Chapter VI
Theatrical Devices
6.1. Theatre : A Multifaceted World

Vera M. Roberts in her book 'On Stage' writes:

"Because theatre is so much by the people, for the people, it is also very much of the people."
(quoted in Holmes and Lehman, 1970 : viii.)

This clearly reflects the democratic nature of theatre, i.e. the playwright, the story, the actors, the stage, the location of time and place, the audience — all contribute to the performing of theatre. "There is hardly any other cultural manifestation that so fully and accurately reflects the society in which it appears."
(Ibid.)

The word 'theatre' in Greek meant "Seeing Place" and the word 'drama' meant "Deed", which reminds us of Shakespeare's definition of 'drama' as "the play is the thing". The playwright's thing is his perception of the world that he is acting out. Plays are written to be performed in a place and time
so that the audience can participate as part of it.
This is the reason why the theatre is exciting.
(cf. Homes and Lehman, 1970 : xi)

The Indian view of theatre is altogether
different from the Greek. "Kalidas talks of theatre
as the 'desirable fire sacrifice of the eyes' (Kāntam
Kratum Chakshushām)." (Karnad, 1999 : 69)

Karnad further explains this view as
follows :

"The parallel is striking in so far as both activities
involve human performances, precise gestures, speech,
and a carefully worked out action leading to a predeter-
mined denouement. But an additional characteristic
common to both is the perennial possibility of disrup-
tion. The disruption may come from outside, either
from a human agency (unruly audiences, mischief-mongers,
intruders, those unable to understand what is happening,
demons) or from a more general ealamity (rain, storm,
political upheavals). Or the source of disruption could
be within : the performers may forget their lines,
mispronounce words, or quite simply may not have prepared
themselves properly for their roles."
To guard against the first two hazards, the yajna is performed inside a sacrificial enclosure, the play inside a theatre building. The third possibility is guarded against by the vigilance of the Chief Priest, the director, the guru." (Ibid. P. 69)

Apart from the similarity shown above, their lies one principal difference between the two is that "drama (theatre — broadly) was open to and became the prerogative of castes and communities excluded from the yajna. Abhinavagupta, a tenth-century critic, author of the only extant pre-modern commentary on the 'Natyashastra', brings home to us both this identity and difference when he explains that in the Prologue of a Sanskrit play the Sutradhar (Stage Manager) is addressed as 'Aryaputra' (a scion of an Arya family), although the actor is a Sudra by birth, because he is the host of the great sacrifice of the Natya Veda (natyavedama-hasattradikshita)." (Ibid, p. 70)

The birth of drama can be traced back to that of man, which, however, gives a firm base for the mythical nature of drama. This fact is attested through
Indian as well as Greek traditions of the history and development of theatre. "The first chapter of Bharata's 'Natyashastra' gives us the myth of the origin of drama ... It was a time when the moral fibre of the society had weakened, irrational passions held sway and people had surrendered themselves to their baser instincts. Knowledge of the Vedas (which presumably could have saved the situation) being restricted to the upper strata of the society, a medium was required that entertained and could restore the health of the society by reaching out to all the people, regardless of their position in the social hierarchy. On being implored by Indra and the other gods to provide such an instrument, Brahma, the Father of the Universe, took the text from the 'Rigveda', the art of performance from the 'Yajurveda', the song from the 'Samaveda' and rasa (aesthetic experience) from the 'Atharvaveda' and created a fifth Veda called the 'Natyaveda' (Ibid)
6.2. Karnad in Search for Modern Indian Theatre

The British dominion had affected the life and culture of the Indian people to a large extent. As Karnad thinks, "... what is called 'modern Indian theatre' was started by a group of people who adopted 'cultural amnesia' as a deliberate strategy. It originated in the second half of the nineteenth century in three cities -- Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras. None of these seaports built by the British for their maritime trade had an Indian past of its own, a history independent of the British. These places had developed an Indian middle class that in all outward respects aspired to 'look' like its British counterpart. The social values of this class were shaped by the English education it had received and by the need to work with the British in trade and administration." (Author's Introduction in 'Three Plays', 1995 : 4)

The old Indian tradition of theatre of which the audience used to be an essential part started reducing itself as a consequence by alienating the latter from the stage performance. "Inevitably the
theatre it created imitated the British theatre of the times, as presented by visiting troupes from England. Several new concepts were introduced, two of which altered the nature of Indian theatre. One was the separation of the audience from the stage by the proscenium, underscoring the fact that what was being presented was a spectacle free of any ritualistic associations and which therefore expected no direct participation by the audience in it; and the other was the idea of pure entertainment, whose success would be measured entirely in terms of immediate financial returns and the run of the play." (Ibid, p. 4-5)

