

Performance Traditions of the Mahabharata in Tamil Nadu

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Lecture 05

THE FESTIVALS AS ‘TOTAL THEATRE’

“One sees from this that *pratyabhijnā* (recognition, scrutiny) is a careful inspection of and continuous reflection upon an object although that object is already [in some sense] known. This is what is meant by *pratyabhijnā* and not the mere recognition that consists in noting that “this is the same thing I saw before.”

Abhinavagupta

The filmmaker Mani Kaul, while introducing the films of Ritwik Gahatak spoke about the distinctive nature of the ‘Epic Form’ as opposed to the ‘Dramatic Narrative’.

The dramatic narrative, he says, typically converges to a climax with the triumph of good over evil; while “the epic form is just the opposite, which means that the narrative is usually very thin, very spread out and at every stage that it develops, it tries to have wider perspectives. Not just concerning the characters but also about nature, history or ideas. These are not just a description of society, but visions of epochs that have gone by. So it cannot be just a simple movement, a narrative moving forward, but as the story is narrated, it must also embrace and spread out.” [Mani Kaul’s interview by Tasreen Munni Kabir]

[Karna’s stage entry song] Here I come before you, the mighty Karna, son of the Sun. A warrior more powerful than any other, I will knock down entire armies instantly. I am Karna the heroic noble expert warrior. Praised by chariot warriors, horse men and foot soliders alike and surrounded by kings of charitable nature. I the giver of all that is asked, Karnan the great earned fame, gained the distinction of being Karnan as the one who gives anything the poor, downfallen ask for woefully. I give what is asked for; abundantly. I give suitably; I am Karna Raja, kind, generous, the first born son of Kunti’s tapas.”

In every festival, there would be contestations between the various performers and the audience as to what was the ‘original’ Mahabharata. For instance, there is a huge difference between the story of Karna as narrated by the storytellers and as enacted by the Koothu performers. In Koothu, Karna before going to war on the fateful 17th day of the battle would request a traditional warrior’s farewell from his estranged wife Ponnuruvi or Ponmala. This scene which has tremendous emotional resonances for the audiences would invariably not be present in the storytelling sessions where they rigorously follow the text. The audiences would be angry at this

glaring omission by the storyteller and in one festival, the storyteller went to great lengths to convince the audience that the story of Ponnuruvi/Ponmala was not a part of any 'authentic' text and was just purely the imagination of the Koothu writers. Karnan did not have good relations with his wife Ponnuruvi.

[Ecchur Villager]- There was no dialogue between them. Only when he is about to enter the battle field and wants a heroic farewell from his wife does Karna reveal as to who he actually was. Before that she would denigrate him on his lower Jati origins by calling him the son of a charioteer. As she gives the customary wives farewell to the warrior husband going to battle, she asks for his apology for not really having known him.

[Karna's song to his wife Ponmala in Koothu]- My woman, my Queen, how can I explain why I called you? Please do not mistake me and argue with me. What has been destined by the gods will happen. Nothing can change that my dear Queen! Dear Ponmala, Duryodhana is my dearest friend for whom I am going to fight against the five Pandavas today. You wanted to know who I am? Let me tell you now. My father is Surya Bhagwan [the Sun] and my mother is Kunti. I am the son born to Surya Bhagwan and Kunti. The Pandavas were born after me to our mother Kunti. So the Pandavas are my own brothers. Even then I am going to fight against my brothers for my dearest friend Duryodhanan. My father is the divine Surya and my mother is Queen Kunti, the Pandavas are my own brothers, the person who made me is Duryodhanan [Ponmala is shocked to hear the truth of Karna's birth]

The Mahabharata festivals of Tamil Nadu and Southern Andhra Pradesh are intricately structured, incorporating multiple orders of expressions and memories within itself. To participate in the festival of this nature, immediately becomes an act of 'remembering'. The epic, due to the way the festival is structured, becomes a trigger, to an entire series of memories, from the individual to the collective. The Mahabharata is also not performed in its entirety, and the responsibility of re-constructing the whole again, is the responsibility of each individual member of the audience.

Each member of the audience would have seen over the years, different renditions of the same episodes of the epic, and what would be remembered finally, would be a cumulative memory of all that each had witnessed. This cumulative memory would naturally include the memory of oneself witnessing a particular rendition, and by a curious process, by remembering the epic, one also tends to remember oneself, reflect on oneself. By this ritual of hearing, viewing and participating in the same story over and over again, the quality of 'attentiveness' of each member of the audience seems to get intensified. The internal process the viewer/listener goes through can only be described as 'Dhyana'.

