

Drama und Theater in Südasiens  
Herausgegeben von  
Heidrun Brückner

Band 11

2013  
Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

Katrin Binder

Yakṣagāna Raṅgabhūmi  
The World  
of the Yakṣagāna Stage

2013

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

The picture on the cover shows a thermacol-based kēdage mundale, made by Krishnamurthy Urala in 2012.  
Property of the author. Photographed by Julian Hughes.

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek  
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.dnb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek  
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>

For further information about our publishing program consult our website <http://www.harrassowitz-verlag.de>

© Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden 2013  
This work, including all of its parts, is protected by copyright.  
Any use beyond the limits of copyright law without the permission of the publisher is forbidden and subject to penalty. This applies particularly to reproductions, translations, microfilms and storage and processing in electronic systems.  
Printed on permanent/durable paper.  
Printing and binding: Memminger MedienCentrum AG  
Printed in Germany

ISSN 1431-4975  
ISBN 978-3-447-06900-7

## Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	IX
<i>Preface</i> .....	XI
<i>Note on transliteration and use of words from Indian languages, Indian personal and place names</i> .....	1
<i>1. Introduction</i> .....	3
1.1. Summary .....	3
1.2. <i>Yakṣagāna</i> of coastal Karnataka .....	3
<i>2. Research material, terminology and method</i> .....	6
2.1. Published research on <i>yakṣagāna</i> .....	6
2.1.1. Lines of inquiry: picking up threads and themes .....	10
2.2. Terminology and definitions .....	10
2.2.1. Genre and classification .....	11
2.2.2. The name <i>yakṣagāna</i> : problems in its history and etymology .....	17
2.2.3. »Tradition« and »traditional« .....	20
2.2.4. Art, artists and performers .....	22
2.2.5. Field, fieldwork and informants .....	23
2.3. Methodological considerations .....	24
2.3.1. Academic reference points .....	24
2.3.2. Performance knowledge .....	27
2.3.3. Implicit learning and procedural knowledge .....	30
2.3.4. Corporeality .....	34
2.3.5. Learning <i>yakṣagāna</i> myself .....	36
2.3.6. Learning and performing as research method .....	38
2.3.7. Committing experience to writing .....	47
<i>3. Performing yakṣagāna</i> .....	53
3.1. Learning processes and transmission .....	53
3.1.1. Transmission of dramatic text .....	55
3.1.2. Transmission of music .....	57
3.1.3. Transmission of dance .....	60
3.1.4. Courses at the <i>Yakṣagāna Kēndra</i> , Udupi .....	62
3.1.5. Other <i>yakṣagāna</i> training centres .....	66
3.1.6. <i>Yakṣagāna Svabōdhini</i> – » <i>yakṣagāna</i> self-taught« .....	67
3.1.7. <i>Teṅkutiṭṭu prāthamika yakṣagāna pāṭhagaḷu (pūrvarāṅga)</i> .....	69
3.1.8. Discussion: books »teaching« <i>yakṣagāna</i> and the institutionalisation of <i>yakṣagāna</i> training .....	71
3.2. <i>Cauki</i> : In the green room .....	73
3.2.1. Abbara .....	74
3.2.2. Green room <i>pūje</i> .....	75
3.2.3. The <i>yakṣagāna</i> stage .....	76
3.2.4. Make-up .....	78

