Chapter - 5
POLITICAL THEATRE:
REPRESENTATION OF MARGINALITY
The onset of modernism necessitated the appreciation of the relationships that subsist between people and state. The concern of State in different aspects of human life is realised. The state’s control is specified by social role rather than by personal characteristics of the individual, which is always subjected to periodical constituency legitimation. Individuals have citizenship rights that they can claim against the state, which made humans political. The rise of Marxism in the late eighteenth century led a radical change in human thinking. The relations between state and the people are redefined and both mutually perceived themselves as binary oppositions. Every branch of knowledge underwent change and theatre is one among them. Slowly a separate branch of theatre started developing throughout the world in the name of 'political theatre'. The main purpose of political theatre in the initial phases was to transform the self-consciousness into group consciousness and to initiate
active political struggle for propagating their ideologies. Many theatre groups in various countries appropriated political theatre as a weapon to fight against all sorts of social imbalances and exploitation of weak. Erwin Piscator (A.D1893 - 1966) used the word political theatre for the first time to describe his efforts to create a theatre that would champion the cause of proletariat in its battle against the bourgeoisie. Later, many theatre practitioners and writers, from Brecht to Augusto Boal have subsequently pursued similar matters and put to discourse different aspects of relations between theatre and politics. Theatre performances are considered as means by which discourses on ideology and politics are represented and popularised. After Second World War, a thorough discussion took place throughout the world on whether the theatre can be used for political purposes or not. Augusto Boal held that since all the activities of men including theatrical are political, theatre is necessarily political. The political theatre cannot be used in its limited sense which otherwise used by scholars in theatre. Most of the scholars used political theatre as a synonym for Left wing theatre or the theatre of the communists. However, the term political theatre need not necessarily represent only theatre of the Left. It is because the other parties of Right wing also appropriated ‘political theatre’ for propagation of their respective party ideologies. The Marxist theory is based on the primary principles of social change through the initiation of ideology. Ideology for them is a conscious effort to transform the lives and environment of the people. This consciousness is
due to the relationship that develops between the forces of production and its relationship with that of production. Innately the dialectics that develop and operate between the forces of production and relations of production leads to the emergence of power structure and social hierarchy. Those who have the say over the forces of production veiled the power and formed into a political system. The power structure in given political system represents the social consciousnesses of the that are outside the power structure for their own advantage. Arts and literature of the people became the areas wherein power structure of a given political system would choose to operate and represents its innate political agenda through them. Therefore theatre became one of the modus operandi of the groups that access the political power. Therefore political theatre innately corresponds to theatre that represent the people at large on which they survive for political gains. In the bourgeois politics of representation theatre is immensely used to sustain in power. Hence the bourgeois theatre staged plays representing the consciousness of the proletariat and to vent their feelings of suppression attributed to the concept of 'fate'. The religious consciousness becomes the foremost themes of the plays written to support the bourgeois status. Entertainment served as the primary goal of the bourgeois to come out of the realities of misery and live in a world of fantasy for a while. Like wise to uphold the bourgeois state as the 'welfare state' theatre is immensely used for several kinds of propaganda. The bourgeois is defined here in the classical sense of 'city dweller' that does
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plays and enactments. The intelligentsia of the Left wing political group appropriates this philosophical dogma. Therefore theatre epistemology of political theatre is traditionally assigned to left wing politics.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The section one deals with an overview of party politics in theatre from a historical perspective. The second section deals with the representation of marginality through the political ideology of the parties.

Section One:

The history of political theatre in Andhra can broadly be divided into two stages: one the Right wing parties and their involvement in theatre and the other the Left wing political parties and their contribution to theatre.

Right wing parties and theatre:

The history of theatre under Right wing political parties can broadly be seen into four phases, the first two phases fall under pre-independence period and the remaining two under post-independence period.

In the first two phases of pre independence period, the first phase is between A.D 1880 to 1910. The main purpose of the theatre in this phase was to address social evils and inequalities, which came up in the way of rising political consciousness in a larger scale, and to fight against the imperial powers of the British. This phase (A.D.1880 - 1910) is popularly known in the Indian history the period of Indian Renaissance or the phase
of Social Reform Movement in India. The plays written by Kandukuri Veeresalingam, and Gurajada Apparao fall under this category, since all their writings are directly meant for social reforms.

The second phase, Right wing politics witnessed two important developments. One, the emergence of National Congress as a political party and the other, rise of Mahatma Gandhi as national leader in freedom struggle. The Minto-Marley reforms of A.D. 1909 initiated the political representation in the British history of India. The National Congress entered the politics of British India and represented the people. Since then at various phases, the national Congress demanded for total representation in the name of Swaraj. With the entry of Mahatma Gandhi into freedom struggle, the party politics of Congress were turned to mass movement from the 'elite representation'. The emergence of Mahatma Gandhi into freedom struggle raised the expectations of the masses. Hundreds of songs were composed in praise of Gandhi and freedom struggle. Many novels and other forms of literature were produced. Chilakamaarthi Lakshmi Narasimham, one of the popular poets of Telugu, spontaneously wrote a poem explaining how Indians are exploited by Britishers. He read this poem in a public meeting when Gandhi visited Andhra and received applause from him. Later that particular poem Bharatakhandambu reached rural Andhra and inspired many people. Between A.D. 1910 and A.D. 1920, many plays were written with Puranic and Historical themes. Playwrights used to incorporate the spirit of
freedom struggle in those plays. The heroic characters in those plays speak about the need for a free nation and inspire people to be united. Plays like *Sivaji*, *Rana Pratap*, *Bobbili Yuddham*, *Rasaputra Vijayadi* fall under this category. After A.D. 1920, a few plays were written directly portraying the theme of freedom struggle. Damaraju Pundarikakshudu's plays like *Gandhi Vijayam*, *Gandhi Mahodayam* and *Panchala Parabhavam* drew the public attention. These literary pieces were prominent not only as performances on stage, but also as lyrics that were sung and read in public meetings and informal gatherings.

