



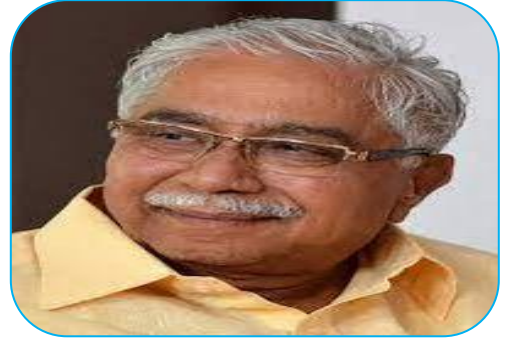
## KANNADA DRAMA WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO CHANDRASHEKHAR KAMBAR

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### ABSTRACT:

*A peace of quality literature always reflects the true picture of the society with its hopes and aspirations, demands and responsibilities. Literature is like a mirror through which we can see the world. Without literature we cannot imagine a society. Like poetry and novel, drama plays an important role of representing different cultural aspects of a society. It not only registers but also manifests the changes the society undergoes. It unable to reconstruct the history, understand the society and comprehend its identity. It portrays the cultural identity of the society to which it belongs. It is the oldest and the most charming form than the other genres of literature. The present paper is modest attempt to study Indian English drama in brief.*



**KEY WORDS:** Drama, traditional, cultural aspects, reconstructs.

### INTRODUCTION:

The history of modern Kannada drama can be divided, roughly, into four periods: a) Professional-popular theatre, b) Elite Theatre of Realism, c) Navya or Modernist Theatre, and d) Navyottara or Post-modernist Theatre.

#### a) Professional-popular Theatre:

Although Kannada poetry has a rich history of more than a millennium, drama entered Kannada literature only at the end of the 17th century; and the first Kannada play to be staged was Singaraarya's Mitravinda Govinda (1700), a free adaptation of Sri Harsha's Ratnavali in Sanskrit. However, popular local forms of theatrical entertainment – called 'Pagarana,' 'Yakshagana,' 'Bahurupi,' etc. – existed since a long time. Mummadi Krishnaraja Odeyar, the king of Mysore (1811-1860), was himself a great writer; and he patronized Yakshagana, a popular dance-music-drama, and wrote many plays in that form.

During the reign of the next Mysore king, Chamaraja Odeyar, many Parsi dramatic troupes visited Karnataka and introduced the 'modern theatre.' The Yakshagana tradition, the influence of English education, and the model of plays of the Parsi troupes – all these worked together to establish a strong professional-popular theatre in Karnataka, in the beginning of the 20th century.

In the beginning, under the king's patronage, a 'Palace Troupe' was formed consisting of court scholars and musicians; and they staged adaptations of Sanskrit plays for the elite audience of the court. However, private troupes (called 'companies' in Kannada) were soon formed in Bangalore and other

major cities. Most of the plays staged by these troupes were either mythological or based on Ramayana and Mahabharata, and later free adaptations of Sanskrit plays and those of Shakespeare. These plays, consisting of innumerable songs, dances, and sophisticated (Sanskritised) language, were notable for their picturesque scenery, glittering dresses, and gorgeous spectacle. (Talking of grand spectacles, one could mention the plays like “Kurukshetra” and “Dashavataara” of Gubbi Company, in which real horses drawing chariots and real elephants would be brought on the stage.) Most of the plays would begin at ten at night and go on till morning. Some of the most popular professional troupes like the legendary ‘Gubbi Company’ and a few of the finest actors and singers were a part of this popular theatre.

This popular theatre reigned supreme in the first half of the last century, and it continued to fulfill the needs of the rural audiences throughout the century. However, the rise of the Realistic Theatre in the Twenties of the last century vehemently opposed the popular theatre and marginalized it. Thus was created the ‘Great Divide’ between the Professional and Amateur theatres, which ‘Divide’ has not yet been bridged completely.

### **b) The Theatre of Realism: (1925-1950)**

Historically speaking, the first realistic-social play in Kannada was written in 1887: Iggappa Hegade vivaaha Prahasana by Karki Venkataramana Shastry; and it dealt with the then burning social problem of ‘Tera’ (bride-price), prevalent in a particular Brahmin community. It was immediately followed by another play on the same subject, Kanya Vikraya. But neither of these came on the stage and failed to catch the attention of any. Perhaps the time for such plays was not ripe.

