

Bharat Leela or Subhadra Parinaya : A Cultural Extravaganza of Southern Coastal Orissa

Dr. Pratap Kumar Dash

Like Pala, Daskathia, Sankirtan, Chadeya Suanga, Dhuduki and Ghoda Nacha, there is a very famous rural folk poetic dance drama called Bharat Leela or Subhadra Parinaya present in Orissa. It is highly popular among the rural people of Orissa, because it has all the ingredient of entertainment for them. It is highly dramatic, musical, mythological and literary. People say that this kind of dance-drama is initiated simultaneously in the districts of Ganjam and Nayagarh propagating Oriya tradition and culture. This Subhadra Parinaya or Bharat Leela or Duari Nata is of great demand than Suanga or Sangeeta or Rasa. The three characters Arjuna, Subhadra and Duari or Dwara Rakshaka (gatekeeper) are taken from the Mahabharat. They make poetic references of the writings of Upendra Bhanja, Gangadhar Meher, Bhakta Charana, Kabisurya Baladev Rath, Abhiram Paramahansa and Charan Das etc.

The actors go on singing the songs of the play themselves and very often are supported by the group of background singers called as Palia. Actually the story of Bharat Leela is taken from the incident of the Krishna Leela. The mythological story says that Lord Krishna and Balaram arranged a yagnya. But while doing this sacred work, they became the victim of a very powerful and dreadful demon king named Gosingha Daitya,

who very often wanted to keep the world under his control and to prove himself supreme. Also he wanted to kill Krishna and Balaram so as to invade their country and to win the wife (or so to say Patarani of Krishna, Satyabhama) of Srikrishna. The performance of yagnya was the right time for him to attack both of them. Then Krishna and Balaram had nothing to do but to escape from his attack. So when they took shelter or hide themselves in the *yagnya kunda*, Gosingha was able to take Satyabhama forcibly and made an attempt to go away. But just at that time of going away with Satyabhama an obstruction came on his way. At night, when he was going in his chariot, Satyabhama used to cry helplessly, which was heard by the great warrior Arjuna, who was then spending his cursed exile in the forest. In addition Arjuna was there because he had promised the sun god to help him come round from a very serious disease called "Ludubudu". There was only one remedy for this disease that he had to burn the "Khandaba Bana" of Indra, the king of the gods. But Indra was unwilling to allow the sun god to burn that precious forest since it was full of very useful plants and trees. But Arjuna owing to his commitment to the Sun, helped him set fire in the Khandaba forest. So that was the time when he heard the cry of Satyabhama. Since it was dark night, he did not

like to go to the place where Gosingha was going with Satyabhama. So he sent a "Manabhedhi" arrow (the arrow that can control one's mind) at that direction which could stop the chariot of Gosingha from moving ahead. They were caught in the magical net formed by that arrow. Next morning, Arjuna went to that place, killed Gosingha and rescued Satyabhama. He took her back to the abode of Krishna. At that time he spent some days there as the guest of Krishna.

In the mean time, Subhadra the most beautiful and lovely sister of Krishna had a deep inner desire to marry Arjuna due to his bravery and handsomeness, When she could learn that Arjuna was very much present in their place, it was a golden chance for her to win his heart. Satyabhama had also a clear cut idea about the weakness of Subhadra towards Arjuna. So she also wanted to make her dream come true by uniting both Subhadra and Arjuna. So she left Subhadra free to win the heart of Arjuna. Finally the *dwara rakshaka* or *duari* worked as the go between. He is also called Betrahasta. Since he hold a guarding stick in his hand. His role is important since he made the marriage between Arjuna and Subhadra possible after a prolonged series of combat of wittious literary arguments were over. Thus let us focus on the technical progression of the poetic drama.