The history of post independent Right wing theatre can also be divided into two phases. The first phase is from A.D. 1950 to 1983. The formation of Andhra Pradesh as a linguistic state of Telugus marked the beginnings of the first phase. From A.D. 1951 to A.D. 1983, the Congress party as National Congress and as Congress (I) ruled the state. As congress party did not have any cultural wing of its own unlike the Leftist parties, the theatre was by and large promoted by the Government of Andhra Pradesh, formed by the Congress through the Ministry of Culture. The Academies such as Nataka Academy, Sangeeta Academy etc., by and large promoted two kinds of theatre: (i) through cultural exchange programmes, different theatre groups from various states are introduced to the Telugus and(ii) through developmental activities in theatre such as literacy campaigns, family planning etc.
The second phase of the Right wing theatre in the independence period is from A.D. 1983 to the present. The emergence of Telugu Desam Party (T.D.P), a regional party, marked the beginning of the second phase. The Congress party literally faced stiff resistance from the T.D.P. With this the Telugu identity began to emerge as the keyword in politics. From this period theatre is much used for propagation of party policies and activities. A separate cultural wing was started in the T.D.P Government to conduct performances and to train performers to campaign for T.D.P activities. The form of theatre became more street play oriented than proscenium. Issues like anti-arrack, Akshara Sankranthi (total literacy), Janmabhoomi, AIDS eradication, DWACRA groups etc., became the themes of the plays. The department of information and public relations is extensively used to propagate various programmes of the Government. Particularly during elections time, T.D.P. employ hundreds of artists through out the state and conduct workshops for them in order to train them for election campaign. Sivaprasadarao, the in charge of such campaign, was given the portfolio of cultural ministry in the next regime in 1999 recognising his services during elections.

The Left based political parties immensely contributed to the development of theatre towards the cause of marginality. The history of Left political theatre in Andhra can be divided into two phases on the basis of political formation. The first phase is period between A.D. 1940 to 1964, wherein the Communist Party of India led the cultural movement as a
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single political force. The second phase is the period between A.D 1964 to 
till date, wherein the Communist Party is divided into various political 
forces that led the cultural movement under various interpretations of 
Marxist ideology.

The First phase of Left political theatre:

In the first phase of political theatre movement, one organisation that 
championed the cultural expressions of the masses was Prajanatya 
Mandali. It emerged in association with Indian Peoples Theatre 
Association (I.P.T.A). Prajanatya Mandali focused on the development of 
theatre from two perceptions: (i) marginalised aspects of theatre and (2) 
people from the marginalised communities/groups. The chief pattern of 
Praja Natya Mandali was Communist party of India. It is important to 
mention the origin and development of Praja Natya Mandali, in order to 
understand the ideological base of it.

In India's struggle for independence, many movements and groups 
were formed with specific ideologies. One such wing was the Communist 
Party of India. The rise of a strong left-based wing is formed due to two 
main factors. One, the impact of Russian revolution and the other, unrest 
spread among some of the activists for the manner in which the freedom 
struggle is being led. Bipin Chandra\(^3\) observed that powerful left-wing 
group developed in India in the late 1920s and 1930s contributing to the 
radicalisation of the national movement. The goal of political
independence acquired a clearer and sharper in social and economic content. The stream of national struggle for independence and stream social - economic emancipation of the suppressed and the exploited began to converge which gradually resulted the emergence of two powerful parties of the Left, the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Congress socialist Party (CSP). In the initial phase, though the left-wing associated with Congress, later it departed from Congress. This situation underwent a radical change in A.D. 1935 when the Communist Party was reorganised under the leadership of P.C. Joshi. Faced with the threat of Fascism the Seventh Congress of the Communist International, meeting at Moscow in August 1935, radically changed its earlier position and advocated the formation of a united front with socialists and other movements in colonial countries. The communists asserted their positions due to the botheration of imperialist and Fascist powers. As a result, after A.D. 1935, they started uniting the masses on two issues simultaneously; one, continuation of struggle for India’s freedom and the other, mobilization of masses against Fascism. This trend is much more evident in the later part of freedom movement. This political scenario of India also influenced many writers, poets and artists to form into a united force and fight for the better living of humanity.

All India Progressive Writers Association:

In A.D. 1919 some of the important writers of the world made a document in entitled The Declaration of Independence of Thought which
was a base for the establishment of International Progressive Writers Association. The important writers who signed on this document were Maxim Gorky, Burbusse, Russel, Rabindranath Tagore, and V.Kumara Swamy.

The second meeting of the forum took place in A.D1936 June 19th to 23rd at London. Mulkaraj Anand had represented India in this meeting. The forum made a conclusion to help the people who died in course of Fascist hegemony. Later another meeting was organised at Paris in which Jawaharlal Nehru, Mulkaraj Anand, P.C.Joshi, Pramodsen Gupta participated from India.

In the same year, for the first time, all the progressive writers had joined together to form a National level progressive writers organisation in Luknow. Popular Bengali writer Premchand presided over the proceedings. They named it as All India Progressive Writers Association. There was a major discussion on progressive writing, language, form, theme etc. Freedom of Expression, agitation against oppression and ban, support of freedom and peace were mentioned as the agenda for the organisation in the manifesto. Writers like Tagore, Nehru, Sarojini Naidu, Mulkaraj Anand, Premchand, KAAbbas are the members of the committee. Abburi Ramakrishnarao, Tummala Venkaramayya, Somanchi Yagnanna Sastry were the delegates from Andhra Pradesh.
The second, third and fourth meetings were held at Calcutta (1938), Delhi (1942) and Mumbai (1943) respectively. Dange presided over the proceedings. In this convention, Taapi Dharmarao represented Andhra. A thorough discussion on the role of progressive writers in contemporary society has taken place. The manifesto was modified. Seeking the independence for India, protecting the nation from Fascism and involving all the writers in the struggle against imperialism were mentioned as the main aims of the organisation. The convention made a request to the writers to follow the footprints of the progressive writers of Russia and China. It also considered the revival of upcoming Indian cinema for progressive purpose.

