

Gujarati Bhavāi Theatre: Today and Tomorrow



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Abstract

Bhavāi, pioneered in the fourteenth century by Asāit Thākar, has been a very popular folk theatre form of Gujarat entertaining and enlightening Gujarati people and incorporating cultural ethos, mythology, folklores, History, dance and music in itself.

The paper 'Gujarati Bhavāi Theatre: Today and Tomorrow' endeavours to study the present scenario of Bhavāi theatre in Gujarat and undertakes to examine issues and challenges of survival and revival of Bhavāi in the age of globalization. While the local issues are more seriously addressed by the elite in the global age, a study of the present state of Bhavāi would be both eye-opening and fruitful.

Among the major issues and challenges of Bhavāi include poor financial condition of Bhavāi players, lack of sponsorship, lack of Bhavāi training centres, lack of technology in promotion of Bhavāi, dominance of the main stream Gujarati literature and theatre, popularity of Commercial Theatre in urban areas, influence of television and the Internet, lack of comparative study/research of Bhavāi with other Indian folk theatre forms.

The paper also proposes strategies for survival and revival of Bhavāi as the folk theatre form of Gujarat. Developing sense of contribution to the seven hundred years long tradition of Bhavāi, systematic training to Bhavāi players, establishment of Bhavāi Training Centres, introducing Bhavāi to the new generation, inclusion of Bhavāi in the syllabi of literature students, financial support from Corporate Houses, NGOs and State Government are but some of the most significant strategies to be developed for the survival and revival of Bhavāi in the age of globalization.

Keywords: Theatre, Folk Theatre, Bhavai, performance, Survival, Tradition, Training.

Introduction

Bhavāi in Gujarat since the Fourteenth Century

Bhavāi theatre in Gujarat, pioneered by Asāit Thākar, a Brāhmin of Siddhapur town in North Gujarat, has entertained and enlightened the rural people of Gujarat since the fourteenth century. It has entertained the illiterate and half-literate rural men and women by creating a world where Gods and Goddesses move and bless, where local heroes with their swords and daggers face their final blow of fate, where social types provide mirth and laughter. It has been an innocent event of merry-making for the rural men and women tired of their daily work and panting for the sacred thirst of witnessing a great performance and at the end of Bhavāi performance they have returned home at the dawn with renewed enthusiasm to live and to work. Performed on familial celebrations like Chaulkriya (giving the hair of the son of the family to Goddess Bahucharā or Ambā as an act of dedication) and marriage and on the religious festivals like Navrātri in the small villages of North Gujarat, Saurāstrā and Kutch, Bhavāi theatre carries and reflects the faith of Gujarati rural people in the Hindu rituals and in the Gods and Goddesses like Mahādev, Pārvati, Ganapati, Kāli and Krishna. While the associations of Bhavāi with Hindu rites and rituals has made it a 'sacred form' of Gujarati folk theatre, Bhavāi has also been a moving school or university preaching with pleasing the lessons of wisdom the uneducated lot would effortlessly and joyfully learn. It has preached Hindu-Muslim unity, love, sacrifice, humanity and faith in God in the turbulent periods of the medieval history of Gujarat and has strengthened and unified the communities belonging to the Gujarati society. Being the theatre of common people, it has relied on mythological episodes, historical episodes, folklores, social types, dance and music and has employed the dialects which the rural people of North Gujarat, Saurāstrā and Kutch daily speak. Depending for its existence and survival on the community support, it has sought the financial assistance from society and has survived against all political as well as financial problems.

It has given Gujarati people courage to live even among odd circumstances and to face the problems of life sapiently and heroically. Bhavāi, as a folk theatre form, has reflected the Solanki period, the Vāghelā period, the Sultanate period, the Moghul period, the British rule and has captured the imagination of men and women ever since its origin in the fourteenth century. In the ages which lacked entertainment opportunities and educational tools, Bhavāi has successfully pleased and preached the audience of Gujarat and therefore may be called a cultural mirror or a cultural Ambassador of Gujarat. One of the greatest contributions of Bhavāi to the culture of Gujarat is that it has played a significant role in lessening the caste, class and communal conflicts and has been able to draw men and women of every caste, class and religion around Chāchar.

