

Paramashivan – A Treasure Trove of a Forgotten Theater Tradition

Life, Music and Search for an Identity

by

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Abstract

Modern Kannada theater refers to a very rich tradition of theater that evolved in the princely state of Mysore, British India. It was founded, supported and nurtured under the royal patronage of the erstwhile kings of Mysore, Mummadi Krishna Raja Wodeyar, Chamaraja Wodeyar, Krishna Raja Wodeyar IV and Jaya Chamarajendra Wodeyar. Popularly known as ‘Kannada *Vṛtti Raṅgabhūmi* (*Vṛtti: Professional, Raṅgabhūmi: Theater Stage*)’, it reached its pinnacle of creative effervescence in the late 19th century during the colonial rule and rode high upon the crest of boisterous popularity from the early 20th century until its decline in the 1970s. The plays in this genre of theater were rife with a wide variety of music, beautiful poetry, dance and action. The dramatic literature—based on popular mythological, historical, social and fictional themes—was used as a story telling mechanism to appeal to the enamoured fancies of the audience. Though it initially thrived under the magnanimous patronage of the kings of Mysore, modern Kannada theater was later promoted by famous drama companies such as A. V. Varadachar Company, Chamundeshwari Company, Gubbi Veeranna’s Channa Basaweshwara Company and K Hirannayya Company.

The current work aims to document the salient features of modern Kannada theater, based on the artistic biography of the eminent Kannada theater personality, my father, Vidwan R Paramashivan (Vidwan – an epithet usually associated with scholarly musicians in South India), often referred to as ‘Kannada *Raṅgabhūmi Bhīṣma Pitāmahā*’ (“Great grandfather of Kannada theater”), who had an illustrious career spanning more than eight decades in Kannada theater as an actor, director, harmonium player and composer with various drama companies from 1935 to 1970. As an essential component of his biography, the work will include brief biographies of two of his sisters

R Manjula (Born 1940) and R Nagarathnamma (1926-2012), both eminent actors, who were groomed under his watchful eyes in the nuances of acting and music.

This work derives from a palette of research approaches including biography, dialogic interviews, auto-biographical and reflexive-ethnographical research methods. A series of personal interviews about Paramashivan's personal life and his knowledge worlds of theater, cinema and music in a politically charged atmosphere amid a growing sense of nationalism determined to uproot the colonial rule, will be interpreted to reflect the social situation, cultural and political processes prevalent in that period. Paramashivan's biography also sheds light on issues related to gender conventions, social status of actors and their struggles, social attitudes, prejudices and cultural pressures towards theater artists that led to the decline of a highly evolved art form such as modern Kannada theater.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Deepak Paramashivan. Various field research methods like personal interviews, audio recording, video recording, visit to archives and galleries and other ethnographic tools have been used to conduct this research. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project ID Pro00071027, titled “20th Century Classical Theater Music of Mysore”. The video and the audio referred to in this thesis can be accessed from the Education and Research Archive, University of Alberta by following the link <https://era.library.ualberta.ca/> .

Note on Transliteration

This dissertation contains words from mostly Sanskrit and Kannada. Unlike Hindi, the terminating a is not dropped in Kannada (ex. Pareśa is not pronounced as Pares). Sanskrit words appear in the form of either the name of the play or as a poem. Kannada words are more frequently encountered in the interview section where native phrases are transliterated and glossed within parenthesis. Lyrics in the transcribed scores of songs do not follow the transliteration scheme. The song lyrics is first presented using the transliteration scheme followed by the melody and the text without transliteration (For example, pareśa is written as patesha in the score).

Note on Long Interviews in Block Quotes

While presenting the interviews, for longer segments of interviews, block quotes are used, and the text is italicized. Shorter ones are presented without any font change or block quotes.

Dedicated to 'The Two Great Dudes'. I am sure, as the greatest intellectuals, they will be able to logically resolve their doubts.

If you spend too much time thinking in the abstract, you will never reach introduction!

--An Old Chinese PhD dropout (Tashi's Guru)

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I am deeply beholden to Professor Regula Qureshi, one of the finest scholars of both Western as well as Indian music, for supporting my life in many ways. She recommended me for the program, kindly accepted me as her student and most importantly, accepted me as a friend into her family. I will always cherish the moments I spent under her guidance discussing a plethora of scholarly subjects such as music, language political science, anthropology, history and so on. I enjoyed those moments of positive shocks when she would merely look at the musical score and talk about the piece at length. Whenever we met, never did I return home without learning a new lied by Schubert, or without learning to appreciate the subtleties of a new symphony or a Bach's suite. It is indeed rare to come by such an exemplary scholar and I thank my good fortune for having encountered her and been associated with her.

This work would not exist without the contribution of Prof David Gramit, who offered me his kind, timely help at various stages of my research as a mentor and a member in the supervisory committee. He changed my understanding of music in the context of colonialism through his wonderful course, which later helped me immensely in my research. I owe him a great debt of gratitude, for, it was his Midas touch that I won so many fellowships and continued my program, especially at a juncture when I was contemplating to go back to climate engineering, a financially more rewarding profession. He in fact got me habituated to winning fellowships. I always adopted a very simple procedure to win a fellowship; 1. Make an application 2. Share it with Prof David Gramit for suggestions, corrections and modifications (the Midas touch part) 3. Submit the application, 4. Request for reference letters and 5. Win the fellowship. He had made my life literally as simple. His scholarship, logical precision in thought and speech is what I aspire to achieve some day.

Thanks galore to Dr. Julia Byl, a fantastic friend and one of the most generous intellectuals, who intervened in a timely fashion, literally held my hand and walked me through the process of writing the dissertation. I have been a beneficiary of her generous affection, concern and invaluable guidance. It was she who first gave me a flavor of true scholarship when she once advised me "Read books a, b, c, d... In book C read the introduction section. In book d there is an interesting section on biography in pages 219-232. The author refers to another article, which you can read but there is another interesting article by the author referred in...". She could have gone on if not for my innocuous interruption, "Let me finish reading these first". It was a great experience working with her as a teaching assistant for her course. It was then I could see her sweet persona, who vicariously felt others' pain and wept with them, a caring teacher who was genuinely willing to help her students, a quality which, ideally, every teacher should strive to acquire.

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It is widely believed that fine arts such as music, dance and drama have divine origins. After creating the drama, the Goddess of knowledge was overawed by her own creation and went cogitating. Waiting restlessly at her abode were both connoisseurs and the curious, of the immortal world, who had taken special interest on the mortals of the human world. At the very first opportunity they could meet the Goddess of knowledge, in chorus they inquired of her, “Well, you created one of the finest, subtlest and the most abstract art form called the Drama. But have you ever thought about teaching it to the mortals, Madam?”. With a placid countenance, resolving one of the most tantalizing questions she had ever faced, the Goddess replied, “Havent you heard of David Barnet?”. I am deeply indebted to the best acting teacher, Prof. David Barnet, a *rara avis* among actors and teachers, learning acting and drama production with whom was a transformational experience. He touched my artistic life like no other art teacher ever did. I maintain that ‘if theater were a religion and if I were a believer, David Barnet would be my God’.

I offer my respectful thanks to Professor Michael Kennard who generously let me take his course, taught me to perform as well as appreciate the beauty and intricacies of physical theater—movement, clowning, bouffon, slapstick—with a selfless passion. He openly and graciously shared his invaluable knowledge with me on many occasions. My heartfelt thankfulness to this world-renowned actor, a wonderful human and a fine friend, under whose tutelage I learnt a tremendous amount of acting, improvisation and the sense of genuineness towards artistry. His advice in the class “Trust your impulse, embrace the fear of the unknown” and the words of assurance just before the performance, “Be honest. If you are honest, the audience will immediately recognize it” have been the success mantras that helped me access the deeper dimensions of my art.

I am extremely grateful to Twilla Mcleod, who was instrumental in me getting into this program without much ado. It was as if all the stars had aligned themselves to make her work on a weekend so that I could submit my application just before the deadline. Her emails to me were all full of positive news. The very first email she sent me was to confirm the receipt of my application. Her second email confirmed my admission to the program. When I did not respond to her third email, she sent a personal note on Facebook messenger which read ‘You have got an email that would make you smile’. It indeed made me smile because it was to inform me that I had won the prestigious Killam award. I, therefore, rightly call her ‘Twilla- the Harbinger of good news’.

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Table of Contents

Table of Figures.....	xiii
Table of Transcriptions	xv
Past Masters of Modern Kannada Theater	xvi
Background	1
Aim and Purpose.....	3
Interviewing a Loving Father or a Disciplinarian Guru?	6
Chapter Schemata.....	10
Chapter 1	12
Introduction.....	12
History of Theater in India	13
Art and Nationalism	24
The Study Area: Mysore and its Brief Political History.....	27
Biographies - Why are they Important to Us?	36
Research Objective and Key Research Questions Addressed in the Dissertation	40
Methodological Issues in Writing Biographies of Indian Musicians.....	42
Chapter 2	47
Research Methodology and Reflections	47
Prelude	47
Introduction.....	48
Research Methodology	49
An Insider's Objectivity and Auto-ethnography in Ethnomusicology – Criticism, Exception and Justification	56
My Tryst with Modern Kannada Theater - Disingenuous Hypocrisy or a Genuine Concern?.	59
Conclusion	75
Chapter 3	77
Raṅgapañcāmṛta – The Modern Kannada Theater Music.....	77
Prelude	77
Introduction.....	78
Kannada Theater Music – A Music of Five Nectars.....	79
Text-setting, Aesthetics and Literary Anthology of Modern Kannada Theater Music.....	83

Chapter 4	111
Biographical Background of Paramashivan	111
Prelude	111
Introduction	112
Socio-political-cultural Climate of Mysore during the 1930s	116
Paramashivan’s Initiation into Theater	118
Neither will You Ever Learn Nor would I Ever Forget	123
Formative Years in Chamundeshwari Company	130
Conclusion	140
Chapter 5	143
An Artist’s Struggle for a Social Identity	143
Introduction	143
World War II, Mysore and Kannada Theater	144
From Railway Platform to Harmonium Paramashivu	147
Life Changing Moment – Meeting the Guru Āsthāna Vidvān Dr. B. Devendrappa	152
A Child Actor Who Never Grew into Adulthood - Life in Kannada Cinema	162
Conclusion	173
Chapter 6	175
Nationalism and Modern Kannada Theater	175
Prelude	175
Introduction	181
Nationalism and Classicization of Art in India	182
Bemoaning the Present and Glorifying the Past: Nationalism and De-Classicization of the Theater Tradition	195
Conclusion	207
Chapter 7	211
Women in Kannada Theater	211
Prelude	211
Introduction	212
Impure Rituals and a Profession of Disrepute	214
Women in Theater in the West– Male Insecurity or Social Unacceptability?	216
Role of Patronage and its Decline: Opera vis-à-vis Modern Kannada Theater	220
Devadāsī-s – The Women Who Donned the Greasepaint in Mysore	222
Strī Nāṭaka Maṇḍaḷi – An All Women Company	241
Is Kumāri R Manjulamma Performing Today? – An Unsung Hero(ine)’s Voice	254

Conclusion	264
Chapter 8	268
Decline of Modern Kannada Theater.....	268
Introduction.....	268
Politics of Representation and the Decline of Kannada Theater	269
Theatergoer's Experience: A Contemporary Account.....	274
The Fate of Different Drama Companies.....	279
Cultural Economics- Role of Cinema in the Fall of Kannada drama	285
Conclusion	289
Scope for Future Work.....	293
Postlude.....	295
Bibliography	298
Glossary	312

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Geographical Map of India (Source: Maps of India, 2018).....	32
Figure 2: District Map of Mysore (Source: Maps of India, 2018)	33
Figure 3: Kings of Mysore (Source: RBSI, 2018)	34
Figure 4: Mysore Palace in 1890 (Source: RBSI, 2018).....	35
Figure 5: Mysore Court Musicians, Approximate date: early 20th century (Source: Kamat, 2018)	35
Figure 6: Family of Actors L-R Paramashivan, Manjulamma, Veena (danseuse and granddaughter of Nagarathnamma), and Nagarathnamma after performing Samsāra Nauka play in 2003.....	40
Figure 7: Pictures above Top: Deepak as Ādi Mūrti a half-wit Merchant in Sadārame, Bottom: In the same play Kalla, a witty thief, Bangalore, July, 2017.....	52
Figure 8: Paramashivan in Samsāra Nauka in the role of a Kaḷḷa Pūjāri February 3rd , 2018.....	53
Figure 9: Manjulamma in the role of a drunk pimp Nājukayya in Devadāsī with Purnima as a police officer, February, 2018	54
Figure 10: Left to Right: David Barnet, Paramashivan and Jayalakshmi (my mother) in August, 2016, Edmonton.....	62
Figure 11: A scene from Sangīta Subhadra, August, 2014, Bangalore.....	65
Figure 12: Deepak applying Make-up during Subhadra Kalyana -2014	66
Figure 13: Poster in Kannada Advertising Subhadra Kalyāna July 25th 4:30 PM (Tickets priced Rs. 100 each).....	72
Figure 14: CD Cover and Volume 1 and Volume 2 of Raṅga Saṅgīta Sammodini.....	73
Figure 15: 20th Century Kings of Mysore L- Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV, R- Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar (Source: RBSI, 2018).....	82
Figure 16: Deepak in the role of Bhīṣma in Bhīṣma Pratijñe, August, 2017, Bangalore, India.	87
Figure 17: Subbarayana Kere Area Mysore, India (Google maps, 2018).....	115
Figure 18: Subedarchatram Road, Bangalore, India (Source: Google maps, 2018)	119
Figure 19: Left-Honorable Former President of India Late APJ Abdul Kala and third from left Paramashivan after receiving the Sangeet Natak Academy Award, 2005	127
Figure 20: Court Musician of Mysore Dr. B. Devendrappa (1899-1986) (Satyanarayana, 2018).....	155
Figure 21: Paramashivan playing harmonium for Sangīta Subhadrā, Tumkur, India, 2014.....	204
Figure 22: Paramashivan and his sister Manjulamma in Samsāra Nauka as Kaḷḷa pūjāri and the servant Siddha	205
Figure 23: L-R Veteran Cinema Actor Leelavati , her son actor Vinod Raj and Paramashivan	224
Figure 24: Map of Melukote in India (Google maps, 2018)	234
Figure 25: Map of Mugur in India (Google maps, 2018)	234
Figure 26: B. Jayamma, queen of the silent movie era	235
Figure 27: Cultured Comedian K. Hirannayya and Bellary Lalithamma	236
Figure 28: R. Nagarathnamma, the founder of the first All-women Theater Troupe receiving ‘Padmashri’ award.....	242
Figure 29: Nagarathnamma applying make-up in 1980s (Family collection)	244
Figure 30: Nagarathnamma as Kamsa in the play Kṛṣṇa Līla	248

Figure 31: Nagarathnamma bottom row third from left, with some of her troupe members	249
Figure 32: Nagarthnamma (middle) as Kamsa from the climax scene in the play Kṛṣṇa Līla	250
Figure 33: B. S. Radha, also known as ‘Dikki’ Radha for her famous role as the villain ‘Dikki’ in Samsāra Nauka. (Source: Karnataka Drama Academy Archive, approximate date 1980-85)	251
Figure 34: B. S. Manjulamma, known for her singing abilities	252
Figure 35: Manjulamma with and without make-up	257
Figure 36: Manjulamma as Sunāma (Left) and as Kamsa Nagarathnamma (Right) in Kṛṣṇa Līla in 1980s	258
Figure 37: Manjulamma playing dual clown as Makaranda in Kṛṣṇa Gāruḍi	260
Figure 38: Manjula as Makaranda along with B. P. Rajamma as Narada in Kṛṣṇa Gāruḍi	261
Figure 39: Manjulamma post performance with the Kannada cinema actress Kalpana	262
Figure 40 An Article from a Kannada News Paper from 1969 about Nagarathnamma’s drama	276

Table of Transcriptions

Transcription 1: Doddapaśugaḷa of Virāṭaparva	61
Transcription 2: Pareśa part 1 from Bhīṣhma Pratijñe	85
Transcription 3: Pareśa part 2 from Bhīṣhma Pratijñe	86
Transcription 4: īśa maheśa from Bhīṣhma Pratijñe	90
Transcription 5: Meru pāri from Bhīṣhma Pratijñe.....	91
Transcription 6: Part 1 of Mārane Sumaśara from the play Tukārām.....	94
Transcription 7: Part 2 of Mārane Sumaśara from the play Tukārām.....	95
Transcription 8: Part 3 of Mārane Sumaśara from the play Tukārām.....	96
Transcription 9: Part 4 of Mārane Sumaśara from the play Tukārām.....	97
Transcription 10: Khalanetthapaaridha of Kṛṣṇa Līla.....	101
Transcription 11: Part 1 of Lankādhi pālana deva song in Sampūrṇa Rāmāyaṇa.....	103
Transcription 12: Part 2 of Lankādhi pālana deva song in Sampūrṇa Rāmāyaṇa.....	104
Transcription 13: Part 1 of Hā sūnuve ninna	106
Transcription 14: Part 2 of Hā sūnuve ninna	107
Transcription 15 Mendicant’s Song Śrīnivāsa Nī Pai.....	114
Transcription 16: The discouragingly funny song composed Paramashivan’s class teacher.....	129
Transcription 17: The very first song Paramashivan sang in 1938 ayya nimage.....	132
Transcription 18: Sarasija Daḷa Nayana.....	150
Transcription 19: Invocatory verse of Sūtradhāra.....	177
Transcription 20: Enu Sojigavo Sogasu song of Naṭi	178
Transcription 21: Eseyuvadi vasanta, a playful romantic song.....	180
Transcription 22: Monkeys’ battle song part 1 in Rāmāyaṇa	281
Transcription 23: Monkeys’ battle song part 2 in Rāmāyaṇa	282

Past Masters of Modern Kannada Theater



G Nagesh Rao



Gangadhara Rao



Gubbi Veeranna (1891-1972)



M.V. Subbayya Naidu (1896-1962)



Bellave Narahari Shastri (1881-1961)



Kottur Channabasappa (unknown)



M. R. Parthasarathi (1923 - 1965)



Ratnakara (1930-2010)



P. Kalingarao (1914-1981)



H. K. Yoganarasimha (1927-2002)



Malavalli Sundaramma (1905-1975?)



Musiri Krishnamurthy (1930-1985)

Background

There are several reasons why scholars study performing arts and artists. The study of performers is as important as the study of the performing art itself since the performers are the ‘direct torchbearers’ of a cultural and artistic heritage they represent, whose collective experience will fulfil the purpose of reproducing and reflecting the ‘life of the art’ in its entirety. Nettl (2005:172) emphasizes that the primary concern of the discipline of ethnomusicology is to study the diversity and characteristics of music of a large population and this goal can be fulfilled by studying an individual musician, exemplary or otherwise, who is a representative of that musical culture.

Regula Qureshi, in the prefatory notes to her book *Master Musicians of India* cites ‘Love and gratitude’ for the hereditary musicians who have been her teachers, as a motivating factor to write the book. Studying artforms serves another vital purpose, as Hansen (1992:3-4) writes, “Even as they entertain, ...they supply “pictures of the world”, because they comprised the principal media of communication in societies before the advent of technology”, and communication of the past facilitates the reconstruction of an ‘ordered, meaningful cultural world’. The current dissertation is an attempt to reconstruct, reproduce and reflect the cultural past of Mysore province during the early 20th century through the medium of modern Kannada theater.

At the very outset, I wish to confess that I had no such noble intentions like Regula Qureshi or Katherine Hansen to write about or document any musical, dance or theater style that I have learnt from various artists. Not because I have no ‘love or gratitude’ for my teachers or the musicians who have inspired me all along, nor because I am indifferent to, the musical worlds in which I have dwelled and the embodiments of rich repertoire that have been my *elan vital*, but only because

I did not find such an exercise necessary. My indifference continued until I realized that it was the only way to gain entry to the innermost musical precincts of a certain *Sarangi* maestro whose music I admired, celebrated, revered and wanted to assimilate into my own musicianship. It is a matter of pure coincidence and serendipity that instead of writing about the *Sarangi*, I eventually ended up writing about modern Kannada theater. I was therefore compelled to write about my family members—my father Vidwan R Paramashivan (Vidwan – an epithet usually associated with scholarly musicians in South India) and my aunts, late R. Nagarathnamma and R. Manjulamma—who are the masters of this technically and musically highly evolved theater tradition.

I will articulate the course of events that induced me to shift the research focus from *Sarangi* to modern Kannada theater and describe the circumstances in my family under which this art form was kept out of my reach for nearly three decades, in the next chapter. Here, without being detailed but being honest, I confess that I undertook the task of writing about my father and his art, among other reasons, because I owe him a debt of gratitude. He is not only a biological father to me, but also has been my Guru who selflessly transferred all his musical skills like singing, composing and playing various musical instruments to me since I was a child and in the recent years, he has been imparting his theatrical skills like acting and direction as well.

In this dissertation, I will document the salient features of modern Kannada theater, based on the artistic biography of the eminent Kannada theater personality, my father, Vidwan R Paramashivan, often referred to as '*Kannada Raṅgabhūmi Bhīṣma Pitāmahā*' ("Great grandfather of Kannada theater"), who had an illustrious career spanning more than eight decades in Kannada theater as an actor, director, harmonium player and composer with various drama companies from 1935 to 1970. I will unwind his personal interviews and subject them to critical analysis to further my own

self-understandings of modern Kannada theater from several vantage points of scholarship; cultural nationalism, classicization, gender conventions and postcolonial modernity. I will study the body of repertoire of Kannada theater to highlight the linguistic and intercultural elements and the influences of the colonial culture on its evolution. I will attempt to throw light on modern Kannada theater's failure to reshape itself, from the conventional colonial narratives, to align with the movement of nationalism which led to its decline.

Aim and Purpose

Modern Kannada theater refers to a very rich tradition of theater performance that evolved in the princely state of Mysore under the colonial rule, in the late 19th and early 20th century; founded, supported and nurtured under the royal patronage of the erstwhile Kings of Mysore, Mummadi Krishna Raja Wodeyar (1794-1868), Chamaraja Wodeyar (1863-1894), Krishna Raja Wodeyar IV (1884-1940) and Jaya Chamarajendra Wodeyar (1919-1974). Popularly known as 'Kannada *Vṛtti Raṅgabhūmi* (*Vṛtti: Professional, Raṅgabhūmi: Theater Stage*)', it reached its pinnacle of creative effervescence in the late 19th century during the colonial rule and rode high upon the crest of a boisterous popularity from the early 20th century until its decline in the 1970s.

When the art is contemporary, the artist and the historical circumstances are both dispensable. But writing about an art or artist from the recent or distant past means to invariably depend on written testimonies in the archives and historical documents. Despite being the most popular form of entertainment in the Southern Karnataka during the late 19th and early 20th century, modern Kannada theater failed to attract the attention of scholars of ethnomusicology or history, thereby remaining obscure and only in the memories of a handful of performers most of whom left this world without leaving any audio or visual imprints, or historical documentation or information for

the posterity. Thus, in the absence of historical information, the knowledge worlds of the surviving artists are not only crucial but rather the only sources of information that can engender the understanding of the art, the artists and the social framework under which the art evolved.

The primary goal of this dissertation is therefore to document and offer an expository glimpse of modern Kannada theater by means of exploring the knowledge worlds of Paramashivan through his personal interviews and by placing them in context. Nettl (2005:173) lists three methodological approaches in ethnomusicological fieldwork to study an individual whose personal music experience represents the collective musical experience of a culture. These include, biography, personal repertoire and performance practice. This dissertation adopts a *mélange* of all these genres of writings and many more that are commonly found in the field of ethnomusicology. At a superficial level, although, this work might appear to be biographical in nature, I travel back and forth between dialogic interviews, biographical, auto-biographical and reflexive-ethnographic styles, quite freely, using them as tools in my tool kit, much like a mechanic who picks and chooses spanners, screw drivers, pliers of different sizes checking the surface with a *bubble level*.

Lenneberg (1988:1) in his endeavor to establish the seriousness of biography as a mainstream scholarly discipline argues that biography in fact is a combination of disciplines like ‘paleography, history, theory, and stylistic analysis’ and that it is impossible to do stylistic analysis of music without a thorough knowledge of ‘individual composition technique’. Küster and Mary (1997) stress on the futility of writing only about the events in the lives of musicians and insist that it is imperative that the music should be regarded as a source of biography. Qureshi (2007:4), writes “Books of interviews with musicians and artists most commonly take the shape of verbal portraits painted by individual artists themselves with due guidance by the interviewer. Interviews can also be turned into a collage of primary source information on an artistic practice, as envisioned by the

author who does the mosaic”. I have made sincere attempts not to completely marginalize my voice as an interlocutor while presenting the words of the primary subject of this dissertation, my father. Also, this work only represents the tip of the iceberg of a very rich tradition, only as much as what could be gleaned from a single individual. However, while attempting an orderly exposition of modern Kannada theater, I will trace the saga of Paramashivan’s life, his childhood memories and association with Kannada theater and relate them to his art and how it had far reaching consequences on his interaction with other knowledge worlds of music and cinema, his social identity and professional career. Though other ancillary issues such as influence of colonialism, movement of Indian nationalism and modernity, gender identities within modern Kannada theater do arise in the course of the current study, they are addressed only in the passing, insofar as an aid to fortify their connections to the modern Kannada theater repertoire and its decline. I am aware that each of these ancillary topics can be further elaborated and have the potential to serve as stand-alone topics for a thorough investigation; yet, such an all-inclusive study is neither the aim of the current study nor was it practically possible, given that the performance of this art form declined in the 1970s and most of the modern Kannada theater performers were long gone, before any scholarly study of this topic could be undertaken. I have instead concentrated my efforts in foregrounding the interviews, the repertoire and the knowledge worlds of Paramashivan that received little or no attention from scholars or performers even within his own province of Karnataka where it had its genesis or outside. While engaging with the dominant tale of modern Kannada theater through the biographical interviews, at each intersection, I inscribe them with mechanisms that influenced the artist and his art. I will try to juxtapose the exposition, wherever possible, with an investigation of causes for the sudden decline of such a highly established, evolved and popular theater form within a span of hundred years, while *Karnatak*

music, Yakṣagāna, Kamsāle, Doḷḷu Kuṇita and other classical and folk artforms continued to survive and flourish in Karnataka.

Here, I associate the word ‘tradition’ to modern Kannada theater with the sense of a ‘synthetic amalgamation of techniques of performance, execution, texts, music, acting, technological paraphernalia and aesthetic parameters that define this particular genre which had remained a major source of entertainment with plays that were pregnant with popular mythological, historical, social and fictional themes, but not in the sense of a mysterious ‘hoary antiquity’ of India. The purpose of this work is primarily to document and present a representative sample of an artistic tradition that went through different phases of an entire lifecycle of intention, conceptualization, implementation, evolution and decline, all within less than a hundred years, from the later 19th century to late-mid 20th century.

Interviewing a Loving Father or a Disciplinarian Guru?

Before describing the interview process, here, I will briefly describe my relationship with my father during my childhood and how it changed gradually over time. My parents had come to an agreement that both had to work hard to educate me and my sister and provide us with a comfortable life. Their professional circumstances compelled my father to work as a music teacher in a high school and pursue his theater and musical career in Bangalore which was an urban center; my mother worked as a lecturer of psychology and sociology in the not so urbane, but soaked in culture, historic city of Mysore, a hundred and fifty kilometers away from him. My mother visited my father thrice a week, but my sister and I could afford to visit him only during alternate weekends. Even during these short visits, he would spend half the time addressing the endless list

of annoying complaints my mother had against my mischievous behavior back in Mysore and the remaining time was spent in teaching me music. As a father he had a very sweet temperament but in the realm of music he would transmogrify himself into an impatient, strict task master. Even a small mistake while singing a phrase attracted a stern glare and severe rebuke, which made me nervous and uneasy singing in front of him, a fear that I carry even to this day. His high expectations and exasperations made teaching and learning music a burden to both of us¹. I will discuss some more aspects of our relationship and the contours of the path that we traversed together before we found ourselves in a mutually amicable comfort zone in the coming chapters.

Paramashivan has shared his treasure of personal and professional stories for this dissertation. I was privy to some of the information since my childhood, at least superficially. I have heard some of these oft-repeated stories from my father while he was sharing them with my mother, his friends, during his interviews in the television, newspapers or during music and theater events which he would preside over as a guest of honor. After I decided to pursue this topic for my dissertation, I formally interviewed him in the year 2017 from January-September during my field work. On many occasions during my field visits, I had to wait patiently for opportune moments to capture his expansive and unhurried mood.

These formal interviews, however, helped me immensely in filling the gaps in my understanding of his person and persona. I did my field work when he was eighty-seven years of age, he had already won many prestigious awards including the highest award for performing arts in India, the Sangit Natak Akademy award and therefore had reached a state of contentment in life. The

¹ The situation had worsened when I decided to quit Karnatak classical music, temporarily, to start a rock band in the college and he heard me sing the cover version of 'Where did you sleep last night' by Nirvana and scream the last part, in the inaugural concert. After the show, I distinctly remember him telling a family friend, 'Today I am proud of my son, he performed the death rites of the holy trinities of our music'.

interviews were conducted at different locations; his modest house in Bangalore, rehearsal venues, and at various auditoria while he was teaching, directing, singing, acting and playing the harmonium.

His house in Bangalore was constructed in 1960 on a plot that belonged to my grandmother which she distributed equally between my father and my aunt late R. Nagarathamma. He built a house on his share of the plot in which he has been living, on the first floor, ever since. As soon as you enter the house, you can catch him tucked himself into his favorite spot, his bed by the window, which my mother joking refers to as 'His Highness' throne sitting upon which he settles all the disputes in the theater world'. It was sitting here that he dictated more than thousand theater songs and the tunes to Mr. Shivalinga Murthy who wrote them down manually which was to be published later as a book along with the music CD. Again, it was here he answered most of my questions either reclining on a pillow or sitting with his legs crossed in his usual poised *sangfroid* of a seasoned artist who has 'been there and done that'.

In each interview he would share a deluge of information about his knowledge worlds in modern Kannada theater, cinema, Karnatak music and his personal associations and experiences with eminent actors, musicians, playwrights, Kannada poets and novelists like Bellary Bi Chi, A Na Krishnarao, J. P. Rajaratnam. Most of these names were not unfamiliar to me because he had mentioned them earlier. In fact, deceived by his self-effacing character, I was quite skeptical for a long time about the veracity of his claims. He always claimed to know these eminent personalities and to have taught music to many of the famous Kannada cinema actors including the Kannada matinee idol, thespian Dr. Rajkumar. My suspicions were dispelled only after I attended a grand event in the year 1995 organized by the government of Karnataka to commemorate the birth anniversary of the theater company proprietor and actor, M. V. Subbayya Naidu. This event

featured Rajkumar playing the role of Ramākānta from the play *Bhakta Ambarīṣa* under my father's music direction and harmonium. After the show, Rajkumar embraced my father and announced to the television reporters about his association with my father in the theater world saying, "Paramashivan can make even a stone sing". When I was introduced to him, I was feeling a sinking surreal sensation in my mind and body, because here was the most popular hero of Kannada cinema to catch a glimpse of whom thousands of people are rioting outside the auditorium braving the ruthless constabulary, and the same person is embracing my father and talking to me in a friendly manner. Because of this experience, I did not have any reason to suspect his words during the interviews when he named many more eminent personalities to be his friends from his theater days.

In the month of May 2017, my father floated the idea of staging a very old play titled *Bhīṣma Pratijñe* that was popular in the 1930s but had not been performed thereafter. He asked me if I could play the lead role. I agreed but upon the condition that he should also direct and let me stage my dream play *Sadārame* which I had already performed, quite amateurishly, in the past. He agreed to my precondition and the rehearsals started in full swing for both the plays. I took the responsibility of teaching *Sadārame* to the crew since I was already familiar with the plot which gave him some respite. During the same time, the chair of the Department of Drama, Bangalore University, approached Paramashivan to teach the play *Kṛṣṇa Līla* to his students pursuing MA in Drama. The university kindly offered its premises and the auditorium to rehearse their play as well as ours. As a kind gesture, my father offered to stage both *Bhīṣma Pratijñe* and *Kṛṣṇa Līla* on the same day in August 2017. I made use of the opportunity to make a video recording of two full length rehearsals of these plays in the university auditorium which captured Paramashivan in action in different avatars; as a director, teacher, music director and harmonium player. I conducted

several other interviews of my father when I recorded over five hundred theater songs played on the harmonium by him. For the same project I requested my aunt R. Manjulamma to sing a few songs, a request that she obliged.

Though I stopped interviewing him formally, I continued to seek clarifications over the telephone after returning to Canada throughout the course of writing this dissertation. I am now habituated to turn on the recorder whenever my father comes on the phone and he continues to enrich me with new anecdotes, a new song or offers a new perspective about Kannada theater.

Chapter Schemata

Chapter 1 deals mostly with the necessary background information about the modern Kannada theater, the study area where the subject of the dissertation Paramashivan, his sisters Nagarathamma and Manjulamma were born and began their theater careers. It provides an understanding of the core research questions and the relevant background literature and where the scholarship stands on Indian theater and modern Kannada theater, along with the literature on biographies of male and female performers and, the nationalism-art nexus and the case of theater. In Chapter 2, following an auto-biographic and reflexive-ethnography approach, I will describe my own association with the theater. Alongside, I will describe the research methodology and clarify my distinct roles as an insider and outsider while I studied my own culture. In Chapter 3, the music of Kannada theater, its influences from other genres namely *Karnatak*, Hindustani music and European airs will be discussed along with a study of text-setting in theater songs. Chapter 4 and 5 mostly deal with biography and dialogic interviews with my father in which I will keep changing my role as a passive observer and an active researcher. Chapter 6 is concerned with

nationalism, classicization of art and culture, and its impact or the lack of it therein, on modern Kannada theater. Chapter 7 is about gender constructs, status of women and the role of *devadasi*s in modern Kannada theater, interspersed with interviews with my aunt and my father. I will be discussing the role of female actors in the theater, how their voices were muzzled post-marriage by their elitist husbands and lastly the hardships they had to face being in theater profession and after its decline. In Chapter 8, I will consolidate the findings from the dissertation and discuss the causes of decline of modern Kannada theater taking into consideration the multifarious factors discussed in the dissertation. I will state the research gaps in the current work and suggest possible directions in which the current work can be extended.

Chapter 1

Introduction

While the literature of early Kannada theater can be traced back to 9th century AD work by the poet Nṛpatuṅga titled *Kavirāja Mārga*, many scholars believe that the modern Kannada theater drew its influences from the touring Persian and Marathi theatres and subsequently established itself as one of the prominent theater styles in India in the early 19th century (Raghava, 1976). This commonly accepted notion of influence of Marathi and Persian theater was later challenged by scholars like Ashok Ranade who corrected the perceptions about such influences and placed them in perspective. Ranade proved that it was the itinerant theater troupes of Mysore that visited Maharashtra thereby paving the way for the genesis of Marathi and Persian theater (Ranade, 1986).

Despite influencing other theatres, a formal Kannada theater movement had not started until 1882, when the erstwhile King of Mysore, Mummadi Krishna Raja Wodeyar, who founded a theater troupe affiliated to Mysore royal court called *Sri Jayachamarajendra Karnataka Nataka Sabha* and appointed court poets to compose modern plays in Kannada language. The content for the plays were either translated from Sanskrit plays or originally composed by the court poets based on mythological themes. These plays were composed and executed adhering to the rules of *Nāṭya Śāstra (NS)*, which says about the content of the play '*nāṭakam khyātavṛttam syāt* (A play should be composed such that the plot and the subject-matter are familiar to the audience)'. Plays were also composed based on contemporary social themes and fiction and included adaptations from famous Persian and English plays such as *Gul-e-Bakāvali*, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Robert Macaire*.

Later the palace drama troupe was taken over by others and renamed as *Chamundeshwari Company* in the early 20th century when Paramashivan made his debut in theater. This troupe along with other numerous theater troupes, often referred to as ‘Drama company’, such as C. Varadachar’s ‘*Rathnavali Theatricals*’, *Chamundeshwari Company*, *C B Mallappa’s Company*, Gubbi Veeranna’s *Shri Channa Basaveshwara Company* and *K. Hirannayya Mitra Mandali*, managed to popularize the Kannada plays during 1900-1970. Eminent artists of these companies include K Hirannayya, M V. Subbayya Naidu, Nagesh Rao, Malavalli Sundaramma and Kottur Channabasappa.

History of Theater in India

The landscape of ‘Indian theater’ is a bricolage of many performing art forms with an incredible number of seemingly endless and complex classifications based on the folk, classical, regional and linguistic traditions across the country. The enormity of the subject not only makes the endeavor of studying Indian theater traditions a cumbersome task but also severely delimits the scope of such a study by being selective and therefore reductive. Regarding the complexity of the Indian theater, Richmond recognizes that Indian theater has many languages, patterns, audiences and purposes (Richmond et al, 1990). Dharwadekar (2005) exposts the vagueness of the term ‘Indian theater’ since Indian theater unlike other forms of theater is not a single entity but a composite of many local, folk and classical forms. The term theater in the context of India does not conform to the narrow definition of theater that Western theorists are familiar with but is a more inclusive term constituting not only the theater but music, dance, literature, storytelling and other art forms.

In the common parlance, modern theater is referred to as *Nāṭaka*. The word *Nāṭaka* is derived from the Sanskrit root ‘*Naṭ*’ which means ‘*to act*’. Interestingly, *Nāṭaka* is only one of the many forms

of drama that were popular in ancient India and taxonomically, it belongs to the genus of all the dramatic compositions, the generic term for which was ‘*Rūpaka*’. *Nāṭaka* is one of the ten *Rūpakas* namely *Nāṭaka*, *Prakarāṇa*, *Bhāṇa*, *Prahasana*, *Dhima*, *ĪhĀmṛga*, *Aṅka*, *Vīthi*, *Vyāyoga* and *Samavakāra*. Another term that had a wider connotation for drama and dramatic forms in ancient India was *Nāṭya* and Bharata the composer of *NS* used the *Nāṭya* for various forms of drama by titling his magnum opus on the theory of dramaturgy as ‘*Nāṭya Śāstra*’. Emmie te Nijenhuis quoting the Indian musicologist Ra Sa situates *Nāṭya Śāstra* between 1st century BC and 1st century AD (Nijenhuis, 1997; Sathyanarayana, 2001). *Nāṭya* is also called *Rūpa* which literally means a physically perceptible ‘*form*’ of instances in life that induces ‘*Rasa*’, aesthetic sentiments or emotions, such as love, humor, compassion, anger, valour, fear, disgust, surprise, and peace, and therefore suggesting the visual nature of the art form and its aim of depicting the real life itself. The word *Nāṭya* whose meaning is currently restricted only to dance, originally was a composite of the three main art forms indispensable but integrated into the art of drama namely *gīta* (song/music), *vādyā* (instrumental music) and *nṛtya* (dance).

Richmond et al (1990:3-4) make a very important observation regarding the divine origins of dramaturgy in India as found in the invocatory chapter of *NS*. Richmond et al. observe: “The traditional legend relating to the origin of drama and theater serves as a reminder that the ancient Indians were fond of attributing creation of all the important institutions to divine ingenuity. In fact, these secular institutions such as arts, medicine, astronomy have been deified and given the status of ‘*Vedas*’ [by ancient Indians] the sacred literature of the ultimate knowledge for the Hindus, by acknowledging these institutions as ‘*pañcama veda*’ or the ‘*fifth Veda*’ in addition to the four Vedas, namely, *Rgveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Sāmaveda* and *Atharvaveda*”.

NS posits a divine origin for theater performance on the one hand and on the other, it makes theater performance accessible to people from all walks of life despite their socio-cultural affiliations, thereby secularizing the art form. It is evident in the first chapter wherein members of all the four varnas *Brāhmaṇa* (priest class), *Kṣatriya* (warrior class), *Vaiśya* (trades class) and *Śūdra* (peasant class) approached the creator to create a distraction/art form that was both audible and visual. Brahma while creating the theater performance gathered the prose from *Rgveda*, poetry from *Yajurveda*, music from *Sāmaveda*, and stagecraft from *Atharvaveda*, and despite its sacred origins, theater performance was secular in its outreach and accessibility. Ghosh (1950) in his commentary on *NS* gives a detailed description of its content along with translations of some of the important sections. *NS* consists of thirty-six chapters with 6000 poems interspersed with prose. It has an elaborate explanation about stage preparation, costumes and makeup, green room design, choreography and five chapters (chapters 28-33) dedicated to theory of music, metres, modes, gamut-s and different musical instruments such as vina and flute.

Background Literature on Indian Theater

Numerous Nineteenth century scholars have discussed the origin, development and decline of Indian theater. Wilson (1827) in his translation of three classical Sanskrit plays, regards the ancient Indian theater as a rich, original and an independent theater that is not indebted to Chinese, Greek, and Muhammadens. He writes, "...it is impossible that they should have borrowed their theater from the people of either ancient or modern times...they present characteristic varieties of conduct and construction which strongly evidence both original design and national development" (Wilson, 1827: xii). While addressing the social hierarchy in the society and the role of Sanskrit language in dissemination of information, Wilson observes that Sanskrit might have been a language spoken in most parts of India but highly unlikely that it was vernacular and therefore when Sanskrit lost

its importance by 13th and 14th century, the theater also started to decline. The role of language politics in the context of modern Kannada theater will be discussed in Chapter 8. Here it will suffice to remark that the case of Kannada theater was distinct from Sanskrit theater because Kannada was indeed the official state language of Karnataka after the linguistic bifurcation of the states in the independent India and has remained the vernacular language till date. Keith (1954) begins by admiring the works of Sylvain Lévi's *Le théâtre indien*, Pischel, Hertel, Jacob and other scholars prior to him on Indian (to be read as Sanskrit) dramaturgy. He also posits Vedic origins to Sanskrit drama tracing them to the hymns of *Rgveda* and sacrificial rituals that consisted of dramatic elements in ceremonies where the priests played different roles of deities like *Indra*, *Varuṇa*, *Yama*, *Soma* and other Vedic deities. He discusses the Sanskrit plays based on *Mahabhārata* and *Rāmāyāṇa* in Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* from 150 BC and it is interesting to note that themes of plays had not changed in the modern Kannada theater even in the 19th and 20th century. Keith has addressed a number of other issues concerning Sanskrit theater namely the drama and religion, dramaturges like *Aśvaghōṣa*, *Kālidāsa*, *Bhāṇa*, *Bhāsa*, *Śūdraka*, and ascribes the decline of Sanskrit drama to Muslim invasion and the Muhammadan rulers who feared the close association of theater patronized by the Hindu kings with 'national religion'. He also emphasizes the increasing distinction between Sanskrit and the vernacular languages, and the growing body of literature in the vernacular, which reduced Sanskrit into a secondary language (Keith, 1954:242-243).

Notwithstanding the efforts of scholars from the early nineteenth century, the total amount of scholarly literature on the performative aspect of 'Indian dramaturgy' has always remained scarce. While the nineteenth century scholars focused on Indian theater for the literary and expository merit of Sanskrit, later scholars were interested in grounding the theater study in social, cultural

and political history and criticism, and its role in nationalism, with very little or no focus on performance, repertoire or expository aspect of it.

In Indian theater, the restriction of the word drama only to theater performance is of a very recent origin that can be found only in modern and postmodern theater that too after the advent of the West. Richmond et al (1990) write “In India performances, except for those of the modern theater, are known by genre-specific names in their local language - *yakshagana*, *ras-lila*, *terukkuttu*, *cavittu natakam*...at the local level, these performances will usually be part of a familiar and friendly world, known since childhood”. Though Richmond et al. have attempted to situate the theater tradition of India historically, discusses some theater traditions such as *Kudiyattam*, *Teyyam*, *Kathakali*, *Ram-lila*, *Ras-lila*, and a few instances of modern theater, from various parts of India, modern Kannada theater clearly seems to be out of his line of sight.

Yarrow (2001) calls the Indian theater ‘a theater of origin’ and ‘a theater of freedom’. Seeking to find a reason for the interest of Western theater theorists in the Indian theater, he frames four reasons namely liminality, plurality, physicality and transcendence. He concludes that theater, like every other art form is always a product of the ‘assumptions of life’, which in case of India is the ancient “Vedic/Hindu’ life. Yarrow provides a brief description of various forms of theater in India namely *Chakkyar Kootthu*, *Bhavai*, *Deyyam*, *Bhoota*, *ras-leela*, *krishna-attam* etc and studies the aesthetical, political and ethical perspectives of these performances. He makes only a brief reference to Kannada theater that too only to the theater of the recent times which include leftist theater of Prasanna. But in his work too, any reference to modern Kannada theater is conspicuously missing.

The first work on the performative principles of Indian theater of the early 20th century seems to be by Anand (1951) who gives a contemporary account of theater performance in various parts of India. Anand refers to other forms of village theater called *Nautanki* (a cognate of the Sanskrit word *Nataka*) or *Tamasha* (literally meaning comedy) that he witnessed in his own native village, wherein the boundaries between the artists and the audience would not exist. Anand also mentions about the Marathi theater, Gujarati theater and the Hindustani theater of the late 19th and the first half of the 20th century, but surprisingly enough he doesn't even make a passing reference to the very well-established Kannada theater in Karnataka.

Hansen (1992) has summarized the form, content, social attitude towards the art form and the social milieu of the performance of *Nautankī*. Hansen has paid particular attention to the social statuses of *Nautankī* artists and their struggle to find an audience with the onslaught of a more stylized and organized theater forms popular in the urban centers. She places theater forms like *Nautankī* in the lowest end of the spectrum of theater entertainment, Sanskrit theater in the upper end and other traditional theater forms which evolved in the late 19th and the early 20th century emulating the Western acting and stagecraft somewhere in between.

Both Varadpande (1979) and Gupta (1991) trace the origins of the theater in India to the Vedic texts quoting examples from the dialogue between *Pururavas* and *Ūrvaśi* found in the hymns of *Śatapatabrāhmaṇa*, reference to hand clapper, lute player and jester in *Shukla Yajurveda*, actor changing his attire in *Maitrāyanīya Upanishad* or instances of actors and musicians providing entertainment in the *Mahābhārata*. Yet, the entire book is dedicated only to study the art forms

starting from the Vedic rituals to the medieval India but does not discuss anything about the contemporary theater of the last few centuries.

In Gupta's work, for the first time we can find recognition of modern Kannada theater in a scholarly work. Referring to it as 'Kanarese theater' (Kanarese is cognate with Kannada), he writes "The Kanarese theater is making remarkable progress in Bangalore and some noteworthy companies are coming into existence in Mysore". The Journal of South Asian literature came out with a special issue on the 'Indian Theater' edited by Farley Richmond in 1975. This is a collection of articles on various theater forms in India namely *Tolu Bommalu Kattu*, *The Braj Rāsa Līla*, *Hitler*, *Nala Charitam*, *Kathakali* and an article completely dedicated to dialogic interview with the theater director and drama teacher Ebrahim Alkazi. The articles cover a wide range of theater forms from Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Kerala and there is an article dedicated to the *Yakshagana Badagathittu* (*Yakshagana* in the Northern style) an ancient folk dance-drama form of Karnataka. Sufficient effort is invested on the works of Chandrashekhara Kambara, Girish Karnad, B. V. Karanth and the contributions of K. V. Subbanna, another socialist director who cofounded the drama school called *Nīnāsam* in Karnataka and wrote mostly in Kannada.

Ashok Ranade's work (Ranade, 1986), offers some crucial information regarding the history of modern Marathi theater, for example, the separation of the audience from the actors by elevating the proscenium-stage, a seating arrangement that gave a sense of distinctness to the audience, usage of dropdown curtains, wings, side curtains, construction of the first theater hall in Bombay in 1842 and Pune in 1854 called *Pūrṇānand Nāṭakagrha* (*Pūrṇānand* Drama house). The author also notes

that the ‘first ticketed performance’ of the theater took place in the Grant Road Theater in Mumbai on March 19th, 1853 and was staged by Vishnudas Bhave and the tickets varied from Rs. 4 for the Box and Re. 1 for the pit. Regarding lighting the author mentions that ‘*Hilals*’ (oil-lamps) and candles hung like chandeliers were used during the performance and kerosene lamps were introduced in 1875. The author also points to the fact that Vishnudas Bhave was asked by the king of Sangli, Maharashtra to compose plays in Marathi after he saw the performance of a troupe from Karnataka.

History of Kannada Theater

In Karnataka, theater falls under two broad categories, namely folk theater and modern Kannada theater. Folk theater arts referred to as ‘*jānapada*’ have a ritualistic and devotional history of being a part of traditional way of life, especially in rural regions. Different folk artforms of Karnataka include *Yakṣagāna*, *Doḷlu Kuṇita*, *Vīragāse*, *Kamsāḷe Kuṇita*, *Bhūtada Kola*, *Gombeyāṭa* and many more depending on their territorial limitations. Efforts are under way through the state government of Karnataka to preserve and promote these folk artforms and artists through performance, research, documentation and archiving activity (GoK, 2013).

Among all these folk artforms, *Yakṣagāna*, a rich dance drama from coastal Karnataka found a global representation due to the concerted efforts of the polymath Shivarama Karanth. He singlehandedly elevated its status from ‘a folk genre performed in open air’ to an elite art form that could be performed within the luxuries of an indoor auditorium. Unlike modern Kannada theater which adopted the European proscenium stage and auditorium for its execution, *Yakṣagāna* on the other hand, until recently, was performed in the open air or in big agricultural fields in the rural coastal Karnataka region. Comparing modern Kannada theater with *Yakṣagāna* and *veethināṭaka* (street plays), Raghava (1976:13) writes “...dramatic art did exist before this period

[of modern Kannada theater] but such art was confined to crude representations in *veedhi natakas* and *yaksha ganas* which cannot be reckoned as stage proper as is generally understood”.

Shivarama Karanth wrote a book delineating the dramaturgy, text, music and dance of *Yakṣagāna* in 1957. In this book, he humbly submits that he is documenting this dance drama because he is native to it and urges that this exercise of documentation should become a pan-Indian phenomenon with respect to every artform (Karanth, 1959:128). According to him, when he undertook this mammoth project, there were troupes performing this dance drama for more than 150 years and he claims to have referred to palm leaf manuscripts from as early as 1620 while searching for the texts and plots of *Yakṣagāna*. This is quite possible because the king of Tanjore is supposed to have offered to patronage to a *Yakṣagāna* troupe in the early 17th century and there are references to many nomadic troupes from the 18th century (For more details see Bakhle, 2005; Varadpande, 1979). Ashton (1969) observes that *Yakṣagāna* has a history of at least four hundred years and argues that *Dombi Dasara Kunita*, *Karubhanta Kalaga* and *Bayalu Ata* and other folk artforms were all the different names by which *Yakṣagāna* was known in different eras also stating that the oldest *Yakṣagāna* play dates back to 1564 AD (More about the causes for survival of *Yakṣagāna* and the decline of modern Kannada theater will be discussed in Chapter 8).

Currently there are only two sources of information on the modern Kannada theater; Ranganath (1958) and the handbook on Indian theater titled *The Oxford Companion to Indian Theater* written by Anand Lal. These two sources provide an overview of the history of Kannada theater; however, Lal’s work is fraught with several factual errors for example, he claims that late R. Nagarathamma worked in Gubbi company a fact which was denied by my father and aunt R. Manjulamma. He also claims that the Kannada cinema actor Rajkumar worked rose to fame in Gubbi company and

does not mention his association with Subbayya Naidu company. Anand Lal continues to promote the theory that Kannada theater was influenced by Marathi and Persian theater whereas later theorists argued contrary to it. Ranganath's work on the other hand is more concerned with the amateur theater movement of the latter part of the 20th century with a passing mention of modern Kannada theater companies.

Other scholars have grounded the post-modern Kannada theater in a socio-cultural-political criticism, for example, Leslie (1998) discusses Girish Karnad's play '*Thale daṇḍa*' which is a recreation of the 12th century religious movement spearheaded by Basava, opposing the erstwhile socio-political orthodoxies in Karnataka. In her two-part article, she discusses the origins of *Vīraśaivism*, a new community founded by the 12th century social reformer Basava, in the first part and in the second part, she discusses the plot of '*Thale daṇḍa*' and the political underpinnings of Karnad's experiment with theater. In a similar article, Leslie consolidates the plots of Karnad's plays like *Yayāti*, *Tughlaq*, *Mā Niśāda*, *Hayavadana* and describes how Karnad cleverly uses the stories of Hindu scriptures, history and folklore and interweaves them into a play to reflect the contemporaneous socio-political phenomena in the current society (Leslie, 1996). Similar political theater was pursued in post-independent India by other socialist theater personalities like K. V. Subbanna which was in some sense a continuation of freedom movement, anti socio-religious orthodoxies influenced by socialism (Subbanna et al, 1992). In Nandi Bhatia's volume *Modern Indian Theater: A Reader*, there are four essays dedicated to theater in pre-independent India and one of them by Bhaskaran (2009:133) focusing on South India accomplishes the task of engaging the political movement with theater. Even though the title misleadingly claims to study the theater of South India, the focus is confined to nationalism movement and its engagement with the theater scene in Madras. The Kannada theater discussed in Bhatia's work is limited to *Yakṣagāna* and

amateur theaters. Sinha (2007:233-527) in his special volume of encyclopedia dedicated to South Indian theater adopts a cataloguing approach and enlists the names of different theater companies. He mentions about the stalwarts of modern Kannada theater including the greats such as M. V. Subbaiah Naidu, K. Hirannayya, H. L. N. Simha including my aunt R. Nagarathamma but only in the passing. The author has dedicated much of his efforts in documenting the plays by Girish Karnad, K. V. Subbanna and other new generation playwrights. K. Hirannayya's son Master Hirannayya's company seems to be clearly missing from the catalogue.

A perusal of literature on Indian theater clearly suggests that no serious academic work has happened on the modern Kannada theater either in India or elsewhere in the world. Glaring reasons for this neglect are: 1. By the time the Western scholars became interested in Indian performing art forms, this theater practice was at the end of its glory; 2. As Richard Widdess mentioned to me in a personal communication, Karnataka has reputed scholars who are known for their erudition and mastery over the classical theoretical treatises in Indian musicology. But there are not as many scholars who have ventured out in the field to study the indigenous local art forms. He cited his own personal experience of showing a reputed musicologist a sculpture in a Northern Karnataka temple, of a woman holding a musical instrument. "I inquired with him if what the woman was holding was a musical instrument and he replied in negative. It later turned out that I was right, because in the evening they had arranged a musical entertainment by the local folk artists and one of the women played exactly the same instrument that we had seen in the morning", he recollected. The social, political and economic reasons for this neglect which will be discussed in Chapter 8.

In the absence of any scholarly literature on modern Kannada theater, its exposition or socio-political narratives, much of the information has been culled out of the interviews with Paramashivan himself. In these interviews, he also clarified and corrected some of the misinformation and factual errors recorded in the literature.

Art and Nationalism

The post-colonial nations described as the ‘new centers of consciousness’, followed the rubric of European model of nationalism and branded their art as ‘national tradition’. In India, this project of ‘invention of tradition’ and ‘nationalization’ of art had to be given a scriptural sanctification which the nationalists were able to accomplish via the Sanskrit route. This rather curious synecdochic reduction was perhaps the best way possible to achieve this objective because the literary sources based on Sanskrit served as the bridge between precolonial history and the postcolonial contemporary. In Northern India this was done by Hinduization of music (Bakhle, 2005) and in Southern India this was achieved through moving these ‘new centers of musical consciousness’ from villages, hitherto under hereditary performers, to music organizations in urban centers that were mostly controlled by the upper-caste elite nationalists (Weidman, 2006).

Some scholars for example, Gayatri Spivak (Morris and Spivak, 2010; Spivak, 2010), Niranjana (Niranjana et al., 1993) who are too preoccupied with culture, modernity and nationalization have altogether excluded art from their discourse. Yet, there is a huge body of recent scholarship that engages critically in examining arts in the light of nationalism which include Allen (1997), Qureshi (1991), Walker (2014), Subramanian (2006), Peterson and Soneji (2008).

Soneji (2012) examines the nexus of aesthetics-politics-sexuality in the backdrop of colonial modernity and culture in South Indian royal courts. The author has employed a judicious mix of different disciplines in the current study namely historiography, ethnomusicology, performance studies, gender and religious study to document the archival system of performing *Sadir* dance at the temple by *devadāsī*-s (temple dancers) and the moral cleansing movement brought about by the dawn of 20th century in the colonial south India which led to the eventual demise of this tradition.

Walker (2014) draws attention to the scholarship of the last few decades that changed the perception of history and its role in the construction of truth and the nature of the truth constructed by history. She underlines the effect of colonialism, nationalism, the notion of ‘oriental other’ and modernity on the history of South Asian performing arts. These issues were also central to the postcolonial scholarship based on which critical approaches to the history creation were formulated. While her primary interest is in the suppressed history of professional female performers and courtesans, the narrative across the spectrum by various scholars unequivocally converges on the marginalization of the role of subaltern which is the characteristic of any scholarly legacy that is inextricable from colonial power structures.

Nationalism in theater is not an entirely new phenomenon either. The history of a mutual interrelationship between theatrical expressions and nationalism can be traced back to Greek tragedies wherein the superiority of one state over the other was established through the theater. In the nineteenth and twentieth century, cultural nationalism gained momentum following the French and American revolutions. Several authors have written about theatrical expression in nationalism. Stone (2004) highlights the ‘The Ba’ albakk Festival and Rahbanis’ musical theater and its evolution to nationalism in Lebanon in the year 1958, the *annus horribilis*, when the identity

of Lebanon had to be redefined. Stone writes “Before Ba'albakk could become a productive site in Lebanon's post-independence nation-building process, the connection between the ruins and present-day Lebanon first had to be made. This process was paradoxically facilitated by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European "identity searching" in the region...in nineteenth century India reminds us that this phenomenon was in no way peculiar to Lebanon. If the English could lay cultural claim to ancient Greece, the nineteenth-century Indian nationalists argued, could not India do the same for its Vedic age, a civilization the greatness of which had already been established by European orientalisists?”.

Wilmer (2008), demonstrates how theater artists used what he calls ‘subversive affirmation’ as an artistic/political tactic to guide the social, political and nationalistic discourses in Austria and Slovenia. He argues that nations and nation-states are vague artificial by-products of different historical events such as wars and invasions whose territorial and cultural topographies are ever changing and get legitimated “through nationalist discourse in the theater, emphasizing their homogeneity and distinctiveness and disguising their disharmonies”.

Schmiesing (2004) quotes the famous opening lines of the essay by Bjornson "Pibernes Program [The Whistlers Program]”, from the year 1856,

Et Tenter i Hovedstaden er Nationalitetens Forpostpogt mod Udlandet. I Hovedstaden foregaar den stente Brydning mellem detfremmede og vort eget, og Hovedstaden virker mest bestemmende indad. Den bar en stör Kamp og et stort Ansvar, og den tiltrænger Tropper og aarvaagne Vagter. A theater in the capital city is a nationality's most remote outpost against foreign countries. In the capital city the largest break between the foreign and that which is our own takes place, and the capital city influences most decisively by working inwards. It fights a great battle and has a great responsibility, and it requires troops and vigilant”. Schmiesing observes that the cultural nationalism unites the disconnected audience into citizens who are entrusted with the task of nation building.

The Study Area: Mysore and its Brief Political History

The modern Kannada theater had its origin in the princely state of Mysore, where incidentally the subject of this dissertation, Paramashivan, was born, raised and soaked in his knowledge worlds of theater, cinema and Karnatak music, even though he later moved to the state capital, Bangalore.

Mysore (also known as Mysuru or Mysūru) city is in the southern part of the Deccan Plateau and southwestern part of the state of Karnataka, India. Geographically, it is located between 12.26° N Latitude and 76.6° E Longitude at an altitude of 740 meters above the sea level. It sprawls a total area of 152 sq. km with a total population of 893,062 according to 2011 census (GoK, 2018). Mysore was the capital of the erstwhile princely state of Mysore during colonial rule. It was ruled by the Wodeyar² dynasty who were great patrons of art and culture, and promoted education, industrial and economic growth of the kingdom. It was the first princely kingdom that reorganized its structure to become a welfare state in the pre-independent India. Kannada is the official language of the state of Karnataka and the inhabitants of Karnataka are referred to as ‘Kannadigas’.

The single most authoritative work on the ‘History of Mysore’ has been Hayavadana Rao’s three volume ‘*History of Mysore (1399-1799)*’ published in 1927 in which he traces the history of Mysore from pre-Wodeyar dynasty period to the extinction of Mohammedan rule and the subsequent accession of Mysore to the British, towards which he brings together literary works in Kannada and Sanskrit in the royal archives, archaeological evidence, epigraphical and historical documents. He deeply acknowledges the earlier work by Lieutenant Colonel Mark Wilks and

² The Hindu dynasty that ruled the Kingdom of Mysore from 1399 till post Indian independence, with an interregnum Muslim rule.

refers to other accounts on the history of Mysore by Jesuit missionaries, vernacular panegyrics to kings such as ‘Cikkadevarāya vamsāvali (The family tree of Cikkadevarāya)’, ‘Kaṅṭhīrava Narasarāja vijayam (The victory of King Kaṅṭhīrava Narasarāja)’, ‘Mysūru doregaḷa itihāsa (The history of Kings of Mysore) and some Persian sources such as Mohammad Nāma, Haider Nāma written during the Mohammeden rule in Mysore. In these works, he discards all the legendary stories based on fulsome eulogies, rumors and hearsay that are far from truth and provides a realistic account of the lives of primary figures of Wodeyar dynasty such as Rāja Wodeyar, Kaṅṭhīrava Narasarāja, Cikkadevarāya, Haider Ali and Tipū Sultān quoting historical evidence to counter some of the common myths and legends surrounding these figures.

A consolidated political history of Mysore starts with the Maurya dynasty ruling during the last centuries before Christ and later Mysore was ruled by several dynasties like the Śātavāhana, Kadamba, Ganga, Cālukya, Cola, Hoysaḷa and the Vijayanagar Empire. Mysore has always played a very important role of being the bridge between the Northern and Southern India. Formerly known as ‘Mahiśapuri (Buffalo Town)’ it was named after the demon Mahiśāsura (Mahiśa-Buffalo, Asura -Demon) who was slain by Goddess Cāmuṅḍeśvari (often spelt Chamundeshwari) according to the Hindu text *Devi Bhāgavata*. There are many theories regarding the origin of the Wodeyar dynasty, however, quoting the ‘Annals of the Mysore Royal Family’, Rao traces the origin of the Wodeyar dynasty to the two princes Yadu-Rāya and Kṛṣṇa of Yādava clan in Dwaraka, Gujarat, North-West of India. Rao writes “The whole of this area [Mysore] was divided into a congeries of principalities ruled by local chieftains, of varying degrees of status, under the designation of Wodeyar, a colloquial word meaning ‘Lord’ or ‘Master’”. These units called ‘sīme’ owed their allegiance to the Vijayanagar empire and acknowledged its superiority without demur” (Rao, 1943:11-15). Eaton (2008:88), mentions that the Vijayanagar empire’s most celebrated king

Krishna Raya seized Srirangapatna in 1513 and his son-in-law Rāma Rāya continued ruling the vast dominions in Mysore province remotely in the latter part of the empire's heydays during 1530-1565.

The Wodeyar dynasty since its inception could maintain an unbroken legacy of rulers namely Yadu-Rāya, Cāmarāja Wodeyar, Thimmarāja Wodeyar and Devarāja Wodeyar in the 15th – 16th century. The Rāja Wodeyars, among them most importantly 'Immaḍi (second) Rāja Wodeyar', 'Kaṅṭhīrava Narasarāja Wodeyar', reigned supreme in the 17th century. The legacy continued till 1761 when Hyder Ali usurped the throne in a *coup d'état* to become the undisputed ruler of Mysore. He was succeeded by his son, Tipu Sultan whose rule came to an end in 1799 after the last Anglo-Mysore war following which the British placed the reign of administration under Dewan-regent Purnaiah for the young titular prince Krishna Raja Wodeyar III later taking over complete administration for five decades from 1831-1881 (Sebastian, 1992).

Shadaksharaias (1992) maintains that the history of Mysore has always been 'The history of administrators than the history of ruling dynasty'. He claims that it was the *dalvoys*, dewan-regents, commissioners and later the British that controlled the state and administration, which is clearly in contradiction with Hayavadana Rao's work in which he highlights the statesmanship and administrative skills of each of the kings, their annexures and expansions, which earned one of the kings, Cikkadevarāja Wodeyar, the title '*Jug Deo Raja*' by Aurangzeb during the latter part of the 17th century.

Mysore as an Epicenter of Art and Culture

Mysore was condemned to a puppet state when the British imposed their rule in 1831. This period saw a sudden surge in religious rites, cultural activities and social duties as an act of 'counter-

balancing' the denial of 'political' and 'economic' power (Ikegame, 2012). Krishnaraja Wodeyar III (reign:1799-1831) was instrumental in bringing about a cultural revolution which soon rose Mysore to prominence as the fountainhead of art and culture among all the princely states. He wrote books such as *Śrītatvanidhi* (Sjoman, 1999; Singleton, 2010) and *Saugandhikopkhyāna*, the latter a compendium on yoga and *āsana*-s.

