

Rise of Samudaaya: Theater Movement in Karnataka

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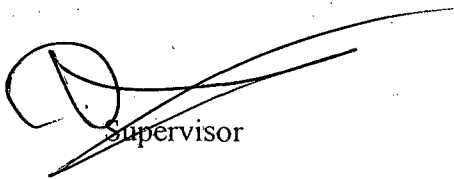
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CERTIFICATE


Certified that this dissertation title **“RISE OF SAMUDAAYA: THEATRE MOVEMENT IN KARNATAKA”** submitted by **B.A. Samvartha** is in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of this University. This dissertation has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University and is his own work to the best of our knowledge.

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled "RISE OF SAMUDAYA: THEATRE MOVEMENT IN KARNATKA " submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University.



B.A. SAMVARTHA

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&
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“... If you ask me why am I writing all these over here, it is because history of theater is not just a documentation of the names of the actors and actresses, it is also a documentation of the overall creation of theater and the struggles that have gone behind theater. Books documenting theater movements might neglect these elements hence I am writing all these here in this book...”

C.G. Krishnaswamy

(Kattaalebeladingalolagey; pg 201)

Introduction

Art to conquer the world and to gain control over the nature

“Human life on earth began lakhs of years ago, opine experts. But the cave paintings which are the documents of pre-civilization life, available to us are not more than thirty thousand years old. These cave paintings deal directly with the food gathering activity of the community; animals, hunters, weapons are the details available in these cave paintings. In these cave paintings, the researchers trace evidences hinting theatrical acts or theater performance.” (Akshara: 1994) The later makes reference to a twenty five thousand year old painting found in a cave in France¹ where a man has worn the skin of a deer and held its horns on his head. The body position of the man in the painting is said to be depicting a dancing posture. “It appears like he is involved in a pre-civilization theater activity as a performer.” (Akshara: 1994)

The author explains that during those days man, after returning from the hunt, had to communicate his hunting experiences to the people of his community. As there was no properly developed language those days there was need for him to enact the entire hunting experience in order to communicate his experience. In this process few of them had to play the role of hunters and few others of the hunted animal. It is in this enactment that man would perform a role and recreate the actual incident. “In this act there is a performer who is representing what he himself is not. The performer is making use of the oldest props of theater i.e. mask and costume. In this performance the performers and the viewers are the same community people who are turning their daily experience of hunting into a theatrical performance.” (Akshara: 1994)

These performances were not just holding communicative purpose. “Behind these performances there must have been a magical purpose. Man who was very much dependent on nature because of his poverty of knowledge regarding nature and lack of control over it must have made attempts to bring nature under control through these performances.” (Akshara:1994) The author argues that by such performance and paintings man, those days, resorted to a false belief of having control over nature.

Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya in a book written for his granddaughter Je Galper Sesh Nei, which traces the evolution of human civilization, explains the use of magic by humans during early days of civilization. “The impossible is turned possible through imagination and creating an imaginary world of magic,” he writes and adds, “Conquering the world became quite easier because of the hope the magic provided. So, this magic cannot be considered illogic and senseless. Without these magic and the creation of an illusion of conquering the world, survival would have been impossible for man during those days.” (Chattopadhyaya: 1998)

Further in the book he argues, “Man during earlier days lived in groups and every action was performed in collective. There was no hierarchy in the collective. If there was no rainfall or a delay in the rainfall they would dance in a group throwing water up in the air, towards the sky which meant imitate the rain. Thus while dancing they thought that they would overcome their fear of drought, thinking that they had conquered rain. This illusion would make them strong and more confident in their day to day work. So because of the strength these illusions would bring in, the idea of magic cannot be considered less profound, however trivial it may appear.” (Chattopadhyaya: 1998)

Such dance, song and paintings have their roots in the idea of magic, argues the Debiprasad Chattopadhyay. “During immemorial times, if the dance and songs were performed after their victory in hunting or battles, then it could have been considered as recreational activity. But man, during those days, enacted battlefield, battle and hunting before he went for hunting and before he went to battle. He would imagine and enact as if he had won the battle or had been successful in the hunt. This would boost his confidence and enter the battlefield or hunting confidently.” (Chattopadhyaya: 1998) He further adds, “Their songs were also to bring a rhythm in work and thus ensure a kind of discipline in work... Songs of cultivation, songs of cropping- many such songs were not entertainment songs for them but a part of their day to day work and thus a part of their attempts to conquer the world.” The cave wall painting also, according to the author was not for recreation. “These paintings were drawn in caves which were completely dark and some of the caves were so narrow that one could not even sit, leave standing, in these caves. If it was done for recreation or entertainment purpose why would he chose to do them in places where his fellow-beings could not see them?”

(Chattopadhyaya: 1998) With these arguments the author draws a conclusion that these forms of art were a part of illusionary conquer over the world, with the idea of magic in its heart.

Drawing our attention to the deeper quest behind the magic the author draws our attention to the difference between magic and religion. "Religion and religious practice is to please the god and thus get something in return from him/her. But magic is not to please anyone but to conquer the world." (Chattopadhyaya: 1998) Akshara K.V. in his book showing the how different the cave paintings became from earlier days to later days, in attempting to understand the body structure of the hunted animal, with intricate details, argues that the ritualistic performances within the context of religion is a continuation of the same quest to conquer the world and gain control over the world. "The theatrical performances of earlier days turned into ritualistic performances. Earlier, the entire community was a participant in the performance but later there were specified people to perform who came to be known by many names like medicine man, shaman who would perform certain rituals on behalf of the community. With this there came in the audience for the performance i.e. the community members on whose behalf the performance was being performed. To mark the difference between the performer and the audience abstract kind of costumes and make-ups were being used. While the earlier performance could have taken place anywhere the later performances had to be conducted in a particular specified space which was considered holy. Thus performance took new meanings and shapes and forms in a society which saw division of labor." (Akshara: 1994)

"An analysis of the music and dance of these nearly thirty-eight million people shows that these tribes make little or no distinction between verbal and non-verbal communication systems and techniques. Expression is total. Individuals, this expression may be free, but in group is it mostly a conditioned movement or sound directly related to life function and experience, such as the hunt etc. Also the song or the dance is a participative activity, but not spontaneous in the sense of allowing free movement. Like the tribal society, the artistic too are highly structured.

Next comes the stage of food-gathering, with a variety of magical fertility rites. Here the immediacy of life experiences is recalled in sound, rhythm and movement. Dramatic action makes its appearance for the first time; naturally, the spoken words and gestures assume

definite position. The fertility rites connected with the earth, the sun and the moon play an important part here..... There is then the organized village society whose origin can be linked with the Vedic concept of grama. Nearly 75% of the population of this country and perhaps of some other parts of Asia have lived and continue to live within this social structure. These villages have been analysed from many points of view, both historical and sociological. Here music, dance and drama have been woven into agricultural functions and are integral to the daily and annual routines of peasant.” (Vatsyayan: 1980)

Art and the social world

The seminal treatise on dramaturgy in India is Natyashastra. The text is ascribed to Bharathamuni. “Natyashastra, in the very beginning, declares the purpose of drama as capsule and present, at once and at the same time, the experiences of the world, the ways of life in the world and entertainment.” (Rangacharya: 1984) How are all these aspects encapsulated to present it to the people? The author questions and he answers the question as “acting” referring to what Aristotle in his work Poetics calls as “Mimesis”. This brings us to the two main emphasis of the treatise: Lokanurutti and Lokanukarana i.e. Happenings of the world and mimesis.

“Theater not just speaks of the happening of the world as expressed in human word and action but through acting also shows the reason behind those words and action. With this knowledge the spectator is completely satisfied. To achieve this drama invokes what is called as rasa.” (Rangacharya: 1984)

In the sixth chapter of Natyashastra the ascribed author Bharatha Muni speaks of Rasa. He speaks of eight rasas namely: Shringara, Haasya, Karuna, Raudra, Veera, Bhayanaka, Bheebhatsa and Adbhuta to mean: Love/ Erotic, Laughter/ Comic, Grief, Fury, Energy/ Heroic, Fear, Disgust and Wonder. These rasa are made to stand on eight archetypes of emotions which Bharatha Muni calls sthaayi bhaava and thirty three vyabhichari bhaava which means mentally mediated individual states.

The rasas, in collective, called Navarasa to mean nine rasas. But Bharatha Muni mentions only about eight rasas. The missing rasa in the sixth chapter of Natya Shastra happens to be Shantarasa. “Though Bharatha did not mention about Shantarasa he did mention about peace

or tranquility as one of the bhaavas.” (Bhatta: 1998) Of all those who wrote commentaries on Bharatha’s work it was “Udbhata who happens to be one of the first person to have proposed Shantarasa.” (Bhatta: 1998) But among the non discursive texts “it was the text of Ashwaghosha which first discussed Shantarasa.” (Bhatta: 1998) The first text to include Shantarasa in the list of rasa happens to be, “A Jainist text named Anuyogadwaarasootra.” (Bhatta: 1998)

“What has happened between Bharatha Muni speaking of eight rasas and Abhinavagupta arguing for Shantarasa is the spread of Jainism and Buddhism and a new kind of art produced by Buddhism and Jainism which popularized tranquility.” (Shivaprakash: 2010) Art responding to the new philosophy of new times resulted in the coming to a new rasa i.e. Shantarasa.

Art for art’s sake and art for a cause

Thus we see that the world of art has been grounded on earth through history having a close and intense relationship with day to day life and has been responding to its time in its own way. But with passing time art, as we saw the growth of ritualistic performance hand in hand with the separation of audience and performer, art became a specialized area and artists at one point of history came to propagate the idea of ‘art for art’s sake’. There was a stream which like Georgei Plekhanov believed that, “The belief in art for art’s sake arises whenever the artist is out of harmony with his social environment.”

The opposition to the stream of art for art’s sake believed, “the conception of art for art’s sake is basically elitist. The reasons for this conception to be elitist are, of course, not very difficult to observe. First, if art is only for art’s sake, then the true artist need not be involved in any kind of work. The only people who can afford to take such an attitude are those belonging to an elite. Second, and more important, if art is for art’s sake then the problems of society need not be highlighted. Of course in any society those who do not wish to portray the problems of that society are those who benefit from that society. In an unequal society this would be the elite again.” (Pani: 1979)

The minds opposed to the idea of art for art’s argued that, “All men including the artists, are social beings” and “not only is the artist a product of a given society but his art also goes on

to influence that society. To the extent that the artist accepts given social values, his art would also reflect these values. Further, his art would go on to influence others in society including other artists. Through such a process of interaction a given set of values get further entrenched.” (Pani: 1979)

In this worry about existing value system being entrenched, the conception of art by the ones opposing art for art’s sake stream of thought is visible. Within the context of theater it found its expression as, “Revolutionary Theater must, by definition, preach revolution, a radical overthrow of the political power of the bourgeois-feudal forces, a thorough destruction of their state machine.” (Dutt: 2009) These minds not saw a direct link between art and society and felt that art had certain social responsibility. Their concerns were so rooted in society that they saw art, even revolutionary art, within the framework of society. “One must understand the stage of revolution in our country before a revolutionary theater can be created. To be unaware of the present state of class struggle, the specific political demands of the proletariat at this given time, is to land in quixotism quite unrelated to the actual struggle of the masses. The plays created will parade revolution in abstract, merely as a philosophical concept, and may perhaps influence a coterie of petty-bourgeois intellectuals, but will remain abstruse and dead to the revolutionary classes. A bigger waste of time cannot be imagined. A revolutionary theater that does not aim at revolutionary masses is a ridiculous contradiction in terms. To us, the truth is concrete. It relates to a specific time, place and stage of revolution.” (Dutt: 2009)

“The increasing emphasis on monetary values slowly focuses on the increasing disparity in income distribution. The focus shifts to the fact that the worker does the work and the capitalist gains the profit. As in the meanwhile loyalty and such values are on the decline, the workers become conscious of the disparity and protest.

When the workers organize themselves against (this) conflict they would overthrow the capitalist system. This overthrow itself is not that simple as the system provides for its own safeguards. First of all, the monetary values also influence the working class leading to economisim in their demands. They do not identify the source of their problems as the centre of the system i.e., the nature of production itself. Instead they would prefer to get as much they can in monetary terms even at the cost of their long term interests. Secondly, the

disparities in the income levels lead to the hope among those who are educated that they can rise to the highest level. Now, since the uneducated do not find the time or the means to study the problems of the society, the only ones who can perhaps do so are the educated. At the same time as the educated come basically from the middle class and above, they are not really interested in bringing about any fundamental kind of change in society. They are far less interested in breaking the system which benefits them. We therefore come to an impasse—the poor have no means to be educated and the educated have no interest in helping the poor by changing the system.

When we consider the above safeguards of the capitalist system, two things come out very clearly. Firstly, not all organizations of the working class are necessarily in the long term interests of the working class. The only organizations which would serve the long term interests of both the working class and the peasantry are those which concentrate not only on economic benefits to these sections of society but also on educating the worker on how to change society.

The second safeguard, i.e., the lack of mass education, brings us back to the role of art. In a country like India where vast masses of the people are illiterate, one has to look for non-literacy forms of mass education. It is here that theatre can play a very important role. Theatre can point out the basic conflicts in society in perhaps more convincing a manner than any speech. Further, it can attack basic values which are held in a regressive society. As Badal Sircar puts it, “It can be the theater of facts.” In essence therefore as *Samudaaya* states as its basic objective, theater must be used as a non-literacy form of mass education.

This it can do by putting across progressive values and attacking regressive ones. We have seen that society moves from one stage to another and higher stage. Those forces which serve to attack the values of the lower stages and put forward the values of the higher stages can be termed progressive. For example, in a feudal situation those forces which put forward capitalist values are progressive. On the other hand in a capitalist situation those forces which present socialist values are the correct values of the progressive forces. Of course, it is possible for progressive forces to put across socialist values in a feudal situation.

If theater is to be relevant source of mass education it must put forward this understanding of society to the people.” (Pani: 1979)

These committed artists, though deeply rooted in their drive to bring a change, did not believe that art in itself can bring a change. “Art basically operates at the level of values and emotions. It can question values/ It can perhaps even provide an alternate set of values; but people are unlikely to change society on the basis of seeing plays or films. Art can at best make people question values prevalent in society. It can point to the contradictions of a society. It cannot by itself change society. It is necessary therefore for art to work with forces which bring about change. Since social change is brought about ultimately only by a political change, art can assist or hinder political change. To this extent there is a very definite link between art and politics.

Progressive politics involves understanding society and organizing forces for a political change. Progressive art must also understand society and support those forces which bring about such a change.” (Pani: 1979)

Theater on the streets and street theater

The stream of thought connecting art and social-politics spoke of art for a purpose. In one of its “militant” forms it took the shape of street theater, which according to Safdar Hashmi “is basically a militant political theater of protest,” with its function being “to agitate people and to mobilize them behind fighting organizations.” (Hashmi: 1989)

“Street theater has a long history and can be traced back to the origin of theater itself and among other things to the activities of the wandering village singers and the story tellers.” (Shirin: 2002)

“Close to the village community but a class apart is a group of professional singers, dancers, musicians and actors, who are differently classified all over India as Bhadas, Nats, Gandharvas, Vairagis, Binakers etc. This is a group for whom the performance is a vocation, not a social, tribal or agricultural function. They are in and yet out of society, a community or group recognized since the days of Panini. They move from place to place. It is this group of people who are responsible for the mobility of ideas, forms and styles between the villages

and urban centers. They have also been the vehicles of expressions of protest, dissent and reform, the carriers of reform movements and the articulators of satire and social comment and thus the instruments of socio-cultural change. The contemporary forms such as Bhavai, Nautanki, Terukhoothu, Veethiatakam, Ottanthullal, etc., belong to this group. In artistic form their technique ranges from acrobatic to pure spoken drama, The word-gesture relationship is, however, minimal. Of late these forms have been termed folk-drama, traditional theater, even street theater and folk dance.” (Vatsyayan: 1980)

“If one were to determine the tradition of street theater, one can perhaps establish many formal relationships with a number of theatrical and quasi-theatrical forms practiced over the centuries all around the world. For instance, the Bacchanalian festivals in ancient Greece, or the pageants in medieval Europe had strong elements of theater as well as social criticism of a kind. Despite their ritualistic character they very often contained ribald elements which drew strength from popular urge to deflate the gods and their human custodians. The Mountebank shows of the Renaissance (like the Madari Tamasha in India today) also had elements of social satire which were responsible in no mean measure, for their mass appeal. In India, much of the folk drama has topical allusions and comic episodes which create humor at the expense of the religious and secular establishment. The two characters most often ridiculed in our folk theater are the pundit (religious priest) and the kotwal (policeman or officer of the law)

Contemporary Indian street Theater has been drawing in equal measures from our folk and classical drama as well as from western theater. The political pamphlet, the wall poster, the agitational speech, the political demonstration- these have all gone into creating the diverse forms adopted by our street theater.

Street theater had become inevitable when the workers began organizing themselves into unions in the nineteenth century. Its arrival became imminent with the emergence of political demonstrations in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

As such, it is a twentieth century phenomenon, born of the specific needs of the working people living under capitalist and feudal exploitation.” (Hashmi: 1989)

“As its origin lie in the explicit attempt to politicize and mobilize the public for particular political ends, street theatre has take forms which len itself more to this task than the approach taken by theater in the classical sense. ‘Spectator’ is therefore, ‘a bad word’, in what Augusto Boal, describes as the *Theater of the Oppressed*. Boal believes that: *It is necessary to humanize the spectator and restore to him his capacity of action entirely. He must also be an actor- on equal plane with those who are generally accepted as actors, who in turn must also be spectators.* Modern street theater takes up this idea of blurring the distinction between performer and spectator in an attempt to ‘democratize’ the theater, both in its content, which is explicitly intended to empower the oppressed, and in its form, which negates the entire paraphernalia of the proscenium. It is a step out of the ‘pregnant dark and silence of an auditorium (even an open air one)’ and adoption of a form in which ‘the voice, the gesturem the mime, the songs, the innovations have to carry the day.’

Drawing from its origins explained above, modern street theater is generally referred to as agit-prop in character. It is regarded as propaganda against what exists, the status-quo. Another term used interchangeably with agit-prop theater is people’s theater, since it emerged out of the the belief that theater should accept its responsibilities as the social art, with the utilitarian purpose of communicating with ordinary people about the matters that most concern them.

This analysis of prevailing currents and idea forms an integral part of the street theater approach. Through an analysis and the development of a message, both about the analysis of what is wrong, an idea for what might be right and a direction for how to move forward, the street theater practitioner can contribute to the audience’s perceptions of these issues and hopefully create space for debate and mobilization for a cause.

Aside from the need for analytical work, the most basic need of a street theater practitioner is to go to people on the streets, in factories, in schools and colleges, in market and in all the places where they are. It sets up anywhere convenient. One prerequisite for this need is to be mobile and light, usually, with very little makeup or costuming. Rati Bartholomew explains: *A color or a favour or a mask may be used to present a character, various headgear to denote a policeman, a soldier or a political leader, orange for a religious figure or a mask for a judge.*

Similarly, the props used are minimum and are often created with whatever is available. So, a piece of wood might denote a dead body, blue cloth can be a river and so on. Human bodies convey doorframes, chairs, a pit and many other things. Street theater activists do not usually have the funds too but and make costumes and property for every new production. They improvise with whatever resources they have, the greatest of them being their own bodies. Also, the need to travel light and set up fast and almost anywhere, requires the groups to carry the bare minimum in terms of property and costume.

But the most outstanding aspect of street theater remains its intimate contact with the audience. The uniqueness lies in its special relationship with the audience. Unlike the proscenium, there is no organized 'holy' space to which the audience travels no dimming lights and scenery to define theater space. The performers define the theater space. The free audience gathers to jostle around that space, the playing being on the same level.

The area of performance in street theater cannot be separated from the audience because they sit or stand at the same level as the performers. The performance space is usually circular and the audience sits or stands around it. In fact, carving the performance area while maintaining its direct contact with the audience and avoiding obstructions and disturbances at the same time is one of the greatest challenges of street theater. As the street theater must go to the audience, and the audience does not come to the theater, street theater will by nature be performed in places that are the most amenable to a performance.” (Shirin: 2002)

Safdar Hashmi traces the beginning of the modern street theater to the year 1918 in Russia, the then USSR. “Street theater as it is known today can trace its direct lineage no further than the years immediately after the Russian Revolution of 1917.

On the first anniversary of the October Revolution, Vsevolod Meyerhold produced Mayakovsky's *Mystery Bouffe* in which he combined elements of the tent show with revolutionary poetry and put up in the city square for an audience of several thousand.

Similar theatrical performances remained popular in the workers' state for several years. This was the beginning of a new type of agit-prop theater performed on the streets, at factory gates markets, dockyards and so on. Avowedly political in nature, this theater sought its audiences at their places of work or residence. It became a voluntary instrument of the democratic

temper of the people and an interpreter of daily events. Mass theatrical performances were also staged in city squares and this time to mark major revolutionary anniversaries.

During the grim war years, the Soviet theater gave a mind-boggling half a million performances at the front- in drug outs, on lorries, in jungles, inside ruins of demolished buildings, on warships, inside hospitals, etc.

Street theater has taken much the same route all over the world, although under different historical circumstances. Within a few years of the modern theater reaching China in mid-twenties, its street counterparts also appeared before the assemblies of workers and peasants uniting behind newly founded Communist Party. Many mobile, open air theater troupes moved with the people's army, rousing the people to rally behind communists.

At crucial periods in their history, street theater has appeared in several countries- in Spain during the Civil War, in Vietnam all through the forty-five-long war against Japanese, French and US aggressors, in Cuba immediately after the revolution, all over Latin America and Africa during national liberation struggles.

In USA it became popular with the Mexican farm workers and the blacks as an instrument of struggle and organization. It appeared in France during the turbulent late sixties. Today it is practiced in Spain, the UK, West Germany, Holland, Sweden, USSR, Cuba, USA the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and many other countries." (Hashmi: 1989)

"This new form of theater experienced a great boom coinciding with the crisis in capitalism that occurred with the great depression of the 1930s. The depression while in some sense contributing toward the political space for street theater to broaden its pervasiveness in Europe, America and Asia, also contributed to the rise of fascism and the defeat of fascism became another of street theater's goal." (Shirin: 2002)

IPTA, Janam and the street theater movement in India

"In India, street theater emerged as a vehicle of Indian People's Theater Association's (IPTA) campaign to draw the masses of people into the anti-colonial struggle.