Taking both intrinsic and extrinsic approaches to Bhavāi, a set of findings come to the front. While its rituals and initiatory rites have contributed to its identity as a 'Theatre of Rituals' and have pinpointed its purificational nature as a folk theatre form of Gujarat, it has also been a 'Secular Theatre' as the very first playlet with which Bhavāi performance begins is centred on the Muslim protagonist named Juthan and a number of playlets in the series emphasize communal harmony and unity. It has typically been a 'Social Theatre' as it has utilized scenes from the social life and dramatized the social types like Brāhmin, Baniyā, Rājput, Kansārā, Kumbhār, Saran, Gardener, Tailor, Patel and even Dalit and has represented a comprehensive picture of Gujarati society and has laughed at the follies inherent in various communities of Gujarat in humorous and satirical way. The predominance of dance and music in Bhavāi performance have made it a thoroughly entertaining piece as it has employed the peculiar style of dance reflecting the psychology of various social types and has continued the use of the traditional dance-styles like Garbā and Raas. At the same time, it has utilized the traditional Gujarati couplets, romantic songs, satirical songs and religious verses with the accompaniment of musical instruments like Bhungals, Tabla and Zanz. In fact, the words 'Gujarat' and 'Bhavāi' have complementary character; for Gujarat is culturally known for Bhavāi and Bhavāi in the folk theatre tradition of India is identified as the theatre forming and dramatizing the quintessential ideas of Gujarati culture.

Bhavāi: Dead or Alive in the Global Age?

In her paper entitled "Structure of Bhavāi Vesas" published in 1993 in the book 'Bhavāi: Theory', Sudha Desai wrote:

In Sola village near Ahmedabad, a workshop and celebration of Bhavāi were organized. I had discussions with the participants and had a debate whether Bhavāi will live or die in the coming times. As a student of Bhavāi, I had stated that Bhavāi lives and will live in the future also.¹

Sudha Desai's paper "Structure of Bhavāi Vesas" was published in the book 'Bhavāi: Theory' in 1993. She did not mention the exact date and year of the workshop at Sola, but it is clear that the workshop was organized long back. Twenty two years have passed after Sudha Desai, the first researcher on Bhavāi in Gujarat, asseverated her faith in the bright

future of Bhavāi. Today, in 2015, is Bhavāi dead or alive? The answer to this question depends upon the survey of the existing relationship between Bhavāi groups as well as performances and various geographical areas of Gujarat and also upon the present status of receptivity of Bhavāi in various geographical areas of Gujarat. In the rural parts of North Gujarat, Saurāstra and Kutch, Bhavāi appears to be strongly associated with familial celebrations, village fairs and festivals and this suggests that it is very much alive and popular. Bhavāi performers still move from place to place and perform playlets in or near temples of Shiva, Ambā and Kāli and again this reveals that the tradition of Bhavāi is still living. Bhavāi performers visit the villages traditionally allotted to them by their forefathers, get rewards in the forms of grain and money and ardently follow the traditionally chalked out plan of yearly Bhavāi performances. Bhavāi is not dead, but very much alive in the remote places of Pātan, Mahesānā, Sābarkānthā, Banāaskānthā, Surendranagar and other districts of Gujarat. In the urban centres like Ahmedabad, Baroda and Surat, a few Art Establishments and Theatre Groups only occasionally organize the performance of Bhavāi playlets in open place or in well-built theatres especially for the urban lovers and endeavour to continue this long tradition of Gujarati folk theatre and this again reveals that Bhavāi is not altogether dead; it is alive. When the Gujarat Government organizes programs on Health Education and Social Education, the potentials of Bhavāi as a folk theatre form are identified and Bhavāi is performed to effectively educate men and women in health and social-welfare sectors and this again reveals the very exercise and existence of Bhavāi in the global age to successfully communicate its message especially to the rural folks of Gujarat.

