CHAPTER II

Antiquity of the Karnatak Theatre

Karnatak has a bountiful literary heritage and the classics starting from 'Kavirajamarga' of Nripatunga of 9th century A.D., indicate from time to time, the existence of an active theatre in the Kannada speaking land, and what is more, they indicate the growth of the theatre in two branches - one at the court under the royal patronage and the second flourishing with the common man, mostly perhaps, in the countryside. Occasionally, the literary indications get the support of epigraphical evidences and the two together act as the main sources of evidence for building up a possible story of the Kannada theatre from ancient times. A retrogressive march into the past, would enable one to meet the milestones of literary and epigraphical evidences that are eloquent of a great past of the Karnatak theatre.

THE COURT THEATRE:

Going back to the history of the Karnatak theatre - essentially the court theatre, it is noted that the earliest available written play belongs to the last phase of the 17th century A.D. It is the play entitled 'Mitravinda Govinda' (1680 A.D.) written by Narasingaraya, popularly known as Singararya or Singarya, a court poet under the patronage of
King Chickka Devaraja of Mysore (1672 - 1704), and nephew of Tirumalarya, a friend and minister of the king. 'Mitravinda Govinda' has a close bearing on the Sanskrit play 'Rituvanali' of Harsha. Deviations from the original are not so much in the theme or development of the play, though altered on the basis of the seed of a drama provided by the holy 'Bhagavata', but is essentially in its characters, in that instead of the lofty but mortal - 'Udayana', the hero of the original, the immortal Krishna is made the hero of the Kannada version, perhaps in identity with the patron Chickka Devaraja - as suggested by Sri. D.R. Bendre, With regard to the other aspects like the movement and impression, 'Mitravinda Govinda' follows the Sanskrit original very closely and remains almost its replica. Apart from this play which is said to have been staged at the Mysore palace in the royal presence, there is no earlier drama yet discovered, be it original or translation. This however cannot lead to the conclusion that there was no theatre in Karnataka before 1700 A.D., for, though there is no earlier drama yet discovered, there are adequate references in the Kannada classics to the drama and the dramatic.

2. "D.R.Bendre : Ibl-
4. The earliest available play in Marathi - Sri. Lakshminarayana Kalyanam' dated 1690 discovered in Tanjore by V.F. Rajwa- de is said to have contained a number of Kannada and Telugu words (Hinge, Taru, Baru etc.) and some instructions also in Telugu, which have prompted scholars to ponder over the possibility of the play having been first staged by Kannadigas' or Telugas' V.F. Dandekar : Marathi -itya Sristi p.17.
Examined independently - without viewing it as a translation, 'Mitravinda' written in old Kannada with frequent 'Kanda' Padya' and 'Akshara gana Vritta' suggests that the language was fairly well used in the dramatic form of expression. If it was the very first play ever attempted in Kannada, the dramatic technique and language would not have given an impression of self development.¹ The inference that there may have been earlier Kannada plays is supported by a verse in 'Shabdamahasana' (1604) of Bhattakalanka, which mentioned of the existence of 'works of Kavya Natika, Alankara and Kalashastra' in Kannada (Bhashakritanam).² This statement of Bhattakalanka prompts one to infer that there must have been drama and dramatic literature in Kannada far earlier than 17th century.

'Nataka Shale': A number of references - literary and epigraphical - are found from time to time to 'Nataka Shale', obviously to the decorated halls specially erected for the performances of 'Nataka'. 'Kaladinripa Vijaya' (1763) of Linganna mentions that a 'Nataka shale' was constructed by king Venkatappa Nayaka of Keladi (1582-1629) in his palace at Ikkeri, - a 'natakashale' which was full of 'strange and wonderful' architectural patterns.³ Almost at the same time

2. 'Kaladinripa Vijaya V - Prose after the 29th verse.'
the Mysore palace also had a 'natak shale' as evidenced by Govinda Vaidya, author of 'Kantiraya Narasaraja Vijaya' (Jyesta 1648) and a court poet of king Kantiraya Narasaraja of Mysore (1638 – 1659). There were 'Bharatacharya' or the experts in 'Natya shastra' also in the Mysore court as suggested by the poet. About a hundred years before Govinda Vaidya, at the times of the decline of Vijayanagar, Ratnakara Siddha, a prominent poet of South Karnataka and author of 'Bharateshva Vaibhava' (1577 A.D.), gave a grand picture of a 'natak shale' wherein his unearthly hero - Bharata, witnessed stage performances. A little before this we notice the Imperial Palace of Vijayanagar had a 'Battada natak shale' evidently a royal theatre,1 while the provincial palaces as at Tanjore and Ikkeri, there were the common theatres 'adorned with gems of all sorts',2 The earliest tangible evidence to the existence of 'natak shalé' is provided by the Mugund inscription, a stone slab standing to this day at the village Mugud, close to Bharwar which records the construction of a 'Natak shale' by Srimannnaha Samanta Martandayya. The inscription is dated at 1045 A.D.3 These references to 'Natak shalé' indicate

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2. Ibid. p. 416.
a flourishing theatrical activity all along in Karnataka from 10th century A.D., and now the question would be as to the kind/theatrical activity, Karnataka had.

"Nataka": A description of the performance of 'Nataka' provided by Govinda Vaidya, convinces one that it was clearly a theme-dance, a 'natya' or at best, a 'natya-nataka' as Sri Bendre put it but not 'nataka' in the sense it is understood today. Ratnakara Siddha also used words like 'Natak shala', 'Poorva Natak Shanihi', 'Uttara Natak Shanihi' and 'Nataka' in his work but actually, his descriptions of the gorgeous performances indicate that they were essentially dramatic dances like the 'Dikkannika natya' and 'Jalakannika natya' performed by 'ganika' or maiden dancers. A Sootradhara with cymbals in hand accompanied the dancers during the performance which was full of dance, music and acting/devoid of spoken word. Like perhaps the 'nataka pandita' mentioned in Basava Purana², the 'Sootradhara' of Bharatesha Vaibhava was an expert in the art and science of natya and was an inevitable during a performance that Sri Muliya Timmappayya identified him with the Shagreata of Kannada Bayalata; but Prof. K.G. Kundanagar was perhaps nearer facts when he identified the entire performance of these theme dances blended with the art of gesticulation with the 'Kathakali' of Kerala more than

with the Bayalata of Karnataka. Though the beautiful
description of the performances suggested only theme dances
without the spoken word in prose, some other references of
Ratnakara Siddha provide clues to the existence of written
dramas, a reference like that "one could be lulled to sleep
with 'Agama', 'Kavya' and 'Nataka'" or the one in 'ttara
Nataka Sandhi' where the curtain that covered the dancing
was girls lowered step by step until it was dropped when
the dancers showered flowers from their hands and began to
dance. The latter picture is full of meaning, for it is in
tune with the tradition followed in the Yakshagana and
Bayalata of Karnataka even today particularly while revealing
the leading role to the audience for the first time.

