The Symbolic Significance of Yakṣagāna

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Yakṣagāna is the traditional dance-drama form of Karnataka, and has a history of more than 400 years. Its area of popularity is confined to the two coastal districts of Karnataka and the adjoining regions. It is the major form of cultural expression of this region and is extremely popular even now. The themes of Yakṣagāna are taken from the Rāmāyana, the Mahābhārata, and the Purāṇas. In the past, Yakṣagāna was always performed in the open, with the entire village witnessing the performance, though now commercially organized troupes have also come into existence. Among the traditional performing arts of India, Yakṣagāna is among the few that have continued to be living, vibrant forms even now. Even modern means of entertainment like cinema and television have not affected its popularity. At present there are more than twenty professional troupes giving one performance each every night, right through the year (except during the rainy season), operating in a relatively small part of Karnataka.

Why is Yakṣagāna so popular? What messages does it transmit? What cultural, psychological, social needs has it fulfilled? This paper is an attempt to find answers to these questions and understand the significance of Yakṣagāna to the community where it has survived.

Cultural Forms as Symbolic Systems

The study of any form of cultural expression has to tackle the crucial question of what the form means to the performers and participants. In the study of Yakṣagāna too, we will have to tackle this question: What does Yakṣagāna mean to the performers and the spectators? At the apparent level, there are factors like aesthetic pleasure, ritualistic appeal, etc., which draw the spectators to the performance. But apart from, or, to be more precise, along with these reasons, a form like Yakṣagāna, which has survived as a major form of cultural expression for several centuries, must have certain deeper layers of meaning whereby it reflects and comments on the various tensions and/or paradoxes in society. Without such an immanent significance directly related to the life of the people, no cultural form can survive for long. These meanings are often not apparent—they are not on the surface. This is especially true of forms and practices that have evolved

over hundreds of years. These embedded meanings can be understood only by viewing the form as a symbolic system.

Our attempt at understanding these deeply connotative and symbolic meanings necessarily involves the task of interpretation. For this, the cultural form has to be viewed as a text or an assemblage of texts. The task of interpretation of these texts cannot be a closed exercise, where the meanings can be found within the texts themselves; they have to be studied in relation to the "social semantics", in the words of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz.[1]

Folklorists, especially in the last few decades, have been concentrating more and more on analysing cultural systems in terms of their symbolic significance. Clifford Geertz's analysis of the Balinese cockfight or James Peacock's study of Javanese drama may be mentioned as examples of such an interpretative approach. Victor Turner's studies of African folk rituals and practices also emphasize the symbolic nature of these systems. The growing interest in the study of symbolism is related to developments in other fields of knowledge such as semiotics, psychoanalysis, communication studies, etc., which have been focusing on the symbolic process of human expression. Raymond Firth, commenting on the growing interest in symbolism, says that it is "in keeping with the general temper of our time to be attracted to studies that concern themselves with the less rational aspects of human behaviour, which tend to reject or criticise a positivist approach, which make play with ideas of ambiguity, uncertainty and mystery".[2]

Interpretation of a symbolic system does not mean imposing a meaning on the cultural form. The task of interpretation is in fact to make explicit how the meanings are related to the symbols. The relationship between the signified meaning and the symbol should be established with a certain degree of reliability. The interpretative mechanism is most often contained in the cultural text itself. As Clifford Geertz says, "Societies, like lives, contain their own interpretation. One has only to learn how to gain access to them."[3] This is because symbols do not exist in a vaccum. Symbols are part of a representational process, where meaning emerges, and is dependent upon a culturally defined social setting. That is why symbols cannot be interpreted without reference to the social context.

