





**A GUIDE TO KATHAKALI**

FIRST EDITION: 1980 (SAKA 1902) □ © DAVID BOLLAND, 1980 □ Rs 30.00

Published by the Director, National Book Trust, India, A-5 Green Park, New Delhi 110016 and  
printed at Sree Saraswaty Press Limited (Under Govt. of India Management), 32 A. P. C. Road, Calcutta 9.

## *Foreword*

THIS is a book about Kathakali written by a layman for laymen. It is an attempt to explain in simple language what Kathakali is all about. Above all it is intended to help anyone who is not conversant with the art, or who knows little about Hindu mythology, to enjoy a performance which is very difficult to follow unless one has some understanding of what is happening on the stage.

I saw my first Kathakali play at Calicut in 1952. It was fascinating and mesmerising, but as I had no idea what was going on, I soon became rather bored. That would have been my only experience of Kathakali had I not had the good fortune to meet Mr. K. P. S. Menon, who I later discovered was an acknowledged authority on the art and renowned author of many books on Kathakali. He persuaded me to see another performance the following night, when he took me behind the scenes to see the actors being made up, told me the story of the play and explained the action on the stage. I was enthralled.

From then until 1971, when I retired from my work in South India, I gradually became more and more interested in Kathakali. Not only did I see over two hundred plays in different parts of Kerala, but through a close personal relationship with the staff and students of the Kerala Kalamandalam at Cheruthuruthy, the P.S.V. Natyasangham at Kottakal, the F.A.C.T. Kathakali School at Udyogamandal, the R.L.V. Fine Arts School at Tripunithura, the Navarangam at Mayyanad (Quilon), the Darpana Academy at Ahmedabad and the International Centre for Kathakali at New Delhi, I got to know numerous Kathakali artistes, who were most helpful to me. To all of them I express a deep sense of gratitude.

In the preparation of this book I have consulted and received help from many people, amongst whom I must mention Mr. M. K. K. Nayar, erstwhile Chairman of the Kerala Kalamandalam, who has done so much to popularise Kathakali in overseas countries; Mr. K. Vasudevan Nambudiripad and Mr. M. P. Sankaran Namboodiri of the Kerala Kalamandalam; Mr. C. P. Damodara Menon, Mr. K. T. R. Nambiar and Mr. V. G.

Bhaskaran Nair of the Ernakulam Kathakali Club; the members of the Committee of the Calicut Kathakali Association; Professor S. Guptan Nair, Head of the Department of Malayalam at Calicut University; Dr. Narayana Menon, Director of the National Centre for the Performing Arts, Bombay; Mr. A. R. Chaudhri of the Indian Cultural Centre, Bombay; Mrs. Mrinalini Sarabhai of the Darpana Academy, Ahmedabad; Mr. C. Balakrishnan of New Delhi; Dr. and Mrs. Clifford Reis Jones of New Jersey, U.S.A., Mr. and Mrs. Graeme Vanderstoel of California; and many others. I thank them all very much.

But it is for Mr. K. P. S. Menon, who was my 'guru' for so many years, that I must reserve my greatest thanks. Not only did he explain everything to me every time we met at Kathakali performances, but even after I left India he gave me enormous assistance over the preparation of this book, reading through my many drafts and answering my numerous queries. To him I dedicate this book, and if it provides you, the reader, with the sort of background information which was provided for me by Mr. Menon, and thus makes it possible for you to understand and enjoy Kathakali, it will have served its purpose.

Having consulted so many people whilst writing this book I have (as my Indian friends will appreciate !) received many different answers to some of my queries. It has therefore been necessary to make a choice in places where there has been a conflict of opinion, but I hope that what I have written will be generally acceptable to the experts. I shall, however, be pleased to hear from any reader who considers that amendments are required in the event of a further edition being published.

It is inevitable that in a book of this nature there should be a number of technical words which are strange to the foreigner and which appear difficult to pronounce. I have endeavoured to keep these to the minimum, and they are printed in italics throughout the text, with a Glossary for ease of reference on pages 116 to 118. All such words and all Indian names have been spelt phonetically to assist over their pronunciation, but no diacritical marks have been shown as these are inclined to be intimidating to the casual reader.

There are very few books on the subject of Kathakali in the English language, and I believe that this is the first time that an attempt has been made to put into one book the outline stories of all the most popular plays. I therefore hope that this simple 'Guide to Kathakali' will be of interest not only to the layman, for whom it is mainly intended, but also to students and connoisseurs, who may possibly learn something from it too.

Malabar,  
Brent Knoll,  
Somerset,  
England.



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All the photographs in this book were taken by the author during actual performances, with the exception of plates 8, 10, 14 and 18 which were kindly provided by Mr. C. Balakrishnan.





# **PART ONE**



**kathakali  
in a  
nutshell**



## *Introduction*

IN THE SOUTH-WEST corner of India lies the State of Kerala, comprised of the erstwhile princely States of Travancore and Cochin in the South and Malabar District of Madras State in the North. It is a beautiful part of the country, with its palm-fringed beaches, bright green paddy fields, endless coconut groves, backwaters, wide rivers and lush hills. It is one of the smallest States in India, but it has the highest density of population, for within its 15,000 square miles live over 21 million people, 85% of them in small villages. 61% of the population are Hindus, 21% Christians and 18% Muslims, and over the centuries they have lived side by side in perfect harmony. They speak Malayalam, a Dravidian language which has a high percentage of words derived from Sanskrit.

From this State comes that unique art form called Kathakali. Although literally it means 'story-play' it is far more than that, and it has at various times been likened to a ballet, a miracle play, a dance-drama, an opera and a pantomime. Yet it is none of these.

## *History*

ELEMENTS of the art of Kathakali are discernible in the ancient ritual plays of Hindu temples and various dance forms that are believed to have been gradually developed in Kerala from as early as the 2nd century until the end of the 16th century. Many of its characteristics are very much older than its literature as they are a continuation of older traditions, but these did not crystallise until the 17th century when the Rajah of Kottarakkara, a small principality in central Travancore, wrote plays based on the Hindu epic Ramayana in Sanskritized Malayalam which could be understood by ordinary people; hitherto the stories had been enacted in pure Sanskrit, which was known only to the learned few.

Thus did Kathakali as an individual style of dance-drama emerge as a 'people's theatre' from the traditional dances of the past. The plays were performed by the Rajah's own company of actors not only in temples and courts but from village to village and house to house. The new art form (called '*Ramanattam*') soon became very popular all over the Malayalam-speaking area. The feudal chieftains of Malabar (as the area was then called) began to vie with one another in their efforts to produce the best Kathakali troupes, and this competition contributed to the rapid development of the art in a very short period. One important result of this development was the composition by the Rajah of Kottayam, in North Malabar, of four plays in verse based on stories from the more colourful Hindu epic, Mahabharata. These are regarded by many connoisseurs as the best examples of Kathakali literature.

Kathakali as we now see it therefore dates back to about the time that Shakespeare was writing his plays. The performances given in Malabar at that time by troupes of actors who were formed by and enjoyed the patronage of the local Rajahs and other noblemen (especially the Namboodiris, or Brahmins of Malabar) must in many ways have been similar to the Masques which were in vogue in England in the 16th and 17th centuries, in which masked performers acted and danced, developing into a form of drama with music. Since then Kathakali has passed through many stages of improvement in make-up and costume, dance forms and acting techniques.

## Training

KATHAKALI is performed by men who in their youth have undergone an intensive course of physical training and a long period of instruction in *abhinaya* (acting) and *nritta* (dancing). The former is the representation of emotions and moods by expressions of the face supplemented by *mudras*, the descriptive and symbolic movement of the hands and fingers in a particular manner to signify an object or action. The Kathakali actor uses *mudras* in place of the spoken word.

To-day there are a number of Kathakali training schools in India. The main one is located at Cheruthuruthy, 65 miles North of Cochin, where in 1930 the Malayalam poet Vallathol Narayana Menon founded the Kerala Kalamandalam (or Academy of Arts) with a view to saving Kathakali from extinction, for it was at that time a dying art. The Kalamandalam, which is now a Government institution, turns out five or six trained actors and two or three trained drummers and singers every year, after they have undergone a rigorous course which starts at the age of thirteen and goes on for six years.

At the end of each year of his training the student has to pass a proficiency test, and only those who pass it are allowed to continue the next year of intensive training. In this way only the strongest in physical fitness and acting ability eventually turn out as Kathakali actors fit to perform in public. Once an actor or musician has completed his course, he receives a Diploma and is entitled to add the word 'Kalamandalam' before his name, an honour which is much sought after by Kathakali artistes.

The physical training which a Kathakali student has to undergo is very strenuous. In the cooler months of the monsoon season he has a daily session of eye exercises and gymnastics

from 3 a.m. to 7.30 a.m. which ends up with an oil massage. This is a special feature of the training in which the teacher, holding to a bar, massages the student with his feet and toes, working gingelly oil into every joint and muscle. The process is painful, but it does create the required fitness and flexibility of body that is demanded by the incredibly exacting tradition of the Kathakali stage.

The early morning exercises are followed by the main classes in which the stories of the plays are rehearsed. These go on from 8.30 until mid-day. After a rest in the afternoon, there are a further two hours of work in the evening, including lessons in the art of make-up once a week. After the monsoon the schedule is less strenuous, but in addition to his training in Kathakali, time has to be found for the student to be instructed in Malayalam and Sanskrit literature and other subjects, for by opting to become a Kathakali actor the student is denied the opportunity of a normal education. This is a serious disadvantage to him if, at the end of his training, he is unable to get regular work as an actor, which is often the case these days. In every twelve months the student gets a holiday for only two months—April and May, when the weather is at its hottest.

## *The Characters*

KATHAKALI characters represent the mythological beings of the three worlds—the upper world of the *devas* (gods), the middle world of humans and the nether world of the *asuras* (demons). The characters are grouped under certain clearly defined types; they are not only individuals but also symbolic personalities. The striking make-up and costume are designed to transform the actors both mentally and physically into the types of characters they are to portray.

With the exception of the female characters and the gentle ones like sages and holy men, all characters have their faces painted over in bright colours: basically green for the heroes, gods and kings, red and black for those who are wicked and fierce, and various elaborate designs for the animal types.

## *The Make-up*

IN many forms of Asian drama the actors wear masks, and as it is not possible to express any movements of the face or eyes, changes in emotions have to be portrayed by movements of the mask. In Kathakali, however, the actor's make-up is thick enough to give the appearance of and provide the advantages of a powerfully painted mask, but as it is applied direct to the face it also allows full expressions of the face and eyes, thus enabling him to portray the different emotions which are an important feature of all Hindu dramas.

The colourful patterns that are painted onto the actor's face are made from various stones and powders which are mixed with water or coconut oil and ground into a fine paste in the green room prior to the start of the process of making up. The actor applies the

outline pattern and the preliminary colours to his face. He also does the finishing touches and fills in the colours, but the most elaborate part of the make-up, the *chutti* (a series of white ridges built up from the chin to either side of the cheek, marking off the face and forming a frame within which the actor can express his emotions) has to be applied by a make-up artiste. He is a man who has undergone a long period of training in this particular aspect of Kathakali and is a most important member of the Kathakali troupe. Whilst the *chutti* is being applied, the actor lies on his back and often goes to sleep.

No matter how important or trivial the occasion, or how minor the character in the play, the same meticulous care is always taken over the application of the make-up, a process which takes two or three hours to complete for each individual actor.

Just before going on to the stage, the actor places a small seed in each eye which turns the whites of his eyes red. This redness, which is not painful and lasts for about five hours, greatly enhances the expressions of the eyes which play such an important part in Kathakali acting.

The make-up falls into five main classes: *Paccha* (meaning 'green'), *Katti* ('knife'), *Tadi* ('beard'), *Kari* ('black') and *Minukku* ('radiant'). Let us look at each of these classes separately:

*Paccha* (green). These are the heroic, kingly and divine types. Their faces are painted green, and they have large black markings around their eyes and eye-brows, the sacred mark of Vishnu on their foreheads and vermilion around their mouths. They wear a *chutti*, the ridges of which are made of white paper fixed into layers of rice paste. On their heads they wear a golden crown called the *kesabharam kirita* (hereafter referred to by its more common name, *kirita*).

Within this class come the incarnations of Vishnu—Krishna and Rama—and Rama's brother Lakshmana and twin sons Lava and Kusa, also Krishna's grandson Aniruddha. They have an identical make-up, but instead of the golden *kirita* which the others wear they have a vase-shaped silver crown with tips of peacock feathers on top called the *Krishnamuti* or *muti* for short. Four other characters, Balarama, Brahma, Siva and Surya have a similar type of make-up and wear the same *kiritas* as the *paccha* characters, but their faces are painted orange-red instead of green; their make-up is called *pazhuppu* (ripe).

*Katti* (knife). These characters are arrogant and evil, but have a streak of valour in them. They wear the same *chuttis* and *kiritas* as the *paccha* characters, and their make-up is basically green, to indicate that they are high-born, but a red mark like an upturned moustache or knife of a shape popular in Kerala is painted on each cheek. They have white knobs on the tips of their noses and on their foreheads to show that they are evil.

*Tadi* (beard). There are three distinct types in this class: *Chuvanna Tadi* (red beard), *Vella Tadi* (white beard) and *Karutta Tadi* (black beard). All three wear artificial trimmed beards in their appropriate colours which just cover the neck.

The Red Beards are vicious and vile characters, whose faces are painted mainly black on the top half and red on the lower. They have an enormous white paper moustache curving up to the ears. Their circular red and white crowns are far larger than those of the *paccha* and *katti* characters, and they have much larger knobs on their noses and foreheads than the *katti* characters. The great monkey chiefs of the Ramayana—Bali and Sugriva—are included in this category because although they are not wicked, they typify the brute force of wild life.

The White Beard represents a higher type of being, and is seen mainly in the character of Hanuman, the monkey-man of divine nature. His make-up suggests that of an animal, with its complicated red, black and white patterns on the face. The patch of green on his nose tells us that he is pious and virtuous. He wears a furry coat and a wide-brimmed head-dress rather like a *topi*, which is believed to have been copied from the helmets worn by the French troops fighting in India in the 17th century.

The Black Beards are the character-types in which black predominates in make-up and costume. These are the primitive beings—the wild hunters and forest dwellers. Their faces are painted black with red and white patterns on them. They wear a flower on the tips of their noses, and on their heads they have bucket-shaped head-dresses of black, white and silver fringed with peacock feathers, called *Karimuti*.

*Kari* (black). These female characters are the demonesses—the most gruesome figures on the Kathakali stage. Their faces are jet black with dotted red and white markings on them. They wear comic false breasts and have the same bucket-shaped head-dresses and black costumes as the Black Beard characters.

*Minukku* (radiant). This class, which symbolises gentleness and high spiritual qualities, is in sharp contrast to the preceding four classes. The costume is very simple and the face is painted a warm yellow tint. The female *minukku* characters are the heroines, servants etc., and also demonesses who assume the form of beautiful maidens (called *Lalitas*) in order to entice men. The male characters are messengers, craftsmen, charioteers, sages and brahmins. The sages wear small conical head-dresses and most of the others wear turbans. The brahmins have little or no make-up and wear a cloth on their heads because a Kathakali actor's head is never uncovered.

In addition to these five main classes of make-up, there are eighteen special characters whose make-up cannot be fitted into any particular category. These include the birds Garuda and Jatayu, the swan Hamsa, the serpent Karkotaka, the man-lion Narasimha and various special elaborations of the standard patterns to meet other requirements.

## The Costume

THE COSTUME of the Kathakali actor is most decorative. The male characters (apart from some of the *minukku* characters) have an enormous 'skirt' which contains 55 yards of cloth, on top of which is a thick woollen jacket draped with lengths of cloth. This seemingly cumbersome dress is in fact functional, as the rhythmic sway of the skirt imparts a certain majesty to the movement of the actor, and its volume gives the right balance to these oversized figures. The ample space it provides allows for ease of leg movements, which are an important part of this masculine art.

The costumes of all the major characters are almost identical, but various fascinating head-dresses are worn, as we have mentioned in the preceding paragraphs. The golden *kiritas* worn by the *paccha* and *katti* characters are encrusted with gold foil, mirrors and imitation stones whilst the enormous red crowns worn by the Red Beard characters add to their ferocious appearance. Although made of light wood, this extraordinary head-dress is



extremely heavy, and adds very considerably to the weight of the costume that a Kathakali actor has to wear for hours on end in a very hot and humid climate.

## The Stage

THE KATHAKALI stage is as simple as it can be. No scenery is required as the actors describe everything by their *mudras* and facial expressions. At the front of the stage, which traditionally is an open space of ground or the forecourt of a Hindu temple, stands a large bell-metal lamp from which two cotton wicks floating in coconut oil give out a mellow and exciting light. This is as it should be, but now-a-days performances are usually given in halls with footlights, microphones and the other impedimenta of the modern stage. But the lamp, which has a religious significance, is always in the front of the stage, and all movements converge on the lamp.

Apart from a table and one or two stools, the only item of equipment used is the *tirassila*, a large rectangular curtain of bright colours, which is held up by two stage hands before the performance starts and between scenes. Whenever powerful or evil characters appear for the first time, they stand behind the curtain and slowly bring it down as they look over the top of it, emitting weird sounds. This is a traditional formality known as the *tiranokku* or curtain look, and it is accompanied by an exciting atmosphere created by the musicians and drummers.

## The Musicians

AT THE BACK of the stage on the left as seen from the audience stand the two drummers. One plays the *chenda*, a cylindrical drum held vertically and for the most part played with sticks, the other plays the *maddalam*, held horizontally and played with the hands. The left end is played with the palm and the right end with the fingers, each of which has a finger-stall made of rice and lime applied to a strip of cloth. The drummers accompany the action, supply the rhythm and emphasise the *mudras* and dance steps of the actors.

The orchestra is completed with two singers who stand on the right of the stage. The leader plays a gong and his assistant a pair of cymbals. The singers tell the story of the play, verse by verse, in Sanskritized Malayalam which the actors interpret word for word through their *mudras* and facial expressions, after which there is a period of pure dance called *kalasam*, when part of the first verse is repeated. After this the next verses are sung, and in this way the whole story of the play is told.

## The Actors

THE FACIAL expressions used by the actors express the nine principal aesthetic emotions—love, valour, pathos, wonder, derision, fear, disgust, fury and tranquillity. The *mudras* supply them with a complete language of gestures which enables them not only to interpret the lines of the story, but also to communicate with each other on matters relevant to the occasion.

In Kerala, most members of the audience of the older generation can follow the sign language of the *mudras*, but their number is dying out and very few of the younger generation have the same fanatical interest in Kathakali as their forbears. Although the *mudras* may seem complicated, even the uninitiated can understand the meaning of many of them if one knows the story being enacted, because they are so explicit. Not a word is spoken by the actors, though the evil and animal characters emit weird sounds from time to time to emphasise their self-importance.

In the 36 plays included in this book there are 209 different characters who appear in 340 different roles: and in addition there are many more in other less frequently performed plays. As every actor must be able to perform any role in any play, it needs little imagination to appreciate the vast repertoire that all the actors must learn by heart. And the musicians must be able to sing all the words of all the stories, whilst the drummers must be able to accompany the actors with set rhythms.

## The Performance

A TRADITIONAL performance in Kerala begins at 8 p.m. and goes on until dawn the following morning. It is preceded at sunset (between 6.30 and 7 p.m. all the year round) by the *kelikottu*, when the silence of the evening is broken by the sound of the two drums, the gong and cymbals, played in the open air near the place where the night's performance is to take place. This tells the local people that there is a Kathakali show on that night.

Before the first play begins, there are four preliminary music and dance demonstrations:

1. The *arangu keli*, a period of invocatory drumming, played by the *maddalam* player, standing in front of the lamp.
2. The *todayam*, which essentially is a rite performed to propitiate the gods, but is loosely translated as 'beginning'. This is the first invocatory dance performed behind the curtain by two or more junior actors with no make-up on. It is important in the training of an actor as it has all the dance patterns of Kathakali, but it is usually omitted these days.
3. The *purappadu*, meaning 'going forth', an introduction in pure dance which in its original form was intended to introduce the main character of the play being performed. Now-a-days it is usually merely an opportunity for one or two junior actors—this time in full make-up and costume—to show their dancing skill, whilst the musicians sing an appropriate song.

4. The *melappadam*, a display of drumming by the two drummers accompanied by the gong and cymbals which lasts for over half an hour and enables the drummers and the singers to demonstrate their skills. As the first part of the *melappadam* the musicians sing a *padam* (song) from the Gita Govinda, which begins with the word *Manjutara*, by which term it is sometimes known.

Only when all or some of these various demonstrations are over does the play begin. In the old days, only one play was enacted in its full form which lasted throughout the night, but now-a-days it is usual for selected scenes from two or three plays to be performed. The opening scenes are quiet and seem very slow to the uninitiated, but they are technically the most difficult to act. The love scene which appears at the beginning of most plays does not necessarily have a bearing on the story: it is intended to stress the importance of *stringara-rasa* (the sentiment of love) and to enable the actor to display his virtuosity. As the night goes on, the action gets faster and faster until the final scenes just before dawn bring the performance to an end with loud drumming and great excitement, usually with fierce fighting and the killing of demons.

At the conclusion of the final scene, when it is just getting light, one of the actors in that scene performs the *dhanasi*, a short solo dance sequence offering thanks to god for the successful completion of the night's work and asking for blessings on the audience.

In Kerala the audiences know the stories of the plays and are familiar with the make-up and costume. Their interest is in the interpretation of a role by a particular actor who they probably know well, and they watch his performance most critically for hours on end. When Kathakali is seen by Western audiences, however, the main interest is in the fascinating make-up and the overall spectacle of the performance, and less attention is paid to any individual actor.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, as we have seen, Kathakali performances were given by troupes who worked under the patronage of feudal rajahs and *Namboodiris*. Now things are very different as most of the performances are given by individual actors and musicians—past students of training schools and others conversant with the art—who may never have acted together before. No rehearsals are needed, and it says much for the firm structure of Kathakali and for the training when one realises that twenty or so men can meet in a remote village to perform three plays (which ones, they will not be told until they have arrived from their homes after a long bus journey), never having acted with each other before. Yet they are able to perform these long plays together as if they had rehearsed them together for several weeks.

In Kerala a night's performance given in the traditional manner is a most exciting experience, provided one knows what is going on. Herein lies the secret of Kathakali and the reason for writing this book. It is hoped that the outline stories of the thirty-six most popular plays which follow will enable the reader to understand what is happening on the stage, thus enabling him or her to appreciate and to enjoy the enthralling and mesmerising experience of a Kathakali performance.

# **PART TWO**



**the stories  
of  
36 plays**



## *Kathakali Plays*

The PAGES that follow contain summaries of the thirty-six plays which are generally considered to be the best examples of Kathakali literature now being performed. The plays are based mainly on stories from the Hindu epics Mahabharata and Ramayana and from the Bhagavata Purana, though often there are variations between the Kathakali text and the mythological stories on which they are based. Some such variations have been mentioned in footnotes.

The plays have been arranged under five different groups :

THE MAHABHARATA  
THE BHAGAVATA PURANA  
THE RAMAYANA  
THE STORY OF NALA  
MISCELLANEOUS STORIES

Before each group there is a summary of the main story of that group which provides a general background to the plays that follow. At the end of the summary is a list of plays which come from the group, with the names of the authors and their dates.

Each play is headed by a synopsis of the story and a list of characters who appear in it in order of their appearance on the stage. Against each character is shown in italics the type of make-up he or she wears, as described fully on pages 3 to 5. The most dominant character in the story is always played by the most experienced actor present; this is called *adyavasana* (which means literally 'beginning and ending') and is shown in capital letters.

A short scene by scene description of the action of the play is then given in simple language. This should enable the reader to follow the story of the play and understand what is happening on the stage—as indicated by the actions, facial expressions and *mudras* of the actors. The names of the characters who are on the stage at the beginning of each scene are given before the description of the action.

In most Kathakali performances some scenes which appear in the text are omitted. Only those scenes which are usually acted are given here, but some of these may also be omitted on occasions.

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## *Mahabharata*

THE MAHABHARATA is the longest epic poem ever written, having over 100,000 verses contained in eighteen books—seven times as long as the Iliad and the Odyssey put together.

The great war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, which is the main subject of the poem, is believed to have been fought on the Kurukshetra plain near Delhi thousands of years B.C., and all the action of the epic takes place in North India. The war became the source of many legends, and it was probably on the suggestion of some enlightened king that these stories were condensed into one vast epic. According to popular belief, however, the original poem was taught by the great sage Vyasa, the grandfather of the heroes of the epic, to his pupil Vaisampayana, who in turn became a great sage and narrated it during the course of an important *yaga* (sacrificial ceremony) conducted by king Janamejaya, great-grandson of Arjuna. After this it was passed on by word of mouth to countless others.

Whatever the origins may have been, there is no doubt that many of the legends are of archaic character, and every generation of poets felt obliged to embellish them with the power of their imagination. But it was not until the *Bhagavadgita* ('the song of the divine one') was added, that the Mahabharata acquired something of its present form. It is quite impossible to give any date to the poem, or to ascribe any particular authorship to it in its entirety: rather should it be regarded as a great compendium which originated in the divine source of sage Vyasa and until about the fourth century A.D. was added to by poets of different ages.

The literature of Kathakali—the *slokas* (verses) of which are usually in Sanskrit and the *padams* (songs) in a mixture of Sanskrit and Malayalam, the language of Kerala—brings to life some of the stories of the Mahabharata with intense vividness, driving home the vanity of ambition and the futility of anger and hatred. To those not familiar with the story, it will probably help if an attempt is made to unravel what can only be described as a most complicated plot. To do so, we shall first delve back into antiquity to see how Vyasa was not



only the original author of the poem but also the source from which the Pandavas and the Kauravas originated.

We begin our summary of the Mahabharata when king Santanu was hunting near the river Yamuna and fell in love with a beautiful girl called Satyavati, who belonged to the caste of fisherfolk. He went to her father, who said that he would give his daughter to the king on the condition that her son would succeed to the throne. But the king already had a son called Devavrata, who was learned and valiant.

King Santanu returned to his palace saddened, and his love for the tribal girl made him inattentive to his duties. Noticing his father's moodiness, Devavrata discovered the reason for it from the king's charioteer. He approached the girl's father and demanded him to give his daughter's hand to the king. The man was adamant: he would only give his daughter to the king if there was a solemn promise that her son would succeed to the throne. Devavrata agreed and then took an oath that he would never marry and would remain celibate for the rest of his life to ensure that no progeny of his would put forward any claim subsequently. In their admiration for this sacrifice, the gods showered flowers on him and called him 'Bhishma'—the terrible.

King Santanu married Satyavati, and they had two sons. The elder son, Chitrangada, succeeded to the throne but was killed in battle shortly afterwards. Vichitravirya, the younger son, succeeded him but died childless, leaving two young widows named Ambika and Ambalika. The law laid down that if a man died childless it was incumbent upon his nearest male relative to father a child of his widow. Satyavati appealed to Bhishma to perform this duty, but he had to refuse because of the oath of celibacy that he had taken. On Bhishma's advice, she sent for Vyasa—her son by sage Parasara—who agreed to oblige.

Satyavati tactfully prepared the widows to have a visit from her husband's half-brother one night. Ambika was horrified to see Vyasa who had a wild and unattractive appearance because he had lived the life of a hermit. She closed her eyes in disgust, and gave birth to a blind son called Dhritarashtra. The younger widow Ambalika turned pale with fright as Vyasa approached her, with the result that her son was born very pale in colour and called Pandu.

Dhritarashtra married the daughter of the king of Gandhara called Gandhari. She became pregnant, but what was delivered was a piece of formless flesh. So Satyavati again sent for Vyasa who cut the flesh into a hundred and one pieces and placed each piece into an earthen pot. In due course each piece of flesh became a healthy baby: thus Gandhari had a hundred sons, who were called the Kauravas, the eldest of whom was Duryodhana and the second Dussassana, and one daughter called Dussala.

Pandu had two wives, Kunti and Madri, but he had the great misfortune to incur the displeasure and curse of a sage that he would die the moment he touched either of his wives. He was sad because a king must have sons to keep up the line. Fortunately Kunti, in her maiden days, had so pleased the sage Durvasa that he gave her a boon in the form of a *mantra* (mystic words) which she could use five times to summon any of the gods as her lover. As soon as the sage had left, in her childish innocence and curiosity she tried out the boon and thought of Surya, the sun god, who immediately appeared and embraced her. A child was born (when a god was the lover birth was instantaneous—no need to wait for nine months!) and in her consternation she floated the infant down the Ganges. Later he became the warrior Karna who fought against the Pandavas as a friend of Duryodhana.

When Pandu was bemoaning his fate, Kunti told him of the boon which she had received from Durvasa, and he not only allowed but begged her to use the *mantra* so that the line could be kept up. She thus gave birth to Yudishthira by Yama Dharma, the god of death. (In Kathakali literature Yudishthira is called Dharmaputra—son of Yama Dharma—the name by which we shall refer to him hereafter.) By the use of the next two *mantras* she gave birth to Bhima by Vayu, the god of the wind, and to Arjuna by Indra, the king of the gods. One *mantra* remained, and this she passed on to Pandu's other wife, Madri, who summoned the Aswini *devas* by whom she had twin sons, Nakula and Sahadeva. The five sons of Pandu were known as the Pandavas.

Although Dhritarashtra was disqualified from ruling because he was born blind, he had to do so when his brother Pandu died. At that time the Kauravas and the Pandavas were young men, and Dhritarashtra had them all trained together under the great guru Drona, a famous brahmin warrior. Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas, was malicious, crafty and ambitious; his brothers were equally bad. Dharmaputra, the eldest of the Pandavas, was virtuous and wise; Bhima was mighty and unrivalled in sheer strength; Arjuna was brave, generous and kind hearted and had no rival in archery; Nakula and Sahadeva were spirited and amiable, but they did not occupy such prominent positions as their elder brothers.

From the very beginning there was rivalry between the princes which turned into bitter hatred on the part of the Kauravas when Dhritarashtra nominated Dharmaputra, who was the eldest, as his heir apparent. The jealousy of the Kauravas was so great that they finally persuaded Dhritarashtra to agree to Duryodhana's plan to send the Pandavas away to Varanavata, where Duryodhana plotted to destroy his cousins by setting fire to the palace which had been built for them and which had been made of lac and other inflammable material.<sup>1</sup>

Purochana, who received the Pandavas at Varanavata and conducted them to the palace, was a secret agent of Duryodhana. But Vidura, a wise and pious man in Duryodhana's court, knowing of the plot, sent a messenger to Dharmaputra to warn him of the danger and tell him about an underground passage through which the Pandavas could escape. The Pandavas escaped through the passage to the forest, and after their escape Bhima set fire to the palace, thereby destroying Purochana. Duryodhana thought that the Pandavas had been destroyed.

In the forest, the demon Hidimba was killed by Bhima. His sister Hidimbi fell in love with Bhima and approached him after turning herself into a beautiful maiden. Bhima spurned her, but Vyasa appeared and asked him to accept her until a son was born to her. Hidimbi produced a child called Ghatolkacha, and then departed with him. After this the Pandavas went to the village of Ekachakra where they lived in disguise as brahmins. During their stay there Bhima killed the wicked ogre Baka *rakshasa*, who had been destroying the villagers.

Whilst in Ekachakra, the Pandavas heard that Drupada, the king of the Panchala country, had proclaimed a *swayamvara* (the custom adopted by the warrior *Kshatriyas* of ancient India whereby a husband was selected by a girl from amongst those present: for this a feat of valour usually had to be performed, and the person who performed it best won the girl's hand in wedlock) at which his daughter Draupadi (sometimes called Panchali) was to select her husband from among the princely suitors.

<sup>1</sup>This story forms the basis of the Kathakali play *Baka Vadha*.

Still disguised as brahmins, the Pandavas went to the palace of Panchala where all the kings and princes were assembled. King Drupada, believing that Arjuna had perished in the lac palace with the other Pandavas, proclaimed that he would give his daughter to the prince who could hit a revolving target with his arrow, a feat which Arjuna alone could do. When all the *Kshatriya* princes had tried and failed, Arjuna came forward and requested that he might be given a chance. Drupada did not take him seriously as he appeared to be a brahmin but allowed him to have a try. Arjuna effortlessly hit the target. There was uproar amongst the princes, who attacked the brahmins. Arjuna fought them, but in so doing he had to reveal his identity—to the great delight of Draupadi. Drupada was delighted that his daughter was to be wedded to the valiant Arjuna.

