

ORIGIN AND GLORY OF “GOLLA KALAPAM” IN KUCHIPUDI DANCE

VEDANTAM VENKATA NAGA CHALAPATHI RAO

Research Scholar

Potti Sreeramulu Telugu University

HYDERABAD

Telangana

vedantamvenkat@gmail.com

Introduction

Kuchipudi is an international art form today, with practitioners from America to Australia and every place in between. In all Kuchipudi expositions the world over, the pride of place today is undoubtedly occupied by Bhama Kalapam, that timeless tale of Jeevathma's eternal desire to mingle with Paramatma. Today Bhama Kalapam is synonymous with Kuchipudi. However, it is a little known fact that just a century back, the pride of place in Kuchipudi expositions belonged to Golla Kalapam. It is an even lesser known fact that Bhama and Golla Kalapams are not the exclusive domains of Kuchipudi.

Key Words: characters, dance, jivatma, kalapam, literature, paramatma, tradition, world

Kalapam

In her book, *The World of Koochipudi Dance*, Dr Swapnasundari states that the word kalapam has many meanings. In Sanskrit, it refers to 'that which holds single parts together, bundle, totality, collection of several separate things, a series of four stanzas in grammatical connection.' In Telugu, too, the meaning is similar—'an ornament, an assemblage playing a character.' The Kalapam is a collection of ideas contained within a seemingly simple story. Although the Kalapam is not known as an uparupaka (dance drama), the salient features found in Margi literature (associated with the classical style of dance described in the *Natyashastra*) resemble the format of the Kalapam. A form of the uparupaka (minor types of Sanskrit plays that emerged from Rupaka [one of the ten major plays defined by Bharata in *Natyashastra*], 'Srigaditham' bears the closest resemblance to the Kalapam structure.

The structure of the Srigaditham has been described in detail within Bhoja's *Sringara Prakasam* (King Bhoja of Malwa, eleventh century) and Saradatanaya's *Bhava Prakasam*. It is also briefly mentioned in Jayapasenani's *Nritta Ratnavali*. Upon parallel comparison of Saradatanaya's *Bhava Prakasam* and Bhoja's *Sringara Prakasam*, the nayaka (hero) must be prasiddha (famous) and possess high quality of character. He must be so powerful that he can slay demons. He is assumed to be the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The nayika is a kulangana (hailing from a reputed family/clan), and suffers from the separation of her beloved, and undergoes several emotional states. The emotion in the composition is vipralabha sringara (love in separation) and vṛitti (the style of dramatic production) is bharativritti (bharati-verbal).

Typically, a single protagonist presents a range of ideas and carries the story forward. The focus is on the main character rather than on the supporting role. The prominent member of the supporting cast is known as sutradhari (conductor/narrator). The dancers who perform should be well versed in singing, dancing and rendering prose dialogues as well. The storyline is conveyed through the use of daruvus, padyams and slokas (literary structures of Yakshagana with specific meters) along with most other features derived from Yakshaganam.

The most famous kalapams in Kuchipudi are the Bhama Kalapam, Bhagavatula Ramayya's Golla Kalapam, Sri Vedantam Parvatisam's Durjati Kalapam, and, in more recent times, Dr Vedantam Ramalinga Sastry's Uma Kalapam. A kalapam brings out the effect of the dramatic sequence by the subjective exposition of the characters themselves, accompanied by a systematic dance and tune suggestive of the situation.

Siddhendra Yogi and Kalapams

Siddhendra trained under Sri Narayana Tirtha, the author of Sri Krishna Lila Tarangini. The story goes that when Lord Krishna appeared and told Siddhendra that he would be liberated from the mundane world, he weaved the story of Parijatapaharanam into a fine sringarakavya (erotic/love poem); he said that his master Sri Narayana Tirtha would attain liberation in his next birth. This episode made Siddhendra write Parijatapaharanam, which later on came to be known as Bhama Kalapam. He gathered a few Brahmin boys, taught them and asked them to perform it as a dance drama and as an offering to Lord Krishna. They, in turn, assured him that they would retain and preserve the culture. The descendants of those Brahmin families continued this tradition of the Kuchipudi dance drama. The Brahmin artistes came to be known as Bhagavatulu, and the dance-drama from the Bhagavatamela nataka was referred to as the Kuchipudi dance drama after the name of the village.