The filmmaker Mani Kaul, while speaking to his students had this to say on 'Dhyana' which has generally been loosely translated as 'meditation', he said-

“I’ll tell you something, if you don’t mind. This word “meditation”, which is mystified in the West, has no meaning in India. There is simply a question of attention, a quality of attention. The word ‘Dhyan’ literally means attention. There is a dichotomy between Being and this quality of attention. Being cannot free itself from certain sorrows; it cannot free itself from its problems and unhappiness, because Being is full of them. The idea of transcending them and reaching a state where there’s no sorrow is all a dream. You can talk about it, but until the end of your life, your sorrows will pursue you.

However, “attention” can be free. A great teacher transforms that quality of attention- of listening, of talking, of seeing, of touching – until there is no sorrow, no fear, no anger, no pain; In music, and perhaps in some of my films, one has this quality of “attention”

‘Attentiveness’, both of oneself and of one’s interaction to the world, is seen as the highest value in these traditions and all performances are designed to promote this quality of ‘attentiveness’. Repetition becomes a key element to provoke this ‘self-introspective attentiveness’.

[Ecchur villager singing Ponmala’s song]- My Lord! Not understanding your greatness. I’ve been abusing you in whatever way I felt. You were like a glowing fire and I was just an ignorant wretch. Now that I Know the truth about you. I am seared to my soul. You were like a growing fire and I was just an ignorant wretch. Now that I Know the truth about you. I am seared to my soul. You were like a brilliant gem, hidden in a dirty cloth hiding your true self.”

Crucial episodes from the Epic are presented thrice in these festivals, as it has already been stressed, as ritual, narrative and theatre. And each time the same episode might be rendered differently leading to contestations as to who is presenting the ‘original’ Mahabharata.

The theatre people would often take dramatic license with the narrative and hence come into direct confrontation with the storytellers who rigorously follow the text. These daily contestations are also a vital part of the theatrical experience of the festival itself. The Epic resists closure in these performance traditions and the quest for the ‘truth’ becomes the onus of each individual member of the audience. Over the years, as one’s own experience of the world deepens, participating in these festivals leads to a more nuanced engagement with both the text, and by extension to one’s own life. This happens in various degrees within each member of the audience

[Selvadurai Bharatham storyteller] Srivilliputhur Alwar says that when Karna entered the battlefield it looked as though all the soldiers who died in the Kaurava army in the previous 16 days had come back to life.

Villiputthuraar song- The suns heat blazes on his crown. The suns heat blazes on his crown. The suns heat blazes on his sacred ear ring. The sun heat blazes on the golden flowers. The suns heat blazes on the wide ocean. The sun, seeing someone more resplendent than himself, blazed

diffidentally on Karna. Oh! The beauty of Karna's presence! Who could ever fail to feast their eyes on him?

[Natarajan Bharatham storyteller]- It seems people outside are angry that I have omitted to mention Karna taking leave of his wife Ponnuruvi before entering the battlefield. That is the difference between the play and the Mahabharata [sarcastically]. The play has been written by 'illiterate' people, while the Mahabharata has been written by 'scholars', poets. You can check with any classical version of the Mahabharata, you won't find this leave taking scene. I have been telling the Mahabharata for 20 years, but nobody seems to have listened properly. In the play they also say that Karna had only one son and that too born 'accidentally'! Isn't it what they say in Koothu? They say accidentally a child was born to them as the husband and wife never spoke to each other. In Mahabharata they have four sons. Can a man and woman live together without talking to each other?"

Commentary-These contestations between the storytellers, the Koothu actors and the audiences are a vital part of the 'theatre' in these festivals. These contestations and the multiple interpretations of basically the same text give each festival a unique character; no two festivals can ever be alike and in every festival the mindful audience would be presented with a different aspect to ponder upon. This probably might be one of the reasons why the festivals have been performed for over a thousand years. The onus is finally on each member of the discerning audience to discover where the 'Truth' rests.