The first two decades of the 20th century in Karnataka (as in other parts of the country) were marked by the spirit of interrogation resulting from the introduction of English education, social Reform Movements, and (a little later) by the National Independence Movement under the leadership of Gandhi. As a corollary of all these movements, the Theatre came to be viewed as an instrument of social reformation; and, as one would expect, a social play called Tollu Gatti (Hollow Strong) by a new playwright won the first prize in a contest organized by Amateur Association, Bangalore, in 1919. This event marked the beginning of the Realistic Theatre in Kannada; and it dominated the Kannada elite theatre for about three decades till there was a reaction against it in the Fifties.

The most important playwrights of ‘Social Drama’ in Kannada were T. P. Kailasam and Sriranga (Adya Rangacharya). Both had spent considerable time in England and had absorbed the form and spirit of the plays of Ibsen, Shaw, and Galsworthy. They returned to Karnataka determined to change the Kannada theatre on the models of Ibsen and Shaw. The ethos of the turbulent period also, with its cry for social reformation and modernism, helped and sustained them in their efforts.

T. P. Kailasam wrote in all 17 plays in Kannada and five in English. Most of the well-known plays of Kailasam can be called ‘Problem Plays.’ In each play, the playwright takes up a particular social problem and dramatizes it in such a way that the unjust and exploitative aspects of the problem are laid before the audience, provoking them to think and act in order to solve or change them. Some of the major problems Kailasam dealt with are: education (Tollu Gatti, 1919), prostitution (Sule, 1945), hollow and vindictive Brahminism (Bahishkaara, 1926; Nam Brahmanke, 1926), marriage (Taali Kattoke Kuline? 1941), marital relationships (Vaidyana Vyaadhi, 1935; Ammaavra Gamda, 1945), popular drama (Nam Kampni, 1944), etc. Most of these plays appear today as talkative though their wit and humour are still fresh. They use a curious mix of English and Kannada which today’s audience may find difficult.

Another noteworthy factor of these plays is their anxiety regarding unquestioned acceptance of Western thoughts and institutions by the Indian Middle Classes. In this sense, Kailasam is typical of pre-independence thinkers and social reformers who wanted to build healthy bridges between the Indian and Western cultures. In his very first play, Tollu Gatti, he contrasts two sons of an English-educated officer. While the first son, cut off from traditional culture and values, grows up as a selfish and heartless being though remarkable in academic achievements. The second son, though not very successful academically, is full of love, caring for others, and selflessness. Both their characters are tested when their house catches an accidental fire; while the first ‘westernised’ son runs out with his

books, the second son saves his ailing mother. Thus, the 'ordeal of fire' demonstrates who is really 'sound' and who is 'hollow.' (Following Shaw, the playwright calls his play a 'disguised lecture.') Perhaps it is for this reason that he uses 'Kannadlinglish' in his plays to reveal the schizophrenic nature of the middle classes during the colonial period.

Sriranga, the younger contemporary of Kailasam, laid a strong foundation for social plays in the northern part of Karnataka. The total number of plays including one-act plays written by Sriranga is staggering, running to more than a hundred. There are two distinctive phases of Sriranga's dramatic career: the first of 'Problem plays' and the second of self-conscious 'Symbolism.'

The problem-plays of Sriranga deal with contemporary social problems such as untouchability, child-marriages, plight of widowhood, family planning, and such. The purpose is, as in the plays of Kailasam, to depict the plight of the victims of an exploitative and cruel religious-social system; and thereby give an impetus to social reformation. Among his problem plays, the most notable are: Harijanwaara (1934; problem of untouchability), Sandhyakaala (1936; clash between orthodoxy and modernism), Shokachakra (1957; moral decline in post-independence India), etc.

The more famous plays of Sriranga, like Kattale Belaku (1959) and Kelu Janamejaya (1960), belong to the second phase. In this phase, the playwright uses many techniques and conventions of traditional drama to transcend the limitations of realism. Also, the plays move in two directions simultaneously: while they turn outward and examine issues like Illusion and reality, they turn inward and self-consciously explore the nature of dramatic illusion.