He laid stress on the importance of art and culture, patronized poets, painters, scholars, musicians, and started a theater company affiliated to the palace called '*Aramane* Company (Palace Drama Company)' to give impetus to theater art and folk artforms like *Yakṣagāna*.

But it was under his successor Cāmarājendra Wodeyar X (1868-1894) that Mysore reached its pinnacle of glory. He was the first king to receive Western education. He instituted the first democratic legislative institution, promoted women's education, founded educational institutions such as Maharaja's college, Oriental research institute and devised policies to mitigate famines. He is also famously remembered for sponsoring Swami Vivekananda's trip to Chicago to attend the World Parliament of Religions, in 1893. Eminent musicians decorating his court included the legendary *Veene* Sheshanna (The forefather of the Mysore style Veena), *Veene* Subbanna, Mysore Vasudevacharya and Bidaram Krishnappa. He gave fillip to industrialization; while the rest of the country was still struggling to cope with industrialization, Mysore was the first princely state to adapt to the changes in the economic environment (Chatterton, 1925). Figures 1 and 2 show the geographical location of Mysore in India.

Cāmarājendra Wodeyar X was succeeded by his son Nālvaḍi Krishna Raja Wodeyar or Krishna Raja Wodeyar IV (Reign: 1894-1940), who won the epithet *Rajarishi* (Sage King) for his able and just administration. He followed the treaded path of his illustrious father and on many fronts outshone him too. Like his father, he brought about administrative changes, gave impetus to

education, health systems, industries, electric power generation and constructed new railway lines and extended the ones already built during his father's rule. He introduced the jury system in 1917. He expanded the special commercial and industrial activities by starting Sandal oil factory, Soap factory and Iron works at Bhadravati. He introduced comprehensive education schemes by establishing technical institute, engineering schools and the University of Mysore (Rao, 1936:277). He was an expert in both Indian and Western classical music and continued the royal patronage to art and culture that he inherited from his father. His rule became the golden age of art and he had many more legendary musicians such as *Veene Venkatagiriappa*, T. Chowdaiah, and Dr. B. Devendrappa (the Guru of the subject) adorning his court. Mysore underwent a cultural renaissance during his rule; eminent theater personalities like Gubbi Veeranna, A. V. Varadachar were encouraged to contribute immensely under his patronage. Figures 1 and 2 show the geographical map of Mysore within India and within the province of Karnataka.

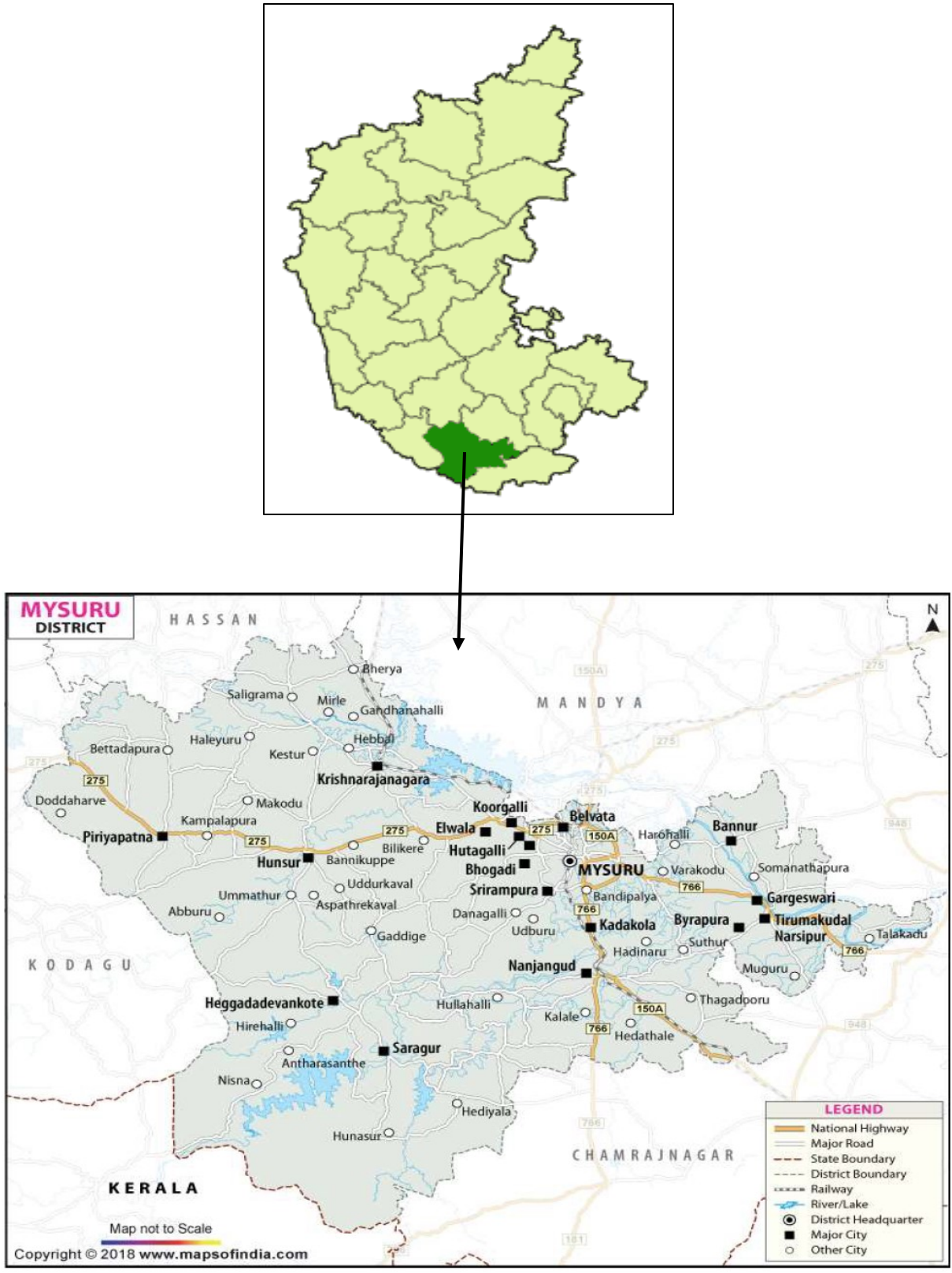


Figure 2: District Map of Mysore (Source: Maps of India, 2018)

The last king of Mysore before its accession to the Republic of India in 1950 was Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar who ruled exactly for a decade from 1940-1950. He was no different than his predecessors in political astuteness, vision or versatility. He was a scholar, philosopher, composer and an educationist. He took to piano at a very young age and insisted that all the court musicians be trained in Western classical music theory. He appointed many more younger court musicians alongside continuing to promote and nurture the veteran court musicians. He felicitated the visiting musicians with grandiose gifts and conferred upon them royal titles. Figure 3 shows the picture and portrait of Wodeyars after the British gained control of Mysore. Figures 4 and 5 show the grandeur of Mysore cavalry and music in palace durbar.

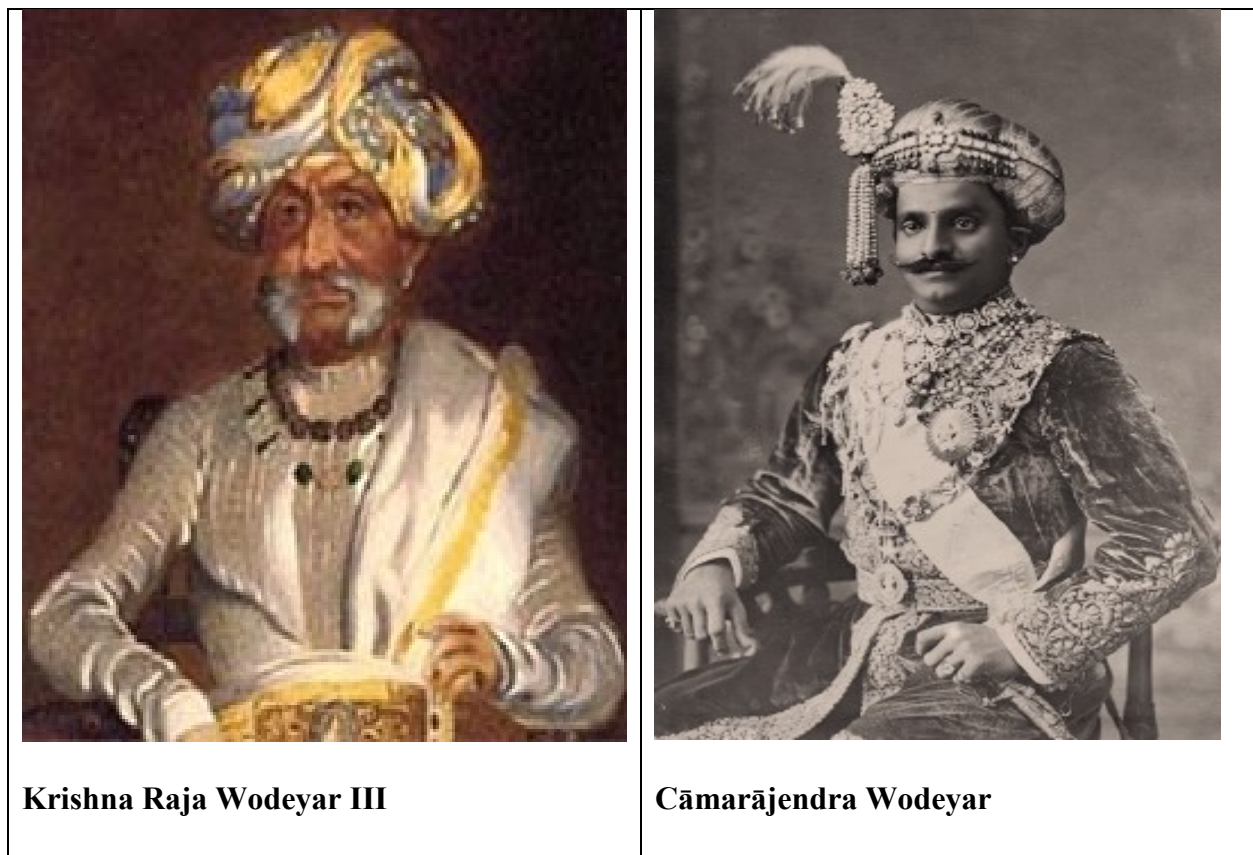


Figure 3: Kings of Mysore (Source: RBSI, 2018)



Figure 4: Mysore Palace in 1890 (Source: RBSI, 2018)

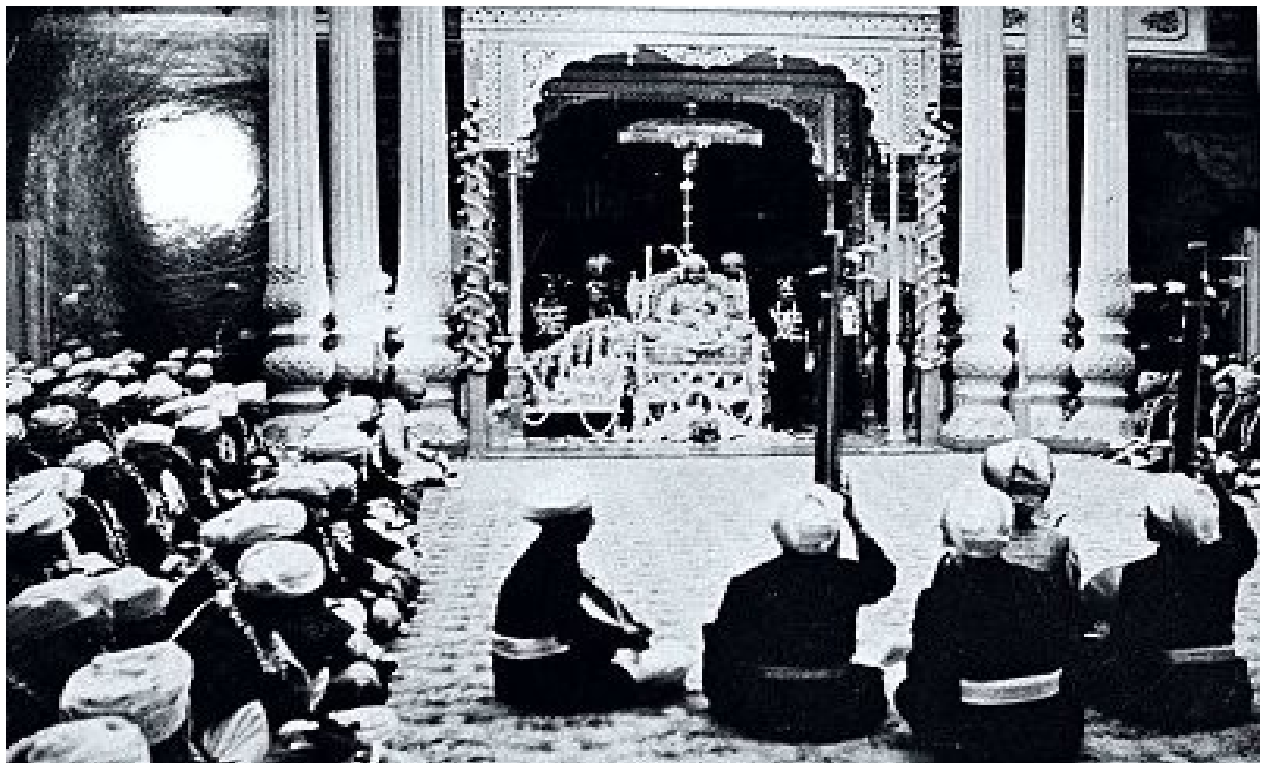


Figure 5: Mysore Court Musicians, Approximate date: early 20th century (Source: Kamat, 2018)

Biographies - Why are they Important to Us?

The lives of musicians become focal centers of music scholarship while writing about the Indian music system where music has not yet been institutionalized and the secrets of music and performance are still held as closely guarded family secrets that are perpetuated by the sacrosanct *Guru-śiṣya parampara* (teacher-student lineage) that bestows sanctity and authority to Guru's words. Yet, for the keen and discerning, rummaging through these references will, divulge a large amount of musical knowledge and, sometimes also acts as a pathway to the secrets of the master's music and musicianship³.

Stock, in his article for the special issue on 'Ethnomusicology and the Individual' (Stock, 2010) thinks and rightly so, that the ethnomusicologists' interest in biography is aroused for three reasons, the nature of the work which entails field work and interacting with individuals whose 'musical individuality is a representation of the musical culture as a whole', political reasons of ethnography which makes it incumbent upon the researcher to collect vital information about the individual and lastly the spectra of cultural study is widening in its scope and context which has in turn compelled ethnomusicologists to study the 'agency and individual choices' made by the subjects within the broad framework of the culture of which they are the representatives. Reemphasizing the importance of biography in ethnomusicological studies, Stock quotes Bruno Nettl who categorized the studies on musical culture sans 'the personal, the idiosyncratic and the

³ Paramashivan in one of his interviews referred to the eminent theater personality K. Hirannayya who while talking to one of his colleagues remarked "The harmonium player of the adjacent drama company (In those days more than two touring drama companies used to camp at the same town during festival season) was shaking his head vigorously. That is not how the harmonium should be played. It is an *avalakṣaṇa* (a negative quality) of a musician". Paramashivan still recollects this comment and says "It was a life lesson for me. Which is why you will never see me vigorously shaking my head or my limbs while playing the harmonium", which is evident from the video in which he is accompanying Mr. Faiyaz Khan singing a North Karnataka *Raṅgagīte* (Rangageethe, 2017).

exceptional' as mere far-reaching generalizations based on 'cultural-average accounts' that do not entirely present a clear and complete picture of the musical culture. The article also refers to Clifford Geertz's 'interpretivism' which focuses on studying the differences between the inner and outer facets of the individual which can be interpreted as the public/private lives or the person and persona; a study that was carried out by Regula Qureshi in her accounts of Begum Akhtar.

Pekacz (2006) in a collection of critical essays on biography introduces expressing his disappointment that 'Biography' as a recognized literary genre in musicology made its appearance in The New Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians only as recently as in 2000. Pekacz notes that there are very few scholarly works that situate 'musical biographies in a broader context of cultural history' because of the '*autonomy*' and *self-referentiality* to musical structure than how a musician's life shaped his creative perceptions.

Stock (2010) classifies the cultural representatives of the field into three categories namely, individuals with outstanding social renown, those with international reputation, and lastly the individuals who were overlooked within their own culture. The subject of this dissertation would belong to the first category, that is, an artist with an outstanding social reputation as the oldest surviving and the most authentic representative of the modern Kannada theater in his own state of Karnataka, India. Paramashivan's reputation did not spread across the country nor achieved international reputation because he worked mostly in Kannada language which is mostly spoken and understood only in Karnataka state in India. Stock (2010) also mentions about the inherent difficulty that ethnomusicologists face while writing biography namely the time constraints under

which field studies are conducted, over reliance on written records, memories and second- and third-hand reports making the history and biography inseparable.

Vidwan R. Paramashivan – The Great Grandfather of Modern Kannada Theater

Popularly known as '*Kannada Raṅgabhūmi Bhīṣma Pitāmaha* (The Great grandfather of Kannada Theater) in the Kannada theater world, Paramashivan is a walking encyclopedia of modern Kannada theater, a harmonium master and a treasure trove of Kannada theater songs. He is popular for his behemoth memory and his ability to sing more than 1250 theater songs from memory without looking into a book. He wrote a book containing at least a 1200 of them in three volumes. He started his career in Kannada theater as a child artist at the age of four in the year 1935. Soon he was recognized by the court musician of Mysore palace, Dr. B. Devendrappa who took him under his tutelage and trained him in the *Karnatak* classical music for several years. He passed his proficiency exam in the year 1952 in *Karnatak* classical music. Under his Guru Devendrappa, he also mastered playing other musical instruments like the *Vīna*, Violin and Jalataraṅg. When he was ten years old, the leading cinema director and actor, Gubbi Veeranna signed him up for the movie *Subhadra* in the year 1941. Paramashivan continued to act in movies like *Bhārati*, *Kṛṣṇa Līla*, *Rāmdās* until the year 1947 and later returned to Kannada theater to pursue his career as a harmonium player and director. He continued working in the theater until 1970 in all the famous drama companies directing plays, training actors and musicians, some of whom became popular cinema actors in the Kannada cinema. Paramashivan's contribution was not limited to only theater but included many other genres namely *Bhāvagītegaḷu* (Light music), *Bharatanāṭya* and Dance ballets (He has composed music for more than 20 classical dance ballets) as a composer, accompanist playing violin and *Vīna* for the last three decades. He owes his expertise in these allied fields to his strong fundamentals and training in the theater. He recognizes his experience in

cinema under the guidance of legendary musicians like P. Kalinga Rao 1938-1950 which enabled him to comprehend and adapt to any new genre without much difficulty. His primary profession being the theater, he retired from the theater profession in the year 1970 because of the dwindling popularity of modern Kannada theater and found a job as a music teacher in a Highschool in Bangalore, India. Post-retirement, he is spending his time teaching acting, theater music to aspiring actors and giving guest lectures on modern Kannada theater at the University of Bangalore.

He was decorated with the *Sangeet Nataka Academi Puraskar*, the highest recognition given to performing artists by the Republic of India, in the year 2005. In the year 2016, he was awarded the coveted '*Gubbi Veeranna Award*', named after the renowned theater personality Gubbi Veeranna in whose drama company Paramashivan himself worked for many years as a harmonium player.

Kaliyuga Bhīma R. Nagaratnamma and Comedienne R. Manjulamma

R. Nagaratnamma (1926-2012) was an actor and founder of the first stable all-women theater troupe in Karnataka. Initially starting her acting career playing female roles, later she became popular for her male villain roles of Bhīma, Rāvaṇa and Kamsa, which she continued for the rest of her career. She earned the title *Kaliyuga Bhīma* (Bhīma of this era). My father joined her company in 1960s and trained her and her troupe in different plays that he had mastered after many years of experience in different drama companies which helped her gain immense popularity. She was conferred upon *Sangeet Nataka Academi Puraskar* in the year 1992, in addition to that she was also awarded the *Padmashri*, the fourth highest civilian award.

R. Manjulamma is Paramashivan's youngest sister, the most popular comedienne of her time known for her unmatched comic timing in her roles as; Makaranda, Mādu, Nājukayya. She underwent a rigorous theater training under my father. However, she remained in the background

all her life without any recognition by the government or other private organizations. Figure 6 captures a rare moment of the entire family after a performance.

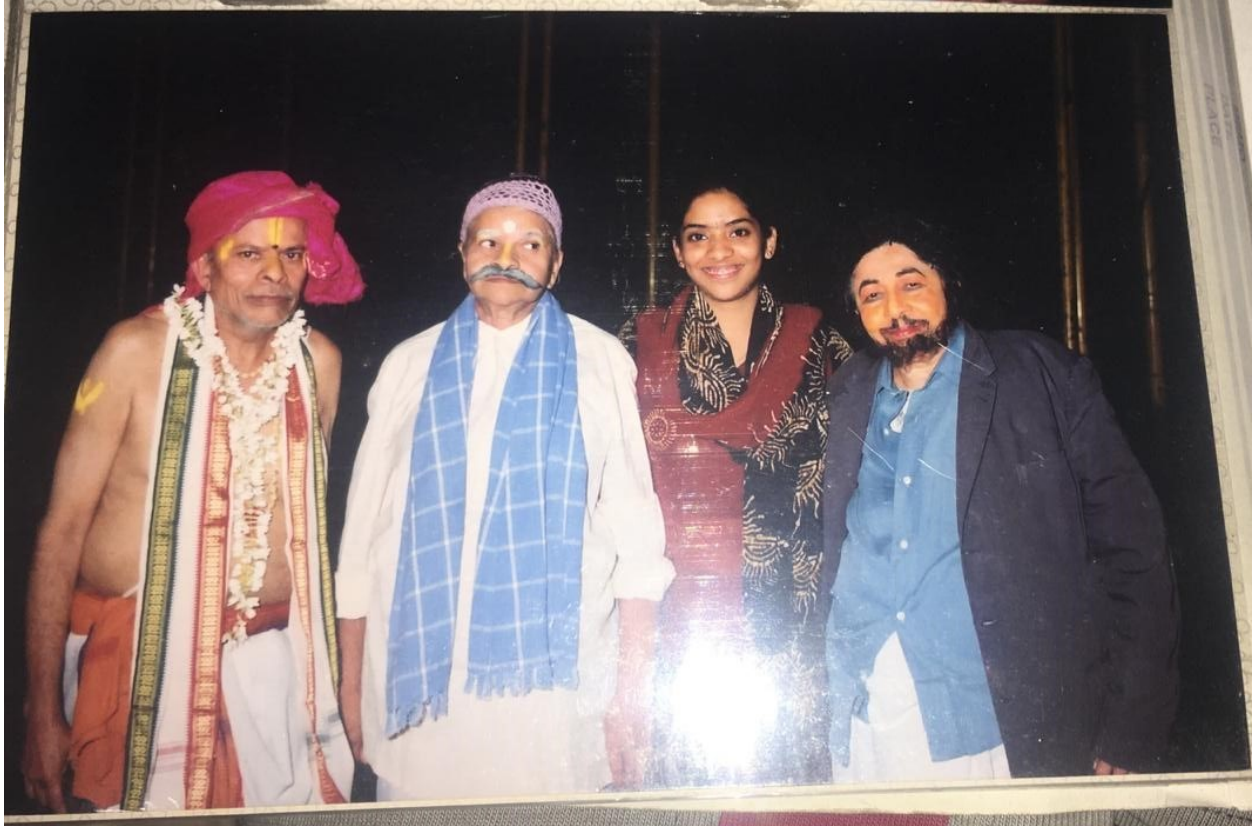


Figure 6: Family of Actors L-R Paramashivan, Manjulamma, Veena (danseuse and granddaughter of Nagarathamma), and Nagarathamma after performing Samsāra Nauka play in 2003.

Research Objective and Key Research Questions Addressed in the Dissertation

This work is an expository study of modern Kannada theater, its repertoire and its ignominious loss, by studying the life of one of the last surviving experts of this theater tradition. The purpose is not to study the personal life in isolation but alongside his knowledge worlds, both of which are strongly and inexorably linked with each other. In addition to an elaborate exposition of the repertoire, the facts that buttress the argument that modern Kannada theater was indeed a highly sophisticated form of theater that was composed and executed by scholars, competent musicians

and artists of status and position in the society, will be highlighted. Firstly, the genesis and evolution of modern Kannada theater, historical and cultural influences on its structure, presentation, form and music will be fully understood. Secondly, modern Kannada theater is a musical theater where both theater music (songs and music composed exclusively as a part of the scene) and incidental music (music that provides background accompaniment to the action and scene separation) played a pivotal role in embellishing the drama. Theater songs called the *Raṅgagītegaḷu* were used to serve multiple purposes, by contextualizing the scene with ‘melody and text that followed strict rules of music and prosody’ respectively, to provide a sense of ‘heightened circumstances’, and in certain cases it was also used as a tool to expatiate upon the prose (dialogues). The nature of theater music will be a crucial expository topic in this dissertation.

Modern Kannada theater plays were composed by the court poets of Mysore palace and music composed by the court musicians who were from the upper echelons of the society. It is therefore important to study how their affiliation with the theater transformed their social identities in the society. The representation of women performers in the theater, their experience and expressions, their status within the theater and the society at large becomes a crucial point to be studied to encapsulate the gender issues completely in the discourse.

The impact of cultural nationalism and the project of classicization of performing arts, on various art forms and how these movements impacted the longevity of modern Kannada theater is a recurring theme in this dissertation. Addressing these issues serves two key purposes; a detailed exposition of the theater repertoire which is the primary focus of this essay and secondly it helps to investigate the causes for decline of one of the the most popular artforms.

Methodological Issues in Writing Biographies of Indian Musicians

In India, ‘biography’ was never pursued as a serious genre of scholarly work until recently. Most biographies are but a collection of legends, anecdotes, some of them apocryphal, and from mostly hearsay and collected from sources that are unauthentic and unverifiable. Winternitz (1927) in his introduction to the book makes some fundamental observations regarding the Indian literature and the role of biography as a literary genre. The author lauds India’s contribution in the discipline of gnomic literature and aphorisms that the author says, “the Indians have attained a mastery which has never been attained by any other nation”. The author also remarks that the Indians have not distinguished between scientific literature and artistic production which makes it very difficult to distinguish between ‘belles-letters and didactic literature’. The author further writes “On the other hand, history and biography have in India never been treated other than by poets and as a branch of epic poetry”. Winternitz’s colonial Orientalist view is acceptable as far as the scientific literature as it appears, only in the passing, within the realm of artistic literature is concerned. For example, there are numerous references to celestial events such as eclipses, comets and planetary positions in *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*. In these texts, the astronomical information is incidental. However, India has also produced dedicated schools of mathematics, astronomy, medicine and other branches of sciences, and I have written an article myself on *Asakṛt Karma* an algorithmic method mentioned in *Mahābhāskarīya* to determine the true position of a planet (Deepak et al., 2011).

Biographies of Indian Musicians

Several Indian as well as Western scholars have written biographies of Indian musicians and their knowledge worlds. Qureshi (2007) adopts a dialogic ethnomusicology approach to study the various schools of *Sarangi* playing by collecting biographies, interviews and a commonly used method particularly in doing ethnomusicology on Indian classical music called the discipular ethnography. A special case of application of participant observation method in the field of ethnomusicology is 'learning to perform' which falls under the umbrella of 'discipular ethnography' method in which the ethnographer becomes a disciple of the research subject. In this technique of unstructured interviewing, the researcher will not ask any specific questions but only facilitates the interview by breaking the boredom and guard against the danger of the interview sounding like a sordid soliloquy.

Gupta (2009) documents the biography of Baba Allauddin Khan, the guru of the famous Ravi Shankar and the founder of the Maihar gharana, is written in the form of a souvenir with articles from his family members who were members of the knowledge world he created. It has articles by the most eminent Annapurna Devi (Ex-wife of Ravi Shankar and Alluddin Baba's daughter) and his grandson Prof. Dhyanesh Khan. This work contains interesting facts culled out from his autobiography originally written in Bengali dated 30th May 1957 in which he clearly mentions that his forefathers were Hindus living in Tripura before converting to Islam. According to Allauddin Khan, his grandfather Dinanath Sharma had joined a group of bandits and had converted to Islam and changed his name to Sams Fakir to avoid getting arrested. Uma Anand (2011), in the biography of Dandayudapani Pillai, an eminent *Bharatanāṭya* composer and nattunavar (an accompanist who not only sings but also recites the percussive compositions for *Bharatanāṭya*) mentions about the

migration of performing artists to urban centers for professional reasons. Napier (2013), in this book captures the lives of many musicians belonging to the class called Nath-Jogis, who sing a traditional music called Mahadevj ika Byavala in Alwar. A snapshot of their lives, musical tradition, livelihood, primary occupation and their economic status is presented by the author. Dāśārmā (1993) has made a sincere effort to summarize the biographies of hundreds of musicians spanning over more than twenty gharanas (styles) and families of musicians, their genealogy, salient features of each of these gharanas, the family tree of musicians, music composers, their pedagogical lineage and the royal patrons under whose patronage these musicians, and their music thrived.

On the influence of indigenous folk artforms on the contemporary theater traditions, Hansen (2011) owes the success of Parsi theater to other folk theatres such as *Bhavai*, *Nautch* becoming decadent and Parsi theater took this opportunity to create plays of social relevance such as educating women and men about family values, hygiene, civility and most importantly these plays glorified the colonial rule. Parsi theater created a public sphere by introducing women actors even though journalists and reformers were chagrined. Hansen gives a brief global history of autobiographies before presenting a translation of autobiographies of four eminent Parsi theater personalities to present a historical synopsis of the Parsi theater. The author uses these autobiographies as sources to make critical observations about both the performance and cultural history of the Parsi theater which more or less remained the face of Indian theater in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century till the dawn of ‘sound cinema’ or the ‘talkies’ in 1930s (Also Hansen, 2002).

Biographies of Female Performers in India

Traditional female performers seem to have been marginalized and neglected by the scholarship for a long time. Only a few scholars have attempted to write about female performers. Most importantly, among them, Qureshi (2010) addresses the fine distinction between the ‘person and the persona’ of the great Ghazal singer of the 20th century Begum Akhtar who she calls the “icon of feudal culture for the Indian bourgeois in the musical establishment of men”. Qureshi feels it was important for women like Begum Akhtar, who like most women coming from a hereditary matrilineal tradition of musicians, to find a niche for herself to be established as one of the agents of the 20th century Indian classical music, which was then a patriarchal institution. The author discusses the indispensable role of biography of women as a medium of expression for their thoughts which were otherwise stifled by a vicious combination of a continuous stigmatization of ‘women’s music’ by the colonial masters and the ‘classical music’ getting redefined in the early 20th century.

Similarly, Sampath’s (2010) work on Gauhar Jaan and Subramanian’s (2006) work on Veena Dhanammal, critically examine the social and the sociological milieu that transformed the lives of women musicians and conjecture that the modernization and India’s ‘troubled engagement’ with modernization might have contributed to the poverty-stricken life of some traditional female musicians.

In the domain of theater, it is virtually impossible to delink the theater personalities and their engagement with the public sphere. Parsi theater created a public sphere in which female actors were featured for the first time much against the opposition of journalists. Modern Kannada theater created a public sphere that was situated between the societal desires for entertainment on the one

end of the spectrum and other end of the spectrum was occupied by the colonial rulers and the society that was modeled on colonial morality which forbade female actors.

This chapter provided the vital background about the history of Indian theater, modern Kannada theater and historical and historiographical issues discussed in the literature. A closer scrutiny of the literature suggests that scholars' interest in studying Kannada theater is limited in scope to either *Yakṣagāna* or the political theater post Indian independence and modern Kannada theater remains an uncharted territory. A brief political history of Mysore, the study area where the subject of the dissertation Paramashivan, his sisters R. Nagarathamma and R. Manjulamma were born and began their theater careers was discussed. This chapter was aimed at providing an understanding of the core research questions, research objectives and the relevant background literature on issues in writing biographies of male and female performers in India and, the nationalism-art nexus and its engagement with the theater. In the next chapter, I will detail the methodological approaches adopted following the style of an autobiographic and reflexive-ethnographic and attempt to clarify my 'insider vs outsider' identity which is finely balanced on a tottering platform.

Chapter 2

Research Methodology and Reflections

Prelude

An 88-year-old man, Paramashivan, a leading expert on modern Kannada theater, and his sister Manjulamma, almost nearing her eighties, are sitting inside a recording studio in Banagalore, wearing their headphones. Both performed a customary warm up for just a few seconds by singing the first two lines. Paramashivan, in his inimitable style inquired with the recording engineer, “*Umesh, monitor noḍkoḷoṇa sound levels check māḍakke?* (Umesh, can we give it a try to check if the sound levels are OK?)”. While the recording engineer was busy adjusting the sound levels, Paramashivan in whose veins all that runs is theater, stagecraft and music, started sharing yet another vintage tale of the song that he was about to sing with his sister. He explained the technical aspects of the song, demonstrated how it was sung by stalwarts in the year 1939 and how the audience reacted to it. The rest of the recording crew and I who were watching this were transported to a realm of the past, while his sister listened with the same keen attention, awe and curiosity, that I imagined she would have devoted when she first had her acting lessons from her brother fifty years ago. They sang a duet from the play *Kṛṣṇalīla*, sung by the characters Kṛṣṇa and his clown partner Makaranda. In the song they discuss the consequences of stealing butter and milk from the households of the cowherd women of Gokul, a recurring theme from the childhood stories of Kṛṣṇa found in the Hindu text called *Bhāgavata*. Paramashivan sang Kṛṣṇa’s part and Manjulamma Makaranda’s, a role which made her the most famous comedienne of her times. Paramashivan finished singing the more serious first stanza. Then it was his sister’s turn to sing the line *cumbisalamborahmbaki* which means ‘While you attempt to kiss the cheeks of beautiful women’. When she repeated the line for improvization, she embellished it with an ‘*um um um um*

um' the sound of kissing, leaving the sound crew and the entire orchestra in raptures bringing the recording to a complete halt. The recording had to be resumed after everyone had regained their composure (Deepak University of Alberta, 2018b).

For this project, I sang a couple of songs upon persistent pressure from Paramashivan and Manjulamma but carrying an incredibly heavy burden of guilt of neglecting a tradition that truly belonged to me. It reminded me of the wise words of advice from Master Hirannayya, the famous humorist and political satirist, at a family gathering, '*Nīnu nimma appana nāṭaka biṭṭu engineering māḍidre, kasubi āgalla, aḍakasbi āgtiya* (If you do not follow the treaded path of your father, you can never be a professional in what you do. You will only be an amateur)'. I found solace in the fact that at least I am documenting this tradition to the best of my abilities and within the available sources of information at my disposal.

Introduction

This chapter is about the research methodology, my own personal experiences and reflections in the 'field' of modern Kannada theater, the rich music it embodies, my past learning experience under the tutelage of my father and observations during my auto-ethnographic and auto-biographic study. It is about the theater world I have been dwelling in as a silent observer and a casual participant, who had unintentionally soaked in its repertoire. It is about the transformation and expressive embodiment of this repertoire that had, for the last thirty years, remained only in the upper edge of my consciousness like a semi-dark, hazy sfumato image to a crystal-clear manifestation of musical beauty and lyrical wonder. Here, I will talk about the stories that I had heard in my childhood which were inexact and semi-definite but gathered a definite context and concretization during my field work when I reheard them for the purpose of recording and

archiving. I study the theater from what Katz (2017:5) calls a ‘phenomenological perspective’, positing it as a ‘coherent transgenerational subject’ that wasn’t resilient enough to maintain its essential integrity. I will elaborate on my late entry into the theater, initial training in *Karnatak* classical music, the sacred, time-honored and the most abused ‘*Guru śiṣya parampara* (Teacher-student legacy)’ of which I could only become a victim than a beneficiary in my pursuit of *Sarangi*. I will describe the circumstances under which some musicians, keeping in mind their own vested interests, restricted me to remain an outsider by imposing their fervent ideals upon me. I will share my personal reflections on what motivated me to pursue my PhD in ethnomusicology, quitting my high salaried job as a climate scientist, and how I landed on this topic for my dissertation. As an insider I will study the language, prosodic and poetic grandeur in lyrics, text setting and music and the context of the plays. As an outsider to the theater tradition, I will attempt to study why I was kept an outsider for almost three decades, while trying to understand why my father invested all his efforts teaching me only *Karnatak* classical music to me but strictly quarantining me from the infectious epidemic of ‘modern Kannada theater’, until both he and my mother were convinced that I was stable professionally so that I would not devolve into the state my father was in his youth. I adopt both autobiographical as well as auto-ethnographical styles of exposition in this chapter without strictly adhering to any one style.

Research Methodology

This dissertation is a confluence of many a method and several genres of writing. Since there is no silver bullet or a *deus ex machina* to resolve the thorny crisis of ‘What constitutes the best research methodology’ that has a universal appeal to address all the problems encountered in ethnographic studies, I have adopted a multi-layered approach—biography, field work, dialogic interview,

reflexive ethnography and auto-biography—each juxtaposed over the other. Some biographical stories in this dissertation are old but retold during the fieldwork with the objective of documentation and some of them are altogether new. I will, however, not distinguish between the two for the sake of seamless transition wherein the primacy is placed on hearing the voice of the subject than the chronology in which I heard them.

It would not be entirely incorrect to say that I started my field work almost thirty five years ago, during the years 1984-85, growing up in a family of eminent theater personalities and musicians, hearing many musical instruments and clandestinely eavesdropping on the conversation between my father and mother that revolved around politics, family gossip and occasionally but certainly about theater, theater personalities and their amorous escapades. I also conducted field study when my sister Smitha and I restlessly waited with bated breath for my father to stop composing his music on the other side of the wall separated by a wooden door, humming his favorite *rāga*-s like *Bhimpalas* or *Kalyāṇi* or *Desh*, so that we can get back to play. I was unconsciously doing an ethnographic study when at the age of six I watched my father and aunts perform plays like *Kṛṣṇa Gāruḍi* and *Kṛṣṇa Līla*. I was doing stylistic analysis of music when I enjoyed my father's background score based on an eerie *rāga* in *Karnatak* music called *Kanakāṅgi*, for the 'Svapnada scene (The dream scene)' of *Kamsa*, which I fondly called 'den det tet – tada tada'.

My formal field work started in 2017 when I visited India during the summer. I started accompanying my father to his concerts, started collecting his pictures, requested concert organizers for videos or audios. I conducted formal interviews with him to elicit the finer details

and perspectives about the stories some of which I had already heard. Stories related to his own personal life were more or less known to me, but the stories about theater offered a fresh understanding of Kannada theater. He introduced several new characters, their lifeways, many unheard songs, and new places within my own state that I was unaware of until now. He was a lot more transparent, this time. Because until then theater was always considered a forbidden fruit discussing which was almost considered sacrilegious in our family. But now he had no inhibitions to discuss personal stories of like ‘who eloped with whom’ but with a promise that I will not write about them in my dissertation.

I spent six months in India learning two full-fledged plays *Sadārame* and *Bhīṣma Pratijñe* and performed them. In the meantime, he was invited by the dean of drama department, University of Bangalore, to teach *Kṛṣṇa Līla* to the university students. I recorded full run through rehearsals of *Kṛṣṇa Līla* and *Bhīṣma Pratijñe* in which he taught acting, singing, entrances and exits to the students. He was initially conscious and hesitant to face the camera and teach students, but within a short while he became comfortable.

Even though I had already performed *Sadārame*, earlier in the year 2008, under my own direction, performing it under his direction was a different experience altogether. Earlier, I had performed the play in two separate parts on different days since it was easier that way to play the deuteragonist. This time I had to perform the entire play in two roles, as a half-wit merchant Ādi Mūrti and a witty thief Kaḷḷa, both comic roles. He recollected some forgotten songs and incorporated them in the play this time. He taught me intonation of dialogues my long 20-minute monologue the dialogues which previously I had practiced incorrectly. According to him there were many flaws in the make-up as well in my previous performance.



Figure 7: Pictures above Top: Deepak as Ādi Mūrti a half-wit Merchant in Sadārame, Bottom: In the same play Kalla, a witty thief, Bangalore, July 2017



Figure 8: Paramashivan in *Samsāra Nauka* in the role of a *Kaḷḷa Pūjāri* February 3rd 2018

His attention to the minute details; the hair style and make-up of each character, the props for each scene, and the transition and sceneries in the background mesmerized me. I regret not recording his advice to the make-up artist and other artists before the play. Here is a clip from my previous unrefined performance which was still well-received (Deepak University of Alberta, 2018d).

Figure 7 contrasts the changes that he brought in vis a vis my direction.

During the field work I recorded 500 theater songs played by him on the harmonium. Due to paucity of time, I could not stay to name all the 500 songs which the recording engineer forgot during the recording. The onus of naming the raw files now fell upon me. I requested my colleagues from the scientific community and my co-artist in *Sadārame* to help me in this endeavor. My friend, Dr. Vedarun, a computer scientist who spent half a day naming the songs

said, “Your father is unbelievable. I would just play the first 5 seconds of a song, he would tell the title of the song, name of the play and all the relevant details. I got suspicious of his abilities and tested him by playing a song that was already named. His reaction was ‘We named this song already, why is it repeating in the CD?’”.



Figure 9: Manjulamma in the role of a drunk pimp Nājukayya in Devadāsī with Purnima as a police officer, February 2018

The CD was mastered and released in February 2018. For the CD release ceremony, I requested both my father and my aunt to act in an assorted medley of their favorite scenes from different plays. My father played his notorious priest ‘Kaḷḷa Pūjāri’ from the play *Samsāra Nauka*. My aunt played the roles that made her famous, the pimp Nājukayya from *Devadāsī* and an uxorious husband Nāṇi in *Makmal Ṭopi*. She was joined by her friend and colleague Purnima who was a character artist, a wildcard actor who could fit into any role. Figures 8 and 9 are snapshots of their

performance at the CD release ceremony. The event was reviewed by the English newspaper Deccan Herald dated February 12, 2018 (Subramanya, 2018).

This work is primarily concerned with the biography of only one individual with a brief contextual reference to his family members who were theater artists too. Works that examine an individual 's music and experience has been popular in the past. Slawek (1991) focuses on the sitar maestro Ravi Shankar and his pivotal role in bridging the traditional and the modern. Chernoff (2003) uses a biographical style of writing to tell the picaresque adventures of a bargirl in Ghana, 'Hawa' in her own words. The author fictionalizes the characters and the places in her stories by changing the names, including that of the subject herself.

Danielson (1997) for example, studies the Egyptian vocalist Umm Kulthum emphasizing the need for studying exceptional performers who have impacted their culture also being participants in the society. Stock (1999) in his review of Danielson's work, explains the motivation behind the study of an individual as "Although ethnomusicologists still study oral tradition, there has been an expansion of interest to deal with music created by known individuals and then passed on by means of written notation or sound recording, even if many such studies still acknowledge the intention to relate the unusual individual musician to more generally shared social traits". Some of the biographical works concerning individuals and groups of musicians in the context of Indian music have been referred to in the last chapter. Even though this work is primarily biographical intending to document a performing art tradition, as mentioned earlier, I have not restricted myself to any one genre of writing.

An Insider's Objectivity and Auto-ethnography in Ethnomusicology – Criticism, Exception and Justification

A very uncomfortable yet a valid criticism that often arises in ethnomusicological studies when insiders study their own culture, like in the current dissertation, for instance, is ‘Can they be objective and detach themselves from the culture they are studying like an outsider does?’. In this regard, Burnim (1985) quoting Bruno Nettl emphasizes the importance of certain ‘standards and safeguards’ that need to be employed by insiders during the field work to be free from personal bias, which includes ‘being critical’ to her/his own observations and clearly maintaining the distinction between the ‘researcher and informants’. Burnim highlights the tacitly assumed, common notion among scholars that objectivity is assured only when the ‘researcher and the research population’ constitute two mutually non-intersecting spaces indirectly asserting that the researcher is invariably a ‘Westerner’ of whom ‘objectivity’ in research is an exclusive privilege. Barz and Cooley (1997:10) have convincingly argued that nationalism motivates researchers, both the British and the continental, to study their cultural and national ancestors, and characterize their ‘national traits’ through the folk music to promote a ‘racial identity’. They write, “Fieldwork within one's own country and among individuals who share the fieldworker's nationality might seem to exonerate the scholar from the critique of ethnography that seeks to describe the Other, but musical folklorists created the ‘Other’ within their national borders by creating cultural and evolutionary development borders separating them from the individuals studied”.

She follows this contention immediately with a rejoinder by scholars like Bruno Nettl himself, Alan P Merriam and Mantle Hood who do not rule out the possibility that the ‘investigator can be a member of the culture’ and offers various counter examples of Nktia and Shiegeo Kishibe who studied their own culture and got acceptance in the field.

A conspicuous change in this perception can be observed later in Nettl's later article, which Burnim refers to conclude that insider's perspective should not be dubbed as unobjective but merits due 'scholarly respect and authority', and both insider and outsider perspectives are 'valid'. Burnim argues that the evaluation of the authenticity of field work is problematic because the researchers do not divulge the detailed accounts of their 'actions and reactions' which is diametrically opposite from what Abu-Lughod (1999) contends in her work on the "Bedouin society" in her book *Veiled Sentiments*, that such honest details can be both 'useful as well as embarrassing'. Without entirely discrediting the importance finer details in the field work, she takes a middle path and presents only those 'salient parameters' that could directly help her in answering the core research questions.

Reflexive ethnography has been accepted as a valid approach to ethnography in the recent times. According to Barz and Cooley (1997), 'Reflexive ethnography' relaxes the colonial constrain that quite rigidly predisposes the ethnographer to be outside the culture being studied. They write, "...responds to redress colonial ethnography that positions the ethnographer outside the culture studied in an Archimedian vantage point from which he or she may view and represent the Other". This claim is supported by Nettl (1983: 262) who goes a step further and concludes, "It is the insider who provides the perspective of the culture has of itself" (See also Kisliuk, 1997).

The second most relevant aspect of reflexive ethnography which Barz and Cooley quote, was postulated by Clifford who challenged the paradigm of 'objectivity' in field work and claimed that all observations are 'partial truths', because ethnographers' cannot avoid hyperboles, tropes and allegories in their writings. According to Clifford, the myriad possibilities for interpretation of what is observed is solely ethnographer dependent, and to establish this fact he assesses the roadblocks in ethnographic studies and accounts for human error. He calls ethnographic writings

as fictions written by individuals who are biased in their judgement from the standpoint of their geographic location, language and culture looking at others as primitive. He believes that it is natural to confront these dualities, but care must be exercised by ethnographers to make allowances for these exigencies while writing ethnography. He terms scientific anthropology as an art and therefore ethnographies borrow literary qualities from art making them less objective. Clifford contends that “ethnography is actively situated between powerful systems of meaning. It poses its questions at the boundaries of civilizations, cultures, classes, races, and genders. Ethnography decodes and recodes, telling the grounds of collective order and diversity, inclusion and exclusion. It describes processes of innovation and structuration and is itself part of these practices” (Clifford, 1989:2).

The above-mentioned sources in literature do not resolve my identity conundrum, but they certainly offer a justification by means of showing examples that an insider studying his own culture has precedence in ethnomusicological studies. My defence in writing about this topic is that, any other topic would have been as ‘interesting and intense’, but this topic is ‘intimate’, since it is primarily about the life and work of my own father. As mentioned earlier, it may be hard to segregate the methodological boundaries strictly into discipular ethnography, reflexive ethnography or biography. For example, during my field work I could not always carry a camera with me for all the performances and rehearsals. There were instances during rehearsal sessions when I was learning singing and acting from my father as a disciple, at the same time observing his actions on the harmonium as an ethnographer, and simultaneously trying to retain it in the forefront of my conscious mind to record it later in my notes as an autobiographer.

My Tryst with Modern Kannada Theater - Disingenuous Hypocrisy or a Genuine Concern?

“Once an actor always an actor. Theater is a strange profession which once you get addicted, you want to be in it all your life against all odds, only because greenroom has a strange aura to it. It is a nice place to be in”, my acting Guru, Professor David Barnet of the University of Alberta, once told me in an informal conversation. This seems to have been particularly true in my father’s case. Perhaps both Professor Barnet and my father feel this passion so intensely that when they were introduced to each other at the university for a brief while, they seemed to have found a long-lost friend in each other with whom they reconnected after many decades. Despite my father’s shyness, in general, to converse in English, he was disarmed and at ease with Professor Barnet.

Although it was forbidden for me to attend theater performances, in the year 1984-85 or thereabouts, when I was 4 or 5 years old, since my mother was away and my father not willing to leave me alone at home with nobody to take care of me, I had to accompany my father for a drama dress rehearsal in an auditorium called ‘Varadachar Memorial Hall’, named after the doyen of Kannada theater A V Varadachar, who reinvigorated the theater tradition in Mysore in the late 19th century. By this time, all the theater companies had shut down; my father had quit theater and moved on in his career as a music teacher in a government high school. Yet, because of his fervent passion for propagating the Kannada theater and obsession with the greenroom, he was actively engaged in training an ad hoc theater group comprised of semi-professionals, young amateurs and only one senior professional actor called Mr. Parthasarathi who also happened to be my father’s childhood friend. They were rehearsing the play *Virāṭaparva*.

As a young boy who had never seen theater, stage and drama, I was both fascinated and intrigued by the automatic opening and closing of the curtains, men and women in makeup brandishing their

swords, bows and arrows, and the razzle-dazzle rhinestones, fake but flashy jewelry worn by actors playing Dharmarāya, Bhīma, Arjuna and other high-status parts. Little did I know then, that I would be playing Arjuna’s role in the same play thirty years later during my field study. But what particularly caught my attention were the two scenes in this play, the duel between the villain ‘Kīcaka’ and ‘Bhīma’ which my father was directing and playing the harmonium, provided a very catchy background music, and the battle scene in the climax containing a marching tune clearly inspired by that of the British Royal Marines Band Services. This battle march tune with its catchy lyrics set to 6/8 tempo, made the song so attractive that I kept humming it many days after the show.

‘Dodda paśugaḷa adda hākuta

let us stop the big cows (soldiers)

Doddiyōḷage serisuvudakaddi enide’

and send them to cowshed without much ado

Vīrarellaru sāri vegadi

Come on soldiers, lets hurry up

Seri nāvu matsyapurava sūregayyuva

to reach and ransack the ‘fish town’

Karadi khadgava bharadi dharisuta


brandishing the swords in our hands

Seri nāvu matsyapurava sūregayyuva

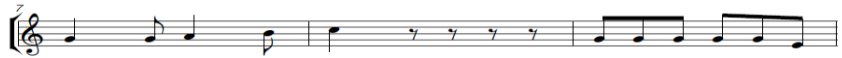
Let us reach and ransack the ‘fish town’

Male Voices 

do d da pa shu ga | la - | a ddi ha ku |

Male 

ta - - | do ddi yola ge | se ri su da ke |

Male 

ad di e - ni | de - | vi - ra re - lla |

Male 

ru - - | sa - ri be - ga | ne - - |

Male 

se ri naa vu | ma tsya pu ra va | soo re gai yyu |

Male 

va - ka ra di kha d ga va -

Male 

bhara di dhari su ta se ri naa vu

Male 

ma tsya pu ra va soo re gai yyu va

Transcription 1: Doddapaśuḡaḷa of Virāṭaparva



Figure 10: Left to Right: David Barnett, Paramashivan and Jayalakshmi (my mother) in August 2016, Edmonton.

This song, like any of the thousand odd songs can be analyzed for its text-setting, lyrical beauty, or alliteration in the prosodic meter which I will discuss later in this chapter. But this song is permanently etched in my memory for an entirely different reason. A few days after the rehearsal and the final performance, when my father was away, I enacted bits and pieces of the play that I could recollect and recreate from memory of what I had witnessed during the rehearsal. I played multiple roles, including that of the stage manager, curtain boy and my father too, by singing ‘*Dodda paśugaḷa adda hākuta*’, at my aunt’s house in Mysore. As soon as my father returned, his informants promptly conveyed, in the most diplomatic tone, ‘We are so happy for your son. He is following the treaded path of his father’. Much to my dismay, instead of showering adulations upon me, he beat me black and blue with a ‘multi-purpose cane’ that was used to scare away the annoying fauna, to prepare the rice pudding, and sometimes to discipline me. After the cane was

cut into many an unrecognizable piece, he roared in his usual stentorian theatrical voice, “Mind you, I am not spending my hard-earned money on you to become a ‘*kelsakke bārada nāṭakadavanu* (a useless theater person)’, but to get you educated so that you will become a professional doctor or an engineer. Hereafter, if I ever catch you enacting or singing theater music, the consequences could be more lethal”.

I had to wait for many years before this little befuddlement was firmly settled in my mind. I had fancied that it was disingenuously hypocritical on my father’s part to have taken such extreme punitive action against me for re-enacting actions which were performed by himself, not too long ago, for which he was also garlanded at the end of the show. I could understand his rationale only after I was mature enough to glean the fear in his head, by carefully analyzing the harsh realities glaring at my face; two unmarried aunts in the family, my parents working in two different cities to make ends meet, and my father’s struggle until he was 76 years old to get the recognition that he duly deserved, offered an explanation for the pragmatic choice of my parents to get me and my sister educated without worrying too much about perpetuating the artistic legacy in the family. In fact, there was no legacy, because my father and aunts were perhaps the first-generation actors and theater personalities, the reason for which was explained in the earlier chapters. I had to wait until I was at the research institute pursuing my PhD in ‘Energy and Climate Modeling’ like a good Brahmin boy from a well cultured family, until I could act on the stage. It was during the last year of my study, I got bold, directed and acted in the lead role, in the fiction drama ‘*Sadārame*’ with a team of like-minded, amateur actors like myself. My very first on-stage performance as an actor received so much critical acclaim that there was a visible change in my father’s perception about my ability to carry on his legacy and he had started making a grand plan in his head. Yet, perhaps since I was in the last year of my course or due to stiff resistance from my mother, he did not voice

his desire to cast me in his dream project until a few more years. In the year 2014, however, my father, along with some theater organizers approached my mother for permission to feature me in the role of Arjuna, the protagonist in the musical play '*Saṅgīta Subhadra*'. I was unaware of the details of the arguments and counter-arguments that transpired between my mother, father and the organizers. One fine day, I got a call from my mother who expressed her wish to talk to me about something very important.

“Your father wants to feature you in the lead role in some play. I will let you take part in this endeavor only if you make me a promise. Promise me that you will not quit your academics career to pursue a career in theater”.

I remember jokingly replying to her, “I can promise you on that, but what if I fall in love with '*draupadi pātradavaḷu* (the lady playing the role of Draupadi)'? you may have to accept her as your lawful daughter-in-law”.

“Yes, of course. I know about you. I agreed to this only after I was told that the lead actress is a mother of two, one of whom is almost as old as you are”, my mother had replied equally humorously.

My debut as a professional actor on-stage in modern Kannada theater started opposite a senior woman in the lead role (Figure 11 and Figure 12). The primary reason for this choice was that then (to some extent even now) she is the only experienced artist in whatever is left of the modern Kannada Theater who could readily accept the extremely challenging role of playing the lead in a three hour long musical, even though she is not a classically trained vocalist herself. Those who

watched my performance could clearly glean that I was very uncomfortable in the scenes that involved flirting, romancing or those that involved any type of physical contact, even as little as holding the hand. My earlier experience in college in a similar situation was not as annoying because the female parts were played by men, my fellow scientists.



Figure 11: A scene from Sangīta Subhadra, August 2014, Bangalore

I distinctly remember my father announcing to everyone after this mega show, ‘My son acted extremely well in those scenes that did not involve holding Subhadra’s hand. For example, in the song *Vanajāksi Tadavetake*, he was supposed to be holding her hand throughout, which he clearly did not. Perhaps he was nervous and feeling conscious because of his mother’s hawkish gaze, who was sitting in the very first row throughout the play, because of which he kept a safe distance from

Subhadra’, inviting the audience to burst into a rambunctious cackling while he only chortled at his humor, quite characteristic of his obdurate predilection for flaunting his sober persona.



Figure 12: Deepak applying Make-up during Subhadra Kalyana -2014

I cannot totally deny that I was uncomfortable holding a stranger’s hand on the stage, the reason for which I could understand only when I played the role of ‘Petruccio’ in Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* under the able training, guidance and direction of Professor David Barnet, my acting Guru. In Indian theater most talents are like rough, uncut diamonds without any formal training in stage combat, the rules of physical proximity and other finer aspects of intimate scenes which have been theorized and formalized in the Western theater training. I had to enact the infamously sexist “Wooing scene” (Act 2, scene 1) of *The Shrew* as it is fondly referred to, which

involved a lot of physical intimacy and combat skills. While my acting partner and I worked on our lines, David announced one day that Mx. Julie Murphy who is a theatrical intimacy and stage violence director, will be coming to choreograph the physical intimacy and combat part of the scene.

Subsequently I attended a workshop conducted by Julie who is one of the only few handful experts on theatrical intimacy in the whole of North America, in which she clearly explained the procedure to be followed to clearly demarcate the physical comfort zones of every actor which is the essence of theatrical intimacy. She explained the idea of Cue, Reaction, Action, Follow-through (CRAFT) in stage violence and choreographed the ‘slapping and reaction’, in which Katherine slaps Petruchio to try his gentlemanliness to which Petruchio instantly reacts, in a seemingly physically violent manner, saying “I swear I’ll cuff you if you strike again”. It was a very good learning experience for me. Her choreography was widely appreciated by the audience and our director and instructor Prof David Barnet.

With all this rigorous training, when I returned to India for another performance, this time with an actor much younger than me playing the role of *Subhadra*, a cinema actor by profession, I tried to diligently follow the steps of proximity practice that I had learnt in Canada, in all sincerity. To my astonishment, when I asked her, ‘Is it OK if I held your hand here?’, her reaction was an innocently innocuous ‘You can hold as you please’ suggesting that formal theater training is severely lacking even among some of the professional actors in India. When I inquired with my father about this his reaction was, ‘In our times, the norm was that you do not get physically close to your acting partner. The closest that you could get is an arm’s length that too only when it is necessary to hold

the hand. Mr. Subbayya Naidu, under whose training I spent more than 5 years, always used to say ‘*hullu benki ottige ittre hathkond bidatthe* (If you keep fire and a dry straw together, it will catch fire)’, that is how far you should be from your fellow actors”. I had even seen him yelling at actors who he felt were trying to misuse the situation in the play. He had admonished an actor saying ‘*avaḷu ninna heṇḍti alla. Dūra nintkonḍ mātāḍu* (She is not your wife)’. Keep your distance and say the lines)’. David echoed the same sentiments when I was learning Shakespeare from him, that similar physical intimacy standards were observed in the Shakespearean theater as well.

When my father was in London, I took him the Globe theater, and while doing a guided tour within the Globe, I conducted a short interview to glean the approach for stage violence in Kannada theater. He explained, “There was no dedicated choreographer. The actors worked on it themselves. The actors who played the role of Abhimanyu and Duryodhana were very good. Only three actors were keen on choreographing their stage combat, namely Shivanappa, Dodda Basavaraju and Shrikanta Murthy”.

Learning under my father or for that matter under David was very intense, exhausting and therefore was never an enjoyable experience. I could relish it only after the learning period is over; their intentions, suggestions and examples started making sense when I went on the stage to perform. What I found interesting and quite similar in the teaching styles of both my father and David, is that they are such passionate masters of their craft that they have very low tolerance for mistakes. They can be severely critical of even the smallest of the mistakes and sometimes make you feel that you cannot make any progress. But when approached with sincerity, I have seen both going out of their way to help a genuine aspirant.

However, my father has mellowed down a lot and his belligerence seem to have come down significantly in the recent past. I have earlier seen him use the harshest language to drive home a point, his favorite phrases being ‘*yāke bhāvili biddavara hāge ādtirā?* (Why are you as restless as someone fallen into a well)’ and ‘*yākri sāitiddīra?* (Why are you dying, Sir?)’.

My father often complained about the condescension of the mainstream elitist *Karnatak* musicians for theater and theater music. But as far as I am concerned, he was no different. Even though any association with the theater was strictly forbidden for me, learning *Karnatak* music was mandatory. Learning vocal music under him would involve waking up early in the morning compulsorily and doing ‘*a kāra sādhana* (voice culture technique)’ followed by learning the repertoire of the famous *Karnatak* music composers. The incentive for learning a new composition was a chocolate bar but the punishment for every mistake used to be taking cudgels on my back, sometimes with the wooden cover of the harmonium or the violin bow, anything he could lay his hand upon. His teaching methods and circumstances were unusual. He would suddenly remember a composition while waiting for the bus at the bus station and start teaching me until the bus arrived and continued it as soon as we reached home. He has taught me music in a restaurant, during the flight or amidst the bustling crowd in a wedding ceremony⁴.

Theater training was entirely different. Seated in front of the harmonium, he would show most of the actions through hand gestures and with the help of examples of how the great theater masters

⁴ I remember learning *Sāmodam Cintayāmi* composed by of Swati Tirunal in *rāga Śuddha Dhanyāsi* waiting for the bus, *Nāda Loludai* and *Nī Cittamu* of Tyāgarāja in the *rāga-s Kalyāṇa Vasanta* and *Vijaya Vasanta* at a restaurant, and *Sadā Matim* in *Gambhīra Vāṇī* during the flight to New Delhi to attend his *Sangeet Nataka Purasakar* ceremony.

would act in a given scene and their respective roles. Each rehearsal used to have references such as ‘*Koṭṭūrappanavaru hīge hādavru, Nageś rāyaru hīge hādavru, Maḷavaḷḷi Sundaramma ī pātradalli idu mādavru* (Kotturappa used to sing this song like this, Nagesh Rao used to sing this way and Malavalli Sundaramma would play the role like this)’. He would not teach the embellishments of the song. He expected the actor and singer to be attentive and gather those embellishments from his harmonium during the rehearsal. He would be delighted when an actor or singer repeated the phrase he played on the harmonium and teach more subtleties. Therefore, the keen and discerning, which more often than not used to be me and a senior lady playing miscellaneous roles, will have to pay a lot of close attention to his harmonium.

My first performance on July 25th, 2014 in the role of Arjuna saw a roaring success with theater connoisseurs coming from all corners of the Karnataka state to be a part of recreation of the Kannada theater history in Bangalore by my father. I had never experienced such adulation and attention on-stage ever in my life as a performing musician (Deepak University of Alberta, 2018e). Figure 13 shows the poster used for advertising the play.

But as an actor, performing in front an audience of more than a thousand people packed inside the biggest auditorium in the province, with the greats of Kannada theater namely the renowned humorist and political satirist, Master Hirannayya (my father’s childhood friend), and an actor, nominated Member of the Upper House of Indian parliament and the granddaughter of the legendary Gubbi Veeranna Ms. B. Jayashree and other dignitaries was an exhilarating experience. It also became a bit annoying when at the end of the show people thronged the backstage irrespective of their age to take pictures with me, some to touch my feet and some just to catch a

glimpse of a scientist acting in a forgotten musical of Kannada theater *Sangīta Subhadrā* or *Subhadrā Kalyāṇa*, revived by his own father, after a long gap of nearly 70 years.

I was surprised to see such a huge audience for an artform that has already declined. My father's explanation was "You give them good theater, people will come". After the show I became aware of the politics of drama, the jealousies of other inexperienced drama directors who are making a mockery of classical drama by including lewd songs and vulgar dance movements. For example, in the year 2016, while doing my field study and conducting discipular biographic study, I played the role of Arjuna in a play called *Rājasūya Yāga*. This play required more than 40 actors and scheduling rehearsals became extremely difficult. I witnessed the rivalry among theater professionals, when some of the amateur theater troupe that wanted to hijack the auditorium for a political event, bribed the sound engineers in *Ravindra Kalakshetra* auditorium, Bangalore, who in turn disconnected the microphones and ensured that the voice of all the actors except mine would not be heard. My voice was spared because my performance in *Subhadrā Kalyāṇa* had already made me famous for my singing. In *Subhadra Kalyāṇa*, *Arjuna* is the central character. Whereas in *Rājasūya Yāga*, there is no central character and the primary focus was the musical varieties. I was convinced that my father was right in saying that the professional actors are all long gone, and the new generation of actors and directors are insecure, incompetent and not willing to go through the rigor of learning music and acting both of which are essential components of modern Kannada theater.



Figure 13: Poster in Kannada Advertising Subhadra Kalyāṇa July 25th 4:30 PM (Tickets priced Rs. 100 each)

I toured with the troupe performing this play in different cities, revelling in the newfound attention, glamour and appreciation for a few months when it was time to pursue my primary passion ‘The *Sarangi*’ about which I was to carry out a discipular ethnography under a very renowned maestro, for which I had to return to Canada.

While the entire world of theater lovers was showering their love and appreciation on me, I learnt from my sister that the very night after the show, my mother telephoned her and confided as follows. “My worst fear came true today. Your brother did exactly what I dreaded all my life that he would do. He did eventually apply the greasepaint to his face”.