In those days, brahmins lived by taking alms from householders. When Arjuna returned to his mother in the village of Ekachakra, he told her that he had made a great acquisition. Thinking that he was referring to the alms he had received, Kunti told him that he would have to share his acquisition among the five brothers. As a mother's word was inviolable law, Draupadi thus became the common wife of the five Pandava brothers, who came to an understanding between themselves that each year she would consort with one of them only.

Now that the existence of the Pandavas had become known, Dhritarashtra recalled them to his court and divided his kingdom between his own sons, the Kauravas, and the Pandavas. To his sons he gave the city of Hastinapura, and to the Pandavas he gave a place called Indraprastha on the river Yamuna (believed to be near to the present site of Delhi) where they built a new city and a marvellous palace which had floors as clear as water.<sup>2</sup> The Pandavas invited the Kauravas to see their new palace, but the visit was a disaster because of some awkward situations which faced Duryodhana and Dussassana there. When they were being shown round, they thought that there was water where there was none and raised their garments to avoid getting wet, whilst at another place they mistook a pool for a crystal floor and fell into it. These antics made Bhima and Draupadi laugh aloud, but Dharmaputra warned them of the consequences. The Kauravas returned home insulted and very jealous of the Pandavas. They determined to plot anew their destruction.

Matters were made worse when Dharmaputra announced his intention of performing the *Rajasuya* sacrifice, thus claiming himself to be sovereign. Having obtained the assistance of Krishna (the incarnation on earth of god Vishnu), Bhima set out to defeat the arrogant and wicked king Jarasandha, who had established himself over the heads of the other kings and was a serious challenge to Dharmaputra. In a duel, Bhima killed Jarasandha.<sup>3</sup>

At the august *Rajasuya* assembly, to which all celebrated kings had been invited, Dharmaputra did homage to Krishna. This angered Sisupala, the king of Chedi, so much that he protested violently. He recounted all the alleged misdeeds of Krishna, thereby arousing the anger of Arjuna, who challenged Sisupala to fight him. But before the adversaries drew their weapons Krishna intervened. He assumed his *Viswarupa* (cosmic form of Vishnu) and, drawing his divine weapon *Sudarsana*, cut off Sisupala's head. After this the rites of the *Rajasuya* were properly completed.

The performance of Dharmaputra's *Rajasuya* exacerbated the hatred and enmity of the Kauravas. At the suggestion of their father Dhritarashtra, the Pandavas came to Hastinapura.

<sup>2</sup>*Duryodhana Vadha*—Scenes 1, 2 and 3

<sup>3</sup>*Rajasuya*

There Duryodhana invited Dharmaputra to play dice with their wicked uncle Sakuni, who had told them that as the Pandavas could not be beaten in a straight fight, he would cheat them, thus getting them to forfeit their wealth and their kingdom.<sup>4</sup>

Dharmaputra accepted Duryodhana's invitation to play dice with Sakuni because it would have been unchivalrous for him—a *Kshatriya* king—to refuse a challenge. He lost each round of the game and everything he staked—his wealth, his army and his kingdom. The more he lost, the more he staked, and eventually he staked his four brothers, himself and Draupadi, and lost them all. Duryodhana then retaliated for the insults experienced at the Pandavas' palace at Indraprastha by ordering Dussassana to fetch Draupadi and make her sweep the floor of the court. Dussassana, in his exuberance, dragged her in by her hair and tried to disrobe her in full view of everyone. Draupadi prayed desperately to Krishna, and miraculously her cloth became endless. Dussassana, tired of unwinding it, collapsed. Draupadi, in her distress, cursed the Kauravas and vowed that her hair would remain dishevelled until Dussassana had been killed by Bhima, who would rip him open and drink his blood.

Dhritarashtra begged Draupadi to stop cursing, and in order to pacify her he agreed to free the Pandavas. But Duryodhana, who feared what might happen if the Pandavas were at liberty, made a last challenge, again to be decided by a game of dice; whoever lost was to be exiled to the forest for twelve years, after which they would have to spend a further year in disguise. If during the period of one year they were discovered, they would again have to go to the forest for twelve years. Dharmaputra accepted the new challenge, and again he lost. So the Pandavas were exiled.

During the period of their exile in the forest the Pandavas suffered great hardship, but they enjoyed the friendship of Krishna. Dharmaputra was told by Draupadi that she could not feed the large number of brahmins who had followed them to the forest. He took the advice of his guru, sage Dhaumya, and prayed to Surya, the sun god, who gave him a wonderful pot (the *akshaya-patra*) which would create just enough food for those present. Draupadi would eat last of all, and there would then be no more food for the day.<sup>5</sup>

Duryodhana, having heard of this acquisition through his spies, requested sage Durvasa to visit Dharmaputra one afternoon when the pot would be empty and remain so for the rest of the day (he thought that the Pandavas would be unable to feed the short-tempered sage and would thereby incur his displeasure). Accordingly, Durvasa paid him a visit with his entourage. In her anxiety, Draupadi prayed to Krishna who appeared saying that he was terribly hungry and must have something to eat. Draupadi told him that the pot was empty and that she had nothing to offer. Krishna said that she would find something in the pot, and produced a bit of leaf sticking to the side of the pot. He took it, ate it and walked away. At that moment Durvasa and his disciples, who were bathing in the forest, felt themselves filled with food and could eat no more. Durvasa wondered how this could have happened, but when he knew the truth he blessed Dharmaputra and departed.

Shortly after this event Bhima killed the ogre Kirmira, brother of Baka *rakshasa*, who opposed the entrance of the Pandavas into the Kamyaka forest. In the furious combat that ensued, Bhima and Kirmira hurled trees at each other, but the ogre was finally strangled by Bhima.

<sup>4</sup>*Duryodhana Vadha*—Scenes 4 and 5

<sup>5</sup>*Kirmira Vadha*

Sage Vyasa then came to visit the Pandavas and advised Arjuna to go to the Himalayas and perform penance to Siva, in order to obtain from him the divine arrow *pasupata*, which would be necessary to help him and his brothers in the eventual war with the Kauravas. In order to test Arjuna's prowess and faith, Siva and his consort Parvati disguised themselves as tribal hunters. The disguised Siva fought Arjuna and defeated him, but despite this Arjuna continued to worship Siva. Eventually Siva, turning into his true form, blessed Arjuna and presented him with the divine arrow.<sup>6</sup>

After this Arjuna's father, Indra, sent his charioteer to invite him to Devaloka, the abode of the gods, where a heavenly beauty called Urvasi fell in love with him. When she found that Arjuna did not respond to her advances, she became angry and pronounced a curse on him that he would become a eunuch. Whilst Arjuna was lamenting his fate, Indra consoled him by saying that the curse would only last for one year and that it would in fact be a blessing in disguise, because it would coincide with the period that he and his brothers had to spend *incognito*, thus providing a useful disguise for him. Before leaving Devaloka, Arjuna showed his prowess by fighting and killing the *asuras* Nivatakavacha and Kalakeya who were at that time attacking Devaloka.<sup>7</sup>

During Arjuna's absence in the Himalayas and in Devaloka, his brothers and Draupadi missed him very much and spent many years visiting forests and holy places. They came to Kulinda and stayed in the forest of Narayanasrama, where one day the wind wafted a beautiful flower near Draupadi, who was so charmed with its fragrance that she asked Bhima to go and find some more for her. The flower was called the *saugandhika*, and not knowing where he was going or what was in store for him, Bhima set out in the direction from which the wind had wafted it. On his journey he encountered many dangers and difficulties before meeting his step-brother, Hanuman, who was meditating in the forest. He was teased and humbled by Hanuman, who eventually told him how to find the garden of Kubera where the flower grew. Bhima collected the *saugandhika* and took it back to Draupadi.<sup>8</sup>

The Pandavas were not only sorry about Arjuna's absence, but also about their own plight. One day sage Brihadhaswa came to their hermitage and told them that they were more fortunate than King Nala of Nishada, who was also deceived in a game of dice, as his wife left him and he had no brothers to console him. (The story of Nala and his wife Damayanti is told in four Kathakali plays called *Nala Charita*.)

Having spent the ordained twelve years in the forest, and Arjuna having rejoined them, the Pandavas decided to spend the thirteenth year in the Matsya kingdom of Virata where they lived in disguise: Dharmaputra as a *sanyasi* (holy man) called Kanka, Bhima as a cook called Valala, Arjuna (fulfilling Urvasi's curse) as a eunuch who taught music and dancing called Brihannala, Nakula as a horse trainer called Damagrandi and Sahadeva as a herdsman called Tandripala. Draupadi took up service as a Sairandhri (female attendant) calling herself Malini and acted as companion to Virata's queen, Sudeshna.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup>*Kirata*

<sup>7</sup>*Kalakeya Vadha*

<sup>8</sup>*Kalyana Saugandhika*

<sup>9</sup>*Kichaka Vadha*

Draupadi's beauty attracted the attention of Kichaka, brother of the queen and commander-in-chief of Virata's forces, who conceived an uncontrollable passion for her. After much shameful behaviour he was ultimately crushed to death by Valala (Bhima).

While the Pandavas were spending their year in disguise, Duryodhana sent his spies to search for them, hoping that they would be discovered and would have to return to exile in the forest for another twelve years. One of the spies reported that someone had killed Kichaka. On hearing this, Duryodhana suspected that Bhima was the culprit and that the Pandavas were therefore in Virata's country.<sup>10</sup>

Knowing that the Pandavas would come out and fight for Virata if his kingdom was invaded, Duryodhana ordered Trigarta to go and capture Virata's cattle, and later himself launched an attack on the kingdom. Brihannala (Arjuna) drove the chariot of Virata's son Uttaran (a boastful young man) who went out to fight Duryodhana, but when Uttaran panicked, Arjuna had to reveal himself and fight the battle for him. The secret of the Pandava's disguise was thus broken, but by then the scheduled period of one year was over, and finally Arjuna fought and defeated Duryodhana. In appreciation of Arjuna's exploits, Virata offered him the hand of his daughter in marriage, but Arjuna said that his son Abhimanyu would be a more fitting husband for her.

Although the twelve years of exile and one year *incognito* were now over, the Kauravas were still unwilling to restore the kingdom to the Pandavas. So Dharmaputra requested Krishna to go to see Duryodhana and ask him for their share of the land. Despite the fact that they were entitled to half the kingdom, Dharmaputra said that in order to avoid war they would be satisfied with five villages, or five houses, or even one house for all five of them. Krishna was about to go to Duryodhana's palace when Draupadi arrived. She deplored the idea of settlement with the Kauravas and reminded Krishna of her curse on Dussassana. Krishna assured her that everything would turn out as she wished because Duryodhana would never agree to an honourable settlement with the Pandavas.<sup>11</sup>

Krishna went to Duryodhana and explained the purpose of his visit. Dhritarashtra asked Duryodhana to obey Krishna and give the Pandavas a share of the kingdom, but Duryodhana was not prepared for any agreement with the Pandavas. During the argument that followed Krishna's pleading for the Pandavas, Duryodhana became so angry that he ordered Dussassana to tie Krishna up in ropes. But Krishna showed his *Viswarupa* whereupon Duryodhana and Dussassana fainted.

As there was no longer any hope of peaceful co-existence between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, preparations for war began. War was declared. Both sides claimed Krishna as their ally because he was related to both. He offered the opponents the choice of himself unarmed or of a large army. Duryodhana chose the army and Arjuna chose his brother-in-law unarmed. Krishna offered to act as Arjuna's charioteer, and it was in this capacity that he is believed to have delivered the divine sermon of the *Bhagavadgita* when the armies were drawn up for battle on the plains of Kurukshetra.

The battle lasted eighteen days. Details of the various actions, in which the loss of life was enormous, are recounted at great length in the Mahabharata. Kathakali literature skips

<sup>10</sup> Uttara Swayamvara

<sup>11</sup> Duryodhana Vadha—Scenes 6 to 9

over this period, but in the latter part of the play *Duryodhana Vadha* it relates the story of the death of Dussassana on the fifteenth day of the battle, when he made a concentrated attack on Bhima, in whom uncontrollable anger blazed up as he thought back on what Dussassana had done to Draupadi in the open court at Hastinapura many years earlier. Given special powers by Krishna, Bhima leapt at Dussassana, hurled him down, broke his limbs and fulfilled the oath sworn by Draupadi in her anguish by tearing open Dussassana's breast with his powerful hands and drinking his blood. Finally, he anointed Draupadi's hair with the blood of Dussassana.

After this, Bhima fought Duryodhana single handed, smashing his thigh (in an action for which he was later condemned for hitting below the belt) and mortally wounding him. Vengeance was thus complete.

The Kathakali dramas take us no further than this, but the Mahabharata goes on to record that after all the Kaurava brothers had been destroyed, the three surviving members of the Kaurava forces set fire to the Pandava camp, destroyed their army and killed the Pandavas' five children. Only the Pandava brothers themselves survived. Dharmaputra and his brothers returned to Hastinapura with Draupadi, and after a reconciliation with Dhritarashtra, Dharmaputra was crowned king. He then performed the *Aswamedha* (horse) sacrifice implying that he was now king of all the kings. The Pandavas lived in peace and prosperity.

The old blind Dhritarashtra was overcome with grief after the loss of his sons, and mourned especially for Duryodhana. The feeling between him and the Pandavas was bitter, and fifteen years after Dharmaputra had ascended the throne he, with his wife Gandhari and with Kunti, the mother of the three elder Pandavas, retired to a hermitage in the forest where they all perished in a fire three years later.

The Pandavas were overcome with remorse at this disaster, and when news came that Krishna had ascended into heaven, they knew that *Dwapara Yuga* (the period in the Hindu system of chronology in which they lived) was about to end and that *Kali Yuga* would shortly begin. In order to avoid living in this *Yuga*, they renounced everything. Dharmaputra abdicated the throne in favour of Parikshit, the son of Abhimanyu and grandson of Arjuna and the only surviving member of the Pandava progeny.

Dharmaputra, his four brothers and Draupadi then set off on the long journey to the Himalayas, to the heaven of Indra on Mount Meru. It was a pilgrimage towards death, and their only companion was a dog which followed them from Hastinapura. One by one the Pandavas died by the wayside, and as they died Dharmaputra explained their deaths as punishment for some weakness. Draupadi died first because she showed more love to Arjuna than to her other husbands, then Sahadeva because he was too conceited, Nakula because he was too vain about his appearance, Arjuna because he belittled the other warriors by his boast that he would destroy all his enemies by himself, and finally Bhima whose death was a punishment for his pride in his strength.

Dharmaputra alone reached the gates of Indra's heaven, and the dog accompanied him. When invited by Indra to enter, he refused to do so before being assured that his brothers and Draupadi had found a place in heaven. He was assured that they were already there, but again he refused to enter unless his faithful dog could come with him. He was at last admitted, but was dismayed to find that his brothers and Draupadi were not there; instead Duryodhana was sitting on the throne, surrounded by the Kauravas.

Dharmaputra refused to stay and was conducted to Hell, where he saw terrifying sights and heard wailing of grief and anguish. Among the screams he distinguished the voices of his brothers and Draupadi, and he resolved to share their fate rather than to live with their enemies in heaven.

As Dharmaputra expressed this resolution, the whole scene was shown to be the effect of *maya*—an illusion which was designed to test his faith. He had endured the supreme test, and thereafter he and his brothers and Draupadi with their friends dwelt with Indra in everlasting contentment.

Nine Kathakali plays cover parts of the Mahabharata epic. The stories of these plays are given on pages 22 to 43.

\*These dates are approximate.



## 1. BAKA VADHA

By Kottayath Tampuran (1645-1716)

WHEN the Kauravas were young men, they became very jealous of their cousins the Pandavas, who were living with them in the city of Hastinapura. Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas, hatched a plot to have the Pandavas burned alive. Having persuaded his blind father Dhritarashtra to prevail upon the Pandavas to live at Varanavata, he had a fine palace built for them which was constructed of highly inflammable material. His idea was that after they had settled down in the palace, it would be set on fire whilst they were asleep. But the Pandavas were forewarned of this nefarious plan and escaped from the palace by an underground passage. Thereafter they lived for some time in a forest, and later in the village of Ekachakra, disguised as brahmins.

### Characters

Dhritarashtra, father of the Kauravas	<i>Paccha</i>
Dharmaputra, eldest of the Pandavas	<i>Paccha</i>
Purochana, secret agent of the Kauravas	<i>Minukku</i>
Asari, a messenger	<i>Minukku</i>
BHIMA, second of the Pandavas	<i>Paccha</i>
Arjuna, third of the Pandavas	<i>Paccha</i>
Kunti, mother of the Pandavas	<i>Minukku</i>
Nakula, fourth of the Pandavas	<i>Paccha</i>
Sahadeva, fifth of the Pandavas	<i>Paccha</i>
Hidimba, a <i>rakshasa</i>	<i>Katti</i>
Hidimbi, sister of Hidimba	<i>Kari</i>
Lalita (Hidimbi in disguise as a maiden)	<i>Minukku</i>
Vyasa, a sage	<i>Minukku</i>
Ghatolkacha, son of Bhima and Hidimbi*	<i>Katti</i>
Brahmin	<i>Minukku</i>
Brahmin's wife	<i>Minukku</i>
Baka, a <i>rakshasa</i>	<i>Chuvanna Tadi (Red Beard)</i>

\*Note: As Ghatolkacha is a child, this character is played by a junior actor.

- Scene* 1. **Dhritarashtra and Dharmaputra.** Dhritarashtra advises Dharmaputra that the Pandavas should go and live at Varanavata.
- Scene* 2. **Dharmaputra and Purochana.** Purochana receives Dharmaputra at the Varanavata palace and tells him what a splendid place it is.
- Scene* 3. **Asari and Dharmaputra.** Asari, a messenger sent by Vidura who is a wise and good man in the council of Duryodhana—warns Dharmaputra of Duryodhana's plan to destroy the new palace by fire. He tells him that to enable the Pandavas

to escape, he will build an underground passage which will lead them to safety. Bhima enters, and towards the end of the scene he allows Asari to measure him, as the biggest of the Pandava brothers, to ensure that the tunnel is large enough. Bhima gives presents to Asari in appreciation of his work.

- Scene* 4. **Bhima and Dharmaputra** in the palace. Bhima tells his elder brother Dharmaputra that if he is allowed to do so, he will go at once to the Kauravas and kill them. Dharmaputra begs him to be patient. At the end of the scene the other three Pandava brothers (Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva) appear, along with their mother, Kunti. They all escape through the underground passage, Bhima carrying Kunti.
- Scene* 5. **The Pandavas and Kunti.** Bhima, returning after fetching water for his mother, finds that Kunti and his brothers are asleep from fatigue after their journey. He waits, watching over them and laments their sad fate.
- Scene* 6. **Hidimba and Hidimbi.** The *rakshasa* Hidimba tells his sister, Hidimbi, that he smells human flesh. He asks her to locate the smell and bring a man to him for breakfast. Hidimbi promises to do so and leaves. She soon locates the Pandavas, but on seeing Bhima instantly falls in love with him. In order to captivate him she decides to assume the form of a beautiful maiden (Lalita).
- Scene* 7. **Lalita and Bhima.** Lalita approaches Bhima and declares her love for him. Bhima sends her away, saying that he can only marry after his elder brother is married. Hidimba, annoyed at his sister's delay, goes in search of her and finds her in an amorous mood. He is furious and attacks Bhima, who kills him.
- Scene* 8. **Vyasa and Bhima.** Sage Vyasa visits the Pandavas. He advises Bhima to accept Hidimbi until a son is born to her.
- Scene* 9. **Lalita and Bhima** in a love scene. (In due course a son was born, called Ghatolkacha.)
- Scene* 10. **Ghatolkacha and Bhima.** As soon as he is born, Ghatolkacha pays his respects to Bhima. He takes leave of his father (as they are of different races they cannot live together) but promises to appear whenever he is wished for. Bhima blesses his son and gives him permission to go away with his mother.
- Scene* 11. **Brahmin and his wife.** A brahmin and his wife are overwhelmed with grief because their only son has to be sacrificed to the ogre Baka, in accordance with an agreement reached between Baka and the villagers.
- Scene* 12. **Kunti and Brahmin.** The Pandavas are now living in the village of Ekachakra, disguised as brahmins. Kunti sees the brahmin moaning over his son. She consoles him and says that her son Bhima will go in place of his son.

*Scene 13.* **Kunti** and **Bhima**. Kunti asks Bhima to go and kill Baka, thus saving the village from destruction.

*Scene 14.* **Bhima** and **Brahmin**. Bhima meets the father of the boy who is being sacrificed. He is given a cartload of food and toddy, intended to appease Baka, and sets forth to meet the demon.

*Scene 15.* **Bhima** in Baka's forest. Bhima challenges Baka.

*Scene 16.* **Bhima** and **Baka**. Baka goes to the sacrificial mound in his forest where the brahmins are to leave their offerings, and sees Bhima eating everything himself. This infuriates Baka who pounces on Bhima, saying that by devouring him he can have both the food and the gigantic Bhima to satisfy his hunger. In the fight that ensues, Bhima kills Baka.

*Notes:* Scenes 1 and 2 are not usually performed. Scene 4 is often a continuation of Scene 3. As there are so many characters in this play, the Pandavas (Scenes 4 and 5) are usually represented by Bhima alone.

## 2. RAJASUYA

By *Karthika Tirunal* (1724-1798)

KRISHNA and his elder brother Balarama were in the Sudharma Council Hall one day when a messenger arrived with a petition from 'more than 20,000 kings' who had been imprisoned by the wicked king Jarasandha, in which they appealed to Krishna to rescue them. Just then, sage Narada entered, inviting Krishna to Indraprastha, where Dharmaputra, the eldest of the Pandava brothers, was intending to perform the *Rajasuya* ceremony. This posed a dilemma for Krishna as to whom he should attend first—the imprisoned kings or the invitation of his relative. As the *Rajasuya* could only be performed after all other kings had been vanquished, Krishna set out to discuss the problem with Dharmaputra.

Having agreed that Jarasandha was the chief and most powerful enemy, Krishna, accompanied by Bhima and Arjuna, all disguised as brahmins, proceeded to Magadha, the country ruled by Jarasandha. Bhima eventually destroyed Jarasandha, and the three then set off to attend Dharmaputra's *Rajasuya*, to which all the celebrated kings had been invited. Sisupala, one of the invited kings, disapproved of the honours which were paid to Krishna and started hurling abuses at him. In the pandemonium that followed, Arjuna—who was very angry—challenged Sisupala, but before they could come to blows, Krishna took up his divine weapon *Sudarsana* and slew Sisupala.

### Characters

Krishna, incarnation of Vishnu	<i>Paccha with muti</i>
Rugmini, Krishna's consort	<i>Minukku</i>
Satyabhama, Krishna's consort	<i>Minukku</i>
Balarama, elder brother of Krishna	<i>Pazhuppu</i>
Uddhava, counsellor of Krishna	<i>Paccha</i>
Doota, a messenger	<i>Minukku</i>
Narada, a sage	<i>Minukku</i>
Dharmaputra, eldest of the Pandavas	<i>Paccha</i>
Bhima, second of the Pandavas	<i>Paccha</i>
Arjuna, third of the Pandavas	<i>Paccha</i>
Brahmins	<i>Minukku</i>
JARASANDHA, wicked king of Magadha	<i>Katti</i>
Jarasandha's wife	<i>Minukku</i>
SISUPALA, king of Chedi	<i>Chuvanna Tadi (Red Beard)</i>

*Scene 1.* Krishna and his two consorts (Rugmini and Satyabhama) in a love scene.

*Scene 2.* Krishna, Uddhava and Balarama in the Sudharma Council Hall. Doota enters and introduces himself as the messenger of the princes who have been defeated in battle and imprisoned by Jarasandha, the mighty and arrogant king of Magadha. He narrates their woes and ends up by saying that they all hope that Krishna will come to their rescue. As soon as Doota has said this, Narada enters. He brings a

message from Dharmaputra who wishes to conduct a *yaga* known as *Rajasuya* and seeks Krishna's co-operation and presence. Krishna tells Narada that he will proceed to Indraprastha, the home of the Pandavas. He dismisses Doota, promising that he will help the princes.

*Scene 3. Krishna and Dharmaputra.* Krishna tells Dharmaputra that the *Rajasuya* can only be conducted if Jarasandha is slain. He advises Dharmaputra to let Bhima and Arjuna go with him to bring this about. Krishna, Bhima and Arjuna set out. Krishna tells Bhima and Arjuna that to ensure the success of their mission they should all assume the disguise of brahmins. This they do.

*Scene 4. Jarasandha and his wife* in a love scene.

*Scene 5. Jarasandha and the brahmins.* Jarasandha sees the brahmins approaching and suspects that they are not ordinary brahmins because he notices that they have scars on their arms caused by the use of bows and arrows. When they appear he asks them what they want. He is made to promise that any wish they express will be granted. "We want a fight" says Krishna. "This is Bhima and the other one is Arjuna." Jarasandha scoffs at this and agrees to fight Bhima. (On the stage the brahmins depart and their real counterparts appear.) In the fight that ensues, Jarasandha is killed by Bhima.

A solo dance sequence at the end of the scene tells that Jarasandha's son is crowned king, and the princes are released.

*Scene 6. Sisupala.* After his *tiranokku* (curtain look), Sisupala describes in soliloquy how, having heard of the death of his friend Jarasandha, he vows to avenge his death. Having been invited to attend Dharmaputra's *Rajasuya*, he sets out with the intention of insulting Krishna publicly.

*Scene 7. Dharmaputra and Krishna.* In the hall where the *Rajasuya* is to be performed, Dharmaputra receives Krishna and does homage to him as the chief guest. Sisupala enters, questions what right Krishna has to receive such homage, and insults him. Though Krishna does not utter a word in self-defence, many of the guests plug their ears and run out of the hall in disgust. Arjuna, who is now furious, challenges Sisupala. In the fight that ensues Krishna, assuming his divine form, takes his weapon *Sudarsana* and slays Sisupala by cutting off his head.

Scene 1 is often omitted.

*Note:* For this particular play there are two texts, one for Malabar and the other for South Kerala. The text given above is the South Kerala version. The author of the Malabar version is Elayedath Namboodiri and in that version Jarasandha is *Chuvanna Tadi* (Red Beard) and Sisupala is *Katti*.

### 3. KIRMIRA VADHA

By Kottayath Tampuran (1645-1716)

HAVING been defeated by the Kauravas in a game of dice, the Pandavas, accompanied by their wife Draupadi, were compelled to live in the forest for twelve years. By propitiating Surya, the sun god, Dharmaputra obtained a magic pot which enabled them to feed themselves and all their followers. The Pandavas were visited by Krishna, and later by sage Durvasa who had been asked to visit them by Duryodhana. Duryodhana hoped that the ill-tempered sage would be annoyed at the lack of food, but he departed happily.

Whilst in the forest, Arjuna killed the *rakshasa* Sardula, thereby incurring the wrath of the demon's wife Simhika, who tried to abduct Draupadi. Draupadi was rescued by Sahadeva who disfigured Simhika by cutting off her nose and breasts; this infuriated Simhika's brother Kirmira, who was eventually killed by Bhima after a fierce fight.

#### Characters

<b>DHARMAPUTRA</b> , eldest of the Pandavas	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>Draupadi</b> , wife of the Pandavas	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Dhaumya</b> , a sage	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Surya</b> , the sun god	<i>Pazhuppu</i>
<b>Krishna</b> , incarnation of Vishnu	<i>Paccha with muti</i>
<b>Sudarsana</b> , Krishna's divine weapon	<i>Chuvanna Tadi (Red Beard)</i>
<b>Durvasa</b> , a sage	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Sardula</b> , a <i>rakshasa</i>	<i>Chuvanna Tadi</i>
<b>Arjuna</b> , third of the Pandavas	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>Simhika</b> , a demoness, wife of Sardula	<i>Kari</i>
<b>Lalita</b> (Simhika in disguise)	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Sahadeva</b> , fifth of the Pandavas	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>Kirmira</b> , brother of Simhika	<i>Katti</i>
<b>Bhima</b> , second of the Pandavas	<i>Paccha</i>

*Scene* 1. **Draupadi** and **Dharmaputra**. Dharmaputra expresses sympathy with his wife who, though used to a life of luxury, now has to undergo hardships. Draupadi tells him that she is finding it difficult to feed the brahmins who have followed the Pandavas to the forest.

*Scene* 2. **Dhaumya** and **Dharmaputra**. Sage Dhaumya advises Dharmaputra to worship Surya, the sun god. Dharmaputra does so and Surya appears, giving him the *akshaya-patra*, a magic vessel which will provide food sufficient for all those present, but only once a day.

*Scene* 3. **Krishna** and **Dharmaputra**. Krishna visits the Pandavas in the forest, and Dharmaputra asks him whether he is not ashamed to see the brothers in their plight. Krishna, recollecting the mean trick played on the Pandavas by the

Kauravas, and determined to punish Duryodhana, summons his divine weapon *Sudarsana Chakra*. Dharmaputra pacifies Krishna, begging him to send *Sudarsana* away and to spare the Kauravas from destruction.

- Scene* 4. **Durvasa and Dharmaputra.** Sage Durvasa goes to the forest with his disciples. He meets Dharmaputra, who welcomes him.
- Scene* 5. **Draupadi.** Sage Durvasa has arrived at a most awkward moment, as everyone has had their food and there is nothing left to give him and his companions. Draupadi prays to Krishna in her predicament.
- Scene* 6. **Draupadi and Krishna.** Krishna appears and asks Draupadi to bring the *akshya-patra* vessel to him. A bit of leaf is sticking to the vessel, which Krishna eats with satisfaction. (At this moment Durvasa and his disciples, who are bathing in the river, feel as if they have had a full meal.)
- Scene* 7. **Durvasa and Dharmaputra.** Durvasa tells Dharmaputra that although he and his disciples asked for food, they now feel well fed and cannot eat anything. He blesses Dharmaputra and departs in a good humour.
- Scene* 8. **Arjuna and Sardula.** Arjuna, attacked by the demon Sardula, kills him.
- Scene* 9. **Simhika.** Simhika, wife of Sardula, bewails the death of her husband and vows to take revenge on the Pandavas by abducting Draupadi. (Her appearance is followed by the traditional antics of a *Kari* character.)
- Scene* 10. **Draupadi and Lalita.** Seeking an opportunity when all the Pandavas are away and Draupadi is alone in the forest, Simhika approaches her after assuming the form of a beautiful damsel (Lalita) and asks who she is and why she is in the forest. Draupadi tells Lalita who she is and that her husbands are away. Lalita invites her to come to the thick of the jungle where there is a shrine. When they reach the jungle, Draupadi becomes frightened and says that she wants to go home. Simhika assumes her true form and carries Draupadi away.
- Scene* 11. **Sahadeva, Simhika and Draupadi.** Sahadeva, the youngest of the Pandava brothers, intercepts Simhika, cuts off her nose and breasts, and rescues Draupadi.
- Scene* 12. **Kirmira and Simhika.** This scene begins with Kirmira's *tiranokku* (curtain look). Simhika goes to her brother, Kirmira, and shows him her wounds. He pacifies her and promises to punish the Pandavas.
- Scene* 13. **Kirmira and Bhima.** Kirmira challenges the Pandavas. Bhima takes up the challenge, and, in the encounter with Kirmira, kills him.

## 4. KIRATA

*By Irrattakulangara Rama Varier (1801-1845)*

DURING the period that they were in exile in the forest, the Pandava brothers and Draupadi suffered many hardships. Early in their stay there Vyasa, the great sage, came to visit them and advised Arjuna to go to the Himalayas and perform penance to Siva in order to secure from him the divine arrow *pasupata* which would be necessary to help him in the forthcoming war with the Kauravas.

Siva and his consort Parvati disguised themselves as tribal hunters in order to test Arjuna's prowess and faith. He was defeated by them, but nevertheless continued to worship Siva who, turning into his true form, blessed Arjuna and presented him with the divine arrow.

### Characters

Arjuna, third of the Pandavas	<i>Paccha</i>
KIRATA, a hunter (Siva in disguise)	<i>Karutta Tadi</i> (Black Beard)
Bhutas (imps)	<i>Special</i>
Kiratastree (Parvati in disguise)	<i>Special</i>
Siva, a god	<i>Pazhuppu</i>
Parvati, wife of Siva	<i>Minukku</i>

*Note:* Kirata and Kiratastree are, in Kathakali parlance, also known as Kattalan and Kattalathi.