'Natya' and 'Nataka': Usage of the word 'nataka' in Kannada
to signify what seems to be a theme-dance without spoken word
deserves some consideration at this stage, for the question
would be as to why the 'Hall of Entertainment' was named a
Nataka shala' and not 'Natya shala' though it was nothing
other than a 'natya' that was performed there; a natya with
its predominance to 'nritya' and 'abhinaya' that went closely
with the 'Natya shastra'. This calls for an accurate import
of the word 'nataka' as used in the Kannada land uni its
relation with the word 'natya'. As in Sanskrit, 'nataka'


2. కాననా ఎంగ్లిష్ నిర్ణయ పాతనం కాననా
సంఖ్య పరిషత్ పాత్రిక, భూన. XXIV 3. ప. 242.
might have been considered here also as a species of the genus - 'Natya' and as from the time of Kalidasa, not much difference was perhaps seen in the meaning of the two terms.1 'Natya' in Sanskrit always included 'nataka' in its fold and what is more important, the Sanskrit 'nataka' by 600 A.D. was fully developed and designed theatrical mode, full of dialogues in prose.

With regard to the fundamental point of the employment of the spoken word in 'nataka', a definition of the term 'nataka' provided by Abhinava Mangaraja, author of the lexicon work in verse - 'Abhinavabhidana'(1378) provides a full import of the word as understood in Karnatak about 600 years ago. According to Mangaraja - 'it would be called a 'nataka' when 'nritya' is performed in the method of 'Hastanga' and of 'dristigati'. In other words, when the art of generalisation of 'hasta' (hand) 'anga' (limb) and 'dristi' (movement of the eyes) was successfully employed in a dance, then it would

1. Kalidasa refers to 'Natya' as the one treat for the variegated tastes of different people and this reference is made in 'Malavikagnimitra' (1-4) which clearly is a nataka in common understanding. Kalidasa evidently had plays like Malvagagnimitra itself on mind when he used the word 'natya' in the said reference.

2. 'Abhinavabhidana of Mangaraja' edited by M. Mariappa Bhat - 1952, p. 25. The word 'ade' is rather intriguing, for, in accordance with the context of usage, it changes the complexion of its meaning to suggest 'playing', 'acting' and also 'talking'. In the present context however, it would be more appropriate to take it to mean 'while acting' or 'while playing'.

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In the light of this definition the court-performance of 'nataka' was virtually the theme dance obviously full of music and perhaps without prose-dialogues like 'Jalakannika Natya' and 'Dikkannika natya' mentioned in 'Bharatesha Vaibhava'\(^1\). The definition of Mangaraja seems to get some support from the evidences of earlier writers like Kavikamadeva of 12th century and Adipampa of early 10th century. Basava Purana (1369 A.D.) of Bhimakavi provides an elaborate description of costumes and decorations worn by 'Somaladevi' who came prepared to perform the 'nataka', agrees in detail with the make up and costumes of only a dancer,\(^2\) thereby indicating that the word 'natakā' in the context earned the import of a virtual dance. Kavi-kamadeva while priding on his work 'Sringara Natnakara' and advising the ambitious to read it for profit, obviously places a predominant emphasis on 'abhinaya' in 'nataka'\(^3\).


2. 'Sangeetaratnakara' - Edited by S.C. Narasimhachar-1898.

3. 'Sangeetaratnakara' - Edited by S.C. Narasimhachar-1898.
The supposition of Sri Muliye Timmappayya that the relevant verse of Kamadeva bears an advice to the playwright writing in Kannada is worth noting though it is difficult to accept it for want of supporting evidences. Adimpleta provided yet another definition of the word 'nataka' by throwing some light on the import of the term at his times. According to him, 'anukarana' or imitation would make a 'nataka'. To him, Nataka is an art of imitation. It would be difficult to say if this 'anukarana' was only in gesticulation or whether it included the spoken word; and if it ever did, it would mark the existence of plays in prose though not with as much popularity as the theme dances. But Pampa uses the word 'Nataka' in another context while describing a virtual dance of Neelanjao, a celestial dancer who came to charm Purudeva with her unequalled art of a 'nataka' which reflected a million shades. This description makes it evident that Pampa had nothing but a 'theme dance' to go by the name 'nataka'.

It thus becomes evident that Mangaraja's definition

1. M. Timmappayya : Kannada Nado, Desi Sahityavoo. p. 5...
2. ".... సమయానికంత సంగీత శాస్త్రానికంత ప్రామాణం సంభవించాలంటే విశేషాత్మకుల పంపా పిండి రెండు సంచేయం..." విశేషాత్మకం 2. రెడీ
3. ఇదిశిభాగానికంత సదాసాగరం శిభాగానికంత పాలనా మేరుపై పిండి పిండి సంచేయం సంచేయం సంచేయం సంచేయం సంచేయం సంచేయం సంచేయం...
of 'nataka' as a theme dance with a mastered technique of
gesticulation gets its support from earlier writers. The import
of the word 'nataka' must have remained the same for centuries
even from before the times of Adipampa, and this explains to
a considerable extent, the conspicuous absence of written
drama in ancient Karnataka inspite of literary references to
the term 'Nataka'. The court performances of 'nataka' were
then essentially theme-dances fully supported by acting,
the art of gesticulation and clearly resembling the present
'kathakali' as Prof. Kundanagar suggested. It should have
been a form of Yakshagana with all its paraphernalia excepting
the spoken word by which the characters expressed themselves
in addition to the media of dance and music. It was perhaps
the fashion of the court with its 'high brow' audiences to
treat themselves to this form of a 'dignified and symbolic
dance-drama' commonly called 'Nataka' to distinguish it from
the folk performances, perhaps recognised by the name 'ata

Prose-plays : Sanskrit : This would naturally project a
question as to whether there were not prose-plays at all in
ancient Karnataka. Bhatta kalanka of early 17th century had
a creditable evidence for its existence. Many an evidence
provided by the history of Vijayanagar and ancient classics
of Karnataka also substantiates the great possibility of
the existence of prose drama - both in Sanskrit and in Kannada.