First Progressive Writer's Meet in Andhra:

In A.D.1943, the first meeting of all-progressive writers was organised at Tenali, Guntur district. Taapi Dharmarao presided over the proceedings. Chadalavada Pichayya was elected as the secretary. In 1944 the second meeting was held at Vijayavada. In this convention Kanyasulkam was performed. In 1945, the third meeting was held at Rajamundry, in which popular poet, Devulapalli Krishna Sastry presided over and Srirangam Srinivasarao, popularly known as Sri Sri, delivered the opening remarks. Fourth meeting was at Madras in the year A. D1947. Popular playwright P.V. Rajamannar presided over the proceedings. Poets and writers like Kodavatiganti Kutumbarao, Indraganti Hanumachastry, Sri Sri, Tenneti Suri, Koganti Gopala Krishnaya, Kongara Jaggaya, Najar,
Sunkara Satyanarayana and many others were participated in this convention. Most of the participants of these conventions had somehow or the other related to the field of theatre.

During the independence struggle, many workshops and political classes were organised in Andhra to create awareness among the activists. Another notable feature of the movement in Andhra was the organisation of summer schools on different aspects of contemporary economics and politics for peasant activists. These training camps, held at Kothapatnam and Mantenavaripalem of Krishna district. The classes were taken by many major Communist leaders of that time including P.C. Joshi, Ajoy Ghosh and R.D. Bhardwaj. Money and groceries for running these training camps were collected from the peasants of Andhras.\(^9\) Communist Party later continued this tradition. As a result, in A.D 1946 May, the forum organised a temporary literary school. This was the first literary school in Andhra. Around fifty-seven promising writers and artists participated as students. Around nineteen popular writers taught in the school. Artists like Sunkara Satyanarayana, Vasireddy Bhaskerrao, Mikkilineni Radha Krishna Murthy, Najar, Mukkamala Nagabhushanam, Ramakoti were the students. Sri Sri, Sripada Subramanyam, Madhavapeddi Gokhale, Kutumbarao were the teachers.\(^{10}\) Many students of this school played a crucial role in the activities of Praja Natya Mandal.
Establishment of I.P.T.A

Having been inspired by the activities of All India Progressive Writers Association, Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA) got emerged and contributed much to the field of performing arts and theatre. On A.D May 25\textsuperscript{th} of 1943, the first meeting of IPTA took place in Bombay. Anil Disilwa read out the temporary manifesto of the IPTA. The manifesto emphasized the necessity to adopt the folk performing arts on to the stage and focus them for cultural progression, economic equality and freedom in order to build up a national people's art movement”.\textsuperscript{11}

The central committee was formed in this convention in which Mukdum Mohiedden and Garikapati Rajarao represented Andhra. The second meeting was also held at Bombay in A.D1946 in which Rajarao and Mukkamala Nagabhushanam were elected to central committee.

The first meeting of Praja Natya Mandali (A.D. 1943):

After a week of Bombay conference of I.P.T.A, the first meeting of Praja Natya Mandali took place in A.D.1943 June 1\textsuperscript{st} at Vijayawada.\textsuperscript{12} Poets and artists like Mukkamala Nagabhushanam, Garikapati Rajarao, Kosuri Punnaiah, Koganti Gopalakrishnayya, Sivirisetti Subbarao, Chadalavada Pichhaya, Kommaraju Padmavathi, Chandra Savitri, Moturi Udayam participated in this meeting. This meeting led the artists of Andhra Pradesh to start Praja Natya Mandali. Rajarao was elected as the secretary of the organisation. Here it is important to note that there were
also women folk who took up the initiative in forming the organisation. Manukonda Suryavathi, Moturi Udayam, Kondapalli Koteswaramma and many other women took active part in forming the organisation.

It is necessary to understand the sociological and cultural background of the land, which led to the establishment of Praja Natya Mandali. In Andhra, it was not for the first time to make combined effort by cultural and political fields, for inspiring the masses for a social cause. In the beginning phase of 20th century itself there was a thrust for freedom of India from Britishers. From A.D.1940 Communist Party started playing an active role in the state politics. Until then Congress was the leading political force in the state. It had already achieved a status and popularity in the state. So it had no need to propagate its ideology among the masses. The leaders of Congress were from middle class Brahmins or the upper class business people. So it did not realise the need for using Theatre for propagating their ideology. In the same period, Andhra Maha Sabha was becoming active in Telengana area of Andhra, through which most of the communist leaders drew the inspiration to fight against Nizam's rule.13

Hence for the newly started Communist Party, it became an immediate need to propagate their ideals. The ideals were based on the class struggle. Hence it has to address the lower class, farmers and agricultural laborer and all other working communities at larger extent. Majority of their target people were illiterate and resides at rural areas.
The only form of entertainment for them is folk arts. All these factors made the Communist Party to create a new genre of performance, which has to be performed in any rural area with out much preparation and a form, which can be understood even by illiterate people. The need of the hour for Communists was to cater for the needs of the uprising *Telengana* armed struggle.\(^\text{14}\)

Hence the Party realised that there were many traditional performing styles in rural Andhra, which are inseparable from of rural life. With this understanding it created a new style and trend in theatre where the form is traditional and the content is Marxist based. This understanding made Praja Natya Mandali different from other organisations. Even in political propaganda, Praja Natya Mandali surpassed the other theatre activities. By the time Praja Natya Mandali was becoming active, many plays were written and performed with the content of freedom struggle. The *Mitavada Dhorani* of Congress and its opportunistic nature towards independence led to a confusing atmosphere in the national politics. This nature had showed its impact on the cultural field also. Because Congress's confusion, even the cultural expressions were also carried the same confusion and *Mitavada Dhorani*. Hence one can find no newness in the cultural expressions of freedom struggle. So they could not reach the public at large except songs like *Maakoddi Telia Dora Tanamu*. But when Praja Natya Mandali entered in to the field, there was no political confusion to the Communist Party. Hence there was a perfect mixture of
form and content. Because of this perfect blending of form and content, the cultural movement of Andhra extended its expressions to the maximum level. The varied contents of the themes of the performances/plays of political theatre reflecting the day to day problems of people, ideology of Fascists, land issues, labour problems, advent of capitalism etc necessitated new forms of expression to popularise their idiom and ideology to the public. As a result native forms like Burra Katha, Vidhi Bhagotam, Jamukula Katha were modified and attracted millions of masses.\textsuperscript{15}

