

## **PERFORMANCE TRADITIONS in INDIA: WHERE PAST and PRESENT MEET**

by

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On May 18, 2001 UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) proclaimed kutiyattam, the Sanskrit theatre of India, one of nineteen "Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity." This was the first time in history that this art has received a prestigious international recognition (see [www.unesco.org/bpi/intangible\\_heritage/india.htm](http://www.unesco.org/bpi/intangible_heritage/india.htm)). To celebrate this momentous occasion professional artists from the Margi Company, a group based in Trivandrum, Kerala, performed at the Theatre of the Nations in Paris in June, 2001. Despite all the hoopla accompanying the designation, kutiyattam was not (and is still not) on the radar screens of many in the field of western theatre. Kutiyattam might well be the oldest surviving genre of performance in the world, having been reformed in the 10th century CE, yet it, and many other genres that populate the Indian theatre landscape, is still virtually unknown to the western world.

At the time of the award we were visiting India on an educational program sponsored by the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia. We were also very much aware of kutiyattam's existence because we had the pleasure of working closely with three professional kutiyattam artists who visited SUNY/Stony Brook, New York in 1989 where we had both previously taught. The result of their efforts was the performance of *The Kutiyattam Ramayana*, an adaptation of selected scenes from the kutiyattam repertory. Our students performed the show wearing authentic costumes and makeup. They valiantly chanted the text of the ancient plays in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and old Malayalam, as well as spoke short passages in English. They brought their characters to life using stylized facial expressions, eye movements, hand gestures, and staging techniques, many of them remote from western spectators schooled in the conventions of western realistic drama and theatre.

Of special significance in India is the co-existence of such varied theatrical performance genres as those that currently exist within today's modern society. While kutiyattam may form one of the world's oldest forms of drama there are numerous elements of Indian folk and dance theatre as well as movements throughout the country that include fairly contemporary dramatic forms of theatre. Many of these bear a significantly western influence that most likely came about during the British colonial period which began in the 17th century CE. While ancient dramas may be performed solely for ritualistic reasons (primarily in the rural areas) many others are presented to modern audiences who are more concerned with remaining in touch with their heritage than in paying homage to the various deities. Additionally, within the major population centers, there is a tendency to produce contemporary productions that bear a strong western influence in the manners in which they are staged. Finally, actual productions of western drama such as the work of Ibsen, Shaw, Beckett and Brecht as well as those of

Williams, Miller and Albee are also readily produced for a typical Indian audience member.

Throughout the Indian subcontinent prayers or blessings are almost always required in all genres of performance to sanctify simple performance spaces. No matter how secular the content of the show may be, the performers take measures to ward off the evil eye and beseech support from the gods, especially Ganesha, the elephant-headed god of good fortune. Despite all of the western influences on contemporary production it is interesting to note the profound impact religion has had on this society. Shrines dedicated to deities and saints are found in virtually every imaginable space throughout Indian society. . .hotel lobbies . . .along the curbs of streets . . .nearly every taxi and motorized rickshaw (a three-wheeled taxi that is smaller than a golf-cart) displays a shrine on their dashboards. This impact even carries into the theatres where one may typically find shrines in the dressing rooms, lobby areas, wings and near the lighting boards. In one case, we even observed a shrine next to the company switch. The voltage of most lighting gear in India is typically around 220-240 volts. Maybe they knew something about their lighting system that we didn't want to know about.

From a design perspective, kutiyattam and many other genres of performance in India are of interest due to the unique approaches they have taken to: performance space, staging, lighting, costume, makeup and sound, all the elements we value in the west for bringing the world of a play to life. Following are some of our thoughts on the place of design in kutiyattam, as well as a number of other genres of performance that enrich and enliven the Indian theatre. Owing to the panoply of these arts, we have chosen to discuss only those for which we have significant visual resources and for which one, the other or both of us have actually witnessed. Our hope is that students of design will find use in what appears to us to be a treasure chest of ideas and resources from the world of Indian design and performance.

### **Traditional Performance Spaces**

Not everyone is lucky enough to see the special theatre structures that have housed kutiyattam for centuries. The theatres are known as kuttampalams and are located within the walled compounds of sixteen Hindu temples in Kerala, a lush tropical coastal state in southwestern India. Kerala is also home of the famous Malabar spice trade. Ordinarily, the temples and theatres are off-limits to non-Hindu devotees. Dr. Richmond first entered and photographed one of the theatres in the late 1960's. He did so disguised as a Bengali Marxist at the behest of one of Kerala's leading contemporary theatre directors. Eventually, the guard at the temple gate got wind of the ruse and unceremoniously escorted both trespassers off the premises. Since those days Dr. Richmond has been obliged to convert to Hinduism in order to study kutiyattam in the temple theatres for which it was originally intended to be seen.

There is little about the kuttampalams of Kerala that is not impressive. In location, size, shape, construction, and detail the structures make a unique contribution to world theatre architecture. The first impression that strikes one about these structures are their massive roofs. Constructed entirely of wooden beams carefully fitted together by a

complicated network of hand-carved grooves. These edifices resemble giant rectangular mountains blending seamlessly within the entire architectural design of important temples of the central and north central regions of the state. Ordinarily, the roof is covered with copper or clay tiles and crowned by three pot-shaped finials running along the ridge of the roof. It is said that if a plum line were dropped from the middle finial it would touch the front edge of the stage within.

The massive roof is supported by either one or two rows of pillars of granite or wood, depending on the overall size and weight of the roof. The larger theatres in Kerala are located in the cities of Trichur and Irinjalagada, and each requires two rows of pillars to support its massive roof. Separating the solid stone base of the building from the roof are rows of smaller pillars connected horizontally by lath walls of wood that filter out the harsh light of day and permit the gentle Malaya breezes to pass uninterrupted through the building. These walls temper the hot humid air and provide a degree of comfort and privacy for the spectators and performers within.

Although impressive in size, even the largest of these structures holds no more than five hundred spectators. The smallest of the structures barely accommodates a hundred patrons. This limited audience capacity promotes a sense of intimacy between performers and spectators that is unusual among the many genres of performance in India.

Once inside the kuttampalam two things are striking: the stage and its acoustical properties. The stage itself is a square roofed structure ordinarily supported by four pillars. The pillars are different in design and color from those elsewhere in the building. The square stages and their roofs remind one of the Noh stages of Japan which are also roofed structures ordinarily housed within another roofed building.

The kuttampalam stage is raised a little over a foot from the cool, smooth surface of the floor on which the spectators sit cross-legged to watch a performance. Thus the audience sees the performers from below rather than straight on or from above, as is typical in most western proscenium houses. A few bold spectators sometimes sit on stage with the actors leaning against the stage pillars and watching the show from the sides. Ordinarily, the spectators divide along gender lines. The men sit on the house left side of the building while the women sit on house right. This follows the common practice in the region for men and women to keep their distance from one another in public gatherings.

Although the stage roof is plain and unadorned its underside is suffuse with elaborate decorations. Wooden carvings of deities that preside over the nine directions of the universe occupy the center panels directly above the heads of the performers. The creator god, Brahma, sits contentedly on an open lotus flower surrounded by eight deities. Edging the underside of the stage roof in most theatres are elaborate wooden carvings depicting scenes from Hindu mythology. A number of the tales are reenacted in the kutiyattam repertory. These narrative decorations are often punctuated by larger sculptures of saints and sadus that contribute to the overall impression of the sanctity of the stage space below. Two narrow doors connect the stage with the cramped quarters of

the dressing room where actors apply their makeup and costumes. The door up left conventionally serves as the entrance for the characters and the door up right acts as the conventional exit.

The building itself is connected to the temple grounds by doors centered in each of the four walls of the structure. Audiences usually enter the structure from the house left door which is conveniently near the main temple gate where devotees ordinarily enter and exit the temple grounds. The actors perform on relatively small stages facing in the direction of the temple's sanctum sanctorum that houses the chief deities. Performances are presented in honor of the gods of the temple and not necessarily for the entertainment or edification of the spectators. On one occasion Dr. Richmond saw a performance honoring the deities in which he was the only human spectator in attendance. Not only are the stages and theatres located within the sacred grounds of the temple complexes but special consecration rites are required to purify the performance space before every show. Complicated and expensive purification rituals are obligatory to bless a newly constructed kuttampalam.

During a performance, one realizes the importance of the design of the theatre and stage to the ritual dramas performed within these spaces. All of the wood in the house along with the smooth surfaces of the floors of the stage and building help to reinforce the excellent acoustics of the space. The sound of the large pot-shaped drums, as well as the voices of the performers, are magnified and enriched in this impressive resonant chamber.

