

Chennai Kalakshetra 07-09-2009

Director Dear Leela Samson, Friends,

Inviting me to the guest of honour at this function is a privilege extended to me and to the institution that I am presiding, Kerala Kalamandalam, now elevated to the status of a University. Kalamandalam and Kalakshetra are sister-institutions inheriting common traditions. Both these institutions came up due to the tireless efforts of two great visionaries Vallathol Narayanan Menon and Rukuminidevi Arundel. Both were searching our roots to find out the cultural identity of our nation. Another bond between us is the love for Kathakali and Dance. Earlier Acharyas like the reputed Chandu Panicker led and now my esteemed friend Sri. Sadanam Balakrishnan leads the faculty. The highest number of enrollment in Kalamandalam is for Dance-Mohiniyattam with Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi as subsidiaries. All these make my journey to Kalakshetra a pilgrimage and I am deeply indebted to Dr. Leela Samson and her colleagues for giving a chance to me to interact with the artists and connoisseurs of Kalakshetra.

I

The three-day workshop will provide ample opportunities for all of you to learn more about the intricacies and aesthetics of Kathakali. I need not go into those details now. I would like to share with you, very briefly, three points.

You all have heard of the great Kathakali maestro Vazhenkada Kunchu Nair. He was our first principal. His birth centenary is being celebrated this month. An instance in his life shocks me even now. It was in the forties. He was participating in a three-day Kathakali workshop in Bombay. Things went on well. Last day Kunchu Nair's Vesham was that of Rukmangada. He was stepping to the stage. A telegram from home. His wife expired! No body knew this. His performance that day was extra-ordinarily marvelous നാഥാ ജനാർദ്ദന! There was all-round excitement in the audience. Leaving the stage he fell down in the greenroom and wept.

How can we explain this phenomenon? The husband in Kunchu Nair was burning in grief; but on stage he forgot the man in him. He was in a trans mood. Perhaps the fire in his heart supplied more vigor and energy to the artist in him. After this, like a fallen angel he fell down to the mortal world and broke down weeping for his wife.

This is art and this is the experience on stage. Aesthetic enjoyment is a beautiful illusion created by the actors. Abhinavagupta uses a beautiful image to express this idea- *alatachakra*. When a fire stick is rounded in great speed, it creates a fire-band, a circle of fire. This is the magic of acting. There are many things on the stage-acting, music, melody etc. The ensemble does not affect the audience. Their experience is a total bliss, forgetting every thing around. This totality, distinct from the parts, is created by the actor through സർവ്വാംഗീകാരം. This is the principle of *Lavanya* laid down by Anandavardhana. *Lavanya* in Sanskrit means salt. Dishes will have no taste with out salt. But salt is seen nowhere in the curry. Its presence is invisible

നിലീന സാന്നിദ്ധ്യം. Secondly, salt cannot be used as such. It makes feel its presence through others. അവയവവ്യതിരിക്തം അവയവസംസ്ഥാനാഭിവൃംഗ്യം ചലാവണ്യം.

An artist can achieve this only through suggestive acting. Classical texts prescribe two methods for suggestive acting - one is *Natyadharmi*, and the other is *Padarthabhinaya*. These give opportunity to the actor/dancer for expressing his/her creative genius, histrionic talents and imaginative faculty. Improvisation is possible only in such contexts. This is the *dhwanipaiva* on stage and the secret of success of classical forms. Every performance is new, artistic recreations; none is mechanically repeated. Beauty is defined-ക്ഷണേ ക്ഷണേ..... We re-read a classic; see a performance again and again.

