



Finding the roots of Yakshagana in Natyasastra with special reference to Chaturvidha Abhinaya

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Yakshagana is a traditional art form of Karnataka. In spite of considering, it as a folk art it has retained several classical elements from Sanskrit dramaturgy. Dr. G. S Bhat a Kannada professor and a Yakshagana scholar opines “Yakshagana by its origin is a folk form, which grew as a traditional art form. In Yakshagana tradition and individual talent of the artist go hand in hand. When Yakshagana is seen in the perspective of an artist, classical terms can be noticed. Classifying Yakshagana as a folk or traditional or as a classical form is quite a difficult task. Instead, one can say that Yakshagana is a theatrical form in which the aspects of classical theatrical techniques can be found.”

The constituent elements of Yakshagana are the verses of Yakshagana prasangas.

The story of the prasangas are taken from Indian mythology, compiled in the Vrta, Kanda, Satpadi, Curnika, Dandaka, Vachanas etc. The Vrtas are in Sanskrit; very few are in Kannada. The stories are mainly taken from Kannada literature, some are also taken from Sanskrit literature.

The makeup and costumes of Yakshagana are peculiar. One can see the influence of Bharata’s Natyasastra on this. The makeup and costumes construct a bridge between the earthly characters and heavenly characters. The music of Yakshagana is in classical ragas of Carnatic and Hindustani music.

The stage performance of Yakshagana is closely linked to Natyasastra . The performance starts with a Sabhavanadane or Sabhalakshana which is the preliminary rite of Yaksagaa. The items of preliminaries behind the curtain, consisting of the instrumental music mostly, were meant to create the atmosphere. Then after the curtain is removed we find the offering of worship to the deities, the worship of Jarjara, the recitation of Nandi and the humorous conversation in Trigata etc. The movements of the sutradhara and the assistants are prescribed with different Charis accompanied by

instrumental music. Thus together with the propitiation of the deities, the interest of the spectator is attracted. The use of dance creates a very pleasing atmosphere.

Thus, yaksagana has an exclusive pre play rituals which is very close to purvaranga mentioned in Natyasastra. Of the four Vrittis mentioned in Natyasastra one can find two Vrittis i.e the Arbhati and Bharati very prominent in Yakshagana. Also Yakshagana is called a Navarasa Bharata Nrtya which means a dance form filled with all the Nine Emotions, but Veera and Roudra are prominently seen. According to the story line of the Yakshagana prasangas one can say that it belongs to the Ihamriga type among the ten rupakas mentioned by Bharata in his Natyasastra.

Teachers of Yakshagana teach the art to their students but little they know or convey to their students about the classical techniques involved in this art for. The art of Yakshagana imbibes the characteristics of Sanskrit dramaturgy, unknowingly. The Yakshagana performers and teachers are very less aware about it. Thus Yakshagana has a danger where dancers are doing Anukarane(mimicking) rather than Anusarana i.e. understanding the technique behind it. So it can be said that it is the need of hour in the field of Yakshagana that the classical technicalities involved are identified and codified so that the artists have a valid source to refer for the future use. Thus this project intends to find the aspects of Natyasastra prevailing in Yakshagana by peeping into the art form. A sincere attempt has been made to find, to the extent the four kinds of abhinaya, the performance, the role distribution and other finer aspects of Yakshangana which are influenced by Natyasastra.

Abhinaya is defined to be an art of gesticulation. The word Abhinaya is a Sanskrit word from the root Ni with Upasarga abhi. Nee – means to guide, abhi – towards. When put together it means the art of taking the audience through the meaning or the theme of the subject is Abhinaya. According to Natyashastra, Abhinaya, the art of gesticulation are of four types:

1. Angika
2. Vachika
3. Aharya
4. Satvika

Angika Abhinaya in Natyashastra :

Angika Abhinaya can be defined as expression through physical medium. According to Natyashastra Angika Abhinaya is of three kinds – Sharira, Mukhaja and Chestakrutha.

Shakha, Ankura and Nritta are the three elements of physical expression.

‘Shakha’, literally meaning ‘branch’, is constituted by the Hasta-s or hand gestures.

