

THE CURTAIN IN CLASSICAL SANSKRIT DRAMA

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Definite evidence of the use of the curtain in the classical Sanskrit theatre in India is available in the plays of Bhasa—the second of the earliest known playwrights, the first being Ashvagosha whose plays in fragments have also come down to us. The thirteen complete plays of Bhasa show a maturity and depth which indicate that the art of drama must have been in existence long before him and we may assume that the curtain may have been in use much earlier. After Bhasa, Bharata in his *Natyashastra* mentions the curtain, but oddly enough, not in Chapter II dealing with theatres and their constructional details, but in Chapter V which explains the *poorvarangas* (preliminaries before the play) and the procedures to conduct them. He states that nine of the nineteen *poorvarangas* should be performed behind the curtain and the rest after removing it. He also mentions the curtain in Chapters XIII, XXXI, XXXII and XXXIII (*Natyashastra*—M. M. Ghosh).

Bhasa (*Pratimanatakam*, II, Chowkhamba Series) as well as Bharata (*Natyashastra*, V-8-15) both use the same word—*yavanika* and in some other of their manuscripts, its variant *javanika* for the curtain. Bhasa also mentions in one single play, and there too, only once, another word for the curtain—*apati* (*Charudatta*—II. Bharata too uses the word *apati* (NS. XXXII—470) as well as *pata* (NS. XIII—2 and XXXIII—227) for the same. Later playwrights, such as Kalidas, Vishakhadatta, Shudraka, Harsha, Bhavabhuti, Murari, Jayadeva, etc., continue to use these words, namely, *pata*, *pati*, *apati* and *yavanika*—*javanika*. Kalidas also uses the word *tiraskarinee* (*Malvi*—I and *Shakuntala*—VI).

The *Harivamsha* and the *Bhagawatapurana* also use *javanika* for the theatre curtain. The lexicographer Amar gives the following words in his *Amarkosha*:

pratiseera, javanika, tiraskarinee.

Another lexicographer Halayudha also uses *javanika*, *tiraskarinee*, *kandapatika*, *apati* and *pratiseera*. Hemchandra, the grammarian gives *javani* and its variant *yavani*. Damodargupta in his *Kuttanimatam-Kavyam* uses *tiraskarinee* and *javanika* in describing the staging of Act one of *Ratnavali*. Abhinavagupta, the only commentator of the *Natyashastra* known to us, prefers to use the word *yavanika* in his *Abhinavabharati*. Here, however, we shall confine ourselves to the classical Sanskrit theatre and will not discuss the use of the curtain in the regional theatre which by the time of Damodargupta seems to be coming into its own.

During the British days some western scholars who had begun to take a deep interest in Sanskrit literature, had also written about the various aspects of the theatrical art, and naturally about the stage. Some in their enthusiasm had tried to show the influence of the Ionian Greeks on the Indian theatre and the word *yavanika* came handy, which was said to have been derived from *yavana*, the word used for the Ionians and others during the Mauryan Empire. Professor Keith refuted this theory of the Greeks having influenced the classical drama of India in his *Sanskrit Drama* and showed that the word *yavana* was used for other foreigners also, such as the Egyptians, Bactrians, Syrians and that *yavanika* was used for the material imported from them, such as the tapestry.

Indian scholars in those nationalist days, also denied Greek influence on Indian drama. And Dr. S. K. De in an article in *Bharatiya Vidya* (Vol. X—1948) traced the origin of the word curtain to another word *yamanika* from the root *yam*, to stop, restrain. He traced the word *yamaneer* to *Vajasanehi Samhita* where it is used in the sense of a curtain, but not necessarily theatre curtain. Then he cites some lexicographers in support of his view mentioned earlier here and others, such as Mahesvara, the commentator of Amar who gives *pratiseera*, *javanika*, *yamanika*, and *tiraskarinee* as the synonyms for the theatre curtain and others who use *yamanika*. He also gives example from the play *Mudrarakshasa* critically edited by Hillebrandt in which in two stage-directions *yamanika* is used along with the variants *yavanika* and *javanika*. Meghaprabhacharya's *Dharamabhudaya* in which "*yamanantarad*" is used in the stage-direction and also gives more examples in support of his theory of the word *yamanika* in place of *yavanika*.

Thus, we have several words used for the theatre curtain from Bhasa onwards namely, *pata*, *pati*, *apati*, *yamanika*, *yavanika*.

javanika; *tiraskarinee*; *pratiseera*. And in almost all classical plays we find the word *nepathye* to mean "behind the curtain". The following are the words commonly used by the playwrights for their stage-directions in connection with the use (which is sometimes implied) and the movement of the curtain:

Nepathye (behind the curtain); *pravishya* (entering—from behind the curtain); *tatah pravishati* (then enters); *patakarshita* (after drawing the curtain); *apatikshepena* (with a fling of the curtain); *patakshepena* (with a fling of the curtain); *pravishyapatikshepena* (entering with a fling of the curtain); *yavanikastaranam* (drawing the curtain); *javanikantare* (behind the curtain) *yavanikantarite* (behind the curtain); *javanikantaram* (removing the curtain) *apaneeta-tiraskarinee* (removing the curtain); *tiraskarinee pratichchanna*; *yavanikavrita*; (covered by or hidden behind the curtain); *javanikamapaniyopasritya* (removing the curtain and approaching); *tatah pravishati asanastha* (then enters seated i.e. behind the curtain); *tatah pravishati yathanir dishta* (then enters as described) and such others of the last type.

