

SHIKARGAH PATHER

It is a traditional Bhand Pather play revived after thirty years, although the play has been in the Bhand tradition for centuries. It deals with the kingdom of Pashupati, the Shiva and his forest beings – the trees, humans, animals and the birds.

The conflict in the play is between forest dwellers and the people who claim to be the masters of the forest. We see a forest dweller, in this case, a man who looks after his cattle in the forest and peaceful co-existence with the animals and birds of the forest. In this world of harmony between man and nature, arrives a hunter along with his team in search of his lost prey of a pair of Deer (HANGUL). On meeting the forest dweller the hunter asks him, "who are you?" The forest dweller responds, "who are you?" This exchange builds itself up to an abstract sequence about the ownership of the forest and nature. The forest dweller becomes a hostage in his own forest, because he cannot understand the hunters and they do not understand him or his language (i.e., Kashmiri). In this humorous argument, the forest dweller shows them the king of forest, who might have taken away their pair of deer. The hunters in their anger and fear go for the hunting of the lion and finally kill him, despite the protests of the dweller. Happy at this killing, the hunters argue above the credit of killing of the lion. The upset forest dweller asks the dead lion to reveal himself, and narrate the story of his death. The lion with other animals sings songs of Nature and its preservation.



BADSHAH PATHER

Badshah Pather is based on *King Lear* of Shakespeare and it narrates the story of two fathers namely, Badshah and Bedar and their sons. The play talks about the relationship between a father and a son and puts in perspective the duties and responsibilities they have towards each other. In our Pather adaptation, Badshah chooses to divide his kingdom amongst his three sons, not relying on their ability to rule but the response to his question of who loves him the most. His elder sons Shamim and Karim express their love for him choosing the most effective praises that get them a large part of the kingdom. But his youngest son Rafiq gives Badshah a very honest reply by saying; he loves him as a son would love his father. Hearing this, Badshah decides to throw Rafiq out of his kingdom and divides it into two parts and gives it to Shamim and Karim. As days go by Shamim and Karim decide not to put up with Badshah's demands any more and force him to leave the kingdom.

Bedar on the other hand makes a similar mistake and faces a similar fate, when he misjudges his son Sikander and believes the lies of Kahram, his illegitimate son.

When exposed to the forces of nature, Badshah realizes the meaning of Rafiq's reply and his love. Badshah then begins to lose his sanity and realizes that his method of ruling and taking decisions was not what was required by a just king.

He respects Rafiq's honesty and courage to speak the truth even at the cost of losing everything. He also acknowledges Rafiq's qualities of love, affection and compassion. He regrets his decision but is unable to change the course of events. Rafiq hearing his father's plight runs to comfort him and trying to bring his honour back is killed in a battle with his own brothers. Badshah is unable to bear this loss and pain, dies.



ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

M.K. RAINA is an eminent theatre, cinema and television personality. A graduate from the National School of Drama, he has been working as an actor and director for over 35 years.

He has been an integral part of National School of Drama's extension programme and has worked with several N.G.O.s and other organizations as a theatre expert. He has also conducted theatre workshops with under privileged children all over the country. Having taught direction in several south Asian countries, he has also had the opportunity to direct plays written by their writers in their native languages.

Over the last decade, M.K. Raina has worked extensively in the state of Jammu and Kashmir focusing on empowering the youth and associating them with their rich traditions and cultural heritage. These workshops have produced several actors, directors and theatre groups that are actively involved in the task of creating plays that have been invited to several theatre festivals all over the country. It is also through these theatre workshops that the state got its first woman director.

For several years he has been working closely with the Bhand community. Two years ago, he conducted a workshop in residence with 35 children from various Bhand groups from all over the Kashmir valley.

The key aspect of all his theatrical work is to bridge the gap between tradition and contemporary sensibility. His present collaboration with the Bhand community is yet another step towards creating the vocabulary of contemporary Kashmiri theatre and giving it its identity that comes from pulling out the riches hidden in its traditions.

He has several awards and felicitations to his credit. In 2011, he was a fellow at Stanford University, and currently is Scholar in Residence at Central University, Jamia Milia Islamia.