‘Ankura’ meaning ‘sprout’ represents the sprouting and narration of various ideas by using the Shakha, and Nritta was the expression of ideas using the entire body. This aspect of Angika abhinaya has gone into oblivion in the course of the past four or five centuries, and hence is out of vogue in the present desi-s. Bharata classifies the parts of the body into Anga-s or major limbs and Upanga-s or minor limbs, enlists all the possible movements for them which he advises should to be practised several times as there are the exercises or Vyayama-s that will shape and mould the body and make it supple enough for dance. The Vyayama-s formed the foundation of Nritta. They are so exhaustive that they create an unlimited scope for the artistic use of the body. The **Anga-s** are head, hands, chest, sides, hip, and feet. The **Upangas** include both Mukhaja (facial) and Sharira (corporal/of the body). The Mukhaja upanga-s are eyes, eyebrows, nostrils, lower lip, cheeks and chin. He also adds the eyelids and mouth. The Sharira Upanga-s are neck, shoulders, elbow, belly, thigh and shank. Later works such as Sharangadeva’s Sangita Ratnakara and Jayasenapati’s Nritta Ratnavali classify the body as Anga-s (major limbs), Upangas (minor limbs) and Pratyanga-s (subsidiary limbs). In this process they enlist the variations of the knee, heels, ankle, sole and toes. The use of the technique and its pedagogy were lost.

Nritta lends itself to **3 other classifications**. They are **Vishama** or acrobatic, **Vikata** meaning comic or ludicrous and **Laghu** made up of graceful Karanas.

Vishama evokes wonder or horror, Vikata laughter, and Laghu pleasant sringara. Hence the so called shudha nritta defined commonly as pure-dance itself conveyed and therefore created a responsive feeling. It is because of the inherent inter connection between the body and the mind.

Angika Abhinaya in Yakshagana: A Comparitive Study with Natyashastra

Though many of the Angika abhinaya exhibited in Yakshagana have great inspiration from Natyashastra, It is sad to say that the Angika Abhinaya is not been codified by giving names. There are no names for the movements of head,eyes,neck, hand gestures though they are in exclusive usage. The Yakshagana artists just follow the Parampara by the Guru. There is no training or codification of this

Angika Abhinaya exclusively. But some of the Yakshagana artists opined that there used to be a book called 'Rasika jana manollasa sarasangraha bharatasastra' which the Yakshagana artists used to refer for the Abinaya.

Yakshagana Vyayamas and Bhedas of Natyasastra :

The students are taught the exercises first before they proceed to learn Kunita. All the exercises are performed on right and left i.e. Savya and Apasavya is what they call.

The Sirobheda such as Dhuta, Vidhuta, Anchitam, Lolitam are performed as exercises.

The torso exercises resembles Nata, prasrita, vivartita and Apasrtha.

The exercises for waist are similar to the movements of Kati bheda in N.S such as Udvahitha, Rechita.

In the similar way the eyes, nose, chin, neck etc. has a great resemblance with the movements of respective angas and upangas.

These vyayamas are compulsory for a student to master over the kunitas and are recommended to perform these exercises before the practice sessions.

Hashtabhinaya in Yakshagana (Saka and Ankura) :

Hashtabhinaya is one of the aspect of Yakshagana. Shivaram Karanth points out that "Yakshagana's dance for consists mostly the nr̥tta-aspects of foot-work and rhythmical body-movements-including those the neck, arms and palm. It contains some fine postures, body-flexions, as well as few squatting, jumping and reeling movements. What is lacks is a stylized gesture language employing symbolic mudras to depict parts of speech. The few gestures and symbols used are the ones that one normally uses in his day today conversation"

Many authors like Martha Bush Ashton, B.H Sridhar are of same opinion that Yakshagana does not have much of hand gesture and its importance is on nr̥tta. By these statements by various Yakshagana authorities, it can be observed that, hand gestures are simple and only few in number. But I beg to differ with these authors and scholars because when observed during performances especially the artists of yakshagana of North Canara district depict the objects which occur in the verses of the Yakshagana prasanga, with more hand gestures, than the artists of Badagu tittu and the Twinku tittu do. Also the senior and traditional artists like Mudakani

Narayana Hegde, Kondadakuli Rama Hegde, Murur Krishna Mani, G.P Hasyagar

Timanna Goankar, Shvaram Hegde, Ganapatu Prabhu, Kitappa, Verabhadra

Nayaka, Devaraya Pai, Molahalli Heriya, Govinda Serigara, Kuriya Vittala Sastri, Kargallu Subbanna Bhat and many others extensively used hand gestures, to suggest the object and the phenomena.

