CHAPTER - V

CHAPTER V

ACTOR - AUDIENCE **PARTICIPATION**

This chapter explicates the actor-audience participation from the viewpoint of different theories of the west, Environmental theatre concept and its relevance in the *bhdgavatha* performances of Andhra Pradesh. The basic aim of audience participation is to create a shared experience between participants and performers as in the ritual performances of aboriginal culture. The task has become a serious matter during the postmodern age in theatre performance realm.

Theatre is an experience not only for those who act in it but also for those who see it. It is like other experiences in daily life- like men falling in love with beautiful women, attending a cricket match, reading a favorite writer a novel or a books and even attending festival ritual etc., . All the above instances require personal presence and each event changes **from** moment to moment as we pass by or encounter series of shifting impressions. Jones, an American critic and scenic designer, presented it in a moderate manner, **"All** that has ever been is in this moment; all that will be is in this moment. Both are meeting in one live flame, in this unique instant of time. This is Drama; this is theatre- to be aware of the new" (quoted in Wilson 1976:2-3).

In the west, theatrologists from Arataud to Schechner explored actor - audience relationship and have come out with successful theories which have rejuvinated the Euro - American theatre. Actor - audience relationship (Kirby 1969; Hanna 1983; Sechechner 1971b) was a novel concept in 1968 onward for avant - garde theatrical movement, but now it occupies common place.

5.1. ACTOR - AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIP: A DISCOURSE

Styan, in his book *The Elements of Drama* (1985:231-255) gives an analysis of audience participation in the dramatic text and performance. According to him, every suggestion

on the stage/text makes a different impression among the audience/reader from time to time. "The dramatist will always be asking himself how imaginatively, emotionally or intellectually he can take him, and to what depth he dare explore. Audience participation is a problem envisaged in the play's inception"(Ibid.:236). Where as Bertolt Brecht's idea is that impressions created by suggestions may help the audience to identify themselves with the actor on the stage, resulting in *Katharsis*. The function of epic theatre is to detach such identification and alienate the audience from the action. He uses audience participation as a device to communicate and demystify the theatre and thus to achieve the alienation effect (Ibid.:236). The above work shows that audience participation has become a serious matter in Euro-America. It is used simultaneously as an inclusive and exclusive element in a performance. Awasthi (1960) stated, "Some other minor conventions are the enactment of the scenes in the midst of the audience for achieving a closer contact with the people or for producing a greater effect; improvization by the actors, both in the spoken word and in dramatic action, repetition of speeches in several styles and patterns and addressing them directly to the audience. Carrying to the acting area some essential properties by the actors themselves in full view of the audience is also common" (Ibid.:21).

5.2. WESTERN THEORIES ON ACTOR - AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION AND RELATIONSHIP

5.2(a). Spectatorship

Popovici in his article *Is the Stage - Audience Relationship : A Form of Dialogue* (1984), writes, "From the spectator's point of view, the performance is everything offered to the eye" (Ibid.:115). Whatever is offered to the eye has not only an objective and non - mediated character but also a semiotic character, inner structure, and also pragmatic significance. This means that everything in the performance is a presence in itself and the representation of something else. Therefore, the spectator sees and hears only a part of what he has to understand. Marinis (1976,1983, 1987) suggested that, "we can speak of this dramaturgy of the spectator in two ways, both of which are already grammatically present in the double

meaning (objective and subjective) of the possessive 'of'.(l) We can speak of a dramaturgy of the spectator in a passive or, more precisely, objective, sense in which we conceive of the audience as a dramaturgical object, a mark or target for the actions/operations of the the director, the performers, and, if there is one, the writer (2). We can also speak of dramaturgy of the spectator in an active or subjective sense, referring to the various receptive operations/actions that an audience carries out: perception, interpretation, aesthetic appreciation, memorization, emotive and intellectual response,etc [...]. These operations/actions of the audience's members are to be considered truly dramaturgical (not just metaphorically) since it is only through these actions that the performance text achieves its fullness, becoming realized in all its semantic and communicative potential" (1987:100-1).

5.2(b). *Theatrical Relationship*

The theatrical relationship is the relationship between performance and spectator. It manipulates the actors and audience in definite semiotic strategies. Thus the performance gives rise in each spectator a range of definite transformations both intellectual and emotional. Marinis's opinion about the performer and the spectator is "...the two fundamental and inseparable dimensions (like two sides of a coin) which together constitute the performance event and the 'theatrical relationship' " (Marinis 1987:101). Theatrical relationship is the relation of performance and spectator. It is a manipulation of the audience by the performance. Further he elaborated, "I do not mean manipulation in the ideological sense which the term traditionally implied before its use in semiotics. That is to say, I do not mean to refer exclusively to cases where the deliberate and explicit aim of the producers of a performance is to persuade or seduce. I wish instead to bring to light an essential and intrinsic aspect of the performance/spectator relationship as such" (Ibid.:101-2).

