

## "PADYA NATAKAM" : THE MUSICAL PLAY OF ANDHRA PRADESH

Padya natakam, Music-drama of Andhra Pradesh, is not only a manifestation of the peculiar poetic genius of the land, but also an innovative speciality popularized by the actors and directors and warmly received by spectators for over half-a-century.

**Padyam** is a metrical stanza and has been the major poetic mode of expression both in the Sanskrit as well as Telugu literary traditions. Though Telugu metrical stanza forms such as "Taruvaja" and "Madhyakkara" were used in the earliest Telugu inscriptions, the **Vrittas** – Champaka Mala, Utpala Mala, Mattebham and Sardulam – borrowed from Sanskrit have been favourites of poets since the days of Nannaya. The Telugu metres are equally popular: Aata Veladi, Teta Geethi, Seesa Padyam and Kanda Padyam are used extensively for specific purposes. Usually of four lines, the **padyam** may extend to four two-lined couplets, followed by a four-lined stanza as in Seesa Padyam. The metrical sequences vary from one type of poem to the other, each line usually consisting of several "ganams" of two or three (or four in the case of Telugu metrical stanzas as against the Sanskrit ones) syllables, both short and long. In the Telugu poetic tradition long before they are used extensively in drama, these metrical stanzas, interspersed with occasional prose pieces, formed the major part of a kavya (usually called a **Campu Kavya**). Always used judiciously, they are not only employed to narrate the story, but to create mood and tension befitting the story. They have also created memorable characters by properly describing them and giving them appropriate dialogue.



Occasionally, there were variations too. For example, the poets, influenced by the Saiva Movement, chose to express themselves in a completely **desi** (regional) metre-**dwipada**, a couplet of five ganams. Dwipada's popularity is further exemplified when it was used as the major descriptive-narrative mode in the folk theatre forms, which also contain several other **desi** metres, usually employed for their rhythmic appropriateness. Among the several rhythmic metres such as **daruvu**, **ela**, etc., the **dwipada** alone is used without the rhythm (laya) unaccompanied by a percussion instrument. The folk plays also contain metrical stanzas, padyams, occasionally sung for specific dramatic effects.

Eversince Nannaya, the first known Telugu poet who translated part of *Mahabharata*, used padyam as his medium its potentialities as a narrative-descriptive medium have been exploited by several poets. The padyam in Telugu has gained additional attraction by adopting two peculiar features called "yati" and "praasa". "Praasa" is to have the same letter repeated meticulously as the second syllable in each of the four lines. That is to say that even second syllable (or its homophones) in each line is identical. "Yati" is internal rhyme. The first syllable in each line rhymes with a later one (9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> etc.). Though this rule restricts poetic flow, they add additional charm to the poem by lending it the beauty of assonance, rhythm and alliteration.

For example, in the following poem - A digo Dwaraka, Ala Mandalavigo andandu goradu nanyadiye agdtha lave radhyal ....

The second syllable in each line - "da" - rhymes with each other; and first syllable "a" and (in this case) the tenth syllable "a" rhyme with each other. The native variety of Padyam, however, does not insist on the "praasa" feature.



### **The Dramatic Poem:**

The "dramatic" poem – in the sense of a poem in drama – has a peculiar emergence. Hitherto padyam, the metrical stanza, was used liberally in champu kavyas – mostly for narrative-descriptive purposes, but occasionally a whole or part of the poem could contain the dialogue of the character. In the epic poems it invariably helped to project the features of a character. In the folk theatre tradition, the main narrative – descriptive medium is the dwipada and the dramatic medium is the daruvu ('dhriva'). Though there are poems – they are often used to link passages or rarely for stage directions (a narrative purpose rendered by the Sutradhara) as to how a character looks like or how the background synchronises with the mood of either a character or a situation. Thus the poem is mainly exploited, in folk theatre, for explaining things about a character, a situation or a mood – viz., it has an extraneous function.

But when the modern dramatic tradition emerged in the midst of the nineteenth century, a new thrust was given to the metrical stanza. The padyam and the way it was made into a useful and attractive tool in the hands of a poet-dramatist as well as a singer-actor tells the entire bewitching tale of the first fifty years of the dramatic history of Andhra Pradesh.

