



Veli Rangarajan

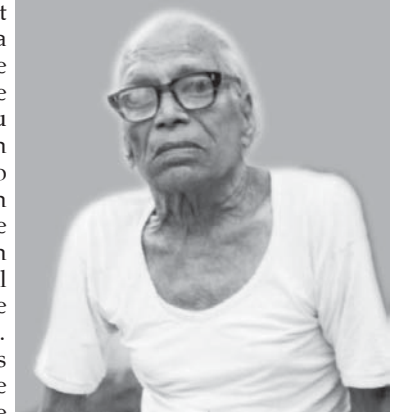
PURISAI KANNAPPA THAMBIAN: AN ARTIST WITH LONG WINGS*

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After having lived a full and contented life, Purisai Kannappa Thambiran passed away recently on October 6, 2003 at the age of 92. A committed artiste who continued to perform Koothu roles till the age of eighty-two, he thereafter involved himself in direction, scripting and composition of songs till his last day. It is indeed rare to find such commitment. The contribution made to the Koothu tradition over last 150 years by six generations of the Thambiran descendants including Veerasamy Thambiran, Raghavan Thambiran, Natesa Thambiran, Kannappa Thambiran is immense and immeasurable. To the Thambirans go the credit for establishing Koothu with a kind of classical language style in the Thondai region. When one takes into account various "schools" of Koothu such as Kongu, Southern Tamil Nadu, Thanjavur (Nartthevankudikkadu, Archuthippattu) and Thondai (consisting of North Arcot and Chengalpattu districts), the contribution made by the Thambiran descendants to modernise and create a unique style of Koothu in the Thondai region will go into the annals of the history of theatre.

It was only after a connection was established between modern theatre artistes and Koothu artistes that the aesthetics of Koothu and the underlying worldview of rural people came to be appreciated and understood from a modern perspective. In that sense, the contributions of Venkat Swaminathan, Na. Muthusamy and Veerasamy are

involvement. In the meantime, although research on Purisai Koothu by E. Krishnaiyar and Shyamla brought artistes like Natesha Thambiran into the limelight, it cannot be denied that Koothu attained a new dimension only after it came to contact with modern theatre. It must be admitted that it is an important cultural exchange within the space of theatre. Muthusamy and his Koothu-p-Pattarai troupe played a significant role in making this exchange between Koothu and modern theatre possible.



If truth be told modern theatre may have benefited more from this exchanges. Importantly, modern theatre, which believed that the literary form of the text was drama, because of the involvement of Koothu, suddenly 'saw' theatre in a whole new way and there was a complete change in perception about the aesthetics of performance. Similarly, after participating in a theatre workshop held in 1978 at Gandhi Gram, Sambantham (Kannappa Thambiran's son) trained in and familiar with Thambiran's Koothu tradition, made thematic changes. Later other like Arumugam from the Koothu tradition, obtained a degree in Drama and enhanced the interaction between Koothu and modern theatre. In this respect, Koothu-p-Pattarai laid the foundation and worked as a driving force and as think-tank for this interaction.

This interaction between Koothu and modern theatre benefited not only the younger generation of Koothu artists like Sambantham, Kashi, Arumugam, but also the older generation such as Kannappa Thambiran, who after the age of 65, spent rest of his life exploring the possibilities of new perspectives, exhibiting his maturity as an artist. In this respect, writing the script and the songs for 'Panjali Sabadam' or scripting a Koothu performance out of Gabriel Marque's story the 'Old Man with Long Wings' in association with Columbia's Mapa Troupe is an evidence of how a real artist will never hesitate to participate in the current of art. The dialogue composition of the recently staged 'Kadothgajan Vatham' performance, under the guidance of Kannappa Thambiran, in which Sambantham had a leading role, was perfect, sharp and similar to modern texts. Without any formal training in Carnatic music, Kannappa Thambiran used many classical tunes in Koothu relying solely on his experience and music sense proving the richness of folk tradition. ...

He dreamed of establishing a school for Koothu. ... Some of his Koothu works are remain still as manuscripts.

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Receiving the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award...

Courtesy: Purisai Kannappa Thambiran Troupe.

noteworthy. Particularly, Venkat Swaminathan's articles on the aesthetics of Koothu published in the Sangeet Natak Akademy's magazine drew national attention towards the Tamil folk arts. Moreover, the fieldwork carried out on Koothu and other folk forms by Richard Frasca and research students from Madurai Kamaraj University broadened this

The Tamil Nadu Eyal Isai Nataka Manram honoured Kannappa Thambiran in 1972 with the title of Kalaimamani. He has also received the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1989.



