CHAPTER IV.

THE PROFESSIONAL THEATRE.

Modern Theatre: The professional theatre, or the theatre run by professional artists is also known in our country as the 'Modern Theatre' and 'Commercial Theatre' in order to distinguish it from the ancient Hindu Theatre (Sanskrit) which fell into decay for centuries, and also to emphasize the commercial aspect of the modern theatre. The idea of taking to the theatre as a profession was rather new and awakening in India, largely due to the western influence. The tradition in ancient India was that the 'actor' was always something else by profession; an agriculturist perhaps in the Folk Theatre and a learned pandit in the Court Theatre. Plays were staged in devotion to some gods in the temple in the former case (Ranga Pooja), and as a court entertainment in the latter. Thus, there is no tangible evidence of the existence in the past of a 'professional theatre' in the modern sense. The financial aspect of the theatre was never treated with any significance because the troupe which played the drama in the court or in the temple, usually came to be constituted just for that show, and whatever expense in that connection was met by the patron—be it the court or the temple.

Theatre of the Middle Class: Like any other commodity, even art began to fetch a price in the modern industrial age, where money occupied the important place in all social and cultural undertakings. Money became the measure of the value of
everything including skill, art and literature, resulting in new social values. Status made way for contract in life: and contract shaped everything including even the tradition into classified professions. Theatre could not remain an exception. Another result of the industrial age was the outcome of the middle class with defined features. As it grew in bulk, new methods and means of entertainment had to be evolved, and this called for a mode of theatre that was different from both the folk and the royal, which catered to the lay and the learned, but not to the middle link—the middle class. Till that time which marked the birth of the influential middle class, the need for a third type of theatre was not felt. That perhaps is one of the reasons that the history of the professional theatre in India does not go back far earlier than a hundred years now; and the time of the birth of the middle class coincides with it. During the hundred years of its history, the professional theatre has mainly depended on the middle class for support. These facts persuade one to associate the two very closely and brush aside the suggestion that their concurrent birth and growth is only accidental. A desire of the middle class to have an entertainment for which it was prepared to pay a price— for that was the accepted vogue in an age of contract—caused the professional theatre into reality.

A link between the folk and Court Theatres: The professional theatre proved to be a link between the folk and the court theatre, for it attracted the salient features from both
of them to strike at a middle mark of compromise. While 
its advent routed out the court theatre out of existence, 
the court itself did not lose much, for it readily found 
a suitable or even more agreeable substitute in the profes-
ssional theatre itself, which could contribute the same or 
even better entertainment not only to the court audiences 
but also to the folk audiences with equal relish. It drew 
all the three strata of society together, but depended 
mainly on the middle class, which in turn got the best 
benefit out of it. The middle class did not relish the folk 
play and had no access to the court play, and therefore, it 
welcomed with open arms the professional play when it came.

Beginning in India: Calcutta- 'Modern Theatre' made a far 
too delayed advent in India for it is very young when com-
pared with the professional theatres of other countries of the 
world. The professional ballet dancers of France, who were 
influenced by the Spanish professional dancers toured England in 
the early years of 18th century. England had a flourishing theatre with a number of 'rival professional performers' 
at the close of the 17th century. Japan had a regular professional theatre at 'Yeddo' in the year 1624. The first 
Indian professional players came up in Calcutta after the 
rebuilding of a 'play house' by public subscription in the 
year 1775-76. * These English theatres which were fast 
becoming commercial filled the minds of rich landlords with great ideas. At the heavy cost of two 
lakhs of rupees (~ 13,000/-) the popular medieval

1 K. Srinivas Rao: The Dramatic History of the World, p.239
2 Warren Hastings is cited as a subscriber: R.K.Yajnik: The 
Indian Theatre, p.23.
Drama 'Vidya Sundar' was acted by men and women in 1835.¹ A number of similar attempts were made at the cost of fabulous amounts and a taste for the drama was created and firmly established. These efforts culminated in the establishment of a public theatre for the middle class. This was the National Theatre that came into being in 1872, 'the first regular theatre in which actors received salary and tickets were sold to the public'.

Bombay: Conditions prevailing in Bombay present a noteworthy contrast to those in Calcutta, for the 'modern theatre' of Bombay does not owe much to the European influence. Parsis 'the most intelligent minority in India', brought with them the Persian artistic traditions developed then in India on the western standards. "In a sense they are the pioneers of the modern theatre in Bombay both in the amateur and professional field." Though Bombay also had a play house as early as in 1770 where a number of English plays were produced, the real history of the professional theatre in western India starts from 1842 when a private theatre was built by Jagannath Shankar Seth and became available for European and Indian productions at a fixed daily rent. Karnataka had to wait for 30 years after this to see the birth of its professional theatre.

The year 1843 is 'memorable in the annals of the western Indian stage, for that marked the birth of the Marathi drama at the hands of "Vishnupant Shave", one of the gifted clerks of the Chief of Sangli'. After the

¹ R.K. Yajnik: The Indian Theatre. p.25
demise of the patron, these Bhave players turned professional, called themselves "Sanglikar Sangeeta Nataka Mandali" and began to tour all over Maharashtra and Karnataka. After 1851 the Bhave players went to Bombay and shaped and styled their presentation with costly settings and costumes on the models of the Parsi and English shows. Their shows had sustained and had made a new hit and a great one.

Soon sprang up a number of rival professional groups in Maharashtra, in every important city like Sangli, Miraj, Kolhapur and Ichalkaranji and started touring all over the land competing with the puffed up Sanglikar Company which had earned for Maharashtra a new mode of theatre run on a novel fashion. All these professional troupes made frequent visits to North Karnataka after 1855. Their colourful settings, costumes and charming stage songs attracted great attention, drew huge sums of money, and earned great reputation. They had their easy way in North Karnataka because their polished performances looked very new to the people who entertained themselves with Doddata and Yakshagana. Tempted by the great success of the Maharashtra professional troupes in North Karnataka, the Parsi companies and particularly the well known Victoria Parsi Company of Batliwalla started its visits to North Karnataka, Mysore and Andhra.

THEATRE OF NORTH KARNATAK: In a short while and before 1870, the entire North Karnataka became 'mad' after the Marathi professional performances which even checkmated the visits of Yakshagana troupes to the cities. This made
the patriotic element of the Kannada population think seriously and when convinced that the Marathi professional theatre was the outcome of the very Yakshagana of Karnataka, it inspired them further. There came up a feeling of suffocation in the self-respecting patriot on seeing the Kannada audience paying for the Marathi drama, often without actually understanding a good bit of the language. The glamour could not be accounted for, and the only way open for the thinking patriot to resurrect the indigenous art and checkmate the surging influence of the Marathi theatre was to build up Karnataka's own theatre and stage plays in Kannada. One of the many that came to this inevitable conclusion in the 1870s was Sekkari Balacharya, popularly known as Shantakavi, the first and foremost playwright of the stage in north Karnataka. He was born in 1856 breathing fresh air of patriotism and a new political consciousness that had set the people thinking of their country and culture.

Speaking of the influences that prompted him to take his pen, the sword against Marathi drama, Shantakavi described that the Kannada country was swept off its feet by the oncoming entertainers, fleeced the material wealth of Karnataka...
with their magic, and that there was a thick pessimism 'all over the Dharwar area' about the capabilities of Kannada language. He said that the people seemed to have been convinced that the language was hard without any softness, tone or grace, that there was no drama, no actor and not even the hope of having them in future. This atmosphere necessarily frustrated the sharp mind and the result was the spirit of challenge. With a desire to have the typical and indigenous theatrical art of Karnataka as the banner in the challenging hand, he fell back on the very Yakshagana which had inspired the Marathi theatre into existence. He desired to write original plays and stage them in the Marathi manner and procedure. Yakshagana was the most manly of entertainments and a befitting reply of vindication and Shantakavi accepted the Bhagavata of 'Karkimela' as the very first and most inspiring teacher of the actors ('Hatas') of north Karnataka.
Shantakavi inspired the people of Gadag (Kritapura) and the result was a favourable response. The first professional troupe came up in Gadag in the year 1877. This troupe was called 'Karnataka Nataka Company' and also 'Sri Veeranarayan Prasadbita Kritapura Nataka Mandal' inspired by the entreaty of Shantakavi, some local enthusiasts of Gadag- Umachgi Laccappa Nayaka, Gudi Raghavendra, Konnur Jeera Balappa, Kunni Immanna and others took up the play 'Usha Harana' written and directed by Shantakavi himself. This troupe seems to be very first to mark the advent of the professional theatre in North Karnataka and Shantakavi richly deserves to be called the 'prathama Guru' of Kannada drama.

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1 It was in 1874, according to Narayanas Rao Huligol (Rangabhoomi, Oct., 1925- p.54 and May, 1928- p.134); but this is improbable for, in a footnote, Shantakavi has made it clear that it was started in 1877. (Prabhati- March 1919) and this is not contradicted anywhere as far as could be seen. Secondly, there is some inaccuracy with regard to this point in Mr. Huligol's observations, for he says that the Kritapura Nataka Mandal was started by Shantakavi himself in 1874 (Rangabhoomi- Oct., 1925- p.34) and alters it later saying that the Kritapura Mandal was started by Nacchgi Laccappa Nayaka and others in the year 1872-73 and that Shantakavi only joined them later. (Rangabhoomi: May, 1928- p.134). Shantakavi is firm and categorical in his saying that he inspired the troupe into existence in 1877.

2 N.K. Huligol writes that the first play staged by the Company was 'Banasura' (Shantakavi) followed by Kescha- ka Vadh, 'Vataala Harana', 'Seetaranaka Pravesha' and 'Sundopasanga'. (Rangabhoomi- May 1928: p.135). This is incorrect because Shantakavi himself clearly says that the first play staged by the troupe was 'Usha Harana'.

3 यस्तील्या वर्गात वास्तविकता क्रियाकलाप केल्यास एकेक्र तकनीकी लागू केलेल्या रुपांतरणाचे अन्वेषण करायला काही वेळा मिळालेला नाही.
'Ushaharana' was followed by a series of 'ten and more' plays of Shantakavi on the Kannada stage. These performances opened the eyes of the people of North Karnataka. They got thrilled when 'gods and goddesses' on the stage spoke the very language they themselves spoke.

"They jumped with joy and became lavish both in their praise and patronage. They liked the play, players and production and believed that within a night by witnessing a show, they would earn all the pleasures of this world and attain all that is best in the other." This great triumph of Shantakavi and his realising an ideal with a steadfast application had a wider significance than a mere personal achievement. He showed the way and there was a country-wide response to his call and within a couple of years Kannada professional troupes sprang from every corner of the country from every town and important village. There was a rich rainfall of Kannada plays and very soon the visiting professional troupes realised that the people here had no more glamour for them "because of the conspicuous change in the attitude of the people. Maharashtrian professional troupes bypassed North Karnataka and went to Mysore and

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1 Other plays written by Shantakavi are 'Sriyala Satva Pariksa', 'Sundopesunda Vadha', 'Keecha-ka Vadha', 'Sudhanva Vadha', 'Seetaranya Pravesha', 'Sakuntalotpatti' and 'Chandra-vali Charitre'. These are prose plays with appropriate penetrating songs.

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Andhra in 1876-77¹ to explore new ground for their commercial talent.

The Kritapura mandali of Gadag started touring around the important cities and villages; moreover as the first troupe under the inspiring guidance of Shantkavi, it had a mission to fulfill—a mission of creating Kannada drama all over and bring about/new consciousness in the people. The company visited important centres of North Karnataka and staged plays at Dharwar, Bellgaum, Navalgund, Nargund, Hubli and Saundatti for the great astonishment and intense relief of the people all over. The company could not pay visits to distant places due to lack of transport facilities.

The troupe had a band of good artists, all well-versed in Kannada and Sanskrit literature and came to be honoured not merely for their histrionic talent, but also for their vast learning and musical interpretation of the classics. The leading artist of the group was Gudi Raghavendra charya who played epic roles of Bheema and Chatotkacha with rare brilliance and bearing, which earned him considerable appreciation. "If the people learnt that Gudi Raghavendra charya was impersonating Bheema, they would flock the theatre and the evening’s collection in those easy days would be Rs.1,200/-"² Dambal

Huechaeharya, another talented artist played the heroine with considerable alacrity. It is said that sometimes even during the day-time he used to dress up like a lady and would attend ladies' social functions without being suspected.¹ Badami Puttacharya made his name as the 'Vidushaka' and Konnor Jeeva Balappa, a well known musician of the time, was the 'Sootradhara'.² Behind this band of cultured, learned and enthusiastic artists was Shanvakavi shaping them with his rigorous training. The troupe earned a good amount of money and wide popularity and made the Marathi troupes hesitate coming into Karnataka.³

Production: The method of production of the play of the Gadag group was clearly based on the lines of Yakshagana though the performance was refined on the one hand, and was richly supported by appropriate settings and costumes on the lines of the Marathi shows. As in Yakshagana, the Bhagavata—called 'Sootradhara' was present throughout, evidently at a corner of the stage to introduce the characters and to sing or speak the narrative portions.⁴ At the opening of the show, Sootradhara appeared on the stage and sang the invocation (Nandi). He was followed by 'Vidushaka' the jester.

2 Mudavidu Krishnavo observes that another 'Sootradhara' or 'Bhagavata' was Kunchur Samachar who had a good training in classical music at Tanjore.
who, as in 'Doddaha' was dressed up all too queer with bunches
of neem leaves tied around his head. He used to make the peo-
ple laugh with his dance and song. Then followed Radha Janapati
and Sharada, presiding deities of learning to bless the play
to success. This marked the end of the preliminaries or
'Pooyavarana' which was followed by the regular play with
Sotradhara introducing every new coming actor. The play inva-
riably ended with a 'Mangalarati'. The Kritapura Mandali became
well known for their literary and histrionic merit. Shanta-
kavi was the life force behind it writing original plays⁠¹
for the troupe and training the artists for production.⁠²

The Kritapura Nataka Mandali functioned for 16 years;
but the death of Konnur Jeeva Balappa and Dumala Rucanacharya,
two of the main artists broke the troupe in 1694-95 and every
effort made by Shantakavi to revive it failed. Without being
frustrated he wrote new plays³ for other young professional
troupes that sprang up as a result of the inspiring activities

¹ Apart from the plays of Shantakavi, this troupe staged a
few plays written by Umachadi Seenappa, particularly his
'Jambavati Kalyana'.

² Shantakavi was working as a teacher in the Kannada school
of Gadag. It is said that his superior officer voiced forth
the feeling of the Marathi companies which were jealous
of the success of this troupe, by transferring Shantakavi
to Hombal. This did not deter the playwright's determi-
nation. Shantakavi made it a point to return to Gadag
every evening after the school by walking up the distance
or riding a horse or even a Buffalo to give suggestions and
training to his artists.

³ 'Seeta Swayamvara', 'Mayuradhwaja', 'Kalasura', 'Pratapa' and
other plays were written for Nargund Company. Shantakavi
was later associated very closely with Shirahatti Venkaba-
rao's Sri Mahalakshmi Prasadita Nataka Mandali.'
of the Kritapura Mandal; he performed musical discourses
enthusing people into patriotic activities and lived for
two decades more to see the rich harvest and bountiful
return for his past efforts. He created a Kannada consci­
ousness among the people and chose drama as his medium with
rich results. He passed away early in 1920s and his plays
yet remain speaking for the man as a compromise between the
methods of Yakshagana and the full-fledged modern stage plays.
His plays still did not achieve any new ground in the techni­
ques of characterisation, but the story moved fast and with
effect.

The First Playwright: 'Shantakavi' can rightly be called
"The Kannada Nataka pitamaha" or the father of the pro­essional drama. It is true that Churamani Seshagiri Rao of
Dharwar had translated 'Shakuntala' of Kalidasa into Kannada
in 1869 1 about five years before Shantakavi wrote his
first play but an attempt was made to bring 'Shakuntala' on
the stage only in 1899 by an enthusiastic troupe of Badami.2
Actually, the play was performed in all seriousness and at
full length (though in two parts on separate evenings) in
1905 by Bharata Kalamkari Sangeeta Samaja, the first ama­
teur troupe of North Karnataka; and so, Shantakavi's plays
appeared on the stage much earlier than Churamani's, though
Shakuntala was translated much earlier. Evidences indicate

1 The date is arrived at by calculating the data provided
in the very last verse of the Kannada 'Shakuntala' of
Seshagiri Rao.
2 Mudavidu Krishna Rao: Preface to Churamani's 'Kannada
Shakuntala Nataka' (1934) p.32.
that Shantekavi preceded Kari Basavappa Shastri of Mysore also, for, the latter's Kannada Shakuntala was performed in the year 1861 in the month of November, practically six years after the staging of plays of Shantakavi in North Karnataka. This indicates that the credit of writing a play and staging it for the first time in the entire Karnatak goes to Shantekavi.

Some critics have held that the Dramatic Troupe of the village Halsigi came into existence earlier than the Kritapura Nataka Mandali. The latter is given the second place chronologically. It is also observed that one Shri Venkannachar Agalagatti, popularly known as 'Shrinivasa Kavi', wrote out plays for the Halsigi troupe. Thus it is opined that the Halsigi company was the first professional troupe in North Karnataka and that Shrinivasa Kavi was the first modern playwright. The suggestion cannot be accepted for the following reasons:

1 C. Ambedkar Rao; 'Mysore Rangabhoomiya Itihasa' (Manuscript);
2 The very translation of Shakuntala by Basavappa Shastri cannot be placed earlier than 1830 according to Mudavidu (Mudavidu's letter to the Editor: Rangabhoomi, April, 1930, p. 148) and his conclusion gets some support as obviously, Shri. Shastri translated only after King Chamaraja Wodeyar gave instructions to the Court poets after witnessing Marathi and Parsi shows after 1878. The suggestion of Sri K.C. Manjundaradhy侦查 that Chamaru's translation was influenced by Basavappa Shastri (Kannada Stage Centenary Volume I, p. 117) cannot be accepted due to the difference in time and distance between the two writers. The very method of translation and the suitability of one to the Popular Theatre and the other to the Court Theatre confirms that neither of them had any influence on the other.
3 Mudavidu Krishnarama; Welcome Speech; On the occasion of the first Dramatic Conference at Dharwar, 1929; Rangabhoomi, Feb., 1930, pp. 98-102.
5 The plays of Shrinivas Kavi are 'Srimati Parinaye', 'Madalasa Parinaya', 'Draupadi Vastrapaharana' and 'Bhuseure Akhyana'.
The date of Shrinivas Kavi as suggested by Sri. Mudavidu in his address in 1929 is mentioned as "about sixty years ago" and would not give an accurate date for the playwright. It is entirely on the evidence of Sri. Mudavidu the said inferences are based and secondly, as early as in 1929, Shantakavi himself declared in his narrative verse entitled 'Nataka' that the very first Kannada 'Mela' came into being in Kritapura (Gadag) and that he himself came to be titled 'Karnataka Nataka Prathama Guru' because it is he that trained the troupe. There is no evidence of any contradiction to his claims which have been on the other hand, accepted by contemporary critics. It is said also that Srinivas Kavi was younger than Shantakavi but that the former died a premature death earlier than Shantakavi.

Finally, Shantakavi's own words could be given more credence for he impresses as a self-less patriot who would seldom snatch an honour that is not rightfully his own. He would not be so proud and happy if ever he was doubtful of his


2 अव नेक्कबुधी रक्षण चक्षुकृत वाचित्र्य कार्यालय सुवर्ण विनाश
   विनाशी चक्र करुण विनाशक कुंभा कथाबद्वारानि ।

3 Takappa Ijari: Kannada Rangabhoomiva Itihasa: Rangabhoomi. Dec.,1925, p.117. And also
   'कर्णेशीर पत्रसंख्याशिला अधिब्यासी' कार्यालय सुवर्ण विनाश ।
   'शंकरकुंभकोपाध्याय' कथाबद्वारानि ।

4 Collected from Sri Betgeri Krishnasarma.
own position and expected some controversy. He pays due regard to Churamuri Seshagirirao as the first playwright in Kannada in a footnote obviously written by him alone because it is in first person (plural as was in vogue) and he would not hesitate to accept the Halsigi group to have held the banner prior to the Kritapura Mandali—if it really was so. Halsigi troupe became well known no doubt, because of the quality and showmanship of its performances but could not live a full life after it came into being. "Inspired by the Kritapura Mandali", as Shantakavi observed in another footnote, "professional troupes suddenly sprang up in Margund, Navalgund, Halsigi, Badami, Rabakavi and died only too quickly."¹ The Halsigi troupe must have come into existence in about the year 1878-79. It staged some plays written by Srinivasakavi and possibly stopped functioning in the middle and was revived again by the year 1882—when Sri Mudavidu witnessed its performances at Sirsi. It is possible that the Halsigi group took for the first time, a tour in the neighbouring regions like Bellary as suggested by Sri Mudavidu and this fact must have contributed considerably to its popularity. In any case, it is acceptable that Halsigi troupe was a highly talented one, but no account from the available evidences can support its claim for an earlier antiquity than the Kritapura Nataka Mandali. The popularity of 'Shantakavi' as a playwright and

¹ Shantakavi: Footnotes 'Brabhaba'-March, 1919, p. 8.
producer set a fashion for others to style their names after his and it cannot be odd to consider that the name of 'Srinivasa Kavi' was but such. Available evidences contribute to the conclusion that Shantakavi was the first of the Kannada playwrights whose plays were staged in Karnataka. It is to Shantakavi, to his undaunted patriotism for his country and language, to his genius in play-writing, production and organization, the Kannada stage of North Karnataka in particular owes its entire life and so he richly deserves the coveted title 'Kannada Nataka Pitamah' as the father of the professional theatre of Karnataka.

Kannada 'Shakuntala': The story of 'Kannada Shakuntala' has an inseparable relation with the unrest prevailing at the time of Shantakavi. It was with regard to the translation of 'Sakuntala' that the Maharashtra stage stole a decent march over Karnataka, and the resultant consciousness of a disappointment rendered the patriotic feeling of North Karnataka intense. Churamuri Seshagirirao of Belgaum was the first in Karnataka to have translated 'Shakuntala' of Kalidasa into Kannada. He completed the translation in the year 1869-70 and soon published it. Though the play was written as early as that, it had to wait for three decades to appear on the stage; but all the verses of the play soon became highly popular as they were based on the prevailing and popular folk and home tunes—all in Kannada music. These tunes and the novel idea of Seshagirirao to see on the stage each actor singing verses relevant to the character he impersonated, rather than leaving the entire bulk to be sung
by the Bhagavata as in Yakshagana or Doddata, attracted and arrested his friend Anna Seheb Kirloskar of Gauripur. Anna Seheb, himself a born Kannadiga,\(^1\) clearly saw in the ideas of Churamuri a revolution on the stage and translated 'Sakuntala' into Marathi in the year 1878-79\(^2\) on the same lines adopted by Churamuri.\(^3\) He immediately brought it on the Poona stage in October 1880 with a group of talented musicians under the name "Kirloskar Sangeeta Nataki Mandali". His 'Sangeeta Shakuntala' revolutionised the Marathi stage with the innovations of each actor singing his own songs couched in charming homely tunes.\(^4\) With one stroke the Marathi stage did with the Sootradhara or Bhagavata who was considered inevitable for a stage play. Every dramatic troupe of Maharashtra took to staging 'Shakuntala' and made the play so popular that within a short while the script was printed several times\(^5\) and in addition, 'Shakuntala' earned for Annasaheb Kirloskar the title, 'Father of Musical Drama'. This fact prompted North Karnataka to feel that Churamuri was not recognised though he was in a way responsible for Annasaheb Kirloskar's translation of 'Shakuntala'. Shantakavi must have been very touchy about it.

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1 Mudavidu Krishnareo: Address. Ibid. p.12.
4 Original tunes which couched the verses of Bhavis's plays and of the Marathi 'Shakuntala' were mostly the tunes of Kannada Javadi, Parijata and Dasarape; but soon the magic touch was given by Bhavurao Kolhatkar who created the 'stage songs' of Maharashtra in 1980s, after which the 'Bhave Style' sank into insignificance.
PROFESSIONAL TROUPES:

It is the ceaseless efforts of Shantakavi and his troupe of enthusiastic and talented artists that gave a shake up and inspired the aspirant to build up the professional theatre in North Karnataka. The shock was strong enough to move the people to action but does not seem to be so strong as to sustain its going. The immediate outcome was however heartening to the patriot, for a number of dramatic troupes sprang up in Dharwar, Ranebennur, Hirekerur, Lakmeswara, Hulki, Kuvijalgi, Navigund, Mangund, Halsigi, Badami and Babakavi. This harvest though bountiful, was too short-lived to render the Kannada stage any consolidated results.

Halsigi: Of the many short-lived companies, the professional troupe of Halsigi (Belgaum district) deserves to be mentioned. Halsigi had great historical and cultural heritage, for it was the capital of the Kadamba dynasty in the 10th and 11th centuries, and remained quite sensitive to any political or cultural current. The Halsigi group must have come up in about the year 1378-79, as already suggested, and the moving spirit behind this was Venkannachar Agalagatti, popularly called 'Srinivasa Kavi', who wrote out plays like 'Srimati Parinaya', 'Madalasa Parinaya', 'Draupadi Vastrapardana' and 'Bhawmasuravadhe'. The entire cause for the impression and popularity of the Halsigi group was the exceptional qualifications of its artists. These artists are said to be learned in Sanskrit and Kannada classics. They lived a pious life and never missed meticulous religious
observations and proved that an artist of the stage could yet remain perfectly moral and lofty. While on tour, the artists attracted people by their 'musical rendering (pravachana)' of the epics and classics. They considered their tours as a religious and cultural mission and utilised their time for the best advantage of both the villagers and themselves. There was one of the best methods of attracting the people to the theatre also and this is evidenced by the fact that on invitation they toured the different important villages and cities from Belgaum to Bellary. After an intermittent pause, the company revived itself with rejuvenated vigour in about the year 1882 and started on its wheels again. During this second phase of its activity it produced two talented artists who were nicknamed 'Sandigi' and 'Mandigi' who are remembered for their histrionic abilities. 'Virata Parva' was one of the popular plays of this troupe.

Tantupurastha Nataka Mandal: The first professional troupe of North Karnataka that made bold to undertake a tour around the different parts of Kannada country, Maharashtra and Andhra was the 'Tantupurastha Nataka Mandal' of Dharwar, which came into being in 1830s. The troupe had among its members Bhima-charya Erli, Gopinathrao Joshi, Ramabhau Dalsigi and Dattatreyaao Dharwad quite known for their histrionic abilities. With initial success in the villages and cities of North Karnataka, the troupe equipped itself with good costumes and appropriate settings and started out touring the different regions for a period of two years, with intermittent breaks. 

