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Dutikarmaprakasha: A Practical Reconstruction of Dutis in Nritya

- Report compiled by : Keerthana Ganesh and Disciples of Mayuri Nrityashala

Noopura Bhramari Research Foundation, Kalagowri, and Mayuri Nruthyashala jointly presented a research-based dance production on April 14, 2019 at Kalagowri Auditorium in Basavanagudi, Bengaluru, titled 'Dutikarmaprakasha: A Practical Reconstruction of Dutis in Nritya', as part of a Senior Research Fellowship by the Ministry of Culture- CCRT.

The production was based on the work of the 16th century musician-musicologist-danceologist Pandarika Vittala, also known as Karnataka Sangeeta Lakshana Pitamaha, during his time in the court of Mughal Emperor Akbar. His work Dutikarmaprakasha, is a text in the tract on the art of Erotics, and highlights the activities of the Duti (female messenger), who is defined as one who is an adept in the art of match-making through a proper representation of the state of separation and whose objective is to bring together two pining souls. It deals with the functions of 21 varieties of Dutis through their definitions and illustrative examples in poetically charming descriptive passages in the form of Muktakas.

The program began with an invocation and a puja for Kalagowri. Ms. Shalini P. Vitthal then presented her research paper, 'Dutikarmaprakasha- A Practical Reconstruction of Dutis in Nritya'. The study involved the analysis of dutis, as well as definition and illustrative examples, and identified relevant excerpts in literature, as mentioned below. This was followed by a discussion with distinguished scholars Shatavadhani Dr. R. Ganesh, and Vid. Korgi Shankaranarayana Upadhyaya.

The dance production sought to explore these varieties of Dutis in Nritya. Excerpts from different sources of literature, be it Folk, dasa or vachana sahitya, Kshetragna Padams, as well as the works of Shatavadhani Dr. R. Ganesh's Abinayabharati were taken, and woven together. Two Sutradharas, or narrators, explained the characteristics of each duti, as well as salient features of the sahitya selected for each duti.

The performance itself was presented in two parts, beginning with a Pushpanjali set to raga Surya composed by Vid. Balasubhramanya Sharma and concluded by Mangalam which was specially penned by Art researcher Dr Manorama B N, for the purpose of the research production.

During the interval, the Sabha Karyakrama saw the presentation of the certificates for students who had successfully completed the course in the Marga Karanas of the Natyashastra, the 'Natyashastra Karana Padavi', conducted jointly by Noopura Bhramari Research Foundation, and Mayuri Nruthyashala. Mayuri Nruthyashala also launched its website www.mayurinruthyashala.com, by website designer Sushma Gowda.

Smt. Shalini also acknowledged the individuals who had made the production successful- Shatavadhani Dr. R. Ganesh for his valuable inputs and sahitya composition, Dr. R. N. Nagaraj for procuring the original text of Dutikarmaprakasha, Vid. Kori Shankaranarayana Upadhyaya for

direction of the Sutradhaara characters, Dr. Manorama B. N. for the composition and direction of the Sutradhaara characters, and Dr. Shobha Shashikumar for the dance direction.

The musical ensemble consisted of Vid. Balasubraymanya Sharma, who composed and directed the music, along with being the vocalist for the day, nattuvangam and rhythm pads by Vid. Prasanna Kumar, mridangam by Vid. Srihari Rangaswamy, flute by Vid. Narasimha Murthy, Veena by Vid. Gopala Venkataramana.

The dance performers were Dr. Shobha Shashikumar and students- Smt. Madhulika Srivatsa, Smt. Megha Srinivas, Smt. Sangeeta Iyer, and Smt. Anuradha Lokesh. The Sutradhaara performers were Smt. Shalini P. Vittal, and Kum. Kirthana Ganesh.

The event was ably documented by Smt Pooja Balasubramanya, the event photographer (Mudra Shots), and Shaale, who provided audio, video, and web telecast services. The sound was managed by Prabhat Studios.

