

Vol I Issue III Sept 2011

Impact Factor : 1. 2018

ISSN No :2231-5063

Monthly Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Golden Research Thoughts

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Publisher
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IMPACT FACTOR : 1. 2018

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RNI MAHMUL/2011/38595

ISSN No.2230-7850

Indian Streams Research Journal is a multidisciplinary research journal, published monthly in English, Hindi & Marathi Language. All research papers submitted to the journal will be double - blind peer reviewed referred by members of the editorial Board readers will include investigator in universities, research institutes government and industry with research interest in the general subjects.

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FOLK THEATRE OF KARNATAKA

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Abstract:

Folk Theatre Of Karnataka Highlights The Rich Tradition And Culture Of The State In Dancing. This Form Of Theatre Is Also Known As "The Village Theatre", "The People'S Theatre" And "The Rural Theatre". The Folk Theatre Mainly Marks On The Past Of A Nation'S Theatre And Also Forms The Basic Structure Of Amateur And Professional Theatre Of Urban Areas. Folk Theatre Acts As A Live Spring And Recurrently Supplies All The Essential Ingredients To Other Forms Of Theatre. It Preserves, Rejuvenates And Also Inspires Cultural Achievements Of The People. It Forms The Supplies And Source Resources For The Progress Of Theatrical Art. "Real India Lives In Her Villages", Because The Village Houses The Folk With All Its "Soft Green Of The Soul" Of Culture, Art And Tradition. The Folk Theatre Of Karnataka - Music, Dance And Drama, Is Mainly Preserved And Protected By The People Of Villages.

KEY WORDS:

Folk, Folk Theatre, Karnataka.

INTRODUCTION

ORIGIN OF FOLK THEATRE OF KARNATAKA

The Origin Of Folk Theatre Is To Be Found In The Religious And Ceremonial Cult Through Which Primitive Peoples Of All Times Have Sought To Promote The Welfare Of The Tribe By Incurring The Favour Of Deities And Placating The Spirit Of Evil. The Rituals Played A Crucial Role In The Folk Theatre. Rituals, When Analysed, Show The Effort Of The Primitive Man To Invoke The Aid Of The Phenomenal Powers To Get Their Assistance In Keeping The Four-Fold Fears Away From His Doors, Or To Offer Thanks When His Wishes Were Fulfilled. There Is Perhaps No Ritual Which Is Not Either An Invocation Or A Thanksgiving To An Unearthly Power. Of The Four, The Fear Of Evil (Bhaya) Dominated And Gave Rise To A Number Of Rituals. The Ritual Was To Please The Evil Spirit (Devva) Which Was Understood To Have Been Causing The Evil, Or To Please Its Superior Power (Deva) Which Was Capable Of Controlling It. It Was Natural That The Ghost (Who In The Eye Of The Folk, Would Express Themselves By Hurling An Earthquake Or A Famine Or Casting A Devouring Plague), A Master Of Evils Was Much Feared And Respected. The State Of Karnataka, With Its Thunderous Skies, Pouring Rains, Thick Forests And Dangerous Valleys, Intensely Feels The Presence Of Phenomenal Powers, And So, Has Been The Home Of Ghost-Worship.

FOLK THEATRE OF KARNATAKA:

Sri Krishna Parijata

Sri Krishna Parijata, popularly known as Sannata or Doppinata is a popular form of folk theater in

Title :FOLK THEATRE OF KARNATAKA Source:Golden Research Thoughts [2231-5063] BASAPPA Y. BANGARI
yr:2011 vol:1 iss:3

north Karnataka. The folk theatre which plays in north Karnataka is also called as 'Moodalapayadata', 'Paduvalapayadata' are famous in Udupi and Mangalore regions. Yakshagana is a type of 'Paduvalapayadata'. There is another folk theatre in north Karnataka called 'doddata' which deals with stories of Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavata etc. but, language is quite sophisticated i.e. Sanskrit and old Kannada. It is believed that sannata (short play) took birth from Doddata (large play) and has a simple colloquial Kannada language. 'Bhagavata' or 'dooti' tells and controls the play.