The discussions in the current chapter must have, in no imprecise terms, conveyed why I remained an outsider to this great treasure of modern Kannada theater tradition and its opulent music for these many years. Regrettably, I seldom had the opportunity to watch my own family, the legends of Kannada theater, namely my father, my two aunts in action performing this wonderful artform. I was deprived of the experience of getting a glimpse of my aunts encased in the flashy costumes of the bygone theater era, singing and saying powerful dialogues under the glittering candelabra of the stage. I also missed watching my father ensconced himself in his favorite and cozy, ‘harmonium pit’, in total control of the entire play but hidden from the curious glances of the audience that luxuriated in the vintage tales of Hindu mythology or a fiction or a Persian fantasy plot, sometimes violently interjecting with a ‘Once More’ for a good piece of music or a powerful dialogue and other times enjoying the serenity like connoisseurs with a meditative predisposition.

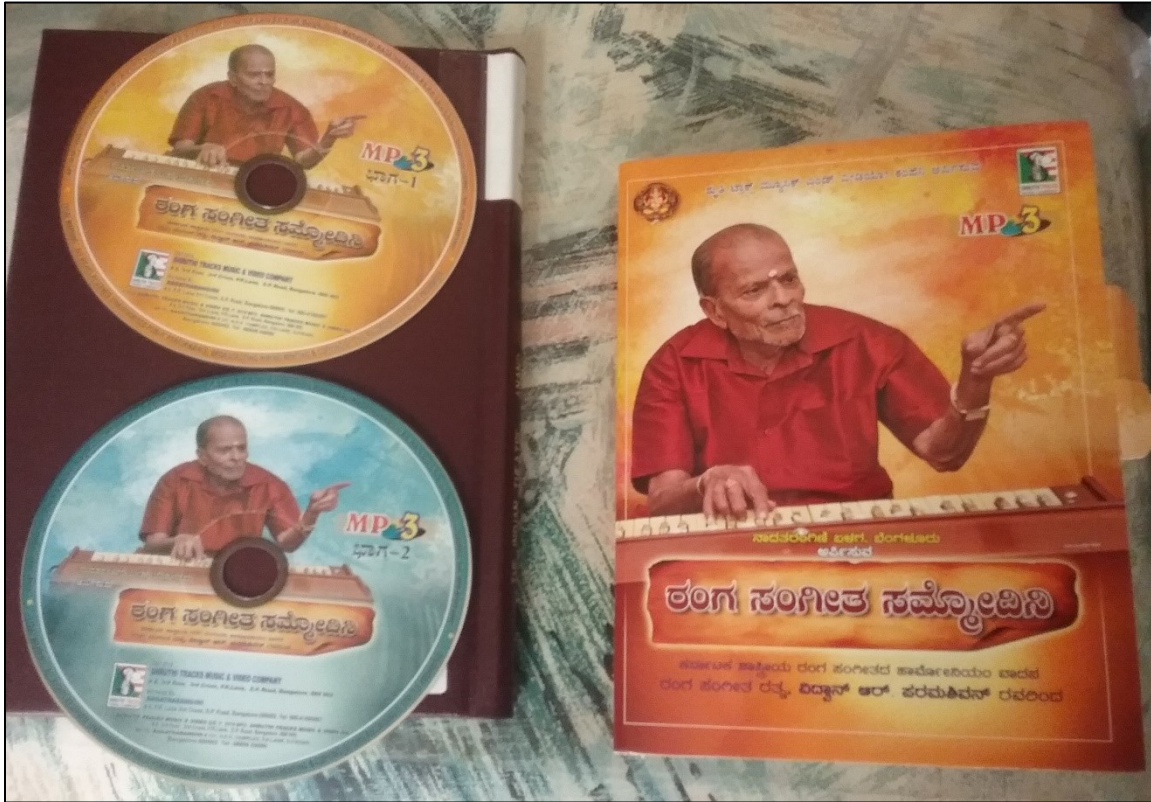


Figure 14: CD Cover and Volume 1 and Volume 2 of Raṅga Saṅgīta Sammodini

It struck me quite nostalgically during the field trip in 2017, when I recorded and released *Raṅga Saṅgīta Sammodini* (Figure 14), a CD of more than 500 theater songs selected from 43 plays and performed by my father on the harmonium, some of which were sung by my aunt, the latter a septuagenarian and the former an octogenarian. I felt I was forced to remain an outsider to the tradition, even though I rightfully deserved to be an insider, because of my parents' fears, however well founded they might be. Instead of teaching me theater, they coerced me to learn the 'Karnatak classical' music but surprisingly did not care to stop me when I was involved in a radically unpragmatic exogamous relationship with the 'Sarangi', an instrument that is completely alien, incongruous and non-aligning with all the 'high society values' that I was brought up with until then.

In one of my desperate attempts to learn the *Sarangi*, which later turned out to be a futile attempt, from a very renowned maestro that I struck a 'quid pro quo' deal with him that I would write his biography and in turn he would give me access to all his music. With Prof Regula Qureshi as my supervisor, who is a *Sarangi* expert herself, it was easy to convince the maestro agree to this proposition. I resigned my high paying job as a climate scientist in 2013 and in 2014 decided to pursue my second PhD in ethnomusicology in this endeavor. I had spent a couple of years studying the literature, applied for ethics clearance and met many musicians to participate in the interviews. Unfortunately, the maestro's ears were poisoned by his well-wishers that I am an 'ethnomusicologist' studying in the West who is planning to exploit him for my own pecuniary gains and he immediately pulled out of the project in the beginning of 2016.

Without realizing the purport of the idiom ‘Once bitten twice shy’, I was still quite frantically spending all my time and effort in persuading the maestro to agree to be a part of the project, under the influence of my mindless panglossian optimism. At around the same time, I gave a symposium at the Wednesday seminar series about the Modern Kannada Theater music at the Canadian Center for Ethnomusicology, University of Alberta. After my presentation my supervisors Prof Michael Frishkopf and Prof Regula Qureshi who were aware of my plight by then, suggested that I should document this wonderful tradition for my dissertation instead of indulging in the Sisyphean task of persuading the unpersuadable. So almost after 2.5 years of working on a thankless topic, I started my dissertation on an entirely new topic.

Conclusion

This chapter was about my sojourns in music, early disinclination towards theater and the serendipitous circumstances under which I decided to write about a theater tradition that seems to be in an advanced state of obsolescence. I have briefly described the dynamics of relationship as a son to my father and how it drastically differed as his music student. I justified the scholarly pursuit of my own culture by citing references of precedential value in the field of ethnomusicology. My intention to cite these references is not to what Katz (2017:6) calls “flout the accepted scholarly procedures that grant agency only to discrete individuals and that evaluate oral historical claims only against an impartial written record”. It was meant to maintain that such an engagement with one’s own culture can still be legitimate and objective. I am aware that there will be avenues for scholarly criticism of my objectivity or the lack of it therein in accounting for all the possible cultural contingencies. I do admit that I still do not have a definite answer to the *vexata quaestio* ‘Am I an insider or an outsider to the tradition that I want to write my dissertation about?’.

Culturally, I am an insider. But as a performer, I was steering between ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ (to be read as *Sarangi* and theater) as an insider who was condemned to remain an outsider in the theater and as an outsider who could only become a quasi-insider in the world of *Sarangi*. In the end this turned out to be a blessing in disguise that for my current work, as a scholar, as an insider I could easily carry out a perspicacious deconstruction of the modern Kannada theater as a performative artform, and as an outsider, an attentive social and historical analysis. In the next chapter, I will exclusively discuss the music of modern Kannada theater called *Raṅgagītegaḷū* which served the purpose of titillating the besotted fancies of the audience of Kannada theater. I will discuss the relevant cultural influences encompassing a broad range of social, geographical, religious and colonial constructs.

Chapter 3

Raṅgapañcāmṛta – The Modern Kannada Theater Music

Prelude

For a long time, theater music called *Raṅgagītegaḷu* was condemned and neglected as inferior by the mainstream classical musicians until Paramashivan changed the perception through his lecture demonstration on *Raṅgagītegaḷu* in the prestigious *Karnatak* Classical Music Conference, held in Bellary, India, in 1972. It was at this conference he highlighted the nuances and the richness of these songs and the theater music tradition, the forerunners of which were none other than the court musicians of the Mysore palace who were scholars of both theory and practice of different genres of music. According to my father, it was after this conference that mainstream classical musicians started recognizing him as one among them. “I was given a short slot of 30 minutes. After I commenced my singing, the audience was so overwhelmed that it demanded the chair of the conference that my program should be continued for the rest of the morning session”, he recollected. In the year 2012, when my father was away touring USA, I was summoned to represent him in a thematic concert on the ‘Usage of Raag Jhunjhooti in Theater Music’. My father guided me over the phone, gave me all the references and taught me the relevant songs from various plays. The chair of the conference was a renowned musicologist and a very senior vocalist R. Vedavalli who was until then not aware of this rich tradition appreciated my lecture-demonstration. I thanked my father for his guidance, to which he replied, “The credit goes to the composers’ ingenuity. They have extracted the essence of the *rāga* and composed those songs which is what makes these songs elegant and appealing to cognizant and laymen, alike”.

Introduction

This chapter discusses the repertoire of modern Kannada theater music which Paramashivan calls ‘a concoction of five nectars of music’. In the narrative that follows, he discusses the intercultural influence of different genres of music on the modern Kannada theater music which made it one of the richest amalgamations of varieties of music that flourished under the royal patronage of the Kings of Mysore. The princely state of Mysore that could boast of one of the longest empires with an unbroken chain of rulers had become a modern and model state by the late 19th century. The generous patronage and encouragement to arts and artists by the kings of Mysore, as discussed in the earlier chapters, started under Krishna Raja Wodeyar III was successfully continued by the last ruling king Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar until India got her independence in 1947. These kings also played the role of cultural founders of Mysore with their profuse generosity by creating a sprawling ecosystem wherein the artists could thrive. This ecosystem attracted musicians from across the country who brought with them their musical knowledge worlds along. The knowledge worlds of these peregrinating musicians interacted and intermixed with the local knowledge worlds giving rise to a unique magical potion of music called the ‘*Raṅgagītegalu* (Theater Songs)’. This genre was constructed on a bricolage of musical domains and a dynamic reconciliation of distinct pre-existing musical repertoire in Karnatak music, Hindustani music, folk music and European airs. The lyrics engineered by the court poets to mitigate the needs of the plot and the context extending over an entire gamut of forms like ode, elegy and ballads effusing real passion further enriched this genre. While presenting a critical anthology of modern Kannada theater music, I will describe the background, influences and include a detailed analysis of text-setting system that evolved through a healthy interaction between the court musicians and the court poets under the Mysore kings. To illustrate the salient features of this genre of music, I will analyse the compositions from the plays in which I took part as an actor or as a director during my field study.

I will discuss in detail the complexity of melody, rhythm and lyrics, and conclude that the extremely challenging repertoire might have been a chief cause for the decline of this theater tradition.

Kannada Theater Music – A Music of Five Nectars

This interview was conducted on March 20th, 2017 at my father’s residence. He sat with his harmonium and turned on the electric tanpura to create the ambience of music.

“I would like to call theater music as ‘Raṅgapañcāmṛta’⁵(A concoction of five nectars of music)”, my father often says summarizing the form, style and influences of Kannada theater music. He continued,

“Our theater music was predominantly based on the five popular genres of music that were prevalent in those days. You can find in them numerous Karnatak music compositions, Hindustani music Bandishes (plural form of the word Bandish which means a classical composition in North Indian music), Western⁶ music, light classical music and folk music. Since there were no dedicated music composers for theater, the court musicians were commissioned to write music who cleverly modified the popular compositions and used them depending on the context. The tunes were decided by the court musicians and lyrics written by the playwrights who were the court poets which gave it the luster. The theater musicians had a very high sense of musical aesthetics. They believed that play should always start on a high note. “ettukotā Sāveri rāga hādidre kaḷegaṭṭalla anta Nāta, kalyāṇi, ī tara rāga upayogisavaru (If you commence the play in sad melodies like Sāveri, it will not appeal to the public. Therefore, theater composers would compose the first song in a play always in rāga-s like Nāta or Kalyāṇi)”.

⁵ *Pañcāmṛta* is a concoction of five nectars namely milk, curd, ghee, sugar and honey, considered an auspicious offering in Hindu prayers and festivities.

⁶ By Western music he meant the influence of waltzes, Scottish and Irish jigs and reels, airs and ballads. Indian musicians classify all these genres under the bracket of Western music. Also, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “Western Music,” Last accessed January 15, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Western-music>

Deepak: Why was it condemned if the songs were composed by the court poets and court musicians?

Paramashivan: It was not the case during the 1930s. All the great musicians used to come to theater to listen to some good music. Note that my Guru, the court musician Dr. B. Devendrappa recognized my talent in the theater and took me under his wings.

This was perhaps one of the instances of a rising national movement, cultural nationalism and the project of classicization that had started just a few decades earlier as a pan India movement, neglecting a highly evolved performing artform. This new wave of cultural consciousness in India at that time, an offshoot of freedom struggle, was ethno-geographical in nature and attested to the evolution of new narratives of cultural history, emergence of a new creative energy in art and culture, was too preoccupied with other 'classical' forms of music and dance neglecting the Kannada theater.

Deepak: Were all the songs copied? Did they not have any original compositions?

Paramashivan: I did not mean to say that. I only meant the composers used the popular tunes liberally whenever necessary. It was not an era of copyrights. Who will you give royalties to? The trinities of Karnatak music, Hindustani composers or the Western music composers? But what still eludes my understanding is how could these conservative court musicians become familiar with as many different styles of music.

While my father expressed his astonishment at the broad knowledge base of the court musicians, my Vīṇa teacher D. Balakrishna provided an explanation for this during my field trip in 2017, since his father was a court musician himself. The knowledge of the court musicians of Mysore can be attributed to the broad vision of the king of Mysore, Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV (1884-1940) who was a musician familiar with all these genres of music, being a saxophone player and a pianist

himself. By that time, the royal family of Mysore was being trained in the English gentlemanly ways by a specially appointed officer by the British which included training in English, politics, economics and Western music. Weidman (2006:66) notes that Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV had employed German Otto Schmidt to conduct the palace orchestra. She also mentions about a series of 'Harmonized Indian airs', composed by the king's younger brother, which were published in London during 1920-1940, that were set to tempos like fox-trot and waltz. This perhaps explains the waltz type airs found in the theater music that we will see in the coming sections.

Krishnaraja Wodeyar, as mentioned earlier, was succeeded by the illustrious king His Highness Jayachamaraja Wodeyar (1919-1974) (Figure 15), who was a scholar, philosopher, educationist, entrepreneur, musician, composer and an exemplary king. He had won 'London's Gild Hall Licentiate Degree' in piano and secured a rank in music examinations conducted by the Trinity College of Music, London, of which he later became an honorary fellow. He toured Europe in 1939 to hone his skills on the piano and expand his knowledge of Western classical music. The King collected discs of the great composers such as Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Wagner, Haydn and frequently arranged listening sessions for his court musicians. Nikolai Medtner (1879-1951), a Russian composer became his close friend and even dedicated one of his Piano concertos to His Highness. The king wanted his court musicians to emulate his example. Therefore, he made it compulsory for all the court musicians to do a preliminary course in Western music theory and appreciation which had equipped every court musician with the ability to read and write the Western musical staff notation. When the doyen of Agra Gharana, *Ustad* Vilayat Hussain Khan joined the palace as a musician, he was asked to train the musicians in Hindustani classical music. This not only helped the court musicians of the Mysore palace expand their horizons beyond the

South Indian *Karnatak* music but also enabled them to incorporate these styles in their compositions.

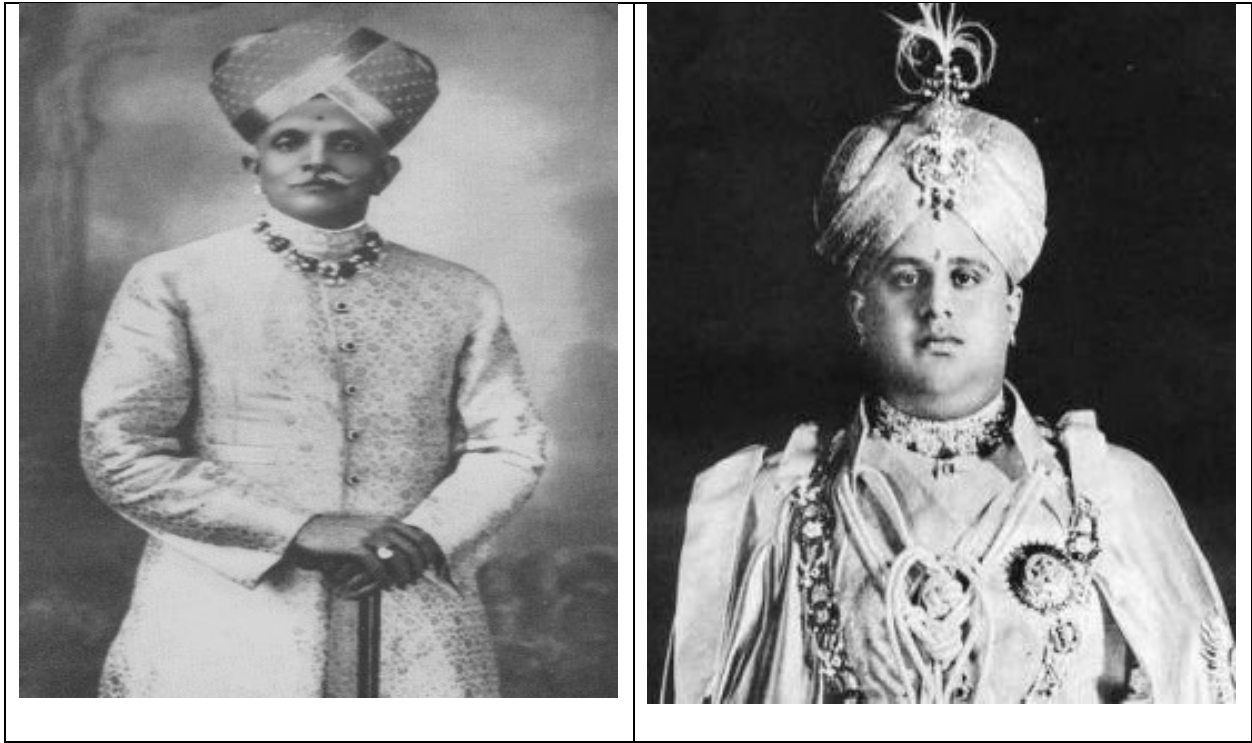


Figure 15: 20th Century Kings of Mysore L- Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV, R- Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar (Source: RBSI, 2018)

In the following sections I will present a critical anthology of my readings of theater songs, the background score that my father had composed for various contexts, the musical inspirations and the context, through the lens of aesthetics, literary value, canons, narrative and text-setting. The book my father wrote contains more than thousand songs from more than 80 plays; for the current study, I have limited myself to those songs from selected plays in which I was involved as an actor or as a musician.

Text-setting, Aesthetics and Literary Anthology of Modern Kannada Theater Music

Text-setting broadly refers to different ways in which music and text communicate with each other. The different types of text-settings that are found in music literature are syllabic setting (each syllable is assigned a note), melismatic setting (a syllable is assigned more than one note) and isochronic setting (syllables are repeated in regular intervals without any constraints on the number of notes in each interval) (King, 2015). In the following sections, I will be studying the influences of different styles of music such as *Karnatak*, Hindustani, and Western music and how they were incorporated into the theater music. Theater songs are replete with intricate rhythmic patterns and complex rhythmic cadences. Therefore, the role of rhythm and its interactions with the text in clarifying the aesthetic stance of music, phonetic character, semantics and poetic meaning of the text in theater songs will be discussed.

Influence of Karnatak and Hindustani Music Compositions on Raṅgagīteḡaḷu

Kannada theater music is a storehouse of extremely rare *Karnatak* music compositions by the trinities of *Karnatak* music, Tyāgarāja, Muttusvāmi Dikṣitar and Śyāmasāstri, and other composers like Mysore Vāsudevācārya, Kṣetrayya and Nijaguṇa Śivayogi. Most of these compositions have either become obsolete or disappeared from the concert repertoire in the contemporary performance scenario. This clearly suggests that the repertoire of music has either changed, evolved or, as some musicians complain, *Karnatak* music has become ‘an ossified institution’ due to both the lack of audience who are open to accepting rare compositions and the artists’ risk-averse attitude towards music making. Apart from the different types of compositions mentioned earlier, there are numerous compositions that resemble the structure of advanced compositions such as Pallavi set into complex aspects of rhythm, rhythmic cadences, gati bheda (division of

rhythm into different tuplets, most commonly into triplets or pentaplets) which are some of the characteristic aspects of the compositions of modern Kannada Theater.

Context and Genre: The song shown in *Transcriptions 2* and *3* is selected from the play “*Bhīṣma Pratijñe*” written in the early 1930s by G. Kṛṣṇamūrti, who was popular for his role as Bhīma, one of the five Pāṇḍavā-s in the great epic *Mahābhārata*. The play revolves around the life of Bhīṣhma, the great grandfather of the Pāṇḍava-s, who sacrifices his throne of which he is the rightful heir apparent, to facilitate his father’s marriage to a fisherwoman. He kidnaps Amba, Ambika and Ambālika, the daughters of King of Kāśi, to get them married to his stepbrothers. Unable to bear the humiliation, Amba commits suicide. As an act of vengeance, in the *Mahābhārata* battle, Amba reincarnates as a eunuch Shikhandi and showers arrows upon Bhīṣma wounding him badly. Bhīṣma, spends his last moments on a bed of arrows called *Śara Śayya*. This play was revived by my father during my field trip in 2017. It was my father’s dream project to direct this play with my aunt Late R. Nagaratnamma donning the role of Bhīṣma. Since the play was performed only a few times during my father’s childhood, he had no distinct memory of the entire plot as he remembers other plots. He was frantically searching for it in every library, book shop and sent his men all around, but to no avail. Sadly, he received the original plot only after the sad demise of my aunt in 2012. It was a rare coincidence that I had to step into her shoes and help him in the resurrection of this play⁷.

⁷ I also filmed a full-length rehearsal of this play and another play during my field study, each play spanning more than 4 hours in which he was filmed in action, directing, teaching and choreographing a group of university students and a group of amateur/professional theater artists (myself included).

2

Vce. ¹⁶

sa rva vi | nu - ta - - va ra | sa ka la ja |

Vce. ¹⁹

ja ga ti paa - la --- | sa - ra - sa | ni - - - bha - ne - tra - |

Vce. ²²

sa ka la jaga | do - - - - dha - - ra | pre - ma - - - |

Vce. ²⁵

dha - - - ra - - - - | - - - - pa re sha ma | ha - - - sa - ra - |

Vce. ²⁸

pa - ra - shu - dha - | ra - - - |

Transcription 3: Pareśa part 2 from Bhīṣhma Pratijñe

Summary of *Guruvara* song in *Bhīṣma Pratijñe*

Guruvara Karuṇisai
Guru mahimākara
Paratara bāndhava
Devādidēva ||
Parēśa mahākāra paraśudhara
Sakala mantrādhāra sarva vinuta vara
Sakala jagatipāla sārasanibha netra
Sakala jagadoddhāra Premādhāra

O teacher be merciful upon me
Thou art of incomparable great virtues
An eternal yet genuine friend
Thou art the Lord of all Gods

Oh, supreme Lord and wielder of the axe
The substratum of the Veda-s worshipped by all
The lout-eyed protector of the cosmos
Thou art the savior and the pedestal of love

In this play, I played the role of Bhīṣma (Figure 16). The play consists of more than hundred songs of which I myself had to sing nearly 30 songs from *Karnatak*, Hindustani and light compositions, and there were more than 20 monologues, some of them two pages long⁸.



Figure 16: Deepak in the role of Bhīṣma in *Bhīṣma Pratijñe*, August 2017, Bangalore, India.

The song, *Guruvara Karuṇisai*, is performed in the very first scene of the play while *Bhīṣma*, who is about to be coroneted as the heir apparent to the kingdom of *Hastināvati* ruled by the king

⁸ My father had warned me before the play, ‘*Idu matte Rāmāñjuneyayuddha, eradu nāṭakagaḷu kabbinada kaḍale idda hāge, huṣārāgiru, idralli geddre yāv nāṭakadalli bekadru gelṭiya* (This play and the Rāmāñjuneyayuddha are like eating and digesting peanuts made of iron. So, if you succeed in this, you will succeed in any play)’.

Śantanu, the great grandfather of Pāṇḍavā-s. In this scene Bhīṣma offers his respects and prayers to his preceptor, Guru *Paraśurāma* from whom he has learnt the art of warfare, weaponry and other knowledge forms pertaining to statesmanship. The plot is borrowed from the epic *Mahabhārata* but focuses only on the life of Bhīṣma, the grand old man who relinquishes the throne for his father and remains a loyal servant to everyone who sits on the throne. The tune for this song is borrowed from a very rare composition of Saint Tyāgaraja in *Karnatak* music called ‘*vanajanayana*’ based on the *rāga* ‘*Kedāragoula*’.

The song is based on the aesthetic emotion of *karuṇa* (compassion) and *bhakti* (devotion). The character first praises the preceptor and then pleads him to shower his uninterrupted blessing upon him so that he can excel in his duties as a noble and a just king, a common theme in *bhakti* literature. Here *Paraśurāma* is praised as the wielder of axe, who despite being born as a brahmin decided to take the path of violence and killed the demon kings to establish the path of righteousness.

The song starts on the 4th beat of the first measure. The commencement of the rhythm and the take-off point of the song is referred to as ‘*graha*’. When the rhythm precedes the music, the take-off point is referred to as *anāgata graha* and when the song precedes the rhythm, it is called *atīta graha*, and when they commence simultaneously it is called the ‘*sama graha*’. Theater songs are replete with examples of all the *graha*-s. *Atīta graha* is usually used for demon’s songs as we will see in the coming sections. Songs in varying ‘*graha*-s’ pose a very interesting challenge to the actor and singer. In the mainstream *Karnatak* classical music performance, the rhythm is usually shown by clapping the hand, whereas in the theater, the actor will be not only busy acting, singing but also paying attention to the rhythmic intricacies without showing them by clapping. It requires many years of rigorous training to internalize the rhythm which makes theater music more

challenging. Lyrically or aesthetically the song does not convey anything extraordinary because the intention is only to invoke devotion.

Summary of *Īśa Maheśa in Bhīṣma Pratijñe*

Īśa Maheśa
Poreyau gaurīśa
Nigamasāra sām̐ba
Bāleṇḍu dhara
Gangādhara śaṅkara

O Lord Shiva, the supreme Godhead
Protect me, the consort of Mother Gauri
The essence of all the Vedas (learning)
Decorated with the crescent moon on his head
Along with Ganga, thou art the bestower of
peace

Īśa Maheśa shown in *Transcription 4* is a Hindustani music composition set to *Rāga Bihag*. Paramashivan could not recollect the original composition which he claims was a popular bandish (classical composition) among Hindustani musicians and was performed in their concerts. This song is sung by *Bhīṣma* in solitude while he worships Lord Shiva on the banks of Ganga. Immediately after the song, he is accosted by *Amba*, the princess of Kashi, who *Bhīṣma* would have earlier kidnapped along with her two sisters *Ambika* and *Ambālika*, to get them married to his younger brother, prince Vicitravīrya. Later, upon learning that *Amba* is already in love with the king Sālva, *Bhīṣma* releases her. *Amba* is refused by King Sālva because she was kidnapped in public by *Bhīṣma*. Therefore, *Amba* comes to *Bhīṣma* praying him to marry her. *Bhīṣma*, an avowed celibate, refuses to marry her. The context throws light on issues such as gender, moral boundaries imposed on the women in the society that a mere act of kidnapping was tantamount to casting aspersions on a woman's chastity thus destroying her marital prospects. As an act of vengeance, *Amba* reincarnates as Śikhāṇḍī (a eunuch) and kills *Bhīṣma* in the *Mahābhārata* war.

1

Voice 

I - - sha - ma - he - sha ja ga di - - sha - - -

Vce. 

gou-ri - sha ee - - - sha - ma - he - - sha ja ga

Vce. 

di - - - sh - - - gou ri - sha niga ma sa - ra -

Vce. 

sam ba - gan ga - dha ra - - shan - ka -

Vce. 

ra - - - baa len - du - - - dha - - ra

Transcription 4: *īśa maheśa* from *Bhīṣma Pratijñe*

Summary of *Meru Pāri* song in *Bhīṣma Pratijñe*

Meru pāri carisidaru
Vara brahmacarya carisadidu
Naāri chalava gaiyya beḍa nīnu
āseyam biḍu nāri āseyam bidu

Even if the Meru Mountain moves
 My celibacy will remain intact
 O woman, stop being adamant
 Give up your desire (of marrying me)

1

Voice  me ru paa ri charisi daru va ra brah-macharya charisadi du - - -

Vce.  - - naa ri chala va gai yya be - - da nee- nu - - - aa se yam bi du

Vce.  naa ri - - - aa se yam - bi du e ke saa- sa vin - tu ba ri de -

Vce.  - saa-ku sa - ku sa - - ri po - gu - - - aa se yam bi du naa- ri -

Vce.  - aa - se yam- bi du me ru pa - ri chari si da ru

Transcription 5: Meru pāri from Bhīṣhma Pratiḡṇe

The song ‘Merupāri charisidaru’⁹ shown in *Transcription 5* is sung to reassert his celibacy and his refusal to marry *Amba*.

⁹ Interestingly, Paramashivan, when asked about this song said the following. “Last time this play was staged was in 1940s. I was a small boy then. The great theater stalwart of our times Kottur Channabasappa, who is popularly known as ‘Kotturappanavar,’ used to play the lead role of Bhīṣhma. He was trained in Hindustani music, which is why he had incorporated a number of Hindustani classical music based compositions. Mr. Kotturappa was also the practice manager and I remember during one of the rehearsal sessions, he was explaining to another artist that the song ‘Merupāri Charisidaru’ is based on the Marathi Bhajan ‘Rādhe Kṛṣṇa Bol Mukh se’ based on the rāg Pīlu”.

Summary of Mārane Sumaśara

Mārane sumaśara
nikaradoḷirivudu Tarave
virahijana hṛdayavidārane
Tāpa mere mīre
Aḷi nikarachikure poḷeva kuḍi noṭada
Oḷage māra naḷa gabhīra madīya
Manavanu bhrānti gaidanentanamama

Oh! God of love wielding the arrow of flowers
Is it fair to pierce through the hearts?
Of the lovelorn, you are the tormentor.
When the passion intensifies (in her memory)
God of love shoots his arrow
through the eyes of the beloved
and confounds my mind, Alas

This song (*Transcriptions 6, 7, 8 and 9*) is selected from the play Tukaram and embodies the pinnacle of combination of melody and complicated rhythmic variations. It is based on the most popular pentatonic *rāga* called *Mohana* (major scale without the 4th and the 7th) in *Karnatak* music. However, the rendition of the song seems to be on the lighter version of the melody which involves using other notes of the major scale and occasional usage of the tritone, which is common in the North Indian music. This song employs a very distinct technique of varying the tempo of the motive (refrain) phrase of the song in ascending and descending order of tempos called the *anuloma-viloma*¹⁰ *krama* in three different stages. The song has long melismatic phrases to account for fewer words and more elaboration, a defining characteristic of a Pallavi. The first stage involves singing the entire phrase in the base tempo, double and quadruple speeds. In the second stage the first line is sung in the base tempo, second line twice as fast and the last line four times as fast as the base tempo and again the tempo is reduced for each line all the way back to the first tempo. In the last stage, the refrain is sung as a triplet in two different speeds as shown in the transcript (Ranga Vaibhava, 2016). The song is based on the aesthetic emotion of ‘viraha’ or separation, which is expressed as a humorous diatribe against the God of love often called by different names

¹⁰ This is akin to the irama of the Indonesian music or augmentation/diminution in Fugues, though executed differently. In the last stage, the refrain is sung as a triplet in two different speeds as shown in the transcript.

such as Madana, Māra, Kāma etc. The character in this song ridicules the God of love for tormenting the sweet romantics, with his arrows, particularly during the time of separation. Interestingly, it is not sung by a lovelorn hero remembering his beloved but by a character called Ratnākara, a rich merchant, remembering Kabir's wife, an extremely beautiful woman in town, but married to a poor weaver and philosopher, Kabir, who spends all his time serving the saints. Ratnākara being a man of loose morals sends his friend Kakodara as an emissary to Kabir's wife to entice her with money. Kakodara gets his lessons on morality from her and returns empty handed. The story also glorifies the value of 'chastity of women' despite their humble circumstances and condemns the lascivious adventures of rich men who misuse their power and money to achieve their ends.

The play was written by Beḷḷāve Narahari Śāstri who uses the alliteration of the letter 'ra' in the words māra, śara, nikara, tarave, virahi, vidārane. When the refrain is sung in the highest speed as 6/8s, the lyrics become jumbled tongue twisters for the untrained. My father who grew up listening to the stalwarts perform has executed this feat effortlessly. When asked how he could do it, he had a humble reply "Its all what I heard as a little boy playing the role of Kamāl, the son of Kabir Das during the years 1934-39".



$\frac{4}{4}$ Ma ra ne | su ma sha ra | ni ka ra do |



i ri vu du | ta ra ve vi | ra hi - - ja - na |



hr da ya vi | da - - - ra ne | maa ---- ra -- ne - - |




su ma sha ra | ta pa me |




- - re - mi - - | re - - - | - - - - |


Transcription 6: Part 1 of Mārane Sumaśara from the play Tukārām


2

Vce. 
ta - - - pa me - | - re - mi - - - | re - - - |

Vce. 
- - - | a li ni ka - | ra - chi - ku - re |

Vce. 
po le - va - ku - | di - no ta | do la ge maa - |

Vce. 
- ra na la | ga - bhi - ra | ma di - - - ya |

Vce. 
ma na va nu | bhra - - - ti | gai - - du - nin - - |

Transcription 7: Part 2 of Mārane Sumaśara from the play Tukārām



- ta la - - ma - ma | maa ra ne su ma sha ra | ni ka ra do li ru vu du |



ta ra ve vi ra hi ja na | hr da ya vi da - - ra - ne | ma arane su ma sha ranika ra do li ru vu du



ta ra ve vi ra hi ja na hr daya vi da ra ne | ma ra ne | su ma sha ra |



ni ka ra do li ru vu du | ta ra ve vi ra hi ja na hr daya vi da ra ne | ma arane su ma sha ranika ra do li ru vu du



ta ra ve vi ra hi ja na | hr da ya - vi - | da - - - - ra ne |

4

Vce.

maa ra nesumashara ni karado | li ri vu du ta ra ve vi ra hi ja na | hr daya vi da - ra ne maaranesumashara

Vce.

nikaradolirivudutaravevirahijanahridayavidarane | maa ra ne | su ma sha ra |

Vce.

ni ka ra do | li ri vu du ta | ra ve vi ra |

Vce.

hi - ja - na | hr - da - ya - - vi | da - - - ra - ne |

Vce.

Transcription 9: Part 4 of Mārane Sumaśara from the play Tukārām

Influence of European Airs on Modern Kannada Theater Music

Even to this date, several Indian maestros believe (my father included), quite unreasonably and without any basis, that any melody in the Rāga Śaṅkarābharāṇa/Bilaval (Major scale of Indian classical music) that outlines a chord progression of I or IV or V is Western music and they proudly flaunt it as a characteristic feature of Indian classical music. It is also used to reassert their claim that Indian music contains harmony. I have debated and confronted many maestros urging them not to make such outlandish claims, but only to lose their friendship in the end. The influence of Western music must have been as Weidman (2006:66) points out only on the ‘Indian Airs’ composed by the court musicians of Mysore with an intention to ‘popularize Eastern music harmonized in Western style’. These airs were composed to be performed by small ensembles. Camaraja Wodeyar X had appointed Pattabhiramayya, an expert on ‘Nottu swara’. This style of composition can be traced back to the era of trinities most notably Muttusvāmi Dīkśitar who composed a compilation of 39 tunes called the Nottuswaras. Nottuswaras or English notes (*nottu*: colloquial word for note, and *swara*: notes) were composed at the behest of Carl Philip Brown (popularly known as C.P. Brown), the governor of Madras, Muttuswamy Dikshitar who composed Sanskrit lyrics for European ‘airs’ (mostly brass tunes), played by the British brass bands in India, which were largely Irish/Scottish in origin. Some important tunes include Limerick, Castilian Maid, Lord MacDonald's Reel, Voulez-vous Danser, and God Save the Queen. This also influenced other musical composers such as Saint Tyagaraja, Mutthaiah Bhagavata, Swati Tirunal and others to compose with strains of European airs (Weidman, 2009:52)¹¹.

¹¹ The source that Weidman quotes as reference for her observations is one gentleman Shankaramurthy from Bangalore. Incidentally, when Shankaramurthy undertook this project, it was my father who studied the scores, trained the musicians (Shankaramurthy included) and recorded the music in Aravind Studio, Bangalore. Sadly, Shankaramurthy took all the credit for himself.

In Kannada theater this style can be prominently found mostly in the form of chorus songs, comedy songs, songs of villains (Generally set to fox-trot rhythm which suited for forceful music and powerful lyrics), war marching songs and some elegies. The other instance where one can find the influence quite prominently is in the background scores. My father uses techniques of vamping, rhythmic accompaniment and chords on the left hand to harmonize while playing the main melody on the right hand. He uses these techniques parsimoniously when accompanying classical *rāga* based compositions but uses them liberally when accompanying light, folk tunes and songs based on Western waltzes, Irish jigs and march tunes. His technique of harmonizing with the left hand is not entirely as elaborate as the piano but much more like the organ, mostly involving playing the triad in the root position of the note that occurs on the strong beat to provide rhythmic accompaniment or sometimes doubling the voice by playing the song in the lower octave with his left hand. Another interesting feature about his accompaniment is that he follows the technique of piano accompaniment or organ accompaniment by playing a short prelude to indicate the commencement of the song. This prelude would either be just the drone usually a chord or the tonic-fifth or sometimes by playing the rhythmic skeleton of the song, a technique which resembles the toccata or prelude of organ music which he seems to have imbibed from the organ music compositions like toccata or preludes which he had perhaps heard in the churches of Mysore as a young boy. He also uses the minor diminished triad to create the effect of horror, fear and introduce the villain.

I had heard my father play a minor blues scale quite aggressively for background music in a battle scene involving my late aunt, in the play '*Kṛṣṇa Gāruḍi*'. When I recorded his harmonium during my field work, I could not get him to record the same melody, but he could only play something

similar, instead. He then revealed that he in fact improvises the background music based on the situation and his own mood. This claim was reaffirmed in August 2017, when he used the same blues scale in a different avatar, this time for a sad scene in the play ‘*Sadārame*’. This approach to background score was perhaps played only by my father first introduced by my father in Kannada theater, because I have watched and heard many plays during my field work, most of them contained obscene and lewd actions, explicit dialogues accompanied by pre-recorded sounds on a cheap synthesizer. When I asked him about the tune, he replied casually, “That was actually a song composed by my dear friend, poet, playwright and a very creative dramatist, Late H. K. Yoganarasimha, for his play ‘*Kaḷḷabhatti*’ in the year 1960 based on the social evil of ‘illegal liquor’ that was quite rampant in the early 60s up till the mid 80s”.

Following are the examples of some of the songs which largely drew from the European airs idiom as explained earlier.

Summary of *Khalanettha paaridha* song in *Kṛṣṇa Līla*

<i>Khalanettha paaridha</i>	Where to didst the villain fly
<i>Balasuttha haaridha</i>	Hither and yon didst he fly
<i>Edhe metti thale kutti</i>	I shall stamp his chest and knock his head
<i>Meredattahaasadhi</i>	And dance in merry laughing out loud
<i>Phadaphada kedukara</i>	Ye rogues!!
<i>Pidiyutha kolve</i>	I shall catch and kill you
<i>Dudukina hudugara edeyanu seeLve</i>	Shall cut open the hearts of these exuberant lads

Context and genre: This song (*Transcription 10*) is from the penultimate scene of the play *Kṛṣṇa Līla* that predominantly focuses on the miracles of Kṛṣṇa and the slaying of the demon king *Kamsa*. Immediately before the song, Kṛṣṇa would have intruded into *Kamsa*’s quarters and pounded his chest with his fist. *Kamsa* is awakened by this, but Kṛṣṇa is nowhere to be seen. *Kamsa* immediately sings this song in his desperate attempts to find and kill Kṛṣṇa, his arch nemesis. The

mood of the song is *krodha* (anger) and the melody is based on the genre inspired by the Irish Jig in triplet rhythm pattern alternating with 4/4¹².

1

The musical score is presented in five systems, each with a vocal line and a violin line. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are in Kannada. The first system is labeled 'Voice' and the subsequent four systems are labeled 'Vce.'. The lyrics are: 'kha la ne tta paari da - bala su tta ha ri da e de', 'me tti ta le ku tti mera dat - ta ha- sa di phadaphadakedukarapidiyutakolve', 'dudukinahudugaraedeyanu silve si da du shtana pada do ddubhrashtana ede', 'me tti tha le kut ti - mere dat ta ha - sa di phadaphadakedukarapidiyutakolve', and 'du du ki na hu du ga ra e de ya nu seelve'.

Transcription 10: Khalanethapaaridha of Kṛṣṇa Līla

¹² On the text aspect, Narahari Śāstri shows his prowess in Kannada language and his knack for word play when uses colloquial words like ‘ede meṭṭi (to stamp the chest by foot)’, ‘tale kuṭṭi (to knock the head)’, ‘aṭṭahāsa (villainous laughter)’, with the ‘ṭṭ’ rhyming and the music, text and context, blending seamlessly. Again, words such as ‘phada phada’, ‘kedukara’, ‘pidiyuta’, ‘dudukina’, ‘hudugara’ the clever usage of the letter ‘ḍ’ is a characteristic feature of his poetry to match the lilting 6/8 rhythms cycle.

Summary of *Lankādhi pālana deva* song in *Sampūrṇa Rāmāyaṇa*

<i>Lankādhi pālana deva</i>	Hail the protector of Sri Lanka
<i>Rāvaṇa lokaika Vīra</i>	Raavana, the invincible King
<i>Pākāri sannuta</i>	The one worshipped the King of Gods, Indra
<i>Kokāri sevita</i>	And served by the killer of Koka
<i>Nākeśanuta samrakṣaṇa</i>	Protector of Indrajithu
<i>Rāvaṇa devādi deva</i>	O Raavana, the God of Gods
<i>Rāvaṇa lokaika vīra</i>	Raavana, the invincible King

Context and genre: Lankādhipālana Deva (Transcriptions 11 and 12) is a song selected from *Sampūrṇa Rāmāyaṇa* (Complete *Rāmāyana*), the longest play that would commence at 10 PM in the night and end at 5 AM, the following day. This play is a concise version of the epic *Rāmāyana* composed by *Vālmīki*. This song was always sung in chorus, by a group of 20 junior actors playing the small role of demons in the royal palace of Rāvana in Lanka. Ten actors would stand on each side-wing and sing this song to hail their demon king Rāvaṇa, the kidnapper of Rāma's consort Sīta. This song follows the pattern of a waltz that were often performed at ballad rooms in Mysore king's palace by visiting orchestras (Shaale, 2018). Since the song had to be sung by 20 actors, it is perhaps set to slow $\frac{3}{4}$ tempo giving due consideration to the ease of rendition by chorus.

What is interesting to note here is that the songs are not harmonized. The influence is restricted only to the bare skeleton of the melody. The 'harmony' was provided by the harmonium, which according to my father was a trend that started after the music director P. Kalinga Rao entered the theater profession.

Voice 

Lan kaa dhi paa la na de va

Vce. 

Raa va na lo kai ka vee ra

Vce. 

paa kaa ri sa nnu ta ko kaa ri

Vce. 

se vi ta naa ke sha mu kha sam

Vce. 

ra ksha na o da ba da li ge

Vce. 

so kki ttu ka du mu da do la gaa ri tthu

Transcription 11: Part 1 of Lankādhī pālana deva song in Sampūrṇa Rāmāyaṇa

2

Vce. ¹⁹

tha de ya ku ma - dha ra ni ka du ka du ka du

Vce. ²²

na de na de na de lan kaa dhi paa la na

Vce. ²⁵

de va

Transcription 12: Part 2 of Lankādhī pālana deva song in Sampūrṇa Rāmāyaṇa

There is another song from the play ‘Sant Tukārām (Saint Tukārām)’, in which Tukārām’s wife Jija Bai, originally played by a male actor R. Nagendra Rao¹³, used to sing an elegy after her son’s demise. It seems to be inspired from Russian Waltz No.2 by Dmitiri Shostacovich, derived from his Jazz which is explainable because the king of Mysore was very fond of Russian composers and often their compositions were played at the palace by the visiting orchestras. The song exactly follows the same structure of whole notes and quarter notes in the first 16 bars and a few measures of eighth notes interspersed with whole and quarter notes.

¹³ Nagendra Rao’s sons, R. N. Sudarshan and R. N. Jayagopal, are a well-known actor and villain in the Kannada cinema and a leading poet and educationalist respectively.

In this elegy, each word is fit into one bar in a $\frac{3}{4}$ cycle or spread over two bars following a melismatic text-setting. For example, the very first word *Hā* is spread over an entire measure. The word ‘*kāṇade* (without seeing)’, is spread over two bars, probably to fit the structure of the melody.

Hā sūnuve ninna kāṇade nānu
Alas, My son, without you

Bāḷuvenento nā saisalāre ī śokava
I cannot live, I cannot bear this this melancholy

Mati hīnanāda pati indale
Because of my mindless husband

Hata bhāgyalāde gati kāṇade
I have been rendered unfortunate, nowhere to go,

Sati suta mamateya toreyuta jātana
My husband distanced himself from all his dear ones

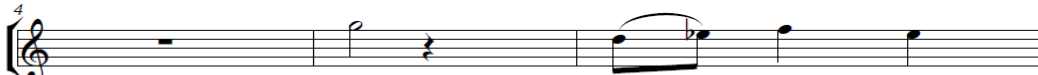
Matigaisidu nimagidu ānandave
Now, will he relish in the untimely death of his own son?

Context and Genre

The song (*Transcriptions 13 and 14*) is a mother’s lament, who has lost her son in a famine. But as a wife, she is sharp in her rebuke of her husband, she calls him ‘*Matihīna* (Mindless)’, which highlights the clash of attitudes, a wife with worldly aspirations and an otherworldly husband who is ever busy serving the saints and preoccupied in his own spiritual pursuits. The notion of using major scales for happy mood and minor scales to represent melancholy seemed to have influenced this composition which is in a minor scale.

Tenor 

$\frac{3}{4}$ ha - | su nu ve | ni nna |

Ten. 

-- | ka | na de naa |

Ten. 

nu - | | baa |

Ten. 

lu ve nen | to - - | |

Ten. 

na sai sa | la re ee | sho - - ka |

Transcription 13: Part 1 of Hā sūnuve ninna

2

Ten. ¹⁶

va - ma ti hi na na - da

Ten. ¹⁹

pa ti in da le ha ta bha gya

Ten. ²²

laa de ga ti kaa na de

Ten. ²⁵

sa ti su ta ma ma te ya to re yu ta ja ta

Ten. ²⁸

na ma ti gai - si du ni ma gi du aa -

Transcription 14: Part 2 of Hā sūnuve ninna

Influence of Bollywood and Light Music

I had asked my father regarding the influence of light music, usage of blue scales and how he learnt about minor diminished triads. He answered humbly reminiscing about his teacher, “I owe it all to the great P. Kalinga Rao. He was a genius who had spent years learning different genres of music and could use them effortlessly in all of them. He was an outstanding composer with a strange persona. Whenever he had a recording at the All India Radio, he would go two hours prior to recording without any preparation. He would then pick a book on poetry from the radio station library, walk around in the garden, compose tunes to 5-6 songs instantaneously and give notations to the orchestra, all this in a span of an hour. Having worked with him in the cinema as an assistant and later as an accompanist when he started singing ‘*Bhāvagītegaḷu* (A genre of light music in Kannada language)’, I learnt the techniques of composition and background scoring from him. For social drama, I would play popular Hindi movie songs depending on the context. For instance, in the play ‘*Aṅṅa Tamma* (Elder-younger brothers)’ which was an adaptation of the Hindi movie ‘*Bhabhi*’, I played the famous song ‘chale ud ja re panchi (Fly away O bird)’ in the climax, Mera Naam chinchin chu of Howrah Bridge in *Samsāra Nauka* for the club dance scene and so on”¹⁴. He has an unrivaled repertoire of Bollywood songs from the early 1940s till late 1960s.

Conclusion

In the current chapter, theater music, its influences and aspects of lyrics’ interaction with music were discussed. In the context of decline of modern Kannada theater, the music also seems to have

¹⁴ In the play *Sadārame*, when I played the deuteragonist role, in a robbery scene, he played yet another blue-scale-based music. He remembered only the tune, but the song had slipped his memory. I hummed the tune for a senior Bollywood music aficionado in Edmonton, Ms. Savitri, who immediately told me that it was a song called ‘Muh Se Mat Laga’, from the 1957 Bollywood movie *Johnny-Walker*.

been a governing factor. Firstly, theater music had limited orchestra with two principal instruments, the Harmonium providing the melodic accompaniment and the *Tabla*, the percussive accompaniment. In the context of Karnatak classical music, Harmonium was 'edged out' of South India by the middle of twentieth century and replaced by the violin which reached the privilege status as a semblance of the West and modernity for political than musical reasons (Weidman, 2006:42). Harmonium which until then accompanied both classical as well as drama music, was now restricted only to drama and folk music. Accompaniment being both a 'social as well as musical matter' (ibid:36), Karnatak music claimed its classical status by adopting the modern violin as an accompaniment instrument and harmonium was condemned to be a cheap equipment that hindered the musical independence of singers. The inability of Kannada theater music to adopt the modern orchestra transformed its status in the collective subconsciousness of the connoisseurs resulting in a declining popularity of both itself and the music it accompanied.

The repertoire discussed in this chapter only buttresses Paramashivan's claim that theater music requires a very high degree of competence and training in vocal music. According to my father, classically trained musicians who could not get due recognition as mainstream classical musicians found their way into the theater. The mainstream Karnatak music of southern India and the Hindustani music in the Northern India came under the ambit of the rising national movement and the project of classicization. The repertoire of modern Kannada theater despite being comprised of complex compositions was treated with indifference by mainstream classical musicians. I have argued in this chapter that the neglect of theater music and the rigid socio-musical hierarchy was a result of social hierarchy which discredited the theater profession as ignoble, discredited the music that came along with it. The politics of nationalism and the resentment for the non-classical made the hierarchy so rigid that it was virtually impossible for the theater artists to become

mainstream classical musicians despite having all the credentials. The Karnatak music aficionados disapproved, with indignation, singing theater songs and cinema songs in classical concerts, until the recent past. Later, Karnatak music was leveraged even in the cinema to promote nationalism and address social issues. The situation was however different in the Northern India, particularly in Maharashtra where musicians could perform the ‘*Nāṭya Gīt*’ (Equivalent of Raṅgagītegaḷu in Marathi drama) towards the end of classical concerts and the audience would still appreciate it. Despite these developments in the neighboring states, modern Kannada theater and its music were pushed to an obscure oblivion. Rigorous training in classical music which served as the precondition to entering modern Kannada theater precipitated its decline further. Modern Kannada theater music was not embraced in the academic institutions in Karnataka either at the universities or in private art schools. The new generation of actors who were not willing to go through the rigors of classical music training either embraced the cinema or the contemporary theater which was not musically intense, which shrunk the induction of prospective performers in the younger generations.

In the coming chapters, details of Paramashivan’s knowledge worlds, their mutual interactions and interactions with the subject will be examined detailed interviews with anecdotal references will be provided. These interviews will be later used to answer the critical questions posed in the beginning of the chapter.

Chapter 4

Biographical Background of Paramashivan

Prelude

In the year 1938, after Marirāyaru (a colloquial version of Mari Rao in Kannada) took over as the proprietor of Chamundeshwari drama company, the company camped in Tīrthahaḷḷi (A small town in the midst of lush green, virgin forests of Western Ghats, Karnataka, India) with all the other stellar theater artists of the era. A small talented boy played the role of Dhruva¹⁵ in the play *Bhakta Dhruva*. In the plot, Dhruva, a staunch devotee of Viṣṇu wanders into the forest, unable to bear the torture of his step-mother. Moved by his sincere and innocent devotion, Viṣṇu descends from his abode Vaikuṅṭha to rescue Dhruva. Hoping that Viṣṇu will come for his rescue, this little ‘actor Dhruva’, who was being tortured by his caretaker in the drama company, too wandered into the dangerous forest of Tirthahaḷḷi, which had the reputation for providing habitat for wild hyenas and leopards. He must have walked into the forest for a few kilometers. An inter-city bus on the main road stopped by and the driver who had seen the little boy act in the drama inquired about his little misadventure. The boy replied, with all his innocence, that he was on a pursuit to perform penance. The driver made no delay but hurriedly went to the town, brought the entire troupe in the same bus with a lot of sweets and gifts to woo the boy. He was ensconced back to the camp with all due care this time. Having reached the camp, every member of the troupe took turns to beat him up and the

¹⁵ According to Hindu belief system, Dhruva, as a young boy, unable to bear the torture of his step-mother, wanders into the forest and meditates upon Lord Viṣṇu who pleased with Dhruva’s devotion accords him the status of a pole star. Pole star is referred to as Dhruva nakṣatra.

little boy never ventured out thereafter with the silly hope of finding the invisible God in the other world but was determined to endure the visible reality in this very world.

Introduction

The story in this chapter unveils at a critical juncture in the history of pre-independent India when the entire country was soaked in the spirit of freedom struggle and there was an unprecedented awakening of a national consciousness giving an authentic expression to the socio-political realities of the colonized India. The country was witnessing the flowering of a nationalist urge that sublimated in the construction of a national identity. People from various walks of life; poets, philosophers, politicians and artists, expounded the spirit of nationalism, by inducing pride among the Indians about their centuries-old cultural past, through their creative work attuned to the endeavor of finding a national identity. The elitists achieved this through the route akin to that of Renaissance by taking refuge in the heritage of the past. The search for a national identity intensified with a concentrated endeavor of consolidation of Indianness in various segments of the cultural sphere. The academia that had hitherto celebrated the Western education and values began to display irreverence and dissatisfaction towards the colonial rule which was fostered by socio-religious movements spearheaded by various seats of learning. In the current chapter, I trace Paramashivan's personal history, drawing on his personal interviews in which he viscerally expresses his childhood memories, his failed attempt to obtain formal education which remained a distant dream throughout his life and his association with Kannada theater, from this period. He offers insightful details about the society, social status of theater artists and vivid details about the different drama companies in which he actively took part as a child actor. This chapter explores

the ramifications of the knowledge worlds of his formative days which later resulted in significant personal and musical consequences.

There is always a series of mysterious and inexplicable circumstances that lead an individual to become an artist; against all odds, defying all the rules of pragmatism and enduring criticism and hostility. Here, I shall explore those mysterious circumstances under which this little boy had wandered into the forest with a hope to meet his creator, literally, but later endured the vagaries of life to become a legendary theater personality in the Kannada theater world. I will be alternating between my role as an interviewer and a scholar while presenting a series of first-hand accounts of my father's family background, his early life in Mysore and the circumstances under which his world view was formulated, in his own voice. As a scholar I would subject his voice to scholarly scrutiny, critique and comment about the socio-cultural and geo-political phenomena of this time period.

What I can tell you certainly is that I have been earning my livelihood since the age of four. I do not have any distinct memories of my life before that. I only vaguely remember that my elder sister, late R. Nagaratnamma, would rotate the wooden window lock to distract me and feed me when I was about two and a half. When I was three years old, I used to go begging on the streets in the month of śrāvaṇa¹⁶ to go to a few select Brahmin households, as it was customary in certain Brahmin communities. It was considered to be a humbling experience and a service to God to go begging. In my family, begging in śrāvaṇa, however, was out of necessity than custom, I would say. We could beg only during this month because it had been sanctified and sanctioned by customs, which otherwise would be considered a curse and derided in the society. I would bring a glass full of rice and tell my mother ammā yakki tandiddīni, anna mādamma [Mother, I have brought rice, please prepare food]. She would then prepare food with that rice and feed the rest of us. Lastly, at around the same time, I remember getting attracted to singing mendicants who held a tambūra in their hand and came begging on the streets. I also remember the song that they sang.

Interview, February 25th, 2017

¹⁶ Śrāvaṇa is the fifth month in the Hindu lunar calendar. Usually it falls between the months August and September of the Gregorian calendar.

Thus, he commenced his life story, chuckling and humming the mendicants’ song, *śrīnivāsa nī pai anudinamu dhyānamu ceyuṭaku* (O Śrīnivāsa, to meditate upon thee, may my mind be fixed)’ (Transcription 15).

Voice

Shri ni va - sa ni pai a nu din na mu dhya- na mu che yu ta

Vce.

ku

Transcription 15 Mendicant’s Song Śrīnivāsa Nī Pai

While my father narrated this story, there was not even a semblance of pain, regret or ‘would have, could have, should have’ emotion on his face, but he transported me back in time to the old Mysore of the early 20th century with the ease of a seasoned story teller, which is what theater is all about, after all. I was born and raised in Mysore myself. The hospital in which I was born, called the ‘Kamamma Hospital’, still remains one of the important landmarks in Mysore (even though it was shut down shortly after I was born and has now been turned into a cowshed). When my father reminisced about his childhood, I could take a virtual walk in those areas and vicariously live his past. His house was in a locality called *sunṇada keri* which derived its name perhaps because it was home to a large number of limestone processing industries. Later he said he had moved into another location near *tyāgarāja* road, near *subbarāyana kere* shown in the Figure 17 (googlemaps, 2018).

My father, Vidwan R. Paramashivan was born on 29th September 1931, as the only male child to Brahmin parents Ramakrishnan and Rukminamma, in Mysore, India. His birthdate has been

debated upon in his own family. According to his mother he was born in 1931, but the birth certificate and his educational records show that he was born in the year 1936. However, his references to the movies, theater companies, musical scenarios and first-hand accounts of artistic and cultural events of those days, clearly indicate that he is more likely to have been born in the year 1931 than 1936. Since record keeping was not seriously followed in India during that time, especially in poor households, it is possible that his date might have been misrepresented in all the records later¹⁷.

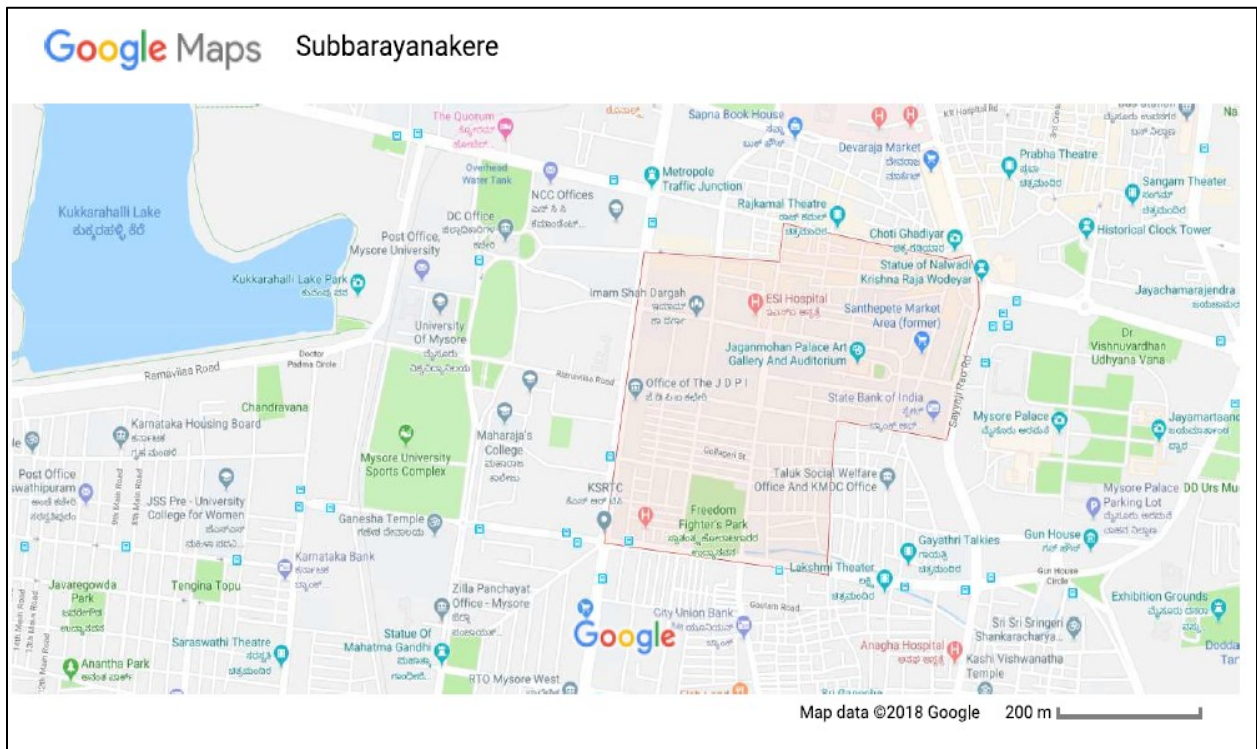


Figure 17: Subbarayana Kere Area Mysore, India (Google maps, 2018)

¹⁷ I witnessed another example of this lackadaisical attitude towards record keeping by the parents or elderly members of the family in those times when my eldest aunt, my mother, my younger aunt and youngest uncle, all of whom had many years of gap between their births, retired on the same day, because they all had the same birth dates in their records, which could not be altered later.

My grandfather was a poor temple priest in the famous *Cāmundi* Hills, Mysore, who is accused, by my father and his siblings, of subjecting my grandmother to an excruciatingly painful lifestyle and austerities which included walking for many miles to fetch water from a temple pond at 4 AM ensuring that she did not fall in the line of sight of people from the *pancama varṇa* (untouchables). When my grandfather was convinced beyond reasonable doubt, that his wife could not comply with the strict oppressive regimen he had imposed upon her, he immediately abandoned her and all his children through her and remarried later. Thus, began the life of my father, his four sisters, and my divorced grandmother who worked hard to support the family of 5 children and herself, who were stripped of all kinds of support—financial, emotional and protective support—from my grandfather.

Socio-political-cultural Climate of Mysore during the 1930s

Before embarking upon the study of modern Kannada theater, it is important to briefly study the peculiar characteristics and socio-political-cultural milieu of the early 20th century Mysore in which Paramashivan grew up.

As mentioned earlier in the introduction, the erstwhile princely state of Mysore had fought fiercely against the British during the 18th century under Hyder Ali's rule and later under his son, a controversial king in the memories of Mysore denizens (Sampath, 2015), Tipu Sultan, who had an unbridled revulsion for the British (Lohuizen, 1961:2-22). By the end of 18th century, after the last Anglo-Mysore war, the British installed Krishnaraja Wodeyar III, a descendant of the old royal family of Mysore, the Wodeyars, as a titular king and Poornaiah, who had served as a minister under Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan, was made the Dewan-regent (Minister) for the young prince.

Initially ruling Mysore indirectly, the British took over direct administration between 1831 and 1881. At the dawn of twentieth century, however, according Meera Sebastian, Mysore was being venerated as the the brightest jewel in the British crown earning the distinction as the best administered state or a ‘Model state’, investing in industries, agriculture, healthcare, sanitation and education. Mysore had completely suffered and recovered from the five most terrible famine outbreaks during 1875-1900. The tribute to be paid to the British was reduced from Rs. 34 lakhs (\$50,882) to the previous 24 ½ lakhs (\$36,665), which the Mysore state continued to pay until 1947 (Sebastian, 1992). The imperial power was busy educating the Maharajas of Mysore to make them into ‘English Gentlemen’. Mysore, which already bore a legacy of a glorious history, had transformed itself into a pivotal site of royal patronage for arts, music, dance and literature. Music (particularly Veena), dance (*bharatanātya*) and paintings of Mysore had created a distinct brand identity of their own and were popular in other parts of India as ‘*Mysore śaili* or *Mysore Bāni* (The Mysore Style)’. As it was discussed earlier, Mysore had become an unparalleled cultural epicenter and a culture exchange platform that attracted the most elite artists and litterateurs from different parts of the country, simultaneously witnessing a rapid growth of a strong nationalistic sentiment from some factions of nationalists who were collaborating with the pan Indian freedom struggle. The princely Mysore state, albeit being a subordinate to the British, was slowly trying to establish its own federal sovereignty (Devi, 1997; Rathan, 1995).

Summarizing this situation, historian Raju (2007) writes “The History of Mysore kingdom is unique and significant from the historical perspective of India. Its historical heritage is a synthesis of Folk and main stream (Shishta) cult, traditional and modern concepts, and Eastern and Western ideology. Thus, the traditional and cultural identity of Karnataka is inextricably interwoven with

the history of Mysore. Hence, Mysore the capital of the Wodeyar dynasty is generally known as the cultural capital of Karnataka”. She further argues that the model state image of Mysore was due to its able Dewans such as Rangacharulu, K. Sheshadri Iyer, Mirza Ismail, and Sir M. Vishweshwaraiah, who invested all their efforts by utilizing “whatever limited opportunities” were provided by the British.

