

LOOK WHO IS VIEWING!

**AN ATTEMPT AT STUDYING RITUAL PERFORMANCES
BASED ON THE STRUCTURAL AND DYNAMIC
CONDITIONS OF AUDIENCE RECEPTION**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

RISHIKA MEHRISHI



**SCHOOL OF ARTS & AESTHETICS
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY**

NEW DELHI-110067

INDIA

2008



CERTIFICATE


This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “**Look who is viewing!: An Attempt at Studying Ritual Performances Based on the Structural and Dynamic conditions of Audience Reception**” submitted by Rishika Mehrishi in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Degree of Master of Philosophy of this university has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university.

RISHIKA MEHRISHI

We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

SUPERVISOR

(Bishnupriya Dutt)

 Associate Professor
School of Arts & Aesthetics
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110067

(Parul Dave Mukherji)

Prof. Parul Dave Mukherji
Dean
School of Arts & Aesthetics
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110 067

Dedicated to the audiences of Khairaling Mahadev Festival

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study is a result of the encouragement I have always received being a student of the School of Arts and Aesthetics, JNU. I am thankful to the faculty members, especially Soumyabrata Choudhuri who since my first visit to Khairaling has stood by my enthusiasm, inspiring me to convert it into an academic endeavour, along with Dr. Bishnupriya Dutt who has patiently guided me by deciphering every thought on the subject, moulding my work into what it is like today. Apart from my classmates, I would also like to thank Prof. Shivaprakash and Dr. Urmimala Sarkar who gave useful inputs throughout the course and field work. Jagdish Vidyarthi, along with all the library and office staff have been important 'administrative' contributors to this work.

I am extremely grateful to the members of the audience of the Khairaling Mahadev Festival. Without their insights and hospitality, the study would have been impossible. I would especially thank the residents of Malau village, especially Mahender and Laskman Negi's family.

The Archives and Research Centre for Ethnomusicology deserves special thanks for providing me with the valuable literature and archival resources, and more importantly Umashankar and Shubha Chaudhuri who have been ever-inspiring and supportive of all my endeavours, along with P. Bilimale, Anita, Utpola and Srinivasan who were always ready to offer help with research.

It gives me pleasure to acknowledge my three best friends- Pranav, Lavanya and Medha (fiancé footnoted), who in spite of their hard corporate life have spared all the time to entertain me and shed my momentary bouts of whiny and disillusioned behavioural patterns and have shown faith in the possibility of my successful completion of this dissertation, an engagement that has always kept them in awe of me.

I am highly grateful to Lakshmi who has been of immense help in this project as a loyal consort in proof reading and untimely tea breaks along with Jyotsna and Moggallan who served as 'virtual' reality checks during the writing process. The 'old boys gang' also deserves special mention, especially Prakash, Pranab Chandan and Ashok (in abstentia) who gave meaningful insights at crucial junctures during my work along with a constant push to meet the deadline.

I would like to thank Meera and Rajiv Mehrishi for their love, care and support- also Tarun, Tushar and Abhinav for their love and 'folklore', making me feel close to home always.

I am thankful to Michael for offering logistic support, and for standing by in spite of it being the longest winter for him.

I owe immensely to my family, especially my parents who have expressed faith in me and have offered every possible support in my academic pursuit. The new family member, Chiaa offered a desired distraction long awaited, I thank Cherry and Abhishek for that.

INTRODUCTION

Performance comes to life through verbal, physical and intellectual responses and exchanges with members of the audience. It enters a performance space not only with native socio-cultural and political identities, conditioning and assumptions but also broader intercultural experiences and understanding, making a possibility of a wide range of reception and responses, where it selects, permits, sanctions, responds, appreciates and patronises the performance. It is this native and intercultural conditioning, performative knowledge and cultural understanding that make the audience assert its individuality, stealing the baton of authority from the official patron in a performance space, becoming the individual patron with an exclusive autonomy, the focus of attention and the object of study.

It is an established fact that every performance invites an audience with a varied typology of expectations, conduct and definitions of functions. This results in a variety of responses and hence the multiplicity of the reconstruction of a performance. This does not deny that every performance has the distinction of inventing its own definition of an ideal audience. The role of the audience in ritual performance has claimed its significance through its active interactive mediation in the process of the performance. It is through this exclusivity that the audience has asserted its presence in the definition and analysis of a performance, and has visibly found its space of action and reception in a different domain than that of other audiences which have operated in a static space, with a clear distinction between the role of the performer and the pre-determined role and response of the audience. This audience not only defines its role but also the space in which it interacts and participates. The focus of my study is the audience of the ritual performances, which is participatory in terms of performing the ritual, the sanctity of which lies with this audience in action by not just viewing, but reinforcing the ritual through its participation and reception.

This audience operating within the self- defined yet transitory structures of action through reception defines the space of the performance which oscillates between the roles of the defined structural paradigms of the ritual space and the space of the 'spectacle'- a space which has moved beyond the passive two- dimensionality of the

dichotomy of performance and viewership, a space which has moved beyond the status of a static theatrical scene and now aspires towards a more participatory, transformative and thereby a dynamic functional mode of action.

Similarly, the audience sets its own paradigms of an ideal performance and to my greater interest expects its own ideal co-audience. Marco de Marinis states that the audience's understanding of the performance is not strictly predetermined by the performance; it is rather enforced by one's own sense of autonomy, with which it defines its role during the performance, based on one's conditioning and knowledge and establishes its authority (Marinis, 1987).

It is through this exclusivity that the audience intervenes and asserts its presence and role in the performance, crossing over the 'ideal' structure, often into interweaving roles of participation and overlapping acts of reception which also exhibit their sites of presence from the ritual space to the spectacle of the fair and which transform into sites of conflict and resistance, the way they evolve as the sites for confluence and festivities.

In my research and field work in the *Khairaling Mahadev Festival* held annually in Uttarakhand, I mainly deal with the nature and context of the audience participating. I attempt to explore this essential aspect of the audience and analyse if it can serve as a methodological foreground for future research on ritual performances.

Of utmost importance to the study would be my endeavour to explore how the audience reacts to interventions and transformations- social, political- hence ritual and performative, in the traditional forms they are conditioned to adorn. The *Mundneshwar Festival* would serve as an important case study to unravel the significance of the spectacle in the performative space of the festival, and how it is utilised by the subjects as semi- performers, semi- audience, reinforcing themselves and the performance through the ritualistic sacrifices and behavioural patterns corresponding to it, and the role of violence in the entire process.

The research calls upon the need to critique institutions, organisations and movements operating in this festival, propagating specific issues in the spaces of the festival and

also to see to what extent the audience makes them manipulate this and in turn manipulate the performance itself. The specific issue in this case would be that of animal sacrifices and how it operates at the level of the ritualistic performances at the *Mundneshwar Festival*, *mela samiti* (the fair committee), the NGO called *Bijal Sansthan* and the state apparatus. It is the intervention of these institutions that has made *Mundneshwar Festival* a critical and significant case study for the role of the audience in creating the ruptures that erupt and evolve annually, negotiating beyond the ideals of not only the 'performed' and the 'viewed', but also what is studied, analysed and has been representatively written about.

Before dwelling upon the larger portions of the method to study the audiences mentioned above as an entry point for the research on ritual performances, it is essential to briefly construct a survey of the academic pursuits of various disciplines leading to an exclusive field of performance studies. Humanities and Social Sciences have experienced immense research in the field of performance by anthropologists, folklorists, linguists, sociologists, performance theorists and other sub- fields of these streams which came into existence over years of exploration, research and documentation.

The intention of anthropological works to dive into performative explorations has seemed to be an effort to draw from performances, meanings and inferences for understanding social, political or economic relations existing vis-à-vis religious inclinations and identity formation (for the interest of this particular study). Apart from some earlier anthropological explorations which laid the foundation for studying performances as a legitimate field of study, Milton Singer's work, *When a Great Tradition Modernizes* (1972) has the distinction of introducing patterns of cultural performances and crystallising the notion of the conceptualisation of performance as an organising principle.

Clifford Geertz, giving immense importance in his interpretative approach to the study of performances and to 'meaning' in cultural phenomenon, has had great influence on both religious and ritual studies. His analysis provides key concepts and a methodological approach for interpreting cultures (Geertz, 1973), where he states that ritual-cultural practices are not only the point at which the 'dispositional and

conceptual aspects of religious life converge for the believer, but also the point at which the interaction between them can be most readily examined by the detached observer' (Geertz, 1973: 115). Through this approach he attempts to reduce the gap between the dispositional ritual and the 'believer' and more importantly the study of the believer by the observer who is recommended to be a part of the community rather than merely detached.

Folklorists like Richard Bauman weigh performance as interplay between communicative sources, individual competence and goals of the participants within the context of a particular situation. He plays an important role in analysing performance as a mode of language use, a way of speaking and utilising performative events as means of identifying the fusion of texts and contexts- performance establishing or representing the interpretative frame (Bauman, 1977). J.L. Austin formulates a linguistics approach with the formulation of the concept of speech acts as weaving through the way language signifies, confirms and fulfils performative events, giving a new approach to the analysis of performance acts where 'saying' becomes 'doing' (Austin, 1975).

The growing interest of the academia in performance practices produced foundational works by anthropologists who study the ritual performances not only to prescribe methods of studying them but also to define the component of the 'ritual'. Stanley Tambiah takes cue from Austin's works and gives his interpretation of performance where he states that 'rituals, however prescribed they may be, are always linked to status and interests of the participants, open to contextual meaning' (Tambiah, 1985:128). For Tambiah, ritual is defined along the lines of patterned and ordered sequences of words/acts in the sense in which Austin pronounces saying as doing, and more so in the indexical sense making ritual formal, stereotyped, condensed and redundant.

Victor Turner, through his phenomenal study of African rituals brought to light the concept of 'social drama' to decipher the symbolic meaning in ritual performances, which is 'ancillary to, dependent on, and secreted from process'. He claims that 'performances, are the manifestations par excellence of human social process' (Turner, 1988) and are practised to recognise the breach within the norm- governed

society and redress them through the process of the ritual. Turner's approach marks a landmark in the study of the performance traditions as processes within the larger social structures.

The study of performance practices takes a path breaking turn with the crystallisation of the field of 'performance studies' which not only institutionalised the discipline but also led to exclusive theoretical discourse around the larger field of performance studies along with its histrionics and sub genres. Richard Schechner's work serves as an important entry point where his experimentation with forms and elements of various performative genres, giving importance to the process of the production of the performance- the rehearsals, preparations, back stage activities, incorporation of the audience- all have led to elaborate investigation of the intricate models and paradigms of performance which Schechner explains within his own structures of analysis. He claims that "whether one calls a specific performance 'ritual' or 'theatre' depends mostly on context and function. A performance is called theatre or ritual because of where it is performed, by whom under what circumstances" (Schechner, 1990:130). Though highly influenced by Turner, he clarifies that "Turner locates the essential drama in conflict and conflict resolution. I locate it in transformation- in how people use theatre as a way to experiment, act out, and ratify change... at all levels theatre includes mechanisms for transformation" (Schechner 1994: 170).

Schechner's initiations complemented and coincided with the contributions of numerous scholars engaging in studying performances to back the cultural theoretical discourse of the field of performance studies. Indian performing arts have been a central focus of many theorists who have surveyed and documented these forms extensively along with exploration and experimentation for academic and performative purposes. The major contributions include Schechner's and Hess' work on the *ramlila* (Schechner, 1983), Zarilli's definitive studies of *kathakali* and other South Indian performance traditions (Zarrilli, 2000), Hein's work on *raslila* (Hein, 1973), Ashton's study of *Yakshagana* (Ashton, 2003) Hansen's study of *nautanki* (Hansen, 1993), Bonnie Wade on Indian classical music (Wade, 1982) and the closest to my field of study being William Sax's work on Uttaranchal performing arts (Sax, 2000), not to ignore the bulk of Indian scholars who have extensively studied the various art forms of the country.

This brief survey of the writings by a few well known scholars from various disciplines converging together because of the central theme of cultural and ritual performance traditions reveals that the study of the structure and dynamism of audience and audience reception has been largely derelict, considering the plethora of research in the field of theatre and performance studies. There have been detailed and extensive accounts of performances which have largely ignored the analysis of the role of audience reception. Brief halts at mentioning the audience have also been confined to studying the structure of an audience which is passive, bereft of any interactive mediation in the process of the performance, neglecting the interplay of the active and ever transforming participatory audience.

There is extensive regional written material which serves as important documentation and analysis on Uttarakhand and its cultural heritage. William Sax has made valuable contribution to the study of performances in the region and has also defined the meaning those performances have for those who perform them. According to Sax, 'ritual performances are an especially powerful means for creating (and sometimes undermining) selves, relationships, and communities, precisely because they inscribe cultural concepts on the whole person, the body as well as the mind, and they do so by requiring of their participants a public, embodied assent to those concepts' (Sax, 2002:12). Andrew Alter's (Alter: 2000) in- depth analysis of the power of drumming in the region has served as an important link in studying the connection of the efficacious and the performative genres in the region. Anjali Capila (Capila, 2002) conducts a thorough research on women folk songs and attempts to socially analyse the song texts. These books serve as important resources for the study of the area. But one must critically look at them, as these studies of the ethnic groups need to be utilised with caution. The works on performance documentation which would be essential for my study need to be demystified, to be pulled away, if not out of the mould, of the efficacy of the ritual and the power it transcends on the people of the hills. Moreover, while giving a thorough look at the regional literature, one would need to trace the thin line between the myth and the real, especially while looking at anecdotes on oral traditions and rituals.

This is however not to ignore the few recent studies which have been dedicated to the exclusive study of the audiences whose role in the performative field of performance production has surely provided new insights. One of the most celebrated works is by Judith Hanna who in her attempt to explore the performer-audience connection through a survey of cross concert connections, traces out aggregate patterns guided by common perception and cultural patterns which prove essential in interpreting emotions and responses through perceptions. Hanna writes that ‘while the dancers come to the performance with their training and creative impulses and projection techniques, audiences come to the performances with their expectations shaped by individual and social history’ (Hanna, 1983:191) Basing her study on eight Smithsonian dance concerts, Hanna claims that the study covers ‘only a small area of people’s perceptions, reasoning, feelings and indirectly, the place and meaning that dance has in some of their lives’ (ibid: 187) . She admits that the audience responses did, however inadvertently, provide insight into some critical problems especially of ‘attracting spectators and building a loyal following’. Hanna’s survey also makes some important observations which claimed that the greater the knowledge of the audiences about the particular dance performance, the lesser the experience of emotional satisfaction or expression of happiness.

This observation stands quite in contrast to Mirella Lingorska’s aesthetic analysis of the idea of audience based on Indian classical views, where the author explores the prescriptions of the *Natyashastra* which designed the need for ‘qualified spectators’. The prescriptions of appropriate behaviour to assess the complex meanings of theatrical performance were considered essential to maximise the pleasure principle while watching theatre. Lingorska, through her article, explores the problems of multiple interpretations of these prescriptions by different social groups and highlights the salient features of the desired audience for Indian classical theatre. The concept of the ideal audience finds its reference in a few writings on Western theatre spectators like an early analysis of the ideal audience defined by Lee Mitchell (Mitchell, 1952). For Mitchell, the ideal audience ‘is a literate audience. It already knows and loves the best of dramatic literature of all languages and all ages. At the same time it is aware of current developments in drama, which means that it is not easily baffled by the unfamiliar flavour of new masterpieces which to the uneducated seem strange or frustrating’(Mitchell, 1952: 3). He puts his ideal audience at a pedestal where he

claims that the ideal audience and its cultivated taste is very essential for theatre education. Later writings like those of Marco de Marinis build extensively on the concept of the 'model spectator' and at the same time formulated the strategies to attract spectator's attention. He states that 'to attract and direct the spectator's attention, the performance must first manage to surprise or amaze; that is the performance must put into effect *disruptive or manipulative strategies* which will unsettle the spectator's expectations- both short and long term- and, in particular, her/his perceptive habits' (Marinis, 1987:109).

Susan Bennett's work is a landmark study which contributes immensely to the documentation of audience reception, historically tracing the contributions of audience reception to performance strategies adopted by theatre practitioners and to the theoretical discourse on audiences. Bennett historically traces the improvisation of Western theatre performances enhancing audience involvement and response forming an essential role in the production tactics which she terms as 'overcoding'. She conducts a thorough survey of the theories that have interpreted audiences through various disciplinary paradigms and also provides her own model which defines an outer and inner frame formulating an interplay between the horizon of expectations leading to reception by the audience and the processes of overcoding by the producers.

Two very similar approaches are reflected in the writings of Rachael I Fretz and Natalie Crohn Schmitt, where they both analyse the participatory roles and contributions of audiences to performances. Fretz exemplifies a storytelling session 'as a cluster of poly-voiced performances in which several narrators and most audience members speak and sing' (Fretz, 1995: 97). By highlighting the various threads of interweaving singing into storytelling, the interactions between the story tellers and the audience and the content of the stories sung, she traces the movements which mobilise one performance to the other and the dynamism which is evolved by the responses, 'the answering' of the songs by the audience. Natalie Crohn Schmitt surveys eleven environmental theatre productions, nine of them in Chicago, where the audience were not passive viewers but active participants in the sense that they were cast in roles in the performance which with one exception depended on their active participation. Through the article, Schmitt not only reviewed the participation, but

also attempted to highlight the crisis between the audience and the role they play once transformed into actors (Schmitt, 1993).

In an important recent study on the listeners and the emotional impact of music on them, Judith Becker tries to trace the physiological changes that happen within the body and brain that support the phenomenological experience of experiencing what deep listeners do. She defines deep listeners as those who are emotionally aroused by music to the level of having near religious transcendental experiences synonymous to what trancers experience in religious contexts. She coins the term *habitus of listening*, while explaining which she states that 'it suggests not a necessity nor a rule, but an inclination, a disposition to listen with a particular kind of focus to expect to experience particular kinds of emotion, to move with certain stylised gestures and to interpret the meaning of sound and one's emotional responses to the music event in somewhat (never totally predictable ways)' (Becker, 2004:71).

Susan Wadley discusses the performance strategies of Dhola performers in Western Uttar Pradesh and states that it is helpful to understand that the performance is devoted to human audience and not divine, which in turn provides freedom for improvisation and innovation to the performer. 'As he responds to his audience, the epic singer carefully fashions episodes and scenes through shifts in delivery style... in a long performance it is aesthetically desirable to cue the audience repeatedly as to their place in the narrative' (Wadley, 2005: 164).

An analysis of the traces of audience analysis in the plethora of writings on performance genres leads one to draw the conclusion that though audiences are beginning to be addressed, their roles are largely seen in subordination to the manipulations and coding of the production processes. Also, the studies have attempted to arrive at a homogenised response analysis of the audience in spite of realising the multiplicity of their cultural and performative conditioning. This homogenisation aspires for spotting the ideal audience frameworks which prove as scales to test the efficacy of the performance and proficiency of the performer. The performance process might have begun to be analysed in relation to the socio-cultural process they emerge from and represent and also with reference to the overlapping performative sub genres and spaces. But the audiences still remain detached from the

social, economic and political realities they represent and emerge from and are taken into consideration only till they are contributing within the space of the proscenium. The studies on audiences have measured them in the two dimensionality of the passive role they play within the space of the prescribed field of performance which have been differentiated from each other within static theoretical boundaries of the theatrical, spectacle and the ritual. Even if they are attempted to be studied as a participatory category, they are considered to have been transported beyond the threshold of spectatorship, falling into the realm of the performative where their audience characteristics are nullified. The recent studies on audience reception have missed out on the analysis of the audience beyond its ticketed passive ontology, leaving out its interactive, ever evolving and heterogeneous nature to be analysed. The Western academia has also largely focussed on mainstream performances which are representative of a given homogenised cultural ethos and has left out the analysis of the non- classical, marginalised or culturally transient audiences.

This makes it imperative to conduct a detailed analysis on *Khairaling* as a site, like several others, to reflect the significance of the audience in analysing the dynamic interaction and mediation which all add up to the process of seeing and studying spectacle, which in itself is never a site of static viewership and reception but an ever evolving mode of transforming action. At *Khairaling Mahadev*, one notices the boundaries blurring between such structural differences of theatricality, ritual and spectacle, due to the roles the audience plays throughout, moving in and out of the spaces, genres of performativity and behaviour.

This project titled ‘Look Who is Viewing!’ is meant to challenge from the very beginning the conventional assumptions which bind the audience as a passive ontology it has come to be recognised as, in the various models of performance analysis. The fact that the audiences reinforce performance, and especially in the case of *Khairaling Mahadev* festival by participating through the act of viewing the events and the acts of others transforming into modes of actions to be viewed, needs to be brought to focus. The study attempts to focus on an audience which is not transported into realms of performing, casting roles or just encountering a performance passively, but an audience which is dynamic, interactive and under certain structural conditions

participatory, ruling over the static theatrical scene and transforming the space into modes of dynamic interaction in determinate ritual sites.

The first chapter is drawn out of the literature survey which demonstrates gaps in the study of audiences of various performance genres by theorists of different disciplines. The chapter thoroughly analyses the writings of Victor Turner as the anthropologist studying ritual performances, Richard Schechner as performance theorist who through his frameworks moulds up the approaches and understanding of performance as a field of study, and Susan Bennett who presents historical and cultural perspectives to the audience within the interplay of production and reception of Western theatre. Through a deep analysis of their works, I attempt to point out the glitches and gaps in their approaches to recognising the observers/audiences as co-creators of performances. These gaps will make way for the contention that emphasises the need for inventing an approach for the study of audiences who contribute to performance through their acts of viewership, challenging the very nature of the performance they witness and participate in, which is further highlighted in the following chapter.

The second chapter is an elaborate study of the ritual performances at *Khairaling Mahadev* festival. This would involve an analysis of the structural and dynamic conditions determining the roles of the audience, where the task is to trace the multiplicity of roles within the structures of reception and to trace the journey of the audiences as participants in the spectacle to the becoming of a 'spectacle' themselves. It would be of key interest to the study to notice those moments of transformation, of breaking out of and breaking into spaces, identities and behaviours, yet revolving around the thresholds of the performative spaces and structures of viewership, which is attempted through illustrations to make the space and the audience relation more comprehensible.

The presence of violence, which I highlight in the third chapter at different levels, is the rupture in the efficacy-entertainment model as it interrupts and manipulates audience response and hence transforms the codes of reception, performativity and behavioural patterns. This would require a historical tracing through anecdotes, newspaper clippings and other sources of incidents of violence over the years. There is a thread of violence that runs through almost every activity of the festival. One

would need to trace the history of fights during procession, over the passing of the buffalo to be sacrificed from the villages, in fixing the flag and circumambulation; intervention of the social workers to ban animal sacrifices in the recent years; the intervention by the NGO called *Bijal Sansthan* over half a decade; the reports of 2005 and the violence involved again due to the *sansthan* as seen in newspaper reports. One would also look at the transitions in the act of sacrificing the animals and its current meaning, significance and performance, where the sacrifice is done by the devotee himself; and the loot at the end of the festival which makes the villagers leave as soon as the sacrifice of the buffalo takes place. This analysis would provoke one to scrutinise the role of the state and its utilisation of coercive power in collaboration with the NGOs, nurturing violence and disruption. While the main focus of the research would be on the audience's contribution and relation to the performance, it would be imperative to study aspects of performance which interact and intervene with audience response and experience. The initial task would be to clarify concepts and definitions which would form the basic understanding and approach to the study of performance theory, audience reception and related concepts.

The study of the *Khairaling Mahadev* festival requires the methodology of documentation and research working at two levels- one, during the festival days, and the other at the level of the in-depth analysis of the socio-economic-political structure of the audience cum performers. The assessment of the activities before the festival, in the village - to bring the flag and animals to be sacrificed, provides an introduction to the community's responses and relation with the performance, ritual activities and the festival. It would also give details about the performances- the music and dances they involve themselves with, which is also an important component of most of the activities which are a part of the ritual practices taking place in the village, where drums and the meaning derived out of various activities revolving around the festival play an extremely essential role. Apart from textual sources and discourse analysis, case studies are an integral part of the methodology. Surveys, personal interviews and documentation have been conducted to analyse what forms an audience in a given situation, how it differs from each other within its own structure, what compels it to be present, what expectations it has from the performance, and how it responds to a given situation. This would involve utilising the grasping of codes through the logistics of viewing and listening, tracing relevant codes throughout the two days of

the festival, grasping the moments of the audience in the field of action, followed by the extensive field work in the community they belong to and the life revolving around it. Archival material which would include a study of recorded live performances and performance reviews in newspapers would also serve as essential sources of previous research and perspective.

It is essential for the study to not only conduct a thorough survey and get an understanding of the methods of the various theorists to hone the theoretical and more so the critical base of the project, but also to offer possible critiques of gaps in the Western conception of the theory and practice of reception of performance. The study will attempt to highlight the need of an alternative approach to the crisis that the audience reception and participation can emerge through contestations with interventions, hence questioning the models of redressal of conflicts within the community. These observations will hopefully add to important insights into identity assertions and power play of the social and political category called audience.

EXPLORING THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS:

A Critical Analysis

The latter half of the twentieth century witnessed a momentum in the orientation of research not only towards performances without written texts but also towards initiatives to define what comprised performance. This phase saw a clear shift in the engagement of social sciences with performance traditions, where the definition of performance per se was redefined, breaking out of disciplinary confinement and incorporating various nuances from everyday life practices. This aspiration towards a broader interdisciplinary approach led to the development of performance studies as a specialised field of study in academia with institutions beginning to be conceived solely for the purpose.

