

## CHAPTER NO.VII

### CHRISTIAN THEMES IN OTHER DANCE FORMS OF INDIA

#### a) BIBLICAL THEME IN YAKSHAGANA:

Yakshagana , a dance-drama , is a lyrical combination of dance, music , poetry, the spoken word, costume and a set of stage techniques, all having a distinct and peculiar style of its own. Commenting on this dance-drama which, at present, is confined to the South Western (coastal) districts of Karnataka including Kasargod area (Kerala). Mohan Kokkar writes: "Open Country. A clearing. A patch some twenty feet square with bamboo poles at the corners supporting a thatch fringed with festoons of mango leaves. This is the stage. On one side are the musicians. On the remaining three sides where the performing area ends sit the spectators. The presentation- a nifty amalgam of song and dance and drama- is robust, spirited. The story is from mythology, with violent passion as the keynote. The performance commences about nine p.m. and extends till dawn. The characters, in finery, are conspicuously dashing and colourful. The spectacle is throughout vivid and vibrant. This is Yakshagana, which can well be described as the people's theatre of Karnataka".<sup>(1)</sup>

It is also called by other names like, Bayalata, Bayalu, field or open-air, ata that is play. This art-form has penetrated so deep into the people's hearts that a serious observer would realise that Yakshagana is not mere entertainment but a way of life and a bridge which connects epic lore with every succeeding generation".(2)

The origin of Yakshagana can't be traced back with a definite date and year. However, it must have a history of at least 400 years. "Evidence of this is the work Bharatesha Vaibhava, written in 1557 A.D. by the noted poet Ratnakara Varni, which carries a brief description for what it is worth, of a Yakshagana performance. The earliest Yakshagana plays available to us, date from about the middle of the 16th century A.D. There is reason to believe that as a form of theatre Yakshagana evolved from the Nagamandala ritual, a propitiatory offering in honour of the serpent-God Subarraya, who in Karnataka is identified with Subramanya, or Skanda, son of Lord Shiva. The element of dance here, in particular, seems to have inspired body movement and footwork in Yakshagana. Costume and adornment in Yakshagana ,too seem to be an extension of what obtains in the Nagamandala ".(3)

Prof.Gururaja Bhatt who published his classic on 'Studies in Tuluva History and Culture' describes Yakshagana

dance and tala-daddale in the form as yet in practice as one of the characteristic features of Tuluva Culture . One thing is clear that Yakshagana (Yaksha= is a being that belongs to the realm that encircles man and the world of nature, gana= song) has been a medium through which the people were taught their religion, mythology, moral truths, history, geography, blending education and entertainment in this beautiful art-form. All this in no way minimizing the entertainment aspect of the art-form. The gist of the whole attempt was to demonstrate that truth triumphs over falsehood, light over darkness, good over evil.

It is interesting to note that Christianity also made its inroads into this region about the time of Yakshagana came into existence. In the late 16th century onwards and more so in the 17th century the Christian population in the said region increased immensely. This was due mainly to an influx of Christians from Goa. They were escaping the tyranny of the Portuguese govt. and the church authorities in Goa who forced them to embrace the western culture and adopt their customs and habits including the Portuguese language.<sup>(4)</sup> These people who settled down in Mangalore and other nearby places led a very confused cultural life. They retained some of their ancestral customs belonging to the pre-Portuguese era in Goa

but kept aloof from the local habits, customs, dance and art-forms. They also lost the sense and self-prestige for their own history and developed a sceptical attitude towards the arts and customs around them, especially when it touched religion.

Though socially they mixed with their Hindu bretheren and lived in close relation with them, with regard to their religious life and practices they were poles-apart. Yakshagana and other art-forms had a close affinity to the Hindu mythology and especially with regard to the themes (Frasanga). Hence these art-forms found no part in the life of a Christian. Whoever went to watch the Yakshagana performances were looked upon suspiciously. The Christian clergy who were educated mostly in Goa played a major role in avoiding and, at times even prohibiting and condemning people from taking part and adopting the art-forms of this region.

In this chapter efforts have been made not to get into the technical aspects of Yakshagana but to find out the scope of Yakshagana themes beyond the realm of Hindu mythology. And secondly, to evaluate critically the efforts made by the Yakshagana artists as well as other people to give birth to new Yakshagana prasangas (plays) on Biblical themes, especially

Mahachetana Kristha Mahatme, a Yakshagana play written on the life of Jesus Christ by the poet Muliya Keshavayya and performed by the author himself and many other Melas (troupes).

