CONCLUSION
The appeal of yakṣaśāṇa to the spectator is so great that the moment he hears the sound of canḍe and maddale, he is automatically drawn by some invisible force, to the place of performance. This appeal and fascination of yakṣaśāṇa, in my opinion, is intimately linked to the meanings that it generates as a total performance, both for the performers and the audience. Yakṣaśāṇa is a traditional form of performance possessing recorded history of more than four hundred years. At the same time, it continues to be highly popular even today, in the face of challenges from modern media like films and television. This is sufficient to justify the vitality and living nature of yakṣaśāṇa and the continued relevance it has been having for its present users and the direct bearings it has on the psychic and emotional needs of these users.

Yakṣaśāṇa has been attracting the attention of scholars and academicians alike as is evidenced by the increasing number of articles and books published on yakṣaśāṇa every year. (The bibliography at the end of this thesis, provides a fair sampling of these writings). 1 Different aspects of yakṣaśāṇa have been and are being studied in these works. Yet very few studies have concentrated on what yakṣaśāṇa means to the participants. The central focus of this study has been to analyse this signifying process; in other words, to find out what yakṣaśāṇa means and how this meaning is communicated in performance. I have been witnessing yakṣaśāṇa performances since my childhood, but many of the findings of this study came as a revelation to me. I became aware of how meanings are embedded in each and every aspect of this performing art. An apparently 'minor' detail like the mark on the forehead of a character (vertical or
horizontal), becomes a sign representing the Vaiśnava (worshippers of Viṣṇu) influence on the yaksāgāna discourse. A theatrical device like the traditional curtain signifies a whole range of denotative and connotative meanings: how the process of transformation of the actor into a character is made part of the performance; how the revealing of the potent signified world on the stage (of the performance), bears close proximity to the way the God's idol is revealed to the devotees in temples. Apart from these individual details, one can also see global questions like how, for example, the discourse of yaksāgāna can be understood only in relation to the context of performance and the social status of the sponsor; or how the unique narrative mode of this dramatic form represents the attitude of yaksāgāna towards art as representation. These and many other aspects of the significationary process, at the level of individual sign systems or of the form as a whole, are then, the most important significations which I have tried to decipher and discuss in this study.

This thesis begins with a study of semiotics - the theoretical approach adopted in this study. The one common concern that we find in different fields of human sciences, specially in the second half of this century, is the concern with the problem of meaning. Different theoretical and methodological approaches have been evolved to study this particular phenomenon. Among the various approaches to the problem of meaning, semiotics has perhaps emerged as the most acceptable scientific approach. Semiotics is an offshoot of the growth of linguistics and is concerned primarily with signs and sign systems. Its basic premise is that human beings are capable of communicating only through signs, whatever be the nature and form of communication. Language
is the most developed form of human communication and therefore it was natural that linguistics provided the earliest framework for the study of signs. But semiotics takes in its ambit of study both verbal and nonverbal signs and as Umberto Eco says, "declares itself concerned with the entire universe (and nothing else)." The First Chapter is an introduction to semiotics in which the growth and development of semiotics in its various forms speaking historically has been studied. The study begins by analysing the postulates of Ferdinand de Saussure and C.S. Peirce, who are considered the founders of semiotics. But the concern with signs and signification can be traced to many linguists and philosophers of the past, including some ancient Indian schools of thought in which a semiotic underpinning is clearly discernable. The growth of semiotic thought is, then, studied in three phases: Russian Formalism, the Prague School and the French contributions of the sixties and seventies.