1 Sri Mudavidu observes that the troupe travelled about for twelve years (Rangabhoomi.Feb., 1990, p.93). It looks an error xxxxxxx for he himself notices later that the troupe returned by 1885 when some of its members took employment in the first Railways of North Karnataka.
The speciality of this troupe was that it consisted of both the Kannada and Marathi artists on the one hand and it laboured to learn the languages of different regions and staged plays particularly in Hindi, Marathi and Telugu. Dr. C. Narayana Rao writing about the influence of Karnataka on the Telugu stage, recalls the visit of an 'enthusiastic dramatic troupe of Dharwar' to Andhradesha. His observation that the troupe consisted of both Kannada and Marathi artists substantiates that 'talented troupe of Dharwar' was none other than the Tantupurastha Natako Mandal. "The troupe made a good impression on Andhra and influenced the Telugu stage to absorb some of its traits and so, the theatre of Andhra owes a good measure of obligation to this troupe." The touring troupe returned to Dharwar before 1885, when the first railways came to North Karnataka. Many of the members of the troupe who were tired of touring went after secure employment and joined the railways, rendering a real loss to the theatre.

The last decade of the 19th century saw the setting in of decay in the stage of North Karnataka. Important professional troupes including the one inspired by Shantakavi had gone defunct mostly due to internal feuds and by 1890, there was not a single professional company sufficiently strong to hold the banner of Karnataka theatre. Quite a number of troupes sprang up all over Karnataka and particularly in Rahebennur, Lakshmeshwar, Hubli, Dharwar and Hire Harakuni,

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1 Dr. C. Narayana Rao: Kannada Stage Centenary Vol pp. 109-114
2 Ibid. p. 111-112
but they were only too feeble to do anything substantial. These troupes were crowded with enthusiastic illiterates "who mugged up the lines of the play and reproduced them like parrots". Drama became a ludicrous affair in the eyes of the educated and learned and soon the profession became unpopular. No efforts of the educated enthusiasts like Shantakavi could restore the stage to its honoured pedestal. The last decade of 19th century witnessed the painful convulsions of many a dramatic troupe that tossed between life and death.

The Hindu Union Club: This state of affairs in North Karnataka and the coming in of the railways offered temptation to the Marathi companies to visit Karnataka again which goaded the people here into consolidation and action. The most prominent of the many visiting troupes was the famed - 'Kirtiokar Sangeeya Netaka Mandali' that visited Dharwar in 1893. This troupe for once acquainted its Kannada audiences with the achievements made by the Marathi theatre in contrast with the Kannada stage. Their shows of 'Kamarajya Vijoga', 'Shapa Sambrama' and 'Saubhadra' sustained very well but set a serious thought in the active minds regarding the future of the Karnataka stage. The sentimental themes, alluring settings and masterly production seemed to have convinced some of the enthusiastic Kannada youngmen that Marathi was the language for drama. The result was the birth of 'The Hindu Union Club' in Dharwar which staged the Marathi drama 'Tratika' an adaptation of Shakespeare's 'Taming of the Shrew' done by Prof. V. B. Kelkar of the Fergusson College of Poona which "has been accorded the most - -"
enthusiastic and abiding reception.\footnote{1}

In a way, it was a challenge to the visiting companies all right, for it is said that the performance of the Club was a grain better in merit than the performance of the same play (Tratika) by the well known 'Shakunagarawasi Natak Kendali' which staged "some of the finest plays in prose soon on the Marathi stage" and which had to its credit a brilliant galaxy of actors including Ganapatrao Joshi and Belavantrao Joshi. May be it was with a touch of obvious pride that the talent of the 'Hindu Union Club' was compared with that of the 'Shakunagarawasi Natak Kendali', but the group proved to deserve it when it staged in Marathi 'Rama Bhimdeva' and 'Haraveera Malhusare' with brilliant success. Bijapur took up the trend from Marwar and some of the enthusiastic graduates like Reujalal Shrinivasa Rao and Mangali Shrinivasa Rao started/played in Marathi, the prominent of which was 'Rama Bhimdeva'.

Revival: It was a shade of history repeating itself again. Marathi plays became highly popular and the people in North Karnataka almost came to hate the Kannada play, and its presentation which provided a glaring contrast with the Marathi plays. As Shri Mudavidu observed, the Kannada people claimed their own in preference to the Marathi plays.\footnote{2} The stage had to be set up for a counter-action.

\footnote{1 R.K. Yajniki: The Indian Theatre. pp. 149-150.}

\footnote{2 'नेपुरुषाला संस्कृतिक, मुख्यतः कन्नडाला, कृपया व तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तुमचा, तुमचा तु
and this time, the opportunity was taken up by the 'Prachya Krsana Sattrashaka Mendali' of Madhgal (Dharwar Taluka) which was usually staging a Kannada play once a year from 1906. It was revitalised with a purpose and a determination and called itself 'Bherata Kalottejaka Sangeeta Samaja' in 1904. The troupe had the set ideal of bringing to light the latent richness of Kannada drama paying more attention to the art of the theatre rather than its commercial aspect. In this sense it was an amateur group, the first of its kind in North Karnataka. The first play chosen in agreement with the set ideal was Chamar's 'Shakuntala'. When the first four acts of the Kannada Shakuntala were staged, the troupe received superlative acclaim by the elite of Dharwar and this encouraged the troupe to take on hand 'Mrichchhkaatika', rendered into Kannada by Uduvashakavi. The well known Marathi plays - 'Ramarajya Vidyogya' and 'Sohhadra' rendered into Kannada by Mudavida Krishnapraso were performed with good success. The troupe attracted to the stage many a cultured and educated person including Deshpande Tirumalarao who belonged to the best known family of classical musicians. It looked as if the theatre of North Karnataka stood firm.

1 In the first performance of 'Shakuntala', the main roles of Krishna, Dushyanta and Shakuntala were played by the talented Vaidya Subhasri, Deshpande Tirumalarao and Santalada Iruya respectively.
on its feet with the prosperity of this troupe. The patriotic Shantakavi praised it whole-heartedly. The railway intervened again, this time by shifting its headquarters from Dharwar to Madras and with the headquarters, went many a member and actor of the troupe, rendering it utterly helpless. All efforts made by enthusiasts like Deshpande Tirumalarao to revive it with new talent only made the troupe linger on feebly for about seven years until the year 1915-16 when it went defunct.

The contribution of the Bharata Kelotejaka Samaj to the theatre of North Karnataka is significant from three points of view. It made again a patriotic challenge to the Marathi theatre; it made an effort to revive the classical element of the Kannada drama; and thirdly, it paved the way for the amateur theatre with its own example.

In the Twentieth Century: The closing of the 19th century marks also the closing of a significant chapter in the story of the theatre of North Karnataka, for it ends the age of challenge and inaugurates the age of real professional entertainment roughly from 1900. During the period that followed the opening of the 20th century, one will not find that challenging spirit, championing of any cause or fervent and desperate appeal for action. In the new age we notice an honest effort to provide real entertainment with better production, a good return for the money paid. From the sentimental plane of the former period, the professional theatre of North Karnataka moved on to the practical or rather

1 (शान्तकवि स्वभावकर्तक) – अरुणाचल, अध्यक्ष मंडळी के आदर से दर्शनकार,
कर्नाटक रेल नेता से सोनर प्रसन्न किया।
"शान्तकवि" मनुष्य जीने के लिए समृद्धि का स्रोत है।
"शान्तकवि" के सौंभाल में किया गया था शान्तकवि का नाम,
"शान्तकवि" के काम में शान्तकवि का प्रमुख काम था।
"शान्तकवि" के सौंभाल में शान्तकवि का प्रमुख काम था।
"शान्तकवि" के सौंभाल में शान्तकवि का प्रमुख काम था।
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"शान्तकवि" के सौंभाल में शान्तकवि का प्रमुख काम था।
commercial plane. Thus the new era produced some of the best troupes and artists. It produced also a number of stage-worthy plays, many of which were translations or adaptations. The new age set a fairly good standard for production and fulfilled to a considerable extent, the age old ideal of making the drama a feast to the variegated tastes of a variety of people.

The Shirahatti Troupe: One of the first, long lived and impressive professional troupes that satisfied the expectations of the new age was 'Sri Mahalaxmi Prasadita Natyak Mandali' under the leadership of Venkobarao Halgerikar, popularly known as Shirahatti Venkobarao. Venkobarao, the leader or rather, the 'proprietor' as he is called in the commercial age came originally from Koppal with an ambition of making a career on the stage as he was enamoured of the plays of the Marathi companies that visited Koppal. He was a boy of 18 when he started the troupe in 1903 and with a rare ability, he made it stand firm on its feet by 1906. The prominent among his initial actors were Kollurayyansvami, Govindacharya, and Vamanarao master, all educated and talented. The first play 'Padmavati Parinaya' on the popular pauranic theme was much appreciated. In 1906, the company staged 'Shakuntala' (of Churamuri), 'Kalidasa', and 'Yuvarat Ayesha'. Its success in the known region prompted Venkobarao to move out with the troupe to the other parts of Karnataka. In the year 1910, the company visited Mysore and staged its plays in the Town Hall. The reputation of the company's success secured for it the royal audience and patronage. Venkobarao,
who played 'Bhattanayaka' and Vamanarao master who played 'Kalidasa' in the play 'Kalidasa Charitra' staged at the Palace in the royal audience, were honoured and the royal patronage in form and finance encouraged the company to tour Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra, staging plays like 'Vivekodaya', 'Kalidasa', 'Pralhada Charitra', 'Krishna Leela' and 'Ramayana'. When in 1916, the troupe visited Mysore again, it was invited by the palace to stage 'Shani Prabhava and 'Krishna Leela'. In later years, the troupe earned a good name by staging 'Ramanjaneya Yuddha' written by Toranagol Rajerao and 'Indira' a translation of the Marathi play by Mamadapur Gururao.

Shirahatti Venkoba Rao himself was a gifted 'prose actor' with dignity and effect in his expression and often, with rare brilliance he outdid with his 'prose-acting' even the music of Vamanarao. His asset was a good tear of artists. "The role of Narada by Shirahatti, humour of Lakshmanpur, Asundi's endless musical elaboration and the alap of Gombal Vasudevaraya" never missed their mark and tempted the art minded to take to the stage.

Shirahatti believed in imposing showmanship and spent huge sums of money on costumes and settings. On one occasion when he witnessed at Mangalore the Tamil performances of 'Erihadambaal Company' of Madras, he was convinced of the

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1 There was, it seems, friendly rivalry between Venkob Rao and Vamanarao in getting claps from the audience. Vamanarao would easily get an ovation after elaborating a song with his golden voice. Shirahatti devised some tricks to make impression on his audience and one such was to have a rather tight stiff collar (made to order) with press buttons and he would at tense moments stiffen his neck to see the collar shot out to the auditorium; the reaction would be richer than the one that Vamanarao got.

2 K.S.Karanth: Ucchavanasina Mattu Mukhagalu- p. 41
of the contributions of settings and costumes in the creation of illusion and immediately spent Rs. 6,000/- in getting specially devised settings for the play 'Dasavatara'. He did create a perfect theatrical illusion, both in Kiranyakashapu on the stage and the people in the auditorium, when he made 'God Narasimha' come out breaking open not only the main pillar, but from nine others and all the forms of Narasimha emerging together into one Super Man. Garud Sadasivarao, a noted contemporary dramatist-actor observed that Shirahatti's was perhaps the best equipped company in North Karnataka, especially in the years between 1915 and 1925. Including the tent, Shirahatti's company had forty-seven cart loads of things while his own had eleven cart loads of them.

Venkabasao was not only a highly talented artist, but was also a very able proprietor with considerable powers of administration. Quite often he had to play 'professional tricks' to meet an emergent situation and an unseen rivalry but when he had to play them, he played them well and with shrewdness. Venkabasao took it as a mission and ceaselessly worked for the Kannada stage. His industry and intelligence was happily favoured by good luck and all through he worked his way to fame and fortune. His company thrived for 33 years adjusting with commendable adaptability to changing times.

1 Collected from Pandit C.Y. Kavali who was for some years the practising manager of the Shirahatti company. (MSS)
2 Collected from Sri Garud Sadasivarao (MSS).
and ultimately came to an end in 1936. Two years later, Sri Venkobarao passed away. He had done his duty for the North Karnatak stage.

Konnur's Contributions: A savant of the Kannada stage in North Karnatak who is well remembered by the land for his services to the theatre was Shivanurthiśwami Kanbangimath who lived up to the single ideal of building up the best equipped company in challenge to the most colourful ones of Maharasstra. He and his troupe come from Bailhongal in Belgaum district. "Konnurkar Kadaciddheswara Sangeeta Natako Mandali" was the name of the troupe with Konnurkar- as Kanbangimath was called- as its guiding star and living inspiration from the time of its inception in 1901 for about twenty years.

Shivanurthiśwami made a number of contributions to the North Karnatak stage at great costs to make it colourful and sustaining. He was the first to introduce women on the stage to play the heroine and later, even the minor female roles, a thing that was at the same time a bold deviation and an experiment with uncertain results. But he was alive to the tastes of his audience and desired to make the drama look 'real' with woman in it. Equally important was his supplying the stage with modern amenities including a small 'revolving section of the stage' which he put into very profitable use in 'Shani Prabhava' the masterpiece of his company. In a split second he changed the gorgeous court scene into a thick dark forest with the help of the revolving settings and created a grand illusion of a miracle.
performed by the magic horse which brought King Vikrame from his Court to the distant dark forest. Just the light would go off for a split second and before it threw its glow again, a seemingly realistic change on the stage made the rustic audience disbelieve their own eyes.

Shivamurthiswami was the first to introduce electric light on the stage—worked by dynamo. To match with all these innovations he equipped the troupe with costumes and gorgeous settings. His contributions became doubly significant because they came at a time when the Kannada stage was looked at with scant sympathy. The story of many a short-lived troupe and their ludicrous condition when compared with the grand examples of Marathi companies had brought a social apathy towards the stage. The credit of conceiving the Kannada stage with all modern devices to stand firm and equal to the Marathi stage, goes to Shivamurthiswami and so, "if ever the Kannada theatre is to be grateful to any single individual who worked zealously with mind and money for the betterment of the Kannada stage and improved production, it is to Kambalganath."

Mouth-piece of Patriotism: These successful examples of Venkobara and Shivamurthiswami made many an ambitious youth to take to the stage and the doors were now left open for women also. Soon the theatre became a "flame". Soths felt like becoming actors and actors cherished the ambition of becoming proprietors of a stylish company, maintaining

a manager and earning 'easy money' and fame. The stage for once looked the most attractive and highly profitable profession. The result was a rich crop again of professional troupes springing up after 1905. This period, following the partition of Bengal in 1905 marked also a spreading of nationalism all over the country and each region gave a fillip to provincial patriotism. Karnataka was not an exception and considerable attempts were made to make the stage the medium of expression of the feeling of the land. In this regard with its new historical themes of patriotic spirit the Kannada stage richly reflected the pulse of the land. So far as the professional troupes went, it was the old story again repeated. Many a troupe that gave great promise initially, died an unforeseen death, but a few of them stood firm and assumed the stature of institutions of indigenous art, culture and patriotic feeling.

Vishva Gunadarsha Mandali: One of the most careful and calculating actors that carved out a brilliant career for himself as a proprietor was 'Vamanrao master' who had become well known for his music and balanced acting even while he was serving as the leading actor with Shirahatti Venkoba Rao. The asset of Vamanrao was his music, his patient and careful planning and his sterling character. With these he started his own professional troupe 'Vishva Gunadarsa Nataka Mandalii' in 1913. Vamanrao had a poetic flair and the playwright's skill, but he never risked any experiment until the troupe found its stable feet. The first plays of the troupe had already held at the stage with Venkoba Rao's
company. 'Padmavati', 'Kalidasa', 'Krishna Leela' and 'Indira' were taken up again and produced with success.

Once established, Vamanrao himself translated the popular plays from Marathi and staged them on the original Marathi fashion and made the shows highly attractive. The prominent among his successful translations for the Kannada stage were 'Vidya Sadhana' (adaptation of Khadilkar's famous play 'Vidya Harona'), 'Sendha Samrajya', (Samsaya Kollol of Deval), 'Parvati Satva Parikshe' (from the Marathi original Mahananda), 'Sant Sakubai', 'Pundalika', 'Bajirao Peshve' and 'Veera Abhimanyu'. The speciality of his plays was the homely language without any heavy burden of literary jugglery and the arresting tunes drawn freely from the polished stage songs of Maharastra.

Vamanrao aimed at giving rich entertainment to his audiences and never minced matters. He, like Venkobarao had an eye for talent and soon gathered a number of gifted artists the most prominent of whom were Gansubai Guledgudd, Gururao Deshpande, Basavaraj Mansur, Keshavbhatta Modi and Ranebennur Mallappa well known for their musical and histrionic accomplishments. With this band of faithful artists, he toured Karnataka staging his own plays. In 1922, when he was in Mysore he was acclaimed by his audience and enjoyed royal patronage. His troupe was well received and came to be known for its charming stage music. After giving a glorious career to his Vishva Gunadarsa Nataka Mandal, with his own leadership, training
and talents, Vamanrao master shrewdly closed the company in 1932 when he took ill. He passed away in 1935.

The life and career of this troupe is intimately related to the life and career of Vamanrao himself. He gave the troupe every thing it needed to become famous and sustaining and in his absence the troupe was rendered utterly helpless. 'Vishwaguna Adarsa Nataka Madal' deserves its name for it lived a moral and stable life setting new fashions to the Kannada stage with regard to its stage music and an easy flowing prose. Its emphasis was on living a strict life of a sterling character. Its plays did not have the pomp and colour of the ones of Shivamurthi sswami nor the ambition of the plays of Venkobara; but they had in abundance, a dignified showmanship of an agreeable theme in intimate prose and alluring music. Though they looked simple in composition, they sustained with an impression that outlived the troupe.

Halgeri Company.

Halgeri, a small village near Mysore, attracted the attention of the play goer, every ambitious artist and playwright with its experiments in dramatic activities. Stage was a co-operative adventure in the eye of the village and in the year 1912 the village
collected share holders and established its dramatic troupe, 'Sri Halasiddheswara Prasadita Sangeeta Nataka Sabha'. The initial management of the company was of Linganagowda Patil, but the troupe really came to prominence about five years later when 'Dodda Jettappa' took charge of the troupe. He was not an actor at all to start with. A possible true story says that he set foot on the stage in 1918 at Byadgi. The early failures of the company had run it down into debts and the creditors used to come immediately after the box office was opened in the evening. Dodda Jettappa thought it wise to be on the stage in make-up in order to escape the creditors. He therefore just put on some paint on his face, wore some attire unwanted by others and appeared on the stage in unimportant roles. Immediately after the end of the play, he would get away from the green room straight to the railway station and come again to Byadgi, or the evening of the next show. This 'forced necessity' became his habit, and soon, Jettappa found the actor in him. Gradually, he picked up and played 'Sumanta' in the play 'Paduka', 'Asoka' in 'Vishama Vivaha' and later, the complex character of 'Vikranta' in 'Rakshaani Mahatthvaskanksha'. He became reputed as actor of outstanding ability in north Karnataka. His fame earned money for the troupe and

1. Collected from Pandit G.Y. Kavali.
2. *VSUTYILN*
enabled it to travel in an organised method the entire Kannada land for 12 years. Later, his brother K.C. Chikka Jettappa, who had already become well known for his stage comic and humour took up the reins of the troupe and managed it with equal success.

If Venkobara's troupe came to be recognised for its rich settings and pomp of production, and Vamanarao's for homely language and alluring music, the Halageri Troupe made a mass appeal with penetrating humour. It was in the method of interpreting drama and the Jettappas considered that the purpose of drama was to give a hearty laugh to their audiences. Their calculation was not a mistake, for soon, the Halageri company became well known. Plays were essentially 'social' in theme and those which provided scope for humour were specially selected and in this line came 'Uttara Thopu', 'College Girl', 'B.A.', 'Pathani Pasha', 'Black Market' and 'Stree'. It was sometimes a case of catering to the rather low taste which looked 'ugly' and 'going too far' in the eye of even the considerate but on no evening was the gallery empty. The troupe earned money and fame and was eagerly...

1 "... "

2 K.S.Karanth quotes the jester (Nakali) using even foul language on the stage with a rustic bluntness that would still draw a laugh: Karanth- Hucchumanassina Hattumukhagalu. pp. 130-131."
received in cities like Bangalore and Mangalore. It is said that the troupe shifted the emphasis in a drama from the hero to the jester. Ever since the visit of this troupe to Mangalore, it became a fashion for the people to ask whenever a new professional group went there as to who would play the jester.

Humour was not all in the play though it was quite considerable. The troupe staged some serious and significant plays also like 'Hemaraddi Mallamma', 'Penduka', 'Chitrangada' and 'Tippu Sultan'. Though rather erude in presentation, it is said that it was a calculated rudeness, for, both the Jettappas paid great attention to regular rehearsals of the troupe and meticulous care in preparation. Shri Shivarana Karanth who was the practising manager of the Halageri Company for some months speaks of some of the ideal qualities of the leader which kept the troupe safe and sound.

Halageri Company's contribution to the Karnataka Theatre was humour - the secret of its own success. It was an experiment well merited for trying and in the trial, the company achieved considerable success though not without some blemishes. The secret of drawing the full house for every show was not simple; and the troupe mastered it. Many a professional troupe tried to follow the foot steps of Halageri, but soon found that

had something more than flippant humour. It had considerable acting talent, an eye for the merited plays to serve the simple philosophy of serving to the standard, and an undaunted spirit of experiment and adventure. Its performances did become controversial, nevertheless, it served a purpose, showed a way for the ambitious and lived in the memory of its spectators.

A new tone - fresh and dignified.

In the year 1515, Garud Sadashivrao of Gadag opened a 'company' of his own called 'Sri Dattatraya Sangeeta Navaka Mandali'. It is this troupe that filled the missing element in the composition and presentation of the stage play - the missing element being good acting or 'abhinaya'. The story of this troupe is so intimately interwoven with the personal life of its leader, that the available information with regard to the troupe is the information only about him.

A high standard of acting and patriotism to the nation are the two aspects of Garud's life and they are richly reflected in the plays staged by Dattatraya Company. When yet a young boy, Garud is said to have witnessed a Kannada play 'Harischandra' staged by an association at Kalburgi in about the year 1894-95. He was filled with joy but his Marathi friends jeered at the crudity of the show. This kindled a light in the little heart of Garud and he determined to take to the stage and
produce plays better than the Marathi ones. With a zeal, he took part in Marathi plays on the occasions of 'Ganeshotsava' and 'Shiveji Jayanti'. At eighteen, he wrote out a musical play 'Markandeya' in Kannada, brought it on the stage. The play is said to have been liked even by his Marathi friends. For about twelve years since his initial success, Garud struggled in Kallur, Bijapur and Dharwar - and the villages near about, trying to train artists, build up a sound professional troupe and to stage his own plays. He was met with scant success. His experience had confirmed his conviction that the bane of the theatre of north Karnataka was either bad or excessive acting. He made a study of acting as a science, trained artists of the Koppal, Hombal and Konnur professional groups and taught them the theory and practice of acting. All was in vain and finally, with the financial assistance of the encouraging Sivamurthiswami Kambarimath, he started and rehearsed his troupe with his plays and set out immediately to try his luck.

Dattatraya Mandali soon earned a reputation because of the literary merit of its plays and magnificent acting. The troupe did not have any imposing settings and costumes for the first ten years of its life, for Garud desired to prove that a troupe could live gloriously mainly on the merit of theme, language and acting. Still by the year 1934, the company had possessed rich equipment of a
fabulous amount\textsuperscript{1} and had become highly popular. Garud staged his plays in every important village and town of Karnataka and Maharashtra. His troupe continued to be the training ground for many a young artist.

On invitation the troupe paid frequent visits to Poona, Sangli, Jamkhandi and Kolhapur and set new fashions for the Maharashtra stage with its own emphasis on 'adhvina'.

Garud, with a great literary flare and good understanding of the requirements of the stage seems to have written fifty-four full length stage plays drawing his themes from mythology, history and prevailing social problems. Many of his plays like 'Echamanayaka', 'Paduka Pattabhisheka', 'Paschattapa', 'Vishama Vivaha', 'Shakri Vilasa', 'Kabirdas' and 'Sharana Basava' earned a name for the Dattatreya Mandali. The troupe came to be recognised for its 'team spirit', 'moral character' and high water mark of acting. Garud was a hard task-master with a minute eye for details, a meticulous and patient trainer and a man with strict moral codes imposed on himself and every other

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\textsuperscript{1} The equipment included six silver pots of about 200 tolas each for use by the 'Gopis' in KrishnaLeela. and 600 tolas of gold in ornaments and decorating the throne. An amount of about Rs. 6,000/- was spent for providing special costumes and settings for the play 'Shakti Mahime'. (Collected from Sri Garud Sadasivara).
actor of the troupe. The troupe never had a woman in it, but Garud had to introduce one just to respect the resolution passed by the Second Drama Conference that met in Bangalore under the auspices of the Kannada Sahitya Parishat, in his own presidency. "So I searched and selected one of the ugliest of women but with rare histrionic talents — called Narasasani. The play 'Shakti Vilasa' I wrote essentially for her sake," 1

Dattatreya Nataka Mandal had set a standard for Karnataka in acting and effect. It was the first troupe again to kindle the fire of patriotism by powerful plays like 'Boddhapanavaka' (Kannada Kadugali) dealing with an intriguing aspect in the History of Vijaynagara and Sharana Basava giving a message of the culture and philosophy of the Karnataka country 2. The troupe established that the greatest asset of a professional troupe was its faithful actor who had the patience to learn and practise the art of drama and theatre and who had an undaunted purpose to serve it.

The troupe heralded a message that the stage is a temple of art both for the artist and the audience and that it should be treated so for the country's benefit.

1. Collected from Sri Garud Sadashivarao (Mss).
2. Sharana Basava, a saint apart from the great Basavekhara.
Garud suffered a calamity in the death of his last child, a girl of six and a 'prodigy in acting' and this proved fatal to the progress of the company. He became renounced and the company virtually came to a close in 1944. Now an old veteran of 75, Garud still hears the call of his country and nurses the ambition of reviving his troupe. Five years ago, he presided over the Drama Conference of Bellary District and convinced that the theatre of Karnataka had a tremendous task to fulfill in free India as the mouthpiece of the culture and art of the region and he considered the sound steps that could be taken in this regard. Just recently he collected the remnants of the broken troupe, came to Dharwar and put three shows of 'Ugrakalyana', a play dealing with the problem of inter-communal marriage and tired himself playing a role in it. The performances gave a glimpse of the original vigour, grandeur of production and magnificence of acting of Dattatreya Sangeeta Nataka Mandali.

