

# SITUATING MUGHAL TAMASHA- IN THE FOLK THEATRES OF MEDIEVAL INDIA- A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL STUDY

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## Abstract:

Odisha was annexed to the Mughal Empire in 1592 A.D. but, it remained under the Bengal Subah till the death of Akbar. During the reign of Jahangir Odisha became a separate *subah* (province). Odisha remained under the Mughal administration till 1751 i.e. till the Maratha conquest of Odisha. As a part and parcel of Mughal Empire, Islamic culture and traditions entered into Odisha. Mughal Tamasha was a fascinating and popular folk theatre of Odisha from 17<sup>th</sup> century till date. *Tamasha* means satirical and Mughal means related to Mughal period. Thus Mughal Tamasha means a satirical play on Mughals. It is a multilingual folk theatre of Odisha. It has songs and dialogues in Persian, Hindi, Urdu, Odia and Bengali.

The term Mughal Tamasha, has been derived from the two words i.e. *Mughal*-a ruling dynasty and *Tamasha* which means fun, satire or entertainment.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Mughal Tamasha was a colourful, humorous a satirical folk play based on the governance and society of Odisha. It occupies an important chapter in the literary and cultural history of Odisha since the last two hundred years. H.K.Mahatab states, "Mughal Tamasha is the root of all folk yatra in Orissa".<sup>2</sup> Jagannath Ballava is of the opinion that, "Mughal Tamasha is performed in open-air-theatre for the promotion of communal harmony". T.Mishra holding the parallel view says that, "Mughal Tamasha was the progenitor of the popular form of Odia folk drama or yatra, which was profusely reformed later on by Vaishnava Pani, the accomplished folk dramatist of Odisha".<sup>3</sup> It is believed that due to similarities in Mughal Tamasha and Yatra they hold such type of view.

In Mughal Tamasha Chorus songs are sung in tune with Violin, Pakhauj and Cymbals (Gini) in praise of Lord Siva. Generally the stage of this play was open in front of Siva temple. Similarly Yatra is staged with the group dance in tune with the playing of musical instruments like harmonium, clarinet, pakhauj or *dubbi, tabala* and cymbal etc. Like the Mirza Sahib of Mughal Tamasha, the Raja enquires about the condition of the particular region in the presence of his minister. The *Faraswala* or the *Jhadudar* of Mughal Tamasha creates humour before entering into the stage and with the entry of Mirza Sahib the actual concert begins. P.C.Mohanty in his book, *Odiya Jatra O Loka Nataka*, has referred the villagers of Mangalpur in Balasore district has maintained the Mughal Tamasha for a long time. From the book of poet Krishna Dash it is revealed that there were several Mughal Tamashas like Sudama Bipra Tamasha, Kalidasanka Tamasha, Brahma, Bishnu, Maheswara Tamasha. However, all the Tamashas were performed during Jhulana Jatra or flower plucking festivals.<sup>4</sup>

The play has comical narration full of entertainment and satires. It is a light folk play written in a sarcastic way giving a detail picture of the social condition during the last phase of Mughal rule in Odisha. When disintegration started in the Mughal administration and the Mughal officers became corrupt, addicted to intoxicants causing chaos and confusion in the state machinery this play reflects their temperament and attitude in the form of satires and comics.<sup>5</sup>

## The Author of Mughal Tamasha:

Bansi Ballava Goswami was the author of the Mughal Tamasha. But, very little information is available about his life. It is said that though he was illiterate but by the grace of Hatanagar Siva, he became exceptionally a prolific writer like the great poet Kali Das who was originally illiterate and became a great poet by the grace of Goddess Kali. Such glorified stories can hardly be verified. However, there is no denying that, Bansi Ballav Goswami had acquired proficiency in the language of Parsi, Bengali, Odia, Hindi and Sanskrit. We do not have such instances of exceptional poet who commanded proficiency in various above languages.<sup>6</sup>

Though Bansi Ballav Goswami was the author, in the course of time Prtilal of Santhia Nilakanthapur, Jagabandhu Mishra and Jagannath Chakrabarty of Banka and Lala Giridhari of Purana Bazar had made some changes in the original work of Tamasha. Bansi Ballava Goswami was a Bengali Brahmin of Village Sangat of Bhadrak. His father Satyanarayan or Ramakrushna Goswami was a learned pandit. His mother was Satyabati or Annapurna Devi. He was born in 1728 CE or in 1135 sal. But this seems doubtful in view of the fact that there is mention of the name Calcutta and jute mill in the Tamasha. Calcutta became capital of British India in 1773 CE and known since then. So, it is doubtful whether, Bansi Ballava flourished about the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century CE, or in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century CE.

