

FOLK THEATRE

ఆచార్య మొదలి నాగభూషణ శర్మ



రంగసంపద

హైదరాబాద్

2011

FOLK THEATRE

ఆచార్య మొదలి నాగభూషణ శర్మ

ప్రచురణ :

వెల : రూ.

రచయిత చిరునామా :

ఆచార్య మొదలి నాగభూషణ శర్మ
'రంగసంపద'

1-8-702/32/39, పద్మ కాలనీ, నల్లకుంట,

హైదరాబాద్-500044. ఫోన్: 040-27624765.

జూ-శీబింజి : శీబింజి రిజిస్టర్డ్ బిజినెస్ ప్రెస్ బిల్డింగ్, బీబీసీ

ప్రతులకు :

విశాలాంధ్ర పబ్లిషింగ్ హౌస్ అన్ని బ్రాంచీలు
నవోదయ బుక్ హౌస్, హైదరాబాద్

రూపకల్పన :

టి. శ్రీకాంత్, క్రియేటివ్ లింక్స్

1-8-725/ఎ/1, 103సి, బాలాజీ భాగ్యనగర్ అపార్ట్‌మెంట్స్,

నల్లకుంట, హైదరాబాద్-500044. ఫోన్: 9848506964.

ముద్రణ :

Characteristics of Folk Theatre : Some Postulates

1. Folk plays are based on mythical stories and had their origins in religious rituals

Folk plays mainly depict the 'deeds' of the mythological heroes and are embedded in the folkloristic versions of either national epics and regional and local epics and legends while religious rituals relating to the worshipping methods of a god are the major concerns of the priests who are hereditarily the custodians of the "god's place", the public enactment of these rituals sans some important religious functions – are carried on into the performances. At that stage, they remain religio-ritualistic – enactments – sacred in intent and 'performatory' in its avowal. This is to make the devotees aware of some facets of the "internal enactment" and inculcate a sense of "awesome devotion" among them. When these ritual enactments give way to dramatizing stories which reveal the essence of the religious propositions and are external manifestations of rituals the folk plays become the carriers of religious faith and ritualistic enactment together.

2. As such, their themes are largely drawn from mythology and legend.

All mythologies fall under two categories – national, or to be more exact Hindu and regional, which are either local variations of larger

mythologies (for example, the Mahabharata stories of the “Thoti” community in Andhra) or local legends that peccated into certain regions of stories of case gods and goddesses that are hitherto called “legends.”

It is customary that the “caste singers” of a caste deity started first as propagators of their faith, but to reach larger audiences and to make a living out of it (as caste slowly withdraw from the responsibility of maintaining them) they expanded their repertoire to include the nationally known mythical stories also. It is interesting to note that they adopted the stories to suit their “performance style,” thereby retaining the original style of the performances of their caste gods.

3. As the forms have close linkages with religious rituals and grow out of the temple-related performances, the audience, at least in the earlier days, were only devotees who came to participate in the rituals thus these forms become participatory in the sense that both the performers and the audience came to participate in an audio-visual presentation of the ‘lilas’ related to a deity. They can also be called participatory’ because both the performers and the audience are participants in the experiences that resulted from common shared beliefs. There is also a common emotional experience shared by the performers and the audience and a pre-established empathy for the hero.

4. All folk forms, including theatre forms, are revelatory. They reveal the community's accepted norm that good wins over evil.

In their origins, the roots of many folk forms lie in their 'revelatory' aspects of the religious faith. As they widen their scope by adding new stories regarding the gods, drawing their materials from different sources, they tend to become "secular" to cater to the needs of a larger, multi-layered audiences, of course with a religious base. In their original form, they were intended to reveal the truth as their god enunciated, but in later years the revelations are universalized into the systems of story narration or presentation and as such the abstractions of ritual practices became the essence of folk performing arts. Such abstractions, which exemplify a conflict between the godly attributes and the demonic features and turn the conflict into a more obvious good versus evil strategy.

This natural process of generalization inverse symbolization of concepts and are attributed to character types. This is the reason why the characters almost always two-dimensional.

5. They are celebratory. They celebrate the divinity of a god (or gods) and establish. His several deeds, which, when dramatically presented, are usually called "leelas." They are also celebratory because, as the festivals in a

family, these community festivals are celebrated by every one men and women and young old.

6. Since these leela-s are performed seasonally during the “janma-tidhi days” – birthday function – they are seasonal and since they continue to be celebrated every year on the same day (or days) these plays are both ‘seasonal’ and ‘cyclic.’ Many of these dramatizations of myths are like the cycle plays found in Christian festivals and much more vibrantly celebrated. They are all commemorative events of dharma’s victory of the godhead. “Deevali” is a case in point, which is variedly celebrated as the occasion of Ravana Vadha remembered or “Dasara” celebrated as an occasion of Mahishasura’s death in the hands of Goddess Parvati.

7. Since what is being performed is based on a known myth, performers become crucial in a folk theatre form or, in some cases, the form or the medium of performance becomes important. People name what the form is, but not what the performance is about. As, for example, one would say that today we have an Oggu Katha or Burra Katha. By saying so, one could denote several known and identifiable performative qualities. One would immediately identify the form and through it the whole context and the stories from the Ellamma Cycle. One would also presume that the performance will have four participants with the main narrator telling the

story while two accompanying singers assist. The next enquiry would be about the performer. If the first question about the form of a performance signifies what narrative or dramatic 'form' is being performed, the second question so about the performer. This information naturally measures up the quality of the performance. Thus the performer becomes crucial to the entire performance.

8. Texts are rare. If one already exists. It is more like a scenario to guide the performers.

A complete performance text for a folk play is almost non-existent. The songs and poems are transmitted, mostly by oral tradition, from the *guru* to *Sishyas*. A Interpretations and explanations in prose are always improvised and form a part of the performance as an 'impromptu' text. Similarly the mischievous meanderings of the comic characters is instantaneous and do not form a part of the text.

One of the several characteristics that determines a folk performance text and distinguishes it from the text of a classical dance or dance drama is its freedom in using the format of the 'improvised' text concurrently, a 'classical' text is one in which the entire text is available for a learner including the nuances of explanatory prose, the comic intrusions and the entire graph of a performance.

9. There are two visible texts that are operated simultaneously or concurrently – the ‘outer’ text and the ‘inner text.’ If the ‘outer text’ is the performance text, right from the invocatory song until the concluding ‘marigalam the ‘outer’ text contains the performers ‘received’ text (usually containing the poetic text which they usually received through guru – sishya tuition and also the ‘improvised’ text – the extempore one (usually the prose text, incorporating connecting words, conversations, sambodhanas and prose renderings of or summaries of the poetic text. In classical performances even this will be a part of the ‘received text.’ The ‘inner text’ is the ‘received’ text, containing songs, poems, slokas and other ‘important’ materials to be transmitted. In ritual performances, even the physical and situational ‘actions’ become sacrosanct and thus become ‘derived’ or ‘received’ text’s proficiency which should be followed in the exact way as it is received.

Improvisations are allowed in the ‘outer’ text and not in the ‘inner text.’

However, improvisations within the parameters of a single character are allowed, depending on the competence of a creative artist as long as it does not counter the general performance strategies.

Improvisations lead to individualization and individualization to specialized focus and such specialized focus always ends up in taking the folk art form to a classical form.

10. As the main conflict is based on ethical criteria, the characters become 'type' characters, often standing as symbols one or the other of the value systems.

This ethical quality, broadly embedded in the mythical framework of the epics, naturally and more vividly percolated into the folk arts in general and folk theatre forms in particular. Since drama is a more prominent visual medium such a moral stand on the part of the performers seems inevitable.

Since the very evolution of the theatre forms depends on their ability to initiate, invoke and invigorate fresh minds into a particular value system, the conflict between what was traditionally believed to be good and evil will be elevated in theatre. Consequently, good winning over evil and evil punished and vanquished, will form the central concern of a folk play.

11. The role the 'Sutradhara' is crucial in the performance of a folk play.

He is usually the 'guru' of the team who can train the actors in song, dance and speech.

His role is pivotal because he is in charge of the show's pace, its trajectory and its emphasis. He is the 'co-ordinator extraordinaire' of the show.

This character in a folk play has assumed great importance since the days of the emergence of the play from the folk narrative. In a narrative the story – teller is all important since he plays the roles of a narrator and a performing actor. The narrator stands 'outside' the story, commenting upon the happenings. An actor is an 'insider' as he is 'in' a character and cannot come out of it. Thus the sutradhara, like the omniscient narrator in a novel, becomes all-knowledgeable and leads the story's import to its predetermined goals.

The Sutradhara is often called the Bhagavatha. This very name indicates his maiden profession as that of an interpreter of the Bhagavatha text for lay listeners. He remains so even in the folk play.

The 'sutradhara' also serves as the 'other' character who directly interacts with a character. But where a comic character is introduced it is he that undertakes this "inter-active" process.

12. The Bhagavatha's role often finds a 'counter point' in the role of a comic character, a jester a buffoon (He is called by several names, each type of folk play choosing its own nomenclature) to carefully juxtaposed to each other

that the events are countered, their intent questioned in such a way that the play itself offers a self-critique and at the same time serves as a unique strategy for the story to move on.

That the jester provides humour is too obvious a statement. He provokes either the Bhagavatha or the Characters to come up with innermost intentions by playing the 'confidante.' He is the only one that can intrude into the private lives of the characters and interacts with them.

Similarly, he is also a sly satirist and is at liberty to comment upon the good or bad of an event, a person or a situation.

If the Sutradhara stands for the 'outer face' of a performance, the jester stands for its 'inner face.' He is also the mouthpiece of the 'intelligent' spectator for he raises the same questions that a spectator would like to be answered on the substance and validity of a theme or the maneuverings of a character.

In many cases, the roles of the Bhagavatha and the comic man are presumed to represent two sides of the same coin : the Bhagavatha, knowledgeable, erudite, scholarly and commands the play's proceedings, whereas the jester is a representative common voice, often babbling, countering and making fun. Between their verbal encounters stands the true import of the play.

13. Folk plays are plotted; they are episodic

As the plays are mainly drawn from mythological stories and are intended to teach a moral while providing entertainment, they do not have complex plot development. They are episodic, moving from one episode to the other. Efficient Bhagavathas develop each episode as a complete play with a beginning, a middle and an end. As in a well-knit play, they do not cater to suspense and surprises, but rely on known incidents ably presented. Thus actors become crucial in a folk play.

These plays are linear in construction and such a straightforward simplistic, episodic narration helps even the lay men to follow the story. In order to make things much easier, the major characters enter the stage introducing themselves. These are called 'Entry songs' (Pravesa Daruvu) which describe and explain the character's role, nature and antecedents of his character and the purpose for which he was entered. The dance, peech and movement used for these entry songs indicate what kind of a character he or she is and what is mood of that particular character.

14. Role-playing is contextual

The kind of involvement and concentration in character-portrayal as we think of it in modern drama is not followed strictly in folk performances. While character validity is all through maintained, the characters of them

deviate into doing other businesses on stage while still in their costume. It is often seen that a man doing the role of Sri Krishna, when he finishes his role in a particular scene, moves on to play the mridangam or harmonium while still in the costume (and not in the role) and comes back a Krishna when the role has to appear in a sequence.

Sometimes a character in his role is seen going to a corner on the stage and nonchalantly lights a 'beedi' and after a smoke, runs back to do his role on time. The audience have a smile for his 'freakish' attitude and would not find it amiss.

Thus it is presumed and accepted that an actor is in his role when the context (a sequence in which he is a part as character) demands and he is free to do other things when he is out of the context.

15. Folk plays are 'total' theatre, using all the tools of theatrical expression – dance, music, speech, gestures, mime, etc.,

All folk plays are an admixture of several elements that are drawn into a theatrical experience. Dance is used often to make the character entries and exists dramatic and it also reflects the 'minds' of the characters. A rakshasa's dance movements reflect his character's ferociousness and a hero's delicate.

Thus all the elements are used to mirror's the nature and function of each one of the characters.

Often, there seems to be an obvious variation between a character's rendering of the poetic text and his pose dialogues. Where the written and the spoken forms of a language differ, this variance is more obvious. This is so because the poetic text is a written one and is in a 'literary' mode (*grandhika*) and the prose dialogue is an improvised one and so is spoken in the natural day-to-day idiom of the actor (*vyavaharika*). An intelligent actor can bridge this gulf easily.

16. Similar variance can also be seen in the narrative and dramatic modes within the written, poetic text itself.

A written text contains two obvious forms – viz., the narrative parts and the dramatic parts. Descriptions and reporting form the narrating elements, whereas direct character-interactions are in the dramatic mode. The writers or mode strictly, the makers of text – are carefully in using appropriate metrical forms to the two modes of the poetic text.

For example, for descriptions of nature, human beings and the like the format of a 'seesa padyam' is used and for narrating an incident, 'dwipada' a two-lined unrhymed meter (which is nearer to prose) is used. For character-interaction 'drama' or 'ragada' is used, which can be called an action-song.

The Puppet Theatre : Creating drama through moving images

Puppetry, the ancient and fascinating art of the “moving picture” has been enthralling millions of viewers all over the globe for the last 2000 years and more. Like the gods in the temples, the puppet is at once static and vibrant, silent and talkative, sober and mischievous, as you may want it to be. It doesn't have an existence of its own, but gains a personality when the Sutradhara credits it with one. It is inanimate, but activated to become animate. This duality of its existential forbearance – the duality of the mask and the *persona* – makes the puppet a highly proactive agent in all communication modules.

Probably the earliest entertainer, the puppet served its roles both as a performer and instructor creditably. It attained divine dimensions when puppet shows were reverently put up before the gods on festive occasions. Many a time, it is called upon to serve the suffering humanity as a divine agent. When the puppeteers performed the “Virata Pravam,” the gods blessed the people with rains!

That puppetry flourished in Andhra Pradesh at least from the twelfth century onwards is known from poetic texts and epigraphic records. Palkuriki Somanatha, a Shaiva poet of the early thirteenth century, in his

famous *Dwipada Kavya. Panditaradhya Caritra*, mentions two types of puppet plays which were popular in his days. In the first canto of his poetic work, Somana says : “Some people performed Mahabharata stories with dolls (bomma) from behind a white cloth and some others played dolls with strings excellently. “This description shows that two kinds of puppetry were popular in the early thirteenth century – the leather puppets which are made to perform behind a cloth and the string puppets that are made of wood. Since Somana’s description pertains to a Shivaratri festival at the Srisailma temple, and only an indigenous form of entertainment could have been featured in such a major religious festival, it would not be a mistake to deduce that puppetry as an art form was consolidated as popular entertainment by that time.

That leather puppet shows were exclusive to south India is borne out by the comments of Neelakantha Panditha, a twelfth century commentator on the Mahabharata, on a technical word *roopopajeevanam* (Mahabharata, xii – ccxcv – 5). According to Neelakantha, *roopopajeevanam*, popular in south India as *jala mandapika*, was a shadow play in which leather figures were projected on a curtain in order to acquaint the people with the deeds and misdeeds of kings and ministers:

Roopopajeevanam jala mandapiketi

Dakshinatyeshu prasiddam.

Tatra sookshma vastram vyavadhaya charma

Mayair akaryaih rajamatya

Deenam charya pradarsyate.

In translation, this would read: “Depictions of life through characters known as *jala mandapika* is popular in south India. It shows leather characters behind a curtain depicting the deeds of kings and minister.”