PRASANGAS IN YAKSHAGANA:

The story content of Yakshagana dance-drama is known as the Prasanga. The Prasangas or the Yakshagana plays constitute a special type of literature in the Kannada language of Karnataka. There are hundreds of plays written on various themes. " Though the stories are from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Bhagavata and the Puranas, they are based not so much on the Sanskrit originals as on their Kannada versions. The language is generally very simple. In fact, the scripts of Yakshagana plays are written of these plays, among the earliest is Devidasa, those Abhimanyu Kalaga and Saindhava Vadha are well known. Next comes Nagappaya, with his Nala Charitre, Chandravali and Ghatotkacha Kalaga. Some other famous playwrights are Subramanya, Helemakki Rama, Rama Bhatta, Shantayya and Madhavadasa.. Among the plays that are popular are Bhishma Vijaya, Girija Kalyana, Karna-Arjuna Kalaga, Babruvahana Kalaga, Draupadi Pratapa and Krishna Parijata ."(5)

Hence, " for many generations Yakshagana had been a hand-maid of stories of Hindu mythology in general and those

in Ramayana and Mahabharata in particular. In local parlance Yakshagana is called 'Dashavathara' which denotes the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu. And yet some of the 'Avatharas' or incarnations are very obscure and one may reasonably entertain doubts if some of them were brought to the field play at all. Conversely, many themes of history, folklore and even politics have made their advent onto Yakshagana stage. Although they have seldom come to stay as a particular isolated theme, still their innovations have brought about an impact of change by satisfying a craving for diversity and novelty among the modern audience of Yakshagana." (6)

In the last decade, many Prasangas like; Pattada Padmale by the Karnataka Yakshagana Sabha, <sup>M</sup>angalore, Sheentrida Chennakke by Shri Mahammayi Yakshagana Suratkai, Nada Kedage by Puttur Mela and many other Prasangas in Tulu language have been staged very successfully by many different Melas on both social and religious themes.

#### REQUIREMENT OF A YAKSHAGANA PRASANGA:

In Yakshagana, the Prasanga (story in lyrics) is the base and foundation for the stage performance. It is a fact that chivalry, valour and heroism are integral and necessary components of this dance-drama form. Hence, keeping in mind

these qualities the script has to be selected and prepared. Summarizing the requirements for a fitting Yakshagana Prasanga, Shri M.Prabhakara Joshy, a noted Yakshagana exponent says, " the theme as well as the treatment should be dramatic, with interesting development, should provide for Yakshagana dance, dialogue and stage craft. The verses should be simple, and be capable of producing effect when sung. In other words, the script should contain a particular line of treatment, lending itself to be exploited well by the Yakshagana form of theatre"(7)

Every Yakshagana Prasanga has a moral truth to teach and lessons to instruct the audience. The whole narration or story melts on one focal point, that is the triumph of good over evil which can't be overlooked by the author of any Prasanga. " It is an effective method of moral and spiritual instruction, in short, of inculcating dharma. This is common to other cultures. In medieval Europe the stories of the Bible were popularised through dramatic representations called Mystery and Morality plays. They achieved the same purpose of ethical guidance through folk art, and helped to preserve the truths of religion in memory and imagination."(8) Neither Natyasastra nor any other theatre treatise in India restricts the theme to Hindu mythology alone. The broader outline of

the requirements and characteristics of Yakshagana Prasanga does not limit it to the boundary of Hinduism alone. Nay, any true art gives the scope and freedom to develop the theme in a given frame-work of an art-form. Hence in every way it is possible for Yakshagana to go beyond the Hindu mythological stories.

In Christianity too one finds the constant conflict between the good and the evil, truth and untruth and death and immortality. Ultimately the good triumphs over the evil. So the Bible could offer ample scope for the development of Prasangas that are truly and typically in the Yakshagana style. 'Mahachetana Kristha Mahatme', a Yakshagana Prasanga on the life of Jesus Christ is written by poet Muliya Keshavayya is the first of its kind to be created and performed on the Yakshagana stage.

#### MAHACHETANA KRISTHA MAHATME:

In the 1960s a Christian known by the stage name, 'Christian Babu' was a big success on the Yakshagana stage. However, his talents and success was not approved and appreciated by the Church authorities and many Christians, mainly because of their prejudices and ignorance with regard to this art-form.

In the recent past people like Agari Srinivas Bhagavata and other have tried , in a limited way, to have Yakshagana Prasangas on the life of Lord Jesus Christ. But it was in 1976 that Shri Muliya Keshavayya (165) wrote a full-fledged prasanga on the life of Jesus Christ under the title 'Mahachetana Kristha Mahatme and staged it in Mangalore on the 1st August 1976. It was the first ever attempt in the history of Yakshagana where the life of Christ was depicted. Though initially it was looked upon with suspicion, it gradually got encouragement from the Bishops, priests and people both Christians and Hindus. By 1982 more than 130 performances of this Prasanga had been staged. This speaks for its initial success and acceptance by the people.

Professional Melas (troupes) like Janatha Yakshagana Mandali of Mangalore, Sunkadakatte Mela, Puttur Mela and many other amateur troupes have staged this Prasanga. Besides individuals like Kadathoka Manjunatha Bhagavata and others in Uttara Kannada have staged the same. The famous Yakshagana artists like Bhima Bhatt , Pervady Narayana Bhatt, Shankaranarayana Samaga, Muliya Keshavayya and many others have enacted the role of Jesus. So far no Christian has acted in 'Mahachetana Kristha Mahatme'. However, since 1982 this novel Prasanga has

suffered a set-back. The number of performances have come down considerably. The factors and reasons leading to this will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

MAHACHETANA KRISTHA MAHATME- A YAKSHAGANA PRASANGA:

Shri.Muliya Keshavayya who is both an artist of Yakshagana and admirer of the person of Jesus Christ has attempted to present a 'Yakshaganised Christ'. The above Prasanga follows the set pattern and the style of this art-form. While developing the theme the author has kept in mind the demands of a true Yakshagana story. The beginning, development, narrations, expressions and conclusion of the Prasanga is strictly in conformity with the traditional frame-work of the Yakshagana play.