Paramashivan’s Initiation into Theater

Thus, Paramashivan grew up in a socially, politically, economically and culturally charged atmosphere, but born under humble circumstances to poor Brahmin parents. His ultra conservative father had deserted his mother, who worked as a teacher in a local school to feed the family.

Recognizing his talent to sing, a gentleman named Kittu (a shortened version of the popular south Indian name Krishnamurthy) took him to Bangalore and enrolled him in the famous Chamundeshwari company.

He was fondly called ‘Ubbu hallu Kitta’ (Kittu with protruding teeth) to distinguish him from ‘Kothi Kitta’ (Kitta who looked like a monkey). Kittu Maama (Kittu’s uncle) worked as a finance clerk for the famous theater company owned and run by Gubbi Veerannanavar, called ‘Gubbi Channa Basaveshwara Nataka Company’. Kittu Maama used to live in Bangalore, where Mr. Gubbi Veeranna had built a theater near a majestic area on Subedarchatram Road (Figure 18). It was in the year 1935 that Kittu Maama took me to his house in Bangalore, gave me castor oil head bath¹⁸, which was a rare luxury for me. I do remember resisting and crying because the water was a tad too hot when he gave me bath. Later he accompanied me to the famous Chamundeshwari drama company, where I was auditioned by some senior actors who were impressed with my ability to sing and deliver the dialogues at such a young age and I was appointed immediately as a child artist. Back then all the members of the theater troupe used to be either from Brahmin community or Lingayat community. People from other castes were appointed much later”. When asked why there was not a universalistic recruitment procedure, he replied, “Purity of diction was of paramount importance in theater. Only Brahmins and Lingayats possessed the correct diction for Kannada language. Others would say ‘ālu hanna’ as opposed to ‘hālu anna’ (hālu:milk, anna:rice).

Interview during March 8th, 2017

¹⁸ Oil head bath is given usually on auspicious days and festivities to mark the coming of good times.

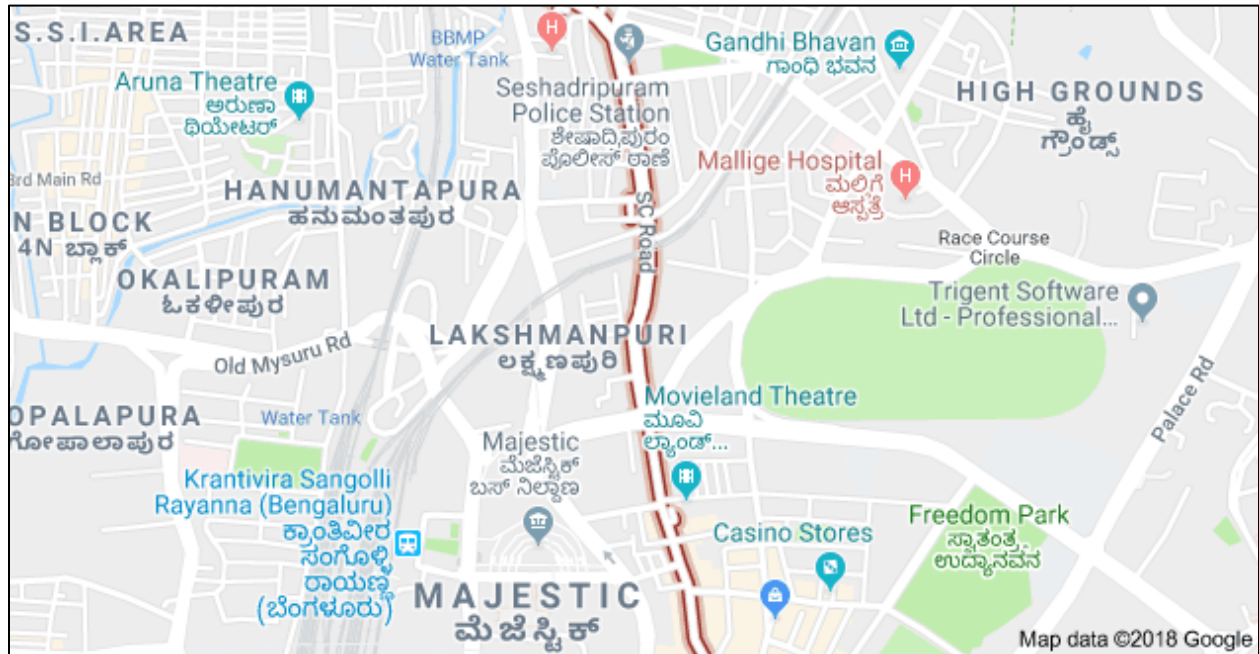


Figure 18: Subedarchatram Road, Bangalore, India (Source: Google maps, 2018)

Paramashivan firmly believes that it was the *pronunciation* that alienated people from other castes from the theater and the diction is primarily responsible for this rather unusual restriction on recruitment policy in the theater companies. This Brahmins and Lingayats only policy in theater recruitment might be because when the king started his drama company, the plays were all enacted by his court poets and musicians, who were all mostly Brahmins or from the upper echelons in the society. Brahmins undoubtedly enjoyed the primary position in the hierarchy of castes but being a Brahmin in theater came with a price. As Gist (1954) notes, the caste system even though prevalent in the entire country, was most prominently and overwhelmingly conspicuous in Mysore and Tamil Nadu with a highly complex, interwoven social strata and a wide array of sub-castes. The hierarchy was well defined with Brahmins at the pinnacle and depending on the economic status the hierarchical distance within the non-brahmin castes varied significantly. Even within

Brahmins, there was a hierarchy, for example, Sudhamani (2002:895) describes the prejudice towards Muguru Karnataka Brahmins who were deemed as cursed by other Brahmins in colonial Mysore. She writes “The discrimination was so serious that if other Brahmins caught sight of these Muguru Karnataka Brahmins in the afternoon they would take a bath because seeing these...was considered a pollution”.

Since both Brahmins and Lingayats form the upper echelons in the societal hierarchy today, I inquired, “*hāgidre nātakadavriḡe tumba gaurava ittā?* (Does it mean, the theater artists enjoyed a lot of respect then?)”. He answered with a disarming simplicity and a charming frankness, “*khandita illa* (Definitely not)”. According to him theater artists had to face the worst kind of condescension and humiliation in the society. Despite being born in upper-caste Brahmin families or Lingayat families, theater was strictly not acceptable as a respectful profession in the society. “Theater artists were often referred to with the disrespectful epithet *nātakadavaru* (those from the theater) and being *nātakadavru* meant a one-word obituary, a total loss of all the prospects - professional, moral, social and even matrimonial. ‘*nātakadavanige heṇṇu kodo badalu, kuttige hisuki bāvige taḷḷi* (Rather than offering your daughter to a theater person for marriage, wring her neck and push her into the well)’, was the popular sentiment regarding theater artists in those days”, he explained with a mixed sense of pride and self-deprecation.

The social status bestowed upon theater artists as explained by my father comes as no surprise. Even though music and dance were already being appropriated by movements of nationalism, drama was left out. Theater artists of modern Kannada theater were akin to their counterparts in the Elizabethan theater era, in which theater artists were treated with suspicion and condescension,

and even talented theater artists were overworked and spent their entire life in poverty (Yance, 1997). Women were not allowed on the stage but could only attend the shows. It is interesting to note that social norms that were relaxed by the late 16th century in England remained rigid in the British ruled colony even in the 20th century.

In my father's case, he had to pay a heavy price of giving up his theater profession and taking up an alternate profession as a high school teacher, which paid him less salary and gave him much less visibility as a performing artist. "I could marry your mother only after I got a teaching job in a government high school. Until then my besmirched reputation as *nātakadavanu* (singular of *nātakadavaru*) haunted me in all walks of life. People were not willing to rent their houses. The drama contractors who organized tours would host us in a dilapidated house, usually in the outskirts of the city. I even remember staying many times in haunted houses. The denizens would reveal the truth only on the last day of our camp when we were about to pack up and the company was about move to the next camp", he once lamented.

His burning desire to find an identity other than the one thrust upon him by the theater profession seems to have blossomed early in his life. The social stereotyping and prejudice in a conservative society against theater personalities seem to have already laid foundation for the decline of Kannada theater. A careful examination of the connections between arts, education and the caste-system prevalent in the Hindu society in colonial Mysore reveals an extremely complex social, civil and aesthetic ambiguity that remained largely unaltered by the social changes and societal transformations brought about by colonial modernity. The social status bestowed upon theater artists as explained by my father comes as no surprise. Even though music and dance were already

being appropriated by movements of Indian nationalism, drama was edged out. Theater artists on the other hand were akin to their counterparts in the Elizabethan theater era, in which theater artists were treated with suspicion and condescension, and even talented theater artists were overworked and spent their entire life in poverty (Yance, 1997). Women were not allowed on the stage but could only attend the shows. It is interesting to note that social norms that were relaxed by the late 16th century in England remained rigid in the British ruled colony even in the 20th century.

Ikegame (2007) quoting Louis Dumont's 1970 controversial work *Homo Hierarchicus* writes "The hierarchical structure of caste system is based on a single principle; the opposition of the pure and the impure. Those who engage in impure activities must reconcile themselves to an inferior status in relationship to Brahmins whose main concern is to keep their purity". This theory of Brahmin centric caste-system view has been opposed by anthropologists whom Ikegame herself refers to on many occasions. She seems to favor Dirks' (1987) ethnohistorical work in which Dirks argues, using the dance tradition in *Pudukottai* district in Tamil Nadu as an example, that there was a strong interlink between religion, ritual and royalty which remained politically neutral in the pre-colonial India but was undermined by the British who further complicated the social system by inventing and promoting a caste system with Brahmins at the helm of affairs. It is interesting to note that Brahmins themselves were no exception to this principle of 'purity'. Thus, Paramashivan was a classic case of a poor Brahmin who took to theater for livelihood, and in the process got ousted from his own community, someone who later gave up his passion and profession, temporarily, to reclaim his lost Brahminical identity.

“Do you remember your first performance?”, I inquired.

“Of course, I clearly remember my first performance. It was in the year 1935, after I was appointed at the Chamundeshwari company with the referral of Kittu Maama. I was playing bālakana pātra (young boy’s role) as Cārudatta’s son Roha Sena in the play Vasanta Sena. It was a scene in which my father Cārudatta, who is sentenced to death by the law, is being taken to guillotine by katukaru (executioners/butchers) for execution by beheading. My role involved pleading the butchers to spare my father by singing two songs and saying two lines of dialogues. I had perfectly said my lines and had sung the song. But when I looked at the executioners who were clad in black clothes, with artificial crooked teeth and their faces painted black, I got so terrified that I screamed in fear ‘Kittu maama, Kittu maama’, which generated unintended humor in the audience in that moment. Nevertheless, the audience liked my singing and role so much that a couple of rich folks in the audience, impressed with my performance, gave me silver coins of Rs. 3. Do you know the worth of Rs. 3 then? “omdu rupāyige hadināru śeru koyambuttūr saṅṅakki sikkuttidda kāla adu (Those were the days when you could buy sixteen Śeru¹⁹ of superior quality rice from Koyambuttur for one rupee)”.

Interview during March 8th, 2017

Neither will You Ever Learn Nor would I Ever Forget

Paramashivan started his career in the theater at the age of four, a tender age when the faculties that decide likes and dislikes are yet to develop, only because he did not want to die of hunger. As a consequence, his formal education took a backseat. Whenever he disciplined me in my childhood, his constant rant used to be “*namma yogyate ge ond slate kodsavru gati iralilla namage* (For all that I am worth, I had nobody to buy me even a slate to write on when I was in school)”. He attended school for a couple of years. Recognizing his talent, the teachers promoted him from the lower secondary directly to higher secondary. But owing to his humble circumstances, inability to pay the fees, and uncertainty about the next meal, his engagement with formal education and

¹⁹ Śeru, a measure which weighed a little more than a kilogram, was common even during my childhood in the eighties. This precious gift of three rupees only meant that he had not only won the hearts of his audience but also didn’t have to worry about his meals for the next few days.

training could not be sustained. Since he was not entirely indispensable in the theater, he was getting only casual, occasional and poorly paid acting assignments in small and amateur drama companies as a child artist and he had to travel to different places in search of employment from one theater company to the other. Thereafter, he never had a second encounter with formal education. After a tremendous gap of thirty years in his formal education and training, he studied privately and passed matriculation, pre-university and started an MA program in Mysore university which he didn't complete, and this brought his second phase of formal education to a formal end. However, to become a high school teacher in music, a matriculation along with senior grade examination which is the equivalent of BA music was the expected qualification. Since he had passed Vidvat which is the equivalent of a MA in Music, along with matriculation, he got the job of a high school teacher.

In Brahmin families, importance of education is emphasized clearly right from the childhood. During the late 19th century and the early 20th century in colonial India, Brahmins seem to have become more sympathetic to English language and Western education than others. Recently Chowdhary (2017), examining the history of higher education policy in India, stated that in 1800 that the British officer Charles Grant started advocating English education in India to open the native Indians to a “world of new ideas”, “help in the dissemination of the Bible and other Christian texts” and “facilitate imparting knowledge of European modern science” (See Choudhary, 2017:9). Some of the controversial figures such as Macaulay further emphasized the need for creating “a class of persons, (who are) Indian in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” (Chaudhary, 2017:12). Furthermore, following Lord Hardinge's declaration in 1844 that English-educated Indians will get priority in government appointments, Brahmins who

until then prided themselves as masters of Sanskrit, now shifted their loyalty to English. He writes “Prior to British rule in India, there were long stretches of time when Indian civilization lived with one or the other elite language of power. For centuries, Sanskrit was the language of power/knowledge. Texts were composed in Sanskrit, which remained the preserve of Brahmins... With Macaulay’s advocacy and Bentinck’s decision, English became the new Brahminical thread of status and power in a new India. It created a new power elite, and English became the central tool of acquiring, retaining, and asserting power for this new Anglophone Brahminical elite” (Chaudhary, 2017:13). Yogesha (2007) observes that following the priority for English-educated Indians in government jobs, conflict between Mysore Brahmins and Madras Brahmins to fill the civil service jobs in the early 20th century led to the formation of caste associations. These associations championing the interest of backward communities gave impetus to backward class movement in Mysore. The movement started as Mysore for Mysoreans and slowly extended its scope by demanding equal rights, social and economic upliftment benefits for all the communities, not just the English-educated Brahmins. This movement led to opening the Mysore Civil Service exam to all the citizens of India. Noted historian from Kerala, India, Shankarankutty Nair (1982) reports that Brahmin candidates secured 15 out of 16 positions in the Mysore civil service exams held during 1910-1920.

The literature discussing the cultural characteristics, occupational orientation, education and social status of different castes in India under colonial rule has unequivocally affirmed that education was a prerogative of mostly a selected few upper-caste communities, particularly Brahmins. Chitra (1972) examines the relationship between education and the society in Mysore in the late 19th century until India attained independence in 1947, writing that “...Western education based on

universalistic criteria of recruitment (implicit in which was the idea of equality) was introduced into Mysore society...men of upper castes. As such, the introduction of Western education in many senses posed a threat to the functioning of the traditional order and the values cherished”.

Western education was introduced to Mysore society in 1838 when Major General Frazer started the first English school at the behest of the King of Mysore. Christian missionaries followed suit by establishing ‘Anglo-vernacular schools’ in which English was taught as a language but the medium of instruction was the regional ‘vernacular’ language Kannada. Chitra observes that these schools were not readily accepted by the public, first because people still preferred to follow their traditional occupational profession, and second because people feared ‘conversion to Christianity’. The first few to enter these English schools were however the Brahmins who found this education attractive because it involved mainly scholarly pursuits and administration, which coincided with their traditional occupation. In addition to offering new economic opportunities, it also helped them to secure their position of prestige and authority in the society. This phenomenon has been further studied by Gist (1954), who conducted a study in Mysore and Bangalore, to estimate the caste-wise percentage of population who had not inherited the occupation of their father. It was found that by 1951, more than 82 percent of Brahmin families had discontinued the traditional occupation of their family. For other castes this percentage was much lower.

Amongst Brahmin elites from the pre-independent Mysore, even to this day, it is quite common to laud somebody’s academic achievement by saying “*avaru British kālada BA Honors mādidāre*” (he /she has done BA Honors during the British rule). This educated elitism, and the apathy for the lack of it therein, among Brahmins continued even during Paramashivan’s childhood so much so that he was made to feel inferior as a school dropout; formal education and training remained one of the unfulfilled desires of his life. Even though he earned fame, fortune and many accolades,

including the highest award for performing arts conferred by the Republic of India, the ‘*Kendra Sangīta Nātaka Academy*’ award, for his contributions to theater from the Honorable President of India, Late Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam (Figure 19), at the mere mention of MA and BA Honors, his face turns pale, clearly showing signs of suppressed disappointment.



Figure 19: Left-Honorable Former President of India Late APJ Abdul Kalam and third from left Paramashivan after receiving the Sangeet Natak Academy Award, 2005

During a telephone conversation in December 2017, I had demanded an explanation for why neither he nor mother stopped me from pursuing my second PhD in music. He had replied thus,

“As long as I was in the theater profession, people would ridicule me as ‘nātakadavnu’ and treated me with contempt. It was a steep climb before I got all the recognitions. I never had any formal education and I had to do all my studies privately. I have told you how I was thrown out of my school when I was in class two in 1936 because I could not afford to pay the monthly fees. My next meal was uncertain, and I used to sleep on railway platforms. I did not want the same fate to befall you. So, your mother and I decided that we will invest all our energies and efforts in educating you and your sister. Study as long and as much as you wish, and I won’t stop you.” He continued

proudly “It seems you had asked your mother not to call you till your exams are over. Thank God you are not an artist like me. For an artist, every performance, everyday is an exam and you would get the results immediately by the applause of the audience or by a marked absence of it.”

In Paramashivan’s case, however, his Brahmin identity was of very little help as far as his formal education and training was concerned.

‘Without any formal education, how did you complete your matriculation, pre-university and how did you enrol for MA degree?’ I asked curiously.

“I owe it all to Kannada theater and my music training. Since I could not afford to buy books and other stationary, I had practiced and memorized almost all the drama plots and more than 2000 raṅgaḡiteḡaḡu (theater songs). Kannada theater material, music, prose and poetry had already made me a master of Kannada language even without any formal education. To pass matriculation, firstly, I had to learn the English language. My travels to different drama camps by train was very helpful in this endeavor. I remembered the English alphabets that I had learned in school. I always had this lingering doubt in my mind, ‘How could you write in English with only 26 letters when we require 52 letters in Kannada?’. To find an answer to this question, I started reading the railway station name boards and signs in both English and Kannada and compare them against each other. It used to be my favorite pastime during my travels. For example I read Maddur in English. I figured out that m and a come together to produce the sound of ma and so on. I am a self-taught English educated man who could never score more than 35 marks in any of the English exams throughout my academic career²⁰. In fact, I married your mother because she is a triple graduate [A reference to people who have earned a masters and a bachelors] who could read, write and speak fluent English. My mother taught me some elementary geometry, construction of circumcircles and incircles, problems in algebra and mathematical aptitude involving ‘time and work’. I studied some science, social studies on my own. All this put together along with music as my major, I passed matriculation with a first class”

Interview during March 8th, 2017

This narrative clearly explains his social conditioning, his frustration of having lost the social and economic opportunities that other English-educated men of his times enjoyed because of which he had to live with a wounded *amour propre*, until he got all the recognitions due to him as an artist. As Chowdhary (2017) writes “The social and political function of oppression and exploitation that was once effectively performed by Sanskrit and knowledge texts in Sanskrit and in a lesser way by Persian in a certain period was now taken over by English and Western knowledge as it came

²⁰ 35 is the minimum passing marks out of 100.

to Indians through the medium of English”. These factors slowly drove modern Kannada theater into an abyss of social and economic irrelevance. When inquired why he did not have access to formal education despite being a Brahmin, he replied thus,

“Brahmins were respected in the society, no doubt. But they were not affluent. If you read any religious story in the purāna, it always starts with ‘ondu ūrinalli obba bada brāhmananiddanu (Once there lived a poor Brahmin in a village)’. My mother used to work as a teacher for ‘badali kelsa’ (substitute teacher) and had rented a house for Rs. 3 per month. She enrolled me in the primary school on the 100 feet road in Mysore. I was given double promotion A class to 1st standard. A class and B class were the equivalents of Lower and Upper Kindergarten respectively. I still remember all my lessons, my school prayer and my class teacher”.

“What was your school prayer like?”, I asked.

“The school prayer was also the anthem of the princely state of Mysore. All the schools in Karnataka would commence everyday by singing this. It is called kāyau śrī gaurī. After singing the school prayer we would march in groups into our classroom singing one more song pāhipadmabandhu netra bhārgavī manohara which was composed into a marching tune”. Nobel winning poet Rabindranath Tagore’s famous Rabindra Sangīt composition ‘ānondoloke Mongololoke birājo sopnosundoro’ is based on this song. It is also argued that this song also inspired him to compose the Indian national anthem ‘Jana gaṇa mana adhināyaka jayahe’.

“For my 2nd standard I joined another school in ‘hasuvina karoti (Cowshed belonging to the royal family where all the cows belonging to the Mysore palace were stationed)’. Here, due to the compulsion of earning my livelihood and hence the commitments in the theater, I was very irregular to school and missed the classes frequently. Miffed by my irregularity, my class teacher, Tirumamma, would condemn me in front of everyone in the class saying ‘hogo hogo nātakadalli kuṇi hogo, nīnu adakke mātra lāyakku (Go away, Act and dance in drama. You are fit only for that)’. She had also composed a funny song exclusively for me in Telugu language. This phase marked the end of my formal schooling”.

Voice

nee ku patamce ppi naa ku manampocu nee ku va cce le du

Vce.

naa ku mar ce le du

Transcription 16: The discouragingly funny song composed Paramashivan’s class teacher

The song is in a colloquial dialect of Telugu spoken by Brahmins in Mysore region, ‘nīku pāṭham ceppi nāku mānaṃ poci, nīku vacce ledu nāku marace ledu (*I lost my respect by teaching you lessons, that Neither will you ever learn nor will I ever forget!*).

Formative Years in Chamundeshwari Company

As mentioned in the earlier chapter, Chamundeshwari (cāmunḍeśvarī in Kannada) company was originally affiliated to the Mysore royal palace. *Camunḍeśvarī* is the presiding tutelary deity of Mysore state and the family deity of the Mysore royal palace. *Cāmunḍi* is a fierce form of Goddess *śakti* held in reverence by both the denizens and all the members of the royal family in Mysore. Most court composers have composed prolifically glorifying Goddess *cāmunḍi* who got the name by slaying demons *caṇḍa and munḍa*, who were generals of demon kings *śumbha and niśumbha*, according to the religious text called ‘*Devi mahātmyam* (Glory of the Goddess)’. Any endeavour undertaken by the royal palace used to be named after *cāmunḍi*, including the theater company. However due to economic crisis in the palace, when the king of Mysore relinquished the ownership of the company, Maḷavaḷḷi Sundaramma, one of the most popular actors and a scholarly musician from the *devadāsī* community, assumed the responsibility in 1938-39.

“*After my successful performance in the very first play, I was appointed as a fulltime employee of Chamundeshwari theater company in 1938. This company, like most of the theater companies in those days, operated a shareholder system. Each member would be given a share commensurate to his importance, role in the play and other responsibilities. Kottūr Cannabasappa (often referred to as Kottūrappanavru), one of the most famous actors of that era and the protagonist (often referred to as rājā part) in Chamundeshwari company used to get the maximum of 8-10% share of the total profit (which was the total profit minus expenses incurred by the company), followed by the harmonium player earning 6-8% and my share in the company was a meagre 2.5%. When Maḷavaḷḷi Sundaramma took over the company as the proprietor, she for the first time introduced a monthly salary system and my salary was fixed at Rs. 10 per month. My elder sister R Nagaratnamma, who joined three years after I joined Chamundeshwari company, quit the job because she was offered Rs. 20 for a very big role, but I decided to stay on for less salary, only to make ends meet. During my stint in Chamundeshwari company, I was given bālakana pātra (young boy’s roles), mostly opposite Kottūrappa, in many plays. Mostly they used to play paurānika nātaka (based on the religious texts called purānas) and the themes were generally chosen from the epic Mahābhārata. In the play Vasanta Sena, Kottūrappanavaru used to play Cārudatta and I played his son Rohasena; in ‘Dānaśūra Karṇa (The valorous and generous Karṇa)’, he played Karṇa and I used to play Karṇa’s son Vṛśaketu; in Gaya Caritre, I played Abhimanyu, or*

Āñjaneya, Puruśāmṛga or Sahadeva in Rājasūya Yāga and Nārada in Tilottame, Tukārām's son Mahādeva in Santa Tukārām, Kabīr Dāsa's son in Santa Kabīr Dās. In the play Rukmāngada Caritra, I played Rukmāngada's son Dharmāngada and so on. Each of these roles had 8-10 lines of dialogues and a few songs”.

Interview during March 8th, 2017

According to my father, Maḷavallī Sundaramma for the first time introduced the salary system in the drama company. Prior to that theater companies used to operate on shareholder system, much like the system that was followed for a long time in the Shakespearean theaters in London. It is likely that kings of Mysore borrowed the strategy of shareholder system-based operation of theater companies from the British because Camaraja Wodeyar X, the king who started drama company in Mysore was the first king to receive English education.

“Do you remember all your songs and dialogues?”, I interjected.

“Of course, I do. How could I forget them, ever?”. I had to wait for a couple of weeks before I could discuss this subject again with him. The following interviews happened at the rehearsal venue when we both used to be working on my scenes before the arrival of other artists. He preferred to sing these songs playing the leg harmonium. He hummed the songs from the plays he had acted as a child artist. I will discuss the play, its plot and the songs some of them in the following sections.

Vasanta Sena

Vasanta Sena is based on the Sanskrit novel ‘*Mṛcchakaṭika* (The Little clay cart)’ by the Sanskrit poet *Śūdraka*, a prudent and erudite monarch accomplished in Mathematics, the science of erotics, and the art of training elephants. This play is supposed to have been composed in the 5th century BC (Oliver et al. 1938) since it does not comply with the rules of the play as preordained by the

Nāṭya Śāstra according to which the play should always be centered around the lives of the noble class. Richmond (1990) writes, “The Little Clay Cart paints a vivid picture of life in the ancient and culturally important city of Ujjain, North Central India.....The moral lessons which he (*Śūdraka*) draws suggests that he was no social critic in the modern sense of the term... In fact, it reminds one of the more delightful comedies of Plautus” (Also, Wilson, 1827; Keith, 1954).

Voice

ay ya - - ni ma ge mu gi ve - -

Vce. 4

kai yya - ay yyo pi ta na - -

Vce. 7

bi di da - - mma yya - - ba la - -

Vce. 10

na - lli da ya vi - - llave ha

Vce. 13

ay yya - - ni ma ge mu gi ve - -

Transcription 17: The very first song Paramashivan sang in 1938 ayya nimage

This play influenced a number of translations and productions in Europe, especially in France. The famous French adaptations of this play include *Le Chariot d'enfant* and *Le Chariot de terre cuite* that was produced by the Théâtre de L'ouvre in the mid 19th century. Paramashivan made his

debut in this play as a young boy of 4 years, in the scene where Cārudatta is being paraded on the streets of Ujjain while being taken for execution; his son pleads the executioners to kill him instead and release his father. The lyrics of the songs reflect exactly the same sentiments²¹.

Dāna Śūra Karṇa

The play is based on the life of *Karṇa*, the famous character of *Mahābhārata* known for his valour but much more for his self-destructive generosity. *Karṇa*'s glorification seems to be a purely 20th century narrative, not so much in the original *Mahābhārata*, but has had a perennial appeal to the tastes of the Indian masses because of the growing popularity of the *backward class movement* that was started to oppose the upper-caste hegemony, because *Karṇa* is a tragic hero and a victim of oppression because of his lowly birth in charioteer's household whose character and valor were subsumed by his arch rival, upper-caste *Arjuna*. His stories are woven into numerous film scripts in many languages.

De Bruin and Brakel-Papenyzen(1992) while comparing the exposition of *Karṇa*'s death in the Indian *kūttu* tradition and the Javanese *Wayang Wong* characterize *Karṇa* as a 'lavishly generous' man who gives away his armour like skin to Lord *Indra* and even while lying mortally wounded in the battlefield he offers the essence of the merits of all his good karma to *Kṛṣṇa* who appears disguised as an old, poor Brahmin.

²¹ Plot of *Vasantasena*: The plot is based on a fictional story centered on a young Brahmin merchant *Cārudatta* of Ujjain, who has been rendered impecunious due to his generosity to profusion and falls in love with a beautiful courtesan *Vasanta Sena*. Their love life and existence are both threatened by an impulsive, half-lunatic and vulgar courtier *Śakāra*, who is violently persuading *Vasanta Sena* but to no avail. When *Śakāra* makes forceful advances, she slips inside *Cārudatta*'s house in the darkness of night. He swears an undying hatred against *Cārudatta* for offering refuge to *Vasanta Sena*, strangles and buries *Vasanta Sena* and blames *Cārudatta* for the murder, then exercises political influence on the judge to condemn *Cārudatta* to death by impalement. *Vasanta Sena*, who is saved by a Buddhist monk enters the scene at an opportune moment before the execution and exonerates *Cārudatta*.

In this play Paramashivan played the role of *Karṇa*'s son, *Vṛśaketu* who promises his mother *Somaprabhe* to behead *Arjuna* to avenge his father's killing in the battle field but is pacified by *Pāṇḍavās* and *Kṛṣṇa* in the climax of the play.

"I remember playing Vṛśaketu in Mandya [A small town, famous for sugar industries, 40 kilometers north of Mysore] camp. The play would commence at 10 PM and end at 2.30 AM or sometimes 3 AM depending on the mood of the actors. If the actors were in good mood, they would be more creative, improvise more and sing more variations, extending the play by half an hour more. The theater in Mandya was setup behind the railway track. After my last scene at about 2:30 AM, I had to go out in the open space to remove my makeup, which was an annoyingly elaborate procedure. First you had to massage the oil into your face, hands and feet. Remove all the excess makeup, wipe it first with a dry piece of cloth, prepared and kept ready for each artist, everyday, before the play commenced. Then you had to rinse with warm water and again wipe it all with another piece of dry cloth. Incidentally, exactly at this time, the Bangalore-Mysore overnight shuttle train used to pass by on the track. I used to get excited watching the train every night, the same train that would become my house later when I had no place to live".

Interview during March 8th, 2017

'Didn't you have makeup artists to help you with it?', I asked.

"No. Makeup artists was a privilege of senior artists. But in big companies like Chamundeshwari company, the makeup used to be ready for different colors and shades. Smaller companies would just mix white lead powder with water and pannīru (rose-water used for fragrance) and make it into a big ball of dough. You had to mix it with the color of your choice and apply it on your face, neck, hands and feet, essentially on every part of your body that is exposed to the audience so that your face color matches with the rest of your body. Since there was no electricity during that time, makeup and costumes were the only aspects of visual spectacles. Costumes included ornaments, headdress, crowns, weapons like swords, bows and arrows, each with its own symbolic significance in identifying the

character in the play. The lead actors used to have their own wardrobe. For everyone else, costumes were separately sewn with adjustable drawstrings to adjust the fitting.”.

Interview during March 8th, 2017

‘Didn’t you have electricity, then?’

“No. There was no electricity and hence no light. Ten petromax lights would be hung on either side of the stage one behind the other. That served as lighting on the stage. There were no dimmers and no transfer of scenes until electricity was affordable”, he had explained.

Context of Dharma Rāja Rājasūya Yāga

This play is again based on *Mahābhārata*; its theme revolves around the sacrifice called ‘*Rājasūya Yāga*’ conducted by *Dharma Rāja*, the eldest brother among the *Pāṇḍavas*. This sacrifice is mentioned in Vedic texts and was usually performed as an imperial consecration sacrifice by a king as a symbolic acknowledgement of unopposable sovereignty in the region. This episode is of considerable significance in *Mahābhārata*, since it is during this sacrifice that *Duryodhana*, while taking a tour of palace of illusions, falls into a water pond thinking that it is solid floor which marks the beginning for *Duryodhana*’s sworn hatred for *Draupadi*.

This and the plays mentioned above were performed till 1942 when Chamundeshwari company eventually shut down. In this play Paramashivan performed the roles of either *Āñjaneya* or *Puruśāmṛga* or *Sahadeva* depending on the needs of the troupe. Each role requires singing 2-3 catchy songs and a few lines of dialogues. Interestingly, *Āñjaneya*’s role employs a very popular song in the South Indian classical music, ‘*marivere dikkevarayya rāma*’ set to *rāga Shanmukhapriya*, composed by the renowned post-trinity era composer *Paṭṭaṇaṁ Subramaṇya Iyer*, a disciple of Saint *Tyāgarāja*. *Puruśāmṛga*’s role employs a traditional Hindustani *bandish*, a

North Indian classical music composition in the rāg malkauns ‘*Pagalā gana de*’. This is one of the several instances of employing classical music compositions in modern Kannada theater music.

Sahadeva’s father is the unruly demon king Jarāsandha who has captured all the subordinated kings and interred them. He is practicing an occult practice that involves sacrificing a king every new moon day to acquire supernatural powers. He is eventually slain by Bhīma with the help of Kṛṣṇa. Upon hearing the news of his father’s death, the young Sahadeva gets enraged and grudgingly decides to kill Bhīma. In the song he praises himself as the ‘*hariya mari* (Lion’s baby)’ and dares anyone who confronts him of dire consequences that he will ‘shake and silence’ the tormentor. Sahadeva also sings a traditional classical *bandish* in the rāga *Puriya Dhanashree*. However, the original composition has faded away from my father’s memory. He said “I would have told you the original composition if you had asked me 10 years earlier. I do remember Koṭṭūrappanavaru singing it during one of the rehearsals. He was trained in North Indian classical music, so he always preferred North Indian classical rāgās over the South Indian. During the rehearsals he would sing the theater song followed by its classical composition equivalent, sometimes to educate us and sometimes out of sheer enthusiasm. Even though he had a predilection for Hindustani music, he was well versed in both the styles. He had taught me a *Karnatak* music composition, Tyāgarāja’s Nagumomu’.

In addition to the above roles, Paramashivan also played minor roles in the plays *Gaya Caritre* as *Abhimanyu* and as *Nārada* in *Tilottame*. When inquired about the context and plot of these plays, he said

“*Gaya Caritre* is about *Gaya*, a devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Subhadre (Kannada word for Subhadra), along with Abhimanyu, visits *Pāṇḍavās* in the forest. Kṛṣṇa appears in Abhimanyu’s dreams. He wakes up in horror and sings a song. *Tilottame* is about the ‘*ekādaśi vrata*’²², was unique in many ways. It had elements of meta-theater (A play within play) wherein the demons Sundara and Upasundara watch the play of *Mohini-Bhasmāsura* enacted by a theater group in their palace. It is the story of how Bhasmāsura, a demon who performs severe austerities to please Lord Śiva who grants him the boon that anyone upon whose head Bhasmāsura lays his hands will burn into ashes instantly. Bhasmāsura is finally tricked by Viṣṇu in the form of *Mohini* (Enchantress), to touch his own head burning himself to ashes. I played the role of Nārada in the play within play. They used to set up another stage within the main stage for our performance”.

Life in Chamundeshwari Company and a Peek Sneak into the Royal Chambers

The years when Chamundeshwari company was active mark a very important epoch in the history of Kannada theater. Firstly, it enjoyed the rare distinction of being the only theater company to be run within the royal palace itself. It was an institution that revered, treasured and trained theater artists including actors, playwrights, musicians, dancers and stage managers. It was in theater companies like these that artists flourished and enjoyed the privileges of royal patronage.

“After my performance in Bangalore, I became officially a part of the troupe and our next camp was in Mysore 1939. When we were in Mysore, the great singer/actor Nagesh Rao joined Chamundeshwari company. Around the same time the company was asked to perform 4-5 special shows exclusively for the royal family. The entry was strictly restricted for royal family members and top officials in the palace. The maharaja and all the members of the royal family used to sit in the royal gallery behind a ‘parade (A colloquial version of the Persian word Purdah, which means screen/veil)’ made of bamboo. It was strictly forbidden for the artists to look at the royal gallery during or after the performance. Since I was a small boy, I could not resist the temptation to behold the King of Mysore, Maharaja Krishna

²² A ritualistic vow practiced by Hindus which involves fasting for the entire day and in some cases consumption of fruits that are only barely sufficient to sustain and spending the entire day worshipping and meditating.

Raja Wodeyar IV, who was popular among his subjects as 'Rāja Ṛṣi (Saint King)' for his just and able administration. I clandestinely glanced at the royal gallery for which I was severely rebuked after the show. The maharaja was extremely pleased with my performance. He had praised me openly among the court musicians that after many years, when I took my 'Senior Grade' Karnatak vocal examination, the examiner Mysore Veene Venkatagiriappa, who was a court musician, inquired 'So you are Paramashivan, whom His Highness praised as the 'young and most promising talent' of Kannada theater?' ”.

Interview during March 10th, 2017

He was referring to the period of 1930-40, when watching theater performances was no more the privilege of only a few selected elites in the society but had been secularized, commercialized and public ticketed shows were being performed in big halls for everyone's consumption. Therefore, the theater companies had started advertising their plays in public.

'What marketing strategies were adopted to popularize the drama, then?', I inquired.

“There was no marketing back then. The drama company would rent a tonga (a small horse carriage popular in Mysore) in the morning, advertisement boards were tied on either sides of the cart and the tonga would go around the town distributing pamphlets for the evening show. When I started playing Nārada's role in 'Tilottame', I was only four years old. The company advertisement used to have a special column for me that read 'kevala Nālakku varśada bālaka Paramashivan nāradana pātravannu nodalu mareyadiri (Do not miss the opportunity to watch a four-year-old boy Paramashivan as Nārada). It was amusing that the theater company continued to advertise this even after I turned eight years old”.

“What were Nagesh Rao's contribution to Chamundeshwari company?”

“He was an indispensable asset for the company. He was not only a seasoned actor, a popular singer but also brought with him an entire treasure of plays that were performed and popularized by the doyen of Kannada theater, Nāṭaka Śiromaṇi (The crest jewel of drama) A. V. Varadachar's Ratnavali Theatrical Company during the 1900s until his sad early demise in 1926. I used to hear from other senior actors that A. V. Varadachar was the most influential actor of his times. Nagesh Rao brought the plots of various plays such as Nirupamā, Śākuntalā, Bhakta Prahlāda, Manmatha Vijaya, Kāḷidāsa, Virāta Parva, Gul-E-Bakavali based on a Persian play bearing the same name and many more. Nirupamā, if I

remember correctly was a Kannada adaptation of some Shakespearean²³ play whose name I do not remember. It was translated by the Āsthāna Vidvān (Court Poet) Nañjanagūdu Śrīkaṇṭha Śāstri”.

Interview during March 10th, 2017

A Childhood of Torture – An Attempt to End the Life

Later, in the year 1939-40, the responsibility of running Chamundeshwari company was handed over to a rich merchant Sāhukāra Nandi Basappa for a brief while who later gave it to the renowned comedian G. Mari Rao. During this time, since my father used to be away from home, there was a local guardian in the theater who played negative roles, usually of demonesses like *Hiḍim̐ba*, *Śūrpanakha* and *Pūtani* in mythological plays. He was very cruel to my father under the pretext of disciplining him. He shared his hardships without any hesitation and continued thus,

“Unable to endure the abuse and gruesome torture, I had made multiple attempts to end my life to escape the terrifying clutches of my guardian, but in vain. During one such attempt, I took a train to Nanjanagud 23 kilometers south of Mysore and planned to commit suicide by jumping into the river. But a police officer who spotted me on the banks of the river Kapila arrested me and sent me back to Mysore with a warning”. After he returned the hardships were more intense and my father was eventually liberated only after he joined the cinema in 1945.

“Marirāyaru was hoping to make a good deal of money in Tirthahaḷḷi camp because the company had done Makkām²⁴ (camp or to stay put) during the eḷḷu amāvāsya jātre, a fare that takes place around the auspicious day called ‘eḷḷu amāvāsya (sesame full moon)’, a thanksgiving festival celebrated by the farmers in Karnataka, which usually attracts large crowds from across the state. Much to his disappointment, it did not turn out to be as lucrative as he had hoped it to be. From Tirthahaḷḷi, we went to a nearby town called Koppa where he incurred more losses and with that Chamundeshwari company had to be temporarily shut down. Both my sister Nagaratamma and

²³ This is not a play based on William Shakespeare but a translation of English novelist George William Macarthur Reynold’s 1839 novel ‘Robert Macaire or The French Bandit in England. Refer to Appendix for more details.

²⁴ Makkām is a corrupt form of the Arabic word Maqam, which means location/position, that might have been introduced to Mysore Kannada lexicon during Hyder Ali’s and Tipu Sultan’s reign. In theater

I had nowhere to go [This was during 1941-42], we started frequenting amateur ad hoc theater companies, to stay afloat”.

He referred to these amateur companies as ‘*chilre (small denomination) company*’, a common phrase used in old Mysore to refer to something that is cheap and non-serious. The economic, political or social causes that led to the royal palace relinquishing the theater are hard to explain. A study of the economic factors of 1900-1940 in Mysore does not show anything unusual such as an economic crisis or infrastructure expansion which might have propelled a sudden closure of the theater company. Mysore had prided itself to be the first princely state to have introduced an ordinance to abolish the *devadāsī*²⁵ system, but the Chamundeshwari company had continued till 1939 under the royal patronage which obviates any social causes for the closure. However, the growing sense of nationalism in Mysore had made the Indian National Congress the party of the masses in the late 1930s which changed the social, economic and political spheres in Mysore (Rathan, 1995). This might have influenced the ruling Maharaja to shift his focus on national politics and ignore a theater company which was not perhaps bringing the necessary profits to the state treasury that would make it worthy of continuing.

Conclusion

The knowledge worlds of his childhood are nothing but the bodily reminders of the socio-political structure of the princely state of Mysore which was under the colonial rule until 1947. Clearly, the modern Kannada theater was dominated by performers from the upper echelons of the society, but

²⁵ A social practice in which girls were dedicated to the service of temples) as early as 1909 while Madras presidency passed the bill in 1947.

these performers were ostracized by their own community members owing to their ignominious association with the theater profession. The abandonment of other respectable professions for a profession of applying greasepaint on the face endangered the social reputation, comfort and stability of the lives of theater performers. The modern Kannada theater company started by the Mysore palace experienced its first phase of decline after it lost its royal patronage and the patronage of a wealthy merchant in 1930s. However, it was resurrected temporarily due to the selfless efforts by passionate theater artists such as Malavalli Sundaramma and G. Mari Rao. The details of camps and tours as mentioned in the interviews reveal that this form of theater performance was confined only to Kannada speaking region of the erstwhile princely state of Mysore and could never rise to prominence by ascending to other dominant sites of music production. What distinguishes modern Kannada theater from mainstream classical music is the migration to urban centers. South Indian Karnatak music, on the other hand, did not suffer from the loss of royal patronage; instead, it was canonized by nationalists who conveniently shifted its focus from the divine precincts of a temple to urban business centers. As Weidman (2006) writes, “In a very real sense, this meant a shift from compositions tied to the context of their performance toward compositions that stood free of such social contexts and instead had their origins on a personalized, timeless devotion”. Such a disassociation was not possible in modern Kannada theater. Moreover, in theater, unlike music, the language performs specific tasks in a theatrical performance in contrast to its non-linguistic performative parameters. Language is indispensable to appreciate the acting, verbal techniques, visuals and personal relationships made it a localized phenomenon. Therefore, this form of theater that descended from an illustrious lineage of composers, poets and performers associated with the royal court of Mysore was limited in its scope and reachability to a select few semi-urban towns in Southern Karnataka and could not rise to

prominence of globally renowned musical forms like the North and South Indian, mainstream classical music. In other words, Paramashivan's knowledge world was delimited by the language in which it expressed itself and remained static without an opportunity to expand its frontiers beyond the geographical boundaries in which it originated.

In the current chapter, Paramashivan's childhood, the socio-political scenario in the princely state of Mysore under the colonial rule in the early 20th century, his entry to the theater and formative years as an actor in Chamundeshwari company and his roles as a child actor, the context of the play and the causes for the shutting down of Chamundeshwari company were discussed. References were made to the lighting, makeup, stage management and other aspects of theater production in Kannada drama companies. The next chapter deals with the most important part of Paramashivan's journey in Kannada theater, his stint in different, small and lesser known, miscellaneous drama companies, leaps in his career from a child actor to a playback singer, music composer, cinema actor and eventually the beginning of his career as a harmonium player. This chapter contains mainly excerpts of the interviews which will be studied, analyzed and profiled in the later chapters.

Chapter 5

An Artist's Struggle for a Social Identity

Introduction

I have devoted this entire chapter to Paramashivan's interview in which he shares his struggle for identity as an artist in the theater world and his swim against the tide in a society stratified by caste hierarchies to reclaim his social dignity and respect. The interviews presented in this chapter will be extensively used to situate the modern Kannada theater in the historical context of cultural nationalism initiatives, gender dynamics, socio-political dimensions and colonial modernity prevalent in the state of Mysore in pre-independent India.

After Chamundeshwari drama company was shut down, my father and my aunt Nagarathnamma started frequenting smalltime amateur drama companies to earn their livelihood during 1941-42. According to my father, if you land in a job in any theater company, notwithstanding the humble living standards and the salaries, every artist is at least assured of three meals a day, theater became the most sought-after profession for the talented, hungry and the poor like himself. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the precise reasons for the sudden abandonment of the 'The Palace Company' are unknown. There are, however, letters written by the British teachers affiliated to the Royal family of Mysore, appointed specially to teach the 'British values' and the 'Gentlemanly' way of life to the Maharaja of Mysore, expressing their disapproval and resentment about Maharaja attending and watching the plays. The colonial training given to the Maharajas of Mysore, intended to transform them from clansmen to Gentlemen played an important role in helping the Maharajas belonging to the 'Urs'²⁶ community to retain their superiority by the 'tactical use of cultural capital

²⁶ A corrupt form of the word *arasa* in Kannada, meaning the King

provided by colonial modernity’, without having to interfere in the village-level politics involving the local peasants (Ikegame, 2013:53). Part of this training involved restricting the Maharajas from indulging in activities that were forbidden for the ‘Gentlemen’ in British societies. Ikegame quotes a letter by Fraser, one of the teachers of the Maharaja appointed by the British, to Maharaja’s uncle Kantaraja Urs in 1898, in which he strongly disapproves of the Maharaja attending the theatrical performances called *A Nations Drama*. He writes,

I wish to write a few words on the subject of His Highness – ‘A Nation Dramas.’ Before we went to Ooty in March, the regularity with which he attended performances in the Palace attracted my attention to the play on Saturday last, [and] suggests that the present is a suitable opportunity to express my opinion. Speaking generally, I think that the less a young boy sees of the stage the better – as theatrical performances have an exciting effect on the mind which often lasts for a long time and is not favourable to an undivided attention to work. This is the case even when the performance is intended for children and the play is of the most harmless character, and the effect produced is not merely exciting, but of distinctly undesirable kind when young boys witness dramas written for adults. What is harmless to the latter is poison to growing boys. A moment’s reflection will recall to you scenes both in Saturday’s play and in others recently acted before His Highness, the moral of which is not good for a boy just turned fourteen. I may mention that no English boy would be allowed to go to the theater at all during term time and I do not think it is good for His Highness to be kept till 2 A.M. and in holidays, the only play a boy would be taken to see, would be a pantomime or some drama, specially adapted for the young. Her Highness, I feel sure, will appreciate the point of view from which I regard this matter. I hope to be favoured with an interview before long (Ikegame 2013, 68-69).

It is possible that by the turn of the century, the Mysore royal family had become far more accepting of the British education and the ‘Gentlemanly’ way of life, which might have influenced the maharaja’s decision to transfer the management of the theater company to one of the actors.

World War II, Mysore and Kannada Theater

In Europe, following World War II, ‘Theater of the absurd’ and Brechtian theater which attempted to dramatize the literary ideas of existentialist writers became popular (Tolpin, 1968). The process

of transformation had already begun a century earlier as a result of which classical theater of Europe declined and gave way to modern theater. This period also witnessed the power of authority shifting from the high-class aristocracy to the rich and elite middle-class. The social upheavals in the society largely inspired this shift which significantly impacted the repertoire, dramatics and the style of theater performance. The directors were more concerned on the representation of the external world than the internal psyche of characters. The national liberation consciousness of the middle-class demanded realism in representation of the lives of the new, rising working-class on the stage. Therefore, theater no longer remained an entertainment enterprise but became a commercial industry marked by its own market value. In this free, open market which was uncontrolled by the rich aristocratic patronage, theater flourished as an independent entity.

The case of India was however different during the World War II. India had become an unwilling participant when Britain declared war against Germany in 1939 and dragged India by force with total disregard for the Indian public opinion. Britain achieved this by passing *Viceroyal Ordinance and Government of India Amendment Act* exercising her dominance. This act of British according to Bhattacharjee (1989:366) was "...in effect Britain's forceful assertion of her right to decide the fate of India in the way she wanted and manifestation of how powerful were the administrative, legal and financial mechanisms created for the perpetuation of imperial interests in this classic colony". The author also notes that "The failure of the Indian leaders to articulate political demands and to mobilize the masses was equally responsible for such a dismal state of affairs". The most telling and grave consequence of World War II on India was the Great Bengal Famine in 1943 which was created as a result of an artificial scarcity of food grains created by the British which left more than three million people dead. Priya (2013:603) writes "The hegemony of the colonial state manifested itself in many forms such as passive acquiescence, apathy,

submissiveness, resignation and unquestioned obedience of the colonial people to the state apparatus. The British used the state machinery for war...This created a mentality of fetters. It helped the British to use the official native structure to mobilize the people to the war front". The author also mentions about the British officers collecting war fund donations from the public by force.

During World War I, Mysore had made a monetary contribution of a total 52 Lakh Rupees for war fund (Ushadevi, 1998). Interestingly, in the context of World War II, though other parts of the nation were severely affected economically, the model princely state of Mysore seems to have remained stable during and after the war. Barton in his address to the Royal Society of Arts in 1945 reveals, "Financially the [Mysore] State is prosperous. The revenue has expanded enormously during the war years. It now stands at £6 million. There was a surplus of over a million in 1943-44". Estimating the total assets of the state to be £7 million and obliged by the help received from Mysore during the war he further says, "Help has been given in the manufacture of explosives. Some pioneer work has been done in aircraft production. Britain has every reason to be grateful for the help and the moral support she has received from Mysore in the war effort...the post-war development plans are, in point of fact, a continuation of a process that has been going on for a quarter of a century or more. The estimated cost of the new schemes is put at £150 million to be spread over ten years. The main elements in the plan are the improvement of agriculture, a great expansion of industry, the development of roads and of electric power. On the social side educational facilities are to be extended...". These observations demonstrate enduringly that Mysore remained unaffected financially post-world war II and hence modern Kannada theater could thrive unabated.

In the year 1939, when the royal palace absolved itself of all the responsibilities of Chamundeshwari company leaving it temporarily under the control of a rich merchant *Dharmapravarta Sāhukāra* Nandibasappa (Philanthropist Landlord Mr. Nandibasappa) of ‘*Sante Peṭe* (A famous market in Mysore)’, who owned businesses worth millions of rupees in the pre-independent princely Mysore. The company was later transferred to G. Mari Rao under whose proprietorship the company was temporarily shut down after a few camps.

During this interim break, when Chamundeshwari company had temporarily suspended its ventures, both Paramashivan and his sister Nagaratnamma, spent some time in a small town called Fraser Peṭe²⁷ in 1942-45. This town was named after Major General Fraser, who was the first to introduce English education in Mysore by starting the first English school in the early 19th century (Chitra, 1972). Paramashivan and his sister Nagaratnamma joined a small, ad hoc, nameless, theater troupe that mainly consisted of all the frustrated and desperate actors like themselves, who were all forced to leave the companies that either had run out of business or had temporarily shut down. The companies shut down due to several reasons; some actors like Mallappa became old, Gubbi Veeranna got attracted to cinema and pulled actors like Subbayya Naidu (1896-1962) with him.

From Railway Platform to Harmonium Paramashivu

While working in Chamundeshwari company, I would earn Rs. 2.5 per month which was barely sufficient to eat but I had no place to live. My mother was living with my uncle Seena Mama, who worked as a station mechanic at the Mysore railway station, and his family lived in the railway quarters, a small cottage provided by the railways to its employees. After the drama, I would go to the railway station and sleep either on the railway platform or in the stationary train coach that would have arrived from Bangalore at 11 PM. Newspaper used to be both my bed and the blanket. This train would leave for Bangalore again at 6 AM for which the engine would be engaged to the coaches at 4:30 AM. The engagement would create a jerk of movement and that used to be my alarm. I would

²⁷ It is interesting to note that my father and many people from his generation still refer to places by their old names and use the British system that was followed in the pre-independent India namely feet, miles, gallons and Fahrenheit, even though SI units were introduced in India in the year 1955. Fraser Peṭe is in Coorg district, Karnataka. It was rechristened with its earlier name ‘Kushalanagara’ after independence.

then proceed to my uncle's quarters for food that he would have collected by doing 'Brahmanara mane bhikṣāṇna [Begging for alms in selected Brahminical households]'. When Chamundeshwari company shut down under G. Mari Rao after Koppa camp, I lost even the meagre Rs. 2.5 per month that I earned to buy my food, as well as the railway platform for my shelter. I was in a state of utter penury when fortunately, I got an invite in Fraser Pete, currently known as Kushalanagar in Coorg district, to work temporarily in a little-known drama company along with my sister Nagaratnamma. This company was an assembly of 'sufferers in sorority'. All the artists had assembled there with a hope to find some food and livelihood in this company. The biggest advantage of being in a drama company is that you are guaranteed three meals a day. (Interview, February 26th, 2017)

-Paramashivan's reference to the eminent actors of the 1930s suggests that they were already in the latter part of their life who retired within a decade. After their retirement from the theater, the next generation of actors preferred the more lucrative and glamorous cinema leaving the modern Kannada theater with no aspirants. This troupe included actors like Narasimha Raju (24 July 1923 – 11 July 1979) who later became a well renowned comedian in the Kannada cinema, G. V. Iyer (3 September 1917 – 21 December 2003) who was a distant cousin of my father, who later became a highly acclaimed and an award-winning filmmaker, and other artists who had just arrived from C. B. Mallappa's drama company called *Śrī Candramauleśvara Kṛpā Poṣita Nāṭaka Sabha*. C. B. Mallappa was venerated with the title 'Abhinava Bhakta Śiromaṇi (New Age Crest Jewel of Devotees)' for his uncanny ability to portray the roles of devotees of Lord Kṛṣṇa and Saints in the plays like *Kabīr Dāsa*, *Bhakta Tuḷasī Dās* (Devotee *Tuḷasī Dās*) and *Santa Tukārām* (Saint *Tukārām*). The actors brought with them the plays from C. B. Mallappa's company and in addition they also decided to perform the popular 'Fiction drama' of that era *Sadārame*.

Everybody wanted to perform 'Sadārame' in those days because it always provided an unfailing feast of music, prose and comedy. It was one of the most popular dramas of that era written by Beḷḷāve Narahari Śāstri, the court poet of Mysore palace. In Fraser Pete, there was no theater hall nor a stage to perform the drama. A rich landlord in that area had let his huge mansion to be used for our performances. Those big houses were called 'Eṃṭu kambada thoṭṭi mane [A house with a pond of 8 pillars]', built in the old traditional Mysore style architecture which had a central square area resembling a thoṭṭi [pond] that is open to sky and surrounded by a courtyard with eight pillars. The tickets were priced 'eṃṭu āṇe (eight annas²⁸)' or 'oṃḍu rupāyi (One rupee)'. It was a very meagre troupe; there was no makeup artist, no lights nor

²⁸ One anna was equal to 1/16th of a rupee in India. This currency is obsolete, now.

could we afford any scene changes. The courtyard was used as the stage and the rooms in the house were used as changing rooms and green rooms. We did our own makeup and there were not even any costumes. Mallappa's drama company's harmonium player from kollegāla (A small town South of Mysore) Mr. Venkatachalaiah played the harmonium. He was a very strange harmonium player who would play both classical as well as theater songs in a very high speed, rather in uncontrollably high tempos without any élan or grace. He was under the assumption that playing extremely fast phrases meant playing elegant music. My sister played female lead roles in those plays, for ex. she would be in and as Sadārame, Tukārām's wife Jjābāyi in Santa Tukārām, Kabīr Dās's, wife Bibi in Santa Kabīr Dās and so on. I continued as a child artist as Tukārām's son Mahadev, Kabīr Dās's son 'Kamāl' and in Sadārame, I for the first time played as a 'Ḍangūraka (Drummer)', a drunkard who beats the drums to attract the attention of the public and then makes announcements from the royal court. This play was later modified by the great playwright K. Hirannayya in which he introduced his own humor and newer songs and lyrics, in which I continued to play the Ḍangūraka.

(Interview exact date unknown, during June-July 2017)

Everybody wanting to perform *Sadārame* suggests the transformation in the preference of the audience gravitating towards fictional themes over the mythological themes. The reasons for this shift are uncertain. This play does not belong to any of the nationalist themes—historical, mythological or patriotic—yet was considered popular among the theatergoers. But these are certainly some of the early signs of a shift in perceptions in the audience and clearly modern Kannada theater does not seem to have reoriented itself when confronted with changing social needs.

After spending some time in this company, my father joined another well-established theater group called Śeṣakamala Kalā Maṇḍaḷi which was founded and run by its proprietor Śeṣācār.²⁹ Here he met another child actor Ratnakar, who later became a popular comedian in the Kannada cinema, and remained my father's close friend, until his demise in 2010. In this company, the proprietor seemed to have been encouraging towards my father, created an open environment conducive to

²⁹ When I was in high school, his wife Ms. Tuḷasamma, used to visit us along with her daughter (an athlete who had represented India in the Olympics) to seek both catarchic (determining the most auspicious time for performing rituals and ceremonies like wedding, house-warming etc.) and predictive astrological counselling from my father, who is well-versed, and a firm believer of the Indian predictive astrology called Jyotiśya.

sincere aspirants to learn music and acting. This gave my father opportunity to experiment with the harmonium and his innate talent to play and master this instrument was nurtured.

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled 'Sarasija Dala Nayana'. It consists of five staves. The first staff is for the Voice, and the following four are for the Vce. (Violin) part. The music is in 4/4 time and G major. The lyrics are in Kannada and are written below each staff. The Vce. part includes fingerings (3, 5, 7, 9) and a triplet in the second measure of the first Vce. staff.

Voice

Sa ra si ja da la na ya na su kha sa da na

Vce. 3

ta na ya be - du ve nu vi no da gu na ga na

Vce. 5

ni na ga dhi na ta nu su na ma ka ru na

Vce. 7

ta na ya be du ve nu vi no da gu na ga na

Vce. 9

sa ra si ja da la na ya na

Transcription 18: Sarasija Dala Nayana

The following interviews provide all the material for exposition of modern Kannada theater. In these interviews Paramashivan enthralled me with the musical and textual repertoire of modern Kannada theater, names the drama companies and the famous actors. He regaled me with the stories, collective memories of cinema personalities and court musicians all of which established a conduit between the contemporary and the classic.

In Śeṣācār's company, they used to perform all the popular plays like 'Kṛṣṇa Līla', 'Eccama Nāyaka', 'Samsāra Nauka' and a new play called 'Rāja Gopicand' written by my friend 'Huṅsur Krishṇa Murthy'. Śeṣācār himself played most of the lead roles and invited guest artists such as Narasimha Raju, 'Naṭabhayaṅkara Gangādhara Rāyaru (The Fearsome Gangadhar Rao)' for certain plays. They also performed another play called 'Prema Līla', in which a police superintendent turns into a child-kidnapper. Comedian Ratnakar and I used to play the role of two singing street beggars. Ratnakar was not gifted with singing abilities so he would attempt lip syncing to the song I sang, 'sarasijadaḷa nayana' (Transcript 17), and the audience would get carried away seeing beggars on the stage and throw 'oṃdu āṇe, eraḍāṇe and nākāṇe (1 anna, 2 annas and 4 annas)' into our begging bowls. I would sometimes extend my singing hoping that those who have not made any offering would change their minds so that we could get more money. We would collect Rs. 15-16 on an average, give it to Mr. Sorath Ashwath, who later became a song writer and an actor in the Kannada cinema, who would sincerely divide it equally between me and Ratnakara. With all the money I had earned and saved from my street beggar's role, at the end of the camp, Mr. Sorath Ashwath took me to a tailor and got me a brand-new suit stitched. Alongside my fine-tailored suit I would also carry other accoutrements like a walking stick and a hat, which were available in plenty in the theater, and saunter around the streets of Mysore like an 'English gentleman'. That was my first experience in life wearing anything expensive³⁰.

(Telephone conversation, January 10th, 2018)

Deepak: Who wrote Eccama Nāyaka and Samsāra Nauka? Because, I faintly remember watching Eccama Nāyaka with you when I was in high school and Samsāra Nauka in Hyderabad when Doddatte (Elder aunt Nagaratnamma) and her troupe performed it.

Paramashivan: Yes. That performance of Eccama Nāyaka was put up by an amateur troupe of theater enthusiasts in Bangalore who learnt it from me for a few months. But Eccama Nāyaka was originally written by the cultured comedian, K. Hirannayya for his own company 'Hiraṅṅayya Mitra Maṇḍali' and Samsāra Nauka was written by H. L. N. Simha for his drama company 'Simha Select Artists' which was popularly known as 'Simha avara company (Simha's company)'. It was however Śeṣācār's company that made these plays popular. When Samsāra Nauka was first written in the early 1930s and enacted by Simha's company, I was given a role too. I portrayed a very small role as the young son of the protagonist 'Sundara' who becomes destitute having lost all his wealth because he marries against the wishes of his conservative grandfather, is subjected to humiliation by his own people and eventually emerges triumphant. I would appear in the very last scene in the courtroom when the judge after reading out his judgement would ask me, 'What is your name?' and I had to reply, 'My name is Sarala Sundara Kumar'. For this small role I would stay awake till 2 AM but I had no choice because it would pay me Rs. 2 per month which I was not willing to sacrifice.

(Interview exact date unknown, during June-July 2017)

³⁰ This composition is based on the famous Hindustani composition rang raṅgīla chail chabīla based on rāga Sohni.

Deepak: Did all the companies perform all the plays or were there certain companies that preferred a certain genre?

Paramashivan: Each company had its own well-established popular repertoire and the audience would select the plays according to its tastes and needs. The drama season would usually begin immediately at the end of the rainy season during November/December with the 'danada jātre [A fair in which people bought and sold cattle]' in Hassan, Karnataka, India. After a month or two in Hassan, the company would travel to other towns like Chunchana Katta, Ramanathapura, Hemagiri and Muduktoore which had their own fairs and eventually camp in and around Mysore and stop the tour at the onset of monsoon. All the companies would be touring the same places, simultaneously and set up their theaters. The audience interested in mythological themes would go to Chamundeshwari company, those interested in poet saints and devotion, would watch the plays performed by Mallappa's company, social themes were catered to by Simha's company and those who loved historical characters would haunt Mohammad Peer Saheb's company".

(Interview exact date unknown, during June-July 2017)

Deepak: What plays did Mohammad Peer Saheb perform? Was he accepted despite being a Muslim?

Paramashivan: People in those days respected art and the artists, not the religion. It was a culture of respect and dignity and Peer Sahebaru [A respectful way of addressing a Muslim in Kannada] had an admirable character with which he had amassed and commanded respect from his peers and the audience as well. His company was famous for the plays Shahjahan, Samsāra Nauka, Eccama Nāyaka and Gautama Buddha. Peer Saheb himself played most of the main roles and he was particularly popular for his portrayal of Gautama Buddha that even his professional rivals had acknowledged his prowess in portraying Buddha's character. In Peer Saheb's company, there were two other famous actors named Mādu Rāyaru (a colloquial word for Mādhava Rao), M. S. Mādu, also called Ḍamās Mādu famous for Sundara's role and Dikki Mādu for his role as Dikki, the villain in the play 'Samsāra Nauka'. Among them Dikki Mādu spent the later part of his career in the Kannada cinema as a character artist.

(Interview exact date unknown, during June-July 2017)

Life Changing Moment – Meeting the Guru Āsthāna Vidvān Dr. B. Devendrappa

Paramashivan considers theater music to be technically more challenging than Karnatak classical music and he owes all his musical skills to his stage experience and *Raṅgagītegaḷu*. He was initially trained in the fundamentals of *Karnatak* music and in rigorous voice culture by Mr. Harmonium Shivappanavaru, who groomed him to become a good theater singer. Shivappanavaru

was the harmonium player in Chamundeshwari company who was not a great scholar of *Karnatak* music but was an ideal teacher from whom he learnt the fundamentals of music.

