

Introduction

Bhattachanaraya is a Sanskrit dramatist who lived around 8th century AD, and famous for his *Venisamhara*, a play in six acts, which dramatizes the incidents from the Mahabharata especially during the war. It is one of the best plays portraying the *vira rasa* or heroic sentiment.

Act VI of *Venisamhara* begins with **Yudhishtira** and **Panchali** lamenting on the death of veterans like Bhishma and Drona in the Kurukshetra war. At that time **Panchalaka** comes to tell that after the death of Salyar and Sakuni at the hands of Bhima and Sahadeva, Pandavas are heading in the battlefield and that fearing Bhima’s oath, Duryodhana has hidden himself. On hearing these words the humiliated mind of Panchali is soothed. During then a supporter of Duryodhana, a demon named **Charvaka** comes to Yudhishtira in the guise of a *muni* and lies that it is not Bhima but Arjuna who is dueling with Duryodhana. The words of the Charvaka shocks Yudhishtira and Panchali while Bhima enters with his body smeared in blood, the blood of the Kauravas who insulted Panchali. He ties the loosened hair of Panchali with his blood stained hands thus keeping his promise. Now, **Krishna** and **Arjuna** enter with the news that Charvaka has been murdered by Nakula. The act ends with the benediction of Krishna.

Among those Sanskrit plays which give importance to *vira rasa*, *Venisamhara* has a significant position. “Veni” means hair, the loosened hair of Panchali which signifies the hurt and humiliation suffered by a woman of the Bharatavarsha. “Samhara” here means tying the hair. The term also means to put an end to something. The play deals with the actions that centers on

the oath of Panchali that her hair tattered by Dushasana at the Kaurava court during the vastrakshepa will remain as such until cleansed by the blood of Dushasana. When the play ends with Bhima fulfilling her desire and tying her hair, the title becomes significant as a message to stop atrocities against women. The play brings for the first time on the Kutiyattam stage, such characters like Panchali, Yudhishtira, Krishna, Charvaka and the like.

Objective

Considering the scope of Act VI of *Venisamhara*, the objective is to create a Kutiyattam out of it and present on the stage so that it will introduce a new set of characters and a new theme which was hitherto absent on the Kutiyattam stage which further will be useful for the future Kutiyattam practitioners.

Implementation

The project aims to choreograph and present the sixth act of the Sanskrit play *Venisamhara* whose attaparakaram and kramadeepika (acting and stage manuals) have been created with the financial aid (Rs 1,00,000/- , 28-6/ICH-Scheme/ /2013-14) of ICH scheme. Stages of Implementation:

1. Distributing the play to the actors and assignment of the characters
2. Group discussion and studying the play by the actors and percussionists
3. Rehearsals
4. Stage Rehearsals
5. The Final Staging

First Progress Report

Accordingly, after sufficient library, research and written works, the *attaparakara* and *kramadeepika* had been formed. Selected actors and percussionists were communicated about the project. They were brought together many times to have a series of discussions on the various

nuances of the play, characters, costumes, thala pattern etc. Senior gurus were consulted especially on such matters regarding the costumes and stage properties. A group section of the artistes was also conducted so as to learn the slokas and the drama as well.

After thus making a thorough research on the theatrical and spectacular aspects of the play, rehearsals are going on, the selected pictures of which are attached.