The theatrical relationship demands active cooperation of the spectator. The spectator is a relatively autonomous emotive effect and can only be truly actualized by the audience. According to Bharata's *Natyasastra,* the good *Prekshakas* are "Persons who are undisturbed, clean, imaginative, sympathetic and unbiased" (Appa Rao 1967:130). They do not have any

part to play in the performance except enjoying the emotions evoked by the character on the stage, ultimately participating in the performance.

5.2(c). George Mounin Theatre Communication Relationship:

George Mounin, a French linguist in 1969, challenged the classification of performance - spectator bond as a communication relationship. His challenges are based on genuine communication of linguistic exchange. He argues "....in the theatre, where the information - giving process is unidirectional and the participants' roles fixed: 'There is nothing of all this in the theatre, in which the sender - actors remain always such, as do the receiver - spectators' " (Elam 1980:33). He represented his idea with the following equation.

$$SENDERS \xrightarrow[\substack{STIMULUS \\ Performance}]{} RECEIVER \longrightarrow RESPONSE$$

$$Code \qquad\qquad Spectator$$

Fig 5.1 Performer-spectator bond equation

(after Elam 1980:33)

Mounin's conception of theatrical performance is a stimulus response model in which one way signals initiate number of more or less autonomous reflexes. Which do not communicate in the same axes. There are several objections made in this model. According to Elam "Mounin's view of the actor-audience transaction appears to be based on the weakest forms of bourgeois spectacle where a passive audience may indeed obediently provide predetermined and automatic responses to a predicable set of signals (many a West End or Broadway comedy has operated successfully on this principle). Not only are the audience's signals, in any vital form of theatre, an essential contribution to the formation and reception of the performance text - and indeed various post - war performers and directors such as Becks and Richard Schechner have extended the bounds of the performance to include the audience explicity - but the spectator, by virtue of his very patronage of the performance, can be said to *initiate* the communicative circuit"(1980:34).

Franco Ruffni's reply to Mounin's challenge was quoted by Elam (1980) "If the sender and receiver know each other's code, it is not at all necessary, in order for communication to take place, that the two codes coincide, nor that they translate each other's message exactly, nor that the two-way communication occur along the same channel" (Ibid.:34). The challenge thrown by Mounin "should be taken up with care: he furnishes a sober warning regarding the difficulty of defining the actor-audience transaction and, still more, regarding the danger of viewing the performance as a 'language' directly analogous to speech and thus a suitable object for analytic models taken straight from linguistics" (Ibid.:35).

Theatrical communication is based on the performance that brings about the multiplication of communication factors i.e, code and decode, of the consequences of the multiplication of components and systems. It is not possible to talk of a single theatrical message. The spectator will interpret these messages into different components such as theatrical, dramatic and cultural codes at his disposal. These features and inter communication between spectators is one of the major distinguishing feature of live theatre. Barthes cybernetic machine theory is the best example in this regard. His cybernetic theory says "What is theatre? A sort of cybernetic machine. When not working, this machine is hidden behind a curtain; but as soon as it is revealed it begins to transmit a certain number of messages in your direction. These messages are distinctive in that they are simultaneous and yet have different rhythms. At every point in a performance you are receiving (at the same second) six or seven items of information (from the scenery,the costuming, the lighting, the position of the actors, their gestures, their modes of playing,their language), but some of these items remain fixed (this is true to scenery) while others change (speech and gestures)" (Barthes 1974:29).

Above cybernetic theory of Barthes is purely about the system of proscenium theatre communication which preserves the concept of mystified theatre. But Schechner's demystified environmental theatre is a cybernetic machine not hidden in any curtain - which transmits a certain number of messages simultaneously from beginning to end. The cybernetic theory is an example of linguistic/semiotic learning that only deals with the scientific study of the
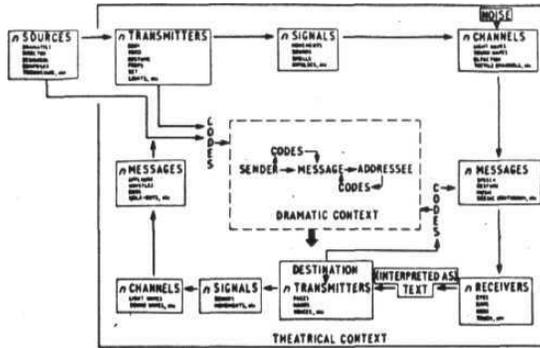
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Fig 5.2 A Simplified Thearitical Communication Model
(after Elam 1980:38)

communicative efficacy of an enactment. He tried to prove in his 'six axioms' of Environmen-
tal theatre, "All production speak their own language". This theory shows total rejection of
Proscenium theatre and its communication process and theatrical language. He created his
own theatrical language adopted from Indian theatre under the four heads:Suprasegmental,
Paralinquistics, Proxemics, Kinesics.

