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Parvathy

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

Book review: Dattila

Parvathy

Abstract

The literature of each language has preserved the human wisdom through the literary sources and hence they provide a wide range of research and study materials. The current world is always fed by the literature of the ancient times and tends to grow and develop, and more importantly to learn and deduct the ancient life as well as wisdom. It needs a keen and focused effort to find out the lessons from the ancient scriptures and this very paper is such an effort to point out the importance of the different perspective of a well arranged text entitled- 'Dattila'. The very text deals with the branch of the knowledge of music and tries to cover the areas under the topic. It is an attempt to introduce the text and its nature to the academic world. The book is being introduced with a conviction that more studies should be conducted in this area and it will surely pave an initiation for more serious studies and discourses. A simple methodology is adopted for the general introduction of the book which includes the explanations about the external and internal details of the same. The aim is to present a general account of the text and it's designed to depict in a more lighter way.

Keywords: Book review, Dattilam, Gandharva sastra, external elements of the text, internal elements.

Introduction

Books are the benchmarks of human wisdom and knowledge. The knowledge world of mankind is being kept alive as printed matter and hence books are the beacons of everyone's life. Though someone is not a scholar or an academic person, everyone's life is being guided by books and the knowledge preserved in books. In Indian scenario, our pioneers believed that knowledge should not be written down and in the beginning the social system didn't have a device to preserve knowledge as written forms. As the scripts came in use, the oral tradition of our entire knowledge system got inscribed on different materials. Hence, ancient thoughts and knowledge were available in a written manner. Nowadays books are being digitized and people are engaged in e-reading. As the technology develops, our devices of knowledge and its related areas also get changed. Here an attempt is being done to review a book of very importance in the field of Sanskrit study and its aesthetics.

Details of the Book

Title: DATILAM

General Editor: Kapila Vatsyanan

By: Mukund Lath

KalAmAIyaSAstra Series (2)

Publishers: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and MLBD, Delhi

Year of Publication: 1988

Price: 300.00

Pages: 236

External Elements of the Book

The cover design and arrangement is so simple but graceful in nature. The page layout is also in a manner that no one will be fed with the effort of reading and referring to a book. The well-arranged font and the title divisions are helpful for an easier and fast reading. But one can observe the absence of a blurb in the back cover which is clearly a missing element. If that was also included, a reader can have a fast understanding of the content of the book. Because, the title of the very text never conveys any clue regarding the content and area to which it deals with. So, one couldn't choose the book at first for reference, even if he has to go through the

Corresponding Author:

Parvathy

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

subject matter. But in the inner area of the front-back covers, it has given a short note about the text and the researcher respectively. It is brief in content, but will help to understand the subject and the editor. Regarding the text, it is stated that: “the Dattilam is a remarkable treatise from the earliest known period of organized, systematic writing in India. The work can be placed in the same period as the Natyasastra (the beginning of the Christian era) and it represents to us a well-developed sastra, composed at the end of a long tradition of analytic thinking on music”. (Dattilam, from inner cover). Similarly, in the back inner cover we will get the details of Dr. Mukund Lath, who is a historian and a teacher, and who has done this present study of the Dattilam with notes and translation. He is from Culcutta and has done a study of Dattilam in 1978. He has translated the Kalpas Utrasinto English, and written the traditional biography of MahaAvIra. Also he is the translator of the artha kathAnaka. This much information is available from the text covers. Also the price is satisfactory as the quality of the book is worthy enough. In short, Dattilam is a handy text with fine pages and with abundant knowledge in it.

About the Book and its Structure

The book is of a medium size and is organized in a vivid method. Anyone who reads the text at first will be able to enter it with ease. The arrangements of the various elements can be expressed as: first the book has got a forward note by the general editor of the kalAmUlyasAstra series, Kapila Vatsyayan. She states the need of publishing such an age old treatise on musicology and the importance of such efforts. Next one can find the introduction by Mukund Lath, in which he explains the whole efforts beginning from the discovery of the manuscript and the later studies. He points out the thing that the text exclusively deals with the gAndharva-the musicology. The original manuscript was found by the great scholar Sambashiva Sastri from Trivandrum. It can be considered as one of the ancient samgita texts. Dattilam is purely a theoretical discussion on music. In literary history there are numerous references to Dattilam and quotations can also be seen regarding the same. As gAndharva is the subject matter, it speaks of a specific body of music, as a sacred form. It is a kind of a musical yajna, which could result in transcendental merit(adrsta), leading to svarga. Also Dr. Lath says that the present text may have composed at about the same time as the nAtyasAstra (1. B.C – 2 A.D)

