CHAPTER V

YAKŞAGANA AS A PARADIGM
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SECTION 1: YAKŠAGĀNA AS A SYMBOLIC SYSTEM

5.0. INTRODUCTION

In the previous two chapters, the significatory process of Yakṣagāna was studied from the perspectives of its sign system, its structure, its codes, the media involved etc. But these semantic and semiotic perspectives will have to be related to the pragmatics, where the form will have to be studied in relation to the culture and society, where it operates. Any system of communication operates in a social setting and context and its meaning can not be studied in isolation, divorced from the users of that system.

There has been a growing awareness in semiotics of late, about how in the study of sign systems and codes, the social dimensions of these systems have often been neglected. Emphasising the need to practice 'social semiotics', Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress, for example say:

...the social dimensions of semiotic systems are so intrinsic to their nature and function that the systems are not be studied in isolation. 'Mainstream semiotics' emphasise structures and codes at the expense of functions and social uses of semiotic systems, the complex interrelations of semiotic systems to social practice, all of the factors which provide their motivation, their origins and destinations, their form and substance. It stresses system and product rather than speakers and writers or the participants in semiotic activity as connected and interacting, in a variety of ways in concrete social contexts. It attributes power to meaning instead of meaning to
power. It dissolves boundaries within the field of semiotics but tacitly accepts an impenetrable wall cutting off semiosis from society and semiotics from social and political thought.¹

The last two chapters of this thesis are an analysis of the 'social semiotics' of yakṣaṅa. Such a study will have to take a holistic approach where the form will be studied in relation to the cultural, social, political and philosophical issues. The 'meaning' of yakṣaṅa can not be isolated from these spheres, which shape its discourse.

5.1. SYMBOLIC SYSTEMS

The study of any form of cultural expression will have to tackle the crucial question of what the form means to the performers and participants. In the study of yakṣaṅa also we will have to tackle this question: What does yakṣaṅa mean to the performers and spectators? At the apparent level, there are factors like the aesthetic pleasure, the ritualistic appeal etc. which draw the spectators to the performance. But apart from or to be more precise, along with, these reasons, a form like yakṣaṅa which has survived as a major form of cultural expression for several centuries, must have certain deeper layers of meaning whereby it reflects and comments on the various tensions and/or paradoxes of society. Without such an immanent significance directly related to the life of the people, no cultural form can survive for long. These meanings are often not apparent on the surface. This is specially true of forms and practices that have evolved over hundreds of years. These embedded meanings can be understood only by viewing the form as a symbolic system.
The attempt of understanding these deeply connotative and symbolic meanings, necessarily involves the task of interpretation. For this, the cultural form will have to be viewed as a text or an assemblage of texts. The task of interpretation of these texts can not be a closed exercise, where the meanings can be found within the texts themselves; they have to be studied in relation to the 'social semantics' in the words of Clifford Geertz. In his study of Balinese cockfight, Geertz says, "If one takes the cockfight, or any other collectively sustained symbolic structure, as a means of 'saying something of something'... then one is faced with a problem not in social mechanics but in social semantics. For the anthropologist, whose concern is with formulating sociological principles, not with promoting or appreciating cockfights, the question is, what does one learn about such principles from examining culture as an assemblage of texts".²

Folklorists, specially in the last few decades, have been concentrating more and more on analysing cultural systems in terms of their symbolic significance. Clifford Geertz's analysis of Balinese cockfight or James Peacock's study of Javanese drama may be mentioned as examples of such an interpretative approach. Victor Turner's studies of African folk rituals and practices also emphasise on the symbolic nature of these systems. The growing interest in the study of symbolism is related to the developments in other fields of knowledge such as semiotics, psychoanalysis, communication studies etc, which have been focusing on the symbolic process of human expression. Raymond Firth commenting on the growing interest in symbolism, says that it is, "in keeping with the general temper of our time to be attracted to studies that concern themselves with the less
rational aspects of human behaviour, which tend to reject or criticise a positivist approach, which make play with ideas of ambiguity, uncertainty and mystery”. The study of literature, for example, has always been concerned with symbols. Poetry especially, relies largely on symbols and the analysis of these symbols, has been one of the chief tasks of literary criticism. Works like *Symbol as Sense: New Approaches to the Analysis of Meaning* (eds. Mary LeCron Foster and Stanley Brandes) and Raymond Firth’s *Symbols Public and Private* have thrown more light on this growing field.

A word about the meaning of the term symbol is perhaps called for. A symbol, generally speaking, ‘says some thing of something’. In semiotics also, the term has been used but in different senses. Saussure and Peirce for example, use it to refer to two different kinds of signs. According to Peirce, symbol (in his triad of icon, index and symbol) refers to those signs in which the relationship between signifier and signified is purely arbitrary. Saussure (who does not talk much about symbols), on the other hand, uses the term symbol to refer to non-arbitrary signs. Sign is a generic term of which symbol refers to one specific type of sign. In a sign, the relationship between the signifier and signified is arbitrary. Whereas in the symbol, the two are related by some kind of likeness. (This meaning is of 'symbol' is nearer to that of Saussure than that of Peirce.) As Turner says, "In symbols, there is always some kind of likeness (metaphoric, metonymic) posited by the framing culture between signifier (symbol-vehicle) and signified (s); in signs these need be no likeness". The term symbol is used here in the sense pointed out by Turner.
The world in which we live is suffused with symbols. We may not always be aware of the meanings of these signs. As J.C. Cooper says:

We live in a world of symbols, most of which are either not understood through ignorance or taken so much for granted that the real significance is often overlooked. Many, we fail to recognise when we meet them. Symbolism is a treasure house of the past and holds meaning for the present: it has not been invented by individuals but has grown naturally out of the need for expression in a medium that transcends the limitations of words, yet speaks a language that can be understood by all, so that from the moment of our birth to the time of our death, we use symbols that were current in ancient times and lands.

Cooper's statement points out the importance of symbols as well as the ancient origin of many of the symbols. But it gives the erroneous impression that all symbols are of ancient origin (denying the emergence of new symbols), or that the meanings of symbols are fixed for all times. In cultural systems, old symbols are redefined and sometimes new symbols are created. What is perhaps more important, symbols do not exist in a vacuum. They are part of the process of representation and so can be understood and interpreted only in performance. Mary LeCron Forster and Stanley H. Brandes make this point explicit. "Symbolism is not merely representation but also a representational process that depends both for its creation and for its replication on human interaction within a culturally defined social setting. This makes social context of crucial importance in determining and interpreting symbols."