The Imperial Palace of Vijayanagar had a royal theatre
(pattada nataka shala) wherein 'natakas' were staged. A play
by name Jambavati kalyanam was written in Sanskrit. By
king Krishnadavaraya himself, a great patron of letters and
arts. The play was enacted to the people who had assempled
to witness the Chaitra festival of God Virupaksha.

The court of Vijayanagar possibly had a band of expert artists
(actors) for Sri. Salatore observes that Gangadha Pratapa
Vilasam' of Gangadhara (at the times of Malli karjuna-
raja) mentions that an actor of the court of Vijaya-
nagar, on hearing that prince Gangadasa was in need
of a proper person to stage the new drama .

proposed to go to the court of that ruler. The farce
in two acts entitled 'Dhurta Samagama Prahasanam' of
Jyotirneshwara kavi Vebracharya (mostly a humorous
play possibly written in Sanskrit as suggested by
the title) must also have been staged in Vijayanagar
during the reign of Saluva Narsimharaya (1475).

The theatrical world was considerably benefitted by
'Taladeepika' of Saluva Gopa Tippa Bhoopala'.

Under the empire of Vijayanagar, even the provincial courts
were not without theatres. Tanjore had a beautiful theatre
adorned with gems and Ikkeri had one in the times of
Sankama Nayaka, a samanta.3

These evidences strongly support the existence of

1. B.A. Salatore : Social and Political life in the Vijayanagara
Empire II. p. 397.

2. Ibid. p. 415.

3. Ibid. p. 416.
written plays, mostly in Sanskrit, containing prose-dialogues, frequently staged in the 'nataka shala' itself perhaps along with the more popular 'dance dramas' called 'nataka' devoid of dialogues in prose. This leads to the inference that there were two types of 'nataka', one with prose dialogues and the other without it, and also, that the ones with prose dialogue were plays fully influenced by Sanskrit drama. It is not improbable that in the royal courts of ancient Karnataka, Sanskrit plays were staged occasionally if not frequently. 'Jambavati kalyanam' is an evidence in support of the inference.

But then, the question is regarding the existence and performance of plays in Kannada. There are evidences indicating the existence of Kannada plays - which seem to be mostly translated ones from Sanskrit. Ancient Kannada works (kavya) show a close affinity to Sanskrit literature, and whatever be the difference of opinion regarding the emphasis to be laid on the different aspects of literature like 'Rasa' or 'Dhvani', by the times of Nripatunga (9th century A.D.), Sanskrit writers seemed to have been accepted as models to copy. Sanskrit literature gave predominance to its drama, and master playwrights like Bhasa and Kalidasa must have impressed on their craft and skill. It is possible that the Kannada writers of those times persuaded themselves simply to translate into Kannada the then available Sanskrit plays. That 'Natya shastra' of Bharata was held in high esteem.

1 सन्तुष्ट रवि व तुल्यः.
the almost as/last word as an authority on the science and art of
dramaturgy, is made evident by Adipampa (10th century A.D.)
who, in his 'Vikramarjuna Vijaya', mentioned that the 
Suraswaas and Pandavas were given lessons in Natyashastra. It was per-
haps the fashion of the times to fall back on Sanskrit litera-
ture and translate some of its well known works into Kannada.
Though unfortunately, full texts of such translations are not
available to-day, there are some unequivocal literary hints regard­
ing their existence and 'Prabodha Chandra' is believed to be
one such translation into Kannada from Sanskrit.

Keshiraja, a grammarian of the Kannada language and
author of 'Shabdamani Darpana' (1260 A.D.), in a verse, while
mentioning his literary compositions, records the title
'Prabodha Chandra' also along with 'Chola Palaka Charitam'
'Sri Chitramale', 'Subhadra Harana' and 'Kirata'. These works
might necessarily be in Kannada and while 'Chola Palaka
Charitam' and 'Sri Chitramale' might be Champa kavya, in tune
with the tradition of the times, Sri Govinda Pai considers
that 'Subhadra Harana' and 'Prabodha Chandra' might have been
prose-plays because of the dramatic context of their names.3

"Vikramarjuna Vijaya." p. 47. This reference by Adipampa would of course place
'Natyashastra' at a time far too earlier than Mahabharata
itself - but the reference itself reflects on the notions
and beliefs of the times of Pampa.

2. M. Govinda Pai. "Kannada Natakada Halame". Stage Cente-
'Prabodha Chandra' in particular, as he suggests may have been the Kannada version of the earlier Sanskrit play 'Prabodha Chandrodoya' written by Krishmanisha Yati (11th century), particularly in view of the similar, almost the very same text of both the plays. If 'Prabodha Chandra' of Keshiraja was on a different theme and in a different form from the earlier Sanskrit drama, Keshiraja would not have used the same title of another, perhaps more popular Sanskrit play. Thus, if it is accepted that 'Prabodha Chandra' of Keshiraja was a translation of an earlier Sanskrit play it would be eloquent of the relish shown to translating well known Sanskrit plays into Kannada and also of the possible fact that the Kannada stage of the 13th century provided for both Sanskrit and Kannada plays.

Like 'Prabodha Chandra', many another well known Sanskrit play might have been translated into Kannada in those early times. Though full texts of such translations are not obtained today, some of the verses thus translated yet remain. In 'Kavyavalokana' of Nagavarma II (1145 A.D.), the Kannada version of a verse of 'Vikramorvansya' of Kelidas (Act 1 - Verse 3), translated verses from 'Naganesha' of Harsha and 'Malati Madhava' of Bhavabhooti are found. That these, and particularly of Bhavabhooti formed part of the full Kannada versions of the original Sanskrit plays is made clear in 'Chhandonushasana' of Jayakeerti (906 A.D. according to Sri Pai) where a reference is made to that effect saying 'Pratihitham Karnata Nalati Madhava Pratiti Kavye'. The word 'Kavya' here is supposed


2. चंडनोषुष समस्थलकु चंडनोषुष समस्थलकु (चंडनोषुष), Chhandonushasana VII 6 last line
to mean a 'nataka' as suggested by Sri. Govinda Pai1 for the obvious reason that the original in Sanskrit is a drama and the verse translated into Kannada is as if spoken by the character in first person. In Sanskrit, 'Kavya' always meant to include 'nataka'.

