oscillates between trust and doubt, till he recognizes the traitor, but by then he has reached the end. His last aim misfires and for an astute warrior that in itself is an indicator of a fall. Yet he causes injury to the villain's nose. (In plot construction, the act of disarming the warrior is the point where emotions of fear and pity can be aroused. But it may not be so in the performance.)

It is, here, that the makers of Drama seem to change genre and bring in elements that expand the plot and alter meanings.

The emperor does not reward Arjun Gaur - instead he is punished for employing deceit. He is the villain who meets with a fall and as Aristotle says, it justifies our moral sense, as it seems deserved.

(The experienced Nautanki performer, Krishna Mathur explains the treatment of the scene. When, Amar Singh collapses, he sings his last song with broken breath and stutters that underlines his realization and evokes pathos in the audience.

Then in the following scene, the king announces the punishment for Arjun Gaur. In response, he too sings. He has been injured in the nose, so the actor is made to sing the notes through the nose. The nasal twang makes him the laughingstock of the audience. Because it creates an uncanny comic effect. Krishnaji's statement makes it clear that certain principles are involved in building the nature of the performance. They are employed in the structuring, in the presentation design and the handling of the actor. The performers too are in sync with

the treatment of varying situations and the twists in technique that are required. The impact is crafted step by step leading to the planned purpose.)

As mentioned above, the play does not end with the collapse of the hero. This is where another dimension sets in. The corpse of Amar Singh is taken into imperial custody. The slain hero claims his right to the last rites through his wife. And the genre changes the course and style of performance. Up till now, the single action of the protagonist was at the core of the structure. Now, when he is no more, the power and claim of the corpse become supreme. Though, lying still and passive, it seems to have more agency than Amar Singh alive. His act of annihilation becomes an act of courage and his own killing, a sacrifice. The plot now breaks the structure of Tragedy and unravels multiple plots as friends and chieftains arrive to take the corpse so that it can receive the last rites it deserves. The honour of the community lies in the dignified farewell to its hero. Support comes from unexpected quarters.

The stranger who received water in the desert is one. Aristotle says, that the greatest pain is that of a brother becoming enemy of a brother. Then the greatest friendship is that when a stranger becomes a brother. And this comes to aid Amar Singh, when he needs it the most-when in his own person, he can no longer lift his weapon.

While Amar Singh was isolated in the court, there are supporters in the community who are not afraid to be seen as his supporters and come forward to retrieve the last remains. And as they come, the community seems to claim him as its own. It does not remain at the edge, but comes in as a force, as an energy, as an army, as a retaliation. It gets involved with the action-continuing the fight started by the hero and in the process, legitimising it.

New characters are introduced at this stage. There are scenes to reveal their connection with Amar Singh. A wife scolds and teases her husband for not going to battle for a member of his clan. Many of these scenes are unexpected and they build a new momentum. Amar Singh's wife offers herself for the act of sati as battles rage in the Fort. The imperial forces are sent to fight the supporters of Amar Singh with the permission of the king.

The fury of the state and the community consumes more lives, creates more heroes and claims more sacrifices. The fighters on both sides are mentioned by name. And with this recollection, the performance becomes a document of history. The makers of Drama have steadily brought about this transformation as they moved from the personal into the historical. The Dramatic construct, that was, with poetic skill, taking forward an action, moved into a historical zone. This is not by wavering intent, but a definite transition.

The basis of the second part lies in the creation of the second scene itself. However, the character of Narshebaaz exists more in the mind of the people than recorded history. The historian of the Folk stage combines the two to bring them into the memory of the audience. For him, it is important to recall both in the same stream of connection that is established in people's minds. He sees value in their significance and thus breaks the structure of the Drama construct for a purpose he considers important. The historian of the Folk stage accepts the truth of both and places them together on the same platform.

In the, 'Poetics', Aristotle states, that, 'It is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen-what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity. The poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or prose... The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen. Poetry therefore is a more philosophical and higher thing than history, for poetry tends to express the universal, history, the particular. '

Poets could be drawn to historical figures, but then construct their plots with the material of their mind and skill. Having acquired that, the poet, in this context, which is being discussed, moved from poetry to history, from exploring the universal to state the particular. Perhaps, it was important for him to take this history into the village square and by subsequent and consequent performances sustain its recollection in memory. The poet turned historian lest this history is forgotten. Perhaps, he felt, that this history would remain untold, if he was not the one to tell it. Because it happened and was hidden away. And untold, it might dissipate into the unknown. An illusion or hallucination. The purpose of Drama, then, could also be to remember. To remember, as a collective, sitting together, actively, engaged with a performance from a shared history, every member remembering, every member connecting, collecting, recollecting, assembling, as it surfaces through the scenes like the vapour of dew dust in the midnight moonshine-that peak hour of the performance!

The timing of the sequence and its placing in the entire length of the structure, highlights its presence. When, Aristotle talks of, the significance of magnitude in a work of art, he implies, 'that a certain length is necessary and a length that can be easily embraced by the memory', provides the proper magnitude. If a beautiful object is too small, it becomes imperceptible. If it is too vast, then the eye cannot take it in one view.

The Folk performers of the Dramatic Tradition in India, also lay emphasis on the duration of the performance. They feel that a certain length is required for the emotions to be expressed. And this is largely achieved by the singing voice of the actor. A line may be repeated or substituted by an aalaap, but with variations of scale and rhythm, the mood or emotion is accentuated. It is not about words, but about the flow of emotions. One of the key unifying factors in Folk Drama, then, is its Music. It is the Music that maintains the temporal and temperamental unity of the performance. This is an extended influence of the Natyasastra, that presents an elaborate analysis of the role and components of music. Most performers explain that the musical compositions are based on Ragas that are selected to suit the moment in the play as well as be suitable to the hour of the night, when they are to be heard by the audience.

The drums may beat at sunset, giving audience time to trickle in. The village stage may just be a platform, but at the time of performance, it acquires a magical attraction, drawing people towards it. Slowly, the performance picks up. As quietness sets in, against the dark curtain of night, the poignant moments of deep emotion are unravelled. The performers feel that the reduction in the length of the performance dismantles the inherent Musical structure of the performance, affecting its unity.

The Music, however, serves as a bridge, when with, the breaking of the Tragic structure of, 'Amar Singh Rathore' the action purposefully expands to include other players. The history of

the Nagara, which is central to these Musical forms, can be traced back to the battle drum. The transition into battle scenes then receives support from the consistency of the musical instruments. Multiple plots abound, so that the last rites of Amar Singh can take place.

In Greek Drama, Antigone tries to perform the last rites for her brother who is condemned by the state. Over centuries, the character of Antigone has come to symbolise protest, but in the play, the character remains isolated. On the Folk stage, the community fights this battle for the anti-state Amar Singh. There are many players with their own greatness and contradictions, and the urgency is imminent, so no new symbol emerges. And Amar Singh continues to be the unifying factor.

Ultimately, the king relents. All along, he had been a witness to the battles, from his isolated high chamber. Then, from among the brave warriors, he finds a capable successor to Amar Singh and acknowledges the moral supremacy of Hadi Rani as the sati, paving the way for the last rites. Amar Singh is thus the victor when he is no more.

The king's words are no more than an announcement that marks the conclusion of the play. However, they indicate, the restoration of peace and order. This is made possible by the assertiveness of the community and the king's magnanimity. Both these factors do not find place in Greek Tragedy. Oedipus does find another magnanimous ruler in, 'Oedipus at Colonus' (part 2 of the Trilogy) but Creon remains his hardened self. Oedipus is resurrected giving the boon of victory to the one who possesses his last remains. (Suffering in itself seems to be a purifying factor). In some of the Trilogy structures, the third part seems to move towards a restoration of order, crossing into the second or third generation. (Interestingly, Tragedies like, 'Laila Majnu' also cover generations. The love of the young lovers is doomed from the start, because both their families had poisoned love much before them). In 'Amar Singh Rathore' the second generation is established with Ram Singh, and hence a fresh outlook seems feasible.

The sati spectacle that used to come in conclusion as the epitome of sacrifice and glory is no longer performed. (A sati incident a few decades ago, led to this decision by the practitioners.)

It is worth reminding ourselves, that the Folk Drama Tradition is not a static one. It makes changes and keeps up with the times. Practitioners dialogue among themselves, but it often remains unheard outside.

The play as it stands today and is performed, has three parts.

1. The action of the protagonist and its tragic consequences.
2. The victory/resurrection of the protagonist as the community claims and battles for him.
3. The Restoration of peace and order.

Of these, the third is marked by brevity, but it takes cognizance of the sorrow and loneliness that accompany the loss of life in battle. Its compulsion and futility are reflected upon. The focus again falls on the original family of Amar Singh, just before the conclusion.

The ease, with which the expansive canvas, relocates the family in altered circumstances, is like a musician's rendering of a familiar syllable in the midst of a long drawn out aalaap.

The announcement by the king is not insincere. It is functional. Like pronouncing that the trial of Harishchandra is over and acknowledging his integrity, the judgement is, that his fortunes be restored to him. What we have seen is enough to draw the conclusion. It has served the purpose of the drama. Performance is to be seen as representation.

According to the Natyasastra, Brahma was approached with the request to, 'Give us something which would not only teach us but be pleasing to the eyes and ears.'

There is space for varying emotions, styles and temperaments. Brahma explains, 'Now Dharma, now Artha, now Kama, humour or fights, greed or killing... Natya is the representation (anukarana) of the ways of the world involving these various emotions and differing circumstances. It gives you peace, entertainment as happiness, as well as beneficial advice based on the actions of high, low and middle people. It brings rest and peace to persons afflicted by sorrow or fatigue or grief or helplessness. There is no art, no knowledge, no yoga, no action that is not found in Natya.'

This performance draws upon history, and brings it into the memory of the audience it makes the character move and recalls the action through the actor. And this actor carries not just the character, but the world of the character. 'In a play, words gain their significance from Abhinaya...The word is only a symbol which embodies and communicates a thing or an idea. It is the meaning that the intellect grasps by hearing it in the proper context. In a play we are helped to do so by the actor's accents and modulations... as the communication is supported by gestures and movements... the meaning can be understood by everybody. The listener grasps, not only the speaker's idea, but also the mental process in the background... The actor shows by his acting that such are the words and manners of the people and also why they are such.' (Adya Rangacharya).

Over a time period of a century, the play would have interacted with many generations. Without the Drama, Amar Singh may not have been cast into oblivion, but it is the village stage that has largely made him into the Folk hero that he is. The commercial stage has not given him such attention as the Folk Drama of the rural hinterland. In the very act of performance, it has claimed him as its own. And given longevity and visibility to his story. This is where he is loved and belongs. There are many heroes that receive no mention in mainstream tellings. The village stage, then, chooses to keep up their remembrance. And the remembrance inspires.

Many scholars, including, Aristotle, have talked of the role of Imitation in learning and growing. The performances of the village stage, contribute to this process by providing examples that seem worthy of imitation in life. Between the guilt-ridden Tragedy and the glory laden Sacrifice, lie countless examples for the poet to choose from. He can frame his construct. That framing is also his view and that could generate endless performances, spread over years and miles apart, spinning a culture.

Several groups have travelled with this performance, covering a vast area of the rural interiors of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and parts of Madhya Pradesh. Amar Singh Rathor' has been extensively performed in Nautanki and Khayal. They both have Music as their base and incorporate elements of movement and dance as well. The stance, gait, posture and gesture of the character are crucial for its definition. However, no mudras are used. The heightened emotions are expressed largely through the singing, while the acting refrains from codification. It is simple and easy for the audience to relate and assimilate the flow of action. However, there could be many reasons for the popularity of the performance and they could also be variables. Practitioners of Kuchamani Khayal say that the character belongs to the region and so is known and appreciated. Far away from Jodhpur, in U. P. it seems that the plot and performance make it work. The success of the Drama leads the audience to the character. Above all, most performers claim that it is the impersonation by the actor and his singing that moves the audience. Others insist that the words guide them. They value the words of text and try to give it meaning through their performance. Actors also pay attention to the Aharya elements of costume, turban, hair style, open hair (for women characters) etc.

The actors play the image, held by stance and gesture, while paying attention to the music, singing for effect and deflecting the emotion towards the audience. The audience, over a period of time, begins to remember the words and is ready with them as the actors bring them into articulation. Many explanations are possible and they all contribute in their own way. However, it cannot be denied, that the basic quality of the impersonation arises from the nature of the Form itself. As music and movement are integral to it, the portrayal of character also ought to be inclusive of these elements. Rather, it is through them that the actor makes the character come alive. When the character enters the performing arena, riding high on the zest and energy of the Form, supported by the Nagara, he creates an impact on the audience. In recent years, the standing mike has reduced the use of stage space by the actor (particularly in Nautanki, for in Khayal dance too dominates and spreads the action all over the stage), though this inhibition does melt, when the singing takes over. Picking the right note matters and it straightens out many shortcomings.

Till electricity took over, the Folk stage, lit by Petromaxes or battery lights, allowed basic visibility, as the audience tuned into the performance, guided by strands of music, character lines, and sensing the happening, as performed and imagined. With increased visibility, the scene gets to be more tangible and the actor-audience realign to the presentation configuration. The show could be ticketed or by invitation, but the audience needs to be with it. The performance venue is generally a raised platform in the open around which the audience can be seated. It can be the chaupal, a school compound or a playing field.

As the conditions are often unpredictable, a smooth performance is in itself a satisfying experience for all. The Natyasastra, itself, describes many kinds of vighnas (obstacles, like a natural calamity or disruption by opponents etc.) that can obstruct the show. Most actors are upset when lines are forgotten or there is discordant music or the opening note is missed or when they are distracted and not centred. Many feel that it is a challenge to face new and huge crowds that are restless. The audience needs to tune in. That is the test of performance. And when that happens, they know it. Apart from that, there is applause, laughter, stillness. The Natyasastra talks of the inclusion of a, 'prasnika' in the audience who is, 'knowing the language and dialects, having practical knowledge of arts and crafts and of four kinds of

abhinaya and of Rasa and Bhava... One who is attentive, honest, able to argue and reason, who can detect a fault and (yet) be sympathetic-such a man is qualified to be a spectator. One who is glad when the character is glad or feels miserable when the character feels miserable and sorry when the character is sorry is qualified to be a spectator.'

It seems that in the far-flung rural areas there are people who can relate, in such a manner, with the character of Amar Singh. Rather, he manages to elicit such a bonding with the audience that there always is an entry for him on the village stage.

This study is an attempt to understand the layers that make this process possible. It has also led towards examining another trajectory-that of the Practitioners of Puppetry-and that presents a striking contrast to the world of Drama. This was most unexpected. Because among the Folk Arts, the name of Amar Singh Rathore is perpetually linked with Puppetry. Their entire repertoire is summed up in this name, title epithet.

The performers of Folk Drama too are connected with their respective Forms and its future. Amar Singh is one of the characters they take forward, though, of course, he remains among the significant and the successful ones.

Amar Singh himself has secured a niche for himself in history. He has been an actual person whose action cannot be obliterated. His historical presence has led to the telling of his story, to the singing of the Bards, to the making of a legend, furthering to the constant enactments in isolated-spread out - village spaces. In each case it is his remembrance that is marked, but with altering aspects, different highlights and contradictory judgements. This shifts the meaning, sometimes changes it completely. The puppeteers claim to be his story tellers for centuries. They identify with this prince of Jodhpur, chieftain of Nagaur, and yet it leaves them with an inner ambiguity.

The Puppeteers of Rajasthan have taken the story of Amar Singh to communities that would have not known of this character otherwise. Their travels tell different tales that deal with their own lives and happenings that compelled them to become travellers. What compulsions prompted them to keep moving along with this puppet? Is it something about the artist and his art or does it have a socio-cultural dimension?

The relationship of the puppeteer with his puppets seems to be like the past that shadows every step. The narrative of Amar Singh that is said to have had fifty-two puppets at the beginning has gone through changes and turmoil. Though, it still connects with Amar Singh, the story has shifted. It has made room for other characters and puppets. It too seems to connect with history, but the expanse has widened and Amar Singh, by allegory becomes the one who is deprived of his place. And he could be identified as many persons. This shift has happened over time and through generations. Attempts to trace the earlier text-or at least parts of it, opened several memory doors that led to the puppeteer's own life and experience. The story of the artist seems intrinsically linked to the story he tells and shapes the craft that he nurtures.

The story that the puppeteers began their journey with, falls in style with the qualities of the puppets, that when simulated with few threads could create movement, humour and interaction.

Some commercial Theatre companies, like 'Bharat Theatres' performed 'Amar Singh Rathore', but he seems by and large to be a character who is comfortable on the Folk stage.

It may also be considered a matter of co-incidence. But perhaps, this added to the motivation of the Folk performing stage, including Puppetry, to keep the connection active. Then success too seems to have been a factor. The large Nautanki groups continue with this show, because there is an eager audience for it. Every performer speaks to its audience through the performance, but the purpose of Drama varies from one to the other. Later on, films were made in Bollywood on Amar Singh Rathore and the one made in 1956/57 received considerable attention and has been covered in this study.

The story that the puppeteers took with them was their imagined version of the emperor's court, with the chowkidar emerging as the most powerful person. And they brought in other themes and incidents close to their experience. The original story, being oral in nature, needs articulation so as to be in easy access. When, not practiced, the content grows in accessible, even if not entirely forgotten.

Gradually, the milestones kept changing and the road ahead became endless. The more they connected with the story, the more conspicuous grew its absence. Fragmented, thus, Amar Singh became more universal as a symbol of the displaced and the ousted. Every Form traverses its journey through its practitioners and whatever they encounter as life experiences influences the growth of the Form itself. Credit goes to the initiative of various artists, that Nautanki, Khayal and Puppetry could emerge and they could go beyond jajmani. However, several socio-economic and cultural factors do play their role in determining the position and future of a Form. Caste, class and colonial notifications have affected the puppeteers and their artistic pursuit in many ways. Often, memory itself veils what the mind may have learnt and sets barriers between the recalling and the remembering. Interacting with the puppeteers and other artists revealed elements of that process that work to make it possible.

It is evident, that all the Arts have developed their own directions, often spontaneously, in response to life experience. There is no one single source that can be said to be centre orchestrating the movement of this content into society. Several factors work independently of each other and sometimes they may intersect. There is a complex layering of structures even in the cultural sphere, that, howsoever porous may it seem, it acknowledges classification and allows many systems to co-exist without interference. The practitioners of Nautanki and Khayal could be following a similar version of the story, but the past few decades, may not have seen much interaction between the two. In a culture of parallel streams, many areas emerge independent of each other, even though there may be an overlapping of certain factors. During the course of this study, the unifying factor, which was the image of Amar Singh, in itself became a series of alternating perceptions. From a killer in official history to a rebel hero in ballads, from a larger than life stature in legend to a tragic dimension in Drama, from a warrior in cinema to a displaced man of the desert in Puppetry,

he has many faces.... At times, he is headstrong, at times obedient, absolutely honest and dedicated, furious, and polite.... He is real and he is also a symbol. He becomes a metaphor for many situations and of irony as well. The actual and the construct mix, melt and merge differently in different proportions, in different genres, in different portraits.

The blurring of the real and the unreal makes the character and his legend appropriate material for popularity within folklore. At the same time, being part of folklore necessarily enhances or at least increases the nature of this blurring (between the real and the non-real) as popular imagination keeps adding and weaving more for the telling is carried on by multiple tellers in various spaces and platforms. Being part of folklore, implies being part of or being subjected to a process that is ever growing. So, it never becomes a finished or a sealed product, but continues as a circulating pattern, which by the very act of circulation or even repetition, cannot be limited to the initial counting. It is customary to add lines while singing a song. Even while recounting, there are several routes of perception. Between the recalling and the remembering lies a life experience.

Recollection chooses filters and highlights, sometimes knowingly and often without knowing. An accumulation of cultural creations (artefacts) keep moving around and acquire meanings that are of value to a region or community. These values have a validity in the region and to the people who see in the image a crystallisation of their affirmations.

That is why, there is an attempt, particularly, where the analysis of legends is concerned to trace back the origins and confirm with historicity, an authenticated version of the happenings or the saga of events. There is an alternate view that looks at all aspects of folklore as part of the cultural composition of a community. This would include the manifestation of the legend over time by the community as it engaged with various processes of development, growth, underlining twists of fortune and various other reasons and factors.

To understand this complex phenomenon, this study has attempted to examine the following areas in detail-

1. Amar Singh Rathore in the context of history. This includes looking at other versions apart from the official.
2. The social-political dynamics of the period that led to the conflict in the emperor's court.
3. The social-cultural practices of the period that defined honour, kinship, code of the warriors and social Norms.
4. Women characters and the life of women in that period.
5. The Elements integral to the legend of Amar Singh and characteristics that perpetuate the manifestation. This includes reading into multiple views interpretations that emerge from it. Comparisons with other such heroes had also been part of this process.
6. The building of the legend-the proximity of the bards of the oral tradition and their role as the conscience - keeper.

7. The ballads and songs.
8. The Folk imagination and its contribution to the Narrative.
9. The Folk stage of Nautanki (Hathras Shaili) and treatment of, 'Amar Singh Rathore'
10. Detailed analysis of the text by Shri Natharam Gaur.
11. Detailed analysis of the text of, 'Amar Singh Rathore' in Kanpur Nautanki. Examining the interplay of the Form and the content
12. Tracing the story of, 'Amar Singh Rathore' through the Puppeteers' memory.
14. Understanding the factors of Jajmani and the role of the colonial notifications and prejudice that affected the Puppeteers and Puppetry.
15. The life experience of the puppeteer and the fragmentation of the story and the emergence of episodic treatment.
16. Khayal and its Aesthetics.
17. 'Amar Singh Rathore in Khayal and the colours of the region.
18. Detailed analysis of the film, 'Amar Singh Rathore' with its emphasis on the long shot and the protagonist as an outsider.
19. New Initiatives-the Narrative moves on with the contemporary.
20. Detailed analysis of the Narrative as handled by Mahashya Nandram Vaidya, well known singer of Mahendragarh.

Academic readings, viewing of performances and interaction with the artists, enabled the flow of chapters that follow. While the research created its own rigour, it does not claim to be exhaustive. Propelled by insights into the content handling by Performance practice and discipline, it seeks to understand more.

CHAPTER 1: THE LEGEND OF AMAR SINGH RATHORE- HISTORICITY & FOLK IMAGINATION

Twenty-five years before the outbreak of the Rajput revolt, that focused on the throne of Jodhpur, a scion of the same royal family of Marwar, challenged the might of the Mughal Empire in the premises of its court. The incident as recorded in the 'Shah Jahan Nama' of Inayat Khan is as follows-

“Narrative of the Assassination of Salabat Khan, the Mir Bakshi, and Ensuing Developments :

Among the singular occurrences that happened about this time in His Majesty's Privy Council Chamber, was the circumstance of the assassination of Salabat Khan, the Lord Chancellor (Mir Bakshi); which is thus briefly related.

Due to illness, Amar Singh, son of Raja Gaj Singh, had not attended the imperial durbar for some time. On the last day of Jumada I 1054 (4 August 1644), as he had finally regained his health, he came to court to pay his respects; and after gaining admittance to the Council Chamber, he went and stood in his usual place. After His august Majesty had finished his evening prayers, he became engaged in affixing his signature to the ever-obeyed edicts.

Meanwhile, Salabat Khan had descended from the dais and was perusing the register of petitions by the light of a four-branched lamp, when Amar Singh suddenly rushed upon him with his drawn dagger and plunged it unaware so deeply into his left breast that it was buried up to the hilt. As the wound had penetrated the Khan's heart, he instantly fell and never breathed again.

On witnessing this unprovoked act, Khalil Allah Khan and Arjun, son of Raja Bithaldas, were the first to fall upon the ill-fated idiot. By the raising of a loud alarm, His Majesty became aware of this daring outrage, and ordered those standing around the foot of the sublime throne to put an immediate end to that miscreant's career. Thereafter, in accordance with the sublime mandate, Mir Khan, the Grand Marshal (Mir Tuzak) and Muluk Chand, the Inspector (Mushrif) cast the slain Amar Singh outside the threshold of the Privy Council Chamber and summoned his followers to carry him away. About 15 of these attendants immediately laid hands on their weapons, but the macebearers who were standing on guard put the infidels to the sword- though six of their own number attained the glory of martyrdom in the conflict, and as many more were wounded. Muluk Chand ranked amongst the slain, while Mir Khan suffered many grievous wounds and retreated into the Council Chamber; and on the following night he also bid adieu to existence.

His majesty directed enquiries to be made regarding the origin of this outrage, but no apparent cause was elicited beyond the excited state of Amar Singh's brain; in fact as a result of constant intoxication, it was believed that he had become somewhat deranged. It is possible that the murder may have been connected in some way with a recent border dispute between Amar Singh and another Rajput chief. It so happened that the borders of Nagaur,

which was the villain's jagir, were contagious with those of Bikaner, the native land and jagir of Rao Karan, son of Rao Sur. And eventually a conflict had broken out between their respective servants on the frontier of their territories. As Rao Karan's men had several matchlocks, a number of Amar Singh's gallant Rajputs were slain. Subsequently, when Amar Singh was informed of the occurrence, he wrote to his followers to congregate together again and fall upon the above-named Rao's retainers. On becoming cognizant of this, the Rao had informed Salabat Khan by letter that unless an arbiter was dispatched from court to settle the boundary, a cessation of hostilities could never be expected. Whereupon, the Khan had reported the circumstances at court and obtained an arbiter. Therefore, it is possible that Amar Singh construed this act as an evidence of partiality towards his rival; and with the foolhardiness of a Rajput, he then rashly perpetrated this atrocious deed.

Summarily, Amar Singh's followers were so taken aback at the enormity of the offense that those of them who possessed a particle of forethought wended their way during the night to their native place. However, a number foolishly resolved upon attacking Arjun's dwelling, which was situated in the neighbourhood. On some pretext, they were joined in this ill-fated conspiracy by a trusty partisan of the late Amar Singh, and also Bhaoo Singh- who since Raja Gaj Singh's demise had been included in the circle of loyal vassals of the crown. As soon as this matter was communicated to His Majesty, he directed one of his servants to go to the hot heads and admonish them thus: "As Amar Singh and everyone who was his confederate in this crime have already met with the merited punishment of their misdeeds, it is senseless for you, who have as yet committed no fault, to strive ceaselessly after your own downfall."

When it was fully ascertained that with the foolish obstinacy of Rajputs, they would not draw back, an ever-obeyed Farmaan was promulgated directing Sayyid Khan Jahan, with the men of the retinue, and Rashid Khan, the commander of the guard, to march and chastise those doomed wretches for their arrogance. The said Khans accordingly proceeded to the place where the infidels were collected, and made the whole of the villains prey to the keen-edged sword; though among the men of their retinues also, some gained the crown of martyrdom in the course of the struggle, after having performed prodigious feats of valour."

This is how the incident is on record in official history. That is the Imperial history of the period. It gives certain details, like the absence of Amar Singh from court.

The court decorum with a system of attendance, registers, paperwork etc. The quietness before the event.

The atmosphere is of evening.

The presence of Arjun Gaur and his role in overpowering and killing Amar Singh. Indication of Amar Singh feeling slighted by Salabat Khan.

The context of Nagaur- Bikaner rivalry and border dispute.

The wrath of the supporters of Amar Singh who fought the first battle outside the court. Attempt to pacify /warn supporters. Consequences of disobedience.

Bloodshed in the Battles: Other Versions

The 'Shah Jahan Nama' does not mention the gate through which the supporters came into the court. The practice was for the supporters to camp outside the Fort. Could they have come in through the 'Bukhara gate', which subsequently came to be known as 'Amar Singh gate'?

According to the 'Shah Jahan Nama', the rebels were handled in the house of Amar Singh. According to Colonel Tod they came in through the Gate that is now associated with Amar Singh.

Various other sources that mention this incident are more or less on track with the official record, though they all have different versions of the build-up to the incident. The date of the incident also varies between 25 July to 4 August, though the year is same-1644.

Himmat Singh Rathore in his book, 'Veervar Rao Amar Singh Rathore' has presented some of these versions.

According to 'Marwar ka Itihas', Amar Singh was unable to attend court for a few days because of ill-health. On feeling better, when he presented himself in court, Mir Bakshi, Salabat Khan, with whom there was tension because of the Nagaur-Bikaner dispute, uttered some harsh words. Thus provoked, the Rao, being of independent nature, took out his dagger, and without caring for the kingly court or the presence of the king, stabbed Salabat Khan.

Colonel Tod puts forward the view, that Amar Singh absented himself from court and went hunting, without permission from the court. On his return, the king imposed the penalty, which was unacceptable to Amar Singh, who placed his hand on his sword, to denote that his weapon was his wealth and might.

Subsequently, the king sent Salabat Khan to Amar Singh's residence to collect the fine. Amar Singh refused and a skirmish ensued between the two. The king then ordered Amar Singh to present himself in court. On arriving, he saw the king listening to the Mir Bakshi, complaining about him. And he acted with his dagger.

(According to official references, Amar Singh was not only an able warrior, but an asset to the Empire. He played a significant role in difficult expeditions that were successful and had battled in hard terrains. It was known, that he took care of the wounded soldiers and looked well after his men. The Emperor had honoured him many times with Saropas and other gifts)

Perhaps that is why many histories have taken cognizance of this incident that happened in 1644.

In, 'Champawaton ki Itihas', it is said, that Amar Singh was unwell and so could not attend court for a fortnight. When he came one evening, the emperor who had finished saying his evening prayers, was dictating a letter. Amar Singh entered and stood among the courtiers in the left row. Salabat Khan was standing in the row on the right side. Salabat Khan talked to Amar Singh harshly and questioned him about the fine. Amar Singh lost his temper. Then Salabat Khan said, 'Rao ji kya ganwari karte ho.' On hearing this, Amar Singh dealt with him

with his dagger.

'Mundiad ki Khyat' mentions that Amar Singh went to meet the king, who was then staying in Dara Shikoh's residence. Amar Singh asked Salabat Khan to arrange for him, an audience with the king. But Salabat Khan paid no heed and went his way. Amar Singh then made his way to the king, on his own and paid his respect (mujra) with an offering of nine coins and then took his place in the prescribed row. This angered Salabat Khan who slighted Amar Singh with his language and the latter paid back with his dagger.

Leave for wedding finds mention in the, 'Kunpawat Ratharon ka brihat Itihas.' It also states that the seven-day leave got extended by another seven. When he did join the court, Salabat Khan demanded the penalty, but Amar Singh did not heed him. Thereupon, the Mir Bakshi started to call him, 'ganwaar', but Amar Singh did not let him complete it.

According to, 'Marwar ka Itihas', Amar Singh flung his sword in the direction of the king also, but it got stuck in a pillar and the king escaped. Khalil Allah Khan and Arjun Gaur surrounded Amar Singh, but he was uncontrollable. Then other courtiers also surrounded him and he finally succumbed, but not without a fight.

According to 'Jodhpur Rajya ki Khyat', the Court was stunned by the assassination and Amar Singh was in the process of leaving the premises, when Dara alerted the king to take action. Then Khalil Allah Khan attacked Amar Singh and injured his hand. Then Arjun Gaur stabbed him in the back. And as he fell, Amar Singh aimed at Gaur and cut off his ear. There is a couplet that goes-

'Amar Singh Gaj Singh ke kari achal Rathore. Kaan badh bucho kiyo, gunhegar chae Gaur.'

(Amar Singh of Gaj Singh, the immovable Rathore, cut off the ear of Gaur, the culprit). When the supporters of Amar Singh were called to take his remains away, they attacked the king's men and there was battle.

'Jodhpur Rajya ki Khyat' mentions the names of the fifteen supporters who lost their lives. Their family details are also recorded.

Several Bards have written about this incident. As an example- Kahe Maniram Gaj Singh juke Amar Singh.

Rakhi Rajputi majbooti nav Nagro Paav ser loh te hilai saari patsahi Hoti samser to chialeyat Aagro.

(Amar Singh kept the Rajput code. With a light weapon he shook the emperor's rule. With heavier metal, he could have taken Agra.)

According to 'Champavaton ka Itihas', the last remains of Amar Singh, were detained at the Fort. Sahibkhanji of Khatu sent for Bhao Singh Kunpawat and Ballu Singh for support. Both were Mansabdars. Bhao ji responded immediately. Ballu ji was initially reluctant, as Amar Singh and he had quarrelled and parted ways. However, motivated by his wife, Maya Kanwar

Tankji, Ballu Singh too came for the battle.

As mentioned in the 'Shah Jahan Nama' these sources also mention that men of the emperor advised them to give up their rebellious venture and leave for Nagaur. However, the Rajputs did not relent as they too had issues with the behaviour of court officers.

(Salabat Khan was related to the Emperor, being the brother of one of his queens. The office of Mir Bakshi had the power of postings and transfers. However, it appears that Amar Singh's mansab was higher than Salabat Khan's.)

While, official records state that the rebels were finished that very night, 'Champavaton ka Itihas' states that the next morning, the Rajput fighters stormed the Agra Fort to take possession of the mortal remains of Amar Singh.

Ballu Singh received a blue-white horse of exceptional strength from the Rana of Chittor.

Jagat Singh liye molhai, kuch din pehle Raan
Ik rakhiyo apne arath, ik kahan deva naan
Ye to bahut sawar hain, raan kahiye mam mat
Yake yogya sawar to, Ballu Champavat.
Kuch din peeche Agre, bhajeye raan turang
Vahi samay pahunchio vahan, jihi biriya jur jang.

(Jagat Singh had, purchased two horses of exceptional strength from Kathiawar. He kept one for himself and despatched the other to Ballu Singh at Agra. It reached in time for this battle.)

The Rajputs, numbered five hundred and entered through Bukhara Gate. Another group of 450 waited outside. Ballu ji climbed the Fort wall to reach the remains of Amar Singh, while Sahib khan, with his family members and fifty men engaged with men of the royal army that suffered heavy losses.

The poet says-

Sahba tanni naganni sujadi, bahar laganni marann basse
Uthapnni Thapanni aanmankh, brakh japanni na jaranti balae
Kamdhaj tanni sanpnni katari khal kaalij kamanni khale
Ab japa jap jadi Atagi, nagi jyan bagi Jahar
Palhara nagi pratmali, lagi tyan bagi lehar.

(The sword is compared to a snake that creates havoc with its blade. It acted with speed like a wave of poison springing from the rebel, Sahib khan).

Ballu ji instigated his men to keep the fight going, even as they too suffered heavy losses.

"kamdhaj Ballu yu kahe soh sunno sardar
Baer Amrra balasya Muglan hun nu maar.....
Sees jaka brahmand aade Ballu di Halkar."

(He incites his men to fight and his call from above fills the space.)

Ballu ji managed to get the remains, but he was surrounded by the king's men. He jumped from the wall on his gifted horse, who perished with the fall. Outside the Fort, another four hundred and fifty Rajput soldiers were waiting. Then Ballu ji fled on another horse, as the king's army followed him, and reached the Yamuna Bank, where the queens awaited their destiny. The 'Sati Sthal' was guarded by Bhao Singh, who too was prepared for the ensuing battle.

Ballu kahe gopal ro satiyani hath sandes Patshahi modkar aanvan che Amres

(Ballu gives over the remains of Amar Singh to his wives and asks them, to tell Amar Singh, that once, Ballu is done with minding the king's army, he too will join him {above in his eternal abode}).

[The story is, that once Amar Singh had asked Ballu ji to look after his cattle and Ballu ji had refused, saying that this was not his job. Amar Singh had then said in taunt, that Ballu will mind the army, but not mind the sheep! Ballu and Amar Singh then parted ways. But at the crucial hour, he had actually handled an army for the sake of his friend!]

Ballu ji faced the army men that had followed him to the Sati sthal and succumbed to their attacks. Abdul Rasool, Sayyid Ghulam Mohammed and several soldiers of the King's army also lost their lives in the pitched battle that took place there.

'Jodhpur ki Khyat has a list of some of the Rajput warriors who lost their lives in this battle. It concludes, that including Bhao Singh and Ballu ji, a hundred and fifty soldiers lost their lives. And the Mughals too suffered heavy casualty [between a hundred and hundred and fifty.]

'Champavaton ka Itihas' records the loss of two hundred and sixty-five Rajput lives.

(As different chieftains came with their men, they fought like an assembly of groups together for a common cause. It is possible, that different writers followed the trail of specific groups and may be not of all.)

Memory in Stone

Veer Rasa is inevitably accompanied by karuna Rasa.

Hadi Rani and the elder queen committed Sati at this spot with the mortal remains of Amar Singh. Other queens and female attendants followed their example at Nagaur. Wives of Ballu ji and other Rajput chieftains also followed the custom of Sati.

Much poetry has been written about this battle and there are many songs about Ballu ji, another hero related to this episode. However, as mentioned earlier, this battle is not mentioned in the official Imperial history.

The Memory of this episode, including its saga of sorrow, is crystalized in stone at Agra. Jaswant Singh, younger brother of Amar Singh Rathore constructed a 'Chhatri' at the Sati site, honouring the memory of Hadi Rani. As the fate of Hadi Rani is linked with Amar Singh, this is a memorial that consolidates and commemorates the remembrance of both, husband and wife.

(Earlier, it was thought that the Chhatri was of Jaswant Singh, but recent research is of the view that is presented above.)

This monument is commonly known as 'Jaswant Singh ki chhatri', because he is the one who built it. The monument is at Rajwara, Balkeshwar, in Agra, along the Banks of the river Yamuna. The construction started in 1644 and was completed by 1658. It is a domed pavilion with twelve pillars of red sandstone connected with screens of the Agra Jali. The stone mesh filters in droplets of light on to a rectangular platform. Like fettered unwept tears, they come and go in silence.

There are steps leading to the riverbank.

The edifice marks the memory of a rebel and it is intriguing that it stands in Agra- the only monument to be constructed there by a Rajput king in that specific period. It was a bold initiative-a stark, constant and concrete reminder of an episode that is not without shadows.

[The tomb of Salabat Khan is also in Agra. It is popularly known as, 'Chausath khamba' and consists of an open sided hall with sixty-four pillars. It is also made of red sandstone.]

A Mention Ten Years Later

Amar Singh is mentioned few times in the 'Shah Jahan Nama' apart from the twilight episode in the Emperor's court. Most of these provide information regarding his participation in war and increase in entitlements.

However, his name finds another mention, ten years after his demise i.e. in 1654 and it is in a specific reference-

"Celebration of the Marriage of Sultan Sulaiman Shikoh with the Daughter of Amar Singh, son of Gaj Singh-

Sometime before this, the daughter of Amar Singh, eldest son of Raja Gaj Singh- who was also the nephew (sister's son) of Raja Jai Singh- had been asked in marriage for Sultan Sulaiman Shikoh. Moreover, one month before this date, His Majesty had invited her to the imperial seraglio and had personally read out the form of betrothal.....

On the night of the 26th of Jumada I 1064(14 April 1654) after the lapse of one half pehar of night, which was the moment fixed upon for the nuptials, the Prince Buland Iqbal brought that joy of the heart of royalty along with him into the auspicious presence. On this happy

night, fireworks were displayed on behalf of His Royal Highness, the heir-apparent. And along the river bank a mock fort was created.....lamps were placed and a host of fireworks arranged...thus forming a wondrous spectacle.....In short, His Majesty, the Shadow of God, conferred on Sultan Sulaiman Shikoh, a handsome robe of honor..... With his own august hand, His Majesty fastened a chaplet of pearls on the brow of that "tender shoot in the flower garden of regality." After completing the preliminaries to the wedding and settling the dowry at two lakhs of rupees, Qazi Khushshal in a chosen moment commenced reading the marriage service in the sublime presence."

This is the epilogue...beautiful...delicate...and yet...the ambivalence of a maiden with no name and the ancestry of a father lost early...

The name was probably withheld to maintain privacy of the lady concerned.

The Making of the Hero by People

It was the supporters of Amar Singh who made him a hero. The first band of fifteen men who entered the Fort and followed in his footsteps, multiplied the course of the action. What may have passed off as a rash act of murder by a single man, came to represent the fury of a wider group. And a group whose anguish was larger than the prospect of life which they were so willing to discard. They did not take quietly take away his mortal remains; instead they retaliated.

This retaliation was an attack on those who had attacked Amar Singh. They did not see his act as crime, but as a deed of justified vengeance – an explosion of a simmering they identified with. As more men poured in, it became a battle between the forces, who were, at one time, together representing the Empire. This battle was sudden and un-announced, but it exposed a crack within the seemingly cemented structure. The indications of rebellion could not be ruled out.

Men of the Empire and other Rajputs, who were at the periphery of this outburst, would have noticed it. The Rajput revolt was yet to blow its bugle, but its initiating vibrations could be heard in the clang of swords within the Agra Fort.

It could not be sheer love alone that compelled the man who was nowhere involved in this battle, to build a monument, commemorating its memory. There was a significance and sentiment attached to the incident, which he understood.

True, that the construction a 'Chhatri' was a common practice, but under normal circumstances. Criminals are not entitled to such honour. The State allows their memories to be dwindle and dissipate. They are meant to be forgotten. Their near and dear ones conceal their grief and do not mourn for them.

In this case, Jaswant Singh, owned his exiled elder brother and cast his memory in architecture. He could not have foreseen that the future revolt would revolve around his memory, as it aimed to reclaim the throne of Jodhpur for his infant son and heir, Ajit Singh.

Jaswant Singh, the younger brother of Amar Singh, became the Raja of Jodhpur, as his father had wished and Shah Jahan had approved. Jaswant Singh was not only loyal to the king, but was also close to him and Dara Shikoh. By building the monument at Sati Sthal, he professed his Rajput identity while serving the monarch and his family.

He was with Dara in the battle of Samugarh, which the crown prince lost to Aurangzeb. When Aurangzeb declared himself emperor, Jaswant Singh was persuaded by Jai Singh to join Aurangzeb against Shuja at the battle of Khajwa. On the night before the battle, Jaswant Singh left the site and turned away.

Aurangzeb pardoned him, so as to prevent him from joining Dara. He was allowed to retain his lands and revenue and was again persuaded to remain loyal to the Empire as Aurangzeb the victor, so desired.

He served Aurangzeb, till he passed away, leaving no heir to the throne that came to him, but could have been his brother's! His son, Ajit Singh was born after his demise and the emperor Aurangzeb, was dismissive of his claim to the throne. The Rajput revolt was about reclaiming it.

[Jaswant Singh, facing the dilemma of shifting loyalties would have made an interesting character to be explored through Theatre.

However, Folk imagination endowed Amar Singh with attention, and kept his memory alive with poetry, music and dance.

As Ugamraj ji had said – it is not about what a person 'is', but about what he 'does.' And what his 'doing' inspires.]

Mark Antony knew the power of Caesar when he was no more and used it to the hilt. Amar Singh too, garnered more power, when lifeless than when he was alive.

That very night, his name travelled in hushed whispers with the men who dithered and fled to their native places. And the men who came riding in support, also carried his name with them and roads and inns would be abuzz with his deed.

As the battle moved from within the Fort to the ramparts and the Gate and into the open- as the casualty increased, the utterance of name, too increased manifold. Chieftains and men and their families in distant villages were all part of the story. And each one of them would have had much to say and much to ask.

The Bards would wonder and the curious would search for more and the innovative would guess at large. Half-truths and incomplete phrases weave into experiences and mark probabilities.

It was the word of mouth that began the story. The bards who witnessed the action in bits would not cease to sing and others would follow suit. They were probably the first ones to begin the telling.

Countless songs were made and are still in the making-
Dekho to Amar Karamat ant din
Sah dhadak asur man moh
Dujdi ek vahanti deese
Padta deese ghanna poh
Sut gaj bandh aadi to sujdi.
Mohiyo vasu sabe murmek
Aspat inn ajmatl ichrajiyo Ek vehe ari pade anek.

(In the last hour, each stroke of Amar Singh's sword killed many. The emperor too saw this and was surprised.)

Innumerable songs in this vein can be heard and collections are available.

A brave man and his glory win the heart and excite the imagination. Stories would be told, and many Performance genres choose popular tales as subjects for the stage.

The Narrators were not without authenticity. They probably checked on historical accounts. But even a single episode does not have one single history. There are various histories and they are in places at variance with each other.

Some histories in verse are not devoid of colour and probably influenced popular Narratives. The Narrator could make a choice or go by his belief system. Some lines that are part of the Puppet play appear to have been influenced by the style of, 'Kunpawat Ratharon ka brihat itihās'-

'Vachan manhi bhar thi ki rekh sudhari thi
Haath se utari thi ki saache hun mein dhari thi.....
Shah Jahan kahe yar sama manhi var var
Amar kee kamar mein kahe kee katari thi'

(Description of the sword).

Some Puppeteers say-

'Amar ki kamar mein kahe ki katari thi
Jodha ne gadhai, Bika ne sanwarai'..... etc.

Language, rhythm and images create a trajectory that are picked up and extended or elaborated, creating the virtual cycle of the image. For example, the 'serpentine sword' can be alluded as, 'snake' some-where and that can become, 'stroke of poison' elsewhere.

Many songs get carried away and paint Amar Singh as a power to be dreaded.

Folk Imagination

However, the Performing Arts have built a spectrum of emotions and colour around him. The glory bears the credentials for the character being on stage. The folk stage does not necessarily create heroes. But it extends them; gives them expanse. Provides them with the limelight.

The performance is a way for the audience to engage further with the hero.. They bring alive moments with Hadi Rani, mingling Shaurya with Shringar with glimpses of Vireh and Viyog as well. These are the fruits of Imagination. They depict humiliation and valour not only as concept and values, but as emotions, experienced and felt by a person. In both, 'Nautanki' and 'Khayal', it is the range of music that depicts the depth of emotion. A story, however, provides a line of action that makes the aesthetics cohesive.

As a measure of authenticity, one can see, that the four major players of the episode remain constant in all histories, performances and ballads. These are-

1. Amar Singh
2. Salavat Khan
3. Emperor Shah Jahan
4. Arjun Gaur

From 'Shah Jahan Nama' to the various other histories to folk ballads and performances, these four characters remain central to the episode.

(At times, one comes across Narrators who say 'Akbar' instead of 'Shah Jahan', but these are few. The story has been going around for so long as a 'story' that many performers are no longer aware that this is a historical subject and not a fictitious tale!)

Among the supporters of Amar Singh, 'Shah Jahan Nama' mentions Bhao Singh, but not Ballu Singh who is probably indicated by inference as the un-named, 'trusty partisan' supporter of Amar Singh. Or that could be Sahibakhan.

Hadi Rani is not mentioned in 'Shah Jahan Nama', but is mentioned in the other histories and is pivotal to most of the ballads and Folk performances.

In the Punjabi ballad, Hadi Rani and Amar Singh have been married for long and live together as a cosy couple.

In most of the other performances, the two are recently married, With Amar Singh taking leave for the wedding and extending it without permission or notice.

In the Film, 'Amar Singh Rathore' [1957] the two are recently married, but Amar Singh does not go to Bundi. He sends his men to bring Hadi Rani to the 'Nau Mahala' in Agra, where the

wedding takes place.

In all the Folk Tellings, Amar Singh's residence is called, 'Nau Mahala' It seems that the Folk Imagination has developed a parallel Tradition of maintaining consistency. They pursue the reality as it emerges in another part of the performance spectrum and are open to assimilation and adaptation, as would suit their medium or point of view.

Ram Singh is generally portrayed as the nephew (Jaswant Singh's son) or as the son. This character has probably been devised by Folk practitioners and serves a purpose.

Ram Singh is not part of the court or the related events in any of the histories. There is a mention of a Ram Singh Rathore in one of the listings of 'Shah Jahan Nama', but he does not seem related to the royal household of Jodhpur.

Pandit Bisheshwar Nath Reu, author of the article, 'Rao Amar Singh, the well-known hero of Rajputana' says, that Amar Singh had a son, Raya Singh, who sometime after the father's demise, received a mansab of 1000 zat and 700 horses.

The Empress or, 'Begum' is not mentioned in any of the histories, but has a role in most Dramatic renderings. She is not mentioned by name and by no means alludes to Mumtaz Mahal [generally associated with Shah Jahan] who passed away in 1631. As Begum was the sister of Salabat Khan, her outburst is not out of place. Like Hadi Rani, she too is a woman, comfortable with the sword.

Kishna Nai is mentioned in the Punjabi ballad and in many other places.

Narsebaaz and Nabi Rasool are central to the theme and story of, 'Amar Singh Rathore' as told by the performing Artists and they seem to be a creation of the fertile Folk Imagination.

The battle in which Ballu Singh emerges as the hero is not mentioned in the 'Shah Jahan Nama', but other histories mention it in great detail. The Nautanki written by Natha Ram Gaur has painstakingly depicted the various battles and has also mentioned leading warriors among the king's men. It seems as if the author was ensuring that this part of history is not forgotten, and has tried to underline its significance.

In the structuring of the performance drama, this poses many challenges. This issue can crop up in the staging of, 'Julius Caesar' too. After the public speeches of Mark Antony the Drama reaches such a height, that to bring in the new element of battle needs careful treatment. Similarly, in the Nautanki, the switch from the musical crescendo to the battle sequence requires an adept handling.

It is commonly accepted by all accounts that Arjun Gaur inflicted the last and fatal blow on Amar Singh. Where, when and how, vary. By some accounts it was in the Diwan-e-Am itself. According to others, Amar Singh was leaving the hall, when the king resorted to action. The fight probably ensued outside, till Amar Singh fell- and that was at the Akbar Gate, where he had reached. That is why this Gate is commonly known as Amar Sigh Gate and was kept shut for a very long time.

According to yet another version, Amar Singh jumped over the Akbar Gate on horseback and that is why the Gate is called Amar Singh gate.

The Folk Imagination has created a parallel story, which illustrates, the, 'Stabbing in the back' metaphor through a dramatic incident.

In this creation, when Amar Singh aims towards the throne, the king escapes. Amar Singh leaves on his horse and is chased by the king's men. He manages to escape by jumping over the Ramparts of the Fort, and his horse perishes in this effort. However, Amar Singh manages to reach, 'Nau Mahala' and prepares for the next action.

Mean- while, the king provoked into further action, by the Empress, calls his courtiers and offers a reward to the one who would bring Amar Singh to him. Arjun Gaur takes up the challenge- 'beeda' [paan with supari {betel leaf and betel nut} which is the traditional way of solemnizing a contract].

He then goes to, 'Nau Mahala' and tries to convince Amar Singh that the emperor is all set for a truce and has invited Amar Singh for negotiation. Amar Singh does not trust him and refuses to go with him. Arjun Gaur then prevails upon Hadi Rani who then asks Amar Singh to accompany his brother-in-law. For her sake, Amar Singh agrees and gives his word.

Arjun Gaur, then asks him to leave behind his armour and arms as they are going on a mission of peace and not war. As Amar Singh goes, dis-armed, Hadi Rani gives him a dagger which he conceals. Arjun Gaur brings him to a half shut narrow gate, which would require the Rathore to bend and enter. But as Amar Singh had decided not to bend before the Mughals, he refuses.

Arjun Gaur advises him to enter facing outwards. While, he is in the process of doing so, Arjun Gaur stabs him and he falls. Even then, he hits at the Gaur with his dagger and chops off his nose. One account mentions, that he chops of the ear. As nose is connected with, 'Honour 'chopping it off makes a metaphor come alive.

In the 'Khayal', he chops off both nose and ear!

The king does not reward Arjun Gaur and after confiscating his lands, dismisses him.

This incident is part of most performances. It almost feels actual, because it is seen and it adds drama and dimensions of domesticity to the plot.

This incident does not occur in the Punjabi Ballad, although Arjun Gaur remains the culprit.

(There are references in the 'Shah Jahan Nama' that Arjun Gaur continued serving the king for many more years after the Amar Singh incident and so the dismissal too is imaginary.)

Punishment accorded to Arjun Gaur fulfils the desire for dramatic justice that people seek to find in a Drama or in a story. It is also appropriate that such justice is provided by the Emperor, who is supposed to be the dispenser of justice.

It is said, that most of the Rajputs who assembled in Amar Singh's house after he was killed, had the intention of storming his house, to teach him a lesson. It is believed, that Ballu Singh too had this regret-that he could not lay his hands on Arjun Gaur. The system of the times, protected Arjun Gaur. And the urge to see him treated otherwise remained unresolved, creating a note of discord that travelled through centuries.

What happens, then on stage, is a wish fulfilment accorded by fantasy. The stage is, in itself, an imaginary space and it wilfully takes liberties from the happenings of life. To some extent all anecdotes do so. We do not know the original source of experience that led to their creation-or inspired their creation. Because this is a mysterious process. It cannot be known. With time, the actual disappears and the virtual lives on.

The action of Arjun Gaur destroyed his brother-in-law and sister (who was one of the queens who committed Sati). In some ways it stereotypes the wife's brother as not being trustworthy. He vaguely reminds of another character in popular culture- Sakuni In Mahabharata, who is the brother of Gandhari, but misguides the Kauravas, leading to their defeat and destruction.

There is no one author to whom this inclusion can be attributed nor is it possible to know how it got incorporated in the story of Amar Singh. But, ever since its inclusion, it has stayed there. This incident has, over time acquired several meanings that have become central to its thematic thrust. Some of them can be seen as-

1. It underlines the role of Arjun Gaur and makes it clear, that he assassinated Amar Singh of his own will.
2. The king is absolved of direct responsibility as this was not in accordance with his order.
3. It highlights the bravery of Amar Singh, who could not be defeated in battle, but lost to deceit.

As the king punishes Arjun, he establishes himself as a 'just' monarch, but does not stop the ensuing battles. He observes them keenly and at an appropriate time stops them. He who punishes also rewards. He offers Ram Singh the jagir of Nagaur and gives Nabi Rassol/ Narsebaaz the post in the Army. In some narratives, he also bows to Hadi Rani.

With the friends and loyalists so honoured, the virtual power of Amar Singh is restored and its supremacy is acknowledged. There is a satisfaction in the good being rewarded and the evil being punished.

It is also striking, that only when the energies of Ram Singh and Nabi Rassol/ Narsebaaz come together, that victory is attained. Their integrity and togetherness earns triumph, while treachery is exposed and punished.

The king as the head of the System re-establishes order. Such an end befits a parable through which people derive lessons. For some this could also be purpose of drama.

History of course took its own course. Shah Jahan did not pass on Nagaur to the heirs of Amar Singh.

Sunita Budhwar in her article on, 'The Qayamkhani Shaikhzada family of Fatehpur Jhunjunu' talks of Daulat Khan, who was the son of Alif Khan. She says that, 'In 1644, the mansab of Daulat Khan was increased to 1500/1000 and he also received the jagir of Nagaur.'

The Qayamkhani Shaikhzadas were originally Chauhan Rajputs from Derara village of Hissar. [After conversion, they retained their Rajput dress, customs and festivals.]

It was Akbar, who began the process of integrating them with the Mughal nobility.

(However, strange manoeuvrings of events led the heirs of Amar Singh back to Nagaur. During, Aurangzeb's war with the Rajputs of Jodhpur, Amar Singh's grandson, Indra Singh held Nagaur, but Ajit Singh of Jodhpur ousted him. Aurangzeb tried placing the heirs of Amar Singh as rulers of Jodhpur, but he could not succeed.)

In one of the Narratives, the story pauses, as there is an entry of the Fakir, who asks the emperor, how with limited men and resources, he could build a vast empire. The king takes him aside and asks him to wait and see, as the answer unfolds in the shape of Arjun Gaur who announces that he has dealt with Amar Singh.

This reduces the neutrality of the king, and brings in another didactic element, that makes a statement on characters like Arjun Gaur, who, for greed can manipulate and allow themselves to be manipulated. The king then is the main manipulator, who uses the weaknesses of characters like Arjun Gaur. They are used and disposed of after their utility is over.

The entry of the Fakir is a theatrical device. It requires Imagination. It could also be reality. The Puppeteers talk of Fakir Kale Khan Alam, who gave them the figureheads to incorporate into storytelling. The Puppeteers also say that the initial wood figurines may have been created on the basis of clay figureheads received from rich /royal households. The early Puppet plays were also performed for Rajput households.

The puppet manipulator, then aimed his plays at Chieftains, mansabdars and rajahs, who like Jaswant Singh, had uncertain loyalties and a step amiss could make another Arjun Gaur.

While, many long Narratives and Dramatic performances have woven in elements that seem didactic, the short Punjabi ballad retains its flavour, by its directness and engagement with the essential happenings. It tells the story of a man and woman who are in love with each other and in love with life. But they both love their honour above all. The culture of liveliness that they had created then comes to an abrupt end.

It is also about Form. Different modes ignite the imagination differently. Popularity too sets its paradigms and limits. It is not possible to cull out the elements and decipher their origins, because over centuries they have blended and acquired their Forms. It does seem that the Oral Narratives created the space and ambience for the actors to take the stage and for the written texts to guide the flow of action.

It is well known that a writer brings in his/her point of view. It is equally true, that an actor performs to the view of the audience. Overall this is a delicate process, requiring checks and

balances. Each Form puts its hinges in place. Some stay; others fall off.

The story of Amar Singh, as it is performed today, is a fusion of Historical happenings and Folk Imagination. It is by no means a document nor does it make that claim.

It is also evident that the Folk Imagination creates an outsider's view of the court decorum. Costumes of courtiers may not be of the period, gestures may be tentative, the chair signifying the throne may be hastily covered, with an overall discomfort with the sophistication attached to a kingly court. The battle scenes that are packed with action in cinema, often remain suggestive in the musical on stage. And yet it brings in the significance of the recalling. People imagined kings in their own way-till the films took over!

Besides, as Ugamraj ji had said, forms like Khayal do not get stuck in the reality- including visual reality- of a situation. It deals with the essence. Like music.

It appears, that some events associated with one character get juxtaposed on another. For example, the action of jumping off the Fort wall on horseback is attributed to Ballu Singh too, but it is identified with Amar Singh. A strong blue-white horse had been gifted by Chittor to Ballu Singh. In the Puppet Play, the horse has a special entry. It could be an allusion to the gifted horse.

Since performers often pick up bits of the performance in an informal way, they may sometimes miss connections or create new ones. When stories continue to be told for a long period of time, they get re-invented in the process, largely because of the shifting of hands that handle them.

Stories outlive their characters and their tellers as well. With each change, the Narrative shifts, an emphasis is altered. Time too speaks through the Narrative. When Agra becomes Delhi, it could well be the nudge of time, for the head office is always in the capital! There is more than a pinch of salt in performance and plenty of spice!

While some patterns are common to the Folk Forms, there are many differences in treatment. In some of the story-tellings, Amar Singh enters the court on horse-back. In some stage performances, he enters, with the drawn-out sword. Sometimes he goes alone. At times, he is accompanied by Kishna Nai and so on. The Narrative is now with the performer and he is the one playing it and taking it forward.

CHAPTER 2: THE LEGEND AND ITS MAKING

Does a legend require a historical basis? This is a question that has varying answers from different scholars. While some feel, that it is not imperative for it to be so, there is a clear opinion that suggests that legends generally refer to a certain time period, characters who could have existed in history and a certain geographical reference wherein events could be located.

However, it is broadly accepted that the narrative is a highly romanticized version of happenings and may not be devoid of larger than life portrayals, superhuman deeds and even miracles. The semblance of the real could be coloured by exaggeration. Often, more than a fixed period or an exact date, it is the geography that appears to lend a base to the narrative—names of places, rivers, references to hills that seem to bind the legend and communities of those areas own the story zealously and often with pride and possessiveness. Framing the legend within the semblance of history and geography enable a process of identification and continuity of the legend within specific communities.

Howsoever fictitious may the telling be, it claims a fact as the basis or origin and the rest as a process of the building of it. In fact, the supernatural, is also meant to be treated as an aspect of truth of a bygone era when such happenings were possible. Myths on the other hand, are generally accepted to be creations of the imaginative mind, exploring mysteries of the universe and western scholars generally refer to Greek myths in this context and they could be placed (the happening not the telling of it) in time, before time acquired a date, almost in a measure of timelessness. The myth of Prometheus is often quoted as an example. Its power lies in its exploration of the mysterious or something so fundamental to human existence as the huge leap taken by the discovery of fire.

However, there also seem to be a number of legends whose telling and characters have within them or acquired over a period of time mythical proportions, but containing within them indications of time reference (though not claiming accuracy) and abroad landscape (though actual places mentioned have bleak bearings to existing names). The legend of King Arthur is one such example. It has ignited imagination and continues to do so in the innumerable tellings. In fact, the quest of the holy grail continues to haunt modern day fiction writers and filmmakers.

According to folklore, it was prophesized that Arthur would be the ruler of a united England. Born out of wedlock, he pulls a sword out of stone and is recognized as the true inheritor of his father's kingdom. The famous Round Table of knights has been woven into several tales and romances of battle and chivalry.

While there seem to be two literary texts that are considered to be authentic versions of the saga, but folklore has added multiple tales around the heroes of king Arthur, keeping the nostalgia and the connection pulsating. The famous British poet Tennyson has drawn on the Arthurian era in many of his poems, including the Lady of Shalott, a woman in a tower, who

must not see the world, but through the reflection in the mirror and she abides by it, till a flash of Lancelot (knight of king Arthur) passes by and she breaks the rule!

Amar Singh is no king Authur, he is a medieval courtier who has grown huge in the imagination of some communities and people.

However, as the legend of Amar Singh Rathore is not lost in zone less antiquity, its time frame falls well within the realm of known history, it is possible to trace the story from sources that have recorded happenings as facts.

Examining the Interplay of Historicity and Legend

By most sources, Amar Singh is said to have been born in 1613, to the kingdom of Marwar, the elder son of Mahraja Gaj Singh. He was daring in battle and also by spirit and temperament. He accompanied his father to various battlegrounds and won laurels as a warrior, but perhaps of his headstrong nature (that may not have succeeded in keeping the chieftains together) his father did not choose him to be the heir apparent. That honour went to the second son and Amar was sent in exile.

Prof. Satish Chandra in his book, "Medieval India-From Sultanat to The Mughals-writes about the inheritance issue of Marwar. While, it is a broad observation, he gives the instance of Amar Singh as an example-

“There were no definite principles regulating the succession in Marwar. According to Jahangir, the rule of primogeniture did not obtain among the Rathors, the son whose mother was the special favourite of the father being nominated to the ‘gaddi’. Accordingly, in 1638, Maharaj Gaj Singh had set aside the elder son, Amar Singh, and nominated Jaswant Singh. The nomination was accepted by Shah Jahan although Jaswant Singh was only a minor, whereas Amar Singh had performed useful service against both Khan-i-Jahan Lodi and Juhar Singh in the Deccan, and had risen to the rank of 3000/2500. Amar Singh was granted the appendage of Nagor which had been earlier held by Rao Sur Singh of Bikaner. During the minority of Jaswant Singh, Marwar was administered by an imperial nominee, Mahesh Das Rathor, no objection being raised to this from any side.”

James Tod, an officer in the East India Company (rather Political Agent, a post that was later known by title of Resident) has in his book “Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan” given a brief biography of Amar Singh, whom he calls Umra Singh. The writer further states-

He repaired to the imperial court; and although the emperor approved and sanctioned his banishment, he employed him. His gallantry soon won him the title of Rao and the Mansab of a leader of three thousand, with the grant of Nagor as an independent domain, to be held directly from the crown. But the same arrogant and uncontrollable spirit which lost him his birth right, brought his days to a tragical conclusion. He absented himself for a fortnight from court, hunting the boar or the tiger, his only recreation. The emperor (Shah Jahan) reprimanded him for neglecting his duties and threatened him with a fine. Amra proudly

replied that he had only gone to hunt, and as for a fine, he observed, putting his hand upon his sword, that was his sole wealth. James Tod then describes the Act of Annihilation and the battles that followed.

He uses the words of their native bard, "The pillars of Agra bear testimony to their deeds, nor shall they ever be obliterated from the record of time: they made their obeisance to Amra in the mansions of the sun." The Bokhara gate by which they gained admission was up, and hence forward known only as "Amar Singh's gate"; and in proof of the strong impression made by this event, it remained closed through centuries, until opened in 1809 by Capt. Geo. Steell, of the Bengal engineers.

The history of the gate and the episode of its re-opening brings the narrative to the present i.e. to the time when the author penned the book. However, he also makes it a point to add a footnote that speaks of his attitude to popular wisdom and that he did not view it as something to be passed over. The footnote says-

Since these remarks were written, captain Steell related to the author a singular anecdote connected with the above circumstance. While the work of demolition was proceeding, Capt. S. was urgently warned by the natives of the danger he incurred in the operation, from a denunciation on the closing of the gate, that it should thenceforth be guarded by a huge serpent- when, suddenly, the destruction of the gate being nearly completed, a large Cobra Capella rushed between his legs, as in fulfilment of the anathema. Capt. S. fortunately escaped without injury.

Clearly, the Captain and the author attached significance to this coincidence. Writing in 1832, almost two centuries after Amar Singh, the author was creating, rather, compiling a history of Rajasthan in English, for a British reader, drawing from all possible sources at his disposal. Oral narratives were by no means excluded nor was the narratives of the bards. And the bards dealt with facts as poetry thus creating elements of narratives. These elements of legends became history when recorded as such.

The tourist guides at Agra Fort point towards the gate and often tell about the snake as well. The story has got cemented with the many tales associated with Agra.

James Tod included the versions of the bards in his writing and that was seen as history as well. He says that heroic poems of India constitute another resource for history. "Bards may be regarded as the primitive historians of mankind." Before, fiction began to engross the attention of the poets, the functions of the bard were doubtless employed in recording real events, and in commemorating real personages...The poets are the chief, though not the sole, historians of western India, neither is there any deficiency of them...

The Bard is the keeper of history and this history becomes poetry. This is what he communicates and carries forward each time he remembers, he sings the tale and collective memory repeats along. He is also the keeper and creator of folklore, because he is actively engaged with the art of song and recitation based on happenings and narrated to an audience. The Bard also remembers and recites the narrations made by his forefathers and thus extends the tradition of recitation and singing along with history.

Commenting on Shahjahan's act of passing on Nagore to Amar Singh's son, the author does not mince words in advising his own people to learn from such acts. He writes-

It may be useful to record such facts by the way of contrast with...the present paramount powers of India should any of its tributary princes defy them as Umra did. Even those despots borrowed a lesson of mercy from the Rajpoot system which does not deem treason hereditary nor taints a whole line for the fault of one unworthy link. Shahjahan, instead of visiting the sins of the father on the son, installed him in the fief of Nagore. But perhaps we have not hitherto dared to imitate the examples set us by the Moghul and even by the Mahratha.

These lessons he learnt from traditional Indian Polity in 1832- exactly a quarter century before the annexation of Oudh and the Explosion of 1857.

However, he does not cover the complete life span of Amar Singh, his life at Nagore and relationship with the community. It does not mention Ballu Champavat, who apparently was one of the loyalists who partook of his banishment and tried to put up a fight for the last remains.

There is also no mention of the Pathaan and other characters who emerge in other tellings of the story.

A Traveller Recounts

Medieval courts were known for their intrigue and rivalries. This is probably true for all empires and centres of power, control and wealth.

Niccolao Manucci, a Venetian traveller who came to India as a young lad during ShahJahan's reign and stayed on to see the reign of Aurangzeb, has recounted the period in -Storia Do Mogor-or Mogul India(Translated with introduction and notes by William Irvine).In this he has written about the things he saw and heard about. He also served at the Mughal court.

Although, he came after the incident involving Amar Singh and Salavat Khan, he has written about it. Rather, it is what was recounted to him. Again, this writing is a product of listening-but, significantly, he came to know of the incident just a few years after it happened, and many people who had witnessed it, would have been alive.

Two incidents are placed one after the other. The first one involves Fede-e-Khan and Shah Jahan. The emperor, it seems, was in the habit of getting up early and gathering fruit with his favourite pages. One morning he had Feda-e-Khan for company. Niccoloa writes-

"Gathering the best of fruit, Shahjahan, placed them in the hands of Feda-e-Khan and when about to enter the door of the harem, he asked for them. Feda-e-Khan made excuses and said that his majesty had given nothing to him. Shahjahan was displeased and said to him: I gave you the fruit and you have the temerity to deny it?

Feda-e-Khan then gave the fruit saying, "Your majesty observes the petty

theft I committed and overlooks the large amount of more than thirty thousand that every day is robbed by the wazir?"

Shahjahan replied quietly, "I know it well and much do I desire to punish him, abhorring all thieves, but sometimes it is necessary to dissemble in order to be well served."

In the next line, the incident concerning Amar Singh begins-

"At the court of Shahjahan was a great Hindu prince, called Amarsinh (Amar Singh)-that is to say, "Lion-minded." For several weeks he had failed to attend court. It is the practice for the Hindu princes and commanders to encamp with their tents for twenty-four hours every week below the royal fortress."

(It is also worth mentioning that in Manucci's version, the fight takes place between Wazir Khan and Amar Singh. However, Manucci was not a witness to the incident and writes what came to him by word of mouth. He has referred to Amar Singh as a "great prince" and seen his name as meaning Lion minded a terminology that is complimentary.)

When he did come to court-

"The wazir (Wazir Khan), who was very fond of him, went up quietly to him, and asked him why he had not come to court and performed his duties. Amar Singh, with his face all aflame, made no answer; thereupon the wazir said to him some words which are offensive among the Rajputs- that is to say, "May you be, you villain!"

Hardly had Wazir Khan pronounced the words, when Amar Singh, laying hold of his dagger, plunged it into the wazir's breast, and he fell dead in the royal presence. There stood Amar Singh, with the dagger still in his hand, looking at the king. All were in consternation at such an act, but Shahjahan dissembled, and rising, retired into the privacy of his harem without uttering a word. But he made sign for them to kill Amar Singh, as was done. The officers then present leapt upon him, and with his dagger he wounded six of them. The cavalry and infantry of Amar Singh who were outside the fortress, on learning the death of their lord, made use of their weapons, killing and decapitating whomsoever they encountered, getting away in safety. King Shahjahan afterwards granted the dignities of Amar Singh to his younger brother, named Jaswant Singh.

(This is probably what Manucci heard and came to know. It contradicts the version of James Tod.)

While the name mentioned here is of Wazir Khan, the footnote mentions Salabat Khan by name- Rao Amar Singh, eldest son of Rajah Gaj Singh, Rathor, of Marwar (Jodhpur), killed Salabat Khan, Roshan Zamir, Bakhshi, in "darbar" on the last day of Jamada 1.1054H (August 5 1644) and was himself slain..." {pg.200}

(The Nautanki text also treats Salabat Khan as the wazir. It also talks of the king retiring to the harem, as is also the case here.)

(According to this version, the battle takes place immediately. The legend from Punjab also maintains this sequence of events. There are other versions that differ)

That this incident is preceded by the one in the garden indicates aspects of Wazir Khan that are not complimentary to him. The emperor lets it pass as he seems to pass by the happening in the court. The job is done by mere indication. The smooth functioning of a power centre!

It is very interesting that the same book has a sketch {opposite pg.200} of four people and an elephant fight, presented below.



Source: Storia Do Mogor Or Mogul Mogul India By Niccolao Manucci, Translated with Introduction and Notes by William Irvine. First Edition London 1907, Reprinted Calcutta 1965.

The Translator's note says-

"Illustration No.X1.bis.- The description placed opposite the picture in the volume O.D.45, reserve, says it represents Shahjahan and his four sons, along with a shaven Hindu prince named Amar Singh standing in front, and alongside of him, Wazir Khan, then the chief minister"

The sketch and the comment that goes with it is interesting because it has the three main players of our text together and also refers to them by their specific names.

CHAPTER 3: UNDERSTANDING THE TIME AND THE CULTURE AROUND THE LEGEND

"Ghodo, jodo, pagdi, mooncha, kug, Marwar'
E panchu rakhe atal Rajputi Rathore."

