CHAPTER - II

YĀKṢAGĀṆA

AND

THE PERFORMING ARTS OF SOUTH INDIA
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SECTION 1: YAKŚAGĀNA: THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE

Yakṣagāna (the song of the Yakṣas - the divine beings) is the traditional theatre form of Karnataka. Yakṣagāna is essentially a folk theatre form but we can also discern elements of classical Sanskrit dramaturgy in some of its aspects—like Pūrvaranga (lit. prior to the play: = the preliminaries that are performed before the commencement of the particular episode to be enacted) the mangala (the auspicious ending) etc. Thus it is clear that yakṣagāna must have come under strong classical influence some time in the past, though it has remained basically a folk performing art. (The folk-classical interaction as witnessed in yakṣagāna is studied in section II of this chapter.) Yakṣagāna was the popular theatrical form in the whole of Karnataka. Now the form that is prevalent in coastal Karnataka and the adjoining Malenāḍ (land of mountains: = the land mass adjoining the Sahyadri range of mountains in Karnataka) region is often referred to, in scholarly writings as coastal yakṣagāna or paḍuvalapāya (western style/school). The form in the rest of Karnataka is known as mūḍalapāya (eastern style/school) yakṣagāna (see map 1)1. As coastal yakṣagāna has achieved greater refinement as well as greater popularity, both inside and outside Karnataka, it is often referred to simply as yakṣagāna. It is also a living popular form as is evidenced by the good number of professional troupes functioning at present apart from the amateur troupes.2 Forms like mūḍalapāya and dodḍāta (major play/performance) on the other hand, are facing neglect and are only occasionally
Map 1. KARNATAKA - Folk Theatre Forms

- Maharastra
- Goa
- Arabian Sea
- Keralal

Shaded area: Samaṭa and Other Forms.

Legend: Samaṭa and Other Forms.
performed. The form under study here is coastal yakṣaṅāṇa and for convenience, will hereafter be referred to simply as yakṣaṅāṇa. The present popularity of yakṣaṅāṇa is confined to the two coastal districts of Karnataka, Dakshina and Uttara Kannada and parts of the districts of Shimoga, Chickamagalur and Coorg. To this must be added the Northernmost part of Kerala state as well (areas adjoining Dakshina Kannada district), where also yakṣaṅāṇa is popular (see map 2). There are regional variations even within the form under study here. These geographical variants and the other folk theatre forms of Karnataka and of South India, that bear close resemblance to yakṣaṅāṇa, have been studied in this chapter. To begin with, a brief study of the land and people of the region where yakṣaṅāṇa has thrived, has been made.

Commenting on the intimate relationship that exists between the art forms of a people and the land which they inhabit, H.K. Ranganath says, "Any art is born out of the interaction of various cultural influences of that place and the people. The human being is a child of the environment. Different aspects of his art and culture will unmistakably reveal the influence of the environment he lives in". The culture of a people is intimately related to the style of life and the land where they inhabit. The particular life patterns, the stresses, struggles as well as joys of the people can best be understood in relation to the features of the landmass where they live. This is more true of rural India, where the people, by and large, are rooted to their land and where the economy and means of livelihood are dependent on agriculture. As a result, the entire life cycle and the year round patterning of various activities (including cultural ones) are conditioned by the seasons and
the related agricultural activities. At a deeper level, the world view and value system of the community are themselves conditioned by the nature of the land and the natural forces of that area. As such, before we study yakṣagāṇa as a form, it is necessary to know the land where yakṣagāṇa has thrived all these years, for a proper understanding of this form.

The topography of the coastal regions of Karnataka is dominated by the Arabian sea on the west and the steep Sahyadri mountain ranges (called the Western Ghats) on the east. The land, sandwiched between the two, is a narrow strip. It is as narrow as ten kilometers at some places and as wide as sixty kilometers at some other places. It is wider in the southern tip and becomes narrower as we move north towards Goa. The region is crisscrossed with rivers, hillocks and streams. Most of the areas are a little above sea level. Near Karwar, the plateau rises to an altitude of 610 meters. In the south, from Udupi to Puttur some hill ranges rise to an altitude of 305 meters.

The Malenad regions, in contrast, are at a higher altitude as they are situated on the western ghats and form part of the Deccan plateau. This area is covered with thick evergreen forests and is crisscrossed with many hillocks and valleys. The pattern of life and agriculture are similar to that of the coastal regions. Due to heavy rains, the mountainous terrain and the thick forests, this area was once isolated, with very little infrastructural facilities like transportation and medicine. As a result, it was once the home of diseases like plague and malaria, though the situation has improved now.
The majority of the population, both in the coastal and in Malenad regions, live in villages. The two coastal districts were directly under the British rule, in contrast to the Malenad regions which were under the rule of the Mysore Kings. Developmental activities under the colonial-rule, were almost totally neglected. As a result, transportation between villages was not often easy. (The terrain also added to the difficulty.) The situation has now slightly improved, though many villages are not easily accessible even today.

There are three seasons: the rainy season from June to October, the pleasant winter from November to February and the hot summer from March to May with scorching heat, when the land becomes parched and dry. The main occupation is agriculture, except in the coastal regions where fishing is also prominent. Paddy, aracanut and coconut are the main crops. In the hilly tracts of coastal regions, cashewnut is also grown. Rubber plantations are also becoming common now. As there are no irrigational facilities, agriculture is mostly dependent on monsoon rains. So, it is possible to grow only one crop. As a result, peasants and agricultural labourers are busy from June to October which is the agricultural season and are comparatively free till the next planting season. It is interesting to note that this 'free' period, coincides with the period of the year when activities like yakṣagāna performance and the rituals of Bhūtārādhane (spirit worship) are performed. (During the rainy season, it is almost impossible to have any open-air activity.)

The changes taking place in this region can best be witnessed in the towns and to an extent, in the villages situated along the main roads. Modernisation has brought
about many changes in the life of the people. This change in the life pattern can best be recognised along the coastal highway (N.H.17), that runs through the two coastal districts. The economy and style of life of the people along the highway and the villages in the hinterland has clearly undergone a great deal of change. New jobs, new opportunities, better price for the produce, contacts with people of other cultures have all been made possible. It has also resulted in new lifestyles and new social tensions because of the change.

Life in the villages is no doubt changing but very slowly. Even today, in the interior, there are any number of villages that are not easily accessible. The economy even now, is largely dependent on agriculture, though new vocations and different sources of income (like the rolling of bidi - a cheroot like object used for smoking for example) are also available now. Possession of land is a matter of great prestige. The life cycle of the villagers is dependent on the agricultural season. The real cultural life of the people by and large, is still to be found in the villages though the bigger villages and towns are fast becoming the main centres of activities like yaksagāna.

Because of the steep Sahyadri mountain ranges that separate the coastal regions from the Deccan plateau, the coastal regions did not have very intimate contacts with the main land. As such, their culture and style of life have evolved in a way that is slightly different from the rest of Karnataka. This does not mean that there were no contacts at all but only that the contacts were infrequent. Infact one of the proverbs prevalent in Dakshina Kannada will make the
attitude of people living in the coastal regions towards the main land, clear:

\[ \text{kēṭṭu} \quad \text{ghaṭṭa} \quad sēru \]
\[ \text{spoil} \quad \text{ghats} \quad \text{join/go} \]

is spoiled must join or go to ghats,

that is, one who has earned a bad name here will climb the ghats and go to the mainland.

Another important reason for the isolation of the major part of Dakshina Kannada is that of language. The majority of the population south of Bramhavar (see map 2) speak Tuḷu. Tuḷu is one of the Dravidian languages and is spoken by the majority in most parts of Dakshina Kannada (except for the northernmost part). Tuḷu has a great deal of oral literature but the language of education and administration had, for the most part, been Kannada. One reason for this, is perhaps the fact that the coastal regions have mostly been under the suzerainty of the kingdoms of the mainland and so Kannada as the language of the rulers, has always enjoyed prestige. It is only recently that Tuḷu culture and language are being studied seriously. 5

People belonging to several major religions of the world, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Jainism live here though the Hindus form a clear majority. There are innumerable temples, a good number of churches and mosques. Among Hindus, Bhūṭāradhane is a major practice. There are said to be more than 360 spirits. 6 Even today, people believe that their joys and sorrows, their good and bad fortunes, in short their entire lives, are controlled by
these spirits. Worship of these spirits to propitiate them, is an integral part of the lives of most people living in these areas. Bhütārādhane also worked as an institution for giving justice and for curing the diseased. Chinnappa Gowda in his exhaustive study of Bhütārādhane explains how this system worked as a ‘socio political judicial system’ and supplemented the feudal system existent in Dakshina Kannada, since medieval times. Most local disputes with reference to land, water or cases of theft etc., were referred to the Bhūta (the spirit). Many a time, the Bhūta acting as a judge would pass judgement after listening to both the parties. People who were possessed by spirit would also come to the Bhūta to be cured. When contagious diseases spread in the whole village, prayers would be offered to the Bhūta for the well being of the community. Another common religious practice is nagārādhane (worship of snakes). This practice seems to be prevalent in the whole of the coastal region, though more strongly present in the south than in the north.

The Bhakti movement has also had a marked influence on the religious practices of this area. Madhvacharya, the preceptor of Dwaita (Dualism) philosophy, chose Udupi as his centre and established eight mutts there. Yakṣagāna seems to have come under the strong spell of this Vaiṣṇava (the believers of Dualism, who follow the Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa cult) influence.

As in other parts of India, here also, society is divided along caste lines with a rigid hierarchical structure. Brahmins, the priestly class, the land lords, the various intermediary castes following the various vocations assigned to their castes, are found here also. The caste hierarchy and the various positions assigned to each, are described in the following words, by Amruta Someshwara:
Coming to the ordering of the society, the Brahmins performed religious duties and enjoyed high respect as priests, astrologers, physicians and wielders of spells. Their influence was higher than other castes. Some of them were also agriculturists. Jainas (non Hindus assimilated into the Hindu system) and Bunts had a prominent position and exercised power as land lords. The Bunts controlled the remaining section of the population in their capacity as minor officials. The Jainas who were connected formerly with ruling the land as chieftains have established religious and educational centres and have become a powerful class. Later down the scale, the Billavas established themselves as toddy-tappers. The Mogaviras were not only expert fishermen but were also skilled and daring navigators and seafarers. Trade and commerce in Tulu Nadu was taken care of by the Muslims who were called Byaris and Konkanis. Christians were added to the society from the 18th century onwards and they are in trade and education.

