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Maneesha S

Research Scholar at Sree
Sankaracharya University of
Sanskrit, Kalady, Kerala, India

Genesis of the human embodiment: An investigation according to saṅgītaratnākara

Maneesha S

Abstract

Music is an art concerned with combining vocal and instrumental sounds for beauty of form or emotional expression, usually according to cultural standards of rhythm and melody. Human internal organs play very important part in producing and developing the sound system. Hence a proper understanding of human body is inevitable for the scientific study of musicology. Indian theorititions on music clearly understood and recognized this fact and included the study of human body based on Carakasamhita and Suśrutasaṁhita in their books dealing with the fundamentals of musicology. Saṅgītaratnākara goes on describing about the details of human anatomy through the scheme of Vedānta.

Key words: Emotional, human, musicology, carakasamhita, suśrutasaṁhita

Introduction

Saṅgītaratnākara is a basic text of Saṅgītaśāstra written by Śārṅgadeva. This text is also known as Saptādhyāyī. It is a landmark in Saṅgītaśāstra, since it illuminates the ancient and medieval tradition. The work is divided into seven chapters. Among them the second chapter named pindotpattiprakaraṇa is fully dedicated to the analysis of human body. In this chapter the author gives a detailed description of the human body with all its complexities. What is the relevance of such a topic in a music treatise? Śārṅgadeva, the author of this work, could do so, for he was himself a physician; and he knew the fact that without a thorough knowledge of anatomy one cannot enter into the world of music at all. He thought that human body provides the required circumstance and instrumentation for the production of voice and vocal melody. The study of physiology is necessary for understanding the process of voice production in the science of voice culture. So Śārṅgadeva finds it necessary to investigate the genesis of human embodiment.

He begins the topic with the discussion of Nāda. Nāda manifests the letters, letters constitute the word, and words make a sentence, so the entire business of life is carried on, through language. The fact that nāda is in very basis of all manifest life, makes it more important and relevant for the author to deal with the subject of the genesis of the human embodiment.

Jīvātmā and Paramātmā

The word Ātman, by itself stands for reality behind all experience; and is in this sense synonymous with the word Brahman. However, when the word Jīva is prefixed to it, it refers to the individual being, and when the word 'Parama' is prefixed to it, it means the universal being, God. The individual beings are not different from Ātman, neither is the world different from it, for, creating by its own power, it is non-different from its creation, just as gold is non-different from its products such as ear rings etc.

From Ātman emanated, ākāśa, first of all, followed by air, fire, water and earth in their respective order. These are the great elements, and they constitute the body of Brahman, thus called Virād. Brahman created Brahmā and having handed over the Vedas to him, it caused him to create the physical world through the words of the Vedas.

Correspondence

Maneesha S

Research Scholar at Sree
Sankaracharya University of
Sanskrit, Kalady, Kerala, India

By the command of Brahmā, created through his mind, the Prajāpatis and from them the seminal creation of bodies is being expounded.

Classification of physical bodies

Śārngadeva classified the physical body into four types, as per the purāṇic tradition, depending on the nature of its cause, viz, sweat, sprout, womb and egg: such as louse etc, from sweat, creeper etc, from the sprout, human being etc, from the womb and birds etc, from the egg. Among these, the human body, being suitable for the manifestation of nāda. That is the purpose of dealing with the human body. The next discussion is about the descent of self-aware intelligence (jīva) into the womb. The self-aware intelligence, the resident of ether, descends into air, and from air into smoke, from smoke into cloud-formation and from the cloud-formation into the cloud. The sun, being satiated by the oblations and surrounded by vapours drawn by its rays in the summer, confines the waters in the clouds. When the clouds release the waters, the self-conscious intelligent being, descending with the showers, transfers itself imperceptibly to the terrestrial growth of trees and herbs. This (Vegetation) becomes food, and when eaten by men, is transformed into semen, which being sprinkled in the temple of love in the body of a young woman in her proper course, on entering the uterus, if pure, unites with ovum and then being impelled by the accumulated residual action of the individual, it begins to develop into the foetus. What is notable here is that the self aware intelligence or the individual soul can never keep an identity without a physical vehicle. So in fact the whole journey is a process of the movement from a purely ideal body to a physical one. Thus it is also a process of evolution or manifestation from the subtle to the gross. Food also is a vehicle for the self-enclosed consciousness and so is semen into which it is transformed.

