

Doddata: A Folk Theatre of Karnataka

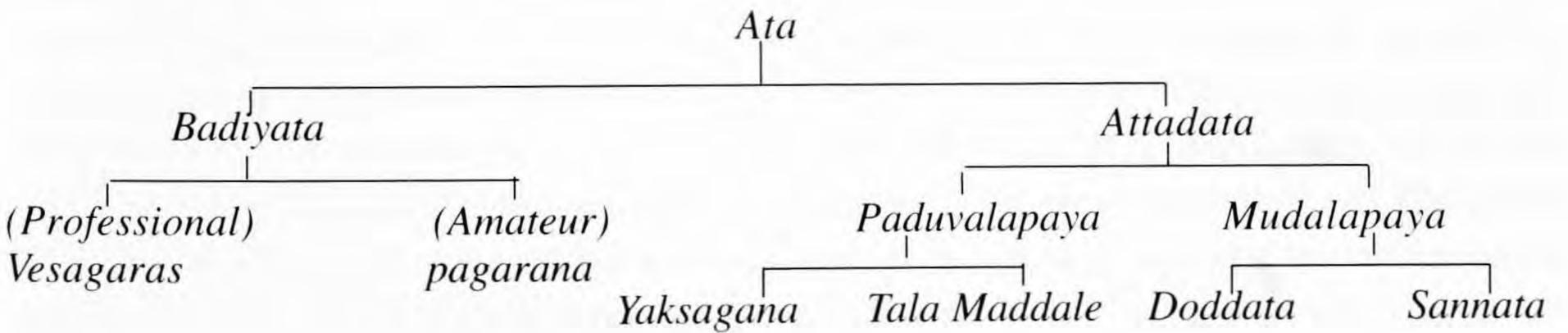
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Introduction

The folk theatre of North Karnataka is very rich and stands apart from that of southern or coastal Karnataka. It has therefore its own distinctive features, which have not all drawn the attention of theatre scholars.

The folk theatre of north Karnataka is generally known as *bayalata*. The word *bayalata* is derived from the word *ata* which means a play or drama (and also game) in general. In the context of Karnataka, drama (*ata*) was classified into two categories for convenience: *bidi ata* (street play) and *attadata* (stage play) or *bayalata* (open air drama). *Bayalu* means open space and *ata* means performance. *Bayalata* is therefore a folk drama performed in the open air before the audience. It can be contradistinguished from the closet theatre of later days. It is generally intended for the free entertainment of rural folks. *Bidi ata* (or *bidiyata*) may be divided into two groups: one, professional plays performed by *vesagaras* or *bahurupis*, and two, amateur plays known as *pagaranas* performed by amateur artists.

Attadata or *bayalata* may be divided into two groups: one, *paduvalapaya* (western mode) and two, *mudalapaya* (eastern mode). *Paduvalapaya* is prevalent in coastal Karnataka consisting of North and South Canara districts whereas *mudalapaya* is prevalent in the eastern Karnataka in general but predominant in north Karnataka districts like Dharwad, Belgaum, Bijapur, Bellary, Raichur, Gulbarga and Bidar. Geographically speaking, these two modes of drama are divided by the Sahyadri mountain range in Karnataka State. *Mudalapaya* may be divided into two categories: one, *doddata* (big play) and *sannata* (small play). Likewise, *paduvalapaya* may be divided into two categories: one, *yaksagana* and two, *tala maddale*:



Mudalapaya (Eastern Mode)

North Karnataka has a very rich tradition of *mudalapaya* (eastern mode) which is known by different names like *doddata*, *hire ata* (big play) or *bayalata* (open-air play), etc. It is prevalent in the districts of Belgaum, Dharwad, Bijapur, Bellary, Raichur, Kalburgi and Bidar (as also southern Karnataka). Although it was originally known as *mudalapaya*, it has really come to be known in north Karnataka as *doddata* (big play) only in order for it to be contradistinguished from *sannata* (small play) or *dappinata* (*dappu* = little flat drum, *ata* = play) which came to be staged in recent years in this area. Whereas *doddata* is characterized by grand themes, grand stage properties, grand costumes, grand songs and dance, *sannata* is marked by simple themes, simple stage costumes, simple songs and dances. Thus *mudalapaya* includes both *doddata* and *sannata* of North Karnataka.

Meaning of Mudalapaya

Taking the Sahyadri mountain range as a line of demarcation, scholars have divided the theatrical tradition into *paduvalapaya* and *mudalapaya*, although the actual practitioners of these modes do not use these terms. The dramatic tradition to the west of Sahyadri along the coastline is called *paduvalapaya*, which consists mainly of *yaksagana*, whereas that to the east of the said mountain is called *mudalapaya* and consists of *doddata*, *sannata* and other kinds of folk drama.

One thing to be specially remembered about *mudalapaya* is that it is not merely a particular style of drama prevalent in the eastern part of Karnataka, but it is also indicative of its entry into Karnataka from the eastern provinces of India through the artists of the Vijayanagara empire (the present Andhra Pradesh). The mountain of Tirupati, adorned with the temple of Lord Venkateswara, was similarly known as *mudala giri* (*mudala* = eastern, *giri* = mountain).

Mudalapaya: From Music to Drama

Like *yaksagana*, *mudalapaya* was originally a musical style, a branch of southern or Karnataki music. It gradually spread from east to west of Karnataka. This style of music is still dominantly prevalent in the *talukas* of southern parts of Dharwad district like Ranebennur, Hanagal and Haveri. *Mudalapaya* style of singing is quite different from *yaksagana* style of singing. The subtle difference is shown by the maestros of this area. The *yaksagana* style resembles that of the coastal belt. But the *mudalapaya* is dominant in the eastern districts of North Karnataka like Bellary, Raichur and Gulbarga, etc. But the style of singing in the district of Belgaum has not retained its purity as it belongs to the border area, where the influence of northern or Hindustani classical style is very powerful. Therefore, the *mudalapaya* style has undergone a little change in that although it employs the melodic patterns (*ragas*) of southern (Karnataki) style, its narration is affected by Hindustani music. For example, the singers and instrumentalists of *mudalapaya* employ the southern melodic patterns and rhythmic patterns like *Zampa Tala*, *Adi Tala* and *Atta Tala*, etc., but yet their method differs from that of the classical (Hindustani) musicians using the same melodic and rhythmic patterns. The

mudalapaya style of singing is therefore more appealing and interesting than the classical style.

Mudalapaya: Writing

Mudalapaya came into existence in the latter part of the 19th century. The opening of new schools in the villages provided a lot of encouragement to the writing of *mudalapaya* plays. Most of the playwrights happened to be either school teachers or those others who had intimate knowledge of village life. Since middle class people had the Sanskrit drama as their model, they found it easy to transfer the material into folk drama.

