

kṛṣṇaduṣceṣṭitakathanam in Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam

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I. INTRODUCTION

The ritual performance Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam [1, 2], a votive offering at the famous Kṛṣṇa Temple at Guruvayur in Kerala is based on the sanskrit poem Kṛṣṇagītī, written by Mānavedan, the Zamorin (Sāmūtiri) King who lived in Kerala in the seventeenth century. Kṛṣṇagītī (completed in 1658 A.D.) deals with the life of kṛṣṇa told in eight cantos: Avatāram, Kāliyamardanam, Rāsakriṣṇa, Kamsavadham, Svayaṁvaram, Bāṇayuddham, Vividavadham and Svargārohaṇam. It consists of ślokas and gītīs set to appropriate rāgas and tālas. Kṛṣṇagītī integrates incidents from Bhāgavata, Mahābhārata and Harivaṁśa. The performance begins in the temple after the last pūjā (*trippuka*) is concluded and the sanctum sanctorum is closed for the day (usually after 10 PM). Preliminary rituals involve placing musical instruments (*ceṅgila*, *ilattālam*, *śuddhamaddalam* and *toppimaddalam*) on the ground, lighting of the big lamp (*kaḷivilakku*) which itself is a representation of the deity, a few beats on the *maddalam* invoking *śabdabrahma*, recitation of a *maṅgala śloka* and the performance of the auspicious dance *toṭayam* behind the hand-held curtain. It is to be noted that there is no special stage set for the performance and the audience sit on the ground in front of the lamp. The performance takes place behind and around the lamp. The statue of Mānavedan with his prayerful hands offering *praṇāma* to the deity is a permanent witness to the performance, usually about three hours.

II. THE PERFORMANCE

kṛṣṇaduṣceṣṭitakathanam occurs as the last scene [3] of the first play *avatāram*, after the dance sequence known as *mullappūcūrral*. As a prologue to the scene, few śloka are sung by the two musicians to the accompaniment of *ceṅgila*, *ilattālam*, *iṭakka*, *śuddhamaddalam* and *toppimaddalam*:

alamalamayi līlāloḷa gopālabālaiḥ
saha vividhavihāraisteyamāhāarakālah
praṇayavivaśayetthaṁ prārthito 'pyāmbayā'gā
na tu navanavanītodgandhivaktrāravindaḥ (1-54)

(Even though the mother affectionately called several times saying, *listen my playing child, it is time for you to eat; stop playing with the gopa boys*, you did not go to her since your mouth was smelling of fresh ghee.)

navamanavamamājyaṁ prājyahasam̄ jihīrṣuḥ
kvacana vadanavātenāśu nirvāpya dīpam
valayamaṇigaṇābhājālabhagnābhilāṣo
niśi nivavṛtiṣe ca mḷānavaktrāmbujanmā (1-55)

(During one night, wanting to eat the freshly prepared ghee stealthily, you blew off the lamp. But then there was illumination of the sparkle of bangles. Hence, losing hope, you abandoned your effort and returned.)

mandam̄ vinyasya pādāmbujamaticakito jātu mañjīranādāt
tatratye gehakṛtye nirata iha jane gūḍhamantaḥ praviśya
śikyāduddhṛtya dugddham̄ sasakhi samapibastāvadevāṅganābhīr-
dṛṣṭo dhāvan gṛhīto 'ntikamatha gamito māturuktā ca saivam (1-60)

(One day, when all were busy with their household work, you entered a house, with silent steps, took milk from hanging pots and happily drank it with your friends. Then the gopis found you. You ran away. But the gopis caught you and brought you to your mother and

said.)

After the last śloka is sung, the hand-held curtain is removed to reveal the scene in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 where kṛṣṇa is caught red-handed in the act of stealing by the gopi women and brought to yaśodā. The *kathanam* follows in padas sung in toḍi rāga and ceṃpa tāḷa. There are twelve padas in the text but only two are sung in the performance (Fig. 3 and 4).

tvatsutenāmunā yat sma no bhidyate
tadvraje kutracid vidyate no
dugdhadadhinavanītatakraghṛitarakṣaṇam
niyatamasmābhirīha śakyate no

(There is nothing left here which is not broken by your son. We are unable to keep milk, curd, buttermilk or ghee safely.)

Each padam is followed by the pallavi

gokulaidhādhipē sūnurayī te
gokule sakalamapi rahasi harate.

