CHAPTER - I

ORIGIN OF SANSKRIT DRAMA

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CHAPTER 1
ORIGIN OF SANSKRIT DRAMA

Drama which is a conglomeration of dance, music and acting is the highest form of art. The aphorism nāṭakāntaṁ kavitvaṁ shows the importance given to dramatic form. India has a rich heritage of Sanskrit theatre. The Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharata (2 c. BC) is the earliest known and the most authoritative work on dramaturgy. Theatre was popular even earlier. The Brahmanical and Buddhist literature and the grammatical works of Pāṇini and Patañjali which are quite earlier than the Nāṭyaśāstra refer to dramatic performances.

Panini refers to nāṭasūtras, aphormisms on the science of acting by two earlier authors, Silālin and Kṛśāśva¹. Nāṭyaśāstra refers to the staging of a drama depicting the story of churning of the milky ocean in the presence of Gods in heaven. Patañjali alludes
to the presentation of Kaṃsavadha and Balibandha in his Mahābhāṣya. Actors sōbhānikaḥ are also referred to. Bharata himself refers to certain works on dramaturgy in Nāṭyaśāstra. As these works are lost to us, Nāṭyaśāstra remains the earliest source to get an idea on the origin of Sanskrit drama.

Bharata alludes to the vēdic origin of Sanskrit drama. Indra, accompanied by gods called on Brahma, the creator and requested him to make an entertainment accessible to all classes of society including the śūdrās as the latter were prevented from listening to the vēdas. Brahma accepted the request and composed the fifth vēda taking dialogue from Rgvēda, music from Sāmavēda, the art of representation and imitation from Yajurvēda and the sentiments from Atharvavēda and handed it over to Indra who pleaded inability of dēvās to act the play. The creator then revealed the nāṭyavēda to Bharata who with his hundred sons brought it to the earth.

Kalidasa supports this version. Kalidasa equates nāṭya to sacrifice and therefore suggests that nāṭya has a religious significance. Some scholars trace the origin of dance to the tāṇḍava
of Siva. Tradition relates that saṅgīta was originated from the rāsa dance of Lord Kṛṣṇa and the gōpikās. All these point to the religious origin of drama.

Sanskrit drama is a combination of music, dialogue, gesticulation and imitation. Music can be traced to the vedic age. In Rgveda there is a dialogue between Yama and Yami and of Indra, Agastya and Maruts. There is impersonation and gestures in the vedic rituals. Professional story tellers while narrating stories of purāṇās and itiḥāsās must have used some gestures and music to make their narration attractive. Thus the origin of Sanskrit drama can be traced to a harmonious blend of music, dance, dialogue, gesture and stories employed both in religious ceremonies and secular assemblies. The fifth veda gained a secular nature since it had access to people of all the classes.

Another version regarding the origin of drama furnished by the Abhinayadarpana of Nandikēśvara is that Bharata studied Nāṭyaśāstra from Brahma and performed before Lord Śiva with the help of gandharvās and apsaras. Śiva with the help of Pārvati taught the tender lāṣya and tāṇḍava through his disciple Taṇḍu.
Therafter the sages brought this art form to earth.

Two versions regarding the origin of fifth veda are found in the Bhāvaprakāśa of Śāradātanaya. One is that Śiva through Nandikēśvara taught Brahma the nātyavēda and made Bharata enact the same as desired by him. The other story is that on the direction of Śiva, Nandikēśvara imparted the knowledge of Nātyavēda to Brahma who taught the same to the sage and his disciples. They acquired commendable proficiency in the art. Manu the emperor of human world, at the direction of his father, the Sun, sought the help of Brahma to get some relief from his duties as a king. Manu brought Bharata to earth with the permission of the creator and popularised the theatre in this world.

