

KALAKSHEPAM

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M. S. RAMASWAMI AIYAR.

KALAKSHEPAM

ITS ORIGIN, GROWTH, AND PLACE ;

ALSO

SOME PROBLEMS CONNECTED THEREWITH.

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PREFACE

A musical entertainment, in our country, falls into four divisions :—(1) Music Party, pure and simple (2) Nautch Party (3) Drama and (4) Kalakshepam. In all these four divisions, the common element of music there is. But it manifests itself in four different ways.

In the first, the tendency has all along been to treat the human voice, like any other musical instrument, merely to show all its possible resources as an organ. In the second, it serves as a background to the dance of the nautch-girl. In the third, it blends itself with poetry and points to the truth that the two partners must meet as equals and one should not dominate the other. While, in the fourth, it appears as an interpreter between the finite and the infinite.

Nautch Party has now almost become a thing of the past, because it happened to fall into undesirable hands. Whether it has to be resuscitated and, if so, how—is a matter indeed for another theme.

But the other three divisions, *viz.*, music, drama, and kalakshepam—we do have even to-day. Music, as it is now performed, pleases only the classes ; while, Drama, as it is now enacted, pleases only the masses. So, pure-music and drama-music exclude and even repel each other.

To make a compromise, as it were, and to draw both the classes and the masses to the same platform, the institution of Kalakshepam, now, tends.

But what is *Kalukshepam*? How did it originate and grow? Was the original form, that it took, enough for the fulfilment of its purpose? If not, how should it be re-formed?

To these questions, it is submitted, the following Essay furnishes an answer. How far the *answer* is adequate, I leave for my reader to judge.

“BAI BHAVAN,”
 TRIPLICANE. } M. S. RAMASWAMI AIYAR.

KALAKSHEPAM

I

The light of the Sun touches the top of a mountain before it reaches its bottom. Likewise, the light of the knowledge must illumine the classes before it approaches the masses. Such has ever been the case in the history of all countries, where the Renaissance preceded the Reformation. It is needless to say that the Renaissance aimed at reforming the classes, while the Reformation aimed at reaching the masses ; that, in every country, the class-movement was followed by the mass-movement, as surely as the day was followed by the night; and that the main, if not the sole, aid to such mass-movement has been Pulpit-oratory in Europe, and Kalakshepam in India.

Kalakshepam is a Sanskrit word and literally means *pastime* (or நேரம் போக்கு), whereby the time is not felt heavily but lightly passed over. In this literal sense, it may mean many things, such as, a game of cards or even a drunken brawl. But the word 'Kalakhepam' is regarded as a form of religious preaching *plus* music. When, therefore, a person is invited to attend a kalakshepam, he never misunderstands it for a game of cards or a drunken brawl but straightaway goes to it with the certainty of being entertained with something of music and edified with something of preaching.

Just as, in medicine, bitter pills are sugar-coated, before they are administered to the patients; so, in religious preaching, bitter pieces of advice (for, advice is, more often than not, bitter) are music-coated, so to speak, before they are delivered to the audience. It is this

'music-coated' advice that goes by the name of *Kalakshepam*. Its another important feature is that the advice, sought to be given, is transmitted to the audience not directly, but indirectly through a *story*. Hence the *Kalakshepam* is sometimes called *Katha-Performance*, 'Katha' meaning a story.

It will thus be seen that the institution of *Kalakshepam* is double-coated, with music and story. This double coating was felt by our ancients to be absolutely necessary to keep the institution intact; and it continues to be likewise felt, even now, though, as we shall see, the element of sermon (or direct advice) has begun to appear as an additional factor.

The origin of the *Kalakshepam* lies in the rather curious tendency of man, especially of ^{the} undisciplined man, to revolt against the advice of any kind being given to him. Indeed there is nothing in this world which the undisciplined man abhors, or receives with reluctance, as advice.

The reason seems to be that the adviser invariably exercises superiority over the advised and thinks the latter to be defective either in conduct or understanding and that, therefore, the advised looks upon the adviser as offering him an affront and treating him like a child or an idiot.

Hence, all the writers—ancient or modern—tried their best to make the insult-looking advice as agreeable as possible, by clothing it in wit, proverb, poetry, or music, and by following the spirit of Alexander Pope's dictum—

"Men must be taught, as if you taught them not;
And things unknown, proposed as things forgot."

But what achieved the greatest success was the clothing of the advice in a sweet story or fascinating fable. For, we peruse or hear the story for the sake of the story and consider the moral as our own conclusion rather than the story-teller's instruction. Hence, the wise men, all over the world, adopted the oblique manner of giving advice. Compare, for instance, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Æsop's *Fables*, *Arabian Nights*, *Old Deccan Days*, and *Panchathanthra*, which itself had been preceded by *Kathasaritsagara*, *Kathamanjari* and *Brihatkatha*.

This fact of human nature, especially with regard to the masses, the ancients of India knew well; and so, they double-coated their advice with music and story and thus originated the institution of Kalakshepam.

In fact, its beginning may be traced back to the time of the very Vedas. For, we hear that kalakshepams used to be held in those days, during the intervals of the vedic rituals; and they consisted in the recital of the stories contained in the Upanishads for the benefit of those that were not privileged to study the Vedas.

Later on, rhapsodies of the Epics took the place of the recital as in Greece. For, do we not hear of Kusa and Lava having rhapsodised the *Ramayana* before Rama himself? And do we not hear of Vaisampayana having rhapsodised the *Mahabharata* before Janamejaya and, further again, of Sowtha having re-rhapsodised it before Sownaka?