The actor - spectator transaction within the theatrical context is mediated by a dramatic
context **in** which a fictional speaker addresses a fictional listener. It is this dramatic com-
municational situation which is extended to the spectator and this peculiar obliqueness of
the actor-audience relationship must be accounted for in any model (Elam 1980:38). For
by the director in any model, a simplified representation of this situation can be seen in his
diagram (fig 5.2). This model, "while undoubtedly reductive and mechanistic, serves at least
as an emblem of the multi-levelled character of the theatrical communicational exchange"
(Ibid.:38).

5.2(d). *Taxonomy Of Theatrical Communication*

The concept of communication is fundamental in theatre semiotics. Daniela (1984) writes,
"....the Semiotic of communication has to establish the various **parameters** which occur in
receiving theatrical messages, such as the proxemic ones (audience's front **or lateral position
that influences the sign selection** and **combination capacity),** Kinesic ones (the variations

imposed by placing the stage in the middle of the hall or by the actors' coming in and out from the audience) as well as the cultural, ideological and rhetorical ones" (Daniela:72). The semiotic modeling of theatrical communication has to provide more than a linguistic description, that means: it has to investigate all the semiotic codes, the merging of visual and auditive iconicity with text symbolism, the specific combinatorics of different sign systems. By its informational polyphony and high sign density, theatre represents a privileged field of semiotic investigation (Ibid.:75). While describing theatrical communication from the viewpoint of Jacobson's communication theory and Peiree's triadic model, he defined semiotically the main non-linguistic sign systems, which are working together in creation of theatrical significances as follows (table 5.1).

Table 5.1

NON-LINGUISTIC SIGN MODEL

Sign-referent link	Semiotic code	Semiotic level	Semiotic dominant	Communicative function
Iconcity				
Image	set gesture mimicry	SEMANTIC	visual	referential expressive expressive
Diagram	set costume	SEMANTIC	visual	referential referential
Metaphor	mask		auditive	expressive or Phatic
	music		metanlinguistic	
Indexicality	gestuality kinesics proxemics lighting	PRAGAMATIC	visual	expressive expressive expressive conative
Symbolism	music lighting	SEMANTIC	auditive visual	poetical poetical

(after Daniela 1984:76)

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Theatrical communication characterizes plurality of code and sign in semiotic (linguistic: narrative and discursive, and non - linguistic: gesture and musical semiotics, kinesics, proxemics etc.) (Ibid.:72). This system is akin to all classical and semi classical theatres of India.

5.2(e). **Closed Performances** and Open Performances

Closed performances are genre - based theatres like the political theatre, children's theatre, women's theatre, gay theatre, street theatre, musical dance theatre, mime, and so on. "Closed performance (Marinis 1987:103) anticipate a very precise receiver and demand well - defined types of 'competence' (encyclopedia, ideological etc.)for their 'correct reception'. In these theatres, the performance comes off to the extent that the real audience corresponds to the performance in the derived way.

The other end of the continuum is the open performance. Open performance make a point of addressing itself to a receiver who is neither too precise, nor too clearly defined in terms of their encyclopedia, intertexual or ideological competence (Ibid.: 103). In this kind of theatre, the performance will leave the spectator more or less free, though still deciding the extent to which the freedom ought to be controlled "where it needs to be encouraged, where directed, and where it needs to be transformed into free interpretive speculation" (Eco 1979:58).

Most of the experimented theatres form of historical avant - garde and are based on open performance. Many non - Western theatre traditions have more interpretive freedom to the audience. Classical Indian theatre, Kathakali, Balinese dance - theatre, Kabuki and even the noh play demand varied levels of understanding and enjoyment. Schechner's environmental theatre explored audience - spectator relation on this ground, though environmental performance are intended to make shared experience between the performer and participants as in the pre-dramatic rituals.

5.3. SCHECHNER'S EXPLORATION OF AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

Theatre experimentation period in Euro - America began in the fifties and ended by the mid -seventies. Schechner, in his essay *The Rise and fall of the (American) Avant - Garde,* (1980) discussed the history and the reasons for the decline given in detail. Experimental environmental theatre's major attention is to explore actor - audience participation. "Experiments in environmental theatre and in audience participation (even to the dissolution of the audience altogether by Grotowski), have been the major avenues of meta - aesthetic in Euro - American theatre... They are individualistic and modest, but clearly connections can be seen between them and Ramalila and Yoqi Easter" (Schechner 1983:303).

5.3(a). Audience Participation

Many people think that participation is a new phenomena and it is new to them, even if it is not new to the theatre. The same people consciously or unconsciously participate in saluting, standing for the national anthem at sporting matches, cheering, and agreeing to umpire for a few innings of cricket matches, at market yards etc. "In fact participation in theatrical event is a very old, widespread practice. It has been limited in our culture for several hundred years for a variety of reasons" (Schechner 1971:73). Many in theatre dislike greatly anticipating or accepting a rough or lengthy performance. Thus people rejected participation in theatre, they were even uncomfortable about inclusion of the audience in space because their presence is visible to each other and their deployment an important part of performance.