*Scene 1.* **Arjuna.** Arjuna sets out towards the Himalayas to do penance to propitiate god Siva. He sees Mount Kailasa, the home of Siva, and is enraptured by it. He is soon engrossed in deep meditation.

*Scene 2.* **Kirata, Kiratastree and Bhutas.** Siva is pleased with Arjuna's *tapas* (meditation combined with self-mortification carried out with the object of propitiating a god in order to obtain a boon from him) but he wants to test him before granting him his wish. Having disguised himself as a hunter (Kirata) he sets out with his wife Parvati, disguised as a huntress, accompanied by a few impish *bhutas*. After they have admired each other's disguise, the hunter tells the huntress of his plan to fight Arjuna in order to test his skill and his valour. The huntress objects, and wants Arjuna to be granted his wish without delay. The hunter then tells her that he has a purpose in his plan to fight Arjuna—to subdue his pride. She agrees to the idea, and they proceed to the place where Arjuna is doing *tapas*.

*Scene 3.* **Arjuna, Kirata and Kiratastree.** Arjuna is engrossed in penance. A boar, which is in fact a demon deputed by Duryodhana (the eldest of the Kauravas) to kill Arjuna, attacks him, but at that moment the hunter and huntress appear on the scene. Arjuna sees the boar coming and shoots an arrow at it: the hunter also shoots an arrow at the same time. The boar is killed, but the hunter is provided with an opportunity to pick a quarrel with Arjuna for shooting the animal he was after.



The wordy duel soon leads to a fight with bows and arrows. The huntress tries to intervene and stop the fight, but when Arjuna does not heed her words she curses him that his arrows will be turned into flowers. Despite this, Arjuna still persists, so the huntress curses him that there be no more arrows in his quiver. Seeing that his quiver is empty, Arjuna tries to beat up the hunter with his bow, but the goddess Ganga (who resides in Siva's hair) snatches the bow away from him. Frustrated, Arjuna tries to fight the hunter with his bare fists, but the hunter easily overcomes him and he is thrown to the ground.

The hunter and his wife, pleased with Arjuna's performance, move away. Arjuna slowly recovers from the blows and begins to worship Siva again, offering whatever flowers and leaves he can find. Suddenly he discovers that the hunter's hair was decorated with the very flowers with which he was then worshipping Siva, and he realises with whom he has been fighting. He asks the hunter to pardon him.

The hunter and huntress disappear, and in their place stand Siva and Parvati. Siva presents Arjuna with the divine arrow *pasupata*. Parvati hands to Arjuna the bow which goddess Ganga had taken away in the fight. They both bless him.

*Note:* *Pasupata* was not a material arrow. It came under the class of *mantrastras* where the user who had acquired it by *tapas* simply used his will-power and meditated on the lord of the weapon with a *mantra* (incantation) whereupon the enemy was destroyed. In the Mahabharata battles many such divine weapons were used—*Narayanastra*, *Brahmastra*, *Varunastra*, *Nagastra*, etc. If the person against whom the weapon was used was capable, he might use a counteracting weapon, but no weapon on earth could withstand *Brahmastra*.

## 5. KALAKEYA VADHA

By Kottayath Tampuran (1645-1716)

SHORTLY after Arjuna had obtained the divine arrow *pasupata* from Siva, Indra—the king of the *devas* (gods)—sent his charioteer Matali to invite his son Arjuna to visit him in Devaloka (Paradise). After meeting Indra and Indrani and paying his respects to them, Arjuna fought and killed the *asuras* (demons) Vajraketu and Vajrabahu who were carrying off maidens from Devaloka.

Urvasi, a famous beauty of Devaloka, seeing Arjuna, fell in love with him. Because he did not reciprocate her advances, she inflicted a curse on him that he would become a eunuch. When Arjuna was lamenting his fate, Indra appeared and consoled him by modifying the curse and telling him that it would only last for the one year in which the Pandavas had to live *incognito*. This, he said, would be a blessing in disguise as it would enable him to conceal his identity during that period, after which he would return to his normal form.

At the request of Indra, Arjuna killed two more *asuras*—Nivatakavacha (who lived under the sea) and Kalakeya—who had been attacking Devaloka.

### Characters

Indra, king of the gods	<i>Paccha</i>
Matali, Indra's charioteer	<i>Minukku</i>
ARJUNA, third of the Pandavas	<i>Paccha</i>
Indrani, wife of Indra	<i>Minukku</i>
Vajraketu, an <i>asura</i>	<i>Katti</i>
Vajrabahu, an <i>asura</i>	<i>Chuvanna Tadi</i> (Red Beard)
Urvasi, a heavenly beauty	<i>Minukku</i>
Urvasi's friend	<i>Minukku</i>
Nivatakavacha, an <i>asura</i>	<i>Katti</i>
Bhiru, a messenger	<i>Special</i>
Kalakeya, an <i>asura</i>	<i>Chuvanna Tadi</i>
Nandikeswara, gate-keeper of Siva	<i>Vella Tadi</i> (White Beard)

*Scene* 1. **Indra and Matali.** Indra asks his charioteer Matali to bring Arjuna to Devaloka.

*Scene* 2. **Matali and Arjuna.** Matali appears before Arjuna and conveys Indra's message to him.

*Scene* 3. **Arjuna and Indra.** Arjuna arrives at Devaloka and meets Indra.

*Scene* 4. **Arjuna and Indrani.** Arjuna meets Indrani, queen of Devaloka, to pay his respects to her. She welcomes him and enquires about the welfare of his family. (After Indrani leaves, there is a long passage of solo acting *swargavarnana* in which Arjuna describes the sights of Devaloka.)

- Scene* 5. **Arjuna, Vajraketu and Vajrabahu.** Arjuna attacks and kills the two *asuras* who have been carrying 'off maidens from Devaloka.
- Scene* 6. **Urvasi and a friend.** Urvasi, a heavenly beauty, having fallen in love with Arjuna, asks her friend how she can obtain her desire. Her companion advises her to seek Arjuna and tell him of her love.
- Scene* 7. **Urvasi and Arjuna.** Urvasi, as advised by her friend, approaches Arjuna and tells him of her passion for him, but Arjuna does not accept her. She gets angry with him and curses him that he will become a eunuch.
- Scene* 8. **Arjuna and Indra.** Arjuna is greatly distressed. He tells Indra what has happened. Indra consoles him, saying that the curse will be a blessing in disguise, for the Pandavas have come to the end of their twelve years in the forest and their one year of life *incognito* is about to begin. He says that he will modify the curse so that it will only last for one year of Arjuna's choice, and that his changed appearance will be helpful as nobody will recognise him; after the one year he will be a normal man again. Indra then instructs Arjuna in many *mantrastras* (divine weapons) and blesses him, requesting him to kill two *asuras* who have been attacking Devaloka—Nivatakavacha, a demon who lives under the sea, and Kalakeya.
- Scene* 9. **Arjuna and Nivatakavacha.** Arjuna challenges Nivatakavacha to come out and fight with him. The demon appears, and Arjuna kills him.
- Scene* 10. **Bhiru and Kalakeya.** Bhiru, a messenger, tells Kalakeya that Arjuna has killed Nivatakavacha.
- Scene* 11. **Kalakeya and Arjuna.** Kalakeya challenges Arjuna. During the fight that ensues, Siva sends Nandikesawara to assist Arjuna, who has been disabled by Kalakeya's magic weapons. Eventually Kalakeya is killed.

*Note:* This play is in two parts, the first part of which ends with Scene 4. Scene 5 is usually omitted.

In the second part of the play a different actor (of a lower grade) usually takes the role of Arjuna in Scenes 7, 8, 9 and 11.

From a technical point of view this play is very important. Scenes 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 have a traditional choreography which requires years of practice to master. In Scene 4 Arjuna does *Ashtakalagam*—a long dance sequence.

## 6. KALYANA SAUGANDHIKA

By *Kottayath Tampuran* (1645-1716)

WHILST Arjuna was away in the Himalayas in search of the divine arrow, his brothers and Draupadi missed him very much and spent a long time visiting holy places. Eventually they came to Kulinda, the kingdom of Subahu in the Himalayas, and visited a charming forest called Narayanasrama, where they stayed. One day the wind wafted a beautiful flower near Draupadi, who was so enchanted by its fragrance that she asked Bhima to find some more flowers of the same sort for her.

Bhima knew only that the flower came from the North, as the wind was blowing from that direction. Having no idea where he was going to, he set off in search of the flower, which was known as the saugandhika. He encountered many difficulties on his journey and eventually came to the forest where his step-brother, Hanuman, was dwelling. Hanuman recognised Bhima and wanted to help him, but he felt that he should first be humbled. He therefore transformed himself into a decrepit old monkey and lay in Bhima's path. After teasing him for some time, he told him how to find the flower. Eventually Bhima reached the garden of Kubera, where the flower grew, and brought it back to Draupadi.

### Characters

<b>Dharmaputra</b> , eldest of the Pandavas	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>BHIMA</b> , second of the Pandavas	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>Draupadi</b> , wife of the Pandavas	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>HANUMAN</b> , valorous and wise monkey chief	<i>Vella Tadi</i> (White Beard)
<b>Krodhavasa</b> , a <i>rakshasa</i>	<i>Chuvanna Tadi</i> (Red Beard)

*Scene 1.* **Bhima** and **Dharmaputra**. Bhima is impatient and tells Dharmaputra that he wants permission to challenge and kill the Kauravas. Dharmaputra pacifies him, telling him that he must abide by the agreement to spend twelve years of forest life and one year of life in disguise.

(This scene is usually referred to as *Souryagunam*—the first words of Bhima's *padam*, or song.)

*Scene 2.* **Bhima** and **Draupadi**. Bhima is sitting in the Narayanasrama forest with his wife Draupadi. Whilst they are chatting amorously a flower drops from the skies and Draupadi picks it up. It is so beautiful, and has such an exquisite fragrance, that she asks Bhima to fetch her some more flowers of the same sort.

The saugandhika flowers grow in the garden of Kubera, and the garden is out of bounds to human beings. But Bhima does not know this and, full of confidence in his strength and power to overcome all obstacles, he sets off to find the flowers. As he strides through the forest he describes the mountains which he climbs, his awe at the sight of the forest, and the wild animals he encounters on his

way: an elephant being attacked by a python and then by a lion, and such other sights.

**Scene 3. Hanuman in the forest.** (Hanuman, the monkey-man of godlike nature, and Bhima were step-brothers, both being sons of Vayu, the god of the wind. After the coronation of Rama and Sita, Hanuman retired to the seclusion of a reserved forest to spend his days in meditation on his lord, Rama, the gods having conferred immortality on him.)

Hanuman is disturbed by the violence of Bhima's approach, and wonders what the cause can be. By his second sight he knows that all the ado is being created by his step-brother, Bhima. He wants to be helpful, but before revealing who he is, Bhima must be humbled. So Hanuman transforms himself into an aged and decrepit old monkey, and lies in Bhima's path.

Bhima is annoyed and irritated to find a creature obstructing his path. He cannot climb over the monkey because he knows that he has a half-brother who is a high-born monkey, so he tells it to get out of his way. But the monkey merely retorts "I am so infirm that I cannot move my limbs, but if you wish you may move my tail to one side with your club and pass on." Impatient to proceed, Bhima tries to move the monkey's tail, but he finds that his club is firmly fixed in the powerful grip of the tail. All his efforts to extricate it prove futile. He has never known defeat before, and feels sure that the monkey-shaped being before him must be a god: he therefore penitently asks him to reveal himself. The decrepit old monkey leaps to life and says "I am Hanuman, your brother." Bhima apologises for his arrogance and asks Hanuman to show him the divine form that he assumed when he made his great leap to Lanka in search of Sita. Hanuman complies with this request and then tells Bhima how to find Kubera's garden and obtain the flowers he is looking for. He returns Bhima's club to him with his blessings.

**Scene 4. Bhima and Krodhavasa.** As he approaches the garden of Kubera, Bhima encounters the *rakshasa* Krodhavasa, who guards the lake where the flowers grow. After fighting and killing Krodhavasa Bhima collects the flowers.

**Scene 5. Bhima and Draupadi.** Bhima, having collected the flowers, takes them to Draupadi, thus satisfying her desire.

*Note:* Scene 1 is important as it has a passage of dance and acting (the part of Bhima) which is very difficult to perform, but which richly displays the heroic mood (*veera-rasa*). This scene is usually performed by a junior, the leading actor taking the part of Bhima appearing in Scene 2.

Scenes 4 and 5 are not usually acted, though Scene 5 is a fitting end to the story.

In the full text of the play there are 6 scenes between Scenes 1 and 2. These relate to the arrival of sage Romesa and Krishna and an encounter with a demon Jatasura whom Bhima kills. These are not usually performed.

## 7. KICHAKA VADHA

By Irayimman Tampi (1783-1856)

HAVING spent the ordained twelve years of exile in the forest, the Pandavas had to live for one year in disguise and decided to spend this in the city of Viratapuri in the Matsya kingdom ruled by Virata, a good and virtuous man. If they were discovered by Duryodhana's spies before the expiry of the year, they would have to spend a further twelve years in the forest, so they went to Virata in disguise to seek employment under him.

Dharmaputra assumed the garb of a *sanyasi* (one who renounces the world) and called himself Kanka; Bhima worked as a cook and assumed the name Valala; Arjuna, taking advantage of Urvashi's curse (see *Kalakeya Vadha*, Scene 7) appeared as a eunuch, teaching music in Virata's court with the name Brihannala; Nakula looked after the king's horses and Sahadeva tended his cows, calling themselves Damagrandi and Tandripala respectively; Draupadi worked as a *sairandhri* (attendant) in the court of Virata's queen, Sudeshna, and acted as her companion under the name Malini.

The queen's brother, Kichaka, who was the commander-in-chief of Virata's forces, was so smitten with Malini's beauty that he conceived an uncontrollable passion for her. His disgraceful behaviour towards her so enraged Bhima that he crushed Kichaka to death. Ultimately Bhima also killed his brother, Upakichaka.

### Characters

<b>Virata</b> , king of Matsya	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>Kanka</b> (Dharmaputra in disguise)	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Valala</b> (Bhima in disguise)	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Brihannala</b> (Arjuna in disguise)	<i>Paccha*</i>
<b>Damagrandi</b> (Nakula in disguise)	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Tandripala</b> (Sahadeva in disguise)	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Malini</b> (Draupadi in disguise)	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Sudeshna</b> , wife of Virata	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Mantri</b> , Virata's minister	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Malla</b> , a wrestler	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>KICHAKA</b> , brother of Sudeshna	<i>Katti</i>
<b>Madolkata</b> , a <i>rakshasa</i>	<i>Karutta Tadi</i> (Black Beard)
<b>Bhiru</b> , keeper of the dance hall	<i>Special</i>
<b>Upakichaka</b> , brother of Kichaka	<i>Chuvanna Tadi</i> (Red Beard)

*Note* : \*Brihannala's make-up should be *paccha* with female breasts—as it is in the next play *Uttara Swayamvara*—but as he has little to do in this play his make-up is sometimes *minukku*.

*Scene* 1. **Kanka and Virata.** Kanka comes to Virata to seek his protection. Virata befriends him.

- Scene* 2. **Virata and Pandavas.** Valala, Brihannala, Damagrandi and Tandripala appear, all seeking employment in Virata's court. The king takes them into his service.
- Scene* 3. **Sudeshna and Malini.** Malini approaches queen Sudeshna, Virata's consort, who asks her who she is. She pleads to be taken as *sairandhri*, and the queen agrees to employ her as her companion.
- Scene* 4. **Mantri, Virata and Kanka.** An important festival is taking place at Viratapuri. Virata's minister (Mantri) tells the king that a famous wrestler called Malla has come to the city, but nobody has come forward to challenge him. Kanka says that Valala can be depended on to beat him.
- Scene* 5. **Valala and Malla.** Valala has a fight with the wrestler Malla and defeats him.
- Scene* 6. **Kichaka and Malini.** The queen's brother, Kichaka, a powerful and lustful man, sees Malini in the garden and makes overtures to her. She is annoyed because a strange man dares to cast lustful eyes upon her, but Kichaka is in no mood to go away. He makes his wishes clear to Malini, who gets angry and tells him to refrain from his evil desires, reminding him of the fate of Ravana, who attempted to seduce Rama's consort, Sita. She tells Kichaka that she has five husbands who are very powerful, and if they happen to know of his intentions they will kill him. So saying, Malini slips away from Kichaka.
- Scene* 7. **Kichaka and Sudeshna.** Kichaka is disappointed, and without the slightest sense of shame approaches his sister, queen Sudeshna, asking her to send Malini to him somehow. Sudeshna warns him of the consequences if he continues his disgraceful acts, and tells him that Malini's five husbands are sure to kill him. After repeated appeals by Kichaka, Sudeshna agrees to send Malini to him on some pretext.
- Scene* 8. **Sudeshna and Malini.** Sudeshna summons Malini and tells her to fetch some rice and wine from Kichaka's house. Malini is shocked to hear this command and begs the queen several times not to send her to Kichaka. Sudeshna gets angry and insists on Malini obeying her orders. Malini proceeds to Kichaka's house, with the faith that Krishna will protect her from harm.
- Scene* 9. **Kichaka and Malini.** Kichaka is delighted to see Malini and tries to seduce her. Failing in his attempts, he starts to use physical force to fulfil his desires. Madolkata, a *rakshasa* who has been sent by the sun god to protect Malini, intervenes and in the scuffle which follows Malini escapes.
- Scene* 10. **Malini and Valala.** Malini tells her husband Valala what has happened. He consoles her and promises to kill Kichaka. To bring this about they decide that she should invite him to come at night to a secluded spot in the palace dance hall, where she will be waiting for him.

- Scene 11.* **Kichaka and Valala.** Kichaka comes to the dance hall after dark, overjoyed with the idea of seducing Malini. At the appointed place he finds the form of someone lying there. Thinking that it is Malini, he addresses loving words to her and gently lays his hands on her. But it is not the form of Malini that he touches: it is the iron form of Valala, who strangles him to death.
- Scene 12.* **Bhiru and Upakichaka.** The keeper of the dance hall (Bhiru) informs Upakichaka that someone has killed his brother, Kichaka.
- Scene 13.* **Upakichaka and Malini.** Upakichaka, suspecting that Malini is the cause of his brother's death, drags her to the funeral pyre. Valala rescues her and kills Upakichaka.

*Note :* Scenes 1, 2, 4 and 5 are not usually performed. Madolkata in Scene 9 is often omitted.



## 8. UTTARA SWAYAMVARA

By *Irayimman Tampi* (1783-1856)

WHILST the Pandavas were still in the Matsya kingdom of Virata, where they were spending one year in disguise, Duryodhana sent his spies to discover their hiding place, for if they were discovered they would again have to return to the forest for another twelve years. One of the spies reported that during his wanderings he had heard that Kichaka had been killed. This aroused suspicion in the mind of Duryodhana, who felt that the only person who could have the physical strength to do this was Bhima, and therefore the Pandavas must be hiding in the Matsya kingdom.

Knowing that the Pandavas would come out and fight for Virata if his kingdom was invaded, Duryodhana instructed Trigarta to go and capture Virata's cattle. In the battle that ensued Virata was defeated and made prisoner, but Valala (Bhima in disguise) rescued him and drove off Trigarta. While Valala was fighting Trigarta, another attack on Virata's kingdom was launched by Duryodhana himself. Virata's son, Uttaran, boasted to his wives that he could easily recapture the cattle if someone would drive his chariot, so Malini (Draupadi) knowing that Uttaran was really a coward persuaded Brihannala (Arjuna) to act as the prince's charioteer. When faced with the foe, Uttaran was completely demoralised, but Arjuna revealed his identity and fought the battle for him. The secret of the Pandavas' disguise was thus broken, but by then the period of one year was over. Finally, Arjuna fought and defeated Duryodhana.

### Characters

<b>DURYODHANA</b> , eldest of the Kauravas	<i>Katti</i>
<b>Bhanumati</b> , wife of Duryodhana	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Doota</b> , a messenger	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Bhishma</b> , counsellor to the Kauravas	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Trigarta</b> , a vassal of Duryodhana	<i>Chuvanna Tadi</i> (Red Beard)
<b>Virata</b> , king of Matsya	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>Valala</b> , Bhima in disguise	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Kanka</b> , Dharmaputra in disguise	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Uttaran</b> , son of Virata	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>Uttaran's wives</b>	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Gopalakas</b> (cowherds)	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Malini</b> , Draupadi in disguise	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>BRIHANNALA</b> , Arjuna in disguise	<i>Paccha</i> (with female breasts)
<b>Karna</b> , friend of Duryodhana	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>Kripa</b> , adviser to Duryodhana	<i>Minukku</i>

*Scene 1.* **Duryodhana** and **Bhanumati** in a love scene

*Scene 2.* **Duryodhana**, **Doota** and **Bhishma**. Doota, a messenger who has been acting as a

spy, comes to Duryodhana's court and reports that Kichaka has been killed. The news makes Duryodhana suspect that the Pandavas are living in the kingdom of Virata. Bhishma agrees, and Duryodhana decides to capture Virata's cattle, as he is sure that the disguised Pandavas will come out to protect Virata and the king's property.

- Scene 3.* **Trigartha, Duryodhana, Virata and Valala.** Trigartha is deputed by Duryodhana to capture the cattle, and this he does, As he leads them away Virata opposes him, but Trigartha easily takes him prisoner. Valala comes to the rescue and takes Trigartha prisoner, but fearing the consequences if they are discovered by the Kauravas, releases him.
- Scene 4.* **Uttaran and his wives.** This scene opens with a love song (*sringara-padam*) after which the women dance a *kummi* to please Uttaran. The cowherds (Gopalakas) enter, announcing that Virata's cattle have again been driven away by Duryodhana's men, and urge Uttaran to recover them. Uttaran boasts that he is as clever and valiant as the great Arjuna, and will have no difficulty in recapturing the cattle, provided that he has a proper charioteer.
- Scene 5.* **Malini and Brihannala.** Malini wants her husband Brihannala to teach a lesson to the boastful young prince Uttaran. Brihannala tells her that she may inform Uttaran that he will drive the chariot.
- Scene 6.* **Uttaran and Brihannala.** Brihannala assures Uttaran that he will drive his chariot. When they arrive at the battlefield Uttaran, who is really a coward, is terrified and wants to run away. After his attempts to instil some courage into the young man have failed, Brihannala reveals his identity to Uttaran and tells him that he will do the fighting if Uttaran will drive the chariot. Uttaran agrees. Brihannala spies Duryodhana and challenges him to a fight, calling the Kauravas cattle thieves.
- Scene 7.* **Duryodhana, Karna, Bhishma and Kripa.** Duryodhana is with his friend Karna and his advisers, Bhishma and Kripa. Karna, hearing the twang of Arjuna's mighty bow, tells Duryodhana that the Pandavas have now come out into the open. He boasts that he will destroy Arjuna in no time. Kripa, hearing these vain boasts, scoffs at Karna, recounting all the valorous deeds of Arjuna. Karna and Duryodhana are very angry with Kripa for praising the enemy. There is about to be a serious quarrel, but this is averted by Bhishma, who advises Duryodhana that he should first of all go out and fight Arjuna.
- Scene 8.* **Brihannala and Duryodhana.** The fight between the adversaries takes place. By using a divine weapon called *mohanastra*, Brihannala makes Duryodhana and the others become unconscious. He then departs with Uttaran.

*Note :* In appreciation of Arjuna's exploits, Virata offered him the hand of his daughter, Uttara, in marriage. But Arjuna declined the offer, saying that as Uttara was his own pupil he could not marry her: he thought that she would be a more fitting bride for his son, Abhimanyu.

The marriage of Uttara to Abhimanyu (which is in fact the title of this play) is sometimes performed, but usually the play ends with the defeat of Duryodhana.

## 9. DURYODHANA VADHA

By *Vayaskara Aryan Narayanan Moosad* (1841-1902)

THIS play tells the story of two of the most important events of the Mahabharata—the banishment of the Pandavas after their defeat by the Kauravas in a game of dice, and their triumphant victory over the Kauravas many years later on the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

The Kauravas' hatred for their cousins, which became intense when Dharmaputra conducted the *Rajasuya* sacrifice, reached a climax when Duryodhana and his brother were laughed at by Bhima during their visit to the Pandavas' palace at Indraprastha. The Kauravas insidiously prevailed upon Dharmaputra to gamble in a game of dice, his opponent being their wicked uncle Sakuni, who had loaded the dice. In the course of the game Dharmaputra lost everything—his army, his palace, his wealth and his kingdom. He then staked his brothers one by one and finally his wife and himself. Again he lost, so the Pandavas all became slaves to Duryodhana.

Duryodhana ordered his younger brother Dussassana to fetch Draupadi into the open court and disrobe her, but he did not succeed because she prayed to Krishna and her cloth became endless. For this insult Draupadi cursed the Kauravas and would only stop cursing when Dhritarashtra, the blind father of the Kauravas, agreed to free the Pandavas. At Dussassana's request another game of dice was played at which whoever lost was to be banished to the forest for twelve years, after which they would have to spend one year in disguise: if they were recognised during that year, they would have to go back to the forest for another twelve years. The Pandavas again lost the game, and were exiled.

After the completion of the thirteen years, the Kauravas were still unwilling to restore their share of the kingdom to the Pandavas. Krishna pleaded with them in vain. Finally a war which lasted for 18 days was fought at Kurukshetra. To enable Bhima to fulfil the vow made by Draupadi at the time she was insulted by Dussassana—that he would avenge the insult by drinking Dussassana's blood—Krishna gave him special powers. After a fierce fight, Bhima floored Dussassana and drank his blood. He then summoned Draupadi to the arena and wiped her hair with his blood-stained hands. (When Dussassana dragged her into the Kaurava court she had vowed that her hair would remain dishevelled until the insult was avenged.)

### Characters

**DURYODHANA**, eldest of the Kauravas  
**Bhanumati**, wife of Duryodhana  
**Dussassana**, second of the Kauravas  
**Bhima**, second of the Pandavas  
**Draupadi**, wife of the Pandavas  
**Sakuni**, wicked uncle of the Kauravas  
**Dharmaputra**, eldest of the Pandavas  
**Arjuna**, third of the Pandavas  
**Nakula**, fourth of the Pandavas

*Katti*  
*Minukku*  
*Chuvanna Tadi* (Red Beard)  
*Paccha*  
*Minukku*  
*Special*  
*Paccha*  
*Paccha*  
*Paccha*

<b>Sahadeva</b> , fifth of the Pandavas	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>Dhritarashtra</b> , father of the Kauravas	<i>Paccha*</i>
<b>Bhishma</b> , counsellor to the Kauravas	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Krishna</b> , incarnation of Vishnu	<i>Paccha with muti</i>
<b>Mumukshu</b> , a pious brahmin	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>ROUDRA BHIMA</b> (Bhima in terrifying form)	<i>Special</i>

*Note* : \*Although Dhritarashtra should really be a *paccha* character (but with a long black beard), it is common stage practice for him to appear as *minukku* in this play.

- Scene* 1. **Duryodhana and Bhanumati.** Duryodhana, having been invited to the Pandavas' palace at Indraprastha, is sitting with his wife, Bhanumati. He shows her the beauties of the garden and makes amorous proposals to her. She is in no mood for love because she is overwhelmed with jealousy for the prosperity which Draupadi is enjoying. Duryodhana assures her that he will manage to subdue the pride of the Pandavas.
- Scene* 2. **Duryodhana and Dussassana.** Duryodhana and his brothers (represented on the stage by Dussassana) go round the assembly hall in the Pandavas' palace, describing its structural beauties with envy. Duryodhana agrees with Dussassana that they should drive their cousins out and occupy the palace themselves.
- Scene* 3. **Dharmaputra, Bhima and Draupadi.** The Pandavas and Draupadi are seated in the assembly hall when Duryodhana and Dussassana arrive. The visit is a disaster, as the Kauravas are faced with a number of embarrassing situations: at one place they think that a crystal floor is water and raise their garments to avoid getting wet: at another place where there is a pool of water they cannot see it and fall into it. These misadventures make Bhima and Draupadi burst out laughing, but Dharmaputra warns them of the consequences. The Kauravas depart, ashamed and infuriated.
- Scene* 4. **Duryodhana and Sakuni.** Duryodhana asks Sakuni to find a way to humiliate the Pandavas. Sakuni says that as they cannot be beaten in a straight fight, the best way is to cheat them. He advises Duryodhana to invite Dharmaputra to play a game of dice with him, so that he could make him lose the game and thus forfeit his possessions one by one. Duryodhana decides to do so.
- Scene* 5. **The Pandavas, Sakuni, Duryodhana and Dussassana.** Dharmaputra accepts Duryodhana's invitation to play dice with Sakuni, thinking that it would be discourteous to refuse the invitation: it would also be contrary to the duty of a *Kshatriya* to refuse a challenge. The game begins: the more Dharmaputra loses, the more he stakes: having lost his army, his kingdom and all his wealth, he stakes his brothers one by one: finally he stakes himself and Draupadi. All of them become slaves to the Kauravas.

Duryodhana now retaliates for the mockery shown by Bhima and Draupadi when he was their guest at the Pandava palace. On his orders, Dussassana brings in Draupadi, dragging her by her hair, and begins to disrobe her. She prays desperately to Krishna, and miraculously her cloth becomes endless. Dussassana, tired of unwinding it, collapses and leaves her as she swoons. Regaining consciousness, she curses the Kauravas and Sakuni. For Dussassana she has a special curse, that Bhima will rip him open and drink his blood. She vows that her hair will remain dishevelled until Dussassana is killed. Dhritarashtra, the blind father of the Kauravas, begs Draupadi to stop cursing. He asks for forgiveness and agrees to free the Pandavas.

*Scene* 6. [A verse (*sloka*) tells that, at the request of Dussassana, there is another game of dice, the condition of which is that whoever loses will be exiled to the forest for twelve years after which they will have to spend a further year in disguise. Again Dharmaputra loses.]

The Pandavas are exiled by Duryodhana.

*Scene* 7. **Dharmaputra and Krishna.** After the completion of the thirteen years in exile and disguise Dharmaputra, knowing that the Kauravas are still unwilling to restore the kingdom to the Pandavas, requests Krishna to go to Duryodhana and ask him for their share of the land. Although they are entitled to half the kingdom, he says that in order to avoid war he will be satisfied with five villages, or five houses, or even one house for all the five of them. Krishna agrees to act as mediator.

*Scene* 8. **Draupadi and Krishna.** Krishna is about to go to Duryodhana's palace when Draupadi arrives. She deplors the idea of any settlement with the Kauravas, and reminds Krishna of her curse on Dussassana. He assures her that everything will turn out as she wishes, as Duryodhana will never agree to an honourable settlement.

*Scene* 9. **Duryodhana, Dussassana, Dhritarashtra, Karna and Bhishma.** Duryodhana is in his court with his counsellors. He tells them that Krishna will arrive shortly, but no one should show any respect to him as he is coming to plead for the Pandavas. He departs, and when Krishna arrives the whole assembly rises in adoration and does homage to him. Krishna tells Dhritarashtra the purpose of his visit, and he in turn advises Duryodhana to obey Krishna. He leaves and Krishna delivers Dharmaputra's message. But Duryodhana is not prepared for any agreement with the Pandavas. He questions their parentage, and Krishna retorts that Duryodhana's origins are also dubious. Unable to stand this insult, Duryodhana orders Dussassana to tie up Krishna in ropes, whereupon Krishna shows his *Viswarupa* (the cosmic form of Vishnu) and dazzles Duryodhana and Dussassana who fall to the ground in a faint. Mumukshu, a pious brahmin, appears, praises Krishna and advises Duryodhana to obey Krishna. Krishna departs. War is now inevitable.

*Scene 10.* **Roudra Bhima** and **Dussassana**. To enable Bhima to fulfil Draupadi's curse on Dussassana, Krishna has given him special powers. Bhima appears in a terrifying form (called *Roudra Bhima*), blazing with anger as he searches for his number one enemy, Dussassana. He finds him and there is a fierce battle. After killing Dussassana, Bhima drinks his blood, pulls out his entrails and roars.