The gist of the Prasanga is as follows; revolt of the evil spirits (Satan) against God in heaven, the battle between Messaih (Son of God) and Satan, defeat of Satan (166), Family life of Joseph and Mary, birth of Christ, the slaughter of the innocents by King Herod, the preaching of religion by Christ, the Sermon on the Mount, confrontation with the Pharisees, conversation between Mary and Jesus (167), the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot, death sentence by Pilate for Jesus,

crucifixion and death of Jesus on the Cross, apparitions of Jesus which ends with the ascension into heaven. The Prasanga ends with a beautiful mangalam on Lord Jesus Christ.

BEGINNING OF A YAKSHAGANA PRASANGA:

Every Yakshagana Prasanga starts with a praise-offering to God, especially to the god or goddess on whom the play is going to be enacted. Here, the author invariably brings in the name of his personal God. The beginning verses of Mahachetana Kristha Mahatme starts with the following verses in praise of Jesus, the Lord of the earth. The personal God of the author Maheswara is also invoked.

" Scion of the House of David,  
 Purifier of the spirit.  
 Co-existent with Truth  
 Free from all passion, wrath and pride-  
 Living Spirit in the Ocean of existence,  
 Love Supreme  
 Manifest in weakness,  
 Emptied of the glory of Divinity,  
 Son of Mary, Great Deliverer,  
 Fulfilling the desires of all nations-  
 Hope of the human race

With this greeting  
 I worship Jesus in Love,  
 And my Lord and great God Maheshwara,  
 We tell the story of Him  
 The Lord of the earth, who uplifts it." (9)

The story proper in Yakshagana usually begins in heaven. Circumstances leading to the situation are normally the revolt of the evil against the good or the gods. In Mahachetana Kristha Mahatme too, the story begins in heaven with the revolt of the evil spirits( Satan) against God which leads to the battle between Satan and the angels of God. But the angelic hosts are overpowered by the Satan.

"Satan, the wily sorcerer  
 Raises the standard of revolt  
 He covets God's throne,  
 The angels of God receive command  
 To strike at these foolish knaves.  
 Michael and Gabriel, renowned in heaven,  
 In fierce battle  
 Confront the rebellious crew  
 Two days the battle lasted.  
 Satan and the evil ones

With cunning force of occult weapons  
Overpower the angelic host. " (10)

Now , God the Father commissions the Messiah to lead the  
battle against Satan.

"Decreed by the Father  
The Messiah entered the field of strife.  
The frightened angels  
were now twice their strength.  
He revives their fainting spirits,  
He binds up their wounds,  
He leads them against their foes." (11)

In the battle Messaih defeats Satan.

"Satan was enraged.  
He drew out the dreaded Shathaghni,  
Wrathfully he struck at the armies of God.  
And now the Messaih fearlessly went into battle  
Determined to vanquish the Evil One." (12)

Defeated Satan flees from heaven to the earth to corrupt  
people. Now the drama continues on earth.

"Satan viewed the full might of the heavenly host.  
He fled in anguish.

But where would he find refuge? His evil designs  
 Lead him direct to the earth, the home of the human race.  
 There, with his evil companions  
 He will surely seek to corrupt  
 The entire race of man." (13)

To save and rescue man from the snares of the Satan,  
 Messaih , the Son of God descends on the earth.

"Hence must descend the Messaih  
 Must descend to the village of Nazareth  
 Where the angel announced the good news of his birth  
 To the humble carpenter Joseph  
 And to the young girl ,Mary." (14)

The conflict between the good and evil continues throughout  
 the story. King Herod seeks to kill the Child Jesus as Kamsa  
 tries to destroy Krishna (168).

" Unrighteous Herod  
 Senses the danger.  
 He trembles with fear.  
 Out went the cruel decree  
 That all infant boys must die." (15)

There are so many other incidents where Jesus who symbolises  
 good, fights against evil like, the Pharasees, temptations by

Satan (169, 170, 171), Pilate and finally death itself. In every Yakshagana there are many moral lessons. Here, the moral teachings are crystallised in the Sermon on the Mount.

"The teacher went up the mountains  
 Followed by thousands who sought in Him  
 The perfect model of man,  
 'you who are poor,  
 You who bear sadness and pain  
 Yours are the riches of the spirit.  
 You who yearn for faith as you toil on this earth  
 You will be satisfied.  
 You who love mercy belong to the kingdom of God.  
 Do not make enemies  
 Work for the good of all men  
 If one smite you on one cheek  
 Be patient and do not strike back;  
 Do not deal blow for blow.  
 Look well within , and by that light  
 See deep into your heart-refrain from all envy  
 For we all come to dust.  
 Do not steal, do not kill.  
 Speak no falsehood.