The alienation of the audience from the stage had its effects on the characters of the play. "The consequences of this secularism were that every character on stage, whether a Hindu deity or a Muslim legendary hero, was alienated from his true religious or cultural moorings; and myths and legends, emptied of meaning, were reshaped into tightly constructed melodramas with thundering curtain lines and searing climax. Unlike traditional performances, which spread out in a slow, leisurely fashion, these plays demanded
total attention, but only at the level of plot. Incident was all. Even in natak companies run entirely by Hindus, the basic attitude was dictated by this Parsi model." (Ibid, P. 6)

The emergence of films added much more to the commercialistic attitude of the British. "With the advent of 'talking' films in the 1930, the Parsi theatre collapsed without a fight. In the West, movies diminished the importance of theatre but did not destroy it. In India, professional theatre was virtually decimated by the film industry, which had learned most of its tricks from the theatre and could dish out the made-to-order entertainment on a scale much larger than the theatre could afford and at cheaper rates. India has not seen a professional theatre of the same proportions since." (Ibid, P. 6)

This inspired Karnad to revive the Indian-ness of theatre, i.e. to make the audience part of theatre and Karnad seriously and sincerely incorporated the folk form of theatre prevalent in different regions of India. "The energy of folk theatre comes from the
fact that although it seems to uphold traditional values, it also has the means of questioning these values, of making them literally stand on their head. The various conventions — the chorus, the masks, the mixing of human and nonhuman worlds — permit the simultaneous presentation of alternative points of view, of alternative attitudes to the central problem. To use a phrase from Bertolt Brecht, these conventions then allow for 'complex seeing'."

(P. 14)

"When he went to Bombay for postgraduation, he came into intense contact with the Western theatre especially the naturalistic theatre of Strindberg's 'Miss Julie' as produced by Ebrahim Alkazi. Later when he stayed in England, Karnad had first hand knowledge of World Theatre. However, he has consistently banked upon the traditional Indian dramatic forms and conventions. Of course, there are certain combinations and permutations of all forms and techniques available to him but he is largely an Indian playwright with the strength of the 'Company Natak' and 'Yakshagana'." (Dhanavel, 2000: 101)
6.3. The Stage

Apart from the best content, the success of a play depends mostly on the theatrical devices, viz. the stage, the costumes, music, lighting, masks, etc. In general, the stage usually has a curtain, wings, and different scenes for different purposes and the audience is seated out front in the orchestra or in the balcony. The curtain is raised and the audience is allowed to see into a living room, a bedroom, a courtroom, or a garden. "Today, in addition to the standard stage production mentioned, the theatre is experimenting with theatre-in-the-round, no curtain, audience involvement on stage and off stage. Playwrights are trying to involve audiences physically as well as emotionally". (Holmes and Lehman, 1970: xv-xvi)

In Karnad’s plays, the theatrical devices used so far become part and parcel of them, e.g. in 'Naga-mandala':

"**Man**: Wait! Don't go. Please
(Thinks.)
I suppose I have no choice
(To the audience.)

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So now you know why this play is being done. I have no choice, Bear with me, please. As you can see, it is a matter of life and death for me.

(Calls out.)

Musicians, please!

(Musicians enter and occupy their mat.)

The Story and the Song!

(P. 26)

Here, as is clear, the audience, the musicians, the story, the song — all become part of the play.

Karnad being a playwright as well as an actor cannot underestimate the importance of stage. He writes, "The stagecraft of the Parsi model demanded a mechanical succession of alternating 'shallow' and 'deep' scenes. The shallow scenes were played in the foreground of the stage with a painted curtain — normally depicting a street — as the backdrop. These scenes were reserved for the 'lower class' characters with
prominence given to comedy. They served as 'link' scenes in the development of the plot, but the main purpose was to keep the audience engaged while the deep scenes, which showed interiors of palaces, royal parks, and other such visually opulent sets, were being changed or decorated. The important characters rarely appeared in the street scenes, and in the deep scenes the lower classes strictly kept place."

