

1 INTRODUCTION

“There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you when you’re performing, and this expression is unique.”

- Martha Graham ¹

Almost every Indian has grown up knowing what the ‘Bharatanatyam’ or ‘Kathak’ dance forms are, what the ‘Hindustani’ or ‘Carnatic’ music forms are, but how many people have heard of ‘Swang’ or ‘Therukuthu’ or ‘Tamasha’? Realizing the general lack of knowledge, even interest, about our rich folk culture made us want to study and explore a folk art form and to contribute towards increasing awareness about the same. When we realized that we wanted to study a folk theatre, we were still undecided about which of the innumerable Indian folk theatres we should focus on.

When we stumbled upon Maach, we were immediately hooked on to it. First of all, we saw the great potential in studying an art form from the Malwa region that is often referred to as the ‘navel of India’ because of its central location. ² Owing to its central location and influential history, it is diverse in its cultural heritage and has derived influences from its surrounding regions, especially from Rajasthan and Gujarat. We realized that a folk theatre from this region is bound to reflect in its presentation this richness of the Malwa culture. Second, the various components of Maach seemed an exciting combination to us. Its capacity to weave together the elements of music, dance, drama and story-telling; and its capacity to transcend being a mere form of entertainment by inculcating a strong connection with its people fascinated us. Lastly, we were certain that we wanted to study Maach when we realized that it was a largely unexplored art form; not much study has been conducted on it previously and not many people, even in Ujjain, the place of its origin, know about it. Seeing that hardly anybody knew about this art form and even that which is known is not properly documented, it increased our resolve to want to analyse and document this art form.

Maach is a lyrical theatre form that is practiced in Madhya Pradesh, predominantly in the regions of Ujjain, Shajapur and Badnagar. Apart from its characteristic combination of elements of music, dance and theatre, it is also made interesting because of its several other characteristic aspects. Some of these include the facts that historically and even till today,

¹ "Quotes About Dance." *Goodreads*. N.p., n.d. Web. 26 Feb. 2014. <<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/dance>>.

² Sharma, Shailendrakumar. Personal Interview. 8 Jan 2014.

only men take part in Maach performances, they play the roles even of female characters; traditionally, a Maach performance went on through the night; and Maach, though performed with the purpose of entertaining the people, goes beyond that by forming a connection with its people that transcends the ordinary relationship between artist and audience.

Maach performances have also covered a wide range of themes in its presentation, ranging from religious and mythological, historic, romantic and social. The study of themes constitutes the focus of our research.

There has not been a lot of scholarly research that has been conducted on Maach. As a result, there isn't a lot of literary material about Maach that is available. We have had to rely only on two main works for the majority of our secondary research. These are "Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes" which is a compilation of several articles by different artists and researchers; and "Folk theatre of Madhya Pradesh – Maach" by Shivkumar Madhukar. These works that are available are the efforts of artists and academicians who have taken the effort to document various aspects about Maach, but none of them, we realized after extensive reading, had studied Maach from an analytical point of view.

For precisely this reason, we decided that our research was to be analytical. When we decided to study the themes of Maach as our focus, we noticed that any mention to themes that has been made by previous researchers has only been in the vague sense of storylines and concepts. For our research, we classified these stories according to the four main themes that we identified. But beyond that, we've also tried to analyse the transitions in the relevance of these themes and the reasons for these transitions. Our research can contribute to the existing study of Maach because it adds the analytical perspective which is vital in the study of any topic. However, our study will be largely qualitative and not quantitative. Most of our analysis is based on in-depth interviews that we conducted, and we did not focus on procuring quantitative or statistical data. This would be the major limitation of our research.

This report is separated into three main sections- the Literature Review evaluates and summarizes the secondary sources about Maach that are available based on the researches that have been previously carried out, the section on Observations and Findings describes the on-field work that we carried out and the final section on Data Analysis explains our analyses and conclusions based on the literature that we read and the findings of our field work.

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2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology is a term used to describe how one has gone about conducting a certain scientific study which contains information on how one has collected data and information on- field.³ This section of the report contains details regarding our methods of data collection for both the pre-field as well as the on-field research that we carried out. It also states the research question that we arrived at and the objectives that we carried out in order to answer that during our on-field work. Finally, it discusses the limitations of the methods of data collection and the sources that were available to us as a result.

The process of our preliminary research mostly involved our interviewing of subject experts, visiting local libraries and reading up on various articles and other sources from the web to finalize our topic- the lyrical theatre form called Maach from Madhya Pradesh.

On deciding our topic, the first objective was to arrive at a proper understanding of Maach by way of deductive reasoning. So, we began reading on a wider spectrum, starting from excerpts about folk theatre forms around the world such as in Indonesia; and then narrowing down to others Indian folk theatre forms such as Tamasha and Jatra; and then finally zeroing in on Maach, a local theatre form, indigenous to the Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh. We also read about the history and the culture of the Malwa region because we thought that would serve as relevant background information considering how closely Maach is associated with the Malwa region and its heritage.

As a part of our pre-field research, one of our team members visited Ujjain and conducted preliminary interviews. First, Ms. Swati Ukhlae, who is the head of the cultural committee of Ujjain and Mr. Manoj Borlia, a music composer from the region were interviewed; they provided us with the contact details of senior Maach artists who were to guide us in our research. The two main Maach artists who were interviewed during the pre-field research were Mr. Omprakash and Mr. Premkumar Sen. The nature of these interviews was mostly in- depth and not based on questionnaires or surveys. These interviews were also valuable because, from these artists, we were able to procure 125 handwritten manuscripts of Maach and an audio CD that contained the music tracks of songs that are commonly performed in Maach.

³ "Research Methodology." *BusinessDictionary*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Feb. 2014. <<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/research-methodology.html>>.

Over and above that, we also conducted local interviews in Pune of various subject experts. This included Prof. Prasad Vanarase and Prof. Rajiv who are experts in Indian theatre, and Prof. Sameer Dublay and Mr. Satyasheel Deshpande, who are experts in Indian classical music for some background information on the nuances of Indian theatre and music.

For our on-field research, we witnessed two live performances of Maach. This form of non-participatory observation enabled us to observe various elements of the performance and also compare it with the claims of literary sources to verify accuracy and determine a possible transition over time. In-depth interviews of the performers were also conducted regarding their perception of the art form and what it meant to them. Similar interviews of the directors, musicians and script writers were also conducted. These also served as important primary sources, providing us with details regarding the themes in Maach performances and the transitions in the performance technique and themes over the years.

Research Question

All these methods were followed in order to gather information pertaining to our research question which is:

“What are the different themes that are depicted in Maach performances and what are the transitions that they have undergone?”

In order to study this, the main aims and objectives that we identified are:

- To document the various elements of Maach performances,
- To study the religious and mythological tales that are portrayed in Maach,
- To analyse the depiction of historic characters in Maach,
- To examine the recent addressing of social issues through Maach,
- To understand transitions in the importance of these themes and the reasons for the same, and
- To analyse the loss in popularity of Maach over the recent years.

Limitations

Since Maach remains a relatively undocumented art form, we had very little secondary sources such as literary material available to us. Since little or no scholarly research has been conducted on Maach, even the literature that was available to us was largely documentary in nature and not analytical.

With the literary sources that we were able to procure, a major limitation was that the vast majority of them were in vernacular languages such as Hindi and Malwi. This language barrier made it difficult for us to comprehend the content of the literature; thereby requiring translations into English.

Another limitation to be noted is that our research was predominantly qualitative as can be judged by the nature of the interviews that we conducted. This could restrict our possibility of statistical representations for lack of quantitative data to support the information gathered.

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3 LITERATURE REVIEW

"I believe that in a great city, or even in a small city or a village, a great theatre is the outward and visible sign of an inward and probable culture."

*- Laurence Olivier*⁴

Literature Review is a section that discusses published information in a particular subject area. It serves as a backdrop and provides a supportive basis on which the primary research is carried out.⁵

Being a relatively undocumented art form, Maach has very little literary material available/ accessible. Even with the literature that was available, there were problems such as the fact that they were predominantly in Hindi or Malvi, thereby necessitating the time-consuming task of translation. The two main literary works that we had to rely on were "Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes" which is a compilation of several articles by different artists and researchers; and "Folk theatre of Madhya Pradesh – Maach" by Shivkumar Madhukar. Apart from this, we also referred to certain generic books on Indian theatre which had excerpts about Maach.

But the greatest problem that we encountered with the literary sources that we were able to gather about Maach was that since none of them were written from an academic point of view, the books were mostly compilations and were merely documentary in nature. None of the works studied Maach from an analytical point or examined it from different perspectives. This is what made us realize that there was a need for us to perceive Maach analytically.

The focus of our research was on looking at the themes that are depicted in Maach. However, the above mentioned books did not have any direct information pertaining to the themes in Maach, only broad descriptions of the storylines. So, for this purpose, we had to look at the unpublished, handwritten manuscripts that we were able to procure. These manuscripts were compiled by a recent Maach artist, Sri. Siddeshwar Sen, who saw the potential of recording the verses of popular Maach performances from the earliest times,

⁴ "Quotes About Theatre." *Thinkexist*. N.p., n.d. Web. 26 Feb. 2014.
<<http://thinkexist.com/quotation/219579.html>>.

⁵ "Literature Reviews." *The Writing Center*. College of Arts and Sciences, n.d. Web. 23 Feb. 2014.
<<https://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/literature-reviews/>>.

almost since its inception. When we read through this, we categorized them according to four main themes as we realized that these were the main perspectives that Maach has portrayed- religious and mythological, historic, romantic (fiction), and the recent development which includes social awareness. Then, we tried to determine patterns of transition amongst these based on the time it was written and the theme under which we had classified it to be.

The lack of scholarly analytical work being done on Maach made us realize the potential of studying Maach from that angle. All the existing literature documented the various elements of Maach performances and gave generic outlines of the stories that were told through Maach. We believed that our research could contribute to the study of Maach in the sense that we would be determining transitions based on patterns that we observed which was going beyond just documenting the stories of Maach. While the literature that we read focussed on describing the elements of Maach over a period of time, we have tried to analyse the transitions over this period of time and determine the reasons for the same.