Yaksagana and its Symbolic Significance

Yakṣagāna, like all other forms of traditional cultural expression, functions as a symbolic system. The symbolic significance of Yakṣagāna has to be understood in relation to the social semantics of the society of the coastal and *Malenad* (wet, rainy) regions of Karnataka, where Yakṣagāna has flourished. This society, being a part of the larger south Indian society, shares its social structure and cultural pat-
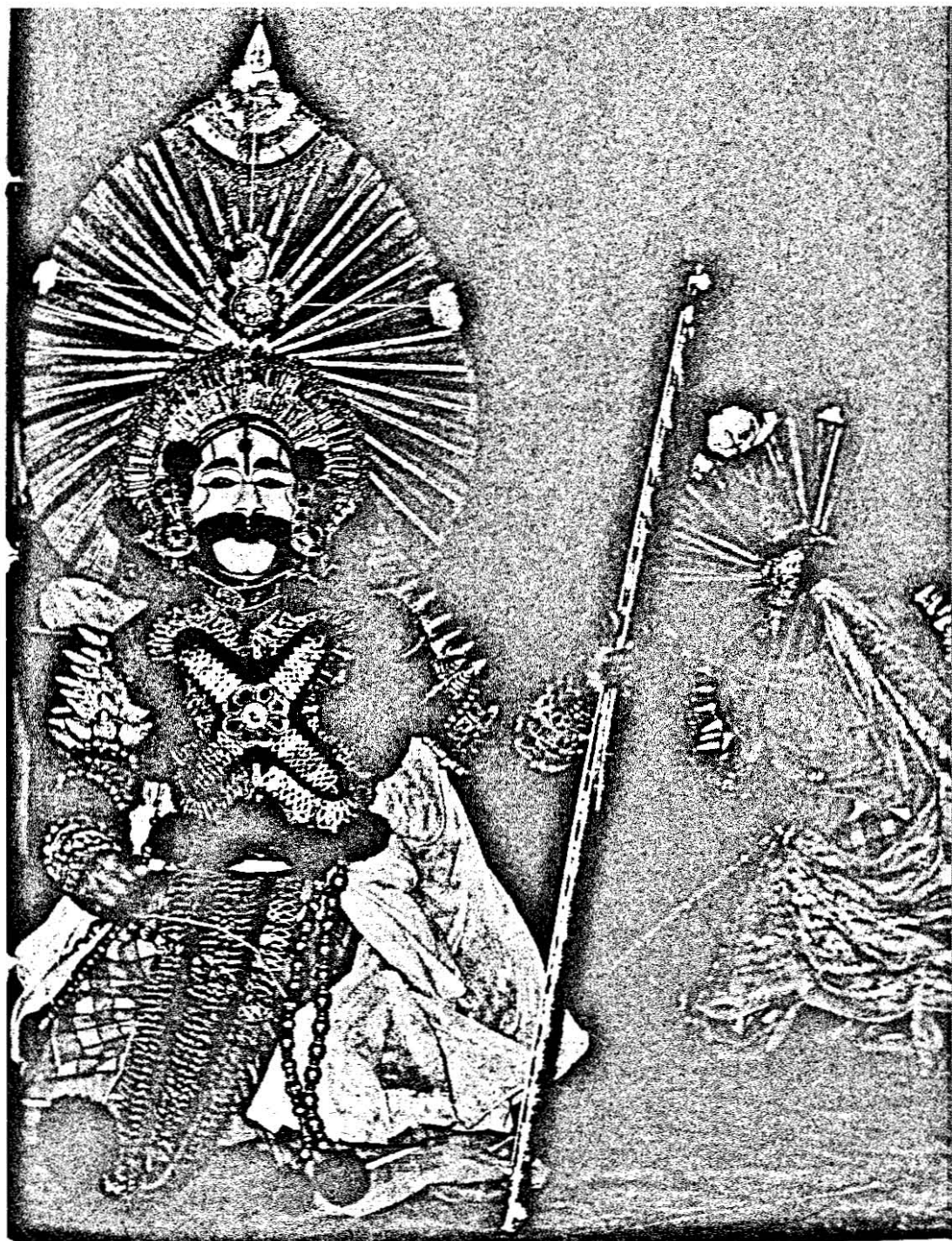
Vibhishana (left) fighting Lava in *Lava-Kusha Prasanga*, Udupi, 1971; note the gorgeous costume and the waist ornament.

terns with the entire region, as well as with the Indian subcontinent. At the same time, there are certain features in this society that are unique to the particular area. The common and the individual features of the society are equally important in interpreting the symbolic significance of a form like Yakṣagāna.

