


# **Semiotic Study Of Yakṣagāna: A Representational Analysis**

Dissertation submitted to  Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the award of the Degree of  
**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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June 8, 1990

CERTIFICATE

Certified that this dissertation entitled SEMIOTIC STUDY OF YAKṢAGĀNA: A REPRESENTATIONAL ANALYSIS submitted by Guru Rao Bapat, Centre of Linguistics and English, School of Languages, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far, in part or full, for any other degree or diploma of any university. This may be placed before the examiners for evaluation for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy.

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To

the unknown Yakṣagāna artists  
of the past who kept the form  
alive through their dedication  
and devotion.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I express my sincere thanks to Prof. H.S.Gill, the leading semiotician, who initiated me into semiotics and encouraged me to take<sup>up</sup> this topic. I also express my gratefulness to him for his able guidance. Dr. Kapil Kapoor has been a source of encouragement to me. I sincerely thank him for his guidance as well as the personal interest he took in my work.

Thanks are also due to the Faculty and Staff of the Centre of Linguistics and English for their help and encouragement.

Sri Shambhu Hegde Keremane, the celebrated Yakṣa-gāna artist, took a keen interest in my work. He allowed me to make use of his personal video recording of Jarāsandha and posed specially for the photographs of the mudrās. I express my heartiest thanks to him for all his help.

Two of my friends, Sri Devendra and Sri G.S. Bhat of Sagar have been very helpful throughout my work. My indebtedness to them is more than I can express.

My friends, Sri Mahadeva, Sri T. Venkatesh Murthy and Sri Rajeev Sharma took a keen interest in my work. My thanks are due to them also.

Thanks specially to my wife Madhuri and children Chaitanya and Mayur for tolerating my long periods of absence and egging me on to complete my work.

Thanks also to Sri Mrithuanjay and Sri Jaideep for the typing work.

GURU RAO BAPAT



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Map - Martha Aston and Bruce Christie Yakṣagāna

Plan - Himakar. J.N.U.

Photographs 3, 11, 24, 26, 31 to 35 - Prabhakar, Sagar.  
The rest of the photographs are by the author.

## INTRODUCTION

## I INTRODUCTION

### I.1 The Object of Study

I.1.a. Yakṣagāna is a dance drama form popular in the Malenad region in Karnataka.<sup>1</sup> It has not been possible to trace its origin and history with accuracy, although authentic records of its existence for at least five hundred years have been established.<sup>2</sup> Yakṣagāna has some similarities with other traditional theatre forms of South India. M.Prabhakara Joshi, an astute Yakṣagāna critic, argues that all these different forms must have evolved from one proto form. "The traditional theatre forms of South India like Terekūthu of Tamil Nadu, Vīthi Nāṭaka of Andhra, Kathakalī of Kerala and Muḍalapāya - Paḍuvalapāya [Yakṣagāna] have many similarities and it is clear that they have all branched out from the same source".<sup>3</sup>

Though Yakṣagāna evolved as a folk form, it would be more accurate to describe its present form as folk-classical. Certain of its aspects like music, dance and costume have a highly developed and codified structure that have evolved over centuries though they do not base themselves on any (written) authoritative texts (Śāstra

Grantha). At the same time, its folk origin can be seen in certain other aspects as well as in the similarity between Yakṣagāna and some forms of spirit worship prevalent in the rural areas of South Kanara district even today. Like most theatre forms the world over, Yakṣagāna's origin was also in religious worship. The religious links are strong even today. Most troupes are organised in the names of temples. Only recently are troupes being organised on a commercial basis.

To understand the cultural life of a people, it is necessary to relate it to the socio geographic situation. The following quotation gives an idea of the geographical situation of the coastal regions of Karnataka, where Yakṣagāna has its strongest roots. "The coastal districts of Karnataka have the roaring Arabian sea on the west, the Sahyadri ranges on the east. The land mass is dotted with hills and valleys. Four months in a year, heavy monsoon rains; then sunshine followed by pleasant winter; then comes the scorching summer. The life of the people here is shaped by the features of the landmass that is known as the creation of Paraśurāma." <sup>4</sup> Yakṣagāna performances are normally held from November to May, with a break in the rainy season (June to October). The main occupation of the people in rural areas is agriculture. These villagers form the largest

base of Yakṣagāna even today. The troupes move from village to village giving one performance in each place either in open space or in temporarily erected tents. Each troupe has about thirty-forty members.

A large part of the audience is not merely rural but also illiterate (in the formal sense of the term). The same can be said of the performers too. But their knowledge of the form and of the mythological world depicted in the performance is very deep indeed. The themes of Yakṣagāna performance are from the ancient Indian epics and Purānas. The universe presented in Yakṣagāna discourse is aptly described by Martha B. Ashton and Bruce Christie :

The plays are set in era when Lords Śiva and Viṣṇu in their manifest human forms walked the earth. It was a time when holy men were holy, when good eventually and always overcame evil; when Garuḍa flew the skies bearing Lord Kṛṣṇa in splendour on his many heroic and epic exploits when aerial chariots whisked not only gods and celestial musicians through out the heavens but also bore the treacherous Rāvaṇa and the kidnaped Sīta to his island kingdom. There are the heroes, Arjuna, Bhīma, Bhīṣma and Karṇa; the villains Duryōdhana, Rukma; the hideous but mighty demon Rāvaṇa; the scheming demoness Śūrpanakhi; the beautiful and delicate Draupadi and Sīta and the mischievous and playful

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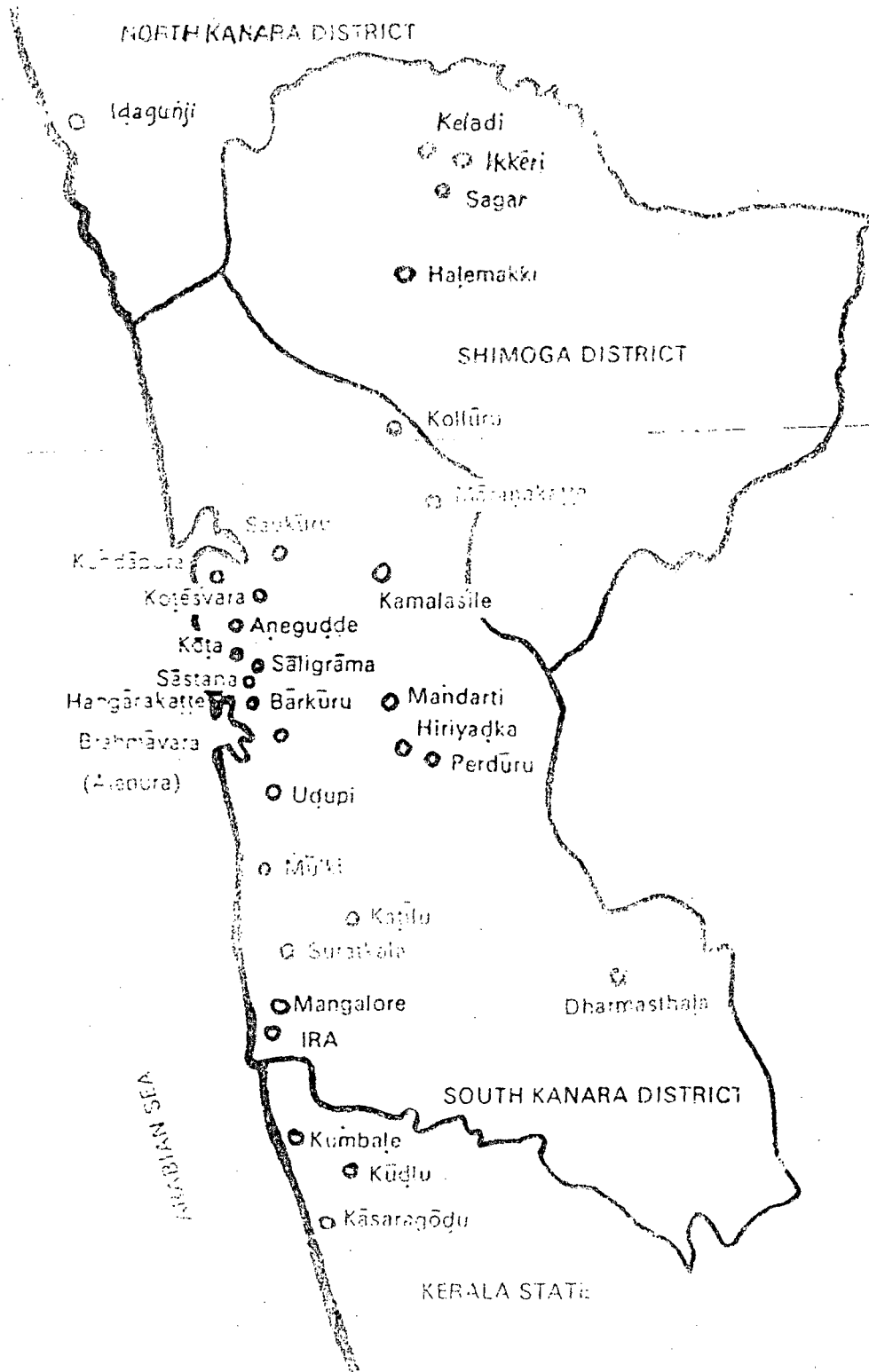
gandharvas.

Over the years many regional variations developed in Yakṣagāna, so that today we have three different styles within Yakṣagāna. The normal practice is to

divide it into two styles - Tenku (Southern) and Baḍagu (Northern). Within the northern style, we have another subcategory (North Kanara) which is distinct from the other two in acting, singing and the use of mudrās and gestures. So it would be more appropriate to say that there are three styles prevalent today. These styles differ from one another in costume, dance and the use of the percussion instruments. At the same time, their similarities are also quite distinct. They all, for example, use the same written scripts (Prasangas). These different styles are located in different geographical areas. In the southern part of South Kanara district we have the southern style and in the northern part of the same district we have the northern style. Further north, in North Kanara district, we find the far Northern variety (See map). The differences between the first two styles are more marked than between the two northern styles.

Apart from these geographical differences, we have to make one more classification based on the way the troupes are organised as this has a direct bearing on the performance text and thus the discourse. Earlier, all performances used to be in the open, with the show being sponsored by some patron, as an offering to the gods. The religious context and motive were foremost





Map showing places of historical and contemporary significance to Yakṣagāna

for the artists as well as the spectators. Later some troupes began to be organised along commercial lines, the shows being performed in temporarily erected tents and admission fee charged. Both types of troupes function today. If the religious context is still maintained in the troupes that perform in the open, commercial compulsions gain prominence in the latter.

I.1.b The present study is an attempt at studying the distinctive mode of semiosis of Yakṣagāna. Just as the discourse in literature is contained in the written text, the discourse of a theatrical presentation is contained in the performance text. The performance text includes not merely the written text but every other aspect that partakes in the process of signification on the stage. It changes from performance to performance because each performance is a one time event; this condition may be to some extent overcome in case of repeat performances, though not entirely. As this study mainly concerns with Yakṣagāna as a theatrical medium, I have taken the performance texts as my primary material. References to the written texts of Yakṣagāna which are called prasangas, are made only as part of this performance text. The purpose of this study is to analyse the process of signification - the sign logic that operates in Yakṣagāna. Thus it is mainly a synchronic study of

the system. So, highly debated questions like the origin or evolution of Yakṣagāna, have not been tackled here. The focus of the study is mainly on the system underlying or the rationale behind the substance. Diachronic details are taken up only when they help in understanding the synchronicity.

Of the three styles of Yakṣagāna mentioned earlier, the North Kanara style is taken up for study here. The analysis of this particular style, no doubt, throws light on the other styles also, as they share many common features, but the details, unless otherwise specified, belong to this particular style. In addition, the structural details mentioned here, are of commercially organised troupes. This choice has been made for two reasons:

- 1) this development along commercial lines of the form that evolved essentially in a religious context, has opened up interesting vistas for study.
- 2) I do not necessarily share the opinion of some that commercialisation itself has led to the destruction of the artistic qualities of the medium. At least some of these troupes have not merely maintained the tradition but have also succeeded in popularising Yakṣagāna in towns and cities where they were rarely witnessed earlier.

Yakṣagāna, in its process of signification, utilises different media like dance, music, costume, written text, improvised dialogue et cetera. Many of these are independent artistic forms in themselves. Yakṣagāna makes use of all these multimedia and a study of their functions in the semiosis of Yakṣagāna, will need an exhaustive analysis. But this analysis being a representational one, I have concentrated only on certain aspects. Other aspects are touched upon only to the extent necessary for understanding the functioning of the form as a whole. For example, I have not dealt with the thematic aspects (except in Chapter IV). The study of music or dance is also incomplete. So, this study is restricted to certain aspects and their functions in the process of semiosis. Other aspects of this complex process, like the ones mentioned above are only touched upon and their functioning hinted at.

The main body of the analysis will be in Chapters II and III. Chapter II will deal with the structure of a Yakṣagāna performance. Each performance has certain features that are fixed and invariable and certain others that vary from performance to performance and thus allow scope for improvisation. The study will concentrate on the functioning of these features and their hierarchical configuration at the syntagmatic and

paradigmatic levels. Along with this, the chapter will also study certain general questions like the manner of representation and the role played by the unwritten convention. In the last part of the second chapter (Secularisation), an attempt has been made to relate the changes taking place in the form to the socio religious context to observe how the social changes of the last three or four decades have changed the discourse of Yakṣagāna.

Chapter III deals with histrionic representation - the role of the actor. Jiri Veltrusky, the theatre semiotician says, "The stage figure created by the actor endows all signs with unity".<sup>7</sup> The question of the actor as a sign is tackled first and then the analysis concentrates on the specific features of Yakṣagāna acting. Through a study of this, an attempt has also been made to theorise on an Indian approach to acting as differentiated from some of the Western schools of acting. Different aspects of histrionic representation in Yakṣagāna, like dance, improvised dialogues, gestures and mudrās and their signficatory processes are also studied. The Nāṭya Śāstra, the authoritative work on dramaturgy from ancient India, includes aspects like costume, make-up and stage props in abhinaya and calls it āhārya.<sup>8</sup> This study has also followed the same

approach and so costume and make-up are studied as part of abhinaya in this chapter. Costume and make-up constitute one of the most attractive features of Yakṣagāna. They are highly codified and posit not merely different categories of characters but also project the internal moral qualities. I have tried to decode this costume make-up code with the help of many photographs.

Chapter IV is the analysis of one particular performance text. The different aspects, studied in isolation in the earlier chapters, are studied in unison here as they function in the performance text. The observations made in chapters II and III are applied to one performance text, to observe how all these aspects function together to create a new discourse. Comment has also been made on certain aspects of signification not referred to earlier like the use of space as a semiotic device. The main concern of this chapter is to analyse how all these discrete elements lead to the constitution of the discourse at the manifest and the immanent level.

## I.2 The Method of Study

Semiotics is a science that studies the sign systems. As an independent discipline, its development took place mainly in the second half of twentieth cen-

tury. Its forefathers were the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce. Saussure's influence has been pervasive not merely on linguistics but on such diverse fields as anthropology, culture studies and psychology. Attempts have also been made to apply the principles of semiotics to the study of literature. The study of narrative specially, has received great attention. The semiotics of theatre in comparison has received lesser attention, though the effort started with the Prague Structuralists. An early attempt at analysing a 'spectacle' can be seen in Roland Barthes "The World of Wrestling" (1952).<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately this beginning was never followed up and so never led to a comprehensive theory of theatre semiotics. Later semiotic approaches to theatre, have drawn elements from different (often conflicting) sources. Keir Elam, in his book, The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama sums up the situation, "Given the unsettled and largely undefined nature of territory in view here, the examination that follows is inevitably extremely eclectic, taking into account sources ranging from classical formalism, information theory to recent linguistic philosophical, logical and sociological research. The result is undoubtedly uneven, but this is

perhaps symptomatic of the present state of semiotics at  
10  
large".

But of late, changes are taking place in the semiotic approaches to theatre that reflect changes taking place in other fields of semiotics. As Marx De Mey says, "Recently, in the wake of similar changes brought about in other fields of semiotics, there began to emerge the coordinates of a pragmatic approach to the theatrical performance, an approach in which it was proposed to study the spectacular text in relation to its cultural context on the one hand and on the other in relation to its conditions of enunciation and of recep-  
11  
tion". This study has also adopted a similar approach with regard to Yakṣagāna. The question of semiosis has been studied with constant references to the cultural context.

Semiotics draws its conceptual framework as well as the tools of analysis from linguistics, which are applied to the study of non linguistic signs. The assumption behind this is explained by Jonathan Culler:

The notion that linguistics might be useful in studying other cultural phenomena is based on two fundamental insights: first that social and cultural phenomena are not simply material objects or event but objects and events with meaning and hence signs; and second that they do not have essences but are



defined by a network of relations, both internal and external. Stress may fall on one or the other of these propositions... but the fact that the two are inseparable, for in studying signs one must investigate the system of relations that enables meanings to be produced and reciprocally one can only determine what are the pertinent relations

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among items by considering them as signs.

Any new work of art should lead to the creation of a new significance. The artist may create the new significance either by restructuring a known narrative or by making use of a new one. Any study of a work of art will in turn be an enquiry into the new significance and the process by which it is created. So, it has to tackle two fundamental questions: how is meaning generated and how is it communicated. Any semiotic study will have to concentrate on these two questions but these two are no doubt interrelated. The creation of a new meaning necessarily involves a new structuration which in turn will be the result of a conscious effort at communication. But in the study of a theatrical performance, the question of reception also becomes important because of the live interaction between the actor and the audience, where the audience response will have an immediate impact on the communicative process itself.

So, these are the questions one has to tackle in the semiotic study of a theatrical medium like Yakṣagāna. Some of the semiotic concepts used in tackling

these questions are explained below.

### I.2.a Sign - Signifier - Signified

Signs are particular forms that mediate between the substance of thought and the physical expression. Saussure uses the term signifier (signifiant) for the physical manifestation and the term signified (signifié) for the conceptual aspect of the sign. The sign is a union of the signifier and the signified. The sign is thus a two faced entity linking the signifier and the signified and Saussure insists that the relation is strictly dyadic. In conventional signs the relation between the two is arbitrary and hence one cannot explain individual signs but must study them as part of a structure. In studying the structure, one must look for oppositions between signs which point to the paradigmatic relations and combinations of signs to form larger units which point to the syntagmatic relations.

In theatre-semiotics, the Prague school semioticians thought of the entire performance text as a macro sign, "whose signified is the 'aesthetic object' residing<sup>13</sup> in the collective consciousness of the public". Later semioticians realised that the 'macro-sign' has to be broken up into smaller signifying units for any real analysis. So, the performance was thought of not as a

macro sign but as a network of signifying units.

### I.2.b Icon, Index and Symbol

If Saussure insists on a dyadic relationship between signifier and signified, Peirce thinks of them as a triadic relationship. In his analysis of signs, he distinguishes ten trichotomies whereby signs can be classified. Of these, this study has made use of the trichotomy from the point of view of the object: icon, index and symbol. The distinction between these signs may be briefly stated as follows:

- (1) If the sign denotes its object by virtue of a real similarity that holds between physical properties (cf. Firstness) of the sign and physical properties of its object, Peirce designates that sign as an icon.
- (2) If the sign denotes its object by virtue of a real cause and effect link (cf. Secondness) that holds between the sign and object, Peirce designates that sign as an index.
- (3) If the sign denotes its object by virtue of a general association of ideas that is in the nature of a habit or convention (cf. Thirdness), Peirce designates that sign as a <sup>14</sup>symbol.

Thus icons represent the signified by virtue of similitude. Diagrams, maps, onomatopoeic words are examples of iconic signs. It should be realised that in some cases, the similarity is hard to maintain, but similitude in any form is enough for the sign to become iconic. In theatre, representation is largely iconic in nature. Jan Kott, who was among the first to apply the Peircian model to the theatre, commenting on the role of the actor says, "In the theatre, the basic icon is the body and voice of the actor"<sup>15</sup>. But the question of the iconicity of the actor becomes more complex, when, (as in Yakṣaḡāna for example), we have the actor playing the role of a demon or when female roles are played by men. Thus icons can never be pure and even similitude is many a time culturally conditioned.

Index on the other hand represents by a real physical connection. Stockings denoting legs, smoke denoting fire can be cited as examples of indexical signs. Peirce includes the pointing finger also in the category of indexical signs. Pointing or drawing attention to particular signifying aspects, is a technique frequently resorted to, in theatre. Keir Elam points to the important role of indexical signs in theatre. "The category of index is so broad that every aspect of

performance can be considered in some sense  
indexical".<sup>16</sup> Kinesics - the study of body motion as a  
communicative medium and Proxemics - the study of spa-  
tial distance as signs, can also be included in this  
category.

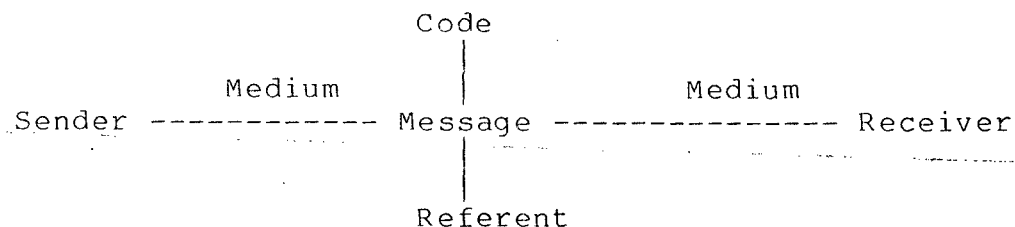
In a symbol, the relation between the object and  
the sign is conventional and arbitrary. (For Saussure,  
symbol represents natural iconic signs.) Man made  
codes, algebraic systems are examples of symbols. The  
most famous example of a symbol is of course language  
(spoken and written). In certain forms of theatre,  
symbol rather than index or icon becomes the primary  
mode of signification. Yakṣagāna belongs to that cate-  
gory. The use of mudrās is one instance of the use of  
symbols.

These three categories of signs never exist in a  
pure form. In any given instance, each sign has more  
than one quality and the question is only one of predom-  
inance. So, one has to guard against any absolutist  
application of these categories.

### I.2.c Jacobson's Communication Theory

Roman Jakobson, one of the influential thinkers of  
the present century, drawing from information theory,  
posits a theory of communication in which he recognises

six elements in any linguistic communication. The six elements that Jacobson mentions in his theory, and their relative positions are presented by him in the form of the following diagram.



In any form of communication, a message is transmitted from a sender to a receiver. Apart from these obvious aspects, communication involves other elements as well. This communication has to be through a medium; it has to be framed in a code. The message is about something; the thing spoken about is the referent. Each message is framed in a code and a knowledge of the particular code is a prerequisite for effective communication. But still the message is not to be confused with the meaning of the communication. "The message is not the meaning." Meaning lies at the end of the speech event, which gives the verbal formula of the message its life and colour".

Related to these six elements, Jacobson also identifies six functions of communication.

1) The referential function  
 This function "is the basis of all communication; it

defines the relation between the message and the object to which it refers. The fundamental problem is to formulate true, i.e. objective, observable and verifiable information concerning the referent".<sup>19</sup> This function is predominant in the language used in various sciences where any confusion between the sign and the encoded message is reduced to the minimum.

## 2) The emotive function

This "defines the relation between the message and the emitter".<sup>20</sup> If the referential function express ideas and observations regarding the referent, the emotive function expresses the sender's attitudes or feelings regarding the referent. In this function, Jacobson does not include spontaneous expressions of emotion because they do not have a communicative intention. But, we may include them also in this category so far as theatrical communication goes, because in theatre everything has a communicative purpose. (Even non purpose actions - involuntary physiological reactions for example - are taken as purposive by the spectators.)

The referential and emotive functions represent two distinctly opposite uses of language like objective/subjective, cognitive/affective.

## 3) The conative or injunctive function

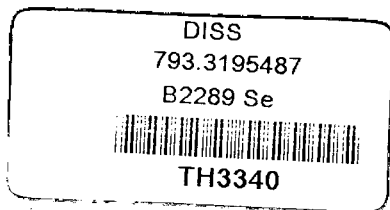
This function "defines the relation between the message

and the receiver, the aim of all communication being to  
elicit a reaction from the latter".<sup>21</sup> This function  
demands a reaction from the receiver which may be refer-  
ential or emotive (referring back to the opposition  
between the two mentioned earlier). Military commands  
belong to the former category whereas in advertising the  
second function (of motivating the receiver), becomes  
important.

4) The poetic or aesthetic function

This function "is defined by Jacobson as the relation  
between the message and itself. This is the aesthetic  
function par excellence; in the arts the referent is the  
message which thus ceases to be instrument of communica-  
tion and becomes its object".<sup>22</sup> This function, as can  
be expected, is predominant in literature and the arts.  
But even in poetry, the poetic function is not the only  
function nor is the poetic function totally absent in  
other forms of communication. As Jacobson says, "Poetic  
function is not the sole function of verbal art but only  
its dominant determining function, whereas in all other  
verbal activities it acts as a subsidiary accessory  
constituent. This function, by promoting the palpabili-  
ty of signs, deepens the fundamental dichotomy of signs  
and objects".<sup>23</sup>





5) The phatic function

This, "affirms, maintains or halts communication... The accentuation of the contact - the phatic function can give rise to a profuse ritual exchange, even to whole dialogues whose sole aim is to prolong the conversation".<sup>24</sup> This function is utilised to draw the attention of the receiver or to establish or prolong the communication. The talk of lovers where the same words are repeated only to prolong the contact is a fine example of this. Such ritualistic exchanges play an important role in many social occasions. Communication itself becomes the referent of the message here.

6) The metalinguistic function

This function "defines the meaning of any signs which may not be understood by the receiver... and here the referent of the message is the code itself".<sup>25</sup> The metalinguistic sign frames the message often referring back to the code from which the message derives its meaning. Underlining of words, putting them in inverted commas are examples of the metalinguistic function. As P. Guiraud says, quite often, the title of a book refers to the code rather than to the content.

All these functions are concurrent in any communication. One function may be dominant but other functions are also present.

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Jacobson's communication theory deals basically with language but the elements and functions of communication that he enumerates in his theory are applicable to non linguistic communication as well. In this study, it will be applied basically for the study of non linguistic modes of communication.

#### I.2.d Denotation - connotation

The word denotation has been used in so many different senses that Umberto Eco quoting Geach says that the term, "denotation 'should be withdrawn from philosophical currency' since it has produced a 'sad tale of confusion'".<sup>26</sup> These two terms are used here in the sense in which they were used by Barthes (and structural semiotics in general), where denotation suggests the primary meaning of a sign and by connotation is meant, "all the second and more or less peripheral meanings or content units that a given code or subcode assign to the denotative one. Thus the word dog denotes canine (or other zoological properties) and connotes<sup>27</sup> according to given cultural conventions, 'fidelity'". Connotative meanings are often more powerful than the denotative ones, and they are dependent on the world knowledge of a cultural group. Bogatyrev, the Russian formalist, who was among the earli-

est to apply the principles of semiotics to theatre says, "what exactly is a theatrical costume or a set that represents a house on stage? When used in a play, both the theatrical costume and the house set are often signs that point to one of the signs characterising the costume or the house in the play. Infact each is a sign of a sign and not the sign of a material thing". In theatre, this sign-signifier chain leads to multiple layers of meanings. Thus the theatre is able to generate an infinite range of signifieds by employing a limited repertory of signifiers.

Connotation is not unique to theatrical presentation. Other forms of signs also have the denotation/connotation structure. But one may not become aware of these multiple layers of meanings in real life situations, but on the stage, due to ostension, these layers of meanings are forcefully brought to the attention of the spectator.

#### I.2.e Ostension

Theatrical representation makes use of another mode of representation that differentiates it from literature or painting and that is ostension. Umberto Eco says, "Ostension has been studied by medieval logicians, by Wittgenstein, by contemporary theorists of

theatre... Ostension is one of the various ways of signifying consisting in de-realising a given object in order to make it stand for an entire class. But ostension is at the same time, the most basic instance of performance".  
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For example, if a teacher, in order to explain what a prism is, holds a prism in hand and tells her students, 'This is a prism,' she is ostending it. The prism in the hand then stands for the entire class of which it is a member. Thus the particular prism becomes de-realised. Often on the stage, several aspects are ostended making them stand for the entire class. In addition, the entire theatrical performance is itself a case of ostension and thus all signs on stage become derealised.