From the material that we read, we were able to get a clear understanding of the elements of Maach which have been recorded clearly. The gist of the information that we gathered from these readings will be discussed in this section.

This section of the report firstly talks about the global scenario of folk theatres and then the scene in India. It then discusses important elements of the Malwa region which would serve as a backdrop for the study on Maach. Finally, it will document the history and elements of Maach.

3.1 GLOBAL OVERVIEW

The concept of folk art forms or a folk theatre in particular is prevalent in many cultures across the world.

In Sumatra, Indonesia, there exists a folk theatre form called 'Randai'. Randai is a folk theatre performed by the Miangkabau ethnic group of the West Sumatra region. It is a unique combination of dance, folk song, instrumental music, acting and a martial art form known as 'silek'. Randai usually depicts the folklores of the people belonging to the Miangkabau.⁶

⁶ Pauka, Kirstin. *Theater & Martial Arts In West Sumatra: Randai & Silek of the Minangkabau*. USA: Ohio UP, 1998. Print.

In Java, Indonesia there exists another folk theatre form known as 'Wayang'. It is a puppet drama that makes extensive use of the shadows of the puppet. It dramatizes several mythological tales that are popular in the region. A similar art form exists even in China.⁷

Thus, we can see that each region has different kinds of folk theatres but all these art forms share some points of commonality even if they come from different cultures and depict different themes. All folk theatre forms reflect regional culture and customs. They portray characters and ideas that are popular in the region. They include elements such as singing or speaking or dancing, sometimes a combination of these.⁸

3.2 OTHER INDIAN FOLK THEATRES

In India, the idea of folk theatre is very common. Almost every state and region in the country has a folk theatre that is a product of its regional culture.

In Maharashtra, there is 'Tamasha' which originated as a form of entertainment for the Mughal armies. It has girls who sing and dance for the entertainment of the men in the armies and the courts. It was regarded as vulgar at many a times and was made unfit for women and respectable men to watch.⁹

In West Bengal and also parts of Orissa and Bihar, there is 'Jatra'. This is a folk art form in which the devotees of Lord Krishna performed frenzied and almost trance-like states of dances and songs as a way of devotion to the Lord. This folk theatre form also consists of several intense dialogues.¹⁰

Other than that, there is 'Yakshagana' in Karnataka, 'Therukuthu' in Tamil Nadu, 'Nautanki' in Uttar Pradesh and several other such folk theatres. All of these contain elements of performance such as music, dance or theatre and also closely depict the culture of the region that they have originated in.

⁷ "Wayang." *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d. Web. 25 Feb. 2014. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/638087/wayang>>.

⁸ "Folk Theatre." *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d. Web. 25 Feb. 2014. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/212271/folk-theatre>>.

⁹ "Southasian Art Forms." *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d. Web. 25 Feb. 2014. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/212271/folk-theatre>>.

¹⁰ "Southasian Art Forms." *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d. Web. 25 Feb. 2014. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/212271/folk-theatre>>.

In this country that is filled with folk theatres, the Malwa region too has its own indigenous folk theatre called ‘Maach’. We believe that Maach, as an art form, hasn’t been given its due recognition and is waiting to be heard and explored. It is for this reason that we chose to study Maach.

3.3 MALWA- A BACKDROP

Maach, being an art form that is indigenous to the Malwa region, reflects in its presentation the culture and practices of the Malwa region. Since the art form is so closely linked to the region and its culture, it becomes relevant to understand various aspects of the Malwa region before delving into the aspects of Maach itself.

3.3.1 Geography

Malwa is the historic province of India that occupies the region of west- central India. Though, the exact borders of the province is unclear and has been prone to fluctuation, it is generally said to occupy portions of western and central Madhya Pradesh, parts of south-eastern Rajasthan and northern Maharashtra. It is generally regarded as the plateau region that is bound by the Vindhya Range to the south, but is sometimes extended to include the Narmada River valley and the Satpura Range. The region is observed as “the land of plenty”.¹¹ It is filled with fertile black soil that is drained by the rivers Chambal, Shipra, Sindh and Parbati.¹²

¹¹ Chauhan, Yamini. "Malwa.". Encyclopedia Britannica. 14 Mar. 2013. Web. 04 Feb. 2014.

¹² Chauhan, Yamini. "Malwa.". Encyclopedia Britannica. 14 Mar. 2013. Web. 04 Feb. 2014.

Map 3.1- Outline of the Malwa region in a partial map of India



*Not to Scale

Source: "Dhar District." *Maps: Official Website of District Administration Dhar, Government of Madhya Pradesh, India*. N.p., n.d. Web. 26 Feb. 2014. <<http://dhar.nic.in/maps.htm>>.

3.3.2 History

The territorial unit that is known as 'Malwa' was named after an ancient tribe called the Malavas. There were settlements of this tribe across the country. However, from around the 5th century A.D., the Malavas belonging to the region of Avanti accepted the territorial name and it is by this name that the territory is referred, even until the present day.¹³

From as early as the 2nd century BCE, the Malwa region has been of prominence in Indian history as it was a significant part of the Mauryan and the Gupta dynasties. Following the Muslim invasion, the province became a strong, independent state. Later, it also became one of the first provinces to be conquered by the Mughals. It was further subject to conquest by the Marathas in the early 18th century. In 1817, the British reinstated order in the province. Under the British, Malwa was one of the most important and influential provinces of India.¹⁴

Over the years, the region has also developed a distinct culture, even if it is influenced greatly by Rajasthani, Gujarati and Marathi cultures owing either to geographic proximity or previous conquests by the empire of the region. Several significant historic figures hail from

¹³ Jain, Kailash Chand. *Malwa Through the Ages, from the Earliest Times to 1305 A.D.* Madhya Pradesh: Motilal Banarsidass Publ, 1972. Pg. 4-5. Print.

¹⁴ Chauhan, Yamini. "Malwa." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 14 Mar. 2013. Web. 04 Feb. 2014.

the Malwa region such as the poet Kalidas, the king Harishchandra, the astronomer Brahmagupta and several others.¹⁵

3.4 MAACH- MALWA KA LOKNATYA

3.4.1 Geography

Belonging to the Malwa region, Maach is performed mostly only within the geographical boundaries of the region. Over the years, it gained popularity in several parts of Madhya Pradesh; but even till today, the regions where Maach is greatly recognized and reputed are Ujjain, Shajapur and Badnagar.¹⁶ Therefore, Ujjain, which is also regarded as the cultural capital of the Malwa region, seemed to us an exciting and relevant option for carrying out our fieldwork.

3.4.2 Historic Overview

The art form Maach is believed to have originated in the early 19th century from the Khayal art form of Rajasthan. The credit for its creation has been attributed to Guru Gopalji who was originally from Rajasthan, and later settled down in Ujjain, carrying with him the techniques of Maach.¹⁷

However, the credit for popularizing and giving recognition to Maach goes to Guru Balmukundji from Ujjain. He is said to have written the script for about 18 popular Maach performances; some of them such as ‘Bharthari’, ‘Dhola-Maruni’, ‘Sudbud Saalanga’, ‘Devar-Bhojai’ and ‘Seth-Sethani’ which continue to be performed even today. It was believed that “his personality exuded attractiveness and his voice had fire in it.”¹⁸ To watch his performances, people came from far and wide and gathered in Ujjain. A commonly repeated legend associated with him was that one night before his performance, he had a

¹⁵ Jain, Kailash Chand. *Malwa Through the Ages, from the Earliest Times to 1305 A.D.* Madhya Pradesh: Motilal Banarsidass Publ, 1972. Pg. 6. Print.

¹⁶ Bhavsar, Aalok. “Folk culture of Malwa”. *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 133. Print.

¹⁷ Shrimaal, Pyaralel. "Effective Folk Theatre Maach and Its Music." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 84. Print.

¹⁸ Shrimaal, Pyaralel. "Effective Folk Theatre Maach and Its Music." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 84. Print.

dream in which an angel had warned him against performing the following day; in spite of that, he went on to perform his piece and as he spoke the lines “Oh please take me away from here”, he breathed his last and dropped dead on the stage in the middle of his performance. In his honour, all the other performers proceeded to his funerary ceremonies in full costume and sang Maach tunes along the way.¹⁹

The third most important Maach artist was Ustad Kaluram of Ujjain. The three of them, Guru Gopalji, Guru Balmukundji and Ustad Kaluram, together are sometimes referred to as the Trimurti or the trinity of Maach theatre.²⁰

The next most significant Maach artist in the history of Maach is Guru Bherulalji who had created 12 Maach tunes including the popular ‘*Barabhai Bagdavat*’. He became an important contributor to Maach since it was him that brought to Maach the concept of singing and performing at high energy levels. In his rendition of ‘*Barabhai Bagdavat*’, it is believed that there was so much energy that the performers actually started fighting on stage. Swords began clashing and in the process, some of them were even injured. The performance was interrupted and legend has it that Guru Bherulalji destroyed his own script to ensure that calamities of this sort did not occur in the future.²¹ (It is important to note that the exact time period of any of these artists is not properly known.)

In recent times, the most popular Maach writer/ performer is Sri Siddeshwar Sen who had created 25 Maach plays incorporating in it 24 new tunes. He was also the one who is believed to have brought to the performance of Maach the originality and purity of the Malvi language in place of the vulgarity that was ordinarily a part of Maach dialogues and lyrics until then. He also introduced the depiction of social and national causes in Maach performances which gave Maach a new dimension and also enabled him to reach out to more people through his performances. As a result, his performances were telecast in national

¹⁹ Shrimaal, Pyaralel. "Effective Folk Theatre Maach and Its Music." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 84. Print.

²⁰ Varadpande, Manohar Laxman. *History of Indian Theatre*. Vol. 2. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1992. Pg.205. Print.