(Three Plays: Author's Introduction, 1995: 7-8)

In this plays, Karnad has made use of both the scenes — shallow and deep — to maintain the effectiveness of the story. In 'Naga-mandala', for example, the inner sanctum of a ruined temple, Appanna's house and rooms, etc. belong to the deep scenes whereas the shallow one includes the ant-hills outside the house, the tree under which the King Cobra is there and the dog barks at it and the village elders and the people gather to settle the problem of Rani's pregnancy.

In 'Hayavadana', Act One starts with the following scene on stage:

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"(The stage is empty for a chair, kept centre-stage, and a table on stage right — or at the back — on which the Bhagavata and the musicians sit ...)

Different positions on stage have different functions per se and the actors depending on their roles are directed to adopt a particular position. As in the above context, the centre-stage is meant for the presiding deity — Ganesha to wish all success of the performance:

"(... At the beginning of the performance, a mask of Ganesha is brought on stage and kept on the chair ...)

Undoubtedly, the chair is kept at the centre. It is the deep scene.

Again, prominence is given to any role-player regardless of his status — low or high — by bringing him to the centre. Hayavadana, for example, is beckoned by the Bhagavata to some centre-stage.

Before Kapila’s arrival, Padmini’s pretention to go in is expressed as follows:
"(She pretends to go in, but goes and stands in a corner of the stage, listening ...)"
(p. 93)

The off-stage or shallow performances in 'Hayavadana' seem to be the forest and the mountain or hill where goddess Kali's temple, but Karnad has deepened them with a curtain thus:

"(Two stage-hands come and hold up a half-curtain in the corner to which he points. The curtain has a picture of Goddess Kali on it ...)"
(P. 97)

In 'Tughlaq', the deep scenes are those which are related to the palace both in Delhi and Daulatabad. They are mainly as follows:

(a) The yard in front of the Chief Court of Justice in Delhi. (p. 147)
(b) A room in the palace. (p. 154)
(c) The yard in front of the Big Mosque. (p. 163)
(d) The Palace. (P. 169, 203, 211)
(e) A house in Delhi. (p. 174)
(f) Another part of the Palace.

(p. 213)

The shallow scenes in 'Tughlaq' are less:

(a) A camp on the Delhi-Daulatabad route.

(p. 188)

(b) Hills. (p. 197)

(c) A plain outside the fort of Daulatabad.

(p. 208)

The deep scenes in 'The Fire and the Rain' are the brick altars (p. 1), the hermitage of Yavakri's father (p. 6), the hermitage of Raibhya (p. 12), etc. The shallow scenes include 'a dry champak tree on the bank' (p. 17), 'the stream' (p. 17), 'the bushes behind the champak tree' (p. 18), 'the village square' (p. 26), 'the jungle' (p. 35), 'the outskirts on the city' (p. 39).
6.4. The Curtain and the Wings

The place of the curtain and wings in certain plays becomes essential especially when the stage becomes the only base for all performances. For example, in 'Hayavadana', the size and the type of curtain have to be considered important according to the context:

"(Two stage-hands enter and hold up a half-curtain, about six feet in height — the sort of curtain used in Yakshagana or Kathakali ...)

Again, the lowering or raising of curtain can have a specific role in the play, e.g.

"(The curtain is lowered by about a foot. One sees Hayavadana's head, which is covered by a veil ...)

"(... The curtain is lowered a little more — just enough to show the head again ...)

There are certain performances in a play that do not take place on stage, The curtain
here serves a good resort to let it be carried on behind, e.g.

"Padmini:
(Lifts the sword and puts its point on her breast when, from behind the curtain, the goddess's voice is heard.)"

X X X X

(... Behind the curtain one sees the uplifted blood-red palms of the goddess. The curtain is lowered and taken away ...") (p. 101)

The use of the white curtain indicates a vacuum in the situation on the one hand and a question-mark before the partakers and the audience on the other, e.g.

"(The stage-hands hold a white curtain in front of the frozen threesome ...)") (p. 109)

Act Two starts with the removal of the white curtain (p. 110) which means, the problem has sought a solution.

The lifting of curtain in a slow — very slow motion or speed also has some specific
sense, e.g.

"Padmini:
(At a sign from the Bhagavata, two stage-hands come and place a curtain in front of Padmini.)

(Does namaskara. The stage-hands lift the curtain slowly, very slowly, very slowly, as the song goes on. The curtain has a blazing fire painted on it. And as it is lifted, the flames seem to leap up ...)

Thus, the lifting of curtain shows the hearts burning with the fire of passion, whereas the dropping of it its fulfilment, e.g.

"(... At this point the curtain, with the fire painted on it, -- which has been there all the time -- is dropped and Padmini, Kapila and Devadatta step forward and join the Bhagavata in prayer.)"