Some scholars have tried to prove that Indian dramas were influenced by Greek drama. Their arguments are based on certain features common to both the traditions such as introduction of heroic and mythic figures, the division of play into scenes, acts etc., the development of type roles, all actors leaving the stage at the end of an act and the word yavanika used for curtain. From a careful examination it can be seen that the similarities are a few
and the differences are more. Absence of tragedy distinguishes Sanskrit dramas from the plays of other nations. Sanskrit drama does not observe the unity of time and place. Shifting of scenes from earth to heaven is often seen. Pūrvarāṇa is an integral part of Sanskrit plays. It is entirely different from Greek tragedies. The Greek plays were intended for the masses, but Sanskrit dramas were presented before men of literary taste and scholarship. Greek drama imitates the action whereas the Sanskrit play imitates a particular state of mind. The aim of the latter is the realisation of rasa and attainment of eternal bliss through the three goals of dharma, artha and kāma. The yavanika is the material of curtain brought to India by merchants. It is not sure whether the Greek theatre used a curtain. The absence of tragic catastrophes in the Sanskrit dramas is another feature that distinguishes Sanskrit plays from that of the Hellenic.

Sanskrit dramas never offer a tragic end when compared to the dramas of other nations. Yet another peculiarity is the length of Sanskrit plays. Chorus is seen in the Greek plays whereas recitation of the verses is preferred in Sanskrit drama. Sankrit plays give
importance to dancing, but Greek drama does not attach much importance to dancing.

On the basis of the above differences the theory of Greek influence can be rejected altogether.

i. DEVELOPMENT OF SANSKRIT DRAMA

Historians of Indian drama trace a religious and to some extend a secular origin of Sanskrit drama. Vēdas contain dance dialogue and music. Max Mullar found dramas in the hymn while interpreting the ‘Marut hymn’. He is of opinion that two groups representing Indra and Marut enacted the hymn. In the early Brahmanical and Buddhist literature, there are references to the dramatic representations.

The thirteen plays attributed to Bhāsa are the earliest of dramas now available. Saumilla and Kaviputra are also mentioned by Kalidasa in the introduction of Mālavikāgnimitra along with Bhāsa. The identity of these authors and their works are unknown. Bhāsa’s antiquity is ascertained from the references of Dandin (7 c. AD) and Bana (7 c. AD). He has an uncanny skill in depicting love and separation connecting them with political fortunes and
schemes. Svapnavāsavadatta is his magnum opus. Āsvaghōṣa (1 c. AD) contributed much to the development of Indian theatre. Buddhacaritam and Śāriputraprakaraṇam are his important works. He wrote a play which ia available only in fragments.

Next comes the golden age of Sanskrit theatre with the great trio- Kālidāsa, Śūdraka and Bhavabūti who produced Śākuntalā, Mṛčchakaṭṭika and Uttararāmaracaita respectively. From a traditional verse it becomes clear that Śākuntalā is the quintessence of Kālidāsa’s poetry. The second is the social play with full of human touch and third is a problem—play, the problem being the conflict between the individual life and official life of a person. There are other dramatists like Viśākhadatta, Bhaṭṭanārāyaṇa, Rājaśēkhara, Kulaśēkharavarma, Śaktibhadra, Murāri, etc. Their works enriched the Sanskrit dramatic literature and contributed much to its development.

Sanskrit drama gained wide popularity not only in India but in Europe and America. Sanskrit plays are being performed in the West in translations. Recently Śākuntalā and Mṛčchakaṭṭika have been enacted in Holland and Moscow respectively.
ii. CONTENT ANALYSIS

Plot, characters and emotions are the three important components of Sanskrit drama. The plot can be drawn either from the great narrations, popular tales or from the imagination of the poet. The plot can either be related to the principal character or to the minor character.

The five elements which constitute the plot are bīja, bindu, patāka, prakāri and kārya. An activity is started with a special purpose (kārya) in mind. The beginning is the seed, the circumstances from which the plot arises. The same turns as object or phala at the end. Bindu or drop links one part of the story to another. Patāka helps and furthers the main topic and prakāri is an episodical incident of a limited duration and minor importance which also assist the progress of the plot. Kārya is the object realised at the end.