Several inscriptions bear testimony to the popularity of puppetry as well as puppeteers. An inscription dated 1208 AD shows that in that year Vipparala Kondapa and Gundapa donated a village to the puppeteer Sutradhari Bommalayya. Many other inscriptions and legends contain references to the existence, popularity and scholarship of puppeteers in different parts of Andhra Pradesh. A 1521 inscription shows that a group of puppeteers was honoured by the royalty. A textbook on Mathematics, written at the instance of a puppeteer, commended the worth of a puppeteer called Bommalakata Kala who, by his sheer virtuosity in the art, had become

close to Krishnadevaraya, the great South Indian king and was honoured by him. Similarly, AR 316 of 1928, an inscription belonging to the Kadapa district, says that two master puppeteers – Chandramayya and Bommalata Amrita Kavi – had donated a village, Chidipirala of Kamalapuram taluk in the Kadapa district, to another puppeteer, Peda Chittayya, to enable him to continue to perform puppet plays. The puppeteers of the day were evidently rich enough to donate villages to other puppeteers for the propagation of their art.

There are many reference to puppet plays in the Telugu classics as well. The central interest of puppet show is the story, says a late sixteenth century poetic text, the *Gangavatharanam*. Another text, the *Chandrangada Charitra*, written around 1650, describes a whole puppet show and the different elements therein. The curtain, the audience seated before it, the commentator behind the curtain, the lights that throw shadows on the screen, the actors, and the puppets – these, the poet says, are the essential components of a puppet show. That puppet shows were performed all through the night is indicated in another text, the *Panchalee Parinayamu*. References in the *Bhaskara Satakam* and *Vemana Satakam* throw light on the contemporary significance of puppet shows.

Koyya Bommalata or the Wooden Puppet play

There are two kinds of puppet plays in Andhra Pradesh today – the Wooden or String puppets and the Leather puppets. The string puppets in Andhra Pradesh are called Wooden puppets (*koyya bommalu* or *katte bommalu*, where *koyya* or *katte* means wood and *bommalu* refers to puppets. This happens because the categorization in this form of art is based on the material that is used. Once very popular for its methods of articulation, wooden puppetry has slowly disappeared. Only one team in Warangal district is active today, though three families in Warangal district and two families in Chittoor district claim they are “Koyya Bommala Vaallu,” or people performing the Koyya bommalata, and that until the last generation, their people were presenting such plays. Made of heavy but extremely durable wood called *boorugu*, the puppet is heavy, but colourful. All the puppets can move their hands and legs. Each one has joints at eight places – the neck, the two shoulders, the elbows, waist, and the two knee points. Special colours that indicate their birth, royalty and stature are used where it is usually red for all king characters, yellow for saints, blue for Krishna and Rama and green for the female characters. The stories performed are a total of about fifteen, including some from the *Bharatam* and others from the *Ramayanam*. Surprisingly, some stories popular with Parsee theatre group

like *Jayantha Jayapala* and *Kannthamati* are a part of these puppeteers' repertoire. These could have been later additions.

The puppets are heavy and so each puppeteer can handle only one puppet at a time. The seven strings are handled carefully so that articulation is lucid. Usually, there are three puppeteers so handle the puppets. Each performer also sings the text, while others sing the chorus or the Vantha. The vantha is usually provided by women. Three instruments – a mridangam, a harmonium and cymbals – provide instrumental support. Each group is made up of a single family – brothers and sisters – and other relatives are called in only when there are prestigious performances which promise more money.

The costumes of the puppets and the ornaments used in the Warangal string puppets resemble the costumes of the sculptures at the Palampet and Ramappa temples, whereas the Chittoor string puppets (which are no more in action) used the Lepakshi temple sculptures as their models. The Warangal puppets are endearing, coloured originally from vegetable dyes and have endured both time and weather. Each puppet is about eighty to hundred years old.

The music used – the *daruvus*, poems and the choral singing – is similar to the Yakshagana singing traditions prevalent in the Telangana Districts of Andhra Pradesh. Highly stylized, it strictly follows the

conventions used in the Yakshagana, with a Ganesh Vandana and Saraswathi Vandana followed by the story, the texts performed are the Yakshagana texts, with modifications to enable easy manipulation of the puppets. Performed in front of a curtain, with only a cover over them, the puppeteers present their stories in an intimate theatre atmosphere. Unfortunately, there is not much of enthusiasm among the youth, even of the families that are traditional performers, to learn the art and perpetuate the tradition.

Each puppeteer is assigned one major puppet for manipulation. While doing so, he sings the song sequences and recites the prose dialogues allotted to that puppet-figure. The prose dialogues are often improvised except in instances when there has been an interpretation of the poetic text, in which case the acquired text contains a prose explanation as well. Interestingly, there is a female comic figure, Golla Malli, who usually speaks a mixture of the local dialect and chaste Telugu to reach across to a multilingual audience. Each *pallavi* and *charanam* is repeated by a group of singers who double as instrumentalists. The puppeteers and the choral group sit behind the small stage that feet and thump the stage to the rhythmic manipulation of the puppet. The stories performed are *Lava Kusa*, *Keechaka vadha*, *Myravana*, *Rama Ravana Yuddham*, *Virata Parvam* and other popular

episodes from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, besides popular folk stories like *Jayantha Jayapal*, *Kanthamati*, *Alli Rani* and some others. An interesting play performed by the group is *Bhakta Ramadas* Who as a devotee of Sri Rama built a temple for him at Bhadrachalam and, for having spent that amount from the Sultan's exchequer, was imprisoned by the Sultan. Ramadas was released when the amount was said to have been cleared by two royal personages (who declared that they were Rama and Laxmana) who appeared in the Sultan's dream.

It is unfortunate that this puppet tradition is slowly becoming extinct since there is only one team that still practices this form of the art and youngsters are no longer willing to follow the family tradition.

Tolu Bommalata or the Leather Puppet Play

Tolu Bommalata, the leather puppet play, is more popular than the *Sutram Bommalata* (the String puppet play) or the *Koyya Bommalata* (the Wooden puppet play) due to its magical and dream world effect. The leather puppet play is also called the shadow puppet play since the puppets, when placed behind a white curtain which light thrown on them from behind, cast shadows on the thin white screen placed in front of the audience. These plays have had a significant place in rural entertainment since thirteenth century. The plays were performed originally by the jangams, an itinerant

community of Shaiva devotees propagating the leelas of Shiva. But when Vaishnavism replaced Shaivism, the jangams also learnt the Bhagavatha stories to eke out their livelihood by performing from both the epics. The puppeteers from Telangana, belonging to the Jangam community, still perform leather puppet plays, whereas their counterparts in the Andhra and Rayalaseema areas have completely stopped doing so and have instead taken to narrating ballad, called the *Jangam Katha*. However, today, the leather puppet plays are performed by a non-native community called the “Aare” Marathis.

Inscriptions belonging to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century indicate a different sect of non-Telugu performers who took up leather puppetry as their profession. We get such information, curiously enough, from a Telangana inscription, known as the Guduru inscription, recovered from Guduru in Warangal district. This mentions the popularity of the puppet plays as well as words “Sutradhari ‘Kommajanaha,’ Baraha,” indicating that the inscription was ordered to be written by sutradhari (Puppeteer) Kommoji. Similarly, the Panagallu inscription contains references to another Sutradhari, Brahmoju or Brahmoji.

The “Aare” Migrants

From these references, it is clear that there are two parallel traditions of leather puppetry in Andhra. One, the ancient tradition that began from the thirteenth century onwards in which Jangam families of native origin performed the hereditarily acquired art of puppetry. These families are still active in the Nalgonda and Mahaboobnagar districts of Telangana. The second tradition – as can be deduced from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century evidences – are of the Aare performers who are said to have migrated from Maharashtra and settled down in Andhra Pradesh during the times of the Nayaka kings. They were enlisted as soldiers in the Marathi armies of Tanjavur and after the Nayaka dynasty collapsed, they joined the mainstream, mainly as “protectors” of their villages. These village watch – and – ward staff was, therefore, called “Nayakas.” In due course, however, members of the family had to undertake other jobs. Some musicians and singers among them chose puppetry as their profession as that was the most popular vocation in the villages. They settled in several parts of South India, especially in the Mysore area of Karnataka and in Andhra Pradesh. There were four such important, widely spread families – Vanarasa, Rekandar, Aveti and Sindhe – who were Maharashtrian by origin and Andhra by choice and who learnt the art of puppetry assiduously and eventually became master

puppeteers. Their members learnt and performed in Telugu, retaining their native dialect, Aare, for home.

It may also be assumed that all puppeteers now settled in Karnataka and Andhra are Aare, and that they originally gave performances only in Telugu and with time, possibly after the Nayaka rule, went on to perform in two different languages. This may be deduced from the practice of the old Karnataka puppeteers singing their Ganesha stuti – invocation to Lord Ganesha – in Telugu.

In Andhra Pradesh, the Aares are known as Aare Kapus, a name which assimilates them into Telugu society where Kapu is the name of a Telugu agricultural community which also produced military chieftains. In Maharashtra, they are known as Gandholis, possibly after the main humorous character in the original Marathi puppet play – *Gandholi* or *Gandholigadu*.

The Aares themselves prefer to be called Balijas or Balija Kshatriyas or Bondilis as they are now called in Maharashtra. They were mostly itinerant, wandering nine months to a year from village to village, staying at each place for a few days. In more recent times, however, they have settled down at different places, doing odd jobs, while continuing with their puppet performances. Many of them have found that they cannot earn enough by

Bommalata to provide for their families and so have taken to other work. The villages where these puppeteers have settled down range from Srinagavarapukota in Visakhapatnam district in the northeastern corner of Andhra to Bommalaatalapalli in Bellary district, now in Karnataka in 1937, a group of about forty Aare puppeteer families made Madhavapatnam near Kakinada their home. Families in southern Andhra Pradesh did not have a permanent home until recently. However, today, these families are settled in almost every part of these state. There are nearly three hundred families who still persistently continue to perform. However, many of them have other jobs to fall back upon since puppetry long ceased to be a full-time profession.

The Making of a Puppet

The leather puppet, thin and translucent enough to allow light to go through it, is cut from a piece of flat raw hide or stiff parchment and is artistically etched into a beautiful figure with a grand array of multiple colours. Each family of puppeteers can make its own puppets and the head of the family is usually a consummate artist. Like manipulating puppets, making them is also a hereditary art. The puppet is made either of deerskin or of goat skin. Nowadays, since deerskin is impossible to acquire, goat skin is used. In the border areas of Andhra and Karnataka, even buffalo skin is used. For a big, human sized puppet, three skins are needed. For a medium-

sized puppet, two skins are sufficient, while for a small, one-piece puppet, one skin is enough. A fresh skin is cleaned to get rid of the hair on it, kept in warm water, stretched out tightly to avoid wrinkles and left to dry in an open cool place. When the parched skin is white, clear and translucent, it is ready for artwork. The puppeteer-artist draws an outline with a pencil or charcoal and the leather parchment is cut into three pieces – for the head, the body and the other limbs like hands and legs. He cuts the shapes of the body, head (along with the headgear) and the limbs. Before colouring the puppet, he designs the necessary jewelry on to the image. Such designs, like necklaces, waistbands, and so on, are etched carefully on the figures with sharp chisels. Various shaped holes – circular, rectangular or triangular – are perforated with chisels of different sizes to make for an array of jewelry. After these perforations are made on the leather according to each design, the different leather pieces are stitched together. Cutting and stitching are necessary so that the puppet-limbs are easy to manipulate to make the puppets more expressive.

After they are thus stitched, the decorative and artistic part commences. The artist chooses the central colour for the figure as is dictated by tradition. The Rama and Krishna figures are in blue. Anjaneya is in green, figures of women are in red, the figures of rishis are in yellow, and so

on. Based on this central colour, the overall colour scheme is finalized. If blue is the colour of the body, a contrasting red will be the colour of the dhoti, etc. In olden times these figures were drawn on the models of kings and queens or gods and goddesses drawn on the walls of the major temples of Andhra Pradesh. If new figures are to be made by a contemporary artist, he may choose to make his puppet figure resemble a popular cinema star!

After the colouring of the body and the costume, the artist moves on to colour the ornaments. For example, if there are four types of necklaces drawn, each one is given a different colour, with white remaining a relief colour. When light goes through these perforated holes, these necklaces look as though they are made of rubies, emeralds and quartz! With the different colours used for body shade and clothing and with the added luster of the perforations of different types and sizes, the figure is now complete. It takes about a month to complete the entire process of making a big puppet.

As the puppet is coloured in the same manner on both the sides, the puppeteer has the option to make it face the audience either way depending on which side the other actor-figure is. This is to enable easy conversion.

Ganiyam

Ganiyam is the name of the thick bamboo box which contains all the puppet figures belonging to a family. It usually contains hundred to hundred

and ten figures used both for the Ramayana and Mahabharata stories. About fifty figures are specifically used either for the Ramayana or the Mahabharata and the remaining are neutral figures that can be used for any other plays. The figures of the kings and queens, the servants and the maids are common. This list also includes birds, animals and trees. The comedians as well as the Ganesha and Saraswathi figures are common to all the plays.

The Ganiyam contains figures of varying dimensions. There are two distinct traditions that developed in the early twentieth century regarding the dimensions. The Rayalaseema figures, which are finely executed, are smaller in size (usually $4 \times 4\frac{1}{2}$) where as the coastal Andhra figures are large and almost of human size ($5\frac{1}{2} \times 2\frac{1}{2}$). Because of the hugeness of the coastal Andhra figures, the stage is erected vertically with a 15° bend on the top towards the audience so that big puppets can be held tightly on the screen.

Again, it is customary to have at least three or four puppets in different sizes for each major character. Sri Rama, Hanuman, Ravana and Anjaneya are always made in three different sizes so that they can be used appropriately. For example, Anjaneya figures are made from the smallest to very huge ones to suit different occasions. This multiplication of the same figure in different sizes is intended not only to have a spare when a puppet gets damaged during a show, but also to relatively indicate the distance a

puppet figure maintains from the other figures. When a puppet is placed at the centre of the screen, it appears in its original dimensions. But when the figure is to be shown as though it is far away, a smaller puppet is used. This is how the puppeteers have incorporated the idea of “perspective” in their shows.

The stage

To present a puppet show, a white curtain is a prerequisite. Unlike in a string puppet show wherein the figures are operated in front of a screen, in a leather puppet performance the puppets appear behind the screen. The entire operation of the figures takes place on the other side of the audience, behind the curtain. The curtain, neither very thin nor very thick, of an 8' x 6' dimension, is tied tightly to poles on both sides as well as on the top and the bottom. The tightness of the screen is important to keep the puppets visible on an unwrinkled curtain. The bottom of the screen is covered with a black cloth so that the feet of the puppeteers are not visible.

The puppets are lighted uniformly from behind. When light is thrown on the figures, their shadows fall on the white screen. Since the puppets, with all the splendour of multiple colours, are seen through the translucent white curtain and they are moving, it gives an illusion of a series of multi coloured pictures. That is why the Andhra Puppet show is popularly called

the “first colour cinema.” Two lights attached to a dimmer can light the white curtain in a uniform way. In the olden days, a row of earthenware lamps was placed behind the screen, the wicks therein lighting it up. Since castor oil, which was used for these lights, became costly, puppeteers and organizers moved to an easier method of lighting the screen. Today, only electric lights are used. The lights are to be hung about 5 ½ feet away from the curtain and at a height of about eight feet and care should be taken that the puppeteer should not come in the way of the light and the puppet (lest his shadow fall on the screen).

Manipulation

The manipulation of the puppets is highly intricate and subtle. In terms of manipulation, all puppet figures can be categorized into three groups : firstly, there are smaller figures, made without any joints. This figure is one single piece. Each of these single figures has a stick attached across it from the head down below. This is to ensure that the figure is stiff enough to stand on the screen. A small piece of the stick protrudes underneath so that puppeteers can take hold of it to operate the puppet.