Though dramatic writing, of the modern type, started as early as about 1860 in Andhra, it was not until 1880 that a Telugu play was put on boards. Vyavahara Dharma Bodhini ('A Premier of Just Behaviour') written by the great reformist-playwright Kandukuri Veeresalingam Pantulu was produced by the author himself with a group of amateur actors mainly drawn from among the local college students. That was a prose play. But, in the same year,



when the Dharwada Company built a make-shift stage and auditorium, and performed plays at Rajahmundry and left the thatched auditorium in tact, Veeresalingam quickly staged two of his translated plays in the same auditorium – Sri Harsha's *Ratnavali* and shakespeare's *Comedy of errors* (the latter translated as *Chamatkara Ratnavali*, 1880). While Shakespear's play was translated into prose completely, *Ratnavali* had verses and prose. Kandukuri earlier attempted translations both from Sanskrit and English (1879) but they were not completed. The perceptible change in his early (prior to 1880) and latter attempts throws light on his method of translation. His earlier translation (*Abhinaya Shakuntalam*, 1875) was done in 'dwipada', a desi metre, used extensively for descriptive and narrative purposes in folk theatre. He was not happy with his rendering. Obviously he felt that there was something missing in his translations. The misapplication of a narrative medium (dwipada) for dramatic purposes was the major drawback. Sensitive to these things, Kandukuri abruptly discontinued his translation. But he changed his stance now; he translated the English plays besides *The Comedy of Errors*, he also translated Sheridan's *The Rivals* into complete prose and translations from Sanskrit were both in prose and poetry; metrical poems for the slokas in the original and prose for the original Sanskrit prose. Six of Kandukuri's plays were written in such a way with a mixture of verse and prose (*Abhijnana Shakuntalam* (1875, 1883), *Malavikagnimitram* (1885), *Prahlada* (1885), *Prabodha Chandrodayam* (1885, 1891), *Dakshina Gograhanam* (1885), *Satya Harischandra* (1886). However, the poems of all these plays were recited rhetorically on the stage in a sing-song way as sloka in a Sanskrit play was recited and was never sung to a set raga.

Almost contemporaneous to Kandukuri (1880-1884), a more formidable playwright was Kandubhotla Subrahmanya Sastry, a Telugu teacher at Guntur Mission School, who was the author of thirty one plays –



both mythological and historical and were staged more extensively. They were all prose plays and are not available today. It was only late in his life that his play *Vastrapaharanam* (1897), full of poems and songs, was published. This play was obviously influenced by the dramatic writings of Dharmavaram Ramakrishnamacharyulu. Several contemporary writers and patriots including Konda Venkatappayya Pantulu and Chilkamarti Laxminarasimham wrote the popularity of Kondubhotla's plays.

Another playwright who translated widely from Sanskrit was vaddadi Subbaraya Kavi whose *Veni Samharam* (1883) was a great hit on the stage. This play contained poems and prose – as in Kandukuri's translated plays (a 'sloka' was translated into a padyam, a metrical stanza, while the prose dialogue was rendered into prose). Vaddadi was also said to be a great actor and was known for his role of Dharmaraja in the play. He trained his actors and produced his and other's plays. His rendering of the poems on the stage was recitative and was inspiringly emotional.

The credit (or otherwise) for introducing songs (paata) along with padyam (metrical stanzas), in Telugu plays, for setting them to ragas and training actors to sing them on the stage goes to Dharmavaram Ramakrishnamacharyulu, a playwright-director of Bellary. An actor who had accredited himself with a good singing voice, Dharmavaram introduced a particular style of singing in which his emphasis was mainly on the bhava. He also started as a playwright writing only in prose (1879), but found that they were not favourably received by his audience. In 1884, he saw a series of performances by a Parsee theatre company – the Baliwala Company – at Madras and immediately took to its tradition by introducing songs – especially in episodes of sringara (love) and karuna (grief). He initiated the tradition of singing the poems as well as the songs on the stage, the only difference



being that the songs were accompanied by a violin (or, in later years, harmonium) and a tabla whereas the poems were sung to the accompaniment of a violin or harmonium. Thus his plays contained all the three modes of linguistic expression: prose, poem and song.