Prayer

In India, it is common for poets to begin their work with a prayer to their favourite personal deity. According to this tradition, the earliest playwrights of *mudalapaya* used to begin their plays with prayers to deities like Lord Visnu, Siva, Hanumanta, Kama, Venkatesa and Virupaksa, etc. But this practice was modified by the later playwrights who shifted their attention from personal deities to a common deity and began their plays with a prayer to Lord Ganapati. Other deities simply faded into insignificance in the presence of Lord Ganapati.

Thus, a prayer to Lord Ganapati became a compulsory feature at the beginning of a *bayalata*, although it was followed by other songs, which varied according to the nature, region and caste of the respective authors. But as years went by, a couple of these songs were commonly approved by the people and used by them as substitutes for the original songs at the time of copying the texts. Consequently two or three songs are invariably found in all the texts of *bayalatas*, no matter who the playwright is.

The prayer to Lord Ganapati, which is almost common to all the *bayalatas* of north Karnataka, is as follows:

Sri Gouri Varaputra, Santatasubha charita
Yogi sajjanastotra, Jananibagatra
Nitilanevana sutane, nigamagama vandipane
Satita sannitakarane, kundalabharana
Podaviyol Kudutiniya, odeya Bhimesana
Odeya Bhimesana, bidade bhajisuve nanu

A free translation of this song would run as follows:

O Lord, illustrious son of Sri Gouri,
 Incarnation of auspiciousness,
 Revered by yogis and the virtuous. . .
 Lord, son of Nitilaksa,
 Revered by scriptures,
 Thy wrists and ears
 Are adorned with snake-rings.

Let me worship thee, O Lord Bhimesh,
Master of Kudutini village,
Constantly.

There are a number of variants for this song. In the place of Lord Bhimesh, other local deities may be mentioned by other playwrights.

Sutradhara and Nati

After the singing of the prayer, the deity arrives on the stage and at the request of the *sutradhara*, blesses him for the smooth presentation of the play. Then the other important character, *sarathi*, arrives and begins to address the audience. The dialogues of these stock characters are standardized and the playwright shows no originality of any kind in formulating them. In the earlier days the influence of Sanskrit drama on *bayalata* was quite powerful and hence the presence of *sutradhara* and *nati* on the stage was normal at the beginning of the play. This couple used to introduce the theme of the play and achieve a mental link between the audience and characters. But as later *bayalata* was able to stand on its own feet, it gave up characters like *sutradhara* and *nati* and introduced another folk character called *sarathi*, who has come to stay.

Bhamini

After the prayer to Lord Ganapati (in some plays, after the dialogue between the *sutradhara* and *nati*), a song is recited by *sutradhara* in a musical stanza called *bhamini satpadi* (which has six lines). The usual number of these stanzas is 5, 6 or 7 and sometimes it is even 8 or 10. The purpose of employing the *bhamini* form is to introduce the broad outline of the play to be enacted that night. Here, the playwright also takes the opportunity of invoking his favourite deities and poets and of mentioning his own name and residence, etc. But nowadays the use of *bhamini* has been going out of fashion.

Dialogues

Mudalapaya dialogues are quite independent of the songs preceding or following them (unlike in musical operas or *gitarupakas* like *Sangya Balya*, *Radhanata* and *Dasarata*, etc). In it both the dialogues and songs contribute to the growth of the play. This might be ascribable to the influence of Sanskrit drama. In spite of the numerous songs, the dialogues are never short or abrupt, but on the contrary are developed according to the law of rhyme, alliteration, and are marked by Sanskritized and old Kannada diction. In some plays dialogues which follow the songs and explicate the contents of songs are known as explicatory dialogues (*padadamatu*), whereas those which follow subsequently are called independent dialogues (*bidi matu*). These dialogues, which are a special feature of *mudalapaya* as they stir the spectators by their grandeur and beauty, are those of the characters introducing themselves. The characters have to follow a definite pattern—of three stages—of introduc-

ing themselves. This, no doubt, contributes a lot to the delineation of heroic (*vira*) and amorous (*sringara*) sentiments.

In the preliminary court scene, the characters are usually seated on their thrones. The *sarathi* enters the stage and goes on asking them their names one by one. When asked thus, no character answers directly. On the contrary, he or she offers a preparatory description of his or her nature and then asks the *sarathi* his name. This is called preparatory speech (*pithika matu*). For example, when Laxmi is asked by the *sarathi* who she is, she counter-questions him thus:

O my dear servant, I am a lady who has the gait of a swan; a face like the full moon, a graceful and auspicious figure; big breasts; a cheerful and poetic nature; the smile of a jasmine, and virtue. May I know you, who have been asking for my name? Please tell me your name, O paragon of servants.

(*Sivajalandhara*)

Preparatory speeches like this give us a sure hint of the nature of the characters, be they gods or goddesses, the virtuous or the vicious; monks or sinners; men or women; saints or demons. When the *sarathi* asks Sumbha about his identity, the latter answers him as follows:

Who are you, the best of monks, who is inquiring about me, the great demon? Tell me instantly who you are and what your name is. Otherwise I will lop your trunk off your face with my sword. Do you understand, meanest of mortals?

(*Devimahatme*)

These words naturally hold a mirror to his demonic roughness and cruelty.

The *sarathi* offers a few details about himself by way of answering the preparatory question posed by the character. Then, the *sarathi* asks the name of the character once again. In giving the second answer to the second question of the *sarathi*, the character describes his name and nature in a very detailed fashion. This is known as the 'naming speech' (*namankitada matu*). Usually the playwright exhausts his talent in composing this speech, which provides a chance for the exhibition of his linguistic skill, rhetoric and prosodic mastery, etc. The 'naming speech' has a lot of variety in it and at times may run into pages together. It may contain references to countries, royal lineage, detailed descriptions of the capital, and so on. Hence the length of the speech. After the delivery of this speech by the character, the *sarathi* confesses that he and the courtiers (i.e., characters assembled on the stage) are well informed about him.

Then the *sarathi* asks the next question to the same character about the purpose of his arrival. The usual structure of this stereotyped question is, 'What is the reason for your coming into the court?' The answer given to this question by the character is known as 'court speech', which contains the theme of the play in a nutshell. Lord Indra, for instance,

answers the *sarathi's* question as follows:

O *sarathi*, the reason why I have come here is that I happened to hear the dinning sound of various drums like *diddi*, *tammate*, *dhanka nagari*, which would shake the cosmos itself. I have come to this assembly with the intention of having the *darsan* of the lotus-born Lord *Brahma* and satisfying the hunger of my arms by defeating the powerful enemy. O *sarathi* the intelligent one, know this to be the purpose of my coming here.

These three kinds of speeches are the distinctive features of *mudalapaya*. The influence of old Kannada and Sanskrit may also be seen in these dialogues because the playwrights used to be quite conversant with these languages. Whenever the playwright could not get the right word from the old Kannada, he would be satisfied with grafting an old Kannada inflection onto modern Kannada phrases. Consequently, the dialogues in these plays sometimes tend to be an admixture of Sanskrit, old Kannada and modern Kannada. Since the playwrights of *mudalapaya* gave undue importance to bombastic language, they could not write very poetically. But there are quite a few exceptions to this rule.

