

Design Resource

Yakshagana Bayalata Sambrama

Open Air Play - Karnataka

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral, Divyadarshan C. S. and
Lija M. G.

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/yakshagana-bayalata-sambrama>

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<http://www.dsourc.in/resource/yakshagana-bayalata-sambrama/introduction>

Introduction

There was a tradition in India long years ago, the people generally belong to the rural part than the urban. They usually had a sense of unity with an intimate relation between them. They knew each other personally with their conventions, customs and a similar culture. Their main occupation was agriculture and led a very simple life with a natural behaviour free from mental conflicts, hardworking, sincere, peaceful life with hospitality, attached to old customs and traditions.

In that system, the needs of the family members in all aspects of life and exercises were controlled. It was through the family they were introduced to the customs and culture of the society. The life of the people of the rural area was simple and economical with limited needs. Major social factors that influence the life of the Indian rural community was caste system, joint families, different laws of marriages with social and religious customs and traditions. Each society had its own way of celebrating functions, rituals and ceremonies that is generally followed from their ancestor period. Folk-customs are also followed by every society by following their tradition.

One such tradition is the Yakshagana Bayalata, bayalata generally means 'open-air play' or the 'street play'. Though this art form is on a decline due to the popularity of cinema and modern stage techniques as a medium of mass entertainment it is still popular in some parts of India. This art is generally found in the Telugu, Tamil and Kannada languages of South India. Yakshagana is a theatre form that combines dance, music, costume, dialogue, make-up and stage techniques with different styles, which is traditionally presented from dusk to dawn. This were mainly found in the coastal regions and the Malenadu region of Karnataka in India. This art has not been noticed in the South Indian literatures before 17th century, as it was performed in the dusk of the seasons after harvesting. Yakshagana generally means song of the yaksha (nature spirits) which is believed to have been evolved from pre-classical music and theatre during the period of Bhakti movement. In Kannada and Tulu it simply means 'the play'. It is referred to style of writing and also written material generally used for poems to enact in the Bayalata such as folk song of Koti and Chennaya.

Yakshagana Bayalata Sambrama was organized by Nadoja Belagal Veeranna the president of Karnataka Yakshagana Bayalata Academy, Bengaluru. The program was attended by many other renowned senior artists. In the two day program four Yakshagana puppet shows were played by the eminent puppeteers.

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History

It is generally a custom among the Yakshagana acting troupes or mela's in South Canara to give the first performance on the Deepavali day in the temple they are attached to. Stories states that Kubera, the king of Yakshas got back his wealth from Bali on the Deepavali day, therefore the Yakshas sing and dance in joy expressing their pleasure.

It has been said that during the beginning of 16th century the Tamils and Kannadigas came together with Telugus under the patronage of the King. They patronized this art and encouraged the poets, musicians and dancers who went throughout the regions. Later on performed in the Temples of Thanjavur by the Bhagavatha melas during the 16th and 17th centuries. This gathered the people of the village after their farming activities during the dusk for conversations within themselves.



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Stage Performance

Yakshagana performance generally begins in the twilight of the day with beating of the drum initially of many fixed compositions and last up to an hour before the actors arrive to the stage with resplendent costumes, head dresses and face paints. The dance is performed behind the curtain held by the Bhagavatha, after which the actors present different dances all to the same tune. Bhagavatha engages in conversation and introduces them with the songs of prasanga and interprets each character with a distinctive entrance. The songs are sung in the green room and moved to the stage by the Bhagavatha and Chorus. After all the characters are presented, the Bhagavatha appeals for a sympathetic response where the show begins.

Folk singers express every human feeling through the songs with simple words with a recurring beauty that strikes. Yakshagana composers generally take up themes of varied human strife that succeed equally. Through the limited ragas they delineate emotions like love, anger, jealousy, fear, joy etc. Forms are usually created to express the content with the mythological themes. Bhagavatha sings to the accompaniment of sruti(drone) by playing a pair of small cymbals. The singer sticks to the high pitch with every song with spoken language accompanied by dance with narita aspects of footwork and rhythmical body movements.



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Yakshagana performance presents the interaction of characters very much bigger than life, there is no realism in this presentation as it is usually mythological. This offers a colourful and overwhelming spectacle with the costumes and make up designed to this end. The colours chosen for make-up and the very lines and dots are selected to suit the presentation in the open air at night and in the artificial light to indicate the nature of each character. Pure white zinc, yellow, carmine pigments are generally used for valiant character that is generally surrounded by a red patch. The stage plays were also chosen Puranas, Ithihasas, Ramayana and Mahabharata with Hindustani/ Carnatic style of music. The actors generally wear magnificent costumes, head gears and face paints, with the ability of the actor's scholarship there are variation in dances and dialog.

