

*Kuttambalam** and its Links with Bharata's Stage

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The *Natyashastra* (NS) of Bharata has wielded a tremendous influence on the dramatic traditions of India and also perhaps on those of the eastern countries. It was the earliest work on dramaturgy and its impact (as that of Indian arts and religions) must also have been felt in all the eastern countries.

The NS deals with all aspects of this composite art: play writing; the different facets of production and its styles; acting with its varied nuances and subtleties; music as an integral part of production; and dance which, like a precious jewel, added lustre to the performance.

Since all these aspects were closely linked with the form of the theatre, the physical theatre, a detailed description of its construction was included along with the various forms of decorative embellishments. These, in fact, added not only to its aesthetic appearance, but also to its functional value and were, therefore, described in detail.

Though definite rules were laid down for all aspects of the theatre arts, these were not considered inviolable or the last word on the subject, for Bharata affirmed again and again that an artiste should seek fresh ideas and inspiration constantly referring to the "Loka" (the people) and the life around him. He says at the end of the last chapter of the NS, "Thus many practices sanctioned by Shastras have been described in connection with the performance of dramas. Whatever remains unmentioned should be included into practice by experts from an observation (lit. imitative) of people (i.e. their usage)", (NS, XXXVI, 83, Trans. M. M. Ghosh, Calcutta, 1961).

Neither the production methods of the classical Sanskrit theatre of the *Dasharupaka-s* nor of the parallel popular dramatic traditions of the *Uparupaka-s* are known to us with any definiteness, or so it seems to some. Even the theatres in which these two traditions staged their plays do not exist today as these were constructed in perishable materials such as brick and wood. Thus, according to most scholars of the subject, nothing except the description of the three types of theatres in the second chapter of the NS survives today.

But we are not wholly in the dark about modes of presentation for we are in a position to supplement the account of theatres and dramatic practices as described in the NS with observations derived from dramatic traditions as they exist today and their stage forms.

There is a broad variety of dramatic forms existing all over India. They differ widely depending on the use of written or improvised speech (straight or musical), of vocal or instrumental music, of dance or its absence,

* *Kuttambalam* is also spelt as *kuttampalam*

of costume, of make-up, of straight acting or that accompanied by stylized hand gestures and facial expressions. The degree of sophistication and stylization adopted or reached in each form varies according to the cultural and aesthetic needs of the region. But, in spite of this bewildering variety, these forms have a common source and share certain conventions arising from this common source. In our present state of knowledge we are not in a position to say whether this source was the *Uparupaka* tradition and if so, how much of it has been adopted by our presentday regional and traditional drama. All that we can say is that this source, too, seems to have been influenced by the *NS*, in the same way as the *NS* itself might perhaps have been influenced by it as the above quotation shows.

Towering above all the regional dramatic forms is the Kutiyattam of Kerala, which stands apart from all others because of its vital and direct links—some apparent, others which need to be probed into and discovered—with the classical Sanskrit dramatic tradition of the *NS*. Further, its importance lies in the fact that it is staged in a permanent theatre constructed specially and set apart specifically for staging classical Sanskrit plays. Kutiyattam, as the classical Sanskrit dramatic tradition of Kerala is called, is the only form, which has the distinction of having a permanent theatre building based on shastric canons set apart for it in the temple complex. This theatre is called the *kuttambalam*, which literally means the temple (*ambalam*) of drama (*kuttu*). The word 'drama' is here to be understood in the sense of the *Natya* of the *NS* and not in its western sense.

I have attempted elsewhere* to establish the possible links between the Kutiyattam and the classical dramatic tradition as reflected in the *NS*. Here, an attempt is being made to investigate any possible links between the *kuttambalam* and the *vikrshtha madhya* (rectangular middle-sized) theatre described in Chapter Two of the *NS*. To do this it will be necessary to describe briefly this theatre of the *NS* as well as the *kuttambalam* to form a clear idea of their essential features. This will help to establish the links between them—the points of comparison and contrast.

Here an attempt will be made to steer clear of the various controversies regarding the location, size and shape of the various elements of the classical Sanskrit stage. I will confine myself to a description of the theatre where there is some broad agreement among some contemporary writers.** The same approach will be adopted in the case of the *kuttambalam*.

*"Kutiyattam and its links with classical Sanskrit Drama", *Journal of the Oriental Institute*, Baroda (To be published).

- **1 Dr. V. Raghavan — "The Theatre Architecture in Ancient India" in *The Theatre of the Hindus*, Calcutta (1955).
 2 Prof. D. R. Mankad — *Ancient Indian Theatre* (Revised Ed.), Anand (1960).
 3 Godavari Ketkar — *Bharatmuniche Natyashastra* (Marathi—Second Ed.), Bombay (1963).
 4 A. M. Joshi — *Bharatiya Natyaprayogavijnana*, Pune (1965).
 5 P. S. R. Appa Rao and P. Sri Rama Sastry — *Naatya Saastra* (1967).
 6 Goverdhan Panchal — "Bharata's Stage in Action" (No. 34, *Sangeet Natak*, Journal of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi (1974).

My field study of most of the theatres spread throughout north and central Kerala indicate that no two theatres are exactly alike. I will, therefore, select as examples the most representative of these—the *kuttambalam* at Kitangur near Kottayam in central Kerala and the Vatakkannathan temple theatre at Trichur. The *kuttambalam* at Kitangur is one of the finest and perhaps one of the oldest; the one at Trichur is a nineteenth century structure and is said to have been reconstructed on the lines of the older one, a theatre of massive proportions and the largest among the existing ones.

Vikrshtha Madhya Theatre of NS.

This rectangular middle-sized theatre (Drawing-1) was recommended by Bharata for mortals because of its two important technical qualities: good acoustics and good sightlines. It was a *n*-shaped structure which Bharata called *Shailaguhakara* (of the shape of the mountain cave). The length of this rectangular theatre (*natyamandapa*) was divided into two equal squares, one reserved for the auditorium (*prekshagraha*) and the other for the stage area (*rangamandapa*).

The auditorium had tiered seating (*sopanakrti*) arrangements. The tiers must have varied according to the specific requirements of the theatre of the king and that of the people. In the first case, the tiers must have been limited to two levels (*dwibhumi*) at the most as the audience was limited; in the latter case the tiers must have been designed to accommodate more people and for good sightlines. These tiers must have been placed in the central portion of the auditorium block, leaving passages on all sides between the pillars.

The other block of the rectangle housed the stage area which consisted of the stage and the dressing rooms (*nepathya*). This was reserved for the costuming and make-up. It was also used for making and storing properties and housing the wardrobe. A wall separated the *nepathya* from the stage. There were two doors in this wall for the entries and exits of the actors.

The stage—the playing space—consisted of two main equal areas called the *rangapitha* and the *rangashirsha*. The *rangapitha* was the main playing area. To its left and right were two other subsidiary acting areas called the *mattavarani*-s, each a square with four pillars, one in each of its corners. The length and width of the two *mattavarani*-s was equal to the length and width of the *rangapitha*.

The *rangashirsha* was at the back of the main acting area (*rangapitha*) and the two subsidiary acting areas (*mattavarani*-s). It stretched from the backwall that separated it from the *nepathya* upto the pillars of the *mattavarani*-s. In the middle of the *rangashirsha* and between the two doors in the backwall, there was a square platform (*vedika*) on which sat the orchestra and the vocalists (*kutapa*).

The entire stage, including the *nepathya*, was a raised level of twenty-seven inches while the first level of the auditorium was eighteen inches in height.

The various divisions on the stage were formed naturally because of the architectural necessity of having pillars on the *mattavarani-s* to support the ceiling and the roof. The four pillars of each of the *mattavarani-s* separated them from the *rangapitha* which was hemmed in between the inner pillars of the *mattavarani-s*. The four back pillars of the two *mattavarani-s* separated these from the *rangashirsha*. The *vedika* became a separate area by virtue of its being a raised level.

These various acting areas, the main and subsidiary, were given separate names perhaps for the convenience of the actors and the producers (*sutradhara-s*) as is done in modern times. In modern stage-geography, the stage area is divided into six or nine zones for the guidance of the actors and the producers, such as upstage, downstage, stage right, stage left and so on.