S.A. Krishnaiah



KOGGA KAMATH: AN EMINENT PUPPETEER OF SOUTH INDIA

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Kogga Kamath, who passed away recently (27th August 2003) in his native village of Uppinakudru near Kundapur (Udupi District, Karnataka), was a great folk artiste, exponent and flag-bearer of puppetry tradition of Karnataka and he was India's number one marionette player. His contribution to the Kannada, Konkani folklore, particularly Yakshagana string puppetry in Karnataka can be remembered for centuries to come. The string puppets of Coastal Karnataka, a unique performance that has retained its popularity since sixteenth century, received a good support and appreciation from the people one of the reasons could be of the Kogga Kamath's Puppet Troupe. The Yakshagana puppetry performing art takes its content from the epics and *Bhagavatha Purana*. The essential tradition has remained but many features have been added to make the effect more spectacular. The string puppet or marionette play is a popular folk art form of Karnataka and the puppets play known as 'gombe aata'. The Coastal Karnataka marionette plays are highly stylised as far as the technique is concerned and the show runs like a theatre performance. The Kogga Kamath troupe of Uppinakudru in Kundapur region has played a major role in taking this form to the mass. As a veteran artiste with his stylised presentation, Kogga Kamath, who adhered strictly to the norms and standards of 'Yakshagana Bayalata' (Folk Theatre of Coastal Karnataka), is always synonymous with the string puppetry of Coastal Karnataka. With his proficient skills, he always thought the art form in terms of new vision and worked hard for the development of the performance within the traditional perspective. He has proved that his unseen hands can create a miracle while presenting different mythological stories and teaching the thousands of audience with the simple media puppetry. With his performance excellence – powerful and mesmerising dialogue, he safeguarded the Yakshagana puppetry art throughout his life.



Kogga Kamath's son, Bhaskar Kamath receiving the Prof. Haridasa Bhat Memorial Award

Kogga Kamath was born in a poor family and he was not able to continue his education after the fifth standard because of the poverty. He went to Bombay where he worked as a cook, bookseller, and server in a hotel till he came back as his father was ill. He had to take up a small job in a tile factory at Kundapur besides his assistance to his father in his puppet performances. With the help of Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya, President of Handicrafts Board, he continued to perform the traditional art of puppetry besides his job in the tile factory. He married Lakshmi Devi in 1942 and had four daughters and one son. She encouraged him in his performances till her last breath in August 26, 2001. Like his father, Devanna Kamath (1888-1971), he also



Prof. K.S. Haridasa Bhat Memorial Award function...

introduced the Yakshagana puppet theatre tradition in foreign countries. Notably, he has inherited this magnificent art from his father Devanna Kamath, who was the recipient of President Award in 1966. Kogga Kamath was a recipient of a National Award from the Sangeeth Natak Akademy, New Delhi, the 'Tulasi Samman' award by Madhya Pradesh Government, and Kannada Rajyotsava Award from the Government of Karnataka. He has also been honoured by a number of non-profit organisations. National Folklore Support Centre (NFSC), Chennai has also honoured him with its first Prof. K.S. Haridasa Bhat Memorial Award for distinguished Kannada folk artist at a public function organised under the auspicious of Regional Resources Centre on August 21, 2003 at M.G.M. College, Udupi.

While continuing with the tradition got from his grandfather and father, Bhaskar Kogga Kamath, son of Kogga Kamath, is presently developing new staging and performing techniques to broaden the appeal of *Yakshagana Gombeyata*. Bhaskar Kogga Kamath can be contacted at:

Sri Ganesha Yakshagana Gombeyata Mandali / Uppinakudru
Sri Devanna Padmanahba Kamath Memorial Yakshagana
Gombeyata, Uppinakudru – 576 230.
Kundapur Taluk, Udupi District, Karnataka (India).
Tel: 91- 825 - 721402 (R)/ 720757(O)

"These are magnificent puppets – beautifully designed, made with activity of great craftsman, the designs, constructions and painting-all shows the love and awareness of the true artist. I am very impressed. I hope to learn from such a great Artist and Guru as Sri Kogga Kamath."

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