

Bhagavata Mela Nataka (Dance-dramas of Melattur)

Text and Photographs

by

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The source-book of the various forms of Indian drama is invariably Bharata's compendium, the *Natyashastra*. The actual text and the commentary on this work contain a veritable mine of information about the technique and production of drama. The *Natyashastra* refers to a class of dramas called the *Dasharupaka-s*, the ten varieties of drama. They are listed in Chapter XVIII¹ and the technique of presenting these drama forms is described exhaustively at various points in the *Natyashastra*.

One striking feature of *Natya* is its intimate connection with dance which formed an integral part of drama. The essential nature of the term *Natya*, derived from its etymology, is very suggestive. In *Harivamsha* (circa 200 A.D.), we meet with the expression *natakam nanrutuh* (they danced a play) and Rajashekhara's *Karpuramanjari* (circa 1000 A.D.) has the expression, *Sattam nachchidavvam* (a *Sattaka* is to be danced or acted).

Varadraja Perumala temple at Melattur



On the contemporary Indian stage we notice two parallel streams: one of the solo dance and the other of dance-drama. The classical Indian drama is denoted by the term *rupaka*. The ancient Indian play was presented through words, gestures, postures, costumes, make-up, song and dance. Whenever necessary, instrumental music was also played. But these different elements did not play an equal part in all the plays. However, with the passage of time, a different genre of dramas with greater emphasis on dance and music developed. Many minor varieties of forms were classified in the post-Bharata period. These derivative types were termed as *Uparupaka-s* and they employed the principles laid down in the *Natyashastra*. Kohala² appears to be the most important writer next to Bharata. He seems to have codified and described these new types of drama and dramatic presentations. Kohala's work, however, is now lost to us but Abhinavagupta in his commentary on the *Natyashastra* often quotes from his writings.

The *Uparupaka* Chapter of the *Natyashastra* is very important for an understanding of the history and development of Indian dance-dramas. The Sanskrit drama, as envisaged by Bharata, appears to be in the nature of a dance-drama with music and dance movements. Roughly speaking the history of dance could be divided into two periods: from the second century B.C. to the ninth century A.D., and from the tenth century A.D. to the eighteenth century A.D. During the first period Sanskrit exercised a firm hold on intellectual life and its rich literature endowed the development of all arts in the country with unity and continuity. In the second period there was a marked development of the regional styles. The latter half of this period coincides with the growth of the various regional languages. The Sanskrit tradition continues beyond the tenth century A.D., suggesting what happened not only to the dramatic tradition but also to the theatrical traditions of India. By the time of *Karpuramanjari*³ it is evident that the pure drama form had given place to the musical play which was perhaps known earlier but had not become so popular with the dramatist. *Karpuramanjari* has been called a *Sattaka*, a theatrical form, which is mentioned in the inscriptions of Bharhut, but a form of which no other literary examples seem to have survived. The growth of the musical play later on generally determined the dance-drama forms of the regional languages in the later medieval period. *Karpuramanjari* was perhaps akin to what is today known as the operatic dance-drama.

This brings us closer to the *Uparupaka* chapter of the *Natyashastra* treatises. The classification of many varieties of the *Uparupaka-s* found in *Abhinavabharati*, *Shringaraprakasha*, *Bhavaprakasha*, *Natyadarpana*, *Natakalakshanaratnakosha* and other texts include the *Kavya* and the *Chitrakavya* types of the *Uparupaka-s*. Of the two, *Chitrakavya* appears to have provided the inspiration to writers and *vaggeyakara-s* to model their own works on similar lines. Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* is an excellent example; it wielded a far-reaching influence on the development of the *Uparupaka* forms in the succeeding period. It occupies a key position in the history of both music and dance. It not only inspired numerous Sanskrit imitations but led to the flowering of a class of musical dance-dramas⁴ in the local languages (sometimes mixed with Sanskrit) in different part of the country. The com-



Patrapravesha daru (Lilavati from Prahlada Charitram)

positions of Shankaradeva of Assam, of Umapati of Bihar, the Bhagavata Mela Natakas of Tamilnadu, the Yakshagana, Kuchipudi dance-dramas of Andhra, the Yakshagana of Karnataka, the Krishnattam and the Kathakali of Kerala all turn to the *Gita Govinda* as the ultimate source of their inspiration.

