

## Performing Arts as seen in the *Kuṭṭanimata Kāvya* of *Dāmodaragupta*

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### Abstract:

Kashmir is known for its great contribution in Sanskrit literature. Given to the scholastic tradition associated with the *Nāṭyaśāstra* it seems that Kashmir was also one of the significant centres of performing arts. These pieces of exquisite letters contain enormous information about the facets related to the culture of the valley. *Kuṭṭanimata* a poem written by *Dāmodaragupta* in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century AD is one of them. The objective of this paper is to understand the performing arts of Kashmir as mirrored in the *Kuṭṭanimata*.

**Keywords:** *Kuṭṭanimata*, *Dāmodaragupta*, Ancient Kashmir, Indian Performing Arts.

### I. Introduction to *Kuṭṭanimata*:

*Kuṭṭanimata*, an advice of courtesan, is a poem composed by *Dāmodaragupta* discovering the characteristic Indian eroticism. *Dāmodaragupta* was the chief-minister at the court of *Jayāpīḍa* (AD 773/4-804/5). Comprising of over a thousand stanzas in the *āryā* meter, the *Kuṭṭanimata* is a vivid elucidation of the deceptions of harlotry by an experienced bawd *Vikarālā* to a young courtesan *Mālatī*. *Dāmodaragupta* has covered nearly all the essential facets of contemporary life within the ambit of this poem. He talks about religious belief and practices, social establishments, administrative systems, economic conditions, family life, position of women along with education, fashion, fine arts, gastronomy, travelling, sports and amusements, etc. All in all *Kuṭṭanimata* is an extremely vital text for the study of the cultural history of Kashmir. There is no direct reference to Kashmir. However there can be no doubt that the poem gives a fairly correct picture of the contemporary Kashmiri culture.

### II. Nature of performing arts in *Kuṭṭanimata*:

*Kuṭṭanimata* provides a good deal of material to reveal the state of Performing Arts in early medieval period. Most of the references deal with music, dance and drama. The poem evidently reflects the

knowledge of the *Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra*. Composer not just provides us the technical information in the form the use of terminologies of dance or music; it also cites the names of the respected divinities and their expertise of the particular art form.

The wide popularity enjoyed by *śāstra* based dance tradition is vouched for by the ample references made in the. It mentions *Bharata* and *Kohalain* the same breath as the authority on dancing and *Dantila* along with *Bharata* and *Viśākhila*.<sup>1</sup> *Nārada* is regarded as the expounder of music, *Matangamunī* as an expert in the employment of hollow instruments and *Dhenukai* described as the creator of a particular *tāla* or beating time.<sup>2</sup>

The skill of good instrumentalist and the perfect harmony between vocal and instrumental music is highly appreciated.<sup>3</sup> Among the types of instrument *stantri-vādyā* (stringed instrument) and *suśira* (wind instruments) are mentioned explicitly in the poem. *Tantri* or lyre and *muraja* or tabor, *vamśī* or flute, are a few of instruments mentioned in the text. Though, *vīṇā* claims the largest number of references. The creation of specific sounds of stringed instruments called *kuharita*, *recita* and *kampita* are also stated<sup>4</sup> which according to *Bharata* refer to the vibrating notes set in throat, head and heart.<sup>5</sup> Mention is also made of *dvipadilaya* and the song called *carcarika* and *dhruvas*, the last one said to have been sung for eight *kalās* and endowed with proper *tālas* and *layas*.<sup>6</sup>

Apart from above mentioned professional singers and instrumentalists, the poem also refers to *vaitālika*, *vandin*, *nagnācārya* etc. depicted as accomplished eulogist.<sup>7</sup>

As the text predominantly narrates the life of courtesans and they were the representatives of cultural ethos of the society almost all the references of fine and performing arts in the poem comes with context to enunciate the qualities of an ideal courtesan. *Mālatī* the young aspirant courtesan is said to be skilled in the knowledge pronounced by *Bharata*, *Viśākhila*, *Dantila* and in the disciplines of *ātodya*, *nṛtta*, *gīta* also *vr̥kṣāyurveda*, *citrasūtra*, *patraccheda*, *bhramakarma*, *pustakarma* and *sūdaśāstra*. *Manjari* and *Hāralatā* occupy the place of heroin in the stories told in the poem, mention also has been made of *Madanasenā*, *Kesarsenā*, *Smaralīlā*, *Mrigādevī* etc. The teachers of dance are called with appellations *nṛtyopadeśaka*, *nartanācārya* and *nṛtyācārya*.<sup>8</sup>