Assenting to the idea that Bhavāi is not dead, but still living, one would be inspired to investigate into the 'quality' of its living and here the pessimistic result would come to the front. Bhavāi seems to be almost extinct among the urban-based middle-classes in Gujarat and this fact is both discouraging and disturbing. The paradigm of the western education has affected the inherited Indian arts and Bhavāi is no exception to it. The establishment of English medium schools and colleges in Gujarat has marred not only the folk theatre form of Bhavāi, but also Gujarati main stream literature and Gujarati language. The increasing interest in learning English at the cost of Gujarati language has resulted into the failure of Gujarati students in the Gujarat Board State Exam in Gujarati subject in the recent years. In the urban centres of Gujarat, the students studying in English medium schools and colleges do not know what Bhavāi is and do not have knowledge of their own folk tradition. When asked by this researcher, a few English medium students answered that Bhavāi might be the name of the chocolate or the ice-cream to be newly launched in the market of Gujarat. Similarly, the city-bred men and women do not know anything about Bhavāi which has significantly contributed to the cultural tradition of Gujarat; they have frankly confessed that they have never witnessed Bhavāi performance in their life. Those who have spent their

childhood witnessing Bhavāi performances in villages and have recently settled in the urban centres of Gujarat faintly remember Bhavāi only as a 'comic drama' and fail to recognize its importance in making the cultural history of Gujarat. The word 'Bhavāi' is often used in a derogatory sense in Gujarati language to suggest something trivial, something farcical or something vulgar and therefore Gujarati people in urban centres, ignorant of their own tradition, link Bhavāi with any low stuff in theatrical performance. Only the rural people know Bhavāi and support it financially as a form of rituals, entertainment and enlightenment. It is their tonic, their oxygen, their elixir of life. Bhavāi is alive, but only in the rural parts of Gujarat. Its spread is limited, its support is meagre and its performers are also decreasing in number today. It is an ignored art and therefore it is withering. Even players of Bhavāi cry that Bhavāi is breathing its last. It is not dead, but it is dying and so this inherited folk theatre form is under the threat in the age of globalization. In their craze to cope with modernity, Gujarati people are forgetting their past and focusing on the new technology, new learning and disciplines in order to secure their future and this scenario is not only sad, but ailing too. If the same scenario continues in the coming twenty to thirty years, Bhavāi tradition would completely die and become an art-form of bygone times. Bhavāi is a theatre tradition and tradition is never dead; in fact it seems that men are sometimes dead to their tradition. Therefore, introspection both on the part of Bhavāi players and the people of Gujarat is necessary in order to make the survival of Bhavāi possible in the coming times. Describing the present scenario of Bhavāi Bhavanishankar Nāyak notes:

The river of time continuously flows. This business of Bhavāi has witnessed its seven hundred years. In the business new players have introduced new changes. In the original playlets, a number of types of mistakes have entered on account of the lack of a guide... In big Town Halls and theatres, plays have started to be performed with electronic equipments...All types of modern musical equipments, trained singers and systematic singing have become the source of entertainment for people. The number of people watching movies is greater than those witnessing Bhavāi.²

Major Challenges to Bhavāi

There are special challenges to Bhavāi in the age of globalization; Bhavāi players themselves pose a few challenges, other competitive forms of entertainment and the urban-based lot of Gujarati society also pose challenges to Bhavāi today. Perhaps the basic challenge of Bhavāi players of Targālā community in Gujarat is their poor financial condition as this community has depended on Bhavāi and on other manual work for its livelihood. The young Bhavāi players of this community do not have an encouraging picture of their forefathers' dedication to Bhavāi before their eyes. Their forefathers lived nomadic life, dedicated their whole life to Bhavāi, depended on the bounty of the society and could not satisfactorily earn for themselves or their next generation. Their forefathers often failed in buying a