#### I.2.f Rasa theory

In the comments on methodology so far, different approaches to the questions of signification and communication, that is how meanings are generated and exchanged, have been discussed. Now, two other questions have to be asked. 1) In theatrical presentation, what exactly is it that is communicated? 2) What is the effect or impact of the communicated 'message' on the spectators? The problem in answering these questions is, as Jonathan Culler says, 'the difficulty of saying

precisely what is communicated is here accompanied by the fact that signification is indubitably taking place".<sup>30</sup> In terms of practical utility, the 'value' of the message communicated is minimal because it does not relate to the immediate needs of the spectator. Still, he goes to the theatre again and again because he considers the experience worthwhile. How to account for the aesthetic experience derived from a work of art - in the case of our study here, a theatrical performance.

The question of aesthetic experience has been the great enigma that aestheticians, both Eastern and Western, have tried to tackle from different philosophical, theoretical stand points. In this study, an attempt has been made to integrate the Rasa theory of Indian aesthetics to the semiotic approach already mentioned. This attempt may appear strange but it is not so. It is now generally accepted that the semiotic concerns were pervasive in many Indian systems of thought. As R.N. Srivastava and K. Kapoor say, "Although semiotics as an independent discipline came to be identified with C.S. Peirce (1839-1914) and Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and as an organised academic undertaking became visible only in the second half of the twentieth century, as a theoretical speculation, its origin may be traced in ancient India to a number of thinkers belonging to

different schools of thought".

Thus, the use of Rasa theory in the study here, can be thought of as an extension of the semiotic concepts but with a different terminology. In addition, traditional Indian theatre forms have all been influenced by The Nāṭya Śāstra, at some stage or other in the process of their evolution. The influence has been both deep and pervasive. For example, in Yakṣagāna, the manifestation of this influence can be seen in the structural aspects of a performance text. The approach to acting in classical Indian theatre is also moulded largely by Rasa theory. So an understanding of the functioning of Yakṣagāna, becomes impossible without reference to Rasa theory.

The Nāṭya Śāstra defines Rasa thus, "out of the union of the Determinants (vibhāva), the Consequent [anubhāva] and the Transitory Mental States [Vyabhicāri], The birth of Rasa takes place".<sup>32</sup> This famous aphorism has been interpreted in various ways by the later commentators. Bharata himself explains the statement on Rasa by using the analogy of the taste one gets from food made of different ingredients." It is said that just as well disposed persons, while eating food cooked with many kinds of spice enjoy its tastes, and attain pleasure and satisfaction, so the cultured

people taste the Durable psychological states [sthāyi bhāva] while they see them represented by an expression of the various psychological states with words, gestures and sattva and derive pleasure and satisfaction".<sup>33</sup>

Bharata distinguishes between four types of bhāva or mental states : vibhāva (Determinents), anubhāva (Consequents), Sancāri or Vyabichāri bhāva (Transitory mental states), sthāyi bhāva (Fundamental mental states). These concepts are central to the theory of Rasa. Bharata further classifies these and explains how they lead to the enjoyment of the appropriate Rasa by the spectator (who has the necessary qualification). The meaning of these terms and how they lead to Rasa can be perceived in the following summation of Bharata's opinions by Raniero Gnoli :

According to the Nāṭya Śāstra, eight fundamental feelings, instincts, emotions or mental states called bhāva or sthāyi bhāva can be distinguished in the human soul : Delight (rati), Laughter (hāsa), Sorrow (śōka), Anger (Krodha), Heroism (utsāha), Fear (bhaya), Disgust (jigupasā) and Wonder (vismaya). These eight states are inborn in man's heart. They permanently exist in the mind of every man in the form of latent impression (vāsana) derived from actual experiences in the present life or from inherited instincts, and, as such, they are ready to emerge into his consciousness on any occasion... These eight bhāvas indeed do not appear in a pure form. The various modulations of our mental states are extremely complex, and each of the fundamental states

appears in association with other concomitant mental states, as Discouragement, Weakness, Apprehension and so on. These occasional transitory impermanent states are, according to Bharata thirty six. These same causes etc, being acted on the stage or described in poetry, not lived in real life give the spectators, the particular pleasure to which Bharata gives the name of Rasa. The fundamental mental states being eight in number, there are also eight Rasas i.e., the Erotic (śṛṅgāra), the Comic (hāsyā), the Pathetic (karuṇā), the Furious (raudra), the Heroic (vīra), the Terrible (bhayānaka), the Odious (bibhatsa) and the Marvelous (adbhuta). Later speculation generally admits a ninth permanent feeling Serenity (śama), the corresponding Rasa is the Quietistic (śānta). When they are not part of real life but are elements of poetic expression, even the causes effects and concomitant elements, just as the permanent mental states take another name and are called respectively Determinants (vibhāva) Consequents (anubhāva) and Transitory mental states (vyabhicāri bhāva). Of course, from the audience's point of view, the consequents do not follow the feeling as they do in ordinary life, but they act as a sort of causes which intensify and prolong the feeling brought about by the determi-

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nants.

Thus we can observe that in artistic creation the bhāvas follow a reverse order from that in which they appear in real life. The vibhāva and the anubhāva become the signifiers through which the spectators reach the signified which is the sthāyi bhāva. The sthāyi bhāva leads him to the enjoyment of the Rasa. The Nāṭya Śāstra's approach to the question of Rasa is simple and straight forward as can be seen from the example of food and its relishment. But as Rangacharya says, "Later writes, particularly his [Bharata's] admirers and com-



mentators have tried to make this idea as abstruse as possible".<sup>35</sup> Questions like the number of Rasas or if śāntarasa can be depicted on the stage have not been taken up here as they do not concern this study. By and large the Nāṭya Śāstra's approach to Rasa theory has been followed. The Sanskrit terminology itself has been used instead of the English translations of these terms.

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STRUCTURE OF A YAKSAGANA PERFORMANCE

## II THE STRUCTURE OF A YAKṢAGĀNA PERFORMANCE

To understand any given system of signification, it is necessary to study the sign process. These signs in turn are not expressions that point to meanings outside them. They are part of a network of relations where the meaning of individual signs has to be found in correlation or opposition to other signs in the structure. Only a study of the structure will give us an understanding of the signifiatory process.

The structure of any Yakṣagāna performance has certain features that are fixed and invariable for all performances and others that vary from performance to performance. A study of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations of these features will reveal the way the system functions as a whole. So a study of these features - fixed and variable - and their relations through conjunction or disjunction is made in the beginning of this chapter. This is followed by a consideration of certain global questions with regard to the mode of representation and the religious/cultural context of Yakṣagāna.

A Yakṣagāna performance normally spreads from 9.30 p.m. till sunrise the next morning. The entire night's performance can be divided into three parts :

- i) Pūrva ranga or the preliminary part of a performance
- ii) The prasanga or the particular episode enacted
- iii) Mangala or the auspicious closure

II.1 Pūrva ranga - The preliminary part of a performance.

This consists of certain items that are performed prior to the commencement of the show as well as the songs and dances performed in the beginning of every show. The items performed prior to the actual commencement of the show, situate the performance as a whole and indicate the strong religious influence on Yakṣagāna. They consist of the following.

II.1.a Preliminaries performed prior to the actual show.

An hour or two prior to the actual commencement of the show, the musicians play on the percussion instruments, caṇḍe and maddale. There is no song and the singer just plays on the cymbals to keep the rhythm. The rhythms played are in different tālas consisting of different rhythmic patterns and their permutations.

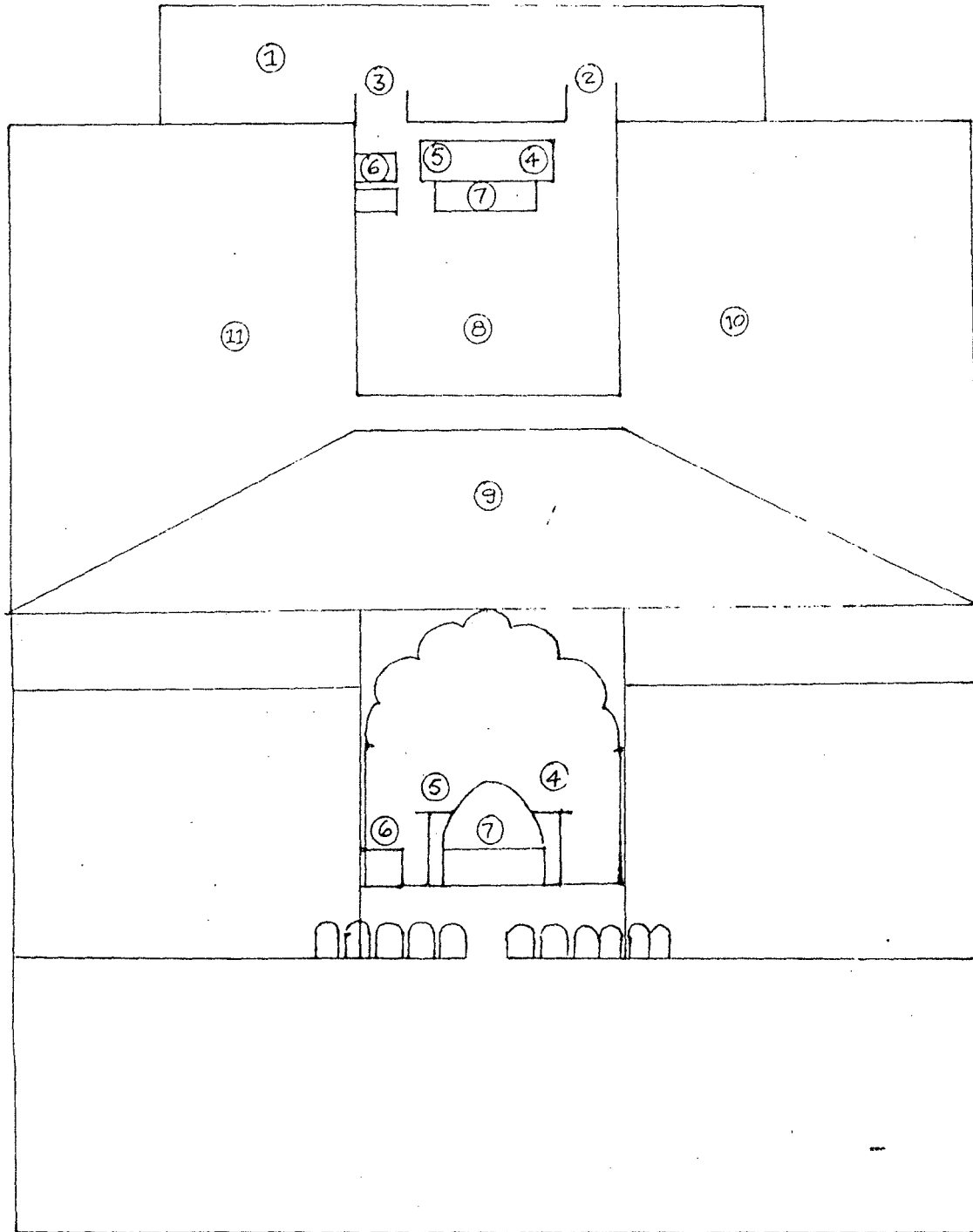
This is called Kēḷi. This affords great freedom to the percussionists to show their talent.

For shows in the open air, the sharp sound of caṇḍe, which can be heard from a great distance also acts as an advertisement for the show, attracting people from the nearby villages. But in the changed context of tent shows which use modern means of advertisement, the significance of this Kēḷi is vastly reduced.

The next part of the preliminaries is performed in the greenroom. The greenroom is normally just behind the acting area (see sketch). There, Lord Gaṇapati is worshipped just before the commencement of the show. All the crowns, to be used as headdresses later in the show, are also worshipped. (The significance of the crown will be discussed later.) A song in praise of Lord Gaṇapati is sung by the bhāgavata accompanied by the instrumentalists. Given below is the first stanza of the song.

"To the leader of Lord Śiva's attendants,  
To the one who has the face of an elephant,  
To the beautiful one who is worshipped in the  
three worlds,  
Let us wave the sacred flame"<sup>2</sup>

Plan and Elevation of the Yakṣagāna Stage and Auditorium



Legend

- 1. Greenroom
- 2. Entry
- 3. Exit
- 4. Bhāgavata
- 5. Maddaḷe
- 6. Cande

- 7. Seat
- 8. Acting area
- 9. Chairs for the spectators
- 10. Men (Sitting on the floor)
- 11. Women (sitting on the floor)

This worship in the greenroom is performed as part of every Yakṣagāna performance, irrespective of the context or the form. Though many of the overtly religious aspects have been given up now due to the process of secularisation, this worship has not undergone any change. This is not something unique to Yakṣagāna either. Almost all traditional theatre forms of India follow this practice. This connotes the fact that the entire performance is considered as a form of worship. After the worship the singer asks, "Is there God's permission to go on the stage?" The buffoon, who normally does the worship nods; playing on the instruments, the singer and the instrumentalists take their place on the stage.<sup>3</sup>

#### II.1.b Preliminaries with which the show commences

What has been described so far deals with the parts performed prior to the actual commencement of the show. The show begins around 9.30. p.m. Each and every performance begins with a set of pattern irrespective of the prasanga (episode) to be performed. These preliminaries are called pūrvaranga in Bharata's Nāṭya Śāstra.<sup>4</sup> In Yaksagana, they are given the name Sabhā Lakṣaṇa. In open air performances, they are performed in great detail, but in the form of Yakṣagāna under study, they are retained in a shortened form.

The Sabhā Lakṣaṇa contains songs in praise of gods. It also describes the qualities to be possessed by the bhāgavata, the instrumentalists and even the spectators. The measurements and the shape of the stage are also described. The songs also prescribe the qualities of śruti (base pitch), the buffoon, the dancers and ends with a polite note about the performers. "Though we are small, the praise of God that we do [through the performance] is not small".<sup>5</sup> These songs are sung before the entry of the dancers when the stage is bare. In present day performances they are used in a curtailed form.

These songs are in Sanskrit, though most of the other songs in the Sabhā Lakṣaṇa and the prasanga are in Kannada. They become pure signs having an incantatory magical effect on the spectators. The atmosphere of ritual and worship is evoked by these. Their verbal meaning is not understood by many in the audience and therein precisely lies its power as a pure sign like that of the mantras chanted during worship. They also point to the strong influence of sanskrit dramaturgy on what originated essentially as a folk form.

#### II.1.c The bālagōpālas

The dance portion of the pūrvāranga begins with the entry of two young actors called bālagōpālas. Their



costume is that of the young heroes, as indicated by their half sleeve shirt and head dress (Fig 1 and 2). Their dance is very elaborate and contains many of the steps and features that are used in the performance of the prasanga. Gestures and mudrās are also used. The only difference between the pūrvaranga and the prasanga proper, is that the former does not contain improvised dialogues. After the detailed dance, the bālagōpālas bring a crown and place it on the seat in deep stage. The crown represents the idol of God in Yakṣagāna. After the worship with the sacred flame, they dance for a short while again and then exit with the crown by the right of the bhāgavata.

The crown being used as an object of worship may appear strange but it is one example of the symbolic style of representation in Yakṣagāna. It is not the crown the object that is worshipped here. The crown becomes a signifier. By tying the waist ornament to the crown it becomes an iconic sign of Lord Ganesh and his elephant trunk. (See Fig 3. This is used by one particular troupe.) This is one example of the way the sign process works in Yakṣagāna. A limited number of stage properties are used for signifying a whole range of signifieds.

The crown no doubt denotes what is worshipped. Does it also connote conceptually, the value system and social structure of an age when not merely the crown but the wearers of the crown (kings) were objects of worship? If we look at the discourse of Yakṣagāna as a whole, the answer appears to be in the affirmative.

These two boys are supposed to represent Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa in their youth.<sup>6</sup> But they are not individualised nor the characters they represent clearly defined. It is kept vague and indistinct. This vagueness has a great significance so far as the function of pūrvaranga is concerned which will be analysed later. It also plays an important part in the training process of young Yakṣagāna artists, which will be discussed in Ch.III. Suffice it to say here that any young boy hoping to become a Yakṣagāna artist starts his career as a bālagōpāla.

#### II.1.d Strīvēṣa - Female characters

After the exit of the bālagōpālas enter two female characters (All female roles in Yakṣagāna are played by men). Their dance also follows the same pattern of songs and dance without improvised dialogues. If in the earlier dance, the most prominent feature was the virility represented by the fast footwork and quick turns

emphasizing body lines and angles, the dance of the female characters represents grace and femininity - lāsya. This aspect of dance in Yakṣagāna is found only in the dance of the female characters. The costumes of female characters resemble the dress of present day middle class women and does not confirm to the structural pattern of Yakṣagāna costumes (Fig 4).

The identity of these characters also, like that of the bālagōpālas is left unclear. The songs sung during their dance deal mostly with Kṛṣṇa. Shivaram Karant says that they may be Rukmiṇi and Satyabhāma, the wives of Kṛṣṇa. A similar practice is said to have existed in kuchupudi - the classical dance of Andhra as well. In Yakṣagāna, they are normally referred to as strivēṣa.

The next feature oddōlaga (the formal entry of characters) is the connecting link, so to say, between the pūrvaranga and the actual episode to be enacted. Like the preliminaries, the oddōlaga is also a fixed feature, but if in the former there is no narrative, the narrative of the prasanga (the episode to be performed) begins with the oddōlaga. So syntagmatically it can be seen as the part of the preliminaries because it is a fixed feature and as the introductory part of the actual story to be performed. As such it will be taken up for

analysis separately after a brief study of the function and manner of signification of pūrvaranga.

#### II.1.e The Function of Pūrvaranga

Pūrvaranga is no doubt part of the tradition of classical Indian theatre as can be seen from the Nāṭya Sastra. Yakṣagāna has evolved its own pūrvaranga in conformity with its own form and structure but inspired by Bharata's Nāṭya Śāstra. But what function do these preliminaries perform in the discourse of the performance text as a whole? As there is no apparent link between them and the main narrative, are they functionally irrelevant?

Recently, in Udayavaṇi, one of the Kannada newspapers, there was a heated debate precisely on this question and whether they should be maintained or discarded. The debate took the form of tradition versus modernity. Even the apologists of tradition failed in enunciating how pūrvaranga is functionally relevant apart from stating that it helped in creating the atmosphere. But how it was achieved was never debated. But if we analyse the communicative process involved by applying the theoretical concepts of semiotics, the function and significance of pūrvaranga becomes clear.

Yakṣagāna, in its process of communication uses a highly codified system. So for a proper communication between the sender and the receiver of the message, knowledge of the code and the sign logic becomes absolutely essential. The traffic signals, for example, are perfectly clear to one who is familiar with the code but mean nothing to another who is unfamiliar with the code. (That is why, perhaps, attempts to popularise Yakṣagāna outside its limited geographical area have had limited success. People in other parts of Karnataka understand the language - that is Kannada - but are unable to understand the 'language' of Yakṣagāna's sign process.) Even for spectators who are familiar with the code of Yakṣagāna, a reminder of the code system is necessary before they are ready to receive the discourse proper. Proper communication of the discourse is possible only after this 'contact' is established. Pūrvaranga does precisely this function of establishing the contact by familiarising the spectators with the code. Borrowing from Roman Jakobson's linguistic functions, we can call this the phatic function, "the essential function of which is to establish... communication, to verify whether or not the circuit is still in operation".

Pūrvaranga accomplishes this function by drawing attention to the code itself. As has already been pointed out, the pūrvaranga does not contain any narrative; the identity of the characters is vague and indistinct. So the attention of the spectators is drawn not to any referential or emotive content but to the code and the sign process itself. The bālagōpālas and the female characters utilise almost all aspects of the Yakṣagāna signifying process, - costumes, make-up, dance, gestures and music. Even the songs contain only a few words and more of rhythmic patterns. Thus all aspects of the code to be utilised later in creating the discourse are used but without the discourse itself.

The entire attention of the spectator is thus focussed on the signifiers which themselves become the referent of the message. The 'unidentifiable' quality of the characters represented by the actors greatly aids in drawing our attention to the codes themselves because they are characters without a context. The referential and emotive functions are also reduced to a minimum as there is no narrative. Because of these reasons, "in what is communicated by the actors, "the referent of the message [becomes] the code itself," to use Jacobson's terms again.<sup>10</sup> This he classifies as the metalinguistic function which defines the meaning of any sign that may

not be understood by the receiver by 'framing' it properly. (Underlining or the use of quotation marks for any words used in a special sense are examples of these.) Pūrvaranga functions as that frame within which the main discourse is to be viewed. If we understand the function of pūrvaranga in this light, Shivaram Karant's efforts at fixing the identity of these characters, seem misplaced because their "unidentifiability" itself allows them to perform these functions.<sup>11</sup> By familiarising the code, pūrvaranga prepares the spectator to receive the discourse in the code already thus familiarised.

## II.2 Oddōlaga - The First Entry of Characters

The lexical meaning of the word oddōlaga is a king's court. Dr. F. Kittel in his authoritative dictionary of Kannada gives this meaning, "A great assembly; a royal audience, darbar".<sup>12</sup> The narrative of every Yakṣagāna performance begins with the oddōlaga - the scene of a king's court. Oddōlaga acts as a link between the preliminaries and the main narrative to be performed. So in its structure it has elements that relate it to the pūrvaranga as well as those that relate it to the main prasanga.

The First entry of a main character is always with

the oddōlaga. This may occur in the beginning of a prasanga or in the middle. Thus the oddōlagas may broadly be divided into two classes :

- a) Oddōlagas that are performed in the beginning of a prasanga
- b) Oddōlagas that are performed during the course of the prasanga

These two vary a great deal in structural details as well as in signification. To begin with let us consider the first one.

II.2.a The oddōlaga performed in the beginning of a prasanga is a detailed, highly choreographed part. Depending on the story to be performed, it may be that of the Pāṇḍavas, or of Indra, Kṛṣṇa, Rāma, Daśratha, or Viṣṇu. Sometimes even Kaurava's oddōlaga is also held. But it has to be of a god or a royal personage (only of those characters wearing a crown or munḍāsa). "The tradition lays down that in the beginning only a god or a king has to enter the stage. Demons, monkey characters or sages do not enter the stage in the beginning".

The tradition also lays down that the prasanga can not start with a person who is going to die in the prasanga. Karṇa parva for example starts with Kaurava's oddōlaga but Gadāyuddha (Kaurava's final encounter with Bhīma) begins with that of the Pāṇḍavas. Of all the oddōlagas,



that of the Pāṇḍavas has a special attraction of its own. Following is a description of it by Shivaram Karant :

In oddōlaga, two stage hands stand to the left of the bhāgavata in the deep stage holding the two edges of a curtain. This curtain is a red cloth [usually six feet by eight feet]... . As soon as the bhāgavata, begins saying the rhythmic patterns for the entry, Sahadēva, the youngest among the Pāṇḍavas, comes behind the curtain, pays obeisance to the stage and bhāgavata by touching the ground and then stands with his back to the curtain [Fig 5]. At that moment only his feet and head are visible to the spectators. Then he begins dancing in tune with the song and rhythm. Then he dances with his face towards the audience. Pressing the curtain a little he shows his profile. After he exits, the actor, playing Nakula does the same dance routine. Arjuna, Bhīma and Dharmaraja also come one after the other, dance behind the curtain and depart. Then all five Pāṇḍavas come and stand behind the curtain. They show their back and profile [Fig 6]. They dance with their face towards the audience. Pressing the curtain down, they show the body from the waist upwards [Fig 7]. They move forwards and backwards pushing the curtain with them as they move. Then they turn, facing each other, and demonstrate different dancing steps and hand gestures. All the while, because of the curtain, the bottom half of their body remains hidden.

As they reveal themselves like this, stage by stage, the curiosity of the spectators goes on increasing. After arousing the curiosity like this, Sahadēva, the last of the Pāṇḍavas, pushes the curtain aside, enters the stage dancing, exhibits his valour and heroism, and departs by the right of the bhāgavata. Similarly Nakula, Arjuna, Bhīma and Dharmaraja come one after the other, do these

forceful dances and exit. Then all of them come together on the stage, stand in a semi-circle and dance moving left and right. They then move in a circle [Fig 8]. They may jump or collapse and jump again. All these movements are done together. The sound of mad-dale and cande increases the spirit and tempo of the dance. To show the oddōlaga dance in

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its entirety it may even take half an hour.

II.2.b The other oddōlagas that appear in the course of a prasanga may be that of hunters, gods and other important personages of the narrative. The entry of a banṇa-da vēṣa (demon) is done differently. A long rhythmic pattern on the cande is followed by the actor's high pitched shout from green room itself. After shouting twice like this, the actor enters the stage behind the hand held curtain. The morning ablutions and rites like washing the face and worshipping Lord Śiva's Lingam are all shown through gestures and mimes. All his steps and movements are broad, slow and measured. He punctuates his dance with the same shrill shout. To quote K.S.Karant again, "the entry of demons arouses the curiosity and anticipation of the audience to the highest pitch, much more than the entry of a king or a god".

Characters like Candī in Ratikalyāṇa (Candī here is the terrible side of Draupadī who comes as a destructive force) or Narasimha in Prahlada Caritre make their

entries through the audience. They are brought on the stage by holding flaming torches on both sides. The audience also participates in this procession with religious fervour. But in the present commercial troupes such entries are rarely seen. This is one more example of secularisation where the religious motif and the audience's participation in it is decreasing.

After the detailed dance, the main character begins speaking. As per the tradition the bhāgavata speaks to him and introduces him, though the practice is decreasing now a days. The main character's speech, specially in the beginning of a prasanga, is like a prologue. The stories of the prasangas are taken from Indian myths, specially the Ramāyan, the Mahābhārat and the Bhāgavata. One night's performance deals with any one particular incident or episode. (Prasanga - lexically means an incident.) Lankādahana, for example, deals with Hanumān going to Lanka in search of Sīta and the subsequent burning of Lanka. In the oddōlaga speech, the lead actor gives a brief resume of the events in the epic upto the scene that is going to be performed.

This speech provides the background, without a knowledge of which the ensuing performance's narrative can not be understood. So this is the section with the

maximum information. But, most of the spectators, being already familiar with it, pay very little attention to it. This resume situates the discourse to be performed in the larger context of the epic world.

Oddōlaga is a set piece with which every prasanga begins in Yakṣagāna. As has already been observed the entry of major characters during the course of the prasanga is also heralded by the oddōlaga. Its fixed rhythmic patterns and steps act as indicators to the audience about the entry of a major character and as a device for drawing their attention.

Compared to other theatre forms, great importance is attached to the entry of characters in Yakṣagāna. The actor is supposed to establish a character, reveal the personality and the sthāyi bhāva of that character in the first appearance itself. So the first appearance of the main character is always with a flourish. Some times, to create a powerful impact even the convention of oddōlaga is given up and the character enters at a moment of climax. Bhisma's entry in Bhiṣma Vijaya or that of Jarāsandha in Māgadha Vadhe can be cited as instances. Why is the first appearance of a character given such great importance in Yakṣagāna?

Yakṣagāna works within the known myth structures and a prior knowledge of the myths is assumed. The

creation of a new significance takes place within the parameters of this shared knowledge between the actor and the audience. The artist uses this shared information as a foundation for the creation of the new significance. The stylised and formalised entry asserts and exchanges this shared information.

II.2.c The hand held curtain becomes a highly charged sign. The curtain is not merely a physical device which separates the stage from the spectators. It is a sign that designates and demarcates the two worlds : the real world of the spectators and the new universe created on the stage. In present day theatrical practice, the curtain is used more as a physical object and its power as a sign has diminished to a very great extent. It has become opaque literally as well as semiotically. The front curtain in a modern auditorium opens and closes with such a finality that Brecht called it guillotine.<sup>16</sup>

The hand held curtain used in Yakṣagāna on the other hand bristles with semiotic potentialities. The actor emerges from behind the curtain in stages and the character is born right in front of our eyes. The pushing and pulling of the curtain from behind by the actor signifies his struggle to be 'born'.

The highly elaborate play with the curtain also connotes 'the fact of performance'. It brings to the focus of the audience that there is an actor behind the curtain who is going to give a performance. Thus Yakṣagāna flaunts its own theatricality. This is what Brecht in his theories on the theatre called "Verfremdungseffekt" or alienation effect whereby the spectator is again and again made aware of the fact that he is in a theatre and witnessing a play. Yakṣagāna can be said to be so rich in this alienation effect that it dares to play with the curtain itself which bifurcates the 'never to be crossed' boundary between the performer and the spectator.

The hand held curtain also acts as a 'closeup' device. Behind the curtain only the top of the head, gear and feet of the actor are visible to the audience (Fog 9). The attention is drawn to the only portion of the actor's body visible-his feet. Then step by step as the actor begins to reveal himself, the spectator's interest will be focussed on those parts that are revealed. Thus it functions in the same way in which a closeup shot functions in cinema. In this process of revealing, the actor begins with the least signifying - the back and by stages moves to the most signifying - the front- when all the intricate designs and colours of

make-up and costume become visible. To one familiar with the costume and make-up code of Yakṣagāna, these details reveal not merely the category to which the character belongs but also his internal qualities.