Importantly the male characters of the play are glorified for their knowledge in Arts. It is stated that ideal *nāyaka* should be well-versed in art forms like painting etc. and the knowledge of drama is one of the requisites for a perfect prince.<sup>9</sup> *Bhaṭṭaputra* is known for his command over *nāṭyaśāstra*, *gāndharva* proclaimed by *Nārada* and instrumental music of *mṛdanga* etc. *Sundarasena* learns dance and music along with all other art forms.<sup>10</sup>

*Dāmodaragupta* even mentions the hand gestures applied in daily undertakings. E.g., a betel-seller offers a betel to *Samarabhāṭa* in *sandamśa* (20<sup>th</sup> *asamyutahasta* of *Nāṭyaśāstra*) and *Samarabhāṭa* receives it in *khāṭakāmukha* (10<sup>th</sup> *asamyutahasta*).<sup>11</sup>

Reference may now be made to some interesting technical terms connected with dance that employed by *Dāmodaragupta*. An ornate account is given in the case of *Samarabhāṭa*'s critical appreciation of dancer's performance in terms of the skilfulness shown by her; it consists of terms like *bhujavalana*, *gātra-sansthiti*, *lālitya*, *udvahana*, *pārśvavalit*, *sthānaka-śuddhi* and *cāturaśrya*, *bhāva*, *rasa*, *abhinaya*, *bhanga*, *parikrama*, *pādamātra* etc.<sup>12</sup> The poem talks about the hard work of dancers learning the *śūcī* type of dance.<sup>13</sup> *Dāmodaragupta* very poetically sprinkles various natural graces of women mentioned by *Bharata* like *kilakincita*, *kuṭṭamita*, *moṭṭāyita* and *bibboka* when *Sundarsena* mourns on the death of his beloved *Hārata* remembering her beauty and skills.<sup>14</sup> In another instance *māna*, *stuti*, *gātra-bhanga* and *vinyāsa* these four types of *abhinaya* are attributed to *ganikā*.<sup>15</sup>

The most important contribution of *Kuṭṭanimata* is its elaborate record of the performance of *Harṣa*'s *ratnāvalī* by *Manjari* and her co-actors. It is an insightful example to comprehend the role of dance in Sanskrit drama. *Manjari*'s capability in playing the role of *Vāsavadattā* is commended by her skills in various dramatic practices like *sthānaka*, *parikramā*, gracefulness in body movements, proficiency in delivering dialogues, projection of well-nourished sentiments, stability over desires, appearance of *sāttvikabhāvas*, *abhinaya*, perfect body language imitating the character, suitable costume and ornaments and expertise of rhythm in playing musical instruments etc.<sup>16</sup>

Preceding the start of the play then *artakācārya* gets all instruments tuned. The play begins with a lute-player and a singing of *pancamasvara*. Then *sūtradhāra* makes his appearance on the stage at the end of the *praveśikidhruvā* and *aālāpa* in *vipadilaya*. Then *sūtradhāra* sings *adhruvā* endowed with *propertāla* and *laya*, based on eight *kalā* and invites *anaṭī*. He announces the entry of the chief characters of the drama and then walking out along with *anaṭī* while singing exit song. The play also provides various dance terms within of the scenes. E.g. *Vatsarāja* watches *madanamahotsava* from *prasāda* in which the *carcarīs* are going on, citizens dancing in joy. Two female servants of *Vāsavadattā* enter on stage in an over-excitement in *ghaṭita* *abhinaya*. They perform *kamalavartanā* and instead of enacting the *abhinaya* of bow since it is an occasion of *madanamahotsava*, they just act some weapons with eyes filled in *vīra rasa* and perform the variety of feet movements. Then *Vatsarāja* and *vidūṣaka* *Vasantak* join them in dancing and singing *acarcarī* song. Before giving a message received from *Vāsavadattā* to *Udayan* both the female messengers dance on *dhātā* and *lālita* feet movements. Subsequently listening to the love or condition of *Vāsavadattā*, *Udayan* experiences intense *rasa* of *śṛṅgāra*. At this moment *nagnācārya*, a

bard sings a eulogy on *Udayan* from the backstage. The play ends with the *naiṣkrāmikidhruvā* marking the exit of the hero and other characters and singing and playing of instruments comes to close.<sup>17</sup>

