

ASHTANAYIKA IN THE POETRY OF SOORDAS

Indian classical art forms are essentially spiritual in nature and thus provide a sacred platform for every individual. From ages of yore, Indian traditions have boasted of arts that directly relate to the supreme. Each and every aspect of the visual arts of India is fundamentally a spiritual concept and therefore our art forms are known to elevate the spectators and performers alike.

When it comes to Classical dance, the dancer is a devotee seeking the association of the supreme. Various aspects of the dance represent the yearning of the soul for the supreme soul. The dancer symbolizes a female who is eternally related to her beloved, the Lord. She displays numerous situations of a heroine in relation to her lover. In these different situations, different types of heroines are depicted. These heroines have been classified into eight types by the great sage Bharata muni in his Natya Shastra and the combination of these heroines or nayikas altogether is known as ashtanayika.

Ashtanayika is an exhaustive topic in dance and music. From composers to singers and dancers, ashtanayika has been explored by one and all. This work focuses on the poetry of Soordas ji and highlights on his depictions of ashtanayika through his compositions. Each nayika is explained as in the Natya Shastra and extrapolated using a composition of this great saint, composer and musician.

Vasakasajja Nayika

The Natya Shastra describes the above nayika as follows:

*uchite vaasake yaa tu rati sambhoga lalasa
mandanam kurute hrishta saa vai vaasakasajjita* (24:212)

‘The lady who embellishes herself with various jewels and adornments and eagerly waits for her beloved’s arrival with happiness is known as a vaasakasajjita nayika.’

This nayika is prepared to receive her beloved at any moment. During the waiting period, she adorns herself with various garments, jewels, perfumes

and flowers. She continuously stares on the pathway expecting the arrival of her Lord.

Inferring this bhava of a heroine, Soordas ji describes Sri Radhika:

*jhoomak saree tan gore ho
jagmag rahyo jarai ko teeko, chhavi ke utthati jhakore ho
ratna jatita ke subhag taryona, manahu jati rabi bhore ho
dulari kantth nirakhi piya ika-taka, drig bhari rahe chakore ho
soordas prabhu tumhare milan ko, reejhi reejhi trina tore ho*

The above composition describes the adornments of Sri Radha as she is ready to welcome Govinda. The poet sings:

‘On her fair complexioned body, the garments look very appealing. Her forehead mark and other decorations enhance her beauty. She waits under an umbrella studded with jewels and appears like a glowing sun among the clouds. When she saw her beloved approaching, her eyes stared without a blink like the chakora bird looking at the full moon. Soordas happily sings of the unison of Sri Radhika with Sri Krishna after a long wait.’

As per a vasakasajja nayika, in the above composition, Sri Radha is anxiously and happily waiting for Sri Krishna. The lines of the poem describe her various adornments thus portray a typical vasakasajjita nayika.

Virahotkanthita Nayika

A virahotkanthita nayika has the following characteristics:

*aneka kaarya vyaasangaad yasyaa naagachhati priyah
tadanaagata dukhaartaa virahotkanthitaa tu saa* (24:213)

‘A virahotkanthita nayika is at utmost sorrow, lamenting the un-arrival of her beloved who could not come due to being engaged in other activities.’

Virahotkanthita literally means, overwhelmed due to separation. This nayika is going through separation from her beloved who is not able to reach to her due to some other important duties. She suffers alone and is very disturbed; everything around her is seen in the perspective of separation.

Soordas ji has described the ultimate sorrow of the gopikas as they discuss their distress with Shri Uddhava who was sent by Shri Krishna from Mathura to Vrindavan. This composition touches the pinnacle of viraha whereby the gopis are overwhelmed with sadness and nothing other than the absence of their beloved occupies their mind.

*bin gopal bairan bhai kunje
tab ye lata lagati ati sheetal, ab bhai visham jwala ki punje
britha bahati jamuna khag bolat, britha kamal phoole ali gunje
pavan pani dhansar sanjeevani udadhi suta kiran bhanu bhai bhunje
he udho kahiyo priya madhav so, viraha karat kar maarat lunje
soordas prabhu ko mag jovat, akhiya bhi bairan jo khunje*

The anguished gopikas say:

‘Without Gopala, alas! These gardens have become enemies! Before, the breeze from the creepers was felt to be very soothing, but now, after His departure, it feels like sparks of burning fire! Indeed!! For what purpose does the river Yamuna flow anymore, why do the birds continue to chirp? The blossoming of the lotus and singing of the bees – all is useless without our beloved. Even the calming cool rays of the moonlight appear to burn us like the scorching heat of the sun. Oh Uddhava!! Please do tell our dear Madhava that his separation is striking on us like paralysis! Soordas says that waiting for the arrival of our Dear Lord, even these eyes have become enemies, tired of looking out for him!!’