However high they may soar in the sky, the folk playwrights never leave the earth. It is never possible for them to disentangle themselves or their imagination from day-to-day life. They are quite aware of the fact that the plays are meant for villagers. Their images are therefore borrowed from their own life, although they are quite simple. Prabhavati, for example, requests Sudhanva when he is about to leave for the battlefield, "How can the crops grow, if you forget to sow the seed? We can achieve liberation (*mukti*) only if you lovingly sow the seeds into the field of my intoxicated youth." (*Pramile*, p.2-3). Such an image is sure to touch the hearts of the villagers, who are only too familiar with agriculture. Sometimes the dialogues are also likely to degenerate into mere vulgarity, although there is no doubt that they hold a mirror to contemporary society.

The playwrights of *mudalapaya* have given greater attention to the construction of prose dialogues than to poetry. They selected the stage for the exhibition of their verbal *tandava*. They are extremely fond of rhymes of two kinds: internal rhyme, and exclamatory rhyme at the end of a dialogue.

The internal rhyme could be found in many sentences. The playwright delights in the exhibition of his linguistic skill in this process. He, for example, tries to bring in the internal rhyme of either *da* or *ja* or *ra*, *pa* or *la*, etc, which cannot unfortunately be reproduced in English translation.

The exclamatory rhyme by and large comes at the end of a dialogue. The addressee's proper name or descriptive name is accompanied by a word or phrase which rhymes with it. These exclamatory rhymes are a memorable aspect of the dialogues of *mudalapaya* and thrill the audience either because of their descriptive appropriateness or because of irrelevant but comic elements. The following list will help the reader to understand the rhymes, if not the meanings.

1. The following exclamatory rhymes are used when the addressee happens to be a male character:

Kanta	Gunavanta
Kanta	Mativanta
Kanta	Rajasrimanta
Raja	Ravikotiteja
Chakravarti	Sadgunamurti
Arasa	Matinol Sarasa
	Sammohanabharana
Sundara	Manohara
Punda	Muru Lokada Ganda
Ramana	Bhagya Sampanna
Dusta	Kulabrasta

2. When the addressee happens to be a female character:

Kantamani	Sundara Suguni
Kamini	Kalaharnsa Gamini
Kante	Srimante
Sakhiye	Chandramukhiye
Ramani	Sadgunabharani
Nari	Vaiyari
Mate	Lokavikhyate

3. When the addressee happens to be the *sarathi*:

Bala	Sadgunasila
Bala	Susila
Kinkara	Anuchara
Kinkara	Sukhankara
Kanda	Manakananda
Duta	Prakhyata
Magane	Chennigane
Sandanagrani	Dhimani
Sarathi	Chaturyakarapurti
Sarathi	Satisayapriti
Sevakagrani	Bhaktachintamani
Suta	Prakhyata

4. When the *sarathi* addresses other characters:

Arasa	Horasa
Bhupa	Krupa
Doreye	Hatti Katigi Horeye
Tayi	Hanna Menasinakayi
Tavi	Hasi Pyaralakayi

Besides these double rhymes, there are single rhymes also. For example, Uttunga Kuchada Mattebhagamini, Matsyagangale, Sarpaveni, Padmanetri, Pranavallabhe, Chapalaksi, Uduraja Vadane, Rajivanetre, etc.

Songs

Songs are the poorest feature of *mudalapaya*. Since the talent of the playwrights is exhausted in the construction of dialogues, they have not paid much attention to the composition of poems or songs. Many times it is difficult to distinguish between a prose piece and a poem.

Many songs of *mudalapaya* have two lines, which are mistaken for individual songs, but the actual fact is that these two lines (couplets) are the refrain of a song, which is followed by a dialogue or stanzas (*caranas*). But each stanza is followed by a dialogue or two. Thus a song of *mudalapaya* is interspersed with dialogues after every stanza. The mixture of poetry and prose adds a special beauty to the *mudalapaya* drama form.

Prosody

Satpadi (six-lined stanza) is the most commonly used metre in *mudalapaya*. But occasionally other metres like *kanda* and *sisā* are also used. Various types of *satpadi* like *kusuma satpadi*, *sara satpadi* and *vardhaka satpadi* are used quite commonly.

Characters and Sentiments

One of the striking features of *mudalapaya* is that even complex themes undergo a process of simplification when they are depicted in this form of drama. Neither the playwright has any willingness to analyze the subtle nature of the characters, nor has the spectator any patience to know the subtleties of characters. Almost all the characters can be divided into black or white. The spectator knows the characters too well to expect much from the playwright. He has absolutely no difficulty in identifying himself with the characters. However, the urban spectator has less familiarity in this respect than the rural one. Even the dialogues and the underlying logic are quite simple. It is unfortunate, however, that sometimes the dialogue degenerates into the language of the street. On the whole, there is no denying that the characterization in *mudalapaya* is naive and insipid.

Heroic and wondrous sentiments are the main features of *mudalapaya*. Stage property, dialogues, dances and entry of characters are all factors contributory to these sentiments. War, therefore, happens to be the main theme of many of these plays and is suggested by their titles themselves, containing the words 'yuddha' (war) or 'kalyana' (marriage). *Ramanjaneya Yuddha* (War of Rama and Anjaneya), *Babhruvahana Kalaga* (War with Babhruvahana) and such other titles testify to the predominance of the heroic sentiment. It may not be wrong to say that *mudalapaya* came into existence mainly for the expression of heroic sentiment. As in characterization, so in the depiction of the main sentiment the playwright does not show any great responsibility. Most of the heroic sentiment is ex-



Ravana in Lanka Dahana:
Photograph: Courtesy Basavalingayya Hiremath

pressed in the high-flown language of dialogues, dances and choruses. Besides the theme of war, the theme of marriage is also quite common in *mudalapaya*, but most of the time the two themes are intertwined. *Girija Kalyana (Marriage of Girija)* and *Kanakangi Kalyana (Marriage of Kanakangi)* and such other plays depict the matrimonial theme. Although there is a lot of scope for the treatment of erotic sentiment in these plays, it is more often than not neglected by the playwright. Even when there are occasions for the depiction of erotic sentiment, it is done through artificial dialogues. The theme of devotion is very common in *mudalapaya*. *Hanumantana Lingadharane (Hanumanta's Possession of Linga)* is a good example of this. Sometimes Harischandra's truthful life is depicted in the devotional manner. But unfortunately the playwright makes Harischandra talk and dance after the fashion of Rama and Ravana, which looks ridiculous indeed. Subtle themes, when introduced on the *mudalapaya* stage, look as incongruous as a poor monk wearing a golden crest.

