

Amdhra yakshagAnam - 1

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- Messages sorted by: [[date](#)] [[thread](#)] [[subject](#)] [[author](#)]
- Next message: [Ramakrishna S. Pillalamrri: "Re: How about them kanda padyas!"](#)
- Previous message: [Ramakrishna S. Pillalamrri: "Re: yakshagaanam"](#)

When we talk about Andhra Yaksha Gana, Prof. S.V. Joga Rao and his exceptional and exemplary work come to my mind.

Prof. S.V. Joga Rao was on the faculty of the Telugu Dept., Andhra University. In 1956, he submitted a dissertation entitled "yakshagAna caritramu" for fulfilment of the doctoral degree in Telugu and in 1957 he was awarded the degree. Subsequently, in 1961, the Andhra University published his doctoral dissertation.

His dissertation is called the "yakshagAna sarvasvamu". It is an encyclopaedic writing. Nothing parallel to this. This book contains 802 lyrics (yaksha songs) written by 465 composers. This book also contains the origin, development, growth, rules, process of composing, spread, role in Telugu literature, meter, and culture of these Andhra Yaksha Ganas.

Andhra University also published 10 volumes on Yaksha Ganas. Dr. Karnaraja Seshagirirao of the Hindi Dept. at the Andhra University wrote and published several nice essays in Hindi on Telugu Janapada Songs and submitted his doctoral dissertation on Telugu Folk Songs in 1965. His works also contain accounts on Andhra Yaksha Ganas.

Yaksha Gana is not merely a singing act but does go hand in hand with a clean and clear story, dance, impressions, and acting. Above all, Yaksha Gana is Literay Musical Dance Drama. With splendid make up and music, the Yaksha Gana offers a superb recreation and pleasure. In Telugu Culture, Yaksha Gana is (can be) regarded as the Pre-Drama (Pre-Stage) form.

The credit goes to Palkuriki Somanadha (1160-1240), who disclosed the dESI style songs:

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BaritOkTi nElalu pADeDivAru narudaMDa jimdulanaDeDu vAru
lIla nammADigELikalu sEyucunu
kODaMgi yATalu guniseDivAru
gramamoMda bahu nATakamulADuvAru
lalitAMgarasa kaLAMkArarEKa lalavaDa bahurUpamADeDivAru
nAvi yadgati bakshulADeDunaTTi
BAvamrOkulapai nADuvAru
BARatAdhi kadhala jIvamaRugula nAraMga bommala nADiMcuvAru
gaDu nadButaMbuga gaMba sUtraMbu
ladaraMga bommala nADiMcuvAru
nAdaTa gaMdharva yaksha vidyAdharAdulai pADeDu nADeDuvAru"
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That is how Palkuriki Somanadha depicted Telugu Desa Yaksha Gana and its performers. Somanadha included "bayalATalu", "dommarATalu", "tOlubommalATalu", "veDDaMgaM", "Elalu", "dAsarula ciMdulu", "gaMtal", "kELikalu" etc. In a place of pilgrimage or at 4 corners of a city or

during festive occasions, some performers used to perform these Yaksha Gana Musical Dance Dramas, who serious took it as their livelihood and used to make people merry and happy. Didn't those communities die a natural death? That is a tragedy as significant as that of a natural calamity which took ordinary people's life (not emotional. Both are equally bad.). Yaksha Ganas existed during Somanadha's times but Somanadha did not call them by that name.

Yaksha Gana has a specific singing style. That was recognized almost Ten + centuries ago in Telugu Nadu. Srinadha was the first one who used the correct words - Yaksha Gana (1381-1446). Srinadha's Bhimeswara Purana has the lines - "kIrTiMtu reddAni kIrTi gaMdhArvuDu gAmdharvamuna yaksha gAna saraNi". From this, it is understood that, the yaksha gAna is a different style of singing all by itself.

Panchagnula Adinarayana Sastri (who wrote the preface for my great grandfather, Sri Paranandi Venkata Ramasastry's Andhra Sabdra Cintamani, Andhra Patrika Press) was under the impression that the Yaksha Ganas are related to the songs sung by Jakkus (jakkulu). Jakkus once upon a time used to perform Yaksha Gana Musical Dances. Gradually, the word Yaksha had become a part of Jakkus. As they used to perform Yaksha acts, they were called "yakshulu" and/or "jakkulu".