(Horse, dress, turban, moustache and sword of Marwar,
These five things are inseparable from a Rajput Rathore.)

The Rajputs were primarily warriors and while, Rajasthan, was ruled for centuries by Rajputs, not all Rajputs are rulers. Many would be enlisted in armies on known terms and often period contracts. They fought battles and believed in the side they were with. Their aim was either victory or annihilation. The term Rajput, has become associated with Kings and kingdoms and a fierce sense of independence, which goes by the popular idiom, 'Death rather than dishonour.'

It is a well-known fact that in medieval times, with few exceptions, their power was not absolute or supreme. It was often subject to their relationship with the Mughal court at Agra or Delhi. Its supremacy acknowledged, the Court at the centre, created the provisions for governance and protocol. As Komal Kothari points out-

"The royal and jagirdar families were governed by, primogeniture, whereas all other people inherited the property of their fathers...The maxim, "the king has died, long live the king" was not the position for the kings of Rajasthan, at least for last six to seven hundred years."

"Talwar Handi" and "kharita" were issued by the central authority to recognize the king and jagirdar's legitimacy. The practice and rule was, that, right from the moment of the death of the king, the kingdom reverted back to the central state authority, who would issue a new order bestowing the kingship. The history of the princely states of Rajasthan is full of evidence of conspiracy where a lot of right and wrong interventions were made by the emperor, the East India Company or the British authorities."

As Masanori Sato points out-

The Mughals made the Rajput chiefs realize that their promotion or deduction in mansab always depended on the quality of their service and loyalty to the emperor... Their active participation in imperial service and securing the imperial recognition of their gaddi offered them opportunities to make their position stable.

(That is why even after his exile from Jodhpur, Amar Singh could establish himself in the Mughal court and acquire Nagaur as his jagir. However, any dispute with neighbouring kingdoms was bound to reach the emperor).

It is quite evident, then, that the Imperial court would be a hotbed of intrigue and politics, with kings relying on the favours of courtiers close to the emperor. Needless to say, such talukadars had their own expectations which had to be met. While, the kings and princes had their powers compromised, they retained much of the pomp and ceremony and courtesy became almost synonymous with respect and honour. The emperor was aware of the significance of decorum and handled it delicately.

The Shahjahan Nama records the various gifts that the king regularly bestowed on the princes, often in the form of robes, swords, jewels, jagirs, drums and titles. The kings were expected to maintain regular attendance in person or by a nominee/representative who would be the heir or close blood relative of that status. Many travellers have noted their presence in the assembly halls and personal camps outside the Fort.

Many of the Rajput chieftains became part of the Imperial machinery and served in different provinces of the country, while retaining their jagir in Rajasthan. They were directly answerable to the emperor and thus their traditional bond with the local raja, based on bhai bandh and consequent system of bhai bant underwent a change.

More-over, since some Rajput strongholds for a long time did not negotiate such terms with the empire, there were varying pulls and pressures within the community, leading to various shifts in relationships. It also led to a process of redefining terms related to honour, clan, kinship and king ship, while keeping the essence. The words and the notions they represented continued to be part of that culture and image construct. The observations in 'Honour Status and Polity' by Pratibha Jain and Sangeeta Sharma state clearly-

The paradigm of honour associated with these erstwhile princely states was best exemplified in a set of values that set the ideal standard of conduct and also defined Rajput identity. These values were not linked to religious faith but were basically chivalric norms and humanitarian practices indicating a rather high standard of ethics and moral behaviour. These behavioural norms came to be defined as 'vir dharma' and Rajput 'kulreeti'. The term 'vir dharma' signifies the predominance of chivalric ideal. It was not a constrictive concept implying mastery over weapons, reckless courage and glory on the battlefield. It, instead referred to a comprehensive set of ethics involving adherence to a code of conduct that focussed on four principles: war, vair (revenge), 'swami dharma' (fidelity and loyalty towards one's senior and protector) and charity. The individual's honour...was linked to his capacity to sacrifice and suffer. There are numerous examples wherein individuals were endowed with an illustrious standing because of their exemplary courage, spirit of sacrifice and utmost generosity.

'Paat 'the throne, was symbolic of highest status, while' thaath' was symbolic of real honour and prestige.

The authors further state-

War in itself was upheld as a value. The Rajputs literally worshipped heroism. Not only heroes, but inanimate objects associated with battle were equally venerable...The pledges in the name of the sword (khadag ki aan) and weapons (sila ki aan) were held to be inviolable... (In the film, Amar Singh gives his dagger).

A warrior who died at the battlefield was deified and worshipped...The 'langar' (gold worn in the feet) worn by a warrior was not a decorative ornament but it was emblematic of his resolve to remain undeterred in the battlefield or return victorious. It was popularly known as, 'laaj ka langar' (symbol of honour). Similarly, it was unheroic to strike at the enemy's back. Even on the arena of warfare, ethical values were adhered to the hilt. which even involved offering the initial strike to the adversary...

Another prevalent practice was 'vair' which as signified by 'aant lena' (to tie a knot signifying determination to take revenge) ...each individual is born with a debt to die (marne ka rin) in vindication of his personal and family honour. ..These blood feuds are over over possessions such as land, water and women or result from incidents of humiliation...the 'vair' was transmitted from generation to generation since it was largely believed that to sheath the sword till the feud is balanced would be a blot that could never be effaced...The basic principle of 'vair' was blood for blood- also known as 'moondkati' (slicing off the head)...In medieval Rajasthan, no money compensation was acceptable for termination of the feud. Only 'dharti' (land) or 'dulhan' (bride) from the guilty clan... could pacify."

Enmity of this nature engaged the attention and energy of many Rajput kingdoms and became their primary motivation for war and glory. As K.R. Qanungo says," It is all the more regrettable because the Rajputs did not learn to sink petty enmities, unite for a common cause and thus divert the lava of a retaliatory spirit of,'vair' from the individual and the class to a national channel ..."

Loyalty too is a sacred virtue and 'swami dharma', an essential principle of existence and co-existence. At the same time, keeping the 'aan' of a word given was considered to be an act of honour.

Charity and hospitality were part of the 'vir dharma' Even a stranger who seeks refuge in the trust of the warrior ought to be protected. Generosity is a quality that builds connection with society and the needy. Giving of food grains (ann daan) animals (pashudaan) land (bhoomi daan) and water (jal daan) are considered acts of piety that bring well-being to all.

With the tracks of life laid out much before birth, there was little scope for individual will or independent path finding. The code was supreme and the men were to follow it. To be on earth to pay the debt carved out by the clan seals away many other colours of the world.

The life of a warrior is a hard one and it drills hardness into me. The sword is both a companion and an extension of his harm. If he rides a horse, their rhythms match. He learns to battle and the battlefield is his school. Whether he be a lord or soldier or mendicant, he has to leave his wife and kin for long and become like an ascetic.

Dirk H. A. Kolff writes in his article,' Rajput in Medieval North India'-

When the naukhar, soldier or mendicant begins his career and leaves his home for the first time, a change comes over him. From now on, he will acquire new norms of behaviour that will set him apart from those he has left behind in the village. In the song of Bijai Mal recorded in the Shahbad district ... his bhauji, wife of elder brother tells him-

"From today, you have begun to forget me."
A new life begins. The ascetic identity takes over.

This also applies to marriage, which becomes largely dormant...As in the same song his wife says-

"My lord, in what month wilt thou return?
My beloved has gone away and entered into Naukri,
Leaving me alone in the house.
He took two or four days of chutti and came,
And went away at Dawn."

There is a certain tension between a man's marriage and his Naukri.... When asked by his wife to, 'stay, here, but one night', he tells her-"hear me o slender wife...I have placed the goddess Durga around my neck and if I do as you desire, all the gods will be displeased with me. I would be killed in the open battlefield."

Among their many duties, an important one was to protect the women and the honour of the women. The women's will was subjugated to the decisions made by their male guardians. Their upbringing prepared them for the daunting challenges that lay before the households committed to warfare. With their men constantly away from home, the women led lives of the 'virhani' -the lonely woman that sees the seasons pass her by.

Very often, matrimony was away of making political alliance and sending a daughter to the other kingdom, could well be a dignified surrender to a stronger power. She had to take it in her stride. According to Zieglar, "when Rajputs of different clans and gotras were involved, they usually confirmed hostilities through gifts of daughters in marriage and the formation of alliances, thus creating a new pattern of relationship amongst themselves."

The social conditioning of the women happened with her upbringing. She was trained to handle the arms as well as be skilled in household duties. Above all, she had to understand the value of honour over personal happiness.

The narrative of Krishna Kumari, the princess of Mewar brings forth the predicament of a daughter in such a household. She was loved and was beautiful, engaged to a prince of Jodhpur, who unfortunately died before the marriage could be solemnised. There was, then a possibility of her marriage into the royal house of Jaipur. This was not acceptable to Jodhpur and led to a long war in which the rulers of Gwalior and other powers also got involved.

The court of Mewar, then felt that as long as Krishna lived, the war would not end. She was asked, if she was willing to sacrifice her life for peace to set in. The princess gave her consent. (There are many versions as to who put the question to her; the father; the court; or she overheard.) The chieftain assigned the task, refused and cursed the decision. The girl was offered poison, while a visibly upset mother watched. To her, the sixteen-year-old girl apparently said-

"Why afflict yourself my mother for this shortening of the sorrows of life? I fear not to die. We are marked out for sacrifice from our birth; let me thank my father that I have lived so

long." She passed away and the heart broken mother gave up food and followed the daughter soon after.

The women may seem protected in the rawala, but their lives were in constant peril. It is not surprising that the call for peace love and Bhakti should come from a daughter of Merta and a daughter in law of Chittor, Mirabai. She saw war from within the household, as a child and as a married woman. Every woman knew the consequences of such an existence. She could be the queen or be at the funeral pyre alive and dressed as a bride. She had to be prepared for the moment of sacrifice and feel the pride and glory of it. To be a sati may be projected as an ideal, but Varsha Joshi says that-If we look at Rajput Satis, we find that there are very few who are actually worshipped by their natal or conjugal clans; most are simply ignored.

In her article,' Deifying the Dead: The Satis of Rajasthan' she also points out-In order to better understand the meaning of the term, we will have to make the following distinctions:

First, a woman, who immolates herself, as a result of sat in her body transmitted by the dead body, comes under the category of sati. Second, in certain areas of Rajasthan, self-immolation was also done as an act of protest against tyranny. This type of immolation was called jamar. The example of a Charan woman of Mithadau...was clearly an act of protection of the village. Interestingly, such kinds of sacrifices were made by women only. In the third category, were the Rajput women who committed self-immolation as a result of demands and expectations from the society. These cases come under the category of 'beli' (burning oneself). There could be other compulsions- like the horror of widowhood. But it cannot be seen as an act of love.

The practice of collective self-immolation by women is often connected with 'Saka' that comes to the share of men, when faced by an invincible enemy. Even when defeat is imminent, the warrior goes to the battle to fight till the end, 'with no expectation of survival or success.' He knows it is his last battle and he also knows what lies ahead. Still he goes to meet that end. That is Saka.

In the article on 'Honour and Gender Construction', the authors (Pratibha Jain and Sangeeta Sharma) state that-

"'Jauhar' and 'Saka' reflect, perhaps, the same psyche of making supreme sacrifice for preserving the honour of the clan and the state. Before men donned the kesariya bana for the ultimate battle, women mounted the pyre ..."

It was the supreme sacrifice by the women inside the Fort as 'Saka' was for the men outside it. 'Jauhar' was expected to relieve the men of the fear and shame of their women being exploited by the enemy. Though it probably added guilt and inadequacy to a distraught mind.

"Although capture of women after military conquest has been a usual feature in all political cultures, 'Jauhar' emerged as a peculiar feature of Rajput polities especially in the erstwhile state of Mewar...Since the defeat of the maharana's forces was clear, Padmini led hundreds of women to the vaults under the palace where they committed 'Jauhar'.

Dirk H. A. Kolff talks of the fall of Raisen. He writes- The 'Mirat-i-Sikandri' written in 1610

relates-

Bahadur Shah offered them, in exchange' for the Fort of Raisen and the country of Gondwana'...the town of Baroda in Gujarat...all must have realized that they were thus to be cut off from Rajasthan...Durgavati and ...other leaders indicated that nothing could recompense for their loss of freedom..

"...for many generations this country has been in our possession, in reality if not in name like an empire...the right way for bravery is this, that we should perform jauhar of our women and children, and should ourselves fight and be slain; and there should be no further longing left in our hearts."

Nizamuddin, who describes the scene, singles out Durgavati as the main pleader for such action...Silhadi (the chieftain who had gone through conversion) was much moved by her stand. He realized that her words expressed what was, according to the tradition he was part of, the ultimate value of life...

And he explained to the Muslim amir...what life in the last resort meant to him:

Every day one crore of betel leaves and some seers of camphor are consumed in my harem; and every day three hundred women put on new garments. If we are killed with our women and children, what honour and glory.

That was decisive." Rani Durgavati taking her daughter in law, (who was the daughter of Rana Sanka), with her two children, by the hand, got into the jauhar and they with seven hundred beautiful women were burnt."

Silhadi, Lakshman and Taj Khan then armed themselves and died as warrior ascetics in a fight with the Sultan's infantry at the foot of the fort.

This is about connection with the land, with freedom, with the known, with the dignity of being on one's own terms. To know what is of ultimate value in life...and in the last resort.

To have no further longing and thus to have the courage to face the end.

Padmanabha in 'Kanhade Prabandh' writes in 1455 about the fall of Jalore that took place in 1310-, When the Fort of Jalore was about to fall in the hands of Ala ud din, jauhar fire was lit in 1,584 homes in Jalore. The kith and kin, fathers, brothers, uncles...barely withholding their tears, stood in rows as the procession of ladies passed in front of them to jump into raging fires...'

Men compelled to see the women going to the pyre...assuring them that the seat of honour that was their body, was beyond the need of protection? Was this not a humiliation of the men? By their own design?

A lament of existence. Lament of the land. For the men to see. The women to suffer... and life turns to ash! To rise as remembrance. To live in a narrative.

This can be questioned and has been by scholars like Prof. Nizami who says-

"When imprisonment of a few hundred or thousand warriors would have solved the problem, jauhars were performed on a large scale and thousands of men and women were needlessly reduced to ashes."

They thought it was for their clan; for its purity; for the name of their clan that was to belong

to the future, in its memory of the past.

The vanquished exercised this one choice- rather than to live as the defeated, not live at all. They did not see themselves as slaves. It was probably also an act of defiance- to deny the victor the power to be their master; to control a people subjugated. The victor could enter the fort, but denied the spectacle of seeing them fearful and cringing. He would not see them at all, nor would they have to see him marching into their personal chambers. The spectacle they made for him was, the smoke and stench of departed lives. Ghastly and ghostly...clad in eerie silence. He could celebrate, but they would not be mocked at by his celebration.

It was long ago. Another time; another age.

Cultures have evolved ever since; people have changed.

This is a large and complex canvas. The story of Amar Singh Rathore emerges from this backdrop and interplays with some of its aspects. Familiarising with the details enables the context of many phrases, objects, motifs and references that are used in the various texts and the film discussed. The legend has roots in tradition and prevalent culture, some visible and many invisible. What popular culture carries and celebrates is the image and its broad essence; how it is achieved varies from Form to Form. It is amazing that what is termed as entertainment, contains so much of History- not just of political events, but also of culture- along with elements of the social milieu around us. As a plant grows out of the soil it is in, a performative creation or artefact too has a foundation all around. Floating pieces combine like atoms to make a construct through which the familiar resounds with the unfamiliar.

CHAPTER 4: THE LEGEND AND ITS SOCIAL INTERWEAVE

Amar Singh was a historical person. Unimportant to the structure of an empire, but important enough to have been mentioned in the 'Shah Jahan Nama' a few times. Post life, he moved into the zone of the legend makers.

His story has been told and re-told by story tellers, and performers who have painted it with their own colours- which were often, the colours of the period and region of the telling. For a legend must have some significance to its period and time beyond. This is not an abstract relationship, as the story needs to be received, both by the teller and the listener. It must have something that is of meaning to them and appeals to some sentiment within them.

A social milieu contains many legends. Not all of them are alike. Often they are contradictory to each other. They do not always say the same things or present the same kinds of nayaks or protagonists. And yet, they mirror some aspect, quality or aspiration of the community that relates with it.

Some talk of truthfulness, others of charity, piety, virtue, goodness, forgiveness, compassion, courage, victory, success, cunning, spontaneity, beauty, love, sacrifice etc. From some we draw moral lessons, while others thrill and excite and some may show the way of love.

The central character may not be ideal in the expected and accepted terms, but has done or achieved something exemplary and inspirational for the future to behold.

As many fountainheads fill up the social stream, so too many belief systems co-exist and generate their legends. The perpetuation of the legend floating in time implies the persistence of the belief system in some form, that initially led to its manifestation.

This does not mean that all legends are popular all the time or everywhere. In the work of present-day Traditional Puppeteers, the collapsing story of Amar Singh is discernible, while new performances are being built around the Narrative of the same character.

There are phases, when a certain legend may gain popularity or be appropriated by certain sections of society. Some legends are owned by certain communities as closely guarded secrets, to be transmitted as ritualistically narrated tales at specific times. There are also instances of some protagonists being deified as deities and their tales being part of worship and remembrance. Communities treasure legends that represent their existence or values they cherish.

Legends often get embodied in the area of their occurrence. Amar Singh Rathore, appears to represent a region that is widespread. Since his story belongs to medieval times, many cities that are mentioned are easily traceable today. He was born, brought up and exiled in Jodhpur (Marwar); the main events take place in Agra; he is the chieftain of Nagaur and identified by it. His equally celebrated wife is from Gadh Bundi; (Hada Pradesh). He battles

with Bikaner. His two friends- whose historicity is ambivalent- connect him to Kaithal in Haryana (where a Nautanki text places Narsebaaz) and Jaisalmer (where the Puppeteers place Zaalim Singh who is also believed by many, to be connected to the Bhatti clan).

Characters of legends generally emerge out of a combination of actual and fictive events and associations. The geographical connection makes the character real – a person, who charted his journey through these various spaces. People of these areas experience a sense of pride in his remembrance. They identify with him and it enables them to assert their identity with vehemence; and it could translate into ‘self-pride’ pushing aside the overpowering influence and lens of elitism.

The Puppeteers of Nagaur have travelled extensively with this story through Rajasthan, parts of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand etc. The first ballad that this researcher was able to access is from Punjab. It is also evident that the story is popular with the singers of Haryana. Rammat players of Bikaner also perform ‘Amar Singh Rathore’ in their own style. It is a story that is often told. May be because it is an interesting one, full of high drama, palace intrigue, conspiracy, heroic valour, a string of battles and a range of emotions.

The most daring act of Amar Singh is, that he challenged the might of an Empire. A killing in the Court of a king is not an every- day occurrence. Julius Caesar was assassinated by the Senators, as a planned conspiracy. Amar Singh acted alone. To be seen as a rebel was his moment of glory. In this act, he becomes a representative of the Archetype in its energy formation.

The hugeness of the Act in itself, makes him a hero in the eyes of many. The other side was powerful and intimidating, yet the protagonist did not waver. It is true, that like a firefly, he is consumed by the consequences of his act and does not live to be the victor.

The Empire does not crumble; it was shaken for a moment. There was a tremor in court when he made his presence felt. And that is seen as an end in itself. A purpose fulfilled. A story made.

A story to be noticed and picked up by the storyteller, who is witness to the happening. And whose presence, may be, propels it.

The poet picks up a line and makes it eternal. The bard as witness and companion picks on the deed and makes it immortal. This awareness of immortality of a deed compels itself on the protagonist. The sense that the present has a place in the memory of the future instils a commitment to it. The hero wills his life to a cause irrespective of victory.

The bard as a companion is a dangerous phenomenon. It lures the person into taking on challenges more so to be judged by the observer and through him by posterity. There can be no persuasive conciliatory negotiation with the personal conscience. The bard as the chronicler is the conscience. For that presence messages expectation and is also the eager messenger to eternity. The bard talks not just of battle, but also sings out the names of those who were in it. To be on the bard’s lips is not just an honour, but an extension beyond mortal life. It takes existence beyond time and space.

“What the young man sees in a mirror, the sage sees in a baked brick.”-Baber-Nama.

Most of the stories come to us, because a storyteller was present when it was happening. His presence probably made it happen.

However, the telling of the story creates its own area of circumstances leading to the main action. These circumstances are created by the teller and vary from one to the other. In the Film ‘Amar Singh Rathore’ (1957), he has taken a vow to slay Salavat Khan even before meeting him.

In ‘Nautanki’ and ‘Khyal’, he reacts to the imposition of the fine and he goes prepared for the deed. In the Punjabi Ballad, the verbal abuse provokes him into the action. Other sources claim, he was being wrongly blamed for the battle with Bikaner and not being allowed to put forward his case.

Whatever be the circumstances given in the telling, it is evident that he does not submit to humiliation. He does not allow himself to be treated as a lesser mortal than he believes himself to be. Coming from one who is in a subordinate position, this is a moment of rare and surprising assertion. It also questions the dealing of the subordinate. Who in himself carries substance. Appropriate handling of a subordinate is subject of all times.

Injury caused by verbal abuse is severe and perhaps that is why every religion talks of the value of proper speech. They say that such a wound rankles more than physical hurt. Sai Baba of Shirdi says that it is good to help someone, but even if you are unable to do so, do not slight the person. A certain level of dignity is to be maintained.

Some historians say that the use of the word, ‘nigger’ by the British in the Indian subcontinent stopped only after resistance. Many other words are being altered in our vocabulary- but only when targeted communities have started objecting to the objectionable.

Many women who work in households quit, because they find the use of inappropriate language unacceptable (even though they may be in dire need of a job). Language is power. The Puppeteers know it and face it each day; everywhere; every time.

Hemtukar Jha, in his book, ‘Man In Indian Tradition- Vidyapati’s discourse on Purusa ‘says- “Vidyapati, therefore perhaps applied his mind to understand the crisis in civil society. His perception of crisis was based on his observation (mentioned in his ‘Kirtilata’) that people had been deprived of what he considered most necessary for social existence. So what is the essence or essential pre-requisite of social existence?

In ‘Kirtilata’ Vidyapati raised this question and then presented his thoughtful proposition... “Jeevan maan saun (living with dignity).” Vidyapati has used the word ‘maan saun’ here whose closest equivalent in English is ‘dignity’ or ‘self- respect’ or ‘self -esteem’ in this context....He observed people being deprived of dignity and so for him, there was a state of acute crisis of human existence...In Vidyapati’s version, the wish of every man is to be confirmed with dignity by man. Recognition of human dignity, for him, it seems is an end in itself.

In the Western philosophical tradition, Hegel considered the 'desire to be recognized as a human being with dignity' as a driving force in history. Once recognized as a right by the state, human dignity was thought to be an end in itself for Hegel as well for whom, 'What truly satisfies human beings is not so much material prosperity as recognition of their status and dignity.' The issue of dignity, however, has perhaps remained in the very core of the psyche of rural people of India. F. G. Bailey, for instance, found the people of Bisipara (Orissa) engaged in quarrel "less about acquiring control over material resources than about human dignity."

Similarly, in Ekwari, (Bihar), the activities of the Naxalites were perceived by their supporters as a struggle for dignity. Vidyapati, however as early as the fifteenth century, held it as of fundamental value for man's social existence."

To stand up, then, is accepted almost as a stance of virtue. Whatever be the reason or ideology, this is the test of integrity. Like music- whether it be protest, prayer, wedding, procession- It is there all around-part of us. It may not necessarily lead to victory or success. But an act that heeds an inner calling and is a prelude to sacrifice, evokes wonder and is recognized.

Narsebaaz followed his conscience; Amar Singh, the honour code of the clan. They were the warrior-heroes willing and prepared for sacrifice. Victory is not always attainable. People understand.

Their own lives are full of hardship that they have not been able to surmount. They connect to a history, that is replete with battles and wars.

Rao Tula Ram of Rewari fought the British. Hasan Khan Mewati of Alwar fought with Babur. Every region proudly acknowledges their vanquished heroes who were not idle when challenges came knocking and rose to the occasion.

Small kingdoms and self- governed units often went to war against huge armies, well aware of the consequences, but they opted to stand by their land rather than be meekly co-opted. These battles were not against invaders alone, but also against other mighty kings who had territorial ambitions. Alha Udal, who fought for the Chandel rulers of Mahoba against Prithviraj Chauhan, are celebrated in folk lore.

The victors are admired for their capabilities and achievements; those who are not victorious, are admired for the choice they made by daring to confront a power, many times their size.

People sing of them and name their children after them, both as a tribute and as remembrance.

We honor those who are willing to be sacrificed for a cause, rejecting the joy and beauty of the living. The effort of such heroes leaves behind a legacy of envisaged possibilities, left unrealized... of the necessity of challenging that which is intimidating.

Narratives circulate through the hegemony of culture and often create blueprints for future narratives. Their power is both apparent and insidious, for they are assimilated over time and through generations.

The story-teller, who tells these stories is aware of their re-enforcing capacity and significance. They set patterns that manifest as tendencies; cultural characteristics. Life emulates stories and when life emulates stories, real people begin to play roles, often bigger than themselves. This becomes the purpose and path of life.

From, 'sarfaroshi ki tamanna' to 'mera rang de basanti chola' there is reckless daring behind the inevitability of sacrifice.

When it comes to a crossroad, the protagonist has to confront his image in the mirror of timelessness. One wrong step-and history will not forgive; the image will be erased from this mirror-board. His story would be cast into oblivion. A historical perspective guides the immediate action.

Lawyer Chitranjan Das, when defending Sh. Aurobindo Ghosh appealed to the judge to look at the issue beyond the trial He said-"This man stands not only before the bar in this Court but stands before the bar of the High Court of History and my appeal to you is this: That long after this controversy is hushed in silence, long after this turmoil, this agitation ceases, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity...Therefore I say that the man in his position is not only standing before the bar of this Court but before the bar of the High Court of History. The time has come for you, sir, to consider your judgment and for you, gentlemen, to consider your verdict."

He reminded the court that their judgement would be scrutinised by the future. When an action is seen in the landscape of history, the perception changes.

Such an awareness heightens the moral considerations and brings out what may seem to be the 'heroic'.

And legends are made out of such material.

Their stage is eternal.

This awareness of history persists in our society even today. People say, 'our actions belong to the future because it is the future that would judge them.' The future is the eye to which they perform.

The Famous Actor and Actor Teacher, Michael Chekhov advises the actors performing Tragedy, to generate for themselves, an illusionary presence shadowing them. In his Book, 'To the Actor', he says, 'All that an actor has to do when preparing for a Tragic part, is to imagine, all the time, that'(while performing on stage and through rehearsal) 'something' or 'somebody' is following him, driving his character to fulfil its tragic business and to speak its tragic lines.'

He also indicates that this, 'something' or 'somebody' as being much much more powerful than his character and even himself. It should be a 'kind of super-human presence.' The actor must imagine or rather sense this 'double ganger' or 'double walker'-this spectre, wraith or apparition- to act through the character which inspires it.

By doing so, the actor will soon make a pleasant discovery, that he does not need to exaggerate his movements, his business or his speech. Neither does he need to inflate himself psychologically by artificial means and not resort to empty pathos in order to achieve the greatness, the true dimensions of a tragic mood.

His 'Double ganger', being in possession of super-human powers and feelings will take care of that..... What kind of super- human presence the actor senses in a given circumstance must be left entirely to his creative imagination.'

What is said to the actor here, may well be an understanding of the predicament of the Tragic hero in real life! This presence -rather, even the awareness of this presence will not let the protagonist falter. It is the path maker. This presence marks and guides the destiny - that awaits the protagonist-and he arrives at it by his own action. An eye trails the Tragic hero.

In Medieval times, this would be the eye of the storyteller. That would also indicate the direction to be taken, for he is the one who would take the story forward; tell it to the world and future generations. The story must measure up to his expectations.

The Bard, who was both the conscience keeper and the witness who followed the protagonist like a shadow, in some ways, set the rules for the protagonist to follow. He was meant to be an 'impartial spectator', who maintained the socio-ethical order.

(The media, today, propels and decides many matters. The images too may be stored in long term data-servers. Memory channels have a lot more to handle now!)

Life, beyond the span of life lived, then becomes the impetus for action. And once a virtual existence is ensured, the termination of physical existence becomes an event in the long run of posterity.

It is worth observing, that in most versions, this aspect is included within the structure of the telling itself.

Both, Amar Singh and Narsebaaz perform their deeds for the eyes of the next generation. Amar Singh scolds Ram Singh, for not having retaliated when his reputation was being tarnished in court. Thus provoked by the latter's inaction, he immediately prepares for retaliation, almost making himself an example- showing to Ram Singh, the exemplary behaviour expected from a warrior of calibre.

Having mounted the horse, under such circumstances, there could be no turning back. However, he could be certain that this action would live on in the memory of Ram Singh. He had succeeded in passing on his legacy by preparing another warrior like himself.

Narsebaaz also takes his son into confidence, before embarking on the battle with the king's forces. It is his son who resolves his dilemma, favouring commitment to a friend over loyalty to a king.

The son grants him his virtual existence, both in Heaven (being in agreement with the father, implied willingness to perform the last rites) and earth, by carrying his story forward.

Ram Singh and Nabi Rasool are apparently, fictive characters, created by the Performance makers and Story tellers. Within the Narrative, they denote the receiving of instruction and in some versions, stand to gain by it.

At the outset, it seems, that the story of Amar Singh, revolves around the Kshatriya code of honour. However, other thematic concerns, that emerge out of the content add intricacy to the story.

The relationship of the regional entities with the central authority affects the functioning of that political entity. An Empire acquires its identity after consolidating its authority over the regions. But the scions and chieftains of these regions are part of the consolidating process. However, they do not constitute the 'State'. They have roles in administration (collecting revenue from their jagirs) but are also among the administered. The centre (Agra) rules the regions, and yet depends on them for support. That is why the nature of partnership is both delicate and tentative.

(At the time of writing this report, the political climate around is rife with discord stemming out of accusations of 'humiliation' by senior leaders of a political party).

In the time of Shah Jahan, these regional chieftains, Rajahs or Mansabdars also constituted the Army. According to the 'Shah Jahan nama', the Royal Army was in battle at various fronts at the same time.

Though the Empire was a powerful one, small rajas and tribal chieftains would often emerge as a challenge its authority. Required dues would not be paid- till the army reached their doorstep. Some of the challengers would prefer to perish- and they too are considered heroes in their areas- while others would submit or negotiate if they could muster the might for it.

The regional Rajahs and Mansabdars were aware of their contribution to the Empire and so could not accept to be classified as the, 'conquered' people. The action of Amar Singh is also considered to stand for the assertion of a regional entity against a condensed centralized authority.

(The Chhatri made by Jaswant Singh, in Agra, while being with the Empire, depicts the magnanimity of the Emperor as well as the power of regional assertion).

Narsebaaz Pathan also revolts against this authority. For the sake of a friend who had ceased to exist. For that friendship to which he had offered his life in case the need arose. And for the sake of a word given, he was prepared to give up his life.

Amar Singh was a warrior -but in the service of a superior. So was Narsebaaz. The relationship with the superior was a mercenary one, but the bond of the word is the binding of the conscience.

The written markings on the Register could not get Amar Singh to submit, whereas one oral phrase led Narsebaaz to fight the very army that he had served.

The spoken word mattered. As the word uttered by Salavat mattered to Amar Singh. It pierced his pride. And the word given by Narsebaaz was to save his afterlife. The word then was a value in itself-the value of breath-the breath that a drop of water restored in the desert.

Brotherhood, transcending religion is a poignant theme in the legend, that takes it deeper into the social fabric- much outside the realm of court and courtiers. It also reveals the insight and wisdom of the creators of the legend and subsequent story tellers. Except for the Punjabi ballad, this incident is very much part of the telling.

It balances the Rajput- Mughal conflict by dwelling on an alternate trajectory of relationships where Brotherhood is possible.

(It is true that Narsebaaz is referred to as 'chacha' (younger brother), but a fictive nephew that refers to Amar Singh also as 'chacha' seems to put the two in alignment.)

The two men embrace in the blazing heat and barren landscape of the desert. History moved far from Babur who said-

'For love of faith I became a wanderer of the desert.' And thanked the 'Almighty who has made me a Ghazi'.

The desert is such. Enmity does not last. Sand dunes appear to disappear. The landscape melts into a new scape. The sand marks on footprints forever.

This is Brotherhood is born- away from civilization that creates cloistered interiors (palaces, courts and homes).

The family is often termed as the sacred space that shields from the world. In this case, it is the treachery of a close relative that destroys the Rathore. This betrayal and its portrayal in the Narrative destroys the sanctity attached to one of the oldest and glorified institutions made by society.

The tellers expose not just the hypocrisy concealed in familial relationships, but also their fragility. All relationships seem notional, as significant as the significance given to them. Narsebaaz attaches his life to a word; the greed of Arjun Gaur has no qualms in trading a life, dismissing all rituals that make him and Amar Singh a family.

The legend has acquired multiple layers through its tellings, and they delve deep into many aspects of our living. Some of them are mirrored; some questioned and some percolate as indications.

Masculine Energy and the Patriarchal Frame

At length I spurred on my horse and advanced,
And driving the foe before me ascended the hill.
My men on seeing me advance, advanced also,
Leaving their terror behind.
Pushing forward, we quickly climbed the hill.
We went on without heeding their arrows,
Sometimes dismounting, sometimes on horseback.
First of all came the boldest warriors,
The enemy showered down arrows from above,
But marking our resolution gave way and fled.
We gained the top of hill and drove the Hazaras before us.
We skipped the heights and hollows like deer.
We cut off the heads of the slain like deer.
-Baber Nama.

This description of a battle by Baber (before he entered India) could well be- figuratively speaking- a portrayal of Amar Singh in action. He was a fearless warrior; famous for his fearlessness. His image resonates with the clang of iron- the armour-clad medieval knight on horse- back, dashing at his foes with a spear and shield in his hands. He is tall, square and muscular, often taking long strides, matching the swift movements of the weapon in hand. He seems an embodiment of the medieval masculine energy, thriving on danger and diving through battlefields.

War was never a bed of roses. Strong hearts and roaring spirits can soak it in, for-

“On day of combat, the dew of blood descended to the fishes and the dust rose above the moon”. (Baber)

In his Book, ‘Image of man: the creation of Modern Masculinity’ George L. Moose is “struck more by the continuities in normative masculinity than by its variations over place and time. The most important continuity was the nearly universal ‘aesthetic appeal’ of a particular visual image of masculinity in the west. Normative masculinity was condensed in and disseminated through an idealized representation of the masculine body.” (Journal of American History vol.84.issue1).

In medieval times, it was the warrior who was the archetype image of vigour.

The might of a warrior may dazzle, but it does not grant him access to power. His volcanic energies are kept in subservience by the socio-political hierarchy of the System. Such are the mechanics of control.

The very System that has requires and uses these energies to sustain itself, denies absolute power to them. Such absoluteness is feared, lest it tweaks the System itself.

The bearer who possesses immense strength, has to also bear his strength as weakness. For

a System draws its lines and sets up a frame- a code of behaviour that regulates its functioning. These could be the rules of Monarchy or the behaviour patterns of clan and kinship drawn by Patriarchy. And to such a system, Amar Singh remained, at most, an outsider. To the supreme patriarch, a subordinate. Powerful, to some extent, but less powerful than the most powerful.

In the film, 'Amar Singh Rathore' (1957) this is conveyed through the cinematography. In all Court sequences, (except one) the scene is set before the entry of Amar Singh. He enters into this space, occupied by others.

Patriarchy, is often seen as a rule of men. But it does not hold all men as equal nor does it distribute equal power to all of them. There is a hierarchy- a distinction between the Dominant men and the ones considered to be lesser in status. A minister is less than an emperor; a son less than his father. The lesser desire to become higher, but it may or may not be so.

The System has its set paradigms that test the person. It is not that Amar Singh did not believe in the System, for he constantly claimed allegiance to it. Perhaps it was the annihilation of the codified Frame that could not contain his volatile energies nor meet his expectations. Or that his interpretation of the code did not match with that held by his superiors.

Amar Singh was born to rule. He was the elder son of Gaj Singh, Maharaja of Jodhpur (Marwar). He grew up as a prince and was tutored in the skills considered essential for a ruler. However, he was brazen, outspoken and unconventional in interpreting the Kshatriya code and principles. The Authority Figure, who is both Father and King, favours his younger son, Jaswant Singh and chooses him as his successor. Amar Singh is exiled and he accepts the verdict of his father as an obedient son and does not rebel or retaliate.

He leaves for Garh Merta and from there onwards to Agra, where begins a new chapter in the service of the Emperor. An unequal contender among equals (other Rajput kings and princes), he has to prove his calibre at every step. And he does so. Step by step, he rises to the rank of Panch hazari. With his life at stake, he is part of several expeditions, including Kandahar.

Honouring his father's desire, the Emperor, Shah Jahan, confirms Jaswant Singh as the next king of Jodhpur. He gives Nagaur to Amar Singh as his riyasat. Amar Singh does not inherit Nagaur. He earns it. It is a promise of a new future.

However, while, he is in attendance at Agra, a battle takes place between Nagaur and Bikaner, wherein the latter is victorious. Amar Singh perceives this as a humiliation. He wants to settle the score, but is not granted permission by Salavat Khan to return to Nagaur. Nor does he get an audience with the Emperor. In some versions, the humiliation is ascribed to verbal abuse rendered by Salavat Khan.

A capable son is rejected by the father.
A capable warrior is slighted at court.
He is not king. But in the service of a king.

He is not as powerful as he seems.
But a mighty sea surges within.
That could rip apart a cliff.

To be in service of the Emperor was a difficult proposition for the Rajput rulers, but the only reasonable way to survive. The Emperor humoured them with gifts, saropas and jagirs. It probably assuaged the discomfort of their crisis ridden manliness, for to be in alliance with an acknowledged superior was to be the lesser one.

Being in service also meant to be in attendance at court. It also meant bowing to the king or doing the 'mujra' (act of obeisance).

(In the Puppet play, the word 'mujra' is included in the dialogue.)

Subjugation dents in ways, that often lie unperceived. Because, as it becomes the norm, acceptance sets in. The society outside the court has its way of handling turmoil.

Two hundred and fifty years before Amar Singh, Vidyapati, gaging the social distress wrote 'Paurush Pariksha' in an attempt to re-state the nature of manliness. Hemtugar Jha says, 'His concern, therefore was how to change that crisis ridden society. He perhaps, thought that man himself could ensure acquisition of his dignity.

But such a man had to be different from one who merely looks like man; he had to be endowed with manliness (paurasha).' Vidyapati developed his ideas and presented them in the book that, 'also contains stories of literary value having the same style of narrative as one finds in the 'Panchtantra,' which Sudipta Kaviraj characterizes as manifesting orality of Indian culture.

This culture, according to kaviraj, 'knows writing, but mistrusts it' and is based on, 'a structure of ideas enriched, perfected, economized and sharpened by an 'impersonal tradition'. Vidyapati draws from this tradition and writes as he says in the beginning, for 'the moral instruction of boys of immature understanding' among others.

Surprisingly, one of the attributes related to male energy is celibacy. This can be seen in the context of many Folk Legends of Rajasthan. Celibacy is both a sacrifice and denotes sublimation of concentration on a higher goal. In the film, 'Amar Singh Rathore' the marriage between Hadi Rani and Amar Singh remains unconsummated. The Khayal performance also indicates the same.

He is known to be a worldly man, but in the film, Hadi Rani draws a line. Then the act of dealing with Salavat Khan is a way to have his manhood acknowledged by his beloved and to prove himself worthy of her love.

In the Khayal it is his own fight to be acknowledged as equal in the world of men. His wife wants him to stay with her, but he can-not. As his hour of test draws near, he is a changed man, possessed of super-human energies. This enhances his stature and makes him extraordinary. In other narratives, conjugal happiness seems to prevail.

The Bhakti poets and saints spoke of the need to reduce attention to worldliness. One of them, who was of Rajput descent rejected the Patriarchal framework and made Bhakti her way.

Mirabai was born in Merta and married to the royal family of Chittor. She was the daughter-in-law of Rana Sangha and paternal aunt of Rana Pratap. She refused to commit Sati at the appropriate time. When the atmosphere grew hostile, she moved out and became a wanderer, singing the Bhajans of joy, peace and love. She made a conscious choice and opted out of the System. Bhakti was her creed, path and protest.

When poetry is prayer and protest, the accompanying dance is the feminine energy seeking the realization of its own potential.

Amar Singh too is disquiet within. He quarrels with the System; fights with it, but does not reject it or move away or discard its principles. He remains in constant strife with the Patriarch or an authority figure close to the Patriarch.

Mirabai too had to face humiliation. But she did not let it affect her. Amar Singh is affected by it- as a kshatriya is taught to be. And he learnt it well.

He was brought up to be a ruler, but he is a subordinate. He was taught that to honour, honour was honourable. That to fight for honour is honourable. To evade is dis-honourable. These are the values of Patriarchy that he had internalized. And to honour them, to honour himself, he must collide with the very System that generated the value. And when he does so, he becomes the antithetical epitome of the system he has imbibed. The physical countenance is still unchanged, but he is out of the System. And is killed.

'With fame even if I die, I am contented
Let fame be mine, since my body is Death's'
(Baber writes the dream of all warriors).
Historically, the story ends here.
The Legend pursues it further.

As Amar Singh prepares for further combat, Gaur flatters him into believing that the Emperor wants reconciliation. Hadi Rani also compels him accompany his brother-in-law to the Court. Amar Singh gives his word in agreement. Then Arjun Gaur insists that he be without weapons. And as he disarms, Amar Singh realizes he is trapped. The armour is his skin.....

Disarming a warrior means to make him vulnerable. It also means the taking away of his identity so far recognized by the System. With this act, his rejection by the System is complete.

The armour that is almost a part of him is separated from him. It is as if he is being emasculated.

His wife passes a dagger to him that has to be concealed. Very much unlike a warrior. Having once given his word, he follows Arjun Gaur and does not retrace his steps.

Shorn of his glory, the fall of Tragic Hero is established.

The lion is led by the jackal.

The lion has been rendered toothless and is without claws. He walks into the trap.

As he has severed links with the King, he will not lower his head (act of bowing in mujra) even in the direction of the king. The principles he observes, work against him.

And thus he is slain-almost a victim of Patriarchy. As he hits at Gaur, the warrior misses the mark! Yet hits the nose and leaves a trace of his former self in a pillar stone.

Amar Singh seems strong and invincible, a symbol of medieval feudalism. But he was not completely in the service of the system, but in constant battle with it. He was constantly finding his space within the set frame and thus unsettling it. He remained, till the end, a warrior, in tussle with the patriarch.

Amar Singh Rathore: When the Hero Is Not the Victor

Written history, rather official history is the privilege of the few; the rulers or the victors. But the ruled who often do not win also have a way to remember those who are dear to them and daring for them. There lives in their heart a Robin Hood; Sultana Daku; Amar Singh Rathor; Mangal Pandey...an endless list of names; people who seem ordinary, suddenly do something extra-ordinary; their daring startles the complacency of a system and even if they do not see victory, they give the world something to remember.

They are not perfect; have many faults, but that does not reduce the significance of their act-often a single act-bigger than the person. His quality may be his undoing. Like Amar Singh, who is naive and trusting, cheated by someone close. As was Siraj-ud-dulah; and many more. And also something similar each one has in personal memory. These characters are remembered not just with awe and admiration, but also fondness. They may be rude, clumsy, boastful; and yet beyond!

The little that can be seen of Amar Singh, makes him appear as a complex character. He is headstrong and so is banished? An Ivanhoe, who loses favour with the father (though not for so clear a reason as the Scottish hero) and so must bear the taboo. A son not valued by the father generally does not gain esteem and engages with the world with a disadvantage. Amar Singh does not fight with Jodhpur or his younger brother. This is unlike the relationship between Prithviraj Chauhan and Jayachand, where the father's preference for the latter, led to an animosity, that caused much warfare. As some scholars trace the lineage of Rathores to Kannauj. Amar Singh does not replay the traits of his ancestors. He just does not look back. In fact, by losing the title of Maharaja, he has to fend like a commoner-and outside the area of his birth. With the skill of the sword and the sword by his girdle, he seeks employment, and makes no attempt to galvanise support to gain back his deprived ownership. He is a warrior, but in the service of the emperor He is not afraid of battle but does not fight for himself. This is a peculiar trait. Not uncommon. It is the fortitude that towers above the humiliation He

slashes one kind of selfhood, in this case, the one derived from birth, to reinvent another.

This man, who has been turbaned in black, seems to possess a strange power. And yet he is an employee, has friends, is quarrelsome and vulnerable. He wins many battles, but in his absence Nagaur loses to Bikaner this is a defeat he cannot contend with; a battle, he must reopen. He is warm to people, but also rude and quarrelsome. He loses a friend when the latter refuses to tend to the sheep he is fond of. One version of the tale has him winning a friend by sharing the last glass of water that he had, when crossing the desert.

In short, he is very real and identifiable, not the neat profiled hero that needs a Vidushak to be understood by the masses. The greatness associated with a knight on a mission like King Arthur does not define him. Amar seems the antithesis of so many such acclaimed or delineated heroes—a character that might later develop in narratives as the anti-hero. He does cause an upheaval. But he is not the victor. He does not come riding in triumph, heralding a new beginning or pronouncing the end of an opponent's rule.

He is not an ideal or a success a culture could boast of or point out as a symbol of perfection or immaculate greatness.

This legend of Amar Singh is such that the hero is not the victor. It sounds strange, but plausible. A culture born out of the insecurities of small holdings and tiny kingdoms constantly at war with each other, cannot belittle the readiness for combat even when, and perhaps specially, when the consequences are known beforehand. The hero, then is the one who is ready for the sacrifice. To be sacrificed. Victory is elusive, and the power of the victor wields history, glorified by virtue and righteousness. The others need to weave their narratives and carry them. For them more than victory, the combat is the moment of selfhood, of assertion of remembrance. The celebration is of the Daring.

“Sar Kata Sakte Hain, Par Sar Jhuka Sakte Nahin”. Each time this comes to the lips of anyone there is an Amar Singh lurking somewhere. This line can be interpreted in a thousand ways and so can the sudden startling action of Amar Singh. Every village treasures its heroes; some have songs too. (Much later, 1857, threw up people, men and women who fought and lost. They were not victors. Yet they remain heroes). This is not just about foreign invasion, but incessant warfare that was a way of life. The legend of Ala-Udal is the story of two brothers committed to the kingdom of Mahoba, of Bundelkhand. Udal dies in battle against Prithviraj Chauhan and Ala, when close to victory renounces it.

Yes, Folklore has carried forth narratives of those who were not victors. Is it to keep up their memory or because this was closer to people's own experience?

As the cultural landscape widens, images of the volatile Amar Singh, seem like the whirling of a dust storm, that rise with a gusto, envelop many and then are traceless—for to even look for its direction is to be naive. The disquiet needs to be absorbed to settle. Yet performers have tried to hold this energy on stage, not binding it, but letting it flow, evoking the emotions through full throated, wholehearted singing and the throbbing of the drums

CHAPTER 5: THE LEGEND FROM PUNJAB- AN ORAL NARRATIVE

The story of Amar Singh has travelled to many places and in different forms and colours. K.C.Temple in his book, "Legends of the Punjab" has a version that has the following title-

"Amar Singh of Garh Merta"

Merta? Not Nagaur? Not Jodhpur?

The title holds attention. Not because it is wrong, But because it is correct somewhere. When, banished from Jodhpur, Amar Singh came to Merta via and stayed with for several months. It is from here that he began his second journey into the world. According to some sources, any communication with the family was through the Merta chieftain, Raj Singhji Kumpavat.

It further says-

"As Told by a Bard from the Kapurthala State." The editor's introductory remark says-

"(the following is the bardic version of a startling incident at the court of the Emperor Shahjahan, which once created an immense sensation.)

"Startling" aptly describes the nature of the event. It is the reason for remembrance. It is also, as the editor says, the sensation in the memory- in the act of evoking the memory.

The narrative is like a ballad, racy and intense, rich in colour and effused with the energy of the characters. Hadia or Hadi Rani is very close to the portrayal as it emerges in the initial scene of the Nautanki. The language of the bard is earthy and poetic; its simplicity is charged with directness; mincing neither words nor thoughts. The Bard gives a preface in prose and he mentions the fine of seven lakhs in this as is the case in the Nautanki text. (However the leave for marriage is not mentioned. In this narrative Hadia and Amar Singh seem married for long and warmly settled and comfortable with each other.)

The preface says- "Shahjahan Badshah se ahitkaron ne chughali khai ke," Raja Amar Singh muddat se apke salaam ko nahin aaya jis pe Shahjahan ne hukum diya ke "sat lakh ke dastak jave."

{People who did not wish Amar Singh well complained of his absence; consequently, the emperor announced an imposition of a fine a fine of seven lakhs}

When Amar Singh gets to know of this, he asks his wife for his weapons so he could go to court.

"Rani, mera tarkash la de, zarri da, gende di dhar."

She replies-

“Kaun wakt darbar da? Gai adhi raat.
Sheesh bharun sharab da, piala mera hath.
Bhar bhar piala piwandi karti mushtak
Pe le Raja Amar Singh, na ho udas.
Rang mahilon sej bicchawndi kar le do baat”

{“This is no time to go to court? Its past midnight!
Let me fill the goblet with wine
Sip it from my hand and you will be fine
Have it, raja, Amar Singh, and be not sad
In the mansions, I lay the bedspread, for you to speak your heart”}

As Amar Singh cannot tune into her, she curses her luck for the husband he is.

She says-

Mar jaa meri mata jinhen Hadi jai!
Mar jaan tai aur chachi jinhen god khilai!

{Die my mother who gave birth to Hadi!
Die my aunts in whose lap I grew up!}

The anguish of these lines turns to a taunt when she says-

Mar jave nai aur brahmin jine ne kari sagai
Main beti Rajput di chakar gal lai!

{May the barber brahmin die who got me engaged-
me a daughter of a Rajput married to a man in service!}

She also offers her jewellery, “Enough to keep them well for four months”. But the open and warm hearted Hadia cannot keep Amar Singh back and he rides away on his horse.

(In this version, he does not go empty handed, but carries some mohurs for the emperor).

At the court Shahjahan asks Salavat khan to keep him at bay. Salavat Khan does so and taunts Amar Singh by saying-
Teri baat dige Darbar mein;
main khara sidhare-

{Your standing in court has fallen}

Amar Singh is not rebuffed. Says-

“Amar Singh digaye na dige; jaise parbat bhari.”

{“Even when pushed, Amar Singh does not fall

Huge and heavy he is like a mountain!”}

Salavat Khan is more insulting and says with disdain- “Hatke khara ganwarriar!” and “Kya kare ganwaar!”

{Stay away boor!}

This is what Amar Singh is unable to swallow-

“Ganwaar kahe se khijta bharta hankare

Aj keha ganwariar, kal dega gari

Parson uun banh pakarke kadh de kachahari baahar!”

{Today you call me boor;

tomorrow you shall abuse and day after hold my arm and throw me out of court!}

The Bard says-Jabbel kadhi misri nikali do dhari Mare Salabat Khan di ja khili pari

Lagi mard de hath na rahi voh dhari

{At this point he takes out his double-edged sword and tears through Salabat Khan.}

“Ehle apne sat lakh Salabat piare!”

{Here take your seven lakhs Salabat dear!}

Kingsmen look on and say-

“Bhala kiya Amar Singh Salabat maare!”

{Well done Amar Singh-that you’ve done away with Salabat!}

This is the only Narrative in which Amar Singh is openly praised by the courtiers for his deed. (This could also indicate that they too were troubled by Salavat Khan.)

In all other Narratives, the courtiers are too shocked to react.

However Shahjahan asks the nobles not to let Amar Singh escape and leaves. Amar Singh moves to Shahjahan-

“Dilli de Badshah hun darwaza kyun bhere?”

{Why does the king of Delhi now shut his door?}

He had come in good faith.

(As no date for the origin of the Bard’s version is given, this reference of Dilli instead of Agra, indicates the existence of the Delhi Fort.)

The nobles surround him and the might of their swords is tested. The Bard mentions Kishan Das (also mentioned in Khayal and Puppetry). He, along with many others, stood with Amar Singh in that fight that day and lost.

Ram Singh is waiting outside and when he gets the news he is dejected-
“Mere dhari rahin do palke, ghar jao kahar:
Apne mahalon so raho, jis se piari nar. Mere dhore woh rahe bandhe talwar.”

{“The two palanquins stand in vain; go home bearers:
Go home those who have dear wives;
Come with me, those who are bound to the sword.”}

And with that they attacked the fort, “Darwaze tore kile de kuhare naal”. And breaking down the gate he entered with his band of warriors; swords clanged and blood flowed like the water of the Ganges that coloured their robes. In the frenzied fight Ram Singh emerged victorious, though with a band reduced by half.

At home, Hadia eagerly awaits her warrior- “Meri bandi daur; mahilon sej bichha de, thori post ghol.

Age Raja Amar Singh Rathor!”

{}“Run my maid, go unfold the bedspread
Be ready with opium as here he comes the raja himself!”}

Unche charke dekhdi bandi nadan.

{She climbs up to look down}

The maid climbs up, but can see no “Doman di joran na lal rabab-khali tarkash bajdi, dal ghende dhal.” (No drums nor red lutes; the quiver rattles empty and the yellow shield with crowd)

“Sab chizan dikhlai dindi hain, magar Raja nahin dikhda.”

{I see all things, but do not see the Raja}

The Rani, however, insists, “Mera Raja bara bahadur hai!”

{My man is very brave!}

What love and pride and hope in this articulation at this desperate moment!

When she learns the truth, she asks the maid to remove her “singar” and fears that-

“Badshah mainu pakar ke din se be-dn karega, aur chakki piswakar dand dilwa dega.Us bipta se bihtar hai ke ap hi mar jaun.”

{The king will drag me and despoil me of my faith and set me to grind grain. Better to die by oneself than such an existence!}

And taking a sword she struck her neck. There is no reference to becoming sati or any such ritual.

When the king heard this, he was remorseful and gave the land of Amar Singh to his men.

The narrative of the Bard is swift and short almost as quick as this incident that happens in a flicker. It is livid with emotion and vivid with the visuals. Words gush out, like the blood gushing like the fountain in the tale. There is no respite and when Hadia says, "Run my maid, spread the bed," the eagerness of life springs forth-but in vain; it is through the urgency of activity, we feel the inactivity that has already set in. The rapidity of the piece prevents it from becoming sentimental, but when the maid says, "no drums nor lutes; I see all things, but do not see the raja, the Bard tells us of life becoming non-life.

CHAPTER 6: AMAR SINGH RATHORE IN NAUTANKI

A Brief Note on Nautanki

Imitation, leading to performance, has been part of community life in all cultures. It is generally accepted that performances of this nature, set on small platforms were part of village life. Storytelling, acting, singing and dancing brought various talents together. Very often, these enactments incorporated stories from the Ramayana and Raslila along with other popular tales. Around the beginning of the nineteenth century, (1815) some of these started coming out as texts and were popularly known as, 'Swang'. It gained popularity in a large area that covered parts of Haryana, U. P. Uttarakhand and Rajasthan as well. It gained popularity in places like Amroha, Ambala, Hathras, Mathura, Awadh, Kanpur, Cama. In some places it led to, 'San-geet', while in and around Agra it led to the, 'Bhagat' tradition. A community activity moved on to a larger stage by the middle of the nineteenth century, several Akharas started emerging, that created performances and a system of performance vocabulary and grammar. These became Training centres for practitioners that accorded definite shape to the elements of performance and precision to the style, while building in the necessary discipline required for it. 'Inderman' akhara of the Hathras gained prominence with several successful performances

Playwright Actor Director, Shri Natharam Gaur was connected with this akhara. He was instrumental in transforming and defining the Nautanki into a distinctive style. His writing blended poetry with drama and gained popularity in the region. Professional troupes were established and many of them took on the shape of travelling companies. With several active akharas contributing to this performance culture, it attracted writers, actors, musicians and set makers.

Motivated by the success of these groups, Bandi Khalifa and other players established the Nautanki in Kanpur in 1910, which evolved its own parameters of performance. The companies of Shrikrishna Pehalwan and Trimohanlal grew to be popular. The Parsi Theatre companies that performed in the region influenced some of the Nautanki groups, whose performances incorporated spectacular elements and expensive stage settings. Posters, publicity and ticket sale also became part of the performance culture. The printing press brought many of the Nautanki scripts into circulation, which till a few years ago, were quite popular. Many actors, however, remember most of the texts they have performed and recall them easily often humming the words. Music maintains the base of the san-geet as the printed text is called.

There is a view that the success of a play called, 'Shehzadi Nautanki' led to a shift in the name. Others say, it is so called, because of the Nav - rasas that are engaged. However, Sushil Kumar Shukla, in his article, 'Avadhi Natya Parampara' ('Rangapat', edited by Abha Gupta Thakur) # talks of the Nautanki of Avadh, in which nine conch shaped containers of baked clay, covered by a leather sheet stitched on to each of them and warmed by fire, formed part of the music system along with the dholak and harmonium. At the right time, all nine would be spurred into rhythm, springing much zest and mirth. The presentation at that time was informal, with

songs and enactment, and interventions by the comedian and the narrator. The ploughs would be turned upside down and mashals or Petromaxes hooked onto them. Crowns and ornaments were purchased, while sarees were given by households.

Murdasinghi clay and tinsel were used for make-up. The actors- singers-dancers filled the night with action and entertainment, the men playing the female parts as well. Towards dawn, they were fed with great care.

Gulab Bai, was the first woman performer on the Nautanki stage and was soon followed by many others, including Kamlesh Lata and Krishnaji. Many of them also formed their companies.

The language of the Nautanki text is simple, but it is cast in a mould that is poetic and phrased to incorporate intent and thought. It is conversation that is meant to flow through the music as actors play the scenes on stage. The musical tone of the actor's voice lifts the words to enhance their meaning or make them an extension of emotion. The acting is inherently placed within the scope of the music. So it is not only about singing, but about interpreting the text through it and projecting the drama. This is what makes the relationship with music as complex as it is with the word. The entire text is set to metre and each word is carefully placed to suit the intent. 'Behre-tabeel', 'choubola', 'doha', 'khamsa' ded tukki'etc are used according to codified parameters and the situation. Diction and emphasis are laid out within this framework and give a base to the actor's modulation. An actor may not read the line, but can grasp the intent by listening and tuning in to the music. Often the tune-word-intent-emotion form a composite flow for the actor. A recollection would probably be inclusive of all the elements.

Since Nautanki is considered to be 'Folk Drama', it is often misconstrued that it is based on Folk music. Mohan Upreti, in his article on, 'Nautanki' has tried to correct this assumption by pointing out, that, the music of Nautanki is distinct from the Folk and it takes its form from the regional variations of Indian classical music. The singing too seems inclined towards the classical, because it does not allow for the flexibility of folk singing. Music, here, has acquired its Form according to the needs of the stage. The music is composed specifically for the stage, within the frame of the Narrative. It is not a show of songs. Rather, the singing is the carrier of the performance sequences as well as the Rasa and emotion.

Most of the Nautanki dramas, deal with Conflict. The right and wrong are debated, morals and choices are analysed, social values and personal needs are weighed against each other. It is significant that the tone of conflict is set by the music. The tone is further amplified, when the Nakkara, picks it up, and repeats it almost like an ongoing dialogue cycle in the mind.

The canvas of the Nautanki stage, brings in a range of characters. Satya Harishchandra and Puran Bhagat are capable of sacrifice. Amar Singh may not be a victor, but is a hero of a successful play. Sultana Daku, too has been a popular character. Women characters like Taramati, Luna, Laila, Padmavati, Hadi Rani, Manjari have been presented. Some of them have been judged by conventional standards, but they have received attention. As, conflict is central to the plot, there is scope for alternate viewpoints to be established.

As Nautanki flourished, it also kept on breaking boundaries. The Kanpur style, affected by the industrial town, gave the Form a different pace and sharpness. The music straightened and visual elements were incorporated. The constant ability of the practitioners to combine innovativeness with commercial viability kept up its popularity with different audiences.

However, in the past few years, some groups have reduced the significance of the Narrative, thereby creating a performance stage, that may entertain, but not quite in the way of the Nautanki. At the same time there are areas where the tradition continues to be popular, drawing on the talent of its artists.

'Amar Singh Rathore' in Performance

The performance of 'Amar Singh Rathore' continues to delight audiences. Even, if it is an edited version or one that has been hastily put together, the performance manages to reach out to the audience. The music, that is set in a tradition, retains the original tunes, and most of the musicians are adept at handling the flow and transitions. This binds the performance and sustains its pace. Then the plot takes over as the scenes unfold.

Senior actors assemble a version of the show as they rehearse and revise the musical lines. They have assimilated the text and each other's performances so well, that they edit and improvise as the show runs. New Nautanki groups also put up this performance. Actors often, prepare this role by practising the music on their own and then checking it with a senior. And probably, many women actors of Nautanki would love to play Hadi Rani, because it has multiple dimensions and demands a range of expression.

The performance, often seems to rest on the scene between Amar Singh and Hadi Rani, as she tries to prevent him from going to the Court at midnight. The exchange between the two sparkles with love, desperation, vulnerability, mockery and possessiveness, creating performance challenges for the two actors. As they receive and respond, while, keeping their characters stable, the actors bring in various colours. They humour each other, they plead and they try to win the situation. The characterization makes them match one another. And till this interaction lasts, the tense reality of the Court seems to pale away.

The impact of this sequence can be felt even as the play moves forward and despondency begins to descend. Taking on a social role, Hadi Rani tries and hopes to get Arjun Gaur on her husband's side, so he can be saved. In this, she loses the game and knows it.

The manipulation by Arjun Gaur also draws on the skills of the actor, for the sequence can be handled in many ways. Some actors hide the cunning intent, while many overstate it. The actor playing Amar Singh has to balance his stance accordingly and unless it has been rehearsed, an awkwardness comes in.

What is evident, is the working of the actors and their interplay, largely builds up the performance and measures its success. Many actors feel that the text ought to remain the guiding factor. But many young actors get to know the text by hearing others perform it. Seniors remember the version they have performed. The text in itself, may be in constant

reference and yet be unavailable. So actors may often impersonate other actors whom they have watched and admired, creating a style of playing a particular role. At times, the attention and applause received by a gesture can become a regular feature of the performance.

With the dwindling of the akharas, the space for rehearsal and practice has been reduced. New upcoming groups are trying to maintain a system of practice and that does reflect in their work.

However, most groups are no longer as big and cohesive as they used to be. The battle scenes, then, often become more illustrative in nature. The Nautanki Form thrives on the solo voice of the actor. Repetition by chorus or group singing is generally not seen. The actor performs a character who is portrayed with the vocabulary of music. The battle scenes, on the other hand, demand physical co-ordination as a group exercise and because of certain limitations, it may not always work out.

Natharam Gaur, consciously, became historian, to bring in the contribution of certain people on the village stage. It was important for him to make it part of the 'whole' even if it meant altering the whole. He knew that he was taking this information to new audiences, outside the geographical space of Amar Singh. He saw a relevance in it.

With time, this may have shifted. Or, it could be, that, scenes lacking performance, could be seen as being less important in a performance centric approach. They could over a time be seen as being dispensable. Because, where the story of the community is known, the audience would have a different relationship with the recollection. Where it may not be known, it is the drama that matters. And with the drama, the reach of the performance. The inevitable presence of the audience can also have an altering context. The dispensing temperament can then trigger in a host of performance variables. It can modify the conclusive hinge of the drama and yet not be devoid of meaning. As the Nautanki practitioner well knows.

Looking at the Nautanki Text

Amar Singh Rathore is a much-performed piece and it would not be possible to count the number of times it has been played. Natha Ram Gaur, the playwright, has created a text that has become part of folklore, and the couplets are passed on as if they were always part of an oral tradition and continue to be so.

While beginning the work on this project, it was necessary to go through the text. Asking leading performers of Nautanki for a copy, did not yield one, as they did not possess any. This was surprising, as this is an ongoing show. But they know the text; the lines, the musical score, the drama. They remember it all. And it is by remembering the listening of others that they learnt it! The memory of a performance instils the performance in them so as to enable them to perform. They extend what inspired them and pulled them into performing. At the basis could be their perception, and in the extension could be their own skill and talent.

However, Shri Bhagwan Das Morwal very generously gave me his copy. His novel "Sur Banjaran" based on the life of a Nautanki performer, traces the journey of Nautanki through

various phases of the past several decades. It also mentions several performances of, "Amar Singh Rathore, "which makes the popularity of this Nautanki more than evident.

Amar Singh Rathore Artharth (meaning) "Banka Beer (part-1)" is widely performed and popular as a performance. It is acclaimed for its poetry as also for the performative challenges it renders. It is also based broadly on well-known elements of the legend and thus the narrative draws on substance which gives it inherent strength and structural cohesiveness.

Text Analysis of the Nautanki "Amar Singh Rathore"

One of the noticeable features of this Nautanki script is, that there are no acts or scene divisions. The Nautanki reads in a seamless flow of narrative performance, interspersed with the active involvement of the Narrator; Kavi as he is referred to, implying that he is more than the conventional Ranga or sutradhar. Kavi or poet, suggests the writer himself and his unique voice and presence. The Kavi connects the units and as this is frequent, it seems that he is throughout on stage, for often he speaks (sings) even in between the characters' interaction and execution of action. He is witness and more than witness, because he consciously sets the tonality of performance, supportive for the actor and indicative for the audience as well. He not only narrates, but also comments on what is happening echoes some of the phrases used by the characters and contributes to the emotion besides setting a perspective with which the narrative is to be seen. Such emphasis on the "Telling" of the story is rare and has been set forth with intent.

1. The opening is the invocation to the deities.

This is followed by an added invocation steeped in gratitude for Queen Elizabeth and seeking blessings for her and her rule.

The lines are-

Elizabeth Dvitiye (second) empress, good gracious strong.
Prayer this ours is, may you live long long.

Chaubola-May you live long long, rule beneficent continue
Fortunate we are all, having queen good like you
Under English sovereigns we received blessings new new
All of them had done good to us in their view.

Couplet-Your gracious majesty of the same dynasty your nature too kind.
For long rule of yours sincerely we pray combined.

It is interesting to note how in a traditional metre, another language is framed. Apart from this, one wonders at this dedication and its purpose. Queen Elizabeth 2. ascended the throne of England in 1952, by which India had gained Independence and ceased to be a colony-unless the poet had the Commonwealth in view. Had Elizabeth 2. not been specified one could have

assumed that Elizabeth 1. was being alluded to, although her reign ended in 1603, almost 25 years before Shahjahan ascended his. Could it be that the writer was trying to make the audience curious as to why a monarch ought to be blessed?

But why the British monarch? Was it to trace a thread of foreign rule that could connect back to Shah Jahan? There is also a view, that this was verse was meant for Queen Victoria and the purpose was to flatter the British rule in India.

However, it is an innovative device that bridges historical space taking the audience from the present to a recent and somewhat familiar past to back into centuries beyond.

Kavi gives a brief background of Amar Singh who is a sipahsalar, stationed at Agra, whilst his brother, Jaswant Sigh looks after the affairs at Nagaur. The text then moves straight into the seed moment from which the conflict is to take off. In Shah Jahan's court, Amar requests for leave of absence as he has to bring his bride from Bundi. The emperor is reluctant, because exigencies arise in the empire for which Amar Singh may be required, but accepts his 'arzi' and permits seven days leave.

The dramatic craft of the writing lies in keeping its focus on the central thread, viz, the happenings at the Agra court. It overlooks the biographical detail of Amar Singh's banishment from Jodhpur and losing his kingdom to Jaswant Singh.

There is also no mention of the fact, that Bundi had refused a matrimonial alliance with Akbar and that Shah Jahan as Khurram had sought shelter there when he was out of favour with Jahangir and that he had been welcomed warmly.

(Bundi along with Kota, constituted the Hada territory, which was also the most fertile region in the desert land and it is from the land that that the identity of Hadi Rani is carved and she is addressed as such.)

Also, Salavat Khan is not a participant in this conversation, implying Amar Singh's closeness with the emperor and that he had the status to over- rule the concerned officer.

History merely states that Amar Singh was an absentee from court, ie, not present in the set tent outside the Fort, as was the required norm and practice in those days.

(some say it was because of a hunting expedition)

That the "gauna" was the reason, is part of folk and oral tradition.

It may be interesting to mention here, that Rani Laxmijiji Chudawat of Deogarh writing in contemporary times states that the journey from Deogarh to Chittor, which is barely 200km would (with elephants, camels and horses) take 4-5 days. The seven day leave period to cover the distance from Agra to Bundi and back, is realistically very demanding.

However, seven has a reverberation in folk narration and here denotes a fixed time period, not indefinite.

2. The next sequence takes a leap into the barren desert, widespread and waterless-the marusthal, or the space of the dead (maru+sthal) Here, Narshebaaz Pathan is choking with thirst and happens to meet Amar Singh returning with his newly wed wife. Amar Singh, too has a long way to go, but shares a bowl (katori) of water with him. Deeply touched, the Pathan pledges his friendship and life to Amar Singh, for this bowl of water has saved his. Moved, by this expression of gratitude, Amar Singh also seals their friendship by the customary exchange of turbans.

This sequence at one level carries within it the earthiness of existence and at another transcends the story as it shifts into the lifeless bleached desert landscape, devoid of colour and crowd-a stark surface -three strangers and thirst that binds them. Thirst in the arid desert means desperation. But the man does not snatch the water; he asks for it and Amar Singh also shares it; he does not give him all for that would make him a daani. Here, they remain equal in togetherness and dignity. In this deserted space, trust is born; friendship blossoms and commitment for life is ritualised.

It goes to the playwright's credit that he has created this moment in the entirety of starkness. There are no accompanying servants, maids, singers or palanquin carriers accompanying the bride and bridegroom. All three characters are shorn of glitter and exist as human beings with basic needs like water. It is also poignant that Amar Singh does not enquire about the Pathan's credentials before sharing the water-it is done in the spirit of open brotherhood.

Many writers have talked of the Pathans as being the remnants of soldiers left from Sher Shah Suri's army when he encroached into the desert. His comment that," for a handful of sand, I would have lost a kingdom," is often quoted even in conversations The Pathans in the area, were considered to be people who survived by taking away cattle.

In the popular Folk narratives of both Pabuji and Tejaji, the central protagonists confront the Pathans and retrieve the cattle, though losing their lives in the process. This animosity Towards the Pathan is absent in the sequence between Amar Singh and Narashhawaz. Amar Singh does not ask him -who are you-what are you doing here-how did you get here etc. A thirsty man is a thirsty man. He gets what he needs. No questions asked. Away, from the world, something quiet and beautiful transpires like an oasis unlike the intrigue of the court and the fury of the battle which the audience is about to encounter.

This is a great moment in folklore, because that is where it comes from. Khayal and Kathputli narratives also have a similar sequence, though the placing in those Forms is different. Therefore, this construct of the folk mind is very special, because it transcends its own narratives. In an unassuming way, it strikes a different chord, as the sand obliterates the markings on its surface. For, this scene, in the middle of nowhere could not be anywhere else.

