



Navavidha Bhakti of Bhagavata in Natya (Nine Forms of Devotion from Bhagavata In Theatre Presentation)

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*‘Sravanam keertanam vishnoh smaranam paadasevanam
Archanam vandanam daasyam sakhyama atmanivedanam’
(7th canto- (7.5.23.) śrī-prahalāda uvacha)*

The two wonderful texts *Bhagavata* and *Natya Shastra* share a common purpose of spiritual enlightenment. The *Bhagavata* has given nine forms of devotional path to practice which *Natya Shastra* propagates it through its divine art forms, especially dance drama and music. The origin of both the texts is to spread the knowledge of Supreme Being, and natya goes ahead in recreating the history at present and in future on the stage most effectively and efficiently.

Devotion – devotion is a movement which has started along with the universe to know, believe and practice to fetch god and achieve salvation being in the worldly relations of life. From the ancient times sages and many philosophers have formulated and advocated many aphorisms (*sutras*) on devotion.

Few definitions are:- being attached to god, unalloyed attachment to godhead, spiritual path, self surrendering at the feet of, unconditional love and affection towards god, eternal bliss and religious path.

The two encyclopaedia texts on devotion by *Shandilya* and *Narada* define the concept of devotion as:-

Shandilya Bhakti Sutra – it has mainly 3 parts, the nature of devotion, the means of devotion and the object of devotion. *Para Bhakti*. (II cahapter, sloka 44) speaks about the feelings of the devotee towards godhead in 10 different ways:-

1. *Sammana-* receiving with due honour for his devotional behaviour,
2. *Bahumana-* valuing even the little help from devotee,
3. *Priti-* concider service to god with love,
4. *Viraha-* extreme pang love in separation,
5. *Itara-vicikitas-* aversion to all those not connected to god
6. *Mahimakhyati-* blissful in singing the glory of god,
7. *Tad aratha Pranasthana -* feeling the presence of god in everything. ,
8. *Tadiya-* feeling he is his.

9. *Sarvatabhava* –the whole world is with him magnificence.
10. *Apratikulya*.- feel death better than being away from god.

2. *Narada* in *Narada Bhakti Sutra*, states 2 stages- Initial which involves self observation of rituals and ceremonies, and mature stage involves subtle devotion towards god by being free from the nature of *Tamasika, Rajasika and Satvika Gunas*. He has mentioned 11 forms in which *bhakti* is observable, they are (82 aphorisms):-

1. *Guna mahatmayaasakti*: love for revering the quality of God.
2. *Rupasakti*: love of God's delightful beauty
3. *Pujasakti*: love of God's worship
4. *Smaranasakti*: love of God's commemoration
5. *Dasyasakti*: love of service to God
6. *Sakhyasakti*: love of God as a friend
7. *Kantasakti*: love for God as that of a wife.
8. *Vatsalyasakti*: love of God as a child.
9. *Aatmanivedanasakti*: loves of self- capitulate to God.
10. *Tanmayatasakti*: love of complete amalgamation in God.
11. *Param virahasakti*: love of pain of dismissal from God.

Both sutras forms are widely used in *natya* in relation to *Nayaka* and *Nayika* states. *Sree Rupa Goswami* states 64 principles of *bhakti* and 3 main stages of it which are

1. Spiritual practices (*Sadana bhakti*),
2. Spiritual cultivation (*Bhavana bhakti*)
3. Love and affection (*Prema bhakti*) the ultimate state.

In *Taittiriya Upanishad* it is said that *bhakti* is *rasa* and *rasa* is godhead himself. '*Raso-vai-saha*'. In *Geeta* *bhakti* is the comparison of transcendental bliss with that bliss *Brahmananda*(bliss experience by soul) is a drop whereas *Premananda* (bliss of love) the result of *bhakti* is a ocean. Few schools of thoughts describe devotion as *Atma, Ishvara, Ishta devata* and *Guru*.

Devotion in Natya.

The origin of *Natya Veda* is the result of *Bhakti*, the purpose of *Vedas* and *Shastras* is to spread the knowledge about the godhead and his associates and make the individual spiritually enlightened about the existences of them so that they can overcome the materialistic infatuation and achieve the higher purpose of life which is *Moksha*. In the beginning of *Natya Shastra* sage *Bharata* starts with the note of praying lord *Shiva* with devotion to empower him to complete the task of composing *Natya Shastra*. The *bhakti* has different shades in *natya* it is the prime essence. *Bhakti* as love and affection creates the whole world of imitation (*Natya*). *Natya* is the imitation of real life, when *Natya Veda* was created and presented to sage *Bharatha* to propagate on the earth, the aim of it was to create the devotional awareness about the godhead through the most memorable way from demigods to mundane people. After synthesising the nature of human *Bharatha* designed techniques to express through '*Chaturvidha Abinaya*' more effectively to convey the message.