Ārambha, yatna, prāpiyaśa, niyatāpti and phalāgama are the five stages of the object. There are five sandhīs also which are performed by combining the five essentials of the plot with the five stages. The five Sandhīs are mukha, pratimukha, garbha, Avamarśa (vimarśa) and nirvahaṇa (upasaṁhṛti).
The plot must be arranged according to the five sandhīs. Between bija and the end there are three stages in which the hero tries to achieve his goal. In mukha the bija is mentioned. It consists of twelve sub-divisions. In the stage of effort there is continuity. There may be obstacles for the achievement of the object. Pratimukha is the secondary effect. Here the union of bindu and prayatna can be seen. After this patāka and prakārī occur. In the garbhasandhi there is mingling of patāka and prāptyāśa. Helpful developments take place. It has twelve sub divisions. Vimarśa is next wherein there occurs a favourable change in the story due to the union of niyatāpti and prakārī. This has thirteen divisions. The last is upasamhṛti which is happy ending due to the union of phalāgama and kārya. It has fourteen sub divisions. Failure in achieving the goal and consequent frustration of the hero are totally
absent in Sanskrit dramas.

The hero may be a god, demigod or a mortal. They are of four kinds -

- dhīrōdāṭta: calm and magnanimous
- dhīrōḍdhata: violent
- dhīralalīta: graceful
- dhīraśānta: peaceful

Each of them is again classified into dakṣiṇa or gallant, śat̐ha or sly, dhṛṣṭha or bold and anukūla or devoted to the heroine only.

Heroines are classified under eight categories.

- Vāsakasajjikā: dressed up for union
- Virahotkaṇḍhita: distressed by separation
- Svādhīnabhārtṛkā: having the husband under subjection
- Kalahāntaritā: separated by quarrel
- Khaṇḍhītā: enraged
- Vipralabdha: the deceived
- Proṣitabhārtṛkā: whose husband is on travel
- Abhisārikā: who due to her infatuation is attached to the lover and gives up modesty in going out to meet him.
Heroines are also grouped into three. Svīyā (wife of the hero) Parakīyā (under the control of somebody) and Sāmānyā, common to all.

Sentiments are nine: śṛṅgāra (erotic), hāsyā (comic), karuṇa (Pathetic), raundra (furious), vīra (heroic), bhayānaka (terrible), bībhatṣa (loathsome), abdhuta (marvellous) and śānta (quietism).

Correspondingly there are nine basic emotions - sthāyibhāvās i.e. rati, hāsa, śōka, krōdha, utsāha, bhaya, jugupsa, vismaya and śama.

The four vṛttis are closely related to the principal sentiment. They are kaiśikī for śṛṅgāra and karuṇa, sāttvati for vīra, ārabhatī for raundra and bībhatṣa. Bhāratī vṛtī is used in śānta and abdhuta, also it is common for all.

Scenes are set in any background. Stage direction and location are indicated through music, dhruvagāna. Singers and instrumentalist perform this duty. Music and dance find a place in the theme itself. The play begins with a nāndi followed by an introduction by Sūtradhāra. The prologue introduces the author and play and announces the commencement of performance.

Literary prākṛts and vernaculars are used simultaneously in the text of the Sanskrit drama. While the major characters speak
Sanskrit, the lesser ones, women of all types speak prākṛts. Prose and verse are intertwined. The combination of prose and verse in Sanskrit drama would be a legacy of the early vedic dialogue hymns which were dropped at the time of the Samhita formation.

The poets can take plots either from the epic or from history. It can be imaginary also. The dramatist is free to remodel the story or character, in the former case so as to bring a harmonious emotional impression expressed by the concept of rasa. Battles, fights, death, sieges etc. are reported on the stage through the dialogue of minor characters and interludes.

iii. CHARACTERISTICS OF SANSKRIT DRAMA

Sanskrit dramas are actor-centered depending on the proficiency and resources of the actor. Even stage articles like bow, arrow etc. were not carried on the stage. Action like shooting, riding or getting up and down was done through appropriate gesticulation. Presentation of wars, death or other calamities were forbidden on the stage; instead they were reported. According to Sanskrit dramatists realisation of rasa and happiness are the real end of the performance.
Along with epic themes love stories are also included. Before the play actually begins, a benedictory verse called nāndī is recited. It prays to the deity for the removal of all the impediments that may arise during the performance of the play. Śūtradhāra the stage manager retires after the nāndī and enters again to introduce the play. The prologue alludes to the poet’s literary attainments, the occasion of production, the group of actors producing it and suggests the subject in the form of bīja.

