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An Overview Of Aharya Abhinayam In Natya Shastra

ABHIDHANATH.B,

Research Scholar,

Kerala Kalamandalam, Deemed to be University for Art & Culture,

Cheruthuruthi, Thrissur, Kerala

Abstract

Natya Shastra, which is believed to be the basic book of Natya, is the contribution of Bharata Muni. This book explains all the elements related to Natya in 36 chapters. In this, Aharya Abhinayam is included in the 23rd chapter.

Since the book focuses on theatre, the influence of this book on our performing artforms is very less. Since it is a scientific book on Natya, this influence should be observed. Bharata Muni in 23rd chapter as 208 verses, explains everything related to Aharya, such as ornaments, books, theatrical tools and its making, male and female costumes and make up, etc. Aharya, one of the four components of chaturvidhabhinaya, is the primary act done by an actor or actress for their presentation. Though the other three abhinaya namely, angikam, vachikam and sathvikam helps to connect with the character, the fourth aharyam is the factor that helps the audience understand the character more easily by observing the physical appearance itself. The costumes are determined in each art form in accordance with the presentation style of the stage performances. In addition to the general criteria of time, country, age, and nature, there are also symbolic differences in aharyam. Natya Sashtra discusses the basic elements that must be taken into consideration with respect to aharyam in performing artforms. It can be observed in the makeup and costume styles adopted in each artform.

Keywords: Aharyam, Natya Sashtra, artforms, costumes, theatrical tools

Introduction

In the division of Marga and Desi, Natya Shastra has the Margi tradition. Margam is the one that has a strict and well-regulated structure in Natya Shastra. Desi is related to a region and its culture. Desi comes into being when certain measurements or additions are made in the Marga system. Bharatamuni wrote Natya Shastra in 36 chapters with 6000 verses based on the presentation of the theatre. It can be said that until then there was no precise scientific book on Natya. Later, there were many books interpreting Natya Shastra. The most important of them is Abhinavagupta's Abhinava Bharati. Abhinavagupta called Natya Shastra 'Shadsahasri'. Dr. K. G. Paulose said about Natya Shastra in simple words as: "Just as a wild plant, which had grown until then, was

brought into a garden and planted in the right place with the right amount of water and fertilizer, Natya Shastra was composed as a guideline by scientifically recording all the subjects required for Natya.” All the applications according to these Natya Shastra rules in margi form became the ideal theatre play. Later, in the absence of each element, it evolved into other metaphors and sub-metaphors. Based on the division mentioned in Natya Shastra, the indigenous form of Kathakali can be included in the sub-metaphor category.” Bharata Muni says about Natyam “Lokavritanukaranam Natyam” (Natyam is the imitation of the world). He has also defined Nritham (dance) and Nrithyam. In Kathakali Natyam, Nritham and Nrithyam blend. Knowingly or unknowingly, the rules of Natyam Shastra and other applications are related to many art forms like Kathakali and Koodiyattam. Therefore, the subject of this essay is how Aharya is explained in Natyam Shastra.

Review of literature

Aharyam, which is a component of abhinaya that help the connoisseurs to easily connect to the character being portrayed on stage is elaborately discussed in the 23rd chapter of Bharata Muni’s Natya Shasthrum as 208 versus. Modern books like Sri K. P. Narayana Pisharody’s Natya Shasthrum Vol 1 gave immense information in a similar manner. Kathakali Vigyan Kosham by Sri Krishna Kaimal is one of the publications which gave details about each and every aspect of the majestic artform, Kathakali. Aharya Abhinaya is discussed with utmost importance in the Keli Vigyan Kairali, especially volume 2 and in “Aharya Abhinaya in Traditional Performances by R. G. Nair in vol 22 of the same. The Aharya Abhinaya is not just in Kathakali, but in every other performing artforms. K. N. Panicker in his publications Theatre and Ritual: Classical Traditions in South India provides insights into other fields where Aharyam is a part. The age-old Sanskrit theatre Koodiyattam and its aesthetics elaborated in Koodiyattam: The Heritage Theatre of India by K. Gopalakrishan and Aesthetics of Koodiyattam by M.P.S Pillai also serves as a valuable source of information. The mesmerizing behind-the-curtain detailing of Aharyam is well narrated in Nepathyam by Sri P.M Ram Mohan.