*He was a master in his own right because whatever he knew, he knew it well. He was an excellent teacher with a sound teaching technique. Being a perfectionist himself, he never compromised for 'satisficing' performance from his students but strived at perfecting the skills of his disciples. He taught me music from the basics like 'Saraḷe varase (Simple solfege)', 'Janṭi varase (solfege of two notes), Alaṃkāra and so on. Later he taught me a few different compositions such as 10 varṇa-s in 'eraḍu kāla (Two speeds)' and 20 kṛti-s in rarest of the rare rāga-s like Mandāri, Kāpi, Kadanakutūhala, Navarasa Kannada etc. Most importantly, it was under his training that I would wake up every day at 4 AM and practice rigorously a set of exercises for voice culture that proved to be extremely beneficial to me to sing theater songs and later to negotiate the phrases of *Karnatak* music when I started learning music from my Guru Dr. B. Devendrappa. It was watching Shivappanavaru did I learn how to play the 'gamaka' (ornamental grace notes) on the harmonium. He was a very sincere harmonium player who, even though he had provided harmonium accompaniment for over thousands of plays, would still practice all the songs of the evening's drama in the morning.*

(Interview exact date unknown, during June-July 2017)

During one of Paramashivan's performances as 'Sahadeva' in the play 'Rājasūya Yāga', he sang a *kanda* (a short prosodic meter of 4 lines predominantly used in Kannada and Telugu poetry) 'Janakanadellirdapano' set to rāga Bihāg, a rāga that is usually taught to and performed by experts after many years of training in *Karnatak* music. Hearing an eleven-year-old boy executing this rāga to perfection, Dr. B Devendrappa, the court musician affiliated with the Mysore palace, who was in the audience, was impressed and walked straight into the greenroom.

He took other senior actors to task for underutilizing a talented young boy's potential to become a great *Karnatak* classical musician by restraining him to theater music, which was considered inferior and impure vis-à-vis *Karnatak* classical music.

"yelli ā huḍuga? yāru iṣṭu saṅṅa huḍuga nā hāḍiddu? Naḍi, namma manege, nānu ninange saṅṅita kalistini (Where is that boy? Is it this boy who sang? Come home, I will teach you music)".

He took my father under his wings and imparted rigorous training in the *Karnatak* classical music for many years. I too remember seeing Dr. B. Devendrappa in my childhood, sometimes in the hospital or at his house near Narayana Shastri Road, Mysore. I also remember attending his funeral and seeing my father sob inconsolably, for, I had never seen this side of an otherwise strict disciplinarian.

His guru had promised my father to take me under his tutelage which was not destined to happen. As a toddler, I used to sing a Kannada cinema song,

*‘tuttu anna tinnakke bogase nīru kuḍiyakke,
tunḍu baṭṭe sāku nanna māna muccakke,
aṅgai agala jāga sāku, hāyāgirakke’*

which means, ‘A morsel of rice to eat, a cup of my hand full of water to drink, a piece of cloth to save my honor and a small piece of land to live, is all I need to live happily’. My father always says ‘When you were very small, I had taken you to my Guru and he asked you to sing a song. You sang ‘*tuttu anna tinnakke*’, the simplicity of the song seemed to have made an everlasting impression on him. He would always ask you to sing that song repeatedly and tell me, ‘Your son is so true. Everything else is but a burden in life. We need to learn to be content with what we possess in our lives’.

My father has told me numerous stories about his Guru during my lessons with him. His Guru Dr. B. Devendrappa (1899-1986) was a court musician in the Mysore palace during Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar’s reign. He belonged to the legacy of Bidāraṃ Kṛṣṇappa, a court musician himself, who was one of the first music composers of the ‘palace theater troupe’ and an actor who performed the play ‘*daśāvatāra* (The Ten Incarnations of Lord Viṣṇu)’ in the *Bhāgavata*

Mela (a folk dance-drama) style. He was also a teacher par excellence who tutored, trained and nurtured many prominent *Karnatak* musicians of Mysore of that time which included T. Chowdaiah, the renowned violinist from Mysore.



Figure 20: Court Musician of Mysore Dr. B. Devendrappa (1899-1986) (Satyanarayana, 2018)

Devendrappa was a descendant of the royal family of Madakari Nāyaka, hailed as the greatest ruler of Chitradurga, Karnataka India. Devendrappa joined the court of Mysore as a Vidwan of Jala Tarang (A melodic-percussion instrument consisting of porcelain bowls filled with water and struck with two bamboo or wooden sticks to produce the sound) in the early 20th century (exact dates are unknown). He was a self-effacing musician of omnifarious musical talents which had remained latent but were soon discovered and duly recognized by the king who conferred upon him numerous titles and accolades. The king's special love for him also earned him the envy and jealousy of many of his colleagues in the royal court (Satyanarayana, 2018).

Deepak: Could you share your experiences with your Guru Devendrappa?

Paramashivan: He was one of the finest humans I have ever met in my life. They say in Sanskrit, 'Paṇḍito paṇḍitam dṛṣṭvā śvānavat gurgurāyate (When two scholars see each other, they growl like dogs)' about scholars, but my Guru was an exception to this rule. He never ridiculed or conspired against other artists. He was a staunch devotee of Lord Hanumān,

organized an annual music festival on Hanuma Jayanti (The festival celebrating the birthday of Lord Hanumān usually in the month of December) to support the up and coming musicians. As a teacher he selflessly taught me music without any fees, not even a penny, for many years. He not only taught music to his students but also provided us with free food and lodging. His students were mostly Brahmins, myself included, so he had appointed Brahmin chefs to cook food for us. Even though he belonged to the Nayaka community who consumed meat, my Guru always remained a pure vegetarian. Words fail to describe his musical genius. True to the title 'Nāda Yogi (A yoga practitioner who meditates on the sound to achieve realization)' that he was decorated with, I had never seen him do anything other than music. Whenever I visited him, he would either be playing the violin or sitār, or the Vīna or singing with his tānpura.
(Interview exact date unknown, during June-July 2017)

His description of his teacher also highlights the dietary habits of Brahmins in South India, who are mostly vegetarians. His Guru being a vegetarian despite being a member of the meat eating *kṣatriya* community was highlighted as a virtue.

Deepak: Did he play the sitār as well?

*Paramashivan: Oh, yes. He played the Karnatak music on sitar. He was perhaps the only person to have ever played the Karnatak music on the sitār. He was conferred upon the title 'Akhila Vādyā Cakravartī (King of all the musical instruments)' for he had the distinct talent to play and perform concerts on at least 16 musical instruments. I have seen him perform on the violin, vīna, goṭṭu vādyā, sitār, harmonium, Jal Tarang. He had acted and composed music for the movie 'Subhadra Kalyāṇa'. I once had the opportunity to accompany him for his Jal Tarang concert for the 'Rāma Navami Ustava'³¹, Bangalore. I was already an expert and an accomplished harmonium player, yet I struggled, unable to match his speed and maneuverability on the Jal Tarang. He played Saint Tyāgarāja's composition 'Śara Śara Samaraika Śūra' set to rāga Kuntalavarāḷi in such a high tempo that the poor violinist from Madras packed his instrument and watched the rest of the concert in awe and helplessness. Can you believe that my Guru was self-taught³² on all these instruments? He firmly believed in the saying 'avval gāna, duyyam bajāna'³³ (Vocal music is primary, playing musical instruments is secondary)'. He always argued and demonstrated that if you master vocal music, you can master any musical instrument with just sheer 'sādhana (dedicated practice)'.
*(Interview exact date unknown, during June-July 2017)**

³¹ A prestigious music festival held every summer for more than 7 decades, at a designated place called 'The Fort High School Grounds', Bangalore, India.

³² This claim has been contested by Satyanarayana (2002), who presents an interview with Dr. B Devendrappa in which Devendrappa himself reveals that he was not self-taught on all the instruments but had learnt the vīna, Dilruba, Sitār from his father Ramaiah, who was a seasoned musician himself.

³³ This has Persian roots. Persian language was the lingua franca during Tipu's period.

Deepak: *What were the distinct characteristics of his sādhana?*

Paramashivan: He was a 'Yama sādhaḥka [A killer instinct towards practicing music]'. For example it is unimaginably difficult to negotiate and play extremely fast phrases on the vīṇa. I had just passed my senior grade examination in vīṇa and proudly announced it to him. He sarcastically welcomed me by saying 'barbeku barbeku, senior pass vidvāṃsaru' (please come, please come, the great mastero who has passed the senior grade examination)' and asked me to tune the vīṇa. He commenced playing the most preliminary lesson on the vīṇa, a Svarajati set to rāga Hamsadhvani, asked me to accompany him and needless to say, I could not play at even half the speed. He then gave me lessons emphasizing the importance of sādhana to achieve mastery of music. In 1953, he was sent to China as one of the cultural ambassadors of India for the Chinese Music Festival. During his short stay of less than a month, he mastered a Chinese instrument and performed both the Chinese music as well as Karnatak music on it and brought laurels to our country. This was specially mentioned in the 'Illustrated Weekly of India' magazine.

He taught me to sing the aṭṭa tāla varṇa-s in three speeds, numerous rare compositions of the trinity, other great composers of the royal court and his own compositions. I became obsessed with Karnatak classical music that no sooner did I hear a new composition, I had a burning desire to learn it instantly by hook or by crook. There was a music teacher called Mahadevaswamy, a clerk at the Mysore palace office, who had dedicated his life to teach only the prostitutes of Mysore. During those days, the Mysore palace would frequently publish books of compositions of the court composers and invariably Mahadevaswamy would get a copy of these books. He would then teach them to the prostitutes of Mysore. Disregarding the taboo of visiting a prostitute's house, I offered to accompany him on the harmonium for his lessons, so that I could learn the rare compositions of the court composer Harikeśanallūru Muttaiyya Bhāgavatar.

This way under the tutelage of my Guru Devendrappa and driven by my own quest for musical knowledge, I built my repertoire of Karnatak music with more than 2500 compositions within a short time including varṇa-s, kṛti-s, devaranāma-s, vacana sāhitya etc. Despite all my musical knowledge, I still felt that my music is incomplete and was severely lacking in 'manodharma (creative improvisation)'. My Guru Devendrappa opened the doors for my manodharma during one of the unforgettable sessions which is forever engraved on my memory. My Guru was teaching me the kṛti 'Ela avatāramettikonṭivi' of Saint Tyāgarāja in the rāga Mukhāri. Shivappanavarau's voice culture had equipped me with extreme felicity that I could sing any 'urṭu (brisk phrases also referred to as birga)' without missing even a single note. My renditions were always rife with an ostentatious display of urṭu-s. I sang this kṛti 'Ela avatāramettikonṭivi' in my usual style. He stopped me abruptly and asked 'What are you trying to do? Are you trying to pray to Rāma or waging a war against him? 'Gaṃṭlu mori nudida hāge nudiyaṭte anta huccapaṭṭe nudistiya? (Just because you have the felicity of a wind instrument, do not use it uncontrollably)'. He then explained the importance of understanding the meaning and appreciating the beauty of poetry which would automatically enable you to render manodharma music without much ado. He said 'In this composition, Saint Tyāgarāja wonders what was the need for Lord Rāma's avatāra (incarnation). Ela (why) avatāramettikonṭivi (did you incarnate), Rāmuḍai (as Rāma), emi (what) kāraṇamo (is the reason)'. This way he split every word of the composition and taught me how to carefully

analyze and render the text and the melody in a composition. He later trained me in 'Rāgālāpane and mūru kālādalli svara hākadu (Improvisation of melody and singing impromptu solefege)'. It was a norm then to sing solfege only in two speeds. But my Guru said 'You should always establish a unique identity of your own. Everybody sings svara in two speeds. You should practice singing in three speeds'. Within two years, I had started performing full-fledged Karnatak music concerts and in the years 1942 and 1943, I got four invitations to perform at the All India Radio, Madras and in the year 1952 I passed my proficiency³⁴ grade examination in vocal music.

(Interview exact date unknown, during June-July 2017)

Deepak: Did you stop performing for the theater then?

Paramashivan: No. I never stopped my theater career. My lessons with my Guru used to be during rainy season when the drama companies used to be shut down temporarily and spent the time rehearsing new plays. Chamundeshwari company had rented a house in the middle of Jaganmohana Palace and Parakāla Maṭha (a religious/monastic establishment belonging to the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition in Mysore), Mysore, where the artists used to assemble and rehearse plays popularized by Varadācār's company, which were introduced to this company by G. Nagesh Rao. My Guru's house was on the Nārayana śāstri Road which was a few blocks away from the company's rehearsal room. I would attend the drama rehearsal in the morning and go for music lessons in the afternoon. When the company traveled from one town to the other, there used to be a short break of 4-5 days. I would capitalize on this break to go to Mysore for my music lessons. Sometimes, my Guru would be performing in the same town where our drama company had camped, but those instances were not too common. It was only when I decided to pursue my proficiency grade examination, I had the good fortune of spending long hours with him on a regular basis. Incidentally, he had contracted typhoid at that time, but he had committed himself to teach music at the 'Government School for the Deaf and the Dumb, Mysore'. Being a man of his words, he started teaching despite his illness. I volunteered to bail him out of the situation when none of his students or family members offered to help him. He would be seated on an easy chair, resting, and I would teach the students at the school. After I had finished teaching them, it was my turn to learn from him. He began teaching me how to do 'neraval (extempore improvisation/expansion of any chosen line within a composition)' in the 'manodharma' style, particularly for the 'viḷamba kāla (slow tempo)' compositions of the court musician Mysore Vāsudevācārya, whose compositions Brochevārevaru rā in the rāga Kamāc, Rā rā rājīvalocana in the rāga Mohana etc have become immortal in Karnatak music. He also taught me some of the unusual compositions of Mysore Vāsudevācārya like 'Rā rā eni pilicite' in rāga Kharaharapriya, 'Hari nī bhajiñce bhāgyamu' in the rāga Śankarābharana, 'Kalinarulaku' of Saint Tyāgarāja in the rāga Kuntalavarāli and a few of his own compositions among which was Śrī lakṣmi in rāga devamanoHari which he had composed praying that the Maharaja of Mysore should have a male progeny³⁵. He always emphasized on the freshness of 'sangati-s (phrases)' and on 'śravaṇa jñāna (Knowledge obtained by listening) to broaden your repertoire and extend the creative horizons. His performances were always filled with dynamic dashes of creativity and soothing manodharma. However, the primary emphasis in his performances was on 'manodharma', which is the crowning jewel of Karnatak music, in which he would reveal the

³⁴ This is equivalent to MA in music and helped my father to become a high school teacher without a formal degree.

³⁵ The king Śrī Jayacāmarājendra Wodeyar only had daughters without a male offspring as his successor.

unchartered territories of a rāga. I remember every phrase of his awe-inspiring neraval at ‘O caturānanādi vandita’ in Brocevarārevaru rā, Nīve nā vibhudani in Rā rā rājīvalocana, Rākā niśākara in Śrī Cāmundeśvari (Set to rāga bilahari), ilalo ī kalilo in Rā rā eni pilacite and the list is almost endless³⁶. In every class, he would say at least once ‘manodharma saṅgīta irbeku kaṇayya (There should be creative improvisation in music)’.

Deepak: How did your Karnatak music training help you in your theater career?

Paramashivan: It was actually the otherway round. Most of the music in the theater was composed by the court musicians themselves. They had selected the choicest of the compositions of the trinities, Mysore Vāsudevācārya, jāvaḷi-s, tillāna-s, kṣetragnya padam and other classical compositions. When I learnt them from my Guru, I could immediately recognize its equivalent theater song. Now, at the age of 86, sometimes I tend to sing the first line from the theater song and the second from its equivalent classical music composition and vice versa.

Deepak: Did you ever perform vocal concerts alongside your guru on vocal?

Paramashivan: I accompanied him on many occasions. When I sang my first concert at the Hanuma Jayanti music festival, my guru’s father, a very eminent musicologist and scholar of Karnatak music Ramaiah, who was bedridden for a long time, rose out of his bed, dashed to the stage, slid his hand inside the pocket and gave me 5 silver coins and said ‘This boy has the blessings of Lord Hanumān. I would have given him all my wealth today, but this is what I have currently’. Then on, not only my berth in this annual festival was secured but also, my Guru was convinced of my abilities and he started taking me for accompaniment, either vocal or harmonium or sometimes on the violin. In an unforgettable concert in Chikmagalur, we took turns to sing and accompany each other, that is, when he sang, I would accompany him on the four-stringed violin and then he would ask me to sing and accompany me on his seven-stringed violin, which he had mastered only to challenge T. Chowdaiah. He sang Rā rā eni pilacite and a rare composition ‘Bāle Brihatsṛṣṭi mūle’ in the rāga Simhendramadhyama composed by the Mysore Maharaja Jaya Cāmarājendra Wodeyar, who was a great scholar of music, sanskrit and philosophy.

I would hereby also like to mention about the unconditional, bountiful love and affection that I received from my Guru’s wife Chanda Bai, who I used to call ‘amma avaru (Mother)’, who had passed BA honors in the early 20th century under the British system of education. My Guru’s first wife had died and amma avaru was his second wife. He had no issues through amma avaru. His family, upset with his second marriage, had abandoned him and so I naturally took the position of their unofficially adopted son. When he started preferring me over his own biological sons in his concerts, gradually his sons started expressing their feeling of envy and jealousy explicitly by giving me a weekday slot in the festival so that many people would not listen to my concert. But my Guru was adamant in his stance. Once he was scheduled to perform a concert in Hosapete, Northern Karnataka, India, but he had to attend to a personal emergency at home. He decided to send me as his representative to perform the concert. He was sharply rebuked for his decision to send an outsider, me that is, when he could have nominated his own biological son. His reply was ‘I know that my son is more

³⁶ All these kṛti-s were composed by the court poet Mysore Vāsudevācārya showing Devendrappa’s preference for Mysore composers. Devendrappa’s rendition of Rā rā eni pilacite is perhaps his only recorded performance that is available for public consumption.

knowledgeable and has had more number of years of training than Paramashivan. But my son's music does not appeal to the masses. Paramashivan, on the other hand, is a theater artist who can assess the pulse of an audience's desire and needs and can arouse the audience to a fever pitch with his 'nātakada thaḷuku (theatrical deception)'. Therefore, I have decided that Paramashivan shall be my protégé and represent me in the concert'.

(Interview exact date unknown, during June-July 2017)

Deepak: How did you learn violin, vīna and other instruments?

Paramashivan: It was all due to my Guru's blessings and training. As I mentioned earlier, his philosophy was 'avval gāna duyyam bajāna'. Since I was already accomplished in vocal, I could learn other instruments with sheer practice and it all happened while I was working as a harmonium player and composer at M. V. Subbaya Naidu's drama company. I owe a lot of gratitude to Subbaiah Naidu, who encouraged me to learn and practice music while still continuing to work in his company. I used to practice the vīna in the morning and the violin in the evening and proceed to the drama theater for the night show. Then I passed my senior grade exams in both vīna and the violin together, all of which later helped me land a government job and also helped in gaining a firm foothold in the field of Bharatanāṭya as a composer and a violinist.

(Interview exact date unknown, during June-July 2017)

The goal of conducting the above interviews was to represent his experiences, social aspects of musical pedagogy in Mysore, interactions between his knowledge worlds and how they influenced his personal predispositions. The interviews above are succinct summaries of the prevailing socio-cultural mindset in music performance and pedagogy in Mysore before India became independent. For example, the upper-caste stranglehold on *Karnatak* music was so powerful that their ideals were held to be sacrosanct, despite Devendrappa being a court musician and an accomplished scholar, he was betrayed of opportunities. In my father's opinion, it was due to his theater affiliation that he was not recognized as a *Karnatak* musician for a long time, despite passing the proficiency examination. There have been exceptions like T. Chowdaih who rose to dizzying heights despite being a non-brahmin.

The period that Paramashivan's knowledge worlds were alive was also the time of vigorous freedom movement. Music was being used as a language to articulate the distinct national identity

and reinforce national assimilation patterns. Prior to national movement, music had remained an aristocratic indulgence or a means of spiritual pursuit to mendicants. Nationalism movement was successful in changing the negative connotation by classicizing music for which standardization of notation became a necessity. A major development in the twentieth century music pedagogy was therefore the introduction of notation system. This resulted in the standardization of musical pedagogic material and institutionalization of music. This was possible because of the reforms championed by Paluskar and Bhatkhande (Bakhle, 2005) in the context of colonial administration to redefine the concepts of identity and culture for nationalist purposes. The idea to adopt the western notation system to notate Indian classical music seems to have resonated well only with the upper-elites of the society (Bakhle, 2005) and several musicians who felt Indian music is 'not to be notated' argued against it during annual conferences in Madras Music Academy. Ramanathan (1961) tracing the history of notation in Indian music observes that, in ancient India, the notation always followed letter-based system. He takes cognizance of a discussion in the First All India Music Conference convened by the king of Baroda in 1911, to introduce a uniform system of notation in the whole country (Ramanathan, 1961; Bakhle, 2005). He also recollects efforts by Chinnaswamy Mudaliar to adopt Western staff notation to notate South Indian music in the late 19th century who also brought out a book on Saint Tyagaraja's compositions in Western notation for the benefit of Western musicians. With the standardization of the notation system, classical music compositions that Paramashivan referred to in the above interviews were all published and made available through the palace office.

Modern kannada theater was never a part of the nationalist movement; it was neither institutionalized nor was its music documented like the classical music repertoire. Theater music had to be learnt aurally and the printed plots of Kannada theater contained only the text of the

songs without notations. Mysore palace which had disengaged itself from the theater did not take the initiative to document or preserve these songs or its notation. Since music and modern Kannada theater are inseparable, with the loss of music repertoire, theater also declined.

A Child Actor Who Never Grew into Adulthood - Life in Kannada Cinema

The mass media practices introduced by the British, had radically changed the proclivities of the audience in South India which resulted in a rapid alteration of the traditional forms of entertainment. Gramophone played an important role in appropriating the music of drama and modifying it to create a new mass culture of cinema music (Hughes, 2007). Insofar, the proprietor of a leading drama company, Gubbi Veeranna had found the cinema more charming, stopped his theater company and relocated to Madras to produce movies. In this endeavor, he lured other theater actors in Mysore thereby leaving a void in Kannada theater for a short period. Kannada theater regained its glory after those eminent actors who could not succeed in the cinema returned to Kannada theater. In the year 1941, Gubbi Veeranna produced a movie in Kannada called '*Subhadra*' which featured a galaxy of brilliant actors and musicians in its star cast. Honnappa Bhāvagavatar played the lead role as Arjuna and Gubbi Veeranna's wife B. Jayamma, who had earlier played the lead role in Raphael Aloget's silent movie '*His Love Affair*³⁷', performed the role of Subhadra (Khajane, 2016). Gubbi Veeranna himself played the comic role of Arjuna's friend. Paramashivan played the role of a shepherd in this movie making his debut into the Kannada cinema as a child actor at the age of 9.

³⁷ Nirmala, an actor in my aunt's drama company had acted in an English cinema during 1940-50. There was a brief period in the history of South Indian cinema during which European cinema makers casting Indian actors in their silent movies in collaboration with Indian directors.

Deepak: You have acted in a few movies as well. Can you share your experience in Kannada cinema?

Paramashivan: I was already a popular child artist in the theater. Mr. Gubbi Veeranna had become cinema oriented and had left his drama company to be managed by others. When he ventured to make his first movie, he booked me as a child artist. The movie was directed by P. Pullaiah and screenplay, dialogues and songs were written by Beḷḷāve Narahari Śāstri³⁸, Veeranna's favorite playwright, who had earlier translated and written several plays for the Gubbi company. The movie was shot in Arun's studio in Pune. Veeranna was a genius who had a complete understanding of the pulse of the public as early as the early 20th century. He appointed the best of the actors, singers and three composers to cater to the tastes and demands of different audiences. He had appointed Padmanabha Shastry to compose in the light music style who used the Western orchestral instruments like the cello, double bass, the piano, violin ensemble etc. We used to call a double bass as 'Tāta Pitīlu (Grandfather Fiddle)' because of its large size and I remember the double bass player used to pluck the strings, as opposed to bowing it, to create the bass sound. The legendary Hindustani vocalist Pandit Mallikarjuna Mansur composed the North Indian music and Āstāna Vidwan (Court Musician)' Dr. B Devendrappa, who later became my Guru, composed the South Indian Karnatak music.

(Interview exact date unknown, during June-July 2017)

Deepak: So, you already knew your Guru before he accepted you as your disciple?

Paramashivan: Yes. I had known him during the shooting, because he not only composed music but also played the role of Nārada in that movie. In a playful mood, I tried to play Devendrappa's Vīṇā, broke the strings and got punished for it too. Since I had a very good 'svara jñāna (knowledge of notating music)', Padmanabha Shastry would buy me breakfast and clandestinely request me to notate his compositions, which he would later dictate to other members of the orchestra. Most music directors ever since the dawn of Indian cinema lack the ability to perfectly notate music, I presume. Altogether, I spent a month's time in Pune for shooting, recording and assisting Padmanabha Shastry in composing. In those days, shooting a movie consumed a lot of time because all the music, dialogues and the background had to be recorded live. The entire orchestra used to travel alongside actors and the shooting crew. The orchestra would be sitting under a tree playing music and we would be singing in the open. We had to wait till the middle of the night sometimes before shooting to avoid the outdoor noise".

(Interview exact date unknown, during June-July 2017)

Deepak: What was your role in the movie?

Paramashivan: I played the female role of a cantankerous and grumpy wife of a shepherd; both my husband and I would sing a funny song abusing each other. Then, Gubbi Veeranna, who played the comic role as Arjuna's friend, intervenes to pacify the couple and settles the

³⁸ The Kannada movies information portal claims that the screenplay and dialogues were written by B. Puttasamaiah. But according to Paramashivan, it is incorrect. This can be verified only after watching the movie which is currently being digitized by the Karnataka Chalanachitra Academy for archival purposes.

dispute. He says 'Yei hāgalla kanro kuniyodu, hīge (Hey, that's not the way to dance. This is the way)' and sings a gibberish folk song 'Dhigitonga, dhigitonga' in different speeds and dances funnily in the Yakśagāna style.

(Interview exact date unknown, during June-July 2017)

Gubbi Veeranna shot the movie in Pune because in those days Mysore had no studio of its own until 1943. The entire crew went to Pune by train with his local guardian. Since there was no direct train to Pune, Paramashivan recollected changing two trains in Hubli and Miraj. It is also interesting to note that his Guru Devendrappa who was a court musician and presumably not a trained actor played multiple roles as a composer and as an actor, Gubbi Veeranna himself produced and acted. This might be due to a) economic reasons, b) Devendrappa was already a court musician who was popular which would add to the luster of the cast and c) The movies were adaptations of plays that largely depended on the singing abilities of the actors. Paramashivan returned to Chamundeshwari company, Mysore, after completing the shooting, from a luxurious life of guaranteed sumptuous meals, attention and care, back to the theater and the railway platform.

Deepak: Did you ever go back to the cinema?

Paramashivan: I did go back to the cinema after a gap of a few years for the movie 'Kṛṣṇa Līla (Divine play of Lord Kṛṣṇa)' but this time with a vengeance, in a multifaceted role. In the meanwhile, in the year 1942, K. Subramaniam, father of the renowned Bharatanāṭyam danseuse Ms. Padma Subramaniam, directed the movie 'Kṛṣṇa Sudhāma' for 'Kalaivaani films', for which the great playwright Beḷḷāve Narahari Śāstri wrote the screen play, dialogues and acted in the lead role as Sudhāma (A childhood friend and devotee of Kṛṣṇa).

I accompanied my sister Nagaratnamma who played Rukmiṇi (Kṛṣṇa's wife) in the movie, because I could go away from my railway platform life, for better food and comfortable life, at least for the duration of the shooting. K. Subramaniam took me along to attend the wedding reception of Mr. S. Satyamurthy's daughter [1942]. Mr. S. Satyamurthy was a Congress leader, a social activist, politician and a freedom fighter.

The legendary Karnatak singer M. S. Subbulakshmi was supposed to perform at the reception. There was a delay in her arrival due to some unforeseen circumstances. K. Subramaniam asked me to entertain the restless audience until Subbulakshmi's arrival. I felt like a whipped racehorse waiting at the starting-gate, immediately accepted the offer and opened the show for a thunderous applause. Those were the days when I could sing in female pitch range, so I

sang with the entire orchestra who had assembled to accompany M. S. Subbulakshmi. I commenced the concert with my favorite and patented composition, Saint Tyāgarāja's Nagumomu in the rāga Abheri followed by Rā rā rājīvalocana. Thanks to my Guru Devendrappa's training, the All India Radio Station director, who was in the audience, was impressed instantaneously and gave me a recording opportunity. He gave me four more opportunities over the next one year.

It was in the All India Radio, Madras, studio that I met my future collaborator, my composition Guru, the famous singer and music director, P. Kalinga Rao. He heard my rendition of Rā rā rājīvalocana and Parama pāvana rāma in the rāga Dhenuka, composed by Saint Tyāgarāja, from the console room at the radio station studio and at the end of the performance congratulated me saying 'Very good boy, keep it up'. He was a very sophisticated person, highly erudite, spoke fluent English and was very regal in his demeanor. We clicked immediately, later did many collaborations together and he continued calling me 'Boy', for the rest of his life.

I was booked for the movie 'Kṛṣṇa Līla', originally only to play the comic role of Makaranda (Kṛṣṇa's best friend). I would like to reveal something to you, now. In 'The Hindu' newspaper, there was an article about Kannada cinema actor Rajkumar's brother Varadappa in which it was wrongly reported that Varadappa played Makaranda's role. It is incorrect. He played the role of 'Mūga (a dumb boy)' and it was I who played Makaranda's role³⁹. But due to my curiosity, ability to learn different things and the talent to sing, I was the assistant editor, assistant music composer, playback singer and I even shot a scene as a director. The movie was made by Kemparaja Urs and Shankar Singh, the father of the famous Kannada cinema director Rajendra Singh Babu. Kalinga Rao was the music director and Sohan Lal from Mumbai, who later settled in Bangalore had choreographed the dance for the entire movie mostly in the Kathak style. The songs were shot in either Kannambāḍi (Krishna Raja Sagar Dam, Mysore, India) or in the 'Navajyothi' studio in Mysore.

(Interview exact date unknown, during June-July 2017)

Deepak: Did you have studio in Mysore by then?

Paramashivan: Yes. Navajyothi studio was the first studio in Mysore and Kṛṣṇa Līla was the first movie shot in that studio. There was a rich businessman called Ramaiah who owned the Canara Public Convenience motors popularly called CPC motors, who built Navajyothi studio in his farmland near Saraswati Puram Fire Brigade, Mysore, in the year 1943. Here I met P. Kalinga Rao again, who immediately appointed me to assist him in composition. Every musician in the orchestra liked me except a violinist called Tātācār, who did not welcome the idea of being dictated notation by a 12-year-old boy. What made him loathe me even more was that if he ever made a mistake during the recording, I would clandestinely convey it to Kalinga Rao, who would then correct him in front of the whole ensemble, which perhaps landed a brutal blow to his ego. I was a simple little boy whose overweening passion for

³⁹ I did pursue this matter with The Hindu newspaper. After a few months I received a response from Ms. Deepa Ganesh, editor of The Hindu, apologizing on behalf of the journalist but the newspaper never cared to issue a rejoinder or correction in this regard.

musical perfection was misconstrued as 'brazen disregard' by some elderly musicians, esp. Mr. Tātācār who mourned his ego blow, which I unwittingly was responsible for, even after several years until he retired as a staff artist at the All India Radio, Bangalore. He used to accompany me on many occasions at the All India Radio and never did he make an eye contact, nor did he exchange a smile or some pleasantries during or after the recording, ever.
(Interview exact date unknown, during June-July 2017)

Gubbi Veeranna was producing movies in South India. Most of them were movie adaptations of Kannada theater. The mass media, video shooting and audio recording technologies transformed drama into a commodity of mass consumption. The actors of theater also were also featured as actors in the cinema. Without any uncertainty, in the eventuality of all the theater actors becoming successful in the cinema, Kannada theater would have died a natural death in the 1940s. Actors like M V Subbayya Naidu, Gubbi Veeranna Himself, Jayamma and other prominent actors returned to theater profession, but Subbayya Naidu started his own drama company.

The actors returned to their theater profession because they realized cinema was still considered as an inferior form of entertainment and it was not implicated as strongly as the theater in the public sphere. Art does not emanate from a cultural vacuum, instead it is a multifaceted evolutionary process that is a product of vitally interconnected social, political, ideological and cultural values. It is for the same reason that Gubbi Veeranna was producing movies that were theater adaptations. At this juncture, national cinema and national theater were not problematized. The reason for sidelining cinema and theater is a consequence of nationalization of art. The theater or cinema both being gifts of colonial modernity could not fulfil the nationalist function because opposing colonial rule but accepting their cultural legitimacy would have given rise to the contingency of semi-acceptability. Later when

economic conditions changed, cinema became more acceptable thereby completely marginalizing the modern Kannada theater.

Deepak: How did you learn the editing?

Paramashivan: 'Curiosity killed the cat', is that what you say in English? I was 'tarle (mischievous)', curious and intelligent. I was curious to know how it was possible to show Nārada singing and walking in the middle of the cloud on the screen. I went to C. V. Raju, a Tamil Brahmin from Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India, who was both the director and the editor for the movie. He would call me 'moṭṭai (tonsured head)' because I had tonsured my head completely except a little tuft that I had grown for Makaranda's role. He recognized my curiosity and appointed me as his assistant in editing and direction. Under him I learned the secrets of creating illusions like Nārada walking in the middle of the clouds, how to repeat a phrase in the song if it is recorded only once during the shooting and other technical aspects in editing.

Deepak: How do you create the illusion of somebody walking in the cloud? How did you repeat the phrase when you did not have Control C and Control V which makes it so easy in the digital world today?

Paramashivan: It is very simple. Firstly, shoot Nārada's song in front of a black curtain and then take a separate shot of the sky with clouds on a moving camera. Now, if you print the latter over the former and then play the reel, it will appear as if Nārada is walking amidst the clouds. There was a folk song in this movie in which a cow laments as follows:

Nā ondu bittida nā ondu beḷedida

Nā ondu tenedanṭa tindāre nī enage badabadagi badideyyo

(For eating an ear of corn that I sowed and harvested,

Isn't it unfair that I am getting beaten and punished?)

The line was sounding wonderful along with the picturization that I insisted on having it played twice. The director and editor, C. V. Raju was a genius who had a perfect sense of the speed of the movement of the reel. He never used a machine while editing, can you believe it? That too in 1940s when the technology was below primitive. He said 'houdeno moṭṭai? Adanna innond sala hādo (Is it moṭṭai? Sing that line again)'. While I sang the song, he manually dragged the reel at a constant speed, cut it to that exact length and asked me to get that piece of the reel duped and reprinted. He then asked me to stick both the new print and the old reel with the white cement. Mind you, this requires tremendous confidence and control, because in a sound-on-film technology, the sound track is recorded onto a photographic film on the same strip carrying the picture and the sound strip is always placed 19 ½ frames in advance. For higher levels of intensity in sounds, the strip would run off the reel and appear on the screen so much so that even a small mistake in editing would cost you very dear. But Raju was genius, when we played it on the 'movie wala', which was exclusively designed for watching the movie while editing, the line showed up exactly twice without any need for any further editorial interventions.

(Interview exact date unknown, during June-July 2017)

Deepak: How was your directorial experience?

Paramashivan: It was a coincidence that I had to direct an entire scene. Mr. Raju was a genius but was also a chronic alcoholic. There was one day on which, all the actors, cameraman Mr. Janakiram and the entire crew had assembled but Mr. Raju got so drunk that he could barely move. He summoned me and said ‘Yei moṭṭai, hogi ī scene nine tegebido ivattu (Oh moṭṭai, you shoot the scene on behalf of me, today)’. I took the script, screenplay and the dialogues. Janakiram, a seasoned camera man with a friendly disposition, liked me a lot. He said ‘You take care of the direction and I will do my job. That way we can save a lot of time and money for the producer’. I was already a mature actor with many years of experience in acting, so I taught dialogues and intonation to the actors, proudly said ‘action and cut’ and finished shooting that scene. Within a few days, he again got drunk himself into the same state of immobility. Both Shankar Singh and Kantha Raj Urs came home, shook me awake and took me to shoot and record songs at night. Kṛṣṇa’s role was played by a girl called Usha who was extremely beautiful but not a singer. Therefore, I sang playback for Kṛṣṇa’s role, myself and for gopika-s’ (cowherd girls) chorus. When the movie was finally released I was delighted to see my name as a playback singer, assistant editor, assistant director and actor. What I did not know was that I was only paid for Makaranda’s role but not for my other contributions.

I was later booked for the movie ‘Bhakta Ramadas’ in which Paṇḍari Bai’s (A popular Indian actor predominantly known for her motherly roles) brother Vimalanand Das acted as Bhakta Ramadas. I played the role of ‘Puṭṭu’, a young drug-addict who is often seen smoking hookah in a ‘sūḷe mane (Brothel)’. I sang a few songs for this movie and then I was booked for the movie ‘Bharati’, in the role of a perverted mendicant Brahmin, who teases a young girl singing a song that employs double entendre. I sang ‘kāṇada tāṇakke prāṇa tolaguva tanaka, vīṇeya nuḍisuvēnu antarangada (Until my vital breath retires into an unseen location, I shall continue playing the vīṇa of my inner self)’. It was a social drama about an old man marrying a young girl, which was a prevalent practice in that era. Mr. Sampat, the owner of one of the oldest printing presses in Mysore, called the ‘City Power Press’, played the protagonist in the movie. It was about this time that I must have hit puberty and as a natural physiological consequence my voice deepened by an octave. I was not the favorite in the cinema anymore, because I couldn’t sing in the range of feminine pitch. They stopped calling me for playback singing, and I was offered only common roles, which I found very insulting, having enjoyed all the stardom and proximity with the best of the actors of our time at such a young age. I decided to quit the cinema industry and was back on the railway platform.

(Interview exact date unknown, during June-July 2017)

The cultural identity of the cinema is a continuously changing phenomenon that largely depends on the contemporaneous social practices as result of which the public sphere to undergoes transformational changes. Dissanayake (2017:39) writes “When we talk of the public sphere, it is important to recognize its historical evolution. The way that the state, civil

society, democratic polity, and mass media interact changes over time, as these elements are compelled to confront new social experiences and provides us with important insights into the social formations of contemporary societies”. A careful examination of the public spheres in the colonial period and postcolonial period, reveals “In the colonial period, the public sphere was restricted to the educated classes, was elitist in nature, and addressed questions of national liberation, Westernization, modernization, and so on. In the postcolonial period, the public sphere expanded, became less elitist, and included criticism of the independent state as one of its functions. In the earlier period, the public sphere was allied with the aspirations of the emerging nation-state, while in the postcolonial period the public sphere was much more concerned with critiquing the nation-state and its diverse appendages” and cinema became a “site of construction of nationalism” (ibid., 39-40).

In case of the Kannada cinema, the public sphere in the pre-colonial period has interacted differently than the rest of the country. Kannada cinema was never a moniker to nationalism or nationhood. Kannada cinema continued to be an inferior form of entertainment until the Kannada nationalistic aspirations were consolidated in 1956. But Paramashivan’s cinema career had come to an end with his voice becoming deep during the years 1945-47. The Kannada cinema functioned as force unifying the ‘sub-cultural differences’ and became the forerunner of a quasi-political movement to reflect the aspirations of Kannada speaking people. Modern Kannada theater never espoused the cause of nationalism or nationhood during the precolonial period nor was there any imbrication with Kannada nationalism movement in the postcolonial period. Thus, occupying a peculiar position *sui generis*, Kannada theater disappeared gradually from the public memory.

Prior to independence, theater and acting was not considered fit for upper-caste women. With the loss of patronage and abolishment of *devadāsī* system, women from the *devadāsī* community were condemned as prostitutes and could not continue their profession of singing and dancing which were now under the propriety of upper-caste women. Consequently, they started acting in the theater and cinema as a means of livelihood. Earlier, when acting was forbidden for women, Paramashivan was booked to play female roles and to sing in female pitch. With changing attitudes and altered gender conventions, more women who could act, dance and sing joined the cinema creating an environment of competing interests. His passion for theater drew him powerfully towards it without allowing him to redefine his niche in the cinema market; his association with the cinema discontinued.

Deepak: Why didn't you continue in the cinema?

Paramashivan: Kannada cinema was not as highly respected as the theater, in those days. I just obeyed my natural proclivity for the theater which in my opinion was more challenging, alive, full of risks and therefore it was my natural habitat. Cinema on the other hand, I felt, was a slave to the technology, risk-free and was unchallenging. In the hindsight, I do feel sometimes, however, that I should have continued in the cinema. I am senior to most of the popular actors in the Kannada cinema industry today and if I had remained in the cinema, perhaps, my career would have followed a different trajectory. Every other profession in my life was like 'oggarane (tempering the food)' and theater remained the mainstay that supported all other professions and careers that I have had in the last 80 plus years of my life.

Deepak: Did you ever go back to the cinema?

*Paramashivan: I did, twice actually, once, in 1959, when my cousin, the well-known Indian film director G. V. Iyer said 'nī enkūḍa vā dā, unnai music director paṇren (Come with me, I will make you a music director)' and took me to Chennai to assist the famous music director G. K. Venkatesh. The famous Tamil music director Ilaiyaraaja was working as a guitarist⁴⁰ in the studio, L. Vaidyanathan, famous for his background score for *Malgudi Days*, was the arranger and Late Chitti Babu was the vīna player in the studio. As an assistant to G. K. Venkatesh, I composed music for two Kannada movies, *Basavaṇṇa* and *Kāḷidāsa* and the musicians started preferring me to give them notation which made G. K. Venkatesh feel very insecure. He stopped giving me opportunities to compose or to interact with other musicians*

⁴⁰ This fact was confirmed by the famous playback singer S. P. Balasubramaniam in a television reality show which was presided by Paramashivan as a guest judge.

which forced me to return to theater. G. V. Iyer was deeply disappointed with my decision to return and he never volunteered to help me thereafter.

I was again booked to be a co-composer alongside G. K. Venkatesh for the movie 'Devadāsī' in the year 1978. The movie was based on an earlier theater play written by K. Hirannayya, which addressed the social evils of 'Devadāsī' system. I composed the song 'nā kaṇḍe ninnalli mane devara, nanna mane devara' which became very popular later. I was supposed to teach the song to playback singer S. Janaki, who had very high regard for me since our early association in 1959, but the persons concerned took the music sheet from me, ensured that the recording was done in my absence and I was not even given any credit for my contributions.

At around the same time, my dear friend, the famous lyricist Kaṇagāl Prabhākara Śāstri directed a film called 'Bangārada Katte (A golden donkey)' for which he booked me as the music director. I composed the songs for which he wrote the lyrics and we recorded Yesudas's (A renowned Karnatak vocalist) voice in Chennai. Perhaps, I was not destined to be in the cinema. The producer fell sick, the movie making halted in the post-production stage and it could never make it to the silver screen ever again. As they say in Sanskrit, my experience as a music director in the cinema was 'prathama cūmbanam danta bhagnam (The very first kiss resulted in a broken tooth)'. With that were the curtains pulled down on the final act of my cinema life.

(Interview exact date unknown, during June-July 2017)

Deepak: You have so far mentioned about only male actors. When did women start acting in theater?

Paramashivan: Women did not act in Kannada theater until 1938-39. Men used to play both male as well as female characters. Nagendra Rao played the lead female roles, Ramakrishna, an excellent singer played Draupadi, Basavanna played Tilottame, there was another famous actor called 'Rāṇi part Rangappa (Queen's part Rangappa)' and lastly there was Venkataramu, the cabaret dancer. He would wear Saree, sing Hindi songs and dance in social dramas.

Deepak: Do you remember the songs he sang?

Paramshivan: I vaguely remember a couple of them⁴¹. One of them was,

Dil-e-nādān ko ham samjhā jāyenge

Samjhā jāyenge bulvā lāyenge

Dil-e-nādān ko.

Āśnā hi karte karte aur duniya hocuke

Hum tumhāre ho na ho par tum hamāre hocuke

⁴¹ Some of the words do not make sense in this song which either means he has forgotten the song or it is also equally likely that the actor sang a corrupted version of these songs. However, the Urdu lyrics and the song structure bear a striking similarity with Mujra songs, generally performed by Muslim dancing women in socially restricted places called the Kotha-s.

The other song was, 'Naije banvālika mazā luṭā hai mazā lutā hai mazā lutā hai'.

The very first woman to join Chamundeshwari company was Sorabhada Lakshamma, a woman from the devadāsī community. The second heroin was Maḷavaḷli Sundaramma, again a devadāsī. Lakshamma and her daughter Saroja joined Chamundeshwari company. Saroja and I opened the show as Sūtradhāra and Naṭi, the stage manager and his wife. At the end of the scene when we walked out of the scene, I used to put my hand around her shoulder, and as soon as we reached the side wings curtain, she would admonish me for what she thought was an indecorous and overbearing behavior on my part. The audience particularly appreciated our small pair, two five-year old kids playing Sūtradhāra and Naṭi. Lakshamma was not endowed with any special singing talent so she was appointed to play secondary roles that did not demand a lot singing. Maḷavaḷli Sundaramma on the other hand was the diva of Modern Kannada theater and one of the finest actors I ever saw. She was a complete actor who was trained under her father in Karnatak classical music in the pure Mysore 'bāni (tradition)' and could comfortably execute advanced compositions like Rāga Tāna Pallavi in the most profound and inherently difficult Karnatak classical music rāga-s such as Todi, Bhairavi, Natakurinji, Begade etc. She was the daughter of the great violinist, musicologist and scholar Maḷavaḷli Subbaṇṇa. Maḷavaḷli Subbaṇṇa was the first ever designated music composer for Modern Kannada theater who composed music for the play 'Saṃgīta Subhadra', the play in which you acted in the lead role of Arjuna. The play was written by G. V. Krishnamurthy, an actor in Chamundeshwari company, who had earned the title 'Kaliya Bhīma (Bhīma of the Modern times)' for his portrayal of the character of Bhīma in Mahābhārata based plays. G. Nagesh Rao played the role of Arjuna and Maḷavaḷli Sundaramma played the role of Subhadra. The famous 'Pūja scene' in which Arjuna and Subhadra pray to Lord Śiva used to run for an hour and a half sometimes in which both displayed their musical prowess by singing two lines of 'kanda', elaborately in many different rāga-s. There were several occasions in which their duet would turn into a healthy competition, each trying to surpass the other by increasing the degree of difficulty of the rāga-s of choice. I regard G. Nagesh Rao and Maḷavaḷli Sundaramma as my Gurus; they are primarily responsible for my musical knowledge from whom I learnt the secrets and nuances of the rāga singing.

(Interview exact date unknown, during August 2017)

Deepak: Did anybody in the theater, other than your first Guru, 'Harmonium Shivappanavaru', ever formally teach you music?

Paramashivan: No. I did not learn anything formally from G. Nagesh Rao or Hoḷale Nārāyaṇa Śāstri and other prominent musicians of the theater. I heard them sing on the stage and imitated them because my inherent talent and felicity of my voice permitted me to do so. Kottūrappanavaru, on the other had taught me one composition, 'Nagumomu', as I had mentioned earlier. But Maḷavaḷli Sundaramma was a very special person who was particularly dear to me. In the play 'Bhakta Prahlāda (Devotee Prahlāda)', I played the role of Prahlāda and she played Kayādu, my mother. In the climax scene, Prahlāda accepts the challenge thrown at him by his father, the demon king Hiraṇya Kaśyapu, and drinks poison to prove the existence of God (Lord Viṣṇu). For this scene, the company used to prepare the 'poison cup' by mixing a cup of delicious milk with sugar, saffron petals, almonds and dry fruits. It was literally a sweet and delicious poison, for which I used to eagerly look forward

to. Maḷavaḷḷi Sundaramma, having recognized my talent for singing and liking for milk, once summoned me to her room, offered me two bananas, a glass of milk and 4 annas, and taught me two very rare compositions of Saint Thyāgarāja, 'Abhimānamenadu galgu rā', set to rāga vivardhini and 'Manasā Śrī Rāmacandrūni', set to rāga Īsamanohari.

(Interview exact date unknown, during August 2017)

Conclusion

The socio-musical hierarchy later played a big role in the decline of modern Kannada theater. As discussed in the previous chapter, firstly it was dominated by performers from the upper strata of the society. Their association with the theater profession was considered as over stepping the accepted societal norms by the ultra-conservative society in the colonial period. When the king himself was in-charge of the drama company, it helped the theater profession to become stronger but modern Kannada theater could not enjoy this support for long. Paramashivan's hankering for an identity as a mainstream classical musician could not materialize due to the strict socio-musical hierarchy which had already been ossified during the colonial rule. After his appointment as a teacher in a high-school, which brought him back the dignity that he had lost in the theater, he remained content without caring to perpetuate his art within his family or outside. As Katz (2017:11) rightly notes, "The continuity of musical repertoire and collective memory cultivated by lineages of hereditary musicians is premised on an intensive, family-based, one-on-one method of instruction". He further argues that the underlying focus of this pedagogical method was to transmit the repertoire, yet, it produced an unbroken lineage of knowledge world perpetuated by the ancestors. Such a knowledge transfer did not happen in the case of modern Kannada theater, because most of the prominent theater personalities who my father was nurtured under, either remained unmarried without any progeny or chose a much respectable alternate profession thereby severing the continuity of tradition. Some artists gravitated towards the more glamorous cinema

and retired from all forms of theater. Also, since this art form was young with less than hundred years of history, theater artists did not feel obligated to preserve and perpetuate the repertoire to the future generation like other hereditary musicians.

Interviews with informants often serve as a primary source for factual and figurative accounts of the normative cultural information of the society which they represent. In the current chapter, I have presented the biographic text that details a significant part of my father's formative musical history. He has without any hinderance explained how his musical perceptions were sensitized, nurtured and honed through his association with his socially disparate knowledge worlds—women of ill-repute (*devadāsī*-s), a Guru who had appointed Brahmin chefs to feed his Brahmin students despite himself being a non-brahmin, and lastly his short-lived experience in the Kannada cinema—a congregation of many an interesting mind. In the following chapters, I shall subject this ethnographic text to critical analysis in the light of his implicit and explicit attitudes towards reclaiming his lost and forgotten Brahminical identity through his family and art and I shall therefore set out to explore the contributions of the broader yet subterranean factors, such as growing and rising culturally-oriented nationalism movements and other socio-political factors that might have played a vital role, overtly or covertly, in the historical process of evolving his person and his artistic persona, defying his own cognition over the *longue durée*.

Chapter 6

Nationalism and Modern Kannada Theater

Prelude

Attending theatrical, music and dance performances during Dasara festival bears a ritualistic and social symbolism in the royal tradition of Mysore which can be traced back to Krishnadeva Raya in the early sixteenth century⁴². It was, therefore, customary for the royal palace to organize theatrical performances on all ten days of Mysore Dasara, which falls in the month of September/October, as a part of this regal state-festival celebrations. To uphold this time-honored tradition of Dasara celebrations, in the year 1936, elaborate preparations are being made for the theater festival in the Jaganmohan Palace, Mysore, formerly the home of the royals now turned into an auditorium.

The King of Mysore, His Highness, Maharaja Nālvadi Kṛṣṇarāja Wodeyar has just arrived in the hall. He is seated on a slightly elevated platform in the front row with his flamboyant family members behind the bamboo veil separating the audience from the performers. The court, officials of the palace, and aristocracy, whose proximity to Maharaja in the hall is in accordance with their hierarchy, have gathered in all eagerness to share space and time with the Maharaja. The orchestra of Chamundeshwari drama company; Mr. Shivappanavaru on the harmonium and Kiṭṭaṇṇa on the *Tabla* are clad in the ‘durbar dress’⁴³ rented for Rs. 20 per day, from the ‘Darbar Dress Shop’ in the Landstone building, Mysore. They have just finished tuning their instruments and are waiting with bated breath for the orders from *Aramane Moktesaru* (Palace Official) to commence the play.

⁴² See Michell (1992) for more details about the history of Dasara celebration in Mysore.

⁴³ Durbar dress was the strict dress code to be adhered to by the invitees of the royal palace. It consisted of white trousers, black long-coat, a white ‘valli (sash)’ draped across the left shoulder and the Mysore turban, famously known as the ‘Mysore Peṭa’.

The *Moktesaru* finally signals the senior person in the side wings curtain to commence the play. The curtain is slowly going up, lights on the stage turn on and Shivappanavaru presses the harmonium keys, the tonic key-B flat, its fifth and the tonic an octave above to indicate the ‘*śruti* (pitch)’ for the singer to commence the invocatory verse and the *Tabla* player bangs the left and right drums both tuned to the same pitch, to announce the commencement of the play. The audience too, is eagerly awaiting the entry of the first character, *Sūtradhāra*, who is the stage manager and the focal point in the entire scheme of the performance of the play, who introduces the name of the play, the author, the characters and the summary of the plot. The audience is expecting the usual senior artist in the role of a *Sūtradhāra* to enter the stage. But the royal audience has little clue that they are in for a positive surprise. The *Sūtradhāra* is a young boy of about four years of age, wearing ‘*kacce pance* (Traditional men’s garments with five folds)’, *kurta* and ‘*Mysore peṭa*’. He enters the stage exuding as much confidence and radiance as a seasoned actor, singing dithyrambic panegyric in the *vṛtta* (A prosodic meter) meter set to *rāga Nāta* in the free style exposition, glorifying the king and praying for his well-being.

Sūtradhāra (enters singing):

śrīkāntāmaṇimānasābjamadhupaṃ nīrejamitrodayaṃ
lokeśādisamastanirjarakirīṭārādhitāṃghridvayaṃ
śrīkaṃṭhapriya mitranūrjitadayāṃ kṣīrābdhimadhyālayaṃ
śrīkrṣṇendrananāvagaṃ poreye kṣṇaṃ bhaktacetaḥ priyaṃ

He who is the bumblebee of the heart-flower of his beloved Lakṣmī
 He who is to his beloved, like the sun is to the lotus
 He who resides in the middle of milkly ocean
 He who protects our King Kṣṇarāja, let us pray to him (Viṣṇu)

Sūtradhāra:

Ārye, ninna alamkāravu pūrtiyāgiddare itta bā Oh Noble woman, if you are done with your
make-up, please come forth this way

Naṭi (enters singing a song):

Enu sojigavo sogasugārane? Why this mysterious sarcasm, my sweetheart?
Dīneyoḷīpari vinodave? why do you play this prank on a helpless woman like me?
Peḷ sarāgave? Is it because you think it is easy (to play pranks at me)?

Voice

e nu so ji ga vo so ga su ga ra ne - dee ne ya li - pa ri

Vce.

vi no da ve pel sa ra ga ve

Transcription 20: Enu Sojigavo Sogasugārane song of Naṭi

Sūtradhāra:

*Ce, hāgenilla, Ārye, sabhikarellaru ninna
gānavannu keḷabekendu āse paduttiruvaru,
nīnu vasanta ṛtuvannu kuritu gānavannu
māḍu.*

Not really, Oh Noble woman, I hastened matters because the audience is eagerly waiting to hear your song. Why don't you sing a song describing the beautiful spring season?

Naṭi (sings the song)

Eseyuvadī vasanta māsam mige

The beautiful spring sprinkles the flower petals

*Eseyuvadī vasanta masamisumisuguva
posa kusumavidesaḷeṇisage
Mellamellanure mārutanaitare*

for me to count them

As the cool breeze blows gently

*Madana sirī mukha virahake virahigaḷu
bedare*

the separated lovers lament in the memory of their beloveds

Sūtradhāra:

*Ārye ninna gānavannu ellarū
meccikondiruvaru. Ī dina yāva nātakavannu
ādisoṇavendu nirdharisiruve?*

Oh Noble woman, the audience is enthralled with your singing. Which play do you intend to perform today?

Naṭi:

*Ī dina Dānaśūrakarṇa nātakavannu
ādisoṇavendu nirdharisiruttene.*

I have decided to present the play *Dānaśūrakarṇa* today

Sūtradhāra:

*Naḍe hogona, mundina kāryavannu
siddhapaḍisoṇa.*

Let's go and prepare the stage for today's play

The image shows a musical score for a song. It consists of four staves. The first staff is for the Voice, and the following three are for the Violin (Vce.). The music is in 4/4 time and the key signature has one sharp (F#). The lyrics are written below each staff.

Voice
e se yuvu dee va sa n ta ma - sa m mi ge e se yuvu dee vasa

Vce. 4
n ta mi su mi su gu va po sa kusu mavalesa deni sa ge

Vce. 7
me lle me lla nure maa ru ta nai - - - ta re ma da na si ri mu kha

Vce. 10
vi ra ha ke vi ra hi ga lu be da re

Transcription 21: Eseyuvadi vasanta, a playful romantic song⁴⁴

Both *Sūtradhāra* and *Naṭi* exit the stage from the right and the play commences. The same little *Sūtradhāra*, returns in a while clad in a new attire, but this time to play the role of Karṇa's son Vṛṣaketu and carries his role until the climax, delivers his lines with an impeccable diction and sings the songs like a trained musician.

The Maharaja is extremely pleased and impressed with his performance. At the end of the play, he instructs the *Aramane Moktesaru*, 'yāru ī cikka huḍuga anta vicārisi (Inquire who this little boy is.)'. The *Moktesaru* immediately saunters forth into the greenroom, inquires with the drama

⁴⁴ This song is based on the Hindustani composition *Kaisi yeh badhaayi hai kanhay* in *rāga Bhairavi*

company manager and replies to the Maharaja, ‘*Mahāsvāmi, ā huḍugana hesaru Paramaśivan anta* (Your Highness, his name is Paramashivan)’.

Introduction

In the previous chapters, biographical text of the excerpts of interviews with the subject were presented in which he offered a light and vivacious description of his knowledge worlds. He opened up about his poverty-sticken childhood and his struggle to access the most basic of the needs such as ‘food, shelter and clothing’ usually referred to as the ‘*roṭi, kapḍa aur makān*’ in Hindi. He then described his ever-expanding knowledge world encompassing stalwarts in theater, cinema, his initial music training under the theater musician Shivappanavaru culminating in the serendipitous rendezvous with his Guru Dr. B. Devendrappa and rigorous training in the *Karnatak* classical music. In the interviews the subject discussed his peripatetic, vagabond lifestyle hopping from one drama company to the other in search of opportunities, his trysts with the cinema and his eventual return to drama company for refuge.

In examining the relationship between the public sphere and arts in the early 20th century, the issue of nationalism looms large. The idea of nationhood in the collective imagination of the public was affirmed through the process of politicization of art, culture and religion. This chapter focuses on the significance of nationalist resurgence that impacted the social and cultural politics and the omission of the modern Kannada theater in the grand project of ‘classicization of art’ in the pre-independent India. Here I will investigate how the knowledge worlds of Paramashivan reacted to the nationalism movement and argue that the sad omission of modern Kannada theater from the project of classicization was a consequence of modern Kannada theater failing to reinvent, rebrand and adopt itself to the burgeoning needs of the elite upper-class. It was neither resilient nor

receptive to the changing socio-economic-political conditions during and after the colonial rule. The politics of language in the post-colonial India reveals that when Kannada nationalism movement was blossoming, it capitalized on the cinema and cinema artists to reflect the growing sense of Kannada identity. I would argue that as a consequence of mutual indifference, between modern Kannada theater and the nationalism movement, Kannada theater lost the support on grounds of its non-alignment with the political machinery in its anti-colonial rhetoric. In Southern part of India, classical music was appropriated by the urban centers from the hereditary performers because of which hereditary performers lost their prestige. The patronage that shifted from royal families to rich upper class that determined the form of the *fin de siècle* art created on the basis of tastes of and policies of the colonial leaders. In this respect, I will conclude that modern Kannada theater occupies a peculiar place in the context of art and nationalism—it was not hereditary—the hereditary musicians did not suffer loss of prestige—nor was it the favorite choice in the reform movement led by the nationalists and as a result became moribund.

Nationalism and Classicization of Art in India

Nationalism emerged as a globally influential strong political force in the 19th century deriving its support from the sense of ‘identity’ and ‘belongingness’ to the state for which many factors such as language, art and culture were revised and reinterpreted to reinforce the principle of ‘inclusion’. Levi (2010) discusses the cultural misappropriations for political gains particularly by the Nazis who were ‘thinking war every minute, but shouting peace every second’ by using musical and other cultural festivals as a subterfuge to convince the world of their ‘peaceful intentions’. He makes specific reference to the celebration of 150th year death anniversary of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in 1931 by calling ‘Mozart Year’. The author notes that Mozart was not a ‘Virulent

Nationalist' as was understood to be by the Nazis but a libertarian who travelled freely across different countries of Europe who had worked with Jewish librettist on his operas. The author also mentions about how Mozart was misused as a cultural icon to support the Aryan cultural supremacy theory. Similarly, Jossarand (1962) discusses how Wagner was appropriated as a cultural icon in German nationalism.

Toby Thacker carefully studies the traditional biography of J S Bach and G F Handel, how it was revised, reinterpreted and popularized by German Democratic Republic (GDR) from a Marxist-Leninist perspective with the help of all the machinery at its disposal such as 'speeches, films, propaganda, school text books, political power' at both scholarly and public levels, until GDR's collapse. The author unravels how the political establishment of GDR cleverly suppressed and highlighted only that information that they felt was crucial to change the public perception about the lives of these composers to achieve a 'wider cultural and ideological hegemony'. The author believes 'musical biographies were forced upon them rather than chosen' after the split of Germany into a '*Communist East Germany and a Capitalist West Germany*' as the Soviet and their communist counterparts of East Germany became the guardians of historical and cultural inheritance of its people and committed to 'a Bizarre mixture of Historical materialism and cultural nationalism'. The author refers to the sincere efforts of Meyer, a Jew and a communist, who completely dissociated Bach from the clergy and religious establishments by projecting him as a composer of the 'common upcoming bourgeois' who opposed the feudal oppression of the working class.

At about the same time, in India, the rising sense of nationalism transported arts, most importantly music and dance that were, in the past, performed within the closed confines of a temple during religious ceremonies or in the princely courts to entertain the royal family, to larger public spheres.

Bakhle (2005:3) writes “In nineteenth-century British colonial India, music was performed mainly in courts of princely states... A century later, the same music was still performed, but with a major difference. It was now seen as simultaneously classical and national. This trajectory calls forth no surprise, since it is by now a truism to assert that classicism invariably accompanies the processes of modernity and nationalism”. Qureshi (2000:825) writes about her experience as a *Sarangi* player and as a student with *Sarangi* players writes, how art gets classicized as “When a nation's past becomes hegemonically and discursively defined, it also involves a politically required suppression of oppositional or minority pasts”. The same statement holds good in the context of South Indian music which according to many musicians was confined to either the temples or princely courts. However, during the period of freedom struggle, music became a unifying force to instil a sense of nationalism among the public. In India, this goal was achieved by authoring a modern history for art by restoring its origin to the ancient texts thereby granting it the ‘classical’ status what Bakhle calls ‘restore to music its ancient origins and address colonial denigrations of it as native caterwauling’. Schofield (2010), argues that the term ‘classical’ when applied to non-Western art music often results in conceptual inaccuracies, because the ‘concepts, practices and institutions’ of Western classical music are historically entirely different from their non-Western counterparts which include the most popular Indian classical music form namely the ‘North Indian classical music’. The author feels that the colonizers used a uniform Eurocentric classicization, of non-Western arts, in which classicization based on Roman and Greek antiquity conceptions, was the rubric. The author notes that the process of ‘classicization’ of North Indian classical music, signifying a sense of cultural and political superiority that initially started during the Mughal rule in which ancient treatises on Indian music written in Sanskrit were translated to Persian, the *lingua franca* of the Mughal courts, was continued under the colonial rule when oriental scholars like Sir

William Jones, Augustus Willard who conferred ‘classical’ status upon Indian music parallel to the Western classical music. Classicization was also a system of compartmentalization of the ‘divine’ music derived from the Vedic text, from the regional folk music. She uses seven points to describe the socio-political and historical reasons that led to classicization of music such as scientificization of music following the dictum of Pythagoras and Plato, masculinity, cultural elitism in the pre-colonial era and nationalism during the colonial era.

Walker (2014) in her provocative analysis of the history and historiography of *Kathak*, a dance form popular in the northern part of India, challenges the narrative of tracing the roots of *Kathak* to temple and religious texts. She argues that it is the oriental exposition of the history of artforms in India that gives them a mythical origin in the ancient and devotional texts, obscuring and ignoring the influence of and integral relationship with the Muslim repertory of music and rhythm. Walker believes that much of the postmodern scholarship in India has emerged out of Edward Said’s redefinition of ‘orientalism’. She further writes “The evidence from the Orientalists, that India was once a leader in astronomy, mathematics and philosophy, offered an accessible platform thoroughly supported by European scholarship from which to confront late-nineteenth-century British portraits of Indian inferiority. Orientalist scholarship provided an India that was even older than Classical Greece and Rome, with accomplishments to rival if not surpass those of these European cultural giants”. She also challenges the claim that *Kathak* is mentioned in the great Indian epic *Mahābhārata*, by quoting the verses from the Ādi parva and Anuśāsana parva, tracing the Sanskrit roots of the word *Kathak* and its two commonly accepted interpretations and concludes that the *Kathaka*-s referred to in these verses might mean the traveling storytellers reciting sacred stories in the Vedic times and does not refer to *Kathak*, the modern dance form.