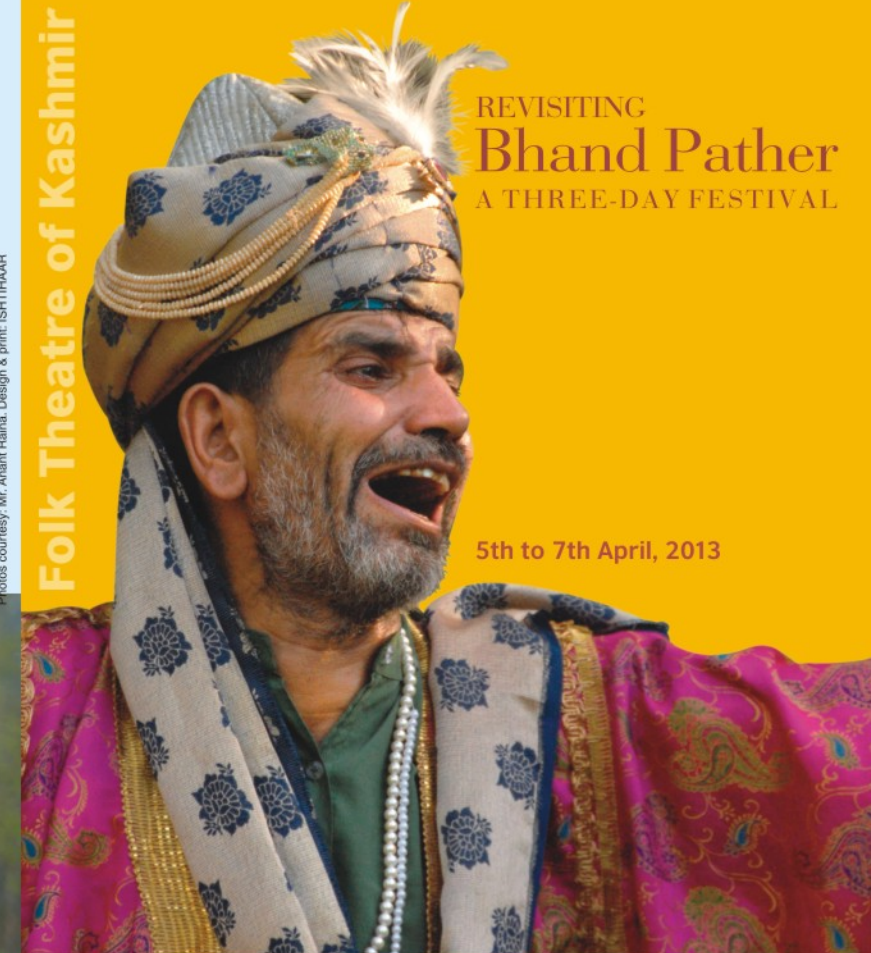
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Folk Theatre of Kashmir

Photos courtesy: Mr. Anant Raina. Design & print: ISHTHAAR



REVISITING
Bhand Pather
A THREE-DAY FESTIVAL

5th to 7th April, 2013

भाउड पॅथर: एक पुनरावलोकन

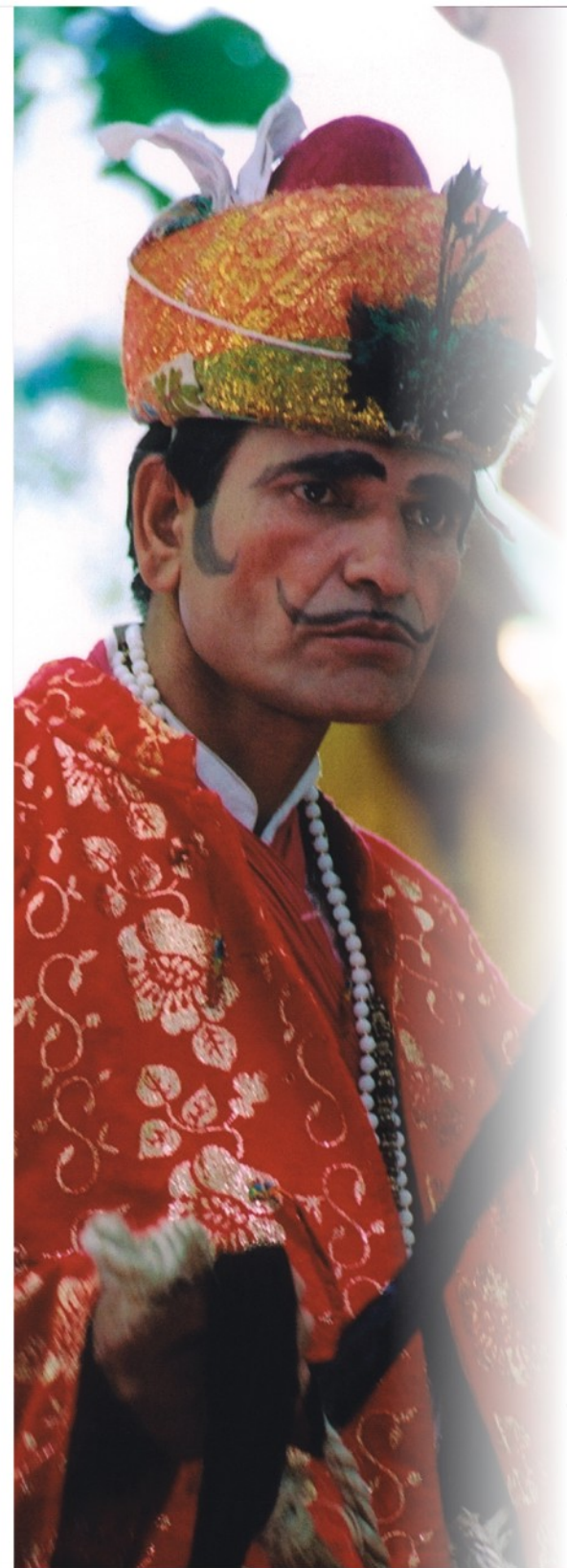
INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE ARTS