Most of the folk prefer 'sannata' rather than 'doddata' because of its simple and attractive words, speeches, costume, colour, easy dance. Here artists are using an instrument called 'dappu'. Therefore it is called as doppinata.

Long back 'bayalata' (a play which played on a ground) was popular among folk. Bayalatas were dealing with stories of God and Goddesses, Ramayana, Mahabharata. Long narration and songs, grand dress and costumes, colourful stage etc, attracted audiences mind. People wanted to watch a sub stories of Ramayana, Mahabharata especially was scenes, Sita Apaharana, terror scenes, war between two kings etc. Afterwards there was change appeared among audiences taste. They showed their reluctance to watch such doddata which have long narration and songs, the same dance, costume, colourful stage.

'Socialization appeared in bayalata after religious type social reforms of Sharana and Dasa. Technique of doddata changed and social stories became popular. The flower of Parijata took its birth from 'doddata' which was tough and hard'.

Dr. B.B. Hendi made 5 types of these stage shows as 1. Doddata 2. Sannata 3. Parijata 4. Dasrata 5. Yakshagana. First four types of stage shows are popular in northern side of Tungabhadra River and at the Southern parts of river Tungabhadra Yakshagana is popular. It is also popular in costal belt of Karnataka.

Sri Krishna Parijata is one of the popular stage shows (bayalata) of north Karnataka "Parijata and Dasarata" – each have been maintaining their own character features.

Origin and Growth :

Sri Krishna Parijata took its birth in Raichur district and grown in Bijapur, Bagalkot and Belgavi districts.

Sri Krishna Parijata can be seen around catchment areas of river Krishna and Ghataprabha. These areas are considered as the land of Krishna Parijata. Folk artists of north Karnataka are showing their talents in performing this stage show. There are many troupes of Sri Krishna Parijata both men and women performing this stage show.

There is a large scope of 'Vishnu Mahime' or 'Sri Krishna charitre' in Purana. But, the subject of Sri Krishna Parijata is small if we consider its scope in Puranas. Due to its unique characters incidents it is attracting our attention. Folks are maintaining the original structure of Sri Krishna Parijata. It shows their devotion towards 'Puranas'. Basically folks are lovers of such Puranas.

Sri Krishna is one of the incarnations of Vishnu and took birth on the earth. Krishna worshiped by people in India in different forms. Devotion of Radha-Krishna did not retain only in north India. It took another branch in the name of Rukmini-Krishna and grew in Maharashtra.

'There are many plays in Sanskrit and Telugu Yakshagana, Kuchipudi based on Parijata subject. Few scholars believed that 'Sathyabhama Vilasa' of Prasanna Venkatadasa influenced Aparala Parijata in Kannada Language'.

"Aparala Tammanna wrote first part and Shiraguppi Sadashivappa completed Sri Krishna Parijata by writing remaining part".

Sri Krishna Parijata is not written by one. It is a work of two writers. "He (Aparala Tammanna) wrote a Yakshagana called Krishna Parijata. His place is Raichur, probably he lived in 1850".

Dr. M.M. Kalaburgi studied manuscripts of Talikote and expressed his opinion as "First part of Sri Krishna Parijata written by Aparala Tammanna and other part by Shiraguppi Sadashivayya".

Sri Krishna Parijata starts by Gajanana Stuti as "He Shambho sutanaada lambodarane" Gajanana assures the Bhagavata that there would not be any hurdles while playing Sri Krishna Parijata. Afterwards, entry of Gollati, Gopala, Krishna-Rukmini, Sathyabhama, Narada, Satyabhama follows one by one. Answer to Krishna's letter, Satyabhama's worry, satyabhama goes to Paramatma, Koravanji's entrance, temple of Satyabhama and Dashwatara scenes appear in order to develop and complete the story.

Sri Krishna is a central character in Krishna Parijata who plays a vital role throughout the play and represents spirituality power and serious dress and costume. Satyabhama is heroine of the play. She shows her complex attitude/ nature, devotion and dedication. Rukmini gets place after Krishna-Satyabhama. Koravanji (disguised Krishna), is another face of Krishna's role. Narada, Gollati, Dooti (Bhagavata) and other artists (Himmela-Mummela) contribute a lot to amuse audiences.