There are medium-sized figures whose elbows, shoulders and knees can be moved. These figures, which normally are brought on the screen for dialogue pieces, have a small hole in the palm of the right hand. A

bamboo stick with a hook is inserted into it to enable hand movement during conversation. Since the legs have joints at the knees, the puppet can also do a vertical jump to show anger, surprise, and so on. It can be down during episodes of sorrow. To the third category belong those figures that have joints for all their limbs and are, therefore, extremely expressive. Each such figure has three joints for each hand (shoulder, elbow and wrist), three joints for each leg (thigh, knee and foot), and one joint for the neck, taking the total to thirteen. These are the main actors in the show and are action-oriented characters. The manipulation of these multi-jointed puppets is intricate, because it must create a stylized effect, while retaining much of the visual realism. There are also two dance figures which have an additional joint at the waist. Usually, the Sarada or Sarasathi figure is also a dancing figure! While manipulating such intricate puppets, the artist must maintain the rule of “synchronization” between movement and rhythm, rhythm and song, and song and mood. The essential thing is to suggest the “posture” of the puppet figure on the screen, which exemplifies not only the character’s personality, but also the mood of the situation. Since the joints are not only movable, but removable, each part can be taken out of the main figure as and when necessary. This can be particularly seen in fighting scenes when legs are cut, bodies hacked into pieces and the head severed from the body.

Performance

The time for the performance of a puppet show ranges between half an hour to the whole of the night depending on the exigencies of time prescribed by the patrons. In olden days the entire Mahabharata used to be performed in eighteen nights and the Ramayana in six nights with the show, commencing at then each night and closing only at daybreak. Nowadays, a performance, on an average, is only an hour long, in which the entire story is covered. As the puppeteers are prone to perform of non-native audiences, this exigency of curtailing the performance time arises very often.

The play invariably starts with a Ganesha Vandanam followed by a invocation to Goddess Saraswathi, and when with a Sabha Vandanam or an obeisance to the assemblage. Then come on the screen the comic figures – Bangarakka and her lover, Kethigadu, with their verbal innuendos. A third comic figure – Juttu Poligadu, Bangarakka's husband – enters subsequently. A figure between the two mean ensues since both are lovers of the woman. But they are soon silenced by Bangarakka after which these two comic figures announce the story that is being presented that night and make their exist.

The story proper commences with an entrance song, called the *Pravesa daruvu*, rendered by the most important character in the play. The

entrance song not only establishes the nature of this character, but also declares his major intent in the episode being presented. Besides, such an introduction of the character enables even the most unaware of the audiences to identify with the character and understand the narrative. It also enliven the performance and adds a dramatic significance. For example, the character of Anjaneya always enters the screen with a few acrobatic feats. Similarly, Jattivadu, a boxing champion sent by Duryaodhana to the court of King Virata, enters with great pomp and noise.

Every *pallavi* and *charanam* of a song (usually called a *daruvu*, coming from the Sanskrit word *dhruva padam*, is, in fact, an action song) is repeated by the choral group which comprises the mridangist, harmonist, cymbal player and usually two women singers. In the old days, when microphones were not known the function of the chorus was to render the lines on a higher note so that people could understand the important of the song even from a distance. The dramatic nature of a sequence is heightened when one among the choral group lends the necessary “sounds” reflecting the mood of the song.

Two types of scenes usually keep up the tempo of the performance : the “fight” scenes and the “comic” scenes. The battle scenes and fights (including duels) in the Andhra puppet show are very absorbing. The

important episodes centre around such fights so that they attract the attention of the audience. The usual order of the fights is a wordy duel, followed by an exchange of hand-blows and then a battle with bows and arrows. During the fights, the style of manipulating the puppets changes. In the climatic scenes of the fight, the puppet figures are no more manipulated by sticks; they are not even manipulated by two different people any more, as they usually are not other times. Both the puppet figures are held by one manipulator and the situation of fight is achieved by thrusting one puppet on the other or by striking one figure against the other. This is further accentuated by the background noise and the beating of the mridangam at its loudest. There are two other instruments that are used by the puppeteers only when a fight is shown. The first is called *pavada*, a hollow bone used as a bugle or a *sankham*, conch, which indicates the start of a war. The second is where one is required to thump on two long pieces of wood, which are placed one on top of the other. The wooden pieces are 1 inch thick, about 6 to 8 inches wide and 2 feet long by clamping one's foot on the two wooden bars a noise similar to that of exchanging blows emanates and that adds to the furor and noisy chaos that is expected of a bitter fight. All the other men and women let out cries of *abba*, *amma*, *chavu*, *chachanu*, which rend the sky. The entire fight scene thus gives a heightened sense of drama.

Another moment of great surprise in an Andhra puppet show is the growth, in size, of the character-figures according to situation. Many of the major figures are made in duplicate and triplicate. The figures change their sizes as and when required. For example, Anjaneya's entry, when required by Rama, will be as a small monkey on all fours, hopping up and down. When Rama entrusts him with the job of searching for Sita, he grows into a two-footer while still remaining small. When he goes near the sea, his friends remind him of his greatness and he swells into a full-sized figure. For each one of these stages a separate figure is required. Similarly, Anjaneya's entry into Ravana's court again requires about four figures. The figure indicating Anjaneya's "Viswaroopa" when Sita asks for identification is the largest puppet used by the puppetees.

The puppet performance is always absorbing. The puppeteers add performative significance to the dramatic episodes by their imaginative handling of the different puppets at the same time. The Andhra puppets, because of their mult-coloured nature and their height, are fascinatingly articulate. The dramatic contrast of the characters is achieved, first of all, visually. For example, the difference in the figures of Ravana and Rama or Ravana and Anjaneya are brought into focus through the contrasts in colour. While the Anjaneya figure is coloured green, Rama is blue and Ravana red:

the contrast when presented on the white screen against the background of white light falling on them in uniquely and tellingly manifest.

Another Characteristic feature of the figures is their relative variations in height. Dramatic propriety is achieved by making certain figures look more prominent than the others by their sheer height and width and also by placing them high on the screen. Thus the figures of Ravana, Keechaka, Bheema, Anjaneya and Rama are larger than the other figures. This visual establishment of the relative supremacy of the figures is achieved as soon as they are mounted on the screen.

Comic Scenes and Clown Figures

The most attractive part of a puppet show for the rural folk is the appearance of the three clown figures-Bangarakka, her husband Jutu Poligadu and her lover, Kethigadu. A woman with an erotic temperament and who shows off, an uncouth man of a husband and a prattler with a hat-full of gimmicks – these three figures are so popular that their names have gone into the day-to-day parlance of Telugu life. They offer fun and frolic throughout the performance. Besides the usual aspects of entertainment through their vulgar, sometimes obscene, and even scatological and erotic imagery (these are avoided in urban performances), they have a number of other obligations in the show. They introduce the play to the audience, as

does a Sutradhara in Sanskrit play. They order the performance pace and regularize the show. They butt in whenever audience interest seems to diminish and they also participate in the episodes as “characters of obstruction.” For example, when Ravana insists on going to Sita to demand love from her, Kethigadu comes in, tries to stop him and pleads with him not to go. In return, he gets a good beating from Ravana. But the untamed Kethigadu makes a comment in an undertone that all people who do not listen to reason will have to learn a costly lesson. Such “obstruction” senses followed by subtle, common sense comments always draw laughs. These characters also can directly talk to the other characters, including the main performer as well as the audience. This gives them an “omniscience” which combines in it the role of the Sutradhara and Vidushaka. There is also another comic figure. “Allatappayya,” who fills in as an attendant and makes fun of the masters.

There are two different “images” of each one of these comic figures – one, when they are within the circle of their own comic world and two, when they encounter people from outside, that is, characters in the main frame of the story. In the former, they are ebullient, reckless and talkative; in the latter they are supercilious and always comment in undertones.

Music

Music is the soul of a puppet performance. Many of the puppeteers, especially women performers, are great singers. Each text makes use of a variety of meters – each play will have *daruvus* in various talas and in addition, poems (*padams*) abound. The narrative part is rendered in *dwipada*, a two-lined *desi* metre. Besides, there are very peculiar *desi* innovations that combine poetic excellence with rhythmic exuberance. They are the *Kandaratham*, *Seesaratham*. *Seesaratham*, and so on, which are half-poem and half-song sequences. They start as a poem in recitation and take off, midway, a song with rhythm, which lends it tremendous dramatic effect.

The dictum that “*adi Nata, antya Surati*” – where the beginning of the song is in the Raga Nata and the end, the Mangalam, in raga Surati – is still followed by all puppet groups. Musical rendering is done at two levels. Each puppet manipulator will sing the *pallavi* and *charanam* of the songs of the particular character he is holding and all the others follow in choral singing. The song always moves to a faster tempo to end in a *teermanam* (*ita dhaita*). The puppeteers also sing the raga elaborately when one episode is over and another episode is being set up on the screen. The usual ragas used by the performers include Arabhi, Sriragam, Kalyani, Mohana, Begada, etc.

Though the ragas are classical, their rendering is invariably *desi*, or in the folk tradition.

The instruments that are used include the mridangam, talam and harmonium. In southern Andhra Pradesh, a clarinet accompanies the songs. In the early days, a drone was used and the harmonium has replaced it in recent years. There are two improvised instruments as well : the two wooden pieces, one placed on the other as mentioned earlier and the pavada, a temporarily prepared instrument made of bone and used for special effects during war scenes.

The way poems are sung is also changing, especially in the northern Andhra style, to include the rendering of poems (*padams*) with elaborate raga, as in the popular “Padya Natakam” of the contemporary theatre.

The performance text of a puppet play is carefully assembled from a number of sources, since the text is made over several years and is always open to change. The basic text, written in the *dwipada* metre, is *Ranganatha Ramayanam* a fourteenth century poetic text. Other texts from which poems and songs of special significance are drawn include the *Bhaskara Ramayanam* and the *Molla Ramayanam*. The songs are drawn, again, from a number of sources 0 from the *Lepakshi Ramayanam* and the *Kuchikonda Ramayanam*. Similarly, the Mahabharata stories are based on the *Andhra*

Mahabharata, translated by Nannaya. Tikkana and Errana. The songs are mainly drawn from the *Yakshagana Bharatam* written by Mynampati Kameswara Rao. This conscious collation of different texts is not unknown in folk tradition.

The performance also includes several *slokas* in Sanskrit drawn mainly from the *Amara Kosa*, and describe a person, place or thing. This rendering is usually followed by an explanation of the same in Telugu prose.

The Performance Group

Usually the group consists of a single family: Wife, husband and children and if need be, brothers and sisters. Each major puppet is handled by a separate person, with men manipulating the male puppets and women the female puppets. There are at least three instrumentalists, two choral singers and two manipulators. One man helps to supply the right kind of puppets whenever they are needed. Thus a minimum of eight members is needed for a performance.

Training

Since all puppet troupes are family troupes, teaching and learning the art of puppetry forms a part of child's growth. The children are born and brought up while the parent perform and so they are intimate with the environment. The children enter the stage at a tender age of six or seven

years, initially by helping the parents by handing them the necessary puppets at the appropriate times. This helps them to identify the puppets. Slowly, they are allowed to sing in the chorus and it is here that they learn their texts, the musical intonation and about rhythm. This happens between the sixth and the tenth year of a child. The puppeteers deem it fit that at the age of ten or eleven, whether a boy or a girl, should be made to handle a puppet independently, though it need not be an important one. In the meanwhile, they would have done little bits of manipulation if their father was exhausted or their mother attending to other work. The child is not given a major puppet – that means a major role – until he or she is past twelve. Meanwhile they take up the lesser roles, learn by rote not only the poems and songs, which they learn by heart when they do not have performances, but also the prose improvisations. The parents correct the children even during the performance by repeating what they think would be a better dialogue. Thus the child learns most of the manipulation and improvisation skills during the performance itself. Only the songs (*daruvus*) and the poem are taught outside the performance. In most of the families, a fifteen-year-old boy is as good as a grown son who is ready to take over a father's profession, having spent nine years of "in house training."

It is true that the primary function of the shadow puppet show is entertain the village folk who look forward to these performances as an annual festival fare. But the shows have also an instructional value, especially in the basic mythical conflicts they portray – the conflict between good and evil as an important ethical lesson in common folk's everyday life. The plays, by doing so, bring colourful heroes, heroines and villains back to the experience of the people in such a way that the villagers relive the experiences of the *Puranic* heroes. This relevance of the puppet plays as reminders or revivifiers of past myths is indicated by their ritualistic functioning : they were invariably seen during festival occasions, especially during the Ramanavami or Hanumath Jayanthi celebrations.

Finally the plays are believed to have social justification as well, it is customary to have a puppet play performed whenever and wherever there is drought. It is common belief that a puppet show, especially a show of *Virata Parvam* brings in rains. This belief is prevalent even today in the Rayalaseema area of Andhra Pradesh.

The puppet show thus offers a theatrical experience, rich both in its visual and aural exuberance duly embedded in its ritualistic mores and traditional beliefs, a form which catered to the needs of millions of people's genuine desire for entertainment the traditional puppet performances are no

more as popular as they were because new gadgets replaced them and, as elsewhere, folk forms are slowly going out of favour from the urbanized and urbanizing cultural modes.

Theatre at our door-step : Pagativesham As 'Instant Theatre'

“Vesham” in Telugu means costume or one’s external demeanor. By extension, it came to mean one’s role-playing. Used often in an ironic tone, the word is used as a satirical indictment of one’s indifferent or uncommon behaviour. It is used against people who, you think, are feigning, putting on intemperate airs. Used simply, in a theatre context say, for example.

Vaadu vesham vestunnadu
(He is donning a role)

Where ‘vesham’ means a role or role-playing. In an uncompromising situation, if one says

Vaadi vesham naaku nachaledu

It means, I did not like his behaviour, his behaviour 'Vesham', thus stands for role-playing, to assume someone else's role, hiding your own-an enactarent.

'Pagati' means during the daytime (from 'pagalu' –day)

'Pagati Vesham,' then would mean ' an enactment' during the daytime. In other parts of the country it is known as "Bahurupam."

A common and popular entertainment in rural Andhra, *Paati Veshalu* are usually referred to in its plural because it is not a single performance, but a series of performance, consecutively presented for a number of days, depending upon the repertoire of a particular actor/troupe and / or the response of a village. Two or three actors take up different roles each day and present their 'show' at the doorsteps of every house in a village. On the last day, they resume their original *Vesham*, go to each house for collecting suitable remuneration. The performance may extend to its full duration – which is a half hour – or, it may end abruptly on the summarily summoned orders of a not-to-enthusiastic lord of the house:

The performance will be repeated at each hose and the entire household becomes the audience, with the wayfarers occasionally intruding into the exclusive performance, a rare privilege for the village folk.

Pagati Veshalu is popular in the villages for two important reasons; firstly because each vesham centres round a character type which is popular with the villages and each one is attached with some peculiar character trait, which the performers ably bring forth. The exaggerated side of the character type is highlighted which will ensure humour. The second reason is the sly humour that goes with each type its costume, mannerisms and behavioral patterns and especially the character – type’s language. Usually there will be two characters – one portraying the main character – type and the other one who makes fun of the other character. There are also some Veshams which are serious and portray a reverential character – two such characters are ‘Sarada’ and ‘Artha-Nareeshwara.’ There is drama in countering the propositions of the main character and since such sly ‘counters’ are the commonly – held opinion on the character – types among the village folk, the villager readily take to it.

A tentative list of the most celebrated *Veshams* included in the repertoire of the different groups would indicate its catholicity and variety. About sixty common *Veshams* are noted, out of which the following are more prominent:

1. Bairagi 2. Budabukkala 3. Somayajulu-Somidevamma
4. Dashtikam Pantulu 5. Dasari 6. Tahsildar 7. Bogam

8. Pamulavadu 9. Drukala 10.

There are some others like “Bhetala” and “Sakti” that will be performed only if the villagers permit them to do because of their fierce nature, of late, however, several two-character scenes from popular ‘padya-natakams’ (musical plays) are enacted.

Many of these veshams seem to have been developed during the latter part of the 19th c. since many of these caste-based or work based professions were losing their veracity and honesty and even those people belonging to the very communities who were the butt of criticism in these veshams themselves laughed at the uncanny way they are ridiculed here. There is a geniality with which these characters are drawn to enable even those belonging to these communities do not take their words amiss. It is also evident that some veshams like the Revenue Inspector and Thasildar must have been added during 1930’s and 40’s when the National movement had gained momentum and these two important governmental positions lost much of their awe and fearsomeness.