It was, however, during the time of Lord Budha that the modern phase of the kalakshepam made its appearance. Just as Martin Luther opened the vista of the Continental Reformation; John Knox, of the Scottish

Reformation; Henry VIII, of the English Reformation; so, Lord Budha opened the vista of the Indian Reformation. For, it was none else than Lord Budha that ruthlessly shattered the spirit of the Hindu exclusiveness in point of religion and proclaimed to the world at large that religion and philosophy, like atmosphere, belonged to all and that the Rishis' grim teaching to the classes must be transformed into the Monks' gay teaching to the masses as well.

Thus it was that Buddhism was hailed as a mass-movement and the system of public-preaching, of which the kalakshepam was a phase, originated.

While Budha inaugurated the system of public-preaching, the various kings of the Gupta Period patronised the institution of Kalakshepam. "The intelligent patronage," observed V. A. Smith, "of a series of able and wealthy (Gupta) kings for more than a century had much to do with the prosperity of the arts and sciences." Lectures on *Bhakti* interspersed with music—the nucleus of the modern kalakshepam—were delivered in all the temples; and Sanskrit Dramas, written even by kings like Sri Harsha, served to give music an operatic turn. Indeed the temples and the theatres became great schools of music, during the Gupta Period, which enhanced the value of the *Bhakti* lectures on the one hand, and enriched, on the other, the music of the kalakshepam with its new 'operatic turn'.

Jayadeva's *Gitagovindam*, which appeared in the twelfth century, marked a distinct epoch in the growth of the kalakshepam. It was a lyrical poem celebrating the love between Radha and Krishna and thus gave the people not only matter for public-preaching but also sweet music. Even to-day, the orthodox preachers attach a

sacred importance to *Ashtapadi*, which is another name of 'Gitagovindam' and sing the songs contained therein with great ecstasy.

With the advent of the Muhammadans in the thirteenth century, the ancient Hindu Music and the institution of Kalakshepam left North India and, moving southward, reached the Yadava Kingdom, where they stayed for a pretty long time. Hence arose, in Dowlatabad, the capital of the Yadava Kingdom, a very great musician, Sharngadev by name, who, basking in the sunshine of King Simhala (1210 to 1247) produced an immortal work, *Sangitharatnakara*, which even now stands as the demarcation line between the Hindu and the Muhammadan Periods of music. Hence also, the Maharatas, the principal inhabitants of West India, in and around the Yadava Kingdom, became enamoured of music and consented to be the willing repositories of the sacred institution of Kalakshepam. Be it noted that the *Tharanganis*, the *Dandis*, the *Ovis*, and the *Sakis*, with which the modern South Indian Bhagavata chooses to delight his audience, are all of Maharata origin.

In the fourteenth century, Lochanakavi's *Ragatharangani* appeared; and with it, music re-appeared in North India and the kalakshepam too lifted its head, though it was not recognised as a regular institution, till Chaithanya's *Bhakti*-revival of the fifteenth century gave it a fresh impetus.

By this time, a new school of music, called the *Dhrupad* School of Gwalior, came into existence and encouraged the classical music, as opposed to *Tappa* or non-classical music. The deep, slow, and long-drawn music of the new school, investing it with an air of awe

and solemnity, was soon engrafted upon the system of the kalakshepam which was thereby immensely enriched.

While the North Indian kalakshepam had its own vicissitudes under the Moghuls of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the kalakshepam of West India went on growing in the hands of the Maharatas and slowly travelled down to Tanjore, where it took a stronghold from the latter part of the nineteenth century.

How the West Indian kalakshepam of the Maharatas travelled down to Tanjore, will be clear by a reference to any historical map of India, wherein the Maharata Kingdom will be found to comprise the whole of West India and the western portion of the modern Central Provinces, as well as the scattered tracts of Bellary, Bangalore, Vellore, Arni, Jinji, and, last but not least, the fertile delta of the Cauvery with Tanjore as its capital.

As soon as the Maharata system of kalakshepam reached Tanjore, it dashed itself against its formidable rival, the indigenous South Indian system of kalakshepam, having for its sacred literature *Thevaram*, *Thiruppuhal*, *Thiruvachakam*, *Thirukkural*, and so forth, in addition to the *Prasthanathrayam* and other Sanskrit sacred books.

At this juncture, there arose a celebrated person— for, God in the plenitude of his wisdom gives man timely agencies—there arose a remarkable performer of kalakshepam, Mr. Krishna Bhagavatar of Tanjore (1847 to 1903), who brought about, as it were, a chemical combination of the two systems that met at Tanjore and produced a third and new system, deprived of all the angularities of its originals. With his keen and observing eyes, he found that, while the songs of the Maharatas



Mr. KRISHNA BHAGAVATAR OF TANJORE.
(1847 to 1903)

were short and crisp and excited but emotion, those of the South Indians were long and tedious and inculcated but devotion; that the music of both the systems was all the same in its recitative, not lyrical, stage; and that the way of story-telling was, in the one, of brain-confusing digression and, in the other, of sleep-producing length.

I may, in passing, remark here that prolixity has been one of the very common arts employed to obtain popularity. For, the ignorant are only too apt to estimate the value of preaching by the quantity rather than the quality; and they invariably evince a fondness for large doses and like to get more often intoxicated than refreshed. Immoderate length in all kinds of religious offices has ever had a telling influence on weak and superstitious minds; and for this reason, Bhagavatars of the old type chose to distinguish themselves by lengthening their sermons *ad infinitum* and by making very long prayers in the name of *Bhakti*. In short, the length of their devotions and the largeness of the fringes on the borders and at the corners of their garments were all so many engines of the craft, alike, of the Maharata and the South Indian Bhagavatars represented by Merusami, Gosami, Andami Bhagavatar, and Manamelkudy Bhagavatar.