Bhima summons Draupadi to the battlefield so that she may see what has happened to Dussassana, and ties up her hair with his hands dripping with the enemy's blood. Vengeance is thus complete. Krishna now appears before Bhima, who prays to him for forgiveness for his outrageous behaviour. Krishna forgives him and blesses him.

*Scene 11.* **Bhima** and **Duryodhana**. Bhima seeks out Duryodhana and mortally wounds him by smashing his thigh (in a manner which was later considered to be unfair). The Pandavas all go to Krishna, who blesses them.

*Note :* Scene 11 is not usually performed.

## *Bhagavata Purana*

THE ITIHASAS, or epic poems like the Mahabharata and Ramayana, tell of the legendary activities of heroes and immortals, whereas the Puranas celebrated the powers and works of gods, representing a later development of Hinduism, of which they form part of the scriptures. The word Purana is a Sanskrit one meaning 'ancient' and the Puranas are timeless legends intended to convey the message of God through his manifestations in various forms. There are eighteen major Puranas, running to 80,000 couplets; they were all written in verse, for the most part in the form of a dialogue between an exponent and an enquirer.

The Bhagavata is the Purana *par excellence* in Hindu Mythology. It is considered to be the holiest of the holy Scriptures, being always referred to with the reverential prefix *Srimad*, meaning 'repository of all virtues'. It is placed fifth in the list of Puranas but exercises a more powerful influence on the feelings of the people than any of the other Puranas. It consists of 18,000 verses contained in 332 chapters, divided into 12 books. It is called Bhagavata because it is dedicated to the glorification of Bhagavan Mahavishnu (Vishnu), and in essence it relates the stories of the *avatars* (or incarnations) of Vishnu on earth.

Vishnu, the Preserver, is the second member of the Hindu Trinity, worshipped by many as the supreme deity. Hindus believe that his powers of preserving and restoring have been manifested to the world in a variety of *avatars* (meaning literally 'descent') in which a portion of his divine essence was embodied in superhuman, human or sub-human form. The concept of the incarnations of Vishnu is very ancient, and strangely enough it tallies to a great extent with the scientific concept of the 'Origin of the Species' in the sequence of the growth of life from animal to human being.

It is believed that Vishnu has so far had nine incarnations and that there is one—*Kalki*—still to come during which he, riding a horse, will come to destroy sin, the sinful and all enemies of the world, restoring purity to mankind. Opinions vary as to the details of the eighth and ninth incarnations, but according to one school of thought the *avatars* are :

1. <i>Matsya</i>	The Fish
2. <i>Kurma</i>	The Tortoise
3. <i>Varaha</i>	The Boar
4. <i>Narasimha</i>	The Monster: half man and half lion
5. <i>Vamana</i>	The Dwarf
6. <i>Parasurama</i>	The Human: "Rama with an axe"
7. <i>Ramachandra</i>	The Gentle One: hero of the Ramayana
8. <i>Balarama</i>	The White One
9. <i>Krishna</i>	The Black One
10. <i>Kalki</i>	The White Horse

Many people, however, exclude *Balarama* from the list and include *Buddha* as the ninth *avatara*, the theory being that although he carried on a crusade against Hinduism and established his own break-away religion, his success as a religious teacher was so great that he was counted as a Hindu god.

To pursue these matters further would involve getting into hot water with the experts, amongst whom it seems difficult to get unanimity of thought. All we shall say, therefore, is that the most popular part of the Bhagavata Purana is the tenth book which describes in detail the life of Krishna from his divine birth in a prison cell to his ultimate journey back to heaven. Although other works like 'Vishnu Purana' and 'Hari Vamsa' also narrate the life of Krishna, they do not describe in such fascinating detail the story of the god who became man upon earth.

Eleven Kathakali plays cover important parts of the Bhagavata Purana. Nine of these tell of various incidents in the life of Krishna, and the first two—*Prahlada Charita* and *Vamana Avatara*—are the stories of the man-lion and dwarf incarnations of Vishnu. The stories of these plays are given on pages 46 to 67.



## 10. PRAHLADA CHARITA

By *Matavoor Kelu Asan* (1857-1888)

THIS IS the story of the fourth incarnation of Vishnu.

In his third incarnation (in the form of a boar) Vishnu killed Hiranyaksha, whereupon his brother, the *Daitya* (demon) king Hiranyakasipu swore before the assembly of *asuras* that he would take revenge and kill Vishnu.

By a strange paradox his son, Prahlada, although a *Daitya* by birth, was completely free from demoniacal propensities and became one of Vishnu's greatest devotees. Hiranyakasipu issued orders that any one who worshipped Vishnu should be severely punished and that he alone should be worshipped. But Prahlada continued to worship Vishnu and because of this his father inflicted extreme tortures on him. After severe penance, Hiranyakasipu had obtained a boon that no man or beast would kill him, but Narasimha, the man-lion who was neither man nor beast, emerged from a pillar and destroyed the demon king.

### Characters

<b>HIRANYAKASIPU</b> , a <i>Daitya</i> king	<i>Katti</i>
<b>Kayati</b> , wife of Hiranyakasipu	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Prahlada</b> , son of Hiranyakasipu	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>Sukracharya</b> , guru of the <i>asuras</i>	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Kimkaras</b> (servants)	<i>Special</i>
<b>Narasimha</b> , man-lion incarnation of Vishnu	<i>Special</i>

*Scene* 1. **Hiranyakasipu** and **Kayati** in a love scene.

*Scene* 2. **Hiranyakasipu**, **Prahlada** and **Sukracharya**. Hiranyakasipu sends his son Prahlada to school to be educated by Sukracharya.

*Scene* 3. **Prahlada** and **Sukracharya**. Prahlada goes to school with other boys. Fearing Hiranyakasipu, Sukracharya teaches the boy about the deeds of the king rather than about Vishnu. But in spite of his efforts he cannot sway Prahlada, who always praises Vishnu and utters his name. When Sukracharya is away, Prahlada influences the other boys to worship Vishnu, by uttering his name "Narayana".

*Scene* 4. **Sukracharya**, **Hiranyakasipu** and **Prahlada**. Sukracharya eventually thinks that he has succeeded in giving Prahlada an education suitable for a *Daitya* prince. He takes him to Hiranyakasipu, who receives his son with kindness and asks him what he has learnt at school. Prahlada, in complete contradiction to what he has been taught, tells his father that one should worship only Vishnu, who is the Lord of all beings. Hiranyakasipu is furious, calls Sukracharya a vile brahmin, and accuses him of teaching hateful notions to his son. Sukracharya tells the king that he has done his best, but without success. The king decides to put Prahlada to death, and orders his servants to destroy him.

- Scene 5.* **Prahlada and Kimkaras.** The king's servants take Prahlada to the forest and advise him not to worship Vishnu, but to worship his father. The boy takes no notice and tells them to do what they like with him. They attack him with all sorts of lethal weapons, but thanks to the grace of Vishnu nothing can destroy him or affect his moral composure. The servants are astounded at this and take Prahlada back to his father.
- Scene 6.* **Prahlada, Kimkaras and Hiranyakasipu.** The king sees his son returning with the servants, uttering the name of Vishnu, and this makes him even more furious. The servants tell the king that despite their attacks on Prahlada no harm came to him. The angry king, with his sword in his hand, asks his son who there is in the whole universe who is greater and mightier than himself. Prahlada, chanting the name of Vishnu, says that Narayana is the person who pervades everything. His father strikes a pillar beside him and says "if the so-called Narayana pervades everything, he must be in this pillar. Let him show himself and protect you from my sword."

As soon as the pillar is struck and broken in two, there emerges a huge and frightening form which is neither man nor lion but both man and lion. The king runs away in fear, but the figure, Narasimha, roars with a man's laugh and a lion's roar, seizes the king, tears out his heart and entrails with his powerful claws, and throws the carcass to the ground.

Narasimha abandons the dead body of the demon king. Nobody dares to approach the creature except Prahlada, who praises him and appeals to him to relinquish his horrible form now that his job is done. Narasimha is pleased and, telling Prahlada not to grieve over his father's death, blesses him and disappears. Prahlada then rules over his father's kingdom as the devotee of Vishnu.

## 11. VAMANA AVATARA

By Manakulam Kunhunni Valia Tampuran (1861-1943)

THIS IS the story of the fifth incarnation of Vishnu as the brahmin dwarf, Vamana, who tricked the powerful *asura* king Mahabali out of his rulership. Mahabali had acquired enormous powers, and having assaulted Indra's capital and taken it by storm, completely routed the celestials and made himself master of the three worlds. Responding to the prayers of the celestials, Vishnu promised to take birth in the world and to overcome Mahabali. Thus was born Vamana, the brahmin dwarf, to Aditi the mother of the gods. Without losing any time, Vamana went to meet Mahabali, who was at that time performing a *yaga* on the banks of the river Narmada, and humbled him.

### Characters

<b>MAHABALI</b> , a powerful <i>asura</i> king	<i>Katti</i>
<b>Vindhyavali</b> , wife of Mahabali	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Namuchi</b> , minister of Mahabali	<i>Chuvanna Tadi</i> (Red Beard)
<b>Vamana</b> , dwarf incarnation of Vishnu	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Sukracharya</b> , guru of all the <i>asuras</i>	<i>Minukku</i>

*Scene 1.* **Mahabali** and **Vindhyavali**. Mahabali, the proud king of the demons, approaches his wife Vindhyavali, who is in a very depressed and disagreeable mood. He tells her that she need not suspect him of infidelity, and tries to console her. She replies that if Lakshmi (the goddess of wealth) is not properly looked after, she may leave him.

*Scene 2.* **Mahabali**, **Namuchi** and **Sukracharya**. Mahabali is pleased with his wife's advice that wealth and money should be spent wisely and in a good cause. He decides to spend all his wealth on religious and charitable causes, and in consultation with his minister, Namuchi, he arranges a *yaga* (sacrificial ritual).

At the *yaga* hall, Mahabali is supervising the performance of the *yaga*. Vishnu, in the form of a brahmin dwarf, comes to the palace and is received by Mahabali, who welcomes him affectionately and asks him what he wants. The high priest, Sukracharya, suspecting who the boy is and what his object is, warns Mahabali not to make any promise or to give the boy what he asks for.

The boy tells the king that all he wants is a small bit of land which measures not more than three of his own dwarfish feet. The proud king takes the request as a joke and offers to give the boy as much land as will secure a decent living for him, but Vamana reiterates that all he wants is three feet of land which will cover his bare necessities. Mahabali laughs, and despite Sukracharya's warning, pronounces his solemn promise to grant the gift requested.

Immediately the small boy grows into a huge form, measures the whole universe with his two feet, and asks the king for the promised space for his third step. Mahabali loses all his pride, praises Vishnu, and offers his head for Vishnu to place his foot upon, thereby fulfilling his promise. Vishnu blesses Mahabali, and sends him to Patala, the nether region where he ruled.

## 12. PUTANA MOKSHA

By *Aswati Tirunal Tampuran* (1756-1794)

THE KILLING of the demoness Putana was one of the earliest feats accomplished by the child Krishna whilst living with his foster parents at Gokula. (The fuller story of his birth and early years is described in the next play—*Kamsa Vadha*.)

Putana was a demoness who, at the instance of the wicked king Kamsa, killed babes by suckling them with breasts smeared with poison. She was ordered by Kamsa to kill the divine child Krishna, and accordingly she went to Gokula disguised as a beautiful damsel. She was eventually killed by Krishna, who sucked the life out of her, but she ultimately received salvation because she had been destroyed by Krishna himself.

Only the last scene of this play is enacted now. The only character who appears is **PUTANA** (*Minukku*) in *Lalita* form—a disguise she has assumed for her evil purposes. When she finds that her plan is thwarted and that her life is in danger, she throws off the disguise and shows her true form—that of a demoness. When the full play is enacted Putana in *kari* make-up enters at this stage, but in this one-scene performance this is not done: the actor indicates the change by darkening his face and putting his hair in disarray.

*Scene 1.* **Putana**, disguised as a beautiful damsel and wearing a gold necklace, arrives at Gokula, where she is enchanted by the sights she sees. She smiles and (according to the story) 'the radiant smile appearing over her bulging bosom resembles the moon rising over a hillock'. She describes the beauty of Gokula where Krishna is living.

Putana enters the abode of Krishna's foster father, Nandagopa, and sees the child asleep. She takes it into her arms and offers it her breasts. She enchants all the women of Gokula to sleep, then, smearing her breasts with deadly poison, she feeds the divine child. Krishna grasps her breasts with both hands, sucks the poison, then the milk and finally her life blood. Putana gasps, writhes and screams with agony. She appeals to Krishna, who she now realises is divine, to let her go. But he drains the life essence out of her, and she falls down dead.

*Note :* The people of Gokula chopped Putana's body into pieces and set fire to it, but out of her smoking bones there arose a sweet smell which pervaded the whole town, denoting her purification from her demoniacal nature because she had touched Krishna. Hence the title of this play, which means 'the salvation of Putana.'

### 13. KAMSA VADHA

*By Kilimanoor Ravi Varma Tampuran (1782-1854)*

THIS STORY encompasses the childhood of Krishna. Vishnu resolved to descend to earth in his full glory as the most potent incarnation of himself, and was born in Mathura as Krishna, son of Devaki and Vasudeva, all of whose children had been killed by Kamsa, the wicked king of Mathura. Kamsa's attempts to kill Krishna failed, and during his childhood he charmed the Gopi (cowherd) women with his flute and protected them from the fury of Indra. After disposing of several wicked men whom Kamsa had arranged to kill him, and curing a hunch-backed woman, Krishna finally destroyed Kamsa himself, and thus freed Devaki and Vasudeva from their captivity.

#### Characters

<b>Krishna</b> , incarnation of Vishnu	<i>Paccha with muti</i>
<b>Gopi women</b>	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Arishtasura</b> , a demon	<i>Chuvanna Tadi (Red Beard)</i>
<b>KAMSA</b> , wicked king of Mathura	<i>Katti</i>
<b>Narada</b> , a sage	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Akrura</b> , a devotee of Krishna	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>Rajaka</b> , a washerman	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Balarama</b> , elder brother of Krishna	<i>Pazhuppu</i>
<b>Kubja</b> , a deformed hunchbacked woman	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Kubja</b> , the same without deformity	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Anakkaran</b> , an elephant mahout	<i>Minukku (with 'elephant')</i>
<b>Chanura</b> , a wrestler	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Mushtika</b> , another wrestler	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Vasudeva</b> , father of Krishna	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>Devaki</b> , mother of Krishna	<i>Minukku</i>

*Scene* 1. **Krishna** and the **Gopi women**. Krishna is playing with the Gopi women who are in an amorous mood and are persuaded by Cupid to dance to the tune of his flute.

*Scene* 2. **Arishtasura**. After his *tiranokku* (curtain look), the demon Arishtasura challenges Krishna who appears and kills him.

*Scene* 3. **Kamsa**. After Kamsa has performed his *tiranokku*, Narada, the sage, appears and tells him that Balarama and Krishna are in fact the sons of his sister Devaki, and that Putana has been killed by Krishna (this story is told in the previous play—*Putana Moksha*). Kamsa vows to get rid of Balarama and Krishna. Narada departs.

*Scene* 4. **Kamsa** and **Akrura**. Kamsa prepares to celebrate a festival with the object of

destroying Balarama and Krishna when they arrive to attend it. He instructs Akrura to proceed to Gokula, where Balarama and Krishna are living, and to invite them to the festival.

- Scene* 5. **Akrura.** Akrura sets out for Gokula. He is a devotee of Krishna, and whilst looking forward to meeting him, he is fearful about the outcome.
- Scene* 6. **Akrura and Krishna.** Akrura arrives at Gokula and is welcomed by Krishna. He conveys Kamsa's invitation to him and his brother to attend the festival.
- Scene* 7. **Rajaka, Balarama and Krishna.** On their way to Kamsa's palace at Mathura, Balarama and Krishna meet a washerman, Rajaka, who refuses to give them clothes and insults them. He is killed by Krishna.
- Scene* 8. **Kubja and Krishna.** Still on his way to Mathura, Krishna meets a hunchbacked woman, who offers him sandalwood paste and other gifts. He touches her, and her deformity is miraculously removed.
- Scene* 9. **Anakkaran and Krishna.** When Krishna arrives at the gate of Kamsa's palace, he sees an elephant mahout with a huge elephant, ready to attack and kill him. Krishna kills the man and the elephant.
- Scene* 10. **Chanura, Mushtika, Balarama and Krishna.** In the event of Balarama and Krishna surviving the attack by the elephant, Kamsa has arranged two wrestlers to challenge them. The wrestlers attack them, but Krishna kills them both.
- Scene* 11. **Kamsa and Krishna.** Krishna meets Kamsa and kills him by jumping on his breast and beating the life out of him with his fists.
- Scene* 12. **Krishna, Devaki and Vasudeva.** Krishna meets his parents, who have been imprisoned by Kamsa in Mathura, and releases them. He reinstates Ugrasena, Kamsa's father, on the throne of Mathura.

## 14. GURU DAKSHINA

By Kurichi Narayanan Nambudiri (1805-1860)

AFTER the killing of Kamsa, Krishna and his elder brother Balarama had their education under guru Sandipani. They were both brilliant scholars and when, after completing their schooling, they asked the guru what his fees were, he waived all monetary consideration. In accordance with the custom of offering a guru a present when leaving, Krishna asked Sandipani what he would like. Sandipani asked for the restoration of his only son who, many years earlier, had been drowned whilst bathing in the river Prabhasa. Krishna and Balarama, learning that the boy had been swallowed by a wicked *asura* named Panchjana, who lived in a shell in the sea, sought him out and killed him and later recovered the boy from Yama, the god of the dead. Sandipani, delighted to be reunited with his son, blessed Krishna.

### Characters

Vasudeva, father of Krishna	<i>Paccha</i>
Devaki, mother of Krishna	<i>Minukku</i>
Krishna, incarnation of Vishnu	<i>Paccha with muti</i>
Balarama, elder brother of Krishna	<i>Pazhuppu</i>
Uddhava, a wise elder	<i>Paccha</i>
SANDIPANI, guru of Krishna and Balarama	<i>Minukku</i>
Kuchela, a poor brahmin boy	<i>Minukku</i>
Kattala, a hunter	<i>Karutta Tadi (Black Beard)</i>
Sandipani's wife	<i>Minukku</i>
Panchjana, a wicked <i>asura</i>	<i>Chuvanna Tadi (Red Beard)</i>
Yama, the god of the dead	<i>Katti</i>
Chitrugupta, minister of Yama	<i>Minukku</i>
Sandipani's son	<i>Minukku</i>

- Scene* 1. **Vasudeva and Devaki.** Vasudeva is with his wife, who bemoans the fact that their children Balarama and Krishna are spending their boyhood in Gokula with Nandagopa, who is Krishna's foster father.
- Scene* 2. **Vasudeva, Devaki, Balarama, Krishna and Uddhava.** Balarama and Krishna have come to Mathura, and are with their parents Vasudeva and Devaki who are living there. Vasudeva thinks that it is high time for the children to be educated and discusses the matter with Uddhava, a wise elder, who advises him to take the boys to the *ashram* (hermitage) of guru Sandipani.
- Scene* 3. **Vasudeva, Balarama, Krishna and Sandipani.** Vasudeva, with Balarama and Krishna, approaches Sandipani, who gladly agrees to teach the boys letters and sciences. The children meet a poor brahmin boy, Kuchela, who is also a student of Sandipani. Kuchela becomes very attached to Krishna. Sandipani imparts education to the boys.



- Scene* 4. **Sandipani's wife, Krishna and Kuchela.** Sandipani's wife sends Krishna and Kuchela into the forest to collect firewood.
- Scene* 5. **Krishna and Kuchela.** After having collected all available firewood at the edge of the forest, Krishna prepares to enter the forest. But Kuchela is afraid, so Krishna goes alone.
- Scene* 6. **Kattala.** A hunter, whilst dosing in the forest, hears a disturbing noise and goes to investigate what it is all about.
- Scene* 7. **Krishna and Kattala.** The hunter challenges Krishna and is defeated.
- Scene* 8. **Krishna and Kuchela.** Krishna rejoins Kuchela. Nightfall comes and there is a thunderstorm. The boys are terrified, and spend the night in the forest.
- Scene* 9. **Sandipani and his wife.** Not finding Krishna and Kuchela at home, Sandipani learns that his wife has sent them into the forest to fetch firewood. He is very angry with his wife for having sent the children to the forest. He goes in search of them, finds them and blesses them.
- Scene* 10. **Balarama, Krishna and Sandipani.** The education of Balarama and Krishna is now complete. As there is a custom of offering a present to a guru on leaving, Krishna asks Sandipani to accept some gift as *guru dakshina* and asks him what his greatest desire is. Sandipani tells Krishna that long ago he lost his only son when he was drowned whilst bathing in the river Prabhasa. Knowing of Krishna's divinity, he prays that the lost son may be returned to him.
- Scene* 11. **Krishna and Panchjana.** At the river, Krishna hears that Sandipani's son was swallowed by a conch-shaped demon, Panchjana, who lives in the water. He finds the demon, challenges him and kills him. He then makes a bugle out of Panchjana's shell and sallies forth to the abode of Yama, the god of the dead.
- Scene* 12. **Balarama, Krishna, Yama and Chitragupta.** Yama is with his minister, Chitragupta. Balarama and Krishna arrive, and Krishna demands Sandipani's son from Yama. Yama hands the boy over to Krishna, understanding that he is Vishnu.
- Scene* 13. **Krishna, Sandipani and Sandipani's son.** Krishna returns to Sandipani, who is overjoyed to see his lost son. He blesses Krishna.
- Scene* 14. **Krishna and Kuchela.** Krishna says good-bye to his old friend and classmate, Kuchela.

In all other Kathakali plays in which he appears, Balarama's make-up is Pazhuppu. In this play, however, he wears a *muti* instead of a *kirtta*.

## 15. RUGMINI SWAYAMVARA

By *Aswati Tirunal Tampuran* (1756-1794)

BEAUTIFUL RUGMINI, daughter of Bhisma, king of Vidarbha, had set her heart on marrying Krishna. But her brother Rugmi, who hated Krishna was determined to give her in marriage to Sisupala, king of Chedi, who was Krishna's implacable foe. Being a brave girl, Rugmini sent a trusted brahmin to Krishna to ask him to come to Vidarbha and carry her away. Krishna successfully accomplished this in the face of the opposing kings gathered to attend Rugmini's wedding. Sisupala who opposed him was repulsed.

### Characters

<b>SUNDARA BRAHMANA</b> , a handsome brahmin	<i>Minukku*</i>
<b>Rugmini</b> , daughter of king Bhisma	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Krishna</b> , incarnation of Vishnu	<i>Paccha with muti</i>
<b>Bhiru</b> , a comic prince	<i>Special</i>
<b>Rugmini's companion</b>	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Sisupala</b> , cousin and enemy of Krishna	<i>Katti</i>

*Note* : \*Unlike the austere brahmins who appear in other Kathakali plays, this brahmin is a handsome, well dressed young man with a facile tongue and therefore called Sundara (meaning handsome)—brahmana.

- Scene* 1. **Rugmini**. Rugmini expresses her grief over the decision of her brother to give her in marriage to Sisupala.
- Scene* 2. **Sundara Brahmana** and **Rugmini**. Sundara Brahmana comes to Rugmini at her request. She woefully tells him that although she has worshipped Krishna from childhood, and has mentally wooed him as her husband, her brother Rugmi has decided to give her in marriage to Sisupala. She implores the brahmin to go to Krishna with a message asking him to save her from her plight. The brahmin assures her that he will do his best, and sets off to find Krishna.
- Scene* 3. **Sundara Brahmana** and **Krishna**. Sundara Brahmana calls on Krishna, tells him about Rugmini's plight, and conveys her message that if Krishna forsakes her she will not live. Krishna is annoyed at Rugmini's decision, and tells the brahmin that at all costs he will wed Rugmini and put an end to her suffering. He and Sundara Brahmana proceed to Rugmini's palace.
- Scene* 4. **Sundara Brahmana** and **Rugmini**. Sundara Brahmana returns to Rugmini and delivers Krishna's message. She is consoled.
- Scene* 5. **Rugmini, Bhiru, Sisupala** and **Krishna**. Rugmini enters with her companion. After performing a 'sari dance' she worships at the shrine of Durga and turns to

- Scene* 4. **Sandipani's wife, Krishna and Kuchela.** Sandipani's wife sends Krishna and Kuchela into the forest to collect firewood.
- Scene* 5. **Krishna and Kuchela.** After having collected all available firewood at the edge of the forest, Krishna prepares to enter the forest. But Kuchela is afraid, so Krishna goes alone.
- Scene* 6. **Kattala.** A hunter, whilst dosing in the forest, hears a disturbing noise and goes to investigate what it is all about.
- Scene* 7. **Krishna and Kattala.** The hunter challenges Krishna and is defeated.
- Scene* 8. **Krishna and Kuchela.** Krishna rejoins Kuchela. Nightfall comes and there is a thunderstorm. The boys are terrified, and spend the night in the forest.
- Scene* 9. **Sandipani and his wife.** Not finding Krishna and Kuchela at home, Sandipani learns that his wife has sent them into the forest to fetch firewood. He is very angry with his wife for having sent the children to the forest. He goes in search of them, finds them and blesses them.
- Scene* 10. **Balarama, Krishna and Sandipani.** The education of Balarama and Krishna is now complete. As there is a custom of offering a present to a guru on leaving, Krishna asks Sandipani to accept some gift as *guru dakshina* and asks him what his greatest desire is. Sandipani tells Krishna that long ago he lost his only son when he was drowned whilst bathing in the river Prabhasa. Knowing of Krishna's divinity, he prays that the lost son may be returned to him.
- Scene* 11. **Krishna and Panchjana.** At the river, Krishna hears that Sandipani's son was swallowed by a conch-shaped demon, Panchjana, who lives in the water. He finds the demon, challenges him and kills him. He then makes a bugle out of Panchjana's shell and sallies forth to the abode of Yama, the god of the dead.
- Scene* 12. **Balarama, Krishna, Yama and Chitragupta.** Yama is with his minister, Chitragupta. Balarama and Krishna arrive, and Krishna demands Sandipani's son from Yama. Yama hands the boy over to Krishna, understanding that he is Vishnu.
- Scene* 13. **Krishna, Sandipani and Sandipani's son.** Krishna returns to Sandipani, who is overjoyed to see his lost son. He blesses Krishna.
- Scene* 14. **Krishna and Kuchela.** Krishna says good-bye to his old friend and classmate, Kuchela.

In all other Kathakali plays in which he appears, Balarama's make-up is Pazhuppu. In this play, however, he wears a *muti* instead of a *kirtta*.

## 16. NARAKASURA VADHA

By *Karthika Tirunal* (1724-1798)

NARAKASURA was an *asura* king born of Mother Earth from her contact with Vishnu's body when, during his third incarnation as a boar, he lifted her on his tusks from the bottom of the ocean. He had vast supernatural powers, but a vicious nature, and he harassed both men and gods. When he dislodged Indra (the king of the gods) from his throne, Indra sought the help of Krishna. To destroy Narakasura, Krishna mounted his mighty Garuda, the king of birds, along with his consort Satyabhama—an incarnation of Mother Earth—and flew to Narakasura's capital. The subsequent battle in which Krishna smashed the demon king's fortifications and finally killed him was one of Krishna's greatest victories.

### Characters

<b>NARAKASURA</b> , an <i>asura</i> king	<i>Katti</i>
<b>Nakratundi</b> , servant of Narakasura	<i>Kari</i>
<b>Lalita</b> (Nakratundi in disguise)	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Jayanta</b> , son of Indra	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>Narakasura's wife</b>	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Indra</b> , the king of the gods	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>Krishna</b> , incarnation of Vishnu	<i>Paccha with muti</i>
<b>Garuda</b> , the king of birds	<i>Special</i>
<b>Satyabhama</b> , wife of Krishna	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Narakasura</b> —at the end of the play	<i>Chuvanna Tadi</i> (Red Beard)
<b>Bhiru</b> , a messenger	<i>Special</i>

*Scene 1.* **Nakratundi.** Narakasura has sent his *rakshasa* servant Nakratundi to Devaloka (the abode of the gods) to capture damsels for his amusement.

*Scene 2.* **Lalita** and **Jayanta.** On her way back after capturing two maidens, Nakratundi meets Indra's son Jayanta, and falls in love with him. Having allowed the maidens to escape, she assumes the form of a beautiful girl (Lalita) and accosts Jayanta, who drives her off. She gets angry, assumes her real form, and in the fight which ensues she is wounded.

*Scene 3.* **Narakasura** and **his wife** in a love scene. Afterwards, Narakasura, hearing a terrific uproar, sends his wife away to find out the cause of the disturbance. At last he finds that the noises he hears are the cries of his wounded servant, whom he now sees approaching.

*Scene 4.* **Narakasura** and **Indra.** Narakasura goes to Devaloka, challenges Indra to a fight, and conquers the land. Indra is driven off his throne.

- Scene 5.* **Indra and Krishna.** Indra goes to Krishna and asks for his help to regain the kingdom.
- Scene 6.* **Krishna, Satyabhama and Garuda.** Krishna summons the divine bird Garuda and, accompanied by his wife Satyabhama, sets off for the land of Narakasura. (This scene is a tableau with no action.)
- Scene 7.* **Bhiru and Narakasura.** Bhiru, a messenger, advises Narakasura that his friend Murasura has been killed by Krishna (a scene in the play which is not performed). Narakasura gets ready to fight Krishna.
- Scene 8.* **Krishna, Narakasura and Satyabhama.** (Narakasura has now become a 'Red Beard' character.) Krishna fights him and kills him with the help of Satyabhama.

*Note :* When this play is performed in an open space there is sometimes an additional Scene 4 in which Nakratundi complains to Narakasura about the treatment meted out to her by Janaka. Nakratundi's appearance is gory and grotesque, the actor wearing a cloth covered in red dye thrown over his body completely covering it below his neck.

If this scene is not performed, Narakasura describes it in solo acting at the end of Scene 3.

This is the only Kathakali play in which a character appears in two different forms of make-up.

## 17. BANA YUDHA

(Sometimes known as **USHA PARINAYAM**)

By *Balakavi Rama Sastry* (1772-1840)

THE *asura* king Bana of Mahishmati was the son of Mahabali. He was wise, charitable and a great devotee of Siva, but he had one fault—pride. He was such an ardent devotee of Siva that the god, in answer to his prayers, guarded the portals of Bana's palace himself. Bana had a thousand arms, and was itching for a fight. He had a beautiful daughter called Usha who, in her dreams, fell in love with Krishna's grandson, Aniruddha. When Aniruddha was brought secretly to Usha's private apartments the king was very angry and put him in prison. Krishna went to Mahishmati with his army, defeated Siva's men who were guarding the palace, and in a fight with Bana cut off all but four of his thousand arms. Bana was humbled, and Usha married Aniruddha.

### Characters

<b>Krishna</b> , incarnation of Vishnu	<i>Paccha with muti</i>
<b>Rugmini</b> , wife of Krishna	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Satyabhama</b> , second wife of Krishna	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>BANA</b> , the <i>asura</i> king of Mahishmati	<i>Katti</i>
<b>Bana's wife</b>	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Siva</b> , a god	<i>Paccha (with orange face)</i>
<b>Parvati</b> , wife of Siva	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Shanmukha</b> , son of Siva*	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>Ganapati</b> , son of Siva*	<i>Special</i>
<b>Nandikeswara</b> , Siva's gate-keeper*	<i>Vella Tadi (White Beard)</i>
<b>Kumbhanda</b> , minister of Bana	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Usha</b> , daughter of Bana	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Chitrlekha</b> , companion of Usha	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Aniruddha</b> , grandson of Krishna	<i>Paccha with muti</i>
<b>Vridha</b> , an old woman	<i>Special</i>
<b>Narada</b> , a sage	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Vishnu Jvala</b> , Krishna's heavenly fury	<i>Special</i>
<b>Siva Jvala</b> , Siva's a heavenly fury	<i>Chuvanna Tadi (Red Beard)</i>

*Note* : The characters marked\* are usually omitted.  
Kumbhanda is sometimes presented as *Chuvanna Tadi*.

*Scene* 1. **Krishna, Rugmini and Satyabhama.** Krishna and his wives in a love scene.

*Scene* 2. **Bana and his wife** in a love scene.