For a standard performance at least 8-9 people are required. Earlier the performance used to go on the whole night but now the maximum duration of the performance is two to two and a half hours where the language can be followed. Simpler concepts are popular among the villagers. Intellectuals are drawn the finer points like the intricacy of the dance steps, ragas in true yakshagana style and improvisations in dialogues. The performance may be enhanced by the costume, scenery, props, lighting, music and special effects. These help create the illusion of different characters, place and time or to enhance the quality of the performance.

On the stage the general practice is that the divine characters enter from the right wing and the others from the left wing. Sometimes the demons make their entry from the above. Some demons carry burning torches onto which inflammable powder 'rala' is sprinkled which would cause rising flames instilling a sense of fear among the spectators.

The singer has to sing the prasangas with adequate stress and elaboration in accordance with the scene and situation. This is especially noticeable when in a rendering of a poem or song the bhagwatha moves up to a high pitch and then abruptly ends the musical phrase. Another characteristic of Yakshagana music is the singing of one or two words and then stopping abruptly.



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Stage Setup

The decoration and colourful make up, the pattern of light and shade all are designed to present the character as larger than life. The costumes and colours used for make-up are brilliant and resplendent. Numerous ornaments are used to cover the shoulders, the chest, the face and the arms. Masks are not used except for symbolic purpose. The colours are also significant; red is the colour of the terrible. Dark suggests the erotic and the tender, the headgear is also suggestive. Nowadays this particularly seen more during the rainy season on the coastal districts in India.

The aspects that support the stage setup are as following:

1. Lighting

Lighting has two functions. To illuminate the stage and more importantly to create the mood and control the focus of the spectators. Earlier oil lamps were used to illuminate the performance. Gingili oil was used in the lamps. The light given out by the lamps gave a mysterious effect and did not irritate the eyes even when exposed for long durations. Today the oil lamps have been replaced by electric bulbs which has provided an opportunity not only to achieve dramatic effects but also to enhance the mood. Lights of different colours are used for different situations and dimmer is used to regulate the intensity.



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2. Music

Music is an integral part of the Yakshagana Bayalata as the words of the songs and the poems tell the story. The rhythms of the songs dictate the use to require a lot of stamina to play this pipe which was made of dried gourd. At no point in the performance is there silence. The scenes are brought out in good combination of pitch, speed and the modulation of sounds.

Instruments used are the 'tala' (cymbals) to keep timing of the dance 'maddale' a small barrel shaped drum, 'chande' a cylindrical drum played with sticks which lends a very distinctive sound and shruti provided by the harmonium. Earlier the drone was provided by a special kind of instrument called the 'shruti burude'. Chande is only played during the entry and exit of characters and during battle scenes. Synchronization of dialogue, music and the actions of the puppets brings liveliness into the performance.



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About this Art

It was developed from several forms of Traditional theatre from different regions, it is still staged in the same old crude way without bothering much for a convenient dais or for improved stage equipment. The women character mostly played by the men itself and Yakshagana is restricted to stage drama. It is a result of slow evolution of drawing the attention of people from ritual theatre, temple arts, secular arts, from royal courts and artists from several hundred years.

[Yakshagana is in simple classified into categories such as folk, classical or rural. It is more varied and dynamic than most dance forms.

Variation and Types: (seven types)

Yakshagana is broadly into several types:

- Moodalopaya Yakshagana; includes eastern areas of Karnataka (such as Channarayapattna and Arsikere Taluks of the Hassan District), Nagamangala Taluk of the Mandya District, Turuvekere Taluk of the Tumkur District, Hiriyuru, Challakere of Chitradurga District and North Karnataka.
- Paduvlopaya Yakshagana comprises the western parts of extended Karnataka (including Kasaragod Dakshina Kannada, Udupi and Uttara Kannada).
- Tenkutittu (includes areas Kasaragod (Kerala), Mangalore District, Udupi, Sampaaaje, Sulliya, Puttur, Bantwala, Belthangady, Karkala, etc.).
- Badagutittu (Udupi to Kundapura area, Uttara Kannada district).
- Badabadagutittu/Uttara Kannadatittu (extreme north parts of Uttara Kannada).