In the above composition, there is no other thought other than the separation from Sri Krishna. There is no anger, no questioning or no anxiety. Every line is full of sorrow, where the gopikas simply put forth their condition in the absence of their beloved. A typical viraha situation.

Swadheena-bhartrika Nayikak8

*surataatirasair baddho yasyaa parshve tu nayakah
saandraa moda guna prapta bhavet swadheena bhartrikaa (24:214)*

‘Through her love and other characters, she who has attracted her beloved to be by her side at all times is known as swadheena bhartrika nayika.’

A swadheena bhartrika nayika always enjoys the association of her beloved who has imprinted his trust in her heart. He shows his love to her and remains subject to her will.

In the following composition, Soordas ji depicts a gopika describing the glories of Sri Radha as a swadheena bhartrika nayika.

*puni puni kahati hai brij naari
dhanya bada bhaagini radha, tere bas hai giridhaari
ek chhinu binu tumahi dekhe shyaam dharat na dheer
murali me tuva naam puni puni kahat hai bala veer
shyaam mani tai parakhi leeno mahaa chatur sujaan
soor ke prabhu prem hi bas kaun to sari aan*

The gopi praises Sri Radhika:

‘This lady of Vraj says again and again, Glories to you Radha! You are indeed very lucky as Giridhari himself is under your control. He becomes restless if he misses your glance even for a second! When he sounds his flute, only your name appears in its melody. You are very intelligent to have known him well. The lord of Soordas is forever won through love.’

The above lines depict the dependency of Sri Krishna on Sri Radha’s love and thus position her as a Swadheenabhartrika nayika. Soordas ji herewith describes the love that Sri Krishna holds for his beloved and thus places her as one who has controlled her lover to be under her love at all times.

Kalahantarita Nayika

The above heroine has been described by Bharata muni as follows:

*irshya kalaha nishkraanto yasyaa naagachhati priyah
saamarshavasha sampraaptaa kalahantaarita bhavet* (24:215)

‘She, whose lover is separated from her due to jealousy and quarrel, is known as kalahantarita nayika. She is sorrowful at her situation.’

This nayika feels remorseful due to separation from her beloved through quarrel. She is full of guilt and is deeply sorrowful as she laments her deeds and separation.

Soordas ji describes a gopika lamenting on the departure of Krishna.

*mai apne jiya garva kiyo
vai antarjami sab jaanat dekhat hi un charachi liyo
kaaso kahu milaave ko ab neku na dheerak sharat jiyo
vai to nitthur bhaye yaa budhi so ahankaar phal yahe diyo
soor shyaam prabhu vai bahu naayak mo si unaki koti siyo*

‘Alas! I did fill my heart with ego! After all, he is omnipresent and thus he recognized my false pride. Now, who shall I heed to for the re-union with my beloved? For, he has become hard-hearted on seeing my egoistic behavior. The Lord of Soordas is capable of enchanting many other women, there are so many like me who love him!’

This gopi has behaved in an egoistic manner with the Lord who has now left her side. She regrets her behavior and continuously laments. She is full of guilt due to the past and is worried about her future re-unison.

Khandita Nayika

A khandita nayika is described to have the following characteristics:

*vyaasangaaduchite yasyaa vaasake naagatah priyah
tadanaagama dukhaartaa khanditaa saa prakeertitaah* (24:216)

‘One whose beloved has not come to her and enjoys with another woman is known as a khandita. She is distressful and angry.’

This heroine feels offended as her beloved enjoys the company of another girl. She is angry at his faithlessness and is full of fear and distress.

Soordas ji depicts a young gopika who has observed Krishna enjoying with another gopi and she says:

mai hari so ho maan kiyo ri

*aavat dekhi aan banitaa rat dwaar kapaat diyo ri
apne hi kar saakari saari sandhihi sandhi siyo ri
jo dekhyo so sej sumoorati kaapyo risani hiyo ri
kahaa kaho kachhu kahat na aave taha govind biyo ri
soordas prabhu ati rati naagar chhal much amrit piyo ri*

'Yes, I displayed my anger at Hari! As I saw him coming forth, enjoying with another woman, I got up and closed the door, locking it with my own hands. When I saw his blissful state with the other one, my heart became filled with anger. What can I say; I have lost all my words! The Lord of Soordas is extremely intelligent and has eventually betrayed me!'

The above depicted gopika displays her anger at Sri Krishna by her various actions. She is enraged at the sight of him enjoying with another gopi and sorrowful at the same time.