It is indeed unfortunate that many scholars and learned translators of the Sanskrit plays—Indian as well as Western—particularly those obsessed by the proscenium theatre have missed the significance of these stage-directions that have been written for different purposes and for varied effects depending upon the mood and the situation and the dramatic impact sought to be created. We may classify them in several categories:

- A—(i) *nepathye*,
- (ii) *pravishya*,
- (iii) *tatah pravishati*,
- (iv) *patakshepena*, *apatikshepena*.

(A)—(i) *Nepathye*

Sutradhar in almost all the plays looks at the *nepathya* (dressing room) and calls for *nati* (actress) *pariparshvika* (assistant), *nata* (actor), or *vidhushaka* (jester) and they make their entry from 'behind the curtain'.

(ii) *Pravishya*

(a) Sometimes a character, to call a door-keeper, etc does the same "*Dasharathah nepathyabhimukha*" (Dashratha looking at the *nepathya*) and the doorkeeper, etc. enter from behind the curtain. Almost all minor characters—*kanchuki* (chamberlain), *cheti* (maid servant), *shishya* (student) etc., enter thus.

(b) Certain sounds are made in the *nepathya*—"nepathye kolahalah" (*Mudra* I. p. 137)—etc.

These stage-directions show that there was a curtain/curtains between the stage and the dressing room. We shall discuss their position on the stage later on.

(iii) *Tatah pravishati*

(a) This again is a general kind of entry in which minor as well as major characters enter the stage from behind the curtain. For the minor characters the stage-direction says—“*tatah pravishati tapasah*” (then enters an ascetic, *Prasanna*, II), *cheti*, *sakhis*, *vidushaka*, etc. “*tatah pravishati nagarikah shyalah pashchad baddha-purushamadayarakshinau cha*” (then enters the *kotwal*, *shyala* followed by a man with his hands tied and the two policemen—*Shakuntala*—VI). For some important characters the stage-direction has the words—“*tatah pravishati raja saparivarah*” (The king enters with his retinue); “*tatah pravishati Seeta sakhi cha*” (Seeta enters with her friend—*Prasanna*, II).

(b) Some of the above stage-directions are at times qualified by the addition of an adjective before the character's name: “*tatah pravishati vishanno vidushakah*” (then enters *vidushaka* in a sad mood—*Shakuntala*—II); “*tatah pravishati kamayamanavastha raja*” (then enters the king in a state of passion—*Shakuntala*—III), etc., thus indicating the emotional state of the character at the time of entry.

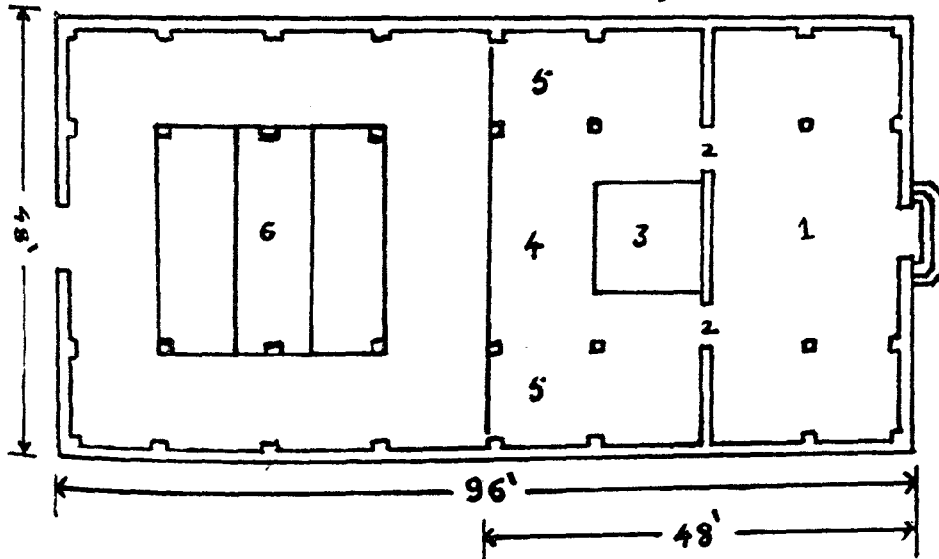
(iv) *Patakshepena; Apatikshepena:*

The entry indicated by this stage-direction has been specifically mentioned by Bharata (*Natyashastra* XXXIII—227; XXXII—470) and has been used by Bhasa (*Pratima*, II) only once as mentioned earlier and by almost all playwrights in almost all their plays. It is an entry with the fling of the curtain to indicate “intense joy, sorrow or anger” according to Bharata; “*tatah pravishati patakshepena sambhrantah samvahaka*” (then enters with the fling of the curtain *samvahaka* in an agitated mood—*Mricchhakatika*—II); “*pravishyapatikshepen kupitah kanchuki*” (enters *kanchuki* with a fling of the curtain in an angry mood—*Shak.* IV). The *kanchuki* is angry because the two *chetis* (maid servants) are seen plucking the flowers against the order of the king. “*pravishyapatikshepena—Anasooya*” (enters *Anasooya* with a fling of the curtain in an excited state—*Shak.* IV). She is very much agitated at the behaviour of the king who had refused to recognize *Shakuntala*.