What has been described so far, deals with the Tulu society. In Uttara Kannada and Malenad areas (including the northern part of Dakshina Kannada), Kannada is the spoken language, with of course dialectical variations. But the system of life and caste configurations are more or less the same. The caste names differ, there are other minor variations, but the essential structure remains the same. For example, Jainas are not prominent in Uttara Kannada and Mogaviras are not found in Malenad regions as is only to be expected. Also, the natural surroundings and the life styles remain the same.

It is clear that the life of the people of the coastal and Malenad regions of Karnataka has been conditioned by the geographical conditions of the region. This naturally is expressed in the cultural expressions of the people and among the most prominent of the cultural forms of this region, is yakṣagāna. It is amidst the wild beauty of the hilly
terrains, the thick forests and the surging seas that yaksagāna has lived and grown. In the words of H.K. Ranganath:

The coastal strip of Karnataka ... with its sounding sea, the thunderous and colourful skies, whistling wind, lofty range of mountains, fast running rivers, deep valleys, forests and thickset green had remained a land of wild beauty and is an inspiring field for the creative artist, who feels the presence of the superman in his surroundings. The wild beauty of the rugged nature is richly reflected in yaksagāna and has made it one of the most colourful of the world's folk arts.

2.1. THE CHANGING SCENE

The villages are no doubt repositories of the folk culture of the land. Most of the villages, in the area under study, have existed without much change for centuries. But in the last couple of decades, life in the villages is also changing and some times changing radically. This change is seen not merely in physical amenities like better transportation, electricity etc. but at a more fundamental level—the interrelations in the hierarchical structure of the society itself—leading to new equations and to new tensions. Several reasons can be ascribed for this change. The foremost reason is of course the democratic set up in post independent India. The structure of society in most of these villages was feudal with the land lord belonging to the upper caste (Jain, Brahmin, Bunt etc.) exercising almost total control over the entire village. This control no doubt emanated from the economic and political power but it extended to other spheres of life, social, religious and cultural. Even sexual exploitation of women belonging to the lower castes by the upper caste landlords was quite common.
The same set up continued in the beginning years of independent India. But slowly, the backward castes, with their numerical superiority, realised their strength and power in the electoral set up where numbers count. So, politically, they began to assert themselves to attain an importance that they had been denied in the earlier set-up. Educational opportunities were also open to them now. They have now become more aware of their rights and are not ready to accept the old stratified system of social structure. This has created new power equations and the old rigid hierarchical structure of the past is undergoing a change, though one cannot say that it has been removed totally.

Another major change was brought about with the abolition of land tenancy with the implementation of Land Reforms act in Karnataka in the seventies. Land has always been a precious commodity in this agrarian society. Ownership of land is associated with prestige and position in society. Most of the cultivable lands of the landlords were leased to the tenants, who were by and large, from the backward classes. When tenancy was abolished, these tenants became the owners of the land of which they were only tenants till the other day. This changed not merely the economic life of the people. The power and prestige that ownership of land was associated with, was also theirs now. Thus, new power equations are emerging and this naturally has led to new tensions in the community.11
2.2.1. Yakṣaṇa: Etymology and Meaning

The traditional theatre of the coastal and Malnad regions is known by the name yakṣaṇa. It is also known by other names such as Daśavatāra āṭa (play/ performance about the ten incarnations of Lord Viṣṇu) and Bhāgavatara āṭa (play/performance conducted by the bhāgavata—the lead singer of the troupe; it may also mean a play/performance about the life of Lord Kṛṣṇa as the story of Kṛṣṇa's life is known as the Bhāgavata). In popular parlance yakṣaṇa is simply referred to as āṭa (the play or performance).

The etymology and exact meaning of the term yakṣaṇa, has been a matter of much scholarly discussion. This discussion is related to the one regarding the origin of yakṣaṇa. The word Yakṣa refers to "a class of semi divine beings, attendants of Kubera" Basavaraja Malashetty mentions other words regarding performance mentioned in Kannada writings of the past which may be related to yakṣaṇa. "The word [Yekkalagana—mentioned in Candraprabha Purāṇa of 12th century A.D] has synonyms like ekka, ekkadiga, jakka, yakṣandōla". He continues, "Scholars hold that yakṣaṇa is a mode of song and yekkalagana denotes the art of the musician. People belonging to the caste called jakkalu ... are still found living on the banks of Godavari river in Andhra Pradesh".

From the above, it may be surmised that yakṣaṇa was originally a form of music. Some scholars like K. Krishna Bhat and Sri Krishna Bhat Artikaje are of the view that the word yakṣaṇa refers to its ritualistic function—as a mode
of worship. Artikaje for example says, "The view that in Sanskrit, yakṣa means 'to worship' and that the song which originated as means of worship, is naturally called yakṣagāna, is in line with the general Indian approach to art which takes music and the other arts as not mere forms of entertainment; but as a way of reaching the divine".\textsuperscript{15} K.Krishna Bhat is also of the opinion that yakṣagāna was basically a form of worship in the temples in the form of singing. He argues that this form of worship, with music, where the songs in Kannada language were used instead of the Sanskrit incantations, was started with the group of Vaiṣṇava saints during the Vijayanagar empire.\textsuperscript{16}

But some scholars argue that from a linguistic point of view, the word yakka (as in yakkalagāna) could not have been derived from Sanskrit yakṣa.\textsuperscript{17} Bhimarao Chitaguppi on the other hand argues that jakka was used as a synonym of jati (yati) and that jakka may have become yakṣa in Sanskrit, but he does not provide any linguistic or etymological evidence for this.\textsuperscript{18}

2.2.2. A style of music

The term yakṣagāna today refers to the theatrical medium using music, dance, costumes, dialogues etc. But most scholars agree that yakṣagāna, as the name itself suggests, was originally a style of music. Shivarama.Karanth is of the opinion that yakṣagāna music was a distinct style different from Hindusthani and Karnatik schools of classical music now in vogue in India.\textsuperscript{19} References to yakṣagāna style of music are found in the works of Sarṅgadeva (A.D. 1210-12147), (who refers to it as Jakka) and Govinda Diksita (A.D.1628).\textsuperscript{20} References to yakṣagāna style of music are found in Telugu
works of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. K. Krishna
Bhat also gives the example of how pāṭālis or sthānikas who
were brahmans attached to temples in Dakshina Kannada for
singing, were also the people most active in yakṣagāṇa.^^

It is clear from the above references that yakṣagāṇa
was originally a style of music to which other aspects like
dance, costume, acting etc. must have been added in course of
time drawing from other folk forms. In the invocation, in the
beginning of any yakṣagāṇa prasanga (lit. episode: = the
written script; the word refers to the written script as well
as to the particular episode to be performed), the author
states that he is going to ‘tell’ such and such a story. We
can take the following couplet from Pārti Subba’s
Paṭṭābhīṣēka:

battisākruti taḷarāgavadhadim Rāmāyaṇam pēḥvuda
Thirty two forms tāḷa rāga variety Rāmāyaṇa telling
bhaktidyānadi kēḍu puṇyakatheyam santōṣamah
with devotion listening this divine story happiness
and concentration
mālpudu\(^23\)
does

[I shall narrate the story of Rāmāyaṇa using thirty two
varieties of rāga and tāḷa. Listen to this divine story with
devotion and concentration and get happiness].

From this quotation, it is clear that the performance
was primarily musical as evidenced from words like pēḥvuda
(telling/narrating) and kēḍu (listening). It is interesting
to note that this form of invocation is found in all the
prasangas including those that are being written now and
meant to be performed through dance, music, costumes
dialogues etc. Yakṣāgāṇa music has ceased to be a purely musical tradition now and lives only as part of the dance-drama tradition. As Shivarama Karanth says, "Unfortunately, yakṣāgāṇa, whatever be its antiquity, ceased to be cultivated scientifically like other schools of music. It lost court patronage long ago. If we find it still surviving, it is because it became a hand maid of the yakṣāgāṇa drama tradition".24

2.2.3. Regional Variants

In the yakṣāgāṇa of the coastal regions, two main variants are recognised. The style that is prevalent to the south of Padubidre and extending up to the northern regions of Kerala is called tenkutīṭṭu (southern region). The style that is found to the north of this region consisting of the northern part of Dakshina Kannada and the whole of Uttara Kannada district including the Malenad regions is known as baḍagutīṭṭu (northern region). Some times, the northern variety is further divided into northern and far northern (Uttara Kannada) varieties. The changes between the southern and northern varieties are more pronounced than between the two northern varieties. The geographical area of tenkutīṭṭu also roughly coincides with the area where Tuḻu is spoken (excepting the area around Udupi, where Tuḻu is spoken but its yakṣāgāṇa belongs to baḍagutīṭṭu).

The difference between tenku and baḍagu styles of yakṣāgāṇa may be summed up as under. The most prominent changes between tenku and baḍagu styles are in the areas of costume and dance. In costume and make-up, tenku style shows certain proximity to kathakali. Munḍāśa, (lit. turban:=the unique headgear of baḍagu style) is not found in tenku style.
The difference is most pronounced in the case of *baññada vēsa* (lit. coloured roles: = demonic characters). This is an aspect that is most highly developed in *tenku* style. The face is decorated with dots made of rice flour and lime which may be made to emerge for about two to three centimeters by repeated application. There are different dot patterns for different characters. The depiction of demonic characters is the most impressive aspect of *tenkutiṭṭu* but this aspect seems to be fast vanishing. In *baḍagu* style, the depiction of demonic characters is neither as well codified nor as elaborately developed as in *tenku* style.

In music, most of the *ragas* and their modes of development, remain the same. The changes can be seen in the accompanying instruments. In *baḍagu*, the singer uses a small pair of cymbals, whereas in *tenku* a metallic gong (*jāgaṭe*) is used. The percussion instruments, *Caṇḍe* and *maddale*, in *tenku* are bigger in size and have a deep bass sound, resembling the ones used in kathakali. In *baḍagu*, the *caṇḍe* player sits to the extreme right of the singer, whereas in *tenku*, the *caṇḍe* player stands to the left of the singer. In *tenku* a pair of medium sized cymbals are used in scenes of brisk action like battle scenes etc.