The dance-drama forms which developed in Andhra and Tamilnadu are thus a continuation of the tradition of the *Gita Govinda*. Inscriptions of the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries support the existence of the dance-drama tradition in Andhra, Tamilnadu and Karnataka. Numerous theatrical diversions composed of music, dance and drama known as the Brahmana Mela appear to have existed in these regions. The Chola inscriptions⁵ refer to a variety of drama called the *Ariyakuttu*, which was staged in the temples and it is not difficult to see, in this the Brahmana Mela, a Sanskritic, if not a Sanskrit, tradition of plays and performances.

The Bhakti movement and its influence in nurturing these art forms in the Andhra, Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Kerala region has been all-embracing in the spheres of the Performing and the Plastic Arts. Prior to the eleventh-twelfth century the tradition had been strongly Shaivite. With the appearance of the *Gita Govinda*, and its subsequent impact on the popular imagination, the religious impulse was directed towards the worship of Vishnu and his manifestations, particularly that of Krishna.

Thus the tradition of the Bhagavata Mela Nataka in Andhra and Tamilnadu came into being as a result of the Bhakti movement. Two devout poets, Tirtha Narayana Yati and Siddhendra Yogi, employed this art of

dance, music, song and drama using themes from the *Shrimad Bhagavata* and other *Purana*-s to extoll the principle of Bhakti. The artistes who practised this art came to be known as Bhagavatatulus in Andhra and Bhagavatars in Tamilnadu.

Of the two traditions of Brahmana Melas, the Kuchipudi dance-drama tradition appears to be an earlier one. The Brahmana Bhagavata Mela form of the Kuchipudi village dates back to 1502 A.D., to the reign of the Vijayanagar king, Vira Narsimha Raya and is mentioned in the Machupalli Kaifiat⁶ of the local records.

After the fall of the Vijayanagar Empire several Natyacharyas, along with other scholars and pandits from Andhra, found patronage under the Nayak kings of Tanjavur. In terms of the historical time-span, the Bhagavata Mela Nataka tradition is traced to the period of the Nayak kings of Tanjavur. One of them Achyutappa Nayak⁷ (1572-1614), followed the tradition set by his father, Sevappa Nayak, and extended patronage to artistes, and during his reign the arts flourished in Tanjavur and its environs.

It is probable that the Kuchipudi Brahmin Bhagavatatulus were among those who migrated to Tamilnadu and developed the art of Bhagavata Mela Nataka at the village of Achyutapuram (present-day Melattur) on the model of the Kuchipudi dance-dramas using the then prevalent technique of Bharata Natyam.

It was customary for the kings to donate villages and land to Brahmin families.⁸ Legend has it that King Achyutappa gifted away a village to 510 Brahmin families for the sole purpose of propagating and perpetuating the art of dance-drama and encouraging the spirit of Bhakti among his subjects. The *agraharam* thus formed was named after him and it is this village which has come to be known as Melattur. Each family received a house, a well and some acres of land. Melattur thus became the centre of fine arts as practised by the recipients of the village.

Tirtha Narayana Yati, the author of *Krishnalilatarangini*, was a sanyasin of Advaitic persuasion. He completed and dedicated his musical play on the story of Lord Krishna (from his birth to the marriage with Rukmini) at Varahur in the Tanjavur district, where he established a *Bhajan Sampradaya*. His followers sang, danced and presented through gesture this play during the Janmashtami celebrations. Thus Tirtha Narayana Yati was one of those who enriched the Bhagavata tradition in the Tanjavur district.

The *Krishnalilatarangini* is one of the numerous works written in the wake of the *Gita Govinda* of Jayadeva and is acclaimed to be the only one among such works to have gained or maintained a comparable musical status. It is written in perfect literary Sanskrit, a fact to be specifically noted. This is because later on, though Sanskrit was handled for music compositions and even though Telugu was included, the style was dominated by Sanskrit. But by then the grammatical and literary equipment of composers became a secondary qualification.

Krishnalilatarangini is in twelve *taranga*-s; the songs are linked by verses and there are prose (*gadya*) passages. It is composed as a regular dance-drama and there are directions that such and such a context is being sung and accompanied by gesture in the next piece and so on. There are also rhythm syllables (*sollukattu*-s) of the Bharata Natyam technique. These *sollukattu*-s are utilized for the sole purpose of dancing. Tirtha Narayana Yati also wrote several poems, *padam*-s, *javali*-s and plays. *Parijata*, *Rukmangada Charitram*, *Rukmini Kalyanam* and *Kamsavadham* are among his better known plays.