She writes “Scholarly evidence linking *Kathak* or the *Kathaks* to Vedic India or even just India before the thirteenth century is therefore spurious at the best and is arguably derived from twentieth-century politics rather than the search for ancient origins rather than any historical facts”.

As Chatterjee (1993) argues, the agenda to accomplish a nationalistic self-representation through ‘Indian Historiography for India’, first propagated in the early 19th century, was not limited only to social history of India but pervaded other domains of history-- of art, language and science-- demarcating the distinct domains of sovereignty bearing the necessary features of a cultural identity. Among the many streams of nationalism that had a predilection for cultural history of the nation, art was a particularly useful avenue in the discursive search for a cultural identity and successful construction of a classical past of India. As far as music was concerned, this undertaking was aggressively pursued by the likes of Bhatkhande and Paluskar in the Hindustani music who gave North Indian classical music performance a definite form, context and path to future (Bakhle, 2005). According to Subramanian (2004), in South India, the call for a nationalistic culture which was deemed vital for the politics of nation building was received with some reservations from the south Indian populace that was already in active pursuit of a regional cultural identity, distinct and different from the pan Indian nationalism that had gained critical mass in the Northern part of India. Southern states of India were already embroiled in regional movements which traced their genesis to some form of anti-Brahmin agitation predominantly in the Mysore state and Madras presidency all of which strived to an alternate interpretation to the cultural nationalism that was radically different from the sclerotic interpretation of the elite apparatchiks of the country. Music being the semblance of culture, was now being recognized as a legacy of cultural inheritance. She writes further, “The case of music and the performing arts, insofar as its discursive history was concerned, was no less important or different as self professed publicists and custodians came

forward to initiate a project of retrieval and revival...The growing interest in classical music among the middle classes, combined with a need to articulate the richness of India's cultural legacy, produced a richly textured critique on the tradition of the performing arts in terms of its content, context, social composition, and its reconstitution as an integral component of India's rich cultural legacy” (Subramanian, 2004:68).

Notwithstanding the social divide between them, both Brahmin elites and their non-Brahmin associates shared a common interest in art, civic interests and social reforms, with the English educated Brahmins still dominating the public life and determining the trajectory of cultural nationalism. What distinguishes South Indian *Karnatak* classical music from its North Indian counterpart is that despite North Indian music being revived and reformulated by Bhatkhande and Paluskar who were themselves Brahmins, the performance was not an exclusive privilege of the Brahmin elite. Atleast among the men, several prominent vocalists, Tabal Ji-s (*Tabla* players) and *Sārangiya-s* (*Sarangi* players) were predominantly from the Muslim community, whereas *Karnatak* classical music has been under the custodianship of the upper-caste elites particularly Brahmins at least over the last century.

Brahmins not only claimed custodianship of south Indian classical music but also drew boundaries between the popular and the classical genres of music. Subramaniam (2004) quotes the 19th century orientalist C. R. Day as writing in 1891,

“The higher branches of the musical profession were formerly confined to either Brahmins (*Bhagavatars*) or to men of very high caste. Music being of divine origin was regarded as sacred,

and it was considered impious for any but men of the sacred caste to wish to acquire any knowledge of its principles. It was and still is called the fifth Veda. Hence, the ancient Brahmins of the country would have excommunicated any of their number who would have so far presumed as to betray the sacred writings to any but the elect, whose mouths were only esteemed sufficiently holy to utter words so sacred. Indeed, it was the knowledge of which they were possessed that was the chief cause of the reverence and adoration paid to the Brahmins of old, and which gave them the power and influence that they prized so much” (Subramaniam, 2004:70). According to her it was C. R. Day who projected a ‘purer’ image of South Indian classical music, unadulterated by the Muslim influence and excesses.

The project in hand of the middle-class, educated elite of south India in the 19th century was to recreate, classicize and rediscover music as a source of ‘aesthetic pleasure’ and edify it as a spiritual pathway (Weidman, 2006; Subramanian, 2004). The latter was done by sanctifying the compositions by the Saint composers Tyāgarāja, Śyāmāśāstri and Muttusvāmi Dikṣitar that were based on ‘grammar and textual authenticity’ as the core of classical music tradition and presenting it to the appeals of the public and the colonial masters. The music was thus restructured into ‘*lakṣhaṇa samgīta* (theoretical music)’ and ‘*lakṣya samgīta* (performative music)’ under the bracket of *śāstrīya samgīta* (classical music) (Subramanian, 2004).

Music classicization in South India had started almost a century earlier than Bhatkhande’s clarion call in 1917 for ‘one nation one song’. Subramanian (2006) claims that the classicization project of music in South India had started because of a Eurocentric sensibility of the kings of Tanjore for art appreciation, who facilitated the dispersion of music from the court salons and temples to larger spaces for public consumption. She further writes, “The cultural politics of the Tanjore court

appears similar to the nationalist project that came nearly a century later...the Madras elite had then found in traditional music a repository of the subtlest and most enduring collective insights and accomplishments, a source of innocent and profound joy and refreshment and a spiritual and intellectual haven immune to the threats, insults and blandishments of rampant modernity. Simultaneously, they found it necessary to recast the tradition in a modern mould”.

The author here demonstrates the paradox of nationalism, because, on the one hand classicization project was undertaken by the ‘Eurocentric sensibility’ towards arts appreciation and on the other as her argument clearly posits, this was accomplished due to the resistance against the threat of a high intensity ‘cultural annihilation’ and ‘proselytization’ by the West. The author also believes that the dissemination of music from Tanjore into the colonial city of Madras and its ready acceptance by the English educated elites was due to ‘colonial sociology of music’ in which the colonizers appreciated especially the South Indian music due to its ‘distinctiveness’ vis-à-vis its European and North Indian counterparts in terms of ‘absence of harmony, stress on melody and adherence to an older system of music less influenced by Islamic interlude’ (Subramanian, 2006:129).

The rubric for classicization was perhaps formed by orientalist narrative of early orientalists such as Willard, Sir William Jones who conferred authenticity upon South Indian music since it adhered to the ‘textual grammar’ and remained unaltered by the Islamic influence. Several authors have written differing opinions about the influence of Islam on Indian performing arts, particularly music and dance. Tagore (1882) consolidates the literature on Indian music (which he refers to as Hindu music) written by various authors of his times. Tagore further quotes Willard’s claims that

“In Hindustan, music arrived at its greatest height during the flourishing period of the native princes, just a little before the Mahomedan conquest, and its subsequent depravity and decline since then, closed the scene with the usual catastrophe”. Regarding the social status of music after it got liberated from the stranglehold of the purists and its evolution to new genres such as khayal and qawwali, he writes “Music has always been highly appreciated, especially when its charms have not been prostituted to add to the allurements of licentious poetry...At present most native performers of this noble science are the most immoral set of men on earth, and the term is another word for all that is abominable, synonymous with that of the most abandoned and profligate exercises under the sun” (Tagore, 1882:28).

This narrative was challenged by later scholars, starting from Qadir (1936). According to Qadir, on the musical front, poets like Amir Khusro contributed to enrich the musical repertoire of Northern India by introducing Persian literature, songs, musical instruments such as *Tabla*, Rabab, Sitar, Sarod, Taos, Dilruba and others, which are of Persian and Arabic origin. The Mughal ruler Akbar was a great patron of classical music and had eminent musical personalities in the history of Hindustani music like Tansen and Baiju decorate his court as royal musicians. Music became the medium of interaction and brand ambassador of bonhomie between Hindus and Muslims. Qadir in his address at Royal Society of Arts in the year 1936 reading from Jaffar’s book observed that “The process of co-operation and intermutation was not a new thing in the time of Akbar. It had begun centuries before. In the domain of music, it became distinctly perceptible how the two communities were borrowing from each other the precious share it possessed in this art, and thereby enriching each other. Khyal, for example, which was invented by Sultan Husain Shah

Sharqi of Polpur, has become an important limb of Hindu music. Dhrupod on the other hand, has engrafted itself on Moslem music” (Qadir, 1936:236).

He claims that the preexisting *Dhrupad* music was replaced by a new genre of music called the ‘*Khayal*’, meaning *imagination* in Arabic. New ragas (modes) bearing Persian names that followed a nomenclature system based on geographical location, seasons, for example Bahar (spring), Yaman (Yemen) and others were introduced. The theoretical treatises such as *Raga Darpan* by Faqir Ullah in 1666 AD and other texts also used Arabic and Persian vocabulary. New languages such as Urdu, an admixture of Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit were used for poetry. This genre itself got impregnated with newer folk/regional subgenres such as *Ghazal* and *Qawwali* adding to its already rich repertoire. Qadir also notes that, despite music being forbidden in the primitive Islam, during its journey through Persia before it reached India, it was greatly influenced by the Sufi cult in Persia who believed that music was mediated between the individual and the divine and Muslim rulers in India invited musicians, painters and other artists from their native land facilitating a healthy atmosphere for cultural exchange in India.⁴⁵

Terada (2000) like many scholars argues that upper-caste elites, particularly Brahmins, dominated *Karnatak* music in South India by shifting the past cultural centers from princely cities like Tanjore to colonial urban centers such as Madras presidency and Bangalore. He thinks that this was possible because the non-Brahmins turned indifferent to classical *Karnatak* music and drifted towards the light, popular film music and recorded cassettes at the turn of the nineteenth century, while Brahmins used ‘public and private channels’ to gain hegemonic control over *Karnatak*

⁴⁵ For more detail on the Mughal influence on dance, see Walker, 2014.

music. He writes “Public discourse concerning South Indian music culture is generally advanced from a Brahman perspective. The Brahman orientation of public discourse is partly a result of their domination of music scholarship and journalism, through which their view has been amplified and authenticated, and of what may be termed the dynamic mechanism of domination in which the perspectives of subordinate groups are excluded or left unarticulated in public domains of communication”.

Both Weidman (2003) and Bakhle (2005) have come to the same conclusion that the classical music became a new identity of the upper-caste, modern, middle-class, elite ‘family women’. Bakhle argues more adamantly that the women were forced to learn music and dance so that their ‘husbands did not have to leave their homes at night in search of musical entertainment’. Weidman addresses how *Karnatak* classical music created both a domestic, private sphere as well as a modern public sphere. Mathew Allen in fact called the term ‘revival’ of classical music in South India, a ‘drastically reductive linguistic summary of a complex process’, that needs to be thoroughly examined from many perspectives. According to Allen, it is not just revival but a combination of ‘revivification, renaming, repopulation, reconstruction, re-situation and restoration’. He traces the history of performance of *Bharatanāṭyam* by the middle-class upper-caste Brahmin women, which was hitherto considered demeaning, to the early 20th century following the performance of *Bharatanāṭyam* by traditional devadasi-s at the Madras Music Academy organized by the lawyer Krishna Iyer. He begins by attributing this appropriation (to be read as classicization) of art neither to cultural nationalism nor the modernity but to the need to ‘dispense with the services’ of traditional hereditary dancers and dance teachers called *naṭṭuvanar-s* who believed that it is impossible to practice the artform of *Bharatanāṭyam* if one is not a member

of the 'usual class' (of dancers). He quotes a letter written Rukmini Devi, who is credited with the project of bowdlerizing and institutionalizing *Bharatanāṭyam* serving as the director of the eminent *Bharatanāṭyam* school '*Kalakshetra*' in South India. He quotes the following lines from one of her letters,

One great new thing that has come as a result of these difficulties is the complete separation of our work from the traditional dance teachers. It is a well-known fact that they are a small clan of people who have never believed it possible for anybody else to conduct a dance performance. I have always had a determination that this must go. They used to think that, except the usual class of people, no one else would be able to dance. Now there are so many girls from good families who are excellent dancers. The second aspect is to train Nattuvanars [dance teachers] from good families. I am happy that on Vijayadasami day I was able to prove that we could do without them. (Allen, 1997:65)

He later identifies this movement in South India to the 'influence currents flowing between' musicologists of Northern India and Southern India. The movement was spearheaded by Bhatkande in Maharashtra who also visited South India to study the *meḷakarta* (a system in which all *rāga*-s of *Karnatak* music can be derived from 72 parent *rāga*-s) which inspired him to start the *thaat* system of Hindustani music (Allen, 1997:65). Similar instances of replacement of hereditary musicians by upper-caste elite performers are reported from the Northern part of India in which Muslim musicians were disenfranchised narrowing the gap between the patron and the performer (Qureshi, 1991).

Most of the corpus of literature on Indian performing arts, particularly on music and dance, focuses on underscoring this professional antagonism and disenfranchisements between Hindu/Muslims in the North Indian music or Brahmins and Non-brahmins in South Indian music. Muslims of south India have always remained aloof about *Karnatak* music. Manuel takes a contrary position and argues that there always has been a syncretic and healthy relationship impervious to the polarizing society, at least as far as music is concerned (Manuel, 2008). This position is contested by Katz

(2012) who believes that given the history of communal discord between Hindus and Muslims, one should not get carried away to believe that music is a communalism free zone and rightly so.

In my own personal experience of having been under the tutelage of Hindu and Muslim, Brahmin and non-Brahmin music Gurus, I have encountered many shades of opinions. Here, I will summarize some of the perceptions of them, in some cases naming them and in some without. During the days when my obsession to learn the *Sarangi* had intensified my pedagogical promiscuity, I had visited one of the most renowned Muslim *Sarangi* players in Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, while my search for a friendly, reliable and transparent *Sarangi* player who was also willing to teach me continued clandestinely elsewhere. I was given a very warm and friendly welcome by him and his family, but after a couple of sessions, a close relative of this family told me in a subdued tone, “Why are you wasting your time here? Don’t you know this *Ustad* doesn’t like to teach Hindus? Leave alone Hindus, he wants his legacy to continue only through his male lineage, so he has ensured that all his grandchildren through his daughters remain distracted with other luxuries of life and do not take up *Sarangi* even though some of them are more talented than his own sons and grandsons through his sons. You claim to be an engineer, why don’t you get a job and pursue *Sarangi* only as a hobby?”.

While I was under the tutelage of the great *Sarangi* player, the Grammy winner, late Pandit Dhruba Ghosh, he once got a telephone call from a very renowned Hindu musician who said over the telephone, “We Hindus should unite and teach these Muslim musicians a lesson”. Pandit Dhruba Ghosh being a highly secular and an erudite scholar told me after the telephone conversation ended, “See, this man doesn’t like Muslim musicians. It should not be Hindus or Muslims who should unite, it is the art and the like-mindedness to worship the art that should unite. This is my opinion”.

These are just a couple of many such encounters that I have had with various musicians who are both political and communal, about which I will write in more detail elsewhere.

Bemoaning the Present and Glorifying the Past: Nationalism and De-Classicization of the Theater Tradition

As explained in Chapter 1, theater was no exception in the grand project of nationalism everywhere in the world.

Indian theater was following the suit of other performing arts such as dance and music and played a definitive role in nation building in the post-colonial India. Richmond believes that modern theater in India was an aftermath of the British introducing English education in India by setting up three universities in urban centers namely Calcutta University, Bombay University and Madras University to impart the British values and tastes to the elite intelligentsia (Richmond et al 1990, 388). It was around the same time that nationalist producers employed theater to foster the growth of national pride and affirmation of national consciousness, both of which are indispensable elements of a national identity. After an unsavory incident in Lucknow during the staging of the play 'The Indigo planters' which depicts a white man raping an Indian peasant woman, the Europeans in the audience were irked and stopped the play abruptly, and the British became increasingly aware of the consequences of the potential role the theater could play in creating 'social unrest'. This also led to strict enforcement of censorship through Dramatic Performances Act 1897 (Gupta, 1958). With the imposition of strict censor laws many nationalist playwrights diverted their attention and efforts towards composing plays on social evils that were gripping the society.

In the context of Indian theater in general, modern Kannada theater in particular, the term *classicization* does not seem to be applicable since Indian theater performance, unlike music, was never divided into the ‘divine’ and ‘regional’ forms. One can argue that the Indian theater was in fact de-classicized because of the sole objective of the play was entertainment for which European technology for production and execution were indispensable. Even though some scholars preferred to take the *Nāṭyaśāstra* route to grant authority to the modern theater performance, most scholars seem to have investigated the realm of theater from a much broader and more relevant perspective, namely the modernization, which in the 19th and 20th century meant moving the performances, which earlier used to take place in front of a public gathering, to private performances to public audience in theater halls on a proscenium stage, using modern technology and lighting, all inspired by the European theater practices, to tell the stories of Indian mythology. The emergence of a vibrant theater form with its emphasis on spectacle and song was, as Kathryn Hansen argues, especially important as it introduced new modes of aesthetic experience that linked pre-existing forms with creative innovations that conveyed a sense of modernity and a pan Indian style (Hansen, 1992:3).

Dharwadekar (2005) argues that the concept of ‘Indian National Theater’ itself is vague and unsustainable, vague because of the linguistic plurality that characterizes the Indian theater and unsustainable, because it denotes a ‘sum-total’ of all the regional forms including the classical Sanskrit theater and the post-independence theater. It is for the same reason Indian theater cannot be bracketed under a ‘National’ framework like its European counterpart where theatrical expression was used to perpetuate a ‘nationalist ideology and progressive democratization’, in other words, theater was classicized, historicized and secularized (Dharwadekar, 2005:22-23).

Modern Kannada Theater - The 'Unclassicized' Artform

Modern Kannada theater maintained a strange distinctness from the rest of the theater in the country. Firstly, like any other theater form in India, it was never party to nationalist agenda that was gaining momentum in the rest of the country. Secondly, the newly educated intelligentsia started a new movement of 'rational theater', whose primary purpose was education while entertainment remained secondary. This form of theater gained popularity among the middle-class elite of the princely Mysore state and it never made any attempt to appropriate the modern Kannada theater either through the project of classicization or through cultural appropriation or explore its transformative role in the society at the apex of anti-colonial nationalist movements. Thirdly, it did not undergo somatic and symbolic aesthetic transformations under Brahmin propriety like other artforms such as *Karnatak* music and *Bharatanāṭyam*. While in Madras presidency and Northern India, the upper-caste (Mostly Brahmin) performers replaced the traditional hereditary performers, Modern Kannada theater remained untouched by the likes of Bhatkhande or Rukmini Devi. This was perhaps because of the societal stigma and the strong negative locutions that villainized and degraded the reputation of theater artists despite their Brahminical background. A number of instances were mentioned both by my father, his colleagues and my friend at the Indian Institute of Science, Mr. Shashidhar Lakshminarayan. I will in the following paragraphs present my interviews and short communications with them to finally discuss the implications of the hegemonic classicization of music on my father's career in *Karnatak* music.

Deepak: Why were you treated badly despite being a Brahmin and a renowned artist in the theater world for so long that you had to eventually take up a government job to be marriage worthy?

Paramashivan: As I mentioned earlier, theater was not considered a noble profession and theater professionals were not respected in the society. I want to remind you what Professor H. N. Meera,

the renowned light music singer said at her school annual function which I presided over as the chief guest. Do you remember, she had reminisced, her family's disposition towards her uncle G. Nagesh Rao who was the most celebrated musician and actor of our times in the theater. I have acted in 'bālakana pātra (Boy's role)' alongside him for many years. People used to come from all over the state to listen to his singing. My own uncle Nagu Mama would pledge the expensive utensils with a pawn broker and use that money to travel to Bangalore from Mysore, only to watch G. Nagesh Rao in action in 'Subhadra Kalyāṇa'. I myself emulate a lot of his singing skills and repertoire in my performance of theater songs, even to this date. He was an outstanding musician, a Brahmin from a very respectable family, but not many people know that he remained a loner all his life. Ms. Meera told me that Nagesh Rao was her maternal uncle and Meera's father who was a lawyer in those days, had forbidden him from entering the house, just because he was in the theater profession. She even confided that he used to visit his own sister (Meera's mother) clandestinely that too when her husband was away in the court. This was just one of the many cases of theater persons being denigrated by the society and their own family members.

(Interview on August 8th, 2017)

Deepak: This is no surprise because Nagesh Rao was an actor. Even playwrights were not spared by our traditionalists. The great playwright, court poet Beḷḷāve Narahari Śāstri was my friend Shashidhar Lakshminarayana's granduncle. He once told me that his great grandfather had ousted and outlawed Narahari Śāstri because he was into theater profession and accused him of 'dharma bhraṣṭa (religious turpitude)'. You said, you owe a lot of your musical knowledge to your theater experience. Did it affect your career in classical Karnatak music?

Paramashivan: My theater identity severely crippled my career in Karnatak music which was considered more pure and classical by the elitists. I had performed four classical concerts at Madras, All India Radio, much earlier than any musician in Karnataka, yet I had to struggle for my identity as a Karnatak musician. The number of concerts that I would get invited as Karnatak vocalist was limited to 4 -5 organizations for their annual music festivals. One of them was my Guru Devendrappa's famous 'Hanuma Jayanti', annual music festival in the month of December. There were a few more organizations and most importantly the All India Radio, Bangalore. I even interviewed for a job in All India Radio once and did not make it. The then director of the All India Radio, Bangalore who was very fond of my music wrote me a letter to Bijapur when I was touring with M. V. Subbayya Naidu's company regarding a job opening in the Bangalore radio station and urged me to apply. I made no further delays, requested for leave and appeared before the panel. The renowned Karnatak musician, Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer was in the panel of interviewers. He asked me to sing the rāga Bhairavi and appeared to be quite impressed too. But eventually the job was offered to someone else and the director in a personal communication to me conveyed that the other candidate was favored because of his 'purer' musical background against my theater music background. A few years later the All India Radio stopped calling me to perform in the classical music slot and instead started inviting me to sing 'raṃgagītegaḷu (theater songs)'. After my Guru's demise, the annual music festival stopped and eventually my Karnatak singing career which ran parallel to my theater career came to a complete halt.

(Interview on August 8th, 2017)

Deepak: Didn't your peers recognize your abilities in Karnatak classical music, then?

Paramashivan: Not until I was invited to give a short lecture recital on theater music at the 'Bellary Sangīta Sammelana (Music conference held in Bellary, India)' in 1972. Thereafter the music organizations scheduled many thematic concerts on raṅgagītegaḷu sometimes solo and other times duet with other 'pure' classical musicians. The most memorable one was with late R. K. Shrikantan on the theme of rāga kāpi. He started his lecture recital with a rare Varṇa in kāpi. But I do not consider it rare because I had learnt it when I was a child from Shivappanavaru in Chamundeshwari company. Later I presented how Kapi raga was dealt with in Modern Kannada theater. After the concert, Mr. Krishnamurty, the grandson of the illustrious composer of the 20th century, the court musician Mysore Vasudevacharya, said in his concluding remarks 'I was really worried when I proposed a duet between a theater musician and a classical musician, but Paramashivan allayed all my apprehensions with his performance today'. To conclude, I sang a 'kanda padya (poem set to the meter of kanda)' from the play Kālidāsa in which the composer has used a humorous double entendre.

(Interview on August 8th, 2017)

Deepak: Can you recollect the kanda padya?

Paramashivan:

*Veśyāstrī darśanam puṇyam sparśanam pāpanāśanam |
(Beholding a prostitute bestows great merits, mere touch will destroy all the sins)*

*Cumbanam svargamāpnoti saṁbhogam mokśasādhanam ||
(Kissing her will grant you a place in heaven and making love to her is the path to emancipation)*

Deepak: This is too direct. Where is the double entendre in this poem?

Paramashivan: That's the beauty of this poem. In the play, after singing this poem, Kālidāsa explains that he was referring to the Gaṇḍaki river in Nepal which is known by its sobriquet 'Veśyā (Prostitute)'. If you now replace the meaning in the poem with the river it makes perfect sense doesn't it?

Deepak: It still does not make any sense to me.

Paramashivan: Here is how you should interpret it.

'You will accrue great merits merely by beholding Gaṇḍaki river

By touching the water in the river all your sins will get washed away

If you drink the water of the river, you are assured of a position in the heaven

Taking a dip in Gaṇḍaki is in itself a path to emancipation'.

Does it make sense now?

Deepak (chuckling): Yes. It does, now.

Paramashivan: The audience burst out in laughter and amazement after I finished singing this poem. Then I had to offer a rejoinder explaining the meaning to the audience the way I did to you.

Deepak: So, you were still being recognized as a theater musician but not as a classical musician?

Paramashivan: Yes. I had all the credentials to be in the mainstream classical music. I got my 'Vidvat'⁴⁶ (proficiency) degree in music in the year 1952. One of the most renowned scholars known for his aggressive predisposition and ruthlessness that permeated his interpersonal relationship with his peers, colleagues and young musicians, Narayanaswamy Bhagavatar was my examiner. I was reluctant to appear for the exam because I was in severe grief due to the passing of my grandmother earlier that week. My mother consoled, coaxed and coerced me to do it as a tribute to my grandmother who loved my singing. We could not afford a radio and she had to invariably request our neighbors and depend on them to listen my radio performances. To save her this embarrassment, I had bought her a small radio which she treasured till the end. Therefore, I decided to appear for the exam to honor her love for me and my music. The examiner was a tough nut to crack. He asked me to sing tāna in rāga Śrī. My voice could easily traverse in all the three octaves effortlessly with grace and utmost felicity, so I sang some brisk phrases exploring the faster side of the rāga. He was an old school musician who believed in slow rendition. He sarcastically said 'namge ekspress nalli hogokke iṣṭavilla rī (I do not like traveling in an express train)'. In the exuberance of my youth, I didn't even have to think to give him a fitting reply. I replied 'Beda śatlalli'⁴⁷ hōgi (Never mind, take a shuttle train)'. The other examiner in the panel consoled me and explained that 'No. What he meant was, take your time to slowly draw the contours of the rāga'. It was not a pleasant experience altogether but eventually I was one of the

⁴⁶ Back in those days, passing Vidvat exam would earn the title 'Vidvān (scholar)', the third and final stage in the series of exams conducted in music education. This system of examination continues till date.

⁴⁷ Express and shuttle trains in those days were classified according to their speeds. Shuttle was the slowest of all the trains that ran on coal engine at a maximum speed of 15 Miles Per Hour.

only few candidates who he had passed in the exam. Despite my vidvat degree I still could not compete with the mainstream classical musicians because my ill reputation as a theater artist preceded me. Which was about the time I decided to diversify my interests and knowledge. I started learning and performing the Vīṇa and the Violin and passed my senior⁴⁸ grade examination in both.

Learning these instruments later helped me in my career to establish myself as a violin and vīṇā player for Bharatanāṭyam which brought me laurels and a lot of stress free money. Within a short period of time I absorbed the techniques of dance music and composed music for more than thirty dance ballets all of which received a lot of appreciation and critical acclaim.

(Interview on August 8th, 2017)

Deepak: Of all the ballets that you composed music for, which ones are your favorites?

Paramashivan: I liked composing music to all of them but 'Yesu Krista (Jesus Christ)', 'Buddha Jyoti (Buddha's Light)' and 'Cheluva Kannada Nāḍu (The beautiful land of Kannada)' are some of my favorites.

Deepak: Why these three alone?

Paramashivan: I have always admired the character of Jesus Christ since childhood. When the senior most dancer of our country Mr. H. R. Keshavamurthy approached me with the script of life of Jesus Christ, I readily accepted the offer. Wherever it was staged, the heads of various local churches have congratulated me. I liked 'Cheluva Kannada Nāḍu', for its grandeur in the lyrical content and Buddha Jyoti for the same reason. You were involved too with Buddha Jyoti, which was another ballet very dear to my heart. It had such vivid description of the relationship between Āmrāpāli, a prostitute by profession who first gets physically attracted to Buddha and later transforms to become his disciple. The author, Mr. Bellibatlu Ramachandra Rao had done such a realistic portrayal of each character in the ballet, that at some point while composing, I started feeling the presence of some of the characters around me. Do you remember I composed the music predominantly in the North Indian style for the entire ballet and the orchestra constituted mostly North Indian musical instruments such as Sarangi, Sitar and Bhansuri.

(Interview on August 8th, 2017)

This ballet played a huge role in my own musical career and moreover, if I trace back the sequence of events leading to the *raison d'être* for my PhD in ethnomusicology, it will logically culminate in this ballet. I will describe it in some detail in the last chapter and discuss more, probably, at a later point in my life when I will have the luxury to name some of the bigwigs in Indian classical

⁴⁸ Equivalent of a bachelor's degree in music.

music. The above discussion with the subject emphatically hints that modern Kannada theater remained untouched and never came under the purview of cultural appropriation or classicization projects of Indian nationalists. Even though it was dominated by Brahmins during its inception later it witnessed a surge of performers from various communities including Muslims actively participating in the theater. However, the classicization project definitely seems to have affected the careers of some of the hereditary classical musicians such as *Devadāsī*-s and some Brahmins too, who eventually had to eschew their career in *Karnatak* classical music because of lack of acceptability and pursue a career of disrepute in the theater. As explained earlier *Devadāsī*-s were condemned as prostitutes and their profession was usurped by upper-caste Brahmin women (Weidman, 2003).

Deepak: Did you ever consider quitting theater and pursuing a career in Karnatak music?

Paramashivan: It occurred to me at least twice during my career and both the times, I was disheartened. I was 12 years old when Mr. Krishnamurthy, a circle inspector in Holenarasipura, India, provided me an opportunity for my first live concert. I didn't have money to buy even a simple concert attire. Mr. Krishnamurthy himself bought me a pair of Kurtas and 'pance (White robe, wrapped around the waist by male performers in Karnatak music)' and I performed my first ever full-fledged concert for 2.5 hours in Holenarasipura. After that I performed sporadically in different places on smaller platforms but never could make it into the bigger arenas. Everybody suggested that I should move out of Mysore to Madras or Kerala and find a Guru. My uncle, Krishna Iyer, used to work as a chef at the royal palace, Mysore. He was very famous for his 'kesari bhāt (A sweet usually eaten as breakfast)'. The legendary Chembai Vaidyanath Bhagavata was performing one evening in the Bidaram Rama Mandira along with T. Chowdaiah. My uncle took me to him and asked me to sing for him. Chembai was very impressed with my singing and said to my uncle in Tamizh 'anupidumgo aiyyar vāḷ paiyyana enkūḍa, nān ivanukk sangītam katt taren (Send the boy along with me Mr. Iyer, I will teach him music)'. I felt my fortunes are going to change forever but much to my chagrin, my uncle plainly refused the offer by saying 'irukkirad ore paiyyan en tangai kk, adhanāle engeyum anuppa mudiyād (He is the only male child for my sister, so we cannot afford to send him away)'. A few years later I tried my luck with the legendary 20th century composer Mutthaiyah Bhagavata, who had made Mysore his domicile for a long time thanks to the royal patronage that he seemed to be enjoying. But he laid out number of preconditions one of which was serving the guru for many years before he could accept me as his disciple. I was disappointed there as well and returned to the drama company.

(Interview on August 8th, 2017)

Deepak: What roles did you play in your adolescence?

Paramashivan: I played Aṅgada, Āñjaneya and many more roles but my career as an actor thereafter was very short-lived. I was immediately promoted as a harmonium player.

Deepak: How did that happen?

Paramashivan: I started playing the Harmonium during Krishna Leela movie when the music director Mr. Kalinga Rao asked me to teach the songs to all the sakhi-s (maidens). I was always surrounded by these pretty girls who were playing different roles. I used to drive them around in a Jeep dedicated to the cinema shooting unit and teach them playback singing with the help of the Harmonium. Within a short while I had become an expert Harmonium player (Figure 21). I was already frustrated with my acting life which was quite demanding. As an actor I had to be at the theater 2-3 hours before the show, apply make-up and then after the show spend another half hour removing the make-up. But as a Harmonium player, I could go just after the second bell, tune the instruments and play an invocation. With the third bell, the play would commence and at the end of the play, I had to secure the harmonium inside the box and could leave immediately. Mind you, the Harmonium player usually referred to as 'Harmonium Meshtru'⁴⁹ was the second highest in the hierarchy of status in any theater company, the top most person being the proprietor of the company himself. The entire orchestra would be under his control and will be respected by everyone. He was the equivalent of a music composer in the cinema. At about the same time, in Holenarasipura (A small town in Hassan district, India), a group of Brahmins had started a theater company called 'Keralapura company'. It was mostly Brahmins from Iyengar and Sanketi communities. Mr. Parthasarathy who became my close friend was in that company. Their official Harmonium player, Mr. Narayana Das was jealous of my talents. In the year 1948 they were playing the biggest drama, the Rāmāyaṇa, which had over 300 plus songs, would commence at 10 PM and by the time Maṅgala (an auspicious verse marking the end of the play) was sung and the curtains went down, it would be 5:30 AM. With a malintent of tarnishing my reputation, Narayana Das gave me the list of pitches of all the singers, said 'onderaḍu scene noḍkotiru bandbiditini (Keep playing for the first couple scenes, I will be back)' and left me alone to manage the play. He never cared to turn up. I had the blessings of Raghavendra Swamy (A saintly figure followed and worshipped by thousands of people in India) and I played for the entire Rāmāyaṇa play and I was again the cynosure of the show. Everyone from the audience started peeking into the Harmonium pit in utter shock to see a 16-year-old conducting the entire music of Rāmāyaṇa. I became a permanent member of their company until it was shut down. Thus, ended my career as an actor and began my new life as a 'Harmonium Meshtru' and I became popular in the theater world by the sobriquet 'Harmony Paramashivu'.

(Interview on August 8th, 2017)

Deepak: Did you ever act thereafter?

Paramashivan: 'Śokhi ge baṅṅa haccave (I used to apply make-up to quench my irresistible fondness for acting)' but only when I was working in my friend Hirannayya's company in the play

⁴⁹ Meshtru is a distortion of the word 'Master'.

Samsāra Nauka. I played the role of a 'kaḷḷa pūjāri (A charlatan priest)' who presents himself to the outside world as an extremely pious, religious Brahmin, but has a dark side to him which is scheming, lusting on a young widow and greed. It used to be very enjoyable because all the three of us, Hirannayya, Musiri and I, who had already earned the reputation as 'Three Musketeers' in the theater world, played three key, yet wicked, roles in this play. Musiri used to play two roles, as 'Dickie' the villain and an old frustrated widow who tortures her daughter-in-law and the sick little grandson. Remember, I told you I used to play the role of this sick grandson when I was a boy? I was now playing a major role in the same play. But that was only occasionally. I mostly enjoyed the reputation and respect of being the 'Harmonium Meshtru' of the theater world. I was the first 'Harmonium Meshtru' to wear blazers and play the Harmonium in the theater world.



Figure 21: Paramashivan playing harmonium for Sangīta Subhadrā, Tumkur, India, 2014

The plot and characters of the plays mentioned by him esp. those based on social themes and fiction can be very useful treasures of information regarding the social structure and organization of the society in the erstwhile Mysore. Firstly, the upper-caste elites (particularly Brahmins) enjoyed a respectable status in the society and it was therefore natural for them to cling on to it for their dear lives. But it is also clear that the society did impose a very strict and binding restrictions on Brahmins and any lapse on moral and ethical behavior of a Brahmin was rebuked severely. For

example, the 'kalla pūjāri' literally meaning a 'thief priest', or a 'deceiving thief', in *Samsāra Nauka*, is a highly respectable, family priest of rich landlords.

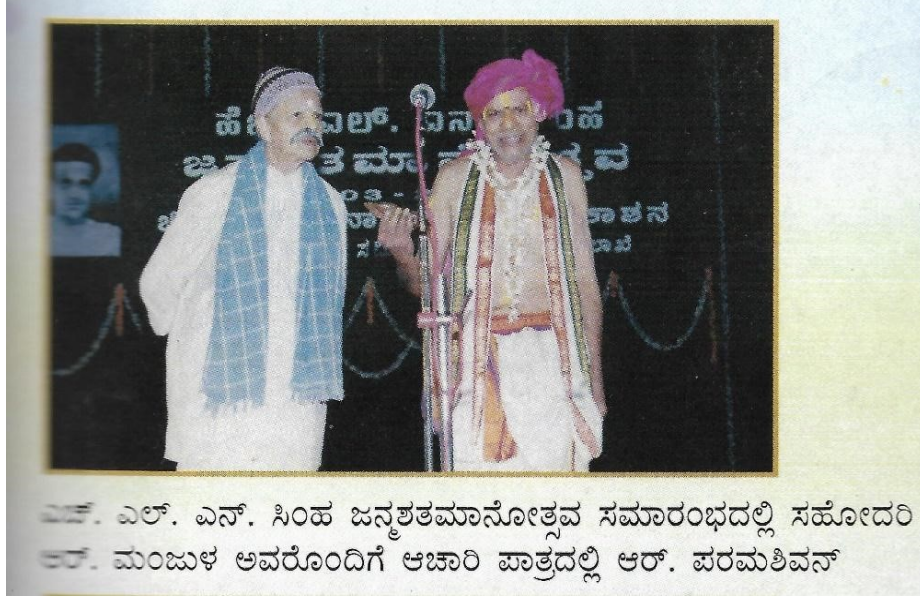


Figure 22: Paramashivan and his sister Manjulamma in *Samsāra Nauka* as Kalla pūjāri and the servant Siddha

The play subtly admonishes the lascivious behavior of a Brahmin priest who is lusting for a young widow. But Siddha, a servant from a lowly caste (his caste is not specified in the play, but the name suggests that he is not from the dominant caste) turns out to be morally and ethically loyal to the family (Figure 22, During the centenary celebrations of the playwright, cinema director and founder of the 'Simha Arts' theater company, Late H. L. N. Simha perhaps in the year 2003.).

The servant Siddha sings a humorous song *sullu paḷḷu* to mock and expose the brahmin priest, the tune resembles an Irish jig, probably as a reference to the Brahmin elitism.

Sullu paḷḷu ella serskonḍ purāṇa heḷkonḍu
(He utters falsehood but quotes scriptures)

Pūje gīje māḍṭīnanta jambha kochkonḍu
(He takes pride in being the priest)

Añcina śālu kañcina pātre kaiyalli hiḍkonḍu
(Wearing a silk shawl and holding a bronze utensils)

Bāyalli mantra manasinalli tantra raṇdera noḍkonḍu
(He chants while he casts his lusty eyes upon the whores)

Koḍṭānellarigu dagā, nan myāg avnig bal nigā
(He deceives everyone but has suspicions about me)

Pūjārappa nam pūjārappa kaḷ pūjārappa balu jāṇa
(This priest, this wicked priest is very clever)

Hāktāne cakkarrrrrrr, Uḷṭa pulṭa sītārām
(He is an unreliable priest who turns the world topsy-turvy)

Śāstrī gīstrī anta enen hesrgliṭkonḍu
(His name smacks of someone regulating the code of conduct)

Kathe githe māḍṭīnanta jambha kockonḍu
(He prides in expatiating upon the mythological stories)

Bhakti hecci heṇmakḷella kāl kāl biddāga
(when the girls fall at his feet in obeisance)

Uhum andkonḍ manasnal nondkonḍ bāyi bāyi biḍuvāga
(He cringes inside his heart, while drooling at them)

Māḍṭāne balu mosa, nagāḍṭāne dil khuśa
(He deceives everyone and then laughs wholeheartedly)

Hāktāne cakkarrrrrrr, Uḷṭa pulṭa sītārām
(He is an unreliable priest who turns the world topsy-turvy)

The language in the song is a dialect spoken by the servant class. The song is a narrative of the norms of the outwardly ‘gentlemanliness’ of the upper-caste elite that had nothing to do with the morality. This was one of the songs that I recorded in a studio with full theater orchestra. The song was rendered by my aunt along with the support of my father on the harmonium, Mr. Nagendra on the clarinet and Mr. Shivashankar on the *Tabla* (Sullu Pallu-Manjulamma, 2018c).

Conclusion

The plot also gives accounts of how widows were treated in the society esp. during the times when widow remarriage was still considered a taboo which will be addressed in the next chapter. From the entire discussion above, one of the very few conclusions upon which most scholars are in consensus is that ‘the fierce form of cultural nationalism’ resulted in Brahminization or classicization of Indian music by the ‘dominant caste’. However, I will be arguing in the following paragraphs that what appears to be a project of ‘classicization’ or ‘Brahminization’ from the vantage point of nationalism, was in reality ‘Unbrahminical’, contrary to what most scholars have been propounding so far.

I begin with a verse that Margaret Walker quotes from the 13th book of *Mahābhārata* called the *Anuśāsana parva* regarding the ‘desirable behavior’ of Brahmins which reads as follows,

Gāyanāḥ nartakāścaiva plavākāḥ vādakāstathā |

Kathakāḥ yodhakāḥ caiva rājan nārhanṭi ketanam ||

She also provides Ganguli's translation for the same as: 'Those Brahmins that are, by profession, vocalists, or dancers or players or instrumental musicians, or reciters of sacred books, or warriors and athletes, do not, O king, deserve to be invited' (Walker, 2014).

There are explicit references in *Mahābhārata* which are full of condemnation of the caste system, for ex. the *Vanaparva* (181.42) explicitly states that 'it is only by great virtues one can be classified as Brahmin and not by birth or caste'. Patanjali in his *Mahābhāṣya* says 'he who is not doing tapas and Vedic study is not a Brahmin even though he is born into a Brahmin family'. The virtues mentioned for a Brahmin include pursuing a profession of teaching, supervising sacrifices and living on donations in a state of glorified poverty. Most importantly, one of the virtues include not pursuing a career in music and dance. These are not isolated verses found only in the *Mahābhārata* but one can easily find numerous references in various texts including the *Manusmṛiti* that music is a forbidden profession in order to retain the Brahminhood. Therefore, what happened in the 19th and 20th century or prior to it was not Brahminization or classicization of music but propagation of 'Unbrahminical' values in which a forbidden art was accepted as a noble profession by the upper-caste elites.

As far as the subject is concerned, in all his narratives so far, there seems to be a continuous struggle and despair, for an identity of being considered 'elite'. Natrajan (2005) using Srinivasa's reference, defines a 'dominant caste' in India as a conglomerate of six attributes namely land holdings, population, position in the local hierarchy but most importantly, 'Western education, jobs in government administration, and urban sources of income'. In his own words, clearly, it had become a desperate necessity for Mr. Paramashivan to reclaim his 'dominant caste' identity by

one of the above means. Having lost on Western education, jobs in government administration, he probably tried to reclaim it through his art in the theater world.

The classicization project resulted in Brahmins claiming the custodianship of classical music and drawing boundaries to demarcate the ‘classical’ from the ‘popular’ and edified the classical with grammar and authenticity. This took place alongside deification of the trinities of South Indian classical music. Modern Kannada theater did not have such spiritual figures either among actors or composers or among playwrights who could be elevated to a saintly status.

Canonization of classical music in south India has another interesting precursor to it namely the revision of the concert format. The old format of leisurely exposition of melody and complex rhythmic compositions were replaced by briskly compositions of the trinities, whereas the theater format remained the same. Music and literature were both leveraged to rekindle the national spirit and pride of their ancient culture among the masses by nationalist poets and musicians through their musical compositions and literature. In the absence of other visual media, theater was considered the most powerful tool in fostering the national pride and national consciousness. Modern theater in India being a product of British strategy to inculcate English tastes and values, when the nationalists attempted to leverage the theater for nationalistic purposes, ‘The Dramatic Performances Act of 1897’ passed by the British imposed strict censorship on the content of drama fearing backlash and rebellion from the public. Therefore, the theater could not break away from the shackles of the mythology-based themes until post-independence. During 1960s, in Tamil Nadu, a neighboring state, the cinema became a driving force of political movement when mythological themes were replaced with the more contemporary social themes gripping the society (Hardgrave and Neidhart, 1975). In modern Kannada theater, though playwrights like Hirannayya

wrote plays about social and historical themes such as *Devadāsī*, *Heccama Nāyaka*, the repertoire largely remained mythological which had a very niche audience that dwindled over time. Audiences did no longer prefer the long mythological plays and the performers of the younger generation who might have been willing to pursue modern Kannada theater not willing to go through the rigorous musical training which was made as an unwritten precondition to enter the theater world. I also explored the interconnections between theater and the linguistic nationalism which was fostered mostly by the cinema art and its artists neglecting the modern Kannada theater altogether. All these factors had a damaging effect on modern Kannada theater.

In the current chapter music, nationalism, the project of cultural nationalization of music and a marked neglect of theater from the purview of classicization and how it affected my father's career were discussed. I also argued that the end result of the classicization project was nothing but glorification and social acceptance of music as a respectable profession by the elites in the urban centers which was in reality an 'Unbrahminical' pursuit. It was achieved by selective quoting of the sacred texts in favor of classicization and deification of music, which scholars interpreted as a project of 'Hinduization' or 'Brahminization'. I also presented some of my personal encounters to argue in favor of a glaring presence of communal divide in Indian music. In the next chapter, the status of women in modern Kannada theater, brief accounts of lives of some of the female actors, role of *devadāsī-s* will be discussed.

Chapter 7

Women in Kannada Theater

Prelude

I seldom have had a casual conversation with my father, the subject of my dissertation, for, as far as I am concerned, he has always been a serious and reticent person who does not encourage any light conversations. My phone calls are always directed to my mother from whom I get all the necessary information about my family. However, in August 2016, I was in an ethical, moral and professional quandary of my life to resolve which I called my father and sought his advice. I was invited to compose music and sing for a major Indian classical dance event in Edmonton. Just two days before this dance event, I heard the sad news that my Godmother under whose love and care I grew up had passed away in India after battling cancer for an inordinately long time. The organizers had spent more than 70,000 dollars on the show, they had booked the 'Festival Place', eminent dignitaries were invited, musicians flown in from different parts of the world, rehearsals were all done, and the show was just two days away. I was indispensable for the show since I was the main singer (the only singer too) and the only person who knew the repertoire for the entire show. I explained my predicament to my father.

He calmly replied "There was a comedienne called Chandramma in my sister Nagaratnamma's theater company. Sometime in the early 60s, one sad morning, her only little son died of some kind of an undiagnosed fever. The drama season had begun, hundreds of tickets were already sold and she was the only artist who could play that role. She buried her child in the afternoon and was there in the green room by evening for make-up and on the stage, you could see her with the same vigor and comic timing. Even my sister Nagaratnamma, upon the death of her husband, completed

all the obsequial rites in the morning and was ready for the show in the evening. Thus, will be an artist's life. You do not have a choice. If you choose this profession, be ready to face these eventualities. It would be humane to attend the funeral but inhumane to make anyone suffer a loss as large as 70000 dollars". The show did go on, then. But what followed was a period of depression, confusion, hopeless wandering and inconsolable grief. I was not sure, if I had made the right choice, of a profession that would not allow me to pay my last respects to my beloved Godmother. I have still not found the answer to this *vexata quaestio* since I do not know what I would have to do if, heaven forbid, something similar was to happen to my own parents and I were in a similar situation.

Introduction

According to Nettl (2005:405) the direction of studies in ethnomusicology were redefined after scholars stated two major concerns regarding the assumption of gender neutrality of music making. Firstly, "understanding of gender as a factor in personal identity, and of general relations in all aspects of society, is essential to the interpretation of musical cultures, and the second concern which is closely related and follows as a consequence of the first concern, "the realization that virtually all relationships, and all developments in music, among societies, and of groups of people within a society, can be seen as a function and expression of power relationships". He notes that the relationships are a consequence of the naturally occurring 'biological' differences and the artificially created "Social differences" depending on the "cultural-specific gender ideologies" with some "inter-cultural regularities "(ibid.:406). Collins (1979:57) makes an interesting observation linking the status of women and the status of art. Portending the impending danger of loss of status of the art itself, he notes: "...an increase in the status of women within the art world might be coupled with a decrease in the status of art within the larger society. If feminist goals

include increased female participation, success, and control in art activity, the achievement of these goals might lead to an increase in the popular feminine identification of art. If art has suffered secondary status in this society because it has been identified as a feminine endeavor, then an increased association with women might lead to a further decrease in its status”.

This chapter is concerned with ‘The role of women’ and ‘Women’s roles’, in modern Kannada theater; the former is concerned with the role women played in the operation and perpetuation of the art form and the latter about how women’s roles were sketched in selected plays. Regarding the status of Indian women, Tharakan and Tharakan (1975) argue that women’s status is always constructed out of social and economic compulsions. They argue that women enjoyed relative higher status in the medieval period, the status changed in an interim period and in the current times of socialization, it is hard to justify the ‘economic justification’ for the inequality of sexes. In this chapter, I am concerned with the status of women in modern Kannada theater. I will also explore the intersections between the status of men and women in modern Kannada theater and conclude that modern Kannada theater was male dominated in the initial days but had reciprocated to changing times prior to independence and inducted many female actors to play lead roles. I will discuss the lives of those women who made an everlasting impression as the best actors and singers, enjoyed many years of adulation, attention and a luxurious lifestyle in their heydays, their careers supplanted by the advent of modern media such as cinema which was preferred over the theater. When cinema replaced theater as the preferred mode of entertainment, theater was marginalized, and these women actors lost their identity and were consequently condemned into an oblivion of misery and hopeless valetudinarianism, which some endured and others succumbed to. I will also discuss in this chapter, the success story of my late aunt Mrs. Nagaratnamma who

was the founder and proprietor of the first all-women theater group called ‘*Strī Nāṭaka Mandali* (Women’s theater troupe)’, who not only toured across the country performing Kannada drama but also earned the highest award for performing arts called ‘Sangeet Natak Akademi’ award and the ‘*Padmashri*’, the fourth highest civilian honor, both conferred by the Republic of India, for her contribution to theater; and, I will contrast her success story with a story of frustration and hopelessness: that of my younger aunt, the renowned comedienne Ms. Manjulamma who was more popular, acted for many years in stalwarts’ drama companies including Nagaratnamma’s company, but could not make it to the top. I will present the text of the interview with Manjulamma, in her own words about her past and struggles in the theater. With regards to women’s character in Modern Kannada plays, I will be drawing liberally from the plots of *Sāmājika nāṭaka* (Social Drama) and subject them to critical analysis to address broader questions about the status of women, gender inequalities and *devadāsī* system. I would refer to the social and fictional plays, particularly ‘*Devadāsī*’ that revolves around the life of a *devadāsī* called Maṇimañjari, written by one of the most prolific Kannada playwrights of the 20th century, actor and comedian, Late K. Hirannayya in which he addresses the ills of the social practice of ‘*Devadāsī*’. I draw several parallels between the Victorian theater, about which more than sufficient literature has been disseminated, and the Modern Kannada theater which followed the footsteps of the Victorian theater in not only execution but also administration and presents an exact mirror image of its colonial counterpart, which formed the perceptions and the overall attitude of actors towards female actors.

Impure Rituals and a Profession of Disrepute

My father has reminisced the lives of many a woman artist he is acquainted and worked with in his 82 years of experience in the theater; he has utmost reverence for some, who are *Devadāsī*-s

by caste and there are also instances in which he expressed a bitter acrimony towards some of them even though they are from the upper-caste, because he thinks they were ethically or morally corrupt. As far as my mother is concerned, it seemed to me that she had her reservations about me or my sister attending theater performances or socializing with theater artists. However, whenever the theater artists visited us, my mother ensured that they were well fed and would also offer them financial help. Being an academician, my mother always relentlessly advised these artists to educate their children and she even had some of them study in the institution where she lectured. In fact, most of these artists would approach my mother if they ever needed any financial help and not my father. She explained her position clearly only much later, probably when she was convinced that I was mature enough to accept the harsh realities. When I asked her to explain her distaste for theater profession, she said, “I have nothing against the theater profession or against the professionals. Everyone deserves to live a respectable life in this world. But because of the societal biases against them, these artists, no matter how great they are, are always judged based on their past lives. Some of them have gone through rough vicissitudes that are still not acceptable in our society. Remember, nobody respected your father until he got a government job and married me. If I had let the theater artists socialize with our family; you would be labelled as ‘*Nāṭakadavaru* (Theater artists)’, and neither you nor your sister would earn the respect that you have in the society, today”.

Only much later did I realize that her apprehensions were not unfounded especially after witnessing two of my aunts in my father’s family remaining spinsters because of their affiliation to the theater. My eldest aunt was an exception because she could find an alliance, within the theater company she was working, who was also a Brahmin. Two of my aunts who could not find an alliance in the

theater remained unmarried because they were not willing to marry a non-brahmin and Brahmins from 'respectable' families were unwilling to accept the alliance of theater artists. In my father's case too, he embraced a new career path as an academician, continued theater as a parallel profession before immersing himself in it again post retirement. This time he was welcomed with more respect in the society because he had already reclaimed his social identity that was marred by the blot of 'disreputable profession' which he had attempted to wash in the murky waters of theater, with no success.

"I underwent all the 'samskāra-s (purificatory rituals)' like 'choula (the ceremony of cutting the hair for the first time), upanayana (ceremony of initiation into Vedic Study and Brahminhood by symbolically wearing a cross-thread) under the supervision of my uncle Krishna Iyer, but still nobody cared about our family. My sisters could not get married. People would come to us asking for alliance, but after learning about our profession, they would politely say 'We will get back to you' but would never return. After we moved to Bangalore and I had already become a teacher, things started changing for better. My mother was a religious lady who observed 'Satyanārayaṇa Vrata (A religious obligation involving worshipping the Hindu God Viśṇu)' on every paurṇami (full moon day). Our house became famous in our locality as 'Satyanārayaṇa Vratada mane (Household that observes worshipping Viśṇu). Almost everybody would take part in it except one family, who still had the prejudice in their hearts that we were drama actors, after all, so our religious obligations must be impure too" (Interview on March 25th, 2017).

Women in Theater in the West– Male Insecurity or Social Unacceptability?

Traditionally, women were expected to abide by certain social regulations which restricted them to reveal themselves only to their husbands and forbade them from becoming public in their demeanor lest they become an object of the gaze of other men. Theater actresses did exactly the opposite of what was expected from a respectable woman, they brazenly went on the stage and exposed themselves to the gazes of many a stranger, thereby transgressing the strict, moral, ethical and social boundaries imposed by the flagbearers of *mos maiorum*.

Seizer (2005: 302) writes “Stage actresses are women stigmatized precisely for being too public, and for moving out into the world beyond the bounds of proper, modest feminine behavior. They have long been the paradigm of illegitimately public female bodies”. The status of women in the theater has undergone a continuous change across cultures, from remaining anonymous in the obscure backstage managing the entire show to becoming the most popular lead actors on stage shining in the spotlights. Irrespective of their role whether as a playwright, stage-manager or actor, each woman had a telling tale of success, failure, personal trauma, illness and poverty. Schofield and Macheski (1991: XVI), comment about the lives of women in America and Britain, who chose a career in theater as “...Women molded the taste of the age and carved out in the theater one of the few available opportunities for independence and renown...these women endured insults, seductions, and rapes...”. Women in theater had to face not only verbal humiliation but were subjected to physical humiliation. Powell (1997, 64-73) summarizes the autobiographical reflections of Victorian actresses and concludes that their careers were precariously hanging in the hands of actor-managers who were either jealous of actresses who posed threat to their limelight or the actresses were expected to comply with the actor-managers’ wills, pleasures and sexual desires to be successful in the theater. She refers to a personal recollection of the 20th century actress Cicely Hamilton who reveals “I was thrown out of work to make room for manager’s mistress; no fault was found with the playing of my part, but it was wanted for other than professional reasons, and therefore I had to go”. Irrespective of heroes’ age, the actresses were expected to be ‘young and lovely’ to achieve great success otherwise they would be condemned to play small/subordinate roles. Dozens of them remained in the background as unsung heroines overshadowed by the star actors, neglected by the rest and died in penury, unrecognized for their contribution. The lives of actresses were not safe either in the theater profession. Langhan (1991,

8) mentions about an accident when the wire holding the car snapped and broke Susan Warwick's thigh on October 1st 1736⁵⁰.

Mulvihill (1991:75) psychologizes the nature of resentment of female theater artists and female litterateurs, and their struggle to make their presence felt in a male dominated culture where their efforts were 'mercilessly ridiculed' by some men. He quotes Poovey as writing "The struggle each of these women waged to create a professional identity was in large measure defined by the social and psychological forces of this ideal of proper—or innate—femininity". Sieg (1994:9) commenting about the struggle of female actors and playwrights in Germany in the early 20th century, writes "...Attention to gender issues, artistic departures from established models, and the very act of writing plays, were often interpreted as social transgressions against feminine modesty and virtue...example attests to the dominant culture's refusal to imagine or represent women as intellectually competent; it also points to the limits of masquerade as a source of empowerment". She also notes that despite many decades of feminist struggle, women had access to the universities and 'feminine' professions like 'nursing, teaching, secretarial and social work'. This was the time when women actresses and playwrights Erika Mann, Anita Berber, Valeska Gert, Jelinek wrote and acted in plays that focused on topical issues such as unwanted pregnancy, abortion, lesbianism with which the theater positioned itself in its new roles of political activism, education and protest. Erik Mann and her brother Klaus toured Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, Netherlands and Berlin, used and performed political cabarets as a 'vehicle against Nazis' cultural synchronization (*Gleichaltung*)'.

⁵⁰ As a parallel, in Kannada theater, Gubbi Veeranna's own daughter Malatamma lost her legs in an electrical accident when she was performing on the stage in 1950s (Paramashivan in a personal conversation).

Sieg quotes Jelinek's representation that the project of 'feminization of culture' and providing women with rights of 'cultural production' was in reality an exclusionary principle which ensconced women in the margins barring them from any role or whatsoever in culture production. Such an exercise, according to Sieg, only broadened the 'range of artistic expression of men', who could now transcend the emotional and aesthetic borders of gender, the focal principle of romanticism, which was articulated, quite subtly, by Kant, Herder, Shiller and others (Sieg, 1994:154).

Powell (1997, ix) deconstructs the accepted narrative about women in the Victorian theater. She contends that women were not hapless victims. Instead she argues that Victorian men did exert their dominance in theater, personal lives and the society at large; in the theater mainly out of fear of women's power on stage by constructing a rhetoric that women displaying their power on stage is nothing but transgressions of accepted social gender codes. The men in theater projected a picture of actresses that was distinctly different from their own, normative 'wives, mothers and daughters' to establish the masculinity of the theater. She consolidates the views of actors, novelists, historical figures on women taking acting as their career in the Victorian era, including that of Karl Marx's refusal to let his daughter Jenny become an actress in 1882, and concludes that while there were some women who became actresses out of financial necessity but most women acted because they liberated and exhilarated, without having the need to play a 'complementary role' to their husbands and rise themselves "above the blank flat level of domestic life along which she was to creep to a nameless grave".

There are several studies that discuss the nature of marriage and motherhood in theater. Powell (1997:19) quotes a line from an 1884 novel called 'The Stage Door' in which the hero pleads the

actress with whom he has fallen in love with in the theater, “Don’t return to the stage Lettie: I could not bear it – Promise me...” and the actress complies with his demand in deference, subjugating her own desire for freedom. Actresses were also expected to deplore the life on stage after marriage. Powell quotes Robert Buchanan’s novel *The Martyrdom of Madeline* (Powell, 1997:19-24), in which the response by a married actress to her husband’s suggestion that she should go back to acting is “It is impossible...I hate the stage. Rather than return to it, I would die”. In some cases, actresses were mistresses to wealthy and influential men (Also see Ledoux, 2014; Brooks, 2014; Phillipson, 2014; Langhan (1991:1-17), Rogers (1991:48)).

Role of Patronage and its Decline: Opera vis-à-vis Modern Kannada Theater

A careful understanding of history of opera, its status in Europe and how it changed in the 20th century Britain, offers useful insights and parallels to the causes of decline of modern Kannada theater. Rosselli (1989) suggests that in the early 17th century, no such profession called ‘opera singers’ ever existed. The only common characteristic feature of all the musicians associated with opera was that they all served a high-status patron usually from the royal family. The primary reason for the rise of opera, according to the author, is a long drawn economic crisis in Europe in the 17th century because of which the power centers controlling the entertainment industry like opera remained in the hands of rich aristocrats. Therefore, all opera musicians, particularly women, either singing for the courtiers or in public theaters, were directly controlled by royal patronage.

Kotnik (2013) offers a convincing argument that opera survived despite it being dubbed as an ‘exotic and irrational entertainment’ because of its adaptability to changing social and economic conditions, newer political regimes and cultural milieus. Sean (2012) calls *prima-donna* as a “fractured identity, one divided between two poles—that of dangerously seductive siren and that

of the innocent songbird”. According to Sean, opera being the site of “feminine power”, women enjoyed utmost freedom and power during 1800-1840 wherein they could influence all the domains of performance, composition, management decisions and dramatic practices.

Interestingly, the status of opera underwent a tremendous transformation in the 19th century London. In the 18th century, every concert performance of repute, more than half of the pieces comprised of opera numbers with the principle of introducing contrast between pieces by alternating instrumental and vocal performances. In 1800s, concerts that shunned vocal and opera music completely became popular. Weber (2006) observes that this transformation in the concert structure was due to the changing political and social climate. He notes that until then the audience was smaller in number and the distinction between different forms was largely flexible. He attributes the downfall of opera to the shift of authority from aristocratic and royal patronage to small rival communities of rich, urbane, elite connoisseurs in London and Paris. He characterizes these elite concertgoers: “The main leaders within this musical community came from a small but diverse and potentially acrimonious group of wealthy, influential people...Audiences drew subtle rather than categorical distinctions between genres or tastes, or between connoisseurs and members of the general public. Most important of all, few concerts were thought appropriate just for the musically learned, a distinction that most people now take for granted about most orchestral or chamber-music concerts” (Weber, 2006:510). Wilson (2007) succinctly concludes that though today opera has regained its pre 19th century status as an entertainer in the popular culture, as the society moved away from class-bound notions of culture, it is still fighting a social battle with other high arts in England.

A parallel phenomenon can be observed in the Indian theater. After the collapse of royal patronage, the authority of controlling the business of theater shifted to rich businessmen like Nandi Basappa

and the *Öffentlichkeit* (public sphere) of market for theater was nationalistic in nature which was continuously aspiring to classicize the art. The rich upper-class patrons decided the form of theater and music that would be acceptable during nationalism movement. When they decided to embrace South Indian classical music, dance and North Indian classical music to further their nationalistic agenda, but by projecting these artforms along the lines of colonial knowledge system, modern Kannada theater was left out. Similar to opera, modern Kannada theater had to fight a social battle with other high arts and the female performers of theater had to compete with the high-status women practicing and performing ‘high’ classical music. Those who had to face the worst form of isolation were the female actors, particularly those from the *devadāsī* community. Courtesans being in whose company was a part of aristocratic life had changed drastically with the power centers moving into the urban locales. They had abandoned their hereditary profession of dance and music, chose an alternate profession in acting in Kannada theater. With the decline of theater, those who could not be restored to the social acceptability through the institution of marriage, lost their economic status along with the social status that they had already lost.

Devadāsī-s – The Women Who Donned the Greasepaint in Mysore

Most actresses in the early 20th century Kannada theater belonged to a community called ‘*Devadāsī* (Servant of God)’, girls dedicated to the service of God and temple rituals. In colonial India, *devadāsī*-s were accomplished musicians and danseuses who served as courtesans in the royal palaces and decorated most of the prominent temple institutions in every princely state. Instead of being wedded to a man, they were wedded either to a sword or to the deity of the temple by tying a *tālī* (a sacred thread) instead of being wedded to a man’.

Historically, dedicating the children (especially the first child) to the service of God and religious institutions as an acknowledgement of the sovereignty of the divine has been a common practice across cultures. Boynton and Cochelin (2006, 3-24), observe that all the oblates in the medieval era to early 12th century, majority of the recruits into both male and female monasteries of Western Europe were aged between three and fourteen, who had been ‘offered by their parents as a gift to God’ as a ‘conscript army’ of oblates. They further note that female nunneries were used by the families as a temporary or permanent abode for their ‘unmarried daughters or widows’. Faraone and McClure (2006) explore the literary representation of prostitutes and courtesans in the ancient times in Mesopotamia and early Christian world by critically examining religious texts, legal documents, poetry and plays, to reflect on who qualifies to be a prostitute, distinction between the promiscuous women and the prostitutes, the institution of temple prostitution in Greece and Eastern part of the world.

Movements like the ‘American Restoration’ and the ‘French revolution’ were significant events in the history that marked the genesis of feminism which eventually lead women breaking ground in the domains of theater, art, science and literature in the West, whereas in Indian theater, particularly modern Kannada theater in Mysore, there were no such movements to bring the women actresses to the fore. Nair (1994) writes “To appreciate the efforts of the princely state bureaucracy we must remember that social movements lacked intellectual force and were organizationally weak in Mysore, unlike directly ruled parts of colonial India where the social reform movement initiated by male cultural nationalists in the 19th century and first wave Indian feminism, which began in the 1910s, foregrounded the women's question though in very different ways”. It is difficult to single out any one cause that might have contributed to women of the 20th

century to choose a career in a male dominated theater braving the prudish moral climate imposed by the European colonizers (Bor, 1987:81-83).