Another interesting aspect connected with the curtain relates to the two stage hands who hold the curtain. They are present on the stage but never become part of Yakṣagāna's universe of signification as projected by the costumes worn by the actors. These two stage hands are in everyday costumes which demarcates them as not belonging to the world created in the performance. So, they nonchalantly hold the curtain showing no involvement with what is going on the stage. Even their movement on the stage and their exit makes it clear that they are not signifiers. The audience also accepts their role (as such) and pays no attention to them.

II.2.d Returning to the semiosis of the oddōlaga, it performs a double function simultaneously :

- a) The character (as represented by the particular actor) is introduced to the audience
- b) The actor also 'enters' into the character during the performance of the oddōlaga

The second function (that of the actor 'becoming' the character) takes place on the stage itself in full

view of the audience. In regular theatrical practice, one of the advices given to an actor is not to 'assume' the character after he enters the stage but to do so on the wings just before he enters the stage. Thus it tries to hide the fact that the universe created on the stage is an artifice. By hiding the fact of 'representation', it tries to gain an aura of reality. This factor lies behind all the theoretical constructs of the 'realistic stage' of the Stanislavskian variety. Yakṣagāna, on the other hand, like most traditional and folk theatres, declares itself to be an artifice, and thus prepares the spectators to accept the new reality created on the stage.

For the actor also, the dance and the fast rhythm with the related excitement, higher pulse rate and the physical exertion helps him in 'becoming' the character. This can be compared to the practice in spirit worship. The 'medium' begins dancing and swaying to the music which aids him in entering into a trance when the medium 'becomes' the spirit. This coincides with the music rising to a crescendo. The only difference is that the Yakṣagāna actor is all the time conscious of his real self and of the fact of representation. This is related to the dialectic of actor/character which will be dealt with in Chapter III.



## The Prasanga

The main discourse of the performance text is contained in this part. This is naturally the longest part and also has the most variety of form. The performers too have great freedom for improvisation here. The structure and narratology of the prasanga will be analysed in the separate section II.4.

### II.3 Mangala-

This is the last section with which the performance draws to a close. Mangala can be roughly translated as the auspicious ending. Martha Bush Ashton and Bruce Christie describe the performance of Mangala thus:

The mangalam dance introduces the highly stylised finale. This is usually danced by a male dancer playing a female character or strivēṣa to songs eulogizing the beauty, virtue and grace of the Mother Goddess, Durga, and in praise of Lord Vishnu..... When this is completed, the strivēṣa pays respect to the maddale, tāla (cymbals) and caṇḍe by touching them with his right hand. Then the singer, drummers, the strivēṣa and the stage hands proceed to the dressing room (cauka). On the way the singer sings about young Kṛṣṇa and his brother Balarāma. In the cauka the final worship of Lord Gaṇapati is performed. The flaming oil-lamp is waved before the image and the singer, accompanied by drummers, sings songs in praise of Gaṇapati and Goddess Durga. The performers then shout in unison "Gōvinda" and the performance  
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is finished.

Just as the opening structure is fixed and invariable, the end also falls within same pattern. The song sung in the cauka points to the strong influence of Bhāgavata tradition on Yakṣagāna. "Rāma and Kṛṣṇa have come home, open the door; It is as if Kamadhēnu has come, derive all pleasure"<sup>18</sup>. The religious motif in this is pretty obvious. What has so far been witnessed is the līla (divine play) of God. Having witnessed the divine play, we now return to our routine mundane world, tired no doubt but at the same time blessed and entertained, having witnessed the titanic characters and their confrontations.

II.4 Prasanga and Nāḍe: The written text and the unwritten convention.

Just as there is a musical score for a musical performance, every theatrical performance has a performance score. The performance score is not to be confused with the written (received) text. Even forms that do not have a received text like Commedia dell'arte where they create their own text during the performance, do have a performance score. As Phillip Zarelli says, "A performance score consists of all the created and/or received conventions which collectively constitute the complete composition performed"<sup>19</sup>. A performance score

may be 'open' as in modern theatrical productions where relatively new scores are created for each production or it may be 'closed' or 'set' where improvisations and variations are possible only in subtle details. Thus an open score leads to great differences from production to production whereas in a 'closed' system the variation is minimal. Yakṣagāna's performance score has elements of both - certain aspects are set while certain others (like improvised dialogues), provide great scope for creating a new performance score.

The starting point of the performance score is the received text which provides the parameter within which all other elements of the form work to set the performance score. The prasanga or the written text is only one part of the received text in Yakṣagāna. The performance of the written text is always guided and controlled by the unwritten tradition - regarding performance in general as well as the performance of the particular prasanga - which has been built up over the centuries. This unbroken tradition regarding the performances of individual text is called Naḍe (The lexical meaning of naḍe is walk. It is used more or less in the meaning in which the word chaal is used in music; the meaning in Yakṣagāna is more encompassing because of the multi-media involved). This section will analyse the

narrative structure of the written text first. After a brief comment on the unwritten tradition, the analysis will concentrate on the significance of the narrative mode.

#### II.4.a Prasanga: The written text

The written text in Yakṣagāna belongs to a special genre that is both poetry and drama. It is different from classical Sanskrit drama that uses both poetry and prose. It is also different from the Western concept of poetic drama. It is more like a poem that has all the elements necessary for a theatrical performance. To any one accustomed to western or even Sanskrit drama, a look at the printed copy of a prasanga presents a strange sight indeed. It is a long continuum of songs not even split into dialogues of characters with absolutely no stage directions (in the sense in which we find them in regular drama). Most songs are those that lead to the generation of improvised dialogues. The information regarding who speaks the dialogue is also given the song itself.

The complete prasanga contains more than four hundred songs. Of these only one hundred fifty to two hundred are used in any performance. The written text is never considered sacrosanct in Yakṣagāna. Old prasangas are frequently revised and some times new

texts are evolved based on the old ones. Even during the course of a performance the bhagavata may decide to skip some songs. Some times, songs from other prasangas are also used.

Depending on the function they perform, the poems of the written text can be classified under three heads:

- a) poems that describe the locale and the context
- b) poems that indicate stage business
- c) poems that lead to dialogue and conversation

In regular dramatic literature a and b appear as stage directions and only c is thought of as dramatic literature proper. In Yaksagana all three are interspersed. Take the following example from Parti Subba's Pancavaṭi.

"O sage, please tell us what Rama and Laksmana did. What happened to Surpanakhi? Make known to us." When the two kids prayed him, the sage [Valmiki] embracing them, told them the next incident of Vanajanabha's [Rama's] life.

The stage action begins with the next song which introduces Surpanakhi entering Ravana's court.

"Beating her head, eyes overflowing with tears in a rage like burning embers, telling her story to the asuras."

Daṣakanṭha saw his sister, called her and spoke with her<sup>20</sup> and heard about how she was insulted".

The story of Sīta's capture by Rāvaṇa begins thus. As can be seen in the preceding song, the stage directions, indicating the stage business of Śūrpanakhi and Rāvaṇa are found in the song itself. The last few words also hint to the improvised dialogue that will follow the dance and abhinaya. The entire song is sung by the bhāgavata and so the spectators not merely see the stage action but also hear it described. This creates a strange ambience whose significance will be discussed later.

Elaborate descriptions are rarely found as they do not suit acting. Wherever description are used, they are always short and pithy. The literature of the written text can be divided into three types :

- a) Vacana - prose renderings.
  - b) Songs in particular metres ( Kanda, Śatpadi) which are sung without rhythm or the percussion instruments.
  - c) Songs set to rhythm. The major portion of any prasanga will be in this category.
- a) Of these the first, Vacanas or prose renderings, are used to link different scenes. They are

spoken by the bhāgavata after the completion of one scene and before the commencement of another when the stage is bare. In any prasanga, the use of vacana is rare and in present day productions their use has almost been given up.

- b) These songs are elaborated and sung but without any rhythmic pattern. This gives freedom to the bhāgavata to elaborate on certain musical notes. The actor does not dance and does only abhinaya for these songs. It is difficult to say when exactly such songs are used. In the opinion of P.V. Hasyagar, "It can be said to be used where the story advances but does not have 'actable'  
21 parts". This provides variety both to the actor and to the audience.

In the presentation of these songs, the referential function rather than emotive or aesthetic function becomes predominant. The attention of the audience is drawn more towards the words and their gestural representation as other elements like rhythm and dance are not used. The cognitive element becomes dominant and the emotive minimal.

- c) The corpus of a prasanga comprises of the third type - songs sung to a rhythm. These songs are

mostly used for dialogue though they are also used for all the three functions mentioned earlier. They lend themselves to dance and to the expression of bhāva.

#### II.4.b Structure of a Prasanga

The beginning of any prasanga has a fixed structure. The first few songs are the poet's prayer to different gods. The poet may even reveal his identity. The themes of the first few songs are as follows :

Song 1. Pays homage to the poet's favourite God

Song 2. In praise of Lord Gaṇapati

Song 3. In praise of Goddess Śārada

Song 4. In praise of the poet's teacher

Song 5. The present episode - its narrative history (The details regarding who narrated this story for the first time and to whom)

These songs are not used in the performance usually as the songs paying homage to gods will have been sung in the pūrvaranga. The incident depicted in the prasanga is taken up directly as can be seen in the example quoted from Panchavaṭi. (The main actor of Oddōlaga in his introductory speech will have given a brief resume of the past events leading up to the incidents to be enacted.) A prior knowledge of the epics is



assumed and the poet starts directly with the incident he is dramatising.

The structure of any prasanga is loose and episodic (in the Brechtian sense of the term). The linear progression of the narrative is broken frequently by detours into the related episodes. In fact importance is never attached to the progression of the narrative. The spectator's familiarity with the story is assumed. So the emphasis is on the establishment of certain bhāvas and in the elaboration of some songs which lend themselves to such elaboration, through dance, abhinaya or improvised dialogues. These are not necessarily the moments of climax. Because the emphasis in such moments is not on the progression of the narrative, the referential element is minimal. The normal question that readers or spectators ask in curiosity, "what happens next" is made irrelevant here. This gives the artists freedom to dwell on the present existential moment in a leisurely fashion.

One example from Kṛṣṇa Sandhāna, (where Kṛṣṇa goes to Kaurava's court as the emissary of peace before the war in the Mahābhārat) will make the point clear. In the climax, Kaurava falls down from the throne on Kṛṣṇa's feet. Kṛṣṇa makes fun of Kaurava and pretends as though his foot is hurt. The performance of this one

bit, may take as long as fifteen to twenty minutes. (The immanent discourse in this episode and in the entire prasanga is Krsna's attempt to break Kaurava's ego. Kaurava is psychologically defeated by Kṛṣṇa even before the actual war starts.) The audience waits for these moments and relishes these elaborations which are thought of as the high points of interest. Sometimes these elaborations and/or the sharp arguments between the characters take such a long time that the rounding up of the story is cursorily dismissed in a few lines. This clearly shows what is considered significant and what is not, in Yakṣagāna.

By its very nature and specially because of the time duration of the performance (from 9.30.p.m. to 6.a.m.) the performance text will not be of uniform interest. There are high and low points. The audience is not merely familiar with the story, but with the performance score as well. So they wait for these high points with great interest. At other moments they may just stroll out or even take a nap. The elaboration of these high points, refers back to naḍe or the unwritten tradition regarding performance. The written script is suitably edited to highlight these points. The casualness of approach of the spectators may appear rude to any one not accustomed to witnessing a Yakṣagāna per-

formance. But in analysing the semiotic functioning of the form, it gives a clue to the significance attached to different scenes by the spectators.

The mangala or the auspicious finale of every performance has already been referred to. The clue to this finale is found in the prasanga itself. All prasangas end in happiness. As Shivaram Karant says "The mangala that comes at the end may be because of the reunion of husband and wife; may be because of victory to Dharma and the defeat of Adharma; whatever the reason the mangala song has to come at the end... The bhāga-<sup>23</sup>vata ends the show in this fixed structure only".

Thematically, most prasangas deal with war or marriage. Most classical Indian dance forms lay a great emphasis on the depiction of śṛṅgāra rasa (the erotic). In Yakṣagāna, on the other hand the dominant rasa is vīra (the heroic). These two different approaches can be traced to Bharata's classification of dance into lāsya (originating from Sakti) and tāṇḍava (originating from Śiva).<sup>24</sup> To present the vīrarasa, the stories chosen are mostly those that deal with battles; even in prasangas that deal with marriage, it is usually preceded by fights. Minākṣi Kalyāṇa for example, ends in marriage, but is famous for its fast tempo where one fight follows another. There are a few prasangas with

no fights at all like Candrāvali and Kṛṣṇa Sandhāna but they are the exceptions rather than the rule. The theme usually decides the tempo of the performance as well. Prasangas like Harīṣcandra have a slow tempi as opposed to those with lots of fights and clashes like Devi Mahātme, which have to be played fast.

In the structure of a prasanga, certain set scenes like jalakrīḍe (bathing in a river) are used. Even the characters are archetypal rather than individualised. A śabara (hunter) remains the same with the same characteristics whatever be the prasanga. In fact Yakṣagāna aims at creating these archetypes rather than individualised characters.

#### II.4.c Narrative Technique

The style of narration used in Yaksagana texts resembles closely the Harikatha tradition. This is a popular form found in different parts of India under names like Kīrtan and Kathā kālakṣēpa. It is a solo performance where the singer himself becomes the narrator, character, commentator et cetera. He mostly 'narrates' the story acting out small bits here and there. So the narratology in Harikatha was evolved keeping the special needs of the form in mind. Yakṣagāna (specially the written text), is said to have originated

from the Harikatha tradition. Even though Yakṣagāna is a performing art, the conventions of Harikatha narration were retained. Synchronically this has led to a very interesting form of the narrative in the dramatic medium where third personal narration is used. In the beginning of any prasanga the poet says that now he is going to 'tell' such and such a story. Whenever a character's dialogue is given in a song, it is qualified with terms like 'said Kṛṣṇa', "declared Indrajitu". Even the stage directions indicating the business on the stage appear as songs and are sung by the bhāgavata. An example of both can be found in the following song from Kīcaka Vadhe.

"As the lotus faced [woman - Draupadi] was coming towards Kīcaka in a hurry, he saw her from a distance and wondering said to himself".<sup>26</sup>

The semiotic significance of such narration in third person will be taken up after a brief study of the other part of the performance score - the unwritten tradition regarding the performance of individual prasangas or naḍe.

#### II.4.d The unwritten Tradition - Naḍe

As has already been pointed out, naḍe is the tradition built up over centuries regarding the perform-

ance of individual prasangas. The written text provides very little details regarding the performance. These are supplied by the unwritten tradition and hence its importance in the performance score. Strangely enough no writer on Yakṣagāna seems to have written about its importance. (Is it because the unwritten tradition never gets the respect that the written word commands?)

The prasanga contains just a series of songs. Even the indications regarding exit and entry or the change of scenes are not to be found in it. So, the performance is guided as much by the songs in the written text as by the unwritten convention developed over the centuries. Without a knowledge of naḍe, it is not possible to get any idea regarding the staging of the text. To cite an instance : the hāsyagāra (buffoon) plays a very important role in any Yakṣagāna performance. He plays all the sundry roles making fun of the high and the low. Even gods are not beyond the orbit of his humour. In the conceptual configuration, he almost becomes the arch anarchist for whom nothing is respectable. But the written text makes almost no mention of him. He may not even have any songs. His role in the discourse is to be found only in the unwritten tradition and not in the written text.

The entry and exit of characters, the way in which a character is developed, the general progression of the performance are all directed by the unwritten tradition. An actor who is performing a new role, will do so only after learning the nade. Nade is not to be taken as static. It is vibrant and evolving all the time. For ~~the same prasanga, there may be more than one nade.~~ There are also geographical and regional variations. For a proper study of the performance score, the study of both the texts is necessary.

#### II.4.e The Significance of the narratology

In dramatic literature and in regular theatrical productions the verbal details regarding stage business and action are hidden from the audience, only the action being shown. But when the linguistic description is also given along with the visual representation, it performs a double function : that of explanation as well as that of 'alienation'. The second function is performed by reminding the audience that what they are witnessing is only a representation of the story narrated to them through the visual/verbal medium. Any illusion of reality that is created by the visual is broken through the verbal reminder that it is only art and not reality. Thus the narrative mode adopted, connotes the

presence of art. By declaring itself as 'unreal', it creates a new paradigm whereby this 'reality of a different order' of the discourse is received. To use Roland Barthes' words, "It is a lie made manifest, it delineates an area of plausibility which reveals the possible in the very act of unmasking it as false".<sup>27</sup>

This act of unmasking the art and presenting it as an artifice is brought out forcefully through another convention. In the beginning of each prasanga (song five or six) the poet declares that he is 'telling' the story as was originally narrated by 'X' to 'Y' for the first time. The stories from the Mahābhārat are presented as told by sage Vaiṣampāyan to king Janamējaya. (This is a tradition not unique to Yakṣagāna but taken from the original Sanskrit epics). The stories from the Bhāgavata are presented as narrated by Śuka Yōgendra to king Parīkṣit. Those from the Rāmāyan are presented as narrated by Sage Vālmiki to Lava and Kusha (sometimes to Śaunaka and others). This assumption appears not only in the beginning but is reiterated several times in the course of the prasanga as well. What does this signify? Is it merely to establish the antiquity and authenticity of the narrative?

The poet, even in the process of writing, keeps this imaginary listener in mind, making it clear that his



creation is a discourse from one person (the poet) to others (listeners, readers and viewers, of his time and of the future). The communicative purpose of his endeavour is thus clearly stated in the beginning itself (clarifying this to himself as well as to the readers). He refers back to this 'prime' listener repeatedly during the course of the discourse as well. Thus again and again the art unmask itself drawing attention to the communicative function. The 'prime' listener, Janamējaya for example, becomes the archetype for all listeners and spectators.

Barthes uses the term 'Writing Degree Zero' for any narrative which unmask itself and makes the story plausible by declaring it to be a lie. His arguments regarding the ideal of his semiotic ideology of art can be summed up as under :

- a) an art that does not pretend to be 'mimetic' of actual reality;
- b) an art that thrives on the paradox of signification;
- c) an art that signals its artificiality;
- d) an art that is understood to be (tolerably and plausibly) contrived;
- e) an art that creates its own 'reality' by endowing the artifice with an illusion of natural-

ness;

f) an art which remains vague enough in its 'moral' to allow the consumer to recreate, through his own imagination, the details of the 'myth' it embodies (in fact, there is then no precise single public 'myth', but rather a cluster of related personal 'myths')

g) an art that produces psychological effects (even if 'euphoric') that are neither risible nor ideologically reprehensible.

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Yakṣagāna never pretends to be anything but an artifice, creating a new significance not by imitating reality (in the Aristotelian sense of the term) but by creating a new universe of signification. This process is closely related to the 'symbolic' style of representation as opposed to the mimetic.

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## II.5 Music

Music performs a unifying function controlling all the other elements of Yakṣagāna. The rhythms of the songs (played on the percussion instruments) dictate the timings of the dance and abhinaya. The bhāgavata (singer) is described as the first actor because the artistic control of the entire show is in his hands. (Of late this control has passed on to other hands. See

comments on secularisation).

Yakṣagāna music belongs to a special category that is neither Hindustani nor Karnatak, the two main categories of classical music in India. References to Yakṣagāna style of music can be found as early as 11th century A.D.<sup>30</sup> (The theatre form evolved several centuries later.) This musical form as an independent entity seems to have died out under the growing prestige of Karnatak music. This has perhaps helped it in surviving as theatre music. As Martha B. Ashton and B. Christie say, "Although Yakṣagāna style is not considered as a classical style, this by no means reduces its potential for achieving beauty and power. On the other hand, the fact that Yakṣagāna is not considered a classical style of music frees it from the bondage of rules and allows it the freedom necessary for a living art form".<sup>31</sup>

The instruments used in Yakṣagāna are tāḷa, maddale canḍe and śruti. Tāḷa is a pair of small metal cymbals that the singer himself plays. Maddale resembles the mridangam of Karnataka music, though it is smaller and the strokes totally different. Canḍe is a cylindrical drum played with two sticks. This has a high pitched sharp sound and is not used continuously. It is used mostly to suggest vīra or raudra rasas.

The two fundamental elements of any musical system are melody and rhythm. Rhythm gains precedence in Yakṣagāna music sometimes even at the expense of melody. K. Manjunatha Bhagavata, one of the leading bhāgavatas today, explains the reasons for this predominance of rhythm. "Because the rasas like vīra, śṛṅgāra, adbhuta and raudra have to be expressed and also because dance is a major aspect of Yakṣagāna, the singer has to pay the greatest attention to rhythm".<sup>32</sup>

Yakṣagāna uses a higher śruti (basic pitch). The singing moves mostly in the higher saptaka (a group of seven notes used as the basis for all music in India) and sometimes in the middle saptaka and almost never comes to the lower saptaka (mandra). Because of the high pitch it sometimes sounds shrill and when sung in the fast tempo the words become unintelligible. At such moments the communicative function is performed more by the 'power' of singing and the fast rhythm on instruments rather than the words themselves. At other moments also, the meaning of words is many a time lost, either due to the demands of rhythm or due to the excessive sound of percussion instruments. Only the first line (which is also used as the refrain) is clear. A.J. Greimas' remarks on the significance of refrain apply to

such songs. "[Sometimes there is] deformation of signifiers because of rhythm. Because of the illegibility of words the refrain appears as a possible guardian of the significance".<sup>33</sup>

Seven tālas (rhythmic permutations) are used in Yakṣagāna. Each of these tālas have fixed muktāyas (endings beats). These muktāyas play an important role in signifying a change of mood, topic, context et cetera. In the course of a song or mere play of percussion instruments, the muktāya may appear in the beginning middle or end of a song. Muktāya functions like a punctuation mark in a written composition. Muktāya also has fixed foot steps in the dance structure. These two together create a closure (may be even for a short duration). This closure is indicative of the change. Sometimes the pause between the closure and the next movement may be so infinitesimal that it is not even noticed. But it still functions as a sign for the shift or change.

As this study is only a representational one, Yakṣagāna music has not been taken for detailed analysis. Only certain aspects necessary for an understanding of the form as a whole have been dealt with. The foregoing remarks highlight only those signifying aspects.

## II.6 Symbolic Representation

Theatrical semiosis always involves ostension. Every thing on the stage is 'projected' or 'held up' however insignificant that object may be. But as soon as an object is 'projected' it becomes 'de-realised'. It stands for something else. As Jiri Veltrusky of the Prague School of Structuralists says, "All that is on the stage is a sign"<sup>34</sup>. A chair kept on the stage is not a mere chair; it denotes the abstract notion of 'chair' and becomes a signifier for the class. It may also connote the abstract notion of power or position. But the same chair, used differently, can be made to become a sign for a wall, a ladder or even heaven. Both are signs but they belong to different hierarchy in the typology of signs. Using the typology of signs provided by the American semiotician C.S. Peirce, we can say that the first instance (a chair representing Chair) the sign is iconic whereas in the second instance (a chair standing for a wall or heaven) the chair is a symbol. In the first instance, the psychic impact of the sign is lesser than in the second. The first instance leads to realistic or metonymic representation. The second would be a symbolic or metaphoric one.

The theatrical medium always has the power of creating an illusion. The creation of the illusion of reality in the theatre began to attain greater importance in western theatre in the previous century. A drawing room for instance, was represented by placing as many real life objects as possible. When it was impossible to bring real life objects such as a house or a mountain, painted curtains, sets or cut-outs (iconic signs) that had the quality of verisimilitude were used. It was not realised that even real life objects 'lose' their reality and become signs. Mimesis and the creation of the illusion of reality came to be regarded as the highest achievement. This factor was closely associated with the growth of the poscenum theatre, with the stage being enclosed on three sides and only one side being open to the audience. This search for realism was carried on to such an extent, that the very fact of 'enactment' was tended to be denied. The actor was supposed not to acknowledge the presence of the spectators. This growth of 'realism' was closely allied to two other developments: 'the well knit play' and the school of acting inspired by Stanislavsky - the Russian director.

Even in painting, verisimilitude was regarded as the highest achievement. Technological innovations

(camara for example) revealed the futility of the search for verisimilitude. Painting had to search for a new significance. Expressionism was the result.

In Western theatre, many attempts were made in the thirties and forties of this century to break from the 'realistic - iconic' mould of which perhaps the most famous example is that of Brecht. The modern aesthetician E.H. Gombrich in his essay, "Meditations on a Hobby Horse" posits an interesting argument regarding the realistic/symbolic dichotomy:

Pliny and innumerable writers after him, have regarded it as the greatest triumph of naturalistic art for a painter to have deceived sparrows or horses. The implications of these anecdotes is that a human beholder easily recognises a bunch of grapes in a painting because for him recognition is an intellectual act. But for birds to fly at a painting is a sign of complete 'objective' illusion. It is a plausible idea but a wrong one. The merest outline of a cow seems sufficient for a tsetse trap, for somehow it sets the apparatus of attraction in motion and 'deceives' the fly. To the fly, we might say, the crude trap had 'significant' form - biologically significant that is. It appears that visual stimuli of this kind play an important part in the animal world. By varying the shapes of 'dummies' to which animals were seen to respond, 'the minimum' image that still sufficed to release a specific reaction has been ascertained. Thus little birds will open their beaks when they see the parent approaching the nest, but they will also do so when they are shown two darkish roundels of different size, the silhouette of the head and body of the bird 'represented' in its most general form... .



The 'first' hobby horse (to use eighteenth century language) was probably no image at all. Just a stick which qualified as a horse because one could ride on it. The common factor was function rather than form. Or more precisely that formal aspect which fulfilled the minimum requirement for the performance of the function for any ridable object could serve as a horse.

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Classical or folk theatres in India never consider realistic presentation as their goal. The same is also true of other Oriental theatres like Chinese opera or Noh theatre of Japan. Symbolic and suggestive representation is their forte. According to Indian aesthetics the goal of art is the evocation of rasas. As J.C. Mathur in his study of drama in rural India says, "If many characters in rural drama do not resemble real life human beings, it is because they are not meant to do so. Infact Indian dramatic tradition does not regard drama as imitation (anukaran) or even as creation (utpatti). It is the revelation and manifestation of aesthetic pleasure (rasa) through the process of suggestivity".

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The symbolism of Yakṣagāna is an integral part of its process of intellection. It starts with the discourse itself. The myth structure it deals with moves in the three worlds of gods, human beings and demons. Even the human beings who appear here, have many qualities common to the gods or the demons, which make them

also superhuman. These worlds being outside the normal human experience, a new universe of signification has to be created for their representation which sets these characters apart from the universe of the spectators. (The immanent discourse has to become meaningful ultimately only in terms of the universe of the spectators - but that is beside the point here.) No realistic or mimetic presentation can create this new universe of signification. Shivaram Karant makes this point explicit:

The world of these epic stories is not that of our empirical experience. The characters and the problems that appear there have a symbolic nature. We cannot picturise them in a realistic mode in the theatre. It needs certain qualities opposed to realism. Even the conflicts that appear in Yakṣagāna can not be compared to the conflicts of our daily life. Invisible forces are at work in such stories. The lives of these imaginary characters are controlled by some curse, boon or Fate. Even the solution to their problems is through some 'unrealistic' means - divine intervention, play of destiny or some other supernatural means. The heroes of these stories have qualities beyond the human. Some have got such power by some god or the other. Even the villains are blessed with such powers by the gods. So these characters dance according to the tunes of the gods. This being the basic nature of the story, how can it be pictured realistically? Such characters can be brought on the stage only after providing them with adequate imaginary

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representation and not otherwise.

This ideological concept is the basis of all the details of theatrical presentation in Yakṣagāna, be it the stage props, the costume, acting and to a limited extent even language. A brief look at these details will make this conceptual framework of Yakṣagāna clear.