This stage-direction—*apatikshepena*—has also been interpreted to mean *a-patikshepena* (*a*=without, *patikshepena*=fling of the curtain—without the flinging aside of the curtain). From what Bharata has said about it and from the situations in which it has been used the latter interpretation does not hold good in the majority of cases, but in some isolated cases it may have been appropriate.

Now, looking at all the stage-directions given in A(i), (ii), (iii) and (iv), the question naturally arises where was this curtain or these curtains on Bharata's stage? Here we may briefly refer to the stage described in the *Natyashastra*, Chapter II, to be able to

fix the position of this curtain as well as for further discussion without going into the various controversies regarding the various elements of the stage. Since Bharata has commended the middle-sized rectangular (*vikrishta-madhya*) theatre for reasons of acoustics and good visibility, we shall confine ourselves to that only. The theatre building was 64 *hastas* \times 32 *hastas* (one *hasta* = 1 foot and 6 inches). This rectangle was divided into two equal parts, 32h. \times 32h., one half reserved for the stage area, the other half for the auditorium. The stage area was again divided into two equal parts, 16h. \times 32h. for *nepathya* (dressing room) and 16h. \times 32h. for the stage, with a wall separating the two areas. At the back of this stage area of 16h. \times 32h. was the area known as the *rangasheersha* of 8h. \times 32h. On either side of this *rangasheersha* in the back wall, there were two doors for the entries and exits to and from the main stage, called *rangapeetha*, measuring 16h. \times 8h. On either side of this *rangapeetha* were the two areas, each of 8h. \times 8h. known as the *mattavarnis* with four pillars one in each corner. Between the two stage-doors was a raised *vedika* (platform) measuring 8h. \times 8h. Thus, the main acting areas were: the *rangapeetha*, the two *mattavarnis* and the *vedika* (Illus. I).

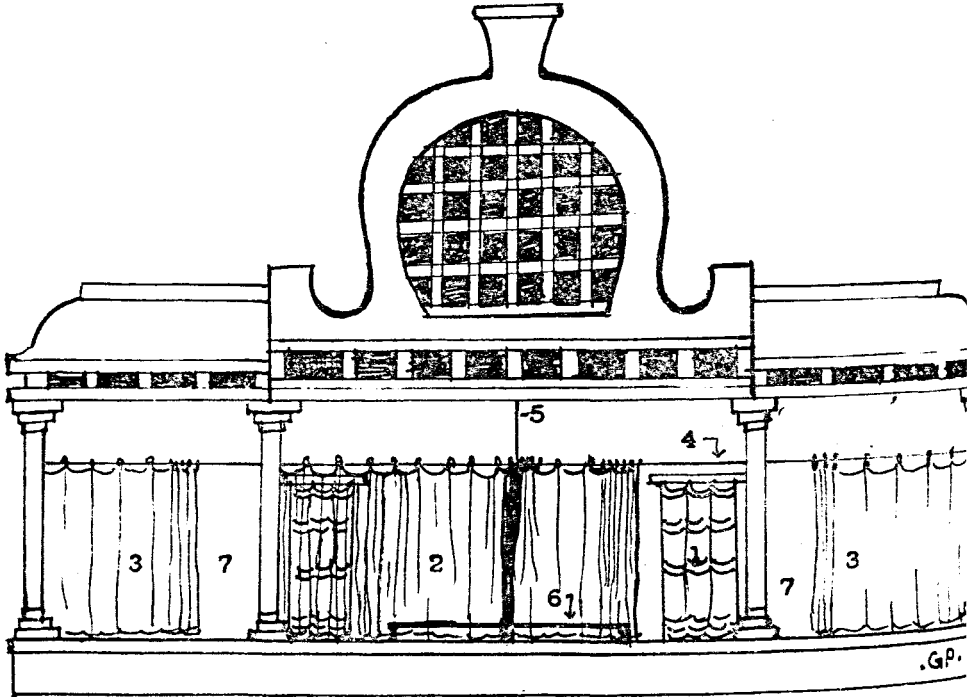


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|---------------------------|----------------|
| 1. NEPATHYA | 4. RANGAPEETHA |
| 2. DOORS TO STAGE | 5. MATTAVARANI |
| 3. RANGASHEERSHA (Vedika) | 6. PEKSHAGRIHA |

