

King versus God: An Introduction to Dhanujatra of Odisha

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Abstract : Dhanujatra is a folk performance of ODISHA, India, that transports the participants, on lookers and all alike into a mythical atmosphere for eleven days and nights as well. In this performance the whole town becomes stage. The uniqueness of the festival lies in the fact that all the episodes of this Jatra enacted in different parts of the town making it the largest open air theatre in the world. The paper would emphasize on the uniqueness and the impact of this performance. Different episodes are enacted at different places in the regime. So, Dhanujatra does not confine itself to a fixed static or dead stage, as in case of other Jatra's; it rather becomes the stage for the world at large. For that, it is said that, Worlds biggest open air theatre held in the tiny town called Bargarh in the western part of Orissa. The play moves sequentially day after day and the audience moves from locale to locale. Here it is analogues to the Ramleela of Ramnagar of Benars. Parallal enactment is a significant feature of this Jatra. From the second day, parallal performances take place in both Bargarh town and Ambapalli epitomising 'Mathura' and 'Gokul' respectively. Krishna is born in the prison on the second day of the jatra. Basudeb exchanges the child with the Nanda's newborn baby in Gokul. In this way, parallal performances go on both in Mathura and Gokul. The ordinary persons who act as the mythological characters, or become historical heroes or the legendary Saints or Bhaktas in a Jatra in the evening, lead the lives of ordinary persons during day time. The dramatic personas of those individuals are shed with the end of the Jatra. On the contrary, the persons who act as the main characters of Dhanujatra are exceptions in this regard. They are identified as the characters they enact for the whole period of performance, both in the evenings and during daytime. It is worth mentioning that generally in the folk performances there is an ample scope to touch upon or interpret or comment or satirize the issues of contemporary relevance with the sole purpose to convey some specific message. Dhanujatra is no exception to that.

Keywords : folk performance, Jatra, parallel enactment, open-air stage, Odisha

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