Wings are used to cover the sides of the curtain and so indicate somebody's entrance or exit thereby, e.g.
"(A scream in the wings. The actor comes rushing in.)" (p. 76)

"(Commotion in the wings.)

x x x x x

(Actor I enters with a boy of about five...)

(p. 133)

6.5. The Costumes

The costume like other wearings has an important role in that it depicts the mood or the mental disposition of a person. If we go on classifying the types of dresses a man can wear, it would be very difficult to exhaust them since it solely depends on the individual choice as well as the surroundings he inhabits. However, there
are some general features of costumes as different from one another in view of the situation or mood — light or tense, delighted or gloomy, etc.

In the plays of Karnad, one confronts with many typical dresses required for their historical and ritual purposes. In 'Tughlaq', for example, Imamuddin puts on the royal costumes, i.e. the robes, head-dress; and surprisingly, Muhammad and Imamuddin both look even more alike (p. 168) only because of the same dress.

Again in the same play, Muhammad does not let Barani to cover the corpse of Shihabu-ud-Din with a shroud so that his people may see his wounds (p. 186).

Muslim women generally put a veil on their faces. However, when some dignified personalities come face to face, they lower it to pay regard just as the step-mother of Muhammad does lower the veil when Majib and Barani enter the room in the palace (p. 156).
Aziz, a clown, adopts the disguise of Ghiyas-ud-Din Muhammad for which he must have put on the kingly dress (p. 209). On the contrary, he took the part of a Brahmin for which he put on a dhoti, the sacred thread, tilak, etc. to resemble a Brahmin (p. 188).

In 'The Fire and the Rain', "The priests are all dressed in long flowing seamless pieces of cloth, and wear sacred threads. The king, who is the host, is similarly dressed but has his head covered." (P. 1)

Every dress must fit the wearer. Arvasu's dhoti gets loose and Nittilai warns him saying:

"Nittilai : Wait ! Don't be a child. Here.
Let me tie your dhoti properly.
(Unselfconsciously, she reties his dhoti, as though he were a child ...)
(P. 40)
6.5. The Mask

Other than the costumes, in classical and historical plays, what the actors use are masks. "Western theatre has developed a contrast between the face and the mask — the real inner person and the exterior one presents, or wishes to present, to the world outside. But in traditional Indian theatre, the mask is only the face 'writ large'; since a character represents not a complex psychological entity but an ethical archetype, the mask merely presents in enlarged detail its essential moral nature." (Karnad, 'Author's Introduction' to 'Three Plays), p. 13)

The use of the masks in 'Hayavadana' is worth-explaining as there are two different masks — one elephant's head and the other horse's head — depicting different motifs, "Ganesh's mask", says Karnad, "then says nothing about his nature. It is a mask, pure and simple." (Ibid. p. 14) "Hayavadana, meaning 'the one with a horse's head' is named after his character". (Ibid. p. 14)
Music

Music being the universal language communicates much more than the verbal language per se. In addition to the verbal, the non-verbal communication requires — especially in drama — actualisation of inner feelings not in terms of the verbal language, but in terms of music. To Karnad, music is a central theatrical device. "The central theatrical device in the play is the use of about a dozen singers who start conventionally enough as a chorus. But as the play progresses, they become the human curtain alternately hiding the action and revealing bits of it as in a peep show." (Ibid, p. 15)

Music includes singing, dancing, and playing on instruments. In 'Hayavadana', "The Bhagavata sings verses in praise of Ganesha, accompanied by musicians:

"O Elephant — headed Herambha
whose flag is victory and who shines like a thousand suns,"
O husband of Riddhi and Siddhi,
seated on a mouse and decorated
with a snake,
O single-tusked destroyer of incompleteness,
we pay homage to you and start our play."

(p. 73)

This verse in praise of Ganesha is an invocation to
the God as well as an indication to the incompleteness of performance and human life.

Music varies according to the context of situation. In 'Hayavadana', for example, there is
'marriage music' (p. 90), in 'The Fire and the Rain',
'melodious music' (p. 59) and 'strange music' (p. 59)
and undoubtedly all have different connotations. The
marriage music expresses the blissful union of two
hearts as well as the departure of the bride to her
groom's house whereas the melodious music and the
strange music are meant for the departure of the soul
from the body.