A Thematic categorization of these character-types would yield a three-fold division: 1) Those based on traditional mythical/legendary types (such as Ardhanareeswara, Bethala, Shakti etc.), 2) Charavter-types based

on contemporary caste-clan-social position (majority of these come under this group), 3) Types of pure farcical interest (Mondibanda Vallu, & Singi Singadu etc.)

The second group, as I just mentioned, is the most prominent one. The characters portrayed here are of contemporary relevance. The performers go to these communities and show a portrayal of their own character-types, which indicates that the types are drawn so broadly and so genially that even those that are directly affected by it would not take it amiss. In fact, the people of the Communities honour the performers for their careful understanding and flawless imitation.

The list of the character-types would also exemplify three major aspects of fragmentation, especially if we compare the characters and their style of rendering with the traditional dramatic forms:

1) against the development of a plot with different characters seen in the traditional forms, this form endeavours to present an in-depth character study of a particular type.

2) As against a full night's performance (roughly about eight hours, sometimes extendable to several nights), a single *Pagati vesham* 'performance' will not exceed half hour. But if we take into account the continuous process of its repetitive performances, moving from house to

house the total time that will be taken by the performers to cover a fairly large village of about five hundred houses would be four to five hours.

3) As against numerous characters required in a full length folk theatre presentation, this performance usually needs one or two characters, accompanied, occasionally, by a harmonist and a percussionist.

Such single actor's performance and not altogether absent in ancient Andhra folk tradition Palkuriki Somanatha's mention of such role-playing, disguised in the characters of Gandharavas, Yakshas and Vidyadharas is one of the earliest references to a single person's multiple role-playing. But that is a night performance and in the precincts of a temple during a festival and so is occasioned by a ritual; whereas no ritualistic back-ground necessitates a pagati-vesham performance.

Three different ancient forms seem to be akin to Pagati Vesham : viz: Bahurupam, Kalapam, and Valakam.

Bahurupam: As the word indicates, Bahurupam is a form in which a single actor takes up the role of different people at different times. In later years, this is described as *nritta* from which indicates extempore action, speech and costume.

Kalapam is a dance form in which a single actor's predicament is exposed through songs, dance and expressive emotions. Bhamakalapam is

one such. But there are other Kalapams such as Chodigani Kalapam and singi-singadu which reveal a great sense of realism both in content and form.

Yet another folk form which goes nearer in presentation is Valakam, a one-man's extempore exposition of a matter of topical interest, mainly presented on ritual days.

Pagati Vesham has something of all these forms in it, but it is basically different from others since it is a diurnal performance and not a nocturnal one. It is more realistic than *Kalapam* and less ritualistic than Valakam.

It may safely be surmised here that in spite of variety of ancient forms which have resemblances to *Pagati-Vesham* either in form or content, it has a unique originality of its own. As no other theatrical form has a unique originality of its own. As no other theatrical form has envisaged to do, the *Pagati-Vesham* is presented only during the daytime. As the wandering minstrels go from door to door singing ballads of Yore, these performers go from door to door presenting a dramatic 'item,' which consists of characters in action and a 'plot' through which the characters are interpreted to us.

In doing so, the form has to obey certain self-imposed rules. These rules go a long way to categorize the form as 'dramatic'; they are costume, make-up, speech and mannerisms that would befit the character-types. Great

care is to be taken in costumes and make-up since it is a daytime performance. The actual likeness of the roles is to be established, firstly through *aharya*.

Secondly, since these Veshams are all character portrayals of contemporary people who form a part of the audience to which the show is presented, the performer's characterization' should be realistic. The performers take a considerable amount of care to achieve this character identification, not only by *aharya*, but also by *Vahika*. The speech rhythm and dialect variations are so minute from one caste character to the other that the performers must carefully incorporate them in their presentation of the characters.

Many items of the repertoire lay emphasis on the *aharya* and *Vachika* aspects of *abhinaya* alone. In a few of them *angika* is predominant (Bhetala, Shakti etc.) and rarely do we come across a Vesham, in which *sattvika* is dominant. There is only one Vesham which insists on such emotive expressions – the *ardha-nareeswara Vesham* originally presented only by the Kuchipudi performers.

The absence of Sattvika aspect of *abhinaya* in the presentation of the Veshas is an indication of the form's reliance on a realistic interpretation of character, for, in the stylized theatre forms in India both classical and

traditional, *sattvika* plays a dominant role in symbolizing the characters, which, in turn, leads to universalization. In *Pagati vesham* the insistence is more on particularizing the character, though there is a limited attempt at universalizing it to be a type. *Sattvika*'s absence in *Pagati Vesham* is also necessitated for two other reasons: through the *sattvika bhavas* presented in the *abhinaya* of stylized characters in regular folk performance, aesthetic distance is maintained between the actor and his audience. Since such distance is not maintained in *Pagati Vesham* performances due to the character's physical nearness to the audience and the realistic style of presentation chosen, only such portrayals are selected which do not need much of emotive expression for a proper interpretation of character. This is perhaps so, since the presentation are required to be understood even by common, not very literate, folk who would have found the intricate gesture-language difficult to follow.

Realistic interpretation of character, as against the stylized symbolism of the traditional dramatic forms, is the first prerequisite of the *Pagati Vesham* performers' functionalist approach to dramatic forms, for this takes the form nearer to common people. Making it as less intricate stylistically as possible is the second step in this direction. Selection of realistic character-types is the third major feature in bringing the performances nearer the

audience. Choice of themes is the fourth one. Except the traditional characters, which are very few, all the others are topical; and a serious portrayal of such characters could be seen in contemporary dramatic literature. Orthodox Brahmin and his relentless wife, the unfortunate widow indulging in some fortunate escapades, the drunken, prestige-conscious, impertinent village Alderman (Dhastikam Pantulu), the prostitute-dance (bogam), Komati (the 'Banya' with his cunning parsimonious habits), the wayward Reddy, the all pleasing Bhattu, the Diwan both docile and ferocious by turns, the Revenue Inspector and his secretive functioning such is a large gallery of character-types which are distinguished from one another by a queer addition of mannerisms relevant to each one.

Another characteristic that specifically helps the *Pagati-Vesham* to gain currency among the village folk is its unbiased approach, to each character type. This is done by giving a sly, humorous turn to the sketch, taking the one from the broad behavioural peculiarities of each type. Humour, in fact, is the real sustaining principle in all these performances; humour, both in *angika* and *Vachika*. The performer goes to the extent of mildly reprimanding some of the characteristics of these character types. In this way they serve as great correctives. Good humour without a stink of malice is responsible for the genial response this form gets from people.

During proper make-up and costume and going about in revelry during festival times, as in Mosques in medieval England, Pagati Vesham seemed to have been popular in Andhra even by 13th c. Palkuriki Somana, a Saiva poet of that century, in his *Panditaradhya Charitra* spoke about such people who danced in the night performances during the Sivarathri festival, donning themselves as Gandharvas, Yakshas and Vidyadharas. Though they are not daytime entertainments, the incognito role-playing is not different from the *Pagati Veshalu* – though the latter are daytime performances.

Some of the Kuchipudi performers, in later years, took to *Pagati Veshalu* partly because they had no work during the lean periods and partly because they were not as talented as the front-ranking performers and to make both ends meet they took to *Pagati Veshalu* which involved a different kind of theatrical talent.

But even before them the “Gaddipadu Bhagavathulu” seemed to be famous. Their tradition goes back to mid-19th c. When an artist called Pallavajjhula Venkataramaiah, who originally hailed from Mysore, migrated to the Krishna delta, taught the art to people there, after settling down at Repalle in Guntur district, it is said that they were adept in about 60 veshams which included portrayals of character – types from almost every

community and sub-community then existed in Andhra. He called these, 'veshams' – Jateeyams' – nationalist entertainment'.

Mode of Performances:

A team usually consisted of 5 or 6 people including a harmonist and a mridangam player. They visit a village, stay there for a month and entertain the villagers with one *vesham* a day. Some *veshams* are pure entertainers and some others instruction or ethical oriented dramatic pieces. The performers carefully alternate them so that their talent can be exhibited. Each morning they go properly make-up from one house to the other engaging people of the household with their song, dance, speech and humour. They usually start their *veshams* with 'Bairagi' and end up with 'Artha-Nareeswara.' The 'Artha-Nareeswara' *vesham* is usually performed during the last night of their stay since, according to them, it is the most artistic one. The next morning they go to each house without any *vesham*, recite benedictory slokas and ask for remuneration for the month-long performances.

Each team will have two major performers who can do a number of different roles, each one running from half an hour to one hour. They repeat the same at the next door. The people in that house are the spectators. They move from house to house singing, dancing and dialogue – rendering and

after a successful tour of the village for the day, they rest. Each team consists of a harmonist who is usually a good singer as well. If the villagers are interested, these singer-gurus will also do “purna-kalakshepam” in a local temple during evenings.

The actors need to specialize in song and speech. They must be able to master different dialects of Telugu as the character types belong to different parts of Andhra. They must also be proficient in caste-dialects and mannerisms of the people belonging to different strata of society.

There are two noticeable ideas at work in structuring a folk art form like *Pagati Vesham*. 1. Fragmentation of a supposedly long though content and 2. The performers’ functional approach that necessitated such fragmentation.

It is in this context that fragmentation becomes a meaningful tool in the hands of the performers, for this half humours, half satirical/critical approach is directly borrowed from the traditional performances themselves. In the traditional performances, such critical-humorous comments are a part of the dramatic interludes, during which time established humorous characters come up to the stage, indulge in name-calling and also foolish prattle. This is the usual comic relief in a traditional play: Kethigadu and Bangarakka in the Shadow puppet plays, Singi-Singadu in Yakshaganam

and Kuravangi, the fortune-tellers in these and other forms, the Vidushaka himself, sometimes on his own and sometimes in the role of Sutradhara – are all character from the traditional folk theatre forms who indulge in good-intentioned, if not always good-humoured criticism of topical events. The content of these interludes, taken out of the main performances, forms the basis of *Pagati Vesham*'s tone and its main social intent.

The functional approach to drama is a two way approach: the performers' need to present items that go well with the audiences of different strata of people, different castes and creeds so that their bread is taken care of. Similarly the audience's expectations of seeing a 'limited' performance within the temporal and spatial realities of life are met with by these performers. Viewed from this point, *Pagati Vesham* is easily the most popular, 'concise' performing art form that is welcomed by the audience.

Finally, the most important functional aspect of *Pagati Vesham* is its ready availability to the audience at their own door-steps. Instead of the entire family making a trip to the central place of the village during the night time, inconveniencing themselves, it is the capsule form that is presented to them; and those few minutes they are the royal guests in their own homes.

Further, such a form becomes 'instant' theatre, because when once the *Vesham* is on, speech befitting the character comes to the performer

automatically and those four or five hours, he lives in the role; most often he does not come out of his role until the complete 'dramatic' tour of the village is over.

It becomes 'instant' theatre because the form is presented, not on an improvised stage as a traditional drama is enacted, but in the wide courtyards of the rich people, in the wide open places where four roads meet, on the muddy roads, narrow by-lanes, in short, wherever the folk audience are found.

Such presentations are almost 'instant' because they start off as vigorously as they are put off, almost suddenly, according to the demands of an environment. They are 'instant' in yet another sense. They get to the content of the performance directly without elaborate preliminaries as seen in the traditional folk theatre forms.

Finally, the functional importance of *Pagati Vesham* top stories the entire performer-audience relationship. While the traditional dramatic forms are performance oriented (that is to say the performance is the fixed entity and all requirements such as audiences, content, style of presentation etc. are to be geared to promote such a performance), the *Pagati Vesham* is receiver oriented.

Thus fragmentation of the form, of the thematic variations viable with different sets of audiences and fragmentation in time have become necessary for the performers to launch almost a new form which takes drama to the door steps of the common people by very innovative and wandering theatre groups.

Toorpu Bhagavatham : A 'Desi' alternative to Mainstream Theatre

For the rural folk of Andhra. "Bhagavatham" means a performance about god and his *leelas*, usually shown on festive occasions and is usually an all night show with varying degrees of dance, song and speech it. Since the days of the development of "Caste Bhagavathams" developed by performers in many castes, modeled perhaps on the Kuchipudi Bhagavatham, groups of actors in each of the castes got stories of the main Bhagavatham rewritten or reformulated for them by "local poets." Sometimes, they also got local legends made into dramas for them, very often the legend – narrations were already popular in their ballad tradition.

They learnt the songs from the balladeers and the linking passages in prose, which were very few, were improvised. Thus almost a parallel theatrical tradition – parallel to the narrative tradition-had emerged. While many caste performers became practitioners of such “Bhagavatha plays,” firstly in competition with other caste performers including those of the Brahmin Communities, and secondly “to entertain their own community people,” they lacked the professional Zeal and experience of the established “Bhagavathulu” because their interest was seasonal and they live on other professions for their daily sustenance.

However, one region in Andhra developed a thoroughly in – bred parallel tradition of performing Bhagavatha plays “in their totality” and created its own ambience for performance and also necessary conventions to make the performances professionally viable and artistically pleasing. This, of course, is the “Toorpu” Bhagavatham called so because of the emphasis of the region “Toorpu,” the Eastern part of Andhra – where it is practiced and performed. At least five generations have gone by since these performances of Bhagavatha plays have ben started and are gaining strength day by day.

Toorpu Bhagavatham is called a “paralled” stream of Kuchipudi for more reasons than one. Firstly, they have almost all the plays of the

Kuchipudi Bhagavathulu in their repertoire, though they have added several new plays as well. Secondly, they are also itinerant and move about the entire area giving performances. Thirdly, and more importantly, only men actors perform both male and female roles, though an exception can be seen in the last 15 years when Anjali, daughter of the veteran Toorpu Bhagavatham lead actor, Brahamananda Bhagavathar's daughter learnt the Bhagavatham thoroughly and performed it for several seasons to the approval of the knowledgeable. Soon her sister and sister-in-law learnt it and are performing today. But for this exception of a single family, all other performers made this a hereditary profession.

Toorpu Bhagavatham is prevalent in the eastern (in fact, in our present-day usage it is north-eastern part of Andhra) districts of Srikakulam, Vizianagaram and Visakhapatnam. The most interesting feature of this Bhagavatham is that it has almost all the 'items' of the Kuchipudi "Bhagavathulu" perform: the major pieces are the *Bhamakalapam* and *Gollakalapam*, though of different authors and performed in a pleasingly 'folk' style. They have also 'Yakshaganam' – they call them "Bhagavathulu" – in their repertoire, their main ones being *Jala Kreedalu*, *Chenchu Natakam* and *Sarangadhara*. They also perform another Kalapam called *Chodiganikalapam*, which is at best a subversion of the lover –

episode found in *Bhamakalapam* and includes the love-anger sequences of Chodigadu, also known as Singadu and his beloved, singi. There are also other Kalapams which are not found in Kuchipudi Tradition : *Radha-Madhava Kalapam*, *Eruka Vesha Katha*, *Jeeva Drukula Kuravanji* and *Sunkari Kondadi katha*. The last one, along with *Chodigani Kalapam*, often finds a place in the midst of the two major *Kalapam* as a comic relief.