The disciples of the saint continued this tradition of dance-dramas in order to propagate Bhakti. Among them the name of Gopalakrishna Shastri deserves special mention. The name of his son, Venkatarama Shastri, is, of course, a household word in the South. To Venkatarama Shastri goes the credit of writing the dance-dramas of the Bhagavata Mela Nataka tradition as it has come down to us in present times. Gopalakrishna Shastri composed *Sita Kalyanam*, *Dhruva Charitram*, *Gauri Charitram*, *Kuchela Charitram*, *Draupadi Vastraharanam* and *Rukmini Kalyanam*. These compositions were used mainly for Harikatha performances and not for dance-dramas. But Venkatarama Shastri's compositions are to this day used for enacting dance-dramas. The following twelve dance-dramas are ascribed to him: *Prahlada Charitram*, *Markandeya*, *Usha Parinayam*, *Rukmangada*, *Gollabhama*, *Sita Kalyanam*, *Rukmini Kalyanam*, *Dhruva Charitram*, *Kamsavadham*, *Harishchandra*, *Shivaratri Vaibhavam* and *Bhasmasuravadham*.

Venkatarama Shastri was a great Sanskrit scholar. Sanskrit verses figure as quotations in the dialogues of his works. However, since the language of the court was Telugu, he followed the prevailing custom and composed these dance-dramas in Telugu. He lived during the reign of the Maratha kings of Tanjavur, Raja Sarfoji (1800-1832) and Raja Shivaji (1832-1855); he was a younger contemporary of Adippayya and the elder contemporary of Mallavji and the famous saint-poet Tyagaraja.⁹

The art of Bhagavata Mela Nataka also spread to five other villages in the Tanjavur district: Soolamangalam, Saliyamangalam, Oothakadu, Nallur and Theperumanallur. Though Melattur has, from the earliest times, been the fountainhead of the Bhagavata Mela art, dance-dramas of a similar type were also enacted in connection with the local Vaishnavite temple festivals. Recent researches¹⁰ point to the custom being in existence in many holy places, for example, in Kivalur, near Tiruvarur. Even before the time of Melattur Venkatarama Shastri, certain Telugu dramas believed to have come from Andhra Pradesh were enacted in Oothakadu. *Prahladan*, *Rukmangada*, *Vipranarayana* and *Sita Kalyanam* were performed in Saliyamangalam twice a year during the Ramanavmi *utsavam* and during the local temple festival. It is claimed that they are older than the compositions of Venkatarama Shastri. The enactment of *Gollakalapam* suggests a definite link with the Kuchipudi dance-dramas. At Theperumanallur different versions of *Prahlada Charitram* are enacted with Sanskrit, Telugu and Tamil verses. At Kuttanur, the Bhagvatars used to stage *Rukmangada* in Tamil for seven nights.



Lilavati

The dance-dramas of Venkatarama Shastri have been more or less regularly enacted for the last 175 years at Melattur during the Narasimha festival. Several Bhagavatars of great distinction and merit have contributed towards sustaining this art. Among them the name of the late Natesh Iyer stands out prominently. He was a great exponent of this art and a nattuvanar endowed with deep knowledge. The noted pioneer, E. Krishna Iyer, studied Bharata Natyam under him. Two of Natesh Iyer's disciples, Kodanda Rama Iyer and Bharatam Nallur Narayanswami, also played a significant part in preserving the tradition.

The structure of the dance-drama follows the Sanskritic and the Shastric conventions. There are songs, dances, dialogues and speeches in the gradual unfolding of the play. The gestures and postures (*angika*), words (*vachika*), the representation of temperament (*sattvika*), costumes and decoration, make-up (*aharya*) — all these elements give *Natya* its characteristic form. The Bhagavata Mela Nataka tradition employs all these elements.

The technique of Bhagavata Mela Nataka incorporates all the three aspects of the histrionic art as expounded in the *Natyashastra* treatises. *Nritta* (pure dance), *Nritya* (expressional dance) and *Natya* (drama) find sufficient scope in the enactment of the dance-dramas. The pure dance flourishes with footwork and the movement of the limbs; *adavujathi*-s and *teermanam*-s are employed at several junctures in the play. The pure dance movements are austere. With exquisite lineaments, arabesques, triangles, parabolas, horizontal and vertical lines, they weave fascinating patterns and the movements are performed in three *kala*-s: *Vilambita*, *Madhya* and *Druta*.