Though Dharmavaram was directly influenced by the Parsee tradition in introducing the songs, he was only following a tradition that was extant in Andhra prior to the advent of modern drama – and prevalent in the traditional theatre called Veedhi natakam or Bayalata. In a Veedhinatakam performance there was not much of prose. The little prose that was used always improvised. Descriptive and narrative dialogues were in dwipada and duologues were in daruvus. So Dharmavaram followed the tradition of the songs and replaced the dwipada component with either prose or metrical stanzas. Here lies the difference between Kandukuri and Dharmavaram: while Kandukuri chose dwipada as his dramatic mode (which it was not), Dharmavaram chose the daruvu as his dramatic mode (which it was) and so has succeeded tremendously on the stage. He implemented his new ideas in his first major play *Chitra Naleeyam* (1886) which was an instantaneous success. This was a bulky play in which poems and songs abounded. His other plays were equally well received. With a creditworthy success in his home town, Bellarym and at Madras, he toured the Andhra towns in 1888-89. The fever of the “new” play (Padya Natakam; Music drama) caught the imagination of both the writers and theatre-goers. This was so because the early playwrights were all good poets first and playwrights later; and the theatre goers were already groomed to listening musical extravagances both in classical Kuchipudi dance dramas and the folk theatre performances of Veedhi Natakam. The only difference was that in Veedhinatakam poems were limited to the invocation and early descriptive and narrative passages and for important ‘dramatic’ situations daruvus were used, whereas



Dharmavaram exploited the flexibility of the poem and extended it to the 'dramatic' situation also. There was also another reason for the instantaneous success of the Padya Natakam in the Andhra region: by the time it was made popular in that area, Satavadhanams (in which a hundred poems are dictated extempore to hundred scribes by a poet) had become a rage.

Thus the over-all format of a Dharmavaram play looks like this: for 'mood' creation – song (in various Carnatik ragas) especially in karuna and srīngara for dramatic purpose – poems (again set to different ragas according to the mood of the situation) for connecting passages prose (generally so, though he exploited prose and the poem for his lengthy monologues). With minor variations, the same format has been followed by other playwrights both of Southern Andhra (from where Dharmavaram hailed) and the northern Andhra (where his influence had soon spread like wild fire). The introduction of poems and their singing on the stage by actors had become so popular that a great playwright like Chilakamarti, who wrote his *Gayopakhyanam* (1889) as a prose play earlier, (a few poems were written for Krishna's role) in the beginning, introduced poems and songs in abundance when he was publishing the play later (1909). So was the case with his *Parijathapaharanam* (1890).

Though Dharmavaram was the first to initiate theatrical singing – singing of both poems as well as songs – and thus is considered the father of the music-drama, he was not completely in favour of it. In fact, he inwardly detested the music-drama. In an introduction written to his first play, *Chitra Naleeyam* (1886) and in the "Prasthavana" of the same play, he made it clear that inclusion of songs and poems was detrimental to the enjoyment of the literary merits and the plot development of the play. However, he said that



since spectators of "these parts" of Andhra (Ballary and the adjacent Rayalaseema areas) were "somehow" interested in music-drama he had to write one to please them. He was especially critical of his introducing "songs" – "they can never express the bhava tastefully" – and felt that this tradition must continue until audiences realized this.

Three more playwrights who followed Dharmavaram diligently need mention here. The first one, Chilakamarti Laxminarasimham, a great patriot, social-reformer and novelist, wrote his *Gayopakhyanam*, initially as a prose play and later included several poems. Unlike Dharmavaram, Chilakamarti paved the way for writing poems closer to the spoken idiom (later to be perfected by Tirupati Venkata Kavulu). The poems now introduced became the rage of the Andhra stage and for half a century the Padya Natakam was the thing. Competitions among acting groups were held; successive generations of actors became famous and were honoured; sales of the play from its publication date (1909) upto 1946 reached an unbelievable number (one lakh copies of the play were sold away during 1909-1946) and illiterate boys and young men, including cowherds and shepherds in the villages knew several of the poems by heart and sang them on their way home in the evenings. The play, along with Tirupati Venkata Kavulu's *Pandavodyoga Vijayalu*, remained a hot favourite of millions of theatre lovers.

What Dharmavaram believed to be a trait of the audiences of his region had become a more response trait of the Coastal Andhra region and both the Music-drama and the singing tradition had since adorned the Telugu stage undeterred for half a century.