By the time Praja Natya Mandali took an organised shape, Communist Party achieved recognition in the state to operate political activity. It was working in Telengana region under the leadership of Andhra Maha Sabha, uniting the small peasantry and agricultural labour against the \textit{Nizam}. The communists took an active part in building up the struggles at grass root levels. "The main targets of attack were the forced grain levy, the practice of \textit{veth begar}, illegal exaction's and illegal seizures of land. Clashes took place initially between the landlord's \textit{goondas} and the peasants led by the \textbf{Sangham} (as the Andhra Mahasabha was popularly known), and later between the armed forces of the sate police and peasants armed with sticks and stones"\textsuperscript{16}. In the same period the Second World War waged against Fascist countries like Germany, Italy, Japan. Here Communist Party had taken a stand in support of the alliance
front consist of Russia, China, Britain, America. So it became a necessity to propagate in favour of the alliance front.

In this context, Communist Party had to propagate two issues simultaneously: (i) there is class difference between the farmers and landlord, hence a class struggle has to be built up in interest of the working class under the leadership of Communist Party. And (ii) the atrocities of Fascist forces must be condemned and a massive support should be built up among Indian people. In order to address the masses on these issues, the Party had concentrated upon the traditional art forms of the people.

As mentioned earlier, in the first phase of history of political theatre in Andhra, only one organisation represented the whole political theatre. In other words, the first phase of history of political theatre in Andhra is nothing but the history of Praja Natya Mandali. For the sake of analysis the history of the first phase can be further divided into three phases:  

1. Phase of blooming (1943 - 1945):

Praja Natya Mandali concentrated on the folk performing arts of Andhra Pradesh. It picked up most of the solo based performances for adaptation. Forms like Koya Vesham, Burra Katha, Jamukula Katha, Sodi, Kolatam were picked up and adopted for a social change. Around forty
performing art forms were taken and adopted for a political purpose. In this phase the themes were not based on class struggle. Thrust of all the themes was on freedom, anti fascism, Bengal drought and other related issues. Many scripts were developed in Burra Katha style. Writers like Vasireddi Bhaskerrao and Sunkara Satyanarayana who already had an experience in writing Burra Kathas made it easy to mould any theme into the form. In A.D.1941 22nd June”, Hitler declared war on Russia. In the same year the Communist Party had taken out a movement against Fascism. This movement gave a chance to the cadre to agitate against Fascism. On the other side the drought in Bengal made Praja Natya Mandali to collect money and clothes through their performances. Popular Burrakatha artist Nazar wrote a katha by name Bengal Karuvu and performed all over Andhra. This performance in first instance itself gathered wide response from the audiences. Audiences for the first time started talking about drought and donated clothes and money for the needy. This was the first time where voluntary donations were collected at the venue of performance itself. Nazar mentioned in his biography that when he was performing the Bengal Karuvu in Bapatla, Guntur district, Ballari Raghava saw the performance and wept like a child. He immediately arranged their program in his place on the eve of his mother's ceremony. They collected money, clothes soon after the performance and sent to Bengal through the party.
Similarly many *Burra Kathas* were produced with themes like *Tanya*, *Stalin Grade*, *Telengana* in this phase. The following table shows the themes adapted to the form of *Burrakatha* by Praja Natya Mandali during A.D1941 to A.D1950.

**Table: Eight**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>WRITER</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kashta Jivi</td>
<td>Sunkara Satyanarayana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanya</td>
<td><strong>Kakumanu</strong> Subbarao</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bengal Karuvu</td>
<td>Sk.Najar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stalin Grad</td>
<td>Sunkara</td>
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<tr>
<td>Andhra Mahasabha</td>
<td>Ch.Viswanadham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telengana</td>
<td>Sunkara</td>
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<tr>
<td>Russia,German Yudham</td>
<td>P.Kodanda Rama Sastry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seetaramaraju</td>
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<td>Kummari Molla</td>
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<td>Veeresalingam</td>
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<td>Sunkara</td>
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<tr>
<td>Palnati Yudham</td>
<td>Nazar</td>
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There are quite a number of other performances that took place at different parts of Andhra but a few themes are quoted since most of them have not been recorded in history.
In this phase the organisation gave importance to solo art forms where a single artist did the entire performance. Mikkilineni Radha Krishna Murthy 19 observes that the cadre (activists) of Praja Natya Mandali was very limited in the first phase. With the available cadre we had to propagate to the maximum extent. This need made us to concentrate on the solo performing arts. Apart from the above mentioned forms, it had also used forms like Golla Suddulu, Sodi, Jantaru Pette, Kolatam, Chenchu Vesham extensively wherein artists were mainly depended on the spontaneity rather than the written scripts.
II. Phase of Activism: 1945 to 1948:

In this phase, the emphasis is shifted from solo performances to playlets and plays. Even though there were considerable solo performances in this phase, the efforts of the entire organisation were diverted to theatre. Plays like *Mundadugu*, *Maa Bhoomi* were written and performed in this phase.

During this period the mainstream theatre represented Parishat competitions and *Padyam* based performances. As an alternate to the existing practice of theatre, Praja Natya Mandali came up with plays and performances, which directly reflected the problems of working class. The Telangana armed struggle, land issues, anti Congress were the main themes of the performances. People like Garikapati Rajarao, Koganti Gopala Krishnaya, Koduri Achayya played a crucial role in training the theatre groups for performances. Apart from other writers, Sunkara Satyanarayana and Vasireddi Bhaskerrao deserve mentions for spontaneity in developing scripts according to the immediate needs of the organisation. Together they had contributed immensely to the cultural movement of Andhra Pradesh.