Interpretation of a symbolic system does not mean that a meaning is imposed on the cultural form. The task of interpretation is in fact, to make explicit how the meanings
are related to the symbols. The relationship between the signified meanings and the symbols should be established with a certain degree of reliability. The interpretative mechanism is most often contained in the cultural text itself. As Clifford Geertz says, "Societies, like lives, contain their own interpretation. One has only to learn how to gain access to them".  

5.2. YAKŚAGĀNA AND ITS SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE

Yakṣagāna, like all other traditional cultural forms of expression, functions as a symbolic system. The symbolic significance of yakṣagāna, has to be understood in relation to the social semantics of the society of the coastal and Malenad regions Karnataka, where yakṣagāna has flourished. This society, being a part of the south Indian culture, shares many aspects of social structure and cultural patterns that are common to the entire region, as well as aspects of the pan Indian culture. At the same time, there are certain aspects that are unique to the particular area. Both these aspects become equally important in interpreting the symbolic significance of a form like yakṣagāna, because its form has been moulded by both classical and folk influences (as has been analysed in chapter II).

In analysing the symbolic significance of yakṣagāna, a distinction between two phases of yakṣagāna, will have to be recognised. This distinction is related to the two types of organisational set up as well as to two periods. The first phase is that of the open-air troupes that performed harake āta (vow-performance). Such performances were usually sponsored by one person. He would have taken a vow that he would sponsor a yakṣagāna performance, if his particular wish
was fulfilled. The performance, though sponsored by one person, would be open to everyone. There was a strong ritualistic element also as sponsoring a performance was thought of, as a religious activity. This was the way yakṣaṅā troupes and performances were organised till about forty years ago, when many troupes began to be organised on a commercial basis. The commercially organised troupes are referred to as 'tent-troupes' as the performances take place in temporarily erected tents with admission being charged. Both types of troupes are in existence now. (This has been analysed in chapter III).

The need to make a distinction between these two phases in understanding the symbolic significance, arises because the difference does not lie merely in the organisational details. The immanent discourse itself has undergone a change and so the symbolic significance has not remained the same either. This change is related to factors like the changes in the economic structure of the society, the changing political equations etc. The same traditional form is now being used as a vehicle for a distinctly different message. This is perhaps a fine example of the fact that symbolic systems do not remain static, but often undergo a change to express new (often opposed) meanings.

This does not mean that there has been a sudden and complete break between the two types mentioned above (except perhaps, in an extreme example, like Tuḷu yakṣaṅā). One has clearly grown out of the other and many of the meanings of the open-air performances that are going to be analysed later, are present in the commercialised forms as well (perhaps in a subdued form). At the same time, open-air performances of the present, show a clear influence of the
'tent-troupes' and their performance (perhaps because of the popularity and prestige that the 'tent-troupes' enjoy now). As both these forms co-exist, this influence is only natural.

In this chapter, the symbolic significance of the first phase of yakṣagāṇa (open-air performance) is studied. The analysis will concentrate on what yakṣagāṇa has meant at the symbolic level these past centuries to the community. The post commercialisation period and the newly emergent meanings are studied in the next chapter.

5.2.1. The Performative context

The open-air performances, as we have already observed, were sponsored by one person (or a group of persons). The performative context and the sponsorship of performances themselves conveyed powerful messages regarding the social structure and the position of different groups in that structure. In order to understand this symbolic significance properly, we have to understand the social and economic structure of the society in which these performances took place. Yakṣagāṇa, as we have seen, never had royal patronage and it has survived largely by the support it has received from the landlords or rich persons of the village. As Martha Ashton and Bruce Christie say, "The patron is most often a wealthy landlord or a prominent businessman who for various reasons commissions a performance... Any one is welcome to attend these patronised performances and they are free to all". Normally the entire village came to witness the performances, but the patronship was almost always by the religious institutions, the landlords and rich persons. This was because, sponsorship involved a good deal of money and most people in the village were without the financial means
to sponsor the performances. Both the points mentioned in the above quotation, that the performances were sponsored by a few people and that they were witnessed by all, become very important in understanding the social message that this system of sponsorship conveyed. In order to understand this significance properly, it is necessary to know the social structuration.

The economy of the villages was totally agriculture oriented. The ownership of land was always in the hands of the landlords and the feudal powers. Great prestige was attached to the ownership of land and usually social and political powers were associated with it. The other people in the village, consisted of tenants of the land or landless labourers (other than a few artisans like carpenters, iron smiths etc.). These people were entirely dependent on the landlord, for their livelihood. This total economic control exercised by the land owners over the other villagers also extended to other aspects of life like the social, political and even the cultural spheres. This feudal structure was clearly unequal and exploitative.

5.2.2. The Position of the Sponsor

The sponsorship of a yaksagāna performance brought to the patron, prestige and recognition. First of all, it was considered a religiously sacred activity. The patron was the host who afforded the opportunity to the entire village to partake in the ritualistic performance. The recognition given to the patron was made overt in the performance itself. He had the authority to choose the particular prasanga to be performed. In the past, there was also the practice where the musicians would sing a few songs either in the house of
the patron or in the temple of his family deity, a few hours before the actual commencement of the performance. At the end of the performance, the sponsor would come on the stage and his name would be mentioned along with the name of the presiding deity of the troupe. Look at the following description of it by Shivarama Karanth:

The sponsors then offer the Bhagavata the specified remuneration, along with betel nut and betel leaves in a plate.
As he accepts it, the following words are spoken:
Bhagavata: Ah ho ho
Strivisa: Ah ho ho
Bhagavata: (Mentions the name of the troupe and the presiding deity and adds), 'From the holy presence of...
Strivesa: This Srimudi Gandha Prasada (holy offering) offered by so and so [the name of the sponsor] in the holy presence of such and such a deity presiding over such and such a troupe is welcome.\textsuperscript{11}

The above quotation shows how the sponsor got the recognition as part of the performance itself. In the seating arrangement also, the position and power of the patron were highlighted. A similar example of how the performance elevates the position of the patron can also be found in Ramlila of Ramnagar. Richard Schechner in his analysis of this form, explains how the performance also acts in highlighting the power and position of the king of Benares who is the patron of these performances, even at a time when his kingdom is lost.\textsuperscript{12}

The performance was thus an assertion of the position of the patron in the society. As we have already observed, the patron was almost always the land lord himself. Yakṣagāna thus provided him a sanction as it were, for his position and power. The themes of yakṣagāna were always about divine personages and so the sponsorship of the performance,
provided symbolically, a divine sanction for the landlord/rich person to continue his exercise of authority over the rest of the villagers. The rest of the audience, having witnessed the performance by the courtesy of the landlord, would unconsciously imbibe the message regarding the power and position of the patron.