It is at this juncture that the research on performance in different disciplines of social sciences- folklore, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, socio linguistics, began to get inclined more towards the processes of social life, inventing process models [Singer (1972), Geertz (1973), Austin (1975), Bauman (1977), Tambiah (1985) and Turner (1988)]. Performances begin to be studied to not only understand human behaviour, but also to accommodate the agents of human behaviour in the discourse of social processes. These processual models came to be utilised quite prolifically especially by scholars who through their field experience and interdisciplinary insight explored the genre of performance to suit their academic agenda. Hence what came to be termed as performance theory also began to be applied to the study of ritual by researchers, in some way or the other, drifting away from the earlier structuro-functional approaches to ritual where the prime focus was on religion and the 'sacred' to a more socio-processual approach towards the meaning and interpretations of ritual.

These processual methodologies leave open a plethora of models to be experimented with, where scholars from varied streams merge theoretical discourses to define, historicise and document performance practices, at the same time defragmenting the package of performance, to analyse portions, assess methods of production, and various contributions and contributors. Technique, space, improvisation, reception- all

are scrutinised to evolve an objective assessment through assigned models of studying performance practices.

The above mentioned quick observations are broadly the reasons for the choice of the three scholars I attempt to discuss in this chapter. The idea of studying them and their work would not only be to justify historically why they form an essential part of a work on performance studies with their generous contributions, but also how they represent three approaches to the study of performances. Richard Schechner who has the distinction of institutionalising the field of performance studies with the establishment of the study programme at New York University (with others soon following suit) broadened the scope of what constituted 'performance', bringing dance, music, drama, theatre, sport, play and to my interest ritual (which was till now confined to religious studies) within the purview of performance. For Schechner, performance is a transformation of 'natural sequences' of behaviour into 'composed sequences' through 'repetition, simplification, exaggeration and condensation', which in the case of ritual get guided by 'specific functions usually having to do with mating, hierarchy or territoriality' (Schechner, 1985: 228) Schechner delves into categorising rituals based on performative acts, nature and functions dividing human ritualisation into social, religious and aesthetic. Apart from this, Schechner's contribution to the field of performance studies is incomparable, considering the plethora of performance genres he has attempted to analyse, theorise and document.

Schechner's explorations of the performative genres of varied cultures are highly influenced by the work of Victor Turner, who through anthropological insights mainly based on his field work in Africa, reveals models of ritual symbolism and structural analysis. Interestingly, throughout his span of work ranging from his concepts from 'social drama' to 'ritual process', Turner transforms his theoretical understanding considerably; his research and theoretical discourse nonetheless offer key concepts indispensable in any study on ritual performances. By defining ritual 'as a transformative performance revealing major classifications, categories, and contradictions of cultural processes' (Turner, 1988: 75) Turner makes a landmark in the anthropological excursions into study of cultures by making ritual performances the key to understanding social processes. In spite of initiating the complex task of

analysing social behaviours through performances, at a very early stage he underlines the problem that 'it is one thing to observe people performing the stylised gestures and singing the cryptic songs of ritual performances and quite another to reach an adequate understanding of what the movements and words mean to *them*' (Turner, 1969: 7) With these apprehensions, Turner moves on with his discourse formulating essential theories of analysis, making him historically important before any study of ritual performances.

Further confining myself to one seminal work, I discuss the third scholar, Susan Bennett who is a little off beat in the sense that her primary concern is with the mainstream theatre and not so much with traditional or ritual performances. She is of considerable importance, however, because of her comprehensive work on theatre performances where she traces an almost three decade long history of commercial theatre audiences and factors which influence theatre production and audience reception. Bennett's study is an alternative method of studying theatre performances and a very apt one, considering the wide range of performance she researched on , filling a very huge gap in the paradigm of performance studies which has traditionally ignored to an extent the analysis of audience and their role. Her study 'devotes little space to the particularities of individual spectator's response to seeing a play and prefers to concentrate on the cultural condition that makes theatre and an audience member's experience of it possible' (Bennett, 1977: vii). Furthermore, Bennett in the second edition discusses intercultural performances and how the experimentations manipulate audience reception which forms an essential read while looking at cultural performances and their audience.

In this chapter, while attempting to look at three approaches of studying performance, through the works of three representatives: Victor Turner (who through his methods and structures of symbolic anthropology presents an important model of studying the ritual), Richard Schechner (who with his Turnerian legacy tries to draw the ritual and ritualistic behaviour into the interpretative paradigm of performance studies) and Susan Bennett (who through her work incites a completely new possibility of an angle to explore and interpret performances centred around the structure of audience reception), I shall try and locate how far these popular approaches can provide a

model for studying Indian ritual performances and their audience. The idea to look at these three somewhat diverse, yet interconnected models is to investigate into ways and patterns of studying rituals and seeing whether or/and to what extent these monumental works contribute or complement the study of the Khairaling Mahadev festival through the dynamics of audience reception of Susan Bennett and the processual symbolic structures of Turner- Schenarian approach.

Victor Turner emerges as an important cultural theorist with a contribution of almost two decades of research and writings that make significant contributions to the understanding of the ritual performances that go beyond religious or anthropological studies and influencing diverse disciplines like sociology, linguistics, cultural studies and performance studies. I will be discussing Turner's concepts and terminologies like the model of social drama, liminal, communitas, liminoid, his notion of structure and anti structure, apart from his definitions and kinds of rituals. Most of these emerged out of his study of the Ndembu of Northern Rhodesia, through a functional and symbolic analysis of which Turner formulated most of his theoretical discourse, apart from his later works which focussed on drama, carnival and cultural performance in post- industrial societies.

While studying the Ndembu society, Turner realised the need to overcome his 'prejudice against ritual', considering the constant 'thudding of the ritual drums' around his camp, which made him understand the need to investigate the ritual performances and move from understanding the ritual as a mere mechanism for redressal to defining rituals as storehouses of meaningful symbols by which information is revealed and regarded as authoritative, as dealing with the crucial values of the community (Turner, 1968).

Turner's study of the Ndembu ritual complex which was published as *Schism and Continuity in an African Society: A Study of Ndembu Village Life* in 1957 revealed a thorough analysis of the various conflicts embedded in the Ndembu society and the mechanisms adopted to redress them. A social structure primarily based on the concepts of matrilineal tendencies and virilocality, characterised by various social conflicts both within and between villages became the key factor of study for Turner,

for which he formalised his concept of social drama to unravel the social contradictions in the structure of the Ndembu society and to resolve them. Social drama, a processual form defined by him as 'unit of aharmonic and disharmonic process, arising in conflicting situation' (Turner, 1974: 37) consisted of four main phases or stages: *breach*, *crisis*, *redress* and *reintegration*. This model was considered a landmark in ritual studies, to understand not only the processes of cultural and social transformation in a society but also to investigate into the symbolic and interpretative structures of a given ritual.

In his book, *Forest of Symbols- Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, written in 1967 Turner not only presents an 'abbreviated restatement' of the social structure of the Ndembu village, mainly the concepts of virilocality and matriliney, but also a detailed formal understanding of the ritual. He discusses the types of rituals, which he broadly classifies as *life crisis rituals* and *rituals of affliction*, followed by a brief description of various kinds of rituals like curative, fertility, hunting, initiation and funeral rituals and rites which he claims have exclusive drum beats, songs and contexts. But more importantly, Turner dedicates a large section of this work to defining the structure, role, properties and meaning of symbols in ritual performance. In an attempt to concretise his conceptualisation of the 'ritual', Turner states:

By "ritual" I mean prescribed form of ritual behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers. The symbol is the smallest unit of ritual which still retains the specific properties of ritual behaviour; it is the ultimate unit of specific structure in a ritual context.... The symbols I observed in the field were, empirically, objects, relationships, events, gestures, and spatial units in a ritual situation. (Turner, 1967:19)

He further discusses the properties and structure of ritual symbols. For this, he claims to have drawn inference from three 'classes of data': the first category is that of the 'external form and observable characteristics' which he is referring to precisely the ritual performance, which in itself underlines the symbolic significance of what is being viewed and analysed, and actually what should and what is allowed to be viewed. The second category which is of great importance to my work is that of the 'interpretations offered by specialists and laymen' who as members of the same cultural group as the performers have their own receptive analysis and have formulated their interpretations of the ritual and its symbols. The third category which

seems the dearest to the anthropological agenda of Turnerian model is the interpretations and inferences of the contexts ‘largely worked out by the anthropologist’ who defines one’s own space of what is to be viewed and hence can depend on one’s own signification and contextualisation of the ritual performance. It is on the basis of these interpretations and sources of data that Turner claims to formulate his structural properties of ritual symbolism, though in the pages that follow, he clearly sets his priority and states at length the apprehension of discrepancies that can rise out of depending on the observer’s inferences which would be overridden by his own interests, purposes, sentiments and an unquestioning belief in and reception of the ritual. Instead, Turner feels safe utilising the anthropologist’s (investigator’s) interpretation, as the anthropologist ‘has no particular bias and can observe the read interconnections and conflicts between groups and persons, in so far as these receive ritual representation’ (ibid: 27). He also makes it very clear that the investigator must analyse symbols. Turner further develops the pertinent properties of the ritual symbol as *condensation*, *unification* of disparate meanings in a single symbolic formation and *polarization* along with another structural classification between the *dominant* and *instrumental* ritual symbols.

The concept of liminality is discussed by Turner throughout his works though *Ritual Process*, (1969), is regarded as one of his most important writings in which he dedicates a large section to discussions on *liminality* and *communitas*. In his previous book, *Forest of Symbols* (1967), he discusses at length, the structural details of liminality as a state during the ritual process where the subject, through instructions, seclusion and communion reaches a state of 'not yet', just before the ritual reaches consummation (ibid: 93-110). Turner relies on Arnold Van Gennep from whom he derives a theoretical approach and states that “Van Gennep has shown that all rites of passage or "transition" are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or *limen* signifying "threshold" in Latin), and aggregation” (Turner, 1969: 94). According to Turner, *liminality* is that state in which the subjects of ritual process undergo detachment from the everyday processes or the 'status system' of life and are “neither here nor there; they are betwixt or between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (ibid: 95). Turner closely follows the communicative and symbolic patterns of the ritual performance to understand the

state of liminality. According to him, this state which occurs during the phase of the rites of passage completely transforms the subject's social status to such a level that this ambiguous state of being is deprived of rank, status and property. This state of detachment instils within the subjects 'an intense comradeship and egalitarianism' which inspires Turner to develop the concept of *communitas*.

In his concept of the liminality, Turner further identifies, through ritual symbolism, the simplification and homogenization or disappearance of social categories and systems operating within a community which leads him to define what he calls the '*communitas*', a term he prefers to 'community' though only to differentiate the state of *communitas* achieved through the ritual process from the 'area of everyday living' (ibid: 96). Turner claims that "communitas breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority" (ibid: 128). He also defines *communitas* as a 'relationship between concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals', emerging out of a state bereft of any structural peripheries of everyday life. While discussing the modalities of *communitas*, Turner puts forth his understanding with an interrelated binary between the hierarchical, structured, evaluated society and the undifferentiated egalitarian *communitas* with the ritual elder as the only authority.

While discussing the modalities of *communitas* which are 'undifferentiated, equalitarian, direct, non rational', one encounters his famous concept of anti-structure, which Turner cautions against any misinterpretation as a negative category. Instead, he suggests that one should not restrict oneself to the analysis of specific social structure but unravel the 'ground of action in generic *communitas*' which signify freedom and spontaneity as against 'structure with obligation, juralty, law, constraint and so on'(Turner, 1974: 46-9).

But interestingly, Turner acknowledges that the experience of *communitas*, devoid of structure, revitalises an inevitable return to the structure. Underlining the ills of an amplified state of *communitas*, Turner states that 'maximisation of *communitas* provokes maximisation of structure, which in turn produces revolutionary strivings for renewed *communitas*' (ibid: 129). The reaffirmation seems to be inherent in the

very structural sequences of the ritual process Turner attempts to analyse, through which he tries to establish a binary between structure and *communitas*.

Having elaborated on the concepts of liminality and *communitas*, Turner puts the potentiality of social systems to further test by inventing a new category-the *liminoid*. He defines liminoid as the 'successor of the liminal in complex large scale societies, where individuality and potation in art have in theory supplanted collective and obligatory rituals' (Turner, 1987: 29). A concept which focuses on events and activities of the complex modern industrialised societies, like liminality discards any social, economic, political structural confinement, but at the same time carries much greater potential at challenging the social structures and instead of reaffirming, explore other structures or suggest alternatives to the prevalent social conditions.

Turner's ideas presented above have definitely contributed to the comprehension of ritual and its role in the social framework of a given culture. But this does not deny the shortcomings one witnesses in his formulation of concepts which cause discomfort in the effort a scholar would make towards a coherent understanding of Turner's work. Turner, while formulating his idea of social drama, especially in the last reintegrating stage, mentions the probability of legitimization or the acceptance of an irreparable schism. But at the same time, he highlights the fact that social drama in the last phase reaches a climax or a solution. What is further confusing is when he discusses the 'positive structural assertions' that social drama makes. Turner indicates a possibility of a rupture, but always reaffirms the aspiration for a communion. Does he or his anthropological project always aspire for a *communitas* after liminality? Turner seems to be seeking a culmination of the 'disharmonic units' into a *communitas* 'over and above any formal social bonds'; which is reintegrative and bereft of the very social crisis it emerges out of (Turner, 1974). TH - 16294

Further, Turner's well developed and thoroughly discussed concept of liminality raises some concerns. One is curious to try and comprehend his interpretation of the liminal phase and how his reading of the 'institutionalisation of liminality' accounts for a transformation devoid of social constraints or differences. But more importantly, one question looms large: is it that only the subject, who is being healed, transformed,

reintegrated goes through the phase of liminal behaviour? Are the interpretations only limited to that of the actor which would hint at an existence of some kind of hierarchy? One does not come across the liminality of the 'observer' or the audience who are in some phase during the ritual substituting their role with that of the performer.

While discussing the category of *communitas*, Turner overestimates the process of social transformation of the society through the redressal of the crisis in the course of ritual performance. Not questioning the efficacy of any ritual performance, one certainly does doubt the axiomatic treatment of the ritual process by Turner himself. While discussing the social dynamics of the ritual performance, he does not take into account the possibilities arising out of a legitimate or an unprecedented schism which might emerge in the culmination of the ritual. Throughout his project, he does not take into account the social, economic or political heterogeneity existing between the individuals and instead ambitiously defines *communitas* as a 'communion of equal individuals' and as a 'relationship between concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals' (Turner, 1969). Turner somewhere fell short of perceiving society as part of a larger modern industrial era, with individuals whose idiosyncracies come from the identity which arises out of a socio-economic dichotomy of everyday relations with the society they are a part of and a cyclic return to the ritual for the redressal of the crisis.

The category of the liminoid as discussed by Turner leaves some ambiguity about the nature of the rituals from which the inferences are to be drawn. Are the events of play, sport and leisure completely bereft of any ritual? If the ritual elements are present, are they outside the purview of Turner's emphasis on the element of the 'sacred' embedded in all ritual processes? The manifestations of the liminoid in the industrial society do compel us to reconsider the definitions of the rituals and the ritual-sacred dichotomy. Also, is there any acknowledgement of the any sort of a *communitas* in the liminoid, where relatively heterogeneous individuals reach a level of communion while 'playing' while the latter is devoid of identity confrontations?

Turner's analysis of the dynamism of the ritual process does not account for the role and structural analysis of the audience. The contribution of the audience as participants and more importantly as observers is not given due importance except for the mention of a homogenised inference reached after assessing the 'reasonable reliable interpretations', which constitute the standardized hermeneutics of Ndembu culture 'rather than the free associations or eccentric views of individuals' (Turner, 1969: 09) While depending on his inferences on the observers (over which he trusts and values the ethnographic mechanism of the anthropologist's experience), Turner 'chooses' his class of data and it is during the very phases of liminality, creates hierarchies of viewership. His approach not only fails to sieve the audience from the social being, but also fails to recognize the crisis and assertions of authority, hierarchy and structure inherent in the very observers he depends on for his 'class of data'.

Moreover, the authority he gives to the ritual specialist in the end underestimates the autonomy of the members of the audience as actors, observers and opinion makers, in recognising and reinforcing, or sometimes even challenging the authority of the ritual specialist. These tensions could be very much a part of the model of the social drama where the authority of the social could challenge the power of the ritual head, if one has to go by the reaffirmation of the structure logic.

I would conclude this section on Turner by reiterating the problematic of the ambitions of an anthropologist's project which override the inferences and challenge the function, structure and interpretation of the audience and its reception. An anthropologist's uncertainties, liminalities and idiosyncracies are to be addressed in the same way as the dynamics of the audience with interwoven acts of participation and reception, which in a way go over and above the performative, if not so much the social norms which Turner's extremely important theoretical approaches fail to address.

The next theorist to be discussed is Richard Schechner who is revered for his new insights to the field of performance studies taking it beyond the historical, artistic and anthropological with the attempt to include various disciplinary approaches under one stream of analysis. Considering the plethora of his written works, models, documentation, direction and extensive experimentation with various forms from

around the world, I would discuss a few of his essays which pertain to discussions on his understanding of the role of audience and ritual circumstances in performance studies. Instead of looking at his books, I would reflect on some of his key essays which are usually overlapping with the themes of his books, but at the same time are sufficient to bring out the relevance of Schechner's work to the project I endeavour for.

Schechner in his essay *Magnitudes of Performance* (1988), making use of his own elaborately worked out categories, tries to capture and comprehend the expanse of what can or has been termed 'performance' and also expresses his desire to 'take an intergeneric and intercultural perspective and see what the "limits" of performance were (Schechner, 1988: 256). For this purpose, he formulates the 'performance time/space/event chart' from which he draws the following inferences:

1. There is a unifiable realm of performance that includes ritual, theatre, dance, music, sport, play, social drama, and various popular entertainments;
2. Certain patterns can be detected among these examples;
3. From these patterns, theorists can develop consistent broad based models that respect the immediacy, ephemerality, peculiarity, and ever changingness of individual performances, runs and genres.

(ibid: 257).

In this essay, Schechner tries to find the close relation performativity, narrativity and theatricality share, through the works of four scholars: Ekman, Birdwhistell, Goffman and Turner. He begins by discussing Turner where he questions the formal homogeneity (of the Cambridge anthropological approach and their claim of the 'primal ritual' Schechner associates Turner with) in contestation with the performative heterogeneity prescribing his own structures of origins and missing neurological-ethnological link in approaches to the study of ritual by Turner and his school of thought. He categorises Turner's work into narrativity based on his model of the 'social drama'.

While briefly analysing Goffman's writings, Schechner focuses on the outsider-insider (practitioner- anthropologist) dichotomy. While doing so, he looks at certain anecdotes in the writings of a few anthropologists in the capacity of outsiders/observers, and the practitioners as insiders respond to their perception of the performance of trance, forming the observer participant braid of experience which

according to Schechner is at the heart of trance and the theory of performance. While discussing the nuances of how Goffman defines his 'performer' of everyday life focussing on ideas of theatricality, Schechner draws attention towards a very pertinent point which backs his aspiration to assess the magnitudes of performance. While forming a diagrammatic difference between professional performers and Goffman's everyday performers, Schechner states:

...clearly, there are several band of participation and reception, and those define what kind of performance is going on.... the main question one asks is whether a performance generates its own frame- is reflexive..... or whether the frame is imposed from outside.. ...in between these streams are many gradations of purposeful concealment or information sharing....'

(ibid: 261).

Ekman, according to Schechner, bases his notion of performativity on universality of the performative language based on his model of six universal target emotions through his neurological elaboration on the matter. Ekman presents a detailed neurological explanation of the 'emotional' language utilised during performance which comprises of facial, bodily as well as vocal movements which are based on muscular manipulations and conditioning. The emotions of surprise, disgust, sadness, anger, fear and happiness and their performance expand the magnitudes of performance from brain to public events. These form the symbolic language which is universal, but at the same time is culture specific, which Schechner sees as the stylistic markers of a particular performative form. Schechner goes on to cite an Indian parallel to this in the Indian treatise, *Natyashastra* and the 'exaggerated' rendition of the emotional expressions in the dance form *Kathakali*. Birdwhistell, for Schechner falls between performativity and theatricality, where according to Schechner, he discusses the 'kinemes' or single component non-verbal signs which are in one sense symbolic, and when combined can lead to a range of 'gestures' which can have culture specific social meanings.¹

¹ Through this brief analysis of the various performance theorists, Schechner along with a correlation with his elaborate performance charts, chalks out seven magnitudes of performance called *brain event*, *microbit*, *bit*, *sign*, *scene*, *drama* and *macrodrama* (1988: 282). These magnitudes are further split by Schechner, where *brain event*, *micro bit* and *bit* fall under performativity: *sign* and *scene* fall under

However, his approach to the study of performances moves apart from and beyond the 'everydayness' of the theatrical and insists on the existence and creation of a 'special' world which is made possible by people by rearranging time, rules and value for events for the sake of pleasure. While emphasising the vitality of this unique formulation, Schechner states that 'the world of performance activities is the pleasure principle institutionalised (ibid: 11). His assessment of what actually comprises performance includes play, ritual, games, sport, dance and music which he marks as 'public performance activities of humans'. These categories are dealt by him 'horizontally' by which he means that they exist on the same plane and not one emerging from the other, where the demarcation between the categories of theatre, games and sport on the one hand and ritual and play on the other is done exclusively on the productivity and utilisation of activity governing rules.

Interestingly, Schechner refrains from offering an official definition of performance and finds it safe to rest the weight of defining or forming a relationship between theory and its application in the performer-audience interaction. Further clarifying this, he goes on to say that 'even where audiences do not exist as such- some happenings, rituals and play- the function of the audience persists; part of the performing group watches- is meant to watch- other parts of the performing group (ibid: 30)

Through this approach towards performance analysis, theory and its application, Schechner widens the paradigm of what comprises performance, by including ritual, play, games, sports, dance and music and placing them on the platter of horizontal relationships among forms which are connected through elements of rules directed towards the attainment of pleasure. He conveniently divides them into three categories. The category of *play* defined as 'free activity' where the rules are defined by the 'player' himself, emphasising the assertive 'I', focuses on the pleasure principle. The other extreme is that of *ritual* which is 'strictly programmed, expressing the individual's submission to forces "larger" or at least "other" than oneself (ibid: 13-14). It is in the ritual that the reality principle takes over and expects

theatricality which seems to initiate at *bit*; narrativity warms up at the level of *scene* and is at its zenith during drama and macrodrama.

an obedience to the rules prescribed by authority, creating the 'transcendental other'. The mediating categories between these two are those of *games, sports and theatre* where the 'social we' balances between the principles of reality and pleasure and accommodating through the frames crafted by rules.

In his essay *From Ritual to Theatre and Back* (1983: 106-152) while discussing the rituals of Kaiko entertainments, Schechner underlines that they are not just ritual displays simply doing, but a 'showing of doing'. This indicates towards his extended understanding of the rites of passage which not only connote towards symbolic meaning in the Turnerian sense but also towards the actualization of the change in status. Schechner from the very beginning tries to draw a binary between ritual and theatre which he mainly bases on the binary between efficacy and entertainment.

Schechner admits to not having drawn this binary as oppositions, but as a complicated continuum based on the tendency of the performance which can be overlapping in transformation, a binary within itself and most importantly existing in a braided structure, constantly interrelating efficacy and entertainment, one dominant over the other. Schechner states that when 'efficacy dominates, performances are universalistic, allegorical, ritualized, tied to a stable order; this kind of theatre persists over a relatively long time. When entertainment dominates, performances are class oriented, individualized, show business, constantly adjusted to suit the tastes of the fickle audience'. In his efficacy- entertainment braid which he tries to trace in the English and American theatre from the fifteenth century to the twenty-first century, he puts avant garde, psychodrama, guerilla actions and political theatre under dominant efficacious performances; and commercial theatre, museum theatre and popular entertainments as part of the entertainment category. Schechner in this essay reiterates his belief that the dichotomy of efficacy/ritual and entertainment/theatre is what he defines as performance:

The entire binary 'efficacy/ritual- entertainment/theatre' is performance: performance includes the impulse to be serious and to entertain: to collect meanings and to pass the time: to display symbolic behaviour that actualises 'there and then' and to exist only 'here and now': to be oneself and to play at being others; to be in trance and to be conscious; to get results and to fool around; to focus the action on and for a select group sharing a hermeneutic language and to broadcast to the largest possible audience of strangers who buy tickets.

(ibid: 256).

Schechner bases his analysis of the transformations of the ritual to theatre and back, on the functional transformations of the audience. The shift from ritual to theatre results from the fragmentation of the participatory audience into people who pay for and evaluate the performance before viewing it. The transformation from theatre to ritual happens when people amalgamate into a participatory audience. These transformations, Schechner claims, can be run through all performances. He represents four models of this process where the performance settings and experiments clearly establish the efficacy-entertainment braid, which according to Schechner are a part of every theatre, making the entire presentation rather complicated.