[Na Muthuswamy]- In the previous night the Koothu is enacted. In Koothu only the story is told with two characters just speaking to each other. Is theatre only two characters speaking? No! Now look at the ritual Arjuna Tapas. Look at this in cinematic language- everybody participates in the cutting and replanting of the tree, the carpenter decorates it. Once everything is ready the actor playing Arjuna will come to climb it. As he is about to climb, women will light lamps below. Now Arjuna will climb the tree singing a verse from the sacred text Thiruvaasagam on every rung of the tree. Some women will tie cradles made of cloth to the tree. Arjuna will throw Bilva leaves and lemon fruits from top, everyone waiting below catch Arjuna's offerings. Now look at this from a cinematic perspective- is all this theatre or not? Every ritual and everything is theatre in this festival.

[Mani Vasagan]-The same narrative is repeated as a story, as theatre and traditional village rituals. For example if we have to narrate Duryodhana's attempt at burning the Pandavas in the Lacquer Palace, the villagers will build a hut like structure outside and place six figures in it and burn the structure. Thus the narrative seen as ritual and narrated as a story will be deeply implanted in the audience's mind. In the night, the theatre, the Koothu is performed. In the theatre only the story is depicted through dialogues. In the afternoon from two PM to six PM the Bharatham storyteller will narrate it as a story. In the nights from the ten PM to early morning it will be enacted as theatre. The rituals take centre stage in the mornings and every ritual is also theatre.

There are three layers of performance in these festivals. The epic is performed as village rituals in the morning, narrated as a story in the afternoons and performed right through the night in a traditional masked theatre form called the 'Koothu'. Repetition, as A K Ramanujan says, is a key component of Indian performance traditions. For as he says "If a thing is only mentioned once- it is as though it were not said at all!" This is the reason for some key episodes of the epic being performed thrice in the festival, once as ritual, second its narration as a story and third its elaboration as a theatrical experience. Theatre is not just performed in the designated theatrical space, but is performed all around the village and every space in the village becomes a performing space sometime or the other. This prompted Na Mutthuswamy a noted playwright/director of modern Tamil theatre to describe these festivals as 'Total Theatre'.

The ritual, 'The Killing of Bakasura' is an important emotional marker of time in these festival villages, evoking multiple memories. Again the killing of Bakasura is performed as a ritual, narrated as a story and enacted as theatre. The killing of Bakasura evokes the idea of the 'doubled' Draupadi effectively. In the Mahabharata, the Pandavas get married to Draupadi after this killing of Bakasura. In the 'doubled' Mahabharata of this region, Draupadi is reborn at Senji to kill Rochakan or Asulamasuran, a later day demon who was the great , great, grand descendent of the demon Bakasura who was killed by the Pandava warrior, Bhima. In the Epic narrative, Bakasura is terrorizing a village in which the Pandavas find asylum after escaping from the assassins of Duryodhana.

[Sambandam]-What does Bakasura do? He enters a village and kills and eats people randomly. So the people of the village plead with Bakasura not to do this and promise to provide with what he wants themselves. They say that he wants a human sacrifice each day and a cartload of food and two oxen to feast on. They say they will provide this voluntarily and ask him to stop the killing indiscriminately. When Bakasura agrees each family in the village provides each day what Bakasura needs."

[Commentary] Bhima gets angry when he hears that the village has been forced to provide a cartload of food, two oxen and a human sacrifice to the glutton, Bakasura, every day. As the only son of the family which had granted them asylum was the designated human sacrifice that day, Bhima offers to go instead. In the festival village, for this episode, each family cooks food for Bhima to carry to Bakasura.

Koothu actors dressed as Bhima and Bakasura travel through the village, collecting food from each household. By the act of cooking food for the ritual, each household inscribes themselves in the epic and each person becomes 'doubled'; they are both members of the festival village as well as characters of Bakasura's village.

[M D Muthukumaraswamy]- Now here which is the ritual, the theatre or which is real life? This travel between the three is the experience of these Bharatham festivals. The ritual will cross its

boundaries to become a part of real life and real life through ritual will transform into theatre. There will be only a thin line separating the three, while the people themselves will flow naturally from one into the other. Only outsiders like us will separate these three as ritual, theatre or real life, while in the village itself all three belong to one continuum”

[Commentary] The ritual of the killing of Bakasura is an important juncture in these festivals where the entire village become characters from the Epic themselves. The ritual is the pivot on which the festival revolves and brings to mind Vishwa Adluri’s etymology of the word Vyasa in “Rethinking the Mahabharata as a whole”.