Drums are beaten for different purposes,
such as pooja, war, celebrations on gay occasions, etc.
In 'Hayavadana', the tremendous noise of drums terrorises Padmini (p. 101). In pooja drums were essential in ancient times, as Kali's words attest:

"Kali: ... There was a time — many many years ago — when at this hour they would have the mangalarati. The devotees used to make a deafening racket with drums and conch-shells and cymbals ..." (p. 102).

In 'Tughlaq', the drum is beaten just to attract public attention for a royal announcement (p. 148).

Singing and dancing go together to express utter happiness usually in a group which multiplies it, e.g. Aziz sings and dances in a circle clapping his hands (p. 201).

Dancing alone is also an outcome of joy. In 'Hayavadana', for example:

"(The three spring to life. Devadatta and Padmini cream with joy and move to one corner of the stage laughing and dancing.)" (p. 110)
When man feels lonely, he often hums a tune to fill the air with sweetness. In 'Hayavadana' Padmini enters the stage humming a tune (p. 87) and in 'The Fire and the Rain', the Actor-Manager hums a song (p. 45).

Thus, Karnad has made appropriate use of music to strengthen the effect. In 'Nagamandala', the man asks the musicians to occupy their seats. (p. 26)

6.7. Announcement

Announcement means an act of making something publicly either in spoken or written form. In classical theatre, the Sutradhar used to announce the staging of a play to the people and in royal court the entrance of the king or
any dignitary was announced properly to make people alert. Thus, it appears, announcement was part of royal etiquette failing which the announcer may be punished.

In all the plays of Karnad, the announcement is made in different manners. In 'Naga mandala', the Man introduces the audience to the play, e.g.

"Man : Wait ! Don't go. Please.

(Thinks.)

I suppose I have no choice.

(To the audience.)

So now you know why this play is being done. I have no choice. Bear with me, please. As you can see, it is a matter of life and death for me." (p. 26)

In 'Hayavadana', the Bhagavata is the announcer — the Sutradhar — , who starts the play with invocation to Ganesha and tells the story as follows :

"Bhagavata : Two friends there were

— one mind, one heart — "

(p. 76)
'Tughlaq' being a historical play, requires an announcer to call the attention of the subject:

"Announcer: Attention! Attention! The Warrior in the Path of God, the Defender of the Word of the Prophet, the Friend of the Khalif, the Just, His Merciful Majesty, Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq."

(p. 148-149)

In 'The Fire and the Rain', the Actor-Manager acts as the announcer or the Sutradhar of the play.

6.8. The Audience

As already discussed, the audience has got prominence in Karnad's play. Directly or
indirectly, theatre is meant for the audience and so no play can be thought or staged without audience. The whole genre of drama is a complex network of the actors and the audience as the living organs and the stage, the costumes, etc. as the non-living ones. And there is reciprocity of the actors and the audience in that the whole performance is enlivened gradually.

Karnad's audience not only views or enjoys his plays but also participates in the plays as and when needed. The crowd in 'Nagamandala', for example, has a vital role to play without which the story can't get completed. When Rani gets ready to take her oath holding the red-hot iron, the crowds are disappointed (p. 56). Sometimes the crowd falls silent on seeing the typical condition of Rani (p. 58) and lastly she acknowledges the indebtedness to the audience (p. 65).

In 'Hayavadana' too Karnad has not ignored the audience (cf. p. 76, 77), although its active participation is not there.
'Tughlaq' starts with the populace in "the yard in front of the Chief Court of Justice in Delhi. A crowd of citizens — mostly Muslims, with a few Hindus here and there." (p. 147). On hearing the announcement, the audience is tense (p. 148). Again in Scene Eleven, there is a crowd of citizens (p. 208).

In 'The Fire and the Rain', the audience has participated in the play as follows:

"Arvasu: He was killed —
(Consternation in the assembly.
Paravasu silences the crowds.)

Paravasu: At whose hands?
(Long Pause.)

Arvasu: At the hands of his son.
(The gathering breaks out into commotion.)"

(p. 38)

The active participation of the audience in 'The Fire and the Rain' takes place
when Vishwarupa and Vritra both dance and embrace each other:

"The audience reacts with pleasure, Indra watches from a distance, then talks to the audience." (p. 53)

At the end, the crowds overwhelm with joy seeing that it has started raining:

"Crowds: What's that? — You smell that?
— Yes. Yes. The smell of wet earth. Of fresh rains. It's raining. Somewhere. Nearby. The air is blossoming with the fragrance of earth. It's raining — It's raining — Rain! The rain!"

(p. 62)