The Russian Formalists were among the earliest to view meaning, not as some thing 'preexistent' but as some thing 'constructed'. They viewed art as a device and concentrated on studying the 'literariness' of literature. The study also focusses attention of Vladimir Propp and on Mikhail Bakhtin who is increasingly being considered as one of the greatest thinkers of the twentieth century. The Prague School continued the concerns of Russian Formalism but it assumed a more truly semiotic form. If Russian Formalism (at least in the beginning), concentrated only on the formal aspects of literature, the Prague thinkers concerned themselves with studying the significatory processes. Nor did they confine their interest only to literature, but encompassed in their study, various aspects of culture like theatre and folk
music. Even aspects of material culture like costume was studied as a sign system by them. They saw semiotics, "to be the most crucial issue in the intellectual and cultural resurgence of modern times". Similarly semiotics as a new perspective drew the attention of the entire world with the developments in France in the last few decades. It developed as an independent methodology and was applied to varied fields like literature, psychology, anthropology, cultural systems, historiography etc. The contributions of major authors like Roland Barthes, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan are summarized both in chronological and logical manner. The first section ends with a brief study of the present scene in semiotics with a summary of the contributions of authors like Jurij Lotman and Umberto Eco. This section also includes a short resumé of Edward Said's *Orientalism* as it is a seminal semiotic study of imperialism and colonialism and is relevent to any study of the so-called 'orient'.

Theoretical issues more directly related to the present study, semiotics of theatre and performance theory, are the subject matter of the Second Section of the First Chapter. Various contributions to the semiotics of theatre, specially those of Keir Elam and Patrice Pavis, have been recognised. The chapter ends with a study of performance theory that has now emerged as one of the important approaches in folkloristics. The theoretical positions of Dell Hymes and Richard Bauman have been considered in detail.

The performing arts are a major form of cultural expression in South India as is evidenced by the great number and variety of forms existing in these parts of the subcontinent. Yakṣagāna is studied in the background of the
other performing arts of South India in Chapter Two. It begins with a study of the land and the people of the areas where yakṣagāṇa has traditionally flourished. There is an integral relationship between the life style and worldview of any community with the landmass which they inhabit. The social structure of the coastal and Malenad regions as well as the changes taking place in these areas in the last few decades, have a direct bearing on the 'meaning' of yakṣagāṇa of the past and of the present.

After a brief study of the etymology of the term 'yakṣagāṇa', the three geographical variants of yakṣagāṇa, their similarities and dissimilarities are discussed. Yakṣagāṇa has been seen in relation to the other performing arts of Karnataka like mūḍalapāya and saṃṇāṭa. Performing arts of other parts of South India like Kathakali, terukkūttu and Telugu yakṣagāṇa share certain common characteristics with yakṣagāṇa. Some folklorists have propounded a theory which seems highly influenced by the Dravidian philological model about the possibility of a 'Proto Dravidian theatre'. According to this theory, the Dravidian stage, like the Dravidian language, operated in its proto form which later seems to have diffused into the many forms of performing arts one notices in the present Dravidian speech communities. We have argued in this dissertation that the search for a proto form, emerges from a faulty theoretical perspective mostly based on suppositions. Even at the synchronic level, no comprehensive comparative study has been attempted to argue with any definiteness about the existence of a proto Dravidian theatre form. The chapter ends with a study of the interaction between folk and classical forms and the influence of Bhakti movement on the different performing arts of India, more particularly, yakṣagāṇa.
The analysis of the significatory process of yakṣagāṇa, begins with a study of the structure of a yakṣagāṇa performance, in which the syntagmatic or linear structure is studied first. The preliminaries, the oddōlaga and its various aspects and the closing prayer are treated as constants and the prasanga as the variable. (The prasanga can be further reduced to constants and variables.) Moreover the structure of the written text has been compared with the structure of the performance text so that one can recognise how the two texts converge and diverge in significant ways. The received text of yakṣagāṇa, comprises not merely the written text but also of the oral tradition of performance called nāḍe. The past studies of yakṣagāṇa have not paid sufficient attention to the role of nāḍe. This study has highlighted the role of orality in shaping the performance text of yakṣagāṇa.

