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Lavani the Folk Dance of Maharashtra: A Study in Aesthetic

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Abstract: ***Maharashtra is land of culture and history, its history reveals the great Maratha ruled this land and these great men had affinity with the arts and dance culture of Maharashtra. No other form of dance culture and literature remains limited to particular area or region. In the course of time art and culture becomes part of remaining part of world. Same is the case of Lavani it came from different part but becomes the popular and folk dance of Maharashtra. At the beginning it was performed by the lower caste women but time has changed its role it became very popular form of literature of social reforms. Beside sensuality, beauty and shringar it appealed the masses to change the attitude of caste and other issues. During the time of Peshwas Lavani came to the doorstep of palace and castle. Time has modified into two forms Fadachi and Baithkichi Lavani both are existed on today in the society and still enjoyed by the masses. The main purpose of this paper is to comment on the Lavani as folk dance of Maharashtra from the aesthetic point of view.***

Keywords: Lavani, Shringar, Beauty, Lavanya, Dholki, Ghungroo, Paithani.

1. INTRODUCTION

Maharashtra is land of fine arts it is famous for many different skills and arts. The terminology of Maharashtra means the land of great people and arts. It has taken many things from other part of country. Though, lavani is originated from Persian and Urdu but it became popular in the land of Maharashtra where the rulers of Maharashtra had given patronage to artist of lavani. It's a folk song and dance of Maharashtra from ancient time. During the reign of Mughal and Peshwa lavani performance was popular among them. Lavani includes various rasas like Shringar, love, passion and adore so it is known as shringaric in action. This shringarras attracts the rich and royal men for entertainment and relaxation. Lavani was a means of poor for livelihood especially downtrodden caste like Mahar, Kolhati and Matang. Though, it was written by upper caste men like Brahmin but staged and performed by the lower caste artist so it is only famous in rural audience. The Rustic audience kept it alive as on today the performance of lavani takes place in villages especially in Yatra or fair. It was

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the main source of entertainment for the rustic people in present day. Because it deals with their issues and matters.

Lavani (लावणी):

is a genre of music popular in Maharashtra. Lavani is song which can be sung with the help of musical instruments like Dholki, Duff Harmonium, Tuntuneand Ghungrus. It is a very popular among rustics and urban audience of Maharashtara. Shringaric nature of lavani kept alive the interest of audience. The performers of Lavani are known as Lavanya or lavanyavatis. Basically, most of the performers are belonged to backward caste as it is mentioned. Lavani is a combination of traditional song and dance, which particularly performed to the beats of Dholki, a percussion instrument. Lavani is noted for its powerful rhythm. Lavani has contributed substantially to the development of Marathi folk theatre. In Maharashtra and southern Madhya Pradesh and North Karnataka, it is performed by the female performers wearing nine-yard long sarees. The songs are sung in a quick tempo. Traditionally, this genre of folk dance deals with different and varied subject matters such as society, religion and politics. The songs in 'Lavani' are mostly erotic in sentiment and the dialogues tend to be pungent in socio-political satire. Originally, it was used as a form of entertainment and morale booster to the tired soldiers. Lavani Songs, which are sung along with dance, are usually naughty and erotic in nature. It is believed their origin is in the Prakrit Gathas collected by Hala. The Nirguni Lavani (philosophical) and the Shringari Lavani (sensual) are the two types. The devotional music of the Nirguni cult is popular all over Malwa.Lavani developed into two distinct performances, namely PhadachiLavani and BaithakichiLavani. The Lavani sung and enacted in a public performance before a large audience in a theatrical atmosphere is called PhadachiLavani. And, when the Lavani is sung in a closed chamber for a private and select audience by a girl sitting before the audience, it came to be known as BaithakichiLavani. The ladies that perform lavani wear a long sari length around 9 meters. They form a bun (juda in Hindi or ambada in Marathi) with their hair. They wear heavy jewelry that includes necklace, earrings, payal, kamarpatta(a belt at waist),bangles etc. They usually put a large bindi of dark red color on their forehead. The sari they wear is called nauvari. The sari is wrapped beautifully and is much more comfortable as compared to other sari types.

"The main subject matter of the Lavani is the love between man and woman in various forms. Married wife's menstruation, sexual union between husband and Wife, their love, soldier's amorous exploits, the wife's bidding farewell to the husband who is going to join the war, pangs of separation, adulterous love - the intensity of adulterous passion, childbirth: these are all the different themes of the Lavani. The Lavani poet out-steps the limits of social decency and control when it comes to the depiction of sexual passion." K. Ayyappa Panicker, Sahitya Akademi There are also men that dance in lavni along with the ladies. They are the called nat (male dancer) usually the kinnars. These men dance in support with the lead dancer. Although beginnings of Lavani can be traced back to 1560s, it came into prominence during the later days of the Peshwa rule. Several celebrated Marathi Shahir poet-singers, which include Parasharam (1754-1844), Ram Joshi (1762–1812), AnantFandi (1744-1819), HonajiBala (1754-1844), Prabhakar (1769-1843), Saganbhau ( )and Lok Shahir Annabhau Sathe (1 August 1920 – 18 July 1969) contributed significantly for the development of this genre of music. HonajiBala introduced tabla in place of the