It is thus noticed that by 10th century A.D. plays were rendered into Kannada from Sanskrit and that 'Satya-shastra' was held in high esteem. The word 'nataka' was freely used and its significance was fully understood. Though there is no tangible evidence to confirm that the Kannada versions of the Sanskrit plays were staged, it cannot be concluded that they were translated for the sake of reading. Drama has always a 'Drishya Kavya' and the best method of serving a play was by performing it. Otherwise, it could at best be individual reading—even if many copies were taken of the plays—which is improbable at those times. And for the sake of collective enjoyment, if they ever staged those Kannada versions of Sanskrit plays, or in general, the 'nataka' in what-ever form extant in those times, it would mean keeping the theatre alive and active.

The inference is substantiated by a few references of 11th and 10th century A.D. when Karnataka reaped a rich

2. Ibid. p. 15.
harvest of merited literature. Pampa, Ponna and Ranna who
reigned the literary scene contributing 'Champlío Karya'.
perhaps resisted the drama form lest they be only on the lines
prescribed by their stalwart predecessors of Sanskrit litera­
ture. Yet their classics do contain in parts, a pronounced
dramatic element. They freely used the word 'nataka'.
The dance of Neelanjane is described as a 'nataka' by Pampa
in his 'Adipurana' (IX - 45). Ponna compared the moon-rise
to the opening of a dramatic performance. "... he compa­
res the stars to the flowers scattered by hirn
(Sootradhara) on the stage; he compares the receding
darkness to the up-going curtains; and he compares
the four divisions of the night to the four acts of
the drama". Ranna, the third member of the great
trio made a mention of a 'Nataka Vidhi' in his Ajita Purana.
He brought in essentially dramatic characters in his 'Sahasra
Bheema Vijaya' like 'Kanchuki' (Aswasa 1 and 2) and 'Vidusaka'
(Aswasa 2) and made them appear though not warranted by the
situation. It is surmised by some scholars that Ranna might
have had the drama form while setting to writing 'Sahasra
Bheema Vijaya' but later, changed it for the 'Champlío' form.

2. Sri. K.G. Kundanagar: 'Development of the Kannada Drama'
3. अजितपुराणानादगुम्भुऽ अनुसरणाद नीमि फलपीयं जसां बोधमाण्यालो
Ajita Purana. V - 6.
Years after the Trio, Durgasimha in his Kannada 'Panchatantra' (1145) made a mention that the queens Jalahadevi and Roopadevi played the roles of Seeta and Rama for self entertainment. Words used in this context are 'Kritaka Natakamāṇḍali' and do suggest the popularity of mythological characters as dramatic heroes and heroines. The reference of Durgasimha is eloquent regarding the genuine love for the drama in Karnataka at his time. If 'Natak' was not as popular, Durgasimha would not have used the word in his work. Moreover, it is the Queens that impersonated Seeta and Rama and their 'natak' was 'Kritaka' in contrast with perhaps the genuine performance at the court with all its paraphernalia. The reference is valuable for it indicates a flourishing theatre possibly in the court of the Chalukya king Jagadekamalla whose patronage Durgasimha enjoyed.

'Panchatantra' mentioned also of the name of an earlier Kannada writer - 'Kannamayya' who composed the 'delightful' Malayi Madhava. The date of the composition is about

2. 'Kritaka Natakamāṇḍali' is included in the 'Ranganatha' of Supra. Pancha Tantarā - II Chapter in the story of Ajita. P. 194-5.
3. Sri Govinda Pai suspects the possibility of the reference to 'Kritaka Natak' being in the original Sanskrit 'Panchatantra' of Vasubhata or not in the ultimate original in Paishachabhasha. Therefore, Sri Pai considers that the reference may not be the original of Durgasimha and may not reflect on the prevalence of drama in his times - but it is improbable that Durgasimha would use a word - even in translation - if it was not easily understood by the people in the 11th and 12th centuries.
900 A.D. according to Sri Govinda Pai. Jayakseeta also made a mention of the 'Karnata Kalati Madhava' in his 'Chhandonushasana'. In spite of the incompatibility in the names 'Malvi' and 'Malati' the close similarity in the titles suggests that 'Malvi Madhava' or Kannamayya might have been a rendering into Kannada of the Sanskrit 'Malati Madhava' of Bhavebhoohti or even if the play was conceived independently by Kannamayya with its theme based on the marriage of Krishna (Madhava) with the princess of Malava, (Malavi) as inferred by Sri Pai, it should evidently be a play in Kannada thus taking back the Kannada drama to about 900 A.D.

So far, the available evidences indicate the existence of the Kannada drama as it mostly existed in the court theatre. Had there been in Kannada a drama form before 900 A.D., surely, 'Kaviraja Marga' of Nripatunga, the earliest extant Kannada work would have made a clear mention of it. Nripatunga however recalls with gratitude a number of poets who preceded him. Some of these poets who are believed to


4. *कविराजअरराग्रा ती 33."

Kavirajamarga VII - 33.
have written 'Kavyas' might have written drama also as 'Kavya'
must have included 'nataka' even in Kannada owing to the pre-
seing influence of Sanskrit literature, particularly in read-
ing the connotation of words. It is thus possible that
'Nriptunga' did not make a special and separate mention of
Nataka. Viewing this matter from another angle, it is convinc-
ing that the life of a people - with regard to their art and
culture in particular would neither grow nor fall all too
suddenly. Visible traces of art and culture are usually
embedded in the invisible and thus, if some tangible traces of
the existence of drama could be found in the early 19th
century, the tradition must have found its roots further back
in the past; but the absence of evidences regarding the written
drama, or its medium the court theatre, earlier than about
900 A.D., one is driven to consider as to whether the court
theatre had its beginning in Karnataka only after the Sanskrit
plays were known all over. From these early days to the recent
times of 'Mitravinda Govinda', representative Sanskrit plays
seem to have been translated into Kannada from time to time, obviously
for staging them. Along with the Kannada versions of
Sanskrit plays, the original Sanskrit plays like 'Jamatwati
Kalyanam' were also put on stage in the court theatre; and
besides both those, a specialised 'dance-drama' that went by
the name 'Nataka' was always popular in the royal court.
This type of Nritya-nataka or Theme-dances with music and
gesticulation enjoyed a predominant position and immense
popularity in the court theatre, from about 12th century to
17th century - possibly at the cost of prose-plays. It is not improbable as Sri. Bendre suggested that the steady development of 'Gandharvagana' from the times of Chalukyas of Kalyani on the one hand, and the advent of the Vaishnava methods of 'Katha korte'na,'bhav-kritva', bhav-seet' and 'bhav-katha' on the other, contributed considerably to the immense popularity of the dance-drama for a long space of time from the 12th century. The court thus preserved a theatrical tradition and nursed it as an inevitable aspect of literary and cultural life, from very early times and almost definitely from 8th century A.D. If ever there existed a theatre in Karnatak earlier than 600 A.D., it must be the folk theatre which now demands a fuller consideration.