In his essay *Performers and Spectators- Transported and Transformed* (1983: 90-123) Schechner, looks at diverse performative genres and forms and tries to pick out the changes which the performer and the spectator experience, considering that every performance is a processual continuum of rejecting and replacing. This analysis, as he states, is not psychological, but a baseline from which to project several stops along a continuum of performance types. His analysis which is based on the various forms from around the world rests on his efforts to trace the performance continuum not only with reference to various cultures, but also draws an 'intercultural' analysis being replaced by an 'international' one, where there will be a 'coexistence of metaphoric and linear knowledge' (ibid: 121). For the performers and spectators, Schechner defines two states of 'change': one that happens through the performance, where the performer is *transformed* through the 'work' of the performance, and the other where the performer is *transported* to return to the 'starting place'. These transformations and transportations keep the continuum of a given performance, where the shift takes place from the ordinary to the performative. While discussing the transportation, Schechner does not ascribe this state to specific performance and their comparisons, but suggests that transportation can happen to a performer, voluntarily and involuntarily, irrespective of the event or the performance per se. Transformations as passage of rites usually take place in initiation rites where social identities get altered. To make the states of being clear, Schechner states that 'for the system to work, the transported must be as unchanged as the transformed is permanently changed' (ibid: 102).

Schechner further complicates this coexisting continuum while discussing the spectator/audience for which he sets a condition that the performance should 'succeed'. He claims that the attention of both the transported and the spectator in the transformation performances rests on the transformed. For the audience, Schechner believes that as the focus and direct stake of attention is on the audience and hence it is essential for the performance to incorporate highly skilled 'elders/professionals who train, guide, officiate and often co perform with the transformed' (ibid: 104). While Schechner speaks of the elder, it is not clear whether it is in the Turnerian sense or merely as a performative category. He carves out four inclusive variables which he believes function in every performance: the performance as *efficacious* or *fictive*, the status of the roles *within* the performance, the *status* of the persons playing the roles, and the *quality* of the performance (ibid: 103-104).

Schechner also analyses the conception of the audience through the *Natyashastra* and finds out that according to the treatise, there is no transformation of the performers and the spectators who are only transported. At his comparative best, Schechner tries to evaluate the chains and braids of transformations and transportations in Greek and Indian theatre performances on the difference between training and rehearsals (where Greek performance is 'freer') and performance (where Greek performance is more fixed): the premise being that Indian theatre performances result in mutual transportation of the performer and spectator with *rasa* as the co-creation of the mutual continuum, which results in a continuous renewal and rejection during the performance. Similarly, he discusses Grotowski's experiments and moves on to giving an elaborate analysis of Japanese Noh theatre performance where he demonstrates the extremity of the effect the intimacy of the audience can have on the performance, proving that Noh's 'apparent solemnity and fixity are deceptive'. Focussing immensely on the connoisseurship of the audience to relish the performance, Schechner suggests that Noh theatre, like Indian theatre only transports, the only difference being that the transportation is based on special knowledge and not just on mutuality. While discussing a relatively different spectatorial model of the Broadway Theatre, Schechner in this case finds that the performer is transported while the spectator breaks out of a collective participatory experience and has an individual role playing response which proved different from the other participatory forms he had been looking at.

In this essay, through a diagrammatic structural analysis of wide ranging performances from Greek theatre to Noh to Broadway performances, Schechner elaborates the co- existence and mutuality of the performer- spectator braid to reach a suggestive method of not only analysing performances through the communion of the performer and the spectator who share the performative experience of being transported and transformed, but also to discover the historicity behind the various theatre directorial experimentations from Brecht to Grotowski to Barba, trying to trace how the performances in the second half of the previous century make a shift to performances and experiments which were transformative, transportative, audience participatory and creative of newer forms and spaces.

A further elaboration of this is seen in another of his essays *Environmental Theatre: Space* (1983) which serves as a fantastic manual for practitioners of theatre into a Schechnerian vision of space and its numerous manipulations that trigger audience response. The whole essay discusses Schechner's experiments with environmental space which the TPG consumes for various productions. Schechner in this essay brings forth the endless ways in which space can be transformed, articulated and animated, which forms the basis of environmental design (ibid: 55). It is interesting that Schechner weighs audience and space as equal mediums through which the performance evolves.

Through an analysis of the performances and their workshops, rehearsals, discussions, warm ups, drawings, models, more so 'as a function of the actions discovered by the performers' (ibid:), Schechner demonstrates how space gets transformed, through which the audience positions itself given a choice to transport itself several times by way of permutations with the performance, performers and co- spectators.

Schechner's importance to space is reflected in the various exercises he recommends which he says 'are built on the assumption that human beings and space are both alive. The exercises offer means by which people communicate with space and with each other through space; ways of locating centres of energy and boundaries, areas of interpenetration, exchange, and isolation, 'auras' and 'lines of energy'.' (ibid: 62).

Schechner through the exercises expresses his agenda which is to arouse *visceral space sense* within the subjects, a sense which is not about edges, boundaries, outlines; it is about 'volumes, mass and rhythm', a sense which transcends the segregation of body and space, where the body gains awareness of the senses, processes and configurations it is made up of. It is this same visceral sense with which Schechner expects the audience to witness a performance and expect a satisfying provocation of response by the performers. In Schechner's words,

...this sharply delineated division of roles, actions and spaces leads not to deeper involvement, not to a feeling of being swept away by the action- the bottomless empathy enhanced by darkness, distance, solitude-in-a-crowd, and regressive cushioned comfort of a proscenium theatre- but to a kind of in and out experience: a sometimes dizzyingly rapid alteration of empathy and distance.

(ibid: 68).

Schechner defends the in and out experience with a critique of 'orthodox theatre' where such processes of dynamic experiences and responses tend to stay masked. Going beyond space sense, he elaborates space fields by briefly referring to the performance spaces of Egyptian, Greek, Balinese, Mexican and New Guinean performative traditions. These spaces are not only performativity, but also culturally and historically shaped, which makes them a relevant case study. Through these various culturally different spaces of theatrical performance, Schechner by making use of his models of space, demonstrates the different formations of space and its corresponding effect on the performance, especially the physical positioning of the audience and their perception of the performance in turn. Although he effectively documents his own perception of the spaces, he admits to not define this environmental theatrical space into a theory; instead he calls off any need to standardise the space which according to him is determined through an amalgamation of the 'basic principles' such as 'the event, the performers, the environmentalist, the director and the audience interacting with each other in a space (or spaces)' (ibid: 78). Schechner, in his own efforts, tries to establish the field of performance studies by pulling into its purview diversified performance events.

In spite of his numerous theoretical models, Schechner's research somewhere misses out on the study of human agency as a representative of social reality. He tends to

structure his work with the dominance of the study of performance per se and in that process tends to isolate the performance from its economic, political and social grounding and focuses on the framing of performance into his pre- conceived models of analysis. His framing seems to be inherently suffering from a fascination for what is efficacious, 'transportative', coherent and communitarian which for him seems to represent the social order.

Schechner incorporates various experimental forms and everyday forms of practice into the purview of performance along with the categories of dance, drama, music, theatre, sport, ritual, play. But the problem with his approach is that many performance genres, especially in India are hard to be dissected into clear cut sub genres. Though Schechner aptly analyses the theatrical, he many a times misses out on the analysis of the often overlapping categories that produce a wholesome performance and are hard to segregate.

One also notices the choice of his points of reference especially in the Indian context where one largely adheres to the 'classical' or textual sources of performances when it comes to traditional performances. We often find him referring to *Natyashastra* and the *Ramlila* performances which have a strong textual base; within the sacrificial also, the references of analysis are the vedic sacrifices. This should be read together with his fascination for a certain kind of codification of the performative genres where he avoids performance with a sort of historical fluidity. This would also link to his concept of the 'restored behaviour' or the 'ritual to theatre and back' where there seems to be an aim at expecting the culmination, the restoration of performance, a coming full circle, a redressal where any disruption or improvisation are ignored immensely by Schechner in his choice of case studies and the terminology and analysis he offers.

Though Schechner gives 'transformation' a priority throughout his theories, he immediately aspires to categorise a performance genre by pursuing an adherence to normative structural patterns. These patterns tend to reinforce the very idea of having a pre- conceived notion in which the performance patterns itself, which has been a problem of many scholars from various disciplines. Schechner's analysis also suffers from this kind of pre- conceived notions especially when he segregates the

performances into those which are efficacious from those meant for entertainment. The types of ritual performances in India do not ever take place in isolation. Firstly, there are overlapping events and sub- genres which congregate to make a performance. To study one in isolation from the other in itself is a difficult task. More than that, the audiences are surely not borne by the assessment of a performative event being efficacious, which is completely isolated from the pleasure of being entertained.

Though he claims that the efficacy entertainment braid is not in opposition but often merge, his compartments and analysis do not reflect an overlapping. Within the separation of the efficacy- entertainment braid, he very clearly demarcates not only the performative genres which he explains are guided by the role of the audience and the nature of the performance itself which is efficacious if ritualized, universal and stable, whereas those dominated by the spirit of entertainment are class oriented, individualised and ever adjusting to the tastes of the audiences. Such a reading is extremely reductionist and attempts only at suiting pre- conceived normative categories, which compromise and leave out numerous performance acts which are ritualised, entertaining and communitarian, especially of the Indian traditional performances.

Schechner's faith in the role of the audience is very apparent in his definitions of performance, in his braids and in his assessment of the impact of performance towards an intended transportation or transformation. But it does not reflect in his analysis of performances where the audience participation is a mere phenomenological anecdote. The audiences Schechner mentions as contributing to the performance are not assessed thoroughly by him as contributors to the making of a particular performance. And if so, in what way, through what channels and roles do the audience transform the performance, if at all. Schechner's audiences do gain a two dimensionality of participation and response, where they seem to be transcended and are hence 'above' any performative analysis or their roles, or their participation is guided by tickets which make them too 'fickle' to be interrogated into. His theoretical grounding of audiences stops at accepting them as equal contributors in the performance braid, but does not appear in the analysis of how they contribute not only at the performative level, but also socially, politically and economically to resolve the social crisis for

which the performance would be held. Schechner's audiences are therefore isolated from their social reality and this happens because he isolates his audiences as a component of the vibrancy of the performance.

Moving on to the work of Susan Bennett, I would attempt to summarise her book called *Theatre Audiences- A Theory of Production and Reception* (1997), to try and analyse what she suggests as a theory for studying the dynamics of viewing.

Bennett very systematically deals with the issue of theatre audiences, and while doing so begins with a historical mapping of instances where audience and their concerns seem to be addressed. In the introduction, she clarifies her agenda: to study the theatre audiences as a 'cultural phenomenon' making the 'productive and the emancipated spectator' of theatrical performances as her subject of study (Bennett, 1997: 1). She prepares the ground for her own model of the outer and the inner frame which she would present in the later part of the book. While presenting the historical approaches to the study of the role of audience, she not only deals with theoretical works in terms of writings by theatre, anthropology and literary scholars, but also delves into experimentation and analyses of audience reception through the works of theatre practices and their practitioners- the stage directors. After briefly halting at Greek theatre, she mentions the introduction of the private theatrical space which established the parameters of audience behavioural codes and conventions which isolated the interpretative audience till the nineteenth century when the stage directors challenged the naturalist theatre and the passivity of its audience.

Bennett's subject of analysis, the audience of Western theatre, warms up in the twentieth century with Meyerhold and his theatrical innovation, who according to Bennett 'attacked the hegemony of the text centred criticism as well as denarrativising productions and drawing the audience from being passive addressees to co-creators' (ibid: 6). To prove this, Bennett discusses in detail not only the methods which Meyerhold used to incorporate the presence and role of audience in his productions, but also the model for capturing the responses of his audience. Bennett notes that 'the implications of the relationship between theatre and cultural institution, sharing or challenging the dominant ideology, and the audience's collaboration in the maintenance or attempt to overthrow that ideology are not explored in any detail'. But

at the same time, as she moves ahead historically, she does underline the growing interest in the theoretical and theatrical communion of the audience with the theatre production and the ideology guiding it, as would be the case with Brecht.

Also, Bennett acknowledges a very important development in the latter half of the twentieth century with the Performance Theory grounding itself with interdisciplinary contributions, opening newer paradigms of audience participation and reception. Bennett seems to have found respite in Schechner's approach to the dramatic structure which he finds analogous to social process, carrying forward Turner's concepts. She also gives some credit to the field of semiology which seemed to have addressed, though inadequately, the role of the audience as a signifier to decode the meanings of a production. Discussing works of Mukarovsky and Elam, she considered the contribution measured and reasonable to an analysis of performance and its various elements, especially the audience.

The other category which Bennett introduces (which she goes on to discuss in great detail, in the other chapters) is that of the reception theories concerning the reading of the dramatic text. For this she discusses the essential study by Una Chaudhuri of the *Drama in the Spectator/Spectator in the Drama* followed by an analysis of two texts dedicated to audience responses. The first text, *Distance in the Theatre: The Aesthetics of Audience Response* by Daphna Ben Chaim, as Bennett admits is an important study, especially the part on Grotowski and his experiments, but the premise of the book that the diminishing distance in theatre results in the disappearance of art itself seems problematic in spite of raising pertinent questions around perception which is affected by the 'distance' in theatrical aesthetics. The other text, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* by Jill Dolan is one of the most interesting studies on spectators for its underlining of the diversity of responses a performance can draw from an audience which is segregated, mainly on lines of gender for Dolan. Bennett then moves to reader response theories and their proponents who seem to have deeply influenced her work. She offers a historical summary and gives the distinction for invoking the interest for audience reception in drama studies in the 1960s to these reader response theories. The theories arose as a challenge to the literary culture of New Criticism where the hegemony of the text began to be

questioned, investing greater interest in the reader and her/his individual experience and knowledge on which early scholars like Norman Holland focused on.

Bennett then goes on directly to one of the key theorists Stanley Fish who works on similar lines of Holland and establishes his concept of *interpretative communities*. For Fish, the text with its own role to play is overshadowed by the reader who guided by his competent knowledge, plays with the manipulations of the text and the related perceptions. He notes that these perceptions are prerequisites for the writing of the text, which is the main function of the representatives of the *interpretative communities*, involving strategies of manipulating the reading of the text- strategies which are continuously evolving and culturally determined. While discussing Patrice Pavis, Bennett focuses on theatre criticism which forms the main premise of Pavis's work, where he emphasises on the role of the critics as influencing not only the perceptions of the performance, but also reflecting 'shared assumptions of what constitutes theatre' (ibid: 42).

Bennett also gives an interesting analysis of Wolfgang Iser, who according to Bennett, in spite of wanting to explore the reader-text relationship with the help of a three way approach, comprising the text, the reader and most importantly the interaction between the two. Iser believes that more than the reader, it is the text which controls the reading and more than that it is the exploration of the structure of the process of reading that controls the latter, which becomes his prime focus. While assessing Iser's work, Bennett states that 'where the reading time is controlled by the performer and not the audience, that any opportunities for review (as in scene changes or intermission) have the potential to provoke the process Iser identifies in an exaggerated form' (ibid: 45).

Hans Robert Jauss's work, under Bennett's scrutiny, draws up the historical curve of the experience of text reading, especially the preceding perception and expectation. For this he discusses the horizon of experience, which Bennett takes up as an important factor throughout her work- the only reservation being Jauss's rejection of diverse horizons of expectations among different readers in a particular social system, which becomes problematic not only for the analysis of theatre audiences, but also

becomes an overall representative of the weakness of the reader response system for not taking into account cultural diversity of the readers it encounters.

Semiotics and poststructuralist theories also attract attention in Bennett's survey which arose out of the demand to study a more complex system of theatre reception, as against the reader response theories which concerned themselves with the text operating within a fixed time limit as a finished product and not accountable to the reader's spontaneous participatory and responsive behaviour. Semiotics began to emerge in theatre studies as a response to the text-centred criticism. This development in the 1970s saw the spectator gaining importance in the works of scholars like Elam who investigated the codes of expectation responsible for the perceptions of a given performance. Elam discusses the 'excluded events' which are outside the purview of performance per se, yet contribute to the reception of it. Elam also believes in the initiation by the audience of the communicative circuit in a performance between production and reception. Studies by Erika Fischer Lichte and Anne Ubersfeld discuss the communion of the sign system with the social configuration. Ubersfeld, while discussing the audience as a social phenomenon, finds a grim possibility of studying an individual spectator, as she believes in the integrated response of the audience as a part of the group. She goes beyond the sign models and formulates a theory of pleasure of the spectator which gets activated in compliance with the response of the co-audience and also with the activity, the involvement of the audience in the interpretation of the multiplicity of signs, both transparent and opaque (ibid: 72). In an elaborate discussion of pleasure and its relation with dissatisfaction, Josette Feral is of the opinion that the spectator feels frustrated with the lack of representation and absence of narrativity. Marco De Marinis also gets a mention in Bennett's analysis for his two dramaturgical models on the spectator: one passive and the other active and receptive.

Bennett in her most elaborate chapter on audience and theatre demonstrates an extremely systematic and thorough study of the processes of theatre in an attempt to lay down the nuances of production reception association, of which there seems to be no elaborate account, as admitted by Bennett herself. She takes up the task of organising by trying to fill the gap left by the reader response or semiotic theories which not only fail to address the subjectivity of the individual audience but also rose

in the very institutions which produced them. After situating the audience through its role in augmenting a performance without being incorporated in the definition of performance, Bennett moves to discussing the models of research which establish a particular construct of the mainstream audience. Through the works of William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen, Bennett brings to our notice the research which addressed a notable consistency in the composition of the audience which she sees as a sign of a homogenised reception brewing under institutionalised state theatre, a reflection of which is seen in the research undertaken in the sphere underscoring the consumption and reception of the art by white, above average educated, male, heterosexual, middle class mainstream audience, a fact also exposed by Dolan in her writings.

Taking a step ahead in research analysis, Bennett brings to notice the work of scholars like Coppieters and Anne Gourdon. Coppieters offers interesting insights into the 'supra individual' with distinct properties of perception. According to him, not only the individual's own perception but the relation with the others' was also crucial for theatrical experience which can be interpreted as a form of social interaction. Gourdon presents an analysis of audience perception in relation with factors shaping it and through her analysis underlines the ideological differences in tastes, expectations and appreciation, which are culturally determined. Janet Wolff, on similar lines claims that audience perception is socially mediated which is gained within the conventions of culture and aesthetics, like that of the actor. Bennett adds to this and asserts:

It would seem then that both an audience's reaction to a text (or performance) and the text (performance) itself are bound within cultural limits. Yet, as diachronic analysis makes apparent, those lines are continually tested and invariably broken. Culture cannot be a fixed entity, a set of constant rules, but instead it must be seen as in a position of inevitable flux.

(ibid: 94).

This brings to the fore the basic premise of the horizon of expectations with which an audience comes to the theatre, largely ideological and cultural, which are always in a flux, ever evolving, in interaction with other aspects which combine towards the formulation of a theatrical event. This determination happens with a variety of factors associated with an event like the occasion, venue, access, ticket price, time and involvement of the audience in the production. For this, she believes that the horizon

of expectations of the audience plays a crucial role in anticipating, recognising and decoding the event, which is done with the help of the codes the audiences are conditioned to for acknowledging and assessing a given performance. For the same purpose, she refers to Turner who believes that in a society replete with social dramas, theatrical events are essentially present. This leads Bennett to discuss the link between the theatrical event, everyday social life and ritual, highlighting the endeavours of the audience to recognise the theatrical event as an important element in the socio-cultural braid, and for the ever evolving culture-event relationship, where the horizon of expectation of the audience plays an important role.

After determining the theatrical event, the selection process where the relationship between production and reception are established becomes an extremely important section in the book. Bennett in this section draws upon various factors which determine the selection of a performance by the audience for reception and inversely for production, and establishes the terms for the inseparable link between production and reception. In the brief discussion that follows, it would be important to bring to notice that though Bennett tries to discuss the diverse factors resulting in selection, she sees a thread running in all the factors which is the overriding economic consideration as a crucial deciding factor for all performances.

Bennett begins her discussion with the most consciously developed categories of the selection process, where she tries to highlight the economic considerations for the selection of a politically motivated performance. She moves on to discuss the process of evaluation which affects selection on the basis of genre, cast, director, author or company producing the performance, though this in some ways is also economically guided in terms of the evaluation of a performance as successful on the assessment of box office returns, which in turn favours the conventional high earning performances to be chosen to be screened over others. The fear of economic deficits due to box office failures have led to a standardisation of the production process in numerous theatre cultures, which has reinforced the conventional codes of mainstream production and reception.

Bennett also discusses what she calls 'intertextual reference', factors which due to their popularity affect evaluation and hence production to reception. These references

could range from fondness for a particular theatre company or a popular contemporary issue, or an advertent challenge to the authorities which tickle the interpretative strategies of the audience. Bennett notes that ‘in each of these instances, the production company seeks to produce an internal horizon of expectations which will attract audiences through challenging their own already formed expectations/assumptions about a particular play’ (ibid: 113). Bennett further discusses the role of the critics, reviews, advertising, tickets and most importantly the utilisation of geographical location and last but not the least the commitment towards a production of the theatre goer.

After discussing the role of the audience in determining cultural background and selection, Bennett discusses the role of the audience on the threshold of the performance. For assessing this, the space of the performance and the milieu surrounding it is of crucial importance to Bennett. Bennett takes up the elaborate discussion of space, the patterns between the stage, audience and the seating area which reflect the physical and ideological perceptions of the audience. Elam’s division of the space into fixed feature, semi fixed feature and informal space discussed in detail by Bennett, offers an insight into the audiences’ relationship with the ‘static architectural configuration’, ‘non dynamic objects’ and units of the informal space forming the braid of reception between stage, actor, audience and seating space.

The most important section where the focus on reception reaches its zenith is during the time of performance, a section of core importance, considering the model Bennett offers for an analysis of the role and status of the audience during this phase. To elaborate her model consisting of two frames, Bennett explains:

(T)he outer frame contains all those cultural elements which create and inform the theatrical event. The inner frame contains the dramatic production in a particular playing space. The audience’s role is carried within these two frames and, perhaps most importantly, at their points of intersection. It is the interactive relations between audience and stage, spectator and spectator which constitute production and reception, and which cause the inner and outer frames to converge for the creation of a particular experience.

(ibid: 139).

Bennett explains that the outer frame is constructed of the audience's conditioning of the horizon of expectation as a member of the interpretative community with which it enters the performance arena, which is confirmed by the already existing theatre conventions. The inner frame has the numerous symbols which the audience encounters for interpretation and combination leading to the wholesome dynamic fictional world on stage. Bennett studies the signs- some fixed, others in flux, divided into two groups, one group comprising signs which are linked to the actor and his representations, the other group consisting of signs which are external to the actor's performance. Bennett discusses what she calls 'overcoding' of a performance done by the producers in order to influence reception. Marketing and the milieu created in and around the performance space are considered important factors here. The other factor which Bennett discusses is that of perception of the performance through an already existing code system. She draws upon three 'interactive relations' which emerge out of the performance: the audience-stage, audience-actor and audience-audience relations. These relations are established throughout the performance, constantly reinforcing each other, through decoding, identification, desire, dissatisfaction, agreement, diversity of perception and pleasure.

For post- performance, Bennett discusses the feedback as a symbol of audience reception for which she positions the applause and the curtain calls as meaningful gestures reflecting the process of decoding adopted by the audience as a collective in conventional theatre scenarios. The non- traditional theatre emphasises on post-production discussions as not only a didactic but also a social process. The reviews and play texts or watching other productions also form a part of the post- performance stage which reflects an extended stage of production and audience reception.

Bennett's second edition of her book is a thorough analysis of spectatorship across cultures as a continuation from the first edition where she discussed the utilisation of the models of Eastern performances, especially the ritual performances creating what came to be called experimental theatre in the works of practitioners like Brecht and Artaud, in an effort to pose a challenge to the rigid Western theatrical canons. In continuation with her penchant for historical tracing, Bennett looks at those performances and opinions which do not comply with the performances coinciding with cultural experience and refutes the conventional decoding of audience perception

and the history of 'fascination' for 'other' cultures. Though she agrees with Philip Zarilli who calls 'fascination' an oversimplified explanation, she claims that 'the interest in this not-like-us theatre is apparently especially (only?) its otherness, its seeming inability to be understood (and, as such, to be 'really' consumed') by conventional receptive processes' (ibid: 167). In spite of stating that the non- Western performances determine the Western conditions of production and reception, Bennett goes on to state that what constitutes theatre can only be determined by an understanding of 'both the cultural material specificities of the performance and the horizons of expectations brought to bear on the audience, individually and collectively' (ibid: 168). This fascination for non- Western cultures curves up to 'obsession' in her terms where she underlines the rise of identity based inclinations of theatre practice which took over the reader response theories in the 1980s. The strengthening of the concept of self and other explained the cultural experimentation evolving in theatre practice and also a stream called 'interculturalism', which has successfully formulated a performance canon around it, apart from theorists consistently testing the intensions behind a venture like that.

Through a survey of opinions of various contemporary theatre practitioners and theoreticians and an assessment of their work, Bennett sketches the idea of interculturalism. Through Patrice Pavis and Fisher Lichte, she tries to highlight the concerns in an attempt to pin down the parameters of an intercultural performance. At the same time, there is an acceptance that audience and their horizon of expectations are at the peak of consideration in intercultural experiments. She also takes into account critical concerns of scholars like Rustom Bharucha who through their critique of Peter Brooke's Mahabharata project have questioned 'decontextualisation of history' which Bennett finds as a brute disregard of the 'ideological formation of the production' (ibid: 174). Along with this, she surveys the important processes of 'importation' of Richard Schechner who is considered one of the proponents of the intercultural recreations. Bennett seems to be sympathetic to Schechner and in some ways applauds his efforts to keep it *real*, in spite of some 'inescapable' differences.

