



The Nepalese Observer addressing the Dance Seminar.

DANCE TRADITION IN NEPAL

By

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WE, the Nepali people, are very glad to get the opportunity of taking part in your Dance Seminar. This is the first time in the history of our country that we have got such opportunity to let you know something about our Nepali dances. We, together with the people of Nepal, are very much grateful to the Committee for inviting us. Though we are from a different country, we feel we are only politically separate, but culturally we are one. In Nepal, there are many such dances which are similar to those in your country. For example, we have got many dances which are based on Ram Charitra and Krishna Charitra. But the movements of the body and the timing of the music are somewhat different, like the dances from the various States of your own country.

Nepal Observer's Thanks

"Madam, Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary, and office-bearers of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, and the other artistes, we are very grateful to you for the invitation given to Nepal, and the kind attention given to us. The artistes of Nepal are very grateful to you for this. I have no words to express our thanks for your kindness," said Shri Chandra Kumar Upadhyay, leader of the Nepalese Delegation to the Dance Seminar, in a short speech at the Seminar.

Now, I will tell you about some popular classical dances of Nepal. Nepal is a hilly country where the people are of religious mind. So most of the Nepali dances are based on religious stories. Though Nepal is a tiny country, we are very proud that we are also rich in dancing. In every area of Nepal there is a dancing place where religious dances are compulsorily shown. Again, every ward has got its own *Nasha Dyo*, i.e., the God of Dance. We have a custom to worship *Nasha Dyo* before presenting our dances.

In Nepal, there are such classes also who worship their gods and goddesses by dancing. But now-a-days we find that dancing in Kathmandu Valley is somewhat declining as the people are getting more interested in higher education and science. Still we find some such classes whose occupation is only dancing. Most of those associations were started during Malla Period, when Newari Rajas were ruling in Nepal. Now it has become their traditional occupation.

Classical Dances

Devi Nritya : *Devi Nritya* is a very old and classical dance of Kathmandu Valley. It was started at the time of King Pratap Malla who ruled Nepal about 300 years ago. This dance is performed in Kathmandu Valley till this day. The religious story of the dance is expressed by *Mudras* and movements. But there is no need of facial expression, because, the actors and actresses put on masks or helmets. Songs are also sung during its performance. These songs are composed on classical *ragas* such as *Bhupali Mata-Shree*,



The Nepalese Observer receiving the Akademi's gift.

Balla-Ribbi etc. Dha, Deshi Khi, Nakhi are the musical instruments that are played with this dance. But, the difference is conspicuous in their tunes. This Devi-dance will be demonstrated here.

Once people suffered a lot in the hands of a big demon. Bairab, a very fearful god, came to fight with that cruel giant. But, Bairab could not win, and so he ran away from the battlefield. Daitya came out victorious. Now, his cruelty was increased more than ever before. At last, Kumari (name of a goddess) could not bear this injustice. She attacked Daitya and killed him. People danced with joy on the death of Daitya. The Association has been performing this dance for a long time ; and it is still carrying on this enterprise. There is a traditional Association for Devi-dance so that it is well preserved.

Government Help

The Government is also giving financial help. This Association has got its own main god, and this dance is taught before that god without Gurubabu. Other dances resembling this particular dance, but not exactly like this, are very much popular in various places of Nepal. Without Gurubabu it cannot be shown.

This dance is shown for eight nights consecutively at the time of Indra Yatra at night. Its performance takes five to six hours. A very interesting fact is that the language of this dance is a mixture of Nepali, Newari and Hindi. We find fine *talas* in this dance. Seven persons are needed for this dance; in which five are male actors and the rest female. They are called : (1) Bairab (2) Daitya (3) Khijak (4) Betal (5) Kawari (6) Kumari (7) Chandi.

Sorathi Rani : Sorathi Rani is also a classical dance of Nepal. It is like a ballet. The story goes like this. Sorathi Rani was the daughter of a King of Jaishi. She was a very good and nice girl. She was a very favourite daughter of her father. Her childhood was spent peacefully and happily in the palace. Later, her marriage was solemnised with a powerful king. Sorathi Rani was so gentle and simple that the King (her husband) liked her too much. Other wives of the king felt jealous of the deep love of the king for Sorathi. So they began to play tricks upon Sorathi. They began to prejudice the King against her. They were successful in their designs and Sorathi was ultimately hated by her husband. Sorathi gave birth to a girl.

The baby girl was thrown in the river by the cruel queens. Queen Sorathi's condition was very bad and sorrowful at that time. The baby girl was not of an ordinary type. Later, a fisherman caught the floating box containing the child. He brought up the girl as his own daughter. He named her Kumari. Kumari grew to be so beautiful that every person was attracted towards her. Even the King wanted to marry her. But the King did not know that Kumari was his daughter. She told her father the real fact of her life and her mother. Then the King took Kumari to his palace. Sorathi Rani lived happily thereafter.