**THE FOLK THEATRE:**

Even if the court theatre produced Kannada versions of Sanskrit plays along with Sanskrit plays themselves, it was essentially for the entertainment of the privileged elite. The common man perhaps had no access to the court theatre, for, some times queens and kings played roles. This explains the natural reasons for the development of the folk theatre independent of the court theatre which was


2. Veera Ballala, the famous Hoysala king is referred to as a talented actor in the Sorab Inscription dated 1200 A.D.

Epigraphia Karnatika : Sorab Inscription No.28.
at best meant exclusively for the 'classes' and not the 'masses'.
Yet, there seems to have been an inevitable contact between
the theatre of the 'classes' and that of the 'masses' with a
pressing mutual influence. The contact was perhaps two-fold.
The court being a patron of the folk theatre invited represent-
tative folk troupes to perform for the benefit of the court
audiences. 'Dashavatara Nataka' mentioned by Govinda
Vaidya, 'Taikunda Nataka' that was possibly performed at
the court of Vijayanagar and numerous gifts of land to
actors by patrons support this inference. Secondly,
the very methods of the presentation of plays by the court
theatre would possibly be influenced by the methods of
the folk theatre which, with its greater antiquity had gained
experience in play-production. The court-presentation would
necessarily be influenced by the tendencies of time and place
and these tendencies are always in abundance and in origina-
lity among the masses and would express themselves through
the folk theatre.

A picture of its Past: It has been accepted that the folk
theatre is the earliest form of the theatre in any country.
Following the same retrogressive method of enquiry from
the known to the unknown, we come across references that prove
the existence of flourishing folk theatre in the coastal tract

1. Govinda Vaidya: 'Kanteerava Narasimha Vijaya' (1618 A.D.),
   XXI - 118.
2. Cheruvu Belgal Inscription of Karnool Taluq (1514 A.D.),
of Karnataka in the 19th century. It may be noted again in this connection that the professional theatre of Maharashtra is clearly the outcome of the folk theatre of Karnataka, for, the Rajasahab of Sangli, on seeing the performances of Kannada Yakshagana in 1842 moulded the Marathi theatre on its model. The coastal folk parties considerably inspired into existence, the professional theatres in North Karnataka as evidenced by Shantakavi and they enjoyed munificent royal patronage at Mysore. A letter written by Krishnadasaraja Wodeyar III of Mysore to Manjeshwara Hegde of Dharmasthala in 1867 clearly indicates that a party of folk artists came from the coast to the Mysore Durbar in the year 1812 and settled there performing 'Dashavatara batu' or 'Yakshagana'.

'Yakshagana':

Yakshagana, the most picturesque and imposing mode of the folk theatre today, was flourishing gloriously in the 18th and 19th centuries as evidenced by the life and works of 'Parti Subba', a great composer - exponent of Yakshagana, who is supposed to have lived from about 1760 to about 1850.

The chiselled features of his compositions indicate that 'Yakshagana' was a perfected art by 19th century. His predecessors like Geerusoppa Shantayya and Madhavadasa of Udipi had earned a name for their art and skill in Yakshagana compositions. 'Yakshagana' was well known in early 17th century for

2. The letter is reproduced by Sri Muliya Timmappayya: 'Parti Subba' p. 121.
4. E.P. Rice: Kannarese Literature, (Heritage of India Series) p. 100.
a mention of it is made by Govinda Dixita, the author of 'Sangeeta Sudha' (1628 A.D.). It is significant that Govinda Dixita observed that 'Yakshagana' was a special type of music. Dr. Raghavan mentions of another musician by name Anjaneys who is said to have observed that Yakshagana was a perfected musical mode. Govinda Dixita observed that Raghunatha Nayaka, the Yuvaraja of Tanjore composed a Yakshagana by name 'Rukmini Krishna Vivaha'. It is said that Mummadi Timma also composed a Yakshagana in 1665. No more detail about the composer or his work is available.

A poet by name Sulagod Hiriyanna is believed to have composed two prabandhas 'Krishnarjuna' and 'Rukmini Swayamvar' in Shaka Shalivahana/1685 (1763 A.D.). These evidences indicate that Yakshagana was a well-established mode of the folk theatre by 17th century and that it was essentially musical. Even today the composition of Yakshagana is essentially musical in written form, set in 'Kanda' and 'Vritta' and only while performing, the verses are interpreted in prose by the participants.

'Dashavataraata': Yakshagana illustrated the various ten Avatar's or incarnations of Vishnu and so, is also recognised by the name 'Dashavataraata', performed by a

1. V. Raghaven: Yakshagana - Jayakarnataka XII - II, p.5.
2. V. Raghaven: Ibid. p.5.
troupe of artists led by the 'Bhagavata'. There are frequent and significant references to 'Dashavatara ata' in ancient Kannada literature and one such, made by Govinda Vaidya, the court poet of Kantirava Narasaraja establishes that his patron-king witnessed the 'Dashavatara Nataka' performed 'with a grandeur beyond description'. Kings of Mysore had perhaps extended patronage to 'Dashavatara ata' from even before the times of Kantirava Narasaraja, for obviously, there must have been an established tradition of having such performances in the palace. Govinda Vaidya, while narrating the modes of theatrical entertainment in the Mysore palace mentions several other types like 'Kattaleysta', 'Piridu Prabandha', and 'Jakkini-Rajakeera' which indicate some common current performances 'close to Yakshagana' as suggested by Sri. Betgeri Krishnasarma.

Mandadigala Nataka: About a hundred years prior to Govinda Vaidya, Ratnakara Siddha referred obviously to Yakshagana and its artists in the 'Asthana Sandhi' of his 'Bharatesana Vaibhava' (1577 A.D.). The word 'Yakkadigaru' used by him

1. "Kantirava Narasaraja Vijaya"
   Edited by Dr. R. Shamashastri 1928 - XXI - 118. p. 409.

would perhaps indicate a troupe of Yakshagana performers. Earlier still, 'Kumara Vyasa' the great composer of the epic Mahabharata in Kannada who lived possibly in the 13th century bears eloquent evidences to the existence of a flourishing folk theatre in his times. His reference to 'Nadadigala Nataka' would clearly suggest a 'theatre of the people' or the folk-theatre. Kumara Vyasa uses the word 'javanika' to denote possibly, the curtain that was used for the stage. Kumara Vyasa thus indicates the possibility of a flourishing folk theatre in the 14th and 15th centuries with a number of plays performed on the stage, which was evidently equipped with curtains. In the words of Sri. Govinda Pai — "if plays were not staged in Kannada, and if they were not highly popular, Kumara Vyasa would not have drawn analogies from the stage as often as he has done."