In analysing the symbolic significance of Yakṣagāna, a distinction between two types of Yakṣagāna has to be made. This distinction relates both to organizational set-up and period. The first type is the Yaksagāna of the open-air troupes that perform *harake āṭa* (vow-performance). Such performances are usually sponsored by a person who has taken a vow that he would sponsor a Yakṣagāna performance if his wish is fulfilled. The performance, though sponsored by one person, is open to everyone. There is also a strong ritualistic element here as sponsoring a performance is thought of as a religious activity. This is the way all Yakṣagāna performances were organized till about forty years ago, when some troupes began to be organized on a commercial basis. The commercially organized troupes are referred to as 'tent-troupes' as the performances take place in temporarily erected tents with admission being charged. Both types of troupe are in existence today.

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

This does not mean that there has been a sudden and complete break between the two types mentioned above (except perhaps, in an extreme example, like Tuḷu Yakṣagāna).[4] One has clearly grown out of the other, and many of the meanings of the open-air performances that are going to be analysed later are present in the commercialized forms as well (perhaps in a subdued form). At the same time, the open-air performances of the present day show a clear influence of the tent-troupes and their performance (perhaps because of the popularity and prestige that the tent-troupes enjoy today). As both these forms co-exist, this influence is only natural.

This paper studies the symbolic significance of the open-air performances of Yakṣagāna. The analysis will concentrate on what Yakṣagāna has meant at the symbolic level to the community these past centuries.

The Performative Context

The open-air performances, as we have already observed, are sponsored by one person (or a group of persons). In the past, the performative context and the sponsorship of performances themselves conveyed powerful messages regarding the social structure and the position of different groups in that structure.' In order to understand this symbolic significance properly, we have to understand the social and economic structure of the society in which these performances took place. Yakṣagāna never had royal patronage; it has survived largely by the support it has received from landlords and rich people in the villages. As Martha Ashton and Bruce Christie say, "The patron is most often a wealthy landlord or a prominent businessman who for various reasons commissions a performance ... Any one is welcome to attend these patronised performances and they are free to all." Normally the entire village came to witness the performance, but the patron was almost always the landlord or a rich person, or a religious institution. This was because sponsorship involved a good deal of money and most people in a village did not have the means to sponsor a performance. Both the points mentioned in the above quotation—that the performances were sponsored by a few people and that they were witnessed by all—become very important in understanding the social message that this system of sponsorship conveyed. In order to understand this significance properly, it is necessary to know the social structure of the coastal regions of Karnataka.

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

The Position of the Sponsor

The sponsorship of a Yakṣagāna performance brought to the patron prestige and recognition. First of all, it was considered a sacred religious activity. The patron was the host who afforded the opportunity to the entire village to partake in the ritualistic performance. The recognition given to the patron was made overt in the performance itself. He had the authority to choose the particular *prasanga* (episode) to be performed. In the past, there was also the practice of the musicians singing a few songs either in the house of the patron or in the temple of his fam-

ily deity a few hours before the performance. At the end of the performance, the sponsor would come on the stage and his name would be mentioned along with the name of the presiding deity of the troupe. Look at the following description of it by Shivarama Karanth:

The sponsor then offers the Bhagavata the specified remuneration along with betel nut and betel leaves on a plate.
As he accepts it, the following words are spoken
Bhagavata: Ah ho ho
Strivisa: Ah ho ho
Bhagavata (mentions the name of the troupe and the presiding deity and adds): From the holy presence of . . . Strivisa: . . . this *Srimudi Gandha Prasada* [holy offering] offered by so and so [the name of the sponsor] in the holy presence of such and such a deity presiding over such and such a troupe is welcome.'