Adluri says

“Vyāsa, the epic’s composer, is also known as Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana, Kṛṣṇa of the island, as he was born on an island in the middle of a river. The Mahābhārata, which occupies a no-man’s land between the two beginnings, is akin to Vyāsa’s birth place at the center of two arms of a river: it can be interpreted as the Archimidean point from which the flux of becoming can be understood.”

In these festivals, this ritual again functions as the Archimidean point where the viewers/listeners are drawn into the Epic to becoming characters from the Mahabharata itself. The Mahabharata now is both an internal memory and an external text. The festival, as Na Muthuswamy says, becomes ‘Total Theatre’ from this point onwards with the entire village having been drawn into the Epic.

VIDEO BAKASURA VADHAM

The theatre cycle would begin with this ritual and every day’s performances from this moment on would be for about 20 hours a day. The entire village would literally live now, in the various performance spaces in the village. Most storytellers in these festivals speak of the necessity of periodically abandoning the comfort of one’s hearth and home and choosing to live in the forests; here one has to kill the demons both inside and outside of oneself. Only then, they say, is a true return to oneself possible.

In the Mahabharata, the Pandavas endure three periods of Vanavaasam; they are born in the forests and return to their paternal kingdom on the death of their father to live with their fraternal cousins the Kauravas. Again they are forced to return to the forest where they kill the demons both within and outside. They return dramatically enriched by their second sojourn in the forests. This return just happens to be temporary and they are again compelled to live in the forests for their longest period of time –thirteen years, after which they are, equipped both mentally and physically to wrest their kingdom back from their cousins.

In fact, the Pandavas spend the largest portions of their lives in the forests- in Vanavaasam. In the festival villages, for the duration of the festival, most villagers live in the performance spaces spread across the villages, in Vanavaasam, or in ‘the forests of their own mind’

During this period of self-imposed Vanavaasam, the villagers listen to the stories the Pandavas had listened to in their own Vanavaasam. The other great Epic, the Ramayana is also narrated to the Pandavas in their life in the forests. Draupadi, in this festival is constantly addressed as being the sister of Rama. Here Draupadi sings the story of the Vanavaasam and coronation of her brother Rama.

[Kelai Video]- I sing the Ramayan Rama! Protect me Arul Keshava! Didn't you go after the magic deer and let Maarichan escape? Rama! Because of Mandari and Kaikeyi didn't you spend half your life In the forest Rama? Didn't you go through hardships there? Rama? Against your mothers advice Rama didn't you renounce princely clothes? Repecting your fathers wishes didn't you go to Kashi Rama? Before going on your Vanavaasam did you not ask your brothers not to follow you? Rama! In the forest Rama didn't you kill the demons Karadhooshana? Did you not go to war with Ravana and his brothers, Rama? Did you not kill demons there, Rama? Did you not crown Vibhishna as King, Rama? Did you not go to Lanka to rescue Sita, Rama? and did you not kill Ravana there, Rama? Did you not crown Vibhishna the King of Lanka, Rama? Did you not return to Ayodhya, Rama? and where you not finally crowned the King, Rama?"

The festival tradition has been evolving over the years and both in Koothu and storytelling sessions, certain new events have been added by individual performers. The Koothu play called ‘Draupadi Kuravanji’ is one such addition which has become extremely popular. This has remarkable resemblances with the story of Pottu Raja, or Pormannan as performed by the Koothu actors. The Koothu narrative of Pottu Raja differs strikingly from the narrative of Pottu Raja, the first guardian deity of the Dharmaraja/ Draupadi Amman temples as narrated by the Bharatham storytellers. Pottu Raja was the popular name by which the Pallava kings were known as and this narrative will be elaborated upon when the Pallava connection to the festival is addressed.

[Draupadi Kuravanji Koothu video]- Here I come Panchala Kuratthi to look at my devotees

[Commentary] In ‘Draupadi Kuravanji’, a narrative which is definitely not in Vyasa’s Mahabharata, Duryodhana who has been searching unsuccessfully for the Pandavas nearing the end of their 12th year of Vanavaasam, listens to Shakuni’s devious plan to force the Pandavas to reveal themselves. If, as Shakuni expects, the Pandavas reveal themselves at this juncture, than the Pandavas could be imprisoned and be forced to spend another 13 years in Vanavaasam.

