

BOOK REVIEW

BHAVAI AND ITS TYPICAL AHARYA : by Goverdhan Panchal, Darpana Academy of the Performing Arts Monograph Series No. 1. Ahmedabad. Price not stated.

Gujarat has a versatile and a traditional dramatic art form - Bhavai which is a conglomeration of separate plays woven together in a series of performances. For more than six centuries Bhavai has entertained the rural as well as urban population of Gujarat with its musical dance-dramatic performances.

The monograph under review is a micro-study of one of the salient features of Bhavai viz. the Aharya Abhinaya (the costumes, make-up and props) in Bhavai.

Goverdhan Panchal has introduced this art form in a succinct manner which adds to the richness of the monograph. It is not merely a list of costumes, make-up materials and props but is an introduction of a dramatic art form in its proper perspective.

Shri Panchal gives the geographical dimensions of Bhavai in relation to Gujarat and its neighbouring states Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. He also stresses the artistic tradition of dance and drama in the region where Bhavai originated.

The author traces in detail the possible historical origin of this art form. In doing so he puts forward a theory of his own about the genesis of Bhavai. According to Shri Panchal, Bhavai is a third generation dramatic form. This claim of his requires some explanation. There is a distinct tradition of stage plays called *Rupakas* (described in great detail by Bharata in his *Natyashastra*). These *Rupakas* from Shri Panchal's point of view, comprise of the first generation dramatic form. There is also a very old tradition of a variety of sub-plays called *Uparupakas* which according to the author fall under the category of second generation dramatic form. There are scholars who have tried to trace the origin of Bhavai from some of these sub-plays or *Uparupakas*. Shri Panchal asserts that the majority of *Uparupakas* were chiselled into classical style and were performed on regular stage in sophisticated feudal atmosphere meaning thereby that they lost their folk character. But according to him there arose a third generation dramatic form which emerged

around the fourteenth century all over India and Bhavai is one of such third generation dramatic form. These dramatic forms were entirely different from the classical and sophisticated drama both in content and methods of production. These were the people's theatres in true sense of the term. They were performed in open air and were patronized by people. These popular type of drama took their inspiration from the people and their costumes and make-up i.e., Aharya was also influenced by the people. Shri Panchal calls it *Lokadharmi Aharya*.

After giving this rich background of Bhavai, Shri Panchal introduces the Aharya of Bhavai. Again here he does not start giving a list of costumes, props etc., but gives a historical perspective of the costumes and calls it "Aharya of Bhavai in Retrospect....."

Giving a short word-sketch of the social and political environment prevailing around fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (in Gujarat), he also gives a broadbased grouping of the *vesas* (plays) of Bhavai. This grouping helps in understanding the typical costumes of Bhavai.

Shri Panchal then describes the costumes of some of the *vesas*. He gives apt illustrations in sketches of costumes and props. Simultaneously he discusses the significance of those costumes connected with characters who use them. At certain points the author has traced the changes that have occurred in some costumes. He points out the happy combination of *Lokadharmi* and *Natyadharmi* elements in certain important *Vesas* like *Zanda Zulan*. He also describes how cleverly the subtle differences are adopted in Bhavai costumes to illustrate the typical Sartorial styles of different communities then living in Gujarat.

Though the costumes of a considerable number of *Vesas* have been described and discussed by the author, some of the spectacular *Vesas* like *Bava no Vesa*, *Vadi no Vesa* are left out.

And this otherwise well studied monograph has not taken into account the role played by the typical dancing in Bhavai. The dance in Bhavai is predominantly *Natyadharmi* and it helps the *Aharya* considerably in a subtle and significant way in portraying the characters.

It must be categorically stated that this monograph is an important landmark in the study of Bhavai. No systematic study of this art form was done till fifties. In 1955 a multidimensional research on this subject was done and was noted down in the form of a theses (for Ph.D.) by the reviewer of this monograph. The thesis was published in a book form in 1972. This initial study of Bhavai has covered many facets of that dramatic art form. But each facet requires deeper study. Shri Panchal has carefully

studied the form and has given a critical account of one of the important features of Bhavai viz. the *Aharya*.

Darpana Academy of the Performing Arts deserves kudos for bringing out an exquisite monograph on a subject which requires scholarly study of its multifarious aspects.

—*Sudha R. Desai*