According to Schechner's "participation means taking part in the play: Dancing, playing a scene with the performers, engaging fellow spectators in conversation as part of the play, removing or exchanging clothing, or any of the many other kinds of physical involvement possible" (Ibid.:73). Theatre is a peak experience, with a speciality to differ from other kinds of life. It comes from it and blends back to it. Thus one should admit that without audience participation no performance is possible.

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Participation is a way of trying to humanize relationships between performers and spectators. This process far transcends what goes on in a theatre. But there is no better laboratory for trying out ways of responsibility than in the intense, microcosmic space of a theatre.

The performance - audience relationship is a dialogue. It is true that the performance and spectators are seen from the perspective of inter subjectivity. Without performance - spectator relationship there is no aesthetic nature. Here two partners are involved in the performance i.e performer-spectator. In this enterprise, only one of them takes an active part (actor), the other partner (spectator) is silent. Here actor - spectator relationship comes down to one-way relationship. To separate the audience from the performance is not, only aı. artificial operation but also an error. The performance exists only togetner with an audience and actors. The audience exists only because he participates in a performance. Thus the performer and audience are both elements in the performance entity.

The theatre event is a set of related transactions. The theatrical event includes audience, performers, text, sensory stimuli, and house personnel. The theatrical event ranges from non - matrix performance to highly formalized traditional theatre. In traditional theatre, all characters are fictional in fictional situations in a fictional world. The spectators and actors do not transact/interact with each other in fictional theatre, instead they keep the social distance.

Schechner's intention is to reject the conventional aesthetic of the fictional theatre and to make a new convention based on various types of sociological transactions. He emphasizes (1968) the primary transactions in a theatrical event that are among performers, among members of the audience, and between performers and audience. To elaborate this...

5.3(b). *Transactions among Performers*

Transactions among the performers begin during the rehearsals and continue throughout all performances. Schechner rejected the Stanislavsky oriental training system which gives emphasis to smooth transaction among performers. This theory covers the principles and

artistic success of a play which is directly related to the transactions among performers. That is, if transaction among the performers is perfected, the production of the play will be artistically successful.

5.3(c). Transaction among the Audience

After happenings came to light serious attention was paid the experimental theatre movement. Until then, transaction among the audience was not seriously concerned in the theatre performance. In Happenings and environmental theatre, the audience are invited to participate in the enactment. In the modern realistic proscenium theatre, the audience got special attention. They are treated with royal hospitality in the theatre. In these, theatre has a definite ethics and code of conduct. Audience were allowed to enter and go out at a particular time and are allowed to sit anywhere in their allotted seats. In that situation, there are hardly any chances for interaction during the performance. Scheduler's environmental theatre does not belong to this category and also does not have any such restrictions. Sometimes, it is evenimpossible to distinguish spectators from performers in his experimental environmental theatre. He says that (1971:74) theatre is a peak of experience and significantly different from other kinds of life. But it is not separate from other kinds of life: It comes from them and blends back into them. To work from this perspective means to accept the audience as a potentially, and to admit that without audience collaboration, no performance is possible . The performers have special training for transactions whereas the spectators attend theatre without any preparations. Such audience are "difficult to mobilize and, once mobilized, even more difficult to control" (Schechner 1968:44).

5.3(d). Transactions Between Performers and Audience

It is a traditional transaction. Any action on the stage evokes direct reaction among the audience. According to Schechner, "the 'best'[1] audience is one in which harmonic evocations are presented up to, but not beyond, the point where the performers become distracted. The traditional theatre barely explores a part of the full range of audience-performer reactions" (Ibid.: 45).

5.4. APPRECIATION OF INDIAN RASA THEORY: SCHECHNER VIEW

In his book *Performance Cirucmstances from Ramalila to Avant-garde* (1983), Schechner admits that:

> ...according to the *Natyasastra*-and many Indian performances of today- the enjoyment of the performance is shared between the performers and the spectators, or as I shall say from their point, between the preparers and partakers. *Rasa* happens where the experience of the preparers and partakers meet. Each, using their skills that have to be learned and that are not easy, move towards the other. The experience of the performance is like that of a banquet where the cooks and servers must know how to prepare and serve, but the diner must know how to eat. And, as in Asian banquets in general, there is more food than that can possibly be consumed: a great part of the skill is in knowing how and what to select for any given occasion...A successful performance is one where both the levels of skill (preparers') and understanding (partakers') are high and equal. If the partaker expects more than the preparer can deliver, the performance is inadequate; if the preparer does more than the partaker can savor, the performance is wasted. Low skill matched by low understanding is preferable to an imbalance. Perfect *rasa* is a meeting point at a very high level of preparer and partaker (1983:110-111).