Several Other Troupes:

Under the influence of one or the other of the representative professional troupes discussed, a number of other dramatic companies shot up

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2. 5th December, 1948.
particularly between 1920 and 1945 with early data written on their faces; yet some of them became well known owing to the brilliance of one or two gifted artists or because of a forceful playwright. Particular mention may be made of different troupes run by eminent artists like K. Sitarama Shastri of Sirsi (Jayakarnatak Nataka Mandali), of Siddharamappa Handigaur (Vishnu Ranjana Nataka Company), of Gangubai Guledgud (Sri Krishna Nataka Company), of Muddu Veeracharya (Sri Ramacceva Natya Samsthe) and of Basavaraj Mansur. Each one of them heralded a promise of its future in the service of the theatrical art of the land but their very strength was their weakness, in that they had all benefits and drawbacks of highly talented but single handed leadership. These troupes were essentially 'one pole tents' and none of them could survive the individual actor or playwright on whom they rested entirely. Yet the stage music of the well known 'Koppal Sangeeta Nataka Mandali', the imposing showmanship of Abbigeri Nataka Mandali of serious plays like 'Kittur, Chennamma', the attractive performances of Vijayalakshmi Nataka Sabha of Aladahalli (particularly of 'Ramanjancya' Yuddha' written by Toramagal Raj Rao) and the significant theatrical contributions of professional troupes run entirely by women, particularly of the 'Lakshmeshwar Stree Nataka Mandali' are intensely remembered to this day by those who witnessed the shows.

1 Perhaps the most famous of professional troupes run by women was the Lakshmeshwara Stree Nataka Mandali headed by Bacchasani, a well known musician of North Karnataka.
Each one of them evidently had internal worth and would have rendered better and longer services if it had received a kindlier treatment from the unwilling society, which had steadily taken to the cinema. But even to-day, in the villages, particularly on the occasion of a fair or a festival the professional troupe springs up though with little light in its eyes. There are still scores of dramatic troupes in North Karnataka and the best known are the Kola Vaibhava Natya Sangha (Belgaum) of Balappa Enige, Sharada Sangeeta Nataka Mandal (Golak) of Basavaraj Hosmari, Kumareshwara Sangeeta Nataka Mandal (Kumatagi) of Gangadhara Shastri, Lalita Kalodhara Mandal of Kanagal Hanumara, a noted playwright, Kumareshwara Kripa Poshita Natak Sangha of Puttayya Gavai, Vasavakali Natya Sangha of Arjuna Nakod and Samaja Vikasa Natya Sangha (Dodvad) of Siddhayayswami Karlawadi. Indeed these seem to be the shadow of the lost substance but they have held the stage all the same.

Career and experiment:

The career of the professional theatre of North Karnataka stretches over a period of eighty years with a clear cut division into two periods. In the first period of about thirty years up to the end of the 19th century, it steadily consolidated a sound foundation mostly owing to the inspiration provided by the Marathi theatre. Though a regular professional theatre did not find its moorings in the last century,
its preaching and rebelling produced faith in a few artistically bent enthusiastic individuals regarding its own potentialities and they chiselled out a real career for it in the period that followed.

Thus, the second stage of its career starting from the opening of the present century was a period of experiment and consolidation. The artist seemed to have more time and better freedom to serve the theatrical art and through it, the people. Each representative experimentalist worked on a different data like Shirahatti Venkotbarao and Shivamurthi Swami on showmanship, Vaman Rao on stage music, Halage Jettappa on humour and Gerud on acting and dramatic literature; yet each came to be convinced that drama needed every one of these elements in measured proportions in order to present a homogenous and symmetrical art of the theatre. The entire period still looked an age of experiment in theatrical art and the experiments themselves obviously attracted and entertained the people. The popularity of professional troupes in their working days and the happy memories they have left behind is a sufficient testimony to their enterprise and fulfilment.

PROFESSIONAL THEATRE OF MYSORE.

Conditions obtained in Mysore for the inception of the professional theatre were entirely different. It was not a challenging problem that hurried a shaping of it; there the professional theatre
was one of gradual evolution and the result of a happy co-operation between the court theatre and the folk theatre.

The beginning.

The palace of Mysore inherited a love for the dramatic art from the times of Vijayanagara and continued the tradition of extending patronage to it. "As early as in 1826, the palace had its own dramatic troupe," but this was obviously the "Bidarada Dashavatara Jela" maintained from 1812 or even earlier to perform the traditional 'Yakshagana' or 'Bhagavatara Ata' and was not a 'dramatic troupe' in the modern sense of the term. It was a happy story of court patronage extended to folk theatre but the tangible result with regard to professional theatre was achieved only in the seventies of the 19th century when the Marathi and Parsi troupes visited Mysore.

The Sangli Company (originally of Vishnupant Bhave) under the leadership of Maladewabhat paid a visit to Mysore in 1876-77 and staged mythological plays both for the public and at the palace in the presence of King Chennarajendra Wodeyar, and brought about a great revelation in the mind of the public. Learning of the uprurous success of the Sanglikar troupe, the Victoria Parsi Company paid a visit to Mysore the next year and staged 'Indra Satha', and 'Gulabkavali' with dazzling costumes, settings and

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These performances stunned the people who were used to witnessing only the 'Basavatara' plays. More than anything, the wonder for them was the curtains that rolled up and down 'automatically'. They never understood the language of the plays but still, came in hordes for the shows mainly to see the miracle performed by the curtain, never minding any disparity in settings or situations on the stage. The performances of the visiting troupes opened the eyes of the people to the possibilities of establishing permanent theatres which could utilise the histrionic talent of the region to profit, entertainment and instruction of the public.

The Palace Company. In 1880, King Chamarajendra Wodeyar instructed the students of the Royal School (attached to the Palace) to try theatrical experiments, and they staged the play 'Prahlada'. Though in Marathi, the play was much

1. The Parsis had four different sets of curtains with matching side-wings - the front curtain (Ankada Phrade), the 'forest curtain', the 'court curtain' and the 'street curtain'. Three or four feet in front of the 'Ankada Phrade', kerosene lamps were placed in a row on the stage. For imposing scenes like the King's Court ('Durbar') and during Dances, the Parsis used burning sticks called 'Matapu' that emitted coloured light.

2. The Parsi settings and scenery were obviously more odd than the Marathi ones which were simple and shrewd. The Parsi curtain which provided the background for an intimate mythological theme like 'Indra Sabha' had the 'Miniser Castle', or the inner apartment of a French hotel painted on it. In the play, the King got a throne all right, but the members of the 'Durbar' sat on fashionable folding chairs.
relished as it was so entirely different from the usual 'Dasavatara rasa'. A little later, the encouragement students staged a play in English 'Finished Apartments'.

C. Rangacharlu, the then Dewan of Mysore, who witnessed the performances of the Royal School clearly saw the advantages of developing a local theatre. With the permission of the Maharaja, he instructed the court poets - Basavappa Sastri, Sosale Ayya Shastri, Jayarayacharya and others, each to write out one play in Kannada. An early and fruitful result was the rendering of 'Shakuntala' into Kannada by Basavappa Sastri. The Dewan, himself a scholar in Sanskrit was very happy at the translation and the play was taken up with the artists drawn from the Royal School. It was carefully rehearsed under the supervision of the Head-master B. Mallappa (to check up pronunciation of words and acting), Asthana Vidwan Sadashivarao and Subhanna (training the artists in Music) and R. Pashunatharao (general supervision of production). The troupe was called 'Shakuntala Karnataka Natke Sabha' as it was the first troupe to stage the Kannada version of the immortal play of Kalidasa. After rigorous rehearsals, the

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1 It is said that when one day the Dewan came to the Palace for royal audience, he met on the ground floor a group of young and educated officials connected with the Palace indulging in leisurely informal talking. The Dewan was greeted by them and as he went up, he thought they were imitating him at his back. He was right, for, when he took a look at them from 'Chandra Shale', they were imitating the method and manner of his gestures and talking. The young group got a rude shock when it suddenly realised that the Dewan had observed its indulgence. The Dewan later received the young men and said with a smile as to how happy he was at their histrionic talents. Some of them were immediately taken up as members of the Palace Dramatic Company. (C. Ananda Rao: Rangabhoomi - Sept. 1925, p. 44).
play was first staged in the Palace in November, 1881, and the talented troupe that consisted of Lakshmipati Sastri (Shakuntala), M.D. Subbanna (Dushyanta), Giribhatta Tammayya (Kanva) and Devaraj Urs (Vidyashaka) was richly honoured for its triumphant success. The show was put up for the public in the specially erected stage at Kalyani Maidan in December 1881. The people for the first time saw the marvel of a play in such settings, costumes and performed in their own language; the miracle was performed by the curtain in the same way as it did on the Parsi stage. This great success, prompted the troupe to move to Bangalore and put up public shows early in 1882. The Palace Company earned a great reputation and as a token of gratitude to the King who was responsible to bring it into being, inaugurating the era of the professional theatre of Mysore, the name 'Shakuntala Karnataka Nataka Sabha' was altered to be 'Sri Chamaraendra Karnataka Nataka Sabha' in 1882.

On the instructions of the Maharaja who desired that well known English plays also should be translated into Kannada, enthusiasts like C. Subba Rao and A. Amrada Rao translated Shakespeare's Othello, Romeo and Juliet and the Merchant of Venice. These plays, when staged by the reputed "Palace Company" - as the troupe was popularly called - changed the public taste considerably and refined the stage productions from the standards of the performance of Dasavatarada Ata. The troupe gradually equipped itself with new plays - all translated from Sanskrit, like - -
'Vikramorvasesya', 'Chanda Kaushika' (both translated by Sosale Ayya Sastri), 'Ratnavali', 'Uttararoma Charitre' and 'Malati Madhava' (translated by Basavappa Sastri).

The main roles like 'Shurasena' (Shurasena Charitre), Ramavarma (Ramavarma-Leelavati) and Aswathama (Venisamhara) were played by certain Ramaram, and roles like 'lusyangte' 'Udayana' and 'Manmatha' by M.D. Subbanna while the talented Lakshmipati Sastri played the leading female roles.

In the year 1884, Bidarada Krishnappa, a prominent court musician was put in charge of rehearsals, and H. Lingaraja Urs, the Darbar Bhaksh, in charge of general administration. Sri Krishnappa collected the cream of the talent available in Mysore and in 1889 secured the services

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1 Raja Ravivarma, the great painter and critic who had extensively toured India is said to have paid a compliment to Lakshmipati Sastri as the most gifted actor at the times in India. A.V. Varadachar accepted him as his ideal in acting. Lakshmipati Sastri later played every different type of role - starting from Veerasena down to the clownish demon - with rare brilliance. (C. Ananda Rao - MSS).

2 Bidarada Krishnappa with his great accomplishments in music and acting was a prominent member of the 'Dasavatara Mela' of the Palace from 1865 and thus, had a rich experience to fill this post.

M. Venkata Krishnayya - 'Kale', III-1, July 1931.
of Mandyam Rangacharya who was already well known for his great histrionic talents, Puttari Sastri who later excelled himself in humorous roles and also Janjuti Seshagirirao, a well trained musician with considerable histrionic ability. This talented group guided and rehearsed by Bidarada Krishnapapa marked the inauguration of the golden era of the professional theatre of Mysore. It set out early in 1890s on a tour to the distant parts of Karnataka including Dharwar, Belgaum and Bellary and

1 Mandyam Rangacharya was one of those who were enthused by the Marathi shows in 1878. He collected his talented friends and started a troupe called 'Rajadhani Ratak Mandali' and successfully staged in 1881 Kannada version of the play 'Banasupakshana' of the Sangli Company. He earned a great reputation as one of the most talented actors that Mysore ever produced. Under his leadership the troupe had a "friendly rivalry" with the Palace Company.

2 While in Bellary, on seeing the play 'Shurasanen Charite' (Othello), a British Army Officer (a Lt. Col.) hailed the play as a model translation and paid a public tribute to Rama Rao's talents (certain Ramnaro who played the hero) that he eminently fitted to be counted among the greatest of British actors and that it was doubtful if even the greatest of British actors could compare well with Rama Rao in the role of Othello. Next day, Sri Rama Rao and the entire troupe was taken round in procession by the citizens of Bellary and was given valuable gifts. (C. Anenda Rao. MSS).
roused a new consciousness towards the Kannada drama.

Much later, when Sardar M. Gopalaraj Urs took charge of the management, the troupe undertook for the first time an extensive tour of Andhra and Tamilnad. The Palace troupe had an established high standard of acting and showmanship and continued its taste for classical plays and dignified portrayal. With these qualities it survived with success the keen competition of several dramatic groups that had sprung up both in the capital and in the round about cities, to rival with it.¹

In the year 1917 the palace decided to disband the troupe and distributed all the fabulous theatrical property among members who were permitted to choose their own careers. Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV permitted also the revival of the old 'Shakuntala' Karnataka Natana Sabha independent of the Palace.

It is the royal patronage that inaugurated the era of the professional theatre in Mysore. Though the members of the Palace troupe were themselves receiving salary from the Palace, it was only a token pay. The fact that the

¹ There came up a rival group in the Palace itself when the independent minded prince Nanjaraja Bahadur of Madana Vilasa started his own dramatic troupe and staged Tula Bhara, Ramayana and Nala Charite. K. Raghavachar and Veerappa played the leading male and female roles. The troupe staged its plays in Bangalore in 1884-85 with some success but soon turned to be a troupe only for private entertainments. (G. Ananda Rao. Mss).
Palace Company put up public shows on tickets confirms the professional attitude of it and secondly actors like Mandyam Rangacharya, N. Subbanna and B. Jachappa were employed as actors with their full time profession on the stage. Finally, the palace troupe led the way and inspired scores of dramatic troupes after the year 1882 and thus contributed in establishing the professional theatre of Mysore on a sound foundation. Their friendly rivalry resulted in better selection of plays and improved methods of presentation. As in North Karnataka the credit of inspiring an indigenous theatre in Mysore goes to the Marathi touring companies initially, but, it is the Palace that nursed it with great care and concern and set to its firm establishment and safe development. King Chamaraja Wodeyar took personal care in the individual actor and his comfort. While on the royal tour and often in the Palace, the actors enjoyed the same food and comforts as the King himself, at his command. When the King went out of the State he invariably took his actors with him and made them witness the presentations of other companies in different languages. He sent some of the leading artists including 'certain Rama Rao' to the Balliwalla Company in Bombay to 'observe' the stage craft in order to incorporate their

The King ordered for costumes, settings and all the equipment for the several plays, and built a small stage in the palace at 'Karikal Potti' and even allowed the troupe to have its rehearsals in "Chandra Shale", an outer apartment of the Palace. The troupe had the best benefits of the cooperation of the well known Pandits and musicians of the Palace all at the royal command. It was privileged to be under the direct supervision of the 'Durbar Bhakshi', the Chief Officer of the Palace affairs. The Dewan and the Maharaja were keenly interested in its progress. Such an atmosphere would keep the troupe fully alert, and motivate it to achieve things that were impossible for others.

**Contributions of the Palace Company:**

The greatest of royal gifts to the theatre of Karnataka is the Kannada plays themselves starting from "Shakuntala". The year 1320 marked the age of translations in Mysore and from then, at the royal command the learned Pandits of the Court set themselves at the task of rendering into Kannada well known Sanskrit and English plays. This created a flare for translating plays from Sanskrit and English. Many a Sanskrit
Theatre was then firmly established in Mysore essentially by the interest and encouragement given to it by the Maharaja Sri Chamarajendra Wodeyar. Even after the dissolution of the 'Palace Company' that did 'monumental service' to the King and the country, the kindly disposition of the Court, continued towards the theatrical art of Karnataka. The Palace has extended material support to different professional troupes wherever they came from and therefore, it is looked up to as an unfailing patron of the Karnataka theatre.

Yet the dissolution of the Palace Company rendered a hard hit to the theatrical art of Mysore and stunted the growth of its dramatic literature. The disbanded artists joined together under the leadership of N. Subbanna — the veteran actor of the Palace Company and revived the 'Shakuntala Karnataka Natana Sabha' late in 1917. The old plays were picked up, rehearsed by the re-shuffled
troupe and were staged with success in Bangalore and Bellary. The troupe returned to Mysore in 1918 and went defunct owing to disagreement among the members. The frustrate Subbanna and B. Rachappa 'retired' from the stage, but within a year in 1919 they were harnessed again by their admiring friends and well-wishers of the theatre to open a new troupe under the banner 'Sri Chamundeshwari Karnataka Nataka Sabha'.

Professional Rivals:

Early in 1880s, inspired by the performances of the Marathi and Parsi companies on the one hand, and by the success of the Palace Company on the other, several troupes with the ideal of fostering the art of the theatre on professional lines sprang up. Mandyam Rangachar who was later claimed to be a veteran artist had started the 'Rajadhani Nataka Mandali' in 1881. Before joining the Palace troupe, certain Rama Rao had one of his own. S.S. Scdtur and N.T. Gopala Iyengar had started a group of professional artists at Bangalore in 1883. In Bangalore there was already a dramatic troupe staging 'polished' plays and this was most probably of Bullappa, a local wealthy merchant. Every one of these troupes seems to have flourished with good success in the initial stages, but not one of them seems to have lived long.

'Gubbi Company':

There is but one exception in Gubbi Chamabassaveshwara Kriya Poshita Nataka Sangha that came into being in the same transitional period. The
troupe has flourished till this day with considerable development in all the facets of the stage craft. The Sangha was established in 1834 by the organized efforts of Gubbi Chandram, Abdul Aziz Saheb and Sahuvar Neelakanthappa, who represented incidentally, the three prominent communities of Jaina, Muslim and Veerashaiva of the village Gubbi in Tunkur. The company was named after the presiding deity of Gubbi and met its initial expenses with the subscriptions raised from the public. The troupe, consisting of the young and the enthusiastic of the village adapted as its first play for the stage - 'Kumara Ramana Kathe' - a well known Yakshagana of the time and made changes in it to suit the stage but the traditional Bhagavata, the chorus (Himmela and Mummela) and all the other accessories of Yakshagana were availed of. It was co-incidental, however, that on the day of the very first performance of 'Kumara Rama', the Maharaja of Mysore - Chamarajendra Wadayar, the patron of the 'Palace Company' happened to be at the village Gubbi. The patron volunteered to witness the performance. He was happy at the show and blessed the young troupe expressing his joy.

Accidental though, the royal presence at the show gave a fillip and unusual publicity for the already enthusiastic troupe and it set out to Bangalore, staged the same play early in 1886 and earned a good name.
After witnessing the more polished performances of the troupe of Bullappa, the proprietors of the Gubbi troupe made immediate changes and got a new play "Chorakathe" written by Veerappa Sastri, rehearsed it and after returning to the native village, staged it on an improvised platform with good settings and self-raising curtains. The troupe soon equipped itself with new plays on varying themes — though mostly mythological — like 'Pandava Vijays', 'Jagannohana Charitre', 'Harischandra', 'Indra Sabha', 'Dharmapala Charitre' and 'Satyavarma Charitre'. The new method of a separate "comic farce" like 'Mital Samkar' was also introduced at this stage to provide humour for the audience and break the serious monotony of the play.

The present proprietor of the troupe — G.H. Veeranna — while a boy of 6 years of age, joined the troupe in 1396 and gradually became a past-master in the stage craft. In 1917 he virtually became the master of the entire management and from that day to this, he has moved his troupe from success to success.

The biography of the Gubbi company indicates that it had a glorious and impressive past and all this, mostly due to the ceaseless efforts, foresight and ability of Veeranna. With his inimitable capacity to spot the real talent, he brought successful playwrights like Bellave Narahari Sastri, Bhimaraju and B. Puttaswamiah to serve the stage. He built up a galaxy of artists of commendable
made ability and then dedicate themselves to the stage. He spared all his efforts and money to make the troupe by far the best in South India and he can as well be proud of making his troupe the ambassador of the dramatic literature and theatrical art of Karnataka—other provinces and particularly in Telugu and Tamil areas. Above all, it is to the credit of Veeranna to have lifted up the theatrical art of Karnataka to the pedestal of both respectability and popularity.

Gubbi's is the longest and, perhaps, most colourful of careers of the professional troupes of Karnataka. As early as in 1923 the troupe set out to Madras and staged plays to the great relish of the people over there. The success and impression of the tour brought about royal patronage to the troupe in Mysore. In 1924, the troupe built its own play house in Bangalore. In 1925, for the first time, a Children's Theatre was attempted in the 'Bala Kal Vardhini Nataka Sangha', which became quite a popular institution with young and promising artists taking part in plays. The young troupe toured all over Karnataka on professional lines. In 1926, Veeranna seems to have accepted the leadership of a professional troupe of Gadag. At this time, it is said that the Gubbi concern had a big train of about 250 persons including the artists and their families to maintain. With an undaunted zeal, new plays were taken up and rehearsed separately by the three sections of the great concern which toured in their own
specified regions. The main branch of the troupe under the leadership of Veeranna himself made an extensive tour of the South including Salem, Madras and Coimbatore. After returning to Bangalore, another play house was built with modern amenities and comforts for the audience, which was opened by the then Dewan of Mysore, Sir Mirza M. Ismail in 1930. The troupe went over again to Adoni and Raichur, picked up the popular Marathi play 'Shiva Chhatrapati', got it translated and adapted into Kannada as 'Swami Nistha', and staged it with great success. Imposing settings, scenery and costumes on the one hand and impressive acting of a talented band of artists which included G. Nareshrao, M.V. Subbayya Naidu, Gurumoortappa, U.K. Vyasarao and Sundaramma brought continued success to the company. During the years 1932-34 the troupe visited Udipi and Mangalore in South Canara and also Trichy, Ettiyapuram, Kumbakonam and other important centres in South India. The Golden Jubilee of the Troupe was pompously celebrated in 1930 under the presidency of the then Dewan Sir Mirza M. Ismail. To fit in the occasion and to hit a landmark, Veeranna got the play 'Kurukshetra' based on the classical theme of Mahabharata written by B. Puttaswamiah and brought it on the stage with special settings, scenery and equipment made at a fabulous cost of about thirty thousand rupees.¹ The play hit the high water-mark of literary merit, acting ability and pomp of production.

¹ Bellave Narahari Sastri: Stage Centenary Vol. 1, p. 47.
It marked again a revolution in the mind of the audience with regard to theatrical possibilities when interred with a zeal. The production as planned was a challenge to the screen which was slowly but surely setting into the soil of the Kannada land "to uproot the professional stage."

The troupe put on 40 continuous shows of 'Kurukshetra' in Bangalore and set out by special train on an extensive tour of the South again, covering Warangal, Bezwada, Aniknada, Vijayanagara, Nellur and other centres, staging plays in Telugu and Tamil. The troupe received rich rewards and honours all over. It was during this tour that Veeranna was publicly honoured in Vijayanagara with the title 'Karnataka Andhra Nataka Sarvabhauma' a rare compliment to the theatrical art of Karnataka. Veeranna was a bold adventurer but his adventures were mostly favoured by good luck when compared with scores of other ill-fated professional troupes of Mysore including even the Ratnavali Theatrical Company of A.V. Varadachar. For once, the film houses of the South found the real competitor in Veeranna who had diverted the people from the film-houses to the theatre.

On returning to Mysore, the troupe performed plays in the royal audience and was honoured with rich gifts including an 'elephant cub' for taking part in plays. The year 1938 saw the zenith of the group of Veeranna's productions. Elephants, horses and moving chariots took part

1 When the grand shows of Veeranna were on the stage in the South, "many film shows were cancelled and the organisers wrote and wired to the distributors asking them not to send good films owing to negligible public response to the films because of Gubbi's Kurukshetra". A.N. Krishna Rao: Karnataka Kalavidaru- 1. p.120.
in 'Kurukshetra' and clever filmic devices manipulated by projectors brought about a touch of reality to the miracles performed in the play. Gubbi's had become virtually a colossal art institution with its fabulous paraphernalia, a band of over a hundred talented artists, scores of merited plays well rehearsed, and with perhaps an unsurpassed pomp in showmanship. At this stage, Gubbi's was perhaps the most colourful and the best equipped professional troupe in South India.

The success had evidently brought a satisfaction to the ambitious Veeranna who sought other venues for exploration. He was convinced of his supremacy in the world of the South Indian theatre and now in 1940 desired to make a debut on the screen and once taken, the decision was pursued with prompt action; but this deviation obviously brought a hard hit to the Kannada theatre, and it should be said that the film did not take him to that lofty position which the theatre had honoured him with.

Though virtually deviated towards the films Veeranna did not wind up his well established dramatic concern. The management was handed over to M.R.Chennappa and A.C.Mahadevaswami who maintained the good name and honour of the concern with their able administration. In 1944 the troupe arrived in Mysore and drew packed houses for a hundred and twenty-five continuous shows of 'Sri RamaKrishna' and the Centenary Celebration of the play was conducted on a grand scale. The year 1945 saw the troupe again in Mysore, and this time, seventeen plays were staged at the palace.
In 1946, the well equipped play house that was built in Bangalore at huge costs and under careful technical supervision was opened by Dr. T.C.M. Rayon and was named 'Gubbi Chenna Basaveshwara Nataka Shala'. The troupe got up new plays like 'Usha Swayanvara' and toured the entire Karnataka once again and the year 1948 saw the grand celebration of the Centenary of the Kannada Stage and the diamond Jubilee of the Gubbi Company. The Centenary Celebration, inaugurated by the Maharaja of Mysore attracted playwrights, actors and producers from all over Karnataka. With its splendour and pomp, the celebration marked the crowning climax to a colourful and meaningful career.

The splendidous celebration was the first of its kind perhaps in the entire South India conducted in such a magnificent measure. It was in a way a great attempt to collect, consolidate and rebuild the structure of the professional theatre of Karnataka. It was a grand example no doubt, but it seemed to be almost the last glow of the going light. This discordant note of pessimism was supported because Veeranna had become essentially film-minded and ceased to take any worthy interest in his dramatic troupe which continued to receive of course, his moral and material support. As a result of his own deviating towards making films, many of his good artists including Honnappa Bhagavat, M.V.S. Naidu, B. Jayamma, Raghavendra Rao and Vasudevarao Girimaji took to films and were lost for the stage. Some of the old veterans were dead, but still the troupe went on and on, staging new plays and touring all over Karnataka.
The troupe paid recent visits to North Karnataka with impressive social plays like 'Sahukar', 'Addadari' and 'Kalachakra'.