The above quotation shows how the sponsor got his recognition as part of the performance itself. In the seating arrangement also, the position and power of the patron were highlighted. A similar example of how the performance elevates the position of the patron can be found in Ramlila of Ramnagar. Richard Schechner in his analysis of this form explains how the performance also works to highlight the power and position of the king of Benares who is the patron of these performances, even at a time when his kingdom is lost.[8]

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

The division of the village into a landowning class and landless labourers and tenants was not merely a division of class. It also related to the caste hierarchy. The landowners usually belonged to the higher castes. The social structure of the village can be properly understood only in the context of this twin hierarchy. In the Indian context it is impossible to understand the social hierarchy without reference to caste. Coming to the coastal region, the landowning class (and so, the patrons of Yakṣagana) mostly belonged to the Bunt, Jain or Brahmin castes, which occupied the upper rungs of the caste hierarchy. The sponsorship of Yakṣagāna also acted as an assertion of the superior status of these castes in the caste hierarchy. The twin hierarchies of caste and class were no doubt related and

both were highlighted in the act of sponsorship. This assertion was not merely restricted to the performative context. It got expressed in the discourse of the performance itself.

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

Yakṣagāna has also been a symbol for the stability of the social structure as it upholds the status quo. The world presented in Yakṣagāna, as we have observed, was essentially an unequal social set-up with hierarchical divisions. The society was (and largely is, even now) hierarchically divided, with great social inequalities. But, at the same time, in such a social system, each caste had its own assured place in the hierarchy, and so the system led to a stable (though unequal) social structure. By emphasizing the status quo Yakṣagāna, through its ritualistic appeal, provided what Clifford Geertz in his study of Bali religion calls "the sanctification of social inequality".[9]

Official and Unofficial Ideologies

It is not to be assumed that the symbolic significance of Yakṣagāna functions only in highlighting the position of the patron of the performance. A complex medium such as Yakṣagāna does not have a unidirectional message. In such a medium, several messages function simultaneously. Sometimes, a second mes-

sage subverting the first message may also be communicated at the same time. Ian Karp, elaborating on Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of ploysemy of voices says,"... utterances can simultaneously convey what he [Bakhtin] called 'official and unofficial' ideologies". He explains how, in a single cultural text, complex and often conflicting messages manifest themselves. Applying this concept to performance, he says, "Performance can be used to assert differing messages of authenticity and inauthenticity either in different phases of the same performance or even in performances that refer to one another . . . It is also possible, however, that the elaboration of unadorned meaning may assert contradictory messages simultaneously."[10]

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

As an example, we can take the question of the status of the artists. The Yakṣagāna artists are from different castes, many belonging to the lower rungs of the hierarchy. Till recently, to be a Yakṣagāna performer was not considered respectable. But the performance provided the artists what Victor Turner (after Van Gennep) calls liminality,[11] whereby they became 'superior' to everyone else during the performance. These artists enact the roles of the gods, goddesses and superhuman beings of the epics and Purāṇas, who are held in very high esteem by the entire populace. By 'becoming' these characters in the performance, the artists gain a position and prestige greater than the patrons and the landlords themselves. The entire audience, including the upper and dominant castes, pay obeisance to these artists representing the gods and goddesses. Thus, even while projecting the official ideology, the performance at another level, through another voice, subverts the message by making the upper castes pay their respects to artists belonging to the lower castes and treating them as superior.[12]

A similar example can again be found in the Ramlila of Ramnagar. When Rama returns triumphantly from Lanka to Ayodhya, he is honoured by the Maharaja of Benares himself. Richard Schechner describes the scene thus:

And finally, he [Rama] is welcomed by the Maharaja at the Fort: one king receiving another. There, assisted by the royal family, Rama and his family have their feet washed, are garlanded and fed a sumptuous meal . . . I mused that the boys who were *swarupas* [those enacting the roles of Rama and his brothers etc.] for the last time during this scene were prolonging it, and deeply enjoying the unique situation where they were being honoured, worshipped and fed by the Maharaja of Benares".[13]

This shows how performance can invest the artist with a status and position which he would never have got otherwise. This position and recognition is no doubt shortlived, but during the performance he attains a superior status and what Victor Turner calls liminality.