Śūtradhāra must know every aspect of drama and theatre and so also his assistants, pāripārvika. The introduction is of two kinds - prarūcana and āmukha. If the śūtradhāra himself conducts it, it is called prarūcana. In āmukha, he holds conversation with some other character like an actress or assistant bearing on the subject to be introduced. The play begins after the prologue. It is divided into acts and scenes. An act must not be too long, must be full of rasa prefixed if needed by interludes. The interlude is a device which is used to communicate the audience certain past or future events which have direct bearing to the plot. Its representation on the stage may be unnecessary or sometimes difficult. The dramatist
gets it done through the conversation of some minor characters between the acts and sometimes before the commencement of the first act.

The performance of the play ends with a benedictory verse wishing welfare of all. It is called bharatavākya to extol the author of Nātyaśāstra or the actor himself or both. Unity of action is maintained throughout. Realism was resorted to costume and speech but not in respect of other elements such as the time of the day or situation. Love in separation is preferred. Importance is given to the development of rasa, music and abhinaya. Incompatible emotions are never linked together. Story is considered only as a medium for rasa. Dramatists disregard the unities of time and place. Unity of action is strictly maintained. Continuity of time and place in different acts is secured by the interludes. Emotional unity is considered an essential factor in a play because the delineation of rasa is the primary object of the presentation.

Music and instruments also play an important role in Sanskrit drama. Bharata says that the presentation is the union of song, instrument and action. A drawing is not beautiful without colours,
so is drama without music. The importance of music is expressed in the saying - अम्रदाञ्जः नाताम्. Bharata states that music, orchestra, dialogue and action should flow in an unbroken sequence.

Nature finds a very unique position in Sanskrit drama. The description of trees, creepers, flowers, deers, plants, parrots, rivers, streams, hills, forests are often met with. Even if tragedy is absent, tragic situations are developed with great skill.

Pūrvarāṅga precedes the actual performance of the drama. There are several preliminaries such as religious propitiations, a series of musical items and dances. They can be simple as well as elaborate.

iv. TYPES OF SANSKRIT DRAMA

Dramatic compositions are either the major type (rūpaka) or the minor type (uparūpaka). The former has ten varieties¹⁰. Rūpaka is so called because the actors assume the form of the characters they represent. It has fourfold abhinaya. Rasa is fully developed. Hence importance is for vākyārthābhinaya. Both the plain and stylised mode of acting are seen in the full-fledged rūpakas. Bhāṇa and vīthi belong to the former class because they are realistic types.
depicting the society.

Uparūpakaś are subsidiary varieties of dramatic performance. Music is sometimes found predominant in this type. Vācikābhinaya is given less importance or sometimes totally disregarded in the uparūpakaś. Sātvikābhinaya and āṅgikābhinaya are preferred to other types. Attention is centered on the facial expression of the actor. Uparūpakaś concentrate on the presentation of bhāvās. So they are called nṛtya not nāṭya. The expression of emotion is dominant. It can be rightly called bhāvābhinaya or padārthābhinaya because each word of the text is elaborately interpreted. Uparūpaka lacked one or other or more of the abhinayās and so scope for lōkadharmī is minimised. It depends on the nāṭyadharmī to a great extent. Uparūpakaś or nṛtyaprabandhās (musical composition) are treated so because they contain elements of the nṛtya and that of the drama. Viśvanātha the author of Sāhityadarpana, recognises eighteen uparūpakaś. According to Saradatanaya they are twenty.

Rūpakāś are the major types of drama of which nāṭaka and prakaraṇa are the perfect dramas since they are fully developed in
the scheme of dasarūpaka.

Nāṭaka, the heroic type, which was given the pride of place, consists of four kinds of abhinayās, viz. āṅgika, vācika, sātvika and āhārya. The hero must be dhīrodātta whose acts are aimed at the defence of a righteous cause. There must be five to ten acts. The plot must be a celebrated story. It should contain five sandhis and sixty four sandhyāṅgās. Śṛṅgāra or vīra must be the chief sentiment and in the conclusion, the marvellous adbhuta. Love is the subject of most of the dramas and the Vidūṣaka plays a prominent role in these plays. The characters must be heroic and there must be good deeds.