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Important Aspects

The Important Aspects of Yakshagana are as following:

1. Raga:

Yakshagana Raga refers to melodic framework used in Yakshagana. It is based on pre-classical melodic forms that comprise a series of five or more musical notes upon which a melody is founded. Ragas in Yakshagana are closely associated with a set of melodic forms called mattu.

2. Tala:

Yakshagana Talaare frameworks for rhythms in Yakshagana that are determined by a poetry style called Yakshagana Padya. Tala also decide how a composition is to be enacted by the dancers. It is similar to tala in other forms of Indian music, but differs from them structurally. Each composition is set to one or more talas, rendered by the himmela percussion artist's play.

3. Literature:

Yakshagana poetry (Yakshagana Padya or Yakshagana Prasanga) is a collection of poems written to form a music drama. The poems are composed in well-known Kannada metres, using a frame work of ragas and talas. Yakshagana also has its own metre. The collection of Yakshagana poems forming a musical drama is called a Prasanga. The narratives of the surviving historic Yakshagana Prasangas are now often printed in paperback.

4. Costumes and Ornaments:

Yakshagana costumes are rich in colour. The costumes (or vesha) in Kannada depend on characters depicted in the play (prasanga). It also depends on the Yakshagana style (tittu). Although ornaments are still predominantly made of woodwork.

Yakshagana costumes consist of headgear (Kirita or Pagade), Kavacha that decorates the chest, Buja Keerthi (armlets) that decorate the shoulders, and belts (Dabu)—all made up of light wood and covered with golden foil. Mirror work on these ornaments helps to reflect light during shows and add more colour to the costumes. Armaments are worn on a vest and cover the upper half of the body. The lower half is covered with kachche, which come in unique combinations of red, yellow, and orange checks. Bulky pads are used under the kachche, making the actors' proportions different in size from normal.

The character of Sthree Vesha makes use of sari and other decorative ornaments. Costumes give information about the performer and also aid in setting the mood. These puppets have very distinctive and elaborate costume. The costumes are made of traditional Palghat and karnad sarees with checks.

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In male characters the lower pants are typical in style called the kasevastra. The top is a blouse which is hardly seen as it is covered with ornaments. One end of a shawl is tied at the back of the head gear and the other end tied to the waist. The female character wears a traditional saree. The rakshasa looks very distinctive due to his headgear which resembles the kathakali style of headgears.

5. Head Gears:

Kadaga Mundale- Head gear for heroic characters, it is a form of leaf, and initially it was made from areca frond. In past mica and wings of beetles were used to decorate the costumes these days tin foil is used, the 'mundasu' is another kind of head gear used by secondary characters.

6. Shoulder Plates:

Shoulder plates for heroic and demonic character respectively. There are two types of head gear, the triangular piece of cloth with conical projections. Earlier conical projections of the jumpa tree were used now they are piece.

7. Breast Plate:

Breast plate of demonic character, Breast plate of a warrior.



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Play's



Narakasura Vadhe Play



Kumarsambhava Play



Sri Krishnarjuna Kalaga Play



Veera Babruvahana Play

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Narakasura Vadhe Play



Puppets of Yakshagana character are dressed up in different costumes.

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The play is started with a prayer chanted for Lord Ganesha.



The scene starts with Lord Devaraya Swamigal discussing with his courtiers about Narakasura's anguish on earth beings.



The appearance of Narakasura the asura son of the earth goddess is portrayed.



Ministers inform Narakasura about the priests performing rituals to Lord Devaraya Swamigal (Indra).

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Saints performing the Rituals.

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Narakasura destroys the rituals and burns the Ashram.



Narakasura leaving on his chariot for a war with Lord Krishna.



Battle between Lord Krishna and Asura Narakasura, where Krishna defeats Narakasura.



On the other side Narakasura's wife seeks help from Rama bhaktas the Vanaras (monkeys).

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She expresses them that her husband Narakasura is in trouble and a King called Krishna is trying to kill him.



The Vanaras (monkeys) goes to the Kingdom of Krishna and starts destroying his city.



Garuda the vahana of Lord Vishnu comes to stop them and tries to make them understand their mistake.



The Vanaras instead listening to his words attacks on Garuda and defeats him.

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When the Vanaras realizes the truth that Krishna is none other than the reincarnation of Lord Rama, they apologize in the end and performs a prayer for him.

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Kumarsambhava Play



Different puppet characters of the Kumarasambhavam play.

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Lord Ganesh is worshiped in the opening of the play.



The introduction of Demon Tarakasur in the play.