Another instance of the subversion of the official ideology can be found in the way the Brahmins are depicted in Yakṣagāna. Brahmin characters represented in Yakṣagāna can be divided into two clearly defined classes—*riṣis* and ordinary Brahmins. *Riṣis* like Vasiṣtha or Durvāsā are played by actors playing the major roles. These characters are represented as highly respectable figures. On the other hand, the characters of ordinary Brahmins are played by the *hāsyagāra* (clown). These characters are almost always the butt of ridicule and laughter. They are presented as ever hungry, greedy and ready to break any moral code for personal benefit. The Brahmin characters in *prasangas* like *Bhīṣma Vijaya, Bhasmāsura*, etc., may be taken as examples of this type.

In this picturization, we can see how double-faceted the picture of a Brahmin becomes in Yakṣagāna. The *riṣis* are presented as honourable personages. So Brahminism, the abstract concept, gets recognition and respect. At the same time, the Brahmins in the village come to resemble the ordinary Brahmins represented by the *hāsyagāra* rather than the *riṣis*. So they are almost always the butt of ridicule. This was perhaps one way of releasing the tension and getting even with the Brahmin, who stood highest in the social hierarchy.

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

As an Institution of Education

Yakṣagāna, like many other dance-drama forms of India, has over the centuries acted as a powerful instrument of education. In this context, it should be remembered that women and non-Brahmins were debarred from Sanskritic education according to tradition. For all of them, Yakṣagāna performances themselves acted as a means of education. The spectators became acquainted with the philosophical issues and ethical values that were represented in the performances. In Yakṣagāna, we find artists who are uneducated (in the formal sense) capable of speaking on complex issues concerning various fields of ancient Indian knowledge in their improvised dialogue. For the performers also, Yakṣagāna has been a school. Thus, over the centuries, Yakṣagāna has acted as a powerful educating

force, not only about the epics and Purāṇas but generally about the Indian way of life.

By presenting stories from the epics and Purāṇas, Yakṣagāna has also acted as a strong force in shaping the moral concepts and the world-view of the people. The right way and the wrong way of life as seen in these performances provide a kind of object-lesson to the spectators. The stories provide examples of various situations in family life, political life, etc., and show the 'right' way for the people to follow.

Linguistic and Cultural Hegemony

The themes of Yakṣagāna, as we have observed, have always been taken from the epics and Purāṇas. Another important feature that we notice is that until recently, Yakṣagāna has always been performed in Kannada, even in Tuḷu-speaking areas. Tuḷu is one of the Dravidian languages spoken by most people in the Dakshina Kannada district of Karnataka and in the extreme northern part of Kerala. Tuḷu has a rich oral literature though it did not have a written literature till recently. Tuḷu culture shows certain marked differences from the rest of Karnataka. For centuries, Yakṣagāna has been performed only in Kannada in spite of the fact that most Tuḷu speakers (especially in the villages) do not understand Kannada. The question that naturally confronts us is how a popular medium of cultural expression like Yakṣagāna could survive for centuries in a language that is (partly at least) alien to the people?[14]

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

Ample work has already been done on the influence of the Bhakti movement on traditional theatre forms like Yakṣagāna. One of the fundamental canons of the Bhakti movement was to spread the religious message through the spoken language of the people (like Kannada, Marathi, Bengali, Hindi, etc.), which were directly accessible to the people. This use of regional languages was in opposition to the use of Sanskrit, which till then was the repository of all knowledge. This knowledge in the hands of Brahmins became the source of their power (to use Foucault's terms), which they used in the social, economic and political spheres. The Bhakti movement broke this hegemony of Sanskrit, especially over religious knowledge, by using the spoken languages of the people for religious teachings. (It is thus not surprising that in most parts of India, the Bhakti movement also became a powerful movement of social change.)