The colourful career of the Gubbi Company from 1884 with 'Kumara Ramana Katha' a typical play of the folk theatre to 1954 with the social play 'Sahukar' replete with fresh humour - brings a few points of observation that may provide clues for its success and impression. The Gubbi Company seems to owe its prosperous name to its remarkable capacity to adapt itself to suit the changing times and tastes; yet putting every effort to maintain a good standard of literary merit and dignity of production. It staged as many as about forty different plays on mythological, historical and also of social themes, though the proportion of the mythological themes is overbalancing. Apart from discovering and tapping the men of letters to write out plays, some of the very popular plays were translated from other languages mostly from Marathi and

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1 Some of the very popular mythological plays of the Gubbi Company before 1900 were 'Pandava Vijaya', 'Satya Harishchandra', 'Indrakshita', 'Dharmapala Charitre', 'Satyavarma Charitre', (after 1900) - 'Prabhahani Vijaya', 'Vasanathmitra Vijaya', 'Prahlada Charitre', 'Subhadra Parinaya', (after 1915) - 'Sri Krishna Leela', 'Kamsavadha', 'Rukmani Swayamvara', 'Jalindhara', 'Marakendeya', 'Savitri', 'Kurukshetra' and 'Usha Swayamvara'. Some of the popular historical plays were 'Karnatak Samrajya', 'Swami Hithe', 'Bheema Kabir', 'Sadhu Tukaram' and 'Akka Mahadevi'; some of the popular social plays were 'Chalti Dunia', 'Sura Mahati', 'Sahukar', 'Addadari', 'Kalachakra'.

adapted to the Kannada stage. While on tour in the South the troupe staged its plays mostly in Telugu or Tamil and thus gained great popularity. The success and progress of the company owes itself to the theatrical genius and leadership of Veerama, a staunch practicalist with a perfect clear sight into things. He saw the future prosperity in the impression of the present. He invested most of his returns for the improvement of the stage itself on the one hand and always tried his very best to keep his artists above want. He believed in creating a colossal impression in his audiences and so never hesitated in spending money on fabulous scenery, settings, costumes and stage devices. He was right in his conviction that the best method of keeping the troupe popular and prosperous was to keep it always on its wheels touring from city to city and province to province in spite of odds and ends. His great success in Tamilnad, Andhra and all over Karnataka established the saying that true art has no barrier of language. It goes to the credit of Gubbi Company to have contributed in a large measure to establish the Karnataka theatre on a firm footing in the Kannada land and heralding its reputation all over the South.

Contemporary Troupes: It was during the last two decades of the 19th century, the professional theatre of mysore built up its solid foundation mainly on account of scores of

1 The important ones are 'Suresmahime' ('Kach Pyala'), 'Raja Bhakti' ('Rakṣeṣa Mehtyakaksha'), 'Karnatak Sarrajya' ('Rana Dundubhi') and 'Swami Mistle' ('Chatrapati Shivaji').
2 The highest pay that was paid by the Gubbi troupe at the times of proprietor Chandrama was rupees fifteen (excluding the expenses of maintenance) which steadily rose up to an amount of 1350/- paid by Veerama to an actor like G. Bagesharao as his monthly pay after 1930.
professional troupes that sprang up in every important city of Mysore State— and particularly in Mysore and Bangalore. The Palace Company was started in 1831, Metropolitan Theatrical Company in the same year, Bullappa's troupe in about 1831 (Bangalore), 'Rasika Manollasini Nataka Sabha' of Peri Shama Iyengar and the famed Gollapet Nataka Company in 1884, 'Srikanteshwara Nataka Sabha' of M.L. Srikantegowda in about 1894, the Bangalore Union in 1898—and scores of others came into being in the last decade of the 19th century. These were only representative troupes known for quality productions and many of them stretched themselves across into the first quarter of the 20th century. Among them all, a troupe that lived a brilliant life and made an ineffaceable impression on Karnatak was the Ratnavali Theatrical Company of A.V. Varadachar, "the uncrowned King of the theatre of Mysore".

**Varadachara Comes on the Scene:** The foundation of the Ratnavali Theatrical Company is to be seen in the 'Metropolitan Theatrical Company' that was started in Mysore in the year 1882 in 'friendly rivalry' with the palace company. It was started by Mandyam Rangachar 'the first actor of Mysore' with a group of lawyers and officials but soon, his troupe came to be dissolved after a very short 'career of unexampled success and popularity' as Rangachar himself was coaxed to join the palace company to play the leading romantic roles. Gauri Narasimhaya, who used to play the leading female roles collected the remnants of the material resources and talents of the troupe and revived it in about 1886,
under a different name 'Sri Saraswati Vilasa Nataka Sabha'.

"It was into this venture that Varadachar first

It was only a
discovered himself. The rest was only a
case of I came, I saw, I conquered. From the year

1889, practically, the dramatic career of Varadachar

had begun and for nearly 36 years he was the un-
crowned king of the Kannada stage." Varadachar

had come to stay and to place the emphasis of theatrical

success essentially on the actor.

The dramatic troupe set out in 1890 under the guidance

of Gauri Narasimhayya up on an extensive tour of the importa-
t cities of Karnataka and the Bellary district and soon

earned money and fame. The main reason for its success

was its high standard of acting and music. In 1896, Vara-
dachar made a mark as a prodigy of histrionics but soon,

just when he was blossoming into fullness the company got

disrupted at Mysore due to differences among its members.

Varadachar gave up the stage and joined the office of the

British Resident in Bangalore as a clerk. An attempt to

start 'The Bangalore Union' with Varadachar as its chief

actor failed. When Varadachar returned to Mysore with a

1 M.A.Gopalaswami Iyengar observes that the original name

was 'Sri Sarasvati Vilasa Ratnavali Nataka Sabha' (A.V.

Varadachar- a sketch of his life and career 1'25.p.6).

But it is improbable for the term 'Ratnavali' seems to

have been first considered in 1904 by Varadachar himself

because the Kannada version of the play 'Ratnavali' when

first staged, seems to have brought him great name and

money. Then he seems to have declared

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2 Y.Bhaskaran: 'Theatre' (Bangalore) March, 1931. p.32.
heavy heart of a broken man as he had lost his wife and the only son, he was persuaded with great difficulty to revive the old Saraswativilasa Nataka Company of Gauri Narasimhayya. Being unable to resist the forceful persuasion of his admiring friends who desired to make him the sole proprietor and stage director, Varadachar at last consented and the company started on its great career in December, 1904 "with a borrowed capital of Rs.200".  

The troupe was renamed "the Ratnavali Theatrical Company" after the great success of the initial play 'Ratnavali'.

It was the genius of one man-Varadachar that moved the troupe from success to success for about 20 years from this time onwards. Within six years, about 20 plays staged by the troupe made it famous- and particularly, 'Sakuntala', 'Nirupema', 'Mamatha Vijaya', 'Ratnavali', 'Visumileele', in which Varadachar played the leading roles established a coveted reputation for the troupe. In 1910, when Varadachar witnessed at Mysore the impressive performances of the visiting Govinda Suami Naikar's troupe of Madras he was convinced of the theatrical scope provided by mythological themes, and so he got Bajakavi Srinivasa Iyengar to write out the stage play 'Pralhada' for the troupe. The play when staged "became a rage" and went on continuously for nights at length. The same play was staged in Bangalore continuously for 26 nights drawing crowded houses to the specially effected tent theatre which accommodated about 1,590 persons. The

1 V. Bhaskaran: 'Theatre' (Bangalore) March, 1931.
troupe staged in the palace 5 different plays including 'Prahlada' in the royal presence and was rewarded. In 1912, the troupe set out on an extensive tour of South India visiting Erode, Coimbatore, Karaikudi, Selam, Kumbakonam, Mangalore, Udupi, Kundapur, Tirthahalli and Bellary. In 1913, Bangalore gave a public reception to the troupe and the next year, under the chairmanship of the Minister Sardar Kantaraj Urs, the public of Mysore honoured Varadachar with the title 'Gifted Actor' and rich presents. The latter part of 1914 saw the troupe again at Udupi at the invitation of the 'Asta Muth'. In 1917-18, the troupe toured again extensively in the South including the Madras Presidency. At Trichy, Kumbakonam, Kadhura and Mangalore, the troupe was publicly honoured as a great ambassador of the theatrical art of Karnataka. It was in Trichy that Dr. Annie Besant presided over a well-attended public meeting and honoured Varadachar with the title 'Nataka Siromani' the one title which he proudly bore on his breast till the end of his days. By 1922, Varadachar was the best known actor in South India, and his troupe the most successful; but he was tired and in addition was getting old (53 years of age). Being unable to bear the entire burden and brunt of a train of about fifty artists and their families, he accepted to amalgamate his own troupe with the 'Sharada Theatrical Company' at the latter's responsibility of management. For three months after the amalgamation in the beginning of the year 1923, the troupe toured again in the South with richly deserved honours. Soon after its return, the new company came to a close due to internal differences and made Varadachar feel
disappointed and almost frustrated. He still gathered up his courage and old colleagues to revive the old 'Krutnavali Theatrical Company' during the latter part of 1923. The troupe strenuously endeavoured to put on the stage, three full-length mythological plays—'Vishnuleela', 'Ramayana', and 'Mahabharata'. When compared with its previous masterpieces like 'Shakuntala', 'Miraupama' and 'Pralhad', these full-length shows proved to be scrawny attempts at dramatising the long narrative epics. Still the troupe toured about in Mysore State and in 1925, the public of Bangalore honoured Varadachar with a precious necklace as a token of appreciation of his services to the theatrical art and the country. A year later, Varadachar died; and without him, the troupe could not but come to a standstill.

Varadachar's troupe gave an unfailing feast of entertainment both to the learned and the lay. Its asset was its gifted artists like Krishnamoorthi Rao (for humour, Bodhara, and R.Nagendra Rao (lady roles), Mari Rao (for devotional roles like Pralhad), Iaja Iyengar (for music), K.Seetharama-rao and others who provided a solid foundation for the grand superstructure of the theatrical art built by the genius of Varadachar. He made a few outstanding contributions; with his innovation to the theatre of Mysore and the stage-music is one of them. Varadachar's was a notable diversion from the

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1 "Mr. Bodhara is the most alluring and delightful heroine-actor. He is the witching consort of Mr. Varadachar's reign and Mr. Krishnamoorthai is a great comic-genius and is unrivalled as Vidshaka". M.A.Gopalswami Iyengar: Op.cit. # p.4.
old methods and set styles of stage songs. In fact, he originated a new method in stage music that became fashionable for decades after his death. The classical Kannada metres—Kanda, and Vrittta were rescued from their narrow obscure settings, were couched in pure Karnatak music and were vitalised with power and beauty. Varadachar saw to it that music was a supporting influence for the full rousing of a sentiment. The sound pit was introduced in order to establish a better contact between the singer on the stage and the instruments which remained till then at the sidelines with obvious disadvantages. Varadachar favoured the leg-harmonium because of its volume and capacity to provide musical effects, and every other professional troupe took to the harmonium henceforth. Ratnavali Theatrical Company became the last word for the high water-mark of acting with understanding. In order to serve every taste, Varadachar introduced dances in his performances as an interlude or as a part of the play itself like in the court-scene of 'Gods and Monarchs'. More important than even these was the better method of make-up, rationalisation of costumes, dignified interpretation of characters and better exploitation of 'light and shadow', particularly as in the play 'Harischandra' in the 'burial ground' scene.

1 "संस्कृतिक अवस्था अंतर्गत स्त्रियां के नामकरण - राजावर्मन चिकित्सक"
V. Sitaramaniah. 'Rangabhoomi' May, 1931. p. 131

2 Introduction of harmonium was done due to the influence of Balliwala Company. Varadachar deputed one of his skillful artists—Seshagirirao to Bombay for training in the art of the instrument. C. Amradas (MS).

3 The first dances on the stage were performed by 'Dance Shamarao' in about the year 1913. V. Sitaramaniah Op.cit. p.180.
Costumes were made to look more natural with the stage settings and spirit of the play. Great sages like Viswamitra and Vasistha and female roles discarded their socks. Sakuntala of the hermitage was released of the heavy load of her ornaments and colourful gold laced costumes. 'Sakuni' would no more look like a 'Rajput Sardar', nor Duryodhana as a Muslim Nawwab nor even Bhima as 'a ghost driving grotesque wizard'. It was a real resurrection for the mythological characters from the fashions and costumes of the 20th century. It was to the credit of Varadachar to have had a more rational idea about the settings to match with the scene and sequence.

With an elevated standard set for acting, a new style of 'dramatic music' and a clear cut deviation in the manner of dressing and method of presentation, the Ratnavali troupe gave a new fashion to the Kannada Stage, that was once re-verting and long sustaining. It was all due to the genius of Varadachar whose 'versatile art' was God's solid gift to the Kannada world. The Kannada stage had its very bright days in the times of Varadachar and though there is an obvious touch of exaggeration, Varadachar was not far from the fact when he observed in 1939/"Some day when there was nothing of a

1 As suggested by reviewers regarding the stage plays, the professional stage usually presented mythological heroes and heroines in strikingly odd costumes which reflected but on the prevailing fashions and notions of early 20th century rather than on the mythological settings of the play. A.N. Krishnarao: Review of 'Purukshetra'-Visvakarnatak of 21st Jan., 1933.

2 Available accounts and photographic illustrations indicate that Varadachar himself dressed up for 'Dushyanta' in the royal long coat with gold borders, tight trousers and a head dress with 'furai'. This was indeed far from the modes of dressing at the times of Kalidasa, but the audience relished it for that was the 'royal dress' in the 20th century and 'looked more natural than the Kings of EanyAvanotier troupe.'

3 V. Bhaskaran: 'Theatre- I'. p.39
stage, Varadacharya and Krishnamurthi not only built a stage for Karnataka but also earned a status for it. They had to stop somewhere and they did; but from that day to this, the Karnataka theatre has not moved an inch.¹

Followers of the Method: The prominent among the several professional troupes that bore the print of the influence of Varadacharya were 'Sri Chemundeshwari Karnataka Nataka Sabha' (1919-1946) headed by N.Subbana, a veteran actor of the Palace Company and after him, by R.Nagendra Rao who was said to be "a gift of Varadachar to the Kannada stage," and the 'Chandra Kala Nataka Mandali' (1930-37) of Mohamad Peer, an actor of consummate talent of whom the Karnataka theatre could well be proud of. The former troupe, an organised limited company with a Board of Directors and a galaxy of brilliant and experienced artists including G.Nageshrao, T.Mallappa, R.Nagendra Rao, Krishnamurthi Rao, Mari Rao and B.Rachappa, strove in the methods of making the performances most imposing on the lines set by Varadachar with 'colossal stage devices to create theatrical illusions'.² The troupe staged mostly mythological plays like 'Danashoora Kama', 'Rajasooya Yaga', 'Bhishma Pratignye' and 'Veera Abhimanyu' and toured with success and impression in the neighbouring Telgu and Tamil areas. After the disruption of the Palace Company and the

¹ K.S.Karanth- Parishat Patrike- Jan-March: 1939, p.14
Rainavalli Sabha, it is the Chamundeshwari Troupe that made an attempt to bring together all the veteran—but frustrated artists together. It continued the traditions of Varadachar and yet tried an experiment in administration by becoming a limited company in the interest of longevity.

The 'Chandrakala Randali' of Mohamad Peer, with its short but glittering career of seven years made an ineffaceable impression on all the different regions of the Karnataka land. Its emphasis was on dignity in showmanship and understanding in acting, on the lines prescribed by Varadachar. The troupe became the beloved of Karnataka for its plays 'Gautama Buddha' (written by B. Puttaswami), 'Shahjahan' (Translation of Dwijendralal Roy) and 'Somsara Nauka (by H. L. N. Simha) in which Peer played the leading roles with M. V. Rajamma and H. L. N. Simha supporting him. The equipment of the troupe was comparatively meagre, its music was thin, it seldom had the stage devices to perform theatrical tricks and yet, it ruled over the theatrical world of Karnataka, though for a short while, brushing aside even a colossal concern like the Guhibi's. When Peer passed away all too suddenly in 1936, even his professional rivals paid homage to this genius-actor and the land mourned the loss of one of its most efficient dramatic troupes.

Among the other troupes which pursued the dramatic profession with a steadfast zeal in the traditions of Varadachar, 'Sri Chandramouleshwara Kripa Pochita Hatake Sabha' of C. B. Mallappa who was titled 'Abhinava Bhakta Shiromani' for his grand portrayal of roles of saint poets like Kabirde,
Tukaram and Tulsidas, and 'Sri Saraswati Prasadita Nataka Sabha' of M.V. Shivappa and M.V. Madappa— the gifted 'cross actors'— are prominent. But, starting from the great—Varadachar, most of the well known troupes— with the single exception of that of Peer—staged mythological plays only. It was essentially left to the lot of K. Hiriyamaya to have turned the taste of the people towards the social themes.

A deviation: A deviation from the prescribed lines of the theatrical art with regard to its heavy themes and 'dignity' of production was made by Hiriamayya, one of the most talented and imaginative theatrical leaders that Karnataka produced. He believed in the method of "lesson with a laugh" and his team became perhaps the most popular after the demise of Mohammad Peer in 1936.

K. Hiriamayya who had the sound grounding in the stage craft for about 15 years— as a partner and actor in different professional troupes— like 'Sugunabodhaka Samaja' of Bengaluru (1932), 'Seethamanobara Company' of T. Seetharamiah of Tumkur (1934), Gubbi Company (1935), 'Sahitya Samrujya Nataka Mandali' of Nagendra Rao, Subba Naidu and Laxmi Bai (1939)— had established his reputation as a playwright and actor of 'no mean calibre', before he set out to Madras to take to films. After a good debut in the film world, he returned to Mysore

1 His plays 'Bochamamayaka' and 'Ashapaska' were staged with good success by the Gubbi Co. and Sahitya Samrujya Nataka Mandali.

to start his well known 'Mitramandali' in July, 1952. From that year till his tragic death early in 1954, the Mitramandali held the stage mainly on the merit of its \textit{social} plays which gave "the most enjoyable insults" to its crowded audiences. 'Mitramandali' with its inimitable talent and capacity made the social play more popular than the mythological and historical ones. The old modes had to make way for the new.

The troupe toured Karnataka in 1944 with 'Devadasi', the master-hit of the troupe, came to Bangalore early in 1945, staged it continuously for 93 shows, built a theatre for itself and staged from November 1945 a non-stop chain of 397 shows of Devadasi. 1946 saw the troupe touring in North Karnataka covering Belgaum, Jamkhandi, Sholapur, Raichur and the other prominent Kannada centres. From 1947 onwards the troupe perfected a number of new social plays like - 'Nakmal Topi' and the burlesque 'Panganama' both replete with humour. Serious plays like 'Devi Manohari', 'Basaveshwara' and 'Masuya' were also performed but it must be said that the special allure of the troupe was humour—humour in words, sequences and action. Mirannayya with his inimitable genius immortalized roles like the pining-Najukayya in the play 'Devadasi', the hempecked 'Hani' in 'Nakmal Topi' and the cook 'Praneichachari' in 'Panganama'. Under the surface of the bubbling worth of humour there was always an undercurrent of serious tone - reflection on several social evils like 'drinking' (Devadasi), social inequality (Panganama) and the problems...
of unequal marriages (Maksal topi). The troupe made its good name mainly because of its social plays and intelligent use of words. Might be with the inevitable influence of Kailasa\textsuperscript{1} Hirannayya was the first however, to introduce the colloquial Kannada with several of its shades and slangs into professional stage and it provided a becoming charm to his plays. He proved that the professional stage could do with the time honoured mythological themes - gorgeous but unnatural make-up, heavy settings and even the burden of stage songs, which had tried the patience of the 'modern'audiences. He was a bold experimentalist. He was sure not only of his themes but also of the taste of his audiences. In addition, he showed the best methods of managing a professional troupe by shrinking the distance between the proprietor and actor. His was literally a 'mitramandali'- a family of friends and it included some of the gifted and experienced artists like Nararachar, Seetharamarao, Chinnappa, and Ballary Lalita. Artists of this troupe defied the common notion backed with noticeable facts- that it is the second nature of an artist to 'hop from troupe to troupe' all the lifelong. It was indeed a great blow to the modern professional theatre, that Hirannayya, an enthusiastic and intelligent playwright and a gifted actor died a premature death bringing down the curtain on the glorious career of a good troupe.

The professional theatre of Mysore that sprouted in 1880 nursed and nourished by the patronising palace, steadily developed with hundreds of troupes some of which were strong and sustaining while others, too feeble to bear the weight

\textsuperscript{1} A.N.Krishnarao; Karnataka Kalavidaru- II. p.127.
of the time; yet, they all strove to keep the theatre going each trying on experiment to rejuvenate it, and contributing for its popularity. The well established troupes went out to different regions of other languages as the ambassadors of the arts and culture of Karnataka and earned respect for the Kannada land. Mysore produced some of the most outstanding actors and troupes in South India who ruled the theatrical world of the South for almost four decades from the beginning of the 20th century. There was a set back to the Mysore theatre starting from the 1930s owing to untimely death of some of the veteran actors on the one hand and also owing to the diversion provided by the talking films. Most of the promising troupes went out of existence by 1945 with the countable exceptions like the Gubbi’s— even that a shadow of the original substance and ‘Sahitya Samrajya Nataka Mandali’ of Subbaya Rai. Even these troupes like those in North Karnataka visibly struggling through the years and yet, even today every village in Mysore has perhaps a dramatic troupe; even today new troupe spring up to their feet only to collapse tomorrow. From the existing relics of the great troupes of theatrical art nothing much can be expected but it is admirable that they have still clung to the stage keeping the candle burning.

South Canara: The coastal home of Yakshagana, which built a formidable folk theatre, strange enough, does not seem to have made an equal or at least any tangible contribution towards building its own professional theatre. Obviously, the coastal village was satisfied with its Yakshagana and the city, with the performances of the visiting troupes from North Karnataka...
and Mysore. This does not negate the fruit of the efforts made by enthusiastic artists like Narayana Setti and Ramayya Adapa who started their own professional troupes. 'Swarajeenvari Nataka Mandali' of Ramayya Adapa (started in 1715) in particular, came to be known for its performances of 'Prabhatvati Darbar', 'Sadarame', and 'Yuvati Vijaya'—plays borrowed from the visiting Gubbi company of Mysore and Shirahatti Venkoba Rao's troupe of North Karnataka. Varadachar also visited the coastal towns frequently. Success of the visiting troupes tempted every professional troupe of Karnataka to visit the coastal tract, and the coast itself much relished the performances of Garud Sadashivrao, Mohamad Peer and V. Hiramaneeya and invited them frequently.

The only exception to the otherwise sorry and short lived troupes of the coast was 'Sri Asa Prasadita Karnatak Nataka Mandali' (1920-1940) of M. Ranganatha Bhatta which frequently toured in different parts of the Kannada land including Mysore and North Karnataka. By the year 1931, the Mandali had become a competent rival of the well established troupes in other parts of Karnataka with its imposing performances of the mythological plays like 'Dhruva' and 'Jarischandra', historical ones like 'Ajanmaksamari' and 'Sinhagada' and the popular social plays like 'Rayara Sose' and 'Nista Mahima'. Published reviews of his plays hail them for natural settings, strikingly appropriate costumes reflecting on the times of the themes and the magnificent acting of Rangappa Bhatta.

1 "कलाकारकर्मीलले कथा औरंगुलीमध्ये तुम्हाला आत्मत्र आदरणे करत आहे, त्यांनी तुमच्या कार्याची आदरणे करत आहे. त्यांनी तुमच्या कार्याची आदरणे करत आहे, त्यांनी तुमच्या कार्याची आदरणे करत आहे."

हेम. [III. नो. लेख] 165
Sri Bhatta with his imposing stage personality and thunderous but obedient 'voice' played the leading roles with great impression. The masterpiece of the troupe was 'Rejara Sona' (Kannada version of the Marathi play- Pontachi Sona) in which Ranganatha Bhatta played the doctor hero with a mastery in the portrayal of mixed emotions. Karnataka respected his talents and honoured him with rewards and titles like 'Abhinaaya Bhushana' and 'Natyakala Visharada'. The presentation of the play was said to be smart and polished in spite of long soliloquies and the occasional untimely dropping of the curtains. Disbending his troupe early in 1940s, Ranganatha Bhatta sought a settled life in Mangalore. Many other professional troupe came up in the coast the prominent of which are 'Manomohana Nataka Mandali', 'Panchalikeshwara Nataka Mandali' and 'Rejrajeshwari Nataka Mandali' but they catered only to the needs of the coast without crossing its borders unlike the Ambaprasadita Mandali of Ranganatha Bhatta.

Bellary: Bellary had for a long time preserved the traditions of the folk theatre with its 'Rogalu Bombe' (coloured image), 'Sootyada Bombe' (The marionet) and Poddeta, the popular folk show. Prominent professional troupes of North Karnataka and Mysore paid frequent visits to Bellary from 1880s and

1 Sringeri the noted religious seat honoured him with the title 'Natyas Kalavisharada' in Dec., 1929, presenting an address which said:-

"....... తెమాచింతమనంతుండి కళాశాఖ ప్రతి మనం ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి మన సంసారానిక ప్రతి

2 'Kala'-III-10. p.368.
in later years it became almost a fashion with every troupe to think of Bellary and Mangalore districts as the land of their prosperity.

Bellary developed its own professional stage though mainly with Telugu plays— from early 1880s after Sri. D. Krishnaemacherlu started writing plays. Bellary remained the home of a number of influential playwrights like K. Srinivasrao, D. Gopalecharlu, H. Hanumanta Gouda, T. Rangal Raje Rao, Balkundi Chalu Shastri, Subba Shastri and J. Doddenagowda. A number of professional troupes also sprang up particularly from 1890 onwards with a keen rivalry in towns and also villages like Hanagama Halli, Hampasagar, Kotur, Moraba, Kadlibail, Singeri, Alur and Rayadurg. If looked as if there was no village nor town without a dramatic troupe in it, but it could not be that they were all 'professional' in the correct sense of the word. There were exceptions however, like 'Saraswati Nataka Sabha', started in 1912 at Koktur (by Jagateru Veerabhadrappa) that toured in important centres like Hubli, Dharwar and Belgaum, 'Basaveshwara Nataka Mandali' of Harapanahalli that toured the Kannada country in 1928 staging impressive plays like 'Hemaraddi Mallamma', 'Chitrangada', 'Kurukshetra', and 'Sati Savitri'; and also 'Maruthi Nataka Company' of Alur; It was essentially during the 'months

1 The professional troupe of Hirekal is said to be the earliest in Bellary. It earned a good name and built a play-house in the village as a standing monument of the theatrical art of the village.


3 Ibid. p.164.
of leisure that many of the troupes functioned and on such occasions each troupe tried to collect good artists on fixed remuneration for the season.

Apart from the enthusiastic service of its professional troupes to the theatrical art, Bellary championed the cause of the theatre by conducting Drama Festivals and Conferences. The credit of such efforts goes to the village Joladarashi which convened the first Conference in 1948, under the presidency of Gavud Sadashivrao, the second in 1950 with H. Nagendra Rao in the Chair and the third in 1952 with A.N. Krishna Rao presiding over. The Conferences aimed at bringing together every playwright, actor and proprietor to discuss the problems and future of the theatre and contemplate methods of preserving and revitalising it. Joladarashi is worthy of being emulated in this regard because of its tireless and inspiring work to bring the professional theatre to its feet again.