3. Kavi tells us that Amar Singh moves to Agra to be with his wife, while he is missed in the court. In the following unit, Salavat (mentioned mostly as Salabat in other books) Khan, the Mir Bakshi or the Controller of Military Accounts takes up the issue of Amar Singh's absence with the emperor who initially is dismissive, then reasons with the officer, that Amar Singh being a courageous warrior is an indispensable asset and must be only gently reprimanded, for a lion must get the due he deserves. Salavat Khan insists on the imposition of fine, a lakh

for a day, no less. The king is aware, that Amar Singh gets easily offended and a “mard’ (male) of his stature must be humoured.. Salavat mocks at these reasons for preferential treatment as if only a Rajput could possess these qualities and not the others. Salavat Khan’s malice is quite evident, his tone derogatory of Amar Singh and his play of arguments manipulates the emperor who then agrees with him and Ram Singh, who is the nephew of Amar Singh is called to convey this order to the latter, viz, to immediately present himself with the fine of seven lakhs, as he has overstayed his leave by a week.

This unit is also an interesting debate between the emperor’s need for the support of the Rajputs and the Mir Bakshi’s insistence on the rule book.

4. Amar Singh lies alone when Ram Singh enters and explains the royal ultimatum. Amar Singh feels insulted and wishes that Ram Singh had behaved as a lion and avenged this insult, while Ram Singh says that he was quiet for the sake of his uncle and that he is ready to go back and challenge with the sword. However, Amar Singh chooses that role for himself. He asks for his armour, horse and gets ready to leave, when Hadi Rani enters and tries to stop him, “Go if you must, but wait till it is morning.”

It is indeed ironical, that a popular character like her has no personal name and is known by the Hada kingdom that was her father’s. She tries to seduce him, take him to the bed that awaits their mutual pleasure and offers him her necklace worth nine lakhs and more. But for Amar Singh, it is not a matter of money, but of the humiliation that this royal command has caused. And as a Rajput, he is always prepared for combat. Hadi Rani does not give up and tries to lure him with the assertion of a demanding wife. She is far removed from the conventional stereotype of shy demure, newlywed, and is in many ways similar to the portrait of Rani Hadia in the Kapurthala Bard’s version of the same narrative, although there the two seem a well settled domestic couple.

She wants him to quit the ‘chaakri’ that does not let them enjoy their togetherness. She treats his being an employee with disdain, perhaps only in the context of the moment, because it was customarily acceptable for a Rajput to be pledged in service, as long as it was on mutually agreed terms and conditions suited to his honour. She then curses all - though playfully-to those who arranged this match, right from the barber, priest and brother in law, Jaswant Singh, who married her to Amar Singh’s sword.

(Interestingly, in some historical accounts, it is Jaswant Singh who was engaged to the Hada household. By this indication here, the playwright combines history with popularly accepted notions.)

When, the Rani remains adamant in preventing his departure, Amar Singh threatens to hit her with a hunter. This is probably a whip, which would be in his hand if he was preparing to mount his horse. The whipping of the horse is a metaphor that occurs in folklore narratives of Rajasthan, particularly in moments when the protagonist faces the dilemma between the wedlock ritual and the call for battle. (The horse is treated as an extension of the character).

Seeing Amar Singh’s determination, the Rani leaves all ploys and reveals what she has sensed- that she fears for his safety and consequently of her life deprived of him. Amar Singh tells her

that he will return and as morning streams in, he sets to go, but he confirms to Ram Singh that he goes with the awareness that this could be a day of no return and he i.e. Ram Singh should help the Rani handle her widowhood.

It is this awareness that makes his act an act of daring; the one who is at a point from where there is no looking back. Kavi narrates the act of getting ready-and this may be treated as a ritual.

5. And as Kavi narrates, Amar Singh enters the court where Salavat Khan mocks at Amar Singh who retaliates, taking out his sword, and at that point, the emperor adds another 50,000 to the fine for misconduct.

As Salavat Khan taunts Amar Singh further, calling him a "ganwaar" (boor) and after an exchange of retaliations, Amar Singh slays him with his sword, then and there. He claims, that that is the payment of the fine and for the new addition; he is ready to pay it in a similar fashion.

As the action is also narrated by the Kavi, and it is not clear how it would be enacted.-with emotionally charged fervour, or as an illustrative act. The emperor quits the space, and goes into the Queen's chamber, where the Kavi follows him and the story moves on.

A killing in the court is a monumental act and has few parallels in theatre, 'Julius Caesar' being one and hence the question of aesthetics emerges for to show this act in itself is a deviation from a general convention.

This incident is recorded in history and recounted in several oral versions. One is rendered in a popular couplet quoted in "Marwar Ka Itihas"

un mukh te gagyo kahiyo,
inn kar layi kataar.
vaar kahann paayo nahin, jamdadh ho gayi paar.

(As he barely uttered "g" to say the word "ganvaar", Amar Singh took out the sword and before he could say, "vaar" ie complete the word, the sword was through his chest.)

In the Punjabi narrative of the legend, Amar Singh takes this insult of being called a boor (ganvaar) to a logical development. He says, "today you call me a boor: tomorrow you will abuse me and day after keep me out of the kachheri (court)", and thus articulating, both the inference of the word and the layered insecurity, he stabs Salavat Khan.

By most accounts, Amar Singh is overpowered at the King's indication and slayed there itself. "The Oriental Biographical Dictionary" by Thomas William Beale (Asiatic Society 1881-original from Oxford University) sums up Amar Singh as-

"Amar Singh, son of Gaj Singh, a Rajput chief, of the title, Rithor. He killed Salabat Khan, Mir Bakhshi in the 17th year of Shah Jahan's reign, in the presence of the emperor on Thursday evening, the 25th of July, 1644; 0.5.30th Jamadi 1,1054H; and was by order of the emperor

pursued and cut to pieces after a gallant defence near one of the gates of the Fort of Agra, which is to this day called Amar Singh Darwaza or Amar Singh gate.”

The narrative of the legend by the Bard of Kapurthala also maintains this cycle of events.

However, the Performing Arts, including Kathputli and Khayal, have another trajectory of sequences that are unfolded as the performance progresses.

6. As mentioned earlier, the emperor enters the queen’s chamber and shares the news with her and she breaks down, for Salavat was her brother.

7. Outside Amar Singh creates mayhem supported by his barber, Kishna (also mentioned in the Punjabi narrative) and as narrated by the Kavi, more fighting and killing takes place; the courtiers are afraid.

8. Amar Singh challenges the might of the emperor and manages to escape.

9. The emperor then asks his courtiers if any one of them is lion enough to capture Amar Singh and bring him to the king. He offers promotion and twelve villages as a reward. When all are quiet, Arjun Gaur, vows to tread where the rest fear and promises to bring Amar Singh to the king. In most accounts Arjun Gaur, brother in law of Amar Singh (brother of his earlier wife, Gaurji) is mentioned as his assassin.

10. An elated Arjun Gaur shares the change of tide in his fortunes with his wife. He can thus rise and fulfil his ambitions. His wife opposes him for it is unethical to desert a person of the family and secondly, because of the power of Amar Singh its best to keep the head low; to raise it is to have the head beheaded from the torso. Arjun Singh wishes to live with head high or no head, for that be end of all worry.

This play on the word head is a way by which the playwright is preparing us for the metaphor that is to follow and be the doom of Amar Singh.

This scene, in some ways is reminiscent of Mandodri advising Ravana not to stray from the right path, but the character of the wife develops no further. Significantly, she has no name.

11. Amar Singh and Ram Singh plan the future course of action. Amar Singh is aware, that having killed Salavat Khan, he is now at war with the emperor himself. Ram Singh offers to prepare a unit with the best soldiers. Arjun Singh arrives there and congratulates Amar Singh on his heroic deed that has restored the pride of all Rajputs and scared the others. He offers an invitation from the emperor to negotiate a compromise. Amar Singh refuses, but Hadi Rani prevails on him to favour peace. He agrees. After he agrees, Arjun asks him to leave his sword behind, as they are going for negotiation. He has to comply-having given his word. A sneeze is heard, that scares Hadi Rani. She entrusts him to brother Arjun Gaur and implores him to take care of his well-being, while at the same time giving a small knife to Amar Singh that can be concealed in the pocket.

This moment in the family is set with lies and deceit, while trust is swaddled in mistrust. The

writer treats Arjun Gaur as Hadi Rani's brother- as Amar Singh's constant reference to the bond between a brother and sister indicates. Most accounts, however, place him to be the brother of Amar Singh's earlier wife.

This scene is an absolute contrast with the desert sequence where strangers meet and then open their arms and bond for life. Here a family member comes to destroy the other.

The small knife is also a significant contrast to the earlier use of sword and denotes the altered stature of Amar Singh-from an open challenger to a dealer of secrecy. He is not comfortable with the situation, but goes on, because he has agreed to go.

12. As Kavi tells us, Arjun Gaur tries to think of a plan to do away with Amar Singh. He suggests that they go through the window as no one must see them. Amar Singh refuses, because for this he would have to lower his head and as a Rajput he could not bow his head in the direction of the king. Arjun suggests that he then place his feet in first. As Amar Singh follows this instruction, Arjun Gaur stabs him from the back. Even after being fatally wounded, Amar Singh hits at Arjun and cuts off his nose.

13. An elated Arjun Gaur goes to the emperor to break the news of his success and receive the reward. The emperor though is filled with anger and remorse that a warrior like Amar Singh should be killed by treason. He refuses to view the body as this was not victory won in battle. As a reward to Arjun, he has his moustache cropped up, face blackened and sent astride on a donkey's back.

In some versions, instead of the window, Amar Singh is asked to enter through a low gate, and he being exceptionally tall, would be required to bend his head which would imply bowing before the enemy and so was unacceptable. So, he was asked to enter with his feet going in first and head facing outwards. He is nevertheless killed in the process by Arjun Gaur.

While in this piece, the emperor humiliates Arjun Gaur, in several versions he has him slayed him, for a man prone to deceit cannot be trusted or applauded.

14. The emperor then plans to have the body brought in and announce that a burial would be provided for Amar Singh, because he wants to see if any Rajput would come forward to claim his mortal remains, and if so would be worthy enough to replace the deceased. If none would dare to come, then he would take this body to the Rani so she could become a sati.

This thought of the emperor makes him appear benign at heart. At the same time, the ensuing series of battles acquire the nature of a game.

In the legend from Punjab, the mortal remains are claimed by Ram Singh in an immediate battle and taken with the returning empty palanquin. The Rani sends for a sword and slashes her head, fearing that now, by virtue of being the wife of the vanquished; she would be made captive and made the emperor's slave-an existence she rejects. The emperor, on receiving this news, is so moved, that he returns Nagaur to the family of Amar Singh. No further battle is mentioned.

15. In the Nautanki, the news of the happening reaches the Naumahala that is cast in doom. The Rani prepares for Sati, but for that she must be consumed by the same pyre with which the husband is lit. Ram Singh wants to lead the fight, but he is too small and the only heir of the Rathors. She then sends a letter to Ballu Singh, a childhood friend of Amar Singh and of the same clan, but with whom Amar Singh had strained relations.

According to various sources, Ballu Champawat was one of the few loyal supporters who left Jodhpur with Amar Singh when he was banished and later looked after the affairs at Nagaur. However, once when asked to pay heed to the sheep as they were being taken by wolves, Ballu Champawat refused saying that that was the shepherd's job, not his. It is said that Amar Singh had retorted that he (Ballu) will heed the Mughal army and not the sheep! Ballu then left his service.

16. Now, when the letter came from Hadi Rani, Ballu Singh reacts with indifference. "Uninvited for weddings and feasts, now to lose my head we are of the same clan!" he retorts.

17. The letter bearer conveys these reactions to the Rani who loses heart, but then sends Ram Singh with a letter to Narashhawaz-the man with whom turbans had been exchanged.

18. Narashhawaz also pales with the content of the letter. His son Nabirasool asks him the reason. Narashhawaz is torn between his loyalty to Amar Singh who saved his life and the emperor, whose employee he is currently.

"Yaar to sahaj banana; magar mushkil hai nibhana".

The son suggests that he resign from the employment and then be free to follow the calling of his heart.

19. Narashhawaz takes Nabirasool with him to meet the emperor and settle all accounts so that he could leave instantly with his entire unit.

"istifa dakhil karoon shehanshah huzoor,
ab yeh naukri karna hame na manzoor".

The emperor is taken aback for this is the time he needs the Pathan team, pre-empting the revolt of the Rajputs. However both father and son want the resignation to be accepted, willingly or unwillingly. The king complies, but with bitterness.

This sequence does highlight the mercenary nature that structured the army-and the fragility of the empire resting on armed power; with the emperor dependent on loyal soldier units-which Amar Singh provided.

20. After resigning the two go to Naumahala and console Hadi Rani whose intent that Amar Singh gets a proper funeral seems synonymous with her desire to be a sati, for his mortal remains need to be freed.

21. The battle ensues. Dalel khan and Narashhawaz confront each other- the former

accusing the latter of being a 'neech mard' who is "hamdard of a Hindu'. However others join in and Narashhawaz is killed.

22. Nabirasool conveys this news to the Rani, who is dejected and feels she ought to swallow a diamond and die, but Nabirasool is adamant on continuing the battle.

23. Ballu Singh's wife asks the maid to serve him food in vessels of iron. When he reacts, being used to silver and gold, she scolds the maid for serving him in a metal he fears. When Ballu protests, she counters by saying that if he was not afraid of metal, he would have been in battle to get the remains of Amar Singh.

"Though born a kshatriya, he has picked no family trait" She demands that she be given the armour instead, while he, on whom the male creation is wasted, should be the woman at home, watching how the fight goes. Hit by these words, Ballu Singh puts on the armour and presents himself at the naumahala.

24. Ram Singh respectfully welcomes him and Ballu letting bygones be bygones, prepares for battle. He talks of the role the Rajputs have played in the building of the empire and that the same energy and power would be seen again. Inspired by his words Nabirasool also adds his unit to the battle.

25. As Kavi tell us, these warriors enter the Fort, and a fierce battle ensues. The emperor himself bears witness and sends in more forces. Ballu Singh reaches where the mortal remains lie and is about to have them picked, when he is further attacked; tired and wounded as he was, injured further, he collapses.

According to several oral tellings and "Champavat ka Itihas" as quoted by Himmat Singh Rathor in his book "Veervar Amar Singh Rathor", it was Ballu Champawat who brought the mortal remains. As he was surrounded by the Mughal Army, he jumped off the fort wall and was able to fulfil the task. This narrative also states that the battle continued up to satisthal, where Ballu Champavat continued the fight saying to the Rani, "you go and I follow - let Amar Singh know how I heed the army."

According to this version, it is here that he succumbed.

26. In the Nautanki, the news of Ballu's collapse spells doom.

"Doob jayega Rathoron ka naam; Balleji bhi yudh mein aa gaye kaam."

Then Ram Singh and Nabirasool take on the task on themselves, giving the example of Luv Kush who as children showed their power. The Rani too wants to join the battle, but they request her not to.

(In Tod's version, the Rani of Bundi, herself entered Fort and took the remains.)

27. The joint Pathan and Rajput units enter the Fort and fight several officers who feel that the young lads will be no match but prove to be. The emperor views the battle closely.

“Ram Singh Rajput sher Nagauri ka jaya hai
Na ladne ki umar kamar so tegh bandh aaya hai.”

30. The battle heats up. Ram Singh orders that their side should spread all over. Kishna Nai and Nabirasool follow so. Ram Sigh comes face to face with Badul Khan. The exchange between them is racy, one being from Kabul, the other from Nagaur. However, Ram Singh is able to reach the mortal remains.

31. At this point, the emperor intervenes. He accedes victory to Ram Singh and Nabirasool, granting Ram Singh the position of Sipah Salar, held by his uncle and post of Shahbaaz to Nabirasool. He mourns the loss of his capable officer, Amar Singh:

“Afsos sad afsos ha mein to daga se lut gaya Banka Sipah Salar mera tha so jag se uth gaya”

32. In the naumahala, preparations are on for Sati. Ram Singh wants to sit close to his uncle and Rani, for there would be no meeting hence.

“Ab juda hogi hamse to kuch der mein; paas apne zara tu bithale hame.”

The desire for calmness and momentary sense of togetherness, that is to dissolve forever, bears the irony of the situation. This is probably the only pause in the incessant hue and cry of the battle. The only silence. And this peace is stillness before it all slides into nothingness!

The desert, that thirsts for cosiness in the midst of strife. The young Ram Singh is trying to hold onto something which has fled or is fleeting by! It is Rani who tells him that this is where all relations end, though what for him is the clay of Amar Singh is her ‘shringar’ as that is to be her destiny soon.

33. At this point the Kavi says, that Jaswant Singh brings a bimaan to travel to the Satisthal and that crowds come to see the spectacle- tamasha- of the act.

34. The Rani is set for sati-implying that the mortal remains of Amar Singh receive the proper ritual as per custom.

“Ak din moi byah pati, sang laye nij dham.

Aaj pati ke sang men mein jaoon sur dhaam.”

35. The Kavi closes the performance, saying that the Rani ascended Heaven and may all here be blessed and live long.

Observations on Content and Form

The text at hand is complex and layered with cultural inferences; it is also steeped in the history of the medieval period and carries within it the turmoil of a generation that saw its life as measure for values like honour, valour and integrity-where the individual was contained within a code, and every act was a movement guided by it.

This text has a historical event at its core; many of the characters are related to that event. Apart from that, the writer has drawn from various other oral narratives and created a piece for performance on the popular Nautanki stage.

The subject is grim and it is probably the Form that gives it the zest which can carry the sound and fury that the core entails. At the same time, by creating the window scene, where Amar Singh refuses to lower his head, the metaphor that characterised the man has been illustrated by a performative enactment of the idiom- with its irony - as a trusting Amar Singh walks into the trap designed for his paradigm. This makes a performance of the metaphor itself. It also creates a distance for the viewer, generating suspense and some humour in the telling just as a twist in the tale is imminent. It seems literal and at the same time an idiom pushed to the extreme; and hence does not shed its logic. The very fact that a performance is a selective and aesthetic arrangement makes this action a symbolic enactment of a trait-that in the grammar of another genre would be seen as a tragic flaw; in folk lore it is a cherished and celebrated attribute of identity.

The text handles a historically sensitive period and examines the relationship of the Rajput chieftains at the Mughal court. The contribution of the Rajputs, the awareness of the emperor in maintaining the correct etiquette in handling them and the inter dependence of both is given space. Altered diplomacy shatters peace.

For a Musical to attempt such a debate is a difficult task, especially as Nautanki must also address from the popular stage. The writer has taken care to prevent the text from becoming a divide between black and white treatment of two communities. The friendship between Amar Singh and Narashhawaz extends as a close bond the next generation, even after the two have passed away. That bonding has found its roots. Largely because it is born of the awareness and memory of kindness in the desert. That has a hold tighter than family ties. Arjun Gaur, a close relative kills Amar Singh with deceit for his personal ambition, while, Narshebaaz, a stranger sacrifices his life for an oral declaration of friendship. The emperor is also overall benign and holds Amar Singh in high regard and even though manipulated, restores balance by handing Nagaur to the family of Amar Singh. Salavat Khan emerges as the one with malice, but he too works through the attendance register. (One of the sources, mentions that the ruler of Bikaner which was at constant war with Nagaur, had Salavat Khan on his side and so Salavat had this attitude towards Amar Singh).

Intrigue was a way of life in practically all medieval courts. However, it cannot be denied that the strain between the ruler and the ruled does surface and that for the ruled dignity is a sensitive issue; one that makes or mars their survival. Many kingdoms claim Rajput lineage, but not all Rajputs were kings. They entered into service contracts on mutually agreed

conditions. Moreover, Amar Singh as an upright general had proved his worth, as the emperor himself acknowledges, and so when officially punished, it was bound to create a furore within him and in his peers. The text does capture many shades and even while accommodating the medieval court manoeuvrings, keeps the intrinsic social fabric in view, with its contradictions, strengths and inherent togetherness. That the conclusive and victorious battle is fought jointly by Nabirasool and Ram Singh, speaks a lot.

Performance Structure

The structure of the Nautanki is such that it seems to have two parts. The first is an almost clear uphill diagonal that leads to the killing of Amar Singh. The second part is the movement of the plot to the announcement by the king. Which leaves of final act of Sati? This then briefly, establishes restoration as a sequel and the third part.

While the first seems to be a relentless thrust of units moving towards a main objective, the second seems to move in loops having several episodes strung together around Hadi Rani's attempt to find support to confront the emperor. Rather than one action, there are three battles and so the tempo seems to be constructed more as a narration of sequences leading to the conclusive moment, while in the first part there is a dramatic construct. Picking up the threads after a major action creates this plateau effect from where the action gradually develops momentum. However, the heightened emotion and passion that fills the first part, now gives space to telling the stories of other characters connected with Amar Singh. This connection provides the basis for their stature and viewpoints. The story and the drama wrangle through the illustrativeness.

New characters are introduced-Nabirasool, Ballu Singh and his wife, the maidservant and several generals who fight on behalf of the Emperor. The action seems stretched out while in terms of actual time, it is compressed within a couple of days.

We also learn of more details, viz, that Narashhawaz was on a contract with the emperor and had to resolve his moral dilemma of torn loyalties.

Ballu Singh had to overcome the hurt of a personal quarrel in the larger interest of what qualified as correctness. In all this, the youngsters, Ram Singh and Nabirasool emerge as the eager and upright soldiers who wish to prove their worth.

This thread does knit the second half with cohesiveness, making battle and triumph a matter of suspense.

The emperor becomes isolated in his splendour. The game played by the set of rules laid by him is played within the Fort where he stands somewhere, high above the action, as spectator and judge. His statement restores harmony as Nagaur goes back to Amar Singh's family and as both the youngsters receive official positions, the second generation is installed: continuity is maintained. In this world of battle and politics, the domesticity of Ballu Singh's wife creates an interesting contrast as we see the warrior, in circumstances, both ordinary and extraordinary. Hadi Rani's vow to be a Sati, is the act of a veerangana, attempting to bring the

narrative of Amar Singh to an appropriate closure.

Language

This is a grim sequence of events, which to be rendered musically is a challenge. The language, however has a sharpness and rusticity that enables the carrying of the sequences with a zest-the zest that characterizes the Folk; it is this flavour in the writing that rebounds into the performance with a splash of energy; the verbal exchange in battle and the well rhymed couplets keep up a racy tempo, holding the pathos, but not allowing it to drown the other elements. Words like, naukri, register, court, kachhari, arzi, istifa, jurmaana, repeatedly used, bring it into the frame of everyday experience of present times. Even in a crisis the characters respond with spirited robustness. A rough translation of Hadi Rani's lines on knowing about the fine could be:

"A lakh per day my dear is a fine so slight
When a moment more dearer, dearer, dwindles in the night
Dwindles in the night and you talk of going from here
Come, let our hearts blossom full, to hell with the messenger
Of nine crores is this necklace of mine,
A string of pearls to pay fourteen days fine."

There is an air of abundance-an open and commanding disposition.

Shah jahan talks of Amar Singh to Salavat Khan:

"You say one thing and I think another,
Bitter and tough by nature is Amar Singh Rathor
Amar Singh Rathor when of the fine he hears,
Being of Rajput clan, the dignity he does bear,
May go out of hand for he knows no fear,
Will hit or be hit for of life he has no care."

In this brief statement the understanding of the king is revealed.

Amar Singh speaks boldly to the queen, after having battled with royal two platoons and after slaying Salavat Khan:

"How now my queen, the sight you see makes thy heart go sore;
Now on his Majesty do paint a coat of colour some more.
Coat of colour some more for what was today so less,
Two platoons charging, by the order of His Highness.
More now, let me see the bravehearts, who all are men,
With Rajput strain in me, I crave for the outcome then!
Better than Rustam; Let the bravest come;
Your Lordship call him now

And test the muscle that Amar Singh shall show!"

There is bravado as lustily he challenges the royal authority. It is in the theatrical performance that the daring can be so celebrated, with gusto and recklessness.

When he plans with Ram Singh for further combat, there is an element of preparation:

"Yesterday in full court, Salavat KhanI did slay,
Seven lakhs by the sword, I settled this way
Settled this way and morrow has more for my mettle.
Another half a lakh of fine I yet have to settle
With petty pennies will I pay Shah jahan's debt,
For this weapon to clang, I threw the gauntlet.
You aimed high yesterday. Wanting to come my way;
Now fulfil your desire
Come along and let your hands show their ire!"

There is bravado, but this spirit is what will see him through the ordeal ahead. It is not bluff, as he is aware of the consequences of what he says (but of course this is the language of performance wherein the author too gains credit for showmanship). This playing through the situations also goes hand in hand with the characters who are at home with these situations and used to handling them with ease.

The situations shift fast and each shift alters the energy zone. The sequences, except for a few are crafted not as complete scenes, but as units of action that keeps the core of the moment alive.

Actions of Battle

The shifting ground of battle and the sinking mood at the naumahala of Amar Singh does linger the desperation but is probably meant to charge the final battle with purpose. The visitors who are on their side must sound the trumpet of battle. Just as the neighing and jumping of a horse, make slight of the whip, so does the flamboyance of the language carry the situation astride. It also broadens the stature of the characters with a robustness that delights in combat. This is a subject that dwells in the core of Nautanki; the Nakara has been an instrument of the battlefield; guarding Forts and heralding the war cry. Such a content takes it close to its original mettle.

This Nautanki also deviates from conventional aesthetics, by depicting a series of killings depicted on stage, besides the act of Sati and three battles, centred around the objective of bringing back the mortal remains of a rebel chieftain.

The Women Characters

The Nautanki has four women characters and none have a personal name; Begum, Bahu of Arjun Gaur and wife of Ballu Singh and Hadi Rani- known by her parental kingdom. Hadi Rani is pivotal to the action and is charged with emotion, playing shringar and pathos to the brink of valour. Arjun Gaur's wife disagrees with her husband and expresses her opinion; Ballu Singh's wife manoeuvres her husband into agreeing with her, the Begum too has her view and yet they appear peripheral to this world of war and politics. It goes to the credit of the writer that their portrayal is at variance with each other. In many edited versions, they cease to exist for they are a bit off the main line of action.

Hadi Rani represents the woman who would love to live, but is prepared to go through the act of sati, almost as a predestined ritual. This is her battlefield, but where the end is known. This action when seen along with the male preparedness for becoming the sacrifice, completes the picture of a community. Amar Singh represents both the power and helplessness of the enigmatic masculine code. He fights for honour, but to keep the honour of a promise obeys Arjun Gaur; his vow to not bow his head, makes him lose it. The word becomes the code. The code goes beyond a lifetime. Amar Singh probably knew it-that he would be a character in a story. The code will ensure that the story is told. Even though he is not a victor, he has added value to the code by making it worthy of sacrifice.

The Nautanki and the legend emerge out of a patriarchal hegemony where individuals and individual traits are at the service, not just of the immediate family, but clan and community. The values and code that the clan upholds, represents or lives by mark the frame. The customs are patterned rules meant to be observed. It is this frame that defines the logic of the action, the gender roles and qualities of personality. Pride and dignity then are also not individual concerns, but owned by the clan or community. Settling scores by duels has been a world-wide phenomenon. That world may be obsolete, but it does generate amazement. It was in the medieval age and should be placed in that context before being judged. But theatre thrives only in the present and this boundary of time assumes greater significance on the popular stage, for the power of performance speaks directly to people today.

CHAPTER 7: HOW ACTORS PERFORM- PERFORMANCE NOTES (AS TAKEN FROM NAUTANKI EXPONENT, KRISHNA MATHUR)

Krishnaji has been associated with the Nautanki stage for almost five decades, which includes twenty five years of active and rigorous practice as actor, director and group coordinator. She started with Hindustan Theatre company (doing dramas), then moved to Bharat Theatre (Performing Company that did both Drama and Nautanki and mostly toured in the east and north-east). In 1964, she performed Amar Singh Rathor and Satya Harishchandra in Hathras and has ever since been associated with the performance culture of the Braj area.

According to her, 'Amar Singh Rathor' is one of the most popular Nautankis performed regularly by multiple groups, in the northern belt and has also been successful in places like Assam, where she has performed. It was an essential component of all tours apart from stand-alone shows. It was also part of Bharat Theatre repertoire, where the performance utilised curtains for location changes and lights for effects and focus. She calculates that for about twenty-five years she was performing for eight months (excluding the monsoons) in a year and would have performed "Amar Singh Rathor" more than a hundred times annually and she still performs it whenever the occasion arises. She is unable to count the number of times she has performed this Nautanki, but gives the number, 2,500 as a conservative estimate.

As mentioned earlier, in Bharat Theatre, the curtains would be pulled up and down so that the scenes could be performed in rapid succession. In the Nautanki, the bare stage lets the action flow without hindrance. For the window scene, the former had a window cut in the curtain, while in Nautanki, platforms would be arranged close to the wings, so that an impression of height is created and when he is hit from behind, the action is visible and he falls with his head on stage. For the Sati scene, in Bharat Theatre, logs of wood with kerosene poured on them would be arranged on stage. A transparent thread would be tied above to an old coin (the one with a hole in the middle).

Through the hole, a lit matchstick would be slid down by a technician at the appropriate time and the fire would seem to light on its own, whilst the actress stood behind it. This created the magical illusion of the fire being lit on its own adding to Hadi Rani's act of being sati. When the flames rose, the actor left, seeming to disappear.

(This does not seem devoid of danger. But another show proved to be more dangerous. That was "Nagin". In one sequence, while the actor sang and danced on stage, two supporters would blow fire from both sides, taking turns, one after the other. (They would hold a mashaal and blow kerosene through it, so that the flames would come in dancing. When the flame came from right the actor moved left and vice versa.) Once, they both blew in the flames together, and the actor received burns.)

In Nautanki, there was no magic and it relied only on music to evoke the required impact. Even the battle scenes were short as singer actors would not be generally, well trained in martial arts.

In most performances, after being hit by Arjun Gaur, Amar Singh would sing the last lines, choking and stuttering, to continue the impact of being stabbed. Similarly, Arjun Gaur, after being hit at the nose by a knife thrown at him by Amar Singh would sing his lines (to the king) with a nasal tinge. It made him appear silly and foolish.

Salavat Khan would be acted in a way to give the impression that the man is seeming to be what he is not; pretending to be more than what he actually is. In Bharat Theatre, the characterization was handled with sophistication, creating a pretentious persona. In Nautanki often this would be achieved by humour, generally through the actors' improvisations. For example, when he would call Amar Singh a Ganwaar, he would add a line- "hum kehte hain chawal, cha-wal-aur ye kehte hain chanwari (as rice is referred to in the village) bataye yeh koi boli hai!"

This is close to a sequence in "Sultana Daku" when after being robbed, the seth and the munshi argue about the amount stolen as they report the matter to the police. One says "75,000" and the other "paun lakh" (quarter less than a lakh). They argue incessantly, not realizing that they mean the same thing, till the policeman shouts at them. The rusticity of the humour would form a connection with the audience, as the shows were in villages. Salavat mocks at their boli and they laugh at him! Shah Jahan, in the Begum's chamber, may also appear un-kingly at that moment, but gains his grace and stature in the unit when he refuses to award Arjun Gaur as he killed by deceit and not by valour. This shift in characterization makes the bonding of the audience flexible and alert.

There is no attempt to make the tragic appear grand-and perhaps by making the characters vulnerable in portrayal, they become more endearing and stay longer -inspiring not awesome always-but charming with the flavours of life.

The Court scene in both instances had a throne for the king and a chair for Salavat. In Nautanki, it could just be the throne. There were no additional courtiers when Amar Singh enters. There could be some guards. In the Company Theatre there was a backdrop of the court. The performance seems to focus on steering the action and dispense with elaboration.

The success of the Nautanki, according to Krishnaji, lies in its rich depiction of emotions-there is veer rasa; karuna rasa; shringaar; vatsalya. It is a tale of sacrifice and brotherhood which generates a powerful flow of emotions that engages the audience. Besides, the range of emotions also brings a diversity to the singing. For example, a "daud" in shringar would be articulated in a manner that makes the words small; in "veer" they are articulated in a stable and strong manner and in "karuna" the raag takes over. Even though the metre may be same, but the rendering does not get monotonous. The artists of course need to match up to the situations and music and when that happens the success of the performance seems certain. The other aspect that connects with the audience is the language of the text, particularly in the Hindi belt. (In the east the emotions and acting matter more). The couplets are such that often the last words are offered by the audience in unison. For example, when Hadi Rani Stops Amar Singh words like "chin chin cheeje raat" would come from the audience. When Ram Singh ends the first line with "Ratharon ka naam", the audience can guess that the second line will end with "kaam" and is ready to say it. The Nautanki also provides space for improvisation and keeping with the times. The actor often humours the audience, but also

has to fight with it-especially when the turnout is in large numbers. For example, when Hadi Rani curses her parents for marrying her to an employee, Krishnaji replaced the text with a folk song-

"mere bhag bigad gaye bilkul hi,
jane kaun uday bhayo paap,
bitaria biyahe di chakar ko'
pade bijuria nai baaman pe
Hadi mukh bhar de saraap
yahan bitiya ko dukh hi dukh dard hain
jane kaun uday bhayo paap"

(My misfortune to be married to a servant-may lightning fall on the barber-brahmin who fixed this match)

The meaning is very close to the original text and the folk song probably expands the intent.

Similarly, when Amar Singh goes to court, in some groups an actress while performing the aarti may bring in a film song, like, "O pavan veg se udne wale ghode"

(Such an incorporation within the narrative seems an interesting device to keep pace with the mind of the audience. Of course, there is room for discussion.)

When the news comes that Amar Singh has been done away with, a sequence of bangle breaking may be added by some groups and here a song with pathos or a bhajan of Meerabai may find place-the song that goes with the mood of the situation and also has a portion in the rhythm that goes with the action.

In a performance by Atul Yaduvanshi, Amar Singh is shown teaching sword fighting to Ram Singh to enhance the bonding.

Evidently, it is the performance that carries the tale and performers who make the performance.

Text and Editing

According to Krishnaji, most groups do not have the published book. Bharat Theatre had a typed copy, based on the book, but with whatever editing thought to be necessary. Even when the duration of the performance was for six hours (9 p.m. to 2 a.m.) editing was deemed to be part of the process. However, in Braj where once, the audience too seemed to remember the couplets, it was difficult to randomly edit, for they would yell, "its cut! They've cut it!"

However, it emerged in our discussion, that often the second vandana (the one in English) is

edited, even though it is meant to be handled with humour and would give space to the comedian.

The narration of the Kavi is edited-rather it is often completely removed. According to Krishnaji, the scenes are self-explanatory; rather removing the Kavi's narration adds to the interest and suspense. The role also does not seem to interest the actors, who prefer playing characters.

(This however, alters the structure of the writing, from narrative to action driven drama .As the narrator was also adding a viewpoint and contributing towards heightening the emotion, his absence would probably reduce the intensity. On second thoughts, it seems that the breaks between the scenes (entries-exits included) while loosening the grip of the action, also provides breathing space between the units. In a way this probably helps in the assimilation of the happenings. Rather than carrying the audience in the flow of emotion, this creates a distance whereby the story translates into a series of happenings).

The scene in which Amar Singh seeks leave to go to Bundi is retained. The desert sequence and the bonding between Amar Singh and Narashhawaz is also kept as it is. So are the next few scenes (Salavat Khan enticing the emperor against Amar Singh; Ram Singh telling this to Amar Singh; the latter feeling upset and insulted) The sequence between Hadi Rani and Amar Singh remains a popular moment, but certain parts are shortened. Instead of two couplets one may suffice.

In the court scene, Shah Jahan sometimes leaves after imposing additional fine and Amar Singh and Salavat continue-probably the involvement of the audience filling in for the court.

The king in the Begum's chamber seems to be optional-and if retained, is reduced. The same can be said for the next few sequences, but the scene between Arjun Gaur and his wife is generally edited. The sequence till the first part concludes with Hadi Rani's vow to be a sati is more or less maintained with minor editing.

Ballu Singh's response is kept short. Letter writing to Narashhawaz is either edited or kept brief. The father and son sequence between Narashhawaz and Nabi Rasool is generally retained in brief, but the unit in which they resign from the army is edited and so is often their meeting with Hadi Rani. The first battle takes place. Most verbal exchanges during battle are edited. Narashhawaz falls.

Nabirasool meets Hadi Rani.If the scene between Ballu Singh and his wife is to be edited, then Ballu Singh could enter here and the next battle ensues. Else the scene with the wife can lead to the second battle.

Again, the battle is without much exchange and Ballu Singh falls.

Hadi Rani is dissuaded from going to battle by Nabirasool and Ram Singh and the two as Luv and Kush go to war. The third battle ends with the emperor granting them victory and giving them the posts they deserve.

Most performances treat this as the concluding moment and the units leading to the sati act are by and large edited.

The editing seems necessary to compress performance time; to enable managing the show with a small group and other practical considerations. Above all, it is about keeping the show going in contemporary times. The content is so arranged that the audience can follow a clear line of action while relating with the emotion and absorbing the music.

CHAPTER 8: AMAR SINGH RATHORE AND THE NAUTANKI OF KANPUR

A Detailed Analysis of the Text 'Saangeet - Amar Singh Rathore – urf- Hindu Muslim Yaranaa', Bahar Kanpuri Natak - by Shri Krishan (Publisher - Shri Krishan Khatri - 1995 Edition)

This text, made for the Kanpur Style of Nautanki performance is another way of handling the legend. While the story remains broadly similar to the Hathras version by Shri Natharam Gaur, there are slightly different contours that play with meaning. The poetry is simple, conveying a sense of dialogue rendering and direct tempering of mood and emotion. Along with the singing parts, the speech too is set in rhyme, giving it ease and flow. The action is swift, and the pace matches with characterization, that does not dwell on ceremony and that appears to be an attribute of the overall Style of the Performance.

“Tulsi banh saput ki....

In the beginning is a doha by Tulsidas, that warns of the consequences of rubbing against a good son. The “good son”, probably of the earth as in this case might imply Amar Singh Rathore.

This is followed by the customary prayer addressed to God who is referred to as, 'Parmeshwar' 'Sarveshwar' 'Lokeshwar'. It is extremely brief and as “Kishan” with folded hands says, in the lotus feet of God lies all happiness.

The prayer is generally presented by the cast, all actors and often other team members being on stage.

In this particular prayer, there is no direct allusion except the reference given above that could be seen as leading into the play. After the Prayer, the Ranga, the Narrator, takes centre stage and introduces the play.

“Shahar Agra mein huebalwan”

He comes straight to the story, where in the city of Agra there was an emperor Shah Jahan, and a sipahsalaar (commander in the army), Amar Singh the valiant.

“Vansh...farmaya”

This is followed by a long passage of musical narration whereby the Ranga tells us, that the brave one was born to the clan of Rathores and was known in the world as belonging to Nagaur. He had power and prestige among the administrators and held high in court. A life led in luxury, unique in all respects, he commanded the army as all obeyed his orders. Then there was one Salavat Khan Sardar, a chief officer who also happened to be the special brother in law of the king .He bore enmity for Amar Singh and on a day, when he tried to harm the

prestige of Amar Singh, he himself was killed by the hands of the brave, though the queen herself had brought him up.

In this passage, Ranga narrates almost the entire story in a nutshell. A part is still left untold, but it does not seem so. For, the event is a complete anecdote. The story told, the drama begins. Rather the Performance. The performance, then is not the story, but the unfolding of the Drama. It is about the elements that constitute the entire Performance, like, the throbbing of the Nakkara, the singing, acting, words of the dialogue, dialogue delivery and the interplay of all components. Once the story is known, the audience knows what it is keeping track of and can enjoy and absorb the performance.

Interestingly, the narrative of this passage is in the past tense, while the action would be in the present- an enactment of that which has already happened. That is why the Ranga Says, "Laga darbar aam hai, shorogul ka na naam hai, " which is in the present tense. As the narrative is set in the past and the action is being staged in the present, before the audience Ranga can switch from one tense to the other, and in between lies a leap of event or imagination.

"Sunata....farmaya"

Ranga concludes by saying that this is the happening that he is about to tell. The court has assembled and all noise has stilled. The time has come for Amar Singh to get his bride home and so Amar Singh asks the emperor's leave.

"Shaboroz...liye"

Amar Singh wishes that the king glory by day and night and respectfully requests for leave to go to Bundi and fetch his bride as he has been called upon to do so.

"sultanate...dang hai"

The emperor says that there is unrest in the empire and this does not seem to be a proper moment to go on leave as he is the right arm of the court. If Jaswant Singh was around and not in Kabul as he is away at war, there, then it would be a different matter. Salavat, give your view as my mind is taken aback.

"maaf...nahin"

Salavat says, that he (Amar Singh) takes too much leave and pays no attention to his work. Is he not paid by the royal treasury? He then generalises to include all the executing officers who for the amount of leave they take, do not show enough interest in their work. And he who holds a special estate does not mend the (crooked) ways of a foot soldier!

The word used here is 'paji' which in common use means crooked, but the original meaning stands for the foot soldier, who has no assets.

"Naukri...nahin"

Amar Singh retorts by saying that he has come in the service of the king, but has not put an iota of his dignity on sale! And if Salavat, you speak unfair words, then your well being is at stake. And if the king cannot grant me leave, he can have my resignation. He who is crooked himself, calls the other that, but the Rathor clan bears no such habit!

“Adab...hai”

Salavat says-you speak impolite, what lies in your heart? Am I any less than you at court?

“Boo...Se”

Amar Singh says -let the king permit, if there’s a smell of arrogance, and let the sword decide the strength of arms!

“Aapas...nuksaan”

The king intervenes-why do you quarrel so-I like not such arguments!

Then, taking note that Amar Singh has necessary business, he approves a week’s leave, at the end of which, he should come and have his attendance registered, failing which there would be a fine of lakh coins per day. And if he does not heed, there would be damages indeed!

With this, probably the three characters exit, in varying moods and Ranga moves ahead with the narration. The sequence is short with a clear display of flying tempers that reveals the animosity between Amar Singh and Salavat Khan and the entangled position of the emperor. His decision is an attempt to balance the two-let Amar Singh have what he wants and show Salavat that the king does not give anyone a free hand. And they do not refute may be, because the king must have the last word. The use of colloquial words like ,’hujjat’ and ‘paji’ is interesting, because it brings the court to the vicinity and even though set to music, makes the verbal exchange familiar and immediate.

Ranga informs us, that Amar Singh went to Naumahala-his residence in all versions-and picking his things left for the journey. And as he could not have his way, a frustrated Salavat Khan turned to the queen to air his views.

Salavat khan, tell his sister that his days seem numbered and there is no security of life as he was insulted in court.

The queen is concerned and wants to know who has caused him such anguish.

Salavat then names Amar Singh as his tormentor who also has the king on his side, making him feel that his presence has no meaning.

The queen promises to take up the matter with the king and have Amar Singh out of the way.

And as Ranga tells us, when the king came and found the queen sad and sullen, he asked to know the cause.

The queen wants the emperor to part ways with Amar Singh or slash her then and there.

The king explains that if he were to do that, there would be chaos in the kingdom, for no one could handle it better than the Rathor.

Why does the king not look towards the Muslim nobles and the Pathans?

The king replies that if he had found someone then why would he take on a Rathor! The queen then suggests Salavat Khan.

The king does not see much value in the suggestion, but promises to try him out, when an opportune moment comes by.

Part of this sequence has been written as dialogue, though that too is structured as formal speech and not as spurts of every day spontaneous conversation.

Ranga winds up the unit by saying that this was just an excuse made up by the king. He then tells us that while Amar Singh was returning with his wife, an incident occurred during the journey.

It is here that the meeting with Narashhawaaz takes place.

The man comes to Amar Singh with parched lips dry throat and restlessness in heart -

"Khushk lab dono hue janab; kanth sukha hai, dil betaab"

And there is no river or well or pond in sight

"Chautarfa dekho jidhar kar khyal, aab ka milna bahut muhaal"

(Wherever you look, there's no water in sight)

And though he has far to go, Amar Singh shares the water he carries. Narashhawaaz is grateful as-

"Bacha li meri jaan, zindagi bhar na bhuloon ehsaan "

(You have saved this life and this I will not forget till I'm alive)

He pledges loyalty to him and hopes there will be opportunity to prove-

"Kaha doon mein bhi asli Pathan"

(So it be known that I am a true Pathan)

Amar Singh realizes that the stranger would be a friend in time of need –

"Waqt pe ye dega madad mujhe hai yakeen"

And the two exchange turbans and are bound in brotherhood. Only after this do they get to know other details about each other.

When Amar Singh mentions that he brings his bride from Bundi, it seems redundant for the audience, but perhaps it is to bring Hadi Rani in the picture who stands, probably veiled, at a distance. She is witness to this pact, for it would be implemented through her-and it is to her

call that Narashhawaaz responds in the legend.

Ranga tells us, that Amar Singh, pleased with the Pathan's sweet words of love continued on his journey to Naumahala. There a fortnight passed in leisure and delight, and the Rathore did not visit the court to mark his attendance. An irritated Salavat Khan brought the issue before the King.

Salavat says, a week has become two weeks and Amar Sing has no attendance! He bears no duty towards his royal duties; his duty being to laxity and comfort!

The emperor tells him that his constant complaining is not a good habit.

Salavat Khan points out to the non-compliance of the official order by Amar Singh and so the due fine of seven days should be sought.

The emperor is reluctant for by this imposition,

"Jama rang apna ukhad jayega"
(The setting of plaster will peel)

Salavat Khan is ready for a duel with him to prove that he is not the only valiant one.

The king disagrees for an army trembles at a slant of his eye, (tedhi nazar).

"Tere to ek bhi sipah ikhtiyar mein nahin"
(while not a soldier is in your control!)

Salavat blames the king's attitude for this-

"Jab mujhko gira rakha hai apne nazar se, Isse hamari izzat darbar mein nahin!"
(You don't eye me with respect, so no one does so in court!)

The king feels that this once fine should be waived off, for he is not an accused nor deserving of punishment.

Salavat Khan feels that if this was done-

"Har ashar pe nahin raub galib rahe"
(The king's authority would be lost on all!)

For, if he were to fear an employee-

"Sultanate bhiyeh reh sakti kayam nahin"
(Then the empire cannot be expected to last)

Here the Ranga intervenes and says that-

On hearing this, the emperor

"Aankhen karke lal"
(Colouring his eyes red)

Turned to Ram Singh and sent him to Naumahala with his admonishment for Amar Singh.

The emperor announces that as he has caused damage to his royal duties, he should deposit-
"Saat yom ka saat lakh dav aakar jurmana"
(seven lakhs for seven days)

failing which-

"To lag sakta nahin deen duniya mein thikana/shair saza bhari se bhari samjha dena jo vo payega"

(He can expect no anchor in this world and can expect strictest possible punitive action)

"Dekh kar jo parvana nahin darbar mein aayega,
Bhej paltan ko naumahala mein udva doonga topon se"

(And if on receiving this message, he fails to report, platoons will be sent to destroy him by canons).

The influence of Salavat Khan is evident on what the emperor says. It is also interesting that Ranga intervenes only to describe the emperor changing complexion. Such underlining is rare. It is as if he donned the mask of authority, which may be a mask like facial expression and then the expression took off and spoke severely on its own accord.

It is set in doha and choubola- and the dramatic rendering by the actor – singer can bring forth the ire.

Ram Singh (nephew of Amar Singh) pauses before his exit and speaks his mind to the audience.

Josh....ban

(As my tempers cool, I am surprised at myself, for how else could I bear so much against my uncle? I fear him so am helpless, else my sword would pay the penalty right away! For I know I could do it. Let me get his permission and then create chaos in Agra! Let aside uncle, I am no less than anyone here. Anyone with a bit of the Rathor within can stay not quiet for what Salavat said. It hurts like thorn and should have been punished for that's what he deserves!)

The placing of this piece is significant. It comes before Amar Singh's reaction, implying that the latter's reaction is not out of proportion to the situation. It is to be expected and almost prepares a justification of the coming action.

And as Ranga tells us, he reached the Naumahala.

Ram Singh bursts upon the uncle -You forget your promise to the king! This wine will be your doom!

And then he recounts the incident that hurt him to the core-

"Salavat Khan ne register dikhlaya
Saat lakh ka jurmana tum par karaya!"

Amar Singh is upset with Ram Singh for having heard him insulted and not taking Salavat's

head, as if the sword is mere show piece.

Ram Singh asks the uncle to say no more, for he would have toppled the royal seat, but for regard for his uncle and is prepared to do so now, if the uncle would command him thus.

However, Amar Singh, keeping the tender age of Ram Singh, does not let him proceed, and prepares to go himself for-

"Jo jurmana kiya shah ne, use chukaigi meri teg dudam"

(To settle the penalty by the sword).

And as he picked the sword, ready to go, Ranga tells us, Hadi Rani spoke her sweet-sounding words-

Ho.....mein

(your eyes are sun like, ablaze with ire, my knight

Where do you go at the mid hour of this nowhere night?)

Amar Singh explains the situation to her, adding towards the end that-

Dhar...mein

(If there's still blade in my sword

I'll go and stir up the court)

Dushmanon...mein

(Of the enemy's ire,

I am the flaming fire,

Swaying to bite, I am that black snake,

For to be crushed and living is not my make)

Hadi Rani asks him to wait and let the morning set in; and let Hai Rani begin her battle; and the head will not be on the torso of the tormentor.

Amar Singh lauds her courage, but thinks of his honour; till he can wield the sword, he cannot send her to war.

Hadi Rani then tactfully tries to restrain him by saying that the valiant does not fight a jackal.

Amar Singh knows he is more skilled than Salavat with the sword and that the combat would be decisive for the latter.

Hadi Rani then advises him that it is not wise to fight the emperor of the world (haft aqleem) and to bear malice towards the one who has befriended does not bear good fruit.

Amar Singh is irritated by her suggestion for a patch up, for he is adamant on not paying the fine.

She then reminds him that he has taken the king's salt and he should be loyal (namak- khwar)

to that; instead he is ready for battle!

Amar Singh asks her-Do you want that I be dishonoured and yet be a coward who sits at home? If he does not pay the penalty by the sword, then he would be known for his cowardice.

Hadi Rani suggests the path of negotiation, so his honour remains intact and the pride of the palace too remains; a simple dialogue may ensure that no feud remains.

Amar Singh feels it would be futile to do so, for Salavat wants to be supreme and so it has to be either him or the queen's brother.

This is the trap of masculinity, set by the outside world. The imposition of penalty has tarnished his image. He is no longer impeccable. No longer invincible. His glory is gone. He has lost face and he cannot retrieve it. The sheen is gone. He can only build a counter image-that of the Defiant; the non-complier. And he can show that he has the power and courage to retaliate. He has been challenged and he rises to the challenge as he sees it.

Hadi Rani, then again insists on getting the deed done herself.

"Veer mahila ka bhi jauhar dekh to lo,
Baat meri bhi ek maan shauhar to lo"
(See the lustre of a brave woman too.
Husband accepts one act for me to do)

But to accept that is not possible for him, for it would further spoil his image. He would be a, 'namard' in the eyes of all if his wife went for combat instead of him.

She then asks to accompany him. As his 'other half' she has half a share in all his deeds. She cannot recline in luxury, while he goes to battle. Moreover, Indrani accompanied Inder to war as Kaikeyi went with Dasrath.

This talk infuriates Amar Singh, who cannot see this happen and he threatens to end her, if she insists.

Then she changes tune and exhorts him as a brave wife to fight to the hilt and not turn his back to the battle even if 'fauj paltan sipahi' were to attack. For doing so would disgrace the clan and she would give up her life.

(Does she say this to delay his departure or trying to put up an act of pretended valour?)

These lines come with such abruptness, that they seem to be the words of a woman distraught who battles her own emotions as she imagines the worst for her husband.

On the face of it, the words appear to exhort a warrior to war, but their literal meaning is secondary to the situation and state of Hadi Rani. She is saying what she should be saying, but her heart is opposing the very nature of those words. She is not speaking them like a 'Virangana' and the effort might lead to voice breaking off, breathlessness or sobbing-

depending on the performer.

Amar Singh assures her that only cowards and the shameless run away from battle, not the Rathores!

“dil dehal jaye durbar mein mera, kya badan mein Priya, mere taqat nahin”
(My heart would tremble in court! Does not my body bear such strength?)

He wants to leave now for the combat which would decide-

"Sar salavat ke dhad par salaamat nahin."

(Salavat's head is not intact on his torso)

At this Hadi Rani asks him in distress-

You are in such haste, but if I miss you (yaad kar tadpun) then who will give me solace?

All ploys, tact and pretensions collapse here as a husband and wife, man and woman bid adieu for battle parts them.

And the man says simply, that he leaves Ram Singh with her.

“ranj se apna jee bezaar na kar”
(do not let your heart be listless with sorrow)

And then says it won't take long! He will be back soon! Hadi Rani prays for him.

As he is about to go, he stops and turns to Ram Singh-

“Kunwar.....bhulana”
(Hear me Ram Singh and do not forget,
Listen to and always obey your aunt.
The court has inflicted on me a penalty,
That by my sword I need to pay,
So I vow to return here only when
I send Salavat on way to Heaven.
If I am slain, for the sake of my wife,
What shall I say, you yourself are wise
Give her solace and give consolation
Remember, this to you, my last instruction.)

As bravado dismounts and drama ceases, a poignant moment emerges. The battle is real and he prepares himself for all consequences. When a man gives his last instructions and still moves on the path where danger lies, he grows taller than ever before. He is an ordinary being, taking on a task that is far from ordinary. For a moment he steps out of the frame (cut out) of a legend and becomes a living person. The man and not the image. It is as if the veil of the image lifted to reveal the person. A man who is not just the deed: he had a life; who lived a life and was not without the concerns of life. In the lifoscope of the audience, where he stood on a pedestal with centuries of edification, he seems human, somebody one may know, within or without. Filtered from legend size to real size.

It is in these lines, which have pathos that he emerges as a hero. Because it is a human moment of the legend. An ordinary man who is bound to a deed. He is a man who loves his wife and lives the life they have and can have, but he knows it may not be forever.

It is worthwhile to note, that the sequence ends here. It does not extend to include Ram Singh's reply or assurance. The same Ram Singh whose wrath had pre-empted Amar Singh's reaction, now remains silent. Any words by him would add to his character, but dilute the revelation. For an actor singer of Kanpuri Bahar, these lines provide ample scope for conveying emotion through the singing.

Ranga takes us back to the legend gradually. He tells us that, saying this, he went, on his way, along with Krishna Nai, his companion in distress and riding a horse at rapid speed. His eyes still ablaze, he reached the court after it had assembled. Seeing, him thus, Salavat turned to the emperor.

Salavat points out to Amar Singh's sword that is not tied to his waist, but held in hand. He seems possessed by craziness and arrogance like a being rustic, primitive and uncouth. He insists that the emperor should take a decision not to waive the penalty.

The emperor is taken aback, that Amar Singh shows no respect for the salt he has tasted and displays arrogance. He realizes that Amar Singh cannot be trusted and should be cast away. And the penalty, 'vo nahin maaf ho, nahin maaf ho.' (may not be overruled; may not be overruled.)

Salavat approaches Amar Singh and the two exchange a few dialogues. Salavat demands payment of the fine, and dire consequences if unpaid, while Amar Singh warns him of the looming end-

"Ab jo bola kadi zubaan, foran khanjar doonga taan"
(if again you speak bitter words, I will use my sword)

Then Salavat provokes by saying, that if he is an actual Kshatriya, he should do what he says.

At this point, Ranga tells us that on hearing these bitter words, the lion heart lashed out with his serpentine weapon and in one stroke, Salavat's head fell away from his body. No courtier came forward to challenge Amar Singh; the entire court stunned to stillness.

Then, with a tremor, as he leapt towards the emperor, the latter ran in to the palace. And the queen was taken aback.

The act of killing is taken over by the narrative, with Ranga telling us about it in the past tense. This means, that even though the action takes place on stage, it is not necessarily performed with the dramatic intensity of the situation. It can be portrayed by a suggestive or illustrative action, which the stylized Form of Performance can accommodate. The realism is substituted by the demonstration. So the action is to be seen as part of narration; as something that happened and is not happening now. An indicative gesture may also suffice. The audience can see that the act has taken place, but is denied the experiential relish of violence or the drama or suspense of its execution or evoking thrill or horror or fear. It is as a happening on record.

Not as it happened. But so that it is registered. So, while Nautanki does not seem to prohibit enactment of an action like a killing, it does not dwell on it. It is handled technically and does not generate emotion. Perhaps, also, because the Form is such, it is the music that weaves the pattern of emotion. The audience can derive satisfaction from the fact that the hero succeeded in achieving what he set out to do and in the central hall of power, displaying his strength. His moment of victory, though is handled through the Ranga. (Amar Singh is assigned no verse. There is no time (performance time) to celebrate and the situation moves swiftly with Ranga as he follows the emperor

The queen, surprised by the King's unannounced entry, asks him for the reason. When he says its because of Amar Singh, she is initially all praise for the one, 'sabse zyada wafadaar tha' (most loyal of all). But when she comes to know that Salavat has been slain by him, she is struck by grief and cannot digest the fact that none of the courtiers or the king himself failed to protect her brother or retaliate. The emperor explains –

“ladne wala babbar sher nahar hai vo-uske jauhar ki tujhko nahin hai khabar
Ek minute bhi thaharta vahan par agar, jaan jaane mein meri nahin thi kasar”

(He is a fierce lion- you know not his valour
Would be slain, had I stayed a minute longer)

The queen accuses the king of being a coward and says that she been called, she would have done a better job and is prepared to do so even now. The king fears him, as, “fauj ekta mein paltan jo balwaan hai”(the united force of) the army is at his behest. The queen scorns at the king for his lack of manliness is exposed and wants to go herself to avenge her brother's killing.

At this moment Amar Singh enters and taunts the king as he is hiding behind the queen for “mard ladte hain mardon se maidan mein”

(Men fight men in the battlefield)

Perturbed, the emperor turns to his courtiers and exhorts the cowards (Dudh ma ka lajate hue saram na lage) who shame their mother's milk, to act now and surround Amar Singh, so he cannot get away alive.

Again, it is Ranga who describes the battle, in which Amar Singh, with a lion's roar moved his sword in all directions and so did Krishna Nai. Some were slain, some injured and some fled.

Then Amar Singh enters and says that he had handled them all and known their calibre, and displayed his.

“Paltane kuch bula lo, hun haazir khada, aap jinka samjhe mujhe hamsar nahin”
(Call in some platoons for I am here for them-among whom you did not consider me a peer.)

Seeing them quiet, he salutes them with his dagger, promising to return the day after to complete the unfinished business of dealing with them. They had followed Salavat and so must taste the fruit (phal chakhaunga ka)! Warning the king of a beheading, he leaves.

Ranga tells us, that Amar Singh reached Naumahala, and narrated the events to his wife.

On the other hand, the emperor too had a plan. Next day, in court, he placed a bare sword and betel leaf next to each other and made an offer of twelve villages and senior most officer's rank to the person who would bring Amar Singh as a prisoner.

(Amar Singh, the huge rebel bothers me in my heart.

How to trap him, this thought leaves me not)

“Amar Singh bada sarkash, mere dil mein khataкта hai,

Phanse changul mein ab kaise, na jee se khyal hat-ta hai.”

The courtiers looked away and those who could, sneaked away giving some pretext. Ultimately, Arjun Gaur, brother in law of Amar Singh picked the betel leaf.

Arjun Gaur tells the Sultan, he has picked the betel and has tied the sword to his waist.

“le aunga pakad ya bhejunga Yamraj nagar mein

Kaam karke aunga/veerta dikhlaunga/aap dheeraj aur dharen”

(will bring him prisoner or send him to the other world

Will do the job, show my valour; comfort your heart).

Then, as Ranga tells us, an elated Arjun Gaur reached his house.

His wife questions him on his joyous state and he narrates the incident at court.

She advises him against his task, for a brother in law ought to be respected and not be cheated upon.

Arjun Gaur says that since his sister is no more, the family bond has no meaning for him. Money and wealth alone is a priority for him. Besides, he has confidence on his ability to handle him with deceit-

His wife says, “jo daga ne bhi tumhare sang ki daga”

If deceit were to deceive you? (then he would not return alive.)

Arjun Gaur is confident that he is rogue enough to manipulate deceit and is happy to place his head at stake for the prospect of wealth.

And despite his wife's entreaties, he leaves for the task ahead.

This scene is significant as it brings out the hollowness of familial ties, which are generally considered to be bondings of trust. The moral incorrectness of that breach of trust is brought out by Arjun's wife, but ambition and greed win over it.

In contrast is Amar Singh's house, where Ranga takes us, as uncle and nephew plan further strategy together.

Amar Singh says, though he has done away with Salavat, he is not content and plans to create further disturbance at the court. And if Ram Singh wishes to, “agar himmat teri pran ka moh

taj" (if your courage can overcome the attachment to life), he could accompany him or take care of his aunt.

Ram Singh is more than ready for, "sinh ke poot sinh hi hote jahan mein." (The sons of a lion are born to be lions in the world).

At this moment, Arjun Gaur enters and praises Amar Singh for the great achievement of doing away with Salavat and that has made him famous and raised his stature among the Kashtriyas. It has also instilled fear in the emperor who, seeing his might, is now eager for reconciliation. He has sent Arjun Gaur, to bring him to court with due respect to have a negotiation. He would again be the Army officer he was and now that his might is known, no one will meddle with him ("chi chapad na kar sakta tumse koi") and life will be smooth.

But Amar Singh is not inclined for he has made up his mind-
"Sheesh jhukaunga nahin shah ko dil mein liya ye than."
(I have decided I will not bow my head to the king)

The sun may change its course and rise from west instead of the east; the moon may come down on earth, but his vow was firm.

Arjun Gaur agrees that what he achieved was no mean accomplishment and compelled the king to hide in shame. But people are also saying that Amar Singh was disloyal and proved unworthy of the salt he had tasted-and this brings ignominy.

Amar Singh is flustered and sees no merit in this criticism for he had met with insult at court.

Arjun Gaur agrees, but also adds that all things run by negotiation and as the king has invited him, he must avail of the opportunity.

Despite persistence, Amar Singh refuses to be moved by his, "lallo chappo" (fawning).

Having failed to move Amar Singh, Arjun Gaur turned to his wife, Hadi Rani.

Hadi Rani asks him why he is so pale and in her heart she too is worried for his brother in law has become an enemy of the emperor. She requests him to find a way to mend the relationship as he is the only one she can rely upon.

Arjun Singh says that as the king also desires the same, he tried to convince Amar Singh, but-
"Apni taqat pe hai ghamand bada jija ko"
(My brother in law is hugely arrogant about his power).

So he augments the enmity with the emperor while you and I worry for him.

Hadi Rani immediately requests Amar Singh to go with her brother (brother of his late wife, whom she regards as brother) and not be at war with the emperor. He has proven his might and so there is no more fear. He ought to go there for reconciliation brings happiness.

Amar Singh says that though the two of them have such a desire, he himself wants to fight the emperor-

“Ulat kar shahi takht surangon se kal kile ko udaunga mein
Na jeeta chodunga Badshah ko gale pe khanjar chalaunga mein
Ye teg dushman ka khoon peene ko dekh to laplapa rahi hai”
(I will turn the royal throne upside down and blast the Fort through tunnels
I will not let the emperor live; and slit his throat by my dagger.
See how this sword blazes to lap up the enemy’s blood!)
And not knowing this his state, she sings her own tune!

However, Hadi Rani persists and Amar Singh says that if she insists, he will go, but his heart still bears the thought he has spelt out and will take an opportune moment to act. And he is ready to go, see and act accordingly.

Hadi Rani wants to him to give up the thought of war, for it can have dire consequences.

Amar Singh mocks at her fears and prays the goddess Ambika stays by his side, so-
"Jiski aayi thi uski kaza ho gayi"
(Whose turn it was went away).

She goes on requesting and he finds ways to avoid, and includes Krishna Nai, who also feels that the brother in law should not be trusted. This also diverts the discussion.

Ultimately, Hadi Rani says that if he does not go with Arjun Gaur, she will –
“Fod kar sar abhi jaan de doongi mein”
(Break my head and give up my life).

Thus, Amar Singh is left with no choice, but to agree. There is no dialogue or song that conveys his assent. There is a stage direction to that end-

Amar Singh ka jaane ke liye tayyar hona (Amar Singh prepares to go). This may happen by a gesture, action or an improvised line or word by the actor.

The one who loves and the one who betrays work in unison to ensnare him.

This is a long sequence and often repetitive. That is perhaps to bring forth the convoluted nature of relationships within domestic sphere. The one who is invincible in war and combat is vulnerable inside the family. The enemy is right there and he is trapped into following him.

Once this is achieved, Arjun Gaur asks Amar Singh to leave his sword behind as they are going for a dialogue. And he should trust him (Arjun Gaur)

Amar Singh disbands the sword.

And as he does so, Ranga informs us, that ill omens appear. The queen’s left eye flickers and the maid comes with an empty pot.

Hadi Rani realizes that she may have made a grave mistake.

(The sight of a warrior being disarmed can also be rather disturbing. There is mention in many places that the Rajput treats the sword as his trusted companion-often as an alter ego-and, bereft of it, his personality feels incomplete. His power too is taken away. Till he has his sword, he cannot be prisoner).

Hadi Rani takes Amar Singh aside and asks him not to go with Arjun Gaur. She cites the omens-the breaking of the nose ring, the slipping of the head cloak etc.

But having once agreed to go, Amar Singh cannot step back. Besides, he has other ways of dealing with the enemy, even without the sword.

(Amar Singh is thinking only of the emperor as the enemy whom he is prepared to target. He does not see Arjun Gaur as the enemy).

Hadi Rani can sense that something is amiss and gives him a small knife that would fit into his pocket. Amar Singh accepts it.

And as they part, Hadi Rani is full of grief-

“Ab ke bichude na maloom kab Jagdishewar bhent karave”

(As we part who knows when God will have us meet.)

She then pleads with Arjun Gaur to take care of Amar Singh whom she sends with him. She requests him not to be tempted by greed to deceive her husband and to think of her as a sister ‘whose boat is mid current’ (naav manjh dhaar meri hai teri behan).

He assures her of loyalty, swearing by Truth, Ganga and God.

Ranga tells us, that as they went Arjun Gaur knew not what to do.

Arjun Gaur thinks in his mind, how to proceed with the task at hand. And then decides to take in Amar Singh by way of a window where the killing could be easy and he could claim the prize money. He knows that in direct combat, he has no chance of success.

Ranga tells us-this time in prose- That Arjun Gaur took Amar Singh not towards the gate, but the window. Amar Singh retorted with anger.

Amar Singh says that he sees that he has been deceived, but does not go back on his promise. He calls him names; and calls him rogue and greedy. This is no negotiation. Yet he will not step back.

Even though the window is low, he will not lower his head, he has vowed to bow only before God. So he will step in with his feet leading.

Ranga tells us, that as Amar Singh was stepping in, Arjun Gaur stabbed him from behind and a stream of blood gushed out and Amar Singh said his last words to Arjun Gaur.

Amar Singh calls him a coward, sinner, hypocrite, who struck from behind; who deceived and who deserves to be damned. He has no regret losing his life, but regrets being deceived. As he prepares for Heaven, he offers Arjun Gaur his knife as a token to keep.

Ranga tells us, that as Arjun Gaur went close to take the knife, Amar Singh hit him with it and even while dying, struck off his nose with it.

Amar Singh went to Heaven and Arjun Gaur was left nose-less (nakta); a metaphor of a man dishonoured. And Arjun Gaur repents and wonders how to show his face to the emperor.

Ranga, further says (in dialogue) that, covering his face, Arjun Gaur comes (in present tense) the king and would we care to know the conversation?

The king asks Arjun Gaur, why he stands with head lowered and face covered? He had picked the betel and what more news does he bring?

Arjun Gaur tells the king, that he went to Naumahala and challenged Amar Singh and after a fight lasting two hours killed him and in the process his nose was injured. The corpse lies by the window. The king can see it and quickly hand over the promised prize of twelve villages. May the glory of the emperor increase!

The king does not believe this version, because he is aware of the valour of Amar Singh and that no courtier was willing to pick up the betel to confront him. So, he demands a truthful version of events.

Then Arjun Gaur confesses how he lied to Amar Singh and having taken him to the window, attacked him from behind.

The king condemns Arjun Gaur, for having thus killed the bravest one (amongst his men) with deceit. He was the one, whose strength made the rule of the ruler possible. Had he fought a fair fight, he would be worthy of the prize. As of now, he deserves punishment and asks him to get out of sight. Then he calls the barber to shave Arjun Gaur's head, blacken his face and set on a donkey, to be paraded in the city and sent away.

Ranga tells us that this is what was done. What the deceitful, dishonoured, nose-less Arjun Gaur, with shaven head and blackened face, says to himself, can be heard by us-

Arjun Gaur calls the king a cheat and curses him for treating him thus-Blackening his face, shaving his head and making him go around the town, seated on a donkey. His dignity was tarnished and he was tormented to the extent that he wept. That was the award bestowed on him!

This turns into the moral of the play- Never practice deceit on anyone, so tells you Krishan (the writer) for who so ever deceives, reaps such fruit!

Salient Features of the Text

One of the most striking aspects of the text is, that the story moves with relentless speed, especially in the first half. This deals with Amar Singh and his dealings with the court of Agra, wherein he comes across as a skilled and fearless warrior. The second half deals with Amar Singh and his relationships within the confines of the family, where he is vulnerable and ill equipped to even sense the perilous situation he is in. These are two sides of a coin, inseparable, but different. The pace and rhythm also reflects the atmosphere of the two spaces. His personality remains quite the same and in both instances, he comes across as a person who gets isolated. The one place where he reaches out in friendship is the wilderness of the desert. The seed of the first half lies in the hostility of Salavat Khan, that leads to the imposition of a penalty on Amar Singh who settles score by slaying Salavat Khan. The second half is a subsequent consequence of this happening, but the setting is unknown to Amar Singh and he is caught off guard. The emperor remains pivotal in both rather three situations-

1. The imposition of the fine
2. Announcing an award on Amar Singh
3. Disgrace of Arjun Gaur

The third creates the third part of the play which has two players, and though not delineated as an epilogue, has elements of it. It creates a twist that is surprising and unexpected. Apparently, the last stroke of Amar Singh has led to it, but its tone and temperament is different from the rest of the play. Arjun Gaur, seems almost a Fool, deserving to be mocked at and by ending the play with him, the writer makes him the symbol of the moral; the lesson to be learnt. He is clearly what the audience should not emulate.

Performance as Narrative: Ranga as storyteller

Another interesting aspect of the text is the presence of the Ranga. Not only is he present throughout, he is the storyteller who narrates what had happened and the enactment of scenes support the narration. The scenes are at times snippets of conversation that may be presented to illustrate a point. The Ranga often provides the background and the impact of the sequence. He links scenes by narrating what happened in between; eg; how Amar Singh reached the court on a fast horse etc. He also gives insights into the mind of the characters and tells us about the motivation behind their actions. He also describes qualities, characteristics of the characters and details of the happenings that may not be performed; eg; the moving away of the courtiers to avoid the betel laid before them. All actions of combat are described by the Ranga.

While, the Ranga is the narrator of the story, various characters at different points carry the narration of events from one scene to the other. They become narrators within the story, circulating the happenings amongst one another. .Ram Singh is told about the penalty by the king. He repeats it to himself, then to Amar Singh. Arjun Gaur picks the betel and then narrates the same scene to his wife. The imposition of fine and killing of Salavat is repeated many times by the emperor and Amar Singh as well. These repeated narrations of the same event do feel repetitive and yet this creates the interesting possibility of accommodating different perspectives to the same happening. These multiple narratives are not in identical language

and this multiplicity opens the scope for varied interpretations. It also gives the actor-singer an opportunity to layer the same utterance with an added meaning each time.