Rasa is the mutuality, sharing, co-creation of preparers and partakers. He further said **that both** performers and partakers are transported and no one is transformed. With aid of

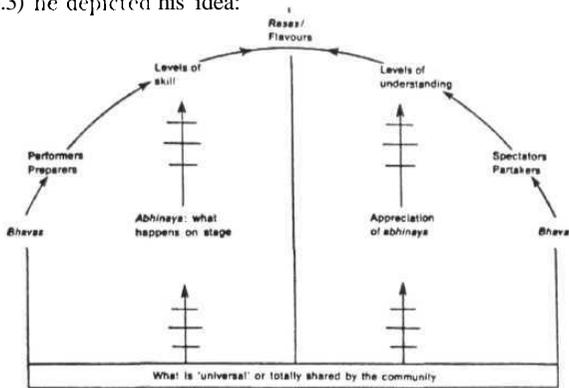the diagram (fig 5.3) he depicted his idea:

Fig 5.3 Preparer and Partakers relationship according to Naya Sastra

(after Scheduler 1983:111)

It is this communication between actor and spectators is essential for evoking *rasa*. Even sometimes this communication is broken ,but it does not effect *rasa* much. Strictly speaking all *bhāgavata* performance comes under this category. Structurally, Scheduler borrowed this audience participation concept from Oriental theatre and applied it to occidental experimental theatre and made theories. Elaborate studies and exercises of his experiments were published in his book on Environmental theatre.

5.5. INDIAN PERFORMANCE THEORY: ACTOR-AUDIENCE PERCEPTION ACCORDING TO NATYA SASTRA

5.5(a). *Theory of Rasa*

Rasa theory is the backbone of Indian aesthetics. The aesthetic pleasure evoked by the audience through the actor's histrionic expressions and sentiments is called *Rasa*. In *Natyasastra,* Bharata dedicated IV & V chapters to *rasa* and *bhava*. He narrated beautiful episodes to trace the origin of *natya veda* in chapter II.

At the beginning of *treetaayuga*, people were leading mixed lives full of misery and happiness subjecting themselves to the elemental passions of lust, greed, rancor and misery. This

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caused much uneasiness to Indra. So, India and the other gods approached the creator of the universe, and requested him to create the fifth *veda*. Through his meditation, Brahma created the fifth veda called *natya veda*. He taught *natya veda* to Bharata as desired by Indra. With his disciples, bharata produced his first production asura paraajaya. This production was disturbed by the demons during the performance and they who disappeared from the audience under the leadership of Viruupaaksha. Indra got angry for the disturbance and appraised Brahma. Then Brahma ordered Visavakarma, a celestial architect, to construct *natya griha* or theatre and he constructed theatre. Later, Brahma enquired the cause of disturbance and Viruupaaksha, accused him of creating *natya veda* for the enjoyment of gods and for insulting demons. Brahma explained to him the purpose of creation of *natya veda*- "I have created natya veda to represent the actions, ideologies and genealogies of both the gods and demons" (Appa Rao 1967:10). It does not stop with narrating the story of either the demons or gods. It presents the activities of gods, demons, kings, saints and commonmen and therefore it is to be called *trailokyaanukarana*- imitation of the happenings in the three worlds. And also presents the nature of the world in all its aspects with it pleasures and pains through the medium of *abhinaya*- histrionic expressions. It promotes strength and peace of mind and gives enjoyment to all, besides giving them information.

The various actions performed will be instructive to one and all, creating *rasa* through the media of *bhava* and emotions. It gives relief to those who are in grief, enlivens others and finally provides reputation to those who enact the play. The ultimate aim of this performance is to evoke rasa among actors and audience.

Rasa theory has a strong performance orientation. It takes into account the performer - spectator interactions and their mutual reciprocal relationship. It supports both actor - audience to explicate pleasure. In chapter V bharata clearly mentioned that *rasas* are produced in the minds of sympathetic audience as a result of the configurations of determinants,consequents and transitory emotions of actors.

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5.5(b). Qualifications for Audience

According to rasa theory - rasa is not experienced by all, only few people can have it. It also stated that the spectator's qualities viz. a clear mind, unadulterated, by un baised thoughts should sympathetically direct towards witnessing the performance. These spectators are called *Sahridayas*- the refined or *sympathetic*. The *Sahridayas* are those who are mentally prepared to receive emotions expressed by the actors. When a *Sahridaya* experiences the intensity of the emotions, he ultimately forgets himself. In this explicit experience, he overcomes his own personality and completely identifies himself with the actual state of the determinants. This state is called *Saadhaaraniikarana* or universalization. It is only possible with the sahridaya - spectator, who is quick in perception and responsive to emotions created by the actors. In a true sense, this is the climax in the audience mind , filled with happiness. This state of *rasa* experience is transcendal and audiences attain eternal or supreme bliss. The same cause effects the actor too when the spectator appreciates through his response. Thus participation occurs both in actors and in audience according to Indian aesthetics.

Natyasastra enumerated eight rasas. Those are *Sringara* (amorous); *Haasya* (humorous); *Karuna* (pathetic); *Raudra* (furious); *Vira* (valorous); *Bhayaanaka* (horrific); *Bibhatsa* (re-pugnant) and *Adbutha* (wondrous). The ninth *rasa santa* was added later (fig 5.4). The rasas are evoked by the actors to communicate the messages in the text to the audience. Thus, these rasas are primarily concerned in the Indian situation. It is a culminative state produced by various movements, gestures and emotions embedded in the actions of the play. It depends on the audience attitude and receptive power and the depth of their emotional experience. In the strict sense, the evocation and enjoyment of *rasa* is directly related to the receptive capacity of the spectator.

