

THE RÔLE OF THE CURTAIN IN THE SANSKRIT THEATRE

The Sanskrit theatre is perhaps the first theatre in the world to have benefited by the effective use of a curtain in the sense we know it today. In the Greek theatre the curtain was used only to form part of the background of the Attic, Megarian and Syracusan comedies¹, but seems never to have been used as a movable mechanical device for producing any stage effects. This is quite understandable, because the Greek dramas were staged in absolutely open-air theatres with an auditorium with gradually rising tiers of seats running more than half way round the orchestra circle, or dancing-place, which separated it from the stage. In such a theatre a curtain could not have served any useful purpose. But in the Sanskrit playhouse, we know for certain, the curtain was used to the fullest advantage for bringing about all sorts of stage effects, though it is difficult to say how exactly an open-air theatre made use of it, with an audience surrounding most probably three sides of the arena. Whatever may have been the case with the open-air theatre, one thing appears certain - that in so far as textual evidence goes, Sanskrit plays were doubtless written to be presented on a stage equipped with at least one curtain.

The commonest Sanskrit term for the curtain is *javanika*. It is also called *yavanika*, a term which has led some scholars to believe that the curtain was borrowed from the Greeks (*Yavanas*). This view, however specious it appears, has no firm ground to stand upon, the most serious objection to it being that the ancient Greeks, as we have just observed, never employed a curtain in their theatre. Anyway, the theory of direct Greek influence on the Sanskrit theatre has now been rejected by many scholars

1. T.B.L. Webster, *Greek Theatre Production*, London (1956), p. 20, 101, 141.

as wholly untenable. The view that the curtain was called *yavanikā* because the tapestry imported from Persia was brought by Ionian merchants, also fails to convince us, not only because there is no evidential proof to support it but also because the word *yavanikā* has no special application to a stage curtain, and may as well be applied to any piece of cloth which serves to cover something. In two of Bhasa's plays we come across the word *yavanikā* used in the sense of a piece of cloth spread over a dead body². However, any attempt to trace in the word *yavanikā* a vestige of Greek influence on the Sanskrit theatre will face a serious challenge from the existence of pure indigenous terms for the stage curtain, such as *apati*, *pati*, *tiraskariṇī* and *pratisīra*. The attempt made by the commentator on the Amarakoṣa to trace the derivation of the term *javanikā* from the root *jū*³ must be considered far-fetched, for it is divorced from any connection with the idea of a curtain for covering or concealing something. It is perhaps a Prakritized form of the term *yavanikā*, whose genuineness is in turn to be doubted. S.K. De is the first to draw our attention to still another term, *yamanikā*, which has been accepted by many as a variant of *yavanikā*. This term is, as De points out, as widely used as *javanikā* and perhaps more frequently than *yavanikā*⁴. *Yamanikā* may have, as he suggests, been derived from the root *yam* (to restrain), and the word is already found in the Yajurveda in the same sense⁵. It seems, therefore, more plausible to look upon *yamanikā* as the archetype of the term *yavanikā*, which eventually almost supplanted it.

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2. *Pratimānāṭaka*, ii; *Um̄bhāṅga*, prose after Verse 65.
 3. *Amarakoṣa*, Haridas Sanskrit Series, Varanasi (1964), com. on II. vi. 20.
 4. S.K. De. 'The Curtain in Ancient Indian Theatre', *Bharatīya Vidyā*, Vol. IX, Bombay (1948), p. 125-131.
 5. *Vājasaneyīsaṃhitā*, xiv. 22.

There can be no doubt that the function of the stage curtain was to reveal persons or things to and from the audience. *Tiraskarini* means a veil or that which hides something⁶. That it was made of cloth is evident from its synonym *pati* or *apati*.

Although Bharata refers to a curtain several times in his *Nāṭyaśāstra*, it does not seem to have drawn his attention as much as the stage or the auditorium, and has been completely ignored in his discussion on the playhouse. All we can gather from the sporadic references in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* to a stage curtain is that the first nine items of the *purvaranga*, or pre-play concert, such as arranging of the orchestra, setting of musical instruments and rendering of some airs by the orchestra, were performed behind a curtain, after removing which the rest of the programme was conducted in full view of the audience⁷, that a curtain was drawn aside before the entry of a character⁸, that a character in an agitated state of mind, however, entered without its removal⁹ and that the intimation speeches, known as *culikas* were made behind the curtain¹⁰. He does not expressly state where it was located or whether there were more than one curtain.

Commenting on Verse 11 in the fifth chapter of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Abhinavagupta remarks that there was a curtain between the *raṅgapīṭha* and the *raṅgaśīrṣa*¹¹ behind which

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6. See. *Mālavikāgnimitra*, ii.1.
 7. *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Gaekwad's Oriental Series, (Vol. I) v. 11 f.
 8. *op.cit.*, (Vol. II) xii, 2 f.
 9. *op.cit.*, (Vol. IV) xxxii. 413.
 10. *op.cit.*, (Vol. II) xix. 113.
 11. *tatra yuvanikā. raṅgapīṭhatacchirasormadhye*, NŚ. Vol. I, p. 210, com.

the musicians performed the nine so-called preparatory items of the *purvarāṅga*¹². We do not know for certain whether this was the location the curtain was assigned to by Bharata, but we cannot at the same time reject Abhinavagupta's statement. It stands to reason that there might have been, in his days at least, such a curtain behind which the first part of the pre-play functions was carried out¹³. (Fig.)