Of all these defects and even others, such as, vulgarity, irrelevancy, and staleness, the illustrious Krishna Bhagavatar steered clear and, like an able captain, conducted the barge of kalakshepam in the ocean of his audience with the help of the well-regulated steam of religious and devotional stories and the fine sails of lyrical songs and the South Indian sacred literature.

The various factors which contribute to the success of a modern kalakshepam are peculiarly his. The *Intro-*

ductory songs to enliven the expectant audience; the *Dhrupad* or slow and long-drawn music to invest the performance with an air of awe and solemnity; the *Upakrama* or the text of the sermon to make known to the hearers the subject to be dealt with; the telling narration of a story, coupled with lyrical music, to illustrate the text chosen; the witty sub-stories and lighter songs to give variety and the *Upasamhara* or conclusion to draw a moral from the story and fit it in with the *Upakrama*; all these are to-day being faithfully followed in the same way as they were first handled by that great forerunner.

I said that Mr. Krishna Bhagavata found the music in its recitative stage but used, in his *kalakshepam*, the lyrical music. Wherefrom did he get the latter?

I answer without hesitation that he got the lyrical music from the fascinating *Krithis* of Thiagaraja. Though his predecessors had been, as a class, conservative and had entertained a doubt whether it would be, after all, proper on their part to give up their time-honored recitative music for the new lyrical style, Mr. Krishna Bhagavata boldly introduced the innovation with the result that the *kalakshepam* has been, since his time, rising more and more into popularity even amongst the classes, as opposed to the masses, for whose benefit it had been, doubtless, originally intended.

When once the principle of the lyrical music in the field of *kalakshepam* was recognised, a mighty revolution set in.

The field of music came to be more and more deserted; and that of *kalakshepam*, more and more overcrowded. Singers, whose musical talents were below

the mark for a *pure and simple* musical performance but above the mark for the purpose of a kalakshepam, imagined they could please the classes with the lyrical music and the masses with their ordinary folklore.

This accounts for the rush, in the beginning of the present century, of indifferent musicians into the field of kalakshepam and also for the idea that whoever despaired to succeed as a Sangitha Vidwan could cut a figure, at least, as a Bhagavatar.

A parallel current happened to run, at the same time, by the influence of which the people, especially the so-called classes, became pathetically content with receiving good music as a sufficient compensation for bad preaching, instead of a brilliant ornament to good preaching.

The result was that the already overcrowded field of kalakshepam became further overcrowded with all kinds of Bhagavatars and that the field of music became almost completely emptied.

O! what a craze has been created for the field of kalakshepam, as though it were a light task that can be lightly handled by any person—*Vasishta* or *Viran* or even *Jones*!

When, finally, men and women, parrot-like, made bold to enter, on the strength of their music or personal qualifications, the field of kalakshepam and posed as Bhagavatars; the all-ready tottering edifice of kalakshepam sustained a precipitous fall. To make the matter worse, the whole ruined field of kalakshepam became pested with all sorts of undesirable elements, whose heads were stuffed with senseless farragos, which

were further disgraced by the degraded spirit of witticism and punning.

The hungry sheep looked up but were not fed.

At this crisis, there arose a powerful genius and an enthusiastic Bhagavatar of great probity and wit, *viz.*, Mr. Panchapakesa Sastri of Thiruppayanam (1868 to 1924). His words convinced every head; his appeal moved every heart; and his effort, when directed against the chaos with which he was confronted, became the most powerful engine in subverting it. His genuine Sanskrit scholarship, coupled with his great experience and indefatigable industry, enabled him to give up the beaten track and cut a new path by setting a new model of giving a *series* of performances, called the *Ramayana series*, which he performed with classical purity and superior music. The later *Bharata series* and *Bhagavata series* were so many imitations of Mr. Sastri's new model.

Compared with Mr. Panchapakesa Sastri, Mr. Krishna Bhagavatar was more brilliant but less profound and, more musical but less learned. Further, Mr. Krishna Bhagavatar, though he renovated the field of kalakshepam by the introduction of the lyrical music, tended more and more to lean on the *amusing* side of his performance. On the other hand Mr. Panchapakesa Sastri, with his energetic diction and expressive countenance, made the kalakshepam a vehicle of *serious instruction*.

But that "serious instruction", it must be admitted, confined itself only to the Puranas and the Itihisas; and it did not soar high into the Vedantic region.

As if to supply this want, came forth, into the field of kalakshepam, the well-known Mr. Lakshmanacharyar of



Mr. PANCHAPAKESA SAS TRI OF THIRUPPAYANAM.
(1868 to 1924)



Mr. LAKSHMANACHARYAR OF THIRUVAIYAR.
(1857 to 1921)

Bhagavad Gita fame (1857 to 1921), who was distinguished throughout for that sweetness of style, that nobleness of sentiment, that elevation, that unction, and that touching simplicity which are the characteristics of a good soul and of true genius. He had further a knack of drawing metaphors from easily understandable sources and frequently from the circumstances of the moment and of making the application generally happy. In short, with the help of a good musician, he succeeded in elevating the institution of Kalakshepam into a high pedestal of serious discourse on spiritual questions, calculated to reclaim his audience from all earthly things.

