

Study of the Economic and Social Problems of Folk Artists

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Abstract

Indian culture is primarily reflected through folk arts. Along with regional diversity, every state in India has a variety of folk art forms. Folk arts play a significant role in creating unity among different castes and religions in society and bring together the cultural talents of the Indian people. Through folk arts, people from different parts of India are connected with one another. Folk arts reflect the culture and history of every community and are preserved from generation to generation. They provide joy and satisfaction in people's lives, enhance enthusiasm, and promote mutual respect.

Indian folk arts include both drama and music, such as Tamasha and Lavani in Maharashtra, Yakshagana in Karnataka, Nautanki in Uttar Pradesh, Garba in Gujarat, and Kakkari Natakam in Kerala. Maharashtra is culturally very rich, where folk arts are viewed not only as a means of entertainment but also as tools for social awareness and livelihood generation. Folk art forms such as Kirtan, Tamasha, Dashavatara, Dandar, Jagaran-Gondhal, and Bharud are widely practiced. However, after globalization, revolutionary changes have occurred in entertainment media. The rapid development of modern entertainment sources such as television channels, cinema theatres, and auditoriums has reduced the importance of folk arts, resulting in a decline in audiences. Consequently, the economic problems of folk artists are increasing day by day. Some folk arts have remained limited to specific regions; for example, Dashavatara is confined mainly to the Konkan region, while Dandar is limited to the Vidarbha region, particularly in Gadchiroli, Bhandara, and Gondia districts. Due to modern entertainment media, performances of Dandar have declined, and this art form has not expanded to other parts of Maharashtra. Today, the authentic folk arts of Maharashtra are facing serious challenges. Therefore, this research paper attempts to study the major folk art forms in Maharashtra and analyze the economic and social problems faced by folk artists.

Keywords: Folk Art, Folk Artists, Economic Problems, Social Problems

1. Introduction

In earlier times, folk arts were performed on a large scale. Folk art forms such as Kirtan, Tamasha, Dashavatara, Dandar, and Jagaran-Gondhal became popular as sources of recreation and entertainment. In the era of digital revolution, the entertainment sector has become open to all, with the availability of numerous media platforms. As a result, folk arts are gradually disappearing. Increased use of the internet and YouTube has reduced audiences for traditional folk performances. Technological changes have increased the

cost of folk art performances, but ticket prices have not increased proportionately. In contrast, cinema, musical concerts, and drama receive higher ticket revenues. Due to this imbalance, folk art organizers often have to borrow money to meet performance expenses, leading to growing indebtedness. Consequently, the number of folk art performances is declining. Despite these challenges, some dedicated folk artists have preserved this rich cultural heritage. Conservation of folk arts is essential. Folk arts still survive in rural areas, where a large proportion of India's population resides. Rural people engaged in agriculture seek entertainment through fairs, festivals, and markets, where folk art performances are commonly organized. Although folk arts in Maharashtra have gained popularity, globalization has brought significant changes to the entertainment sector. Folk arts have not adapted at the same pace, resulting in several economic and social problems for folk artists.

2. Objectives of the Study

1. To review the major folk art forms in Maharashtra.
2. To study the economic and social problems of folk artists.
3. To suggest measures for the preservation of folk arts.

3. Research Methodology

The present study is based on a descriptive research methodology. Secondary sources of data such as books, research articles, reports, newspaper articles, and websites have been used for data collection.

4. Major Folk Art Forms in Maharashtra

4.1 Kirtan

The tradition of Kirtan has existed in India since ancient times. There are various forms of Kirtan, and it holds a special place in the Warkari tradition. Kirtans are organized during festivals such as Ganesh Utsav, Bhagwat Saptah, and religious events. In Maharashtra's folk cultural tradition, Kirtan has immense significance. Saints like Sant Dnyaneshwar, Sant Tukaram, and Sant Namdev nurtured this devotional and narrative folk art. Through Abhangas, Ovis, Shlokas, legends, and humor, Kirtan has conveyed messages of social equality, moral values, and collective unity. However, changing economic, social, and technological conditions have made the financial situation of Kirtankars challenging.