In dance, the emphasis in *baḍagu* is on graceful steps and wavy movements of the body, whereas in *tenku*, it is more on whirls, turns and jumps which are more suited for communicating the 'manly' qualities like courage, valour etc. In acting too, the emphasis in *baḍagu* is on emotive acting whereas in *tenku*, of late, it has been on improvised speech. In fact, the talent for improvised speech has come to have an overriding importance in *tenku* style at present at the expense of other aspects like dance, emotive acting or even costume and make-up.
Viewed synchronically, the changes taking place now, have had a double impact on the two styles of yakṣagāṇa. On the one hand, due to the improvement in communication, the contacts between the two styles have become closer. Several artistes belonging to one style, are performing in troupes belonging to another style and this has resulted in a certain amalgamation of the elements of both the styles. The organisation of troupes along commercial lines has also led to certain uniformity regarding organisation, style of performance, the living conditions of artistes etc. On the other hand, the rise of Tuḷu yakṣagāṇa has led to a divergence of ways that is sharp and distinct, as is evidenced in the change of language, the changes in costumes, themes etc. Tuḷu yakṣagāṇa is played only in tenku style. Tuḷu yakṣagāṇa has broken away in many ways from the traditional format of yakṣagāṇa and its influence can be witnessed even on traditional prasangas performed in Kannada in tenkūṭṭu. In comparison, baḍagu has retained more of the traditional features and the changes taking place in it are at a subtler level. This has led to new differences emerging between the two styles. In spite of these differences, there are very marked and fundamental similarities like the use of the same written scripts, the similarity of the entire structure, the music, of the context of performance etc. So, one can say that the two are regional variants of the same form.

Between the two northern styles of baḍagu, the differences are far less pronounced. The differences are more subtle and pertain chiefly to the different styles of acting. In most other respects like costumes, musical instruments, and the prasangas used, they are similar. So far as acting and dancing are concerned, the far notheren style (of Uttara
Kannada district) is more relaxed with prominent use of hastamudrās (hand gestures), the emphasis being on representing the words of the song through gestures and dance whereas in the other baḍagu style, the emphasis is on nṛtta (pure dance) in fast rhythm. This kind of dance is often referred to as nirbhāva nṛtya (emotionless dance). This dance naturally needs more physical energy whereas the far northern style needs more of an intellectual approach with emphasis on gestural representation and elaboration on the meaning and the emotional content of the song. It may be of interest to note here that the far northern style has been dominated by Havyak brahmins, whereas in baḍagu style, the majority of artistes are from nonbrahmin castes.

However, in the last 20-30 years, these two styles are merging so fast, that it may not be possible to differentiate them in a few decades from now. One reason for this has been the free movement of artistes of one style who are now working in troupes belonging to another style. Another, perhaps the major reason is that the most talented and popular artistes of the last two decades like Shambhu Hegde and Chittani Ramachandra Hegde belong to the far northern style. Yakṣagāṇa, till recently, did not have any institutionalised system of training and so, the young artistes more often, learnt the art by copying the famous artistes. As a result, we find that many young artistes of the present (of both styles of baḍagu) try to copy the famous artistes mentioned earlier. Because of all these developments, the synthesis of the two styles of baḍagu has now become highly pronounced.
FOLK THEATRE FORMS OF KARNATAKA

YAKṢAGĀṆA

Paḍuvalapāya
(Western style)
(Coastal yakṣagāṇa)

Mūḍalapāya
(Eastern style)

Tāḷamaddale
(Performance involving only music and improvised text)

Āṭa
(Play/performance)

Tenkuttiṭṭu
(Southern region)

Badagūṭṭu
(Northern region)

Uttara
Kannada
Baḍagu
Far-
Northern
region)

North Karnataka

South Karnataka

Doḍḍaṭa
(Major play/performance)

Saṃṇaṭa
(Minor play/performance)
(Including Desarāṭa, Pārijāṭa, etc)
2.3. OTHER FOLK THEATRE FORMS OF KARNATAKA

From the preceding section, on the meaning and etymology of yakṣaṇa, it should be clear that yakṣaṇa has had links in the past with other performing arts of South India like yakṣaṇa of Andhra, Kathakali etc. If there has been such an interaction, it is only natural, because no art exists in a vacuum. It always has to contend with other forms in the same region and in the neighbouring regions and is always subject to a variety of forces that shape the form. "No form of drama", writes Shivarama Karanth, "...has remained uninfluenced by its neighbouring forms. No pattern of culture, can ever remain so. To perpetually stagnate is no virtue either. People move from region to region, and their minds receive notions, ideas, and fancies from neighbouring people. All this results in the change, growth or even decadence of every artistic activity; the theatre is no exception to this".27

So, before we study the structure, the significatory process and the symbolic significance of yakṣaṇa, it is necessary to place it in the context of the other performing arts of Karnataka and of South India, with which it shares many common features. So, in this section, a short descriptive study of the other traditional theatre forms of Karnataka will be made. This will be followed by a study of the similar performing arts from other parts of South India, after which, certain general questions concerning yakṣaṇa and the other forms will be discussed.

The folk theatre form that is prevalent in the rest of Karnataka, other than the coastal and Malenad regions, is also considered to be a variant of yakṣaṇa. It is
popularly known by the term *mūḍalapāya* yakṣāgāna (Eastern style yakṣāgāna), in contrast to the western or coastal variety. Of late, in scholarly works, the term *pāḍuvalapāya* (Western style) has been used to refer to coastal yakṣagāna. In the northern districts of Karnataka, the same form is known as *dodḍāṭa* or *hireṇṭa* (major play/performance). This is perhaps because another form of folk theatre called *saṇṇāṭa* (minor play/performance) also exists in these areas and the terms clearly designate the two as major form (*dodḍāṭa*) and minor form (*saṇṇāṭa*). The different folk theatre forms of Karnataka and the relations between them can be presented in the form of a diagram.

2.3.1. *Mūḍalapāya* yakṣāgāna

*Mūḍalapāya* yakṣāgāna refers to the folk theatre that is/was prevalent in the whole of Karnataka except in the coastal and Malenad regions. Generally, this term is taken to refer to the folk theatre of the eastern part of Karnataka (in contrast to the western or coastal Karnataka). But Basavaraja Malashetty argues that *mūḍalapāya* actually refers not to the theatre prevalent in the east but to the kind of theatre that came from the east. The implication is that this form of theatre seems to have come to Karnataka from the Telugu speaking regions, probably during the rule of the Vijayanagar kings, when both these areas were under their rule.

*Mūḍalapāya* is also performed the whole night till dawn. Its themes are drawn from the epics and *purāṇas*. Some
popular episodes like *Karibanţana Kālaga* (The Battle of Karibānta) and *Kumārārāma* (the Young Rāma) are based on the lives of folk heroes and historical characters. This form also has a ritualistic background and is performed in front of temples or in the main square of the village on a raised wooden platform, temporarily erected for the purpose. (This explains another name, *aṭṭadāṭa* (Platform play) by which also this form is known.) Normally, these performances were conducted during special festivals like *jātre* (the local fair) or some special worship at the village temple. The villagers would come together a few months before the proposed performance and hire the services of a professional *bhāgavata* (the lead singer who also acted as the teacher) to train them. *Mūdalapāya* does not have professional troupes or performers unlike coastal *yakṣagāna*. Only the *bhāgavata* is normally a professional. The other artistes are all villagers who begin rehearsing under the training of the *bhāgavata*. The following description by H.K.Ranganath gives a clear picture of a *mūdalapāya* performance.

*Mūdalapāya* has all the essential characteristics of the Folk Theatre [sic] with the *Bhagavata* supported by a chorus called *Himmela*, vigorous dances and music, colourful costumes and make-up and finally an epic theme and its organic development. The platform in the decorated arena is more spacious than for *yakṣagāna*, as it has to accommodate a bigger number of participants who perform wild dances. The performance opens with a prayer to *Ganapati* the God of learning who appears on the stage to bless the play. In *yakṣagāna*, different characters are introduced to the audience by the *Bhagavata* but *Mūdalapāya* has a jester called *Sarathi* to do the necessary introduction of character and also to provide the essential humour. Every character addresses the *Sarathi* while speaking and an ingenious *Sarathi* is a liason between the audience and the stage, interpreting one to the other. He fills the gap between the exit of one role and the entrance of
another. Witty as he is, he often indulges in humorous conversation even with the audience. The Sarathē is usually assisted by Kodangi the 'minor' jester.31

In mūḍalapāya, the bhāgavata is supported by a chorus. The accompanying instruments are maddale (a barrel like percussion instrument) and mukhavīne (a reed instrument). The last mentioned, is not found in yakṣagāna and there, the cymbals are played invariably by the bhāgavata himself. Mūḍalapāya makes use of drop curtains (as in a proscenium theatre) unlike the hand held curtain of yakṣagāna or kathakali. (In some places, there seems to be a custom of using both types of curtains.)32 The main characters dance behind the curtain for some time, shaking it vigorously before the curtain is removed and the characters presented.

The performance opens with the preliminaries, which begins with a prayer to Lord Gaṇapati. This is followed by the appearance of Śārade, the goddess of learning. With her also appears hanumanāyaka (the clown). It is his job to introduce all the characters. Then follow two young actors called bālagōpālas (young actors). After seeking blessings from all these, the show proper, begins with the introduction of the main characters. During the first appearance, the characters may give an introductory speech called pīṭhike (introduction). Most of the stories deal with battles and fights. The characters usually enter from the back of the stage. Demonic characters enter from the front. They start their war cries much before they are seen. Then two people holding burning torches take them to the stage, while they continue their shouting. Characters like Ānjanēya (the monkey God) may enter by gliding on a rope from the top of the stage.
Battle is the essence of most of these performances. Many a time, the actors become so involved that real fights ensue. D.K. Rajendra says, "The actors fight with such spirit that there are instances where the actors have lost their limbs". As per the conventions of classical Sanskrit dramaturgy, death is not presented on the stage in classical drama. Incidents of death are always reported. It is assumed to be inauspicious to present death on the stage. In contrast, in mūḍalapāya as well as in most traditional theatre forms of South India, (including yakṣagāna) death is freely depicted. In fact, the act of killing itself becomes the highlight of the performance and certain episodes like Bhīma killing Kīcaka or Duṣyāsana are presented in all the gory detail. This is one example of how the theatre forms of South India, though influenced by classical Sanskrit drama, show fundamental differences. The show ends with a mangala (auspicious ending) during the singing of which, all characters usually assemble on the stage.