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traditional dholki. He also developed the baithakichiLavani, a subgenre, which is presented by the singer in the seated position. Satyabhamabai Pandharpurkar and Yamunabai Waikar are the popular present day exponents of Lavani. Shringar Lavani is mostly sung and danced on the stage by a female and written by male. Lavani can also be termed as a romantic song sung by lady who is waiting for her lover to accept her, who longs for his love. Many Lavani dancers are from some castes of Maharashtra like Mahar Kolhati, and Matang. Marathi films played an important role in making Lavani genre accessible to masses. Movies such as Pinjara and Natarang not only attempted to blend traditional music with social messages but also helped portray Lavani world in positive light.
Lavani, is a dance form popular mostly in Maharashtra, but also in parts of Southern Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Lavani is a combination of music and dance performed traditionally to the beats of the dholki by women adorned in their flamboyant paithini saris and several kilos heavy ghungroos. A classic Lavani performance begins with the swift sounds of the dholki, soon followed by a group of women entering the stage with the pallu of their Paithinis covering their heads, as they entice the audience with their latkas and jhatkas. But beyond the canvas of bright lights and shiny dance sets the history of Lavani that paints a starkly different picture. Derived from the word Lavanya (meaning beautiful), it has two main forms: Nirguni Lavani and ShringariLavani. The former is of a philosophical nature while the latter is presumed to be of a sensuous and erotic nature. ShringariLavani talks about a married woman's menstruation, sexual union between husband and wife, a woman's longing for her husband/ lover, wives bidding farewell to their husbands leaving for war etc. that can be traced back to as early as the 17th century.

Lavani has been traditionally performed by women of the lowers castes; namely Kolhati, Mahar and Matang. During the Peshwa rule, slave trade of these women was rampant, who would perform in the royal courts and hence, had access to some sort of patronage in those times. But the stigmatization of being 'nautch girls' or 'courtesans' never left them. Lavani began as an expression of women's sexuality and their innermost thoughts, feelings and desires, but quickly became the basis for their marginalization by the society. It becamea tool for controlling the sexuality of the lower-caste women, and created a vicious circle for the performers. For example, women from the Kolhati community, had to continue to perform the Lavani, as this was the only skill they knew and had toperform to sustain themselves. Invasion of 'modern' forms of entertainment like theatre and movies further reduced the creative space available to them. Vishnudas Bhave was the first to present a theatre performance of a Marathi play which turned the face of Maharashtrian entertainment forever. Sharmila Rege, a noted feminist, quoted a statement from the Bombay Times: "Bhave's plays are…. Void of everything approaching licentiousness and indecorum and are images of the moralities in which the Christian church in older times used to rejoice" (Bombay Times, March 8, 1853).What was witnessed was the growth of 'decent' bourgeois forms of entertainment whose audience shunned 'indecent' forms like Lavani as it did not mirror the 'morality' of the changing times. By the turn of the 20th century, Lavanis dancers were earning their livelihood by performing raunchier versions of their art to satisfy the palate of the Hindi and Marathi movie connoisseur, further denigrating the status of the lower-caste Lavani performer. Cut to the present, the modern viewer has a warped and skewed notion of this dance form as most of it is fed by what various regional and national movie industries are churning out. For the viewer Lavani is just another item number adding masala to a movie.

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To add injury to insult is the fact that these dances are performed by mainstream actresses, as no one wants to cast the women who have lived and breathed this dance for centuries.
The antiquity of the professional dancer fight with caste and gender discrimination and their contemporary day experiment for existence doesn't find a voice. Mainstream of the dancers only perform for rural Maharashtra now, as the urban populace no longer has a taste for such entertainment. Many of them have had to turn to prostitution and are suffering from AIDS and other deadly diseases. Economic and social orkestracization has pushed them to dance out of a need to survive and not from a desire to perform.

2. CONCLUSION

Though it is famous folk art of Maharashtra the government has not taken any initiatives to improve the living condition of Lavani performer. In the last phase of these artists they face many difficulties of health and finance; it is very dark and pathetic period of life for them. Lavani becomes the folk song and dance of Maharashtra after long struggle of it performers. Lavani is now the words on the lips of young to old people due to its popularity. Lavani performers devote to perform it from the bottom of heart.
Many of the Lavani dancers are from backward caste and community so some time it was known as lowest and degraded from of dance. But it has beauty, skill and aesthetic so now a day's so many people from other part of world came to see the performance. Many researchers have been exploring the types of Lavani. In the course of time Lavani may flourish as classical form of dance. There is need to change the traditional approach towards Lavani. It's my opinion, no art is lowest or highest, the attitude and approach makes it degrade so through this research paper it is an honest attempt is made or change the approach to lavani. Art is for art sake and art for stomach sake should be the approach to look at Lavani.

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