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Uparūpaka-s: The sub-variety of Indian drama

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Abstract

Literature holds an important place in the natural life of every human community. In India- where world's oldest literary works had been originated- literature is known as Kāvya, as a form of art. It excludes scriptures or religious writings, histories, technical writings on science, philosophy etc and hence can be assured as secular in nature. Its main purpose is the supreme rapturous joy. Kāvya is generally divided into two as, Dṛśya (visible) and Śravya (audible). Dṛśyakāvya-s (Visual art forms) is of three types commonly referred to in the major texts of dramaturgy viz., Nṛtta, Nṛtya and Nāṭya. Nṛtta is the beautifying art that lends charm without any dramatic element, but it is not mere imitation like abhinaya. Nṛtya is the representational dance concentrates only on the production of bhava-s (emotions). While Nāṭya is the Indian formulation of dramatic art. It represents the world around us through imitation. It can also be described as the depiction of pain and pleasure in the empirical world through gestures. Nāṭya is believed to be derived by Brahmadeva, as the mimicry of the manners endowed with emotions constituted in particular situations. The term Nāṭya is replaced variously by the synonyms like Rūpa, Rūpaka, Nāṭaka etc. The present paper is an attempt to discuss about the minor types of dramas known as Uparūpaka-s.

Keywords: Uparūpaka-s, minor plays, performance traditions, nāṭyaśāstra

Introduction

Different scholars are of different opinions about the origin of the Nāṭya. Mainly there are six views regarding this discussion. First one is the traditional account to be found in *Nāṭyaśāstra*- the earliest Sanskrit work on dramaturgy. In the first chapter of *Nāṭyaśāstra* Bharata describes the story about the origin of Nāṭya. At the beginning of Tretāyuga, gods along with Indra visited Brahma and requested to create some new entertainment device that is audible as well as visible. Taking this request into consideration, Brahma generated the fifth Veda- Nāṭya using different elements from four Veda-s i.e, Pāṭhya from Rgveda, Abhinaya from Yajurveda, Gīta form Sāmaveda, Rasa from Atharvaveda. Bharata and his sons learned it, and organized the performance along with the apsarases of heaven^[3].

As the art of music and dance, drama is also found that existed in the early era of Veda-s. The dialogue hymns (Samvādasūkta-s) in the Vedic corpus are considered as the prototype of the classical drama. Other discussions on the origin of Nāṭya can be traced from the epics, Aṣṭādhyāyī of Pāṇini, Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali and Pali literature. The role of secular art forms and the influence of Greek theatre are also the significant observations that shouldn't be treated as pointless. There are also debates on the relation between dance and drama.

The history of artistic activities goes back to the upper Paleolithic era. Indian tradition ascribes a much earlier date to dancing than that of painting and sculpture. Various portrayals of the dance postures could be found all over the picture galleries of the country and for plenty of reasons it is viewed as the primordial component of theatre. Some scholars hold the view that the ancient Śaiva ritual dances gave rise to the drama in course of time.

Major and minor types of plays

Dramas are viewed to be developed gradually from the dancing on the occasions like festivals. Nāṭyaśāstra describes ten types of plays- Rūpaka-s. They are Nāṭaka, Prakaraṇa, Samavakāra, Īhāmṛga, Ḍima, Vyāyoga, Aṅka, Prahasana, Bhāṇa and Vithī. "The playwright should develop his story in a drama on the largest scale i.e, either of the two types Nāṭaka and Prakaraṇa. The other eight types of plays are relatively primitive types.

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The two main types provide the utmost scope for development and alone use the tender mode of stage business [4].” Comparatively less developed types like Bhāṇa and Prahāsana are surviving only because of their being popular entertainment.

Mostly later writers meaningfully described the minor varieties of plays, called Uparūpaka-s. These art forms are generally devoted to the elements of music and dance. They survived as the popular entertainment, certainly distinct from the less developed types (which have only a selected elite class audience) come under the major division as noted above. The Uparūpaka-s appear to be a link between the ancient classical theatre and the later popular theatrical traditions [5]. Bharata explains about a secondary type besides the ten major ones, named nāṭī or nāṭikā having the features of both the Nāṭaka and the Prakaraṇa. Dance panels, in the form of sculptural representations from second century BC onwards, allude the popularity. Some of the writers preceded by Bharata put on the view that there are thirty minor types of plays. Kohala was the first who discussed about Uparūpaka-s. He is the author of Uttaratantra, i.e., the supplement to Nāṭyaśāstra. From the commentary of Abhinavagupta, it is clear that he had dealt with the forms like Toṭaka, Saṭṭaka, Rāsaka and Rāgakāvya.

Sagarānandin and Śāradātanaya describe the varieties of Uparūpaka-s. They talk about Nāṭikā, Troṭaka, Saṭṭaka, Sallāpa, Śilpaka, Durmallikā, Goṣṭhī, Prekṣaṇaka, Pārījātalā, Rāsaka, Hallīśaka, Ḍombikā, Bhāṇaka, Sidgaka, Ullāpyaka etc. Bhoja, in his Śrīgāraprakāśa and Viśvanātha in Sāhityadarpaṇa are deal with the subject Uparūpaka-s. Abhinavagupta calls some Uparūpaka-s as Nṛttātmakaprabandha-s and Dhanika calls them as Nṛtyabheda-s. In the major dramas, strī and nīca characters have even no right to speak Sanskrit. They use Prakṛt during communication. While the female characters or participants have a significant role in most of the Uparūpaka-s. Sahityadarpaṇa can be quoted in this regard as it says, “Nāṭikā kṣptavaktā syātstrīprāyā caturaṅkikā” [6].