How and when these plays have arrived from Kuchipudi to northern Andhra is not easy-even to conjecture. It might have happened in the early part of the 19th c. When the Kuchipudi troupes used to be invited by local chieftains, zamindars and even by kings of Vizianagaram, Barampuram (the present-day ‘Berhampur’ in the state of Orissa) and other northern estates. It might be due to the bold initiative taken by some enterprising authors (like Kella Appaiah) who, after seeing the performances of Kalapams in some court, wrote such plays to suit their local teams. The texts are so near to each other in construction that they look to be too close imitations. Again, there arose, in due course, hereditary teams in many north-Andhra Villages – especially where festivals of local gods and goddesses (especially goddesses) are celebrated on a large scale. In course of time it has become customary that a family was given “annual performance rights” (called *vaarshikam*) and this have been claimed by successive generations of the

families. Kings and rich Zamindars, who could not get the Kuchipudi artists as and when they wanted took pride in developing their own ‘Bhama’s,” and, in succession, developing their own versions of both *Bhamakalapam* and *Gollakalapam*. As is natural in a village environment, humorous episodes intruding into the main performance are freely allowed. They have, in course of time, gained an identity of their own and are expanded into all-night performances.

But one very important thing about their style of presentation is to be ascertained in this context. While the texts of Toorpu Bhagavatham closely follow those of Kuchipudi, the latter sticks to its classical parameters, whereas Toorpu Bhagavatham consciously keeps it a folk entrainment.

Toorpu Bhagavatham and Kuchipudi Bhagavatham:

Kuchipudi Bhagavatham, also called Kuchipudi Yakshaganam, is a classical dance-drama form of Andhra Pradesh. Couched in a strong theatrical format with *samvada* – ‘duologue’ – as its major forte, it adopts several *abhinaya* techniques mentioned in *Natyasastra* texts. Its major emphasis on *sattvika abhinaya* is one attribute among several others that give it special classical status. *Mukhjabhinaya*, accompanied by appropriate hand gestures and foot work contribute to the classical nature of the Kuchipudi format – a format which synthesizes the text, the gestures and the

facial expressions harmoniously – all leading to the attainment of aesthetic pleasure.

Kuchipudi's repertoire contain *Bhamakalapam* and *Gollakalapam* and eight Yakshaganas: *Bhakta Prahlada*, *Usha Parinayam*, *Rama Natakam*, *Gaya Natakam*, *Sasirekha Parinayam*, *Harischandra*, *Mohini Rukmangada* and *Rukmini Kalyanam* – all of them rendering a story through dance, music and occasional speech. There is also a difference in the Kalapams and Yakashaganas in the sense that *Kalapam* tend to be more of in-depth studies of character in a moment of a crisis, whereas the yakshaganas are straight, linear narrations.

There are several similarities between the Kuchipudi and Toorpu Bhagavatham schools in as much as the performance modalities followed. Both of them contained only male performers (until recently); both of them had, for a very long time, only one play in their repertoire, both performed the *Bhamakalapam* and *Gollakalapam* as an all-night performance, stretching it, on demand, to a three-night performance, incorporating several sub-plots, mostly based on humorous episodes. Similarly, each format expanded the kalapams adding new dimensions of development as their audience desired.

Even in developing the format, both Kuchipudi and Toorpu Bhagavatham differ drastically. Toorpu Bhagavatam has been developed as a temple-ritual-performance whereas Kuchipudi has no such tie-ups of religiosity. In most of the ‘Vaishnava’ (a broad nomenclature because all Vishnu temples, and even some of those dedicated to local goddesses accepted this practice and put it into practice) temples of north-eastern Andhra, the “Bhama-Veshagaadu”- the male actor impersonating as Satyabhama – will have to touch the palanquin in which the god/goddess is placed on taken an procession, before the procession starts and after that, follow the procession throughout the village leading it with dance and accompanying music. And when procession returns to the temple and proper rituals are celebrated, the ‘Bhama-actor’ will have to perform Bhamakalapam before the god.

This Sacred function adds a new dimension to the entire portrayal of Bhama, for she is not only a dominant character in the play whose performance abilities make or mar the fortunes of the presentation, but ‘she’ virtually becomes the ‘sacred symbol’ of authority, whose symbolic gesture makes or mars a whole procession. Thus ‘Bhama’ is accepted as the ‘presiding poojari’ of the entire festival; of both its religious functioning as well as its more secular entertaining function!

Kalapam in three styles:

Bhamakalapam has become, for long, a litmus test for testing the acting prowess of a performer. That the story in its various formats becomes a testing ground for a style of performance is not surprising. Three variations in performance orientation and textual approach to the same subject can be seen in Andhra and all the three have their own points of focus and areas of achievement.

Besides the Kuchipudi Kalapam, which has attained the status of a model for classical abhinaya, there is a temple dance of Bhama Kalapam performed in East Godavari, especially at the Kunti Madhava Swamy temple at Pithapuram and is known as Nava Janaradanam. It is also called Parijatam, a general name given to Kalapams in the northern districts of Andhra. Bhama Vesham, Radha Vesham, Golla Vesham, etc. are all called 'parijathams' in Andhra as in some other parts of India.

The antiquity of the Kalapam has not been clearly established. However, it is a well-known fact that the Kuchipudi School made the Kalapam popular, Siddhendra Yogi, the founder of the school, is said to have lived before the end of the 15th c., because by 1600 A.D. the fame of the Kuchipudi performance has spread from Cuttack to Hampi. Aini Akbari mentions 17 famous traditions in dancing and the tenth appears to be

Kuchipudi style. It records that the actors are Brahmins, the female roles are played by men; they use ancient musical instrument and they stage 'Krishnalila' dance. In those days there was no other school of dance, which before comparison with this description except the Kuchipudi one.

'Kalapam' is the general name given for dramatic compositions of the song-dance type, with a major concern for character-portrayal. Though the famous Kalapams are Bhama Kalapam and Golla Kalapam, others which do not have Kalapam as part of their word, were also popular- Koravanji Vesham, Koorkaula Vesham, Pantulu Pathani Vesham, etc.

Kalapam is a form, which portrays character through song, dance and acting. There is not much of story or plot. Usually it is a single incident elaborated to bring out the psychological and social nuances in character. Because of its association with classical drama, it is sometimes mistakenly called Veedhinatakam or Veedhi Bhagavatham. And because of the predominance of song and dance, it also acquired names like Kelika and Kirtana.

The word 'Kalapam' has various meanings, it means a bund, a group, a collection. It also signifies a mantra in the Vedas (veda vak). Accordingly the art form Kalapam, actually happens to be a collection of songs, in various metres, strung together by the artist.

For example, the Kuchipudi School includes songs from Gita Govinda in their Bhama Kalapam. The dance-song of 'Dasavataram' is a must in their repertoire. Similarly, songs depicting the planks of the child, Krishna, (Krishna Lila) are included in Bhama Kalapam, and the story of Ramayana in Chodigani Kalapam. These inclusions of various types of songs and dances not only extend the performance to be a night-long one, but adds variety and wider understanding of the story.

The Kalapam stands midway between the Yakshaganam and vedhinatakam. The take-off point was Yakshaganam, when it was still a one-man narrative. Kalapam enlarged the scope of this one-man narrative by adding several alankaras to it. The Yakshaganam is a narrative-descriptive – dramatic piece in which a single actor, at least in the earlier stage of its development, acted out the episodes of a story and also by supplying the necessary links giving the story through narration and providing the details of characterization and locals through description. He also acted out several roles. Whether there were costume changes in this Yakshaganam was not easy to decipher. To such a single actor's performance, the Kalapam added new specificities.

Though there is only one actor in kalapam, he is aided by a second actor, who serves both as the Sutradhara and the Vidushaka. While the

acting part is retained with the main actor, the descriptive – narrative parts are taken over by the second actor, who is the new addition in the Kalapam.

Secondly, Kalapam introduced a feature like the character's self-introduction. The entrance song as it is called (*pravesa-daruvu*) is elaborated in the classical form of the Kalapam, whereas in the folk form, it is short and crisp. It introduces the major characteristics of the character and thus works as an introduction to the character. In fact, the whole Kalapam is an elaboration and exemplification of this introduction of the character. These songs are usually couplet sequences of various meters called kalika, utkalika, Dwipada manjari and ragada. They might also be stanzas comprising four lines like the taruvoja and utsaha. All of them, when sung to a dance, are called duruvu, and are of varying length. They contain a 'Pallavi' and can be sung and danced in different time-scales. Originally, it is believed that a cluster of four such songs was called Kalapam, which, in course of time is given to the entire performances.

Since the days of the 'Bhagavatha Purana,' the Krishna-Radha episodes have been a central concern of both the poets and the performing artist. It is interesting to note that Satyabhama replaces Radha in the Andhra Kapalam and, in the entire Indian context, it is only in Andhra that the Krishna/Satyabhama love episode has been central to the Krishan legends. It

is surprising that the Telugu imagination of love seems to have chosen Satyabhama as the love-Iron beloved of Krishna, perhaps because it wants to highlight the love between a husband and a wife within a familial context. This replacement is also perhaps due to the unconvincing portrayal of the relationship between Krishna and Radha interpreted not through the text but through extra-textual interpretations (metaphysical, mystical and religious). Kalapam's major emphasis is on this Satyabhama who, with a sense of ego belittled the importance of Krishna and when Krishna goes away from her as a consequence of this, will have to implore his return through various stages of yearning.

The *Kalapam* is a love-story between two lovers, which encompasses in it the eight aspects of sringara with an emphasis on vipralambha (love due to separation), finally it celebrates the reunion of the two lovers after an agonizing separation. The play also includes a wordy duel between the two lovers of Krishna-Satyabhama and Radha. This variation is presumably to compromise Jayadeva's choice with that of the Telugu poet's (popularly attributed to Siddhendra Yogi) on whose *Bhamakalapam* all other sub-original texts have been modeled.

The *Kalapam* is operatic like the Yakshaganam, but the songs here are specially composed for dance. We cannot say that all desi songs in

Yakshaganam are set to dance, but in *Kalapam*, all of them are dance-based, In fact, the dance itself explains the import of the song. In the exhibition of this piece, characteristics native to the theme are created, thus making the Kalapam a unique composition.

There are two distinct styles that are discernible in *Kalapam* today: one is the classical style adopted and developed by the Kuchipudi performers and the one retained in its original folk form seen in such other forms as Toorpu Bhagavatam. With the persistence and incomparable visualization by the saint-choreographer-writer, Siddhendra Yogi, the other have retained a native flavour, but none the less invigorating, Bhamakalapam of the Kuchipudi style begins with the classical invocation and staging itself is on the lines of ‘Abhinaya Darpanam.’ The performance is strictly in accordance with the tenfold exposition of ‘abhinaya.’

Bhamakalapam in Toorpu Bhagavatham Style:

Bhamakalapam the most popular of the plays performed by the Toorpu ‘Bhagavathulu,’ is not the same as Bhagavathula Ramaiah wrote for the Kuchipudi “Bhagavathulu,” though the story is the same. Though written by about fifteen different authors for so many “melams” of northern Andhra,

the story and the incidents run on the same lines. It tells us the story of how Krishna one day came to Satyabhama's palace when she was in deep sleep. He woke her up, decorated her with all precious ornaments, brought a mirror in which both his and Satya's images reflected. Krishna then asked her which of them was beautiful. In her pride, Satya said that she was definitely more beautiful. Krishna was irked at the answer and went away.

Bhama realized that the lord left her in a huff-she pined for him. She went through all the *avasthas* of a *srinagara nayika*. Finally she sent her maid, Madhavi, with a letter. Madhavi delayed and Satya became suspicious. At last Satya's pride had disappeared and there was genuine anguish and suffering. Krishna, having known this, appeared, Satya gave him a momentous welcome.

The Text

Though the incidents in *Bhamakalepam* do not vary much in all the styles, *Toorpu Bhagavatham* retains the folk flavour much more rigorously than its other counterparts. There are as many texts as there are patrons, for it was a custom that a particular poet – patron finances the performances since it was his text that the bhagavathulu were performing. Such poets were great directors too it seems that *Toorpu Bhagavatham* never followed the Kuchipudi though one or two *daruvus* were borrowed by certain performers.

The major text was that of was that of Vankayala Balarama Bhukta, followed largely in Vizianagaram district. This was the text one of the famous gurus and performers, Varada Audinarayana followed. Kocherla Brahmananda Bhagavathar, a noted performer of *Bhamakalapam* said that they had a family text ordered by one of their ancestors, Kocherla Akka Bhaktudu and authored by Kella Appaiah. Saginetti Ramachandra Raju paid a substantial honorarium to Appaiah to write the text for Akka Bhaktudu, whom Raju considered a great actor-dancer. Appaiah also wrote *Ksheera Sagara Mathanam Gollakalapam*) and *nala Natakam*, though the last one seemed not to have been performed. In Visakhapatnam district the texts of Saraswathula Subbaiah, Atreyapurapu Tammaya Kavi, Adhikarla Narayana Bhukta of Nimmalavalasa Village are popular. It has been a practice that each 'Satyabhama' followed a text of her (his) own, specially written for the actor or has been there in the family.

Other important *Bhamakalapam* writers are : Gutti Kannaiah, Venkatadasu, Atava Peddapalli Brahmam, Jaggumanthri Kondala Rao, Veera Narayana grama Bhima Kavi and Achyutaraya's son Venkateswarlu. These texts are used by individual performers and since they are written only for specific *bhama veshadharis*, they are not known outside the family circles of that performer.

It is said that one episode of *Bhamakalapam* of a particular writer is popular with one or the other group. For example, the “Veni Prabhandam,” i.e., the description of Satyabhama’s jada (plait) written by Narasimhadevara Venkata Sastry is popular. Similarly Garimella Venkatesam’s madana Gopala Padam is increasingly used in Srikakulam areas. Nandru Seetaiah’s ‘Rayabaram’ (sending an emissary) is popular in Vizianagaram. The Bobbili performers used Adhikarla Suryanarayana’s version of the letter. Similarly Kella Appaiah’s letter is a must with the Yelamanchili and Jagannadapuram performers,

This kind of getting special texts written for specific performers is not new in performing arts. This is to keep their individuality. This is also necessitated because a performer strong in rendering Sanskrit slokas performed the *churnika* before the letter in Sanskrit. An actor good in singing will have it written in a series of mandakaranta verse and so on.

However, one point is to be stressed here with regard to the text. The text is not ‘sacrosanct’ as classical forms, though some families of performers retained their special texts because they were written exclusively for their ancestors. It is flexible, the performer having the option to draw both from other texts or from other sources. But they took care not to borrow from a

contemporary text as that would lower their reputation. Instead, they ordered new daruvus to be written, on the model of popular *daruvus*.

This leads us to another important factor : since the text is flexible and new things perennially join the main stream, it is not easy to say which is an authentic text (even of a particular writer). This has happened with the Kuchipudi text itself and after months-long deliberations of performers, gurus and critics the erstwhile Sangeet Natak Academi of Andhra could not clinch the issue regarding the authenticity of Siddhendra's *Bhamakalapam*. Since in Toorpu Bhagavatham printed texts are rare, and since the guru-sishya tradition existed in which the guru decided the text, interpolations are plenty. Unless an ankitam (dedicatory epistle in the last charanam of daruvu) is mentioned in text, no one can easily recognize whose song/poem it is. There were always minor writers in the villages who were happy to add a stanza here and a song there written at the behest of Bhama performer and considered that a great opportunity!

The text abounds in songs written in desi meters : *Daruvu*, *ragada*, *padyam*, *kandam* and *kandardham*, *seesam* and *seesartham*, *vacanamela*, *dwipada*, *diwipadartham*, *triputa* and *arthachandrika*, *dwipada* – as the name indicates is a two-lined stanza with five syllable, often used for narrative and descriptive purposes. Most of the sandhi vacanas are done in

dwipada. Amongst the metrical stanzas *kandam* and *seesam* are the most prominent. Along with *dwipada*. These two fulfil the major narrative functions. These poems are sung in raga and have no rhythm and so cannot be danced. However, there is a peculiar way in which even these narrative models gain theatricality.

Theatricality is achieved by singing the first three lines in a raga like any metrical poem and all of a sudden shift into a song with the fourth line onwards. This sudden shift makes the stanza theatrically virile because from a mere singing of poem with raga, it all of a sudden became a medium of singing both with raga and a laya and talam (which a song contains). This is the meaning of the word *kanda* + *artham*, *seesa* + *artham* and *dwipada* + *artham*. Upto half the way, it is *kandam*, *seesam* and *dwipada*, later on it changes into a song with a beat (talam). That means, each one of these arth-s are half-poem, half *daruvu*.