If we, on the authority of Abhinavagupta, accept that the Sanskrit theatre had a curtain running breadth-wise and dividing the stage into two halves, we must ask ourselves the question: Could this have been the only use of this curtain? If we should believe that there was a curtain, then we should also believe that it was designed to serve a greater and more practical purpose than concealing a group of musicians from the audience but for a short spell of time. If it played some part in the dramatic preliminaries, it must definitely have had a more specific function to perform in the play proper.

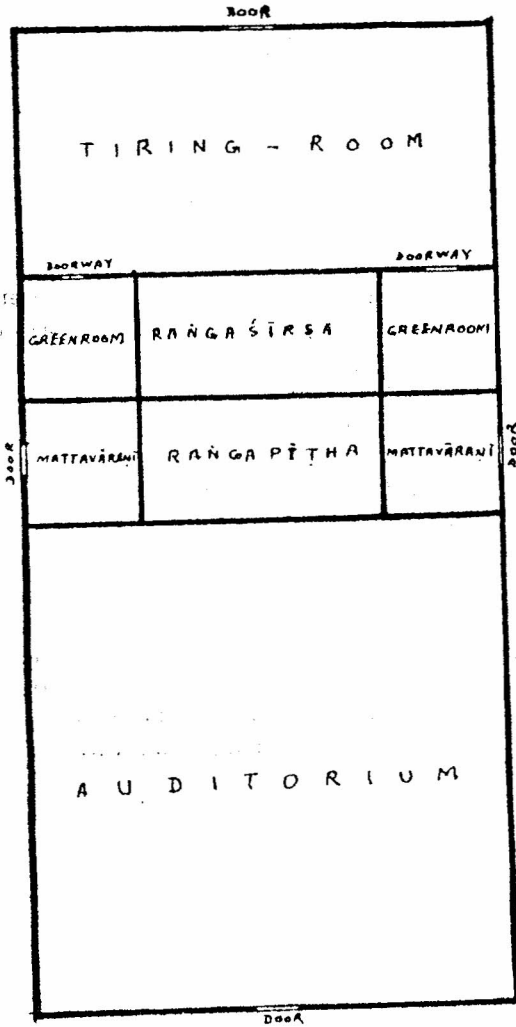
One thing we know for certain is that this curtain was not permanently fixed, but an adjustable one that could be drawn in and aside when required. But it should be clearly understood that it was by no means a drop-curtain, as some have hastily declared. The phrases like *paṭe capakarṣite*¹⁴, *apanītatiraskariṇī*¹⁵, *javanikam*

12. *NS.* (Vol. i) v. 11.

13. It may be noted that a similar curtain which divided the stage into two acting areas and, when removed, exposed the whole stage to view, was known to the Elizabethan theatre as well.

14. *NS.* (Vol. II) xii. 3.

15. *Kuttanīmata*, 910.



Plan of the medium type
of rectangular play-
house described by
Bharata.

*vighātya*¹⁶ and *apasāraṇa*¹⁷ would suggest that it was pulled to a side and not lifted or lowered as the modern drop-curtain. In one place Abhinavagupta refers to the removal of the curtain as *yavanīkadāna*¹⁸, and nowhere do we find a phrase like *yavanīkapāta*, which would have been the apt expression if it were raised or dropped. According to some modern scholars, this curtain was divided in the middle and was removed by two comely maidens appearing at the appropriate time.¹⁹ The view of course looks quite plausible, but we have not been able to trace the original source of this information. It has been suggested by some that the curtain referred to by Bharata is nothing but a portière hung on either of the two doorways in the tiring-room wall²⁰. This, however, receives no support from factual evidence and has therefore to be set aside until some illuminating evidence is found to validate it. About 100 B.C. a curtain was introduced into the Roman theatre, but this curtain, which was rolled about a cylindrical pole in a pit running across the front of the stage, was drawn up to screen off the stage from the audience, and lowered to reveal it. We cannot definitely say that the Sanskrit theatre knew the use of a curtain in the first century B.C., but the question of the Sanskrit theatre borrowing it from the Roman theatre may well be ruled out, since the methods used in the two theatres for manipulating the curtain were entirely different.

16. *NS.* (Vol. I) v. 12.

17. Cf. *Vikramorvaṣīya* ed. by H.R. Karnik & S.G. Desai, Bombay (1959), p. 10, Raṅganatha's com.

18. *NS.* Vol. IV, p. 449, com.

19. S.M. Tagore. *The Eight Principal Rasas of the Hindus*, Calcutta (1879), p. 58 f.; E.P. Horowitz. *The Indian Theatre*, London (1912), p. 17; A.B. Keith: *The Sanskrit Drama*, Oxford (1924), p. 359 f.

