

5/96

Sangeet Natak Akademi
New Delhi



Paramparik Natyotsav '96

4 - 6 October 1996, daily at 6.30 p.m.
Meghdoot Theatre, Rabindra Bhavan, New Delhi



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As a genre traditional theatre forms, though varied linguistically, are characterized by several features which they share in common. If they happen to display a wide variety of presentational styles they also possess important narrative and contextual similarities, a high level of stylization and ritualized performance traditions. Epics, the Puranas, the regional folk-tales and ballads, form a common thread. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata have a pan-Indian sweep, be it performed in Yakshagana of Karnataka or Ankia Nat of Assam.

All the varied traditions seem to have an inbuilt mechanism of acceptance of change, of modification and dynamism, within a well-defined system of unity in their artistic vision. This also results in continuity despite the changes through the centuries.

This festival will bring to view some of these forms as practised today and feature some of the finest performers. The presentations will include Ankia Bhaona of Assam, Bhavai of Gujarat, and Krishna Parijat of Karnataka and Prahlad Natak of Orissa. While Prahlad Natak and Krishna Parijat are one-repertoire forms drawn from the Bhagavata, the other two forms draw from varied themes, religious and social.

The present festival is the second in the series, the first having been held in October 1994. We hope the keen audience in Delhi would be pleased with our present effort.

ANKIA BHAONA

FRIDAY 4 OCTOBER

ANKIA-BHAUNA NATYA DAL, KALIABOR, NOWGONG, ASSAM

Ankia Bhaona developed in the Satras of Assam. The play is performed in the village Namghar. A series of rituals precedes the actual presentation of the play which is held through the night. Traditional music and dance are an essential part of the theatrical presentation.

The plays are based on Vaishnava themes, particularly from the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavata*. Shri Shankardeva, a religious leader and reformer of the 15th century, and his foremost disciple Shri Madhavadeva, composed and presented plays in Ankia Nat which is a tradition still in practice today. The language of Ankia Bhaona is an interesting admixture of Sanskrit and Assamese with Brajhasha, Maithili and Bhojpuri.

In Ankia Bhaona performance two groups of musicians participate. The vocal music is accompanied on the Mridanga (Khol) and cymbals. Various kinds of masks, distinctive costumes and make-up are used by different characters. The Sutradhar plays an important role and sings the Nandi in Sanskrit announcing the subject of the play. The musical compositions, known as Borgeet, follow the Dhrupad tradition, and the dance movements have a definite classical tradition.

Synopsis:

Ram Vijay by Shri Sankardev

Vishwamitra takes Rama and Lakshmana to the forest where many of the Rishis are engaged in conducting a Yagna. The brothers slay the demons who try to disturb



KRISHNA PARIJAT

the Yagna. After the completion of the Yagna Vishwamitra takes Rama and Lakshmana to the court of King Janaka where Rama lifts and breaks the bow and thereby wins the hand of Sita. The sage Parasurama challenges Rama to break the string of his own bow which Rama is able to do without any difficulty. Parasurama recognizes Rama as the incarnation of Vishnu and bows to him in apology. The two brothers, Sita, and Vishwamitra leave the court of King Janaka victorious.

SATURDAY 5 OCTOBER

Shrikrishna Parijatha Mandali, Lokapur, Bijapur, Karnataka

This form of folk theatre from north Karnataka has a one-play repertoire and is distinguished by its



musical content. The music is an interesting blend of Carnatic and Hindustani systems. It is usually performed in the open air and runs through the whole night when presented in its entirety.

Originally written by a folk poet, Aparala Tammanna, in the early 19th century, Krishna Parijat was refined and popularized later, around A.D. 1870, by Kulgod Tammanna of Gokalk Taluk who enhanced the original play by adding his own lyrics and staged it as a full-fledged play incorporating elements from local folk forms and the Tamasha of neighbouring Maharashtra. The dramatic structure is simple and uses versified dialogue that enriches both the poetic and musical content of the play. Krishna's costume is distinguished by his blue Kurta and a Pagdi on his head. Kaujalagi Nungamma was the first actress who entered the domain of an all-male cast in 1980. Today there are several professional groups who perform widely in the region.

