

Vyaṅgyavyākhyā

The Aesthetics of Dhvani in Theatre



Edited by
K.G. Paulose

VYANGYAVYĀKHYĀ

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Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan
Deemed University
Under M/o Human Resource Development
Govt. of India, New Delhi



Publishers of Indian Traditions

Preface



It had been a long cherished dream to publish *Vyaṅgyavyākhyā* (VV), after I came across *Naṭāṅkuśa*. It was in the late 1980s that efforts were started to bring out *Naṭāṅkuśa*, the unpublished critique of Kūṭiyāṭṭam. When I started to study the text seriously I could no more endorse the popular view that *Naṭāṅkuśa* is the result of a personal acrimony between the author and a particular actor who humiliated him. The anonymous author of *Naṭāṅkuśa*, emerged to me as a great scholar with deep knowledge in almost all branches of learning, especially in *Nāṭyaśāstra*. He has great respect for Kulaśekhara and Śaktibhadra. Above all his quarrel is not against any particular actor, but to his/her deviations from the classical stream. It came to me as a revelation that *Naṭāṅkuśa* cannot be studied in isolation. It presupposes VV, the work of another *Nāṭyaśāstra* scholar, inheriting the same tradition.

A glimpse into the manuscripts of VV opened a new world before me. I could find in Kulaśekhara, a genius with great insight into the potential of theatre. When it came to his notice that the *dhvani* theory propounded in the other end of the subcontinent opened a new world of imagination to the poets, he immediately applied the same to rejuvenate the theatre. More than that, he created a band of new artistes with their disciples to carry on the mission of invigorating theatre. It is sad that as in the case of all those endowed with greatness, Kulaśekhara too was ahead of his time and his followers failed to imbibe his vision. Yet he left deep imprints in our theatrical discourses.

Inspired, I began to translate VV into English. The introductory parts were published in 1994 in two issues of *Pūrṇatrayī* journal. But I could not proceed further due to the heavy administrative responsibilities that fell on my shoulders. It is now that I am able to fulfil the cherished dream. Meanwhile the new enthusiasm created by the discovery of Kūṭiyāṭṭam in the later half of the last century produced many works, especially by Western scholars on different aspects of that intangible heritage. One thing that worried me was that these learned authors do not get access to the original sources of the classical theatre of Kerala – VV and *Naṭāṅkuśa*, the former innovative and the latter critical. I feel relieved that I could offer *Naṭāṅkuśa* to the scholarly world, in 1993, and VV now after a lapse of several years. Actually these could have been done in the reverse order. My hope is that access to these two mutually complimentary

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some ancient master). In all probability, these definitions are from the text of Kohala that is now lost to us.

As the regional forms have been constantly growing, and were constantly being defined and redefined by the *ācāryas* in Bharata's tradition, several optional terms are used for these so-called *nṛttaprabandhas*. *Nṛtya*, *saṃkīrṇa rūpaka* and *anya rūpaka* are the terms that can be applied to these minor forms of drama according to Dhanañjaya and Dhanika (*Daśarūpaka*, *vṛtti* on I.8, III.33); Hemacandra uses the term *geyarūpaka* for them; Śubhaṅkara, Dattila and Sāgaranandin call them *gauṇarūpakas* (minor plays), while authors of *ND* use the term *anya rūpaka* (other plays) for them. It is in *AS* and *SD* that these forms of drama find the nomenclature of the *uparūpaka*. They are also called *deśī rūpakas* or *deśya prabandhas*. In fact, they are prototypes of a variety of regional forms of theatre in this vast peninsula.

There can be no limit to the number of these *deśī* forms of drama. Considering the multiplicity of traditions that these minor forms belong to, we find that the number is constantly increasing, and contrary to the limit of ten that is mostly accepted in case of the number of *rūpakas*, any attempt to prescribe a limit of number for these regional forms could be futile. We find that the *ācāryas* had been observing the process of emergence of new forms of theatre in different regions and their growth in relation to regional variations and they were also trying to define and standardize the emerging new forms.

Abhinavagupta has quoted the definitions of the following regional forms of theatre named as *nṛttaprabandhas*, as given by some ancient *ācārya* or *ācāryas* — *rāsaka*, *ḍombī*, *prasthāna*, *bhāṅikā*, *bhāṅa*, *ṣidgaka*, *hallīśaka* and *rāmākrīḍa*. Elsewhere, he has given a detailed description of *ḍombikā* or *ḍombī*. Dhanika has enumerated *ḍombī*, *śrīgadita*, *bhāṅa*, *bhāṅī*, *prasthāna*, *rāsaka* and *kāvya* as seven varieties of *nṛtya* like *bhāṅa* (*bhāṅa* here is different from the *rūpaka* named *bhāṅa*). Amṛtānandayogin in his *AS* (IX.2-3) has defined sixteen *uparūpakas* — *nāṭikā*, *saṭṭaka*, *troṭaka*, *goṣṭhī*, *prekṣaṇaka*, *bhāṅikā*, *saṃllāpaka*, *prasthāna*, *kāvya*, *hallīśa*, *rāsaka*, *śrīgadita*, *lāsikā*, *durmali*, *nāṭyarāsaka* and *ullāpya*. Viśvanātha adds *prakaraṇī* and *śilpaka*, in this list, and makes them eighteen (*SD* VI.5). Viśvanātha and some other authors talk of eighteen *uparūpakas*, which are — *nāṭikā*, *troṭaka*, *goṣṭhī*, *saṭṭaka*, *nāṭyarāsaka*, *prasthāna*, *ullāpyaka*, *kāvya*, *citrakāvya*, *preṅkhaṇa*, *rāsaka*, *saṃllāpaka*, *śrīgadita*, *śilpaka*, *vilāsikā*, *durmali*, *prakaraṇī*, *hallīśa* and *bhāṅikā*. *AP* and *SP* count twenty-seven and twenty-four types of *rūpakas* and they include the regional forms also in their treatment. Śāradātanaya raises the number to thirty by adding *mali*, *kalpavallī* and *pārijātaka* (*BP*, chap. VIII, p. 221). Out of the thirty *rūpakas* that he has cited, ten are *rasātmaka* and remaining twenty are *bhāvātmaka* according to him.

Dr Paulose by selecting *Vyaᅅgyavyākhyā* now and *Naᅅāᅅkuᅅam* earlier for his elaborate critique has been able to project an extremely sensitive problem related to the know-how of Indian histrionics. This especially is to be viewed as inevitable at a time when Indian theatre is facing a crisis of identity and groping in the dark to relate to its national character. Dr Paulose's untiring efforts in creating awareness of our tradition and its immense potential deserve all encomium. His clarity of vision and liveliness in analysis are well mooted and well intentioned. I wish that his work on *Vyaᅅgyavyākhyā* will be made a guide by all practitioners of performing arts especially the theatre people who nurture belief in the Indianness in Indian performing arts.

— Kavalam Narayana Panikkar