Methodology

The study involves an in-depth understanding and overview on the Aharyam aspect of chaturvhabhiyam discussed in The Natya Shasthrum by Bharata Muni. The study is based on descriptive and exploratory approaches. The very elaborate explanations about Aharyam as per Natya Shasthrum is considered through descriptive approach. References from other publications about the currently practiced methods of Aharya abhinaya especially in Kathakali and Koodiyattam is dealt with through exploratory approach. The study points directly to the textual analysis of different components in Aharya Abhinaya as explained in Natya Shasthrum. Field work and witnessing live performances in Kerala Kalamandalam and Margi Theatre, Interviews with renowned artists provided firsthand information. The information gathered from modern day publications like Kathakali Vigyan Kosham, Nepathyam, Koodiyattam: The Heritage Theatre of India along with internet sources and archival materials paved way to a complete analysis incorporating both ancient and recent concepts in the currently prevalent performing artforms.

Analysis and discussion

Aharya Abhinayam

When it comes to the presentation of poetry or drama, the creation of characters relies on Aharya or the methods of costume. This physical form is the first thing enjoyed by audience. Whether it is Koodiyattam, Krishnanattam, Kathakali, theatre or any genre of stage art, Aharya is essential in the creation of characters during the presentation. Aharya is the act of giving the actor the physical appearance of the character. In this way, the actor gets more connected to the character, which makes acting easier. It is said that “So Asmiti Manasasmaran” means that when an actor who has adopted costumes sees his new form in the mirror, he feels

that “I am him”. When he enters the stage with this feeling, acting becomes easier. The audience, in the first sight itself, sees the actor as character and forgets the original person who is acting. This strengthens the enjoyment of the artform. Natya Shastra states that Aharyam has many components and sub-components. Bharata Muni begins the 23rd chapter of Aharya Abhinaya with discussion of Nepathyam. Nepathyam means the place of getting ready, that is, the backstage. The actions performed in this Nepathyam are called the Nepathya karmas (acts). Natya Shastra classifies these actions into four. Pustha, Alankara, Angarachana, and Sajjeevam. The order can differ in the greenroom. The Pustha section should be prepared in advance. The Alankara mentioned afterwards is the wearing of costumes and jewels. The Angarachana is mentioned thereafter. However, an actor first prepares the pustham followed by Angarachana, and then only the wearing of costumes and jewels come.

In this, the Pustha itself is divided into three elements.

Pustham

Pustham is the making of theatrical tools. They are classified as sandhimam, vyajimam and veshtimam.

Sandhimam - Sandhimam is a type of theatrical tools made of various materials such as bamboo, leather, old clothes.

Vyajimam – Tools operating with the help of machines is vyajimam. A wheel and string are used for this.

Veshtimam - Veshtimam is the creating another form by covering an object. Bringing up the physical appearance of a bull or bird by covering a human or any other object can be considered as an example for this.

Art forms like Kathakali and Koodiyattam uses creations through sandhimam and veshtimam. In the category Sangamam, dolls made of animal skin or cloth are given the form of animals. Bheeman lying by covering himself in Keechakavadha is through Veshtimam approach. The scene in which guhan is transporting Rama and Lakshmana in a boat in Ramayana, and the scene where Brahma and Lakshmi appear with a lotus blossom can be included in the vyajimam.

Alankaram

The decorations given through costumes and jewels is Alankaram. There are three categories of alankaram: garlands, ornaments and clothes. Garlands used are made of flowers, rudraksha, ilanjikkuru, etc. The garlands themselves are again divided into five.

Veshtimam: - Those that are wrapped and tied.

Vitatam:- Vitatam is a widely spread garland.

Sanghatyam - Sanghatyam is a garland made by joining several garlands together.

Granthimam:- Orderly arranged on a thread is Grandhimam

Pralambitam:- Pralambitam is a garland that is hung.

Aabharanam (Ornaments)

Neck chains made of metals such as gold and silver are included in ornaments. Ornaments are of four types: Avedyas are those that are worn by making holes in the body, Bandhaniyas are those that are tied and fixed, Aropyas are those that are placed and fixed. Ornaments are separately mentioned for males and females.

Vasthram (Clothes)

They are divided into three categories: Sudham, Vicithram, Malinam. For occasions such as worshipping gods, auspicious rituals, fasting, special days, wedding rituals, and holy rituals, sudham is used regardless of gender. Characters with soft and sober behaviour can generally accept this dress. Vichithram are prescribed for gods, demons, yakshas, rakshasas, kings, and lovers. Malinam are prescribed for mad men, drunkards, travelers, and forest dwellers. Natya Sastra shows a system where white is used for Sudham, multiple colours for vichithrama and black for malinam.

Angaracha

The third element of Aharya is Angarachana. According to Natya Shastra, Angarachana is the artificial changes made to the face and body using colours. The colors used for Angarachana are classified into three categories: swabhavika varnangal (natural colors), samyuktha varnangal (compound colors), and upavarnangal (sub-colors).

The natural are white, blue, yellow, and red. Colors that are formed by combining two colors are called compound colors. Their proportions are also mentioned.