Immediately after independence it allied itself with the democratic forces which were continuing the fight against the economic and social oppression of the people.” (Hashmi: 1989)

“Despite its origin in the progressive cultural movements in other parts of the world, modern street theater in India developed its own style, with its own cultural traditions and molded itself according to its own specific needs. Gradually street theater travelled beyond workers’ movement into other struggles, particularly the anti-colonial struggle which gave rise to a variety of anti-establishment modes of performance. These included the traditional singing and story telling forms of the wandering minstrels and were a mixture of songs recitation gesture and movement.

Invariably, the outer shell of these forms had a religious significance. Many performers, like the Bauls of Bengal, were religious mendicants. They wandered around remote areas of the country and could easily escape the clutches of the law. There were also some secular forms such as the *Shong* in Bengal. This was a form of satire, where high-caste lords of English officials were pantomimed and ridiculed through song. The political turbulence of the 1930s and 40s resulting from the great depression, the rise of fascism and the world war two led to an even greater proliferation of these forms of street theater, culminating in the creation of the Indian People’s Theater Association (IPTA) in 1943. IPTA was the first organized theater movement in India and was brought together under the auspices of the communist party.” (Shirin: 2002)

The draft resolution of All India People’s Theater Conference reads: “This conference held under the auspices of Indian People’s Theater Association recognizes the urgency of organizing a people’s theater movement throughout the whole of India as the means of revitalizing the stage and the traditional arts and making them at once the expression and organizer of our people’s struggle for freedom, cultural progress and economic justice.

The immediate problems facing the people are external aggression by the Fascist hordes who are the deadliest enemies of freedom and culture; internal repression by an alien Government which seeks to hold our people in subjection and prevent them from organizing an effective defense of their own home-land; rapid disintegration of the entire economic life of our people

and particularly the havoc wrought on the morale and the health of our people by the shortage of food and other essential articles; and lastly the absence of sufficient unity among the people's forces which alone can compel the imperialist to retire, stop the economic disintegration of the country and defeat the Fascist aggressors.

It is, therefore, the task of the Indian People's Theater Movement at present to portray vividly and memorably through the medium of the stage and other traditional arts the human details of these important facts of our people's rights and enlighten them about their rights and the nature and solution of the problems facing them. It is the task of the movement to enthuse our people to build up their unity and give battle to the forces ranged against them with courage and determination and in the company of the progressive forces of the world. It is our task to make this movement a means of spiritually sustaining our people in this hour of crisis and creating in them the confidence that as a united force they are invincible.

For the achievement of these aims it is necessary that not only the themes of our songs, ballads, play etc. be suited to the purpose in view, but it is also essential that our productions should be simple and direct so that the masses can easily appreciate and understand and also participate in the creation and production of these. A revival of folk arts, mass singing and open air stage are specially desirable for this purpose.

In this connection we are greatly encouraged to find that under the stress of the present situation there has been developing spontaneous from among the masses, particularly the militant kisans, workers and students, a movement of songs, recitations and dances rousing the people to action against the fascist aggressors and the food hoarders and for the release of national leaders and the achievement of a national government. It is essential that this spontaneous movement should be organized and coordinated into an all-India People's Theater Movement." (Pradhan: 1979)

"Though IPTA worked primarily through the stage, its contributions to the development of street theater cannot be ignored. It was the first stage group that successfully brought a wide audience to see a series of short skits dealing with contemporary issues, largely because it identified itself as an agent social change seeking various means of social and political expression. While not taking theater to the streets, IPTA did recognize that proscenium was

not the theater of the masses and therefore introduced new forms and techniques, enabling the stage to fulfill a function of education and mobilization that is beyond the scope of proscenium theater. Remarkably, this broadening of the scope of theater impacted not only street theater movements, who see themselves as continuing IPTA's work, but also on the proscenium theater itself, which had to stand up to the challenges of this form of theater.

While modern street theater activists often see IPTA as their point of origin, the history of Indian street theater is of course much longer. Over the years, it has gone through many periods of frenzied action as well as those of apparent inaction. For instance, the street theater of the period around the revolt of 1857 or the street theaters of the Ghadar movement were all significant landmarks in its development. While there is no recorded history of this theater, Tripurari Sharma asserts that evidence can be found, for example of street theater performed in the open areas between the tents of the sepoys around 1857.

There is also evidence that the political prisoners in British jails performed plays, who could only have used the medium of the street theater given the constraints on performing in a prison. Several songs and scripts were written in jails, some of which were smuggled out and have survived in bits and pieces. This use of performance in prisons has been mentioned by many revolutionaries in interviews and in memoirs, and some of these plays and songs are still performed today. Poems written by Bhagat Singh while in jail, for example, are widely used by theater groups all over Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and several other parts of north India.

The late 1960s saw a new phase in the history of Indian street theater. While IPTA was an important precursor to Indian street theater, it was not until 1967 that IPTA's philosophy was actually taken to the street. In the words of Shamsul Islam: *When established institutions have become victims of stagnation and decadence, and have become part of the conspiracy against the people, then it is only natural that opposition should be reflected in theater. This facet of culture has played this role many times in history... Today when the state institutions have turned away from becoming the voice of the people, theater has to fulfill its historic responsibility. A loving example of this was the birth of street theater in 1967.*

This movement that started in the late 1960s grew in the form of group activity in the beginning of the 1970s. Mukti (meaning liberation or freedom) formed in 1971-72, is often

regarded as the first organized street theater group in India. Many of the most important figures in Indian street theater began their work with Mukthi.

The national emergency of 1975 banned all street theater activity. However, Mukti continued doing some work. In order to avoid the police, who knew Mukti by name, its name was changed to Jagriti (meaning awareness or consciousness) and it started performing plays based on the works of Brecht and Premchand in colleges, picnic spots and other places. The emergency taught new tactics to street theater performers. They invented new techniques and forms of presentation, in order to continue their work and yet escape the police.

One example of the new techniques is given by Shamshul of Nishant (meaning dawn) which emerged out of Jagriti: *Our actors used to pose as buyers and sellers in the Sabzi Mandi or vegetable market of Delhi. The strategy was that these actors would suddenly burst into heated arguments, for example, over the price of a vegetable or fruit. The argument would then turn into a huge discussion on issues ranging from inflation to the freedom of speech and expression. Everyone around, including the police, unaware that this was actually a street theater performance, would immediately get involved. It looked like a big public debate in progress. The idea was to raise issues of common concern by involving the people into these arguments.*

By the end of emergency in 1977, several groups had emerged on the scene. The most prominent were Jana Natya Manch (Janam) and Nishant. Janam, though formed in 1973, performed only on stage until 1977.” (Shirin: 2002)

Samudaaya

In the state of Karnataka a new theater movement started around the time of emergency which soon took over the form of street theater and not just moved to the corners and the cornered but also travelled all over Karnataka with its new concept of Jathas to reach out to the people.

Samudaaya was started in the year 1974 as a small drama troupe, sometime before the emergency declared by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The emergency period marks the breakdown of Nehruvian model of socialism. *Samudaaya* was “aligned to the leftist ideology and inspired by the Indian People’s Theatre Association.” (Lal: 2004) The aim of

Samudaaya has been “to reach out to the masses and educate them about their social, economical and political conditions, through songs, plays and pictures.” (Chandrashekhkar: 1999) The aim also was to “use theatre as an instrument of education, as an attack on feudal and semi-feudal values.” (Pani: 1979)

Samudaaya first made its mark by producing several plays in Bengaluru, the then Bangalore. The first of its production was *Huttava Badidare* directed by one of its founder Prasanna. *Samudaaya* developed eight plays during its first year. Its works included ‘*Belchi*’ based on the burning of Harijan labourers in Bihar and ‘Struggle’ about a strike in a Bengaluru, the then Bangalore, factory, dramatized by the factory workers themselves. Other plays dealt with similar themes of murders, oppression, and police brutality. One of its founders, Prasanna, directed many of plays such as *Huttava Badidare* and *Taayi* (translated from Brecht’s *Mother*) These productions helped create a distinct aesthetics and organizational identity for *Samudaaya*, which grew steadily over the next few years. Prasanna also “worked with groups in Mysore and Mangalore at the time of Indira Gandhi’s martial law. Prasanna coordinated theater of liberation groups for a one month mobile festival to combat Mrs. Gandhi’s re-election attempt in Chikamagalur district. Following the success of this venture, thirty two more units were formed working both with rural communities and with proscenium theatre.” (Yarrow: 2001) Local units started functioning at district capitals like Dharwad, Mysore, Mangalore, Raichur, Shimogga, coordinated by a central committee in Bengaluru, the then Bangalore. *Samudaaya* also arranged a series of workshops beginning with a theatre workshop under Badal Sircar.

Samudaaya “organized a major activity in the late 1970’s- two cultural *jathas*, for which several units travelled all over the state with songs, lectures, exhibition and street plays.” (Lal 2004) The *jathas* were taken in the year 1979 and 1981. The first entitled ‘towards new values’ attacked superstitions, communalism, social economic inequalities and the second one which followed the peasant uprising in Northern Karnataka, was ‘towards the peasant.’

“As the different units of *Samudaaya* were getting ready to celebrate the completion of a decade, the drought in Karnataka began to get more and more severe. How could a people’s organization like *Samudaaya* indulge in festivities when there was misery all around? They

were on the point of abandoning all programmes planned to mark the occasion when their units in the drought-ridden northern districts came out with the idea of the *jatha*. It was not enough to raise funds for drought relief. It was necessary to make people realize the truth about the recurring phenomenon attributed to nature.... After a five day workshop two groups were flagged off on April 18 from Kundapur and from Bidar in the north. They were to converge in Bengaluru, the then Bangalore, fifteen days later on May 3 for the concluding ceremony... [In north] there was no drought for humanity in the poor, unsophisticated villagers for whom they performed. These simple folks shed tears at their own plight, depicted in the plays and songs, mistook their own misery for the misery of the performers and thrust food on them. A beggar was so moved that he gave them his day's earnings... Once a drunkard interpreted the show to say, "This, really, is drama. Others do only politics. This is the first time I have seen a real play". (Chandrashekhar: 1999)

Critics like T.P. Ashok have commented saying, "In retrospect, none of these merit serious attention as classic works. All the same, being the immediate often incandescent theatrical response to events of their time and place, they retain a certain historical importance and relevance." (1995) But as observed by Anand Lal, "Although this did not result in a strong political theatre movement in Karnataka comparable to Bengali political theater in IPTA's aftermath, it succeeded in generating political consciousness through a new crop of theater practitioners from the lower classes and castes, as well as 'content consciousness' among Kannada theater workers in general." (2004)

Objective and Scope

The objective of the study is to understand the *Samudaaya* movement in its flesh and blood, which, as everyone agrees has made a strong mark in the history of the Kannada theater culture. The cultural movement surfaces in a soil which has no history of left movement. The existing literatures have recognized the strong presence of *Samudaaya* during the 1970s and 80s but, very less or no discussion has been carried to understand the emergence of such a strong movement and decline of the movement. Not much has been studied and discussed on

the impact that *Samudaaya* movement made on Kannada theater culture. This study intends to examine the long term impact of the *Samudaaya* movement on Kannada Theater.

The scope of this study lies in the fact that the *Samudaaya* movement in its commitment to reacting 'here and now' did not document much of its activities and later even theater historians have paid less attention to a vibrant movement such as this to understand it in its flesh and blood. Though like a 'lily of a day' the *Samudaaya* movement was a strong movement which moved the socio-political scenario of Karnataka to a certain extent. This study intends to fill the gap by unearthing and recovering some material of the *Samudaaya* movement and looking at it in fresh light after almost 25 years of its decline.

Research Questions

- 1. Explore how *Samudaaya*, a left cultural movement emerged in Karnataka where there is no history of leftist movement.**

Karnataka in its pre-independence times and even in the post independence times has not been a witness to any left driven movements. The first people's theater was set up in Bangalore in April 1941 it was "stalled because of police repression. Anil De Silva, who was instrumental in organizing the theatre in Bangalore, came to Bombay, where she initiated a people's theater in 1942. This became the IPTA and Bombay its head quarters." (Bhatia: 2004) Though IPTA had its unit in Bangalore, "the activities of IPTA never entered Karnataka as it did in West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Maharashtra." (Akshara: 1998) Savanuru Satyagraha and Kagodu Satyagraha were strong movements for land rights during the 60s decade but they were driven by the Lohia influenced Samaajvaadi movements not left movements. In such a context it is interesting as to how a strong left inclined movement such as *Samudaaya* emerged and worked for nearly a decade making a great impact.

- 2. Why did the *Samudaaya* movement, which was strong, get weakened in the mid-80s?**

“In 1981 there was the second jaatha but activity declined after this... *Samudaaya* continues however both to perform and to organize *jathas* periodically,” (Yarrow: 2001) but the movement has weakened. While Ralph Yarrow hints, through his bringing together of facts, that Prasanna leaving for National School of Drama in mid-80s was one of the reason for the decline of *Samudaaya* movement (2001), K.V. Akshara hints that the splitting of left ideology in the wake of post-modernism into further streams like feminism, environmentalism and Dalit movements as one of the reasons for the collapse of the left driven *Samudaaya* movement. He also raises the question, “did the dreams of revolution and progress also swallow the multiple voices and turn into a single voice like the dreams of a national theater did in the early days of independent India?” and leaves the question unanswered. But Akshara mentions almost contradicting himself by saying in the very same essay that the Dalit Sangarsh Samithi joined hands with *Samudaaya* in the movement and so did other progressive groups, to say *Samudaaya* was also a meeting point of several ideas and ideologies, which is not in tune with the argument *Samudaaya* split with the emergence of several streams of progressive ideas. “*Samudaaya* of Karnataka, however dynamic it may have been during people’s struggle of the 1970s and 80s, was finally caught in the troupes of the bourgeoisie,” commented Lokendra Arambham in the Sangeet Natak journal (2000) Diverse opinions are presented in passing but no interest has been taken to locate what caused the decline.

3. Study the long term impacts of *Samudaaya* on Kannada Theater.

“The 70s placed in the forefront the question of ideological commitment and leftist movements grew. Against this background, it was only natural that street plays gained prominence during the decade. The form questioned, altered and expanded the very concepts of literature and theatre, which was an instant demand that like language, theatre, too, be used for day to day affairs for immediate responses to social issues and as a tool for political movements and agitations. It came out from closed auditoriums and found place on the streets, enabling people to respond to it even while going about their everyday activities. This extended the idea of actor-spectator relationship and notions about acting style, costumes, props also changed

as 'meaningful functionality' became vital refrain of this theory of theatre. Although it sometimes reduced theatre to simplified sloganeering, this movement nevertheless created new images through productions like *Belchi* and *Patre Sangappana Koley Prakarana*." (Ashok: 1995) This makes us clear that though short lived a movement, *Samudaaya* did widen the horizon to an extent by challenging the form, content and purpose of theatre and shifting the space of action and space of interaction. "... it did affect a definite shift discernible by the 1980s: theater became much more aware of content, new activists from lower castes and classes participated and the amateur movement gained both an idea of theatricality as well as a sense of purpose." (Lal: 2004) The inclusive nature of *Samudaaya* including the marginalized and lower caste and class did bring about a shift also in the sensibilities of theatre. These statements are quite sweeping in nature and this researcher would like to study in detail the changes that *Samudaaya* brought in the Kannada theatre culture.

Chapterization

1. **Introduction:** This chapter focuses on tracing the brief history of *Samudaaya* movement in the context of theater history.
2. **The Emergence of Samudaaya:** This chapter will attempt to understand the eruption of left leaning cultural movement *Samudaaya* in a land which has no history of left movement. This will involve analyzing the socio-politico-cultural environ of Karnataka then and thus understand what led to the emergence of *Samudaaya*.
3. **The Praxis of Theater as Part of Other Types of Cultural Practices and the Impact of Samudaaya at Large:** This chapter looks into the involvement of *Samudaaya* in direct political activities through the *Jathas*, songs, dance etc which pushed the envelope of theater and the responsibility of theater in society. The attempt is to see how other types of cultural practices were incorporated by *Samudaaya* in their activities and what role did they play in grounding the agenda of *Samudaaya* on earth. The attempt is also to see how *Samudaaya* movement made an impact on Kannada Theater at large.
4. **The Twilight of a Radical Culture:** This chapter intends to understand the reason for the weakening of an impactful strong movement *Samudaaya* during the mid-80s.

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5. Conclusion

Though it cannot be said that no research has been done on *Samudaaya* movement it can be well said that the movement has not been taken very seriously by the theater historians and theoreticians in Kannada world. One must depend on texts, archival materials, oral testimonies, newspaper articles to give a perspective.

1. Texts on the history of Kannada Theater has been looked into to place the *Samudaaya* movement within the tradition of Kannada Theater. It was necessary to look if the seeds for a progressive movement such as *Samudaaya* was sown at a different time period which sprouted in the 70s decade.
2. Earlier studies on Samudaaya, in form of research and articles, have been looked into.
3. Texts from other streams of knowledge such as history and sociology of Karnataka were looked into to understand the undercurrent of the era in which *Samudaaya* emerged.
4. Seminar papers and lectures with regard to street theater movement in Karnataka has been looked into.
5. Samudaaya did bring out magazine of the name *Samudaaya* periodically. Back numbers of these periodicals was looked into carefully not just to put the events and programmes in a timeline but also to hear the voice of *Samudaaya* from the workers for *Samudaaya* and the literature on *Samudaaya* which was produced in parallel with the movement.
6. The autobiographies of the important theater artists of those times like C.G. Krishnaswamy (Kattaalebeladingalolagey) and Siddalingaiah (Ooru-Keri) were looked into for insights about the movement.
7. Interviews of major living playwrights and directors involved with Samudaaya movement such as Prasanna, T. Surendra Rao, I.K. Boluwar, Vasudev Uchil, Raghunanadan were interviewed.

Chapter One: The Emergence Of Samudaaya

The Seeds of Samudaaya Movement within the Realm of Theater

The first people's theater was set up in Bangalore in April 1941 it was "stalled because of police repression. Anil De Silva, who was instrumental in organizing the theatre in Bangalore, came to Bombay, where she initiated a people's theater in 1942. This became the IPTA and Bombay its head quarters." (Bhatia: 2004)

This episode from the history of theater in India and also of Karnataka speaks not just the connection between people's theater and Karnataka but also speaks about how the state of Karnataka was not ready to welcome a culture of people's theater.

But it appears like theater activities were a part of the communist party movement, though not under the IPTA banner. B.V. Kakkillaya in his autobiography titled *Bareyada Dinachariya Mareyada Putagalu* writes, "In the history of Communist Party of India, the time span between 1945 and 1947 is very crucial and significant. It was the time when the people of the nation were working towards the decisive move in bringing down the colonial power.

The Communist Party of India, those days, had emerged as a major strength, though not as a decisive strength, in the realm of politics. The colonial powers and the regressive groups of this country with vested interests too had realized the emergence of the Communists as a major strength. The Congress party was caught those days in compromising with the feudal and regressive forces of the country, in order to fight the colonial forces.

All India Trade Union Congress had a membership of five lakh and was active in all major industrial centers. This was a result of the efforts put by the communists. At the same time the All India Kisan Sabha had over eight lakh membership and was playing a key role in the farmer's movement in Andhra, Bihar, Kerala and Bengal. The student's federation, women's organizations, youth organizations were active in several states. The units of party were involved in pedagogical exercises awakening the people, through night schools and libraries. IPTA, Progressive writers movement were organized by the party inclusive of revolutionary artists." (Kakkillaya: 2003)

Though there is no direct reference made later to the IPTA in the autobiography of Kakkillaya we come across a book titled *Indina Haadugalu* to mean ‘Songs of This Day’ published by ‘Janataa Rangabhoomi, Manjeshwara’. Kakkillaya while referring to IPTA in the lines quoted above, calls IPTA as Janataa Rangabhoomi. This publication gives us a hint that there existed a cultural group, though not organized under one name or banner, which, though not a unit of IPTA, was working in the same lines of that of IPTA.

The book *Indina Haadugalu* published in the year 1952 is a collection of the songs that were sung by Venkatrao Kaandilkar. In his autobiography Kakkillaya mentions about Kandilkar singing during various occasions and events of the Communist Party.

Speaking of the years 1949-50 Kakkillaya writes, “A meet of the representatives was being held in Ullala. Around hundred representatives from Bangalore, Mysore, Bhadraavati, Daavanagere, Hubballi, Dharwad, Belgaum, Gulbarga, KGF and other places were expected.

The state level meet of the representatives held in Ullal had representatives not just from Mangalore, Udupi, Bantwala but, as expected, from outside too.

The days of underground activities were discussed. In the election for the state committee N.L. Upadhyaya was elected as the secretary. I became of member of the state committee. I was selected as the state representative for the national meet. In this meet M.S. Krishnan, M.C. Narasimhan, C.V. Krishnamurthy and many others had participated.

A public meeting was held at the *Kendra Maidan* of Mangalore, at the end of the meet. Many spoke during the occasion but the most inspiring and memorable part of the programme were the revolutionary songs by Kandilkar Venkatrao.”² (Kakkillaya: 2003)

After mentioning the song of Kandilkar in the 1949-50 state level representative’s meet Kakkillaya continues to say that the songs of Kandilkar was followed by the songs sung by “M.S. Krishnan, Malsekar of Karwara” (Kakkillaya: 2003) which is a reference to that such cultural units were operational in other parts of Karnataka too and that in Mangalore it was not just Kandilkar but there were others too who were a part of singing, which indicates that there was a group of singers.