(Listen, queen of gokul, your son is stealing almost everything.)

nandapatnīha te nandanenāhitam
vyāpṛtam bālacāpalamitīdam
akṣamāmahi vyaṃ śikṣyate 'yaṃ na ce
dakṣamā rakṣitum samamapīdam

(Wife of Nanda, we pardoned all pranks of your son, considering that he is a child. If you do not chide and punish him, you may not be able to safeguard all these.)

The śloka

śrutvā tāsāṃ vilāpaṃ bhayavivaśadṛśāṃ mlānanamrānanābjam
dṛṣtvā cāsaktapāṇidvayamadhigalamurvyāṃ likhantaṃ padena
śokasnehānukampāvivaśitahṛdayā śikṣaṇe 'śikṣaṇe vā
neśā sūnum nyagādīdatiruṣamabhiniyeyamudyamya daṇḍam (1-61)

(She (yaśodā) heard their complaints and saw her son standing with frightened eyes, lowered face, hands pressed on his neck and drawing on earth with his feet. Overwhelmed by sorrow, love and pity, she was unable to decide to punish or not. Taking a stick, she said) follows (Figs. 5 and 6).

This is followed by a *hitopadeśa* by yaśodā in few padas sung by musicians in mukhāri rāga and aṭanta tāḷa (Figs. 7 and 8). There are five padas in the text but only two are sung during the performance.

mahitavamśe vihitaajāte
ratiraho te kathamakārye
kathaya caurye kalinikāyye
tanaya vāryo paramanārye

(Son! Tell me, born in a great race, how could you think of stealing, which should not be done, which is deplorable, avoidable and which is a reason for quarrel.)

jananasārān janaya sūnū-
nityanātham bhuvananātham
jananacoraṁ tanayamāpam
vidhibalāt tvāṁ vihitanātham

(I prayed to the Lord of universe to give me sons who are good from birth. But due to fate, I got you as my son who begs for anything and steals everything.)

The śloka

praṇayabharaparītāṁ bhāratīm māturetā-
majita madhuravādī tvāṁ niśamyetyavādīḥ
‘vacasi tava variṣṭhe sarvadāmbāvatīṣṭhe
śapa iha caraṇābhyām tat prasīdāmukābhyām’ (1-62)

(Hearing this affectionate *hitopadeśa* of mother, you said: *Mother, henceforth I will obey your words. Touching your feet, I promise. Kindly be pleased with me.*)

is sung and enacted next (Fig. 9) followed by the śloka

śrutvā karṇarasāyanam tava giram prītyā yaśodā'vadad
'gopyo nandata nandanena na bhavet kopyādhirasmāt param'
prodīryeti vimuṣṭamiṣṭada vitīryasau tava śreyase
daṇḍam nyasya tavāsyabimbamadhikapremṇā cucumbotsmitam (1-63)

(Hearing these pleasant words from you, yaśodā said happily: *Gopis, be happy. Henceforth, you will not face any problem from my son.* yaśodā comforted the gopis, compensated their losses, threw the stick away and kissed your face affectionately.) (Figs. 10 and 11).

To conclude the play properly, according to the rules of the classic Indian Theatre, three actors (yaśodā and two gopi women) perform the auspicious dance *dhanāśī* (Fig. 12). While the concluding maṅgala śloka is being sung, they offer *praṇāms* to the sacred ground, to the flames of the sacred lamp and finally to the deity in the sanctum sanctorum. A few beats on the musical instruments conclude the play.

III. TEXTUAL SOURCES

We note that the description of kṛṣṇa's childhood pranks in *Kṛṣṇagīti* has some similarities with *Śrīkṛṣṇavilāsam kāvyam* which is an earlier work. It is interesting to search for the source(s) for the account in both these works. In *śrīmadbhāgavatapurāṇa*, dvitīya khaṇḍa, daśama skandha, aṣṭamo'dhyāya we find a very brief account, in a total of four slokas.