The ostensible purpose of Yakṣagāna was *dharmaprasāra* (spreading the *dharma*—the righteous way of life). Though Yakṣagāna came under the strong influence of the Bhakti movement, it is strange that it preferred to do so not in Tuḷu, the spoken language of the large majority of people in Dakshina Kannada, but in Kannada. The explanation is that the Tuḷu land was mostly under the suzerainty of Kannada rulers. As Viveka Rai says, "From historical times, the administration of Tuḷu land was under the influence of the Karnataka rulers."[15] As a result, Kannada became the language of power and prestige. Though Tuḷu has a rich oral literature, the written literature was always in Kannada. Thus we can say that so far as Tuḷu is concerned, the hegemony of Sanskrit was replaced by that of Kannada and this hegemony was part of the cultural and linguistic power structure. Yakṣagāna, which was performed in Kannada, also became a part of this hegemony. If the exercise of this hegemony was not always perceived to be so by the community, it was perhaps because of the other appeals of Yakṣagāna (ritualistic, aesthetic, etc.), which held a strong sway over the minds of the people.

Acculturation

The hegemony referred to above also worked at the levels of religious and ritualistic beliefs. The themes of Yakṣagāna were always drawn from the pan-Indian epics and Purāṇas. Yaksagāna did not deal with any other theme either of folk origin or even historical episodes.[16] This choice of subject-matter can be associated with the process of acculturation, where the Aryan Brahminical pantheon gained precedence over the local deities; the Brahminical rituals became more respectable than the local cult practices. But even to this day, practices like *Bhutārādhane* (spirit worship of ancestors) and *Nāgārādhane* (snake worship) are central to the lives of the people of coastal Karnataka; the conventional religions are often of no relevance. In spite of this, till recently, these deities or their legends were never represented in Yakṣagāna. This was partly due to the influence of the Bhakti movement, which in the coastal regions was predominantly the vehicle of the Vaishnava faith. Thus the stories about the ten incarnations of Viṣnu gained in prominence. Thus in Yakṣagāna too the *prasangas* dealing with the stories of Rāma and Krishna (two of the incarnations of Viṣnu) form the largest chunk of the literature. The local ritualistic practices of Dakshina Kannada never figured in Yakṣagāna until recent times. Nor did any theme from Jaina sources appear in Yakṣagāna, even though a number of Jaina chieftains and landlords were patrons of Yakṣagāna.

Thus the hegemony of the religion of the 'great tradition', to use Robert Redfield and Milton Singer's term, as opposed to the 'little tradition' is manifest in Yakṣagāna discourse. The above remarks should not be taken to mean that

there was a constant struggle and confrontation between mainstream Hindu practices and the ritual practices associated with the local deities. (Such a confrontation, if there was any, is totally hidden in time.) What is seen now is a peaceful acceptance and coexistence of both the traditions. Most people worship the deities of both the streams. In fact, in many cases, the local deities have been absorbed into the Hindu pantheon. But the point being made here is that the little tradition never formed a part of Yakṣagāna discourse, even though most of the participants—artists, partons and spectators—were devotees of the local deities as well. In this, we can see how Yakṣagāna was part of the hegemony of the great tradition.

Expression of Male Ethos

Yakṣagāna has always been an all-male domain where even female characters are played by men. Women participate only as spectators. Such a form naturally became an expression of the male perspective. Even the costumes of female characters (played by men) are quite plain compared to the gorgeous costumes of male characters. This difference in costumes highlights masculine qualities at the expense of feminine qualities.