There were two rows of pillars—one row touching the enclosing wall and at an equal distance from each other and from the other row of pillars opposite them. The pillars on the wall-side must have been smaller in height because of the characteristic roof structure. The larger row of pillars must have supported the n-shaped roof.

The brick walls enclosing the building had small latticed windows through which a gentle breeze could flow. There was an entrance in the auditorium which was to the east of the musicians who sat facing this direction.

Thus the entire building had three divisions, the auditorium, the stage and the *nepathya*, the last two being at the other end of the building beginning from the centre line.

These were the basic elements of the stage of Bharata and these certainly were kept in mind by playwrights as their stage-directions and the texts of the plays often suggest.

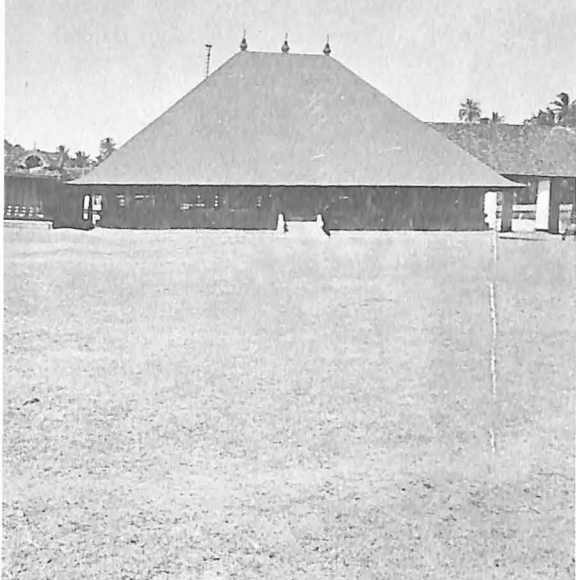
*Kuttambalam**

These theatres are constructed as a part of the temple complex (Drawing 2) and are placed, as a rule, to the right to face the direction of the deity in the main shrine.

The *kuttambalam* is also a rectangular building with a steeply rising roof ending in a ridge. On the ridge there are three pinnacles (*tazhikakkudam-s*). The superstructure consists of a framework of horizontal and perpendicular wooden bars, forming rectangular trellises. It is set between a

*For further information see:

- 1 G. Panchal — “Kuttampalam, the Sanskrit Stage of Kerala”, *Sangeet Natak*, Journal of Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi, No. 8, 1968.
- 2 Dr. C. R. Jones — Kerala Kalamandalam, Kerala, 1968.
Sanskrit Ranga, No. VI, Madras, 1972.
Quarterly Journal of the National Centre for the Performing Arts, Vol. IV, No. 1, March 1975.



The Vadakkunnathan temple kuttambalam at Trichur.



Passages between the three rows of pillars in the auditorium at the Vadakkunnathan kuttambalam.

row of small pillars on which rests the entablature (*prastara*) that supports the roof structure. The entire superstructure with pillars is firmly placed on a stone socle (*adhishtana*) on which also rest the decorative brackets supporting the eaves.

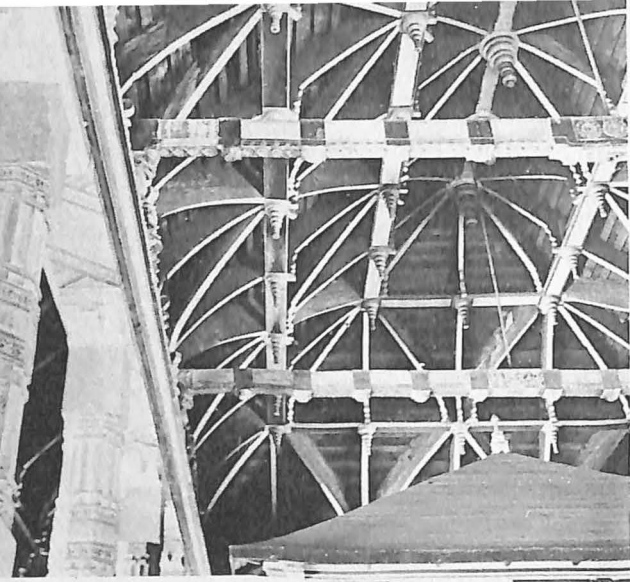
As you enter the theatre the feeling of stepping into a cave is unmistakable. You can almost touch the eaves of the roof and in some cases you have to stoop to avoid collision with the low door-frame cut in the superstructure frame because of the low roof.

A second row of pillars as at Kitangur or a third row of pillars as at Trichur (Drawings 3 & 4) with their beams (*uttara*) support the oblique struts, the horizontal rafters and other elements supporting the roof. From the vital joints hang down graceful lathe-turned pendants (*balakuda*-s) which hold firmly the various elements meeting at the juncture (Picture 3).

Between the second and, in larger ones, the third row of pillars in some theatres, there is a raised platform in the auditorium facing the stage. The audience sits on the platform as well as on the floor level and also on the sides of the stage and even on the stage itself at times.

The stage is at one end of the rectangular theatre. It faces as a rule the presiding deity in the main shrine as the actors are required to be performing before the god.

The stage is a raised square platform. In each corner there is a lathe-turned, red-lacquered pillar with dividing black lines in variously shaped *kumbha* (pot) designs. The pillars support the stage roof which is either in the shape of an inverted square tray or a square double roof ending in a finial (*stupi*).



The ceiling structure of the Vadakkunnathan Kuttambalam auditorium.



The extension of the stage (between two of the corner pillars of the stage plinth) of the Vadakkunnathan Kuttambalam as seen from the stage front. Perhaps remnants of the *mattavarani-s*.

The stage ceiling (Picture 6) is the most richly carved area in the whole *kuttambalam*. Its sides are decorated with small intricately carved figurines of gods and goddesses as well as heroes and heroines of the epics. The central coffered area of the ceiling has nine squares and in each of its eight recessed squares presides a guardian deity of the eight directions (*ashtadigpala-s*) with Brahma in the centre in the ninth square. (The Trichur *kuttambalam* is an exception as there are more than nine squares with lotus designs carved on them.)

The dressing room (*nepathya*) is a small rectangular room placed at the back of the stage. A wall separates the two areas and there are two doors in this wall for the entries and exits of the actors.

There is some space between this stage wall and the stage in several *kuttambalam-s*. The chief musicians, the *mizhavu* (large oval-shaped copper drum) players sit here and the other two or three percussion or wind instrument players also stand in this narrow strip of space. One or two vocalists sit at right angles to the *mizhavu* players to their right.

These again are broadly the elements of a typical *kuttambalam* for in details they vary a great deal as noted earlier and yet conform to a basic pattern. And I am also inclined to believe that the same must have been the case with the theatre of Bharata, the reason being that it was neither necessary nor possible to recreate exact replicas complete in every detail. The broad pattern of the divisions of the stage necessary for dramatic purpose must have been adhered to but the other architectural details and ornamental embellishments must have been adopted according to individual requirements, as well as those of time and place.

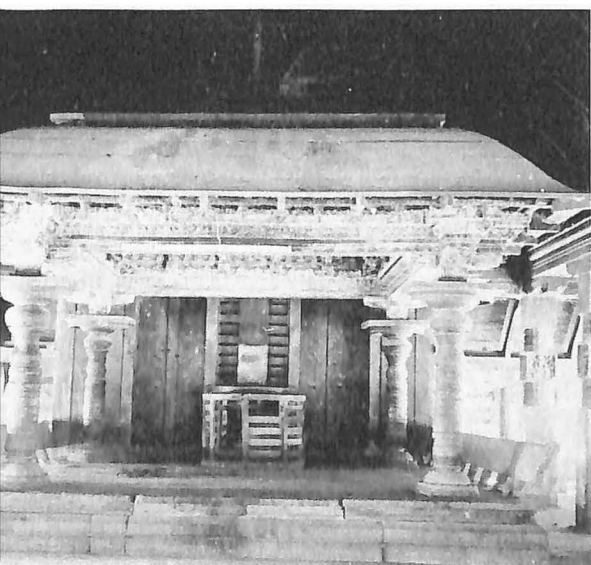
Here it must be noted that there is a gap of several centuries between the stage of Bharata and the first *kuttambalam* that might have been constructed nearly a millenium ago. In comparing these two types of theatre, we must bear in mind that the oldest among the latter, (that is among those that are still extant), is perhaps not more than four hundred years old. Even so, the links between the two types are certainly very strong to suggest a continuity in the classical Sanskrit tradition, at least in its regional form. Architecturally they may be different as is to be expected in theatres belonging to such widely separated periods. But what is attempted here is some indication of the similarities in their basic elements and form and the dependence of the latter on the original source, the *NS*.