Due to the number of dutis (twenty-one), each individual piece was short; however, the potential for each of them to be more deeply explored, was quite visible to the spectators. The use of Sutradharas added humor to the presentation, as well as managed to convey information through a combination of acting and poetic dialogue, which was lauded as a novel method of linking the different sahyas, and dutis into a single cohesive performance. The door is open- for artistes in general, and dancers in particular!

Below is a brief description of each 21 dutis set to varieties of the sahyas and weaved in the format of dance drama structure.

1. Veshadharini : Raga: Abhogi,

Composer: Shatavadhani Dr. R. Ganesh

In the treatment of this composition, the Duti has the responsibility of inconspicuously passing on an intimate message of the Nayaka to the Nayika. She chooses to disguise herself as a priest and hides the message amidst the offerings (prasaada) from the temple. Passing by the watchful eyes of the security at the gates, she – rather, “He” – manages to hold the nature of a learned scholar and successfully reaches the quarters of the heroine. Aghast at the entry of this stranger, the Nayika refuses to accept anything from this ‘priest’ initially; however, on releasing that it is after all the Duti dressed in the garb of a priest, accepts the offering, and thus the message, and bids her farewell.

2. Maniharini and Ceshtasanketakovida

Raga: Mohana

Composer: Shatavadhani Dr. R. Ganesh

This Duti – an expert at communicating through signs, and a seller of beads & bangles – arrives at the Nayika’s dwelling with beautiful bangles and other jewelry. She finds herself surrounded by girls and women of all ages eager to try on the jewels. As she decorates them with earrings, necklaces and bangles, she skillfully passes on the message of the Nayaka to the Nayika using her proficiency in signs by making marks on the palm of the heroine and by way of symbolic gestures.

3. Napiki

Composition: Instrumental

Napiki refers to a beautician. The love-lorn nayika is seen in her house, rather upset. The Napiki arrives for her regular appointment, and starts her work by painting the Nayika's nails. Upon noticing that the Nayika is upset and unresponsive, she questions her, and the Nayika reveals that she is in love with a man but hasn't found a way to tell him of her feelings. She also feels she may not match up to his charm. On hearing this, the Napiki promises to deck up the Nayika and make her look so very beautiful that her hero will have no option but to fall in love with her at first sight. She dresses the Nayika with utmost care, and asks her to go right away and meet her Hero. She promises that the mere sight of the Nayika is enough, and she will not even have to speak to the Nayika to elicit his love.

4. Shilpini; Raga: Ragamalika

Composition: Kanakadasa's *Mohanatarangini*

While asleep, the Nayika (Usha) dreams of a handsome man who captures her heart instantly. Upon waking, she is thus extremely restless and desperate to find this man of her dreams. Her friend Chitralekha observes her restlessness, and offers to help her. She first asks Usha to describe the man. Trained in the many mystical arts, she then offers to travel the seven worlds to find all men who may match this description, paint a picture of them, and bring them back to Usha. She thus departs, and eventually finds herself in Dwaraka, where she happens upon a man who seems to an incarnation of Manmatha himself, and after observing him in a disturbed sleep, is convinced that he is the one Usha described. She paints a portrait of Aniruddha, and travels back to Usha. After teasing her with paintings of other men, she finally reveals the picture of Aniruddha, which Usha immediately recognises and is ecstatic, hugging her friend in gratitude.

5. Kumari ; Raga: Tilang ;Composition: Dr. Manorama B. N.

The innocence and ignorance of children have served as instrumental in conveying messages of love many a time. Here is Kumari, a young girl whom the nayaka utilises wisely. He pens down verses seemingly in praise of the small girl but intently in admiration of his beloved. He sends the letter through the child to the nayika, instructing the girl to demand the nayika to sing the verses for her. The all playful girl, who regularly plays with the nayika, does so, not even understanding that she has been used as a messenger. Also, how could the nayika miss to get the nayaka's tone in the poem, though she does not disappoint the zeal and excitement of the young girl in being praised!

6. Dasi

Composition: Instrumental

The Nayika, preoccupied with her thoughts about the Nayaka summons her maid, and asks for a scroll to write a message for him. She then asks the maid to deliver the message immediately. At first, the maid is terrified; she can neither read nor write, and is scared to even hold the message. However, at the insistence of her mistress, she dutifully follows her orders to the letter, and leaves to fulfil this responsibility.