Chilakamarti's additions to Dharmavaram's initial innovations are plenty: as against the Sanskritized verse of the latter, Chilakamarti's is



conversational, idiomatic and dramatically more flexible. While Dharmavaram also used several varieties of Sanskrit vrittas and the desi metres in abundance, Chilakamarti used the metres to suit not only the situations, but also the characters who sing them. Thus, in the very beginning of the poem, when Sri Krishna, Satyaki and the Vidushaka pay their obeisance to the Sun God, three different vrittas are used to vividly bring out their individual personalities. Another of Chilakamarti's innovations is the dramatic use of the poem by dividing the duologue within the poem. This method of dividing the poetic lines between two or more characters lends intensity to the situation. For example, in a "seesa padyam" containing 4 couplets followed by four lines of aata veladi each couplet contains a question or by accusation rendered by one character, followed by another couplet containing an answer/ counter – accusation of the other character. The tradition was already in vogue in the "samaveda-daruvu" – argument songs – of the Veedhi natakams and this method was exploited to a great dramatic advantage by Chilakamarti.

Another playwright who helped the "singing" tradition to be established was Vedam Venkataraya Sastry, a great scholar. His *Prataparudriyam* contained in it a judicious mixture of song and verse – folk songs for a washerman and his wife – Perigadu and Elli – and poems for the rest of the Hindu characters. Vedam, whose prose was felicitous, wrote the poems in an equally vibrant style. Though occasionally pedantic, his poems not only revealed his characters' traits, but also elevated the "plane" of the story and helped to create a "historical" atmosphere.



## Gurazada / Panuganti

Two playwrights of this period have, in two different ways, attacked the "singing" tradition of the music-drama. The first one, Gurazada Appa Rao, brought up in the tradition of Shakespeare and Comedy of Manners, wrote his *magnum opus*, *Kanya Sulkam*, completely in chaste spoken Telugu, contrary to the contemporary practice of using rhetorical Telugu diction in plays (grandhika: literary Telugu as against the spoken one). As a social reformer and staunch realist, he chose only prose as his vehicle of expression and often pooh-poohed the use of poems in plays, saying that they are unnatural.

Though not as great a playwright as Gurazada, but certainly a more prolific writer, Panuganti Laxminarasimha Rao wrote over thirty plays. He is the only playwright of this period who, both in practice and theory, disliked elaborate singing on the stage. While accepting that "poem" – thereby meaning poetry – elevates the bhava in a play, he was against their practice of "singing" them with a raga. In order to dissuade his actors from this practice, he chose two methods: one was to write in only desi metres, especially in ata veladi, theta geethi and seesa padyam – which are not as vulnerable for singing as the vrittis are – and secondly, he broke the samasa – the compound word structure – and distributed it in two different lines of the stanza so that the actor who renders the poem should invariably read it as a near-prose passage.

But, by and large, the Padya Natakam gained unprecedented response. This resulted in the multiplication of theatre groups. The greater the response for music-drama, the larger the number of poet-playwrights; the larger the number of poet-playwrights, still larger the number of singer-



actors. In the next phase, acting has become synonymous with singing and an actor is one who can sing, whether he can really act or even fits into the character!

## **II Phase: 1908 – 1928**

Among the poet-playwrights who chose the medium of verse (designed to be sung by actors) the most famous were Tirupati Venkata Kavulu. Divakarla Tirupati Sastri and Chellapilla Venkata Sastry were "twin" poets. Known as "Janta Kavulu" in Telugu, they were the uncrowned kings of the poetic world of Andhra. Both of them were "satavadhanis". The younger of the two, Chellapilla was a prolific writer (though they claimed joint authorship for whatever each one wrote individually) and was chiefly responsible for popularizing poetry among the new literates as well as the old adepts. They wrote 13 original plays and translated three plays from Sanskrit. Among the original plays are six plays based on the entire Mahabharata story. Two of these six plays – *Pandava Udyogam* (1903, 11) and *Pandava Vijayam* (1903, 11) – had been the hot favourites of every budding actor as well as the greatest and the most established one. Such was the charisma of the plays!