²¹ Shrimaal, Pyaralel. "Effective Folk Theatre Maach and Its Music." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 84. Print.

television; and he was conferred the Rashtrapati award for his contributions to Maach. He passed away recently in the year 2002.²²

3.4.2.1 *Akhadas and Gurus*

Another characteristic feature of Maach is that since its conception, there existed the concept of 'Akhadas'. This meant that certain *gurus* or teachers of Maach had their own groups/ troupes of performers which came to be referred to as *akhadas*. Each *akhada* had certain characteristic methods of performing, certain stories that were performed most extensively and other such unique elements that were typical to them and distinguished them from others. Competition between *akhadas* was also not uncommon, especially in the late 19th century. In fact, there evolved a certain kind of Maach known as 'Gammatt' which depicted competition between two *akhadas*, normally with an underlying philosophical tone.²³

Traditionally, there existed eight main *akhadas*, each of which was headed by a particular *guru* and was most prominent in a particular area. The eight *gurus* of the different *akhadas* were:

- ❖ Guru Gopal from Bhagaripura
- ❖ Guru Balmukund from Jaisinghpura
- ❖ Guru Radhakishan from Bilotipura
- ❖ Guru Fakirchand from Abdalpura
- ❖ Guru Shivjiram from Badnagar
- ❖ Guru Chunnilal from village Mangrola and
- ❖ Guru Bhairavlal whose village is not known but is famous for his rendition of 'Heer-Ranja'
- ❖ Guru Siddeshwar Sen from village Rao Rangwasa²⁴

²² Shrimaal, Pyaralel. "Effective Folk Theatre Maach and Its Music." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 84. Print.

²³ Waqt, Ashok. "Maach: The Resonating Culture of Malva". *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 95. Print.

²⁴ Waqt, Ashok. "Maach: The Resonating Culture of Malva". *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 95. Print.

Figure 3.1- Depiction of the 8 *gurus* of Maach and their *akhadas*



Over the years, the relevance of these *akhadas* was reduced but the concept lived on. Even now, before the beginning of a presentation, some artists recite prayers and invoke the blessings of the original leaders of their *akhada*.

3.4.3 Performance and Techniques

Maach performances combine elements of music, dance and theatre; and as a result, is referred to as ‘total-theatre’.²⁵

There are other characteristic elements of a Maach performance, as well. Foremost in this is the practice of men traditionally playing the roles of women. A typical Maach performance did not have women present at all; not as performers, not even as audience. One

²⁵ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. "Folk Theatre Maach – Presentation Technique and Construct." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 86. Print.

explanation that is provided for this is that Maach of the earliest time was characterized by vulgar dialogues and as a result was considered unfit for the womenfolk. But even after the vulgarity was removed, the tradition of men playing female roles persisted. These men merely put on a *ghunghat* and modulated their voices a little, and took on the character of a woman.²⁶

Another interesting feature of Maach performances is that they were performed through the night. Having originated and become popularized in a time that did not have televisions and other such modes of entertainment, Maach served as a medium of entertainment and stress buster to people after they finished their work for the day. After a long day of work, people would come to witness Maach. A performance that begins at late evening or night goes till dawn when people leave to begin the work for a new day.²⁷

3.4.3.1 Music

Even though Maach portrays elements of music, dance and theatre, it is still regarded as music- centric. The performances are set as verse- dramas which are referred to as '*Khel*'. Though there are prose dialogues, the main emphasis is on singing the play. About 68 different tunes have been identified in Maach performances including Halur, Ekhari, Dohari, Langadi, Teen Kadi, Dadra, Dugun, etc.²⁸

Each song in a Maach performance is ended with the tonal wave "Aa aa aa ha", with an extremely loud and powerful emphasis on the "ha" that is believed to be energetic enough to wake up a sleeping person.²⁹ There is even a local tale that says that women who listen to performances from within the confines of their homes, get so engrossed in the music that in the process of making '*rotis*', they would place it so hard during the "ha" that they would break the earthen pots. The tale has it that because this became a common practice, women

²⁶ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. "Folk Theatre Maach – Presentation Technique and Construct." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 86. Print.

²⁷ Shrimaal, Pyaralel. "Effective Folk Theatre Maach and Its Music." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 84. Print.

²⁸ Shrimaal, Pyaralel. "Effective Folk Theatre Maach and Its Music." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 84. Print.

²⁹ Shrimaal, Pyaralel. "Effective Folk Theatre Maach and Its Music." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 84. Print.

started preparing ‘rotis’ before the Maach performances started so as to ensure that they didn’t break their vessels.³⁰

In some performances, there is even a specific area referred to as the ‘Tek ka Pat’ which is an area of the stage where a group of singers sit. Their role is quite interesting; when an actor is delivering his ‘bol’, this group of singers repeat after him, creating a refrain which greatly enhances the dramatic aspect of the performance. It is kind of like an echo system that rebounds and hits the audience with an impact. This works especially during the recitations of “Aa aa aa ha”.³¹

The dialogues, the lyrics and the dance moves are all set to very peppy tunes. These tunes are delivered by powerful male voices, that is accompanied by the *dholak* and the *sarangi* which are the main instruments, though in recent times, the harmonium is also used.³² The *dholak* is of especial significance because it sets the beat for dancers to dance to and also adds to the enthusiasm in performances.³³ Some performers even consider the *dholak* to be “the life of Maach”.³⁴

³⁰ Shrimaal, Pyaralel. "Effective Folk Theatre Maach and Its Music." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 84. Print.

³¹ Varadpande, Manohar Laxman. *History of Indian Theatre*. Vol. 2. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1992. Pg.206. Print.

³² Shrimaal, Pyaralel. "Effective Folk Theatre Maach and Its Music." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 84. Print.

³³ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. "Folk Theatre Maach – Presentation Technique and Construct." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 86. Print.

³⁴ Nigam, Jhalak. "The Dholak and Taan of Maach." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 96. Print.

Figure 3.2- The *dholak* , the most important instrument in Maach



Figure 3.3- The Harmonium, an instrument that has gained importance in Maach recently



3.4.3.2 Dance

Besides the dialogues and the lyrics, there is also extensive and interesting use of hands, feet, neck and effectively, the entirely body in such a way that even people watching from a distance can observe the movements clearly.³⁵

The most common dance steps are simple and repeated often during a performance. It is mostly the female characters that break into frequent dance steps that involves circular movements of the feet and a corresponding twirl of the hands. To enhance the visual appeal of these movements, the costumes are also made accordingly; most of the female characters wear *ghagras*, the skirt of which makes twirling movements look graceful. The male characters also perform dance movements. Their movements, while being fewer, are also more powerful and strong which is a contrast to the graceful movements of the female character. It was believed that it took men of strength and courage to become successful Maach artists. This gave rise to the common phrase “if you are a man then we challenge you to perform Maach” to be used.³⁶

It is important to note, however, that dance isn't a very integral part of Maach performances. The dance movements are merely inserted in between and along with dialogues and lyrics to add colour and vibrancy to the depictions. But, the movements are not very complex, probably owing to the fact that men cannot easily perform feminine, graceful steps. As a result, the element of dance itself becomes relatively less important than the musical or theatrical elements.

³⁵ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. "Folk Theatre Maach – Presentation Technique and Construct." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 86. Print.

³⁶ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. "Folk Theatre Maach – Presentation Technique and Construct." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 86. Print.

Figure 3.4- The dance element of Maach



3.4.3.3 Theatre

Even as Maach is music- centred, it is still essentially a theatre form and therefore contains all the important theatrical aspects such as dialogues, dramatization, costumes, etc. Maach songs, even if they aren't always of a high literary quality, are very impactful in its dramatization.³⁷

Since men play the roles of women, Maach performances are also greatly characterized by voice modulations.³⁸ Voice quality and physique are the two most important qualities that are looked for in Maach performers. The main roles are played by tall men with loud voices.³⁹

Another aspect of the Maach theatre is its informal nature. Maach performances do not require the extensive use of props or accessories but only a great imagination on the part

³⁷ Varadpande, Manohar Laxman. *History of Indian Theatre*. Vol. 2. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1992. Pg.205. Print.

³⁸ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. "Folk Theatre Maach – Presentation Technique and Construct." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 86. Print.

³⁹ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. "Folk Theatre Maach – Presentation Technique and Construct." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 86. Print.

of the viewers. The characters are also given the freedom to improvise a great deal of the script on stage.⁴⁰

3.4.3.4 Significance of the Stage and Other Rituals

The word Maach is derived from the Malvi word ‘*Manch*’ which means stage or platform.⁴¹ But another version has it that it is actually derived from the word ‘*Machan*’ which is a scaffolding that is made for holding the stage.⁴²

In accordance with that, the stage plays an integral role in Maach performances. There is a lot of importance attached to its construction and other aspects and there are also several rituals associated with it.

The stage is erected very high, between 5 and 25 ft. in height. It is believed that a Maach stage is high enough for a bullock cart to be comfortably parked under it.⁴³ The length and the breadth, however, are not fixed and can be changed to suit the requirements of the particular performance.⁴⁴ It is normally constructed facing the East, for it was considered auspicious.⁴⁵

There are also several rituals associated with the construction of the stage. To begin with, a pole which is referred to as ‘*khambh*’ is erected in the place where the performance is to be held and the performers and the director worship it. To mark this occasion, music is played and ‘*prasad*’ is distributed. This also serves as a public declaration and advertisement that a performance is about to be held soon; mentally preparing the artists and the audience for the forthcoming event.⁴⁶ Following this is the actual construction of the stage. The stage

⁴⁰ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. "Folk Theatre Maach – Presentation Technique and Construct." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 86. Print.

⁴¹ Waqt, Ashok. "Maach: The Resonating Culture of Malva." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 95. Print.

⁴² Awasti, Rajendra. Personal interview. 8 Jan. 2014.

⁴³ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. "Folk Theatre Maach – Presentation Technique and Construct." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 86. Print.

⁴⁴ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. "Folk Theatre Maach – Presentation Technique and Construct." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 86. Print.