The *Nayika* and *Nayaka* characters were built upon the human temperament and established '*Alambana Vibhava*' as godhead always. So any dance dramas goal is to portray the *Nayaka* as godhead and different types of *Nayikas* showing their desire to unite with him, the different human nature formed different types of *Nayika* and *Nayaka* on facade with the permanent *Stayi Bhava* as devotion. *Natya* with devotion arises the rudiments of usual human desires towards the attainment of the short term state of bliss, which would create an impact to attain permanent bliss in the real life.

Devotion in Bhagavata: Devotion means the cognitive love which has no desires then being with or connected to god always. Devotion places a very vital role in enriching the knowledge of love and attachment to god.

Devotion by practices through different forms suitable to each individual which would uplift the standards of spirituality eventually to reach ultimate goal of life successfully, thoughtfully and fruitfully, one can follow any one or in combination the 9 forms of devotions mentioned by the author of *Bhagavata Sri Bhagavan Vedavyasa*, there are two ways to apprehend it, the devotion of devotees and second devotion on deity. Out of 12 cantos the first 9 cantos have the detail stories of the devotees who have excelled following the different forms of devotion, and from the 10th canto the stories of deity is described.

Cantos: In the first 9 cantos in connection to 9 forms of devotion one can witness and summarise the devotees conduct related to deity as following:-

1. Hearing about the great devotees – *Sravana*
2. Words on the devotees-*Keertana*
3. Words of devotees-*Smarana*
4. Great deeds performed by the devotees-*Padasevana*
5. Serving the devotees as gurus to direct towards god-*Vandana*
6. Praising the devotee, thanking devotees for decoding the ways to reach god-*Archana*
7. Being devotee of the great devotees- *Dasyam*
8. Learning from the devotees deeds connect to god as a friend - *Sakhyam*
9. The stories of devotees who got enriched spiritually by completely surrendering to god-*Atmanivedanam*.

Bhagavata's Devotion concept through Natya: it is a challenge as certain stories actually just as literature can create *Rasanubhava* but fails to express on the stage effectively due to technical issues like showing *krishna* with 4 hands going round with spinning maze in the womb of *Uttara* and foetus watching it. Though it can be presented using four types of *Abhinaya* (*Chaturvidha Abhinaya*) and new technology or as a part of narration but needs lot of effort when compared with *Natya dharmi* (theatre oriented) and *Loka dharmi* (natural life oriented). So selecting the important story that is more adoptable for natya will hold as testimony to the choreographer's creative ability and knowledge.

Few stories selected from each canto's as illustration to the nine forms of devotion in *natya* which can create *Rasanubhava* through dance drama and music are:-

Shravana – King *Parikshita* defeating *Kali* sequence, a very strange bull with one leg and a weeping cow controlled and being tortured by a ruthless king encounters *Parikshita* while he was on his rounds in the woods. Then king *Parikshita* protects the one leg bull and cow which were symbolic to *Dharma* and mother earth respectively, the legs of the bull represented Austerity, Cleanliness, Mercy and Truthfulness and the ruthless king was *Kali*, after defeating *Kali*, *Kali* surrenders to *Parikshita* and asks for shelter, he was granted to reside in 5 places – gambling, alcohol, stray women, untruth and superfluous gold.

This as an act on stage which has sufficient rasas like *veera*, *roudra*, *karuna*, *bhaya* and *adbutha* and keeps the audience enthralled by connecting quickly.

Kirtanam- The praising ,singing the *Chatur Sloka Bhagavata* recited by god himself to *Brahama* about the magnificent forms of him is a wonderful musical piece to which the *Abhinaya* and *Nritta* can be fused and create a fully fledged rhythmic and musical

comprehensive dance piece. Energetic and activeness is the feelings that would create the sentiment of *veera* and *adbuta*.

Smaranam- In the remembrance of god. the *Astanga yoga* taught by *Kapila* to his mother *Devahoti* which consists of the preaching's on how to meditate, control and channelize emotions towards devotion, physical and mental practices which would build a strong connection to attain penultimate stage of yoga, the *natya* involves audience and take them to the parallel meditation mind which is the paradigm of *Shanta rasa*.

Vishnu Padasevana – The son of *Prachinabarhi* leaves home seeking divine knowledge, pleases lord Shiva by his devotion and humbleness and gets blessed with the preaching about lord Vishnu.

Shiva has done a beautiful *stuti* (hymn of praise) called as *Rudra Geeta*, The *Shiva* appearing from the lotus lake with his musicians, associates, demigods singing hymn in different *gatis* and *ragas* uplifts the aesthetic awareness to climax in the audience. Here the *padasevana* of *prachinabarhi* son and *keertana* of Vishnu by *Shiva* is the combination treat which will raise the *bhakti bhava* to *rasa* level making *bhavas* like *utsaha*, *harsha* as major *bhavas*.