20. M. Ghosh. *'The Hindu Theatre'*, *IHQ* (1933), Vol. IX(contd.)

Nepathye, or 'behind the scenes', is a very common stage direction found in Sanskrit plays. Many scholars have allowed themselves to believe that back-stage sounds like *cūlika* and *ākāśabhaṣita* (sky-talk) proceeded from the tiring-room, apparently on the assumption that the curtain separated the stage from the tiring-room. This view can hardly be supported. The internal evidence furnished by the plays themselves proves that they were produced behind the curtain from that part of the *raṅga-sīrṣa* which was used as the green-room, and not from the tiring-room. Those who argue to the contrary mistakenly interpret the word *nepathya* in the stage direction *nepathye* as the tiring-room. The word *nepathya* has three connotations quite distinct from each other, though loosely interrelated; it means a curtain, the tiring-room, or the costume and make-up of the actor. The stage direction *nepathye* does not, therefore, necessarily mean 'in the tiring-room'. It may also mean 'behind the curtain', which should be the correct interpretation in the present context. *Singhabhūpāla* defines the intimation speech known as *khaṇḍacūlika* in the following terms:

*raṅganepathyasamsthāyīpātrāsamllāpavistaraiḥ
adau kevalamaṅkasya kalpita khaṇḍacūlika* ²¹

thus clearly referring to the stage curtain (*raṅganepathya*), apparently to avoid any confusion. The *Nāṭyadarpaṇa* expressly states that offstage voices belong to persons stationed behind the curtain²². *Rucipati*, commenting on the *Anargharāghava*, says that any offstage place could be called *nepathya*²³. Here we have the more reliable author-

p. 592. A.K. Coomaraswamy, 'Hindu Theatre', IHQ (1933), Vol. IX, p. 594.

21. *Rasārṇavasudhākara*, iii. 185.

22. *Nāṭyadarpaṇa*, GOS, Baroda (1959), p. 35.

23. *Anargharāghava*, Kāvya-mālā Series, Bombay (1937), p. 25, com.

ity of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, which states that the *cūṭikā* (intimation speech) is that which is made by a character from behind the curtain²⁴. It is common sense that the persons who made such offstage sounds should follow the progress of the play closely and that they would be unable to do this if they were stationed in the tiring-room, as they would be at a loss as to what was going on on the stage. The several offstage voices, found towards the close of Act V of the *Mṛcchakatika*, show how important it would be for the actors who made such sounds to watch closely the progress of the play. We may also compare Act IV of the *Nāgananda*, where the musicians who beat the drums as the Garuda seizes upon Jimūtavāhana, have to watch the movements of the former to strike the drums at the right moment. Hence we have to accept that the production of back-stage sounds and ethereal voices (*akāśabhāṣita*) was done by persons standing on the *raṅgaśīrṣa*, concealing themselves behind the curtain.

Singing praise of kings or the announcing of the time of the day by bards behind the scenes is a feature commonly found in Sanskrit plays. These were not merely recited but sung, in all probability to the accompaniment of music, and so it required the bards to be on the *raṅgaśīrṣa* with the musicians. The *dhruva* and *akṣiptika* songs²⁵, which were sung behind the scenes were most probably accompanied by music. It is ludicrous to imagine that the songs were sung in the tiring-room, while the instruments were played on the *raṅgaśīrṣa*. As the tiring-room was on a lower level, it may have been all the more necessary for the back-stage sound producers to be on the *raṅgaśīrṣa* (i.e., green-room). But a sound like that indicated by the stage direction 'far off in the nepathya'

24. *NS.* (Vol. III) xix. 113.

25. Two types of song extraneously introduced into a Sanskrit play to heighten dramatic situations. They were generally composed in Prakrit and sung by a chorus stationed offstage, to the accompaniment of music.

(*nepathye dūrataḥ*)²⁶ may probably have been produced in the tiring-room, and this must be considered a special case. In the final act of the *Bālaramayāna*, songs and instrumental music are heard from behind the scenes. In Act III of the *Caitanyacandrodaya*, a *muraja* is being played in the *nepathya*, and in the last act of the same play, singing and instrumental music (*mahāvāditranirghoṣa*) is heard. In Act I of the *Vidagdhamādhava*, a flute is played behind the scenes. What an absurd idea it would be if, once the *purvarānga* was over, the musicians with their instruments were made to retire to the tiring-room!

That portion of the *raṅgaśīrṣa*, which was immediately behind the *raṅgapīṭha*, could not have been used during the performance of a play by those who made back-stage sounds or by the orchestra, for it was used as an additional acting area. Instead they must have taken their stand on either end of the *raṅgaśīrṣa* used as green-rooms, which were screened off by the folds of this curtain. There is nothing to prevent us from presuming that they occupied some place even in front of the curtain, provided they were not visible to the audience, for a sound produced from the stage by any person not visible to the audience could be said to have come from the *nepathya*.

In Rājasekhara's *Karpūramāñjarī*, a ninth century work, we come across another stage direction '*javanikantare*' used in place of *nepathye*. In the opening act of this Prakrit play, the Vidūṣaka, having fallen into an altercation with a maid, leaves the stage in a huff and begins to shout in a loud voice behind the curtain, "Oh no, I will not come". This time the direction is *nepathye*. Rājasekhara here uses both *javanikantare* and *nepathye* indifferently to mean 'behind the curtain', and we must not in the least hesitate to accept that *nepathye*,

26. *Vidagdhamādhava*, Kāvya-mālā Series, Bombay (1937), p. 159.

when used as a stage direction, always signifies some space behind the scenes, as distinguished from the tiring-room. The *Kuṭṭanīmata* of Damodaragupta, which gives a vivid account of an actual enactment of Act I of the *Ratnavālī*, records that two maids, after conveying the queen's message to King Udayana, made their exit by withdrawing behind the curtain²⁷.