When Sorabhada Lakshamma, a *devadāsī*, decided boldly to become the first woman to act on the stage, it is unclear whether the *quondam* dissidents of the prospective of women acting in the theater had already become resilient to the new paradigm or if it was ignored as an aberration because she was already from the *devadāsī* community. But she provided a precedential model for a new generation of female *dramatic ingenues* who followed suit by choosing a career in theater and acting.



Figure 23: L-R Veteran Cinema Actor Leelavati , her son actor Vinod Raj and Paramashivan

(At an award ceremony which my father presided over as a chief guest, approximate date 2006)

Following the suit, many women from other communities got emboldened to pursue a career in acting. Some of them retired in the theater profession, actresses while some like Jayamma, Bellary Lalitamma and Leelavati (Figure 23), Kalpana had dazzling careers in both cinema as well as theater.

Devadāsi- A Caste or a Ritual or an Identity?

According to historian Janaki Nair, the word *devadāsī* is of relatively recent origin, and there is no direct reference to dancing in the temple in the classical texts on Indian dance theory, namely the *Nāṭyaśāstra* or *Abhinaya Darpaṇa* ; the word can be found only in the more recent 11th century text called '*Kathāsaritsāgara* (An ocean of the streams of stories)', one of the largest collections of stories composed by Somadeva in which the meaning is not clear (Nair, 94:3159). She also argues that earliest inscriptional evidences only refer to the words '*sūle* (prostitute)' and one can encounter the word '*pātaradavaḷu* (performer/actor/singer)' in later inscriptions (ibid.:3159-3161). As the scope, responsibilities and authority of the temples started expanding and resembling that of a king's court, the role of dancing women in temples also diversified, and the word *devadāsī* was introduced to suggest that she would share the same relationship with the deity in the temple, as she would with the king as a courtesan. They were primarily appointed to offer royal pleasures called '*Raṅgabhoga*' that included holding the '*chatra* (royal umbrella)', fanning the idol with '*cāmara* (flywhisks)', singing and dancing.

When I was visiting the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Chennai, India, noted Indian historian, epigraphist and archaeologist, Dr. Nagaswamy gave a series of private lectures on the history of Indian temples which are being currently digitized for the NPTEL project. In one of

them he quoted the following verse from the *āgama śāstra*, the book that deals with the precepts of temple construction and rituals,

Bharatoktaṃ yathā nṛttam sandhiṃ prati sukārayet

Which means, ‘During the twilight hours dance be performed as prescribed by Bharata’. His health deteriorated thereafter, and I have not been able to gather the exact reference from him on this. But it suggests that performance of dance, music and poetry were a part of the offerings in the temple ritualistic tradition in the past thousand years (Pathashala, 2018).

Sudhamani (1999) raises and attempts to answer some genealogical questions regarding the institution of *Devadāsī* in Mysore region. She claims that the *devadāsī* was not a separate caste in itself, but a complex conglomerate of many castes. However, most girls who came into this profession, generally belonged to *Kuruba (shepherd)*, *Beda (hunter)*, *Gangdikara Okkaliga*, *Telugu Banajiga and Lingayat* castes. Nair claims that their caste is uncertain, but they started identifying themselves as members of these castes only much later after they were disempowered from the temple services, sometimes, to preserve the inheritance rights, so that when the government started acquiring the properties belonging to the temples to which hitherto *devadāsī*-s were sole proprietors, could retain their land holdings by donating it to their relatives or kins which was easier when they had affiliation to a particular caste. Sudhamani refers to another interesting practice in which women of these castes used to take a vow to dedicate their daughters to the service of God for safe delivery and the case of an immigrant Tamil speaking community which became famous as *Kalkolavar* from Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu, India, who were childless for a long time and later avowed to dedicate the eldest girl for the service of God if they begot children. In order to fulfil this divine obligation, they started dedicating their daughters to temples

(For more information about *Devadāsī*-s of Tamil Nadu, see Soneji (2012), Subramanian (2009), and Tizianna (2018)). The male members of this clan became nattuvanars whose primary occupation was accompanying the women of the household in their performances. They also enjoyed royal patronage that granted them lands in the form of ‘*inams* (gifts)’ which provided them with the necessary economic support and in return they were expected to perform at the royal palace during important religious and ceremonial occasions.

The decline in the status of hereditary performing women according to scholars first began in the second half of the 19th century with the formation of British Raj in 1858. Walker (2010), attributes the anti-nautch movement to the British educated upper-class Indian elites who were tutored in ‘European philosophies and English grammar’ by the British, in England, who upon their return to India spearheaded the project of ‘cleansing the fallen women’, through the ‘anti-nautch’ movement which was motivated by the ‘Victorian morality replacing the enlightenment philosophy’. Her critical study of the history of *Kathak* is based on the central theme of how hereditary women were displaced, replaced and subsumed by the male ‘hegemonous owners’ currently dominating the classical dance form called *Kathak*. She extensively refers to the 19th century European travelogues and Urdu sources by the courtiers of Lucknow, the cultural fountainhead of art and culture in Northern India, including *Madun-al-Musiqi*, *Sarmaya-i Ishrat and Bani*, and concludes that hereditary women already had a dance repertoire that was independent of the male *Kathaks*. She adds, “Tainted by colonial laws, muzzled by the anti-Nautch, and made redundant by a series of shifts in patronage, tavayafs, lead artists and culture bearers of previous centuries, disappeared off the stage and became no more than an embarrassing footnote in the history of Indian music and dance”.

In the entire British India, the princely state of Mysore was one of the forerunners of the project of modernization of society. Sudhamani (1999:671) makes a noteworthy observation that in the 19th and early 20th century, *devadāsī*-s underwent training in music under male Brahmin Gurus, citing examples of *Panakesari Venkata Subba Bhatta*, an orthodox Brahmin, training numerous *devadāsī*-s in music and dance without any reservation or compunction.

However, she believes that the transfer of power from the Kings of Mysore, who were great patrons of arts, to the hands of British in 1831 was responsible for condemning *devadāsī*-s to mere prostitutes. With the loss of royal patronage, these hereditary artists had to depend on rich feudal landlords, who were mere ‘seekers of pleasure’ and not savants of art, for subsistence. After an interregnum of 50 years of British rule, for political reasons, when finally, the administration was handed over to the titular king by the British authorities in 1881, the king was supported by an able group of educated upper-caste officials to advise him in the administrative matters and bureaucracy. One of them was the *muzrai* (a distortion of the Persian word *mujra* which means allowance) department that was in charge of regulating the functioning of the temples. The first *muzrai* commissioner A. Srinivasacharyulu, a Brahmin himself, banned the appointment of *devadāsī*-s in the major temple complexes that were patronized by the Mysore palace, namely Nanjanagud, Melukote, Nandidurga in Chikkaballapura, arguing that their services were unnecessary for the functioning of the temple, thus marking the first ever attempt by any British Indian state at abolishing the ‘*devadāsī* system’ as early as 1898. To get religious sanction for this major social change, they invoked the shastric (scriptural) injunctions that mandates the services of *devadāsī*-s in the temple functions but with a precondition that these women were expected to be celibates failing which would be a ‘grievous violation of the scriptures’. The fact that most *devadāsī* women had offered both entertainment and sexual services to the rich, upper-caste

patrons, was cleverly held against them by the authorities in defending their decision to terminate the *devadāsī* services in the temple. Petitions by practicing *devadāsī*-s, namely Kittasani and Nanjasani, who urged the king and the government to continue their services were ignored. Nair (1994) writes “The evocation of a powerful dystopia had long served as the format for the voicing of upper caste, male anxieties, particularly about the sexual appetites of women”, whereas the same moral constraints were not applicable to the ‘venal behavior’ of the male priests. Nair in fact concludes that though, the bureaucracy in Mysore set forth to ‘extricate patriarchal’ elements from the pre-colonial order, the ‘abstract legality’ resulted in replacing it with a new form. An alternate explanation to this newfound enthusiasm of the British to inculcate the Victorian morals and discipline among the elite Indians is that they were wary of a resurgence of nationalism and wanted to avert any uprising like ‘the first war of Indian independence of 1857’. Therefore, they took every care to curb indigenous ideas including arts of hereditary dancers and replaced the customers who were earlier ‘Indian aristocrats and white Mughals’ by the British military who had no interest in music or poetry but was interested only in sexual services. The problems faced by the *tawāif*-s⁵¹ were further exacerbated by feminists, missionaries and British-educated Indian middle class (Walker 2014:93).

In the Mysore state, the abolition of ‘*gejjepūje* (a ceremony of induction into *Devadāsī* profession)’ in the year 1909 to keep a check on prostitution, according to Sudhamani (2006), was a half-hearted one since it only curbed the dancing profession but not prostitution. She notes that since the government did not consider providing alternate means of livelihood to these hereditary artists, *devadāsī*-s, who were already ill paid, suffered poverty, ran into debts and had to endure

⁵¹ Courtesans from the Mughal era. They are the equivalent of *devadāsī*-s in Northern India.

discrimination. Chatterjee's definition of these women as "sex objects of nationalist males" (Chatterjee, 1993: 131), exonerates other men who were equally lascivious in their pursuit of pleasures and were responsible for degrading these women. As it can be clearly seen from the narrative above these women were "sex objects" of rich males, nationalist or otherwise. As Walker (2014: 92) rightly observes, "Wealthy and aristocratic men from high social positions sought the company of *tawāyif-s*, in whose *koṭhā-s* or salons, they could relax and enjoy the pleasure of witty conversations, fine music, food and drink. Association with a famous *tawāif* could increase a man's reputation and social standing; certainly, he would be able to network other important men at her establishment". She draws attention to the fact that even though the colonial records refer to them as 'public women' or 'whores', they were not simply prostitutes providing pleasures after the performance but were loyal mistresses attached to a rich patron.

Devadāsī-s of Mysore were significantly distinct from their *tawāif* counterparts—they were not accused of corrupting the 'purity' of *bharatanāṭya* dance form—whereas *tawāif-s* were accused of corrupting the '*Kathak*' dance form which they learnt from the hegemonic male performers. The project of classicization coincided with the abolishment of *devadāsī* system, *devadāsī-s* who had no other option took to acting career as an alternate profession and as a means of livelihood. Since *devadāsī-s* were exponents of dance and music, with changing social and political climate in the country, with the first wave of feminism and, most importantly, since their reputation was already sullied by their past profession, gaining entry into the male dominated theater would have been a lot easier than in the late 19th century or early 20th century. The following excerpts from an interview with my father and my aunt help us situate the status of women in the theater profession.

Motherhood and Marriages in Kannada Theaters

Marriage was considered an antidote to the malady of acting. Marriages within the theaters were mostly marriages of convenience between lead actors and actresses or actresses with the proprietors of the theater troupe. In Kannada theater several theater company proprietors, married men with a family, had also married or kept as mistresses the lead actresses in their theater for the sake of their profession or perhaps because of the fear of losing them to another rival company. “M. V. Subbayya Naidu, a very famous actor and proprietor of a drama company was married to Lakshmi Bai, Cultured comedian K. Hirannayya to Lalitamma, and Gubbi Veeranna to Jayamma and Sundaramma”, my father recollected in this context in the first half of 20th century.

Marriage, if it happened outside the theater profession, meant the end of the acting careers to most women. After marriage and betrothal, they were expected to remain servile to their husbands/betrothed and relinquish their stardom, denounce their glamor and give up their profession. Based on the real-life incidents of women theater artists some of which I will be explaining in the following paragraphs, in the year 1981, a film called ‘*Ranganayaki* (Stage Heroine)’ was made in Kannada by one of the most renowned filmmakers, Puttanna Kanagal. The film explores the life of a stage actress, *Ranganayaki*. Enchanted by her beauty, a wealthy upper-caste merchant falls in love with her. Much against the opposition from his conservative family, they marry each other and beget a child. Even though she promises to give up her acting career post marriage, however, after many years, the theater troupe she worked with visits the town she lives in during one of its tours; circumstances force her to act in the drama to replace a missing actress, and her husband leaves her and takes away their child. Several actresses in Kannada theater were faced with such stark choices in their acting careers—enjoying the freedom of expression

and the adulation of the audience as an actress—or embrace the respectable domestic role as a devout housewife. The film also highlights the threats the stage actresses faced from the lascivious wealthy business men who desired to keep these women of lowly social status as their concubines. These women were referred to as homewreckers by other respectable household women, who were distraught with their husbands' amorous pursuits in search of entertainment, which is why according to Bakhle (2005) music was classicized, and the upper-caste women embraced a performing career in music.

In a critical study of the interplay between theater career, motherhood and maternity in the lives of 18th century actresses, McGirr and Engal (2014:2) profile the eighteenth-century celebrity actresses as those who “may be counted among the first modern women, heralding new possibilities for women, in their ability to fashion a complex yet recognizable personality that projected a combination of public display and personal revelation”. In the same vein, artists like Sorabhada Lakshamma in 1939 and other first generation of actresses of Modern Kannada theater can be regarded as the first modern women of Kannada theater. McGirr and Engal, argue that maternity grants actresses a status of ‘normative femininity and goodness’ and the absence of the same in the theater profession would create a ‘binary opposite’ identity of a ‘sexualized, illegitimate prostitute/whore’. Sorabhada Lakshamma was a married woman with a daughter; so, when she decided to become an actor, it is quite possible that her femininity, the status of being married in this context, might have guarded her from the conservative custodians of the culture that she was engulfed in. This might have prevented the society from reacting over ‘unfavourable forebodings’. McGirr and Engal (2014:3-5) quote the famous actress Cyrill Connolly as saying “There is no more sombre enemy of good art than the pram in the hall”. They also assert that the

Anglo-American feminism embraces the argument that mothers are ‘creatively barren entities’ identified by the ‘fruit of their womb’. Nagarathamma, the founder and proprietor of an all-women theater troupe had to face this dilemma when her new-born would be crying in the side wings and she had to fight her motherly instinct on the stage and wait for the scene to end before she could attend her baby.

Deepak: What kind of *devadāsī*-s joined the Kannada theater, during your childhood?

Paramashivan: *They were usually referred to as ‘Tāfe avaru (a distortion of the Persian word tawāif)’ or ‘Gumbhārati sūleru’, prostitutes who walked in the front during festival and temple processions carrying a sacred lamp called Gumbhārati. They were respected as ‘Nityasumangaliyaru (women who never attain widowhood)’. In fact, during weddings, they were invited as special guests to bless the tāḷi (sacred thread tied around the neck of the bride by the groom which marks the official completion of marriage, write it better if you can). The belief was that if they bless the tāḷi, the bride too will not become a widow⁵². A devadāsī could be from any place. During our times, however, Devadāsīs from Melukote and Moogooru were quite famous. The latter were Saivites and the former Vaishnavites. This was perhaps because of the presiding deities in these two places. Melukote is a sacred place for Lord Vishnu and counted one among the 108 divyadesams for Shrivaiishnava Brahmins, Mugur on the other hand was famous for Tripurasundari temple, sacred for Shaivites. This distinguishing feature between them was reflected as symbols on their foreheads, with those from melukote wearing a naama (vermillion applied on the forehead vertically) and the Mugur devadāsī wearing vibhooti (sacred ash applied horizontally).*

(Interview on March 25th, 2017).

⁵² In the current times, eunuchs still visit the wedding halls, demand money and bless the couple.

Melukote

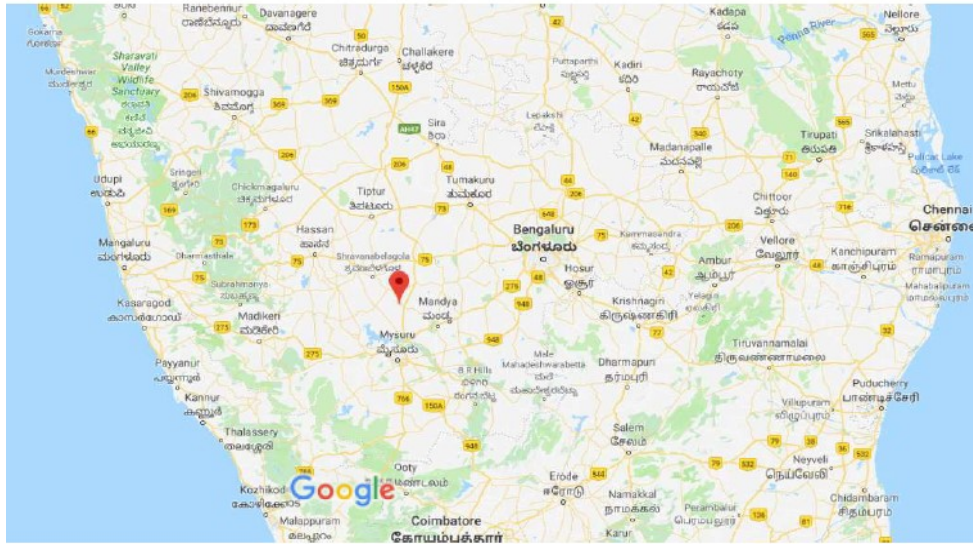


Figure 24: Map of Melukote in India (Google maps, 2018)



Figure 25: Map of Mugur in India (Google maps, 2018)

The maps of Moogooru (Muguru) and Melukote are shown in Figure 24 and 25, respectively.

Deepak: How were they treated in the company? How did women acting in theater become acceptable?

Paramashivan: In the drama company, what mattered was talent. They were all treated with utmost respect by other actors who were mostly Brahmins or Lingayats. Earlier, men used to play both male and female roles when I joined. Ramakrishna, Basavanna, Rāṇi part Rangappa were famous for their female roles. They had knack of draping the sarees that would put women to shame. When Murarachar who could sing in G# (in the voice range of a soprano, usually between C4 – C6) came on the stage en travesti as Ratnaprabhe Madhu Mohini, a prostitute in the play Kabīr Dās, I remember people reacting ‘This woman is remarkably beautiful? Is she a new actress?’. With his feline grace, feminine glances and dressed up in an immaculately neat female attire and gentle voice modulation, he was unrecognizable as a man. In the late 30s and early 40s, actresses Sorabhada Lakshamma and the great Malavalli Sundaramma joined Chamundeshwari Company. Ballari Lalitamma joined K. Hirannayya’s company. Gubbi Veeranna’s case was different. He was a man with a shrewd business and managerial acumen. He realized that it was expensive to hire actresses to run his theater company and pay them salaries. Instead, he boldly introduced his wives Sundaramma (different from Malavalli Sundaramma) and B. Jayamma (Figure 26) into theater and his cinema productions. Sundaramma was known for her portrayal of ‘vīrapradhāna strī pātra (valorous female roles)’ like Madālase opposite Mr. M. V. Subbayya Naidu, in a play whose name I have forgotten; it was a translation of an English play, though. B. Jayamma, the queen of silent film era, who shot to fame through her movie ‘His love affair’, for which a Belgian technician Raphael Aloget was recruited, was famous for Kayādu’s role in Daśāvātāra and Mallamma in the 1946 cinema ‘Hemareddy Mallamma’ opposite Honnappa Bhagavatar.

(Interview on March 25th, 2017).



Figure 26: B. Jayamma, queen of the silent movie era

(Source: Personal collection of a friend)

Deepak: Did the male actors ever feel threatened or insecure when actresses occupied the centerstage and enjoyed all the adulation which was until then a privilege of men, alone?

Paramashivan: Not at all. Nobody felt threatened because they were extremely confident about themselves and their singing and acting abilities. But there was definitely a healthy competition between some singers and actors. For example, the two all-time greats of Kannada theater, Nagesh Rao and Malavalli Sundaramma used to drag the famous pooja⁵³ scene in 'Sangīta Subhadra' for almost more than an hour on certain days. Nagesh Rao would sing a kanda in raaga Kambodi and explore the contours of the raga until the middle octave. Sundaramma would respond to it by singing another kanda in natakurinji and stop on the tāra shadja (tonic in the upper octave). The audience would cry 'once more' and he would sing the same kanda in Simhendramadhyama in the higher octave. This would go on endlessly until both realized that it was time to move on, otherwise the play would never end.

Mr. K. Hirannayya (Figure 27), who was an aficionado of the choicest of music, literature and acting, wrote his magnum opus, the famous 'Devadāsī', which was perhaps one of the first plays written in Kannada language that addressed the social evil of 'devadāsī' system. Mr. Hirannayya made several changes to the storyline and songs before he finalized the plot in its current form. It was known earlier by other names such as 'Karma Kannāḍi (A Mirror of Karma)' in 1930s, 'Āśā Pāsā (The bondage of desire)' in 1936-37 or thereabouts and eventually he rechristened it as 'Devadāsī' in 1942. When Devadāsī was first written in its current form, Mr. Hirannayya himself played the role of the pimp Nājukayya. My brother-in-law, Nagaratnamma's husband, Mr. M. R. Parthasarathy played 'Shyamasundara', the protagonist's friend who corrupts him by teaching him all the vices and motivating him to visit a prostitute.



Figure 27: Cultured Comedian K. Hirannayya and Bellary Lalithamma

(Source: Karnatka Drama Academy Archives)

⁵³ Hindu ritual of worshipping Gods and Goddesses

Deepak: Do you remember the plot of the play and highlight the important dialogues in which the status of devadāsī is underlined?

Paramshivan: How can I forget it? I have reveled in each line of that play. It is a tight slap on all the men who take a moral high ground and cast aspersions on the character of devadāsī-s. It is about the life of a devadāsī Manimanjari who, initially, like any devadāsī, entices rich men with her charming looks and offer them her music, dance and sexual services. After they become destitute and are unable to afford her, she would find a new patron. She is assisted by her chief pimp Najukayya whose job is to keep a watchful eye for rich patrons and trap them. One such patron is Vasantashekhar, a rich landlord, who becomes a pauper and goes insane. Eventually, she meets another rich landlord Sakharam, with whom she falls in love and wants to marry him. But the pimp Najukayya whose livelihood depends on Manimanjari's profession does not approve of her marriage and kills her. Mr. Hirannayya had an uncanny ability to use humor in a serious subject to ease the tempers and provide respite. His famous monologue in the climax scene in which he makes a mockery of the constabulary, lawyers, doctors and other professionals of essential services exposing their lackadaisical and corrupt attitude towards their profession. Bellary Lalitamma and Malavalli Sundaramma, both devadāsīs were complete artists, in my opinion. An actor should be able to act, sing and dance, and these two actresses were not only classically trained singers and dancers but also actors par excellence. Bellary Lalitamma used to sing a special repertoire of songs for this play, notably two extremely rare javalis; which she had learnt from her Guru in Andhra Pradesh, where she was initiated into Devadāsī profession and trained in classical music and dance. They were composed in raga Huseni and Todi. They were so beautiful that many years later a very senior Bharatanāṭya dancer and Guru of Karnataka, H R Keshavamurthy learnt it from me to use it for one of his ballet productions.

(Interview on March 25th, 2017).

Deepak: Can you sing them for me?

Paramashivan: I only partially remember the one in todi raga because Bellary Lalitamma used to perform it very rarely. But I do remember the Huseni one because it is a very unique javali which has a citteswara (solfege). Hirannayya had written Kannada lyrics 'Sandhya Sālaṅkṛtadā' replacing the original Telugu lyrics 'Ninna sāyantramuna'. The original song was used in the 1942 Telugu movie 'Sumathi' in which Lalitamma herself played the lead role.

The play commences with Manimanjari casting her lusty glance on the landlord Sakharam, a romantic gentleman, already married but falls in love with Manimanjari at the first sight. His timid personality gets emboldened by his friend's support who convinces him that she cannot be a household woman but a whore, to explain which Hirannayya composed a wonderful kanda which means, "She who glances obliquely and moves with a seductive gait can never be a household woman".

There is another very interesting poem in the play composed for Najukayya's character in which he describes who could be a true husband of a whore. Vasantashekhar, an old man, who is still

obsessed with Manimanjari but has no money to afford her is accosted by Najukayya. The conversation between the two is also equally humorous and meaningful.

Vasantashekhara: Where is Manimanjari?

Najukayya: She has gone to watch a cinema with a rich landlord.

Vasantashekhara: How could she go with him when I am here?

Najukayya: Is she a lawfully wedded wife of yours? Do you know who is a true husband of a whore?

Vasantashekhara (Giggling in excitement): People like me.

Najukayya: I swear by my father, your understanding is flawed. A whore's husband is,

*Jagadadi devateya prati rūpavo emba
Jhaṇa jhaṇada rūpāyi avaḷa gaṇḍa
Bayasidāseya phalisi brahmāṇḍadoḷu mereva ā
beḷḷi rūpāyi avaḷa gaṇḍa
Kalaha kāraṇa sarvakārya sadhana trāṇa
guṇapūrṇa rūpāyi avaḷagaṇḍa
Maḍadi maḍadi maḍadi endu baḍidāḍi maḍiva
nīv Bhaṇḍaro gaṇḍaro śaṇḍaro nīvu*

The money which is an embodiment of the very first God of this universe,
That makes the sound jhan jhan, is her (whore's) husband,
That silver coin, which fulfils all your desires
and reigns supreme in this cosmos, is her husband,
That which ruins relationships, the spine of all businesses
The virtuous rupee, is her husband
That which destroys you when you possess it
And grieves you when you don't, that dual-paradoxical rupee is her husband
Those who wail Oh wife, my wife,
Are they shameless, husbands or impotent weaklings?

Later in the play when Vasantashekhara accuses Manimanjari of being a whore, she offers some really profound rebuttals to his accusations, which is where two things become clear: Mr. Hirannayya's genius as a playwright and poet, and his concern for the society, *devadāsī*-s. That play is an evergreen play which can be performed till eternity, at least as long as there is prostitution in the society and those men who accuse women for the ills of the society.

Deepak: Could you recollect the conversation for me?

Paramashivan:

Manimanjari: Who is this? Vasanta?

Vasanta: (Laughing violently) Yes. You witch. Did you get scared that your deception stands exposed, now?

Manimanjari: Why should I be scared? Nobody is my lawfully wedded husband (since I am a devadāsī).

Vasanta: That's right. It is a good fortune for this world that nobody committed the mistake of tying the knot to a characterless, fearless woman who has no compunction of committing sins.

Manimanjari: Your understanding of good karma and sins is incomplete. It is equally wrong on your part to blemish the reputation of an innocent person for the self-inflicted psychosis that you suffer from. We (Devadāsī-s) have not transgressed any code of conduct enjoined in the scriptures under the garb of tradition. You shall incur the sin of baselessly calumniating our family profession.

Vasanta: (Confused) Ah.

Manimanjari: Vasanta, utter the truth. Did I purloin your wealth? Did I come on the street and drag you to my den? You voluntarily sought my company. Isn't ruining your happiness on your own and blaming me falsely for it, now, the same as cutting the udder of the cow? Hearing your sharp rebukes, I am feeling emotional instead of getting angry at you.

Vasanta: Sadness? Really? Even if you had an iota of emotion in you, you would not have caused as much damage to the society. Rich men would not have been rendered homeless by getting caught in the web of your glance.

Manimanjari: If that were true, it is also true that you made whores out of us.

Vasanta: Ah (Bamboozled).

Manimanjari: You men desired us, under the disillusionment that you could, in us, find the comforts and pleasures that you couldn't find in your lawfully wedded wives. Thereafter didn't you make us drown in the ocean of tears of those innocent hapless women and turned us into prostitutes? If it is true that we live by selling our bodies in the society, it is also true that you men are those abominable murderers who pay a price for our bodies and are solely responsible for perpetuating such a profession. Why Vasanta? Are you tongue-tied? Henceforth do not consider us as characterless women who loot the wealth of the rich and render them penniless. Instead think of us as mothers who light the lamp of knowledge in the hearts of selfish rich men who are deluded by unrighteousness and blinded by the pride of their wealth. Begone. Nevermind if you think I am a cold-hearted wench. Under this tenebrous delusion of the snare of lust and desires, hold the lamp of your duty and perspicacity, and see through. You will see light in the heart of a whore too.

By the end of the play, the character of Manimanjari transforms into a sanskritized, respectable woman who wants to be married to the protagonist and forbids her paramour from drinking alcohol, whom she had persuaded in the beginning of the play to drink. The following conversation takes place at this juncture.

Sakharam: Manimanjari, latterly you had called it your love potion. Today, you are forbidding me from drinking. Why?

Manimanjari: Please forgive me, Sir. Latterly, I was a whore ridiculed by the society, Today, in the company of a Godly person such as yourself, I have become a Devadāsī (God's servant).

Sakharam: I repeat what I had uttered in the dark hours when I first met you, in broad daylight today. You are the goddess of my heart.

(Interview on March 25th, 2017).

The plot superficially revolves around an upper-caste married man falling in love with a *devadāsī-s*. At the subcutaneous level, it answers several critical questions regarding the status of *devadāsī-s* who took to prostitution profession, because of 'abolishment of *devadāsī* system' which deprived them of their livelihood as temple dancers. This was a critical juncture in the history of India, wherein, on the one hand the rising sense of nationalism had give rise to classicization of art and on the other hand activism saw through the implementation of laws against *devadāsī* system, both of which contributed to the loss of livelihood for *devadāsī-s* whose profession was music and dance. Music and dance were confiscated by the upper-caste women who started performing public concerts and 'abolishment of *devadāsī*' stripped them of royal patronage. So *devadāsī-s* becoming actors is not a mere coincidence but a consequence of a sum-total of social, political and economic reasons. The plot suggests that it was the upper-caste men who had patronized the *devadāsī-s* to whom it was either a status symbol to own concubines or got enamoured by *devadāsī's* music and dance (Bakhle, 2005).

Strī Nāṭaka Maṇḍali – An All Women Company

In the Western theater arena, matters became more complicated when the Victorian stage was a transformed space within which gender delimiters were blurred or altered giving actresses the privilege of enacting male roles like never before. This process was both ‘complex and contradictory’ for the actresses were seizing opportunities from men on the one hand and transcended the realm of sexuality into male domains. Women undertaking male roles was a ‘virtual metonymy’ of the gender transformations, an implication of the feminine ability to traverse the chasm between professional and private lives; as embodiments of male characters on stage and as women in public lives (Powell, 1997:27). There were instances of actresses training their sons and daughters in acting. This also helped the actresses to remain close to their family also bail them out of their disreputation of being adulteresses because the audience identified them as mother and son rather than as actors who could potentially have an affair. This also addresses the larger question of what are the transformational factors that change a space into a theater. This question is particularly pertinent in private theatricals where the audience and the performers are drawn from the same social rank.

In Kannada theater, one woman who made a name for herself donning male roles was my late aunt Mrs. R. Nagarathnamma (1926-2012) (Lal, 2001), founder and proprietor of the first all-women theater group called ‘*Strī Nāṭaka Maṇḍali*’ which she founded in 1958. She was popular for her histrionics donning macho male roles in mythology such as Bhīma, Kamsa, Rāvaṇa and Duryodhana. Born June 6th, in the year 1926 as the eldest daughter into a Brahmin family, she was not only one of the daring women to don the greasepaint, despite being born into a Brahmin family, but she was an entrepreneur who created history in Kannada theater by founding and running an

all-women theater troupe for many decades. She took to theater to support herself and fight poverty. Her theater life exactly followed the same trajectory as my father's because they worked for the same drama companies, with the same actors until my father became a harmonium player and music composer, while she preferred to remain an actress. She was no exception to one of those deeply passionate actresses who went on the stage braving and enduring personal losses because she was committed to the artform and felt obliged and answerable to the audience that was eagerly waiting to watch her in action on the stage and paid for it too. In her short biography published by the Karnataka Nataka Academy (Parvati, 1999), she shares the story of the sad demise of her first baby and later husband, her packed travel schedule and her inability to be present at the funeral of the latter. However, unlike many other unsung artists, she got due recognition for her contribution; she was conferred upon the '*Sangeet Natak Academi Puraskar*' in 1992, the highest award for performing arts in India and the fourth highest civilian award called '*Padmashri*' in 2012, both awarded by the Republic of India (Figure 28).



Figure 28: R. Nagarathamma, the founder of the first All-women Theater Troupe receiving 'Padmashri' award

*From the Former President of Republic India, Ms. Pratibha Patil in 2012.
(Source: Family Album)*

Though I was very close to my aunt-the human, I could never get close to my aunt- the excellent actor when I was small. When I had started singing on the stage, my father had once expressed to me in private, ‘Your aunt loves your singing and has just one wish. She wants to play the role of Hiranyakaśyapu in ‘*Bhakta Prahlāda*’, and she badly wants you to play the role of Prahlāda. I don’t think it will ever materialize, because your mother is opposed to the very idea of you acting on stage’. It didn’t materialize, then, of course, not even after I started acting and directing in the college drama group, because she had become old and physically weak by then. My dream to share the stage with her remained unfulfilled and shall remain so forever. My father’s desire was to perform *Bhīśma Pratijñe*, casting her in the lead role of ‘Bhīśma’, which could not materialize because my father had forgotten the play, the original script was unavailable until after her death in 2011 and eventually I performed it in 2017 during my field visit.

However, I had the good fortune of accompanying her on five or six occasions, mostly assisting my father by playing the background music on the keyboard while he played the harmonium, and once I independently accompanied her on the harmonium for a short performance, since my father was preoccupied. These performances were done under the vigilant and watchful eyes of my mother who would be present throughout the play, with a perpetual fear and concern that I might get attracted to theater profession and quit my studies. Otherwise, I have watched numerous performances of hers, but at a tender age when I could not appreciate the subtle nuances of acting, music or any other artform. Figures 29- 34 show different artists from Nagarathnamma’s drama company. These female actors were popular for their skills in singing, acting and comic timing.



Figure 29: Nagarithamma applying make-up in 1980s (Family collection)

Unfortunately, there is only one video recording of an entire play *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Gāruḍi* in which she played her signature role of 'Bhīma'. During the 'Silver Jubilee' celebrations of her drama company in the 1980s, which ran for three days, she enacted the best of her full-length plays such as '*Samsāra Nauka*', '*Kṛṣṇa Līla*', '*Devadāsī*' and assorted scenes from other plays namely, '*Beḍara Kaṇṇappa* (Hunter Kaṇṇappa)', under my father's music direction, but there are no traces of their records except in my memory. These performances were recorded professionally into videotapes which the Kannada actor, filmmaker, Chikka Suresh, who passed away in February 2018, borrowed for his documentary (which was never made) and later swore by God that they were stolen by his former car driver. I have been frantically searching for them but met with little

success. I eventually found a 20-minute video in the *Sangeet Nataka Academi* archives, New Delhi, India; but due to the redtapism in the government offices, I still have not been able to access it. Incidentally, I was present in New Delhi when this short play was recorded in the year 1986 and I distinctly remember the trip because it was my first trip outside my province, that too the capital of the country, which was as exciting as traveling abroad. Nagarathnamma died in 2012. There is very little information available about her other than the magazines in the department of Kannada and culture or inaccurate biographical sketches written by others (Lal, 2004). Therefore, I had to collect all the relevant information about her company from my father.

Deepak: What motivated your sister Mrs. Nagarathnamma to start her own drama company?

Paramashivan: There was an actress called Ambujamma in Mysore, a Brahmin woman, who first floated the idea of forming a group of all-women drama company, as a fund raiser for her two daughters' wedding in 1957. She was the earliest forerunner of an all-women theater troupe which she founded in Mandya [a small town near Mysore], along with a few of her colleagues H. P. Saroja, Kamalamma and others. She persuaded my sister to play Bhīma's role in 'Kṛṣṇa Gāruḍi', an offer which Nagarathnamma plainly refused. That drama troupe had a harmonium player called 'Sūle Doreswamy (Prostitute Doreswamy)', who emboldened her to play the role.

Deepak: Why would anybody be addressed with the title 'prostitute'?

Paramashivan: He earlier worked in Chamundeshwari Company playing small roles. Noted theater company proprietor Sheshachar's brother's name was Doreswamy too. To distinguish between the two, they gave the former the title 'Sūle' because he⁵⁴ belonged to the devadāsī community of T. Narasipura [A small temple town near Mysore]. So, the title stuck to him forever. My sister was hesitant initially. Later after persuasion by Doreswamy and her husband Parthasarathi, she finally acquiesced with his suggestion and made a bold attempt at playing Bhīma in Mandya. The audience was so enthralled and mesmerized by her performance that she got applause for almost every dialogue. Due to financial circumstances, Ambujamma couldn't run the company for long—she relinquished the proprietorship of the company--my sister took the

⁵⁴ Men born to devadāsī-s through their patrons were considered to be from devadāsī community.

responsibility of running the company. This was truly a landmark in the history of Modern Kannada theater.

(Interview on March 25th, 2017).

Deepak: Didn't other actresses endeavor at starting a group like this?

Paramashivan: Those who were envious of her did try but failed irrecoverably. One actress tried playing Bhīma and by the end of the first scene her voice choked. Earlier, when Nagakka⁵⁵ used to play female roles, people often commented 'She is an excellent actor, but she has a very deep, masculine voice'. But that's life. What you consider as your biggest weakness, can turn out to be your greatest strength when luck is on your side. In her case, it was a blessing in disguise. Her voice perfectly suited her roles and that brought laurels to her as an actor.

Deepak: When did you join your sister's troupe as a harmonium player⁵⁶?

Paramashivan: When she founded the troupe, I was still working in M. V. Subbayya Naidu's company. In the year 1960, my astrology guru Belur Joshi predicted that with the onset of 'Candra Daśa⁵⁷', my financial situation would improve, and I joined Strī Nāṭaka Maṇḍaḷi exactly about that time.

Deepak: How was it working in your sister's company?

Paramashivan: Firstly, it offered a modicum of financial security, as predicted rightly by my astrology Guru. I was used to a monthly salary until then, but here I started enjoying a daily wage of Rs. 15 per day immediately after the play. On the creative front, when I joined the troupe, the company's repertoire was limited to selected plays like Kṛṣṇa Gārudi, Kṛṣṇa Līla and Samsāra Nauka. By then I had had the experience of performing in more than 50 major drama companies and I had become familiar with and absorbed the acting skills, plays and music styles of actors and playwrights spanning three generations. I found this troupe to be a fertile ground where I could experiment with my ideas. I undertook dual responsibilities, both as the drama director and music composer, in this troupe. I introduced numerous new plays namely Devadāsī, Beḍara Kaṇṇappa, Rāmayaṇa, 'Makmal Ṭopi (Velvet Hat)' and many more; modified the existing ones such as Kṛṣṇa Gārudi, Kṛṣṇa Līla, Samsāra Nauka and trained the actors in executing them. This not only diversified the repertoire of the troupe, it also improved the skill sets of the actors. Actors were now equipped with the ability to play a wider variety of roles. I took keen interest in training my younger sister R. Manjulamma who later became a very renowned comedian and an

⁵⁵ My father called her Nagakka, akka means elder sister in Kannada.

⁵⁶ Even though it was an all-women theater company, the orchestra always had men playing the harmonium and the Tabla.

⁵⁷ A planetary period during which moon brings good fortune.

indispensable asset to the company. The orchestra was limited to just a harmonium and Tabla, yet, the shows used to be triumphantly successful. I introduced some new songs too in addition to the existing repertoire. I composed some of them, for some I borrowed the tunes from Bollywood music and wrote the lyrics in Kannada. For example, in the play Samsāra Nauka, the climax was very boring in the original play. I introduced a club dance scene, composed some ebullient songs and background scores, and this scene became the highlight of the play. The song 'Ati Madhura' that my younger sister Manjulamma gets requests from the audience to sing in all her live shows is based on the Bollywood song 'Kabhi na kabhi', composed by Madan Mohan and sung by Mohammad Rafi in the movie Sharabi, for which I wrote Kannada lyrics. There was a song called 'Oh my darling dear, you please come near, you don't fear' from the play 'Anna Tamma' in the Western popular music style. I combined that song with 'Yeh dil mujhe bata de' and introduced it in the club dance scene. The play was otherwise based on a very serious theme of how touching life can be. This scene provided the much desired, well-earned relief for the audience. Ms. Katyayani, who was an excellent dancer in this scene had become famous as 'Katony' and the advertisement always read 'Katony avara club dance nodalu mareyadiri (Don't miss watching Katony's club dance)'. The club dance scene had become so famous that in Chickmagalur camp, all the rich coffee plantation owners would reserve the seats by paying Re. 1 in addition to the base fare, sit in the front row and leave immediately after the club dance scene without even waiting for the climax. I had designed the costume for this scene emulating the costumes of the famous English musical revue of the early 1900s called 'The Passing Show'.

(Interview on March 25th, 2017).

Deepak: Did they have dedicated make-up artists?

Paramashivan: Never. I have never seen any artist in our company letting a make-up artist touch their face. The women in the company had their own unique method of curling their hair, which I had never encountered until then, by tying small hairpins and ribbons in a circular arrangement which made them look like handsome men with curly hair. Nagarathnamma, after curling her hair, would look exactly like the famous Tamil actor Gemini Ganeshan. Mr. H. L. N. Simha, the author of Samsāra Nauka, was an erudite scholar who had written a monologue in English for this play.

*'Oh God! Oh Ye set of swindlers,
ye devils in the shape of human beings,
who call your friends unfortunate souls, whom you kill;
sucking their life blood, turning them out into beggars,
we believe you, we care for you, we shelter you,
we share our food with you, in times of your need;
but, when we fall, you forsake us; you make street dogs of us;
ye venomous serpents who breath the poison of death to the entire world;
ye abominable creatures, ye perfidious wretches;
damnation, ruin and persecution steer you...*

(At this point he forgot his lines and couldn't complete this line)

*Away, begone the army of Satans, begone from Sundara,
Sundara the accursed, Sundara the penniless,
whose blood you have sucked to the very last drop,
Away, away, away from Sundara'.*

When Nagarathamma, who was class 2 dropout with absolutely no knowledge of English, delivered this long dialogue in chaste English, the crowd would appreciate it with a 'once more'. It is a very intense monologue. When she said 'away, away', the audience would burst into a thunderous applause.



Figure 30: Nagarathamma as Kamsa in the play Kṛṣṇa Līla

(Source: Karnataka Drama Academy Archive, approximate date 1980-85)

Deepak: What according to you were her best male roles?

Paramashivan: She got the title 'Kaliyuga Bhīma', for her Bhīma's part, but in my experience of 83 years in theater, I never saw any male actor play the characters of Kamsa in Kṛṣṇa Līla (Figure 30), Daśaratha and Rāvaṇa in Rāmāyaṇa, the way she portrayed them. In Davanagere camp 55 shows of Kṛṣṇa Līla were performed. Also, no other theater company that I have directed and trained executed Rāmāyaṇa to such perfection. I had trained four women to play Āñjaneya's role. In Kunigal camp, people would throng the theater coming by special buses that ran exclusively for our company's Rāmāyaṇa.



Figure 31: Nagarathamma bottom row third from left, with some of her troupe members

B. P. Rajamma (Second from left, bottom row), B. S. Radha (second from left top row), Sathyavathi (third from left top row) (Source: Karnataka Drama Academy Archive, approximate date 1980-85)

Deepak: Who were the other actresses in the troupe?

Paramashivan: There were many actresses; Dikki Radha famous for her male villain roles, B. P. Rajamma, very famous for playing devotional characters, B. S. Manjulamma, an excellent singer, who played roles that demanded singing, her sister Poornima, who was like a computer of theater.

She had memorized all the plays that she acted in entirely and would prompt other actors onstage should they forget their lines. There was Kalavathy, my favorite singer, whose rendition of the song Sarasa Nayana in Kṛṣṇa Līla, remains my favorite and perhaps the best rendition that I ever accompanied. Kalavathy was very close to my younger sister Manjula because their association dates back to their childhood when both of them danced on a plate for a simple tune based on an instrumental gat in Hindustani music.

(Interview on March 25th, 2017).



Figure 32: Nagarathnamma (middle) as Kamsa from the climax scene in the play Kṛṣṇa Līla

Deepak: Could you tell me something about Nagarathnamma's husband Mr. M. R. Parthasarathy? How could she marry a Brahmin despite being in the theater profession?

Paramashivan: Parthasarathy was an excellent actor, a very fine Vīṇa player, a disciple of the Mysore court musician 'Goṭṭuvādyam Nārayaṇa Iyengār', and an able administrator. He was the son of a very famous advocate in Mysore, Mr. Rangachar, from a very respectable family. Mr. Rangachar was known for his charity activities; the land on which Mysore Ramakrishna Mission is built today was his acreage which he generously donated for the good cause. Parathasarathy on the other hand broke away from his conservative family, befriended Mr. K. Hirannayya and

joined his theater company. He featured in almost all the new productions of K. Hirannayya Mitra Mandali troupe in all its premiers and helped Mr. Hirannayya management and administration. My sister Nagarathnamma too joined this Hirannayya's company where she met Parthasarathy, they fell in love with each other and decided to get married. But his family opposed the marriage tooth and nail, this time not because my sister is a theater artist, but from a different sub-caste within the Brahmin community. He belonged to the Iyengar sub-caste (Followers of Viṣṇu) and we were Iyers (Followers of both Shiva and Vishnu); this was unacceptable to them. Finally, when he parted ways with Hirannayya due to a misunderstanding and joined Sheshachar company, my sister followed the suit. They both eventually got married with Sheshachar's blessings. He had such a wonderful comic timing that the audience would go into raptures bursting into laughter at his jokes, but he would maintain a poker face mixed with a stupid innocence in his role as Basappa in Hunsur Krishnamurthy's famous play Dharmaratnakara, which was modified and rechristened by Mr. Hirannayya as 'Makmal Topi' by K. Hirannayya.



Figure 33: B. S. Radha, also known as 'Dikki' Radha for her famous role as the villain 'Dikki' in Samsāra Nauka.

(Source: Karnataka Drama Academy Archive, approximate date 1980-85)

Deepak: What was the life of other actresses like, in Kannada theater?

Paramashivan: Barring a few, most women spent the evenings of their lives plagued by misfortunes and languishing in penury. Actresses coming from the devadāsī community usually had one rich patron to whom they remained loyal throughout their lives and that patron would take care of all their needs. When they lost the patronage due to political reasons or when the patrons died, they were left in the lurch with no means of livelihood. Brahmin women associated with the theater

profession could not find a respectable alliance for marriage. But that is life in theater. You are king/queen only on the stage but in real life you are a pauper. The greatest actress of our times, Malavalli Sundaramma, once came to the school where I was teaching and borrowed some money citing health reasons. She had become unrecognizable because of severe poverty and I was in utter grief for many days to see the diva of our times in such destitution. Among all the actresses in the company, apart from Nagarathnamma, the only other artists who were popular were B. S. Radha (also called Dikki Radha) and my younger sister, comedienne Manjulamma. Radha who was famous for her male villain roles, especially Dikki in Samsāra Nauka, in which, when she entered the stage smoking a cigarette and blowing smoke rings with a backspin, the crowd would be thrilled and cried in ecstasy. My younger sister Manjulamma who played the comic character Mādhu too elicited similar response, especially in one scene wherein she ate half a dozen bananas just to show that the character is a voracious eater and while doing so she would slowly look at the crowd; members of the audience, forgetting that she is a woman, would retort 'namgond kodappa (Sir/Man, spare one for us)'.

(Interview on March 25th, 2017).



Figure 34: B. S. Manjulamma, known for her singing abilities

(Source: Karnataka Drama Academy Archive, approximate date 1980-85)

The economic status of women is usually related to their marital stability, sex preferences and poverty status (Hoffman, 1977). According to my father, Radha and my aunt Manjula were

generous and spendthrifts, both to profusion. He recollected incidents of them donating an entire day's salary for charitable causes. My aunt could live with the family of Nagarathamma, but Dikki Radha died under very humble circumstances in a small hut in a remote suburban slum in Bangalore. I was told that she was chauffeured around by a sympathetic vegetable vendor on his push cart because she could not walk nor could afford any means of transportation.

“She joined the theater at about the same time as I did. In 1930s, when I played Prahlaḍa, she played a small comedy role as ‘Gāga (ḍimwit)’ in Bhakta Prahlaḍa. After the company stopped, she spent some time at a rich actress’s house working as a maid servant and cook. And there was Malatamma, Gubbi Veeranna’s daughter, who suffered a severe electric shock, while she was performing Sīta’s role in the play Daśāvātāra, an accident that cost her both her legs and she could never walk again. In Kalavathy’s case, her acting career ended abruptly post marriage. She married a clerk in the government treasury. He bought tickets and came every day to watch her performance over the entire duration of our camp in Sringeri, expressed desire to marry her and immediately after marriage he restricted her from acting onstage since he felt his reputation in the society was at stake. It was indeed a great loss to the theater world that such a wonderful actress had to succumb to the male pressure and became a mother of three daughters”, he had once recollected emotionally.

Married or unmarried, women actors seem to have been forced to quit modern Kannada theater profession. If married, they would quit out of their own accord or by the compulsions of their spouses or by the compulsions of the society. With the decline of theater, unmarried actors depending on their background chose alternate professions. Those from the *devadāsi* community found rich patrons to support them. Others found alternate professions such as *harikathā*, cooking, or became maids in the houses of rich actors or good Samaritan connoisseurs who had now assumed the role of patrons. There does not seem to exist enough critical research or empirical evidence to make conclusive inferences about the socio-economic status of women in general and female artists in particular that takes into account education, social, cultural and political factors in the pre-independent India. Gender bias which according to scholars seems to have affected women at every level in the labor-literacy-politics matrix, however, does not seem to have affected

the artists in modern Kannada theater. Both men and women have suffered the same discrimination irrespective of their cultural background as far as Kannada theater was concerned.

Deepak: How did the society treat actresses?

Paramashivan: They were treated no differently than men. As I have mentioned earlier, theater artists were 'aspr̥yaru (untouchables)'. I will give you two extreme examples of how theater actresses were treated by the society. I had joined a small drama company in a small village called Kunthnūr, near Kollegal (small town near Mysore), whose proprietor was an actor called Mariswamy who performed only one play, 'Beḍara Kaṇṇappa'. When the actresses in that troupe sauntered across the village, the householders would sing 'Nāṭakada sūle baṃḍaḷu, Nāṭakada sūle baṃḍaḷu (The drama whore arrived, the drama whore arrived)'. Ironically, all the actresses in this troupe were Brahmin women who were in theater profession only for financial reasons. There was a renowned Brahmin scholar and a worshipper of Goddess Shakti in Bellary (A district in Northern Karnataka) called Bhaskar Pantulu. He was the head priest of the 'Vaiśyaru (Merchant class)' in that region. He was my Guru, who initiated me into the worship of Goddess Shakti. One evening Malavalli Sundaramma came to visit him to seek his blessing. He came out of his prayer room after offering his evening prayers. He offered her a seat, presented her with tāmbūla (coconut and fruits along with betel leaves and nuts, usually offered as a mark of respect) and vermilion (red powder), said in Telugu 'Rā talli kooso. tāmbūlam tisko (Come mother, have a seat and please accept the tāmbūlam)'. In the former case, the women were Brahmins, the villagers were non-Brahmins, but in this case, the woman belonged to the prostitute caste, but a Brahmin showed her utmost respect. In my view it depended largely on the mindset of the individuals. The collective mindset of the society about theater artists in general was that 'they are untouchables' [From the lowest caste].

(Interview on March 25th, 2017).

Is Kumāri R Manjulamma Performing Today? – An Unsung Hero(ine)'s Voice

In the following conversation, my aunt R. Manjulamma, a renowned comedienne, shares her personal encounters in her theater career, the circumstances that led her to the acting profession, how it affected her life negatively, and her embitterment about how she never received due recognition for her contribution to theater which was at least on par with her own sister, if not more, by the government or arts councils, the way life and the society treated her and her decision to remain a spinster. I fondly call her Manjatthe (atte in Kannada means 'aunt'). I could not get close to her when I was growing up because she did not 'approve' of my mother's 'disapproval'

of the theater profession and her constant anti-theater tirades. Her disenchantment with life in general mixed with professional frustrations complicated the relationship further. But slowly she seemed to have realized that my mother's misgivings about theater profession were not totally unfounded when she herself became the victim of her cherished profession. My mother did many times persuade her to get married, but to no avail. Ever since I started acting regularly, she has been a constant source of support, guidance and offers constructive criticism to improve my acting skills. She was delighted that I was eventually able to go on the stage, When I played Arjuna in *Subhadra Kalyāṇa*, during the intermission she barged into the greenroom shouting 'Elli nanna aliya? Elli avanu? (Where is my nephew? Where is he?)', hugged me tightly and said 'Deepanna, nimma appana hesru uḷsbitte (Deepak, you brought glory to your father's name)'. She also said in public that she was reminded of the golden era when the great Nagesh Rao played the role of Arjuna. Whereas after my performance in *Bhīṣma Pratijñe*, she told me in private "Your singing was stupendous, acting was excellent, but you are too thin to be a Bhīṣma. You must put on some weight before you try this role again".

Both of my aunts belonged to the species of actresses who were not willing to go 'that extra mile' to achieve success. In case of my elder aunt, luck was on her side and all the recognitions came her way on their own, whereas in Manjulamma's case, she was pushed to obscurity with the shutting down of her sister's drama troupe. Currently my aunt is leading a saintly life by helping family and friends, by extending financial, emotional and moral support to the needy. Following excerpts are from a telephone conversation with her in February 2018.

Deepak: Hello Manjathe⁵⁸, I will be writing about you in my dissertation. Can you please share your experiences?

Manjulamma: Firstly, thanks a ton for writing about me. My life is an open book which everyone in the family knows about, including you. Still, let me know if you want me to tell you only my stint at 'Strī Nāṭaka Maṇḍali' with my sister or my entire theater career?

Deepak: Please tell me about your entire career.

Manjulamma: I was born on July 1st, 1939, in Mysore. When I was 5 years old, I was accompanying Nagarathamma and her husband Parthasarathy for their performance at K. Hirannayya's company. I was dancing in the side-wings for the music played by the orchestra, seeing which, Mr. Hirannayya asked his assistants to take me to the stage to perform 'raṅga pūje (prayer to the stage)' dance before the commencement of the play. I liked to be on the stage, unaware of my surroundings and time, and continued dancing, without paying heed to Hirannayya's summons from the side-wings. Finally, Mr. Hirannayya himself came on the stage and carried me away invoking a chuckle from the audience. That was my first encounter with the theater, as a child artist. He blessed me with Rs. 5 for my dance on that day. Later I was appointed as a child artist for a salary of Rs. 25 per month in his company. I continued there until I later joined Sorath Ashwath's company where I played the role of little Kṛṣṇa and Mr. Sorath Ashwath would play Makaranda in Kṛṣṇa Līla. Impressed with my performance, he gave a certificate of appreciation which I have preserved till date. I accompanied my elder sister Nagarathamma to M. V. Subbayya Naidu's company to babysit her second daughter. Subbayya Naidu had a policy of 'There is no free meal in this world', so he appointed me as a child artist, this time for a salary of Rs. 15 per month. Here too I played little Kṛṣṇa, Bhakti and other roles, and Sharada (The younger sister of the matinee idol of Kannada cinema Dr. Rajkumar), an excellent singer, played elderly Kṛṣṇa. Rajkumar, who was known as Mutthuraju then, treated me as his own sister, we shared the same camaraderie till he breathed his last. I accompanied my sister to 'Calanacitra Kalāvidara Saṃgha (Cinema Artists' Troupe)' and played small roles and in the meantime played major roles in amateur companies, along with B. S. Manjulamma, in 'Pragati' troupe started by Mr. K. S. Narayanaswamy (whose daughter is a well-known host and news reader of Kannada small screen), and other troupes of leading industries namely Kirloskar, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and others.

In 1958, when my elder sister Nagarathamma started her own all-women troupe, 'Strī Nāṭaka Maṇḍali', I joined her to play small roles like Satyabhāma, Māyāmohini. On one of the occasions, the woman who was supposed to play Makaranda's role disappeared without any prior notice, with a malicious intention of creating trouble to my sister. The harmonium player Doreswamy encouraged me and trained me to perform Makaranda in Kṛṣṇa Gāruḍi in Tiptur. We then toured Hubli in North Karnataka where the contractors, a doctor and lawyer, deceived us and ran away with all the money that was collected during the entire camp. The landlord of the house we had rented confiscated our costumes and the harmonium in lieu of rent. Mr. Kulkarni, a dear friend of H. L. N. Simha, miraculously came to bail us out of the situation. My mother and my second elder sister Sundaramma were very displeased with my decision to take up acting as a career because I was good at studies. I had studied Hindi and passed Rashtra Bhasha certificate exams in it. I had

⁵⁸ Atte in Kannada means aunt. I addressed Nagarathamma as Doddathe (elder aunt) and Manjulamma as Manjathe.

just given my high-school exams and saw the result while I was touring with the drama company, in 1959. After completing my pre-university I bid farewell to all forms of formal education. In those days pre-university would fetch you a decent job in the government sector, but I was not interested in it. After all, the thunderous applause of the audience, the adulation and appreciation of the admirers is an intoxicating 'elan vital' for any artist.

In the year 1960, your father Paramashivu (My father was referred to as Paramashivu by his family and as Pammi by his theater peers and colleagues) joined our company. Under his tutelage everyone in the company excelled as actors and musicians. He was an expert musician, a very fine drama director, an experienced harmonium player who knew plays and songs of almost all the companies. He not only expanded the repertoire of our performance by introducing new plays, recognizing my talent, he trained me in a wide spectrum of all the major comic roles namely Mādhū in *Samsāra Nauka*, Nājukayya in *Devadāsī*, Kāśī in *Beḍara Kaṇṇappa*, Makaranda in *Kṛṣṇa Gāruḍi* and *Kṛṣṇa Līla*, Nāṇi in *Makmal Ṭopi*, Akra Makra in *Rāmāyaṇa* and so on. I was his favorite among the sisters, anyways.



Figure 35: Manjulamma with and without make-up

Left (In the role of Mādhū in the play *Samsāra Nauka*), Right at home in the traditional attire.

(Source: Family album, 1960s)



Figure 36: Manjulamma as Sunāma (Left) and as Kamsa Nagarathamma (Right) in Kṛṣṇa Līla in 1980s

(Source: Family album)

Deepak: What was learning acting under Paramashivan like?

Manjulamma: He was a very strict disciplinarian. Since it was an all-women company, he was very protective, caring and guarded us from predators. Actresses were not supposed to look at the audience while on stage. If anybody giggled on the stage, missed their lines, they had had it. He would barge into the greenroom during the intermission and take the actresses to task. His signature line, ‘Yāke ellide jñyāna? Yāke bāvili biddora hāge ādtiya? (where is your mind wandering? Why do you behave like someone fallen inside the well?)’ scared us all. I would like to share this hilarious moment when one Ms. Chandramma was playing Dharmarāya in Kṛṣṇa Gāruḍi. She was quite arrogant that she had already performed in many other troupes. She was warned by other actors about your father’s temperamental nature and high expectation from the actors which probably acted upon her mind and made her more nervous, subconsciously. After delivering the very first line, ‘Bhīmasena, Pārtha, Nakula Sahadeva’, stage fright got the better of her, and she went blank onstage. She obliquely glanced at your father to see his reaction. Your father who was already livid, gestured like spitting at her with contempt and fury, from the harmonium pit. Chandramma not only forgot her lines—also forgot that she was playing the role of a king—instead she coiled herself on the throne out of fear, quite unbecoming of Dharmarāya. As demanding as he was, if approached with a desire to learn, he would go miles to help the actresses. When I played Nājukayya in Devadāsī for the first time, there is a long soliloquy extending up to half an hour; during which he stood behind the curtains and prompted my lines for the first few performances until I had become comfortable. His contribution in shaping my artistic career as an actor and as a musician is immeasurable and unforgettable.

Deepak: Where did you play Nājukayya in Devadāsī for the first time?

Manjulamma: This was in a place called Kalgatgi in North Karnataka. It was during the same performance that a stone fell from the top of the theater roof on your father’s head in the middle of the performance. There is a famous scene called ‘the hunter scene’ in Devadāsī. I was supposed to enter the stage when this mishap occurred, and blood oozed out like a flood from his head. The artists and the audience were all flabbergasted. Fortunately, there was a doctor in the audience who gave him the first aid and suggested that the play be canceled, but your father insisted ‘Let us finish the play. The audience will be disappointed otherwise’. Your father was a perfectionist, each scene was perfectly choreographed under his direction who had a music for every move. Your ‘doddathe (Elder Aunt)’ could not walk on the stage without his harmonium background score. Under his direction, we toured places in Southern Karnataka like Mangalore, Hassan, Sakaleshpur, Gouribidnur, Chikkamagalur and other places. In no time I became the most popular comedian in the Kannada theater world. While touring Gouribidnur, I contracted typhoid for 21 days. The theatergoers would come to the booking counter and ask “Is Kumari Manjulamma performing today?”, when the answer was in negative, they would go away without buying the ticket. The collection went down to a few hundreds and it was becoming incredibly difficult to manage for my sister. Eventually they announced that I was back onstage. I had no choice but to act to give fillip to the collection; a doctor was seated in the first row to keep watchful eyes over me, after acting my scene, I would immediately collapse in the side-wings on a bed specially kept

for me with other artists fanning me to make me comfortable. In another occasion, in Shimoga, we had announced to perform *Sadārame*. Radha played the comic role of *Ādi Murti* and I played a small role as *Brahmin*. When Radha entered the stage, the audience created ruckus and demanded ‘*Kumari R Manjula should play Ādi Murti’s role*’. Eventually, to quieten the spectators, I changed my costume and played *Ādi Murti*.



Figure 37: Manjulamma playing dual clown as *Makaranda* in *Kṛṣṇa Gāruḍi*

(Source: Family album, approximately late 1990s)

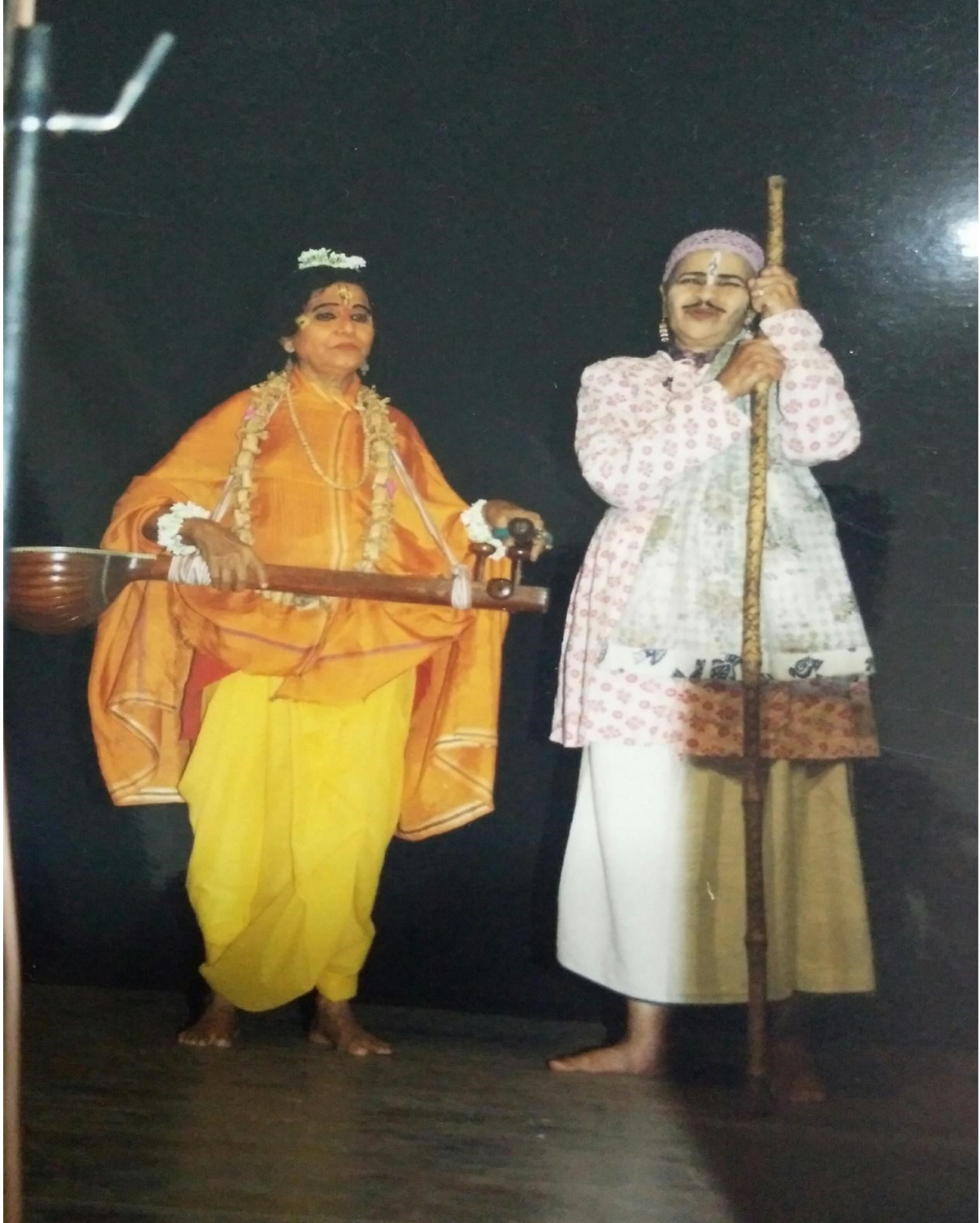


Figure 38: Manjula as Makaranda along with B. P. Rajamma as Narada in Kṛṣṇa Gāruḍī

(Source: Family album, approximately 1990s)



Figure 39: Manjulamma post performance with the Kannada cinema actress Kalpana

(Source: Family Album, approximate date 1965-68)

I was very popular even among my peers and colleagues, rather more popular than my sister. I silently enjoyed this status of second-in-line in the hierarchy of the company. I was managing the finances, made payments and in charge of all the administration including recruiting new actresses and training them. Several actresses who trained under me became quite famous in the cinema. For example, 'Minugu Tāre Kalpana (Shining Star Kalpana)', was trained under me (Figure 39). She used to play a small role as Māyā Mohini in Kṛṣṇa Gāruḍi which had 2 lines and a song which I sang playback, since she was not trained in singing. Anyhow, all this pomp and glory came to an end when our company's theater collapsed in Chamarajanagar due to thunderstorm and deeming this as a bad omen, my sister decided to shut down her company.