Abhinaya follows the accepted conventions, using the *angika* aspect with hand gestures and facial expressions to intensify the emotional content of the song. In these aspects the technique of Bharata Natyam is closely followed.

The element of speech (*vachikabhinaya*) brings the form closer to the concept of *Natya*—drama proper. The conventions of *Lokadharmi* (the realistic and more natural) and the *Natyadharmi* (stylized) are employed in the presentation.

On the occasion of Narasimha Jayanti (which falls in the month of May or June) Melattur village (situated at a distance of twelve miles from Tanjavur) wears a festive look for about a week.

Melattur has three long streets with two rows of houses occupied by Brahmin families who claim descent from those to whom the village was originally donated. A *pandal* was built opposite the Varadaraja Perumal temple and dramas were staged on one side of the street on the same level as the audience. The light used was that of the big earthen lamps placed on trunks of plantain trees. There were no curtains, mikes and other modern appliances.

Today we see the temple deity being brought in a procession and placed in a mandapam about a hundred feet away, facing the stage. The convention now is to stage the dance-dramas in the divine presence. The dance-drama begins with the entrance of the *konangi* or a buffoon, who dances for a few minutes, his pranks provoking laughter. He is a direct link with the ancient drama tradition. He attracts the attention of the audience and utters 'Sadhu' 'Sadhu', requesting them to be silent. After his exit the musicians enter and sing *Todayamangalam*, beginning with the words *Jaya Janaki Ramana Jaya Vibhishana* in *raga* Nata. They sing *Prahlada Pattabhisheka Shabdham*, if the play to be enacted is *Prahlada Charitram*. They also recite several scintillating *sollukattu*-s. Then, as an offering of respect, the Bhag-avatars are presented with sandal paste and flowers by an elder of the village. These formalities are observed at the beginning, during the enactment of the play, and are not repeated later on.

After these preliminaries a young boy with the mask of the elephant-head presents the *Patrapravesha daru* of Ganapati. He dances to the rhythm of the music provided by the musicians who sit in one corner. Sometimes this item is performed by a boy whose parents have taken a vow to present him on the stage. By his appearance in the role of Ganapati the vow is considered to be fulfilled. Then the dance-drama proper begins. The chief characters introduce themselves from behind a piece of cloth held by two stage hands. The characters sing along with the musicians and dance enacting *abhinaya* with appropriate *hasta*-s and facial expressions. The *hasta*-s employed follow the text of *Abhinayadarpana* and the scheme of facial expressions has for its basis the technique of *abhinaya* as laid down in the *Natyashastra*. These entrance songs (the *Patrapravesha daru*-s) generally offer a description of the character.

These *daru*-s afford a direct link with the *Natyashastra* tradition. The *Dhruvadhya*¹¹ of the *Natyashastra* refers to five kinds of *Dhruva*-s (*daru*-s) depending on their place and specific function. The first is the entrance *daru* (*Praveshiki*), which introduces the character who appears on the stage. The actor-dancer also sings and introduces the character he is impersonating, either in the third person or in the first person depending on how the song has been composed. Abhinavagupta rightly observes that these songs are called *Dhruva*-s because they stabilize, or form the basis of the production and their themes are of fixed significance. The other *daru*-s employed in the Bhagavata Mela Nataka are the *Samvada daru* (also called *Uttarapratyuttara daru*) where two characters converse, and *Svagata daru*, soliloquy songs. The characters express their sentiments in a certain context and most of these *Svagata daru*-s suggest a mood of sorrow or helplessness.

The dance-drama progresses from one scene to another. Besides songs there are regular *vachanam*-s (prose dialogues). Various other literary verse forms, like *Padya*-s, *Shabdama*-s, *Shloka*-s, *Churnika*-s, *Pada-varna*-s, *Shisam*-s, *Shishardhama*-s, *Kandama*-s, *Kandardham*-s also appear in these dance dramas. Along with the poetic diction they blend with the dance and *abhinaya* at every stage. On the whole, the impression is one of a remarkable synchronisation of music, speech, dance and *abhinaya*, producing a highly aesthetic appeal which is aimed at *rasanubhava*.