The costumes of the characters are attractive and colourful though they do not seem to have been as codified as in yakṣagāna. Only broad categories like good heroic characters and evil characters are represented through the costumes and no subtle intradistinctions within the categories are recognisable. The most attractive features of the costumes are the shoulder ornaments which give the appearance of wings. These shoulder ornaments are not found in yakṣagāna. The crown worn by female demons, appears to have a lot in common with that of yakṣagāna. Other female characters do not have a special costume, except for the coronet like ornament worn at the back of the head. While dancing, they carry a kerchief in one hand.
The dance is usually fast and rough with emphasis on the expression of heroic emotions. This points to a male oriented theatre where the force of movement and energy of foot work become more important than grace or beauty of body lines. B. Malashetty, explaining the energy that the actor has to expend for this dance says, "an actor who jumps and dances and succeeds in breaking at least one of the wooden planks of the platform gets the recognition as a good actor". The actors naturally get so tired while dancing, carrying the heavy costumes, that many a time, they have to take a short break after the dance and before they can utter their lines. On the whole, this dance is more suited for the expression of valour and for the depiction of war scenes. If we compare this dance with that of coastal yakṣagāṇa, we see that this dance does not possess the felicity for expression of subtle emotions that is found in yakṣagāṇa dance. But for the expression of vigour and valour, mūḍalapāya dance is highly suited and as H.K. Ranganath says, "... with its war cries, wild dances and fantastic language, the Mudalapaya some times impresses as far more thrilling than yaksagana".

The most important difference between yakṣagāṇa and mūḍalapāya lies in dialogue. The yakṣagāṇa script contains only songs to be sung by the bhāgavata and dialogues based on these songs are totally improvised by the actors. In mūḍalapāya the script contains the songs as well as the dialogues which have to be learnt by rote by the actor. The language of the dialogues are loaded with Sanskrit and old Kannada words. The use of alliteration and rhyme is very prominent and almost every sentence shows the use of these devices. The humour is provided by the hanumanāyaka, who talks to all the characters and makes fun of even the high
and the mighty. He also acts as a stage manager apart from his role as a clown. The following remark by B. Malashetty makes this clear. "If any one of the ornaments like the shoulder ornament or the crown gets displaced in action, he is the technician on stage to restore them. Those characters dying on the stage are carried away by him". His humour, at times may become crass and obscenence or may be out of place, if the scene being enacted is a serious one.

On the whole, mūdalapāya, for the most part, has remained in the hands of the rural folk. Each performance used to be a kind of a village festival in which the entire village from elders to young urchins took eager interest. Thus it was truly a participatory form of performance. But of late, this form has almost become extinct, unable to withstand the challenges of media like the cinema and the professional theatre. Attempts have been made to revive this form. The Folklore Department of Mysore University led by Prof. J.S. Paramashiviah has taken a keen interest in this form and in its revival. Infact, a new troupe consisting of the students and members of the staff of the department was also started. But these attempts have remained only academic exercises because the people among whom mūdalapāya has survived so far, now seem to have lost interest in it.

The demise of certain cultural forms of expression is perhaps as important from a folkloristic point of view as is the emergence of new forms of expression, because both throw light on the community where these cultural forms operate. The decreasing popularity and appeal of mūdalapāya is perhaps a fine case for the study of why the community does not feel it to be relevant any more (as is evidenced by its present state).
2.3.2 *Saññāṭa* and other forms

Though *yakṣaṅgāṇa* (both *mūḍalapāya* and *paḍuvalapāya*,) is recognised as the major theatrical form of Karnataka, during the last hundred to hundred fifty years, several new folk theatre forms emerged in Northern Karnataka, specially in the districts of Belgaum, Bijapur and Dharwar. These forms arose as a distinct contrast to the existing major form, *mūḍalapāya*. So, if *mūḍalapāya* came to be called *doḍḍāṭa* (major play/performance) in these areas, these new forms were called *saññāṭa* (minor/simpler play/performance). They are also known as *qappināṭa* (*qappu* is a leather percussion instrument that is used as an accompaniment for these forms). Along with *mūḍalapāya*, two other influences on these newly emerging folk theatres were Tamāṣa of Maharashtra and *dāsarāṭa* (the play by *dāsa*- a caste of performers) of northern Karnataka. Regarding its origin and relation to *doḍḍāṭa*, B. Malashetty says:

Nothing definite is known about the origin of *sannata*. We know that it was current in the later [sic] half of nineteenth century. If the time of composition of some *sannata* plays is examined, it may be possible to fix the date later than 1850. By 1900, these earned public acceptance and honour and a dramatic tradition came into being. The remarkable thing about this unsophisticated folk theatre form is its survival and popularity in the face of coexisting and greatly absorbing traditional form of *Doddata*. We can not say that the former is in any way a simplified or diluted form of *Doddata* though, some scholars hold such a view. Its story, music and style of expression show distinct variations from those of *Doddata*.

*Saññāṭa* gave up the gorgeous costume, make-up, dance and the flowery dialogue of *doḍḍāṭa*. The music was also different, drawing freely from Hindusthani and Karnatik music
as well as from other sources like the Marathi Tamāṣa tradition. The themes were also different—the lives of saints, imaginary or folk stories or even actual events of the day, became the subject matter of these plays. The most popular among these, is perhaps Sangya Bālya, based on an actual incident. This play, on the relationship between Sangya, a rich young man and a married woman, Ganga, resulting in his murder has retained its popularity even to this day. It is being staged even now, not merely by the folk theatre groups but by modern Kannada theatre troupes as well.

Another form of theatre that became greatly popular around the same time was Kṛṣṇa Pārijāta. The plot revolves round the two wives of Kṛṣṇa, Rukmiṇi and Sathyabhāma and the jealousy of the latter. Pārijāta as this theatre form is popularly known, became path breaking in two ways: i) The performers were so much in demand that they became professional troupes and ii) Women began to take part in public performances for the first time. (Women began to perform in saṅgāṭa performances as well.) Kṛṣṇa is presented in the play as an ordinary mortal caught between two jealous wives. The most attractive feature of this form was its catchy, attractive tunes. This form enjoyed great popularity till the middle of this century. But, public patronage on which this form had survived, is fast decreasing and so the form is struggling for survival now.

These forms discussed above, have developed into a tradition that is quite distinct from that of yakṣaṇa. As they do not have a direct bearing on the topic of study here, only a brief resume has been given.
2.4. OTHER SOUTH INDIAN PERFORMING ARTS

Performing arts, both classical and folk, occupy a prominent place in the culture of South India. In almost all the regions of South India, one variety or the other of the performing arts can be found. There are also many common factors among the different forms found in different places and regions. These similarities are found not merely in the factors intrinsic to the performing arts per se but also 'extrinsic' ones like their ritualistic function, the contexts of performance, their organisational pattern etc. In the following section, those theatre forms from the other South India states, that seem to bear the closest resemblance to yakṣāgāna have been dealt with. After a brief study of these forms, certain general questions with regard to these forms as a whole, will be taken up for discussion.

2.4.1. Kathakali

This dance-drama from Kerala has now gained national and international recognition. It is recognised as one of the four schools of classical dance of India. Unlike most other performing arts of India about whose origin and subsequent development very little is known, Kathakali's origin and subsequent development have been clearly recognised. The present form of kathakali is said to have evolved in the 17th century A.D. by king Kottarakara of Travancore as counter to Kriṣṇāṭṭam, the performing art patronised by king Zamorin of calicut. Earlier it was assumed that the dance drama form, Rāmanāṭṭam itself later came to be known as kathakali. This view is not accepted now by scholars who believe that Rāmanāṭṭam became extinct.38
Kerala has always had a strong tradition of performing arts. Kūḍiāṭṭam is perhaps the only living tradition of performing Sanskrit plays. This performing art is said to have a tradition dating back to 2nd century A.D. It is said to have an unbroken tradition of more than a thousand years, and is performed even today in the precincts of temples. Though kathakali has evolved in close conformity to Bharata’s Nāṭya Śāstra, it no doubt drew from folk and ritual performing genres and also from Kerala’s martial arts, Kalariapaṭṭu. Kathakali had also fallen prey to neglect, when it was revived and brought to its present status by Valathol, the Malayalam poet by establishing Kerala Kalamandalam for its revival.

Kathakali has survived on the patronage of kings and landlords but it never became a ‘courtly art’. It has always retained a strong religious message and function. Mrinalini Sarabhai makes this point more clear. "There is ... in Kerala an essential continuity of the dance pattern, beginning as ritualistic and slowly developing into an art form. Yet, throughout its quest for essential style, the dance remained a religious manifestation, opening up vistas in human thought and meaning. The entire search was and is for the discovery of the meaningful in human existence and the identification of man with God".39

Kathakali’s style of representation is highly symbolic in nature, as is evidenced in its costume and make-up code and the elaborate hastamudras (hand gestures) through which the words of the song, are represented by the actor. The costumes are highly colourful, elaborate and ornate. The make-up is highly codified with the classification of
characters into pacca ('green'), katti (knife) tāḍi (beard) etc. In the make-up which represents the internal qualities of the characters, the cuṭṭi or the extension of the chin in the make-up and the basket like expansion of the waist, are the most prominent features. The cuṭṭi highlights the face and facilitates in the intricate eye and facial expressions that are the hallmark of kathakali acting.

Another prominent feature of kathakali acting is the use of hastamudras (hand gestures). It has a vast array of mudras to act out the words of the song, sung in the background. The kathakali actor does not speak as the form does not have vacīkabhinaṇa (speech acting = the use of speech in acting). Infact, the actor needs years of training, before he can enact any of the major roles. As Philip Zarelli says:

The performers who enact the character roles, spend years in training to perfect the nuances of their technique and must be equally adept at dance and acting even though they never speak a single line with their voice... Each actor 'speaks' his character's lines of dialogue with their hands, having been trained over the years through mastery of a complex vocabulary of over 500 hand gestures (mudras). Equally adept at facial gesture, the actor must be able to manipulate individual eye and facial muscles as he interprets a role and 'creates' his character through the stylised configuration used to express a character's various emotional states.