Arjun Gaur lies to Amar Singh that the emperor is calling him for reconciliation. He repeats this many times. Then he repeats this to Hadi Rani and she re tells the same, tempered with her sincerity to Amar Singh. This repetition almost makes it seem true. Perhaps that is why Amar Singh is unable to see through it. Arjun Gaur lies to the emperor too, when he says he had a fight with Amar Singh. But the emperor sees through it and insists on knowing the truth.

Repetitions also build images. The king talks of the valour of several times- to Salavat, to his wife, to the courtiers and - even after knowing Amar Singh is no more-to Arjun Gaur. It is said sometimes in fear, sometimes in caution and sometimes in admiration, but each time it reinforces itself. Amar Singh also says the same about himself. It may seem like boasting, but by no means an empty one. The man knows himself. He knows his worth and what he deserves. It is worth noticing, that the only character who does not praise Amar Singh for his bravery is Narashhawaaz, though he is in the king's service. On the other hand, it is Amar Singh who sees Narashhawaaz as a person who can be relied upon. The formal introductions take place after the exchange of turbans – after they have made the bond of commitment to each other. And then they go their ways. This bonding between strangers is beyond family, profession and status.

Portrayal of Amar Singh and other Characters

The portrayal of Amar Singh, in this text is not a static one. It has a clear graph and develops steadily. It also does not glorify him, but also presents his flaws as well. Amar Singh is seen initially as a valiant army officer indispensable to the empire. He is fearless and direct. The hostility between him and Salavat is also apparent. He extends the period of leave, almost provoking punitive action. In the film, he is a man of his word. That is his leading trait. Here it is not so, for if it was, then he would have maintained the day of joining. The delay is either intentional or he gets engrossed in the leisure and delight of the marriage. His nephew suspects he has been drinking. Amar Singh reacts immediately to the penalty and is all set to pay it by the sword. In this text, his leading trait is fearlessness. Though, he does listen to Hadi Rani, he is resolute in his intention. He is an epitome of masculinity and sees no reason to compromise it, though he is aware of the price and the pain. After, his first success, there is no looking back. In saving his image, he knows he has created his own self destruction. His life is to be sacrificed to the image. At most, he can become a hero. He is intent on rebelling further and harming the emperor himself. While the king admires Amar Singh, he feels humiliated and disinclined for a dialogue. Amar Singh too builds up his defiance. His fearlessness becomes a flaw, because it makes him careless. He intends to blow up an empire - singlehanded. This may be arrogance that does not sense the danger from a petty man like Arjun Gaur. Till the end, he remains a fighter and tries to retaliate, leaving an imprint on his foe.

Amar Singh is isolated in court and he gets isolated in his home. This is a parallel to the

renunciation of social ties. The aloneness is an important characteristic of the hero in the Folklore of Rajasthan. In this text, as in the film, he goes alone, with his slayer, as if almost ready for the sacrifice.

The emperor represents a mighty empire, but he himself seems bereft of kingly qualities. He does not trust himself with the sword nor does he investigate closely. He depends on his officers and courtiers, but knows the value and power of his orders and judgements. His primary concern is the empire and as he is also a shrewd observer of characters, he engages them accordingly. Salavat Khan manipulates him by disguising his jealousy in the garb of the empire's interest. In many ways, he is an opposite of Amar Singh. He is afraid; Amar Singh is fearless; he is dependent on his courtiers; Amar Singh operates by himself.

Portrayal of Women Characters

The character of Hadi Rani also develops in an interesting manner. From a mute witness in the desert scene, she creates a counter point to the protagonist. She tries to hold her husband back, but unlike the text by Natha ram Gaur, she does not use feminine charm to distract him. On the other hand, she offers to fight the battle herself, giving the impression that it is too petty a fight for his skill to engage with. But the manly Amar Singh cannot have his wife fight his battles- he has to handle them himself. She constantly gives the suggestion of having a dialogue with the emperor. Her insistence on this, establishes the point, that this could have been an alternative way of handling the situation. She knows that fighting a mighty empire is a daunting and perilous task. Loyalty has its merits. She has poise, tact and confidence, but is distraught at the prospect of losing him, for she does love him.

In the second half she considers Arjun Gaur her ally, because he talks of a reconciliation with the emperor-a possibility she has been hoping for. In her haste to avail of the opportunity that he seems to offer, she compels Amar Singh to fall in his trap. As her husband is disarmed, she senses that something has gone wrong and tries to dissuade him, failing which she arms him with a small weapon. Her pleading with Arjun Gaur is the last attempt to salvage a sinking reality- the irony of which is both, horrifying and pathetic. Though, Hadi Rani acts for the interest of her husband, she is by no means his shadow and stands on a distinct footing.

The women characters in the text are clearly chalked out and are outspoken about their views. Their judgement may not always be correct, but they comment and advise their husbands on their plans and activities. The queen speaks on behalf of her brother; condemns the king's cowardice, when he runs into the palace and exhorts him to take action. Like Hadi Rani, she too seems equipped to handle arms and is prepared to wield the sword. The wife of Arjun Gaur dissuades him from working against Amar Singh. As a family member, he deserves respect and as a warrior he ought to be feared. Though he does not heed her, she can see that the consequences of his deed will be grave. Ironically, none of the women have proper names and are mentioned as they are referred to. Hadi Rani is called as she hails from Bundi (Hadadesh).

Language

The text is in verse, with easy rhymes; at times predictable. This helps the performance to connect well with the audience as they tune in to the flow of words and music. At times, the lines do not conform to the grammar of sentence construction and the words to set to maintain the stresses and rhythm of the selected metre. The language is direct, active and has the sharpness of fight and combat. There is very little ornamentation; allegory and similes have been used sparingly. They have been used either to describe Amar Singh (nahar sher babbar) Amar Singh's anger (eyes ablaze like the sun) or the sword (swaying like a snake). When he talks of his desire to overthrow the throne, the description (through the tunnels blast the Fort) is so vivid that it impacts like an image. Over all the words are familiar and picked up from the world around; the content and intent clearly stated, with little space for emotion. This play is set in the fighting arena; the atmosphere is charged with strife, hard and unsentimental.

It is interesting that English words like 'register', 'platoon', 'pocket', are often used. Colloquial words like 'lappo chappo' 'mooji' 'paaji' are used along with Urdu words like, 'sarkash', 'hafte akleem', 'namak-khwar' etc. This brings the action close to the audience and the distance of centuries disappears.

The action of the emperor placing a betel leaf along with an unsheathed sword before the courtiers echoes the metaphor, 'Beeda utha lena' (taking on a challenge). It is as if the king has thrown a gauntlet and Arjun Gaur has picked it up.

The City of Kanpur and Amar Singh Rathore: The Cosmopolitan Prevails

Much before industry came to Kanpur, it was a cantonment developed by the British around the village, 'Kanhapur', and was referred to as 'Cawnpore.' As sepoys moved here, markets and trade also opened up. The hinterland connected here as outsiders from other parts came to try their luck and skill. Freight and passengers moved to Allahabad and Calcutta via the Ganges. The British officers had access to an opera house. The first independent dancing girls set up their salons here. While the township flourished, it also felt the palpitations that gripped the country in and around 1857. As the sepoys faced the conflict between the call of the 'salt' and the call of the conscience, their loyalties underwent a change. Many became rebels and many others spied upon them. Many dancing girls picked up arms along with the sepoys and patrolled the cities. Then there were the executions. And after that, came the industry. Mills and factories for the children of the executed. The city expanded. The mills took in more hands. The Nautanki of the rural roots interacted with the touring Parsi Companies from Mumbai. The Kanpur Nautanki evolved its trajectory imbibing the elements from the atmosphere, lifestyle and culture around. It was urbane and direct, open to changes and accessible to the working class and the trader alike. It brought in a whiff of the village, people had left behind and along with the nostalgia, was the fast-changing world around.

Shri Krishan came to Kanpur from Unnao in the second decade of the previous century and

set up a tailoring unit. He actively engaged with Nautanki. He has written many texts and 'Amar Singh Rathore' is one of them. The language and texture of the play resounds with the culture of the city. Amar Singh was not born here. Perhaps that is why Ranga mentions Shah jahan first, the opening being-

Shahar Agre mein hue-Shah jahan sultan

(In the city of Agra , there was a king, Shah jahan)

Then Amar Singh is mentioned. The city of Agra is close by and is a familiar association. Shah jahan has also been heard of. Through them Amar Singh, the strong one, is introduced. Then the story begins and it draws the audience into the action. The very first scene is likely to strike a familiar chord as Amar Singh asks for leave and a squabble ensues. Amar Singh may be a prince and a riyasatdar, but in the text, he is an army officer- an employee of the king who needs to apply for leave and seek permission of the emperor. Salavat Khan grumbles like the usual attendance keeper- officers take leave randomly, do not treat official duty as work etc. It is all so familiar! Kanpur is (was) a city of mill workers and other employees, who bring in their own parallels to the viewing. The situation is like an everyday occurrence; words like 'hujjat' 'pajipan' and phrases like 'bech dali maine koi izzat nahin' are amply heard at the street corner today.

It might seem odd that such language is used in court, but it familiarises the audience with the situation. This brings the past right into the present; rather right at the doorstep of the audience. The language creates the scope for identification by the audience. As mentioned earlier, along with common colloquial words Urdu too is integral to the script. What is interesting is, that this combination is uniformly maintained. It is not, as if only Urdu is spoken by the Emperor, begum and courtiers in the court or that another kind of vocabulary exists in the Naumahala. All characters speak the same language- the language of the play. The language does not segregate the characters; it brings them all within its framework. It is cosmopolitan. Like the city. With its history, officialdom, diction and slang embedded in the very style of the writing. The language of the performance is the language of the people. Even though set to music, it is close to the spoken. At the same time, the usage of some words and phrases touches the core of recesses that lie deep rooted in the cultural ethos of the area.

Terms like 'namakmkhwar' and being true to the salt bring up memories of the sepoys as do words like, platoon, hajari. The enormity of rising against an empire was felt here in many homes. As was the call to become 'sarkash' and rebel. Amar Singh who dared the might of an empire would be a hero here .The 'bagi' or the rebel who absconds is a popular character in the folklore. Stories of Robin Hood like dacoits are also many. Amar Singh who proves his manliness would be every man who feels the oppressiveness of a system that does not take cognisance of his existence. When a system- and probably all systems do so-deflates within a man that which he considers to be the core of his being, then he often resorts to hitting back, as does a person who is cornered. War lords are not the only ones who react in such a manner. Many try to assert some sort of power when rendered powerless. Amar Singh who often talks of losing face, resorts to a phrase often used, till today, to denote the losing of social space. He is not the one who defines that space, he merely has a foothold and that too is perpetually slippery. The system operates through laws of its own making, often stifling the individual. Amar Singh who drinks and makes merry for two weeks after his wife comes and does not report for duty may be at fault, but is all the more likeable for it. He has the small

joys and the big moments of daring. Not a distant hero, but one of the neighbourhood. Amar Singh for whose head, the betel leaf is prepared and laid out, epitomises heroes of many movements in the area. And as Arjun Gaur deceived Amar Singh, so was Tantia Tope (who operated in Kanpur,) too was deceived. As were many others.

Madari Pasi of Hardoi, formed the Eka Manch and led a popular and rebellious peasant movement against the British and landlords and the talukadars of the region around 1920. The British had announced an award money on his head and he had to go into hiding. He was from a community that had been active in 1857. Echoes vibrate and Re-vibrate. He used the narrative of Alha Udal to mobilise the peasantry. Their relationship with the character of Sayyad Mir Talhan who trained the brothers in warfare and enabled them to fight Prithviraj Chauhan, became synonymous with the inherent unity between Hindus and Muslims. Just as the bonding between Narashhawaaz and Amar Singh comes to be. Water as precious as blood and as necessary makes them brothers. Water in the desert, so rare and precious- such is the nature of friendship.

As mentioned earlier, in this text, the women characters like Hadi Rani and the Queen are adept at wielding the sword. Hadi Rani is confident of handling a foe like Salavat Khan.

There is an ease with which the wife has her say-

Let the morning come. Let a brave woman show her valour!

Even as Amar Singh insists on fighting his battles himself, she insists on accompanying him as a right of 'the other half.' This right to enter the male bastion of arms is what the women had claimed in Kanpur city. They, particularly, the dancing girls picked up arms and fought the battle in 1857. The courtesan Azizun is one such example, who is remembered by the people of Kanpur even today in their conversations. They speak of her, not in hushed voices, but in stray images, incomplete sentences as they recall what they know.

Oral History passes around and converges in nooks and corners. It takes on different shapes and changes contours. It becomes the city's memory somehow known to all who live there or even pass by. People remember. What they may fear to write, they narrate and give it life in another mind, another memory. Sometimes, they may make mementos; toys; a rider on a horse; who knows from where he comes and where he goes.

Amar Singh may be a medieval warrior, belonging to an era gone by, but his story might stir up associations of another past, elsewhere. Kanpur has seen many rise and many fall; many phases that have circulated and dissipated.

CHAPTER 9: TREATMENT OF AMAR SINGH RATHORE IN POPULAR FOLK FORM, 'KHAYAL' OF RAJASTHAN

Background

Rajasthan- the sandy land guarded jealously by the sun-whose bleached meadows blossom with wild unfettered colours that people here adorn; from whose waterless depths gush forth music, rhythm and dance. This brightness fills the flow of life with vitality. Where existence is hard and nature ungenerous, the spirit generates the balm to soothe itself. As the ordeal of the day ends, the night calms the sand and a song floats from a parched throat...whether it be a shepherd, a bard or a peasant woman.

When survival itself is a miracle, reaching the end of a day, asks for celebration. Drums must beat and a song must vibrate the silence -as anklets tinkle all along the long trail searching for water. The tinkle does not make wells, but it makes the search less tiring and less lonely. It is a companion. In the barrenness, it makes dreams and builds fantasies. For in real life, even to get a new odni could be an aspiration of many seasons. And as the songs say...it will be possible, if it rains and the fields yield, if the man returns with money, and if the money lender does not take it away, and if the roof-top does not need repair and if.....it's an endless list to the odni.

The imagined prosperity is invaluable as it keeps life going. People here, with limited resources have created a rich and bountiful culture that gives them sustenance, strength and a sense of well-being.

Needless to say, that this wealth of song, tales and ballads have evolved and acquired the shape of well chiselled Forms. Different dimensions of singing get codified in distinct styles. There is a diversity in dance, having roots in area, occupation and caste.

Among the Performing Arts, Khayal is perhaps the most organized and dramatic in form. It is operatic in structure, though (un-like western opera) dancing is also an integral part of it.

While the story is rendered entirely in verse, the musical score forms the basic structure. The dance is largely improvisational, though by no means accidental to the Form. It retains its identity as an art of movement expressed by the human body. It is not 'interpretive' of the lines or verse as rendered by the actor.

At the time of singing, the actor focusses on the music. Then, when the Nagara takes over, he takes to dancing and lets it come full flow. Then lines may be repeated along with the dance, but they do not control the movement.

'Khayal' or 'Khel' as this Form is referred to, is a unique combination of the two terms. Many Practitioners, however, insist that 'Khayal' derives from 'Khel', which is the original term and it means Performance. 'Khayal' means, thought; idea; fantasy; opinion- an abstraction from

the concrete experience- a journey of the mind, the spirit; a virtual paradigm.

'Khel', on the other hand means, -game, fun, play- drama. It is something lively, entertaining, full of tricks, surprises, jokes and laughter. [Incidentally, 'khel' translates as 'play' into English, where also it is related to game and drama].

As, 'Khayal' and 'Khel', both are in prevalence, it makes the Performing space, an area where the profound and the playful meet; Fun and fantasy weave the performance, making it multi-layered and multi-dimensional. For the one with perception, it offers food for contemplation and learning.

For all, it tells a story with interesting and dramatic events. It has music and dance, auditory and visual, thought and action; physical and virtual.

Like, 'Khayal', 'khel' too does not denote permanence. It comes and goes; it is created in time and space, but does not stay. It dissolves. It appears in the 'real' world, but is seen as a sphere of imagination; it has separate rules and notional tasks. [This would apply even to all games like Kabadi, kho-kho etc.]

It is interesting, that the singer-actors refer to themselves as 'Khilari' (players) and they do so with great pride. 'Khilari' is one who has perfected his skill and is adept at it.

The musical structure of 'Khayal' is based on the composition of the Ragas. These are selected according to the situation of the play- and to suit the hour of the night, when it is likely to be played. Thus, the purpose of this arrangement is to provide the audience with a musical experience that has its aesthetics well grafted and not entirely bound to the story.

[Many Practitioners say, that by reducing the duration of performance, this inherent musical structure has been disturbed, affecting the over-all impact of the performance].

Unlike the music, the graph of the dance is not crafted in such detail. Perhaps because it relies on rhythm for its pace and would be slow, very slow, or fast, depending on the base provided. This grasps the mood and gives the performer an indication of the character.

Sometimes, the gesture emerges out of the dance, incorporating the stylization in an effortless way.

The performers often move to different parts of the stage and repeat their lines, so as to reach out to audience. This is an accepted convention and the audience is not irked by the repetition, rather it savours it and enjoys it further, if the singer-actor can shift the emphasis or elongate a syllable further. The word and tune must relate to the story and yet extend a little beyond.

Most Khayal Practitioners trace its origin to 'Rasa'. Over time it has carved its own distinct Form, creating variance with Music and dance, while incorporating a Narrative with inter-connected dramatic contours. While 'Rasa' may be connected with the Temple and themes related to Krishna, Khyal deals with many subjects taken from Mythology, History and Society

around. 'Satya Harish Chandra' is still popular, while Ali Baksh largely made performances around fantasies.

Khayal can be performed anywhere in the open, on a bare stage. According to Komal Kothari, Khayal in its present Form has existed for over a hundred and fifty years.

Practitioners and other writers say it could be more than two hundred.

There are different Schools of performance in Khayal, like- 'Kuchamani Khayal', 'Chidava Khayal', 'Ali Baksh Khayal', 'Shekhavati Khayal,' 'Kishangarhi Khayal' etc.

Khayal performances may run round the year, but largely around festivals and post- harvest when people have time at hand. Needless to add, that famine and other calamities affect the performances adversely. A performance in a village is a sign of prosperity. The happening of a Performance is in itself a celebration.

Sometimes, a khayal Team would base itself in a village for a few days and perform consecutively. At times, it makes one performance and moves to the next setting. Members of a Khayal party can be from any caste. While many Mirasis and Dholi are 'Khilaris', Brahmins, Nais and others are also among the performers. It is not bound by family nor is it passed on as a hereditary occupation.

Many years ago, when this researcher was working with Ugamraj ji, and asked him why no member of his family had joined the Art Form, he had Said, ' Khayal is an artistic pursuit and only he can enter, who has the inclination. It has to be a calling from within. Like Bhakti. He who craves for God, is lost in him. But it leads from inside.. Without it, it does not happen, nor should it be...why should someone enter this field, just because someone else from the family is in it?'{Subsequently family members joined in and are keeping the group alive}

He had also said that, 'When you are before an audience, what you are, shows clearly; your actions speak for you; no one can shield you there. It is like your deeds are, in front of God. Deeds in life- gestures on stage- always with a spectator!

Ugamraj ji was born in a brahmin family, but lost his parents when he was rather young. He used to sing well and gradually the word spread. Bhanwar Gopal, a noted Khayal Performer heard of him and came to see and hear him. He spend the night in the verandah, where Ugamraj spread the late mother's saree for a sheet for the guru. At dawn they both left and gradually Ugamraj was chiselled into a versatile Performer of Khayal.

He also became a person of substantial means and had his own 'akhara' away from his residence, in the midst of fields. There also was a well and space to stay, where artists could practice and be trained Opening a pod of green mung, which had the raw lentil grain lined like emeralds, he had spoken about the characters portrayed in Khayal.

Most of them are from mythology and some are historical. 'Satya Harish Chandra' and 'Amar Singh Rathore' are popular examples.

He believed that a character must have substance. By this he meant, both stature and nobility. They should have accomplished some feat or achieved a certain level of moral standing that places them at a height. And gives reason for their story to be told. What the character does, defines him. Duryodhana may have reasons for being the way he is, but that does not justify his actions and he does not become a hero.

Loona may have her logic and reasons for wanting to seduce Puran, but the act of seduction is not absolved of judgement. The notion of 'noble' comes from what is projected by the action and its measurement according to social paradigms. The Act of the person makes or unmakes a hero- not the inner depths or turmoil. Mythological characters are to be seen in the spirit that they were constructed. And as carriers of certain values.

Supposing, we were to look at these characters as ordinary human beings and look at the conflicts they would have experienced within? Ugamraj ji explained, that the idealism and extra-ordinary qualities of the characters made them worthy of portrayal. They were examples of the noble and the virtuous. Their greatness created the space for them to be heroes in performance. If they would think and feel like ordinary people, why would they be in Khayal? What would be the need to remember them at all? People of substance and consequence have the rare honour of becoming the subject of the poet's word.

Then there is no hope for an ordinary person to be a character in Khayal? I had asked and he had said, 'Not unless the person does something that makes him or her worthy of being a character in Khayal.' A character must be worthy of the attention that a performance bestows upon him or her! "You must ask of yourself what have you done that I should want to have you in the Khayal?"

So it is about a point of view- the view of the poet and artist. We write about characters we can identify with, but the poet here looks for greatness that can be aspired for. The inspiration is to touch an element of the ideal, the magnificent in the human being and not merely to express oneself.

But if the central character was an ordinary one, then would it not enable the audiences to identify with him/ her? Ugamraj ji disagreed. He explained, that even the ordinary person identified with the king who is the hero. Every person can relate to a king, because he wants to see himself as king. (And thus allows himself to see a reflection of himself in the character of the king?).

This way of looking at the presence of kings in Folk Drama, challenged the generally echoed premise, that the hero as king has nothing to do with the life of simple mortals. But probably does have and this may have been missed by critics. A willing reflection of the self is a way of connection.

Too close a portrayal can make the audience defensive. The depiction of the lives of kings also creates a distance that provides space to draw out lessons.

What Ugamraj ji said, came from both, belief and experience. He emphasized that the poetic works for performance are created after considerable thought and study.

Mythological characters have their own standing and acceptance in the minds of people. He had respect for it. Discussion was one thing-performance was different. He felt that altering images or interpretation, purely on subjective perception was not correct. It had to be mythologically accurate-in the sense there should be some proof to substantiate the stand. He was open to discussion, but also grounded in his system.

He is, unfortunately, not with us anymore, but he is remembered, both for his performance and command over the Form.

While, working with him, I had suggested the use of stools or 'chowkis' in a scene, where many characters were standing. But Ugamraj ji did not accept the suggestion. He gently said, "This happens in Drama- not in Khayal."

It took me some time to understand the meaning of his statement. In a Form where all characters break into dance at the given moment, not only will the chowkis be in the way, but also that solid real objects take away the abstraction of the form. Khayal or Khel best occupies the emptiness- it flows in and out. At the same time, he was open to including the Dandiya dance- as it creates a circular shape and then dissolves it too.

Khayal: where the woman performer is conspicuous by absence

An eminent Khayal performer had once demonstrated the veil. There were several ways of adorning it, based on caste and region. There was a lot of variance to reflect individual traits as well. The veil could cover the face completely or come half way or conceal three-fourths of the face. Some reveal the eyes; some a single eye; some an eye and part of the chin.

Some reveal profiles-the right side or the left side.

Sometimes, the veil invites, sometimes it scolds; sometimes it conveys agreement and often disagreement. This was through the observation, imagination and improvisation of Pukhraj ji, the legendary Khayal artist who is still remembered with awe and admiration.....

The woman performer is absent from the world of Khayal performance. This is considered to be one of the attributes of the Form. It is men who don the feminine and act the parts of women characters. They spend time over their transformation. The flowing lehenga, colourful dupattas, bodice and layers of make-up are put on with painstaking effort and sense of ease. The jewellery too is meticulously chosen and adorned with great élan.

"Naak kali kachnar, honth pyari ke patle paan

Mere danth kanth yeon khile, chameli khil rahi madpaan Thodi theek thikane khilrahi, maulsari saman,

Genda si gardan khili, karti maan gumaan."

This is how Ali Baksh, a Khayal writer describes the beauty of woman.

(The nose is like half open orchid; the lips of the beloved like thin leaves of betel. The teeth are like the rows of fragrant chameli,

The chin is held in proper place like malsurry, And the neck like the marigold carries its pride.)

Men strive to match the poet's words and create an illusionary woman the poet dreams of. Radha is described by the same poet as-

“Pat ghungat mein, lat latkai, Ulak-dhulak, mukh par chai, Jaise badra mein chand chipe, Aise dhaj par lini ujjari mein”

(Behind the veil, lie the locks of hair Hap hazardly, they fall on the face

As through the clouds the moon hides And then is seen through the light.)

In another place he says-

“Mein phoolon ki si Kamini, so mera hai Kanchan sa gaat Aji mukhda mera yeon dipe,so jyon jada nagina danth Soorat mein kamti nahin, sau pariyon nae karti maat.”

(Delicate as a flower, with skin of golden hue,

The face so brightly lit with teeth like gems in queue No less in beauty than hundred fairies in view).

Young men sit on the floor, a small mirror before them and the makeup spread around it. Murdasingi is applied on the face, followed by rouge and powder. The eye lashes are made to sparkle and golden dots decorate the cheeks. It could take hours for the actor to be ready, but he does not feel weary or irritated. With a soft new gait, he moves and turns and approving his look in the mirror goes on to play.

The role of the Queen or the Rani, is much coveted and young actors wait for their turn to take centre stage. The Khayal Performer prides in his ability to play the woman.

When Ugamraj ji received an award, he graced the event in the costume of the Rani. “The award was not for me, but for my art [kala]”he said.

On another occasion, he proudly displayed the jewellery box. “I did the bead- work myself. My guru insisted on it. We also bought loose ghungroos and put them in a string ourselves, according to the weight we wanted.”

Photographs of his young days showed that he kept long hair. His Rani was free of a wig!(It is not unusual to see a player, running off stage, holding on to the artificial hair coming off.) How is it to be a man and play the woman?

Ugamraj ji considered it to be a great accomplishment. "When a woman performs, the audience is allured immediately. But when a man performs, they know it is not a woman they are watching-and yet, despite it, if they are allured by him; taken in so completely, as they would be by a woman, then that is an achievement -and a difficult one too."

(For 'allure', he had used the phrase 'moh lena', which means more than, 'to attract.' It is be overwhelmed- so fascinated by some-one or something, so as to forget oneself. It is used in the context of beauty in the human form, as well as God and Godliness.)

In the extreme, this implies ,to be filled by a presence that enhances and elevates your state of being. In a way this is what Art is all about. When used in the context of the feminine, would it be because of its association with the finer and more sensitive qualities of human nature or would it be so because of the more apparent and visible traits like facial looks, gentle gait and softer voice?

"Only the visible can be believed,"Ugamraj ji had said, "When a man stands on stage as a woman, it is not true and it is not an illusion. Yet people believe it. Not because, they are supposed to believe, because he is dressed in women's clothes, but because he feels real; when he surpasses the real, it becomes an achievement."

His actors say, that his presence on stage would have the audience guessing...Is it a man or a woman? A man or a woman...? Really a man...?

But would this not be true of the other parts as well? For example, the king on stage is not a real king and we all believe that. But we get carried away. We believe...we allow ourselves to believe...

"That is why all roles have to be practiced, so as to become believable. But the illusion created by man playing woman is greater than man playing man in any other role. Because, even the basic body of man and woman is different."

If women played women's parts would it not be Art?

But of-course, when a man plays the Rani, the challenge is undoubtedly bigger.

Khayal could also mean a notion- the notion of something and not its actual presence. Yet, the actor needs to imbibe the woman's gait-slow and graceful; the movement of the arms and wrists; the awareness of the waist; the 'hav-bhav' (expression and gesture). The man must get the 'loch and lachak' (flexibility) of a woman. "you cannot portray a woman, merely by wearing the ghaghra lugdi (costume) of a woman; but by acquiring these traits she emerges from within."

The male actor, personifying the woman, projects the feminine form on stage, access to which is generally denied in social interaction. Here too, he can only indicate and not reveal. So, the romance of the garb, the gait and the gesture increase manifold. A human body, attired as the female, moves and dances to music on stage. There is something explicit and mysterious in the presence. Because the audience knows that a man is playing that part. So entangled

are the two- the impersonated form and the actor's body, that it is difficult to sift and sort the two.

Then, what attracts the audience-what they perceive or what they know? There can be no clear answer. Also, because, during dance, the sculpturesque patterns created by the human body, themselves defy labels. The dance exudes joy and energy that is infectious. The audience is pulled into it.

Is it then, man watching man, not as man, but as woman or man watching woman who is really a man? It is a puzzle, a game and like all games, notional. For, the truth is, as the poet Yeats has so famously said- who can tell the dance from the dancer?

Many women performers who perform on the popular stage, are disturbed by the intrusive male gaze. Women in general, confront it in various aspects of daily life- from office colleagues to bus journeys to the vegetable vendor. Many women performers feel vulnerable and it affects their self- esteem. Some cringe, withdraw into themselves and get inhibited. They perform with an unsmiling face. There are others who learn to play with the gaze and take it in their stride.

How does the male actor performing as a woman respond to the male attention that comes his way? Performing in Khayal is a voluntary decision; it is not hereditary or bound by caste. The actor comes there, following a creative pursuit; to claim the right to express himself by acting-singing -dancing. It is also an attempt to explore what is beyond experience; to dress and perform as woman when you are born as man.

The actor may be occasionally mocked at, but he grows to love his part. Asuji, a writer connected with Khayal, said that there are stray incidents of advances, but every actor handles it his own way. Besides, the performance space is not an isolated space and should not be judged in itself, but as a part of society. The desire for control manifests in many ways in the powerful.

The actor, by virtue of his talent and projection on stage, is openly an object of attention and susceptible to the delineations of the gaze. That he does not give up, is because of the bigger power of the Muse that leads him on. The actor may, for a while be intimidated by an angle of a gaze, but his great moment is, when he is flattered by it, held by it; when he is the master of attention.

And that he cannot give up. When the drums beat, the drape rustles, and the ghungroos clink, then his feet move unrestrained, he swings and sways, carrying the eyes of the audience with him. Then there is no pulling back.

It is worth observing, that in Khayal, the dancing is not restricted to the female parts. Male characters, too have their share of dancing. Banshi Lal Khilari, who generally, would play the lead, used to take steps with poise, taking confident strides, covering the entire stage. (He still performs, and there is rhythm in his feet, but for health reasons, he has to curtail too many movements). Even though, the dancing is free of the text, it maintains the flow of rhythm.

While women performers are absent from the scene, the women characters in Khayal are central to the plot and its development. Lachchi Ram ji of Kuchamani Khayal has created women characters that are strong and theatrically significant.

Mirabai is the pivot around which 'Mira Mangal' is structured.

Taramati in 'Satya Harish Chandra,' has immense scope and space for performance. Loona in 'Bhakt Puraan' is a substantial role.

Hadi Rani and the Empress in 'Amar Singh Rathore' leave an impact on the audience. Hadi Rani has many shades of love, courage and sacrifice, while the Empress wrangles at length with Amar Singh. These roles have been crafted with care and are by no means incidental to the performance. Many of these characters play the Veerangana and are not meek, demure and docile. They challenge the playing capacity of actors, providing him with myriad situations and emotions.

How does a male actor understand the role of a woman?

Ugamraj ji had said that they played it as the situation demanded and as they would approach the role of a king or a beggar. The actor has no experience of these characters, but uses imagination and observation- also, keeping the audience in mind.

What about knowing the character more or the life of the character?

"Life is life and stage is stage. What we do here and how we live are two different things. This role on stage, begins and ends here. The other goes on."

Many artists subscribe to this view. Several Nautanki artists also segregate the spheres of life and performance. Before entering the Performing space, they bow to it; touch it with reverence and place its dust on their forehead. Then they step into this space. This makes the space special; sacred. It is the zone of Art. The zone of imagination. Distinct and separate from the world around it -the real world. This is liberating for the artist.

But the artist moves in and out of this world. How would that affect them? This is not an appropriate question, for the separation of zones implies an ability to distinguish. Besides, for a man playing as a woman, the process of 'atmsat karna' can lead to implications that stereotype the actors. The answer that Ugamraj ji had given and as noted in my old diary was-

"All the men in Khayal are normal men. They are physically strong and labor hard in the fields when required. They have arranged marriages, children and look after their families. They are like other men, as good or as bad as them or as good or as bad as they would have been with or without Khayal. Some take their money home, some play the bride and hit the bottle."

The Khayal player does not want to be probed unnecessarily. Like all actors elsewhere, his ways of arriving at a role are mysterious. And as all artists guard their inner resources, so must the Khilari. However, it is visible that the female impersonation brings a certain delight with it. Nail polish, curls lipstick and colourful clothes. Most players make their own costumes.

They choose the cloth, design and have a tailor to stitch it. Sometimes, they take the help of a female relative in choosing and designing.

The Khayal troupe is organized and managed in different ways. Senior Artists make their groups and aspiring artists try to get attached to one. Sometimes, there may be a contract for a season, which would be for roughly four to six months. Such a group would have a manager to fix and line up the shows. Often, they would be ticketed. At other times, villages would host and share partial costs.

The various fairs (pashu melas) that are spread all over Rajasthan generally have Khayal performances. Pushkar has been a popular venue. Artists can also be called as and when the shows are fixed. Sometimes, a small group may attach itself to a bigger agency for a season. Artists also have a system of receiving payments- some as advance, some mid- way and some at the end of the work. Till recently, Senior artists maintained a space [house independent of residence or open area] where training was possible. As intricate singing is integral to Khayal, riyaz or regular practice supports its sustenance.

Bansi Lal Khilari of Kuchamani Khayal

A few years ago, this researcher had seen, 'Satya Harish Chandra' in Kuchamani Khayal performed by Bansi Lal ji's group. It was staged in a narrow rectangular compound of a school in a small village. At one end was the lit-up stage and the audience filled up the rest of the space. There was a wall and verandah on one side and the school building on the other. This made the entire setting compact and supported the acoustics.

Bansi ji was not acting, but he sat by the musicians, seeing the performance move smoothly. 'Satya Harish Chandra' is a well-known performance of the group and draws large crowds.

The actors were experienced and performed with ease- their voices, filling the night with melodious notes. The actors performing women's roles were not self-conscious, the actor playing Taramati was well built with no trace of frailty. There were no exaggerated movements to bring out grace or delicate demeanour of the Queen. The role of Taramati is such.

[When a woman actor, Radha Rani plays this role in Nautanki, she also does not act like a submissive wife, but as a character that is equal to Harish Chandra in stature. 'Ji swami' may be said many times by the woman to her husband, but as meaning that does not mean that each time, she bows low to him. The phrase is often rendered 'but' or 'I see' etc]

Taramati begins as the Queen, but is soon put on trial to face the vicissitudes of fortune. She bears the turn of tide with strength, while bearing deep sorrow. When Harish Chandra maintains a stoic indifference to her suffering, she is forced to beg.

As the music prepares for the moment, the actor playing Taramati, extended her odni forward (jholi pasarna) and with a plaintive note, stepped into the audience. The Queen was no longer queen; she was a woman standing in the midst of us and begging with a woeful cry.

She could be the woman from Rajasthan, forced to beg- at the red light crossings of Delhi-in years of famine. She could be a migrant or any woman with no means.

Her singing was soft, also because no mike followed her and the actor's rich soulful voice was clear and effortless. As the dethroned queen moved through the people, she seemed to signify a change in fortune, that could befall on anyone. It was not easy to make contact with the actor. Eyes grew moist, as people put forth coins in the spread out odni.

This was a master stroke of Direction, that de-contextualized mythology and brought it in the area of the experience of the common person. The audience began by sympathizing with the character, but were soon identifying with her.

Perhaps that is why Masters of Folk Performance do not feel the need of intellectually re-interpreting mythological characters. They internalize mythology to the extent that they can draw from it, while handling the challenges of life around them. That is why for them mythology does not lose relevance and they have the skill to contemporize it with a simple device. They can bring a mythological character straight into the world of ordinary mortals

and make contact with them!

That moment from the Performance remains with me.

Bansi ji has been with the Khayal stage for about half a century. He was born in 1940 as Bashir Mohammed and after performing in Ramlila and Nautanki, moved to Marwari Khayal. Like his father, Imam Baksh, he too was drawn to music and his initial training was at home.

One of Lachchi Ram's nephews was with him in school and got him interested in the writings of the great exponent of Khayal. He was from Bhudsu, where the family had settled, after leaving Kuchaman. However, as Bansi Lal ji, points out, no other member of Lachchi Ram's family kept up with the Khayal tradition and they do not have much inclination for music either.

Bansi Lal ji, took on a professional name, probably because, it defines his voice-crystal clear like the notes of a flute.

[Many artists are known to take on a name that signifies the quality of their talent. Well known artist of Nautanki, 'Chunni Lal' was so called because of his diction- it seemed that the words were chosen like gems.]

Bansi ji lives in Degana with his family. His son, Shaukat helps in the management of shows etc. Not all Khayal plays are published. According to Bansi ji, the diversity in Khayal comes from the colour of the region in which the Performance is created. In Rajasthan, music has many shades and that is why Khayal too carries those vibrations.

The story may be the same, but the style of singing creates a distinct flavour-and so they are gauged differently. 'Kuchamani Khayal' belongs to the area in and around Kuchaman, that also includes Nagaur. It draws extensively from, 'Maand.'

According to Bansi ji, Lachchi Ram ji has created more than fifty Khayals. He probably composed them orally or while in rehearsal. Many artists gathered around him and wrote out the texts. The phenomenal growth of artists at that time meant that there was continuous expansion of the Form. Most of the verses are part of the 'Books' that were accumulated and prepared in this process.

Not all Khayal texts are published. Bansi ji learnt Khayal from other performers and handwritten texts. However, some of the dialogue in the performances are not taken from the 'books' as these works are generally referred to. The artists improvise the lines or add on portions to their performance. What seems to work, stays on.

The three characters central to Khayal are-

- 1.The Hero or the king
- 2.The Rani or the queen
- 3.The Vidushak

The Hero and Rani have been already dealt with above.

The Vidushak, is 'chatur' by temperament. He generally presents a counter viewpoint to the Hero. He sometimes, mediates between the Hero and the audience; at times, he questions or makes fun of the king. At times, he also supports him.

The Vidushak is played by an actor, who is quick with reflexes and can play with dual faces- one aspect of expression as he interacts with the hero and another as he shares his actual intent/comment with the audience. Sometimes, this exchange with the audience can be without words- just by an altered facial expression and a gesture.

An actor playing Vidushak, may sometimes use a crooked gait, to emphasize the cunning that he carries with him. A Vidushak played well, adds to the success of the performance.

Some of the popular Khayals are-

1. 'Satya Harish Chandra'
2. 'Amar Singh Rathore'
3. 'Jagdev Kankali'
4. 'Raja Chand Maliyagiri'
5. 'Paras Pitambari'
6. 'Rao Reedhmaal'
7. 'Vikram Nagwanti'
8. 'Goga Chauhan'
9. 'Bhakt Puranmal'
10. 'Mira Mangal'
11. 'Rukmani Mangal'
12. 'Raja Bhartihari' And so on.

There is no text on Jaswant Singh [younger brother of Amar Singh Rathore] as I am told on enquiring.

As an aside, Bansi ji shares in a lighter vein that there is a rumour among Khayal players, that any group performing 'Raja Bhartihari' is likely to split the very next morning ![after the show].

Bansi ji has memorized many of the Khayals and can perform them at a short notice. Audiences in places like Kuchaman, Nagaur and Pali would also know them and knowing would add to their enjoyment.

This style is largely popular in Western Rajasthan, though performances take place all over. The pashu melas and other Fairs provided venues for performance. There was a time when a single Khayal would be performed over two or three nights.

Till about a decade ago, a Khayal performance was a celebration in itself. The moving Khilaris on stage, sometimes enhanced by the brightness of the full moon; their voices etching currents in mid- air; the night flowers bursting with fragrance ; wakeful men and women in the audience, absorbing the over-all ambience of the wintry event.

The trend of ticketed shows was commonly prevalent, the average pricing of a ticket being around Rs.20/- Shows in villages might follow another pattern of performance management and was negotiated from place to place.

However, now, as Shaukat points out, there may be people below thirty years of age [in Rajasthan itself] who may not know about Khayal.

Their group has managed to deal with changing circumstances. Bansi ji's fame brought many invitations. For some time now, he acts less, but directs and keeps the group going.

The players take on other work, joining him, as and when required. Shaukat too, is engaged with the transport business and that supports the household.

'Amar Singh Rathore' and Kuchamani Khayal

Connoisseurs of Khayal talk of the days when Ugamraj ji played Hadi Rani and Bansi Lal ji played Amar Singh Rathore. Both the Khilaris excelled in the respective roles and mesmerized the audiences.

This researcher has had the opportunity to see Bansi ji perform Amar Singh with other co-actors. Dressed in his spotless angarkha with churidar and well-made turban embellished with a jewel, Bansi ji created an indomitable presence on stage. With a sword dangling at the waist, he could cover the entire stage with his dancing steps. The dexterity of his foot-work was evident even as the strides widened. When he stood, his spine was straight and stance firm and well composed. His performance was marked by precision and neatness, while being warm and robust. He sang in crystal notes; his voice maintaining an aesthetic composure-without it being gruff or shrill.

Years later, in August 2019, Bansi ji's group performed the same Khayal in Jaipur. He was nearing eighty, and walked with support. However, he prepared to play Amar Singh Rathore with the same enthusiasm as before! The costume impeccable and with great delight he placed the jewel on the turban, 'after a long gap' as he said.

Once on stage, he needed no support to walk, though the dancing strides were cast aside. The feet throbbed with rhythm. A chair was brought in, so he could sit and sing and emote. But his robust energy would not have it this way. A Khilari on stage is always a Khilari! And so was Bansiji. The occasion became more special, as his old friend and nagara player, (who has played with the British band Radiohead) came to play the drums once more for Bansi ji in performance!

Bansi Lal Khilari says, that he has played Amar Singh Rathore, at least a thousand times, if not more. This is one of the Khayals that could be performed consecutively over two-three nights.

It still continues to be popular, particularly in Marwar and other parts of western Rajasthan. The main attribute of this Khayal is Veer Rasa. Almost every 'ter' and verse is based on this

emotion. That is widely appreciated. The language and costume is also of the region. There is drama and situations move at a fast pace. Besides, people know about this character and his story.

The Khayal Narrative, follows the story and over-all flow of the other Folk Forms, but there are some deviations, which are interesting in themselves.

The opening scene takes place in the Agra Court, where Amar Singh requests for leave and that is granted seven days.

The next part moves around the palace of Hadi Rani, wherein the Vidushak as Kishna Nai (known to be a confidante of Amar Singh) talks and flirts with the maids around. He asks the maid her name. She says-Champa.

Then he tells his name-Champa Lal.

So there is much mirth and laughter. She might then make fun of 'lal'.
If she calls herself, 'beenani'; then he might pose as, 'beend' and so on.

Such kind of banter is commonly associated with weddings and both rural and urban households are familiar with it.

(According to Bansi ji there is no Nai in the, 'Book' and this has been created largely by the actors.)

There is also a scene between Amar Singh and Hadi Rani. She is in a room and Amar Singh enters. He wishes to see her face, but as is expected of a newly-wed wife, Hadi Rani declines. When all pleas fail, Amar Singh says something to the effect that-no wonder, people say, the princess is short of one eye!

At this, all resistance fails and a bewildered Hadi Rani pulls back the veil to confront Amar Singh with a- Whaaaaaat?

And Amar Singh is triumphant as the audience too have had a glimpse of the newly wed wife.

Then begins the homeward journey to Nagaur.

This is filled with a lilting song about the sun; the heat and gentle patience that is needed to deal with it.

Dhoop leharawe Mujhse sahi nahi jaave

(The wife says- heat waves of sunlight are adrift and I can bear it not)

Matee ghabrave

Du ghanta baad dhoop dhal jaave

(The husband says- Do not be perturbed- in two hours, the sunlight will set)

Dopehari ki dhoop

Mujhse sahi nahi jaave Dheere chalo

(The wife cannot bear the heat and asks him to walk slowly)

Rani, mann mein Dheeraj rakh, matee ghabrave

Do ghanta mein dhal jaave, thandi chaon aa jave

(The husband asks her not to panic as soon the heat will recede and cool shade will take its

place.)

Jungle ki teji sahi nahi jaave

Dheere chalo, paanv mein chhale hue jaen

(The wife says that she cannot bear the heat of the open wild and there are blisters on her feet, so he must walk slowly.)

[Jungle does not necessarily translate as forest. It is often referred to as a place where there is no habitation- only sand, cactus and wild shrubs.]

Dheeraj rakh Rani, Hava bhi hai dhoop bhi

Rasta to kaatna hi

(The husband again asks her to be patient-besides, with the heat, there is also breeze. And they have to anyhow cover the distance.)

And so on.

The tune is soft and soothing as the newly- weds cross the desert on foot, providing shade and solace to one another, by being together- each for the other.

Ironically, the desert with all its hardships, gifts the pair space to connect and speak to each other! In a traditional society, the husband and wife, constantly surrounded by relatives, may not find it possible to have a word with one another.

In this song, merges the voice of Narsebaaz, asking for water-

Paani peovo ji

Jungle jhadi mein jal kahan se aave

(Get me some water...where would there be water in this wasteland)

Paani peavo...jee ghabrave

Sukho kanth, bola nahin jaave

(Get me water... the heart panics.. the parched throat cannot call out..it panics.)

Vikat ujad padav mein

Paani kahan se aave.

(In for midable waste, where would there be water.)

Amar Singh stops and traces the calling to Narsebaaz. Both the characters inter-mingle these lines. One is in desperation and the other is understanding the situation.

The Nai, who has been coming behind Amar Singh, also hears the cry.

He hides the water. He does not want to offer it to Narsebaaz.

This is point of view- an alternate point of view to the hero. By bringing in this alternate point of view, the significance of the hero's action increases manifold. We see it in the perspective of a possible response that could have avoided the sharing of water. The Nai can improvise around his point of view, delay the hero's action, argue with him, annoy him, but the insistent

hero would have his way.

Here, Amar Singh offers water to Narsebaaz. The two become brothers of word and Narsebaaz promises his blood for the water he has received.

The revelry around the weddings, maids skirting in and out adds a colour of domesticity to the story, which otherwise deals more with the affairs of the court. The song and dance of the newly-weds also brings in the gentler aspects of personal life. It also has a repetitive refrain that is a tradition common to Folk songs.

These two sequences set the Khayal in contrast to Nautanki, where the treatment is stark with the court scene followed by the desert. The Khayal takes time to dwell in the oasis that softens the desert.

The next scene in the Khayal is in the court of Shah Jahan, where Amar Singh is absent. The decision to impose fine of seven lakhs is taken and messenger dispatched to Nagaur, with Salavat Khan's signature on the Farmaan.

It is noticeable, that Ram Singh is not presented in court. Nor does he inform Amar Singh about these happenings. He comes to know only when the messenger reaches Nagaur. Amar Singh reacts to the 'parvana aeyo' and prepares to leave for the court.

['parvana aeyo' is often rendered as, 'parvana aeyo Dilli se'. Although, as Shaukat says, the Khayal story places the action in Agra. By mentioning Delhi, the present comes knocking.]

Hadi Rani tries to stop Amar Singh from going, but he explains the situation to her and asks her, 'kyon ban rahi hai agayni'.

He is a gem among warriors and would prove himself. But 'the modh in her hair is still intact' [implying that the personal rituals of the wedding were incomplete]. She warns him not to trust the Turks. She also offers him her necklace, which is worth much more than the penalty imposed. Amar Singh plans to pay the fine with his, 'kande ki dhar' [the stroke of his sword] and insists that, 'seekh mane do'; 'maane vida karo'.

This indicates the ritualistic farewell.

Amar Singh confronts Salavat Khan in court, because he has spoken ill of him, 'chugali khai hai'. Salavat denies, saying that, on the contrary, 'maine baat sudhari hai.' {have rather contained the matter.}

But Amar Singh feels humiliated, 'mere par dand kiya, jaane duniya saari.' And then asks him to be prepared for consequences.

A heated argument ensues. Salavat Khan uses abusive words, that angers Amar Singh and when he calls him 'ganwaar', Amar Singh hits him with his sword.

The court is stunned and the courtiers disperse, none daring to challenge the might of Amar

Singh.

The Emperor goes into his personal chamber where the queen confronts him. She wants revenge for her brother, but the Emperor is reluctant. He feels that Salavat Khan too was responsible for the tragic events and he does not blame Amar Singh. She feels that Amar Singh is alone and can easily be dealt with.

She insists that the king take action, else she would do it herself, for 'Rathore akela, koi mard nahin saanjha'. When, Amar Singh enters, she wrangles away the sword from him, but he manages to take it back, 'Ae ji Marwar ka mein raja, galbal galbal mat kar raja', for he has seen many warriors, 'bade bade sipahi soorma dekhe....galbal galbal mat kar dekhun tera zor.'

The queen, however is stuck with the notion that, 'ek akela Rathore' should be no match for the king.

After warning them, Amar Singh leaves, but the queen is upset with king, for something done in, 'bhari kachheri' is a challenge to his authority. 'kahan gaya sar ka taj?' and 'kahan gaye tere sipahi ?'

The king then calls a meeting of the courtiers and promises a handsome reward for whosoever would bring Amar Singh Rathore alive to the court.

Arjun Gaur picks up the beeda-takes up the challenge. The Khayal, geographically places him as belonging to the Ghodavati region, and an inhabitant of Barot village. His sister was Amar Singh's first wife.

Arjun Gaur arrives in Nagaur, where Hadi Rani meets him, but does not recognize him. He mentions his sister and then she willingly accepts him as brother. When he says that, his intent is to have a 'rajinaama' between the emperor and the Rathore, Hadi Rani extends support to his venture.

However, Amar Singh refuses to trust him or go with him. Arjun Gaur pretends to be upset and tries to go without partaking a morsel. Then Hadi Rani pleads with him to go with the brother-in-law. Amar Singh consents, having faith in his armour and weapons.

But Gaur does not let him put them on, as they go for a negotiation of peace. Amar Singh keeps his word and sets out with him, taking the dagger that Hadi Rani passes to him.

They arrive at the small gate/ window, where, as Amar Singh takes a step with feet inwards, Arjun Gaur stabs him. Amar Singh, however, manages to use the dagger he is carrying and cuts off the Gaur's nose.

In some of the performances that this researcher has seen, the Actor playing the Vidushak, also plays Arjun Gaur. The khayal, 'Amar Singh Rathore' is hero centric even as the hero confronts opposition from various characters- Salavat Khan, the Empress and even Hadi Rani who tries to hold him back.

The Vidushak, thus has hardly anything to do after the wedding and the Desert scene. Bansi ji also pointed out that, “the Vidushak is nowhere to be seen in the court or the consecutive battles.’ The reason could be that his presence in court might not seem logical. (Though Krishna Nai is said to be in battle with Amar Singh, according to many sources).

It is interesting that when the actor, playing Vidushak, also doubles as Arjun Gaur, he brings in similar qualities to this performance, as he employs for the Vidushak. For example, while posing as a well-wisher in front of Hadi Rani, he looks slyly at the audience, and with a gesture of his hand, indicates the intent of slaying Amar Singh. Arjun Gaur is not only hypocritical, but also a character of no integrity. The humour then turns dark and deviant. It can also be seen as becoming anti-hero.

But the Folk stage does not place its hero on too high a pedestal. The very fact that he is a hero in the Khayal, brings him glory. The rest in Khayal is notional- not trapped in realism.

(Amar Singh and Hadi walk through the desert and they sing a song along. According to Bansi ji, that is not Amar Singh-that is the Form. The Folk stage, then, assimilates the Hero into its conventions and Form.

It takes the story forward- not the person. Habits and personal traits of the historical character are not part of the performance. It is the presentation of the Hero as he exists now-after centuries of travel -in the imagination.

Urban, modern playwrights explore the mind and motivation of the historical characters, particularly as viewed from today’s perspective. This analysis gives it Form.

The khayal places emphasis on the deed- the action -which makes the story. It presents the story, as received today. So, it too is not bereft of contemporary references.

The two differ in approach. Hence, in impact and aesthetics.

The story of Amar Singh is popular, though it is grim. To take the grim and temper it with music and dance is a feat of the Khilaris who know how to play with the Form. The lightness is liberating as it creates a distance between the happening and the, ‘khel’ or play of it.

Greatness of the past then falls softly today!

Arjun Gaur, then is played and treated like a clown-who is laughed at for he meets with well-deserved disappointment. The emperor, of-course does not reward him. On the contrary, he confiscates his jagirs and expels him from court! The crafty, ‘Vidushak’ can now play the Fool!

The Emperor then sends word to Nagaur, that the mortal remains of the Rathore could be taken from Agra, by a warrior of equal calibre.

At Nagaur, Ram Singh prepares for battle. Moved by his tender age, Hadi Rani too prepares for battle, but Ram Singh dissuades her. She then remembers Narsebaaz. Their combined forces battle in Agra and are successful.

The Emperor concedes to them. Ram Singh is granted the riyasat of Nagaur while Narsebaaz is promoted to the rank that Amar Singh held in the Army. It is note-worthy that in Khayal, both Ram Singh and Narsebaaz are rewarded. Arjun Gaur is punished. The loyal and dis-loyal are shown apart.

Hadi Rani commits sati, but that is not shown.

There is a 'Chhatri' in Agra built by Jaswant Singh, to mark the spot where Hadi Rani committed Sati on the pyre with the remains of Amar Singh. The monument retains that memory. And is open to tourists.

The fact, that most Folk practitioners say, that they no longer show the sati scene makes it clear that the Folk stage is not a monument of history. It is a performing tradition that engages with the contemporary moment and the living. On that basis, the players are constantly editing, improvising and re-working.

The memory is not crystalized as in architecture, but is contextualized.

The exclusion of the Sati scene also indicates the power of the medium. It can influence and create role models. The 'Hayavadna' concluding scene is so artistically woven into symbolism that it seems surreal. On the Folk stage, even a line of poetry or a strain of melody would appear to glorify a ritual. Such glorification may probably impact behaviour, but is an area that requires a critical enquiry. The Roop Kanwar Sati case of Jaipur taught us all many lessons. And the Khayal players are no exception. They too are aware of the implications.

This researcher asked Bansi ji and Shaukat, if they ever sensed that the Khayal, 'Amar Singh Rathore' polarized the audience on the identity issue. So far it had not.

'There are two places in the script that it might,' said Shaukat, 'One is where Hadi Rani warns Amar Singh not to go to court, as the rulers Turks and Muslims are not trust-worthy. The other is, when the empress uses an abusive word for the Rajput Amar Singh- 'Rangad ko pakad lo...kisi mard ka nahin sahara...No Rajput can tolerate this.'

Both instances are of terms used by women characters! Probably because of their rawness. The men, by their dealings in the Court had learnt a more sophisticated and dignified grammar of social interaction.

(The film, 'Amar Singh Rathore' {1957} does not refer to religious identities.)

So what would the Khayal artist do?

'People who know the story and the history watch it from that view. Some others may find it objectionable. So, we sweep fast over these scenes. In some places we change the words or the line itself. At times, we skip the verse itself.'

The main thing is, that the Khayal is about 'Veer Rasa'- courage and valour. The mature Khayal artist knows the meaning of the performance.

How does the Khayal artist view the Puppet show?

'They tell their story-we tell ours,' says Shaukat, 'in one puppet play, the wife, instead of stopping Amar Singh, is excited about the trip!'

Some Khayal players have become part of the entertainment mainstream, while many continue to move through the country lanes. They all are wandering performers who are used to shifting locales and varying stage spaces. Each time, they look out for the new make-up area, where they can keep their little trunks and bags- and transform for the evening. The artist loves his moment of glory; and that is, when he dances in the eye of the spectator!

CHAPTER 10: WHEN A PUPPETEER TRIES TO REMEMBER

Peripheral Beginnings

At the time of making this proposal, I had discussed it at length with Ramlal. “There used to be fifty two puppets,” he had said with great surety, “And the story was of Amar Singh Rathore; always of Amar Singh Rathore.”

And this generated great curiosity in my mind. Fifty two puppets? What did they do? Who were these characters? How did they travel and how could they fit on that tiny stage!

There could be many guesses, all tentative between probable and the improbable. It all seemed mysterious and blurred. Hopefully more would be revealed. Could be revealed. And there must be some source. The origin. Where it all started.

“It is the village Kheri in Nagaur,” he said.

Nagaur and Amar Singh are connected. So that could be the starting of the story. I tried to locate the village and read about it, but nowhere were the puppets mentioned. Also the census reports were also not supporting the existence of a flourishing puppeteer population here. Each time I checked with Ramlal, his answer also remained the same. Spoken words and readings on paper did not match. I could not be certain, so I left it at that.

Then, when I started working /researching, I needed Ramlal’s support. He was excited and yet busy. There were other things happening; training, projects, travel etc.. We could not get moving. In fact, for a long time we were unable to meet.

I approached the Sangeet Natak Akademi, Delhi and was given access to see the recordings of archived material. These were of several Puppet shows, all called “Amar Singh Rathore”. While each was distinct, there were certain overlapping similarities that placed them stylistically together. The use of the whistle, the singing by the woman narrator, Characters like Kotwal, Amar Singh, Salavat Khan, Anarkali, the dancer, the Emperor were there in most. In a few, the main story was absent, though the title remained the same.

Over the years, new characters like Tarzan, Superman etc had been added to the repertoire. It seems that the emphasis has moved onto the show of skill, the story being an adjunct of it. Nevertheless, the similarity in design is not only evident, but conveys an interpretation that could well be the world view of the Puppeteer. The members of the Royalty, make an entrance and then stand in front of the back curtain. They remain there, tied by the Puppeteer, motionless, almost a curtain,(reminding one of the human curtain in ‘Ghasiram Kotwaal’) while characters of the street like Kalbelia, washer woman etc. come forward, up front and perform.

This is where the skill of the Puppeteer shines and as these characters take up the front stage, the Puppeteer would gain applause. These are the active characters, active and alive, while

the royal remain fixed almost like a back curtain. It is almost like a show of life, the performance of the Drama of every day. Characters of different regions, caste and professions are given space. In some of the shows, the weaver woman, who swallows the royal thread is depicted, and the woman justifies her act, as she was hungry. Yet, the kotwal pulls out the thread from her mouth and makes a heap of it, in some cases of different colours.

In one show, the woman relates her hunger to the “Chappaniya (a) kaal”(or the famine of 56 by an Indian calendar, which would be approximately around 1926.(There are many Folk songs in Rajasthan on this famine.)

Such insights, wherever discernible, bear a thoughtful temperament.

The Royal court pales in contrast and the final battle leaves them in a heap, the Drummer goes on playing the drum...”aur bajegi, aur bajegi...”

The show seems to belong to him.

Is he the Puppeteer; the witness and the teller? The spectator, for whom the happenings at the Royal court do not hamper the flow of life? And yet he knows and tells his knowing.

Then why the name-Amar Singh Rathore? What makes him the hero? The act of questioning authority? A single act in the midst of so many actions? And that one act leads to the killing of Amar Singh himself.

May be that is nature of the heroic: giving up the carnival of life-the fun -flexibility -gaiety -laughter for another track. Giving up. Renunciation.

The irony is that the killings too are game like. Puppets do not bleed; they mesmerize with their movements, bordering on the surreal.

None of the shows had fifty two puppets.

The duration was not long enough to accommodate even the entry of fifty two puppets. There was little dramatic singing. (though popular folk songs were incorporated.)

Meanwhile, I also read few books and related material.

It is interesting to note that Devi Lal Samar traces the concept and origin of the Puppet to Figurines made of ancestors and Folk deities in wood, clay or stone for the purpose of worship and placed at sites associated with the deceased...initially, they were not the entertainment providers; on the other hand, they were offered entertainment...they did not personify a character to sing praises ; it was for their glory that events were organized. They inspired songs, dances and festivals.. They absolved difficulties for all and removed obstacles from the path.

This gives the Figurine and the subsequent Puppet a power condensed in its Form.

Gradually as Forms and symbols of worship changed, the role of the Puppet also underwent a change and as Dr. Vikram Singh Rathod says, "they became a medium to express varying aspects of the social life of human beings."

Dr. Mahendra Bhanawat describes the puppet as, "a doll of wooden bust and no feet... dressed in colourful attire with suppleness in shape and form...kings wore long gowns...with sword in one hand and shield in the other...These puppets were 14"-16" and those of courtiers would be smaller...the Puppeteer Sutradhar keeps a special whistle in mouth that ejects the language of the puppets, that is decodified by the words of the woman playing the dholak.."

There is an element of exaggeration and symbolism in the construction of the puppet-the face bigger than the body and eyes larger in proportion...tied to threads, the right- left oscillation and hopping jumps make the movements lively.

Dr. Rathod further states that the Sutradhars were from the Nat and Bhat caste groups for whom this became a means of livelihood. But not merely so - for it embodied the totality of their existence. They worshipped the puppets of their ancestors and their descendants tried their utmost to keep this inherited tradition alive from generation to generation. Their heart felt respect for the Puppet does not allow them to discard or throw away old and unusable Puppets anyhow; they consign them to the waters of a stream.

According to him in medieval times this Art received the patronage of kings. The three outstanding Puppet plays have been-

From the times of Vikramaditya, "Singhasana Battisi"

From the times of Prithviraj Chauhan, "Prithviraj Sanyogita"

On Amar Singh Rathore's life, "Amar Singh Rathore ka khel"

Out of the above, in Marwar, today, only "Amar Singh Rathore ka khel"

remains in transformed versions.

"Most of the Puppet Bhats of Rajasthan generally present only "Amar Singh Rathore ka khel"

The event of Amar Singh Rathore's life that occurred around 1644 has become synonymous with a puppet show."

This connection is crucial for this study. The Tale and its Telling have merged to create a style-a genre that has pervaded a Tradition for several hundred years. When the content and the construct become synonyms, it defines a relationship between them. It also marks a standard of workmanship, sets expectations of the audience and absorbs innovation within a prevailing framework.

The Tradition of Puppetry in Rajasthan seems to have a history flowing through centuries as Sampa Ghosh and Utpal Banerjee in their book, "Indian Puppets" say-

"It is said that puppetry of Rajasthan is more than a Thousand years old, but there is no written evidence of it. We can get references only in the folk tales and ballads."

The existence of social practice creates references.

There are many ways in which collective memory stores its references. Mention in tales and ballads is one such way.

They remain open to scholastic choices and debate.

Yet prevalence of a phenomena reflects in the acceptance accorded by social behaviour.

(When the Puppeteers came to our neighbourhood, the behaviour of the residents reflected that this was not a new occurrence; they knew what was to be expected- that charpois would be required etc...People get habituated by a continuity.)

The authors mention the practitioners as-

“Mainly the Bhat community practices this art termed Kathputli. These people are called Nat and claim that their ancestors had performed for royal families and received great honour and prestige from the rulers of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Punjab...”

It is however, the Form that spells its magic in various ways, drawing on the presence of the Wooden Puppet that enchants –

“Rajasthan puppets have their own speciality. It would seem that they are creatures from some celestial world come down to earth with small bodies and long skirts and with eyes and nose disproportionate to the anatomy of the body compared to the earthly beings....Their bodies and limbs, made of mango wood are stuffed with cotton and a slight jerk of the string is meant to cause movements of the puppet’s hands , neck, and shoulders...”

The Puppeteer has a deep relationship with the Puppet. “For the Bhats, puppets are part of divinity, giving them livelihood, peace, activity and joy. They never destroy a puppet, but consign broken puppets to a sacred river and allow them to flow away with the stream -on the way back to their celestial home.”

They further conclude, that,” In Rajasthan puppetry, the epics are never used, unlike in other states and even gods are absent...A curtain generally dark in colour is at the back stage and a colourful curtain with three arches ,called Tiwara... or Tajmahal hangs in front. ..Sometimes, they use a throne for the king, but mostly no property is used on stage...”

This curtain and style marks the backdrop for,’Amar Singh Rathore’ as was evident from most of the archived performances.

“Sometimes there are 52 characters in the play ‘Amar Singh Rathod’. (!)”

This statement seems to corroborate what my friend Puppeteer had been saying! Seeing it in a book is a relief! Black and white print adds weight to what the Puppeteer already knows.

That is in his memory. Knowledge invisible. The printed is knowledge acknowledged, documented, visible, quotable; hence it gives so much strength to this vague attempt trying to piece a Tale together!

Geoffery J.Snodgrass spent several years interacting with the Puppeteers and has written extensively about them, their links with the past and attempts to carve a future in the urban centres. He also focusses on their world view, which shapes their interpretation of stories in "The Centre cannot hold: Tales of hierarchy and poetic composition from modern Rajasthan" he says-

"Bhats demonstrate the ways in which high caste persons such as kings are utterly dependent on bardic services-thus rendering performers like them central and kings peripheral....."

Bhats are not prepared to concede that they are in any way inferior of those whom they serve, whether these are gods or human patrons...In taking patrons' names-that is, in praising them and maintaining their genealogies and histories- Bhats argue that they give their patrons (matlab) history (itihās) and that they make them happy....In the past Bards possessed the power to make or break reputations...Thus literally to forge royal identity.

As curators of collective memories, skilled praise singers vested kings with noble lineages stretching back to the sun or the moon....Bhats then, do not conceive of Bards as inferior dependents of kings. Rather my informants think of patrons as dependent on bardic services. In these terms, a patron's gifts are not a sign of lordly supremacy. Rather they are a tribute and thus an implicit acknowledgement of bardic value..”

The Bards have a way with words and can manipulate meanings with a twist. Also they are open to old tales finding new meanings, often subversive to the mainstream. An old tale demeans Shudras by naming them as feet, but the Bhat talks of the power of the feet without which no move is possible. “What might otherwise seem marginal and degraded, becomes central and superior.”

This reversal is born of ingenuity and a sense of power that can shift the blocks of the prevalent power structure with an ease in their interpretations or performances. The very Design of ‘Amar Singh Rathore’ in which the princely characters form a backdrop, while ordinary beings actively perform in front, seems to emerge from this world view . The author observes that, “My Bhat informants place neither kings, priests nor elite bards at the centre of society....they centre society around their interloping selves.”

This probably gives the community a sense of self- worth, importance and power-at least in their own eyes. To survive in tough circumstances, rejecting pity from within and without. At the same time, they constantly apply ways and means to bolster their image and income. The author indicates that the title of ‘Bhat’ used by the Puppeteers could also be a recent phenomenon. “Splitting with their Nat brethren, my informants renounced their dancing and acrobatics. They also took more fully to Puppetry -an Art form that entered their community at the beginning of the twentieth century though my informants sometimes claimed that it had been known to them for thousands of years.”

While the Puppetry is practiced in the urban centres, they maintain contact with their Jajmans in the village, who are Dalit leather workers or in some cases, turned weavers.

They keep their genealogies and also sing and entertain on occasions like weddings. At the same time, they have taken on new opportunities that have opened up in recent times. “Shortly after Independence in 1947, and seemingly building on modern gains in status during the colonial period, my Bhat informants expanded their clientele by finding new audiences for their performances in the major Indian metropolitan centres. In more recent times Bhats have also taken to performing Puppet dramas for local and foreign tourists as well.”

This has been facilitated by changes in outlook that support commerce. Palaces that were once private residences are open to public. The author notes the irony as high caste bards (Charans) move away from their traditional ground, many Rajputs have converted their mahals to hotels where Puppet shows are held! ... “Thus, for example, my Bhat informants narrate the epic of Amar Singh Rathore, a minor 17th century noble from their home district

of Nagaur in western Rajasthan, who is said to have served under the Mughal emperor Shahjahan.”

Some Puppeteers also tell stories of other heroes to a new emerging clientele (according to their preferences.) They not only ‘market history in old style,’ but also put a sheen of antiquity to their puppets, to make them attractive and saleable...and “in fabricating fictive royal bardic identities, present day Bhat are able to appropriate roles and statuses now abandoned by the former elite bards of post – Independence Rajasthan.”

[However, what appears to be fictive, might have a basis in a past-as most Puppeteers assert.]

The author says that in performance, ‘purpose of playing does not lie in the explicit advocacy of specific political positions, but rather in the implicit, but pervasive suggestion that all such positions are situational, provisional, and motivated by the passions and interests of their advocates.”

Such a treatment always creates High Drama and popular entertainment! All characters seem, “poor players who strut and fret their hour on the stage of life.”

In his book, ‘Casting Kings: Bards and Indian Modernity’ the author has elaborated on their way of life and Narratives and performances including, ‘Amar Singh Rathore.’ He quotes Bansi Lal of Udaipur as saying, “Bhat ancestors learned to dance puppets in the early part of the twentieth century, picking up the technique from a nomadic troupe from a region in what is now Pakistan. Late, one night, Muslim artists wandered into a Bhat village and put on a private puppet performance in the mansion of a local landlord. Though the performance was intended for Rajput eyes only, a Bhat peeked through cracks in the walls of the royal haveli...” Watching ‘miniature dancing figures’, he decided to learn it.

The Udaipur Artist, probably learnt the Art in this manner, but the little anecdote also provides different pointers. And they may be worth examining-

1. That the Art of Puppetry existed prior to the orientation of this Artist.
2. He may have been the first one in his area. There may have been active groups in other parts, as nomadic troupes were performing this show and probably this particular group was not the only one.
3. That Puppetry as an Art Form was initially performed indoors and for the nobility- as most Puppeteers assert. And that landlords gave it attention; hence support.
4. That this was a troupe having some members and probably not just a couple.
5. That he learned through the performance of another group. A puppeteer’s learning process is informal. There may not have been ‘akhadas’ for learning as in Nautanki and Khyal.
6. That religion does not divide the Artistic aptitude of the Performing community. This group, telling the story of Amar Singh Rathore to a Rajput family, is in itself proof of this. The

Puppeteers of today, themselves testify, that they play this story, irrespective of religion.

7. That this particular group, in pre partition days had its roots in a culture that knew no borders.

8. That the story of Amar Singh Rathore belongs to the people since the seventeenth century. The desert laid bare its tales to the wanderers of the desert who carried them as legends. Whether that 'region' is here or there, - it is somewhere in the reference area of the legend. It belongs to the pre partition culture of the sub-continent and performances probably existed much before the middle of the previous century. The show that the nomadic group brought could have been in their repertoire for a long time...

It may be a matter of further research as to where that group is placed now and the progress of the show.

It is to be noticed, that the 1871 Act mentions Puppeteers along with gymnasts, acrobats and dancers.

It is not the purpose of this study to establish the antiquity of the Performance- rather it is to view its various versions, including those that may be in the memory of the Puppeteer and along with them to understand the transitions. However, as is evident, there are diverse and varying positions that bring challenges to this study. As is known, the basic character of Amar Singh is historical. Folk imagination has further coloured it in hues of heroism. There are records and overlapping narratives, that adhere to a familiar outline, each one selective in its highlights.

Would 'Amar Singh Rathore' be an appropriate subject to be initiated in the mid twentieth century? Or is it that a phenomena of the rural landscape that existed for a period of time and entered the hotel of the tourist only now? It is difficult to fix an origin to something that is so widespread. Once, it seems, the medieval knight inspired the Puppeteer and the performance was his story. On the other hand, in the present design of the Performance, the other characters occupy more space. It can also be possible that with time, the main characters were diluted and the more interesting ones survived- Royalty paled, just as feudalism grew weak at the core.

(The 1956 film on Amar Singh Rathore, contextualizes the story within a certain politics. it depicts the fall of Salavat Khan, almost as the falling of a puppet. This moment in the film seems to be imbued with a grammar that could well belong to a popular tradition of Puppetry).