#### II.6.a Stage

The stage used in Yakṣagāna is a bare platform open on three sides with a curtain at the back (see sketch). In the deep stage next to the curtain, the musicians sit on a table or a platform. Next to them, in the deep stage again, is a simple bench like structure called ratha or chariot. (Earlier it used to have small wheels - now a days it has begun to resemble a throne more and more). This bare platform, the place of action, 'becomes' any locale - heaven, King's court, war field, forest, river - just by a mention or a gesture by the actor. The power of its polyvalence lies in its openness. A change of locale is suggested by an exit and an entry. Sometimes, just by going one round on the stage, the change of locale is indicated. The locales are indicated not by projecting any detail of the locale itself but by how human beings interact with it. For example a river is suggested by the gestures of swimming and playing in water; plucking flowers becomes a sign

for a garden. Thus the indistinctness of the stage itself becomes its strong point making for its easy transformation from one locale to another. The potentiality of spatial representation on such a stage becomes very great inspite of the smaller physical dimensions. Reneta Berg-Pan, comparing the Chinese traditional theatre (which follows a similar system of representation) with modern stage, highlights this point. "[Inspite of the stage props and devices in modern stage], psychologically speaking, the place of action has become even smaller, compared to the empty stage of the Chinese theatre, because the actual potentialities for overcoming that space - the action shown by actors - remains the same... The suggestive type of acting and the barely hinted stage props in the Chinese theatre are quite superior to the realistic method generally used in European theatre because they allow for greater freedom on the part of the actor as well as the audience".<sup>38</sup>

The bench like structure in the deep stage, is the only stage prop used. It can become a sign for anything 'elevated'. Its most common use is as a seat or a throne. It can also become a bed, a mountain or the sky. In sequences of war, it is used as a chariot. It is also sometimes used as a sign for abstract mental states - for example an elevated mood. Kicaka on seeing

Sairandhri (Draupadi in disguise) feels extremely joyous. He conveys this joy by jumping on to the seat and dancing on it (Fig. 10).

#### II.6.b Stage Properties

The shape of weapons that the actors use are also fine examples of semiotic devices. The weapons used are bow and arrow, sword, mace and cakra. The bow is not bow shaped but straight like a stick (Fig.12). The arrow is a short thick piece made of wood. In scenes of battle the arrow never leaves the hand. The arrow is turned in the hand and it creates a sharp snapping sound as it hits the bow. This sound acts as a signifier for the release of the arrow. The semiosis functions here in an interesting way drawing from two different codes altogether, because an arrow released from a real bow never makes any distinct sound. The bow is also used as a support while standing on one leg (a posture used frequently in Yakṣagāna). The Cakra (a weapon used by Vishnu and Kṛṣṇa) is also represented in a way that is appropriate to the symbolic structure. It has a grip or handle attached to it tangentially. But weapons as a whole are thought of as obstacles to dance and gestural expressions. So the actors normally keep it on the seat in the deep stage at the first opportunity.

A few other interesting examples of the use of objects as signs can be cited. Reference has already been made to the use of crown as an object of worship. The symbolic representation can be said to start from there itself - the God worshipped. In Pādukā Paṭṭābhiṣēka (Rāma handing over his pādukas to his brother Bhaṛata), the cymbals are used as signs for the pādukas. Yakṣagāna makes use of limited stage properties to signify the entire range of signifieds, which leads to a polyvalence of signs.

#### II.6.c Costume and Makeup

Costume and make-up play a very significant role in the semiosis of Yakṣagāna in creating a new world of signification for these gods, human beings and demons that move about on the stage. Broad classifications among characters are also signified by the costume and make-up. As A. Someshwar says, "The internal qualities of the characters can be to a great extent recognised by their make-up"<sup>39</sup>. But a detailed analysis of the signifying process of costume and make-up will be taken up in the next chapter. Only a few examples to show their 'symbolic' nature will be mentioned here.

Costume and make-up project not merely the category to which the character belongs but also his internal

characteristics - his guṇadharmā. To take an example: Rāvaṇa and Vibhīṣaṇa are brothers but Rāvaṇa is presented as a baṇṇada vēṣa (the category of costume and make-up that designates him as a demon) but Vibhīṣaṇa is presented as a human being because of his mild nature. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa continue to be princes even when they are in the forest. So they are presented in regal costumes only and not in the costume worn by sages or forest dwellers. Prof. H.S. Gill in a different context explains the rationale behind such a representation. "If a prince becomes a yogi or a cowherd or a washerman he remains mentally a prince and the story teller keeps on reminding the audience of the spiritual transformation. As a matter of fact, a yogi-prince or prince-cowherd is culturally at a higher status than the ordinary Prince".<sup>40</sup> Yakṣagāna shows this intrinsic character through visual means - the costume and make-up. A śabara (hunter) wears the same costume that is worn by the other heroic personages (except for the headgear). This signifies his bravery. He wears some mango leaves on his breast to show that he is a forest dweller.

Certain basic colours like green, red, black and white are used for make-up. Each signifies a particular aspect of the character. Green, for instance, stands for the erotic (śṛṅgāra) red for courage and anger.

This applies not merely to the make-up but also to the colour of the garment worn. The relationship between the colours and their signification is largely culture determined and part of the code system of Yakṣagāna.

#### II.6.d Character

The actor 'represents' a character on the stage. He becomes the sign for the character. But the personality of the actor continues to 'intrude' upon the character. This actor/character dialectic will be dealt with in the III.1. A few instances relevant to the topic under study are cited here. We have perhaps seen instances in theatrical productions where one actor performs more than one role in one performance. In Yakṣagāna we witness the opposite, where the same role is performed by more than one actor. In a performance of Hariṣcandra that I witnessed recently, Hariṣcandra's role was performed in the first half by one actor and in the second half by another, thus providing two alternative signifiers for the same signified. (That the signified - the character - also changes because of the different actor is a point which I shall not enter into here.) A telling example of character as a sign can be seen in Reṇukā Mahātme. Sage Jamadagni's rage is presented as a character who enters into an argument with Jamadagni himself. A realistic theatre bound by the



limits of verisimilitude can never think of presenting a state of mind in visual concrete terms as a character.

#### II.6.e Dance and Gestures

Dance has great suggestive power and Yakṣagāna utilises this to the maximum in its 'symbolic' communication. Dance in Yakṣagāna is highly developed in the delineation of certain rasas, specially vīra (heroic). The power and force of the movements themselves communicate the heroism of the character. Events like journey or playing in water (jala Krīda) have a set choreography which are part of the code. War is also presented in a highly stylised manner. The actors do not even touch each other except at the end of the fight. A fine example of the way in which symbolic representation functions can be seen in the following illustration from Nalā Damayanti: Nalā is disguised as Bāhuka and he acts as a charioteer and takes another King in manōvēga (speed of the mind) to the proposed marriage of Damayanti. The speed of their journey is represented through dance - not the movement itself but by the waves of their body they suggest the buffeting wind and thereby the speed in which they are traveling (Fig.11). This more or less typifies one of the significatory processes of dance in Yakṣagāna.

Gestures and mudrās also form part of the symbolic representation but with one difference. Dance is not bound by the linguistic limits whereas gestures and mudrās are another set of codes that emphasize and elaborate on what language is communicating.

To sum up: Yakṣagāna never resorts to mimetic or realistic representation. It thrives on symbolic representation where the relationship between signifier and signified is rarely iconic and is quite often arbitrary. That is why it becomes a codified system and a knowledge of the code becomes necessary for proper communication to take place.

#### II.7 Secularisation of Yaksagana: The Progression from Religious Worship to Secular Art.

Most theatre forms both classical and folk, have their origins in religion. They mostly started as various forms of worship. We also observe that from these religious origins they usually undergo a process of secularisation and emerge as 'pure' art forms. The development of Greek drama from Dionysian worship is perhaps the most famous example of this progression. But in the case of many Indian art forms, the religious significance continues to operate on the form and content. All the same the process of secularisation can be recognised in the immanent discourse though perhaps not

in the manifest discourse. A study of this process in Yakṣagāna is very fascinating because it is undergoing this process right now and the religious motif in the discourse is still quite strong.

The origin of Yakṣagāna is clearly in religious worship. Some writers like K.S. Karant trace it to certain forms of worship of spirits prevalent in one district of Karnataka even today. It also has close links with the worship of the snake (Nāgamaṇḍala). An interesting argument regarding Yakṣagāna's origin and overtly religious function is posited by M. Mahabala Bhat. It is worth quoting though his arguments are not commonly accepted:

The Portugese in Goa, not satisfied with political power began to convert the Hindus by force... The common people were filled with great terror of this forced conversion and began fleeing from Goa. It is a historically recorded fact that many came to South Kanara also... Yakṣagāna was born out of this tension and challenge before society. The Hindus, noticing the threat to their religion, realised the necessity of strengthening the faith among the people. Men of imagination, using the local systems of song, dance, costumes and dialogue evolved Yaksagana. They wrote prasangas in simple language and metre that could be understood even by common men. And what better stories than from the Purāṇas to increase the faith,

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belief and interest among people.

The religious links of Yakṣagāna run very deep indeed and is manifested in all its aspects - its per-

formance structure, its organisational setup and the attitude of the performers and the spectators. As has already been analysed, the entire performance, starting from the prayer in the green room to the mangāḷa at the end, is modelled as a form of worship. Traditionally the entire thrust of the discourse was to show God's līla (Divine play) through one of his incarnations. Two other names by which Yakṣagāna is known will make its religious motif clear: Daṣāvantāra āṭa (The performance of the ten incarnations) and Bhāgavatara āṭa (The performance of the Bhāgavata - the story of Kṛṣṇa's life).

Organisationally, Yakṣagāna troupes have always been associated with temples. Even today of the thirty odd professional troupes only one does not bear the name of any temple. Most of the performances were previously performed within the precincts of temples. Admission to the performance was free (bayalāṭa) and were sponsored by individuals as a form of offering to the Gods (harake). Yakṣagāna has survived in the last few centuries only because of this kind of patronage. Even today there are quite a few troupes which perform only these open air shows. The devotees take an oath (harake) of bearing the entire cost of a performance. This is considered a sacred duty and a form of worship. The spectators also watch the performance in the same mental

frame in which they would listen to a religious discourse. In some temples, in the list of different kinds of service to the deity (Sēve), the performance of Yakṣagāna is also mentioned. Infact, there is one temple in North Kanara district (Gundabāḷa), where this service of paying for a Yakṣagāna performance, has been booked for the next ten years.

Taking part in a performance is also considered a way of worship. In the temple referred to earlier (Gundabāḷa), devotees also take oaths of taking part in a performance. This is called "wearing a mark on the forehead". Even if the devotee is not a Yakṣagāna artist, he wears the mark on the forehead and just walks on the stage once.

Thus the entire ethos was a religious one. The artists as well as the spectators had a feeling of partaking in the sacred work.

The scene began to change around the forties and fifties of this century. Troupes began to be organised on commercial lines. Performances began to be given in temporarily erected tents with admission fee being charged. In the case of many troupes, this became necessary as the number of sponsors and patrons began dwindling. With this drastic change in the 'performance space' and 'performance context', a sudden rupture from

the religious context took place. Now most troupes are organised along commercial lines though they still carry the names of temples. One obvious reason for the process of secularisation that is taking place now is the fact of commercialisation itself - the 'box office' pressures. Due to the changed performance context, the psychic attitude of both the artists and the spectators also changed. The performance was no more in the deity's service. It was a commercial venture performed before paid audiences.

This rupture naturally changed the discourse as well. The external structure of the earlier 'religious' performances is maintained even today but the discourse is not the same anymore. I shall take up for analysis two examples of this process in operation. One is the search for new plots; the other is a subtle and sometimes not so subtle shift in the treatment of old prasangas whereby a new significance is created.

II.7.a To take up the first point: there was commercial compulsion to present at least one new production in the tour itinerary every year to attract the audience. Writers were assigned to write new prasangas. In the beginning of these 'tent' shows, (that is about 30-40 years ago), the new prasangas followed the traditional format. Episodes from the purāṇas that had not already

been presented in Yakṣagāna were chosen and presented. Some prasangas, with one character, from the epics as the centre, were also attempted. For example, there are two traditional prasangas on Bhīṣma's life: Bhīṣma Vijaya - dealing with Bhīṣma bringing the three daughters of the King of Kāṣi and the subsequent clash with Ambe; and Bhīṣma Parva which deals with his role in the Kurukṣētra war. A new prasanga, Samagra Bhīṣma dealing with the entire life of Bhīṣma was written. But in course of time totally new stories having no connection with the purānas were chosen. It is interesting to note that in some of these prasangas we can see borrowings from western classics. For example the prasanga, Pāpaṇa Vijaya bears a close resemblance to King Lear. The break from the religious motif becomes quite manifest in these new prasangas and their performance. The value system of the old works is still accepted without question and the temporal context of a bygone age maintained, but the main thrust of the performance-score is on theatricality and the possibility for attractive visuals.

II.7.b The second example referred to earlier - the reinterpretation of old and traditional prasangas - presents a fascinating study of the process of seculari-

sation in operation. The same texts are used but by a shift of emphasis the focus of attention has shifted from the 'good' characters like Arjuna or Rāma to the 'wicked' ones like Kaurava, Rāvana, Kamsa or Kīcaka. These 'wicked' characters become the object of the discourse and are presented in such a way that the sympathy of the audience is with them. This shift of focus has taken place in such a subtle and imperceptible manner that the spectators and many a time even the actors are not clearly aware of all its ramifications. But it is certainly a process that is still going on. The following is a short list of some of the characters (with the names of the prasangas) which have undergone this process.

<u>Characters</u>	<u>Prasangas</u>
1. Bhasmāsura	<u>Bhasmāsura Mōhini</u>
2. Kaurava	<u>Gadā Yuddha</u>
3. Jarāsandha	<u>Māgadha Vadhe</u>
4. Kamsa	<u>Kamsa Vadhe</u>
5. Karṇa	<u>Karṇarjuna Kāḷaga&amp; Karṇa Parva</u>
6. Kīcaka	<u>Virāta Parva</u>
7. Sālva	<u>Bhīṣma Vijaya</u>
8. Duṣṭa Buddhi	<u>Candrahāsa</u>



In the traditional conceptual framework all these are 'wicked/evil' characters. In the written texts they are presented as such. The main thrust in the prasangas is the destruction of these evil forces and the victory to Dharma. The religious motif of the discourse is thus evident.

In the last twenty-thirty years, the actors playing these 'evil' characters began to 'humanise' and elevate these characters. They began to represent them as characters with a generous nature having one flaw, which led them to the path they had chosen—thus giving a tragic dimension to these characters. By treating them almost as tragic characters, the audience were made to sympathise with them. Thus the religious motif got subverted. The artists themselves do not seem to be completely aware of this connotation.

One or two examples would reveal how this reinterpretation/recreation is accomplished in the performance text. Kicaka was earlier presented as a drunken lout who tried to seduce Sairandhri. (His make-up also revealed him as belonging to the 'wicked' class.) But now he is presented as a 'romantic' hero who is attracted by a woman only twice in his life: once in Draupadi's swyamvara (marriage) and a second time when he sees Sairandhri. He does not realise that Sairandhri herself

is Draupadi. The make-up is also slightly altered to reduce his 'wickedness'.

The written text is also edited and shortened suitably to highlight these characters. In the prasanga, these 'wicked' characters are not the protagonists. They appear as part of a larger canvass where the value system against which they are to be judged is presented. But with the omission of those parts, these characters posit a value system of their own in the light of which they have to be judged. I shall illustrate this point from Gadā Yuddha :

The written text of Gadā Yuddha (after the traditional Oddōlaga), begins with a confrontation between Dharmarāya and Śalya in which Śalya is killed; this is followed by the sight of the desolate Kaurava who comes across the innumerable dead bodies on the battle field. He meets Aṣwathāma who promises to kill the Pāṇḍavas. Kaurava hides in a lake; he is forced to come out by the insults hurled at him by the Pāṇḍavas specially Bhīma. They fight. Kaurava falls with his thigh broken. Aṣwathāma in the meanwhile uses the Brahmāstra against the Pāṇḍavas. Kṛṣṇa diverts the weapon against the Upapāṇḍavas, the children of Pāṇḍavas, who are killed. Aṣwathāma is publicly disgraced for killing the children. The prasanga ends with Kṛṣṇa presiding over the

coronation of Dharmaraya.

But the performance text cuts the first and the last portions (where the greatness of Kṛṣṇa is highlighted). Only the incidents dealing with Kaurava and Aṣṭhāma are performed. In fact in some recent productions even the Aṣṭhāma episode is deleted. Thus the entire focus of attention of the audience is on the last moments of Kaurava, who achieves the dimension of a tragic hero. Kṛṣṇa who is presented in the prasanga as guiding and protecting the Pāṇḍavas and upholding Dharma is sidelined. With this new significance created, the religious motif gets totally altered.

The actors make use of the freedom of speech that the totally improvised dialogue offers, to 'humanise' and glorify these characters. For example, Kaurava in the instance given earlier, looks at the dead bodies in the battlefield and recognises his dear ones. But he also recognises Abhimanyu and mourns for his death. Suddenly Kaurava's character gets 'elevated' and the spectators in turn begin to sympathise with him.

Through their speech, the actors intellectualise the characters and provide a frame work for the understanding of the character. If in the traditional prasangas the conceptual opposition is between good and evil with the destruction of evil at the end, in the new

frame work built up through the performance text, the opposition itself gets changed. The abstract entities of good and evil represented by these characters vanish and the opposition becomes the one between two individuals. Moreover the positions of the being and the other become reversed. As the focus of the discourse shifts from the good character to the wicked one, the wicked character becomes the being and the good character the other. Thus the religious motif gets totally subverted. As the wicked character becomes the being, the crux of the discourse also gets totally altered; it becomes the struggle and fall of a brave and proud character with some streaks of wickedness in him. This change opens up the possibility of viewing the new discourse as a tragedy in the Aristotalian sense. No doubt the original stories of the epics contain all the ingredients whereby a Kaurava, a Karṇa or a Rāvaṇa can be easily fitted into this mould. Thus out of the very traditional structure of Yakṣagāna we are perhaps witnessing in indigenous form of tragedy emerging.

This change taking place in the immanent discourse of Yakṣagāna, becomes central to any synchronic understanding of the form because the small and seemingly insignificant changes taking place in the structure of Yakṣagāna, have to be paradigmatically related to the

process of secularisation. Perceived in this light, these 'insignificant' details become the most significant signs of the change.

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## ABHINAYA : HISTRIONIC REPRESENTATION

### III ABHINAYA - HISTRIONIC REPRESENTATION

The Nāṭya Śāstra describes the word Abhinaya etymologically. "It is from the root <sup>ni</sup> 'to carry' with the preposition abhi meaning 'towards'; that which carries the meaning (lit. the performance) to the audience is called Abhinaya" Bharata further classifies Abhinaya into four kinds: Āngika(bodily acting), Vācika(verbal), Āhārya(dress,makeup,etc.) and Sātvika(temperamental). It is clear from this that Abhinaya includes not merely what we mean by acting but also costumes, make-up, stage props and all those things that help in carrying the meaning to the audience.

This chapter will make a study of these aspects of abhinaya with reference to Yakṣagāna and make an enquiry into how these factors function in 'carrying' the meaning to the audience, We can begin the enquiry with the fundamental question of the actor himself.

#### III.1 Actor as a Sign

The actor who appears on the stage - what does he represent? He no doubt has a real-life existence with a persona of his own. But he claims to represent another entity - the character or dramatis persona who may or

may not be a person with a real existence. In this short but incisive article "Semiotics of Theatrical Performance", Umberto Eco analyses the semiotic functioning of a human being as a sign. He takes the simple example of a drunkard exposed in a public place by the Salvation Army in order to advertise the advantages of temperance :

As soon as he has been put on the platform and shown to the audience, the drunken man has lost his original nature of "real" body among real bodies. He is no more a world object among world objects - he has become a semiotic device; he is now a sign. A sign, according to Peirce, is something that stands to somebody for something else in some respect or capacity - a physical presence referring back to something absent. What is our drunken man referring back to? To a drunken man. But not to the drunk who he is, but to a drunk. The present drunk - in so far as he is the member of a class - is referring us back to the class of which he is a member. He stands for the category he belongs to. There is no difference, in principle, between our intoxicated character and the world "drunk."

Apparently this drunk stands for the equivalent expression "There is a drunken man", but things are not that simple. The physical presence of the human body along with its characteristics could stand either for the phrase "There is a drunken man in this precise place and in this precise moment,"; or for the one "Once upon a time there was a drunken man"; it could also mean, "There are many drunken men in the world". As a matter of fact, in the example I am giving, and according to Peirce's suggestion, the third alternative is the case. To interpret this physical presence in one or in another sense is a matter of convention, and a more



sophisticated theatrical Performance would establish this convention by means of other semiotic media - for instance, words. But at the point we are, our tipsy sign is open to any interpretation. He stands for all the existing drunken men in our real world and in every possible world. He is an open expression (or sign vehicle) referring back to an open range of possible contents.

Nevertheless, there is a way in which this presence is different from the presence of a word or of a picture. It has not been actively produced (as one produces a word or draws an image) - it has been picked up among the existing physical bodies and it has been shown or ostended. It is the result of a particular mode of sign production.

The actor thus has a real presence of his own and it is only this real presence that allows him to function as a sign and represent something that is absent. He is performing both functions simultaneously. To quote Eco again :

Nevertheless there is something that distinguishes our drunkard from a word. A word is a sign, but it does not conceal its sign quality. We conventionally accept that through words someone speaks about reality, but we do not confuse words with things (except in cases of mental illness). When speaking, we are conscious that something impalpable stands for something presumably palpable. But not every sign-system follows the same rule as others. In the case of our elementary model of mise-en-scene, the drunk is a sign, but he is a sign that pretends not to be such. The drunkard is playing a double game : in order to be accepted as a sign, he has to be recognised as a "real" spatio-temporal event, a real human body. In theatre, there is a "square semiosis". With words, a phonic object stands for other objects made with different stuff. In the

mise-en-scene, an object, first recognised as a real object is then assumed as a sign in order to refer back to another object (or to a class of objects) whose constitutive stuff is the same as that of the representing  
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object.

The issue touched upon by Eco in the last sentence of the passage just quoted, leads us to one of the fundamental questions regarding histrionic representation. The actor in the process of representing the character is also representing himself. He claims to represent another reality but the actor's real self (belonging to the world of the spectators' every day experience) is also projected, thus representing two 'realities' at the same time. These two levels of reality - do they work in opposition or are they complementary? How is the tension between the two strata of reality resolved in theatrical semiosis? This leads us to the next question.

### III.1.a Actor/ Character Dialectic

The actor and the represented character - these two coexist in any theatrical performance as we have just now seen. A character created on the stage will always be the 'character as represented by the particular actor'. Thus the sign can never be the actor per se or the character per se. It will always be a dialectic

between the two. Different theatre forms resolve this dialectic emphasizing the one or the other.

To illustrate this point, I shall take up two extreme examples. The first is the puppet theatre. The puppet does not have a persona of its own. (It is an intentional sign created solely for the purpose of signification). All its features are intentional signs. There are no physiological details that are not significant. As Jiri Veltrusky observes, "A puppet which represents a character has only those features of a real person which are needed for the given dramatic situation; all the components of a puppet are intentional signs. By contrast, the stage figure created by an actor is shaped not only by the artistic intention but also by physiological necessity. The movements of the facial muscles, for instance, are controlled both by the semiotic and by the physiological functions... . Yet the audience perceives all the elements of the stage figure as signs...[the stage figure] oscillates between being a sign, that is, a reality standing for another reality and being a reality in its own right".<sup>5</sup> Thus the puppet comes closest to 'being' the signified-the character.

On the other hand let us take the case of a popular film star of the commercial circuit (preferably of the Bombay variety). When this film star acts in a

film, he more or less represents himself. The character he represents is intentionally left amorphous, because the purpose is to project the 'star image' which remains the same, whatever be the character he is representing. Thus, the film star, to a large extent, projects himself or to be precise his 'star-image', in every character that he depicts.

These two examples are two polarities of the actor/character dialectic. Most other theatre forms fall between these two extremes. Even in these extreme examples, the dialectic does not get totally resolved; the 'stiffness' of the puppet, for example, rubs onto the character; the film star even to project the star image needs the alibi of a character. This dialectic works in varying degrees and depends on several factors - the form of the theatre, the actor's 'method', the personal knowledge or intimacy of the spectators with the actor's real life et cetera. Different theatre forms resolve this dialectic in different ways. In realistic theatre, for example, the attempt would be to reduce the dialectic to the minimum, whereby the actor tries to 'become' the character to the extent possible; whereas Brecht, exploited this dialectic in his theatre, stating that the actor should represent the character as well as himself. Yakṣaḡāna utilises this dialectic in a

unique way making use of the freedom afforded by the totally improvised dialogues. But before that question can be tackled, it is essential to know Yakṣagāna's approach to acting

### III.1.b Acting in Yakṣagāna - Form and Essence

There are various theories and schools propounding divergent approaches to acting. The western approach to this question has been varied. Two basically opposite approaches that became highly influential can be seen in the theatrical postulates of Stanislavsky and Brecht. The first approach aimed at total internalisation of the character. The actor was asked to draw from his personal experience, similar situations or from similar persons that he had come across and then to present them on the stage. The assumption was that perfect internalisation would lead to perfect representation of the character. Brecht tried a different approach whereby the actor was asked not to identify himself totally with the character but to maintain a distance and present the character critically. The approach of Yakṣagāna and most other classical dance/drama forms of India, to this question is integrally different.

Acting involves the creation/presentation of a character. But this creation is the essence that can not be done without the form or the signifier. The form

here is the body (and voice) of the actor and the control that he exercises over it: the movements of the facial muscles, eyes, limbs et cetera including the minutest ripple of the muscles. Stanislavsky's view is that if the actor does proper internalisation and learns to live the role, the form will take care of itself. The traditional Indian approach is that without achieving a perfect control over the form (in this case, the actor's body and its constituents along with the stylisation of the particular form), conveying the essence becomes impossible. That perhaps is the reason why the Nāṭya Śāstra describes abhinaya in the minutest detail: thirteen types of head movement, thirty six expressions of the eyes and so on.

In Yakṣagāna, in the initial stages of the training process, the neophyte actor is made to master the form. He does not bother about the signified or the essence at this stage. By continuous practice and correction the form becomes second nature to the actor. Phillip Zarelli's comments on the training process in Kathakali makes this clear. "The Kathakali student simply does the exercise repetitiously attempting to master the exercise to the point where it is automatically at hand as part of his in body knowledge".<sup>6</sup> When this actor begins performing on the stage his earliest

roles are in Pūrvaranga and Oddōlaga where, as has been observed in Chapter II, the roles are without any specific context. The depiction of these roles involve nṛtta, mere dance steps and movements without an emotive content. According to the Nāṭya Śāstra, such a dance is not supposed to have any meaning though it pleases by its beauty.<sup>7</sup> These roles in the preliminaries, help the young actor in achieving total mastery over form without concerning himself about the essence. Because in these roles, the essence is the expression of the form - the referent of the message being the code itself. In these roles, the actor need not have to do any internalisation. All he is concerned about is the expression of the form. Thus the performance of these roles is a continuation of the process of training.

When the actor becomes more mature and takes other roles, he is supposed to internalise the role. This process of internalisation or emotionally filling out the role also follows a process of objectification. To quote Phillip Zarelli again, "Just as the external in-body process of Kathakali acting is a process of objectification which is non-personal, the internal side of actor training and performance shares in the development of this process of objectification. Even though, the emotional states are extremely important in Kathakali,

these emotional states are objectified and non personal experiences".<sup>8</sup> These comments on acting in Kathakali apply equally truly to most Indian classical dance drama forms including Yakṣagāna.

The actor no doubt draws from his personal experience in delineating a character or a situation but what he looks for and reproduces is not verisimilitude. The emotional states may be innumerable but they are broadly classified under different bhāvas. The actor recognises the sthāyi bhāva of a character. This is the main emotional state of a character - one of the eight or nine as classified by the Indian aestheticians. Keeping this sthāyi bhāva as the central focus, he recognises the passing emotional phases or the sancāri bhāvas. Thus what he draws from his personal experience is not an individualised experience but an objectified classified form - the Sthāyi bhāva. Apart from the sthāyi bhāvas, the concomitant fleeting emotional states or the sancāri bhavas are also cognised by the actor. For example in Sri Rāma Pattābhiṣēka (the story of Rāma's coronation, when he is forced by Kaikeye, to go to the forest), the emotional state of Daṣaratha, when he is sending his son Rāma with Sīta and Lakṣmana can be taken. The Sthāyi bhāva here is sorrow. At the same time he also expresses anger at Kaikeye and his own



helplessness. These become the sancāri bhāvas.

Thus acting in Yakṣagāna begins with the form. Only after achieving mastery over it does the actor begin to internalise the role. (This process can be compared to the process of learning in Indian classical music where also internalisation and expression of emotion comes only after the 'form' has been thoroughly mastered). This internalisation is also not of personal experiences but the generalised form of emotional states (sthāyi bhāva) for which the actor finds counterparts in his personal experience. This leads to the creation of the archetypal characters of our epics.

### III.1.c Stylisation

Acting in Yakṣagāna is highly stylised. By 'stylised acting' we mean a system where gestures, expressions and body movements from day - today usage are chosen and then exaggerated and ostended in a particular form. These then become so distinct from the gestures and expressions of daily life that they become stylised. Any expressive sign used by the actor has to be in conformity with this stylisation.