The division of the village into the land owning class and landless labourers and tenants was not merely a division of class. It was also related to the caste hierarchy. The land owners usually belonged to the higher castes. The social structuration of the village can be properly understood only in the context of this twin hierarchy. In the Indian context it is impossible to understand the social hierarchy without reference to caste. M.N.Srinivas was perhaps the first sociologist to point out the crucial role played by caste in the social structuration in the Indian context. At the same time, he points out that the jāti (caste) system as it operates at the village level is different from the pan Indian concept of varṇa (lit. Colour:= the division of the society into four varṇas, brahmana, kṣatriya, vaiṣya and śudra and the fifth one of untouchables which is supposed to be outside the hierarchy). He says:

Ideas of hierarchy derived from the varṇa model of five layered India wide castes are not only too simple and clearcut but misleading in understanding the caste system as it operates at the village level... [In the varṇa model] there is no doubt about the exact position of each in the hierarchy. In the jāti system however, only the two extremes of the hierarchy are fixed with any degree of firmness and there is ambiguity regarding the position of all the others... The view of caste as a ladder like hierarchy expressed in varṇa, prevents the understanding of jāti which is basically local.¹³
Even while recognizing the distinction between varṇa and jāti, Srinivas points out the crucial role played by jāti in ordering the relationship of different persons in the village. He says that the villager's relationship with other human beings was mediated through caste.

Coming to the coastal regions, the land owning class (and so, the patrons of yakṣagāna) mostly belonged to the Bunt, Jain or Brahmin Castes, that belonged to the upper echelons of the caste hierarchy. The sponsorship of yakṣagāna also acted as an assertion of the superior status of these castes in the caste hierarchy. The twin hierarchies of caste and class were no doubt related and both were highlighted in the act of sponsorship. This assertion was not merely restricted to the performative context. It got expressed in the discourse of the performance itself.

The value system and the world view presented in yakṣagāna, also project and uphold the unequal division of society. The themes of yakṣagāna, drawn from the epics and purāṇas, highlighted the stratified hierarchical social structure in which each person and his caste was given a definite place in the hierarchy. In this hierarchy, the brahmins and the kṣatriyas occupied the top rung of the hierarchy. (The social structure presented was one of varṇa rather than that of jāti). The other communities are rarely presented in yakṣagāna except as caste stereotypes or as servants, gate keepers, soldiers etc. whose castes are never mentioned. (The only exception to this rule seems to be the character of kirāta, the hunter.) So, the function of these other groups, seems to be only secondary and complementary—to serve the two communities at the top of the hierarchy. When this grid of the projected social structure
was applied to the ground situation of the village, where the performances took place, it invariably had the effect of asserting and strengthening the social structure - the local landlord replacing the king in the shift of frame from the epic world to the real world of the village life. Along with it, all other values attached to such an unequal social structure were also highlighted. Any attempt to break this hierarchy was shown as having disastrous consequences. The case of Karna is a fine example of this. Karna Parva dealing with the last moments of Karna's life is also one of the most popular yakṣaṅgaṇa prasangas. The classes and castes lower down the hierarchy, were thus taught to have unquestioned obedience and respect for the upper castes/classes.

Yakṣaṅgaṇa has also been a symbol for the stability of the social structure as it upholds the status quo. The world presented in yakṣaṅgaṇa, as we have observed, was essentially an unequal social set up with hierarchial divisions. The society was (and largely is, even now) hierarchically divided with great social inequality. But, at the same time, in such a social system, each caste had its own assured place in the hierarchy and so the system led to a stable (though unequal) social structure. By emphasising on the status quo, yakṣaṅgaṇa through its ritualistic appeal, provided what Clifford Geertz in his study of Bali religion calls, "the sanctification of social inequality".15

5.2.3. Official and unofficial ideologies

It is not to be assumed that the symbolic significance of yakṣaṅgaṇa functions only in highlighting the position of the patron of the performance. A complex medium such as yakṣaṅgaṇa does not have a unidirectional message. In such a
medium, several messages will be functioning simultaneously. Some times, a second message subverting the first message may also be communicated at the same time. Ian Karp, elaborating on Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of polysemy of voices says, "... utterances can simultaneously convey what he [Bakhtin] called 'official and unofficial' ideologies". He explains how, in a single cultural text, complex and often conflicting messages manifest themselves. Applying this concept to performance, he says, "Performance can be used to assert differing messages of authenticity and inauthenticity either in different phases of the same performance or even in performances that refer to one another... It is also possible, however, that the elaboration of unadorned meaning may assert contradictory messages simultaneously".16

In any yakṣaṅa performance, the message described earlier, of asserting the social hierarchy and the value system that it entails, may be termed the 'official' discourse. This is the ideology that provides the prestige and approval of society to the performance, specially from the powers of authority. At the same time, other messages, sometimes contradictory to the official ideology are also being conveyed. Such messages are symbolically transmitted along with the official one, during the course of the same performance.

As an example, we can take the status of the artistes. The yakṣaṅa artistes are from different castes, many belonging to the lower rungs of the hierarchy. Till recently, to be a yakṣaṅa performer was never considered a respectable profession. But the performance provided them, what Victor Turner, after Van Gennep calls liminality17 whereby they became 'superior' to all the others during the
course of the performance. These artistes enact the roles of the gods, goddesses and superhuman beings of the epics and the purāṇas. These characters are held in very high esteem by the entire populace. By 'becoming' these characters during the course of performance, the artistes gain a position and prestige greater than that of the patrons and the landlords themselves. The entire audience, including the upper and dominant castes, should pay obeisance to these artistes representing the gods and goddesses. Thus, even while projecting the official ideology, the performance at another level, through another voice, subverts the message, by making the upper castes, pay their respects and treat as superior, the artistes belonging to the lower castes.\(^\text{18}\)

A similar example can again be found in the Ramlila of Ramnagar. When Rāma returns triumphantly from Lanka to Ayodhya, he is honoured by the Maharaja of Benares himself. Richard Schechner describes the scene thus. "And finally, he [Rama] is welcomed by the Maharaja at the Fort: one king receiving another. There assisted by the royal family, Rama and his family have their feet washed, are garlanded and fed a sumptuous meal ... I mused that the boys who were swarupas [those enacting the roles of Rama and his brothers etc.] for the last time during this scene were prolonging it, and deeply enjoying the unique situation where they were being honoured, worshipped and fed by the Maharaja of Benares".\(^\text{19}\) This shows how, performance invests the artiste with a certain status and position, which he would never have got otherwise. This position and recognition is no doubt short lived, but during the performance, he attains a superior status and what Victor Turner calls, liminality.
Another instance of the subversion of the official ideology can be found in the way the brahmins are depicted in yakṣaṅgāṇa. Brahmin characters represented in yakṣaṅgāṇa, can be divided into two clearly defined classes—riṣis and ordinary brahmins. Riṣis like Vasiṣṭha or Dūrvasa are played by actors playing the major roles (second role - opposite role etc.) These characters are represented as highly respectable figures. On the other hand, the characters of ordinary brahmins are played by the hāsyagāra (clown). These characters are almost always the butt of ridicule and laughter. They are presented as ever hungry, greedy and ready to break any moral code for personal benefit. The brahmin characters in prasangas like Bhīṣma Vijaya, Bhasmāsura etc. may be taken as examples of this.