Of the three essential attributes of Kalakshepam, *viz.*, *interesting*, *instructive*, and *inspiring*, Mr. Krishna Bhagavatar appropriated the first; Mr. Panchapakesa Sastri, the second; and Mr. Lakshmanacharyar, the third.

There is now a Bhagavatar who tries to blend in himself all these three; but I fear it may be a little premature on my part to now determine whether that Bhagavatar will be a brilliant luminary or a mere shooting-star.

Later on, a tug of war was waged between a handful of first-rate Bhagavatars and a battalion of tenth-rate Bhagavatars—the one trying to draw down the kalakshepam from its highest pedestal of serious instruction to its lowest depth of intoxicated merriment, and the other leaving no stone unturned to resist the regrettable attempt of the opposition and endeavouring to maintain the institution in a high state of perfection.

Thanks be to God that, as a result of the work of Messrs. Sastri and Acharyar, as well as of the *tug*,

referred to, the people have learnt to discountenance the tenth-rate Bhagavatars who are now fast disappearing.

II

For those that work, as well as for those that intend to work, in the field of Kalakshepam, the following message will be of some use.

1. *Before any one of you proceeds to play the role of a Bhagavatar ; do form a correct conception of the true position of a Bhagavatar in relation to the world at large ; and act accordingly.*

Judged as a teacher of morality, the position of a Bhagavatar, like that of the pulpit-orator, must ever stand acknowledged as the most important and effectual guard, support, and ornament of virtue's cause. If the whole of humanity be regarded as a big army marching towards the goal of salvation ; the Bhagavatars may be said to lead the van, while the Judges of the Law Courts may be said to bring up the rear. While the functions of both are, alike, to lead man to the right tract ; the Bhagavatars can perform them with greater success than the Judges. For, murderers are daily hanged ; yet, the murder never ceases. If, however, positive maxims of advice are timely advanced by the preachers ; O ! how many crimes will disappear from the world ! How tellingly significant is the meaning of the proverb : " Open the School and the Pulpit and close the Criminal Court and the Prison." Indeed, the Bhagavatars' mission is noble and their function is sacred. Again, they establish the strong, restore the weak, reclaim the wanderer, and bind the broken heart.

Hence it behoves the Bhagavatars to be very careful of their lives and manners and—

“ To bid the pleadings of self-love be still,
Resign their own and seek their Maker's will,
To spread the page of Scripture and compare
Their conduct with the Laws engraven there ;”

and also not to render themselves liable to the poet's attack—

1. “ Some decent in demeanour while they preach,
That task performed, relapse into themselves ;
And having spoken wisely, at the close
Grow wanton, and give proof to every eye,
Whoever was edified, themselves were not.”

or 2. शास्त्रेषुहीनाः कवयो भवन्ति
कवित्वहीनाश्च पुराणभङ्गाः ।
तत्रापिहीनाः कृषिमाश्रयन्ते
भङ्गाः कृषेर्भागवता भवन्ति ॥

2. *Having realised the true nature of the Bhagavata's calling as well as the importance of his being careful of his life and manners ; now tactfully, guard yourself against one and all the three kinds of peril, of which the life of a Bhagavata is full, viz., peril to virtue, peril to art, and peril to society.*

So long as you regard the kalakshepam, not as a trade, but as a sacred mission and so long, again, as you—in that frame of mind—seek to handle things divine ; your virtue consists in sedulously cultivating, in you, a divine simplicity, without at the same time allowing it to be imperilled by a counter-desire to dazzle with laces and diamonds—which desire, unless uprooted, will ere long tempt you to prostitute and shame your noble calling. Hence—

(a) *Avoid pomp in dress, vanity in manners, frivolity in conversation, lightness in speech, and mark ! looseness in morals.*

A faithless and corrupt generation would attend the kalakshepam only for amusement, would laugh without peace, and would even weep without virtue. What is worse? It would clamour for incessant *encores*, even with regard to a trash. Most of the present-day Bhagavatars yield and agree to be mere purveyors of pleasure and thus, at one stroke, degrade their art and spoil the public taste. Again, they stoop down to lavish their praises even on those who do not deserve them.

It is said that James II once asked a preacher how he could justify his praising the princes when they did not deserve it. The preacher replied: "The princes are so high in station that the preachers cannot use the same liberty in reproving them as other men. So, by praising them for what they are not, he virtually taught them as to what they ought to be."

As a contrast to this English preacher, it is also said that an independent Italian preacher, Carracciolo by name, was, during the time of one of his preachings, confronted with His Holiness the Pope and his Cardinals and that the bold preacher did not mind his situation but courageously exclaimed, in a vein of irony: "Fie on St. Peter! fie on St. Paul! Fie on them both, who having it in their power to live as *voluptuously* as the Pope and his Cardinals, foolishly chose rather to mortify their lives with fasts, watchings, and labours."

(b) Avoid the extremes and choose a golden mean; refuse to yield to your hearers' clamour for 'encores,' however incessant it may be; and open their eyes to the fact that such a clamour, if yielded to, will utterly ruin the balance of a sustained work of art, not to speak of over-exhausting the already exhausted performer.

(c) *As for praise, make a judicious use of it and praise your audience, as a whole, to keep them in good humour ; but never praise individuals, especially when they do not deserve it. Praise undeserved is scandal in disguise.*

But to enable the Bhagavatars to stand upon their legs and make their success depend only on their merits and not on their friends or factions, the public must come forward and proceed to organise the institution of kalakshepam and go to the extent of founding what I may call the *Kalakshepam Mission*, wherefrom the well-fed, well-looked-after, and well-trained Bhagavatars could be sent to all the parts of our country and be enabled to bring about, or further the cause of, our social and spiritual regeneration.