Was there any other use of this curtain? It is a pity that none of the works on dramaturgy throws any light on this very important question. Only a handful of Sanskrit dramaturgists have made some genuine and serious efforts at documenting the more important practical aspects of the drama, while the majority took pride in repeating almost parrot-like only what their respective schools taught about dramatic theory and conventions. We are, therefore, driven to depend and base our conclusions mainly on the stage directions occurring in the plays, for they shed some light on certain practical purposes that appear to have been served by the curtain. It seems to have been used to advantage by almost all the dramatists from Bhasa downwards for producing stage effects and also for maintaining what may be called 'dramatic economy'. One such stage direction is the *asanastha-praveśa* (entering while seated), which usually runs as "then enter (so and so) seated". Now the question is, how can a character enter while seated? Some scholars, having the ancient Greek theatre in mind, interpret the word *praviśati* in a literal sense, and try to prove that the characters who entered seated were actually carried to the stage on wheeled chairs, a view that has now been reduced to absurdity. Some try to explain this maintaining that the characters came as usual on the stage and then took their seats. This too has to be rejected, for it is our firm belief that the dramatists did not mean

27. *Kuṭṭanīmata*, 909.

praviśya upaviśati when they wrote *upaviśtaḥ praviśati*. Incidentally, Bhavabhūti has prescribed the stage direction *praviśya upaviśati* for Kalahāṃsa in the *Mālatīmādhava*, who is supposed to take his seat after entering the garden²⁸. It is, therefore, very important that we should be careful not to confuse the two stage directions. Furthermore, such stage directions as *tataḥ praviśati kṛtāsanaparigraho bhagavan nityanando jamādanandaśca* as we find in the *Caitanyacandrodaya*²⁹ strongly support the view that the actors were behind the curtain, who, on its removal, were revealed in their respective postures. Entry of characters seated, without a curtain being removed, could be possible only on a revolving stage, which could have hardly been known to the Sanskrit theatre.

In the opening act of the *Nāgānanda*, there is a scene of a penance-grove, where the hero and the *Vidūṣaka* hear some young lady singing sweetly somewhere to the accompaniment of a lute. She must be a votaress, they discern, of the deity whom she is propitiating. Desiring to catch a glimpse of the deity, they remain there hiding themselves behind a *tamāla* grove in order to avoid the sight of a woman. Then occurs the stage direction "with a maid enter *Malayavatī*, seated on the ground playing a lute", which means nothing but that a curtain is removed revealing the two actresses who have taken up their positions as mentioned above. In the *Kundamāla*, at the beginning of Act II, enters *Sītā*, in a pensive mood, seated on the ground. Similarly, in Act III of the *Sakuntala*, *Duśyanta* peers through the branches and informs us that his sweetheart is reclining on a slab of stone bestrewn with flowers, attended by her two friends. He is curious to know what they are talking about. At this moment "enters

28. *Mālatīmādhava*, Nirnaya Sagar Edition, Bombay (1936) p. 20.

29. *Caitanyacandrodaya*, ed. by Pandita Kedaranatha, Bombay (1917), p. 119.

Sakuntalā as described above, with her two friends". Sometime later, Priyamvadā and Anasūya make their exit leaving the lovers to themselves. They do not actually leave the stage but must be considered as remaining behind the curtain-fold, for they have to be there to inform the lovers, in metaphorical language, of the arrival of Gautamī, giving the king sufficient notice to quit the scene. In Act VI of the *Mṛcchakatika*, Vasantasenā enters asleep with her body covered up. In the *Viddhaśālabhañjika*, too, the fourth act opens with a scene where the Viduśaka and his wife appear. The wife enters asleep, which means they are discovered while the Brāhmaṇi is in a sleeping posture. In the middle of Act III of the *Uttararamacarita*, Rama is discovered fallen prone on the ground.

Bhasa does not seem to have made extensive use of this stage device. In him we do not come across the stage direction in more than two places - once in the *Svapnavā-savadatta* (Act I), where a female ascetic enters seated and once in the *Avimaraka* (Act II), where the hero is introduced in a seating posture. Among the Sanskrit dramatists of note it is Viśakhadatta who makes the maximum use of this curtain mainly for the purpose of maintaining dramatic economy. His stage directions are instructive, elaborate and descriptive. The following stage direction from the *Mudrarakṣasa* will illustrate his style:

*Tataḥ praviśati āsanasthaḥ svabhavanagataḥ
kopanuviddham cintam natayamś caṇakyaḥ*³⁰.

Here Caṇakya is not just revealed but is revealed in his own house (*svabhavanagataḥ*). Thus, the stage area behind the curtain served as a quite different *kakṣya* or acting locale. In the fourth act of the same play, a man in the guise of a way-farer enters and seeks access to Minister

30. *Mudrarakṣasa*, iii.