The kuttampalams of Kerala are truly unique environments for the performance of any genre of theatre, in India or anywhere else in the world, for that matter. The fact that they were designed to be used exclusively for kutiyattam, as well as two other related temple genres of performance (cakyar kuttu and nangyar kuttu), suggests the special place they hold in Kerala and certainly contributed to UNESCO's decision to honor kutiyattam as a performance genre.

At the opposite end of the Indian subcontinent in northeastern India in the state of Assam, there are also unique and yet very different performance sites. These are the prayer halls (namgars) of Assam where ankiya nat is traditionally performed. Ankiya means "one" and nat refers to a "play." So ankiya nat literally means a "one-act play" performed in the Sanskrit language. Ankiya nat is a genre of performance that honors Lord Krishna who is worshiped by the devout inhabitants of Assam. Founded in the 16th century CE by the poet-saint Shankaradeva who wrote the first and most important plays of the genre. Even today the priests of the region are obliged to write at least one play before they die as a sign of their devotion to god. The namgars were not designed exclusively for performances of theatrical events, as were the kuttampalams of Kerala. They serve as a general assembly space for the laity of the community. The prayer halls are long rectangular structures with peaked roofs supported by tall pillars. Wings run along both of the long sides of the rectangle. Except for the fact that the namgars are only one-story buildings they resemble many of Europe's medieval cathedrals in shape.

At the eastern end of the rectangle is the "house of jewels" (manikut), located in a similar place as the high altar of a cathedral. The manikut houses the *Bhagavada Purana*, the sacred text honoring Lord Krishna who is worshiped although not through his image as is usual in other parts of India. Assamese Hindus do not worship idols but recognize god's presence through his holy word.

When spectators assemble to see an ankiya nat in a namgar they take their places in a tennis court arrangement facing each other down the long sides of the rectangle and side aisles from east to west from the entrance of the building to the manikut. This provides a wide corridor where the performers act, sing, and dance. It gives many people an opportunity to literally sit at the feet of the characters, some of whom play incarnations of divinities. This contributes to the feeling of participating in a deeply religious event among the devotees. At the western end of the performance space near the entrance to the building is a temporary archway of fire (agni gar). All the characters and musicians must pass under this portal in a ceremonial procession as they make their way toward the sacred space of the manikut and the playing area. The agni gar symbolizes the transition of the characters from the temporal world to the divine world of the drama. When Lord Krishna himself enters through the archway his arrival is signaled by exploding fireworks. The actor who plays the role is regarded as an actual incarnation of god himself and the spectators reverently and tearfully reach out to touch his feet as he passes by. Literally, at that moment, they consider themselves in the presence of god.

Although most scenes are played along the narrow corridor between the spectators the actors sometimes play above and across the heads of the spectators. Scenic locales may be established behind the spectators to symbolize a forest, a shrine, a throne room, and so forth ---whatever is required by the play. Simple props and scenic pieces are used to signify these areas. A chair becomes a throne, tree branches symbolize a forest, etc. By playing above the heads of the spectators the actors further intensify the intimacy and closeness of the spectators with the events of the performance. In a way, the entire performance site is highly charged with religious significance ---bringing divine events into a single room, the same room where the sacred word of god resides. In this sense ankiya nat of Assam is a living reminder of the intense feeling of devotion people in Europe and England must have experienced when they witnessed religious drama during the medieval period. Like the kutiyattam of Kerala, the ankiya nat of Assam provides unusual staging opportunities for the actors within a carefully controlled highly charged religious environment. One further reminder of the connection between the ankiya nat and the middle ages is the inevitable presence of a stage manager who carries and consults the text of the play throughout the show. The stage managers of ankiya nat are priests. They often move freely among the actors whispering directions to them or cueing them to say lines or perform movements.

Annual festivals held in north India every fall recount the victory of Rama, the epic hero, over Ravana his evil rival. Celebrating this event are large-scale open-air public performances, known as Ramlila, which are performed for hundreds of thousands of spectators each year. In a typical thirty-one day ritual performance, audiences move from one location to another throughout a city, from ramparts to groves, from balconies

to fields, and so forth symbolizing the dramatic action of the *Ramayana* epic. For a thorough and detailed account of such events we recommend that readers consult Kapur's vividly illustrated account of a performance held in the city of Ramnagar, North India, in 1979. Kapur provides a day by day description of the procession events, as well as many graphic drawings and photographs to illustrate the spectacular happenings. These events are climaxed by the burning of giant effigies that are symbolic of evil.

Besides kutiyattam, ankiya nat, and Ramlila, there are a wide variety of other genres of performance in India. Yakshagana, bhagavata mela, seraikella chhau, purulia chhau, bhavai, sang, maach, tamasha, jatra, nautanki, khyal, raslila . . . to name but a few. Most of these genres are performed in the open air in small towns or villages throughout the subcontinent. Among the more common locations for these events, which often last from late evening to sunrise the next day, are rice paddy fields that have been cleared of stubble and made smooth for the performers and patrons. Other locations include a public square (chawk) large enough for the people and performers to gather and street corners, often near Hindu temples. Sometimes four poles, often of bamboo, demarcate the performance spaces that form a square or rectangle. The poles are frequently connected by rope from which hang festoons of colorful decorations. Sometimes the poles serve to support a colorful tent top (shamaiyana). In such venues the patrons often come and go as they please throughout the long hours of the night. The show ends at dawn the following day and patrons at that time may travel home safely. Many spectators and their families come prepared to bed down for the night when attending these performances. A particularly good film showing the juxtaposition between the performer and audience is *Lady of Gingee: South Indian Draupadi Festival*. Although the plan of these outdoor performance spaces appears to be designed to suit arena staging, in truth, the performers usually only play to one side of the space. Musicians usually sit or stand behind the performers ---supporting this frontal juxtaposition.

## Contemporary Performance Spaces

As a rule, India's contemporary theatre movement can be considered to be in its infancy and the role of Britain's colonization cannot be overstated in its influence over India's contemporary production practices. Virtually every stage/theatre used to produce contemporary Indian productions follows the proscenium style format with most of these performance facilities having been built within the last fifty or so years. Due to the dense population, with few exceptions, most of India's contemporary theatre structures are found within an easy walk of various rail/train or bus transportation systems. These theatres typically seat somewhere around 300 -400 patrons at the orchestra (main seating) level while another 200 or so seats may often be found in a balcony. The actual layout of the theatre is quite similar to that which we find in western society. However, the embellishments typical of western theatres are typically missing in Indian society. Walls are plain, elaborate sculptural details such as pillars and pilasters are missing, elaborate paintings on the walls or ceilings are absent and gold leaf is non-existent. These are functional; not ornate theatres. Audiences are accommodated but they aren't necessarily made comfortable. This is very different from theatres in western society where audience comfort is critically cared for. Air conditioning is often not present with air circulation coming about from a number of ceiling and wall fans placed throughout the audience area or through having partial exterior theatre walls that open up to courtyards/gardens or limited access streets.

With the exception of a few state sponsored theatres most of these commercial facilities are under the management of landowners who rent their facilities to the various production organizations. Rarely will an organization own its own performance space. It is in part due to this that the touring troupe forms the prominent form of production organization within contemporary Indian theatre. Theatre managers typically enlist several different companies to produce up to three or four different productions in a given day at any single theatre. Turn-around time between productions is minimal and is often completed within an hour or two. To facilitate some of the rapid changes from theatre to theatre many of these commercial facilities have adopted similar floorplans. In many cases, the standard proscenium opening is kept to a twenty-three foot wide opening that allows for the easy transfer of a production between different theatres. Due to both the short load-in time and transportation issues there is also a heavy reliance on stock scenery and minimal use of scenic elements that are specifically created for a given performance. As a rule, many of the troupes who currently perform in the commercial theatres make use of flat painted scenery. Muslin drops and soft goods usually form the principle components of their settings. Much of this scenic art follows the examples of the painting techniques used in the work of western scenic artists from the late 1800 - mid 1900's. In many productions a single drop forms the scenic background for much of the play. Scrim, too, may come into use within a production but in the production that we observed during our visit in 2001 the scrim panel only covered between a third to half the stage. In fact, touring companies will often carry their scenic elements in their personal automobiles ---if they are lucky enough to have one, while other companies may even typically carry their props, wardrobe trunks and other related materials in the taxis or motorized rickshaws that form the most popular element of transportation around the

major cities. In a manner similar to the touring troupes of early Europe numerous touring companies navigate throughout the major cities each day . . .sometimes completing two or more performances in different theatres on any given day.

