

Executive Summary

of

Minor Research Project

Entitled

**CONTRIBUTION, OBSTRUCTIONS AND SCOPE: A STUDY OF
ZADIPATTI RANGBHOO MI WITH REFERENCE TO SHRI VENKATESH
NATYA MANDAL**

Principal Investigator

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Objectives of the Study:

The present research project intends at exploring the contribution of Shri Venkatesh Natya Mandal of Navargaon, Dist. Chandrapur in the overall progress of Zadipatti Rang Bhoomi and also in forming a theatre culture in the region. It also explores the development of this performing group through last three generations. Stating particularly its contribution, the hurdles in keeping the pace with the time and the other aspects such as quality actors, negligence of government agencies, lack of basic facilities, and the wider scope to this mass movement. The prime objective of the study is to illustrate the past and present of this 150 years old theatre with a glimpse of future through actual visits, interviews, original scripts and viewing the performances.

Actual Plan of the Study:

First Year: As the work is field based; the prime focus of the study during the first year of study was data collection, visits to various libraries, visits to institutions and individuals.

Second- Year: Classification of data, analysis of data, planning of chapter scheme, preparation of rough draft, editing of the draft, computerizing of the final draft were undertaken. On the other hand a live discussion with following theatre scholars was stimulating and path-showing.

- Mr. Makrand Sathe, Pune
- Dr. Tutun Mukherjee, Hyderabad
- Dr. Mustajeeb Khan, Aurangabad.
- Dr. Ajay Joshi, Pune
- Dr. Shailaja Wadikar, Nanded

Chapter Scheme:

The project is divided into four chapters with following details.

Chapter I- Introduction

Chapter II- Contribution of Shri Venkatesh Natya Mandal

Chapter III Obstructions and Scope

Chapter –IV Conclusion

Research Methodology:

The research for this project is field based. Therefore the researcher intends at analysis of data, analysis of views and opinions and a critical analysis of scripts.

Overall Summary:

The Theatre is being accepted in this Zhadipatti (jungle area) not as an end in itself but as an undividable part of a large organizational set up for the developments of people. In other words, theatre has been expected to perform a vital role in shaping and reshaping the lives of ordinary men and women. In the remote villages of Chandrapur and other districts of Eastern Vidharbha has not been an effective medium to enlighten and entertain the people. Therefore, theatre becomes pre-dominant in these circumstances to formulate the life-centric issues and everyday struggle.

The Rangbhoomi strives to shape the performances through suggestions, interruptions, and valuable ideas conveyed by audience. Some time the audience shows complete disappointment with the ongoing performance. It compels the writer to modify the script for better performance next time. No proper script, no proper training and less technical support yet Zhadipatti is among the few promising performing agencies in Maharashtra. The tribal belts in the dense forest covered regions of Vidharbha have been listening the music and dialogues from the Zhadipatti stage for more than one hundred years now. It has been the source of entertainment and earning for lakhs of villages in its surroundings. The theatre runs in the veins of villagers in different villages of Gadchiroli, Bhandara, Chandrapur, and Gondia districts of Eastern Vidharbha. The early mornings during the season (Post Diwali to late March) begin either with a prolonged song or a comic dialogue. The Zhadipatti theatre is developed thorough *Dandar*, *Khadi Gammat*, *Tamasha*, *Nakkal*, the old folk performances in Maharashtra. The budget and response of this 'thriving small industry' has been over-whelming for many years. Even mainstream theatre failed to receive such a response of the audience and also to raise handsome annual income. More than hundred theatre companies are found in this region and Wadsa, Dist. Gadchiroli is the centre of zhadipatti performances. The researcher visited Wadsa during the course of this project to meet, interact the concerned body of people and

also to learn the actual mechanism. More than hundred offices of various theatre groups have been set up for convenience of the people who wish to book a show. It is expected that they should intimate first to the office as far as location and date concerned. A group of young people from any village of eastern vidharbha particularly has made this practice a means of their bread and butter. The four to six months of actual season are very fruitful to them. Their responsibility is to book a show, take it to their village, look after uninterrupted conditions for actual performance. The fixed amount is being paid to the owner of the group and the remaining amount is being equally shared among the organizers. The active group in the village thus earns some money out of this business more particularly during that period when there is no work left in their farms. On the other hand, the small businessmen/women in the village like paanwala, tea vendor, and some others earn well during the performance of the show. The rest of the villagers are happy to spectaculate the show in their own village. In this way, the whole village is being involved irrespective of their community differences; in the actual performance. It is just like a feast they have been awaiting from a fixed period of time.

