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Dusshasana Still Roams the World

A. P. Govindankutty

I

The drumming and roaring
Sent shivers
Down the spines of the viewers,
Seated on palm-leaf mats,
As ferocious Bhima
Pounded and ripped open
The chest of Dusshasana,
Pulled out the innards
And drank the gushing blood
Squeezing with his hands,
On the make-shift stage,
Illumined by the flames
Of a chest-high bronze oil lamp,
In the wee hours of the dark night.
The weak of heart
Shut their eyes ,
Frightened kids
Clung to their mothers,
Hid their faces
In the folds of their dress.

Looking at his palms
Smearred with blood
Bhima recalled his vow
To tie Daraupadi's hair,
Loosened by Dusshasana
To pull her by force
To the royal court,
Where he tried to disrobe her.

II

As the rising Sun
Reddened the East,
Flames put out,
Strong smell arose
From the oil lamp.
Viewers rolled their mats,
And hurried home
In all directions;
Some saw, behind the stage,
Bhima and Dusshasana
Help each other
Shed their make up,
Share drinks
Poured from one pot,

Chew betel leaves and areca nut
Taken out of the same pouch.

III

Bhima fell dead
Climbing the Himalaya
On the Mahaprasthan*
Led by Yudhishtira,
Entered the heaven
Even before his elder;
Ghost of Dusshasana
Still roams the world,
Pulling at Draupadi,
Disrobing her,
Molesting her.

*Final journey of Pandavas to heaven.

Part one depicts a scene from Kathakali performance.

(There was a time when Kathakali was performed in the rural ambience on make-shift stage in bare open ground, viewers sitting on the ground on mats made of palm-leaf or other such materials brought by themselves. The stage lighting was limited to the chest-high bronze oil lamp so as to illumine the face and hands of the actor; the slightly reddish glow of the lamp was most suited to the make-up and to zero in on the facial expressions of the actor.)