Famous Dance

Ghatu Nritya : Ghatu Nritya is a very famous dance among the Gurung community. Saraswati, the goddess of learning, is called Ghata in the language of Gurung tribe. This dance is very old and classical. It is performed only before the god and goddesses or during great religious festivals. This dance can be divided into four parts : (1) Sadha Ghatu (2) Chutka Nacha (3) Kusum Ghatu and (4) Baramase.

Shadha Ghatu : Shadha Ghatu is a dance with narrative poems. Stories are narrated in songs. We have Byaha Danda, Sati Danda and Sikar Danda.

In Byaha Danda, the dance begins in this way. First of all, a very beautiful princess, named Amubabti, is seen doing make-up before a big looking glass. It is a pleasing weather. The musical instruments are also played from behind the screen. At this moment a King, named Parshu Ram, comes there. The marriage of King and Princess Amubabti is performed. They spend their days happily and get a son in course of time. Here comes the ending of Byaha Danda.

Sati Danda

In Sati Danda also we have a story of the same King Parshu Ram. At the birth of Bal Krishna a great festival is organised in the palace. The King makes presents of horses and elephants to his people. After some years the King goes to the battlefield leaving his only son and his dear wife. The King is killed in the war. But this sad news could not reach the queen. But, that night the queen saw a bad dream. She began to weep bitterly. At such a time, a parrot and a crow come with the tragic news. The queen could not control herself and she fainted. Later, the queen decided to commit Sati. This is the story of Sati Danda.



A demonstration of Nepalifolk dance.

In Sikar Danda, we see Ram and his brother, Laxman, wandering in the forest for hunting. It was growing darker and darker. They were quite tired after hunting. They returned to the palace. The King Dasharath was very pleased with them and he presented a strong horse to each of them. Then Ram and Laxman toured through all the country on those horses. This is the story of Sikar Danda.

Chutaka Nacha : There is a group of men in which a person starts singing one line of the song and the rest begin to repeat the same again and again. They all dance on the tune of this song. Every person can take part in this dance. The songs are all centred round the life of Rama and Lord Krishna.

Kusum Ghatu : Kusum Ghatu is a very wonderful dance of Gurung tribe. Two unmarried girls are needed for this dance. When the girls begin to dance before this Kusum Ghatu, they can be liked or disliked

by Kusum god. If the god likes the girl, she forgets herself and begins to move slowly here and there. Songs are also sung during the performance : but, there is no need of Mandal, however, Karatal is played.

It cannot be shown at all places and on all occasions. We should arrange dancing place in the house of Mukhiya, Jimbuwar or Guru Ba. It should be noted that if once a girl takes part in this Kusum Ghatu, she has to dance once a year for three years continuously.

Kusum Ghatu begins in this way. First, two girls stand before the god Kusum. Guru Ba begins to read *mantra* and girls are charmed with these *mantras*. Those girls are covered with white cloth as they depict dying. How far it is true or not, the Gurung tribe has a strong belief that those dying girls sleep for ever if Guru Ba has done some mistakes in religious rituals. Again Guru Ba starts his singing and prays to Kusum god for the life of those dead girls. If Kusum god is satisfied with their worship, then only those girls get new life. When the girls revive, they begin to move very slowly here and there. When they come into sense, they begin to dance very happily at getting new life. This dance is found only in Gorakha at the place Sirani Choka and Lambungrais. This song is sung when the dance is going to be started.

“Hariyo Gobarle Lipeko Satai Jamunako Pani.....”

When the girls are going to be killed—

“Udhai dhalyo Kali Chawar Champai Rani Maidan Maran Bho Jau.....”

This song is sung when Guru Ba prays for the life of the dead girls. “Udhai dhalyo seti chawar champai Rani Maidan Ma Jagavna Gan.”

Dresses : For Guru Ba and Guru Ma simple Nepali dresses ; and for the girls, Jariya, Makhamalko Chola, Patuka, Gahana, Dhungri, Suna, Tirouli, Jantar, Nougedi, etc., are used.

Bara Mase : Bara Mase is the dance which can be shown in every month. This is the most popular dance in Nepal, because it is so simple that every person can learn it very soon. Most of our light and folk dances are called Bara Mase. In Bara Mase we cannot find the story of god and goddesses. Love dances and harvest dances are some of the examples of Bara Mase Dance.

Last of all, let it be noted by all the esteemed members in this audience, that here we have presented only a few specimens of the best dances of Nepal. On account of the political conditions, most of these dances are very much in the background, and we have to explore the artistic character and scope of these dances. Lot of research work has to be done. And, we hope that in not a very far future, these dances will come into limelight with all their glory and become popular once again.