In theatre forms which use gestures and expressions in a mimetic way, even purely physiological acts which are unintended and nonpurposive are apt to be

mistaken as signifiers. "Groucho Marx illustrates the point in his amazement at the scratches on Julie Harris's legs in a performance of I am a Camera: 'At first we thought this had something to do with the plot and we waited for these scratches to come to life. But ... it was never mentioned in the play and we finally came to the conclusion that either she had been shaving too close or she'd been kicked around in the dressing room by her boyfriend'".<sup>9</sup>

Whereas in a stylised form like Yakṣagāna, the unintentional non purposive components, immediately 'stand out' because these are not framed in the code (stylisation) and so are simply neglected by the spectators as not being part of the signifying system. An actor on stage adjusts his crown, keeps or picks up the weapon, adjusts the costume or ornaments but these are not considered signifiers. Thus, what may appear as an impropriety in realistic theatre is never considered so in Yaksagana.

Now let us return to the question of actor-character dialectic and see how it functions in Yakṣagāna. It is necessary to know a little about the Yakṣagāna actors and the popularity they enjoy to understand how the dialectic functions. The Yakṣagāna actors (the leading ones at least), are very popular and have a 'star'

following which can rival even that of the film stars though the geographical area of their popularity is limited. The spectators have a prior knowledge of the personal life of the actors, their professional rivalries and problems.

The actors in their improvised dialogues make use of this 'information' through the use of double entendre dialogues. In fact this style of speaking - which generates two specific meanings - is an expertise that most Yakṣagāna artists develop. In their dialogue they quite often refer to the personal lives of the actors. This may appear as a rupture in the character-sign but it is never taken as a break either by the actors or by the spectators. They hugely enjoy these references and accept the existence of the two realities simultaneously. Thus the dialectic acts not as an opposition but becomes complementary; one complementing the other.

### III.2 Dance

Since time immemorial dance has been a spontaneous mode through which man has expressed his emotions. Dance as a mode of instinctive expression goes back to a time even before language. We see this mode of instinctive expression even among animals. A very functional use of dance as a means of communication among bees has

been studied in great detail by Karl von Frish. <sup>10</sup> Dance has been one of man's basic modes of expression. To quote Shivaram Karant, "Ever since man evolved as a social being, dance must be among the first to be used by him to express his emotions. This is a universal phenomenon. We can never say who first discovered dance. When man is filled with joy or exuberance it gets expressed through his body. It shows itself not merely on the face but in his body movements, rhythmic <sup>11</sup> steps, jumps and in throwing the limbs out".

When dance becomes a mode of artistic expression, it gets bound in a form and structure. Dance formed an integral part of dramatic performance in the Indian tradition. Ancient Indian aestheticians divided the dance used in dramatic performance into three types: nṛtta, nṛtya and nāṭya. The difference between the three can be understood from the following quotation by Apparao. "The physical movements of the body have an equal importance in both nṛtya and nṛtta. While nṛtta retains the pure dance form only, nṛtya incorporates the song and histrionic expression in addition to pure dance. Similarly nṛtya and nāṭya have equal predominance of abhinaya with the difference that nṛtya concentrates on āṅgika abhinaya (bodily acting) while nāṭya concentrates on Vācika abhinaya (voice control)

and Sātvika abhinaya (temperamental acting) in addition to a well - knit plot" <sup>12</sup> Nṛtta is pure dance without rasa or bhāva where the rhythm is predominant. Nṛtya on the other hand is born of Nṛtta in which music and acting is used for the expression of bhāva. Nāṭya is the elaborate form of Nṛtya where all the four ingredients of abhinaya - āngika, vācika, āhārya and sātvika are used. In the form of scenes it develops the narrative and by the expression of bhāva leads to the enjoyment of rasa. Yakṣagāna makes use of all these three types in its dance and an understanding of the distinction between the three is necessary to understand the way dance functions in the signifying process of Yakṣagāna.

Dance is one of the most attractive features of Yakṣagāna. It is very difficult to describe in words the fascination of this dance. Yakṣagāna dance has certain features that differentiate it from other classical dance forms of India. Great emphasis is laid on the foot work. The dance is usually brisk and vigorous. There are choreographed items of great polish and beauty though some aspects do also have a rough edge.

The actor dances to the song being sung by the bhāgavata. Usually the first half of the song is used for pure dance and the second half for abhinaya. Rarely

are they done together. But there are no strict rules regarding this and the actor has a great deal of freedom to develop his dance in whatever way he desires and it mostly depends on the actor's strong points and his understanding with the bhāgavata.

Gestural representation and abhinaya, are also performed along with the dance. The lines are repeated several times by the bhāgavata to allow the actor to perform gestural representation, as well as abhinaya, moving to the rhythm and keeping the laya. The pure dance or nṛtta is done either between the two halves of a song or at the end of the song. After this pure dance, the song ends with the refrain.

To understand how a song is depicted using dance and abhinaya, I give below the transcript of a workshop/seminar conducted by Shivaram Karant to Yakṣa-gāna artists. In it he explains to the actors how a song should be developed and represented on the stage. The song is taken from the prasanga, Ratikalyāṇa (the episode of the marriage of Kṛṣṇa's son Pradyumna to Rati). Kṛṣṇa takes an oath with Rukmiṇi that he can arrange the marriage in eight days. Unseen difficulties arise because of which he feels that the oath can not be fulfilled. The song analysed, depicts his sense of defeat.

"O God ! why did I take the challenge with queen Rukmiṇi? All my strivings have been in vain and I am unable to arrange the marriage of Smara [Kṛṣṇa's son]".

This is the translation of the entire poem which will help in understanding the way it is depicted in dance and abhinaya line by line:

The bhāgavata sings the first line

<u>Hara Hara</u>	<u>Paṭṭadarasi</u>	<u>Rukmiṇiyolu</u>
[Exclamation addressed to God] Hara	throne queen	Rukmini [Case ending show- ing his challenge with]

Karant: (to the actors), The entire song depicts the tone of despair. This despair and tiredness should be depicted in the abhinaya. Intone the first two words 'Hara Hara' with the bhāgavata. Let your voice also convey the despair... Show the feeling, "I gave the promise to the queen but I could not fulfill it". In the first two words show the intense devotion with which you are praying to God.

(Asks the bhāgavata to sing the first line several times), In your prayer your helplessness should be established... lift both your hands; it denotes devotion and respect. If you lift one hand the devotion is

decreased... let your hands be away from the lines of the body.

Next line

Rukmiṇiyolēke

Panthavesegidenō

Rukmiṇi with why

Challenge took [verb ending of first person]

Karant: 'Rukmiṇi' It is necessary to show her grace and delicacy. A definite abhinaya is required for 'why'. To make the bhāva clear, the beats of the maddale, the bhāgavata's voice, cymbals the dancer's foot work and gestures should all participate in the abhinaya. The sense of rhythm is fundamental... The sense of defeat and despondency should be shown in your dance and acting.

Next line

Smaranige

Vivāha

racisalārade

Smara to

marriage

arrange

(negative ending)

Karant: How to show Smara [Madana - The God of Love] in acting. His daintiness should be show in your steps. After seeing your acting we should feel as though Smara has appeared before our eyes. Gesturally demonstrate marriage by bringing the two hands together gracefully



and slowly...[Fig.17] (to the actor), don't do it so fast, that looks like oxen yoked by force.

Last Line

baride

balaluvudāytu

mere

striving happened.

Karant: In your steps and movements show the tiredness of defeat. The arms naturally sag down in defeat. But the arms should sag behind the body in despair, not in front of the body.<sup>14</sup>

This detailed analysis will perhaps give an idea of how abhinaya is performed and how dance becomes the medium of that abhinaya. The dances performed in Yakṣa-gāna can be broadly classified into two types:

- a) dance with songs: nāṭya and nṛtya
- b) dance for the mere rhythmic patterns played on the percussion instruments - nṛtta

The functional use of both are different. The first is used basically for the elaboration of a song through gestures and expressions added to the footwork of the dance. This affords the greatest opportunity for improvisation. There are no set dance scores for these songs. As Martha Ashton and Bruce Christie say, "[These are] dances that neither follow a conventional pattern nor have specifically programmed steps and these are

danced to songs that actually tell the story. During this time the dancer chooses any steps in his repertoire that display the emotion or the situation and fit the musical timing. The dancer is also free to create steps as long as he keeps within the style of the dance".<sup>15</sup>

The second type on the other hand, is pure dance nṛtta which is done without any emotional representation. It usually is danced in the middle or end of a song. It also includes fixed features like the introductory dances (Oddōlaga), journey, war and such other dances which are also done only to the beat of the percussion instruments. If nṛtta is done during a song the shift from the one to the other type of dance is indicated by the actor circling the stage once and the muktāya beats which punctuate this change. (See II.5 Music on muktāya)

III.2.b In terms of emotional states that they convey a different typology can be used for the classification of types of dance. They can be grouped under three heads:

- (1) Lāśya: Light gracefull dance delineating śṛṅgāra or the erotic.
- (2) Hāśya: Dance that elicits humour.

- (3) Dances that depict the vīra (heroic) or raudra (furious).
- (1) Lāsya (the graceful) is said to have originated from Pārvati (just as its counter point tāṇḍava is said to have originated from Shiva)<sup>16</sup>. This type of dance is mostly used in the depiction of Śrī n-gāra. Most Indian dance forms are greatly developed in the depiction of lāsya. In Yakṣagāna in the other hand, lāsya is found only in the dance of the female characters. (Is it because, in the dance forms well developed in the depiction of lāsya, the dances were performed by women whereas Yakṣagāna has remained an all male domain).
- (2) Hāsya (the humorous) is performed only by the buffoon and rarely by the main characters. (The role of Uttara Kumāra in Virāṭa Parva is one such rare example). The buffoon normally uses the same footwork but gives an odd twist or two making it appear humorous. He dances as though he is fighting against gravity, as though he is about to fall down. (Even the apparently uncontrolled falling is in reality very controlled.) This adds to the humour.

(3) The real strength of Yakṣagāna dance can be seen in the depiction of vīra and raudra. Most of the steps are virile and fast and are naturally suited to convey the heroism or the forcefulness of the characters.

The raw material for the dance is usually the actions and emotions of the characters. The psychological state of the character can be depicted in dance.

### III.2.c The Function of Dance

What and how does dance communicate? Is its function only aesthetic? The communicative function of nāṭya and nṛtya can be recognised because of their emotional and psychological purport. Let us consider nṛtta (pure dance) which does not seem to have any specific significance apart from the aesthetic. The Nāṭya Śāstra itself states, "It is true nṛtta does not give any meaning; but it is used simply because it creates beauty".<sup>17</sup> Because nṛtta is done as a pure dance with no emotional purport, it appears as though it has only the aesthetic function. Is it really so? If true, what then is the reason for the great impact that nṛtta always has on the audience. Let me analyse this further with the help of an example from Kīcaka Vadhe. Kīcaka

forces his sister to send Sairandhri to his palace. Sairandhri is forced to take a bowl of honey to Kīcaka. When Kīcaka sees her he is so greatly filled with joy at having got her that an elaborate nṛtta is done during the song, "To which universe does this beauty belong?"<sup>18</sup> The dance is brisk and vigorous and at the same time graceful. The dance, no doubt, has a great impact on the audience but what does it signify?

We can understand the way dance functions here by comparing it with the way cinema makes use of montage. In cinema many a time neutral shots are used. These are shots without any emotional or psychological purport. But these neutral shots become loaded with 'meaning' because of montage; the preceding or the following shot leaves its imprint on the neutral shot so that it also becomes loaded with the purport of the other shots.

In the preceding example, Kīcaka's yearning for Sairandhri and his exuberance on seeing her are already communicated by words and abhinaya prior to the nṛtta. Thus when the pure dance is performed, it naturally relates paradigmatically to his entire relationship with Sairandhri (his desire and lust for her, her strong refusal, the present sense of victory, the anticipated sexual union with her and also the sudden memory of Draupadi's marriage). All these criss cross references

become 'loaded' on to the pure dance which itself at the manifest level communicates nothing.

There is another way also in which dance partakes in semiosis. The sheer physical force of the movement and foot work connote the sense of urgency, the intensity of desire or sometimes even the power. To take an example, in any dance depicting war or confrontation, one particular type of dance manḍi or pirouetting on the knees is always performed (Fig. 13). The audience also eagerly expects this dance and cheers the dancers lustily. While performing this dance the actor literally 'goes down on his knees'. In the normal parlance of signification this posture of bending down is taken as a sign of defeat or acceptance of the superiority of the opponent. But in manḍi dance the signified meaning is exactly the opposite - challenge and show of strength. How does the same posture get the opposite signification? Doing this dance involves great physical energy and it is this flow of energy that connotes the energy of the character.

Thus all the three types of dance nṛtta, nṛtya and nāṭya take part in the semiotic process of Yaksagana. They also partake in the very raison d'etre of the entire performance, rasānubhava or aesthetic experience.

### III.3 GESTURES and MUDRĀS

Gestures form an integral part of the activity of speaking. Gesture and gesticulations complete the significatory process of speech. Some cultural groups or communities may use gestures more than others, but no speech activity is truly devoid of the use of these (unless where the emitter of the message is absent). Most theatre forms also make prominent use of gestures. In 'realistic' theatre, the gestures used are those that are taken from daily life. The only difference is that on stage they are ostended.

Gestures and mudrās are used prominently in many Indian dance forms. But their use differs from the 'mimetic' use of gestures of realistic theatre. Mudrās form an almost complete code system in themselves which are used along with the speech(song), to emphasize or clarify the semantic significance of the word. The word mudrā has a ritualistic signification too. "The hand symbols used by Tantrics were called mudrā".<sup>19</sup> They are used as a part of āṅgika abhinaya (bodily acting) to aid in the communication of bhāva. The Nāṭya Śāstra and NandiKeshwara's Abhinaya Darpaṇa give a detailed list of the different mudrās and their uses. Dance forms like Bharat Natyam and Kathakali make detailed use of mudrās.

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A word about the use of the two words—gestures and mudrās. I have used these two words to denote two slightly different ways in which hastābhinaya(hand acting) is used in Yakṣagāna. By mudrās, I mean those hand gestures that are part of the code system (where the relation between signifier and signified is mostly arbitrary) and so are unintelligible to any one not familiar with the code. Gesture on the other hand, refers to that part of 'hand acting' which is taken from every day conversation and is understood even by those not familiar with the code. Yakṣagāna makes use of both in its 'hand-acting'.

As has been explained in the introduction, Yakṣagāna has three regional variations; Tenku(south), baḍagu(north) and extreme baḍagu (North Kanara). Of these, only the last mentioned, uses mudrās to a large extent. In the other two variations, the use of mudrās can be seen only in the preliminaries but not in the acting of the main prasanga. The use of gestures and mudrās analysed here is of the North-Kanara variety, where according to P.V.Hasyagara. "There were many actors in the past who could express every word through mudrā in North-Kanara. Even now, this is the speciality that distinguishes actors of North from South Kanara".<sup>20</sup>



Yaksagana uses some of the mudrās used in other classical Indian dances, but the number of mudrās in Yakṣagāna is limited. Also, the use of these mudrās is based not on any authoritative text (Śāstra-Grantha), but only on unwritten tradition. A number of gestures used in every day conversation are also used. As Shambhu Hegde says, "Yakṣagāna does not have mudrās to suffice all the emotions. So, many gestures are taken from daily life. Thus an actor can create his own mudrās. For example, urgency or quickness can be demonstrated by a snap of the finger with the thumb. Whatever the mudrā, its effectiveness lies in its capacity to communicate the bhāva to the audience".

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Some mudrās have a polyvalence of signification as the same mudrā is used to signify a number of meanings. For example one mudrā (Fig 14) is used to signify king, kingdom, power, position, personality, riches. The gestures used for verbs are the actions indicated by the verbs themselves. The gesture used is of course a stylised form of that action (See Fig 15 "Listen"). Some nouns are also represented by their (verbal) action. 'The act of blossoming' represents a flower; a bee can be signified by its act of hovering round of flower. At the same time, some mudrās are part of the codified system for which verisimilitude between the

sign vehicle and signified can not be found. The mudrās for hatred and friendship (Figs 16 and 17) can be seen as examples of these. Their 'meaning' can not be realised in isolation. Only in opposition, when they are taken as part of the structure, does their signification become clear. Many a time these mudrās became emblematic gestures standing for a complete spoken utterance.

The gestures and mudrās can be classified using Peirce's triad of icon, index and symbol. Those mudrās that represent the object by virtue of similarity can be classified iconic signs. According to Peirce, iconic signs are those where the sign denotes its object by virtue of a similarity between the physical property of the sign and the physical property of the object.<sup>22</sup> The mudrā for a horse (Fig 18) is an example of the iconic sign. The similarity between the object designated and the sign may not be very obvious (the shape of the head of a horse), but the basis of the sign is the similarity of appearance.

Index: According to Peirce, indexical signs are those signs that denote the object by a cause and effect link. "An index is a sign that refers to the object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that object".<sup>23</sup> The mudrā for Rāma can be cited as an example of this (Fig. 17). The mudrā is an iconic sign

of an archer with a bow and arrow. This bow and arrow in turn designates Rāma the celebrated archer.

Symbol: In the Peircian triad, in a symbol the relation between sign vehicle and signified is conventional and arbitrary. Signs that are artificial man made codes, signalling systems and language are all symbols. Most of the mudrās fall into this category. The mudrās for forest (Fig.20) and the one for Kṛṣṇa (Fig.21) can be cited as instances of this.

Shambhu Hegde in his study of the gestures and mudras in Yaksagana uses another classification.<sup>24</sup> He also classifies them into three categories. His categories bear a close resemblance to Peirce's, only the second being of slightly different.

a) mudrās that denote by a similarity of shape.

b) mudrās that suggest by representing the action (eg: blossoming for a flower)

c) mudrās that communicate only because of a prior understanding between the performer and the spectator.

Of these a and c correspond closely to an icon and a symbol; b alone differs from an index in that it does not necessarily involve a cause and effect relation.

Whatever be the classification it should also be remembered that there can not be exclusivity. A single

mudrā many have elements of two kinds (or more) which perform simultaneously.

The use of mudrās and gestures in forms like Bharat natyam and Kathakali may have been necessitated by the fact that they do not use Vācika (speech) except for the song sung in the background. But Yakaṣagāna uses Vācikābhinaya also in the form of improvised dialogues. As such, some writers on Yakaṣagāna, are of the opinion that the use of gestures and mudrās in Yakaṣagāna is redundant and that it has no functional role to perform. Shivaram Karant also expresses the same opinion. "This task [communication] is done by language. Why should dance do the same again? Can the mudrās and gestures be more easily understood than language?"<sup>25</sup>

Are gestures and mudrās in Yakaṣagāna redundant? Do they merely perform the same function as that of speech replacing sound with hand gestures? What is their function in the total configuration of significance as a whole?

The function of gestures and mudrās can not be seen in isolation. It has to be understood in the context of all the other media used in a performance. All other aspects of Yakaṣagāna like the text, singing, costumes acting and dancing are all being used simultaneously. Thus their signification has to be understood

in the context of this multi media where each aids the other and also draws from it and thus creates a total configuration of signification. Certain words get emphasized and elaborated upon by the mudrās. At the same time the mudrā acts on the signification of the word also giving it a visual shape. For example, the mudrā for forest (Fig.20), focusses the spectator's attention on one particular aspect of the forest - its denseness as signified by the crossed hands. The mudrā thus alters the semantic range of the word - either restricting it or enhancing it.

All the same it should also be realised that mudrās act within the linguistic boundary. They can not exceed the boundary because like the Morse code or the gesture language of the deaf and the dumb, the sign refers back to the word itself. Their role is one of mediation between the word (distorted by music) and the signified.

#### III.4 IMPROVISED DIALOGUES

Dramatic literature in Yakṣagāna involves two totally different kinds of linguistic usages; one is the prasanaga (written text) comprising of songs. (See II.4 for details). The second type is the improvised dialogues that the actors create on the stage itself.

These impromptu dialogues are based on the literary text no doubt, but barely so. It affords the greatest freedom as well as the greatest challenge to the actor.

The Yakṣagāna artist is supposed to be not merely a good dancer and actor but is also expected to be fluent in speech, have a mastery over the language, with a good knowledge of the epics and the Purāṇas along with the faculty to create a character through speech alone. The primary function of the improvised dialogue is to provide the links of the narrative. Speech can communicate the story easily to one and all. Along with it the actors also provide the framework within which they develop the character. The framework is not merely of the narrative but of the emotional, psychological parameters of the character. This they normally do in the first entry of the character. Sometimes it is done at the end, whereby they round up the character. Through their speech, they not merely delineate the action of the character, but they also try to provide a philosophical paradigm where these actions become justifiable.

The following is an example of how the dialogue is developed from a song, which many a time provides only the barest details. The song is from Rati Kalyāna. Draupadi is sleeping and she wakes up and feels that Kṛṣṇa is calling her:

Here in Gajapura [Hastināpura], Draupadi was in her bedroom at this time.

Draupadi: It is mid night and I am in the bed-chamber with Pārtha [Arjuna]. I hear someone's voice and so I arise but I don't see anyone. Dharma and Bhīma are asleep. Who would call me? Even if I listen attentively, I can't make out the voice but the voice is not strange to me. Ah ! It must be my brother Kṛṣṇa's voice. But why should he call me so late in the night? This can not be true. I was thinking about him before I went to bed. Unless Lord Kṛṣṇa had shown his grace upon us we would never have regained our position; the Kuravas would never have been destroyed. How can I forget his kindness. Though I am queen of Hastināpura now, Lord Kṛṣṇa is all prevailing in our various states of sleeping and awakening. Let me listen, carefully  
26  
now.

Yakṣagāna artists are capable of showing great creativity in developing a character through the use of speech. The characters being the well known characters of the myth, the new creation should show a new flash in the interpretation/recreation of the character. In other words, it should lead to the creation of a new significance.

III.4.a This new creation is not merely a creation but also a criticism of the character. Normally in the arts, the creative and critical faculties are supposed to be exclusive one coming into operation after the other has completed the work. But in improvised dialogues they take place simultaneously. The representation of the character also involves the art of interpreting the character, coming close to Brecht's concept of acting that it should be a criticism of the character at the same time.<sup>27</sup> Sheṇi Gopalakrishna Bhat, recognised as one of the experts in this art of 'telling the meaning' (arthadhāri), expresses his attitude to the creation of a character. "The written script is the raw material. Mere explanation of this raw material is not the work of the artist. To me it is the creation of another work of art based on the original work... One role enacted several times will remain the same in larger details. But each day's creation is a new one depending on the mood and psychic state of that day... I should think as the character and also as myself".<sup>28</sup>

This creative / critical faculty together helps in the creation of the character. Perhaps it is for this reason that in the improvised speech, the emotive function is minimal and the referential function the maxi-



mum. No doubt in songs depicting Vīra (heroic) or Karūṇā (pathetic) rasa, speech is used for communicating the bhāva effectively. But, except in such intense moments, the speech is used more for the purpose of analysis and information rather than for conveying the emotion. (The significance of this non-emotive speech will be discussed later).

The language used by the actors is special register developed over hundred of years. It is slightly archaic, bookish and with a liberal use of Sanskrit words. It clearly stands out from spoken dialect but at the same time is easily communicable. To quote M. Prabhakar Joshi, "The language should be such as to create the atmosphere of antiquity. At the same time, because the speech is improvised, many words, inflectional endings and phrases of spoken dialect also appear. But the contrast between spoken dialect and bookish language does not become prominent because of the special dialectical variety used in the coastal district".<sup>29</sup> (The common language used in South Kanara is Tulu and so the Kannada spoken there is considered slightly bookish). This special register, helps in creating the temporal distance for the mythological characters without losing in communicability. It becomes a sign that demarcates the universe of signifi-

cance created on the stage from the universe of the spectators.

The actors usually begin and end their speech at a particular pitch. This pitch is the base pitch (Śruti) of the singer. Even during the speech the pitch is maintained so that there will not be a jarring shift from the song to the speech. This also maintains the musical atmosphere of the performance.

At the same time, the speech results in a kind of a monotone. Yakṣagāna artists normally do not use intonation as a signifying device unlike other theatre forms where the meaning and emotions are often communicated by intonation alone. This monotone also restrains the speech from becoming emotive and thus an expressive vehicle for bhāva. Structurally this aspect is thus related to the 'non-emotive' function of speech referred to earlier.

There is another point of interest regarding the improvised dialogues. I have been using the word 'dialogue' but these improvised speeches are more in the form of monologues. When two characters speak, one usually becomes a passive listener. The active speaker (to whom the preceding song belongs) engages in a monologue. The passive actor reacts only in the forms of monosyllabic interjections like 'oho' or 'huh'. This

passive actor begins speaking only when his turn comes which is normally with the next song. When he begins speaking, the hitherto active speaker becomes passive. So what we call dialogues are really alternating monologues. The songs are also usually composed similarly with different songs for different character. So the passive actor usually waits for his song-dance sequence to give his reply which will again be another monologue. The influence of Hari Kathā tradition on the structure of the written text has already been discussed (II.4 on Prasanga). Its influence even on improvised speech can be recognised here. It is not to be assumed that this is the only format of improvised dialogue. Some times sharp exchanges of dialogues do take place and these are usually in the form of sharp arguments and altercations. In these exchanges each actor tries to score a point over the other.

Quite often, the actors make use of dialogues that have a double sense. They use this double entendre for making a comment on the present political or social situation. Keeping within the framework of the mythologies, they are thus able to make the contemporary significance clear. By using double entendre, they are able to refer to the past as well as to the present simultaneously. Many actor also use this as a means of

gaining easy popularity by giving a sexual undertone to their dialogues. Some even forget to subterfuge of the myth and begin a direct speech on present day affairs.

The 'freedom of speech' also leads to another development. As has been pointed out earlier, the dialogue can often lead to sharp argument and counter argument. If done in a proper spirit it can become very interesting. But often the actors forget the actor/character dialectic. They feel that any defeat in the argument is a defeat to their realselves. At such moments comes a real rupture between the sign and the sign vehicle. Kaurava may be defeated in the fight with Bhīma but the actor who plays Kaurava refuses to be defeated in argument. As Shivaram Karant says, "Individual pride and spite has destroyed the beauty...[of the performance] as nothing else. For some, the performances become a place to show off their scholarship and belittle others".<sup>30</sup>

Each prasanga as we have seen, deals with one small incident taken from the larger discourse of the epics. So, in these dialogues a great deal of intertextuality comes into play. For example, there are a good number of prasangas in which Kṛṣṇa appears as a character. While depicting his character in any one prasanga, references are often made to other prasangas by the

actors. This intertextuality helps in making the discourse explicit as well as in placing the present discourse in the larger context of the universe of Purānas as a whole. The audience is thus reminded that this character in this particular prasanga has a past and a future and what is being witnessed, is only a slice of that larger discourse.

#### III.4.b Double Articulation in Acting

In Yakṣaḡāna acting, we witness a special feature, which is perhaps rarely witnessed in any other theatre form. Each bhāva and each action is acted out twice. It is not a question of mere repetition. The 'content' is performed twice. When a song is being sung by the bhāgavata, the actor dances and enacts, sometimes using mudrās also along with the dance. During the song, the actor concentrates on the expression of bhāva contained in the song. After the song-dance sequence, the actor normally becomes static and begins his speech. In his speech, he communicates 'verbally' what has already been enacted through dance and abhinaya. Thus the same 'theme' is enacted twice, the first time through dance and abhinaya, and a second time through speech. This results in a double articulated acting that is rarely witnessed in any other theatre form.

Does this double articulation result in redundancy? How does Yakṣagāna overcome this danger? If we analyse the way the two different media - dancing and speech are functionally utilised, we get the answer to the question. Dance is used mainly for the expression of bhāva or the emotional state. Dialogue on the other hand is used mainly for its referential/semantic function.

Yakṣagāna has thus functionally separated the two types of acting. During the song the emotive/affective function becomes predominant. In dialogue it is chiefly the referential/cognitive function that operates (exceptions to this have already been mentioned). The analysis of the song in the form of improvised dialogue carries maximum information value and so its power as a sign vehicle of emotion is minimised. The monotonal delivery of speech also emphasizes the referential function.

The double articulation can also be gauged by the way the 'passive' actor shows his reaction. He reacts to the other actor only during his speech and not during his dance/abhinaya. But it is not to be assumed that these two functions are exclusive. The emphasis is only a question of degree. For example in scenes of anger or show of heroism, the speech is also used to convey the

emotion. On the other hand, in Karuna rasa, the actors normally do not dance at all. The emotion is mostly expressed through speech, though facial expressions also play their part. But by and large the exclusivity of the two is maintained. Thus the double articulation of acting does not become redundant. The functions of the two media (dance and speech) become separate and so each becomes meaningful and communicative in a different way.

