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PROBING HISTORY OF CHAVITTUNATAKAM

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Introduction

Chavittunatakam is considered as a dance performance which is popular among the Latin Catholic Christian communities residing in the coastal regions of Kerala. Chavittunatakam can be regarded as the fusion of north the Western and Eastern theater concepts it is considered as a beautiful musical dance drama similar to that of Kathakali and Opera of the West. It can be regarded as the Christian counterpart of Kathakali and also as an Indian edition of European Opera.¹

Seeds of Chavittunatakam were introduced to Kerala by the Christian missionaries who came to Kerala in the 16th century. Chavittunatakam derives its name from Chavittu to the forceful and rhythmic footing of steps. Chavittu means book work and natakam means drama.

Chavittunatakam is can be regarded as a blend of music, dance action and drama. The actors who perform Chavittunatakam stamp their feet on the wooden stage in time with Chenda and other musical instruments while they act and sing.² Themes of Chavittunatakam are adopted from the heroic lives of European Catholic emperor and from the Bible.³ The actors who performs Chavittunatakam are good singers too because it is foremost a musical dance drama. Actors sing while they take steps footsteps in Chavittunatakam depends upon tales. Chavittunatakam songs are composed in the vast and varied Esa of the rich Tamil musical literature.⁴ Sweet and melodies songs are played during the love scene. Chavittunatakam songs are in the tandar style.⁵ Acting is one of the most important aspect of Chavittunatakam Actor acts according with the music they also sing songs while they make steps. Actors makes expression through songs and gestutes fighting and hunting are important aspects of Natakam. Actual hunting and fighting equipments are used. Actors are given training to use these weapons and they are also given physical training in gymnastics schools.

Costumes used in Chavittunatakam are realistic nature. The heavy ornaments are given to the Kings. Women Characters are less in Chavittunatakam she had no definite representation. The brilliantly glittering costume, the stamping and loud declamation give Chavittunatakam on other worldly feel.⁶ Master or the instructor of Chavittunatakam is referred as Annavi. Later Annavi changed to Asan, Asan or Annavi is regarded as the trainer in staging the natakam. He is the person who is expertise in dealing with footsteps, music dance and acting. He should be well aware of using weapons, musical instruments, songs and he is the master in gymnastic too. Young children are given training for Chavittunatakam in many places including Gothuruth, Chellanam, Alleppy etc. The expense of

¹ Sabeena Raphy, Chavittunatakam dramatic opera of Kerala, Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi,1969

² Ibid

³ Taniya Abraham, Eating with History: Ancient Trade influenced cuisine of Kerala, Niyogi books, 2020

⁴ Sabeena Raphy, Chavittunatakam A dramatic opera of Kerala, Sangeet Natak Akademi , New Delhi,1969

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Swaderski Richard, Representing Representing: A Chavittunatakam performance, Asian Theatre Journal 4, No.2,1987.



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Chavittunatakam is met from the public contributions in the coastal villagers of Kerala. Chavittunatakam is usually played as a part of feast and festivals mainly in Church Chavittunatakam are usually played in a open maiden.

To conclude Chavittunatakam was a deliberate attempt to represent the Latin Catholic. It originated as the effect of Christian missionary as an alternative to Hindu dance form like Kathakali and alternative to Syrian Christian narrative dances like Maargamkali. Chavittunatakam is so far the first folk theatre of Kerala in its full sense.

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