One of the reasons that Indian theatre companies have struggled is a direct result of the exorbitant costs of producing a production. Production costs are comparably high no matter where an organization chooses to produce a production within India. The most expensive cities to produce within are Calcutta and Mumbai (formerly known as Bombay). A typical dialogue drama requiring a single set produced in either city would have associated production costs several years ago of between Rs 15,000 - 30,000 (\$1,225 -2,500). While this in itself may not seem like a significant figure in the west, one must understand that the average per capita yearly income for India at that time was Rs 200 (\$164). A multi-set play typically will cost between Rs 40,000 - 70,000 (\$3,250 - 5,700) and a play demanding a detailed setting and costumes of a historical period could run between Rs 1,200,000 - 1,600,000 (\$97,500 - 130,000). On the other hand, a dialogue drama produced by an amateur group in a smaller city such as Madras may cost as little as Rs 3,000 - 5,000 (\$250 -400). Many companies will make use of stock set pieces, costumes and their own lighting equipment to further reduce their costs. Theatre rental rates form the bulk of production costs with average rates going between Rs 1,200 - 3,000 (\$97 - 245) per day. It is unlikely that the trend of increased rental rates will change in the future . . .which will result in still tighter restraints on an organization's production budget. Other significant costs to a production include advertising costs along with the scenic and costume needs of the production.

Earliest construction of proscenium theatres in India is thought to date back to the early 1700's in what is now the southern area of Bombay (Mumbai) known as the Fort area. Throughout the years, as the city has expanded, theatres, too, have migrated northward with the population along the Arabian Sea. Today there are two significant performance centers that exist at the extreme northern and southern extent of Mumbai (nearly a two hour commute by rail from one part of the city to the other). The first, is a theatre center much like our own Lincoln Center in New York City and is located in the southern financial district of the city. This is the National Center for the Performing Arts (NCPA) which forms a complex containing three major performance spaces of various sizes and configurations along with a host of additional studio, gallery and support offices scattered throughout the facility. To the northern extreme of the city is a second facility, the Gadkari Nangayatan, that also forms a modern complex surrounded in a suburban community with gardens and a lake adjoining its grounds. This modern facility has become the center for the performance of Marathi plays within the city of Mumbai. Marathi plays are contemporary secular plays that are generally performed in the Marathi language (spoken primarily in the state of Maharashtra). The plays most commonly deal with various social themes. Other population centers also have a few select facilities that provide fairly sophisticated means of supporting production. Several notable examples being the facilities of the National School for Drama in New Delhi that would be a comparable to our own Julliard School and the Theatre Academy in Pune. On the grounds of the National School for Drama is a proscenium theatre that seats approximately 450 patrons. This is the primary performance facility for the training

program. While slightly dated, the 40 foot proscenium stage is fairly well equipped. A counter-weighted fly system (although quite different in look from what we'd find in an American theatre) provides a batten on an average spacing of every foot or two. Additional equipment includes a 24 channel sound mixer that looks as if it could have been pulled off the shelves of any western sound manufacturer, two portable racks of approximately 96 electronic dimmers and a computerized lighting console. Despite the relatively recent control system for the stage lighting a set of auxiliary dimmers that are used primarily for house lights are created from auto-transformers mounted within piano-boards. Fixtures and hanging positions tend to follow the tradition of being a bit aged and fundamental in design. However, for a number of reasons, most of the popular commercial theatres in India are more in line with the summer stock theatres of the fifties and sixties of our country. Therefore, this facility has become a premier training facility for the country.

In a more detailed examination of the National Center for the Performing Arts (NCPA), the largest theatre (Jamshed Bhabha Theatre) is a 1,150 seat state-of-the-art proscenium facility that is suitable for staging western operas and ballets. The wide proscenium opening (approximately 60 feet wide) masks large wing spaces, fully rigged counterweight fly systems, lifts and lighting and sound systems that are equivalent to any that you would find in most western theatres. The 1,010 seat National Theatre (also named the Tata Theatre) forms a fan-shaped auditorium that provides excellent acoustics for performances that are predominantly concerts or recitals in nature. Large acoustic panels help to provide an exacting sound environment for these music events. The floorplan of this theatre's stage and house areas has a number of similarities with the Vivien Belmont theatre in New York. While sophisticated lighting is not required for the performances that are typically presented in this theatre there are actually relatively few hanging positions and fixtures dedicated to this space. This theatre reflects the common minimalistic approach to lighting that is characteristic of Indian's theatrical production. A third theatre, the 300 seat Experimental Theatre provides a flexible environment for theatrical presentations. Additional performance spaces include the 200 seat Dance Academy Theatre and a 114 seat multi-purpose recording auditorium. The auditorium provides an intimate space that functions well for those performances that follow a format that is more typical of the traditional religious dramas of India. Lectures, demonstrations and workshops are also conducted throughout the numerous studios and classrooms that exist throughout the building. This modern well-equipped complex forms the flagship of Indian performance facilities.

Another popular Mumbai theatre that was created in the same manner that is essentially parallel to our non-profit theatre in America is the Prithvi Theatre. The initial funding of the theatre was secured through the development of a trust fund that was formed in memory of Prithviraj Kapoor and his touring company. Kapoor, an actor-manager, dedicated his life to touring various Hindi plays that were of little commercial interest but which still formed a significant part of the cultural fabric of India. The Prithvi, which opened in 1978, was designed as a variation of a thrust design so that the intimate audience/performer relationship required by the Hindi plays might be created. The facility contains a single theatre, gallery and various support spaces such as dressing

and equipment/projection rooms. The audience is seated on a series of benches that span across three separate banks of the auditorium ---accommodating approximately 200 seats. There are no shop facilities on the premises. The thrust area of the stage measures approximately 20' x 16' while the background portion of the stage measures roughly 40' x 16'. Costume/dressing areas are found on the second floor of the building near the projection booth. Scenic elements are typically minimal and the house lighting systems consists of approximately 40 fixtures and twenty-four dimmers. A two-scene preset is used for the stage lighting while the house lights are controlled by a rotary auto-transformer. The principle lighting position is a catwalk that follows the audience seating sections at about three-quarters to the rear of the house. Due to the steep rake of the seating areas many westerners actually have to duck to avoid hitting their heads on the lighting units that are hung from below this catwalk. This theatre has generally developed as an independent performance facility where any number of producing organizations may rent the theatre, gallery and production spaces. The organization also produces several art and theatre festivals throughout the year. Today the theatre is typically booked for performances on 300 days of the year and systems have been developed to allow for equitable use of the theatre by any number of organizations. In fact, any given organization may only book the space for approximately one week in any given year.

## **Scenery**

With typical contemporary theatrical production in India being centered in touring companies or troupes several noteworthy conventions and qualities become apparent throughout most contemporary productions. In comparison to western theatrical production most Indian contemporary productions may appear minimalistic and somewhat improvised. However, most productions are mounted in this minimalistic fashion for a number of practical reasons. First, a majority of the companies are formed by amateur performers who also hold down jobs and have other occupations then acting. Additionally, many troupes choose minimal production support because of high theatre rental rates, quick turnarounds, transportation issues and the overall high costs of mounting a production. Limited availability of scenic materials such as wood products also play a role in establishing India's characteristically minimalistic production styles. Wood and other building products are a rarity in India and have substantial costs associated with them because the environment is not particularly well suited for the production of trees and lumber products. In many areas of the country, what little foliage that exists has already been cut down and used for various wood products or even more commonly ---simply as firewood. In many of the urban areas there might even be laws that regulate the cutting of trees. While organizations may have their own office nearly all of these offices do not contain enough space that would be considered sufficient for performance or shop facilities. Most scenery is commissioned to carpenters who specialize in theatrical scenery and who work off of sketches or plans that have been supplied by a director or designer. In many cases, theatre managers will provide a selection of neutral black flats, a selection of house lighting equipment and a few simple stock pieces of furniture and other scenery to the troupes renting a given facility. In many cases, this stock scenery is recycled through any number of different performances

and troupes. A well established organization, troupe or commercial theatre may also have a fairly extensive selection of stock scenic and prop elements stored in warehouses from which they might pull a given production.

Unfortunately, the lack of technical sophistication found in many of the commercial theatres is a direct result of managers maintaining schedules that do not allow for maintenance and regular upgrades of the facilities and stock inventory, troupes that have no vested interest for improvement in the theatres in which they are performing and production costs that inhibit all but the most essential needs of any given organization. While equipment may be rudimentary, many of the most common shifting techniques of the proscenium venue do exist within these theatres. An example is that while a counterweighted fly system is an unlikely prospect in these theatres, most will still have some capability for flying scenery and some form of pinrail or hemp flying system. However, a full flyloft is also a rarity and often drops are simply hung from battens and pulley systems that are mounted only feet above the top edge of the proscenium opening. At the Bharata Natyam Theatre, in Pune (the second largest city in Maharashtra), we saw a production and strike where the scenic elements from the production included a single painted drop, a neutral black platform measuring approximate 4' x 8' x 8", and a set of black masking flats that had been pulled from the theatre's stock inventory. The flats were in poor condition while the batten to which the drop was attached consisted of a series of scabbed together 1 x 3's that were supported by three or four lengths of cotton rope. Furniture used in the production was simply pulled from the company or manager's readily available resources and no attempt was made to contribute to the specific demands of the play. The lighting made use of very few units and was adapted quickly from those fixtures already previously hung in the theatre. Despite conditions such as these, the productions play to full houses consistently and there is a sense of true support for the performers who act in these plays.