Preference is being given almost all the time to popular choice. The villagers have an idea of record- breaking plays of the season. They demand performance of such plays in their village. The responsibility of the organizing group is to get the show booked on any terms. They rush Wadsa, contact the concerned office-bearers and get it done before other bookings. Delay may hamper actual income of the group. Therefore, possible efforts are being taken by them. The land has a very old dramatic tradition with millions of theatre loving people. Farming is the main occupation of most of the people in this region. It has been a continuous process for last one hundred year and more to experience the present state of this theatre industry. There is no such theatre industry in the whole country even to formulate such a wide network of people. It seems as a community movement involving a number of groups of people.

The eastern Vidharbha hails of being a land of Dandar, a folk type; continued for more than eighty years in the region. The tribal youth more particularly of Gaund community used to undertake significant performances of this folk type. In course of time, Dandar performances continued to decline. With a steady decline of these

performances, there is an emergence of dramatic performances though slow but in steady speed. There wasn't any particular favorite subject for performances but these dramatic performances were social in nature. The playwrights centered their focus on prominent social issues. And more particularly, these dramatists were imitative in nature. The celebrated Marathi plays were performed in different parts of the region. The response obtained in these earlier days was quite encouraging. In course time, several serious socio-economical issues were considered for the actual performance. It was not that much easy to maintain quality all the way in the script. Therefore, a number of ordinary performances continued to take place for a great deal of time. But on the other hand, some good writers were taking all the possible efforts to maintain the level of quality. It is certainly appreciative to know their sincerity in this regard. The contribution of these skilled people expects a due respect for their commitment and love for theatre. Today, it's being a pleasing experience to visit these various places and spectaculate these performances. For more than four months the bonanza continuous to leave the audience with an unforgettable experience. Even the actors from Pune and Mumbai are interested now to demonstrate their talent and earn their livelihood out of their active involvement. It pleases to see the way

The Rangbhoomi has produced Late Dhananjay Nakade, Harishchandra Borkar, Pramod Munghate, Sanjay Niwekar, HiranmanLaanze, Sadanand Borkar, Chudaram Ballarpure, Vinod Morande, and Vijaya Dewalikar who occupy a prominent position in the theatre of Maharashtra.

The performances covered under Zhadiparti Rangbhoomi are broadly divided into two groups- 1) Performances on concrete stage 2) Make Shift Plays. As far conventional performing groups concerned, the name of Shri Venkatesh Naty Mandal is being taken with reverence and honour. It was founded before more than one hundred years by the fore fathers of Sandanand Borkar, leading organizer, producer, script writer and director from young generation of professionals. His family has been associated with the Mandal for the last three generations. In a truer sense the natya mandal has been running a people's movement because it has been of the people, for the people, and by the people since its inception. Without any sponsors and commercial patrons SVNMM succeeded in obtaining a heterogeneous multitude. The

performing group has produced its own playwrights, actors, and technicians. As a matter of fact, it survives without any external support. The fuel on which it runs is the outstanding support of general audience. The contribution of the group in sustaining the dramatic movement in tribal belts of Maharashtra is certainly a matter of worth consideration. But on the other hand, the hurdles confronted by the professionals associated with this performing group should not be neglected.

There are three phases of plays performed under the banner of SVNМ, as far its history is concerned. The first phase reveals the adaptation of mythological subjects for presentation. The second phase is all about the borrowed scripts and their presentation. Whereas in the third phase there is a growing consciousness for contemporary social issues. Stating the development of Mandal in an interview with the researcher, Mr. Parmanand Borkar puts on record: “ Shri Vyankatesh Natya Mandal was established over hundred years now. It was started with a purpose to make people conscious against cruel British rule. The troop was visiting all nearby villages of Navargaon in those days with least prop and local artists with this spirited purpose. There was no intention to earn the money out of these performances but to do something for a patriotic cause. Britishers tried to suppress the performances by putting the actors in jail but the passionate actors continued the performances in the four walls of jail. In those days as it is even today, it was difficult to have women actors. Hence men were compelled to perform the role of women. What SVNМ is today nothing but whole-hearted devotion and innate love for the theatre of hundreds of local artists in shaping this People’s Industry”. He stated further the hurdles in keeping the pace with time and also revealed scripts, quality actors, and negligence of government agencies, lack of basic facilities and the wider scope to this mass movement. The researcher tried to understand the obstacles in performance before them by meeting the senior artists of the Mandal such as Mule Sir, Vishvanath Parwante and others. He enjoyed the performances and astounded to experience tremendous response. The period between Post Diwali to March of every year is a prime time for performances in this region. The small region is crowded with various performing groups from different parts of Vidharbha. But for SVNМ the season starts on the auspicious occasion of *Makar Sankranti*. The Mandal has its own concrete,

permanent auditorium with all basic equipments. The only concrete theatre house is credited, in this way to SVNM. The group has performed more than one hundred plays to the date with Sadanand Borkar as their resident writer, producer, and director. The plays penned by him *Maze Kunku Meech Pusale* (I decided my own fate) and *Aatmahatya* (Suicide) receive an over-whelming response even after a great number of performances of these plays. These plays were performed almost in all the villages in the vicinity of Nawargaon. Still there is growing demand from the theatre lovers for a few more performances. Both the plays are interwoven with the society and culture. The plays explore socio-cultural, economical reality and strive to suggest a solution to the problems highlighted in respective plays.