A beautiful description of 'Nataka' made by Hijaguna Shivayogi in his 'Viveka Chintamani' (1500?)

1. Shri. Govinda Pai thinks that the word 'Phani' would indicate that the 'Nadadigala Nataka' in question was one based on the life of Harischandra - Govinda Pai: Kannada Natakada Halame.

2. It is of interest that the English stage had its first curtain in 1577, about a hundred years after Kumara Vyasa - 'Theatre' - Encyclopaedia of Universal Knowledge.

describes the form of a composition of dance and drama which was termed 'Shuddha Deshya' (purely native) and that he referred to a folk-form that was close to 'Yakshagana'. As even today, the temple was the seat of cultural activities of the village in olden times also, and possibly, plays were performed to please the deity of the village or the city.

Speaking of the theatre that flourished in the 13th century, Sri. B.A. Salatore observes, "From very early times in South India, dramatic art has been associated with temples and royalty. In the days of Rajaraja I and Parakesarivarman, dramas were acted in temples. The 'Kangasthala' or the stage is mentioned in Karnataka in A.D. 1220. There is no denying the fact that both in the Tamil and Karnataka dramas were acted in early times. Earlier still, in 12th century, Aggala in his Chandraprabha suram (1189 ?) mentioned that the king Ajitasena was listening to an 'Ekkalagana', possibly an interpreter or Bhagavata of Yakshagana. Abhinava Rama of the 11th century also

1. "... एकादश संवतः एक्कलागनानि यथा चेत ।
विख्यातेन वासुदेवे राजा आसिद्धिकुटि । ..."


3. "... एकादश संवतः एक्कलागनानि यथा चेत ।"

referred to 'Yakkala gana' in his 'Mallinatha Purana'.

About two hundred years prior to Abhinava Pamapa, a very important reference came from 'Nripatunga' the author of 'Kaviraja Marga' (9th century). While discussing the various forms of Kavya, Nripatunga made a significant mention of a particular form called 'Nalpagarana' and its variants like 'Bedandegabba', 'Chattana', 'Bajanegabba' and 'Melvada'.

It is a point worth noting that these forms are not found in Sanskrit literature, but are essentially 'deohya' or indigenous of Karnatak. Meaning and significance of the term 'Nalpagarana' could be discussed a little later, and therefore, it is sufficient to note that 'Nripatunga' clearly indicates the different modes of the folk theatre of his times.

Far earlier than even Nripatunga, the inscripational evidences of Pattadkal near Badami, pay a glorious tribute to one 'Fatasevya' of 8th century who had mastered the art of dancing and acting. The inscription categorically exhorts that 'he alone was the dancer and the very best among the actors on the face of the earth'.

1. "సంగాం నుండి ఉండిన ప్రస్తుతంలో మండి ప్రతి క్షమా.

2. "... సంగాం నుండి ఉండిన ప్రస్తుతంలో మండి ప్రతి క్షమా.

3. "చరిత్రం సాధారణ యోగ్యం అవకాశాలు కలిగి ఉంచుట సాధనం కారణం."

The two different
words deliberately used in the inscription - 'Nartaka' and 'Nata' should necessarily convey two different meanings. As Sri. Panchamukhi interpreted, Natasevya was perhaps both a 'teacher of dramaturgy and unequalled in the art of dancing'⁴. The suggestion is that he mastered two independent arts. It is highly probable that this inscription was regarding an artist who represented the folk theatre which also demanded like the Dance-drama of the court, an intimate understanding of both the arts. In any case, the inscription provides a definite suggestion that there was a clearly marked out distinction between dance and the art of acting - which was well appreciated by the people even as early as in 800 A.D.; and secondly, that there was a form of drama even at that time - a dance-drama that went very close with the present Yakshagana. The Pattadkal inscription, thus indicates possibly a flourishing folk theatre in the 7th and 8th centuries.

200 - 400 B.C. : The earliest available mention of folk-performance according to the late Sri. Kerodi Subba Rao, a noted critic and composer of Yakshagana - is in the Hariyamsha Purana of Bhagavata (bet. 200 and 400 A.D.) wherein there is a reference to a 'Bhagavatara mela' under the leadership of Bhairva Nata. The troupe performed 'Ramayana' as a part of the planned scheme to slay Vajranabhasura, a powerful Danava. This indicates at once both the antiquity and popularity of 'Bhagavatara mela' which must have been a close variant of the present Yakshagana though not its replica.

References enumerated above provide a positive indication of the folk theatre existing side by side with the court-theatre. It is natural that even before the court theatre came into being - possibly owing to the influence of Sanskrit drama, the folk theatre lived and developed on its own lines. It is not improbable either as already suggested, that the folk theatre did influence the court theatre, if not with its very inception, at least with regard to the modes of its presentation including music and costumes.

Dances of Karunatar: This presupposes the suggestion that the folk theatre of Karnataka is far older than the court theatre and the question would be as to how far older. Though it is not possible to confirm that that ancient form or forms of the folk theatre could be anywhere close to the ones in the recent two hundred years either in the play-pattern or its presentation, there must have been a form of folk entertainment - perhaps a combination of some dance and some music. This inference is supported by the Tamil classic 'Nilaappadigaram' of the early years of the Christian Era which bears a significant reference to the Kannada actresses and actors who entertained Sanguttuvan, the Chera king at the Nilgiri hills which is said to have formed a part of the Kannada speaking people even at the times of the Sangam Literature1. The Chera king was evidently on a visit to the Neelgiris when

the 'Konkana', 'Karnata' and 'the Kuduga' - men and women dancers and actresses, a hundred and twenty in all, waited on him. Silappadikaram presents an elegant description of the dance and music, 'make up and costumes' and 'appearances and acting' of those 'nati' and 'nartaki'. "The fierce Karunatar in their respective dresses and ornaments and actresses whose dark curly hair was, loosely woven with shining garlands, whose ,nepicent breasts were adorned with, (jewelled) chains and whose long eyes resembled carps, sang . . . . . The reference is evidently to a group of folk artists who performed possibly a combination of dance and music to entertain the visiting king. Both dance and music seem to have had a predominance in their entertainment and in fact, they form the essential feature of the indigenous folk art - the deshya type. It is significant that 'Natya shastra' of Bharata stresses on the same elements, dance and drama, as the fundamental aspects of the original Sanskrit theatre.