Ground Plan Illus: I

Now the stage-directions which we have just discussed go to show that there was a curtain on each of the two stage-doors (Illus. II and III). Without these, the entries in A (iii) would be very awkward because the king and his retinue or Seeta and her *sakhi*, etc. entering through the uncurtained door would not be able

to make a dignified entry. And the A(iv) entries would be just impossible without the door-curtains. Almost every playwright has used these curtained entries or exits—sometimes simple and inconsequential and sometimes very dramatic, depending upon the situation. These narrow curtains sometimes may have been just drawn aside (*patakarshita*) quietly by the characters themselves, such as the *pratihari* (door-keeper) when she enters ("*pravishya*"). For the other more important entries, such as of a king or some such important character or characters, it may have drawn aside by the stage-hands so that the dignity of the characters is not compromised by working it themselves. In the A (iv) type of entries too, the character himself or herself would fling aside the curtain to enter to indicate the agitated state of mind

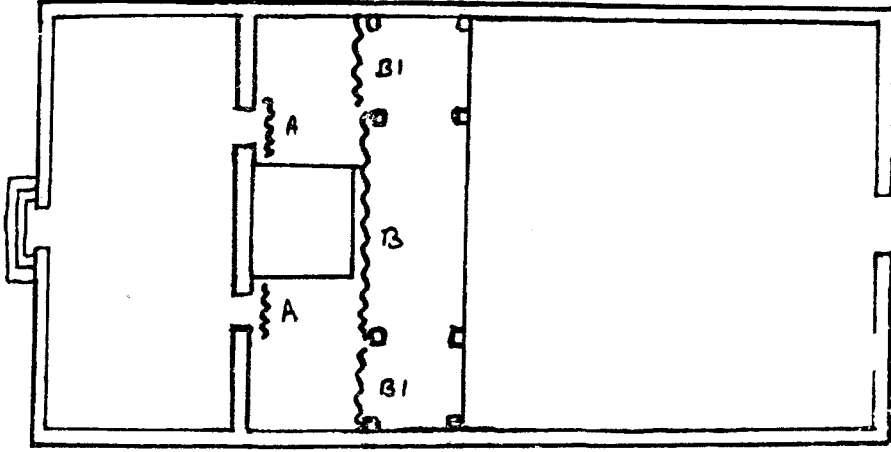


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| 1. PATI-APATI (Curtain on doors) | 5. SUPPORT FOR ROPE |
| 2. YAVANIKA (Curtain between RP and RS) | 6. VEDIKA (on RS) |
| 3. YAVANIKA (Curtain behind MATTAVARANI) | 7. MATTAVARANI |
| 4. ROPE (Supporting curtain) | |

Illus: II

ELEVATION OF STAGE

Usually these entries are confined to minor characters and only rarely a major or main character enters in this manner (*tatah pravishatyapatikshepena ratharoodho raja sootascha (Vikramorvashiyam—I)*), used obviously to indicate the mimed action of the chariot-speed; (*tatah pravishati patakshepena Vashistho Bharata Shatrughnah cha—Anargha. VII*).



A — CURTAINS ON DOORS-PATI-APATI
B-B1 — YAVANIKA

Illus. III

(B) *Yavanikastaranam*:

Bhasa is perhaps the only playwright who violates the *Natya-shastra* rule that death should not be shown on the stage. He violates the rule in two of his plays: *Pratimanataka* and *Urubhanga*. In the first Rama Seeta and Lakshmana are exiled by the King Dasharatha to fulfil his promise made to Kaikeyi. So grief-stricken is he at his own act of banishing his beloved sons and daughter-in-law that unable to bear the separation, he dies. Bhasa has shown the dying scene on the stage. Dashratha's last words are addressed to his children to tell them that he is going to *pitriloka* (to join the ancestors).

To cover this tragic scene, the poet gives the stage-direction: "*kanchukiyo yavanikastaranam karoti*"; *kanchuki* who is an employee of the harem quietly "draws" the curtain on the tragic scene.

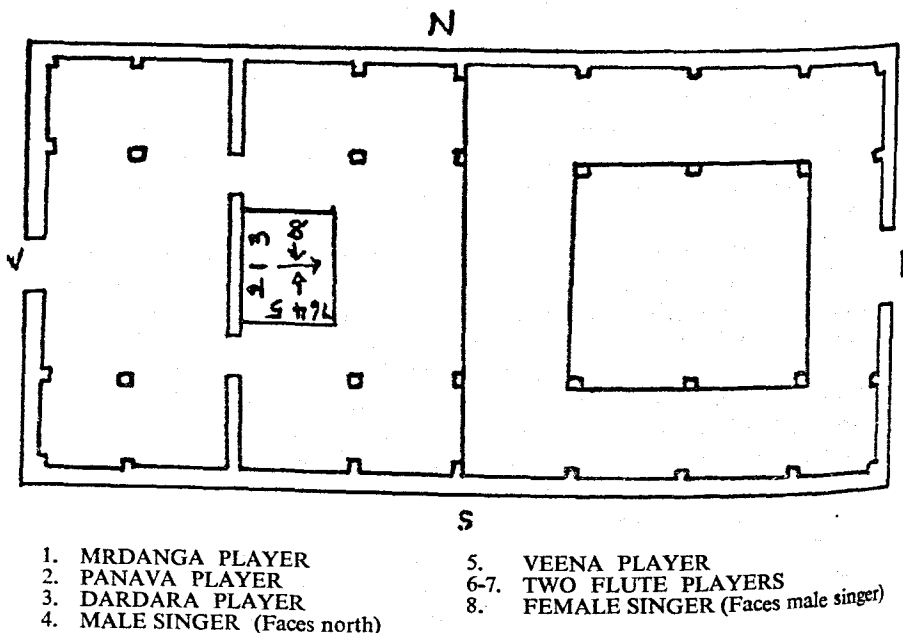
After the terrible '*gada-yuddha*' (mace duel) in *Urubhanga* with the mighty Bhima, the uncompromising brother of the Kauravas, the king, Duryodhana, is vanquished, and he lies in the battlefield with both his thighs battered, surrounded by his kinsmen. There is no bitterness in him as if conscious of the wrongs he had perpetrated on the Pandavas and, feeling that he deserved this punishment, he advises Ashwatthama who wanted to wreak vengeance on the enemies, not to do so. And he addresses his last words obviously to the *pitris* (ancestors) so as to say "I am coming" and he dies.