Kutiyyattam appears to have been a simplified version of the classical Sanskrit drama adapted to suit local taste, later times, and regional requirements. This is evident from its overemphasis on the *angika abhinaya* during the staging of an act by the characters, particularly in the *nirvahana* (which is a sort of flash-back); from other devices adopted to fill up the gaps in the story; from the stress on the *vachika abhinaya* during the *nirvahana* of the *Vidushaka*; and from the highly stylised costumes and make-up. The stage form had also to be adapted to suit their own method. In it the spatial requirements were limited and, therefore, the classical stage was pruned and simplified to suit this new dramatic version. The *kuttambalam* was the result.

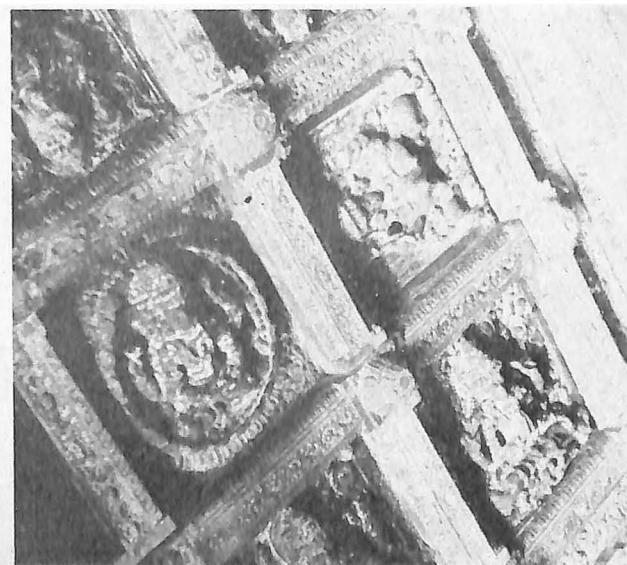
Comparison and Contrast

The *NS* describes the shape of the theatre as *shailaguhakara*. This shape could be the result of two factors. One was the particular historic period to which it belonged, when the n-shaped roofs were more in prominence than the other types—round, gabled or pyramidal. The bas-reliefs on the gateways of Sanchi and Bharhut and the cave temples of Karle, Bhaja, Kondane, Pitakhora etc. of the second or first century B.C. point to the

The stage at the Kitangur kuttambalam. Note the wooden back-rests on either side of the stage and the space between the stage pillar and the back-rest.



A portion of the stage ceiling with nine squares, with Brahma enclosed in the central circle.



n-shaped central roof with its flattened out sides and Bharata naturally adopted this shape for the theatre. And the second reason was that since the theatre was meant for performing plays, good acoustics were of the utmost importance and this shape must have helped to ensure these. The n-shaped wooden ribs supporting the barrel-shaped roof, the beams and the other ornamental wood-work, apart from being aesthetically pleasing, were also essential for the breaking up of the even, flat surfaces which otherwise might have reflected back, or created echoes of the spoken or sung word. Nowadays these surfaces are treated with insulation boards. In those days the breaking up of the surfaces of walls and ceilings with wooden beams and ornamentation seems to have admirably served this purpose since they absorbed the sound.

The *kuttambalam*, too, in spite of its differently shaped ridged roof, gives the same feeling of a cave-like structure, mainly on account of its enormous and steeply rising roof which allows a very small part of its superstructure to be seen from outside (Picture 1). The feeling is enhanced when one steps into it through the doors cut into the trellis frames on three or four of its sides. The underside of the roof of the auditorium is criss-crossed by a mass of wooden beams, struts, rafters, brackets, and pendants. These prevent the sound from being reflected back and creating echoes.

Bharata's theatre had brickwalls with small latticed windows (*jala-vatayana*) so that only a gentle breeze would pass through them, without disturbing the sound. At the same time it could keep the auditorium cool. In the *kuttambalam*, though the arrangement of the wall section comprises of the trellis frames, the openness is sought to be neutralized by a very low roof and this allows only a gentle breeze inside. Thus the acoustics in a *kuttambalam* are perfect.

Bharata's theatre had two rows of pillars, the outer one perhaps smaller than the inner one and this left a passage which could also be used to seat the audience. The two or three rows of pillars in the *kuttambalam* also serve the same purpose and are also used in the same manner (see ground plans in Drawings 3-4).

In the former, the main part of the audience sat in the central area between the inner rows of pillars. They sat on tiers (*sopana*) which must have varied according to requirements. The theatre meant for the people perhaps had more tiers than the private theatres of the nobles and the kings. As the main mass of the audience sat in the central area facing the stage, the actor-audience relationship was frontal. But, in spite of this arrangement, there was no difficulty in seeing or hearing since Bharata had recommended precisely for this reason theatres which were neither too large nor too small in size.

In the *kuttambalam*, too, the main part of the audience sits in front of the stage either on the raised platform or on level ground between the two inner rows of pillars. Others sit in the passages and on the sides of the

stage. Nowadays any member of the audience sits where he pleases. This was not the case in days gone by. Then the social and political conditions in Kerala were different. Socially and politically the Nambudiri Brahmins formed the dominating class and caste. They alone were permitted to enter the *kuttambalam*-s during the performances. Even among these, the more privileged must have sat in front of the stage, with the others squatting in the passages. The non-Brahmins had to watch the performance from outside, through the trellis frames. The decades of warfare between the Cheras and the Cholas had resulted in the region being fragmented and small principalities dominated by the Nambudiris had sprung up. Caste-consciousness was thus sharpened.

The Stage

In the classical theatre the entire length was divided into two equal sections and the stage began from the centre line. In the *kuttambalam*, too, the stage area begins from the plumb line of the middle *tazhikkudam* (*kalasam*) which falls in the central line of the breadthwise division of the theatre. This would divide the stage area and the auditorium section into two equal parts. Due to its limited requirements of space, the stage area in the *kuttambalam*, of course, did not occupy the same square-foot area as in the case of Bharata's stage.

The stage of the *vikrshtha madhya* theatre of Bharata was large and stretched from wall to wall with several divisions formed naturally due to the pillars on it. Kutiyattam needed no big stage-space for reasons noted earlier and the classical stage had to be modified to suit regional requirements, the emphasis now shifting to the main central playing space to which the action was being confined. And as the other areas of the classical stage, the two *mattavarani*-s, the *rangashirsha* and the *vedika*, were no longer relevant, they were greatly reduced in size almost to the point of elimination in several *kuttambalam*-s. But in several others and older ones one can still discover these even if in a truncated form. The emphasis now was on simplicity—simplicity in the dramatic form as well as in its stage. There were reasons for this shift of emphasis. The first reason could be that interest in the Sanskrit drama had begun to flag since Sanskrit was no longer understood by the common people. To revive interest in classical drama, the Perumal (ruler) of the time, Kulashekhara Varman, himself a dramatist of repute, is said to have made certain changes in the classical form by localizing and simplifying it and also modified the theatre to suit the form. Another reason could be that the Perumal, being perhaps an Alwar, a saintly person, preferred simplicity to grandeur and elaboration. This simplicity was reflected in the many temples and theatres which were constructed during those times and the present temples and theatres indicate that they must have been re-built on the lines of the previous ones destroyed during the decades of political turmoil. The oldest among the existing *kuttambalam*-s was perhaps built four centuries ago. And it is, therefore, difficult to say what changes, other than those noticeable, were carried out in the later structures. But it is reasonable to assume that they must have followed the older plans as is supposed to be the case in the Trichur *kuttambalam*. Even in the case of the *kuttam*-

balam built at Thirumuzhikulam only some five decades ago the traditional plan has been meticulously followed though the material used in construction is wood and concrete. In a tradition-bound society, which Kerala, to a certain extent is, it could not be otherwise and particularly so when it comes to re-building a theatre for classical drama.