The play actually starts with an invocation to goddess Bhavani by the chorus singers. Then the story proper starts. The time of the story is midnight when Arjuna has gone to bed. He gets up all of a sudden to hear knocking and shout of a woman at the door of his residence. Then he orders his gatekeeper to inquire and inform him about all that matter. Then the turn of the gatekeeper comes. He starts his action on the stage by praying his master or Guru; then he prays Lord Jagannath, Lord Shiva and goddess

Saraswati to provide him due knowledge in due time. Then he takes the lead role as the thread bearer between Arjuna and Satyabhama and finally Satyabhama gets access to reveal her purpose of arrival at the door of Arjuna. In the meantime the gatekeeper straight jumps into the ocean of knowledge vested in references of the Mahabharat, the Ramayana, other Puranas, legendary and mythological stories. He designs the story of union of Arjuna and Subhadra, the sister or Lord Krishna in a purely scholastic and aesthetic way. In the different contexts of the proceeding of the play, he discusses about the six natures present in man; also he discusses the relevance of ten names of Arjuna; he refers to Shankaracharya's Mohamudgara, the different sayings of Sanskrit and Oriya scholars too. His main aim is to evolve the aesthetics of the Mahabharat that provide different ideal instances for common man to live a farsighted, reasonable, intellectual, artistic and spiritual life. Arjun in the meantime does not easily accept the deep love of Subhadra for him. So he becomes very callous to believe and accept her. Then this gatekeeper takes the vital role of convincing him to accept Subhadra. Cordially, while trying to convince Arjuna, he resorts to different mythological instances like how and why the world was created, where lies the essence of faith and love, what are the ingredients of love of man and woman. He gives reference to the mythological king Dakshya Prajapati and the origin of different life styles in the earth. He refers to logical and ethical topics related to virtue and sin; refers to the stories associated with the eight royal queens of Lord Krishna; focuses on the follies and foibles of the characters of Arjuna and other characters of the Mahabharat. He specially refers to the theoretical and artistic analysis of the love of Radha Krishna too.

Finally, he discloses the truth to the audience that is the farsighted plan and illusion created by lord Krishna. He discloses the truth that this drama of union of Arjuna and Subhadra takes place because from them Abhimanyu is to be born; he is to be killed mercilessly and unlawfully by the Kauravs in the battle of Mahabharat. As a result that painful event instigates Arjuna to join the battle of the Mahabharat and fight for the cause of establishing the law of nature in the earth.

While expressing these subject matters, he sings songs beautifully changing the rhythms and tunes. He sings following the Binakar, Haliageeta, Dhuduki, Pala, Sankirtan, Chadeya Suange styles and the singing style of the Odia Ramayana. At times these traditional style of songs are added with the songs of Odissi, Champu and Chhanda etc. They have composed songs themselves in Chaudakshyari (14 letter lines) in couplets and quatraits. They also sing them in the style of Pallavi, Chokhi and popular tunings of present time. The songs are full of humour, logic and wittious references of mythological stories.

The history of this Bharat Leela or Subhadra Parinaya dates back to sixty years or so. Some rural art and culture loving people

developed such a poetic drama in the districts of undivided Ganjam and Puri, but credit goes to some specific persons like Kirtan Gaud of Ganjam and Nabakishore Samanta. Their disciples have spread the poetic drama through the districts. The Bharat Leela groups of Digapahandi of Ganjam and Patharkata of Nayagarh perform this on different occasions of fairs and festivals like Kumar Punima and Dola. The lead role of gatekeeper is very attractively performed by Nabakrishore Samanta (Nabina) and Nabaghana Parida (of Digapahandi). Nabakishore Samanta and Dutikeswar Dalabehera (of Muthagadia, Nayagarh) have given this story of Mahabharat a beautiful poetic Drama form. This poetic drama is enacted continuously at least for two days covering the festival nights. Sometimes a competition is organized between two famous dals and the audience enjoy the aesthetic of the art. Prize is given to the attractive performers.

Dr. Pratap Kumar Dash is a Lecturer in English, Ranpur College, Ranpur, Nayagarh.



Udayagiri Ranigumpha