4.2 Tamasha

Tamasha originated during the Peshwa period and represents Marathi culture vividly. Traditionally, artists such as Songaadya, Dholki players, and harmonium players played important roles. Tamasha performances are organized during village fairs and religious festivals. Renowned artists like Kalu Balu, Dadu Indurikar, Raghunath Khedkar, and Surekha Punekar contributed to preserving this art. However, the influence of cinema has negatively affected Tamasha. Although Tamasha serves as a medium for entertainment and social-political awareness, it is increasingly presented in orchestra formats rather than traditional styles.

4.3 Dandar

Dandar and Khadi Gammat are folk theatre forms popular among tribal communities in the Vidarbha region, particularly in forest areas. These performances are organized after Diwali during fairs and festivals. The use of local dialects makes the themes emotionally appealing and socially relevant. Despite efforts to preserve and provide academic recognition to this fading art form, modern entertainment has reduced its popularity.

4.4 Dashavatara

Dashavatara is an ancient folk theatre tradition of the Konkan and Western Maharashtra regions, based on the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu. It is an integral part of Ganesh Utsav and Shimga festivals. Performances usually continue for four to five months a year. During the remaining period, artists depend on agriculture, jobs, or other occupations for survival. Low remuneration, declining audiences, competition from modern entertainment, and inadequate government support have pushed Dashavatara artists into economic insecurity.

4.5 Jagaran–Gondhal

Jagaran–Gondhal is a significant folk art deeply associated with religious faith and community life in Maharashtra. Performed traditionally by the Gondhali community, it involves overnight worship of the goddess through singing, music, dance, and storytelling. It strengthens religious belief, social unity, moral values, and cultural preservation. However, insufficient remuneration, irregular performances, and lack of alternative employment have led to financial difficulties for artists.

5. Economic Problems of Folk Artists

Modernization, urbanization, and digital entertainment have adversely affected traditional folk art platforms.

1. **Limited Sources of Income:** Low education levels and lack of alternative employment opportunities restrict income sources.
2. **Low Remuneration:** Payments vary according to festivals and private events and are generally inadequate.
3. **Travel and Equipment Costs:** Increased travel and modern sound systems have raised expenses.
4. **Globalization and Lifestyle Changes:** Growing popularity of cinema and television has reduced folk art significance.
5. **Health and Age-related Issues:** Vocal strain, respiratory problems, and lack of income in old age affect artists' well-being.
6. **Limited Access to Government Schemes:** Many artists are deprived of government benefits, and subsidies are insufficient.

6. Social Problems

Society often holds a narrow perception of folk artists due to malpractices in some folk art centers. Low income, limited education, inability to adapt to technological changes, and lack of digital and social media skills contribute to social marginalization and frustration among artists.

7. Measures and Suggestions

1. Government should implement special financial assistance schemes for folk artists.
2. Kirtan should receive official recognition and grants as a folk art.
3. Training and digital platforms should be provided for promotion through media.
4. Workshops and competitions should be organized to attract youth.
5. Separate financial schemes for Dashavatara artists should be introduced.
6. Monthly honorarium and insurance schemes should be implemented.
7. Folk art performances should be encouraged at school and college levels.
8. Digital documentation and promotion of folk arts should be undertaken.
9. Effective implementation of government schemes is essential.
10. Jagaran–Gondhal should be preserved as an important cultural identity of Maharashtra.

8. Conclusion

Although Maharashtra's folk art traditions are culturally rich, folk artists face severe economic and social challenges. Joint efforts by the government, society, and cultural institutions are necessary to enhance their economic security. With appropriate policies and the use of modern tools, the preservation of folk art traditions can be ensured.

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