Prakarana is a play in ten acts having some social elements. Hypocracies of the high class and the vices of the lower are exposed. The story must be a fictitious one invented by the poet. Hero or leading character may be a Brahmin or a minister or a merchant. The heroine can ever be a courtesan. The principal sentiment is śṛṅgāra. The victory of true love, character and chastity is given importance in this type.

Bhāṇa is a monologue wherein the hero narrates dramatically a variety of incidents either to himself or to others through a device
called ākāśabhāṣita. The plot is invented by the poet. Love, war, fraud, intrigue etc. are dealt with. Love and heroism are the prominent rasās. It contains only two jurtures the opening and the concluding. Kerala is rich in such dramas of which Mahiśamaṅgaḷabhāṣa of Mahiśamaṅgala is an important one.

Vyāyoga is a one act play with a few female characters. It should have a well known theme and a famous hero, dhīrodātta and shall not be a divine person. Vīra, adbhuta or raudra may be the main sentiments. Descriptions of battles, duals, attacks and counter attacks, exchange of insults of many men engaged in a struggle find a place in this type. Kerala has contributed much to this type of rūpakas. Kālyāṇasaugandhika of Nīlakaṇṭha, Kirātārjunīyavyāyōga of Kuṇḍikuttān Tampurān are some among them. Only the incidents occurred on a single day are described. Samavakāra - consist of four acts and a well known story of devas and demons. Vīra is the principal sentiment. Several subjects are mixed together in this type. 

Dīma - is one in which the subject is well-known. Hero should be a god, a yakṣa, a rākṣasa, a serpent or a goblin. It
contains rasās except hasya and śṛṅgāra. The dominant sentiment is raudra.

Ihāṃṛga - consist of four acts. Here the hero is disappointed because he could not get his beloved. The plot is a mixed one. Nāyaka and pratināyaka should be either a mortal or a God. Ihāṃṛga is derived as that, mṛgavat ālabhyāṃ nāyikāṃ nāyako īhate iti (Hero tries to gain a devine heroine who is as unattainable as a deer). The hero should be a dhīrodātta.

Anka or utsṛṣṭikāṅka - is a one act play where the plot may be borrowed from the epic. sometimes it may be well-known. The main sentiment is karuṇa. As there is lamentations of women who lost their dear ones in battles and dialogues expressing disgust, lack of enthusiasm and disinterestedness, the anka can be reckoned as a play depicting the consequences of war.

Vīthī is also a one act play. It should be arranged with the employment of one character or two. The touch of śṛṅgāra is there. Līlāvatī and Candrikā of Rāmapāṇivāda belong to this class of rūpaka.

Prahasana - is so called because of the large amount of laughter it causes. It has no restriction of acts. Its subject matter is imaginary
and it represents people of questionable characters. The hero is of a
low character. The main sentiment is hāṣya. It is of three kinds -
regular, modified and mixed. The parasites and hypocrites of
society are ridiculed in prahāsana.

These rūpakas differ from one another according to the nature
of the hero and other characters, the plot, length of the play and
sentiments. They shed light on the contemporary social life of the
people and enable the spectator to assess the living standards of the
people in those times. Indeed dramas are composed for pleasure.
Many of them exhibit their commitment to the society and they
instruct the readers of the dire consequences if they violate the
norms of good conduct. The justification for such a variety of ten
rūpakas is this: The request of gods to Brahma was to create a
plaything appreciable for all the sections of society. Representation
of different strata of society on the stage is needed for its fulfilment.
By giving different types, Bharata was providing an opportunity
for the dramatists to choose their characters from a wide range of
the society. If there were only one type, the nātaka, all the characters
other than the nobles would have been marginalised in Sanskrit
theatre.
Of these ten, the first two viz. nāṭaka and prakarāṇa are considered to be the best.

V. AIM OF SANSKRIT DRAMA

The realisation of aesthetic bliss of rasa is the highest purpose of Sanskrit drama. It can arouse and promote moral consciousness in the spectator. Sanskrit drama is intended to achieve harmony out of chaos and produce restfulness out of disturbances. This idea is evident in the dictum which holds that the hero, Rāma should be followed, not the Villain, Rāvana and this must be the lesson one has to learn from Rāmāyaṇa play. The message is that virtue should not be defeated. While selecting the theme, ancient dramatists had borne this in mind. An art is not intended to confuse or pose problems to its viewers but help them to overcome hurdles and attain calmness. It can act as the most powerful weapon against social, economic and political evils.