### III.5 COSTUME and MAKEUP

Costume and make-up constitute the sign vehicles which provide a 'texture' as well as context to the characters on the stage. Tadeusz Kowzan, in his study of the semiotics of the theatre, classifies all the sign systems of the theatre into thirteen types; three of the types mentioned by him - make-up, headdress and costume - belong to the category under study.<sup>31</sup> All these three play a very prominent role in the signifiatory process of Yakṣagāna. The Nāṭya Śāstra considers costume and make-up as part of abhinaya and calls it āhārya,<sup>32</sup> (which includes even stage props). As has already been pointed out (II.6), costume and make-up in Yakṣagāna do not follow a realistic mode of representation. Shivarāma Karant says, "For the depiction of these superhuman characters [the characters from Indian mythology], a

realistic style is never helpful... When we have to show the courage, bravery, largesse of heart or tenacity of these characters, which are beyond the size and measure of ordinary mortals, we have to take recourse to imagination and not to realism... Where the theme or personality is not from everyday life, the artist has to cross the boundary of reality and make use of his imagination in such a creation. Yakṣagāna is an excellent example of such a creation".<sup>33</sup>

The costumes in Yakṣagāna create a new universe of significance. They at once differentiate the actors on the stage from the world of the spectators. These costumes denote that the actors clad in these costumes are going to create a new 'reality' on the stage for which the costumes provide the 'frame' separating this new universe from that of the spectators. It is also to be remembered that apart from its denotative and connotative functions, the costumes also participate in the aesthetic function because the visual appeal (the actor's body + costume and makeup) itself becomes an object of aesthetic pleasure.

These visual representational aspects (costume and make-up) not merely create a new universe of significance but they also partake in another important semiotic function: they project differences within this new



universe of signification. So on the one hand they demarcate the performers from the spectators and on the other they also posit different categories (of characters) from amongst the participants of this new universe. To understand their sign logic it is necessary to decode these intra distinctions. The individual details of costume, if studied in isolation, will not provide the clue to their understanding. The entire array of costume and make-up is to be taken as a system, where each detail from the smallest to the biggest, becomes a part of that structure. Only a study of the entire structure, with the hierarchy of each seme and its syntagmatic and paradigmatic relation within the structure will lead to an understanding of its functioning as a whole.

We can perhaps find a model of this kind of analysis of visual signs in Claude Lévi-Strauss' study of Red Indian masks. His conclusions are highly illuminating. "I have thus demonstrated ... [that these masks] can not be interpreted each for itself and considered in isolation. They are parts of a system within which they transform each other. As is the case with myths, the masks ... become intelligible only through their relationships that unite them".<sup>34</sup> In this structural pattern, each small detail attains a significance. The

importance lies not merely in what is represented but also in what is chosen not to be represented. To quote Lévi - Strauss again, "A mask is not primarily what it represents but what it transforms, that is to say, what it chooses not to represent. Like a myth, a mask denies as much as it affirms. It is not made solely of what it says or thinks it is saying but of what it excludes".<sup>35</sup>

For a proper understanding of the significatory process of costume and make-up it is necessary to understand the structure. The structure in turn can be understood only after it is broken down into minimal signifying units and a typology posited. This typology can not be merely of the details that constitute the costume. It has to be a typology of the characters as represented by the costume and make-up because these in turn are themselves part of the larger semiosis of performance where the actor represents "the dynamic unity of an entire set of signs".<sup>36</sup>

III.5.a The traditional classification of roles done in Yakṣagāna will perhaps provide us with a starting point. It can be briefly stated as follows:

1. Second role: the main role (hero ?) of the prasanga
2. Opposite role: he is the one usually opposite

the main role

[also called Puruṣa vēṣa]

3. Third role: the next important role; this may also include Kēdige mandale (young heroes)
4. Preliminary roles: the actors who appear in the Oddōlaga and in several smaller roles during the performance
5. Baṇṇada Vēṣa: Demons and demonesses
6. Hāsyagāra : the buffoon who plays several roles such as servant, watchman, aide et cetera during a single night's performance, and his assistants
7. Strī Vēṣa: Female characters (played by actors who have specialised in it).

(It may be noted that the 'first' role has not been mentioned. In any troupe, the bhāgavata or the main singer is assumed to be the first role and the leader of the troupe).

This typology shows certain broad classifications like lead roles, demons and servants. But on closer observation, we realise that this typology points to the classification of actors rather than the characters they represent. Any troupe has to have actors specialised in these roles. So the purpose of this classification

seems to be to facilitate the distribution of roles. It also does not clarify the intra-distinctions of characters. So another typology of characters as represented by the distinctions in costumes and make-up has to be posited, because these distinctions are expressive of the character types - not merely of their status and social standing but also of their mental/emotional makeup. This in turn is related to the fundamental conceptualisation of costume representation in Yakṣagāna. In the words of Mahabala Bhat, "The fundamental principle of costume designing in Yakṣagāna is that the internal qualities of a character like his nature, conduct and character can be represented by externalising them through costumes".<sup>37</sup> In the last chapter, reference has already been made to how Rāma, Sīta and Lakṣmaṇa are presented in royal costumes even when they are in the forest. In one of the regional variants of Yakṣagāna, Bhīma is presented as a Baṇḍa Vēṣa (demon), specially in the scene where he kills Duṣyāsana, though the other Pāṇḍavas are presented as human beings. This points to the fact that Bhīma, though a Pāṇḍava, has qualities similar to demons (his marriage to Hiḍimbe, his drinking of Duṣyāsana's blood, his extraordinary physical prowess can be cited as instances of this).

III.5.b The personages that people the world of Yakṣagāna can be broadly classified into three categories: gods, human beings and demons. But in the Yakṣagāna representational system, this three way division is made binary. Human beings are presented as belonging either to the world of gods or of demons. To quote Mahabala Bhat again, the two categories are, "1) Gods and human beings who have godly qualities; 2) Demons and human beings with similar qualities. In the first group we have Indra, Viṣṇu, Rāma, Dharmarāya, Arjuna and others. It also includes characters with a slightly angry or wicked temperament like Karṇa, Duryōdhana, Paraṣurāma and Kārtavīrya. In the second group we have characters like Rāvaṇa, Mahirāvaṇa, Kamsa, Jarāsandha, Bhīmā, Kumbhakarṇa et cetera".<sup>38</sup> (This classification is of one tiṭṭu(style) of Yakṣagāna. The actual list of characters differs slightly in other styles).

Based on this broad grouping we can evolve the following typology as represented by costumes and make-up.

- 1) Gods, Kings and other royal personages . This group can again be divided into three sub categories based on their headdress.
  - a) wearers of crown
  - b) wearers of munḍāsa

- c) wearers of Kēdige Mandale
- 2) Kirāta- hunters
- 3) Sages, brahmins, ṛiṣis
- 4) Strī vēṣa- Female characters
  - a) Warrior queens
  - b) Others
- 5) Hāsyagāra- roles played by the buffoon
- 6) Baṇṇada vēṣa- Demons and demonesses
- 7) Characters like Hanumantha, Garuḍa, Narasimha et cetera.

Now I shall deal with these categories and sub-categories in detail to get an understanding of their signficatory processes as well as the relations of each within the structure.

- 1) Gods, Kings and other royal personages

This is the major category that covers most of the important characters that appear in Yakṣagāna. These are either Gods (Indra for example) or Kings. (Daṣara-tha, Hariṣcandra). They are bold and courageous and belong to the warrior class. This category also includes other characters, who share these qualities but are not kings themselves. The basic costume for all characters coming under this category remains the same. But a further sub-classification as represented by their headgears can be made

a) Wearers of crown - Fig.22

The crown represents position of authority. Only kings and a few of the Gods can wear a crown. Arjuna is an exception to this. He wears a crown even though he is not a King. (This is so in the style of Yakṣagāna under study. It differs in other variants). The theme of Yakṣagāna being the epics, it is natural that many of the important characters are wearers of the crown. The significance attached to the crown has already been dealt with in the earlier chapter.

b) Munḍāsa - Fig.23

This is a special headgear found only in Yakṣagāna. Its shape is somewhat similar to 'hearts' in a pack of cards. This is worn by royal personages who are not kings like Karṇa, Gandharva, ministers and others. Śalya, though a King, comes in this category. The decorations on top or in front will be removed to suggest a lower status. It has two base colours - red and black.

c) Kēḍige mandale - Fig.24 (character on the right)

This headdress is worn by young heroes. Abhimanyu, Sudhanva, Nakula and Sahadēva come in this subcategory. The bālagōpālas also wear this.

The headdress is similar to munḍāsa but smaller in size. These characters wear half sleeve shirts and do not have a moustache. The front of the headgear is decorated with a golden coloured ornament. Kṛṣṇa is also represented in this category as a symbol of his eternal youth (Fig.25).

Thus we notice that the primary categorisation is provided by the costume which remains the same for all three subcategories (except for the half-sleeve shirt for the young heroic types). Further subcategorisation is denoted by the headgear. The munḍāsa as well as the Kēdige mandale, is a very fascinating headgear. The basic colour is red or black and this provides a subtler distinction. (The signification of colours will be discussed later). The lines that project from the face provide a beautiful geometrical pattern. Shining ribbon of different colours is used to get this geometrical pattern. Shivaram Karant comments on this, "The headgear looks like a halo and thus gives a special getup... drawing the spectator's attention to the actor's face"<sup>39</sup>. During the dance also, the actors give a whirl to the headgear, when it sparkles in its brilliance.

These three subcategories show how it is impossible to get the 'meaning' of these headgears in isolation. It is only in their opposition and correlation



that their significance becomes clear. A fine example of this can be seen in Fig.26. The scene depicted is of Daṣaratha sending his sons Bharata and Śatrughna to their grandfather's house. Daṣaratha is wearing the crown, the two young princes are wearing Kēdigemandale. The minister at extreme left is wearing the munḍāsa. The sage at the back is Vasiṣṭha (his headdress as also that of the Strivēṣa will be discussed later). The correlation and opposition of these become very pronounced when several such characters are on the stage together.

2) Kirāta (hunter) - Fig.27

He is related to the first category as shown by his costume but is greatly removed from them in social standing, which is also connoted by the costume. His headgear is similar to that of munḍāsa but there are important distinctions. It is worn at a slanted angle. The slant is so pronounced that the difference is made obvious. The difference is enhanced by the long red line that he draws from the tip of the nose to the forehead. He also does not wear the chest ornament, instead of which he wears some mango leaves to indicate that he is a forest dweller. (This is

not so in the photo as also in one or two performances that I saw recently. One wonders if the recent ecological movements have changed the signficatory process of Yakṣagāna costume as well).

The Kirāta is also a bold courageous fighter as denoted by his costume. In most prasangas the hunters show great courage only to be defeated at the end.

3) Sages and brahmins - Fig.28

If the earlier categories discussed so far were the bold warlike characters, this group of sages and brahmins stands out as being different and belonging to another social strata. This difference is at once recognisable in the visual pattern. The ornaments depicting valour are not worn by them. Their head-dress is also different. It is indicative of the long uncut hair tied in a knot on top of the head and is called Śikhe. They wear horizontal ash marks on the forehead unlike most of the other characters of the first two categories who wear vertical marks. The two sages seen in Fig.28- are Viṣwāmitra and Vasiṣṭha. Viṣwāmitra is known for his rājasa (quick tempered - ready to pick up a challenge or a fight) quali-

ties whereas Vasīṣṭha is known for his Sātvika (pious) qualities. This difference is indicated by the colour of the headgear (black and red) as well as the colour of the beard (black and white).

A subcategory can be pointed in this category also. Characters like Drōṇa, Paraṣurāma and Aṣwathāma are brahmins by birth but their nature is different. As K. S. Karant says, "They are brahmins by birth but their action and behaviour is that of Kṣatriyas - their nature is heroic and warlike".<sup>40</sup> To show their inherent nature, the costume of these characters is similar to that of other heroic types(category 1). The only change will be their headgear. They wear śikhe, the head gear of sages. In some instances Paraṣurāma also wears a crown. Agni(Fire God) is represented with a three pronged śikhe.

Ordinary brahmins do not come in this category. They come mostly in the category of roles played by the buffoon(category 5).

#### 4) Strī vēṣa - Female characters - Fig 29

The costume of female characters has been a matter of great controversy. It is generally conceded that the traditional costume for these

characters is 'lost'. The costumes now worn resemble that of present day middle class women . Thus, it does not confirm to the structural pattern of Yakṣagāna costumes. The headdress worn now (see Fig 29) was a recent invention that was designed on the model of male headdresses. This is now commonly used by all Strī vēṣas.

One wonders why the costumes of female characters have changed so much, when Yakṣagāna as a rule has so zealously guarded its costume structure. It may be because the male actors playing these female roles tried to mimic the women of their times. It looks like the result of a problem of gender identity .

Female characters can also be divided into two subcategories. Most characters come in the category whose costume can be seen in Fig 29. On the other hand, there are some female characters who take part in wars exhibiting their courage and heroism. Minākṣi in Minākṣi Kalyāṇa is one such character. The sari is worn by them in a different manner (facilitating dance steps in war scenes). The ornaments worn are also different.

5) Hāsyagāra - (buffoon) - Fig 30

Hāsyagāra is an actor category and not a character category. But there are varied sundry roles like that of servant, messenger, aide or commoner played by the buffoon or his assistants, the Koḍangis. To identify all these characters I have used the actor categorisation itself. In the past, they usually wore simple white garments (as opposed to the gorgeous ones worn by other characters). But now a days the costume that they wear is a medley. Thus, these characters (as represented by their costumes) are a bridge between the world of the spectators and the world of the other characters at the paradigmatic level. Their function is also many a time to bridge the two worlds.

An interesting subcategorisation can be added to this. What happens when a king or 'hero' is forced to become an ordinary man due to force of circumstances? Fig 31 shows Hariṣcandra after he becomes a watchman in a cremation ground. His costume, specially the black coarse woolen blanket on his shoulder indicates his ordinary status. At the same time the long yellow cloth (silk?) round his neck denotes his intrinsic quality, his

'Kinglyness'.

6) Baṇṇada Vēṣa (Demons) - Fig 32

This category stands in direct opposition to the 'good' characters. This category includes not only merely demons (rākṣasa) like Rāvaṇa, Hiraṇya Kaṣapu or Bakāsura but also human beings with demon like qualities like Kamsa and Jarāsandha. As has been pointed out earlier, Bhīma is also presented as a baṇṇada vēṣa in one style of Yakṣagāna. This again points forcefully to the basics of costume and make-up in Yakṣagāna : they represent not the birth or caste of a character but his mental make up.

The costume and specially make-up design of these characters is an elaborate field demanding a detailed analysis. As such an analysis is beyond the scope of this study, I shall confine myself to only some of the signifying aspects. As can be seen from the photograph, the entire costume design is very different from that of the characters seen so far. On the visual level the emphasis is on creating the impression of a huge size as denoted by the shoulder ornaments and head dress. Of very special interest is the make-up.

What looks like a mask is actually a very elaborate make-up. The emphasis is on the expression of cruelty. The colours used are black and red and these are highlighted with white dots. The pattern of these dots changes from character to character.<sup>41</sup> The white border to the face makes the face appear bigger. In some cases, the real eyes are hidden and artificial eyes written on the forehead. The crown worn is also bigger with a different design. It has a huge circular shape behind the crown which adds to the physical dimension of the character. The head dress in the photo is that of a demoness.

Now a days, due to the process of secularisation, many of the characters that were previously depicted as demons are now projected as belonging to category 1. This change in the categorisation of characters has transformed the immanent discourse. The moment one sees a bannada vēṣa, one expects an angry, wicked and excessively proud character whose destruction by the good forces at the end is certain. But when the same character (with the same qualities) is presented as a character belonging to the first category, the religious motif becomes ambivalent and thus the value

system represented also undergoes a change. The implication of this change at the level of discourse has been dealt with in I.7.

- 7) In this last category we can add characters from the animal world like Hanumantha (Fig 33), Vāli, Garuḍa, Jāmbuvanta and such others. Here again, in the representation, the emphasis is not on verisimilitude. In the representation of these birds and animals, the 'human' structure of the actor is retained for the most part. The demarcation is shown by the makeup and small details of costume which act as signs signifying the entire animal. For example, two horns on the head and the proper colour combination on the face signifies Nandi, the bull (Śiva's Vehicle).

In this category can also be included certain terrible forms like Narasimha or Caṇḍi that the gods have to take to destroy the evil forces. The make-up of these characters (though not the costume) is very similar to that of baṇṇada vēṣas (demons). Structurally, this presents us with a very interesting configuration. These terrible forms are those that the gods have assumed and so syntagmatically they are related to the World of gods; at the same time in their appearance they



are similar to demons and thus paradigmatically they are related to the World of demons. To destroy the demons the gods have to become equally fearful and terrible. Thus the opposition becomes reversed.

These seven categories cover the gamut of all the characters that appear in Yakṣagāna, which aims at creating not individualised characters but archetypes. These archetypal categories become clear to the spectators the moment they see their costume and make-up. Shambhu Hegde puts it accurately, "Much before dance, speech or acting, the first recognition that the audience gets of the characters is through costume and make-up"<sup>42</sup>.

III.5.c We can now turn to some of the details of costume and make-up and study their significatory process. The peacock feathers on top of the crown (Fig.22) are indicative of a fully 'blossomed' personality. The crown of the demons does not have the feathers but it has a ball like top, which can also be seen on the crown worn by Hanumān (Fig.33), which denotes his monkey-man nature. (The tall peacock feathers in Fig.32, belong to a different signifying process altogether.)

The shoulder ornament is of two types - compare the ones worn by the two characters in Fig.24. Originally these two types were only regional variations and the distinction was not semiotically significant. But nowadays the shoulder ornament with smaller blunt needles ~~(worn by the character on the right) is worn only~~ by Kēdige mandale characters (young heroes). This is an example of how new signs keep emerging even in this very codified system of costume signification.

The shoulder ornament and breast plate are indicative of armour and so of warlike quality. The waist ornament in Figs.22 to 27, resembles a phallic symbol denoting 'masculinity' and so courage and strength. The cloth worn behind these shining ornaments has a dull non-shining texture, which helps in highlighting these ornaments.

The mark worn on the forehead is an important signifying element. There are two types - the vertical one and the horizontal one (subtler distinctions within each type can also be made). The horizontal mark denotes a cruel wicked character (Fig.34 - Indrajitu and Rāvaṇa). Kīcaka Sālva and Kamsa are some of the others who wear this mark. These horizontal lines make the face appear broader and when combined with the red colouring round the eyes, give a cruel look to the face.

But it also functions connotatively because these marks are culture specific signs in real life representing Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism - the vertical mark is the symbol of the devotees of Viṣṇu; the horizontal ones of the devotees of Śiva. Prabhakara Joshi comments on the significance of these, "This indicates that Yakṣagāna, in the past must have come under the deep influence of Vaiṣṇavism. The Yakṣagāna literature as a whole depicts the equality of the Trimūrtis Brahma, Viṣṇu, Mahēṣwara... but the slant of early literature is towards Vaiṣṇavism. This must be the reason why the main roles wear vertical mark and the villainous roles have a horizontal mark on the forehead".<sup>43</sup> These marks thus become signs for the motif of the discourse itself.

#### III.5.d Colour Signification

The basic colours used for make-up are green, red, black, white and yellow, whereas the basic colours in costume are red, green and black. The signification of these colours is culture determined and where the colour code is not strong, its interpretation becomes hermeneutic. We can evolve certain generalisation based on practice. Red usually denotes heroism and courage. It can even indicate anger or rage. For quick tempered and choleric characters, red colour is usually applied

around the eyes. Such characters also wear red shirts. But colours also signify as much by inclusion as by exclusion. The shirts are usually green or red. Green denotes Śṛṅgāra (erotic). So if a character wears a red shirt, it not merely denotes his heroism but also his lack of eroticism (in that particular prasanga at least).

Black signifies in two different ways in make-up and in costume. Black lines on the face give a cruel look. It is used for villainous characters. The black lines may be dark or light depending on the cruelty and wickedness of the character. On the other hand, black in costume denotes pathos, tragedy, death and other concomitant emotions. Fig 35 shows Kālapuruṣa (Time) with Rāma. He wears a black shirt. Fig 23 shows Karṇa. The base colour of his headgear is black. Infact Karṇa is the only character who wears a black munḍāsa. These are only a few example of the way colour signification works in Yakṣagāna.

In Yakṣagāna, every actor has to do his own make-up. This rule is followed from the youngest actors to the most senior ones. The make-up, as we have already seen, projects the internal qualities of the character to the spectators. For the actor also, the process of internalisation of the character begins with the make-up

itself. Even as he does the make-up, with its colours and lines, his hands and mind lead him to the essence of the character. That is perhaps why an actor who can not do his make-up is considered no actor at all.

In conclusion, the signifying process of costume and make-up in Yakṣagāna is codified and complex having evolved as a continuous tradition over hundreds of years. New significations also keep emerging (as seen in the example of the shoulder ornaments). The remarks in this section can only be a pointer to this vast and fascinating field of signs and signification. It shows how each detail, from the smallest to the largest is a result of intellection and a conscious effort at signification. We can end this study with the remarks of Shivaram Karant about the original artist who might have created these costumes and make-up. "Some greatly talented artist ... who must have had the qualities of a painter, sculptor and costume designer in addition to his great flights of fancy".<sup>44</sup>

IV

THE ANALYSIS OF A PERFORMANCE TEXT

#### IV THE ANALYSIS OF A PERFORMANCE TEXT

##### The Last scene of Jarāsandha

In the preceding chapters, we have looked at the various aspects of Yakṣagāna and their signifying processes. But each of these aspects has been studied in isolation. In an actual performance all these aspects work in unison and contribute in the building up of the discourse. This discourse, will in turn have a signifying process which is made up of these discrete parts and yet is not a mere sum of all these. Each of the discrete parts, alters the others and is also altered by them. So, a study of how all these aspects together lead to the performance discourse is the purpose of this chapter. My attempt will be to study how these multimedia lead to the creation of a new significance. According to Indian aesthetics, the ultimate aim of all art is rasānubhava - aesthetic experience. This chapter will also try to study how the performance discourse will lead to rasānubhava.

The performance text chosen for analysis is Jarāsandha. Jarāsandha's story appears in The Mahābhārat. In Yakṣagāna literature, there are several prasangas on the same theme. Two prasangas, one by Hattiangāḍi Rāma Bhatta (17th century) and another by Bhīma (18th cen-

ture) dealing with Jarāsandha's story have the same title Rājasūya. Two other versions belong to the nineteenth century : Rājasūyādhwara by an unknown poet of Taleppadi and Agrapūje by Bishtappa Kavi. The performance under study is of Agrapūje by Bishtappa Kavi.

The prasanga is about the Rājasūya Yāga performed by the Pāṇḍavas, of which Jarāsandha's story forms only a part. As has been pointed out in II.7, many prasangas depicting the wicked characters have, in recent times, undergone a change (through editing) whereby only the wicked characters get highlighted. The present performance is also an example of that process. This change of emphasis can be observed in the changes that have taken place in the different titles given to the performances of the prasanga. Earlier it used to be performed in the same name as that of the prasanga, Agrapūje. Later it came to be called Māgadha Vadhe (The killing of Māgadha). Now a days it is performed just under the name Jarāsandha. Thus the shift of emphasis is made explicit in the name itself.

The present analysis is based on a performance of this prasanga in Bahrain by Sri Iḍagunji Mahāgaṇapati Yakṣagāna Maṇḍali, Keremane N.K. I have used a video recording of this performance to facilitate my study. It was performed in a modern auditorium before specta-



tors, many of whom were not familiar with Yakṣagāna. The changed performance space and context have no doubt subtly changed the performance text but for the purpose of my analysis, I have considered these changes 'non-significant'. Due to the constraints of space, I have taken only a part of the performance for study, but I hope it will present an adequate picture of the performance score.

IV.1.a Résumé of the narrative up to the scene analysed.

The story is taken from The Mahābhārata, and deals with the killing of Jarāsandha, the king of Magadha. The prasanga begins with the Oḍḍōlaga (court) of Dharmarāya in Indraprastha. Nārada tells the Pāṇḍavas that they should perform Rājasūya Yāga whereby their father's soul would be purified. Dharmarāya asks his brothers' opinions regarding the performing of the Yāga. They all agree that they can undertake this Yāga provided Vāsudēva is in favour of it. So, Indrasēna is sent to Dwaraka to bring Kṛṣṇa to Indraprastha.

The scene shifts to Kṛṣṇa's court where Indrasēna comes as the emissary. Kṛṣṇa agrees to come and decides to make use of this opportunity to kill his old enemy Jarāsandha. He meets Satyabhāma and tells her that he

has received pleas from innumerable kings who have been arrested by Jarāsandha. He is going to free them now. She asks humorously how Kṛṣṇa can save them when he himself had to turn away from his place seventeen times because of Jarāsandha. He says that he will get Jarāsandha killed by Bhīma and thus he will get the Kings released.

Kṛṣṇa comes to Indraprastha. After honouring him, Dharmaja tells him of his decision to perform Rājasūya. Kṛṣṇa tells him of the difficulties. Unless all the kings accept his suzerainty and pay him tribute, Rājasūya can not be performed. He lists the names of kings who will not accept the Pāṇḍavas' suzerainty. Apart from the Kauravas, there are Jarāsandha, Śiṣupāla, Śālva, who are all brave and famed warriors. Specially Jarāsanda would never agree, because he is Kṛṣṇa's enemy (Kṛṣṇa had killed Kamsa, the son-in-law of Jarāsandha). He tells them that he was himself defeated several times by Jarāsandha. In order to arouse their anger, he says that he can not see any brave warrior amongst them who can defeat Jarāsandha and without defeating him, Rājasūya can never be performed. Bhīma, pricked by this innuendo, declares that with Kṛṣṇa's blessings, he will kill Māgadha (Jarāsandha). These are the words for which Kṛṣṇa is waiting. He happily says that he is now

confident and leads Bhīma and Arjuna to Jarāsandha's capital Magadha.

Outside the town, on a hill, they see three huge drums. Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa how Jarāsandha got these drums. Kṛṣṇa tell them the story of how Śiva killed the demon Māgha and cutoff his three heads. Māgha's brother Vraṣa confronted Śiva and Śiva, out of his skin made three drums and played on them. Jarāsandha's father got these drums from Śiva and placed them on the hill Girivraja. The drums, when struck, cause such terror in the hearts of enemies that they surrender without a fight. Jarāsandha, using these drums had defeated innumerable kings and had put them all in prison.

Kṛṣṇa tells Bhīma and Arjuna that the destruction of the drums is necessary in order to defeat Jarāsandha. So, those two, destroy the drums. It creates such a terrible din that Jarāsandha's 'world' shakes. This is the first appearance of Jarāsandha, who enters the stage as though he is spinning, with fear and worry writ large on his face. He is advised by the brahmins to perform Śānti - a religious ceremony for peace.

In the next scene, we see Jarāsandha inviting the brahmins for the ceremony. Kṛṣṇa Bhīma and Arjuna enter in the guise of brahmins. Jarāsandha is slightly wonderstruck looking at these three brahmins who have

entered by the back door. They also refuse the seats offered to them. At first, he thinks that these brahmins may not have been properly treated by his servants; but their continued reticence arouses doubts in his mind. The sight of three brahmins together is supposed to be a bad omen. They do not even bless. This arouses his suspicion. The section analysed begins from here.

#### IV.1.b Costume and Make-up

The conceptual basis of costume and make-up in Yakṣaḡāna has already been discussed in III.5. Here, we have a fine example of how costumes denote the internal qualities of a character and not the present stage. Kṛṣṇa, Bhīma and Arjuna are supposed to have entered Jarāsandha's court disguised as brahmins. But they do not change their costume. Infact they continue to wear the same costumes which denote them as royal personages. Kṛṣṇa wears a Kēdige mandale headdress [Fig.37]. Bhīma wears a munḡāsa and Arjuna a crown.<sup>3</sup>

Jarāsandha's role was traditionally presented as a baṇṇada vēṣa (demon). But in the performance under study, he is not presented so, which is another example of the process of secularisation. But the crown worn by him is different from the crown of kings. It has a circle behind the crown, denoting thereby his demonic qualities because only the crown of a demon has such a

circle. This crown worn by Jarāsandha is not part of the traditional head dresses of Yakṣagāna, but was devised by Sri Shambhu Hegde (the actor who plays Jarāsandha's role in this performance). He has used the traditional crown worn by kings and has added the circle of the crown worn by demons (Fig 36). This is a fine instance of individual creative talent, working within the conventions of Yakṣagāna and using the codes for a new signification.