Rakṣasa's house. The scene is supposed to represent the compound of Rakṣasa's residence. The stranger seeks an interview with the minister. He learns from the door-keeper that the minister is indisposed but gets an assurance that an interview will be arranged at an opportune moment. "Then the minister is discovered on a seat in his bed-chamber, in the company of Śakaṭadāsa". When the curtain is drawn aside, the stage area revealed behind would serve as Rakṣasa's bed-chamber. By successfully making use of this artifice in his play, which has a most complicated plot of political intrigue, Viśakhadatta has been able to cut down the number of scenes to a minimum. In Act II, a spy in the guise of a snake-charmer arrives at the gate of the house of Rakṣasa and desires to see him. Immediately afterwards enters Rakṣasa seated in his room. Likewise, in Act III, King Candragupta wishes to pay a call to his preceptor, and Caṇakya is shown seated in his own house. In the same way, the entry of Śakuntalā reclining on a stone slab³¹, the entry of Queen Dhāriṇī (who is suffering from a sore foot) resting on a bed³² and of the female ascetic in the *Svapnavāsavadatta*³³ signify the introduction of new scenes.

Another equally important stage business effected by the manipulation of this curtain is the *apaṭikṣepapraveśa*, also called *paṭikṣepa* or *paṭakṣepa-praveśa*. Although not expressly mentioned by Bharata, it is a conventional artifice recognized even by such great dramatists as Śūdraka and Kalidasa, and therefore needs to be dealt with here at some length.

The stage direction usually reads *tataḥ pravīśatyapaṭikṣepena* so and so, and has been often rendered into

31. *Śakuntalā*, iii.

32. *Mālavikāgnimitra*, iv.

33. *Svapnavāsavadatta*, i.

English as "Entering with a toss of the curtain so and so". Kālidāsa employs the device in all his plays, twice in one and the same act in his masterpiece. In Act VI of the *Śākuntala*, the enraged chamberlain enters with *apatīk-ṣepa* to admonish the two maids, who have forgotten the king's order banning the Spring Festival. A little later the king's personal attendant, Caturikā, with a tablet in her hand enters in the same manner. In the opening act of the *Vikramorvaśīya*, hearing the distress cry of the nymphs, Purūravas, accompanied by his charioteer, makes a dramatic entry. In Act IV of the *Mālavikāgnimitra*, Bakulāvalikā rushes in to prevent the king from coming out, as she suspects that there is a serpent outside. In his play *Śūdraka* uses the device twice in the second act. With his pursuers at his heels the Saṃvāhaka darts on to the stage with *apatīkṣepa*. Later in the same act Karṇapuraka similarly enters Vasantasena's house in a jubilant mood.

Although a few commentators have essayed to explain how this curious stage direction was actually carried out, their explanations do not show that they had a first-hand knowledge of the Sanskrit stage technique. Rāghavabhaṭṭa seems to have understood the direction as referring to a normal withdrawal of the curtain, for he explains it simply as 'removal' (*kṣepa*) of the curtain (*apatī*)³⁴. Kaṭayavema appears to hold the same view. He says that an actor, (playing a character) in a confused state of mind due to emotions like joy and grief, enters with *apatīk-ṣepa*³⁵. And Raṅganātha follows suit. Since theatrical convention does not generally permit the entry of a character without prior indication to it (a convention which has

34. 'tiraskariṇītiraskāreṇetyarthah', *Śākuntala*, Nirnaya Sagar ed., Bombay (1958), p. 198; cf. *ibid.*, p. 215.

35. *Vikramorvaśīya*, Lahor Edition (1929), p. 13.

of course not been rigidly followed by any dramatist), says, he, a sudden entry should be effected by *apatīkṣepa*. He also records a view held by some that *apatīkṣepa* is the absence of *patīkṣepa* or removal of the curtain³⁶.

Whatever these commentators say, judging from the instances where the stage direction has been employed, it appears quite certain that *apatīkṣepa* (or *patīkṣepa*) means something more than a mere removal of the curtain. There is at least one commentator, Śaṅkara, who seems to have believed that the stage direction did not mean a normal entry, for he says that *apatīkṣepa* implies 'suddenly'³⁷, and in support of his view quotes a line which he attributes to Bharata. This line, which reads "There should be no *patīkṣepa* in the case of the entry of a king or of an agitated person"³⁸ is, however, not found in the present text of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. There is only a casual reference to such a convention in Chapter XXXII of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The verse in question says that, in the case of characters entering hurriedly under stress of emotions like excessive joy, anger and grief and without the curtain being removed, a *dhruva* song in progress should stop at once³⁹. And in another place Bharata says that such entries are made without being indicated by *praveśikī-dhruvas*⁴⁰. That Bharata here

36. *Vikramorvaśīya*, ed. by Karnik & Desai, Bombay (1959), p. 10.

37. *apatīkṣepeṇa akasmādityarthah; Śākuntala* with commentaries of Śaṅkara & Narahari, Darbhanga (1957), p. 235.

38. *patīkṣepo na kartavya ārttarājapraveśayoriti bharataḥ, ibid.*

39. *Nāṭyaśāstra*, xxxii. 413.

40. *Ibid.*, 327.

definitely means "without removing the curtain" is made quite clear by Abhinava, who explains it as *paṭākṣepa-syākaraṇena*⁴¹.