While simplicity is the rule there are also exceptions throughout India where fairly modern conventions and equipment are utilized throughout various performance spaces. In Calcutta the Circarena Theatre is designed as a modified version of Washington D.C.'s Arena Theatre. This theatre boasts a twenty foot diameter turntable with a hydraulic lift that can sink below the stage area for completing scene changes. The first turntables in India showed up in Calcutta in the 1930's and ironically have never gained any popularity elsewhere in the country. In Mumbai the most typical means of shifting scenic elements has come through incorporating wagons into a production's design.

The role of the scenic designer is just starting to emerge in the contemporary theatre of India. As already stated, in many cases, scenery is often pulled somewhat randomly from stock selections that often may have only minimal connections with the actual needs of the production. Box settings may be mixed with wing and border settings and there is often a reliance on 2-dimensional painted scenic components rather than sculptural elements such as those that have become characteristic of western theatrical productions. In many cases these scenic elements are in poor condition --a casualty of heavy use and frequent moves between various theatres. It is generally thought that

scenic design forms the least well-developed art of the modern Indian stage. Props, too, often fall into the use of generic furniture pieces that seldomly make any commentary on the individual play. In fact, in the Marathi play that we had mentioned that we had attended earlier, two chairs used in this production were of the white plastic pool-side or balcony variety that we might find readily available at one of our WalMart or K-Mart SuperCenters. Most props are typically bought at local emporiums and markets and little effort is made to acquire pieces that reflect the historical context of a production.

Having said this, India is also one of the few countries in the world where one may still observe multiple scene changes accomplished through the use of moveable painted wings and shutters. These shifting techniques, perfected by the British during the Restoration, are still used as a common practice in various theatres in the southern portion of the country. The seemingly elaborate means of shifting these settings is actually done through the use of primitive technology fashioned from scenic panels with grooves and tracks worked into the stage deck, wires, bamboo and rope. The dedication of the well-choreographed crews make these shifts appear effortless throughout each production ---in some cases, plays may require fifty to sixty scene changes within a two hour performance. One of the most successful organizations in this style of production is Manohar's National Theater of Madras. When first conceived a designer will paint a set of renderings that illustrate each of the specific scenes required throughout the production. The renderings are then photographed and the resulting prints are mounted onto panels of wood or illustration board and finally cut to resemble the actual profile shutter and wing/leg panels that will be used in the production. These panels are then used to create a model where various scenic changes can be worked out prior to building the actual scenery and moving into the theatre. Again, the approach is typically stylized and follows traditional scene painting characteristics. A typical rehearsal schedule will allow the technical crews to perfect the scenic changes over a period of approximately fifteen days before the actors arrive at the theatre. The actors will then rehearse for another ten days on the set with an additional three days spent in full dress rehearsals prior to presenting the show to an audience. In addition to the elaborate scenic changes these plays will also often make use of various special effects that could include: flood scenes, decapitations, appearance of giant monsters or snakes, flying swords, etc. These scenic shifts can be just as impressively executed as those illustrated in Western theatres such as the historic Drottningholm Court Theatre in Sweden.

### **Alternative Performance Spaces**

As an exception to the proscenium format a few theatrical companies are experimenting with the use of found spaces and a variety of audience/performer relationships. A popular alternative performance space for many companies has been in the use of outdoor amphitheatres. While many of these spaces are being utilized through various experimental companies a number of these external spaces have been developed through using the model of the proscenium theatre. In New Delhi, also at the National School of Drama, an amphitheatre has been designed where a terraced seating area faces a stage that rises about nine inches off the ground. More importantly, the stage features three sets of legs that have been formed through building brick walls that are

approximately eight to ten feet tall and approximately eight inches thick. These walls define the proscenium opening and wings while also dividing the space into several different planes for the performers' entrances and exits. This amphitheatre also makes use of two lighting towers situated on either side of the audience seating area. These function much like the box boom positions or lighting towers that a western amphitheatre will most likely be equipped with. A second amphitheatre is found at the Theatre Academy at Pune and forms the primary venue for this academic program. This amphitheatre more closely resembles the theatron of the ancient Greeks in that a roughly semi-circular orchestra area is defined as the primary performance space. A stone wall and dressing room facility with associated entrances forms the background for the stage --once again much in the same manner as the skene of an ancestral Greek facility. This amphitheatre boasts a terraced area where audience members may be seated on a series of flagstone ledges. There are also provisions for lighting in this amphitheatre through a truss-like structure that has been placed at the downstage edge of the orchestra area. A simple two-tiered structure, this provides lighting positions at the edge of the performance area and stretches across the central two-thirds of the stage. While we didn't witness any performances in this space several issues come to mind in regard to the location/position of where the truss is currently placed. First, there is the obvious issue of placing the structure in a location that obscures audience sightlines; second, the steep lighting angles that this position would produce for lighting the downstage areas of the performance area are likely to cause some problems and finally the issue that the truss doesn't span across the entire width of the performance area. One interesting quality found in many of the Indian amphitheatres is in the fact that the lush tropical vegetation can often actually block audience views of the stages from various perspectives. Trees that have any significant size may be left standing in the middle of the performance area rather than being cleared for various sightline issues.

## **Lighting**

Theatrical lighting as we know it is non-existent within the religious/ritual dramas of India. In these dramas illumination generally comes from a single oil lamp situated down center of the performance/staging area. These lamps form an element of ritual for these events and are lit ceremoniously at the beginning of the performance and are snuffed out at the conclusion of the evening's entertainment. The lamps produce a unique quality of light and create an atmosphere and mood for the performance that is very different from the light that we have become accustomed to seeing in western performances. The lamps produce a soft yellow glow around the performers that enhances their golden costume adornments and is often reflected in the mirrored tiles found in the festive headdresses and body ornaments that some of the performers may be wearing. The lamp's flame/flames (some lamps make use of multiple wicks and flames) is typically placed around two or three feet off the ground. This provides yet another unique quality in that the performers are therefore up-lit from this single source of illumination. The light is caught in their eyes and casts distorted shadows of the actors onto the background of the temple stages.

Contemporary theatrical lighting has also taken on unique qualities that have become solely characteristic of Indian productions and the touring needs of the typical theatre company. Most of the popular theatres' lighting equipment could be compared with 1950's- 60's era production in America. As a rule most lighting is done through a much more minimalistic use of lighting fixtures. However, when a troupe rents a theatre facility the rental fee generally includes the use of enough house lighting equipment to adequately light the production without the need for renting additional fixtures. Most dimming in a typical facility is done through the use of rotary auto-transformer dimmers, circuits are few and far between and gel is generally only available through being imported. Wiring codes are also not enforced as stringently as they are in this country and it is common to see various cables simply strung throughout the theatre. Even more surprising is the fact that significant power loads are seldomly protected within conduit runs in the theatre. In the commercial theatres typical hanging positions are found in the form of a first electric, a FOH pipe hung approximately fifteen feet in front of the proscenium opening and a set of pipes that are mounted to the side walls of the auditorium ---replicating the boxboom positions that are characteristic of most proscenium theatres.

Due to the sheer lack of luminaries westerners will typically find that the lighting within the Indian theatre to be dim when compared to the intensities with which we have become accustomed to in western lighting design. Tapas Sen, arguably India's foremost lighting authority has been credited with the development of a lighting system that has become a characteristic style of contemporary Indian lighting design. While spotlights and fresnels form the majority of equipment available to an Indian lighting designer these are used in a minimalistic approach throughout any given design. Another Indian designer, Pradeep Muley, speaks of lighting up to five productions with as few as four spotlights per show. Part of the unique lighting quality that Sen is credited with creating is as a result of his specification of various hanging locations throughout a theatre. He has suggested construction of platforms of about eight feet in height directly behind the two sides of the proscenium arch for the mounting of spotlights and their associated operators. These lights are then supplemented with fresnels that are mounted on battens found both downstage and upstage of the proscenium and a series of spotlights hung on vertical pipes mounted to the sidewalls of the auditorium and balcony rail. These fixtures if blended and toned correctly will produce an even coverage of the entire stage. Ironically, part of the lighting quality often associated with Indian performances and this system often results in the perception that the strongest illuminations are located in the upstage portions of the stage while the downstage areas may appear relatively dim. Even despite the relatively few fixtures demanded by lighting systems such as this a specific light plot is developed for each theatre that a production will be presented within. Again, time is of the essence and the lighting must be capable of being hung, circuited, focused and cued within hours of a performance.