The traditional kathakali performance, begins in the evening with the Cenda and maddalam (leather percussion instruments) players playing on their instruments, various rhythmic patterns, starting slowly and building to a crescendo. This custom of playing only on the instruments before the actual commencement of the performance, is found in yakṣagāna also. In the past, this used to act as a kind
of announcement to the surrounding villages about the performance. This is followed by a phase when there is only music, when songs from the *Gita Govinda* of Jayadeva are sung. The preliminaries end with the dance of two young boys called *purappāṭṭu*. (This can be compared to the dance of the *balagopala* in *yakṣagāna*). This is followed by the performance of the main story. The traditional curtain which is held by two stage hands is used for the introduction of characters. Traditionally, the performance used to occupy the entire night from dusk to dawn and was always performed in the open-air. Now a days, performances of shorter duration (2 1/2 to 3 hours) are becoming quite popular. This is one small example of how kathakali has been able to redefine itself in response to the changing times and contexts.

Kathakali dance is vigorous and masculine and so is more suited for the expression of emotions, like *vīra* (heroic) and *raudra* (furious) rather than feminine grace through its dance. Female characters are also played by men. Certain scenes like the killing of Duṣyāsana by Bhīma are depicted in all the gory and horrific detail.

There are many similarities between kathakali and *yakṣagāna*. The influence of kathakali can be seen on *tenkutitṭu yakṣagāna*, specially in the areas of costume and make-up.⁴¹ Many of the *prasangas* of Parti Subba, perhaps the most famous of the *yakṣagāna* writers, seem to have been influenced by the kathakali scripts. K.Krishna Bhat in his edition of Parti Subba’s works, gives a list of songs which seem to be direct translations from the original Malayalam works.⁴² Kathakali is a highly classicalised form and *yakṣagāna* also seems to have undergone the process of
classicalisation some time in its history, though the process never seems to have become as complete as in kathakali.

There are also prominent differences between yakṣagāna and kathakali. The most prominent is that of the improvised text, spoken by the actors in yakṣagāna. As a result perhaps, mudras are never prominently used in yakṣagāna. As Shivarama Karanth says, "Not withstanding all these similarities, the difference between kathakali and yakṣagāna is very great and also very interesting". 

2.4.2. Terukkūttu

This is the popular folk theatre of Tamil Nadu. At present it is popular in North Arkot district and in Pondicherry. Terukkūttu literally means street play. The performances are in the open-air with audiences sitting on all three sides. The musicians called pinpāṭṭu sit at the back of the stage on a bench. The accompanying instruments are mridaṇḍam, (a percussion instrument), mukavīṇa (a reed instrument) and a small pair of cymbals played by the vocalist himself. Professional groups of terukkūttu players are known as Kūttādis. Terukkūttu has a long tradition, but now, it has fallen into neglect. Even today it is popular among the poor and the uneducated. As Balvant Gargi points out, "In the slum areas of Madras, there are fifty amateur Therukoothu troupes, but few people know of them". These people, whenever they want to hold a performance, pool in money and hire the services of a teacher who will also act as the stage manager during performance known as kaṭṭiankāran.

Traditionally, terukkūttu performances have been connected with the rituals and worship in the temples of
Mariamman (Māri goddess; the goddess of rains and also of pestillences like small pox) and Draupadi (the wife of the five Pāṇḍavas, who has been deified in Tamil Nadu). The worship in the Drupadi temples, usually concludes with a nine day cycle of terukkūttu plays covering the entire story of the Mahābhārata. The ritualistic function of terukkūttu can be seen in the following remark by Edwina Ranganathan, where she describes the end of the rain festival where Goddess Māri is worshipped. The festival closes with a performance of terukkūttu. At the end of the performance, "actors and villagers alike walk in procession three times round the temple. If the goddess is pleased, rains will fall".45

The themes of terukkūttu are mostly taken from mythological stories, specially the Mahābhārata. The show begins with the preliminaries, beginning with the worship of Lord Gaṇēsha. Other gods also, like Mīnakṣi, Saraswati, the Goddess of learning and Dakṣināmurthy (one if Śiva's forms who sits facing south) are worshipped. After seeking their blessings, the show begins. In present day performances, the preliminaries have been much shortened. (This is also true of most other dance drama forms including yakṣagāna.)

The most important person in a terukkūttu performance is the kaṭṭiankāran (stage manager). He controls the entire run of the play. He talks to the actors, comments on the actor's dialogue, narrates and links up the different episodes. He plays the dominant role, helping the actors when they need it, being strict when they go out of control. He some times even admonishes the audience if they are unruly. He is also usually the trainer of the troupe and well versed in Sanskrit, Tamil and Telugu. His role can be compared to that of the sūtradhāra (lit. one who holds the strings:=the stage manager) of doḍḍāṭa of northern Karnataka.
Another equally important character of terukkūttu is the clown who is called Kōmāli. Along with providing the humour, he acts as an aide to the kaṭṭiankāran in the progress of the play. Though the dialogues of terukkūttu are fixed and have to be memorised by the actors, kōmāli has the freedom to improvise. Many a time, he engages in a sharp repartee with the kaṭṭiankāran. He makes his entry at the beginning of the performance and Balvant Gargi explains how his entry can be startling. "He enters slapping and beating the spectators with a cloth whip, stumbling and jumping over their heads". He has an easy rapport with the audience. He may sprinkle cold water on those in the audience who are sleeping and thus arouse laughter. He has the liberty of making fun of all. Terukkūttu has for the most part, been the preserve of illiterates and lower castes and has almost totally been neglected by the elite, who in the words of Gargi, treat it as 'pariah'. Kōmāli, perhaps giving expression to social tensions, often makes fun of the brahmins as can be seen in following the comment by Edwina Ranganathan. "He wore a ridiculous cap to make people laugh and daubed himself with all sorts of religious markings—both Saiva and Vaishnava signs. He would then poke fun at the brahmins, teasing them for their vegetarian habits".

The importance given to the clown, not merely as a character but as an integral part of the form itself, seems to be a feature shared by other performing arts of South India also like mūḍalapāya and yakṣāgāna. David Shulman relates the clown to the 'boundary'—of language, of accepted behaviour, even of the dramatic reality of the stage, because he, "stands somewhere between the dramatic reality of the play and the everyday reality which the audience has left behind". This highlights the 'reflexive' role of the clown.
because he is free to comment on the dramatic action itself. Thus the clowns, whether in terukkōttu, müdalapāya or in yakṣagāna, perform the function of mediation between the dramatic reality of the performance and the audience.

The plot and characterisation is developed through song, dance and prose. Only men take part in performance. A white cloth (supplied by the village washerman), is used as the traditional curtain held by two stage hands. The entry of characters is from behind this curtain. As in other theatre forms like kathakali and yakṣagāna, great importance is attached to the first appearance of characters. The character and his role are determined and defined in the first appearance itself. All introductory speeches are in the third person. The characters speak in the first person only when they speak to other characters. The actors are often made to repeat their lines, by the kōmāli (clown). The dance mostly consists of strides, swirls and jumps. Some acrobatic movements can also be seen. Edwina Ranganathan mentions how in one show about Arjuna’s penance, the actor playing Arjuna, climbed on top of a forty five feet high pole, and balanced himself there in the posture of penance. No stylised gestures are used. Though acting is not realistic, some gory realistic details like Bhīma drawing out Kīcaka’s entrails are depicted.

The costume and make-up are elaborate with tall headgears and massive shoulder ornaments. They have, according to Balvant Gargi, "a family resemblance to kathakali". But their resemblance to the costumes of müdalapāya seems to be much closer. The colours used are red, yellow, white and black. Villains are painted red with black and white dots. Bhīma’s make-up is in blue and black.
whereas for the divine characters like Kṛṣṇa and Rāma, blue is used. (According to Balvant Gargi, it is green.)

In the past, there were famed troupes like that of Nateshan Tambiran. But the present status of terukkūṭtu is one of neglect. It is popular among the rural common folk even today but by and large, has been neglected by the elites and scholars. Political parties, being more keenly aware of the pulse of the common people, have used terukkūṭtu as a means of political propaganda. This aspect as well as the present status of terukkūṭtu, is made clear by Edwina Ranganathan:

In the cities, terukkuttus are performed in poor communities who live together as a social unit, i.e. rikshaw drivers or railway porters etc. They have come from the villages to the cities to make their living and look forward to the annual performance of the terukkūṭtu in which they themselves act...Here again, the community is very strongly pulled in to participate. Since, the performances are so improtant to the poor communities, political parties have hired terukkūṭtu actors to perform sociological themes extolling the merits of their party and political ideas. The audience they are trying to reach is largely illiterate and the performances are an effective means of reaching them.51

Tamil Nadu is a land that is proud of its classical culture like Bharatnatyam and Karnatik music. It is an irony that this has resulted in the almost total neglect of forms like terukkūṭtu. If we look at the present status of terukkūṭtu, we can see a total break in the interaction between the classical and the folk, though terukkūṭtu must have come under classical influence in the past as is evidenced by the convention of the preliminaries, for example.52 But, because of the neglect of the elite and the
educated, it has survived in its present form, only in the hands of the rural and uneducated people. Commenting on its potentiality Balvant Gargi says, "Therukoothu as a dramatic form is far more interesting than is apparent in actual performances today. It has power in its operatic songs and reveals theatrical shrewdness in the character of kattiakaran and his function".  

2.4.3. Telugu yakṣagāna

Today, the term yakṣagāna has often come to mean only coastal yakṣagāna of Karnataka because of the recognition it has received. But the folk theatre of Andhra is also known as yakṣagāna and had flourished all over Andhra a few centuries ago. Today, yakṣagāna in different parts of Andhra is also known by other names like vīdhināṭakam, bhāgavatam, Vīdhībhāgavatam etc. which are all regional variations of yakṣagāna.