In this picturisation, we can see how double faceted the picture of a brahmin becomes in yakṣaṅgāṇa. The riṣis are presented as honourable personages. So, Brahminism, the abstract concept gets recognition and respect. At the same time, the brahmins in the village, resembled the ordinary brahmins represented by the hāsyagāra rather than the riṣis. So, these are almost always the butt of ridicule. This was perhaps one way of releasing the tension and getting even with the brahmin, who stood highest in the social hierarchy.

The above examples indicate how different, often opposed messages are transmitted in a complex medium like yakṣaṅgāṇa. Infact, yakṣaṅgāṇa functions at several levels and so the symbolic meanings are also multiple. Two such meanings, of the official and unofficial ideologies, have already been recognised. In yakṣaṅgāṇa, various other layers of meanings are also embedded. Some of these are studied below.
5.2.4. As an Institution of Education

Yakṣagāna like many other dance-drama forms of India, has over the centuries, acted as a powerful instrument of education. In this context, it should be remembered that women and nonbrahmins were debarred from Sanskritic education. For all of them, yakṣagāna performances themselves acted as the means of education. The spectators became acquainted with the philosophical issues and ethical values that were represented in the performances. We have seen in the previous chapter (in the study of the improvised text), how artistes who are uneducated (in the formal sense) can pontify on many complex issues concerning different fields of ancient Indian knowledge. For the performers also, yakṣagāna has been their institute of education. Thus, over the centuries, yakṣagāna has acted as a powerful educating force not merely about the epics and purāṇas, but generally about the Indian way of life.

By presenting the stories from the epics and purāṇas, yakṣagāna has also acted as a strong force in shaping the moral concepts and the world view of the people. It has functioned as a strong role model to the people to follow and to shape their lives. The right way and the wrong way of life as seen in these performances, provide a kind of object lesson to the spectators. The stories provide examples of different situations like family life, the relation between brothers, the political life etc. and show the 'right' way which become models for the people to follow.

5.2.5. The Linguistic and Cultural Hegemony

The themes of yakṣagāna, as we have observed, have always been taken from the classical sources of the epics and
the purāṇas. Another important feature that we notice is that, until recently, yakṣaṭagāna has always been performed in Kannada, even in Tulu speaking areas. This has been so, inspite of the fact that many Tulu speakers (specially in the villages) do not understand Kannada. The question that naturally confronts us is how could a popular medium of cultural expression like yakṣaṭagāna, survive for centuries in a language that is (partly at least) alien to the people?²⁰

The answer to this, lies in the linguistic hegemony of Kannada over Tulu. This dominance was not merely one of language but also of the culture and the religious model that the language represented. In order to understand this phenomenon properly, we have to view it from the perspective of the Bhakti Movement and what it meant to yakṣaṭagāna.

References have already been made (in chapter II) to the Bhakti Movement and its influence on traditional theatre forms like yakṣaṭagāna. One of the fundamental canons of the Bhakti Movement was to spread the religious message through the spoken language of the people (like Kannada, Marathi, Bengali, Hindi etc.), which were directly intelligible to the people. This use of the local languages was in opposition to the use of Sanskrit, which till then was the 'repository' of all knowledge. It may be remembered here that nonbrahmans and women were barred from studying Sanskrit and so, from the knowledge that it contained. This knowledge in the hands of brahmans became the source of their power (to use Foucault's terms), which they used in social, economical and political spheres. The Bhakti Movement broke this hegemony of Sanskrit specially over religious knowledge, by using the spoken languages of the people for their religious teachings. (It
is thus not surprising that in most parts of India, the Bhakti Movement also became a powerful movement of social change.

Coming to yakṣagāna, the ostensible purpose of yakṣagāna was considered to be Dharma prasara (spreading the dharma—the righteous way of life). Though yakṣagāna came under the strong influence of the Bhakti Movement, it is strange that it preferred to do so, not in Tuḷu, the spoken language of the large majority of people in Dakshina Kannada, but in Kannada. It is to be remembered that Tuḷu land, was under the suzerainty of Kannada rulers. As Viveka Rai says, "From historical times, the administration of Tuḷu land was under the influence of the Karnataka rulers". As a result, Kannada became the language of power and prestige. Though, Tuḷu has a rich oral literature, written literature was always in Kannada. Thus we can say that so far as Tuḷu is concerned, the hegemony of Sanskrit was replaced by that of Kannada and this hegemony was part of the cultural, linguistic power structure. Yakṣagāna, which was played in Kannada, also became a part of this hegemony. If the exercise of this hegemony was not always perceived to be so by the community, it was perhaps because of the other appeals of yakṣagāna (ritualistic, aesthetic etc.), which held a strong sway over the minds of the people.

5.2.6. Acculturation

The hegemony referred to above, worked at the levels of the religious, ritualistic beliefs also. The themes of yakṣagāna were always drawn from the classical themes of the pan Indian epics and purāṇas. It did not deal with any other themes either of folk origin or even with historical
episodes. This choice of subject matter can be associated with the process of acculturation, where the Aryan-Brahminical pantheon gained precedence over the local deities; the Brahminical rituals became more respectable than the local cult practices. This process was undoubtedly partly due to the influence of the Bhakti Movement, which in the coastal regions, was predominantly of the Vaishnava faith. Thus, the stories about ten incarnations of Viṣṇu gained in prominence. In yakṣagāṇa also, the prasangas dealing with the stories of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa (two of the incarnations of Viṣṇu) form the largest chunk of yakṣagāṇa literature. The widely practiced local ritualistic practices of Dakshina Kannada like Bhūtārādhane (spirit worship) never figured in yakṣagāṇa until recent times. Nor did any theme from Jaina sources appear in yakṣagāṇa even though, a number of Jaina chieftains and landlords were the patrons of yakṣagāṇa.