There are several reasons as to why the music-drama has attained its highest degree of perfection in Tirupati Venkata Kavulu's works. Firstly, they have not sacrificed dramatic probability for musical/poetic convenience. Secondly, the characterization is realistic and at the same time tried to retain the mythological propriety. The 'ethos' of each character has been well maintained all through. Thirdly, they are extremely stageable, without any sets and lighting effects. Fourthly, they exploited the poetic medium for achieving every kind of dramatic effect. Their poems served the purpose of all dramatic situations: descriptive, narrative and dramatic. They chose the



appropriate metre for bringing out the internal and external conflict of their characters. Besides, Tirupati Venkata Kavulu employed the poem to emphasize the "bio-rhythm" of the characters. Bio-rhythm may be defined as sabda-laya which is co-terminus and co-existent with and a revealing comment on the sareera-laya (the body rhythm) of the character. This comment is not limited only to the speaker of the padyam. It extends to all the "given circumstances": who, when where, whom and how. In their poems, the word clusters – of short and long words – succinctly comment upon the nature of the man speaking the lines, the relationship of the speaker to the person spoken to, the temporal and spatial referents, if they are important, and finally if the poem refers to an action, emphasizes the nature and extent of its importance. Very few earlier Telugu poets were capable of using the "bio-rhythm" meaningfully, the most conscious of them was undoubtedly Allasani Peddana whose first three cantos of *Manu Charitra* fully substantiate the varieties of bio-rhythm that a poem could exploit. Tirupati Venkata Kavulu added a new dimension to it: they related bio-rhythm to the conversational idiom.

Sripada Krishna Murthy Sastry's *Bobbili Yuddham* (1908), Balijepalli Laxmikantham's *Satya Harischandreeyam* (1912), Dharmavaram Gopalacharyulu's *Bhakta Ramdas* (1920) and Mutharaju Subba Rao's *Srikrishna Tulabharam* (1922) are some of the other popular music-dramas that used the verse form judiciously. In most of these plays poems and songs have been extensively used.

The success and popularity of the Padya Natakam (music-drama) had both its positive and negative results. The padyam was mainly responsible for drawing huge crowds. Ticketed shows were full. Singing actors became the most sought-after actors. With the popularity of the Padya Natakam and



singer-actors, many professional companies were established by paying the major actors huge sums as monthly salaries. The starting of the professional theatres necessitated that songs and poems had to be on a professional level. The songs were after the Hindusthani models, musicians who were experts both in Hindustani and Carnatik music traditions were drawn to the music composers.

Though Dharmavaram and others started theatre groups, toured extensively and built theatres to stage their plays, theirs were not professional theatres. These were all semi-professional theatres. The first professional theatre was started at Rajahmundry by two men – S. Gunneswara Rao and Krithiventi Nageshwara Rao – in 1908. It had everything a professional theatre should have – a designer, a director and a music-director and several well-known actors who were already famous in the semi-professional theatre – all of them well paid. The company – Hindu Nataka Samajam – employed one Papatla Kanthaiah, a man well-versed in Hindustani music as the music composer. He was also a versatile writer of songs. He set the tone to the singing pattern on the stage for the next twenty to thirty years. The Carnatik ragas have now been largely replaced by Hindustani ragas. Gamakas after the Hindustani musical pattern have become the "fashion". Songs, hitherto left behind by several playwrights as unwanted addendum, have been given priority over poems.

Other professional companies followed suit. The Mylavaram Company – Bala Bharati Samajam – was started in 1913. It had attracted talents from all over Andhra. All great singers were employed as actors. Papatla Kanthaiah as music composer, A.T. Ramanujulu as Violinist and Bagganna as tabla player were drawn into this company. Great actors such as yadavalli Suryanarayana, Jonnavithula Seshagiri Rao, Daita Gopalam, Uppuluri



Sanjeeva Rao and Addanki Sreerama Murthy were paid employees of this Company.

Another company which gained popularity was the Seetharamanjaneya Nataka Samajam of Eluru – popularly known as Mothe Company, after the name of its patron, Mothe Narayan Rao. This company also had drawn several stalwarts from all over the state, especially from the Mylavaram Company.

Several other companies which were not professional in the sense that the actors did not draw a monthly salary, but were paid for each performance became popular. Such were Rama Vilasa Sabha of Tenali and Indian Dramatic Company of Musalipatnam.