Sanskrit drama plays a pivotal role in popularising spiritual, cultural and literary heritage of the country. It is a means for the upliftment of the society and an instrument to boost up the standard of morality. It shows the ways of the world - lōkacaritaṁ and the
doings of men in order to enlighten and guide the audience who with the knowledge can recognize what is good and accept it.

Visuals have a direct appeal to the diverse tastes of the people. When a drama satisfies different people with varied tastes, its purpose is served. It should act as a relief to those tired of their routine work. So a dramatist has to present the condition of people in a realistic manner. Bharata in his Nāṭyaśāstra says that the dramatic presentation consists in the imitation of a condition, life or the ways of the world. For a successful imitation of the above, the knowledge of dharmī or mode of representation is inevitable. Nāṭyaśāstra classified dharmī into lōkadharmī (realistic) and nāṭyadharmī (stylized). Lōkadharmī is the imitation of natural events on the stage. Since this imitation lacks artistic value it does not have an appeal to the audience. When it is done with additions and artistic presentations they will be appealing and enjoyable.

vi. Kūṭiyāṭṭam

Kūṭiyāṭṭam of Kerala is the only surviving form of traditional presentation of Sanskrit drama. In this art form several actors come together and perform their respective roles resorting to all the four abhinayās.
Abhinaya is derived from Abhi + ɲiṇ meaning - ‘to lead towards’. Poet’s intention is conveyed to the spectators through the fourfold acting. Only selected acts from Sanskrit plays are enacted. That is why separate names are given for each act of the dramas. There is the fusion of dance, music and action. The adoption of nāṭyadharma gives the art an unusual charm.

The word Kūṭiyāṭṭaṁ is a combination of two words - kūṭi (combined) and āṭṭaṁ (dancing). Kūṭi also refers to a mixture of narration and acting. The actor conducts nirvahaṇa alone during the initial days of the performance. At the end of the solo performance the text begins and other actors join him. The acting now becomes multi charactered. This is called Kūṭiyāṭṭaṁ.

Nirvahaṇa is a customary practice found in Kūṭiyāṭṭaṁ where in the character relates past events to the present context. This is a solo performance. Hence the actor has to take different roles in course of the narration. This is technically called pakarnāṭṭaṁ (transformation of roles). This technique gives the actor ample scope for imaginative acting (manōdharma). Actually these two distinguish acting in Kūṭiyāṭṭaṁ from the ordinary acting
in Sanskrit plays. Transference of roles and imaginative acting are the contributions of Kerala actors to Sanskrit theatre. This is actually an improvement of Bharata’s scheme of acting.\(^{15}\)

Cākyārs are the traditional actors of Sanskrit drama in Kerala. The word has given rise to curious interpretations. Some derive it from ślāghyavākkukār emphasising the six qualities of good speech - sweetness, clarity in every letter and in every word, harmony, brevity and steadiness.\(^{16}\) The word cākyār was commonly used for actors during the saṅghaṃ period. In the Tamil epic Cilappatikāram there is a reference to a Kūttacākkaian presenting the arddhanārīśvara dance before King Ceṅkuṭṭava. This goes to prove that the cākyārs have a long tradition in the South.

Naṅgyārs are the female partners of the actors in Kerala. They doned the female roles in Sanskrit plays. During 13th and 14th centuries due to the socio-economic changes in the society the female characters were sidelined. The 15th century critique Naṭāṅkuśa severely criticizes this tendency.\(^{17}\) Any how major roles were not given to female characters for a long time. Naṅyārs had to satisfy with their solo performance, the Naṅyārkūttu which is a
narration of the story of Śrīkrṣṇa. Recently prominence is given to the roles of women in Kūṭyaṭṭam.

vii. VIDŪŚAKA

Vidūśaka played an important role in keeping alive the tradition of Sanskrit theatre. He gave comic relief to the audience. He enjoyed certain privileges. He can speak Malayalam, point his fingers at a member of the audience and ridicule anyone under the pretext of interpreting the text.