small house, providing good education to their children, satisfactorily arranging the marriage of their children and died in utter penury. The result of their forefathers' devotion to Bhavāi seems to have disillusioned the new generation of Targālā community. The economic condition of the present senior Bhavāi players discourage the new generation of Targālā community in joining their traditional business of folk theatre. Lack of sponsorship emerges to be one of the challenges to this seven hundred year old folk theatre form in Gujarat. Traditionally, several communities invite Bhavāi players to perform playlets on auspicious familial occasions like Chaulkriya and marriage and sponsor this folk theatre in the rural parts of Gujarat. In the days of Navrati, Bhavāi players play roles in various playlets and get corn and money in return in the rural parts of Gujarat. Bhavāi is mainly sponsored by Patel community in North Gujarat and therefore Bhavāi players prefer to play Bhavāi especially in the villages having majority of Patel community. Traditionally Bhavāi has been ethically and financially supported by various communities like Brāhmin, Baniyā, Rājput, Patel, Barber, Soni (Goldsmith), Kumbhār (Potter) in Gujarat. But in today's era of globalization, the interest in Bhavāi has declined and therefore the tradition of community support and sponsorship has also weakened. One of the greatest challenges in the field of Bhavāi today is to train players in a more professional way. Dedication is missing; old spirit of performance is absent in the new generation of Bhavāi players as they are not sure of their future as folk theatre artists. Many players play their roles quite mechanically, without effectively revealing their facial expressions and body movements, without delivering their emotive soliloquies and speeches, without devoting their time to costume and make-up. Bhavanishankar Nāyak honestly notes:

The fault lies also with Bhavāi players. There is no new change in the business, the same old playlets, the same old performance without work-satisfaction and the lack of enthusiasm and dedication to art. There is exploitation of players also. Earlier a player received a handsome income, while today he has to depend on the bounty of the leader of the group... Studying all these things, Bhavāi players have left this art.³

Besides poor financial condition of Bhavāi players, the major challenges to Bhavāi include lack of training centres, lack of use of technology in promotion of Bhavāi, dominance of the main stream Gujarati literature and commercial theatre, dominance of television and Internet, lack of comparative research on Bhavāi and other folk theatre forms of India.

Bhavāi: Forming Strategies of Survival and Revival

Explaining the nature of Bhavāi and sharing his views on popularizing this Gujarati folk theatre form Janak Dave boldly opines:

In Gujarat the tradition of this art can be continued and saved. Studying the inherent talent for Bhavāi in Targālā community, it must be recognized as a part of theatre and we must harmonize with it. People fumbling for popularity of Bhavāi must introspectively

study themselves whether they are working for their aim or they exploit the Bhavāi players and become absolutely selfish?⁴

In order to address the issue of poor condition of Bhavāi players of Targālā community, immediate steps must be collectively taken by the state government, NGOs and Cultural Organizations. This is not a proposal to financially help members of a particular community alone, but in this way to help a dying folk theatre tradition which could be saved and preserved by its artists who feel to lose their battle on pecuniary ground. The senior Bhavāi players who played in their youth roles of kings, queens and princes find problems of survival in their old age and observing the miserable life they live at the sunset of their life, the new generation of Targālā community feels hesitant to join Bhavāi groups as actors. The state government must make a policy for improving the condition of Bhavāi players and for attracting the new generation towards Chāchar, the acting arena. A systematic and liberal policy including grants, housing, health and pension of Bhavāi players can attract the new lot to join Bhavāi and to continue it in the coming times. Sangeet Natak Academy runs programs like 'training and support', 'Inter-State Cultural Exchange Program', 'Indo-Foreign Cultural Exchange Program' for training and preservation of 'Traditional, Folk and Tribal Performing Arts'. But NGOs and Cultural Organizations must make arrangements for providing financial assistance for Bhavāi players and Bhavāi performers. Bhavanishankar Nāyak sadly comments: "Now you wouldn't find Bhavāi players and the old art of Bhavāi will also die. To continue it, the financial condition of Bhavāi players must be improved. The life of Bhavāi depends on the happy and satisfied life of Bhavāi players."⁵