Siddhendra Yogi wrote many Kalapams. He primarily developed a unique and particular style based on the Natyasashtra and Nandikesvara's Bharataranava. He initiated young Brahmin boys to Bhama Kalapam. The actual training of the actors was developed to turn them into Bhagavatula, or performers of the Bhagavata Mela Natakams (theatres), which are prevalent until this day—making glorious history in Kuchipudi.

Bhama Kalapam

The main story of Bhama Kalapam is based on Satyabhama's estrangement from Krishna. Satyabhama is annoyed that Krishna has presented the celestial flower, Parijata, to Rukmini, his previous wife. Satyabhama considers herself more beautiful and well-bred than the other wives of Krishna, and therefore feels that she deserves the gift. This forms the background of the Bhama Kalapam, although the complete episode is indirectly referred to in its performance.

The story starts with Satyabhama proclaiming her special qualities. She requests a friend to bring Krishna to her palace. The friend seeks an explanation from Satyabhama for the reason behind her separation from her lord. In response to this, Satyabhama refers to her love quarrel with Krishna. She yearns for reconciliation and sends the emissary with a letter to him. Initially unresponsive, Krishna eventually returns to Satyabhama. The sutradhari enacts the dual role of Madhavi (Satyabhama's confidante) and Madhava (friend of Krishna) without any change of costume but with imaginative use of accessories. By playing the dual role of both Satyabhama and Krishna's friend, the sutradhari maintains the connectivity between the jivatma (which Satyabhama represents) and paramatma (embodied by Krishna). Symbolically, the confluence of jivatma with paramatma is highlighted.

Although Bhama Kalapam was written in the form of a Yakshagana—it comprises daruvus, padyams, gadyam, kandarthams and dvipadas (all literary structures). It was not a dance drama in the true sense but had a complicated, traditional story and scenes. It can be referred to as prabhandakavya (a literary genre of medieval Indian Sanskrit literature) describing the different moods and feelings of the heroine Satyabhama. In her quest for Lord Krishna and her pain of separation, she experiences several nayikavasthas (physical expressions of the different aspects of the

heroine's feelings and emotions) such as svadhinapatika (one who is swollen with pride of her beloved's love and devotion), virahootkantitha (one who is distressed and desires reunion with her lover), khandita (one who sends away the deceitful lover in anger, the lover who had disappointed and saddened her), proshitabhartrika (one who is missing her beloved as he is far away on a long journey) and abhisarika (one who courageously goes out for the meeting with her lover). The dasakamavasthas as described in the Natyasastra are articulated at various segments within the kalapam.

Salient features or sequences of Bhama Kalapam:

<i>Prasthavana</i>	An introductory sequence which states the substance of the play; generally done through pravesa daruvu.
<i>Bhama samvadam</i>	Satyabhama's conversations with the other characters—mostly Madhavi
<i>Avadhi</i>	The cause of conflict/misfortune; the mirror is the cause for the quarrel between Satyabhama and Krishna.
<i>Viraham</i>	Suffering the pangs of separation from the beloved.
<i>Svapnavastha</i>	A dream-like situation often recalling the pleasant state with the beloved.
<i>Sapatni vivadam</i>	The quarrel of two wives; Satyabhama's tussle with Rukmini to gain Krishna's attention (this was important in the older versions).
<i>Dutika samvadam</i>	The conversation of Satyabhama and her emissary; the protracted debate between the two about giving the bejewelled nose pin as an incentive for running an errand (forms an important sequence).
<i>Candropalambhana</i>	Blaming the moon for heightening physical passion, and thereby the suffering of separated lovers
<i>Manmathoopalambhana</i>	Blaming Manmatha, the God of love, for causing heightened desire and thereby increased suffering; The impact of Manmatha's flower-darts is portrayed in the impassioned sequence danced by Satyabhama.
<i>Vayopalambhana</i>	Blaming the breeze for fanning the flames of passion, thereby causing suffering to separated lovers.
<i>Murcavastha</i>	The state of swooning or fainting out of frustrated love—this sequence leads to the eventual reunion of Krishna and Satyabhama.