The significance of different facets of the performance text like the preliminaries and the Oddōlaga, can be understood appropriately only in the perspective of the entire discourse of the performance and the function they perform the making of this discourse. This becomes the subject matter of the paradigmatic analysis. Roman Jacobson’s model of linguistic communication and the six functions that he recognises, have been used in analysing the function of different components. Tere the traditional curtain used in yakṣagāṇa, becomes a highly charged sign with a polysemy of signifieds. The unique narratology of the written text, connotes yakṣagāṇa’s attitude towards art as representation that is far removed from the realistic, mimetic mould. A study has also been made of the organisational structure of yakṣagāṇa performing troupes. The emergence of yakṣagāṇa troupes and its implications on the discourse of yakṣagāṇa
have also been discussed. The audience forms an integral part of any performance, as they are the raison d’être of every performance. However, no sustained study of the audience and its structure of any performing art of India, has so far, been attempted. A preliminary attempt in this direction has been made in this study, by focussing attention on the structure of audience as it was in the past and comparing it with the structure of audience of the present, specially of the commercial ‘tent’ troupes. The conceptual paradigms of any community, find expression in different forms, including the way, it organises its space. The concept of space in yakṣaṅa also, represents these paradigms, that can be deciphered by studying the space codes of yakṣaṅa. The developments in yakṣaṅa can be recognised as a movement from religious space to social space. The symbolic significance of performance in the night and how the night is conceptually equated with "spacelessness" also become important in understanding the significance of space in yakṣaṅa. These and other aspects of the structure and meaning of yakṣaṅa, have been discussed in Third Chapter.

Yakṣaṅa in the process of communication, makes use of multiple and complex channels of communication. Different modes like music, dance, costumes and make-up, body language, etc. function in this communicative process. All these collectively function within the ritualistic and cultural contexts of the performance. Chapter Four studies the complexities of these multichannel systems of communication. Some theoretical positions like A.J.Greimas’ concept of modality and the Rasa theory of Indian aesthetics, provide the perspectives with which multichannel communication systems can be studied and comprehended.
Different channels and modes of communication like language, music, dance, costume etc. function collectively in yakṣagāna. Each medium has its own sign system and significatory process. However when several media function together, as a collective delivery, each is reshaped and redefined by the other media that function in close collaboration and togetherness. The different modes of communication that function in yakṣagāna are analysed individually, but keeping the multichannel nature of the communication in yakṣagāna in view. The music of yakṣagāna for example, has been studied in the light of its unique features and also how it is oriented towards dance and histrionic representation. The current trends in yakṣagāna music are influenced by modern amenities (like sound amplification systems) and also by classical music.

Yakṣagāna dance has its origins in ritual performance. Dance is recognised as one of the most attractive features of yakṣagāna. This attraction and aesthetic appeal is intimately related to the meaning(s) generated by the rhythmic body movements. Dance is analysed here in terms of Alan Lomax’ theory of Choreometrics and Birdwhistell’s concept of Kinesics, which studies body movements as meaningful entities. One particular type of dance nṛtta (pure dance, that is not accompanied by words or histrionic expression), is analysed to show how meaning is generated through dance. Nṛtta is supposed to be a dance that does not convey any meaning. In this study, it has been shown that even nṛtta communicates definite meanings. The concept of montage has been used for this analysis.
The improvised text, in the form of dialogues created during the performance, is one of the unique features of yakṣa-gāna. In performance, it plays an important function in communicating the narrative and the referential component of the discourse. The performance text of yakṣa-gāna keeps changing, often radically, (though the written text remains the same) primarily because of the freedom that the improvised text provides. Yakṣa-gāna has also been able to maintain the contemporary relevance, largely by the creative and intelligent use of the improvised text. The changing political, social and economic conditions are reflected in the improvised text. Important subjects such as the changing perception of the social hierarchy (as represented by the caste system), the democratic political set up, the rights of women etc. find expression in yakṣa-gāna because of the freedom provided by the improvised text. The study also deals with issues like intertextuality and how yakṣa-gāna, inspite of the multiple articulation in different media (like music, dance, speech, etc.), overcomes the problem of redundancy.

Costume and make-up are usually recognised as one of the most beautiful aspects of yakṣa-gāna. The aesthetic appeal is intimately linked to the signifying power of these visual signs. The costume and make-up structure of yakṣa-gāna, constitutes a highly codified system, projecting different character and situation categories. The traditional categorisation of characters employed in yakṣa-gāna is basically an actor category, evolved for the purpose of distribution of characters to different actors. This study has posited a new typology, based on the 'differences' projected by costume and make-up. These visual signs project major categories. Within each category, subtle
distinctions are also projected. For example, in the category of heroic characters, the change of headgears, ornaments or make-up signifies subtle distinctions of characters within the major category.