Thus the hegemony of the religion of the 'great tradition', to use Robert Redfield and Milton Singer's term, as opposed to the 'little tradition' is manifest in yakṣagāṇa discourse. The above remarks should not be taken to mean that there was a constant struggle and confrontation between the main stream Hindu pantheon and the ritual practices of the local deities. (Such a confrontation, if there was any, is totally hidden in time.) What appears now is a peaceful acceptance and coexistence of both the traditions. Most people, worship the deities of both the streams. Infact in many cases, the local deities have been absorbed into the Hindu pantheon. But the point being made here is that the little tradition, never formed part of the yakṣagāṇa discourse, even though most of the participants—artistes, patrons and spectators—were devotees of the local deities as well. In this, we can see how yakṣagāṇa was part of hegemony of the great tradition.
5.2.7. **Expression of the Male Ethos**

Yakṣagāna has always been an all male domain where even female characters are played by men. Women participate only as spectators. Such a form naturally became an expression of the male perspective. We have seen in chapter IV how, in contrast to the gorgeous costumes of the male characters, the female characters are dressed in simple costumes. This opposition in the costume structure highlights the masculine qualities (of course at the expense of the feminine qualities).

In the themes and dance style also, we have observed how the emphasis is on the depiction of the virile and manly qualities with scenes of battle dominating the performance. All these elements together, function symbolically in projecting and asserting the male ethos. The most overt sign of the assertion of masculinity is perhaps the waist ornament of the male heroic characters. (See Pics. of costumes of heroic characters). It is clear that this is an exaggerated iconic sign of the male genital organ. The need for such an assertion of the masculine 'pride' can be understood if we relate it to the social context and the family system. In the coastal regions of Karnataka, where yakṣagāna has largely flourished, the matrilineal family system was in existence and this perhaps explains the need for such an assertion of the male ethos.

This male oriented nature of yakṣagāna discourse can be better understood if we compare it to the other dance traditions like Bharatanatyam which are performed by women. If the emphasis in these forms is on the expression of grace through dance, yakṣagāna (like many other male dominated
traditional forms), emphasises on the expression of power and valour. A similar example can be found in kathakali of Kerala which is also a male dominated form. Manjushri Chaki Sircar and Parbati Sircar view it as an assertion of the status of the Nair Community and also as an expression of the masculine pride. They say:

Thus the birth of Kathakali may be considered very significant in relation to the prevailing social exigency. The Nairs were losing their glorious status in the community and the dance theatre was one way to channelise the ethos of their masculine pride. In a matrilineal society, the absence of a male physiological priority in the lineage system, masculine pride perhaps needed to be affirmed.

The selection of heroic themes for kathakali's dance dramas, probably reflects the need of the performers to assert the male ethos. Kathakali is violent, acrobatic and athletic. The Nairs chose the themes from the mythical past, not from the historical past, to create a supernatural aura of ritual dancing... In contrast with the male character, the female character (played by young males) is presented in an exceedingly simple way without any elaborate costume and make-up.

5.2.8. Conclusion

So far, we have observed how yaksagâna functions as a symbolic system, conveying various meanings at the immanent level of the discourse. Many of the meanings will be functioning at the subconscious level and so the performers and spectators may not always be aware of these meanings. But an interpretative approach can decipher these symbolic significations. These are not imposed meanings but those that are present in the form itself. As Clifford Geertz says, one has only to learn how to gain access to them.
SECTION 2: THEATRE AS RITUAL

5.3. RITUAL AND PERFORMANCE

Ritual may be described as consecrated behaviour that carries a special significance to the performers as well as to the viewers. Rituals were mostly studied for their religious meaning, as sacred symbols. But of late, folklorists interested in performance in general, have been paying greater attention to rituals and the symbiotic relationship that exists between rituals and performance. Richard Schechner, who has written extensively on performance and the relation of performance to rituals, for example, points out, "...all performance has at its core, a ritual action." Viewed in this perspective, the meaning of the term ritual is at once broadened to include a vast array of behavioural patterns and not merely those that have a clear religious association.

So, it becomes necessary to understand the different meanings in which the term ritual has been used. Victor Turner, for example, defines a ritual as "transformative performance revealing major classifications, categories and contradictions of the cultural process". The process of transformation of an individual or a group in the community from one recognised status to another, according to Turner, is achieved (or blocked) through ritual. Turner's definition of ritual is inspired mainly by Arnold Van Gennep's concept of the Rites of Passage. Van Gennep studied the different rituals of the world, in terms of the Rites of Passage, whereby an individual moves from one phase of life to another. This passage is achieved by means of special rites. In such rites, Van Gennep recognises three phases of
separation, transition and incorporation. Turner's definition lays great emphasis on the transformative function of rituals and does not consider the other meanings in which the term has been used.

R. Schechner, on the other hand, recognises five different senses, in which the term ritual has been used. According to him, they are:

1. As part of the evolutionary development of organisms including but not limited to, the development of the brain; 2. As a structure, something with formal qualities and relationships; 3. As a performance process, a dynamic system or action with both diachronic and synchronic rhythms and/or scenarios; 4. As experience, as what a person individually or as part of collective, feels; 5. As a set of operations in human, social and religious life.

Schechner finds the process of ritualisation in all living organisms including insects and fish. He divides human ritualisation into social ritual, religious ritual and aesthetic ritual. Such a broad conceptualisation of ritual includes genetically ordered behaviour, religious rituals, aesthetic performances and even 'social dramas' which according to Turner are, "units of aharmonic or disharmonic social processes arising in conflict situations".

The division of rituals into social, religious and aesthetic rituals is chiefly for the purpose of study and analysis. Many rituals truly belong to a mixed category where more than one element will be present. Yakṣaṇa, for example has qualities of aesthetic ritual but the religious element is equally strong. The element of social ritual is also present, though to a lesser degree. Even a purely social ritual like the republic day parade, is not devoid of the aesthetic element. In local festivals like jatre (a fair-
conducted at fixed intervals under the auspices of a temple), all three elements are strongly present. People come to worship in the temple and at the same time, the jatre also becomes an occasion for socialising, meeting friends and relatives, of commercial activity, of entertainment etc. Thus the jatre becomes a complex occasion where all three elements of the ritual (and much more) are present.

Ritual, performance and entertainment are all intimately related. Many of the present day genres of entertainment like theatrical performance seem to have emerged from rituals. Classical Greek theatre that emerged from the rituals related to Dionysian worship is perhaps the most famous example of the process where ritual becomes secular art with emphasis on aesthetic pleasure. Traditional and folk theatre forms of India, on the other hand, exhibit qualities where the ritualistic element is very strong even now. The various types of performance and their relation to rituals on the one hand and secular art on the other, may be thought of as a broad spectrum in which religious ritual stands at one end and modern modes of entertainment like theatre, (cinema and television may also be included in this list), stand at the other pole.