Venkatarama Shastri had a thorough acquaintance with the technique of music and dance; his play, *Prahlada Charitram*, is considered one of the finest examples of this art form. This is so not only by virtue of the theme, but because of the excellence of the composition and it is the most frequently produced play in the Bhagavata Mela tradition.

The drama centres round the devotion of Prahlada¹² to Lord Vishnu whom the mighty and invincible Hiranyakashipu wishes to avenge for killing his brother Hiranyaksha. After practising severe penance, Hiranyakashipu has obtained a boon from Lord Brahma: he would not be killed by any being in Brahma's creation; he would not die indoors or outdoors, during the night or day. There was also a warning from the heavens that when he began to persecute his son, Prahlada, the God would slay him.

Prahlada worshipped Vishnu and all the attempts made by Hiranyakashipu failed to deflect him from the path of devotion. Finally, Hiranyakashipu told his son that if his God was present everywhere, why did he not appear and enter into combat with him? He struck a pillar from where emerged a strange creature half-lion and half-man (Narasimha). The king was amused to see him and challenged him, whereupon the Lord in that form killed the demon king and protected his devotee.

In the Bhagavata Mela Nataka tradition when the king strikes the pillar, the actor impersonating Narasimha (with a mask) appears from behind the stage. He goes into a trance and the stage hands put a scarf round his middle to prevent him from attacking Hiranyakashipu. Hiranyakashipu climbs down from the stage and walks among the spectators, who stand up to create a passage that leads to the temple. Hiranyakashipu carries on an exciting dialogue with Narasimha. The atmosphere is electrifying and the audience is thrilled. In the dialogue between the king and Narasimha, Venkatarama Shastri's text is replete with the doctrines of Bhakti and Vedanta. The audience hails the actor, playing the role of Hiranyakashipu, for his histrionic ability. Following the *Natyashastra* tradition, scenes of death and war are narrated. The killing of Hiranyakashipu, the ripping open of his stomach are not depicted. The king is vanquished symbolically.

Later on flowers and lamp *arati* are offered to the actor with the mask of Narasimha. Prahlada, Bhudevi, Lilavati, all climb down from the stage and along with Hiranyakashipu walk through the passage to the temple and cir-

A scene from *Prahlada Charitram*





Narasimha (with a mask) in a trance



Hiranyakashipu among the spectators

cumambulate the deity inside. The Bhagavatars sing a song in *Bhupala raga* (*Kamalanayana purnapurusha*), one most appropriate for the morning and the mood of early dawn. After offering *deeparadhana* rice to the deity, the actors walk through the streets of the village receiving honours at every house. Then they go to another temple in another street and offer prayers before the mask is removed. Sometimes the actor wearing the mask goes into a trance and remains motionless when the mask is removed. Water is then sprinkled on him and he recovers to resume his normal state. Once again the benedictory verses are recited. This is one of the most fascinating spectacles of our living theatre.

It is said that at the time of Natesh Iyer, ten dance-dramas by Venkatarama Shastri used to be staged in Melattur and the tradition was sustained till his death in 1930. In 1938, the present group of artistes led by G. Swaminathan took over the formal enactment of the plays. From 1938 to 1942 they presented two plays every year, *Prahlada Charitram* and *Markandeya*. From 1943 to 1951 they added two more plays: *Rukmangada* and *Usha Parinayam*. In 1952, *Harishchandra Nataka* (in two parts) was added. Since then four dance-dramas *Prahlada Charitram*, *Harishchandra* in two parts, *Usha Parinayam* and *Markandeya* are staged every year. In recent times *Rukmini Kalyanam* has been revived and plays like *Vipranarayana* added to the repertoire.