To cover this scene again, Bhasa uses the stage-direction: "*yavanikastaranam karoti*" (the curtain is "drawn"). He dies in the battlefield and therefore, the poet of great sensitivity that he is, he does not say who draws the curtain. Obviously it was

drawn by the stagehands as other characters were too involved in the delicate action of the play.

Now both these stage-directions raise the question, which was *this* curtain? It cannot be any of the curtains on the doors, because scenes of such importance cannot take place except on the main stage, which means on the *rangapeetha*, in either of the *mattavarnis* or on the *rangasheersha vedika*. If the scenes took place on the *vedika* which was a somewhat raised level, then we have to presuppose a curtain between the two back pillars of the *mattavarnis*, i.e., between the *vedika* and the *rangapeetha*. And this could easily be drawn to cover the scenes. (Illus. III.)

But this poses some difficulty. Bharata, as has been observed earlier, said that the '*kutapa*' (orchestra) sits between the two doors. Eight musicians are mentioned by him (NS. XXXIII—221) the conductor *mridanga*-player in the centre, the *panava* and *dardara*-players on either side of him; the male singer with the *veena*-player on his left and two flute players on his right—all of the four on the actor's right, and a female singer facing the male singer, on the actor's left. These were the minimum and even these would take up with big drums, *veena*, etc., large space on the *vedika*. In the little space available, no Sutradhar would dream of playing such delicate scenes, and surrounded by so many musicians. But, if the musicians on either side of the *vedika* sat on the stage floor of the *rangasheersha* and there is no reason to believe that such flexibility was not possible—Bharata has merely



Illus: IV

KUTAPA

said that the *kutapa* sits between the two doors without mentioning any specific place—then the problem could be solved as enough space would be available for the scenes.

Thus, we arrive at the conclusion that there was a curtain which could be drawn aside as the stage-directions say. It had to be at a convenient height so that it could be drawn easily by the raised hand of a person. It had to be of thin, but opaque material so that it could easily be drawn and yet cover the scene. And when drawn, would not make too much gather at the sides to hamper the entries and exits as the space between the last inner pillars of the *mattavarani*s and the corners of the *vedika* was not more than six feet (4 *hastas*). Lastly, this curtain had to be in two parts because the space between these two inner pillars was twenty-four feet, too wide for any wire or rope with the weight of a single 24' x 7' or so curtain not to sag from the centre. If the curtain were in two parts then on it could be operated so as to overlap in the centre two wires or ropes or if not a single wire or rope could be easily supported from the centre (Illus. II).

There are other reasons to believe that there was such a curtain between the *rangapeetha* and the *vedika*. Bharata has mentioned the need of such a curtain to stage certain preliminaries behind it as noted. Abhinavagupta has also mentioned this *yavanika* in his commentary on the *Natyashastra*. But he seems to think that it stretched the entire width of the stage from wall to wall, because, he seems to argue, parts of this curtain when drawn aside to begin the performance, would still cover the space between the two back pillars of the *mattavarani*s, thus screening off the area of the *rangasheersha* between the back pillars and the back wall. He says that the space thus covered off by the partly-opened *yavanika*, could be used by the actors as waiting place before the entry and a resting place for the tired actors after the exit and could also serve as a decorative element on the stage. This forty-eight feet long curtain raises several questions: where were the stage doors located? The *yavanika* pre-determines their position between the six-feet space available on either side of *vedika* and the inner pillars of the *mattavarani*s to make them clearly visible for the entries and the exits and to make such entries as the *apatikshepena* meaningful. The entries in this space would also meet Bharata's clear instructions that no pillars or other objects should be in front of the doors (NS. II—75-80) precisely for the reasons of sight-lines and also for the *patakshepa* entries.

But still some questions remain unanswered. Was this 48 feet long curtain in one piece? It could not be for practical reasons of supporting such a long curtain. It had to be supported in at least three places—from behind the inner pillars of the *mattavarani*s and at the centre of the *rangapeetha*—these supports were musts and such supports would hamper the curtain movement. This meant that it was one single curtain, but in three pieces—one each

at the back of the *mattavarnis* and the other which we have just discussed.