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts



The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) is an autonomous Trust set up by the Govt. of India under ministry of culture and is a premier resource centre engaged in research, documentation, publication and dissemination of knowledge of the arts. It is visualized as a Centre encompassing the study and experience of all the arts, each form with its own integrity, yet within a dimension of mutual interdependence and inter-relatedness with nature, social structure and cosmology. Through diverse programmes of research, publication, training, creative activities and performances, IGNCA seeks to place the arts within the context of the natural and human environment. The arts are here understood to comprise the fields of creative and critical literature, written and oral; the visual arts, ranging from architecture, sculpture, painting and graphics to general material culture, photography and film; the performing arts of music, dance and theatre in their broadest connotation; and all else in fairs, festivals and lifestyle that has an artistic dimension.

The fundamental approach of the Centre in all its work is both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary. The work of the Centre is carried through five divisions, viz. Kala Nidhi, Kala Kosa, Janapada Sampada, Kala Darsana and Sutradhara. It has a well developed Media Unit for audio-visual documentation and film making; Cultural Informatics Lab for production of CD-ROMs, DVDs and developing National Digital Data Bank on Culture.



The **Sastra and Prayoga** programme of the IGNCA is aimed at organization of programmes/performances/lectures/demonstrations based on the textual series of Kalakosa Division. Under the aegis of this programme, a three day festival on **Bhand Pather**, is being celebrated from 5th to 7th of April, 2013 under the ongoing Silver Jubilee celebrations of the establishment of the IGNCA. The three-day event, hosted by the IGNCA focuses on the present state of affairs of the Bhand Pather of Kashmir and also looks at the future possibilities.

During this festival stage performance of three Bhand Pather plays, namely, Gosain Pather, Shikargah Pather and Badshah Pather is being performed every evening in the amphitheatre of the IGNCA. All plays are preceded by a short introduction of the play by the subject expert. On 6th April, 2013, a panel discussion is being held wherein noted scholars from the field will talk about various aspects of Bhand Pather. The plays are being performed by traditional artists of Kashmir.

This three-day programme provides an opportunity to scholars and performing artistes to experience the academic, historical and cultural perspectives of this endangered Art-form and will further suggest the ways and means of rescuing and preserving this art-form. The event will also open fresh possibilities and debate about the tasks ahead, in serving the wider cultural fabric of Kashmir valley and will also enhance the urgent need of documenting many dying cultural art-forms of the state, e.g., Sufiana-kalam, Vak and Shruk recitative traditions, etc.

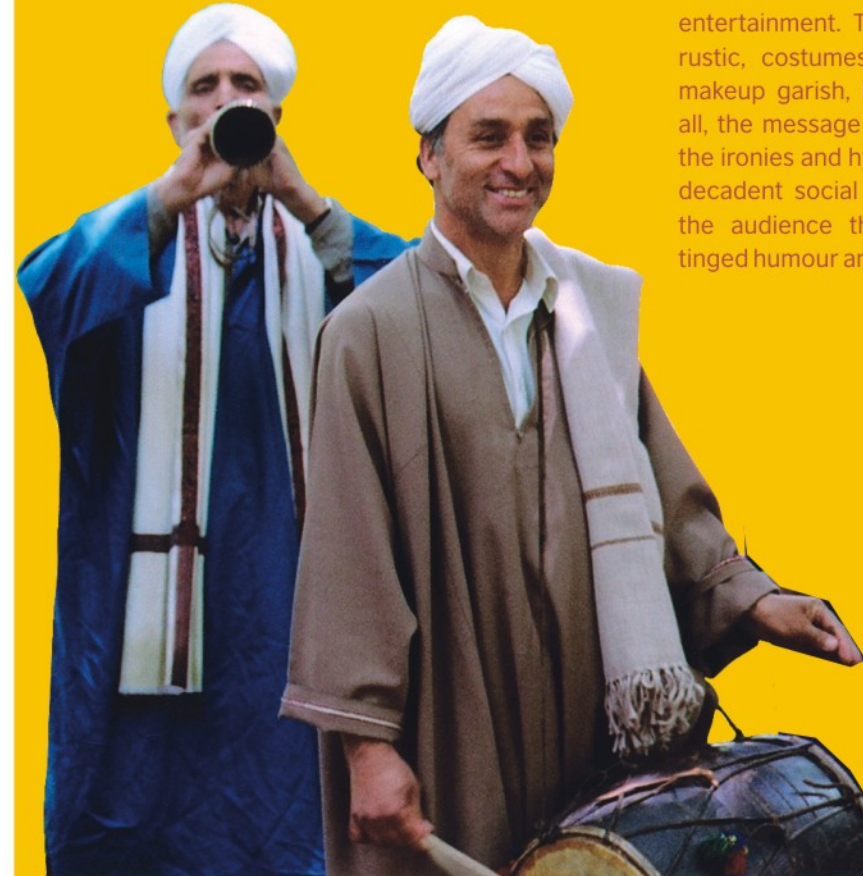
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BHAND PATHER