3.2.5. Costume	79
3.2.6. Character-types	81
3.3. <i>Sabhālakṣaṇa</i> : Stage preliminaries	83
3.3.1. The » <i>Yakṣagāna sabhālakṣaṇa mattū prasāṅga pīṭhike</i> «	85
3.3.2. The <i>sabhālakṣaṇa</i> – a stage manual?	103
3.3.3. Performance of the <i>sabhālakṣaṇa</i> today	104
3.3.4. Interpretative challenges	111
3.3.5. »Reconstructions« of the <i>sabhālakṣaṇa</i> in <i>badagu tiṭṭu</i>	113
3.4. <i>Āṭa</i> : »Play« or The <i>yakṣagāna</i> performance	126
3.4.1. Dance	126
3.4.2. Music and rhythm	130
3.4.3. Acting	140
3.4.4. Speech	144
3.4.5. Characterisation	148
3.4.6. The portrayal of female characters	153
3.4.7. Performance conventions and staging characteristics	159
3.4.8. Oral transmission, written texts, and performance texts	170
3.4.9. The use of stage space	183
3.4.10. The use of the curtain	184
3.4.11. The curtain entrances	186
3.4.12. Set pieces of dance	197
3.4.13. The closing of a performance	201
3.5. Case studies of three performances	202
3.5.1. <i>Perḍūru mēḷa: Harśavardhana</i>	203
3.5.2. <i>Mandārti mēḷa: Mahābhārata</i>	210
3.5.3. <i>Pūrṇacandra mēḷa: Bhīṣma Vijaya</i>	217
4. <i>Yakṣagāna raṅgabhūmi</i>	222
4.1. Introduction	222
4.1.1. The <i>yakṣagāna</i> season	222
4.1.2. Context	224
4.1.3. The <i>yakṣagāna</i> scene before 1975	226
4.1.4. <i>Yakṣagāna</i> as a means of »education«	230
4.1.5. <i>Yakṣagāna</i> as a religiously meritorious act	232
4.1.6. Processes of commercialisation	235
4.2. The Performers	242
4.2.1. <i>Yakṣagāna Kalāraṅga</i>	250
4.2.2. Amateur, children and women <i>yakṣagāna</i>	252
4.3. Troupe activity	255
4.3.1. Troupes	256
4.3.2. Performance venues	261
4.3.3. Sponsors and audiences	264
4.3.4. Repertoire	272
4.3.5. Troupes, venues, occasions, <i>prasāṅgas</i> and sponsors	280

4.3.6. Tulu yakṣagāna	288
4.3.7. Additional information from the newspaper announcements	292
5. <i>Maṅgaḷam: Conclusions and reflections</i>	296
5.1. What roles does <i>yakṣagāna</i> play?	296
5.1.1. Regional identity, social status and performance	297
5.1.2. <i>Yakṣagāna</i> as an icon of cultural identity	299
5.2. The »invention of tradition«	303
5.2.1. »Refinement«, reconstruction and the rhetorics of invention	306
5.2.2. Authenticity and legitimisation	310
5.3. Conclusions	312
6. <i>Appendix: Prasaṅga literature and the history of yakṣagāna</i>	313
6.1. Introduction	313
6.2. Sources	315
6.2.1. Epic and puranic prasaṅgas	316
6.2.2. Contemporary prasaṅgas	319
6.3. An attempt at a history of <i>yakṣagāna</i>	321
6.3.1. Kannada literature and the history of <i>yakṣagāna</i>	322
6.3.2. Telugu <i>yakṣagāna(s)</i>	326
6.3.3. Historical context	329
6.3.4. Textual evidence	332
6.3.5. Regional patterns of performance	332
6.3.6. Conclusions	334
6.4. Authors and poets	335
6.5. The poetry of <i>yakṣagāna prasaṅgas</i>	344
6.5.1. Metres	344
6.5.2. Characteristic stylistic features	348
6.5.3. Narrative structure	350
6.5.4. Content	351
7. <i>The tāḷas, song texts and verses</i>	353
7.1. Introduction	353
7.2. The seven <i>tāḷas</i>	353
7.2.1. <i>kōre tāḷa</i> ( <i>tittittai maṭṭu</i> )	353
7.2.2. <i>ēka tāḷa</i>	354
7.2.3. <i>ēka tāḷa, eraḍanē kāla</i>	354
7.2.4. <i>jhampe tāḷa</i>	355
7.2.5. <i>jhampe tāḷa, eraḍanē kāla</i>	355
7.2.6. <i>rūpaka tāḷa</i>	356
7.2.7. <i>rūpaka tāḷa, eraḍanē kāla</i>	356
7.2.8. <i>aṣṭa tāḷa</i>	356
7.2.9. <i>aṣṭa tāḷa, eraḍanē kāla</i>	357
7.2.10. <i>trivude tāḷa</i>	357