The *kuttambalam* stage proper has been greatly reduced in size as it comprises only of the central areas of the classical stage—the *rangapitha* which was the main acting area and the area right behind it of the *rangashirsha*, both together measuring 24 square feet, thus almost eliminating the areas of both the *mattavarani*-s and the areas of the *rangashirsha* right behind them. The largest stage is that of the *kuttambalam* at Trichur. It is 22 square feet, or nearly so, though there are many of much smaller dimensions. This is almost half the size of Bharata's entire stage.

Thus the central area of Bharata's stage was almost retained with its earlier dimensions in the larger *kuttambalam*-s. But the *mattavarani*-s were more or less eliminated, though a suggestion of their existence seems to have been retained in some *kuttambalam*-s, particularly at Trichur and Kitangur (Pictures 4-5). In the latter, the stage extends by a foot or so on the sides beyond the pillar bases. This extension of the stage is backed by a plank fixed on the surface of the plinth at an angle of 30° and ending in abstract *makara* designs. This presumably must have been used as a back-rest for those who sat on the stage during performances.

Bharata's square *mattavarani*, on either side of the *rangapitha*, and measuring 12 feet x 12 feet was used for dramatic purposes and not for seating the audience. But in the regional version of the stage, the *mattavarani*-s were reduced to narrow strips and could not be used for dramatic purposes. They were, therefore, perhaps used for seating the spectators. The argument that these narrow strips of the stage were remnants of the former *mattavarani*-s gains strength from the arrangement in the Trichur *kuttambalam*. In this *kuttambalam* there are three pillars in each corner of the stage, a total of twelve in all. These narrow strips between the front two pillars (on either side) again have hardly any dramatic significance here. The area is also used for seating a few members of the audience, particularly the Brahmins. The female chorus, the Nannyars reciting the verses of the texts of the plays also sit in this area while the action is confined to the main stage, particularly to its central area. How else can one explain the extensions of these stages (Picture 4) and of some others beyond the pillars except as remnants of the *mattavarani*-s of Bharata's stage?

The *mattavarani*-s were nothing more than extensions of the main acting area, the *rangapitha*, on either side of the stage. In later centuries this principle was also extended to forms of architecture other than the stage, as one finds in the *mandapa*-s of the temples of Gujarat. One also finds this principle of the extension of the main space applied to secular architecture in the form of *jharokha*-s (balconies) in stately mansions and palaces. In my recent tour of Kerala during a visit to the private temple of the Raja of Kattapadi, near Guruvayoor, I also visited the deserted palace where a pub-

lic function was being held. On the upper storey of the palace, I saw a long balcony-like extension with canted balustrades and a long bench-like seat overlooking the courtyard where, in older days, dramatic performances and dances must have been staged. This was the *mattavarani*, a Nambudiri scholar explained to me. It was used by the ladies of the court as they watched the performances below. This clearly shows that the space extending beyond the stage in certain *kuttambalam*-s is a reminder of the *mattavarani* of Bharata's stage.

In several *kuttambalam*-s, again, there is a strip of space between the stage enclosed by four pillars and the backwall separating it from the *nepathya*. It is in this space that the musicians sit and stand: the *mizhavu* players sit on the huge *pinjara*-s (cages) holding the copper drums; the Nannyars (vocalists or chorus) squat on the stage floor; those playing the *idakka* (damaru-shaped drum), the *kuzhal* (small wind pipe) and the *shankha* (conch-shell) all stand on this strip of space. This seems to be the remnant of the *rangashirsha* now reduced to a mere strip with the *vedika* removed for the sake of having more space for movement. Here the *rangapitha* area has merged with the *rangashirsha* area to form a square stage but left a part of it to suggest the original area at the back of the main stage (Drawing 5).

Musicians according to the *NS* sat between the two doors on the *vedika* (platform) in the *vikrshita madhya* theatre. But in the *chaturashra-kaniya* (square-type small theatre) of Bharata, this was eliminated presumably to allow the full use of the small-sized stage so that the musicians could sit comfortably, while the actors were left with enough space for their movements. The musicians must have sat on the stage-floor itself between the two doors at the back. On the *kuttambalam* stage, the *mizhavu* players, as has been noted, sit on the frames holding the drums and the Nannyars squat on the floor. The other three musicians, being of a lower caste, stand and the nature of their instruments is such that they encounter no difficulty in playing them in a standing position.

Even the placing and the arrangement of the musicians on the *kuttambalam* stage remind one of Bharata's stage. The drummers led the orchestra and controlled the performance in the latter and this is also the case in the *kuttambalam*. The position of the vocalists was to the right side of the drummers on Bharata's stage and we find the same arrangement for the Nannyars on the *kuttambalam* stage. But differences in social levels came into being in the centuries which followed, and so the other musicians have now to stand in the *kuttambalam*.

On the classical stage, again, the main musicians-drummers sat facing the east. This means that they sat facing the main entrance. The presiding deity in many a shrine in Kerala faces the west. And as the actor is playing before the god, the stages in these *kuttambalam*-s face the east and consequently the musicians and the actors have also to face the east and thus perform in front of the deity.

It is said that the first play staged by Bharata (before Brahma, the gods, and the demons) was an open-air performance. The play was offen-

sive to the demons, and they created a turmoil and did not allow the play to progress. Later on they relented on account of the intervention of Brahma, who tried to pacify them. But the lesson was learnt and a closed theatre was built after this. Various gods were symbolically placed on the stage of this theatre in order to protect it and the actors. A *mandala* with nine squares was drawn on the stage (NS—III, 22) and various gods were installed in each of these with Brahma in the central square (NS—III, 23-30). This central square on Bharata's stage was called the *Brahma-mandala* and it was here that the *nartaki* scattered flowers during the *purvaranga* ceremony to pay homage to Brahman, the creator of the *Natyaveda* (NS—I, 93-94). In the *kuttambalam*, the central portion of the coffered stage ceiling has nine recessed squares in eight of which are carved the images of the eight guardian deities. Brahma presides in the central square which is exactly in the plumb-line of the centre of the stage. It corresponds to the *Brahma-mandala* of Bharata. The several guardian deities are the same as also the directions in which they are placed (Picture 6).

Bharata had said that in the *Dakshinatya Pravritti* (the southern method of staging the plays, NS—XIV, 50), the door on the stage left (actors' left) should always be used for the entry and the one on the stage right for the exit. One finds the same convention being followed by the Chakyars (the hereditary actors of Kutiyattam). During the staging of an act (only single acts from several plays are staged now) all entries are made from the stage left door and all exits through the stage right door.

The need for door curtains (called *pati/apati* by Bharata) was perhaps not felt and these are eliminated. Nor was there any need for the *yavanika* (which used to be between the *rangapitha* and *rangashirsha* of Bharata's stage) as there are no such clear-cut divisions on the *kuttambalam* stage. Instead there is a third flexible curtain. The use of this curtain is not mentioned by Bharata as it was not a part of the permanent stage equipment of his stage. But it might have been borrowed from the *loka* (people) since Bharata had himself stressed the need to turn to the *loka* for fresh ideas and inspiration. The use of this curtain has definitely been indicated by Bhavabhuti who called it the *chitra yavanika* and its use is implied in the stage-directions of several plays. It is this curtain which has been adopted on the *kuttambalam* stage and used in various ways.

The use of this curtain, *chitra yavanika* (multi-coloured curtain), is also in keeping with the classical Sanskrit tradition. But it combined the use of both the curtains—the *yavanika* of Bharata's stage and the *chitra yavanika*. Some *purvaranga*-s (preliminaries) were performed behind the *yavanika*. On the *kuttambalam* stage, the *chitra yavanika* takes over this function and it is used for concealing the *marayell kriya* (preliminary ceremonies) which are performed behind it. Then it is also used for the sudden revelation of characters or for entries from behind it or for "seated entries" (*pravishati asanastha*). It is also sometimes used for concealing death scenes. But its use for "curtain-looks" (*thira-nokka* in Kathakali), which one meets with in several existing traditional dramatic forms, is not to be found on the *kuttambalam* stage.