To sum up: *paṭa* or *paṭī* means the curtain; *kṣepa* is throwing or pushing aside. So *paṭīkṣepa*, or *paṭākṣepa*, is the throwing or pushing aside of the curtain. It is now clear that it means a regular withdrawal of the curtain, and *kṣepa* is just another synonym for *apakarṣaṇa*, *apanayana* or *ākṣepa*. We must now clearly understand what is meant by 'removing' or *kṣepa*. From the above-quoted references by Bharata and Abhinavagupta and also from the line attributed to Bharata by Śaṅkara, we can safely conclude that *paṭīkṣepa* means a regular drawing aside of the curtain to reveal characters to the audience. *Apaṭīkṣepa* is the absence of *paṭīkṣepa*, or regular withdrawal of the curtain. We have already noted that certain characters walked into the stage and others took up their positions behind the curtain which, when removed, revealed them to the audience. In the case of the *paṭīkṣepa* entry, the curtain was not removed by stage-hands. The rule regarding the entry of a character in a flurry is scrupulously adhered to by all dramatists. It would be undramatic to indicate such an entry beforehand, for if it was done, the desired effect would be lost. Such characters did not enter by the proper way by which the characters normally entered, but made a lightning entry, hurriedly pushing the curtain aside. It seems, therefore, that *apaṭīkṣepa* is the correct form. If those ancient authorities who have accepted the forms *paṭīkṣepa* and *paṭākṣepa* (in preference to *apaṭīkṣepa* or *apaṭākṣepa*), as well as those who have interpreted *apaṭī* as 'curtain', had any idea of this device, they must definitely have meant this hurried pushing aside of the curtain by the character himself. As there was no complete withdrawal of the curtain, the direction was termed *apaṭīkṣepa*, those cases of ordinary removal of the curtain

41. *Abhinavabhāratī*, Vol. IV, p. 387.

(employed mainly for opening scenes), which had been accepted as an established convention, requiring no indication.

There are no indications that this stage device was employed by dramatists prior to Śūdraka and Kālidāsa. It is not found in the dramas ascribed to Bhāsa, except once in the *Carudatta*⁴², but the same direction occurs in the same act of the *Mṛcchakatika* too. Which of the two plays is the original and whether the *Carudatta* was actually written by Bhāsa has not still been settled. On the contrary, in the other Bhāsa-plays the stage direction does not occur even when its use is warranted by convention. In Act II of the *Pratijñayaugandharāyana*, for instance, the Kañcukin, who even forgets in his excitement the order of the sentence he is to utter, is introduced in the normal way.

In Bhavabhūti we come across a somewhat similar yet different stage direction, *nepathyārdhapraveśa* (half-entering from behind the curtain). In Act II of the *Mālatīmadhava*, Mālatī enters seated, with Lavaṅgikā. Some time later, the female door-keeper enters, hiding herself partly behind the curtain. And so does the female door-keeper in the second act of the *Mahavīracarita*. Addressing Malyavān, who is already present on the stage, she says, "This palm-leaf written on with *tamāla* juice was brought by the messenger sent by Your Honour to Paraśurāma" gives the palm-leaf and goes off. In Act V of the same play the female door-keeper again enters in the same way. A parallel to this stage direction is found in the *Anargharāghava* of Murāri, in which a man half-enters from behind the curtain (*nepathye 'rdhapraviṣṭaḥ*)⁴³ This has been explained by Rucipati as *javanikapato dghatitardhaśarira*⁴⁴.

42. Act ii.

43. Act iii.

44. *Anargharāghava*, Kāvya-mālā Series (1937), p. 159.

The significance of these stage directions is, however, dubious, but we may assume that these characters had to hide themselves partly, as their full appearance on the stage was not required or desirable, because, in all the four cases, they were lower characters.

Besides revealing characters in sitting and lying-down postures and introducing those characters who are excited or in a state of flurry, this curtain was also used in the case of ordinary entries, even when the employment of such a device is not hinted at by the dramatist. It appears that stage-managers sometimes changed certain stage directions given by the playwright for the sake of stage effect or practical convenience. Thus, in the description given in the *Kuṭṭānīmata* of Act I of the *Ratnavālī*, we find that before Queen Vasavadattā appeared (*abhavat*) on the stage with a maid, the curtain was removed (*apanītatiraskariṇī*)⁴⁵, though the direction given by the dramatist is "then enter Vasavadattā" etc., without any allusion to a curtain being removed. The curtain was no doubt in the middle of the stage, for Vasavadattā's entry took place in the middle of the act, even while the king and the Vidūṣaka were on the stage.

Did the Sanskrit stage have any other curtain besides the one which was employed between the *raṅgapīṭha* and the *raṅgaśīrṣa*? The unanimous answer given by most scholars to this question has been in the negative. The strongest and perhaps the only sensible ground on which this view is based is the dramatic convention laid down by Bharata that all the characters should leave the stage at the close of an act⁴⁶, a rule which is believed to have been necessitated owing to the absence of a front curtain. We shall return to this point later, but let us now examine a few

45. *kuṭṭānīmata*, 910.

46. *Nāṭyaśāstra*, (Vol. II) xviii. 23.

facts which should not be allowed to be passed over without being given some consideration.