There is one more argument to support this theory of the curtain between the *rangapeetha* and the *rangsheersha*. There are certain stage-directions which do suggest some such curtain: "*Nepathye dhroova geeyate*" (*Dhroova* songs are sung from *nepathya*—*Prasanna*.—IV); "*Nepathye dundubhidhvanirmangalgeetishcha*" (drums and the auspicious music are heard from the *nepathya*—*Anargharaghava*—I), etc. From where these musical sounds were made since we know that the musicians were sitting on the stage itself and not in the *nepathya*? This only means that the centre curtain is drawn and behind it these sounds are made since *nepathye* as we have seen is translated as "behind the curtain". In these cases the action is going on on the *rangapeetha* or in the *mattavarnis* and naturally the area behind the closed curtain is referred to as the *nepathya*.

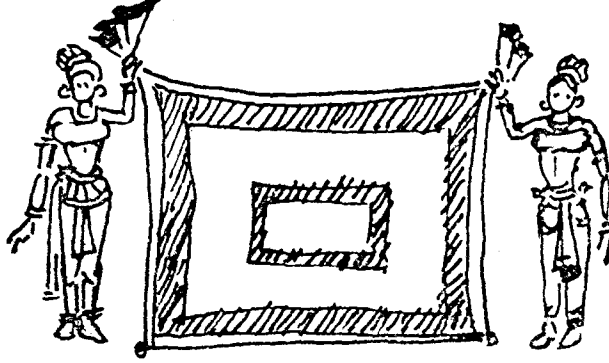
This draw-curtain—*yavanika*, then, serves several functions. It covers the unessential preliminaries, it covers certain highly delicate scenes, serves as *nepathya* for some musical sounds essential for the action and also serves as the background in some scenes. It has to be in three parts for practical reasons as suggested. This practical difficulty gives it a greater flexibility and ease in operation of the three parts. The parts of this curtain, behind the back pillars of the two *mattavarnis* could be drawn aside to link up the *mattavarnis* with the *rangasheersha* or separate them as the action demanded.

Now we must turn to some other kinds of stage-directions which again have created much confusion among many a scholars who do not seem to be aware of our traditional dramatic forms in many of which this curtain is extensively in use. One of these *kootiyattam* of Kerala is over a thousand years old and uses this curtain—"yavanika" during staging of Sanskrit plays.

(C) There are several stage-directions used by the Sanskrit playwrights which suggest a different and this third type of curtain. Though the same type of curtain was used for all such stage-directions, the way it was used created varied impacts. Bhasa has definitely suggested its use. Bharata has not mentioned it as he was not concerned with stage-directions. But it has been variously named: Kalidas calls it *tiraskarinee* (*Malv.* I and *Shakun.* VI); Vishakhadatta, *yavanika-yamanika* (*Mudra.* VII); and Bhavabhuti, *chitra-yavanika* (*Malati.* VI).

In the entries suggested by these stage-directions, two persons, perhaps "two beautiful girls" enter with a colourful curtain—"chitrayavanika"—a large piece of cloth and hold it near the door behind which the characters enter unseen by the audience and then all move to the acting area. The characters then arrange themselves

in their particular positions and they are revealed in a tableau-like scene after it has been withdrawn (Illus. V).



CHITRA-YAVANIKA. Illus. V

This is an extremely effective method of creating a dramatic impact on the audience at crucial moments in the drama that has ever been used anywhere in the world in a theatre of imagination. (It fulfilled the functions which the present-day stage-lighting with all its complicated gadgets and equipment carries out, such as, sudden switching on the characters, emphasis on the scene, switching off of the scene, etc.).

A few examples are given below to show its dramatic use:

- (i) One stage-direction describes the pre-entry physical condition of the characters by the characters already on the stage :

"Anasooya : (entering with the unguents) Come friend. Let us go.
(They walk about).

Priyamvada: (observing). There is Shakuntala who had a full bath early at sunrise and who is being congratulated by the female ascetics that are invoking blessing with grains of wild rice in their hands. Let us approach her.
(They approach)."

And then enters Shakuntala as described by Priyamvada:

"Tatah pravishati yathoddishtavyapara asanastha Shakuntala" (then Shakuntala enters seated, engaged as described—*Shakuntala*. IV, M. K. Kale's trans.)

In Act III of the same play, the king Dushyanta is watching her through the branches and says, "Ah! the elixir of my eyes is

found. Here is the beloved of my heart, reclining on a stone-slab covered with flowers and waited on by her friends. Well, I shall hear their confidential talks." (Stands observing).

Then Shakuntala enters as described by the king in the words of the stage-direction:

"*Tatah pravishati yathoktavyapara saha sakhibhyam Shakuntala*".

In the first instance while the *sakhis* are approaching—that is, moving about in the *mattavarni* area, Shakuntala would enter behind the *chitra yavanika*, arrange herself as described and would be seen by the *sakhis* at the removal of the curtain and then the action would commence.

In the second example, while the king acts observing through the branches, she would enter behind the same type of curtain with her friends carrying along with them the "stone" seat, and arrange themselves as described. The curtain would then be removed and the action would then proceed.