In the classical theatre, the stage plinth was one and a half *hasta*-s (twenty-seven inches) high. In between the first *sopana* (tier) of the seating arrangement which was one *hasta* (eighteen inches) high there was a passage perhaps of twelve feet. This arrangement could have been suitable for a large theatre of 96' x 48' with an imposing stage of 48' x 24' and an equal-sized *nepathya* behind it. Even the largest *kuttambalam*, that at Trichur is 74' x 55' 5". For a theatre of this size, the passage between the stage and the sitting level was eliminated. The audience was brought nearer because there was perhaps a greater emphasis on the *angika abhinaya*, and on subtle shades of *bhava*-s. It could also be because of the informal atmosphere and simplicity sought to be introduced in the theatre, its stage and in the form itself. The classical stage was different. Its proportions were imposing; it was formal and aloof; the audience was highly sophisticated and well-versed in the artistic norms of the theatre. Kulshekhara Varman brought the Sanskrit drama closer to the people by introducing the local language in his plays and giving more prominence to the role of the Vidushaka. But the difference in the levels of the stage plinth and the auditorium was maintained for practical reasons to ensure a fairly good view of the stage.

In some *kuttambalam*-s the roofs are partially gabled. Two large openings at the ridge ends, latticed and ornate, are made to let in light and breeze. These take several shapes—triangular, horse-shoe or *gavaksha* and a still more elaborate form which combines the horse-shoe and the cusped design. Bharata's theatre also had such *jala-gavaksha* (latticed bull's eye-shaped) windows as noted earlier and the main entrance itself must have had a latticed *gavaksha* over it.

And finally about the materials used in the theatres of Bharata and the *kuttambalam*. Both used bricks and wood as main construction materials. All the *kuttambalam*-s are basically wood structures, of which a few have brick walls, a few feet in length, at the corners between which are set the wooden trellis frames (Ground plan, Drawing 3).

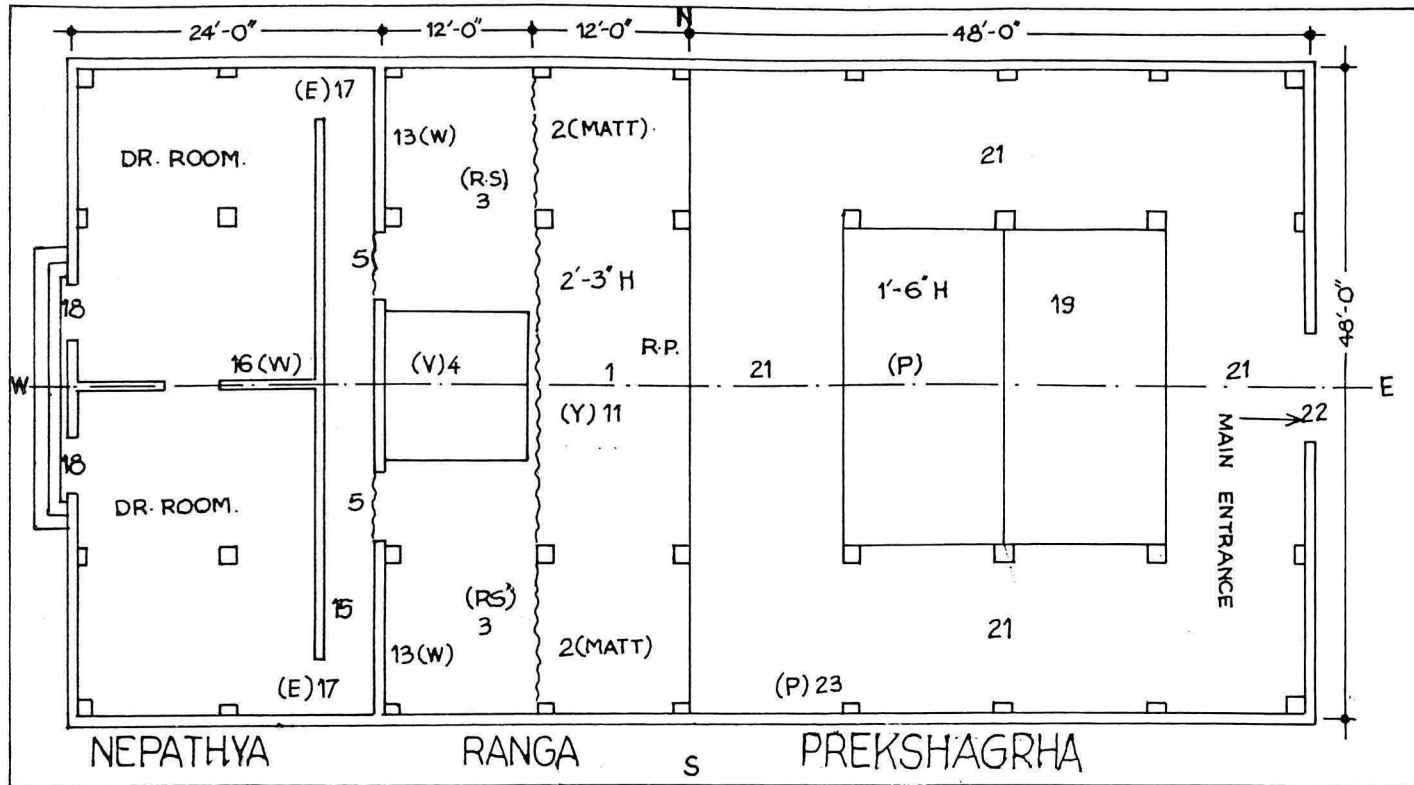
The direct links, between the *kuttambalam*-s and the *vikrshita-madhy*a theatre of Bharata, sought to be established here, it is hoped, will clear the confusion in some minds about Kutiyattam being a "folk" art, for no "folk" art or its stage is known to have a permanent theatre based on shastric canons. Through Kutiyattam the classical Sanskrit plays were brought closer to the people but this was certainly not attained at the expense of sophistication. It was achieved by a shifting of emphasis on certain visual aspects, by offering more prominence to the role of the Vidushaka and by introducing a degree of simplicity in the form, its stage and production methods.

Note 1

The study of the kuttambalam-s attached to the Kerala temples was made possible firstly, by a study-tour grant of the National School of Drama, New Delhi in 1968 and later by a grant from the Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi, for an extensive coverage of the subject in 1974-75.

Note 2

The drawings are by Kaushik M. Panchal and based on original sketches made by the author. The pictures are by the author.



RANGA (Stage)

- 1 Rangapitha (RP)
- 2 Mattavarani (Matt)
- 3 Rangashirsha (RS)
- 4 Vedika (V)

5 Doors for entries — exits (with curtains called pati/pata/apati)

6 Yavanika between RP, Matt, and RS

7 Wall between the stage and the dressing-rooms (W)

NEPATHYA (Dressing-rooms)

- 15 Passage between the dressing-rooms and the stage wall
- 16 Wall separating the dressing-rooms for men and women (W)

17 Entrances (E) to the passage (15)

18 Doors to the dressing-rooms from outside

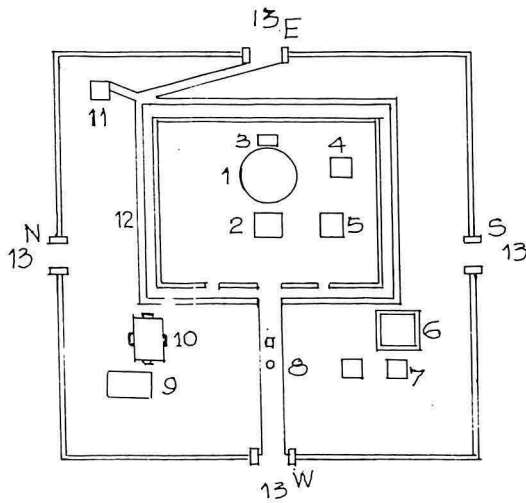
PREKSHAGRHA (P) (Auditorium)