While speaking of the district level meet of the *Raitha Sangha* (organization of the farmers) Kakkillaya writes, “It was a successful meet. It is a feather in the cap to be able to mobilize 15-20 thousand people in the Nehru Maidan of Mangalore. After the meet there was a performance of *Balyalaata*³ from the Ira Somanatheshwara Krupa Poshita Yakshagana Mandali, which went on till the breaking of dawn. Along with this there were revolutionary songs and dance performance by the children trained under Dasappa master of Vitla.” (Kakkillaya: 2003)

These performances indicate that several forms of performances were used by the Communists as a part of their programme. Though it is quite easy to conclude that these performances were merely for entertainment the kind of songs that were sung and the advertisement found in the last page of the book *Indina Haadugalu* of a book titled *Raitha Vijaya* (victory of the farmer) penned by one Gopalakrishna with the subtitle reading ‘Saamaajika Yakshagana Prasanga’ to mean ‘A Social Dance-Drama (Yakshagana) Text’ makes it clear to us that within the folk frame work of performances revolutionary ideas and contents were invoked and hints that the performances following the meets and meetings of the communists were not just for entertainment purpose but for pedagogic purposes.

But these experiments and performances do not get much of a mention in the history of theater in Karnataka, which makes it quite obvious that these performances did not catch the attention of the critics and historians or that they did not find these experiments too significant to be mentioned. Or it may also be so that like IPTA these experiments also did not move the society of Karnataka and make its presence felt in the way it did in other states. It has been documented that though IPTA had its unit in Bangalore, “the activities of IPTA never entered Karnataka as it did in West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Maharashtra.” (Akshara: 1998)

Like the experiments and performances in Mangalore and surrounding places and that of IPTA the team named ‘Chitra’ doesn’t get much of a mention in the history of Karnataka theater. The team ‘Chitra’ was “The first team to turn the course of theater history and theater movement in Karnataka” (Bettakote: 2002)

The feather in the cap for 'Chitra' is the fact it was "the first team to perform street theater in Karnataka" (Bettakote: 2002) The team Chitra was formed by A. S. Murthy in the year 1974 and "Kattu was the first street play in Kannada" (Bettakote: 2002) performed by Chitra team.

But as Bettakote observes, "though Kattu was the first street play in Kannada, it did not fit into the form of the modern street theater" and continues to say, "The Chitra team soon realized that though it has performed theater on the streets it was not street theater in its real sense and that theater doesn't become street theater just because of its performance on the streets." (Bettakote: 2002)

This realization made Chitra team re-discover the new form of and new contents for street theater and thus the *Kattu* was followed by the performances of *Bandaro Bandaru* and *Ullavara Neralu*. These performances were followed by their experiments of performing Kannada poetry, which gave a unique experience for the viewers and the performances of 'Dhanwantari Chikitse' adapted by Dr. Vijaya and Siddalingaiah's '*Alley Iddoru*', other than several other productions in the streets of Mysore, Mandya which was one of the attempts at "decentralization of theater activities in the times when theater activities were urban centric." (Bettakote: 2002)

But "these performances cannot be accepted as street theater in its strict sense because as Hashmi points out street theater, basically, is a theater of protest with political purposes. So no performances of Chitra can be accepted as street theater." (Bettakote: 2002) It is also said that "because Chitra team lacked political intentions it went unnoticed in the history of street theater and did not get any importance." (Bettakote: 2002)

Though the Karnataka chapter of IPTA, the experiments of Mangalore cultural teams associated with the Communist Party and the performances of Chitra do not have much significance in the history of Karnataka Theater, these can be seen as the precursor to a revolutionary theater movement of the later days under the banner of *Samudaaya*. These teams and experiments can be seen as the workers who made way, for *Samudaaya* in the later days, to get established.

The modernist movement in Kannada literature, called the *Navya* movement, that emerged during the sixties is said to have influenced the playwrights and the plays written post-60s in Kannada.

“The 60 decade was crucial for the developments of Kannada Theater. It was in this decade that Adya Rangacharya conducted his first theater workshop and it was in this decade that B.V. Karanath directed his first play in Karnataka. On the other hand the 50 and 60 decade was significant for Kannada literature too. The *Navya* poetry was inaugurated in the 50s by Gopalakrishna Adiga and in the 60s *Navya* movement influenced the short stories and novels in Kannada too. Slowly the *Navya* movement while expanding itself did influence the playwrights of Kannada too.” (Akshara: 1994)

“The 60s decade saw the invasion of the *Navya* movement into the world of theater too. Playwrights who did significant experiments in modern Kannada Theater involved themselves in writing of drama texts with a commendable hold on the medium of theater. With the exception of Samsa, Kailasam, Shriranga no other playwright in the *Navodaya* movement, which preceded the *Navya* movement, had not accepted the medium of theater as their primary medium of creative expression. For many in the times of *Navodaya* drama was not even a performance text. Even in the context of language usage the *Navya* writers contributed more to Kannada theater than the *Navodaya* writers... When compared to the *Navodaya* playwrights the *Navya* playwrights were more sincere and honest in their response to life through their creative expression of drama writing... The entry of absurd drama in the 60s to Kannada Theater has been well criticized because of its western roots. But when pointed at the nativity maintained by these play texts while borrowing the genre from the west, the critics were silenced.... The renovation of modern Kannada theater by incorporation of folk elements is one of the significant developments within theater in the 70s decade. The play texts which were heavy with realism and absurdity had lost their gravitation because of their intellectual nature. It is at this juncture of time that this renovation takes place. When the spectators were torn between the entertaining professional theater and the dry realism of amateur theater this renovation through incorporation of folk theater elements breathes fresh air into Kannada Theater and becomes a welcome relief for the spectators.... The *Navya* theater practitioners had the examples of Brecht in using of folk theater in

modern theater. If that was abroad, even in India the ‘back to the roots’ movement was getting strong and such experiments were being conducted in Marathi, Hindi, Bengali and other languages... All in all the 60 and 70 decade were decades for experiments and discovery and invention of a new theater. As an expansion of the same and as a response to this later we see the coming of street theater and political theater with great political consciousness.” (Marulasiddappa: 2003)

Here we can see, holding the lines of Marulasiddappa that there was *Navya* movement which pushed *Samudaya* and such theaters with political conscious to come into existence.

Speaking of the 70s decade C.R. Bhat and M.G. Venkatesh, while recollecting their 25 years of journey with *Samudaaya*, write, “In the cultural sphere especially in that of literature and theater the major undercurrent was *Navya*. Due to western influence, in the field of art and literature, there were many experiments that were being conducted with form and content. Karanth, Karnad, Shriranga, Champa, Lankesh, Kambar and others enabled theater attract a large crowd of middle class, through their innovations and experiments..... Though there was a rise in the art that upheld the slogan of ‘art for art’s sake’ there were debates about art being for art’s sake exposing the hollowness and limitations of such an approach and at once and at the same time there was a search for an alternative. As a result of this the approach to art which aspired to bring a change, to provoke and not please and create a new movement, started to flower from its bud form..... Amidst this new awakening *Samudaaya* was born to promote theater with social commitment.” (Bhat and Gundanna: 2000)

The same streak of thought has been expressed in the constitution of *Samudaaya*. The first line of its resolution reads: *Samudaaya* reject the stream of thought declaring art as ‘for art’s sake’ and believes that art is for the sake of better life.

Seeds of Samudaaya Outside the Realm of Theater

Prasunna, in one of his articles for the *Samudaaya Vaarthapatra*, a periodical brought out by *Samudaaya*, writes, “In recent times political plays are on the increase. Outside the plays performed as a part of protest, street-plays and other didactic plays the other plays performed at Kalakshetra⁴ has also imbibed political consciousness..... The days when *Samudaaya* appeared out of the box for its political plays such as ‘Taayi’ has changed now and politically

conscious plays have become common. If one has to find reasons for the same there are two main reasons for it. One, the political condition of this country has collapsed to such an extent not just the middle class of this country but also the upper-middle and upper class sections of this nation have gotten worried about the situation. Theater which has been a part of their life has started reflecting these worries and dissatisfaction of theirs. Two, political consciousness in theater is a phenomenon not just in Indian theater scenario but is also prevalent in other countries.” (Prasunna: 1981)

In another article of his in *Samudaaya Varthapatra*, Prasunna after speaking of the shift that appeared in the kind of plays being written Kannada juxtaposes the plays written during the early 70s and late 70s and hints that the change in socio-political situation of the country has also played a role in bringing about this shift. Hinting this he writes, “All these changes (post-Independence India has not seen such a huge change in its thirty years as much as it has seen changes in the past five to six years) though major, cannot be seen as a fundamental change in the political structure. But these changes have to be viewed as the situation created by the crisis this country is undergoing.

The ruling party, instead of solving the crisis has itself become the reason for the crisis. The independence of 1947 did not inaugurate a golden age in the history of this country. All the expectations of the Congress party did not come true. Turtle’s walk continued. Congress spoke of socialism but kept one of its leg in capitalism and the other feudalism. Yet Congress continued to remain in power, thanks to the devotion people have had for Gandhi, Nehru, Congress, elections, police and courts.

The middle-class which could not achieve any change was disappointed. This class yet was not divorced from the desire to move up the socio-economic ladder. The ones who could bring the change did not have the power of literacy. The ones who possessed it were lazy. The ruling class couldn’t have asked for anything more than such a situation, which protected its interests.

But the situation did not continue to remain the same. The economic crisis which had sucked the farmers and labourers, exploded and absorbed the middle-class too. Along with this there came Emergency which not just scared the apolitical people of this nation but also brought a

new awakening in them.” (Prasunna: 1983) In the very same article Prasunna says that the new kind of plays being written in Kannada emerged out of “historical necessity” and “historical pressure”.

This historical necessity and historical pressure was the reason not just for the emergence of new kind of plays but also for new kind of theater i.e. street theater and also for theater groups with new approach towards art and life, such as *Samudaaya*.

Though it is popularly believed that *Samudaaya* took birth as a protest against and as a response to the Emergency declared by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in the year 1975, the truth is that *Samudaaya* had come into existence even before emergency was declared. But it was born “as a response to the crisis of pre-emergency and emerged as a force through its responses in the post-emergency period.” (Bettakote: 2002)

C.K. Gundanna explains the situation of those days in an article of his where he recollects his association with *Samudaaya*. He writes, “Year 1975. The politics of the country was undergoing change. The dark times of Indira Gandhi’s dictatorship was casting its shadow of the entire nation. The freedom of speech and expression was targeted by the Congress government of those days. The working class and the intellectual class of the nation who maintained the equilibrium of and peace in the country were attacked by the government... At such a point of history few individuals in the city of Bangalore were sketching the idea of a new theater troupe. Of these few were from the University of Bangalore and others employees in other organizations who all had a concern for social issues. In the lead, of this group, was Prasunna who believed that through theater society can be changed and the torn parts can be stitched.” (Bhat and Gundanna: 2000)

These few individuals included, other than Prasunna, K.V. Narayan, Nissar Ahmed, M.K. Bhat, C. Veeranna, D.R. Nagaraj, Mohan Kondajji, Nagari Babayya and Ki. Ram. Nagaraj and all of them met in the campus of Central College on a daily basis. It was Ki. Ram. Nagaraj who gave this troupe the name *Samudaaya*.

As observed by Hema Pattanshetti, “In the year 1975 in the Kannada world, especially in the surroundings of Bangalore University left leaning thoughts was in the air. These leanings had not yet taken a form of a party or had formed completely as a political ideology. In such an

environ Prasunna joined the team of intellectuals who, with great authority, could speak of politics.” (Pattanashetti: 2000) This group of intellectuals and artists finally formed the troupe *Samudaaya*. This not just shows the ideological grounding *Samudaaya* has but also shows that left leaning thoughts were already getting popular and reaching the people and also becoming the preoccupation of the people. It is in such an intellectual atmosphere that *Samudaaya* emerged.

As pointed out by Prasunna a similar kind of theater was being done in other parts of the world too. This pushes us to ask if the other parts of the world were also undergoing such political change. While placing the Naxalbari Movement in the global context Sumanta Banerjee writes, “To get back to the birth and spread of the Naxalite movement in the 1960-70 period, apart from exploring its domestic roots, it is also necessary to locate it in the contemporary international situation. The radical upsurge in different parts of the world at that time was marked by rereading Marx to rediscover the sources of revolutionary humanism that could inspire individual courage to sacrifice for a cause. The general trend was towards a return to the moral fervor and spontaneity of the early days of the revolutionary movement which inspired communists, socialists and anarchists alike, and was exemplified by the predominance of morality over political expediency. This was reflected in the civil rights and anti-war movements in the USA; in the students’ agitations in Western Europe, which rejected both the State’s promises of affluence and the established Left’s bureaucratic torpor and sought to revive the past socialist notions of self-management and self-representation; in Che Guevara’s self-sacrifice in the jungles of Bolivia in pursuit of the old dream of international solidarity of all revolutionaries, and in China’s Cultural Revolution which in spite of excesses, errors and crimes committed in the name of Marxism, was initially motivated by the Rousseauan emphasis on transforming the individual, and the reiteration of the doctrine that sovereignty lay with the people.” (Banerjee: 2008)

This global scenario of the 1960-70 can also be seen as a force that created an atmosphere for the emergence of *Samudaaya*, which identified itself with the left politics. This global left upsurge and the upsurge of the left in Karnataka were the political-intellectual forces acting along with the political developments in Karnataka which made road for a movement like *Samudaaya* to walk in.

H. Janardhan, in one of his speeches, said it directly, “In those days (70s) the intellectuals with leanings towards socialite and leftist ideology and organizations with such leanings initiated several shifts in cultural practices. *Samudaya* took birth from such a situation and went on to become a movement and not just an organization” (Kundur: 2002)

“The commitment that Kannada theater found for itself in the seventies decade was a result of the churning in political, social and cultural fields. On one hand the Dalits who were illiterate for centuries were not just becoming literates but also were demanding for their rights and organizing themselves under the banner of *Dalit Sangarsha Samithi*. On the other hand the farmers were uniting under the banner of *Raitha Sangha* and demanding for their rights. In parallel to this the Lohiaites, Marxists were also emerging as a force.” (Halemane: 2004)

“The opportunity for education after independence ushered new thinking among Dalits. One of the causes for the emergence of Dalit movement in Karnataka was the speech by Basavalingappa. Basavalingappa was then one of the ministers in the Karnataka Government. He was invited for a function in Mysore. The in his speech on ‘Tadition, Social Structure and New Views’ he said that Kannada literature was *Boosa* literature.” (Vijaykumar)

Prithvi Dutta Chandra Shobhi, in the introduction to the second edition of D.R. Nagaraj’s book *The Flaming Feet and Other Essays: Dalit Movement in India*, writes, “On 19 Novemeber 1973 Basavalingappa addressed Dalit students at a seminar organized by the University of Mysore and characterized Kannada literature as *Boosa* (Rice Husk), fit only for cattle; he advised his audience to study English to improve their status in contemporary world. Basavalingappa regarded English as an instrument of emancipation. This conscious positioning of English located Kannada as the repository of a culture which promoted inequality and denied opportunity for Shudras and Dalits to articulate their aspirations. Basavalingappa’s critic not only resulted in a cultural debate concerning ideological influences on literary production it also attracted angry responses and strong criticism from the dominant caste.

In fact instant unrest ensued. Upper caste students took to the streets prompted by their political leadership. Many leading Kannada writers took offence and criticized

Basavalingappa. The incident took an overtly political turn when the majority of ministers in the Devaraj Urs cabinet resigned. Mounting student's unrest took its toll on campus life where pitched battles between upper caste students and Dalit students supporting Basavalingappa took place." (Nagaraj: 2010)

From the autobiography of Dr. Siddalingaiah titled *Ooru-Keri* it can be learnt that at almost the same time of the *Boosa* Movement, Periyar Ramaswamy Iyengar had come to Bangalore and also about a seminar held by the radical students.

"Periyar Ramaswamy Iyengar was invited to Bangalore. Many protests were held against his coming to Bangalore... Slogans were cried against him, outside the hall, when he arrived. We started crying slogans in praise of him... Periyar began his speech by saying: *Kadaval illai, kadaval illai, kadaval illave illai. Kadavalai karpittavan mutthala, kadavalai parapiyavan ayogyam, kadavalai karpittavan kattumerandi* (God doesn't exist, god doesn't exist, god doesn't exist at all. The one who created god is a fool, the one propagating the idea of god is useless and the one bowing down to god is a wild-animal)... He asked, will not the mice get crushed if the heavy-weighing Ganesha sat on it? If Parvathi were to create Ganesha from the dust accumulated in her body, since how long had she not taken bath?" (Siddalingaiah: 2000)

The seminar organized by the radical students was "against superstition" and was holding, in its heart, the "will to fight for a caste-less and class-less society" (Siddalingaiah: 2000)

It can be understood that a radical intellectual stream had started flowing in the land of Karnataka during the 70s decade. This radical thought was getting voice in different mediums and its expression through the medium of theater was inevitable. So, the coming of *Samudaya* to existence could be understood as a result of the radical atmosphere that was getting strong and intense in Karnataka, at that point of history.

"Karnataka," observes Narendra Pani, "is generally associated with tourist guide impressions of a beautiful and docile state. To the people of this state is attributed neither the rugged individual outlook of the Punjabi nor the culture conscious artistic image of the Bengali. This image of the Kannadiga being docile and subdued is perhaps not very wrong. Its roots can be traced to a history which in spite of a strong culture has not been one of continuous struggle.

The changes which have occurred have very often done little to upset the value system of the Kannadigas. This process has further strengthened the feudal values which seem often to be all comprehensive.

Even as Karnataka moves from a feudal economic system to a capitalist one, there are notable traces of the feudal system being made use of by the capitalists. This is done partly by the landlords themselves becoming capitalists. For instance, in villages around Bangalore one sees a tremendous investment in agriculture. This investment is coupled with a very low wage rate as well as an element of bondedness. The servility of the people to the landlord is made use of by the landlord turned capitalist. As such there exists a situation where the agricultural wages are almost half of those prevailing in the neighboring Kerala and Tamil Nadu and yet there is a lack of any large scale protest movement.

This servility has also been made use of in the political sphere. As we have seen earlier, the concept of the benevolent dictator arises out of this servility. It arises out of a belief that whatever benefits which are given to the masses are due to the benevolence of the ruler and not because of any rights of the masses themselves. As such there exists an unquestioning attitude of the ruling political leaders. This attitude is combined with the gratitude which arises from most meager economic benefit. The ruling party leaders in Karnataka have made full use of this. They have on the one hand built images of superhuman beings around themselves and on the other they have given bits of land from excess Government land to areas where there seems to be the possibility of discontent. When this land is given even to only two or three people, the rest of the people in the area also support for the same forces in the hope that they will be the next beneficiaries.

This overall socio-political situation is reflected to a great extent in the feudal ethos which holds Karnataka today. Protest is sporadic. No movements of any major nature have really developed. The air is generally one of unquestioning belief. This ethos necessarily reflects itself in the cultural field too. It becomes tremendously difficult to make people question. In fact, it is only when one attacks the unquestioning belief that there is some semblance of protest. This protest, given the strength of the beliefs, is, however, against those who are not willing to question them. A clear example of this process is *Samudaaya's Kuri*." (Pani: 1979)

In these lines Narendra Pani not just explains the social atmosphere of the times when *Samudaaya* came into existence, which makes it clear of the kind of situation which brought, out of historical pressure and historical need, *Samudaaya* into existence, but also speaks of the kind of apathy that he observes to be existing in Karnataka for social and political movements.

Quite disagreeing with the Narendra Pani line of thought, T. Surendra, counter argues by saying that the *Kagodu Satyagraha* that left a mark in the history of Karnataka took place in the 50s decade though a Lohia influenced Samajvaadi movement and not a proper left movement, can be said as one of the precursor to the left leaning cultural movement of *Samudaaya*, for it did create the temper and atmosphere for the movement. T. Surendra Rao believes, “Karnataka has a history of movements. Be it the 12th century Vachana movement or the *Kagodu Satyagraha* or the *Samudaaya* movement. What we see is a progress in the movements. After the socialite movement of Kagodu, the historical progress was to come in the form of a proper left movement and it came in the name of *Samudaaya*.” (2011) The historical progress indicates that the previous movements made space for the movements of the next level. With this as the base, we can also see the earlier movements as a cause for the emergence of the left leaning *Samudaaya* movement in the 70s decade.

To uphold the voice of the marginalized and oppressed

The constitution of *Samudaaya* reads: *Samudaaya* intends to respond to the anxieties and aspirations of the people especially the marginalized and the oppressed. It is believed by *Samudaaya* that it is a historical responsibility on its shoulder to fight the deep rooted caste system, superstition, communalism and other anti-people, anti-life elements to replace them with scientific temper and for the overall development and progress of civilization. We support all forces which strive to build a world where there is no oppression. *Samudaaya* also works for universal peace, unity of society, democratic values and national freedom.

The lines from the constitution of *Samudaaya* gives a glimpse of some of the social evils that were prevalent in the society then (and continues to exist now too) which were identified by *Samudaaya* as an evil and had decided to fight them.