Do not look with longing on what is not yours.

Take care of old parents,

Look upon all women

As you would on a mother." (16)

The final victory of the good over evil in the form of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, a victory over death, sin, darkness, falsehood is brought out clearly.

"As they were mourning the figured appeared-

The Gracious One stood among them." (17)

The story is ended by the ascending of Jesus into heaven. At the conclusion of the Mahachetana Kristha Mahatme a beautiful Mangalam is sung in praise of Jesus:

"Blessed be the Son of God.

Blessed be the Saviour of men,

Praise full of bliss be upon our blessed Christ

Blessed be the Lord of Dharma,

Sing praises to One who ascended in glory

As the disciples gazed on him

Blessing on His name." (18)

AN ANALYSIS OF YAKSHAGANISED CHRIST IN MAHACHETANA KRISTHA

MAHATME:

" The greatness of this Prasanga (Mahachetana Kristha Mahatme) is that, while watching , one can't differentiate it from the traditional Yakshagana Bayalata."<sup>(19)</sup> This was one of the reviews that appeared in one of the local papers. The critic writing this meant that inspite of a novel theme the performance completely kept to the traditional Yakshagana format and technical aspects. This is the most encouraging and positive aspect of this novel venture that the author was capable of comprehending and understanding the story of Christ in the Yakshagana style.

Dr.Joachim Wietzke says that, "the author has not shrunk from the difficult task to present a Yakshaganised Christ." The proof for this can also be seen in the many expressions used by the author adopted from the Indian mythology which fit in very well with the theme, situation and the plot of the story.

Satan after his defeat against the Messiah comments on Him:

'This is the Messiah who has ruined all our designs  
Like Yama, the terrible destroyer.'

While attempting to tempt Jesus Satan tells him:

' Jesus , in vain you live in your austere cave  
The life of a Sanyasi'.

Again the evil one flatters Jesus to get Him into his designs saying:

' You threw me out from heaven  
As strong as Bhima. '

In the mangalam Jesus is addressed as 'The Lord of Dharma'. Certain customs and mannerisms are typically of Indian origin, i.e. in the Jewish society it is usually the father who gives the blessing to the son before he sets out for any important mission or task. But in Mahachetana Kristha Mahatme we find Jesus receives the blessings of his mother before he starts his salvific mission.

"And now must he begin his task  
of the world's salvation.  
He must leave his own home  
to go into the world  
And for this he received his mother's blessing."

And again , there is another verse from the sermon on the Mount where Jesus preaches:

'Look upon all women

As you would on a mother .'

This is definitely the influence of the native culture where mother is treated with great honour and respect and occupies a prominent place in the family. In a land where the role of the mother goddess is stressed and where at times God is addressed as the Mother.

QUESTIONS RELATING THE CONTENT AND THE SCOPE OF THE TEXT:

Commenting on the Mahuchetana Kristha Mahatme Ghri.M. Prabhakara Joshy (20) says, " it would be fair to say that the author is aware of the need to adapt the story to Yakshagana. He has made an attempt to 'Yakshaganise' the theme. The inclusion of the battle between Satan and Messiah is an instance of such an attempt." However, he points out that, " Some of the situations that could be very well exploited to create dramatic effect, have been treated with little care and planning. The character of Herod, (a parallel to Kamsa in the story of Krishna) the meaning of John and Jesus, the confrontation between Jesus and Satan, the trial of Jesus by Pilate could be beautifully depicted."

Mr.David Jackson says that 'there is something very important left out in the script. Exactly how Jesus sets the

people free is almost passed over. There is very little treatment of the good deeds and teaching of Jesus, or his ongoing and progressively more hostile interaction with the political and religious authorities. ....And in his condemnation and trial there is only a superficial understanding involving only 'religious' issues, and totally ignoring the very real social/political/ economic orientation of Jesus' message." (21) Dr.F.Muliyil tells that 'the omission of the scenes of the resurrection is conspicuous.' (22)

But the birth of every new idea is received with a critical outlook. It is evaluated with the purpose of attaining a greater degree of perfection. This has happened with regard to the evaluation of the text- Mahachetana Kristha Mahatme. The author has used his own imagination in selecting the plots and scenes for the continuity and development of the story. So, some incidents lose force and others gain importance and prominence in a given Yakshagana Prasanga. However, the above scholars have given valuable suggestions and comments for the improvement of the text- Mahachetana Kristha Mahatme.

#### THEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS:

When an alien Prasanga (theme) is brought into Yakshagana here, Mahachetana Kristha Mahatme from Christianity, certain

controversies and theological questions are bound to arise. So, in this connection quite a few questions are raised by Mr. David Jackson, a Christian theologian on the Yakshagana Prasanga, Mahachetana Kristha Mahatme. Though he likes the idea of 'Christian Yakshagana' and points out 'the lack of truly Indian Christianity is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, failings of the Indian Church', he has certain critical observations to make. According to him, 'Hindu/Buddhist influences abound in the script. Jesus is presented in a very Hindu / Buddhist, but not un-Christian perspective. When it is said of Jesus: 'He comes to break the chains that bind us ' is unlike Gautama who came to free us from ourselves and to break the twelve-fold chain of causation? Or is it so very different from Krishna who whenever righteousness declines, incarnated himself to teach and lead men? Many Christians may object , but perhaps we can say that at least this much is true. The Buddha-like character of Jesus is further pointed to by such expressions as 'heroic strength', 'Glorious One', 'The one who gives light'. The author has no hesitation in using the title 'Lord of Dharma' for Jesus- a title normally reserved for figures such as Gautama Buddha or Krishna. Of course, the author was not intending a deliberate comparison with the holy men of Hinduism." .....