Archana –Worshiping god through meditation is more powerful than worshiping with material things which he already possesses. To illustrate this concept of *Archana* the story of *Jada Bharatha*, the rebirth of king *Bharatha* practiced meditation silently and looked apathetic (*Jada*), his family failed to recognise his personality and used him as a servant, one fine day when he was in the woods meets the palanquin bearer of king *Rahoguna* and joins them to serve as the palanquin bearer, while serving the king he would not follow the rhythm and coordinate with other bearers as a result the king in irritation abuses him, for which in return he gives him the discourse about universal truth and the divine power, by which the king falls on his feet and accepts him as guru.

The conversation between *Rahoguna* and *Jada Bharatha* is a wonderful showcase of *Vachikabhinaya* in the play. The *Sama* as *Sthayin* is shown with other temporary *rasas* initiating intellectual spirituality.

Vandana – Bowing to god. The story of *Ajamila* is a beautiful combination of deeds and devotion. *Ajamila* transforms from a righteous life of an austere to a barbaric human life for the sake of a woman, he will have ten children from her and to look after them he steals, does robbery, tells lies, plays gambling and corruption. But when the death approaches he calls his last son *Narayana* with anxiety, because of which the real *Narayana* sends his messengers to protect him, later by this incident he turns back to his righteous life style goes to *Haridwar* and practices the yoga of devotion.

This story on stage has a wider scope for the dance drama and music part to establish the various *rasas* like *karuna*, *raudra*, *veera*, *adbuta* and *shanta* efficiently and attractively.

Dasyam - Serving as servant. In the story of *Prahalada* son of *Hiranyakashpu*, he spreads the message of devotion on lord *Hari* and its fruitfulness in all directions faithfully and propagates to his father also, because of which he undergoes lots of punishments from his father, but the faith in god serves him in every difficult condition. Finally god himself takes the incarnation of *Narashima* and protects his devotee. This story proves that devotion is *rasa* and *rasa* is lord himself so what is given to him is to get back from him.

Prahalad story for *natya* is wonderful, many musicians and theatre artists choose it because of its scope in all directions to present on stage as a musical dance drama. The famous

Tyagaraja's Geya nataka (musical drama) '*prahalada charitam*' is all time favourite subject for a natya production. It has all 9 rasas led by bhakti as *stayi bhava*.

Sakhya - Attitude of a friend. The story of *Amrutha Manthana* is the most favourite theme to present in *Natya*, this story depicts many qualities of lord *Vishnu* as a friend helping and suggesting demigods to churn and get the Nectar. Lord being the universal supreme still pretends to be one among demigods and demons by taking the form of a tortoise carrying mountain on his back, and later as a beautiful maiden *Mohini* mesmerises demons and serves nectar only to demigods.

Amrutha mantana takes a remarkable place in *Natya Shastra* as it was one of the productions by *Bharata* presented in *Kailasa* Mountain in front of gods. This story has lot of scope in making the play colourful, curious and enjoyable with high level of aesthetic sense.

Atma Nivedanam-self surrenders to god. The story of *Pururava* son of *Budha* and *Ila* falling for the beauty of *Urvashi*, their togetherness and later separation, after which on advice of *Urvashi* *Pururava* worships *Gandharvas* and gets an identical women in place of *urvashi* named *Agnisthale*, *Pururava* mistakes her as real *Urvashi* and lives with her happily for few days, on realising the truth he leaves her and goes to perform rituals and ceremony to satisfy his desire, after which he goes to find '*Agnistale*' but finds her as '*Sanvi*' tree given birth to a '*Vata*' tree, he takes the sticks of both the trees and burns it from which his lust also get burnt and transforms himself and surrenders completely repenting at his past on the feet of lord *Vishnu*.

For *Natya* the *Pururava* and *Urvashi* story highlights *Sringara rasa* and later *Karuna* ending with *Shanta* through *Atma Nivedanam*.

In conclusion the *sutras* mentioned by great sages and schools on devotion are concluded in the 9 forms mentioned by *Veda Vyasa* in *Srimad Bhagavata* which is more comprehensive for common man to understand and relate. As performing arts it relates to common man fulfilling the purpose of education and entertainment. The omnipresent and omnipotent qualities explained by illustrations more memorably with good impact. In *natya* we can present according to the regional based theatre styles to make it more connected and effectual. The 9 cantos makes the *Rasikas* matured and gain purity, after which the devotion on god will be understood and attain *Rasanubhava*.

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Glossary

Chaturvidha Abhinaya – Angika, Vachika, Aharya And Satvika.

Tamasika = Cruel Nature.

Rajasika = Valour Nature

Satvika = Spiritual Nature

Gunas = Nature

Natya Veda = Text On Theatre.

Nayika = Heroine

Godhead = lord Vishnu

Sutras = a collection of aphorisms relating to some aspect, a thread like that connects to remember big number of concepts.

Nayaka = Hero

Alambana Vibhava = Is The Person Or Object On Whom Others are Dependent.

Rasika – Connoisseur, Beholder Of The Aesthetic Beauty.

Moksha = attainment of salvation.