II - Bhava

How do an actor transport the audience to a sublime level in his performance? It is here that we confront with the concept of Bhava. Since this workshop is named after bhava, it will not be out of place to deal it in some detail. Bhava is perhaps the most important concept in our aesthetics. It denotes four, different yet inter-related, concepts-

- i. Bhavati – that which permanently exists- സത്ത they are the sthayi. Bhavayati in the causal comprehends all the modes of communicating the emotions. വ്യാപനം Bharata enumerates 49 bhavas of these 8-sthayins are internal, invisible. They are to be suggestively presented by the remaining 41 co-relatives. Here in lies the challenge before an actor. Performance in this sense forms a bhavaprapancha. Bhava-Bhavana denotes both these concepts-emotion and its communication.
- ii. Another use of bhava is sanchari, 33 as distinct from the 8 sthayins. Valsalyam, bhkti etc. which we use in dance very often come under this category.
- iii. A third meaning of bhava is suggested by Kalidasa in Meghasandesa. മൽസാദ്യശ്യം വിരഹതന്തു വാ ഭാവശമ്യം ലിഖന്തി The yakshapatni has not seen the വിരഹതന്തു of her husband. He was quite handsome in her company. Then how does she draw it? ഭാവശമ്യം She imaginatively reconstructed his body. Bhava here stands for imaginative acting as against the imitative, which is commonly seen.
- iv. Fourth meaning of bhava is നേത്രാഭിനയ. Express the bhava through eyes.
കണ്ഠനോലാപയേത് ഗീതം, പാദാഭ്യം താളമാചരേത്
ചക്ഷുർഭ്യം ദർശയേത് ഭാവം ഹസ്തേനാർത്ഥം പ്രദർശയേത്
(ഭരതാർണ്യം)

Kerala tradition goes a step further and designates നേത്രാഭിനയ for the expression of the suggested sense. Kutiyattam and Kathakali give special importance to the subtle netrabhinaya. An instance from the training of Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair will be of interest in this context.

The maestro of Kathakali Kamandalam Krishnan Nair learned netrabhinaya under Mani Madhava Cakyar for three years. At the end of the course a test was held for the disciple. The master will present a scene. The disciple should explain the details of it. Accordingly, Mani Madhava Cakyar enacted a beautiful women singing. Due to the force of swinging leaves fell down continuously from the tree. Krishna Nair watched the acting and explained. Now came the final question; which tree was it?

The disciple thought for a moment and said:

It seems that it is a tamarind tree.

Teacher replied:

You are almost right. The tree is *amalaki* (Emblic myrobalau, nelli in Malayalam). The leaves of both are similar. Both are small and easy to be mistaken the one for the other. The leaves of tamarind tree will not fall easily.

The acting here was by the movement of the eyes. The women, her swinging, falling of the leaves, its size and genre-all were expressed by the subtle movements of eyes. The saying that Kutiyattam gave eyes to Kathakali became popular after Krishnan Nair received the training from the Cakyar.

III Cosmic Concept

Bhava stands for an emotional complex, which during aesthetic enjoyment is elevated to a sublime cosmic level. Individual *chit* is elevated to *chidakasa*, *chidambaram*. So art operates not in the temporal level but in a universal plane.

ആംഗികം ഭൂവനം യസ്യ വാചികം സർവവാങ്മയം
ആഹാര്യം ചന്ദ്രതാരാദി തം നുമഃ സാതികം കീവം

Melpputter has beautifully described this in his Narayaneeya

യഃ കൃതാ വിശാരദം രജനിയവനികം പ്രോജ്ജലദ്ഭാനുദീപം
ശശ്വതന്തുഷ്ട സമ്പ്രേക്ഷകമഖിലജഗദ് ഭ്രാന്തിനാട്യം വിതത്യ
കർമ്മഘോഷാചൂണ്ഡമാർദംഗികലയവശഗാൻ വാസനാഗാനസക്താൻ
ജീവച്ഛാത്രാൻ മുകുന്ദഃ സ്വയമഭിരമതേ ക്രീഡയൻ സോഽസ്തു ഭൂത്യൈ

The word *kala* means ‘Part’ അംശം It is commonly used in relation to the moon – ചന്ദ്രകല. It is not static. Kala gradually attains *purnima*. Hence the word a *kala* carries the auspicious notion of growth and perfection. Art is our journey to perfection, to the sublime, *sat*.

Coming to Kalakshetra or Kalamandalam is, therefore, a pilgrimage to this blissful perfection.

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