“*Daruvu*” is the most important song-pattern used in Kalapams as well as in other folk plays of Andhra. Daruvu is dhruvagana – mentioned in Natyasastra. Though classical in origin and even in fixing the classical ragas, the singing pattern (raga-phanati) is in folk style. Dhruvaganam is of five types, according to Natyasastra – *Pravesa*, *Aakshepa*, *nishkarmana*, *parasadika* and *aantara daruvus*. In *Kalapams*, the *pravesa daruvu* is more

often used than the others. Pravesa daruvu is an entry song through which the characters introduce themselves. All important characters are given these entry songs. Along with it is also a half curtain (artha yavanika) behind which the character enters. When the most important characters enter, two people hold the curtain. Behind the curtain, the character performs a prayer and comes out of the curtain (the curtain is taken away) with a *Pravesa daruvu*. This is true of the *Yakshaganas* of *Toorpu Bhagavatam* also. Since the performance is given mostly to the rural audience, pravesa daruvu enables the illiterate audience to know who the character is and what are his/her antecedents. The daruvu in *Bhamakalapam* “Bhamane Satyabhamane” is very famous and in almost all types of performance this daruvu is sung, with variations in the charanams while the pallavi is the same.

Gollakalapam

Gollakalapam is believed to be of later origin; at least it is not as ancient as Bhamakalapam. The Kuchipudi Bhagavathulu follow a text written by Bhagavathula Ramayya of later 18th century and early 19th c. Toorpu Bhagavatham has its own version of Gollakalapam, many, many versions of it. However, it is possible that Gollakalapam has originated in the eastern districts of Andhra where Toorpu Bhagavatham is prevalent. The

reasons are not difficult to predict. Firstly, a large majority of people of the eastern districts belonged to the non-elitist class with a high percentage of the golla (Yadava) community, Bhamakalapam is already very popular; in fact, there are more number of Bhamakalapam troupes in the east than there were ever in Kuchipudi and as many writers of the Bhamakalapam texts. One of these writers must have thought the social need to turn the table on the so-called elitist, knowledgeable caste through the Gollakalapam. As some scholars believed it might as well be the Kuchipudi people, having served the elitist community with the Bhamakalapam, now turned to the rural spectators' taste to write and perform Gollakalapam. This is unlikely because Bhamakalapam, the Sringara Kalapam will go much better with the common people than the metaphysical duologues of Gollakalapam! Gollakalapam needs knowledgeable people to perform and equally knowledgeable people to enjoy! There seems to be no social or intellectual compulsions for the Kuchipudi artist to write a text like that, whereas it is natural that the Toorpu Bhagavatham patrons and performers, while practicing Bhamakalapam, found it necessary to counter the pretensions of the high caste people to knowledge. Thus Gollakalapam is the answer for people who are proud of their caste supremacy.

Whoever be the originator of Gollakalapam, it has gone permanently in to the repertoire of Toorpu Bhagavatham. It is a wordy encounter between a saiva (or Smartha) Brahmin, who is well-versed in the Brahministic rituals of performing yagna and yaga and gollabhama, a gopika who comes into the village to sell her milk, curds and buttermilk! Enquiring as to who she is, the gollabhama says she is a cowherdess and knows about the way of the world. The Brahmin, who is proud of his knowledge gets into an argument with her. She counters everyone of his arguments regarding several metaphysical aspects of life, a supposedly innocent woman lecturing on metaphysical aspects to a supposedly all knowledgeable Brahmin! She seems to have her tongue in her cheek!

Besides the conversation, the Kalapam offers several points to ponder. It is not merely an encounter between the laywoman and the pundit, it is also an encounter between a saiva man and a vaishnava woman! In a society which is full of caste and sub-caste rivalries, this seems to throw more light on the origins of Gollakalapam! It is to be pointed out that Vaishnavism has been more widely prevalent in the eastern parts of Andhra than in the central and southern parts. In the southern parts, saivism dominated and in central Andhra, it is the Smartha cult, which gives equal importance to saiva and vaishnava sects, that is dominant.

In Toorpu Bhagavatham's Golla Kalapam, after the initial introductory invocation of the sutradhara and the vantha-s, an episode of "Singi-Singadu" is enacted, Singi is here referred to as Erukalasani and Singadu as Chodigadu. Originally this episode forms a part of Toorpu Bhagavatam performances, though this part is taken out and performed separately as Chodiganikalapam.

This is a humorous prologue to the play. Yerukalasani (a female fortune-teller) appears behind a screen with a guru stuti and invocation, comes out of the curtain with an entry song. Soon comes Singadu with a pravesa daruvu, searching for his wife Singi. She makes fun of his dress, his demeanours and finally his intelligence. When others come to settle the quarrel between them, Singi and Singadu unite saying nobody needs to poke their nose in their private affair!

Then comes the gollabhama with an entry song, selling milk and curds. The Brahmin laughs at her when she says that her milk is divine and her curds are godly! She explains how the entire world including all the castes are "gollamayam" (full of golla-s). She equates all the people with this nomenclature of 'Golla' and goes to the pindotapathi karamam (the process of a childbirth) to show that this is a divine process and no one knows the 'why and how' of creation. In their birth all are equal, she says. She then

extensively quotes from Sanskrit texts to say how man is made, how knowledge is acquired, how the four “gnanendriya, karmendriya vyapara’s,” Sadhan-s the three guna’s and similar things of metaphysical import.

The Brahmin proudly tells her who he is. “If you are a Brahmin, please teach me Brahma Jananam,” entreats the woman. The Brahmin proposes that they should dilate on yagina. He talks about the rituals connected with it. She goes beyond and proposes that the manasa yaga, proposed in the Taithareeyopanishad, is the real-type of yaga.

The most important incidents in Gollakalapam are covered in two parts. In the first part gollabhama’s entry, vinikipattu (behind the curtain), challa pattu (selling milk), golla pattu (describing the twelve kinds of golla community, their nature and functions), Eka pattu (her arguments that all people are one), Yagjna kramam (the discourse on yagjna), and Tripurasura Samharam (the killing of Tripurasura).

The second part is mostly narrative : it narrates the story of Samudra Madhanam followed by the entry of a new character Sunkari Kondadu (who is Vishnu himself in disguise) and his encounter with golla bhama, and sabhavarana. The text is full of Sanskrit slokas and Telugu poems. In an otherwise philosophical discourse on the nature of man and the universe, the entry of a down-to-the-earth character like Sunkar Kondadu is a happy

relief! Ultimately he appears as Vishnu and says that gollabhama is Mukti Kanta, the woman who came to release and soul from its human bondage and give moksha!

Even in Gollakalapam, the most important character is bhama. Her make-up and costume are the same as Satyabhama's. The only difference is her carrying a milk pot indicative for her profession. The text is full of Sanskrit and mythological references. There are churnikas whenever the gollabhama daruvu-s, dwipada, ela, Kandardham, seesartham and all the other meters popular with Toorpu Bhagavatam. As it is a philosophical text with much of the commentary in prose, the few Daruvu-s in it are interesting. The incidents of Tripurasura Samharam and Samudramadhana are danced in a Kelika style. In Samudramadhana story, the incident of Vishnu coming as Mohin for distributing amritam (divine sector) is acted out, not merely narrated, by the performer. Added to the Vidushaka's helpless encounters with gollabhama, the play has ample scope for humour both at the beginning when Singi-Singadu story is acted out, and later, when Sunkar Kondadu appears to argue with gollabhama.

Many performers follow Kella Appaiah's text. Saraswathula Subbaiah and Venkatadasu wrote only the Ksheerasagara Madhanam part. Atreyapurapu Tammaiah Kavi and Bhamidipati Appaiah Kavi have written

specifically for the Bobbili performers. Garimella Venkateswara Kavi wrote the same story as Samudramadhanm. This is followed by the yerra family patronized by Majji Venkunaidu of narasingabilli. Of early twentieth century texts, mention must be made of Nanduri Seethaiah's Gollavesha kalapam, Samudra Madhanam and tripurasura Samharamu.

Chodiganikalapam

Its main characters are Singi and Singadu. These two characters from a part of Gollakalapam and in the olden days, they would come at the beginning of each play, sing and dance to humorous songs and inform the story of the day and leave. That tradition is almost extinct now. As they are seen in Gollakalapam, the two characters appear in Chodiganikalapam and extend the same text to make it a performance on its own right.

The story is simple : Singi comes, sing the invocation verses and leaves. Chodigadu or singadu appears. He is searching for Singi. The hasyagadu comes and asks him whom is he searching for. Singadu narrates his story. Singi left him angrily and he came in search of her. They move in and out of the stage, he searching for her and she avoiding him. Ultimately, they meet. Singi is angry with him for drinking country liquor, for being rude, etc. Singadu finds fault with her: her ruffled dress, biting marks on her cheeks, etc. Singi answers benifittingly. Completely convinced of their

innocence. Singadu prays that she should come back to him. She obliges. They dance.

The costume and make-up of Singadu is like a tribal's. He carries a curved stick in his hand as an indication that he is a humourous character. In his long search for Singi, he reveals certain home truths about marriages in general.

Singi also appears in Yakshaganas as a 'Sodi' woman, telling the future: She does this almost to every heroine of the Yakshaganams. But that part is now edited.

Yakshaganas of Toorpu Bhagavatham

Like their Kuchipudi counterparts, Toorpu Bhagavathulu also expanded their repertories by including Yakshaganas. The most popular Yakashganas are Jala Kreedalu, Sarangadhara and Chenchu Natakam. While all the performance conventions are retained in these Yakashaganas, the role of the Sutradhara is completely lessened and, instead, he is replaced by an alternative humourous character in each play. This transformation seems to be the most innovative part in the development of Toorpu Bhagavatham. In a one-woman show like the Bhamakalapam or the Gollakalapam, the hasyagadu-sutradhara has a very important role to play. While he provides leadership for the conduct of the play i.e., its music, its narration and its

dramatization of the incidents – he also acts out the ‘other’ character who are absent on the stage. As a confidante of the main character, he is the doer of things, while bhama is the ‘thinker.’ Having a tradition of only a two-person scenario until the last century, the Toorpu Bhagavatham performers do a good job in a play wherein each character is donned by a separate actor.

Jala Kreedalu

Jala Kreedalu is in the repertoire of Toorpu Bhagavatham for long. The text followed is the Lepakshi Krishna natakamu written by Seerneedu Venkatarama Kavi. The performers say that they are enacting the play for the last 400 years but the play was written around 1830 and published for the first time in 1864. This play could have been the earliest one of these Bhagavathulu, besides the Kalapams. It is so because this play also deals with Srikrishna’s life and Maha Bhagavatham has quite a bit of Krishna’s Childhood life depicted in it. So its treatment in a dramatic form by the Bhagavathulu still come under the ‘Bhagavatha’ category.

Though the text is entitled ‘Krishna Natakamu’ alias Jala Kreedalu, this has been referred only with the latter name. In the performance proper, there is nothing of “Jala Kreedalu” – water sports – in which Krishan takes away the clothes of the gopikas. The text contains this episode. But not the performance. It is interesting to note that the name Jala Kreedalu is retained

without “Jala Kreedalu” being performed. It may be due to its attractive name or it is because it is known so to both the performers and the audience!

The play itself is very interesting. It starts with Devaki, in her advanced pregnancy, describes, her condition. They call for the midwife – mantrasani – to attend on her. The mantrasani refuse to attend on her in the beginning but later obliges the maid’s request after she gets her quota of presents. A boy is born; the eighth to Devaki. He is soon replaced by a girl. Kamsa comes and kills the girl in spite of requests from every one.

The scene change to Repalle where Krishna is being brought up by Yasoda. Putana comes to kill the young Krishna. A long scene how Yasoda refuses to give the boy to Putana and how ultimately she yields. Putana dies in the act of giving poisoned milk to Krishna. The curtain is imaginatively used in enacting these incidents. Young Krishna is in a mischievous spree. He and the boys of the village move into everyone’s house and steal butter. They indulge in other kinds of mischief. The gopikas come and complain. Yasoda wants to threaten him. Unlike in Maha Bhagavatham, Krishna innocently narrates how the gopikas are after him. In a long passage he narrates several incidents which turn the blame on the gopikas. All the gopikas, in their love for Krishna, surround him and dance with him.

Krishna goes to Kamsa's court at his request and kills him. With that the play ends.

The roles of devaki, Putuna. Yasoda and Krishna are the most prominent. There are two maids of Devaki, who later become maids of Yasoda who dance out to the daruvus, sung by Devaki and Yasoda. The group dances as well as the individual's dances keep the show's interest as a dance-drama. All dances in Toorpu Bhagavatham are mano-dharamam nrityas since they create a psychological mood rather than interpret the text.

The text is extremely lyrical and the daruvus are in par with those in Bhamakalapam and Gollakapalam in their musicality and their poetic texture. Jala Kreedalu is now very rarely performed, partly because it needs more number of actors, but also because it needs more singer actors whereas Bhama or Golla needs only one major actor.

Chenchu Natakam

The other two plays – Chenchu Natakam and Sarangadahra – are popular in other theatre forms even before the Toorpu Bhagavatham has got the plays written for them. Chenchu Natakam is popular with Chindu Bhagacathulu. It deals with Lord Vishnu's new incarnation of Narasimha and his love for Chenchulaxmi, when he left his abode and came in search of his lost wife. He makes love to tribal men can do like climbing trees

and killing a wild animal with a single arrow and so on. He says yes and she marries him. Then comes Vishnu's consort, Srilaxmi. Without knowing that they belong to the same 'amsa' (the divine self), they fight like any other common women who are co-wives of one husband! This is the most amusing part of the play as it contains savathula kayyam – the quarrel between two co-wives!

Sarangadhara

The other play, Sarangadhara, is also popular in Andhra. It is the story of one Raja Raja Narendra, a fictitious ruler of Rajamahendravaram who marries Chitrangi, originally selected for his son, Sarangadhara. When the king sees her, he is enamored of the beauty, marries her. Chitrangi dislikes it. She is in love with Sarangadhara. When the king is away hunting, she waits for an opportunity to make love him. When Sarangadhara's parrots fly away to Chitrangi's palace. Sarangadhara goes there to fetch them. Chitrangi makes advances towards him.

He rejects her and goes back. Angered at Sarangadhara's rejection, she complains against him when the king comes back from hunting that Sarangadhara tried to molest her. The king becomes angry and orders that his legs and hands be cut. The punishment is implemented and after that the king comes to know of the mischief of his younger wife. When he is in deep

remorse, a siddha ho is Sarangadhara's yoga guru, appears and heals Sarangadhara. Chitrangi is punished.

These three plays are performed outside the festival performances. During the festivals of local goddesses, usually Bhamakalapam or Gollakalapam is performed. These plays are thus non-ritualistic and are added to the group's itinerary as villagers like to witness these plays.

KATHA-S IN ACTION:

DRAMATIC STRATEGIES IN FOLK NARRATIVE

Folk narrative, intended for portraying the valorous deeds of either the gods or the heroes has been one of the first art forms that mirrored the community ethos – their aspirations and frustrations, their concerns and beliefs, their very way of life. Initiated as a story-song the folk narrative has been a soul-filling of religious participation. The power of a narrative performance to shape, reflect and embody community identity is nowhere better evident than in the folk narrative. They are religious in content and ritualistic in intent and served, in their earliest practice, as a means to transport the audience from their everyday secular lives to the higher ground of the mythic and soured spheres of heroic events.