In order to make the survival of Bhavāi possible in the coming times and to revive Bhavāi in the areas where it has ceased to be performed, Bhavāi Training Centres must be opened where the practical aspects of Bhavāi-writing could be discussed, the theoretical aspects of Bhavāi could be explored and the traditional playlets as well as the experimental playlets could be performed. Keeping in mind the newer issues of Gujarati society and broadly human society, new Bhavāi playlets must be written and performed. Dinkar Bhojak in Visnagar, a town located in North Gujarat, ran a Bhavāi Centre for some time and in Unza and Mahesana Vināyak Raval organized training programs and workshops on Bhavāi. With new vision and well-defined aims and objectives, such Training Centres would definitely contribute in promoting Bhavāi for the generations to come. The scholars on Bhavāi like Dinkar Bhojak and Vināyak Raval and senior Bhavāi players like Ratilal Nāyak and Dasharathbhai Nāyak can run Training Centres and can guide the new generation of Bhavāi players. These scholars and players have knowledge of the theoretical aspects of Bhavāi and that of its performance-related aspects; they have experience of reading and interpreting the 'text' of Bhavāi playlets in their socio-cultural background and they have experience of the practical aspects of performance and field-work. Cultural organizations, corporate houses and the Gujarat Government can provide

more financial assistance to Bhavāi Training Centres and if the collective efforts are not made today, Bhavāi will be obliterated tomorrow. This is the need of the time as Bhavāi theatre is passing through its phase of 'now or never'. Janak Dave complains:

Seminars on drama are organized; seminars on music and acting are organized. But nobody thinks of organizing seminars on Bhavāi. By organizing seminars on Bhavāi at Palodar, Visnagar, Vadnagar, Unza or Pātan, one can reap the benefits of the Bhavāi players of this area. If Gujarat University or 'Sangeet Nritya Natya Academy' takes a step in this direction, then it will be great and laudable.⁶

A movement by Bhavāi players, Bhavāi writers and Bhavāi scholars to popularize Bhavāi as a folk theatre form of Gujarat is necessary in the era of globalization. This is the age of advertisement and the age of communication and Bhavāi properly advertised through various modes and tools of communication would its spread even in the areas where it is hardly performed. Advertisement of forthcoming Bhavāi performances through news-papers, mobiles, SMS, Whats App and e-mails can contribute to the spread of Bhavāi and can attract its lovers. It is very necessary to make the new generation realize the potentials of Bhavāi in addressing the contemporary issues like AIDS and Menopause, Cleanliness and Global Warming in the modern age. It is very important to acquaint the new generation with the full potentials of Bhavāi as a form of entertainment, enlightenment, Health Education, Social Education and propaganda. Bhavāi performers must change their strategy of performance and must explain the relevance of the old playlets in the modern times to attract the modern spectators. So far as performance is concerned, the greatest drawback of Bhavāi players is that they directly begin with the Vesa of Juthan or Zandā-Zulan without giving a brief introduction to the playlet and consequently the modern audience, unaware of the socio-political background, fails in appreciating the playlets. In their performance, the players must introduce the playlets from the socio-cultural point of view in the inception and must draw the relevance of the playlets in the modern times. Like the role of chorus in the Greek drama, Bhavāi players must introduce their play in the inception, must provide important comments during the performance and must draw a message at the end for the modern audience.

Though the main stream literature has been dominant in Gujarat, Bhavāi playlets have significantly influenced the main stream literary forms in themes, treatment and style. For its enrichment, the main stream Gujarati literature owes to Bhavāi, however, no systematic research has been undertaken to study the influence of Bhavāi theatre on the Gujarati main stream literature and particularly the main stream Gujarati drama. This kind of study would establish the significance of Bhavāi as a theatre that belongs to the folk tradition and would shed new light on the influence it has exerted on the main stream literature. This sort of interdisciplinary study, by revealing the employment of folk elements and folk theatre devices in the main stream literature which is otherwise

viewed in opposition to folk literature, would lessen the conflicts between the two traditions and establish their harmonious relationship.