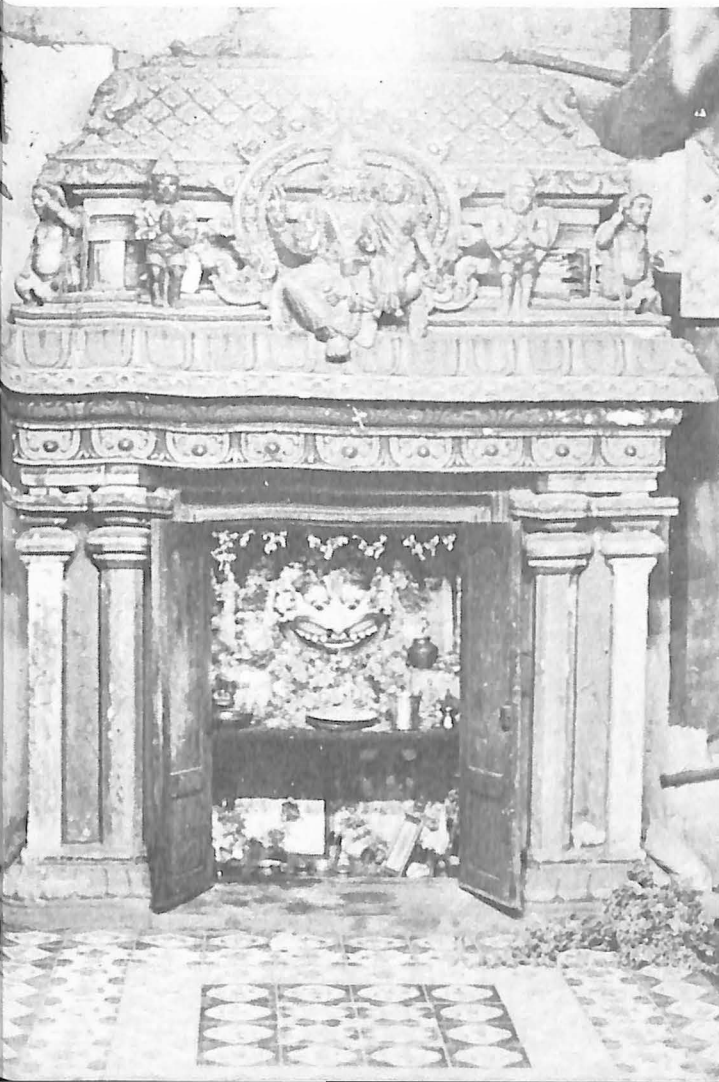
The most important Bhagavatar after the demise of Natesh Iyer is Balu Bhagavatar who lives in retirement at Melattur. He is more than eighty years old and can hardly guide the group. He is the last of the generation which knew the art in its varied aspects. In the remaining five villages the tradition is virtually dead. At Theperumanallur, feeble attempts are being made to revive the tradition with the help of the oldest living *natyacharya* T. V. Natesh Bhagavatar.

The late E. Krishna Iyer's contribution in reviving this tradition is most significant. In 1950, along with Rukmini Devi he visited Soolamangalam to organize the festival of these dance-dramas. Until his death in January 1968, he made strenuous efforts to put them on a sound footing. He also initiated the plans for building an open-air theatre on the plot of land donated by V. D. Swamy of Melattur. However the performing artistes prefer to present the dance-dramas in front of the temple.

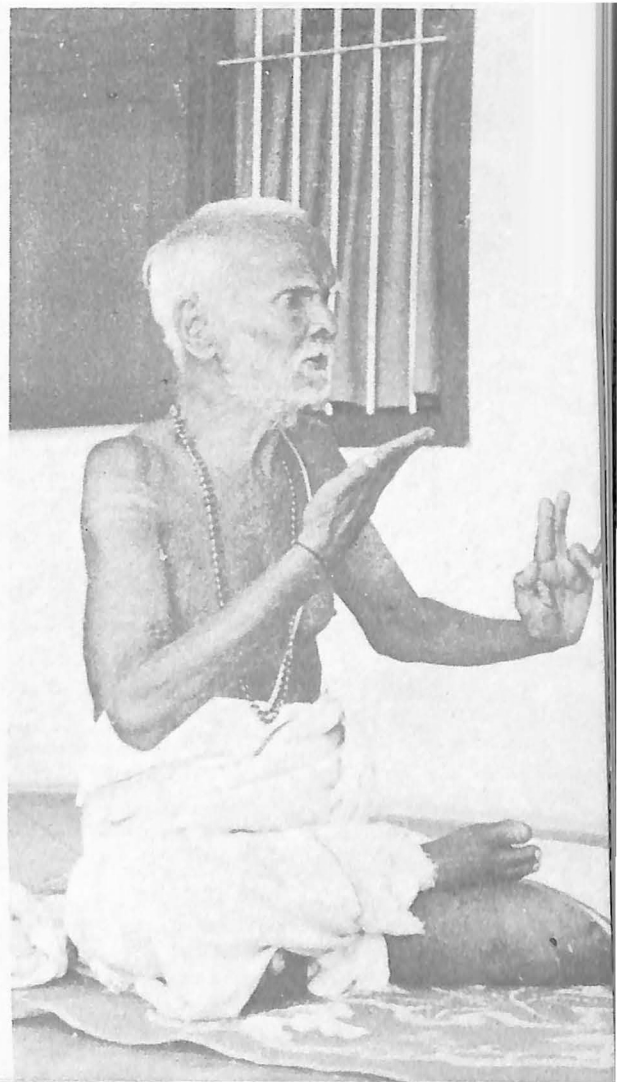
At present there are two groups at Melattur. The first group is led by G. Swaminathan and his son S. Natarajan. It is known as Shri Lakshmi Narasimha Jayanti Bhagavata Mela Natya Nataka Sangam. The other group is led by Sethuraman and is known as Bhagavata Mela Natya Vidya Sangam. In order to avoid any conflict the festival is now celebrated twice a year within the interval of a month in May or June.