These facts furnished by dramatic compositions as well as by treatises on drama lead us to believe that the Sanskrit stage had more than one curtain. Damodara-gupta seems to have known a stage with several curtains. We have seen earlier, in his *Kuṭṭanimāta*, that, in the enactment of the first act of the *Ratnavālī*, Queen Vasavadatta entered the stage drawing the curtain aside. This must have been the curtain which we discussed above, and in front of which the king, the Viduṣaka and the maids were participating in a revelling scene. According to the text of the play, the king and the Viduṣaka enter seated on top of the terrace of the palace and no alteration must have been done of the stage direction in the performance recorded in the *Kuṭṭanimāta*, for it says, *atha viśatīṣṭa narendrah prāsādāgataḥ samam vayasena* ("Then entered the king seated in the palace in the company of his friend" [i.e., the Viduṣaka]), though the withdrawal of the curtain is not explicitly mentioned. We now see that two curtains were used in one and the same act, one to reveal the king and the Viduṣaka, the other to introduce the queen. The two maids who came a little later entered gesticulating in dance movements, through the usual way (*nṛtyantaḥ pravīśataścetyau*)⁴⁷

The entracte to Act V of the *Nāgārāma* consists of a soliloquy delivered by a female door-keeper. The act proper commences with the entry of Jīmutaketu seated, accompanied by his wife and the daughter-in-law, and a curtain has to be removed to reveal the three characters. A little later the Garuda enters seated, with the hero lying before him, which would only be possible by means of another curtain, which, when removed, discovered the actors in their respective positions. A number of similar cases, where the use of two curtains can be

47. *Kuṭṭanimāta*, 896.

inferred, may also be cited from the works of other great dramatists like Kālidāsa and Viśākhadatta. If we are prepared to accept that there were two curtains, we shall have to locate the one in front a little away from the edge of the *raṅgapīṭha*, for an unlocalized narrow stage is sometimes necessary as in the case of the above two instances in which the minister Yaugandharāyaṇa and the female door-keeper respectively engage in monologues in front of the curtain.

It may be argued that the introduction of characters mentioned above may well have been done by means of a single curtain. But we have sufficient evidence to prove that there was a curtain directly intervening between the audience and the actors, which appears to have served a purpose somewhat different from that served by the curtain that divided the stage. Let us take, for example, Act II of the *Mālavikāgnimitra*. It begins with the entry of the king, the Viduṣaka, the queen and the Parivrajikā, all seated. The king, impatient to see Malavikā who is about to appear on the stage, whispers in the Viduṣaka's ear, "Friend, my eye, eager to see her who is behind the curtain (*nepathyagata*), has, as it were, become ready to draw away the curtain (*tiraskarīṇī*)⁴⁸. That the king and the party had a curtain before them is quite evident. Kalhaṇa compares the cloud of dust that obscures the warriors engaged in battle to a curtain that conceals the dancers performing a dance⁴⁹. This curtain alluded to cannot be taken as one separating the stage from the tiring-room. The comparison of fighting soldiers to a group of performing artistes suggests that Kalhaṇa had in his mind the picture of a front-curtain that screened off a live performance from the audience. Needless to point out that a performance is given on the stage and not in the tiring-room.

48. *Mālavikāgnimitra*, ii. 1.

49. *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*, viii. 1519; cf. *ibid.*, vii. 1731.

the *Cāridatta*, though they are sent away by the same direction in the plural. The *Tapasavatsaraja*, a ninth century work, has two acts (III & IV) which end with the exit of the king and the Viduṣaka in both cases, though the stage direction is "all leave the stage". At the end of Act II of the *Kundamāla*, only Sita and Vidavati are left, but the direction is again *exeunt omnes*. The opening act of the *Vikramorvaṣīya* closes with the same stage direction, when only the king and the charioteer are left on the stage. From these examples we can see that the stage direction at the end of an act is a mere formula which can scarcely be construed literally.⁵¹

There are also other instances where the close of an act must have been marked by drawing the curtain in. The second act of the *Pratīmanātaka* ends with the death of King Daśaratha. The two queens, Kauśalyā and Sumitra, the charioteer Sumantra and the Chamberlain (Kañcukin) are present on the scene. The Kañcukin spreads a cloth over the corpse. Now, if the actor playing the rôle of Dasaratha is not to be embarrassed by making him get up and walk out, we shall have to accept that the curtain should be drawn in to cut the scene off. Again, in the *Abhisekanātaka* (Act II) there is a similar scene where Valin dies, being hit by Rama's arrow. The act comes to a close here and the closing has to be done by drawing the curtain in. In the finale of the one-act play *Urubhaṅga* ascribed to the same author, the dead body of Duryodhana is covered with a shroud. The curtain was most probably drawn in before all the actors came in to sing the Epilogue. It is important to note that as soon as death is depicted, the acts are cut off, evidently because the dead body has to be removed before the next

51. Raṅganātha, however, remarks that, when the direction is in the plural where it should be in the dual, it means that the day's performance being over, all including the audience left the house. This statement has some sense, at least in this particular case.(contd.)

act opens. Similarly, Act II of the *Abhiṣekanātaka* opens with the entry of *Sītā* surrounded by a number of *Rākṣasīs*. After *Rāvaṇa* has gone away, the *Rākṣasīs* fall asleep. This gives *Hanūmān* an opportunity to have a confidential talk with *Sītā*, at the end of which both retire leaving the sleeping *Rākṣasīs* on the stage. This calls for a close of the act by drawing the curtain before the next act commences.