The verse “Sitarakta Samayoge” states that red and white mixed gives the colour of scarlet lotus, and if yellow and blue are mixed, green is produced. When colors are mixed, the rule is that one part for a strong color and two parts for a weak color. However, one part of blue color requires four parts of other colors.

The next thing that is discussed in Natya Shastra is about the mukuda (crowns). The crowns for gods and humans are sloping to the sides and straight on the top. There are three types of crowns. In each variant, the crowns are classified in different forms. The nature of the crowns is determined by the country, caste, age, and circumstances.

Sajjeevam

The fourth part of Aharya is Sajjeevam. Sajjeevam is the use of living things. There are three types of living things: four-legged, two-legged, and legless. Natya Shastra mentions Sajjeevam in three verses. The three types of Sajjeevam are Apada, Dwipada, and Chatuspada. In this, Apada means legless things like snakes, Dwipada means two-legged things like humans and birds, and Chatuspada means four-legged animals. It is said that Sajjeevam can be used with various weapons in war, strife, and urban sieges. Later, the Shmasru Karma is mentioned. These are various forms of beard and moustache.

Weapons

The next category is weapons. He has made it possible to describe their dimensions, methods of manufacture, and the materials required. Bharata Muni describes the characteristics of weapons by saying that weapons should be made according to the dimensions of humans, that it can be described according to logic and principles, that he should guess and find out the characteristics needed and that only characteristics can be described are that of jarajjarama (a weapon) and sword.

Then he talks about the construction of artificial heads. Further, the methods of manufacturing the theatrical tools are explained. Bharata Muni says that the weight of these tools should be relatively low, like that of the ornaments, and that the person who makes a new type of work or sculpture should decide on its shape, dimensions, and characteristics. The last parts of the chapter on Aharya Abhinayam discuss the materials used to make these tools light enough to be suitable for theatrical use, and how they should be made. He also concludes the twenty-third chapter on Aharya Abhinayam by stipulating that weapons should not be used to split, cut, or strike, and that only indicating gestures should be used.

Conclusion

By overviewing the 23rd chapter on Aharya abhinaya in The Natya Shastra which is the first ever book on Natya, we could understand how much importance is being given to Aharya, a part of chaturvidhabhinaya. While the first parts tell us where Aharya Karmas should be performed and how to distinguish between those Karmas, Bharata Muni has not forgotten to elaborate on what materials must be used for the act of Aharya, along with the quality, quantity and colors of the materials used. Although the colors for the body and face makeup are mentioned, the color-making materials are not discussed. It can be understood that artforms such as Kathakali and Koodiyattam relied on painting and the color-making materials of the ritual folk art forms that had continued until then for sources of colour making.

Natya Shastra prescribes separate ornaments for men and women. In Kerala's stage arts, male and female ornaments have been prescribed similar to this. Although there are differences in the names of the ornaments used for men and women, if we look at the positions where the ornaments are used, the way it is used in art forms such as Kathakali and Koodiyattam are related to what is prescribed in Natya Shastra. Natya Shastra specifically states that ornaments should be used appropriately by looking at the mood, expressions and circumstances. This applies to any art. It is essential to seek expert opinion or look at how they have been done before to decide on the materials, measurements and shape of ornaments to be made.

It is said that heavy ornaments should not be used in stage performances as it can hinder the long duration performances. It is also said that gold, pearls and gems should be avoided from the ornaments and that using decorations with gems in proper positions can increase the splendor. This is the model followed in all our stage arts. Bharata Muni justifies the avoidance of heavy ornaments stating the fatigue that can be felt by the actor or actress during performance. There are many reasons to use light wood for gold ornaments in the construction of decorative objects in Kathakali and Koodiyattam. Unlike Pala (blackboard tree – *Alstonia scholaris*), Murikk (Indian coral tree – *Erythrina orientalis*), which is among the lightest, Kumizh (*Gmelina arborea*) is a padumaram, which means it is fairly thick, but cutting and shaping to make ornaments with it makes it lighter. Murikk and Pala cannot be cut and shaped into ornaments as they become brittle and may get damaged easily. Kumizh wood is used to make ornaments according to need and convenience. Therefore, this wood is used for Alankaram (decorations) in performances like Kathakali.

It is said that whoever creates a new work or sculpture determines its form, size and characteristics. Also, new creations made using wood and machines are not suitable for acting and that it makes the performance regrettable. Therefore, it is said that the tools for theatre should not be made with iron or the core of heavy wood, instead wood, leather, cloth, bamboo can be used for tool construction. If made as said, it will be helpful to carry them and use with more ease. The tools for performing artforms have been made by incorporating all these criteria. Therefore, it is necessary for practitioners to examine the Natya Sashtra.

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