- Scene* 3. **Siva, Parvati, Shanmukha, Ganapati, Nandikeswara and Bana.** Siva is guarding Bana's palace with his wife, Parvati, and his sons, Shanmukha, Ganapati and Nandikeswara, who is the captain of the guards. Bana, itching for a fight, comes to Siva and asks him to indulge in a friendly fight. Siva knows that if he agrees, it will mean the end of Bana; but this must not happen because he has promised to befriend Bana, his ardent devotee. Siva tells Bana that it is improper for a god and his devotee to fight each other, and consoles him by saying that before long he will meet his match. Bana is pleased to know that there will soon be an occasion for a fight.
- Scene* 4. **Bana and Kumbhanda.** Bana discusses the marriage of his daughter, Usha, with his minister, Kumbhanda.
- Scene* 5. **Usha and Chitrlekha.** Usha, the beautiful daughter of Bana, is playing with her companions. After the game she falls asleep. When she wakes up she is very morose and tells her clever companion, Chitrlekha, of the dream she has had, saying that she cannot live any longer without attaining the love of the handsome youth she saw in her dream. Chitrlekha paints the portraits of all the handsome princes in the land, one of whom Usha recognises as the man of her dream. Chitrlekha tells her that her man is Aniruddha, grandson of Krishna, and as she has magical powers, she promises to bring Aniruddha to her secretly.
- Chitrlekha goes to Krishna's palace at Dwaraka, where she finds Aniruddha, and whilst he is sleeping she brings him to Bana's palace at Mahishmati. Aniruddha wakes up and at once falls in love with Usha. They live secretly in the palace, spending blissful days together.
- Scene* 6. **Vriddha and Bana.** The secret of Usha and Aniruddha does not last long. Vriddha, an old woman working in the palace, discovers that Usha has a lover and reports the fact to Bana.
- Scene* 7. **Bana and Aniruddha.** Bana is furious at the audacity of any man who is in love with his daughter secretly. He challenges the intruder. Aniruddha is defeated in the fight that ensues and is taken prisoner. In his heart of hearts, Bana feels the young man will be an ideal match for Usha, but he has to be punished for his impudence.
- Scene* 8. **Usha.** Usha laments the separation from her lover, and fears that she will never be able to marry him.
- Scene* 9. **Krishna and Narada.** Krishna is worried at the sudden disappearance of Aniruddha from the Dwaraka palace. Search parties report that there is no evidence of him having been seen anywhere. Sage Narada, who constantly travels through all the three worlds and knows everything about everyone, calls on

Krishna who asks him if he has heard anything about Aniruddha. Narada tells him where Aniruddha is and explains how he reached Mahishmati. Krishna immediately prepares to go and fight Bana.

*Scene 10.* **Krishna, Siva, Vishnu Jvala and Siva Jvala.** Krishna is prevented from entering Bana's palace by Siva, who is guarding it. He releases the Vishnu Jvala in him to attack Siva, and Siva releases Siva Jvala to meet Vishnu Jvala. In the battle that ensues between the two heavenly furies, Siva Jvala is defeated and falls at the feet of Vishnu Jvala. Siva Jvala is pardoned.

*Scene 11.* **Krishna and Bana.** Krishna enters the gates of Bana's palace and challenges him to a fight. There is a fierce battle in which Krishna chops off Bana's arms with his divine weapon, *Sudarsana*. Before all Bana's arms are chopped off, Siva intervenes and begs Krishna to spare him. So Bana is left with four arms. He is humbled and recognises the divinity of Krishna. He is also happy because his daughter is loved by Aniruddha.

The marriage of Usha and Aniruddha is celebrated, and they accompany Krishna to Dwaraka.

*Note :* Scenes 1 and 2 are not usually performed.



## 18. KUCHELA VRITTA

By Muringoor Sankara Potti (1851-1914)

THIS STORY brings out one of Krishna's most endearing traits—his accessibility to even the most humble. In the days when he was educated under Guru Sandipani (as related in the play *Guru Dakshina*), Krishna and Kuchela were fellow pupils and became great friends. (Kuchela's real name was Sudama, but he was called Kuchela because of the rags he wore). After leaving Sandipani's hermitage they parted company: Krishna went to his palace at Mathura and Kuchela to his humble hut. In the course of time Kuchela raised a large family; though poor he led a pious life. His wife persuaded him to go to Dwaraka to seek Krishna's assistance.

### Characters

<b>KUCHELA</b> , a poor brahmin	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Kuchela's wife</b>	<i>Minukku*</i>
<b>Krishna</b> , incarnation of Vishnu	<i>Paccha with muti</i>
<b>Rugmini</b> , Krishna's wife	<i>Minukku</i>

*Note* : \*In Scene 1 Kuchela's wife wears a cloth covering her ornaments to indicate her poverty. In Scene 4, when she is rich, the ornaments are revealed.

*Scene 1.* **Kuchela and his wife.** Kuchela's wife approaches him and, reciting their daily hardships, requests him to pay a visit to his old fellow pupil Krishna, as she is confident that he will assist them. With much reluctance, Kuchela agrees to do so. He sets forth for Krishna's palace taking with him a small packet of beaten rice as an offering to Krishna, which is all that he can afford.

*Scene 2.* **Kuchela.** On his way to Dwaraka, Kuchela soliloquises: "How long it is since I parted company with Krishna ! Will he now remember me after all this time ?" He consoles himself with the thought that Krishna, being kind to brahmins, will certainly receive him.

*Scene 3.* **Krishna and Rugmini.** Krishna is with his consort when Kuchela arrives at the gate of Dwaraka. Krishna, seeing him in the distance, rushes to the gate and prostrates himself before Kuchela. He embraces him and takes him to the palace, where he honours him in right royal style. Krishna reminds Kuchela about the happy days of their youth under sage Sandipani at Gurukula, recalling the occasion when they went into the forest to collect firewood. Kuchela tells him that he has been living in constant thought of him.

Whilst in this happy mood, Krishna jokingly asks Kuchela if he has brought him any present, and takes from him the packet of rice that he has brought with him. He opens it and takes a handful of rice saying "What a delicious thing you

have brought me.” As he is about to take another handful Rugmini stops him, and asks him (without Kuchela hearing) whether he is determined to make her the servant of the brahmin’s wife (for this is what will happen if he takes another handful).

Krishna tells Rugmini that in his joy over seeing his old friend after such a long time, he forgot himself. Kuchela and Krishna continue their dialogue for some time more, after which Kuchela bids farewell to Krishna.

*Scene 4.* **Kuchela and his wife.** Kuchela returns home and finds that everything has been transformed. Their humble hut has become a palace, and his wife and children are clad in rich clothes and ornaments. Krishna bestowed wealth on him because he did not ask for anything. Kuchela advises his wife not to be lured into worldliness, but to praise Krishna for his bounty.

## 19. SUBHADRA HARANA

By *Manthredath Nambudiripad* (1851-1906)

ONCE ARJUNA set out on a pilgrimage and whilst visiting holy places came to Raiivathaka hill near Dwaraka where the Yadavas were conducting a festival. Although he was in a garb of a *sanyasi* (hermit), Krishna recognised him. There he met Subhadra, the beautiful sister of Krishna, and fell in love with her. Krishna, who understood his friend's desire, advised him that he had better carry her away. Balarama, impressed by the *sanyasi's* looks, invited him to Dwaraka and charged Subhadra to look after him. Thus thrown into proximity, their love blossomed forth, and eventually Arjuna disclosed his identity to her. Subhadra prayed to Krishna for guidance, and Arjuna hoped that his father, Indra, would come and help him to wed Subhadra. Arjuna finally carried her away and married her. This annoyed Balarama, but he relented after being soothed by Krishna.

### Characters

<b>Krishna</b> , incarnation of Vishnu	<i>Paccha with muti</i>
<b>Rugmini</b> , wife of Krishna	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Satyabhama</b> , second wife of Krishna	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Indra</b> , father of Arjuna, king of the gods	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>ARJUNA</b> , third of the Pandavas	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>Subhadra</b> , sister of Krishna	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Gopurapalas</b> (gate-keepers)	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Viprithu</b> , captain of the Dwaraka guards	<i>Chuvanna Tadi</i> (Red Beard)
<b>Brahmins</b>	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>BALARAMA</b> , elder brother of Krishna	<i>Pazhuppu</i>

*Scene 1.* **Krishna, Rugmini and Satyabhama.** Krishna, knowing that his sister Subhadra wants his advice and support, sets out to see her, accompanied by his consorts.

*Scene 2.* **Indra and Krishna.** Indra approaches Krishna and proposes that Arjuna should marry Subhadra. The wedding takes place in their presence.

*Scene 3.* **Arjuna and Subhadra** in a love scene.

*Scene 4.* **Arjuna and Gopurapalas.** Arjuna attempts to leave the city but is opposed by the gate-keepers. He defeats them and departs from the city with Subhadra.

*Scene 5.* **Viprithu, Arjuna and Subhadra.** Viprithu, captain of the guards, at the command of Balarama, opposes the passage of Arjuna. There is a fight in which the Yadava chief is defeated. He not only begs pardon of Arjuna, but realising that the elopement is with Krishna's knowledge, provides the couple with a chariot.

- ne 6. **Brahmins.** Some local brahmins gossip about Subhadra's elopement.
- ne 7. **Balarama and Krishna.** Balarama is angry when he hears of Subhadra's elopement with Arjuna. He threatens to kill Arjuna, but Krishna soothes him, saying that the death of Arjuna would result in their sister becoming a widow. Balarama relents and endorses Arjuna's action.
- ne 8. **Balarama and Krishna.** Balarama proceeds to meet the Pandavas, taking with him gifts for the bridegroom. They meet the Pandavas and are welcomed. Everyone is happy.

## 20. SANTANA GOPALA

By Mandavappalli Ittiraricha Menon (1747-1794)

IN THE year that followed the Kurukshetra war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas there was peace at Hastinapura, the Pandava capital. Arjuna paid a visit to Krishna at Dwaraka. Whilst there he met a brahmin bemoaning his fate, having lost all his children at birth. Arjuna swore that he would protect the life of the child that the brahmin's wife was expected to bear shortly. When he failed to do so he had to be extricated from a difficult position by Krishna. This pathetic story ultimately turned into a sense of wonder at the discovery that Krishna and Vishnu were only different aspects of the same supreme being. It was brought to a happy conclusion when all the brahmin's children were restored to him.

### Characters

<b>Krishna</b> , incarnation of Vishnu	<i>Paccha with muti</i>
<b>Arjuna</b> , third of the Pandavas	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>BRAHMIN</b>	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Brahmin's wife</b>	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Vridha</b> , an old lady	<i>Special</i>

*Scene 1.* **Arjuna and Krishna.** Arjuna pays a visit to Krishna in Dwaraka, and is invited to stay there for a few days.

*Scene 2.* **Krishna, Arjuna and Brahmin.** Whilst Arjuna and Krishna are together, a brahmin comes to Dwaraka carrying the dead body of his ninth child, the eight previous ones having died soon after they were born, and mourns his loss. Krishna turns a deaf ear to the brahmin's wails but Arjuna, unable to bear the sad sight, promises the brahmin that any children his wife may bear in the future will not meet the same fate. The brahmin cannot place any reliance in Arjuna's assurances because of Krishna's silence, but he is pacified when Arjuna solemnly vows to immolate himself by jumping into a fire if he fails to protect the future children.

*Scene 3.* **Brahmin and his wife.** The brahmin returns home and pacifies his wife by telling her what has transpired, especially the vow given by Arjuna.

*Scene 4.* **Brahmin and his wife.** The brahmin's wife advises her husband that she is pregnant. He is delighted.

*Scene 5.* **Brahmin and Arjuna.** As the day of the confinement draws near, the brahmin goes to Arjuna and tells him the good news. Arjuna goes to the brahmin's house and takes all precautionary measures against any likelihood of the next child being snatched away by the god of death.

- Scene 6.* **Brahmin and Arjuna.** The time for the confinement of the brahmin's wife has arrived. As the crucial moment approaches, the brahmin is restless. Anxious minutes pass before an old lady announces that the child has been born. The brahmin is thrilled, but the next moment he collapses on hearing the heart-rending news that this time not only is the child dead, but the dead body has disappeared. The brahmin gets up and showers upon Arjuna all the abuses he can muster.
- Scene 7.* **Arjuna and Krishna.** Arjuna is at his wit's end and searches everywhere for the child, but in vain. Unable to keep his promise, he prepares to immolate himself in a fire. At this crucial juncture Krishna appears on the scene and stops Arjuna from destroying himself, assuring him that all the brahmin's children will be recovered. Krishna and Arjuna go to Vaikuntha, and there they see the ten 'dead' children. Vishnu hands them over to Arjuna.
- Scene 8.* **Krishna, Arjuna and Brahmin.** Arjuna returns the children alive and well to the brahmin, who is overjoyed. He blesses Krishna and Arjuna.

## *Ramayana*

THE RAMAYANA, one of the great epics of India, celebrates the life and exploits of Rama, the seventh incarnation of the god Vishnu. It is the oldest of the Sanskrit poems, believed to have been composed by the sage Valmiki about five centuries B.C., and to have received its present form a century or so later. It is divided into seven sections, and consists of about 50,000 lines. The story impresses its readers with the ultimate triumph of good over evil, in the course of which many good people suffered many hardships.

The heroic deeds recounted in the Ramayana, like those in the Mahabharata, have from time immemorial influenced the life and the traditions of the people of India. These two great epic poems are still learnt by Hindu children from the moment that they can understand the spoken word, and there are very few people in the Indian sub-continent who are not familiar with the stories of the two epics.

Although the story of the Ramayana is far less complex than that of the Mahabharata, it will probably assist anyone who is attending a Kathakali performance of one of the plays from the Ramayana, and who is not familiar with the epic, if we provide an outline of the story of Rama, who made his appearance in the world at the end of the *Treta Yuga*, the second period of the Hindu chronology. (The story of the Mahabharata took place in the third period, called *Dwapara Yuga*, and we are at present living in the fourth period, *Kali Yuga*.)

Rama was the eldest son of Dasaratha, a king of the Solar race who reigned at Ayodhya. Dasaratha was in fact childless, but by performing the *Putrakameshti Yaga* in the hope that he would obtain offspring, he so pleased the gods that he received the promise of four sons. At that time the gods were terribly alarmed at the exploits of Ravana, the wicked *rakshasa* (demon) king of Lanka, who had obtained extraordinary powers through his severe penances and devotion to Brahma<sup>1</sup>. In their terror, they appealed to Vishnu for deliverance, and he agreed to become manifest in the world with Dasaratha as his human father.

<sup>1</sup>This story forms the basis of the Kathakali play *Ravanodbhava*.

Agni, the fire god, appeared out of the sacrificial fire and gave Dasaratha a pot of *payasam* (sweetened rice) for his wives to eat. Dasaratha divided the *payasam* among his wives, and as a result Kausalya brought forth Rama, Kaikeyi gave birth to Bharata, and Sumitra had twin sons, Lakshmana and Satrughna. The brothers were all attached to each other, but Lakshmana was particularly devoted to Rama.

The four brothers grew up together at Ayodhya. When they were still very young, sage Viswamitra sought the aid of Rama to protect his sacrifices from desecration by the *rakshasas*. Dasaratha was most unwilling to agree because Rama was so young, but he finally consented. Rama and Lakshmana went to Viswamitra's hermitage, and on the way there Rama killed the demoness Tataka. Viswamitra then took Rama to Mithila, to the court of Janaka, king of Videha. The king had a beautiful daughter named Sita, whom he offered in marriage to anyone who could bend the bow which once belonged to Siva. Rama not only bent the bow but broke it, thus winning the hand of Sita, who became his devoted wife.<sup>2</sup>

Parasurama, the sixth incarnation of Vishnu, was a mighty brahmin who had exterminated the warrior caste of *Kshatriyas*. He was a devotee of Siva, and was most offended at the breaking of Siva's bow. He challenged Rama to bend his own big bow which had been made for Vishnu—both these mighty bows having been made by the divine craftsman Viswakarma. Rama accepted the challenge and bent the bow with ease. As soon as he touched Vishnu's bow, strength and power flowed into him, and at the same time the godly virtue departed from Parasurama, who then realised that Rama was in fact Vishnu in his next incarnation.

Preparations were made at Ayodhya for the coronation of Rama as successor to Dasaratha, but Kaikeyi, Dasaratha's second wife, who was his favourite, took advantage of two boons granted to her earlier by Dasaratha, and persuaded him to consent to instal her son Bharata as king and to send Rama into exile for fourteen years. Rama then departed with Sita and Lakshmana to live in the forest of Dandaka. Dasaratha died of sorrow from parting with Rama. Bharata was called upon to ascend the throne but refused, setting out to the forest to bring Rama back. When the brothers met there was a long argument, but Rama insisted on completing the sentence which had been passed on him by his father. So Bharata returned and acted as his brother's vice-regent.

After many years of nomadic life, moving from one hermitage to another, Rama took up his abode at Panchavati on the banks of the river Godavari, a district which was infested by *rakshasas*. Surpanakha, sister of Ravana, saw Rama and fell in love with him. He repelled her advances, and in her fury she attacked Sita. This so enraged Lakshmana that he cut off her nose and breasts. Surpanakha, in her agony, went to Khara, Ravana's cousin who ruled the area. Khara was killed in battle by Rama, and when Ravana came to know what had happened, he vowed to take revenge.

Ravana decided that as a reprisal for Surpanakha's disfiguration he would abduct Sita. He persuaded his uncle, Maricha, to help him. They proceeded to Rama's abode in a *vimana* (aerial car, obviously a forerunner of the aeroplane) where Maricha disguised himself as a golden deer and lured Rama from his forest home. Ravana, disguised as a *sanyasi* (holy man) then approached Sita, who received him hospitably. He thereupon turned into his true self,

<sup>2</sup>Sita Swayamvara



seized Sita and took her off to Lanka in his *vimana*.

Rama and Lakshmana were in despair at the disappearance of Sita. They heard from the dying Jatayu that the *rakshasa* king Ravana had carried her off to Lanka. They were wondering how to find her when they came across Hanuman who advised them to seek the help of Sugriva, with whom they entered into an alliance; Rama would kill Sugriva's elder brother, Bali, the king of the monkeys as a punishment for the maltreatment meted out by him to Sugriva, and in return Sugriva promised to find Sita and to help Rama fight Ravana. Rama killed Bali and Sugriva became king of Kishkindha.<sup>3</sup>

Rama received not only the support of Sugriva and his forces but also the active aid of Hanuman, who was Sugriva's minister. Hanuman's extraordinary powers of jumping and flying enabled him to proceed to Lanka and discover Sita.<sup>4</sup> By superhuman efforts, Sugriva's forces were transported to Lanka by 'Rama's Bridge'. After many fierce battles, the city of Lanka was captured; Ravana was killed and Sita was rescued.

By this time the stipulated period of Rama's fourteen years of exile was over. Rama returned to Ayodhya, to be welcomed by Bharata and his subjects. Rama and Sita were crowned king and queen.

(At this point the Ramayana ends, but the story is continued in an appendix called *Uttara-kanda*.)

This happy state of affairs did not last long. Scandalmongers began to say that Rama should not have taken back Sita as his wife because she had been touched by the evil Ravana, a *rakshasa*. He had no doubt that his wife's behaviour was above board, but he felt that there should be no suspicion about her, so he banished her to a forest. In due course Sita gave birth to twin sons, called Kusa and Lava. The children knew that the land they lived in was ruled by Rama, but were not told that he was their father.

One day Rama decided to perform a great sacrifice called *Aswamedha*. The king who performed this sacrifice had initially to conquer all the other kings. To ensure this, a horse, with a challenge fixed to its brow and attended by a guardian, was allowed to wander through the length and breadth of the country. Any ruler who challenged the supremacy of the king by capturing the horse had to be fought and defeated.

As they were playing in the forest, Kusa and Lava saw a horse wandering about. Not knowing what it was, they captured it and wanted to take it to their mother. Satrughna, Rama's younger brother who was in charge of the horse, demanded it back but the boys refused. In the fight that ensued, Satrughna was defeated by the boys. He was ashamed at being defeated by two boys and returned to report the matter to Rama.

Rama, on hearing of the mishap, knew that the boys were his sons. As he obviously could not fight them, he summoned Hanuman and sent him to recover the horse. Knowing that the children were his master's sons, Hanuman pretended to fight them fiercely. After a time he allowed himself to be captured and taken to Sita, who was astounded to see the powerful Hanuman in such a plight. She ordered the boys to release him, and he returned to Rama with the horse.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Bali Vadha

<sup>4</sup>Torana Yudha

<sup>5</sup>Lavanasura Vadha

Rama repented of his unjust treatment of his wife, and invited Sita to return to Ayodhya with her sons, provided she was prepared to declare her chastity in public. Shocked at this demand, Sita prayed to her mother, Bhumidevi, to save her from such disgrace. Mother Earth then opened up and took her into her bosom.

The very first stories composed for Kathakali were called collectively *Ramanattam*, or 'the dance relating to Rama', and are attributed to the Rajah of Kottarakkara, a small principality in central Travancore (now part of Kerala), who is believed to have lived in the latter part of the sixteenth century.

There were originally eight plays in *Ramanattam*, but only three of these are now performed. These three plays—*Sita Swayamvara*, *Bali Vadha* and *Torana Yudha*—do however tell the basic story of the life of Rama as described in greater detail in the preceding paragraphs.

Four other Kathakali plays cover parts of the Ramayana epic. Three of them—*Ravanodbhava*, *Ravana Vijaya* and *Bali Vijaya*—are known as the pre-Ramayana stories and tell of the period before Rama came on the scene. The fourth—*Lavanasura Vadha*—is the post-Ramayana story of Kusa and Lava. These four plays were composed two hundred years after *Ramanattam*.

The stories of these seven plays are given on pages 72-85.

## 21. RAVANODBHAVA

By Kallaikulangara Raghava Pisharoty (1725-1799)

THE *rakshasa* (demon) chiefs Malyavan, Mali and Sumali were creating havoc on earth by molesting all god-fearing people. Indra, the king of the gods, appealed to Vishnu for help. In the fight between Indra and the *rakshasa* chiefs, Vishnu appeared and killed Mali. The other two demons took refuge in the nether world.

After the defeat of the *rakshasa* chiefs, Sumali's daughter Kaikasi married the sage Visravas. She gave birth to a daughter and three sons, the eldest of whom was Ravana. By obtaining a boon from Brahma, the creator of the universe, Ravana became all-powerful and was able to conquer the whole world.

### Characters

Indra, the king of the gods	<i>Paccha</i>
Narada, a sage	<i>Minukku</i>
Vishnu, one of the Hindu Trinity	<i>Paccha</i>
Malyavan, a <i>rakshasa</i> chief	<i>Chuvanna Tadi</i> (Red Beard)
Mali, brother of Malyavan	<i>Chuvanna Tadi</i>
Sumali, brother of Malyavan and Mali	<i>Chuvanna Tadi</i>
Mantri, minister of Malyavan	<i>Katti</i>
Visravas, a sage, husband of Kaikasi	<i>Paccha</i> (with black beard)
Kaikasi, daughter of Sumali	<i>Minukku</i>
Kutti Ravana (Ravana as a child)	<i>Katti</i>
RAVANA, eldest son of Kaikasi	<i>Katti</i>
Kumbhakarna, second son of Kaikasi	<i>Katti</i>
Vibhishana, youngest son of Kaikasi	<i>Paccha</i>

*Scene 1.* **Narada and Indra.** Sage Narada tells Indra that the *rakshasa* chiefs, the brothers Malyavan, Mali and Sumali, are creating a lot of trouble on earth by molesting all god-fearing people. He invites Indra to go to Vishnu and seek his aid in order to get rid of them.

*Scene 2.* **Vishnu and Indra.** Vishnu listens to Indra's prayer, and tells him that he will destroy the *rakshasa* chiefs.

*Scene 3.* **Narada and Malyavan.** Narada goes to Malyavan, who receives the sage respectfully and asks for his news. He is told of Indra's designs. Malyavan summons his brothers and decides to attack Devaloka (heaven), Indra's realm. They all set off with their army.

*Scene 4.* **Malyavan, Mali, Sumali and Indra.** Malyavan challenges Indra. During the fight between Indra and Mali, Vishnu appears and kills Mali. Malyavan and Sumali leave the battlefield and take refuge in Patala, the nether world.

- Scene 5. Kaikasi and Visravas.* Kaikasi, at the bidding of her father Sumali, approaches the sage Visravas and begs him to be her husband. The sage agrees.
- Scene 6. Kaikasi and Visravas.* Three boys and a girl are born to Kaisaki, who takes the boys to Visravas for his blessing.
- Scene 7. Kutti Ravana and Kaikasi.* Kutti Ravana (Ravana as a child) is sleeping in his mother's lap when tears fall on him. He wakes up and asks her why she is weeping. She tells him that she has seen Vaisravana (who is the son of Visravas by a former wife, and king of the Yakshas) travelling in a *vimana* (aircraft), all rich and powerful. She is pained because he (Ravana) will never be as great as Vaisravana. He consoles her by assuring her that he will become much more powerful than Vaisravana.
- Scene 8. Ravana, Kumbhakarna and Vibhishana.* Ravana goes to Gokarna with his two brothers and does *tapas* (penance) to propitiate Brahma. After a very long time, Brahma appears and asks Ravana what boons he desires of him. Ravana prays that he may be invincible to all gods and that only man may kill him (as *rakshasas* are man-eaters, he does not expect any danger from a mortal). Brahma grants Ravana and his brothers the boons they desire and departs.

Ravana then asks his brothers what boons they have received from Brahma. Kumbhakarna replies that he intended to pray for *nirdevatvam* (a world without gods), but unfortunately by a slip of the tongue he asked for *nidravatvam* (long sleep), which was granted to him.

Vibhishana says that he prayed for and received *Vishnubhakti*—devotion to god Vishnu. Ravana is angry and disappointed with his brothers, for they cannot be of any assistance to him in his ambition to conquer the three worlds. He pities them and scoffs at them, saying that their lives have been wasted and that he does not require their assistance: he will master the three worlds single-handed. They all return to their mother.

*Note :* Only eight of the sixteen scenes in the play are detailed here. In a scene preceding Scene 5, seldom performed, sage Visravas tells his son Vaisravana to go to Lanka and reside there (formerly Lanka was the seat of the *rakshasas*: in due course it was occupied by Ravana).

Usually only Scenes 7 and 8 are performed. Scene 7 is then known as *tapasattam* (meaning dance-drama of *tapas*). This is wholly *ilakiattam*, or solo dance-acting, in which the actor who plays the part of Ravana describes the entire action in a dramatic *tour de force*.

In Scene 8 normally Brahma does not appear on the stage as Ravana describes the scene himself.

In the following scenes, which are rarely performed, Ravana marries Mandodari and celebrates the marriage of his sister, Surpanakha, with Vidyujihwan, king of Patala.

## 22. RAVANA VIJAYA

*By Kilimanoor Raja Raja Varma (Cherunni) Koyil Tampuran (1812-1846)*

THE ONLY part of this play which is now performed is called *Rambha Pravesa*, meaning 'the entry of Rambha.'

Ravana, the wicked *rakshasa* king who conquered the whole world, behaved in a disgraceful manner. When he was in the Himalayas on his way to fight his step-brother, Vaisravana, he saw Rambha, a nymph who had been produced by the churning of the ocean, and was smitten with her charms. Rambha told Ravana that she had a date with Nalakubera, the son of Vaisravana, but said that she would come to him as soon as she was free, which would be at the end of the day. But Ravana could not wait that long, so he molested Rambha and was cursed by her.

### Characters

<b>RAVANA</b> , a wicked <i>rakshasa</i> king	<i>Katti</i>
<b>Doota</b> , a messenger	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Rambha</b> , a nymph	<i>Minukku</i>

*Scene 1.* **Ravana** and **Doota**. Doota (a messenger) has been sent by Vaisravana to tell his younger step-brother, Ravana, that he should stop his wicked ways and behave more virtuously. Ravana hears Doota's words, but makes no reply. He is so furious that he chops off the messenger's head. Ravana is determined to teach Vaisravana a lesson and is on the war path.

*Scene 2.* **Ravana** and **Rambha**. Ravana is resting on the slopes of Mount Kailasa in the Himalayas. When night falls, he discovers the divine Rambha, who is enchantingly beautiful, walking alone on her way to keep a tryst with her lover. Ravana begs Rambha to bestow her love on him as he cannot bear to part from her.

Nymphs like Rambha do not marry, but accept a lover for a day. Rambha tells Ravana that she will come to him after she has spent the day with Nalakubera, Vaisravana's son, with whom she has a date.

Ravana cannot wait, and takes Rambha by force. She pronounces a curse on him, that the moment he again touches a woman against her will, he will die.

## 23. BALI VIJAYA

By Kallur Nambudiripad (1774-1833)

AFTER defeating Vaisravana in battle, Ravana attacked Devaloka, the abode of the gods, and subdued Indra. He was now supreme lord of the three worlds. Sage Narada came to Indra when he was deploring his hard fate, and consoled him by saying that he would contrive to humble the *rakshasa* king, using as his instrument Indra's own son, Bali.

Narada went to Lanka and, after singing Ravana's praises, told him that there was a monkey called Bali who had no respect for him: he suggested that Ravana should fight and defeat him. Ravana was surprised at the thought of having to confront an insignificant monkey as an enemy, but accompanied by Narada he went to Bali's abode where, to his amazement, Bali overcame him. Narada, having carried out his word, departed, leaving Ravana duly humiliated.

### Characters

**RAVANA**, the *rakshasa* king of Lanka  
**Mandodari**, his wife  
**Narada**, a sage  
**Bali**, king of Kishkindha

*Katti*  
*Minukku*  
*Minukku*  
*Chuvanna Tadi* (Red Beard)

*Scene 1.* **Ravana** and **Mandodari**. Ravana describes the beauty of his wife, Mandodari. He says that his ten faces and twenty arms are quarrelling amongst themselves as to which should kiss her and embrace her first. While at this dalliance, they are disturbed by the arrival of a visitor, sage Narada.

*Scene 2.* **Narada** and **Ravana**. Narada has come to destroy Ravana's pride, although he sings his praises. Ravana feels flattered and receives him in a fitting manner. He tells Narada of his greatness and reminds him how his mighty son Indrajit fought Indra and imprisoned him, and how he released Indra when Brahma came and pleaded with him.

Narada tells Ravana that the fact that Indrajit imprisoned Indra is well-known, that the very name of Ravana frightens everybody, and that he is held in great respect by one and all. But, he says, there is a monkey called Bali who has no respect for Ravana and likens him to a blade of grass. Narada tells Ravana that unless he acts immediately, it will be impossible for him to defeat him later on. He asks Ravana to accompany him immediately to Bali's abode so that he can tie him down and capture him.

Ravana is surprised at the thought of having to confront an enemy as insignificant as a monkey, and wonders how Bali can stand up to his might. Nevertheless he decides to comply with Narada's request and sets out to find Bali, taking his mighty sword *Chandrahasa*. Narada pretends to be surprised at the sight of the weapon, whereupon Ravana narrates how he obtained it from god Siva.

In a piece of solo acting called *Kailasodharana*, or 'the lifting of Mount Kailasa', Ravana tells how, on his way to fight Vaisravana, he found a great mountain blocking his path. He was so powerful that he lifted it up in his hands as if it were a toy. Siva and his wife, Parvati, were living at the top of the mountain, and when she found that the mountain was moving, Parvati caught hold of Siva to steady herself. Siva understood what was happening, and with his toe he pressed the mountain down. Ravana, finding himself crushed under the weight of the mountain, knew that it must be Kailasa, the abode of Siva, and sang praises to the god. Siva was so pleased with these praises that he released Ravana and bestowed upon him the sword *Chandrasasa* as a mark of grace.

Narada, realising that Ravana with his sword would be invincible, tells him that such a powerful weapon is not at all necessary for such an insignificant foe as a monkey. Ravana agrees, and leaves his sword behind.

*Scene 3.* **Narada, Ravana and Bali.** In accordance with the plan arranged by Narada, Bali is sitting on the foreshore in a praying posture when Ravana and Narada arrive. Narada shows Bali to Ravana and tells him that if he goes in front of Bali, the monkey will run away in fear. He asks Ravana to creep up behind Bali, grab his tail, and thus catch him. The very sight of Bali makes Ravana nervous, and he even thinks of returning home to Lanka, but realising that this would not befit a person of his might, he finally decides to do as the sage suggests and proceeds to catch Bali's tail. To his great surprise and chagrin, Ravana finds himself held fast in the coils of Bali's tail around him. Narada, having done his duty, departs happily, leaving Ravana to his fate.