The introduction of the local language made Kūṭyaṭṭam more accessible to people of all walks of life. In later time Vidusaka gained superiority over others and even the hero of the drama lost prominence. While conducting nirvahana vidūsaka gets the opportunity to add, delete or multiply to his liking and thererby exhibit his talent and eloquence. The role of vidūṣaka came to be enlarged beyond proportion. This gave room to vehement criticism from the puritans. Naṭāṅkuṣa is an eloquent example of this kind of criticism.

viii. STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

References in Nāṭyaśāstra prove that Sanskrit theatre had attained a stage of perfection at the time of its composition. i.e. 2 c. BC.
The period that followed was the golden age of Sanskrit theatre with the emergence of classical dramatists like Kālidāsa, Śūdraka and others. By 6 c. AD the theatre began to stagnate. It showed signs of decline from 11 c. AD.

The history of Sanskrit theatre in Kerala presents a different picture. During the golden age it had no influence in the south. It begins to appear by 6 c. AD. It began to flourish from 11 c. AD while it was on the verge of decline in the North.

Mattavilāsa (7 c. A.D) is perhaps the earliest work produced in the south. It reveals the standard that the pallavās had attained in theatrical performance. Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi may be the first drama written in Kerala which is very much popular with the Cākyārs. Then came Kalyāṇasaugadhika of Nīlakanṭhakavi, Subadrādhanaṇjaya and Tapaṭisaṃvaraṇa of Kulaśēkhara (11 c. AD). He formulated a scheme for the presentation of his dramas with the help of a brahmin scholar in his court. The schemes viz. Dhanaṇjayadhvani and Saṃvaraṇadhvani are known under the common title of Vyaṅgyavākyā which gives valuable information about the stage practices of that time. Many Sanskrit
plays were presented on the Kerala stage according to the mode of presentation prescribed in Vyaṅgyavyākhyā. The actors prepared their own stage manuals for presentation of the dramas.

ix. DRAMAS USED IN KūṭIYĀṬṬĀṂ

Kūṭiyāṭṭaṃ was one way of presenting Sanskrit dramas. There were other methods also. This is clear from the introductions of several dramas produced in Kerala. Many plays such as Kamalinīrājahansa, Sītarāgaha were composed on the instruction of the rulers for presenting during temple festivals. But they were not presented according to the mode of presentation of Kūṭiyāṭṭaṃ.

Cākyārs accepted only a couple of dramas to their repertory. They prepared elaborate acting manuals for the dramas selected by them. Only a handful of dramas got the good fortune to be presented on the Kūṭiyāṭṭaṃ stage. Scholars are not unanimous in their opinion regarding the number of dramas used for Kūṭiyāṭṭaṃ. Some give exaggerated numbers. One reason is that separate acts used by Cākyārs were counted as independent productions. Any how the actual number of dramas chosen by the Kerala actors for performance on the Kūṭiyāṭṭaṃ stage does not exceed twenty.
They can be enlisted as shown below.

1. **Dramas by Kerala authors**
   - Kalyāṇasaugandhika,
   - Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi,
   - Subhadrādhanañjaya and
   - Tapatīsāṃvaraṇa

2. **Buddhist influence**
   - Nāgānanda

3. **Farces**
   - Mattavilāsa and
   - Bhagavadajjuka

4. **Thirteen plays ascribed to Bhāsa**

   The following thirteen Trivandrum plays ascribed to Bhāsa were all used by the Cākyārs for Kūṭiyāṭṭāṇ performance. Mahāmahopādhyāya Kuppusvāmi Śaṅkral has termed them as Cākyāṁatākacakramaṇ instead of Bhāsanāṭakacakramaṇ. Though the authorship of these dramas by Bhāsa is under dispute, the fact that they were used for Kūṭiyāṭṭāṇ performances is never under dispute.
1. Dūtavākya
2. Karṇabhāra
3. Īrubaṅga
4. Pañcarātra
5. Avimāraka
6. Pratijñāyauṇḍhaṅgārāyaṇa
7. Cārudaṭṭa
8. Bālācarita
9. Pratīmānāṭaka
10. Madhyamāvaṁśyāga
11. Abhiṣēka
12. Svapnavāsavadatta
13. Dūtaghaṭṭokaca

It seems that Kerala actors were not fascinated by the charm of Śākuntāla of Kālidāsa. Kālidāsa was not a favourite of the cākyārs. But recently Śākuntāla was presented on the Kūṭiyāṭṭaṁ stage with great success. There are also many new dramas accepted by the actors for Kūṭiyāṭṭaṁ.