In terms of lighting equipment most theatres, regardless of type of facility, make use of fairly limited numbers of inventory. PC Spots and various forms of ellipsoidal reflector spotlights (the box silhouette is quite prominent) form the most common type of instruments found in many of the theatres. Fresnels are also popular within many of the

theatres while it is also common to see 14-16" scoops typically hung from the first electric which function as floodlights for the upstage areas. Throughout our entire period of travel we did not observe any theatres making use of any of the enhanced fixture designs such as Source Fours and Parnels or for that matter, we also never ran into any theatres making use of PAR fixtures either. As mentioned earlier, gel must be imported and is considered a luxury. It is used quite sparingly throughout Indian lighting design. In terms of dimming capabilities most theatres have fairly simplistic lighting systems that would have more in common with our 60 -70's era systems of road/traveling packages and preset systems. Eighteen through thirty-six dimmer systems appear to be fairly typical in many of the commercial theatres while the computer is virtually non-existent. In fact, rotary auto-transformers seemed to appear fairly frequently throughout our travels.

Ironically, the film industry is located in an area located just outside of Mumbai that is appropriately called Bollywood and makes use of fairly sophisticated lighting equipment ---much of it being current enough that it could have come from any one of our own production houses along the California coast. We had the pleasure of attending a shoot for one of the popular musical movies that Bollywood has brought into popularity over the last several years. Reflective panels, cranes and booms (although mechanized by human power as opposed to winch motors) and Pani fixtures are all typical equipment on a back lot or location shoot in Bollywood.

## **Sound**

In the majority of Indian performances sound forms a critical element to the production. However, in virtually every case, this does not include the use of elaborate sound effects that have been created through any number of electronic means as done in western theatre. Rarely are recording devices used to add underscoring or effects to an Indian performance. For the most part reinforcement is characteristic of only the commercial theatres that produce primarily contemporary musical productions ---many times using antiquated equipment and techniques. It is a common practice to place microphones in plane view of the audience ---sometimes placed on boom stands located across the front of the stage and approximately eighteen inches above the deck while others are hung from directly above the stage. The use of sound is simply meant to be live in most Indian performances. In many cases, live musicians accompany many of the performances. Often a single individual will produce the sounds through the use of any number of percussion or string instruments. Many times this musician(s) is prominently displayed in a pit area directly downstage of the stage. An alternative position will have the musicians seated along the forestage area directly in front of either side of the proscenium arch.

In nearly every form of Indian theatre "live" sound plays a significant role in the final performance. In the ancient ritual dramas such as kutiyattam the drummers set the tone and pace of the production while performers chant and dance to the rhythms set by the drums. In kutiyattam two drummers will generally sit upstage behind the rest of the performers on specialized stands that hold their drums --giving them a prominent stage

position throughout the performance. In the native temple theatres where these performances are traditionally performed many considerations have gone into the construction of the building so as to maximize the effectiveness of the acoustics within the space. Hardwood floors and beams are fashioned from select woods due to their ability to reflect and resonate the sounds of the performance while thatch may be used as an acoustic insulator throughout other areas of the building.

## **Costumes**

Contemporary costuming for Indian urban plays is also simplistic compared to western standards. Plagued with many of the same problems as contemporary Indian scenic designers the role of the costume designer is also very much in its infancy. In many cases, costumes may come from an actor's personal wardrobe or may be purchased at one of the local markets under the supervision of the director or costume designer. However, in the case of historical costumes where period details are required it is impossible to purchase the clothing off the rack. In these cases, a director may hire a costume designer or design the costume himself. In cases where a costume must be created specifically for a given type of performance the usual solution is to hire a tailor to complete the costume because these services are readily affordable due to the relatively low rates that tailors typically charge. Once built or acquired, costumes are typically moved from theatre to theatre in baskets or special trunks that resemble a decorative form of footlocker. These are kept small so that they can easily be carried while using various forms of public transportation.

In the west we tend to think of costumes as a way of reinforcing character and character traits, as well as reinforcing and shaping the overall concept of a production. A silhouette signals a particular time period, a fabric's texture gives us clues to the socio-economic status of a person, as well as his or her disposition, mood, attitude, and so forth. Costumes help to define the weather conditions, both inside and outside. They clue us in on the mood of a person, his or her emotional state, relationship to other characters, etc. In other words, we rely on costumes to shape audience opinion about a whole host of important matters in subtle and not so subtle ways. Used judiciously, costumes speak volumes about the production and viewpoint of a play. Indian costumes in modern productions in urban theatres of India may do virtually the same thing. But that is not the way costumes function among the many genres of performance in the Indian countryside. They take their cue from practices set forth in the *Natyasastra*.

The *Natyasastra* is India's earliest authoritative guide to theatre practices in ancient times. The work dates from between 500 BCE and 500 CE and is attributed to the sage Bharata who seems to have been either a man of the theatre or a keen observer of its performance. He recommended that costumes and ornaments should be fashioned in imitation of the real items of dress in order to prevent the actors from tiring under the actual weight of heavy metals, such as gold and silver which are found in typical dress and daily attire in India. Bharata lays down in considerable detail instructions concerning the use of costumes, ornaments, and head gear for various categories of characters in

Sanskrit drama. To an extent, the practices seen today in villages throughout the country more or less follow the broad injunctions of the past laid down in this ancient work.

Among the many items of a costume, headdresses are the more important. According to the actors of some of the genres of performance that survive today, headdresses possess magical powers and for that reason must be kept near the deities that preside over the dressing room. They should only be worn after prayers are offered to god. In kathakali, actors silently offer prayers to deities and their teachers before wearing their elaborately decorated crowns. Many fascinating tales are told about the actors of kudiattam who when offended by a careless remark made by a member of the audience removed their headdress, which not only stopped the show but polluted the entire temple. According to custom, when such a terrible event happens, the priests of the temple are obliged to conduct expensive purification ceremonies to restore the theatre and the entire temple complex to a state of purity. It behooves spectators to mind their tongue in front of a kutiyattam actor.

More than anything you might say that a character's costume and headdress in many of the genres of rural performance in India are symbolic. They tell the spectators "who" a character happens to be and to what category of character he or she belongs rather than helping to explain anything about the character's personality. In kutiyattam, audiences find it easy to identify the actor who portrays the clown (vidusaka). This character is always shirtless and his headdress is uniquely different from all the other characters seen in this genre. It is perched jauntily forward on his head very much like a broad billed baseball cap. However, other costumes are generic and may belong to any number of characters. For example, in kutiyattam Ravana, the demon king of Lanka, may easily be mistaken for the heroic Arjuna if it were not for his makeup and the details in the way his costume is wrapped and tied, setting him apart from his heroic counterpart. Many headdresses are unique to specific characters. In the kathakali of Kerala, Hanuman, the monkey commander and devotee of Lord Rama's army, sports a distinctive headdress, not like that of an other character found in this or any other genre. When he moves his head tiny silver dangles attached to the underside of a broad brimmed "hat" shimmer in the lamplight ---seeming far grander to us than his humble status as a monkey warrants. This style of headdress is used by all the actors who play Hanuman, no matter where an actor performs and with whom he happens to play the role.

Although kathakali characters resemble those in kutiyattam because of their makeup treatments, to the trained eye, there is no way a spectator could mistake a kutiyattam male from a kathakali male simply because the bell-shaped skirt of the kathakali male character signals that he is indeed performing in a kathakali play. Also, kutiyattam performers do not wear ankle bells whereas kathakali male performers must sport a patch of cloth below each knee to which bells are securely attached --- accentuating their strong footwork through the sounds of the bells. The costumes worn by performers of yakshagana, a genre performed in South Kanara (a region of Karnataka state, further up the Arabian sea coast), are clearly different from those worn by their Kerala brethren. The basic male costume consists of black loose fitting pajama bottoms, strings of tiny bells wrapped securely around their ankles and a ten-yard red and golden

yellow checked cloth. The cloth is wrapped and tied in a distinctive manner so that the performer may dance and perform according to the strenuous physical demands of his role. He also wears a short or long sleeve jacket of red, green, or dark blue according to his character type. His waist, chest, arm, and shoulder ornaments further serve to define him and the genre in which he performs. Elaborate and distinctive lotus-shaped headdresses wrapped and tied entirely by the actor signify exactly what character he is playing. In summary, it is possible to say that in kutiyattam and many other genres of Indian performance that class identifies characters and that within each class unique features of the costume assist us to identify exactly who the character happens to be.