19 Sopanakrti (tiered seating arrangement)

21 Passages on all sides

22 Main entrance to the prekshagrha

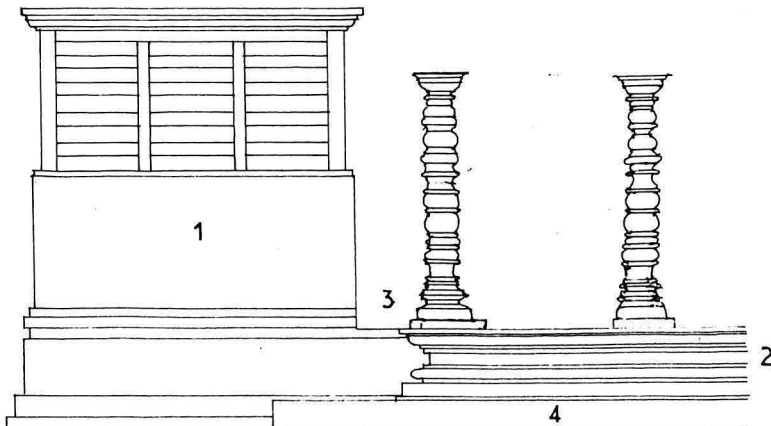
DRAWING 2



Ground Plan of the Trichur Temple Complex

- 1 Main shrine of Lord Vadakkunnathan (Shiva)
- 2 Namaskara mandapam (3-4-5-6 other shrines)
- 7 Shankaracharya samadhi
- 8 Dipastambha (lamp-pillar)
(In front of 8 is the balikkal, the stone on which offerings are made)
- 9 Gaushala (cowshed)
- 10 Kuttambalam (temple-theatre)
- 11 Parashurama samadhi
- 12 Pradakshinapatha — next to this is the Chuttambalam (the trellis frame wooden boundary enclosing the shrines)
- 13 Gopuram-s (gateways) in the four directions in the high wall enclosing the temple-complex

DRAWING 5

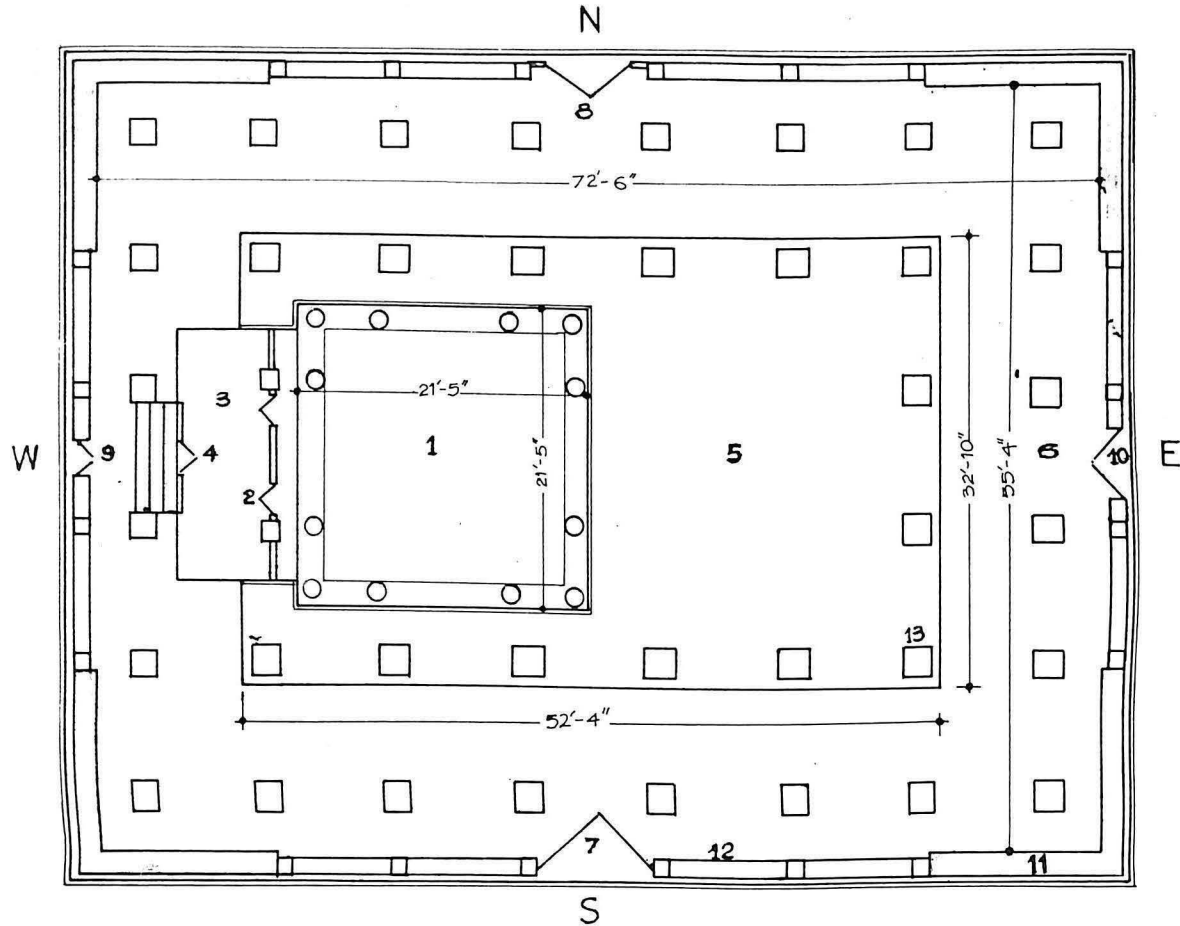


Nepathya of the Vadakkunnathan Kuttambalam (side elevation)

- 1 Nepathya
- 2 Adhishthana (stage-plinth)
- 3 Space between the stage-plinth and the nepathya
- 4 Brahmin level