7. Skhalita ; Raga: Ragamalika

Composer: Shatavadhani Dr. R. Ganesh

The Nayika has received a proposal from the Nayaka but is not sure if she should accept, since she is not sure of the Nayaka's character. Therefore, she sends her companions, the dutis to check on his character and give her correct and detailed information about him. The dutis, obediently go to

check on him without his knowledge. However the Nayaka spots them, and uses the opportunity to pretend to be a learned and charitable man. The dutis (who are not very smart) believe the Nayaka to be a true gentleman and pass on the very same information to the Nayika. Nayika trusts them blindly and accepts the Nayaka's proposal only to realise his true colours. She is completely disappointed with her dutis and blames them for her having gotten a bad name and to have fallen in the eyes of the society. She blames them for not checking on the Nayaka properly because of which she has had to pay a heavy price. However, it does not seem like the dutis truly understand the depths of the consequences of their actions. They assure the Nayika that they will confront the Nayaka, and leave, resulting in a surprising conclusion.

8. Svayamduti ; Raga: Ragamalika

Composer: Shatavadhani Dr. R. Ganesh

Where can there be more honesty than in the elements of nature, that is worthy of complete trust, especially when the message is about the most delicate emotion of love! Here is the nayika who has set herself the task of sending love message to her hero.

Alas! What can honesty achieve without the skill and will! If the messenger be the cloud, it disappears on raining, if the messenger be the wind, it has no consistent intensity. If the messenger be the parrot, it has no modulation but only monotony in its voice. If the messenger be the peacock, its words are like harsh abuses. If the messenger be the deer, there is a constant fear and not confidence to deliver. If the messenger be the moon, he is too cold to comprehend the warmth of love. Despite the nature being at its best, it cannot fulfil the task of being a messenger!

Realising thus, the nayika decides that it is futile to expect anyone to deliver the delicate message of love. So, she decides to go herself. When she attempts to write her message herself, she realises that her mind has already fled from her clutches, being immersed in the thought of the nayaka. Then, how else could she convey the depths of her desperation?

In the part second part of the production **Viprashnika, Parachitta Visheshanya, and Ganavati** focused in one single composition which was set to Raga: Anandabhairavi, Ahirbhairav, and Valachi.

Composition were weaved by the stanzas of Korvanaji's literature of Sri Vadiraja , Vachana, Folk and Dasa Sahitya, and Helavanakatte Giriyamma

In this composition, the duti, a Koravanji woman looks at the nayika and realises that she needs to be foretold about her nayaka and how she will be the perfect match for him. She goes on to sing and describe that the lines on her palm reveal that her nayaka will be coming soon to her and looks as handsome as Lord Krishna himself. Nayika is extremely happy to listen to the words of the duti and thanks her immensely for informing her of the good fortune.

10. Vichitravachana

Raga: Brindavani

Composer: Shatavadhani Dr. R. Ganesh

She is the Duti who is an expert in coded language and has a knack for wordplay. Realising that she needs to pass on the message of the Nayaka to the Nayika in tactful manner, she creates a fun piece of poetry. She says – “that bull (gooLi) which you have been keen on seeing for many days

now is standing outside the house of grandmother Lakshmi (lakshmiajjiya mane aache), come and see it quickly!” For anyone who hears this, it simply seems like a random call to anyone who wishes to see the bull near someone’s house... however, the Bull here refers to none other than the Nayaka and the grandmother Lakshmi has layers of symbolism - the Mother of Goddess Lakshmi is the Lotus, and the Mother of a Lotus is the Lake! Hence, “lakshmiajji” refers to a lake on the other side of which awaits the Nayaka. The confused Nayika, slowly figures out this puzzle and understands the message embedded in the poetry, and praises the tact and skill of the duti.