Mysore Karnataka: The frequently visiting professional troupes of Maharashtra seem to be entirely responsible in inspiring the Kannada speaking areas of Mysore Karnataka to staging plays in Kannada and later, to building up professional troupes. The early performances were annual amateur affairs as on the occasions like Ganesha and Shivaji Jayanti. The first decade of the 20th century saw the springing of professional troupes, the prominent
of which came from Kalburgi and Devadurga. These troupes toured about in important centres of Nizam Karnataka and inspired Bidar, Raichur and Koppal to have their own professional groups. They staged mostly mythological plays with 'an over-emphasis on costumes and affected acting' - and none of them adventured on the other parts of Karnataka. It may be said however, that Nizam Karnataka provided to the professional theatre, two of its outstanding architects and savants in Shirahali Venkobanda and Garud Sadashivarao, both of whom came from Koppal; and both of them paid frequent visits to Nizam Karnataka with their troupes.

This brief survey of the careers of some of the representative professional troupes of Karnataka suggests that their story covers a span of about eighty years with three distinct stages:

1) 1875 to 1900: The age of experiment and establishment.

2) 1900 to about 1940: The Golden age of talent and prosperity.

3) 1940 onwards: The period of competition and decline.

During the first period of about twenty-five years the professional troupes both in North Karnataka and Mysore seem to have striven to establish themselves on firm footings against odds of different nature, shaping themselves

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1 'Shivasuta Prasadita Mandali' of Kalburgi provided the first opportunity to Garud to appear on the stage. Kannada Stage Centenary Vol. I- p.74.

2 The Devadurga troupe was the most popular dramatic company all over the Nizam area with its imposing showmanship of mythological plays'. Mudavidu Krishnarao. Jayakarnatak: XII. II. pp. 154-55.
all the while with an aim of providing 'professional entertainment' to variegated tastes. The second period witnessed the full growth of the institution of the theatrical art with its influence penetrating into the soil of neighbouring regions. It was during this period that many of the most outstanding playwrights, actors and producers of Karnataka contributed their mite to the theatre. The grand galaxy of artists included Garud Sadashiv Rao, Vaman Rao Master, Handi- gnur Siddharamappa, Basavaraja Mansur, Gangubai Gulecode and others in North Karnataka, Ranganatha Bhatta and K. Seetharama Shastri in the coastal tract, T. Raghavachari and Varian Shamarao in Bellary and N. Subhanna, Varadcharch, Veeranna, Mohammad Peer, M.V. Rejamma, Hirannayya and others in Mysore. The artists heightened the reputation of the respective troupes and proprietors like Veeranna and Mallappa spent fabulous amounts of money in the interest of making the performance most impressive. Professional theatre during this golden age, dictated forms and fashions, and moulded the peoples' tastes even from the pedestal of its mythological plays. It was obviously the brightest period in the career of the professional stage. During the third phase of its career after 1930, the professional troupes had to face a sudden and dangerous change in the taste of the people owing to the talking film that made its inroad into even the villages. Soon the city play houses got converted into film-houses. The new born amateur theatre diverted the educated section of the people from the professional stage. The latter's loss was complete when gifted stage artists like Nagendra Rao, H.L.N. Simha, Handi-gnur Siddharamappa, M.V. Rejamma
H. Ramachandra Shastri and scores of others sacrificed the stage for careers in the film. Veeranna had become essentially film-minded. Peer seemed for some time the only glow of the theatre but with his untimely death, the stage lost much of its hopes. Several troupes became alive to the great change in the people's taste and saw their future in making amends and adjustments to serve the changed tastes. Some of them eagerly took to social themes and cut short the duration of their performances to four hours. The troupes of Veeranna, of Subbiah Naidu, of Enigi Balappa, of Hirannayya and others survived only as they compromised with the changed tastes. Many another troupe lagged behind the times, lost its moorings and force. The trend was towards new themes and new technique, towards quick and cheap entertainment which either the film or the amateur stage could give.

**THEMES AND PLAYWRIGHTS:**

During the eighty years of its career, the professional stage discovered a number of playwrights to supply stageable material, but out of them only a few seem to be original and creative. The theatre being professional, the playwright could not be totally indifferent to the people's taste. Apart from making adequate provision for acting, music, transfer-scenes and total impression, the writer had to remember that the play had to confine to an acting space of a limited time and that it had to avoid multiplicity of characters and subsidiary incidents in the interest of the unity of impression. Unlike the novelist or the poet, the playwright was bound down by several conditions which made Bernard Shaw speak out for all
playwrights: "I do not select my methods; they are imposed upon me by a hundred considerations; by the physical considerations of the theatrical representation... by the economics of theatrical commerce, by the nature and limits of the art of acting, by the capacity of the spectators for understanding what they see and hear and by the accidental circumstances of the particular production in hand." It is time that these considerations came to be seriously considered only in the present century; but even in the beginning of the career of the theatre, the conditions and considerations could not be totally ignored though not much heeded to. As a matter of fact there was no critical taste in the audience and it had only to be created by the playwright. Plays themselves could not have been classical in nature and lofty in literary merit and theatrical in nature if the writer had to serve the undependable opinion of the audience. In any case the playwright had first to be sure of his theme; a theme that would 'serve all tastes'. He unhesitatingly hit upon the mythological themes drawn from the epics and romantic legend, which had tremendous vitality to hold the audience because of the portrayal of the triumph of the good over the

2 The words of K. Sidhvarao bear considerable meaning in this regard:
evil and elements of devotion (Bhakti) and morality (Neeti).

In the last decade of the 19th century, it was not considered a befitting theme- a theme around a problem that is general to-day and exceptional tomorrow and so, the playwrights wrote on themes "which were richly symbolic of an eternal and all powerful force"; and only the epic could supply them. Thus, the professional troupe began to present in appropriate scenes, settings, stage devices and intelligent spoken word- the same theme that Yakshagane presented in colour, costumes, dance and music. The epical theme seemed to hold the stage forever.

Prominent among the playwrights who wrote original plays based on pauranic themes for the stage and who actively associated themselves with professional troupes are Shanta-kavi (Sakkari Balacharya), Ccrud Sadashivarao, Kondagal - Honamantaharao in North Karnataka and Bellave Nar-hari Shastrl, Namjuyangud Srikanta Sastri and B.Puttaswamai in Mysore.

Shantakavi wrote essentially for the 'Kritapura Nataka Mandal' of Gadag and later for the 'Nargund Dramatic Troupe'. He mentions of nine plays- all on pauranic themes- as to have been staged by the former troupe and 'four or

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1  Paurani plays belong to the 'Pratima Vidhana' of which Sri K V. Puttappa observed -
five' by the latter. They seem to be vitalised stage versions of 'Bhagavatara ata' devoid of the latter's dance. They provided considerable theatrical scope and contained humour, though oddly enough like the Senapati of Ushaharana mixing up Urdu words in his talk, or Makshatramala, a cheti of Chandravali (Chandravali Charitre) mixing up English words like "warrant" and "magistrate". His plays were received with great enthusiasm by both the city and village and they sustained on the stage for over twenty years after they were written.

Venkammacharya Asalagatti (Srinivasa Kavi) wrote plays for the Haesi Dramatic Troupe on mythological themes like 'Shrimati Pariniye', 'Madhasa Pariniya', 'Draupadi Varapunyaharana' and 'Bhomasura Vadha'.

Ganad Sadachivarya and Kandesal Manusantherao may not claim credit for original themes of stage plays but they did give very original touches to the prevailing Pauranic themes and made them sustain for decades. 'Paduka Pattabhisheka', 'Sudama-deva', 'Sairandhree' and 'Kamsavadha' written by Ganad may be cited as some of the most attractive stage plays of North Karnataka. Couched in dignified language...

1 Ushaharana, Srigala Sutva Parikshe, Vatsalabharana, Sundopacunda Vadha, Kichakavade, Sudhaana Vadha, Setaranyya Pravesha, Shakuntlopathyrra and Chandravali Charitre were staged by the Kritisura Mandal. Seternawayavara, Kolamira, Mangunadhvaja and Pratapa were written for the Murgund Company. Chaitakevi, 'Nataka Prabhuva-mon-ki', March, 1919, pp. 7 & 8.

2 "महाकाव्य युद्धरचना मध्ये विविध विषयांच्या निर्माणाचे काही उदाहरण.

3 Of these, the manuscript of the play 'Bhomasura Vadha' was exhibited at the first Drama Conference presided over by T. Raghavachari in Dharwar in Dec., 1929.
replete with appropriate humour and providing considerable scope for the dramatic scenes, the plays were staged both by Garud's troupe and others. Kanumantharas Kandagal paid particular attention to 'characterisation' and apart from his own troupe, many an other professional company of North Karnataka staged his 'Akshayanabara', 'Lankadahama', 'Janasiga Rrama', 'Kurukshetra' and 'Chitrangada'.

The most prominent of the playwrights who wrote for the professional stage of Mysore is Bellava Narahari Shastri who was closely associated with the Gubbi Company and when B.P. Rice wrote as early as in 1921 as 'one of the most prolific dramatic authors'. He is said to have for his credit about forty full length stage plays. Possibly every one of them is staged for they were written specially for Veeramma and some of them like 'Krishna Leela' (1919), 'Yama Garvabhoags' (1922) and 'Mankandeya' (1932) held the stage for years at length and remain popular to this day. Several characteristics have contributed to the success of his plays like a very attractive construction of the plot, fully blossomed characterisation, dignified language, well balanced proportion of music and humour and witty and imaginative dialogues.

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1 It is odd enough that the Court wrestlers of Kamar-Mustika and Chanura' carry on their conversation in Urdu in the play Kama Vadha.

2 B.P. Rice: History of KannadGx Literature (Heritage of India Series) p.100.


4 కంచాలేలు సంశరించింది నిందించింది చిత్రణం కుడి దృశిలేదు కుడి దృశిలేదు (కుడి దృశిలేదు)
Bellave retained the traditional methods of play-presentation but made them highly relished with new techniques and stage devices. The under current of 'Bhakti' traceable in his plays added lustre to them and charmed their audiences. He deviated from the old plays which had 95 per cent of music and 5 per cent of spoken prose and set new fashions to the writers for the stage. He remained faithful to the mythological theme but was brilliant in reproducing their shades with colour and meaning and in providing scope for effective showmanship. It was a happy co-incidence for the benefit of the professional stage of Mysore that Bellave had the Gubbis to produce his plays and the Gubbis had Bellave to write for them.

Another similar happy combination that brought about fruitful results on the professional stage of Mysore was Moodenagud Srikanta Shastri, a scholar-playwright and A.V. Varadachar the great actor-producer. A well known scholar in Sanskrit and Telugu, Srikanta Shastri made a prolific contribution to the dramatic literature by his translations of /plays by Veeresha Lingam Pentulu and also/or original stage-plays. 'Kanakalata Parinaya' and 'Tilottama' are his original creations out of the religious lore. Some of the other plays like 'Secta Swayanvara', 'Abhigna Pradhana', 'Secta Parityaga'

1 He made the opening scene of every play of his very gorgeous in order to arrest the audience. The tradition of getting some God on the stage to bless the play was maintained by Bellave but as in Krishnaleela, he made it very artistic. As the curtain went up, the spectator would behold all the 'Dvayas' praying to Vishnu entreatling him to eradicate the evil and the Lord would bless them to success.

(themes drawn from the epic Ramayana), 'Rajasoyya Yaga', 'Vijayabhyudaya' (drawn from Vishnu Purana), 'Dhruva Vidyay' and 'Vishnu Uddesa' (drawn from Vishnu Purana) are based on the traditional dramatic episodes and have remained popular on the Mysore stage. Reflecting at every step on his deep learning and discerning eye for details, plays of Srikantha Shastri became 'enrilling' in spite of their split into eight or more acts. It is true that some times the main theme got disturbed and diffused by prominence given to details. It was the method of showing the maximum for the relish of the audience though at the cost of the Unity of Imagination. Yet his plays remained great successes on the stage and Varadachar also was in a large measure responsible for their successes with his brilliant showmanship.

A number of others contributed original plays on Puranic themes. 'Indraheela Vijaya Natekam' of Mysore SeethaCirn Shastri, 'Shrimati Paripaya' of Alasandecher, 'Nala Deivamani' of Kerur Vasudevachar, 'Handodari' and 'Nachiketa' of C.K. Venkataramiah are some which added colour and dignity to the professional stage of Karnataka. B.Pattasamiah, a contemporary playwright with his ingenuous method of infusing modern thought into puranic themes wrote for Peer and Veeranna, imposing plays like 'Kurukshetra' and 'Sati Tulasi', which are essentially theatrical like those of C.K.Venkataramiah.

1 'Rajasoyya Yaga' portrayed all the ten 'saturas' in detail in the context when Dharmaraja praised Krishna as most eminently suited for 'Agrapooja'. In 'Vijayabhyudaya', the entire story of the 'Digvijaya' of Arjuna is portrayed at full length including even the episode of 'Darupadi Vastra- paharama' though, strictly, the episode has no place in the play.
The Karnataka theatre seems to have depended almost entirely on the Pauranic themes for about three decades for its consolidation and firm foundation with perhaps an occasional exception. But after the partition of Bengal in 1905 which gave a shake up to the conscience of the country, Karnataka also seems to have suddenly awakened to the glory of its history, particularly to the great past of Vijayanagara and the patriotism of many a savant who burst out to break the shackles of bondage or slavery. Yet the professional theatre 'had to move slowly for it was still not sure of the taste of its audiences'. As the first experiments in historical themes, professional troupes brought on the stage plays written on the lives of Saint poets, for these plays contained both pauranic and historical elements. The single-mindedness of a lofty moral purpose, a determination to destroy the evil and 'Maya' in order to attain the sublime and an undercurrent of 'Bhakti' made the plays like 'Sant Tukaram', 'Tulsidas' and 'Kakadas' highly popular. 'Shrimad Basava' and 'Kabirdas' of Garud and 'Sant Sakhubai' of Varnavada Master come to hold the stage of North Karnataka. 'Hemaraddi Mallanna' of Dallave and 'Gautama Buddha' and 'Akka Mahadevi' written by Puttaswamiah drew crowded houses in Mysore State. Though historical in settings, these plays were essentially devotional in spirit and remained semi-mythological in their import. They occupied an equal place along with those on the Pauranic themes by 1920s.
Mostly after 1920, many a play built around patriots who sacrificed themselves for the sake of the country made its advent on the stage. Themes connected with patriotic activities like the establishment of Vijayanagar and other dramatic episodes arising out of the patriot's fight against the foreign invader prompted plays like 'Rajabhatti', 'Karnatak Sannajya', 'Swami Nista' and 'Tejaswini' which were staged by the Cubbi Company. These and 'Bheemaneyaka' written and staged by Cemud Sedashivarao, 'Shaha Shivaji' and 'Tippu Sultan' staged by the Halgeri Nataka Mandali can be cited as examples of catering to the new tastes. Almost all the prominent professional troupes staged the patriotic plays like 'Kittur Channama', 'Belavadi Mallanna', 'Kittur Rudrambe' and 'Sangolli Rayanna'. These plays threw flood of light on the patriotic heroes and heroines of Karnataka and shook up the people to action against the alien rule. Telling episodes from the history of Mysore were recreated in all their grandeur and dignity by 'Samsa' whose 'Vikramaraya', 'Ramar Sihasana' and 'Suguna Gombheer', could well suit the stage if ever seriously attempted by the professional troupe. 'Shahajahan' a Kannada rendering by Puttaswamiah of Dwijendralal Roy's Bengali play of the same name made a mark at the hands of Peer and H.B.N. Simhr.

1 'Rajabhatti' is a translation of the Marathi play 'Bakhadri Mahatvaonkaro'. A review of the play as staged by the Cubbi Company praises its internal worth and production values. (Rangabhoomi. Nov., 1929. p.47-51).

2 A review highly appreciates this staged in imposing historical settings of Vijayanagar, for able showmanship and as a grand deviation from the 'hackneyed' patriotic themes 'with their usual irritating songs and unworthy reflection on women'. (Rangabhoomi. Feb., 1931. p.124).
Chandragupta of M.M. Chaudappu, a Kannada rendering of the Bengali original did stand to a grand stature, when it was staged by V. Veerabhadrappa's troupe in Mysore. Quite a number of plays like 'Chatrapati Shivaji', and 'Yasodhara' of Nasti, 'Mayura' of Devudu, 'Vidyasnyana Vijaya' of D.V. Gundappa, 'Baktakshi' of K.V. Patappa came in the line deserving full consideration from professional troupe.

The historical theme brought about a necessary change in the showmanship of plays apart from providing scope for the first time to the argument of the playwright. It bound the production with a defined type of settings, costumes and presentation that looked very different from the pauranic play, but decidedly more natural. Stage songs gradually made way for conversation and dramatic action; symbolism of the pauranic play made way to material suggestion, and pure entertainment to calculated education. In spite of the odd battle scenes and 'humorous' war pictures of the historical play, it became more acceptable for it led the way towards the natural and realistic. It replaced the mythological play as the exclusive occupant of the stage and provided something new and substantial. Imaginative artists like Sarud and Peer recreated historical heroes for both entertainment and inspiration of the country. Unlike the pauranic play, the historical ones came with a specific purpose and hit a middle mark in the march of the theme from the pauranic to the social both from the points of literary content and methods of showmanship.
"Our stage is overflowing with Gods and Goddesses and kings and queens; it is high time we gave them some rest and discovered the God in man" declared Harindrenath Chattopadhyaya in 1930. But even from earlier times there was a growing unrest towards the mythological plays where the heroes of the epics performed the same old tricks over again with rampant music and a stage intonation that missed the suppleness and changing rhythms of the speech of life. Still the theatre was instinct with life and hundreds of people drawn from all classes flocked to it mainly owing to the great merit of the actor rather than the theme according to the critic. A demand went up for 'intellectual' plays as contrasted with the 'physical performance' of mythological themes. It was evidently a demand of the intelligentsia, but it was a demand all the same, the outcome of a new age influenced by western education, the patriotic movement in the country and the growing amateur theatre; the demand had to be met by the professional for the sake of survival. It was not to be a question of complete replacement of the mythological, but one of finding place for something different, something more intimate and something earthly on the stage,


2 "అండ్రా నాటక శిశాంతం కాలంలో వివాహం రాయాలను కురుగాకుడాలను ఉండాలంది. నాటకంలో మనం ఎంచుకుంటే మనం నాటకం చేసుకుంటే మనం సాంఘారించిందని మనం సాంఘారించాలంది అలు మనం సాంఘారించాలంది".

స.ఎ. కాలంలో సాంఘారించాలంది - అలాంటి వాడించండి.
obviously along with the mythological and historical which had become monotonously static.

The advent of social themes had already been inaugurated by the translation from Sanskrit of 'Mricchakatikā' in the last decade of the 19th century. Srikranta Shastri had translated a number of plays of Veeresha Lingam Penta from Telugu. But it was essentially after 1920 onwards, the social theme was taken up by professional troupes. Imaginative playwrights like Kevur Vasudevacharya, Sarad Sadashivrao, Irana Shantappa, N.K. Maligol, Hemamantaroji Kandgal, C.G. Hegde and others of North Karnataka and M.L. Srikantagowda, G.V. Ramaswami Iyengar¹, H.L.N. Sinha, K. Hirannayya, Hanur Krishnamurthi in Yusore, wrote out social plays which contained considerable dramatic element. They generally dealt with social evils and mal-adjustments like unequal marriage, tyranny of social customs, dangers of blind faith, artificial education and the like.

The first professional troupe that specialised in popularising social themes with impressive showmanship was the famed 'Halgeri Company' with its versatile proprietor-actors and Dodda Jettappa/Chikka Jettappa. 'Street', 'B.A.', 'Athani Pasha', 'Cholti Duniya' and 'Black Market' were among its popular plays that infused a spirit of patriotism and aimed at eradication of social evils and artificialities. 'Mitra Mandali' of K. Hirannayya tirelessly staged long runs of

¹ G.V. Ramaswami Iyengar was the playwright-proprietor of Karnataka Nataka Mandali (1930-1957). 'Mirhaba Gharkti' and 'Sanskara Sara' dealing with the evils of drinking and prostitution, were the most popular of his 17 stage plays.
social plays like 'Nevadagi' and 'Makmal Topi' that pleaded for prohibition and emancipation of women. Gerud's performances of 'Vaschattapa' (Visham Viveha) and 'Satya Sankalpa' though in historical settings were essentially social in spirit and implications. Even the Gubbi Company which had its mainstay in mythological themes soon took up social plays like 'Nisha Mahima', 'Sahukar', 'Zalakachra' and 'Addadari' all looking at social and political odds and artificialities from the angle of humour. 'Sayara Sase' of Abba Prasadita Nataka Mandali remained very popular on the professional stage. 'Samaara Nauka' staged by Peer proved that professional troupes could prosper entirely on social plays themselves. Recently, though written on a contemporary episode of the topical interest, Hunsur Krishnamurthi's 'Dharma Ratnakara' a biting parody replete with ironical humour held the professional stage drawing crowded houses. Sinha's 'Abba Hadagi' a parody on the manners of 'educated' girl was also attempted with success in Mysore.

The social theme which is 'intimately connected with the people' created new values and brought about a revolution both in the writing for the stage and methods of showmanship. It negated the accepted belief that the mythological play could hold the professional stage; it tempered down the stage language towards naturalness; it rationalised the manner of acting; it replaced the stage music with humour; it discarded the fabulous settings, scenery and the spectacular, and thus, catered more to the mind than to the eye. In this sense, the social play came to be regarded as more intellectual and
concerning in nature and more rational in presentation
than the mythological and historical. It is a fact however,
that the social theme brought about a change in the outlook
of all—of the writer, of the actor and also the spectator.
Very gradually, the stiffness of the stage began to make way
for informality in talking and acting. The professional stage
essentially after the second decade of the present century
came a step closer to the society by dealing with and dis­
cussing its problems and evils. In this role, it came to be
regarded first as the educator of the society and then its
entertainer.

THE

OBLIGATION TO DRAMATIC LITERATURE OF OTHER LANGUAGES:

Sanskrit: The professional theatre was a sudden reality in
Karnatak inspired by the touring Marathi and larsi troupes.
The urgent need of the theatre after coming into being was
suitable dramatic literature. North Karnatak had prepared
itself to an extent to meet the emergency and its first —
troupe came into being after the plays themselves were written
by Shantakavi. Mysore was not prepared for the emergency, and
naturally, it had to fall back in its initial stages on the
reputed plays of other languages particularly of Sanskrit
and English to keep its theatre-going.

There was nothing unseemly in falling back on Sanskrit
drama. Marathi theatre was gaining both stability and popu­
ularity because of translations of Sanskrit plays by Rajwade,
Krishnasastri Chipolunkor, Lele and others. The Court theatre
of Karnatak had the influence of Sanskrit drama even in the
times of Chikka Devaraja Wodeyar. One could be sure of the merit of the play with regard to its dramatic element, literary merit and scope for production. The popular taste would be well served as the theme of the Sanskrit play was invariably mythological. It had a beautiful blending of poetry and prose, providing for music and acting. Sanskrit drama looked ideal from all points of view particularly at the hour of need.

Chamaraja Wodeyar, the King of Mysore accordingly instructed the learned Poets of his Court to translate well known plays from Sanskrit to Kannada. This yielded rich results in that almost all the well known Sanskrit plays were rendered into Kannada both by the Court poets and other learned pundits. A significant feature of the first translation was that they were entirely faithful to their originals unlike 'Vitru Vinda Govinda'. Prominent among scholars who brought successful translations are Basavappa Shastri, Soochale Ayya Shastri, Giri Shattara Tamayya, Jayarayacharya, Dhonde Narasimha Mulbagal, Amentanayaya Shastri, Shivashankara Shastri, Nanjagud Subba Shastri and Devashikhamani Alasingaracharya. The Palace Company was placed in a happy position of trying theatrical experiments as it did not have to cater to the popular taste and thus, it staged some of these translations, the most successful of which were 'Kannada Shakuntala' of Basavappa Shastri, 'Vitvatormavashiya' of Ayyashastrti, 'Mriccha-Katika' of Nanjagud Subba Shastri and 'Venk Sanhara' of Jayarayacharya. The example set by the Palace Company was followed by Varadarachar, who staged with great success

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1 संस्कृत „काशी गोविंदा“ ने आयोजित किया है.
'Shakuntala' and 'Ratnavali'. From the inception of the modern theatre of Karnataka early in the 1880s up to the end of the 19th century approximately, plays drawn from Sanskrit originals seem to have held the stage—particularly in Mysore.

Basavappa Shastri: Among the court poets who rendered Sanskrit plays into Kannada, Kari Basavappa Sastri occupies a unique position both with regard to the quality and quantity of his contributions. Gifted with great learning and a poet's imagination, Basavappa Sastri seems to have made a mark in composing a merited poetical work 'Krishnara, abhyudaya' at the age of 18. He was a gifted 'gamak' obviously capable of musical rendering of the classics. He is said to have contributed 28 literary compositions (17 in Kannada and 11 in Sanskrit) and his rendering of 'Shakuntala', 'Yakramorvasiya', 'Ratnavali', 'Uttararama Charite', 'Malati Madhava' and 'Chanda Kaushika' are available. Of these, his rendering of 'Shakuntala' has been acclaimed by critics as the most faithful rendering of the inimitable Kalidasa. Of the translations of 'Shakuntala' into several languages, the Kannada version of Shakuntala by Basavappa Shastri is hailed as the nearest to the original, revealing every subtlety of

2 "..."
3 "..."
Kalidasa's imagination, feeling and expression. The Palse could naturally be proud of honouring him with the title 'Abhinava Kalidasa' for his 'rendering was as good as to be appreciated by Kalidasa himself.' The Court theatre of Mysore staged Sastri's renderings to the great relish and enjoyment of its LEARNED audience.

Because of its mythological theme and unsurpassed brilliance and subtlety in the development and portrayal of the grand drama, 'Saluntasala' has come to be translated into Kannada by a number of scholars and today there are as many as seven different renderings of the play, including that of Basavaappa Sastri.

Churamuri, Sheshagirirao was obviously the first in Karnataka to have translated 'Sakuntala' (in 1352). He intended it for the popular stage unlike Basavaappa Sastri. His rendering in easy flowing homely prose and lyrics set in charming native tunes (Javadi, sung in the homes of North Karnataka) captured the common people to whom it was meant. Churamuri had every reason to be proud of his translation for its faithfulness to the original, for its simple prose and charming poetry. For some years there was no home in which women did not sing lyrics from Churamuri's 'Sakuntala' nor a musical performance which did not have a couple of them. It is strange enough that it was not taken up seriously by the professional troupees.

2 M.G. Nanjaundadriya: op.cit. p.114.
troupes of North Karnataka.

Among the other versions of 'Shakuntala', the one by B.Krishnappa is a rendering in prose and of B.Harabhar Shastri is more an adaptation than a translation. M.Krishnarao, Shankara Shastri and Balasaya Dixit have also rendered it into Kannada. The success of 'Shakuntala' when staged by the Palace Company brought forth wide popularity and tempted many a scholar-poet to render every well known Sanskrit play into Kannada.