The study of the multimedia communication of yaksagāna, is concluded with the study of the actor as a sign. The dialectical relationship that exists between the actor and the character that he represents, is studied in relation to the general approach to acting in yaksagāna.

Of late, there has been a growing realisation in semiotic studies that the signification of any work cannot be understood in its totality, by studying the work in isolation, as a self-contained unit. The study of the structure and sign systems of any form needs or rather demands to be studied in relation to the cultural and social contexts in which the form exists and functions and where it finds its complete meaning. Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress for example, recognise "... social structures and processes, messages and meanings as the proper stand point from which to attempt the analysis of meaning systems". Commenting further on how the meaning of any one sign system is dependent on other sign systems, they say, "... a theory of verbal language has to be seen in the context of a theory of all sign systems as socially constituted and treated as social practices".

Yaksagāna has been viewed holistically in the last two chapters by relating the meaning of yaksagāna, to the social structures and processes, to the contending power structures, the resultant tensions and paradoxes of the society. Chapter Five studies yaksagāna as a deep symbolic system, conveying
certain immanent meanings that are directly related to the lives of the people. An analysis of these deep underlying meanings, necessarily involves the task of interpretation. Only such an approach can tackle the crucial question of what yakṣaṇa actually means to the participants - the performers as well as the viewers. Such an interpretative approach involves the viewing of culture as a text or as an 'assemblage of texts' as Clifford Geertz puts it.8

In studying the symbolic significance of yakṣaṇa, two distinct phases need to be recognised: the traditional open-air performances and the commercial performing troupes. Sponsoring a yakṣaṇa performance was considered highly prestigious for the sponsor. Sponsorship was economically viable only for the landlords and rich persons of the village and thus, the sponsorship of a performance acted as an affirmation of the prestige and social status of the sponsor. These arrangements seem to project the feudal structure of the society in the performance context as well as in the discourse of yakṣaṇa. This also affirms that yakṣaṇa, by and large, has been projecting the ideology of the dominant class or caste in the social hierarchy.

Yakṣaṇa at the same time, also projects other 'unofficial' ideologies as well. Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of polysemy of voices, for example, seems to work well in recognising the complex ensemble of messages of yakṣaṇa. Yakṣaṇa, over the centuries, has also acted as an institution of traditional education. Its role in imparting moral conduct and knowledge about the epics and purāṇas, as well as about the traditional value system in general, has been highly impressive. The characters of yakṣaṇa, traditionally, have acted as strong role models for the
spectators. It has also acted as a powerful force of acculturation. Yakṣagāṇa is also seen in this study as a strong expression of male ethos. This need for the assertion of the male perspective is studied in the light of the matrilineal kinship system which exists in the coastal regions of Karnataka.

The relation between yakṣagāṇa and ritual has been studied in the Second Section of this Chapter. Rituals in the past were studied mostly for their religious meanings, as sacred symbols. But of late, many folklorists as well as scholars of theatre have been studying rituals and the symbiotic relationship that exists between ritual and performance. In yakṣagāṇa, the ritualistic framework controls and permeates the entire performance, as the performance itself is considered a form of worship. The changes taking place in yakṣagāṇa now, have had a double faceted impact on the ritualistic element. On the one hand, one can clearly see a progression towards deritualised entertainment, on the other, the stories of local deities and folk-heroes that are appearing in yakṣagāṇa now, have again enhanced the ritualistic appeal.