Look at "krIDABirAmamu" (15th Century) and one can see "jakkula puraMdhri", the Musical Talent of Jakkus:

kONAgRa saMGArsha GamaGamdhvanitAra
kaMThasvaraMbutO gAraviMpa
masiboTTu bOnAnanasalu kolpina kannu
koDupuce dATimcu neDapa daDapa Srutiki
nutkarshaMbu jUpaMca valayucO
jevitrADu bigiyiMcu jIvagaRRa
gilku gilku na mrOyuMkiMkiNI guccaMbu
tALamAnaMbutO mELaviMpa
rAgamunanuMDi laMGiMcu rAgamunaku
nurumayUrudvayaMbupainoltigilli
kaamamalli mahAlakshmiIkaiTaBARI
valapuvADu vacce jakkula puraMdhri.

It is also described that the "naTTuva girls" are the same "yaksha kanyalu" in krIDABirAmamu. One can also see the description of the yaksha girls dancing in krIDABirAma:

hara hara yiMta yoppune mahAraBaTin jagaJaMkRta svana
nmuvaLi viSritAmkarava mUrcala jittamulubbi yakkale
Dvurunade yADa jocciri kaDugaMDu vEDka samunnamatRyO
dharayugaBArA BIma tama tanvaValagnamulaina nRtyamul.

The word "jakkiNi" has its roots from "jakkulu" and "yaksha gAnamulu". The jakkula puraMdhra's main occupation was to entertain people with their songs, music, dance, and action and they nurtured the yaksha gAna.

Look at the Telugu translation of Annamacharya's "saMkIrasa lakshaNa" (in Sanskrit) as done by his grandson, Cinnanna. In that, one can see the occurrence of word "yaksha gAna":

yakshagAna padaMbu navvidhamuna
samucitAnEkavidhatALasaMgatulanu
navarasAlaMkriyA suvarNaMulagucu
nalaruna viharikIrtanAcAryuDaniye.

What is the connection between Annamacharya and Yakshaganas? Recently, I was reading a collection of songs - cittUru palleImalo vemkaTESvarunipai BaktigItAlu. These are Chitturu Folk songs on Venkateswara. Who composed these songs? What were their Origin? Now it strikes to me that some of those may have origin from jakku's tongue.

Peddana's (16th century) lakshNa sArasaMgrahamu contains inclusion of "tripuTarEku", "jaMperEku", "raccarEku", and "ATatALamu" and also the distinctions of "ragaDa". In Telugu literary history, it is documented that the "saurabha caritra" of Prolugamti Cenna Sauri (14th century) contains the story of Jakkulu. Dr. S.V. Joga Rao, the boss-man researcher of Andhra Yaksha Ganas, said that in Vellamki Tatabhattu's "kaviloka cimtAmaNi", the "lakshmi kaLyANamu" may be an "yakshagAnamu" but unfortunately this piece was unfound.

The first songs of yakshaganas are called "jakkula rEku". The Devotional and songs on the Brave do belong to the first category also.

In Telugu Yaksha Gana, the prose is minimum. There is no sUtradhAri. Either a female or male will render the song with "bhAva".

sugrIva vijayamu belongs to the second category of Telugu Yaksha Ganas written by Kandukuri Rudrakavi (16th Century). Cakrapuri Raghavacharya's "vipranArAyaNa caritra" also belongs to this yakshagana category. Kandukuri Rudrakavi's sugrIva vijayamu is very popular (according to SVJR). Kramja Venkatadri's "vaasamtikaa pariNayamu", Balapapamba Akkamahadevi's "kaMkaTi paaparaaju vishNumaayanaaTakamu" and Tekumalla Ramgasayi's "jaanakI pariNayamu" were written in the 16th century. Balapapamba was the first Female Yaksha Gana Writer.