The Playwrights

The playwrights of *mudalapaya* are generally not first-rate writers. Although they write plays for folk audiences, they are not purely folk poets either. They are average men combining the element of folklore and standard literature. Most of these playwrights belong to the Brahmin community, who are generally well acquainted with myths and scriptures. These writers have no ability to compose works of standard literature, but because of their acquaintance with mythology and philosophy, they attain a place a little higher than ordinary folk. These playwrights are well informed rather than inspired. Like other writers, these playwrights also mention their names and favourite deities:

1. This play was written in the city of Kampali by the virtuous son of Nagappa, native of Kalagi village, in a very delicate language.
(*Kanakangi Kalyana*)
2. I pray continuously to Lord Bhimesh.
(*Samba Laxmi Kalyana*)
3. I offer my prayers to the kind Lord Amaresh of Nalavadi and sing the glory of the King of Celestial Beings.
(*Sugandha Puspa Harana*)

Since the *bayalata* troupes used to tour from village to village, there is no fixity about the names of deities and places. The names of local deities and villages were inserted in place of non-local ones. Hence the difficulty of identifying the original authors and places of composition of these plays.

There are a few manuscripts of *mudalapaya* available, which were printed around 1900. The playwrights of *mudalapaya* must have been active between 1900 and 1950. These fifty years may be said to be the golden age of *mudalapaya*.



Music

The earliest playwrights of *mudalapaya* seem to have been good musicians of Southern or Karnataki style, who could compose songs and set them to music. But the later ones seem to have been quite ignorant of music, although they would have learnt a few set tunes from their *gurus* and transmitted them orally to their own disciples.

The number of tunes (*ragas*) commonly used in *mudalapaya* does not exceed 10 or 15. They are *Mohana*, *Kalingada*, *Kedaragouli*, *Kalyani*, *Todi*, *Bhimapalasi*, *Bhairavi*, *Udayaraga*, and so on. It is not possible to elicit formal information about these melodies from the *sutradharas*. The rhythms (*talas*) generally used by these artists are *Adi*, *Rupaka*, *Atta*, *Tripata*, *Jampa*, *Bilandi* and so on. Sometimes even if other rhythmic patterns are employed, they are based upon these basic ones only. Thus the addition of regional peculiarities to southern music has resulted in *mudalapaya's* own system of music.

But it is an interesting historical fact that the *mudalapaya* system of music has been slowly alienating itself from the southern mode and surrendering itself to the influence of the northern (Hindustani) mode. This fact is easily borne out by the practice prevalent in the districts of Belgaum, (western) Dharwad and (western) Bijapur, where the assimilation between northern and southern modes of music is quite successful. But in the eastern part of these districts the gap between the two modes is still maintained. There the female characters follow the northern mode and therefore their songs (which are sung by the *sutradhara* himself) are accompanied on the *tabla*, whereas other songs by male characters are sung in the southern mode and are therefore accompanied on the horizontal drum (*maddale*). The songs of male characters are sung by the *sutradhara* himself, although the actors add their voice or lip movement to the songs.

The chorus of *mudalapaya* is a unique feature of this theatre, not to be found in any other theatre. It consists of at least four members throughout the performance. Many characters, who play minor roles, join the chorus after they complete their part in the scenes. Thus the number of members of the chorus goes up to ten or twelve. They begin with the song (*kochu*) 'He Deva' (O Lord) and sing the song in an elevated tone at the height of their pitch. This style naturally adds to the heroic sentiment of the play. They also encourage the characters by their hortative interventions like 'shabash', 'vahava', 'shahabo shahaba', which are roughly equivalent to the English words like 'bravo', 'cheers', etc. The chorus is thus a very important feature of *mudalapaya* theatre.

The Structure of Songs

The popular tunes of *mudalapaya* are sung in three tempos consecutively. The first rendering is slow (*vilambita*), the second (*madhya*), i.e., double that of the first, and the third quick (*tivra*), i.e. double that of the second. The change from one tempo to the other is suggested by the *sutradhara* himself, as for example here:

Slow (Single speed):

Sutradhara	<i>Odatiye nanondu yuktiya peluve yuktiya peluve nadeyamma adarante kadu jane.</i>
Himmela	(Repeats it twice)
Sutradhara	<i>Dasaratha bhupanu nadesida tantravanu.</i>
Himmela	(Repeats it twice)
Sutradhara	<i>Ena helali nanu, ena helali nanu kadu dukka baruvada.</i>
Himmela	<i>Odatiye nanodu yuktiya peluve nadeyamma adarante kadujane.</i>

Medium (Double speed):

Sutradhara	<i>Odatiye nanondu yuktiya peluve Nadeyamma adarante kadujane.</i>
Himmela	(Repeats it twice)
Sutradhara	<i>Kela odati.</i>
Himmela	<i>Tha thayya.</i>
Sutradhara	<i>Enna vacana.</i>
Himmela	<i>Tha thayya.</i>
Sutradhara	<i>Peluvana.</i>
Himmela	<i>Tha thayya.</i>

Quick (Four-fold speed):

Sutradhara	(in soprano voice) <i>Kela odati enna vacana</i> (Descent) <i>A, a, a, a, a, a, a</i> (to the base <i>sadja</i>)
Himmela	(Soprano <i>sadja</i>) <i>Kadkadata, Kadkadata, dhitta ...</i>

These rules of music are not uniformly employed in all the areas of Karnataka. There are, of course, many regional variations and options. But one tune is particularly common to the folk theatre of north Karnataka and that is the prayer to Lord Ganapati, 'Sri Gouri Varaputra'. This song is sung in single (*vilambita*) and four-fold (*druta*) tempos only.

In Raichur district there is another practice of adding to the song. The addition is called *anda*, which literally means beautiful or ornamental. After a stanza (*carana*) is sung, the content of the same is broken up into rhythmic phrases which are sung within one or two notes before or after the base note (*sadja*). The following serves as an example:

Song:	<i>Rakkasanu Bidade enna / Fakkane sere vaivanamma Kakkulati illavenamma/Mikkite-Karma</i>
Anda:	<i>Rakkasanu Ivanu Abaleyu nanu / Sere Oyvanivanu Kakkulati illadavanu / Bhandu rakkasanu</i>

(Ms. Sulakskine Pada in *Vali Sugrivarā Kathe*)

This addition of *anda* is not composed by the playwright himself but made by others. Nabisaheb is said to be a popular composer of these additions in Raichur area. Since these 'additions' are quite simple and can be composed and inserted by anyone with a minimum artistic talent, it is difficult to trace the authors of the same. Such features, though of anony-

mous authorship, are found in the *mudalapaya* of the western part of north Karnataka. The 'Kela Odati - Tha Thyya' portion of the 'Odatiye Nanondu' song before the beginning of quick tempo is composed not by the playwright but are common poetic phrases. Whenever the songs are addressed to a king or a minister, the exclamatory phrases are modified accordingly. In that case 'He Deva' is replaced by 'Kelo Raja.' (Listen, Your Highness) or 'Kelo Mantri' (Listen O Minister) and so on.

