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## Master Hirannaiah exits the stage

Chiranjeevi Kulkarni

BENGALURU: Theatre personality 'Master' Hirannaiah, known for his razor-sharp dialogues and stinging wit that cut through even the thick skin of politicians, passed away here on Thursday. He was 85.

A doyen of the Kannada theatre world, Hirannaiah was recently admitted to a hospital following health complications. He is survived by his wife and children. He was known for his iconic roles in plays like Lanchavatara, Kapimushthi, Nadubeedi Narayana and Makmal Topi. He was active till five years ago when he nearly faced physical attack for his remarks against Congress leader Siddaramaiah. That day, he declared he would stay away from public life.

Son of "cultured comedian" K Hirannaiah and Sharadamma, Narasimhamurthy went through many struggles before taking over his father's name and becoming Hirannaiah. As is true to many theatre



'Master' Hirannaiah

personalities, his father, a star of the theatre world in the 1950s, did not leave him much except his name and the rich culture.

The death shook Narasimhamurthy, who came to Bengaluru from Mysuru and lived the life of near destitution. Litterateur AN Krishna Rao guided him to take up theatre and follow his father's footsteps.

The humble beginnings in theatre led him to a theatre company built and run by Ballari Lalitamma, a contemporary of his father. The period saw Narasimhamurthy taking on his father's name as well as imbibing his spirit, transforming into a cultural critic as is seen in many of his plays.

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## Master Hirannaiah exits the stage

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In his book on theatre movement in Karnataka, writer Gudihalli Nagaraj highlights Master Hirannaiah's role in taking Kannada plays to the west.

"Taking a drama troupe of 15-20 people to the distant US is not an easy task. Usually, Hirannaiah alone gets the invitation and he takes an artiste with him. Another artiste, Kulkarni, who stays in the US, joins Hirannaiah. The three

stage Masterayana, a two-hour drama comprising excerpts from their Lanchavathara, Nadubidi Narayana and Makmal Topi dramas," he writes.

A self-declared "RSS man", Hirannaiah, however, remained a humanist in his personal life. He did not spare any politician as is evident by some of his caustic words against then chief minister B S Yeddyurappa.

Theatreperson B Suresh said Hirannaiah came out to help one and all. "He has

helped thousands of people in his personal capacity. He would stage plays solely to raise funds for struggling actors or for associations engaged in charity," he said.

Actor Mandya Ramesh said Hirannaiah will be remembered for his generosity as much as he is known for his roles.

"He did set an example for us. He showed young actors that they can build a comfortable life through theatre," he said.