

8. Ksheera Saagara Madhanam

Legend has it that sage Bharatha, the author of Natya Sastra (the original Indian treatise on Dance) composed Ksheera Saagara Madhanam as one of the first dance dramas on the advise of Lord Brahma. This dance drama brings out the latent energy of the performers and the audience alike- towards the understanding and fulfillment of Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha, the four paths of Life.



Ksheera Saagara Madhanam is the story of the quest by Devas (the Gods) and the Danavas (the demons) for the divine nectar Amritha that has the power to give eternal life. To get Amritha, these perennial enemies have to cooperate with each other and churn the Ksheera Saagara (the Ocean of Milk). This epic endeavor is fraught with many perils, but brings many rewards as well. In the end, the Devas, the protectors of Dharma, acquire the Amritha and vanquish their rivals.

Scene-1:

Traditionally the first scene of a dance drama involves the invocation of various Gods of the stage (Poorva Rangam - Ishtadevatha Prarthana, Nandi Sthuthi, inviting Rangadhistava Devatas).

Scene-2:

The Devas, defeated in a war by the Danavas go in a deputation headed by Indra to present their grievances to Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu advises them to seek the cooperation of the Danavas in obtaining Amritha by churning Ksheera Saagara, using Mandara Giri (the biggest mountain) as a churn and Vasuki (a huge five- headed serpent) as a rope.

Scene-3:

Bali, emperor of the Danavas, having established his supremacy over the Devas, reigns with Amaravathi as his capitol. During a dance performance in his palace, the Devas headed by Indra, approach him and assure him of their desire for peaceful and friendly relations between Devas and Danavas. They explain the project for obtaining Amritha and promise an equal share to them if they cooperate in the venture. Though Sukra, the teacher of Danavas (Danava Guru) expresses his disapproval, Bali ignores his advise and promises full cooperation. His real motive in agreeing, however, is his ambition to rule the entire universe.



Scene-4:

The Devas and Danavas uproot Mandara Giri and transport it to the Milky Ocean.

Scene-5:

The Devas and Danavas go to Naga Loka (the land of snakes) and pray for the help of Vasuki, who agrees to help them.

Scene-6:

Mandara Giri, with Vasuki rolled around it, is installed in the Ocean of Milk. However, the mountain sinks and is submerged. At last, in response to the prayers of the Devas and Danavas, Lord Vishnu appears in the form of a tortoise which supports the mountain on its back.

Scene-7:

Preparing to churn the Ksheera Saagara, the Devas grasp the head of Vasuki, the Danavas the tail. The Danavas protest and insist on holding the head. The Devas calmly agrees, but when the churning begins, Vasuki strained by the pulling, vomits poison, thus killing some of the Danavas.

Scene-8:

During the churning, there emerges from the Milky Ocean "Halahalam" - a poison, a hundred times more potent than the fire in the eye of Lord Siva. Fearing the destruction of the entire universe, the Devas and Danavas pray to Lord Siva, who appears and swallows the poison in order to save the world.

Scene-9:

As the churning continues there emerge many wonders which are distributed to the Devas and Danavas:

1. Surabhi or Khamadhenu (the celestial cow whose teats exude nectar) is given to the Devarishees.
 2. Utchairsavam (the horse), though desired by Bali, is given to Indra at the advice of Lord Siva.
 3. Hari (a deer) is given to the Devas.
 4. Iravatham (a white elephant)
 5. Kalpa Vriksha (the desire- gratifying tree) are given to Indra.
 6. The Apsaras (celestial dancers) are given to the Devas.
 7. Amsa of Chandra (a part of the moon) occupies his place in the universe at the advise of Lord Brahma
 8. Lakshmi is received by lord Vishnu as his consort.
 9. Varuni (a girl) is given to the Danavas
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Scene-10:

Finally, Dhanvanthari emerges holding the Amritha Kalasa full of nectar. Lord Vishnu foreseeing a violent struggle for possession of the Amritham, appears in the guise of Mohini, a beautiful woman. At the sight of her, the Danavas forget themselves. While they are thus distracted, the Amritham is distributed to the Devas alone. Only one of the Danavas, Rahu, retains his wits and sitting with the Devas, consumes the Amritham. When the Danavas realize the trick, they attempt to do violence to Mohini. She disappears and in her place, Lord Vishnu appears and shows his Visvarupa. The Danavas flee in terror.