⁴⁵ Nigam, Jhalak. "The Dholak and Taan of Maach." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 96. Print.

is made generally of wooden planks that are uplifted by poles which are rooted deeply in the ground. It is generally open on all sides. The stage is a very functional unit with only the absolutely required props such as a chair or two. It is sometimes decorated with flowers or banana plants, which are also used as offerings.⁴⁷

Apart from this, there are several other rituals associated with a Maach performance. A Maach performance typically begins by worshipping the Gods, especially Ganesha and Bhairavnath, who is worshipped as the main Maach deity.⁴⁸ This is supposedly because according to legend, it was the deity of Anandbhairava that had inspired Guru Gopalji to evolve the Maach art form.⁴⁹ The artists then bow before the Guru or a chieftain and quickly exit to get dressed. Articles such as the sword and a holy book are placed on the stage as a sign of respect to the Guru. The Guru is given an almost divine status in Maach. On the sides of the stage, they also placed two silk mats which were considered a unique and important element of Maach. One side was reserved for singers-actors and the other for scholars and knowledgeable senior citizens.⁵⁰

A character known as the 'bhishti' then enters and sprinkles water on the stage as an act of purification.⁵¹ He also sings a song, which goes:

अजी भर लाया निर्मल जल से, मसक मनोहर भर लाया ।।
अजी छोटा डोला मसक मोरी मोटी/मैया
चट कंधे पे धर लाया में...
मसक मनोहर भर लाया ।।

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⁴⁶ Varadpande, Manohar Laxman. *History of Indian Theatre*. Vol. 2. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1992. Pg.205. Print.

⁴⁷ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. "Folk Theatre Maach – Presentation Technique and Construct." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 86. Print.

⁴⁸ Shrimaal, Pyaralel. "Effective Folk Theatre Maach and Its Music." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 84. Print.

⁴⁹ Varadpande, Manohar Laxman. *History of Indian Theatre*. Vol. 2. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1992. Pg.205. Print.

⁵⁰ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. "Folk Theatre Maach – Presentation Technique and Construct." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 86. Print.

⁵¹ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. "Folk Theatre Maach – Presentation Technique and Construct." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 86. Print.

This translates to

*Manohar (Krishna) has filled a big pitcher of water
to sprinkle on the stage and its surroundings,
I have a small body frame and the pitcher is big,
yet I have placed it on my shoulder and brought it.*

There is another character known as the ‘farrason’ who lays mattresses for the chiefs and other important people who are spectators. He sings a song on the lines of:

रंग भर जाजम झटक बिछावा,
(बालाजी) कई चारी पल्ला खोल ।
(अजी) इन जानम पे, बिलीजी बैठे (कई)
ज्ञान तराजू तोल ॥
बालाजी कई ज्ञान तराजू तोल ॥

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which translates to

*Open the 4 layers of the mattress,
and lay the colorful ones.
On, these, will sit intellectuals like Birlaji,
who will evaluate our performance with their knowledge.*

The next important ritual is the appearance of a Bal Ganesh, portrayed by a young boy, who is generally depicted with a red trunk. The owner or the funder of the performance then performs a ritual of worship to this figure.⁵⁴

⁵² Sen, Siddeshwar. *Malwa Ka Loknatya- Maach*. Pg. 143. MS.

⁵³ Sen, Siddeshwar. *Malwa Ka Loknatya- Maach*. Pg. 145. MS.

⁵⁴ Waqt, Ashok. "Maach: The Resonating Culture of Malva." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 95. Print.

Following this, all the performers enter the stage, one after the other, greet the audience and then exit again. Following this, the lead actor along with the jester/ joker known as *Sher Khan* have a dialogue in which they describe the performance that is about to happen. It is only after the observation of all these rituals that a performance can begin.⁵⁵ However, in recent times, the number and duration of rituals in a Maach performance have been greatly reduced.⁵⁶

The literature that we were able to procure explained all these elements in detail. While this helped us in the process of documentation of Maach, it wasn't particularly helpful when we tried to find material pertaining to our research focus- the themes in Maach. We only found general outlines of the stories that were told through Maach.

To gather more information about the themes and to study the transitions that they have undergone, we had to rely largely on our primary sources. The next section of this report describes in detail the process of our on-field research and summarizes our findings based on this research.

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⁵⁵ Waqt, Ashok. "Maach: The Resonating Culture of Malva." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 95. Print.

⁵⁶ Nigam, Jhalak. "The Dholak and Taan of Maach." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 96. Print.

4 OBSERVATIONS AND FINDINGS

“All the world’s a stage.”

-William Shakespeare ⁵⁷

This section deals with the details of the on-field research that we carried out and what our observations and findings based on this were. This section has been categorized according to the three main methods through which we gathered information on-field – the performances that we witnessed, the interviews that we conducted and the secondary literary sources that we were able to find.

4.1 PERFORMANCES

6th January, 2014. It was a usual chilly winter’s morning in Ujjain. Fighting the inclination to sleep a little longer, we woke up early in the morning to get ready. We were surrounded by an aura of importance. The day was to be vital and it was as if we already knew it. It was the single most important day of our field trip to Ujjain for this was the day we were going to witness two live Maach performances that were being staged especially for us.

When we enquired about the possibility of seeing Maach performances, we were made aware that these performances no longer happened on high stages or in places of public gathering. As a result, the performance that we saw was staged in a studio setting with the audience being merely the thirteen of us. Performances also do not happen throughout the night any more. “It becomes impractical to do so” ⁵⁸ said Premkumar Senji, the son of Sri. Siddeshwar Sen, who was organizing and directing one of the performances that we were about to see. The performance we witnessed was staged in broad daylight.

We entered the premises of Kalidas Academi at 8:00 A.M. in the morning, eagerly awaiting the outcome of the day. We were received by the beautiful art and architecture of the Academy. Almost every wall of the Academy is covered with artistic representations of regional folk tales as well as scenes from epics such as the Ramayana. Every few strides, one

⁵⁷ "All the World's a Stage." *Poemhunter*. N.p., n.d. Web. 26 Feb. 2014.
<<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/all-the-world-s-a-stage/>>.

⁵⁸ Sen, Premkumar. Personal Interview. 6 Jan 2014.

stumbles upon a bust or a sculpture of popular historic characters. Stepping into the Kalidas Academi, one feels as if he / she can get a true sense of the richness of the Malwa culture just by observing the creative depictions within the confines of this single Academy that serves as a tribute to the Malwa history and heritage.

Figure 4.1- Paintings and sculptures in the Kalidas Academi



The studio within the Academy was where the performances were going to be held. The artists still hadn't arrived which wasn't much of a surprise; the people of Ujjain lead calm, laid back lives, their day begins well past 10:00 A.M. We waited for them arrive, absorbing the feel of the Academy and the chilly morning wind of Ujjain.

When they did finally arrive, they seemed to function with an air of purpose. The opportunity to showcase Maach- the art form that they feel so passionately about, the art form that they can see is losing its importance all around- fills them with excitement and hope, says Dayaramji, a Maach artist who has been performing for 25 years now.⁵⁹

The process of make-up was elaborate. Having been informed that Maach was very informal in nature, we didn't anticipate that so much importance would be given to make-up. Maach is not that informal any more, we were told by a *Maachkar* who was in the middle of

⁵⁹ Dayaram. Personal Interview. 6 Jan 2014.

the process of drawing a fake moustache on his face. But, that's difficult for us, he added. "We cannot afford the expensive make-up products in the market, we have to make do with whatever we can."⁶⁰ On a closer look, we realized that he was making the moustache with a simple matchstick, no brushes or elaborate designing tools. But for all their simplicity, the *Maachkars* still tried to ensure that they did justice to the appearance of the roles they were going to play.

The first performance that we saw was believed to be one of the most popular Maach stories from the earliest times. The performance was brought to us and directed by Mr. Premkumar Sen. It was based on the story of King Bharthari. The performance that we saw focussed on the religious elements of the story, with a great deal of importance being given to character of the saint Goraksh Nath and his ideas and teachings.

Figure 4.2- King Bharthari and Gorkash Nath



The performance was about two hours long as opposed to the traditional Maach that went on for 6- 8 hours through the night. From this performance, we were able to observe several elements of Maach. Some of them were in keeping with the literary material that we had already studied. For instance, the practice of men playing the roles even of female characters was very evident. The story had several female characters, some important

⁶⁰ Patel, Atmaram. Personal Interview. 6 Jan 2014.

characters also such as the Queen Pingala, but every single one of them was portrayed by men. Their costumes were complete with a *ghunghat* and ornaments around their wrists, necks and waists. Some of them even modulated their voices to sound feminine.

We were also able to observe the informal nature of Maach. We saw that the artists forgot their dialogues or lyrics occasionally and were prompted by their fellow performers or by the director. Their dance movements weren't always synchronized. Sceptically, we enquired of the director how it was permissible for performers to commit errors such as these. To this, Mr. Premkumar Sen replied that the nature of the art form was such that the artists never focussed on ensuring that they remembered their lines, their aim was simply to entertain. He also informed us that such occurrences of forgetfulness were not regarded as 'errors' by the traditional Maach audience.⁶¹

We were also able to clearly observe the various elements of music, dance and theatre. We noticed how music was of prime importance, and how the artists focussed on singing most of the play. The *dholak* was very important, contributing greatly in setting the pace and rhythm of the whole performance. We also noticed how the use of dance movements was very little and simplistic which is exactly what the literary material we had read had prepared us for. The dialogue delivery was of a high dramatic potential.

But we also noticed several differences in what we saw and we had read. Other than the fact that the performance that we saw was not on a traditional stage or at night, there were several other modifications, as well. For instance, literature claims an extensive number of rituals that are performed in the beginning of a Maach performance. These rituals are detailed and specific according to the books that we read. But in the performance that we saw, there weren't as many rituals, and the rituals that were performed weren't carried out to the extent that is described in the literature. For example, a *bhisti's* ritual is supposed to involve the carrying of a pot of water, following which the water is sprinkled on the stage and then a song is sung on purification. But in the performance that we saw the character merely sung a purification song without observing any of the other practices that came along with it. We also observed the lack of certain characters that were mentioned in the literature such as the *farrason* and the *Sher Khan* or the jester. When we interviewed the performers afterwards, they explained that considering the time constrain, it becomes difficult for them to still observe every ritual and depict every character.