The last few decades have been a period of great change in yakṣagāṇa. Some fundamental changes have taken place in the performative context, the organisational structure, the themes, etc. At the same time, yakṣagāṇa has continued to be a popular form, even in the face of challenges by media like cinema and television. But, these challenges and resultant changes have not been studied systematically. The studies in English, do not take cognisance of these changes and the writings in Kannada, usually view them from the limited and superficial perspective of tradition versus change. These do
not for example, tackle the crucial question of why these changes are taking place. In this study, these changes are viewed holistically by situating them in the performative context, which is governed by the social, political and even philosophical changes that are taking place in the society. These changes taking place in yakṣagāna, are a fine example of invented tradition, where the cultural form is recoded and restructured so that it becomes an expressive vehicle for new meanings and ideologies. Yakṣagāna as a living sign system in which new meanings keep emerging, has been examined from the perspective of performance theory.

To begin with, the changes taking place in the society of the coastal and Malenad regions in the last few decades, are discussed. The weakening of the old feudal hierarchical structure and the growing aspirations as well as the growing political consciousness and economic power of the backward classes/castes become important in understanding the present phase of yakṣagāna. These changes have led to the formation of new power equations and tensions in the society, which are now getting reflected appropriately in yakṣagāna. The commercialisation of yakṣagāna troupes has fundamentally changed the symbolic significance of the performance. If in the past, the audience saw the performance by the courtesy of the sponsor (a landlord or a rich person), now each member of the audience pays for the performance and by doing so, becomes a sponsor himself or herself. This fundamental change has drastically altered the traditional meaning of yakṣagāna. These changes are studied in the Sixth Chapter.

One of the most obvious developments witnessed during the last few decades, has been a movement away from ritual and ostensible religious messages. Traditionally, yakṣagāna
represented the clash between *Dharma* (righteous/proper way of life) and *Adharma* (non-righteous/improper way of life), with the victory of *Dharma* in the end. But in performances now, the villainous characters like Rāvaṇa, Kaurava or Kaṃsa, are projected as protagonists and are presented in a tragic light. With this reinterpretation, the entire religious discourse and ideology is getting subverted. This process of secularisation is studied with examples, to show how this reinterpretation is achieved in the performance text. This change in performance is related to the social changes taking place in society, where the traditional religious message does not have the same appeal.

Among the many changes taking place in yakṣāgāna now, the emergence of Tuḷu yakṣāgāna has led to the most intense and often acrimonious debate. Tuḷu is one of the Dravidian languages and is spoken in the major parts of Dakshina Kannada Dist. Till recently yakṣāgāna was performed only in Kannada even in Tuḷu speaking regions although many people of this region, do not speak or understand Kannada. In the last few decades, when yakṣāgāna began to be performed in Tuḷu, many other aspects of traditional yakṣāgāna, also began changing. Important aspects such as the themes, costumes, make-up, dance, etc. began changing radically. The Tuḷu yakṣāgāna has become so popular now that troupes of tenkutitiṭtu rarely perform in Kannada, in Tuḷu speaking regions.

The Tuḷu yakṣāgāna has often been studied from the limited perspective of language shift from Kannada to Tuḷu. But a radical change such as the emergence of Tuḷu yakṣāgāna, could not have come about and found acceptance by the community if it had not fulfilled its deep psychological
needs. The Tuļu yakṣagāna has been viewed in this study as a reaction against the cultural and linguistic hegemony that Kannada and the pan-Indian epics and purāṇas exercised and represented. In order to understand the entire significance of Tuļu yakṣagāna, one has to take cognisance not merely of what it represents, but also what it chooses not to represent. The themes from the epics and purāṇas which are equated with Brahminism and Sanskritic metaphor have almost totally been rejected or ignored in Tuļu yakṣagāna; so has been the traditional costume and make-up structure. This negative signification is equally important in understanding what Tuļu yakṣagāna actually signifies.

Thus, Tuļu yakṣagāna is seen as representing the urge for the assertion of local metaphor in terms of ethnic and religious (non Brahminical) identity; it is also seen as representing the contending and conflicting ideologies in the social, political and religious spheres. It is also a fine example of how the different social structure itself emerges during performance. Tuļu yakṣagāna is not merely an expression of social change but it has also become an agent of that change.