The plays performed by Praja Natya Mandali and their writers are given below.
Even though the list of plays performed by Praja Natya Mandali
seems to be small, the number of performances were numerous. As a
matter of fact, there could be no other single organisation in the state that
gave so many performances like Praja Natya Mandali. KAAbbas
mentioned it as a world record that 125 groups performed *Maa Bhoomi*
and with in a year of 1947, they had completed thousand performances.²⁰
Mikkilineni Radha Krishna Murthy, mentioned that around twenty lakh
people watched *Maa Bhoomi*.²¹ Apart from performing within the state, the

<table>
<thead>
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<th>PLAY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mundadugu</td>
<td>Sunkara &amp; Vasireddy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maa Bhoomi</td>
<td>Sunkara &amp; Vasireddy</td>
</tr>
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<td>Congresa, Angresa</td>
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<td>S.Jagannath</td>
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<td>Jaya Bheri</td>
<td>Pratyagatma</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
organisation organised shows at places like Madras, Sholapur, Pune, Bombay, and Ahmadabad. In those days around ten thousand audiences bought the tickets with four *Anna* and witnessed *Maa Bhoomi* at Sholapur.

The workshops:

For the first time in the cultural history of Andhra, Praja Natya Mandali initiated a series of workshops on cultural aspects. It had organised workshops with fifteen days duration each in almost all districts of Andhra. Rajarao who happened to be a doctor by profession used to take care of the medical needs of the delegates. The basic medical kit was a must for every workshop. The delegates used to wake up by 4a.m and continue to practice the given work till the night. Within the span of fifteen days every group used to master the given art form. People like Koganti Gopla Krishnayya, Mikkilineni Radha Krishna Murthy, Rajarao, Kosuri Punnahai, Umamaheswar Rao used to supervise the process of workshops.

K. Lakshmi Narasaiah describes that both the women and men were the participants of the workshops. They used to be very friendly with one another with out making any problems to their personal as well as professional lives. The participants always tried to correct their own mistakes with out giving a chance to others to comment upon their work. Still everybody were given an opportunity for discussing different issues.
In this manner around fifteen workshops were conducted in the state and it paved way for the development of many groups and individual artists in Andhra.  

III. The phase of decadence: 1948 to 1952

During this the period, Praja Natya Mandali began to deteriorate and lose its charm. Most of the leaders and important cadre started disappearing from social activism either due to the police threats or due to personal problems. Performances at major cities and towns were banned. Very few performances have taken place in rural areas. Some times performances were given in the name of the other organisations. An association, which had been showing a great legacy on the entire cultural field of Andhra for about a decade, gradually faded into darkeners for which three reasons were found.

(i) There was the ban on Praja Natya Mandali and communist party. Many artists, poets, singers were not only arrested but experienced rigorous harassment from the police. Because of this ban, the cultural movement that been taking a desirable shape in Andhra got suppressed. This was not only a set back to Praja Natya Mandali, but also to the entire cultural movement of Andhra. The Government, which tried to create an obstacle to the upcoming communist party’s ideology, indirectly suppressed the then flourishing left oriented theatre of Andhra Pradesh. Vallam Narisimharao, an artist from Praja Natya Mandali said that
wherever there is information of Praja Natya Mandali's performance, police force used to appear there and destroy the arrangements. Sometimes they were so frightened to face the police, who do not know the local language, so it used to be a hell to convince them. The Government of Madras issued an order banning the play *Maabhoomi*. Most of the prominent leaders had gone to underground in order to avoid the police oppression. Thousands were arrested and beaten, many died, and the leaders languished in jails. Party suggested the artists of Praja Natya Mandali to withdraw the cultural activity and look after their own survival.

In 1948 Party had taken a decision to close Praja Natya Mandali at an underground meeting held at Vijayawada. With this some artists went in to film industry and some to their own previous professions like agriculture and wage laborers. This was a gloomy experience to all the associates of the organisation. Nazer, one of the leading performers of *Burra Katha* in those days felt that their association with the communist party made them to close their cultural organisation so soon. He aspired for a cultural organisation that exist with out affiliation any political underpinnings. But one must also imagine that whether it is possible to develop such a great movement with out the support of the party.

The revolutionary communist party, which was supposed to continue the political and cultural activity even in the oppression, had suggested the cadre to withdraw the activity. During the oppression, the
artists and writers who were active in the second phase of the movement had gone into the film industry. Most of them went to Madras and tried to pursue their career as artists and writers in film industry. The artists who were active in the first phase remained with the people and continued to perform for the people. They could not get a chance to enter into film industry. But the artists who had gone in to the industry never turned back to perform for a social cause. The artists who were mainly associated with folk performances and individual based forms were able to continue their commitment even in the third phase. But the artists who were educated and knew the adaptability of their creativity to the silver screen had never been able to involve themselves in the third phase of the movement.

(ii) The second reason for the weakening of the organisation was the cultural policies of Communist party itself. The differences in the leadership also had shown its impact on Praja Natya Mandali. There was no clarity to the Communist party on what kind of relationship should exist between the political field and cultural field. It had directly started propagating their ideology through art forms without preparing the masses for that. The sudden rise of people's spontaneous feelings was misunderstood as if the masses are strongly supporting the party. It was the support to the issues that the party had taken up not the ideology of it. This phenomenon can be understood with the first general elections of Andhra Pradesh in A.D1952, where Communist Party was expected to win with great majority lost the election. The party that was supposed to
prepare the ground for a revolution had tried to create the revolution itself. Hence the same confusion has been carried out to Praja Natya Mandali also. Even though the party formed Praja Natya Mandal, it could have continued as independent body without losing its ideological commitment.