There is no use merely animadverting on the kalakshepam as being "a medley of jokes, gymnastics verbal, on a background of a story, repeated times without number."

What, I ask, has the public done to secure the right kind of Bhagavatars? What systematic encouragement have the intelligent *elite* of the people chosen to hold out to the Bhagavatars and how, indeed, have they made them forget, or rise above, the stomach-problem and focus their whole attention to the refinement of their art?

Let us pass on to another point. "Don't you come to the Harikatha Performance that is now begun?"—with these words *A* invited *B*.

But *B* replied : "Let that *damned* 'introduction' be over; and I shall join the audience, just when the story begins."

What led *B* to make this curious reply is the question which I now proceed to deal with, as it enables me to explain the mentality of the audience as well as to put the Bhagavatars on their guard, regarding the *Introduction* to a Harikatha.

Now, be it noted, the 'Introduction' to a Harikatha or Kalakshepam is of two kinds. The first is with regard to the expression of the performer's modesty or humility; while, the second is with regard to the very text of the sermon of which the succeeding story is but an illustration.

The first kind of Introduction was, in ancient times, conspicuous by its absence. It is not found in either of the two Indian *Epics*; nor is it found in the *Thirukkural*. All the three personages—*Valmiki*, *Vyasa*, and *Valluvar*—straightaway entered into their respective subjects, without caring to mention any word about themselves.

But Kalidas and Kambar thought it, in their times, expedient to introduce the *personal* element into their respective works. The former compared himself to a pygmy attempting to reach a fruit hanging far above him¹; while, the latter, to a cat coveting to lick away the whole of the 'milky' ocean.²

Such personal depreciation fell, in the hands of the modern Bhagavatars, further down and degenerated into a nauseating nuisance.

1. Cf. प्रांशुलभ्ये फले लोभादुद्वाङ्मुखि वामनः—*Raghuvamsa*.

2. Cf. ஓசைபெற்றுயர் பாற்கட லுற்றொரு
பூசைமுற்றவும் நக்குபு புக்கென
ஆசைபற்றிய றையலுற் றேன்மற்றக்
காசில் கொற்றத்திராமன் கதையரோ.

I know of an instance in which a Bhagavatar began his *personal* introduction thus : " The Sabha before which I now stand looks like the Devendra Sabha". Here followed a description of the Devendra Sabha which consisted of one hundred verses in Sanskrit and which took about twenty minutes for him to quote.

Then he continued : " The fact that I stand before such a Sabha looks like——". Here, again, followed another one hundred verses to fill up the blank, which took another twenty minutes for him to quote.

In the meanwhile, the audience began to yawn ; and some of them went even to sleep.

It is this kind of *Introduction* that *B* rightly looked down upon, with disgust, and rightly wanted to avoid.

Equally disgusting is another *phase* of the same Introduction which is generally couched in some such terms as these : " I am a raw, inexperienced youth (or Abala, in the case of a lady), unlearned, untrained, and undisciplined in the art. Nevertheless, an insatiable desire pushed me to the front ; and I now stand before you. Pray, pardon me and forget all my faults, just as you would do in the case of your children or follow the example of the Swan-in-the-Fable."

If a Kalidas had said this, we should have interpreted the whole introduction by the contrary and regarded him as either unnecessarily depreciating himself or cautiously blunting the edge of any possible criticism.

But most of the present-day Bhagavatars are very true to their personal introduction and are, as a matter of fact, raw and inexperienced hands, unlearned, untrained, undisciplined in the art, and mark ! uncontrolled even in

manners. They but follow a prevailing fashion, when they beg the audience to follow the example of the Swan-in-the-Fable, quite at the same time forgetful of the fact that they place before the Swan of their audience, not the fabled mixture of milk and water, but of the pure and simple water alone. Hence—

3. *Avoid, as much as possible, all kinds of personal introduction ; or use them, if at all, only to a limited extent, say, for example, to the extent of reclaiming any defiant portion of your audience.*

But the second kind of introduction is a misnomer ; for, it is no introduction at all but forms the very text of the sermon, which the *katha* or story serves only to illustrate. This sermon is indeed the warp and woof of the whole texture of the *kalakshepam* ; and the illustrative *katha*, that follows the sermon, is calculated only to bring the said sermon into bold relief.

Unqualified and unwanted Bhagavatars, who were not able to effectually deliver a serious sermon, made an apology of it and, having created sufficient distaste therefor, took shelter in the narration of a story interspersed with music. The pleasure-loving audience, on their part, slowly inclined to prefer the story and music to the sermon, just as the children tend to prefer the honey and sugar to the medicine.

The above-indicated inclination of the present-day audience accounts for the above-mentioned *B's* reply to *A*.

A question, therefore, arises, at this stage, as to whether and, if so, how far a serious sermon is a necessary prelude to the narration of the *katha*.

But there is a preliminary point which we would do well to discuss first, as its solution is likely to pave the way for easily tackling the problem, stated above.

I am referring to a hot discussion, which raged in the latter part of the last century, and on which opinion became sharply divided as to whether the system of kalakshepam was intended for the benefit of the classes or of the masses.

There were philosophers who cared only for abstruse philosophy or abstract metaphysics and regarded the Bhagavata as wasting his time in singing and story-telling, instead of drawing a scholarly distinction between Sankara's *Advaita* and Ramanuja's *Visishtadvaita* or between Plato's *Idealism* and Comte's *Positivism*.