5.5(c). Rasa Theory and Classical Theatre Performances

Rasa theory is the monopoly of Indian classical performances and the attempt to trans-plant it into any other tradition in the conceptual or structural level, has not succeeded so far. It requires a long period of training for actors to produce rasas, and to appreciate them, also it requires a long period of training. The audience is specially trained to enjoy classical arts from childhood onwards. Since *Natya* is a composite art, the power of reception varies from individual to individual. Mastery of all fine arts is essential for full enjoyment of a performance in its mise-en-scene. Strictly speaking, classical theatre follows Bharata's instructions mentioned in *Natyasastra.* Therefore it is meant for highly educated people in the society, who know the sanskrit language and semiotics of *Natyasastra.* Such audience only can anticipate and participate in the classical theatre performance.

5.6. ACTOR - AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION: REQUIREMENT IN B-HAGAVATHAMS

Actor-audience participation in *bhāgavathams* is not common like in other theatre forms of India. It purely depends on the nature and environment of the performances. *Bhāgavata* performances are a part and parcel of society. The performance acts as a shaman and is treated as a therapy in a clinical sense. For instance, in *Prahalada charitham* of *Melattur bhāgavata mela,* When Lord Laxminarshimha appears on stage, all the spectators/devotees stand up and worship with devotion (fig 5.5). In a theological sense, the characters are con-sidered the incarnation of the transcendal god. It is pure belief of the spectator/devotees who feel that He will save them from all the worldly problems. There was many an occasion when people of the audience approached god and touched his feet physically. In another instance, Yellama vesham in *Chindu bhagavatham* is a local deity. Before the performance and during the performance all actors and spectator worship her with devotion. Nataraja Ramakrishna was present during one of the performances, worshipping Yellamma deity (fig 5.6). *Bhāmā Kalāpam* of *Toorpu bhagavatham* is intended to satisfy the village deity Paidy thalli and is performed during festivals during major disasters in the village such as contagious dis-

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eases, droughts or floods; the *bhagavatham* is enacted to please such powers and thus escape **from** disasters. Like this there are many incidents that can be observed in *bhdgavathams*. Therefore it is deep-rooted faith in the central motif that functions therapeutically. This spiritual communication channel between performer and participants is almost equal to the communication between god and devotees. It is very much liked to religious canons. **It** is **true that when** people do not believe in a super human power, spiritual communication and participation is not possible.

In each region of Andhra, *bhdgavata* performances vary according to geographical, social and cultural modes. The performance tradition also differs from one place to another. By and large, all *bhāgavata* performances of Andhra are treated as divine bliss. On every occasion of major festivals, ceremonies and marriages these performances are enacted in villages. It underlies the customs and beliefs of the people. Thus *bhdgavata* performances not only serve ritual, and religious causes, but also aesthetically they are very dominant.

5.7. IN SEARCH OF ACTOR-AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION:

5.7(a). Kuchipudi bhagavatham and Melattur bhdgavatha mela

In the true sense, there is no pure classical theatre (play house) like *Kudiyattam* of Kerala that followed pure *Natyasastra* treatise in Andhra Pradesh. Nevertheless, one can trace some major characterstic features from *Natyasastra*. For instance, *Kuchipudi bhagavatham* and *Melattur bhdgavata mela* strictly follow the *Natyasastra* in terms of *abhinaya* part. Therefore, *Kuchipudi bhagavatham* and *Melattur bhagavatam mela* require long periods of training for both actor and audience to experience *rasa* or emotion. Because both the above *bhāgavathams* are rich in mudras, gestures, body language and facial expressions, the actor requires intensive training for about 5 to 6 years to fulfill the above requirements. If the same audience repeatedly watches the performance, they can understand the emotions(rasa) **and** abhinaya of **the** actor.

5.7(b). *Toorpu bhāgavatham* and *Chindu bhāgavatham*

Toorpu bhagavatham, Chindu bhagavatham are dominant in drama sequences. Actor - audience participation in both forms varies from one to the other. The performance style of *Toorpu bhagavatham* stands in between classical and folk; it can be treated as traditional theatre. The audience participation is not so as in *Chindu bhagavatham.* In the literary sense, participation is evoked both ritually and aesthetically. Since these performances are performed by the villagers for the villagers they are shaped in such a way that everybody can enjoy and participate in these performances. More participation is made possible only with the presence of *Vidushaka* (buffoon) (fig 4.11). The Vidushaka often tells jokes and interacts with the audience physically. As the entire performance is based on Krishna-satyabham lovelore which is known to them, the audience watch the performance with interest without any disturbance. *Toorpu bhagavatham* is full of musical interludes. In *Bhdmd Kalāpam,* the main mridanga player Dupam Suryalingam while playing the mridangam in between the presented Jatis on the mridangam.(fig 3.4) After that one of the audience got up and offered him Rs. 116/- for his excellence. Sometimes the mridangist can share text with performers. In another incident, in between the scence, Vidushaka came from the acting place and asked for a beddi from a spectator and enquire of the impact of the performance. He sat with them for sometime and chit chated and again he resumed his role in the stage. Therefore the entire performance continues very casually with dance, music, jokes and dialogue to elicit participation. In the case of *Chindu bhāgavatham,* the participation is not only elicited through dance, music, jokes and dialogues before utals after the performances and bears some ritual significance.