Spiritual thinking is a secret stream which is flowing among folk. Parijata teaches spirituality in many ways. It sows seeds of devotion among folks. There is no discrimination in society. One has to learn to lead life by understanding meaning and reason of birth, events and Karma and get salvation.

Very simple colloquial Kannada language, pleasant dialogues, stress on important words and sentences, variation of pitches, dress, costume, stage, team of himmela etc. catch our attention and provide entertainment.

There are many troupes of Sri Krishna Parijata in Jamakhandi, Lokapura, Sonna, Babaladi, Kunchanur, Dadanatti, Shoorpali, Alagur, Nagarala, Belagavi, Mahalingapur, Bailhongal, Kaujalgi, Kulagod, Yadawad, Savadi, Aparala, Shiraguppi and many other villages of Bagalkot, Bijapur, Belagavi, Bellary and Raichur districts.

Many troupes are providing entertainment and communicating to the mass through radio and television.

The following villages are famous for Krishna Parijata troupes.

Teradal, Sarawad, Konnur, Lokapur, Jamakhandi, Mahalingapura, Chimmada, Sonna, Cchabbi, Yandigeri, Gokak, Suralikalla, Kochari, Rampur, Kadlimatti, Bodanayakanadinni, Gurlapur, Narasapur, Budihal, Siraguppi, Utagi (Jatta Tq) Katavi, Dadanatti, Belagali, Jagadala, Navalagi, Mugulkhod, Kakhandaki, Sulikal, Benal, Hunakunti, Honnarhalli, Maradibudihal.

DODDATAAND SANNATA:

Both Doddata and Sannata are bayalatas of Karnataka. These have a slight difference in nature. Doddata deals with stories like Ramayana, Mahabharata and long narrated sentences and words which are quite difficult to utter. But, Sannatas have the same stories of Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavadgita in simple language and small sentences. Most of the folklorists believed that Sannata took its birth from Doddata. Gradually audiences diverted their attention from doddata and concentrated on sannata.

These forms of folk theatre are popular in Karnataka especially in north Karnataka. Now a days doddatas are rare. Although songs of doddatas being sung by the folks in rural areas. Sannata became popular form. Sri Krishna Parijata, dappinata, Radhanata etc. are called as Sannatas.

Yakshagana can be found in Karnataka but has different shape. It is not true that Yakshagana is only related to coastal area of Karnataka. 'Yakshagana' is popularly known as 'bayalata', 'dombidasara kunita' in South Karnatak. People of north Karnataka are calling it as 'doddata'.

In coastal area this art is popularly known as 'Yakshagana bayalata'. But, this art of this area is different from 'Yakshagana' of north Karnataka in three ways. Tala, Maddale and Chande are used there (South Karnataka) but, here (North Karnataka) only Tala and Maddale are being used. Blowing instrument (Mukhaveene or mukha venu) is not there. 'Vedike Mundasu' wearing by the artists of Badagutittu is not here, but they are same as badagutittu.

Whether it is sannata or doddata aim of these folk theatres is same i.e. amuse the audience and pass on messages. Let us consider whole Karnataka state. We can see many types of Yakshagana. Long back folklorists divided them in to two sections namely 'Moodalapaya', 'Paduvalapaya'. Doddata, Sannata, Parijata of north Karnataka, bayalu nataka of Mysore region, 'bayalata' or 'dashavatara ata' of costal area etc are the different types of folk theatre made according to region.