Costumes in other genres of performance in India are not so stylized or as suggestive as those mentioned above. In some genres the characters seem to be wearing a slightly exaggerated form of street dress. This is particularly true of the female characters in genres such as yakshagana, tamasha, jatra, khyal, and bhavai ---among others. What these "realistic" costumes don't seem to do is exaggerate peculiarities of their characters or comment on the weather, mood or any of those other elements which western costume designers provide as symbolic clues about character.

Costumes in India are constructed of many different fabrics. Cotton, silk, and zari handlooms have always been the traditional fabrics of choice. Today, however, synthetic fabrics have come into vogue. Nylon, polyester, satin, artificial silk, velvet, and velveteen are to be found in all parts of India. Since the controlling hand of a costume designer is not present, the results can sometimes become an incongruous conglomeration of colors and materials that are not aesthetically pleasing or consistent within a given cast of characters.

## **Makeup**

Makeup is yet another way for spectators to identify one character from another. Nothing is more striking to a westerner than the multiple patterns of color on the faces of performers in yakshagana, kathakali, kutiyattam, krishnanattam, therukoothu, or raslila ---to name only a few genre in which stylized makeup is used. Within the framework of the generic roles: heroes, heroines, deities, demons, animals, etc., there are markers that distinguish one character from another. The actor's face is a slate on which the decorative and distinctive markers of each character are clearly written. The *Natyasastra* mentions colors that are appropriate for use in the theatre. White, blue, yellow, and red are considered the basic primary colors because they are found in nature. By mixing these colors various other colors and shades are produced. Considering the spectacular facial painting found in kutiyattam, kathakali, yakshagana, and other genres of Indian performance, it is little wonder that Ariane Mnouchkine, the prominent French director, was so impressed with this makeup and makeup process, that she went so far as to reproduce a kathakali dressing room as a pre-show experience for audiences who attended her adaptations of three Greek plays that were produced at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in the 1980's.

For a moment, let us imagine a visit to a typical kathakali dressing room. Well before sunset and the ritual playing of the first drums announcing a night's performance, young apprentices sweep clean and make ready a space near the performance area. They unpack trunks or baskets laden with damp costumes and costume pieces. They string rope cloths lines across the pillars and posts of the building in order to air-dry the damp garments that were worn during the previous night's show. Unlike western dressing rooms with their banks of chairs, makeup tables, brightly lighted mirrors, washers and dryers, pressing tables and so forth, the best place for a kathakali dressing room is a big open room where simple woven mats may be spread out on the bare floor. Kathakali performers usually begin makeup preparations sitting cross-legged on the floor, their faces reflected in a small 4"x 6" hand mirror. From the very outset the dressing room has an air of sanctity about it. Everyone speaks in whispers in order to maintain their concentration and the dignity of the space. Sometimes performers do not know what role they are to play until the very night of the show and they avoid idle talk that might distract them from thinking of the demands of their part.

Small granite grinding stones are used to turn natural substances into the bright colors required for many of the characters. Brushes aren't used to apply the makeup. Rather, strips of palm frons are cleaned and broken into six to eight inch lengths and dipped into the bright colors which are kept in palm leaf strips about two inches wide. Performers ordinarily draw the colored patterns on their faces holding the mirror and palm strip in their left hand and make the patterns with the stick in their right hand. The mats on which the actors sit also serve as a resting place during the middle stages of the makeup preparation. At that time specially trained makeup artists carefully inscribe snow white frames of rice paste, called chutti, into beard-like frames on the performers' faces. These structures help to focus attention on the complicated patterns of color on the actors' faces. During this time the makeup artists slowly build the white frame layer upon layer over the course of nearly an hour. The chutti artists work upside down. Sitting cross-legged above the head of the prone performer, they view the faces of the actors upside down, surely one of the more unusual conventions for applying makeup anywhere in the world.

During the final stage of the preparation, actors refine the patterns of color and lines, concentrating especially on their eyes. Some characters may even require the actors to place a seed of a type of eggplant (cuntappuvu) within their eyes in order to inflame it, calling special attention to the eyes which are used to express the emotions of their characters. At the conclusion of the makeup process some characters are required to wear thick fabric beards of red, black, or white, depending on their character type. Finally, they reverently don their headdresses that are ritually thought to transform them into the characters they portray. Dressing rooms and the process of applying makeup in kutiyattam and krishnattam of Kerala are virtually the same as those of kathakali. For an excellent film, partially dealing with makeup, we recommend David Bollard's film *Masque of Malabar*. No matter what the genre of performance, the clown characters emphasize and exaggerate their faces with comical touches of makeup. As we said earlier, the kutiyattam clown is easily identified because they are shirtless. Their makeup also helps broadcast their identity. A thin white coating of rice paste is smeared on their

faces, chests, and legs. Ash black (kajal) is used to accent their eyes and to form a pert moustache that is turned up at one end and down at the other. The moustache and red dots suggest the humorous nature of the kutiyattam clown and assist him in fulfilling the demands of his role.

Female characters in traditional theatre are normally permitted to wear a slightly exaggerated almost “realistic” makeup similar to that worn by women on the street. The famous kuchipudi actor Vedanta Satyanarayana Sharma wears “natural” makeup to play Satyabhama and Usha, important female characters in the repertory. One would be hard pressed to distinguish his makeup from that worn by wealthy Brahmin ladies of that area of India. In kathakali, female characters are classified as *minukku*, which means, “shining.” They wear a light colored base makeup with exaggerated eye lines. Powdered mica is applied to the base to give it its “shiny” appearance. In krishnattam, Bhudevi, Satyabhama, Yasoda and Radha all-important female characters, wear green (paccha) makeup, which is normally worn only by male characters in kathakali. They also have a rice paste border along the jaw line. Possibly the association of these ladies with Lord Krishna prompted the artists at the inception of krishnattam to coordinate their makeup color and style with that of Lord Krishna. But it seems strangely inconsistent that Rukmini and Devaki, also important female characters associated with Krishna, should wear a deep rose, “natural” makeup closely akin to the *minukku* of kathakali.

## **Masks**

The use of masks in drama recalls a primitive urge of man to impersonate deities and demons as a means of bringing their power under his control. Several magnificent forms of devil-dancing in which fantastically shaped masks, some as tall as coconut palms, are still to be seen in villages along the Malabar coast. Perhaps the impulse to use masks for religio-magical purpose has motivated the annual production of *Prahlada Charitam* in Melattur, Madras. At the climax of the annual performance of the play one of the actor-devotees who has fasted and prayed throughout the day goes to the temple near the playing area to receive the mask of Narasimha, the man-lion incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The mask is kept safely above the central shrine during the year. Actors believe that this mask is endowed with the spirit of Vishnu’s avatar and attendants must accompany the actor who wears it to prevent himself from doing physical harm to himself and others. Players tell of a story where many years ago an actor who wore the mask lost control, overpowered and strangled to death a helpless actor who was playing Hiranya Kashipu, the evil foe of Vishnu. A similar mask to that used in bhagavata mela is worn by kuchipudi actors in the village of Andhra Pradesh for a performance of the exciting story of Prahlada. The performance, however, does not produce the same terrifying effect as that in Melattur because the actors do not believe that the mask possesses supernatural power.

Almost every performance of traditional theatre begins with a dance and song in praise of Lord Ganapati, the elephant-headed god of good fortune. Often a small boy impersonates the deity by wearing an elephant-headed mask. Craftsmen throughout the country differ as to their approach to the color and decorations appropriate to Ganapati

masks. In some areas the masks are painted white, in others pink. In Sahi Jatra the artisans who produced the mask we have chosen to illustrate here, have painted the mask a strong red. They have also chosen to incorporate the headdress with the mask in order to produce a total unifying effect.

Masks are not used in all theatre forms nor do all the characters in those forms in which they are used wear masks. In Assam, for example, the traditional craftsmen of ankiya nat have chosen to create giant masks and effigies to be used by actors who impersonate demons and animals in the stories concerned with Lord Vishnu's incarnations. The giant mask and framework body illustrated in this article is designed to impersonate one of Ravana's demon brothers. The mask and body are constructed of lightweight bamboo covered with painted cloth. The mouth and both arms of the effigy are movable.

Masks of many different materials, shapes and sizes are to be found in Ramlila of Varanasi. Hanuman's brass mask is small but testifies to the excellent workmanship among the artisans of north India. Ravana and Vibhisana, both demon characters, wear masks made of cloth and covered with sumptuous zari-work. In contrast, Ravana's demon hosts wear crudely constructed masks of papier-mâché. The monkey and bear forces of the epic hero Rama wear smoothly polished masks of papier-mâché with shiny lacquered finishes. By far the most impressive items in the ritualistic spectacle are the giant effigies of Ravana and his brothers made of loosely woven bamboo that has been covered with papier-mâché and cloth. The explosion and burning of these effigies serves as a fitting climax to the mighty contrast between the forces of good and evil.