To say that almost every well known play of every prominent Sanskrit playwright has been rendered into Kannada would not be an exaggeration of the fact; for 'Swapnavasavadatta' and 'Panchavijaya' of Bhasa, 'Mrichchhakatika' of Shudrakru, all the three plays of Vallabha, 'Mudrarakshasa' of Visakhadatta, 'Ratnavali' of Harichandra, 'Uttararamacharite' of Dhruvbhuti, 'Veni Sambhara' of Bhattacharya, and 'Chanda Krishna' of Ksherekarshana- are all rendered into Kannada; and each one of them has been differently rendered by two or more scholars, but not many of them have been staged by the professional theatre, because, after the sudden initial demand of the theatre was met with the adapted play, from Sanskrit, there was sufficient time and talent for creating original plays on Puranic themes. After the demise of Vrindachar and the dissolution of Ratnavali Theatrical Company, no serious attempt seems to have been made to bring on the stage the Kannada versions of Sanskrit plays. They have still remained only in libraries and in the hands of students as text-books rather than on the stage.
FROM ENGLISH DRAMATIC LITERATURE:

Being satisfied with the translations and staging of 'Shakuntala' by the Palace Company, King Chamarajendra Wodeyar expressed a desire in 1682 that well known plays from other languages and particularly from English be translated for the benefit of the stage and Kannada dramatic literature. English language had already made its impression event in Karnatk and English literature had come to be prescribed for study and was widely read. Learned enthusiasts like A. Amudarao, C. Subba Rao, Basavappa Shastri and Jayarayacharya set to translate Shakespeare at the royal command. C. Subba Rao who was connected with the Royal School translated - 'Othello' and completed it with the assistance of Basavappa Shastri who must have given final touches to the work. The translation was called 'Surasena Charitre'. A. Ananda Rao, a Forest Settlement Officer translated 'Romeo and Juliet' (Ranevanna Lekavati Charitre), 'Merchant of Venice' (Panchali Parlnay) and 'Hamlet' assisted by Jayarayacharya, a learned poet of the royal court. The translations when staged by the Palace Company came to be relished and set others to translating plays from English dramatic literature.

M.L. Srikantayogda is one of the first and foremost to translate Shakespeare. The best known of his translations are of 'Macbeth' (Pratapa Raudradeva) and 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' (Pramularjuniya). His attempt to place the themes in the native settings met with considerable success, but it necessarily made him deviate from the original in details.
He gave popular local names to his characters and employed easy flowing simple Kannada. Of his renderings, Pratapa Radhadeva is better known and was successfully attempted by the Hatnavali Theatrical Company of Varadachar. N.V. Gundappa's rendering of the same play 'Macbeth' perhaps does more justice to the original with its accuracy of expression in dignified blank verse. It is hailed as giving a convincing and intimate glimpse of Shakespeare.

It is true, but no professional troupe made bold/attempt it on the stage because of its being beyond the reach of the lay and the rustic.

"Taming of the Shrew" has been well adapted by K.Lakshmana Rao as 'Chandi Mada Mardana Nataka' and also by Darvatavuni as 'Shadbuddar Ganda'. Both seem to sustain well on the stage and the latter has been often staged not only by regular professional troupes but also by a number of amateur ones. The prominent among the other renderings of English plays into Kannada are 'Birugali' an adaptation of Shakespeare's Tempest by K.V.Puttoppa, known for its poetical merit, beauty of expression and grandeur of imagination that has made it look an original play rather than an adaptation, 'Vicharam' an adaptation by Davada etc.

'Trial of Jesus' of John Webfield, 'Savina Samayye' a rendering of 'Twice is too much' done by Vembar Venkatacharya, 'Sootrada Bombo' an effective rendering of Ibsen's 'A Doll's House' by S.G.Shestxi and 'Asadhabhothi' a beautiful adaptation by A.N.Moorthirao of Moliere's 'Tartuife'. Not one of these plays was taken seriously by the professional stage, for,
in its opinion, though they had poetical worth and literary merit, they did not have sufficient theatrical strength.

In North Karnataka, Gando Krishna Churamuni seems to be the first to have translated Shakespeare. His rendering of Shakespeare's 'Othello' as 'Raghevendra Rao Nataka' (printed in 1885) is a broad adaptation rather than a true translation. His effort to put the alien theme into native settings is not fruitful and there is no evidence of it being staged by any professional troupe of Karnataka. Later Gadigayya Baschayya Komapurmath translated 'Taming of the Shrew' under the title 'Tratika Nataka'. His was not a rendering straight from the English original but was based on the Marathi version by Prof. Kelkar of Poona which was staged by the 'Hindu Union Club' of Dharwar in about the year 1894-95. 'Dvesha Shandara' an adaptation of Macbeth by Narshalli Anantarao did not serve the professional stage. Sheridan's 'School for the Scandal' named 'Mohini' or 'Hindakara Hadavali' is better known for its rendering. More popular Kannada versions of Shakespeare's plays came from Kerur Vasudevacharya whose rendering of "A Mid Summer Night's Dream" (Vasantayamini Swapnu Chandrakara Nataka), 'Merchant of Venice' (Suranagarada Sresti), 'Romeo and Juliet' (Ramesha-Lalita) and Goldsmith's 'She Stoops to Conquer' (Pati Vasikarana) caught the imagination of the reading public rather than the theatre-goers. Evidently no professional company came forward to stage them, but every effort was made to bring / - at least on the amateur stage by 'Vasudev Anamra' of Bagalkot.
This brief account would suggest that the renderings of English plays enriched the dramatic literature of Karnataka rather than adding a lustre to its professional stage. The professional troupes did not take to them as dearly as they did to the renderings of Sanskrit plays. The objection was obviously to the theme, which, though provided good entertainment did not preach the morals as the ones drawn from the epics did; nor did it come near the land's history, nor even did it reflect on a social evil or a problem of immediate concern. In the eye of the professional troupes, the renderings of English plays were meant essentially for the educated who would be satisfied with entertainment devoid of moral preaching. According to the available evidences only the Beloo Company— and later, the Ratanwati Company staged the adaptations of Shakespeare, particularly 'Romeo and Juliet' and Shurasena Charitre (Othello). Even theirs was a bold adventure considering the standards of time, but the plays sustained beautifully on the stage, essentially owing to the histrionic brilliance of eminent artists like 'Certain Ramarao' and 'A.V. Varadachar'. Other troupes declined to risk them on the stage. The adaptations however, justified themselves on the amateur stage owing to the initiative of troupes like 'The Amateur Dramatic Association' and 'Chaya Artists' of Bangalore and 'The Vasudeva Amateurs' of Bagalkot.
If the professional theatre of Mysore took shelter under the wings of Sanskrit drama in the initial stages, the professional theatre of North Karnataka drew its resources from the Marathi dramatic literature, and enthusiasts of the early 20th century aimed at bringing into Kannada every Marathi play of repute. The Marathi stage itself had not sacrificed efficiency and good standard to speed. Playwrights like Gadakari, Khandkar, Kolhatkar and Deval with their prolific and merited contributions placed the Marathi Theatre on a solid and lofty bed rock. Even in 1933, "It ranked next to the Bengali theatre". North Karnataka, without any hesitation drew on the Marathi drama and translated almost well known play into Kannada.

Ganpatrao Raghuvaroa Mokadapur of Dharwar set himself at the task with a seal and translated a good number of Marathi plays for the professional stage. Madavidu. Krishnarao, Ganad Sadashivlarao, Vennasrao Master, Subbarao Akreaddy, C.G. Hegde and L.J. Bendre, steadily drew resources from the Marathi dramatic literature. C.G. Venkanna got four of the most popular plays — Eclach Ryddo (Sura Rahine), Rakshee Mahatvakanaksha (Raj Shkrtri), Ranaddaabh (Karnatak Samrajyo) and Chatrapati Shivaji (Samh Niste) translated by into Kannada and adapted them for the Kannada stage.

1 R.K.Yajnik: The Indian Theatre- p.95
Most of such adaptations into Kannada became extremely popular on the professional stage of North Karnataka. People who had seen the Marathi originals themselves, flocked again to witness the Kannada versions of them and were obviously satisfied for the latter were almost the replica of the Marathi originals with similar settings, costumes and stage songs. Kannada versions of 'Ramrajya Vidyotsa' and 'Rasbhari Mahatva karnaka' staged by Garud, 'Yuvati Vidyotsa', 'Saubhadra', 'Mahendra' and 'Indira' staged by Shirahatti Venkatarao, 'Shaha Shiva', 'Chhatrapati Janma' and 'Tipu Sultan' staged by the Halgaru Company, 'Simhacha Chhaya', 'Draupadi Vastra haram', 'Vidyaharam', 'Mahendra', 'Sant Sakhubai', 'Bajirao Peshwe', 'Samana Yakkal', 'Bhakti Prahlad' and others staged by Vamanrao Master, 'Panigrahan' staged by Servoda Nahta Sangha and 'Pantachi Soon' staged by Amba Prasadita Natake. Mandali- held the professional stage for years at length even from the last decade of the 19th century.

An achieved magnificence of the Marathi stage is its music and Karnataka went raptures over it. North Karnataka accepted the Marathi stage song as a model to copy. Vamanrao's troupe became well known all over the region particularly because of its music and method of portrayal, faithful to the Marathi productions. A.V. Varadachar deputed his talented musicians like Sekagirirao to Poona and Bombay to learn the Marathi stage songs for the benefit of the Mysore audiences. 1

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF THEATRE STUDIES

After coming into being in late 1880s, the professional theatre of Andhra steadily built up its dramatic literature contributed by D.Krishnasacharlu, D.Copalacharlu, Guruji Appareo, Kunchur Veeresha Lingam Pantulu, Vaddadi Subbarayalu, Vedam Venkatarayya Sastry and others. Some of their representative plays, particularly of Veeresha Lingam Pantulu were translated into Kannada by Hanjiangud Srikanta Sastry. He translated about 30 plays from Telugu and the prominent and popular among them are 'Bala Bharya Vridha Bhirtr Prahasana', 'Mahabhadratha Prahasana', 'Moodha Bharya Chatur Bhirtr Prahasana' and 'Vismaya Vivaha'. Kannada Krishna Iyengar's rendering of 'Kemya Sulka' has been popular on the stage in Mysore under the title 'Vismaya Vivaha'. Jyarmyacharya also rendered 'Mahabhadratha Prahasana' into Kannada. Renagal Ramasao and V.B. Ishwararao translated 'Kalshopriya Prahasana' and 'Tiaga - Raksheta' respectively. Yet with its grand conception and brilliant exposition the play 'Bhadrachala Ramadas' written by D.Copalacharlu became a great success when staged on professional lines by

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1 Guruji Appareo inaugurated a new phase in the stage drama by writing plays in spoken and not literary Telugu. Its magnificent sense of humour, skill in characterisation and emphasis in rousing the sentiment as the main purpose of drama — all achieved in his well known play 'Kemya Sulka' made it very popular.
by the Amateur Dramatic Association of Bangalore with Pandit Taranath and T. Raghavachari in the leading roles. The Kannada rendering of 'Kenya Shulka' with its topical theme went well with both the professional and amateur stage. The rest are considered 'out moded' and are not seriously considered for staging.

BENGALI: With the last hundred and fifty years Bengal built up such a merited dramatic literature that it is commonly said that "the value of the Bengali drama would not in any sense be diminished had everything that was written before 1800 completely perished." The plays were contributed by scores of playwrights of real creative genius, the prominent of whom are Michael Madhusudhan Dutt, Girish Chandra Ghosh, Binabandhu Mitra, Dwijendralal Roy and Tagore. The plays with their amazing vitality have held the stage with a glory of their own for years, and many of them were translated into other languages. Unfortunately, Karnataka has not drawn a justifiable number of plays from the rich Bengali dramatic literature.

C.K. Venkataramayya made an able rendering into Kannada of the famed 'Tupobala' of Girish Chandra Ghosh. The tragic theme of 'Krishna Kumar' of Michael Madhusudana Dutta - inspired Kannada writers - particularly Cha Vasudevayya in his 'Aruyakeerti' and M.H. Kamath in his 'Kshatrapu Teja'. Three of the well known plays of Dwijendralal Roy - 'Nemad Ratan',

'Shahjahan' and 'Chandragupta' were translated into Kannada by G.L. Halleppannavar, B. Puttaswamiah and K.N. Choudappa respectively. Of these, the play 'Mewad Patans' has been on the professional stage of North Karnataka, while 'Shahjahan' and 'Chandragupta' on the professional stage of Mysore. Of these, again, 'Shahjahan' held the stage with rare brilliance and drew crowded houses continuously when staged by the Chandrakala Natasa Mandal. The great success was due both to the strength and beauty of the play as much as to the outstanding histrionic abilities of Mohammed Peer.

The professional theatre of Karnataka thus tried to draw its themes, and sometimes, straight plays from Marathi, Bengali and Telugu dramatic literatures apart from the inevitable Sanskrit and English literatures. The North Karnataka stage owes a considerable obligation to the Marathi dramatic literature for both substance and form while the Mysore stage comparatively has a slight more of originally written plays in Kannada, though it has quite some tangible dramatic themes and plays drawn from Sanskrit, Marathi and Bengali dramatic literatures. It is strange, however, to see that Karnataka has only drawn themes from the dramatic literatures of the neighbouring regions but has seldom given anything substantial of its own to others in the form of stage plays. This cannot imply a poverty of original plays in Karnataka, for there is none a excruted play of considerable internal worth and theatrical strength, deserving to be translated into other languages. 'Charena Basava' and 'Socanamayaka' of Garud, 'Badananda Bhoota' of Kandgal, 'Streeksharna
Rahasya' and 'Shikohna Sambhrama' of N.K. Huilgol, 'Mandodari' and 'Nachiketa' of C.K. Vankataramiah, 'Samsara Texta' of H.L. N. Saha, 'Devapada' of K. Niranmayya, 'Akka Mahadevi' of E. Puttaswamiah and 'Dharma Patnakara' of Hunsur Krishnamurthi are some of such brilliant stage plays that armutek could well be proud of and which richly deserve to be translated into other languages.

THE ACTOR: It is the actor who fills in bright life into cold words of the playwright, gives them a meaning and a power and brings the mental picture of the latter to the visual plane. He is the interpreter of the dramatist and is ultimately responsible for the impression of the play. There are abundant instances of the actor's genius of portrayal which have turned a dull script into a potent performance. It is natural therefore for the theatre to depend for its success on the potential abilities of its artists in no less a degree than on the creative genius of its playwright. Like the eminent playwright, the intelligent and talented artist also has gone down into the pages of the dramatic history of any region or country. The theatrical history of Bengal cannot but pause and reflect on the magnificent theatrical abilities of great actors like Girish Chandra Ghosh sisir Kumar Abaduri or Nilakantha Lahiri and the theatrical history of Maharashtra, - of the great Ganapatrao Joshi, Kesaverao Date or Bal Gandharva. Karnatak also discovered scores of actors of talent and genius who made their memory live ever green by giving a glamour to the stage.
It is not a question of mere adding glory to the stage. The professional theatre is essentially the making of the actor, for, unlike as in the folk theatre or the amateur theatre, it is around a professional actor that a troupe usually revolved and a play sustained. In Karnataka, it is the talented actor who usually formed a troupe and later ran it for its own sake. Many a professional troupe went defunct immediately after the death of an actor like Peer or Mundgur and many an acclaimed play like 'Shakuntala' or 'Deenanandhu Kabi' lost its all power after the death of Varadachar and Raguravachar. It is the artist ultimately, who takes the play into success. In the hands of a bad artist even a good play becomes bad, but in the hands of a good artist even a bad play may become good. Actor, thus is the very spine of theatrical strength in a region, but it must be admitted that the condition of the professional actor in Karnataka is yet utterly deplorable.

Karnataka is the home of actors and actresses, and the high water mark of the region's histrionic talent could well be seen on the professional stage as well as the folk and amateur platforms. Even from within the abyss of pain and poverty the talented ones rose up to immense heights with a mastery in the theatrical art in both its branches of dignified 'character-acting' and of the all pervading comic type. A few of them who were the architects of Karnataka theatre set standards in theatrical artistry and showmanship and A.V. Varadachar was one such.
H. S. Subbarao, presiding over a Drama Conference in 1930 appealed to the stage-artistes not to imitate Varadachar for it would not do any justice to the role, the actor himself and never to Varadachar. To imitate the inimitable Varadachar was hazardous and yet it had become a contagious fashion. Varadachar was truly a symbol of the best acting and showmanship of the Mysore stage which he ruled as its uncrowned monarch for a quarter of a century from about 1900 A.D.

Gifted with a grand personality and a magnificent voice, Varadachar had acquired a thorough knowledge of the Kannada classics and classical music. More than his contribution to the theatrical grandeur and sustenance with a new method of stage music, the sound pit, stage-illumination, rationalised make up, costumes and settings, it is his capacity to live the role that brought him the deserved honour. His portrayal of the roles like Hiranyakashipu (in Prahlada), Santapaka (in Hirupana), Vasanta (in Ratnavali) and Rama Varma (in Rama Varma Leelavati) made both Varadachar and the roles famous all over the Karnataka country and in fact, in the entire South India. "In Hiranyakashipu he portrayed a subtle inter-play of pride and pity, love and hatred, agony and conflict... he tried to

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1 Kala 1, 3, May 1930, p.64
2 Kala 1, 3, May 1930, p.64

humanise a 'Rakshasa' character into a gorgeous object of impotent wrath fighting and foundering on the rock of an inexorable law... His Rama Varma was a moving epic study in tragedy. 1 He gave these roles an individual touch that he alone could give. In the role of Hiranyakashipu, he impressed as the monarch who had scattered away the 'Devas' and lived the real Lord of the world; yet he gave a delightful human touch to the role in the Dream Scene when he lovingly entreated the young Prahlada to respect his words, and then again, in the last scene, when the uncontrollable obstinate fury gave way to utter bewilderment as the Lord Karanika came out shattering the huge column, he expressed every shade of the emotion befitting/vignified monarch of the Earth and Heavens. The climax came when before meeting his own 'Karma' that came to devour him, when he paused, took a loving look and grabbed his little son to his bosom to press a kiss on his forehead. Though in the raptures of a devotee who had long awaited to see the God of Gods, he then turned towards the pronounced enemy, super-imposing a real royal fury. Varadachar's mastery at portraying mixed feelings made his audience never forget him as a genius of dramatic art. He gave the same magic touch to every role he portrayed. "Neither bound by narrow tradition nor by the rigid scholasticism of psramic plots, Varadachar

1 V. Bhaskaran. 'A. V. Varadachar—Actor and Artist. 'Theatre' March, 1931. p. 25.
flew easily with outstretched wings into the realms of deepest human tragedy and presented a Romeo of the finest type to the audience. In the love of Bushyanta he was love incarnate; his Keechaka was the very epitome of love gone crazy and mad. His deep-set rolling eyes are said to have portrayed feelings more vividly than his matchless voice and acting could do. He appeared to reach his best form in his 'inimitable delineation and display of 'Sringara Rasa' which earned him the reputation of being the greatest romantic hero of the South Indian stage.

In an intimate pen-picture of the acting abilities of Varadachar, V. Sitaramiah pays a compliment to the very manner he entered and retired from the stage in different scenes, for the very entrance perfectly portrayed the internal emotion of the character. The way he deliberately danced into the stage looking hither and thither, taking a leap and prussing a while as Bushyanta—chasing the deer—brought him a spontaneous ovation from the entire theatre. In the

1 "పాలరాయనానంతర కొప్సలో పృథివికారం మహాపాలం", ఎందుకు మధ్యం సమసాగించి ఇంటింటే కొందరు కానం అనంతరం వెలుస్తుంది
3 చాలా సమయాలలో ఎందుకు మధ్యం కనుకండి కానం వెలుస్తుండవచ్చు, కనుక తన మనం తపసు చేసి ఆధారాంకం జనాంకాల ప్రామాణికత ప్రదస్త్రయ ఇవి
4 "అయినప్పటికి నిరోధ చరిత్రలో ప్రాముఖ్యత దృష్టి కు గమనము", ఎందుకు ప్రాముఖ్యత ప్రదస్త్రయ ఉండవచ్చు కానం మహాపాల వెలుస్తుంది అనుమతి ఇవి.
play 'Ratnavali', on the occasion of the Spring Festival (Vasantotsava) the solemn dignity of his entrance infused a serene atmosphere into the entire setting. In 'Harischandra', his entrance from the rear wing of the darkish stage into the cremation ground as the heavy hearted but determined Harischandra with his deep dark shadow growing on the hind screen as he slowly advanced on the stage was a calculated achievement in showmanship. Varadacchar—represented a rare combination of acting and showmanship by living a role and creating a natural atmosphere with calculated accessories and settings on the stage. "His performances gave a new vision to the spectator's eyes, taught him a new taste with which he could distinguish the worthy from the unworthy in the theatrical art."

'It was not mere acting that earned such unstinted and superlative praise for Varadacchar from the public. Nature had blessed him with a voice which for its depth and volume, its timbre and melody was hard to excel'. This God given gift, he made use of for the best advantage of the stage. With a skill which bore a stamp of genius, he evolved a new tradition of stage music and made it support a full expression of a sentiment. In music and acting, he was a rigorous trainer of himself and every individual of his troupe. Every movement on the stage was calculated with a deep understanding of the role and when the song came, it came only in exquisite harmony with the emotion and environment. "His sublimated

1 V.Sitaromatish—Ibid.
music made Varadachar's art so entrancing. He showed 'Navarasas' in delightful profusion, and his music bathed the play in rare melody of delicious charm and grace."

But the stage was only a nature's compensation to Varadachar 'a man of many disappointments'. He was hard hit by several domestic calamities. Death snatched away his parents when he was quite young, his wife and the only child died when he was in the prime of youth, and his supporting brother—Shamanna, an eminent actor himself, passed away when he was most needed to sail smooth the flourishing troupe. Varadachar remained all alone but not all for himself. He dedicated himself, his art and all his possessions to the society, only too ungrudgingly. His generosity became proverbial and earned him the title from C.R. Reddy/‘the most princely benefactor among the Mysore public’. He said ‘nay’ to none and facts regarding his generosity seemed to be fiction. Like a loving father of a family, he stood by the members of his troupe in each individual's pleasure and pain and lived as an example both on the stage and in real life.

All through his career, society was bountiful both in its praise and patronage to him. Yet strange enough are its ways for, it left him to die in despair and distress, in poverty and humility in 1925. He left an ever green memory and not a tangible legacy. "For one thing, his example was too high to be easily emulated by common people... there was

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1 M.A. Gopalaswami Iyengar—A.V. Varadachar: A Sketch—1326.  
   p. 1
absolutely no question of imitating his transcendental art which blossomed and danced only to a symphony of its supreme master and the ecstatic urge of its soaring intellect. At best Varadachar's bequest could be a sweeping gesture— from the serene heights to the half-gods below. Yet his memory worked the miracle and 'the Varadachar school of acting' attracted every ambitious actor of the Mysore and imprinted its stamp on the performances of eminent artists like T. Raghavachari, R. Nagendraro and Mohamed Peer.

Garud: Very similar if not the same traditions of acting were set on the North Karnatak stage by Garud Sadashivarao, a junior contemporary of Varadachar. He trained scores of ambitious young men in the theory and practice of stage acting and the Garud School of acting and stage performance is an achieved reality, for almost every impressive actor in North Karnatak to-day, says that he drew inspiration if not direct training from Garud. To Garud, the art of acting was a methodical science, which could be reasoned and taught. He believed that 'an actor was not born but made with systematic training and experience. 'Those that desire to make others feel must feel it themselves' was the secret of Garud's theatrical success and he acted on the stage what he said. 

2 He insisted on one's FEELING the emotion he tried to portray. It is said that while rehearsing an artist of his troupe for the role of Veerappa Nayaka, Garud insisted on his feeling thrilled when he said 'I am thrilled'. The feeling was to be physically shown by making the hair stand. The actor could not do it, but Garud demonstrated the feeling every time he rehearsed the words 'I am thrilled'. (Collected from Pendit C.Y. Kavalil, MS).
method was planned rather than spontaneous and he had trained himself in the 'Trishya' and 'Chaturashra' types of acting—out the mixed emotions and employed them at command particularly in the roles of Dasharatha, Kshema Mayas, Kabirdas and Ashoka. Garud was perhaps the first to have rationalised and analysed the art of acting on the lines of scientific principles. Almost every play of his created sufficient scope for 'study in contrasts', thus amply providing for the actor's talent. An artist who came out with success from the vigorous training and tests of Garud was certain of making a name as he was always on demand by the different professional troupes.

Equally important as the facial expression was an intelligent use of voice and a calculated articulation for the maximum benefit of the role. Garud's own troupe which earned a reputation for 'abhinaya' and the literary and dramatic merit of its plays paid a clear attention to the voice and the best use of it unlike many an other troupe which 'shouted through the play'. In the role of the aged Dasharatha crushed with the shock of the departure of Rama,

1. 'Trishya' is the method of playing two different shades of identical emotions upon one fundamental basic emotion, all simultaneously. 'Chaturashra' presented a play of three different shades on the basis of one fundamental emotion.
2. Most of his plays have also contrasting characters as in Bhashamayaka wherein the good and the evil are symbolised through Sunjivya and Lakshamana Mayaka against Bayesma and Jagadevaraya, Hanuma against Kriya and Agasara Chikkayya against Arosara Ramarao.
Garud put his voice into a memorable use when he moaned the name of Rama twice with short pauses between - completely altering the tone and the volume of his voice. He portrayed Dasharatha with immense intensity of a human tragedy whose last painful groans and helpless cries for Rama live for ever once heard. Equal was the grandeur of his acting of the role of Ashoka (in the play Vishama Vivaha) particularly while portraying the great monarch suffering a shock of realisation of the wickedness of his wily queen. He excelled himself in the portrayal of conflict and suffering in the soul and yet like Varadachar, he often appeared in minor roles on the stage to make a magnificence of the insignificant. The country recognised his art, patriotism and tireless efforts in shaping the theatre of North Karnataka and adding a merited worth to its dramatic literature by honouring him with the title 'Karnataka Natakalanjara' at the Belgaum Kannada Conference in 1925. His example is being emulated by many a professional artist of North Karnataka for the benefit of its stage.

Raghavachari:

In the same line came T. Raghavachari whose bearing and acting of dignity and understanding made his performances memorable. It is said that when once Varadachar was asked as to why he did not choose to portray the great Shakespearean tragic roles as he did the romantic ones like "Romeo", Varadachar remarked - "What? I too play
Hamlet and Othello? Who could compare with Raghavachari in those roles? If Irving saw him playing Hamlet, even he would say the same.¹ Those who saw Raghavachari on the stage would not think that this was an undeserved compliment, for he really was an actor of consummate skill in portraying intense emotional feelings. Gifted with a grand personality and a charming face with chiselled features that could ably express the serious and sublime, rather than the light and humorous, Raghavachari could well be compared with Ganapatrao Joshi of Maharashtra or Sidir Bohaduri of Bengal. Like Certain Kamesh of the Palace Company of Mysore the first Kannada actor who came to be honoured for exquisite portrayal of the role of Othello, Raghavachari also with ceaseless effort and an insight, gained a mastery in portraying the epic characters of Shakespeare, particularly those of Othello, Macbeth, Hamlet and Shylock and earned appreciation from even western critics resident in India.² Though he is an outstanding representative of the amateur stage of Karnataka and Andhra, his theatrical art and achievement compared favourably with the reputation of the best of the professional artist and so, deserves a mention here as he enhanced the prestige of the Karnataka theatre.

