

Jagar - News and Notes

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(Jagar on May 21 1977 at Kokner, Palghar District, Maharashtra.)

In the month of May, 1977, the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research and Development, the National Social Service and the University Music Centre (University of Bombay) undertook a unique venture called Jagar in the village of Kokner in the Palghar District of Maharashtra.

The village is about sixty miles from Bombay and the students of the University have been working there with the local Adivasis a programme of social and economic development. An additional cultural bias was sought to be added to this programme. Various amateur groups in the field of dance, drama and music were invited for preliminary discussions and it was decided to hold a full-night festival of the performing arts at Kokner on the 21st of May. The first half of the all-night festival was allotted to the Adivasi artistes and the latter part to artistes from the urban centres. The underlying aim was to ensure a mutual exposure of Adivasi and urbanized art-forms, to watch and weigh the responses. Adivasi groups from about ten neighbouring villages performed in Jagar. About forty artistes from Pune, Bombay, Mahad and Aurangabad represented the urban segment. Nearly three thousand people watched the programmes with lively interest till the early hours of the morning.

One cannot be quite sure about how this experiment should be assessed. The following morning when I met some field-workers in the adjoining Shiva Temple, some revealing comments were made. On the whole, the idea of mutual exposure was appreciated. But urban items of a half-hour duration were felt to be too short. C. T. Khanolkar's playlet, *Zadavari Bole Kaga*, presented by Madhav Vaze and his associates from Pune, was appreciated for its whimsicality and its earthy sense of justice. The playlet centres round a crow's comments and a narration-cum-enactment of the story of an aged king's wife getting 'effectively' enamoured of the king's peon! Short skits on the police-thief and the dowry theme, presented by the Gossip Group (Bombay) were well liked. These contained lot of mime and were slickly presented. The didactic powada-s of the Mahad Group were heard in silence: they dealt with the theme of abstaining from drink! Similarly, bhajans by Shri Appasaheb Inamdar (Pune) evoked a lukewarm response.

The Adivasi items were full of verve and were marked by audacity of content. There were no inhibitions; there was no exhibitionism either. The Tarpi and Tipri dances were instances of amazing rhythmic precision and concentration. Improvisation and participation were evident at their fullest. The Tarpi-player improvised a rhythm-motif and the dancers immediately responded by changing the steps. Members of the audience came and joined when they felt like doing so. At one time there were about fifty dancers on the makeshift earth-mound that formed the decorated stage—all of them immersed in the dance and the accompanying music! Unfortunately we did not have any suitable recording equipment with us.

For the urban artistes it was an experience to watch the Adivasis' totally absorbed attitude towards their art. At times the friendly indifference of the audience was also of great interest. It was almost dawn when the Jagar came to an end. Many of the Adivasis from the neighbouring villages had come in their bullock carts along with their families, and they left immediately to face a day of toil in their fields. The urban artistes complained that they were 'tired'.