Like ankiya nat, Purulia Chhau is not well known outside its region of India. But the masks that are created by the artisans for Purulia Chhau are some of the finest to be found anywhere. Only four families of mask makers reside in Charida village and continue to serve the companies that play in about five hundred villages of the area. The contribution of these craftsmen to mask making in India is apparent from the examples we have illustrated. Papier-mâché is molded over a wet clay base, which defines the facial features of the characters. After the papier-mâché is dried in the scorching sun the rough edges are sanded, polished and painted. Finally a variety of beads, tinsel papers, plant fibers and feathers are stitched to the headdress to give it its unique design.

Not far from the Purulia District is the small village of Seraikella, Bihar, which is known for Seraikella Chhau. The dancers boast of the beautifully wrought clay masks produced by master craftsmen like the late Sri Mahapatra. Thousands of masks poured forth in rich profusion from his humble home for almost sixty years. Sri Mahapatra was closely associated with the dance party of the local maharajas for whom he made some of his best masks. In contrast with the masks of Purulia Chhau, those of Seraikella Chhau reveal the gentle, refined and lyrical features of characters that often personify butterflies, peacocks and young lovers. Besides the art of mask making, Seraikella is also known for its magnificently decorated village homes, which ornament the sun-baked landscape. It would be difficult to find an area more richly endowed with traditional arts and crafts than this hilly region of eastern India.

Far to the South, in Trichur, Kerala, the hereditary art of mask making for the krishnattam has long since disappeared. But thanks to the study of a family of sculptors the superb wooden masks belonging to the krishnattam party at Guruvayur temple were revived for a short time in the mid-1970's. Sculptors and their assistants chisel the faces and hollow out the insides of the masks from solid blocks of wood in order to make these masks. They then sand the masks until all the corners are rounded and smooth. The next step in the construction process is to paint and lacquer the facial features. Finally they insert tiny hand-cut glass mirrors into the carved indentures in the wood. Colored tinsel papers are applied with bees' wax giving the masks their jewel-like appearance. The entire process takes about one month for each mask. A full set of eight krishnattam masks runs into many thousands of rupees and many man-hours of labor. But the results are well worth the expense and wait.

### **Summary**

It would be unfair to conclude these remarks without mentioning some of the difficulties inherent in preserving these works of art for future generations. As India continues to modernize many of the flourishing traditional crafts might disappear or diminish in quality. Unfortunately adequate steps have not yet been taken to halt the disastrous loss of these old and noble traditions. Quite naturally the fate of traditional theatre crafts is linked with the fate of traditional theatre. When traditional theatre suffers a setback, when it is cheapened by the influences of commercial films, when it changes its form to suit the tastes of the unsophisticated, when performances are driven through commercial gains. . .the theatre crafts conform to the change and move one step closer to the least appealing aspects of contemporary culture.

Some institutions have made valiant efforts to film experts of selected performances. The Sangeet Natak Akademi in New Delhi is to be commended for leading the way in this effort. The Folk Research Center of Calcutta and the Bharatiya Kala Lok Mandir of Udaipur follow closely behind in sympathy and effort. Bharatiya Natya Sangh in New Delhi has assembled a significant collection of masks, costumes and ornaments for a museum, which unfortunately does not yet exist. Dedicated individuals have sought to preserve the best of traditional art from decay and corruption. Dr. Suresh Awasthi, Dr. S.N. Karanth, Dr. Asutosh Bhattacharya, Dr. Maheswar Neog, the late Mohan Khokar, Dr. Sunil Kothari and the late K. Bharatiya Iyer, to name but a few, have fostered an interest among the general public in the traditional theatre crafts. Without the foresight of the late Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya it is doubtful if these men would have progressed as far as they have toward that goal. While many of the ritual genres are passed on through an apprentice/master teacher system of training in recent years formal education in design and performance has also become available. The two most significant training programs being the National School of Drama and The Dramatic Art and Design Academy (DADA). Both are located in the city of New Delhi.

There is still much to be accomplished in regard to studying these unique genres of performance. Documentary films need to be made in order to preserve for future\_

generations a visual record, as they exist today, of the traditional theatre arts and crafts. Research needs to be conducted and books written to provide the general reader with detailed accounts of the rich landscape that is part of this culture. Institutes of traditional crafts must also hire theatre artisans, not just those who produce paintings, sculpture and brassware. While we have spoken of the co-existence of both contemporary and traditional genres of Indian theatre alongside one another we must not lose sight of the fact that these historical gems could easily vanish from existence. The task is difficult but the future of one of India's richest cultural heritages is at stake.

### **Bios.**

**Farley P. Richmond** is Director of the Center for Asian Studies, University of Georgia/Athens. He co-authored *Indian Theatre: Traditions of Performance* with Darius L. Swann and Phillip P. Zarrilli. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990. Articles on Indian theatre and drama have appeared in *The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre*, 1991. Paperback Edition, 1993 and in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Theatre*. Edited by John Russell Brown. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995. His CD-ROM entitled, *Kutiyattam: Sanskrit Theater of India* was published by the University of Michigan Press in 2001.

**Richard E. Dunham** is an Associate Professor of Design at the University of Georgia and has been designing lighting and scenery for over twenty years. He has been active in USITT and is Co-Commissioner of the Lighting Commission. In addition to designing entertainment lighting he is NCQLP certified and designs architectural and landscape lighting through being the principle in Dunham Design Associates. He also holds memberships in IALD and IESNA as an architectural lighting designer.

## **Recommended Reading**

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**Captions and Illustrations:**

***Hardcopy:***

1- Floorplan of the Prithvi Theatre in Mumbai (courtesy of [www.prithvitheatre.org](http://www.prithvitheatre.org))

***Slides (photography by R. Dunham):***

1. Terraced audience seating areas at amphitheatre of the Centre for Performing Arts in Pune.
2. Performance area and changing rooms of amphitheatre of the Centre for Performing Arts in Pune.
3. Lobby of the Jamshed Bhabha Theatre at the National Center for Performing Arts (NCPA) at Mumbai.
4. Jamshed Bhabha Theatre stage at the National Center for the Performing Arts (NCPA).
5. Jamshed Bhabha Theatre house, projection booths and acoustic panels.
6. Jamshed Bhabha Theatre stageleft wing and counterweight flyrail in background.
7. National Theatre (also named the Tata Theatre) of the National Center for the Performing Arts (NCPA).
8. Small recording theatre at National Center for the Performing Arts (NCPA).
9. View of house and balcony of Bharata Natyam Theatre in Pune (a contemporary commercial theatre).
10. Marathi performance at Bharata Natyam Theatre in Pune. Note painted drop, front of house electric and plastic lawn chairs.
11. Marathi performance at Bharata Natyam Theatre in Pune. Note use of stock scenic elements in the form of platform and black flats. Microphones can be seen hung in typical fashion from directly above the stage and along the lip of the stage.
12. View of stageright wing at Bharata Natyam Theatre.
13. Electrician focuses first electric while musician strikes his equipment from the musician's pit at the Bharata Natyam Theatre. Note microphones along edge of stage.
14. Exterior of the Prithvi Theatre in Mumbai.
15. Dressing room and makeup table at the Prithvi Theatre.

16. Lighting area in control room of the Prithvi Theatre. Note auto-transformer for houselights and two-scene preset board for stage lighting control.
17. Lighting catwalk at Prithvi Theatre.
18. Lighting fixtures hanging above benches of audience seating area in Prithvi Theatre.
19. Playbills on exterior facade of Shivaja Mandir Theatre in Mumbai. This theatre is one of the most successful Marathi Theatres in the country.
20. View of the house/balcony of the Shivaja Mandir Theatre. Note fans mounted on walls and ceilings and simplistic decoration of the house.
21. Shivaja Mandir Theatre first electric and wing. Note prominent use of scoops from this lighting position.
22. Scabbed batten used to hang a scrim panel being hung at a load-in at the Shivaja Mandir Theatre.
23. Stock scenery of the Shivaja Mandir Theatre stored upstage as crew members hang a scrim on a makeshift batten.
24. View of Shivaja Mandir Theatre stageright wing, legs and electrician with auto-transformers. Scrim has now been flown to working trim.
25. Typical wardrobe trunks used by contemporary production companies.
26. Wardrobe members press and prepare costumes for an upcoming performance.
27. Makeup application to an actress in the dressing room of the Shivaja Mandir Theatre.
28. Backstage shrine located in the dressing room of the Shivaja Mandir Theatre.
29. Shrine by company switch at the Shivaja Mandir Theatre. Note auto-transformer in foreground, wood road boxes for gel and unshielded wiring around circuit boxes.
30. Shivaja Mandir Theatre patch panel located in stageright proscenium wall.. Red velour is main curtain.
31. Amphitheatre of the National School of Drama in New Delhi. Note wings constructed of natural brick.
32. Seating risers and lighting towers of the National School of Drama's amphitheatre.
33. National School of Drama proscenium stage viewed from house.
34. National School of Drama proscenium stage view of house and projection booths.