When the song is being sung in the double tempo, the members of the chorus interpret it with their exclamations like 'He Deva' ('O Lord'). This is a common feature in the *mudalapaya* of north Karnataka. But around Haveri area (former Dharwad district), phrases like 'He Deva' are not used at all, but the entire *koche* is sung in *alap* at the highest pitch.

A few *bols* are added to the song when it is completed in quick tempo. These songs generally end with a *bol* in soprano, like for example: *Kadkada ta Kadkada ta dhitta*. The songs in Raichur area end with 'Hodi dandana taita taita aha. But in Dharwad area, the songs in double tempo end with lengthier *bols* like *Ta, Kada tom, Janana, dhigi dhigi dhitta*, *Thaita! dhitta Tonta dhitta Thaita, dhigi, dhigi dhigi ! Dhittom dhinna, kada kada ta / dhinna / kadakadata / dhinna kadakadata*.

Instruments

Musical instruments are an indispensable feature of *mudalapaya* theatre. There is no rigidity about the use of these instruments in the history of this folk theatre. Different instruments are used at different times in north Karnataka depending upon the availability of instruments or instrumentalists. The main instruments used in *mudalapaya* were, and still are, the horizontal drum (*maddale*) and cymbals (*talas*). The base tune, of course, was provided by a mono-stringed instrument called *swarakayi* made of wood, pumpkin and string. But nowadays the artists devise an easier method of replacing *swarakayi* by an ad hoc instrument. They tie one end of a thin cotton thread around their neck and the other end to the bottom of a tin and produce a series of short sounds like *jee, jee, jee, jee*, by striking the cotton thread with a matchstick-like piece of wood. That sound also produces a good base note. All these old-fashioned instruments disappeared with the advent of harmonium. Harmonium has become an inevitable part of the folk theatre because of its portable size, impressive sound, and variety of scales. Although it is looked down upon by snobbish musicians because of its so-called crudity of sound, it has become very popular among the rural audience as it can capture the attention of a large gathering on account of its volume of sound. The maestros, who have devoted their entire life for practice on this instrument, are capable of showing extraordinary dexterity in performance and capturing the hearts of even unmusical people. The horizontal drum (*maddale*) is quite big, i.e., around three feet in length and ten inches in diameter at the right end and fourteen inches in diameter at the left end. Some experts play the classical Karnataki *bols* on this instrument. The right end of the horizontal drum produces a hard, sharp, and metallic sound, whereas the left end of the same produces a soft, mild, booming or thumping sound. The *maddale* maestro plays on his instrument on either side or

on both sides alternately or simultaneously. He strikes the right side with his forefinger and other fingers (except, of course, the thumb) simultaneously or alternately and produces a sound like that of the hooves of a horse on it. He slaps or pecks the left side of it with his fingers and produces a thumping or a booming sound. When the horizontal drum is played like this, the exciting rhythm of it energizes the characters and enlivens the dozing audience. Nowadays, because of the influence of Hindustani music, the horizontal drum (*maddale*) is being replaced by the *tabla* and *dagga*. Cymbals of bell metal are used in the folk theatre of all parts of Karnataka. They are known by different names like *gundadala*, *sottedala* and *atada tala*. They are played by the *sutradhara* and three or four members of the chorus. When these cymbals are struck against each other peripherally they create a light rattling sound, but when they are struck centrally, they produce a clangorous sound. Thus the jingle and clangour of cymbals go on alternating. As the tempo changes from slow to medium to quick, the clangour and chime create an intoxicating effect upon the ears of the audience. The use of fiddle also was quite common in certain areas of north Karnataka. The wailing and groaning of the fiddle, no doubt, contributes to the varying moods of the play. Nowadays other wind instruments like *mukhavine*, *sanadi*, or *saj* (different forms of clarionets of different sizes) are also employed. The effect of the super sweetness and serpentine phonic meandering of these instruments upon both audience and characters is enormous indeed.

Dance

Dance is a predominant feature of *mudalapaya* theatre. It is customary in north Karnataka to ask 'Which role do you dance?' rather than 'Which role do you play?' In this theatre character-playing is less important than dancing it out. The dancing is obviously influenced by a number of folk dances. It is quite simple and unsophisticated. The field still awaits further research.

There is a difference between the male and the female dance in this theatre. The male characters dance according to the heroic or terrific sentiments (*vira or bhayanaka rasas*) they have to express, whereas the female characters dance more gracefully and their dance easily resembles *lasya*. The male dance must have been formulated from a combination of step-dance (*hejje kunita*), impersonators' dance (*puravantara kunita*), and *datti* dance (*datti kunita*). In the male dance steps are given special importance and hence the negligence of facial features and other gestures. The dances are, therefore, known by the number of steps used in them such as three-step dance, five-step dance and six-step dance. The male dancer moves either back and forth or left and right. Occasionally he jumps off the platform and kicks the wooden board of the platform. By the time he completes his dance, he is totally exhausted and is gasping for breath and therefore unable to continue his next dialogue. Even then he struggles hard to play his role in order to attract the attention of the rural audience.

The female dance is not so crude as the male, although it does not express the finest feelings of the human heart. The female dancers never go to the extent of breaking the wooden boards. Their dance varies from two-step to nine-step. Fortunately their dance is

not confined to steps alone. They give some attention to facial features, gestures and neck-turnings. Although the female dance was originally expressive of fine feelings, nowadays it has degenerated into a crude and artificial one.

Sometimes the female characters dance on the stage in-between scenes. The dance consists of moving up and down, back and forth, showing simple gestures of hands. For example, in the Flower Plucking Dance, the dancers go ahead rhythmically and mime the act of plucking flowers. Many of these dances have been influenced by regional cultures. For example there are many symbolic dances suggestive of cotton-picking, corn-cob cutting, and harvesting. In some areas Straddle Dance (*kisagalu-kunita*) is practised and this must have been an imitation of Bharata Natyam. In brief, it can be said that the dance of *mudalapaya* is not so capable of expressing the subtle feelings of characters as the dance of *yaksagana* is.

In some areas, the dances are accompanied by *bols* of the horizontal drum uttered by the *sutradhara*. These *bols* are obviously modelled upon various rhythmic patterns (*talas*) like *Rupaka*, *Adi* and *Atta*, etc. The *bols*, which are also called *gattu*, come at the end of dances by and large.

I. The following *bols* are common to all types of characters:

- (1) *Taitaka dhinna, Taitaka dhinna. Taitaka dhinna*
Taitaka dhinna tai tai. Taitaka dhinna taite
Taitaka dhinnoti / Tadaginita/ Tadaginita, tadaginita .
- (2) *Dhittai taita kitata /kita tata tata kitata*
Tai talangu tadagit todagit tomta.
- (3) *Tatayatataya/dhigitattaya/dhigitattaya*
Dhigitattaya / taitalangu ta / dagit tadagit tomta.