The main stream Gujarati drama has been known for its receptivity; for it has assimilated themes and style from other traditions as well. Though the target audience of the Gujarati main stream drama has been the elite and the urban groups, it has accepted and assimilated themes, style and other elements of Bhavāi. An exhaustive research on the contribution of Bhavāi to Gujarati drama would bring fresh findings and would reveal how the folk tradition adds to the dramatic tradition developed on the basis of the classical doctrines.

In cultural-educational centres of Gujarat like schools, colleges and Socio-Cultural Organizations, Bhavāi must be explored in every way. Such institutions can provide a great platform to Bhavāi players and Bhavāi and can awaken the interest of the new generation in the folk theatre tradition of Gujarat. Bhavāi players must be invited to share their experiences of performance with students, teachers and lovers of Bhavāi. This is very important as there is not even a single collection of Bhavāi players' experiences of performance in Gujarati, although since fourteenth century till the day, Bhavāi has been played in Gujarat. Lectures series of Bhavāi scholars on the nature of Bhavāi, its history, its tradition, its dance and music and its relevance to the modern times would acquaint the new generation with the real spirit of Bhavāi. A series of performance of various Bhavāi playlets would deepen the sense of the new generation about the performing side of Bhavāi. Workshops to write new Bhavāi playlets and to perform them would provide exposure for the new generation towards the script and practice of Bhavāi. For all such activities, the cultural-educational centres of Gujarat must work together because such centres engaged with formal and informal education of the young generation can successfully promote Bhavāi.

It is indeed necessary to establish the superiority of Bhavāi to Commercial Theatre in Gujarat as it carries and reflects the cultural ethos and ethical and spiritual vision of life, while the Commercial Theatre serves low stuff and spoils the young generation. Bhavāi, on the other hand, entertains the men and women in a far decent way and at the same time enlightens them, yet the demand of Commercial Theatre is increasing. For imbibing the cultural values in the young generation and for protecting it from the harmful effect of the Commercial Theatre, promotion of Bhavāi is sine qua non. Bhavāi must rely on several strategies of the Commercial Theatre like advertisement in papers and through posters, mobiles and SMS and must endeavour for its promotion in the modern times.

Bhavāi has indeed powers to charm the Bollywood Industry as it has got readymade plots, songs, dance-styles and music. Inspired by a Bhavāi playlet named 'The Vesa of Dalit', Ketan Maheta has already made a classic movie named 'Bhavni Bhavāi' and has earned reputation as a director of Hindi Parallel Cinema. Sanjay Leela Bhansali has utilized Bhavāi songs and musical instruments like Bhungal in his celebrated movies like 'Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam' and 'Ram-Leela'. This would attract other directors to

explore the form and the tradition of Bhavāi and in this way the promotion of Bhavāi could be possible and the researchers of Bollywood can learn about employment of Bhavāi elements in Bollywood movies. Especially the plots, dance-style and folk tunes of Bhavāi still remain unnoticed by the Bollywood directors and if employed, would definitely enrich the Bollywood movies.

Television and the Internet—the two great threats to Bhavāi could be converted into great aids to Bhavāi theatre of Gujarat. In fact, television and the Internet can be great media of advertisement and promotion of Bhavāi. On different channels in Gujarati language, Bhavāi discussions including its form and history as well as series of playlets could be held and different Bhavāi troupes could be invited for the live telecast of their performance. Awareness programs on health, viral fever, traffic rules, women empowerment, environment, Global Warming could be telecast in Bhavāi form and in this way both the spread of awareness and the promotion of Bhavāi may be possible. In the old age Bhavāi groups reached at the centre of the villages and performed their playlets and in the modern age of technology Bhavāi could reach the drawing-rooms of every home through television. A good director can make a serial on Bhavāi playlets and can attract the new generation to Bhavāi by adding the dramatization of new playlets to old ones. Bhavāi has great powers to appeal and to suggest and therefore local advertisements of various products could be telecast in Bhavāi form during the programs in various television channels and obviously this would reveal the potentials of Bhavāi to win the modern market. Similarly, the Internet could be used for the promotion of Bhavāi; for at the international level, folk theatre scholars can study the nature of Bhavāi from theoretical point of view and can view the actual performance of Bhavāi uploaded on You tube videos. One would get a chance to compare Bhavāi with other folk theatre forms of India like Terukuttu, Yakshagana, Tamasha, Maach, Khyal and Naqal and contrast Indian folk theatre with that of Ireland, England, Spain and Germany.