⁶¹ Sen, Premkumar. Personal Interview. 6 Jan 2014.

The second performance that we saw was organized by Mr. Harish Poddar, a Maach artist himself who is specialized in the dance element. He is a more contemporary artist who has experimented with several new dimensions of Maach presentation.

This performance was based on the tale of King Harishchandra, a popular historic king of the Malwa region. But the performance had been adapted in such a way that there were certain elements of the story that weren't exactly according to the historic account of it. The artists had also managed to incorporate within the performance certain social issues such as dowry, female infanticide and child education. These, while not a part of the original version of the story as described in Box 4.1, were still included in the performance. Harish Poddar says that such incorporations become necessary with changing times, for, people now associate better with performances that depict issues that are directly relevant to them.⁶²

Figure 4.3- A scene from the Maach performance about King Harishchandra



In this performance too, we noticed several deviations from what the literature claimed to be 'authentic Maach'. Music, the main element of Maach, in this performance sounded rather unlike the typical folk music that was characteristic of Maach. The music sounded more structured and seemed as if it derived some amount of influence from Indian classical music.

⁶² Poddar, Harish. Personal Interview. 6 Jan 2014.

We also noticed that in this performance there were fewer, almost no instances wherein the performers forgot their dialogues or lyrics. The informal nature of a typical Maach performance wasn't evident from this one. Even the costumes were colour coordinated and it could be seen that a great deal of care was taken to ensure that the artists looked as much like the characters that they were portraying as possible. This performance also involved the use of certain props and ornaments to enhance the visual appeal and the reach of the performance.

When we questioned Mr. Harish Poddar about this lack of informality in performance, he said that “Maach has had to adapt over the years to sustain. Maach has realized that continuing features like its informal nature into the present time would only contribute to lowering its popularity among the modern- day audience. Therefore, Maach has realized the need to become more structured and systematic in order to survive.”⁶³

Box 4. 1- Story of Harishchandra

King Harishchandra was believed to be the most truthful and righteous man of all times. To test his righteousness, sage Vishwamitra disguised as a Brahmin approaches the king who offers to give him anything he desires. The sage demands his entire kingdom and as a supplement, also asks the king to sell his wife, Taramati and son, Rohitasva. Being the honourable man that he was, Harishchandra agrees to these terms. He then takes up a job with Kalu Dom at a cemetery where he collects taxes for providing the fire for cremation. Vishwamitra, still not convinced of his honour turned into a snake and bit the prince Rohitasva, killing him. Taramati carries the corpse of her son in the rain and mud with great difficulty to the cemetery where Harishchandra works. Even after he realizes that it was his wife and son, he refuses to cremate the body until he receives payment for his master. Having no other means of making payment, Taramati offers him her ring which was a present to her from Harishchandra himself. She is then required to cover the corpse with a shroud but since she couldn't afford one, she sees no alternative but to unwrap her sari. As she is about to do this, Indra and the other Gods appear, proclaim that Harishchandra is the most virtuous man and restores his son to life and also returns his kingdom to him.

Source: Sharma, Mahesh. *Tales from the Puranas*. New Delhi: Doamond, 2005. Print.

⁶³ Poddar, Harish. Personal Interview. 6 Jan 2014.

Thus, we were able to see two Maach performances. From this, we were able to witness several elements of Maach such as the use of music, dance and theatre and the feature of men playing the roles of female characters. We also observed contrasts between the two performances which enabled us to understand the transitions of Maach better.

There were differences in the thematic focus of both the performances. The first one was largely religious while the second one was historic with certain elements of social, as well. The first one was more traditional while the second one was more sophisticated, owing to the fact that it was performed by contemporary artists. This can be seen in the more informal nature of the first performance as compared to the structured presentation in the second one.

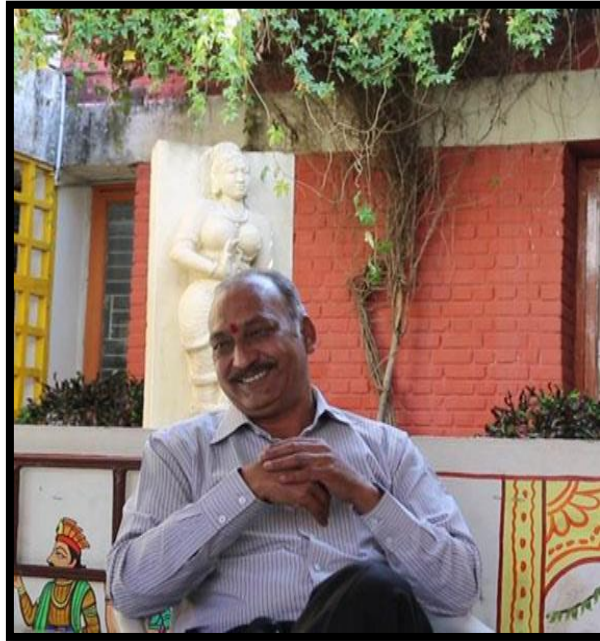
4.2 INTERVIEWS

Following this, we also conducted interviews of certain important people who added to our knowledge about Maach. The first of these people was Mr. Rajendra Awasti, a senior Maach artist. He spoke about Maach as a traditional art form and talked to us a little about how it has changed over the years, but mainly, he was able to explain to us the historic reason behind why women never participated in Maach. He stated two reasons for this. Firstly, he said, our country has historically been patriarchal. As a result, women were kept busy with household work and weren't given the freedom to be a part of social gatherings which is what it was for the audience of Maach. The women weren't even allowed to come watch the performances; it was of course unthinkable that they would be allowed to perform on stage. Next, he explained, was the characteristic vulgarity of the Maach dialogues of earlier times. This vulgarity made it absolutely unfit for the eyes and ears of the womenfolk. And since the women weren't a part of Maach initially, that practice has continued till today as a tradition and therefore women hardly ever take part in Maach even today. Certain *akhadas* might allow it, but largely, it is not practiced.⁶⁴

The literature that is available to us offered very similar reasons when explaining the lack of female participation in Maach.

⁶⁴ Awasti, Rajendra. Personal Interview. 7 Jan 2014.

Figure 4.4- Mr. Rakendra Awasti, senior Maach artist



Our next main interviewee was Mr. Shailendrakumar Sharma who is an author and editor of a book on Maach which served as one of our most important secondary sources. He also serves as a professor of Hindi literature and drama in the Vikram University of Ujjain.

He explained to us several aspects of Maach performances. The main piece of information that we gathered from him was about the close relation of Maach to Malwa. He explained to us that the relationship between Maach and Malwa isn't merely as simplistic as that Maach is the regional folk theatre of Malwa and therefore depicts tales and themes that are important to Malwa. Every theme in Maach and the transitions that these themes have undergone are all a result of the transitions in Malwa itself, he said. He goes on to say that to him, Maach IS Malwa; if people think that Maach is dying as an art form, it means that Malwa at large is dying too.⁶⁵

He also explained to us in detail how Maach has always been a 'people's theatre'. Maach has always depicted to its people what they want to see. If people wanted to see romance in the performances, then the artists would include romance in their stories even if meant changing the historic account of a tale. Any other purpose, even the recent inclusion of social awareness, is merely secondary. Nobody, according to him, ever went to watch a

⁶⁵ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. Personal Interview. 8 Jan 2014.

Maach performance because it included concerns of the society and the people. It is because of this reason that Maach artists seldom had formal or structures scripts to follow during their performances. They used to see what the audience wanted and then improvise accordingly.⁶⁶

Figure 4.5- Interviewing Mr. Shailendrakumar Sharma, an author of a book on Maach



Our next main interviewee was Mr. Omprakash Sharma, a senior Maach artist whose understanding of the musical element of Maach was of much importance to us. Apart from explaining to us the importance of music in Maach, he even taught us some of the popular Maach songs. He provided us with lyrics of important Maach performances about various themes and taught us the tunes for them, as well. He also explained to us the elements of classical music that are beginning to enter into Maach music. The *ragas* and *raginis* of Indian classical music are beginning to be a part of Maach, as well. He sang for us Maach dialogues that were set to *Asawari* and *Jogiya* which are popular Indian classical tunes. He explained that Maach music is nowadays a mixture of music that is classical, folk but also contains certain aspects that are exclusive and typical of Maach.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. Personal Interview. 8 Jan 2014.

⁶⁷ Sharma, Omprakash. Personal Interview. 8 Jan 2014.

4.3 SECONDARY SOURCES

Having watched the performances and conducted in- depth interviews, we had gotten most of the information that we could gather. But looking at the extensive libraries that were at our disposal, we also tried to procure more secondary sources pertaining to our research.

The library at the Kalidas Academi and the one at the Vikram University were the two main libraries that we visited. Once again we encountered the problem of the literature being in Hindi and Malwi, which made it difficult for us to understand.

From what we could make out of the literature, we realized that most of the content in these books were repetitive and rather similar to what we had already gathered. As discussed earlier, the greatest problem with all this material is that it is largely documentary in nature and not very analytical. We realized that not much scholarly work has been done on studying Maach from different perspectives but have rather focussed on recording various elements and themes of the art form. Considering these limitations, we didn't really procure new information from the secondary sources pertaining to Maach. What we did find useful was that some of these sources contained detailed compilations of popular Maach stories and songs. This helped us in understanding the themes in Maach and the different time periods these themes were prominent in.

That brought us to the end of our on-field research. Based on what we found from our on-field research and also, considering the literary material that we read up on, there were some important analyses that we made and conclusions that we arrived at which will be discussed in the flowing section of the report.

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5 DATA ANALYSIS

“You need three things in theatre - the play, the actors, and the audience, and each must give something.”

- Kenneth Haigh ⁶⁸

This section of the report explains in detail the analyses and conclusions that we were able to arrive at based on what we gathered from the literature available and on what we found during our on-field work. This section also largely contributes towards answering our research question.

From our preliminary research based on the literature that we read, we gathered that there were several different themes that were depicted in Maach performances. It appeared as if the Maach artists had composed lyrics and written scripts on almost any and every topic that is relevant to the people. We were able to broadly categorize these under four main themes- religious and mythological, historic, fictitious with an especial focus on romantic and social.