Another strong Hindu/Buddhist influence is the emphasis on 'truth' which is of course not un-Christian, but 'Truth' , here is seen in a decidedly gnostic way..... The passages including the teaching of Jesus- notably the Sermon on the Mount- show perhaps too great a tendency to 'Hinduize Jesus..... With the drama starting in heaven, coming down to earth, and ending again in heaven, the main importance is given to heaven, and what happens in this world is merely a reflection of what happens in heaven. This is a very gnostic view. The danger is not in gnosticism as such, but in too great a gnosticism which leads to an unworldly dualism. And Gospel of Jesus is decidedly non-dualistic and this-worldly. For Christians to try to present the world as a mere shadow of the 'real' world 'up there' or 'out there' is unscriptural. And the 'good news' of the Gospel is neither 'good' nor 'news' to the Hindu if this world is devalued."

As an answer to these theological issues Shri.Prabhakara Joshy says that " the attempts at 'indianising' Christ have become unacceptable to the theologian in Mr.Jackson. At one point he has rightly said: 'lack of truly Indian Christianity is one of the greatest, if not the greatest failing of Indian Church' . At the same time, he criticised the work to be bearing

Hindu-Buddhist influence, which poses a potential danger according to him . Here is a contradiction of what he pleaded for first. When an alien theme is Indianised, it is bound to come under Hindu influence. There is no escape from this reality. .... If at all Christ has to be brought to the Yakshagana stage, he has to be not only Indianised, but 'Yakshaganised' too. Then he will come out in a different form and colour, not conforming to the principles of Christian theology. He may become unacceptable to many Christians in his new costume. But we cannot help such a situation. Needs of art cannot be sacrificed to meet requirement."

According to Dr.F.Muliyil, " we need not look for any particular theological scheme. The author chooses incidents which best suit the frame work of Yakshagana. The fourth Evangelist stretches the story back to the beginning of creation and the ascension is the resolution of the story in the realm of the spirit, which interpenetrates human life and goes beyond human history. Yakshagana deals with gods and men and is a form in which perception of the supernatural realm may best be conveyed. The Yaksha is a being that belongs to the realm that encircles man and the world of nature. The conflict between good and evil begins in the realms above and descends to the earth. It is to the credit of the author that

he is fully conscious of the significance of this conflict. Though Christians may feel that he has not dealt adequately with the cross, it is clear that the real battle with the powers of evil is fought not on the cross but in the agony in the garden. St. Paul does refer to a conflict within the spirit of Christ, when he speaks of our warfare being not with flesh and blood but with principalities and powers. The author sets the story in the wider context of the world of nature and human history. There is actually no dualism involved. The question of appearance and reality does not arise at all. Human history itself becomes a parable of the conflict."

Indian art-forms primarily are for experiencing, comprehending and understanding the Divine truths and message. This, in turn results in preaching or sharing that experience with others. Here, beauty is unfolded and revelation is attained. This process takes place in the depth of man's consciousness and faith-experience. So, when Christ and his message is experienced in and through Yakshagana and once an attempt is made to understand Him, certain changes are bound to take place in the process of this new development and growth both in the sphere of art and Religion. If this doesn't take place and Yakshagana is used to preach Christ- the result will be a 'Yakshagana coated Christ' and not 'Yakshaganised Christ'. Considering

these aspects of faith and art in reference to Yakshagana and Christ, one can't but admit that the author of 'Mahachetana Kristha Mahatme' is true to both Christian Theology and the art-form, Yakshagana Bayalata.

#### GENERAL OBSERVATIONS:

The performance of the Prasanga, 'Mahachetana Kristha Mahatme' is truly Christian in content and 'Yakshagana Bayalata' in form and style. However, a few observations and suggestions are made on various aspects of the performance.

The performance upholds the various aspects of the Abhinaya ( modes of representation) as per the Yakshagana tradition and treatises. However, in the aspect of Ahārya Abhinaya (Costume and decor) one could notice that Jesus is not redeemed from the Jewish Cultural habit: the dress. He wears a gown-like costume whereas Mary is in Indian Saree(167). Here , there is scope for designing and developing a costume that is suitable for 'Yakshaganised Christ'. A certain symbolic costume and colour be also designed and used for Mary, Joseph and others too. But more particularly for Jesus.