Golla Kalapam

Kuchipudi dance is renowned for the dramatic practice of expanding the process of a single role within a play. Such plays with their well-defined presentational aspects are believed to be derived from a format known as veshakatha (person adorning a character). Another kalapam which stayed with Kuchipudi dance-drama is Golla Kalapam written by Bhagavatula Ramayya, who belonged to the early eighteenth century.

The operatic dance drama rests on a weighty libretto with a vedantic theme containing several layers of meaning. At one level, it is simply a light-hearted exchange between a Golla Bhama and a Brahmin. At another level, it conveys a message of the universality of the human spirit and underscores the futility of caste-based distinction. The dance opera serves as a metaphor for the process of self-realisation. It abounds in the philosophy of life from birth to death. For the first time in dance-drama, the author has introduced both the spiritual and biological aspects depicting Vedic sacrifices, yagna and the process of human birth.

The story has two characters—the milkmaid and the Brahmin. The Brahmin and Golla Bhama set out on a journey engaging in a friendly repartee. The Brahmin refuses the buttermilk offered saying that a member of a higher caste would not accept anything touched by a member of a lower caste. The

milkmaid is equally well versed with the sastric and puranic lores and traces her lineage to Lord Krishna, who was also a golla (a cowherd). She refutes all arguments put forward by the Brahmin who is superior by birth. The milkmaid finally emphasises the oneness of creation and the supremacy of the lord—the unique expression of his self in all his creations.

The salient features of Golla Kalapam as listed by Dr Swapnasundari in the book *The World of Koochipudi Dance* are:

<i>Pancha mahayagnam</i>	Five great devotional rituals of Brahmins
<i>Panca kosham</i>	The five sheaths of the soul
<i>Pindotpatti</i>	Formation of the foetus
<i>Bhupathanam</i>	Infusion of life force in-vitro
<i>Bahyam, kaumaryam, yauvanam, vardhakyam</i>	The four stages of all life on earth—childhood, adolescence, youth and old age
<i>Yagnyam</i>	The most important fire ritual amongst the Hindus
<i>Purvapaksham</i>	The first objection to an assertion in any discussion—the prima facie view or argument in any question; one side of a question in logic.
<i>Siddhantam</i>	Established Truth, Principles and Doctrines of Vedanta

Similarities and contrasts between Bhamā Kalapam and Golla Kalapam
The ideas emerging as vesya kathas appear to have been more sophisticated representations in kalapams. Kalapams of Kuchipudi developed all three aspects of dance—nṛitta (dance steps performed rhythmically), abhinaya (emoting the song) and natya (dramatic representation) equally.

Both Bhamā Kalapam and Golla Kalapam are priceless assets to the literature of dance. They are perfect examples to show that our scriptures are poems with philosophical content and that our literature is a spiritual treatise with romantic content. They are complementary to each other to reveal the truth of the art as envisaged in ancient days, i.e. ways to reach God through art.

In both the Kalapams, the format was set in such a way that the lead dancer had to have good stamina, memory, knowledge of philosophy and scriptures, and a good command over the language to render vacikam (dialogues). Both the Kalapams is a remarkable audio-visual treat to the audience and are an aesthetic experience.