(The tale of Amar Singh Rathore seems to be tied to the string of Puppetry – the make- up of the Bundeli artist who performs the story of the Rathore prince, is very similar, if not identical to the persona brought out by the traditional string puppet as made by some Puppeteers and one in possession of Ramlal-as I saw later).

G.J.Snodgrass draws interesting parallels between the puppeteer's and Amar Singh's connection with Nagaur, where, they be outsiders now.

(Amar Singh was exiled from Jodhpur and Nagaur was given to him by the emperor. Some folk versions talk of him, being on the run after provoking the emperor's ire).

Being on the run. Most Puppeteers would identify with this experience. At the roots could also be the nostalgia that draws them to this story.

As Puppeteer, it is they who make story and assume power over the characters who happen to be royalty. By virtue of being the narrator -carrier-teller of the tale, the characters remain his characters. To extend this metaphor further, the string puppet is tiny, is handled by the arms of a puppeteer whose size is almost five times the puppet that personifies the character, whether it be of the greatest king or his minister.

The world of puppets is created by the Puppeteer. Yet he remains outside of it.

The Puppeteer remains the perpetual outsider, often, having no land or permanent place.

Narratives that Puppeteers may tell of their roots (ancestry, past, or relationship with their skill) are often dismissed as being non-existent. This attitude is in sync with prejudices held by certain sections of society.

The Puppeteer today stands at the perpetual crossroads wondering where he belongs to-where his place is-on ground and in the system? Could there be another view; other views-may be counter views? And would those other views matter?

There are no quick answers. Neither short ones.

In many cities (not only in Rajasthan), one can see Puppeteer families huddled beneath plastic tents. Many of them live in rented rooms. And today, some have constructed their own houses in towns and cities. They are seen at melas, festivals, Birthday parties, creative workshops and many such gatherings. The dream of an Artists village, at and around Shadipur Depot in Delhi, revolved largely around their presence, talent and movability with the Times.

Amar Singh may or may not have been with them for centuries. And yet, if the legend has had a journey, then it has been largely through them. They walked and travelled and told a story. And the story as a narrative of life, happened to be called "Amar Singh Rathore"! So is there a beginning to this journey? Must it have one?

The source of a river is often unseen. It flows.

Theatre person, poet and painter, Gopalji of Bhilwara advises me, "May be there is no one truth...something that is happening here could also be happening elsewhere...a plough is a plough, used here and everywhere else...somewhere with a bull, elsewhere , by other means."

A river too is made of many rivulets.

Over a period of time, nothing can be said to belong to any single entity. There would be variations, fluctuations, modifications.

There would be versions-of how a story or a construct-made its way. It could be right here and yet someone could get to know of it elsewhere.

Regarding, the tradition of Puppetry, he says," when we were children, very very tiny, then,

the puppeteer families would come to our village. Ours was a small village, about forty- fifty houses. They would generally stay outside our house. And there they would set up the stage. They borrowed a charpoi and we children, would watch them eagerly, and so eager to be of any help, to get them something, wondering what to get for them... They would use a petromax or four /five lanterns .They would perform in that light. At nightfall, the show would begin and it would be magnificent. We would be totally taken in by it. In the morning, they would leave. They were generally, two or three- a man, a woman and sometimes a child. They had a pony or a donkey with them. They would pack up and get going. We would be very sad and angry too-at our parents, as to why they were not stopping our uncle and aunt from leaving. Then, with a heavy heart, we would go behind them, in our own manner, accompanying them till the end of the village so as to see them off ...”

Another friend, Shiv Singh who hails from Mukteshwar in Uttarakhand recalls, "my father would often talk of them-a couple who came on horseback and would do this show of Amar Singh Rathore and as my father and his cousin had no money, they would hide and see..." I too can recollect, the stage set by a charpoi in the verandah and the show of puppets as also another in the school corridor, where there was a ticket too.

So many are the roads by which this Amar Singh has meandered into far flung landscapes, cosily wrapped up in a Puppeteer’s bag, nodding to a pony’s trot; then glowing in the lit-up nights of villages unknown.

Wandering story tellers with a bag of puppets! What were their travels like? Where all had Ramlal been?

What was the route through which he carried this tale; can it be mapped? How long was a tour? The experience of it? Being of the desert and moving through fields and hillocks? Making a shelter and a stage daily? Did the language remain the same throughout or were there adaptations? How frequently did they revisit the same location? Were there contacts, friends, relationships? Was it always one show and over; or was the story told in pieces?

With a volley of questions and constant reminders, we finally did meet.

I share my notes with him. He seems to know most of the Puppeteers whose work I had seen in the recordings.

When I mention the Drummer, his face lights up. "Yes, that’s Khadbad Khan. I have played him. He is my favourite character!"

Then there was a couplet and I had missed a few words even though the recording had been replayed many times.

It seemed familiar to him, but he was not able to offhand fill in the words. “I will have to try to recollect,” he says, “and when that happens, it will come. “ (yaad karna padega...yaad karoonga to aa jayega..)

Of course, it cannot happen just like that. It would need time .And preparation. And...looking back...and...

“Actually, I do not remember the story in detail, the exact couplets and all. It is the women who tell the story. They speak the couplets and sing. The men handle the puppets and play

the, 'Boli'; the stutti-whistle, made with two small pieces of bamboo reed and placed between the lips. The men create patterns with it and the women give it meaning, drawing on words, music and poetry. The Boli, bears the mood and situation, which the women pick up and at times we also anticipate the couplet, but the exact words one cannot always follow, because the attention is on the movement of the puppet, the threads and so on."

He promises to ask his elder sister who used to accompany on the dholak and narrate the story with his father. She is now married and in Madhya Pradesh. He will discuss when he gets to talk with her, because though there is a mobile phone, "it is shared by the kids and her..." "But she will know," he assures, "She is sure to remember, she has said it many times and even now, occasionally does the show."

Then we come to the story. Why Amar Singh? He cannot answer for a Tradition. It is a phenomenon. It exists. But maybe someone knowledgeable...Who can that be?

He again insists that the source is in Kheri, Nagaur and there lie the answers. He has asked around. There are people who know.

But there seem to be no Puppeteers there.

He is sure to find and is trying to get the correct person.

What else could he tell me? May be about the fifty two puppets. He is confused, for at one level he seems sure that this was the number, but at the same time cannot straight away list them out. May be another day, when he is more prepared.

May be if he tried to recall the performances; the ambience-the stage-the audiences.

Spaces where the shows were held-

"Mostly in the open-where the stage would be made. Sometimes in schools. Sometimes in Temple compounds or grounds."

In the house of jajmans?

"No, not there," he seems surprised at the question, "There, we played only the dhol. We do not even say aloud the genealogies."

So the Puppetry, then, is independent of the jajmani?

"In our case at least..."

So, the structures seem porous. The Bhat, in this case, has a dual mode of survival. One, that is connected with the Jajmani and hence is essentially part of the village structure, which has a geographical dimension, social role and its historical placing along with its intertwining culture of relationships.

The other is the wandering Puppeteer who tells a tale through his puppets. And yet, it seems that the Puppeteer carries his identity as the drum player along in his Narrative. He does not let go of it. Does not discard or forget it. Rather gives it a shape, places it in the Performance; perhaps in that guise speaks his voice.

For Khadbad Khan plays the dhol in the Narrative, "Amar Singh Rathore"!

And for Ramlal, that is his favourite part!

Does the Puppeteer, then, place himself there by bringing in his other life role in a persona within the telling of the story? And while the story draws to a conclusion, the drummer continues to play the drum...signifying the unending saga of life?

“In that case, the meaning changes,” says Ramlal.

Is the telling, then a comment on the tale?

Or the telling is framing the tale within the world view of the Puppeteer group ?

Rather, an event encompassed by the largeness of life...

Could be...he cannot be certain.

He did not think about it then...he was young then, struggling with the skill of strings.

Now on looking back...

He needs to reflect more...

And ask others...

Many more questions seem to arise

Was this design of the performance planned or did it so emerge?

And yet it seems to be part of the pattern in most performances.

Then should Puppetry not be considered a part of tradition?

“It is a tradition,” he is clear and retorts firmly, “The string puppet it has a style, a method, sequence, a specified rhythm with set variations and a way of handling and dealing with the Art.” How old is the Tradition?

Its an odd question. Traditions are what gets passed on. Ageless in spirit and connected to a previous generation in practice. May be as old as the story? Or more recent?

Again, the answers are probably with someone who knows. Again, it would be from Kheri.

“My father might have known. But I never asked him.”

He ponders for some time and then says, “may be Sitabiji’s son might know-Sitabiji taught my father.”

And Ramlal learnt from his father. And has since moved on. Did he not like the string Puppet? Was it too much work? Too tedious?

“The puppets are fine. The threads are magic in your hands. You can create so many movements, sometimes new ones come to you on the spot. But it is the whole thing- the way people look at you, treat you, almost gesturing you away; all that is not nice. Even when we travelled, it was not without fear; we did not know what to expect; rain, thunder, beasts and people-all were unpredictable. But greater than all these, was the fear of people -their unpredictable behaviour. We never knew what to expect... We did not know how we would be treated in the next village. Sometimes, they treated us well, gave us proper place to stay and perform and then after the show, sometimes they gave generously, sometimes they were indifferent or rude...putting pebbles in the thali we passed around after the show... You know it all.”

Perpetually scared. Perpetually performing. Perpetually moving. He stops abruptly.

There is silence. We let it pass. Then we talk again.

Where all has he taken the show? “Oh all over.”

He nods when I mention Bhilwara.

Yes that was on the route as they went southwards to Ratlam ,Jhabua, Indore, Dewas, Bhopal, through the forests, stopping at hamlets and small towns, having shows in schools , cantonments, public squares, haats and so on.

Would it be possible to recreate the route? He shakes his head in denial.

“So much has changed..” he says, “Besides ,even then we had no straight connections. We avoided the main roads and stuck to the beehad...forest and fields.”

They would be less noticeable then. The puppeteer seems to have perfected the art of rendering himself invisible, in Life and in Art. He is not to be seen. The performance is his creation and his hands play with the puppets, but he himself remains behind the curtain-invisible.

The women sit by the side of the stage in dim light, faces, veiled by the odnis. Their voices string in with the movements of the puppets, in a spontaneous improvised manner, perfected over the years by practice. They rarely rehearse, but rarely miss each other’s cue. They get trained to see well and at the same time, not to be seen.

A tour could last as much as two years. They had a horse and often more than one. The women and children would ride them, while the young walked alongside.

He has covered the entire belt on foot!

The homeward journey did not cover the same villages again. It was not a to-and-fro linear Concept, but a circular one. Sometimes, if the horses got sold, they could take a train back, but generally they avoided Railways and the Main Roads. They stuck to the less walked paths and meadows. The terrain was tough, but...

There was comfort in the wild. For Amar Singh too. That is where he met his trusted and loyal friends, Narsebaaz and Zaalim Singh.

(The Railways, roads and highways have cut through the traditional routes taken by many Performing communities, Pastoralists who moved with their sheep and goats; Banjaras who transported salt and other goods for settled communities. Communities living in forests have also felt threatened by the inroads into their area.)

The return was time for rest and other household tasks. “At times my father would be loaded with sacks of coins, collected during the journey. Mostly, that is how people would give-in small change and it would get accumulated. An outpouring of wealth, no doubt, but a problem all the same. For my father would go to the market and try to exchange the coins for rupees and traders would not be forthcoming. Then someone advised him, to take fewer coins at a time to a shop, so that it would be easier for the merchant to count and exchange...”

Could he be proud of his wealth?

A man burdened by his earnings!

The personal and professional are intertwined. A story teller’s earnings are the fruit of his Telling and the treatment he receives is the placing of that skill by society !

Again a silence and its awkwardness. Another start.

We come to the story as shown in Khyal and Nautanki.

Do the characters Narsebaaz and Haadi Rani have a role in the Telling by the Puppets? Ramlal takes a while to respond. Then he nods. “Yes of course, they are there.”

But they were absent in most of the recordings I had seen.

Besides, how could the scenes outside the court be accommodated while the court is set? Is it ever dismantled?

“No, it is not dismantled. Not necessary either. It just stays. When another scene happens, like Narsebaaz and Amar Singh in the desert, it happens in the front and all attention is there. The Puppets at the back are still. Frozen. Not part of the action- they become almost like a curtain. It is accepted that they are not there.”

Ramlal is able to explain with clarity a device, that seems to have become a convention, having been accepted by both Puppeteer and audiences.

The recordings seem to have skipped these scenes. Not even one had dealt with these aspects. He is confused.

Maybe they were edited due to time constraints...

“I think there also was a Couplet for Haadi Rani... my mother used to sing...” He pauses. Tries to get to the words by a faint humm...then shakes it off.

“Let me check , my sister will remember if I ask her...” Any other couplet he can remember?

“Amar Singh to Amar bhaey ...jaane sakal jahan....there is more to it...”

Remembering is an effort. And the effort showed. he looked tired.

“I will have to try to remember,” he says, “so many years have passed... it was a long time ago..” Yes it was.

Almost half a century has passed by.

Our conversation seems adrift of a context. We pause and leave it for another time...

To reach the tale through the teller implies recognizing his experience of the telling. That is by no means easy and as he left, it did sink in, that it was not going to be easy...

The past has moved away and so much more has happened for Ramlal. He has no reason to recall-that which he has tried to forget or put aside somewhere within.

The recollection brings with it pain. Pain-that is not easy to fathom; But is so crystalized and concealed, that when you recall, the body cells quiver.

Perhaps what for me was a discussion became a probing into the past for Ramlal. I feel, that in my eagerness to know more, I have hurt him. That I cannot do.

Ramlal and I have been friends for about forty years now. We have worked on many projects together, travelled and shared ideas. We have seen each other go through the highs and lows of life, given support in moments of difficulties and even when there were disagreements, we kept up the bridges. A quiet affection and a mutual respect for each other’s creative aspirations marks this association as we continue to notice the greying of each other’s hair, with unarticulated concern.

Talented as puppeteer and actor, he won applause with Bhanumathi Rao in my play, “Reshmi Rumaal”. He applied his skills to create an elephant on the design of ‘Kutchi Ghodi’ for the children’s play, ‘Gadariya Raja’. The Krishna Dolls that he made for “Radha” while interacting with students at the National School of Drama reflect an aptitude for detailed workmanship. He has been a regular resource person for the Skills section of the “Bal Sangam” children’s Festival organized by the T.I.E. of N.S.D. He has his space in Dehradun and has built a reputation for himself as Trainer and Puppeteer.

Way back, when I met him, he was barely in his twenties. He was known as the talented

puppeteer who had given up the string puppet and was now working with the glove puppet for social messaging. He had worked out the mechanism for water to flow out of a toy sized handpump to be used in a play. Young and spirited, he would draw attention in any workshop or gathering. He played the drum with ease and lifted his feet with grace. Quick to respond and improvise; excited by innovation, he enjoyed every bit of a performance. As an actor, he held his space and kept it charged by his energy. However, as Puppeteer, he is still comfortable being invisible behind the curtain, leaving the stage to his puppets. Even if they be glove puppets or objects made of foam....

While preparing for a trip to England, there was a suggestion that we have a Children's play in our repertoire. We selected an animal story and it was felt that the string puppet would bring out the playfulness of the animal characters. Ramlal was asked to make and assemble the characters. He was most reluctant to do so, but was persuaded by group members. Once, the strings were in his hands, the animals were alive and the puppeteer too played along. He laughed as them, screamed as them and was exuberant when the strings made ripples of movement within them, animating their cottoned shapes with mischievous exaggeration.

Why then was he so reluctant to express his talent?

Later, I asked him about his initial reluctance.

"I have given up traditional puppetry;" he replied," but these are animal characters and not made of wood...so it seems okay."

Give up...what he is so good at..? It is confusing for the listener. "I no longer like it."

Still more confusing. Not like, what you are good at? And evidently, what you seem to enjoy?

That is when the dialogue about Traditional Puppetry started. But it did not go far. He mentioned the one play his family performed-Amar Singh Rathore.

And for years, I wondered why this phenomenon of Amar Singh that was the bread for so many performers was missing in urbane and structured understanding of Performing Arts?

He also talked of ill treatment meted out to members of his caste. But he would not elaborate. A door closed. Somewhere there was a past.

This feeling hit me many more times, especially when interacting with the women performers of U.P. and Bundelkhand. Many of them were part of Nautanki troupes. Some were by caste performers and were shy to talk of it...childhood...past... Artists belong to the present, to the performance; the stage-

"But who were they, where were they married, what were the social customs under which they grew and what role have they played socially and aesthetically in the society and many other questions remain unanswered. The vocalists, the instrumentalists, the rhythmists, the dancing women, the female vocalists and the process of recruitment need thorough enquiry."

Komal Kothari says this in the article, "Patronage and Performance."

The Tale has a Teller. The Teller too has a tale. Whether to tell or not to tell- therein lies the tentativeness of discourse.

CHAPTER 11: THE BACKGROUND- LOOKING AT THE ROOTS

Every Puppeteer that I met would at some point in the conversation say, “Hum Kavi hain.” (We are poets)... Poets, who sing of dreams and before they sing or while they sing, dream of dreams.

And often, it reminded of a passage from, 'The Prophet' by Kahlil Gibran (where he talks of Buying and Selling). The lines are as follows –
And if there come the singers and the dancers
And the flute players, -buy of their gifts also.
For they too are gatherers of fruit and
Frankincense, and that which they bring,
Though fashioned of dreams, is raiment
And food for your soul.

And before you leave the marketplace, see
That no one has gone his way with empty hands.
For the master spirit of the earth shall not
Sleep peacefully upon the wind till the needs
Of the least of you are satisfied.

The artist was integral to society in Rajasthan and had an acknowledged share (how so ever small) in the social distribution of wealth, either in cash or kind. “Wherever the money changes hands, it makes economic life possible for the performer and consequently, the institution of patronage comes into existence.” (Komal Kothari)

In the article, “Patronage and Performance”, he further identifies three patterns of complex relationships of patronage or Jajmani, as it is commonly alluded to, between the patron and performer families. These are, as said in the article-

- (1). Where the patron caste is treated as property by the performer caste. The performer-successors divide the given number of nuclear families of patrons among themselves. There is a close relationship between the successive increase in patron families and that of performer families.
- (2). Where the patron families have formed a village- based caste group, and performers divide the villages among their successors.
- (3). Where no family division or village division is in operation, but the performer’s group has open access to the whole of the caste. Any performer can reach any member’s house and has a right to receive payment. But whoever arrives first receives all customary payments.

“...One definite element is the patron’s total obligation to pay for the services to the performers....It is fixed, like birth with the patron group.”
It is also fixed for the artist- he too is stamped for life by birth.

“The jajman could not replace the dholi and neither could he leave the jajman,” says Varsha Joshi in her article, ‘Drums and Drummers’, “The jajmani system was assort of contract between [them] and the jajman.”

The performers have importance for the patron’s own social standing. “...no group will get cognizance as a caste till it has a hereditary musician (Dholi), genealogist (Bhat) or poet (Rao).” (Komal Kothari)

They not only kept the family history alive, but kept cultural roots in place.

Their presence was a notification of norms; expected social behavior; social stability and continuity. Komal Kothari further elaborates, “The patrons explain that these are the people who carry the immense weight of memory within their heads about their origin, their ancestors and family history. They see them in a timeless unit of human civilization to which they owe their existence.”

(This aspect has been dealt earlier in this study, when talking of the role of the Bard in creating the legend of Amar Singh Rathore and for sustaining the code he upheld. The bard then is, not just collating history, but defining its course. He is the witness, mirror and the conscience of the hero. His word eternal.)

In realistic terms, the royal and kingly families needed the artists to build and spread their reputation. They also created the decorum and grandeur of the household. Komal Kothari talks of another kind of a patronage that existed, independent of the Jajmani, that supported individual artists from the hereditary groups, “but who left the traditional role of attending to the life cycle ceremonies of the general patrons and looked for the prestigious role of court musician with a sense of economic security and artistic achievement among the elite of society. Such musicians were not hereditarily bound to a king or a kingdom or his family.” Nor was the kingdom bound to them. Women dancers who, “All were paid salaries and their commitment ended with the loss of the job.”

During the Mughal and British rule, including the East India Company, the princely states of Rajasthan were governed by interventions of these power centres. The kingdom or jagir belonged to the living king or the jagirdar only. With his demise, the descendent did not become the automatic inheritor. “The kingdom reverted back to the central state authority who would issue a new order bestowing the kingship.” At such a time the reputation of the household mattered for the ‘talwar handi’ and ‘kharita’ (overall package) to be given to it. There are many examples of the role played by artists in this process.’

While, the other caste groups did not have to negotiate with a ‘central authority’ for inheritance, the culture of prestige enhancement, elaborate ceremonies at birth, weddings, funerals and festivals, engaging musicians and drummers became a way of life for all in that structure. “Jajmani” meant that the ‘jajman’ could draw upon a certain number of artists who by tradition were in his wardship. “Drum is connected with royalty as well as with the common man,” says Varsha Joshi, “From birth to death ,no ceremony could be performed without a drum in a peasant society. In different parts of Rajasthan, the drummer is called by different names, such as Dholi, Dhadhi etc. He may be either a Hindu or a Muslim. The Langas, Manghniyars, Mirasis, though Muslim, belong to this class...The function of the Dholi was not di-lineated by religious considerations in the sense that either of the religious groups- Hindus or Muslims could be Dholis.”

In some places like Javali, a dhol danka or tax would be levied on the occasion of a daughter's marriage and it was divided among various service providers-

2 paisa to Khawas

10 annas to Bhand

5 annas to Dhadhi

5 annas to Chobdar and Balai

2 paisa to whoever puts the tanchi ie, either to Bhand or Dhadhi

The pagri or piece of cloth was given to Bhand and Bhadi....

"Apart from the above payment, Dhadhi (Dholi) was entitled to parosa or kansa on the occasion of marriage and gangoj."(Varsha Joshi).

"In medieval times the Raj Dholi formed part of the village bureaucracy...The rhythm and pitch of drumming revealed differentiated messages... in case of any calamity befalling the village, like attack, dacoity, flood or fire, the villagers were warned by drumbeats....the Raj Dholi was given mafi land, exempted from all taxes and lag bags..."

However, not all Dholis had access to such privileges. It depended on their position within the socio-economic structure and the caste groups they were attached with. Similarly, not all Bhats had the same privileges or social standing. It all depended on the placement of their activity as fixed by a highly hierarchical and rigid structure. "There were certain castes in the villages where the Dholi did not play the Dhol." (Varsha Joshi). These included certain service providers, Bhambhis, Balais. For them too, "on auspicious occasions, drum was played. The Nustal Balais and Bhat...performed this service. Their drum was small and was called the dhapli. Dhol thus is the measuring rod of caste hierarchy." (Varsha Joshi). The Nats (Acrobats, jugglers) were also Bards of Bambhis. (According to some sources, the Nats, in some parts, specially of Punjab are said to be originally, Brahmins, who by a twist of fate, were rendered inauspicious and hence slid down in hierarchy!)

As their Jajmans were placed in the unprivileged segment of caste hierarchy, the Bhats and Nats associated with them were also similarly ranked. By way of explanation, there is a story that is popularly narrated. At a time, when battle was taking place and the enemy were closing in and all associates of the Rajput king (warriors, drummers, flag bearers, trumpet blowers) were being put to sword, some among them, who were seekers of life, hid in the most unlikely place the enemy would search for them. The houses of the Balais proved to be a safe haven for them. The act of taking shelter implies accepting the wardship of that community- a role and responsibility acknowledged as being that of a Jajman. And the relationship has stayed ever since.

Most scholars prefer not to give weight to this story. Even if fictitious, it is not improbable. Any serious study of Rajasthan lays bare the war-stricken history of the region. 'Saka' and 'Jauhar' were not symbols, but practiced customs. The coterie around the royalty lived in perpetual danger of extinction, either by way of custom or the enemy's sword, that may soften, in case of conversion.

Hiding may not be exemplary, but it is not unreal. They may not be heroes who renounce life, but survivors belonging to life.

Recounting this story, may establish a notional royal connection for the ancestors, but in a culture, where loyalty is the abiding code, it is also not a compliment. It is told not with pride, but sheer acceptance. Both the stories mentioned above carry within them an element of being stained- of bearing disgrace-received as inheritance. Internalized, it indicates, the cultural subjugation to which communities may be subjected to in a rigid hierarchical structure. This too, is culture.

As indicated by Varsha Joshi, the religious identities are fairly porous in rural Rajasthan, with an overlapping of rituals saints and practices. Such intermingling and brotherhood is born of a deep understanding of the predicament of the times and hardships that led to such a reality. It is the sweetness of water that makes the desert bearable. Not surprisingly, this is the most striking image in 'Amar Singh Rathore'! Narseh Khan Pathan and Amar Singh meet as strangers and part as brothers 'of word'. True to its context, it reflects the bonding between two communities. (people remind you that Akbar was born in a Sodha Rajput household, as Humayun was on the run, trying to escape from Sher Shah.)

Whatever be his status, the Bhat and Nat clearly had a place within the Jajmani fold and recognizably a part of that society with certain obligations to it. Certain family members might have travelled while others, fulfilled these obligations. But an entire community, constantly on the move since the very inception, seems unlikely as it does not match with their social obligations within the village.

The Bhat who engaged with Puppetry was also essentially a musician (drummer, bankia player, storyteller) and hence a part of the structured Jajmani system. He may not be the most important member of the system or the highest in hierarchy, but the prevalence of the system implies definite roots.

Roots that define his existence and place within the structure. That structure is not just rigid, it is stationary. It has not only a history, but a geography as well. The ground from where the Tradition was formulated. The Nat and Bhat belong to this structure. In tangible terms this would mean a house (howsoever small or shabby), a permanent address, a space fixed for the person. May be once it was so. But today he is discernible as 'ghumantoo'! A person without bearings. Shelterless.

Constantly on the move. A free wanderer would never have been fettered by a hierarchical connection that demands his submission. But the Bhat accepts and is accepted as an integral part of this system. He was cast out of this system but cannot be cast away.

A leaf flutters away, but remains recognizably of the tree to which it belonged. Even today, most artists (barring a few) make it a point to be present at the jajmaan household on appropriate occasions. If they are unable to do so, then a family member marks the attendance. This presence means that he does not allow himself to be non-existent. Not absent-very much there! The attendance marks a claim to a place within the system- wherever that may be in the hierarchy, but part of the system, part of its geography and not outside of it. Not an outsider, but one of the land. He is the Uprooted one, but his insistence is, not to be forgotten He has a claim and knows it too...

The Uprooting

Meena Radhakrishnan in, 'Invented Pasts and Fabricated Presents: Indian Nomadic and Denotified Criminal Tribes'(Text of Kunda Datar Memorial Lecture delivered at the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune, on 9th December, 2009) has raised issues relevant to this study and which affect the lives of 80 million people, including Bhat, Nats, Puppeteers. It is also pertinent to understand the Bhats, Nats and Puppeteers in the context of the large Indian reality, that includes other Nomadic Tribes, Artisans, Dwellers of the Forest, because they share a common legacy of being denied their rights by the State. The process initiated by the British, who by the force of state machinery succeeded in building a wall of prejudice that keeps these communities away from the mainstream. She elaborates that,

"In 1871, the British instituted the Criminal Tribes Act, under which, over the next 50 years, about 200 communities were declared 'criminal tribes' by the British. This Act enabled provincial governments to declare any tribe, section or class of the people to be a Criminal Tribe; to order their registration and the taking of their finger prints; to direct that every such registered member should report himself or herself at fixed intervals to a police officer of the village; to further direct that those declared criminal tribes will report to the authorities any changes of residence; and that their movements will be restricted to a particular geographical area.

A provision of the Act denied members of the Criminal Tribe normal rights under the common law; another provision took away the jurisdiction of the courts to question the validity of notifications issued under this Act. It was not for any offence committed that all these punitive measures were employed, but only for "preventive action". This could be done even though a Criminal Tribe member had no previous convictions, had never gone to prison, or even paid a fine. All that was required for notification of a community as a Criminal Tribe was "reason to believe" on the part of the police that the community was addicted to crime." The Act provided for arrest without warrant.

The said purpose of the Act was to "ensure peace, law and order" by bringing under,"effective control anti- social elements chronically addicted to criminal activities." As G. N. Devy says, "If prejudice is a common human instinct, State sponsored prejudice can spell disaster for humanity. Fascism is one form of it. The 'criminalisation 'of a large number of communities is another. In India this criminalisation of communities is credited by Historians to British colonial rule....beginning with the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871...turned a large number of nomadic communities and artists into criminals."

Several factors could have led to the formulation of this Act. Many of the communities listed above had taken an active part in the 1857 revolt against the British (then East India Company) or extended support to the rebel sepoys. Some were either in the service of rebel chieftains or used by them for espionage or as message carriers. During my research on 'Azizun', I learnt of the Tawaifs who had sided with the sepoys and discarded their anklets for the sword. Their Kothas were soon declared to be brothels and with 'hygienic' checks and police licencing, the tawaif was eased out of culture.

The singer-dancer women of Bedin community talk of ancestors who were either tied to the scaffold or sent to Kala Pani. It is well known that there were rajahs and nawabs who opposed the British.

Many artists who were in their service participated as spies and messengers, while some sent out signals and announced meetings through their drums. Some surviving members of these communities were kept in 'Badas' [fenced compounds] where each movement of theirs was under surveillance. Till a few decades ago, some of these Badas were still there, in places like Kanpur and Mauranipur. (These communities have traditional links with the Performers of Rajasthan). [Ramlal remembers that his grandmother would say that some of their ancestors used to be 'in hiding.']

Veena Oldenberg describes in detail how the Mohalla Architecture of Lucknow was broken down, because those lanes had befriended the rebels. Bithoor was razed to the ground. And communities who were considered hostile to the British, were declared 'Criminal Tribes', who, by virtue of this Act of 1871 lost any claim to citizenship.

The Forest Dwellers (largely Tribes) who resisted encroachment in their zone of existence were included. Wandering Artists who could have helped the sepoys or might be of use to future rebels could not be spared. The Banjaras who had also protested on occasions were included along with the broad spread of Nomadic communities including pastoralists, performers hunters, practitioners of shifting agriculture gypsies etc. All traditional rights of livelihood and life generating measures were ignored. The Dancers, Singers, Puppeteers, Acrobats became suspects. They could be thieves in disguise! Wanderers caught off guard faced further persecution.

Several factors seem to have facilitated the making of this Act. One of them was the existence of caste itself! When the Bill was introduced, it was said, "people from time immemorial have been pursuing the caste system defined job positions; weaving, carpentry and such were hereditary jobs. So, there must have been hereditary criminals also..." This was broadly elaborated as, "When we speak of professional criminals we mean a tribe whose ancestors were criminals from time immemorial, who are themselves destined by the usage of caste to commit crime and whose descendants will be offenders against the law" (attributed to a British Officer).

Past, present and future walled in.

Some studies in Anthropology and Genetics seemed to plant the idea that criminals are born.

Another prejudice seems to have been that all gypsies and wandering people are criminals. This was particularly so in Europe. It was thought that their mobility implied that they were fleeing from the law or hard work; suspicious vagrants had to be reined in by the law. The loyalties of the sedentary could be easily ascertained and the system could deal with them accordingly -even employ them. But the wandering person was elusive. Such people were being detained in Reformatories and settlements in Europe and that attitude permeated here also.

M. Radhakrishnan further points out that, "Not having enough knowledge about either the European gypsies or the Indian nomads, the British administrators felt that people who constantly moved were aimless vagrants, needed to be settled and put under surveillance through appropriate legislation. The general opinion about nomads is that they are constantly moving because they must be escaping from law, or simply fleeing from hard work of any kind. Nomadism is not seen as a chosen way of life, but as an aberration of some sort. Research establishes that settled communities have always been ambivalent in their attitude to mobile communities and while the latter's usefulness is recognized, they are regarded with hostility and suspicion. Thus communities which historically bear the stigma of hereditary criminality have been nomadic ones.

This was an exercise based and justified by a culture of prejudice against those castes and communities who had, "relatively egalitarian practices regarding their women allowed widow remarriage, choosing of own husbands, easy divorce, lack of child marriage and so on. These practices, in the eyes of high caste groups of the society, made such communities immoral, almost criminal. The Victorian morality of the British many a time coincided with Brahmanical values regarding women, and in addition they depended on high caste sections for testimonies of 'good character' of a villager. Historical records show that if a nomadic community which was already considered to have low morals by the high caste society also defied these powerful sections in any way (for example, by refusing to work free on their land, or by wearing a turban or using a hookah – the signifiers of high caste status), such a community was declared a criminal tribe." (M.Radhakrishnan)

Various groups of the Bhats, Nats and many other Performing communities did not adhere to conventional standards of morality and hence punitive action against them satisfied the self-righteousness of those who treated and wanted them as outcasts. The feudal landowners and the overseas masters saw them with the same lens. Rather, the feudal mindset and the Victorian view- point formed a nexus so that Politically, administratively and socially, these communities were isolated. Deprived of rights and ownership. Uprooted.

As mentioned earlier, among these were the performers, entertainers ,singers, dancers, acrobats, tight rope walkers, gymnasts, puppeteers, story tellers, musicians, displayers of animals like bear apart from small traders who sold salt, forest dwellers who may sell forest produce like honey, artisans, pastoralists, craftsmen who made things with bamboos iron clay etc.

Sadhus, Fakirs, fortune tellers genealogists, sellers of herbs and medicines, healers were also included. The wanderer was the non- conformist who did not fit in and was brushed away.

Along with the people, skills acquired through generations, wisdom and knowledge garnered as tradition also lost legitimacy and space.

In the princely states, different versions of the Act were applied, and depending on the whim of the ruler, the provisions were either modified or kept the same as in British India.

The performer was thus notified in police records. He was no longer safe where he was known to be. He became insecure in his home, because that is where he could be traced, hounded

and apprehended for any crime or any reason. Earlier the travel could be measured by seasons, professional income and preference; now it was the way-the only way to survive. He was compelled to flee-a perpetual absconder to the native space. He had lost his citizenship and could not claim anything to be his. If a house or land had been received by him or his family, it could be taken away by anyone who was respectable, sedentary and powerful. The Nat/Bhat had no one or nowhere to appeal. He could not dare to-the Administrative authorities, in their records and attitude had declared him the criminal, a perpetual offender. Moreover, he would not be having proper papers pertaining to his property and would be seen as an illegal resident. All he carried, was in his memory, unseen and unsaid to the world. And with this baggage he went on a journey, perpetually on the move, without a destination. Like Amar Singh exiled.

Amar Singh, the declared offender Outlawed.

Amar Singh traversing the wild.

Amar Singh and the Puppeteer.

The Puppeteer becomes Amar Singh.

The Absconder.

Alone, to move, forward

Never to turn back.

Nothing to look back to.

A lost man.

A man who has lost everything.

If ever he would utter a word about a past that had comfort and wealth, he would be scoffed at and not be believed. What was memory to him, became fictive for the world. The words of a community deprived of its legitimate place, can claim no credibility. Its members became unequal players in the game of life set by the world. With disadvantage as their dice, they played it to the hilt.

Today these communities are known as De-notified Tribes. Independent India erased this Act in 1949. But there was no homecoming for the Puppeteer. No return of the native.

The Criminal Tribes Act was soon substituted by the 'Habitual Offenders' Act, which by 1959 was fully in place. Though Nehru had termed the British Act as, 'monstrous,' the one made by the Indian Government, maintains the spirit of the earlier prejudices and carries them further claiming that the habitual offender is one who has been a victim of subjective and objective influences and has manifested a set practice in crime and also presents a danger to society. It asked the police to investigate people with, 'criminal tendencies' who seemed suspicious. It was to be seen if the occupation they practiced was 'conducive to a settled way of life.' Again, 'civilization' was being defined keeping some people out of it. Members of the earlier notified tribes continued in the realm of suspicion. Attaching the notion of practising crime as a profession to communities and branding them as such criminalised their mode of survival. The consequent relisting of the same group's re- stigmatised them. "Their persecution continues and indeed has worsened," says Devy," through legislation such as, Habitual Offenders' Act and Prevention of Anti-Social Activity Act; the very nature of police training and most importantly, thanks to the indifference and distrust of citizens towards them."

Innocent-till proven guilty-says the spirit of the Law. But not for all.

When communities are marked as 'Habitual Offenders,' the verdict is registered even before proof of event!

Many other laws have been formulated that do not call the tribes or castes criminal, but render their traditional means of livelihood as illegal, liable to be treated as an offence against the State, as a crime. The stated concerns for these new laws range from conservation of forests or wild animals to preserving the sanctity of the urban space.

The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1950 along with the Wildlife protection Act books those "cruel, inhuman and sadistic criminals 'who use a wild animal (as snake may be used by Kalbelia) for street entertainment

On the other hand, Behrupiyas made up as black Langurs are being employed to drive away monkeys- a job that could be hazardous.

According to some sources, Tight rope walking which is a popular skill mastered by the Nats was made illegal in 1982. As children are often engaged in the demonstration of these skills, where the family operates as a unit, the guardians are accused of making money by 'child labour.' The harsh complexity of being poor, homeless and performers is bypassed.

"The Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959 – adopted with amendments by a large number of states and applicable to an ever-increasing number of towns and cities in India today – has also adversely affected the livelihood of nomadic communities. That this Act was written with the nomadic communities in mind is evident from the definition of begging itself. Begging is defined as: "Soliciting or receiving alms, in a public place, whether or not under any pretence such as *singing, dancing, fortune telling, performing or offering any article for sale*". In practice, then, anyone who approaches an audience to get paid for the street entertainment which they have provided, gets booked for begging.

The significant point about anti-beggary legislation is that it is used by the administration largely in urban areas. This piece of legislation penalizes all the performing communities, with or without animals. Artisan communities are also prohibited from selling any items on the street as this is also seen to be a cover for begging. In Delhi recently, there was acute harassment of these communities by a zealous administration in the name of keeping up the flow of traffic on major roads, as the destitute children of these communities used to sell at traffic signals artefacts made by their nomadic artisan parents. Such children were caught by the police, who promptly took away the few rupees the children had earned, as exemplary punishment for trying to eke out an honest but unlawful livelihood." (M.Radha Krishnan).

Children of the Nat and Bhat communities also make stuffed birds, camels, horses and elephants, hoping to sell them to commuters on the road. That they sell puppets is well known. The little girl who draws a moustache on her face and performs cartwheels could also be seen as begging. So drilled is this notion in the passers- by, that they miss the talent and skill of the artist who deserves the applause of the best arena.

The Act can view the nature of their work as beggary and it can also be applied, if 'having no visible means of subsistence and wandering about' in a public place. Hence, their being in any place can be considered an offence against the State-if the administration so chooses. This applies more to urban space. Ironically, that is where Puppeteers are trying to make a future for themselves. The urban space that earlier did not take cognizance of their presence, now is suspicious and hostile. The notion of sanitised and well-kept beautiful spaces often finds the presence of the poor and the tattered out of sync with the aesthetics of the place. So they are pushed to corners where they could 'less visible.' As equal citizens, they have a right to be in any public and wander about like other citizens....

Many Puppeteers and other artists share experiences of being rounded up by the police, if a robbery or any other crime takes place in their vicinity. It is a well-known fact, that on the contrary, they keep away from such possibilities because they are aware that they are being watched! In large cities they can be seen at crossroads and footpath, without roof or privacy, vulnerable to jokes and leers, threats, accusations, arbitrary behaviour and arrests. Something like playing cards or having liquor can activate punitive action. They could be locked up and harassed, compelled to give bribes to be let off.

Women performers have also often complained of such treatment. The Bedin artists are used to police raids. Many of them have tried hard to get their children educated, but schools instead of honouring these first-generation learners often mistreat them and condemn them as "thieves". They live in dingy homes, with almost no amenities, undernourished and ill clad. There is no sign of affluence that would be theirs if they were into robbery and crime. On the other hand, if they are seen in possession of a new item, they are liable to be booked for theft. Any woman can wear a new dress and move about freely, but if a woman from among the listed communities she could be asked to produce a receipt or face charges....

Komal Kothari has talked of," itinerant social groups like the Kanjars, who were brought under the punitive Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 and continue to be treated with suspicion in the 21st Century. The Kanjars were acrobatic women groups similar to the Nats and were traditionally associated with dancing before large village gatherings. Criminalisation of the community has made them wary of accepting payment in kind. The fear of being apprehended on the charge of possessing even a blanket given as payment makes Kanjar women insist on being paid in cash. (R.Barucha).

The place changes. The narrative re-echoes. In the village they could not draw water from an upper caste well; they often had to wait at the doorway, take the morsel as it was given, and seek permission to pitch their tent. Some artists who had been living at the outskirts of certain villages are now being ousted, because the construction of a highway has increased the price of the land and villagers want them away. The caste composition of villages does not want them to settle, because they could then lay claim to the village resources. Once the water in the well was a resource severely denied. Today it could be reservation, Panchayat funds etc. The villages hesitate to allow burial or cremation for those who pass away, as this validates their connection to the village and could support in getting 'domicile' rights. They are threatened, harassed, sometimes the women molested and settlements attacked.

On suspicion of crime, ten Nats were lynched (Vaishali 2007). Evidently, this was done on

sheer assumption and the real culprits were found later. The State initiated prejudice initiated by the British has over time seeped into pockets of the social mind set. Their presence itself in any place is enough to cause suspicion. Members of 'settled' society are rattled by their presence and feel that they should not be in the vicinity- particularly in urban spaces, ironically where Nats and Puppeteers are gradually shifting. People wonder why they appear to be lurking where they have no apparent business to be. They could be there, because there is somewhere, they have to be; for wherever they are, they be outsiders. Their place and space has been taken away and so they are perpetually mobile. They are actually searching for a permanent address!

It is true, that on paper there are schemes that could support and provide for them, including land and opportunities of education and employment, but the process of classification has not been able to define their existence and their identity remains elusive for the grammar of official records. Most of them do not have a permanent address and so no way to prove their credentials to the Administration. As mentioned above, even if they try to settle, they are ousted as people around decide. They cannot substantiate any claims even of their caste and bearings, because they do not have relevant papers of their fathers and forefathers. What is in memory, could be made oral, if listeners would believe. And if memory can be accepted as testimony. The power of the spoken word is such, that once you hear, it echoes. Often, it is not heard, lest it compels us to believe...

They are also trapped by the web of colonial indifference that classified many castes and non tribes as tribes (1871) and thrifting -sorting of their bearings and belonging seems to go on. A community may be in a S.C. list in one state, S.T. in another and with multiple groups and subgroups and groupings within that, they are yet to know if the syllables on paper accommodate them. So, while they bear the burden of the caste of their birth, a caste certificate to that effect often eludes them. They could bribe someone in the system- the same system that for generations had them notified.

CHAPTER 12: LIFE OF A PUPPETEER

After a long gap, spanning many months, Ramlal got in touch again. He had been trying to trace a knowledgeable person within the community who could provide the required information. Some puppeteers were in Jaipur and he was in touch with them. He had also contacted Sitabiji's son who actively practised the Art of Puppetry. However, one name that had been mentioned by almost all the people he asked, was of Khairati Ram of Kheri, Nagaur. He seemed to be the person who was thought by most to know more than the others. Khairati Ram was in Jaisalmer at that time, with his son and Ramlal was trying to get his phone number from someone...Once that was available, then he could speak directly with Khairatiji and maybe he would try tele conferencing and we could all have a conversation, despite Internet issues in remote areas. Google does not mention Puppeteers in Jaisalmer.

At a time, when the smartphone and the net are supposed to be the information providers, there was a whole network operating through the word of mouth and this network was confident of its outreach and resources. It has its own way of functioning, very revealing of a reality we may not otherwise be able to see.

Meanwhile, Ramlal was willing to share whatever he could recollect, as he could, because, he had been thinking of the Tale of Amar Singh and their playing of it. He also felt that he still had bits and pieces and that it would take a long time to arrive at the whole, but he could begin and see.

Begin where?

The Beginning as he saw it.

And with that started a long series of conversations, held long distance; often in the nature of the monologue, seen or heard miles away. At times, he was speaking to me, at times, probing the memory and also, at times, viewing and analysing through the lens of time.

Ramlal hails from Kotri. His forefathers were connected to the Royal Household of Marvah. They were Nats, famous for kalabaazi and showing, 'Bharat ka Khel' that included long, high and complex jumps, acrobatics and formations. Three of them-brothers -orchestrated a leap from the top of the Fort wall. (Probably one jumped, and the other two supported by playing their drums.) And for this feat, they were honoured and awarded some property in Kotri. The brothers separated and only one part of the family moved to Kotri; while another branch grew up in Rupengarh. However, this feat is recognizably, a high point in the Family History. There is a Doha (couplet) that commemorates and records the event-

Kankad kila chunieyo nischal gadhi neenv
Bhakta Bhao Singra shavla dabi seem.

In all gatherings the family members are greeted with this couplet. This is what is unique to

them and praiseworthy; hence marks their special identity. Each family has a distinct couplet of greeting accorded to it and in every Group gathering a showering of words enhances the presence of each family.

Ever since, this property was received, the family shifted its base to Kotri. The house that was built, still stands there as their ancestral house. However, thirty Bigahs of land that had a well within its boundary was forcibly taken away by some hierarchically higher caste people, dispossessing them. Later on, Ramlal's father created another space by the river (where the horses he had could roam about,) with a hutment and later a house was built there. The family also had traditional farming rights in the 'Bund' land [bandaa land] which is the land at the base of a pond. As the water drains off or dries, this land is used for cultivation as it retains moisture and is considered fertile. According to Ramlal, he saw this practice in his childhood, but over the years, it has been taken over by other families.

(Komal Kothari has spoken of the system of patronage extended by royal households to talented artists, outside the jajmani system and that this was often time or event bound and did not manifest as liability towards the artist's family. This has been discussed above.)

(It has also been indicated, that once, certain castes were in the 'Notified List' of 1871, the confiscation of their properties by people of power can be seen as the second next step.)

(Shri Khairati Ram, the Puppeteer -who later discussed many aspects-mentioned gave recent examples of similar kind. Returning from travel, Puppeteers find themselves dispossessed of their property and then they have to go to court and get embroiled in litigation).

(When Ramlal talks of his ancestors having jumped the wall of a Fort, it brings to mind, young men and adolescents jumping from the towering height of the Fatehpur Sikri Gate .Children and youngsters jump over the Marble rocks of Narbada, to the astonishment of tourists).

(There seems to be a passion about horses in Marwar and much trade used to revolve around them).

A few days later, Ramlal clarified, after checking with relatives, that as his great grandfather was the eldest, he received the land in Kotri, while one brother was given a piece of property and right to operate in Rupengarh and the third in Nayagaon.

His father had three brothers. One of them was into jajmani and keeping up 'rishtedari' and social contacts. This has immense significance for a community whose members are constantly on the move in different directions and combat uncertainty at every step. One looked after the land.

One brother was a storyteller. He would tell stories at gatherings, especially when people had to stay awake at night. He would tell stories in dense verse, where the sounds of syllables, specially consonants would create a rumbling rhythm. Ramlal does not remember the verse fully, but as an example he tries to recollect, and as his throat vibrates, I pick a few words-
Raja gadh ma utarayi, bakho padhiyo gadh mahe
raja ne gadh mokla, par gadh ne raja nahin

gadh ne raja mokla, raja ne gadh nahin...

This is the story of a king and his Fort. The king feels that the Fort exists because of him and the Fort feels that the king is king because of him. The king, to prove himself, leaves the Fort and goes away encountering difficulties and battles fought without the protection of the Fort. He crosses swamps on a 'garud' and has many adventures. Years later, he returns, wounded, old, worn out and unkempt; the fort too is crumbling, worn out, old and unkempt! Without one another, they lost their bearings! Their existence was with one another!

Amar Singh Rathore was not on his list. Raja Harish Chandra was. There were many others, that revolved around miracles and fantasy, revolving around, 'udan khatola', 'jadugarni chidiya' (black- white) that fly away with the king! Mayavayi women who alter shape, some to love and others to destroy the king. (kaali bhali na kodiya bhali/na dhuli bhali na safed/charon ko aise de saadvan/ho jaye rann khet). There is another story where the king is kept in a cage beneath the earth and the Poet manages to keep in touch with him and guides him- in which direction must he look-which colour must he follow- and what to avoid. (The troubled or caged king is an interesting and recurring image in these stories, while the Poet /bard is the saviour!)

His father was a well- known singer who got invited to various houses. He used to sing Thumris and Maand for audiences.

Puppetry? That was later. It is evident that within a single family, there could various streams, all related to the Performing Arts. One of his cousins is a well- known Bankia player.

His grandmother was from village, Kharia, near Kuchaman, on way to Jeenn Mata, their Kuldevi in Sikar. His father and uncles were married in Dudhu. "That is when I would go there, they would give me gifts-chocolate, etc." Rupengarh, Nayagaon, Kuchaman, Dudhu...Relations, implied geographical expansion. Having a relative in an area meant a connection with that place. By taking a name, the proverbial welcome would come to his share.

Some months later Ramlal told me, 'I have been asking around about my family and now I know about my grandfather, great grandfather and his father' and as memory absorbs the history-personal history-he adds, 'this easily takes me back about a hundred and fifty years...I feel I have grown so much. I carry these many years!'

(A compass encompassing time.. encompassing space around ... it is indeed amazing, how much history and geography can fold within a person...he is, after all a being of the ground! Grounded within!)

Ramlal learnt Puppetry from his father. He imbibed it, as a part of daily life routine. From the age of four, he was handling puppets, passing them in sequence during performance; soon tying broken threads, stitching torn costumes and so on... The Art grew on him. He received the method of performance as a Tradition is passed on. However, his father, Shri Salma Ram, was the first one in the family to practice this Art. He was initiated into it, by Sitabi Ram of Shyampura, who was also a close relative/cousin, younger in age, but experienced with the

Puppets. His father, was a well-known Puppeteer who had also made contact with some English speaking officers and had himself, picked up a smattering of it. Ramlal has a hazy memory of the ninety year old man saying , 'Young man come here' to him when he was less than five...He designed an advertisement in Puppetry for 'Panama' cigarettes' that had a Puppet smoking a cigarette and exhaling smoke. He also made some shows with health messages.

Though he cannot be certain, as to when his father actually started Puppetry, he places this to be some time in the mid- forties, much before his birth and when his father would be young and eager to travel. It was probably an year of famine or one when 'jamano nahin aayeo (as a phase without prosperity is commonly referred to) and so opportunities for the singer were few within the confines of their area. So Sitabiji asked Salma Ram to join him on his travels and learn the play of Puppets.

Salmaji agreed and thus was forged a friendship that lasted a whole time.

'Salma Sitabi became famous and known for their hazir jawabi and when they performed together, their jugalbandi was much talked about.'

Ramlal tells me that his father also perfected the craft of Puppet making. He would carve them out of mango wood or sheesham. Heavy wood is good for balance. He does not have Puppets made of aadu. Sometimes, it would take a month to complete a Puppet. Other people also would asked Salma Ram to make Puppets for them They would bring the wood and once work commenced, there would be some feasting, but no money was charged. His father made his collection himself and that is how, he also learnt to paint their eyes and faces. 'Kuchh maang kar bhi late the agar pasand aa jati thi' (he would request others to give him their Puppet, if he really liked it). It was given as a favour or a gift. No money exchanged hands.

The Puppet is treated as a treasure-invaluable- and not as an object. It is something sacred; one, because it is their means of livelihood; and second, it has an aura, that deserves respect. The Puppets are never displayed. When not in use, they are neatly rolled and tucked in; then arranged in a bag and kept on a loft or a place where they are not unnecessarily fiddled with. When taken on travel, the Puppets are carried in a special square bag with flap called 'pitara'. They are generally never alluded to. Rather, it would be said, 'pitara le aao'; 'pitara rakho'; 'pitara kholo/ bandho' etc.

Whenever a Puppet is added, there would be a ritual of veneration, offering of kheer, puri to the Puppets. The dholak is also included in the ritual. When, after a break, the season of performances begins, there is a puja. Even if they be on the road and have nothing with them, a flame would be ignited on a stone in the open. Offerings of puri and gur would make, 'the flame bigger and the wind would blow and twirl it and with that we would start the shows and the Puppet could resume the dance.'

While travelling, all things of necessity were packed neatly on horse- back. There was a whole system to it. Some bedding, 'gud-di (The patch-work sheet, part of the identity of all ghumanto communities) pitara, dholak, petromax, utensils, tents (tambudi) bamboos etc were arranged. Another important bag was the 'kharia'. It had a hole in the middle, so it could fall on both sides of the horse and many things could be placed in it. Apart from these objects,

important documents, especially those pertaining to official permissions, testimonials of village Heads, receipts of items purchased, specially of horses were also essential for the journey apart from money. Could he demonstrate this-on a toy horse? He agreed to. A relative offered his pony and guddi for the exercise, but Ramlal felt-not real, but demonstrative is better.

Some days later, he added more details to the tying of the luggage. The dholak was tied in an upright position. Prior to putting anything, they would make a taal on the back of the horse which would be like two feet on either side. Then, they would place a square katli, over which they would tie a belt, for balance and also be comfortable for the horse. Then Kharia, pitara, dholak, petromax etc would be kept. The bamboo tambudi was also kept straight. Each morning they packed and each evening unpacked, so a clear way of doing it, was also a quick one that ensured that everything was in its place and so nothing was amiss or forgotten. A regular, professional performing group maintains this discipline.

Did they worry about the house when away?

‘There was nothing much to worry about-just a wooden cot or a box or one or two metal vessels. Nothing much for a thief. Still, it would be locked and key given to somebody who stayed back. It was understood that that person would be using the house. Who knew when exactly the owners would be back.

The journey began with many people, could be forty -fifty people. Then the routes diversified. A route could include-Bhilwara, Chittor, Jhabua, Ratlam, Dhar, Kala Pathar, Mandu, Indore, Ujjain, Dewas, Mhow, Alirajpur, Harda (Where thereused to be a big Haat and much buying and selling took place).

In Tribal areas, sometimes our horse would be booked for weddings. The people were warm there and gave us grain. If I made friends with somebody and wanted to go to their house, my father stopped me- zyada dosti nahin-(not too much friendship)-he would tell me. ‘A few years ago, I met a person around my age from that area. He remembered the Puppeteers. He also remembered the horse he had for his marriage. It had a bent in the back. Just like mine. When asked, he recalled a smallish boy with ear-rings too!’ (the world is small and people contain so much geography within them!)

When the routes diversified, some people would keep going in one direction. Then at some point, they would separate, but before that, they would fix the next meeting point and the day of meeting. So, even as each family took a separate path, they were aware of the presence of the others in surrounding areas. They would reach a village by late afternoon or evening. They would stay a little away from the houses. Often near the performance venue. They would feed the horses. Then have some tea and go around the village, announcing about the performance, come back and prepare the stage, the curtain with arches and all; then rest for a while, then sing songs and bhajans. And then people would come and the show would begin. At the end, they collected some donations.

Sometimes, their family would also split. If it was a large village, then they would do two shows, simultaneously- his father and sister managing one, while he and his mother would

handle the other. This controlled the size of the audience and doubled their income. In some places, they also tried ticketed shows, but it could not fulfil their expectations. In the morning, they left.

Several days would pass and then, they would meet the others. When they were many, they camped in a field or in the meadows for pasture. There, they would exchange experiences. Sometimes, ' families who had been into Puppetry would mock at my father; saying something like -' tum kya chalaoge, baap dadaon ne to kabhi chalai nahin-(what will you play- your forefathers never played it) Then my father would call me and say, 'you played that puppet well- show them also' and I would do it and at times be praised. At times someone else would demonstrate his style. So this was a kind of learning, not formal, but still it was there. Also, if I played well, they would recognize it and the word go around to others, like these days there are one or two names of youngsters that keep coming up... this way you build a reputation.'

Few days later, after speaking with his sister, Ramlal added one important activity that was essential on reaching the village. They had to meet the Pradhan /Sarpanch who would grant them the permission to stay overnight. They would collect donations from the village households the next morning and as the sun rose high, much before mid-day, they would be on the path again!

The other detail, that he now remembered and described, was the gramophone that his father brought with him on all their travels. He carried it on his head; the weight being, light for music was his first venture into the Arts! He remembers his father as being tall and sturdy. He enjoyed singing and listening to music. At the beginning of the performance, he would sing in praise of the goddess-

Hriday bas ja Bhavani re/aao mere kanth/tumhe gur narel ka prasad chadhaoon/chawal bhog lagaoon/Hriday bas ja...

(Goddess, dwell in my heart; dwell in my throat; I offer you coconut etc)

He would also sing-Raagan chadhi Rasool ki kya dhar laayi/kapde jaake rang rangeele mastak moka bhag....

(Rang Rangeeli means the Puppet).

What else did his father sing? It seems that for himself, he generally sang Bhajans of Meera and 'someone called Binduji- I remember hearing this name in the songs.'

Binduji was apparently a saint of Brindavan, whose bhajans are popular.

Growing Up

Ramlal remembers being on travel since the age of four and for almost fourteen years, this was a major part of his life. They fill his memory, but not all can be recounted or shared. Few stray glimpses come and go. Balloons...

Balloons decorating a party. This was in Indore, when he was quite a child, 'I did not help with the puppets yet.' His family was to perform a show on the Birthday of a child. 'It was a big house and the party was in a lawn and there was a wall around. Balloons were tied all over. I had never seen balloons before and kept insisting to my mother, to get me one. She just kept nodding ...there were many things to eat, and I was hungry too, but more than that, I wanted the balloon and was getting impatient...

Finally, my mother went and asked the host...The lady nodded -abhi dete hain...just wait let me see the guests first, phir... Father said- they sell balloons here ... we'll get you some tomorrow...Mother consoled...abhi abhi ... 'And the child waited. The wait extended beyond the guests, the party, and the walk back beyond the house.

As he grew up, he understood things better -the reason behind various small actions, as to why his mother kept a thali by her side while sleeping and a stick by her hand. When they stayed in rural areas, the 'Dera' would be set up. Tents on bamboo or sheets placed on three bamboo sticks made curtained huts (specially for young couples.) The kharia (with all the documents) formed the pillow. The Puppet bag or Pitara was hung high on a peg or placed on a chabutra (it was never kept on the ground) towards the pillow (never towards the feet).

One night, some thieves entered the village through their camp. His mother woke up and beat the thali with the stick, alerting everyone. The thieves ran away. The thali by the side a purpose. 'At times like these, sometimes you are unable to scream-the voice doesn't come out,' his mother explained. So, the thali had a purpose!

Sometimes, much after the show, some men would come by and them to restart. Then they would give answers like, 'the Puppet has slept; On waking up she asks for blood!' And this would suffice. Sometimes not. They would move away but shout back threats. Then the Puppeteers would be tense, still and awake, till all was quiet. If the village was unusually hostile, every one of them would hold two lit bidis in each hand so that through the darkness, an illusion of multiplied numbers could be projected. (that they were many more than they actually were).

So, he took to smoking fairly early- more for the pretension of being an adult. (Children working in glass factories displayed similar traits). And he would speak phrases picked up from the conversations of grown-ups. Whenever, there would be a theft in the area of their travel, the police would round them up and say mockingly, 'chori karte ho!' to which this little boy would respond by saying, 'hamari to zindagi beet gayi, chori karte karte.' Coming from a nine year old, the line hit hard and nonplussed the men in authority. The child saw that. And used it often. It seemed to work.

Whenever the police would come, his sister would fore warn him, 'ruk jaao jaanch hogi.' And they would stop, waiting for an interrogation. The strategy was that his father and sister would recede back, because they had to be protected, while the little lad and the older woman did the talking. At such times, if they needed to converse with one another, they would communicate in 'Parsi' (the community's internal language and code).

Once, they were made to wait for a long time by a path. The men in uniform also started drinking. Then, when some people came walking on the path, my mother started shouting at the police-making us wait and look what you are doing- The people stopped, turned and looked in their direction. The men were embarrassed and let them off. In this lay the sense of timing! But each time was also different.

In Dewas, many of them had gone to a Goddess Temple. That very day a serious crime took place. The men had to run and hide. The women and children were rounded up, while the investigations were going on elsewhere. By evening there was restlessness, the children were wailing and the women edgy! They were sent on the assurance of sending in the men. His father went and showed all the papers and certificates from places where they had performed, including schools, colleges, army offices in the city and of their village Sarpanch. By then, the police had probably also found other leads in the case. They were allowed to move on.

The Horse

There were surprises and challenges all the way. Unexpected turns. One day, when they were in a remote forest village, his father fell ill. Local people talked of a Vaidya, but he was many miles away. If someone would go and tell him the symptoms, he would give the medicine.

Ramlal, who was just about ten, was mounted on a pony and sent to that village, the way being through the forest. He was informed about landmarks and the way seemed simple, but it was his first journey by himself in an unknown area. The landscape was unfamiliar and he would not know if and when lost. There was not a person in sight. He didn't know the beasts. Only the horse was known and as they moved, his faith in her grew absolute.

They were going in an emergency and she knew it. She galloped hard and he held on to her. Suddenly, he saw, ahead of them a dug ditch, meant to trap 'jungle suars' (boars). The pony also saw it, but was unable to stop. It jumped over it and such was the force that Ramlal fell off and rolled over. He was un-nerved. The pony stood trembling, a few feet away. Both were shaken and for some time neither moved. No one came to help. There was no one. Then he got up and petted her. He was not big enough to get on to her. So, he brought her near a tree; climbed the tree and from one of its branches, jumped on to her. Then the pony moved- she trotted gently and did not go fast. They reached the village and got the medicine. The villagers showed them another path to go back. And they returned, just in time for the evening show to begin.

That night Ramlal had to play the Puppets. This was the first time he handled a performance by himself. His first show ever! Once it was over and the Pitara packed, he found a lonely spot and wept by himself like a child. Allowing the tightened stress in his muscles to burst forth. He had suddenly grown up-in a day!

(The day Ramlal narrated this incident, the network was weak, so I had switched off the video. As a tremor crept in his voice, I switched on the video. His eyes were brimming and cheeks were moist. 'That horse saved me that day,' he said, 'her name was Chameli. We had a special bonding ...I petted her when she slept and as we walked, she would nestle her face by my

side. I wanted to keep her- not be sold.’)

(Such experiences make the horse very special to a person. Often a hero is remembered along with the horse. In folk lore, the horse is at times treated as an extension of the hero. It also has a special place in the narrative of Amar Singh Rathore. Even though the great fall attributed to the horse from the Ramparts of Agra Fort, seem unrealistic, popular imagination celebrates that possibility. For a ten-year-old boy, a six-foot jump over a ditch makes his pony a big horse hero. The virtual hugeness of the hero multiplies the expanse of his horse’s capacity, the base lying in experiences such as this. In Puppet shows, Amar Singh generally enters on a horse. In Folk Art and Craft of Rajasthan, the horse is a recurring symbol. Toy horses are quite popular.)

City Life

An event may leave its mark, shake up a person, but the journey does not pause-it carries on with, ‘each day being a new day, a new place, a new experience.’ However, the stay in the city would often be an extended one. The city allured with more sophisticated opportunities, like, schools, colleges, clubs, parties etc, but the living spaces were cramped and unclean, with little space for cooking. Yet his mother would somehow get for him a chapati and compel him to eat, though he often ate little. In Indore, they got further stranded because of the monsoon and the shows too were not forthcoming because of the season. It was during this period, that he started observing a fellow Puppeteer, who made stuffed toys like, horses and elephants with straw. From him, he picked this Craft, and perfected it to the extent that it became a parallel source of income. His father tried selling the toys in residential colonies. In the evenings Ramlal would take his horses and elephants and arrange them outside ‘Regal’ cinema and sell them to passers-by after the usual bargaining. His father would tell him, not to sell below a certain rate and if he managed to sell it for more, he kept the margin amount and used it largely to see films. ‘Anarkali’ is a film he remembers.

While performing at a politician’s party, the latter asked them if they could make a huge three-dimensional plough that could advertise his symbol. They agreed and it was made jointly by father and son with family support.

It was then, that a marriage contractor asked Ramlal, if he could make a pair of huge horses that could be paraded on a trolley as part of wedding decoration and children could also play on it. This was a major task and he took it on. He used to work at night and kept the straw (covered by tarpaulin) under a lamp post. ‘Workers of Malwa Mill would go that way and see me lying on my back, stuffing the horse’s belly with straw.’ He used pipes to make the basic structure and had to sit with the welder to get it accurate. When complete, the horses looked Great! The contractor was thrilled and gave Ramlal the first ride on the horse trolley going through the market and the lanes. He was also paid a handsome amount of three hundred rupees! In that proud moment he tasted the joy of success and endeavour. This was his construct, made solely by him. He felt he had grown some more!

(Later on, a structure of pipes with nuts and bolts, was used for making a folding Tambudi).

When, of, fourteen years of age, he received his first and only Puppet set. He made performances with it for two years. Then stopped. One Diwali night, when the entire village dazzled with lights, while there was darkness in his house and a deeper darkness within, he severed his link with the Puppet and almost attempted destroying them. There was such bitterness and frustration within. He had been married by then and when he faced the world as a couple, the realization of their vulnerability hit him hard. People would come after the show and make advances, that threatened them and challenged his capacity to take care of the young woman alongside him. Once an old woman took them in her house and that shelter gave them breath. The man with the Puppet received no money from people's hands; no respect from their eyes. But as a human being, he valued his own worth and to know that, he cut the umbilical cord of the profession he had imbibed.

His father was disappointed, but he understood. His brothers had not been too happy with his travels and Puppets, though the family had stuck together throughout. So, Salma Ram also quit his passion and decided to settle in the village and play the traditional drum. 'Jab tak Dholi hai, tab tak dhol bajega'. (The drummer keeps the drum going). Perhaps that is what he was avoiding all along. The Puppets were the path-to be more than what the village made him.

Tentative Links

Despite differences, father and son maintained an affectionate relationship. When Salmaji passed away, Ramlal respectfully buried him. Salma Ram had performed the ritual feast of 'mauser' while alive. (not unusual in Rajasthan.) 'Our rituals are all mixed up. Some people call them 'kuriti' (malpractices) but they are not that; they represent an adjustment-a solution to live life. When we meet, we celebrate, the very act of meeting. We, who live on the road respect and must respect one another. Earlier, I too saw it as wastage, but now I see the point. In ceremonious 'Baithak' we say our dohas and others cheer us up. The world may mock at us, but we appreciate one another ...even for celebrations, we take our tents along-there is no food feasting, only singing, dancing and merry making.'

He spends more time in the village, because he does not want his father to be forgotten. To keep the memory alive. The family still has Jajmani in several villages and two come to his share. He does not go, but some-one else replaces. While our conversations were going on, he was attending weddings of the community and discussing some of the issues mentioned here. He has made a list of the groups and subgroups within the community and learnt of his link with Marva, and that that is a defining point of Marwar. 'All this is giving me my bearings-in knowing who I am.' He was disappointed that DJs were being called. 'Our drums are there-hanging on the wall-but are silent ...the women are talented dancers, but have no stage ...' Things are changing and elders are losing space as external factors influence.

'The most beautiful thing is, that we celebrate anything. If a person spreads a colourful jaajam (carpet) that may become his identity-so and so -jaajam wale. We honour dreams. A person wanted to give aeroplanes to his daughters. Of-course, he could not afford it. So he got them tiny silver planes and got his title. Another person, who was landless had a dream to hold the plough and he wanted that to be for all of them. It was not going to be possible. So he got tiny

ploughs made of silver and distributed to about twenty people. And he became known as the hal-wala! The Plough man. Imagine a Landless being famous as a Plough man' That's the dream and the dream gets passed on. As the story is known.

Then one day Ramlal called early morning to say that some-one had indicated that one of his forefathers is buried in Marva and there is a 'Chatri' to mark the place. The 'Chatri' is recognized history; memory cast in stone...remembrance ...the trail is long; the links tentative. 'A person who may be considered insignificant, has so much that is of significance for himself' and the world he weaves around and spins within.

(As the report was being sent for submission, Ramlal informed me, that he had gone and seen the 'chhatri'. It is there and few more people have corroborated its connection with them- and it probably goes back to the period before they split in three directions).

CHAPTER 13: THROUGH THE MEMORY MAZE-ATTEMPT TO SEQUENCE THE FORGOTTEN PERFORMANCE OF AMAR SINGH RATHORE

The conversations we had were a way of recollection -at times about the Puppet play, 'Amar Singh Rathore' and at times about the life that revolved around the performances. Bamboos, ropes and curtains were essential for the making of the stage in which the Puppets were played. There was a sequence of entries, but the characters were many and their coming and going got jumbled up. But the exercise went on.

1. The first to enter was the Bhishti, with his mashak, spilling water by the wayside.
2. Then came the woman who swept the pathway.
3. Then came the Drummer, with the 'Tasha'/Nagara in between the legs and stick in hand. (The tasha may be referred to as the 'baaja' or 'dhol'/dholak), his main refrain being-mera baaja aur bajega-aur bajega. He also makes announcements.
4. The Chowkidar came in next-the gate keeper in physical terms, but the master registrar of all entries in the context of the performance. And he lays the backdrop- that the king is expected and 'durbar' will be set up. So he makes announcements! (or maybe they split-while quarrelling with one another. It's a constant quarrel).
5. Then the cushioned mattress (gad-da) is brought in for the king's seat. 'This,' says Ramlal, 'is probably my father's contribution to the set. Earlier we did not have this and then he said that, it would be nice to have a seat for the king and then this was made.

And then he added, 'Actually, the front curtain of the show had arches like that of a palace. So a seat makes it look like a durbar. It comes on its own. Somewhere, before this, comes-

6. Dancer Puppet who carries a petromax and goes right in front. Maybe it is the Rasdhari? And then is the entry right in the beginning? Somewhere...he is not sure. When I tell him, that Rasdhari is considered to be a performer of one of the oldest forms of Rajasthan, Ramlal says, 'is that why the Puppet comes with petromax -to show the way-? the senior artist showing way to those who come now? It is a beautiful thought! Then there would be Aarti...and thali passed around.....
7. Then come the State Rulers. Like Man Singh of Jaipur. There are many-eight/ ten on either side of the king. They are all colourful-each one having some special quality-tareef. For example, there is one-

8. Shaukeen, who insists that that he can sit anywhere, not on the allotted space... the chowkidar, keeps pulling him away...the Drummer gives beat to their fight...he wants to sit on the Badshah's seat...

(And there is another one. He is like a drunkard...Narshebaaz...? But he is not a ruler. Many come, some on foot, some on horses and camels.)

9. The Emperor has an impressive entry. He is the only one who rides an elephant.

10. He is accompanied by four horses in front and four at the back. They are all on one stick and they are stuck at the back so there is balance. The Puppeteer holds the Emperor in one hand and the rest tied to a stick are in the other.

11. Then there is the Pathan. He is on horseback and does all sorts of acrobatics. He has sword and shield in hands...? Actually most rulers have the swords and shields. He sometimes has little mashaals with which he plays around.

12. There is a boy who plays with ball or lemons.

There is a couplet for every ruler, like- Amar ki kamar mein kahe ki katari; Jodha ne gadhai aur Bika ne sanwrai- (Amar has a knife tied to the waist; made by Jodhpur and decorated by Bikaner). (He was born and bred in Jodhpur {later exiled} and all along fought battles with Bikaner, sharpening his skills in combat with them)

Mother used to run the Narrative, the Puppeteer, creating sounds with the whistle held in the lips. Could this device have come naturally to performers who in life spoke 'Parsi' to converse with one another and Marwari/ Hindi to communicate with the world. One verbal pattern within the community and another for the outside. The Puppets also speak in a pattern that cannot be deciphered by the audience of human beings, till it is interpreted for them by the Narrator, who then, also becomes the Interpreter for the Puppets.