11. Souchiki; Composition: Instrumental

The Souchiki (tailor) meets the Nayika at her residence, and notices that she is quite despondent. Upon probing, the Nayika reveals that she has not met the Nayaka for quite some time and wishes to pass on a message about a secret meeting. The Souchiki suggests that she could stitch the message into an Angavastram that she could be gifted to the Nayaka. As he wears it he would be able to read the message, which would be camouflaged as designs. She then completes the garment and promises to gift it to the Nayaka, and leaves a joyful Nayika behind.

12. Rajaki Composition: Instrumental

Rajaki means a washer-woman. At the crack of dawn, the Rajaki walks to work along with her mule. As she washes and dries clothes, the Nayaka who is passing by, notices that his lover’s saree has been washed and laid to dry on the clothesline by the Rajaki. He approaches her, requesting if she can do him a personal favour by handing over his love letter to the Nayika when she delivers the washed clothes. The Rajaki obliges, of course in return for a good sum of money. She tactfully hides the love letter between folded clothes and carries the message from the Nayaka to his lover.

13. Malini

Raga: Vasantha Composer: Shatavadhani Dr. R. Ganesh

She is a Duti whose special talent is to create beautiful and meaningful garlands. The Nayaka passes on the message and requests it to be communicated through a flower garland. The Duti adeptly creates a unique garland and creates the message through the choice of flowers itself. She picks white flowers that blossom at night and strings them into a garland and offers it to the Nayika. The time and place of the rendezvous of the lovers is suggested and conveyed through those particular flowers that bloom at a specific place only during nightfall.

14. Kathini and Prativeshini

Composition: Instrumental

This depiction revolves around a gossipmonger, who also happens to be the neighbour of the Nayika. Unsure of how to pass on her love message to her beloved, the Nayika hears the lady speaking volumes about everyone in the neighbourhood. Not wishing to miss this opportunity, she immediately goes over to the neighbour’s house, and requests her to go to the Nayaka and use her skills as a colourful storyteller with a knack for exaggeration to paint a lovely picture of the Nayika. Such must be the description that the Nayaka must immediately be captivated. The thrilled Kathini simply cannot wait to create tales and commence this duty of passing on the message of her neighbour!

15. Dhatri

Raga: Kambhoji

Composer: Shatavadhani Dr. R. Ganesh

The Nayika, a courtesan, is seen waiting for the one she loves at her place of work. Her mistress, the matron of the establishment, notices her disinterest towards other prospective visitors and advises the Nayika that it is not right to fall in love with any one person and that her profession doesn't allow her to do so. She goes to convince her by saying that the Nayika has the power to attract hundreds of men and it is not right for her to be smitten by love. She further accuses her of rejecting the familial tradition of which she is a part. After reminding her that marriage, children, and other typical aspects cannot exist in this line of work, the Nayika agrees to forget this infatuation.

16. Sakhi and Prasangini

Composition: Kshetrajna

A close aide of the nayika, who is a well-wisher in the true sense, is trying to get through to the Nayika, as to how big a blunder it would be, to not entertain the Nayaka who is so much in love with her. The context of the song is that, the Nayika who is a courtesan, has forbidden the Nayaka from visiting her anymore, not realising the depth of his love for her. The Nayaka on the other hand is uncomplaining and unperturbed by her behaviour, and confesses in public that he is not fortunate or deserving of her love; she who is unparalleled in beauty, and whose nature is as blissful as the nectar. The Sakhi tells her how he came to her doors time and again, so that he may seek her hand in marriage, least affected by the fact that she is a courtesan. The call of her friend, comes as a jolt to her impaired senses. The Sakhi, a genuine friend of the Nayika, through emotional and powerful narration as a Prasangini; manages to impactfully show the Nayika, the depth of the Nayaka's unconditional love for her.

The performance was much appreciated by the august gathering of scholars, performers, and sahridayas. The Lokadharmi (worldly) aspects of dutis like the Souchiki and Napiki clicked instantly with the spectators present. The intensity of the presentation of dutis such as Swayamduti, Sakhi, and Prasangini were applauded. The presentation showed the potential for the exploration of the character of the messenger in Shringara abhinaya, which traditionally focuses on either the Nayika (heroine), or the Nayaka (hero). This practical reconstruction needs a wider exposure, especially in the dance fraternity, and must be performed by many so that such aesthetic work reaches the mainstream.