The artistes are all amateurs barring those of the old group. The female roles are played by male actors, in accordance with tradition. S. Natarajan plays the roles of Lilavati, Chandramati and Rukmini in *Prahlada Charitram*, *Harishchandra Nataka* and *Rukmini Kalyanam*. The artistes earn their living in different cities pursuing a variety of vocations, but invariably assemble a week in advance of the festival to rehearse the dance-dramas. It is in the nature of a votive offering but the standard is very poor. Sometimes nattuvanars like Shri Kittappa are invited to improve the *nritta* numbers like Alarippu, Jatiswaram and Tillana.

Mask of Narasimha



Balu Bhagavatar

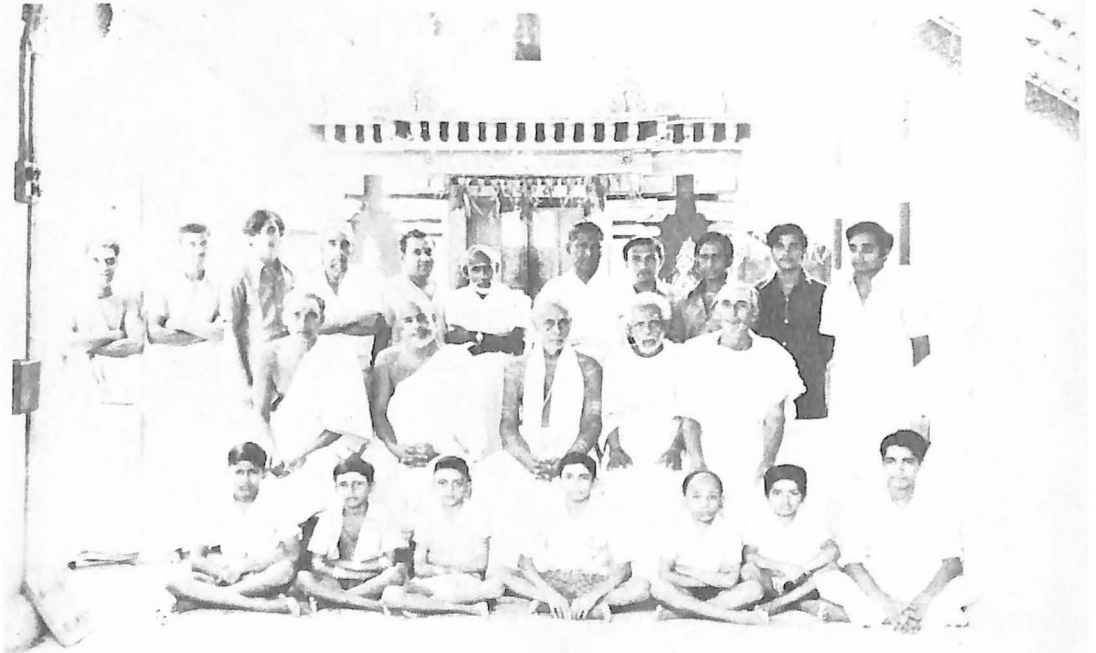


G. Swaminathan is the only actor whose histrionic gifts are impressive. As Hiranyakashipu he is very convincing. His son S. Natarajan has been trained in the art of Bharata Natyam and is the moving spirit behind the troupe. He has kept the torch of this tradition alive through hard work and against several odds.