While documenting the coming of Periyar to Bangalore Siddalingaiah narrates the episode of the evening of the programme. “That evening Periyar and other leaders were indulged in an intense debate at the Yadav hostel in Gandhinagar. Agrahara Krishnamurthy and I got bored and came out after a while. The anti-Periyar group, which had assembled in the park opposite the hostel, attacked us and trashed us. My lips got slit and started bleeding. Even the leg was injured and made walking a difficult exercise. The ones who attacked us reached the police station even before us and complained against us saying we attacked them. We got arrested.” (Siddalingaiah: 2000)

The seminar organized by the radical students also, as documented by Siddalingaiah in his autobiography, ended up being attacked. “We had called it a seminar against superstition. Some of them argued saying superstitions are good and should continue to exist in the society. Some questioned us how were we born if there was no god. Birth is caused by sexual contact of a male and a female; it had to be explained to them. During my speech I said caste should be wiped from the society. As I uttered these words, somebody from the audience asked where caste in the society was. As a response somebody said, if caste is vanished then agree for an inter-caste marriage where our boy will be married to one of your girls. This answer angered the group which questioned. They attacked us with cycle-chain, dagger and iron rods. The radicals, who were unprepared for such an attack, fought these goons bare handedly. This fight went on for an hour. As it was in the University campus, the police did not interfere. Many of us got injured badly.” (Siddalingaiah: 2000)

In his introduction to the book of D.R. Nagaraj’s book, Prithvi Dutta Chandra Shobhi, documents about the attack on the supporters of Basavalingappa during *Boosa* Movement. “Nagaraj’s teacher Prof. Marulasiddappa a leading scholar of Kannda Theater recalls an incident when Nagaraj ran into his office to escape from upper caste students who were chasing him. Similarly Siddalingaiah and others were under constant threat and rarely slept in the same hostel room or house for two consecutive nights. Many other supporters of Basavalingappa were advised by relatives not to visit their villages in Southern Karnataka.” (Nagaraj: 2010)

In an interview to the *Samudaya Varthapatra*’s special issue during the 1981 Jatha, Dalit writer Devanur Mahadeva said, “We are living in such dark times that it is not enough even if

the *Jathas* are taken to every door. Inside the skull of the people there is no brain. It is filled with the shitty ideas of caste and untouchability. We need to change this. We need to clean the shit from the skulls of the majority of the population and then replace it with a sane brain. All our cultural movements should keep this in mind and work towards this end.” (1981)

The society, with the new awakening of the Dalits through education, was still regressive and the new awakening did anger the majority who could not stand the awakening of the till then oppressed. This led to another kind of oppression of the already oppressed, trying to stop them from waking up and demanding for equal rights and rights of equality. C. Basavaligaiah, in his speech during a seminar on street-theater, recollecting the 70s decade said, “In the 70s in broad day light women and dalits were being burnt alive, inequality was being sown in the soil of this state... land, women, dalits all were exploited and value system had collapsed.” (Kundur: 2002) While Siddalingaiah’s poetry was voicing the oppression of the marginalized, similarly these oppressed and suppressed voices had to find its voice in theater too. *Samudaaya* with its social concerns emerged as a voice of the marginalized of the society.

Though one section of the Dalit and the marginalized class had got exposed to education and a new awakening had dawned on them, the major portion of this population was still illiterate and had accepted exploitation silently. So, along with becoming the voice of the marginalized and the oppressed there was also a need to speak to the marginalized and the oppressed. This is also one of the historical pressure and historical necessity which led to the emergence of *Samudaaya*. This can be well understood by the editorial of K.V. Narayan in the very first issue of *Samudaaya Vaarthapatra*. He wrote, “How to communicate when a major chunk of the population is illiterate? Speeches and radio are good but not enough. More importantly the medium of radio is not in our hands for its control and ownership is in the hands of the state. Now we are left with only one medium that of theater. Some might ask if it will not lead to a kind of propaganda. We are not to make value judgment through theater but push the viewers to think by exposing the multiple sides of the society by making them a part of the play’s content. We should make the viewers look at their own lives, after the play and not just feel pleased after watching it. One might feel that it is inflaming the viewers but as I said earlier our theater must be in such a way that it shouldn’t just anger the

viewers but provide them with insights and make them think about the issues. This, I know, cannot happen just with theater. Many other activities should go hand in hand with theater activities and should involve people and there should be a great people's participation in these activities only then we will be able to witness some kind of change. I know, it is not as easy as speaking. But, we should think in these lines. Shouldn't we?" (1977)

Thinking in these lines, *Samudaaya*, started not just a street theater movement but also film clubs, first in Udupi and then in Bangalore, and library movement in Dharwad. The earlier one was quite a success, as Prasanna recollects (2011) but not the latter one. But these were all within the larger idea of decentralization and expansion of *Samudaaya*.

Decentralization and breaking of the proscenium

H.S. Shivaprakash, in the souvenir brought out during the *Samudaaya*-20 celebration, wrote, "The achievement of *Samudaaya* includes, breaking the walls of Kalkshetra, and taking theater activities outside of it and to different districts, through its district units. This is a kind of decentralization and its incorporation of street-theater, soon after coming to existence, is also a kind of decentralization, which again must be counted as one of its achievements." (1995)

Ellinda Bandirendu

Keluteeri Neevu

Janara Naduvininda Endu

Heluteevi Naavu.

Munde Payana Elligendu

Keluteeri Neevu.

Mattey Janara Balige Endu

Heluteevi Naavu

This theme song of *Samudaaya* in translation would mean:

You ask

Where have we come from

Our answer:

We were amongst the people and have come from there

You will ask then

Where our journey is heading

Our answer will be:

Back to the people again...

This theme song of *Samudaaya*, in short explains the commitment the troupe had towards the people. So, once it started because of the historical pressure, historical need, as a next level of the movement in the history of Karnataka, it had to decentralize theater and thus not just expand its reach but also reach the corners and the cornered for the cornered were one of its major concerns.

In his autobiography, C.G. Krishnaswamy, writes about the meeting where the decision for such decentralization was taken and mentions that it was also an inclusive politics. “We were faced by the question, how to give a political form to the organization and include new members. As an answer to this it was decided that we should not restrict theater activities to the city of Bangalore and should be taken to different districts. This suggestion came from the leaders of the Marxist party. When discussion proceeded in the same lines it was decided to start different units of *Samudaaya* at district level.” (Krishnaswamy: 2002)

“As a part of the expansion programme a unit of *Samudaaya* was set up in Mysore. This unit was started with the production of *Thayi* using local talent. It was a resounding success...

The Mangalore unit of *Samudaaya* started with *Marichana Bandhugalu* (Marich’s relatives). This was a translation from Arun Mukhopadhyay’s original Bengali play. Later on the Mangalore unit followed up with Krishnaswamy directing his *Panchama* (The fifth one).

At this time it was also decided not to restrict *Samudaaya* to theater alone. The idea of Film Society Movement as well as a Library Movement got favour within *Samudaaya*. The first Film Society was started by the Udupi unit of *Samudaaya*... At the same time the Dharwar unit of *Samudaaya* was started around a Library movement. This unit also put up *Panchama* directed by Gangadharswamy.

The Raichur unit of *Samudaaya* has to its credit perhaps the best coverage of surrounding areas. Not only villages but also nearby towns and cities....” (Pani: 1979)

C.K. Gundanna and M.G. Venkatesh wrote, “The changed situation in January 1977 enabled *Samudaaya* establish its units in Dharwad, Raichur, Gubarga, Udupi, Shimogga, Bhadravati and other places, in great speed, and start theater activities at district levels.” (Bhat and Gundanna: 2000) indicating the lift of emergency played a role in the expansion of *Samudaaya*.

Though these developments took place after *Samudaaya* came into existence, the emergence of these developments is significant because these developments shaped *Samudaaya* as it is understood now.

The founding member of *Samudaaya*, popularly known as the founder of *Samudaaya*, Prasunna said, “We wanted to move theater activities out of Kalskhetra first then we found the need to move it out of the proscenium structure too.” (2011) He said, “The proscenium theater, as explained in Bharatha’s Natya Shastra, was constructed, in its rudimentary form, to keep out a certain section of people who were known as *Asuras*. The idea of proscenium in its idea holds a certain exclusion politics and not inclusive. This had to be broken. So we got on to the streets with the form of street-theater and also took out state wide *Jathas*.” (2011)

Samudaaya did start with proscenium theater and then took on street theater, though did not give up performing plays in the proscenium theater. There could have been other reasons, other than the inclusive politics, which could have led the team to take on street theater. This can be traced by the history of other street theater movements in India especially that of *Jana Natya Manch* or *Janam*, which was operating at the same time as *Samudaaya* was.

Molyashree Hasmi, in an interview said, “Although initially *Janam* didn’t do any street theater of the kind that we are doing now, but in one sense the basic motivation of doing theater was much the same, which was taking theater to the people. So even our large proscenium productions were very rarely confined to auditorium spaces, they were usually in the open where we should erect makeshift stages. Those days we went a lot to the rural areas. Plays like Ramesh Upadhyay’s *Bharath Bhagya Vidhata* and Sarveshwar Dayal Saxena’s *Bakri* were performed in front of large audiences of thousands.

After the emergency, we found that the organizations for which we performed earlier could no longer afford the expenses of the large plays. They had suffered in the emergency, and the priority for them was to reorganize themselves. Many comrades told us: we need your plays in our effort to reorganize, but we cannot pay for them. Can't you do something cheaper?

That was the motivation for street theater

We thought if we can't take big theater to the people, we can take small theater to the people- these were actually Safdar's words. That's when we started looking at small plays. But whatever we looked at, nothing excited us. So we took a very major decision in *Janam*, which was an important turning point- a creative turning point- that we could write our own plays. After brainstorming and discussions in *Janam* and with our trade union friends in the CITU, Rakesh Saxena and Safdar penned down *Machine*, first performed on 15 October, 1978" (Deshpande: 2007)

"The street theater workers of the present generation, unlike the pioneers of the forties and fifties, have become more conscious of its distinctly formal aspects. While unabashedly accepting the ideological nature of their theater and its unconcealed alignment with political forces, they are no longer producing only poster plays.

In our view there are two reasons for this new development.

Firstly, in our cities with one or two exceptions, there is no tradition of theater going. The masses of our urban population have never been to a theater. Our theater, even the best of it, has remained mostly confined to a very select group of theater goers.

The theater, on its part, has also not been addressing itself to the common, working people. If our urban theater has been a major cultural force- a living and popular art form reflecting hopes, as aspirations and struggles of the people- then perhaps our street theater too would have remained only a functional propaganda device, surfacing every now and then to focus attention on burning issues. But since our mainstream theater is by and large out of tune and touch with the majority of our people, the need remains for a fully developed people's theater, a theater which is available to the masses. The street theater workers now have firsthand experience of the artistic inadequacy of poster plays. Such plays serve a purpose,

but they satisfy neither the people's need for a fuller theater, nor the actors' and directors' carving for more challenging and stimulating material. Since conditions have continued to be unfavorable for a mass expansion of Proscenium Theater, they have been seriously seeking to develop street theater itself. Secondly, their long association with street theater has gradually opened before them, the unforeseen possibilities of the development of flowering of street theater into a full-fledged art form. The circular acting area, the conditions of performance, the proximity of the actor and the spectator have all demanded a new acting style, new dramatic structures, new writing skills, a new kind of training, a new use of music, verse and chorus and a new method of theater management. Even the audience-performer relationship in street theater is something unique and demands have already led to some amount of serious work on the language, structure, grammar and aesthetic of street theater." (Hashmi: 1989)

In his paper, read in the 2002 seminar on street theater in Mysore by Janamana, H.S. Umesh opined, "When watched closely the street plays performed in the 70s decade it becomes quite obvious that they were not a spontaneous or immediate reaction to the situation but reactions with great insights. Behind such insightful reactions there must have been a long meditative period... This keeps happening at a subconscious level and these insights, gathered by experience, keeps waiting for a touch by an external force to explode. When there is a rub with an external factor these insights come out in one or other forms of expression. The reactions of the 70s were that sort of reaction where the thoughts expressed through theater were waiting for an outlet and when the time was ripe, they found a voice of expression..." (Kundur: 2002)

This observation of the street theater movement by H.S. Umesh is extended to the emergence of *Samudaaya* and if the emergence of *Samudaaya* is understood in the light of the insight that H.S. Umesh provides for understanding the street-theater of the 70s it can be understood that the intellectual preparation for the movement of the nature of *Samudaaya* was happening with the increase in leftist thought, pushing many intellectuals and artists to a meditative state. With this there were external factors like the atrocity on the marginalized and oppressed, restriction of theater to the urban society, the *Navya*'s movement's influence making theater borrow the style of absurd theater, the emergency which chained the freedom of intellectuals

and artists and the disillusionment caused by the Congress government leading to socio-economic crisis, which when came in contact with the ideological meditations led to the emergence of *Samudaaaya*.

Chapter Two: The Praxis of Theater as Part of Other Types of Cultural Practices and the Impact of *Samudaaya* at Large

Samudaaya which was born with a political agenda with it, did not restrict itself to just performing plays but also through praxis of theater as a part of other types of cultural practices made its attempt to bring about socio-political changes. One of the major cultural practices that it incorporated was that of *Jathas*, which it took out all through Karnataka in the years 1979, 1981, 1986 and more. But before it incorporated the concept of *Jatha* it took an active participation in the 1978 Lok Sabha bi-elections when Smt. Indira Gandhi contested from Chikamagalur of Karnataka.

The participation of Samudaaya in the Chikamagalur Lok Sabha bi-election

“The Government in the centre had changed in the year 1977. In the history of India for the very first time a non-Congress Government had come into power. Seeking re-entry into the Sansad Smt. Indira Gandhi decided to contest for the bi-elections in 1978 from Chikamagalaur. The opportunity was made available to her by Shri D.B. Chandregowda who resigned from his Sansad position and made way for a bi-election.” (Bhat and Gundanna: 2000)

As recollected by M.G. Venkatesh and C.R. Bhat, “The bi-election of 1978 at Chikamagalur was considered by *Samudaaya* as a political battle against dictatorship and organized many songs, street plays and poster presentation.” (Bhat and Gundanna: 2000)

C.G. Krishnaswamy, in his autobiography, documents the meeting that was called soon after the by-elections were announced, where artists and intellectuals met. “The bi-election at Chikamagalur was announced. Once it was confirmed that Indira Gandhi was contesting from Chikamagalur, with the help of Shudra Shrinivas, at R.V. High school, I arranged for a meeting inviting all active social activists and cultural activists. That particular meeting was a very significant one. Prasanna was out of town hence he could not participate in the meeting. Shriranga, Lankesh, Venkata Subbaiah, J. Lokesh, B.V. Rajaram, B.V. Vaikuntaraju and others were present at the meeting and in voice opined that we all should take part in the Chikamagalur by-election. To the best of my knowledge, all theater groups except for

Nataranga team were present in the meeting that day. Shrirang wrote *Prajaprabhutwa Lolalotte*, Lankesh wrote *Muddu Magana Maruthi Caru* and Siddalingaiah wrote *Nelasama*. This new team was called *Vedike*. I stood as the convener of it. By then I had directed the play *Belchi. Samudaaya*, then, decided to protest through poster exhibition. The head of Prajavani, Harikumar agreed to provide with news print for the posters. The bottled up anger, with a proper opportunity, can shake the Himalayas, it appeared to us. This fight was considered as a fight for the resurrection of freedom, by all of us.” (Krishnaswamy: 2002)

The entire experience of *Samudaaya* in the bi-elections was summed up by S. Malathi, in the November 1978 edition of *Samudaaya Vaarthapatra*. She was the editor of the magazine then. Her report reads, “It was decided by *Samudaaya* to participate in the Chikamagalur Lok Sabha bi-election and attempted, through plays based on real life incidents, to bring about a collective awakening and bring about a mass education through theater. Fifty members of *Samudaaya*, broken into four groups travelled around the different taluqs of the election constituency and gave over 350 performances which were viewed by over seven lakh people.

The duration of the plays performed by us would not exceed half an hour. We would also sing the songs written exclusively for the current movement on current scenario (written by Siddalingaiah). There was a need to speak directly and hit the nail on the head. Bringing in the local political angle the plays was also the need of the hours to reach out to the people.

The plays performed by us were *Jeetada Sangappana Koley*- based on the articles published in the *Panchama* magazine-, *Indira Gandhiyavara Sullu Pramaana Patra*, the short-play based on the Turk Men Gate incident of Delhi, scripted by Siddalingaiah and other skits based on the atrocities that took place during election campaigns, atrocities during emergency. An attempt was made to provide insights into several other issues such as the caste issues, the harijan issues, issues of unemployment through these plays.

Day and night, we visited all the villages and performed plays, without break. Every group would give 6-7 performances a day. Our artists would go, by walk, to the villages without bus facilities and make announcements about the play by beating the drum. Within half an hour people would gather, who would watch the play patiently and in great interest. At some places the play would be followed by protests voiced through slogans in favour of the

dictator. When faced by such protests we would say, “we have said in our play as to why who is to be defeated in the coming elections with reasons based on real life incidents. You kindly explain to us why the dictator should be given the vote.” This would lead to no answer but silence. At some other places the congress party workers would come and ask questions after the play. We had to answer them all.

Most of our performances were done in the areas where Congress has a strong hold. The Mangalore *Samudaaya* team was attacked with stones while performing at Moodigere and Chikamagalur causing injuries. There have also been instances where violent groups of goons threatened *Samudaaya* not to perform its plays.” (1978)

In the very same report S. Malathi mentions about the lathi-charge unleashed on the *Samudaaya* troupe in Ujire while they were rehearsing the play. She mentions about a boy named Satyanarayana who had major injuries and of one Gayathri who died in the incident. That day’s play performances were cancelled and a silent protest march was taken through the streets of Ujire. As a mark of protest posters with anti-dictatorship slogans were exhibited during the march. Later many new songs, about the incident, were written composed and sung.

S. Malathi concluded her report by writing, “Though there has been a call for social and political consciousness within plays, when theater at large has been for sheer entertainment of the middle class, this is for the first time that theater got into street politics and street fights by participating in day to day life.” (1978)

In the very same issue of *Samudaaya Varthapatra*, a small report on the poster exhibition reads, “Last month *Samudaaya* was active more than ever. The Bangalore Unit of *Samudaaya* staged several anti-dictatorship plays between October 24 and November 3 in the villages that fall under the Chikalamagalur election constituency. Apart from this, in Bangalore, between October 22 and 24, in a big hall, poster writing was held. The call ‘Come, write posters against dictatorship’ was answered, by writing posters in the way they found comfortable, by thousands of labourers, students, women, bank employees, lecturers, LIC employees etc. Colors, brush and paper were provided by *Samudaaya*. The invitation was not restricted to only artists. Thousands of lay men came and registered their protest

through writing posters. Some wrote several posters taking time from morning till late night. Several quality works of posters were produced. The programme which was to end at 9 in the night went on till 2 in the late night because of excessive people participation. In three days over 40,000 posters were produced.” (1978)

Though Smt. Indira Gandhi came victorious in the Chikamagalur Lok Sabha elections, a member of *Samudaaya* H. Janardhan opines that *Samudaaya* through its plays during the election time ‘troubled the peaceful sleep of the congress party’ and thus showcased the power of street theater (Kundur: 2002) Apart from causing sleepless nights for the congress party the plays also “sowed the seeds for a new cultural- socio-political though process in Karnataka” (Bettakote: 2002) But to C.R. Bhat, “Though Indira Gandhi won in the bi-elections the experience of ensuring that emergency will not be imposed again on this country and resurrecting of democratic values was a memorable victory of democracy.” (Bhat and Gundanna: 2000)

Samudaaya Samskruthika Jaathas

“*Jatha* meant moving from village to village, town to town explaining the problems to the people and taking their insights to find a solution; to grow, to engage, to mobilize etc.” (Krishnaswamy:2002)

“The greatness of *Samudaaya* is in the cultural *Jathas* that it took out. For various reasons these *jathas* are a milestone in the social-cultural realms in Karnataka. The artists, writers, intellectuals, students who realized that art is not for arts sake but for the sake of improvising life, in groups took art to the people. In moving to the people these groups and these *jathas* intended to bring in a new radical-scientific awakening among people and shaking the feudal, capitalistic system and the corrupt politicians by their roots. More importantly the target groups of these *jathas* were the groups which were, until then, neglected by the mainstream cultural partcitioners and those who can enable a change in the society...

Samudaaya broke the system of performing plays before the ticket-buying middle class and lived up to its belief that through art a new dynamism can be brought in the society. By overriding the energy level of the regressive forces these *jathas* created a new wave in Karnataka by becoming the voice of the voiceless. Never before in the history of Karnataka

had art come to streets the way it came with the *Jathas* of *Samudaaya*. Factories, slums, dalit colonies all these spaces saw the entry of art through *Samudaaya*.” (Bettakote: 2002)

As recollected by C.K. Gundanna the concept of *Jatha* came to *Samudaaya* from the Bengali ‘Jatra’ where artists are on the move for six months in a year. “In a similar fashion *Samudaaya* decided to move all around Karnataka carrying street-plays with democratic and pro-human values, for a month.” (Bhat and Gundanna: 2000) The idea of *Jatha* was first presented, according to Gundanna, before *Samudaaya* by its founding member Prasunna, who in an interview said that the idea for the *Jatha* came from the “long march of Mao in China.” (2011) In his autobiography C.G. Krishnaswamy writes, “In organizing the *Jatha* the Telangana struggle of P. Sundrayya and the life and struggle of Mao-Tse Tung gave us a lot of insights and inner strength.” (Krishnaswamy: 2002)

“The idea of the *Jatha* was by Prasunna and it was CGK who saw into the organizing of the *Jatha* by contacting all local *Samudaaya* units discussing the matter with them and inspired all the members” (Bhat and Gundanna: 2002)

Hosa Moulyagalatta Samudaaya Saamskruthika Jaatha- 1979

For the first time in the cultural history of Karnataka between 15 October and November 16 in the year 1979 a month long state wide *Jatha* was organized by *Samudaaya*.” (Bhat and Gundanna: 2000)

The first meeting to plan the *Jatha* of 1979 which was titled *Samudaaya’s Jatha for New Values’* was held at the Kapaali hotel in Tumkur whose owner was a supporter of *Samudaaya*. But the decisive meeting was held later at the head office of *Samudaaya* in Bangalore. Recollecting how a map of Karnataka was brought from the Avenue road to the office and how he and S. Malathi kept wondering how to plan the *Jatha*, C.G. Krishnaswamy writes in his autobiography of the meeting where the *Jatha* plans were finalized.

“When our eyes travelled through the map of Karnataka we realized that the distance we wanted to cover was no less than three thousand kilometers. Three thousand kilometers in thirty days meant travelling nearly 100 kilometers a day. Malathi said, “If we travel at this speed we will be travelling like the politicians who just get down from the car and just wave

their hands.” Did we have any car to travel? What is the use of waving hands? We started discussing. That is when the idea of breaking down into two groups and travelling in parallel dawned on my mind. Everyone seemed to like the idea and was accepted by all. We divided Karnataka into two parts and started with what we named as ‘road mapping’ making notes of the villages, taluks and districts that we had to cross and reach. We decided that one *Jatha* will take off from KGF and the other from Bidar.” (Krishnaswamy: 2002)

In the very same meeting it was decided that the *Jatha* which was to start from KGF and reach Dharwad would be led by Prasunna and the *Jatha* to start from Bidar and reach Dharwad was to be led by C.G. Krishnaswamy. The members in both the *Jatha* groups were decided in the same meeting.