35. Counterweight fly system of the proscenium stage at the National School of Drama.
  36. Sound system (mixer, amps and patch bay) of the National School of Drama's proscenium facility.
  37. Auto-transformer piano board house lighting system of the National School of Drama's proscenium facility.
  38. Computer light board of the National School of Drama's proscenium facility.
  39. Road dimmers and patch system for National School of Drama's proscenium facility.
  40. Backlot facades for a Bollywood film.
  41. Grips move lighting gear around at a backlot shoot for a Bollywood film.
  42. Diffuser/reflector panels on backlot shoot for a Bollywood film.
  43. Camera crane in use on a backlot shoot for a Bollywood film.
- Slides (photography by F. Richmond):***
44. Exterior of the Academy Theatre in Calcutta.
  45. View of stageleft proscenium wall of Academy Theatre in Calcutta.
  46. View of house of Academy Theatre in Calcutta.
  47. Scenic sketch and rendering for a contemporary production.
  48. Scenic model for a contemporary production.
  49. Scenic model for a contemporary production.
  50. Therukoothu actor having his straw underskirt wrapped.
  51. Actor wearing makeup, headdress, and costume of Radha in krsnanattam.
  52. Male actor wearing makeup, headdress, and costume for a female role in kathakali.
  53. Therukoothu actor wearing makeup, headdress, ornaments, and costume for Bhima, one of the major character in the Mahabharata epic.
  54. Carved but unpainted mask of the giant demon character in krsnanattam.

55 Craftsman carving the back of the headdress for the giant demon mask.

*Digital Illustrations (photography by F. Richmond) --on ZIP Disk*

## COSTUMES

D1.pct Costume for the character of the stage manager in ankiya nat.

D2.pct Actor dressing for the role of the demon in krsnanattam.

D3.pct Ornaments used by female characters in krsnanattam.

D4.pct Actor wearing costume, headdress, ornaments, and makeup of the clown character in kutiyattam.

D5.pct Striped jacket with three-quarter length sleeves worn by some of the characters in kutiyattam.

D6.pct Therukoothu actor in costume performing on stage in a small village.

D7.jpg Baskets of yakshagana costumes.

D8.jpg A wooden kutiyattam headdress based on a design on paper.

D9.pct Yakshagana actors resting in the shade during a photo shoot. At the left is the actor playing Indra, at the right the actor playing Arjuna, both central characters in the Mahabharata epic.

D10.jpg A yakshagana heroic character performing in a small village in rural south India.

D11.jpg Headdress of the monkey character Hanuman in kathakali.

D12.jpg A kutiyattam headdress and makeup for Arjuna, a heroic character in the Mahabharata.

D13.jpg Yakshagana actor tying his "lotus-shaped" headdress. Village children look on.

D14.pic Actors wearing street cloth typically seen in urban Maharashtra and used for a play in Mumbai. Photo: Rajdatt Arts, Mumbai.

D15.pic Actors in a production of Waiting for Godot produced in Delhi by Rangmahal. Directed by Alaknanda.

D16.pic Delhi actors in a National School of Drama Repertory production of Maha Bhoj, a contemporary Hindi play.

D17.jpg Scene from A Doll's House, a Nandikar production, Calcutta.

D18.pic Scene from A View from the Bridge, a Madras Players production.

## LIGHTING

D19.jpg Kutiyattam actor performing close to the oil lamp in a temple theatre.

D20.jpg A village barber holding the oil lamp traditionally used in bhavai, a genre of performance in rural Gujarat.

## MAKEUP

D21.pct A kathakali actor applying the makeup of a heroic character.

D22.pct A black beard character in kathakali.

D23.pct Makeup artist applying the white frame beard (chutti) to a kathakali actor's face.

D24.jpg A student practices making the white frame beard (chutti) on a clay pot.

D25.pct A kathakali actor wearing the "shining" makeup of a female character.

D26.pct A kathakali actor applying makeup for the character of Hanuman, the monkey.

D27.pct A kathakali actor wearing the makeup and headdress of a heroic character.

D28.pct Krishna and his wife Radha in a krsnanattam production.

D29.jpg Makeup for Bali, the monkey king, in kutiyattam.

D30.pct Makeup for the clown (vidusaka) character in kutiyattam.

D31.jpg Female character portrayed by an actress in kutiyattam.

D32.jpg Kutiyattam actor applying makeup in the dressing room.

D33.jpg Makeup for Ravana, the demon king, in kutiyattam.

D34.jpg Makeup for Sugriva, the monkey, in kutiyattam.

D35.jpg A young boy wearing his makeup for Rama, the epic hero, in a Ramlila production.

D36.pct A actor applying makeup for an evil character in therukoothu.

D37.pct Headdress and makeup of a yakshagana demon character.

### MASKS

D38.jpg Mask of a minor demon character in ankiya nat.

D39.pict Head of a giant demon effigy in ankiya nat.

D40.pct Man-lion mask used in kuchipudi.

D41.jpg Actor possessed by a man-lion mask used in bhagavata mela. Note the temple priest reading from the play text which guides the dramatic action.

D42.pct Mask of Brahma, the creator god, in krsnanattam.

D43.pct The giant demon mask in krsnanattam.

D44.pct Action shot of Krishna accompanied by his bird-vehicle confronting the giant demon in a krsnanattam production.

D45.pct Mask of a foolish demon character in krsnanattam.

D46.pct Mask of the female demoness Puthana in krsnanattam.

D47.pct Entrance of a heroic character and Ganesha, the elephant-headed god, in a rural Purulia Chhau production.

D48.pct A Purulia Chhau heroic character makes a dramatic entrance.

D49.pct Lion masks used in Purulia Chhau.

D50.pic Ravana, the demon king, being insulted by Hanuman, the monkey, during an episode of the Ramlila.

D51.pic Ravana, the demon king, sitting on his throne in a Ramlila production.

D52.pct Freshly painted Seraikella Chhau masks.

D53.pct Mask and headdress of the god Shiva in Seraikella Chhau.

D54.pct Mask of Ganesha, the elephant-headed god, in Sahi Jatra.

### PERFORMANCE SPACE

D55.pic Krishna makes his entrance in an ankiya nat performance held during the day. Devotees look on.

D56.pict A temporary prayer hall with saffron crowned hut protecting the sacred text. Such spaces are used in ankiya nat performances.

D57.pict A stage manager guides actors by consulting the play text during an ankiya nat productions. Spectators surround all the performers.

D58.jpg Spectators watching a kutiyattam temple performance.

D59.JPG Sculpture of Brahma, the creator-god, carved on the central panel on the ceiling of a kutiyattam stage.

D60.pct Wooden panels of deities carved on the stage ceiling of a kutiyattam theatre.

D61.pct Attendants hold the traditional red curtain in anticipation of the entrance of a kutiyattam character in a temple performance.

D62.pct The Haripad Temple theatre used for kutiyattam performances.

D63.pct The underside of the roof of a temple theatre.

D64.pct The delicate lath walls of a kutiyattam theatre as seen from the inside looking out.

D65.pct The stage of the Vatakumnathan Temple theatre in Trichur where kutiyattam performances are annually held.

D66.pict Plan of a kutiyattam temple theatre and stage.

D67.pict Spectators sitting on the ground watching an outdoor performance of yakshagana.

D68.pic A performance area defined by bamboo poles in a cleared rice paddy field. A yakshagana performance was given here the previous evening.

D69.pct Burning of the giant effigies of demon characters in a Ramlila production in Delhi.

D70.pct Three giant demon effigies used in a Ramlila production in Delhi.

## SCENERY

D71.jpg A typical box set in a Mumbai theatre.

D72.jpg Wings fitted into grooves backstage in a south Indian theatre.

D73.jpg Grooves as seen from below in a south Indian theatre.

D74.pic Set for Theatre Group's Hamlet. Photo by Madhu Gadakari.

D75.pct Set for a modern Sanskrit play in Mumbai. Note the elaborate painted scenery and historical costumes.

D76.jpg Painted wing and drop set for one of Manohar's National Theatre productions in Madras. Note the lighting positions and microphones.

D77.jpg Characters in front of a painted drop in a south Indian production.

D78.pic Scene from the famous Sanskrit play Shakuntala performed in Madras. Note the painted drop and profile of a deer, as well as actual tree branches in the background.