We have seen earlier in this chapter, how references to yakṣagāna are found in Telugu literature in the 15th century itself, earlier than they are found in Kannada literature. These references are found in the works of Srinatha, a 15th century poet and many other works of 15th and 16th centuries. As has already been mentioned, Jakkas (Jakkalu) are a group of people living in Guntur and Godavari regions even today. Thurston, in his monumental study of the castes and tribes of South India, mentions that they are dancers and stage artistes. R.V.S. Sundaram, in his comparative study of yakṣagāna of Karnataka and Andhra says "... from available proof so far, we can say that Telugu yakṣagāna took shape in the latter half of 15th century and reached its height of glory in the 17th century. Under the patronage of Tanjavur
Nayaks, it grew in variety with many performances in the 17th and the 18th centuries. This age is called the golden age of Telugu yakṣagāna". Thus we find that yakṣagāna originated in Andhra and in Karnataka, more or less around the same time (15th-16th centuries). References to different folk forms are found earlier to this, in inscriptions and in literary works, but the term, yakṣagāna is found mentioned only around the 15th century.

There are supposed to be more than six hundred yakṣagāna works in Telugu. It came to be recognised as a separate literary genre in Telugu literature, perhaps because of the royal patronage that it received. But as R.V.S. Sundaram says, many of the works do not seem to be meant for performance. Telugu yakṣagāna works show a vast variety in their themes. Apart from mythological themes, works on historical themes are also found. In fact some works were written about kings who were contemporaries of the writers. Kings themselves have scripted many works. This points out the courtly patronage that yakṣagāna had once enjoyed in Andhra. Works on folk heroes like Karibhanṭa and Sārangadharā are found in Kannada (mūḍalapāya) as well as in Telugu.

The costumes of Telugu yakṣagāna bear a closer resemblance to mūḍalapāya than to that of coastal yakṣagāna. The heroic characters wear the crown (made of light wood and stuck with mirrors), shoulder and breast ornaments. The crown of demonic characters is of a different shape. In make-up, green and red colours are used as the base for demonic characters. A frightening appearance is created by the design of white dots on the black base that is applied to the face. Black and red is used as the base for demonesses.
Like mūdalapāya, Telugu yakṣagāna also never seems to have had professional troupes. It remained in the hands of the rural folk who performed only infrequently. The following remarks of R.V.S. Sundaram gives an idea of the performance of Telugu yakṣagāna:

Normally, the performance starts at 10 p.m. and goes on till dawn. Some may continue for two or three nights. The show need not necessarily be on any fixed sacred day, but can be on the seventh (saptami), eleventh (ekādaṣi) or full moon day. Any raised place, about 9 feet square can become the stage. Two bamboo poles are erected in front of the stage and decorated with festoons of mango or neem leaves. The number of characters in Telugu yakṣagāna is normally between 12 and 15. In costume, make-up and in acting, difference is shown between human and godly characters. Actors become so involved in their roles that it is difficult to keep in control wild and terrible characters like Narasimha. Some times, a sheep or hen is sacrificed to reduce the wildness of these characters. Just like the hunumanāyaka of Kannada [mūdalapāya], hāsigādu (clown) can come and go on the stage any time he pleases.  

Mention must also be made of two other dance-drama traditions in Telugu culture. One of them, Kuchipudi, is now recognised as the classical dance form of Andhra. Kuchipudi is the name of a village in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh. This tradition of dance has been kept alive by the Brahmin families living there. Siddhendra Yogi is supposed to have taken elements from yakṣagāna and refined it into Kunchipudi and thus created Bhamākalāpam. According to M.A. Naidu, "Kuchipudi Bhagavatas refined and lifted the dance drama from folk to classical level and dedicated themselves to the propagation of 'Madhura Bhakti' devotional love of God". Kuchipudi became more and more classical and its rising popularity may have led to the demise of yakṣagāna in Andhra. Women were strictly forbidden from performing in
Kuchipudi, until the late 19th century when Bhāgavatulu Ramiah taught his creation Gollakalāpam to dēvadāsis (God-slaves:=women who were dedicated to the temples to serve the deity—mainly through dance and music; see note 65).

Another classical form of dance drama is Bhāgavata Mēla of Melattur, near Tanjavur. The rulers of Tanjavur were great patrons of dance and music. Bhāgavata Mēla came into prominence during the time of Tirtha Narayana Yogi, who is said to have migrated to Tanjavur from Andhra, about 300 years ago. It became highly classical, under the influence of Venkatarāma Sāstrier, who was himself a composer and a contemporary of Saint Tyagaraja, one of the trinities of Karnatik music. This form shows clear links with Kuchipudi. It is clearly classical in style and presentation. This dance-drama was performed in villages around Tanjavur, the most famous of which was Melattur.61

The yakṣagāna traditions of Karnataka and Andhra seem to have many things in common. In the words of R.V.S.Sundaram, "...though difference are found in Karnatana and Andhra yakṣagāna, in themes, costumes and characters, we see a great deal of similarity".62

2.5. THE COMMON FEATURES

Apart from the performing arts discussed above, a great number of other performance traditions, both classical and folk are found is South India. For example, puppet theatre is a major genre in itself, but that has not been referred to here as it is beyond the scope of the present study.63 This variety and abundance points to the major place that traditional theatre and performing arts in general occupied
in the cultural ethos of the people. Looking at the central role that performing arts had in the cultural expression of the people of South India in general, may we say that this was the major genre of folk expression of the Dravidian culture? The importance attached to performing arts can be realised from the fact that an entire institution like the devadāsi system, inhuman and exploitative as it was, was created chiefly to keep up the tradition of music and dance in the temples. This custom, created an entire class/caste of professionals completely devoted to the performing arts. In this context, it is perhaps important to note that the devadāsi system was predominantly a South Indian phenomenon. But this institution can explain only in part, the predominance of performing arts in South India. For one thing, devadāsis were associated with classical forms, performed by women, mostly solo, like Bharatanātyam for example. They were not in any way connected with the forms discussed above. So, it does not completely account for the prominence of performing arts in South India. One can only say that this aspect of South Indian culture needs a closer scholarly attention, than has been given so far.

Another related issue, has drawn the attention of many scholars; this pertains to the many similarities that one finds in the different folk theatre forms of South India, at a synchronic level now. On the one hand, these similarities can be found in different aspects of performance like theme, costume, dance etc. At a more fundamental level, the position and function of these theatre forms as rituals connected with local temples and festivals, seem to point to a common tradition shared by all the folk theatres of South India. Performance was a participatory event in which the
entire community took part. This ensured a continuity of tradition as well as respectable place for the performing art in the religious/cultural context of the society.

Looking at the common traditions shared by the different traditional theatre forms of South India, some scholars have put forth the argument of the possible existence of a Proto Dravidian theatre form. The many theatre forms of the present, would then be oicotypes of that 'Proto' form. Basavaraja Malashetty for example, says "A comparison of yaksagana, yaaksandola and yekkalagana in the Karnataka area with the forms of folk theatre in the neighbouring states, as in the yakasaganamu or vidhinatakam of Andhra Pradesh, the Kathakali and Ramanattam of Kerala, the Kanian Kuttu and terukkuttu of Tamil Nadu, leads to the conclusion that in ancient South India, there must have existed a type of proto folk-play with music and dance which gave rise to yaksagana".67

The argument of the 'proto' form suffers from many weaknesses. The evidences available for such diachronic conclusions about these folk theatre forms are too scanty. Even at the synchronic level, no comprehensive comparative study of these forms, has been made. Another problem lies with the concept 'Dravidian'. No doubt, the term Dravidian has been associated with South India. All the major languages of South India belong to the Dravidian family. But the interactions between the Aryan and Dravidian strands have been so close and, intense that as A.L.Basham says, "The cultural history of India after the Aryan invasion has been commonly interpreted as the process of fusion of Aryan and non-Aryan elements over a period of three thousand years".68 Because of this 'fusion', it is very difficult at the present
juncture, to speak with any definiteness, about purely Aryan and Dravidian elements. To take but one example: the themes of almost all the performing arts of South India, are taken from the Indian epics and purāṇas: and these are supposed to be Aryan creations. In addition, recent studies also disprove the theory that South India was the original home of the Dravidian people. To quote Basham again, "Arguments in favour of the South Indian Peninsula being the original home of the Dravidian language family, very popular with Tamil scholars at one time, can not resist the weight of evidence both archeological and linguistic [that the Dravidian languages were brought to India by migrants]." 69

A more fundamental objection to the 'proto' theory, stems from a philosophic perspective. The search for a proto form derives from a centrist position in believing that the dissemination of culture is always centrifugal, starting from one point and one proto form and later breaking up into different forms. This idea of the proto form is inspired clearly from the linguistic model of the family tree. The most famous of these linguistic models is that of the Indo-European family of languages, propounded by the 19th century philologists. Other than its inadequacy in satisfactorily explaining the links between the various branches of the family tree, it should be realised that this grand design was the result of a Eurocentric viewpoint. Linguists themselves have expressed dissatisfaction with such a perspective. Gabriella E. Ferro-Luzzi comments, "More than a hundred years ago, J. Schmidt already voiced doubts about linguistic reconstruction pointing out that Proto Indo-European might have been a number of related dialects rather than one monolithic language. Modern linguistic research on the influence of neighbouring languages on one another and the
fusion of different languages has further undermined the general validity of the reconstructionist method in linguistics.\textsuperscript{70}

Before we proceed further, it is necessary to specify the similarities that we find in these dance drama forms. Here only traditional /folk theatre forms have been taken into consideration. The performing arts connected with dēvadāsis and courtesans have not been taken into consideration. These forms that were usually performed in temples and in kings' courts, belong to a tradition that is in many ways, in opposition to the forms under study here. This opposition is fundamentally one of courtly art (that was confined to the select few) and folk art (where the entire community participated). This is related to other opposites like closed-open, performed by women—where only men perform etc., which are concomitant on the basic opposition. The contexts and functions of the two traditions being different, they developed into two distinct traditions. But this does not mean that they were totally exclusive. As is only to be expected, many links and influences can be found between these two traditions that have existed side by side.

The common features found in the dance-drama forms of South India may be summed up under the following heads.

\textbf{2.5.1. Open-air performance}

As has been mentioned earlier, these performing arts were in antithetical opposition to the courtly arts which were performed in courts or inside the temples. In contrast, these traditional dance-drama performances were always in the open, like the open courtyard of the temple, the village
square or even the fields after the harvest was over etc. They were thus open to the entire community, though the show may have been sponsored by one person. Conceptually the spatial convention of the unenclosed open-air performance stands for a world view that is inclusive and expansive unlike the enclosed atmosphere which is exclusive and constrictive, which is typical of courtly, elitist culture. The spatial conventions of the performative context become signs representing such a world view.