“The following question crossed all our minds after the discussion and decision about the routes that the *Jatha* was to take:

- 1- Why are we holding the *Jatha*?
- 2- How do we finance this *Jatha*?
- 3- Is it possible to bring out our publications during the *Jatha*?
- 4- What are our strengths to sustain the *Jatha*?
- 5- What are the slogans that we will be using during the *Jatha*?

The first question was answered as “to raise voice against inequality using the tools of culture and literature. At the same time to initiate a dialogue and create a public discussion on the issues of superstition, exploitation of women etc.

The next question before us was ‘what is the amount of money required?’ and ‘how to raise the required money?’ The answer to this was not an easy one. Malathi made some quick calculations and estimated that almost eighteen thousand rupees were required to carry out the jatha. Prasunna suggested that we can raise funds by making greeting cards. Everyone appreciated and agreed to the idea pitched in by Prasunna. It was decided that greeting cards will be designed at a low cost and all of a sudden all of us turned out to be artists in the wake of making greeting cards to raise funds for the *Jatha*. There were questions raised as to who would be the greetings which had paintings done by us. Such questions were postponed

temporarily. “We ourselves,” I said. “We will find an answer to this later. More over we can ask some people to fund us too” I added.

The question regarding publishing books. There was really a need for a publication. Those days there were only two places which published radical books- *Kriya* and *Navakarnataka*.... When the question about publication was put on the table the immediate following question was what kind of publications? Who will read these publications, followed by few other questions. Malathi said immediately that the book published should be of lesser price and have ideas and thoughts about literature and culture. All of us said “Yes” in one voice.

Lengthy discussion was held on how to go about publication and the expenses attached to the publication. We were not ready to take the help of *Navakarnataka* publications because they belonged to the CPI party and were strict with regard to money matters. Our comrades had a lot of pending money to give back to *Chakrapani* press hence it was not possible to approach them. I asked if we could ask for papers from K.N. Harikumar and everyone said “ok” as they were tired of the meeting and wanted to leave. The following titles were decided by us to publish:

Chirasmaraneeya Kayyooru by Niranjan

Telangana Raita Horata by G. Rajshekhar

Shivamogga Raita Chaluvalli by G.P. Basavaraju

Dalitara Melina Daurjanyagalu by Shivaji Ganeshan

Namma Shikshana Paddati by Iqbal Hussain

Bahu Raashtreeya Samsthegalu by Narasimhan

Raita Kaarmika Sanghatane Mattu Saamaajika Badalaavane by M.K. Bhat

Dalitarige Bekaadudu Hesarina Badalvaane Alla by Siddalingaiah

‘Holey Maadigara Haadu’ ‘Saaviraaru Nadigalu’ by Siddalingaiah

Samudaayada Aashaya by Prasunna

How to take the *Jatha* without stop? For this several theater workshops need to be conducted, several scripts should be written for the *Jaatha* said D.R. Nagaraj and would say that this should not just turn out to be a normal *Jatha* but should become a creative upsurge in Karnataka” (Krishnaswamy: 2002)

C.K. Gundanna documents his experience of the 1979 *Jaatha* this way, “The *Jatha* titled *Hosa Maoulyagalatta Samudaaya Samskruthika Jaaha* (Cultural *Jatha* of *Samudaaya* towards new values) that began at once and at the same time at Kolar and Bidar on October 15- 1979 got over at Dharwad on 15 November. The *Jatha* starting from Kolar was inaugurated by Khadri Shamanna and was being led by Prasunna. It was a comfortable *Jatha* with no problems regarding food, bath, travel etc. The *Jatha* starting from Bidar was inaugurated by M.S. Sathyu and was being led by C. G. Krishnaswamy. This *Jatha* faced quite a few problems like financial, food and travel. Both the *Jathas*, for the first one week, began on bicycle and then shifted to matadors. One of the *Jathas* was provided with a matador by T.N. Narasimhan and the driver was Shankar, who now is the manager of Sanket studios. In every district and every village we would contact all our friends conduct programmes from morning 9 to afternoon 3 and then from evening 6 to 12 or 1 in the night... We would sing the poems of Kuvempu, Siddalingaiah, Kotegana Halli Ramayya, S.S. Hiremath, R.K. Hudugi and perform the plays such as *Belchi*, *Patre Sangappana Koley Prakarana*, *Chasnal Ganiduranta*, *Hyderabad Goli*, *Burude Baabana Katey*. With these songs and plays the *Jatha* sharpened the radical and political insights and consciousness of the people.” (Bhat and Gundanna: 2000)

The *Jatha* special report by S. Malathi in the December 1979 issue of the *Samudaaya Varthapatra* read, “It’s a month since the *Jatha* got over. While we began we had no clue as to how would it go. All we knew was that we were aiming something very high. There was a lot of anxiety, aspiration, enthusiasm and confusion within us, then. Because it was a new kind of programme, we did not know what and all shape could it take finally.

Now while looking back we realize that the *Jatha* was more successful than what we thought it would be and what we expected it to be. The excitement filled reaction of the villagers to our street plays, songs and publications has filled new energy in us.....

..... There were rumors spread saying we have received money from the Marxists and that we have been funded by Devraj Urs. As Government's money is people's money we wished that we had got money from the Government... In fact we raised more money from the business men. When we would go in the villages and towns, asking for money open armed, the shopkeepers fearing that the presence of the thirty of us can damage his business would give us some money and ensure we left the place...

It is interesting as to how a friend of mine from Tamil Nadu who came to see the *Jatha* spotted us. After having looked at the schedule of the *Jatha*, he came to the Sagara town of Shimogga district. He had arrived a day early and was new to the place. He did not know Kannada too. He felt that if he enquires at the office of the communists or the samajavadis he would get the information about the arrival of the *Jatha*. He roamed around the town hoping to find the red flag somewhere and having failed to find one he went and spoke to a person who he assumed to know English. He asked the unknown man where the communist office was. The man answered saying there are no communists here but I am told tomorrow a communist *Jatha* will be arriving to our town.

Of the several rumors that were reaching places before us were also the rumors saying we are communists, we are sent by Devraj Urs, we criticize Hindus and the Gods. Because of such rumors our audience increased because of the increased curiosity among the villagers and town people..." (1979)

Raitharedegey Samskruthika Jaatha- 1981

"The success of the 1979 *Jatha* inspired the activist artists to take cultural *Jatha* to the people again. Those were the days of Gundurao's governance. To Karnataka it was like a second season of emergency. Corruption had seeped into the political system and almost achieved a legal status those days. The Government was deaf to the cries of farmers and labourers. The movements of the working class were being suppressed heartlessly by the Government.

The demand for irrigational tax to the farmers of the Naragunda, Navalgunda area even when the waters of Malaprabha did not flow through their area triggered a massive protest refusing to pay the tax. This protest spread state wide...

In this situation *Samudaaya* decided to hold yet another state wide *Jaatha*. This time the groups were district based independent groups. *Jathas* were held simultaneously in ten districts of the state between January 15 and 30. Many books discussing several farmers protest of India were published and sold during the *Jatha*.” (Bhat and Gundanna: 2000)

The editorial in the *Samudaaya Varthapatra* of December 1980 read, “While the memories of the successful 1979 *Samudaaya Jaatha* is still fresh in the minds of the people *Samudaaya* attempts to recreate history in a similar grand fashion. *Jathas* will be taken in twelve districts of Karnataka. Every team will travel in their districts for five hundred kilometers by walk and bicycle. This is for the first time in the history of this country that a cultural team is covering such a long distance to bring awareness among the people.

Being operational in a country where the majority of the population is illiterate, *Samudaaya*, has decided to use the tools of mass communication for the illiterate and hence this time the pedagogical exercise will be through street plays, songs, paintings and cinema. Though the *Jatha* is organized by *Samudaaya* artists, progressive people and cultural activists not belonging to *Samudaaya* are also invited to be a part of the *Jatha* and make the *Jatha* not just a *Samudaaya Jatha* but a *Jatha* of the people.

The *Jatha* is inclusive of programmes which throw light on matters and issues such as casteism, superstition, economical inequality, social inequality etc. But the main theme of the *Jatha* will be ‘*Jatha* of the left and democratic forces in solidarity with farmers’ as the *Jatha* focuses on the problems of the farmer community. It’s the need of the time to unite and fight against the system which systematically has exploited and oppressed the farmers. The *Jatha* being taken out by *Samudaaya* which responds to ‘here and now’ is apt and timely. This *Jatha* will not just complement the farmers’ movement that is spreading state wide but also will nurture it.

Samudaaya stresses on peoples participation, with active participation of local folk artists, in mass programmes such as the cultural *Jathas*. As district units are taking out the *Jathas* this time the opportunity of making the *Jatha* much more intense is high and the opportunity to tap local art and local artists for the *Jatha*. The literary figures and intellectuals of the district

all will be participating in the *Jatha* and will also organize lectures and debates. There will be a close interaction between the intellectuals and the artists in this *Jatha*....” (1980)

The *Samudaaya Varthapatra* report reads, “The *Jathas* taken in the districts of Bengaluru, Kolar, Chitradurga, Shimogga, Dakshina Kannada, Bellary, Raichur, Kalburgi, Bidar, Dharwad, Belgaum and Bijapur have proved that the people are ready for taking in new values. The reaction of the people to the *Jatha* and the way *Jathas* were welcomed by people are a proof for the same. The district wise reports say that nowhere was the *Jatha* a cake walk. But the response of the people made all the efforts worthwhile.

The rebellious farmers of Naragunda and Navalgunda put a strong foundation for the farmers’ movement. The same farmers got militant with the Naragunda massacre. The *Jatha* focusing on the farmers issue was taken out at the right moment of history.

The street plays performed during the *Jatha* made the people speechless and the songs made them restless. They, at many a places, joined their voices with the songs. The participants of *Jatha* have vivid experience but all have the same hope: with such *Jathas* the common man, inclusive of the farmer community, can be taken towards a new dawn.

Though *Jatha* was organized by *Samudaaya* artists, social-cultural activists, intellectuals, students, writers all participated in the *Jatha*.

The plays performed during the *Jatha* were: *Naragunda Bandaaya*, *Hari Janoddhara*, *Beley Erike*, *Hosa Baalinedegey*, *Kooli Henu*.” (1981)

Other Jathas

While *Samudaaya* was observing its decennial year (1985) the state of Karnataka saw serious drought. *Samudaaya* then took out a *Jatha* with the focus on drought to explain the socio-political angles of the drought other than environmental reasons.

The United Nations was observing the year 1986 as the year of ‘World Peace’. *Samudaaya* contributed to the observation of the UN by taking a state wide ‘Painting *Jatha*’ displaying a 120feetx4 feet oil painting on peace. The painting was taken through Bangalore, Kolar, Tumkur, Mandya, Mysore, Madikeri, Dakshina Kannada, Chikamagalur, Hasana, Shimogga,

Uttar Kannada, Dharwad, Belgaum, Bijapur, Bidar, Gulbarga, Raichur, Bellary and Chitradurga.

When Safdar Hashmi, the street theater artist based in Delhi, was murdered in broad day light while performing a street play on 1 Jan 1989, as a protest *Samudaaya* kept performing plays for the next three months at its district units along with holding protest meets and all concluded the protest with a five day (12 April to 16 April) *Samagrata Utsav* in Bangalore where several street plays by several units of *Samudaaya* were performed not just at the location of the *Samagrata Utsav* but also in different colonies and corners of Bangalore.

In the year 1985 *Samudaaya* also participated in the *Bharath Janvijnan Jatha* and later in the literacy movement. *Samudaaya* even in the recent years have organized state wide *Jathas* like the *Hasivu Muktha Karnataka-kkagi Samudaaya Saamskruthika Jaatha-* 2010 and *Brashtaachaara Virodhi Samudaaya Samskruthika Jaatha-* 2011.

The Impact of Samudaaya at Large

Anand Lal observes, “Although this did not result in a strong political theatre movement in Karnataka comparable to Bengali political theater in IPTA’s aftermath, it succeeded in generating political consciousness through a new crop of theater practitioners from the lower classes and castes, as well as ‘content consciousness’ among Kannada theater workers in general.” (2004)

“The 70s placed in the forefront the question of ideological commitment and leftist movements grew. Against this background, it was only natural that street plays gained prominence during the decade. The form questioned, altered and expanded the very concepts of literature and theatre, which was an instant demand that like language, theatre, too, be used for day to day affairs for immediate responses to social issues and as a tool for political movements and agitations. It came out from closed auditoriums and found place on the streets, enabling people to respond to it even while going about their everyday activities. This extended the idea of actor-spectator relationship and notions about acting style, costumes, props also changed as ‘meaningful functionality’ became vital refrain of this theory of theatre. Although it sometimes reduced theatre to simplified sloganeering, this movement

nevertheless created new images through productions like *Belchi* and *Patre Sangappana Koley Prakarana*.” (Ashok: 1995)

Inclusive Nature of Samudaaya

Siddalingaiah in his autobiography mentions about the singer poet Janni (Janardhan) and writes, “Janni earned a state wide name through his association with *Samudaaya*.” Later in the autobiography, while writing about Prasunna he writes, “Prasunna had taken the leadership of *Samudaaya*. An NSD passed-out student Prasunna was a disciplined and short tempered man. But he showed a lot of interest in the matters of and affection towards Dalits. He would be visiting the night schools we were running in different colonies of Bangalore. There he identified the theater talents of many students and teachers and brought them to light... The love and affection he showed to the people in our slums still moves me. He identified and trained several talented people from our slums and made them star performers at Kalakshetra. Janni (Janardhan) and Basavalingaiah are the two main people who turned out to be great artists who earlier were identified and trained by Prasunna. Both were extremely talented but I always wonder if the state would have got such great artists if Prasunna had not visited our slums and identified and trained these talents.” (2006)

The same Janni alias Janardhan while speaking in a seminar on street theater organized by *Janamana*, Mysore in the year 2002 said, “In the 70s decade street theater became a very strong mass medium... It became significant because it was responding to the contemporary issues and times. It is also significant because *Samudaaya* was picking up contemporary issues to educate the mass but before educating was giving logical insights to the contemporary issue. This was nurturing and nourishing us. The clarity and functioning style of *Samudaaya* made space for the rural talents. This may not have had happened through theater but only through street theater. The talented people of the rural spaces, when felt like speaking, street theater came as a useful means of communication.” (Kundur: 2002)

“Krishnaswamy’s *Belchi* and *May Day* did a series of slum shows in Bangalore. Almost every single in the city was covered, Further, as he has used slum actors as well as some extremely effective songs by Siddalingaiah, *Belchi* was one of the most striking plays *Samudaaya* has done so far.” (Pani: 1979)

Writing about the same play C.G. Krishnaswamy, the director of the play, in his autobiography writes, “The actors for the play were selected from the slums of Shrirampura, Vinobha Nagar and Maavalli Nagar,” and adds, “Around 90 per cent of the actors of this play were non-Brahmins, lower caste people and untouchables.” (2002)

B. Suresh in his blog writes, “Art is inherent in the Dalit world. CGK was of the belief that the Dalits were in no need for training in theater and brought them on stage. They became a part of the productions like never before adding new meaning, success and a sense of fulfillment to the performances... An entire new team of theater practitioners came into the theater world because of this.” (2009)

These statements make it clear that *Samudaaya* included people from the lower caste and the non-Brahmin castes in their productions which as Prasunna opined, in an interview, “Shows which world the troupe is negotiating with.” (2011). This negotiation should also be understood in the spaces which it explored to perform its street plays. Be it the slums of Bangalore where *Belchi* was performed or the nooks and corners of Karnataka which were reached by *Samudaaya* during their *Jathas*.

The inclusive nature was not just at the level of caste but also gender. While documenting the experiences of *Samudaaya*'s participation in the Chikamagalur bi-elections, S. Malathi writes, “All the women who never attend any lectures or meetings came out of the house and watched the plays standing with the men of their village.” (1978)

The same S. Malathi in her article ‘*Jatha* and Women’ published in the *Samudaaya Varthapatra* wrote, “In the villages the women fraternity would come running to watch the play but would stand on the edges to watch the play. When asked to come front they would refuse but slowly as the play progressed they would come closer and join the inner circle of the group watching the play.” (1979)

These experiences reflect as to how women who “never attend” other public programmes were made a part of the performance and the public space, which also shows the inclusive nature of *Samudaaya*.

Introduction and Nurturing of New Artists

In his blog write up titled *Kaaduva Kelavu Prayogagalu* B. Suresh while speaking of C.G. Krishnaswamy and his theatrical experiments involving the marginalized group writes, “An entire new team of theater practitioners came into the theater world because of this.” Later in the same write up he mentions about Basavalingaiah and Suresh Anagalli as one of the most prominent theater practitioners of Kannada.

“C. Basavalingaiah an alumnus of NSD experimented with quite a lot of Brechtian plays soon after his graduation. His adaptation of Brecht at Harappanahalli was innovative in the way it used props. His *Kerege Haara* was presented in a very fresh manner. His productions of Gandhi v/s Gandhi, *Kusumabale* are some of the most successful theater productions in Kannada. The use of space in *Kusumabale* held the audience tight and Gandhi v/s Gandhi spoke of the contemporary while making references to the past with political insights.

While speaking of memorable productions in Kannada theater another name which crosses the mind is that of Suresh Anagalli who with his innovative stage design and prop designs has directed some of the most unforgettable productions in Kannada. Anagalli’s *Manteswamy Kathaprasanga* is one such production....” (2009)

As mentioned by Siddalingaiah in his autobiography the artist Basavalingaiah was “turned out to be great artists who earlier were identified and trained by Prasunna” (2006) as a part of *Samudaaya*. Suresh Anagalli, remembered G.V. Karanth, of the Kundapura *Samudaaya* unit, in an interview, first was introduced to the world of theater by his participation in the *Samudaaya Jaatha*. (2011)

“When we travelled from village to village and town to town we roped in the local poets, actors and other artists, this not just expanded *Samudaaya* but also let *Samudaaya* incorporate new voices and nurture and bring to the forefront the hidden talents,” said Prasunna in an interview. (2011)

Vasudev Uchil, of the Mangalore *Samudaaya* unit, remembers how the Mangalore Unit of *Samudaaya* identified artists like “Mohan Chandra and trained them by sponsoring their theater education later at Heggodu,” and adds that it was through *Samudaaya* that artists like

“Chandrasah Ullal, Gopadkar, Jeewanram Sullia came to the forefront in their earlier days.” (2011)

Speaking of his own experience in the *Jatha* the founding member of *Samudaaya*, Prasunna, in an interview said, “I learnt a lot during the Jathas while performing, travelling and while interacting with the people directly,” and added in the same breath, “All my writings came only after my experiences with *Samudaaya*.” (2011) hinting the influence *Samudaaya* has had on his writings which came later on and are still bring written, after his days with *Samudaaya*.

Prasunna in the same interview also said, “The playwrights of T.N. Seetharam, B.V. Vaikuntaraju etc have a lot of *Samudaaya* influence on them” (2011) hinting the impact *Samudaaya* has had on playwrights who walked along with *Samudaaya*.

In an article written for the souvenir *Samudaaya* brought out during its completion of two decades playwright H.S. Shivaprakash wrote, “If *Samudaaya* had not shown directions for new kind of playwrights probably I wouldn’t have take play writing so seriously.” (1995)

Innovative Productions Innovative Playwrights

Writing about amateur theater in Kannada and discussing *Samudaaya* movement in specific Dr. K. Marulasiddappa wrote, “The content here are contemporary. The bases for these contents are newspaper reports and real life incidents... When written play texts were not available they use real life incidents as the text for the plays, with or without written text, which keeps changing with every performance.” (1983)

One of the most successful street plays of *Samudaaya* based on a real life incident happens to be C.G. Krishnaswamy’s *Belchi*. Writing about the production of *Belchi*, Prof. Lingadevaru Halemane writes, “With the intention of producing plays for the slum-dwellers of Bangalore *Samudaaya* members started walking towards the slums of Bangalore. But there were no play text available which would meet the needs of the play to be produced for slum dwellers and to be performed in the slums... So, CGK decided to write such a play text.” (2004)

“Having decided to put up a play with the slum dwellers with a story of the marginalized I started looking for play texts with such a story. To our bad luck there is no tradition of such

plays in Kannada, which I realized while searching for the play texts. When I started thinking what to do the issue of *Belchi* crossed my mind.

Just few days after Moorarji Desai of the Janatha Party had come to power the untouchables in the Belchi village of Bihar district were burnt alive by the landlords there. Many reporters made it to the distant Belchi for fact finding and truth finding. Mainstream had given a detailed report on the Belchi incident. The report had a quote from the Congress party blaming the Janatha party for the massacre of the untouchables. For the protection of the untouchables police force was nominated who could not reach Belchi as there was no tar road connectivity to the village. Saying if there was proper road connectivity to Belchi, the police would have reached earlier and the no-road situation was the cause for the massacre the Janatha government blamed the previous government of the Congress party for the massacre for the previous government did not make proper roads to Belchi. As an answer to this Indira Gandhi reached the village by travelling on an elephant and asked the Janatha government, “how is that I could reach the village?” In response to this Moorarji Desai said while he was to reach the village via air the airplane was damaged by the congress party and that he had to jump from the plane to save his life. This fight between the two parties I realized that Belchi incident was the apt story for the play and started penning the play. How to write a play? I did not know the ABCD of writing a play, yet I began with it.” (2002)

The play was first performed on August 26, 1978 at the Gopalswamy hostel. “People from the Shrirampura slum and other places had come to watch the play. They had not seen such a play before hence gave us a pat on the back... The play would move from one slum to the other. Some would say ‘its getting late, let us pack up’ but the slum people would welcome us with such warmth that we would continue with great joy and enthusiasm. At places there would be a welcome board written especially for us. This popularity made theater personalities discuss the issues of form and content... The theater critics were wondering how to measure a play like this...” (Krishnaswamy: 2002)

B. Suresh in his blog write up titled *Kaaduva Kelavu Prayogagalu* has written, “CGK in his *Belchi* and *Alley Iddoru* leaving behind the techniques of the street play used until then adopted new techniques of scenic design.”