Jarāsandha's make-up also denotes his cruelty. The horizontal marks on the forehead and the colour around his eyes denote it. All others wear vertical marks on the forehead. The significance of these is discussed in III.5.c. Jarāsandha also wears a long cloth on his shoulders, which signifies that he is engaged in performing the religious ceremony for peace.

#### IV.2 The Analysis

The analysis will concentrate mainly on the progression of the discourse in the performance text and to see how the different media function together in the creation of that discourse. Media like dance and music are basically non-linguistic and the 'meaning' they generate is also largely non-linguistic and so only their broad outlines may be indicated in language.

The part of the performance taken up for analysis contains thirty songs starting from the moment of actual encounter between Jarāsandha and the other three (Kṛṣṇa, Bhīma and Arjuna). It ends with the killing of Jarāsandha by Bhīma and the final summation of Kṛṣṇa. For the purpose of analysis I have divided the episode taken into five ensembles. This division is based on the linear progression of the performance. Each ensemble is also divided into subensembles and each song has been taken as a subensemble. The songs have been numbered in serial order for easy identification. The development of the discourse/narrative in the five ensembles can be briefly summed up as follows :

- 1) Jarāsandha's thoughts on seeing the three men in disguise  
- songs 1 to 6
- 2) Initial skirmish - Kṛṣṇa's challenge; identity not yet revealed  
- songs 7 to 15
- 3) Identity revealed; Jarāsandha's mockery of Kṛṣṇa  
- songs 16 to 20
- 4) Challenge for a duel; Jarāsandha's choice of Bhīma  
- songs 21 to 27
- 5) The duel and the finale  
- songs 28 to 30

The analysis will concentrate on the progression of the discourse through all these ensembles. The paradigmatic relations of the discourse will also be pointed out. The effort will also be to relate to an actual performance, many of the general comments, regarding different aspects of Yakṣagāna, made in Chapters II and III.

IV.2.a Ensemble 1 (Songs 1 to 6)

(The translation of songs from the written text is given in the beginning of each ensemble followed by the analysis)

1. He reflected and thought that these [persons] are not immortals of the earth [brahmins].
2. What a wonder O God! These three are not the immortals of the earth.
3. On closer observation, they are kings who have come for a fight with me.
4. Now, who has the temerity in this world [to challenge me]. The Kings of Nāgapura [Kauravas] are my friends; Dharmaja is not a villain
5. Yādavas are my old enemies; among them the cowherd; what to say of the other Kings of this earth.
6. The other rulers of this wide world are [like]

pearls that have been used and discarded. The arrival of these men in disguise is strange indeed.<sup>5</sup>

These songs are like Jarāsandha's soliloquy. He looks at Kṛṣṇa Bhīma and Arjuna and sees through their disguise. He realises that they are not brahmins. His state of mind starts with doubt and suspense. His sense of security and self confidence have already been shaken by the destruction of the drums. Now the arrival of these men in disguise fills him with fresh doubt. From doubt he moves on to wonder which becomes the Sthāyi bhāva (Durable psychological state. In Yakṣagāna, the Sthāyi and other bhāvas are cognised not merely for the character as a whole but also for separate phases and even songs of the prasanga). The actor performs a fine swaying dance to communicate this sense of wonder, which is born out of his supreme self confidence. He is certain that nobody is left on earth, who can challenge him. To him, the kings of this earth are like clothes he has used and discarded. Along with the word 'discard' he exhibits an attitude of contempt. His ego and his disregard for all others come through in the brief dance and the stance that he assumes after a sharp



muktāya (ending beats and steps). So, from wonder, his emotions become heroic leading to vīrarasa (heroic). The only kings he respects are the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas. But the Kauravas are his friends and he is certain that the Pāṇḍavas would not indulge in warfare with him, without reason.

Then he remembers the Yādavas, specially Kṛṣṇa. They have been his enemies whom he has defeated seventeen times. In the improvised dialogue he says, "That group of cowherds and their leader Kṛṣṇa! Couldn't they find a proper leader even?"<sup>6</sup> The crux of the discourse is established here. The major thematic opposition is between the forces of good and evil as represented by Kṛṣṇa and Jarāsandha. Apparently Jarāsandha has nothing but contempt for Kṛṣṇa. But deep within him, he has fear and admiration for him. This also gets established in the acting. The linear progression is thus broken and paradigmatically the tension between the two, established. It also has intertextual connotations that take us outside the prasanga to the larger discourse of the epic world.

So the songs move from one bhāva (sentiment) to another and these are enacted by the actor through his dance and abhinaya. For example, the sense of wonder is expressed in the eyes, hands and the entire body pos-

ture, where the actor kneels on the seat with one foot on it. Vīrarasa is expressed in gestures of fight as well as in the dance where the energy of the dance itself becomes a sign for valour and bravery. Many words are gesturally represented. The actor emphasises certain other words by intoning them along with the bhāgavata.

In the improvised speeches for these songs, the bhāgavata reacts to Jarāsandha's speech in monosyllables. The other characters, though they are present on the stage, do not react. The speech pattern can be compared to an 'aside' in Western drama. But the question of aside or soliloquy does not arise in Yakṣagāna because the bhāgavata is supposed to be omnipresent and the characters speak to him in such situations. Thus the bhāgavata becomes not merely the controller of all the action on the stage but also the confidant, sharing the innermost thoughts of the characters. To some extent, the bhāgavata's role can be compared to that of the chorus in a Greek tragedy.

This ensemble introduces the first encounter between Jarāsandha on the one hand and Kṛṣṇa, Bhīma and Arjuna on the other. In the presentation of the songs, the singer and the actor elaborate on some songs. The different emotions are developed and established at a

leisurely pace. The emphasis is never on the progression of the narrative. The 'moment' becomes important allowing scope for leisurely expansion of the sthāyi and sancāri bhāvas through song, dance and acting. The representation through gestures and mudrās also add to the elaboration.

IV.2.b Ensemble 2. (Songs 7 to 15)

7. "Who can oppose me?" thought the king and then addressed Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna and Vṛakōdara respectfully.

8. And said, "why have you come to my town in the guise of the immortals of the earth? In such a disguise proper for respectful men? Speak out quickly".

9. "Will persons enter the house of enemies except in disguise? O king, we have come for confrontation with the enemy" spoke the destroyer of the demons' race.

10. "O Śiva! am I your enemy? And my place the house of an opponent? What may be the reason for our enmity?"

11 & 12 The one worshipped by Gods Spoke, "You have put in prison several kings. Give up your adamant posture. Hearing their cry for help we

have come to release them".

13. "Are you grandson, friend, son or the wife's brother of these kings? What is your heartburn if I imprison them? Tell me" said [Jarāsandha].

14. "To kill the wicked and to protect those that have come under my shelter and thereby uphold Dharma is my task. Stop your vituperation".

15. "Śiva Śiva! are you the consecrated individual [Dīkṣit] for punishing the guilty and protecting the innocent? Have you come hearing the cry of the kings to get them released? I have witnessed the greatest wonder in the world today. But why the reluctance to reveal your identity?"  
7  
Spoke [Jarāsandha].

If the first ensemble represented the thoughts of Jarāsandha, this ensemble presents the actual encounter. Jarāsandha confronts the three and asks them for their identification. The challenges and the counter challenges are like the initial thrusts of a fencing bout where each is testing the other. Jarāsandha is still exhibiting his supreme confidence that almost amounts to arrogance.

Song 7 is an example of how the song contains not merely the dialogues but also stage directions. The

songs contain not merely the speeches of characters but also words like 'said', 'spoke' or 'wondered' which one does not usually come across in dramatic literature. Jarāsandha's mood is one of mockery which he brings out in his acting. In song 8, sitting on one knee, he indicates the three with his left hand and with the right suggests that the disguise cannot cheat him. In the improvised dialogue he calls them bad actors (vē-ṣadhāri), because he can see through their disguise. The word Vēṣadhāri, means the wearer of a dress or disguise. The same word is also used for Yakṣagāna artists. Thus, based on this pun, an interesting dialogue ensues. This is an example of a direct reference to the actor, and not to the character that he is representing. This has been discussed in the actor/character dialectic in chapter III.1.a. Such references never intrude upon the actor's presence as a sign. It only highlights the existence of the double-reality - the actor as a person and the actor as a sign.

Kṛṣṇa's reply (song 9), starts with an elaborate dance. The dance highlights Kṛṣṇa's character as a whole, as a protector of Dharma and also the present challenge that he throws to Jarāsandha. Several words in the song like 'enemy', 'enter' and 'confrontation' are represented by mudrās. After the first half of the

song, only rhythmic beats are played on the instruments for which the actor does nṛtta (pure dance). This dance conveys Kṛṣṇa's grace and charm.

In this ensemble, we see the typical structure of a prasanga when two characters confront each other. The songs alternate between the two characters. This structure of the written script also determines the way such confrontations are presented on the stage. The confrontation does not take place simultaneously but follows a cyclical pattern as indicated by the songs. In Yakṣagāna, the right side of the stage is the 'active' side and the left 'passive'. (The indications of left and right are from the point of view of the actors. In dramatic literature, the common practice is to indicate them from the audience's point of view, but that practice has not been followed here as the Yakṣagāna stage has spectators on all three sides.)

The relation between two persons can often be gauged by the spatial distance they maintain between them in different social cultural contexts. E.T. Hall has studied the use of these spatial codes in society and he calls such a study proxemics<sup>8</sup>. In theatre, proxemics is used as a powerful sign. The distance between characters, their movements towards or away from someone, the position they occupy on the stage - all

signify a certain meaning. But in Yakṣagāna, proxemics as a signifying device works in a different way. The character who is enacting the song is always on the right. As soon as his song begins, the other character (who may have just finished his speech sequence) moves left and the 'active' character occupies the right. This space convention is fixed and does not change. In some cases, if the character is a king in his own court, or if he is a person of a very high status (a sage for example), he sits on the seat at the back after his song instead of moving left. Jarāsandha, in the present instance, sits on the seat after each of his songs and it is only Kṛṣṇa who moves right for each of his songs until the active involvement of Bhīma and Arjuna when the spatial relations get a different dimension.

Songs 11 and 12 represent Kṛṣṇa's challenge. The songs are in faster tempi (kāla) where Kṛṣṇa tries to enrage Jarāsandha. The mandikuṇita (pirouetting on the knees, Fig 13) is always used to signify this challenge. He taunts and irritates Jarāsandha. The vīrabhāva (heroism) exhibited by Kṛṣṇa is to be understood in the larger context of his personality. He is only exhibiting the heroism to annoy and enrage Jarāsandha. Jarāsandha falls to Kṛṣṇa's trap. He accepts the challenge (as represented by his pirouetting on the knees).

Song 14 contains the religious motif of the pra-  
sanga-Kṛṣṇa as the upholder of Dharma. In his dia-  
logues, Kṛṣṇa has already emphasised how Jarāsandha has  
broken the Rāja Dharma by arresting the kings who had  
surrendered to him. So he declares that he has come to  
fulfill the motto of his life - punishing the wicked.  
Songs which contain such ostensible religious motif are  
not usually elaborated in performances now a days (as a  
result of the process of secularisation).

The written text consists mostly of songs that are  
sung to rhythm and also some that are sung without a  
rhythmic pattern and so without the percussion instru-  
ments. Song 15 is one such example. The song begins in  
mockery of the claims of Kṛṣṇa by Jarāsandha, that his  
task is to punish the guilty and protect the good. The  
mockery here takes the form of vismaya (wonder). The  
actor communicates this through his eyes and posture.  
The dance that follows enhance this mood. The song ends  
with a sudden rush of anger and a posture of confronta-  
tion with Kṛṣṇa.

Behind all these emotions, the fear of death which  
is the sthāyi bhāva is also present and all the boast-  
ing of Jarāsandha and his mockery of Kṛṣṇa have to be  
understood in this light.



IV.2.c Ensemble 3 (Songs 16 to 20)

16. "I am the God worshipped by gods. I am also the destroyer of asuras [demons]; this here is the son of the Wind God; the other, Pārtha. Choose one of us for a fight".

17. The king, listening to the words of Acyuta, was filled with wonder and drowning and floating in the sea of massive mirth spoke thus to his people.

18. "Do you know who this person is, he is my own kin, the nephew of Kamsa; so he becomes my grandson".

19. "Know his caste you all and know his conduct".

20. "O cowherd listen, having defeated the weak kings you have become head strong. Do you confront me with that courage? Kudos to you brave man!"

The identity of the strangers is revealed in the first song of this ensemble. The rest of it deals with Jarāsandha's reaction when their identity is revealed. He is not for the moment concerned with Bhīma or Arjuna. His concern is only with Kṛṣṇa - his true foe. Jarāsandha's longstanding enmity and hatred of Kṛṣṇa are

also revealed.

Song 16 provides a fine illustration of how the performance text differs from the written text. In the song Kṛṣṇa reveals his identity first and that of the other two, later. But in the performance, during the speech, he introduces Bhīma and Arjuna first and does not introduce himself until Jarāsandha questions him with a meaningful gesture and glance. This adds to the theatrical impact.

This song also provides an example of certain problems posed by the double articulation of acting. The identity of the three is revealed twice - first in the song and again later in the dialogue. When should Jarāsandha react? The expression of shock and surprise is very important as it leads directly to his reaction as revealed in the next song. During the song dance sequence, Jarāsandha does not react at all. He remains totally 'indifferent'. It is only during the speech of Kṛṣṇa that he shows his reaction. The audience also does not feel 'cheated' because the suspense has already been revealed in the song. Infact what appears like a suspense is not a secret at all. It is part of the shared common knowledge based on which the discourse is built up. Thus the attention of the spectators is directed not towards knowing the secret but towards

knowing Jarāsandha's reaction, when the identity is revealed. The attention is thus focussed on the discourse and the narrative becomes secondary. Because of this 'shared common knowledge' the structure of the discourse is radically altered.

It has already been observed that from the usual Yakṣagāna spectator's point of view, a performance has high and low moments. Song 17 is one such 'high' moment eagerly awaited for, by the spectators. This song is one of the most famous in the prasanga. The song does not contain any dialogue but only stage direction (in the usual sense of the term). This song shows how even the 'stage direction' can be dramatically very powerful.

The expression of 'massive mirth' is the essence of action here. The mirth is expressed in the whole body. Jarāsandha stumbles from the seat, swaying his whole body and laughing loudly. In the dance also, he depicts the tumbling motion as though he is about to fall down in his 'massive mirth'. One of the distinctions between classical and folk theatre forms can be perceived here. If the classical forms insist on restraint, the folk forms allow for exaggeration and 'gay abandon' for which this enactment is an example. This abandon creates a different order of semiosis. The entire body of the actor becomes a sign for mirth and

laughter. For the moment of the song, the actor ceases to be the character and becomes 'mirth' - a personification of it as it were. Theatrical presentation quite often makes use of a part of an object to stand for a whole (a door frame representing a house for example). Semioticians of theatre have called such devices, scenic synecdoches taking the term from classical rhetoric.<sup>10</sup> What has been discussed so far, perhaps presents the opposite method of signification where the whole (the actor's entire body) is made to represent a part.

This gay abandon in Jarāsandha's life is also perhaps his last before his end.

Breaking the linear progression, songs 18 and 19 deal with the past life of Kṛṣṇa. Jarāsandha derides him and calls him a thief. "He is a born thief, no, he was born in theft. He was born in the place of thieves - a prison". He makes fun of Kṛṣṇa's relation with gōpies in a tone of mockery. But at the immanent level we also recognise the conflicting emotions of rage, appreciation and fear. Jarāsandha's hatred of Kṛṣṇa is so intense that he unknowingly becomes the 'other'. In his words like 'my own kin' this double sense can be perceived. On the one hand Kṛṣṇa is related to him through his own son in law Kamsa. In the philosophical sense too it is true that Kṛṣṇa has come to 'do good' to

Jarāsandha.

Song 20 is the challenge thrown by Jarāsandha to Kṛṣṇa. The song is sung in a fast tempo and is not elaborated. Anger being the main emotion here, it does not allow for elaboration or even for gestural representation. The tension begins building up leading to the final scene of the fight.

IV.2.d Ensemble 4 (Songs 21 to 27)

21. "Which is the ornament for the brave - mere boasting or the clang of sharp swords? If you are all that brave, challenge us for a fight without fear" said the father of Māra [Madana].

22. "Cowboy listen, [I shall] quench the fire of the sorrow of Kamsa's queens with your blood".

23. "Do the strong show their strength in mere blabber? If you have the strength in your shoulders show us. Are you better than the lotus eyed protector of cows?" remonstrated Phalaguṇa [Arjuna] quivering in rage.

24. Listen Māgadha, have you become victorious over Bhīma and others just because you have defeated [Bala] Rāma?" scolded the lifter of the mountain.

25. "O evil man, listen, you proudly declared that you would lay low all three of us; let that

be; I shall reckon your courage if you defeat one of us" said [Kṛṣṇa].

26. "You are courageous in running [away from the battle field]. I can never equal you in [such a] fight; so today, I am afraid of fighting with you".

27. The courageous warrior then said that Bhīma was his equal in strength and offered to fight with him.<sup>11</sup>

In this ensemble, the confrontation really heats up with charges and counter charges being exchanged. We also get to know the reason for Jarāsandha's hatred of Kṛṣṇa. It ends with Jarāsandha choosing Bhīma for the fight which is the theme of the next ensemble.

Song 21 shows Kṛṣṇa challenging Jarāsandha to show his mettle in battle and not in mere boasting. In his speech, he also defends his past actions. Most war scenes in Yakṣagāna have a fixed structure of challenge and counter challenge, charge and counter charge before the actual fight. Here also we see the same structure with a change. All these challenges are made by Kṛṣṇa, but the actual 'challenger' for the duel is Bhīma and not himself. That is because the opposition of the discourse is between Kṛṣṇa and Jarāsandha and Bhīma acts

only as Kṛṣṇa's agent.

The motive behind Jarāsandha's hatred of Kṛṣṇa is revealed in song 22. His daughters have become widows because of Kṛṣṇa. Jarāsandha declares that he is going to quench the fire of their sorrow with Kṛṣṇa's blood. His wrath is expressed here. If we use The Nāṭya Sāstra's approach, Jarāsandha's daughter's sorrow becomes the vibhāva (lit. the cause of the bhāva or determinant); the actor's glaring eyes, the clenched fists and the quivering body become the anubhāva (consequents) which transmit the sentiment of Krōdha (rage) to the spectators in whom it becomes the raudra rasa (the furious). This act of 'carrying the meaning' is the task of the actor. As Rangacharya says, "Abhinaya is nothing but the acting of the anubhāva and vyabhicāri<sup>12</sup> bhāva".

In the improvised dialogue after this song, Jarāsandha addresses Bhīma and Arjuna. He says that as Kṣatriyas, they deserved greater respect from him. "But you have come in support of the cowherd who has no respect and so you also did not get the respect you deserved. Kṛṣṇa has come desiring his death. Leave him to me and go back". The written script gives no clue to Jarāsandha's address to Bhīma and Arjuna, but these words give a link to the next song which is Arjuna's

reaction. Details like these are part of the unwritten tradition regarding the performance of the prasanga called naḍe (see II.4 for details). This shows the importance of naḍe in the performance score.

Proxemics as a signifying element has already been referred to. In the preceding songs from 9 to 21 Kṛṣṇa moved left whenever Jarāsandha had songs to enact. But in this song Kṛṣṇa does not move left. This places Jarāsandha in the centre, Kṛṣṇa on the right and Bhīma and Arjuna on the left. This spatial positioning becomes a powerful visual sign as Jarāsandha tries to bring a schism between them.

That his strategy of 'divide and rule' does not succeed is made manifest in the next song (23) not merely in words but even in the positioning, because Arjuna crosses right and stands beside Kṛṣṇa. In songs 23, 24 and 25 we find that Jarāsandha's reactions are not indicated in the songs. This is because those songs are left out in the performance though the written script contains them. Taking this kind of freedom with the written script is accepted in Yakṣagāna. The link between these songs is provided in the improvised dialogues by the actors. Infact their words are supposed to lead to the next song. For example, just before song 24, Jarāsandha says, "Arjuna, for a trial of strength, I



need not fight with you. In the past, I have defeated Balarāma, Kṛṣṇa's brother". This is the clue for the bhāgavata to start the next song, 24, which is Kṛṣṇa's reply to Jarāsandha.

Kṛṣṇa brings Jarāsandha to the present, telling him to choose one among them. But Jarāsandha, harps to the past again to make fun of Kṛṣṇa now. He says Kṛṣṇa has become famous for running away from the battle field. Irony and mockery is the chief note of the song. The act of "running away" is presented in the dance in different ways and for this purpose the lines of the song are also repeated. Whenever the elaboration of any one moment takes place in this manner, the progression of the narrative stops. The spectators also expect and eagerly await for such elaborations. During such moments the progression of the narrative almost become "non significant". Infact, moments of mere progression of the narrative are considered "low" moments by the spectators, many of whom simply stroll out for a cup of tea during such moments.

This song again provides an example of spatial relations on the stage. The Yakṣagāna code not merely specifies that the "active" character should be on the right but also that the 'passive recipient' of the song, that is the character to whom the song is addressed

should always be to the left of the 'active' character. Before song 26, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna are both to the right of Jarāsandha. As soon as the song begins, Kṛṣṇa crosses left as he is the 'passive recipient' of the song though Arjuna continues to stand on the right.

After rejecting to fight with either Kṛṣṇa or Arjuna, Jarāsandha selects Bhīma for the duel. He also expresses appreciation for Bhīma and his strength. This ensemble thus leads to the duel.

IV.2.e Ensemble 5 (Songs 28 to 30 and the duel).

28. Having spoken thus, king Māgadha, happily placed dress and weapons before Hari, Bhīma and Partha. He also dressed suitably for the fight.

29. "O king, weapons like bow arrow and axe may be necessary in warfare for you; fight me with bare hands if you have for capacity" said the son of wind.

30. "O son of wind, listen, it is said that we two are equal in strength in this world. Now we shall see if it is true or false".<sup>13</sup>

This ensemble presents the actual duel and the summation done at the end by Kṛṣṇa. Song 28 is in the metre Bhāmini. Like song 15, this is also sung without percussion instruments. But if the earlier song was

Jarasandha's speech, this one is a stage direction. Bhāmini is used mostly for this purpose. After enacting the stage direction and the dialogue, Jarāsndha exits. After his exit, Kṛṣṇa expresses his joy because his ploy has succeeded. He tells Bhīma that he will give him proper directions during the fight at appropriate moments. Then these three also make their exit.

All four enter again. The costume remains the same, but the implication is that they are now properly attired for the duel. Bhīma prefers to fight with bare hands. Songs 28 and 29 are to be seen as part of the formal structure of a fight. It is verbal duel before the actual duel.

### The Duel

As has been pointed out in II.6, duels and fights are presented in a stylised way in accordance with the symbolic mode of representation of Yakṣagāna. The dance representing war is one of the few fixed choreographic items in Yakṣagāna. The actors do not have freedom for improvisation here. The particular footwork and movements depend on the weapons used. Bhīma and Jarāsandha fight with bare hands here. This kind of fight is called malla yuddha (a type of wrestling). During the entire fight, there is no song. The music consists of only rhythmic patterns played on cymbals and percussion

instruments.

Just as the fight is about to begin, Kṛṣṇa stands on the seat in the deep centre stage. He is thus 'heightened'. The denotative meaning is that he stands there to give guidance to Bhīma during the fight. But the connotative meaning is far more complex. His heightened position becomes a sign for his Godly status. He stands in a posture of benediction as though he is presiding over the fight. What is taking place in front of him is only part of his līla (Divine play). In fact the entire performance becomes his līla.

The fight begins with an apparent show of strength by the two contestants. This is conveyed by slapping the inner thighs and arms (the typical gestures used by wrestlers). Then they extend their arms in show of readiness for the fight. The actual fight is 'demonstrated' by mimes and gestures. They first take a round of the stage in broad steps and come back to their original place. Then they cross each other with gestures of fisticuffs though they are quite at a distance from each other. After this, they take half a round. This is followed by the actual contact when they hold hands (as in a wrestling bout) and take a smaller round of the inner stage. They hold each others' throats and Bhīma pushes Jarāsandha off stage through the exit.

(Exit is always by the right of the bhāgavata just as entry is from the left of the bhāgavata. This practice is almost never broken.) The exit of one of the contestants after a fight is a signifier for a defeat or death. What exactly it is, can be known only in the improvised speech.

Battle scenes are well developed choreographic items in Yakṣagāna, but in this performance, it is shown very briefly. Many aspects of the war dance are left out. This is also another facet of secularisation. As Jarāsandha is projected in sympathetic terms, the punishment meted out to him is also minimised in visual presentation. Thus the fight comes to a sudden end.

Kṛṣṇa in his speech after the duel, sums up the entire proceedings including the duel. He touches upon Jarāsandha's strange birth and how Bhīma had to be guided by him to kill Jarāsandha. In the original epic narrative, these details are given great prominence. But in Yakṣagāna, many a time, such narrative details are dismissed in just a few words as is the case here. We also see how improvised dialogue provides great freedom to elaborate on certain aspects and to compress others. Kṛṣṇa's speech at the end gives an idea of how the end is compressed. "This is the end of Jarāsandha. But the throne here, has to be handed over to his son

Sahadēva, who has also agreed to pay the ransom and help you in your Rajasūya Yaga. All the Kings in the prison have been released. They have also agreed to come to the yaga. Our work here is over. Then why wait? We shall proceed". All three depart in style using the dance representing journey.

A traditional Yakṣagna performance should end with mangala (the auspicious closure with prayers being offered to gods). But because of the totally different performance context (it was performed in a foreign country), it is dispensed with here.

#### IV.3 Conclusion

What has been analysed so far, forms only a part of the performance text. But, this I hope is sufficient to give us an idea of how the different media function together in the creation of a new significance. The creation of the new significance is the basis of all creative activity. It is this new significance that leads to aesthetic pleasure or rasānubhava.

Perhaps one way of understanding how this new significance is created is to see its correlations and differences with the prasanga or the written text, which the performance uses as its foundation. The motif of this prasanga, like that of most other old prasangas is

religious. Even the present performance at the manifest level keeps this religious motif. It is only at the immanent level of the discourse that we observe the changes. Because Yakṣagāna has a continuous unbroken tradition of centuries, the new significance is created not by a total break from the prasanga (or the performance texts of the past), but by a shift of emphasis within the frame work of the written text. Thus if in the written text the emphasis is on an overtly religious motif, the present day performances try to find the meaning within the human context. This aspect can be related to the process of secularisation referred to, in II.7. At the same time, it should be kept in mind that the performance text can not take the freedom of altering the narrative. All the elements contained in the prasanga (which in turn are drawn from the original epic narrative) are maintained. But the significance is altered by emphasising and highlighting certain aspects (already extant in the prasanga) and by underemphasizing others.

In the written text Agrapūje, the opposition in the discourse is between good and evil. Kṛṣṇa and Jarā-sanda are projected as the representatives of these two abstract concepts. But in the performance text under study, they do not belong to such black and white cate-

gories. Jarasāndha remains wicked but other aspects of his character also get highlighted. In Kṛṣṇa's character on the other hand, his shrewdness, and his diplomacy get highlighted rather than his godly status as a protector of Dharma.

According to tradition, Jarāsandha should be presented as belonging to the category of demons (baṇṇada vēṣa). The shift of emphasis of the present performance is made visually manifest in the costume. Here we have a 'humanised' Jarāsandha. His psychic state and the highly complex emotional tension that exists between him and Kṛṣṇa, become the crux of the discourse. Jarāsandha gets the greatest shock of his life when the drums are destroyed. The drums are a sign for his invincibility and their destruction 'shakes' his world. The presence of the three persons in disguise fills him with doubt and this is to be seen in conjunction with the earlier happening. Through a small mention in song 5, Jarāsandha's 'other' in the configuration of the discourse, Kṛṣṇa, is introduced. Jarāsandha's changing sentiments of scorn, wonder, mockery, rage and hatred are to be understood in the light of his complex relation with Kṛṣṇa. These emotions are also to be seen as a defence mechanism whereby he tries to cover the fear of death induced by the destruction of the drums. Thus we see



Jarāsandha, the human being, rather than Jarāsandha, the embodiment of wickedness.

In Kṛṣṇa, the 'other' of the discourse, we have an astute statesman who defeats Jarāsandha in the psychological duel between them, much before Bhīma kills him in the physical duel. Kṛṣṇa decides to 'use' Bhīma to get rid of his old enemy. He irritates and enrages Jarāsandha to accept to the duel - not with him but with Bhīma. All the while he keeps his cool and this enrages Jarāsandha even further. He knows that the real defeat of Jarāsandha is not so much in the physical duel but in the psychological duel that he fights with him.