2.5.2. The role of music

Music acts as the central binding force in all these forms, controlling the entire progression of the performance. The primacy of music in these forms can be properly understood if we compare it with classical Sanskrit plays, where the songs form only a substructure, whereas the main progression of the play takes place through dialogues. On the other hand, in these forms, the songs sung by the singer/s form the main structure. The entire progression of the narrative and so of the performance is controlled by the songs sung by the singer. The performance can, infact communicate even without the dialogues. Some forms like Kathakali do not have dialogues at all. Shivarama Karnath in his experimental form of yakṣagāna got rid of dialogues altogether. Thus dialogue is not the central focus of these forms but they are unthinkable without music. On the other hand, in Sanskrit plays, the songs do not greatly contribute to the progression of the narrative. This shows the pivotal role of music in the dance-drama traditions of South India. This predominant role of music, also necessitates the presence of singers and musicians on the stage, throughout the performance.
2.5.3. The prominence of dance

Obvisouly linked to the role of music, is that of dance. All the theatre forms discussed earlier are dance-dramas. Rarely does the actor himself sing; his job is to enact through dance to the song sung by the singer. Even in forms that have dialogue, dance is the primary means of enacting and creating the character.

2.5.4. Use of the traditional curtain

All these forms make prominent use of the traditional curtain held by two stage hands (In some forms like mūḍalapāya this seems to have been replaced by the regular certain used in the proscenium theatre). The first appearance of characters is usually from behind this curtain. It is important to note that in most of the forms, this theatrical device becomes a highly charged sign with great significance. (The range of signification of the traditional curtain with reference to yaksagana is discussed in chapter III, but the analysis applies equally to the other forms that make use of this curtain). Intimately related to the use of this curtain, is the importance attached to the first appearance of the main characters. The actor is supposed to define the essential quality of the character in the first appearance itself. The traditional curtain is often used as an effective device for the exposition of the character. Entries in surprising ways (as when a demonic character comes in procession through the audience) are also used for this purpose.
2.5.5. **Emphasis of **vīra*** and **raudra*** emotions  

As we have observed earlier, the themes of these forms are drawn from the epics and the purāṇas. But one feature that is unique to all these forms, is the predominance of themes dealing with battles and the depiction of the Vīra (heroic) and the raudra (the furious) emotions. This emphasis on the depiction of valour can be better understood if we compare these forms with the traditional forms in other parts of India, like Rāslīlā or Tamāsha where the emphasis is on the depiction of Śīṅgāra (the erotic). The dance movements and steps of these South Indian forms are also brisk, fast and 'rough'. They lay emphasis on tāṇḍava (the furious; supposed to have been derived from Śiva's furious dance of destruction) than on lāsya (the graceful; supposed to have been derived form Śiva's consort Pārvati).

This emphasis on the heroic and the furious emotions may in part be due to the fact that all these forms are performed only by men. Manjushri Chaki Sircar and Parbati Sircar in their study of Indian dance, relate the emphasis of these emotions in Kathakali to how the Nairs, who were a martial class, were fast losing their preeminent status in society because of colonisation, and so used kathakali for asserting their martial tradition and social status. They also relate the predominance of valour in kathakali to the matrilineal family system of the Nairs, (and so the need to assert the male ethos, through these 'manly' emotions).  

This study is with regard to kathakali, and so, does not adequately explain the predominence of these emotions in almost all the South Indian forms. One can only say that this phenomenon needs to be studied more thoroughly before it can be properly analysed.
2.5.6. **Performed only by men**

One important feature that distinguishes these dance-dramas from the performing arts of *devadāsis* and courtesans referred to earlier, is the total ban on women from taking part in the performance. Female roles are also played by men. (This is largely true of these forms even today). In this factor also, the opposition of these forms to courtly art (in which women participated) is evident. (The performance of women in forms like *Pārijāta* and *sapnāta* is a comparatively recent phenomenon and has not been accepted by other forms). Another related factor is that these forms are essentially group performances and not solo performances. This is one more element that distinguishes these folk traditional performances from classical dance traditions.

Apart from the features enumerated above, many similarities can also be found in aspects like costume, dance and music. A thorough comparative study of all the aspects of these different traditions is a daunting task indeed. There would also be a need to find a proper theoretical and methodological framework, before such a task is attempted. Such studies have been attempted in myth and folk narrative, but have rarely been attempted in performing arts. Till such a study is made, any talk of a 'proto' form, would at best be, only a conjecture.

2.6. **CLASSICAL AND FOLK INTERACTION**

Cultural forms of expression, are usually divided as belonging to either classical or folk traditions, which are recognised as two distinct streams. The applicability of this classification to the Indian context, has often been
questioned because of the existence of many cultural forms in India which exhibit both classical and folk elements. Commenting on the inadequacy of the terms classical and folk, Stuart Blackburn and A.K. Ramanujan in their introduction to *Another Harmony*, explain how the other systems of classifications like the Great and the Little traditions propounded by Robert Redfield and Milton Singer also explain the Indian phenomenon only in part. They say that the same is the case with indigenous systems of classification like *akam* (interior)-*puram* (exterior) and *marga* (the road; the recognised path)-*desi* (local; indigenous). Without entering into a debate regarding the adequacy or otherwise of these systems of classification, an attempt has been made in the following pages to study the South Indian performing arts in terms of classical and folk interaction and the influence of *Bhakti* movement on these forms.

It is now common place to state that all classical forms of art have originally evolved from folk forms. But a truism such as this, has the danger of implying that this progression is always unidirectional—from folk to classical. Such an assumption will give only a simplistic picture of the complex criss cross of interaction that takes place between these forms (both classical and folk) that exist and operate side by side. The same is true of the performing arts under study here. On the one hand, some folk forms under the influence of a general movement or of one person of genius may become classical—as happened with Kuchipudi of Andhra Pradesh. On the other hand, a form like Telugu *yakṣagāṇa*, when it lost royal patronage, survived only in villages and began to regain folk features. Among the performing arts of South India, we have highly classicalised forms like *kathakali* at one end of the spectrum, and forms like
mūḍalapāya and terukkūthu, that have remained largely folk, at the other end. Yakṣaṇa may be said to occupy a middle place in this configuration. But in all the forms, the folk elements are clear even today. At the same time, it is equally clear that all of them have undergone a process of classicalisation. We see the influence of the Nāṭya Śāstra, the authoritative Sanskrit text on dramaturgy, on all these forms. The major phase of classicalisation no doubt took place under the influence of the Bhakti movement. It is necessary to deal with this aspect in greater detail, in order to understand the present form of these performing arts.

2.6.1. The influence of Bhakti Movement

The Bhakti movement was a pan Indian movement, that swept the country during the 13th to 17th centuries. It was basically a reinterpretation of Hinduism, laying emphasis on devotion and total surrender to God as the path way to mōkṣa (salvation). This shift from knowledge to devotion-bhakti, as the true path, opened the way for the participation of people of all castes and classes in this religious resurgence. This movement was spread to all parts of India by the saints belonging to all the denominations of Hinduism. As Adya Rangacharya says, "The whole of the Indian subcontinent from Basaveshwara in the South to Kabir in the north, became suffused with saints and their songs and religious discourses. It is not a mere coincidence that in the period of these four or five centuries, every linguistic region of South India, saw a galaxy of saints". These saints used the local languages (as opposed to Sanskrit) and reached the people through their songs and discourses.
The Bhakti movement, on the surface, was a religious movement, but it was also a great agent of social change. It opposed the rigid hierarchical structure of society along caste lines, where all knowledge was confined in the hands of the Brahmins. This movement, opposed the concept of stratification of society itself and broke the hegemony of the Brahmins on traditional knowledge. It paved the way for people belonging to all castes and classes to participate in this religious resurgence. It is thus not surprising to find that the saints and poets of this movement belong to all castes and groups. In this way, this movement was also a movement for social equality. A.K. Ramanujan, in his illuminating comment on the Bhakti movement, explains how the 'great' and the 'little' traditions, had their own structures and how the Bhakti movement stood for what he calls anti-structure, "the ideological rejection of the ideal of structure itself". He further says, "The 'great' and the 'little' traditions flow one into the other, as in an osmosis. They together constitute the 'public religion' of Hinduism, its 'establishment' or structure as described above. Bhakti as antistructure begins by denying and defying such an establishment".

Before we proceed to understand how this movement changed the folk theatre forms, it is necessary to analyse another related aspect, common to many of the folk theatre forms of India. One of the interesting factors that strikes us from a study of the dance-drama forms dealt with so far, is that most of these, (in their present form) seem to have evolved in the 15th-17th centuries. (Kathakali-17th c., Kannada and Telugu yaksagana-15th and 16th c.s, Kuchipudi-earliest reference 1508 A.D., Bhagavata Mela-17th c.) This makes one wonder how all these forms in different parts of
South India, could have evolved around the same time. It is not to be assumed that these dance-dramas appeared suddenly out of nowhere. References to earlier folk theatre forms are found in all South Indian languages, but the dance-dramas of the present seem to have emerged during these two-three centuries.

In order to understand this phenomenon, we will have to take a holistic view and consider all aspects of life of that period. A synchronic study of the present status of these dance-dramas, shows many similarities as well as certain essential differences. Another kind of synchronic study, dealing with all aspects of the life of the 15th to 17th centuries, will no doubt reveal the social, political religious and cultural forces, the 'epistemes' to use Foucault's term, that led to the growth of these forms. A synchronic study does not mean that it has to be a study only of the present. It can be of any slice of time of the past. Only, such a study will have to encompass as may aspects of life of that chosen period as possible, to make the study complete and satisfactory.

Such a study is no doubt necessary, for the proper understanding of the emergence of these dance-dramas. Only the possibility of such a study and certain pointers in that direction can be attempted here. The collapse of the Vijayanagar empire, that had ruled over most of South India, was followed by a period of political instability, with small principalities trying to vie with one another. It was also period of the rise of Muslim rule in the South.