![Diagram of Efficacy, Yakṣagāna, and Entertainment]

- Efficacy
- Yakṣagāna
- Entertainment

Religious rituals
Ritual theatre
Secular art
In this spectrum, the element of the sacred and the relation to the transcendental Other is highest in religious rituals. The opposition at the other end of the spectrum is that of secular art, where entertainment becomes the professed purpose of performance. (It may be noted here that the usual opposition of the sacred is to the profane. Though secular art is not equated with the profane, we have many example in world history where the performance genres that were far removed from rituals were either condemned or totally banned by the authorities as they were considered profane.) But in this wide expanse, the difference between different performance genres is one of the degree of emphasis on ritual or on entertainment. These two are not mutually exclusive. Even in religious rituals, the element of entertainment is present and in modes of entertainment the ritualistic element is often pronounced. The most telling example of how even a modern genre like television could be perceived ritualistically, was seen when the Rāmāyaṇa was serialised on television in India. Before the commencement of each episode of the serial, many viewers used to worship the 'idiot box' and watch the programme in all devotion as though they were witnessing a religious ritual.

The general movement of most performance genres is from religious rituals to secular art. In this spectrum, traditional forms like yakṣagāna exhibit qualities of theatrical performance and entertainment but at the same time the ritualistic element is strongly present even now and so can be placed somewhere near the middle of the spectrum.

Though the general movement is from ritual to secular art, it would be wrong to assume that this movement is unidirectional. Many experiments in modern theatre like
those of Grotowsky, Peter Brooks and Richard Schechner are fine examples of how the theatre is trying to recapture the elements of religious ritual. A writer like Wole Soyinka has tried to synthesise African rituals and modern theatre. In Kannada theatre also, we find a similar kind of attempt, specially in the works of modern writers like Chandrashekar Kambar and H.S. Shivaprakash. Modern Kannada theatre which had clearly shunned folk and traditional theatre forms is now trying to integrate many of these elements into the idiom of modern Kannada theatre.32

Richard Schechner sees the two poles of the spectrum (Ritual and Secular art) in terms of a different opposition - efficacy and entertainment. He sees the relationship between the two, in terms of a braid and says that the theatre really flourishes when entertainment and efficacy are both present in equal degrees. When either of the two becomes dominant, the performance takes on different qualities. According to him "When efficacy dominates, the performances are universalistic, allegorical, ritualised, tied to an established order; this kind of theatre persists for a relatively long time. When entertainment dominates, performances are class-oriented, individualised show-business, constantly adjusted to suit the tastes of a fickle audience".33 The difference between efficacy and entertainment is studied by him in terms of the position of the Other, the participation of the audience, collective and individual creativity etc. He sums up his arguments in the following words:

1. In some social settings, ritual performances are part of the ecosystems and mediate political relations, group hierarchy and economics; 2. In other settings, ritual performances begin to take on qualities of show
business; 3. There is a dialectical-dyadic continuum linking efficacy to entertainment—both are present in all performances, but in each performance, one or the other is dominant; 4. In different societies, at different times, either efficacy or entertainment dominates, the two being in a braided relationship to each other.

If we study yakṣaṅa in the light of the above remarks, we can say that yakṣaṅa is a form where efficacy dominates. It has survived as a ritualistic performance for several hundreds of years. In the last three-four decades, we can perceive a movement from efficacy towards entertainment. But even now, the element of ritual/efficacy is strongly present.

5.4. THE RITUALISTIC ELEMENTS IN YAKṢAṅA

5.4.1. The Ritualistic context

In yakṣaṅa, the performance itself is considered a form of worship. This framework of worship, conditions and controls the entire performance. This was perhaps due to the Bhakti Movement, which has influenced almost all the traditional theatre forms of India (as has been analysed in chapter II). As a result, to participate in the performance, either as a performer or as a spectator, is considered a sacred task. People take vows to sponsor yakṣaṅa performances as offerings to the gods. Performances are organised on special occasions like child birth, marriage etc. The attitude of the patrons, in sponsoring these performances is explained by P.V.Hasyagara. "The villagers, either together or singly, used to sponsor the performances. They would say, 'I can not feed everyone; let them at least get the satisfaction by witnessing the performance'. Their idea was that they would get puṇya (credit for doing a good
deed, specially in the eyes of the Almighty) for having created faith and belief in God along with artistic enjoyment". The mental attitude of the sponsors as well as that of the spectators becomes clear in the above statement. This religious framework operates very strongly in open-air performances. Mention may be made here of the performances that take place in the temple of Mukhyaprāna (Hanumantha) at Gunḍabāḷa, a village in Uttara Kannada dist. If the sponsored performances usually take place at the village of the patron, at Gunḍabāḷa, they are always performed in the precincts of the temple there. People come from different places to sponsor yakṣagāṇa performances there. More than a hundred performances are done every year in the same place. The number of people who wish to sponsor performances here is so large that, the sponsorship of performances for the next fourteen years, are said to have been booked. Even taking part in a performance is considered sacred. Many take vows that they would participate in the performance, even if they are not well versed in yakṣagāṇa. Such people enact small roles or just come on the stage once. All these details show how, the performance context of yakṣagāṇa is framed in a strong ritualistic mould.

5.4.2. The Structure

The intimate link of yakṣagāṇa to religious practice is visible in the organisational structure of the troupes as well. Almost all the troupes are organised in the names of temples, even in these days of the commercialised 'tent' troupes. The first and last performances of each season of every troupe, are performed in the precincts of the particular temple and they are always open to all. This practice is followed even today. Some troupes belonging to
famous temples like Dharmasthala and Kateelu, even have facilities where the spectators offer worship and receive blessings in the form of prasāda (offering to God, which is then supposed to come back with God’s blessings).

The performance structure also exhibits many elements of ritualistic worship. To begin with, the stage cannot face certain directions during different days of the week. Rahu, the evil spirit, is supposed to reside in these directions during particular days of the week. If inevitable, certain rituals have to be performed whereby the evil force is propitiated. But this rule does not apply if the performance takes place within the precincts of the temple. We can see here how, the sacred space of the temple nullifies the evil force of Rahu.