Deepak: Didn't you act in cinema yourself (like some of the other actresses in your company)?

Manjulamma: I did act in a few movies. The very first movie in which I acted as an adult was 'Parasangada Geṃde Timma' in which Nagarathnamma donned the role of the protagonist's mother. I was accompanying her for the shooting. The director requested me to play a cameo role and I obliged. It was remade in Tamil as 'Rojappoo Ravikekāri' in which only my sister acted. Recently I acted in a few movies as a mother or aunt or as a senior person.

She did later talk about her tryst with fate of being a theater artist; ostracization from the society, lack of marital prospects and her harsh decision to remain unmarried for the rest of her life. Figures 35-38 are her comic and villain roles from different plays. From the conversation with Manjulamma, it is clear that Paramashivan's knowledge world had started interacting with the knowledge worlds of his own family members. Interestingly, when he realized that his sister had already started acting on the stage, he encouraged her to don new roles unaware of the social consequences. Both him and my aunt writing exams suggests a collaborative effort to eschew their theater identity and reclaim the age old respectful social dignity. My father succeeded but my aunt could succeed only partially.

Conclusion

I had personal encounters with many of these actresses mentioned in the interviews. On certain occasions, I have been a young, helpless witness to their hardships. For example, in 1996, when my aunt's troupe toured Goa, I was accompanying my father and the organizers put us all in a cheap hotel which had unruly, uncivilized and uncouth perverts for its residents. When a young girl in the troupe, who played bit-parts and extras, was taking bath in the common bathroom, one of the residents peeked into the bathroom through the window. In the hindsight, now I can imagine the pain and humiliation that she faced and in general the perpetual fear under which actresses in my aunt's company or elsewhere, lived, protecting themselves from pervert predators. In the same tour, Ms. B. P. Rajamma had stopped my indignant father from beating me up, for he was enraged at my bold attempt to swim across a fast-flowing river. My fears and reservations about theater artists dissipated after this tour in which I got spend a lot of time closely interacting with them.

I have faint memories of Dikki Radha visiting our house, probably with a hope to get some financial help, for my mother was known for her compassion for the theater artists. In 1991, I had accompanied my parents to Hyderabad for one of the last few tours of my aunt outside Karnataka. I distinctly remember Ms. Radha's entry to the scene blowing smoke rings in *Samsāra Nauka*. Post-performance, my cousin and I, the two curious young kids, clandestinely asked Ms. Radha, if she did really smoke on the stage, to which she replied 'No. Never. I was just acting. Smoking is very dangerous. People who smoke will go blind', with a little smile on her face. Much later I came to know the truth that she indeed smoked on the stage, but I couldn't stop respecting her for her sense of social responsibility towards kids. In the same tour, I also witnessed a love affair

between one of the artists in the troupe who was hoping to have a stable relationship with a married man with children, and both decided to end their lives by committing suicide within a couple years, because their families opposed this relationship, for obvious reasons.

The female characters in the plays *Samsāra Nauka* and *Devadāsī* offer a vivid social description of the status of women in the erstwhile society; the latter about prostitutes and the former about women in respectable upper-caste families. The voices of the characters in *Samsāra Nauka*, Susheela, Sarala and the widow Girija, are silenced by the conservative, dominating, old man. Both he and the priest, get Susheela, the daughter of the priest, married to the old man's half-wit son, Mādhu, much against her wishes explains the social construction anchored in a male-dominated colonial India. The brahmin priest casting his lusty eyes on Girija widowed at a very young age throws light on the vulnerabilities of widowhood grappling with loneliness, misunderstanding and sexual exploitation by predators, during the times when widow remarriage was not an accepted norm in the societal and family periphery. Kandiyoti (1988:273) highlights why marriages in patriarchal societies resulted in early widowhood. He writes, “under classic patriarchy girls are given away in marriage at a very young age into households headed by their husband's father. There, they are subordinate not only to all the men but also to the more senior women, especially their mother-in-law”. In one of the conversations, my father recollected a story from his childhood when he and his friend, both about seven or eight years old were engaged in playing ‘aḷi guḷi maṇe (A strategy board game played with tamarind seeds)’, her in-laws brought the news that her husband died of the disease he was afflicted by a few months ago. He recollected “Do you know what was her reaction when her in-laws said her husband was no more? She didn't even spare a second glance at them. She looked at me with an innocent, unperturbed calmness and said ‘Yei, īga ninna saradi kaṇo, āḍo (Hey, it is your turn, now, play)’. Back then Brahmins were

poor but lacked family planning skills and bore too many children. The popular saying was ‘makkaḷu ādre keḍe, maḷe bandare keḍe (It never harms to have lots of kids nor does it harm if there are lots of rains)’. The parents those days, in a bid to absolve themselves of their responsibility, would marry their daughters off at a very young age which resulted in personal tragedies like in the case of my friend who never remarried and spent the rest of her life working as a teacher in a school”.

In the current chapter the role of women, their lifeways balancing their profession and motherhood, and women’s roles in the Modern Kannada theater plays, were critically examined to reconstruct a social narrative of their ‘status and identity’, as curbed voices in the society in the colonial India in the early 20th century. Those who successfully overcame these societal discriminations and cultural barriers alone could make their presence felt in Kannada theater. I have tried to argue that male dominance as a cultural phenomenon was not restricted to nationalists but was an accepted norm in both societal and familial peripheries. Derné (1994) writes “Male dominance in India is rooted in the gender division of labor. Men continue to work in public sphere...women’s work often remains restricted to hours of toil in the domestic sphere”. On the other hand, Liddle and Joshi (1985) blame the gender inequality in India not on male dominance alone but a combination of male dominance and the colonial imperialism that wanted to capitalize on the existing social practices and complicated it further by adding its own, not ‘out of concern for women’ but because of the colonizer’s need and desire to wield a formidable clout in the financial and political establishments in a colonized country, India that is.

The discussions in this chapter reveals that as far as the status of women in theater was concerned it was no different from that of men. Irrespective of their social status, their association with theater

always harassed them to condemnation and berated their status. The women artists too like their male counterparts either remained unmarried and those who got married ensured that the next generation was not groomed with the family tradition. *Devadāsī-s* who lost their patronage turned to theater hoping to find a better life. But with the decline of theater they remained in obscurity, sometimes alone or sometimes serving rich patrons as their concubines. My father shared stories of some *Devadāsī-s* who quit theater profession grabbing the earliest opportunity they could, made incredible strides in academics and retired as university professors completely disowning their past identities. Unlike music, modern Kannada theater was marked by an absence of lineage or hereditary. The theater tradition that was founded in the late 19th century and continued till the middle of 20th century could not boast itself of having a hoary antiquity of a few hundred years like the gharanas of the North Indian music world nor were there the deified saintly trinities of the South Indian Karnatak music. At the same time, because of the taboo associated with the theater profession, modern Kannada theater artists did not find a compelling reason to their repertoire. In my own family neither my father nor my aunt ever cared to transmit their repertoire to their children. I was perhaps the only outlier, who received theater training, much later in my life, only after my parents were convinced of my academic credentials to earn a livelihood. These aspects of modern Kannada theater; a history of less than hundred years, lack of hereditary and lineage, and most importantly the artists eschewing their professional and social identities, and not perpetuating the theater repertoire to the next generation, led to the early decline of modern Kannada theater. In the next chapter, I will discuss the statuses of artists after the company drama disappeared from the public gaze and consolidate the factors that drove the decline of modern Kannada theater by carefully analyzing the social, political, economic circumstances by including my own speculative reasoning.

Chapter 8

Decline of Modern Kannada Theater

Introduction

Unlike other domains of culture such as literature, music, visual arts or for that matter other folk or classical dance forms of the Indian subcontinent, modern Kannada theater was never studied in a systematic manner by scholars nor documented to firmly position it in the larger context of history of arts in India. The dominant narrative in theater historiography always construes the development of theater repertoire in the backdrop of class and culture. With the upper-class elite preferring to support the classical artforms to achieve the goal of cultural nationalism, modern Kannada theater was forced to fall into a state of artistic coma. It is significant that in the last forty years not even one actor or playwright has been able to replace the stalwarts of modern Kannada theater who once aroused the fanciful expectations of the worthy aficionados with their dithrambic poetry and music. The theater that thrived under the royal patronage, attending which was once enmeshed with the ‘royal experience’ of the cultural capital of south India has remained unrecovered after its demise in the 1970s. This chapter is about the decline of modern Kannada theater. Here, I will make some concluding remarks, discussing mainly the mainstream classical music-theater music dyad, the decline of the modern Kannada theater thereby unpacking the myth of ‘cultural expression of postmodernity’ in Kannada theater and suggesting the possible directions in which this work can be extended. I will present some more interviews with my father for the most part of the discussion, since he is the ‘be-all and end-all’ of whatever remains of this tradition. I will profile the interview to underscore the *raison d’être* for the decline of the Modern Kannada theater tradition also exploring the other linguistic, political or ideological reasons.

Politics of Representation and the Decline of Kannada Theater

As I have argued throughout this dissertation, there are multiple causes for the decline of modern Kannada theater and it is hard to isolate them. So far, I have discussed the social circumstances that compelled the theater artists including Paramashivan to decide against perpetuating this tradition of theater to the posterity. Here I will discuss the political causes such as politics of representation, language and ideologies that contributed to the decline of this theater.

Folk artforms is a representation of the variegated cultural cross-sections of the contemporary and historical heritage of a region where it originates. The complexity traits of these artforms and their regional uniqueness form the basis for preserving them by the cultural councils of the state. As Geertz (1983) hypothesizes, art is a sector of the society and response to the aesthetics of art cuts across other social spheres of religion, morality, politics, gender and so forth. Desai (2000:114) quoting Clifford argues that all representations are partial truths, but positional truths expressed in the context of historical processes mediated by culture, ideology, politics and economics. Therefore, only when art is integrated into the socio-political-cultural fabric of a society it will find a representation locally as well as globally. In the context of global representation, I will discuss the UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) project that focuses on intangible aspects of a culture and the representation of Indian arts.

The UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage project defines 'intangible cultural heritage as "*...the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them*

with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity” (unescoich, 2018). The project is aimed at safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage by recognizing its importance for individuals and large populations, and inventorying them with the support of stakeholders, the government and NGOs who help in the ‘identification and definition of elements’ of an intangible heritage culture. The artforms of India that fall under the ambit of this project since 2008 include Kutiyattam from Kerala, Sankirtana- A ritual of singing, drumming and dancing from Manipur, Songs from Rajasthan, Buddhist music of the Himalayas, Ramlila and other folk and ritualistic dance, music and theaters in India. Qawwali, Veena music, Nautanki and many more are classified under *backlogged nominations*. These artforms can also be seen in the catalogues of Sangit Natak Akademy, New Delhi, which is maintained and administered by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. Incidentally, modern Kannada theater does not feature in the Sangit Nataka Akademi catalogues except for a twenty-minute performance from 1986 by my aunts late R. Nagarathamma and R. Manjulamma under the direction of my father. The lack of representation of modern Kannada theater at a global level is clearly reflected from the fact that it does not find representation within its own country.

Titan (2009:119), questioning the usefulness of safeguarding musical heritage, proposes a collaborative effort to preserve musical cultures. He writes argues that cultural heritage management is “doomed to the paradox of constructing staged authenticities with music treated as a market commodity. Instead, best practices arise from partnerships among ethno- musicologists, folklorists and music culture insiders (community leaders, scholars, and musicians), with sustainability interventions aimed directly inside music”. The collaboration can occur between all the stakeholders mentioned by Titan or a collective within the community could ensure the sustainability as observed in the context of *Yakṣagāna* by Ashton (1969). Interestingly, she notes

that *Yakṣagāna* being a community event, its success was largely owing to its cooperative approach in which people from different walks of life contributed to stage a play. With the carpenters contributing by building the stage, rich landlords financing the costumes and other infrastructure, *Yakṣagāna* remained a sustainable community activity. This is perhaps one of the major reasons for its survival even to this day, because even to this day people in coastal Karnataka villages during harvest season organize *Yakṣagāna* performance as a mark of gratitude to the God of harvesting. The threats faced by *Yakṣagāna* was only in the form of one troupe trying to replace the other rather than a threat posed by an altogether different artform or the media. Modern Kannada theater's sustenance largely was dependent on the royal patronage and not on community partnership. Due to the absence of community participation and partnership, with the collapse of the royal patronage modern Kannada theater could not sustain itself. Gornostaeva (2009:38) postulates that sustainability of creative production depends on the urban environment and their relationship with it and the economic development based on 'creative production'. The author uses Film and Television (FTV) industry to prove that FTV has a higher success rate of sustainability because of its socioeconomic transactions.

In his autobiographical article titled '*I do my bit*', Shivaram Karanth shares his experiment and experience with *Yakṣagāna*, how he eschewed the dialogues and initialized the tradition of presenting them as musical ballets inspired by the Western operas and ballets, that he had familiarized himself with, during his tours of Europe and UK during the 1950s. He seems to be convinced that it was due to his efforts that *Yakṣagāna* received the recognition it deserved. Highlighting the class hierarchy and how he achieved this tremendous feat of popularizing *Yakṣagāna* on a much wider platform for a heterogenous audience, he writes "Our low-class people have a number of folk-dances, but the so-called upper classes have shown total indifference to them. In

1958,1 published a thesis on Yakshagana. This folk-theater has its own rich tradition of dance, music and costume. I wanted to exploit its potential...My troupe performed ballets at Bombay, Bangalore, Mysore, etc. Non-Kannada people and foreigners appreciated them very much. I am happy to say that my humble efforts have brought due recognition to the Yakshagana". In the same article he shares the experience of staging the *Yakṣagāna* in Bombay which was attended by 'art critics and members of foreign mission' and received critical acclaim. He argues that it was the removal of dialogues and introducing Western instruments violin and saxophone for background music is what made it popular on a global platform even though it made him unpopular among the traditionalists (Karanth and Potdar, 1991). Critic Alkazi motivated him to present a Hindi version of *Yakṣagāna* to the Hindi speaking audience in New Delhi through which he received grants from the state government of Karnataka and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) of the government of India to travel to other parts of the world.

Though I was tempted to suggest to my father to experiment something similar with modern Kannada theater, I realized that it is not a viable option because *Yakṣagāna* has a judicious mix of dance and dialogue, in fact one could even argue that the dialogues assume a secondary place in the performance and it is mostly the dance which conveys the main story with its background music and songs. In modern Kannada theater, dance is only incidental, but the performance *per se* is predominantly based on the dialogue and the text of the sung poetry. Therefore, modern Kannada theater being a smorgasbord of many a genre of theater and music, firmly rooted in the tradition and texts based on Kannada language, could not define itself belonging to any of the categories-- folk, classical or contemporary--and as a result, could not find a representation in the Sangit Natak Akademy which has sincerely been trying to promote all the local endangered artforms. It does

not find a representation in the 'intangible cultural heritage' for the same reason as it does not find a representation in Sangit Natak Akademy.

Linguistic Nationalism and the Language of the Elite

The primary condition for recognizing and representing a language, its culture and the social groups it represents, is the politics. In case of certain languages playing a hegemonic role, other languages get marginalized. The politics of language-equity drives the path taken by the decision-making institution that grants legitimacy of representation. As Barnette argues in the context of broadcasting reforms in Africa, "entrenched patterns of socio-economic inequality, social relations of ownership and control, and the existing structures of markets for broadcasting services have all constrained attempts to deploy broadcasting as an instrument for fostering more equitable treatment of diverse languages in the public sphere" (Barnett, 2010). Discussing the role of language in social life and representation, Wenden (2005) argues that the politics of representation is the same as the language used to represent the meaning to society. She writes "...representation refers to the language used in a text or talk to assign meaning to groups and their social practices, to events, and to social and ecological conditions and objects".

In India, Karnataka state has always been proud of its multicultural and multilingual identities which jeopardized its own official language, Kannada. Ever since Bangalore, the state capital, became the Information Technology capital of the country in the late eighties, the demographic balance in the state has significantly changed. Kannada is being marginalized, English and Hindi are slowly replacing Kannada as the official language rising concerns among the native Kannada speakers. Discussing various linguistic nationalist movements in Southern India, Murthy (2006)

observes that post 1956 there was a consolidation of Tamil nationalist movement and Telugu nationalism movement in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh states respectively in which the thespians of the film world played a pivotal role to kindle the spirits of linguistic pride and consciousness. M G Ramachandran and N T Rama Rao became the guiding forces behind the social transformation and linguistic resurgence in these states. They started political parties and served as the chief ministers of their states. Currently there are political parties like *Kannada Caḷuvaḷi Pakśa* (Kannada Agitation Party) and organizations such as *Ka Ra Ve or Kannada Rakśaṇā Vedike* (Kannada Protection Forum) that participate and organize agitations and movements to protect the interests and rights of Kannada people (called Kannadigas) claiming to represent their voices and angst. In the absence of such political parties and fora, Kannada cinema actor Rajkumar functioned as a cultural icon and a unifying force. Murthy writes, “Karnataka, however, turned out to be different. Unlike Andhra Pradesh or Tamil Nadu, its cosmopolitan structure proved an obstacle for unifying Kannada nationalistic sentiments. Along with Kannadigas, the state also has sizeable sections of Konkani, Tulu and Kodava-speaking populations not to mention the domination of Marathi and Hindi in the northern parts of the state”. (On Kannada language and politics, also read Nair, 1994 and Nair, 1996). In the absence of Kannada nationalistic sentiments, absence of a history that could be traced back to hundreds of years in the past, modern Kannada theater lost its traditional prominence and could not relive its past glory in a climate of cultural changes.

Theatergoer’s Experience: A Contemporary Account

I tried very hard to reach out to theatergoers from the past to elicit their experience of attending theater shows, but in vain. At last, I found an eighty-year old gentleman who had collected some paper clips from the past about my aunt because he wanted to write a book about her but did not

materialize. He shared this news article in which the author shares her experience of attending my aunt's drama. The reporter has not discussed her experience as a member of the audience, but the article is written from the perspective of a fastidious critique who is in awe of my aunt's performance. In this article written in Kannada the author applauds my aunt for being the proprietor of the only all-women company that has sustained itself against all odds for more than two decades. Later she appreciates her gait, voice and music in her villainous roles as Kamsa, Bhīma and Rāvaṇa.

In order to get a contemporary account of the experience of theatergoers, I requested a couple of my friends on the Facebook from Germany and Australia, who I remember had attended my performances. They are non-resident Indians who visit India once in three or four years in summer during which they want to soak in the experience of their culture which they seem to miss, living far away from their homes. They kindly obliged and shared their experience of attending the performance in which my father had tried his best to recreate the past glory of modern Kannada theater. My father being a household name in Karnataka, it was not difficult to advertise the play on Facebook.

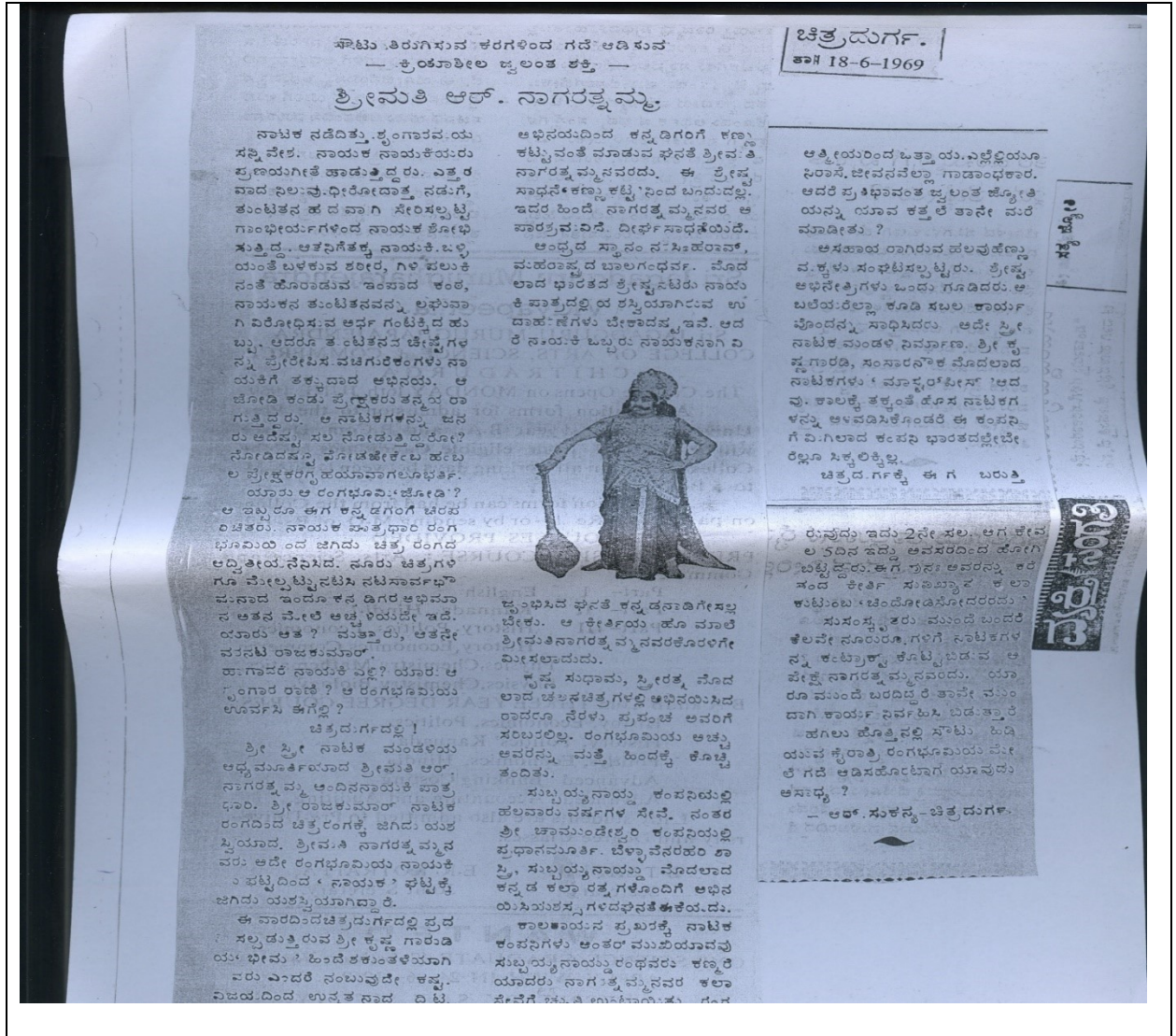


Figure 40 An Article from a Kannada News Paper from 1969 about Nagarathamma's drama

Worse than having to work from home on a stormy Sunday afternoon, is having your angry girlfriend insist that you watch a theater play, because she paid for the tickets. I had to choose between the lesser of the two storms. Don't get me wrong, I am pro-theater, an acquired taste I had begun to relish in my University days. I enjoy the spontaneity on stage, entirely lacking in the edited cinema. I enjoy a good stage performance as much as the curious imperfections at the change of a scene- the slight misoriented backgrounds, the mild mis-contoured make up, the meekly protesting collar microphones, the size-fluid wardrobes and the occasional impromptu off-script dialogues, averting the breach in continuity.

We arrive to a packed theater despite the rain and find our seats. The play is called Sadarama, a Kannada classic. My girlfriend tells me that her cousin Deepak, who also happens to be an acclaimed actor and vocalist is in it. The lights go dim and she points to this bloke on stage walking under a spot light. He briskly paces to the center of stage and blasts off with a musical vocal prelude, that makes the audience lean forward in their chairs. The wide applause it met, in form of mature nods and silent approving claps of nearly everyone in the audience, took me by surprise as I had underestimated the reach of Indian classical plays. There were moments of fleeting Déjà vu when I saw the characters play multiple roles, making me wonder about the pace at which they had had to change between the costumes. Although punctuated heavily with archaic vocabulary and accents, as is the case

with Indian classical plays, the clear enunciation and intonations by the performers reflected a practiced perfection.

The director-actor stood out distinctly with his lucid and effortless portrayal of Kalla, the outlaw, who drew more love from the audience than eponymous protagonist, Sadarama. Kalla succeeded in translating the elite language of the classical script into the more universally understood emotion, with his vocal renditions strategically interspersed throughout the play. Overall, the play is a celebration of pure emotion and by far one of the few bests I have seen so far. A classical play of this theatrical splendor will need to cast either the most veteran performers or a perfectionist crew. Judging by how satisfying it was, I'd say they've done both. If you happen to be one of those aficionados who visit the crew back stage, it won't be difficult to spot a frail chap with visibly infectious enthusiasm for life. Don't hesitate to say, 'Hello, Deepak'. The conversation will be worth it.

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I was dressed as a (how one with a palette of an American TV binger would characterize) Ghazal chorus singer and had the single agenda to avoid answering any questions on my starched-white Banarsi kurta and a Kashmiri wool Nehru jacket. To help me waltz out of the office was Jasraj and Bhimsen Joshi's number from Birbal My Brother. Drut laya means faster steps.

A week ago, when Deepak shared the pamphlet on the Facebook inviting connoisseurs to Subhadra Kalyana in Ravindra Kalakshetra, the first thought in my mind was sartorial. The second was that I will be the youngest in the audience. It is here when I started showing compassion to the floor carpet in my office. It paid off. The first person I crossed in the auditorium was silk shirt and dhoti clad with vibhooti across his forehead. I took only a few more seconds to realize that we were mutual sartorial consolations. My second thought, however, was right. Connoisseurs are failed artists and it takes years (and harsh interventions) to realize that one is not good enough. I realized it very young. With no interventions.

The thunderous applause and whistles welcomed Vidwan R Paramashivan on to the stage. The second bout of applause when he said, "Other than Deepak, no one knows music here," ridding the audience of the utter helplessness they felt at the sight of this doyen, told me that Deepak should be genetic inheritance's most convincing use case. "He just certified Deepak" I thought. The Vidwan then took on the harmonium. Transcendental magic. On any other day, the musician in me would've pestered me to ascertain the pedantic platitudes of a classical composition, but that day, I pitied those who would have. The alacrity, authority, and affection emanating from that harmonium demanded its listeners to abandon their needless pretensions. And those who still harboured these pretensions should have melted at the first note Deepak sang. It was as if Lenny was directing the orchestra while Zimerman played Chopin with his eyes closed, with precognitive levels of forethought. It was as if Foreman's Salieri was absolving universal mediocrity, only here the inter-generational musical greatness was absolving and compensating for the paucity of intellectual heft in their milieu.

"naarada muni... ee reeti nyayave..." (Hey Sage Narada, is this fair?) went Deepak when the second inevitable cacophony hit the auditorium. Microphone feedback. (What is the first, you ask? Mid-performance applause!) Deepak stopped. Lenny vanished. Salieri dissolved. Hoots! Whistles! Shrieks! Why was I hearing them? Oh. I was back to my pedantic self. Shuffle! Your left leg is numb! The shrieks faded. Microphones stopped feeding upon themselves. "... ee reeti nyayave..." (Is this fair?) said Deepak, pointing not at Naarada, but at the microphone technicians. He broke the fourth wall. He broke my distaste to mid-performance applauses. I'd have traded a limb to be able to whistle now! Where is Lenny, now? Ah. There he is. Shhhh!

Did I tell you what the story is about? I didn't. And I will not, either. Subharda Kalyana, along with Sadarama, are one of the most well-known plays in Kannada performing arts. An entire generation learns these stories by-heart. The reason I won't tell you what the story is about is that the play was so exquisitely performed, the story is one of the last things you take back home. The beginning and the end become an unintended consequence when the characters and their lines pull you to invest in them. The narrative becomes second fiddle to the narration.

Subhadra is pleading Arjuna to let her go. Arjuna is holding her hands. "suralokake sopanavannelekatti matysayantravam saletarida...dhuradheeram ninage sotiha... ohisale gandharva vidhiolivanam... taruniiiiii..." says Arjuna looking at Subhadra, his left hand pointing at himself, with the index finger straighter and pointier than the others. The Subhara is swept off her feet at this confession of vulnerability by Arjuna. The actor, however, has the faintest of smiles of adulation attributed only to Mona Lisa, for I know, and she knows, that the actor who played and sang for Arjuna has brought the stage down. MID-PERFORMANCE APPLAUSE. Oh, stop it, please!

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Each of these accounts of theater experience from different generations depict a definite mindset, taste and expectations of the audience at a given point in time. For example, Sharma attended the show because he was compelled by his girlfriend not because of his love for classical Kannada drama. But he expresses his surprise at the outreach of classical drama. He points to the archaic vocabulary in the plays which may be a dissuasive factor to theatergoers of the current generation who are unfamiliar with the classical usage of the language.

Karthik on the other hand came with a 'sartorial' expectation. He had stereotyped the audience in his mind as 'senior and seasoned connoisseurs of modern Kannada theater'. Karthik's accounts clearly suggest his tastes—reference to Hans Zimmer and Chopin—Salieri, Lenny and discomfort with the mid-performance applause—were formulated by association of the Western educated elite.

The classical language which is Sanskrit centric might have created a niche audience which is mostly the elite, scholarly literati and alienated the common populace that found entertainment in the colloquial. This reflects the shift in preferences and the transformation in the social consciousness of the audience which in the absence of colloquial entertainment preferred the classical plays. The lack of interest in the new generation of theatergoers did not support the survival or resurrection of Kannada theater.

The Fate of Different Drama Companies

In most cases, according to my father, the companies stopped because the proprietor who owned the company died. When I probed him further to get the finer details, he revealed the details of the fates that befell some of the finest theater actors, proprietors and playwrights. For example, he recalled that when the cultured comedian K. Hirannayya died in the year 1953, his son Master Hirannayya did not have money even for the funeral.

“Mr. Hirannayya had fallen seriously ill for many months when his company camped in Madikeri, a hill station bordering Kerala and Karanataka states. His son Murthy⁵⁹, whom Mr. Hirannayya had tried all his life to keep away from the theater, had to act for the survival of the company. Earlier, if his son was ever spotted anywhere in the vicinity of the theater, his father would say ‘ā sūle maganige joḍu togonḍu hoḍedu oḍisi (Hit that bastard with slippers and send him away from the theater)’. Since Mr. Hirannayya could not act, the collection in the company had dwindled and within a few weeks he died after battling a prolonged illness. His son was an innocent young boy who did not know what to do. Then, the grocery shop owner opposite the ‘company mane (The rented house where the theater members would be accommodated)’, paid for the last rites. After his demise, in Madikeri, the company was shut down. His son was gallivanting around ‘Majestic’, the city bus stand in Bangalore. Sitaramayya, who was a loyal assistant to his father, would go begging people, collect enough money to buy one meal and both would share it. The people to whom his father owed money laid their claim on the theater that his father had built on Kempe Gowda Road in Bangalore and confiscated all the furniture, scene-sets, and upholsteries, so Murthy had no roof to stay under and nowhere to go. He would sleep on the banks of a small pond near the bus stand. Later, the renowned Kannada novelist Mr. A Na Krishna Rao took pity on him and gave him refuge. It was many years later that Ms. Bellary Lalitamma, who was a heroine in his father’s company, helped him resurrect the company by investing the seed money and since then there was no looking back for Murthy”.

(Interview exact date unknown. Appr. during April - June 2017).

I pressed him further to give a consolidated image of what happened to the fate of other companies and some stalwart theater artists that he was rubbing shoulders with. He vividly recreated the

⁵⁹ Master Hirannayya’s real name is Narasimha Murthy. He is referred to by this name only by my father and my Late aunt Nagaratnamma

scenes with his eidetic memory and it was all the much easier for me to physically walk hand-in-hand with him in the places that he referred to because I have spent considerable time in those places in 'Old Bangalore' which is still a paradise for bibliophiles who wish to collect and read old books.

“Chamundeshwari company stopped after Sundaramma and Mariappa stopped controlling the company in 1948. The actors were all getting old. Who would want to watch old people act on the stage? This led to poor collection; employees, actors and the orchestra could not be paid which in turn led to higher attrition rates. The audience too started expecting to see younger actors perform on the stage. But the artists of younger generation were not willing to go through the rigor of theater training, learning music, language and diction. When I was young, to be recruited to any theater company, you had to first sing chorus songs in the roles of ‘vānara sainya (monkey army)’ in Rāmāyaṇa. The monkeys extol the power of Lord Rāma by singing a song (Transcripts 22 and 23). The monkey songs are not very easy to sing because they are set to intricate rhythmic patterns constantly moving from different time signatures like triplets and quadruplets”.

(Interview exact date unknown. Appr. during April - June 2017).

tenor  **6**
 bha la | raa ma sa ha - | ya bha la |

Ten. 
 raa ma sa ha - | ya bha la | do re tu du ja ya |

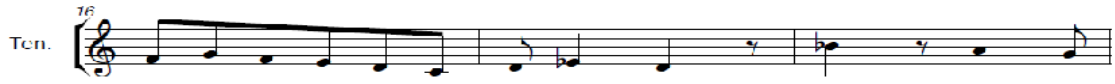
len. 
 ha ri na ra pri ya raa ma sa ha - | ya bha la |

len.  ¹⁰
 do re tu du ja ya | ha ri na ra pri ya raa ma sa ha - |

len.  ¹³
 ya bha la saa ke ta | bhu - pa - pra ka |

Transcription 22: Monkeys' battle song part 1 in Rāmāyaṇa

2



ti ta vi ja ya - | la - pa | saa ke ta |

2



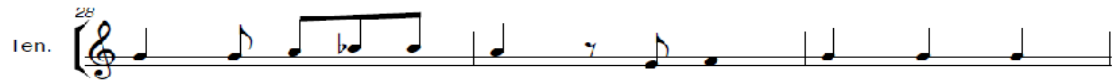
bhu - pa - pra ka | ti ta vi ja ya - | la - pa |



shrira - dha ra va ra - | vi ra vi ca ra ja ya shrira - dha ra va ra - |



vi ra vi cha ra va ra - | chadu ra ku | maa ra ra ghu |



vee ra su dhi - | ra va ra | chadu ra ku |



maa ra ra ghu | vee ra su dhi - | ra bha la |

Transcription 23: Monkeys' battle song part 2 in Rāmāyana

[Translation of the song

Rāma's blessing is great
The victorious emperor's blessing is great
The King of Ayodhya, his blessing is great
The young, profound and handsome king's blessing is great]

When asked if there were any companies that did well at all, Paramashivan gave a detailed account of seasonal fluctuations in the collection, camping and touring pattern of theater companies across the sphere of modern Kannada theater. According to him, while most companies had to shut down to account for monsoon, two companies could stay afloat even during the rainy season namely Gubbi Veeranna's company and Subbayya Naidu's company. Gubbi Veeranna's company could afford two separate kitchens in the company, one for Brahmins and one for the rest, indicating that even within the company there was a tacit caste hierarchy and conservatism.

“My dear friend Yoganarasimha's (fondly referred to as Yoga) theater company, 'Udayakala Nataka Mandali', ran out of business when he camped in a dry place called Athani, in the Northern part of Karnataka, which was notoriously famous for its poor rainfall pattern. The place would record only 1.5 centimeters of rainfall per annum. Therefore, the denizens were busy sustaining themselves and, the local economy could not support luxuries like theater and music. Yoga had taken loan from everyone in the town; the grocery shop, house owner and others, hoping his play 'Kaḷḷa Bhaṭṭi (Illicit Arrack)' would fetch him a lot of money and he will be able to repay the loan. However, his play was a failure, and the collection was not enough to even breakeven. He left virtually everything, the harmonium, scenes, chairs, costumes and even his wife and children and ran away. Some respectable people in the town paid for the return journey of his family. Following this disaster, he quit theater profession and spent the rest of his life writing screenplays and dialogues for the cinema. C. B. Mallappa's company had stopped long before because he became old and preferred to retire. The company was running because of the devotional theme he had mastered. He attracted the crowd with his exemplary singing in the pitch of G#. After he retired, everyone in his company moved to other companies. Some pursued a career in acting

in the cinema. Mr. Mallappa himself started visiting other companies for Rs. 50 or Rs. 100 playing small cameo roles.

All the other companies had to invariably shut down in rainy season and reopen in summer. Therefore, most actors would migrate into Gubbi company. It was called the 'guarantee company' because your food and salary was assured, whether the company would fare well or not. Mr. Veeranna was an astute businessman, a seasoned politician and an exemplary visionary in the theater field who could run his company for almost hundred years against all odds. The same could not be said about other companies. But if Gubbi company that could run for hundred years had to be shut down what about other smalltime companies? In 1990s I visited Thirthahalli with a Bharatanāṭya dance troupe, the same place where I had strayed into the forest in search of Lord Viṣṇu at the age of four. There, I shed blood not tears to see the 'Great Gubbi' theater in a dilapidated state and 'Channabasaveshwara Nataka Mandali' banner torn into pieces. The company that used to feed 200 people every day, and now the theater did not even have the gates. There was only one person who was the contractor, stage manager, booking clerk and the guard at the door. It happened because Mr. Veeranna delegated the responsibility of the company business to his son Channabasavanna who in turn relinquished his responsibility as the proprietor and became an agriculturist. The new proprietor was an alcoholic. It seems if the collection was Rs. 200, he would pay Rs. 150 towards food for the employees and spend the remaining Rs. 50 on drinking and gambling.

Master Hirannayya continued his father's company informally for a long time but only recently due to his bad health he stopped. Your aunt's company 'Stree Nataka Mandali', stopped in 1970 in Chamarajanagar when because of heavy rains the theater itself collapsed. Fortunately, there were no casualties. The light boy was resting inside the theater and the roof fell on the box that contained electrical paraphernalia for the theater which saved his life. Considering all this as a bad omen, your aunt decided to close it down. Her son had a secure government job, so her life was secured too.

In North Karnataka, companies called 'Bhakri'⁶⁰ ootadha company (Company that only gives you food but not salary)' continued to function until recently, because the proprietors struggled to the best of their abilities to at least offer three meals a day. But when affording even Bhakri became a challenge, these companies were closed too".

(Interview exact date unknown. Appr. during April - June 2017).

Cultural Economics- Role of Cinema in the Fall of Kannada drama

Modern media and its role in mass communication played a significant role in the decline of traditional artforms. As Bhaskaran observes, "When popular, commercial drama appeared on the cultural scene in south India at the end of the nineteenth century, there was no radio or cinema to compete with it in the realm of mass communication. It appeared in an age when the dissemination of ideas and information was crucial to the emergence of nationalism and it soon came to be used as an instrument in the nation's struggle for liberation" (Bhaskaran, 2009:133). While his claim might be true with respect to the political theater, a form of theater which is aimed at engaging and subscribing to political ideologies, but it is not true in case of theater that was preoccupied with performing classical plays translated from Sanskrit and based on mythological themes. The unwillingness of modern Kannada theater to acclimatize itself to the new political climate of boisterous nationalism that had engulfed the society could have been one of the factors that lead to its decline. Modern Kannada theater had to compete with modern media and mass communication that performed both the tasks—entertainment and dissemination of ideas and information—replacing other folk and popular art forms.

My father could not explain if cinema did play an important role in usurping the status that the theater enjoyed as an unrivaled primary source of entertainment for many decades.

⁶⁰ Bhakri is a flat bread made of corn, a popular meal in Northern Karnataka, not as much in Southern Karnataka.

“A number of good actors in theater graduated into the cinema. Narasimharaju, Balakrishna, Rajkumar, Ramachandra Shastry, Honnappa Bhagavatar et al moved to Chennai to pursue a career in the cinema in the late 1960s. Rajkumar went to Chennai in 1954 for a career in cinema. In a year they would make only three Kannada movies because Kannada cinema was not respected in the other parts of the country. The hero would only earn Rs. 7000 because there was no worth for Kannada cinema. G. V. Iyer, Narasihma Raju, had rented houses. It was in this company the renowned director Bhagawan worked as a dress keeper and played executioners in Kannappa. Despite, these actors would remain struggling in Chennai under humble circumstances. These Kannada cinema actors, in order to supplement their income, started a drama company called ‘chalanachitra kalavidara sangha’ and toured different cities like Hubballi, Davanagere, Madikire, Tumkur, and Kolar. I was the harmonium player there too because I was the only person who knew plays from all the companies. They played Heccama Nayaka, Sadarame, Sahukara and Kannappa. That would give them a lot of money. That was sufficient for them to sustain in Chennai during lean periods.

Until early 70s, the movie was not a very popular medium. There were some small tents playing a 2-hour short movie for 4 hours because every half hour the projector operator had to stop for changing the reel. People obviously preferred the theater over cinema, esp. the rural audience. With the advent of the TV now people have stopped watching cinema also. In Bangalore they are bringing down all the theaters and building malls. I think modernization and commercialization contributed largely to the decline of the theater.

You must note that not everyone who tried a career in the cinema became successful. As they say ‘Kalā māte, ellarannu kai bīsi karitaḷe. ādre kelavaranna mātra kai hididu kāpāḍtaḷe (The Goddess of art invites everyone to become an artist by waving her hand at them. But holds the hand of only a few and protect them)’. For ex. Master Hirannayya did not shine in the cinema so he remained in the theater for the rest of his life. Mr. Subbayya Naidu, in whose company every famous cinema actor, including the Kannada thespian and matinee idol Dr. Rajkumar, was groomed and trained under his watchful eyes, was a failure himself in the cinema. He tried performing a new play called ‘Śri Rāma Janana (The Birth of Lord Rama)’ in Bangalore and invested all his savings and the earnings on the movie ‘Bhakta Prahlāda’. The movie was of a very inferior quality and to make it worse, because of poor editing work lampposts could be seen in a mythological movie, making it a box office failure. He lost all his money, sold his two cars and was rendered penniless. He could not even afford to go by auto rickshaw, and one fine day, I was devastated to see my ‘āru varṣa anna hākida dhaṇi (The master who fed me for six years)’, waiting for the bus in scorching sun. He eventually died in Mandya and his company stopped. His daughter Bangaramma tried to revive the company by performing a play called ‘Ashok Kumar’, written by herself. Subbayya Naidu’s son Lokesh was the protagonist in the play who also quit the theater for a career in the cinema with which the company was shut down permanently”.

(Interview exact date unknown. Appr. during April - June 2017).

The protagonist in the cinema earning Rs. 7000 (\$125) per cinema is a reminder of the economic advantage cinema had over the Kannada theater. It was only because the number of Kannada movies produced was negligible that the actors toured performing theater to supplement their income. Later, when Kannada cinema became more popular, it offered more financial stability and the actors forswore the theater career in pursuit of the more lucrative and glamorous cinema.

As Cowen (2001:958) writes “Some cultural economists suggest that art is not just "another economic good," but often they take this point in the wrong direction They seek to elevate the arts over other economic goods, whereas in reality art holds a secondary function for most consumers. For most individuals, art is subordinated to a wide variety of informational, signalling, and symbolic goods”. He suggests that when governments draft policies on arts, both tangible and intangible values must be brought to the forefront of consideration. Lewis and Rushton (2007) illustrate the conflict between the political machinery’s willingness and people’s expectation regarding the public spending on art. The authors argue that the discretionary policies on arts are always guided by a few hegemonic elites in the society than the demands of the connoisseurs. They argue that the legislators are more sympathetic to issues that are easily interpretable, politically interesting and where the actions of the government are perceivable. They also expose the tacit perception among the legislators that spending on art is a futile. In India, of this year alone the culture ministry has been allocated a total budget of 2, 843 crores (roughly 404 million USD) roughly increasing the budget by 3.82 compared to the last fiscal year. A large of proportion of this budget is however being spent on Archaeology, Archives, Museums and the art sector is getting only Rs. 310 Crore which includes other schemes such as Gandhi Heritage sites and fellowship schemes (Culture Ministry Annual Report, 2019).

During this conversation he revealed his failed attempt at becoming an entrepreneur in theater business. My father too had started a company called ‘*Mañjunāthesvara Nāṭaka Maṇḍali*’ with his astrology Guru Mr. Joshi as his business partner. The company had a stellar cast, cinema actors Dikki Madhura and Narasimha Raju and my father being the harmonium player. They did two camps, suffered huge loss and the company was shut down. He summarized the lives of the legendary male actors, who disappeared into an oblivion without any recognition in the later years. For example, Malavalli Subbanna, a very profound musicologist, scholar and composer whom court musicians consulted for music related doubts, lost his mind because of his failed attempt at alchemy and became a saint wearing an orange robe. The renowned villain Mr. Gangadhara Rao earned thousands of rupees during 1940s and 1950s, did not save even a penny and in his later years was supported by an astrologer based in Bangalore whose favorite pastime activity was playing the ‘*Pagaḍe (Game of Dice)*’ who seemed to have found a gaming partner in Gangadhara Rao. His other favorite activity was to distribute sweet candies to any little kid that he came across. In his last days, he would request people for a rupee or two to buy candies for kids.

Nagesh Rao, who was a stellar performer remained single all his life without a family or marriage. As mentioned earlier, he was ostracized from his family of conservative Brahmins for pursuing a career in theater. My father recollected meeting him in the year 1970, having heard him singing songs from the play *Nirupamā* from the first floor of an old building in Bangalore. The senior artist introduced my father to his friends proudly, “This boy has accompanied all the great theater artists of almost all the major, small and sundry drama companies. *āḍu muttada soppilla anno hāge, ivn nuḍisade iro nātakada company illa. Yāriḡe heg beku hāge nudisballa* (As they say a grazing goat leaves no plant untasted, he knows the music and drama of all the companies and could play adopting to the needs of different artists)’.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have made a sincere attempt to combine several methodologies at my disposal, biographical, autobiographical to argue that Modern Kannada theater was a highly evolved system of theater art which combined the Western technology for the visual effects, sounds and execution. The theater which was confined to the royal courts was secularized and the performance space was transformed into proscenium stages because of colonial influence. The objective of the dissertation is to study the theater as a source of history, a communication tool and an expression of culture and determine what led to the decline of a tradition as rich and evolved. The current work was an inquiry of an unsung communication system that got obliterated from the memories of its own people. Communication serves a vital function of a systematic reconstruction of the cultural pasts of a community. The shared experiences is what constitutes a community and it is unimaginable to study the *communitas* without studying communication. As Hansen (1992:3-4) writes, "Since these processes occur in historical time, the task of understanding communication entails attention to historical conditions and experience of particular peoples... The historical experience of a particular community contributes to its self-representation in cultural performance". Different groups experience a performance differently. The stiff contest between the experiences and the victor will determine the central narrative of what constitutes the 'art and its experience' and its meaning in the larger cultural atmosphere.

The inquiry into modern Kannada theater has opened new vistas of understanding for me as a scholar and as a rightful representative of the tradition which was hitherto kept away from me. Unlike other theater traditions, modern Kannada theater tradition ostensibly started on a high note and ended on a high note but sadly leaving only one individual as its true representative, my father that is. While other performing arts traditions in the rest of the country had to realign themselves

to cater to the needs of cultural, political, economic and technological changes that the colonial rule brought about in India, modern Kannada theater did not have to undergo radical transformations because it was established by the kings of Mysore who were already impressed by the colonial modernity, 'gentlemanly morals' propagated by their colonial masters and their own inherent penchant for gentleness in the aesthetics of art. As Ranganath (1958) writes, "At the turn of the [19th] century, one could pause and look back with satisfaction at the impressive career of the Kannada stage during the preceding fifty years. It looked established. It could boast of a prolific dramatic literature of original and translated plays; it had a number of itinerant troupes". Transmuted remnants of other theater traditions in India persist in some form or the other which help in identifying the cultural systems that formulated them. For example, Kerala has *theyyam*, *chakkiyar kooth*, *nangiar kooth*, Tamil Nadu has *Bommalaṭṭam*, *karagāṭṭam*, *villuppāṭṭu*, *kolāṭṭam*, Andhra Pradesh *Burra katha*, *Vīra Nāṭyam*, etc. modern Kannada theater on the other hand remains only in the memory of one person who is the last representative of what was once a vital and vibrant cultural phenomenon, indeed the last of his kind.

Historically, the modern Kannada theater has occupied a peculiar position in colonial and post-colonial cultural system. In the colonial era, it was nurtured and groomed by the kings of Mysore who shared a very close relationship with the British value system and the intelligentsia. In the post-colonial era, the movements of nationalism and cultural elitism took over the responsibility of perpetuating the mainstream 'classical music and dance'. With the emergence of a new literary order, the Western-educated intelligentsia started seeing the classical theater based on mythological themes as too long that spanned the period from dawn to dusk, its presentation 'crude' with excessive stage-settings and costumes 'gaudy' (Ranganath, 1958:97-100). This gave

impetus to new drama whose objective was to uproot the commercial theater based on Brahminical, mythology-based themes and replace them with rationalist themes. In this endeavor, people like the acclaimed socialist dramatist like K. V. Subbanna and the polymath Shivarama Karanth, founded the amateur troupes for whom theater was not just a form of entertainment but a pedagogical tool to create awareness about social issues such as superstition, illiteracy, widow-remarriage, and casteism. The themes were a blend of strong Western Individuality, Laisses-Faire economic system wherein scientific bent of mind and a liberal world-view was upheld as a sacrosanct principle. In fact, Karanth and Subbanna differed ideologically, that Subbanna was a socialist whereas Karanth considered socialists as self-centered hypocrites. Notwithstanding their political leanings, the amateur theater movement that they spearheaded became a force to reckon with for modern Kannada theater. With the loss of royal patronage, having been neglected by the nationalist movement and lack of institutional support, modern Kannada theater disappeared from the stage in 1970 which coincided with the shutting down of my aunt's theater company.

In chapter 4 and 5, extensive interviews with my father, the subject of this dissertation, were presented, discussed and analyzed. Interestingly, even though my grandfather was a priest, my father was betrayed of his 'Brahminical' identity for a significant part of his life which he could reclaim only after eschewing a career that he had so passionately pursued all his life. The central questions which emanated from the discussions in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, along with the interesting details about his personal life and experience in the modern Kannada theater, cinema and the mainstream classical music, therefore were, 'How art was perceived, patronized and classicized by the Western-educated upper-class elite in the postcolonial emerging independent India?' and 'What was the texture of the cultural fabric of the country that was freshly being woven in the looms of cultural nationalism?'. These two fundamental questions were answered in Chapter

6 by firstly studying the influence of nationalism in transitioning the perception of the indigenous art from low status to high status through many an intermediary limbo of statelessness by the process of classicization. The social life of the artists too under the influence of nationalism became a dialectical process with incumbencies of different statuses of various artforms within a community. This was particularly true in case of India where the cultural boundaries became both rigid and movable at the same time, especially when viewed from the vantage points of cultural nationalism, nationalistic movement and classicization of art. Music and dance were transported to larger public spheres, whereas the theater, was pushed to the margins of respectability. One can glean this from the letter of Frazer presented in Chapter 5, to the queen of Mysore, expressing his resentment at the prince watching a theatrical performance which ‘no young gentleman in Britain’ would indulge in. Hansen (1992:6) writes, “Although antecedent attitudes may have contributed to the theater’s disrepute, the marginalization of popular culture seems to have been quick” and further notes that these popular art forms were considered ‘licentious and voluptuous tastes’ of the ‘vulgar’ populace, from whom the cultural elite was trying hard to distinguish itself.

Conventionally, the nationalist ideology has shaped the arts by continuously negotiating with the stakeholders of diverse castes, class, gender at different historical conjunctures. Depending on the power or authority these agents exerted, they were either included or marginalized from the project in which agendas for the discourse on a nationalistic self-representation are formulated and reformulated as a continuous process. Despite these desperate attempts by the elitist to nationalize the art by granting it the authority of scriptural and Vedic origins making it the principle site for cultural production, I argued that the end result of these invented traditions would be considered an unbrahminical practice. I used Walker’s reference to quotes from the epic *Mahābhārata* to substantiate my claims (Walker, 2014).

In Chapter 7, the status of women and their lives in the theater were discussed in detail by citing examples from my own family, personal encounters of my father with his seniors and other women in my aunt's drama company. I discussed mainly the perception of the society towards theater profession and how it treated theater women in particular. The moral imposition resulted in the prohibition of 'nautch' in the Northern India and the abolishing of temple dancing and the outlawing the *devadāsī*-s.

During my field study in 2017, I witnessed a poorly executed drama in which the male and female actors were locking themselves in awkward positions every now and then mimicking the *kāmasūtra* postures for half an hour to a medley of cinema songs on a keyboard. The song stopped abruptly, the female actor was found to be complaining to the harmonium player about the misbehavior of the male actor, all of this was being settled live on the stage. This is in tune with the observations made in chapter 7 in which the status of women in theater was discussed. Clearly, the status of women in theater has not changed much. The #MeToo movement that gained momentum during October 2018, let the skeletons come tumbling out of the closet. Most prolific lyricists and movie makers in the cinema industry, and the mainstream classical music field were accused of inappropriate behavior with their female colleagues.

Scope for Future Work

The current work is a sincere attempt at documenting the theater tradition which was neglected by scholars both in India and in the West. There were some students from the Bangalore university who came with much enthusiasm wanting to document this tradition. Their documentation would commence with a brief introduction about why they are interested in Kannada theater, and with two hours of an informal conversation with my father, their field work would end in a grand

ceremonial offering of a fruit box. Serious scholars can address the very many gaps in this work that remain to be filled. First and foremost, the reformist and educated discourse of the elite had established a trend towards puritanism that aimed marginalizing those indigenous artforms deemed 'lewd and lascivious' by the colonial rulers. Kannada theater on the other hand was already formalized, highly evolved, popular and an established artform which was conceptualized by none other than the kings of Mysore who had ensured, by detoxifying it right at the inception, that it will not suffer from bowdlerization at the hands of their colonial masters. Yet, this artform could not get a berth in the bogie of nationalization. It would be interesting to exhume the finer socio-economic-political details at vital historical conjunctures and investigate a causal-effect relationship between them and the downfall of Kannada theater. The scope of this explanation might be broadened to study why the elite that gained absolute control over classical music and dance neglected the equally classical Kannada theater.

The impact of modernity and the advent of media is not yet fully studied or understood in the current dissertation which can be an interesting study in itself. By modernity here, I mean the project initiative of upper-class nationalists who shifted music and dance from temples, courts and the drawing rooms of wealthy patrons to concert halls in urban cities by replacing the traditional performers such as *devadāsī*-s by upper caste women. Some of the Brahmin musicians argue that it was actually the project of classicization that gave Indian musicians and dancers an opportunity to perform on a global platform. These alternate narratives need critical thinking and field research. Accessing the archives of Mysore palace for documents and records might clarify the role and significance of theater as a cultural expression vis-à-vis music and dance which made it eligible to be neglected by the royal family, later political systems and scholars.

In the year 2004, the Kannada Film Chamber of Commerce (KFCC) and Kannada producers' association had coerced the Karnataka state government to declare a seven-week moratorium on releasing non-Kannada language films in a bid to protect the interests of Kannada cinema producers. It is worthwhile studying the influence of politics of language, linguistic identities, language as a flag of allegiance to the state and the influx of cinema and other forms of entertainment in other languages on the Kannada theater.

Postlude

During one of the interviews, I was asking him the same set of questions *ad nauseum* hoping to get a different perspective regarding the decline of Kannada theater. He was getting frustrated because he was convinced that he had answered my question, but I was adamantly persuading him to say something more or different. Sensing his discomfiture, I asked him if he can consolidate in his own words what modern Kannada theater meant to him, his eyes immediately lit up in excitement and confidence. After all, he now knew, he is the real maestro who is on top of the situation.

Theater has given me everything. It is my life. The theater taught me music, language, culture and it is from the money that I earned in the theater did I build this house. There is nothing that I wish for anymore. It was my deep desire to give back something to the theater which has given me so much. Thankfully, I was able to write a book of collection of more than thousand songs and record at least a thousand of them for the posterity. You recorded more than 500 songs on the harmonium which can be immensely helpful for singers, actors, harmonium players and drama directors. I have revived the dramas that I thought I will never be able put together in which you acted except 'Tārā Śaśāñka'. I really want to see you in the role of Āñjaneya in Rāmāyaṇa and I hope you will find time for it, soon. In Manmatha Vijaya play, there is a wonderful line for Śiva. It is 'bhavitavyam bhavatyeva (What will be will be)'. If this tradition is destined to see the broad daylight tomorrow, it

will survive. If not, it will die like many other great traditions of the past. I have done what I could do, to the best of my abilities and at this age, I can only do so much. As Omar Khayyam writes in his Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam⁶¹, 'Dead yesterday unborn tomorrow, why fret about them if today be sweet?'

Of late, all his rehearsals are held in an old school. The principal of the school, a theater enthusiast, has kindly lent one of the classrooms to be used for drama rehearsals after the school hours. He uttered the above words, the same words that he oft repeats in all his speeches these days. These words are always laced with a sense of gratitude, humility and contentment filled with pride. He then sat comfortably with his back against the back of the plastic chair with extra cushions to raise the height so that he can easily reach the harmonium. Mr. Murthy, his manager, entered with other actors, *Tabla* player Sudhir and the clarinet player Mr. Ramanna, all of whom had assembled there to rehearse the play '*Subhadrā Kalyāṇa*'. All the actors formed a queue, touched my father's feet one after the other, as it is customary to seek the blessings of the harmonium master before the commencement of the rehearsal and at the end. They exchanged pleasantries with me while Mr. Murthy opened the harmonium from its box. At the sight of the harmonium, my father, currently 88, looked excited like a child that has just found smoother and rounder pebbles and shells on the seashore, examining each one of them with an innocent curiosity. In my artistic career, I have seen three very senior artists express this childlike delight at the sight of their favorite toy, their musical instrument that is. The world-renowned *Sarangi* maestro, *Pandit* Ramnarayan, who I last met when he was 88, every time he opened his *Sarangi* box, he pulled out the accessories in a particular order, the tuning key, rosin, the bow, the cloths to support the *Sarangi* and eventually the *Sarangi*

⁶¹ Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, according to my father, changed his perspective of life. It helped him come out of destructive alcoholism to a celebratory one. He quotes profusely the verses from Fitzgerald's English translation and D. V. Gundappa's Kannada translation of Rubaiyat.

itself. As soon as the *Sarangi* popped out of the box, he would be a transformed man. He would examine carefully each string, each peg and sometimes pulling out his little brush to clear the dust particles settled on its skin. During my field study in 2016, I had to accompany *Pandit* Birju Maharaj, the renowned *Kathak* dancer who was touring Bangalore at that time. He was sitting next to me for the first 1.5 hours and suddenly he was not to be seen. I turned around and he was sitting on the floor tying his *ghunghru* (anklets). He lifted his head, looked at me with his eyes sparkling like a child thoroughly immersed in himself and his anklet. Likewise, my father too looked a very happy and contented man without the air of ‘*Bhīṣma* of Kannada theater’. He blew away the dust that had settled on the reeds, commenced played the invocatory verse ‘vande mama rāṣṭra janani’ and the entire troupe joined in chorus.

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Glossary

A. V. Varadachar – Doyen of Kannada theater and proprietor of Ratnāvaḷi Theatrical company

Bellāve Narahari Śāstri or **Bellave Naraharishastrī** – Playwright, actor and court poet

Bharatanāṭyam – A classical dance form popular in Southern India

Bhīṣma Pitāmahā – A character from Mahābhārata. Colloquially means a grand old man

Bhīṣma Pratijñe – Vow of Bhīṣma, a play composed by G. Krishnamurti

Bollywood – Cinema industry in Mumbai, India

Company – In the context of drama, it refers to drama troupe

Devadāsi – A courtesan well versed in dance and music initiated ritualistically to serve during temple rituals (can also mean the devadāsi community)

Dr. B. Devendrappa – Court musician in the royal palace of Mysore and exponent of many musical instruments

Draupadi – The wife of Pāṇḍava-s

Gangadhar Rao – Famous theater personality popular for his villain roles

Glossary

Gubbi Veeranna – Eminent theater personality, director, Member of Legislative Assembly and cinema producer

Guru – Teacher or preceptor who teaches music

Guru-śiṣya parampara - teacher-student lineage

H. L. N. Simha – Playwright and Proprietor of Simha Select Artists drama company

Harmonium – a pump organ considered indispensable for Kannada theater. It is used to accompany theater music and provide background music for the play

Hindustani Music – Classical music system popular in Northern India

Jāvaḷi – Love songs in Karnatak music whose poetry is based on love-devotion to the Supreme being

K Hirannayya – Cultured comedian, playwright, actor and proprietor of K. Hirannayya Mitra Mandali

Kannada – A south Indian language predominantly spoken in the state of Karnataka

Karnatak music – A popular classical music system of Southern India

Khayal – lit. thought/idea, refers to a kind of classical composition in Hindustani music

Krishna or Kṛṣṇa – A central character in Mahābhārata

Kṛṣṇa Gāruḍi – A fictional play based on Mahābhārata written by Bellave Naraharishastrī

Kṛṣṇa Līla – Glories/Miracles of Kṛṣṇa, a play written by Bellave Naraharishastri

Kṛti – A form of composition which makes the most part of repertoire in Karnatak music

Kshetrajña Pada – Love songs whose poetry was mainly composed by the 17th century Telugu poet Kshetrajña

M. V. Subbaya Naidu – Theater actor, cinema actor, producer and proprietor of theater company. Most Kannada cinema actors were from his drama company

Mahābhārata – One of the two major epics in the Hindu tradition

Malavalli Subbanna – Father of Malavalli Sundaramma, violin player, composer and musicologist

Malavalli Sundaramma – Theater actor, cinema actor and classical vocalist

Master Hirannayya – Son of K Hirannayya, a political satirist, humorist and succeeded K Hirannayya as the proprietor of the company

Mummadi – Lit. ‘The third’. Usually used with respect to Kings to represent the order in the clan (example Richard III)

Mysore – capital of the princely state of Mysore and currently a district in southern Karnataka

Nagesh Rao – Eminent vocalist and actor in Kannada theater

Nālvadi – Lit. ‘The fourth’. Usually used with respect to Kings to represent the order in the clan (example Henry IV)

Nanjanagud Srikanta Shastri – Court poet and playwright

Nāṭaka or Nataka – One of the ten forms of entertainment but commonly refers to drama in common parlance

Nāṭya Śāstra – A treatise on dramaturgy claimed to have been composed by Bharata during 100 BC-100 AD

P. Kalinga Rao – Music composer, singer who worked in Kannada cinema and theater

Padmashri – The fourth highest civilian award Republic of India

Pāṇḍava or Pandava – The five brothers Dharmarāja, Bhīma, Arjuna, Nakula and Shadeva in Mahābhārata who kill their cousins Kaurava-s in a fierce battle

R. Manjulamma – Comedienne popular for her clown roles

R. Nagarathamma – Actor popular for playing male villain roles and the proprietor of the first all-women theater troupe

R. Paramashivan – Subject of the current dissertation

Rāga – A mode, usually a collection of notes in the ascending and in the descending

Rājasūyayāga – Play based on the sacrifice performed by Dharamarāya in Mahābhārata

Rāmāyaṇa - One of the two major epics in the Hindu tradition

Raṅgabhūmi - Stage or Theater

Raṅgagītegaḷu – Refers the genre of modern Kannada theater songs

Rasa – Aesthetic emotion associated with art and literature

Sadārame – A fictional play written by Bellave Naraharishastri

Samsāra Nauka – Boat of Life, a play written by H. L. N. Simha

Sangeet Nataka Academi – The highest award conferred by the Republic of India in the field of performing arts

Sangīta Subhadra – A musical play based on Arjuna’s marriage to Subhadra

Sheshachar – Actor and proprietor of Sheshakamala Nataka Mandali

Shivalinga Murthy - Drama organizer and field expert who collected more than 100 pictures of Kannada theater artists, personal assistant to Paramashivan

Śiṣya – Disciple

Sorabhada Lakshamma – The first female actor in Kannada theater in Chamundeshwari drama company in 1938

T. Chowdaiah – Karnatak violin exponent famous for introducing the seven-stringed violin

Tawaif – A courtesan or nautch girl similar to devadāsi-s in Southern India

Tillana – A rhythm-based composition performed at the end of a Karnatak concert or Bharatanāṭya performance

Varṇa/Varna – A form of composition in Karnatak music that helps delineate the rāg

Veena or Vīṇa – A lute instrument in Karnatak music

Veene Venkatagiriappa -Court musician in the Mysore palace and a Veena exponent

Vidwan or Vidvān – Scholar of music or Sanskrit

Vṛtti - Professional

Vṛtti Raṅgabhūmi – Refers to the professional theater performance

Wodeyar – lit. Lord, the dynasty of kings that ruled Mysore

Yakshagana – A folk dance-drama from Karnataka popular in the coastal Karnataka