(iii) The third reason was, inability of Praja Natya Mandali to make any theoretical premise for the new styles and approaches that it made in theatre practices. Leaders like Rajarao, Koganti Gopala Krishnayya and the other leaders of the organisation, did not put any efforts to develop a theoretical understanding of theatre. It created a new way in play writing, music, sets, characters etc. It adopted folk performances to the contemporary themes but could not develop an ideological agenda to it. Because of this, the tradition created by the organisation could not be continued to the next generation either to follow it or to modify it. Even though the organisation was able to involve many women, dalits and all other marginalised groups into theatre, it could not develop an ideology to accentuate how these groups and communities are vital in building up a cultural movement in a rural based country like India. Such type of discussion could have influenced the mainstream theatre much. The lack of theory, discourses, discussions and documents in this regard made the next generations just to praise the organisation for a moment and forget it there itself. Because of this limitation there was no continuation in the work of Praja Natya Mandali.
There is also another reason for the obscurity of Praja Natya Mandali. In the history of World theatre, wherever there is a trend of people's cultural movement with a strong leftist ideology, there was an opposition to proscenium and hence, performance mostly based on the tradition were developed. From Augusto Boal to Badal Sircar, it is felt that proscenium and people's theatres are contradictory to each other. Hence they strongly built up a counter form of presentation, acting style, new method of costumes, a new way of relationship between the audiences and performers. But for Praja Natya Mandali, there were some misconceptions in the performance patterns in which it believed. People like Garikapati Raja Rao did not put any efforts to change the method of proscenium stage. Even though he tried to adopt many forms of people successfully, the main intention of all those efforts was to reach the people with their content. But he or his colleagues did not understand the contradictions that exist between the traditional art forms and proscenium form. Hence the organisation tried to use both the forms of presentation to address the people. Hence most of the cadre hailing from middle class felt that proscenium is more convenient than the traditional art forms. The cadre did not realize the ideological contradiction between these two. As a result the cadre was more attracted to proscenium and the clapping middle class audiences. Rajarao himself will stand as the best example for this phenomenon. He was fully engaged in producing the proscenium
plays after they shut down of the organisation. He also had conducted a Parishat in Rajamundry for proscenium plays\textsuperscript{26}.

Because of these reasons Praja Natya Mandali showed much interest on stage plays than the folk forms in the second and third phase of development. Hence plays like \textit{Maa Bhoomi, Mundadugu} received the priority and popularity. Another major draw back was the appreciation of the middle class was taken in to consideration. Hence great plays like \textit{Maa Bhoomi} was performed in Parishats at Vijayavada and received the best script award also\textsuperscript{27}.

The middle class ideology that does not accept to bring major changes in performance style led the artists of the organisation to enter into cinema industry. Some of the leaders organised regular Parishats in their towns in the name of progressive ideology. Its failure to develop proper perception about cultural aspects among public gave a wrong signals in the following years. Hence expression of progressive ideology is more important than that of the way it is expressed. Later on, the person who is expressing ideology became more important that of the ideology that is being expressed. Because of this, the ideals of Praja Natya Mandali were accepted by every one including the people who were supposed to oppress them. The ideal of socialism became the so-called ideal for commercial cinema, Parishats organised by \textit{Zamindars} and confused middle class intellectuals. As a result, every organiser started utilising the ideals of Praja Natya Mandali for their own benefits.
Praja Natya Mandali, which could not be active for not more than one decade had shown a great impact for around five decades. With the activity of a decade, Praja Natya Mandali had created a new epoch and perspective in the history of Telugu theatre. The analysis of its history and contribution shows that how it is distinct from mainstream Telugu theatre. It also suggests the do's and undo's to future political theatre activists in the process of synchronising both politics and theatre. Praja Natya Mandali gave due importance to the issues, that are overlooked by mainstream theatre.

1. The themes of all the performances are based on day-to-day problems and life styles of common people like wages, labour, land tenures and land levy etc. The performances were based on different motifs of Fascism, Independence movement, Russian Revolution and other national and international issues. They were addressed to the spectators in a way that they get deeply immersed and involved in events that were represented on stage. The narrative technique and story line were synchronised to give a lively effect in the performance.

2. The Prajanatya Mandali took native art forms, which were very powerful from both thematic and performance perspectives. Hence prime importance is given to the marginalised theatre forms of marginalised communities. Hence people from rural areas owned the
organisation. The organisers invited the folk performing artists to train the artists of the stage plays for the time of rehearsals.\textsuperscript{28}

3. Praja Natya Mandali incorporated women and dalits into performances. Women centered plays and dalit issues like untouchability, slavery, bonded labour were staged to arouse social consciousness and public awareness among audience. It followed the ideals of Ballari Raghava by involving the women in to the organisation. A culture of respecting the women artists in the group was encouraged by the organisation. The women \textit{Borra Kata} group of Moturi \textit{Udayam}, Chintala \textit{Koteswaramma}, Mahankali \textit{Lakshmi} gave numerous performances of the biography of Tanya, a Russian revolutionist. Kondepudi Radha, Tapi \textit{Rajamma}, Viramachineni \textit{Sarojani's} group from Praja Natya Mandali of Krishna District gave hundreds of performances of \textit{Alluri Seeta Rama Raju} in \textit{Burrakatha} form, which was attended by the political leaders of Congress Party\textsuperscript{29}. Later the Government banned this performance since it was potential enough to mobilise the masses against British imperialists. Praja Natya Mandali created congenial atmosphere for exposing the problems of the marginalised to a wide range of audiences from lay people to intellectuals.

4. Till the emergence of Praja Natya Mandali as a powerful theatre movement, the general trend was that one performing group prepares a play and the same group gives numerous performances
at different places. But the strategy of Praja Natya Mandali was different. It trained hundreds of groups in a single play and organised their performances at different places simultaneously. In other words, thousands of performances concurrently covered larger geographical areas within a lesser span of time. This practice set aside the question of superiority of the director over writer and vice versa.30

5. Even though Praja Natya Mandali is a cultural organisation, it never confined its activity only to the performances on stage. It always tried to respond to the needs of the people in miseries. The organisation collected cash and kind from public to help the sufferers in Bengal drought. In A.D.1944, when the Government failed in its duty to remove silt in Bandar canal, around five hundred youngsters of Praja Natya Mandali worked and removed it for a length of four miles.31 At this juncture, the Praja Natya Mandali performers gave performances at the bank of the canal to amuse the workers on one hand and on the other to make the labour feel relaxed and inspired at work spot.