5.8. COMMUNICATION VEHICLE IN BHAGAVATHAMS

Dialogue is one of the most important vehicles in actor - audience communication. In a performance communication,efficacy is directly related to its audience reception. In chemical terminology, it is a reversible reaction,(fig 5.7) other actors communicate to the audience, they respond and send their reactions back in the form of physical and vocal applause.

Actor $\rightleftharpoons$ Audience

Fig 5.7 Actor-Audience Communication Vehicle

Sometimes in traditional and folk theatre (*Toorpu bhdgavatham* and *Chindu bhdgavatham)* they request actors to repeat the dialogues, songs etc., by saying 'once more'.

The above communication channel is common in all *bhdgavathams* of Andhra. Here, the actor's tools are his body, voice and emotions. An intelligent actor uses his body language to produce emotions and expressions. These emotions and expressions directly pass into the audience mind and evoke rasa. For instance, in *Kuchipudi bhdgavatham* and *Melattur bhdgavatha Mela,* actors communicate *abhinaya* through psycho-physical exercise. These psycho-physical actions are called body language. The performer needs to bend his body, eyes and facial expression impressively in order to communicate the text to the audience. This needs perfection and intensive training of both actors and audience in communication vehicle.

Avant-garde theatrologists highly explored body language in their pioneer works. Brecht's epic theatre propagates the concept of new non-verbal theatre language. Walter Benjamin's opinion on this work is, "the gesture is the material and epic theatre its practical utiliza-ion"(quoted in Elam 1984:69). Antonin Artaud dreamed of "pure theatrical language" freed from the tyranny of verbal language. A language of sign, gesture and attitudes having an ideographic value as they exist in certain unperverted pantomimes" (Ibid.:39). All the above directly or indirectly influenced classical Oriental theatre, whereas Schechner's experimen-al environmental theatre and its open rehearsals, were directly influenced by traditional theatres of India, particularly as one can see, in the *bhdgavathams* of Andhra Pradesh.

5.9. TRANSACTION OF BHAGAVATHAMS

In *Natyasastra* there is no direction that exclusively deals with audience participation as it is relevant today, but in Chapter XXXVII there is a reference to the quality of the audience.

In *bhāgavathams*, audience participation can be divided into three components (1). aesthetic participation; (2). ritual participation; (3).Devotional participation. *Bhagavata* performances deal with stories taken from the life history of Sri Krishna, who is considered a personification of God. The stories lay emphasis on his romantic episodes, enacting the relationship between Sri Krishna and his spouse Satyabhama.

Among the *bhāhagavatams*, *Kuchipudi bhdgavatham* and *Melattur bhagavata mela* have little variation as far as audience participation is concerned. All *bhdgavathams* are concerned with ritual elements even though the performer and audience belong to two different realms. Some of the scenes in the performance occur in the midst of the audience, enabling participation to take place. For instance, In *Prahalada charitham* of *bhagavata mela* in the last act, Lord Narshimha appears on the stage breaking through the pillar. Hiranyakashipu immediately jumps into the audience (fig 5.8). All the spectators get up and start worshipping Lord Narshimha (fig. 5.5). In *Kuchipudi bhāgavatham*, audience participation is psychological. For instance, in *Bhdmd Kaldpam* in the first scene, Radha awaits Krishna's arrival (fig 5.9). During the performance Radha will look towards the audience expecting Krishna while the spectators think that Radha is looking at them. In this way, the audience participates in this episode. Besides this, audience also appreciate the actor who portray female character in the performance and act as female (fig 5.10). In *Toorpu bhdgavatam* and *Chindu bhdgavatam* audience participation is very much seen in each episode. Most of the time the spectators get inspired by the performer's actions, dialogues and dances and on many occasion with music. In *Toorpu bhdgavatam* and *Chindu bhdgavatam* the concept of mystification is unknown. The performers, before and after their roles in the play, spend time sitting with the audience to witness the remaining scenes, even sometimes to share jokes with the audience

to make them laugh during the performance (figs 5.10 and 5.12). The symbolic interaction between the performers and participants in these performances happens in the form of a give and take process. Participants even sometimes donate money - usually rupees - to the performers during performance. For instance, in a *Toorpu bhāgavatham* audience impressed by the Satyabhama's action and also **Mridangam players,offered** 116 **Rs/-** to both the actor and the mridangam artist. In *Toorpu bhdgavatam* and *Chindu bhāgavatam*, Vidushaka uses vulgar colloquial language to elicit more participation. Audience never thinks of it as a disturbance. Rather they participate in the scene.