The introduction of Malayalam on the stage brought some
important changes in the performance of Sanskrit plays. The inflated role of vidūṣaka pushed to the background all the other characters. Even the hero lost his prominence before the jester. The solo-performance of vidūṣaka endeared him to the audience. Utilizing this opportunity the cākyār started independently the narration of puranic stories in his own inept style. He used the campūs and prabandhās for this purpose. Gradually prabandhakkūttu became an autonomous form independent of Sanskrit dramas.

In kūttu there is one character with the dress and make-up of vidūṣaka and vācikābhīnaya is prominent. In Kūṭiyāṭṭaṇi there are different characters with different costumes and all the forefold abhinayās are used effectively. By the time of 13th-14th centuries presentation of Sanskrit dramas moved to temple premises. Kūttampalams were specially constructed for this purpose. Performance became part of temple ceremonies. More importance was given to ritualistic aspect. Kūttu was presented outside the temple premises in 1949.

x. THEATRE CRITICISM

The 15th century Naṭāṅkuṣa indicates the changes occurred in the conduct of actors. The royal patronage and freedom to criticize
might have intoxicated them. The critics act as corrective force and the arbitrary acts of the cākyārs were strongly criticized. The lengthy accounts dealing with different branches of learning, introduction of obscenity, admixture of the regional language and the stylised tone adopted while speaking Malayalam and the disregard to the canons of Nāṭyaśāstra were subjected to severe criticism.

Only one act was enacted on one day or night due to the lengthy excursion. So separate nirvahaṇa and nāndī became necessary. Naṭāṅkuṣa criticizes this practice also. In reply to these criticisms the cākyārs point out the permissive directive to enlarge or extend the application of Bharata's directions. What Naṭāṅkuṣa insists is that changes should be made without detrimental to the flow of rasa, propriety and the requirement of proportion.

Now this precious cultural heritage has got wide popularity even in foreign countries. Kūṭiyāṭṭam is being conducted in Kēralakalāmaṇḍalam, Ammannūr Cāccu cākyār Memmorial Gurukulam and Māṇi Mādhavacākyār Gurukulam. Besides, Naṭanakairali Iriṅgālakkuda; Mārgi Thiruvananthapuram;
International Centre for Kūṭiyāṭṭāṁ, Tripunithura and School of Ancient Theatre, Srīsaṅkarācārya University of Sanskrit, Kalady conduct diverse activities to popularise this great tradition and also to encourage research and studies in this area. Recently UNESCO proclaimed Kūṭiyāṭṭāṁ as the intangible heritage of humanity. This honour is a matter of great satisfaction to the Sanskritists since the long tradition of Sanskrit theatre is being internationally recognised. It also goes to prove that Sanskrit theatre has an uninterrupted flow from the time of Bharata to the present day.
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3. महेन्द्रपुरुषेंद्रमः किल फिलमः
   कीडनीयकमिच्चामो दूरं श्रव्यं च यद्भवेत्।।
   न वेदावहारोऽयं संब्रह्यं शूद्ववालिषु।
   तस्मात् ज्ञापनं वेदी पञचमसार्वविणकम्।। N.S. I. 11-12

4. जग्राह पाठमृगैवदाल्सामयो गांतमेव च।
   यजुर्वेददानविन्दन रसानथवंगारीपं।। N.S. I-17

5. देवानामिदमतिन सुनयः कन्तोऽक्षुरेण
   रुपेणस्वमाकृत्यतिकरे स्वाङ्गो विभक्तं हिशः।
   तैगुण्योद्भवमं लोकमार्गं नानां सम्र दृष्यते
   नावभिषिक्तिनन्दस्य बहुसायंकं सम्पार्थनम्।।
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