In the Angika Abhinaya, hastās( hand gestures) especially the Dēva Hastās (gestures for gods) could be innovated to

suit the different personalities of the Bible. In Yakshagana<sup>14</sup> the hasta-language is not much developed, may be because Nritya (While Bhagavata sings the dancer expresses the same in gestures and facial expression) is followed by a dialogue in extempore. But at the same time the hastas are used. So, in Mahachetana Kristha Mahatme hastas for the personalities of the Bible can be developed according to the cannons of the Yakshagana and the Christian theology.

It is not enough to have just one Prasanga on the Bible and expect that it would build up an audience that is conscious and interested in the Bible themes in Yakshagana both among the Hindus and Christians. Several Prasangas have to be written so that a truly Yakshaganised Bible is created and growth of the Church takes place in India. There is ample scope for the development of the Christian stories for the Yakshagana performances. This will be clear when one studies the dance-drama traditions of the Christians in the region of Palghat and Cochin (Kerala). For particulars, reference should be made to the chapter on the dance-forms of the Christians in Kerala.

During the interview the author of the Mahachetana Kristha Mahatme, Shri.Muliya Keshavayya himself admitted that the lack of knowledge of the Bible on the part of the performers

is a real handicap which could limit the success of the performance. So far, the performers in the Mahachetana Kristha Mahatme are all Hindu artistes and much of their knowledge of Christianity or the Bible is limited. Here , the artiste may have his limitations in the field of Satvika Abhinaya . To solve this riddle one could suggest that many Christians should learn traditional Yakshagana and after which they should be able to do justice to the Satvika Abhinaya which is an important component of the said dance-form. Also as Shri Muliya Keshavayya himself suggests that the non-Christian artistes should enrich their knowledge on the Bible to raise the standard of the performance and be able to give their best to the role they play.

In the last two years the number of the performances have come down considerably. This is mainly because of the reasons cited above and a lack of positive and active encouragement and participation by the Christians, especially the Church authorities. This has to be taken seriously. The Christians should feel that 'Yakshagana' is also the heritage of their region and they have a right for it and an obligation to promote it. As already said elsewhere that Christians should take pains to learn and master the art and get actively involved in it.

Another main problem is of the finance and sponsorship of the art. In this region practically all the 'Melas' (troupes) of the Yakshagana are formed and sponsored by a temple or a trust which actively takes part in the managerial and financial matters of the 'Melas'. In Uttara and Dakshina Kannada there are two Catholic dioceses and other Christian denominations. But they have never thought of forming and sponsoring a Yakshagana 'Mela' even after the successful experiment of Mahachetana Kristha Mahatme. Thousands of rupees are spent and hundreds of peoples services are utilised for many charitable and social projects, they also have a Communication Centre in Mangalore which is interested mainly in bringing out cassette tapes which are highly influenced by the western music. It is high time that responsible people take steps to form a Yakshagana troupe (Mela) and try to encourage and participate in the process of promoting the art-form and 'Yakshaganised Christ' to the highest degree of perfection.

Finally, "One can only be grateful to a Hindu for placing Christ within the context of the folk culture of our land , a faint image of the Indian Christ. It is only when the Indian Christian community reflects in its life together both the cross and the resurrection that the ineffable can be transmitted into art. Since the Christian religion found a home in India

before it went to the West, we are grateful that a beginning has been made." (23) Yes, a baby is born and it is left to the Christians of this region and the Yakshagana artistes to nurture it or throw it out.

b) BURRAKATHA OF ANDHRA PRADESH

Burraakatha is one of the most popular traditional art forms of Andhra Pradesh and has gained immense popularity in recent times. It is widely used for communication and propaganda purposes. Scholars are of the opinion that Burraakatha has evolved mainly from Yakshagana. (24) However, the form of present day Burraakatha has evolved mainly from Jangam katha (25) (the Saivite minstrels who gave religious instructions in the form of story-telling). A troupe of Burraakatha " generally consists of three persons (172) but occasionally some modern artists introduced harmonium, tabla and other musical instruments in the orchestra and, in this way, increase the strenght of the troupe. The paraphernalia of a typical Burraakatha show include earthen and / or metal drums called dakki for the two side performers, a tanbura (173) and two metal rings for the principal performer and dancing bells for all three. The costumes consists of long coloured kurtas,

turbans for the head and long coloured handkerchiefs." (26)

The main performer is called Kathakudu who takes his position in the centre and is expected to depict rasas in his performance. The person to his right is called Rajkiya who brings in contemporary political and social problems. The person on the left of the Kathakudu is called Hāsyam who provides comic relief to the audience. The performance begins with a devotional song in praise of the Gods and continues with the katha or story(theme) and is concluded with Mangalārathi. The performance begins late in the evening and go on till the midnight which is mostly conducted in the open-air.

#### CHRISTIAN THEMES IN BURRAKATHA:

A survey conducted by Kajal Kumar Das in 1979-80 shows that nearly 10% of the Burrakatha artists are Christians. Among the 25 most popular mythological Burrakathas he found, three were on Christian themes, they are- Samson and Daliliah, Ten Commandments and Yesu Kristhu Janmam . According to him there is hardly any distinction in terms of religion and caste. Long ago, Burrakatha had ceased to be a religious art and entered the domain of secularism.<sup>(27)</sup> The technique used and

the mode of presentation of the Burrakathas on Christian themes exactly follows the traditional form.