Ravana cries out with the rigorous pain he undergoes in the grip of the monkey's tail. After some time, Bali pretends to be surprised at hearing his cries, tells him that he was not aware of what was happening, and releases him from his grip. Bali asks Ravana why, with all his might, he wanted to live in a monkey's tail. Ravana bows to Bali, Indra's son, and says that it all happened on Narada's advice, which he foolishly obeyed because he was ignorant of Bali's might. Ravana takes leave of Bali after having lost his pride, albeit only temporarily.

*Note :* Most Kathakali plays begin with a *sringara-pada* (love song) in *vilambit kala*, or slow tempo, to display the erotic sentiment, in which the main character appears as a lover with his spouse.

Scene 1, as given above, is sometimes replaced in this play by a scene from *Karthaveeryarjuna Vijaya* (the rest of which is no longer performed). In this scene Mandodari tells Ravana that in her dreams she saw him engaged in love play with Urvashi, a dancing girl, in the heavens, and this upset her very much. Ravana tells her that everybody in the heavens is her servant; it is silly to think that he has any interest in her. (As he is consoling Mandodari, Ravana sees in the sky a being descending towards Lanka and discovers that it is sage Narada, who is singing songs in praise of him. He leaves Mandodari and goes to receive Narada.)

## 24. SITA SWAYAMVARA

By Kottarakkara Tampuran (1555-1605)

KING DASARATHA of the Solar dynasty had four sons, the eldest of whom was Rama. Rama grew up strong and valiant. Whilst he was still a teen-ager, Viswamitra, the celebrated sage, went to Dasaratha and requested that Rama should be sent with him to safeguard a *yaga* (religious sacrifice) which he was performing and which was being disturbed by the *rakshasas*. Dasaratha agreed, somewhat reluctantly because Rama was still only a young man, but he could not refuse the request of a great sage. Rama's younger brother, Lakshmana, went with him because the two were never far apart from each other.

Near Viswamitra's hermitage Rama killed Tataka, a demoness, and Sabahu, a wicked *rakshasa*. After the religious ceremony was over, Viswamitra took Rama to king Janaka who had a huge bow that no one could lift or bend. Janaka proclaimed that he would give his daughter, Sita, to any prince who could lift it. Although many princes had tried in vain, Rama had no difficulty in lifting and bending the bow, and indeed breaking it. Sita was accordingly wedded to Rama and they returned to Ayodhya, accompanied by king Dasaratha and the others who had come to attend the marriage.

On his journey home, Rama was confronted by the warrior-sage Parasurama, the sixth incarnation of Vishnu, whose mission was to destroy the *Kshatriyas*, the warrior race who had become arrogant and wicked. Parasurama's father was a brahmin and his mother a *Kshatriya*.

Only the last two scenes of this play are now performed.

### Characters

Viswamitra, a celebrated sage	<i>Minukku</i>
Rama, eldest son of king Dasaratha	<i>Paccha with muti</i>
Lakshmana, Rama's younger brother	<i>Paccha with muti</i>
Janaka, king of Videha	<i>Paccha (with white beard)</i>
Dasaratha, king of Ayodhya	<i>Paccha</i>
PARASURAMA, the mighty warrior-sage	<i>Minukku</i>

*Scene 1.* **Viswamitra, Rama, Lakshmana and Janaka.** Sage Viswamitra brings Rama and Lakshmana to king Janaka, who welcomes them. The king invites Rama to bend the bow which once belonged to god Siva and is sacred to him, having proclaimed that anyone who can bend the bow will win the hand of his daughter, Sita.

Rama has no difficulty in bending the bow, and in addition to this he breaks it. Sita is accordingly wedded to Rama.

*Scene 2.* **Dasaratha, Rama and Parasurama.** As the wedding party is on its way back to Ayodhya, Parasurama stands in the way 'like a towering hill' and challenges Rama because he has broken the bow belonging to Siva. Rama refuses to fight because Parasurama is not only a brahmin but a sage. Parasurama then challenges Rama



to bend his own big bow, which was made for Vishnu and which, like that of Siva which he had already bent, was made by the divine craftsman Viswakarma.

Rama accepts the challenge at once. He lifts the big bow and bends it with ease. As soon as he receives Vishnu's bow, strength and power flow into him and at the same time the godly virtue departs from Parasurama who 'like a wounded serpent recoils from the dauntless figure that confronts him so boldly'.

• The mighty Parasurama says "Surely you are Vishnu himself, or why do I feel bereft of all power like this, as you take up my bow?" He praises Rama and retires to do penance. Rama and the others proceed on their way to Ayodhya.

## 25. BALI VADHA

*By Kottarakkara Tampuran (1555-1605)*

RAVANA vowed to take revenge on Rama for the attack on his sister Surpanakha and the death of Khara. In consultation with his wicked uncle, Maricha, he hatched a plot to kidnap Sita and take her to Lanka. After the kidnapping, Rama came to an arrangement with Sugriva, the king of a tribe of monkey-men, who promised to find Sita on the condition that Rama would first kill his brother, Bali.

The powerful Bali ruled over Kishkindhya, the land of monkey-men. When he seduced Sugriva's wife, the brothers became bitter enemies. There were several encounters between them, in all of which Sugriva was badly beaten. So, accompanied by his counsellors, chief of whom was Hanuman, Sugriva retired to a hill called Rissyamuka, where on account of a sage's curse Bali could not enter. Sugriva lived in constant fear of Bali. One day he espied two young men (Rama and Lakshmana), who looked handsome and brave, approaching his retreat. He sent Hanuman in disguise to find out who they were, and when satisfied that they were not enemies he came to an understanding with Rama. Bali was duly killed by Rama's arrow.

### Characters

<b>RAVANA</b> , the wicked king of Lanka	<i>Katti</i>
<b>Maricha</b> , uncle of Ravana	<i>Katti (with black beard)</i>
<b>Rama</b> , eldest son of king Dasaratha	<i>Paccha with muti</i>
<b>Sita</b> , wife of Rama	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Lakshmana</b> , younger brother of Rama	<i>Paccha with muti</i>
<b>Sanyasi</b> , a hermit (Ravana in disguise)	<i>Special</i>
<b>Jatayu</b> , a giant bird	<i>Special</i>
<b>Vatu</b> , a brahmin boy (Hanuman in disguise)	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Hanuman</b> , chief counsellor of Sugriva	<i>Vella Tadi (White Beard)</i>
<b>Sugriva</b> , brother of Bali	<i>Chuvanna Tadi (Red Beard)</i>
<b>Bali</b> , king of Kishkindhya	<i>Chuvanna Tadi</i>
<b>Tara</b> , wife of Bali	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Angada</b> , son of Bali	<i>Minukku (with monkey mask)</i>

*Note* : In this play the role of Hanuman is performed by a junior actor, the character being known as Kutti (boy) Hanuman. He first approaches Rama and Lakshmana disguised as a brahmin boy (Vatu). When, in Scene 6, he announces himself, Vatu's place is taken by Kutti Hanuman.

*Scene 1.* **Ravana and Maricha.** Ravana consults his uncle, and decides to abduct Sita as a reprisal for the disfigurement of his sister Surpanakha by Lakshmana. At first Maricha refuses to co-operate, saying that Rama is not an ordinary mortal and that the venture will be dangerous, but he agrees to obey when Ravana threatens to kill him.

- Scene 2.* **Rama, Sita and Lakshmana.** Maricha appears before the forest abode of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana in the guise of a golden deer. Enchanted by the sight of the deer, Sita asks Rama to catch it for her. Telling Lakshmana to guard Sita, Rama stalks the deer and, realising the deception, kills it. Maricha moans aloud in Rama's voice, asking Sita and Lakshmana to come and save him. Sita asks Lakshmana to go to Rama's assistance. He is most reluctant to leave Sita alone, but eventually agrees to go off to help Rama.
- Scene 3.* **Sanyasi and Sita.** A *sanyasi*, who is Ravana in disguise, approaches Sita, who has been left alone after the departure of Lakshmana. She receives him hospitably. After a few commonplace remarks Ravana suddenly reveals himself and announces that he has come to carry her off. He leaps forward, seizes Sita by her hands and places her in his *vimana* (aircraft). Ravana departs for Lanka.
- Scene 4.* **Ravana and Jatayu.** On his way back to Lanka, Ravana is intercepted by the giant bird Jatayu, an old friend of Rama's father, which attacks him. There is a furious fight, but eventually Jatayu's wing is slashed by Ravana. The bird falls wounded to the ground. Ravana proceeds on his way to Lanka.
- Scene 5.* **Rama and Lakshmana.** Rama and Lakshmana return to their abode and are most distressed to find that Sita is not there. They set out to find her, and on their way they come across the wounded Jatayu. The bird tells them what has happened and then dies. Lakshmana performs the last rites.
- Scene 6.* **Sugriva and Hanuman.** Sugriva, living on a hill in fear of Bali, sees two men approaching. Wondering who they might be, he sends Hanuman to investigate and bring them to him if they are friends.
- Scene 7.* **Rama, Lakshmana and Vatu.** After travelling over many hills, Rama and Lakshmana meet Hanuman, who has assumed the guise of a brahmin boy (Vatu), having been deputed by Sugriva to find out who the strangers are. Hanuman reveals himself, assures them that Sugriva will be helpful in finding Sita, and invites them to meet him.
- Scene 8.* **Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva and Hanuman.** Sugriva receives Rama and his brother with respect. Rama enters into a pact with Sugriva. He promises to help him in killing his enemy, his brother Bali, and Sugriva undertakes to find Sita. To instil confidence in Sugriva, Rama shows his prowess by kicking off with his toe the huge skull of a dead *rakshasa* and later shoots down seven trees with a single arrow. Sugriva shows Rama the ornaments which Sita dropped to the earth as she was flying to Lanka in Ravana's *vimana*. Rama sheds tears over them.
- Scene 9.* **Sugriva and Bali.** They all set out for Bali's palace, where Sugriva challenges him to a battle. Bali cannot believe his ears: Sugriva, whom he has always considered

to be a coward, is challenging him to a battle. In the terrible fight that ensues, Sugriva is unable to match up to Bali's strength. He runs away with Bali on his heels.

Sugriva is about to be defeated when Rama, seeing his plight, shoots an arrow at Bali without his seeing him. It flies like lightning and pierces Bali through the heart. Bali falls to the ground, and his wife Tara and his son Angada appear, weeping bitterly when they see what has happened. Rama and Lakshmana also appear. The dying Bali at first taunts Rama for having wantonly killed him, but then repents and confesses his sins, begging Rama to take care of Tara and Angada. He tells Sugriva to rule Kishkindhya well and to be kind to Tara. In his last words, Bali prays to Rama for salvation.

After the curtain is held up for Bali's exit, Lakshmana annoints Sugriva as the king of Kishkindhya.

## 26. TORANA YUDHA

*By Kottarakkara Tampuran (1555-1605)*

RAMA, having killed Bali in accordance with the agreement reached with Sugriva, was annoyed at the monkey king's delay over fulfilling his part of the bargain—to find the whereabouts of Sita, who had been abducted by the *rakshasa* king Ravana and taken by him to Lanka. Rama sent his brother Lakshmana to warn Sugriva of the serious consequences if he did not do as he had promised. Sugriva then sent Hanuman, his counsellor who was now Rama's emissary, and Angada, Bali's son who was the general of his forces, to search for Sita. Rama gave Hanuman his ring to show to Sita in order to make his identity known to her. In due course Hanuman discovered the whereabouts of Sita and, after setting fire to Lanka, returned to Rama.

### Characters

HANUMAN, emissary of Rama	<i>Vella Tadi</i> (White Beard)
Lankalakshmi, as a demoness guarding Lanka	<i>Kari</i>
Lankalakshmi as herself—a good spirit	<i>Minukku</i>
Sita, wife of Rama	<i>Minukku</i>
Ravana, demon king of Lanka	<i>Katti</i>
Mandodari, wife of Ravana	<i>Minukku</i>
Prahasta, minister of Ravana	<i>Katti*</i>
Rakshasas	<i>Minukku</i>
Vibhishana, brother of Ravana	<i>Paccha</i>

*Note :* \*In practice, Prahasta's make-up is usually *Minukku*.

*Scene 1.* **Hanuman.** Hanuman sets out for Lanka, leaping over the sea. In the dance action he describes three adventures that befell him on his aerial journey—his encounter with Surasa, the sea monster who had the magical gift of enlarging her body, and his competition with her in which he outwitted her (“anything you can do, I can do better”); his battle with the demoness Simhika who tried to stop him by catching at his shadow, but was ultimately killed by him; and the occasion on which Mount Minaka rose from the sea and invited him to rest and refresh himself before proceeding, to which he replied “I cannot rest until I have found Sita” and went away, thanking him.

*Scene 2.* **Hanuman and Lankalakshmi.** Hanuman arrives at Lanka, the city of Ravana, and is stopped by Lankalakshmi, a good spirit who through a curse became a demoness and had to guard Lanka. She orders him to leave immediately. Hanuman strikes her, and because the sage who cursed her ordained that if she were struck by a monkey she would regain her normal form, she immediately becomes a lovely maiden again. Blessing Hanuman, and telling him where he can find Sita, she leaves Lanka.

Hanuman enters Lanka and in due course sees Sita in the wood of Ashoka trees, surrounded by *rakshasa* women. When he is about to introduce himself to Sita, he hears a noise and sees the pompous entry of someone with a retinue. He assumes that it must be Ravana.

*Scene 3. Ravana and Mandodari.* Ravana enters with his wife Mandodari, surrounded by his henchmen. He is love-sick because he has not obtained Sita's love. He decides that she can be won over by the gift of clothes and ornaments, so sending Mandodari away, he asks his men to lead him to the Ashoka wood where Sita is kept a prisoner.

After dismissing his men, Ravana addresses nice words to Sita, but she turns a deaf ear to his appeals and tells him to restore her to Rama. Ravana is furious and draws his sword to kill Sita, but he is prevented from doing so by the timely reappearance of Mandodari, who leads him away.

*Scene 4. Hanuman and Sita.* When Sita is sitting alone Hanuman, hiding in a tree, calls out "Rama! Rama! Rama!". She looks up and sees the monkey, who folds his hands and raises them to his head in salutation. At first she suspects him, but when he tells her the whole story and gives her Rama's ring, she gives him her crown jewel and asks him to hand it to Rama. After assuring her that Rama and his men will soon be in Lanka, and that Ravana will be slain, Hanuman takes leave of Sita.

Hanuman decides to make his presence known to Ravana and starts destroying his garden. Several *rakshasas*, led by Prahasta, attack him: some of them are killed. The remainder run off to tell Ravana what has happened. (Eventually Ravana's son, Indrajit, overpowers Hanuman with his magic weapons.) Prahasta leads him away to be brought before Ravana.

*Scene 5. Hanuman and Ravana.* On being brought before Ravana, Hanuman makes a seat out of his tail and sits on it, well above Ravana; this is considered insulting behaviour. He then reveals his identity as a messenger of Rama. Ravana speaks of Rama with scant respect, and orders his men to kill Hanuman.

When he is advised by his brother, Vibhishana, that it is unethical for a king to kill a messenger, Ravana orders strips of cloth to be tied to Hanuman's tail. His servants pour oil onto the tail and set fire to it. Hanuman jumps around the whole city with his tail on fire, setting ablaze all buildings except the Ashoka grove where Sita is, and Vibhishana's palace, causing much havoc. After setting fire to Lanka, Hanuman dips his tail into the sea and jumps back to his homeland.

*Note :* In the full text of the play there are six scenes before Scene 1, but they are not usually performed.

## 27. LAVANASURA VADHA

By Palakkatt Amritta Sastry (1815-1877)

BY THE TIME that Rama, with a force of monkey-men under the leadership of Hanuman, had fought and killed Ravana and rescued Sita from Lanka, the stipulated period of fourteen years of exile was over. Rama returned to Ayodhya, to be welcomed by Bharata and his subjects. Rama and Sita were crowned king and queen.

But the happiness of Rama was short-lived. Scandalmongers began to whisper that he should not have received back Sita as his wife and queen because she had been touched by the *rakshasa* Ravana. Rama never for a moment suspected his wife's virtue, but he held that the queen must be above suspicion. He therefore banished his wife to the forest, where she lived in the *ashram* of sage Valmiki. In due course she gave birth to twin sons, named Kusa and Lava. The children knew that the land in which they lived was ruled by Rama, but they did not know that he was their father.

One day Rama performed a great sacrifice called *Aswamedha*. The king who performed this had first of all to conquer all other kings, and to ensure this a horse, attended by a guardian, with a challenge fixed to its brow, was allowed to wander through the length and breadth of the land. A ruler who challenged the supremacy of the king by capturing the horse had to be fought and defeated. Kusa and Lava saw the horse and, not knowing what it was, they captured it, thus posing a problem for Satrugna who was in charge of the horse.

### Characters

<b>Mannan</b> , a washerman	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Mannati</b> , his wife	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Sita</b> , wife of Rama	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Kusa</b> , twin son of Sita	<i>Paccha with muti</i>
<b>Lava</b> , his brother	<i>Paccha with muti</i>
<b>Brahmin boys</b>	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Satrugna</b> , brother of Rama	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>HANUMAN</b> , the monkey chief	<i>Vella Tadi (White Beard)</i>

*Scene 1.* **Mannan** and **Mannati**. A washerman's wife returns home after staying with her mother, but her husband suspects her fidelity, thinking that she has gone to see her lover. As the curtain rises, the washerman is seen beating his wife. She runs away to escape from his blows. There is an angry scene in which he drives her out of the house saying "I will not take you back as Rama took back Sita".

(This remark was reported to Rama. Although he had no doubt about Sita's chastity, he decided that he would have to discard her. He felt that a king should submit to the will of his people, so he ordered his brother, Lakshmana, to take Sita into a forest and leave her there. Sage Valmiki took her into his hermitage, and there she gave birth to twin boys, Kusa and Lava.)

**Scene 2. Sita, Kusa and Lava.** Sita is with her sons. They ask permission to go and play in the forest. She gives them permission and goes away.

As they are playing in the forest, Kusa and Lava see the sacrificial horse. Never having seen such an animal, they capture it and lead it away to show it to their mother.

The children of sages who are doing penance in the forest see the foolhardy action of Kusa and Lava. They ask them to release the animal, but the boys refuse to do so. The brahmin boys leave. Kusa asks Lava to take charge of the horse and leaves the scene along with the brahmin boys.

Rama's brother Satrughna, who is in charge of the horse, finding that it has been led away, enters and sees it being held by Lava, who refuses to part with it. A fight ensues in which Lava is made captive, but shortly afterwards Kusa appears and fights Satrughna, who is compelled to leave without the horse. He returns to Rama to report the incident.

Rama, on being told of this mishap, knows that the boys are his own sons. Obviously he cannot fight them, so he summons Hanuman and sends him to recover the horse.

**Scene 3. Hanuman, Kusa and Lava.** Hanuman approaches the boys, who have never seen anything like him before. He teases them for a while and asks for the horse, but they refuse to hand it over and there is a fight. Knowing that the boys are his master's sons, Hanuman pretends to fight fiercely. He allows them to capture him and take him to Sita.

**Scene 4. Sita, Hanuman, Kusa and Lava.** Kusa and Lava bring Hanuman to Sita, who is astonished to see the powerful and wise Hanuman in this plight. She orders the boys to release him immediately, and tells them to apologise to him. Hanuman prostrates himself at the feet of Sita and tells her of the *yaga* which Rama is performing in which her place at the *yaga* has been taken by a golden statue of herself, for the performer of a *yaga* must have his wife by his side. Sita is greatly comforted to know that she has the undivided love of her husband.

After greeting the boys affectionately, Hanuman takes leave and returns to Rama with the sacrificial horse.

*Note :* Except for the washerman scene, the first part of this play is not performed now as it has no bearing on the story given in Scenes 2 to 4.

Sometimes Scene 1 is performed without the following scenes, or Scenes 2 to 4 are performed without Scene 1.

As Scene 1 has social characters in it, it introduces an element of comedy combined with tragedy.



## *The Story of Nala*

IN THE Mahabharata there are twenty-eight chapters called the *Nalopakhyana* which tell the story of Nala, king of Nishadha, and his wife Damayanti. The story was narrated to the Pandavas by sage Brihadhaswa when he came to their hermitage in the forest whilst Arjuna was away in the Himalayas doing penance to Siva.

At that time the Pandavas were very sorry for themselves and worried about how they would be able to defeat the Kauravas, particularly if Arjuna did not return. They told the sage of their misfortunes, and Brihadhaswa replied that it was not correct for them to say that no one in the world was as unfortunate as they were. "Have you not heard of king Nala of Nishadha?" he asked. "He suffered more sorrows than you when he was deceived by Pushkara at a game of dice, after which he lost his wealth and his kingdom and had to go into exile in the forest. Compare your state to his. He was less fortunate than you because he was alone after he had lost his wife, whereas you have the company of your heroic brothers and a devoted wife who is always with you, and you are supported in your adversity by learned brahmins."

The sage then recounted the story of Nala and Damayanti.

Damayanti was the only daughter of Bhima, king of Vidarbha, and was very beautiful. Nala was brave and handsome. He was skilled in the handling of horses, but inclined to gamble. Although they had never met each other, they fell in love because of the fame of their respective virtues. Bhima decided to hold a *swayamvara* at which his daughter would select her husband from among the princes present. Nala was one of the princes who went to the *swayamvara*. Four gods—Indra, Agni, Varuna and Yama—also decided to go.

The gods met Nala on his way to the *swayamvara* and ordered him to go to Damayanti as their messenger and request her to accept one of them as her husband. Nala reluctantly agreed to perform this task, but told the gods that he himself was in love with Damayanti. On hearing this each of the four gods assumed the form of Nala, so that when the time for

the selection of the bridegroom came, Damayanti had five Nalas to choose from. She prayed to the gods for help in identifying the Nala whom alone she loved. They then assumed their true forms in her sight, thus allowing her to marry Nala.

Kali, an evil spirit possessing magical powers, and Dwapara, another evil spirit who was Kali's henchman, arrived too late for the *swayamvara*. Kali was furious when he heard that Damayanti had been married to Nala. He resolved to take revenge on the couple by driving them out of the country and instigated Pushkara, Nala's younger half-brother, to challenge Nala to a game of dice at which he (Kali) charmed the dice. Nala lost every game he played and eventually lost his wealth and his kingdom. He was banished to the forest with Damayanti, where he suffered great hardship.

Nala and Damayanti wandered about the forest hunting wild animals. One day two birds (Kali and Dwapara in disguise) flew away with the only garment that Nala had. He decided to abandon his wife, and did so while she was asleep. Nala hoped that she would return to her father's palace, but she did not go home and went instead to the court of the king of Chedi, where she took up service as companion to the queen. She was eventually discovered by messengers whom her father had sent out to search for her, and she then returned to her father's kingdom, Vidarbha.

Whilst alone in the forest, Nala rescued the divine serpent Karkotaka from a fire, but was bitten by it. The serpent told him that the poison would remain in him until he had learnt the secret of playing dice, when the evil spirit Kali, who was now in him, would depart: he would then recover his wife and his kingdom. Because of the serpent's poison, Nala's skin turned blue-black in colour. In this disguise he entered the service of Rituparna, king of Ayodhya, as a trainer of horses, calling himself Bahuka.

Damayanti, suspecting that Nala was living in the court of king Rituparna, resolved to test his faith by announcing that she would hold another *swayamvara*, so that she could select another husband. King Rituparna decided to attend the *swayamvara*, and took Bahuka with him to drive his chariot. On the way to Vidarbha the king, who was a mathematician, instructed Bahuka in the secret of playing dice. As soon as Bahuka had acquired this knowledge, the evil spirit of Kali left him—as foretold by the serpent—though his colour remained blue-black.

Damayanti approached the charioteer, who upbraided her for thinking about taking another husband. He then put on the magic cloth which the serpent had given him and regained his normal form as Nala. Nala and Damayanti were reunited, after which Nala went to Pushkara and challenged him to another game of dice. Having the advantage of the knowledge that he had obtained from Rituparna, he won the game and regained his kingdom.

Four Kathakali plays cover the story of Nala under the title *Nala Charita*—First Day, Second Day, Third Day and Fourth Day.

All four plays were composed by Unnayi Warriar, whose exact dates are not known. Scholars and authors of the history of Malayalam literature are not agreed on the dates, but according to *Kathakali Rangam* by K.P.S. Menon they are 1675-1716.

## 28. NALA CHARITA

### First Day

By Unnayi Warriar (1675-1716)

#### Characters

<b>NALA</b> , king of Nishadha	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>Narada</b> , a sage	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Hamsa</b> , a golden swan	<i>Special</i>
<b>Damayanti</b> , daughter of king Bhima	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Attendants</b>	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Indra</b> , king of the gods	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>Agni</b> , the god of fire	<i>Minukku</i> (with red face)
<b>Varuna</b> , the god of the seas	<i>Minukku</i> (with yellow face)
<b>Yama</b> , the god of death	<i>Katti</i>

- Scene 1.* **Narada** and **Nala**. Sage Narada visits Nala and tells him about Damayanti, daughter of king Bhima of Vidarbha, who is very beautiful. Already in love with Damayanti (having heard of her charm from others), Nala's love for her intensifies.
- Scene 2.* **Nala**. Nala is desperately in love with Damayanti. He wonders how he can seek and win her.
- Scene 3.* **Nala** and **Hamsa**. Seeking solace, Nala goes to a secluded spot in the palace garden. A golden swan, the heavenly bird Hamsa, flies into the garden and falls asleep. Nala picks it up. The swan, thinking that Nala will kill it, pleads to be let free. He releases the swan and it flies away, but wishing to express its gratitude to Nala, it returns, praises him for his kindness and describes Damayanti's beauty to him, promising to help him to win her. Nala is extremely happy.
- Scene 4.* **Damayanti**, her attendants and **Hamsa**. Damayanti is amusing herself with her friends in the palace garden of Vidarbha. She has heard a lot about Nala, and has fallen in love with him. Suddenly she sees a beautiful swan (Hamsa) landing in the garden. She approaches it, but it will not let her catch it. When Damayanti is alone, the swan tells her the story of Nala and his love for her. Damayanti tells the swan of her love for Nala, and begs it to carry her message to Nala. Hamsa flies away.
- Scene 5.* **Nala** and **Hamsa**. The swan returns to the anxious Nala and tells him about its meeting with Damayanti and her love for him. Nala is overjoyed.
- Scene 6.* **Nala**, **Indra**, **Agni**, **Varuna** and **Yama**. Nala sets off for Vidarbha, having received an invitation to attend Damayanti's *swayamvara* (the occasion on which a princess

the selection of the bridegroom came, Damayanti had five Nalas to choose from. She prayed to the gods for help in identifying the Nala whom alone she loved. They then assumed their true forms in her sight, thus allowing her to marry Nala.

Kali, an evil spirit possessing magical powers, and Dwapara, another evil spirit who was Kali's henchman, arrived too late for the *swayamvara*. Kali was furious when he heard that Damayanti had been married to Nala. He resolved to take revenge on the couple by driving them out of the country and instigated Pushkara, Nala's younger half-brother, to challenge Nala to a game of dice at which he (Kali) charmed the dice. Nala lost every game he played and eventually lost his wealth and his kingdom. He was banished to the forest with Damayanti, where he suffered great hardship.

Nala and Damayanti wandered about the forest hunting wild animals. One day two birds (Kali and Dwapara in disguise) flew away with the only garment that Nala had. He decided to abandon his wife, and did so while she was asleep. Nala hoped that she would return to her father's palace, but she did not go home and went instead to the court of the king of Chedi, where she took up service as companion to the queen. She was eventually discovered by messengers whom her father had sent out to search for her, and she then returned to her father's kingdom, Vidarbha.

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Damayanti, suspecting that Nala was living in the court of king Rituparna, resolved to test his faith by announcing that she would hold another *swayamvara*, so that she could select another husband. King Rituparna decided to attend the *swayamvara*, and took Bahuka with him to drive his chariot. On the way to Vidarbha the king, who was a mathematician, instructed Bahuka in the secret of playing dice. As soon as Bahuka had acquired this knowledge, the evil spirit of Kali left him—as foretold by the serpent—though his colour remained blue-black.

Damayanti approached the charioteer, who upbraided her for thinking about taking another husband. He then put on the magic cloth which the serpent had given him and regained his normal form as Nala. Nala and Damayanti were reunited, after which Nala went to Pushkara and challenged him to another game of dice. Having the advantage of the knowledge that he had obtained from Rituparna, he won the game and regained his kingdom.

Four Kathakali plays cover the story of Nala under the title *Nala Charita*—First Day, Second Day, Third Day and Fourth Day.

All four plays were composed by Unnayi Warriar, whose exact dates are not known. Scholars and authors of the history of Malayalam literature are not agreed on the dates, but according to *Kathakali Rangam* by K.P.S. Menon they are 1675-1716.

## 29. NALA CHARITA

### Second Day

#### Characters

<b>NALA</b> , king of Nishadha	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>Damayanti</b> , wife of Nala	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Kali</b> , an evil spirit	<i>Special</i>
<b>Dwapara</b> , henchman of Kali	<i>Katti</i>
<b>Indra</b> , king of the gods	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>Pushkara</b> , brother of Nala	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>Kattala</b> , a hunter	<i>Karutta Tadi (Black Beard)</i>
<b>Sartavaha</b> , an itinerant trader	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Sudeva</b> , a brahmin messenger	<i>Minukku</i>

*Note :* In fact, Kali's make-up is *Karutta Tadi* with the headgear of *Chuvanna Tadi*.

- Scene 1.* **Nala and Damayanti.** Nala and Damayanti are on their honeymoon. Nala tells Damayanti of his love for her, and describes how unhappy he was before their wedding. The couple are very happy together.
- Scene 2.* **Kali, Dwapara and Indra.** Kali, an evil spirit possessing magical powers, and Dwapara, his henchman, are on their way to attend Damayanti's *swayamvara*. They meet Indra, the king of the gods, and are surprised to hear that he is returning home after attending Damayanti's marriage to Nala. Kali is angry when he hears this, and vows to drive the couple out of their kingdom. When Indra departs, Kali and Dwapara conspire to achieve their evil objective. Dwapara tells Kali about Nala's younger brother, Pushkara, and says that they can persuade him to challenge Nala to a game of dice and see that Nala is defeated.
- Scene 3.* **Pushkara, Kali and Dwapara.** Pushkara is ambitious but timid, and he is jealous of his brother Nala. He sees Kali and Dwapara and wonders who they are and why they should come to him, for he is nobody and has no wealth or power. Kali tells him that if he does what he is told, he will get all the wealth he desires and will even get the throne for himself. Pushkara falls into the trap.
- Scene 4.* **Pushkara, Nala and Damayanti.** Pushkara challenges Nala to a game of dice. Nala contemptuously takes up Pushkara's challenge, despite Damayanti's entreaties. He dismisses her fears about Pushkara's evil intentions as unfounded, and agrees to play the game of dice. In the game Nala loses his wealth and his kingdom and all that he has because of Kali's guile. Pushkara banishes Nala and Damayanti to the forest.

*Scene 5. Nala and Damayanti.* Nala and Damayanti wander about the forest hunting wild animals. Nala tries to catch birds by using the only garment he has as a snare. Two birds, who are Kali and Dwapara in disguise, fly away with the garment, leaving him naked and without any chance of getting new clothes in the forest. Nala feels that if Damayanti continues to travel with him it will be a burden on him and will cause unbearable suffering to her. He therefore tries to persuade her to leave him and seek refuge in her father's kingdom.

Damayanti is not prepared to leave Nala, and is willing to suffer any hardship in his company. When she falls asleep, Nala cuts a strip from her cloth to cover his nudity and runs away, in the hope that if left alone she will somehow find her way to her father's palace. Damayanti wakes up, and when she does not find Nala by her side she thinks at first that he is playing a joke on her. When she is convinced that he has disappeared, she curses the devil who caused these misfortunes for them.

*Scene 6. Damayanti and Kattala.* Damayanti, alone in the forest, is attacked by a python. Her cries are heard by a hunter, who comes and rescues her. The hunter is attracted by her beauty and makes bold advances towards her. She thanks him for saving her from the danger, but the hunter is in no mood to leave her alone. She then remembers that at the time of her wedding, Indra granted her a boon that anyone who threatened her chastity would instantly be burnt to ashes. She appeals to Indra to help her, and the hunter is instantly burnt to ashes. Damayanti bows in gratitude to Indra.