The *Bhand Pather* is believed to be a derivative of the 'Bhana', which is a type of drama, according to *Natyasastra* of Bharatamuni. The *Natyasastra* is a text considered to be the fountainhead of all music, drama and dance of India and the critical edition of its Newari version is being prepared by the IGNCA. In 'Bhana' genre of drama, the main character is 'Vita' (Maskhara: Kashmiri) and he is accompanied by other jesters. The Bhand Pather is an age-old traditional Natya Prayoga (dance-drama) of Kashmir.

There have been references to traditional folk theatre in Kashmir in ancient literature and an early reference is the *Bhand Pather*. Its vocabulary has been enriched by several great medieval poets of Kashmir, such as Nund Rishi. It evolved as a blend of various art forms dance, drama, mime, puppetry and music, a kind of total theatre. Popular with the masses, *Pather*, in Kashmiri means, a play, while *Bhand* is the character (performer) or actor. Interestingly, there is no pre-determined script, since it belongs to an oral tradition, handed down intangibly from one generation to the other. Although the themes are old, the performance is always new, as it manifests itself in a new space and time, from period to period. The ingenuity lies in the performer's improvisations and the theme he is dealing with. As such, stage, props and green rooms become redundant as fields, courtyards, or the shade of the Chinar trees and the sacred spaces, offer an ideal

location for instant entertainment. The humour is rustic, costumes curious and makeup garish, but through it all, the message is loaded and the ironies and hypocrisies of a decadent social system reach the audience through satire-tinged humour and puns.



GOSAIN PATHER

It is a traditional play from the Bhand Pather repertoire performed by Bhands all over the valley for many centuries. The play deals with the concept of realizing God's ultimate truth. Some want to realize it by hard and painful ritual practises and others through the path of Kashmiri Shaiva and Rishi traditions, where the ultimate duality between the subject and the objective existence ceases to merge into the ultimate reality. The indigenous Kashmiri philosophy of life transcends faith, caste and creed, which is depicted through this Pather. The narrative of the performance proceeds with the arrival of exhausted and tired Sadhus from a long pilgrimage. A local Kashmiri Brahmin along with his three sons receives these Sadhus and takes care of them and their Guru, hoping to get some gifts, in lieu of the services they render, in cash or kine. The Brahmin and his sons represent the material world of greed, profit and possession. Through fun, humour and satire, they expose their small petty existence.

The play takes a turn, and the action moves to another level where we see a local Rishi looking at some very spiritual form, which represents the female principle. The Rishi insists on having a darshan of her before leaving, which is unacceptable to Brahmin family. They mediate between the two, again in the hope of some material gain, while carrying messages between the two, which are of much higher, sacred and spiritual nature. The Brahmins are completely oblivious of the level of these messages as they keep lampooning and making fun of this discourse between the Rishi and this female and bring down their entire dialogue to the mundane level.

The essence of their discourse is about the meaninglessness of this material world and hence the renunciation of the physical form itself. At the final stage, the Rishi reveals his true self by disappearing into the void. Now, the Brahmin ponders at the depth of this dialogue while his sons want their father also to leave this world like the Rishi, so that they can inherit his worldly possessions. This insistence on his death turns into an absurd humour when the father keeps on pretending to die and then rising again. While dying and coming alive, he enacts the dying of numerous corrupt and dishonest characters within the society. The sons getting fed up of his act threaten to murder him if he does not leave his body quickly. Finally, they take their father to be dead and take him for cremation, but under the shroud he reveals that he is still alive.

The play operates at many levels of consciousness from physical to abstract through the teachings of indigenous Shaiva and Rishis traditions of Kashmir represented by Lal Ded and Nundrishi.