Furthermore, Bennett seems to be very cautious of any extremes of the interpretations of interculturalism and draws attention 'to the degree to which source culture must be repositioned for the target culture. Not only must it 'fit' within the expectations, it

must do so irrespective of the intrinsic nature of the work' (ibid: 173). She also gives credit to the efforts of interculturalism to work towards a single identity formation under the banner of 'national' identity, which according to Bennett serves as an important ingredient not only for assessing multiculturalism and the debates surrounding it, but also for the nuances of the concept of nation. Bennett guards off against any confusion between seeing and believing which usually happens with the misinterpretation of the leverage of 'artistic freedom' over the 'cultural assumptions that historically pertain'.

Bennett also delves into an interesting discussion of the interpretation of the audience in performances discussed above. She reminds us of the boundaries between what is to be seen and what is to be believed by the audiences in performances. She brings to the forefront the interpretation of audience reception by critics and others like the funding agencies, where 'imagined reception' operates in discussing the successes and failures of a performance which seem to homogenise not only the present audience, but also the disagreements that might occur through different receptions. From this point, she returns to the agenda of tracing *who* constitutes the audience and also the *divergences* in the expectations and behaviour of the audience, especially of the audience which encounters 'intercultural' performance. For the same analysis, Bennett picks up three examples of Afro- American performances by Anna Deavere Smith, Robbie Mc Cauley and June Jordan respectively. Their works though on almost similar lines of the experimentation with the 'alternative', bring out divergent reactions from the 'new audience' they endeavour to target. Bennett goes on to discuss her opinion on intercultural performances, this time finding some respite from the dilemmas of such experimentations in Ariane Mnouchkine's work, who in Bennett's opinion carefully balances the conditions of the spectator- production relationship, letting the spectator get a reasonable insight into the making of the performance. She gives credit to Mnouchkine for her caution against the contingent use of metaphors from the Orient, which in turn restricts her from overdependence on those of the mainstream theatre surrounding her. Bennett, through the neat use of translations, goes on to discuss the status of translation in such performances and states that:

if intercultural theatre is to extend its own processes and questions into the fields of meanings produced by the spectators, then the compromises and conciliations, as well as the translations, need to find a language in performance- to draw attention to themselves, as it were, and to find their complexity embedded in the receptive processes that the performance stimulates.

(ibid: 200).

Towards the end of her discussion on intercultural performances, Bennett admits to the numerous problems but at the same time recognizes that such performances offer 'an experience and the kinds of connections with others, either in production or reception, which make those confrontations into negotiations and which, at best offer imaginations whereby we can see our own and others' stories if not better, then at least somewhat differently' (ibid: 203).

Bennett's work serves as one of the most useful resources for any work on audience studies, giving a thorough survey of all the major theoretical nuances along with western theatrical mainstream or traditional and the non- traditional or alternative performances as she calls them. Her work surely fills the neglected gap of audience reception and its role in production and digs out anecdotes on audiences and their perception from all historical junctures in various genres of criticism.

Bennett's analysis of audiences through the scrupulous theoretical study makes the task easier as a compact thesaurus on theatre and its audiences. She aptly clubs and compares theories and corresponding performances, making a perfect blend of a critical theoretical analysis. But this in a way leaves the reader dissatisfied, with a stimulated desire to read Bennett. Her political agenda is clear, as she raises her voice against the mainstream theatre conventions and the idea of the passive spectator whose passivity needs to be questioned and whose activity recognised by challenging the existing codes and conventions, and acknowledging the potential of alternative theatre and its methods for addressing the complexities of audience reception. In spite of a road map as clear as this, Bennett somehow gets sidelined in her own work, in an effort to validate what she feels strongly for. Her work, which more or less is a blend of performance theory, semiotics, structuralist theories, reader response, sociology and psychoanalysis, gives a hazy, yet a cultural theorist approach to the study of the audience.

What pervades throughout her book is the utilization of the mainstream for its own critique. Bennett seems to have employed the available, the well documented Western Theatre, and in the case of alternative theatre with intercultural, multi-ethnic cast productions, her examples are largely drawn from the African American theatre scene. This in turn makes her fall into the very political arguments she offers about the role of the critics and role of the tactics of overcoding adopted by the producers. One has to give her the credit nonetheless for accepting the very premise of the traditional theatre to be based on economic considerations which determines what is being produced and received. Even in the case of alternative performances, Bennett admits to have utilised the well documented, accessible theatre which somewhere falls into the institutional playing spaces. The spaces which she addresses throughout her analysis are also around the popular mise-en-scene of Western theatre which inadvertently produces a not so diverse theatrical experience based on different horizons of expectations.

The biggest dissatisfaction comes with the absence of non- western theatre traditions, which do not get surveyed by Bennett. Be it the mainstream theatre or intercultural performances, Bennett seems to have ignored this and even more complicated sections of audience reception. One is intrigued to test the application of the inner and outer frames of production and reception to non- western models of the intertwined traditional, spectacle, ritual theatrical performances, elements of which have been utilised by the non- western and mainstream western theatre. The audience reception and their role in performance remains still unexplored in spite of an exhaustion of their documentation by the very theorists Bennett depends on for her models (for example, Schechner). For Bennett, the discussions of non- traditional forms in the Western sense, in its highest limit, extend to experiments like those of Peter Brooke or Mnouchkine, who at the end of the day draw motifs from other cultures, transported into the realm of the very alternative yet mainstream theatre paradigm a make believe fictional stage reality which would simply fit into the inner-outer frame of production and reception with the codified process of decoding an intercultural performance through the psychoanalytic horizon of expectation which is culturally grounded, and economically backed.

Also, Bennett seems to be getting carried away by the plethora of information she deals with and somewhere misses out on her own analysis of the audience, the audience of the very alternative theatre she hopes to have moved out of passivity to challenge the conventions. My desire to assess the very individual in the audience who asserts reception and the horizons of expectation in spite of being a member of an interpretive community does not appear in her analysis and leaves gaps in the understanding of the very heterogeneous audience who float free in the space of the ritual and spectacle. She leaves out the individual spectator who intrudes into the fictional space of the actor, and takes over the structural analysis of the dynamics of the theatrical event. She also gives too much leverage to the horizons of expectation which are fruitful in anticipation of the performance but not always during the event of decoding, which might move beyond those pre-conceived horizons within cultural boundaries. She does assess the effects on those horizons, but does not take into account an overthrow of those expectations. Would the audience then depend on conventional codes which they are conditioned to as members of a cultural unit? Would their challenged horizons through overcoding result in the conventional interactive relations Bennett sees as established? If not so, then what model would account for the divergence in reception and newer levels of interrelations drawn in? These questions do need to be addressed, especially in the context of the field work I would address as part of the non-western ritual performances.

The analysis of the space in relation with the audience is also superseded by the importance given to the theatrical event. The alternative spaces which challenge the conventions of mainstream theatre spaces seem to have been ignored, considering the role of environment theatre which even Schechner, who she extensively refers to finds important. Her own encounter of alternative performances, as an audience, seems guided by pleasure where she succumbs to challenge the performance and admits to the impossibility of being able to view only because of the 'abandonment of what one knows, the admission of what one does not know, and from that place to learn', where she experiences her own reception strategies becoming disabled and irrelevant (ibid: 194-195). What she resorts to in this case, is merely a 'spiritual and physical ritual of belief', which to me does not seem to be outside the realm of the very fascination with pleasure of experiencing the other she seems to question in her analysis of the spectatorship across cultures.

The analysis of the three main scholars- Turner, Schechner and Susan Bennett gives an overview of the state of theoretical discourse on analysis of performances representing various cultures. The three proponents through their phenomenal work have expressed their approaches to the research of the sub- genres and nuances of what comprises performance analysis and theory. But none of them have had a convincing approach towards the study of performances through an appropriate processual model of analysis of audiences of ritual performances, which is the concern of the current research. Turner's approach, as mentioned in his work's critique, in spite of claiming to be dealing with ritual process finds itself oscillating between the structure and anti- structure, ignoring the temporality of a given ritual performance and unaddressed breaches within a social order. Schechner's work tends to compartmentalise performance genres into patterns which might be applicable in performances that are in transition and more so social groups viewing and participating whom he declines to categorise or assess. Susan Bennett, prioritising the analysis of audiences becomes essential to this study. Like Schechner, she aspires to grant equal weightage to reception as much as production, while formulating a theoretical discourse on performances. Shortcomings in her study however arise from her affinity to the models of reception theory, reader response and structuralist approaches to theatre through which her analysis frames audience reception as dependent on the challenges posed by the performance production. The intertextual references which she discusses manipulate the conditioning of the audience, not only making them passive observers of the intraplay of the production tactics, but also bereaved of any exclusivity and autonomy of expectations and response. The reception theory models pronounce the ideological and cultural conditions for the horizons of expectation subordinate to the factors of production isolating the audience from the production process through the act of reception. Moreover, the rejection of the existence of heterogeneous expectations within a particular social system restricts the approach to the study of an audience as a passive, homogenised group watching a production in the two dimensional space of production and reception. The performative text dominates the dynamics of audience reception which is isolated from any participation, thus making the framework of audience and space passive. An approach like this followed by proponents of audience theories is reductionist and is limited in applicability to the study of heterogeneous audiences with varied

expectations as a part of an ever evolving social process, addressing audiences of traditional performances across non-western cultures which form a complex and a completely unexplored area of research, for which the audience of Khairaling Mahadev Festival offer an appropriate subject of analysis.

The audience of *Khairaling Mahadev festival* would find it difficult to be framed under the ritual process of Turner within which the social drama unfolds. It is an audience which is consistently in transformation, largely a part of the 'liminoid', migratory and assertive. It is this audience whose behaviour transcends the performative and spatial, what can be confined and redressed. It is the audience cum performer which gets transformed and transported within Schechnerian terms but its behaviour, experience and expectations of horizon lie outside that of the performative transformation where it negotiates between the dynamics of the ritual and the actual. It is the audience which crosses the barriers of the two- dimensional mainstream theatre which Bennett seeks to address, but represents the complicated and multifaceted genre of performance which at the same time challenges the dynamics of the role of the audiences of Khairaling Mahadev.

The following chapters, through an in depth field work documentation and analysis, will offer an overview of the very audience mentioned above, the role it plays throughout the preparations and will prepare ground with elaboration of the need to study the structural and dynamic conditions of audiences of ritual performance which are symbols of the socio- processual dynamics of cultural progression.

KHAIRALING MAHADEV FESTIVAL:

Reception of Reconstructing Confluence through the Ritual Performance

The festival of *Khairaling Mahadev*, like many other ritual festivals has the distinction of evolving into a spectacle with the audience as its backbone. The audience at *Khairaling Mahadev* defines its significant presence in each and every action during the festival, not as mere viewers but as the participatory patrons of the festival. The audience of *Khairaling* from the very initial processes selects its role, sanctions rituals, participates and defines the spaces of action and viewership. The structurally defined roles of the audience at the festival correspond to the dynamism of the functions of this very audience from participation to reception, leading to the formation and dissolution of the transformative models, spaces and meanings of the ritual and spectacle.

At *Khairaling* we witness the space transforming and criss-crossing over other spaces, hegemonising at some moments and succumbing at others, and also the audience shifting the locus of behaviour and responses. The heterogeneity of codes makes it imperative to understand the space and audience through the undercurrents the community is soaked in. Nonetheless, through an analysis of the competition and the strife for power and authority that unfolds at *Khairaling Mahadev*, one can assess that the audience of the *Khairaling Mahadev* Festival serves as an interesting model of studying a community in continuous transition, which pulls the music, rituals, identity and the space of celebration into its arena and establishes complete control over the behaviour, representation, reception and interpretation.

Before delving into an analysis of this, it would be important to locate the festival, , through various field trips to the site. *Sri Khairaling Mahadev* temple is situated on the Pauri-Kaljikhil-Bonsal motor road, about thirty kilometres from Pauri, and twenty five kilometres from Bonsal, resting on the peak of the lofty hill, offering an exhilarating and unforgettable experience, about eighteen hundred metres above the sea level. The temple is interestingly located at the centre of the hill which is

surrounded by eighty four villages of the Aswalsyu patti² along with the villages of Patwaalsyu patti, Maniyarsyu patti, Barahsyu patti, Dhangu and Chandkot situated at the base. It is on the hill, at the temple of *Khairaling Mahadev*, every year, in the first week of June that the fair of *Sri Mundneshwar Mahadev* takes place where huge crowds assemble. But before the two-day fair, the elaborate preparations, ritual ceremonies and celebrations contribute in warming up to the events.

Legend of *Khairaling Mahadev* Festival

As per the information collected from viewers and participants, the legend of the *Mundneshwar* Fair goes back to the fifteenth century, based on the story of Maaru Thairwal, a resident of village Thair of the Aswalsyu patti who left his village for bringing back household necessities from the market around the town of Kotdwar. Kotdwar which was then known as Dhaakar was the centre of all transactions, where the villagers would walk to, usually for four to five days to get basic amenities like clothing and food. Maaru Thairwal is said to have gone there with a group of people, where he purchased salt (among other goods) and surprisingly took a huge lump of it which fitted in his small jute bag with unimaginable ease and with the bag on his back started the journey back with his fellow villagers through the villages.

On the fourth day of the tiring journey uphill, on reaching Berboota village, Maaru realized that he was almost approaching his village Thair, and sat down to rest as he could feel the weight more and more as he climbed higher up. When he thought of recommencing the journey, he could not even lift the jute bag from the ground. Tired of his effort, Maaru Thairwal decided to reduce the weight of the bag by leaving out the cheapest commodity which happened to be the lump of salt. While doing so, he noticed that all this while he had been carrying a beautiful stone in his bag, which also was left back due to the needless weight on his shoulders. After doing so he returned to his village.

It is said that for almost a week after this incident, Maaru Thairwal could not stop wondering about the mystery of the bag getting heavier and the stone in his bag. He

² *Patti* refers to a cluster of villages which together form a unit of revenue.

also began to dream of Lord Shiva, who in the dreams instructed him to build a Shiva temple at the very spot where he had left the stone out of his bag. Maaru narrated this to the villagers who accompanied him to the spot and agreed to build a temple at a nearby spot on the closest cliff from there and soon the task was done with utmost dedication and devotion. The temple became popular by two names *Mundneshwar* and *Khairaling Mahadev*, both of which have their own interpretations. The name *Khairaling* came from the word *khair* for salt and *ling* for the stone shaped as *lingam* found in the bag. The name *Mundneshwar* has varied interpretations³, the most commonly reported being the incarnation of Shiva known as the *Mundmala dhari Shiva* (Shiva adorning a garland beaded with heads), derived from the heap of heads of the goats which were sacrificed and piled up in front of the lingam, an extant practice now.

The construction of the temple was not solely done by the villagers of Thair⁴ who came to be known as the *maiti* or 'maternal' caretakers, but other neighbouring villages too, which till date have an important role to play. Mirchora and Nagar, two villages of the Aswalsyu Patti dominated by *Aswal* rajput caste also acknowledged *Khairaling Mahadev* as their deity, becoming the *sasurali* or 'paternal' caretakers. The Bharadwaj brahmin caste of Saknoli village took over the responsibility of priesthood of the deity and the temple. These responsibilities are carried on till date, where in case of no sponsor for the flag or buffalo sacrifice, the villagers of Thair, Mirchora or Nagar definitely contribute to the same, in order to keep the tradition alive.

³ The other opinions refer to the shape of the hill which resembled that of a head referred to as *mund*; also the number of people visiting the fair used to be commendable and all that one would see were numerous heads of devotees, hence reference to the heads-*mund*.

⁴ *Khairaling Mahadev* came to be recognized as the *kshetra-pal* or regional deity of the Aswalsyu, Maniyarsyu, Patwalsyu and other neighbouring *patties*, who have various other village specific deities. But the villages of Thair, Mirchora and Saknoli accepted *Shri Khairaling* as the *gram devta* or the village deity, and have small temples in the village dedicated to the deity. Every year, on the day of the festival special prayers are conducted at all these 'sub temples' and the offerings are taken to the main temple. The 'sub temple' at Thair village is of great importance even before the festival begins, to which the bamboo is taken before it reaches the host village (The bamboo flag ceremony will be discussed in detail in the latter part of this chapter).

The Temple of *Shri Khairaling Mahadev*

The temple, along with the Shiva *lingam* as a symbol of devotion to Khairaling Mahadev, also established an idol of goddess Kali to please her devotees as well. The idol engraved on the wall, on the right side of the temple, on the outside, with the lingam positioned inside in the centre were all said to have been done keeping in mind astrological calculations, as other temples in Garhwal, except for the positioning of the entrance into the temple which is always facing north, unlike in Khairaling Mahadev temple. The entrance was made to face south considering a larger part of the hill facing this side and also considering the crowds that would get pulled in during the fair and the visits to the temple, which over the years proved to be a positive and thoughtful compromise. These considerations while constructing the temple and its surrounding arena highlight the thoughtful structural mapping of the space for the audiences to select their spaces of viewership and participation.

By the turn of the nineteenth century, the temple compound took a form which more or less resembled what it looks like today, with the core with the lingam endorsed by numerous tridents serving as symbols of Lord Shiva. The immediate entrance is flanked by bells of different sizes which are constantly struck as devotees gather in multiple queues to offer prayers to the Shiva lingam in the sanctum sanctorum. The devotees after doing so circumambulate in the inside boundary and when they exit from the right, they offer prayers to goddess Kali who is painted in bright saffron adorned with red scarves. Circumambulations form a mandatory ritual of almost every event- after offering prayers at the village temple, before leaving the village for the festival, after offering prayers at the Khairaling Mahadev, and before performing the animal sacrifice. Not only do they have ritualistic relevance, but are also utilised by the audience for asserting power over the other groups where the first village to circumambulate is believed to be having greater efficacy and social strength.

There is another building compound which is a new addition to the space, say about a decade old, on the right which is occupied by the *mela samiti* (fair committee) for their official activities during the festival. One can find the members of the committee, other influential representatives of the state, along with some police officials and priests in the offices, coordinating, resting, and conversing. The temple

premise is now surrounded by a boundary around which the space of circumambulation lies, mainly of the animals to be sacrificed.

Commencement of the festival

The devotees start the preparation of the ritualistic ceremonies weeks before the fair begins. The preparation is inaugurated by the decision of an appropriate date, in consultation with the priest of the temple, based on astrological calculations of the family sponsoring the rituals and the sacrifice, of the village, and the village deity. The first week of June is kept under consideration for deciding the final date, which is considered an auspicious time for the fair and the sacrifices. In case of more than one sponsor, the first date decided stands final. Once the date has been fixed, the village *patvari*⁵ is informed who officially declares it, following which the preparations begin full-fledged.

Drumming, Possession, Dancing

The reason to bring these performative nuances at this moment is for the role drumming plays even before the ritualistic practices actually begin. Drumming constitutes the first performative and ritualistic act, posing as a messenger announcing the commencement of the festival and hence making it imperative to pause and discuss the aspects of drumming and its relation to the audiences of the ritual performances. Before any event throughout the festival, it is drumming which declares the 'moment' of gathering to begin, as a reminder for the communion to start, meaning that the villagers should begin to assemble at the decided spot, in the centre of which the drummers would be performing (hence playing a role in defining, declaring and occupying the space of the communion or the performative). Drumming proclaims the launch of the procession, ceremony, ritual, sacrifice, or any event which requires invoking the villagers to view, participate and celebrate in communion. I refrain from entering into what actually comprises of 'Garhwali drumming' repertoire due to the fear of homogenizing a performative tradition I have partially experienced-

⁵ *Patvari* is the official village accountant of the land deeds. He is also considered an important member in decision making and in mediating with other villages and other administrative matters.

geographically and through musicological expertise. My understanding of the role of drumming would be restricted solely to the experiences in the events unfolding at *Khairaling Mahadev Festival*. When one analyses drumming it is impossible to not discuss dancing and possession along with it, as there seems to be a clear performative connection among them, where drumming plays the most important role of triggering the act of possession and dance through participation as a witness to the act of drumming. Also, I would mention that the details of drummers, drumming, possession and dancing come mostly from the audiences as responses to these events as the performers during the events are usually inebriated and hence not in a state to bank upon as reliable sources of information. But at the same time I would be focusing more on the performative than the psychological aspects of the music and musicians and their influence on the actions of their audience.

Through my visits to the festival, I had the privilege of witnessing drumming and more so the drummers who are the singers too and hence the drummers would serve as my only encounter with ‘musicians’ during the festival. The drummers belong to the *oujhi* community, but carry the name ‘*das*’ in their names which has different interpretations as *das* can mean one who offers servitude to god, and also to drumming (Chandola, 1977) and also as a term to honour them for their skill, making them a part of a musician community known as *bajgi*, close to meaning ‘players’ (Burton, 2000). In addition to this, the term *jagariya* is also used for them, which can be for any musician but specialized in invoking spirits through singing *jagars* during ritual performances.

Any community celebration or ritual performance is incomplete without representation by drummers. Music of the drummers is one of the biggest factors in deciding ritual potency and possession as they define space and audience participation. In the ritual, as Andrew Alter rightly puts it, drumming provides entertainment to revelers, enhances auspiciousness, provokes deity invocation, accompanies processions and conditions symbolic action. Drumming not only adds to the efficacy and vigour of the performance, but even before that ‘declares’ the occasion or the event. The participants from different villages, from far off hills are informed about inauguration of events, arrival and departure of procession through the sound of the drums. The unremitting playing of the drums only occasionally

interrupted by vocal interludes presides over the performative in all the ritual events witnessed at *Khairaling Mahadev*. It is drumming which pulls the members of the audience into the space of performance and henceforth in the arena of the ritual where the spectacles of dance and possession set in.

The most commonly represented is the combination of *dhol-damau* drums which is an essential combination for accompanying processions and ritual musical gathering. *Dhol* is considered one of the most significant symbols of musical power and efficacy in the entire Garhwal region. It is a barrel shaped drum made out of a copper body, with both heads equal in size over which usually goat skin is stretched across a wooden rim that fits over the head. Twelve holes are equally spaced around the rim which are used for bracing a rope which is a special 'y' shaped bracing using metal rings or cloth pieces for adjusting the tension on the heads. The drum is tied to shoulder straps which facilitate carrying and playing the drum in any position, but drummers mostly play standing. The *dhol* is struck on the left head with the hand and the right one with the stick. Tuning is not usually done to a particular note, but varies according to the singer's judgment.⁶

Damau, the accompanying drum is a shallow kettle drum, which is high pitched, and is played with two long sticks held between the thumb and the index finger, passing through the middle finger. The head is circular covered with deer or buffalo skin, tightly held to the body of the drum which is usually made of copper. The body of *damau* is covered with intrinsic bracing rope patterns which are not utilized for adjusting the pitch but to just hold the skin tight; hence there are no rings on the drum. *Damau* player is an accompanying singer, who sings the chorus catching up with the *dhol* player.

The *das* playing the *dhol* is the key to every move during the performance of ritual dancing and possession in the region. He is also the lead *jagariya* and usually sings with his left hand on the ear, reverting to playing the moment he stops singing. The dynamism of the audience in all the events is best reflected in the moment of

⁶ Refer to Chandola, 1977; Burton, 2000 and Nautiyal, 1991 for details on *dhol*.

drumming and *jagar* narration, where it is provoked, challenged and expressed. The *dhol* player actually commands the performance. His playing the *dhol* also has its own pattern setting the pace which the *damau* follows. The drums are played for short periods very loudly and then made softer as the drummer strikes the vocals. The pace and volume pick up again as soon as he reverts to drumming, and it is now when the dancing rejuvenates and the villagers scream in excitement.

The drummers sing *jagars*⁷ in honour of various deities, beginning with the invocation of the *kshetra pal*, the regional deity who is *Khairaling Mahadev*, followed by the *gram/bhu or sthaniya devi*, the village deity also referred to as the deity of the 'local', followed by *jagars* in the name of *kul devta*- the deity of family lineage, followed by the *jagars* related to Pandavas which also form a part of the popular and rich *Pandava lila* repertoire exclusive to the Garhwal region(Sax, 2002). But *jagars* resulting in invocation and dawning of Kali and Bhairav, an incarnation of Shiva, on the audience are considered to be of immense significance.

The singing of the *jagars* which has a clear purpose of invoking or waking (*jagran*) the deities is one of the most essential parts of the entire night performances, as the possessions of the deities mentioned on the audiences happen in performative, cultural and psychological synchronization with the drumming and humming of *jagars* by the drummers. The *jagars* address ritualistic connotations where the possessed dance and enact the particular characteristics of the specific deity they represent through their actions and gestures. The singing of *jagars* by the drummers has a very clear ritual agenda which is to invoke the deity within the audiences, where the deity is pleased with the praise and represents the pleasure through dancing; hence dancing becomes a condition for *jagar* rendition and drumming along with it.