Yakshagana is prevalent all over Karnataka as art form though in its mode of presentation there is some difference between one region and the other. Despite the region, the plots adopted for Yakshagana are mythical in nature and quality. But, diversely drawn up. Technically, Yakshagana is we often described by such terms as Bayalata (Open air theatre) (Bhagavatara ata, Dashavatara ata) Doddata (as opposed to sannata which is smaller in proportion. Doddata gets its name because of its huge structure, spectacular display and above all sublimity of exposition) and moodalapaya, etymologically it means one acquired through ancestral inheritance, in terms of dress and costumes, as also in the treatment of the topic. All those that come under this stock take the name of moodalapaya and the Yakshagana activity, rendered by that segment takes also the other name moodalapaya as its nomenclature. It is a misnomer to trace the group which belongs to the eastern region as the word 'moodala' suggests.

We can also find another form of yakshagana goes under a proxy, as paduvalapaya. This means yakshagana of the western costal region. Paradoxically, the rural artists who practice this do not call themselves so. Perhaps, it is just a figment of imagination without any relevance to context; or a fancy coined by someone without any knowledge or foresight. Because, in essence, the so called paduvalapaya is nothing but the regular yakshagana in its rhythm and structure and tone.

Almost all believe that moodalapaya and Doddata are not yakshagana performances. Viewed from their proper perspective, these yakshagana performances should be qualified as regionally distinct.

“Dasaratas are forms of sannata in north Karnataka. Kamarudasaru, Gopalabutti dasaru, dandige dasaru are playing these plays and making publicity of Dashavatara form of Vishnu. Dialogue between Radha-Krishna, songs of himmela and mummela, style of music are unique in nature. Few artists of Guledgudda in Bagalkot district are maintaining this tradition. They can make use of any social subject as

the story of their play. Javari, Bhima, Goddi are male characters and Rangasani, Yamunasani, Bhimasani, Nagasani etc are female characters. They perform their show on stage. Dr. Chandrashekar Kambar assumes that it may be a advanced stage of Dravida bayalata”.

Dappu, Tala, Harmonium, Damadi etc instruments are used in sannata. 'Adda sogu' a comic character amuses audiences in between the play. Roopasena, Raadhanta, Badavanata, Sangya-Balya, Pativruta, Chillala, Shivashakti, Raitana Golata became popular sannatas in rural areas.

“Krishnaji Kulkarni of Madihal village (Aland Taluk) composed Radhanatha and Nabisaheb of Talewadi village (Bijapur District.) wore dress of Radha, enacted and popularized the play. It is believed that 'Shivashakti Vagwada' written by the poet of Halasangi Lavani. Few people are calling Radanata as Rajanata. But, Rajanata was a different form of play which almost disappeared”.

Doddata seems big in its character, dress, costume, number, music, etc. Aranyakumara', 'Kurukshetra', 'Badavara Golu', 'Krishna Sandhana', 'Ramayana', 'Lava-Kusha', 'Chitraketu Raja' etc are popular doddatas of north Karnataka. In south Karnatak Panchavati, Airavana, Mairavana, Lankadahana, Lava-Kushara Kalaga, Ramanjaneyara yuddha, virataparva, Abhimanyu Kalaga, Babruvahana Kalaga, Nala-Damayanti, Shashirekha parinaya, Devi Ata etc are popular stage shows.

Devil characters create a situation while playing doddata which will be an horrible scene. Red dress, black colour costumes, crying, dance etc can impress audiences mind for a long time.

Artists of doddata make dances according to songs of mummela.

Thom Takadin din takadin tayasssss
Thom takanadim tom nanaditta
Dum takadina ditte
Dum dum takadina ditte thai
Thai taka thai thai ditte thai

Another song is there which follows a horrible dance during veera and Rudra scences.

Tom tatajana
Thimtata jana
Tom tatajanataa
Tayaadhim tatajanataa
Takado takadom ditte

Both sannata and doddata are still popular folk theatre in rural areas. But, players and audiences are less in number. Although, audiences do witness such plays in their or nearly villages during fairs and festivals days.

YAKSHAGANA:

Today Yakshagana is performing not only in our state but also in foreign countries. It has got international platform. Dr. Shivarama Karant introduced Yakshagana to the distant lands.

Yakshagana has its own status in Indian folk theatre tradition. It is a mixture of literature, music, acting and dances. This colourful theatre is a symbol of a rich culture of our folklore.