Maze Kunku Meech Pusale (I decided my own fate) lashes at the superstitions still prevailing in our society. Not only uneducated families but educated and learned families also fall prey to these evil superstitions. A schizophrenic person becomes a victim of superstition. His educated wife takes him to a *mantrik*. He is being kept hungry under hot sun that leads ultimately to his death. The playwright urges to clean such superstitions from our mind and we should build a society based on rational ideas. The play has a record break shows till the date.

Aatmahatya (Suicide) presents the tragic state of farmers of Vidhrbha who have been compelled to commit suicide due to continuous draught. The play, with Sadanand Borkar as its lead actor, depicts the facets that lead a farmer to commit suicide. It was selected for the SAARC Theatre Festival in Trichur, Kerla in December 2008. There are social, economical, and political reasons behind suicide of farmers. Constant failures on various fronts lead a farmer to finish his life. The play stages a poor farmer family with a number of problems related to their survival. The play in three acts, appeals the sensibility of audience who has a concern for the issues of farmers in their region. A poor father commits suicide and his three sons remain helpless. The play represents the tragic fate of thousands of farmer who lead the way of suicide for a very little amount of debt. On the other hand, the play states how the villages have been gradually changing their previous identity. All the way, the play connotes harsh realities related to lives of farmers.

Both the plays signify writer's awareness for the social issues and also an urge to get a solution. Disclosing the present situation, Sadanand Borkar expresses: "This theatre is largely losing its indigenous nature, where primarily the language used is greatly influenced by the urban dialects" (Joshi: 337). The hurdles are numerous but the scope is wider even in the world of TV and Internet to this indigenous theatre.

At present, the most serious issue before the Mandal is to have regular artists for the performances usually taking place from the month of January onwards. The researcher met the concerned authorities of the Mandal and interacted with them regarding the present state of SVNMM. According to them, there is a great difficulty in getting women artists even today. The artists from outside have huge demands and such demands cannot be easily fulfilled. Wadsa is the centre of Zhadipatti performances. A number of theatre companies have been operated from this place. The artists from outside prefer to perform for Wadsa than SVNMM due to the trifling amount they get from the producers. On the other hand, the local artists are considerably decreasing in numbers. Either they have been migrated to larger places or shifted their interest to other fields. Hence, it has been a problem to find good artists for the performance and also script writers. Except Sadanand Borkar, SVNMM has not any other writer to pen the plays. Hence there is always a difficulty to maintain continuity in the performances and also to maintain variety in the subject.

Amidst different obstructions, SVNMM has a great scope due to a number of reasons. The foremost among them is legacy. It is the oldest and highly revered theatre group in the region. The patriotic initiation of the group in those early years is still remembered and respected. Most of the actors associated with SVNMM have a good knowledge of performance and theatre techniques. Young talent has been attracted towards SVNMM. The writer, director and proprietor Mr. Sadanand Borkar is keen to script well. Therefore, amidst the hurdles; SVNMM deserves a glorious future.

The foremost findings of the project can be listed as below:

- i) Shri Vyankatesh Natya Mandal is the oldest theatre agency in the region.
- ii) The SVNMM performances served a dual purpose right from its inception i.e.- entertainment and social awareness
- iii) Zhadipatti Rangbhoomi has become a people-centric theatre movement.

- iv) The socio-economical as well as cultural impressions of this Rangbhoomi on the lives of the people in Eastern Vidharbha can't be dissociated.
- v) Different groups of the people have been associated with SVNМ and other theatre groups in the region due to certain socio-economical reasons.
- vi) SVNМ has been providing a platform to the budding talent in the region.
- vii) It has been responsible to generate jobs at least for a speculated period of the year.
- viii) There are certain hurdles such as lack of government attention, quality scripts, least theatre houses and also degrading of performance quality.
- ix) Except Sadanand Borkar there isn't any other influencing face with SVNМ.
- x) There is a need to review the scripts and also a need to go for offbeat subjects.
- xi) SVNМ has certainly created new possibilities of performance excellence.