The third phase of Telugu Yaksha Gana's transformed into street dramas (vIdhi nATakamulu). This transformation took place in the 17th century during the rule of Tanjore Kings. Eventhough the birth place of Yaksha Ganas is Rayalseema, they enjoyed the care and petting of the Rajas of Tanjore. This always happens where the people of Andhra ignore their Heritage and someone else will take it over. Look at the present state of Tyagaraja's lyrics. Never be surprised. One of these days, Annamayya will move to Madras also and he will be called "Anna" or "Annamoyyappayyar". (Not emotional. Feel sad!)

"rukmiNIkRshNa vivAhamu", another Yaksha Gana, was written by Raghunadha Nayaka (16th Century) but unfortunately this is also not available. That is what happened to several of our literary treasures. It is also said that Vijayaraghava wrote 23 Yaksha Ganas, which contain "kaLiyamardanam", "kRshNavilAsamu", "vipranArAyaNa", "raGunAdhABYudayamu", "pUtanaharaNam", and "prahlAda caritra" - the 6 published Yaksha Gana plays, which are very popular. It is also known that Vijayaraghava, deliberately called these Yaksha Ganas, "Drama" or "nATakamu".

As mentioned earlier, Yaksha Gana and Vidhi Nataka are inseparable. Yaksha Gana has the salient features of Vidhin Nataka. Yaksha Gana and Vidhi Nataka are the same. The most famous of those Vidhi Nataka - Yaksha Gana are: raGunAdha naayakaaByudayamu (vijayaraaghavuDu), mannaarudaasa vilaasanaaTakamu (pasupuleTi ramgaajamma), hEmaabjanaayikaa pariNayamu (mannaarudevu), vijayaraaGava camdrikaa vihaaramu (kaamarasu vEmkaTapati sOmayaaji - probably related to our BGSU KV RAO - very few with this last name exist these days), vijayaraaGava kaLyaaNam (kOnETi dIkshita kavi), and the tamjaapuraannadaana mahaanaaTakamu (purushOttama dIkshituDu). The line "nATaka SabdamicaTa sAmAnyA dRSyaprabaMdhavAci" - was an arcane but well-known

kaavya (caaTu kaavya) those days. The raaga of Yaksha Gana is importance.

Again non-Telugu kings like the Maharashtra kings like Sahaji (16th century) himself wrote 20 Yaksha Ganas and kiraatavilaasamu, kRshnalIlaa vilaasamu, gamgaapaarvatI samvaadamu, jalakrIDalu, draupadI kaLyANamu, paarvatI kaLyaaNamU, ratIkaLyaaNamU, raamapaTTaaBishEkamu, rukmiNISatyaBaama samvaadamu, vallI kaLyaaNamU, viGnEswara kaLyaaNamU, tyaagaraaja vinOdacitra prabamdhamu, vishNupallaki sEVA prabamdhamu, SaMkara pallaki sEVA prabamdhamu are the most famous of his works.

vidhi Baagavatamulu are just like the Yaksha Ganas. The Kuchipudi Bhagavatars, who are the most talented in Barata's Dance are well-respected in this. The Kuchipudi Bhagavatars popularized the Yaksha Ganas like the kiraataarjuniyamU, garuDaacalamu, tripurasamhaaramu, paarvatiipariNayamu and gamgaagaurI vilaasamu. The siddhEmdra yOgi's kalaapaamu is said to have roots from the Yaksha Gana, upto some extent. Yaksha Ganas played a major role in the prominence of Kuchipudi Dance.

The rest is forthcoming.

--pAlana

Acknowledgements: I am indebted to Chy. Paruchuri Sreenivas who is always my inspiration and encouragement in learning hidden treasures of our Literature and Culture. We had some discussion about Yaksha Ganas and Chandassu long time ago. That is the start of this essay and it is long due. Time has come.

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- 7) Dr. K.V.R. Narasimham - Some personal discussions (1978-1980)
- 8) Sri Samineni Suryanarayana - Personal discussions (1970-1980)
A violinist born to play violin in the Devadasi community.
My music teacher.
- 9) Annamacharya Geya Samputi
- 10) Citturu Jillalo Venkateswarunipai Pallepatalu

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