ದೂತೀಕರ್ಮಪ್ರಕಾಶ ನೃತ್ಯಪ್ರಸ್ತುತಿಯ ಮಂಗಳಪದ

- ರಚನೆ : ಡಾ.ಮನೋರಮಾ ಬಿ.ಎನ್



ಮಂಗಳವು ಮಂಗಳವು ಶುಭಮಂಗಳ
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ಶೋಭಾವಹವು ನಾಟ್ಯ ಅಭಿನಯವು ಮಂಗಳವು
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ಗೀತ ಮೇಘಕೆ ರಾಧೆ ಮಧುಲಿಕೆಯು ಮಂಗಳವು

ಪಾಡಿ ಆಡಿದ ಬಾಲ-ಶರ್ಮಂಗೆ ಮಂಗಳವು
ತಾಳ ವಾದ್ಯದಿ ಪ್ರಸನ್ನ ಮಂಗಳವು
ನುಡಿಮೃದಂಗವು ಚೆಂದ ಶ್ರೀಹರಿಗೆ ಮಂಗಳವು
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ನಲ್ಲ ನಲ್ಲೆಯರಿಂಗೆ ದೂತಿ ಮಂಗಳವಯ್ಯ
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Dutikarmaprakasha

A Practical Reconstruction of Dutis in Nritya

- Kirthana Ganesh, and Mayuri Nruthyashala, Bengaluru

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Nayaka and the grandmother Lakshmi has layers of symbolism - the Mother of Goddess Lakshmi is the Lotus, and the Mother of a Lotus is the Lake! Hence, "lakshmiajji" refers to a lake on the other side of which awaits the Nayaka. The confused Nayika, slowly figures out this puzzle and understands the message embedded in the poetry, and praises the tact and skill of the duti.

II. Souchiki; Composition: Instrumental

The Souchiki (tailor) meets the Nayika at her residence, and notices that she is quite despondent. Upon probing, the Nayika reveals that she has not met the Nayaka for quite some time and wishes to pass on a message about a secret meeting. The Souchiki suggests that she could stitch the message into an Angavastram that she could be gifted to the Nayaka. As he wears it he would be able to read the message, which would be camouflaged as designs. She then completes the garment and promises to gift it to the



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tradition of which she is a part. After reminding her that marriage, children, and other typical aspects cannot exist in this line of work, the Nayika agrees to forget this infatuation.



16. Sakhi and Prasangini

Composition: Kshetrajna

A close aide of the nayika, who is a well-wisher in the true sense, is trying to get through to the Nayika, as to how big a blunder it would be, to not entertain the Nayaka who is so much in love with her. The context of the song is that, the Nayika who is a courtesan, has forbidden the Nayaka from visiting her anymore, not realising the depth of his love for her. The Nayaka on the other hand is uncomplaining and unperturbed by her behaviour, and confesses in public that he is not fortunate or deserving of her love; she who is unparalleled in beauty, and whose nature is as blissful as the nectar. The Sakhi tells her how he came to her doors time and again, so that he may seek her hand in marriage, least affected by the fact that she is a courtesan. The call of her friend, comes as a jolt to her impaired senses. The Sakhi, a genuine friend of the Nayika, through emotional and powerful narration as a Prasangini; manages to impactfully show the Nayika, the depth of the Nayaka's unconditional love for her.

The performance was much appreciated by the august gathering of scholars, performers, and sahridayas. The Lokadharmi (worldly) aspects of dutis like the Souchiki and Napiki clicked instantly with the spectators present. The intensity of the presentation of dutis such as Swayamduti, Sakhi, and Prasangini were applauded. The presentation showed the potential for the exploration of the character of the messenger in Shringara abhinaya, which traditionally focuses on either the Nayika (heroine), or the Nayaka (hero). This practical reconstruction needs a wider exposure, especially in the dance fraternity, and must be performed by many so that such aesthetic work reaches the mainstream.