But, credit goes to Bansi Ballava Goswami for his creation of original dramatic form, in fact, it was the first milestone in the gradual development of modern Odia play. The satirical songs and dialogues were written in different languages. Noteworthy to say that, Bansi Ballava displayed his talent in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the poets of Odisha could not dare to go against the traditional path of metaphorical poetry. The portrayal of realistic picture of his contemporary society certainly indicates the modern outlook of Bansi Ballava, which is an exceptional departure from the literary practice of 18<sup>th</sup> century CE.

It is presumed that, Mughal Tamasha was originated during the early part of 18<sup>th</sup> century when Marathas were ruling over Odisha. Because this was the time of Hindu supremacy and people fearlessly criticised and satirised the earlier Muslim ruler who were tyrannical. Kabi Bansiballava Goswami wrote a number of Tamasha such as Bhil Tamasha, Radha-Krishna Tamasha, Mughal Tamasha. Out of all the Tamashas, the Mughal Tamasha is in living tradition. Therefore the script of this play could be collected and printed by Dr. Krishna Chandra Behera.<sup>7</sup>

It is said that Bansiballav, wrote two different Tamashas. One Badshahi Mughal Tamasha and other Saudagari Mughal Tamasha but the former is only being performed today. The tradition of second has been completely lost.

## Characters of the Tamasha:

There is no definite or fixed plot of Mughal Tamasha. Most of the characters are un-related. They are mostly the servants (people who render personal services) to the rulers and the administrators. They are *Vetiwala* (water man), *Jhadudar* (sweeper), *Farash* (person arranging the bed), *Hukawala* (person who arranging huka for smoking), *Pankhawala* (person who fans), *Bhat* (person who recited praises), *Nanakshai* (followers of gurunanak), *Daptari* (peon), *Khansama* (cook), *Zamindari* (Landlord), *Gumasta* (Manager of the land lord), *Bhandari* (barbers), *Dodhwali* (Milkmaid) etc. All these characters are summoned to the stage one by one by the chopdar as desired by the Mirza, the Mughal administrator. All of them sing songs to introduce themselves and their profession. Family life is also delineated. Most of the songs are the satirical and arouses humour. While singing the songs, they also indulge in mild dancing and gesticulations.<sup>8</sup>

After the performance, each ask for *Bakshish* (gift) from the Mirza and while leaving ask the leader of the Orchestra what is going on here? He says the festival of Shiva is being celebrated then he starts singing in praise of Shiva and then departs.

The play starts with a loud music with *Shanai*, *Dhol* and *Jodi-Nagara*. The music continues for hours together to attract the people. When the audience settles down the member of Orchestra come to the stage and occupy their seats, just in front of the stage. After the opening Orchestra music a long narrative song is sung in chorus in praises of Lord Shiva. Thereafter the *chopdar* (body guard) enters the stage shouting '*Dabe Kahade Ho*' (stand silently), '*Hat Khade Ho*' (stand at a distance), this indicates the coming of the Mirza, the Mughal administrator. Then they announce the arrival of Mirza who comes out from a beautifully decorated palanquine. There after he is led to the throne placed in a raised platform. The Mirza takes his seat majestically and *chopdar* salutes him. Then the other characters are summoned one by one and sing as well as dance.<sup>9</sup>

The play continues with the character coming to the stage one by one. Enough humour and satire is provided through dialogues. The last and most interesting character of the play is *Dudhwali*, the milk-maid (the only female character in the play). It is played by a male person. With amorous movements, the milk maid sings, shows her beauty, with youthful gesture, to her relations and persons of social circles. The Mirza infatuated with her beauty expresses his love for her. The milk maid objects as she tells him that she is married and of Hindu religion. But the Mirza insists and allures her with promises of good fortune. But the milkmaid refuses all love and allurement and finally leaves the stage. The Mirza gets disappointed and here end the play.<sup>10</sup>

Through operatic in character, musical and songs predominant the whole performance. It is farcical, satirical and provides pure entertainment to the village people. But, the irony of the fate is that this folk-theatre, which provided recreation, entertainment and subsistence to thousand and thousands of the rural people and spread the ideas of universal brotherhood, communal harmony is declining fast because of the onslaught of radio, cinema and T.V and lack of patronage.

## References:

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