

Bayalata: An Overview

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Abstract:

Bayalata is an open air theatre drama performed at the end of harvest in northern Karnataka of India.. It involves literature and dance. Bayalata is performed in all districts of Karnataka to cater the need of the people. The stories of Bayalata are taken from Ramayana and Mahabharata. Several stories performed in Bayalata in Ballari are Girija Kalyana, Arjuna Karnana Kalaga, Ashwamedha Yaga, Renuka Mahatma etc. This is the best mode of entertainment and enlightenment to the villagers. The main core of attraction is its extraordinary costume and dance. Artists are specially trained for months, stage setting and music are peculiar. Maximum taluka places of Ballari have grand performance of Bayalata. My article aims at the study, analyze and examine Bayalata art form performed in Ballari, to translate colloquial language used in Bayalata into English, to know the characters involved in this art form and to know how far this drama form is successful in reaching out the audience, entertain and enlighten.

Keywords: Bayalata, performance, art, audience, entertainment etc.

Bayalata is one of the most diverse forms of Karnataka folk art. It is a form of Yakshagana that includes lyrics, music and dance. Generally Bayalata begins after the completion of harvest work. It is the hobby of set of artists to practice stories from Indian classics like Ramayana and Mahabharata and perform in an open theater in the evening to village audience. Artists selected for episodic roles meet every night for two or three months to learn under the guidance of senior artists. A teacher who teaches Bayalata is called “Bhagavatha”. Earlier artists were given food grains by the head of the villages , nowadays, they get money and gold ornaments by rich people and their relatives. Bayalata is usually held during fairs, festivals, and other happy occasion, spectators come to a particular village to see the performance.

Bayalata has the history of about the two centuries, works like “Girijakalyana” and “Vedavathi” written by Marinara , who lived in Vijayanagara empire tells the nature of Bayalata and Yakshagana. There is a lot of information available in Ballari orally, many artists know about the art form. Kudutani Narasingarayyar wrote ‘ Dushysans Katha’ Shambharanavadi’ enriched with the information of Bayalat. Similarly, Rushabendrayya of Kurugodu wrote a play “Shambuvijaya”, Emmiganur Ramashastri and Kampli Kampilaraya’s stories and plays were popular in the local villages and many plays were enacted on the basis of these stories.

Two days before Bayalata’s play is performed in the village, advertisement in the form of Dangura(drum beat and announce) and pamphlets are distributed in the village. “Gejjepooje” is performed before two days of actual performance. Gejjepooje is rehearsal where characters are painted and dressed up. On the day of the performance of the play the actors praise God in a colorful chowki and worship the instruments. Most important is the worship of ‘Balaganapathi’ an actor is dressed up as a Balaganapathi, who arrives at the stage and all the characters pray lord Ganesh for the smooth performance of the Bayalata without any hurdles and hindrance throughout the night of performance.

Costume brings elegance to this festival and is worn to attract people. Identity of characters lies in costumes and colour of dress. Each character wears a different costume. Main characters wear a crown, a breastplate, a shoulder crown, a waist belt, a headband, a horse face belt, earring, anklets, a coin chain around the neck, a large chain handcuffs, a garland round the neck, a weapon in hand (sword), weapons like a bow, a yard, an axe, Darshan Chakra, and paint their faces according to their roles. The costumes of those times were strange. Artists' team manufacture ornaments and weapons, they used to mix several things give less weight such as cow dung, cotton and clay to make crowns, bamboo sticks were attached to wear. Over a period of time they used plywood shaped CDs and colour papers are pasted. Nowadays flower crowns are used. Ornaments like omelettes and belts adorning the shoulders are made of wood. Small mirrors are attached to ornaments as it helps to reflect the light during performance and add more colour to the costumes. Female characters wear sarees and traditional palgat and karnad sarees. Rakshasa and Audra characters have mustaches made of sheep's wool. Similarly, there are Bhujakirti and chest necklaces, colored strings around the neck. Actors themselves can tell what their character is by looking at the costumes they wear. For example, the elephant symbol in the crown of Duryodhana. These symbols indicate their roles. Several changes have been taking place till today.