“The technique used for this play by the director is unique. The pillar in the centre to make all the required props within reach, the blockings which did not block the path on the stage and the way the round stage was made use and the stage balance of *Belchi* made the viewers spellbound.” (Yadahalli: 2007)

The production of *Belchi* by C.G. Krishnaswamy showed the innovations *Samudaaya* made in not just writing of texts but also in its production. This innovation seemed to have an influence of Badal Sircar’s Third Theater. Narendra Pani hints this while writing, “At the other end of the spectrum, one has the theater of artists like Utpal Dutt which are performed on a stage for large audiences. This theater by its very nature cannot get the audience too involved in it. It would seem therefore that Badal Sircar’s theater would be very useful in putting up plays where there is a need for an involvement with the audience. For example Krishnaswamy’s Kannada play *Blechi* done for *Samudaaya* was a great success.” (1979) Few months before the production of *Belchi* a workshop for *Samudaaya* artists by Badal Sircar was held at Kumbalgot between May 28 and June 7 of the year 1978.

B. Suresh in his blog write-up recollecting the most memorable productions of Kannada, while mentioning of Prasanna has written, “The stage for the play *Thayi* was extended up to the shutter behind the stage. The extra space was shown as the factory and workers were shown working there.” (2009) and opines that no other director has used the entire stage so well except for Benewitz. In the following paragraphs he notes, “[Prasanna] used half screen very well in his play [Kadadida Neeru] which was not known to Kannada Theater... It was Prasanna who used Brechtian epic theater techniques the most in Kannada. The vastness of Kalakshetra nor the compressed space of the rest room did not become a hurdle to Prasanna..... His production Galileo, performed in the rest room of Kalakshetra showed the possibilities of intimate theater to Kannada theater world,” (2009) which gives a glimpse into the innovative theater productions of *Samudaaya*. Writing about the play Galileo Narendra Pani mentions, “It was in this play that a new smaller portable stage was first designed by Prasanna.” (1979)

The first play performed by *Samudaaya* was ‘*Huttava Badidare*’. “This play was adapted by K.V. Narayana from a very feudal play by Samsa- ‘*Vigada Vikramaraya*’. The feudal nature of the original play was completely altered to a progressive message by changing the focus of

the play. The protagonists were no longer the members of the royal family but two palace guards.” (Pani: 1979) C.K. Gundanna recollects that in the meeting it was decided that “let not the first play be from some other language and some other soil but an independent Kananda play and so the play *Vigada Vikramaraya* based play *Huttava Badidare* was written by K.V. Narayan.” (Bhat and Gundanna: 2000)

This possibility of adaptation later showed path to many major productions of Kannada namely *Odalaala*, *Kusumabale*, *Yayathi* and many others.

Though not successful an experiment of multiple director play by *Samudaaya* is a significant one. “The idea of group direction was tried out by *Samudaaya*. This however, came across many difficulties inherent in theater itself. The experiment was with a group of five directors who also acted in the play. The result, however, were not very appealing. This was because each of the five directors had their own overall conception of the play. This being the case, the direction from anyone of them was in the context of that person’s individual conception. The net result was that the play looked hotch potch and seemed to lack an overall impact.” (Pani: 1979)

Awakening of Political Consciousness

S.R. Ramesh, while speaking at the seminar on street theater organized by *Janamana* of Mysore said, “*Samudaaya* must be given the credit for making people of the state familiar with radical thoughts, pro-people ideas and scientific temper.” (Kundur: 2002)

M.G. Venkatesh recollecting his experiences with *Samudaaya* in the *Samudaaya Varthapatra* wrote, “It is difficult to identify the roots of inspiration and attraction to involve myself with *Samudaaya*... But being with Prasunna who had quit his job and joined as a full time member of *Samudaaya* and many like him who was from different steps of life, my life and personality took the shape it is in today. In their company my interest spilled out of the framework of theater and expanded to the realms of society, social system, politics, injustice, exploitation, atrocities in the name of caste and religion, social change etc...” (2007)

In his autobiography C.G. Krishnaswamy recollects of an incident from the *Jatha* where Shantarasa was delivering a public speech. “Saying, this *Jatha* which upholds new values is

our new hope, Shantarasa took out a letter from his pocket and read it out. It was a letter that his son Basavaprabhu had written to him saying all these years the institution of school failed to teach him much and confessing that he had learnt quite a lot from the experiences of the *Jatha*.” (Krishnaswamy: 2002)

While these are firsthand accounts from the members of *Samudaaya* and participants of *Samudaaya* as to how they developed political consciousness, there are second hand reports documenting the audience reaction to the plays which reflect a kind of political consciousness awakening among the common men.

C.G. Krishnaswamy also narrates of his experiences while performing *Belchi* in the slums of Bangalore. “When we would announce that we had come to perform street plays, no one would believe us. But once we would start the people would get involved so much that they would give a running socio-political commentary for the play. When slogans were cried against Indira Gandhi people would clap and would also discuss what was right and wrong, after the play performance. Our members Gundanna, Basavalingaiah, Janardhan, Taxi Madhavan all would get into their own political explanations.” (Krishnaswamy: 2002)

M. Ramesh in his report on the experiences of *Jatha-1979* in the *Samudaaya Varthapatra* mentions of an experience while performing the play *Patre Sangappa*. “The protagonist of the play, at one point of the play says, he would not go back to village for he fears the landlord Lokeshappa killing him. As this dialogue was delivered an audience said loudly to the protagonist, not to fear and that he would save him and exclaimed “damn, they killed him?” when in the play later the protagonist is killed.” (1979)

In the very same issue S. Malathi’s report on women and *jatha* documents an incident at Dandeli. “Around three thousand people had gathered to watch the play at Dandeli. After the play a group of women came to me and asked which party we were. When told that we were from the party of the poor they said the depiction of Indira Gandhi was excellent and that if Indira Gandhi visited their town again they would beat her black and blue and added that they had already made all the required preparation for the same. I later handed over to them a book on women liberation. They said they were illiterates yet took the book saying they would ask some literate to read it out to them.” (1979)

The report in *Samudaaya Varthapatra* on the 1981 *Jatha* documents of an incident where an old lady while watching a play on price rise exclaimed, looking at the shopkeeper, “he looks like our Shetty. To hell with him.” (1981)

Siddalingaiah in his autobiography mentions about an incident from the rehearsals of the play *Taayi* which happened the day he went to watch the play rehearsal. “On the one side of Kalakshetra the singers were practicing. B.V. Karanth was playing the harmonium and instructing the singers... One line from the song that they were singing appeared quite weird to me. They were singing the line saying “*Rajya Vidyuth Rajya Vidyuth*” (state electricity state electricity) in rhythm... I was puzzled by the perplexity as to what the connection between state electricity and this play was. The play is a translation of Brecht’s play *Mother* which is an adaptation of Maxim Gorky’s novel of the same title. The story speaks of Russian revolution. Both Gorky and Brecht were Marxists. I was wondering how electricity entered the play. The usage of electricity in the song sung by the workers while going on a march appeared out of place and context. I tried listening to the entire song. They were singing ‘*Rajya vidyuth rajya vidyuth, karmikara manege rajya vidyuth*’ (state electricity state electricity, to the houses of the labourers) The fight in the play was not for electricity. I was not sure if Russia had electricity when Gorky wrote the novel. The workers were fighting for a revolution and not electricity. I asked a friend to get me a copy of the English play and soon the problem and confusion in my mind was solved. The song was saying ‘Labourers need state power’. This is what Gorky and Brecht had meant. The workers in the play say they need state power. In Kannada this should have been translated as ‘*rajyadhikara*’ (state power). But the translator had translated ‘state’ correctly as ‘*rajya*’ but had translated ‘power’ as ‘*vidyuth*’ (electricity). I pointed out the mistake and everyone was ready to correct their mistake. But one singer got up and asked me what was wrong if it were to be *rajya vidyuth* (state electricity)? I tried explaining the mistake in translation. But he asked ‘do you say the houses of the labourers do not need electricity?’ and challenged me. I had to explain it to him that the houses of labourers need electricity but the play and the songs in the play do not need electricity.” (2006)

Though quite hilarious the incident, especially when the singer questions ‘do you say the houses of the labourers do not need electricity?’ shows a kind of consciousness working in him which reflects his sense of right and the will to fight for the right.

Brush with the Regressive Forces

One of the letters to the editor written to the newspaper *Kannada Prabha*, reacting to the *Jatha*, by one Chi. Na. Mangala read: “These people who are taking out the cultural *Jatha* are writing slogans on the walls and dirtying the entire city. These people, who do not have any sense of cleanliness, wonder what culture they speak of”

Another letter to the editor written to the editor of *Udayavani* read: “If you want you can mobilize farmers and labourers in the name of economic inequality. But don’t touch Indian culture. If you do, you will be cursed.”

These responses during the 1979 *Jatha* were published in the *Samudaaya Varthapatra* reflect the kind of brush *Samudaaya* had with regressive forces. In the very same issue of the *Samudaaya Varthapatra* a report by Prasanna mentions of an incident at Sagara where a group of RSS members with whom he had an exchange of words.

“It was a beautiful evening at Sagara (11 November 1979). We were making arrangements for the *Jatha* programme at Town Hall ground...

Some youngsters came near me and handed over an envelope to me. When asked who they wanted to meet they took by name. I asked what the matter was and they instructed me to read the letter. When I was opening the envelope they started to make a move. Asking them to stop I opened the letter which had ‘Om’ written in Sanksrit on the top of it. I understood what the matter was... The RSS people of Sagara had posed several questions in the letter. The attitude and tone of the letter angered me.... I invited them to talk on the mic and debate the matters. They refused saying they did not want a platform provided by us. I insisted they voice their heart out.

People, by then, had started gathering around us. I asked them to take seat nearby and invited them for a discussion. They accepted the invitation. Thus began our *baithak*...

They claimed to have worked in crematoriums being sure we haven't done any such sort of work. I started my arguments saying culture was not something belonging to the past making several references to the atrocities on Dalits in the recent past. They claimed that their organization brings about a change in the society with love while we attempt changes by force and through violence. Controlling my laughter I asked them to change one Muslim with love and then I would believe their statements. They asked me what change have we brought about in the society. Before I could answer a Dalit youth sitting next to me spoke about the Arakere dalit atrocity and our street plays about the same which has instilled a bit of confidence among the Dalits in the village.... The discussion continued shifting from issues to issues.

When I concluded the *baithak* as it was getting late for our programme the audience for the debate had grown beyond measure.” (1979)

The letter handed over to Prasanna by the RSS of Sagara on the 11th of November 1979 reads:

To,

The organizers of Samudaaya Jatha

Sir,

We have learnt about your Jatha arriving to our town. We have a few questions for you and hence we write this letter seeking answer from you.

- 1- Yours is a cultural Jatha. What according to you is culture? Is it culture to speak of the entire system as exploitative and not show any alternative?
- 2- Your Jatha opposes everything, how many constructive work have you all done? Name one village or town to give an example of your ideal society.
- 3- During the times of calamity what constructive work have you all done?
- 4- In the October Samudaaya Vartha-Patra editorial RSS and other organizations have been vulgarly attacked. Is this your culture?
- 5- In the same issue you have referred to RSS as bastards. Do you know who is referred to as bastards?

- 6- In the very same issue you have referred to Hindu Rashtra as communal. Can you explain?
- 7- Speak on stage of your achievements, if any, leaving aside complaints against others.
- 8- Last point- in today's programme, if you have any constructive criticism against RSS go ahead and make your criticism but if you continue with your own vulgar way of criticism, know this- we too can answer.

There is no need for sweeping answers.

Yours sincerely

Yuvaka Vrunda

Sagara

The report on the 1981 *Jatha* published in the *Samudaaya Varthapatra* documents an incident from Shimogga where a group of people purchased the book '*RSS: odu vishvruksha*' (RSS: a poisonous tree) and burnt it very close to the book stall. (1981)

S.R. Bhat in his documentation of the Dakshina Kannada Jatha of 1981 documents of the incident at Udupi, "Everywhere in and around Udupi there were wallpapers, banners and posters by *Brahman Sevadal* (with RSS influence). They also had printed some pamphlets which read: Warning to *Samudaaya*- Do not speak ill of casteism, Atheists of *Samudaaya* walk out of the Udupi cars street. It has come to our notice that the secretary of the auto driver's association Shrinivasrao is the convenor of *Brahman Sevadal*. There was stone pelting during our performance but it did not lead to a battle. Some kids were hurt because of the stone pelting." (1981)

With the aggressive wake of Hindutva politics post 1990 the attacks became more physical in nature. In the year 1999 *Samudaaya* along with other cultural organizations held a Jatha to uphold the values of communal harmony and peace. In Savadatti the *Samudaaya* member C.R. Bhat was attacked while he was selling books (*Komuvaada Endarenu* by C.R. Bhat and *Fascism Endarenu* by B. Madhav). When the *Samudaaya* team was performing at Anekallu near Bangalore the Sangha Parivar lead goons attacked the artists of *Samudaaya* including a grave attack on C.K. Gundanna. (Bhat and Gundanna: 2000)

The instances where *Samudaaya* had a brush with the regressive forces and the attacks on *Samudaaya* members by the regressive forces do reflect the strength which *Samudaaya* possessed and how it was causing a threat to the regressive forces. It also reflects how *Samudaaya* had identified RSS as a serious threat to national integrity in the early days of its resurrection in the post-emergency period.

Inspiring other organizations

T. Surendra Rao in an interview said that the coming into existence of the *Dalit Sangharsha Samiti* and *Bandaya Sahitya* were all in way indirectly connected to the social atmosphere that *Samudaaya*, through its activities, had created. (2011)

Janasmaskruthi Utsav was held in Bangalore by *Samudaaya* between November 28 and December 4 of the year 1995 to observe the completion of 20 years of *Samudaaya*. Speaking during this occasion Pralayan of Tamil Nadu said, “Many troupes in Tamil Nadu have been inspired by *Samudaaya*,” and mentioned of several troupes who participated in Cultural Evenings and many political speeches being given in such occasions where there is a huge public gathering. (Bhat and Gundanna: 2000)

Chapter Three: The Twilight of A Radical Culture

Speaking at the seminar organized by *Janamana* of Mysore on street theater H. Janardhan said, “The intensity of the movement got less in the 80s decade.” (Kundur: 2000) Speaking in the same seminar Tukaram said, “The years between 1976 and 1984 were the most productive years, in every sense, for many like me.” (Kundur: 2000) Both these statements indicate that by the end of the first half of the 80s decade the movement of street theater and *Samudaaya* got weak.

In the opinion of one of the founding member of *Samudaaya*- Prasunna, “*Samudaaya* was too beautiful a dream and history could not bear it for long.” (2011)

H. Janardhan adding to his observation about the decline of the movement said, “There were good reasons for the decline. The pro-people movements broke apart, organizations and movements started working under the umbrella of power holders, parting of individuals from each other and from organizations.” (Kundur: 2000)

In the opinion of Lakshmi Chandrashekhar, “A sort of decline began with Prasunna quitting the organization.” (Bhat and Gundanna: 2000) Vasudev Uchchil is also of the same opinion that “The exit of Prasunna marked the decline of *Samudaaya*.” (2011) I.K. Boluwar speaks in the same line opining that the exit of Prasunna marked the decline of *Samudaaya* but adds the name of C.G. Krishnaswamy also to the list saying the “Exit of C.G.K and Prasunna marked the decline because none of the other organizers left behind by them were not great theater artists though were good at organization.” (2011)

The two- Prasunna and C.G. Krishnaswamy- were considered as the two strong pillars of *Samudaaya*. “I believed always that if Prasunna was the brain of *Samudaaya* CGK was the leg,” wrote Lingadevaru Halemane and adds, “Now *Samudaaya* has neither brain nor the leg and is left with just body,” (2004) hinting the damage caused to *Samudaaya* by the exit of Prasunna and C.G. Krishnaswamy.

“Prasunna and I had become the two buffaloes carrying the plough on our shoulder. All responsibilities were on us. Success failure whatever be the end result it was we two who had to take it all.” (Krishnaswamy: 2002)

“Prasunna worked as a full time member of *Samudaaya* for six long years. His monthly salary was just Rs.200/- those days. When asked why he quit *Samudaaya* after working so hard for six years his answer said that he was too tiered physically and mentally after working day and night for six years. My family life had been affected...” (Pattanshetti: 2000)

In an interview Prasunna said, “My marital life was facing problems by the end of my six committed years with *Samudaaya*. My wife and I both could not stay together in the same place. It was important for her to be in Bangalore. So I decided to quit Bangalore and *Samudaaya*.” (2011)

“In the days following the *Jatha* the success of the *Jatha* made us believe that the revolution was at the doorstep. We had started living in utopian dreams and not in the real world. By then it was long, very long, since CGK had visited the University where he was employed. He was also under financial crisis. Though it was discussed that *Samudaaya* should help him out financially, nobody did help in anyway. The discussion about the second *Jatha* had begun and Prasunna tied his shoes to direct his newly written play *Dangeya Munchina Dinagalu*.” (Halemane: 2006)

“By then I already had a son named Keerthi. When his health collapsed because of my financial crisis, a friend got him admitted in the hospital. After the first show of *Dangeya Munchina Dinagalu* I directly went to the hospital where my parents and my wife did not speak to me out of anger. The doctor who was treating my son came to me and asked me to get some medicines and said that the prescription was given in the afternoon itself. He was unaware my financial crisis. I couldn't even speak about it to him. Collecting the prescription from my wife I went to the medical shop nearby. The shirt and pant that I was wearing that day must have had ten pockets in total, but not a single rupee in all the ten pockets. How to buy medicine? Dint even know whom to ask for money. Finally went to the medical store and asked how much money was required to buy the medicines prescribed. I was told that it might cost up to two hundred rupees. I took out the HTM watch I was wearing and placed it on the table asking the shopkeeper to keep the watch and give me the medicines. He gave me the medicines taking which I went to the hospital. It must have been around 9 in the night. Looking at my parents and my wife I realized that they had not eaten anything the entire day.

I came out and sat alone in the drizzling rain. By now the play props must have been taken to the *Samudaaya* office, so someone might come with the money that I am in need of, I thought to myself. It was 10 in the night. There were no stars to count too. I should have counted the rain droplets. Who could I blame? Why should I blame? Only these questions were left with me. I felt like crying but couldn't. I started speaking to myself about my mistakes. By then Shashidhar Adapa arrived in search of me. I had hoped that he would have got the money. The doctor by then had warned me about my child's health. I asked Shashi if someone had sent some money to which he said "No". He too did not have any money. My eyes swelled and tears dropped. Shashi searched his pocket and found a 50 paise coin. Handing it over to me he asked me to call Kalakshetra and see if someone was there. I went to the nearby public booth and dialed the number after inserting the 50 paise coin. "Is it Kalakshetra?" I asked. The answer came, "Wrong number." Out of great disappointment I banged the receiver. Over forty coins cropped out of the phone box. Shashidhar Adapa and I picked up all the coins and went to Kempegowda Circle to get some food... Shashi, after keeping the idly packets in his bag, asked me if we should wait for the rains to stop. I started walking without a word. As I was walking in great speed the footwear of my right leg got carried away in the rain water, I let the other one also flow. I handed over the food packet to my father who was sitting in the hospital. I didn't even have the inner strength to ask him to eat.

I went and sat in a corner of the hospital staring at the photo of Jesus Christ that was hanging in front of me. As I kept looking at the melting candle thoughts about the Mysore Mission Hospital settled on me. Then my mother had lighted candles before the Christ praying for me. Now I was sitting before Christ, holding my hand on the burning flame of the candle, praying for the recovery of my son. There was a poster nearby which read 'Don't lead me, I may not follow you; Don't follow me, I may not lead you; But come with me let us go together'. As I read this I came to a decision. I am no leader, nor a cultural emissary. So what was I then? Unable to control the melancholic feeling I wrote a letter to a friend. Must be to Rajshekhar in Udipi saying I need nothing but my home, family and my son. After sometime the doctor came to me and announced that my son was alright. Shashi and I lit a cigarette then. In the morning Shashi said he would bring the money and asked what time would I come to Kalakshetra. There was to be a repeat show of the play that day. I said I wouldn't be

coming in a very detached tone. Saying so I walked to the department... I had decided to quit *Samudaaya*. Many friends from *Samudaaya*, on hearing the news, apologized accepting their mistakes. But I refused to go back to the organization. (Krishnaswamy: 2002)

The narratives of Prasunna and Krishnaswamy not just provide reasons for their exit which led to the decline of *Samudaaya* but also shows how much dependent the organization was on a few individuals and how much of a pressure was put on individuals which cost them too much leading to their decision to quit the organization making way for the decline of the organization.

C.G. Krishnaswamy in his autobiography also mentions, “We all were gathering in my room at Gandhibazar for the preparation of the Jatha. Myself, Malathi, M.G. Venkatesh, P. Venkateshmurthy, C.K. Gundanna, Surendra, T.S. Lohitashwa, Sanath Kumar, Shashidhar Adapa and other friends would hold meetings. We would have taken up work on ourselves for 24 hours and would visit our work places and offices only for namesake. Gundanna was working in the postal department. M.G. Venkatesh was working in the audit department. These people were under the scanner of their bosses and were served notice more than once.” (Krishnaswamy: 2002) This mention about notices being served to Gundanna and M.G. Venkatesh open the window to look into the personal blows people had to take. Though Gundanna and M.G. Venkatesh continued to remain with *Samudaaya* their examples show the possibilities of many like them who unlike them quit the organization which made the organization weak.

I.K. Boluwar in an interview, speaking of the Puttur unit of *Samudaaya* said, “In the year 1981 myself, S.S. Bhat and Ramakrishna all got transferred from Puttur and with that the Puttur unit had to be closed down,” and added “It is sad that others couldn’t continue to keep the temper and the organization going,” (2011) which again reflects that *Samudaaya*, at places, was too much dependent on a few individuals and their strength.