The possessed known as *devta* or *devi*, (deity) share a special connection with *jagariya* as it is his singing which entices the members of the audience to get possessed by a particular deity. The possessed beings dance very close to the *dhol*, and sometimes even bow down jumping and swaying the head in front of the

⁷ Refer to Chandola, 1977, Burton, 2000, Nautiyal, 1991 and Capila, 2002 for details on *Jagars*.

drummer. At an ecstatic level, they clinch their fingers on to the rings of the drum as the drummer sings the *jagar* close to the head. There is actually no set choreography to the movements of the possessed. The performance is mostly dominated by actions which at the closest represent the deity who dwells on the possessed. For example, through the possession of *Bhawani*, they usually represent her through her manifestations, believed to sometimes touch thirty six in number, which is done in different poses and facial expressions. In the case of *Bhairav*, it is a demonstration of strength and unnatural powers, and the possessed is also seen as easily chewing the local scorpion grass which leaves rashes and acute itchiness on the skin even when accidentally steps upon. The manifestation of *Bhim* from the *jagars* of *Pandava lila* is represented through excessive eating which is demonstrated in the arena as the possessed gulps down lumps of jaggery, bread, and water melons. The entry into the arena of performance is completely sporadic and this is reflected in the performance which also ranges from rigorous body shaking, jumping and swaying with hands frantically moving in all directions making the possessed swirl across the arena to a complete frozen, static state of the body with eyes fixed on something unknown to the observer's eye, marked by extremely loud shrieks at unrhythmic junctures. The performers usually possessed by the male deities even fall on the ground crawling and scratching themselves hysterically. The complicated phase of transition into the state of trance is reflected in the highly dramatic acts of impersonating and enacting the perceptive image and acts of the deity being possessed. These details, though vague and barely suggestive, clearly demarcate the behavioural and performative patterns of the male from the female deity representatives, where the latter is less intermittent in rhythm and more iconic, while the former is exaggerated in movements, actions and representation.

Once the deities have been invoked and pleased, the *jagars* are followed by the performance of the *mangal* which refers to the performance of 'mangal', the 'auspicious'. The *mangal geet* usually consist of songs of *ahwan* (announcement), *puja* (devotional) and *vivah* (marriage) songs as sub-categories. In the case of the ritual performances like the one being discussed here, the *mangal* songs usually comprise devotional songs to which the members of the community dance. Here the participation elicited from the audience is greater and not so much dependent on being connected to the drumming or possession but more like a community celebration

connected with reverence to the deities who are being sung about in the *mangal geet*. During the performance of the *mangal*, the group of dancers joining the others is very much random and there does not seem to be a pre- decided pattern, but one can see that the performers inadvertently form themselves into circles while dancing. There are fewer women who dance and that to only during the mangal and rarely in processions, which is usually when possessed because of their limited participatory role as members of the audience to male dominated events. But the dance steps of the women can clearly be differentiated from those of the men. The movements of the male dancers are usually centered on strolling and lifting the legs alternatively, with a slight jerk of the knee throwing the leg forward. This is done by a dip of the hip, usually twice which is corresponded by one hand rising up close to the face while the other swaying behind the back and alternated while moving ahead, twisting the wrist with the a pause. The women have similar movements, only that the stroll is slower with a slight dip and more grace in the hand movement, sometimes taking a full round.

Animal Sacrifice at the *Khairaling Mahadev* Festival

The main attraction of the fair at the site of the *Mundneshwar* temple happens to be the animal sacrifices which form an essential part of the ritual events. The two- day festival with its paraphernalia of the religious prayers being offered at the temple, the usual *mela* or the fair scene, along with the *bali pratha* or the tradition of the ritual of animal sacrifice, invites surging crowds to the *Khairaling* Festival. But as anecdotes reveal, the animal sacrifices have been the main reason for consistent attendance and devotion to the event. Dating back to centuries, the animal sacrifices at the fair of *Mundneshwar*, like many other fairs especially in Uttaranchal, are said to have begun mainly for reasons of entertainment and recreation for the devotees who were mostly meat eaters.

But the dramatic act of sacrifice did not restrict itself to the entertainment factor, apart from the general assertion of authority through this act. The animal sacrifices connected with the thread of ritual when the act began to be practised as an offering to the gods. At *Khairaling Mahadev*, the devotees who pledge a vow to offer the sacrificial animals come sometimes before or mostly after the fulfillment of what they

plead the deity for, with a *dhwaja*, a tall bamboo flanked by a flag with images of Kali or Shiva, which symbolizes authority and victory and is to be attached next to the temple as part of the first event on day one of the festival, along with a buffalo called *baghi* symbolising the evil and the demonic element to be sacrificed on the second day as the last event. These are accompanied by several goats brought by other villagers on fulfillment of plea or for appeasement or other such reasons, which are sacrificed usually on the first day. It is not very clear when the sacrificial rituals began to be conducted for purposes other than entertainment. But as far as the participants of the *mela* can trace back, the animals began to be sacrificed as a present to the gods for fulfillment of a vow, at the end of which the ritual was promised- the practice of *mannat* or *manyata* as it is generally known in several Indian traditions. It is known as *Manoti* specifically in Garhwal, meaning offerings to the deity for praise, appeasement, reconciliation, request or gratitude. But the underlying factor among all the possible reasons remains the concept of 'scapegoat' where the surrogate victim is substituted for the social restoration of the whole community, the surrogate victims being the animals here. These animals acting as 'ritual victims' serve as cleansers to the community which sacrifices them when the community suffers from some ills (Girard, 1977).

At the same time, the devotees and other audiences at *Khairaling Mahadev* festival experience the ritual of animal sacrifice as an extended state of assertion of power and authority, where 'victory' of one village or group over the other extends beyond the ritual or the religious and is established through the number of animals- goats and buffaloes being brought, the size of the animals (the bigger the powerful), and most importantly during the time of circumambulation. It is through these assertions that the dramatic ritual sacrifice is metamorphosed into violent acts which are hard to place in the structure of the performative and the non- performative. The discussions around these experiences at the *Khairaling Mahadev* will be underlined in the course of this work.

Before initiating a discussion around contemporary concerns at the festival, it would be suitable to introduce the festival of *Mundneshwar*, as the events unfold from the initial preparation days before the actual fair, to the culmination of the two day festival with the sacrifice of the *baghi(s)*. Throughout the description, my attempt

would be to trace the role of the audience in all these events, to document the happenings through the experiences and anecdotes presented by them, underlining their participation and contributions in manipulating the performative elements. The levels of pre- festival preparation and ceremony, night long celebrations, and the two day festival combining the ritual and the spectacle of the fair and sacrifice will be explored to demonstrate the transformative socio- processual dynamics the audiences utilise to assert their individual presence and participation, altering and challenging the structures of viewership and participation.

The *dhwaja* ritual ceremony

One of the first events one witnesses is the procession to the forest for the bamboo (*dhwaja*) ritual which takes place on an auspicious day prescribed by the priests, to be held within a week before the festival is held. This ritual is considered one of most important events for the initiation of the festivities. The *dhwaja* ritual is marked by important factors of performance and viewership, determining the dominance of one village over others. The significance of the ritual is to lead a procession to an area far away from the initiating village, hunting for the tallest bamboo shoot. This will ensure making of the tallest flag or *dhwaja* which is considered the most significant symbol for establishing strength and hence victory over other villages participating in the festival.

The procession comprising only men leaves the village early morning, around sunrise. The group with about forty to sixty men is regarded as the 'core' group. This is an interesting moment of study as this core group of men includes not only men from the village representing the flag (*dhwaja*) and the buffalo (*baghi*) to be sacrificed, but also men from neighbouring villages who stand in solidarity as members of the same *patti*.

The procession is led by the drummers along with the village *pradhan* (headman) and elders. The younger men leave the village dancing to the beats of the drum. This group defines the core audience representing the village with the *dhwaja*. It is this group which stays bound to most of the events, serving as the most consistent group participating in almost every event throughout the festival and also serving as 'vanguard' of the village, its strength and its performative representation in the

festival.

The procession crosses village after village and has its own audience as it passes by. The drummers, who sometimes are left behind chatting with the villagers come to the forefront, attracting men to dance for a while as the other villagers drink water or wash up, smoke or just sit and rest after walking for miles. This goes on for a while till the procession moves again and this act is repeated almost next to every village which is by the roadside (and not on the hill). If there is no village by the roadside for a long time, the procession stops by one of the natural water streams trickling down the hill, resting in shade and eating local berries, with the boys taking the drums from the drummers and playing around in their own amateur ways. Noticeably, at every halt, the members in the procession divide themselves into groups which define their cultural roles more than the social for the fact that the hosts of important halts are villages with Rajput dominance, dissolving any social hierarchies between them and the village in procession lead by Rajputs.

After walking some fifteen to twenty odd miles, the villagers in the procession reach the part of the hills with dense vegetation. The bamboo shoots are initially not seen from the road and are come to visibility only once we climb up the hill. Within moments, one can witness interesting patterns within the villagers who as members of the procession now transform their role and soon spread themselves into the environment on the hills. The contours on the hill provide different levels of viewership as the audience takes it place. The figure below is a rough illustration of how the entire space between the hills transforms itself into a performative ritual space with specific locations of the audience and their roles. While formulating these illustrations based on mere viewing, it is essential to underline the fact that the roles and positions of the audiences never stayed bound at the level of reception or participation and even though the grouping seemed clear and easy to define in structures, they were overpowered by their dynamism and fluidity. This dynamism was demonstrated by simple interests in reception and social stature of the individuals, be it at the level of *kul*⁸ or other roles of political authority at the village level.

⁸ *Kul* refers to the unit of family which may be extended or related through lineage.

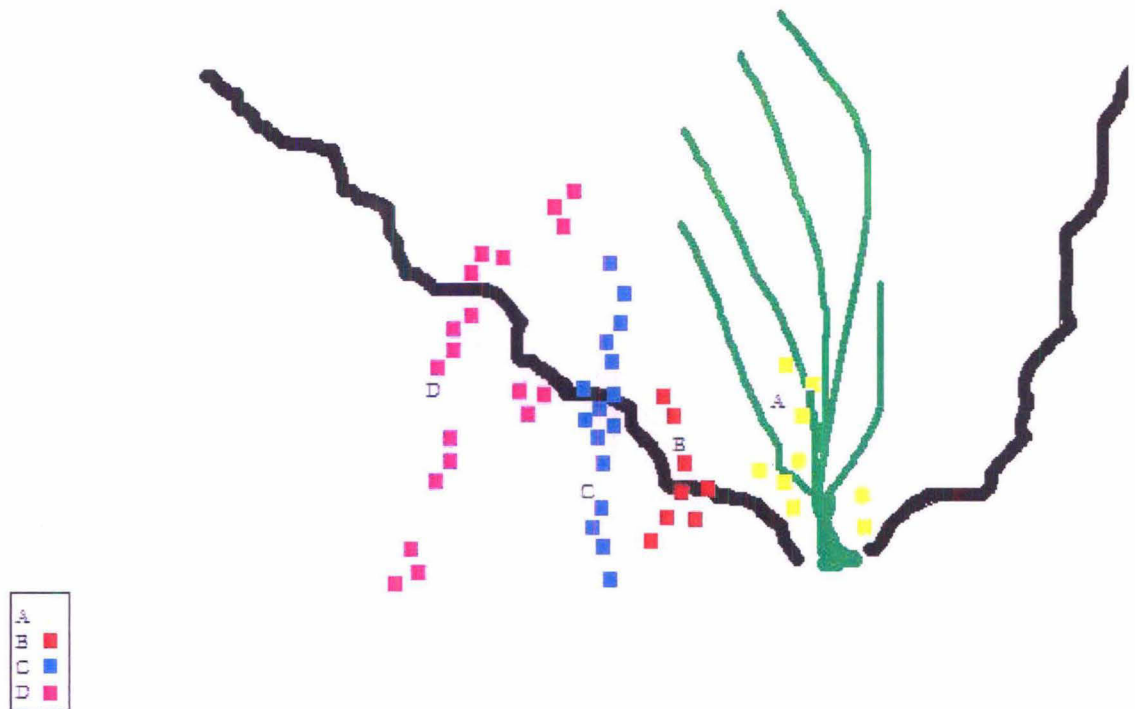


Figure 1

The positioning of the group A (as shown in figure 1) happens closest to the bamboo shoot. This group comprises of the priests and close members of the family sponsoring the *dhwaja* along with a few other villagers who serve as the ‘prompting audience’ and provide a link with group B. The prompters interact with others and after minutes of speculation choose the sturdiest bamboo shoot with suitably ‘winnable’ knots⁹ around which the ritual centres. The ritual is actually brief and begins with the priest (also known as *kul guru*) chanting prayers for the bamboo and offering betel leaf, sweets and vermillion mark to the chosen bamboo. A red thread used in religious and ritual ceremonies is tied to the bamboo shoot chosen for the *dhwaja* and to the weapon which is used to chop it off. Once the prayers have been offered, vermillion mark on the forehead is applied to everyone present. In the meanwhile, the only woman spectator, the owner of the forest area and hence the bamboo shoot is called in to offer blessings to the sponsor of the *dhwaja* who offers

⁹ The village with the *dhwaja* with the maximum knots is pronounced victorious over others. This factor has contributed to several incidents of violence leading to *dhwaja* breaking in the history of *Khairaling Mahadev*.

his reverence to her and later pays her for the bamboo.

Group B which is usually a small group of old men, 'ex- sponsors', priests, village *pradhan* and *patwaris*, sits and is the key 'prompting' audience. The ritual takes place under their close surveillance and constant commentary not so much for the *kul guru* but for the sponsor who needs constant instructions or is so made to believe. This group is in constant interaction with the members of group A who are on the periphery of the ritual space and the bamboo and simply view with no role to play in the prayers, offerings and blessings.

Group C forms the vibrant group which multi tasks in its viewership roles. This group not only includes the representatives of the village who will mostly stay in the forefront of the performances, but headed by the drummers who are constantly performing- playing drums and singing *jagars*¹⁰, except for when the priests chant and offer prayers. It is this group which continues to view the ritual from a higher spot and at the same time responds to drumming.

The younger members of the representative village, along with the members of other villages form what I mark as group D. These members are usually on the periphery while the ritual is on, usually chatting in groups, sometimes loitering around and constantly changing location. They do not locate their viewing at specific sites of action but generally keep an overall eye and opinion on the event.

As the ritual prayers conclude, the locations of viewership and participation alter, transforming, in fact reversing the model and process which was established and mentioned above (as is shown in Figure 2). As soon as the ritual is over, the task of chopping the bamboo begins which displaces the groups from their chosen spaces. Group D plays the vital role, completely focused on the safe chopping and undamaged pull out of the bamboo which involves coordination at different spots in the pit. Group C replaces Group B and one can witness the drummers standing near the pit, only

¹⁰ *Jagar* songs are an essential part of the Garhwali traditional song repertoire, mainly sung in the honour of various folk deities associated with particular caste, lineage, village and region (in the context of the festival), apart from songs related to spirit worship.

drumming, louder than before, viewing the event of *dhwaja* chopping, along with the other members who no longer acknowledge the drummers and instead are in constant interaction, rather instructional mode with noticeable authoritative tones over the youngsters helping the chopping and felling. Group B has shifted further up and is almost merged with Group A, viewing the commotion in the pit and expressing opinion and concern which are not communicated outside their spatial confinements, while Group A offers least attention to the felling and get busy winding up the items used in the ritual, along with money and other transactions. Soon the bamboo is felled and the members of group D carry it straight out of the space of the ritual (as the rough illustration attempts to demonstrate) followed by other members.

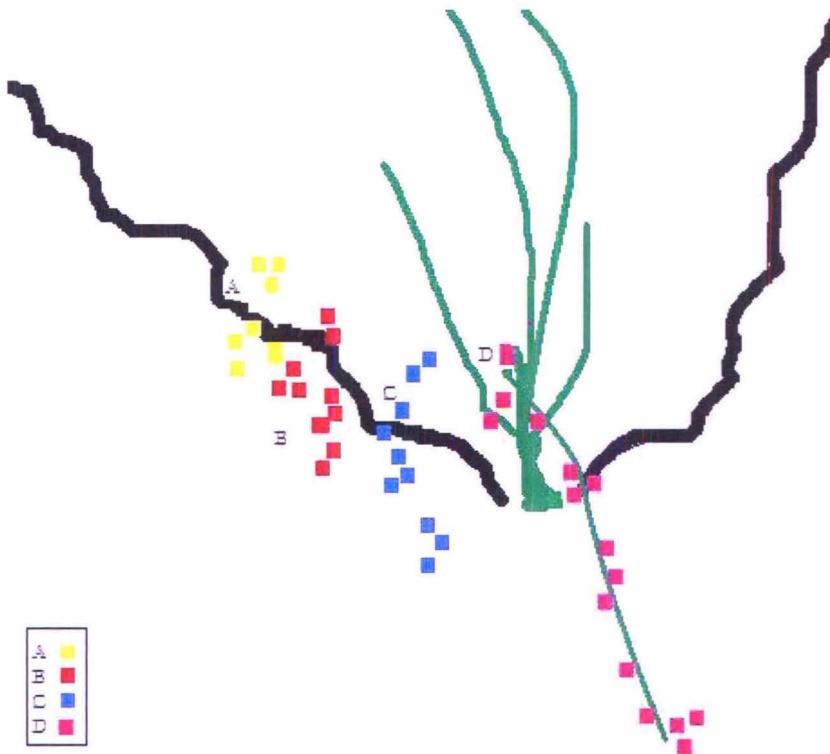


Figure 2

The bamboo is carried to the road from where the procession came and is settled on the road for final pruning of the leaves and small branches and refining of the knots, smoothening it up across its length with utmost precision and contribution from different members who volunteer to do so. The drummers continue to drum forming a small group of dancers around them, till the bamboo is christened as *dhwaja* and with

one end on the ground is lifted for the first time with crowds cheering to heightened drumming, exhibiting the first symbol of power and gear up for the festival to establish victory over other participant villages.

The *dhwaja* is lifted horizontally by the members of the procession, taking turns on the way, stopping and resting for water, berries, drumming, smoking and chatting. On the way back, the village of *Mirchora*, as an annual ritual sponsors a late afternoon meal for all the members in the returning procession which is greeted with great enthusiasm by the host village. After a community meal, on the edge of a hill, the procession gears up for the miles to cover. Apart from small stops, a major halt happens at the Thair village, where the procession moves uphill into the village to offer prayers at the 'sub temple' of *Sri Khairaling Mahadev*. The entire village gathers around the village, viewing the procession moving through the thin alleys and huts, reaching the temple where brief prayers are offered and the *dhwaja* is lifted vertically again, for the villagers to cheer up in praise of *Khairaling Mahadev*. The procession then rushes out, carefully carrying the *dhwaja*, which is guided through safe routes and numerous helping hands of the young enthusiastic boys, with the men closely following and instructing, while women only view from various levels- windows, alleys, terraces, courtyards and wooden attics.

The procession reaches the host village and disperses into the hills, where from the road one can hear the cheers and drumming as the host village receives them after a long day of waiting for the arrival of the procession and the *dhwaja*, while the members from other villages return to their respective homes. The *dhwaja* is kept in a safe place, where there is no fear of it bending, breaking or drying up, and from that moment onwards the responsibility of the festival becomes not only that of the sponsor or the small group of villagers in the procession, but the entire communion in the village. From that night onwards, till the days of the actual festival, night long celebrations begin, where the villagers from the host and the neighbouring villages gather together post- dinner and dance till wee hours to the tune of the drummers who usually belong to the same village or are related to the *kul* but reside in another village, or have been especially called upon for their skill.

Jaat – Khairaling Mahadev Festival (Day I)

The first day of the festival is called *jaat* meaning journey. On the day of *jaat*, the villagers will undertake the journey through procession to the main temple of *Shri Khairaling Mahadev* (near Kaljikhhal and Mundneshwar village) where the fair will begin on the same day. The day starts off early with the family sponsoring the sacrificial animals having an elaborate praying session at the local temple with the priest and close family inside the temple. The villagers begin to gather around the temple and sit or stand around viewing the ceremony. The men in the meanwhile prepare the *dhwaja*, tying frills and red cloth across half its length. There is a small *dhwaja*, brought from the forests along with the big one, to be attached to the local temple, which is also prepared. Once the prayers have been offered, the family steps out along with the priest who puts *bindi* or vermilion dots on everyone's forehead and distributes *prasada*¹¹. In the meanwhile, the drumming starts and a group of men carry both the *dhwajas* to this temple. The small one is fixed to the temple wall with the help of ropes among crowds cheering and dancing with a printed image of Shiva on the flag.

The main *dhwaja* leads the procession to a courtyard which is in the centre of the village surrounded by houses of wood and concrete with attics which by now have been occupied by numerous women and children of the village. This is where the '*baghi*' buffalo which is to be sacrificed leading to the culmination of the festival is given a ceremonial bath and a red string and cloth are tied to the heads of the animal across its horns and vermilion is smeared on its forehead. A white dust mixed with mustard oil is rubbed all over the buffalo- a ceremony called '*baghi tharapna*' and it is fed with a special preparation of rice and pulses to which all the families contribute so as to wash themselves off all the misdeeds and unforeseen mishappening, as the belief goes. The same is done with the sacrificial goats.

After attaching the flag with colourful printed images of Shiva and Kali to the bamboo, a procession with the sacrificial animals tied with ropes circumambulates the entire village to visit and purify all the four directions. At the given spot, a small hole

¹¹ Offerings to the deity usually in the form of sweets and fruits distributed among devotees and viewers after the prayers.

is dug into the earth; the sponsor is asked to pray to the *bhu devi* and present seven types of offerings to the deity which in small quantities are dropped into the hole, as the chanting by the priest and the drumming keep company throughout. The offering includes rice, pulses, corn, crab, fish, milk, coconut along with bread made of flour and jaggery which are buried with a long iron nail and a lit oil lamp. After this short ritual and circumambulation, the procession returns to the courtyard where the villagers engage in a community meal and prepare for departure to the fair.

The entire village gathers and a huge procession led by the drummers starts its journey to *Mundeshwar*, the site of the temple as well as the festival. The men dance the *pandava dance* to the tune of the drums and sing occasionally while the women and children follow them as spectators. The entire procession moves slowly cutting across dense pine jungles taking almost two hours to walk uphill, stopping at intervals for water and rest from carrying the heavy *dhwaja*. Sometimes the procession has to wait to congregate with other processions and flags of other villages and then move uphill towards the festival, where they break independent on reaching the last road to the festival premises.

On reaching the festival arena where hundreds of people have already gathered to offer prayers at the temple, the procession halts for the merger of all the *dhwajas* into one, as they are tied with ropes and then carried together. This is where the devotees see each other's *dhwaja* and the crowds stand at all levels of the hill to view the tying of the *dhwaja* and speculate the 'winner' village. This is considered a particularly tense moment as the conflict over the *dhwajas* can lead to fights. The event which is purely meant for demonstration of power witnesses an interesting role the devotees play in concealing the powerful through the performative. The drama can be clearly witnessed in the diluting dance groups where the villagers do seem to participate in the celebration by dancing and finishing the *jaat* successfully by reaching the destination, but this performative interest is overpowered by the concerns for power and declaration of authority which constantly pulls them out of the performative and back into the viewing of the *dhwaja* tying. Actually the tradition of tying them together emerged out of the fear of quarrels over the *dhwaja*, but till date this is one of the main attractions.

Soon the 'winner' village is declared and the tallest *dhwaja* signifies the most powerful village. The *dhwajas* carried by the procession heads straight to the temple, cutting across the numerous devotees, where the flag is devoted to the temple and then fixed to the wall with the help of the hooks attached to the temple walls, along with prayers, drumming and dancing. This is followed by the men with the animals to be sacrificed circumambulating the temple five times. The village members break into groups either moving around the *mela* space, visiting the row of numerous small shops selling food and various accessories, jewellery and toys, or just simply resting around a tree and their animals. But most of them queue up to make their offerings to goddess Kali and lord Shiva till the first half of the day.



Figure 3

In an interesting transformation of space, the geography of the entire region is minimized onto the hill of the *Khairaling Mahadev Fair*, where the villages have demarcated locations on the hill. They have to occupy these very places with their group, animals, and musicians. The zones marked as 'A' in the figure above represent

the different villages as they occupy the space on the hill corresponding to the direction of the village they belong to after the *jaat*, the procession concludes in the devotion of the *dhwaja* to the temple. These areas are demarcated based on the location and more so the direction of the hill facing the particular village. Hence it is very interesting to see the villagers transforming the environment of the hill into their own mini village where they prepare to spend two days, cook, tie and feed the sacrificial animals, dance and get possessed along with continuous music of the drums. But this space is not occupied so much on the day of *jaat*. On *jaat*, one notices the space of the spectacle swallowing up that of the ritual and the religious. It is interesting to note that the patterns of audience viewership and participation continuously transform the space, often merging the viewership and participation of the religious into that of the ritual space being overlapped by that of the spectacle which cuts across that of the religious and especially the ritual- pulling attention from the fair to the possessed and the sacrificed.