Vipralabdha Nayika

Bharata muni describes the above heroine as follows:

*yasyaa doorim priyah preshya dattaa sanketameva vaa
naagata kaaraneneha vipralabdhaha tu saa bhavet* (24:217)

'Even after sending messages, she whose beloved does not show up is known as vipralabdha. She feels sad and humiliated.'

A vipralabdha is disappointed at her beloved for not showing up on time despite his knowledge about her distress in his absence. She has waited for long and is anxious, fearful and sad.

The gopikas pour out their sorrow of Krishna completely forgetting them despite being aware of their sorrowful condition.

*udho hari kaahe ke antarjaami
ajahu na aai milat ehi avasar avadhi batavat laami
apani chop aayi udi baitthat ali jyo ras ke kaami
tinako kaun parekho kije jo hai garuda ke gaami*

‘O Uddhava! What sort of omnipresent Lord is Hari?! He promised to return back but has not shown up even long after the decided time. He only comes to us like the bee visits the flowers, simply to quench its desires. How is it possible to understand the ways of Krishna?’

In the above composition, the gopis have waited very long for the return of Sri Krishna. He promised to them to return from Mathura in a few days and has not kept his promise. Being omnipresent, he is well aware of the distress that the gopis of Vrindavan are facing in His absence yet he does not show up, thus putting the gopis in the vipralabdha condition.

Proshita bhartrika Nayika

The proshitabhartrika has been illustrated to have the following characters:

*gurukaaryaantara vashaad yasyaa vai proshita priyah
praroodhaalakakeshaantaa bhavet proshita bhartrika (24:218)*

‘One whose husband has left to another place for an important business is known as proshita bhartrika. She is depicted as a lady who has abandoned her ornaments and left her hair loose.’

This nayika portrays immense grief, being neglectful of her appearance and deprived of energy. She is sleepless and constantly thinks of her beloved’s arrival.

As the gopikas mourn with pain remembering Sri Krishna, Soordas ji describes,

*akhiyaan hari darasan ki pyaasi
dekhyo chaahat kamala nainani ko nis din rahati udaasi
kesar tilaka motin ki maalaa brindaavan ke vaasi
aaye udho phiri gaye aangan daari gaye gal phaasi
soordas prabhu tumhare daras ko laihe karavat kaasi*

‘These eyes are thirsty for the sight of Sri Hari! They desperately want to see those lotus eyes of his, and thus they remain sorrowful day and night. My heart remembers his delightful form adorned with musk on the forehead and

pearls on his chest! He promised to return but has not shown up, his separation is becoming like death itself! Thus describes Soordas the status of the gopis who have been deprived of the sight of the Lord.'

The Gopis have been described in the above composition to be remembering Lord Krishna who has left for Mathura for the redemption of the Yadavas from Kansa. They know that he is busy in other works but yet continue to mourn as they cannot bear to be separated from him.

Abhisarika Nayika

The abhisarika nayika illustrates the following characters:

*hitvaa lajjaantu yaa shlishtthaa madena madanena vaa
abhisaarayate kaantam saa bhavedabhisarika (24:219)*

'Overwhelmed with love, she who leaves behind her family and shame to go and meet her beloved is to be considered as an abhisarika.'

When the gopis hear the flute of Krishna, they rush towards him and the poet sings:

*chali ban benu sunat jab dhaai
maat pitaa bhaandhav ati traasat jaati kaha akulaai
maanati nahi aur ras paavati nikasi naato tori
jaise jal pravaah bhaado ko so ko sake bahori
jyo kechuri bhuangam tyaagat maat pitaa yo tyaage
soor syaam ke haath bikaani ali ambuj anuraage*

'When she heard the sound of the flute, she rushed towards the forest. The family members showed anger and asked, where do you hurry to? She did heed to any of their words and got out of the household, breaking all other associations. It appeared as if the unstoppable rains of the rainy season are moving forth. She gave up all other relations and ran towards the Lord, like a bee flies with all love towards the fully blossomed lotus. After all, she has completely surrendered herself to the Lord of Soordas!'

The above composition depicts an abhisarika nayika looking forward to association with her beloved. She is ready to give up anything and everything in order to come to her Lord. She dresses up, neglects the world and moves towards her love.

Through the above eight compositions, highlights of the ashtanayika have been brushed on by the great saint poet – Soordas ji. There are numerous of other compositions that embed the characteristics of the ahtanayika and can be studied in great detail. This work gave a simple shade of the ashtanayika portion of classical dance as expressed in the poetry of Soordas ji.