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NATYASHASTRA AND BHAGAVATA MELA - ITS RELEVANCE IN THE PRESENT SCENARIO

Prof. Ranjani S.

**Faculty in Department of Performing Arts, KristuJayanti College,
Autonomous, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India.**

ABSTRACT :

Natyashastra is considered to be one of the earliest treatises which deals with Indian Dramaturgy. Sage Bharata, the author of Natyashastra has spoken about the various ritualistic aspects that are evident even to this day in their performances.

The paper focuses on the aspects of Natyashastra and its relevance in certain performances even today. The instructions of NatyaShastra became established through centuries of practical work.

Bharata took a Universalist stance and claimed that emotions become tools for attracting viewers when they are universalized by art. It might be claimed that Natyashastra is more relevant for performers than for teachers.



KEYWORDS : *Natyashastra, Bhagavathamela, Prayoga, Dramaturgy, Contemporary, Modern, Practice.*

INTRODUCTION :

The history of dance dramas can be well understood through the Uparoopaka chapter of Natyashastra. Bharata envisioned dance dramas incorporating music and dance steps. In the latter mediaeval era, dance theatrical genres began to expand. Gita Govinda by Jayadeva holds a significant place in the history of dance and music. One of the key compositions that let other dance dramas blossom in places like Assam, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala was Jayadevas Gita Govinda. The Bhakti movement gave rise to the public imaginations and the worship of Vishnu and his incarnations, which led to the creation of Gita Govinda.

Thus the Bhagavata Mela Nataka of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu came into existence due to the Bhakti Movement. TirthaNarayanaYati and Siddhendra Yogi, two devoted poets, professionalised the arts of dance, music, song, and theatre using tales from the Srimad Bhagavata and other Puranas to enter a state of ecstasy about the Bhakti principle. In Andhra and Tamil Nadu, the practitioners of this art form were referred to as Bhagavatatulus.

The Kuchipudi dance-drama tradition appears to have an earlier version of BrahmanaMelas. The MachupalliKaifiat 6 of the local records mentions that the Brahmana Bhagavata Mela form of the Kuchipudi village dates back to 1502 AD to the reign of the Vijayanagar king, ViraNarsimha Raya.

Early Period

After the downfall of Vijayanagar Empire several Natyacharyas, several scholars moved from Andhra and found patronage under the Nayak kings of Tanjavur. The Nayak kings of Tanjavur are credited for beginning the Bhagavata Mela Nataka tradition. Achyutappa Nayak (1572-1614) who followed the tradition set by his father, Sevappa Nayak, was responsible for the art form to flourish in Tanjavur and its environs.

It was common for rulers to give Brahmin family villages and land. The 510 Brahmin families that received a village as a gift from King Achyutappa are thought to have received it solely for the purpose of promoting dance-drama and fostering the Bhakti spirit among his followers. The village was named as Achutapuram after him and presently known as Mellattur. A home, a well, and a few acres of land were given to each family. Mellattur thus became the center of fine arts as practiced by the recipients of the village.

About 200 years ago Venkatarama Shastri wrote a dozen dance-dramas which became Bhagavatha Mela favourites. They are Usha Parinayam, Rukmangada, Golla Bhama, Rukmini Kalyana, Sita Kalyana and many more. They were written in Vaishnavite themes and are written in Telugu. Nateshalyer was the next great Bhagavata. Venkatarama Sastry and his father followed the tenets of Thirtha Narayana and composed their own dance-dramas in that line, improving the tradition to suit their own times.

The late E. Krishna Lyer made a great effort to resurrecting this practise. He travelled to Soolamangalam in 1950 to plan the festival of these dance-dramas with Rukmini Devi. He worked tirelessly to establish them on a solid foundation up until his passing in January of 1868. On the property donation from Melattur resident V. D. Swamy, he also started the designs for an open-air theatre. The performers, however, favour to stage the dance-dramas in front of the shrine.

Similarities between Natyashastra and Bhagavata Mela

It is mentioned in Natyashastra written by Bharata that Purvarangavidhi means purva-before, ranga-the stage, vidhi- rituals. It means rituals done by the performers before entering the stage or starting of the play. When Bharata was asked by the sages the preliminary rites i.e the purvarangavidhi to describe he explained the same to them which is mentioned in the fifth chapter of Natyashastra. Sriharsha the author of Vaartika has said "Purvaschasaurangaiti". According to him the term connotes instrumental accompaniments which occur before the scene

Purvarangavidhi has to be carried out in a particular sequence along with recitation of passages and accompaniment of playing of drums. The constituents are: Pratyahara, Avatarana, Arambha, Ashravana, Vaktrapani, Parighattana, Sanghotana, Margasarita, Asarita. Purvaranga worship in Bhagavatha Mela is performed through offering of aromatic smoke, lamps, holy water and flowers to the 8 directions which is called as Jarjara Pooja in Natyashastra. After removing the curtain ten preliminaries are performed with recitation of passages and with playing of the instruments as mentioned in Natyashastra.