Thirty years after *Samudaaya* began, one of its founder members Prasunna while writing his book *Desi Jeewana Paddathi* on indigeneous life style, in the foreword wrote, “In my twenties I was looking at everything through the glass of ideology and everything appeared in red colour to me.” (2005) While speaking at the *Samudaaya 30* seminar at Kundapura

Prasunna said, “Too much of an ideology was our mistake” (2011) In a similar tone Prasunna spoke during the seminar on street theater organized by *Janamana* in Mysore. He had said, “Even in my early days I made the mistake of being too aggressive in my art.” (Kundur: 2000)

“While some of our comrades had joined us with a political will to change the society many others had joined just out of passion for theater.” (Krishnaswamy: 2002) Recollecting the days soon after the Tumkur unit of *Samudaaya* had started, Krishnaswamy notes, “By then an invisibly crack had developed between the upper layer and the lower layer of the organization. Many artists were quite skeptical about wearing red. I sat with the problems of the organization. On one hand there was an invisible friction within the organization and on the other hand there was the fear of the red color of the cultural leaders.” (Krishnaswamy: 2002)

I.K. Boluwar, in an interview, said, “C.R. Bhat and B. Madhav would be taking classes on ideology for the artists. This was a boring session for the artists who had joined us for aesthetic reasons. This caused a drift between the ideologues and the aestheticians. The study circle in *Samudaaya* was too ideological in nature and this made many turn away from *Samudaaya*.” (2011)

The drift was not just between ideologues and aestheticians but as I.K. Boluwar opines it was also between the central committee in Bangalore and the *Samudaaya* units. “The central committee would be instructing the units, based on their experience and exposure to the Bangalore dreams. But the units wouldn’t have the resources to realize the Bangalore dreams,” said I.K. Boluwar and added, “The decisions taken in Bangalore are like the decisions taken in the Vidhan Soudha which will not have much relevance in other parts of the state. The play decided by the Bangalore central committee became only a play in the units but not food for thoughts because the play did not have much relevance to the people here.” (2011)

I.K. Boluwar remembered the *Jatha* of 1981 when it was decided by the central committee to stage plays on Naragunda and Navalugunda issue which the Dakshina Kannada *Samudaaya* felt would not appeal to the people of Dakshina Kannada (2011) This episode has been

recorded by S.R. Bhat, who was the convenor of the *Jatha* of Dakshina Kannada in 1981, in his document of the *Jatha*. The alternative plays performed in the *Jatha*, as documented by S.R. Bhat, were *Yantragalu*, *Ondu Permit-na Katey* and *Beney* which were earlier performed by the Puttur unit of *Samudaaya*. (1981) In the opinion of I.K. Boluwar this change was mainly done because the rebel of the farmers in the northern part of Karnataka did not have much relevance to the people of Dakshina Kannada. This shift, as remembered by I.K. Boluwar, did cause a bit of friction between the central committee and the Dakshina Kannada branch of *Samudaaya* where the central committee questioned as to why the plays decided by the central committee were not performed as a part of the *Jatha*. (2011)

C.G. Krishnaswamy in his autobiography narrates an incident of his tryst with G. Rajshekhar of Udupi who was supposed to sell some handmade greeting cards for the fund raising of the *Jatha*. “The sense of humor and the presence of mind of G. Rajshekhar were appreciable. S.R. Bhat once had assigned him the job of selling the greeting cards. He was not successful in and had kept all the greeting cards safe in his bag. Once when I went to collect the money raised for the *Jatha* S.R. Bhat told me what had happened and said he would call for a meeting. I directly went to meet G. Rajshekhar who said he knew the purpose of my visit and also said that he had already received a warrant from S.R. Bhat that morning. He asked me who would buy the handmade greeting cards and took me to the car street of Udupi... Rajshekhar had tried his level best to sell the cards but had not succeeded. Then he took me to the famous Diana hotel... walking straight to the man at the counter Rajshekhar, placing the cards on the table, said those cards were made by patients of TB for fund raising. The man bought the cards. Receiving money from him and handing it over to me Rajshekhar said, “It is easy for you people to instruct through letters from Bangalore. But you people have no clue as to how difficult it is for us to follow those instructions,” and had laughed aloud,” (2002) where again in the words of G. Rajshekhar we get to see the commanding central committee and the lack of resources and capacity among the smaller units to follow the commands. This again shows the drift between the central committee and the units of which I.K. Boluwar spoke.

“The people of Dakshina Kannada wanted plays which had a Tulu⁵ sense,” said I.K. Boluwar (2011) The document of the 1981 *Jatha* by S.R. Bhat documents many audience reaction saying a play in Tulu language would have been preferred.

“Bellare: 16 Jan 1981: One T.G. Muloor in a hand written letter said, “The performance was affective. If local language and local folk literature were to be used more it would have been even the more impactful.” The *Yuvajana Sangha* opined that it would have been wonderful if the play was performed in Tulu.

Shambur: 19 Jan 1981: A school master said the play was realistic but should have been performed in Tulu.” (1981)

These audience responses in a way show the gap between the commands of the central committee and the real ground situation which were divorced slightly.

Vasudev Uchchil, making connections between the larger scenario and the decline of *Samudaaya* said, “By the mid 80s all socio-political movements had lost their temper.” (2011) Speaking at the seminar on street theater organized by *Janamana* in Mysore, Siddangowda Patil said, “The movements that surfaced during 1975, all of them declined by the year 1984-85...” and later spoke of his observation, “20 years ago when the movements were going strong if there was any atrocity anywhere there would be protests everywhere in Karnataka. Today all movements have vanished away.” (Kundur: 2002)

Speaking at the seminar organized by *Janamana* of Mysore on street theater activist Prof. K. Ramdas said, “When there are no social movements it is not possible to perform street plays. Like you need to make several preparations to perform a play on the stage, the necessary preparations to set the stage for a street play are social movements. Street plays get a proper focus only when backed by social movements.” (Kundur: 2002)

Prasunna, the founding member of *Samudaaya*, opined in an interview that “from the 80s the socio-economic structure itself started to undergo a change,” (2011) which in his opinion was the main cause for the decline of all movements and also that of *Samudaaya*.

“At the beginning of the 80s decade the Indian government signed an agreement with GATT to take huge loans and following this the representation of the working class in theater started

declining, though there were some representations here and there. The representatives of the labour class like *Samudaaya* also became a bit silent. The Communist government at Russia started to collapse at the same time... At the same time an immature idea of 'national theater' became a fashion in the theater world. As a result of this many plays started to give a folk touch to them and started concentrating on dance and music elements... Though these did bring in new dimensions to theater after this shift the thought system of our dramatists and playwrights changed completely." (Suresh: 2008)

In the changed scenario, as said by Vasudev Uchchil in an interview, "A concrete enemy couldn't be identified, to fight." (2011)

Speaking at the seminar organized by *Janamana* of Mysore on street theater activist Prof. K. Ramdas said, "This morning someone said that today street theater movements have declined because today the enemy is not in front our eyes. You cannot show the enemy in today's time. It is invisible. Who will you show? If you show the TV or the computer one will have to break it. But they are just products behind which there is a mentality, a spirit, a driving force which are not in front of our eyes. All of a sudden multinational companies, millionaires have become the string holders. They are not in front of you. Today unlike the days when the enemy was visible in the form of landlord and a caste head is standing in between us being invisible being our enemy and murderer." (Kundur: 2002)

It was S.R. Ramesh who in the same seminar had mentioned about the invisibility of the enemy which was later picked up by Prof. K. Ramdas. In his speech S.R. Ramesh said, "To perform a street play on information technology is not easy as it was to perform a street play based on *Belchi*, because these are quite abstract thoughts. We can go to the people only when we get concrete icons. For example its easy to represent *Belchi* and the landlord but how to find an expression to the way Bill Gates is exploiting our country?" (Kundur: 2002)

Thus the changing socio-economic structure with the invisibility of the enemy all the movements including the street theater movement, of which *Samudaaya* was a part, started declining. It is not just the invisibility of the enemy but also the joining of hands with the enemy and absorbing of the people in the movement and the form of street theater by the till then considered enemy- state, also was one of the reasons for the decline of the movement.

“In my personal opinion the movements which started off by protesting against the system in the 70s decade joined hands with the state around 1985 and this was a major reason for the movement to lose their temper,” said Siddangowda Patil at the seminar organized by *Janamana* in Mysore. (Kundur: 2002)

In an interview T. Surendra Rao mentioning about the poet Siddalingaiah said, “He who once inspired an entire generation to be a rebel through his poetry now is writing poems with lines like- come embrace me of darling leaving aside the problems related to the world. He has been awarded with positions by the state, right? Why will he not move away from the movement and identify himself with the state?” (2011)

“In introspection, I who still identify myself with leftist movements and left party, I am of the opinion that it was till around 1985 that street theater, *Samudaaya*, Dalit movement, Farmers’ movement, Labour movement all of these had real concerns. Till then they had the fire in them. I remember it being 1981 when Indira Gandhi came up with the Nation Security Service Maintenance Act. Both the Communist Parties along with its cultural organization gave a call for all India bundh. *Samudaaya* team which was performing street plays those days was arrested and it was seen by the Government that they do not perform. The tragedy is that the same Government, at a later stage, invited the same street theater artists and asked them to perform street plays on literacy and KPTCL⁶,” said Siddangowda Patil and in the same speech went ahead and said, “Comrades all over joined the literacy programme (*Saksharata Andolan*) with a class concept in mind thinking that the class about which we are concerned do need literacy for it would be a tool in their hands to fight the might. The change did not happen here because the plays were more for promotion and nothing... A.S. Murthy said in the morning that when the form of street theater was used for the government sponsored *Saksharata Andolan* the street plays lost its power. It is true... Before *Saksharata Andolan* street theater had reached the nooks and corners of Karnataka only through the *Samudaaya Jathas*. Though the *Andolan*’s greatness is that it reached the corners of the state it did reduce street theater just to its form. Worse the state thought acting on streets was street theater and with the same artists, without any thoughts, it performed plays on electricity and recently even on the need for toilets. Street plays have been done even on AIDS awareness.... Street theater thus did not remain as a movement.” (Kundur: 2002)

In the same seminar H.S. Umesh opined, based on his observation, that “By the beginning of the 90 decade street theater had become an activity and was not activism.” (Kundur: 2002)

Mohanchandra in the same seminar pointed that, “Even NGOs have used street theater for their purposes. NGOs are not always foreign funded at times it is also funded by the Indian Government. Why does the Indian government fund street plays? It funds so that its ideas can be propagated.” (Kundur: 2002)

I.K. Boluwar remembers that in the city of Mangalore it was between the 1980 and 1990 that the NGOs started to mushroom. He recollects, “Many NGOs like Kiran Center, DEEDS, Nagarika Seva Trust, Abhivyakta all came up in and around Mangalore in those days.” (2011) Vasudev Uchchil recollects the incident where a person from the DEEDS NGO came to *Samudaaya* to compose music for the play *Taayi* claiming to know Russian music. “Slowly he absorbed people from our organization to their cultural wing giving them incentives and good pay for performances.” (2011)

This process of participating in sponsored movements for publicity and not as a protest began with the participation of *Samudaaya* in the 1985 *Bharath Janvijnan Jatha*.

“In the year 1985 many *Samudaaya* members participated in the *Bharat Janvijnan Jatha* organized by the *Kerala Rajy Vijnan Parishad*, which passed through the state in the month of March.” (Bhat and Gundann: 2002)

Stalin K., who had participated in the *Bharat Janvijnan Jatha* said, “I was more than happy in the *Jatha* because the *Jatha* would provide me three meals per day which otherwise was not guaranteed to me.” (2011)

“Theater in itself is not strong enough to feed the artist with four square meals per day. That is why people from theater move to other professions and other mediums.” (Suresh: 2008)

While many as said by B. Suresh went to the television medium but many as he himself pointed out, in his article *Television Emba Daityanu Mattu Ramgabhummi Emba Chiranjeevanu* says, continued to do theater in free time.

But with the taste of money the artists lost their commitment for theater and for the issues, as I.K. Boluwar opines. (2011) Mohanchandra, while speaking in the seminar on street theater organized by *Janamana* of Mysore said, “When an artist feels for an issue and speaking about it he walks barefoot and performs using money from his own pocket. But when he has to propagate tailor made ideas he will go on the vehicle provided to him and perform after eating the food provided to him by the one who has sponsored.” (Kundur: 2002) I.K. Boluwar mentions that with this the artists started performing for money and not for any cause and only when there was a Government or NGO sponsored programme and not when there was a crisis or an issue which had to be addressed.” (2011)

These shifting attitude and approach of the artists with the coming of Government and NGO sponsored street plays did accelerate the decline of the *Samudaaya* movement.

Apart from these reasons there were reasons from within the *Samudaaya* organization which caused its own decline.

Muddukrishna, in the seminar organized by *Janamana* of Mysore on street theater said, “We the likeminded people who came together and formed organization in the 70s have not remained as likeminded people and I doubt if we will ever come together as likeminded again.” (Kundur: 2002)

But *Samudaaya* did not seem to have all likeminded people from the beginning. There were some basic differences between individuals from the beginning. This comes across in the autobiography of C.G. Krishnaswamy who soon after starting with the *Samudaaya* chapter of his life writes, “There were differences within *Samudaaya* and as its organizer it was my duty to make everyone stand under the same umbrella,” and adds, “The need for everyone in the organization was to forget all the ideological differences they had with each other and march together.” (2002)

But later, in an introspective tone, C.G. Krishnaswamy writes, “Though it appears that it was political ideologies which brought these people together and made them part ways, it was not the exact reason. The true reasons, now appears to me, were selfishness and narrow mindedness which blocked the smooth flow of leftist movements.” (2002) He also mentions that “ego clashes would not let all of them stand together” and concludes by saying, “It is a

lesson that I have learnt being in movements that while building up movements man becomes very selfish.” (2002)

This selfishness was more to pose as the reason for the success. C.G. Krishnaswamy writes, “When I recollect all these days [the days of *Jatha*] I wonder who and all capitalized on the success of *Samudaaya*. I wonder because the people who toiled for *Samudaaya* are different and the ones who ate the fruits of it are different.” (2002) In the later pages he writes, “The greatest blasphemy in the cultural world of Kannada, to me, are the episodes of some people (inclusive of myself) quitting *Samudaaya* for petty reasons, some making a business out of art, some engaging in workshops funded by the Ford Foundation.” (2002)

Raghunanadan, in an interview said, “Prasunna was controlling the functioning of *Samudaaya* even after he quit. This was not accepted to many,” (2011) hinting the cause for some quitting the organization and the cause for disappointment of many with *Samudaaya*. C.G. Krishnaswamy in his autobiography writes, “I had difficulty in answering the high command about the participation of Raghunandan, who was from the CPI, in the activities of *Samudaaya*,” (2002) which is a clear indication of the fact that *Samudaaya* in a way practiced political untouchability. This as Raghunandan said in the interview, “Made *Samudaaya* stoop to the level of leaving my name from the list of its members participating in the *Bharath Janvijan Jatha*, while reading out its yearly report that year, even when it was I who got *Samudaaya* involved in the *Jatha* using my connections with the *Vijnan Praishad*.” (2011)

Two more episodes from the autobiography of C.G. Krishnaswamy speak of the political untouchability of *Samudaaya*. While writing about the meeting where *Jatha* was being planned, he mentions about a decision taken to publish some books and the members present there wondering who would publish it. While narrating this episode he writes, “We were not ready to approach *Navakarnataka* publishers because they belonged to the CPI party.” (2002)

In his autobiography C.G. Krishnaswamy also narrates of an episode where the *Samudaaya* members had a huge debate on staging the novel *Chirasmarane* of Niranjan. He writes, “How does it matter as to who adapts the novel into a play? How does it matter as to who directs the play? I was searching for these answers and I started seeing the play of ego and

other issues behind this. A wonderful work of literature went out of our hand. The problem our friends had was that he had CPI associations and had relationship with the Soviet Union.... It's a black mark in our history that we avoided Niranjan and Ka. Vem. Rajgopal just for the reason that they were from the CPI." (2002)

C.K. Gundanna in his article for the souvenir brought out to mark the completion of 25 years of *Samudaaya* wrote, "The condition of *Samudaaya* has changed a lot today. The temper of the movement does not exist. Once there existed 35 units of *Samudaaya* but now only 15 are working. The earlier form and commitment is lost now... and the organization has become very weak." (Bhat and Gundanna: 2000)

Conclusion

Man, during the early days of life on earth, after returning from the hunt, had to communicate his hunting experiences to the people of his community. As there was no properly developed language those days there was need for him to enact the entire hunting experience in order to communicate his experience. In this process few of them had to play the role of hunters and few others of the hunted animal. It is in this enactment that man would perform a role and recreate the actual incident. Scholars have noted this as the earliest form of theater, who also opine that behind these performances there must have been a magical purpose. Man who was very much dependent on nature because of his poverty of knowledge regarding nature and lack of control over it must have made attempts to bring nature under control through these performances. Conquering the world became quite easier because of the hope the magic provided. So, this magic cannot be considered illogic and senseless. Without these magic and the creation of an illusion of conquering the world, survival would have been impossible for man during those days.

Slowly as the hold over nature got stronger the theatrical performances of earlier days turned into ritualistic performances. Earlier, the entire community was a participant in the performance but later there were specified people to perform who came to be known by many names like medicine man, shaman who would perform certain rituals on behalf of the community. With this there came in the audience for the performance i.e. the community members on whose behalf the performance was being performed. To mark the difference between the performer and the audience abstract kind of costumes and make-ups were being used. While the earlier performance could have taken place anywhere the later performances had to be conducted in a particular specified space which was considered holy. Thus performance took new meanings and shapes and forms in a society which saw division of labor.

With passing time art, as we saw the growth of ritualistic performance hand in hand with the separation of audience and performer, art became a specialized area and artists at one point of history came to propagate the idea of 'art for art's sake'. The opposition to the stream of art

for art's sake believed that the conception of art for art's sake is basically elitist. The reasons for this conception to be elitist are, of course, not very difficult to observe. First, if art is only for art's sake, then the true artist need not be involved in any kind of work. The only people who can afford to take such an attitude are those belonging to an elite. Second, and more important, if art is for art's sake then the problems of society need not be highlighted. Of course in any society those who do not wish to portray the problems of that society are those who benefit from that society. In an unequal society this would be the elite again.

These minds not saw a direct link between art and society and felt that art had certain social responsibility. Their concerns were so rooted in society that they saw art, even revolutionary art, within the framework of society. These committed artists, though deeply rooted in their drive to bring a change, did not believe that art in itself can bring a change. Art, they believed, basically operates at the level of values and emotions. It can question values. It can perhaps even provide an alternate set of values; but people are unlikely to change society on the basis of seeing plays or films. Art can at best make people question values prevalent in society. It can point to the contradictions of a society. It cannot by itself change society. It is necessary therefore for art to work with forces which bring about change. Since social change is brought about ultimately only by a political change, art can assist or hinder political change. To this extent there is a very definite link between art and politics. So they believed that progressive politics involves understanding society and organizing forces for a political change and so progressive art must also understand society and support those forces which bring about such a change.

As a product of this stream of thought *Samudaaya*, a theater movement, which began as a theater troupe, in Karnataka emerged.

Samudaaya which was aligned to the leftist ideology and inspired by the Indian People's Theatre Association was started in the year 1974 as a small drama troupe, sometime before the emergency declared by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The emergency period marks the breakdown of Nehruvian model of socialism. The aim of *Samudaaya* was to reach out to the masses and educate them about their social, economical and political conditions, through songs, plays and pictures. The aim also was to "use theatre as an instrument of education, as an attack on feudal and semi-feudal values.

Samudaaya first made its mark by producing several plays in Bengaluru, the then Bangalore. The first of its production was *Huttava Badidare* directed by one of its founder Prasunna. *Samudaaya* developed eight plays during its first year. Following the success of this, thirty two units of *Samudaaya* were formed around Karnataka.

Samudaaya organized a major activity in the late 1970's- two cultural *jathas*, for which several units travelled all over the state with songs, lectures, exhibition and street plays. The *jathas* were taken in the year 1979 and 1981. The first entitled 'towards new values' attacked superstitions, communalism, social economic inequalities and the second one which followed the peasant uprising in Northern Karnataka, was 'towards the peasant,' which are considered historical creating a unique name and space of *Samudaaya* in the history of Karnataka culture and theater.

Karnataka in its pre-independence times and even in the post independence times has not been a witness to any left driven movements. The first people's theater was set up in Bangalore in April 1941 it was stalled because of police repression. Anil De Silva, who was instrumental in organizing the theatre in Bangalore, came to Bombay, where she initiated a people's theater in 1942. This became the IPTA and Bombay its head quarters. Though IPTA had its unit in Bangalore, "the activities of IPTA never entered Karnataka as it did in West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Maharashtra. Savanuru Satyagraha and Kagodu Satyagraha were strong movements for land rights during the 60s decade but they were driven by the Lohia influenced Samaajvaadi movements not left movements. In such a context it is interesting as to how a strong left inclined movement such as *Samudaaya* emerged and worked for nearly a decade making a great impact.

The seeds of *Samudaaya* can be seen inside the realm of theater and outside the realm of theater too.

It appears like theater activities were a part of the communist party movement, though not under the IPTA banner. B.V. Kakkillaya in his autobiography titled *Bareyada Dinachariya Mareyada Putagalu* writes about theatrical performances and songs being performed during the party meetings and seminars, on issues which were of concern to the party. Though there is no direct reference made later to the IPTA in the autobiography of Kakkillaya we come

across a book titled *Indina Haadugalu* to mean 'Songs of This Day' published by '*Janataa Rangabhoomi, Manjeshwara*'. Kakkillaya while referring to IPTA in the lines quoted above, calls IPTA as *Janataa Rangabhoomi*. This publication gives us a hint that there existed a cultural group, though not organized under one name or banner, which, though not a unit of IPTA, was working in the same lines of that of IPTA.

The book *Indina Haadugalu* published in the year 1952 is a collection of the songs that were sung by Venkatrao Kaandilkar. In his autobiography Kakkillaya mentions about Kandilkar singing during various occasions and events of the Communist Party.

Like the experiments and performances in Mangalore and surrounding places and that of IPTA the team named 'Chitra' doesn't get much of a mention in the history of Karnataka theater. The team 'Chitra' was the first team to turn the course of theater history and theater movement in Karnataka. The team Chitra was formed by A. S. Murthy in the year 1974 and *Kattu* was the first street play in Kannada performed by Chitra team.