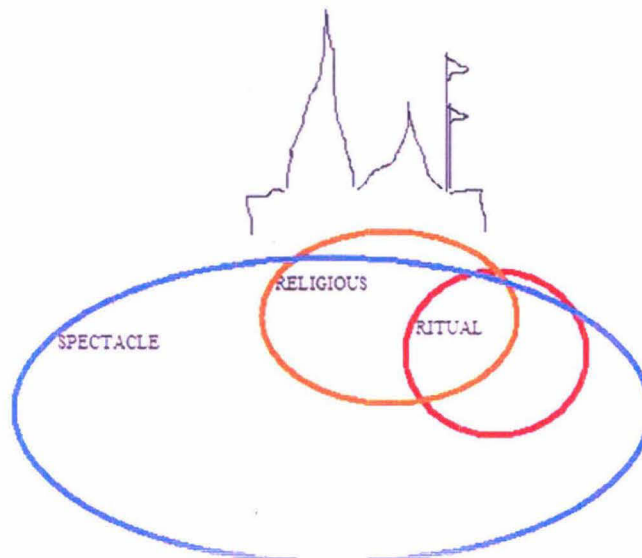


Figure 4

Throughout the afternoon, the visitors to the temple keep increasing in numbers, and after offering prayers at the temple, spread themselves across the landscape of the festival ranging from the fair space to the village demarcation to the temple, cutting across barriers of the spectacle, devotional, and performative. The day of *jaat* witnesses interesting models of audience reception, movement and participation, as the audiences from different villages flock together for celebration. The processions from different villages with autonomous viewing and participatory patterns congregate on the grounds of the festival, diluting village identities in terms of solidarity. The villagers in the temple premise seem the most self-reliant where their role as devotees confines them to the agenda of being able to offer prayers to the deities. This group largely comprises of women who queue up outside the temple gate, waiting sometimes for hours for their turn. Till they enter the temple sanctorum, they usually keep chatting with co-devotees, holding offerings in their hands. This is interrupted by the space of the ritual which is very near to the temple premise, demanding attention through performances, and these devotees offer the closest and consistent viewership mainly to the possessed who dance next to the queues, and of course to the animal sacrifices which also take place within the span of their viewership. Once these events fade away, the devotees return to their self-absorbed zone of participatory devotion, to be pulled out for the recurrent ritual performance by another group or individuals.

The space of the ritual on the day of *jaat* is frequented by patterns of viewership at intervals. Just before the animal sacrifices take place in this space, the possessed warm up the area with the drumming-possession link offering apt reasons for inviting enthralled viewership. Possession becomes an important site of viewership as the drummers continue to sing and invoke various deities, mainly goddess Bhawani. The possessed take over the temple space where the drums beat constantly and the beings in trance on whom the deity is said to have dawned sometimes perform vigorous movements or just go still for long spans, both actions revolving around the idea and iconic representations of the goddess. The possessed also have set patterns of demonstrating, where each actor has his or her own stylistic representations. Some of them focus more on the iconic poses where the body stays still and the main focus remains on eyes and use of hands to demonstrate imaginary props like tridents and swords which are moved around depicting anger/strength; while others break into

frantic, swirling or jumping motions with no focus on any specific movement of a body part, but carefree motions often leading to unaware fusing into audience circles or tripping on the steps and rolling on the floor. They perform in fixed and episodic sequences which are repeated over time and with intense behavioural patterns. This group of audience comprises not only of the devotees mentioned above, but two other sections: those who come to witness the deities which have possessed the dancers and take blessings from them and have a ritual inclination to their viewership; and the other is the audience of the spectacle of possession. These three possible criteria of audience reception confine into one in the space of the ritual blurring the motives of their presence, sometimes even swapping criteria. At the same time, these concentric patterns of viewership are the least stable and keep fluctuating, breaking and reforming circles around the events of the ritual.

The largest audience gathering is located opposite the temple premise, on a huge mound which over the years has somehow been naturally transformed into terraces where the audiences assemble, making the zone look completely packed. By the afternoon, and especially on the second day, it seems like a mound of faces and that is all one can see from the temple: faces which eat, sit under umbrellas, chat, smoke, but also viewing for the largest fraction of the time spent there. These are the members of the audience, who seemingly do not belong to any of the villages bringing the *dhwaja* and *baghi*. On the day of the *jaat*, the people forming this part of the audience mostly 'assess' the space of the ritual, the temple visit and most importantly the *mela*. It is around here that one gets the judgment on vibrancy, crowd, efficacy, food and the overall organisation of the events and the *mise-en-scene*. This group that can witness the maximum movements of their fellow villagers and relatives while getting a complete overview of the entire space declares the time of the important rituals through the movement of the major village with animals groups. These audiences, on the day of *jaat*, are very rarely participatory once they park themselves on the hill after brief survey of the fair and the temple, offering full commitment to the act of spectacle, and moving only at the time of their final exit from the space to their respective village.

Approximately around four in the evening, an important event takes place called *chakra chot* or *baghi ghaav*, where a small cut is made on the back of the *baghi* with

a sword, outside the temple, facing the idol of goddess kali. The ceremony inaugurates the sacrifice of the goats, which also takes place usually in the space on the immediate right of the temple. The audiences generally surround the goat and the *jallaad* (the appointed person who slaughters the animals with a special sword) is called in, who waits for the goat to shake its head which is considered a sign for approval. The goats are held tightly from the hind legs and are struck on the neck in one blow which is considered auspicious and is one of the expected rules of sacrificing. Earlier, the heads were devoted first to the goddess in the temple, where it is said that there used to be heaps of heads in front of the idol, till some years ago, when the number of sacrifices used to be large. But now the heads are simply taken away by the devotee owner.

In an hour's time after the sacrifice, the crowds start returning home before it gets dark and also take the uncertain weather conditions into account. The devotees stay up all night at the site of the festival with the animals and few other villagers, dancing the night away, of which little is known as I was unable to stay overnight on the hill ever as the place was pronounced 'unsafe' by the villagers owing to very little presence of women willing to accompany due to excessive intoxication within the exclusive male gatherings which often lead to misbehaviour with women.

Kauthig –Khairaling Mahadev Day II

The second day called *kauthig*, begins with people congregating again on the grounds of the *Khairaling Mahadev* temple. The visitors usually reach the festival premises by noon, and after a long walk, almost similar distance as covered during the *jaat*, though faster, straightaway head for the round of the fair or the temple if they missed it on the first day. There seems to be a bigger crowd flocking around the shops and the entire *mela* space, moving around eating, buying or just simply viewing and waiting. One also notices longer queues as the day proceeds, for Shiva and Kali worship. By afternoon, the entire festival space is absolutely packed with huge crowds interacting, buying, eating, meeting, visiting the temple, dancing, moving and relishing every moment of being there, but all eagerly waiting for the main attraction- the sacrifice of the *baghi*.

Interestingly on the day of the *kauthig*, one can notice a reversal of the dilution of the villagers into the entire space of the festival. As far as my observations could reveal, the 'mini- environmental space of the village' of the demarcated space pulls the crowds in larger numbers than the day of the *jaat*. It is here that the space of the ritual from outside the temple reverts back to these zones on the second day. This area where the villagers gather becomes the arena of performance and ritual. The drummers consistently play the drums and the deities appear in order on various members. The villagers, instead of spending time around the space of the fair and its spectacle, confine their allegiance to the viewership and participation in the village space and begin to rejuvenate the spirit of village solidarity which was last seen during the *dhwaja* tying.

The villagers, who have brought the *baghi* to sacrifice, sit around it, feeding it well. They sing and dance around it. Some women even hug the *baghi* time and again, rubbing and patting it, feeding it and pampering it by keeping the flies off its *chakra cho'* ritual bruise. Meanwhile, the men dance in circles and produce loud shrieks at intervals. The drumming stops for a while and the drummers smoke or drink water to restart bringing back the excited men to dance. It is from these zones that the villagers view the day of *kauthig* witnessing the transformations in the space of actions which begin to precipitate with burgeoning crowds in the expanse of the festival arena. The villagers notice, acknowledge and savour the increase in number of people in almost every space- the hustle bustle by afternoon to visit the temple where the queues seem suffocatingly packed and one can hear the incessant ringing of the temple bells; the explorations of the length and breadth of the fair, visiting each and every shop, haggling for prices, buying, arguing, relishing every bit of it; and the ritual space which is sporadically occupied by the possessed. Every contour of the hill is occupied with clusters of people for whom, by the afternoon, there are sub- entertainments like cultural programmes, special guest performances by popular music or 'comic' artists, tight rope walkers and individuals and organisations who sometimes manage these events to propagate their anti- animal sacrifice stance.

By three in the afternoon, these groups of villagers leave their demarcated space of

the village zones in large groups led by the drummers, cut across the space of the fair, circumambulate the temple while dancing and screaming loudly in groups, to return to their village area. This is simply done to exhibit excitement and strength as a build up to the event. This act serves as a moment of exhilaration for the viewers from the mound, who by now are swarming and clustered in space and excitement. The viewers from the mound watch the procession and begin to decide on their allegiance and viewership of the animal sacrifice which is being signalled at from the procession, village after village. The crowds grow bigger in the village zone, and after being fed well, the *baghi* is taken for circumambulation around the temple along with a huge procession.

In the meanwhile, seeing the processions revisiting the site of the temple, the space of the ritual re-livens and the possessions multiply in number, possibly considering potential audience. The annual *stalwarts*¹² of possession by now have presided over the temple arena and have members of the audience pushing each other to merely get a glimpse of the *devi* who has dawned on the possessed. They become a sight of spectacle for quite some time, changing poses and glances, and for a larger part of the time exhibiting the popular iconic representations of the goddess which the audience can clearly relate with adding to their conditioned belief.

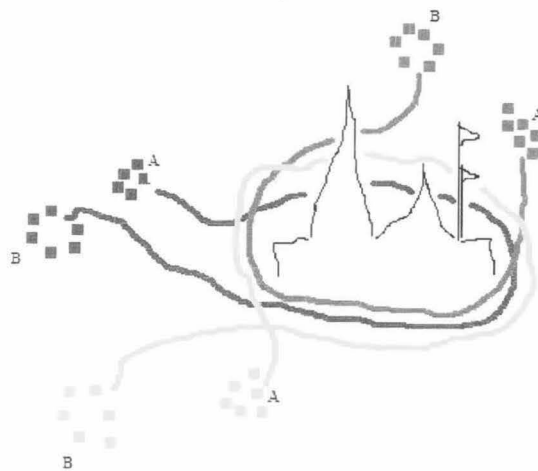


Figure 4

¹² Few women and men have become well known for possessing special skills of expressing the incarnations of the deity which dawn on them, mainly Kali/Bhawani on women and Shiva/Bhairav on men which also lead them to excessive responses like blood drinking at the site of sacrifice.

The audiences who had gathered to witness the possessed, in some time, start to follow the particular village procession they wish to join to witness the sacrifice. To underline the fact, the *baghi* is not sacrificed outside the temple like the goats, but is taken a little away towards a demarcated area, facing the village to which it belongs, followed by large crowds, extensive drumming and faster beats, exaggerating or rather building up to the event which corresponded with more people dancing with greater vigour and enthusiasm. As has been shown in the figure above, the villagers leave their village zones marked as A to circumambulate the temple cutting across the spaces of viewership, action and participation, moving to the zone B which is the shifted zone of sacrifice of the *baghi*, thus creating a new pattern for audiences to locate their role and space within the intermingled paradigms of the ritual, religious and that of the spectacle. In no time, the possessed rush out of the temple shrine and swirl their way through the procession next to the *baghi*. The processions of each village grow bigger and bigger, drawing people from every corner of the hill, drawing their attention to the gearing up for the event. In these moments, the crowd gets into such a state of enthusiasm that one can see group tensions heightening between different villages at the time of circumambulation and procession and the viewers are always anticipating a quarrel at this moment. Each village's procession keeps on growing at this time as the crowds which was divided through the space of the ritual and the spectacle now begins to merge into the procession with the crowd that moves towards a larger pit where the *baghi* would be led into. The *baghi* is tied with ropes which are held tightly from all sides for safety reasons in case the *baghi* gets injured and becomes violent. The drums beat with the maximum pace and the crowd converts itself into complete audience panicking to find the right spot around the pit to witness the sacrifice. Interestingly, the possessed woman finds a place next to the drummers, being the only woman in the pit, so close to the *baghi*, usually swaying to the drumming and breaking into momentary shrieks, but mostly freezing at the spot almost like the iconic deity serving as the closest audience for the sacrifice. The moment the *baghi* is sacrificed, the devotees instantly jump into the pit for fresh blood oozing out of the slaughtered body, which they apply to the forehead, with women soaking their feet in it and on extraordinary occasions drink the blood, which used to be done mostly by possessed women and by all efforts is prevented nowadays by

force.

The sacrifice of the *baghi* brings the festival to an end. Crowds leave the area as quickly as possible to get to the public transport, if any. But some stay back to buy things for half the price from the fair, and some to loot the shopkeepers off their money and belongings, who are now hurriedly winding up to prevent this. Soon the *mela*, the prayers, the music- all fade out and the villagers return home.

Reiterating the Space and Audience Relation

Through this brief discussion, we have noticed the varied transformations of space and the audience in the celebration of the Khairaling Mahadev festival. Concerning the space, one notices the performative space shifting the site of activity from the village to the forest, back to the village, cutting across many villages and hills, to Mundneshwar where the festival spreads itself on a hill with the Khairaling Mahadev temple, for two days. Even during the two days of the festival, the space shifts location from the activities in the temple, inside the temple arena where the deity is said to transcend some members of the audience, outside the temple arena which becomes the sacrificial space for the goats, the circumambulatory space around the temple, the space of the sacrifice of the *baghi*, the space of the fair with shops and eating places.

The ritual space with its own demands of efficacious behaviour establishes itself over every other space as the key zone of all activity revolving around the festival. It can be seen in the way all the pre- festival activities and the procession cutting through other spaces culminate in the ritual space situated at the peak, announcing its sovereignty over other surroundings and hence subordinate physical as well as geographical spaces. Even in the festival arena, the important activities happen around the temple of Shiva and Kali, the epitome of the ritual, and when the ritual corresponds to the spectacle in the culmination of the slaughter of the *baghi*, the entire ritual space shifts and relocates itself around the pit where the sacrifice is to take place.

As the ritual space locates itself around the temple and asserts its importance by shifting location and hence pulling response at the utmost, the space of the spectacle, the fair, takes over the entire arena of the festival. It is the unavoidable space. The space which pulls in the audience, the participant, the devotee, the moment he breaks out of the important but momentary ritual space, and challenges the function of the festival where one questions if the space of the fair is actually in the periphery of the ritualistic headgear of the festival or not. It is this space where the audience plays its most multiple roles where the subject, the participant, the spectator- all blend into one at the same time.

Beyond this, the space of musical performances keeps cutting across all these sites pulling the audience and creating a space of performance around the drummer. The space of 'spectatorship' is also very fluid and it interestingly improvises itself immediately, as and when required around what needs to be viewed. Sometimes both these sites could exist in the festival arena at multiple spots, considering the choice of participation and viewership of the audience, hence creating layers of audience-viewing and participating and layers of performative spaces.

This multiplicity of space and its transformation leads to multiplicity of its nature and meaning. The space while creating itself defines itself through its functionality. As one notices in *Khairaling*, the space changes hues from the ritual space to the festival space, to the theatrical space- all these at times cut across each other, often intermingle, often opposing each other and demanding exclusiveness, thus blurring the lines between ritual, spectacle and theatre.

This overlapping multiplicity defines audience and the role it chooses to play which in turn defines the space of performance. The festival attracts an audience with varied conditioning of the role it desires to play in the festival. These roles are self defined, which can be transformed and transcend physical and behavioural spaces. The audience participates in almost every activity happening around the festival. The members of the audience/community respond during rituals in the village; become a part of the procession, a pilgrimage to the festival; dance, sing and help carry the heavy flag; bring their animals to sacrifice; represent their community and assert their space among other groups of representation.

It is interesting to note that some members of the audience who by virtue of their actions and participation reflect their conditioning which results in multiplicity or 'openness' of interpretation and hence reception. As Marco de Marinis claims 'this openness leads to a real increase in the number of "authorized" spectators and in the types of reception....'(Marinis, 1987:104) These members of the audience almost 'ideal' through their assertion and authorization, take up their roles from the very beginning as the performer, moving in and out, merging with other performers, and soon merging with the audience, moving in spaces of theatricality, participating in the ritual, perhaps as the sacrificer, as the devotee on whom the deity descends, hence becoming the site of the spectacle, 'being viewed' and worshipped, and in some time shedding that and beginning to 'view' others and the spectacle around them.

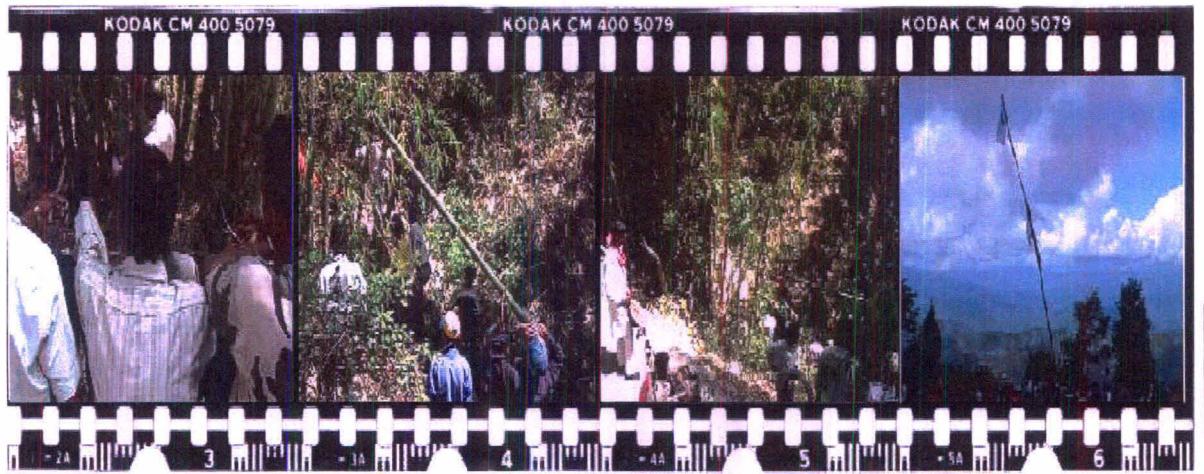
The audience not only creates a space of viewership by its own behaviour, but creates an audience to view the behaviour of others by enforcing it through knowledge and pre-conditioning. This audience guides and directs, evaluates a given behaviour or performance by viewing it, being a participant through one's own selection of the event and gives it importance by choosing to view it and not anything else, thus enforcing the performance back with its assertion to view. This enforcer audience hence pulls in others and creates a viewership by granting an unofficial sanction of relevance to a particular section of the performance which could be ritual, theatrical or spectacle or all of this. This is done as an unofficial critic representing popular yet crystallised opinion regarding the performance, comparing, critiquing and highlighting the pleasure of viewing and that of being viewed. Through conditioning, knowledge and criticism, these authorised members of the audience work as pace makers to the ritual performance, making sure that the strings are connected and flowing through each and every event, which is viewed and relished.

The audience while reflecting its autonomy of behaviour, participation and evaluation of the festival resonates of the conditioning it receives from being a part of a certain community – community for the values of which this audience follows the structures, defines and nurtures those very rituals which are markers of their socio-cultural identity. This community as a part of the modern state and polity dissolves the social hierarchies while participating in the ritual performance in order to restore what

Turner calls 'socio structural crisis'(Turner, 1977: 202). It is shown especially at the level of the understanding they exhibit of being a part of the rituals at the festival where the entire audience performs the sacrifices with a consensus of the codes of performativity, striving for a communion for the culmination of conflicts through sacrifice, corresponding to what Turner sees these ritual processes 'as a series of transformative symbolic actions designed to convert a preliminary situation of major social disunion into a situation of profound union among community members'(ibid: 196).

At *Khairaling Mahadev*, it works at an extended level where this continuity of consensus prevails even in the grossest highlights of transition or ruptures within the community which can be at the cost of manipulating performative-ritualistic events carved out of the very structural dynamism the ritual was being moulded into. This rupture has been reflected in the festival with the incidents of violence that run through almost every activity of the festival. One can trace the thread of violence pervading through the history of fights during procession, history of fight over the passing buffalo, through another village history of fights in fixing the flag and circumambulation, intervention of the social workers to ban animal sacrifices over the recent years, and other such aspects of violence that transform the space, the audience and hence the performance into something beyond the continuum of the efficacy-entertainment braid (Schechner,1994:120) and thus enters an exclusive arena of codes of interpretation and response by the participatory audience.

The next chapter attempts to deal with this very violence and its conditions between the dynamism of the villagers and that of the state challenging and contesting the very structure of the ritual performance through which the audience strives for authority, thereby blurring the line between the self- assertive and the self- transcendental audience for which Schechner separates 'play' from 'ritual'(ibid: 13)where the 'we' takes over the self- assertive 'I' and the self- transcendental 'other'; the codes of pleasure and the reality principle float within this newly created crevasse of processual rupture. This processual rupture evolves into something beyond the performative, spilling over the ritual, the sacrificial and the spectacle.



Audience members view the ceremony, instructing from their space of viewership

Audience positions itself within roles of viewership and participation

The Drummers playing and viewing the dhawaja being pulled away by the villagers

the dhawajas from different villages joined before being offered to the temple, while the audience surrounds them

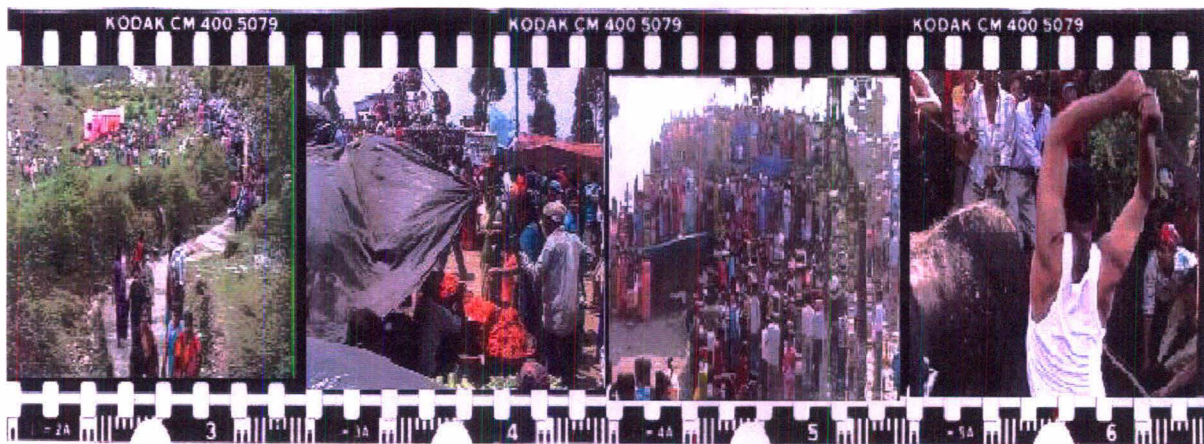


Drums- 'dhol' and 'damru'

The audience viewing drumming and the possessed

The sacrificial buffalo, 'baghi' with the villagers

men dancing with the sacrificial sword, followed by the drummers



'Jazal' - the journey to the Festival

the 'mala' space on the day of 'Kauthig'.

Audience occupying different contours on the hill to view a fight over the head of the sacrificed

the baghi sacrifice

CONTESTING VIEWERSHIP THROUGH VIOLENCE:

Surveying Interventions and Ruptures at Khairaling

The *Khairaling Mahadev* festival, as shown in the previous chapter, portrays the role of the audience in creating the ritual, cutting across the space of the religious and that of spectacle. This is done through their choice of viewership which is not only determined by the space they wish to acquire, but also the event on whose periphery of participation they wish to locate themselves. In the present chapter I will be sketching those events, mainly pertaining to violence which falls outside the purview of the performative per se, but taking place in the very space of the ritual and the spectacle from which it erupts. To make it clear from the very beginning, these events of violence pertaining to rituals and yet not 'performative' become the guiding force of viewership and reception of the audience at the *Khairaling Mahadev*, so much so that most often even participation is with the anticipation of violence which could break out at various events in the festival. The audience at *Khairaling* has over the years, through factors of repetition and conditioning to these events, actually demarcated these 'moments' in the ritual performances which could in some way precipitate into violence.

It was noteworthy to witness the viewership patterns of the audience as they determined their reception of the event as it boiled down to situations like these and their assessment of it, sometimes leading to violence and many times not, at the same time pinning down few individuals and their transformative role from being an audience to a ritual being performed to a sudden dive into action as participant in the violence. These disputes which vary from mere heated arguments to heightened physical violence including incidences of murders and such attempts of and by the participants have been briefly noted down to give the reader an image of the kind of violence unfolding in these events.

Surveying theoretical discourse on violence

It is a difficult task to define violence, where I can only attempt to differentiate it from others' interpretations of the kinds of violence I came across in a few writings on violence, broadly sacrificial and political. Violence in the sacrificial has been seen as a purifier, an attempt for redressal of crisis inherent in a society. Rene Girard does not define it but proclaims violence as inevitable when countered or suppressed, and especially when two rivals possess the desire to appropriate the same object, where imitation of desire results in conflict. The 'sacrificial crisis' as he calls it, rises out of a dissolution of hierarchies and differences within a society and diverts itself into a murder or expulsion of a scapegoat, a sacralisation which results in the restoration of social order (Girard, 1979) At the same time, the scapegoat serves as the victim who cleanses the community making the sacrifice of its ills by absorbing the evil. His premise on the sacralisation of the scapegoat as a necessity for generating violence also believes that this desire finds its solace in the sacred. Girard makes his claims on the act of violence which is guided by the desire for power and culmination of crisis within a community through the sacrifice of an object alien to it, in an attempt to resolve all possibilities of reprisal (ibid: 36).