(see also *Shakuntala*. II, and other plays)

It is not difficult to understand why a curtain like *chitra yavanika* is necessary, as, without it the characters coming to the *rangapeetha* and arranging themselves, would create a very clumsy picture. We shall discuss later why such scenes could not be arranged behind the centre-curtain (called *yavanika* by Bharata) between *rangapeetha* and *rangasheersha* mentioned earlier.

(ii) There are entries which require that the characters should be discovered "seated" and discussing something with some other characters. In *Shakuntala*, V, we see the king and the *Vidushaka* entering in this way—they are engaged in hearing the strains of music coming from the *sangeetshala* (music hall). In a situation like this, it would not be proper if they were to enter, sit down and then act listening to music. And hence the stage-direction:

"*Tatah pravishatyasanastho raja vidushakascha*". (King enters seated with the *vidushaka*) (see also: *Uttararamacharita*—I, *Swapnavasavadatta*—I, *Mudrarakshasa*—V, etc.)

(iii) Some entries are far too sculptural to be made in the usual manner. They suddenly must be switched on as it were so that the extreme dignity of the situation is maintained. Such a scene is the tableau suddenly revealed, with the withdrawal of the *chitra-yavanika*, of the coronation of Rama who "enters" with others. The audience is suddenly dazzled by the scene with all its resplendent beauty of glorious costumes and glittering jewels like a painted sculpture created by the master at the removal of the *chitra-yavanika*:

"*Tatah pravishati kritabhisheko Ramah saparivarah*".
(*Pratimanataka*—IV).

Other example of the presentation of such an entry is provided by Harsha in *Naganand*. It is a simultaneous scene (and there are quite a few such scenes in several plays), in which the heroine Malayavati with *cheti* enters 'seated' on the floor, playing a *veena* and singing a song in praise of Bhagavati (*Bhagavati-vandana*) in front of the temple while the king and the *vidushaka* hide themselves in the *kadalivana* (plaintain-grove) watching her and appreciating her singing. It is a delicate picture which cannot be marred by the usual entry. It is only a great poet who could paint such a picture by just a few words even in a prosaic stage-direction:

"*Tatah pravishati bhumavupavishta veenam vadayanti Malayavati cheti cha*" (*Naganand*—I). (Then enter Malayavati and *cheti* seated on the floor, playing *veena*).

(iv) Some entries of great dramatic significance, again, need to be seen as if in a flash. Such entries would lose their drama if a character were made to walk in onto the stage. Such an entry is of 'Ramabhadra' with a raised sword in hand, in the *Pushpaka-vimana* (*Pushpaka* aerial car). This is his second arrival in the *Dandakaranya*, and though he is the king now, he is addressed as Ramabhadra as if in memory of old times when he came here during exile:

"*Tatah pravishati Pushpakasthah sadayodhyatakhadgo Ramabhadrah*" (*Uttar*. II).

The raised sword is to reluctantly kill Shambuka to deliver him from his curse and to do this Rama was looking for him everywhere and has now found him in *Dandakaranya*. He is to kill him now and hence his entry with a sword in hand, seated in the *Pushpaka*. There is some reluctance because it was the same hand that was used to accept Sita in marriage and now *Dandakaranya* reminds him of the days spent here during his exile.

The scene of the play within the play of *Uttaramcharita* is an extremely emotional scene of delicate beauty full of pathos apart from being dramatically picturesque. A drama troupe is enacting before Rama himself, Lakshmana and others, the scene of Rama's banishment of Sita who is in an advance stage of pregnancy. She is unable to bear this humiliation and throws herself in the river Bhageerathi, but she is rescued. And the poet draws the picture with a delicate sensitivity in a graphic manner:

"*Tatah pravishati utsangitaikaikadarakabhyam Prithivigangabhyamavalambita pramugdha Seeta*," (*Uttaramcharita*. VII).

Prithivi who was her mother and Bhageerathi, her ancestral goddess, each holding a child in her lap and supporting the fainted Sita are revealed to the audience at the removal of the *chitra-yavanika*.

When the scene begins, Sita has regained her consciousness and they both comfort her and tell her that she had been saved by them and that she had been blessed with twins—"Raghuvamsha dharau sootau (the perpetuators of the clan of Raghu).

Through this picture the poet seems to bring out the irony that one of the *Raghus* who had made her go through the fire-ordeal after securing her release from Ravana and again had banished her to be left to her fate, she, instead of ending her life, had been instrumental in perpetuating the clan of the same *Raghu*.

(v) A very different dramatic use of *chitra-yavanika* is seen in *Mudrarakshasa* to emphasize a scene of immense dramatic power. Rakshasa, the minister of the hated Nandas and a powerful adversary has been captured alive and is brought before Chanakya, now the Prime Minister of the Mauryan king Chandragupta. Rakshasa is already on the stage and Chanakya enters behind the curtain with only his beaming face showing:

"Tatah pravishati yavanikavritashariro mukhamatra drishyasya saharsha Chanakyah" (*Mudrarakshasa*-VII).

He is brought before the audience in this manner to indicate that he is not yet to be seen by Rakshasa. But the audience has to know his thoughts through his speech and the expression of great joy on his face, and hence his face uncovered. And Rakshasa's reaction whom he is presently to see, has also to be conveyed. And therefore, there is an intervening period between Chanakya's entry behind the *chitra-yavanika* and his revealing himself to Rakshasa. When each one's reaction is known to the audience, the curtain is withdrawn, Chanakya approaches him at the removal of the curtain and attempts to remove the sense of humiliation at his capture with these disarming words:

"Minister Rakshasa! I, Vishnugupta, salute you!"