Both *Abhinavabhāratī* and the *Nāṭyadarpaṇa* explain the 'exit' (*nirgama*) at the end of an act as "the screening off by the curtain of the actors who have finished their business after entering the stage"⁵². This shows that even as early as *Abhinavagupta*'s time, the curtain had come to be used to mark the close of an act. The acts of the *Prakrit* play, *Karpūramañjarī* of *Rajāśekhara*, are styled *javanikantaras* instead of the regular term *aṅka*. During *Rajāśekhara*'s days, too, an act must have definitely opened with the removal of the curtain⁵³. This must have been the front curtain, because the rear curtain had to open and close in the course of an act as the situation demanded. As we have seen earlier, the plays of *Viśākhadatta*, *Harṣa*, *Bhavabhūti*, *Kālidāsa* and even *Bhāsa* seem to have been written for a double-curtained stage, and the practice of using the front curtain to change acts may thus be traced back to a very

Most part of the first day's performance was generally covered by the long *Purvarāṅga* and perhaps only the first act from the play was shown on that day. (See *Vikramorvaśīya*, Bombay (1959), p. 26 f., com.)

52. *bijārtheti upakṣepātmano bijasya yatpatrayojanaṃ tena ya yuktiḥ sambandhas tatra yuktaṃ upayabhūtaṃ karyam prayojananusarī viśiṣṭarāsasampadopetaṃ vidhaya tatparisamāptau javanikaya tirodhanarūpaṃ niṣkrāmanam darśanīyam.* A. Bh. Vol. II, p. 420: *nirgamo raṅgāpraviṣṭapātraṇam svakaryāṇi kṛtvā niṣkrāmo javanikaya tirodhanam*. ND. p. 32.
53. Cf. *Nāṭakalakṣaṇaratnakoṣa*, 3200 f.

early phase in the evolution of the Sanskrit theatre. Even Bharata refers to the closing of an act as *aṅkaccheda*. Incidents which have taken place within a month or a year, he says, should be intimated after cutting off the act (*aṅkacchedam kṛtvā*)⁵⁴. When a long journey is to be represented, too, the act should be cut off (*tatra'pi aṅkacchedam kāryaḥ*)⁵⁵. Is there anything to prevent us from assuming that this 'cutting off' was to be done by the curtain? We have also Bharata's authority that the curtain should be drawn aside before introducing characters to the stage⁵⁶. A similar opinion has been expressed by the *Viṣṇudharmottara-purāṇa* which states that each character should be introduced after removing the curtain (*tato javanī-kakṣepaiḥ pratipatrapraveśanam*)⁵⁷. After all, if a curtain did not intervene, how could two acts be clearly distinguished from one another? The interlocutors who took part in the introductory scenes (i.e., *praveśakas* and *viṣkambhakas*) may have delivered their parts standing before the front curtain, for such scenes involved little action. But it must be borne in mind that the curtain was sometimes used in the course of introductory scenes as well. Thus, in the *entracte* to the fourth act of the *Tapasavatsarāja*, *Śaṃskṛt-yayani* enters seated and leaves the stage at the end of the scene with the stage direction *iti niṣkramati*. But we do not actually know whether the curtain was drawn in to cut off the scene or whether she stood up and walked out. Apparently the curtain came in, for we find the act proper begin with the entry of the sorrow-stricken king seated.

54. *NS.* xviii. 31.

55. *ibid.*, 32.

56. *ibid.*, xii. 2 f.

57. III. xx. 9.

The drawing in of the curtain at the close of an act may also have been required for still another reason, however unimportant it may seem. That is the arranging of stage paraphernalia. Although no elaborate and heavy accessories were used on the Sanskrit stage, certain indispensable articles like seats and armour have been allowed by Bharata, without which no representation of a dramatic spectacle would have been possible. While the curtain remained drawn in, the stage may have been made ready for the next act.

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We cannot also assume that the same curtain was brought to the stage by stage-hands whenever it was required, because it is firmly established by Abhinavagupta's evidence that the curtain between the *raṅgapīṭha* and the *raṅgaśīrṣa* was a regular feature.

The Tamil classic *Śīlappadikāram* also speaks of three stage-curtains, viz, a single-curtain which was pulled to one side, a double-curtain divided at the middle and shrinking to either side and a front-curtain rolled upwards and downwards⁵⁰. We have, however, no evidence in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* or in the existing dramatic literature for the existence of a rolled curtain but one which was drawn sideways. The double-curtain mentioned there must have been the one which was located between the *raṅgapīṭha* and the *raṅgaśīrṣa* by Abhinavagupta, and the single-curtain must have been hung over the tiring-room wall to serve as backdrop if and when required.

What could have been the occasions on which this front curtain was drawn off and drawn in? It follows from the initial stage direction of the act discussed above that the curtain must have been drawn in at the close of the previous act, i.e., Act I, thus leaving a possibility of acts being closed by the drawing in of a curtain. Bharata's rule requiring the actors to leave the stage at the end of an act does not, in any way, rule out the possibility of the existence of a front-curtain. We may note that the stage direction *niṣkrāntaḥ sarve* (*exerunt omnes*) has been used even when the number of characters who are sent off the stage is two, in which case it should have been in the dual instead of the plural. Act V of the *Śākuntala* closes with the usual stage direction *niṣkrāntaḥ sarve*, when there are only two characters, the king and the Pratihari, left on the stage. Again, there are only two characters, Carudatta and the maid, left at the end of Act III of

50. See V. Raghavan, "Theatre Architecture in Ancient India", *Triveni*, Vol. VI, No. 1 (1933), p. 48 ff.