In the performance structure, (as described in chapter II), the worship in the Cauki (make-up room) and the worship on the stage are clear instances where the performance takes on the features of worship. The preliminaries called Sabhā-lakṣaṇa (the qualities of the assembly), consist not merely of the prayer and worship of the deity but also of the performing space, the musical instruments and the assembly. The conceptual similarity of the traditional curtain used in the odgōlagā to the curtain used in temples during worship has already been commented upon. The idea seems to be that the vision of divinity is too dazzling for human eyes and so can be exposed only by slow degrees.

The ceremonial ending of the performance, mangala (auspicious ending) rounds up the performance in the same ritualistic mould. The worship, by waving the sacred flame, is performed on the stage at the end of the performance,
after which the musicians, accompanied by the strīvēṣa (female character), return to the cauki singing the following song:

Ramakṛṣṇaru manege bandaru
bāgilu tereyerō
kāmadhēnu bandantāytu
sukhava paḍeyerō

Rāma and Kṛṣṇa have come home
open the door
It is as if Kāmadhēnu has come
Get happiness.37

The entire performance comes to a close with the worship again in the cauki. What began with the worship in the cauki, is rounded up in a similar manner with the worship again in the cauki. The significance of the song quoted above and the final rituals in the make-up room are explained thus by Shivarama Karanth. 'The Bhāgavata and his accompanists, accompanied by one Strīvēṣa move in procession to the green room. They are supposed to bring back Balarāma and Gōpala to the green room. The play that has been staged was theirs after all... Thus the play that started from the Cauki (green room) also ends there. In yakṣagāna, the stage is merely a passage. The whole play is conceived more as a ritual than as mere entertainment'.38 This statement explains how the entire performance from beginning to end, becomes a ritual in which the enacted part on the stage is only a part of the entire process. Infact, the performance on the stage can be termed a ritual within a ritual because the stage performance also begins and ends with the worship
of the gods on the stage. This is framed in another ritual which begins in the cauki before the performance and ends again with the worship there after the performance.

Chandrashekar Kambar, in his study of the folk theatre of Northern Karnataka, points out the similarities between the structure of the ritual worship with the structure of the performance. He mentions the six stages of ritual worship by the Asādis (the non brahminical priests) to the six fold structure of folk drama: prelude, make-up, chorus, music, dance, theme and mangala. Such a similarity, highlights the close links between ritual worship and the performance of these traditional theatre forms.

5.4.3. The Themes

The themes of yakṣagāna also highlight the ritualistic element. The stories, as we have already noted, deal with gods and goddesses or the superhuman characters of the epics. The audience have great faith/fear regarding those characters and so their mental make-up as they receive the discourse is in a ritualistic frame. The prasangas highlight the fight between Dharma (the proper/right way of life) and Adharma (the improper/wrong way of life). In this fight, Adharma gets defeated. The victory of Dharma and those who follow the proper way of life, become object lessons to the audience to model their own lives.

5.4.4. Current Trends

The present day changes in yakṣagāna, have had their impact on the ritualistic element as well. Due to factors like commercialisation, the ritualistic context of the
performance itself was drastically altered. The performance now became an economic venture where the audience participation was dependent on payment of the admission fee. So, the mental make-up in which the audience attended the performance, was itself altered. In addition several other factors like the process of secularisation, have also contributed to the reduced ritualistic appeal of the performance. Secularisation refers to the process where the traditional prasangas are being reinterpreted with emphasis on human values rather than on the religious message. The emergence of new prasangas that are not based on classical themes, has also contributed to the reduced importance of rituals as these prasangas do not have any religious appeal. Most important is perhaps the changed sociopolitical context of the society, where the value system of the Hindu religion (as represented in the prasangas) may not be in consonance with the changed ideology of the present. (The concept of Varna can be taken as an example).

At the same time, we witness another development also whereby the ritualistic appeal is further strengthened and heightened. At present, a number of new prasangas are also appearing, which deal with themes like Sthalapurānas (lit. place legends = stories about deities or temples of a certain place), local deities, folk heroes etc. These prasangas have an obvious religious appeal, as the deities or heroes represented in them, have a vast following. Prasangas like Dharmasthala Kṣētra Mahātme (The miracle/legend about the pilgrimage centre Dharmasthala), Amara Śilpi Kalkuda (The Immortal Sculptor Kalkuda) and Kōṭi Cennaya (the folk heroes of Tulu land) may be cited as examples. Through such prasangas which represent the folk deities, as opposed to the deities of the Hindu pantheon, the ritualistic element is getting strengthened.
This process can be viewed as an assertion of the ethnic identity where, the local deities are being raised to classical status. This development is related to the developments in the social, cultural and political fields where the Brahminical/Sanskritic tradition does not command the unquestioned acceptance that it had enjoyed, for so long. These new prasangas on the folk deities can be viewed as an assertion of the identity of the non Brahminical castes and groups. In this process, we perhaps witness a development that it is opposition to what M.N.Srinivas has termed "Sanskritisation'. Commenting on the upward movement in the caste hierarchy, Srinivas says," A low caste was able in a generation or two, to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism and by Sanskritising its ritual and its pantheon. In short it, took over as far as possible, the customs, rites and beliefs of the Brahmins and the adoption of the Brahminic way of life by a low caste, seems to have been frequent though forbidden. This process has been called Sanskritisation in this book".41 But the prasangas referred to above, seem to indicate a development where, in the upward movement of social groups, they not merely imbibe the Brahminical way of life but also assert their own identity and beliefs. This change is perhaps related to the changing social and political situation in India where the assumed 'superior' status of the Brahmanical way of life, is being questioned and challenged increasingly now.

A telling example of the strong ritualistic appeal of yaksagana, was witnessed by this researcher in the performance of 'Śani Mahātme' (The Miracle/Legend of Śani).42 It was performed by a commercial tent troupe. The tickets were all sold out but still there was a great rush of people.
So the covering of the tent was removed and the performance was converted into an open show. There were nearly four thousand people and because of the heavy rush, most people had to stand throughout the performance. But, in spite of such inconveniences, no one went back. (It is believed that it is inauspicious to leave in the middle of this particular performance). Half way through the performance, one person among the audience, suddenly stood up and began shivering. It was believed that Śani has entered his person and he was taken to the Cauki (make-up room). The performance continued. This is but one example of the powerful impact of the ritualistic element in yakṣagāna even today. Thus we see a double faceted movement in yakṣagāna now, where on the one hand the ritualistic element is getting reduced but at the same time, is getting strengthened in some other prasangas. This may appear like a contradiction, but it is not. The ritualistic appeal seems dependent on the prasangas performed and the themes depicted.