The costumes used for female roles are similar to those used by solo Bharata Natyam dancers. The male actors wear a long velvet coat and dhoti. They are decked with various ornaments to suit their roles, depending mostly upon the availability of funds. Masks are used for the *Rakshasa* characters. The mask of Narasimha is worshipped and is believed to possess magical powers.

The music of the Bhagavata Mela Natakas follows that of the classical Carnatic tradition. Venkatarama Shastri's knowledge of music was profound and he used the time-*raga* theory to intensify the *rasa*. The musician instruments used are the mridangam, flute, violin and cymbals. The nattuvanar recites the *jati*-s and the vocalists render the *daru*-s. The *jati*-s have been appended to certain *daru*-s by the author of the play himself. These *jati*-s generally extend over two or four *avarta*-s and end in sets of five (*khanda*), seven (*misra*) or nine (*sankirna*) *tala* syllables. The various *tala*-s employed are those used in the solo exposition of Bharata Natyam. *Chaturasra Tripata* (Adi), *Chaturasra Rupaka*, *Khanda*, *Jhampa*, *Misra Chapu* and *Tisra Eka* are commonly used in these dance-dramas. Comic interludes are introduced

Artistes performing in the Melattur Bhagavata Mela Natak



as a concession to popular taste, even when not related to the main theme. The presentation is often crude and points to the gradual deterioration of standards. Nowadays the use of coloured lights, drop scenes and micro-phones rob these dance-dramas of their aesthetic appeal.

The copies of the manuscripts of the plays by Venkatarama Shastri were gifted away by Kalyani Amma, the daughter of Natesh Iyer, to Rukmini Devi of Kalakshetra in 1966. Rukmini Devi's efforts to preserve this tradition date back to 1950 when she visited Soolamangalam to see the Bhagavata Mela Natakas staged there. In 1958 Kalyani Amma came to Kalakshetra and with the assistance of Balu Bhagavata she helped Rukmini Devi to mount the production of *Usha Parinayam* using the original text. The text was edited by Telugu pandits and the dance-drama was produced on the lines of Kalakshetra productions. While reconstructing the dance-dramas Rukmini Devi followed the traditions prevailing at Melattur. Since then she has produced *Rukmini Kalyanam*, *Rukmangada Charitram* and *Dhruva Charitram*. In her work the tradition has found an extension at Kalakshetra. But at Melattur the tradition is fast dying out.

The Central Sangeet Natak Akademi and the Madras State Nataka Sangam have through grants to the groups sought to perpetuate the tradition. But such financial aid alone is not the remedy. There is no regular training centre and with the passing away of the old Bhagavatas, the art will die at Melattur in the next two generations. The Melattur group sometimes travels to Madras and performs before city audiences; but the poor standards only succeed in defeating the purpose of preserving and keeping the tradition alive. Unless some urgent steps are taken to save this art, it might become a matter of the past in coming years.

References:

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2. *Ibid*, Chapter XXXVI; also see Raghavan V.: *Shringaraprakasha* (Chapter on 'Bhoja and *Natyashastra*'), p.536 and Mankad D. R.: *Types of Sanskrit Drama*, p.102.
3. Konow, Sten: *Karpuramanjari* (see Introduction 'Life and Work of Rajashekara', p. 195); Vatsyayan, Kapila: *Classical Indian Dance in Literature and the Arts* (CIDLA), Chapter III, p.280; see also *Indian Classical Dance* by the same author, p.2.
4. Raghavan, V.: *Uparupakas and Nrityabandhas*. Paper read at the All India Dance Seminar, Delhi, 1958.
5. Nilakantha Shastri, K. A.: *The Cholas*, Madras University Historical Series. See Appendix, Summary of Inscriptions; 154 of 1895 South Indian Inscriptions iii, 202.
6. Venkataramanayya, N. *Studies in the History of the Third Dynasty of Vijayanagar*, pp.462-463, Appendix C.
7. Vriddhagirisan, V.: *The Nayaks of Tanjore*, p.13.
8. 120 of 1925 Inscription at Tiruvaduturai in Tanjavur District.
9. Krishnamurty, B.: "Prahlada Charitram Kirtanas of Melattur Venkatarama Shastri", Music Academy, Madras; see also the preface by Dr. V. Raghavan.
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11. *Natyashastra*, 'Dhruvadhya', Chapter XXXII.
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