Sadu Thomas Venkata Subhaiah is considered to be the originator of the Christian form of Burrakatha in Andhra Pradesh. For this reason he is known as 'Andhra Christian Burrakatha Pithamaha' (father of Andhra Christian Burrakatha). Since 1942 he has been giving public performances in Burrakatha. It was in 1947 that he started his troupe 'Netaji Burrakatha Dalam' and on the 7th May 1950 he gave his first Burrakatha performance on a Christian theme. The story was called 'Balidānam' (Sacrifice). Since then he has been regularly giving performances in Burrakatha on Christian themes besides the traditional episodes. According to Sadu Thomas Venkata Subhaiah, Bishop Mummadi Ignatius of Guntur, Mr. Thomas Naidu, Fr. S. Thomas and institutions like Amruthavani and several others have encouraged and supported him. An average of 25 performances are given per year. So far he claims to have given over 1000 shows on Christian themes.

Burrakatha performances are usually conducted on the occasion of the village church-feast, diocesan feasts, blessing of a new chapel etc. At present this art is also used for giving religious instructions and proclamation of the Gospel.

80% of the audience consists of rural and 20% urban. Narra Venkata Narayana from Guntur is another exponent of this art form. There are many amateurs and semi-professional groups who give performances on Christian themes regularly in different parts of Andhra Pradesh. Dappukatha (drum-story) episode by one man with the small drum is also performed in the same way in many regions in Andhra.

In the recent years, many Burrakathas are written by many artists. A few very popular ones are Karunāmāyudu (by Sadu Thomas Venkata Subhaiah) Parivarthana Natika, Murchum Jeyudu, Chraisthava Ganamala, Jnana Sundari, Yosepu Charitra, Esther etc. The performance of Burrakatha attracts many people with no restrictions of caste and creed. This is because the entertainment and social aspect is more pronounced in these performances than the religious aspect, though the theme may be chosen or based on a particular religion.

#### c) CHRISTIAN THEMES IN KATHAKALI

Kathakali is one of the major classical dance forms of India from Kerala. It is very interesting to note that in Kathakali too there are quite a few episodes written and performed on Christian themes by the Hindu artistes. In 1952 O.K.C. Narayana Namboodiri wrote Snāpaka caritam which was

performed in Delhi, Trichur and other places. Sorabum Rustuvum was written by Kalamandalam Kesavan in 1967. Abraminte Bali written by Azhumattur Rajaraja Varma and was published in 1930. Besides Davidu Vijayam by Sordar K.M. Panikker, Oliver Vijayam by Mahakavi Kattakkayam, Magdalēna Maria by T.M.B. Nadungadi, Sristi by Sukumaran were all written in the recent past and were performed in many places, especially in Delhi, Trichur, Ernakulam and other parts of Kerala.

d) CHRISTIAN THEMES IN THE NORTH INDIAN ADIVASI DANCES:

In the North an interesting feature can be observed in the dances of the Adivasi Christians. The Adivasis who got converted to Christianity have preserved and kept up their traditional dances together with their tunes. However, new lyrics have been composed based on Christian themes to suit these different dances and to the already existing tunes. This phenomenon is found throughout the North like Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Orissa etc. For example, the Christian Adivasis of Santhal Parganas, District of Bihar have four main types of folk-dances in practice;-

(i) Don Enec: This dance is performed during the marriage ceremony. Men and women both take part in this dance. On the

previous day of the marriage ceremony a grand Pandal is erected, the Christian religious symbol, the Cross is ceremoniously placed on a raised platform in the centre of the Pandal. The Dance starts after 8.00 p.m. and goes on throughout the night (174). This is called MANDWA JAGAVO, awakening of the Pandal. On the second night the marriage ceremony proper takes place and on the third night again there will be dance. The lyrics for this dance are very appropriate which can be observed in the following example.

" Hopon babu bapla re do, Probhu Jisu holai neotayea  
Beriget atakinai chamda, bhoratakinai mandwa, Sahaikinae  
juri-pari  
Sarjom dare cetan re, Mala potam in tukawakat  
Okoe nel hor re menak'kin, Probhu Jisu kin tangeyedekan."

(For the marriage of our youngest we will also invite Jesus . He will come and sit under the marriage canopy and bless the pair for a good and happy life).

(ii) Lagre Enec:

This dance is performed only by the bachelors before the marriage season. The dancers come in beautiful and colourful local dresses. The mode of dance is very vigorous and forceful. The lyrics are mostly love songs based on the moral stories

of the New and Old Testaments.

"Raskak pe jaoge koejoripe jaoge  
Sanam okte sanam gharie sarhaoepe  
Entet' ape lagit' Jisu Masire  
Isorak' mone do noa kange "

(Always be happy, always be prayerful, Everytime, every moment praise Him, because in Jesus Christ God wants you to be happy).

(iii) Sohrae Enec:

This is a harvest festival dance done by both men and women (175, 176). It is slow in tempo and very graceful. It is a thanksgiving dance. The lyrics are appropriate and meaningful. i.e.

