

Actresses.—Although on the ancient Hindu stage female rôles were generally played by women, the tradition was discontinued after the Moslem conquest on account of the inferior status of women and the 'purdah' system. Thus the native histrionic talent was confined to the salon of the dancing girls and to certain types of village performances. The new contact with the West, however, brought about a change, although orthodox opinion, afraid of all criticism, was very slow to introduce reforms. When the gifted Parsi actor-manager Balliwala returned from his European tour, he made the bold experiment of introducing a few women on the popular stage of Bombay. Gohar, Mary Fenton and Munnibai are among the best actresses seen on the Urdu stage.

The story of the English actress, Mary Fenton, daughter of an officer in the Indian army, falling in love with the acting of the celebrated K. P. Khatau is graphically told by one Gangakanta.⁴ She excelled in the rôles of Parsi heroines in light social comedies and was universally admired. Gohar played several Shakespearean rôles with success, whereas Munnibai recently won laurels in a Hindu domestic tragedy. Despite about a dozen good actresses on the Gujarati-Urdu stage during the last half century, however, the popular prejudice, based on social considerations, has made it extremely difficult for women to act in professional theatres.

Boy Actors.—In a manner not unlike the practice of the Elizabethan 'Boy companies', boys in India are generally selected in professional companies for their gift of singing, though, unquestionably, handsome features and charm of personality are additional qualifications. On account of the prejudice against actresses, the young boys selected play as chorus girls and later on rise to be understudies and finally to the rank of 'stars'. With only the rudiments of education, the gifted 'Sundari' (named after Desdemona) and 'Bāla Gāndharva' made their début on the Bombay stage.

4. *The Gujarati periodical*, Bombay, October 15, 1916.