So, Duryodhana plans to perform the funeral rites for his cousins. According to Tamil traditions, if the funeral rites to a person is performed even mistakenly when they are actually alive, then they would be never be able to return home.

It becomes the task of the Pandavas to stop the funeral rites from being performed without disclosing their identity. First, Bhima enters Hastinapura disguised as a wood cutter to stop these rites and is promptly imprisoned. Now it is Draupadi's turn to both stop the funeral rites and to rescue Bhima. She enters Hastinapura, disguised as a gypsy fortune teller.

[Draupadi Kuravanji Koothu video]-The basket on my head is swirling and my clan deity is talking to me

[Commentary] She then meets the mother of the Kauravas, Gandhari and the 100 wives of the Kaurava brothers. Draupadi tells Gandhari and the other Kaurava women that she is an expert fortune teller who can narrate what had happened, what was happening and as to what the future holds.

[Draupadi in Koothu video invoking all the deities to assist her in foretelling the future] Mother! Ganga! Bhavani ! Come ! Come! Come! Amma Shakti! Come ! Come! Come! Agaya Vaani Durgai! Come! Come! Come! Eshwari ! Parvathi ! Come! Come! Come! I am invoking all the Devas! Please come!

[Commentary] After invoking all deities, Draupadi goes into a trance and begins her soothsaying. She first surprises Gandhari by disclosing events from Gandhari's past which no one other than Gandhari could know. Then importantly, she narrates the entire Mahabharata from the birth of the Lunar dynasty, to the Vanavaasam of the Pandavas to Gandhari and the wives of the Kaurava brothers. She continues the narrative with the Pandavas returning after successfully completing their stipulated Vanavaasam to reclaim their kingdom from Duryodhana. She continues with the events of the Great War where all the Kauravas would be killed by Bhima and Arjuna.

As in Hidimbi Kuri where Hidimbi foretells the Pandava future to Kunti to allay her fears, Draupadi also begins her narration from the birth of the Lunar Dynasty to the present time. The audience, in both these sessions, get to hear the Mahabharata again from two different perspectives and get to remember the Epic again.

[DRAUPADI SINGING THE MAHABHARATA KOOTHU VIDEO]- I am here, Panchala Kuratthi, at the request of my devotees! I am here, Panchala Kuratthi, at the request of my devotees! I carry the swirling basket on my head! Now I am ready to narrate the past, the present and the future! It is my misfortune that I have to visit the palace of bad people. This is where the terrible Dhuriyan [Duryodhana] attempted to violate my modesty”

[COMMENTARY] Duryodhana enters the play at this time and promptly imprisons the Gypsy fortune teller, suspecting her to be Draupadi herself. Now Arjuna comes in disguise as a Gypsy himself and frees both his brother Bhima and Draupadi. Now Duryodhana knows that the Pandavas are alive and he cannot do anything as it was still the 12th year of Vanavaasam where it did not matter if the Pandavas were seen.

The Kaurava elders now intervene with Duryodhana and foil Shakuni's plan of performing the funeral rites for the Pandavas as they were still alive. So the mission of Bhima, Draupadi and Arjuna to stop the funeral rites being performed is successful. More importantly, this Koothu gives the audience the narrative of the entire Mahabharata, with Draupadi refreshing the audience's memory of the Epic by narrating it from her perspective.

[KURAVANJI VIDEO DRAUPADI'S SONG]

The audiences for the festival prominently, are mostly women with the men providing the manpower to conduct the festival and watching the proceedings from the side lines. In most of the Koothu's performed it is mostly Arjuna, Duryodhana, Shakuni, Karna or Bhima who hold center stage with the women being almost peripheral characters. Draupadi has a prominent role in only three of the ten Koothu's in the theatre cycle. So this Koothu where Draupadi is the central character where her divinity is made explicit is very popular among the women. This might be the reason for its inclusion in the theatre cycle even though this narrative is found in neither in the Sanskrit nor in the Tamil renderings of the Epic and is purely an invention of the Koothu writers.

In most festival cycles, either the Koothu 'Draupadi Kuravanji' or the later day Bharatham interpolation of 'Hidimbi Kuri' would be included as it is extremely popular with the women audiences. In some festivals, both could also be included making the festival longer in duration.

