

Deviations of Kathakali Dance from *Natyasastra*

Mohan Kumaran. P
Associate Professor,
Dept. of Rabindra Sangit, Dance & Drama,
Sangit-Bhavana, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan.
E mail: mohansanti@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

It is interesting to note that Kathakali dance conveniently ignore some classical theatrics referred in Natyasastra. But such ignorance never affected the total aesthetical values. But then it added some advantages and perfections. So Kathakali without regrets rejected inconvenient instruction of Natyasastra. The article explores diversions of Kathakali from Natyasastra and and I hope such leads may open doors for research by some scholars, one day.

Entire Indian classical dances claims that they belongs to the strict tradition of Natyasastra. However, as sing their own praises, none of them follows Natyasastra as it is. Whole elements deliberated in Natyasastra can only be theoretically/conceptually rebuilt on stage, by any category of Indian classical dance. Maximum Indian classical dancers believe that Natyasastra is an authentic book of commandment and methodology of the dance which they represents or belongs to. But factually Natyasastra is a manuscript on dramaturgy. It signifies a golden era of Sanskrit Indian theatre, that lost its traces somewhere in the theatre history. But we can detect that music and dance stood projected in that days. For that reason, Bharata discourses dance, music and instruments in his authentic work.

Some of the persisting customary Indian theatre shadows Natyasastra to a certain magnitude. In the oldest living theatre, *Kutiyattam* we can trace out some of these *Natyadharmi* elements with almost all details. In Kathakali theatre there are several significant *Natyadharmi* elements well-preserved. But in a detail verification we can find that Kathakali rejects many of the strict instructions of *Natyasastra*. Other Indian Classical dances are also conserving decent amounts of *Natyasastra* directives, but in this article, I am only locating deviations or deliberate steps took by Kathakali from Natyasastra.

In a general survey, we can observe that Kathakali deviates from the rules of Natyasastra for some relevant or valid reasons. Though the elements of Kathakali was existing at the cultural atmosphere of Kerala much earlier, it crystallized as Kathakali, only around 1500 years away from Natyasastra. This lengthy spell made substantial changes in the socio-cultural-aesthetical approaches/attitudes. And it is understandable, that by then, Kathakali became popular or crowd pulling than the classical theatrics mentioned in Natyasastra. Bharata discusses *abhinaya* with all

four divisions and full details as '*angiko vachikaschaiva aharyo satwika smruta*'.¹ But in a factual confirmation we can find out that two of them are totally omitted from Kathakali. The *vachika* section is wholly dodged from Kathakali. One can argue that the background music is the *vachika* section of Kathakali. But one who carefully studied Natyasastra never accept such opinions as Bharata describes how the actor should deal with dialogue rendering and voice modulations with his own effort. This is a predominant and liberation step taken by Kathakali. It was intelligent because the actor, freed from the complications of dialogues, put more effort and attention in his facial expressions. Furthermore the Kathakali actor often gasp due to physical strain and it is hard to speak while he struggles to breathe. Kathakali's expressional acting became more attractive by the escaping of spoken words by the actor.

Satwikabhinaya has been deliberated in Natyasastra as a most vital part of abhinaya by Bharatmuni. As we know *Satwikas* are physical manifestations/exhibitions of mental/emotional conditions. He enumerated eight *satwikas* starting from *sthambha* to *pralaya*.² But interestingly Kathakali never care about four of them. Bharata says that *sweda* (perspiration) to be shown on the body by the actor to convince that he is in a sweating situation. It is so funny to ask the Kathakali actor to show sweating as his entire body concealed with elaborated dressing, costumes and ornamentation. The very next *satwika* is *romancha* (hair stands as spikes). One cannot even imagine about to lookout for *romancha* (as a proof of *bhavas* felt) on the body of a Kathakali actor as the visible parts of body is only hands and fingers. The Kathakali actor shows the *angika* of *romancha* with vibration of shoulder, but it never become close to *satwika* defined by Bharat muni. Another *satwika* is *swarabhanga* (cracked words from broken throat) as a reaction of *bhava* with voice modulation. As the Kathakali actor never uses spoken words no need to say anything about *swarabhanga*.

Change the complexion or skin tone to be displayed as a proof of experiencing *bhava* in accordance to the *vaivarnyam* division of *satwika* category as per instruction of Natyasastra. Since skin of face is not displayed by the Kathakali actor, never arises the question of *vaivarnya* in Kathakali. Subsequently the facial make-up with layers of paint, one never suggest a change on facial complexion. Therefore Kathakali deliberately deviates from *satwikas* without effecting its aesthetical qualities.

The *Vachikas* and *satwikas*³ explained/instructed by Natyasastra are the main rejected elements by Kathakali. But the rejection never effected the extreme expressional acting of Kathakali. There are so many occasions of such avoidances/liberal step outs engaged all over Kathakali, that never put any impact on its aesthetical qualities. Bharata explains the qualities of actors as *Nayika-Nayaka lakshanam*. He cast a black complexioned tall man with heavy voice for villain characters and a white skinned and fare look for hero. As we all know there is no personal identity or mark for any Kathakali actor because the characters are types/categories. But in the case of *Nayikas* of Kathakali, Natyasastra is helpless as the heroine (*nayika*) roles of Kathakali are conducted by men. To Natyasastra, some sensitive and uneasy scenes like cruel killings, disgusting descriptions and even eating to be avoided on stage.⁴ But most Kathakali

stories ends with ferocious fights and brutal killings to create *beebhatsa* (disgust). So, Kathakali deviates or took some liberal steps out from the tight instruction specified by Natyasastra.

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Reference:

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