7.2.11. trivṛde tāḷa, eraḍanē kāla	358
7.2.12. ādi tāḷa	358
7.3. Songs from the <i>sabhālakṣaṇa</i>	359
7.3.1. Gaṇapati stuti	359
7.3.2. Kōḍaṅgi	361
7.3.3. Bālagōpāla	365
7.3.4. Pīṭhike Strīvēṣa	384
7.3.5. Rāja vēṣa oḍḍōlaga	395
7.3.6. Śrīkrṣṇana oḍḍōlaga	397
7.3.7. Rāmalakṣmaṇara oḍḍōlaga	402
7.3.8. Pāṇḍavara oḍḍōlaga	410
7.3.9. Baṇṇa vēṣada oḍḍōlaga	419
7.3.10. Heṇṇu baṇṇada oḍḍōlaga	425
7.3.11. Kirāta oḍḍōlaga	425
7.3.12. Prayāṇa kuṇita	428
7.3.13. Yuddha kuṇita	431
8. Performers on the VCDs	435
8.1. VCD 1	435
8.2. VCD 2	435
9. <i>Sthala Purāṇas</i> in Bhatta's » <i>prasāṅga directory</i> «	436
10. Troupes	438
10.1. Northern style	438
10.2. Southern style	438
11. Glossary	440
12. Bibliography	446
12.1. Literature on <i>yakṣagāna</i> including internet entries with author	446
12.2. Secondary literature and internet pages with author	451
12.3. Online resources	456
12.3.1. Websites	456
12.3.2. Single entries without author	457
12.4. Audiovisual sources	458
12.5. Resource persons	458
<i>Indices</i>	459
Authors	459
Personal Names and Places	462
Subjects	467

### *Acknowledgements*

Many people have contributed in one way or another to my doctoral project. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks explicitly to the following people:

My parents Dagmar and Eike Fischer for their support – without them, this project would have died in the planning stages for lack of funds. I am also deeply grateful to them for kindling and nurturing my appreciation and enthusiasm for languages, arts, literature and music beyond our own cultural horizons. Thank you for embracing my Indian family with open arms.

My supervisors Prof. Dr. Klaus Butzenberger and Prof. Dr. Heidrun Brückner for bearing with me. A special thank you to Prof. Dr. H. Brückner for accepting my book into this publication series.

Martha Ashton-Sikora for sharing her memories, for her enthusiasm, encouragement, friendship and hospitality. Thank you also for the *strīvēṣa* costume. I will wear it with pride.

H. Krishna Bhat for allowing me to study at the Yakṣagāna Kēndra in Udupi, and all the teachers and students there.

M. Prabhakar Joshy for providing me with a host of insights both in person and via email.

Narayan A. Gatty for all his help and enthusiasm, and for making Sussex »yakṣagāna land« for a while.

Paul Jenkins and Sarah Thew who proof-read much of the dissertation manuscript. Isobel Jenkins and Susanne Fritz for sustaining friendship and babysitting. Jens helped in so many ways, but most of all kept me going.

I take full responsibility for the many mistakes and shortcomings that remain in this work.

This project was partially funded through a travel grant by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the Landesgraduiertenförderung Baden-Württemberg.

*To my teacher Sanjeeva Suvarna  
and my akka Vedavathi*

*Nanna gurugaḷu Sañjīva Suvarṇa  
mattu nanna akka Vēdāvati  
avarige*



## Preface

Since this study of *yakṣagāna* was submitted as a doctoral thesis, the world of the *yakṣagāna* stage has continued to be flexible and dynamic.