In Natyashastra the prologue in which the three characters, viz. Vidushaka, Sutradhara and Pariparshvaka engage in a conversation called Trigata. The chief characters introduce themselves from behind a piece of cloth held by two stage hands in Bhagavatha Mela which can be called as Trigata.

The right-hand side of the stage is filled with musicians. Besides the Bhagavata there are two other main vocalists, amridangam (drum) player, a violinist, flutist and maybe vind or ghatam (pot percussion instrument) players which are called as Avartana in Natyashastra. The vocalists provide quite a powerful accompaniment with one taking over from the other or singing together in some of the lengthier passages known as Arambha in Natyashastra.

After the preliminaries in Bhagavata Mela a young boy with the mask of the elephant head presents the Patrapravesha daru of Ganapati. This can be referred to as Nandi written in Natyashastra. The chief characters introduce themselves from behind a piece of cloth held by two stage hands which is called Trigata in Natyashastra.

These darus find a direct link with the Natyashastra tradition. The 11th chapter of Natyashastra refers to five kinds of Dhruva-s (daru-s) depending on their place and specific function. The character who arrives on stage is introduced in the entrance daru (Praveshiki), which comes first. Depending on how the song is written, the actor-dancer also sings and introduces the role he is playing in the first or third person. The reason these songs are referred to as Dhruvas is because they anchor, or creates a framework of the production, and their themes have a set significance, as Abhinavagupta clearly explains. The Samvada daru (also regarded as Uttarapratyuttara daru), in which two characters interact, and the Svagata daru, which features soliloquy songs, are the other darus used in the Bhagavata Mela Nataka. The characters use specific contexts to express their emotions, and the majority of these Svagatadarus portray an expression of helplessness or despair.

Relevance in present Scenario

The NatyaShastra is probably the world's largest and most comprehensive theater and dance manual and till date it forms the foundation of the classical forms of theater and dance in India. The instructions of NatyaShastra became established through centuries of practical theater work and so has Bhagavata Mela

It can be said that Bharata had a universalist stance and asserted that emotions become an instrument of appeal to the audience when they are universalized by art. NatyaShastra's creator, Bharata Muni, has explicitly said that the Shastra should be expanded upon to include theatrical experimentation (proyoga) and conceptions of time. As a result, rather than being a set of predetermined concepts and instructions, it is an organic, living, and traditional book in aesthetics and performing arts.

The "Bhagavata Mela Natya Nataka Sangam" now oversees the Melattur Bhagavata Mela's operations. The tradition was preserved by "Bharatam" Natesalyer, and after his death, it was lost to time.

In 1938, Melattur's V. Ganesalyer brought this art form back to life. After that, the tradition was continued by his son G. Swamithan and grandson S. Natarajan. The Melattur Bhagavata Mela's current prominence is solely because of the life that his grandson S. Natarajan gave to it. The Melattur Bhagavata Mela has been discussed by a number of columnists and critics.

In conclusion, one can envision both the layperson and the connoisseur being carried away to a spiritual realm in which there is no distinction between anyone. The actors and watchers change into Lord Narasimha worshippers and lose their individuality. They ask for his favour in prayer.

In conclusion, one can envision both the layperson and the connoisseur being carried away to a spiritual realm in which there is no distinction between anyone. The actors and watchers change into Lord Narasimha worshippers and lose their individuality. They ask for his favour in prayer. Even in the modern era, the special fusion of Bhakti, music, dance, and theatre transports one to the world of Lord Narasimha himself. The scene depicting the emergence of Narasimha from the pillar would be mind boggling. Even in the present day the actor would fast on the previous day. People have been believing in the power of prophecies connected with the Melattur Bhagavata Mela.

CONCLUSION

The Central Sangeet Natak Akademi and the Madras State Nataka Sangam have through grants to the groups sought to perpetuate the tradition. Training centres have to be built and with the passing away of the old Bhagavatas, the art will die at Melattur in the next two generations. The Melattur group sometimes travels to Madras and performs before city audiences to keep the tradition alive. Urban migration and a lack of patronage have harmed these systems incalculably. The pain was made worse by Westerners' condemnation of Indian tradition and imitations of it. One-sided political movements have a severe impact on culture. Instead of adequately addressing the societal ills of the day, they opted to target and destroy the finer qualities of culture. It is important that we protect our art and culture. 'If art is to nourish the roots of our culture, society must set the artist free to follow his vision wherever it takes him'- John F. Kennedy

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