Yakshagana is famous in Dakshina Kannada, Uttara Kannada, Udupi, Shimoga and other parts of coastal and Malnad area. There are two type of Yakshagana – 'Tenkatittu' and 'Badaga tittu'.

“Yakshagana bayalata tradition of Kannada state is a most beautiful part of kannada culture. Once upon a time this was a powerful art which attracted minds of folk”.

Dr. Shivarama Karant realised the importance of Yakshagana. Therefore he expressed his views which are relevant till today. Due to his sincere effort, today Yakshagana is enjoying a status and this tradition is growing.

There is a debate going on origin and development of Yakshagana. There are plenty of comments on it. Few scholars opined as there is a reference of Yakshagana in 'Natya Shastra' of Bharata. 'Yakshya', 'Natya Matruka' are related to Yakshagana.

“R.B. Hasanagi made assumption that Sanskrit plays are the reason for Yakshagana. Maliya Timmappayya says that Yakshagana art was there in Karnataka before 12th century. 'Odevakkati' in Nagachandra's 'Mallinatha Purana', 'Ekkalagana' in Aggala's 'Chandraprabhu purana', 'Yakkadiga' and 'Yakkalagana' of Ratnakaravarni's 'Bharatesha Vaibhava' all says on Yakshagana. According to our knowledge origin of Yakshagana took place during the reign of Vijayanagara emperor. Dr. Shivaram Karant said in his book 'Yakshagana' published in 1974.”

“Few researchers believe that Yakshagana existed in 11th century, but clear light spread on the subject during 15th century. Suppose we have to say on Yakshagana only on written record not on the basis of performances. Although information on performance of Yakshagana in last 50-100 years and experiences of senior artists might be helpful while understanding the Yakshagana tradition”.

“We can have many references on origin of Yakshagana during Vijayanagara period. In an inscription found at Laxminarayana temple in Somasamudra (Tq : Kurugodu) related to 1556 A.D. says on Talamaddale a division of Yakshagana. The kolata sculptures of Hajararamaswamy temple give information on kolata Yakshagana. It is clear that in those days Yakshagana existed”.

Researchers have collected data from different sources to find out history of Yakshagana.

“It is identified that Yakshagana based on Haduvahalliya paduvalapaya (Sangeetapura). Subba of Nagire is an ancient poet of Yakshagana. Records found in Uttara Kannada district in 1700 A.D. In a Rathashilpa there are pictures of Yakshagana. Hanumanta Temple of Gundabala was a centre of Yakshagana. Scholars opined as 'Haiwaynadu' is source of Yakshagana. Colonel Mechenji's Sirsi Kaiphiyattu has reference of Yakshagana. Further there is a reference of yakshagana. Further there is a reference of Yakshagana is Swarnavalli Mutt which is as old as 1200 years. There is reference of Yakshagana seve aata, Talamaddale. Yakshagana grown as a unique art in these centuries”.

“Prasanga is special in Yakshagana literature. It is being written till today. It is rich in Dakshina Kannada, Uttara Kannada, Hassan, Shimoga and Malnad area. Yakshagana also existed in some other parts of our state. Udupi press released more than 80 prasanga. Dashavatara melada vara and Talamaddale have remained. The publishers from Bangalore and Bellary published Yakshagana prasanga in a large scale”.

Due to printed literature Yakshagana prasanga remained among us. Still today many Bhagavatas refer printed version along with their oral tradition. These are called as akhyana, prasanga, prasanga patti, bhagavatara patti. There are vivid Yakshagana prasangas on Ramayana and Mahabharata. Great epics of India (Ramayana and Mahabharata) influenced on Yakshagana stories of Ramayana developed as a part of Yakshagana.

Subjects of Yakshagana related to epic stories. They are spreading values, thoughts on social, economic and political are still relevant. People can adopt such values in their life.

Yakshagana artists do use current affairs and problems in their story and ridicule in a humorous way. Bhagavata should be clever. He can communicate to the audience.

Yakshagana used and succeeded while spreading knowledge on HIV/AIDS, health and sanitary and other subjects. Messages are reaching our folk with the help of Yakshagana. Yakshagana is considered as an influential medium of communication.