Troṭaka (or Toṭaka) is a variant of Nāṭaka. It consists of the story about the relation between heavenly people and human beings. Usually have five or seven acts, known as Javanikāntara-s. Goṣṭhī is a one act play with nine or ten heroes, and about five or six heroines. Brief references are found to be about the deeds of the ‘boy of goṣṭha’ while killing the demons. Raivatamadānikā is an example of Goṣṭhī. Saṭṭaka is a variety of Nāṭikā, written entirely in the best Prakṛt language called Mahārāṣṭrī. Karpūramañjarī of Rājaśekhara is the earliest known Saṭṭaka. Sallāpa is a play having three acts based on a famous or an invented story, with an unorthodox Pāṣaṇḍa as the hero. Śilpaka (distinct from Sidgaka and Simgaka) is of four acts and twenty seven limbs [7]. Kanakavatīmādhava is an example for the composition of Śilpaka.

Durmālikā is a humorous play in four acts. There are four conjunctions and nāgaraka is the hero. Female messenger describes the secret enjoyment in an unrefined manner. Indumati is a humorous play which satisfies the features of a Durmallikā. Śāradātanaya explains another type called Mallikā, as seems to be a variant of Durmallikā. It is also similar to a type of novel called Maṇikūlyā [8]. Prekṣaṇaka is a one act play with a special feature that is free to perform as a street play or in a theatre. The comic and sensitive play with abundant music and dance in it is known as Kalpavallī. Parājjitalā or Parājjitaka is the last one erotic and heroic sentiment.

Ḍombī (Ḍombikā) appears as the type of Dhanika’s seven Nṛtya-s. According to Abhinavagupta, Ḍombī is disguising. Hidden passion is the specialty in the Bhāṇaka, Preraṇā, Bhāṇikā etc. Śrīgadita is a one act play, in which a seated woman recites something of Karuṇarasa from any illustrious story. Śrī, here means Lakṣmī, the fortune. Mādhva’s Subhadrāharaṇa calls itself as Śrīgadita since it is colored with the word Śrī. But it is not accepted by the scholars like Warder [9]. Bhāṇika or Bhāṇa gives predominance to the instrumental music with broken rhythms. It is a bold and vigorous dance telling the story of the different incarnations of Viṣṇu. Rāsa or Rāsaka, Hallīśaka and Lāsyā are the three important names to be found in the classical texts on dramaturgy. The rāsa dance first originated in Saurashtra. It is the earliest of the minor type of play. It is considered as a ballad. There are eight, sixteen or thirty two female singers, who perform group dance or Piṇḍibandha-s. Rāsakāṅka, as much a play as a ballet, was largely in Saindhava language [10] a form of Apabhramśa. Bhoja and Śāradātanaya with the support of Nāṭyaśāstra try to establish that there are carcaṛī dances in longer plays of Nāṭikā, Toṭaka and Saṭṭaka. Rāsaka is embellished by various rhythmic expressions (citratalālayānvitam) of strokes and melody. Nāṭyarāsaka is somewhat distinct from Rāsaka. It is more like a play and should be grouped with lāsyā dance.

Tāṇḍava (The dance of Śiva), is the first dance mentioned in the Nāṭyaśāstra. Pārvatī, the consort of Śiva, watched him dancing and danced herself, introducing more delicate movements and gestures. This new form of dance is known as Lāsyā. It has 12 limbs which can be used separately in any type of drama. They are Geyapada, Sthitavādyā, Āśīnavādyā, Puṣpagandhikā, Pracchedaka, Trimūḍha, Dvimūḍha, Saindhava, Uttamottaka, Vicitrapada, Uktaprayukta and Bhāvitā [11].

The emergence of various modern spoken languages in India, made Prakṛt and Sanskrit languages as literary ones. So the Rūpaka-s and Uparūpaka-s written in Sanskrit went far away from the common man. There the rise of new art forms influenced by the old Sanskrit theatre happens. They have adopted the popular dance-drama style and successively surviving in modern time. So these are also can be categorized as Uparūpaka-s [12]. Kathakali in Kerala, Yakṣagāna in Karṇāṭaka, Kuccippuḍi in Andhra, Bhāgavatamelānāṭaka in Tanjaore, Aṅkīyanāṭ in Assam, Līlā plays in north India, Bhavāi in Gujarat, Lalitā, Tamāśa, and Daśavatārī in Maharashtra etc are some of them. Epics have played a very important role in Indian performance tradition. Their structures follow the format of recitation and storytelling [13]. Kathakali is the most popular classical art form of Kerala in which three types of abhinaya are being emphasized. The whole dramatic text is recited by the singers on the stage. Bhāgavata in Yakṣagāna also sings and recites the entire text. Conventionally choreographed dance steps are also be found in it. In Terukkūttu-the performance related to Draupadī cult- the whole Mahābhārata story is being performed in 18 days.

Uparūpaka-s mainly deals with the popular stories that are closely connected with the life of the people. The tools and means used in the performance also of the public approval. These could be treated as the real main stream tradition in the rich history of cultural multitudes of India. Further the ritualistic, spiritual, socio-economical and anthropological peculiarities must be studied seriously for a better overview on the growth of life cycle of the common people.

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7. Warder AK. Op.cit, 141.
8. Ibid, 144.
9. Ibid, 158.
10. Bharata mentions Saindhava as a limb of Lāsya, since many of the minor types were in Prākṛt-s such as Rāsaka etc. See Warder A.K, Op.cit., for more discussions, 139.
11. Ibid. 149-150.
12. Tharlekar GH. Op.cit. 165.
13. Awasti Suresh, Performance Tradition in India, National Book Trust, 2002, 1.