" Probhu Isor duk'lar kodo acel-pacel dhontako,  
Suluk nirai garreko orhe sercnkan  
Gota dharti ,gota dharti Isor bhorsage  
Manewa bogey tehen Isor umulre".

(Those who love God lack nothing, They live in the house of plenty. Because the whole of this earth belongs to Him. And man lives happily only in the shadow of God).

(iv) Baha Ehec:

This is a dance of the unmarried boys and girls. This is performed on the fullmoon night after the harvest. The lyrics are very romantic with a touch of moral lessons i.e.

" Ale bagwan re, barea gulab baha bahawakan  
Delari Calak' sit' kate seet'relari sajaoa  
Raja kuri leka lari jhak jhakaok'a."

(In my garden there are two rose flowers, let's go and pluck them and put them on our hair and we will look better than any princess.)

There are 5-6 melodies for each of the dances mentioned above. The musical instruments used are drums, violins, kurtal (cymbals) and flute. The choreographic patterns could be seen in one line (177), many lines, in a single circle or in many circles one outside the other. The language used by these people is Santhali. The dances are spontaneous expressions of these simple people and no formal training is given. There is no difference in the technique with regard to the Christian and other Adivasi dances, however, the lyrics are different.

e) CHRISTIAN THEMES IN DONDO-NĀTO:

Dondo-Nāto is a unique and rare kind of dance-drama prevalent in the Ganjam District of Orissa. The Hindus must

have practised this art-form for centuries, but the dance-dramas among the Christians on Bible themes came into existence only in the 1930s and 40s. However, systematic beginning of the Christian version of Dondo-Nāto was started at Goudogotha in the year 1946 when Fr. Cuemes was the parish priest of the place. Some of the educated of Goudogotho Parish felt that some Christian themes could also be shown to the people in the form of 'Dondo-Nāto'. The Parish Priest approved of the idea. One of the young teachers called Richard Nayak wrote the script. Mr. Marcel Sabhasundar, a senior teacher modified it a little, and the script was approved. The final and the complete script was written in the late 1946. The plot of the dance-drama is the life of a young unbeliever who becomes Christian and gives his life to defend his faith. Golayath Bodho (slaying of Goliath) and Sadhu Agapit are the most popular Dondo-Nātos of recent times.

Nāto-Guru (dance teacher) of the village trains the dance troupe. The performers are only men, female roles are enacted by the young boys. The language used is Oriya. It is performed at any time of the year. The occasions for the performance are many, it is performed on the parish-feast of a village church, on the Patron Saint's day of a particular church and on religious festivals. It is also performed on the invitation

of a rich man who sponsors the show for fulfilling a vow or asking for a favour from God. The costumes and make-up are in accordance with the local customs and dress. They use folk-music with Dholak, harmonium, cymbal and trumpets as the accompaniments. For lighting they have petromaxes.

#### MANCHA (THE STAGE)

Very surprisingly they have a very peculiar stage set up. The stage is in the shape of a Stair. Several wooden planks are used to erect the stage. A small portion of the ground in front of the stage is also used for dancing and acting. They act and dance on all the platforms of the stairlike stage, at times they jump from the top to the acting ground in front of the stage. The whole stage is covered with Chamundia(pandal), bamboos are tied and over it they spread green leaves. The area of performance is separated from the orchestra and the audience by tying ropes around the acting area. The orchestra sits on to the right side of the stage close to the dividing ropes which is used to keep the people away from the acting area.

#### THE MODE OF PERFORMANCE:

It can be divided into two parts, the Purvangam Vidhi , the rituals before the performance and the actual performance.

On the day of the performance the whole troupe goes to the house of the person who has invited them at mid-day, the host welcomes them. Then the performing troupe goes round the street carrying a statue of Mother Mary (178,179,180). Finally, the statue is brought back to the house of the host and is installed on the altar. Kneeling down they all venerate and pray to Mother Mary. This is followed by a dance by the Chōdia, the main dancer. Then the troupe is given rice, vegetables etc. for cooking their own food. Together with this the host offers them personally the puffed-up rice. By eating the puffed-up rice and drinking water they break their fast, according to the customs every troupe member has to fast upto this ceremony.

The actual performance starts at about 10.00 O'clock at night (181,182). Now, the actors and dancers go around the village carrying the statue of Mother Mary and finally place it on a raised platform in the front right side of the stage. They venerate the statue with flowers, agarbatti, candles etc. A prayer is sung to Mary and to which the young boys dance. After this begins the proper story of the performance. The buffoon (Duāri) appears here and there and makes fun of everything and everybody around. Whenever a character is to enter the stage the director whistles. The main singer guides the whole show. Both singing and dialogues are used. From

here the style of performance is similar to that of Yakshagana. However, in Dondo-Nāto the dialogues are not spontaneous but pre-written. At dawn the performance is ended with a thanksgiving dance performed by the Chōdia , the main dancer. After this the sponsor offers in a plate whatever money he has promised to give and also gives food-stuff to all those who had taken part in the dance-drama.

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21. Shri.David Jackson is an Australian national who spent a year of his theological studies at the Tamilnadu Theological Seminary , Madurai.
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