6. Praja Natya Mandali understood the interrelation and interdependence between theatre and literature. The organisation distributed many literary works to the cadre artists for their reading and made them to acquaint with literature and literary styles. Popular poets and writers were invited to address and share their
experiences with the performing artists. Soon after the completion of the performances, they are open for discussions in which local intellectuals, journalists, and writers were invited to comment upon the previous day’s performance. Even at the organisational level, Praja Natya Mandali and Progressive Writers Association traveled and worked together. Later this phenomenon discontinued in Telugu land. Tummala Venkata Ramaiah\textsuperscript{32} popular activist mentioned that both Praja Natya Mandali and Progressive Writers Association were children of the same mother that received a good reception from the audience of entire Andhra. Though there is a little time gap between the two organizations in their establishment, both of them efficiently reached people and won popularity within no time because of their tremendous contribution to the society through their ideology. One became the body and the other its soul. They both contributed to each other’s development.

**The Second phase of Left political theatre: Party Politics**

The second phase of political theatre in Andhra starts from A.D.1964 to present. In A.D. 1964, the Communist Party of India was divided into two groups with the names of Communist Party of India (C.P.I) and Communist Party of India (Marxist) (C.P.I.M). Debates and discussions, over a arguments in a period of ten long years resulted for this split. M.Basavapunnaiah, the polit bureau member of C.P.I. (M) holds that the clashes were developed from Telengana struggle itself. He attributes
ideological differences as causes for its split in A.D1964. P. Sundarayya, Nambudripad, Basavapunnaiah, A.K.Gopalan and others represented C.P.I. (M). Ch.Rajeswarrao, Dange, Mohit Sen and others led the C.P.I. Again there was another division in C.P.I. (M) during A.D.1968, with the name of C.P.I. (Marxist, Leninist). Charumajumundar, K.Seetaramaiah and others led the group. This split rose a fundamental discussion on the way that a revolution should be led. The C.P.I. (M) says that the revolution should be through parliamentary method, through which the public consent has to be built up. Where as the C.P.I. (M.L.) felt that it is only through armed struggle that the revolution can be successful. Hence it led the Nuxualbury armed struggle in West Bengal during 1970. Later this group had undergone many further splits with many names like C.P.I. (M.L. Janasakthi), C.P.I. (M.L Prajapandha), C.P.I (M.L People's War) led by different leaders.

This division of Communist Party of India into many parties led to the rise of subsidiary cultural wings. Hence the history of political theatre in Andhra witnessed many political theatre groups after 1968. Each group tried to build a cultural wing of its own. The following parties have started various theatre groups in different names.

2. Communist Party of India (Marxist) – Andhra Praja Natya Mandali


Praja Natya Mandali, which championed the cause of masses during A.D.1940 to A.D1960, was formed into two groups, one is for C.P.I., and the other is for C.P.M. Both the parties could not start their cultural wings soon after the split. It took much time for both the parties to emerge as political forces. During A.D.1980s both the parties reorganised their own cultural wings based on their previous relations and experiences. Both the parties had new names for their 'cultural wings because the Praja Natya Mandali of yester years got withered away by A.D1960 itself. But the both parties wanted to use the same name of Praja Natya Mandali. In order to escape from the confusion, one party named it as Andhra Praja Natya Mandali and the other party as Andhrapradesh Praja Natya Mandali. But many people got confused with the nomenclature of the party's represented wings and hence the names of these cultural groups were identified as C.P.I's Praja Natya Mandali and C.P.M.'s Praja Natya Mandali.

In the second phase of political theatre, Jana Natya Mandali stood at the forefront and revolutionised the people's art forms.
Jana Natya Mandali:

The historical Naxalbury movement inspired the tribals of Srikakulam region to fight against the oppression. Artists and writers like Vempatapu Satyam and Subbarao Panigrahi started propagating their ideology and people's sufferings through their art forms and songs. Subbarao Panigrahi effectively used the local folk form *Jamukula Katha* and incorporated the ideological content into it. With the inspiration of this movement, people like B.Narisingarao and Gaddar started a cultural organisation called *Art Lovers* in Hyderabad. Slowly many poets and writers were attracted towards the Marxist-Leninist party's ideology. As a result Jana Natya Mandali was started in A.D1972.

In the initial stages of Jana Natya Mandali, the performances were in and around of Hyderabad with usage percussion instrument *dappu* and a gas lamp for lighting. Later the performances were spread to some of the Southern districts of Andhrapradesh. The main art forms of the organisation were song and street plays. It developed many songs on almost all oppressed communities. The very unique contribution of Jana Natya Mandali was that it brought out a performance style in singing the songs. It used acting as a supportive medium for singing. The tradition of using the song for the propagation of their creeds was started ever since the Bhakti movement. A performer using style of song, a little bit of rhythmic body movement and dance, dialogue and with instrumental support was the basic performance style of *Harikatha*. The same style
followed by three people with different content is *Burrakatha*. Where as the singing style of Jana Natya Mandali was quite a different one in style when compared with the above mentioned art forms. Gaddar, a legendary figure of Jana Natya Mandali was the one who popularised this style. He is a poet, performer, singer and lead narrator. His contribution to the cultural movement of Andhra was immensely great. His style became so popular that even the governmental agencies followed the same approach for publicising their political dogmas, activities and schemes. All the leftist cultural groups, non-governmental agencies and apolitical organisations appeared to have pursued the same pattern. In this context it is important to review and analyse the style of performance of Gaddar. Though it is the innovative performance of Gaddar, all other groups of Jana Natya Mandali also used to present the performance with the same style.