DRAWING 3

Vadakkunnathan Temple, Trichur—Ground Plan



1 Stage

2 Doors for entries and exits

3 Nepathya

4 Door to nepathya

5 Brahmin level

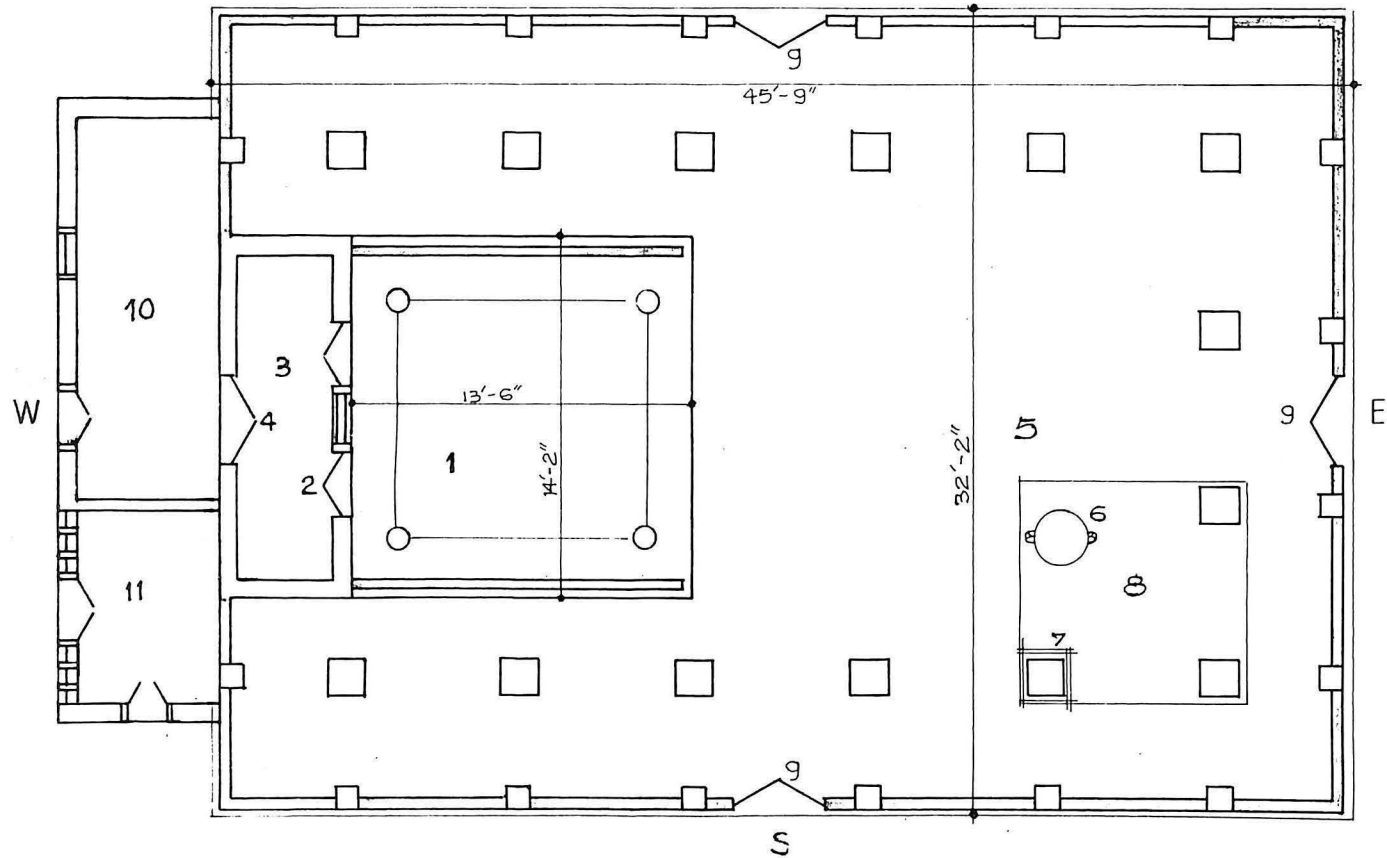
7-8 Auditorium entrances

9 Actors' entrance to nepathya from outside

10 Entrance used during action in some plays

11 Corner walls

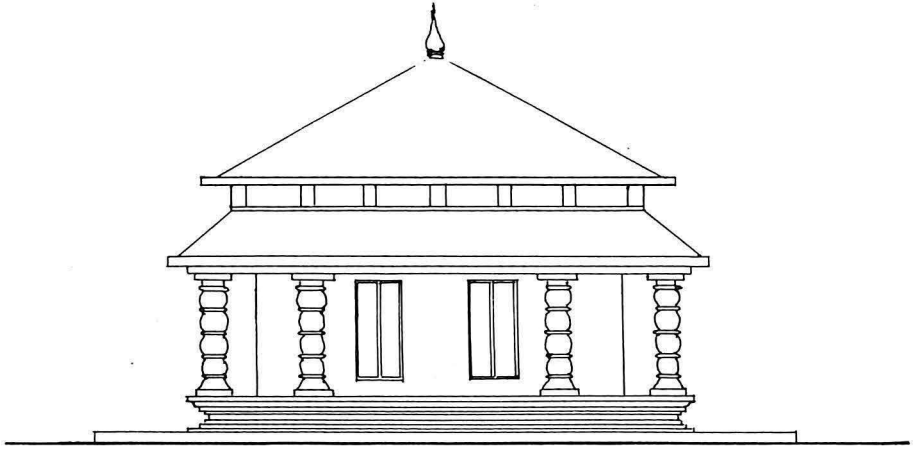
12 Trellis frames set between pillars



- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1 Stage | 6 Large shallow vessel for storing oil etc. |
| 2 Doors for entries and exits | 7 Small shrine built around the pillar |
| 3 Nephathya | 8 Platform for the shrine |
| 4 Door to nephathya | 9 Kuttambalam entrances |
| 5 Auditorium level | 10-11 Extensions for storage |

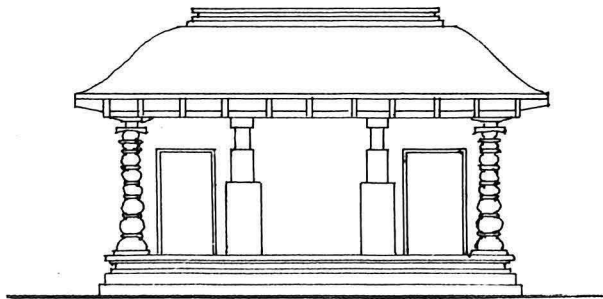
(Shaded portions indicate the back-rests, two on either side of the stage plinth and on all the sides of the auditorium plinth)

DRAWING 6



Note the double-roof structure of the stage and the pillar-arrangement (three in each corner) — the only one of this type at the Vadakkunnathan kuttambalam.

DRAWING 7



Another type of roof structure and pillar arrangement (one in each corner) which is common.



The Museum, which bears the name of Jehangir Nicholson, was inaugurated by Ustad Vilayat Khan on December 21, 1976.

The Museum, which will also exhibit the art of other countries, will be open to the public daily from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Golden Jubilee of the Music Academy, Madras, 1976

The session of the Indian National Congress held in Madras in December 1927 declared complete independence as the goal of the nation. The session included an All-India Music Conference where a resolution was passed urging the formation of a permanent institution to promote the cause of music. The Music Academy came into being and was formally inaugurated by Shri C. P. Ramaswami Iyer in the autumn of 1928. Ever since, the Academy has ceaselessly endeavoured to advance the science and art of music.

Conferences

The Academy organizes conferences where leading artistes, as well as persons learned in the *shastra-s* and *sampradaya-s*, come together to constitute the Experts' Committee of the Academy. They seek to reconcile

theory and practice without repressing in any way the free development of the art of music. Forty-nine sessions have thus been devoted to a variety of subjects, including the entire range of *raga*-s. *A Summary of the Raga Lakshana-s*, as clarified during these discussions, was issued on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the Academy.

Performances

The performances arranged by the Academy have exerted a chastening influence on public taste. A careful selection of the different styles, compositions, and languages, a limitation on the number of accompanying instruments in consonance with their true character as auxiliaries, the adoption of the tambura as the sole drone instrument, a due regard for *raga bhava* and for *gita, vadya* and *natya*, and finally the publication of an educative programme with full details are some of the features of the concerts organised by the Academy. North Indian music, vocal and instrumental music, dance and *Kalakshepam* all come within its purview. The programmes are drawn with a view to avoiding repetition of the same song during a concert season. Artists are thus stimulated to enlarge their repertoire and revive a forgotten masterpiece. On the occasion of the Tyagaraja Centenary Celebration, this principle was so carefully followed that a large number of the lesser known and rare pieces of the saint were sung. As a result musicians discovered the range and quality of the Tyagaraja repertoire. Last year the bicentenary of the birth of Muttuswami Dikshitar was celebrated on the very same lines and it was decided to have as many of his *kriti*-s rendered in the concerts as possible. This proved to be a great success and many of the great composer's *kriti*-s which had hardly been heard before were sung.

Hindustani Music

The Academy has always sought to promote better mutual appreciation between the Northern and Southern systems of music. During its conferences it arranges, at considerable cost, concerts of Hindustani music, both vocal and instrumental. In recent years it has also presented recitals of North Indian dance forms. The Academy's contribution in this field has been recognised by the Sangeet Natak Akademi, Delhi which has come forward to render assistance to this part of the Academy's activities.

Encouragement to Young Talent

In pursuance of its plans to encourage young talent, the Academy devotes two series of performances at its annual performances to artists of promise and music lovers are admitted free to these performances.

Bharata Natyam

The Academy has played an important role in dispelling some of the prejudices surrounding the ancient art of *Bharata Natyam*. By refining performances and issuing an enlightening programme, the Academy has won for this classic form the intelligent appreciation of the public.

The Teachers' College of Music

The Academy established a college of music with the avowed aim of improving the theory and practice of music. It has had the good fortune of having eminent *vidvan*-s like Sangita Kalanidhi Tiger Varadachariar, Sangita Kalanidhi Gayakasikhamani Dr. L. Muthia Bhagavatar and Sangita Kalanidhi Mudikondan C. Venkatarama Iyer as its principals.

The Journal

The sustained work of Dr. V. Raghavan has made it possible for the Academy to conduct a serious journal devoted to the advancement of the science and art of music. Forty-five volumes have been published to date and the Journal has earned the appreciation of savants, both here and abroad.