The comments given by *Samarabhaṭa* after watching the performance of *Ratnāvalī* shows the intelligence of royal persons in appreciating the drama.<sup>18</sup> He finds the presentation of drama perfectly created around seven musical notes, six qualities of song and modes of three rhythms. He further feels that it contained acts full of *sukumāra* and *āviddha* movements, variety of *nṛtta* and *bhāvas*.<sup>19</sup> He finds that the dialogues were perfectly balanced with serious as well as sweet words, also the accuracy in playing various songs by the instrumentalist. The singer flawlessly sung the subtleties of music, its *druta-madhyā-vilambita* laya, maintaining rhythm and full of sentiments. *Samarabhaṭa* also praises the costume used in the drama. Finally he says that even the women in the harem of *Nahuṣa* couldn't acquire this level of skill in drama after learning from *Bharata*'s sons as it seen the performance of *Ratnāvalī*. *Dāmodaragupta* also briefly cites about the disorders or errors of drama mentioned by *Bharata* which *Manjari* overlooked due to her lovesick condition while playing the role of *Vāsavadattā*.

The final most important reference provided by *Kuṭṭanimatai* is about the temple dancers. It is to be noted that *Urvaśī* a damsel of heaven is called *asdevagaṇikā*.<sup>20</sup> *Manjari* was also the *pāda-mūla* or temple attendant belonging to the shrine of *Kamaleśvara*.<sup>21</sup> *Gambhireśvara* *dāsī* was a dancing girl committed to the temple of *Śiva Gambhiresvara*.<sup>22</sup> Other reference tells us about the group of ordinary dancers and musicians surround *Samarabhaṭa* instantly after he completes his worship at the temple of *vr̥ṣabhadhvaja*.<sup>23</sup> The temple was also used as venue of dance and dramatic performances for popular recreation. The first act of *Ratnāvalī* is said to have been enacted within the precincts of the *vr̥ṣabhadhvaja* temple at *Varanasi*.

## Conclusions:

1. Temple, its precincts and the surrounding were in use as the centres of community gatherings and cultural performances. The production of *Ratnāvalī* in *Kuṭṭanimatai* is the testimony of this development that can be seen on pan Indian level.
2. It was the language of *Nāṭyaśāstra* that we saw used heavily in the *Kuṭṭanimatai*. If we revise the references of the technical terms used in the poem it gets clear that the dance language followed by these writers was the one explained by *Bharata* in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The sensitivity of connoisseurs in maintaining the *Nāṭyaśāstra* prone conventions of drama, also of dance in the performance is noticeable. We have seen the critical appreciation of the performance of *Ratnāvalī* in our text.

3. Apart from this, the references confirm the influence of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* on people beyond the communities of artists and connoisseurs. The way in the *Kuṭṭanīmata* betel-box carrier offer betel to prince *Samarabhaṭa* and how he accepts it expresses the horizontal as well the vertical spread of the gestural language spoken in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* within the day-to-day social life. This was the real picture of the society rather than a fantasy of the poet. We have also noted how important it was for an ideal *nāyaka*, Prince and Princesses to have knowledge of all the *śāstras* in which *Nāṭyaśāstra* was the vital text. This was the period when *Nāṭyaśāstra* and the gestural language described in it became a part of people's daily lives, off-stage too. It became *sārva-varṇika*, and this is interesting.

## References:

<sup>1</sup>Kaul, Madhusudan. (Ed.) 1944.*Kuṭṭanīmata Kāvya* of *Dāmodaragupta*. Bengal: Royal Asiatic Society, verses 81, 123.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. 75, 876, 82.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.881.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. 575.

<sup>5</sup>Kulkarni V.M., Nandi T.S. (Cr. Ed.) 2006.*Nāṭyaśāstra* of *Bharatamuni*. Vol. IV. Vadodara: Oriental Institute, XXIX. 21-22.

<sup>6</sup>Kaul (1944) 881, 904, 928.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid. 760, 787, 919.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid. 82, 354, 792.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid. 534, 948.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid. 75, 235.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.758.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid. 84-85.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.190.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid. 477; Kulkarni V.M., Nandi T.S. (Ed.) 2003.*Nāṭyaśāstra* of *Bharatamuni*. Vol. III. Vadodara: Oriental Institute, XXII. 18-21.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid. 656.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid. 803-808

<sup>17</sup>Ibid. 879-928.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid. 929-945.

<sup>19</sup>GOS (2003.Vol3.XXVI.24-25)*sukumāra* and *āviddha* are the types of dramatic production mentioned by *Bharata*. *Sukumāra* means delicate type of production and *āviddha* is the energetic one.

<sup>20</sup>Kaul (1944.999.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.735.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid. 743.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid. 756.