But when we spoke to performers and directors of Maach about this and went through manuscripts of Maach plays from different time periods, we realized that these themes hadn't all come up at the same time nor were they all popular at the same time. Based on this, we were able to analyse a transition in the predominant themes of Maach performances over the years. We noticed that each of these themes were predominant during a certain time period. This did not, however, mean that the other means were not performed at all during the predominant phase of a particular theme; it was merely that they were subsidiary to the main theme of that time.

We recognized that the earliest theme in Maach performances was religious and mythological. These included tales singing the praise of the Gods or were from epics from the Puranas. Then there came a time when pride in the regional history of culture of Malwa enveloped the lives of the people. As a result, the Maach performances came to depict historic tales that portrayed the lives of the popular regional historic characters. Around the same time, there was also a growing need amongst people to sensationalize the themes that were depicted. Fiction, then, came to fill in this need. Several of the historic tales came to be

⁶⁸ "ToInspire Quotes." *ToInspire*. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Feb. 2014. <<http://www.toinspire.com/author.Haigh>>.

adapted to include elements of fiction such as romance and also others such as exaggerated acts of bravery or intellect of the protagonists. Recently, there arose yet another wave of transition; this time to include in the performances the theme of social awareness at a time when there was growing concern in the society about issues such as dowry, female infanticide, and so on.

Once we realized that there have been transitions in these themes, we set out to try and understand two things pertaining to this transition- the reasons for such transitions and the exact period(s) of the same. The former proved to be an easier task. We were told that the reason behind each of these transitions was simply that there was a change in the preferences of the people or a change in the outlook of society at large.⁶⁹ But when we tried to determine exactly when these transitions occurred, we kept running into dead ends. Nobody was able to give us a specific time period associated with a specific event. All of them, the artists or the experts on Maach, merely gave us broad time frames within which these changes were observed. The justification provided for this was that such transitions did not occur overnight and therefore it isn't possible to pin point these changes to a very specific time. These changes were a product of time and therefore cannot be confined to specifics.⁷⁰

We also realized that as the themes in Maach have been constantly undergoing transitions, so also are several other elements of Maach performances.

This section also considers our analysis of a very significant element of Maach that sets it apart from most other folk art forms. This is the extent of its characteristic informality and the close connection that it shares with the people of the society who are more than mere spectators of the play.

This also leads us to finally consider the trend of the diminishing popularity of Maach performances over the recent decades and in this light, look at various measures that have been adopted by several sectors to support and revive the art form. Based on this, we have tried to predict what the future might hold in store for Maach.

This section will thus focus on explaining the transition of themes in Maach, the other transitions that can be observed in the art form, the characteristic informality of Maach performances, the loss in popularity and the consequent efforts at revival of Maach, and finally, our prediction of its path ahead.

⁶⁹ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. Personal Interview. 8 Jan 2014.

⁷⁰ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. Personal Interview. 8 Jan 2014.

5.1 THEMATIC TRANSITIONS

5.1.1 Religious and Mythological

Box 5.1- Lyrics of a Maach between Bhakta Prahalad and his mother

When we spoke to senior Maach artists, we were made aware of the fact that the earliest Maach performers had a tendency to largely depict religious and mythological tales. This was during the late 18th century and the early 19th century. This was at a time when religion played a central role in the lives of people and prayers and invocations to the Gods was a way of life; in fact, the only way of life that many of these people knew.⁷¹

It follows that the theme of their art form greatly reflected the beliefs, values and ideas of the people themselves and their society. So, religious tales that describe the greatness and prowess of their Gods came to be lyricized and dramatized. Tales of divinity and sanctity were the most accepted and therefore the most popular.

Though tales of some Gods were more popular and performed more frequently than others; generally, there would be tales that sing the praise of several Gods. The tales were mostly from epics or the Puranas which delve into stories about Shivala or the lives of saints or great devotees such as Narasi Mehta or Bhakta Prahalad.⁷²

Box 5.1 contains an excerpt from a popular Maach between Prahalad, a devotee of Lord Vishnu and his mother.

प्रल्हाद - हरि गुण गावा (ओ माता मोरी)
हरि गुण गावा मुक्ति पावा
यो जग झुठी (ओ माता मोरी) माया रे
माता राम भजन मन भाया रे ॥
माँ - छोड़ सेतानी (ओ बेटा म्हारा) राम कहानी
लाज कुटुंब की (ओ बेटा म्हारा) जावे हैं
बेटा क्यों तु लोग हसावे हैं ॥

*Prahalad: I feel like singing the glory of Hari
That is the way to salvation,
Oh my dear mother,
This whole world is an illusion,
His name is the only thing that soothes my heart.*

*Mother: Stop your mischief, dear son,
The prestige of our family is at stake,
Why do you behave such that would make people
mock us?*

Source: Sharma, Omprakash. Personal Interview. 8 Jan 2014.

⁷¹ Awasti, Rajendra. Personal Interview. 7 Jan 2014.

⁷² Awasti, Rajendra. Personal Interview. 7 Jan 2014.

5.1.2 Historic

Towards the mid- and late- 19th century, Malwa as a region began to gain prominence and started becoming highly influential. Several prominent historic figures belonged to the Malwa region. The tales of Maach then began to depict the lives, deeds and accomplishments of these figures in fictitious as well as non- fictitious tones. Some of these popular figures were Raja Harishchandra, Amarsingh Rathod, Raja Shivaji, etc.⁷³

It is believed that the prominence of this theme lasted much longer than any other theme. In fact, even till today, the representations of Kings such as Harishchandra and Bhathari continue to be popular. As already mentioned, the two performances that we saw were based on these stories. However, several of these stories are now being adapted to include other elements and do not offer a purely historic account of people or events.⁷⁴

Box 5.2 explains the historic story of King Bharthari, though these aren't the exact details of the performance that we saw.

Box 5.2- Story of Raja Bharthari, a popular Maach

Raja Bharthari was a king of the Malwa kingdom and Pingala was his favorite wife. Once, seeing an ordinary woman commit Sati at the death of her husband, the king decided to test Pingala's love for him. He went hunting one day and sent his messenger back with the false news of his death and his blood stained clothes as proof. Pingala, on hearing the news, swallowed poison and killed herself. But, later, the king realized his folly and was overcome by guilt. He spent all his time mourning in the cremation ground when one day; he encountered a yogi named Goraksh Nath. The yogi complained to the king about a broken pot and insisted that he wanted it back. The king explained to him that what is destroyed cannot be brought back. The yogi then explained to him that the same was true of his demised queen, as well. Like the pot, the queen, and everything else made on earth must one day return to it and cease to exist in its earthly form. The king then renounced his kingdom and became a disciple of Goraksh Nath.

Source: " Raja Bharthari." *The Great Natha Siddhas*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Feb. 2014.

<<https://sites.google.com/site/nathasiddhas/raja-bhartrihari>>.

⁷³ Varadpande, Manohar Laxman. *History of Indian Theatre*. Vol. 2. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1992. Pg.205-206. Print.

⁷⁴ Sen, Premkumar. Personal Interview. 6 Jan 2014.

5.1.3 Romantic

Box 5.3- Lyrics of a Maach depicting the story of Nala Damayanti

अजी सुनो दमयंती, बाई गुणवंती...
 माथो पे चीर बंसती, म्हारा राज भला
 स्वयंवर में धीरे चाल जो जी राज
 अजी धीरे धीरे चालो (बाई) जो जी राज
 बर माला लो
 जनम सांगाती के डारो (म्हारा राज) बाई
 प्रीतम घर घी का जिवला बालजोजी राज ।।

*Listen oh, Damayanti, oh virtuous lady,
 The crescent on your forehead looks beautiful,
 Walk slowly towards your swayamwar (wedding),
 Walk slowly with the garland,
 Your life, partner awaits you eagerly.
 When you go to his home, may you light lamps of 'ghee'
 (for prosperity)*

Source: Sharma, Omprakash. Personal Interview. 8 Jan 2014.

Sometime in the 20th century, people also developed a taste for themes that had a greater entertainment value. As a result, Maach plays began depicting a lot of fiction. The stories of kings and the battles they fought were adapted and exaggerated to be more entertaining.

But the most popular and entertaining segment of fiction were the romantic performances. According to Mr. Awasti, there was a time when Maach performances were all about love and romance. This hooked people on to the art form unlike anything else. To be able to reach out to everybody and so that the people could associate with the themes and stories, the performances depicted not only the romances of kings and queens but also of common people. Some of the popular romantic protagonists were Heer- Ranjha, Veer- Tejali, and so on.⁷⁵

Box 5.3 contains lyrics of a Maach about the love story of Nala and Damayanti.

⁷⁵ Awasti, Rajendra. Personal Interview. 7 Jan 2014.

5.1. 4 Social

In recent times, especially over the last few decades, Maach has adopted yet another new dimension. This is the social/ national one which covers common themes such as labour, marriage, etc. and also at times, addresses social concerns such as inequality of distribution or child marriage. The most popular of these contemporary performances are ‘*Mehanant ka Moti*’ and ‘*Dharati ka Dan*’. ⁷⁶

In keeping with the changing times, Maach too has also evolved in order to sustain its popularity. Maach plays have begun to include issues and concerns such as these so that the common man can associate with it, as well. Other than that, the Maach artists also realized that it was impractical to perform stories about kings and Gods any longer because people weren’t interested in them anymore. Society was beginning to be characterized instead by a growing concern over issues such as dowry or child marriage. So it became a viable option for Maach artists to stage performances on these themes. ⁷⁷

The pioneer behind this wave of change was Sri. Siddeshwar Sen who was one of the greatest performers of recent times. Box 5.4 contains an excerpt of lyrics from a Maach *khel* that was composed by him which deals with the issue of family planning.