Though the Karnataka chapter of IPTA, the experiments of Mangalore cultural teams associated with the Communist Party and the performances of Chitra do not have much significance in the history of Karnataka Theater, these can be seen as the precursor to a revolutionary theater movement of the later days under the banner of *Samudaaya*. These teams and experiments can be seen as the workers who made way, for *Samudaaya* in the later days, to get established.

In the cultural sphere especially in that of literature and theater the major undercurrent was Navya. Due to western influence, in the field of art and literature, there were many experiments that were being conducted with form and content. Karanth, Karnad, Shriranga, Champa, Lankesh, Kambar and others enabled theater attract a large crowd of middle class, through their innovations and experiments. Though there was a rise in the art that upheld the slogan of 'art for art's sake' there were debates about art being for art's sake exposing the hollowness and limitations of such an approach and at once and at the same time there was a search for an alternative. As a result of this the approach to art which aspired to bring a change, to provoke and not please and create a new movement, started to flower from its bud form. Amidst this new awakening *Samudaaya* was born to promote theater with social

commitment. *Navya* movement thus can be seen as one of the force which pushed *Samudaya* and such theaters with political conscious to come into existence.

In one of his articles Prasanna said that the new kind of plays being written in Kannada, during the 70s, with political consciousness, emerged out of “historical necessity” and “historical pressure”.

This historical necessity and historical pressure was the reason not just for the emergence of new kind of plays but also for new kind of theater i.e. street theater and also for theater groups with new approach towards art and life, such as *Samudaaya*.

Though it is popularly believed that *Samudaaya* took birth as a protest against and as a response to the Emergency declared by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in the year 1975, the truth is that *Samudaaya* had come into existence even before emergency was declared. But it was born as a response to the crisis of pre-emergency and emerged as a force through its responses in the post-emergency period.

What was the mood of this period like? The independence of 1947 did not inaugurate a golden age in the history of this country. All the expectations of the Congress party did not come true. Turtle’s walk continued. Congress spoke of socialism but kept one of its leg in capitalism and the other feudalism. Yet Congress continued to remain in power, thanks to the devotion people have had for Gandhi, Nehru, Congress, elections, police and courts.

The middle-class which could not achieve any change was disappointed. This class yet was not divorced from the desire to move up the socio-economic ladder. The ones who could bring the change did not have the power of literacy. The ones who possessed it were lazy. The ruling class couldn’t have asked for anything more than such a situation, which protected its interests.

But the situation did not continue to remain the same. The economic crisis which had sucked the farmers and labourers, exploded and absorbed the middle-class too. Along with this there came Emergency which not just scared the apolitical people of this nation but also brought a new awakening in them.

By the year 1975 in the Kannada world, especially in the surroundings of Bangalore University left leaning thoughts was in the air. These leanings had not yet taken a form of a party or had formed completely as a political ideology. The radical upsurge in different parts of the world at that time was marked by rereading Marx to rediscover the sources of revolutionary humanism that could inspire individual courage to sacrifice for a cause. The general trend was towards a return to the moral fervor and spontaneity of the early days of the revolutionary movement which inspired communists, socialists and anarchists alike, and was exemplified by the predominance of morality over political expediency. This was reflected in the civil rights and anti-war movements in the USA; in the students' agitations in Western Europe, which rejected both the State's promises of affluence and the established Left's bureaucratic torpor and sought to revive the past socialist notions of self-management and self-representation; in Che Guevara's self-sacrifice in the jungles of Bolivia in pursuit of the old dream of international solidarity of all revolutionaries, and in China's Cultural Revolution which in spite of excesses, errors and crimes committed in the name of Marxism, was initially motivated by the Rousseauan emphasis on transforming the individual, and the reiteration of the doctrine that sovereignty lay with the people. At such a point of history few individuals in the city of Bangalore were sketching the idea of a new theater troupe and formed *Samudaaya*.

This global scenario of the 1960-70 can also be seen as a force that created an atmosphere for the emergence of *Samudaaya*, which identified itself with the left politics. This global left upsurge and the upsurge of the left in Karnataka were the political-intellectual forces acting along with the political developments in Karnataka which made road for a movement like *Samudaaya* to walk in.

The commitment that Kannada theater found for itself in the seventies decade was a result of the churning in political, social and cultural fields. On one hand the Dalits who were illiterate for centuries were not just becoming literates but also were demanding for their rights and organizing themselves under the banner of *Dalit Sangarsha Samithi*. On the other hand the farmers were uniting under the banner of *Raita Sangha* and demanding for their rights. In parallel to this the Lohiaites, Marxists were also emerging as a force. It can be understood that a radical intellectual stream had started flowing in the land of Karnataka during the 70s

decade. This radical thought was getting voice in different mediums and its expression through the medium of theater was inevitable. So, the coming of *Samudaaya* to existence could be understood as a result of the radical atmosphere that was getting strong and intense in Karnataka, at that point of history.

But at the same time, the Kannada society, with the new awakening of the Dalits through education, was still regressive and the new awakening did anger the majority who could not stand the awakening of the till then oppressed. This led to another kind of oppression of the already oppressed, trying to stop them from waking up and demanding for equal rights and rights of equality. C. Basavaligaiah said, In the 70s in broad day light women and dalits were being burnt alive, inequality was being sown in the soil of this state... land, women, dalits all were exploited and value system had collapsed.

Though one section of the Dalit and the marginalized class had got exposed to education and a new awakening had dawned on them, the major portion of this population was still illiterate and had accepted exploitation silently. So, along with becoming the voice of the marginalized and the oppressed there was also a need to speak to the marginalized and the oppressed. This is also one of the historical pressure and historical necessity which led to the emergence of *Samudaaya*. This can be well understood by the editorial of K.V. Narayan in the very first issue of *Samudaaya Vaarthapatra*. He writes, "How to communicate when a major chunk of the population is illiterate? Speeches and radio are good but not enough. More importantly the medium of radio is not in our hands for its control and ownership is in the hands of the state. Now we are left with only one medium that of theater. Some might ask if it will not lead to a kind of propaganda. We are not to make value judgment through theater but push the viewers to think by exposing the multiple sides of the society by making them a part of the play's content. We should make the viewers look at their own lives, after the play and not just feel pleased after watching it. One might feel that it is inflaming the viewers but as I said earlier our theater must be in such a way that it shouldn't just anger the viewers but provide them with insights and make them think about the issues. This, I know, cannot happen just with theater. Many other activities should go hand in hand with theater activities and should involve people and there should be a great people's participation in

these activities only then we will be able to witness some kind of change. I know, it is not as easy as speaking. But, we should think in these lines. Shouldn't we?"

Overall, the intellectual preparation for the movement of the nature of *Samudaaya* was happening with the increase in leftist thought, pushing many intellectuals and artists to a meditative state. With this there were external factors like the atrocity on the marginalized and oppressed, restriction of theater to the urban society, the *Navya's* movement's influence making theater borrow the style of absurd theater, the emergency which chained the freedom of intellectuals and artists and the disillusionment caused by the Congress government leading to socio-economic crisis, which when came in contact with the ideological meditations led to the emergence of *Samudaaya*.

Samudaaya which was born with a political agenda with it, did not restrict itself to just performing plays but also through praxis of theater as a part of other types of cultural practices made its attempt to bring about socio-political changes. One of the major cultural practices that it incorporated was that of *Jathas*, which it took out all through Karnataka in the years 1979, 1981, 1986 and more. But before it incorporated the concept of *Jatha* it took an active participation in the 1978 Lok Sabha bi-elections when Smt. Indira Gandhi contested from Chikamagalur of Karnataka.

The bi-election of 1978 at Chikamagalur was considered by *Samudaaya* as a political battle against dictatorship and organized many songs, street plays and poster presentation. Fifty members of *Samudaaya*, broken into four groups travelled around the different taluqs of the election constituency and gave over 350 performances which were viewed by over seven lakh people. The plays performed were *Jeetada Sangappana Koley*- based on the articles published in the *Panchama* magazine-, *Indira Gandhiyavara Sullu Pramaana Patra*, the short-play based on the Turk Men Gate incident of Delhi, scripted by Siddalingaiah and other skits based on the atrocities that took place during election campaigns, atrocities during emergency. An attempt was made to provide insights into several other issues such as the caste issues, the harijan issues, issues of unemployment through these plays. Most of these performances were done in the areas where Congress had a strong hold. The Mangalore *Samudaaya* team was attacked with stones while performing at Moodigere and Chikamagalur

causing injuries. There were also instances where violent groups of goons threatened *Samudaaya* not to perform its plays.

Though Smt. Indira Gandhi came victorious in the Chikamagalur Lok Sabha elections, a member of *Samudaaya* H. Janardhan opines that *Samudaaya* through its plays during the election time 'troubled the peaceful sleep of the congress party' and thus showcased the power of street theater. Apart from causing sleepless nights for the congress party the plays also sowed the seeds for a new cultural- socio-political though process in Karnataka.

The greatness of *Samudaaya* is in the cultural *Jathas* that it took out. For various reasons these jathas are a milestone in the social-cultural realms in Karnataka. The artists, writers, intellectuals, students who realized that art is not for arts sake but for the sake of improvising life, in groups took art to the people. In moving to the people these groups and these jathas intended to bring in a new radical-scientific awakening among people and shaking the feudal, capitalistic system and the corrupt politicians by their roots. More importantly the target groups of these jathas were the groups which were, until then, neglected by the mainstream cultural partcitioners and those who can enable a change in the society...

Samudaaya broke the system of performing plays before the ticket-buying middle class and lived up to its belief that through art a new dynamism can be brought in the society. By overriding the energy level of the regressive forces these *jathas* created a new wave in Karnataka by becoming the voice of the voiceless. Never before in the history of Karnataka had art come to streets the way it came with the *Jathas* of *Samudaaya*. Factories, slums, dalit colonies all these spaces saw the entry of art through *Samudaaya*.

Two of the major *jathas* were taken in the year 1979 and 1981. The first entitled 'towards new values' attacked superstitions, communalism, social economic inequalities and the second one which followed the peasant uprising in Northern Karnataka, was 'towards the peasant.'

While *Samudaaya* was observing its decennial year (1985) the state of Karnataka saw serious drought. *Samudaaya* then took out a *Jatha* with the focus on drought to explain the socio-political angles of the drought other than environmental reasons.

The United Nations was observing the year 1986 as the year of 'World Peace'. *Samudaaya* contributed to the observation of the UN by taking a state wide 'Painting *Jatha*' displaying a 120feetx4 feet oil painting on peace. The painting was taken through Bangalore, Kolar, Tumkur, Mandya, Mysore, Madikeri, Dakshina Kannada, Chikamagalur, Hasana, Shimogga, Uttar Kannada, Dharwad, Belgaum, Bijapur, Bidar, Gulbarga, Raichur, Bellary and Chitradurga.

When Safdar Hashmi, the street theater artist based in Delhi, was murdered in broad day light while performing a street play on 1 Jan 1989, as a protest *Samudaaya* kept performing plays for the next three months at its district units along with holding protest meets and all concluded the protest with a five day (12 April to 16 April) '*Samagrata Utsav*' in Bangalore where several street plays by several units of *Samudaaya* were performed not just at the location of the *Samagrata Utsav* but also in different colonies and corners of Bangalore.

In the year 1985 *Samudaaya* also participated in the *Bharath Janvijnan Jatha* and later in the literacy movement. *Samudaaya* even in the recent years have organized state wide *Jathas* like the '*Hasivu Muktha Karnataka-kkagi Samudaaya Saamskruthika Jaatha- 2010*' and '*Brashtaachaara Virodhi Samudaaya Samskruthika Jaatha- 2011*'.

Although *Samudaaya* did not result in a strong political theatre movement in Karnataka comparable to Bengali political theater in IPTA's aftermath, it succeeded in generating political consciousness through a new crop of theater practitioners from the lower classes and castes, as well as 'content consciousness' among Kannada theater workers in general.

Samudaaya included people from the lower caste and the non-Brahmin castes in their productions such as Basavalingaiah, Janaradhan etc. which shows which world *Samudaaya* was trying to negotiate with. This negotiation should also be understood in the spaces which it explored to perform its street plays. Be it the slums of Bangalore where *Belchi* was performed or the nooks and corners of Karnataka which were reached by *Samudaaya* during their *Jathas*. The inclusive nature was not just at the level of caste but also gender.

When *Samudaaya* travelled from village to village and town to town it roped in the local poets, actors and other artists, this not just expanded *Samudaaya* but also let *Samudaaya* incorporate new voices and nurture and bring to the forefront the hidden talents. Thus an

entire new team of theater practitioners came into the theater world because of *Samudaaya*, like Basavalingaiah, Janardhan, Chandrahas Ullal, Gopadkar, Suresh Anagalli, Mohanchandra, who later went on to become towering figures in the realm of Kannada theater and culture.

Speaking of his own experience in the *Jatha* the founding member of *Samudaaya*, Prasunna, in an interview said, “I learnt a lot during the *Jathas* while performing, travelling and while interacting with the people directly,” and added in the same breath, “All my writings came only after my experiences with *Samudaaya*,” hinting the influence *Samudaaya* has had on his writings which came later on and are still being written, after his days with *Samudaaya*.

Prasunna in the same interview also said, “The playwrights of T.N. Seetharam, B.V. Vaikuntaraju etc have a lot of *Samudaaya* influence on them” hinting the impact *Samudaaya* has had on playwrights who walked along with *Samudaaya*.

In an article written for the souvenir *Samudaaya* brought out during its completion of two decades playwright H.S. Shivaprakash wrote, “If *Samudaaya* had not shown directions for new kind of playwrights probably I wouldn’t have taken play writing so seriously.”

Innovative productions were done by *Samudaaya* like that of *Belchi* which broke the till then followed techniques of street theater but making an impact. Productions such as *Tayi* showed the immense possibility of stage space usability and at the same time productions like *Galileo* showed the possibility of intimate theater in Kannada for the first time.

With the intention of producing plays for the slum-dwellers of Bangalore *Samudaaya* members started walking towards the slums of Bangalore. But there were no play texts available which would meet the needs of the play to be produced for slum dwellers and to be performed in the slums. Thus *Samudaaya* started writing play texts based on reports and real life incidents expanding the meaning of play texts.

The first play performed by *Samudaaya* was ‘*Huttava Badidare*’. “This play was adapted by K.V. Narayana from a very feudal play by Samsa- ‘*Vigada Vikramaraya*’. The feudal nature of the original play was completely altered to a progressive message by changing the focus of

the play. This possibility of adaptation later showed path to many major productions of Kannada namely *Odalaala*, *Kusumabale*, *Yayathi* and many others.

The idea of group direction was tried out by *Samudaaya*. This however, came across many difficulties inherent in theater itself. The experiment was with a group of five directors who also acted in the play. The result, however, were not very appealing. This was because each of the five directors had their own overall conception of the play. This being the case, the direction from anyone of them was in the context of that person's individual conception. The net result was that the play looked hotch potch and seemed to lack an overall impact. Though not a successful experiment it is a significant experiment by *Samudaaya*, showing a possibility, which can be improved, in theater.

Samudaaya should be given the credit for having brought in a new political awakening in the Kannada land. This new awakening is reflected in the various audience reactions to the plays of *Samudaaya*, the experiences of the participants of *Samudaaya Jatha* and the artist of *Samudaaya*.

There have been several instances where *Samudaaya* had a brush with the regressive forces and instances of attacks on *Samudaaya* members by the regressive forces which do reflect the strength which *Samudaaya* possessed and how it was causing a threat to the regressive forces. It also reflects how *Samudaaya* had identified RSS as a serious threat to national integrity in the early days of its resurrection in the post-emergency period.

By the end of the first half of the 80s decade the movement of street theater and *Samudaaya* got weak. There were good reasons for the decline. The pro-people movements broke apart, organizations and movements started working under the umbrella of power holders, parting of individuals from each other and from organizations.

Exit of C.G.K and Prasanna marked the decline because none of the other organizers left behind by them were not great theater artists though were good at organization. The two-Prasanna and C.G. Krishnaswamy- were considered as the two strong pillars of *Samudaaya*. The reasons for the exit of Prasanna and Krishnaswamy also shows how much dependent the organization was on a few individuals and how much of a pressure was put on individuals

which cost them too much leading to their decision to quit the organization making way for the decline of the organization.

In the year 1981 I.K. Boluwar, S.S. Bhat and Ramakrishna all got transferred from Puttur and with that the Puttur unit had to be closed down because others couldn't continue to keep the temper and the organization going, this again reflects that *Samudaaya*, at places, was too much dependent on a few individuals and their strength.

While some of the members of *Samudaaya* had joined with a political will to change the society many others had joined just out of passion for theater. The study circle in *Samudaaya* was too ideological in nature and this made many, who had joined *Samudaaya* with interest just in theater and art, turn away from *Samudaaya*.

The drift was not just between ideologues and aestheticians. It was also between the central committee in Bangalore and the *Samudaaya* units. The central committee would be instructing the units, based on their experience and exposure to the Bangalore dreams. But the units wouldn't have the resources to realize the Bangalore dreams. This made the movement *Samudaaya* grow a bit weak.

The movements that surfaced during 1975, all of them declined by the year 1984-85. When there are no social movements it is not possible to perform street plays. Like one needs to make several preparations to perform a play on the stage, the necessary preparations to set the stage for a street play are social movements. Street plays get a proper focus only when backed by social movements. This decline of social movements in general was also one of the reasons for the decline of the *Samudaaya* movement.

Also, from the 80s the socio-economic structure itself started to undergo a change. At the beginning of the 80s decade the Indian government signed an agreement with GATT to take huge loans and following this the representation of the working class in theater started declining, though there were some representations here and there. The representatives of the labour class like *Samudaaya* also became a bit silent.

In the changed scenario a concrete enemy couldn't be identified, to fight. To perform a street play on information technology was not easy as it was to perform a street play based on

Belchi, because these were quite abstract thoughts. For example it was easy to represent Belchi and the landlord but how to find an expression to the way Bill Gates is exploiting our country? Such changing features of the enemy not just caused a difficulty in representation but was in overall changing the mentality of the larger mass.

The movements which started off by protesting against the system in the 70s decade joined hands with the state around 1985 and this was a major reason for the movement to lose their temper.

While some active members of *Samudaaya* got honoured with awards and positions most of the *Samudaaya* artists got absorbed by the street theater sponsored by the state. Many joined the literacy programme (*Saksharata Andolan*) with a class concept in mind thinking that the class about which we are concerned do need literacy for it would be a tool in their hands to fight the might. The change did not happen here because the plays were more for promotion and nothing. Before *Saksharata Andolan* street theater had reached the nooks and corners of Karnataka only through the *Samudaaya Jathas*. Though the *Andolan's* greatness is that it reached the corners of the state it did reduce street theater just to its form. Worse the state thought acting on streets was street theater and with the same artists, without any thoughts, it performed plays on electricity and recently even on the need for toilets. Street plays have been done even on AIDS awareness. Street theater thus did not remain as a movement and became an activity and did not remain as activism. At the same juncture of history the NGOs started mushrooming everywhere and these NGOs started using street theater for their programmes and started absorbing street theater artists from other troupes including *Samudaaya* and the artists got pulled towards it because of the decent payment done by the NGOs who had funding from foreign and also from the Indian state. With the taste of money the artists lost their commitment for theater and for the issues. These shifting attitude and approach of the artists with the coming of Government and NGO sponsored street plays did accelerate the decline of the *Samudaaya* movement.

Apart from these reasons there were reasons from within the *Samudaaya* organization which caused its own decline. *Samudaaya* did not seem to have all likeminded people from the beginning. There were some basic differences between individuals from the beginning. The emergence to come together by emergency died off with the end of emergency and soon the

ideological differences started becoming more visible and weakening the organization from within. Along with this there were people whose selfishness and personal differences, not ideological, started weakening the movement.

The condition of *Samudaaya* has changed a lot today. The temper of the movement does not exist. Once there existed 35 units of *Samudaaya* but now only 15 are working. The earlier form and commitment is lost now and the organization has become very weak.

Notes

Introduction

1:



A twenty five thousand year old painting found in a cave in France where a man has worn the skin of a deer and held its horns on his head. The body position of the man in the painting is said to be depicting a dancing posture

Chapter One

2: Erali kempu baavuta| Haarali kempu baavuta.
Mel mel mel merali kempu baavuta||
Raita janara baavuta| Jeetadavara baavuta|
Sotu sunnavaada janara| Neetuvanta baavuta||
Dudiva janateyellava| Koodisuva baavuta|
Kadeya kaala sulivargendu bidade saarwa baavuta||
Dalita janara gola baalanalisuvanta baavuta|
Sulidu naliva khala dhalavanalisuvanta baavuta|
Baladi nelada holawa phalawa meluwa alasi vargake|
Naliva kalewa uliwa kaal kaleyitenuva baavuta||
Didiva badawarondu goodi| Tadeyadodane sangha hoodi|
Kadahu, bedaginodeyarannu| Kedeva baavuta||
Heeri Parara suriva beware| Saara, siriya meerdavara|
Garuwa harise tori saari saari| Karewa baavuta||
Haleya koleya toleyalelasuvileya janara baavuta|
Holalanaalwa khalaraneledu urulisuva baavuta|
Suliwa chalada balada mallarillavenipa baavuta|
Keelindulidar naliva nelege melaketwa baavuta|
Ee kraanti baavuta| Namma janara baavuta|

Nammolavina baavuta| Namma balada baavuta|
Ee kraanti baavuta| Ee kembraavuta||

3: Bayalaata, literally- theater in the open, is a form of Yakshagana, a folk art from Karnataka, in the form of dance-drama.

4: Kalakshetra is a proscenium theater in Bangalore which was the main centre of theater activities those days.

Chapter Three

5: Tulu is the local language of the south-west coastal belt of Karnataka, different from Kannada.

6: Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation Limited

“... The disillusionment caused to many from our generation who identified themselves, including you and I, with the Samudaaya, Bandaaya movement need not be turned into a big issue. Nobody had asked to have high hopes and live in illusions. Or nobody had given us the contract of changing the course of Kannada culture. We ourselves had taken up that responsibility. None of us were wise enough to understand that the culture that we went to change is larger than us. Kannada world has lived for thousands of years without our concerns...”

G. Rajshekhar

(In a personal letter to C.G. Krishnaswamy)

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