*Scene 7. Damayanti and Sartavaha.* A group of itinerant traders, headed by Sartavaha, find Damayanti in the forest. They help her to reach the kingdom of Chedi, where she lives in the palace, acting as companion to the queen.

*Scene 8. Damayanti and Sudeva.* King Bhima, having heard of the misfortune of his son-in-law, has sent messengers all over the country to ascertain the whereabouts of Damayanti. One of the messengers, Sudeva, happens to come to the court of the king of Chedi, where he finds Damayanti living in disguise. He escorts her back to her own palace at Vidarbha.

## 30. NALA CHARITA

### Third Day

#### Characters

<b>Nala</b> , king of Nishada	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>Karkotaka</b> , a divine serpent	<i>Special</i>
<b>BAHUKA</b> (Nala after being bitten by it)	<i>Paccha</i> (with blue-black skin)
<b>Rituparna</b> , king of Ayodhya	<i>Paccha</i>
<b>Jivala</b> , charioteer of Rituparna	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Varshneya</b> , charioteer of Rituparna	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Damayanti</b> , wife of Nala	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Sudeva</b> , a brahmin messenger	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>Kali</b> , an evil spirit	<i>Special</i>

*Scene 1.* **Nala.** After leaving Damayanti, Nala is in a pensive mood. He forms a philosophy of his own, concluding that as in the forest evil is not hidden as it is in the outside world, but can be seen in the appearance of wild animals, the forest is a better place than the world of man. He hears the cry of something in distress.

*Scene 2.* **Nala and Karkotaka.** Karkotaka, a serpent with divine powers, has been trapped in a forest fire. Nala rescues it, but it bites him. Because of Karkotaka's poison, his body turns blue-black in colour. (At this point Nala's make-up and dress changes, and his form becomes blue-black.) Nala is naturally furious at the apparent ingratitude of Karkotaka, but the serpent explains that its bite was in fact a good deed, because Nala must go out into the world and should not be recognised: furthermore, its poison affects only the evil Kali, who schemed Nala's downfall and is now in him.

Karkotaka tells Nala to seek the advice of Rituparna, king of Ayodhya, who will teach him the secret of 'playing dice, whereupon Kali will leave him. The serpent promises that after that, Nala will recover his kingdom and will be reunited with his wife. After giving Nala a cloth which will enable him to regain his real form when he wears it, Karkotaka advises him that in the meantime he should assume the name Bahuka so that nobody will recognise him now that his form is different to that of Nala.

*Scene 3.* **Rituparna, Bahuka, Jivala and Varshneya.** Bahuka (as Nala is now called) approaches Rituparna with a request for employment, saying that he is an excellent cook and can also manage horses. Rituparna takes him into service as a charioteer and introduces him to his other charioteers, Jivala and Varshneya.

*Scene 5. Nala and Damayanti.* Nala and Damayanti wander about the forest hunting wild animals. Nala tries to catch birds by using the only garment he has as a snare. Two birds, who are Kali and Dwapara in disguise, fly away with the garment, leaving him naked and without any chance of getting new clothes in the forest. Nala feels that if Damayanti continues to travel with him it will be a burden on him and will cause unbearable suffering to her. He therefore tries to persuade her to leave him and seek refuge in her father's kingdom.

Damayanti is not prepared to leave Nala, and is willing to suffer any hardship in his company. When she falls asleep, Nala cuts a strip from her cloth to cover his nudity and runs away, in the hope that if left alone she will somehow find her way to her father's palace. Damayanti wakes up, and when she does not find Nala by her side she thinks at first that he is playing a joke on her. When she is convinced that he has disappeared, she curses the devil who caused these misfortunes for them.

*Scene 6. Damayanti and Kattala.* Damayanti, alone in the forest, is attacked by a python. Her cries are heard by a hunter, who comes and rescues her. The hunter is attracted by her beauty and makes bold advances towards her. She thanks him for saving her from the danger, but the hunter is in no mood to leave her alone. She then remembers that at the time of her wedding, Indra granted her a boon that anyone who threatened her chastity would instantly be burnt to ashes. She appeals to Indra to help her, and the hunter is instantly burnt to ashes. Damayanti bows in gratitude to Indra.

*Scene 7. Damayanti and Sartavaha.* A group of itinerant traders, headed by Sartavaha, find Damayanti in the forest. They help her to reach the kingdom of Chedi, where she lives in the palace, acting as companion to the queen.

*Scene 8. Damayanti and Sudeva.* King Bhima, having heard of the misfortune of his son-in-law, has sent messengers all over the country to ascertain the whereabouts of Damayanti. One of the messengers, Sudeva, happens to come to the court of the king of Chedi, where he finds Damayanti living in disguise. He escorts her back to her own palace at Vidarbha.



### 31. NALA CHARITA

#### Fourth Day

#### Characters

<b>Damayanti</b> , wife of Nala	<i>Minukkú</i>
<b>Kesini</b> , companion of Damayanti	<i>Minukku</i>
<b>BAHUKA</b> , the disguised form of Nala	<i>Paccha</i> (with blue-black skin)

- Scene 1.* **Damayanti** and **Kesini**. Damayanti and Kesini are together in the garden of the palace of Vidarbha. Damayanti sees Rituparna's chariot approaching, and from its speed concludes that the charioteer must be her husband, Nala.
- Scene 2.* **Damayanti** and **Kesini**. Damayanti is disappointed to see that the man who is driving the chariot is dark and so unlike her husband. She asks Kesini to talk to the man and find out all about him.
- Scene 3.* **Kesini** and **Bahuka**. Kesini approaches the charioteer and questions him. Although she receives evasive replies, she is convinced that the man is none other than king Nala.
- Scene 4.* **Kesini** and **Damayanti**. Kesini tells Damayanti that in her opinion the charioteer is in fact Nala, even though he does not look like him.
- Scene 5.* **Damayanti**. Damayanti soliloquises sadly about Nala who has arrived as Rituparna's charioteer. She decides to meet him, after obtaining permission from her mother.
- Scene 6.* **Damayanti** and **Bahuka**. Damayanti sends for Bahuka who goes to meet her. When they meet, he upbraids her for thinking about taking another husband. She assures him that this was only a ruse to make him come to her. He is doubtful and cannot decide what to do, so he puts on the magic cloth given to him by the serpent Karkotaka (see *Nala Charita*—Third Day—Scene 2), and thus regains his normal self. Damayanti prostrates herself before Nala, but he turns away. He then hears a voice from the heavens saying that Damayanti has remained pure in thought and deed. Greatly relieved, he embraces her. Nala and Damayanti are reunited.

*Note :* The story goes on to tell that after Nala and Damayanti are reunited, Nala challenges Pushkara to another game of dice. As he now knows how to play dice, having been taught by Rituparna, and as Pushkara no longer has the help of Kali, Pushkara is defeated. Nala forgives him. He is once again king in his own land.

This conclusion to the story is sometimes performed as Scene 7.

*Scene 5. Nala and Damayanti.* Nala and Damayanti wander about the forest hunting wild animals. Nala tries to catch birds by using the only garment he has as a snare. Two birds, who are Kali and Dwapara in disguise, fly away with the garment, leaving him naked and without any chance of getting new clothes in the forest. Nala feels that if Damayanti continues to travel with him it will be a burden on him and will cause unbearable suffering to her. He therefore tries to persuade her to leave him and seek refuge in her father's kingdom.

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## 32. HARISCHANDRA CHARITA

*By Pettayil Raman Pillai Asan (1841-1937)*

HARISCHANDRA, the king of Ayodhya, was the symbol of truth and honesty. Viswamitra, one of the seven great *rishis* (sages), tried his best to prove that Harischandra was not as honest as others thought him to be, but he failed in his attempt.

### Characters

Viswamitra, a sage	<i>Minukku</i>
Vasishta, another sage	<i>Minukku</i>
HARISCHANDRA, king of Ayodhya	<i>Paccha</i>
Rati, a beautiful girl	<i>Minukku</i>
Virati, another beautiful girl	<i>Minukku</i>
Lohitaksha, son of Harischandra	<i>Paccha</i>
Satyakiri, minister of Harischandra	<i>Minukku</i>
Chandramati, wife of Harischandra	<i>Minukku</i>
Sukracharya, agent of Viswamitra	<i>Minukku</i>
Kalakanta, a rich man	<i>Minukku</i>
Veerbahu, owner of the cremation ground	<i>Minukku</i>

- Scene* 1. **Viswamitra and Vasishta.** In the assembly of the gods Viswamitra remarks that no man can be absolutely honest. Vasishta says that there is one person who will never depart from the truth, and that is king Harischandra. Viswamitra does not agree. He wagers that he will make Harischandra break his word.
- Scene* 2. **Viswamitra and Harischandra.** Viswamitra goes to Harischandra, who does not suspect his intention to do him harm, and demands a huge amount of gold. The king gives him the gold. Surprised at getting the gold so easily, Viswamitra hands it back to Harischandra for safe custody.
- Scene* 3. **Viswamitra, Rati and Virati.** Viswamitra creates two beautiful girls, Rati and Virati, and tells them to go to Harischandra and seduce him.
- Scene* 4. **Harischandra, Rati and Virati.** Harischandra withstands the seductive acts of Rati and Virati, and sends them away.
- Scene* 5. **Viswamitra, Rati and Virati.** The girls inform Viswamitra of their failure to seduce Harischandra. He is very angry about this.
- Scene* 6. **Viswamitra and Harischandra.** Viswamitra comes to Harischandra's court in an angry mood because the king has insulted his daughters. He manages to make the king give up his kingdom. Having in the meantime caused the gold which he

*Scene 5. Nala and Damayanti.* Nala and Damayanti wander about the forest hunting wild animals. Nala tries to catch birds by using the only garment he has as a snare. Two birds, who are Kali and Dwapara in disguise, fly away with the garment, leaving him naked and without any chance of getting new clothes in the forest. Nala feels that if Damayanti continues to travel with him it will be a burden on him and will cause unbearable suffering to her. He therefore tries to persuade her to leave him and seek refuge in her father's kingdom.

Damayanti is not prepared to leave Nala, and is willing to suffer any hardship in his company. When she falls asleep, Nala cuts a strip from her cloth to cover his nudity and runs away, in the hope that if left alone she will somehow find her way to her father's palace. Damayanti wakes up, and when she does not find Nala by her side she thinks at first that he is playing a joke on her. When she is convinced that he has disappeared, she curses the devil who caused these misfortunes for them.

*Scene 6. Damayanti and Kattala.* Damayanti, alone in the forest, is attacked by a python. Her cries are heard by a hunter, who comes and rescues her. The hunter is attracted by her beauty and makes bold advances towards her. She thanks him for saving her from the danger, but the hunter is in no mood to leave her alone. She then remembers that at the time of her wedding, Indra granted her a boon that anyone who threatened her chastity would instantly be burnt to ashes. She appeals to Indra to help her, and the hunter is instantly burnt to ashes. Damayanti bows in gratitude to Indra.

*Scene 7. Damayanti and Sartavaha.* A group of itinerant traders, headed by Sartavaha, find Damayanti in the forest. They help her to reach the kingdom of Chedi, where she lives in the palace, acting as companion to the queen.

*Scene 8. Damayanti and Sudeva.* King Bhima, having heard of the misfortune of his son-in-law, has sent messengers all over the country to ascertain the whereabouts of Damayanti. One of the messengers, Sudeva, happens to come to the court of the king of Chedi, where he finds Damayanti living in disguise. He escorts her back to her own palace at Vidarbha.

*Scene 16.* **Chandramati** and **Harischandra**. On her way to Kalakanta, Chandramati comes across the dead body of the prince of Benares. She is accused of killing the prince, and as Harischandra is the executioner, he has to kill her. At the crucial moment, Viswamitra appears and says that everything will be restored to him if only he will tell one lie. But Harischandra will never do that. He is about to kill his wife, when the gods appear and bless him.

Viswamitra has been defeated and repents. The happy couple return with their son to Ayodhya, where they rule contentedly.

### 33. DEVAYANI SWAYAMVARA

*By Tazhavana Govindan Asan (19th Century)*

THERE WAS war between the *devas* and the *asuras*, whose king was Vrishaparva. The *asura* king's guru, Sukracharya, had a *mantra* (mystic word) which enabled him to bring back to life all the *asuras* who were killed in battle. The *devas* had no such *mantra*, and were therefore at a disadvantage. Kacha, the son of Brihaspati, who was the guru of the *devas*, decided to help the *devas* and begged his father to allow him to become a disciple of Sukracharya in order that he could obtain the *mantra*. Sukracharya accepted him. When Kacha came to live in the hermitage Devayani, Sukracharya's only daughter, fell in love with him. But his only object was to secure the *mantra*.

Vrishaparva's spies discovered the identity of Kacha, and guessed why he had come to the hermitage. The *asuras* killed him, but seeing his daughter's distress, Sukracharya uttered the *mantra* and Kacha reappeared. The *asuras* killed Kacha a second time, and ground his flesh into paste which they mixed with the liquor which they gave to Sukracharya, who drank it. Knowing what had happened, Sukracharya asked Devayani whether she wanted her father or Kacha. When she replied "I want you both" he gave the *mantra* to Kacha, who was inside him. Kacha burst out of his belly, and after restoring life to the guru, took leave and returned to Devaloka, the abode of the *devas*. Devayani was disappointed that Kacha did not love her, and cursed him that the *mantra* would not work. He in turn cursed her that no brahmin would ever marry her.

#### Characters

Sukracharya, guru to the <i>asura</i> king	<i>Minukku</i>
KACHA, son of the guru of the <i>devas</i>	<i>Paccha</i>
Devayani, daughter of Sukracharya	<i>Minukku</i>
Suketu, a friend of the <i>asura</i> king	<i>Karutta Tadi</i> (Black Beard)
Asuras	<i>Minukku</i>

*Scene 1.* **Kacha and Sukracharya.** Kacha arrives at the hermitage of Sukracharya. The guru is pleased with his demeanour and impressed with his appearance. He accepts him as a disciple.

*Scene 2.* **Kacha and Devayani.** Kacha meets Devayani, the gay and beautiful daughter of Sukracharya. They become friendly. The girl is attracted to the handsome youth, and invites him to join her in play.

*Scene 3.* **Suketu, Kacha and asuras.** Suketu, who is a friend and adviser of Vrishaparva the *asura* king, discovers the identity of Kacha and the object of his stay in Sukracharya's hermitage. He looks for an opportunity when Kacha is alone in the forest, and then attacks him with two of his henchmen. They kill him. Kacha's body is reduced to pulp and mixed with the liquor which Sukracharya imbibes every evening.

*Scene 4. Suketu, Sukracharya and asuras.* Suketu enters the hermitage of Sukracharya with his two henchmen, carrying the pot of liquor, which he hands to the guru. Sukracharya dismisses him and drinks the liquor.

Devayani is distressed when she does not find Kacha at home as usual. She goes to her father to ask him what has happened. The guru ponders and then realises what has befallen Kacha whom he has inadvertently consumed with his liquor. He is unhappy that unconsciously he has a human being in his stomach, and particularly that the body should be that of a brahmin youth who was virtuous and loyal. He says to Devayani "you can have one of us—me or Kacha: choose one of us." Devayani replies "I want you both." The only way that Sukracharya can satisfy his daughter's wish is to tell Kacha (in his body) the secret of the *Mrita-Sanjivini mantra* which he has come to the hermitage to discover. He gives the secret to Kacha.

Kacha immediately comes out of Sukracharya's stomach as the guru dies, but having obtained the *mantra* he is able to restore life to him. Having achieved his objective, Kacha takes leave of Sukracharya, who blesses him.

*Scene 5. Kacha and Devayani.* Kacha takes leave of Devayani, but she begs him not to leave her: she wants him to take her with him. Kacha is a *brahmachari* (a brahmin student whose duty it is to pass his student days in celibacy and humility) and does not want to marry: he has only a brotherly feeling towards Devayani. Disappointed that Kacha does not love her, Devayani is angry and curses him. Kacha tells her "the curse of a woman influenced by lust will not affect me. I curse you that no brahmin will ever marry you."

Kacha and Devayani part. Kacha returns to Devaloka, the abode of the gods. Now that he has obtained the secret of the *Mrita-Sanjivini mantra*, loss by death is no longer a problem for the *devas*.

*Note :* The above scenes, collectively known as *Kacha Devayani*, are only a part of the play of which the other scenes are not now performed.

## 34. RUGMANGADA CHARITA

By Mandavappalli Ittixaricha Menon (1747-1794)

KING RUGMANGADA was a devotee of god Vishnu who strictly observed the *Ekadasi* fasting on the eleventh day from the full moon and the new moon, which was sacred to Vishnu. He accumulated so much merit that the gods became jealous of him, and decided to test his devotion. This story shows the great benefits which were promised to devotees of Vishnu who observed the *Ekadasi* fast.

### Characters

RUGMANGADA, a devotee of Vishnu	<i>Paccha</i>
Mohini, an enchantress	<i>Minukku</i>
Brahmins	<i>Minukku</i>
Dharmangada, son of Rugmangada	<i>Paccha</i>
Sandhyavali, wife of Rugmangada	<i>Minukku</i>
Vishnu, one of the Hindu Trinity	<i>Paccha</i>

*Scene 1.* **Mohini and Rugmangada.** The gods send a heavenly enchantress, Mohini, to Rugmangada. She captivates the king with her beauty, and promises to be his mistress if he will grant her all her desires. The king agrees to do so.

*Scene 2.* **Brahmins.** Some brahmins gossip amongst themselves about the way Rugmangada is enjoying himself with Mohini.

*Scene 3.* **Mohini and Rugmangada.** On an *Ekadasi* day, Mohini approaches Rugmangada and tries to embrace him, but the king repulses her. As he has promised to grant all her desires, she says that if she is denied enjoyment, and if the king continues to observe *Ekadasi*, she will release him from his promise only if he kills his only son, Dharmangada, while he is lying in his mother's lap, without shedding a tear. The king begs Mohini to be merciful and to spare his innocent boy, but the enchantress is adamant.

Dharmangada, having heard what is going on, appears, accompanied by his mother, Sandhyavali. He tells his father that he will gladly give up his life to help him keep his promise. After much mental torture, the king decides that he would rather kill his son than break the observance of *Ekadasi*. Rugmangada raises his sword to strike down Dharmangada, when Vishnu appears before him.

As Rugmangada and the others bow down before Vishnu, the god tells him that he should not kill his son because Mohini is a creation of Brahma to test Rugmangada's devotion. Mohini is dismissed, and after crowning Dharmangada as the king, Vishnu takes Rugmangada to his abode in *Yaikunta*.



## 35. AMBARISHA CHARITA

By *Aswati Tirunal Tampuran* (1756-1794)

*Ekadasi*, the eleventh day after the new moon and the full moon, was a day sacred to Vishnu. On that day all devotees of Vishnu fasted and on the following day, *Dwadasi*, those who observed the fast took food only after feeding the brahmins who were present. Durvasa, a sage who was noted for his irascible temper, took it as an insult when king Ambarisha, who was observing *Ekadasi*, sipped water before he himself had eaten. He tried to kill Ambarisha, but Vishnu intervened and Durvasa had to seek his pardon.

### Characters

AMBARISHA, king of Ayodhya	<i>Paccha</i>
DURVASA, a short-tempered sage	<i>Minukku</i>
Brahmins	<i>Minukku</i>
Krittika, a demon	<i>Special</i>
Sudarsana, Vishnu's divine weapon	<i>Chuvanna Tadi</i> (Red Beard)
Vishnu, one of the Hindu Trinity	<i>Paccha</i>

*Scene 1.* **Ambarisha and Durvasa.** King Ambarisha, a great devotee of Vishnu, observes *Ekadasi*, which is only completed the following day. On that day sage Durvasa, reputed to be very short-tempered, comes to the king, who is pleased to see such a venerable guest. The king begs Durvasa to be his guest for the *parana* (breaking of the fast).

*Scene 2.* **Ambarisha and brahmins.** Durvasa goes off for his bath, over which he purposely takes a very long time. Many other brahmins are waiting, and on their advice Ambarisha decides to break the fast at the appropriate time. But as his principal guest has not yet arrived, he himself sips only a drop of water.

*Scene 3.* **Durvasa and Krittika.** Durvasa takes it as an insult when he finds that Ambarisha has broken his fast before his arrival. By his spiritual power he creates a demon called Krittika, and orders him to kill Ambarisha.

*Scene 4.* **Krittika, Ambarisha, Sudarsana and Durvasa.** As Krittika approaches Ambarisha he is destroyed by Sudarsana, the divine weapon of Vishnu. Sudarsana then attacks Durvasa himself. Durvasa takes to his heels.

*Scene 5.* **Durvasa and Vishnu.** Durvasa, thoroughly alarmed, goes to all the gods, and finally to Vishnu for protection. "You must go to Ambarisha" says Vishnu. "He alone can save you, because I am the servant of my devotees."

*Scene 6. Durvasa and Ambarisha.* Repentent, Durvasa goes to Ambarisha, who is prepared to forgive him. His only request is that Durvasa should accept his hospitality. The sage blesses the king and departs.

*Note :* This play sometimes begins with the conventional love scene between Ambarisha and his wife. This is followed by a fight with Yavana, the leader of a godless race who invaded the country, in which Ambarisha kills him.

These scenes are not usually performed.

### 36. DAKSHA YAGA

By *Irayimman Tampi* (1783-1856)

DAKSHA, the son of Brahma, and his wife Prasuti adopted a child whom they had discovered in a conch shell. The child was called Sati, and in due course was given in marriage to god Siva. After the wedding Daksha, regarding Siva only as his son-in-law, did not realise his greatness.

Daksha treated Siva with contempt, and when he commenced to perform a *yaga* he proclaimed that the sacrificial offering would not be proffered to Siva. Sati went to witness the *yaga* and to see her people, but she was abused and sent away. In shame and anger, she left the place, returned to Siva, and told him that Daksha must be punished.

Siva sent two terrible creatures, Virabhadra and Bhadrakali, to destroy Daksha. They beheaded him, but when Brahma prayed to Siva to forgive Daksha, the god relented and restored life to him.

#### Characters

DAKSHA, son of Brahma	<i>Paccha</i>
Prasuti, wife of Daksha	<i>Minukku</i>
Sati, adopted daughter of Daksha	<i>Minukku</i>
Brahmin	<i>Minukku</i>
Siva, a god	<i>Pazhuppu</i>
Indra, king of the gods	<i>Paccha</i>
Nandikeswara, gate-keeper of Siva's abode	<i>Vella Tadi</i> (White Beard)
Rishis (sages)	<i>Minukku</i>
Virabhadra, a destructive spirit	<i>Chuvanna Tadi</i> (Red Beard)
Bhadrakali, another destructive spirit	<i>Special</i>

- Scene* 1. **Daksha and Prasuti.** Daksha, a demi-god who is the son of Brahma, in a love scene with his wife.
- Scene* 2. **Daksha and Prasuti.** Whilst they are bathing in the sacred river Yamuna, Daksha and Prasuti find a large and beautiful conch shell in a lotus leaf. As Daksha grasps the shell it becomes a human baby. They are very pleased and bring up the baby.
- Scene* 3. **Sati.** The conch shell baby has become a beautiful maiden, called Sati. She is doing penance to become the wife of Siva.
- Scene* 4. **Sati and brahmin.** An old brahmin approaches Sati and tries to dissuade her from her purpose, saying that Siva is unromantic and repulsive, and that her beauty and virtues will be wasted if she marries him. Sati is firm in her purpose, so the brahmin, who is really Siva in disguise, is pleased and grants her wish.

- Scene* 5. **Siva** and **Sati** are married.
- Scene* 6. **Daksha** and **Indra**. After the marriage of Siva and Sati, Daksha becomes an enemy of Siva. He defies Siva before the other gods because he went away with Sati without telling anybody. Indra, the king of the gods, warns Daksha not to displease Siva.
- Scene* 7. **Daksha** and **Nandikeswara**. Daksha tries to approach Siva, but Nandikeswara, the gate-keeper of Siva's abode—Mount Kailasa—refuses to admit him.
- Scene* 8. **Daksha** and **rishis**. Daksha commences a great *yaga* (sacrificial ceremony) in which he does not give Siva his due share of the offerings. The *rishis* (sages) warn Daksha of the consequences of showing such disrespect to Siva.
- Scene* 9. **Sati** and **Siva**. Sati wants to attend her father's *yaga*, but Siva dissuades her, saying that she will be insulted. Despite his warning, she goes.
- Scene* 10. **Sati** and **Daksha**. Sati goes to Daksha, but he abuses her and orders her to leave. She warns him that for his insult to Siva he will be punished severely. She leaves.
- Scene* 11. **Sati** and **Siva**. Sati returns to Siva and tells him that as Daksha is no longer her father he must be punished.
- Scene* 12. **Siva**, **Virabhadra** and **Bhadrakali**. Siva creates two destructive spirits, Virabhadra and Bhadrakali, and orders them to destroy Daksha.
- Scene* 13. **Virabhadra**, **Bhadrakali** and **Daksha**. Virabhadra and Bhadrakali proceed to the hall where the *yaga* is taking place and destroy everything. Daksha is beheaded, and his head is thrown into the sacrificial fire.
- Scene* 14. **Daksha** and **Siva**. An uncompleted *yaga* does great evil to the whole universe, so Brahma requests Siva to forgive Daksha and give him back his life, so that he may finish the *yaga*. As Virabhadra has burnt Daksha's head, a goat's head is placed on his body, and Daksha is restored to life. He is repentent, and prays to Siva for pardon. The *yaga* is completed, and all is well.

*Note* : The Kathakali version of this story, as given above, is different to that which appears in the Puranas. In the Bhagavata Purana Sati, repenting of disobeying her lord Siva, and unable to suffer the shame inflicted upon her by Daksha, immolates herself by burning her body on the *yaga* fire (created by her own spiritual powers). The bhutas (attendants) of Siva, who accompany her, return to Kailasa and report the end of Sati. Siva is terribly upset and angry. He creates Virabhadra to destroy Daksha. Bhadrakali does not appear in the Puranic version of the story. The finding of baby Sati in a conch shell is also an invention of the composer of the play.



# PART THREE



**who  
what  
& where**



## COMPLETE LIST OF CHARACTERS GROUPED UNDER DIFFERENT TYPES OF MAKE-UP

### *Paccha*

Akrura	Indra	Rugmangada
Ambarisha	Janaka	Sahadeva
Arjuna	Jayanta	Satrughna
Bahuka	Kacha	Shanmukha
Bhima	Karna	Uddhava
Brihannala	Lohitaksha	Uttaran
Daksha	Nakula	Vasudeva
Dasaratha	Nala	Vibhishana
Dharmangada	Prahlada	Virata
Dharmaputra	Pushkara	Vishnu
Dhritarashtra	Rituparna	Visravas
Harischandra		

### *Paccha with Muti,*

Aniruddha	Kusa	Lava
Krishna	Lakshmana	Rama

### *Pazhuppu*

Balarama	Siva	Surya
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### *Katti*

Bana	Kichaka	Narakasura
Duryodhana	Kirmira	Nivatakavacha
Dwapara	Kumbhakarna	Prahasta
Ghatolkacha	Kutti Ravana	Ravana
Hidimba	Mahabali	Sisupala
Hiranyakasipu	Mantri	Vajraketu
Jarasandha	Maricha	Yama
Kamsa		

### *Chuvanna Tadi (Red Beard)*

Arishtasura	Malyavan	Sugriva
Baka	Namuchi	Sumali
Bali	Narakasura	Trigartha
Dussasana	Panchjana	Upakichaka
Kalakeya	Sardula	Vajrabahu
Krodhavasa	Sisupala	Viprithu
Mali	Siva Jvala	Virabhadra
	Sudarsana	

### *Vella Tadi (White Beard)*

Hanuman	Nandikeswara	
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### *Karutta Tadi (Black Beard)*

Kattala	Madolkata	Suketu
Kirata		

### *Kari*

Hidimbi	Nakratunni	Simhika
Lankalakshmi		



*Minukku—Male*

Agni  
Anakkaran  
Angada  
Asari  
Asuras  
Bhishma  
Chanura  
Chitrugupta  
Damagrandi  
Doota  
Gopalakas

Gopurapalas  
Jivala  
Kalakanta  
Kanka  
Malla  
Mannan  
Mantri  
Matali  
Mushtika  
Purochana  
Rajaka

Rakshasas  
Sandipani's son  
Sartavaha  
Satyakiri  
Tandripala  
Valala  
Varshneya  
Varuna  
Vatu  
Veerabahu

*Minukku—Brahmin*

Brahmin  
Kripa  
Kuchela

Mumukshu  
Sudeva

Sundara Brahmana  
Vamana

*Minukku—Rishi*

Dhaumya  
Durvasa  
Kumbhanda  
Narada

Parasurama  
Rishi  
Sandipani  
Sukracharya

Vasishta  
Viswamitra  
Vyasa

*Minukku—Female*

Bana's wife  
Bhanumati  
Brahmin's wife  
Chandramati  
Chitralkha  
Damayanti  
Devaki  
Devayani  
Draupadi  
Gopi women  
Indrani  
Jarasandha's wife  
Kaikasi  
Kayati  
Kesini

Kubja  
Kuchela's wife  
Kunti  
Lalita  
Lankalakshmi  
Malini  
Mandodari  
Mannati  
Mohini  
Narakasura's wife  
Parvati  
Prasuti  
Putana  
Rambha  
Rati

Rugmini  
Sandhyavali  
Sandipani's wife  
Sati  
Satyabhama  
Sita  
Subhadra  
Sudeshna  
Tara  
Urvasi  
Usha  
Uttaran's wives  
Vindhyavali  
Virati

*Special*

Bhadrakali  
Bhiru  
Bhutas  
Ganapati  
Garuda  
Hamsa

Jatayu  
Kali  
Karkotaka  
Kimkaras  
Kiratastree  
Krittika

Narasimha  
Roudra Bhima  
Sakuni  
Sanyasi  
Vishnu Jvala  
Vridha

# KATHAKALI CHARACTERS AND THE PLAYS IN WHICH THEY APPEAR

## KEY TO THE PLAYS:

1 BAKA VADHA	13 KAMSA VADHA	25 BALI VADHA
2 RAJASUYA	14 GURU DAKSHINA	26 TORANA YUDHA
3 KIRMIRA VADHA	15 RUGMINI SWAYAMVARA	27 LAVANASURA VADHA
4 KIRATA	16 NARAKASURA VADHA	28 NALA CHARITA 1st day
5 KALAKEYA VADHA	17 BANA YUDHA	29 NALA CHARITA 2nd day
6 KALYANA SAUGANDHIKA	18 KUCHELA VRITTA	30 NALA CHARITA 3rd day
7 KICHAKA VADHA	19 SUBHADRA HARANA	31 NALA CHARITA 4th day
8 UTTARA SWAYAMVARA	20 SANTANA GOPALA	32 HARISCHANDRA CHARITA
9 DURYODHANA VADHA	21 RAVANODBHAVA	33 DEVAYANI SWAYAMVARA
10 PRAHLADA CHARITA	22 RAVANA VIJAYA	34 RUGMANGADA CHARITA
11 VAMANA AVATARA	23 BALI VIJAYA	35 AMBARISHA CHARITA
12 PUTANA MOKSHA	24 SITA SWAYAMVARA	36 DAKSHA YAGA

Agni 28  
Akrura 13  
Ambarisha 35  
Anakkaran 13  
Angada 25  
Aniruddha 17  
Arishtasura 13  
Arjuna 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 19, 20  
Asari 1  
Asuras 33  
  
Bahuka 30, 31  
Baka 1  
Balarama 2, 13, 14, 19  
Bali 23, 25  
Bana 17  
Bana's wife 17  
Bhadrakali 36  
Bhanumati 8, 9  
Bhima 1, 2, 3, 6, 9  
Bhiru 5, 7, 15, 16  
Bhishma 8, 9  
Bhutas 4  
Brahmin 1, 2, 19, 20, 34, 35, 36  
Brahmin boys 20, 27  
Brahmin's wife 1, 20  
Brihannala 7, 8  
  