Bhavāi players must not feel defeated in the age of technology and must positively think of the opportunities the technology would provide for the promotion of Bhavāi. They must come together and put their efforts in the promotion of Bhavāi—the folk theatre form that has earned bread and butter and laurels for their forefathers. Renewed efforts of Bhavāi players, Cultural-Educational Centres, Art Establishments and Theatre Centres would bring significant changes and better results for the promotion of Bhavāi. But a lot depends on NĀYAK community in Gujarat since the very identity of the community has been associated with Bhavāi; for they have been the script-writers, actors, dancers and musicians. Bhavāi has been their realm and they have been the sole rulers of the field in North Gujarat. They must not divorce themselves with the splendid tradition of Gujarati folk theatre pioneered and developed by their forefathers. Bhavāi is the traditional art and the traditional business of this community financially assisted by all other communities in Gujarat. If the senior members of the community want their sons to be placed in private

companies and government departments, it is better and acceptable, but at the same time, they must exhort their new generation not to leave the practice of Bhavāi as it is their inherited art and it is performed at night and would not directly affect their working hours.

Gujarat is one of the most popular tourist attractions in India and was visited by 19.8 million domestic and international tourists in 2010-11. Every branch of tourism is well-developed in Gujarat. Archaeological and Heritage Tourism includes attractions like historic forts of Gujarat, step-wells, Hindu and Jain temples and mosques, while Medical Tourism provides medical treatment to domestic and foreign patients with internationally approved equipment and affordable prices. While Religious Tourism includes attractions like Dwarka, Dakor, Shamlaji, Somnath, Mahudi and Pāvāgadh, Cultural Tourism includes attractions like Gujarati Bhavāi, dance, song and drama, Bandhni and Patola handicrafts, embroidery and pottery. One of the best ways to promote Bhavāi and to spread it worldwide is to theoretically introduce it and to perform a few playlets for domestic and international tourists who visit the historical places of Pātan, Modhera, Vadnagar, Ambāji and Ahmedabad. While the tourists flock to Gujarat, they reveal a keen interest in learning the culture of Gujarat and obviously the folk theatre of Bhavāi would be the best medium to acquaint the tourists with the culture of Gujarat. This would not only provide the opportunity for skill-development of Bhavāi players, but would also earn them bread and butter. The Gujarat Government must work in this direction and must arrange the performance of Bhavāi playlets in the centres like Pātan, Vadnagar and Ahmedabad. This would not only popularize Bhavāi, but also promote tourism. One of the laudable attempts on the part of the state government is the establishment of Bhavāi Government Museum to popularise this folk theatre form among the domestic and international tourists and to preserve it for the generations of tomorrow. Old and unpublished manuscripts of Bhavāi playlets, historical records related to Bhavāi performances, photographs, video-collections, costume, make-up kit and musical instruments used in Bhavāi performance could be collected for Bhavāi Government Museum. The domestic and the international tourists would carry with them knowledge of Bhavāi tradition and would spread it in the areas they live and in this way the tourists would naturally advertise and even popularize the traditional folk theatre form of Gujarat.

Gujarati people must take the responsibility of promoting Bhavāi as everything cannot be left on the shoulders of the players and the State Government. The life-style of Gujarati people is influenced today by the western culture and therefore they celebrate birthdays, wedding-anniversary and such other occasions throwing parties for friends and relatives in restaurants and hotels. Can't they invite a group of Bhavāi players and arrange a show of Bhavāi in order to add joy in their life and in those of others on the auspicious occasions of their life? This would help not only in the promotion of Bhavāi, but would also strengthen the ideology of Gujarati culture among their friends and relatives. Once the

relationship between the old Bhavāi and the new generation is established in the modern times and the familial celebrations through the traditional folk theatre begin, a new tradition in Gujarati society would take place and the ideas like love, harmony, unity and humanity would spread through Bhavāi in the modern Gujarati society.