Publications

The Academy has published valuable works on music and dance: *Sangita Sudha* (Sanskrit) of Govinda Dikshita, *Abhinaya Sara Samputa* (Tamil, 2nd edn.) and *Abhinaya Navanita* (Tamil, 2nd edn.); *Chaturdandi Prakasika* of Venkatamakhin Part I, Sanskrit Text, and Part II, Tamil Translation; *Sangita Sara Sangrahamu* (Telugu), *Sangita Saramrita* (Sanskrit with English Introduction). Songs of Pallavi Doraiswami Iyer, Mysore Sadasiva Rao, Patnam Subrahmanya Iyer, Ramnad Srinivasa Iyengar and others and the *Hastamuktavali* of Subhankara have been published so far. The *Sangita Samaya Sara* of Parsvadeva (Sanskrit) has been taken up for revised critical edition. An edition of *Javali*-s has also been brought out. The most important undertaking of the Academy is the preparation and publication, with the full help of the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi, of the Tamil Script edition of the *Sangita Sampradaya Pradarsini*. Among works recently published are the *Raganidhi*, a thesaurus of *raga*-s of the North and South, Mazhavai Chidambara Bharati's Songs and Melattur Venkatarama Sastri's *Prahlada Charitra Kirtana*-s. A volume of songs of the *Krishna Lila Tarangini*, and of the unpublished songs of Mysore Sadasiva Rao, has also been undertaken. A volume of *Garbhapuri Kirtana*-s, one of the compositions of Pallavi Seshayyar, and a third of the compositions of Mysore Subbanna were issued in the last few years.

Special Research Project

Recently the Government of India entrusted to the Academy a special research project in Indian music instruments aided by the Unesco and the work of survey of instruments all over India by Vidvan S. Krishnaswami under this project was completed in 1974. The publication of the material collected and the setting up of a gallery of the photographs of instruments surveyed is being planned.

Film Seminar, Sixth International Film Festival, N. Delhi

A Film Seminar was organised by the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi, on January 5, 6, and 7, 1977 as part of the International Film Festival.

Not surprisingly, the first half of the seminar—on whether cinema should be personal or have social relevance—proved less concrete but more interesting than the subsequent discussion on film-making as a co-operative enterprise.

Inevitably, there was considerable debate on what good cinema constituted. Indeed, the question was put, point-blank, to the participants by Jagdish Parikh, Chairman of the FFC, who was defending his organisation against the charge that its policy towards serious film-makers had undergone a change.

"Is it artistic, parallel, serious, purposeful or committed?" asked Jagdish Parikh. The neatest rejoinder came from N.V.K. Murthy, the FFC General Manager, much later: "Any cinema that heightens man's perception of life is good cinema", he said. With that, no one could disagree.

The policy of the FFC towards film-makers was examined at some length. Dileep Padgaonkar, of the *Times of India*, asked whether the support to innovators in cinema would be discontinued. Jagdish Parikh assured him that it wouldn't and went on to say how the FFC was developing a 16 mm circuit for university students and workers, with this in mind.

But film-makers were far from satisfied. S. Sukhdev asked whether a director would have to mortgage everything he had (including his wife!) if the FFC insisted on collateral security each time it made out a loan. Jagdish Parikh reassured him that he had a flexible approach to such matters.

As Kantilal Rathod, who has made *Kanku* and *Parinaya*, pointed out, the FFC could hardly hope to take on the Goliath of the film industry if all it made were four or five features as against a hundred times as many by 'Bollywood'. He felt that the government should have plans to make at least 10 per cent of the films churned out by the industry. He also felt that directors oughtn't to be disqualified from getting a second loan if they hadn't been able to pay back the first one.

Jagdish Parikh countered this and other criticisms with the curious observation that the FFC hadn't made out any loans of late because of the paucity of scripts which, he felt, was a bigger constraint than the lack of funds.

An alternative was posed by Kumar Shahani, maker of *Maya Darpan*. He believed that the government should lift the burden of producing a film off the shoulders of serious film-makers. Otherwise, they would be like any other commercial producers.

Jagdish Parikh once again found it difficult to extricate himself from the charge of wanting to finance "light and wholesome" entertainment films. Although he claimed there was no rigidity about such a policy, he was prepared to stick his neck out and let perhaps one-third of all FFC films belong to this category. However, as Kumar Shahani pointed out, such films already existed in the commercial circuit; Amita Malik, a critic, also voiced her unhappiness about such a trend.

A hint regarding the changes in official support to film-makers was dropped by S.M.H. Burney who revealed that the government was considering amending the Cinematograph Act, so that theatre owners would be compelled to screen films in the order in which they received a censorship certificate. FFC-financed films would be shown on TV and field publicity units and each theatre would be forced to show a children's and an art film once a month.

The chairman of the seminar for the first day, Ashok Mitra, a former secretary of the Information Ministry, pertinently asked whether any bureaucrat or institution could judge the purpose of a film. The question went unanswered.

On the second day, S. Sukhdev read out his paper, in which he launched a vicious attack on personal cinema and condemned "the gloss of mere form". Although Dileep Padgaonkar had earlier warned that a clash between form and content would crop up during the seminar, it only did so at this stage and then, too, only marginally.

Kumar Shahani pointed to the difference between art and propaganda. He said that film-makers were often like governments who appeal to democracy but in fact do the opposite. Furthermore, he posed the twin problems of a director: firstly, how to resolve the problem of patronage in a society where the ruling class had not only economic but political power and secondly, how the film-maker, who is either from the capitalist or petty bourgeois class, can depict the life of the working class. He also tried to broach the formal problems of trying to introduce elements of "our experience" to the people. The narrative technique in a feature film or the mere juxtaposition of images in a documentary could distort reality. Unfortunately, these points were not taken up for debate.

The last day's discussion was more down to earth. Jagat Murari, Director of the Film Institute, Pune, spoke about the Chitralkha co-operative in Kerala (which had made Adoor Gopalakrishnan's *Swayamvaram*); he also mentioned a similar venture in Hyderabad. He provided details of the recent formation of *Yukt*, where 20 graduates of the Film Institute, Pune, had obtained a personal loan of Rs. 15,000 from a nationalised bank.

Other speakers emphasised the need for film education, so that people could appreciate good films and thereby form an audience for 16 mm films. Mushir Ahmed, of the Films Division, warned that experience unfortunately proved that seminar suggestions on 16 mm films were always filed away, without any action being taken on the resolutions.

Several participants felt that the seminar should conclude with some practical suggestions for the government to act upon instead of mere exhortations. After a hurried consultation, a small working team came up with the following eight points:

1. The Prime Minister and the I & B ministry should actively encourage serious film-makers. The present cavalier attitude towards them ought to be discouraged and a critical, scientific and aesthetic attitude should be developed.
2. Films should be made a Central, not a State, subject.
3. 16 mm films should be developed on a war footing.
4. TV should develop its own identity.
5. Film-making should be recognised as an industry to enable it to obtain institutional finance.
6. Entertainment tax should be rationalised.
7. The approach to films ought to be laid down as part of a national policy.
8. Film education ought to be encouraged.

The purpose of the seminar, according to its convener, M. V. Desai of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, was to give the Sixth International Film Festival a serious content. The trouble was that some participants took themselves too seriously—rather than the issues which were at stake!

—DARRYL D'MONTE

Mudrarakshasa at the German National Theatre, Weimar

At the close of the XXth Berlin Festival, on October 6, 1976, the German National Theatre, Weimar presented Vishakadatta's *Mudrarakshasa*. This ancient Sanskrit work was recently translated into German by the Berlin Indologist, Prof. Wolfgang Morgenroth in co-operation with Wolfgang Mach. The play centres round the political power game in the Magadha Empire of the fourth century B.C. It was produced by Guest-Director Vijaya Mehta together with Fritz Bennewitz, with the support of Prof. D. G. Godse (Decor), Guru Krishnan Kutty (Choreography), and Bhaskar Chandavarkar (Music). Under their expert guidance, the Weimar Ensemble absorbed the strict discipline of Indian traditional theatre norms to present an exceedingly moving spectacle, involving twenty-four actors. The highly stylised body language of the Kathakali dance form was adapted to the needs of the production and the two main actors, Victor Brager (as Chanakya) and Fred Disco (as Rakshasa), along with the other members of the cast, succeeded in projecting through it the essential spirit of this drama.