TOGALU GOMBEYATA (Puppetry):

Togalu Gombeyata (Puppetry) is the oldest folk theatre of Karnataka. The artists belonging to Maratha Community and migrated from Kolhapur, Satara of Maharashtra state. They are called as Killikyata, Shillekyata, Kataru, Gombe Ramayaru etc. It is believed that these people belong to Sri Rama of Ramayana age and were his devotees. Sri Rama gave a roll of picture to these people while leaving this land and asked them to show these pictures and tell stories to other people of society and lead life.

We can see such Killekyata families in Bijapur, Bagalkot, Belgaum, Dharwad, Bellary and other southern districts of Karnataka. Few families are living in Bommalatapalli of Anantapur district (AP) who know Kannada language very well.

Doddada Bharamappa of Hagaribommanahalli (Bellary) is an expert artist of Puppetry and exhibited his talent in Germany also Belagallu Veeranna of Bellary district is another wellknown artist in Karnataka who has shown many shows like, Sree Basaveshwara Charitre, Channamma Charitre, Shikshana Prasara, Hasiru Kranti, Kutumba Kalyana etc. He is trying to revive the art form his level best and got an award given by Janapada and Yakshagana Academy, Govt. of Karnataka.

The artists of Togalu Gombeyata are showing stories selected from Mahabharata, Ramayana and Bhagavata. Associations of puppetry originated in Manvi taluk of Raichur district, who are giving a commercial touch to this art form. They are using leathers of goat, Buffalo and deer to prepare puppets and also use natural colours extracted from many plants and leaves. Togalu Gombeyata usually shown during evening hours using oil lamp or electric bulbs. Other artists help to show the puppetry.

It is believed that, if folks conduct a Togalu Gombeyata (puppetry) in their village they do receive sufficient rain. People give food grains, cloth, goat, and cash. These artists do praise the person while showing the play to public who gave them an opportunity to conduct this show and food, grain, cloth etc.

Artists are expert. They do make a preliminary survey of the village and villagers. They find out miser, lean, and thick fellows and rich people. They ridicule the miser using his name in between the show in order to amuse public. We can realize the effect of communication.

“Usually Togalu Gombeyata belongs to a family, women, and children render their services during the show. Other families of Killikyata do co-operate each other as and when they need services while performing shows in villages”.

Killekyathas prepare leather puppets which have approximately 2 feet tall and use a small bamboo stick to hold it. They also prepare other parts of body like hands, legs, head etc. They apply apt colours to the puppets according to the characters of Ramayana, Mahabharata and Bhagavata. These puppets communicate to public (Audiences) with their activities, movements of their bodies and there will be sound effect of the puppet player. His wife called Bangarakka also plays a significant role while performing the show in a temple or a place where four roads meet (cross) on a stage specially prepared for it. Music will be there and harmonium, tabala players play their instruments and sing songs according to the situation of the story.

“Puppetry is an indigenous theatre form of India. From time immemorial it has been a popular and appreciated form of entertainment in rural India. The stylized vocabulary of puppet theatre in India carries a relevant message social awareness, historical and traditional identity and moral value system. Puppet theatre is integrated in the ritual observances and the social milieu of the rural people in India. The theatre has shown remarkable staying power against vicissitudes of modern times. Its relative isolation and distinct style of improvisation made it a powerful medium of communication in the rural areas of India. There are six different types of puppet theatre like string puppets, rod puppets, shadow puppets, glove puppets etc that are found in different parts of India (the marionettes of Rajasthan are simple, stylized and symbolic string puppets)”.

“The age old value system, the idea of right and wrong is represented by stylized and movements patterns through symbols fantasy and entertainment. The manipulator is using the puppets like a medium to express and communicate ideas, values and social messages. Puppetry is a natural development of story telling and religious and social preaching prevalent in India. Puppetry in India is a flexible form of traditional communication. It has been successfully used by government departments, voluntary organizations for development communication, adult education, health and sanitation and family planning”.

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