There were certain others, *Bhaktas* as they might be called, who would like to tread on the main line of *Bhakti-Marga*, with however a side-peep into the higher *Gnana* and who would at one time sit, with men of fastidious taste, to listen to a learned discourse on high philosophy and would, at another time, doubt whether even the philosophers could patiently endure the tooth-ache and therefore sit, along with the masses, to enjoy a popular tale.

But the large majority of the people came under a third category and were of opinion that the kalakshepam had been all along eminently a matter of mass-movement; that the performer of the kalakshepam must needs make it a point to satisfy the masses more than the classes; and that to expect from a teacher of the masses a lesson worthy of being learnt by the classes was as wrong as to expect a Professor of Chemistry to give the substance of the four Mysore Wars or to expect a

Tamil or Sanskrit Mahamahopadyaya to examine the legality of the Lathi-charge.

My own view of the institution of Kalakshepam is a compromise of all these three standpoints.

I have often regarded the position of a Bhagavatar as being similar to that of the Editor of a newspaper. What is found in a newspaper? It opens with advertisements; only a certain class of its readers will anxiously peruse them, not all. Turn, then, to the leader; it happens to be the Communal Award; only the politicians will read it and others are likely to skip over it. The next article is on the latest method of combating the disease of consumption; the Doctors will read it, and not others. The next article is on the recent discovery of an inscription at Thirukkalikunram; the historian may read it but not others. The next article is on the funny case of "O. S. No. 49 by S. V. V.,"; the Judges and the lawyers may heartily laugh over it but not others. The next article is on the latest method of teaching Geography; the poor Schoolmaster may read it but not others. The next article is on the arrest of the Hon'ble Mr. So and So; perhaps, all will read it, being a sensational news.

Thus, it is clear that all the contents of a newspaper do not—cannot—please all the readers alike. Every reader, therefore, must remember that the newspaper is intended, not for him alone, but also for so many others having so many tastes, all different from his. So, when he finds in it articles that do not interest him, he must know that they must be of some interest to others but should not condemn the newspaper, as a whole, as being the product of a needy blockhead.

Similar to the position of the Editor is, I repeat, the position of the Bhagavatar. I regard the big assembly, he has to face, as a world in itself though in miniature. Some may have come for music alone ; some, for discourse alone ; some, for the beautiful violin-play ; some, for the sublime drum-play ; some, for satisfying their idle curiosity ; and some, for scoffing the Bhagavatar and thereby undermining his popularity in favour of his rivals, if any.

It is not therefore possible for one poor, individual Bhagavatar to satisfy, equally, the different tastes of a hydra-headed assembly. He should be judged in fairness.

If the Bhagavatar waxes eloquent in his discourse, the music-loving portion of his audience must patiently wait for their turn. Again, if he goes on with his enrapturing music, the discourse-loving portion of his audience must remember that they have already had their turn and that the other portion must likewise have theirs.

Formerly, there was not that motley crowd with which the modern Bhagavatar is now confronted ; nor were there any pressing problems, such as stare him in his face to-day. The former Bhagavatars had invariably only one set of people before them, *viz.*, the masses, whom the serious sermons were rightly regarded to be too high to reach. Hence, then, the story-telling loomed large and was, in fact, the be-all and end-all of the whole kalakshepam.

But, now, the angle of vision has been changed, be the causes what they might. The classes have come to stay ; and they have made it a point to join with the masses and form part and parcel of the whole audience, which the modern Bhagavatar has to take serious notice of.

Whatever importance it might have assumed a quarter of a century ago, the question whether the kalakshepam was intended for the classes or the masses has now lost all its force ; for, both the classes and the masses have, since the time of Mr. Krishna Bhagavata, effected, once for all, a merger and formed one whole audience. Indeed, the old homogeneous audience has now become heterogeneous. Hence the modern Bhagavata must adjust themselves to the present condition of things and prepare two sets of food for their audience — the *heavy* (i.e., the Sermon) for the classes and the *light* (i.e., the Story) for the masses. The children cannot swallow the heavy food ; nor can the adults be contented with the light one.

Thus, at one stroke, we have in a way solved both the preliminary and the main points :—

(1) The system of kalakshepam, though originally intended for the benefit of the masses, has now come to be a *common* institution of both the classes and the masses ; and

(2) A serious Sermon must necessarily precede the illustrative Story.

Hence—

4. (a) *Do not drop the Sermon, because one of your audience happens to mistake it for an Introduction ; but open his eyes to its being now the warp and woof of the very texture of the performance and convince him of the necessity of the accommodating spirit of the modern audience.*

(b) *At the same time, make your Sermon as short and sweet as possible and dip it in the ambrosia of music.*

Its duration, doubtless, depends on the interest created but may not, in any event, exceed one-third, in point of time, of the whole performance.

There is yet another problem which often comes for discussion in connection with kalakshepam ; and it may be stated thus :—How far the introduction of the element of *Miracles* into a story can be justified.

The imperious Brahmin of Adanur, for instance would not permit his slave, Nanda, to go to Chidambaram, until he was brought face to face with a 'miracle' whereby his lands, which had been negligently allowed to remain fallow, became—during the course of a few hours of a particular night—suddenly filled with full-grown paddy-grains. Again, the hot-headed Sultan of Hyderabad would not set his Tahsildar, Rama Das, at liberty, until the 'miracle' of the midnight-visit of Sri Rama before him and the payment, by that divine Raghava, of the misappropriated money happened.

Are such *miracles* necessary for teaching mankind morality ?