Some of the other changes taking place in yakṣagāna are studied in this chapter. New prasangas not based on classical themes are being written now and are becoming increasingly popular. These new prasangas by and large, represent the same value system and world view of the traditional prasangas. Certain social and political issues of immediate concern to the society (ecology, communal politics=. Ayodhya/Babri Masjid etc.) are also being represented in these new prasangas. At an immanent level, new 'unofficial' ideologies are also getting represented.
The chapter ends with a study of Shivarama Karanth's experimental performing troupe Yakṣaranga and its influence on yakṣagāna in general.

Thus the thesis begins with a study of the growth and development of semiotics. After studying yakṣagāna in relation to the other performing arts of South India, it concentrates on the study of the structure and sign system of yakṣagāna. The different media involved in the communicative process are also analysed. The symbolic significance of yakṣagāna and the changes taking place in yakṣagāna are studied by relating the cultural form to the social structure and the social processes.

A few comments regarding the effectiveness of semiotics as a methodology for the study of a performing art like yakṣagāna, are perhaps in order. In folklore studies, different approaches and methodologies have been evolved for the study of different aspects of oral tradition. Semiotics did not originate as a methodology specific to folklore. In fact, from the beginning, semiotics has always been interdisciplinary, encompassing in its ambit, a whole range of disciplines. At the same time, it is also true that from the beginning, folklore studies, have played a prominent part in the growth of semiotic thought.10

The semiotic approach has been found to be greatly helpful in analysing the codes and sign systems of yakṣagāna. Semiotics, being primarily concerned with signs, both verbal and nonverbal, has been found to be aptly suited for the task of studying a form like yakṣagāna, with its multiple and complex sign systems, verbal, kinesic, visual, ritualistic etc. The concepts of semiotics have helped in elucidating
aspects like the function and significance of different units of the performance text, the narratology of the written text, the typology of characters, the multimedia involved and the function of each, etc.

In studying the relationship of yakṣagāṇa to the society in which it operates and functions, the insights provided by the performance theory have been fully exploited. The theory has helped in analysing the symbolic significance of yakṣagāṇa and in studying the changes which are taking place in yakṣagāṇa now, as an example of 'invented tradition'. Performance theory has helped in studying the cultural text by situating it in the context of the social situation. Such an approach can be viewed as a corrective to the 'text centred' approach of many semiotic theories which concentrate on the power of discourse but often fail to recognise the discourse of power. This insight is perhaps the special contribution of folklore to semiotics. It will be most appropriate to conclude this part of my study, with the following remarks by Bauman:

"... If folklore is special, it is so chiefly in so far as it shows us especially clearly how expressive form and social function, individual creativity and collective tradition, personal action and communicative interaction are interrelated in the kinds of communication we call art. That seems to me to point the way to a unified semiotic study of artistic creativity in social life as part of a socially constituted semiotics of art."
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Many of these books are published in the form of commemorative volumes honouring individual yaksagāna artistes. There are quite a few organisations and forums that conduct seminars and workshops on different aspects of yaksagāna.


4. Bharata for example in *The Nāṭya Sāstra* says that nṛttā does not communicate any meaning and that it is used only because it creates beauty. "It does neither relate to its meaning nor reflect its spirit ... it is said that dance is occasioned by no specific need. It has come into use simply because it creates beauty." *The Nāṭya Sāstra*, IV 266-267, tr. Manmohan Ghosh (Calcutta: 1967), p. 68.

5. Shivarama Karanth, for example, comments on "The richness, grandeur and beauty of costumes and make-up of yaksagāna". Shivarama Karanth, *Yaksagāna* (1975), op. cit., p. 100.


7. ibid, pp. VII-VIII.


9. The use of performance theory does not mean a theoretical shift away from semiotics. Performance theory, as has been explained in the introduction, has been influenced by semiotics and other related approaches. Richard Bauman, for example, points out how the works of Jacobson, Bogatyrev and Bakhtin converge in the ethnographic approach. See Richard Bauman "Conceptions of Folklore in the Development of Literary Semiotics", *Semiotica*, (Vol. 39, 1982).

10. For details see Bauman, op. cit.

11. ibid, pp. 16-17.