Harivaṁśa, the khila to *Mahābhārata* contains a more detailed account of kṛṣṇa's life than *Bhāgavata*. However, the episode we are looking for, is missing in the editions available in print, as well as the celebrated Chitrashala Press edition. In these editions, there is only a very brief description of kṛṣṇa's childhood pranks occurring in the seventh chapter of *viṣṇuparva* titled *yamalārjunabhaṅgaḥ*. We find somewhat disconnected sequence of ślokas

atiprasaktau tau dṛṣṭvā sarvavrajavicāriṇau
nāśakattau vārayitum nandagopaḥ sudurmadau (2-7-12)
tato yaśodā samkruddhā kṛṣṇam kamalalocanam
ānāyya śakaṭimūle bhartsayanti punaḥ punaḥ (2-7-13)

According to the editor of the BORI Critical Edition of *Harivaṁśa*, between these two ślokaś, the southern recension has two full chapters which the editor has relegated to Appendices 9 and 9A. We find that a detailed account of kṛṣṇa's pranks occurs in the southern recension of *Harivaṁśa* in two chapters named kṛṣṇsaṁkarṣaṇayorbālakrīḍā (15 ślokaś) and yaśodāyai gopināṁ kṛṣṇaduṣeṣṭitakathanam (23 ślokaś). The summary is as follows:

kṛṣṇa used to enter the houses, steal milk, curd, ghee etc., eat as he pleased and distribute the rest to other boys. Sometimes he used to pour milk into buttermilk pots and buttermilk into milk pots. He used to break the pots indiscriminately. Also, he used to untie calves and leave them free to drink milk from cows. He used to tie the hairs of several boys together and create havoc [5].

Fed up with these pranks, the gopīs, in a group, met yaśodā and complained to her, describing the incidents in detail. One said: kṛṣṇa broke ten of my pots. I do not have any milk, buttermilk, curd or ghee at home. Another: Your son broke all my fifty pots. I am left with none. Another: All my pots are gone due to your son. What do I do? Your son freed the calves and they drank all milk from cows. Another: I prepared sweet dishes for my boys. Your son ate it all leaving nothing. Another: Your son released all my cows and calves and I have nothing. The chapter concludes saying that yaśodā comforted and compensated all gopis for their losses [6]:

atha tābhyo yathānaṣṭaṁ yaśodā dattavatyalam

samāśvāsyā tataḥ sarvāḥ svam̐ svam̐ veśhma vyakālayat (9A-23)

As is well-known, the southern recension of *Mahābhārata* is more consistent and complete than the northern recension. We find that the same is true of *Harivaṁśa*. Interestingly, only printed edition of the southern recension of *Harivaṁśa* available to the BORI editor was in Grantha lipi. This may partly account for the ignorance prevalent in *Mahābhārata* scholarship regarding many gems [7] in the southern recension of *Harivaṁśa*. In the light of its extreme importance, it is mandatory to have a printed edition of this text in Devanāgarī lipi. We hope that *Mahābhārata* scholars will initiate an effort towards this goal.

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- [1] Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam, is a votive ritual theatre offering at Guruvayur temple, Kerala, India. For more information, visit the site:
http://www.geocities.com/kri\'\{s\}nadas_a2000/kri\'\{s\}na/krishnattam.html
- [2] Krishnattam, Martha Bush Ashton-Sikora and Robert P. Sikora, Oxford and IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi (1993). ISBN 81-204-0769-5
- [3] For an enlightening appreciation of this scene, see, Rustom Bharucha, Preparing for Krishna, chapter ten of *Theatre and the World - Performance and the Politics of Culture*, first published by Manohar Publications, India (1990). Reprinted by Routledge, London (1993).
- [4] Harivaṁśa being the *Khila* or Supplement to *Mahābharata*, edited by Parashuram Lakshman Vaidya, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune. Vol. I, Introduction, Critical Text and Notes, (1969). Vol. II, Appendices (1971).
- [5] Reference [4], Appendix I, 9, kṛṣṇasaṁkarṣaṇayorbālakrīḍā, pages 37-38. Available on the internet at <http://mahabharata-resources.org/harivamsa/southern/hvs-balakrida.html>
- [6] Reference [4], Appendix I, 9A, yaśodāyai gopānāṁ kṛṣṇaduṣeṣṭitakathanam, pages 38-40. Available on the internet at <http://mahabharata-resources.org/harivamsa/southern/hvs-dushcheshtitam.html>
- [7] For another important incident in kṛṣṇa's life described only in the southern recension of Harivaṁśa, see *On the episode of Naraka-Satyabhāmā yuddham in Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam*, available on the internet at <http://mahabharata-resources.org/southern/satyabhama-naraka.pdf>

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