Not very far away from Girard, Turner notes that 'ritual concepts such as pollution, purification, sacrifice, etc., emerge from the recognition that social groups, in the course of time, get increasingly clogged by these negative sentiments, so that if there is any sense of generic human communality at the foundation of the group it becomes harder to find as people identify themselves more and more with their statuses and their ambitions to rise in status and power.'(Turner, 1977: 197). Turner highlights not only the reconstructive, but also the deconstructive functions of sacrifice through a clear differentiation between the rituals of prophylaxis which on similar lines as Girard makes sure that the 'structure is cleansed, but left intact'(ibid: 213) with a mission of renovating the 'negative sentiments' so that 'generic human communality' prevails and the ritual of abandonment which serves as an indicator of the 'dissolution of all structural fines and boundaries, an annihilator of artificial distances, restorative of *communitas*, however transiently'(ibid: 212-213). For Turner, the performance of sacrifices is not confined to a response to the attempt to resolve crisis, but is an event where 'two notions of power are contrasted: power based on force,

wealth, authority, status, tradition, or competitive achievement; and power released by the dissolution of systemic and structural bonds'(ibid: 214). He immediately clarifies by saying that 'the first kind of power is offered and abandoned' and the second is 'tapped to purify and simplify relations among group members and the mental state of individuals' (ibid: 214).

Jesse Goldhammer, while attempting to connect the ancient notions of sacrifice and martyrdom with the modern political glossary through the analysis of the French revolution, seconds Turner's argument and analysing it as politically inclined and instructive states that in the real world, the boundaries between the vilified and the revered scapegoat are not clearly demarcated and says that 'scapegoats and martyrs are thus ideal-typical concepts whose meanings become blurred when actual violence generates multiple forms of contestation. This ambiguity also illustrates the two respects in which sacrifices are political: (1) the form of the violence itself structures or restructures power relationships between sacrificer and sacrificed; and (2) the meaning of sacrificial violence is a subject of dispute, which means that the dominant and weak interpretations have different political values'(Goldhammer, 2005: 32).

Schechner while tracing the function of ritual claims that 'individual and collective anxieties are relieved by rituals whose qualities are repetition, rhythmicity, exaggeration, condensation, and simplification...'(Schechner, 1995: 233) He ranks ritual as offering relief from pain, a surfeit of pleasure, and purifier of violence with substitution of the surrogate (where he seconds Girard's view). But interest is in the parallel Schechner draws between ritual violence and theatre, focussing on how in theatre, in a very similar fashion, the actor plays the substitute- a representation of the character and so does the audience which substitutes its role as a 'society, responding more as a group than as discrete individuals.' (ibid: 234-235).

Violence at Khairaling: A brief history

The incidents of violence at the *Khairaling Mahadev* have been a common feature and very much a representative feature of the festival. It is noteworthy that the audience as much as participative is equally cautious of the violence which could break out from any of the events, mainly the *dhwaja* offering and circumambulation

of the animals around the temple. Apart from the incidents encountered by me during my visits from 2004 onwards, I will be tracing the history of the violence falling outside the purview of the performative violence of conducting the animal sacrifice—the very violence for the supposed redemption of which the sacrifices came to be conducted. The events before 2004 have been picked up from the anecdotes noted by Vidyadutt Sharma, a social activist who devoted around two decades to the cause of banning animal sacrifices. His writing of the brief history in a small booklet distributed during the festival serves as a source for events of violence (which he puts under the heading *Itihas ke Kuchh Kaale Panne*) before my visits to the festival. I would also depend on my observations and newspaper reports collected over a period of time.

The first event noted by Sharma dates back to 1905, a year which brought the *dhwaja* and *baghi* from the villages of Thair and Jhatkandi. The offerings for the temple from the Thair village were from a Rajput family and those from village Jhatkandi were from a lower caste villager. It is said that in those days it was inauspicious to have the *dhwajas* from representatives with caste variations to offer them jointly to the temple. For the same reason, Thair villagers objected at the *dhwaja* from the lower caste family to be offered along with theirs. In an interesting turn, the rajputs of village Jhatkandi took offence and came to defence of their lower caste villager and refused to be second to Thair in offering to the temple. This led to heated arguments which led to fighting till a villager from Jhatkandi got struck on his head by a stick and died on the spot. This event marks one of the farthest memories of such violence and death due to a feud over the ritual of *dhwaja* offering. The case was fought by kin of the victim for years though no justice could be dispensed because of lack of evidence due to mass indulgence in the quarrel. The villagers of Jhatkandi, after this incident, took the pledge of never offering *dhwaja* and *baghi* at the temple, till it was broken in 1997. Since then the ritual has been conducted with ardent participation from the village.

This incident is not only important in terms of the first evidence of such incidents taking place over ritual events, but also in terms of the setting of parameters of the extremity of violence that could be apprehended for years to come. It also portrays the very essence of the festival and mainly the ritual around the *dhwaja* offering which is

more than an individual's offering, and hence becomes the responsibility of the entire community. In this incidence, it was also brought to the fore the connection the village community has with the ritual- that the performance of the ritual posed a challenge to the dignity and power of the entire village, which was considered over caste allegiance, leading the members of the Rajput caste of one village fight the other, posing a consideration and throwing challenge to the confines of the ritual over those of the social system.

The event of 1924 as illustrated by Sharma brings to notice interesting beliefs and rituals of that time. During those days, the *baghi* after being brought to the festival for *jaat* and the circumambulation, used to be taken to the village it belonged to, to be sacrificed there on the day of *kauthig*. This ritual became the bone of contention because the procession with the *baghi* was considered inauspicious, as the *baghi* represented the ominous, and hence was not allowed to pass through villages. That year, the *baghi* of Khugsha village created trouble as the villagers of Sula village refused to let the procession pass. One of the villagers chopped off the ropes tied to the *baghi*, which made the animal flee, creating ruckus and feud among the villagers, also dragging the villager to the court where he was fined for the misdeed.

By 1933 there were minor quarrels over issues like designated place at the festival venue for various villages (which later led to the demarcation of place according to the direction of the village downhill), fights over chance over the other to circumambulate the temple, and also personal grudges during these events which became a reason for hostility for the whole village. By this time, the feuds over the *dhwajas* and being the first village to offer it to the temple had more or less been sorted out and it was decided by consensus that villages coming from one zone of the hills would meet at a common ground and unite their *dhwajas* to avoid conflict in the festival space. This began to be followed well till the issue arose in 1933, where there were three *dhwajas* to be offered by Saknoli, Sula and Nagar village. As the rule was, the villages used to meet at a common point while crossing the hills and from there move towards the festival uphill together, after joining the *dhwajas* together. While the village of Sula reached the expected spot of union, the villagers of Nagar stopped the procession at a junction way before that spot, believing that they have been insulted by Sula village as they did not find them there and much ahead on the hill. In

the meanwhile, the villagers from Saknoli, not finding the procession of the other two villages till evening halted at the point they were supposed to meet. Seeing the villagers from Nagar not budging, village Sula moved towards the temple and ultimately were the only ones to be able to offer the *dhwaja* to the temple, to the anguish of the other two villages who jointly filed a case against Sula village for breaking the protocol of uniting the *dhwajas* with the deputy collector in Pauri. The case went on for a long time, brewing more grudges among villages, and finally deciding in favour of Sula village, some say because of favouritism of the officials dealing with the case and others report of Sula village's loyalty to the decided place for meeting where they did wait for a long time for Nagar procession.

The incidents of violence related to the ritual performances at *Khairaling* precipitated over the years and several incidents were narrated to me during my visits, of events of killings due to fights over circumambulations and other rituals. More importantly, several cases came to be reported of *dhwaja* breaking which has led to massive fights going on even after the festival and acute rivalry among villagers which is grudged out at the slightest opportunity in the next festival or any time of the year. The *dhwaja* breaking usually took place once the uniting of villages at a decided spot was called off due to delays and confusions, and it was settled for tying the *dhwajas* together just few metres away from the temple where the villages would meet. The moment they used to be tied and the *dhwaja* of some village would be taller than the other (bringing disgrace to the one and show of power for the other), the aggrieved participants of the loser village would break the *dhwaja* of the victorious, turning the entire *mela* space into a battlefield and disrupt one of the most important rituals at the festival. These disputes gave a character to the festival where almost every ritual and every activity began to be guided not only by a show of strength through these rituals, but also constructed every ceremony with an anticipated violence with display of victory or loss or mere completion. These events at *Khairaling* came to be marked as serious ruptures not only within the very structures of the ritual that began to be manipulated by the probability of violence, but also the very people participating- performing and viewing.

Conflict through Contemporary Intervention

Khairaling Mahadev witnessed many transformations over the years, where the nature of the *mela* itself was believed to have evolved. The significant new developments around the issue of animal sacrifice took place over the years with contributions from various individuals and groups.

One of the main contributors is Vidyadutt Sharma who also wrote a booklet on the festival's history. For almost two decades he has been dedicated to efforts to ban animal sacrifice. His main efforts centred around convincing people to stop sacrificing animals which he conveyed through personal conversations, but notably through 'cultural' endeavours. He organised parallel cultural programmes many times which were held in the *mela* ground, a little away from the temple. These programmes which included songs, dances, street plays, comedy shows and other entertainments by contemporary popular performers caught the attention of the people at the *mela*, especially the sitting crowd which generally just spent the day at the site after visiting the temple. These events which offered entertainment to the villagers along with the *mela*, also spread the message of banning animal sacrifice, which was the prime focus of the organisers, through speeches by popular singers like Narendra Singh Negi and many others, etc. These attempts by Vidyadutt Sharma were not only confined to organising programmes during the festival, but also through conveying the message especially to the sponsor of the sacrifice personally. His efforts throughout the past one decade revolved around culturally inclined activities including street plays which were taken to many villages to spread the message across.

In 2002, his organisation organised a huge programme at the site of the *mela* where popular artists shared a common platform to propagate against sacrificial killings. Soon after the programme got over, it was time for the rituals to begin for the sacrifices. As the organisers of the cultural programme intervened along with Sharma, they were attacked by the villagers supporting the sacrifice and stoned, also plundering their complete stage and set up. The havoc over the years got complicated and Sharma was threatened several times to withdraw his agenda. But he continued with the cultural programmes being staged and his conviction to the cause was proven

almost every year at the *mela* till the ill fated death of his elder son while returning from the festival in 2003 as his jeep fell into a gorge.

The cultural programmes stopped at the *Khairaling Mahadev* and Vidyadutt Sharma and his contingent were not seen in action campaigning against the animal sacrifice. While interviewing a few villagers at the festival about their opinion on animal sacrifice, Vidyadutt Sharma's disappearance was one of the reasons quoted in favour of animal sacrifice where the death of the son was interpreted as the 'curse of the deities', 'revenge of Kali' and 'punishment for going against the essence of Hinduism' and in turn seemed to have reinforced the belief of the villagers in the sacrificial killings. Sharma's younger son Tribhuvan Uniyal, who took the baton of social activism along with journalism and had been an avid organiser of events against the sacrifices had a different opinion which was that the violence and insensitivity of the participants at the festival, along with the ill feeling that lingered on throughout their efforts of selfless service over decades have forced them to withdraw from organising any of those events at *Khairaling*. According to Uniyal, it was sheer disappointment of contributing relentlessly to the cause and seeing no change in the performative and behavioural structures of the rituals and more so of those conducting them that had made them retreat from their cultural resistance and transformation.

During the same time, Sarita Negi, chairperson of the Bijal Sansthan was becoming reasonably active with the issue of banning the sacrificial killings. She and her co-activists, mainly women, had the experience of banning sacrificial performances at the *Chandrabadni* and *Kalimath* festivals and were determined to bring the change in *Khairaling Mahadev* too. Their method was different from that of Vidyadutt Sharma and not so much culturally oriented in terms of utilising alternative performances as a means of spreading the message, but had similar motives which were to convince the villagers to quit performing sacrifices and instead resort to offerings in kind to the deities which could include items made of silver. Sarita Negi's experience of social work in the villages related to a plethora of issues ranging from dowry, female foeticide to education and health, has made her a known figure amongst the villagers and the local media. Her methodology has been to join hands with the state administration and utilise its machinery and power to enforce state law.

Ruptures at *Khairaling*: Transforming roles of participation and reception

During my presence at *Khairaling Mahadev* for the first time in 2004, I was completely unaware of the condition in which animal sacrifices were conducted and especially the roles of the NGOs during the festival. The presence of sacrifices at the festival did not come as a surprise as they are so embedded in the performances in Uttarakhand where the cults of Shiva and Kali are the most revered, though the number of sacrifices has seen a remarkable decline. Interestingly, as the number has considerably come down, and the number of *dhwaja* and *baghi* has been reduced to one each, the villagers from the entire region show their allegiance to the sponsoring village, at least performatively.

But the elements of conflict began to brew on the day of *jaat* as police jeeps rolled into the space of the festival to my amusement. And in no moment, I was updated about the situation which had led to this. Sarita Negi representing her NGO Bijal Sansthan, along with a few women had been on an outright campaign that year. Their failed efforts to stop the villagers from sacrificing as well as the verbal conflicts and warnings to them from the villagers over the few years had compelled them to bring along the police in case of any mishap. It was interesting to note that even the police jeeps were surrounded by spectators who were simply struck by their presence and gearing up for something ‘unprecedented’ to take place.

This year had special significance in the history of *Khairaling Mahadev*. By noon, the festival had warmed up to the crowds who were jubilant after the *dhwaja* had been devoted and there being only one *dhwaja* in that year, the event was a communion celebration- villagers from every village viewed the *dhwaja* being fixed to the temple, as there was no reason for any conflict or demonstration of power. This was followed usually by the time for villagers to queue up for the temple and settle down after the long procession from their respective villages. In the meanwhile, I noticed crowds surrounding Sarita Negi as she spoke with random groups who simply surrounded her to listen to heated arguments between her and the *mela samiti* members or the sponsors. After some time, around one in the afternoon, a group of villagers had reached the temple premises and were suddenly engulfed amidst numerous groups of

viewers who anyway were excited about expecting something unprecedented. Within minutes, the crowd was screaming and the drums were beating incessantly. And soon victory was declared.

This event had left everyone awe struck as the ritual of *chakra chot* had just taken place much before the conventional time. This manipulation was done, simply to dodge the NGO representatives and the police who were waiting for a crackdown around the usual time of the *chakra chot* which in all these years had been around four in the evening. The goats were hurriedly circumambulated and brought to the patio next to the kali temple. The crowds yelled and shrieked in excitement, forming circles over circles, watching the possessed from different heights. Soon the yard was soaked in blood and taken over by dancers once each animal was taken away after being slaughtered. By now the *Bijal Sansthan* women headed by Negi had reached the spot and realising that it was late, headed straight cutting across the audience, into the ritual arena of the sacrifice which was occupied by men and the animal. They held the animals and pleaded with the villagers to give the animal up. The crowds started getting agitated and started to push them out of the circles loudly shrieking as the drummers continued to play. The social activists with all their requests were soon thrown out of the circle which was soon sealed by the viewers to witness the animal being sacrificed. The audiences were thrilled with the performance of the *chakra chot* and the sacrificial offerings and their participation into the dance circles were taking place for longer periods than simply viewing. The NGO and the police could not do anything and soon left the scene.

There were few incidents of violence during the act of animal sacrifice during my subsequent visits to *Khairaling Mahadev*. Over the years, the performance of the animal sacrifice itself has been codified, yet through continuous evolution and interventions of various forces. As the animals had decreased considerably in number, the heads of the goats stopped being piled up in front of the temple shrine. Also the *jallaad* or the sacrificer was not always allowed to conduct the sacrifice. The sponsors consider it a demonstration of power and pride to conduct the sacrifice themselves by using the *jallaad's* sword. This act of aggravated zeal on the part of the sponsor exhibits his lust for power through the performance of sacrifice, but at the same time shows his amateur endeavours at blows on the neck of the animal with the sword,

sometimes going up to twelve-thirteen attempts of separating the head from the rest of the goat. The exhilaration during the sacrifice crossed the borders of the space of the sacrifice, as immediately after the head gets separated by numerous blows, some member of the audience jumped into the space of the ritual and snatches the head leading to massive quarrelling between the sponsor who was the performer and some members of the audience. This fight over the ownership of the head does not define any clear reason but suggests a portrayal of 'ownership' as a symbol of pride.

In 2005, the interventions of the NGO *Bijal Sansthan* reached their maximal force. Not seeing any transformation in the spirit of the sacrifices on the day of *jaat*, Sarita Negi reached the festival premises on the second day and rushed to the village zone where the *baghi* was tied, with a few activists. She chopped off the rope with which the animal was tied to the tree and by use of force dumped it into a police truck and brought it to the main town of Pauri. The news spread like wildfire all over the festival and to the villages. In no time, the festival turned into a field of a spectacle of violence where the villagers vented their anger onto the police force present there. The policemen were stoned at, a dozen of them were reportedly badly injured. A few villagers also became victims during the panic of fleeing which. By then had taken over hundreds of participants present at the site. Many policemen were successful in fleeing the site, except for the police commanding officer Darshanlal Chitran and his gunman who were incarcerated by the villagers.¹³ The gunman was somehow able to get out of there, while the clothes of the officer were torn and he was made captive inside the temple. This did not suffice for the rage that the taking away of the sacrificial animal had caused and the villagers set the officer's vehicle on fire. Along with this, seeing the festival turning into a battlefield, the villagers began loot and plunder of the shops in the fair which worsened the state of affairs. The news reached far and wide and this was validated by the spontaneous attack on the Satpuli police station. The reporters were attacked, cameras broken and police stations stoned at. At the designated time for the ritual, the festival site was nothing less than a battlefield. In the meanwhile, Sarita Negi pressurised the state machinery to send more forces to the festival site to control the rage. None of the policemen dared to reach the site and some of them were reported to have been sent in civil clothes, unable to control

¹³ *Dainik Jagran*, June 5, 2005, Dehradun.

anything at the site.¹⁴ Through intervention of the elderly and few media reporters, the police officer, after hours of captivity and humiliation was set free later in the evening. It is said that it was around midnight that the agitated villagers managed to arrange for another *baghi* which was sacrificed with great zeal at the very site of the performed ritual. This was seen as the greatest symbol of assertion of power by the villagers- the violence and sacrifice, both sending a message of victory, power, challenge, and a warning to interveners through the re-establishment and performance of the very ritual and identity in question.

In spite of this, the events of unprecedented violence which unfolded during the festival in 2005 left indelible and unpleasant memories lingering on over to the next year. The year of 2006 saw a drastic decrease in the number of visitors, sacrifices. The role of the state administration and NGOs also took a back foot. The violence emerging from the performance of the ritual sacrifice had created some dilemma on the very essence and identity of *Khairaling Mahadev*. The visitors held the NGO responsible for questioning and challenging their faith and cultural identity, but at the same time took pride in the union of the entire community on the issue of keeping up with the structural and social significance of the performance of the sacrifice, which according to them is the very essence of the entire organisation of the *Khairaling Mahadev* festival. The festival proceeded in a peaceful manner but was reported unexciting by many visitors from the local villages, and many young men actually expressed the lack of zealous participation, mainly because 'there was nothing to look forward to'. This could mean the lesser probability of the anticipated conflict which by now I was beginning to realise had become the pleasure principle of the social participation connected with togetherness in expressing strength, and more so in taking pride in their efforts to 'preserve' the (structures of) traditional ritual performances and behaviour which to their consciousness had not been manipulated at the cost of any outside intervention or 'attack' on their cultural ethos.

The villagers were determined. Any challenge would be unacceptable. After years, 2007 saw not one but three *dhwajas* and *baghis* at the festival. There was jubilation all

¹⁴ *Amar Ujala*, June 5, 2005, Dehradun.

around. The villagers were not only excited about their own display of power against the *dhwaja* of other villages, but from this year onwards, all the villages had one common enemy- Sarita Negi and her organisation backed by the state administration. It was captivating to see how in a short span of two years, the memories of the events of the violence of 2005 had turned into anecdotes of community valour undertaken to protect the ritual ethos. The conflicts had turned into a play through the ritual and villages seemed confident than ever before of the battle they might have to engage in and at the same time emerge victorious. The night long *jagar* performances along with the *dhwaja* ceremony saw an impressive solidarity among the villages. The *patti* in which I was staying was represented by the village Hachui, which had huge participation from the villages of Thair, Mirchoda, and Nagar, the bastions of Rajput community and champions of violence with an active past record at Khairaling Mahadev, along with smaller, neighbouring villages like Malau. These villagers while being the avid audience of the various rituals and special night long *jagar* performances offered timely assurances to the sponsor village in their conversations with each other of full support in any event, mainly referring to the visit by the NGO during the festival.

The day of *jaat* saw huge crowds flocking the grounds; the crowds since morning seemed more than what was seen in the previous visits. The police was nowhere near the site, though one did spot some jeeps; say about a couple of miles away from the festival hill. The visitors were as usual exploring the spaces and participating in the usual events of visiting the temple and wandering about the fair, meeting and chatting away, and most importantly viewing others were performing. The ceremony of *chakra chot* took place in the typical pattern of appointed time, circumambulation, prayers, drumming, and a cut on the back of the *baghi*, symbolising the inauguration of the sacrifices of the goats.

As the goats were beginning to be sacrificed, the women from *Bijal Sansthan*, though fewer in number, emerged at the arena of sacrifice. They argued and screamed trying to get to the sacrificial animal, but they could not get anywhere near this time. The villagers had cordoned them and while the elderly asked them to leave with respect, the younger men threatened and insulted them, hurling curse words and asking them to pray for their lives if they were not choosing to leave. The arguments went on for

quite some time and in one of the most violent arguments the women were chased out by men threatening them to be slaughtered along with the animal. The very audience members had been transformed into saviours and defenders of the sacrifices and one of them snatched the sword from the sacrificer and began to shriek at the women rescuing the animals. Soon the women were engulfed by circles of men asking them to leave as there would be no victory to their cause by just arguing away and trying to convince. In the meanwhile, right behind them, the first goat was sacrificed and the crowds became exhilarated, followed by an endless row of sacrifices in which the presence of Sarita Negi and her supporters faded away amidst the cheers of the crowds which were breaking into complete frenzy over the chopped off heads, grappling for the head and brief physical encounters.

The sacrifices were soon over and the attentions reverted to the spectacle of the fair till the villagers left for their respective homes, to return for the day of *kauthig*. To my surprise, Sarita Negi was nowhere to be seen throughout the day when over the past years, they would persist trying to convince the sponsors to not sacrifice and instead set the *baghi* free, in spite of their pleas invoking no response as well as not followed up by actions. The villagers were waiting for action by the NGO or some intervention by the state which would pull in some excitement; and not seeing any of this happen, the audience soon had their own explanations to offer. A few people noted that this disappearance of the interventions of the state was due to the change of the government in the state of Uttarakhand which had brought the BJP, a right wing party into power. Some villagers seemed very supportive of this clear assumption that the right wing support in the state, and especially in that region was due to their 'respect for traditions' and during the tenure of the right wing, the NGO and the police would not be given any logistic support. One can never be sure if this was the reason but anyway the absence was noteworthy.

The processions began to move for the circumambulation of the village around the temple with the *baghi*. This was a very enthralling moment where the multiple players of viewership were clearly emerging at every contour. The general rule of circumambulation is that on the day of *jaat* the goats are made to take three circumambulations and the *baghi* five on the day of *kauthig*. There surely exists a difference of opinion about the number which was strongly felt during these

processions. There were conflicts on the issue of which village would circumambulate first. Once that was decided, it was unbelievable that the village which was to follow became highly restless and the crowds began to get agitated. This was because of the fact that due to three villages offering circumambulation, there was a decision to take only three rounds. It is unsure whether it was decided by the villages themselves or officially declared by the *mela samiti*. On seeing the first village taking the rounds, the second village began to get angry as it seemed insulting to wait in queue for the procession. The audiences were also of the opinion that the first village had done this on purpose to ridicule the others by keeping them waiting in queue. As soon as theirs was over, the other villages followed suit, with a near conflict situation outside the temple premises, where the procession of the two villages were to cross each other. Violence was avoided at the last minute with the elderly and the priests pacifying the two sides, claiming that it was a sheer misunderstanding of the ritual which led to prolonged circumambulations. It was also interesting to note that the third village, seeing the two villages proceed toward their respective sacrificial pits, converted their ritual of circumambulation into merely two rounds and rushed to the pit. This was understood in terms of the first sacrifice of the *baghi* offering the biggest spectacle and audience participation which simply means a culmination of efficacy and exhilaration into the viewership of the first sacrifice, for which all the villages aspire. Avoiding last minute conflict indicates the culmination of the festival as one of the best attended ones along with the maximum sacrifices, in my experience of the festival.

Sarita Negi and her political contacts, mainly because of her designation as the Secretary of the Animal Welfare Board in Uttarakhand, have been subject to a lot of criticism by the villagers and participants of the *mela*, claiming that her role in banning the sacrifices is merely for political mileage and media hype. Neither of this could ever be assessed, nor did it deter Negi from her actions which by May 2008 were indicating that this year the administration would not leave any stone unturned and a complete crackdown was being plotted in the office of the District Magistrate, Pauri, Uttarakhand. Court notices had been sent which summoned the two *patwaris* and village headman of village Saknoli which was supposed to be the sponsoring village of the *dhwaja* and *baghi* this year, along with the priest of the Khairaling temple and Vimla Devi, the 'sacrifier' and the sponsor of the *baghi*, under the animal

welfare and environment laws. The Superintendent of Police and the Sub- Divisional Magistrate were all involved in sending orders of suspension of the *patwaris* and warnings to the excise officers who would be responsible for checking illegal trafficking of alcohol into the region on the day of the festival which was considered a major catalyst in the violence during the festival. No stone was being left unturned to make the villagers believe that it would not be easy to defy the State to the level that the kith and kin of those summoned were also being warned against any support or propaganda in favour of animal sacrifice. Just before the festival would commence in the first week of June as the custom has been for decades, the Pauri Garhwal tourism department received a letter from the *mela samiti* regarding postponing the festival to the 11th and 12th of June, 2008, to everyone's surprise. The reasons were not told but could definitely be guessed, where the administration felt that the villagers were becoming obstinate and wanted to buy time to gear up for the event. But the scene seemed completely different on reaching the Magistrate's office. These administrative actions had never happened before and the intervention of the State at this level has never been witnessed by the villagers as far as the festival and the ritual performance was concerned, which had caught all of them in bewilderment and brought them down to the main town of Pauri. All those who had been summoned met the SDM and the police superintendent, asking for forgiveness and assured of their efforts to convince the sacrificer, Vimla Devi who was the only one still firm on her commitment to sacrifice, defying the court order. The District Magistrate, SDM and Sarita Negi along with the activists of the *Bijal Sansthan* planned a meeting with the villagers.