Chandramati 32  
Chanura 13  
Chitrugupta 14  
Chitralkha 17

Daksha 36  
Damayanti 28, 29, 30, 31  
Damagrandi 7  
Dasaratha 24  
Devaki 13, 14  
Devayani 33  
Dharmangada 34  
Dharmaputra 1, 2, 3, 6, 9  
Dhaumya 3  
Dhritarashtra 1, 9  
Draupadi 3, 6, 9  
Durvasa 3, 35  
Duryodhana 8, 9  
Dussassana 9  
Doota 2, 8, 22  
Dwapara 29  
  
Ganapati 17  
Garuda 16  
Ghatolkacha 1  
Gopalakas 8  
Gopi women 13  
Gopurapalas 19  
  
Hamsa 28  
Hanuman 6, 25, 26, 27  
Harischandra 32  
Hidimba 1  
Hidimbi 1  
Hiranyakasipu 10  
  
Indra 5, 16, 19, 21, 28, 29, 36  
Indrani 5

- Janaka 24  
 Jarasandha 2  
 Jarasandha's wife 2  
 Jatayu 25  
 Jayanta 16  
 Jivala 30
- Kacha 33  
 Kaikasi 21  
 Kalakanta 32  
 Kalakeya 5  
 Kali 29, 30  
 Kamsa 13  
 Kanka 7, 8  
 Karkotaka 30  
 Karna 8  
 Kattala 14, 29  
 Kayati 10  
 Kesini 31  
 Kichaka 7  
 Kimkaras 10  
 Kirata 4  
 Kiratastree 4  
 Kirmira 3  
 Kripa 8  
 Krishna 2, 3, 9, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20  
 Krittika 35  
 Krodhavasa 6  
 Kubja 13  
 Kuchela 14, 18  
 Kuchela's wife 18  
 Kumbhakarna 21  
 Kumbhanda 17  
 Kunti 1  
 Kusa 27  
 Kutti Ravana 21
- Lakshmana 24, 25  
 Lalita 1, 3, 16  
 Lankalakshmi 26  
 Lava 27  
 Lohitaksha 32
- Madolkata 7  
 Mahabali 11  
 Mali 21  
 Malini 7, 8  
 Malla 7  
 Malvavan 21  
 Mandodari 23, 26  
 Mannan 27  
 Mannati 27  
 Mantri 7, 21
- Maricha 25  
 Matali 5  
 Mohini 34  
 Mumukshu 9  
 Mushtika 13
- Nakratundi 16  
 Nakula 1, 9  
 Nala 28, 29, 30  
 Namuchi 11  
 Nandikeswara 5, 17, 36  
 Narada 2, 13, 17, 21, 23, 28  
 Narakasura 16  
 Narakasura's wife 16  
 Narasimha 10  
 Nivatakavacha 5
- Panchjana 14  
 Parasurama 24  
 Parvati 4, 17  
 Prahasta 26  
 Prahlada 10  
 Prasuti 36  
 Purochana 1  
 Pushkara 29  
 Putana 12
- Rajaka 13  
 Rakshasas 26  
 Rama 24, 25  
 Rambha 22  
 Rati 32  
 Ravana 21, 22, 23, 25, 26  
 Rishi 36  
 Rituparna 30  
 Roudra Bhima 9  
 Rugmangada 34  
 Rugmini 2, 5, 17, 18, 19
- Sahadeva 1, 3, 9  
 Sakuni 9  
 Sandhyavali 34  
 Sandipani 14  
 Sandipani's son 14  
 Sandipani's wife 14  
 Sanyasi 25  
 Sardula 3  
 Sartavaha 29  
 Sati 36  
 Satrughna 27  
 Satyabhama 2, 16, 17, 19  
 Satyakiri 32  
 Shanmukha 17

Simhika 3  
 Sisupala 2, 15  
 Sita 25, 26, 27  
 Siva 4, 17, 36  
 Siva Jvala 17  
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### SUMMARY

	Characters	Roles
<i>Paccha</i>	34	69
<i>Paccha with muti</i>	6	18
<i>Pazhuppu</i>	3	8
<i>Katti</i>	22	28
<i>Chuvanna Tadi</i> (Red Beard)	22	24
<i>Vella Tadi</i> (White Beard)	2	7
<i>Karutta Tadi</i> (Black Beard)	4	5
<i>Kari</i>	4	4
<i>Minukku—male</i>	32	39
<i>Minukku—brahmin</i>	7	18
<i>Minukku—rishi</i>	11	21
<i>Minukku—female</i>	44	71
<i>Special</i>	18	28
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	209	340
	<hr/>	<hr/>

## THE AUTHORS, THEIR DATES AND THE PLAYS WHICH THEY COMPOSED

Kottarakkara Tampuran (1555-1605)*	<i>Sita Swayamvara</i> <i>Bali Vadha</i> <i>Torana Yudha</i>
Kottayath Tampuran (1645-1716)*	<i>Baka Vadha</i> <i>Kirmira Vadha</i> <i>Kalakeya Vadha</i> <i>Kalyana Saugandhika</i>
Unnayi Warriar (1675-1716)*	<i>Nala Charita—1st Day</i> <i>Nala Charita—2nd Day</i> <i>Nala Charita—3rd Day</i> <i>Nala Charita—4th Day</i>
Karthika Tirunal (1724-1798)	<i>Rajasuya</i> <i>Narakasura Vadha</i>
Kallaikulangara Raghava Pisharoty (1725-1799)	<i>Ravanodbhava</i>
Mandavappalli Ittiraricha Menon (1747-1794)	<i>Santana Gopala</i> <i>Rugmangada Charita</i>
Aswati Tirunal Tampuran (1756-1794)	<i>Putana Moksha</i> <i>Rugmini Swayamvara</i> <i>Ambarisha Charita</i>
Balakavi Rama Sastry (1772-1840)	<i>Bana Yudha</i>
Kalloor Nambudiripad (1774-1833)	<i>Bali Vijaya</i>
Kilimanoor Ravi Varma Tampuran (1782-1854)	<i>Kamsa Vadha</i>
Irayimman Tampi (1783-1856)	<i>Kichaka Vadha</i> <i>Uttara Swayamvara</i> <i>Daksha Yaga</i>
Irrattakulangara Rama Variar (1801-1845)	<i>Kirata</i>
Kurichi Narayanan Nambudiri (1805-1860)	<i>Guru Dakshina</i>
Kilimanoor Raja Raja Varma (Cherunni)	
Koyil Tampuran (1812-1846)	<i>Ravana Vijaya</i>
Palakkatt Amrita Sastry (1815-1877)	<i>Lavanasura Vadha</i>
Vayaskara Aryan Narayanan Moosad (1841-1902)	<i>Duryodhana Vadha</i>
Pettayil Raman Pillai Asan (1841-1937)	<i>Harischandra Charita</i>
Manthredath Nambudiripad (1851-1906)	<i>Subhadra Harana</i>
Muringoor Sankara Potti (1851-1914)	<i>Kuchela Vritta</i>
Matavoor Kelu Asan (1857-1888)	<i>Prahlada Charita</i>
Manakulam Kunhunni Valia Tampuran (1861-1943)	<i>Vamana Avatara</i>
Tazhavana Govindan Asan (19th Century)	<i>Devayani Swayamvara</i>

*Note:* \*Scholars and authors of the history of Malayalam literature are not agreed on the dates of Kottarakkara Tampuran, Kottayath Tampuran and Unnayi Warriar. The dates given here are taken from *Kathakali Rangam* by K. P. S. Menon.

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## GLOSSARY OF TECHNICAL WORDS

<i>Abhinaya</i>	Acting, or representation on the stage of emotions, feelings and sentiments through co-ordinated facial expressions and movements of the body
<i>Adyavasana</i>	The most dominant character in the play, and the role played by the leading actor
<i>Arangu Keli</i>	Invocatory drumming by the <i>maddalam</i> player with which all Kathakali performances begin
<i>Ashram</i>	The hermitage of a sage
<i>Asuras*</i>	A race who were the natural enemies of the gods
<i>Aswamedha</i>	The horse sacrifice performed by a king to propitiate the gods and establish his paramount sovereignty
<i>Avatara</i>	Literally 'Descent', the incarnation of a deity, especially Vishnu
<i>Bhagavadgita</i>	Krishna's exhortation to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. A religious poem forming part of the Mahabharata
<i>Bhutas</i>	Imps or goblins
<i>Chandrasahsa</i>	The sword presented by god Siva to Ravana
<i>Chenda</i>	Cylindrical drum, held vertically, played with the sticks
<i>Chutti</i>	The ridge of rice flour and white paper which forms a frame for the <i>paccha</i> and <i>katti</i> make-up
<i>Chuvanna Tadi</i>	'Red Beard', the make-up of vicious and vile characters
<i>Daityas*</i>	Similar to <i>Asuras</i>
<i>Devas*</i>	Gods
<i>Dhanasi</i>	Benediction at the conclusion of a Kathakali performance
<i>Ilakiattam</i>	Solo dance-acting, accompanied by drums, gong and cymbals only
<i>Kalasam</i>	The dance passage between the lines and at the end of a <i>padam</i> (song)
<i>Kari</i>	'Black', the make-up of demonesses
<i>Karutta Tadi</i>	'Black Beard', the make-up of primitive beings like hunters and forest dwellers
<i>Katti</i>	'Knife', the make-up of arrogant and evil characters who have a streak of valour
<i>Kelikottu</i>	Playing of drums, gong and cymbals at sunset to announce a Kathakali performance
<i>Kirita</i>	The golden circular crown worn by <i>paccha</i> and <i>katti</i> characters: also worn by special characters such as Hamsa, Jatayu, Karkotaka etc.

## Glossary

<i>Krishnamuti</i>	The vase-shaped silver crown tipped with peacock feathers worn by Krishna, Rama and their relatives
<i>Kshatriyas</i>	The warrior caste
<i>Lalita</i>	The form of a beautiful maiden adopted by demonesses with evil intent
<i>Maddalam</i>	Cylindrical drum, held horizontally, played with the hands
<i>Mantra</i>	One or more syllables used as an incantation to obtain spiritual or occult powers
<i>Maya</i>	An illusion
<i>Melappadam</i>	Display of drumming, accompanied by gong and cymbals, which precedes the start of the first play
<i>Minukku</i>	'Radiant', the more realistic make-up of secondary characters—females, messengers, craftsmen, charioteers, brahmins etc.
<i>Mudra</i>	The descriptive and symbolic movement of hands and fingers to signify an object or action. The sign language of Kathakali
<i>Muti</i>	Abbreviated form of <i>Krishnamuti</i> . Also applied to other types of head-dress, e.g. that worn by Hanuman
<i>Namboodiris</i>	The Brahmins of Kerala
<i>Nritta</i>	Pure dance as in a <i>kalasam</i> (as differentiated from the dramatic, meaningful dance which interprets a text)
<i>Paccha</i>	'Green', the make-up of heroic, kingly and divine characters
<i>Padam</i>	Song sung by Kathakali musicians interpreting the story of the play. A mixture of Sanskrit and Malayalam
<i>Parana</i>	Breaking of a fast
<i>Purappadu</i>	Introduction in pure dance. One of the preliminary demonstrations before a Kathakali performance
<i>Putrakameshti</i>	The sacrifice performed to obtain male offspring
<i>Rajasuya</i>	The sacrifice performed by a king to propitiate the gods and establish his supremacy
<i>Rakshasas*</i>	A race akin to <i>Asuras</i> who were the enemies of man
<i>Ramanattam</i>	Stories from the Ramayana composed by the Rajah of Kottarakkara in the 16th century
<i>Rasa</i>	Sentiment, emotion or mood
<i>Rishi</i>	A sage
<i>Sairandhri</i>	A female attendant or companion



<i>Sanyasi</i>	A holy man. One who has renounced the world
<i>Sloka</i>	Verse of Kathakali literature. Usually in Sanskrit
<i>Sringara-padam</i>	The love song with which many plays begin, displaying the erotic sentiment
<i>Sudarsana</i>	The weapon of god Vishnu
<i>Swayamvara</i>	The occasion on which a princess selected her husband from a number of competing princes
<i>Tadi</i>	'Beard'. Classification of characters who wear artificial trimmed beards—red, black and white
<i>Tapas</i>	Meditation often combined with self-mortification carried out with the object of propitiating a god to obtain a boon
<i>Tiranokku</i> (or <i>Tiranottam</i> )	'Curtain Look' performed by fierce characters ( <i>katti</i> , <i>kari</i> and <i>tadi</i> ) when appearing on the stage for the first time
<i>Tirassila</i>	The rectangular curtain used on the Kathakali stage
<i>Todayam</i>	Dance performed by junior actors behind the <i>tirassila</i> , with no make-up, prior to a Kathakali performance
<i>Uttara-kanda</i>	Appendix to the Ramayana: sometimes called <i>Uttara-Ramayana</i>
<i>Veera-rasa</i>	The heroic mood
<i>Vella Tadi</i>	'White Beard'. The make-up of Hanuman and Nandikeswaran
<i>Vilambitakala</i>	Slow tempo
<i>Vimana</i>	A magical aircraft. (Ravana owned one called Pushpaka)
<i>Viswarupa</i>	The cosmic form of Vishnu
<i>Yaga</i>	A sacrificial ceremony
<i>Yuga</i>	An age of the world in ancient Hindu chronology

(The Ramayana story took place in *Treta Yuga*, the Mahabharata story took place in *Dwapara Yuga* and we are at present living in *Kali Yuga*.)

*Note\** *Asuras* and *Rakshasas* have been loosely translated throughout this book as 'demons'. *Asuras* and *Daityas* were, in general, the enemies of the gods. *Rakshasas* were the counterparts of the *Asuras*, but they belonged to a different world and to a race which was inimical to man: they included fiends who haunted cemeteries, disturbed sacrifices, harassed devout men, devoured human beings and afflicted mankind in various other ways. *Rakshasees* were demonesses with supernatural powers who could change their form at will.

## TWO FILMS ON KATHAKALI

ANYONE wishing to learn more about Kathakali, or to have a souvenir of the art, may be interested to know that the author of this book has made two 16 mm sound films on the subject, both in colour and with a descriptive commentary and full sound effects recorded on location.

Because of his personal relationship with the staff of the Kerala Kalamandalam, he was permitted to film very unusual shots of the long training of a Kathakali actor. He was also able to film plays whilst they were actually being performed in various places in Kerala. As the films were edited from material shot and recorded entirely in Kerala over a period of six years, they are completely authentic and give an excellent idea of Kathakali as performed under natural conditions.

*MASQUE OF MALABAR* (43 minutes) is designed to be valuable in the classroom as educational resource material and will prove useful in courses on dance, actor training and theatre history. It will also be useful to specialists in Asian studies.

The film opens with shots of a Hindu temple festival with gaily caparisoned elephants accompanied by massed drumming of *chendas* which is so typical of Kerala. The titles which follow lead into the playing of the *kelikottu* at sunset (see page 7). The camera then moves to the Green Room, where the three hour process of making-up is shown in considerable detail (pages 3 to 5) interspersed with shots of the *arangu keli*, the *purappadu* and the *melappa-dam* (page 7) each accompanied by the appropriate music.

A flash back shows the location of the Kerala Kalamandalam and all the stages in the training of an actor from the time that he first goes there as a young boy until, six years later, he is fully trained and ready to perform in public (pages 2 and 3).

The last twenty minutes of the film show extracts from the most important scenes of two plays—*Kalyana Saugandhika* and *Duryodhana Vadha*. The commentary describes the story of each play as told by the actors through their hand movements and facial expressions. The music recorded on the sound track is the actual music sung and played during the performance of the plays. The film ends at dawn with the *dhanasi* (page 8) as the sun rises over the Kerala landscape.

*MALABAR MASQUE* (20 minutes) is a shorter version of the same film which omits all the technical words from the commentary, shows a little less of the making-up and training sequences, and includes only two scenes from one play—the dice game and the killing of Dussassana by Bhima in *Duryodhana Vadha*.

Anyone who wishes to purchase a copy of either of these films should write to:  
Colour Film Services Ltd., Portman Close, London W1A 4BE

or to

A. D. Bolland, "Malabar", Brent Knoll, Somerset TA9 4EH, England.

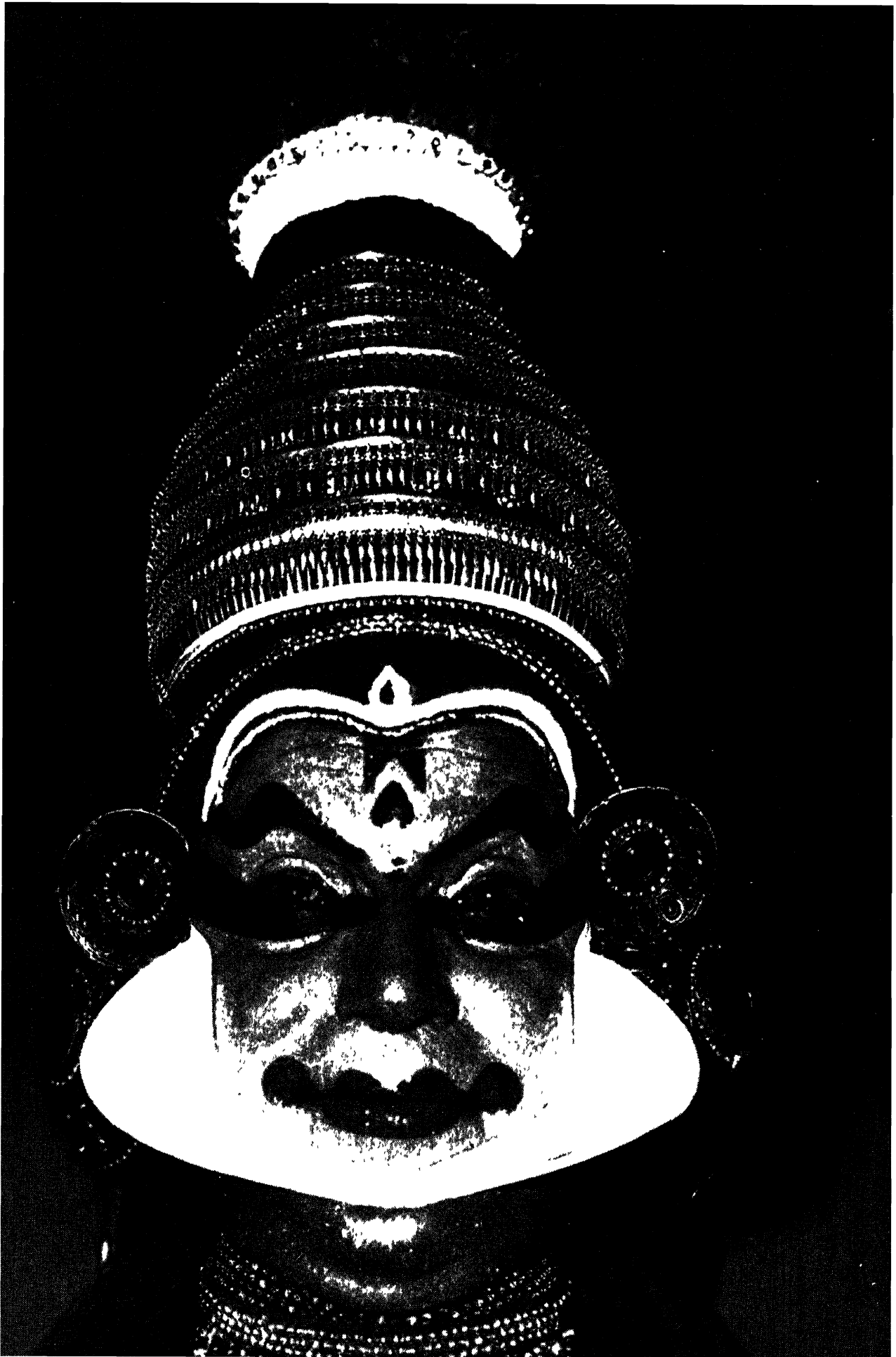


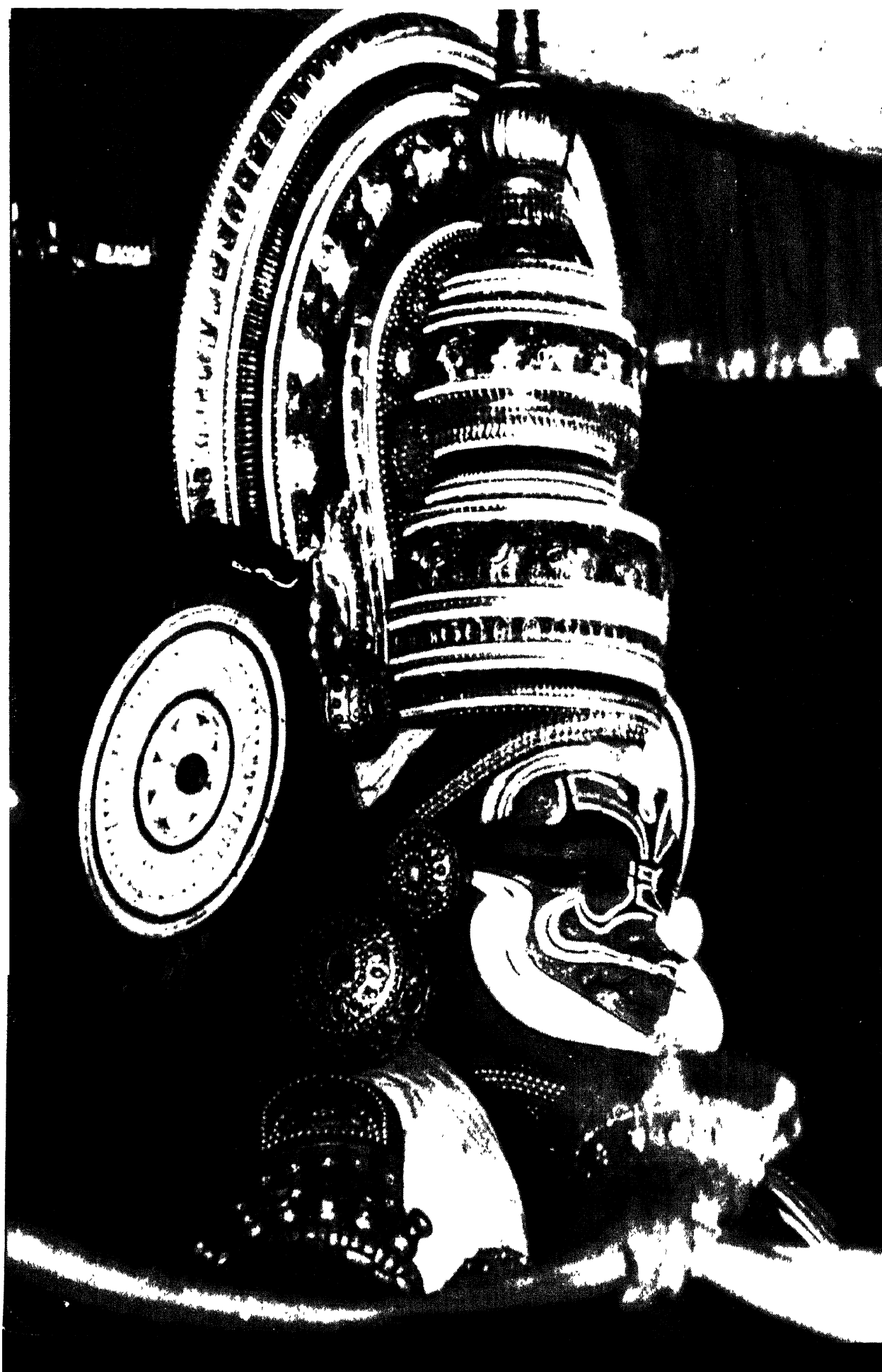
The scene in a typical Kathakali green room.



*Paccha*. A kingly, heroic or divine type.







Below and left :

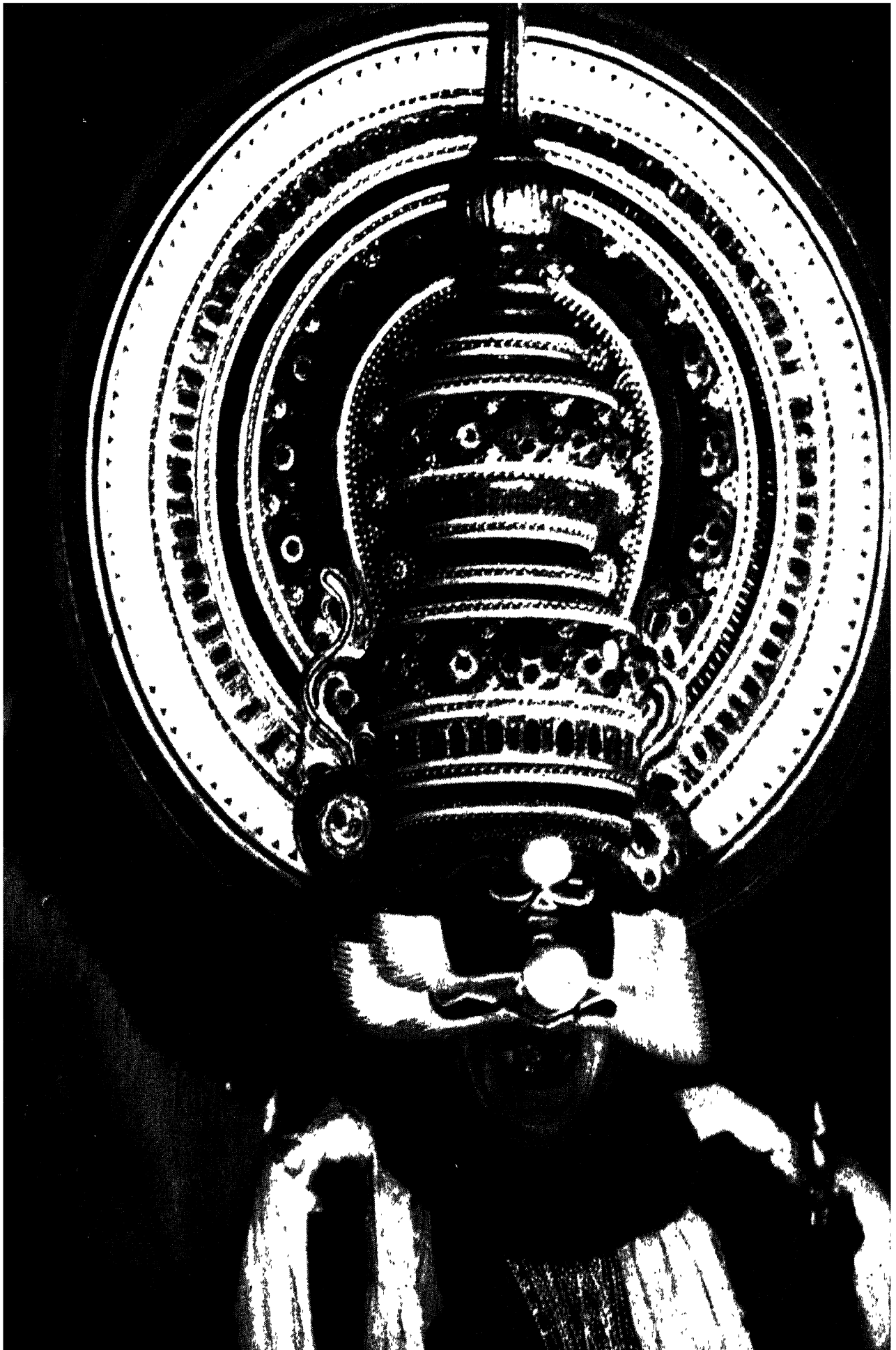
*Karti*. An arrogant and evil type who has a streak of valour.





Below and right :  
*Chivanna Tadi* (Red Beard). A vicious and vile type







*Vella Tadi (White Beard). A higher type of being : Hanuman.*

*Karutta Tadi* (Black Beard). A wild hunter or forest dweller.



*Kari. A demoness.*



*Minukku (female). A heroine, servant etc.*



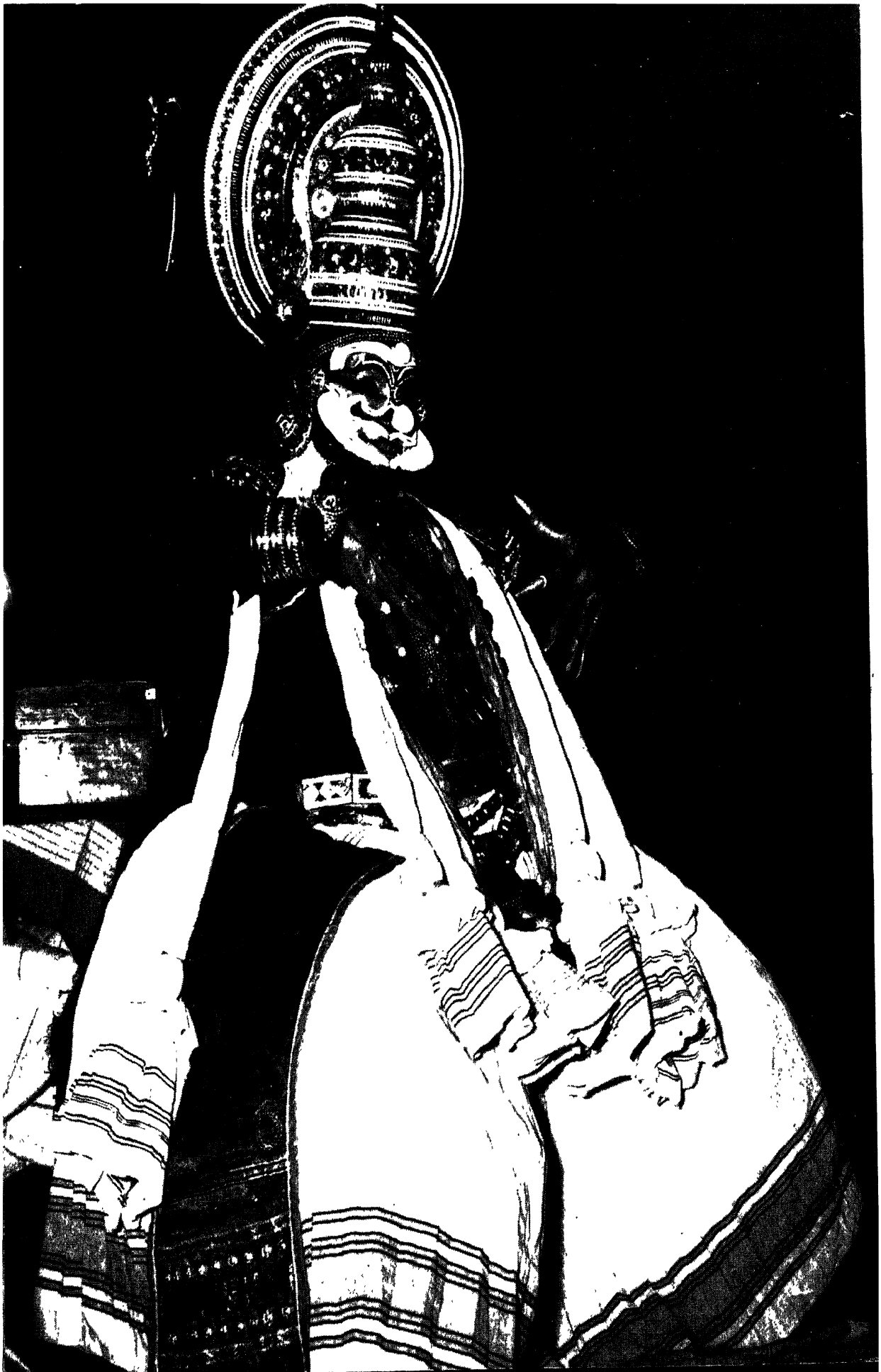
Below : *Minukku* (male). A brahmin.

Right : The 'Bird' make-up.









Felt - Kichaka *Chakri* in Kutchi *Chakri*

Below - Hanuman *Chakri* in Kutchi *Chakri*



Bhima (*pracha*) and Draupadi (*manako*), in *Kalyana Saganadhika*.



A typical open air Kathakali performance in Kerala.



One of the preliminary demonstrations before the play begins —  
the *purappadu*, an introduction in pure dance.



Most plays open with a love scene which is intended to stress the importance of *sringara-rasa* (the sentiment of love)..... (below)

.....and the final scene of the play, just before dawn, brings the performance to a close in a state of great excitement, usually with the killing of a demon.... (overleaf)