Utilizing the advantages of fast communication media in the modern age, Bhavāi must be explored as a research area in order to preserve it for the generations to come. In comparison to the main stream Gujarati literature, Bhavāi stands as an ignored and less explored area from the academic point of view. Asāit Thākar, the pioneer of Bhavāi is said to have written 360 playlets, but availability of only several of his playlets today disturbs us. Still, a number of Bhavāi playlets remain in the form of 'Chopadas' (note-books) with Bhavāi players; they must be collected and published before they perish. Mahipatram and Sudha Desai have collected Bhavāi playlets and have published collections, but the new generation of Bhavāi lovers and culture-lovers must take up the task of collecting and publishing the playlets. In all villages of Gujarat, people are equipped with mobiles having video-recording facility and the mobile technology could be used to record the performance of Bhavāi in order to uploaded on the You tube for international viewers. Whatever is available today must not perish and must be preserved utilizing the new technology.

Bhavāi itself demands innovations for its survival in the modern times; it is a form that demands novelty in themes, treatment and performance in order to suit the modern claims of its contemporariness. Therefore, new Bhavāi playlets must be written on the modern themes and must be performed by the players to attract the generation of today. Microphones and colourful bulbs could be used. Modern Gujarati language could be employed instead of archaic words and expressions. In order to charm the audience of the urban centres, there is no harm if several performances are organized in the well-built theatres. The male actors played the female roles in the old times, but many Gujarati girls, interested in traditional folk theatre form of Gujarat, would play female roles, if chance is given to them. Bhavāi is a tradition and the tradition must include new changes to successfully entertain the modern taste and to survive in the age of globalization.

At national level, systematic comparative study of folk theatre forms of India would bring out a number of similarities and differences among them and would inspire the folk theatre artists to accept and to assimilate the elements of other traditions with their own. It would revive the study of Indian folk theatre and would attract the young scholars to undertake research in the area so far marginalized by the main stream literary tradition. Bhavāi shares with Daskathia of Orissa which was pioneered in the seventeenth century to strengthen Hinduism and to promote a culture of peace in the periods of socio-religious conflicts between Hindus and Muslims and likewise Bhavāi theatre was pioneered to accentuate Hindu faith and to promote Hindu-Muslim unity. Like Bhavāi of Gujarat, Daskathia of Orissa is a dying art. Like Bhavāi, Swang is a famous folk theatre form of

Haryana and Uttar Pradesh and dramatizes mythological and social scenes. Bhavāi shares with Tamasha of Maharashtra in simplicity, initiatory rites and social enlightenment. Khyal of Rajasthan, like Bhavāi, aims at various mythological and historical role-playing with dance, songs, for entertainment of the rural lot. Mudi yettu of Kerala employs the mythical episode—the war between the Goddess KĀLI and Darika and the destruction of the latter. Terukuttu of Tamil Nadu is performed in the temple square yard and is performed for the worship of family deity, on ear-piercing ceremony of a child, on ceremony of completion of a pilgrimage and likewise Bhavāi is performed on the auspicious familial occasions and religious celebrations like Navrātri. What needs is to explore these folk theatre forms in order to theorize the folk theatre of India.

At international level Bhavāi could be promoted in the age of globalization. Many Gujarati diasporic communities in the countries like United Kingdom, United States, Canada, France, Australia and Germany and organize cultural programs inviting Indian singers, stage artists, actors and actresses. Here indeed is a great opportunity to promote and to

popularize the Bhavāi theatre of Gujarat in the foreign countries. In occasions like marriage and in celebrations like Navrātri, Gujarati Bhavāi players could be invited to play Bhavāi and to create Gujarati mood and spirit on the foreign land. Vishwa Gujarati Samaj, an international organization of Gujarati community worldwide, has already organized several shows and has taken up the task of promoting and popularizing Bhavāi in the foreign countries.

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