The *anti-miracle* party argues that the miracles, as such, are unnatural, improbable, imaginary, and even grotesque ; that they are devoid of any kind of human interest ; that they are not suitable or necessary agencies for the propagation of morality ; and that, therefore, they should be avoided in the story-telling.

The *pro-miracle* party, on the other hand, contends that the modern science destroys the imagination of its votaries but gives them nothing in exchange ; that it shuts its eyes to the fact that life itself is a paradox and, as such, cannot be regulated by square and compass ;

that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in all philosophy; and that one may philosophise and closely question with regard to the origin of the miracles; but, there it is that the age-long superstitious belief takes a strong hold in men's minds and that such men will ever delight in the employment of the miracle-element.

Apart from the tug between these two parties, the miracle-element, on close observation, seems to exert a powerful influence over all average men and women, whom superstition controls. Look, for instance, at the young girl of twenty years old, Mrs. Siddons, who was to have acted the part of Lady Macbeth. Gripped by the horror of the character and its supernatural connection, she fled away from the room and exclaimed: "As I went upstairs, the rustling of my silk-dress seemed to me as more like the movement of a spectre pursuing me." Look, again, at the *Narisimhopasana* people who (on the breaking of a pillar and the appearance of Narasimha therefrom, in a stage) lose their equilibrium, get inspired, dance, and dash to crush the demon of Hiranyakasipu and who, on getting back their consciousness, proceed to apologise to their injured friend, who well acted the part of the demon.

From this superstition, even persons of superior intellect, well-read scholars, expert logicians, and keen observers of life and manners were not exempt, and, as Macaulay said, such persons seemed to have entered, even the House of Commons, with messages from God.

Dr. Johnson, incredulous on all other matters, was a ready believer in miracles and apparitions. He would not believe in the earthquake of Lisbon; but he was willing to believe in the Cock-Lane Ghost.

Shakespeare rightly realised the situation of his times and made proper use of the miracles by rationalising the operations of the Destiny. With them, he prophesied Richard III's doom and Richmond's victory ; and, again, with them, he revealed the past to Hamlet and the future to Macbeth.

Nor did our own poet, Sri Harsha, fail to realise the situation of his own times as well as to make equally proper use of the miracles, inasmuch as he introduced Gowri, at the end of his *Naganandam*, and enabled Her to transform the tragedy into a comedy, which ever fits in with the Indian mind.

So long, therefore, as the superstitions connected with birth, death, weather, comets, birds, plants, animals, and mark ! *Omens*, persist to exist ; the miracle-element will, despite your science, ever have a grip in men's souls.

Hence—

5. *Use the 'miracle-element' only for effect, but not for amusement, and advise the sceptic to exercise a little forbearance and allow the believer to have his own way, till the reign of superstition comes to a natural end or till the magic and its feats are all scientifically explained.*

I said that one of the arguments of the *anti-miracle* party was that the miracles were not suitable or necessary agencies for the propagation of morality. This takes me to a still broader question as to how far the very institution of Kalakshepam serves the purpose of propagating morality.

My answer is that morality is a quality which the institution of Kalakshepam may or may not possess, for the plain reason that it does not belong to its constitu-

tion. The quality of morality depends, not upon the kalakshepam, but upon the Bhagavata who performs it. If he is a good man, the tendency of his kalakshepam will be moral; but if he is a bad man, it will be the reverse.

It is contended that the kalakshepam will, on close scrutiny, be found not to suffice as a system of ethical training; that, in order to develop moral force and stamina, the volitional nature must receive a more direct and a more powerful discipline than what comes from the chance suggestions of a kalakshepam; that, in all the ethical emotions, there is always the feeling of *personal* obligation to let the sentiment bear fruit in deed; and that the said feeling of *personal* obligation, which is the quintessence of the moral feeling, is hardly present in æsthetical emotions.

The above contention seems to be based on the notion that everything, which excites emotion but does not culminate in immediate action, has a weakening and enervating effect upon character.

Is this *notion* always true? No. It is true only under certain circumstances. If an appeal, for instance, to the emotion of a raptly-listening audience, roused with a view to help the suffering neighbours, is not immediately followed by action; or if a commander's appeal, like that of Henry V's appeal on the eve of the battle of Agincourt, resulted only in the soldiers' beating their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks; that roused-up emotion will surely have an enervating effect and drive the defaulters to the barren region of sentimentalism.

But, be it noted, to be affected by a drama, a novel, a poem, a song, or—for that matter—a kalakshepam,

which points to no immediate duty of action need not enervate ; it only disciplines the emotion.

It is, by far, better to feel without action than to act without feeling.

In order, however, to successfully discipline the emotion of the audience, the Bhagavata should make it a point to equip himself with decent learning and practical experience and also to cultivate the habit of keeping his head cool but his heart warm, besides being—

“ Simple, grave, sincere ;

In doctrine uncorrupt ; in language plain,
And plain in manner ; decent, solemn, chaste,
And natural in gesture ; much impressed
Himself, as conscious of his awful charge
And anxious mainly that the flock he feeds
May feel it too.”

As regards the manner in which a sermon ought to be delivered or a story ought to be narrated, I cannot but quote the celebrated Garrick's precepts to his pupil on the point :—

“ You know how you would feel and speak in a parlour concerning a friend who was in imminent danger of his life and with what energetic pathos of diction and countenance you would enforce the observance of that which, you really thought, would be for his preservation. You could not think of playing the orator, of studying your emphasis, cadence and gesture ; you would be yourself ; and the interesting nature of your subject, impressing your heart, would furnish you with the most natural tone of voice, the most proper language, the most engaging features, and the most suitable and graceful gestures. What you would thus be in the parlour, be in the pulpit ; and you will not fail to please, to effect, and to profit.”