Dr. G.S Hegde has done a commendable job about Hasthabinaya in Yaksag ā na. He has found that there are 150 hand gestures used in Yaksag ā na. He says the hand gestures used in Yakshagana are derived from Abhinayadarpana and Natyasartra.

“In Yakshagana even though the practice of two hand Gesture (single and double hands) is there they do not bifurcate as Samyutha and Asamyutha Hand Gestures. **Exhibition of hand-gestures :**

Since the Yakshagana artists learn the hand gestures according to usage but not in a systematical way of naming them and the usage of hasta in the form of slokaṣ below list has been made to explain the applicability of various hand gestures.

Traditional artists of the Yakshagana describe various objects with the help of the hand – gesture Pataka hasta as follows :

1. Starting of dance :
2. Horse
3. Sleeping
4. Proceeding
5. Sea – River
6. Splendor
7. Wind
8. Garden/Forest
9. Benediction
10. Promising

11. Throne or cot
12. Mirror
13. Sun/Moon
14. Flag
15. Cutting
16. Soldiers
17. Gathering
18. Entrance
19. Eyes
20. Friendship and marriage
21. Gods

The following object are shown by Śikara hasta by the artists :

1. The King
2. Bow
3. Questining
4. Bell
5. Brushing of the teeth

6. Valour

Musti hasta is used for the following abinaya.:

1. Wrestiling
2. Beard

Uses of Suci hasta can be mentioned as below:

1. Showing corner, moon and Sun
2. Beloved
3. Amazement

Mrigasira Hasta is used by the artists to show the following :

1. Male- Female
2. Calling
3. Wearing the holy ash
4. Home/Place

Sarpashira hastha is also used by the artists to denote certain things like :

1. Serpent
2. Elephant
3. Arms of the wrestlers

Usually actors of the Yakshagana especially from Badagu tittu make use of Simhamukha hasta to show animals like :

1. Deer
2. Elephant
3. Other animals like Cow, horse and other timid animals

Alapadma Hasta denote the following meaning :

1. Lotus
2. Breast
3. Elephant
4. Putting on the vermilion mark
5. Questioning

Hamsasya hasta is very commonly used in Yakshagana. This hasta most of the time is used by the artist according to their whims and fancies. But the traditional artist will not use any hastas according to whims and fancies. Here are some of traditional usage of this hasta listed down :

1. Marriage and Garland
2. God Cupid
3. Beauty
4. Pearls
5. Wife

Urnanabha hasta is used to denote cruel animals like tiger lion and the demons. When this hasta is kept at the side of the chest with roaring sentiment, it indicates the tiger. The same action along with open mouth and pulled out tongue, shows the lion.

Mukula is rarely used in today's Yaksagana. The traditional artists used these hasta to denote the following:

1. Donation
2. The birds, calf etc

Not much of the combined hand gestures mentioned in Natyasastra are being used in Yaksagana.

Some of the Hastats used are Anjali, Karkata, Pushpaputa and Makara.

Anjali hasta is used for doing salutations. With the help of Karkata hasta the artist exhibits the coyness or amoroussentiment. Pushpaputa hasta is used for denoting receiving something, begging, Giving Arghya, Showing Arati etc. Makara hasta is used to denote fish, Matsya Avatara.

Nrta hastas mentioned in Natyasastra are hardly seen in Yaksagana. But the extensive use of Hasta Karana Vyavartitha and Parivartita are seen. When an artist starts dancing from the beginning position, he starts moving his hands in Vyavartita and parivarita. The Nrta in Yakshagana does not

involve any gestures. But the Vivartita and Parivartita Hasta Karanas can be seen in their hand movements during Nrta. It has to be noted that the concept of Soutsava exists in Yakshagana though not called by the exact name.

Kunita:

The Kunita is nothing but a colloquial term used for Nrta in Yaksagana. Nrta though plays a very prominent role in Yakshaganais not elaborate and varied as he 'Tirmanas' and 'Adavu' 'Jatis', but still attractive and effective. The Kunita has many aspects of Bharata Natyasastra, but this has never been codified in Yaksagana. Artists feel codifying the Nrta aspect leads to the loss of creativity in Dance.

Kunita comprises of stances and movements which can be compared with the Sthanas, Charis, Karnas, Mandalas of Natyasastra.