One can imagine the dramatic impact such a device of the use of the curtain would create on the audience.

Kalidas also uses such a curtain ("*tiraskarinee*") to hide ("*pratichchhanna*") Sanumati the *apsaras* who wants to know, unseen by others, how the king fares after his refusal to recognize Shakuntala (*Shakuntala*-VI).

(vi) And now from *Malatimadhava* of Bhavabhuti where the word *chitra-yavanika* is used (*Malati*-VI).

Makarand, the friend of the *nayaka* (hero) is asked by Kamandaki—well wisher of the hero—to put on the female costume of Malati—the heroine who is about to be married to someone else instead of the hero, so that he (Makaranda) in female costume can be married off instead of Malati. He changes the clothes behind the *chitra-yavanika* brought on the stage:

Makarand: *Yathajnapayasi yavaditaschitrayavanikamantar-dhaya nepathyam dharayami.*

Several observations can be made on this stage-direction:

- (a) The curtain is brought on the stage in the middle of the scene to facilitate the changing of the costumes from male to female to impersonate Malati.
- (b) It is brought to the centre of the stage—*antardhaya*.
- (c) It is of variegated colours—*chitra*.

(d) And it has been called *chitra-yavanika*—a definite name given to this particular type of curtain. No other playwright has mentioned this, though the implied use of it is to be found, as we have seen in almost all the plays. Vishakhadatta, as seen earlier, definitely gives the indication of such a curtain and calls it *yavanika* or *javanika* as usual. But Bhavabhuti is the only playwright who gives it a definite name—*chitra-yavanika* and also suggests how it was used.

Now, one might ask why all these scenes can not be staged behind the draw-curtain between the *rangapeetha* and *rangasheersha* with equal dramatic effect and why is there need for a separate curtain like *chitra-yavanika*? The answer is to be found in the last two stage-directions just discussed (i.e. v and vi), which definitely suggest the use of a flexible curtain and not a fixed curtain. A flexible curtain can be used on any part of the stage and therefore would be of great practical help. Secondly, all such scenes cannot be laid too far deep on the *vedika* which was 18 feet to 24 feet from even the first row of the audience depending upon the space one allows between the stage and the seats. For the two plays of Bhasa, such a use of the *chitra-yavanika* was definitely suggested in his stage-directions. But few other playwrights have done so. Thirdly, many of these plays were staged in palace theatres or in which the king was present and his seat was somewhere in the centre of the auditorium (*Sangeetaratnakara*). This would further increase the distance between the central seat and the *vedika*. And lastly, some of these scenes require larger space for staging them than available on the *vedika*—such as the *abhisheka* scene of Rama.

We have tried to show from the internal evidence of the plays themselves the use of different types of curtains on the classical Sanskrit stage. We have tried to show that there were three types of curtains on this stage—*pati*, *apati*—on the stage-doors, *yavanika* between the *rangasheersha* and the *rangapeetha* and *chitra-yavanika*—a flexible curtain to be used anywhere on the stage. And we have also tried to show the distinct dramatic functions of each one of them as suggested by the playwrights themselves. Our particular emphasis has been on the *chitra-yavanika* as there has not been much clear thinking on its existence or use. The stage-directions regarding the use of it have been in several

cases wrongly translated and are entirely misleading, showing the lack of understanding on the part of the learned translators of the practical aspects of the theatre. Some scholars have suggested "drop-curtain" for such entries which (as we have seen) just cannot be accepted for practical as well as aesthetic reasons. The drop-curtain technically is a curtain operated from above and went up and down and there is nothing to suggest that the classical theatre was equipped for this. Again an act-curtain is suggested for the end of an act or for the end of a play. This is also difficult to accept, for the playwrights themselves clearly say *nishkrantaha sarve* (all exit) at the end of an act and at the end of play after the *bharatavakya* and there is no point in dropping the curtain on an empty stage. Then again its dropping or even drawing as suggested is untenable aesthetically as music was an integral part of the show and the sound of the rings of the curtain would definitely distract the audience. Then again it is as impracticable and unwieldy due to its length as the centre curtain would be if not used in three parts.

There are several other aspects of the classical theatre which need to be explored and resolved afresh from the practical point of view of the theatre-man, for theatre is an art essentially based on practice. Such other aspects are the Bharata's stage itself and the way it was used for staging the rapidly moving scenes and simultaneous scenes often inter-cutting each other in several plays, such as, *Mricchakatika*, for which fanciful, impractical and absolutely unnecessary devices such as the "transverse curtain parallel to the sides of the stage" or the "screens" to be used in the like manner have been suggested.

Such suggestions are entirely opposed to the spirit of our tradition in which imagination was the basis and an all important aspect. One may remember that the theatre of the imagination is not something peculiar to us for it is the basis of the entire eastern tradition and also to a large extent of the tradition of the west such as the Greek and the Shakesperean theatre.