Both Kailasam and Sriranga share certain common weaknesses: long exhortations, black-and-white characterization, and lack of movement on the stage. Also, more importantly, they were responsible for the vast schism between professional-popular drama and elite amateur drama. But, despite these limitations, it is no exaggeration to say that these two playwrights ushered in 'modernity' and 'contemporary consciousness' into Kannada drama and shaped the theatre as a socially responsible institution.

Another playwright, more famous as a novelist, was Shivarama Karanth, who wrote many successful realistic plays like Bittida Bele. But he is remembered today more for his theatrical experimentations like 'Gita Nataka' (similar to opera), mimes, and shadow plays.

Curiously, every major writer of this period (called 'Navodaya') wrote plays which were not meant for the stage. Drama as a form of literature, divorced from the theatre, flourished during this period; and all possible sub-genres of Drama like Tragedy, Comedy, Farce, Opera, Musical, and Mime were introduced to Kannada literature. Some of the major writers of 'closet plays' were: Samsa (historical plays), Kuvempu (mythical plays and Shakespearean adaptations), Putina (Operas), etc.

### c) Navya or Modernist Theatre (1950-1965)

Along with modernist poetry and fiction, modernist drama also entered Kannada theatre during the Fifties of the last century. However, plays in the modernist mode – both 'plays of the Angry Young Man' and 'Absurd Plays' (called 'Asangata' in Kannada) – were short lived; and only two major playwrights of this period need to be mentioned: P. Lankesh and Chandrashekhara Patil.

Lankesh, better known as a novelist and short-story writer, wrote in all nine plays, of which two are notable even today: Teregalu (1964; Waves) and Sankranti (1971; Transition). Influenced by Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, the first play forcefully lays bare the decadence and decline in values of post-independence India. The play revolves around three strangers interrogating a seemingly innocent individual; and as the play moves, it gathers varied ethical and political connotations. The second play examines the famous 12th-century socio-political revolution of Karnataka under the leadership of Basavanna and the reasons for its failure. The play explores the inherent contradictions of all such socio-religious movements.

Chandrashekhara Patil (Champa, as he is popularly known) was, like many others of his generation, greatly influenced by the Absurd plays of Ionesco. However, Patil's strong theatrical sense and his forceful prose make a few plays like Kodegalu (Umbrellas) and Appa (Father) relevant even today.

In general, both the Modernist and the Absurd forms of drama could not find any roots in Kannada since the experience they communicated and their form appeared totally alien to the Kannada audience. Very soon, they gave place to a new kind of plays which could successfully combine the elements of both traditional and avant guard theatres.

#### d) Navyottara or the Post- modernist Theatre: (1960 - )

By critical consensus, this period is considered the 'Golden Period' of Kannada Drama. Many dramatic geniuses like Girish Karnad and Chandrashekhara Kambar, many highly imaginative directors like B. V. Karanth, and many committed troupes like Samudaya, Benaka and others entered the Kannada theatre during this period and brought it recognition, both national and international. Some of the best plays, from the points of view of both literature and theatre, were written and staged during this period.

There were many reasons for this dramatic surge at this point of time. One of the reasons was the establishment of National School of Drama at Delhi. Most of today's famous directors were N. S. D. products; and they brought an increased awareness of theatrical possibilities to Kannada theatre. Also, almost at the same time there arose the School of Drama at Heggodu (the famous Ninasam center) and the Repertory, Rangayana, at Mysore. Those who were trained in various aspects of the theatre in these centers made it their aim to bring together the techniques of professional theatre and social seriousness of Avant Guard theatre. Again, the Modernist movement of the Fifties had succeeded in creating an awareness of literature, be it poetry or drama, as a serious intellectual activity and a heightened sensitivity towards language. Added to all these elements, Karnataka had just begun to understand and appreciate the vast resources of its folk-traditions in poetry and drama. As a result of all these forces, the 'Great Divide' between professional-popular theatre and amateur-experimental theatre came almost to be bridged.

It is in this context that one has to view Kambar's achievement in the field of drama. He brings to the theatre not only a play which has an interesting plot and subtle characters but also poetry, songs, and dances drawn from folk traditions. Indeed, along with Girish Karnad Chandrashekhara Kambar can be said to have created a 'Total Theatre.'

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