The popularity of all these professional and semi-professional companies lay in the singing abilities of their actors. Many of these Professional companies had permanent playwrights on their staff. The importance given to songs and poems in the plays produced by these companies can be understood by the fact that several of the plays – mythological plays rewritten – has a prefix, "Sangeeta" to the titles of their plays: *Sangeeta Savitri*, *Sangeeta Harischandra*, etc.

### **III Phase : 1928 – 1945**

By 1928 many of the professional theatres were closed, partly because of the economic recession after World War I and partly because of the emergence of the cinema. When the companies were closed, many actors migrated to the film world in Madras. The same actors who were dictating terms to the professional companies were now at the receiving end.



Enterprising contractors, many who served as Managers in professional companies, started a new system called the "contract dramas".

The contractors "contracted" only padya natakams. Their modus operandi, commercially motivated, worked out roughly like this: a contractor wanted to put up a play at a particular town. He would initially book the hall, contact the actors from different parts of the State – he normally booked the 'best' known actor for each role – and sell tickets. On the specified date actors would arrive from different places, assemble at the hall, insist on being paid before the performance and do their role.

The 'contract' dramas had done considerable damage both to sane theatre movement in the state as well as to Padya Natakam. As there were no rehearsals, the performance itself was a kind of a hotch-potch affair wherein only the singing abilities of individual actors were exhibited, but not an over-all composite dramatic performance. As every actor had his 'fans', there were "cleats" and "once-mores" for each poem and the actor, paid for obliging the dictates of the audience, had to repeat the poem, irrespective of the embarrassment caused both to himself and to the dramatic situation. As the spectator was paying for the performance and as he was sure he was not paying for a well-knit theatre event and only for the musical gimmicks of the actors, he wanted each one to exhibit his or her musical virtuosity, though that would adversely affect the tempo of the play. Since actors came from different parts of the State, and since there were no rehearsals, each actor mutilated the text as he wanted, several additions to elevate his or her own character being introduced. This ultimately resulted in establishing only those plays that demanded greater musical ability on the stage. Thus Tirupati Venkata Kavulu's *Pandavodyoga Vijayalu* Chilakamarti's *Gayopakhyanam* and Balijepalli's *Harischandra* remained the most sought after plays.



Even during this period new music-dramas were written and became popular with particular groups, which continued to operate sporadically. Kallakuri Narayana Rao's *Chintamani* and Kopparapu Subba Rao's *Roshanara* and *Tara Sasankam* are such plays which drew enthusiastic crowds.

However, the period saw a slow deterioration of the standard of performance of the Padya Natakam. Ironically, neither the actors nor the spectators cared for a healthy tradition of theatre performances and Padya Natakam had a natural death.

Another important reason for the gradual extinction of the Padya Natakam is the emergence of the social problem play. Thanks to the efforts of the Andhra Nataka Kala Parishad (established in 1929 and reviewed in 1943) and the Praja Natya mandali (a State wing of IPTA, started in 1943) the problem play has a strong impetus on the new generation of theatre goers. These plays are essentially prose plays. Due to the influence of realism, the Parishad prohibited in its competitions the Padya Natakam, though it allowed a poem or song in the prose plays if the dramatic occasion demanded it. Unfortunately the Parishad had done virtually nothing to revive the Padya Natakam, except occasionally honouring the actors who were proficient in it. This is a sad reflection on the lack of foresight and vision of the Parishad. The result is that Padya Natakam is virtually unknown to the younger generation of audiences today.

#### **IV Phase: 1945**

There are some recent efforts at reviving the Padya Natakam. Mention must be made of the Ramakrishna Natya Mandali of Nellore whose dynamic



actor-director Ponnala Ramakrishna Reddi has been keeping the flag of the Padya Natakam afloat. Similarly Savera Arts, an amateur group from Cuddapah had done a commendable job in producing newly written plays on Ramayanama with concerted efforts towards giving well knit performances. Others who are sporadically trying to revive the genre include such veterans as Pisapati Narasimha Murthy, Vemuri Ramaiah, Achanta Venkata Ratnam Naidu and also such enthusiasts as G.S.N. Sastry, V.K. Radha and Ayyadevara Purushothama Rao.