II. Notations for male characters:

- (1) *Te tonga/dhittonga / kadataijanam /dadhitaijanam*
Kadataka ta taya/Kadataka ta taya /Kadataka ta taya
- (2) *Kadakadatom /jantajanta migitaka*
Dhinnakidataka ta/dhinna kadataka ta /dhnna kadataka ta

III. Notations for female characters:

- (1) *Kadataka dhatai dhatai /kidataka dhataka dhinam*
Tadhkim gidataka / tadhim gidataka / tadhim gidataka .

Sutradhara

We have already discussed how the playwrights of *mudalapaya* imported the character of *sutradhara* and *vidusaka* from the Sanskrit drama available to them. But these stock characters have been naturalized totally in the folk theatre. *Sutradhara* has been known by different appellations in different regions. He is generally known as *bhagavata*, *nayaka*, *mummela*, *mastaru*, *kathegara*, *metitala* and so on. The word *nayaka* is quite popular in Raichur area

whereas those like *mummela* and *metitala* are popular in Belgaum district.

Sutradhara's duty consists more in the preparations for *bayalata* than in on-the-stage activities. He is, therefore, called master (*mastaru*). In the eastern districts of north Karnataka there are many professional masters. Generally, they have mastery over half a dozen or a dozen plays. They travel from village to village and train the rural participants for a whole month or so. The Master teaches them songs and dialogues. But coaching in dance is not his responsibility. The elder villagers teach these dances to the younger ones.

On the day of performance of the play, the drama director (or teacher or master), who is a paid servant so far, assumes the elevated status of a *guru*. He has to direct every aspect of the play. In a way, he himself can be said to be the 'hero' of the play. He stands with members of the chorus (*himmela*) on the right wing. After the prayer to Lord Ganapati is sung, the *sutradhara* prays to Lord Ganapati to ward off all the hurdles in the performance of the play. Similarly he requests Gopala the child god and Goddess Sarada also to facilitate the enactment. After the gods are done with, the *sutradhara* starts his dialogue with the *sarathi*. He asks the *sarathi* to introduce the kings and emperors on the stage to the gathering and withdraws from the stage. But he stands behind the wings and sings with the members of the chorus. But whenever the *sarathi* indulges in jokes by comparing kings and emperors to Lord Kama or Allah, the *sutradhara* comes on the stage and asks him to talk with respect about them, as they happen to be kings and emperors. The *sutradhara* has no organic connection with the content of the play. That he is an echo of the *sutradhara* of Sanskrit drama is quite clear. He is called '*mummyala*' (chorus) and '*metitala*' (central rhythm or cymbal) as his duty consists mainly in singing. But in the early days, the *sutradhara* used to provide a link between scenes and narrate events which could not be spoken or acted by characters on the stage. Sometime he gives a hint of what is going to happen in the forthcoming scene. In this respect he resembles the chorus of the Greek theatre.

Sarathi

Although the *sarathi* is borrowed from the Sanskrit drama, he has acquired regional characteristics. Whereas in *yaksagana* he is called *kodangi* and *hanumanayaka*, he is known as '*sarathi*' in *mudalapaya*. He is even called an indirect protagonist of the play because of his predominance in the stage. There is simply no limit to his jokes, songs and speeches. His movements, which more often than not exceed the limits of relevance, are immensely liked by the audience. His comedy is generally very closely woven into the texture of heroic and wondrous sentiments of the play. After the exit of *sutradhara* from the stage, the *sarathi* assumes the important role of controlling the entry and exit of characters. Sometimes he even replaces the *sutradhara* by performing the latter's duties also. He invokes the spirits of deities like Lord Ganesh and Goddess Saraswati and asks for their blessings. He enjoys a liberty that is denied to the *vidusaka* of Sanskrit drama and combines in himself the roles of *sutradhara* and *vidusaka*.

Most of the plays of eastern mode (*mudalapaya*) deal with the theme of war. The hero,

who is to go to the battlefield, has to have a chariot and a charioteer (*sarathi*). *Sarathi* was introduced into *bayalata* in order to suggest a chariot and war but later he was made to control the entire dramatic activity. All the characters of the play confide in him their joys and sorrows, worries and anxieties, pangs of separation, etc. He acts as a loyal servant to all the characters who ask him, usually in prose but sometimes in poetry, to oblige them. It is usual for a warrior (character) to sing:

Come on, *sarathi*, drive my chariot quickly.

When Lord Indra has to call his wife Sachi on the stage, he sings:

Come on *sarathi*
Go and call my dear spouse
Come on and bring her quickly.

Usually the *sarathi* enters the stage after the prayer (benediction) is over. Sometimes, as in the area around Kittur (of Belgaum district), his arrival is announced in a song by the *sutradhara*. As the *sutradhara* goes on singing the following song—

The *sarathi* is coming
Is coming
To the beautiful stage
With a branch of neem tree
In his hand.

—the *sarathi* comes in dancing on the stage in his own style. After the dance is over, he relaxes a little and starts talking with the *sutradhara*. His first dialogue addressed to the *sutradhara* is quite involved, stylish and querulous in tone. After it is over, he goes on introducing the characters to the audience one by one, in a rather bookish language:

1. Ho sir, who are you, who has graced this stage with his pomp and glory? What is your name?
2. Now both the respected audience and I have come to know you. May I further ask the reason why you left your court and came to the stage?

The *sarathi* thus talks with other characters very respectfully. But when they ask him back about himself, he switches on to the colloquial language, which is instinct with raciness, contemporary consciousness, mild humour and self-directed irony, and which is uttered in a rhythmic fashion. A sample can be seen in the following:

He Raja, Jarkateyannu uttu, harkangiyannu tottu, berki annuttiruva harki kwanana hanga sarkara davarannu darkara madadantha murkha sarathi annuttare.

O King, I am called the foolish *sarathi*, who is clad in a ragged shirt; who rides a clever he-buffalo and who does not care for the Government people.

It is simply impossible to bring out the raciness of the Kannada language in English translation. But what is to be noted is that his sentences are marked by word rhythms, initial rhymes, middle rhymes and end rhymes. His sentences may contain satirical comments on the corrupt government, his own poverty, matrimonial incompatibility, helplessness, etc.

Whenever the entry of characters is delayed by problems of make-up or costumes, it becomes mandatory on the part of *sarathi* to keep the audience engaged with his dialogues. It provides him a chance to use his resourcefulness to the maximum extent. He cracks all the jokes he knows and sometimes addresses the audience directly. He sings short and sweet songs composed by local poets and captures the attention of the audience. If he exhausts his collection of folk songs, he would not mind singing film songs. He may interlard the film songs with jokes, references to popular local heroes, digs at VIPs and anecdotes. His dialogue is thus a gallimaufry of countless items and therefore elicits full response from the audience. When everybody in the audience is absorbed in the enjoyment of his speech, nobody bothers about the relevance or otherwise of the contents, at least for a while.