The singing of a story, especially of gods and heroes, has a long tradition in Andhra. Stories in honour of a presiding deity of a particular place have been reported in poetic texts, the earliest available mention being the references available in Saivism texts of *Basava Puranamu* and *Panditharadhya Charitramu* by Palkuriki Somanatha. He spoke of devotees, in their excited moods of devotion, improvised songs while singing them. He mentioned thirteen different varieties of songs sung to large groups of

people who gathered at annual celebrations of Lord Siva, along with *Bhaurupa-s* and *Yakshagana-s*.

In Srinatha's *Bheemeswara Purana* and *Palanati Veera Charitra* evidences of narratives sung during Festivals of commemoration to Gods and Goddesses are aplenty. The most absorbing account of contemporary narrative traditions is reflected in a dramatic narratives, writer in the style of a *Veedhi* (one of the ten dramatic variations found in the *Natyasastra*) called *Kreedabhiramam* by Vinokonda Vallabharaya, the text itself being said to be a translation of a Sanskrit *Veedhi*, *Premabhiramam*. Vallabharaya, a chieftain belonging to the mid-14th c., believed to have written this with the active help of a great contemporary poet, Srinadha, describes several dramatic and narrative pieces that entertained the people of Orugallu (the present day Warangal) during a Sivaratri festival. He specially mentions Bavaneedlu a singing the *leelas* of Ekavira Devi, the presiding goddess of the place. He also vividly describes how a well decorated woman-singer sang Ekavira's divine stories with the help of a stringed instrument. These and many other instances illustrated how narrative performances stimulated the audience's ethical and aesthetic responses.

Thus the ballad (folk narrative) singing tradition is an off-shoot of the attempt of Veera Saiva cult to propagate Saivism. The earliest group of

intendant singers is called the Jangam-s ('Jangam' comes from the word *jangama* which means 'moving,' 'not statics'), a wandering sect singing the stories of Siva. The Jangam Katha is the first known folk narrative. It narrated an incident, a *leela* of the Lord or his several followers, using normally a *dwipada*, a two-line stanza, with ecstatic devotional fervour. But, in course of time, the themes have been extended to the local deities, thus consciously creating parallel myths to strengthen local/specified devotees. Still later they covered the stories of heroes, who either proved their valour in the battles, sacrificing their lives for the welfare of the community or local heroes who waged unrelenting wars against brutal authority. Andhra is rich in all these multiple varieties and they have widened their thematic scope, and, along with it, their performative strategies. The 'Oggu Katha' is an illustration of a folk narrative which sings in praise of Beerappa, an incarnation of Parasurama, the family deity of the Yadavas as well as of Yellamma, the caste deity. Both *Palnati Yuddham* and *Bobbili Yuddham*, both of them called 'balled-cycles,' which contained the exploits of war heroes, have hair-rising episodes of anger and pathos that easily captivated the audience over centuries. Chivalrous martyrdom marked these exploits. The heroic deeds of a local-hero, Pandga Sayanna, who exploited the rich to feed the poor is sung by the Kinnera-Katha singers.

The Telugu ballad lore encompasses a whole gamut of the social structure, not only with the Saiva and Vaishnava myths presented, but involves all the class structure. If we accept the theory that castes are formed, largely from the occupations, it is evident that several of the craft caste gods are worshipped by its followers. The myths that surround these gods are sung to commemorate the gods seasonally every year on an auspicious day, prescribed as the god's birthday. When once the myths are woven around the god head, Andhra's caste supremos thought it fit to create a class of dependants whose only duty is to go round the caste families and on happy, or even unhappy occasions sing the mythical narratives connected, with the caste god. This is done to invoke the gods for the welfare of the family and for the larger welfare of the community.

All the seventeen and odd song-narratives now in vogue have had their origins in the rituals and festivals of village goddesses. Most of them are written in one single poetic metre, either in the two-lined *dwipada* or a four-lined *ragada*. The format is almost the same : if it is a narrative of a god or goddess, it describes, in various episodes, the power of the divinity in suppressing any evil spirit and reign supreme. If it is a narrative about a war hero, again, the format contains mainly deeds that made the hero a martyr. It

is difficult to locate the narratives to a specific period, though it is common belief that they survived at least two centuries.

A list of the kathas, the god involved and the performing caste might be useful.

Jangam katha	Siva	'Jangam'
Asadi katha	Peddamma	Asadi-s
Sarada katha	Yellamma	Budiga Jangalu
Picchukuntala katha	Mallikarjuna Swamy	-
Oggu katha	Yellamma, Beerappa	Kuramas
Jamukula katha	Parasurama & Yellamma	Baindlu Bavaneelu
Pamba katha	Ankamma	
Runja katha	Siva	Jangams, Viswa
Brahmins		
Kinnera katha	Jamba Puranam Pandaga Sayanna katha	Dekkala
Pandavula katha	Nagoba Jalli Devara & Bhima Devara	Thoti-s Girijans
Palanati katha	-	Veera Vidyavanthulu,
Harijans		
Katamraju katha	Gangamma	Kommu Gollalu

Kanyaka katha

Kanyaka

Veera Mushti

Burrakatha

Heroic narratives

Secular

The performance history of each one of these forms tells a varied story. Some of the forms remained to be ritualistic forms that are enacted during the caste deity's festival Asadi katha, Kinnera katha, Pamba katha remained basically ritual forms, narrating a story as it came to them without the performances own creative inputs. Such forms, glued to the original, serve the purpose religious resuscitation and ritualistic necessity. They remained to be narrative. This might be construed, also, as a pointer towards the social status of either the performers or their progenitors. These castes belonged to the lowest of the low in the social hieraschy and so, as in the case of other advanced castes, they have had no opportunities to expose themselves to outside world and confront more provocative audiences which might have tempted them to a different performance orientation.

Other forms such as Jamukula katha, Palnati katha, Ogu katha and Burra katha, performed by releticely more socially-conscious of artistes have, in the last have a Centary, included several dramatic and theatrical strategies, a study of which would reveals the potentialities of these forms to be popular both the rural and the urban audiences alike.

The first and foremost observations in this regard is the fact that same folk forms, though initially served the purpose of reassuring and strengthening the layman's faith in the god head and so spiritual in purpose and inductive in technique, slowly opened up to new audiences and needed strategies that would satisfy them. Growing urbanization and semi-urbanizing ethos have entered into rural households. The youngsters, now town-educated, looked at the folk art forms, both as spiritual – orientation as well as mere entertainment. This wish naturally demanded new stratagems from the performers. In order to sustain in the art field, the performers had to learn new techniques in narrating their story.

This resulted in the polarization of the performing artists into broadly two categories – those that retained the tradition narrative methods, limiting themselves to the ritualistic model, both for purposes of spiritual sanctity as well as of limited artistic resources. Those that have the potential to improvise and add techniques of their own or borrow techniques from neighboring arts, in which they found popular performance arts as more popular. The second category of people are those that are exposed to other forms which means that they have a broad mind to receive and a boldness to implement some of the received strategies in their own performances.

This tendency of dramatization of a narrative may also be due to the influence of Telugu mainstream commercial drama since the late 19th c. and, more importantly, of the Telugu cinema that became a major attraction since its advent in the early 1930's. These cinemas, in the first decade, were mostly folklore – based and so the chivalrous stances taken by the motion picture actors have percolated into the performance techniques of the folk narratives also.

There seems to be yet another reason for this growing tendency towards adopting popular methods in pure narratives. This is with regard to the individuation process that has influenced several performing arts, most notably, the folk arts. Until the end of the 19th c. When folk narratives remained ritual – centered, group performances remained a norm. But when the artists realized that if their talent is individually made recognised, personal focus is forthcoming. Along with recognition, come fame and honours, leadership and money. Thus several front-ranking folk artists in the mid-20th c. took to ways of individuation, which depended mainly on their improvisational abilities at creativity. The most important narrative forms that transformed themselves into dramatically vibrant forms are Jamukala katha, Oggu katha and Burra katha. The strategies they adopted for a change denote how folk forms, under pressure from changing community life,

personal aspirations and cognate public recognition of merit had induced the artists to deviate from the mystically ritualistic format of folk narrative to a more universally – acceptable form.

Into a plain, monotone story narration of the early days, the first major change occurred when a singing group the refrain, used after each line either dainty and diminutive or long and reverberating. In the folk song, especially in the story-song narrative the refrain always played a significant role. It used to repeat the line so that the singer can rest that much of time to start afresh. Secondly, the refrain, used in chorus, is always on a higher pitch and so easily reaches the congregation (especially in the old days when microphone facilities were absent). From being a narrative addendum, the refrain has become mood-determining tag of a line – traversing between a single letter expletive to a whole line, repetitive of the song-line or at least of its length. This elongation or diminution is dictated not by the original line as in old days but by the demands of the mood in the story. The narrative theme might range between war and death (which it tends to be usually) the refrain changes as, for example, in the war scenes it is an abrupt, single-letter word to speed up the narration and reflect the urgency that warranted such a situation, whereas a reflective and sorrowful elongation fits into a post-war situation when the narrator sings in pathos the agony of the heroes

involved in the tragedy. Usual descriptive passages will be rendered in a non-mood singing, when the refrain is a mere repetition of textual line. Thus linking the mood to the refrain used in the narration has been achieved with considerably praiseworthy results, both in Jamukula katha and Oggu katha. This change is not necessitated in Burra katha, alterday mid-20th c. form since the text itself provided the short-long alternatives based on mood.

EMOSIONAL INTENSITY:

In the earlier structures of folk performances ritual participation used to be a key module. The devotee's identification with the ritual has an overriding significance to the success of this ritual process and ritual communication. The worship patterns themselves provided a psychic elation and psychic relief. In the goddess – devotee relationship, emotional exuberance revealed itself in trances, which are extemporaneous testimonials to the power of the divinity. The accompanying folk narrative is a signification of the visually – experiencing ecstasy turned into storytelling with duon – besting chanting and audience participation becoming a part of the narrative context.

Further emotions, in the earlier manifestations of folk narratives, used to be geared up to stimulate awe and respect for the priestess's appearance and screening and persuade the gathering to renew their faith in the

awesome spirituality. Her message (called ‘Rangam Yekkadam’ : getting on the stage) can be seen as a metaphorical and rhetorical feature which is a culmination of spiritual process and ritual communication. The priestess’s formulaic pronouncements, in fact her entire message, is punctuated by exclamations and flamboyant gestures.

If, in the old days, these proclamations and gestures were enough to invoke a sense of spirituality and involved an experiential process, which very often was a mediation between the godhood and the layman. But in today’s modern world, such metaphysical symbiosis, such experiential process gives way to a more mundane, realistic level of experience and so modern audience tend to accept the ritualistic background as only a part of the whole, and the remaining part will be served well if the tales of the goddesses (or gods) are narrated in which the divinity part of the story forms only a part of it. Thus came the myths that surrounded each local god and goddess with a lot halo around each one and gaining thereby religious sanctity as well as lay men’s acceptance and willing participation.

But the changed narrative performances shifted the emphasis from continuous rendering of text-context- application - resolution scenario to unit clusters of courage-valor – confrontation – angry outburst and final victory of the godsend. It illustrates victory over *adharmik* maneuverings,

thus shifting the emphasis from religious concerns to social concerns. It thus parts moves away from mere persuasive techniques and levels heavily on performative metaphors – the shift from story-rendering for its own intrinsic ethical impact to story-performance for an audience's experiential process. In the former, it presumes an innate identification with the spirit, whereas in the latter, the sheer identification by dramatization. Instead of an innate acceptances of the spirit, it beloves of reaching to a stage of acceptance through action, punishment and victory.

The *Veera*, *Raudra* and *Karuna* emotions now becoming predominant. In order to demonstrate these emotion – ridden situations the performs undertake several *aangika* and *vaachika* strategies to make the performance dramatically intense and visually striking. The body positions of attacking opponents, the way an opponent is finished off, the manner in which the divine punishes the offenders, thereby reclaiming the supremacy of the divine being. The narrative artistry that is brought into a *Jamukula katha* by obviating a paradox of word and sound – using the sung word in opposition to the playing on the string instrument is unique in storytelling style. Subba Rao Panigrahi, the unsurpassed veteran of this art form invokes his word and sound to rouse people against the atrocities of the landlords – which heralded significant mass movements in Northern Andhra.

Similarly, two ace-performers of Oggu katha – Chukka Sathaiah and Maida Ramulu opened up new vistas of aangika and vaachika improvisations to take the art to new heights. The circular moves of the narrator, while the chorus repeats the line gained a new momentum and, somewhere in the middle, the main singer's unexpected turn in the anti clockwise movement, to avert the opponents sword striking and this unexpected expediencies brings a rare dramatic turn in the recent history of folk performing strategies. Chukka Sattaiah, an hononarany Doctorate – holder from Telugu University, where he also teaches, is a veritable experiment. His enactments of valorous deeds like striking a foe or his traversing a long journey on horse-buck, galloping all the way, increasing his rendering of the lines reflecting the fastness of the horse-ride are enough examples of supreme mastery of the art of performance.

Another equally meritorions performer was late Maida Ramulu who was priest in the Yellamma temple and an Oggu katha performer. His forte was the vaachika. A impromptu maker of poetic lines himself and adept in the pcituals of Yellamma worship, he re-enacts several of them with skillful and awesome reproduction, all the time rendering the strong. He was also skilled in the offering of 'harathi' (camphor light offering) with his hands, forearms, shoulders and head decorated with camphor lamps and dances

before the Goddess as though he was like Coauthor offering himself to the Goddess. A supers performer, he reminds one of the ancient practice of trance – dancing during the days of Jatara.

The third example is that of Shaik Nazar, a master – artist and storyteller, whose narrative artistry earned him national honours such as Padmashree and Sangeet Natak Akademi award and several state awards. Two aspects of his performance. Paradigm are especially illustrative First, Nazar’s ability at text improvisation to signify the pace of the narrative is a notable example of his folk aesthetic. Such storytelling possessed of the imaginative power that he brought to bear in the performance is a gift bestowed on him, partly by his association with the front-ranking theatricals of the Praja Natya Mandali and partly by his own conviction that Burra katha is the best suited medium to portray the confrontational attitudes that he explores in the story.

The multiple strategies adopted by Nazar in his narrative rendering reflects to what extent a narrative, persuasive medium can be transformed into a dramatic, performative medium. His dramatizations of events embellish the traditional tales adding what Henry Classic would describe as “mental associations woven around texts during performance to shape and complete them, to give them meaning” hitherto unexposed in traditional

rendering. Thus there is a running commentary, or gloss, harmonic to the tale proper, and is a stylistic feature of Ramulu's narrative expertise which tells the old text with a never sub-texts running concurrently a notable achievement.

A second quality in Nazar's performative excellence is his ability to sudden dramatically effective shift from one emotion to the other in a split second. For example, in "Planati Yuddham," a historical tale of importance, Nazar dwells upon the young hero, Balachandra's undaunted courage while fighting with the enemies and with eyes opening wide, with fire emanating from them, with a forward right leg thumping and with a slow, best confirmed outrage of words, he suddenly drops down and bemoans the fact of the several opponents attacking him at the same time and the performer collapsing as though he was Balachandra himself. This simultaneity of roles – that of a narrator and an actor – makes the narrative highly emotive. Thus the meaningful, yet explosive mechanisms, initiated by the prime narrator mirrors and monitors idealistic behaviour in culture and elevates community values.

In the modern vivification of the tradition, 'individuation' plays a prominent role by making the art form a uniquely co-ordinated endeavour, by combining and severally allocating diverse roles dramatics personae to

different performances in the group so that it becomes “a dramatic enactment of a narrative, “ which, while rendering the major actor as the chief performer-actor, allocates judicious role – playing to the other members of the group. Such a recreation of a traditional format into a modernist aesthetic modern is the gainful achievement of the contemporary narrative performance.