Tabular representation of Bhamā Kalapam and Golla Kalapam

BHAMA KALAPAM	GOLLA KALAPAM
More relevant to Bhakti cult	More relevant to Vedic cult
The heroine is Satyabhama	The heroine is a milkmaid, Golla Bhamā
The heroine enters with grandeur in the Pravesa Daruvu	The heroine enters the stage selling milk and butter in the Pravesa Daruvu
The conversation is between the confidante Madhavi and Satyabhama	The argument is between Golla Bhamā and the Brahmin
The union of the jivatma with the paramatma is the highlight	The philosophical discussion of life and death is the highlight
A 'localised' story with a 'contextualised	Speaks of the origins of the universe, narrating

theme' of the lord and his consort	the story of the samudra manthanam (churning of the ocean of milk), and the story of saving it from the raksasas (demons) by Lord Krishna
Dissimilarities between what one believes, and the real truth as it is, is what Bhama Kalapam dramatises	A short prelude showing dissimilarities in human temperament is what Golla Kalapam aims at
Sheathed in a romantic veneer.	Woven in philosophical attire
The values represent individual to the universal	The values represent universal to the individual

The Andhra dance tradition is a composite fabric. There are a variety of dance-drama forms under the terpsichorean umbrella of the Andhra Natya Parampara. Few notable among these are the Kuchipudi of the Bhagavathulu, the Navajanardana Parijatham of Pithapuram (East Godavari district), the Veedhi Natakams, the Toorpu Bhagavathams, and so on. Golla and Bhama Kalapams provide a common subject matter to many of these forms. As such, Golla Kalapam was always taken up for special treatment given the rich scope for spontaneity, wit, improvisation, and a spectacular display of linguistic talents. What made Golla Kalapam so famous in those times, and so rare today, forms the crux of our discussion.

The story of Golla Kalapam (milkmaid) is a beautifully simple representation of complex concepts of Indian spirituality. A witty Golla Bhama indulges in a repartee with a Brahmin, challenging his supposed supremacy over other humans by virtue of his caste. Two complex concepts Pindotthpatthi and Yagna Pattu are debated in a crisp manner, and the Golla Bhama enlightens the Brahmin on the equality of all human beings, and the unity of Godhead. To elucidate such complex concepts in a way which is equally appeasing to learned scholars and illiterate spectators, incorporating humor, wit and fantastic Vachika Abhinaya is no mean feat, and hence Golla Kalapam was a treat particularly looked forward to.



Vedantham Sathyanarayana Sarma as Golla Bhama

Origin of Golla Kalapam

One of the earliest versions on record is by the famous Saint – Poetess Tarigonda Vengamamba, whose Mutyala Harathi is still offered to the Lord of the Seven Hills today. This version dates back to

at least 1760s. The next concrete evidence we have of a version comes from the Kuchipudi Bhagavathulu. Paramaguru Bhagavathula Ramiah to whose Sishya Sampradaya belong many stalwarts of Kuchipudi including Vempati Chinna Sathya garu, authored a version of Golla Kalapam in the early 1800s which is the general standard text even today. In 1800s and early 1900s eminent Bhagavathulu such as Tadopalli Perayya garu, Bhagavathula Vissayya garu, Vempati Venkata Narayana garu, Chinta Venkata Ramayya garu and other great stalwarts presented Golla Kalapam with great dexterity and scholarly brilliance.

In alternative traditions, Pendela Sathyabhama garu (the great dancer who taught Bharata Kala Prapoorna Dr. Nataraja Ramakrishna the intricacies of Navajanardana Parijatham), had in her possession a slightly different text. The past stalwarts of the now reconstructed Vilasini Natyam, Annabathhula Bulli Venkataratnam garu, the Marampalli sisters Vaidehi and Induvadana were also adept at staging Golla Kalapam. An interesting trivia here is the fact that in the famous 1958 Sangeet Natak Akademi conference it was these sisters Induvadana and Vaidehi, who had presented an excerpt from Golla Kalapam, which contributed to Kuchipudi being appreciated as a classical form for the first time. Eminent poet Sri Devulapalli Krishna Sastry had scripted another version which is used by his grand-niece pre-eminent Guru Rathna Kumar, as also the pre-eminent dancer and Guru Sobha Naidu garu.