These were developments on the political front, the Bhakti movement was creating a new awareness and a new
enthusiasm among all sections of the people. The saints of the Bhakti movement used the spoken language of the people, in their songs and discourses. And what better mode of reaching the people than through the performing arts. So the existing forms were reinvigorated, changed and adapted to the new need. The performing arts also received a legitimacy as they became a part of the religious worship. Thus, the religious aspect of these dance-dramas became pronounced. In the process of this adaptation, most of the original elements of the folk forms were retained. Each area and each folk theatre form, though influenced by the Bhakti movement, chose those elements that best suited its genius and the needs and aspirations of the people. Thus we find that in forms like Raslila or Manipuri the emphasis fell on the expression of Śṛṅgāra (the erotic), whereas in the South Indian forms, by and large, the emphasis was on the depiction of scence of battle and the fight between good and evil. Whether it is yakṣagāna, kathakali or terukkūthu, the vīra and the raudra (the heroic and the furious) emotions dominate over all others.

The changes that came over the folk-theatre forms, because of their contact with the Bhakti movement, were far reaching indeed. Adya Rangacharya explains how the performance itself became a mode of worship and how this assured, a definite place for these theatre forms in the religious, cultural life of the people:

The most important benefit for folk theatre, because of its contact with Bhakti movement, was that it acquired a place in the social life of the people. The moment the stage came out of the precincts of temples, to the streets and squares, it became a kind of religious performance. The stories were provided by the Gods of the saints not merely Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. More than the
themes based on the stories of these Gods, the event of performance itself became important. For example, about fifty-sixty years back, it was the custom in villages to arrange for the performance of a play, after harvesting was over. In an indirect way, it was considered as a ceremony for offering homage to some indistinct deity, the village goddess, the rain god or the earth goddess. What is important here is that the dramatic performance itself become a ritual worship. It came to be considered that to be selected for performing a role, was itself the result of good acts done ... the programme became the joint effort of the entire village. Men, women, old people, children, boys, girls, all would be happily waiting for that day. Though no holiday was declared, that day would be considered a public holiday. By evening, everybody would be ready in their best clothes. This new atmosphere, created by the Vaiṣṇava plays, established the folk theatre on a firm footing.

This statement explains the 'firm footing' that folk theatre gained because of its interaction with the Bhakti movement. In redefining and reshaping the folk theatre forms, many aspects of classical Sanskrit dramaturgy were inculcated into them, thus leading to a classicalisation of these folk theatre forms. Thus we see the channeling of classical elements into these folk forms.

It is also to be noted that the state of affairs of the folk theatres described in the earlier statement, continued well into the present century. But when the village structure began changing with modernisation from a predominantly agrarian economy to a market economy, new social and political forces began emerging in the second half of this century. As a result, new power equations and new social tensions began emerging and these theatre forms began to lose their assured place as their raison d'être was lost. Only those forms that were able to redefine themselves and retain their relevance in the changed situation, like kathakali and yakṣagāna, (both in different ways, of course) were able to survive the change.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Other theatre forms of Karnataka like mūḍalapāya are discussed later in this chapter.

2. At present, there are more than ten professional troupes and an almost equal number of open-air (bayalāṭa) troupes, giving about 180 performance each, per season. There are also hundreds of amateur troupes that perform frequently.


5. This can be seen as an affirmation of regional and linguistic identity. More and more scholars are now studying different aspects of Tulu language and culture. Even the studies by western scholars are being translated into Kannada. For example, Peter Claus' articles on different aspects of Tulu Culture have been translated and brought out in the form of a book in Kannada. Peter Claus, Tuḷava Darṣana [The Vision/View of Tuluvas], tr. A.V. Navada and Subhaschandra, (Kundapura: 1987). The impact of this trend on yakṣagāna is studied in ch.VI.

6. This number varies according to different authors. The number given here is according to Chinnappa Gowada's research work, Bhūtārādhane: Jānapadiya Adhyayana [Spirit worship: A Folkloristic Study] (Mangala Gangotri, Mangalore: 1990), pp.34-39.

7. Ibid., p.194.

8. According to some scholars, the Pan Indian Bhakti movement has influenced most performing arts all over India. This aspect has been discussed in the latter part of this chapter.

9. Amrua Someshwara, "Tulu Folklore", in Encyclopaedia of Folk Culture of Karnataka, op.cit., p.556.

11. The impact of this change on yakṣagāna is discussed in chapter VI.

12. Prabhakara Joshi' Kēdige [Fragrent screw pine; also an ornament in yakṣagāna] (Mangalore:1986) pp.2-4 and Anandarama Upadhyaya, Yakṣagāna Rāmāyana Prasangagaḷu (Yakṣagāna Prasangas of the Rāmāyana] (Bangalore:1980) pp.8-14, have given a brief summary of the various opinions expressed by several scholars regarding the origin and meaning of the term yakṣagāna.


19. Shivarama Karanth, Yakṣagāna Bayalāṭa [Yakṣagāna Open-air Performance] (2nd ed. Puttur 1963), pp.78-79. Shivarama Karanth has also written a book in English, Yakṣagāna (Mysore: 1975). In further references, the two books by Shivarama Karanth will be referred to, by their years of publications.

20. K.S.Upadhyaya says, "Sarngadeva, an authority on music in ancient India, recognised Jakka as a style of music popular in his time. The only other reference to yakṣagāna system of music in any of the Sanskrit works on dance and music is in Sangeeta Sudha of Govinda Dikshita. He referred to yakṣagāna as one of the systems of music. This work, however, is comparatively of recent date, having been published only in 1628". "Yakṣagāna", Sangeet Natak, 70, p.38.

22. Ibid., p.XVIII.


25. Prabhakara Joshi gives a brief comparison of the music in the two styles in Kēdige, op.cit., p.10.

26. One reason for this was the entry into yakṣagāna of Harikathe (lit. the story of Hari-Viṣṇu) artistes. Harikathe is a solo performing art, where the artiste performs as the singer, narrator and commentator, expounding on themes from the epics and purāṇas. Many of these artistes, who entered yakṣagāna in the last twenty, thirty years, were not well versed in aspects of yakṣagāna like dance or make-up, but with their knowledge of the epics, could expound on them through the improvised text.


28. This term paduvalapāya (western style/school) has been coined recently by some scholars along the lines of mūḍalapāya (eastern style/school), to refer to coastal yakṣagāna. But it must be noted that this term is in use only in the writings of scholars and folklorists and will not be understood either by the artistes or the spectators of coastal yakṣagāna.

29. One more subcategory Ghaṭṭada Kōre (The Edge/Border of the Ghats), prevalent in Mandya Dist. is also some times recognised.


31. H.K.Ranganath, op. cit., p.62. This description is of the northern tradition of mūḍalapāya. In the southern tradition, the clown is called hanumanāyaka. The clown is an integral part of most of the traditional theatre forms of South India.


33. Ibid., p.68. Translation mine. In all further references, where quotations from Kannada are given, the translation is mine.

35. H.K. Ranganath, op.cit., p.70.


37. Ibid., p.413.


41. Tenkūṭṭu yaksagāṇa is popular in the northern most part of Kerala, where Kannada is spoken, even now. Kumble in Kasaragod taluk of Kerala, has been one of the strongholds of yaksagāṇa.

42. K. Krishna Bhat, op.cit., pp.XXIII-XXVII.


47. Ibid., p.133.

48. Edwina Rangnathan, op.cit., p.8. The same is true of other folk forms like dāsaraṭa (performance by dāsas, a backward caste who are professional performers) of North Karnataka, that have been patronised only by the lower castes, as the following comment by Chandrashekhar Kambar about the folk theatre of North Karnataka makes clear. "Brahmins do not witness these plays. Neither the audience, nor the actors feel their absence". Chandrashekhara Kambar, "Ritual Kannada Folk Theatre", *Sangeet Natak*-25, July-Sept 1972.

50. Balvant Gargi, op.cit., p.139.

51. Edwina Ranganathan, op.cit., p.11.

52. Padma Subramanyam, the famed dancer and authority on Bharatnatyam has called it, "a folk theatre with a classical base", quoted in Rangavaikhari, op.cit., p.144.


57. Ibid., p.30.


59. Siddhendra Yogi has almost become a mythical character. There are many stories about why he became a Yogi (a hermit). His period has also been a matter of controversy. Shivarama Karanth is of the opinion that he had stayed in Udupi in coastal Karnataka for a few years and that kuchipudi which he evolved later, was based on yakṣagāna which he had observed in Udupi (S.Karanth, 1973, pp.46-48). R.V.S.Sundaram, disagrees with this opinion (op.cit.)., p.60.


63. There is a famous puppet theatre form of yakṣagāna also, which uses the same music, literature etc. of yakṣagāna. Only in performance, puppets are used instead of actors. Kogga Kamat’s troupe of Uppina Kudru, Dakshina Kannada is the most famous yakṣagāna puppet theatre troupe.

64. If some forms like yakṣagāna and kathakalai have continued to be popular even today, some other forms like mūḍalapāya, saṃṇāṭa or Telugu yakṣagāna do not enjoy the same patronage now as they did in the past and so are struggling for survival.

65. Dēvadāsis are women who are dedicated to the temples to serve the deity through song and dance. They are supposed to be married to the presiding deity, though most of them end up as prostitutes. This custom, though legally banned, is still prevalent, specially in some parts of Karnataka. A semiotic study of the devadasi system can be seen in Saskia Kersenboom-Story, Nitya Sumangali: Devadasi Tradition in South India (Delhi: 1987).

66. Apart from South India, it has been recorded only in parts of Maharashtra, contiguous to Karnataka and in the temples of Orissa.


69. Ibid., p.2.


71. Manjushri Chaki Sircar and Parbati Sircar, "Indian Dance:Classical Unity and Regional Variation", in India: Cultural Patterns and Processes, eds., Allen G.Noble and Ashok Dutt. (Boulder Colarado:1982). These meanings with reference to yakṣagāna have been studied in chapter V.


75. Ibid., p. 36. Ramanujan also points out how this anti-structure of the Bhakti movement, itself became the 'establishment' at a later date and how these saints were deified and became in retrospect, the founders of a new caste.

76. This seems to be true of the folk theatre forms in other parts of India also. Saint Chaitanya gave a boost to jātra, the folk theatre of Bengal with his play Rukminiharan in the 15th century. Sri Shankaradeva and Madhavadeva started the tradition of theatrical performance Ankianat in Assam around the same time. I am indebted to Adya Rangacharaya’s book for these details and for many of the ideas of this section.