5.4.5. Religious Rituals and Social Exegesis

Religious rituals have often been viewed as a community's way of overcoming chaos that may have befallen the community. Clifford Geertz views religious rituals "as a community's attempt to deal with pain, bafflement and moral paradox". The ritual world has its own well defined order which lies beyond the realities of life. This conceptual order of the ritual world, thus presents an opposition to the chaos, pain or paradox of the real world. So, communities, when faced with periods of crisis whereby the order or the very existence of the community is threatened, seek solace in religious rituals as Geertz points out.
If we view the emergence of ākṣagāṇa in this light, what was the crisis that led to the emergence of ākṣagāṇa? It is difficult to pin point this, because nothing definite is known about the origin of ākṣagāṇa. But several possibilities have been posited in this regard. One such attempt tries to relate the emergence of ākṣagāṇa to the existing political conditions of the times. Analysing the reason for the emergence of ākṣagāṇa around the sixteenth century and its possible relation to the historical situation of those times, Muliya Mahabala Bhat argues that the reason can be found in the upheavals caused by colonialism and the forced conversion of Hindus into Christianity, particularly by the Portugese in Goa. He says:

Around the sixteenth century, the feudal lords of Mangalore, Karkala and other principalities were weak. Having been defeated several times by Hyder Ali and Tippu Sultan (Rulers of Mysore), ultimately, they had to bow down to the power of British. At the same time, another development also took place. The Portugese who had settled in Goa, not satisfied with political victory, began to convert the Hindus enmasse forcefully. The common people of those times, specially the villagers did not have any political awareness. Even when the kings changed, the life of the common folk went on as usual without any worry. But people were filled with fear because of conversion and so they fled from Goa enmasse. It is a historical truth that many came even here (coastal Karnataka). As a result of this, a sense of fear, worry and turmoil arose. The kings did not have the strength to protect the people from such a danger. Historians say that a disturbed chaotic condition was prevalent at the time.44

Mahabala Bhat argues that ākṣagāṇa evolved in answer to this crisis and threat faced by the followers of Hinduism. This argument regarding the origin of ākṣagāṇa has not been generally accepted. At the same time, the above statement highlights the period of uncertainty, chaos and moral
paradox. It also draws our attention to the British and Portugese colonisers and how the existing order was destroyed by the colonising forces. Whether yakṣaṅaṇa emerged out of such a contingency is not definite. But what is certain is that it became the means whereby the community could deal with the period of chaos and moral paradox. The large following that yakṣaṅaṇa has had, over the centuries and the overtly religious themes, may be better explained in this light. The emphasis on scenes of battle and violence in yakṣaṅaṇa, where good ultimately triumphs over evil, can be perceived as the attempt to inculcate among the audience, qualities like heroism, courage and the will to fight the evil.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


6. Mary LeCron Foster and Stanley H.Brandes, "Introduction", op. cit, p.3.


8. In this analysis, the past tense has been used as this represents the conditions as it existed a few decades back. Changes in the form of yakṣaṇā as well as in the society, have altered the symbolic significance even of open-air performances. For example, the performances are no more sponsored by the land-lords alone. This change has been discussed in the next chapter.

9. Martha Ashton and Bruce Christie, op.cit., p.3.

10. Kota Srinivasa Naik Yakṣaṇa Bhāgavatanobbana Anubhavagaḷu, op. cit. p. 29. This custom, seems to have been given up even by the open-air troupes now.


14. The castes mentioned here, are of the land owning castes in Dakshina Kannada District. In Uttara Kannada dist. and in the Malenad regions, the caste names of land owners are different but they also belong to the upper echelons of the caste hierarchy and so, the same system operates there also, though the actual caste groups differ.

15. Clifford Geertz, op. cit., p. 177-180.


18. It is not to be assumed that all yakṣagāṇa artistes come from the lower rungs of the caste hierarchy. In baṅgautīṭṭu of Uttara Kannada for example, a sizable number of artistes are brahmīns. But the interpretation given here is not there by invalidated because, as has been explained earlier, the yakṣagāṇa artistes as a whole were looked down upon. So, in this case also, the interpretation holds good by referring to the other hierarchies.


20. Yakṣagāṇa is popular not merely in areas where Tulu is spoken, but also in areas where Kannada is the language of the majority. The analysis in this section deals mainly with what yakṣagāṇa signifies in the Tulu speaking regions. In the context of acculturation, the argument holds good in Kannada speaking regions also.


22. This aspect has been analysed in greater detail in the next chapter in the section on Tulu yakṣagāṇa

23. The difference between yakṣagāṇa and mūḍalapāya yakṣagāṇa becomes clear here. Though mūḍalapāya also has dealt with the same themes by and large, it also deals with local heroes. *Karibanṭana Kāḷaga* (Karibanṭa's Battle) and Kumara Rāma (the young Rama) may be cited as examples.
24. The Vaisnava faith, emphasises on the worship of Viṣṇu as opposed to the Śaivites who worship Śiva. But in yakṣa-gāna, the trinities of Hindu faith, Brahma, Viṣṇu and Mahēśwara are pictured as equal. The fight between the Vaiṣṇavites and Śaivites, regarding the superior status of Viṣṇu and Śiva, never appears in yakṣa-gāna.

25. It is perhaps strange, but the similarity is rarely recognised by the regular yakṣa-gāna spectators. Many expressed surprise when the similarity was pointed out to them.


32. This trend has created a new interest in many of the folk theatre forms of Karnataka. Theatre goers inside and outside Karnataka have now become aware of many of the folk theatre forms that were previously known only in particular regions. At the same time, it has had its negative impact also, where it has often taken the form of 'appropriation'. Many of the plays of the Saṅgāṭa (small/minor play/performace) are becoming very popular as played by these modern troupes in the towns and cities, while the traditional troupes are languishing due to lack of support.


34. ibid, p. 141.

35. P.V. Hasyagara, (1975), op. cit, p.53.

37. Yakṣagana Sabha Lakṣaṇa Mattu Prasanga Pithike (Udupi, 1980), p.68. Kāmadhēnū is a heavenly cow and has the power of fulfilling all the wishes of devotees.

38. Shivarama Karanth, (1975) op. cit, p.43.


40. This aspect has been studied in greater detail in the next chapter.


42. Performed by Saligrama Troupe in Sagar on 20-4-91. Sani is the planet saturn. The God Sani is supposed to bring ill luck and suffering to one and all and so is regarded with great fear and reverence. The same attitude was visible among the audience during this performance also.

43. Clifford Geertz, quoted in Manjushri Chaki Sircar and Pārbati Sircar, op. cit, p.158.

44. Muliya Mahabala Bhat, Baṇṇada Vēṣa, op. cit, p.57.