'Deshya' - 'Narga': The relation between 'Deshya' and 'Narga' in the field of art and the precedence of one or the other is yet a matter of conjecture. As the prehistoric period with regard to the theatre is an uncertain and mysterious region, any consideration regarding the origin of the theatrical art and its time should rest purely on the academic plane.

is the contact between Aryans and Dravidians. As discussed earlier, even before the Aryan advent, there had settled a people in north India; a people that depended on agriculture with a great civilization of their own; a people worshipping the Bull and Linga and a people who seemingly had trekked up north from the plains between the rivers Godavari and Kaveri. During the advent of the ferocious Aryans, it is possible that the original people who were subdued gradually succumbed to the impact and influence of the invaders and slowly trekked back to the original homeland south of Godavari. These points when reconsidered, some of the things which are taken as established, will present themselves to new interpretation and throw some new light on the hidden past in general, and on the Kannada theatre in particular.

Yakkalagana - Dakshina gana: The term 'Yakshagana' is of a particular significance. As Govinda Dixita and Arjaneeya suggested, Yakshagan must have represented a specific type of 'gana' or music, perhaps vitalised with some vigorous dance. Yakshas are believed to have been the inhabitants of the South, Kubera, their lord having been defeated by Ravana of Lanka, himself a Yaksha, is said to have fled away with a section of the Yakshas to the north and settled in Alakavati at the foot of Himalayas. This suggestion is symbolic in its support to the movement of the Southern people to the north. And it is those who trekked on to the north that had to face the adventurous Aryans and submit themselves to the superior force.

It was during the period of 'Aryanisation' that the conquerors
imprinted their stamp on many an indigenous custom and art, religion and language. That was a period of supreme domination of Sanskrit language and the 'Marga' style and the indigenous people almost lost their original entity under the Aryan culture. Their arts which were 'deshya' in its pure native form had to undergo a gradual transformation to meet halfway the 'Marga' style of the Aryans. Even today, the word 'deshya' or 'desi' is used to distinguish the original Dravidian form from the 'Marga'. 'Yaksha Gana' may have been the original 'desi' music closely associated with the Yakshas. The fact that 'Yakkalagana' or 'Jakkana-gana' was extant only in South India and that not a trace of it is found in the North, tempts one to infer that it was essentially, what could be 'Daksina gana', or the Music of the South. It had perhaps developed on lines so independent and striking that it caught the attention of the Aryans as something very attractive.

Nalpagarana: Among the available names evolved to signify the folk entertainment, the term 'Nalpagarana' mentioned by Nripatunga is the oldest. The term is made of two distinct words - 'NAL' to denote 'Nad', 'Nadu' or "music".

1. A strange parallel is in the term 'Jakkana Shilpa' which indicates a typically South Indian style of sculpture. It is attributed to a sculptor 'Jakkana' or 'Jakanacharya' (Jakkana 'achara')? who has yet remained a legendary figure standing for - the 'Style' of the South' in Architecture. The name 'Jakkana' however, occurs but once in the inscription of the Malleswara Temple or Turuvakere, built in 1260 A.D. (Mysore Gazetteer Vol.II. Historical part 1. p. 316.}
country, and 'Pagarana' to denote talk or acting with an emphasis on humour. The word 'Pagarana' is taken to have derived from the Sanskrit word 'Prakarana', one of the 'Dabhidroopaka' mentioned by Bharata and explained by Keith as "the bourgeois comedy, a comedy of manners". In this sense, the spirit of 'Pagarana' or 'Hagarana' is the same as that of Prakarana, but the term 'Nal-pagarana', set in old Kannada indicates a great antiquity to the word 'Pagarana'. If it ever was a pure Dravidian word, it is not improbable that like many other Prakrit words that passed on to Sanskrit during the process of 'Aryanisation', it may have as well passed on to Sanskrit to become 'Prakarana'. If it ever was so, 'Nalpagarana' would indicate the oldest form of the folk theatre which was indigenous (deshya); but even if it was otherwise, the 'Nalpagarana' remains as a 'Pagarana', relished and relished by the entire 'nal' or 'nad' indicating the entire Kannada country as suggested by Sri. Muliya Timmappaya.

Objections and satisfaction: It is thus observed that 'Nalpagarana' had become a most popular mode of theatrical

1. The word 'Hagarana' is the later form of 'Pagarana' and even today it has retained the connotation of 'humorous talk', 'coquetry' and 'cheap acting.' Kumara Vyasa uses the word with the same meaning in Sabha Parva - when Duryodhana who became a 'laughing - stock' at the court of Yudhisthira told his grief to his father.

entertainment by the times of Nripthunga and that it must have
grown side by side with the earlier Yakkalagana, the origin
indigenous music of the Yakshas or the music of the South.
These indigenous modes of the Dravidian theatre might have been flourishing even before the advent of the Aryans. Two objections are usually raised against placing the folk modes of Karnataka - especially Yakshagana - far earlier to the Sanskrit dramaturgy. For one, that the themes of Yakshagana as seen today are all borrowed from the 'marga' literature of epics composed in Sanskrit and for the second, that no script of a Yakshagana composed before the 18th century is available, - while a number of plays in Sanskrit, and in some cases, excerpts of their rendering into Kannada are available. At the outset it may be said with regard to the first objection, that the present form of 'Yakshagana' could not be the same as that of the ancient 'Yakkalagana' though with inevitable bearing on it. The old theme of 'Yakkalagana', - 'The Music of the South' might have been in praise of superior powers, festivals, social habits, tribal wars and such others as the ones prevalent in the folk-lore even today. After the infuse of the Sanskrit literature the Aryan themes of the Epics and Puranas must have been immediately accepted for their obvious and rich dramatic qualities and for their immense scope for presentation and sustenance. The new themes were perhaps thus borrowed and presented through the indigenous and mastered methods of

dance and music. At a time when the art of imitation joined the original music and dance in the interest of vitalising the grand dramatic themes, the performance marked a levitation but evidently became so popular all over the land that it may have assumed the qualification of being the 'Nal Pagaraṇa'. Sanskrit, at best brought only a fresh flood of rich themes to the already existing indigenous modes of entertainment.

The second objection regarding the non availability of the Yakshagana compositions of antiquity could be convincingly explained, for, the folk, or the popular tradition of preserving its art and even letters has always been orally passing it from generation to generation. Even today, not all the folk songs are written, but they are just sung, taught and remembered. It is true that during the transmission of the art from generation to generation, a little part of its personality is lost, and inevitably; that is how the shape of the art is changing eternally, yet its soul remaining the same forever.