### **The Music Makers**

The early music composers were mostly people who were trained in the Carnatik classical music. The first names that come to our minds are those of Dharmavaram Ramakrishnamacharyulu of Bellary who was influenced by the Baliwala Company's musical rendering but used his own training in classical music to mould theatre music. It is evident that he followed the Parsee model for his songs in composing which he used mainly Hindustani ragas – Hindustani Kaapi, Kamaz, Baig, Navaroj, Hussaini, Janjhut, etc. - Though he also used Carnatik ragas such as Panthuvrali, Kharaharapriya, Mohana, Maya Malava Goula, etc. He also used "English note" for his mangalam – almost like the band music set to the marching songs!

It was the same case with actors of the Coastal Andhra who followed Dharmavaram. Hari Prasada Rao of Guntur used the same format for his performance in *Chitra Naleeyam* as well as other plays including *Harischandra*. This tradition continued with all actors including Malladi Govinda Sastry of the Guntur Second Company, Yadavalli Suryanarayana, also of Guntur but later of the Professional Companies and Bellamkonda Subba



Rao of Narasaraopet. Under the direction of Marepalli Ramachandra Sastri of Visakhapatnam, a director of repute, extension of the raga beyond the text while rendering of a poem was said to have been curtailed to the minimum. He gave equal importance to stage design, music, acting and even sword fights if need be. He employed M. Ratnam, a painter (the very first attempt to employ a painter for painting various curtains).

The most important phase in the history of the Padya Natakam started with the emergence of the Professional theatre. It was in 1908 that the Hindu Nataka Samajam was started with N. Gunneswara Rao and K. Nageswara Rao as its Producer and Director respectively. They employed Papatla Kanthaiah from Hyderabad as their music composer. Well-versed both in Hindustani classical music and in playing harmonium, Papatla Kanthaiah turned a new page in the history of Padya Natakam and Telugu theatre history.

Papatla's contribution was varied. He introduced the Parsee song tradition into Telugu theatre. He also authored several new songs to suit the dramatic situations and taught them to the actors. In the later years, when the need for a director was completely ignored (1928-1943), it was the music composer, especially the harmonist, that became the director. He was called the "Conductor", for the entire play was nothing but singing poems and songs! Another of Kanthaiah's contributions was the use of "gamaka" in singing the raga. Taken from the Hindustani "alapana" tradition, this found immediate acceptance with Telugu audiences. Special Hindustani ragas like Kaapi, Baig and Hussaini were made prominent. Besides, even the Carnatik ragas with "gamakas" were extensively used. Jonnavithula Seshagiri Rao of the Mylavaram Company and K. Raghuramaiah, a free lance actor were the most important 'gamak' singers. Joladarshi Doddana Gowda who acted along



with the illustrious actor-director Bellary Raghava, was honoured with the title *gamaka kalanidhi*, kanthaiah's popularity was such that other theatre companies wanted to "buy" his services. Thus he shifted from the Rajahmundry Company to Bezawada Company (originally called the Bala Bharati Nataka Samajam, but popularly known as Mylavaram Company, 1913). He and his associates A. Ramanujulu, the violinist and Bagganna, the tabla player had earned laurels for their virtuosity. Three-fourths of the collection from the box office were due to the musical aspect of the performance – the elaborate singing of Padyam (poem) and paata (song).

During the third phase (1928-43) Kanthaiah's disciple at the Mylavaram Company, Daita Gopalam has created quite a new sensation. His musical compositions, especially in plays like *Sakkubai* (with the Meera bhajans in it) gained such popularity that ten thousand gramophone records (a set of three records composing the major musical part of the play) were sold in a span of five years! He essentially used the Hindustani bhajan tradition with "gamaka" – an embellishment of the raga rendering.

During the later part of the phase, which saw the decline of the Padya Natakam several instrumentalists who played harmonium became popular as "Conductors". Mention must be used of Valluri Koustubha Bhushan Rao (Masulipatnam), Marti Seetharamaiah (Pamaru), Surabhi Baba Rao, Yadavalli Nageswara Rao etc.

Of some of the recent actors who showed a great control over their singing, mention must be made of Pisapati Narasimha Murthy, whose rendering of the Padyam has in it a happy and harmonious blending of raga and bhava. His superb exposition of the bhava with appropriate choice of the raga, the importance given by him to the poetic text and the innovative