The growth of the embryo

Now, the author goes on to describe the various stages through which the embryo develops during the entire period of pregnancy and connected matters. From a comparative study of the monumental works of Indian medicine and surgery by Caraka and Susruta, it appears that Śārngadeva, who is known to be a medical practitioner himself, has based this section of his work mainly on these two authorities, though he also seems to have consulted subsequent literature on the subject. In the section named pindotpathiprakarana the verses from 23 up to the end of 41 describes the growth of the embryo.

In the first month the sperm is united with the ovum forms into a jelly-like substance in a liquid condition, the five elements of which, under the impact of cold, heat and wind solidify in the second month into a mass. This mass according to our authority forms in three shapes, viz. a ball like round shape, a tandon like oblong, and an egg like oval shape, each of which indicates respectively the masculine, feminine and the neuter gender. On this basis the embryo can be distinguished even in the second month. In the third month five protuberances appear in the solidified mass of flesh at the five places where the five organs have to be, while the minor limbs and their parts are formed in the shape of very minute papillae.

In the fourth month all the limbs and the organs and parts thereof are fully developed. Since the viscus of the heart too is developed. The cravings of the mother and the child are related in identity and therefore the unfulfilled desires of the pregnant woman are likely, not only to cause mental

complications in her mind, but those complexes react on the consciousness of the embryo, so much so that the non gratification of any desire for a particular sensation during gestation tends to adversely affect that particular sense organ of the child. The fulfilment of such desires is conducive to a healthy progeny.

In the fifth month, the thought body is revived and intelligence begins to function through the mind. In other words, there is an awakening of consciousness in terms of self awareness.

In the sixth month the bones, sinews which are fibrous tissue uniting muscle to bone, nails, hair on the head and the limbs appear distinctly and there is an augmentation of energy and complexion.

The foetus is complete in all the elements physical as well as psychological and the encephalon feels greatly fatigued. Susruta speaks of mental awakening in the fifth month and the development of the intellect in the sixth month, while in the seventh, all the organs and the suborgans of the body are fully and distinctly developed. The embryo, with the cavities of ears covered by its hands held in-between the two thighs, being afflicted by its stay in the environment of the womb, recalls the experience of past lives along with the torments of various types, and contemplating the means of freedom remains self-absorbed.

In the eighth month the skin becomes compact and thick and memory brings in the element of choice, ie, the operation of will Śārngadeva interprets that the embryo is able to listen to outside sounds.

Then the parturition or the delivery of the child takes place after the ninth month commences. The placenta or parā-nādi of the foetus is joined to the lymphatic vessels or Rasavāha nādi of the mother by the umbilical cord, through which the essence of lymph-chyle produced from the assimilated food of the mother enters into its organism.

The author is describing the position of the embryo in the parturient's womb and the process of parturition with hands folded over the forehead and the limbs flexed, the embryo stays by the mother's back. As it is believed, if it is in the right side of the womb, it is a male, if in the left side, a female and if in the centre, a hermaphrodite. As it is turned upside down by the strong force of the parturition-winds it is ejected through the vagina, its limbs being afflicted through the passage.

Conclusion

Thus on an analysis in detail we find that Saṅgītaratnākara on a whole is an authoritative work in which facts and techniques on music, the growing process of a human being since its conception arranged and presented in a scientific and systematic manner. This work can be considered as a guideline and model for many other lakṣaṇakāras, and for the students studying Music, Āyurveda, and Linguistics.

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