In the themes and dance style also, the emphasis is on depiction of virile and manly qualities, with scenes of battle dominating the performance. All these elements together function symbolically to project and assert the male ethos. The most overt sign of the assertion of masculinity is perhaps the waist ornament of the heroic male characters (see photograph on p. 5). It is clear that this is an exaggerated iconic sign of the male genital organ.[17] The need for such an assertion of masculine 'pride' can be understood if we relate it to the social context and the family system. In the coastal regions of Karnataka, where Yakṣagāna has largely flourished, the matrilineal family system was followed: this perhaps explains the need for such an assertion of masculinity.

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

Thus the birth of Kathakali may be considered very significant in relation to the prevailing social exigency. The Nairs were losing their glorious status in the community and the dance theatre was

one way to channelise the ethos of their masculine pride. In a matrilineal society, the absence of a male physiological priority in the lineage system, masculine pride perhaps needed to be affirmed. The selection of heroic themes for Kathakali's dance dramas probably reflects the need of the performers to assert the male ethos. Kathakali is violent, acrobatic and athletic. The Nairs chose the themes from the mythical past, not from the historical past, to create a supernatural aura of ritual dancing . . . [18]

Conclusion

So far, we have oberved how Yakṣagāna functions as a symbolic system, conveying various meanings at the immanent level of the discourse. Many of the meanings function at the subconscious level and so the performers and spectators may not always be aware of these meanings. But an interpretative approach can decipher these symbolic significations. These are not imposed meanings but meanings present in the form itself. As Clifford Geertz says, one has only to learn how to gain access to them. ☐

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: 1973), p. 448.

2. Raymond Firth, *Symbols Public and Private* (Ithaca: 1973), p. 28.

3. Clifford Geertz, op. cit., p. 453.

4. Tuḷu is one of the Dravidian languages spoken in Dakshina Kannada district of Karnataka. In the last two or three decades, Yakṣagāna has begun to be performed in Tuḷu also. Tuḷu Yakṣagāna has broken away almost completely from traditional Yakṣagāna.

5. This analysis concentrates mostly on conditions as they existed in the past. The past few decades have been a period of great change in Yakṣagāna as well as in the society in which it exists.

6. Martha Ashton and Bruce Christie, *Yaksagana: A Dance Drama of India* (New Delhi: 1977), p. 3.

7. K. Shivarama Karanth, *Yaksagana* (Mysore: 1975), p. 43.

8. Richard Schechner, *Performative Circumstances From Avant garde to Ramlila* (Calcutta: 1983), pp. 261–62.

9. Clifford Geertz, op. cit., p. 177.

10. Ian Karp, "Laughter in Marriage: Subversion in Performance", *Journal of Folklore Research* (Vol. 25, No. 112, Jan–Aug. 1988), pp. 40–41.

11. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Antistructure* (London: 1969), p. 95.

12. It is not to be assumed that all Yakṣagāna artists belong to the lower rungs of the caste hierarchy. In Uttara Kannada district, for example, a good number of artists are Brahmins. But the interpretation given here is not thereby invalidated, as Yakṣagāna artists as a whole did not enjoy a respectable position in society till recently. The interpretation given here will hold good as it also refers to other hierarchies.

13. Richard Schechner, op.cit, p. 261.

14. Yakṣagāna is popular not merely in areas where Tulu is spoken, but also in areas where Kannada is the language of the majority. The analysis in this section deals mainly with what Yakṣagāna signifies in Tuḷu-speaking regions.

15. B. Viveka Rai, *Tuḷuva Sanskrit* (Mysore: 1971), p. 66.

16. Another form of Yakṣagāna, Mudalapaya (literally, Eastern Style), for example, has many stories dealing with folk heroes and historical characters.

17. It is perhaps strange, but the similarity is rarely recognized by regular spectators of Yakṣagāna. Many expressed surprise when this similarity was pointed out to them.

18. Manjushri Chaki-Sircar and Parbati Sircar, "Indian Dance: Classical Unity and Regional Variation", *India: Cultural Patterns and Processes*, ed. Allen G. Noble and Ashok Dutt (Boulder, Colorado: 1982), p. 158.