Box 5.4- Lyrics of a Maach about Family Planning

दुखी परिवार है मोटा जी, पड़े खावा का टोटाजी
कभी लुननी कभी मिर्चीनी... दालने रोटाजी....
वक्त पड़े पे पड़े बेजणा... थाली लोटा जी...
पड़े खावा का टोटाजी ॥

*A big family is painful to manage,
There are problems in feeding all members,
At times, problems of clothing, problems of
having chillies to cook,
At times one has to sell off even the utensils.
A big family is painful to manage.*

Source: Sharma, Omprakash. Personal Interview. 8 Jan 2014.

⁷⁶ Varadpande, Manohar Laxman. *History of Indian Theatre*. Vol. 2. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1992. Pg.205. Print.

⁷⁷ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. Personal Interview. 8 Jan 2014.

Thus, we can see that Maach constantly underwent changes and evolutions to keep up with the changing times and changing demands of people and society. But these transitions were not observed only in the thematic representations but in several other aspects as well.

5.2 OTHER TRANSITIONS

The last few decades are regarded as the period that witnessed significant changes in Maach presentation techniques, topics and themes. Apart from the transition from fantasy-based and history-based stories to ones of social awakening, there have also been significant changes in other aspects. For instance, some *akhadas* are recently allowing and encouraging the participation of women in Maach roles. Female characters are now sometimes performed by women themselves which adds a touch of realism to the performances. Mrs. Pukhraj Pande, Mrs. Kanchanbai Sen and Mrs. Sharadhabai Dighe are some of the most effective women performers of today who have begun to gain importance as ‘*Maachkars*’.⁷⁸

There is a lesser inclination towards wearing ornaments of pure gold or silver, probably owing to the increasing prices and therefore lower affordability of precious metals. Nevertheless, the costumes and makeup of the artists have gained greater emphasis. Earlier, a lot was left to the imagination of the audience. Over the last decade, however, greater care is taken to dress and present a character as close to the original one as possible. In such ways, Maach is losing its characteristic informality in performance.⁷⁹

Owing to the changing entertainment scenarios in the country, Maach has also had to adapt. For instance, it became impractical to conduct performances that occurred through the night. Therefore, Maach performances now last hardly an hour or two. This also caused a reduction in the number of rituals that are performed, the number of characters who take part and so on.⁸⁰

The very setting of Maach has transformed. Electric lights have taken the place of the traditional ‘*mashaal*’.⁸¹ The stage, the most important ‘prop’ in a Maach performance

⁷⁸ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. “Successful Performances.” *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 162. Print.

⁷⁹ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. “Successful Performances.” *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 162. Print.

⁸⁰ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. “Successful Performances.” *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 162. Print.

which originally used to be a grand 15 or 20 ft. in height, so high that bullock carts could pass under, is now reduced to the height of an ordinary elevated platform to perform on.

Music, the key element of Maach has been inflicted with change, as well. Replacing the traditionally folk nature of the music in Maach performances is now a more sophisticated and trained Hindustani classical version.⁸² The traditional instruments in Maach have also changed; while the '*dholak*' has still managed to retain its importance, the '*sarangi*' has been replaced by instruments such as the harmonium and the clarinet.⁸³

There has also come about additions in the medium of Maach presentation. Maach performances are now being aired through 'Aakashwani' and 'Doordarshan'. Earlier, no form of media was ever involved in Maach, but now the use of such mediums to propagate the art form has become necessary. The purpose of this is to be able to increase the reach of this art form in such a way that people all over the country are able to experience its joy.⁸⁴

5.3 MAACH AS A 'PEOPLE'S THEATRE'

The most important analytical component of this report is the study of Maach as a 'people's theatre'. While it is characteristic of most folk art forms to be very closely connected to the community, the intensity of this connection, we observed, was greater in Maach. While several other folk art forms are still informal in their approach, they are most likely to have specific troupes of performers who still practice that art form as their main source of livelihood. In Maach, we were able to identify an almost unique feature wherein all the performers merely performed Maach as a way of entertaining their community. All of them have and have always had other means of earning income which was their primary employment. Their performances, were therefore, very simplistic and focussed merely on reaching out to the community.

⁸¹ Nigam, Jhalak. "The Dholak and Taan of Maach." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 96. Print.

⁸² Nigam, Jhalak. "The Dholak and Taan of Maach." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 96. Print.

⁸³ Shrimaal, Pyaralel. "Effective Folk Theatre Maach and Its Music." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 84. Print.

⁸⁴ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. "Successful Performances." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 162. Print.

Essentially, entertainment was considered the main objective of these performances, social education was secondary. Therefore, the religious and historic plays are not quite entirely religious or historic. The stories are not portrayed truly but are adapted to appeal to the public by way of its dramatic potential.⁸⁵

Therefore, typically, religion, history, tradition, ideology and several other aspects are all woven into one performance. The reason it was so engaging for people is because Maach has the potential to present the crude or unpleasant aspects of society in a humorous and satirical manner. A Maach performer connects to all the emotions and social aspects of people, which is why the audience feels like they are a part of the performance itself and therefore, respond accordingly. It is even believed that Maach in its depiction is absolutely impartial, portraying often unpleasant aspects about a king while also glorifying the loyalty of a servant. "It is seen as an epitome of righteousness" that always held the welfare of society above all else.⁸⁶ In this way, it brought about unity amongst the people, making it a community theatre.⁸⁷

The Maach performers and audience share a personal rapport which makes this folk art a 'people's theatre'. It is believed that the audience, when they view a Maach performance, don't just look at the characters as the king, queen, minister, God or whatever role they play, but also as their neighbour, shopkeeper and whatever other social role that is assigned to them in the community. This ensures a connection between the performers and the audience unlike anything else.⁸⁸

So, if a character forgets his lines or loses his breadth on stage, other members of the caste and even members of the audience are more than happy to prompt him. Their costumes and props are also largely informal, without even making the attempt to be convincing of their role. For example, a male performer who is supposed to be playing a female role would sometimes lift his '*ghunghat*' revealing his unshaved moustache and beard and would relax on the stage, sometimes to the extent that he would start smoking a '*bidi*' on stage.

⁸⁵ Varadpande, Manohar Laxman. *History of Indian Theatre*. Vol. 2. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1992. Pg.205-206. Print.

⁸⁶ Patel, Narhari. "Reflecting on Malvi Maach." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 82-83. Print.

⁸⁷ Patel, Narhari. "Reflecting on Malvi Maach." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 82-83. Print.

⁸⁸ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. "Successful Performances." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 162. Print.

Maach performances are also characterized by a lack of ramps, curtains and involve the use only of minimal props. For instance, if a performance is to depict a journey through the entire cosmos, the performer merely takes two or three steps and the idea is conveyed. In the performances that we saw, as well, there were very few props that were used. In Figure 5.1, the performance of a *yajna* has been depicted merely by the use of a plate and a glass and other such minimal props. Figure 5.2 is that of a toy rubber snake that was used to portray that the Sage Vishwamitra had taken the form of a snake to kill the prince Rohitasva. On the part of the audience, it requires a great deal of imagination. These actions never affected the audience in any way and in no way acts as a hindrance to the responses the performance receives.⁸⁹

Figures 5.1 and 5.2- Depicting the use of minimal props in Maach



Actors also often switch their roles and seamlessly blend into a musician or a dancer or a narrator. They are also given the full freedom to improvise on stage; they can add or require dialogues and lyrics as per their interest or on several occasions, as per the wishes of the audience.⁹⁰

Another way Maach serves as a way of inculcating social connect is in the fact that it never required any sort of patronage or such from kings or rich individuals even in the earliest times. Right from the wooden planks for the stage and the stage decorations till the

⁸⁹ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. "Folk Theatre Maach – Presentation Technique and Construct." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 86. Print.

⁹⁰ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. "Folk Theatre Maach – Presentation Technique and Construct." *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 86. Print.

costumes and jewellery of the artists, everything to be used was gathered from the people of the community itself.⁹¹

In these ways, Maach goes beyond being just an art form that entertains the masses; it imbibes the cultural radiance of the community and instils a close connect between the performers and the people of the community. And in this way, in spite of its informal nature, Maach had the quality of almost becoming an addiction for the people, the artists as well as the audience. The effect that a Maach performance typically had on the community was one of absolute enchantment.

5.4 LOSS IN POPULARITY

Maach, as it has already been discussed has undergone several significant changes and transitions over the years. But there are two prevalent views of this change in the minds of the people, who are mostly the performers and the experts that we interviewed. Some (few) welcome these changes. The new ‘additions’ to Maach, they say, only increase its liveliness and vibrancy. They do not regard these changes as derogatory or demeaning, but only inevitable and even welcome.

But the majority of them view these changes as deviations from the ancient purity of the art form and as pollutants that the art form must be protected from. They view the changing times and demands of people as detrimental to folk art forms. The classical age is believed to have faded, the new age that it has heralded in its stead has wounded cultures and traditions, and Maach is no exception to this. Malwa has fought a difficult battle in an attempt to preserve and uphold her tradition, not completely failing. But in spite of that, Maach has suffered like several of the other folk traditions that were scattered and shattered from their originality and ‘folkness’. Sustenance, therefore, becomes difficult.

But there is still hope. Several *Maachkars* have taken it upon themselves to do their bit to preserve Maach. For instance, they have now begun to write and record their scripts and lyrics. A tradition that was merely passed on over generations within a family is now being formally recorded in manuscripts and in audio and visual medium so that they aren’t lost. With the same intention, Sri. Rajendra Chavada has begun conducting workshops and classes for children. If Maach is imparted to them from a young age and if they are made aware of its

⁹¹ Sharma, Shailendrakumar. “Successful Performances.” *Maach, the Folk Theatre of Malwa and Other Attributes*. Ujjain: Shailendrakumar Sharma, n.d. 162. Print.

cultural value, they hope and believe that these children will serve their part in ensuring the continuation of this art form. The government too has seen the need to support art forms such as this and rekindle interest in them. It has funded Maach performances and also provided Maach artists with the opportunities to perform in cultural festivals and showcase their art through modern mediums such as television, theatre, and radio.

But, to paraphrase Sri Shailendrakumar Sharma, a swimming pool may be created with the help of support and donations, but not a river. And Maach is like a river, natural, not still, not structured and not controllable. It can live on and progress only with the awakening, participation and support from society. For Maach to retain the essence of its roots, it needs the help of the people.