'Natya': Several other considerations contribute to the inference that there was a great tradition of drama with the Dravidians in South India far earlier than the advent of the Aryans. The word 'natya' is significant for it has derived from the word root 'Nāt' which is purely non-aryan and yet, it is only the word 'Natya' that has a fuller meaning than even 'Nṛitya' which is derived from the Sanskrit root word 'Nṛit'. While 'Nṛitā' stands for mere dancing...
Nritya for dancing along with acting of emotions, it is
'Natya' which has a good proportion of drama on account of
its including 'Anukarana' or Imitation; imitation of dress
and costumes, manners, methods and even talking. 1 In addition,
the natya has a theme of its own and invokes 'Rasa' unlike
'Nritya' which invokes only 'bhava'. 'Nat' and 'Nata' are Aryan words and it is significant that the term 'Nata' is
also in the name of a South Indian clan with which another
clan by name Kanna or Karna amalgamated to form the new pe ple
called 'Karnatas' who worshipped the Bull and Shiva or Nat raj.

Nataraja:
Nataraja who is an aspect of Shiva is essentially
a Dravidian God and possibly the presiding deity of the cl
called 'Natas'. Megasthenes and other Greek chroniclers
identified Shiva or Nataraja with their own 'Dionysus'
the God of the Greek Drama. 2 The identity is due to the fact
that Nataraja is the presiding deity of the Indian - and
particularly the Dravidian drama. These evidences contrib te
towards the conclusion that the ancient people of the South
particularly of Karnataka had a great tradition of drama and
a fascination for it. When in the north, they came in close
contact with the Aryans during the period of anarisation,

2. Cambridge Indian History : Vol. 1. p. 419 and 422.
they must have given something of their indigenous theatrical traditions to the invaders.

DraVidian Contribution to Natya Shastra:

Natya shastra of Bharata is considered the fifth Veda thereby clearly suggesting that it was not in the original Aryan fold. Bharata and his hundred sons (evidently a clan) who staged the first drama on the occasion of 'Indra Dhvajotsava' did not enjoy the same Vedic status as the 'pure' Aryans. These hints also strengthen the inference that the Dravidians might have given their theatrical traditions to Aryans. 'Natya Shastra' itself is said to bear eloquent testimony to its incorporating DraVidian dramatic methods.

Sri. A.R. Krishna Shastri supports the view because of the following reasons:

1) The technique of the Kannada 'Bayalata' the Tamil 'Terukkuttam' and the Telugu 'Veethi nataka' very closely resemble the modes and technique elaborated by Natya Shastra.

2) "A number of strange words that occur in 'Natya Shastra' suggest that it must have taken some DraVidian 'Satva'."

3) Looking at the variety and originality of the DraVidian metres, music and dance, one would feel that

2. "ప్రతి రామానందురు సాంప్రదాయం కలిగి చేసే విధానం తెలిసే తిరుమల కాణాం. హిందు ప్రతి విధానం ఇతర ప్రతి విధానం తెలిసే తిరుమల కాణాం. హిందు ప్రతి విధానం ఇతర ప్రతి విధానం తెలిసే తిరుమల కాణాం.

38th Annual Conference - January 1934. p. 50."
they had a richer wealth of the art of dance and drama -
and than the Aryans. In the Aryan/ non-Aryan give and
take, many a non-Aryan God and Rishi took a position
in Aryan hierarchy and so, it is not improbable that
the Aryans borrowed also the great theatrical traditions
of the Dravidians. Once taken, they made it their own
by moulding it into a new shape. In other words
the so called ‘Marga’ should have been evolved out of
the contact with the ‘deshyā’.

Among the significant contributions possibly made
by the antique Dravidian theatre to the Sanskrit Dramaturgy,
are perhaps the modes of dancing and music, devotional themes
and important characters like ‘Sootradhara’ and Vidūṣaka.
South India and particularly Karnataka is essentially the home
of the Bhakti movement and the soil always had the seed of
this movement centuries before the ‘Dasa’ came up preaching.
It is not improbable that the Aryans inculcated the ‘Bhakti
marga’ and based their plays on themes of ‘bhakti’ after their
close contact with the Dravidians. The first seeds of
the themes of later Sanskrit plays thus lay in South India,
the home of the conception and development of the ‘Bhakti
Marga’. The folk theatre of Karnataka has still preserved some
relics of such crude performances of the ‘dasa’, to the likes
of which Sanskrit drama perhaps owes considerably.

Sootradhara: ‘Sootradhara’ of the Sanskrit drama, as his
name suggests should be responsible for the most important part
in the production and presentation of the play but actually, he is not very important there. Apart from his appearance in the beginning of the play invoking Gods and conducting formalities with the audience, he is seldom seen on the stage again. But in the Kannada 'Bhagavata art' or 'Yakshagana' and 'Doddata' of Karnataka, the Bhagavata even today justifies the name 'Sootradhara' for he is present on the stage from the beginning of the performance to the end of it. Bhagavata is the virtual Sootradhara having a complete control on the stage as well as the artist. His contribution is significant for he is responsible for the movement of the play and its action. It is the Bhagavata who prompts every character into self expression, action and conversation and in short, he conducts the entire performance. In this sense, the Bhagavata of 'Yakshagana' is the real Sootradhara. The responsibility and contribution of the Bhagavata seems to have prompted the Aryana to retain him in their plays with the name 'Sootradhara', but gradually they stripped him of his responsibilities as more modern modes like the character himself making a self-introduction and singing his own songs—were introduced. As there could not be a substitute for invoking Gods and make preliminary introductions to the audience in the beginning of the play, 'Sootradhara' had to be continued but he was confined only to the 'Poorva ranga'.
Natya shastra laid a great emphasis on music and dance in the drama, but the later Sanskrit plays did not lay the same emphasis on those - the once 'fundamental' aspects. It cannot be said whether the change was due to the later playwrights' recognising non-Aryan elements in Natya Shastra. But the folk theatre of Karnatak however, has even today in its known form with its Gombevata, Yakshagana, Doddata, and other modes treats dance and music as fundamental aspects of drama. The earliest modes of the folk theatre of Karnatak must have attracted the attention of the Aryans who eagerly borrowed the fundamentals and gave them their own magic touch.

This discussion suggests that the antiquity of the folk theatre of Karnatak possibly goes far earlier to the date of the compilation of Natya Shastra. That the folk theatre did truly represent the life and arts of the people to whom it belonged is considered in the following chapter which exclusively deals with the folk theatre.