A performer, who wants to present Golla Kalapam successfully, has to be an authority on the five Sanskrit Mahakavyas. He/she should be able to compose replies to Sanskrit slokas in Sanskrit itself, with rhyme and metre. He/she should be a trained Carnatic singer and has to have a deep understanding of Abhinaya theory. He/she should have amazing oratory power and strong clear diction. It almost immediately becomes clear why Golla Kalapam is so difficult to stage nowadays, and why it is such a scholarly treat for audiences.



Vedantham Radheshyam as Brahmin/Sutradhari

On reading the text, one can clearly notice why Golla Kalapam had instant appeal to both scholarly and commoner classes. While the Vachikam of the Brahmin is replete with characteristic Grandhika ornamentation, the Vachikam of the Golla Bhama is replete with beautiful, sweet Telugu rusticity.

Slyly terming the Brahmin as “Ayyavaru” or “Bapanayya” the Golla Bhama explains spiritual intricacies to an admiring Brahmin who keeps addressing her as “Bhama Ratna” or “Tarunimani”, or even “Chanchalakshi” in one place. The text itself, which depicts class miscomprehensions, and scenes where the Golla Bhama minces no words in ridiculing the arrogant Brahmin must have been very entertaining in a time when caste divisions ran hurtfully deep.

Like with other major Telugu drama texts, the padya bhagam of Golla Kalapam is replete with Kanda Arthams, Dvipadams, Daruvus etc. The characteristic lyrical sweetness of Kuchipudi scripts is present in Golla Kalapam as well. Two examples follow:

Brahmin “ Abbabba, vinTimipuDa,
Gabbuna nunDedi sisuvaTu kashTambulalo,
Nibbangi unDi; YepuDa
sabbandula basi VeDalu samayamu jepuma”

Meaning: Oh God! I have only now heard of the difficulties a foetus faces in the maleficent womb! Tell me when shall he leave those difficulties behind and emerge?

Golla Bhama "PaTTuga Veshamulu Dalchi, Brahmanulamanchu Diruga,
BaTTi Pujinthu Yella, VaTTide Summi”

Meaning: Because they roam around clad in silk, calling themselves Brahmins, everybody pays homage to them! Its all a silly lie!

Conclusion

Golla Kalapam Inspired by Bhama Kalapam Bhagavathula Ramayya Sastry composed Golla Kalapam. Golla meaning cowherd and Golla Bhama meaning the milkmaid is the central character who has a conversation with a Brahmin about the Indian philosophy and spirituality. It is a clever representation of how a milkmaid indulges in a humorous banter and challenging the knowledgeable Brahmin. The simple representations of complex thoughts in this format found favour with the masses. Golla Kalapamis also known as Gopika Vipra Sambhashanam or Gopika Vipra Samvada. The milkmaid and the Brahmin indulge in two complex concepts called as Pindotthpathi and YagnaPattu. It is probably a fine example of a performance where the depiction needs to introduce and explain a complex philosophical thought process, without going overboard with vachikaabhinaya. Unlike BhamaKalapam, there are only two characters in this. While the Brahmin’s words are replete with ornate words that showcase his mastery over scholarly texts, the milkmaid’s words, in contrast, are in simple Telugu depicting the sweetness of rural areas. Starting from the patrapravesham of both the Milkmaid and the Brahmin, the conversation leads to birth and death of mankind. For each reasoning the Brahmin gives, the Milkmaid counters it with a superior argument. At the end, the Milkmaid justifies that one does not attain salvation or Moksha just by virtue of being born in a particular caste or family but only by true devotion to the Paramatma. This dance drama is understandably popular in rural areas of Andhra and is not frequently performed in the cities. Golla Kalapam is an invaluable and a spectacular piece of wit, spontaneity, improvisation and linguistic capabilities. An earlier version of Golla Kalapam was written in the 18th century by Poetess Tarigonda Vengamamba. However, the standard text that is performed today is by Bhagavathula Ramayya’s version.

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