[HIDIMBI KURI OR HIDIMBI AS THE FORTUNE TELLER IN BGARATHAM VIDEO] At first Budha, the son of Chandra, came to earth. To Budha was born the son Puru. The son of Puru was the king called Ayu, to Ayu was born the great king Nahusha,

[COMMENTARY] About 60 years back, a senior storyteller from Kanchipuram, Sundaramurthy, and the father of the contemporary Bharatham storyteller, Kanchipuram Muthuganesan added a performance to his repertoire. This was a performance called 'Hidimbi Kuri' and this became so popular that all other storytellers were compelled to include this in their performance.

[Mani Vasagan]- Some interpolations to the main text are always popular among the people. In Theukoothu the play 'Draupadi Kuravanji' is extremely popular. In the same fashion, in our Bharatham sessions we sing a text which is not found in Villibharatham or Nallapillai. This is a performance called Hidimbi Kuri which was first performed by Sundaramurthy Ayya.

[Muthuganesan]- Once the Pandavas escape from the Laquer Palace they reach Hidimba's forest and meet Hidimbi who sings a song which Villiyaar did not sing, but Nallapillai has mentioned it. He has said that Hidimbi could narrate the past, the present and the future. He did not elaborate any further, but my father created a performance, Hidimbi Kuri, using this line where Hidimbi foretells the Pandava future! When the next storyteller went to the same village, he was told about this performance and asked to sing it. Now if a soryteller says he does not know

Hidimbi Kuri, he will not be recognised as a Bharatham storyteller! Because this performance has become so popular with the audiences!

[Mani Vasagan]-Each singer/storyteller would bring her or his own style or 'Bani' to the rendering of the same text which would colour the text differently. If the respected Muthuganesan sang this song, his style would be more measured and austere like this -This son Janamejayan had a son called Prachinan' But when my father Melpallipattu Krishnamurthy sings the same song it will be lighter and more musical. This son Janamejayan had a son called Prachinan' . Prachinan's son was Sayyati whose son was Sarvabhoman"

Even in the same village, different storytellers and Koothu actors would be hired each year each with their own style or 'Bani', specific to their tradition; some storytellers would be hired for their musical abilities, others for the quality of their storytelling. Some Koothu troupes would be hired for the energy of their performance while other group might be hired for the element of tragedy they get into their performance. This again ensures that the emotional register of each festival even in the same village would be different each year. People still remember details of a performance which had probably happened twenty years earlier with great relish

[Na Muthuswamy]- Koothu and the Mahabharata festivals have been evolving down the ages. From the times the Nawabs of Arcot were ruling this region there is ritual performed in Purisai. Before the beginning of Koothu during Pongal, on Kaanum Pongal day there is a festival. In this ritual performed in Purisai there will be an actor representing Arcot Nawab. Another actor will be dressed as the British District Collector! These are not characters from the Koothu but are present just for this ritual. You can record all these, it can be both amusing and interesting. You can see rituals where many officials like the Accountant, the Munisif, Collector will be called. In Thanjavur Koothu they hold a rope separating the actors playing Hiraniyan and Narasimha. This custom of holding the rope they say came from British or Colonial times. It seems the British Collector of Thanjavur was scared that the actors playing Hiraniyan and Narasimha in their fight might really injure each other. So the Collector asked them to be separated by a rope. The actors transformed this edict of the Collector of using a separating rope into a performance itself. Any information given to the Koothu actors would be transformed by them into a theatrical performance. But if you ask me whether contemporary actors have the same ability to transform anything into theatre I might have to say no. But once this ability was there!"

The Mahabharata festivals as they are celebrated/performed in Tamil Nadu have evolved and transformed from its origin in the Pallava times. Perunthevanaar Bharatham which was commissioned in the Pallava times is now a lost text with only 339 verses of the original 12,000 verses currently available.

The festival as it is performed right now is structured around a 14th Century text called 'Villibharatham'. An 18th century text in simpler prose called the 'Nallapillai Bharatham' is used by a lot of contemporary storytellers. While the songs they sing would be from Villibharatham,

Nallapillai Bharatham would be referred to for the narrative elaboration of these songs. There is a strong anti-war core to these festivals which will be elaborated in the next session, and Draupadi is seen as the representative of all the people unjustly affected by war. This narrative will be continued in the next chapter where the anti-war nature of the festival and its Pallava origins are explored further. The anti-war core of the festival, its Pallava origins and birth of Draupadi at Senji will be explored in the next session.