Narada tells Taraka to please Lord Brahma and ask a blessing for immortality.



Later Narada goes and informs Indra about Taraka's intention.

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Indra calls Apsara Rambha and tells her to distract Tarakasur while meditating.



Rambha tries everything to intrude his meditation but he kept chanting Lord Brahma's name.



Lord Brahma gets pleased by his devotion and grants him the blessing of immortality in only one condition that a child will have the destiny to kill him.



After receiving the blessing Taraka attacks Indraloka and defeats Indra.

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Parvathi is worshipping Lord Shiva with a desire to marry him.



Kamadeva the God of love comes and strikes Shiva with his arrow of Love.



Parvathi and Lord Shiva gets married with the blessings of Brahma and Vishnu.



Later they gave birth to Kartik who known as God of war in the future.

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<http://www.dsource.in/resource/yakshagana-bayalata-sambrama/plays/kumarsambhava-play>

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Lord Kartik was the child who defeats the demon Tarakasur and brought peace to the world.

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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/yakshagana-bayalata-sambrama/plays/sri-krishnarjuna-kalaga-play>

Sri Krishnarjuna Kalaga Play



Narrator describing the story in the form of a song with musical instruments.

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Opening scene of the play where Lord Ganesh is adorned with a dance performed by one of the dancer dressed as Ganesh.



First scene of the play starts with a conversation between Yudhishthira, Bhim and Arjuna.

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Gaya (Young Character) one of the Gods comes to Arjuna seeking help.



He first asks Arjuna to give him his word for his safety and then explains the story about his mistake because of which Lord Krishna has decided to kill him.

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Arjuna initially declines to go against Lord Krishna but then agrees as he had given his word to protect Gaya.



Narada comes to Krishna and informs him that Gaya is under the protection of Arjuna.



Krishna asks suggestions from his elder brother Balarama after knowing that Arjuna is protecting Gaya.

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Taking his brother Balarama's advice Krishna summons wife of Arjuna, Subhadra and advises her to speak to Arjuna so that he release Ganga from protection.



Subhadra tries to convince Arjuna, but Arjuna has to obey his promise and refuses to listen.



Balarama tries talking to Bhima to persuade Arjuna, but Bhima stands in favor of his brother Arjuna and refuses talking to Balarama.



On the battlefield Arjuna defeats Krishna.

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Later Arjuna realizes his mistake and requests Krishna to come back to life.



Again a battle occurs and this time Krishna defeats Arjuna and feels guilty. Krishna decides to cut Arjun's head with his divine Chakra and jump in the fire.



In the end Lord Shiva appears and tells Krishna and Arjuna to forgive Gaya and put an end to the battle.



All the characters of the play comes together on the stage to thank the audience at the end of the play.

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Source:

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Veera Babruvahana Play



Yudhisthira, Bhim and Arjuna talk about the Asvamedha horse entering Manipur and so they decide to go there to catch the horse and take back to Hastinapur.

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Babruvahana the son of Arjuna introduces himself on the stage.



Babruvahana's minister reads out the letter received from Pandavas which said that if the Manipur kingdom is weak for a war then surrender themselves to Arjuna's army.

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A messenger comes and informs Babruvahana about the army of Arjuna entering the city looking for the Asvamedha horse.

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Babruvahana reads the letter himself and send orders to capture the horse.



A maid informs to Chitrangada the princess of Manipur about the arrival of Arjuna with his army.



Chitrangada fills with joy on hearing that her husband Arjuna has arrived after so many years.

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She also comes to know that Babruvahana has captured the horse without the knowledge that Arjuna is his father.

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Chitrangada reveals the story of her and Arjuna and discloses Babruvahana about Arjuna as his father.



With joy Babruvahana goes to meet his father Arjuna to tell him about himself and his mother Chitrangada.



Arjuna refuses to accept them and disrespects him and his mother Chitrangada, which leads to a battle where Babruvahana defeats his father Arjuna.



After realizing the mistake made by Babruvahana, Chitrangada and Babruvahana requests Lord Krishna to help them.

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Lord Krishna appears to their request.



Lord Krishna brings Arjuna back to life.



Arjuna is then acknowledged by Krishna about his relation with Chitrangada and Babruvahana and makes Arjuna realizes his mistake.



Krishna also tells about the curse of Ganga Devi given to Arjuna that his own son will kill him, that is Babruvahana and now Arjun is redeemed from that curse.

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Arjuna apologizes to Chitrangada and Babruvahana for his disrespect.

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