Tracing the structural and dynamic conditions through the socio-processual analysis

The festival which evolved through the routine events and procedures, with the ritual ceremonial process of the *dhwaja* devotion, circumambulation and goat sacrifices could not be intervened into, as the vehicle which was brought to fetch the animals along with the policemen is said to have fled the spot after being threatened by the villagers, or with some apprehension of violence. With greater persuasion on behalf of the NGO and other likeminded people, the state machinery was tightened up for the day of *kauthig*. The *baghi* was roped out of the site with the help of force and in a truck was brought to Pauri the way it was done in 2005. But this year, something

unprecedented took place. Never in the history of *Khairaling Mahadev* had the sacrifice not taken place, and this is why it did not happen this year. The villagers went back and there was no replacement or substitution for the sacrificial animal.

The state stood victorious, taking the credit for winding up the longest battle with the villagers and their convictions. Press conferences were held and the tales of schism and continuity were narrated. Maneka Gandhi sent congratulations via news channels to the combined efforts for the rescue of animals which were being the innocent substitutes. The state authorities were being flashed on the local television network crediting their efforts to have culled the heinous act of sacrifices and hopes fluttered around the continuity of the spectacle and the vibrancy of the fair in the future even without the performance of the animal sacrifices just the way the fairs continue to flourish where state intervention has blocked the performance of animal sacrifice.

These anecdotes point to the fact that the violence which spills out of the performative sphere through the very force of its performativity clearly shatters the notions of researching and assessing the concept of solidarity and communion which at *Khairaling* are found not only in the performative which are used to legitimise and claim local village and group identity, but also to challenge any assertion of an intervention to define identity within the fixities and conventions of what one understands as 'community'.

The initial years of violence clearly portray an intra community affirmation of power through the symbols of the ritual. The tall *dhwaja* is symbolic of the strength of the village carrying it to reconfirm supremacy over the other village. This has gone on for decades, where in spite of being politically and economically almost on the same plane, the villages seek ritual competitiveness through the structures of the festival. But through the traces of violence, it is not difficult to notice the socio- processual dynamics with which the villagers have over the years consistently yet through transformations left space for the vibrancy of *Khairaling Mahadev* to persist. The violence which somewhere forms the essence of the festival has left the dynamics and the conditions of reception anticipating the events of each year's celebrations. The villagers participating in the events of the festival through the defence of their symbolic props of authority have manipulated the performative of the festival through

an interplay of the ritual and actual violence. This interplay of a binary of violence which grips each other so closely maintains an exhilaration of viewing and participating in the ritual events during the festival, annually testing the horizons of expectations of the audiences to these events. This binary of the sacrificial and actual violence, though separated by a very thin line, presides and reflects in almost every event the desire for conflict which sustains and revives the contestations and hence the aspiration for communion utilised to emerge authoritative in the performative.

The area of the Garhwal region where the Khairaling Mahadev holds significance and attendance is an area affected by large scale migration because of the limited resource base, poor employment opportunity for men due to the geographical terrain, resulting in limited opportunity for source of income within the villages and migration to menial jobs to the city or the army (Capila: 2002). The villages throughout the year are inhabited largely by women who take care of the cattle and the self-sustaining terrace farming, considering poor irrigation; hence very meagre means of survival and occupation. This has resulted in huge migration rates, where men at a very young age leave the villages for employment to mainly around the circuit of Dehradun, Delhi and some areas in Punjab. It is noteworthy that the women in the villages, in spite of being greater bearers of actual livelihood and dependence on the villages, have scant role to play during the festival. They mainly assist in food related acts, whether for the community meals or the preparations of special meal for the animals to be sacrificed and are rarely at the forefront. They are mainly the audience to the events in the villages during the day, especially on the day of *jaat*, flocking at the temple of *Mundneshwar Mahadev* as devotees and as the potential customers of the shops in the fair. Their audience-participation in the ritual performances is very limited and only maximised during possessions in the *jagar* performances and the two days of the festival. The women are more like the devout participants who have an association with the religious, and do not have an apparent role in the power play. It is interesting, as for most women, the festival has great value *within* the village premises, as it is during the festival that all those who have migrated return to the village for the 'get together' during the festival. It is the time for the women to meet their loved ones who visit the village annually and preferably during the festival. The small houses get packed with visitors and one witnesses the 'division of labour' in household work and also in grazing of cattle; at the same time big community gatherings in the courtyards

with endless chatting sessions- exchanges of stories, social and economic engagements and hardship among other experiences of the 'city' and eating fill the environment with activity.

The men take control of all the chores of the festival including the arrangements and economics of the various events, with little role to play in the chores traditionally dominated by women which involve time consuming tasks of grazing the animals twice a day, fetching wood and grass for cooking from far off hills, and spending time on the fields ploughing or sowing chilly saplings during the festival time (if it has rained timely). The men, as they return for short time periods, usually leave their huts in the morning, mainly for visiting other houses or other villages and sometimes for official pending tasks. The men returning home make the event special in its own way of symbolic masculine assertion. In no time they dominate the space, action and discussion which are conspicuous by absence for the rest of the year.¹⁵ Why it becomes so important to discuss the position of men is because of the agenda of the power play which is completely detached from the identity women seek in spite of their geographical commitment to the space. It is the men who return 'home' and who confirm their local identity through communion and continuity, participation and appreciation, aggression and redressal. This anticipation and exhilaration of exhibiting and gratifying power through symbolic, and in defence of it through physical strength, very much reflects the desire to be identified with the rituals of their community.

The return to the homesteads, to the very processes of the rituals which bind them to their identity with their community through music and rituals is not completely detached from the experiences of the city which have seen transformations in the festival itself. The fair has been a good example of that and over the years it has been aspiring to cater to the needs of the contemporary through accessories, jewellery, clothes, toys and especially food items which leap to the latest fetish for 'Chinese' food and compact discs. The music is at the heart of reflecting this binary between the

¹⁵ I write this because I felt a huge reluctance and a feeling of futility to discuss the festival among the villagers in the 'off season' of the festival. None of the villagers saw any point in 'speaking' about the festival when it was 'not happening'. Was it because of the understanding of the festival as 'special time' cut off from everyday life events or was it because of the absence of the men who as the torchbearers of the festival were absent in the off season – both reasons seem plausible, yet difficult to ascertain.

nostalgia of home and the experiences of the city, where contemporary music of Garhwal has several references of travelling to the city for work, missing home and mountains, going through hardships of being away from family and the beloved, and so on and so forth. Veit Erlmann, while studying the music traditions known as *isicathamiya* of the Zulu-speaking migrant workers in South Africa, traces these very hybrid metaphors in the song texts and traces that

the feeling resonating through these verbal and embodied figurations of the modern urban spaces speaks of disorientation, uncertainty and ambiguity. But far from submitting to the shock of the world-in-the-home and the home-in-the-world, *isicathamiya* performers also tell of a past and a future in which a truthful existence and an ordered social universe are anchored in and thus mutually enabled by the homely - a firmly framed world of local rootedness, tradition, and of sexual and collective identity.

(Erlmann, 1998: 18).

Beyond these song texts serving as symbols reflecting the relation of the migrant workers with the connection of home and the world, Erlmann discusses the violence during dance competitions which emerged out of colonial efforts to convert rural rivalries and antagonisms into a contestation of performance. Erlmann interestingly points out how this transformation did not affect or help in dealing with the antagonisms and states that even these dance competitions never quite managed to 'evade the ethos of power, physical strength and violence sporadically stirring even the most placid-minded performers to agitated expressions of local pride' (ibid: 19) These dance performances were banned along with other rustic leisure activities due to the bloodshed they were resulting in, in the 1930s by the reformists, leading to the emergence of the *isicathamiya* musical form. This form's emergence helped in venting out 'legitimate expressions of regional and group identities of the Zulu speaking migrants. Erlmann though aptly highlights social process of the relation of the local identities expressing the uncertainties and power play of 'home' and 'world', misses out the result of the heterogeneity of experience and its role in transforming the performative aspect of the life of the migrant workers. It is interesting to note and connect that similar functions of the experiences by the male migrants are featured in the rituals of *Khairaling Mahadev* where it is this male dominance which stands in defence of the symbols of masculinity and power, be it the *dhwaja* or the male

scapegoat in the form of sacrificing the buffalo or owning the head of the goat, to make claims over their collective identity through heterogeneity of experience and expectations.

It is this communion, the aspiration for a collective identity as a society, as an audience which enjoys the festival, the music- the nostalgia of being home, the pleasure of participation in something, which represents and reaffirms their identity and more so binds them with that identity through the contestations pitted against each other for claims of power and victory. It is the anticipation of the thrill, the pleasure to be able to witness it year and year again, which draws the villagers to view and participate in the violence of the substitute, of the sacrificial. It is the ability of the audience to determine the autonomy of viewership and participation which permits, sanctions, and configures the identity assertions through the conditions of violence. The audience, as members of a community whose claims of identity recognition are permuted through the histrionics of animal sacrifice, is enthused to participate in the festival expecting and appreciating, through viewership and performance of the rituals.

Over the years, the interventions into the festival have been several. There have been individual efforts, attempts by NGOs, involvement of the State, which have had their influences clearly spoken of in the previous section of this chapter, an assessment based on the views of the participants, eye witnesses and my visits. The formation of the *mela samiti* (fair committee) in 1980 and a later its revival in 1994¹⁶ through the intervention of the District Panchayat (*Jila Parishad*) of Pauri, apart from reasons of fund management was a clear effort to 'get a grip on' the procedures of the

¹⁶ The fair committee came into being in the year 1980 for the first time with the main objective of handling the finances that were mainly retrieved from the money offerings to the temple (earlier maintained by and distributed among the priests) and money collected from the 'businessmen' class of the region. Both these sources later came to be utilised for the maintenance of the temple premises and especially water arrangement which was and still is the biggest crisis (leading to chaos and riots over drinking water out of the tankers which are brought in to the hill with great difficulty). Over the years, with the increase in security expenditure, construction and water arrangements, the committee began to be bankrupt and had to be finally shut down. It was restarted in 1994 with a completely different economic and political role. Currently, the committee survives on offerings to the temple, contributions and tax collection levied by the fair committee on the shop keepers who set up their stalls in the festival.

performance through a governing body which would preside over decision making with consultations from the priests. But the committee in itself over the years has not been very popular with the villagers. The membership in the committee has led to another layer of power play and craving for authority- the nitty-gritty of which was something difficult to get into, but was clear from the current status that the committee had pulled its hands off from the events of violence seeing their efforts at intervention being defeated over the years and instead focusing on elections of the committee, tax collection, organising sports meets and cultural competitions as a line up to the festival and prize distributions. The committee, with representation of the headmen of the villages sponsoring the sacrifices, surely leaves little space for voicing opinion against the sacrifices, putting the villagers in a safe position to defend their cause. At the same time the committee is considered as a negotiator between the villagers by the State authorities, which surely had not been fruitful over the years, leading to the support by the latter to NGOs interventions.

The State, since the heated efforts of the NGOs, has been offering support in order to end the tussles over animal sacrifices and ‘secularise’ the spirit of the fair which would serve for the benefit of all. The state is very clear in its agenda: it has no role in the devotion towards the temple, or the fair and frolic. But the rioting, especially the insensitive loot and killings of the animals has been made a valid reason for the crackdown on the villagers. Throughout the years of countering the act of sacrificial ritual, the State tried to effect it through the channel of strengthening the *Bijal Sansthan*, by providing police support and vehicles for necessary action. It was seen as a kind of indirect intervention which in its own unfortunate ways fuelled violence. The whip of the State through the use of force with its own agenda guided violence to its peak, leaving no one victorious, but giving the villagers a new layer of violence to view and participate in, unleashing a riot not only in the festival arena, but across the entire geographical if not performative scope of *Khairaling Mahadev*.

The steps in 2008 brought the matter into a new foray of utilising State to draw a disjointed, yet powerful connection between ‘insensitivity’ and ‘unlawfulness’, where the State played its best card by utilising the Indian Penal Code to pressurise the

villagers¹⁷ and sponsor as has been discussed above. In spite of no direct law to be imposed, the events from the past served as reasons good enough to charge the villagers with indulgence in violence. The weapon of law was utilised in the most perfect manner in a situation where the villagers were equipped with dealing with the police only and not the judiciary. The court orders not only sent a wave of fear, but completely disrupted the unity among the villagers, and soon it was declared that except for a handful, none of the villagers were in favour of the sacrifice.

The role of the state and its participation in enforcing restraint on the performance of animal sacrifice is worth concern, as *Khairaling Mahadev* has been an intervention which has not only transformed the nature of the festival of *Khairaling* but also posed a challenge to the ever evolving local identity assertions of the villagers. The role of the state utilising the judiciary can be assessed by Veena Das's claim that the agencies of the state have often inhibited the mechanisms of restraint and notions of limit that have been crafted in local moral worlds' (Das, 2001: 2) The state plays upon those very notions of the judicial, the administrative as well as the notions of morality with regard to animal sacrifice to complicate the issues of identity, power and assertion. The event of 2008 when the animal sacrifice did not take place could be an extension of the notion that in 'response to the imperatives of imagining a common feature communities also have to experiment and put into place ideas of limits to violence' as Das further claims (ibid: 2-3) One cannot be sure whether this was actually a case of experimentation, retaliation, fear or reconciliation. It does not even seem to be on the agenda of this research, considering the festival will continue to take place and the assertions of power and search for identity will surely seep in, resolve and erupt through some performative genre at *Khairaling* through actions of the community enacting social processes. What is of greater concern is the status of the ritual performance that the events at *Khairaling* have resolved. The violence which spills out of the performative sphere not only transforms the space, the audiences and the actors, but also the very nature of the ritual. The sacrificial ritual which aspires

¹⁷ The villagers were charged with Sections 147, 148, 149, 336, 436, 332, 353, 323 and 417 of the Indian Penal Code. Most of these are against rioting, carrying weapons, offence against 'prosecution of a common object', mischief, cheating and attacking personnel on duty. None of these pertain to animal sacrifice, as Uttarakhand does not have a law as of now against animal sacrifices within temple premises or for religious purposes unlike states like Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Gujarat, etc. The Wildlife Protection Act does not take sacrifice of domesticated animals for any purpose into its purview.

through the theatrical to redress and resolve the crisis of the community gets transformed into the bureaucratic, judicial and moral crises through the intervention of the state. The heterogeneity of opinions leads to heterogeneity of roles played out by the representatives of the agencies of the state and the members of the community participating at *Khairaling Mahadev*.

CONCLUSION

The study 'Look who is viewing!' offers a preliminary analysis of the audience of ritual performance which asserts its status of power through viewership and participation, as a representative of a socially and politically charged community. The role of an audience which is heterogeneous not only in terms of its culture, but also in its viewership and participatory patterns make it a complicated category for analysis. Nonetheless, the endeavour has been to analyse the historical and theatrical role of the audiences at *Khairaling Mahadev*, offering as a pertinent category for assessment.

The attempt has also been to indulge with the audience as an exclusive category of theoretical discourse within the field of performance studies which has witnessed numerous disciplines and concepts evolving and developing along with research and documentation of various events.. These genres of performance have been utilised by scholars of different disciplines to validate and inspire their research, theoretical endeavour and argument, as is seen in the first chapter.

In the first chapter, three scholars from three different disciplines- Turner as an anthropologist, Schechner as a performance theorist and Susan Bennett as a linguist- are brought under one roof in order to test the models they theorise to highlight certain aspects of their stream through the backing from the performative sphere. Turner, with his symbolic structuralism, attempts to draw from the African ritual performances to colour his theoretical discourse which ranges from what he calls social drama (made up of structural phases defining the breach in societal order where the performance of ritual leads to a redressal within the community) to ritual process (in which the subject via the route of the participation in the ritual experiences transformations from the 'liminal' state of being to 'communitas'). Highly inspired by Turner, Schechner takes the baton forward and as the forefather of the stream of performance studies indulges in high value research on varied forms which could be incorporated within the discipline. He measures the 'magnitudes of performance', traces the process of the 'theatre to ritual and back', attempts to decipher the processes of transformation and transportation which take place during performances and more importantly formulate a suggestive approach to the study of performance

practices. Susan Bennett's approach focuses on the aspect of audience reception based on the analysis of Western mainstream theatre, filling the substantial gap in theatre research with essential research and documentation. By keeping the collaborative project of theatre production and reception as the base of her work, Bennett sets out to explore the cultural and economic conditions which hone the experience of the theatre audiences, who form the core subject of her study.

Not only Bennett, but also the other two scholars, though from different streams with varied agenda and case studies, tend to make the study of the performance genres they are utilising for the benefit of their theoretical framework, detached and isolated from the ever evolving social and political realities of a community which cannot be determined or captured within frames of representation and conceptualisation; at the same time, they revere the performance genre for its utility and perseverance which is pronouncedly homogenous, resolvable, emancipatory and disruption-proof. Turner's 'observer' does not qualify as the reliable member of the audience, where the authority of information is prescribed to the highest in hierarchy; also the crisis of authority assertion inherent in the audience facing the social conflict is not recognised. Though Schechner acknowledges the audience as an important component through which a performance evolves, restricts their contribution to an isolated transformation which does not in turn explain the way the performance gets reinforced. Bennett restricts the larger part of her work to the western theatre audience which is rendered passive, static and swallowed up in the 'inner' frame of the theatrical event which is guided by the material conditions of production and overcoding. Her work limits itself to formulating the cultural understanding of the audience experiencing the performance, and does not attempt to even inquire how that understanding contributes back to the stage, ignoring the possibility of cross-pulled identities and heterogeneous affiliations.

It became imperative to discuss the case study of *Khairaling Mahadev Festival* which had compelled this research for the precise reason that the conventional models would not have sufficed for a justifiable analysis of what unfolds at the events of the festival. In the second chapter we saw the tracing of the legend, the processes of the pre-festival preparation, the essential factors of drumming, dancing and possession, the significance of the animal sacrifice, the pre-festival ceremonies, along with an in-

depth analysis of the two days of the festival. More than the description of the festival and the ritual performances which dominate the scene, the attempt here was to spread across the structural and dynamic conditions of reception which are reflected in interplay of the audience's viewing patterns and their participation at various levels during the festival. The analysis of the collaboration of the space and the audience reception portrays the heterogeneity of the roles played during the ritual performances at *Khairaling Mahadev*. The audience at the festival transforms itself through viewership and participation from the ritual ceremonies within the village, the pilgrimage to the hill of the *Khairaling Mahadev* temple, the devotion in the form of prayers at the temple, *dhwaja* and animal sacrifices, celebration, dancing and invitation to deities to dawn on them, and finally the assertion of power, pride and status through the very media of ritual performance. The *Khairaling Mahadev* prepares ground for a survey of its multiplicity of genres of the ritual, devotional, sacrificial and spectacle through a survey of the audiences which offer a corresponding multiplicity of roles, observations and participation through the dynamism of their behavioural patterns that prove essential in determining the socio-processual conditions of the *Khairaling Mahadev* festival.

The third chapter, following the documentation of the *Khairaling Mahadev*, brought to the fore the instances of violence created through the interplay of the power assertions of the audiences among themselves and in later years, vis-à-vis the Non-Governmental Organisations. The chapter also narrated incidents of conflict that have taken place in the space of the festival, pointing to transformations in the role and status of the very audiences who participate to mould the performance and later negotiate the ruptures within it. The chapter also attempted to understand the nature of violence at *Khairaling Mahadev* which is neither completely within the paradigms of the sacrificial, nor is it situated bereft of the ritual structural conditions fenced within the political categories. The crisis and the events following it precipitate out of the contestations of power and identity assertions which aspire to be recognised and are established through the medium of the ritual sacrifices.

The project has endeavoured to decipher the dynamics of audience reception which helps in reconstructing the constant disruptions and evolutions in the performativity of the rituals, the spectacle of the 'mela' and the theatricality attached to it, which are

results of the interventions by the audience. The anecdotes from the audience-participants at *Khairaling* as the primary source help in constructing the historicity providing another set of insights and scope of exploration to the method of studying rituals and constructing them through audience reception of the festival. The audience underline the essence of ritual behaviour which is constructed by the very act of participation through viewing. The villagers represent themselves as an interactive audience participating, sanctioning, provoking and responding to the performers and what is being performed. As members of a community guided by social and political affiliations, they interpret, assert and manipulate the performance of the rituals for their culturally constituted affirmations. Through its receptive responses the audience also patronises the structural and dynamic conditions which in turn augment the dynamism of the space of the spectacle.

Khairaling Mahadev festival acknowledges that any denial of recognition leads to discrepancies in motives of participation leading to eruption of violence. The audience which sanctions and patronises also inherits the possibility of rupturing and manipulating the performance of the sacrifices. The crisis of the socio-political contestations between the aspirations of the community and agendas of the state vents its way out through the performative source of conflict and historical ritual redressal of crisis. This transforms into an administrative and moral complication leading to heterogeneous role players representing the state and the community.

The preliminary analysis of the conditions of audience reception has surely left gaps in an attempt towards a holistic analysis. One such major gap has been the study of the audience as a purely cultural category detached from its economic condition which definitely forms an essential area of further research considering the fact that it is a major reason for migration of men from the region of Uttarakhand. The consideration of the economic criteria while assessing the crisis and the struggle for identity formations would lead to interesting areas of analysis and theoretical discourses where they would be scrutinised as limited categories of recognition, as suggested by Nancy Fraser (Fraser, 2000), when read together with the links with political economy and redistribution. Such an assessment would have definitely led to newer insights to the analysis of the state versus identity assertions of the community.

Another factor which only comes as a passing remark in the study is the gender dimensions of the entire ritual performance and how women finds their place in the multiplicities of audience composition. *Khairaling Mahadev* witnesses a composition of audience participation which is male dominated owing to the nature of the performative spaces where one notices clear gender demarcations vis-a-vis the space of the spectacle, the ritual and the religious. The dominant role of the women in controlling the agriculture and animal rearing throughout the year, as permanent residents of the village, is seen as a subordinated role when addressed as audiences where their reception largely confines to the space of the fair and temple offerings. It would be of immense importance even as a future project to discuss the role of the women in relation to animal 'rearing' and that of the men in relation to animal 'sacrifice', to explore the gendered dimensions of such performances and its political economy.

As a present limitation but a possible future exploration would be the important area of the study of violence since this study refrains from indulging into an analysis of the 'violence' that dominates the Indian society, which theorists like Amartya Sen, Sudhir Kakar, Veena Das, Roma Chatterji and Martha Nussbaum, among others have been reflecting upon. This category of violence has been left unexplored in this study considering the limitation of utility as these categories pertain to inter community violence predominantly guided by religious fervour and fanaticism. But it cannot be completely ignored considering the undercurrents of religious hostilities which surface around the question of animal sacrifice where the audiences have expressed their inability to understand the efforts to ban their (hindu) 'cultural motifs' when their own animals are exported from Uttarakhand in large number for Muslims, who consume them for pleasure sake, whereas for the former it is a ritual compulsion.

These limitations in the study could be the ground for future explorations into the study of audiences. I hope the convergence of these excavations into the alleys of audience's mind would lead to an exploration into the possibility of interpreting and researching performances from the decoding of the audience reception method of perceiving and enforcing through participating as audiences in the space of the ritual performative spectacle.

While pursuing research and moving towards studying the conditions of audience reception, these questions have been thought of to underline why audience reception becomes as an important entry point for the study of performances and research. Is it because the recent academia realises the absence of audience representation in research and documentation which could find its roots in the long existing model of performance studies paradigm revolving around the paraphernalia of the performance per se? Is it because the logistics of the method of reportage utilised the act of writing, followed by viewing and later listening? Is it because the recent scholarly engagements want to avoid the rhetoric of grand notions and theories on culture? Is it an attempt to break away from the convention of homogenisation of communities and representations? Is it an effort to invent a discourse of identification of cohesion and rupture fermenting in a society which sees its reflection in the articulation and manipulation of performance? Is it because for aspiring researchers like me, the only place of being situated in the field is next to the audience at levels of knowledge, behaviour and hence experience which is ideally the case in ritual or folk theatrical performances, unlike classical genres where one might find oneself closer to the performer over time which could have been spent in learning and 'practicing the art form'? I hope that these questions are partially if not fully addressed, through the in-depth analysis of the structural and dynamic conditions of audience reception, in the study of the ritual performances at *Khairaling Mahadev* festival and are a harbinger of clarity of thought and discourse which would be imperative for knowing 'look who is viewing!' within the larger discourse of performance studies.

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