Some of the most important developments in the professional scene include the decision of the Kaṭīlu *mēḷa* management to pay their artists all year rather than only during the touring season. Furthermore, both Kaṭīlu and Mandārti temples each have launched a fifth troupe with the 2010/2011 season, while performances continue to be booked for the next two decades. The commercial sector has seen as steep decline. The last southern style »tent« troupe, Maṅgaḷadēvi *mēḷa*, was disbanded in October 2011. It is not lack of popularity that is forcing the owner to take this step, but shortage of singers, which is affecting both *harake* and commercial troupes in *teṅku tiṭṭu yakṣagāna*. The last *bhāgavata* of Maṅgaḷadēvi *mēḷa* was reported to have joined Mandārti *mēḷa*, a northern style *harake* troupe. The remaining artists were absorbed into the other two troupes owned by Maṅgaḷadēvi's owner. Interestingly, these are northern style troupes, too. In *baḍagu tiṭṭu*, two commercial troupes, Sāligrāma and Perdūru, remain after the unsuccessful launch of a new commercial troupe, Śrī Mahiṣamardhinī yakṣagāna maṅḍaḷi Niḷāvāra, by Perdūru *mēḷa*'s owner for the 2010/2011 season.

The Udipi Yakṣagāna Kēndra has moved into its new building, complete with a raised stage and a wing with flats for the gurus. With the beginning of the 2011 intake, they have also altered the structure of the course so as to allow boys to continue their formal education while training in *yakṣagāna*. Lessons now take place in the early morning and after school in the evening. The new course structure appears to be working to the advantage of all sides. The boys are doing very well academically. The added benefit of schooling is expected to make it more attractive for them remain in training at the Kēndra for several years rather than going into the troupes after only one year.

The doctoral thesis presented here as a book was shortlisted for the International Convention of Asia Scholars Best Dissertation in the Humanities in 2011.

Visual material illustrating costume items and ornaments, as well as the steps in putting on a basic male hero costume with *kēdage mundale* are accessible online at:

<[http://indologie.uni-wuerzburg.de/yakshagana\\_rangabhumi/welcome/](http://indologie.uni-wuerzburg.de/yakshagana_rangabhumi/welcome/)>.

*Note on transliteration and use of words from Indian languages, Indian personal and place names*

As a general rule, words from Indian languages have been transliterated according to academic standards using diacritical marks. Indian personal names have been used in the way found in the source cited or referred to. This results in some persons appearing in several different forms, e.g. M. Prabhakara Joshy, Prabhakara Joshi and Em. Prabhākara Jōṣi are all used in the text. Place names follow commonly used anglicised spellings (e.g. Mangalore). An exception are place names when they are part of troupe names. So it is Mandarti in reference to the place, but Mandārti *mēḷa*. Transliterated words are italicised. Proper names have been capitalised and not set in italics (e.g. Rāma, Kṛṣṇa). Common English forms of Indian terms have been used where appropriate (e.g. brahmin instead of *brāhmaṇa*). Names of Indian languages have not been transliterated (e.g. Kannada, Tulu).

The orthography and (or) transliteration found in works cited has been maintained in quotes. This also applies to American spelling of English words where it differs from the British English maintained in this work.

Long »e« and »o« in words from Kannada have been distinguished from their short counterparts by diacritical marks even if the word in which they appear is a loan word from Sanskrit or other languages which do not need this distinction. Additionally, I have mostly retained »Kannadised« forms of Sanskrit words and names, most frequently and obviously in the instances of those ending in -ā in Sanskrit, which is changed to -e in Kannada (e.g. *pūjā*, *sēvā* become *pūje*, *sēve*). Occasionally, the -ā ending is also used. Plural forms of Indian terms have been generated by adding -s without hyphen. Translations from Kannada are mine if not otherwise indicated.