In order to emancipate the art of kalakshepam from the thralldom of commonplace triviality and make it a revelation of all that is most exalted in thought, sentiment, and purpose and, again, in order to produce the consummate art-result ; the two partners of the kalakshepam, namely, *preaching* and *music* must come as equals, neither one the drudge of the others. Hence—

6. *Do not over-elaborate the preaching nor over-emphasise the music ; but let the all-important text of the sermon stand out, first and foremost, in bold relief ; and let the music and preaching illustrate and strengthen it, most graphically with a unity of purpose.*

III

From the Bhagavatar I now turn to the audience even to whom I have a message to deliver. If the hearers desire to get the fullest benefit of a kalakshepam, they must conform themselves to the following rules :—

1. Sit down to listen to a kalakshepam with a sympathetic frame of mind and remember that the Bhagavatar stands before you to please the audience, as a whole, but not individually.

2. Give the Bhagavatar sufficient time to recover, if need be, from any kind of nervousness and encourage him, especially at the beginning, with a cheerful look.

3. Avoid, as a rule, private talking or even criticism, during the course of the performance ; but be all attention to whatever the Bhagavatar says or acts.

4. Create in your mind an atmosphere of the subject matter of the kalakshepam and follow the incidents described by the Bhagavatar, as though you were a direct eye-witness and a vigilant watcher of those incidents.

Here, it may be argued that the ability to secure the attention of the audience rests mostly with the Bhagavatar himself.

I grant it. Yet, the fact remains that that 'ability' will pale into nothing, before the wanton mischief of the professional scoffers. Hence, will it not be graceful, on the part of the audience, not to put the Bhagavatar's 'ability' to any kind of unnecessary test but to help him with the creation of such an atmosphere of attention as to overawe even the professional scoffers into silence?

5. Do not undertake to do the dry and good-for-nothing task of guaging the depth of the Bhagavatar's learning, as to how far he is a Sanskrit or Tamil or Telugu or Music scholar; but merely enjoy the performance, if enjoyable, and go away.

Here, I am reminded of two anecdotes which will be of some interest to my reader:—

(i) Dr. Edward Pockocke, a celebrated preacher and a profound *Latin* scholar, always avoided, in his sermons, the least show of the ostentation of his 'Latin' learning. He did not care to din, into the ears of his audience, Latin quotations for the plain reason that they could not understand them but amused and instructed his hearers with the simple mother-tongue in a homely and conversational style, quite in keeping with the spirit of Mr. Garrick's precepts. But the result was that only a few learned persons appreciated him; while, the many (who formed the unlearned, and even the unlettered, portion of the audience and who, therefore, had no right or qualification to judge of any person's learning,) were audacious enough to entertain a contemptuous opinion of the

Doctor's learning and spoke of him as being "a very honest man, but no Latiner."

Substitute Sanskrit for Latin; and whatever I said in connection with Dr. Pococke applies equally to some of our genuine Bhagavatars.

(ii) Mr. Natesa Bhagavatar, a profound scholar but overfond of quotation, long ago gave a Harikatha Performance in the Thumbu Chetty Street, Madras. A grave old but offending critic listened to the performance with rapt attention. Before, however, the Bhagavatar finished his tenth sentence, the critic muttered aloud: "That idea is nothing original; it is from Kalidas's *Raghuvamsa*". The Bhagavatar did not like this kind of interruption but went on. He had not proceeded much further, when the rude critic broke out with: "That's from Bhoja's *Champu*." The Bhagavatar frowned but again thought it better to ignore the interruption and pursue the thread of his discourse. Still, for the third time, the unsympathetic critic exclaimed: "That's from Bhavabhuti's *Malatimadhavam*." This was too much for the Bhagavatar who, yet, went on. Still again, for the fourth time, the thick-skinned cynic ejaculated: "That's a cunning prose-rendering but still a verbatim quotation from *Kamba-Ramayanam*." Contain himself the Bhagavatar could not; and he cried in anger: "Hold your tongue or you shall be turned out."

"Ah!," replied the unabashed critic, "this is the only wording which I find to be *your own*."

Don't you think, gentle reader, that the cynical critic spoiled, by his foolish interruption, the enjoyment of both the Bhagavatar and his audience?

Further, what is fundamentally wrong in the act of quoting? By necessity, by proclivity, and by delight, all minds do quote. I may go even to the extent of stating that the so-called originals are not original; for, there is imitation, model, or at least suggestion to the very archangels, if we knew their history. The first book tyrannises over the second. Read, for instance, Tasso and you think of Virgil; read Virgil and you think of Homer. Again, read Bhoja and you think of Valmiki; read Kamban and you think both of Valmiki and Ilango-vadikal, the one for language and the other for thought.

If therefore an author gives us just distinctions, inspiring lessons, or imaginative poetry; it is not so important to us whose they are. If we are fired and guided by these, we know him as a benefactor and shall return to him as long as he serves us well.

Is not the Moon, despite its borrowed light, welcomed by the people on account of the joy it gives?

6. Hence, do welcome the Bhagavatar, even though it happens that he has nothing original, or no material of his own thinking, to give us but merely transmits to us what he learnt from others—provided that the matter, so transmitted, is in itself delectable.

And last, but not least—

7. Forbear if the Bhagavatar harps, for a while, upon a point which does not interest you but which may be of some interest to others.

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