13. There used to be a scene in which, Amar Singh would say, 'mein chutti jaa raha hoon' (I am going on leave). He comes, says and goes.

14. The Sanpera (snake charmer) with the snake had an entry and a small piece.

15. The maalin -rather the woman selling vegetables- would come. She would sing -maalin aai Bikaner se-

Is this the song from the film? (But this is older- and it is possible that the refrain went from the tradition here- outside to cinema. And the words are not same). A few days later some words came-and then some more-they stuck together like-

Tarkari le lo- maalin aai Bikaner se-Aalak bechun, paalak bechun, aur bechun chaulai-sagae jeth ki pagdi bechun- main maalin ki jayi...

(I sell this and that, spinach and greens, and the turban of my husband's elder brother).

16. The Jadugar (Magician). He would show some tricks.
17. Behrupia- generally, a Puppet with two faces-male and female- with a flirtatious comic skit between a man and his wife's sister.
18. The Weaver who has swallowed thread given to her by the king...She is stopped by the chowkidar who insists on searching her and sees a piece of thread in her mouth and pulls it and goes on pulling till a heap is collected. The woman then admits to having swallowed it as she was hungry. A few days later, memory brought in more details. This sequence was often executed with the participation of the audience. The chowkidar would begin and then call someone from the audience to pull the thread. The person pulling the thread would be flabbergasted by the amount of thread that would keep coming out of a small puppet and this would create ripples in the audience.

Audience participation had many Forms. Sometimes, while, the Snake charmer sequence would be going on, the Puppeteer would suddenly lift up the snake and it would seem that it had disappeared. Then an Aarti thali (tray) would be prepared to pray for the safe return of the Snake God and be passed through the audience (who might in the name of the Snake God place some donations in it). There was also a paltan...

What about the story of Amar Singh? How does it run? It forms a parallel stream to the stream of life. After Amar Singh goes on leave and some of the street characters have performed, the court becomes alive. (The non durbari characters come, either to display their skills to the emperor or are passing by and the chowkidar gets into a tiff or a dialogue with them).

So, then after a while, Salavat Khan would say-"Saat din ka vayda kiya, choudhan din guzraye/Hadi Rani bihakar, Amar mujre par kyon nahin aaye"
(The promise was for seven days, but fourteen have passed; having married Hadi Rani why has he not come to bow before the king?)

He then asks the king to impose a fine and the king tries to dissuade, because if they insist, they may be the losers. But Salavat Khan has his way. First a messenger is sent to Amar Singh's house and then he goes himself. A fight ensues and Amar Singh cuts off Salavat Khan's nose. Then, Salavat Khan and Arjun Gaur conspire and Arjun gets Amar Singh. Hadi Rani gives him a kataar and the small gate sequence happens.

But then does Amar Singh not slay Salavat Khan? There was confusion here ...There is the famous couplet- Amar Singh to amar bhaye, jane sakal jahan; Mughal Badshah ke saamne maara Salavat Khan (Amar Singh is forever alive as the world knows well; in front of the king, he slayed Salavat Khan).

And is Hadi Rani a character? She definitely was. There are couplets for her. Ram Singh tells her everything. She remembers the Pathan and he comes. (they meet in the forest)

Now? (Earlier with Amar Singh?) Then he and Ram Singh go to fight and slay all the durbaris. The Drummer plays the Drum, sitting by them. (Aur bajegi, aur bajegi/ meri to aur bajegi) Ram Singh and Pathan turn to the Emperor. He flees. (The Puppeteer quickly makes the Emperor take a swift jump and lifts up the Puppet creating this impression).

Hadi Rani also joins the fight? She is there...in support. Actually there is also a technical problem-it is difficult for a Puppeteer to handle three Puppets. (Father had explained). So she is there, but it is more as a suggestion of support. There is a song too...mother used to sing

Then the Chowkidar comes to the Drummer and says, 'chal bhai, khel khatam ho gaya,' but the Drummer does not listen. Chowkidar plunks him down. The Drummer shakes his neck, 'aur bajegi; meri to aur bajegi.' Chowkidar plunks him down, tosses him up, plunks him backwards, but the Drummer does not relent; goes on beating the Drum and repeating his insistence. Then Chowkidar says, 'he will not stop, so let us end here (yahin khel khatam karte hain.) And he drops a curtain on the fallen Puppets.

Some sequences are very clear; some emerge in outline; some hazy and in some there is confusion. Memory has its own ways and there is no written text or record of the sequencing. So, bit by bit, we try to delve into a past performance.

Some More- the Chowkidar and the Drummer used to be in front- little ahead of the durbar. The Drum (of the Drummer) would be played at every entry. And in some cases extra for highlights- like for the Magician. Then when the Drunkard is thrashed, the Drum builds it up. The children would love it. There was also another sequence they enjoyed.

19. The washer man who would be swallowed

20. The Crocodile.

21. Then his Wife, the washer woman comes. Chowkidar tells her what has happened. She laments, but Chowkidar suggests she can have another man and he offers himself. And she soon agrees, 'Aur karoongi' (I'll take another) and with this refrain, she exits.

22. The Rebari (As Rai community is referred to) comes on camel back. There are acrobatics by the camel. He turns upside down, legs in air etc.

One film song that was used later and was popular was, 'inhe logon ne le lina dupatta mera/ dupatta mera.

23. It was used for Anarkali, the dancer in the Emperor's court who had a long dance sequence (and many threads). Actually, earlier on, she was called by a different name....

There also was a song for Hadi Rani. 'Khub ladi mardaani ...' Not this, but something on similar lines.

CHAPTER 14: THE PUPPETEERS FROM KHERI, NAGAUR

After talking to several people and exchange of many numbers, it was finally possible to speak with Khairati Ramji, the Puppeteer from Nagaur. He was happy to know about this study and happy to share whatever he knew about the Puppet play and issues related to it. He was in Jaisalmer at that time, but was soon going to be in Kheri. He was clear, that, the original and complete 'Amar Singh Rathore' was a play of fifty-two Puppets, though over a period of time, shorter versions were being performed. 'Earlier, people had time and would watch the show for about two hours- now we are barely given fifteen-twenty minutes. So we cut short.' He has some old Puppets and could try and one or two from friends to give us some idea of the earlier format- as he knew it and played it.

On reaching Kheri, he made preparations and also invited a senior friend/relative/Puppeteer Babulalji to join him in this exercise. He also had some young Puppeteers for support. Ramlal too joined him and I connected with them via zoom link.

Khairati Ramji feels, that the source of Puppetry lies in the Art of making figures in clay. These could be of various Gods and Goddesses. Sometimes, when a man would be away, his wife would need to see his face for some ritual or fast, and at such time she could look at made image. Rajput women married into Mughal households could also be observing these practices. After the rituals were over, the images were still there. It is difficult to destroy an image that has a face, eyes and life like features. Some of them were given away to Fakir Kale Khan Aalam, to do as he pleased with them. He probably used them for story-telling. Then, at some point, he got the images crafted in wood.

Sutar (craftsman) of village Bassi, near Chittorgarh made them out for him. (known for wooden dolls). Fakir Kale Khan Aalam passed on the wooden figures and this Art to our ancestors and we are carrying it forward. There is also the story, that a subgroup of our community started using maize cones for storytelling and the Puppet developed from there.' Later on, the Puppeteers started making their own Puppets.

Ramlal is excited, hearing about Fakir Kale Khan Aalam. He used to wonder why after the birth of a child, the first share of the sweet offering of lapsi is made called 'Allah ka Pinda', whereas all other offerings are dedicated to the Kali Goddess. 'This connection with the Fakir clarifies that.'

The Puppeteers do not deny that Puppetry existed prior to this, but they relate their engagement with the Art to this happening, which could well be several hundred years ago. And there could also be recent Puppeteers, like Salmaji, who started in the forties. Anyone from any of the subgroups of the community [and there are fourteen such sub-groups that are recognized] could take on Puppetry at any time; it seems that engagement with many of the professional Arts are interchangeable amongst them. The Jajmani Arts (playing dhol/reciting genealogies etc. remain the same). [As this report was nearing submission, Ramlal informed me, that his continued interaction with members of the community

indicates, that there are many more sub-groups. However, it needs to be researched more].

The Puppeteers of Nagaur tell the story of Amar Singh Rathore, because his identity is one with Nagaur. Though, he was born in the royal house of Marwar, he was exiled from Jodhpur and earned the jagir of Nagaur from the Emperor and established himself there. So, whose story to tell? Amar Singh Rathore!' He is known by the name of Nagaur and we earn our livelihood through his name.' He feels that it is not possible for them to leave the Puppet. 'This is our jagir.' Like people have land; like land is passed as inheritance; the Puppet is their inheritance. Their roots that move with them in their 'Pitara'.

Some Puppeteers feel that earlier, Puppets were played to royal households and private gatherings. Khairati Ram agrees with this view. 'Look at the Puppet-look at its size. Clearly, it is meant for a small gathering. These days, those who are showing on the stage or for big audiences are making bigger Puppets. In some palaces there still are rooms meant for Puppet shows. Who knew, that one day, the Puppeteers would be compelled to move from village to village.' At times, they perform more than one show for a village, if it is a large one, so that the audience per show is reduced and they can watch the Puppet properly. The eye lines, the body detail like moving neck of the Drummer etc are better seen from close quarters.

He also maintains, that earlier, the Puppet stage was such that the Puppets could enter from the side, like walking in. At that time, Puppet shows were performed by four- five players. Fifty-two Puppets; battle scenes, Drummer- chowkidar, simultaneous actions- only a team of four can bring it alive with proper timing. It is more than what one person can handle. It could be an assembled team or a family, but all who could handle the Puppets. This narrator-puppeteer- two people [often husband-wife] team came about when, the show became a part of travelling. The Puppeteer tries, but it is tough. 'Akela chalane waala-Raunak chali gayi' (with the sole player-the lustre is lost). Gradually, the number of Puppets get reduced and scenes with more characters- that are difficult to handle-get taken off.

Many Puppeteers still carry old Puppets and keep adding new ones. When a Puppet is given to another, he does not remove the costume of the Puppet. He puts the new dress over the previous one. So the journey of the Puppet is often contained in the layers of its clothing. A grandfather's Puppet in the hand of fifty-year-old person could well be hundred years old! As he holds one!

Khairati Ramji and his team assembled the Puppets and rehearsed in the afternoon. I was able to watch bits of it. They had planned a night performance, which could not take place, because of an unfortunate incident in the village. So, in a corner of the house, Khairati Ramji, Babulalji and Ramlal sat together, taking out the Puppets one by one and trying to build the sequence of the playing, as they remembered -and as was confirmed by their presence together.

As we were about to begin, Babulalji said that they had created the long version of the performance, that day (25.11.2020) after almost twenty years and that they could see the shortcomings, particularly in the dialogue. According to him, the full dialogue could not be rendered-there were gaps-bits they had forgotten. And are coming back in bits and pieces.....

Sequencing the Action of 'Amar Singh Rathore' by Three Puppeteers

1. The first to enter is the Beldar. He is the one to make the road-making the way. Laying the foundation. Setting the space for action. He comes with a shovel- and does the action of digging. He stands, bends, sits. Actions are accompanied by Rhythm.
2. Next comes the man who sweeps and cleans the way- Bringing the preparation in the Immediate- for the action to begin.
There is a couplet for this character-
Haath Buhari sir pe khari; kaam kare sarkari
Jhadu dhang se lagana bhai; dhang se lagana!
(Broom in hand, basket on head; works for government
Sweep properly brother, sweep properly.)
The lines would be spoken by the narrator-the first to the audience, about the character and the second, addressed to the Puppet.
3. Then comes in the 'Pakhali' who has a 'mashak' through which water sprinkles.
(The action of water dripping is created by the Puppeteer)
4. This is followed by the Puppet that spreads the carpet.
'Durrie bichaie, durrie bichaie
(spread the carpet, spread the carpet- says the Narrator).
5. The Chowkidar enters. (At times there would be two chowkidars- one on the left; the other on the right).
Chowkidar: Badshah ki gaddi ko namaskar! Khabardar, khabardar, meharbaan kadardaan.
Aaj Badshah ki sawari aa rahi hai.
Aap aaeie, tamasha dekhiye! Main bataoonga kaun kahan baithega.
Main hoon chowkidar, khabardar, khabardar!
(I bow to the king's seat; Beware, well-wishers, Today, the king comes; come, see the show; I will tell who sits where. I am the chowkidar, Beware!)
The last two lines have an inkling of power. He is gate-keeper of the Power System and controls access to it. He is the face of the system in the world-the one the Puppeteers have to grapple with each day-the Pradhan/village Headman who has the power to grant them permission to camp and allot them a place. (The chowkidar is both Pehredar (man on guard) and Halkara (One who announces names in Court).
6. The Drummer enters who has the drum between the legs and has a neck with movement.
Chowkidar: Kath ki Putli, haath ki safai, Pet ka hunar, Ye hain Lucknow ke Nawab- aaiye, Jaldi aaiye
Nawab- jagah bataiye (show me my place)
Chowkidar: aaiye aaiye Swagat hai (welcome)
7. Then, on the lilt of a folk song, the Nawab of Lucknow completes his entry.

Nawab: jagah bataiye

(The chowkidar welcomes him and then adds, 'we are meeting after a long time, so let us have a chat - And then asks him -how he is doing; how are the children and things in general; then shows him his place and the Puppet is settled there.)

8. Then comes Lal Khan, who is the 'shaukeen' (Fond of the good things of life). After the usual questions, the chowkidar tells him 'aage chalo ji'

(Forward move- he does so -)

'Peeche chalo ji'

(Back Move- he does so)

'Dayan chalo ji'

(Right move-he does so)

'Bayan chalo ji'.

(Left move- he does so).

Then he asks about his four horses-

Lal Khan neighs.

then he asks about his two 'teetars'

(Partridges) .

Lal Khan happily creates their sound;

Then he wants to know about the four cocks

And the Puppet of Lal Khan shakes with the usual 'kukdukoon'.

Then he asks how his four wives are faring

Lal Khan, giggles, embarrassed.

The Drummer supports the merry making, by beating the Drum.

The chowkidar gets angry at the Drummer-

Badshah ki kachcheri mein gadbad karta hai?

(you create a ruckus in the king's court?)

The Drummer (Khadbad Khan) plays the drum.

Chowkidar: Tera Nagada phod doonga (I'll break your drum)

(The Drummer plays the drum)

Chowkidar: Tera sir phod doonga. Danda dekha hai?

Khadbad Khan (the Drummer plays the drum)

(The chowkidar hits him.)

The drummer keeps playing

(Chowkidar sits on him)

Chowkidar: Now play!

(Momentarily, the Drummer quietens down.)

As Chowkidar moves, he raises his head and starts again.

Chowkidar turns to him. He stops.

As he turns his back, he starts again..

Khadbad Khan: Aur bajega! Mera Baja aur bajega!

(It will play- my drum -play more and more! (goes on playing)

(This fight goes on for a while. The chowkidar tries to throw him out etc. but he returns.

This goes on till the next entry).

(This is one example of their fight, which keeps recurring many times)

9. Entry of the Behrupiya. This Puppet is two in one (male and female). They enter on a folk song and have a flirting fling.

10. Then comes in Tees Markhan. (The Puppet is thin and lanky).

After, the usual exchanges, the Chowkidar says- Swagat hai!

(Welcome)

Kya tamanna saath lekar aaye ho?

(What desire comes with you?)

Tees Mar Khan- Badshah ki gaddi par baithne ke liye aaye hain.

(To sit on the king's seat).

Chowkidar-Ram! Ram! (oh my God) [turns his face away]

[Then] voh aapki jagah nahin- samajhiye

(That's not your place, understand)

Tees Mar Khan-Hum nahin samajhte

(I don't understand)

[Chowkidar pushes him to his place and asks him to sit]

Tees Mar Khan: Nahin baithoonga!

(I won't sit)

Chowkidar again shows him his place to sit. But he refuses. He is Tees Mar Khan (one who has killed thirty) and such a brave- heart, who has fought and won many battles will seat where he pleases and that is the Emperor's seat. The Chowkidar tries by showing other spots, but he refuses and keeps moving towards the seat. The Chowkidar pulls him, makes fun of him and his claim.

Chowkidar: Can't hold your weight and Tees Mar Khan!

Hits him again and again;

He falls, but is adamant. The Chowkidar hits him hard (like a slap) and settles him in a corner.

(The Drummer too beats his drum and again, there is a fighting duet between the two)

(Ramlal burst out laughing here- he remembered, he still has this Puppet- having played this scene so many times- and it has received so many beatings and slaps; been hit hard so many times, that it has dents on the face and a chipped nose!)

11. Entry of Arjun Gaur. There is a couplet for him-

Gaur bulave ghatva, chadhav shekhan

Khara lashkar maranna chadhav lekha.

12. Entry of Ram Singh

(Both Arjun Gaur and Ram Singh are dressed in Rajput attire- and not the gowns that other Puppets wear. They wear pyjamas and so they are Puppets with legs.)

13. Entry of Salavat Khan.

(The neck is so formed, that the head can separate from the rest of the body-as is revealed later.)

14. Entry of Maan Singh.
(For him there is a couplet-
Maan tumhari mauj se dariyav dehle
Mehar dare, baasak tassale, pota Bhagwat Das ka, bhalkate bhal)

15. Entry of the Emperor on elephant (at times accompanied by the eight horses). To give the Emperor a certain stature, this Puppet is made larger than the rest, so it stands out. The Puppet is often made to sit as well.

(Here, Ramlal suddenly remembered the entry of the Paltan (Platoon).
'This is the place that the Paltan came and it makes sense too, in honour of the Emperor.'

16. The Paltan (Platoon).
On a single thread three straight Puppets are tied on one side and three on the other.
(In The centre is the Commander (Captain), Pipli Sahab.)
They march in -left, right, left, right.....
(Then, Pipli Sahab addresses the audience directly, 'kya meri tarah kar sakte ho?')
(Can you do as I do?).
An adolescent boy is picked from the audience and called to meet Pipli Sahab.
He asks the boy to.... 'Munchh pe haath phero'
(Brush up your moustache)
And the adolescent feels shy and awkward.
Pipli sahib: Shadi karoge?
(will you marry)
{The child nods}
Pipli Sahib: Biwi kaise chahiye kali ki gori?
(What kind of wife you want-fair or dark?)
{Boy answers}
Pipli Sahib: Lambi ke choti?
(Tall or short)
Lambe kaan wali ya lambi poonch wali?
(With a long ear or long tail?)
{Boy answers}
Pipli Sahib: All right, ab jaisa main karoon vaisa karo!
(now follow me!)
{He stretches up and down; sits, stands; the boy follows.
Then he does more complicated turns and twists, which the boy finds tough and then he does cartwheels and acrobatics, wherein the boy probably gives up and goes back, much to the merriment of the audience.}
The Platoon exits.

(Khairati Ram has six Puppets in the Platoon. Ramlal said that they had only four. He also added, that Khairati Ramji had, in a similar fashion, also experimented with the Band- on a single string, he had two and two Puppets with one in the centre (total five) and so all five drums would play together).

(Sometimes before the entry of Paltan, there would be a song, 'naam likhva lo', which was probably about recruitment to the army.)

[This is also a point at which Amar Singh can make his entry and first exit.]

17. The Emperor asks for some entertainment-Kuch manoranjan ho jaye-
(The Chowkidar calls in the Jadugar. (Magician).)

He is a magician from Bengal. And asked to show his 'kartab'. (Magic).
He does many tricks, playing on a quick rhythm. He takes out his head, turns it around, tosses it about; holds the head in hand; holds it by his feet etc.

18. Then comes in Narseh Khan Pathan. He has a shield in one hand and with the other, he takes out and flashes a sword. The song for him goes as-
Pagdi teri paanch ki, jaama karod ka
Surat teri had bani, ladke Pathan ka.
(Your turban and clothes are expensive; handsome son of Pathan).

19. Horse of Jelum Singh (Probably Zaalim Singh as referred elsewhere).
(The Chowkidar views it curiously.)
Chokidar: 'Ghoda hai ya ghodi?
(Male or female?)
The horse kicks him and goes.

20. Jelum Singh, the Dacoit of Bikaner, had reached Jaisalmer lost his horse. He comes on horse. He is said to be related to the Bhati Gotra. There is a verse for him, though not often used-
Gadh Delhi, gadh Agro, gadh Bikaner
Bhajo chunave Bhatian, sare Jaisalmer
Jaisanno jasraj ro khuban kare khalak
Kh avann peevannre ganth de dekh nari badi jhalak
Ghoda ki jo kath ka pind ki jo pasann
Pairan bastar johe ka, jab dekhun jaisann.
(Tiny mashaals of live fire are used on either side of this Puppet.)

21. Gangaram-Maali ka beta.
This character has a cheerful face and is very popular.
He plays with ball, transferring it on shoulder, the arm, the knee etc.
(The song that may be used is the one by the Maalin-
Tarkari le lo, maalin aayee Bikaner se
Gaaajar ka gadh kot banaya
Mooli ka darwaza
Shakarkand ki top banai
Lade karela raja
Tarkari le lo, mmlin aayee Bikanerse
Alak bechun, paalak bechun
Aur bechun chandlai
Saat gaanv mein sabzi bechun
Main maalin ki jai.

(The Vegetables she sells are special- the carrots make the Fort walls; the radish is used for the doorway; sweet potato is the canon; and king bitter gourd is the fighter. She sells vegetables in seven villages.)

[Ramlal was overjoyed that the missing lines of the song were back on his lips and the three Puppeteers enjoyed this particular recollection thoroughly and sang in support of each other.]

22. Then comes in the Dancer-Munna Jaan of Agra. (Now generally called Anarkali). The song she sings is 'Anaar wali Bagiya'. Later, the 'dupatta' song took over.

23. Next comes Sakuri Julahi. The Chowkidar accuses her of not having completed the weaving. Sakuri- Badshah ne soot diyatha- kam pad gaya. (The king had given thread, but it was less.)

Chowkidar- Kaise?

Sakuri- Main kha gai kya? (Have I eaten it up ?)

Chowkidar- kha gayi to nikal liya jaye

(If so, we'll take it out).

[He pulls out some and then calls someone from the audience.

Generally a child would come and pull the thread. Goes on pulling and the thread keeps coming much to the amazement of the audience.)

{They can pull out up to 200gm of thread/wool, says Khairati Ram}.

It is of two colours - white and red-the former from the mouth and the latter from the stomach. Also taana-baana.]

Sakuri-I was hungry. She goes.

The puppeteer removes the thread/wool.

24. Next comes the Sadhu (Bhakt).

This puppet is made of wood and the limbs are very pronounced; scantily attired.

(He does yoga and makes many poses.

And moves on.

He is searching for the Bhaktani (his wife) whom he lost in the Kumbh mela.

Sadhu: 'Bhaktani kho gayi!'

Chowkidar-Kab? (when was it?)

Bhakt-barah saal ho gaye. Tab se dhoond raha hoon

(Twelve years ago; searching for her ever since)

Chowkidar-agar aapki baat mein sachai hai, to who aa jayegi. Tab taka ap dhuni ramaao

(If you are genuine, she will come herself. You do your penance).

[Bhakt immerses in his worship]

25. Bhaktani enters. She is looking for her Bhakt and is happy to see him. He is equally happy.

She fans him, he lies in her lap.

Chowkidar/narrator-patni kare pati ki seva, paaye mishri aur meva

However, the Bhakt soon goes back to old ways of bhakti and does shashtang pranam to the wife.

(She is disappointed leaves him in a huff.)

The song for her is as-thari kumdi re paani kaun peeve

Baba langotiya!

(Who can drink from your sacred jug

Old man in loincloth.

Bhakt realizes, his wife has gone and begins calling out to her 'Bhaktani...'

And running behind her, begins his search all over again.

(Sometimes, this scene is played as the Laila Majnu sequence, with Bhakt making the entry with, 'Hai meri Laila! Main gaya Makka Medina, vahan meri Laila kho gayi! (Oh my Laila!) (I went to Mecca and there I lost her!)

26. The snake charmer

27. His snake

(The snake charmer plays on his been and the snake moves on it.)

The Puppeteer makes the snake disappear.

There is Aarti for the Snake god and thali passed around in the audience for money collection.

28. The Dhobi (Washer Man.) He wears everyday clothes.

29. Crocodile-swallows the washer man.

30. The Dhobin (washer woman) comes.

The Narrator tells her what has happened.

The washer woman wails.

Then Chowkidar asks her to stop

Washer Woman: apne dhobi nu roun, paanch ghade paani ke laata; un sukhan nu rovaan!
(I cry for my man, he would bring five pitchers of water; I weep for those comforts).

The Chowkidar convinces her to give up weeping and take on another man.

He lures her to himself- and gradually, she moves to saying-

Washer Woman: 'aur karoongi', 'aur karoongi'!

(Take on another).

She climbs onto his back and leaves like that.

Chowkidar exits and returns.

31. Entry of Amar Singh on a horse (which is taken out).

When he enters, the Puppeteer touches the rod-to which the Puppets are tied- in such a way, that it seems that the entire courtiers tremble at his coming.

The couplet for him is-

'Salla Devi bal diya, chadhiya mahaan mard

Aisa mahaan mard pachrang jhanda ropeya aisa mahaan mard.'

(Another one, more like a song, that could be used-Amar Singh ghode par jaata, Gadh phod Agra jeet fateh ki paata.)

The Emperor asks-Amar Singh kaise aana hua?

(What brings you here?)

He replies that he needs leave for his marriage celebrations.

The Emperor advises him-'aap Salavat Khan ke paas jayen'.

(Go to Salavat Khan).

Amar Singh refuses-'Salavat ke paas nahin jaoonga. Voh mooh ka aisa hi hai aur hum Rajput hain.'

(Not to Salavat Khan; he is loose with his tongue and we are Rajputs.)

The Emperor then grants him a week's leave.

He says: Main saat din ki chutti de sakta hoon.

Amar Singh moves.

Behind him are-

32. Hadi Rani and ,

33. Kishna Nai.

Narseh Khan lies on the ground.

Amar Singh calls out to Kishna-

Amar Singh: dekh kaun hai-(see who is there).

Kishna is scared, 'kya pata, bhoot hai, kaun hai'

(May be a ghost).

But Amar Singh is insistent.

Narseh Khan introduces himself as 'Sher Khan ka ladka' (son of Sher Khan).

He is thirsty and there is no water in the desert.

Amar Singh offers him water from his pitcher.

(The water pours from the pitcher on to Narseh Khan's jointly cupped hands and he drinks it.)

(The water being poured and the dripping water must be seen, say the Puppeteers.)

After his thirst is quenched, Narseh Khan has a couplet-

Haath uthaon Kaa'be ki taraf, kasam tumhari khaon

Jahan bahe paseena aapka, vahan khoon bahaon.

(In the name of my God, I promise you, where your sweat drips, my blood shall flow).

The two embrace and become Brothers of the word.

The Court is assembled and the narrator says-

Aaye Badshah baith takhat par, nyaya kare maalik sabka

Kahe Badshah suno Salavat, kaun kaun mujre aaya

Kahe Salavat, suno Hazrat, ek Amar Singh nahin aaya.

(The king sat on his seat and asked who all have come in attendance.

Salavat says, only Amar Singh is absent.)

Implying, the rest are all present.

Emperor-unka kya kiya jaye? (what should be done about him?)
Salavat-Mujre nahin aaya, to jurmana dena padega
(he should be fined.)

Emperor-sooae huae sher ko mat jagao. Voh jurmana nahin dega.
(Don't wake up a sleeping tiger. He will not pay the fine.)

Salavat-yeh jurmana Salavat lega. Hazrat ka order hona chahiye. Saat din ka saat lakh
jurmana- main loonga- Badshah ko doonga.
(Salavat will deliver to the king, seven lakhs for seven days, if your Lordship will order)
The Emperor assents.

34. Here, probably takes place the sequence, where a messenger informs Amar Singh about
the fine and.

He comes to court.

[Salavat Khan faces him]

Salavat Khan-Saat din ka kaul kiya, din chaudhan guzraiye/ Hadi rani biyah ke hindu, mujre
kyon nahin aaye?
(You gave word for seven days and stayed for fourteen; after getting married to Hadi Rani,
why did you not come for attendance in court?)

Amar Singh-zyada bak bak mat kar sheikh Salavat Khan
Zyada bak bak karega to teri loonga zubaan nikaal
Loonga zubaan nikaal, nayanon se nayan chipaaon
De khanjar ki maar, tera dhad se sheesh udaaon...

(Don't stretch your nonsense Salavat Khan else I will pull your tongue and eyes and with my
sword separate the head).....

And with that, he attacks and the separated head falls away.

(This verse, meant for Amar Singh, would be said /sung by the Narrator, because, the
Puppeteer with the whistle, would find it tough- though it is possible for him to bring out the
sensation of the phrases- and may be it could be whistle could underline the words at times
or be inter-woven into them.)

Narrator-Amar Singh to amar bhayeo, jaane sakal jahan
Mughal Badshah ke saamne maara Salavat Khan
Maara Salavat Khan, Kuchchheri tharrai
Badshah kamdhaj tumne achchi talwar chalai!

(Amar Singh has become eternal for in front of the Emperor, he slayed Salavat Khan and the
Court trembled even as the Emperor is impressed by the swordsmanship of the prince from
Jodhpur).

The Emperor gives a paan (betel leaf) to the Chowkidar and says-Amar Singh ko jo Agra le
aayega, use Dilli ka aadha raj milega!

(Whosoever brings Amar Singh back to Agra will be given half of Delhi).

The Chowkidar carries the betel leaf (indicative of the 'beeda' [betel leaf and betel nut {supari} that is proverbial] and still in use for mercenary contracts).

Chowkidar-Jo Amar Singh Rathore ko Nagaur se layega/voh aadhi Dilli ka raj paayega.
(Whosoever brings Amar Singh Rathore from Nagaur, will get half of Delhi).

Arjun Gaur comes forward to say that he will do it.

Chowkidar-But he is your brother in law! (More to underline the family relationship between Amar Singh and Arjun Gaur [for the audience] as the latter's sister was married to the former)

Then Arjun Gaur meets Amar Singh.

Amar Singh tells him that he has no quarrel with the Emperor; the enmity he had with Salavat Khan, and that is settled. Arjun Gaur persuades him to return, But Amar Singh does not trust him.

But Arjun Gaur assures him by saying- 'hamare beech Ram dharma hai; Ganga jal hai, tulsi ka patta hai; Ganga mata ki saugandh hai; aapse koi dhokha nahin hoga.
(All the holy and pure symbols bound us to integrity).

[If Hadi Rani gives him a dagger, then it has to be here].

Amar Singh asks Arjun Gaur to walk ahead. They take a few steps and establish the Agra Fort.

Amar Singh asks-Agre ke Qile ka darwaza bund kyon hai?

(Why is the Fort Gate shut?)

Arjun Gaur replies- aapke naaam se dare huae hain, idhar se chaliye, choti khidki se

(All are scared of your name-come from here, the small window).

As Amar Singh would have to bow his head to go from there, he goes backwards-legs in first.

At that point, Arjun Gaur slays him.

Narrator-Amar Singh ko maarkar, sagi behan ko vidhwa kiya

Kisi Rajput ne aisa dhokha kabhi nahin kiya.

(He slayed Amar Singh and widowed his sister. No Rajput ever deceived so)

Amar Singh swipes Arjun Gaur's nose with his dagger. He hides his face.

Narrator-Ek katari Agre, had vai amresh.

Paav dora lahu su, dooja takht hile

Amar ki kamar mein kahe ki kataari

Jodha ne gadhai, Bika ne sanwrai

Arjun Gaur ka kaan aur naak le gai

Agre ke kot mein kataari rang le gayi!

(Amar Singh's sword made and sharpened in Bikaner and Jodhpur, took away Arjun Gaur's nose and Left its mark at Agra Fort).

The Emperor: aise veer bahadur ko kyon maara; aisa veer, mera senapati!
He is upset with Arjun Gaur for having killed the brave man, his commander who had valour!
He orders for Gaur's face to be blackened and his lands to be confiscated.

Here comes the scene between Hadi Rani and Ram Singh who tells her what has happened.
She asks him to remember Pathan chacha.

Narseh Khan comes and the two, go to fight the King's men-in this case, the courtiers, who fall fast.

The two attempt to move towards the Emperor, but he is swiped off by the Puppeteer, giving the impression of fleeing.

The Drummer beats his drum.

Hadi Rani also comes.

Hadi Rani places Amar Singh on a horse and attempts to bring him out.

Narrator-Odh rani baandhe sevra, Hadi baandhe modh

Beti Chatarsal Hada ki, lade Dilli ki Pod (pol).

[Unlike other women, Hadi, daughter of Chatarsal of Hada, fought the gateway of Delhi.]

At this point, the Emperor comes on top and says- Beta ho to aisa; Bhai ho to aisa; Rani honi chahiye to Hadi Rani jaise.

(Such should be a son, such should be a brother; and a queen ought to be like Hadi Rani).

Then Hadi takes him out.

The Drummer continues playing the drum.

The chowkidar asks him to stop. He carries on.

The Chowkidar tells the audience the play is over.

(In the story, Hadi Rani commits sati, 'but not in our play,' Khairati Ram clarifies.)

This interaction among the three Puppeteers was spontaneous and they recollected many things together, often adding line to line. The thrill and joy of being able to remember and have it tallied! Roughly. 34 Puppets were thoroughly discussed. A few got left out. Somewhere in between comes Rasdhari (35) who worships Krishna and through him, the Aarti thali is passed, to collect donations.

{According to some scholars, the Rasdhari, represents the oldest Performing tradition of Rajasthan, the Rasa. Such a character would be familiar to the audience.} If, the six Puppets in the Paltan are counted separately from Pipli Sahab, then the number crosses forty, [41], but perhaps more patience is required to trace more puppets.

(There used to be 2 chowkidars and there is scope for two, but now one suffices...)

[Ramlal still insists on the Drunkard with 'bottle in hand']

Khairati Ramji and Babulalji showed some of their Puppets-Ram Singh made in 'Saagwan' by Khairatiji's father and painted by him when he was ten.

The Paltan is made in 'Baaer' and others in 'Aam' and 'Aankda'.

Amar Singh is made in 'Aam'; while Man Singh is in 'Aankda'.

There are some Puppets that were there in other shows, but got missed here, but the Puppeteers were together able to construct a brief performance outline, which in itself gives an idea of the scope of the Performance.

Interaction with Chaman Ram and Madan Lal, Sitabiji's sons

Sitabiji's sons presented a brief demonstration of their performance and it seems to have the same flow, with minor differences. For example, the Chowkidar is also referred to as, 'Chobdaar' and Khadbad Khan as 'Band master' too. But the relationship is on the same lines.

Drummer tells Chowkidar-hamari dholak gat se gat milaegi

(my drum will keep beat with beat)

Chowkidar tells him-aapki hamari nahin jamti. Aap sur mein nahin bajate.

(We don't get along. You are not in tune).

Drummer- hum sur mein nahin bajate -tumhari hamari nahin jamti - to...?

(I am not in tune, we don't get along, so...)

Chowkidar-Aap so jao (you sleep.)

Drummer pretends to sleep, but as the Chowkidar begins to speak, he interrupts with a beat.

It Happens repeatedly.

(Chowkidar turns to him)

Drummer- Taan aa gayi..[The tune came...]

(And the fight begins).

The entry of the Nawabs and Princes is on folk songs. The nawab of Hyderabad has characteristics of the Shaukeen, Lal Khan.

Agra Nawab is Sheikh Salavat Khan.

An interesting addition is the Camel with the rider, that brings to mind the Rebari (pastoralists) who move around with camels. The Camel Puppet has a flexible neck, that does movements; it jumps and throws off the rider. The song that accompanies it is, 'gaadivaan ...'

Amar Singh rides a Kutchchi ghoda (horse of Kutch, from where Marwar accessed its horses.)

There is another horse-Pawan Ghoda, who rides like the wind and takes circles etc. (this could be Jelum Singh's horse, who later comes with the rider and lit by mashals).

(This could also be the horse gifted by the Rana of Udaipur to Balluji just before the attack on the Fort. This is mentioned in the, 'Champavaton ka Itihas.')

Narrseh Pathan plays with swords.

The magician from Bengal severs his head, plays with it and puts it back.

Sakuri Julahi is called 'Shakuri'

[shakkar se bhi meethi-sweeter than sugar.]

A member from the audience is called and the thread is pulled out - This is suut ki vasooli!

[Recovery of thread].

The sanpera is called Champalal and he plays the 'been', which is replicated by the Puppeteer on his whistle.

Snake slithers away.

The scene between Salavat Khan and Amar Singh opens with the fine being imposed- 'Saat

din ka kaul kiya...mujre nahin aaye'
And then the fine is imposed.
Amar Singh refuses to pay a penny.

Salavat Khan says – 'hat ganwaar'[uncouth]
Amar Singh retorts-'ganwaar ganwaar kya kehta hai, ganwaar ki chot dekh halki hai ya bhaari.'
[The 'ganwar' dialogue is there in the Punjabi narrative]
Salavat Khan goes on demanding.
Then Amar Singh Says-'zyada bak bak.....'
(Some words are are different 'nakhon se tere nayan nikaloon' etc.)
(And he slays Salavat).
The Narrator's summing up is little different, though emotion is similar. It condenses the life in a sentence.

Narrator-Amar Singh Rathore, jinhone beyahi Hadi Rani thi
Marwar ka bashinda gadh Nagaur Rajdhani
Amar Singh to amar bhaye, jaane sakal jahan
Shah Akbar ki god mein maara Salavat khan!
(Amar Singh who had married Hadi Rani, resident of Marwar who had his capital in Nagaur; his fame is eternal as he slayed Salavat Khan in the lap of the Emperor).

Such a summing up, also sums up the important facts of his life. The marriage to Hadi rani is underlined, because the Hada Pradesh did not enter into matrimonial alliances with the Emperor's household. At the end, when all Puppets fall down, the Drummer beats drum.

Narrator-Jhagda yaheen rache maharaj
Tamasha dekho kathputli ka
Ladaiyan ho rahi maharaj
[All fights are made here; come and see the pageantry of the Puppets; fights are going on...]

Chaman Ram looks at the court as a contemporary metaphor, though the story may be 400 years old. According to him, the story has gone to Khyal from here. He says that the Puppet is not meant for the streets; palaces like Jaigarh had a permanent stage where Puppet shows were performed. Most of the Puppets have four threads, some have six or seven, though now there are some with more and so the face and eyes also have movement. They performed in the light of a Petromax.

According to him, there have also been women Puppeteers. 'My grandmother handled Puppets and played the whistle, while my grandfather played the dholak and did the narration. Three of his sons are not interested in this; only one is. 'Isme kuch nahin rakha' (there is nothing in it now).

The Puppeteers made a name for themselves as they travelled with this Art, but so many restrictions have been imposed. Now mostly, it is Tourism. They also do not go much in Jajmani- if they go at harvest, they may get something , else, 'they are less and we are more-go only if called, else they use the D.J. bands.

Bhats are engaged with many Arts, some take it forward, some backwards... Earlier there were Nats who would walk on the rope. There were some who would long jump over five camels. They would be challenged to jump over more-may be even ten. They did cartwheels [gulati khana] ; 'chattar kotli'- biting through a chattar made of dry gourd; making pearl necklaces with the mouth; balancing objects, sometimes even a plough, on the chin, forehead, lips .

He sees the Chowkidar as the gate keeper who welcomes [like durbans today] and Khadbad Khan as the main character who holds the 'nagare ki chob'. There are many more Puppets, including a drunkard but all are not often shown. In his memory, there were at least eleven kings on either side of the emperor.(22). According to him, Puppetry is an ancient Art. Our ancestors carved with a blade in bamboo and moved it. They use timber of Mango, root of 'aankda-the root does not crack; it is strong.

Mango wood is safe from mites. The one used for making Puppets for selling is aldoo. It gets mites easily. It is soft and easily handled, but it does not last.'

He has Puppets made by his grandfather-going back a century, as he himself is 62 now. If painted with water colour, they have to be retouched every six months. Now, they use oil paint. 'When we make the Puppet, we think of the character, and imagine, as a poet does; wondering, would he have long arms or short? What colour would he like? Some things are ingrained- like the type of beard- then, accordingly, you have to give a cut in the wood. We look at ourselves in the mirror; look at children and then think of the character who may be a king. Then polishing, painting; finally, the whole family is involved, in dress making and completing the Puppet.

'Once the Puppet is ready, she is our, 'Bhavani'-source of livelihood. But as the pen needs paper, the Puppet needs sound to be alive. It is the rhythm of the dholak, ghungroo, whistle and verse that fills the movement. It is what breath is to the flute; it gives the control, the flow. There has to be co- ordination between the musician and the Puppeteer, like flour and salt. It has also to be learnt. This Puppet is made of wood, if we don't manage the thread, it will fall. Once, when I was small, the thread of a Puppet broke in the middle of a show. I tried to fix it, but could not. My father pinched my ear.' A puppeteer's son has to rise to the occasion; like the Puppeteer; and the Puppeteer he has to be. All performers know so.

Some Observations: On the Journey of the Content and Form

The Puppet performance of, 'Amar Singh Rathore' contains within it, several shades and phases. Handled by hundreds of artists in various places, varying circumstances, it has a range and flexibility that charms and disarms. For, a phenomenon that multiplies by addition and subtraction at various ends, creates patterns that can be observed, not measured. There are families that could have been doing the performance for several generations and some that may have taken to it only in the past four-five decades. It is, a flowing ensemble, with shifting levels and layers. At its core lies the skill of handling Puppets and in the Puppeteer's mind, a deep connect with Amar Singh Rathore, that stays on, even where the story has disappeared.

The Puppet begins with the image. There is no attempt to seem real. Its very existence acknowledges the role of the 'construct' in art. When animated, it moves, stylistically, often in jerks and jumps, sometimes, as if the lines of a cartoon are in motion. It is not mimicking the characters and yet, the very nature of cartooning action, moves towards developing a comment, The Performance is live animation, synchronised to live sound and music, orchestrated to timing that is maintained spontaneously, because it probably changes with every venue, availability of space, audience response, the concentration of the two human players and their co-ordination with each other.

Spectacle, action, humour, reversal of status, music, crisp exchanges and poetry- the Performance has many elements of Popular entertainment. The Puppets delight with their actions. Every character brings in a movement, that either has swift changes or a culmination of the same. The Puppeteer's hands are never still. Even the characters of the Court are so designed, that except a few, the others have movements to execute-forward- backward; sit-stand; right-left etc.

Many have action imbued in the structure of the Puppet itself. Salavat Khan's head separates; thread comes out of Sakuri; A second Puppet emerges out of the Behrropiya; the Magician cuts his head, holds it by the foot and revolves it all around. The Animals too are made with movement in view- the Camel has a flexible neck and legs, it tries to throw off the rider; the snake dances and slithers; the crocodile swallows and the horse jumps. Acrobatics are displayed throughout. Whether it is Gangaram, juggling the ball with various body parts [shoulder, head, arm etc] or the demure dancer, playing with the edges of her dupatta or the swordsmanship of Narseh Khan or the Bhakt doing Shashtang, nearly every character has a 'kartab' [feat of physical skill] to display.

Looking at the Puppets closely, one can feel the indelible stamp of the Nat community on this design. Display of 'kartab' was part of daily life for them and that is how, it comes across in this Performance, with very character having something to show- even like the washer-woman jumping on the Chowkidar's back. There are surprises and moments of wonder. Like the sportsman, that is what the Nat was supposed to do- perform extra- ordinary feats which were beyond the scope of ordinary people. Yet, they filled the spectator with thrill and awe as the agility and the ability of the performer touched soaring heights.

The sensation and source of movement is a knowledge that a Nat/ performer/ actor cultivates. He/ she carries it within almost as an awareness of 'reflex' activity. It becomes a viewpoint, quick to catch action and the sharpness of timing. It is quite likely, that as members of the Nat Community moved into Puppetry, they brought with them their huge experience of charismatic feats and a viewpoint to life that easily captured moments of action, scope of acrobatics and surprises created by extending the 'usual' into the 'unusual'.

Even the use of 'boli' or whistle has a magical effect- puppets converse [rather tweet] in a twittering strange language, which filters to us by a human interpreter. [This may be related to the internal dialogue in 'Parsi' that the community maintained, while the formal language of social interaction was different.] Stylistically, this enhances the impact of the spectacle 'construct'.

They knew and understood the power of the 'kartab' and, by mastering the art of Puppet handling, endowed it with a style that has become its uniqueness.

The Display of the Puppet holds the attention of the audience in the act of performance-what it does and how it does. The Nat too is a performer, who performs difficult jumps (over five camels etc) and grips the audience with the skill of performing an acrobatic action. It immerses the audience in the 'present'-the moment of the action.

The story, on the other hand, specially, in performance engages the audience by generating suspense about the 'future' action-what next? What will happen next? It compels you to ponder about the future, while a demonstrative act, binds attention just to the moment.

The Nat performs without a story. His Act is the Performance and that itself is the moment of suspense. Will he do it? How will he do it? See how he does it! The Puppet, too, when it is active and acrobatic in style is demonstrative- its completeness delineated by the range and quality of skill.

The Performance, despite a pervading 'sameness' also comes across as a work that has evolved over a period of time. It feels like a document of the times it has passed through. It begins by narrating the events of the Agra Court, but characters that exist at the 'fringe' [seen from the Royalty's point of view] take over the performance. This is a subaltern 'telling' in which the 'fringe' framing the gory events of the Court emerges as the stream of life. The visual Design is such, that this stream/ framing takes over the stage, while the court pales as a curtain of stiff characters in the background. When the Puppeteers performed indoors and for the landlords / Rajputs, the story with its battles was probably performed with intensity, carving out the heroic with the verse and manoeuvring of the Puppets.

The Performance has two distinct strands- one is the Story of Amar Singh Rathore and the other is the collage of stories/ episodes of the characters that come and go on the road. The two are strung together by the presence of the Chowkidar and the Drummer. The happenings in the Royal court and the common road are unaffected by each other and exist as two parallel streams- Rather, two different scripts, one layered on the other. It is like writing in a copy that already has prewritten pages. As the new text asserts itself with a bright colour, the earlier one fades and recedes in the background. As if the new one is in pen and the earlier was by pencil.

Such layering probably happened over time. Perhaps, initially, the performance was more about Amar Singh Rathore and gradually, other characters got added, gained popularity and stayed on. Some are performers called to the court, and some appear to be passers- by on the road. The style of the two portions is different from one another. The Story of Amar Singh has more of couplets and verse; a central conflict that builds up to the main action of Salavat Khan being killed and as a consequence of which there is battle. The sequences on the road are packed with more demonstrative action and the entry of each character becomes a unit by itself and is completed by the exit of the character.

Incorporating, contrasting streams of characters has been an aspect of Indian dramaturgy. There are classical/ traditional/ folk texts in which this pattern is visible with a plot and sub-

plots that intermingle and complement one another. As the Performance comes to us today, this intermingling is not evident. This is what makes this structure special. The story is only a part of a whole. It is not the main part that weaves the whole. This reduces its size/stature within the Performance. There is a happening in the Court and there are happenings on the road. The king and princes have their issues and concerns. The people have their own. They are connected by space and time, but the connection is not over spelt; so a disconnect is palpable.

Such a structure could have also evolved over time. Initially, there may have been more interweaving. [Narseh Khan Pathan, displays the skill of swords in the court and later joins Amar Singh. The song of the maalin as recollected by the three Puppeteers, builds a picture of a Fort, which thematically connects with the story, even as a Fort and fighters of vegetables transfers the image into a zone of sweet fantasy, giving it an alternate view, almost as the Puppet itself or as animation takes away the pain of a fall/ injury.]

To the Puppeteer, who carries a Huge 'Disconnect' and is fragmented within himself, this arrangement probably came naturally. The road outside the court is the margin in which the Puppeteer provides space for these characters to burst forth. They are interesting in themselves; create momentum and hold attention. The story needs time to unfold.

Sometimes, when groups have to perform in limited time allotted to them, brevity weakens the thread of the narrative.

In short performances, the independent episodes provide interesting glimpses into the art of Puppetry. They could be performed independent of the story and some groups do so. But they retain the title, 'Amar Singh Rathore'. Many Puppeteers say, 'our livelihood is through the name of Amar Singh Rathore' even though the story no longer dominates the performance. It may have lost the lustre, but not the connect. Each time, the performance begins, the name of Amar Singh is evoked. Over years, the title has stuck to the Form. It comes from tradition and hence is easily acceptable. A new title could have invited censorship, specially, as the Puppeteers had to deal with Laws, that were unsympathetic to them.

The canvas of 'Amar Singh Rathore' brings with it a range of characters. Apart from king and princes, there are many more. Most of them are Dalits and people who work with their hands. They are everywhere, but are rendered invisible by the gaze of the mainstream. In this Performance, they are the main living stream, with royalty forming a passive backdrop to their acrobatics and quick-witted stances. The Beldar, who makes the road, the Sweeper who keeps it clean, the Bhishti, who waters it- the contribution of each one is recognized and given place. The washer-man, washer- woman and a crocodile make one episode. The Gardner's son has a beautiful entry. The platoon comes by. The Weaver woman, Sakuri is a character that leaves her mark. She is the one accused of theft and thread is pulled out of her mouth. Her reply, 'I was hungry' defies the accusation, for the longer is the thread, the deeper is abyss of hunger.

Another character that stands out, is Narseh Khan the Pathan. He is probably a dashing handsome man who rides on a horse, demonstrates the sport of swords and has a couplet praising his looks and clothes. This is in contrast to the treatment of the Pathan in other stories of folk lore. There, the Pathans engage in the act of stealing cattle and battles are fought with

them. [It is generally accepted that the Pathans were initially soldiers of Sher Shah who stayed back in the area]. The friendship between a Rajput, Amar Singh and a Pathan, who calls himself, 'son of Sher Khan' sets an example, that counters enmity. Water in the desert is as precious as the brotherhood they commit to. [the water is real-the drops visible]. This episode, comes from experience that transcends religion. The truthfulness of this relationship is in striking contrast to the treachery of Arjun Gaur, who betrays Amar Singh, a family member. The family morality gives way to greed, while a stranger in the desert keeps his promise, as a 'brother of word.'

Many of the other characters are from performing communities, that had been notified by the Act of 1871 made by the British government... This includes, the Dancer, the Magician, the Behrupiya, the Kalbelia and the Drummer. They, who were being pushed aside of the mainstream, register their presence here and leave their mark on the audience. Apart from performers, the 'Rebari' (pastoralist) community, that was also included in the list, has been given space here. In this context, the character of the 'Bhakt' is of special interest. Through him the conflict between 'yoga' and 'bhoga' is humorously dealt with. At the same time, the Performance includes another character targeted by the infamous list of 1871. It is a well-known fact of history, that many rebel sepoys who had managed to escape the gallows, donned the attire of sadhus and moved into interior areas. The inclusion of such characters may be incidental; co-incident; or an intentional choice. But it speaks of the nature of the Performance and the spirit of inclusiveness it represents. It also becomes a subtle act of advocacy when such characters delight the audience and do not seem like 'rogues' as the authorities label them.

The Chowkidar emerges as the face of authority and the pivot around which the performance revolves. He maintains a high status with the nawabs and Princes, ordering them about and even mocking at some. He guards the seat of power while rebellion takes place within! He imposes his power on Sakuri, flirts with the washer-woman and is kicked by the horse of a dacoit! However, his constant opponent, Khadbad Khan, the Drummer is always by his side and is not silenced by his threats or beatings.

The Drummer, in many ways is the Puppeteer himself and the Chowkidar is the guardian figure the former encounters at all entrances only to be denied access. The Drummer, however, is not silenced and his drum plays on, even when the story is over-even when the chowkidar covers the stage...Life goes on, the zest and spirit of life carry on...The battle within the Fort renders all lifeless...Outside, there is life in the Drummer; his drum is the announcement of life.

When the song, 'Ladaiyan ho rahi maharaj...dekho tamasha kathputli ka' comes at the end, it highlights a subaltern viewpoint, that is unmoved, if not unaffected by the battles of the royalty, for the stream outside flows on. However, if the end is such, that the Emperor concedes defeat and Amar Singh's group is victorious, then a certain value of defiance, emerging from the story is highlighted. A slight twist in the playing, alters the meaning. Amar Singh as the rebel, challenges the might of an empire. He dares to fight a battle, that could well be the battle of the characters outside- a battle that certain communities fight every day to survive. And if they survive, that in itself is a victory. In that case it would be this victory, that the Drummer would celebrate; his victory over the Chowkidar.

Though, it too is temporary-the next moment is another fight- life itself being an endless series of fights-so many that it is an every- day occurrence. 'Ladaiyan ho rahi maharaj...'

Over the years, the Performance has also become the carrier of the Puppeteer's own tale as well; if not entirely over the earlier story, then in between; a constant sub-text.

At some places, the Performance elicits participation of the audience. One the ways is to create a moment suitable for Aarti, either for the Snake God or by the coming in of a character like the Rasdhari, who performs in the name of Krishna. Most Puppeteers talked of two moments when a member of the audience is called to interact with a Puppet.

This creates a rapport between the audience and the Performance. By drawing a person into the Puppet world,- the Puppet world also gets connected to the real world. The selectivity of the two moments when this happens are poignant and not without purpose.

One is, when some-one is called to pull out the stolen thread from Sakuri's mouth i.e. it is a punitive action against a culprit Puppet. (A person is called, because neither the Puppeteer nor the Musician are free to do it. The Chowkidar could mime it, but....). The thread is generally long and it amazes the person who pulls it and the audience. The thread is real, like hunger...and her answer, 'I was hungry,' shocks the person who pulls and through him/her the audience.

The second time is when the Paltan (the Platoon) comes. Sometimes, there is a song, 'naam likha lo..' Then Pipli Sahab asks the audience, 'Can you do as I do?' And an adolescent lad comes forward. The Pipli Sahab does movements and acrobatics, which the lad cannot perform. The underlying message seems to be, that, 'not everyone can do it!' As the acrobatics seem to come from the experience of a Nat, it probably also adds up to saying, 'Its not easy being a Nat!' An assertion of Skill.

There are probably more Puppets and pieces of the story, that can emerge with more interaction with the Puppeteers. Prolonged exchanges with senior Puppeteers and amongst them can bring out more insights. 'Amar Singh Rathore' as the Puppeteers mean it, is a multi-layered phenomenon; the more you see-the more there is to see.

CHAPTER 15: FILM - AMAR SINGH RATHORE-1957

The year 1957 is known to be a landmark in the history of Film making in India. A decade after India gained Independence, various streams brimmed in this cauldron of culture based in Bombay. The year saw releases like "Do Ankhen Bara Haath", "Mother India," "Naya Daur", "Pyasa" along with entertainers like, "Paying Guest", and "Tumsa Nahin Dekha". While, "Do Ankhen Bara Haath" examined the concept of justice, punishment, compassion and the Gandhian spirit of reform, "Mother India" with the towering image of Nargis as the epitome of strength and sacrifice gave glory to poverty stricken citizen's commitment to the society and Nation. "Naya Daur" with Dilip Kumar looks at industrialization, positioning in the spirit of a new Nation, while, "Pyasa", strikes the chord of disillusionment with the intensity of Guru Dutt. The other two, one with Dev Anand and the other with Shammi Kapoor kept the lighthearted cinema buzzing. In the midst of all these films, "Amar Singh Rathore" also entered the mainstream. Directed by Jaswant Zaveri, the film had Actors Jairaj and Nirupa Roy in the main roles with Veena, Murad, Raaj Kumar in supporting roles. The lyrics are by Bharat Vyas, who was also the lyricist for, "Do Ankhen Bara Haath" that won the award for the Best film that year.

The film, "Amar Singh Rathore," is generally termed as being, 'historical,' but as a construct it draws on the imagination and has its share of fiction, drama, conflict ;the virtuous quality and tragic flaw of the protagonist that is to meet the destiny he does. It deviates from what is formally known and accepted as history. There are some facts of history, but the lens that is revisiting incorporates many other shades and also chisels to carve the story it presents.

The conflict between Bikaner and Nagaur has been mentioned in various sources and there are some indications that Salavat Khan's role in alienating Amar Singh on this pretext led to hostility between the two. That Salavat Khan had a personal desire for Hadi Rani (since the time she was princess) is something that is part of the plot of the film, not said so in books of history. There are some hints that inclined marriage proposals from the Mughal household to the Hada Kingdom did not materialise.

The film carries streaks of the period around which the film was made and is indicative of immediate political concerns. It also seems to carry with it an awareness of the times it was made in and weighs the said and the unsaid; that which is shown and that which is not. In line with the spirit of the central character, some of the views voiced are by no means conventional and there is a questioning of correctness versus righteousness. Political intrigue at the emperor's court and centre-state relations also appear to be thematically woven into the film.

The film is well over two hours and the camera work is in Black and White. It is a carefully made film that provides and establishes the setting of each sequence and chooses to contextualise the characters in the created space .At times this could give the impression of a stage being set and as the Entry of Amar Singh generally takes place after the setting has been established, it enhances the effect of him being an outsider-perpetual outsider! The one

noticeable exception is the Emperor's court after Amar Singh has returned as victor from Qandhar. As the camera shows the court, Amar Singh is already seated.

His entry has happened. He is now an insider and in place, on his seat. It is also ironical that this should be so, because immediately after this, the manoeuvring to oust him will begin. And the son who has accompanied him will be the one to see it happening and also be the messenger.

The film sows the seed of an upcoming action in a sequence that precedes it, building a logic of continuity. It evolves a grammar-a pattern-and makes a departure too when the moment arrives.

Long shots are extensively used and close mid shots are sparingly engaged. There are very few extreme tight close ups. The dialogue, even when the subject may be of blood and battle is articulated in quiet tones, so that it does not become jargon and seems to be a subject that, is part of life.(the sole exception being certain lines in court at the time the hero is alienated from it and those lines have an impact that breaks the frame-rather they seem to leap out of the frame of story).When one compares this film with the others of the period, there seems to be a certain restraint in the telling, that was probably intentional. A subject that is volatile is handled with composure, creating an aesthetic and narrative distance so that the frame is not overwhelmingly full with the character-rather does not overwhelm with the emotions of the character.

Another device that helps in creating this distance is the constant intermingling with scenes between the escort and the maid of Chandravati. Not only do these scenes bring in comedy, but also create a parallel that comments regularly. At times it appears to be a parody of the hero's efforts. As an example, he tries to woo the maid, by pretending to have lost an arm in fighting the enemy, but his boast of bravado lets the cat out of the bag! This is not unlike the purpose of the role of Vidushak – to make light of the hero's preoccupation.

The Film: A Detailed Analysis

The very opening is set by a Narrative song, "Hum tumhe katha sunate Bharat ke Rajasthan ki...Jai jai Rajasthan...Bharat ki shaan..."As it fills the audio, the camera moves from monuments to a shrub strewn wooded landscape ...as Amar Singh and his escort move on horseback.

An opening song has been a convention in Bollywood. What is significant here is that sets the tone of narration- a katha- that is going to recount the times of fire and swords-and leads the viewer to the protagonist. This invisible voice seems to be of the omnipresent Bard who is the teller of the story and has an insight into its significance. This narrative song imposes itself over the frame of the story several times during the course of the film. It sometimes narrates part of the story and at other times, underlines, comments, celebrates and occasionally guides with its perception.

Similarly, a historical character on horseback is a predictable introduction, but in this case it

has a certain significance for two reasons. Firstly, Marwar had groomed and earned fame for its horses and secondly, the horse plays an important role in the story of Amar Singh.

The hunting scene brings Amar Singh face to face with the Hada princess, Chandravati, whose arrow hits the deer before Amar Singh. Arguments ensue even as Amar Singh reaches the fort, where the Hada Sardar welcomes him and the fiery daughter turns docile. Romance blooms and a song fills the air. Amar Singh follows the princess and offers his hand, and as expected she withdraws.....but the hand that tries to reach out to the princess already holds a sword. The father tells Amar Singh that the condition to marry his daughter is the killing of Salavat Khan as the latter had lusted after her. Amar Singh does not want to be bound to a condition, but is willing to give his word for it.

“Jis tarah ek Rajput apni dushmani nahin bhulta, usi tarah apna diya hua kaul nahin bhulta”.
(just as a Rajput does not forget his enmity, he does not forget his word)

And the marriage is fixed, with Amar Singh giving the Sardar his dagger as a token of his word and remembrance. The lure of love and the shadow of bloodshed lie at the same doorstep and the man has walked into it.

In the parting scene with Chandravati, Amar Singh promises to send for her and she tells him, “magar zyada der hui to aapki di hui kataar mere paas maujud hai.” (If you delay much, then your dagger is with me).

He says, “Uski zaroorat nahin padegi; umeed hai tum mera intejar karogi.”
(That will not be necessary; hope you will wait for me)

The conversation is quiet. The dagger is the gift of love. It could be put to use. By the one loved. They understand. They know.

On reaching Jodhpur, Amar Singh is assigned the task of tracing Zaalim Singh, a bandit who has looted money meant for the Royal Treasury at Agra, whose authority is accepted by Gaj Singh, ruler of Jodhpur and Amar Singh’s father. Amar Singh succeeds, but also comes to know that the bandit distributes wealth to the poor and is popular. Amar Singh is also impressed by his bravery and befriends him, even as he arrests him, with a promise to have him released.

The next sequence is set in Jodhpur court, wherein Amar Singh makes his entry with Zaalim Singh. He presents him as per the father’s instructions, but immediately instructs his men to set the bandit free. When the ruler objects, because, “Tum kanoon ko haath mein nahin le sakte.” (You cannot take the law in your hands).

Amar Singh insists that he has given his word and is bound to stand by it, even if it means, disobeying the father.

He says, “pita ki aagya na manne ka apradh Bhagwan shayad Kshama kar denge, par apna kaul na manne par mein khud ko maaf nahin kar paoonga.”
(The sin of disobeying father, might be forgiven by God, but for not keeping my word, I will not be able to forgive myself) He is answerable to his conscience.

Father then unceremoniously dismisses him-door ho ja hamari nazron se...Zaalim Singh nahin ja sakta-

(Be out of my sight..Zaalim Singh cannot leave)

Amar Singh's men prevent the courtiers from arresting Zaalim Singh and disobeying all orders, Amar Singh leaves like the "toofaan" that is unstoppable.

Here, Amar Singh's commitment to the word of promise, appears as a personal creed, crossing the boundaries of the community code. He sets his course as an individual. Defined by the call of conscience. His disobedience to the father is also unusual and makes him apart from the dutiful son, a hero is expected to be. It also raises the conflict between "Kanoon" (the law of the state) and "Kaul" (the moral law).

In the period when the film was made, this was a crucial question of the Times. Which Law? Whose Law? That by which individual groups in society abide or that which is provided by the governance of the State? Later on, in the film, the same question, the word 'kanoon' is used in the Imperial court at Agra.

The news of this incident reaches the Hada Sardar, who prevents Chandravati from using the dagger on herself, by reiterating his faith on Amar Singh, who could forego a kingdom for a bandit, and so would not forget the promise given to them.

The news reaches the Imperial court where Shah Jahan treats it as an internal matter of Jodhpur, especially as no appeal from either side has come to him. He is keen to take Amar Singh in his service as his deeds of bravery are well known. This likelihood of this presence is not welcome news for Salavat Khan who can sense the arrival of a rival.

Through Arjun Gaur (brother of Amar Singh's late wife and at whose house the banished prince of Jodhpur lives with his son and daughter) Amar Singh receives the news of the Emperor's interest in him and after initial reluctance to being in service, accepts it for the sake of his children and as Arjun Gaur assures, "there is much respect for the brave in the emperor's court."

In the film Arjun Gaur is initially established as a sincere, well meaning and a helpful relative. This is in contrast with the treatment of the Folk stage, where he is presented as a greedy and selfish family member. His act of deceit that comes later, brings pain with the revelation that a close family member has changed into a foe.

The court is set and Amar Singh (with his men, including Zaalim Singh) enters (the entry being very similar to the one in Jodhpur Court) to receive the rank and honour bestowed on him along with 'Naumahala'-his residence in Agra that is mentioned in all tales related to him.

Salavat Khan pays a visit to Amar Singh and the latter can see how the former eyes his growing daughter, Tara whom he sends away. Amar Singh lets Salavat Khan know of his intention to marry Chandravati and the promise to slay the one who inappropriately lusted after her. And though unsaid, Salvat Khan can feel the threat directed towards him and leaves.

Amar Singh sends for Chandravati.

(In the film, he does not go in person, whereas in the Nautanki and Khyal performances, his return journey with Hadi Rani forms an important part of the narrative.)

As Chandravati sits in the palanquin for Agra, the Narrative Song fills the action with the lines-
Veer pita ki veer kumari, babul ka ghar chod ja rahi...

(Brave daughter of a brave father, leaves the father's house)

An unlikely description for a bride to be!

And as the father presents her with the dagger of Amar Singh at the parting, the lines are-

Yeh kataar kisi ke garam khoon ki hai pyaasi

Chingari ab sulag uthi hai nari ke apmaan ki

(This dagger is thirsty of someone's warm blood. The fire ignited for a woman's insult)

The narrative song holds a mission even as the visuals lead towards marriage.

Subsequently, celebrations follow with decorations and dancers. Salavat Khan is a guest and Chandravati, from the women's quarters notices him seated next to Amar Singh and is unnerved.

In the next scene, Chandravati and Amar Singh are by themselves in their first night together.

As the face of the wife is revealed, there are tears in her eyes. She finds it difficult to accept the presence of Salavat Khan as Amar Singh's guest in the house and asks-

Pyar ki jo jyot jalai thi,

Kahin vo jugnu ki chamak to nahin?

(The flame that lit the lamp of love was it the glow of the firefly?)

The modulation is soft. Not angry. Not accusing. But neither is it hesitant. It is a questioning.

And then she brings out the dagger as a reminder of his word and the man moves away from the bed. He understands. He can have her as his wife only when the word becomes the deed.

Does her holding back mean that she doubts his word? Has mistrust crept in? He does not plead or insist. Nor repeat the promise. But the said words echo. The narrative song takes over-

Pratham raat ke Pratham milan mein pyar ka bandhan tod diya

Aaye vachan yaad to usne uljhan se mukhda mod liya

Sej saji hai raat milan ki par ek kaam adhura

Sej chodi Amar ne jab tak vachan hove na poora

(At the first meeting, the first night, the bond of love snaps.

All is set, but one task left incomplete

and he leaves the bed till the task be met)

The lure of love has the dagger at the centre.

The lure of love bears the shadow of death.

The lure of love brings the shadow of doom with it.

The unconsummated marriage is a thematic current and an aspect of the narratives of other Folk heroes.

(However, in the Nautanki performances this is not so stated and in the Ballad from Kapurthala, they have been blissfully married for long).

At this time, Salavat Khan manoeuvres the emperor into sending Amar Singh to the battle of Qandhar. Amar Singh is summoned and he accepts the challenge with gladness. His words are compressed and without rhetoric when he speaks to the emperor, "Haar jeet to kismet ka khel hai aaliyaan lekin Amar Singh apni jaan dekar bhi shahi taaqat ki shaan badhane ki har mumkin koshish karega."

(Defeat and victory come by the game of chance, but Amar Singh will give his life in his every effort to add to the glory of the empire's power.)

The traditional aarti to Jai Ambe, leads to Chandravati's aarti for Amar Singh as he leaves for battle.

The narrative song culminates into a marching tune as smoke from canons fills the screen. The battle of Qandhar is presented in a few shots as Amar Singh's face becomes the cover of the background. It is an altered face-in armour, teeth clenched, stern, a frozen roar of war contained in the warrior. As a flag is pulled down and another goes up, the Narrative song goes...." katha sunate apne Hindustan ki".

(for audiences in 1957, the historic flag hoisting of 1947 would be close to heart and memory)

Meanwhile, Salavat Khan tries to enter the citadel like Naumahala, but is rebuffed by his son and Zaalim Singh. This leads to Salavat's line- akhlaq to tum logon mein hai hi nahin (you have no courtesy)

(This is the closest this film comes closest to "ganwaar", a term attributed to Salavat in most folklore.)

Amar Singh returns and the gate of the palace opens for the master.

There is again an aarti and he steps in. The aarti is in long shot and like the previous one, a ritual performed with a sense of duty. There is no personal moment between him and Chandravati. Even while at war, there is 'missing' of one another-no lonely moment of the knight by the tent. Or of the wife. The personal is thus conspicuous by its absence. It probably denotes the distance, the vacuum, that now lies between them. This hits the viewer when a comic sequence between the escorts comes on screen, because something ripples between them.

It may be worth mentioning here, that the battle of Qandhar is treated almost like a narrative line in a novel. It happens. There is no dwelling over it. There are no details even of Amar Singh's leadership or strategy. There may have been technical reasons. But a clearer reason seems to be, that, howsoever tough the siege may have been, the depiction would not have

added more to the story. Rather it may have distracted from the main flow of the narrative. For a soldier in service of the emperor, battle is part of job and handled ably and professionally by Amar Singh. For him, the battle that waits at the personal front bears more meaning and significance. That is what the film is about.

In fact, during the shots of the battle, the presence of the face of Amar Singh looms large, like a tiger in full form. Probably at home in the battlefield.

In the following part, we are to see the caging of the tiger, when battle reaches his home ground.

In the following sequence, Amar Singh is seen seated in court with his son, having made his place in this arena. Welcoming him and celebrating the victory over Qandhar is a dance number with the refrain, "shamsheren rakh do mayan mein, meri nazar ke teer chenge, chup chupkar is maidan mein."

Like most Bollywood films, this dance number lifts the curtain to the next sequence of the film.

Salavat khan prevails upon the ruler of Bikaner to blame and appeal against Nagaur for the skirmishes taking place at the border of the two states, lest Amar Singh takes over their territory by force.

The appeal comes before the emperor who postpones the hearing till an investigation is completed by Salavat Khan. Amar Singh's son who is present in court takes the tidings to his father.

Meanwhile, Chandravati tells Amar Singh that Mewar has accepted the marriage proposal of Tara, but want the wedding to be outside Agra-rather outside Mughal domain.

"To kya Mewar ab bhi apni aan pe tika hua hai?" he asks

(Does Mewar still hold on to its dignity)

"haan ,vahan Rana Pratap ke kisse ghar ghar sunai padte hain"

(yes, there tales of Rana Pratap can be heard in every house)

The memory of Rana Pratap stirs something in Amar Singh and provides a direction to the dilemma brewing inside him.

(This is a rare example when the interplay between the memory of one legend leads to the creation of another one. Amar Singh receives this as a connection with the collective consciousness that he carries within him and of which he is also a part. Does it fortify resistance, create an aspiration to be the legend that lives on for posterity and is perpetually honoured by remembrance?)

In the emperor's court, Amar Singh testifies that Bikaner infringed first, whereby he asked his men to defend themselves by any means.

To which the emperor retorts-Tumne kanoon ko apni jagir samajh rakha hai?

(Do you consider the Law to be your estate?)

After Salavat Khan contradicts Amar Singh, the latter threatens him with dire consequences, wherein the emperor reprimands the latter, “Bhool rahe ho ki tum kahn khade ho. Tum par muqaddam chal raha hai Kanoon ke aage sir jhukane ki jagah seena tanne ki koshish kar rahe ho. Tum mujrim ho, munsif nahin.”

(You forget where you stand. You are on trial. Instead of bowing to the Law you show your fist. You are an accused, not the judge)

After some more exchange, the emperor wants the judgement to be left to his discretion.