NEGOTIATING DUALITY : TWO ‘MEDIAL’ FORMS

The dual functioning of a folk form both as a dance and also as a dramatic piece rarely occurs. It is common knowledge that in all folk art forms song, rhythmic movement of the body and dramatization (however meager it could be) of events go hand in hand and all the three types of expression – the *vaachika*, the *angika* and *sattvika* – are judiciously mixed up according to the dictates of the form. Theoretically, this duality or an admixture of two major types, should, in course of time, either settle down with the dominance of one of the elements or completely go out of use as it is neither this nor that. But interestingly a separate genre – as a medial form has emerged from this unison and is called variously as ‘Nataka Bhajana’ (in the coastal Andhra region) and as “Chiratala Ramayanam” in Telangana. This form has come to stay and, a combines the elements of both ‘Chekka Bhajana’ and ‘Veedhi Natakam,’ retaining some of the prominent qualities of both the forms.

CHEKKA BHAJANA:

‘Chekka’ means a wooden piece; but, in the context of folk dance. It is a pair of wooden pieces, specially prepared to be used as the main percussion instrument to the rhythm of which the dancers dance. It

resembles Kolatam in many respects it uses the same technical vocabulary as in Kolatam. In this dance form also, a group of dancers is known as *jatti*, the place of performance, *garadi*, the angles of bodily movement, *kopu*, and the beginning, the change of pace and the conclusion *ettugada*, *usi* and *muktayimpu* respectively.

However, there are also recognisable differences between the two forms. One is the use of ‘chekkalu’ instead of ‘kolalu’. This gives a greater scope of the movement of hands in Chekka Bhajana, because in Kolatam, both the hands are used for striking with two sticks held in both hands, whereas in Chekka Bhajana both the Chekkas are held in the right hand and the other hand is used for occasional, generalized gestures. Another difference lies in the format of the text used. Kolatam gives importance to single separate songs, each one becoming a whole by itself, whereas in Chekka Bhajana, long narratives are much more prominent than single songs. This narration of episodes and the accompanying dances led to dramatization in Chekka Bhajana. Thirdly, Chekka Bhajana offers a greater variety both in the rhythmic beats and the ensuing sounds emanating from the percussion because the chekkas, not only provide the basic rhythm as in kolas, but with the jingling bells tied at the ends and the metal pieces fitted into the chekkas give a more pleasing variety of sounds.

Chekka Bhajana, more than any other folk art, has remained a temple form for many centuries. It is popular especially in the Sri Rama temples, which abound in Andhra. No village in Andhra, however small it is, exists without a Rama temple and wherever there is a Rama temple. Chekka Bhajana is bound to be performed. It has been a happy and absorbing folk dance, learnt during the lean months of summer when villagers are relatively free from their agricultural work and presented to the villagers in the following festivals.

‘Bhajana’ the absorbed devotee’s way of expressing his faith in the God, is in fact the artistic form of the large masses of rural India and serves as an obverse to the rituals in the *sanctum sanctorum* of the temple, where only the *archakas* perform worship. Thus it serves as the common man’s worshipful method. It doesn’t involve recitation of slokas and mantras as the *archakas* do. Further, as a group performance, it involves the whole village either as performers or as spectators.

‘Chekkalu’ (also called ‘Chiratalu’ in some parts of Andhra) are a pair of wooden pieces 1 ½ feet long and 4 to 6 inches of width. They are flat on one side and oval-shaped on the other. They are chiseled and riveted with jingling bells. Midway on either side rings are arranged to hold the two chekkas, one with the thumb and the other with the other fingers. On either

side of the ring and at the end of each chekka, holes are made and round, metallic pieces are fitted into the wooden piece. By opening and closing the palm, the chekkas can be struck at each other, which produces metallic and jingling sounds at the same time.

In the old days when each village has a trained group of Chekka Bhajana dancers (this group was called 'Rama Dandu'), a dance troupe from one village used to go to the next village in procession – with a burning lamp placed in the midst of the dancing group when they perform at key places in the village – and hand over the 'torch of performance' to the dancing group of the neighboring village. This goes on until, on the Sri Rama Navami day, the group that gets the torch or flame last, would visit Bhadrachalam, the sacred place where a famous Sri Rama Temple is situated. During such processions, each group sang the entire Ramayana, beginning with the birth of Rama to his coronation and wedding.

As in Kolatam, kopu is the basic unit of movement in Chekka Bhajana also. Some of the kopus are common to both of them, but some are special to Chekka Bhajana. The first ten steps (known as *adugu-s*) are the basic ones. *Adi adugu* – the first step – is the initial one and the most important it involves a step forward first with the right foot and then the left foot joins it, with a movement of the hips and the bending of knees. The first step in all

kopus is the *adi adugu*. Others that follow it are the *rendo adugu* (second step), *moodo adugu* and so on. Almost as in classical dance, other adugus are variable combinations of these ten *adugus*. Other *adugus*, as in Kolatam, describe the body movement. *Kuppi adugu* (jumping step), *melika adugu* (twisting step), *bicycle adugu* (cycle step), *gurraputadugu* (horse step), etc.

The teacher stands in the middle of the circle along with other instrumentalists – a flutist, a mridangist and a cymbal player. Only the mridangist sits in the middle by the side of the lamp post in which a flame burns all through the performance.

A Chekka Bhajana group consists of 16 to 20 artists, always an even number. The teacher not only initiates each song, but he also prescribes the change in the rhythm and the pace. A kopu starts slowly with the *adi adugu* and picks up momentum as the song proceeds. At a climatic point in the performance of each song, usually at the end of a *charanam*, the instrumentalists and the dancers step up the performance and freeze. This is called *nilupu*, which means ‘stop’. This invariably brings in suspense and adds to the dramatic effect of the performance.

The costume of the artists is simple, but colourful: a dhoti tied in the fashion of a cyclist, a *dhatti* on it, a garland around the neck, garlands to

hands, a coloured kerchief around the neck and ankle bells. They will also tie a wide, coloured ribbon around their forehead tied, in an artistic way, at the right side. Each dancer prepares his 'chekkas' with utmost adoration. on the outer side of each piece, the images of Rama, Sita and Laxmana are engraved. Otherwise, they may have beautiful creepers painted.

The songs are usually taken from the popular texts on Rama – written by Bhadrachala Ramadas, Tyagaraja, Tumu Jarasimha Das and other saint-composers. Some of the local writers wrote songs on other gods and goddesses. There are also episodes from Krishna's life, from Harischandra etc., but the songs and narratives on Sri Rama are more in number and more popular. However, in course of time, several songs on local legends and humorous songs had set in. If the occasion of performance is not a religious one and if it is intended only for entertainment, lighter songs of a humorous or romantic nature form a larger part of the performance. There are duets set to Chekka Bhajana, which include Krishna-Gopika Samavadam.

With its great variety and the innate devotion and its dramatic element, Chekka Bhajana has been the most popular avocation of the village performers, in which chaste literary nobility is combined with a variety of rhythmic movements and enjoyable music.

OTHER FORMS OF BHAJANA:

Jada Kopu :

As in Kolatam, in Chekka Bhajana also, weaving a plait while dancing and singing is a popular skill. The 'jada' (a woman arranging her hair with a plait) needs perfect synchronisation among all the dancers. It is a skill which needs great concentration. Ropes or ribbons are tied to the branch which needs great concentration. Ropes or ribbons are tied to the branch of a tree. Each one of the performers holds one rope. By moving in and out, by crossing other dancers and with careful movements, the dancers weave the plait and also unweave it, all the time singing, dancing and supplying the rhythm. There are several varieties of Jada Kopu: Sada Jada Kopu, Patteda Jada, Payala Jada, Valu Jada, Putta Jada and so on – all these being different types of hair styles used by Andhra rural women folk.

Chiratala Bhajana :

Though Chekka Bhajana and Chiratala Bhajana are used as synonymous terms in Telangana. In coastal Andhra Chiratala Bhajana is a devotional dance using a smaller pair of chekkas, as the ones used by Hari Dasus. Sometimes, the artists use two chiratas each in both the hands, for they are small in size and easily manageable.

Pandari Bhajana :

Pandari Bhajana, a dance form that came from Maharashtra is a dance in the worship of Lord Vittalanatha of Pandaripuram, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The devotees on their way to Pandaripuram spend their time in singing about the Lord and dancing in praise of him. This form is more popular in Rayalaseema area, especially among young boys between 10 to 16 years of age. It can be said that Pandari Bhajana serves as a preliminary step towards other Bhajana dances, for the young boys learn *laya* (rhythm) and *swara* (tone) values necessary for dance and music. Wearing ochre – and coloured dresses, and an ochre-coloured ribbon around their head, with garlands in the neck and waists, bells to the ankles and with an yellow flag in their right hand, the young dancers dance devotionally to the songs on Vittalanath sung by the guru. This dance usually contains the first *adugus* of the Chekka Bhajana. When elders learn this dance, they incorporate into it more intricate foot work and body movements. Since the dancers themselves do not have percussion instruments in their hands, the instrumentalists are important to this dance : a tabla, kanjira, harmonium, dholak, flute and cymbals are the accompanying instruments. In addition to invocation songs, the texts used for dance include Srikrishna Lilalu.

Baito Bhajana :

This is not a dance form. It is a group participation in common choral singing of devotional songs. It got its name because the singers sit and sing before the God's image in contrast with several other types of Bhajana which demand singing accompanied by dancing.

NATAKA BHAJANA:

Nataka Bhajana, as the name suggests, is both nataka (play) and bhajana (devotional singing). Taking off from the traditions of bhajan singing in the temples and reaching out to the more altering technique of dramatic portrayals of characters, the form is a hybrid one. It was active in the villages of Krishna, Guntur and Prakasam districts (the last two originally was one district – Guntur) during the early decades of the twentieth century the villagers wait for a whole year to participate in the group singing programmes during the local god's festival and practice stories relating to his *leelas*. As some enthusiastic youngsters opted out for dramatic performances on the same *leelas*, the elders thought it wise to combine both – the bhajan singing as a narrative and dramatic portrayal with costume and make up. While retaining the basic structure of the circular form of the bhajan singing, it makes room for dramatic incidents to take place in the middle of the circle, which, in course of time, was made into an elevated platform. As and when an incident is to played, the commencement

of the dramatic incident suggested by the leader blowing a whistle (as in bhajan singing), the characters come to the central platform, enact the scene and join the group with a chorus later. As it is seen in a similar, parallel form in Chiratala Ramayanam, nataka bhajana is basically a narrative form, during the performance of which select dramatic incidents are enacted, thereby satisfying the desire of the singers and the actors as well. The form did not last long for soon drama has taken over the all-night performances and bhajan singing retained during festival nights alone.

Chiratala Ramayanam:

Chiratala Ramayanam is a medial form which contains both elements of dance and drama. It is originated from Chiratala Bhajana, the dance form which contains twelve to twenty people who sing the stories from epics in *daruvus* to the accompaniment of chiratalu – two long wooden pieces, designed in an oval shape at the ends and two round tin plates at each end to give a tinkling sound. The wooden chiratas are held in the right hand. By striking one against the other, the chiratalu supply (called ‘Chekkas’ in Coastal Andhra) the necessary beat for the dance movements. In addition, the dances are also accompanied by a harmonium and a *dolu*.

The dancers, usually in a white dhoti tightened at the ankles and with bells tied on the dhoti at the ankles, do a circular dance. This popular dance

form has several variations – chekka bhajana, chitikala bhajana, chiratala bhajana, etc., the names denoting the percussion instruments handled by the dancers. This serves as pastime to several village youngsters who perform this dance during festive occasions – especially during Ram Navami days.

Chiratala Ramayanam is an extension of Chiratala Bhajana, both in terms of form and technique. The Bhajana form is a circular dance which dances to a rhythmic song sung by the performers themselves. The *Ramayanam* is transformed into a dramatic form while retaining several characteristics of dance.

The most prominent elements of dance that we find in this form can be enumerated thus.

1. The original circular dance movements are retained throughout the performance. This circularity is known as ‘gundam.’
2. All the participants continuously indulge in dance steps. As simple steps are needed to allow the dramatic action to take place, only *ata tala daruvus* are used.
3. The dancers constantly beat their chiratalu as in Bhajana.
4. When the song (daruvu) is over, there is a panegyric for Lord Rama (Ramachandra Maharaju Ki Jai) which

denotes the end of a song. This is retained though this disrupts the tempo of the play.

5. Each song ends with a *muktayi* – end rhythm – denoting the closure of the song, followed by dance in a fast tempo. This is typical of the Bhajana dance.
6. The leader of the performance who is the jester and is known as Buddari Khan holds a whistle with him and uses it for any change in *gati* and *prasthara*.

But as this is moulded into a dramatic form, it has acquired some dramatic qualities also.

1. In spite of the constant circular movement of the performers, whenever an episode demands, the actors from the group get onto a stage – a raised platform usually higher than the area used for dance (*gundam*).
2. When once the characters get on to the stage they get into *tole-playing*. Minimum hand props are made available to them. They participate in the dance with their costumes on and go on to the stage at the command of the leader.
3. The acting out of the dramatic episode is similar to that seen in a *Veedhi Natakam* performance. It contains a

pravesa daruvu (the entry song sung by the character itself introducing himself or herself), *samvada daruvu* (the dialogue song), *samvadam in vachanam* (prose).

4. Full costume, make-up and role playing as seen in a Veedhi Natakam makes it a dramatic performance. When once the episode ends the characters come down the stage and join the remaining performers in the circle.

That means, that at any given time, except during the invocation, there are two stages operative simultaneously, the floor level area where the circular dance moves on in a clock wise fashion with *chirutalu* in the actors right hands. The forming of this circular movement is called “*gundam kattadam*” (the building up of a ‘*gundam*’). These dancers also participate in the chorus, singing the *pallavi* of the character’s dialogue song. If there are two characters – say *Hiranya Kasipa* and *Prahlada*, the group sings in chorus the songs of both the characters.

There is another, higher stage at the centre of the circle, usually a make – shift one with a raised platform, where the episodes are acted out. This may be called the ‘dramatic’ stage or the “acting area” in contrast with the earlier one which is a dancing area.

Whenever there is a particular scene to be enacted, the characters that would appear in that scene, already in their costumes, would leave the dancing area and “climb” up the “acting area” and act out the scene.

While many props are mimed, there will be essential hand props like a sword a mace, or a spear. These may either be in the hands of the actors throughout – i.e. even when they are dancing along with the other actors in the dancing area-or may be placed near the raised platform so that the actors can pick them up while going on to the stage. In the latter case, it may be said that their taking up the hand prop defines their character and designates their role in the performance.

Thus the shifting of positions of the chorus – i.e. the dancers – and the characters continuously lend the performance the fluidity of the epic story without any tangible break. The chorus serves the purpose of narrating the story. Occasionally the threads are connected by the Sutradhar – comedian, by giving the “sandhi-vachana”. The Sutradhar holds a whistle, as in Chiratala Bhajana, for conducting the dance both in the *mandra and tara sthayis* and also for shifting the narrative to the dramatic. The mode of whistling indicates the change.

The role of the jester – Budderi Khan – drawn from the Veedhi Natakam performances – is multi-dimensional. As a Sutradhar, he is responsible for the play's continuity. He is also responsible for connecting the 'singing' parts with the prose narration (which is minimal). He also conducts the dance score. He also keeps the scenes lively by getting into conversation with the characters on the stage and provides comic relief.

The form was an off-shoot of the Chiratala Bhajana, sung and danced in a *saptaham* (seven days of celebration) during Ram Navami festival. On the final day, some episodes of the Chiratala Bhajana used to be performed as a dramatic presentation. Hence the name Chiratala Ramanayam. In course of time, it evolved into a full-fledged theatre form, without the need for preceding it with Chiratala Bhajana performances. In its developed stage even Bhagavatha and Mahabharatha stories are drawn into its repertoire. Chervirala Bhagayya, the Telangana Yakshagana writer, wrote about 15 Chiratala plays. He named it "Chiratala Natyam" to include in it stories from Ramayana and Mahabharatha. In course of time other stories – such as Balanagamma and Kamamma stories have been rendered into the 'Chiratala' form. Other writers like Venkatapathi

and a score of anonymous writers contributed to its development in the early part of the century.