The language and culture of Bayalata are found in the couplets of Harihara and Purandaras of the Purandas of the Vijayanagara Empire 600 years ago. The artists of those days were not graduates; they composed epic poems like classical works of India. They used to write in old Kannada language, recite Sanskrit verses, and explain their meanings. The artists who learned it used to transform Sanskrit language into Old Kannada. This is how the language and culture of the artist is expressed.

Saltation An Open Dance:-

Entry of the artist to stage of the theater is amazing. The male characters are full of raudra star and the female characters are full of lasya. However, only the charioteer takes a slow step. Dance in Bayalata is a tradition where people dance to the beat of the table and harmonium veena today. Singing in Bayalata is amazing, songs consist of two syllables.

For example:- "Kitadaka|Datatoom|

Kitidaga|Daadaa Kitidaka

Daakee Tataka Too Kitidaka

Dittakitika|Dittakatadaginata|

Dittakatadaginata

Dittakatadaginata

In Bayalata, Sarathi character is the protagonist from the beginning to the end. Before the start of the race, the charioteer begins the race by chanting the praises of Vishleshawara and God, then the characters enter. He gets acquainted with the actors who comes to the theater. Then he introduces himself to the co-actors. When they come and get tired of dancing, meanwhile the charioteer entertains the people by singing stories of experience, folk songs and jokes. Sarathi, a chariot paly a very significant role in Bayalata. Sarthe introduces characters throughout the play and entertains the audiences with joke and satire. The dialogue is a mixture of prose and verse.

Stage setting is an important aspect in Bayalata, mandapam (stage) is temporarily constructed with wood and cloth. A common place is selected in the village to set up mantapam, erect Handarakamba, a type of pole, an advertisement for the show. Couple of days before, all the team members gather to give final touch to the stage, small stakes are planted, planks are spread over and a high platform is prepared. This platform is about 30*40 named as Mantu. A 10 cubit high flat is placed on the platform and covered from

all three sides Jamakhna (colorful blanket). The back part of the flat is left for coloring and dressing known as ‘chowki’ and curtain is placed to hide the back part of the stage.

Characterization is the crux of Bayalata, approximately ten to twelve characters participate in a play. Male characters are heroic and violent whereas female characters glow. Make up and ornaments symbolizes the nature of characters such as red indicates romantic and green is associated with saintly characters like Karna ,Arjuna , Narmada etc. These characters are presented with pleasing colors and costumes. Demonic characters like Havana, Mahishasura, Duryodhana have a bright makeup with dark colors. Combination of visual elements make it a rich and visually engaging. Nowadays small LED lights are used in tamakas, crown, shoulder and the edges of dress. All major characters enter stage from chowki. Female roles in Bayalata are mostly played by men. The characters are assigned to match their form, character, dignity and respect. Actors sing, dance and describe a situation with Sarathi, music assistants and aother characters encourage them by saying bhalaebhale, barre shahabas and hur bhala shahabas. The singers use a high pitch style, for better projection in outdoor settings and apply specific gammas embellishment. The songs tell story of the play, making music an essential part of the narrative.

To conclude, Bayalata is a genre of folk drama expression of culture, blending music, dance and story-telling. It imparts victory of good over evil. It emphasis community values, tradition and the preservation of cultural heritage, leaving the audience with a sense of collective identity and continuity. Bayalata embodies reinforcing the joyous and communal spirit. It preserves traditional stories, folklore and cultural values educating audience in an engaging manner. Bayalata is celebration and call to action. It celebrates the richness of cultural heritage and the beauty of its transmission across generations. At the same time, it calls on readers to reflect on their own lives, urging them to find a balance between respecting traditions and forging their own paths.

Reference:

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