Sthanas:

Bharata in N.S gives six sthanas for men and three for women. All the Sthanas mentioned in N.S are being used in Yaksagan a.

The basic stance of Yakshaganais "demi plie" or Mandalam of N.S. Demi plie with more space between the legs is also used to depict the demonical characters which in N.S is called Mandala(Aindra Mandala). Aleeda and Pratyaleeda Stanas are used to show lifting a bow or during the time of war. Sama sthana with feet in Trayasra can be considered as normal position in Yaksagana. Vaishnava and Vishaka Stanas are used while indicating something when conversing with the other characters and showing the objects in the sky.

The stree stanas are used by the stree veshas(female disguise). The normal standing posture of the streevesha will be in either avahita or ayatam. Ashvakrantam is not much seen in the Yakshagana performance.

Caris and Karanas :

As mentioned earlier there is no nomenclature for any movements in Yaksagana. The movements are traditionally learnt from the Guru. But the usage of some Caris can be seen. But the Yakshagana artists hardly know that these are derived from N.S.

Bhu Caris like Janita, Samapada, Stitavartha, Adyartika, Vichava, Bhadda , Syndita Apasyandita are in usage. AkashaCharis like Atikranta, Parshvaranta, Urdva janu, Danda,Bramari are in usage though not in the exact form.

Since Yakshagana is a desi dance form most of the movements from Marga technique are either lost or not adopted exactly from the Marga technique. Traces of some Karnas can be found in this art form. Samanakam, Unmattam , Goornitam ,Vaishakarechitam,Bramaram, Chakra mandalam, Vinivrttam , Janitam can be seen in a vague form.

Mandalas : Veera and Roudra rasa being prominent in Yakshagana prasangas, Mandalas have prominent role to play in a performance. The fights on the stage are done in the idealistic style(Natyadharmi).The two characters engaged in fight first exchange strong words, then decide to settle the issue and thus begins the fight. This fight is nothing but a dance sequence in which two actors on stage cross each other, take a circular movement with other pugilistic movements. The dance ends with shooting of arrow by producing a sound on their bow sticks. It is interesting to note that the “Yudda Kunitha” of Yakshagana has striking similarities with the Mandalas of Natyashastra.Mandala like Lalita sanchara, Soochividda,Krantha,Bhramara are comparable with the movements in Yudda Kunitha.

Conclusion:

South Indian states like Kerala, Tamilnadu, Andhra and Karnataka, are known for stage crafts. Kutiyattam, Kathakali,Kuchipudi,Bhagavata mela and Yakshagana are some of them These forms contain some elements of Abhinaya or gesticulation in them. Popular ballads of ancient times may also be supposed to be sung with some sort of Abhinaya. These art forms can be witnessed even now a days in the Gambira, the Gajan, and the Nalapuja(of Bengal) and Ramlila(of Uttarpradesh).The Mahavrata- ceremony of the Vedic times probably presented such art forms.

This also implies in case of Yakshagana. Even though Yakshagana is not considered as a classical art form, it contains dramaturgical elements like nrta, nrtya, natya, bhava, rasa,tala,raga and gestures. Also, the various factors like Vritti, Dharmi, stage presentetation of the play has a very close relationship with Sanskrit dramaturgy, especially Natyasastra. Also, there are several things which had been derived from Natyasastra but are unfortunately lost with the lapse of time. The hand gesticulation these days are hardly used by the artists, which in earlier days were used extensively.

Globalization and modernization have a significant influence on art form. As it's an age of fast food, people hardly have time or patience to watch a overnight show of Yakshagana. The lengths of the Yakshagana shows have come down to three hours. This forces to cut short various rituals and

preliminaries of the show. The students who learn Yakshagana want to quickly go on the stage and perform. Which has resulted in shallow knowledge of art among the performers. Today number of Yakshagana performer can be found but with no knowledge about the dance they perform. When asked about the reasons behind the hand gestures or a particular standing posture or a movement performed most of the artists are unable to answer regarding the technicalities involved in it.

So the need of hour was to identify and codify certain aspects which are prevailing in Yaksagana with respect to some authorized source. Natyasastra being the oldest text for dramaturgy had definitely an influence on Indian art forms. An effort is made through this paper to identify the factors Natyasastra present in Yakshagana. This would help the younger generation learning Yakshagana, and also the teachers of Yakshagana to know Yakshagana in a more technical way.