The character of *sarathi* is not moulded by the dramatist. On the contrary he is a creation of folklore. His dialogues or songs were not to be written down, as they were orally crystallized and transmitted from individual to individual. It is only recently that the copyists have started capturing them in script or print. The expressions of the *sarathi* are nothing but expressions of the folk mind and folk ethos. Hence the deep rapprochement between the audience and him.

Costumes

Costumes in *mudalapaya*, unlike in *yaksagana*, are not given special attention. Although each character requires a particular type of costume, this rule is not followed very meticulously. One can easily see the process of simplification in the assignment of costumes. The characters are roughly divided into (1) noble characters like Kama, Arjuna, Laxmana, Dharmaraja, Abhimanyu and Indrajitu; (2) evil ones like Duryodhana, Ravana and Kichaka, etc.; and (3) women like Sita and Draupadi, most of whom happen to be goddesses. Whereas all the noble characters have one type of costume, all the evil characters have another type of costume. Likewise, all the women characters have costumes of a set pattern. Most of the characters use silken garments so that these garments would glisten in the yellowish light of petromax lamps.

Generally rose tint is used for the make-up of all characters except, of course, Rama, Krisna, Siva and demons. The tint is prepared from a combination of white, red and blue powders. Originally this was prepared from a nut called *aradala* or *antavala*. A king is usually decked with long curly hair let down behind his shoulders. It is topped by a golden crest. The crest is not as big as the ones used by kings in *yaksagana*. It is made of metal or

ಜಾನಪದ ಸಂಪ್ರದಾನ ಕೇಂದ್ರ ರಿಷ್ಯ



Invocation to Lord Ganapati in *Lanka Dahana*.



Sita and her companions in the same play.
Photographs: Courtesy Basavalingayya Hiremath

wood or simple cardboard and painted with golden colour. Whether the characters use a metallic crest or a cardboard one depends on the financial position of the organizers of *bayalata*.

Most of the male characters are supposed to have moustaches. If they do not have natural moustaches, they wear artificial ones made of wool. The evil characters like villains and demons are expected to have thicker moustaches than others. Usually the moustaches are thickest below the nose and go on tapering at both the extremes and are twirled upward into circles with a flourish. The difference between a righteous character and a villainous one can be detected by the size of their mustaches themselves. A long flowing cloth is usually hung from the shoulders and let down until it trails on the ground. Males wear a white silken shirt and put on a waistband and colourful necklaces. Most of them wear large shoulder-crests in the eastern region of Karnataka. They hold a sword or bow and arrow in their hands. In some districts, they have the habit of having a bouquet in their hands.

Villainous or ferocious characters do not have any special make-up. Their ferocity is expressed in the large shoulder-crests, tall crests on heads, thick moustaches covering almost half of their faces and big heavy garlands of flowers. In their right hand they hold a bow or mace and in the left hand, a red towel.

Female characters wear a special type of crest. They are usually smaller than those of male characters. Further, all of them wear very costly silken saris, with filigree work on them, borrowed from the local families. Since most of the female characters wear such silken saris, it becomes rather a problem to distinguish between a queen and a maidservant. Most of them are burdened with golden or gold-like ornaments like bangles and necklaces, which are used more than required. But the rural audiences do not find fault with this excess at all.

The male characters like Siva, Rama and Krisna wear blue make-up. Hanumanta is made to wear a pair of hairy shorts and is painted a lurid red around his nose. The saints like Narada wear long hempen beards and moustaches and long loose saffron cassocks. As for the *sarathi*, he is not restricted by any rule with regard to costume. He wears a shirt and a pair of shorts and a turban wound around his head or simply a cap. His face is painted with white stripes. He wears one or two necklaces around his neck and holds a *neem* twig in his hand. Initially the crests, shoulder-crests, swords and clubs used to be made of wood. Nowadays the gorgeous costumes are disappearing because of the influence of urban entertainment.

Stage

Although it is known as open-air-drama, *bayalata* is usually enacted before the houses of local leaders, or in front of temples or near big crossroads. The preparations for the erection of the stage begin a couple of days in advance. Sometimes they may start weeks ahead. As is usual in Indian life, people interested in presenting a *bayalata* consult an astrologer or an almanac for an auspicious moment and erect a wooden pillar at that time. After a few days, they fix cartwheels at both sides and wooden beams in-between them and cover them with wooden boards. Sometimes they use oil drums in place of cartwheels. Now the bare stage is

ready. The back portion is covered with a big carpet. The upper portion of the stage is fixed with a few bamboos and again covered with a big carpet. The flanks and the front portion of the stage are not covered. The floor of the stage is also covered with a big carpet.

Lighting

One can trace a line of evolution in the history of lighting in this folk theatre. In the earliest days of *bayalata*, the lighting was provided by cowdung lamp. At both sides of the stage two tripods of a man's height used to be erected. On these tripods two cauldrons used to be kept. One or two servants used to soak the cowdung cakes in kerosene oil and keep them burning in cauldrons. They would keep on supplying cowdung cakes, providing a very lurid light on the stage. Later on, the primitive method was replaced by a more sophisticated one of keeping two big torches on both sides of the stage. The light of these torches contributed very richly to the portrayal of the sentiment of fear or ferocity. Whenever the villains would start dancing with excitement, some servants in the side wings would throw the *aradala* powder on the torches, which would flare up and add up to the ferocious atmosphere. Later again, the torches were replaced by petromax lamps. Nowadays the villagers have started using electric lamps. This has unfortunately taken away the natural charm of the folk theatre. The electric light does not create the same mysterious atmosphere.

Prayer

The *sutradhara* worships his favourite deity in the greenroom and walks to the stage with *himmela* and instruments. There also he performs worship of the stage and instruments. It is only then that the prayer is sung. This prayer is sung differently at different parts of north Karnataka. The prayer is generally known as *stutipanchaka* (five-fold prayer), containing five songs. Many times they are not actually five songs but only three, the three sections of the third being wrongly counted as independent songs. Generally a prayer starts as follows:

'Sri Vighneswara Pahimam'

It is followed by the second song with three sections:

'Sri Sambhavi Sukumara'

And ends with a praise of *guru*:

'Manabhimanava Ninnadu Tande'

In some districts of north Karnataka, a single prayer to Lord Ganesa, '*Sri Gouri Varaputra*', is sung instead of the *stutipanchaka*. This method is followed in the district of Bijapur. In the prayer to Lord Ganesa, a brief reference is also made to Lord Sankara. But in the districts of Dharwad and Belgaum a prayer to Lord Siva is followed by prayers to Lord Ganesa and Goddess Sarada. It is only Lord Ganesa, who appears on the stage, dances lightly and sits on the holy seat. It is only then that the *sutradhara* starts his dialogue. Normally the situation is as follows:

Sutradhara	Lord, my salutations to you.
Ganesa	Please get up, O sutradhara
Sutradhara	Yes, my Lord.
Ganesa	O sutradhara, as I was at the shrine of Mount Srisaila, and of Mount Kailasa and enjoying the sight of dances of Nandi, Brungi, Narada, Saraswati, Garudas, Kinnaras and Kimpurusas, I heard your melodious voice and came here instantly. I am very pleased with you. Let me know your wish so that I can grant it immediately.
Sutradhara	Lord, I fall at your feet and pray to you. Tonight I am going to arrange a play called <i>Lanka Dahana</i> (<i>The Burning of Lanka</i>)
Ganesa	My dear sutradhara, I bless your play <i>Lanka Dahana</i> wholeheartedly. As for the mistakes likely to be made by children and the ignorant, please pray to Saraswati, Goddess of speech. My time is already up. I must be going to my abode now.
Sutradhara	Lord, kindly do as you please.