Raghavachari, apart from the divine gift of a —

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2 Principal J.C.Tait, a Professor of English in the Mysore University and a well known critic was one of the admirers of Raghavachari and particularly appreciated his 'Shylock', saying "that he portrayed it much better than some of the well known English actors". -C.K.Venkatarasimha: Stage Centenary Vol. II, p.76-77.
'stage personality', a good mastery on the expressive voice, was equipped with high academic education in literature and law and also with an intimate knowledge of the literature of different South Indian languages. This served a double purpose of adding 'a culture' to his performance and creating a favourable feeling towards the stage, be it amateur or professional. Raghavachar's speciality was in his brilliant interpretation of the epic characters. He was at his best in the mythological roles of Harischandra, Dasaratha, Ravana and the grand historical personalities like 'Chanakya', Ramadas and Kabir. His brilliance seems to be due to his complete self abandon in the portrayal of such roles.

His audiences are said to have had the best evidence of the full realisation of the theatrical art and the author felt honoured if he took up his plays. Contemporary artists like Sthana Narasinha Rao of Andhra was convinced that "he was inimitable in the great epic characters". -- Raghavachar's 'living the roles' of Ramadas and Kabiradas


2. "నా రూపంలో సంతలు సంప్రదాయానికి తయారు చేయాలను చూసి ప్రతి పిక్సు జాదుగు పతనం వచ్చింది. అదే సంభవం కానీ ఈ నరసింహరావు ముఖ్యతో పరారాధన ప్రతి సంస్థలో స్వభావంగా చేసింది. ఈ సంస్థలో అన్ని పిక్సులు ప్రఖ్యత కలిగి ఉండాలి. ఇంత సంస్థలలో అయినప్పటికీ నీటి కలిగి ఉంటే ఈ సంస్థల లో ప్రతి పిక్సు జాదుగు పతనం వచ్చింది.

స.హె. విపటి చరిత్ర సాహిత్య ఆధారం - (తెలుగు)
convinced his admirers of the truth of the story that he was
born of divine grace by the blessings of 'Avadhoota Basappa'.
To them he was more than a mortal. His conviction of the
stage as a sacred temple and the drama as a mode of worship
gave a holy touch to his art and earned him friends and
admirers. His bearing and 'gait' on the stage, his portrayal
of roles with a rare understanding convinced his spectators
that he was a prodigy in acting.

Raghavachari lived as the soul and spirit of the Saraca
Vinodini Sabha of Bellary and the Amateur Dramatic Association
of Bangalore which toured the different parts of the South
on professional lines. His rigorous training and attention
for details of production made the plays highly attractive.
His troupe staged plays in Kannada, Telugu, and English.
Raghavachari's performances in 'Doengabenda Katir', a stage
play written by Pandit Taranath, 'Ramadas' of L.Gopalscharhi,
'Prahlada' of Rajeshv Srinivas Iyengar, 'Chitra' of Tagore
and Othello' became well known and he led the A.D.A. troupe
on a two months' trip to Bombay, Simla...

1 Reserve- 'Netyajeeri' - Kala: Bellary, 1951. p.XVI.
2 Raghavacher's letter to Sri C.Ananda Rao, an amateur
actor of Mysore, throws some light on this aspect. 'Do not
seek for the applause of the Gods and you are applauded.
Do not seek for success and you succeed... The stage is
meant to contribute to the happiness of the world; and we
can never feel happy nor make others happy until we keep
the "I" in us far away from the foot of lights... Never
look for individual appreciation, nor strive to imitate
any one however great he may be! Lose your self in HIM
the Chief Actor; I always pray before I go on the stage;'
and Calcutta in the year 1931 and made an impression for the first time on the other regions of India with the theatrical art of Karnataka. Mahatma Gandhi while in Bangalore witnessed the performances of "Osmabandhu Kabir" and also 'Sagara', a social play on the problem of untouchability and said, "Of the impressions I carry of Karnataka, this will be one of those that will never be forgotten". Raghavachari was reckoned with the best in the theatrical art of Karnataka.

While in the west in 1928, to study the advancement of the theatrical art for incorporating its salient features for the benefit of the Indian stage, Raghavachari was honoured as a representative of the Indian theatre by the well-known Garrick Club of London. The party arranged in his honour was attended by the great British artists like Sir Forsyth Robertson, Mr. and Mrs. Norman Forbes Robertson and dignitaries like Winston Churchill. Raghavachari had an intimate interview with Bernard Shaw and the English Press greatly admired him for his approaching the International Theatre Society for exchange of theatrical troupes between England and her overseas colonies for periodical tours. After his return from the West, Raghavachari closely associated himself with the theatrical art of Karnataka and Andhra, was honoured by his own country-men with the title 'Nayya Kala Prapanna'.

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1. Rangabhoosi, 11. 11. 165-166.

2. J.E. Green, a correspondent of the Illustrated London News wrote in his paper about Raghavachari. "A fascinating personality, a wise speaker, he is sure to elicit interest for a new movement which is one of far reaching importance for the better understanding of Mother-land and its allied empire beyond the seas." - Rangabhoosi - Oct. 1928, p. 32.
and by the British Government with the title "Rao Banadur".

Like Varadamshar, Raghavachar also wrote stage plays in the last years of his stage career and staged them with success.

Raghavachar passed away in 1946 (April) at the age of 66.

Peer:

Mohamed Peer was from the same classical mould and he came on the scene - though for a brilliant short time when the shades of night were falling fast on the dramatic world of Karnatak. As a determined youth, he 'bore amid snow and ice' a banner excelsior of the salient and sustaining aspects of the theatrical art. Within a short span of a decade from 1925 he made a mark as an actor of outstanding ability, especially in the portrayal of serious and dignified classical roles. Though a Muslim, he spoke the very pure Kannada, the blank verse and even the classical, with an ease and effect; but more than this, it is his potential talent that attracted the critic, the learned and the layman to his performances.

After starting with minor roles in Eriyante Pakshana Karnatak Natika Sabha of 'Hata Bhayankara' M.H. Ganagadharam and Lalita Kale Mandal of M. Subbanna, Peer started his own troupe in 1930. But by then, he had earned a reputation for his portrayal of the role 'Vijaya' in the play 'Krishna Leela'.

1. 'Saripadamiyagadula' and 'Telugani Samasya' are the two plays - both in Telugu.
and the like. With a distinct devotional implication, Peer
"resurrected the role of Vijaya from the deplorable abyss
into which Shirshatti Venkobarao's performances had put him,
and made him again an innocent and devoted companion of
Krishna".1 The parting scene when Krishna left, on the invita-
tion of Kansa, provided full scope to Peer for the display of
his talents. Peer would stand still at a corner of the stage
for scores of minutes, all silently with bent head and wet eyes
till at last Krishna said farewell to all and turned to him.
Krishna would move to him with a heavy gait, would slowly lift
his face by the chin- with a look into the eyes, and then they
would fall into the arms of each other- all too silently but
all too eloquently. Peer created a new world for his spectators
by his performances and always collected the toll of their tears
as Dana in 'Shahajahan', Sundara in 'Chandramallika' or even
Gautama in 'Gautama Buddha' in the latter's parting scene
from Yoshodhara, and later, from Chenna.

After starting his troupe in 1930, Peer came to be
known all over Karnatak as an artist of rare abilities. He
did not stage mythological plays, nor did he have spectacular

1 A.H.Krishna Rao: Karnatakada Halavideru (p.49). In the
play 'Krishna Leela' staged by Shirshatti Venkobarao,
Vijoy was depicted as a "helpful go-between for Krishna's
romantic life."
sceneries and settings; his plays did not lay any emphasis on the stage music and yet, he toured the entire length and breadth of Karnataka creating a new taste for prose plays. His only assets were the plays themselves, like 'Shahajahan', 'Samsara Nauka' and 'Gautama Buddha' and a talented troupe of artists that consisted of H.L.N. Simha, H. Narasimha Shastri and H.V. Rajsama. As Duwa in 'Shahajahan', he intensified the effect of the tragedy with an ineffaceable smile of dignity as a reply to all the meanness of the Imperious Aurangzeb. As 'Sundera' in 'Samsara Nauka', he depicted the helpless victim of the parental wrath, of the social inequality and of the eating poverty in a manner that the play became perhaps THE most effective of social plays on the professional stage of Mysore. The golden climax to his fame was provided by 'Gautama Buddha' in which he played the hero with an effect that touched the heart of his spectator. With his brilliant performances of these potent plays Peer created a respect for the Mysore stage in the other parts of Karnataka and came to be accepted by the learned and the laymen. With the tragic death of Peer in 1957, the three plays also died out of the stage.

1. 'सर्वसे जयसम्पुर्वतया सुभाषितो हि गौतमकोश महाराजानुि गुरुप्रगटुः। अनुष्ठानोऽकारिकाः अत्यःप्रसन्नाः। অন্তর্জাতিক সাহিত্যের স্বরূপে গৌতম বুদ্ধের সমর্পণ। অতঃপূর্বক তদ্যপি গৌতম বুদ্ধের সমর্পণ অন্তর্গত হইয়াছে।'

2. 'গৌতম বুদ্ধের মতে সম্বন্ধিত গ্রন্থের অর্থময় অংশের অধ্যয়ন করিলে একটি বিশেষ সৌন্দর্য্যময় প্রভাব প্রাপ্ত হইবে। অনুষ্ঠানের মূলে অভ্যন্তরীণ অংশের সম্বন্ধে গৌতম বুদ্ধের সম্পূর্ণ দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি অনুসারে অন্তর্জাতিক সাহিত্যের স্বরূপে গৌতম বুদ্ধের সমর্পণ।'

শ. মিষ্টিকেশ হটিয়া - সম্পাতিক শ্রীমোত্তম প্রসন্নচন্দ্র
Peer died in the prime of his youth and success - thus bringing the curtain down on the golden age of the Karnataka theatre which had started with A.V. Varadachar early in the 20th century. The period of 40 years saw a galaxy of great artists and playwrights. His death marked also the end of a great tradition of the 'classical' drama and left the field free for the humorous light plays. His death seemed to mark the end of 'studied acting' with an emphasis on the unity of impression of the play. In a way, his death became symbolic of the death of all the original pomp and power of the professional theatre and the forties of this century accepted the symbolic prophecy.

Handigenur Siddharanappa.

A tragic hero of North Karnataka who closely resembled Peer both on the stage and in real life was Siddharanappa of Handigenur (Bijapur District). Within a short span of a decade from about 1935 to 1945 he came to the forefront of the theatrical artists of Karnataka, created a place for himself among the noteworthy and came to be reckoned with the classical mould of acting and showmanship. Though destined to live short, his career...
was obviously glittering as that of Peer for he filled the stage literally with his towering personality, royal demeanour and resounding base voice. He specialised in interpreting the lofty mythological characters like Krishna (in the play Akshayambara), Kamasura (in Usha Swayamvra), Harischandra - and Bhidhama (in the play Uttara Phoopa) which came to be closely associated with his name and even prompted the critic to hit a note of exaggeration saying that he avoided alone without equals in portraying such lofty characters 1. It must be reckoned with, however, that he did show the same genius of Varadachar in entering into the very core of the role he was playing and was capable of portraying roles of very different types with equal success.

Even as a boy, Handigenur was attracted to the stage and he took to it with a steadfastness and stuck to it even in the darkest days under disillusioning circumstances. He started his stage career at the age of ten playing female roles and made a name because of the rare naturalness in his portrayal and also because of his resounding musical voice. He worked in different professional companies for about twenty

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1. హూమాన్యుగంలో సంస్కృతి అనుభవ వారికి దోష పెంచడం కంటే సమాధానం కంటే పెద్ద ప్రాంతం నిరాధారం చేయడం నేటి అవసరంగా ఉండి ఈ రాణి అంటే 'సమాధాన ఇక్కడ ఉంది.'

ప. ముఖ్తసర రాణి చెప్పించడం కంటే మీద కంటే?
years before he started his own troupe by name 'Vishvekala Nataka Samsale' in the year 1930-39. Though with scanty stage equipment, his troupe thrived well for about eight years and earned a good name though not money. The entire attraction for the public was Siddaramappa himself, his acting and his voice. His thunderous voice, calculated emphasis and the becoming gait made his portrayal of Banasura and Ravana — a household word in North Karnataka. 'Harischandra' also was a role propounding one basic sentiment, but the role of Krishna in 'Jyotshyambara' provided considerable scope for his talents and he gave an individual touch to the complex character of the scheming Krishna "who realised his own desire" by bringing about a war between the Kauravas and Pandavas though fully pretending to be interested in establishing an understanding between them.

1 He served in the 'Kotagi Maharaj Natak Company' for about three years and then in 'Maidargi Company' on a monthly of Rs. 17/-, later in an Urdu dramatic troupe on partnership and then returned to Kundur and started an amateur troupe, and ran it for about three years. Later he joined as the leading actor of the Krishna Natak Company of Gangubai Giledgudda on a monthly pay of Rs. 25/- then he worked in Vanivilasa Company. Later he joined the 'Lalita Kaladakara Mandal' of Kundagali Hanumantharao and earned good fame as Krishna in the play 'Jyotshyambara'. He then joined 'Vishwa Banjan Natak Company and became well known for his Banasura in 'Jyotshyambara'.
Later, Handigaur is said to have been at the climax of his theatrical success in the roles of 'Bhishma' in the play 'Uttara Bhoomi' and 'Karna' in the play 'Drupadi.' In the former, he portrayed the internal conflict of Bhishma who had to stand against the Pandavas because of his obligation to the Kuravas. Handigaur excelled himself both in the exquisite make-up and remarkable penetration into the character and virtually recreated 'Bhishma' in all his ripe glory on the Kannada stage. His 'Karna' is also widely remembered for the magnificent impression. When Karna went up and was about to shoot the 'Natsaya' in the 'Natsya Yatra' to win for himself Princess Draupadi, she despised him on the plea that he was a 'Soota.' This situation was made memorable by Handigaur who gave a bit of his brilliant acting in this context by fixing up his eyes at the top light and delivering his effective soliloquy of Karna cursing his fate. He would drop a tear or two from the wide open eyes which would draw its alike from the thousand eyes that saw the master-actor.

Handigaur, like the later well-known actor Madhavaraja Umajji, projected great hopes for the Karmetak theatre, but

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1 Madhavaraja Umajji of Bijapur earned a great name all over Karmetak as a very successful actor of rare understanding and abilities. He worked with several professional troupes and particularly with the Pattatraya Nataka Mandali for about ten years and was trained by Carud. He is compared with Varadachar in dignity and stature. His portrayal of the roles like Harischandra, Krishna (in Akshayambara, Kurukshetra and Patharatri) and Arjuna (in Chitraganda) is remembered to this day. Umajji who held a great promise died in April 1952, at the age of 38.

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died all too suddenly in 1947 rendering considerable loss to the North Kannada stage. Those who saw his performance as the villainous 'Dashabuddhi' in the screen play 'Prahlada' predicted of his great future on the screen; but those who knew him intimately declared that he would never give up the stage for the screen. His untimely demise took away a glamour from the stage and a hope of the screen; with him went off another light which brightened the theatre of North Kannada.

Veeranna: It is humour that provides oil to the wheels of life and it has been an inevitable aspect of the theatre in its different phases. If the folk-stage provided laughter with its humorous roles like Kodangi, Hemmane and Sarathi, the professional stage created separate scenes called 'Farce' and characters like the over-fed Brahmin, the greedy Vaishya and the drunkard growing songful over his cups. The Amateur stage created humour in a more intellectual manner apart from magnifying the odds and artificialities of individuals and situations. In its various different manifestations, the stage humour which was 'physical' to a considerable extent on the folk and even the professional stage developed to become more intellectual and verbal on the amateur stage. Whatever be its manifestation, and its platform, the actor portraying humorous roles soon became popular with the people and got away with an ugly expression or even at the audience on insulting remark when he used the weapon of humour in the way it should be.
The theatre of Karnataka has had a tradition of humour and discovered a number of artists who specialised in portraying it. Theirs was a different method from the 'classical' type of acting the noble; theirs was a different technique in portrayal often flaunting the rigidity and dignity of the theatre and came to be loved by the spectator in spite of it, or rather, because of it. The comic actor was always a talented artist and was often better remembered than the artist who played the hero. The performances of Lakshmipati Shastri (Palace Company), Krishnamurti Rao and Manirao (Ratnavali Company) of Mysore and of Nakali Doddananjappa and Kannan of Nanjundiah of North Karnataka are remembered and spoken of to this day. In this line came G.N. Veeranna who has been giving hearty laughs to his crowded audiences for about fifty years now.

Veeranna has closely moved with the changing times and has successfully served to the changing tastes of his audiences. He is known more for his administrative abilities and cleverness in keeping the ship of his professional troupe sailing safe in the midst of dangerous winds and waters. His fame as the most pompous producer of stage plays in Karnataka seems to have overshadowed his artistic abilities. When closely noticed, Veeranna comes out as an intelligent artist of considerable talent. He has set fashions in the portrayal of humorous roles.

Veeranna started with the comical interlude called 'farces' but through the years he created a lofty and rightful place for humour in the stage play as an inevitable
aspect of it. Initially, his method of evoking laughter was not an exception to the accepted standard of low and loud humour— but he was a real artist, for he made even that, charming and sustaining. His genius was in the portrayal of roles of the abnormal or subnormal nature and such roles like Adimoolam in the play 'Sadaram', Kamaranda in 'Krishna-leela', Nagan in 'Swami Nite' and Kakodara in 'Kabiradas' earned great fame for him and money for his company. With all his early emphasis on awkward contortions of the face, uncontrolled gesticulation and odd dresses in fast colours, he earned the title 'Versatile Comedian'— a compliment to his genius in portraying the 'complex characters'. Later his performances placed considerable emphasis on a clever use of words and exploitation of funny situations. His methods also became refined and the people affectionately called him 'Vinoda Batnakara'. The critic recognised the elements of Charles Chaplin in his performances and called him the Chaplin of Kamatotsak.2

Veeramma tried to play the roles of dignity and tragedy like that of Durvodhana in 'Kurukshetra' (1974)— with considerable success, but his audiences were so much used to his humour that they could not reconcile with him in serious roles and wanted their 'Hasti Veeramma' to come back to his own garb.

1 A.N.Krishnarao: Kamatotsada Kalavidaru I.p. 130.
2 Ibid. p. 132.
Critics argued about his potentialities to portray serious roles. Veeranna respected the feeling of his audience by coming back to humorous roles and with his humour and satire, he achieved more than an actor delivered sermons on morality and social behaviour. If he has turned film-minded to-day, the professional stage of Karnataka is poorer to that extent.

Hirammaya: The tradition of stage humour initiated by the artists of the 'Palace Company' and developed by versatile like Krishnamoorthi R., K. Sectoramashastri of Halimane, K. C. Chikkanna Jettappa and Veeranna was in a way perfected by K. Hirammaya, one of the most witty and intelligent of playwrights and actors of Karnataka. From the times of the jester and farces, the stage humour had become a part of the play at the hands of Jettappa and Veeranna. Hirammaya took the trend, shaped and sharpened the stage humour into a potent double edged weapon and couched it in the theme itself. Humour almost became satire with a lesson in it. The jester did not remain a secluded individual in Hirammaya's plays but popped up his head in different garbs like a clever brahmin (in Basaveshwara), a learned cook (in Pengamama), a henpecked husband (in Makal Topi), an ingenuous pyap (Najukeyya in Devadasi), or even...
a dudé prince as in the play 'Bichama Nayas'. Hirannayya's speciality was in the very angle from which he looked at even profound things. Humour with calculated spontaneity became the bed rock on which the edifice of morals and social philosophy came to be erected. It may be said that he was one of the most prominent of professional playwrights who wrote biting social satires in which humour was elevated into an intellectual status. His humour gave both a hearty laugh and a serious thought to the society and drove deep many a homé-truth. He started from where Peer had left and continued to serve and shape the popular taste by establishing the social play—intellectual but numerous—on the professional stage. He wrote and acted it out for immense pleasure and profit of the society. He played with the society, tricked, and even insulted it, but the society loved him all the more and learnt things with a laugh. Hirannayya passed away in his mid forties while on the stage during a performance at Coorg a few months ago. With him the theatre lost one of its illustrious luminaries.

Condition of the stage artist: Scores of other artists made deep impressions with their potential talent on their audiences at different times. They enhanced the prestige and popularity of the professional theatre, but to-day scores of them like R.Nagendra Rao, a reputed actor and close associate of A.V.

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Vasudev Girimajii, Komnagge Dhagavatii and Mahabala Rco of the Gubbi Company, and Mansur Krishnamurthii, author of
'Dharma Hatnasara' are not seen on the stage as they have
turned to films for careers. Many others like Basavaram
Mansur, an acclaimed musician—actor of North Karmati, Shanta-
kumar, an intelligent stage-comedian, the famed Seshacher of
the Seshokala Mandal who held great promise to the Kannada
stage have been obliged to withdraw from the stage obviously
owing to a lack of social patronage— and live by means of
other professions. From a third point of view the professional
stage seems to be unfortunate, for, quite a number of talented
artists like Peer, Nondiga, Madhavrao Umarji and Girensaya
who could compare well with the best of the actors of other
regions died only too prematurely just at a time when they
had established themselves and were most needed by the theatre.
It is in such artistes that the theatre centred its hopes.

Even under the most disillusioning circumstances, many
an other actor has clung to the stage with hunger in the
stomach and hope in the eyes. There is a real need for the
actor also for it is an actor that a professional troupe
revolves around and it is he who gives strength and glamour to
the stage. Even today, in the age of films and the amateur
stage, social patronage is earned by a troupe if it has a team
of good artists or at least one or two of them who are out-
standing in the talent of the theatre.
The public seems to take more easily and dearly to
an outstanding actor rather than to a merited play or
imposing production, for the obvious reason that while the
latter remain static and monotonous, the talented artist,
changes the shades of his portrayal every time and adds
freshness to the performance. The saying that Shakespeare
is static but Irving is always new is symbolic of a general
truth.

Actor is thus the life-blood of the stage and the
pride of the country; - but yet, even to-day, his economic
condition is utterly deplorable though his social status has
improved considerably. An actor of average ability in Mysore
who would have taken to the stage for earning his living and
worked with a professional troupe would get under normal
conditions, an average income of between fifteen and twenty-
five rupees per month; he would be unemployed for about five
months in the year; he would have toured about fifteen villages
and cities; he would have taken part in about a hundred per-
formances; he would have become a victim of habits which he
could not afford and he would have got in to small debts to
the tune of about a hundred rupees a year. ¹ An actor would
become unable to fulfil his duties after a regular service

¹ Taken from the statistics prepared in 1942 by C. Mandurao
considering eight actors who worked in uncertain professional
troupes of Mysore for a year on the average e. M25. Conditions
of actors in North Kanatalak are not better in the total
though their income is slightly more than those of Mysore;
nor have the living conditions of the average actor improved
since 1942.
for about fifteen years and six out of ten artists usually suffered from bad diseases including Tuberculosis and Asthma. This state of affairs may not exist in the well established concerns like the Sattle wherein actors are better paid and allowed to enjoy privileges like Annual leave and maintenance allowances for families. The state of affairs is not true either, in exceptional cases of very highly talented actors whose monthly income would reach the average of a hundred and fifty rupees and when the professional troupes rivaled to possess. It is not true either of an actress of even the average talent for she was usually better placed and cared for by the leader of the troupe. It may be said incidentally, that many a marriage between artists of the same professional troupe has made the general atmosphere bright and healthier. On the whole, the general condition of the professional artist is deplorable. Many a stage-actor is in no way inferior in talent or impression to a film actor and yet, the disparity in their economic conditions provides pictures of glaring contrasts of extremities. The economic condition of the stage-actor demands to be considered with all urgency and seriousness, for, without placing him in security and above want the theatre cannot be stable and sound. The revival and regulation of the professional theatre depends in a large measure on its artist, - educated and economically better placed.
DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONDITIONS OF THE THEATRE

The Performances: During the short span of its life of about eighty years the professional stage evidently made slow but steady progress in the methods of showmanship. Considerable achievement was made with regard to some of the fundamental aspects of the stage—viz. in the stage music, make up, settings, scenery and the very patterns of the portrayal of the play.

The theatre often bowed down, though unwillingly to the popular demands and amended its ways both with regard to the theme and the manner of presentation. The extent of the stage development would reveal itself when a dramatic performance of the present day is compared with the ones staged half a century ago. Reminiscences of some of the veteran stage artists belong to different parts of Karnataka compared favourably in giving a picture of very similar theatrical conditions all over the land.

The troupe which usually consisted of about thirty persons halted at every village including the ones which had just about two hundred families and staged plays. Immediately after reaching, all the actors including the hero who enjoyed exclusive privileges and sometimes drew the maximum monthly

1 G.H. Veeranna (Mysore)- 'Mataka Bangadalli Namma Anubhava-Galu'- Prajamada (Bangalore); Republic Day Issue—1953.
2 Laxmi Sadashivarsa (N.Karnataka)—Reminiscences. (NSS).
3 Kumagai Hanumathrnarao (N.Karnataka). 'Kannada Stage fifty Years Ago'. (A broadcast speech).
4 Shivarama Karanth (S.Karnataka). References in 'Hiruchu-manaassina Hattu Mukhogalu'.

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pay of 8/- would set to erect the stage called 'Chappa-
ra'. A pit would be dug in the immediate front of the stage-
called the 'Chairs' pit' (Kurchi Halla). though actually, the
troupe could not afford chairs to put in there. In this pit
of about a hundred sq. feet were put some logs of wood to
improvise a sort of benches for the 'upper class' spectators.
When the local dignitary or the official came to witness the
play, he brought his own chairs from his home. The stage
would be ready by the evening with an enclosure around a
spacious arena. If it ever rained in the middle of a per-
formance, the actors would hurriedly bundle up all the stage
equipment and would resume the play only after the skies
cleared. The villager gave a measured quantity of some com-
modity instead of the coin for the entrance fee. The grains
were later sold and money was realised. Each play would cost
the troupe about thirty rupees and the return on a rush-day
would be well near a hundred rupees. Publicity to the play
was given by the village caller. Handbills were printed only
by reputed and economically sound troupes; but they were
kept in the personal custody of the proprietor who would on
no account spare more than eight or ten of them in a village.

It was the self-rising curtain— a miracle in the eye
of the rural spectator— rather than the play that attracted
the entire village to witness the performances initially.