Krishna Parijat draws its story from the *Bhagavata*: Narada presents the heavenly Parijat flower to Krishna. He in turn gives it to Rukmini who wears it in her hair. Krishna's other wife, Satyabhama, is jealous and demands that she should be given one also. Krishna attempts to get it from the tree which blooms in Indra's own garden Nandanvan and, when he is unable to do so, he invades the city of Amaravati. He uproots the tree after a fierce duel and plants it in Satyabhama's courtyard, which makes her proud.

BHAVAI

SATURDAY 5 OCTOBER

Coordination by Indian National Theatre, Rajkot, Gujarat

In Bhavai, the popular folk theatre form of Gujarat, there are a number of interludes known as Veshas woven into the plays. These Veshas form an integral part of the whole play to emphasize some of the religious, historical and social aspects of the play itself. They often involve virtuoso dancing including acrobatic movements, sword-play, and highly skilful movements to create different animal forms with a piece of cloth, without stitching or knotting done, while the dance is in progress.

Bhavai performances are usually held on days sacred to the female deities during Navaratri. Poet Asait Thakur, believed to have been the originator of the tradition in the 14th century in Siddhapur, north Gujarat, composed nearly 350 Veshas, most of



which have survived as basic play-scripts. Traditional Bhavai artists hail from the Tragala community, and are known as Nayaks and Bhojaks.

Bhavai used to be mainly an oral tradition. It does not have a rigid structure but is based on a series of accepted norms and patterns that are flexible, allowing improvisation, spontaneity and contemporaneity.

Performed in temple courtyards or village squares, Bhavai has a repertoire that contains numerous plays of secular nature. Female roles are played by male actors, and there is invariably one comic character of jester who also acts as a messenger.

The musical instruments that accompany Bhavai are the Bhungal, Pakhawaj and cymbals. Some Bhavai troupes use the Vanasali and Ravanhato as well.

Synopsis: Mahiyari No Vesh

Sumatilal, a rich Bania, is infatuated by Kamasena, a prostitute. Leaving his wife, he goes to live with her. His wife, in connivance with her father-in-law, goes to sell milk in the disguise of a milkmaid. She attracts the attention of Sumatilal who falls in love with her and proposes to her. She agrees on the condition that he obtains the permission of his father. Sumatilal marries her and discovers his wife's identity.

SUNDAY 6 OCTOBER

Lakshmi Nrusinga Natya Kala Sansad, Ganjam, Orissa

Prahlad Natak is a form of traditional theatre with a one-play repertoire from the southern district of Orissa; it is commonest in Ganjam. It is performed in

PRAHLAD NATAK

the open on a five- or six-tiered stage, at the summit of which Hiranyakashipu's throne is placed.

The text of Prahlad Natak, which contains 120 songs, was written by Gopinath Parichha who belonged to the court of Raja Ramakrishna Chhotray of Jalantar (now in Andhra Pradesh) and ruled from 1857 to 1905. The language of the play is a mixture of Sanskrit and colloquial Oriya. There are about twenty characters in the play, nearly all of whom are required to dance, mime, and use stylized gestures. The characters wear distinctively elaborate costumes and make-up. The role of Prahlad is usually played by a young boy.

The play employs the traditional music of Orissa and a stylized form of delivery. The Mardala, harmonium, and a pair of small cymbals – Gini – are used for accompaniment. Nrisimha wears a distinctive mask.

The play enacts the mythological story of the devout Prahlad, the challenge to his faith from his father Hiranyakashipu, and the climactic appearance of Vishnu in his Nrisimha (man-lion) incarnation to save Prahlad and slay Hiranyakashipu.



Acknowledgements

DULAL ROY/Guwahati
D.N. PATNAIK/Cuttack
B. JAYASHRI/Bangalore
MANSUKH JOSHI/Rajkot
MAKARDHWAJ HOTA/Ganjam

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Friday 4 October

ANKIA BHAONA (ASSAM)

Saturday 5 October

KRISHNA PARIJAT (KARNATAKA)

BHAVAI (GUJARAT)

Sunday 6 October

PRAHLAD NATAK (ORISSA)

Programme subject to change