To which Amar Singh retorts, “aur vo faisla kya hoga mein achhi tarah janta hoon. aaj is darbar mein mujhe mujrim thrakar insaaf ka dhol peeta jar aha hai. kya mein pooch sakta hoon alijaan kya apke is deewan e aam ki buniyad insaaf par rakhi gayi thi? kya yahan ka chote se chota pathar is baat ki gawahi de sakta hai ki vo insaaf ke usuloon par khada hai?”

(And what that judgement will be, I know too well. Today, justice clamours, making me an accused. Can I ask if the foundation of this building rests on justice? Can even a tiny pebble here bear witness to the fact that it stands on the principles of justice?)

And then a few lines later, adds-

“agar hamari kaum ne saath na diya hota, to na aap Badshah hote na apki badshahat hoti; na aap munsif hote na mein mujrim.”

(If our community would not have supported, you would not be king nor would this be your kingdom; nor would you be judge and I be accused)

At this point, the emperor loses his patience and thus he imposes a fine of one lakh coins on him to be augmented daily till it is paid. And the house to be in royal vigilance.

The fine in Folk performances is connected with non attendance after the wedding leave. Here it is treated as a fine for insolence and gives it a political perspective.

(In most Folk performances, it is Salavat Khan who wants the fine to be imposed and insists on its imposition, even as the emperor tries to avoid it. In the film, it is clearly the decision of Shah Jahan, the King.)

With a ‘shukriya’ Amar Singh leaves.

This is one sequence in which Amar Singh's words seem large and articulated for dramatic effect. He seems to speak on behalf of a community who is part of the ruled. He does not talk only of his deeds and contribution. The question he raises is perpetually before us. What is justice? Whose justice? Who decides? Who defines it? Empires made by the rule of the thumb, make rules for justice!

Thus Amar Singh is caged in his house. Trapped by humiliation and the assumed laughter of Salavat Khan's victorious mockery. He paces alone like a tiger in captivity. Also because he is determined not to pay the fine-not to accept the law that has punished him unjustly. The imposition of a punishment by authority feels like an insult and his status reduced to that of a man with no freedom, is a slave. He would rather, “hum muqabla karenge par sar nahin jhukayenge.” (face rather than submit-bow down)

Dare the emperor! His escort first tries to flee at this prospect, but then as a brave and loyal supporter, unsheathes his sword and armed with it moves around, not knowing which way to

go! The sequence provides an alternative point of view to Amar Singh and seen dramatically is a sharp comment on his state of mind. Extreme fearlessness is folly!

Cornered, Amar Singh gradually convinces and prepares himself for retaliation.

He knows that once his sword leaves the sheath, it would not rest till it tastes blood! His daughter too supports him.

The emperor, on the other hand is repentant. He tells the queen, “uski gusthaki se majboor hokar us par jurmana karna pada...sakhtiyon ke vaar se ham logon ko hara to sakte hain, par unke dil ko jeet nahin sakte...hukumat ki buniyad pukhta karne ke liye raham aur akhlaq ki zaroorat hoti hai...

Amar Singh hukumat ka ek baazu hai, hum nahin chahte ki vi baazu kat jaye.. Amar Singh ke dil mein vafadari ki jagah bagawat jaga de...”

(Pressed by his behaviour, the fine was imposed...by hardness we can defeat people, but not win their hearts...to strengthen the foundation of the kingdom compassion and ethics is necessary...Amar Singh is an arm of the kingdom, I do not want that this arm should tear apart...instead of loyalty kindle revolt in his heart)

While the king is in mood of reconciliation, lobbyists in the court, chiefly led by Salavat Khan oppose it. The rule must be imposed. The king should not seem weak.

When message comes, that Amar Singh has not paid anything, the king would rather overlook it, but not the courtiers who care more for the prestige of the king than the king himself! While the king thinks of the well-being of the empire as it stands, the courtiers have vested interests and desire larger portions of power in the Court. They also have rivalries to settle and the emperor can their jealousies disguised as concerns.

Meanwhile, Chandravati sensing the situation, sends Zaalim Singh to Mewar so that Tara could be taken away to safety by her betrothed.

Amar Singh manages to go out for hunting-which too is seen as a breach by courtiers.

In the forest, he sees Nausherbaaz, an employee of the emperor, who has almost fainted because of thirst. Amar Singh places the head of the stranger on his thigh and shares his water which saves his life. Nausherbaaz is grateful, while Amar Singh feels earth, water, air belong to all. Nausherbaaz pledges every drop of his blood to Amar Singh for the water that gave him life.

(In most Folk plays this sequence is placed right in the beginning in the midst of a long journey through the desert and becomes one of the primary units- signifying the defining traits of the protagonist. (As the Zaalim Khan Episode does in the film). Its placement here, when the character has been established, maintains Nausherbaaz as part of the story and keeps him till the end.)

Courtiers press on the emperor to use force on Amar Singh and he continues to be disinclined. This time his reasons are different. A man with courage and self-respect if touched too close

might react in a way leading to undesired consequences. He is also worried that if this spark spreads wider in Rajputana, it could cause a major revolt. But the lobbying courtiers feel that the inaction compromises the emperor's authority and gives the impression to people that his judgement has no value and can be slighted. It also gives the impression that the emperor is afraid. Ultimately, he yields and authorises Salavat Khan to extract the fine and gain access the inside of the house.

Salavat Khan reaches Naumahala on horseback, flaunting the firmaan and also offering compromise, if he were to get Tara. Amar Singh who is on the rooftop jumps down and challenges Salavat Khan with his sword. Salavat Khan does retaliate, but then flees. Amar Singh chases him on his horse, sword in hand -through the trees and fields into the Fort. Salavat Khan enters the court on foot and begs the king for protection. Amar Singh follows, riding still on horse, his sword in mid-air. With a flash of the sword, in a single stroke, he severs the head of Salavat Khan from its body and gallops out.

There is a flash of the sword. The head flies.

The body falls.

And the deed is done.

Over

The rider flees.

It is abrupt.

Almost alarming.

Like a performance in haste.

As a puppet falls.

There is no build up; no close ups cringing with fear or glint of aggression. No flowing blood cries or shrieks. Almost as an act on record. No more. It does not feed the viewer with the details of the act; with the attributes of violence.

The action moves on. Amar Singh on horseback galloping on the ramparts of the Fort -being chased by the king's men; his way blocked by horse riders from all sides; he gages and then one moment, one blink, one close shot (not too close). Just before the jump -from the Fort wall!

We do not see it. We hear as the king does when the incident is reported. The horse took the rider to safety, but could not survive. Amar Singh manages to escape, while his men engage the royal men and a battle rages at the Fort gate. The emperor asks his men to stop, lest more innocent lives are lost for a rebel. He plans for a battle at Naumahala in the night.

Amar Singh returns and tells his wife, "Salavat khan mara gaya. Bhare durbar mein use maut ke ghat utar kar apna vachan poora kiya."

She says, "mujhe vishwas tha...lekin ab kya hoga?"

"Muqabla. Hamne jo aag lagai hai uske sholon ko yahan tak pahunchne mein der nahin lagegi."

"tumhari vidai ke baad jauhar ki tayari..."

"Abhi der hai. Apna vachan poora kar aaj hi to patni ke roop mein paya hai." That night is to be the first and last night of love.

The lure of love is the footfall of death.
It is the final destination.

The scene is shot in a simple way, with no close ups highlighting emotions. There is no thrill. It is all matter of fact- the looming immediate urgency felt in the situation. It betrays no extreme emotion-of triumph, elation, joy, pride or even relief. There can be no celebration in a house besieged by the royal men and yet he wants the room to be decorated as the moment that has fled by.. Now even as he says so, his he seems tired - the agony, the danger, the effort, all for, the knock of death – of life wasted to chase the end? Was the word then a baggage that he carried and now done can leave and go? Or he bore his word like a cross and that takes him to the end? Did he see it in the beginning and so had his bride fetched and did not go in person to be reminded by the father? He knew the price and he pays it now!

The king gives permission to the army to attack Naumahala.
Amar Singh and Chandravati – he fills her maang with sindoor, both well aware that they are surrounded by difficulties.

Then the noise sets in.

Chandravati puts tilak on Amar Singh's brow with her blood. There is no ceremony, no aarti, no time for decoration in this decisive and final battle of life.

The Narrative song does add its layer-

Veer sati ne pati ko apne khoon se tilak kiya Hukumat se baazi thi uske bhag ki

Amar Singh goes to the roof top and seeing the troops assemble orders his men to attack and with the battle cry of 'Har har Mahadev' Naumahala becomes the battlefield.

The gate is broken down and swords jostle with each other.

The escort wields the sword as if it were a game and even fights with flowerpots before realizing that his sword has been misplaced. This adds to the bravado of the fight.

But Amar Singh can sense the consequences.

In the midst of this, he comes to his daughter. Zaalim Singh has not returned with her future husband and he is unsure if his arms would be there to protect her from the enemy's hand.

The girl understands.

"Lijiye"(here)

She lowers her head and offers her neck so he may strike.

He flinches for a second, closes his eye and opens it, with the sword ready to strike Zaalim Singh and the groom enter from aside door. She is saved.

(Again this sequence is played in a manner that is matter of fact.

No tears, no rhetoric, no bravado, no reference to duty, no pleas.

It is a way of life)

With the groom comes the whiff of Mewar-aap us kul ke Deepak hain jiski roshni se aaj Rajputana jagma raha hai-

While the groom wants to join the battle, Amar Singh, with a hasty blood tilak wants them to leave to safety for they are the hope of Rajasthan. Again, no ceremony, no grand farewell- a quick hug and the girl is on her way to the desert kingdom.

At this point Arjun Gaur stops the battle and tells Amar Singh that the king is prepared for

reconciliation. Initially, the latter does not listen-aaj hum hukumat ki buniyad hila denge, Agra ki gali gali mein hulchul macha denge-

But eventually, he agrees to go. "Not alone" as his wife fears, "with my sword by my side."

(In most Folk plays Arjun Gaur prevails on Amar Singh through Hadi Rani, but in the film it is handled differently.)

(In the plays Arjun Gaur insists that he leave his sword behind. The film does not disarm him.)

Agra Fort is set in the background as the two figures walk towards it.

When they reach the gate, Arjun Gaur opens the small half door for him to enter, made specially to protect him from danger-though people we own as ours are generally dangerous. And even though the gate is small Amar Singh tries to enter in a way that his head is not lowered. As he is involved in this process, Arjun Gaur stabs him in the back.

Even as he stumbles, Amar Singh hits at Arjun Gaur, but the latter runs into the Fort. Amar Singh manages to take a step back and falls outside the Fort, where Nausherbaaz, probably, the only witness to this act, runs to him and places the former's head on his lap.

This composition is identical to the one in the forest, though then it was Nausherbaaz who received the support for life. Now, it is Amar Singh who receives support as he moves into the next life.

"Nausherbaaz khyal rakhna, hamari laash ki beizzati n hone paye...ye hamari aakhri dili khwaish hai."

And Nausherbaaz vows on the "Paak Kalma" that this last wish would be kept with the last drop of his blood. On hearing these words of assurance, with a tremor Amar Singh releases a fistful of mud from his hand and passes away

Nausherbaaz says aloud, "khabar kar do Rathore Sardar dhokhe se maare gaye"

The emperor scolds Arjun Gaur for treacherously slaying the brave Rathore and has him arrested. He orders that the mortal remains be kept in royal vigilance for he would cover it with a shroud the next morning. The queen expects the men of Amar Singh to come for the corpse. That would enable the king to find a successor in place of Amar Singh.

Nausherbaaz prays for the departed man. When royal soldiers come, he does not yield and is supported by his men for, "raahe khuda par chalne wale jaanbaaz ki aakhiri khwaish poori kar raha hoon." (fulfilling the last wish of a brave heart who walked the path of God.)

Fighting ensues at the Fort gate as Amar Singh lies huge in the foreground-more powerful and potent than when alive. Men and swords clash.

More supporters of Amar Singh arrive.

Chandravati in battle armour with her son comes leading a force filling the landscape.

The Narrative song this time includes a female voice-

"Tumko pukarti hain Pratap ki kahaniyan

Tumko pukarti hain Padmini si Raniyan"

Chandravati participates in the fight. Amar Singh now lies on a platform. She hits the guard and approaches Amar Singh. With a soft, 'swami' she lifts the corpse and carries him away.

Nausherbaaz sees her receding figure on horseback is relieved that his mission has been achieved. He too falls and succumbs to his wounds.

The emperor comes in person to stop the fight and announces Amar Singh's son as his successor for the brave boy was still in fight and also consoles him, 'tumhare vaalden nahin rahe...' (your parents are no more, but their story will be remembered till the sun and moon remain.)

And an image of the pyre with the two appears as a brief glimpse. The Narrative song concludes-

Aah na ki, parvah na ki,

aakhir tak apni jaan ki,

Usne dikhla di duniya ko,

kya unchain insaan ki

In veeron ke karan ti

ki hui hai dharti Bhagwan ki

Amar rahegi ye amar ye kahani

Amar ke balidaan ki.

(Not a sigh, not a care for his life till the last

He showed the height of a human being to all

God's earth rests on brave hearts such as these

Immortal is and immortal will be this story of Amar's sacrifice.

Impersonation and the Long Shot

There is something in the art of impersonation that brings to the fore energies that lie compressed within the human consciousness. To impersonate a legendary character sets forth a challenge that excites and also intimidates. Because the character has acquired a giant like stature by constant remembrance over centuries and is yet someone who has walked on this very earth and are cast in their times, a distance unmeasurable. When another human being centuries apart, the actor in this case, reaches out through a complex web of probabilities to that notional apparition of the icon and creates a living form, it is like giving breath to the image on the coin. Familiar and yet not real. The actor makes it real- more so when the semblance enters the sphere of realism. Which is what cinema often aspires to be and seems to be the case in the present film. Specially if the comparison was to be made with the nature of impersonation in the other Forms which unlike cinema, are in the arena of live performances like Nautanki and Khyal. (Although within there is an element of the action being staged, particularly in terms of sets, dance numbers and sword fight sequences. The

behaviour pattern draws on certain performance conventions along with conceived mannerisms and etiquette designs).

While cinema builds an experience with images, it attempts to create the real world around the character and communicate a feel of it to the viewer. The Folk Forms, on the other hand are performed in the open and on a bare stage, where spaces (interiors or Forts etc) are imagined, and in built into the actor's performance, stimulating or expected to stimulate a parallel process of imagination in the minds of audiences. The performance of the actors is also in accordance with the needs and artistic conventions integral to the Form, whether, it be moving to music and rhythm, singing or dancing. Such a Form and the actor therein can bring out the range of feeling and emotion, the mood and energy of character and situation as intensified or elaborated through the song and dance. The actor may also establish character by recognizable and accepted gait, stance set by Style of the Form or popular precedence- successful actors who may have performed the role. Since stylization brings in another layer of performance vocabulary, the actor may resort to rhythmic footwork or acrobatics in the portrayal that may not be part of the characteristics of the character. It evokes the magnificence and grandeur of the hero. In fact the very act of performance and being stage worthy showers glory on the character. Often the personality of the person (character) and thought processes may not be traceable. It conveys the essence (rasa?) of the character, not the details of existence.

In most Folk performances Amar Singh comes across as a colourful character, spontaneous, trusting, flamboyant and impulsive. In the film, he is sombre, with density of purpose and conviction. As the main act (in the film) is predetermined, he carries an aura of doom and the apprehension of looming tragedy. In film and drama, the character is fearless, full of compassion, who makes friends transcending the narrow confines of clan and creed. These bonds bear truth and integrity, much more than family, as he is stabbed by a close relative. He remains committed to his Word and is a law unto himself.

Though the Heroic is maintained in both the genres, the composition of elements creates un-identical persona and the experience of receiving too is different for the audiences. Realistic cinema and Folk performances open entirely different windows into the character. Not just that the framing is different; it is also the view- thus what we perceive or understand is different. It's like multiple forms of the character. Every medium brings its world to the narrative and dons it with its trappings. An icon is cast and recast; narrative formed and re-formed.

Hadi Rani too is a different woman. While in the Folk, she is uninhibited and wants Amar Singh to stay with her, in the film she is reserved, and holds back her emotion for a purpose. In the beginning, she is on horseback and her arrow hunts a deer that she claims as her possession. Towards the end, she dons the armour and battles for the possession of Amar Singh as he lies lifeless. His last rites are to be hers as well. Like the warrior, her sacrifice of herself is her glory. The fire that consumes them both is not of the passion, generated in the intimacy of the living; if at all it be called passion, then it is the passion of promise, of vows fulfilled.

In the Hathras Nautanki there is a moment of pause, a lull after the storm when the nephew talks of grief and pain caused by battle, though there may be attainment of glory.

The element of glory in this film comes from the Narrative song that is layered on the scenes of depiction. The Narrative song places the story in the context of the glory of a region and country enveloped in the tradition of sacrifice and embers of fire; of swords and warriors. It is not just about telling a story, but paying tribute. This adds value to the memory and makes it more than history or a happening in the past. It is to be treasured. And like all treasures it is precious. During the course of the film, we see the memory of another warrior hero, an earlier one becoming inspiration for someone of another generation, another period. It is a very significant treatment of the larger memory of society. As legacy. Towards the end, the hero becomes one with that memory. And the ending lines of the song testify that it is the word that immortalises the deed.

The film, in the telling also, maintains a Narrative distance. It presents the hero in human form and brings him close to the viewer, but not too close. It tells as much as it is possible to tell. This allows the incidents to speak. The pace is such that it gives the time to ponder over the happenings. And this raises questions within the viewer. Was it so easy to leave his home and father? He does not even turn? Why does he not go to bring his bride? Why does he talk at length to Salavat Khan about Chandravati? Questions arise. The answers are not stated. May be there is no one answer. The questions occupy the viewer; rather keep them occupied with the character. Trying to understand the mind behind the action; at times concealed behind the action. By not having too many tight close ups, the film does not claim to know with definiteness what cannot be known -the mind of centuries gone by.

Not being able to read the character's mind completely creates an ambiguity-an ambiguity that fills the viewer with questions, and allows the character to seep in and fill the mind.

Probably this is the process that makes the legend come alive- in the heart of the viewer where the grappling plants a connection. The denser the hue, the more complex the ambiguity like a riddle with thousand answers. Perhaps the essential ambiguity lies in the distance-in the time the action actually may have taken place- centuries ago- and the present moment? Who can tell what the man felt? Or the woman? Who can know? The unravelled mysteries of those hearts haunt the mind that engages with them like melodies of a strange music-enticing and unknown! By not underlining or disclosing too much, the long shot maintains the aura of ambiguity. It leads to the zone of mystery, but reveals not all. (Revelations happen by and by, as the mind of the viewer chooses.)

Such a treatment constantly reminds us of the contextual frame of the character and that the situation is generated by it. Not independent of it. Nor devoid of it. A lot that seems extraordinary or highly dramatic was probably also a way of life and accepted as such. The code was known and the consequences unavoidable. It is not that emotions were absent; probably they were there, but their place was not in the foreground. They do not lead the situation. The film takes us close, but also maintains a distance of awe and propriety. The film is not making the characters. They already are. The legend defines them. The film carries them. We do not see characters in the making. The film does not demystify them. It takes us to the zone of mystery, not to deconstruct, but to behold its premise. Like the unsaid stories about a monument fill its passages with enigmatic resonance.

Of Symbols and Space

The dagger symbolises the word given by Amar Singh, handled by Chandravati when fearing the word to be forgotten, handed by the father to her as the parting gift and revealed by her to Amar Singh as an echo of his given word. The forest is an area of comfort, where there is no intrigue and new friends are made- people with outstanding qualities and truthful mettle, whether an outlaw or in the service of law. These strangers whom the protagonist be friend are true and loyal to him, while a family member, a close relative stabs him. The sanctity of family is questioned and it seems infested with intrigue. The relationship between Amar Singh and his father is no different from that of a king with his officer. The family is where the danger lies; the dangerous forest begets trustworthy camaraderie.

At another level, it seems both Zaalim Singh and Nausherbaaz appear almost as apparitions of the course, Amar Singh's future is about to take. The former, the outlaw Amar Singh would be treated as and the latter, the fallen man on the ground that is to be his fate. He befriends them both and they both stand steadfast by him-one in life and the other almost as a guardian angel oversees his desired passage to the rites into the other world.

Repetition of composition reiterates bonding at times, as between Nausherbaaz and Amar Singh. It is also indicative of the initiation of a new phase- and such an indication may be wrought with irony. The entry into Jodhpur court and Agra Court are almost similar and so are the consequences. The position of Salavat Khan is almost same as Amar Singh outside the Hada Fort. They mark the opening of a new chapter. These repetitions become steps of measurement that mark the advancement of the narrative. The opening or refusal to open is a hall mark of authority. The naumahala gate opens with a flourish for Amar Singh, not for Salavat Khan and the forces have to use brute force. In the last sequence, Amar Singh is led to gate, low for his size. He falls outside the Fort in the open. Such elements constitute the world of the narrative and actions around them acquire significance, not just for the happening, but also because they describe the nature and temperament of the happening.

Parallels across Time

The film attempts to dwell on the complexity of the relationship between the empire and its allies. A system containing contradictions, mutual need and negotiation. Beneath the calm and courteous tip of the iceberg lie volatile currents and cross currents. The courtiers create various lobbies around manifested identities for power and political ends. The film does not talk of religious identities, nor is any character referred to by the epithet of religion. It exists by implication. The term Rajput is used, often by Amar Singh to define himself and the moral code he identifies with. Rajput, also as of Rajputana, a huge geographical area that largely accepted the supremacy of the empire, but there were pockets not devoid of dissent. Shah Jahan as the monarch at the helm is aware of the importance and the fragility of this equilibrium. He knows that the rules of administration and the needs of empire building are not always in tandem with each other. Religion is not the factor that motivates his decision. To appease both Bikaner and Nagaur is not easy and requires astute statesmanship.

The significance of statesmanship and the theme of negotiation between central authority

and allied princely states also reflects an aspect of the period in which the film was made. It may well be a coincidence, but a striking one.

At the time of Independence, more than five hundred and sixty states were part of the process of integration. Jodhpur was one of them and the accession papers were signed by Hanwant Singh on behalf of the state on 11 August, 1947 after refusing Jinnah's 'blank paper' offer. There is a popular rumour that Hanwant Singh managed to carry his revolver to one of the meetings and flashed it too, though with no consequences. (This seems to bear a whiff of Amar Singh entering the court on horseback, sword in hand). It is also said that he played a pivotal role in preventing communal disharmony.

Hanwant Singh had a relationship of unease with the policy makers of the time. The assimilation process required revision and reworking in order to develop a firm foundation of policy and principles. Meanwhile, elections were due in 1952. Hanwant Singh as one of the makers of the Akhil Bhartiya Ram Rajya party campaigned extensively and challenged the Congress in 4 Parliamentary and 35 Assembly seats of the region. This party won all the four Parliamentary seats and 31 Assembly seats. Unfortunately, his private plane, in which he was travelling, crashed on the day of the counting and he did not live to see his victory.

The States Reorganisation Act came into being in 1956 and by November that year the princely state of Jodhpur was formally dissolved and included in within the state of Rajasthan. The film reached audiences in 1957.

CHAPTER 16: THE LEGEND MOVES ON

While, in the popular Puppet version, we sense the collapse of the main story, there are many other ways in which the legend of Amar Singh Rathore seems to be continuing its journey. Traditional Narratives have their routes. Apart from them, there are individual singers whose contribution can be accessed over the internet. They are also singing in public and drawing huge crowds.

There are singers in Bundelkhand, who have started telling the story of Amar Singh Rathore. A narrator is supported by musicians and one or two singers who support with repetition.

They have built the story into the 'Alha' style. Veer Rasa pre-dominates. In some of them, the costume and 'get-up' appears to resemble the Puppet character.

The solo singer, Gajendra Singh of the Palwal region has created a novel way of telling this story. He uses the Nautanki text, but there is no enactment of it. He sits and sings the verses supported by the Nagara and harmonium. The stage has no frills. It is a singer communicating with an audience. His voice is firm and melodious. The water sharing sequence between Narsebaaz Pathan and Amar Singh is the one that seems to interest him the most.

The emotion is sustained in the singing and there is no attempt to accentuate or externalize it further. This restraint defines the nature of his telling of the story. He does not indulge in acting. He sings. The telling is through singing- he gives his voice to the story and that voice, supported by drums, rendering repetition, spreads the word.

Many other recordings are also circulating. Some of them are short and the singers are selective in choosing a portion of the story. While, the water sequence is a favoured one, there is one in which the imposition of the fine and opposition to it, forms the thematic thrust. This is a group singing by artists who are standing and they are not in traditional costume.

There is a long audio recording of another artist in which there is a sequence, where Arjun Gaur is troubled by the task at hand, viz; assassination of Amar Singh, and is unable to sleep at night. This is an interesting twist from the usual portrayal of an excited, greedy Arjun eager to get his award after a successful mission. His wife too is unhappy with the situation, but has no say in the matter.

It is interesting to note, that a new generation of artists are finding their own readings into the story and taking it forward from that perspective.

However, a popular Folk singer of Mahendragarh, Mahashay Nandram Veyda, has created a genre of storytelling that takes historical characters (among others) to contemporary audiences. He, musically narrates the story of Amar Singh Rathore in a four hour performance. The recording runs into four episodes over the Net.

The Singer of Mahendragarh

Roughly, a hundred and thirty kilometres away from Delhi, Mahendragarh, is in Haryana, bordering four districts of Rajasthan- Alwar, Jaipur, Sikar and Jhunjhunu. There are hills in the area that are said to have been the tap sthal of Rishi Chyavan, for whom the Ashvinis prepared the tonic that is famous by his name. There is also an extinct volcano in these Dhosi Hills.

Though the terrain is tough and the wind brings with it sand, the area has been historically active. There is a Fort, many havelis that have paintings on the walls, temples and monuments in the vicinity that span several centuries. Mahendragarh along with Rewari, Narnaul, Gurgaon, Kotkasim, Kotputli, Bansur, Behror, Mundawar forms part of the Ahirwal region where Ahirwati/ Hirwati is also spoken and is described by scholars as a, 'cultural- geographic region', encompassing parts of Rajasthan and Haryana.

This is the region that nurtured Ali Bakhsh, the legendary Khyal poet and composer who along with his team of actors created a unique style of Khyal Performance that goes by his name. Known as 'Ras Khan of Alwar', Ali Bakhsh is remembered in the area and amongst Khyal practitioners with much love and admiration. It is generally accepted, that he was born in 1854 and contributed to Khyal till approximately the end of that century. He writes about himself as-

Rajput hoon Tikawat, mera Ali Bakhsh hai naam
Nagar Mundawar subas baso jo mera nij dham.
(He describes himself as a Tikawat Rajput, belonging to Mundawar.)

Ali Bakhsh enjoyed attending theatrical performances-a fact indicative of a flourishing performative tradition in the area, that provided a foundation for the flowering of his verse. It is said, that on one occasion, when he was watching a performance from the stage, the Group In-charge asked him to float his own company, if he so enjoyed being on stage while a performance was on! A humiliated and disheartened Ali Bakhsh, eventually garnered his strength and talent to create performances, invoking The Goddess to bless his efforts in a verse that is well known in the region. It goes as-

“Man ki mansha hai yehi, Mansha Devi aaj
[This is the longing in my heart Goddess Mansha]
Aaj sabha ke beech mein, rakho mhari laaj
[Do protect my honour in the gathering today]
Aaj laaj rakh do Mahamaiya aur khelan ka var do
[And with it grant me the boon to play]
Tere dwar khade khilar, Khyal se pet inho ka bhar do
[The players are at your doorstep and with the Play, fill them full]
Aji je tera Mansha naam hai, mhari mansha puran kar do
[As your name is, fulfil my desire]
Ali Bakhsh aa pada charan mein, haath sheesh par dhar do

[Ali Bakhsh is at your feet, place Your hand on his forehead]
Kanth khule, sur taal mille, kuch aise kirpa kar do
[Full throated voice with notes and rhythm. In harmony; may such be your blessing]
Durge tumhe manaata hoon, sheesh charnon mein jhukata hoon”
[Goddess, I celebrate you. And bow my head to your feet]

The verse sets the tone of preparation for the performance known as Khyal and /or Khel. The actor is known as ‘khilar’ or ‘khilari’ (player). A full-throated voice, with notes and rhythm in harmony is the most essential and basic requirement for the Performance, that is musical in nature. ‘Pet inho ka bhar do’ can also mean-let them play to their heart’s content. Players who are in tune and sing with open voices to their heart’s content, bring honour to themselves and the poet.

The term, ‘honour’ could be a reference to the Nineteenth century Feudal set up, but it also implies the presence of other performing groups who observe each other along with a discerning audience. The performance is an event and like all events, it is a planned exercise. But planning has its limits and what happens at the spur of the moment makes the happening. When a singer in tune reaches out to the audience and compels it to tune in, then success is born and honour multiplies.

This region, rich in a performative musical tradition, can generate diverse genres that may be dis-similar and yet be connected the cultural ambience.

Mahashaya Nandram Veyda has evolved a style wherein the main solo singer narrates the story, supported by a co-singer who repeats some of the lines and/or phrases as if underlining them while three other instrumentalists also constitute the team. Nandramji handles the harmonium himself, as he sings; stops and also expands on the narrative, by speaking and adding to the lines.

Born in 1957, he has been performing for the past forty-one years. His narratives cover social, contemporary and historical subjects. Nandram ji considers Umrao Singh, who was a Headmaster and the author of the text of, ‘Amar Singh Rathore’ as his guru and his name is woven in the poetry itself.

This kind of narrative singing is different from a dramatic performance. The main singer is the Narrator (not character) though at times, he does enact a few selected actions of certain characters. The singing is clear and direct, even as it brings out changes in the mood and transforms from the conversational to the heroic.

The Performance begins by Nandram ji talking to the audience about the story of ‘swabhimaan’ (self-dignity) that he is about to tell.

He, however, highlights that it contains an episode with Narsebaaz Pathan, the thirsty man in the ‘biyabaan’ (wilderness), who in gratitude, for a few drops of water, promises his life to Amar Singh. {tene paani pilakar, mujhe doosra Jeevan diya hai; main asli Pathan hoon, asli Mussalman hoon, tujhe kabhi zaroorat pade Jeevan mein, yaad kar lena; is pani ke badle jaan de doonga-khoon de doonga aur us Narsebaaz Pathan ne yaari ka vada poora nibhaya...Jab

tak Bharat ka itihās zinda rahega, Narsebaaz Pathan ko koi mita nahin sakta}

After this introduction, the Narrative begins, giving a brief background of the central character in his family.

“Haath jod sabha ko barambar parnam
Amar Singh Rathore ki katha suno tamam.
Marwar mein shahar Jodhpur Rathoron ki Rajdhani
Vahan Gaj Singh raj karte shurvir”

While elaborating, Nandram ji adds that Jodhpur city still exists [connecting the present] and that Gaj Singh was content {do putra bhoop ko kafi the} with his two sons, Jaswant Singh and Amar Singh, the latter was ‘ugr svabhav’ [Turbulent by nature] ‘krantikari tha’ [literal meaning is revolutionary, though in this context it may imply ‘rebel’] ‘swaabhmani tha’ [self-respecting].

Once, when insulted by his father, he left Jodhpur, taking his nephew along and went towards the Court of Emperor Shah Jahan.

It is interesting to note, that this Narrative says that he left Jodhpur by his free will and not that he was exiled, as most others insist.

On meeting the Emperor, Amar Singh says-
Main badi door se aaya tere durbar mein;
[I come from far in your court]
Chahta hoon Naukri karna aapke yahan Sarkar mein.
[Wanting a job in your government]
‘Durbar’ is also used in bhajans and qawwalis which are popular.
There it means to be in the presence of the deity or a higher power.

The refrain about him wanting a job, has contemporary vibrations, especially with the youth. While speaking, Nandram ji adds phrases like, ‘main berozgaar hoon’ [I am unemployed] ‘sena mein bharti hone ke liye’ [to be recruited in the army] etc. and they make an immediate connect with the audience.

(This region has many households with relatives in the Army).

Amar Singh succeeds in getting a job in the army along with Ram Singh for, ‘the young of a lion, snake and a kshatriya are never underage.’ These favours make Salavat Khan jealous. Then comes the letter from Bundi with the date fixed to complete the marriage rituals and bring Hadi Rani with him. With a glad heart Amar Singh goes to the Emperor with, ‘Seva mein ardaas hai...manzoor karo Sarkar, saat din ki chhutti Manzoor karo Sarkar...’ [request for seven days leave]

Again, this strikes a familiar chord with the audience as he explains,
‘Jahanpanah majboori hai;
Mujhe jaana bahut zaroori hai
Yeh samaj ki dastoori hai...’

They negotiate. The Emperor is reluctant to let him go even for a day, but stretches the leave for five days. But Amar Singh needs seven. No less. And he becomes the son-in-law in every house when he explains,

‘Do din Bundi jaane ke;
Do din wapis aane ke
[Two days to go and two to return]
Teen roz thehrane ke;
Sasure ghar daawat khane ke’
[Three days to stay and feast in the
Father-in-law’s house]

And he gets it- seven days leave and no more! A fine of one lakh per day would be imposed if he extends the leave. The decision to impose fine is taken by the Emperor, without any interference by Salavat Khan. (This is noteworthy, because in many Forms it is Salavat Khan who brings in this element.)

The Narrative, however, skips the feast and comes to the return journey through the desert. ‘Tap raha Registan; tadap raha bin paani ek khan [In the scorching desert, a Khan groans without water]

Pran sankat mein hain [His life is in difficulty]
Nabh se aag baras rahi hai; [The skies rain fire]
Chaundh si lapat daras rahi hai [Dazzling bleached fumes are around]

The Narrator asks -which month would this be-and on getting the answer continues-
Jeth maas ki dupahri; [The noon of the month June]
Gehri Chaya dhundh rahe; [all search for thick cover of shade]
Pashu pakshi insaan; [animals, birds and humans]
And the refrain... ‘pran sankat mein hain...’

Amar Singh hears the cry of a thirsty person, ‘koi dukhiyara’ and gets off his horse.

Daud pada-saamne dekha ek insaan; [he ran and saw- a human being]
Behosh insaan, mooh phade, aankhe band padi [he had fainted, mouth open, eyes closed]

It is worth noting that the narrative says he saw a ‘human being’ rather than naming the character, though the name is known to the audience by now.

He sprinkles water from the kettle he has and as oil poured in a lamp ignites the lamp, Narsebaaz, opened his eyes that are red.

He drinks the water, cupping his hands and in gratitude falls at the feet of the giver. His life has been saved, else that would have been food for kites and crows!

He places his head gear on Amar Singh’s head and Amar Singh accepts the exchange. Narsebaaz Khan says he is ‘asli Pathan, saccha Mussalman’ who will stand by his benefactor, in an hour of need, even if his blood is needed. And they part as ‘brothers of word.’

Few things in the treatment of this unit stand out. When Amar Singh spots somebody, he is referred to as a 'human being' and he is unconscious by then.

While, he had earlier been groaning and wanting water, he does not ask Amar Singh for water. Though Narsebaaz Khan falls at his feet out of gratitude, it is he who takes initiative to exchange head gears and become 'pagdi badal yaar' (friends bonded by taking on each other's turbans- embracing each other's identity) and brothers of word.

His name is given as 'Narsebaaz Khan', with the last name matching with Salavat Khan, but is not underlined.

At this point, Amar Singh is lauded and exalted in the Narrative-

'Neer pilaya/ jaan bachaya/ tera kya kehna

[Gave water; saved life; what more to say],

But in the next unit Salavat Khan twists and presents a contrasting image-

Ek ganwaar mansabdaar

[One uncouth officer]

Adbi bhool baitha

[Has forgotten the conventions/propriety]

Voh Badshah ka pyaar

[The Emperor's affections too]

Moodh makkaar bhool baitha

[That vacuous trickster has forgotten].

Having just noticed the noble side of the character, these accusations seem exaggerated and trivial. However, he has-

Saat roz ki chhutti thi pakhwada beet gaya

[Seven days leave and fortnight has passed]

Naumehle baitha sunta goune ka geet naya

[In his palace he hears new wedding songs]

The Emperor tries to evade the subject, but Salavat Khan is insistent-

Moodh Naukri ko apna adhikar samajhta hai

[He treats the job as a right]

Aana jaana marzi ke anusar samajhta hai

[To come and go as he wills]

Arre bhar samajhta hai seva, gaddar bhul baitha

[Considers service a burden, the traitor forgets]

Badshah ka pyar.....

These lines are interesting in themselves and they seem to echo a common sentiment expressed by employers against employees and while continuing the Narrative, they make a connect with the familiar and the contemporary. Any office goer knows the importance of reporting on time after the granted leave is over.

The Emperor, however, does not pay heed to the verbal complaints of Salavat Khan and asks for proof.

Salavat Khan has it ready and produces the Attendance Register (again a present-day office phenomena) that cannot be challenged by any law and the Emperor, trapped by his own words, has no option, but to notify the seven lakh fine in writing.

Ram Singh, who is present in court visits Amar Singh at night and tells him about the event. (In the Nautanki, the Emperor sends him to Amar Singh, with the order to report immediately).

Amar Singh lies on a 'charpoi' (cot). Again, it is an integral part of village life.

Ram Singh comes, 'Do lal netra huae, Ram Singh bol nahin paaya'

[His eyes go red and Ram Singh is unable to speak]

However, he does tell his uncle that-

Ho chaacha darbaron mein aaj tumhara zikra aaya tha

[In Court today you were mentioned]

Neech Salavat Khan garaj raha tha darbaron mein

[Lowly Salavat was roaring there]

Kiya samman tumhara badkaron mein, gaddaron mein

[Honoring you with the wicked and The traitors]

Chacha sab kam akal ganwaron mein tumko batlaya tha

[counting you among the stupid and The boors]

He then explains about the fine and concludes with-

Naukar hokar izzat gir jai, rang bure hain

[Being in service, if dignity droops, it is not a good Sign]

He assures his uncle that 'Ram Singh sang tumhare poore hain.'

[Ram Singh is fully with you]

Amar Singh sits up.

He was lying down and he wakes up- a clear simile with a lion who wakes up in a forest.

'Uth baitha tha Amar Singh; lalvaran ho jaye

[Amar Singh sat up going red in colour]

Yoon sote sher ko pal mein diya jagaye.

[In a moment the sleeping lion was woken up]

And he asks Ram Singh -

Tujhe izzat beizzati ka khayal hai-

[Do you care about dignity and indignity?]

Then why did he not retaliate in the Court itself?

'Buzdil tu pishar nahin-tu paji pishar nahin bhai ka

[Coward, you are no son of my brother]

Amar Singh comes across as a person of fierce temperament-

Dushman ko dikhayi narmi

[You were soft to the enemy]

Kahan khoyi khoon ki garmi

[Blood did not boil]

Tu kayar kul kukarmee

[Coward, you are a blot to the family]

And without reconciling with the nephew, he, the man of action, gets up and puts on his armour and prepares to go to settle the score at Court.

Ironically, during this entire sequence- 'badshah ke pyar ko voh moodh makkaar bhul gaya', continues as the refrain. The constant reminder seems to indicate the flaw of Amar Singh, that is building up the consequences.

Amar Singh is about to mount his horse, when Hadi Rani comes and requests him not go at night. Unlike the Nautanki texts, she neither offers her jewellery to pay the fine or offer to accompany him or handle Salavat Khan in combat. She tries, to calm his ire and to distract and delay his departure. Her tone is soft, sweet and sensuous. As the Narrator sings on her behalf-

'Hai more Saniya
Danko gale baniya
karo pyar ki baat
Kile mein mat jao
[Dear, embrace, Talk of love and do not go to the Fort]

As he does not respond, she lures him further-
'Joban ki bagiya phuti;
khil rahe aam anaar
[the garden of youth ripe with fruits]
Mehak rahi kyari kyari; aa rahi ajab bahaar
[with fragrant rows in upcoming spring]
Ye phuli phulwari; Shobha khili nyari
[Spread of blossoms herein and beauty flowers]
Taj kar inka saath; kile mein mat jao
[Do not leave this company; Do not go to the Fort]

Despite her entreaties, he cannot stay and she is no longer demure –
Main charnon ki daasi hoon; mat paida karo jhamela
[At your feet, I ask for no commotion]
Ye Bakhtar apne dharo utarke; pyar karan ki bela
[Take off the armour, this time is to love]
He refuses. By then the night has passed and it is dawn.

Krishna Nai who sleeps near- by wakes up and wants to know the matter. To this 'sacha senani -sacha mitra-sacha sathi - (true warrior; true friend; true companion) Amar Singh explains his point of view-

'Mughalon ki sewa karne ka harjana dene jata hoon
[I go to make amends for rendering Service to the Mughals]
Saat roz ka saat lakh jurmana dene jata hoon
[To pay a penalty of seven lakhs for seven days]
The tone of the Narrative changes dramatically and it grows harsh and definite.

'Shahi durbar beech jisne gaddar ganwar kaha mujhko
[In the royal court he who called Boor and traitor]
Us neech Salavat ko yam ka parwana dene jaata hoon
[To that lowly Salavat will I hand the warrant of Yama].

The consequences of bothering a lion in his den are terrible. And he is that disturbed lion. On his way to combat the challenge.

Kishna too wears his armour and the two set out on their horses – towards Agra Fort.

The journey to the Court is the journey of transformation. It is this point that the Narrative chooses to give a description of Amar Singh and that renders him in proportions that are gigantic and heroic. The portrait moves, in a few lines, from brightness to dark dense colours. It begins by saying-

'Amar Singh jawan sajeela hai
[Amar Singh is a handsome young man]
Pusht bhuja gaj bhar ka seena, badan gatheela hai
[Strong arms, broad chested, muscular Square build]
Bhare huae gaal, bhaal nau inch chaudai hai
[Blooming cheeks and nine inch broad Forehead]

(This width is unusual.) His hair is curly and eye-brows huge and thick. So far he seems to be the warrior hero of medieval times, but soon his image acquires dimensions that can also strike terror.

'Netre lal lal jeone mashaal si gadhai hain
[The eyes are red as if set with flaming cressets]
Munchon ka kamaal vayaal jaisi chavi chai hai
[His moustache stiff and stretched like an Alert serpent]

He moves, 'kavach kaskar' [straddled in armour] with a shield on his back and a sword in the sheath.

'Haath mein bhala, kamar mein kataar hai;
[In his hand is a spear and a dagger at Waist]
Sinh ke samaan vo ashv pe sawaar hai.
[Like a lion he rides the horse]

Though he seems 'veer Randhir'
[Courageous resilient warrior]

He goes like 'kaal vikraal'

(Demon like evoking terror) past the waiting guards, like an unstoppable gust straight into the Court and gets off the horse in front of the Emperor seated on his throne. Their eyes meet. In that contact-

'Badshah ho gaya dheela hai'
[The Emperor goes pale].

'Amar Singh jawan sajeela hai'
[Amar Singh is young and handsome].

This refrain of 'sajeela' contrasts as well as rhymes with 'dheela' in a way that the entire drama of the situation is captured in these two words. 'Sajeela' is expansive and bright, while, 'dheela' droops- and a spectacle is created!

Amar Singh asks the Court to open its accounts' ledger and extract the debt he owes.

'Khari khoti parakh lo, usi ko parkhane aaya
[Test the clear and adulterated-I come for that]
Apna hisaab apni marzi ke anukool kar lo
[Make your account as you wish]
Pai pai jodkar byaj dar vasool kar lo
[Add up the coins and interest and extract it]

The Emperor is silent.

Salavat Khan attempts to argue and mock. He is about to call him 'ganwaar' [boor], but barely begins the utterance, when Amar Singh slashes his neck.

'Idhar zubaan se g nikla, udhar talwar nikal gayi
[As 'g' came out, the sword was out]
Vaar keh nahi paya tha ki gardan paar gayi
[He could not say for the neck was cast away]

Amar Singh moves to the Emperor who moves out and the sword the former aims gets stuck in a pillar. There is chaos as all run here and there. Provoked by the queen, the Emperor asks his men to put an end to Amar Singh and Kishna Nai. The two join their backs and fight the Royal soldiers.

'Liya khanjar nirala
Pada kaal roop vikrala
Gir rahe moond kat kat ke'.
[With an amazing dagger
Donning a terrible form
Severed heads are falling]

However, seeing the futility, Amar Singh on horse-back jumps off the Fort wall and loses his Horse. Kishna Nai also manages to escape.

The Emperor promises an award of twelve villages to the courtier who would finish Amar Singh. Arjun Gaur, greedy for the prize villages, offers to do the needful.

He goes to Amar Singh and flatters him and lies to him that the Emperor wants to patch up. Amar Singh rejects the offer as Rathors do not want such treaties and prefer challenges-

Hame na pran pyara hai
[We do not care about life]
Jaan se maan pyara hai
[More than life we care about honour]
Aan ka dhyan pyara hai
[We care to pay attention to its value]
Dhara dhan na dham chahiye
[We want no land, wealth or house]

Jinka ghoda hi ghar hai; musibat jinki rehbar hai
[Their horse is their house and hardship their Mentor]
Kaal chat ban kar sar par hai gale aaraam na chahiye
[Death is the roof on their head and they want no comfort around]

The story takes the same route as many other versions, but there are lines that speak beyond the story and stay with the audience after the show as well. For example when Hadi Rani advises Amar Singh to go with Arjun Gaur, she says-

‘Kaam shanti se banta ho to talwar bajana theek nahin
[If things can be resolved peacefully, One should not use the sword.]
Gud dene se marta ho to zehar pilana theek nahin
[If jaggery can kill one should not use Poison]
Bhai ki baton mein mujhe nazar aa raha saar piya
[I see merit in brother’s words dear]
Is duniya mein sabse badhkar hai aapas ka pyar piya
[Mutual affection is above all dear].

Such lines are also used as a refrain by the Narrator and are repeated by him and the supporting singer. When Amar Singh is asked by Arjun Gaur to disarm as he is going for peace, the Narrator tells us-

‘Dhokhe mein aa Amar Singh ne bandhe hathiyar utar diye
[Caught by deceit, he takes off the weapons he had worn]
Rajniti ke sab sidhant bisaar diye
[He dis-remembered all principles of politics]
He also warns us of the consequences of such behaviour-
‘Khud paanv kulhada maar liya
[He axed his feet himself]
Dhokhe mein aana theek nahin
[One should not fall for deceit]
And the refrain of, ‘gud dene se marta ho to zehar pilana theek nahin ‘brings out the irony of the situation.

By bringing in the phrase, ‘rajniti ke sidhant’ another layer is added to the telling. The Narrator keeps reminding us that Arjun Gaur is constantly thinking of the twelve villages he expects, highlighting the greed behind this manipulation.

As he disarms, Amar Singh and Hadi Rani realize that they have been trapped and she gives him a dagger.

The same Amar Singh who had said-
‘Nahin darta durbaron se
Na tumse makkaron se
Dhokhebaaz siyaron se’
[Am not afraid of courts, or cheaters like you, deceitful jackals]

Now follows Arjun Gaur to the Fort. The lion is led by the jackal. He had killed a man for a word and is now trapped by his own word. Amar Singh is led to the window -gate and as he steps in, looking upwards, arms stretched to the side, holding the pegs for support, he is slayed by his own relative.

This is the first time in the entire performance, that the Narrator demonstrates the position or stance of the character, Amar Singh. Amar Singh hits Arjun Gaur, slitting his nose. The Narrator takes out his handkerchief and places it on his nose to show the action of Arjun Gaur.

The Emperor does not award Arjun Gaur, instead punishes him for his deceitful act also adding that, 'he who could not be true to his own, cannot be expected to be true to us.' He informs Naumahala about the last remains of Amar Singh that lie at the window, to be taken by defeating the Royal army or he would be buried.

Hadi Rani faints and it is Ram Singh who asks her to be strong-advise, that goes beyond the story-

'Unka nahin koi sahayak jinke dil hil jaate hain
[The weak hearted have no one to help]
Himmat walon ko lakh saathi mil jaaate hain
[Those who are strong find many companions]
Apni Raksha jo insaan khud kiya karte chachi
[Those who protect themselves, aunt]
Sunte hain unki Raksha, Bhagwan kiya karte hain
[We hear, that God protects them too].

Hadi Rani sends a message to Narsebaaz Khan and Ballu Singh, a relative, in which she mentions her intention to commit Sati. There has been no mention of this so far. Knowing that facing the Royal army amounts to a risk, no less than a sacrifice of the self, Hadi rani offers herself as the first sacrifice.

Narsebaaz Khan is in the service of the Emperor and he is torn between loyalties. His son, Nabi Rasool shows him the way. He says-

'Kathin preet ka panth ant tak nibhana padta hai
[The path of friendship is tough as Commitment is to be till the end]
Jahan paseena gire yaar ka khoon bahana padta hai'
[Where a sweat drop of the friend drips, the other's blood must flow].
He further resolves the conflict in his father's mind-
'Badshah ki sewa to hum tankhaah lekar karte hain
[We serve the Emperor and get salary]
Jis din choden farz khatam hai sidhi baat karte hain
[The day we leave, the duty is done-[This is straight talk].

This clarity makes no room for the oft quoted and feudal sentiment of loyalty conveyed through the metaphor of salt. (namak halal/ namak haram etc)

It is interesting that in this crisis, it is the youngsters, Ram Singh and Nabi Rasool, who advise the elders and enable them to act accordingly.

Ballu Singh also listens to his wife and comes for the battle. Narsebaaz fights alone and loses his life. The poet tells the people-

Umrao Singh zara aankh khol gun parkho veer pathanon ka
[Open your eyes to the courage] Of the brave Pathans]

Itihason mein amar rahega naam un veer mardanon ka
[Histories will remember the names of those brave men]
Un paagal parwanon ka jass humko gana padta hai
[Fireflies engulfed by passion whose [Deeds compel poets to sing of their glory]

The same happens with Ballu Singh. Ultimately, Kishna Nai, Ram Singh, Nabi Rasool and a group of young lads assembled at the Naumahala, come together to fight the Royal army and like 'Bhukhe sher'[hungry lions] go to battle.

The Emperor concedes their mettle, 'Liya imtihan; tu (Ram Singh) ussa balwan; kiya yudh ghamasan'. [I tested; you are as strong and fought bravely].

As Hadi Rani prepares to perform Sati, The Emperor, with folded hands says, 'mata mujhko maaf karo', and asks to be forgiven.

The Narrator then asks the audience to say Jai to the Sati; to the mother land; to the Gods; to the martyrs [Shaheed] and the Rishis.

The performance is engaging and layered by imagery and interpretation.

The music is easy pleasant and catchy. Bhajan, Qawwali, Film music impact the compositions.

However, the Narrative retains its nature. Moods change, but the music does not insist upon it or create it. The, 'vritant' holds its energy- neither shrill nor dipped in melancholy. The singing and speaking is energetic, warm and well- tuned. At the same time, the word has immense significance. The speaking repeats the verse and often elaborates like, 'vyakhya'.

The words build the situations; create spectacle and the layers of meaning.

In a telephonic conversation, Nandram ji told this researcher that he had made a request to Umrao Singh ji and had this Narrative written for performance. He feels that the main theme is about 'swabhimaan' (dignity and self- respect).

The style has also been devised by him and it has now crystallized into an accepted Form. The repetition of lines is a constant feature that builds the format.

In every unit a refrain becomes the core that defines that particular segment. It may define the situation ('chahta hoon naukri karna') or bring out the irony of the particular situation ('ek Badshah ka pyar/ vo moodh makkaar bhool gaya') or cull out a dictum or aphorism- (kathin preet ka panth ant thak nibhana padta hai') that can stay with the audience.

At times the piece seems contemporary and at times, it acquires the texture of a medieval tale. The Narrative has few frills and rarely ponders through description. When it does, it transforms a situation into a metaphor. Like the blazing desert epitomizes the thirst of Narsebaaz.

The placing of Amar Singh's word portrait is very significant because it metamorphizes his

character, giving it a gigantic presence and power; the snake, the lion and the warrior are combined into one entity; one image; one energy. It also shows how the telling exalts the stature of the character; ascribing qualities and characteristics that make it appear larger than life.

This hugeness is also his tragic flaw, because he is a law unto himself and does not fit into the rules and discipline of the world. A lion used to the wild, struggles when confined to a structure. He could be tamed by the affection of the Emperor, as long as it remained unconditional. It was not in his mettle to be tested.

In this Narrative, the colour red is associated with three characters- Narsebaaz {eyes red like the flicker of a lamp} Ram Singh {eyes red, unable to speak} and Amar Singh {red-ness of a lion}. It seems to be the colour of emotion; of intensity. Salavat Khan, on the other hand, is the keeper of the rule book and his insistence is, that it be followed.

Arjun Gaur is led by greed and this is underlined several times. According to Nandram ji, treachery, fanned by greed and adherence to superstitions have caused more harm to society, than external factors. Perhaps, that is why, When Amar Singh leaves with Arjun Gaur, Hadi Rani gives him the dagger, guided by her good sense, rather than because of ill omens {like a sneeze or spilling of water etc, as some other Narratives depict.}

Nandram ji has been an active and popular Performer in the area for almost four decades now and has been showered by many awards and honours. During this time he has seen many changes; his team companions have changed; Television has made its presence felt; yet he continues to be popular.

CONCLUSION

As a study, this has opened up many new areas for analysis and understanding of their impact on Performance and culture. The practitioners of Art relate with the nature of their performance and also add to it by their contribution. It is an ever-active field, for each performance entails a remoulding of the inherent elements. The Performing Arts, by their very nature, thrive on this constant intermix between the artist who is in the contemporary and the Form that represents a Tradition. It is equally true that several steps and experiments lead to the culmination of a Tradition, which then stabilizes as a code in itself. And is often accepted as an authentic version of the Tradition. As practitioners move on with their work, they handle their material of performance in altered situations and add, edit or make small changes. For example, an actor might bring in a folk song popular in a region to express the emotional state of a character. This reaches out to the audience and is well received. However, it may be seen as an aberration breaking the given structure of the performance.

Over time it may be repeated and for the audience constitute a regular part of the show. More such additions may follow. A sweet or plaintive film song sometimes finds a place in context and also becomes a part of the performance. Each time, a choice is made, a significance is measured. And a divergence ensues. Over time, two or may be more versions of the same performance might be in vogue.

The Authentic and the Accumulated then keep moving on their tangents, acquiring meanings over time and establishing their respective validity.

This phenomenon is by no means new. It is well known that regions have songs attributed to Mirabai or Kabir and other fakir and saints, but are the creations of local poets and singers. The latter remain anonymous by choice, so as to contribute to a stream of thought and philosophy that is identifiable with the main poet. This seems to have percolated in all cultures and all passages of folk lore. It has happened to parables, proverbs, metaphors, and jokes as well. Stories also gain additions and/or change versions. And the same can be said of legends whose proportions seem to extend with the passing of time. This is the active imagination of the people that keeps building these manifestations.

As industrialization and related migration has torn apart many communities, these manifestations that they carry with them to alien spaces, acquire a special meaning. Uprooted, in these new spaces, they have little else to identify with. Moreover, as globalisation spreads, formatting a monoculture, communities, struggle to keep up with connections they identify with. Some of these probably include characters seen regularly in performances on the village stage. They may include Tejaji, Amar Singh Rathore or Alha Udal, and they touch a chord that is recognizable to the self of a person. They bring with them memories of home, waiting villages and musical tones.

Any classification or stratification that is divisive of the original and the accepted would accentuate this sense of loss. The accuracy of historicity, may have over time become a smaller consideration, given the other symbolic overturns the legend may have succeeded in communicating and while remembrance may be a factor to begin with, the connection it appeals to, makes it worthy of remembrance. The social milieu then is crucial as it devises ways to keep it alive because it cherishes something in it that brings value to the existence of its members. This could be notional to the outsider, but may be falling into a pre-existing context like a bhajan of surrender or valour for self-dignity.

The Authentic and the Accumulated may not be always be at discord. They can be seen as extensions of each other. Marking the present and moving backwards, also traces the trajectory of change. All performing arts change as they operate within the binaries of Structure and improvisation. The very act of building the drama from a legend, de-contextualizes the seminal source. And when the performance becomes primary, then a de-contextualization of the drama construct cannot be ruled out. Forms then, can change, either by bringing in factors that seem to be in context or by de contextualizing aspects within the existing structure.

It is true, that the Dramatic Construct of 'Amar Singh Rathore' contains within itself elements of a powerful performance that has also achieved popularity. The impact comes with its totality of design, plot and characterization. The puppeteer can convey an idea with fragments of a narrative, but the Folk stage, energised by actors and music, does not merely tell a story, but seeks to create an emotional journey as well. When all the elements and situations interplay, this impact is well felt and experienced. However, groups often have limitations of resources and find themselves in circumstances, where changes are imminent. They, then make choices based on the priorities they consider important.

For some groups, it may be important to delve into the educational aspects of the Performance. These could be about sacrifice or duty or moral conduct. Another group may consider the Dramatic aspects to be important as they generate interest in the performance. The cunning manipulation by Arjun Gaur, played with humour might be included, even though it reduces the stature of Amar Singh. However, seasoned practitioners maintain a baseline for the performance and that consists of the thematic core. Often, this is listed along with the title. In Nautanki, particularly, there is a tradition of setting dual titles that are explanatory in themselves. The Hathras text is called, 'Amar Singh Rathore urf Banka Beer', while the Kanpur text is, 'Amar Singh Rathore urf Hindu Muslim ka yarana.' This twin titling opens the subject and provides an indication of the underlying significance of the work and performance. One may stress on the heroic stature of the protagonist, while the other may play it differently. Groups that are inclined towards having successful shows are also aware that the Drama exists within the spirit of the play itself.

The Desert sequence between Narshebaaz and Amar Singh Rathore is rarely edited. Even if, the performance is unable to perform the end, this sequence remains in place. Artists attach great significance to this scene because it brings out the character of Amar Singh. It makes him more than a chieftain. He is a man who befriends strangers and is at home in the desert and the wild.

Aristotle does not think it is important to demonstrate those traits of character that do not lead to the fall of the character. But the Indian Folk stage lays emphasis in delineating the character, because this adds to his worth as a human being and values it as a quality. The hero who is not a victor, is defined more by his qualities than the consequences of his action.

The loss of such a man is a common loss of that quality with which the audience relates and identifies. He also embodies such a world. Even many solo singers who perform only one scene of the text pick on this one. The folk imagination has placed certain aspects so firmly in place with the character, that it has become synonymous with him.

In the film, 'Amar Singh Rathore', this sequence, is positioned differently, but the significance of Narshebaaz is highlighted. The Amar Singh of the film is restrained and carries the weight of a promise within him. He has given his word and that has to become the deed. He is played as the perpetual outsider. Hadi Rani or Chandravati, as she is called, is a quiet, determined presence, who knows her destiny. The film has combined history, and folk characterization, with realism and created convincing portrayals of the characters.

However, the Folk stage has carried on with its own version of depiction. Hadi Rani has not become Chandravati. The stage with all its inadequacies carries on. It has not been influenced by the film and bears no resemblance to any character or sequence. It revels in the absolute abandonment to theatricality that can claim the bare stage. This relation with the past also renders it unsentimental. When realism gropes through the dark passages of history, it engages with the heaviness of the past and pulls it into the present. Theatricality, with its music and stylization, carves an alcove for it, welcomes it and handles it.' Ghasiram Kotwal' has a dark subject held by theatrical and folk elements. Energy as a counter point to the subject, further charges the performance dynamics.

The past often feels like an invisible space filled with ghosts. We do not know where and what that space is. It could well be within us. Engaging with it, means to knock at unseen quarters. The Puppeteers dress them up and bring them in the present to make them dance. They entertain us.

When actors of the Folk stage impersonate heroes, and a Form binds them in song and dance, the stage also becomes a levelling ground for transcendence. A different beginning. A new outlook. The stage makes them come alive, but also marks a distance. It could be the distance of time. And this distance makes room for a critical perspective to emerge.

When Arjun Gaur, manipulates Amar Singh, with his cunning, members of the audience want to warn Amar Singh, some laugh at him, for taking the proverbs too far. The tale is old and distant in time, but the scene is happening on the stage and the audience can feel the proximity of the action. So, they tend to react, when they see the hero being outwitted. Perhaps, some day they may question or disagree with the hero! Heroes are not always on a pedestal.

How culture works within the sub lateral and sub conscious layers of society is a marvel in itself. Varied and layered social intricacies make heroes and ascribe them a space in the virtual

collective. They are there as Memory and motivational references. It is for society to decide how to deal with its icons.

Performance does not treat icons like statues. They are characters in action. The nature of the medium affects the relationship of the audience with the character. The Folk artist often knows and understands the audience and measures the performance accordingly. The film is made once and shown repeatedly. The stage performance is made anew each time. Every show is different and circumstances too are never the same. But some elements like the story, music and performance scenes remain constant. Certain gestures of the actors also get imprinted in the memory of the audience. The audience expects and waits for them.

There is a glimpse of Amar Singh as an ordinary mortal and that is probably the most heroic moment, because it shows the effort it takes to be extraordinary. The legend from Punjab is the only one in which the courtiers praise Amar Singh for his deed. There is a fluidity in the way heroes are handled in the creative space.

The theatricality of the stage was largely instrumental in laying out the acting style in early Bollywood cinema. Many of the initial actors were singer actors. In the film 'Amar Singh Rathore', conscious effort has been taken to play the central characters with gravity, poise and measured gesture, while the comedy scenes between the maid and escort are more theatrical. They become a comment on the main narrative.

The folk structure does not have the comedy scenes of the extra characters. The stage is filled by the main action itself and the interactions of the characters. Every character has a voice and a viewpoint, hence a presence and a journey of action. They agree and disagree, provoke and shout. In one text, Hadi Rani uses womanly charm to keep back Amar Singh, while in another, she insists on handling Salavat by her sword and emerges as a concerned advisor in the third. There are so many changes that even when different actors perform in a similar manner, it falls short of a stereotype.

In the court sequences too, the king and Salavat Khan have different opinions. The latter prevails on the king each time. The queen also states her view. Not only do the king and queen squabble, but Amar Singh too quarrels with the queen! And threatens the king as well. Balluji's wife mocks at him and leads him to the battle.

There is domesticity with its small things threatened by looming danger. There is an inkling of joy, which needs a chance to flower. But the issues of honour and intrigue, of pettiness and deceit, become more important.

Accentuated by music, the vibrations are at times unsettling, but they provoke the action to move. The action is relentless, and emotions change rapidly. The atmosphere is charged. So much effort, because so much is at stake!

The treatment has a rusticity and robustness that may not fit with the realism of the situations. Yet, this defines the temperament of the performance. This probably sinks in. And stays with the audience.

What is performance, but a flicker in the night?
With a sigh it brings a melody sweet into sight!

Many of the migrants take with them the impressions, as they have received from the village stage. The version in their memory is the version they know and it is complete in itself. Wherever they go, they can see the recordings of these performances in their phones and probably even look at the same actors who performed in the village.

Nostalgia is often linked with the village performance. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, a phase of industrialization pulled workers from the villages and stationed them in townships where industrial plants were set up. Most of them were not planned cities and the population lived in urban hardship, very different from the rural landscape. The arrival of a Nautanki troupe would bring back memory of merriment and infuse the same ticket windows opened up. Performances by many Nautanki groups became a regular feature in these cities. It is not surprising that many industrial houses sponsored Nautanki shows in their area.

Trader guilds also organised shows, taking the Folk stage to urban areas. After the harvest, when farmers transported the grain to local agrarian markets, those spaces often became venues for performance.

Troupes went in large numbers to fairs and melas in faraway places where the participation of the migrant community was ensured. The craving for the narrative back home gradually gave way to the delight of fantasy that soon grew popular. As the drama left centre stage, the performance structure gave way as new numbers and episodes came into play.

When, communities own or acknowledge a narrative, it binds into an organic relationship. However, the performance of a narrative does not substitute for a ritual. That is why the Folk artist does not give up. Each time, he or she performs, it is with full zeal. They are not tired. And they believe-believe in the power of their narrative. Because a narrative implies a certain power of choice and agency in a character. The practitioners of the Folk stage generally do find a stable meeting ground for expectations that arise before them. Every Form finds its own route for performance and relevance.

The Puppeteers began with the story of Amar Singh Rathore for a specific audience. They also say that the initial design was for indoor performance. As the circumstances changed, they carried the story to unknown areas, outdoor shows and new audiences. They discovered the power of the performance-the performance of the puppet, created by the skill of their hand. The Nats successfully transferred their acrobatic potential on to their puppets, manipulated by a simple thread. The making of the puppet involves not just woodwork, but symmetry of design and proportion.

Kings slay and sever heads, while a puppeteer makes tiny wooden torso heads and stitches clothes on them to make them dance! The puppeteer brings life to wood and cloth and gifts it to the audience. Soon, the puppeteer had many puppets, each one telling a story and demonstrating its skill. Amar Singh becomes a symbol of each of them. Like him, they have been denied their right to dignity. The puppet of the weaver woman who swallows the thread

sums it all with her one sentence, 'I was hungry!' The puppet achieves with brevity while the stage loves to elaborate.

These puppet characters are on the road, constantly on the move. Like the puppeteer himself. In fact, they are all shades of the same destiny. They are characters rendered invisible by society but it also needs and admires their skills. The puppeteer brings them in view and does not let them be forgotten. In that way, he keeps up the memory of Amar Singh too alive. Each time, a show begins, Amar Singh is invoked. His story still remains part of the show. At times, it becomes the backdrop and serves the purpose to bring in more stories, more characters, that multiply the experience.

Many young puppeteers may have lost track of some of the original puppet characters, but what has got accumulated is close to the authentic spirit of the protagonist. As a symbol, then, Amar Singh speaks to us of the world of today, of people who abound in it today. There is history too, somewhat bleak and distant. When it surfaces, it destroys-but that destroying is illustrative. Life, nevertheless, continues. It sustains itself. The emperor's court may be desolate, but the road beyond, is active, as the puppeteer himself (as character) continues the show!

By placing himself in the show, by creating a puppet that represents him as the drummer, the puppeteer has claimed a stake in the performance. It can be seen as his story. Certainly, as a story that he wants to tell.

It is not a common practice for a creator of a piece to mark his presence within the performance. Poets would often include their names in the text, so that the poem could be well identified. Performance directors are known to accompany the group to oversee the show. But, in this case, the puppeteer has installed his village identity of the drummer as a character. He could be seen as the other self or alter ego of the puppeteer. He carries his identity, thus externalised of himself, making it an entity in himself. This is a clever and interesting device to position and counter position his roles. As a drummer, he plays the rhythm and yet he opposes it.

This entity remains in constant opposition to the flow of action, which can be seen as being maintained and handled by the guardian of the 'system'. The drummer keeps challenging it, teasing it, mocking it. At one level, he enters his own show. At another level, he opposes it. In an interesting and significant way, he attracts attention and projects his point of view. The artist is becoming his own spokesperson through the inclusion of this character. He makes it amply clear, that it is his story that he is taking to the people while showing them a performance of 'Amar Singh Rathore'. Even with a narrative that has got fragmented over time, the performance gets the pivotal idea and spirit across, catching the experience of Amar Singh in myriad of shapes.

At the same time, it is evident, that an earlier history of the Mughal period has been replaced by another one, that of the colonial rule notifications, and probably this leads to the immediate present. The authentic and the accumulated tear apart one another and yet continue to say a similar story. They are parallels and they also extend the common thread. The puppeteer is the teller, observer and character in a narrative fragmented by the

experiences it has encountered. The puppeteer like many others who know the road, get to deal with fragments.

The very fact, that an artist wants to place himself in the frame of his work, is of significance. This can mean, that he acknowledges that the work is coming from his experience or that he shares some part of it. The work of an artist probably needs to be understood in the context and in relation to his life experience. By looking at the work and not at the person, he/she is rendered invisible. It is generally assumed, that as the traditional Folk Forms are codified, the individuality of the artist contributes less than the skill he possesses. But what is the nature of satisfaction that an artist derives from his work? Does it enhance joy and self-worth or does it reinforce drudgery? What stimulates the artist to create more?

The artist too is generally shy about expressing the personal. The moment of performance is the moment of glory. After that is the wrap up. Komal Kothari too has said, that very little is known about the life and learning processes of the artists. Many of them remain invisible and their knowledge too scatters away.

An artist's life is not without challenges or hardships. Society often treats them with ambivalence. Their performance is enjoyed, but they often do not receive the respect they deserve and are treated with indifference. This tells on the artist's own relationship with himself, his art and creativity.

Puppetry, Nautanki and Khayal are Forms that developed new performance strategies and they opened many doors for the artists. Nautanki and Khayal laid emphasis on training, imparted by senior artists or through akharas. Many companies employed artists and paid them stipulated salaries. Performing on stage was a different experience from performing in weddings and personal events, especially for women. Traditional Patrons are often seen as persons with grace, but they command a certain power that can be possessive of the artists. That is why many artists preferred the impersonal ticket window to the comfort of mansions and courtyards. The puppeteers assisted seniors they travelled with. Being away from the village, meant breaking away from boundaries. Yet, caste, class and professional prejudice take their toll on the artist. Many give up. Those who strive, enjoy the appreciation, as and when it comes. Few care to be understood. By taking the reality of the artist into cognizance, the interpretation of his work can become more meaningful. This interpretation then also adds to a cumulative understanding of the overall Form itself.

The opposite may also happen. When artists give up practice, they lose contact with the Form and may forget many aspects of it. Then, recalling is not an easy process. It is said, that forgetting itself is a way of learning. It is a learning to seal off that which is difficult to bear. Since the life experience of the artist intertwines with the skill that he practices, the two do not exist in dis-association. Ramlal, handled his first independent show the same day that he lost his way in the forest. One memory is tied to the other. Lines of the text also often get tied up with experiences that one may wish to cast aside. It is by recalling, that the memory maintains its knowledge base. When young practitioners ask questions, seniors answer by recalling their experiences. It is the interest of the young that opens new ways. Disinterest often snubs curiosity and when it does not seek answers, it loses on the knowledge that would

have enriched its base. By not accessing it, it is allowed to be forgotten. Repetition or articulation keeps the awareness of the resource. Unused, it fades away.

Sometimes, a group may decide to remember together (As was done as part of this study). Recalling a line by one person, led to another person recalling a similar line in another scene. Someone remembered a couplet and another person could give it the correct placing. Songs got streamlined. The significance of certain sequences, like that of the horse, got clarified. And a text that had not been accessed for many years grew discernible. Along with the text, the animation of the puppets also became fuller. The puppeteers also recollected incidents from the past, some that came easily and some that had got knotted up. Unknotting of these knots requires effort. Remembering becomes an effort. Memory does not unfold at once. It takes time. Slowly the gaps fill up. At times they never do. When this happens in the context of a narrative or a skill that has been passed on orally, the loss is irrevocable. Because it is no longer about personal memory concealed in personal anecdote. It is about collective knowledge that belongs to all and which ought to be treasured by all.

The nurturing of the artist, by the society then becomes an important concern for all, because the more the artist is nurtured, the more, he /she aspires as an artist. The Skills that a Folk artist possesses are unique and they have to come to society through generations of honing. Most artists are so adept at their performance, that they seem to do it effortlessly. The Khayal male dancers face many challenges to become performers. However, ease of the artist gives the impression that it comes easily. Their full-throated voices fill the air and the listeners with joy. They are tireless singers and dancers. They sing and dance and that singing and dancing is their practice. They are also modest and do not project the challenges that they encounter while trying to master their artistic talents. It is often assumed, that it happens without training. However, the artist, is in the process of learning all the time. Even, while watching others, they are working on themselves. These are complex skills, meticulously learnt, rehearsed and brought into performance. Many of them belong to a generation that learnt music from their elders in the home. Subsequently, they moved to the stage and learnt more. Many of the senior artists are tiring out, and new people are figuring out their way. As traditional akharas have waned out, may be new ways and systems need to evolve, so that the built performance culture of the specific Forms not only continues, but keeps evolving and growing. The skills involved also project and extend the philosophy of the Form. Future trends of the Form would determine the nature of individual plays including 'Amar Singh Rathore.' Theatre and music are not about blocks, beats and words. Treasuring the salient and subtle to be carefully carried forward is a challenge in itself.