5.5 THE PATH AHEAD

When we considered the trend that not only Maach, but most other folk art forms have followed, we were uncertain about what could be said about the future of such an art form.

On the one hand, we were inclined to believe that Maach, a mere, antiquated tradition might just fade away slowly under the pressure of the changing modern times. But after having spoken to several artists and experts on Maach who feel so passionately about Maach and its sustenance, and after having looked at the measures, even if only small ones, that have been taken to ensure its continuity, we were forced to reconsider our view.

But the essence of what Maach originally was is not retained any more, we remarked to Champalalji, a Maach artist. Champalalji was quick to correct us. “The essence of Maach is not merely in the setting or the story or the style which is prone to change, but it is in its artistic appeal and its capacity to connect to the people and enable the audience to transcend their reality and be enveloped in a world of lyrics and dialogues which is the story of someone else’s life.” That, he insisted, is what made Maach what it is. And it is that spirit that he wishes will survive on to the future generations.⁹²

The general spirit amongst the performers is that of optimism. They say that Maach as an art form has never really required any help from external forces to sustain. “Think about the time a couple of centuries ago when all other folk art forms required the patronage of kings and rich individuals in order to survive. Even back then Maach never required any such

⁹² Sarsangi, Champalal. Personal Interview. 6 Jan 2014.

support. All it needed was the support and interest of its people. Therefore, it is very likely that Maach will survive these transitions and continue to live in, even if only in a changed form” said Amarji, a veteran *Maachkar*.⁹³ “Consider also the fact that so many measures are being taken to revive and sustain Maach. The government aids Maach performances, workshops are being conducted for children so that the next generation too is acquainted with this tradition, several *Maachkars* are beginning to record in written or oral form their dialogues and lyrics so that the art isn’t lost even as they pass on. What more can you expect? All this is more than enough to carry on the tradition” adds Dilipji, another Maach artist with a glint of hope and optimism in his eyes.⁹⁴

This optimism comes attached with an acceptance, rather than resignation to the fact that change is inevitable. As a result, they don’t feel the scepticism that we do when we come across a folk art form that is constantly adapting and is evidently losing its popularity to newer and easier modes of entertainment. But listening to their words of hope and seeing the optimism in their eyes, we re-examine our data. It is possible, we conclude. May be the art form will sustain in spite of the odds stacked against it. An art form that is used to adapting will but adapt again and again to deal with the changing times. This way, it can always live on. Who knows? Maybe in the future, they will have Maach plays about robots and science fiction. It isn’t altogether impossible, we realize. We cannot control the journey of an art form such as this. It has to follow its natural course. We can only hope for the best and see where it goes...

AAHA!

⁹³ Wagana, Amar. Personal Interview. 6 Jan 2014.

⁹⁴ Chauhan, Dilip. Personal Interview. 6 Jan 2014.

6 CONCLUSION

“The theatre is the involuntary reflex of the ideas of the crowd.”

- Sarah Bernhardt ⁹⁵

Finalizing one topic from a wide range of possibilities to choose from seemed like one of the hardest things that we’ve ever had to do. But from the moment that we came across Maach, we knew our fascination with it was not going to fade away anytime soon. And whenever we were asked what about Maach was it that fascinated us so much, we would be at a loss for pinpointing it to exactly one aspect. Was it the elegant manner in which the art form combined elements of music, dance, drama and story-telling all at once? Was it the way it reached out to its people, reflected their beliefs and established a connection with them in such a way that it truly deserved to be called a ‘people’s theatre’? Was it the beauty, the grace, the colour? What was it? In the end, it was a little bit of all this...

Our knowledge of the fact that there was hardly any previous research on this obscure art form made us feel more strongly about wanting to recognize it, wanting to document it so others can know of its joy, as well.

Maach is a typical folk art form, in every sense. It reflects the culture and the customs, and the principles and practices of its region. It is typically informal, and shares a strong bond with its people. It interlaces dance and drama, and song and story-telling, the resultant combination of which is an entertaining, interactive and unforgettable experience for its audience. There are unique characteristics of Maach that add to how interesting it is. For instance, the fact that women are not allowed to participate in Maach and men play the roles even of the female characters. On the one hand, it reflects the patriarchy of the society, but on a simplistic note, it fascinates the casual observer how a man can pull off such graceful dance movements or such a sweet voice.

Maach stories are deeply rooted in religion and tradition as reflected not only in the stories that it portrays but also in the fact that it necessarily involves the performance of multiple rituals. But over the years, the stories evolved to not only depict myths and epics, but historic folk tales, romantic stories and social anecdotes, as well.

⁹⁵ "Quotations from Sarah Bernhardt." *Poemhunter*. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Feb. 2014.
<<http://www.poemhunter.com/quotations/famous.asp?people=sarah%20bernhardt>>.

For our research that was focussed on studying the themes and the transitions of the art form, we undertook an extensive on-field research trip to Ujjain. Here we had the pleasure of witnessing two Maach performances, interacting with artists and experts who feel very passionately about their art and reviewing literary material that enhanced our understanding of various elements of this folk theatre.

Based on this, we were able to analyse the information and arrive at certain important conclusions. We concluded that each of the four main themes that we had identified- religious and mythological, historic, romantic and social- were prominent during separate time periods when they were the most relevant to the people. As the lives of the people acquired new meanings, the themes of Maach also evolved to incorporate these new ideas. But the inevitable changes that society has gone through have impacted art forms such as Maach in negative ways. Sometimes, it becomes unable to adapt to the changing social scenario and at the same, retain the connection to its roots. Faced with this dilemma, Maach has been losing its popularity over the recent years.

But the *Maachkars* themselves aren't entirely worried by this change. They optimistically look at the various measures that the government, cultural associations and the veteran artists are adopting to ensure that Maach doesn't fade away. For all that it has lost, the one thing that Maach hasn't lost is hope.

Knowing about a performance through secondary sources is one thing. But actually watching one and interacting with the people who perform it out of passion is another. The one major thing it did to us was to make evident to us the intensity of the passion in the people who performed it. These artists do not follow Maach as a primary source of income; they all have other jobs that they do. Maach, for them, is not a source of livelihood, but their passion, interest and heritage. And because of this, they are even less willing to watch it fade away. And when we thought about it, we realized that for an art form to sustain, more than it needs government support or donations, what it really needs is the passion of its people.

AAHA!

PICTURE GALLERY

Figure 7.1- The Kalideha Palace, Ujjain



Where the day was twenty four hours long; but somehow it seemed much longer;

Where there is no hurry, and there is nowhere to rush to;

Where the ancientness of the Indian culture is evident in every walk of life;

Where one is embraced in antiquity and is enveloped by serenity;

There is Ujjain. The Dharmic City of India.

Here, we came; to see, to listen to understand, to discover.

Figure 7.2- Dialogues in a Maach performance



From this ancient land, there arose an ancient art form;

Whose history spans over twenty decades;

Whose portrayals on stage reflected the meanings of life of its audience;

Whose stories have resonated like the sound of a conch in the minds of the people;

Whose beauty and grace and colour left an eternal impression on its every viewer;

Maach.

Figure 7.3- A man playing the role of a female character



Oh the grace of every step, every move, and every twirl!

Oh the beauty of her fast, circular movements!

Oh the elegance of her veiled face and slim body!

But, wait. Look again. Look closely this time.

And comprehend that it is the grace of a man.

Figure 7.4- The musicians of Maach



The wind is chilly. The stage is black. The sound is of silence.
And then a thud that echoes across the entire surrounding space;
A reverberating explosion of music that captures your attention at once;
A melody that you don't truly appreciate the beauty of until you've witnessed it,
And become immersed in it; forgetting any other reality.

Figure 7.5- Sunset in Ujjain



Having travelled hundreds of miles away from home;
Having discovered an obscure tradition that is yearning for recognition;
Having explored and soaked in the legacy of an ancient culture;
In the end; there was purpose, there was resolve and there was accomplishment;
In the end; we were ready to return home.

- Shruthi Rajkumar

AAHA!

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GLOSSARY

1. Akhada- a troupe of Maach performers with certain characteristic methods of performance. Each akhada is headed by a guru.
2. Asawari- a raga in Hindustani classical music
3. Bhishti- a character in Maach who sprinkles water on the stage as a purification ritual
4. Bol- a mnemonic syllable. It is used in Indian music to define the tala, or rhythmic pattern, and is one of the most important parts of Indian rhythm.
5. Dholak- a two-headed hand-drum which is mainly used as a folk instrument. It is the most important instrument in Maach.
6. Farrason- a character in Maach who lays the mattresses for important spectators
7. Gammat- a kind of Maach performance which depicts competition between two *akhadas*, normally with an underlying philosophical tone.
8. Ghagra- a long full skirt, often decorated with embroidery, mirrors, or bells. It is worn as a costume by the female characters in Maach.
9. Ghunghat- a veil worn by women to cover their heads and often their faces, as well.
10. Jogiya- a raga in Hindustani classical music
11. Khambh- a pole
12. Khel- in Maach, performances are set as verse dramas which are referred to as khel
13. Maachkar- a performer of Maach
14. Machan- a scaffolding that is made for holding the stage
15. Manch- Malvi word meaning stage or platform.
16. Mashaal- a torch that produces flame on a stick of resinous wood or of a flammable material wound about the end of a stick of wood.
17. Miangkabau- an ethnic group of people from the Minangkabau Highlands of West Sumatra in Indonesia.
18. Prasad- a devotional offering made to a God, typically consisting of food that is later shared among devotees.
19. Raga- Raga in Indian music is a series of five or more musical notes upon which a melody is made.
20. Raginis- a derivative melody related to a raga.

21. Roti- an Indian dish. Consists of bread, especially a flat round bread cooked on a griddle
22. Sarangi- an Indian bowed musical instrument about two feet high, with three or four main strings and up to thirty-five sympathetic strings.
23. Sher khan- a character in Maach who is the joker/ jester.
24. Silek- a martial art form that is popular amongst the Miangkabau people.
25. Yajna- a ritual sacrifice with a specific objective

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