Arrangement of the Content of the text

- i. Forward (by Kapila Vatsyayan)
- ii. Introduction (by Mukund Lath)
- iii. Content page
- iv. Abbreviations
- v. Dattilam – Sanskrit text in the left page and corresponding English translation in the left page and corresponding English translation in the right page. (total 244 verses)
- vi. pATHavimarSa (text –critical comments)
- vii. Commentary on the text
- viii. Appendix : a chart of Dattilam in quotations
- ix. A select bibliography
- x. pAdAnukramaNikA
- xi. padAnukramaNika

The text Dattilam

The very text starts after the list of abbreviations. The Sanskrit version is given on the left page and its English

translation is on the right. So it is very easy to find out the meaning of each verse from the English translation. In Sanskrit verse side, the verse number is in devanagari script while in the translation, the numbers are in Latin script. This even helps one who doesn't know Sanskrit to find out the verse and its meaning, quickly. If we check with the core content, after the preamble, the text states the origin of gAndharva and its nature. In the English translation, may be for easy use, the editor has divided the text into sections. From the sixth verse up to the 110th, is the first section and from verse 111 to 244 is the second section. But this kind of sectioning is not there in the original Sanskrit text. In the first division, Dattilam Deals with the subjects as scara, sruti, grAmas, mUrcianas, iAnas, the methods for dropping notes on vINA, sthAnas, jAtis, varNAs, alankAras etc. In the second section, the topics like tAla, kalas, layas, pANis, yatis, pANikas, gItikas, gItis, mArgas, concluding remarks. In the Sanskrit verses, the undiscovered words are omitted in five places. Also, the words that are not clear or not clearly regained are put in the square brackets. In the pATHavimarSa portion, the editor says that: “we ourselves have used the square brackets. They indicate portions which have been restored, either by us or by the original editor, purely on the basis of conjecture, without the help of what might be reasonably termed a pADhabheda which for us consists in quotations from the Dattilam in other texts, whether expressly ascribed to Sattila or not. The commentary of the text is quite long from the page 65 to 201. It is in English and in a mild language too. Charts and diagrams are also added in important places.

The text explains each definition and concepts in detail but precisely. One can easily understand the standards and rules used in the earlier time by reading the text. Also, the English translation is very simple and it completely did justice to the Sanskrit text. Such an acute translation needs more effort and scholar hood. In that aspect the text is completely of academic quality and intensity. The core contents of musicology are being unraveled through the verses of Dattila. The text is in the verse form hence a student also can go through it effortlessly.

Conclusion

It's always notable that every book has its own impacts in the society and in the field of academics. It sometimes lays pavement to more controversies, sometimes initiates studies and discussions and people always pay attention to such activities. On this backdrop it can be stated undoubtedly that the book Dattilam will surely enrich the existing realm of knowledge and will motivate students and scholars for further readings and studies. It is really thought provoking and encourages each one for deeper research. Because, it is such a sastric text that deals with musicology in detail with authenticity. Still, the date and the author or the text is not discovered and fixed. Thus, it has become the responsibility of students and scholars of Sanskrit as well as arts to continue with new studies on the basis of Dattilam and also to extend the knowledge that has been unwrapped by the very text. So, it can be stated the work Dattilam holds an important position in the new Sanskrit research scenario and thus the reviewing of such an important text is too significant. It's the responsibility of both the art and Sanskrit students to learn more on the basis of this text as it purely talks about the art of music, its scientific knowledge, through the medium of Sanskrit language. Many concepts in the text such as the division of arts etc. are notable too. So, the blend of Sanskrit

and music should be there behind each study based on Dattilam. It may be helpful to draw new lines in the horizon of wisdom and human effort.

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