Then the *sutradhara* prays to Goddess Sarada. While he is praying to Goddess Sarada, she comes dancing on to the stage. The dance of this goddess has its own distinctive style, which does not bear any resemblance to the other dances of *mudalapaya*. The dialogue between the goddess and *sutradhara* resembles that between Lord Ganesa and himself. But Goddess Sarada, unlike Lord Ganesa, clinches the matter by granting the wish of the *sutradhara*. It is only then that the *sarathi* comes on the stage and continues the scene.

Balagopala

As in the *purvaranga* of *yaksagana*, there is a tradition in the eastern part of north Karnataka of bringing in Balagopala (child Gopala) at the beginning of the performance. Usually a small boy is made to play this role. His arrival on the stage is preceded by a song praising him. The song is generally as follows:

Come, O come / O Gopala, the child,
 Stealer of Gopi's clothes, / Lifter of Mount Govardhana,
 Tender of cows / Rider of the eagle,
 O lotus-eyed one, / *Kaustubha*-decked one,
 Come O come / Gopala, the child.

The boy with the make-up of child Gopala stands behind the curtain when the song of praise is sung. As soon as the song is over, he comes on the stage dancing. (In some areas, it is the child Gopala and not Lord Ganesa who comes on the stage after the prayer to Lord Ganesa is sung.) But unlike Lord Ganesa with his protruding belly and trunk, Balagopala stands and is talked to, not by *sutradhara* but by *sarathi*. Here *sarathi* does not bother about asking for boons or blessing. On the contrary, he goes on introducing the other characters to the audience through his dialogue. A sample can be seen in the following:

- Sarathi O Lord, may I know who you are?
- Balagopala Bravo, man. Who are you, the crest-jewel who come to this gem-studded court-hall and ask the name of the holy deity?
- Sarathi I am called *sarathi*, who talks with people like you.
- Balagopala Bravo *sarathi*. O *sarathi*, the supremely intelligent one, please know that I am Sri Balakrisna, who is like the moon to the ocean of Devaki's womb and Vasudeva, who is a great Lord intent upon rewarding the good and punishing the wicked in the world.
- Sarathi Now I can understand that you are Lord Balakrisna. Respected sir, may I know the reason why you left your celestial abode and came to this court-hall?
- Balagopala Bravo, *sarathi*. The reason why I came down in to this pleasant-looking court-hall is to grant the wishes of my devotees. Understand, *sarathi*?
- Sarathi Lord, whom do you bless with boons?
- Balagopala (*Sings*)
Please know that
I bless those
Who worship my feet
With wealth abundant.
O, *sarathi*, please understand that I shall grant the wishes of the devotees who pray to me. O man of glorious virtue.
(*Sings*)
I entered the ocean
And slaughtered the demon
Called Somakasura
And brought the Vedas
Bravo, *sarathi*. Listen to the story from here carefully. Please know that I am Lord Madusudhana who protected the earth by bringing the Vedas after destroying the demon called Somakasura.
- Sarathi Dear Lord, we have planned to enact a play called *Chandrasahasa*. I request you to kindly bless us.
- Balagopala Bravo, my dear *sarathi*, why not? I bless you wholeheartedly. My time is up now. May the play be enacted very happily. My dear *sarathi*, let us go to Gokula now. Do you understand me?

These dialogues of Balagopala appear to be incomplete. But in the earliest days the passage must have contained a full description of all the ten incarnations, both in prose and in song.

Entry of Characters

The good or virtuous characters cover themselves while they walk from the greenroom to the stage. But the demonic characters come on dancing right from the greenroom itself. As they come dancing and jumping ferociously in the light of torches and accompanied by drumbeats, the somnambulistic audience are awakened with a jerk as it were. Sometimes crackers are fired to add to the ferocity of the situation. In some districts the characters enter the stage

from side-wings, whereas in some others, they do so from within the audience. Whenever there is a court scene, two servants hold a blanket or a shawl until the characters occupy their seats behind it and then lift it up.

To ward off the evil eye, spectators wave lemons or coconuts or pumpkins before the characters according to their stature, and crack or break them. In some districts only coconuts are waved and cracked before all the characters no matter what their stature is. This practice of warding off the evil eye is conspicuous by its absence in the western tradition of folk drama, i.e., *yaksagana*.

Rehearsal

The movement of a chariot, war or journey and such scenes are accompanied by rhythmic singing in the background. Background singing of this type is called *talim* (rehearsal), which is in accordance with the rhythm of the horizontal drum *maddale*. In the early days, senior *sutradharas* used to show a lot of variety, which present-day actors cannot. The musical phrases like '*lali lali lalito, lali lali*', with the repetition of the 'I' sound are quite pleasant to hear. Such musical phrases are also called '*lali bidti*'. *Bols* of *mridangam* are also recited, for example, '*Tomtaka janadhim takajana tom tomtaka janato / Dhimtaka jana tom takajana takajanadhim taka janata / taita / Dhimataka janata*'. Such recitation of notes of the drum accompanied by the drone of harmonium and *shehnai*, create a very exciting atmosphere.

Other Aspects

Usually the people of north Karnataka stage a single play in a night, but paradoxically enough, even the single play contains three plays or themes and deserves to be called a trilogy. A *bayalata* like *Pramile*, for example, contains the stories of Sudhanva, Pramile and Babhruvahana. Similarly, another *bayalata* like *Devi Kathe* contains three stories of *Madhu Kaitabha Vadha*, *Mahisasura Mardhana*, and *Sumbha Nisumbha Vadha*. However, this does not rule out the possibility of the enactment of single-story *bayalatas*.

The *mudalapaya* theatre is generally said to have been nourished by amateur artists only. But an example contrary to the general supposition is provided by the Harijans of Kappagallu Bellary district, who are said to have made enactment of *bayalata* their full-time profession. Their troupe is said to have consisted of only four or five artists. Another surprise of their troupe is that an actress used to play the role of *sutradhara*. They are even said to have visited other districts with their troupe.