1 In North Kamataka the early plays were usually staged in
spacious spacious halls of buildings (in the first floor) and
so, this reference is in regard to the conditions in Mysore.
2 "புரர், புரிகுள், அருள், சுருக்குள், முயல், முளக்குள், போலப்புறம்" குறிப்பிட்டு வந்து விளக்கம் முதல்வாறு வைக்கப்பட்டு விளக்கம் முதல்வாறு
"புரர், புரிகுள், அருள், சுருக்குள், முயல், முளக்குள், போலப்புறம்". குறிப்பிட்டு வந்து விளக்கம் - வந்து
The stage had the front and rear curtains along with drop curtains for the sides. The drop curtains kept hanging loose and travelled on the shoulders of every incoming or outgoing character. Kerosene lamps were kept in a row in front of the first curtain. The prestige of a professional troupe depended upon the number and size of the lamps. Stage settings were scanty and often improvised. The throne of the inevitable King was always a shaky structure made of an arrangement of kerosene tins or the tool box and covered with a coloured cloth. It was literally the privilege of the King alone to sit on the Durbar Scene for want of seats for other members.

There was no complication of make-up. 'Ingaliya', the native/grey provided the foundation colour to the face and the black of the charcoal was liberally used for eye brows and mustaches. Crape-hair was yet unknown. After 'making-up' the face, the final touch was given by smearing the face with the 'gold powder' (Abhraka). Any person could play the lady-role with the help of a piece of black cloth tied around the head and a string of artificial 'pearls' dropped from the centre to resemble the parting of the hair. The entire equipment of the green room was a big wooden box containing all the dresses. It was on this box the lamp was placed and all the actors sat around it with small mirrors in hand while making up the face. The size of the mirror usually indicated the status of the actor in the company.¹

¹ अनीमा क्रिष्णन नारे- हनमतकोणा केल्तिकार के- प. ११.
Neither was there any such distinguishing feature among the different roles as could be marked by the dress they wore. Sometimes it was only the talking of the character that distinguished him as the King from his associates. Each of the important actors was given a pair of socks, a long shirt, a necklace and a head dress which he had to use and preserve with care. The artist wore them all immaterial of what role he played; he wore the socks and the necklace even if it was the role of an orthodox Brahmin, lest it was used by some other actor if he kept them in the green-room. It was the usual custom to go round the village to borrow - colourful sarees and ornaments for the night's show. The audience usually would discover the ornaments as belonging to a particular family, during the performance, sometimes ornaments and head dresses were borrowed from even the audiences. Quite often members of the audience volunteered to lend the actor their shawls, walking sticks and ornaments. This fact alone reflects on the meagre equipment of the professional troupes on the one hand and on the other, the survival of the most ancient theatrical principle, of the absence of any separation between the performer and the audience.

Plays were mythological almost without exception. To speak of the plays of the Gubbi Company itself, they were...
'Kumara Ramana Charitram', 'Trabhavati Durbar', 'Pancava Vijaya', 'Indra Sabha', 'Harischandra', 'Dharmapala' and 'Gulbaka Vali'. If there was a desire on the part of the audience to see a different play it was soon got up and staged without much difficulty as it was only the theme that would be really altered rather than the costumes, make-up, settings or scenery. Mostly the available songs were freely drawn with minor alterations to suit the new play. Actors were mostly illiterates and yet the secret of the troupe's success was the undaunted enthusiasm and sterling character of the players.

Plays were infested with songs. The audience would not consider him an actor if he did not sing a good number of songs. Each time when the curtain was down, it was the custom to sing again from behind to engage the audience till the curtain's rise. The only accompaniments were the violin and Tabla and naturally, every actor had to adjust his voice to the common single pitch (Sruti) of the instrument and with obvious disadvantages. Songs were often philosophical and moral in import and many of them being compositions of saint poets like Purandara Dasa and Kanakadasa, they captured the audience and brought credit to the performance. Quite some incongruities had come to be accepted, like the King announcing the gift of half of his kingdom to every one who brought...
him some good news and the good news was brought to aim at least half a dozen times. The wild gesticulations could not be anywhere near the artful acting. Movement of the extended hands invariably accompanied the spoken word and when the actor became silent, the tired hands rested on the waist. A king, a giant and in fact, the hero always engaged his right hand in the usual heroic method of twirling the mace while acting, his partner on the stage would be still and cold like an immovable statue. In fact, the show closely resembled what Shakespeare put as "An arena of children that cry out on the top questions and are most tyrannically clapped forth." 

Play-houses: Many of these old modes and methods of the theatre seem to have persisted through the times for decades for they reveal themselves glaringly even after the turning of the century. With the financial betterment of the professional troupes, their performances did become more imposing. The well to do ones equipped themselves with their own tents to provide better shelter to the village audiences and better seating arrangements with chairs and benches (Kalu manes) for higher classes. In big cities, when the halls proved insufficient to house the large number of audiences, spacious pandals were constructed. The Palace Company of Mysore started the tradition of constructing them in 1920s and by 1920 Varadachar, Veeranna, Shrinathti Venkobaran, Garud and all other important

1 Hamlet. Act III. Scene 2.
professionals moved with their heavy but ready equipment to construct at short notice spacious pandals as to house even 1,500 to 2,000 spectators. Later still, the zinc sheet pandal put up in 1934 by Veeranna in Bangalore and Mysore for showing the play 'Kurukshetra' had the capacity of accommodating 4,000 spectators. The Cubbi Company during its extensive touring of the South India after 1935 had to move only in special trains because of its immense equipment and personnel. In addition to the improvised 'theatres' for shows at different places, regular play houses came to be constructed in big cities of Mysore State both by individuals proprietors like Veeranna and K. Hiranayya and local institutions. The municipal 'Town-halls' that sprang up almost in every important small city of Mysore made specific provision for staging plays by visiting troupes. Such bountiful construction of regular play-houses is not seen in North Karnataka though the big cities of Hubli, Dharwar, Belgaum and Gadag proved to be exceptions. By the year 1930 every important city of Karnataka invariably had its own play-house. It is a fact that they lacked the fundamental conveniences of separate green-rooms, good ventilation and decent seating arrangement. Yet they provided a place for performances.

Neither the troupe nor the audiences seemed to have minded the manifold inconveniences but after the advent of the Talkies late in 1950s, the stage suffered a major setback, because many of these play-houses were immediately converted into film houses. Some others which persisted in continuing as the play-houses yielded later to become godowns during the Second World War. A few of the theatres in big cities like
Bangalore, Mysore, Mangalore, Tumkur, Hubli and Gadag however, remained only as exceptions. Many a troupe which could not afford its own pandal suffered a gradual death. The years that followed were gloomy for the professional troupe and it looked that after the heat-blast of the Second World War and the soaring up of the prices, neither the city nor the village could afford to build play-houses. But soon the talking film brought a revolution and saw to it that every good village built its own film house apart from the cities which afforded scores of them. Leading cities, particularly in the Mysore State built ten of them at huge costs but even the biggest city in Karnataka has not got xxx to this day a worthy play-house with sufficient stage equipment, provision for theatrical devices and a healthy and comfortable auditorium.

**Duration:** Stage was the play-ground of Gods, Kings and Queens even in the first quarter of the present century; they 'talked and sang and sang and talked' with only soliloquies and battles in between - serving to the taste of the gallery to get from it claps and "once more's". The professional play was yet a moral preacher with long sermons. It usually covered a span of at least five hours. Such drawn out performances could not be afforded except by the very leisurely spectator. The condition which prevailed in 1928¹ had not improved a bit even by 1935.

¹ 'మసర్తెందుకు జగన్నాథుడు తిరుగు విశేషాల కలిషే పనిలేదు. సమయం తట్టించాయప్పట్టి తెలియలుండి. సంపాదకాలు విశేషంగా నిర్ధిష్ఠులు ఎందుకు పడేవును. మా సంపాదకుడు పడేవును సంపాదకుడు పడేవును. 'మసర్తెండు జగన్నాథుడు ఎంత విశేషాల కలిషే పనిలేదు. సమయం తట్టించాయప్పట్టి తెలియలుండి. సంపాదకాలు విశేషంగా నిర్ధిష్ఠులు ఎందుకు పడేవును. మా సంపాదకుడు పడేవును సంపాదకుడు పడేవును.'
when 'Kurukshetra' of the 'Gubbis' usually went on for six hours. Many a time the sleeping 'spectator' had to be disturbed from his slumber for the final scene. Songs and soliloquies were specially devised to pad up the play to cover more than four hours. A series of attacks on the unnecessary and unhealthy length of the play gradually reduced it into the limits of four hours by 1940 and brought out a better unity of impression.

Stage settings: Settings and scenery play a specific part on the stage to help creating and sustaining the illusion of the drama. Early troupes of Karnataka had a glimpse of the mighty contribution of scenery, settings and costumes to the fulfillment of the play from the performances of the visiting Parsi troupes, but they themselves do not seem to have taken the lesson till the turning corner of the 19th century. The Palace Company of Mysore was perhaps the best equipped troupe in its times. Shirahatti Venkoba Rao and Shivamurthi swami Kambarji-math of North Karnataka paid great attention to making their performances pompous with fabulous stage equipment. Many an other troupe had but the four inevitable curtains of the - 'Durbar Scene', 'Forest Scene', 'Street Scene', and the 'Home Scene'. The same curtains were used to provide the background for different scenes of any play. These common curtains that

persisted through the tides later acquired some of the incongruous paintings of modern subjects and a bald blatant mention of the painter's name. Even mythological plays were staged with modern paintings in the background and more often than not, the very elementary principles of providing appropriate settings, scenic costumes, ornaments and weapons reflecting on the time of the theme were clearly eluded by the equipment used in the play. Many a time the effect of a moving sequence or a piece of good acting was shattered by an odd and ugly background and unnatural settings. "If you stood in front of these curtains and play a comedy it would surely become a tragedy and a tragedy would become a hilarious comedy." The curtains persisted of in spite of critics.

The same lack of judgement was witnessed in the make up and costumes which often looked strikingly unreal. While the financially unsound troupes borrowed screens and made paper-crowns, the rich ones provided a perfect contrast, for, what was lacking in one was fully overdone in the other. The troupes of the second category some times went to the extent

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1 Harindranath Chattopadhyaya: 'Kala': Sept, 1931. p.106.

of presenting 'Shakuntala' the innocent hermit girl in heavy and fabulous costumes. 'Some times even with a wrist watch and spectacles'. Till the beginning of the Thirties, a glaring artificiality in setting, costumes and an over-colouring in the make-up seems to have been an accepted trait of the professional performances. The make-up looked so alien to the Indian themes and settings that as early as in 1921, Jinaraja Dasu pleaded for a change in the method of play-presentation. "We live in India and let us give a picture of Indian life - nowhere else is make-up ever intended to disguise the nationality of actor.... Such an English actor as Sir Boncroft comes on the stage for many a part without touching up the face in the least degree." Yet until the times of Veeranna, there were but a few instances of agreeable and natural settings in play-production because the merit of the play of a professional troupe came to be judged entirely on the qualities of transfer-scenes, settings, costumes and dances performed by girls-rather than the merit of the theme and plot construction.

It was the aim of professional troupes to compete and overshadow the fabulous methods of Parsi productions and some like that of Veeranna, of Venkobrao and of Shivasumatinawami did succeed in their attempts. 'Karukashtra' of the Cebbi Company can be cited as an example, for it attracted thousands of people from the village and city alike because of its fabulous transfer scenes of Krishna's apartment, of 'Geetogadshala', of 'Sharatalpsa', and also on account of the movement

of the elephants, horses and chariots across the stage in the war scene. It became an imposing example of the most pompous productions of the Kannada Stage. It was spectacular with its merit in settings and scenery. Many a professional troupe aimed at emulating the daring example of the Gubbi Company but at the cost of their lives. Another set back was suffered by the stage on account of ever doing the settings because it sacrificed simplicity and symbolism. The advertising handbills of the early Thirties reflect on the tastes of the audience and attractions provided by the stage. In bold print they showed: "New Scenery! New Dress! New Play!!! Women play roles! There are Parei dances! Artists have been honoured with trophies and medals by Rajas and Maharajas! A girl aged 16 years will also take part in the play!"¹ The handbills usually contained some warnings - "The audience may shout ‘once more’s for a song; but it is left to the entire discretion of the actor to sing it again or not! Police will be present during the performance and will take charge of persons who change from lower classes to upper classes; in no account will the money be refunded."

Stage Music: Music was rampant on the professional stage. In North Karnataka it was shaped by the indigenous folk and home tunes,² and later, by the Marathi stage songs; while

² In North Karnataka, the stage music was a blend of folk and home tunes, along with Marathi stage songs.
in Mysore, it seems to have been developed on independent lines though a few tunes were borrowed from Bombay. Varadachar refined the stage music of Mysore and set new fashions in singing the 'Kanda' and 'Vritta' in classical Karnatak music. Lyrics were often couched in the set notations of some of the compositions of Tyagaraja. The play itself was opened with a Vritta in the raga 'Nata' and was followed by a Kriti in Telugu—usually of Tyagaraja. Both in North Karnatak and Mysore, the professional actor indulged in lengthy musical elaborations unmindful of either the duration of the play, its propriety in the sequence or unity of the impression of the performance.

Music and dance were the fundamentals of the theatre but then, Bharata warned against overdoing any of them at the cost of a harmonious blending and beauty. The professional stage somehow upset the balance between music and other aspects of drama by overdoing the former—especially in the early stages of its career. Almost every speech and situation was musically elaborated into excesses. A stage play in the first quarter of the 20th century usually had 'eighty to hundred songs and twenty to thirty 'Kanda' and 'Vritta'. It was not different on the Marathi stage where music had become 'the greatest blemish of the Marathi productions.'

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1 Osborn, "The Indian Theatres," p. 122.
2 "The Indian Theatres," p. 122.
play Sabhodra had to sing twenty-six songs in the first act alone. It was the same situation all over south India and the Telugu Theatre in particular is said to have been influenced by the Kannada professional troupes with regard to its musical excesses. Even at the oddest moments like the fight and escape, musical elaborations were indulged in. Even Varndachar paused to sing leisurely songs while chasing the deer as Dushyanta and the escaping Draupadi as Keechak. It was common that the hero sang before chasing the bandits who abducted the heroine—elaborating as to what he would do to the bandits when he caught them. 'A mother with a child at the point of death would sing a pathetic song in two or three ragas keeping perfect time the while, and it must be said to the credit of the child that it very obligingly refused to die till the music also came to a dying close.' An 'able actor' sometimes ignored his role and performed a regular musical concert by singing the favourite songs of the audience in response to their applauses, whistles and 'once more.' And if it was a musical duet between rivals, the audience themselves had to intervene to bring about peaceful ending of the play. Music, instead of lifting the play into loftiness lifted itself at the cost of a fair balance and a good impression.

1 Gopu Seshachiravolu: Reminiscences. (MSS).
2 In his introduction to the play 'Chitra Haliniy', B. Krishnamachari, the Father of the Telugu Drama observed that he had to fill the play with songs as 'the Tamnada plays are so full of them'.
3 In the play 'Chitrangada', when Arjuna (S. Rama Rao, a Court-musician of Mysore) and Babruvahana (B. Srinivasa Iyengar, also a Court-musician) went on for more than two hours with musical 'saval and jawab' in various different ragas each aiming at outdoing his professional rival, the audience had to intervene between them; Sangath, 31 July, 1928. p. 181.
Many an artless individual found place on the stage because of his or her music. Though an illiterate, a dancing girl played the heroine essentially because of her musical abilities. It became a hindrance to the progress of the theatre and an insult to its morality. After the advent of social themes the undue importance enjoyed by music on the stage for decades steadily sank. Enlightened artists like Garud, Raghavachar, Jeer and Hiranmaya were considerably responsible in showing its rightful place in the drama. They established with the examples of their performances that a play—social, historical or even mythological could sustain and capture audiences without much music in it. They showed that a real actor with a rational portrayal could still make a glorious stage career without the attraction of music. To-day, the stage music is at its low ebb if not totally absent. The professional stage has yet to know that the objection is not to the stage music itself—far from it—but to an indiscriminate employment of it; it has yet to hit at a compromise between the excesses and a total absence of it.

WOMEN ON THE STAGE:

As in Maharashtra and unlike in Bengal, the professional theatre of Karnataka—particularly in its early period avoided the woman from the stage. The Kritapura Mandali, the Halsiri Troupe, The Palace Company and the Ratanavali troupe of Varadachar had impressive stage careers without including women-artists in their performances. Garud Sadasivaraa
started his troupe in 1916, but did not entertain women-artists until 1931, when a resolution was passed by the Second Drama Conference at Bangalore in favour of including women in the theatrical performances. Women artists were seen but as exceptions on the stage till the end of the second decade of the present century though they were encouraged by the Kommur Company in North Karnataka and by the Gubbi Company in Mysore as early as during the last decade of 19th century. Their experiments yielded the expected results because the performances got a natural tone and the commercial ideal of the theatre was better fulfilled. Many a troupe hurried to find women-artists with good voices and music, and brought dancing girls on the stage. Their example, however, were unpalatable in the eye of the socially moral orthodox for 'it made the actor yield to immoral influences on the one hand and prompted the audience to measure the worth of a play on false values'.

Starting from the early 1920s, there arose a bitter controversy regarding the inclusion of women in the theatre both on the professional and amateur stage. Individuals, —

1 Available evidence indicate that the Gubbi Company had a lady artist by name Rajamma by the year 1881. (See: Stage Centenary Vol.1 - p.97). The first lady artist of North Karnataka was one Kalavva who joined the Kommur Company of Shivasurthi RamaKumarguthi in 1859 to play leading roles along with her husband Gurulingappa who was a well known artist of the same troupe. Collected from Pandit G.Kaluvadi. MSS).
institutions and the public took an active interest in the controversy.\(^1\)

The morally orthodox section of the theatre-goers opined that examples showed that a man would portray the woman's role with ease and emphasis that could hardly be achieved by the self-conscious actress.\(^2\) They said that only the morally loose women (professional dancing girls) with their single qualification of musical accomplishments volunteered to the stage and rendered the temple of the theatre impure with their bad ways and that it was an irony that such women, morally so low, portrayed the roles of Seeta and Chandramati. They said finally that the drama itself was an illusion and if the man played the woman in it, it was part of the illusion. The folk theatre in its representative modes like Yakshagana and Doddeal did not entertain women artists to play lady-roles but had not suffered a whit in its impression.

1. Hated correspondence went on the columns of newspapers and magazines. The Amateur Dramatic Association arranged a public debate on the subject in November, 1931. The debaters went into heated arguments. The prompters in favour of the inclusion of women-artists pleaded for popular consideration as the stage would be unrealistic without women like in it like the temple without God and house without housewife; but the audience voted AGAINST including them in theatrical performances.

2. The same orthodox opinion prevailed in Maharashtra—that gifted boys could do full justice to the female roles, could not without unnecessary shyness, could speak more distinctly and could win a higher glory by overcoming the handicap of nature. (Report of the Marathi Dramatic Conference-Poona, 498 1929). This was of course a modern view as against the ancient and orthodox opinion expressed in Shivaleddamrit which prescribed a method of purification for even he who saw a man playing the role of woman.
Counter arguments were launched by the people of progressive thought. They left the question of the artist's immorality to his own individual concern and considered entirely the theatrical art itself. To them it was only too natural that women played women's roles. Even the best of actors while portraying the lofty roles like that of Sesta, Savitri and Rodha could at best express lust but not love. Only a woman could infuse a cheerful atmosphere all round and put an end to the glaring expression of free love-talk indulged on the stage by the 'male-females' and the resultant bad example set for the young boys and girls in the auditorium. The woman was to have her rightful place in the stage as she was an inseparable aspect of human activity. They pointed out the possibility of women taking part in ancient Sanskrit drama because of the creation of the role of 'Nati' and the hint provided by Kalidasa that great women-artists like Urvashi playing the roles of heroines.

1 Senbongi Chhimati Chhimati: Sambhavita 1923 p. 84.
2 Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay: Bengabhoomi: Feb. 1924 p. 84.
3 ‘Vikramorvasi’ deals with the theme of Urvashi playing the heroine in the play ‘Lakshmi Swayamvara’ where she blundered uttering the name of Pururavas her lover, instead of ‘Purashottama’ when she was asked by her ‘Chati’ as to who she would marry.
They spoke of the other regional theatres, particularly of Bengal, which made a great progress on account of their women-artists who uniformly maintained the dignity and high standards of Hindu ideals. Thus the controversy did considerable dust-raising in the third decade of the present century.

The subject could have substantial arguments on both sides, but it was to a considerable extent true that many illiterate and morally low women had made her advent on the stage. Though added considerable glamour to the stage, these women became instrumental in the fall of many a promising professional troupe both in North Karnataka and in Mysore. They could be easily tempted by rival companies with a higher remuneration and on such occasions they seemed to have no scruples. For quite some time it was not the merit of the play nor the dignity of showmanship that counted to make the play popular but the number of girls that took part in it. Thus, if not for the sake of morality, for the preservation of the theatrical art itself and to bring about a correct perspective towards the theatre, the cry arose shouting the woman out of the stage. The rational element of the argument expressed itself in the appeal for wives to act along with their husbands and the appeal for the educated men and women to take to the stage. The dawn of new reason brought its bright and warm light and from the 1930s, many an example of an actor marrying an actress could be cited. The number of women artists steadily increased on the professional stage and some of the talented like K. Aswathamma (Bharata Janojasini Sabha and later, Gubbi Company), Trimuramba (Gubbi Company),

Lakshmibai (Sahitya Samagraya Nataka Mandali), M.V. Rajamma (Chendrakala Nataka Mandali of Peer), E.Jayamma (Gubbi - Company), Gangubai Gulelrudd (Viswa Ganadarsa Mandali of Vamanerno Master), Ballari Lakshmi (Mitramandali of Miramma-yya), Rukademma (Chandeeswar Company) added great lustre to the professional theatre by their exquisite performances. Apart from the women's troupes as that of Lakshmeshwar (Stree Nataka Mandali) actresses like Gangubai Gulelrudd or North Karnataka, Manjaseni of Bangalore and Kamalamma and Lakshm-sondi of Mysore founded and led their own professional troupes.

With the increase of the liberty of the individual in the field of art as in other fields, the society gradually lost both the right and interest to question the artist of his 'morality' and the controversy that raised a dust-storm in 1920s no more existed after 1930.

DECLINE:

In spite of experiments and successes the professional stage of Karnataka seems to have taken a curve towards its decline in the 1930s. Causes for the decline could be grounded under external influences and internal weaknesses. The most formidable of the external influences was the advent of the 'talkie' film which became an over-powering competitor with the theatre which had remained for decades the single medium of entertainment in the cities. The film came at a time when the people had started measuring their money's worth. They naturally took to it for it was a cheaper mode of the more colourful entertainment. Play-houses got converted into
film houses. Reputed artists gave up the stage in favour of the screen for it provided them more money, steadier life and wider popularity. The stage gradually receded from the cities and tried to find its moorings in villages but soon came to be displaced by the touring talkies. Excepting a few of the well-to-do concerns like the Gubbis, the S.S.S. Nataka Mandal of M.V.S. Koidu, Kumareshwara Kripa Yoshita Natya Sangha of Gadag, Kala Vaibhava Natya Sangha of -

Enid Balappa, and Sharada Sangeeta Nataka Mandal of Gokak-which could still stage plays in cities even after paying the entertainment tax, others soon crumbled down to the dust.

The second of the external influences was the steady importance gained by the amateur stage which stood as a serious competitor "with its 'intellectual' plays, refined methods of production and better taste". It was the gift of a true spirit of renaissance that came up in the 1930s. Amateur Stage—the stage of the intelligentsia—gave a rude shake up to the professional theatre, its themes, plot construction and its productions, and made it pick up social subjects for its dramas. But when the professional troupes receded to the villages being unable to bear the shocks of the film and the amateur stage in the cities, they found that the social plays were not received with as much relish as the mythological in the villages. The professional troupe had to toss between the city and the village with social and mythological plays respectively. It struggled to survive without any scope for compromise.
Possibly even more than the external influences, its own internal causes and conflict forced the professional stage into an early decline. The professional stage never reacted quickly to the changing times and tastes. It usually repeated the same old hackneyed plays for years at length. The artist was always disgruntled, for, excepting the leading and economically sound troupes, others did not pay properly and regularly to their artists, and so, they aimed at breaking out and opening their own companies. The allegiance of the artist was naturally undependable; like the Spartan soldier, he could be tempted to join the rival troupes with slightly better material advantages. The general complaint that the professional stage remained only as the last resort of persons "who were unfit for anything better" was full of meaning. The stage was considered to be the easiest profession and that proved its real bane in the path of progress and prosperity. All these factors were naturally interconnected and moved in a vicious circle, each acting and reacting on the other and all together contributing to the steady downfall of the stage.

AN ESTIMATE:

This broad and rapid survey of the professional theatre of Karnataka would suggest that in spite of its blemishes and excesses, it did fulfil its purpose to a considerable extent by remaining a potential institution of art.

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Hongchhooai, lee., 1925. p. 102.
It made a considerable contribution both in merit and volume to the Kannada dramatic literature. As a powerful medium of art and culture of the Kannada country, it grew into a lofty stature, taught its patterns to the other provincial theatres as much as it learnt the salient aspects from them. It did produce playwrights and stage artists of immense skill and understanding—some of whom like Varadachar could be counted among the best of the stage artists of any country at a particular time. While still in prosperity, the professional theatre met its decline for it: evidently was too rigid for the changing tastes; but by no means had it outlived its utility.

That even to-day the people are enthusiastic and sympathetic to the professional theatre is witnessed whenever a play is announced in a busy city. Such instances are not rare, for a town like Hubli provides crowded houses to a play like the outdated 'Kurukshetra' even to-day. This evidences the popular sympathy shown to the professional stage even in the age of the three dimensioned films. It is in this sympathy, the hope and future of the stage lies. There is something mechanical and monotonous all the time about the shadows of the screen while there is a direct touch of nature on the stage. The difference is as between the musical performance of a creative genius and a gramaphone record. If not for anything else, it is for the sake of this direct contact and intimacy between the artist and the audience the theatre needs to be preserved. The preservation can be achieved and its future assured essentially by the professional
stage where the artist devotes his entire life for the sake of the art of the theatre unlike the amateur— and to a considerable extent even the folk artist; the preservation is possible when the society creates living and growing conditions for the professional troupes. The professional troupes also need a consolidation for the sake of resurrection. They will have to feel the pulse of the times and serve not like a slave but as an enlightened friend. They will have to avail of modern amenities of the Western stage in the interest of more convincing productions. All this calls for a cooperation between the society and the artist; and when achieved, the theatre can still live and grow again as the People’s University diffusing a bright light of knowledge and a rejuvenating cheer all round. After the National Independence, there seems to be a growing awareness of the duty of the country to its theatre. If the awareness results in consolidated action leading to the resurrection of the professional theatre on stronger foundations, the society would regain a great institution of art, an intimate and benevolent friend, philosopher and guide for its own pleasure and profit.