(It may be mentioned, in passing, that Yakshagana, successfully surmounted a difficult phase due to the efforts of people like Dr. Shivram Karanth).

While the Drama moves on with its performances, there are many other ways by which the legend reaches to people, generating a host of interpretations. Tourists to historical places in Agra and Nagaur may find a story. 'Amar Chitra Katha' also tells one. Some contemporary poets pen lines for this character. As mentioned earlier in this Study, there are several solo singers who recite or sing about Amar Singh. There are different elements that catch the popular imagination and each one may be distinct from the other.

There is a counter view, that claims the story and character exclusively as a Rajput symbol. The reasons are obvious as he was born a prince. Legends have been owned and acknowledged simultaneously by diverse groups for what they may read into it. At times they have been appropriated and at times forgotten. Communities also honour legends with opposing traits. They may acknowledge the power of one and yet shower affection on the other. That is because they know that there is no one face to reality, it is enigmatic. That is why legends have no straight answers. They honour the enigma that surrounds them. Like the long shot in the film. It shows, but may not reveal. The purpose here is not to judge. Not to prove a point. Then there may be a wall. The more you insist, the thicker it gets. But the more you see and hear, the more transparent it is.

There is more to a man than his birth. As both Ugamraj ji and Aristotle would say, that it is not what a man is, but what he does, that defines him. And by doing what he does, he acquires a certain persona, a certain quality, a certain identification. The traits of a warrior lie beyond his skill as well. He is also defined by the friendship of Narshebaaz. The legend is set in a period, where word of mouth had higher credibility than the written. A perpetual outsider, he is restless and unsure, who seems to be at ease in the desert. He remained at the periphery of the royal etiquette and was in constant struggle with the system. People from different castes and religions watch the Khayal performances of this character. It may seem redundant to say so, but it may be mentioned, that the role of Amar Singh has been played by actors across caste and religion. And they own the performance with conviction, delight and grandeur. Towards the end, like an ordinary person, he walks into a trap. Though, trapped and outsmarted, he does resist and leaves his mark somewhere.

The story has moved out of the traditional region associated with the character, and several singers and narrators are telling it in their own way. They are finding their own reasons and interpretations. The Famous Folk singer of Mahendragarh, is an outstanding example. He values the tale and feels compelled to take it to audiences. A virtual construct can neither be confined nor governed. It can move about like a cloud that may rain miles away. These attempts could also find new ways of telling the story and telling that which is still untold!

This study has tried to gauge some threads, but it cannot claim to be conclusive or complete. The Folk stage occupies a huge space in performance culture. This study has tried to get close to the work of some of the creators of the field, through their texts, performances and conversations. It has tried to relate to the oral and the written, and tried to place them next to each other. The richness of the soil is such that each Form shapes the content in its own way, yet the legend remains whole and enigmatic.

Cover Images: Clockwise from the top left- Amar Singh of Jodhpur (Credits below); Puppet of Amar Singh (made by Ram Lal and his father, Salma Ram); Bansilal Khiladi, famous Khayal exponent, as Amar Singh; Ram Lal, puppeteer. *Image Credits below:*

Amar Singh of Jodhpur: Creation Date: 1638-1644. Credit Line: Edwin Binney 3rd Collection. Accession Number: 1990.612: The San Diego Museum of Art. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

URL-

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rao_Amar_Singh_of_Jodhpur_\(6125095904\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rao_Amar_Singh_of_Jodhpur_(6125095904).jpg)

Bansilal Khiladi & Ram Lal Photos: Kabir Sharma

Puppet Photo: Ram Lal.

Annexure-1

The following ballad is taken from the book "The Legends of Panjab Volume III," authored by Lieutenant-Colonel E. C. Temple, archived by the Cornell University Library.

No. L.

AMAR SINGH OF GARH MERTĀ,

AS TOLD BY A BARD FROM THE KAPURTHALĀ STATE.

[The following is the bardic version of a startling incident at the Court of the Emperor Shāhjahān, which once created an immense sensation.]

[In A.D. 1638 the celebrated Rājā Rāj Gaj of Mārṅwā or Jodhpūr died, leaving two sons—the elder Amar Singh, the hero of this tale, and the younger Jaswant Singh, who succeeded him and became famous in the days of the Emperor Aurangzeb. The turbulent and impracticable temperament of Amar Singh induced the assembled nobles of Mārṅwā to exclude him from the succession even during the lifetime of his father by the ceremony of *deseitā* or banishment. Tod, in his *Rājasthān*, describes this as consisting of mounting the victim on a black horse, clothed in black with black accoutrements, and turning him out of the State as a perpetual exile. Amar Singh after this betook himself with the following that always hangs on to a Rājput chief to the Mughal Court at Āgrā, where he was taken into favor, granted Nāgaur in Bikāner, a Rājā's fief,—but never apparently Mertā as the bards think—and made a commander of 3,000. On one occasion he had absented himself from duty and was called to task and fined by the Emperor Shāhjahān. The Mir Bakshī (Controller of Military Accounts) Sayyid Salībat Khān was sent to recover the fine, but was told by Amar Singh to go away. On this the Emperor sent for Amar Singh to his presence in the *Darwāz-i-Khās*, (Hall of Private Audience) at Āgrā, where the irritated Rājput stabbed Salībat Khān before the assembled Court. He was thereupon pursued and cut to pieces with many of his retainers near a gate of the fort known to this day as Amar Singh's Gate. This tragic event occurred on the evening of Thursday the 30th of Jumādīa'l-awwal 1054 A.H. or 25th July 1644 A.D.]

[Tod states that the fief of Nāgaur was nevertheless continued by Shāhjahān to Rāi Singh, Amar Singh's son, after whom it devolved successively on Hāthi Singh, Anp Singh and Indar Singh, which last was dispossessed by the then head of the Rājā's, and Nāgaur once again annexed to the Jodhpūr State. The descendant of Amar Singh, the head of the Rājā's by right of birth, after this became and is still but a petty *shākur* or baron of the Mārṅwā feudal system.]

TEXT.

RĀO RĀJĀ AMAR SINGH SAKNA GARH MERTĀ 'ILĀQA BĪKĀNER.

Shāhjahān Bādshāh se ahilkāron ne chughālī khāī, ke 'Rājā Amar Singh muddat se ap ke salām ko nahīn āyā,' jis par Shāhjahān ne hukm diyā, ke 'sāt lākh ke dastak jāve.' Rājā Amar Singh Shāhjahān Bādshāh ke salām ke waste chālā. Rānī ne kahā, ke 'Rājā mat jāo?' Is par Rājā Amar Singh Rānī par ghussa hūā.

Bhaṛkā Rājā Amar Singh mānge hathiār :

“Rānī, merā tarkash lā de zarri dā, gonḍā dī ḍhār.”

Uṭhī jo Rānī Hāḍīā, phaṛ lindi bāg :

“Kaun wakt Darbār dā? Gāī adhī rūt !

5 Shish bharūn sharāb de, piālā merā hāth.

Bhar bhar piālā piāwandī, kartī mushtāk.

Pī le, Rājā Amar Singh, nā hove udās.

Rang mahiloṅ sej bichhāwandī ; kar le do bāt.

Piū de main chihṭṭī bhej dūn, āveṅ nau lākh :

10 Gal kā hār jo bech dūā, kaṭ jān chhah mās.

Āj baso rang mahil meṅ, Bādshāh ko milnā parbhāt.”

Ghussā hoke Rānī ne ik araz sunāi :

“Mar jā merī mātā, jinheṅ Hāḍī jāī !

Mar jāū tāī aur chachiān, jinheṅ god khilāī !

15 Mar jāū nāī Brahmanān, jine ne karī sagāī !

Main beṭī Rajpūt dī chākar gal lāī !

Chākar ho te naukarān le pallā pāī !

Beṛā rah giā bich meṅ, nā pār langhāt.

Haṭke ḍolā phir do bābal ghar tān :

20 Ab dī jāwan phir piū de, dewān Rām duhāī.

Adh-purush Rāthor de nā koī kare sagāī !

Pānān jihā rang thā, phir gal zardaī.

Kyā tujhe dukhṛā māl dā ? Kyā zahmat āī ?

Barjān, Rājā Amar Singh, milnā nā jāe :

25 Āge zulmī Bādshāh degā marwāe :

Pairoṅ beṛī, hāthon thokṛī, gal tauk pahināe !”

Barjā Rājā nā rahā, ghoṛī chālāī.

Khushī ho Rājā Amar Singh chālā Darbāre :

Moharān liāū pesh kar le panj aur chāre ;

- 30 Hāzir loke rākhīū Shāhjahān Darbāre.
Dekhkar Shāhjahān Bādshāh bhartā hankāre :
Kahā Salābat Khān nū : “ Kām karo hamāre.
Āge āunā nā do, Rājput rākho atkāre.”
Salābat Khān an Bakhshi didā tāre :
- 35 “ Adab mānke khaṛā raho, Rājput bichāre !
Terī bāt digī Darbār meū, main khaṛā sidhāre.”
“ Merī tū kyā bāt saūwārdā ? Kartār saūwāre !”
Amar Singh ḍigīā, nā ḍige, jaisā parbat bhārī.
“ Haṭke khaṛā, gaūwāriār ! Kyā kare gaūwāri ?”
- 40 “ Gaūwār’ kahe se khijtā bhartā bankāre :
“ Āj kabā gaūwāriār, kal degā gārī !
Parsoū uūū būih pakaṛke kaḍh de Kachahri bārī !”
Jabbal kōḍhī misrī nikalī do dhārī :
Māre Salābat Khān dī jā khīlī pārī :
- 45 Lagī mard de hāth dī nā rahī wo dhārī.
“ Eh lo apne sāt lākh, Salābat piāre !
Kāṛṭe dharke jānch le, hor ghāt hamāre !”
Khaṛe pukāreū umre Bādshāh de piāre :
“ Bhalā kū, re Amar Singh, Salābat māre !
- 50 Bhale bure dā chughal thā, taiū āj guzāre !
Derā pakaṛe, Rājput, mere mīt piāre ;
Mansab likhīā suber nūū pakkā sāt hazāre !”
Charḥ bolā Shāhjahān Bādshāh : “ Sun, umro, mere :
Khūnī jāne na pāve, māro tum ghere.
- 55 Sub meū sher kahāute, tum mard baḍhere !
Hindū mār Salābat Khān nūū jā legā ḍere.”
Rūo dī ujaṛ tale na āū, ho giā parere.
Dūr jā bolā : “ Dillī de Bādshāh, ab darwājā kyūū bhēre ?
Kaul deke Rabb de ā ḍhokā neṛe.”
- 60 Arjun, duhe Būṛā, sātī shamshere ;
Tan lā de Amar Singh ḍī, tan gāī udheṛe :
Paṛdoū Rājā Amar Singh lie jaūḍhar phere.
Sāt amīroū nūū mārke Rājā surgdhārī.
O,ak Amar Singh de laṛde kahārūū :
- 65 Ikkī amīrūū nūū mārke, jūjho chhah kahārūū.
Rājā dā Brahman Rāt Gokal Dās :

- Gokal ne sūtf misrf, chokhī Gujrat :
 Mārī Mallūko jo ānke jā kātā mās :
 Chandan rukh kaṭke talwāron ghāiā.
 70 Rājā dā nimak halāl kar Brahman Baikunṭh nūn dhāiā.
 Kishan Dās Masalchī ran pherā changā :
 Mīr Khān de tan nūn lā dīā kuwat kar jhaṇḍā.
 Dūje mārīā Hasat Khān dil kar lā changā.
 Umre yūn līṭe Darbār meā, jūn paṛe Malangā.
 75 Phuāre* ghāi yūn paṛe bhakābhak, jūn bahe Gangā.
 Khā lī bhajiā bhāng, yār, jūn chāṛhe tarangā :
 Pachīs amīrān nūn mārke nāi dā ban chalā sarangā.

- Laṛkā pūchhe Rām Singh : “ Sun, Kishan Dās,
 Tum gae Darbār meū chāchā de nāl.
 80 Mere kyā chāchā se namṛe ? Kyā milā inām ?”
 “ Kyā kahū, mere Kaiwarjī ? Nā pūchhe bāt !
 Rājā Amar Singh nūn us ne kahā ‘ gaūwār ’ !
 Loth paṛī, Kaiwarjī, Kachahri pūs.
 Ṭhokar māreū Mughal, yār, gal kaṭeū mās !”
 85 Sun sun bātāi Rām Singh ho giā udās.
 “ Merī dhari rahin do pālki, ghar jāo, kahār :
 Apne mahiloū so raho, jis se piāri nār.
 Mere dhore woh rahe bāndhe talwār.”
 Ghoṛe kāzā kar die kilēṭ de bār.
 90 Darwāze toṛe kilē de kuhāṛe nāl.
 Kilē de andar jā baṛā pān sau jawān.
 Misri baji kilē meū paṛte jhankār ;
 Saudā tole sarohioū nar kare bampār.
 Kesrāni jāmā ho gai, jihā kheṇḍā gulāl.
 95 Pān sau meū se laṛkā Rām Singh lāiā do sau sātḥ.

Kahe Rāni Hāḍiā : “ Merī bāndī, danṛ ;
 Mahiloū sej bichhā de, thoṛī post ghol.
 Āge Rājā Amar Singh ā gae Rāṭhor !”
 Unche chaṛhke dekhdi bāndī nādān.

* For *faṇāre*, a jet, spring of water.

† For *gila*.

100 "Rānī, nā Dōmān dī jorīān, nā lāl rabāb !
Khālī tarkash bājdi, dāl geṇḍā ḡhāl!"

Jad bāndī ne Rānī se kihā, ke "Sab chīzān dikhilāi dīndī haiñ, magar Rājā nahīñ dikhā." Rānī ne eh bāt sunke apne man meñ ḡhussa karke kihā, ke "Merā Rājā baṛā bahādur hai." Jad sabh mardmāñ mahil meñ ākar jamā hoe, tāñ Rānī ne puchhīā, ke, "Hamārā Rājā kahāñ ribhā?" Tāñ sipāhīāñ ne jawāb diā, ke "Rājā tāñ Surg sidhāre!" Itnī sunke Rānī zār zār rove lagi, aur tamām mahil meñ shor ḡhul hoī. Rānī ne bāndī se kihā, ke "solāh singār merā utār lo, sūrī khushī Rājā de nāl gaī!" Rānī ne solāh singār battīs abran, sabh utār lā aur kihā ke "sīṭ katā;ā lāo, main khākar mar jāūñ. Rājā merā mar giā, Pādshāh mainūñ pakaṛke dīn se be-dīn karegā, aur chakkī piswākar dānā dilwā degā. Us biptā se bihtar hai, ke āp hī mar jāūñ." Itnī kahkar Rānī ne apne hāth se gale meñ talwār māri aur foran mar gaī. Jad Bādshāh ne eh hāl sunā, nihāyat afsos kiā, aur jo kuchh ke jāgīr Rājā Amar Singh dī thī, us dī fauj nūñ bakhsh di.

TRANSLATION.

THE SONG OF RĀJĀ AMAR SINGH OF GAḠH MEṚTĀ IN BĪKĀNER.

His courtiers told tales to Shāhjahān, the Emperor, saying that Amar Singh had not been to pay his respects for a long while, on which Shāhjahān issued an order that a demand for seven lākhs (of rupees) was to be made upon him. So Rājā Amar Singh went to Shāhjahān, the Emperor, to pay his respects. His Rānī, however, said to him, 'Go not, Rājā,' on which Rājā Amar Singh became angry with his Rānī.

At once Rājā Amar Singh ordered his arms, (saying) :

"Rānī, bring me my jewelled quiver and my golden shield."

Up got Rānī Hādīā and seized his reins, (and said) :

"Is this a time for the Court? It is past midnight!

5 I fill thee a flask of wine, the cup is in my hand.

I fill the cup for thee to drink and make merry.

Drink it, Rājā Amar Singh, and be not sorrowful.

- I spread a bed in the painted palace, let us talk together there.
 I will send a letter to my father* and he will send nine *lākhs* (of rupees).
- 10 And I will sell my necklace from my neck, on which we can live for six months.
 Stay to-day in the painted palace and go the King in the morning."
- In her anger prayed the Rāni :
 "May the mother die, that bore me Hāḍiā !
 May the aunt and uncle die, that brought me up !
- 15 May the barber and the Brāhman die, that arranged my marriage !
 For I the Rājput's daughter have embraced a servant !†
 Have been given to the servant of a slave !
 My boat hath remained in the midst (of the stream) and hath not crossed over.‡
 Send me back to my father's house.
- 20 Now would I return to my father, and claim the protection of God.
 No one should marry into the Rāthors, the first of men !
 Thy hue was fresh as betel leaves and has now become pale.
 What loss is there in property ? What evil hath come ?
 I entreat thee, Rājā Amar Singh, go not (to the King) :
- 25 For the cruel King will slay thee :
 He will put fetters on thy feet, handcuffs on thy hands and a weight round thy neck !"
 The Rājā would not listen to her entreaty and urged on his mare.
 With pleasure Rājā Amar Singh went to the Court :
 And presented four or five gold *mohars*,

* She was the daughter of the Rājā of Bāndī.

† A taunt levelled at her husband for coming under the power of the Musalmāns.

‡ Idiom : I am in great trouble.

- 30 And laid them before Shâhjahân in Court.
 As soon as he saw him Shâhjahân the King called out,
 And said to Salâbat Khân: "Do my bidding.
 Let not the Râjpût come forward, keep him back."
 Salâbat Khân, the Controller, cast his eyes on him,
 35 (And said): "Stand and be respectful, thou wretched
 Râjpût!
 Thy fame hath fallen in the Court, and I keep watch
 (over thee)."
 "How can'st thou watch over me? God shall watch!"
 Amar Singh, like a great mountain, was not to be kept
 back.
 (Said Salâbat Khân): "Stand back, thou boor! What
 wilt thou with thy boorishness?"
 40 Incensed at the word 'boor' (Amar Singh) called out!
 "To-day he calls me a boor to-morrow he will abuse me!
 Next day he will take me by the arm and put me out of
 Court!"
 In his wrath he drew his dagger and struck twice:
 He struck Salâbat Khân and went through him:
 45 Struck by a warrior's hand the blow stayed not.
 "Take this for thy seven *lâkhs*, friend Salâbat!
 Take thy scales and weigh them out!"
 Called out a trusty noble of the King:*
 "Well hast thou done, Amar Singh, to slay Salâbat!"
 50 To-day hast thou slain a tale-bearer!
 Go home, Râjpût, my beloved friend,
 I will have thee made in the morning commander of a
 good 7,000!"
 Up came the King Shâhjahân and spake: "Hear, my
 nobles:
 Let not the murderer escape, surround him and slay him.
 55 Ye are lions among all men, and great warriors!
 The Hindû hath slain Salâbat Khân and hath gone
 home."

* Arjun Ghor according to Tod's account: he was Amar Singh's brother-in-law. This was said to quiet down Amar Singh.

- The Rājā's (Amar Singh's) blow did not reach (the King)
and he went within.
- From a distance (Amar Singh) exclaimed: "King of
Dillī, why hast shut thy gates?
I came to thee deceived by the oath in God."^{*}
- 60 Arjun* and Burā drew their swords,
Struck at Amar Singh and pierced his body,
And Rājā Amar Singh lay stretched (upon the ground).
After slaying seven nobles Rājā (Amar Singh) went to
heaven.
- Afterwards Amar Singh's litter-bearers took up the fight,
65 And slew twenty-one nobles with the loss of six bearers.
The Rājā's priest was Rām Gokal Dās,
And Gokal drew his sword, forged in Gujrāt.†
And struck Mallūko,‡ who came up, and cut into his
flesh,
And having cut down this splendid tree he was destroy-
ed by swords.
- 70 True to the salt of the Rājā the Brāhman entered Heaven,
Then Kishan Dās the Torch-bearer rushed into the fray
And inflicted a mighty blow on Mīr Khān,
And next he struck Hasat Khān with a brave heart.§
The nobles strewed the Court, as fall Malangs.||
- 75 Blood gushed forth in a bubbling stream, as flows the
Ganges.
Like one who is filled with *bhāng*, my friends,¶ when the
intoxication rises,
After slaying twenty-five nobles, the barber became
famous.

Said the youth Rām Singh: "Hear, Kishan Dās,**

* See above, line 48.

† Meaning Gujrāt in the Panjāb, famous for its cutlery.

‡ A noble of the Court according to the bard.

§ Door-keeper of the palace according to the bard.

|| Malangs are militant Muhammadan fanatics.

¶ To the audience.

** Amar Singh's Torch-bearer: See above, line 71.

- Thou wentest to the Court with my uncle.
 80 How fared my uncle there? What reward obtained he?"
 "What shall I say, my Prince? Ask me not!
 Râjâ Amar Singh was called a boor!
 And his body lies, Sir Prince, near the Court.
 The Mughals spurn it, my friend, and cut its flesh!"
 85 Hearing these words, Râm Singh became sorrowful.
 (Said he): "Put down my litter, and go you home, my
 bearers:
 Let them stay at home that have cherished wives.
 Let those stay with me that fasten on swords."
 They rested their horses at the fort gate,
 90 And broke open the fort gate with axes.
 Five hundred warriors entered the fort.
 Swords flashed in exchange in the fort;
 And dauntless warriors struck bargains with their
 swords.
 Their robes became red, as if they were playing with
gulâl.*
 95 Out of five hundred the youth Râm Singh brought back
 two hundred and sixty.
 Said Rânî Hâdiâ: "Run, my maid;
 Spread the couch in the palace, and mix a little opium.
 For Râjâ Amar Singh the Râthor cometh!"
 The silly maid went up to the roof to see (and said):
 100 "Rânî, I see not the drums of the musicians, nor the red
 lutes!
 The quiver rattles empty and the yellow shield is in the
 crowd!"

When the maid said to the Rânî that she could see everything
 except the Râjâ, the Rânî heard her and became angry, saying,
 "My Râjâ is a great warrior!" And when all the warriors col-
 lected in the palace the Rânî asked them, "Where hath my Râjâ

* A red powder thrown over each other by the revellers at the Holi
 festival.

stayed?" Then the men answered, "Thy Rājā hath gone to Heaven!" Hearing this she wept bitterly and there was a cry through all the palace. Said the Rānī to the maid; "Take off my sixteen ornaments, for all my joy hath gone with the Rājā!" The Rānī took off all her sixteen ornaments and her thirty-two jewels* and said, "Bring me a dagger that I may stab myself and die. My Rājā is dead and the King will seize me and despoil me of my faith† and giving me a hand-mill to grind will make me live on it. To kill myself is better than such misfortune." Saying this the Rānī struck her own neck with a sword and died at once.‡ When the King heard of this he was very sorrowful and gave to Rājā Amar Singh's following all the lands he had held.

* See Vol. I. p. 452.

† Several Rājput princesses had before this been forced into marriage with the Musalmān Emperors.

‡ Tod says that Amar Singh's body was removed by his wife and burnt.

Annexure-2

Discussion notes by Shri Bhagwan Das Morwal in response to a dialogue with the researcher. Well-known novelist, Shri Morwal, is the author of "Sur Banjaran"- a novel that traces various phases in the trajectory of nautanki.

भगवानदास मोरवाल से संवाद

- 'सुर बंजारन' को आपने लंबे समय तक अपने विचारों और स्मृतियों में संजोए रखा। इस लंबी यात्रा की प्रेरणा का स्रोत क्या रहा?

आपने सही कहा है कि यह एक लंबी यात्रा रही है। जहाँ तक 'सुर बंजारन' के प्रेरणा-स्रोत का प्रश्न है, तो इसका एक मज़ेदार वाक्या है। साल 2005 में मुझे दिल्ली सरकार की हिंदी अकादमी, दिल्ली की संचालन समिति के सदस्य के रूप में मनोनीत किया गया था। इस समय अकादमी के सचिव के रूप में श्री नानक चंद कार्यरत थे, जबकि हिंदी साहित्य के पुरोधा हज़ारी प्रसाद द्विवेदी के सुपुत्र श्री मुकुंद द्विवेदी इसके उपाध्यक्ष थे। हिंदी अकादमी के एक महत्वपूर्ण और बेहद लोकप्रिय आयोजन 'लोक पर्व' के अंतर्गत हरियाणा की मशहूर अदाकारा और एक मशहूर हरियाणवी फ़िल्म 'चंद्रावल' की नायिका रहीं उषा शर्मा की प्रस्तुति हो चुकी थी। मुझे जब लगा कि 'लोक पर्व' के अंतर्गत हरियाणा की एक लोक कलाकार की प्रस्तुति हो सकती है, तब दूसरे कलाकारों की भी हो सकती है।

इस तरह एक दिन मैंने ऐसे ही नानक चंद जी से कहा कि क्या अगले साल हाथरस शैली नौटंकी की अदाकारा कृष्णा कुमारी को भी आमंत्रित किया जा सकता है। मेरे इतना कहते ही नानक चंद जी ने तुरंत हाँ कह दी। सच तो यह है कि मुझे इसकी अपेक्षा नहीं थी कि वे तुरंत हाँ कह देंगे। मैंने तो बस ऐसे ही पूछा था। जबकि सच्चाई यह थी कि मैं कृष्णा कुमारी के नाम के अलावा इनके बारे में कुछ नहीं जानता था। वे कहाँ रहती हैं। नौटंकी कला से वे जुड़ी हुई भी हैं या नहीं। आप साचिए कि जिस कलाकार के बारे में मैं कुछ नहीं जानता। जिसकी नौटंकी मैंने अपने कस्बे में अपने स्कूली दिनों में देखी हो, मैं उसकी प्रस्तुति की सिफ़ारिश अकादमी के सचिव से कर रहा हूँ। जिसे उन्होंने बिना एक पल गँवाएँ मान भी लिया।

इसके बाद मैंने कृष्णा जी की खोज शुरू कर दी। कई लोगों से पूछा मगर किसी ने कोई आधिकारिक जानकारी नहीं दी। मुझे यह भ्रम था कि कृष्णा जी मथुरा में रहती हैं। इस तरह एक दिन हिंदी अकादमी की टीम जिसमें मुकुंद द्विवेदी, नानक चंद, मैं और अकादमी के एक अधिकारी कृष्णा जी से मिलने मथुरा के लिए चल दिए। इससे पहले मैं अपने दूसरे उपन्यास 'बाबल तेरा देस में' (2004) के लिखने के दौरान मथुरा के कोसी कला से पंडित नथाराम शर्मा गौड़ द्वारा रचित सांगीत अर्थात् नौटंकियों की पुस्तकें ला चुका था। इन पुस्तकों को खोजने का भी दिलचस्प किस्सा है। हुआ यह कि मुझे अपने इस दूसरे उपन्यास में इसके एक पात्र द्वारा नौटंकी 'स्याह

पोश' की कुछ पंक्तियाँ गवानी थीं। मगर दिक्कत यह थी कि इसकी मुझे प्रारंभ की सिर्फ़ यही पंक्तियाँ याद थीं- गलत ना पढ़ना चाहिए है ये कुरान शरीफ़/इसीलिए मैं आपको देता हूँ तकलीफ़। मैं चाहता था कि उपन्यास में पूरी पंक्तियाँ दी जाएँ। मगर मुश्किल यह थी कि मैं इन्हें लाऊँ या ढूँढ़ कहाँ से। इसी दौरान मेरा सपत्नीक अपनी मौसी के बेटे की शादी में कोसी के पास ब्रज के एक गाँव में जाना हुआ। दिल्ली के आश्रम चौक से आगरा जाने वाली बस ली और हम कोसी उतर गए।

हमारे पास समय बहुत था। चूँकि कोसी भी एक समय नौटंकी का केंद्र रहा है, तो मुझे लगा पंडित नथाराम की जो नौटंकियाँ साठ और सत्तर के दशक में ब्रज के मेलों में पटरियों पर बिकती थीं, शायद यहाँ मिल जाएँ। मैं पत्नी को लेकर बस अड्डे के पीछे एक स्टेशनरी की दुकान पर गया। मैंने दुकानदार से पूछा कि एक समय नथाराम शर्मा की नौटंकियों की पुस्तिकाएँ मेलों में बिकती थीं, वे क्या अब भी मिल सकती हैं? दुकानदार ने कहा कि साब अब कहाँ मिलती हैं। ऐसा है आप बगल में जो कैसेट की दुकान है, यहाँ से और पता कर लीजिए! हम उस कैसेट की दुकान पर गए और दुकानदार से इन पुस्तिकाओं के बारे में पूछा, तो उसने भी मना कर दिया। फिर बोला कि हमारे पास कृष्णा कुमारी की नौटंकियों की कैसेट्स हैं। मैंने तुरंत कैसेट्स दिखाने के लिए कहा तो उसने रैक में लगी कैसेट्स में से कुछ कैसेट्स हमारे सामने रख दीं। अपने सामने रखी 'कृष्णा कुमारी एंड पार्टी' वाली कैसेट्स को मैं उलट-पुलट कर देखने लगा। सपना कैसिट कंपनी, बस स्टैंड के सामने, कोसी कलाँ, मथुरा की इन कैसेट्स में से मैंने नौटंकी अमर सिंह राठौर और नौटंकी इंदल हरण की पूरी कैसेट्स खरीद लीं। खरीदने के बाद मैंने कैसेट पर छपे कलाकारों पर नज़र मारी, तो पाया कृष्णा कुमारी के साथ उन्हीं कलाकारों जैसे नैमसिंह, रामसिंह, ताराचंद प्रेमी के साथ हास्य कलाकार चौधरी धर्मपाल सिंह का नाम भी छपा हुआ है, जिसके लिए यह पार्टी जानी जाती थी।

कैसेट्स लेने के बाद मैंने फिर से दुकानदार से पंडित नथाराम शर्मा की पुस्तिकाओं के बारे में इस उम्मीद से पूछा कि शायद यह इनकी प्राप्ति का कोई सुराग दे दे। दुकानदार ने टालने की मुद्रा में बताया कि उस तरफ़ हनुमान मंदिर के सामने एक भगत जी हैं। वे बहुत पहले मेलों में पटरियों पर इन्हें बेचा करते थे। आप वहाँ जाकर पता कर लें। हम इसके बाद पैदल ही हनुमान मंदिर की तरफ़ चल दिए। वहाँ जाकर देखा तो पाया एक बुजुर्ग चारपाई पर लेता नवंबर की गुनगुनी धूप सेंक रहा है, और उसके एक तरफ़ जमीन पर संतोषी माँ से लेकर सत्यनारायण की कथा के साथ दूसरी पुस्तकें भी लगी हुई हैं। मैंने पास जाकर देखा तो देखते ही मेरी बाँछें खिलती चली गईं। लगा जैसे मेरी मुराद पूरी हो गई क्योंकि इन धार्मिक पुस्तकों के साथ जो सबसे आगे पुस्तक सजी हुई थी, वह वही थी जिसकी मुझे तलाश थी, और यह थी 'सांगीत स्याह पोश उर्फ़ पाक मुहब्बत'। हालाँकि मुझे एक प्रति की ज़रूरत थी, लेकिन वाहन रखी मैंने इसकी दोनों प्रतियाँ उठा लीं। सिर्फ़ यही नहीं कुछ और नौटंकियों की पुस्तिकाएँ जैसे सांगीत अमर सिंह राठौर (सम्पूर्ण दोनों भाग), सांगीत इंदल हरण (सम्पूर्ण दोनों भाग), सांगीत भक्त पूरनमल (सम्पूर्ण पाँचों भाग), कत्लजान आलम (सम्पूर्ण तीनों भाग), हीर राँझा उर्फ़ सपने का आशिक, नौटंकी शहज़ादी उर्फ़ अय्यारा औरत, श्रीमती मंजरी उर्फ़ गमज़दा कैदी, ऊदल का ब्याह उर्फ़ काठ

का घोड़ा, दहीवाली उर्फ बदकार यार, सुल्ताना डाकू उर्फ गरीबों का प्यारा, रूप बसंत (तीनों भाग), हरिश्चंद्र उर्फ गुलशन का नाग, सती सावित्री उर्फ हुस्न की देवी भी खरीद लीं।

शादी से लौटने के बाद मैंने सबसे पहले लिखे जा रहे अपने दूसरे उपन्यास 'बाबल तेरा देस में' का वह अध्याय पूरा किया, जो नौटंकी स्याह पोश की पंक्तियों के मिलने के कारण अधूरा रह गया था। वो अधूरी पंक्तियाँ ये थीं, जिन्हें इस नौटंकी का पात्र गबरू, महल के झरोखे में कुरआन की गलत तिलावत करती शहजादी को सुनाते हुए दोबोले और चौबोले में कहता है-

गलत ना पढ़ना चाहिए है ये कुरान शरीफ़

इसी वास्ते आप को, देता हूँ तकलीफ़। (दोबोला)

देता हूँ तकलीफ़ इनायत जो हुज़ूर फरमावे।

दिलोजान हो शाद महल के, ऊपर हमें बुलावे।।

पाक मुहब्बत करें कलामुल्लाह पढ़ाने आवें।

यहाँ कुरान के तीसों पारे, सारे सही करावें।।

हम जब मथुरा पहुँचे और कृष्णा कुमारी के बारे में पता किया तो पाया यहाँ तो ऐसी कोई कलाकार नहीं रहती है। हम जब एक व्यक्ति से इनके बारे में बात कर रहे थे, तब मैंने बताया कि इनके साथ एक नैमसिंह सिसोदिया नाम का कलाकार भी काम करता था। तब उसने बताया कि अच्छा-अच्छा आप उसकी बात कर रहे हैं। ऐसा करिए कि आप रेलवे लाइन के साथ वाली कॉलोनी में जाओ वहाँ है यह सिसोदिया। हम जब इस बताई जगह पर गए तो पता चला उस व्यक्ति ने हमें नैमसिंह सिसोदिया की जगह सिसोदिया नाम के एक इंटर कॉलेज भेज दिया। उसे लगा हम शायद इस कॉलेज के बारे में पूछ रहे हैं। अब हमारे पास खालर हाथ सिवाय दिल्ली लौटने के और कोई रास्ता नहीं था। हम सब निराश वहाँ खड़े रहे। अकादमी के सचिव और उपाध्यक्ष मेरी तरफ़ देखने लगे कि वे क्यों मेरी बातों में आ गए। इसी बीच उस कॉलेज के सामने खड़े एक व्यक्ति से मैंने हिम्मत कर पूछा कि यहाँ मथुरा में नौटंकी में काम करने वाला कोई व्यक्ति है? उस व्यक्ति ने एक पल सोचा और फिर बोला उस तरफ़ पटरियों के पास एक आदमी है जो यह काम करता है। लौटने से पहले हमें इस आदमी से मिलने में कोई बुराई नहीं लगी और उसके घर पहुँच गए।

उससे जाकर जब हम मिले और हमने कृष्णा कुमारी के बारे में पूछा, तो उसने जो जवाब दिया उसे सुन हम सबका चेहरा खिल उठा। वह बोला कि कृष्णा जी को तो मैं जानता हूँ। हम दोनों न जाने कितनी बार साथ शो किए हैं। मैंने तुरंत कहा कि फिर उनसे मिलवा दीजिए? वह बोला कि मिलवाऊँ तो तब, जब वे मथुरा में रहती हों। वे तो शिकोहाबाद में रहती हैं। हाँ, मैं उनसे अभी बात कर लेता हूँ। इतना कह उस व्यक्ति ने उसी समय अपने मोबाइल से संपर्क किया और हमारे सामने यह सूचित किया कि एक पार्टी आई है। बात होने के बाद सचिव नानक चंद जी ने मुझसे कहा कि मोरवाल इनसे एकमुश्त पैसे की बात कर लीजिए। सारे कलाकारों और साजिंदों को ये उसी तय राशि में लेकर आएँगे। उनके लाने-ले जाने की सारी ज़िम्मेदारी इनकी होगी। उस व्यक्ति से बात करने से पहले मैंने कहा कि मैं पहले इससे अकेले में बात कर लेता हूँ। मैं यह पता कर लूँ कि इनकी माँग क्या है। मैं जब उस व्यक्ति से अकेले में बात करने गया और पूछा कि आपकी माँग क्या है? तब उसने बड़े संकोच के साथ कहा कि आप पच्चीस हज़ार दिलवा देना। इसके साथ ही उसने इन पच्चीस हज़ार में से मुझे भी देने की बात की। इतनी कम राशि माँगने पर मुझे हैरानी हुई। मैंने उसे समझाते हुए कहा कि आपको पचास हज़ार के अलावा पाँच-सात हज़ार अपने कलाकारों और साजिंदों के आने-जाने का किराया माँगना होगा। मेरे इस सुझाव पर वह सकपका गया, लेकिन फिर मान भी गया। बाद में बात हुई तो पचास हज़ार में बात बन गई। दरअसल, मुझे पता था कि हरियाणवी की उस कलाकार उषा शर्मा को पारिश्रमिक के रूप में पचास हज़ार दिए जा चुके थे। इसके बाद हम दिल्ली लौट आए। और हाँ, जिस व्यक्ति से हमने बात की आपको सुनकर आश्चर्य होगा कि यह व्यक्ति कोई और नहीं, नैमसिंह सिसोदिया था। इस तरह हिंदी अकादमी दिल्ली द्वारा अपने 'लोक पर्व' के अंतर्गत दिल्ली के मंडी हाउस के त्रिवेणी सभागार में हाथरस शैली की नौटंकी अमर सिंह राठौर का मंचन हुआ। इस नौटंकी में कृष्णा कुमारी ने अमर सिंह राठौर की पत्नी हाड़ी रानी का अभिनय किया था। पूरा त्रिवेणी सभागार खचाखच भरा हुआ था।

अगले साल 'लोक पर्व' के दौरान फिर से नौटंकी के मंचन की बात चली, तो इस बार भी कृष्णा जी को बुलवाया गया। पिछली बार वे नैमसिंह सिसोदिया के साथ एक कलाकार के रूप में आई थीं, मगर इस बार उन्हें कृष्णा कुमारी एंड पार्टी के बैनर तले आमंत्रित किया गया। नैमसिंह सिसोदिया उनके साथ एक कलाकार के रूप में आए। इस बार उन्होंने भक्त पूरनमल का मंचन किया। इसी दौरान मेरे मन में आया कि क्यों न कृष्णा जी को केंद्र में रखकर एक उपन्यास लिखा जाए। मगर कुछ कारणों से मैंने इसे छोड़ दिया और मैं दूसरे काम में लग गया। इस बीच कृष्णा जी से भी बात होनी बंद हो गई। बाद में लगभग आठ साल के बाद जब एक मित्र ने पूछा कि मैं जो नौटंकी पर काम करने वाला था, वह कहाँ तक पहुँचा, तब मैंने कहा कि मैंने उसे छोड़ दिया है। इस पर मित्र ने कहा कि नहीं आपको यह काम करना चाहिए। मुझे उसकी यह सलाह ठीक लगी और एक बार फिर कृष्णा जी से संपर्क किया। संपर्क करने पर बहुत-सी स्थितियाँ बदल गईं। कृष्णा जी के पति डॉक्टर माथुर का अचानक देहांत हो चुका था। इसके बाद वे जब भी दिल्ली आतीं, वे मेरे घर ज़रूर आतीं।

आपने 'सुर बंजारन' के प्रेरणा-स्रोत के बारे में पूछा, तो मैंने जब फिर से इस पर काम करने का मन बनाया तब सबसे पहला सवाल मेरे मन में यह आया कि मुझे क्यों यह काम करना चाहिए। मेरे मन में शुरू से कृष्णा जी को लेकर उनकी कला से ज़्यादा लोकप्रियता की एक अलग छवि बनी हुई थी। इनकी लोकप्रियता का आलम यह था कि पश्चिमी उत्तर प्रदेश, मेवात व पूर्वी राजस्थान में सत्तर और अस्सी के दशक में जब शैक्षणिक संस्थानों का निर्माण हो रहा था, तब इनके संचालक कृष्णा जी को बुलाते और टिकट से जो पैसा इकट्ठा होता, उससे इनके भवनों का निर्माण कराते। मेरे कस्बे का आज जो राजकीय महाविद्यालय है उसके शुरूआती दो कमरे इनके शो से इकट्ठा हुए पैसे से बने हुए हैं। मुझे लगा कि एक कलाकार का योगदान सामाजिक निर्माण में इस तरह भी हो सकता है। इनकी जनप्रियता उस समय किसी फ़िल्मी स्टार से कम नहीं थी। तो मैंने यही सोचकर इनके कला-जीवन और आज लगभग विलुप्त हो चुकी नौटंकी परंपरा को केंद्र में रखकर 'सुर बंजारन' लिखना शुरू किया। इस उपन्यास के पूरा होने में खुद कृष्णा जी की भूमिका भी बड़ी महत्वपूर्ण है। इनके सहयोग के बिना यह संभव नहीं था।

- एक कला के रूप में उस समय नौटंकी और समाज के बीच का कैसा संबंध था? इसके प्रति आपका दृष्टिकोण कैसे निर्धारित किया गया? क्या आज भी कुछ-कुछ वैसा ही है?

दरअसल, उस दौर में आम जन की समझ नौटंकी को लेकर एक कला की समझ भले ही न रही हो, मगर वह इसका भरपूर रसस्वादन करता था। हालाँकि नौटंकियों में काम करने वाली स्त्री कलाकारों के प्रति आम दर्शक या नौटंकी प्रेमियों के मन में वही छवि थी, जैसी फणीश्वरनाथ रेणु की कहानी पर शैलेन्द्र द्वारा बनाई गई फ़िल्म 'तीसरी कसम' की नायिका हिरामन बाई के प्रति था। इसलिए हमारे मेवात में ही नहीं पूर्वी उत्तर प्रदेश में भी नौटंकी को 'रंडीन को नाच' कहा जाता था। नौटंकी को बहुत अच्छी नज़र से नहीं देखा जाता था। शायद यही कारण था कि नौटंकी में जहाँ पुरुष कलाकार सवर्ण जातियों के होते थे, वहीं उसके साज़िंदे और महिला कलाकार आर्थिक रूप से कमज़ोर दलित, ज़रायम पेशा और मुस्लिम समाज की होती थीं। कानपुर शैली नौटंकी की मशहूर अदाकार गुलाब बाई एक ऐसी ही बेड़िया जाति से आती थीं। मगर यहाँ कृष्णा कुमारी का नाम एक कलाकार के रूप में बड़े आदर के साथ लिया जाता था। इनके साथ किसी तरह की बे-अदबी मैंने कभी होती हुई नहीं सुनी। इन्होंने जितनी भी प्रस्तुतियाँ दी, अपनी शर्तों पर दीं। यह सम्मान कृष्णा जी ने अपनी आवाज़ के बल पर अर्जित किया था। आज भी मेवात के लोग इनका नाम उसी सम्मान के साथ लेते हैं, जैसे उस समय लिया करते थे। इसी सम्मान ने मेरे दृष्टिकोण को इस रूप में पुख्ता किया कि अगर एक कलाकार के पास उसकी कला है तो समाज अपने आप उसको सम्मान देना शुरू कर देता। उस समय दर्शकों का रैला सिर्फ़ नौटंकी देखने नहीं आता था, बल्कि कोयले की धधकती आँच पर सिंकते नक्कारा-नक्कारी की खनकती धमक और पेटीबाजे के महीन सुरों पर कृष्णा कुमारी के गले से निकलने वाले दौड़, दोहा, दोबोला, चौबोला, बहरतबील और दादरा, ठुमरी के आरोह-

अवरोह को सुनने आते थे। यह एक तरह से हाथरस शैली नौटंकी का यह स्वर्णिम मगर उसका अंतिम दौर था। मगर आज यह सिर्फ और सिर्फ स्मृतियों और इतिहास की बातें रह गई हैं।

- आपके लिए नौटंकी की विशेषता क्या है और क्यों यह लोकप्रिय हो पाई?

कला कोई भी हो अगर उसमें संप्रेषण की क्षमता है, तो वह अपने रसिक बनाने में सफल हो जाती है। नौटंकी की सबसे बड़ी विशेषता यह रही है कि हमारे जितने भी पौराणिक, ऐतिहासिक और मिथकीय चरित्र व घटनाएँ हैं, वे अपने दर्शकों से सीधा संवाद स्थापित करती हैं। उनके पात्र भावनात्मक रूप से उनसे जुड़ते हैं। इसका एक उदाहरण मैं 'हरिश्चंद्र उर्फ गुलशन का नाग' के उन दृश्यों के रूप में देना चाहूँगा, जब राजा हरिश्चंद्र और तारामती अर्थात् पति-पत्नी के बीच बेटे रोहिताश्व के शव के जलाने को लेकर संवाद होता है। इस पौराणिक कथा के बारे में हम सब जानते हैं। मगर माँ तारामती की भूमिका में जब पुत्र वियोग में कृष्णा जी बेटे से लिपट कर रोते हुए पति से गुहार लगाती थीं, तो दर्शकों की रूलाई फूट जाती थी। इसी तरह अमर सिंह राठौर में जब हाड़ी रानी बनी कृष्णा को अपने पति की धोखे से हुई हत्या का पता चलता है, जब मंच पर वह अपनी चूड़ियाँ तोड़ते हुए विलाप करती है, वह दृश्य दर्शक को अंदर तक हिला देता था। यही संप्रेषणीयता नौटंकी की सबसे बड़ी विशेषता है और इसकी इसी संगीतमयी संप्रेषणीयता ने इसे बेहद लोकप्रिय बनाया। इसकी इस लोकप्रियता में उस वाद्य यंत्रों जैसे नक्कारा-नक्कारी, पाँवों से चलनेवाला पेटीबाजा और दूसरे वाद्य यंत्र हैं। शैलेन्द्र की 'तीसरी कसम' की खूबसूरती एक तरफ़ उसकी कथा और अभिनय है, तो दूसरी तरफ़ वह पारंपरिक संगीत भी है, जिसमें इन वाद्य यंत्रों का इस्तेमाल किया गया है।

- आपके उपन्यास 'सुर बंजारन' में सांगीत अर्थात् नौटंकी के तीन अध्याय दिखाई देते हैं- कंपनी रूप, कलाकारों द्वारा संचालित गुप या कंपनियाँ और सरकारी अनुदान का एक कलाकार के जीवन और उसकी कला पर प्रभाव। ये उतार-चढ़ाव इस कला को किस तरह प्रभावित करते गए?

मैंने लिखते समय इस तरफ़ ध्यान नहीं दिया। मेरी कोशिश एक कलाकार के जीवन में कला रूपी उतार-चढ़ाव को दर्शाने की रही है। जैसा कि हम सब जानते हैं नौटंकियों के मंचन के साथ-साथ पारसी थिएटर के तहत नाटकों का मंचन होना शुरू हो गया था। आगा हश्र कश्मीरी के नाटकों का मंचन खूब होने लगा। चूँकि नौटंकी कंपनियों का दर्शक प्रबुद्ध जान तो था ही, उसका बहुत बड़ा दर्शक धुर गाँव-देहात का व्यक्ति था। जो मेलों में होने वाली नौटंकियों और फिर आर्थिक संसाधन जुटाने के लिए छोटे-छोटे मंचन होने लगा। ये नाटक कंपनियाँ आर्थिक रूप से काफ़ी मजबूत थीं। इनके पास कलाकारों, साज़िंदों और दूसरे कारिंदों की अच्छी-खासी संख्या होती थी। जब तक ये नौटंकी कंपनियाँ थीं, कला और कलाकार के हर दृष्टि से संपन्न थे। बाद में कंपनियाँ समाप्त होने

लगीं तो जीवनयापन के लिए खुद कलाकारों ने अपने ग्रुप बनाने शुरू कर दिए। आपको सुनकर आश्चर्य होगा कि जो कलाकार पहले एक साथ किसी कंपनी में काम करते थे, उन्होंने अपने-अपने ग्रुप बना लिए। बाद में खुद कृष्णा कुमारी ने 'कृष्णा कला केंद्र' नाम से अपना ग्रुप बना लिया। फिर जब यह विधा समाप्त होने लगी तो इसे दूसरी कलाओं की तरह संरक्षण देने की नीयत से सरकार कलाकार और संस्थाओं को अनुदान देने लगी। मगर जैसा कि हमारी व्यवस्था का मिजाज़ है उसकी नज़र कला और एक कलाकार का कोई मोल नहीं है। इससे जो भ्रष्टाचार और बेईमानी पनपी उसने हमारी लोक कलाओं को केंद्र में लाने या पुनर्जीवित करने के बजाय उल्टा हाशिए पर धकेल दिया। एक खाता-पीता सरकारी नौकर एक प्रतिबद्ध कलाकार को भी अनुदान लेने के लिए इस तरह विवश कर देता है कि जब तक वह उस सरकारी नौकर को चढ़ावा नहीं देगा, उसे अनुदान लेने की इस पूरी प्रक्रिया में सिवाय धक्के खाने के कुछ नहीं मिलेगा। मैं तो इस बात का गवाह रहा हूँ। इस प्रक्रिया के चलते कलाकार को खुद अपनी कला के प्रति वितृष्णा होने लगती है और उसमें अरुचि पैदा होने लगती है। दरअसल सरकार का काम ऐसी विलुप्त होती लोक कलाओं को जिस तरह ईमानदारी के साथ संरक्षण देना चाहिए, वह नहीं मिल रहा है।

-उपन्यास में औद्योगीकरण और नौटंकी विस्तार संबंध नज़र आता है?

औद्योगीकरण और बाज़ारवाद ने सबसे ज़्यादा हमारी लोक कलाओं को प्रभावित किया है। पहले कलाओं का प्रदर्शन कला के लिए होता था। बाद में धीरे-धीरे माँग कला पर हावी होती गई। इस माँग का असर यह हुआ कि असली कलाक नेपथ्य में चली गई और उसकी जगह नकलीपन और फूहड़ता ने ले ली। अब आप नौटंकी को ही लीजिए। इससे जुड़े कितने कलाकार हैं जो इसके छंदों का पालन करते हैं। सिर्फ़ गा लेना भर दौड़ या चौबोला नहीं होता। उसके लिए विधिवत अभ्यास और प्रशिक्षण की ज़रूरत होती है। मुझे लगता है कि दर्शकों को बाँधे रखने के लिए बीच-बीच में जिससे-जैसे हास्य कलाकार का दखल बढ़ता गया, नौटंकी एक फूहड़ता का पर्याय बनती चली गई। इसीलिए नौटंकी शब्द का इस्तेमाल आज व्यंग्य के रूप में होता है।

-कथ्य और कलाकार। आपकी नज़र में विधा की ताकत किधर है?

इस विधा की ताकत, कथ्य और कलाकार दोनों में है। विशेषरूप से हाथरस शैली की नौटंकी की। क्योंकि इस शैली की असली ताकत इसका गायन है। कहने का आशय यह है कि यह विशुद्ध गले की विधा है। अभिनय इसका गौण पक्ष है। गुलाब बाई की तो पहचान ही उसका यह दादरा है 'नदी नारे न जाओ, श्याम पेंया परूँ', जो बाद में 1963 में बनी फ़िल्म 'मुझे जीने दो' में आशा भोंसले ने भी गाया।

- कृष्णा कुमारी जी की कौन-सी भूमिका सबसे अधिक लोकप्रिय रही?

मेरा मानना है कि नौटंकी अमर सिंह राठौर में हाड़ी रानी की भूमिका सबसे अधिक लोकप्रिय रही। एक तरह से इस नौटंकी की हाड़ी रानी की यह भूमिका उसकी ताकत है। इसके बाद में नौटंकी हरिश्चंद्र-तारामती में तारामती के अभिनय को उनकी लोकप्रिय भूमिकाओं में मानता हूँ। फिर इंदल हरण और भक्त पूरनमल नौटंकियों में उनका बड़ा सजीव भूमिका रही। इस लोकप्रियता की सबसे बड़ी वजह रही है उनकी गायन कला। कई बार ये अतिरिक्त छूट लेते हुए जिस तरह दौड़, दोहा, दुबोला, चौबोला, बहरतबील या दादरा के बीच लोक गीतों का प्रयोग करती थीं, उससे दर्शक अपने आप उस भूमिका से अपने आपको जुड़ा महसूस करने लगता था।

- नौटंकी प्रदर्शन को लेकर आपकी कुछ स्मृतियाँ होंगी?

कृष्णा कुमारी जी को लेकर आम जन में बहुत से किस्से किंवदंतियों की तरह प्रचलित थे। जब वे अपनी फ़िएट से शो करने आती थीं, तब लोग उनकी इस कार को इसलिए देखने आते थे कि वह कलाकार कैसी होगी जो शो करने अपनी कार से आती थी। कई बार तो ऐसा होता था कि आयोजक इनकी कार को पहले ले आते थे ताकि लोगों को यकीन हो जाए कि कृष्णा कुमारी आ रही हैं। एक तरह से नौटंकी प्रेमियों में इनके प्रति ग़ज़ब की दीवानगी थी। ऐसे बहुत-सी स्मृतियाँ हैं। जैसे जब मैंने पहली बार अपने कस्बे में इनका शो देखा था, तब मैं आठवीं में पढ़ता था। टिकट लेना बूते से बाहर था, तो कनात से बनाई गई दीवार के नीचे चोरी-छिपे अंदर घुस कर इनका शो देखा था। इसके बाद जब कोई तीस साल बाद इनको 2007 में मथुरा में देखा था, तो मैं एकाएक भाव विह्वल हो गया था।

- उपन्यास में 'अमर सिंह राठौर' का उल्लेख कई बार हुआ है। इसका कारण क्या है?

जैसा कि उपन्यास 'सुर बंजारन' हाथरस शैली की अदाकारा कृष्णा कुमारी और नौटंकी के लगभग पिछले साठ साल के सांस्कृतिक इतिहास को समेटे हुए है, इसलिए स्वाभाविक है कि इस बहाने उस नौटंकी का सर्वाधिक उल्लेख हुआ है, जो बेहद लोकप्रिय थी। अगर आप देखें कृष्णा जी ने हाथरस के बिजली कॉटन मिल में अपने जीवन का जो सबसे पहले शो किया था, वह अमर सिंह राठौर ही था। इस शो के बाद वे इस कला की शोहरत की बुलंदियों को छूने लगी थी। सबसे ज़्यादा मंचन भी अपने पूरे अभिनय काल में इन्होंने इसी नौटंकी के किए थे। दूसरी बात, एक लेखक के साथ-साथ एक आम नौटंकी प्रेमी के रूप में मुझे भी यह सबसे ज़्यादा प्रिय रही है। चूँकि यह उपन्यास है और उपन्यास, यथार्थ और कल्पना से उपजा रचनात्मक कौशल माना जाता है इसलिए कई बार इस नौटंकी का आना स्वाभाविक है। कथा को प्रमाणिक और सुरुचिपूर्ण बनाने के लिए कुछ प्रसंगों की आवश्यकता होती है। जैसे जिस समय एनएसडी में इस नौटंकी का मंचन हो रहा होता है, तभी इस उपन्यास की

नायिका के पति की असामयिक निधन हो जाता है। और संयोग देखिए कि जब इसकी सूचना ग्रुप के दूसरे कलाकारों को मिलती, उस समय शहंशाह के महल में अमर सिंह राठौर के धोखे से मारे जाने का दृश्य चल रहा होता है। उस दृश्य में हाड़ी रानी विलाप कर रही होती है। लेखक ने इन दोनों प्रसंगों को आपस में गूँथने की कोशिश की है, जो स्वाभाविक भी लगती है। दरअसल, यह लेखक की कल्पना है। कई बार कुछ चीज़ें जिसे लेखक जानबूझ कर नहीं देता, बल्कि कथानक की माँग के अनुसार आ जाती हैं। ऐसा ही अमर सिंह राठौर को लेकर हुआ।

- अमर सिंह राठौर की लोकप्रियता को आप कैसे देखते हैं?

मेरा मानना है कि नौटंकी अमर सिंह राठौर की रचना इसके लेखक सांगीत शिरोमणि हिंदी भूषण पंडित नथाराम शर्मा गौड़ ने बड़ी ही सूझबूझ और कौशल के साथ किया है। भारतीय समाज की जैसी संरचना है और उसमें जो विशेषताएँ पाई जाती हैं उनका समावेश इसमें किया गया है। एक ऐतिहासिक कथानक होने के बावजूद इसमें सांप्रदायिक सौहार्द के वे सारे तत्व विद्यमान हैं, जो एक रचना को कालजयी बनाते हैं। एक तरफ़ शहंशाह की उदारता है, तो दूसरी तरफ़ बादशाह होकर वह दरबार के नियमों का चाहकर भी अतिक्रमण नहीं कर पाता है। यह जानते हुए भी कि अमर सिंह राठौर की नया-नया गौना हुआ है, वह उसे छुट्टियों में रियायत नहीं दे पाता है। गौना करके लौटते समय रास्ते में एक मुस्लिम पात्र नरशहबाज़ पठान से भी भेंट होती है, जो मारे प्यास के व्याकुल है। अमर सिंह उसको पानी देता है। इसके बाद नरशहबाज़ पठान कहता है कि कभी विपत्ति आए तो उसे याद कर लेना। यहाँ पानी दरअसल प्राकृतिक प्रतीक के रूप में आता है कि जीवन में पानी का क्या मोल है। इसी तरह एक दरबारी सलावत खाँ की ईर्ष्या और खुद अमर सिंह के साले अर्जुन गौड़ द्वारा अमर सिंह की घात लगाकर हत्या करना, जैसे प्रसंग इस नौटंकी को बेहद रोचक बनाते हैं। इसके अलावा हाड़ी रानी का विलाप ऐसे कई भावपूर्ण दृश्य हैं जो दर्शक को बांधे रखते हैं। नौटंकी कला की लोकप्रियता का एक मजबूत पक्ष है उसका लोक संगीत। मैंने देखा है कि नक्कारा-नक्कारी की खनक के साथ ढोलक की संगत और हारमोनियम व पेतिबाजे के महीन स्वर भी इसकी लोकप्रियता का एक पक्ष रहा है। हालाँकि नौटंकी की मूल आत्मा का क्षरण हास्य कलाकार की उपस्थिति के चलते भी हुआ। क्योंकि आगे जाकर हास्य की आड़ में पनपती फूहड़ता नौटंकी की ज़रूरत बन गई। ऐसा नौटंकी के साथ ही नहीं हुआ, बल्कि नाटकों के पितामह आगा हश्र कश्मीरी के नाटकों के मंचन के दौरान भी ऐसा हुआ। आगे जाकर तो स्थिति यह हो गई कि दृश्य बदलने के दौरान जब हास्य कलाकारों को मंच पर बुलाया जाने लगा और वे जो कुछ बोलते या गाते, सालों बाद वे आगा हश्र कश्मीरी के नाटकों के टेक्स्ट का हिस्सा बन गए। जब इनके नाटक पुस्तकाकार में आने लगीं, तो इन हास्य कलाकारों के संवाद भी आगा हश्र कश्मीरी के समझ कर उनमें शामिल होते रहे। नौटंकी जन मानस तक किसी बात को संप्रेषित करने का बहुत अच्छा माध्यम था।

- क्या नौटंकी का मंचन सामाजिक सद्भाव का संदेश देपाने में एक कारगर माध्यम साबित हो सकता है?

नौटंकी ही नहीं हमारी जितनी भी लोक कलाएँ हैं उनमें सामाजिक सद्भाव का संदेश देने की पूरी क्षमता है। इसका एक कारण यह है कि यह एकदम देसी और स्थानीय कला है, जो दर्शकों तक अपना संदेश पहुँचाने में पूरी तरह सफल होती है। दरअसल नौटंकी या सांगीत के कई अलग-अलग रूप हैं। हरियाणा में सांग तो ब्रज में इसे सांगीत कहते हैं, जो बाद में नौटंकी कहलाने लगी। जिस समय भारतीय समाज में मनोरंजन के माध्यम और साधन बेहद सीमित थे, हमारी लोक कलाएँ उतनी ही समृद्ध थीं। धीरे-धीरे जैसे-जैसे टेलीविज़न, सिनेमा घर और इसके बाद इंटरनेट अस्तित्व में आया, मनोरंजन के विकल्प पैदा हो गए। आज स्थिति यह है कि बड़े और छोटे शहरों से सिनेमा हॉल गायब हो गए हैं। एक समय था जब सिनेमा घरों के परदों से सामाजिक सद्भाव के संदेश दिए जाते थे। कहने का तात्पर्य यह है कि जैसे-जैसे प्रौद्योगिकी (टेक्नोलॉजी) का विस्तार होता गया हमारे पारंपरिक माध्यमों की भूमिका भी खत्म होती चली गई। नौटंकी भी इसकी चपेट में आ गई। हाँ, अगर पारसी थिएटर की तर्ज़ पर नौटंकी कला में कुछ प्रयोग होते, तो शायद आज यह उस तरह खत्म नहीं होती, जिस तेज़ी के साथ हो रही है।

- क्या नौटंकी का मंचन सामाजिक सद्भाव का संदेश दे पाने में एक कारगर माध्यम साबित हो सकता है?

नौटंकी ही नहीं हमारी जितनी भी लोक कलाएँ हैं, उनमें सामाजिक सद्भाव का संदेश देने की पूरी क्षमता है। इसका एक कारण यह है कि यह एकदम देसी और स्थानीय कला है, जो दर्शकों तक अपना संदेश पहुँचाने में पूरी तरह सफल होती है। दरअसल, नौटंकी या सांगीत के कई अलग-अलग रूप हैं। हरियाणा में सांग तो ब्रज में इसे सांगीत कहते हैं, जो बाद में नौटंकी कहलाने लगी। जिस समय भारतीय समाज में मनोरंजन के माध्यम और साधन बेहद सीमित थे, हमारी लोक कलाएँ उतनी ही समृद्ध थीं। धीरे-धीरे जैसे-जैसे टेलीविज़न, सिनेमा घर और इसके बाद इंटरनेट अस्तित्व में आया, मनोरंजन के विकल्प पैदा हो गए। आज स्थिति यह है कि बड़े और छोटे शहरों से सिनेमा हॉल गायब हो गए हैं। एक समय था, जब सिनेमा घरों के परदों से सामाजिक सद्भाव के संदेश दिए जाते थे। कहने का तात्पर्य यह है कि जैसे-जैसे प्रौद्योगिकी (टेक्नोलॉजी) का विस्तार होता गया हमारे पारंपरिक माध्यमों की भूमिका भी खत्म होती चली गई। नौटंकी भी इसकी चपेट में आ गई। हाँ, अगर पारसी थिएटर की तर्ज़ पर नौटंकी कला में कुछ प्रयोग होते, तो शायद आज यह उस तरह खत्म नहीं होती, जिस तेज़ी के साथ हो रही है।

-अमर सिंह राठौर की सफलता इसकी नाटकीयता में है, या इसके ऐतिहासिक शौर्य प्रदर्शन या मनोरंजन में है?

मेरी दृष्टि में इसकी सफलता का रहस्य इसकी नाटकीयता, मनोरंजन और इसके ऐतिहासिक शौर्य प्रदर्शन में तीनों में छिपा हुआ है। हमें यह नहीं भूलना चाहिए कि नौटंकी साहित्य की एक विधा फ़िक्शन का ही प्रदर्शन रूप है। लेखक ने इसको लिखते समय उन सारे कथा तत्वों का समावेश किया है, जो एक प्रदर्शन कला को लोकप्रिय बनाते हैं। एक और तत्व जो नौटंकी में लालित्य पैदा करता है, वह है इस विधा की भाषा। जिस तरह फ़ारसी, उर्दू, खड़ी बोली, ब्रज और अंग्रेज़ी मिश्रित छंद स्वरबद्ध होकर कलाकार के गले से निकल अपनी शास्त्रीयता के साथ दर्शकों के कानों में घुलते हैं, तो दर्शक अभीभूत होकर उसमें खो जाता है। मैं हाथरस शैली की नौटंकियों के रचयिता पंडित नथाराम शर्मा की इस अद्भुत रचना कौशल को प्रणाम करता हूँ। मुझे जैसे साहित्य के विद्यार्थियों को यह सीखने की ज़रूरत है कि भाषा भी किसी रचना की लोकप्रियता और उसकी सफलता का आधार हो सकता है।

- क्या नौटंकी अमर सिंह राठौर को ऐतिहासिक माना जाना चाहिए?

देखिए, इसमें तो कोई दो राय नहीं है कि अमर सिंह राठौर मुग़ल काल का एक वास्तविक ऐतिहासिक पात्र था। अब सवाल यह है कि एक लेखक ने इसे अपनी रचना या कहिए नौटंकी का कथानक क्यों चुना? इसका एक कारण मुझे अमर सिंह राठौर की वह बहादुरी और निडरता लगती है, जिसकी अपेक्षा हमें अपने शासकों से रही है। अगर देखें तो इस नौटंकी में ऐसा कुछ खास नज़र नहीं आता। एक हिंदू सरदार की साधारण-सी कथा है। मगर इसे जिस तरह रचा गया है और इसमें वे सारे ऐतिहासिक पक्षों को समेटा गया है, वह इसे ऐतिहासिक दृष्टि से प्रमाणिक ही बनाता है।

-नौटंकी 'अमर सिंह राठौर' का दूसरा भाग क्या मंचन में शिथिल पड़ जाता है?

मैं अगर इसे एक दर्शक की नज़र से देखूँ तो मेरा मानना है कि एक आम दर्शक की रुचि वहीं समाप्त हो जाती है, जब अमर सिंह राठौर की धोखे से उसी का साला हत्या कर देता है। दरअसल, एक दर्शक की रुचि, वह भी नायक प्रधान नौटंकी या नाटक में, तभी तक बनी रहती है, जब तक उसका नायक मंच पर रहता है। दरअसल नौटंकी अमर सिंह राठौर का सबसे खूबसूरत हिस्सा वह है जब हाड़ी रानी से विवाह उपरांत वह गौना करने के बाद वपिस दरबार लौटने लगता है। इस दौरान पति-पत्नी के बीच दोहा, चौबोला, कव्वाली, दौड़, दादरा, बहरतबील में पगा जो संवाद होता है, वह इसकी सबसे बड़ी ताकत है। किसी भी कथानक का अगर नायक ज़ल्दी नेपथ्य में चला जाता है, या कहिए उसकी भूमिका समाप्त हो जाती है, तो दर्शक का उससे अलगाव शुरू हो जाता है। संयोग से अमर सिंह राठौर का पहले भाग के लगभग शुरू में ही क़त्ल हो जाता है जिससे मंचन में शिथिल आ जाती है।

-हाड़ी रानी के पात्र को कैसे आँका जाए? इसकी क्या खूबियाँ हैं?

हाड़ी रानी के किरदार को मैं उस दौर की एक पारंपरिक और कथित तौर संस्कारवान स्त्री के रूप में देखता हूँ। उसमें वे सारे स्त्रियायचित गुण मौजूद हैं, जो ऐसे राजपूत परिवारों की स्त्रियों में होने चाहिए। उदाहरण के लिए एक नई-नवेली दुल्हन की तरह वह अपने पति अमर सिंह को प्यार से रिझाने से लेकर गुस्से का इज़हार करती हुई, दरबार में जाने से रोकती है। इतना ही नहीं पति के रूप में अमर सिंह राठौर एक पुरुष की तरह उसे हंटर मार कर चुप कराने की कोशिश करता है। और तो और पति की हत्या के बाद हाड़ी रानी पति के साथ सती होने के लिए भी कहती है। मुझे लगता है कि परंपराओं के नाम पर यह सती जैसी कुप्रथा का महिला मंडन है। जब हिंदी अकादमी द्वारा नौटंकी अमर सिंह राठौर का मंचन हुआ था, तब कृष्णा जी को यह निर्देश दे दिया गया था कि मंच पर ये दोनों प्रसंग नहीं होंगे। इसलिए मुझे यह पात्र उस दृष्टि से एक पतिव्रता स्त्री का पात्र ज़्यादा लगा। वैसे भी यह नौटंकी पुरुष प्रधानता और उसके पराक्रम की महिमा का बखान करता है इसलिए हाड़ रानी की भूमिका उतनी ही है, जितनी उसकी भूमिका ऐसे परिवारों में होती है।

-कवीन विक्टोरिया को लेकर लिखी गई प्रशस्ति या वंदना क्या कभी मंचित हुई होगी? यहाँ भी इसमें दो राय हैं। एक यह कि यह वंदना विक्टोरिया को लेकर लिखी गई होगी या एलिजाबेथ को लेकर?

यह संभव नहीं है कि पूरी नौटंकी का मंचन हो। प्रकाशित रचना और उसके मंचन की अपनी-अपनी सीमाएँ होती हैं। चूँकि मंचन के लिए समय की बाध्यता होती है और वैसे भी नौटंकियों का मंचन आम लोगों के मनोरंजन के लिए होता था, इसलिए पूरे का मंचन न तो संभव था, न उसकी कोई ज़रूरत होती है। रही बात इसकी कि इसमें विक्टोरिया के बजाय एलिजाबेथ की प्रशस्ति या वंदना की गई है, इसके बारे में कुछ भी नहीं कहा जा सकता। लेखक अगर अंग्रेज़ी में दोहा और चौबोले जैसे छंदों के साथ इसकी रचना करता है, तो बहुत सोच-विचार के साथ किया होगा।

-आपने 'सुर बंजारन' में नौटंकी के नाम पर हास्य मंचनों का उल्लेख किया है। यह महल उपन्यासकार की कल्पना है, या यह यथार्थ पर आधारित है?

आपने नौटंकी के नाम पर जिन हास्य मंचनों का जिक्र किया है वह इन दिनों खूब हो रहे हैं। बल्कि हास्य के नाम पर दर्शकों को फूहड़ता और अश्लीलता परोसी जा रही है। रामपत हारामी की नौटंकी और भोजपुरी नौटंकी नाच इसके ताज़ा उदाहरण हैं। ये नौटंकियाँ एक ज़माने में दिल्ली के मंडी हाउस के सप्रू हासउ में मानचित होने वाले

पंजाबी के 'जीजा दी हाँ, साली दी ना' जैसे द्विअर्थी नाटकों का दूसरा रूप है। इतना ही नहीं कृष्णा जी के साथ काम करने वाले हास्य कलाकार चौधरी धर्मपाल की हाथरस शैली की नौटंकी के नाम पर आपको यू ट्यूब पर इन्हें देखा जा सकता है। मैंने नौटंकी के साथ होने वाली इन्हीं विडम्बनाओं को उद्घाटित करने का प्रयास किया है।

Annexure-3

27/08/2021

Gmail - Report: When a puppeteer remembers



Tripurari Sharma <tripurari56@gmail.com>

Report: When a puppeteer remembers

ramlal bhatt <ramlalbhatt@gmail.com>
To: Tripurari Sharma <tripurari56@gmail.com>

Thu, Aug 26, 2021 at 10:02 PM

आदरणीय त्रिपुरारी जी,

सबसे पहले तो बहुत बहुत धन्यवाद कि आपने इतना महत्वपूर्ण लेख लिखा है जिसने मेरी यादों को ताजा किया है। बहुत गहराई से और प्रभावशाली ढंग से आपने इसे लिखा है जो इसमें रुचि रखने वालों को सीख देता है। सारी जानकारियां इसमें सही हैं और इससे मेरी पूरी सहमति है।

पपेट और पपेटियर के लिए ये बहुत महत्वपूर्ण लेख रहेगा।

धन्यावाद

रामलाल

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