5.10. PARTICIPATION THROUGH THE PHYSICAL STRUCTURE

The physical structure of the *bhdgavata* theatre shows that the audience can have direct access to the stage. As there were no permanent fixed seats, the audience and the characters entered the stage through the audience in all *bhāgavathams* during olden days. But now this practice is not in vogue because of the availability of space and socio - cultural barriers. Thus a special entrance path for the actors through the audience is cleared and the characters enter the performance space. This kind of special entrance and the structure of the traditional performing space prove the transaction between performers and audience, and it was common to most of the *bhdgavata* performances.

The more environmental a performance is, the more intense the participation and also transactions in *bhdgavathams*. Schechner observed on Indian Performance, "If some theatres need an audience to hear it, and some need spectators to see it, Indian theatre needs partakers to savoir it" (Schechner 1983:110). Though *Kuchipudi bhdgavatam* and *Melattur bhdgavata mela* are considered as classical theatre, and *Toorpu bhdgavatam* and *Chindu bhdgavatam* are considered as traditional and folk theatre, the participation is the same through physical and psychological involvement unlike in the avant - garde theatre experiments. In *Toorpu bhdgavatam* and *Chindu bhdgavatam,* the participation is dominantly through physical and less psychological Unlike in the classical theatre.

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5.11 PARTICIPATION THROUGH DUPLICITY OF ACTORS

Audience watching a performance of *Bhāmā Kalapam* of *Kuchipudi bhdgavatham* or *Pra-haladacharitham* of *Melattur bhgavatha Mela* with their favorite actors is an all time per-formance in a state of dual perception. For instance, Vedanta Satyanarayana Sharma in Satyabhama role and Natarajan in Lilavathi's (fig 5.9, 5.11) role present a dual perception in the audience's mind. The audience are watching Satyabhama and Lilavathi as characters in the story and also the performances of their favorite actors. Elderly people even post-mortem the interesting episodes and appreciate the roles played by the actors. According to Vedanta Satyanarayana Sharma, "After the *Bhdmd Kalapam* performance is over some peo-ple (*sahridayas*) came into the green room and hugged me and appreciated my performance, though I was in female costumes and could not remove them until they left me" (person-al communication). This duplicity acquires great theatrical effect in the lbhagavatharns. Aesthetics of Indian theatre has dealt with this problem of dual perception and actor-role relationship in explaining theatrical communication and perception of theatrical events.

5.12. PARTICIPATION THROUGH HUMOROUS SITUATIONS

In *Kuchipudi bhdgavatham,* Madhavi and Madahvudu play humorous roles besides vidushaka (fig 5.13). In *Melattur bhdgavata mela* Katikaran or buffoon provides humor through his external decorations. He creates humor with a large nose, protruding belly and curved stick. His physical appearance creates the humor. When sutradhara provides the lead, the vidushaka disturbs the play with his humorous comments on situations. This kind of role appears in all *bhagavathams* of Andhra, with regional variations in their costumes and external decorations. These characters enter the stage from corners of the performance space any time during the performance. When they feel that the audience needs entertainment, they contradict sutradhara and provide interruption with loose talk, fun, jokes and willful ironic thrusts. All feel that it is part of performance; the audience never gets angry. Rather, they participate in the event. Vidushaka has total liberty to have a direct conversation with the audience and with other actors in the play. He can make fun of anybody including the

main character i.e God, King, Minister, Hero, Heroine etc., he even makes fun of himself. He is to remain alert all through the performance. He should be aware of text to prompt **the** actors when they miss the episodes or incidents. All through, he keeps the performance **lively,** eliciting audience participation.

5.13. CONCLUDING NOTES

Audience participation in postmodern age is "creation of new kind of space for theatre, a widespread intent" (Schechner 1983:119). In the West, only in the 1960s it has become a novel concept and dominant virtuality of the performance. And its specialty is radically questioned. "The democratizing 'environmental' experiments of that period attempt to replace the illusionistic character of the stage as a 'special place' with a purely informal 'found space', consisting of an impromptu performance area, presented as such rather than as an 'intangible image' "(Elam 1980: 68-69). Experiments in environmental theatre, and in audience participation have major avenues of meta - aesthetics in Euro - American theatre (Schechner 1983:303).

In the Indian context, audience participation is common from time immemorial time. In the classical theatre, rasa is evoked from actor and audience. It strictly adheres to *Natyasastra* tradition. Whereas in traditional and folk theatre it is different according to the form and space. The *bhagavathams* of Andhra Pradesh are the amalgam of classical, traditional and folk theatres. In addition to this, *bhagavathams* favor the devotional and ritual participation as a commune in the society besides its aesthetic participation. Every spectator and performer participates in it as feast. The sole aim of participation in the *bhagavathams* is to create aesthetic as well as meta - physical life.