Thus the discourse becomes a clash between two personalities - Kṛṣṇa and Jarāsandha, and not between the abstract concepts of good and evil. The audience in turn is made to sympathise with this 'humanised' Jarāsandha. The framework of the written text is maintained but the shift of emphasis leads to the creation of a new significance.

V

CONCLUSION

## V CONCLUSION

V.1 The fascination of Yakṣagāna is so great to one who has been initiated into it, that the moment one hears the rhythmic beats of caṇḍe and maddale, one is drawn to the place of the performance. Anyone who has been brought up in the Malenāḍ region of Karnataka knows how strong this attraction of Yakṣagāna is. This undoubtedly is part of the reason for its great popularity even today, in the region of its activity. This popularity is not restricted to any one class or group. A look at the variety of spectators one comes across in any Yakṣagāna performance would reveal its wide appeal. "The audience is a pot pourri of college professors, doctors, lawyers, school teachers, merchants, students, house wives, fishermen, construction workers, factory workers, farmers and servants." This mingling of people of all classes and age groups is typical of the patronage that Yakṣagāna has received over the ages. It has grown amongst the people and has become an important part of their cultural life. Yakṣagāna has never become elitist either in its approach or in its appeal. It has always survived on the support of the common people and does so even today. Therein perhaps lies the reason for its strong appeal to one and all.

Yakṣagāna undoubtedly deserves to be ranked among other classical dance forms of India like Bharat Natyam, Kathakali or Odissi. But unfortunately, it has not received the recognition that it so richly deserves. Even today, not many outside Karnataka know of Yakṣagāna. The reasons are not hard to seek. Improvised dialogue is one of the unique features that distinguishes Yakṣagāna from other dance drama forms of India. This uniqueness itself has perhaps come in the way of its becoming popular in non-Kannada speaking regions. Shivaram Karant tried to overcome this handicap in an experimental troupe that he organised (Yakṣaranga) where he got rid of improvised dialogues altogether. This experimental succeeded in reaching the non-Kannada speaking audience nodoubt, but was not generally accepted by the traditional Yakṣagāna viewers because they felt that the uniqueness of the medium was lost.

At the present moment, Yakṣagāna is truly in a state of flux. There are more than thirty professionally organised troupes and a good number of amateur ones. New prasangas are written every year and changes at different levels are taking place at a fast pace. Thus the code and structure of Yakṣagāna are getting altered. Commercialisation has also played its part in this

process of change by encouraging what may be termed 'consumer art'.

At the same time, a new awareness of the need to study and maintain tradition has also grown. There have been attempts at institutionalising the training of young artists. Several such institutions are now imparting training in different aspects of Yakṣagāna like music, dance and make-up. Several books on different aspects of Yakṣagāna have been published. The credit for this new awareness and awakening should go primarily to Shivaram Karant, the famous Kannada writer and social activist, who, for the last forty years, has been involved in the ressuruction of Yakṣagāna in various capacities. The present study can also be seen as part of this new awakening so far as Yakṣagāna is concerned.

V.2 The main purpose of the present study has been to analyse the significatory process of Yakṣagāna by relating it to the culture context. As one who has been witnessing Yakṣagāna performances for more than twenty years, I can definitely say that the study came as a revelation to me. It opened my eyes to innumerable aspects of Yakṣagāna at the micro and macro level of which I was not aware earlier. It also increased my respect for Yakṣagāna, because the study made me realise

that each small detail is a product of intellection. Some of the findings of this study, I am sure, will be of great interest to all those who are interested in Yakṣagāna, which includes not only the Yakṣagāna critics but the performers and the ordinary spectators as well. Some of the salient features of the study are listed below.

As has been mentioned in Chapter II, there was a heated debate recently as to whether Pūrva-ranga (the preliminary portion of a performance) should be maintained or discarded. Even those who were in favour of maintaining it, never said how pūrvaranga was functionally important. This study concentrated on that aspect and was able to reason out how pūrvaranga plays a functional role in the performance. The Oddōlaga (entry of characters) becomes important because it functions in two ways : the character is introduced to the audience and at the same time the actor also 'enters' the character. These two functions take place simultaneously bringing home forcefully to the spectators the actor's function as a sign. The narratology of the written texts and its relation to another medium like Harikatha has also been highlighted. The principle underlying the system of representation in Yakṣagāna was studied in 'symbolic representation' by contrasting it with the

assumptions behind a realistic representation. The changes taking place in Yakṣagāna have been studied in the context of the social and cultural changes in the last part of chapter II. These changes have been seen as central to a synchronic understanding of Yakṣagāna.

Chapter III has been focussed on abhinaya and the role of the actor in the semiotic process. Certain unique features of Yakṣagāna acting like its double-articulation have been recognised. Attempt has also been made to relate Yakṣagāna's approach to acting to an Indian theory of acting. To my knowledge, no separate ~~study has been done on acting in Yakṣagāna so far.~~ This is perhaps the first instance of a study of the process of acting in Yakṣagāna by seeing it in the perspective of different approaches to acting.

The integrative approach of semiotics has taught me to view seemingly isolated factors as part of a larger process. For example, changes taking place in costume and make-up are seen by many critics as isolated instances resulting out of the carelessness or weariness of the actor. But this study, has seen these changes in the larger perspective of the changes being brought about in the medium as a whole as a result of secularisation. When viewed in this light, these small and apparently insignificant details become part of a new

structuration that alters the discourse as a whole. These new developments can thus be understood properly, only when they are studied in relation to the cultural context. These changes can then be seen as signs for the changed perspective of the society as a whole. The study thus concentrates not merely on the performance text but also on the spectator response. The Rasa theory of Indian aesthetics has been integrated into the semiotic study for this purpose.

Chapter IV has tried to integrate the isolated aspects studied earlier by relating them to one specific performance text, because in theatre, it is the performance text alone that leads to the creation of the discourse and rasānubhava. Attempt has been made to show how the different aspects of Yakṣagāna lead to the discourse at the manifest and the immanent levels.

The study, has of necessity, been an incomplete one. I am keenly aware of the limitations inherent in making generalisation on a form based only on a representational analysis. Perhaps the most glaring omission in this study has been the role of music. But the study of music would have necessitated a different methodology. In addition, the semiotic approach if applied mechanically may lead to many pitfalls. In search for signs and the process of signification,



semiotics of theatre has the danger of seeing the performance as static. Infact the semiotic approach to theatre has often been accused of freezing "the actor, the performance space and the event into a system where everything is foreseen, where every element is semiotized - trapped in the grip of an infernal signifying machine"<sup>2</sup>. But in theatre, quite often, the unpredictable takes place, because in theatre one normally knows what will happen but can never predict how it will happen. Added to this is the response / participation of the audience which varies from performance to performance which nodoubt conditions the actor's creative process as well. So the present study has tried to integrate through Rasa theory the spectator response as an essential part of the interpretative process. I shall end this study by quoting the opinions of Patrice Pavis regarding the future course which semiotics of theatre should adopt. "If semiotics wants to do justice to the event-structure of theatrical performance it must be open to hermeneutics and to the aesthetics of audience participation... From now on, in addition to the precise methods of linguistics, the semiotician of the theatre must develop an understanding of rhetorical stage movements, a flexible model that takes into account the subjectivity of the spectator and finally the

capacity to apply the semiotic approach to the mechanisms of cognition and ideology".<sup>3</sup>

The present study has been an attempt in that direction.



Fig.1. The Bālagōpālas



Fig.2. Close up





Fig.3. The crown (with the waist ornament) used as an object of worship (a sign of Lord Ganesh).



Fig.4. Striveṣa - Female characters



Oddōlaga (of Pāndavas) - The Entry of Characters



Fig.5. Single actor revealing his back



Fig.6. All five showing their profile





Fig.7. Front Pose



Fig.8. All five dancing in a circle after the curtain is discarded





Fig.9. The Beginning of the oddōlaga after all five characters have entered



Fig.10. Kicaka, dancing on the seat, exhibiting his joy on seeing Sairandhri (Draupadi)





Fig.11. Bāhuka (right), taking King Rutuparna in a chariot



Fig.12. A King holding a bow and arrow



Dance



Fig.13. Pirouetting on the knees-

Mudrās (demonstrated by Shri Sambhu Hegde)



Fig.14. King, power etc.

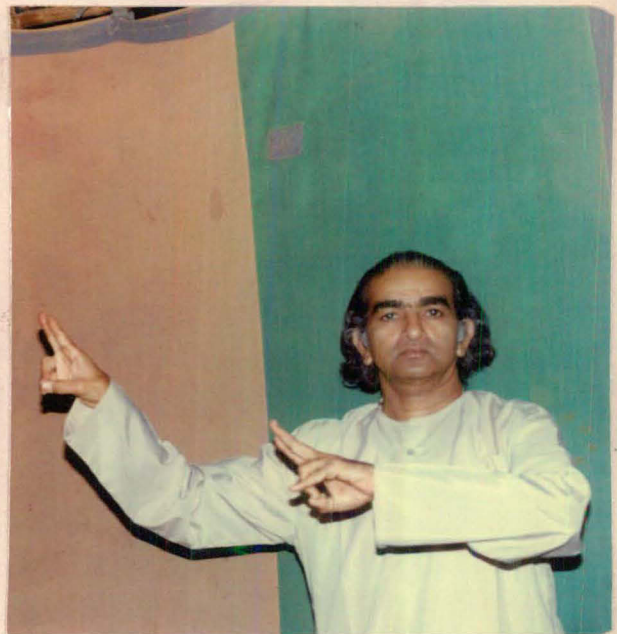


Fig.15. "Listen"



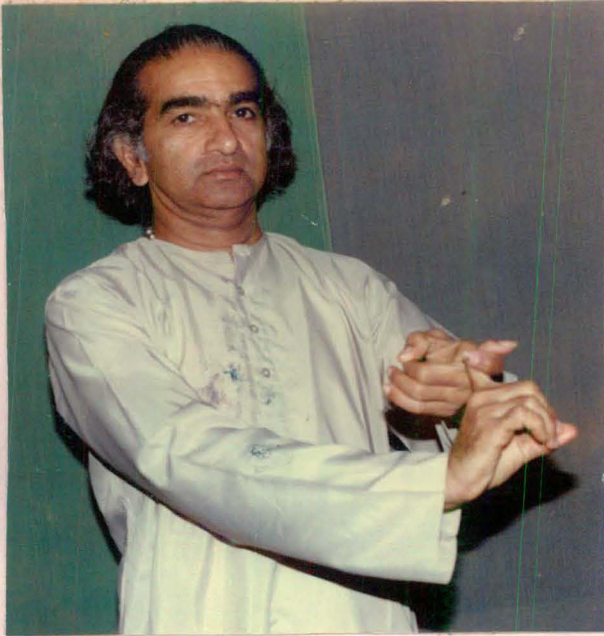


Fig.16. Enmity

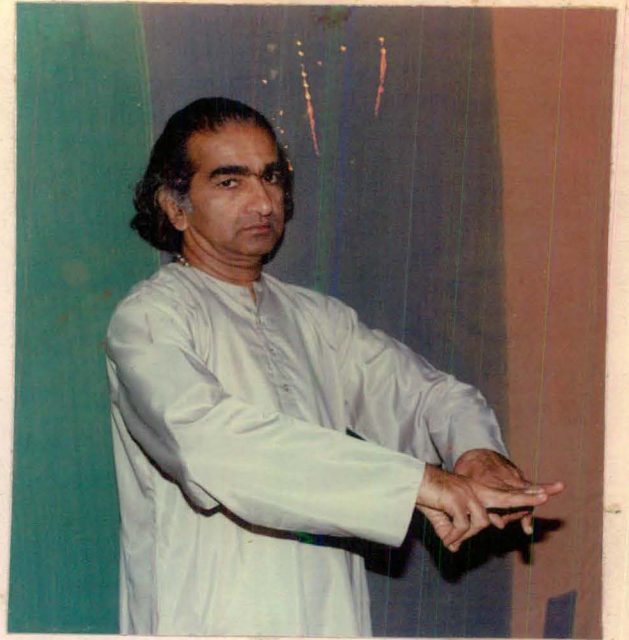


Fig.17. Love, friendship



Fig.18. Horse



Fig.19. Rāma



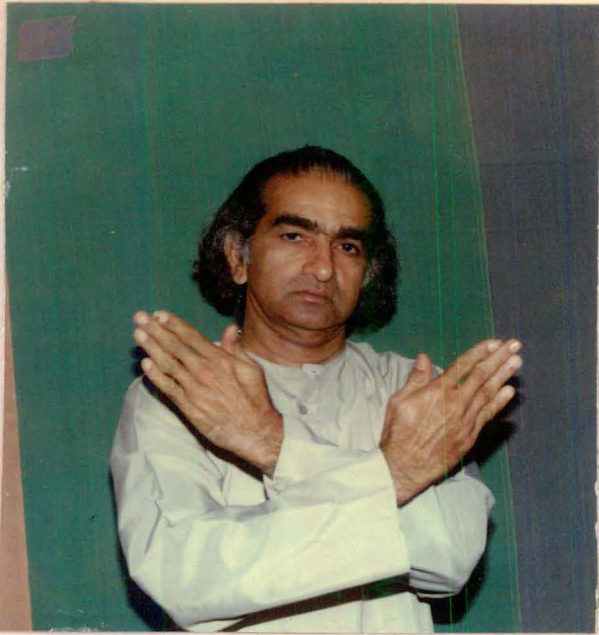


Fig.20. Forest

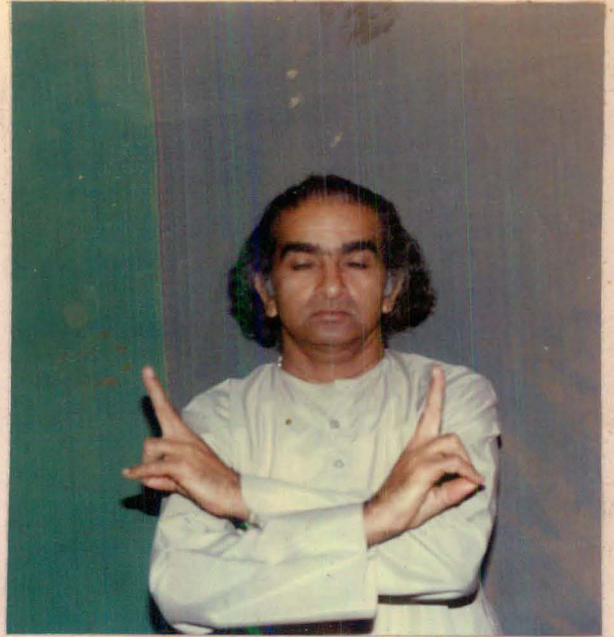


Fig.21. Kṛṣṇa



Fig.22. A King



Fig.23. Karna (black muṇḍāsa)





Fig.24. A King and a young hero (Kédige mandale)



Fig.25. Kṛṣṇa





Fig.26. Daśaratha with his sons Bharata and Śatrughna  
(Notice the different head dresses)



Fig.27. Kirāta (a hunter)  
(Cross mundāsa)



Fig.28. Sages Viśwāmītra and Vasiṣṭha





Fig.29. Female Characters



Fig.30. Buffoons

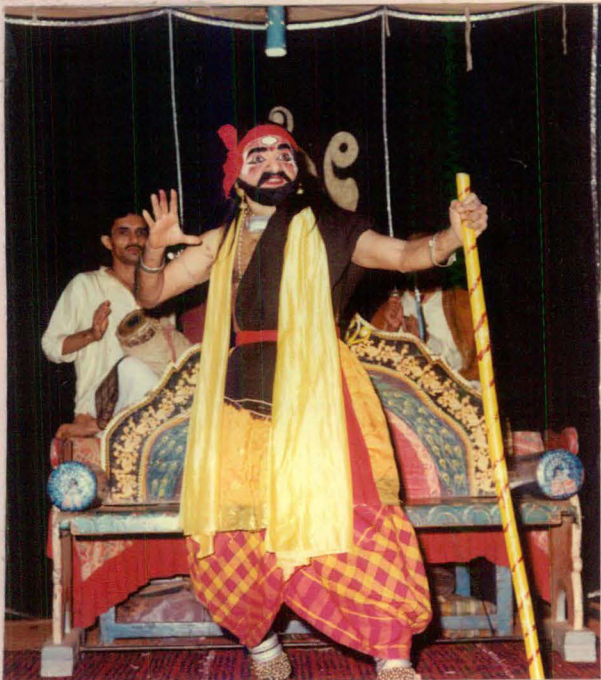


Fig.31. Hariṣchandra after he becomes a watchman



Fig.32. Baṇṇada Vēṣa (Dēmoness)





Fig.33. Hanumān



Fig.34. Indrajitu and Rāvāṇa  
(Horizontal marks on the forehead)



Fig.35. Kālapuruṣa (Time) and Rāma





Fig.36. Shambhu Hegde as Jarāsandha



Fig.37. Krishna Yaji as Kṛṣṇa



NOTES AND REFERENCES

I Introduction

1 The two coastal districts of North and South Kanara and the adjoining districts in the Sahyadri ranges, Shimoga, Chikmagalur and Hassan are called Malenad.

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3 ibid., p.4, Translation mine. In all future references to books in Kannada, translations are mine.

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## II Structure of a Yaksagana Performance

1

The details mentioned here are of the commercially organised troupes of the baḍagu tiṭṭu (Northern Style).

2

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op.cit., p.76.
- 5  
Yakṣagāna Sabhā Lakṣaṇa Mattu Prasanga Piṭhike (Kanna-  
da) (Udupi: Shiman Madhwa Sidhanta Granthalaya, 1980),  
p.15.
- 6  
Shivaram Karant, Yakṣagāna Bayalāta, (Kannada) (1957,  
rev.ed. Puttur: Harsha Prakatanalaya, 1963), p.38.
- 7  
ibid., p.57.
- 8  
P.V. Hasyagar, "Yakṣagāna Kale Mattu Prayōga," Yakṣagā-  
na (Kannada) ed., V. Seetaramiah (Bangalore: I.B.H.  
Prakashana, 1975), p.58.
- 9  
Roman Jacobson quoted in P. Guiraud, op.cit., p.8.
- 10  
ibid., p.9.
- 11  
Recently many attempts have been made to present  
shortened versions of the performance lasting about  
three hours, where pūrva ranga is totally omitted. In  
most such attempts it is generally observed that the  
first thirty or forty minutes fails to communicate  
properly. One wonders if this is because, these moments  
are forced to perform the function of pūrvaranga.

12

Dr. F. Kittel, Kannada English Dictionary, ed. Rev. J. Bucher (1923, rpt. New Delhi: Asian Education Services, 1987), p.102.

13

P.V. Hasyagar, *op.cit.*, p.75.

14

Shivaram Karant, Yakṣagāna (Kannada) (Mysore: University of Mysore, 1974), pp.75-76. This book has also been published in English. This study has made use of the Kannada version. Here afterwards, the two books by S. Karant, will be referred to by their years of publication.

15

*ibid.*, p.77.

16

John Fuegi, Bertolt Brecht: Chaos, According to Plan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.98.

17

Martha B. Ashton and B. Chirsite, pp.7-8.

18

Yakṣagāna Sabhā Lakṣaṇa Mattu Prasanga Pēethike, *op.cit.*, p.68.

19

Phillip Zarelli, The Kathakali complex: Actor, Performance and Structure (N. Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1984), p.219. The preliminary part of this section is inspired by Zarelli's analysis of Kathakali.

- 20  
Parti Subba? Pancavaṭi (Kannada) quoted in Yakṣagāna,  
ed. V. Seetaramiah, p.18.
- 21  
P.V. Hasyagar, "Yakṣagāna Prasangagaḷu" Vaijayanthi  
(Kannada) ed. G.S. Bhat (Mysore: North Kanara District  
Cultural Society, 1978), p.2.
- 22  
Devidasa (16th century), Kṛṣṇa Sandhāna (Kannada)  
(Mangalore: Nityananda Granthalaya, rpt. 1989).
- 23  
Shivaram Karant, 1974, p.36.
- 24  
Bharata, Nāṭya Śāstra, V-19, tr. in Kannada Adya  
Rangacharya (Sagar: Akshara Prakashana, 1984), p.24.
- 25  
Mahabaleshwara Bhat, "Prasanga Tantra," Yakṣagāna  
Makaranda (Kannada) (Mangalore: Polali Shastri Smaraka  
Samiti, 1980), p.170.
- 26  
Vishnu Bhāgavata, (16th century) Virāṭaparva (Kannada)  
(Udupi: Shriman Madhva Sidhanta Granthalaya, 1979),  
p.11.
- 27  
Roland Barthes, "Writing Degree Zero," Barthes: Se-  
lected Writings (Oxford: Fontana Pocket Readers, 1983),  
p.47.
- 28  
Sandor Hervey, op.cit., p.146.

29

A detailed study of Yakṣagāna music is beyond the scope to this representational analysis. My knowledge of music also being limited, I have restricted myself to a few comments on music, which I feel are necessary for understanding the semiosis of the form as a whole.

30

Shivaram Karant, 1957, p.82.

31

Martha Ashton and B. Christie, pp.60-61.

32

K. Manjunatha Bhagavata, "Yakṣagāna Hāduḡārike," (Kannada) Vaijayanti, op.cit., p.12.

33

A.J. Greimas, On Meaning: Selected writings in Semiotic Theory, tr. Paul. J. Person and Frank Collins (London: Frances Pinter (publishers), 1987), p.220.

34

Jiri Veltrusky, quoted in Keir Elam, op.cit., p.7.

35

E.H. Gombrich, quoted in John Fuegi, op.cit., p.31.

36

J.C. Mathur, Drama in Rural India (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1964), p.85.

37

Shivaram Karant, 1974, p.82.

38

Reneta Berg-Pan, Bertolt Brecht and China (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1979), p.172.



39

Amrit Someshwara, "Yaksagānadalli Sānkētikate," (Kannada) (Symbolism in Yaksagana), Yakṣagāna Makaranda, op.cit., p.263.

40

H.S. Gill, A Phukari From Bhatinda, (Patiala: Punjabi Literature, 1977), p.32.

41

M. Mahabala Bhat, Baṇṇada Vēṣha (Kannada) (Mangalore: M. Mahabala Bhat, 1988), pp.57-58.

### III Abhinaya - Histrionic Representation

1

Adya Rangacharya, An Introduction to Bharata's Nāṭya Śāstra (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966), p.28.

2

Bharata-Muni, The Nāṭya Śāstra, VIII-9, tr. Manomohan Ghosh. op.cit., p.151.

3

Umberto Eco, "Semiotics of Theatrical Performace" The Drama Review, T 73, No.21, (1977) p.110.

4

ibid., p.111.

5

Jiri Veltrusky, "Theatre in the Corridor," op.cit., p.69.

6

Phillip Zarelli, op.cit., p.207.

7

Bharata, The Nāṭya Śāstra, op.cit., IV-267, p.68.

8

Phillip Zarelli, *op.cit.*, 209.

9

Keir Elam, *op.cit.*, p.9.

10

Karl von Frish described by Sandor Hervey, *op.cit.*, pp.252-259.

11

Shivaram Karant, 1974, p.81.

12

P.S.R. Apparao, A Monograph on Bharata's Nāṭya Śāstra (Hyderabad: Natya Mala Publishers, 1967), p.100.

13

These opinions are expressed by Shambhu Hegde in his article in Udayavani (27-8-1978). There are variants (regional and otherwise) of this.

14

V. Srinivasa Bhat, Yakṣagāna Vēṣha Bhūshaṇa Mattu Abhinaya Gosṭi (Kannada) (Udupi: Yakṣagāna Kendra, M.G.M. College, 1972), pp.12-14.

15

Martha B. Aston and Bruce Christie, *op.cit.*, p.62.

16

Sankara, "Ardha Nariṣwara Sūtra," as quoted in Bharatiya Kala Darshana ed. A.N. Krishna Rao (Bangalore: Sangeet Natak Academy, 1964), p.205.

17

Bharata, Nāṭya Śāstra IV-267, tr. Adya Rangacharya, *op.cit.*, p. 37.

- 18  
Vishnu Bhāgavata (17th century) Virāṭa Parva op.cit.,  
p.12.
- 19  
M. Sridhara Murthy, "Bharata Nāṭya Hastagaḷu," Bhar-  
tiya Kala Dārshana, op.cit., p.178.
- 20  
P.V. Hasyagar, "Yakṣagāna Kale Mattu Prayōga," (Kanna-  
da) Yakṣagāna, op.cit., p.68.
- 21  
Shambhu Hegde, Udayavani (a Kannada daily), 27-8-1978.
- 22  
Here and in the following, the details are taken from  
Sandor Hervey, op.cit., pp.30-33.
- 23  
C.S. Peirce quoted in Keir Elam, op.cit., p.21-22.
- 24  
As revealed in an interview I had with him when he  
posed for the photographs used here. He is among the  
most renowned artists of Yakṣagāna today.
- 25  
Shivaram Karant, 1957, op.cit., p.114.
- 26  
The example is taken from Martha Ashton and Bruce  
Christie, Yakṣagāna, op.cit., p.40.
- 27  
Brecht reached this conclusion from a totally differ-  
ent ideological premise.

28

S. Gopalakrishna Bhat, (Kannada) quoted in Dashāvātara (commemorative issue) (Gunḍabāḷa. N.K.: Mukhya Prāna Venkatēsha Temple, 1989), p.60.

29

M.Prabhakar Joshi, Kēdige, (Mangalore: Chitra Prakashan, 1986), p.46.

30

Shivaram Karant, 1957, op.cit., p.150.

31

Tadeusz Kowzan, quoted in Keir Elam, op.cit., p.50.

32

Bharata, The Nāṭya Śāstra, tr. Manomohan Ghosh, op.cit., ch.XXIII pp.417-441.

33

Shivaram Karant, 1957, pp.24-25.

34

Claude Lévi-Strauss, The Way of the Masks, tr. Sylvia Modelski (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), p.93.

35

ibid., p.144.

36

Jiri Veltrusky, quoted in Keir Elam, p.9.

37

M. Mahabala Bhat, "Bayalāṭada Baṇṇagārike," Baṇṇada Vēṣha, op.cit., p.40.

38

ibid., p.37.

39

Shivaram Karant, 1957, p.153.

40

V. Srinivasa Bhat, op.cit., p.32.

41

This aspect is discussed in Mahabala Bhat, Bannada Vēṣha.

42

Shambhu Hegde, "Yakṣagānadalli Veṣabhūṣaṅgaḷa Sthāna," Śringara (Kannada monthly) Jan.1973, p.41.

43

Prabhakara Joshi, Kēdige, op.cit., pp.80-81.

44

Shivaram Karant, 1974, p.86.

#### IV Analysis of a Performance Text

1

These details are taken from Shivaram Karant, 1957, pp.186-261.

2

Bisṭappa Kavi, Agrapūje (Kannada) (Honnavar: Śringara Mudrana Prakashana, year of publication not mentioned).

3

For details on the head dresses and their significance, see III.5. on costume and make-up.

4

See III.5.c. for the significance of the marks on the forehead.

5

Bisṭappa Kavi, Agrapūje, p.13. All further references to songs are from this edition. The translation is mine.

6

Jarāsandha, private video recording of the show given by Sri Idagunji Mahāgaṇapati Yakṣagāna Mandali, Kere-  
mane, in Bahrain, featuring Shambhu Hegde, Krishna Yaji  
and others. All references to the dialogues and enact-  
ment are to this video record. Hence, this source has  
not been mentioned hereafter.

7

Bisṭappa Kavi, p.14. In the original, the direct  
speech is not demarcated by quotation marks. They have  
been inserted in the translation.

8

Edward T. Hall, The Silent Language (1959, rpt.  
N.Delhi: Affiliated East West Press Pvt. Ltd., 1973).

9

Bisṭappa Kavi, p.15.

10

Keir Elam, op.cit., p.28.

11

Bisṭappa Kavi, p.15.

12

Adya Rangacharya, An Introduction to Bharata's Nāṭya  
Śāstra, op.cit., p.73.

13

Bisṭappa Kavi, p.16.

## V Conclusion

1

Martha B. Ashton and Bruce Christie, Yakṣagāna: A Dance  
Drama of India, op.cit., p.4.

2

Patrice Pavis, "Notes Toward a Semiotic Analysis (concerning Dispartitions)," The Drama Review, vol.23, T 84, (1979), p.104.

3

ibid., p.104.

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Yakṣagāna Sabhā Lakṣana Mattu Prasanga Pīṭhike. (Kannada) Udupi: Sriman Madhvasidhanta Granthalaya, 9th imp. 1974.

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naya Gosṭi. (Kannada) Udupi : Yakṣagāna  
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struction. London: Routledge and Kegan  
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