**The performance of Gaddar & Jana Natya Mandali:**

Before starting the actual performance some general songs were sung by the artists. Gaddar in the beginning of his performance attracts the audiences with his satirical dialogues and sets the minds of the audience for his show. Then he begins to explain the exploitation and miserable sufferings of the masses in the hands of power groups, be it government or landlords and so on. He requests the people to be united in order to fight against these problems. He asks the audiences to listen to the heartbeat of working class. Immediately the remaining performers start playing the Dappu instruments. He symbolically says that these sounds
are the heart beats of the exploited class\textsuperscript{37} of the society. As in the traditional performances wherein a prayer is sung in the beginning, he sings a song in praise of the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the party. Because JNM believes in armed struggle many activists died in the struggle. So his martyrs' song includes all the martyrs of recent past. The song runs like this: \textit{Oh! Students, youth, martyrs of nation Lal Salam} (Red Salute) for you! You were the one who fought for land, food and for nation's freedom from the clutches of the exploiters. Gaddar is very emotional and makes the audiences to experience the great sacrifice of the martyrs for the welfare of the downtrodden. At the end of this particular song audiences develop a great compassion for J.N.M's ideals.

Soon after this song, he makes satirical comments on the existing political leaders of the state and strongly critisises their policies. His criticism contains lots of humour that makes political leaders very cheap and contemptible before the public. Slowly he narrates the way how the people's army in the dense forests is getting prepared for the war against the oppressive political leaders and landlords. Again he becomes emotional and explains the sufferings of \textit{Dalams} to build up a new society for the exploited. He further narrates how the police forces torture the innocent villagers and tribals to reveal the where about of \textit{Dalams} (armed troupes) in their neighborhood. Some times Gaddar openly mentions the names of the police officers and ridicule them. He also explains his commiseration for the poor lives of the police constables.
"Neeku Naaku Teda Ledanno! Oh! Policeanna!

Manala Maname Champukuntero! Oh! Policeanna!

Sarkarodu Kuluku Tunnado! Oh! Policeanna!"38

(Oh! my police brother! there is no difference between you and me. We are killing each other and the Government is enjoying the process!)

The song tries to establish an identity between the members of dalam and constabulary by asking to join with them in their fight against the state. In this song he describes how the higher officials harass the lower police to attend the work at their own houses. Whenever Gaddar's performance takes place, the police constables that attend his programme to control the law and order, they frequently request him to sing this song for them (privately).

When he criticises the politicians, his first target is the contemporary Chief Minister and Home Minister of the Government. His songs on Vengal Rao, Chenna Reddy, NT. Rama Rao and Chandra Babu Naidu are very popular. The songs narrate their biography in humourous and satirical form. This open criticism of the individuals was not found in the previous leftist cultural movement, especially with Praja Natya Mandali. Audiences enjoy this type of songs, since they knew that the lives of all leaders on whom songs are composed. And they never come across such a performer who directly pinpoints the leaders in a public
gathering. For instance one of his song on the then Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, NT. Rama Rao was a big hit.

“Anna Vachindo! Ramanna Vachindo!

Rama Rajyam Thestanantu Rankelestu

Anna Vachindo! Ramanna Vachindo!”

(Brother Ramanna has come before public saying that he will bring the Rama Rajya again)

This type of songs made Gaddar much more popular and nearer to the people. The important aspect in his entire performance is his Abhinayam. He sings every song with lots of emotion and tries to depict the visuals through his body movements. It is neither a solo performance nor a dance balled or a series of song recitals. It has all the preparations, which a modern play requires like rehearsals, acquiring the properties, instruments etc. But one cannot compare it with a modern theatre performance. It is not a play, which takes place in a proscenium. There is no specific story, but it has a specific beginning, middle and an end in the content. No entries and exits. Once the performance starts, all the members of the group will be on stage till the end. There are no curtains, sidewalls or specific lighting and set requirements. Even though all these characters are found in traditional folk theatre, one can't specify the form. The costumes of the performers are similar in nature. Everybody wear a general dress code of a Telengana rural peasant with a black woolen
shawl on shoulder, a *dhothi* and a stick in the hand. Even though Gaddar took up this dress code from the people, it became so popular that wherever a performer wears this kind of dress, people immediately say that it is *Gaddar’s dress*.

In the history of Telugu Theatre, the performances of Gaddar were not considered as Theatre. Hence no one has reviewed or analysed his performances in detail. If any one looks at the performance of Gaddar in comparison with a modern proscenium play, one cannot find any characteristics of modern theatre. So most of the critiques and scholars did not mention about his work. But if an analysis takes place in comparison with the traditional folk theatre, one can place Gaddar in a distinguished position. The language, dialect, costumes, tunes of the songs, instruments and other performance inputs are exceedingly folk and rural based.

There is also another aspect of it. All this popularity of Gaddar is not only the greatness of the form he chooses but also lies in his personal image as a revolutionary. He went to exile for about a decade. All these happenings gave him an image as an exponent of Gaddar style in Jana Natya Mandali. When he came into the public life from the exile on 20th February, A.D1990, people of Andhra Pradesh gave a grand welcome. His public meetings are always crowded with lakhs of people. Even though he is not able to sing with the same pitch as that was in A.D1980s, he is well received because of his image. Almost all his performances are
lively because, his own experiences as a ‘revolutionary’ will get transformed into his verbal and non-verbal expressions during his renditions.

The major strength and draw back of Jana Natya Mandali in its thirty years of cultural movement is its identity with Gaddar. One cannot imagine the organisation without Gaddar. At the same time his style became the solo practice of entire movement of the organisation. Even though Gaddar says that he is like any other member of it, he became its whole and sole. In their performances, the artists follow costumes, body movements and even modulation in voice of Gaddar while enacting different themes and singing songs and narrating different events in episodes. The adaptation of Gaddar style was so internalised that the main performer is always called as ‘Gaddar’. In other words, the style and pattern of performance was identified with Gaddar. The performances were successful because of that identity. Hence J.N.M had unconsciously produced replicas of Gaddar in all their performances in the last thirty years. As a result great movement of thirty years has its own limitations also. Except for a few performances, it never tried with other forms. Vangapandu Prasadarao a composer, singer and writer who worked in shipyard of Visakhapatnam for a long time as a worker came into contact with V.I.R.S.A.M (Viplava Rachiyatal Sangham), made such efforts with some folk forms. His association with J.N.M made him a great composer. Songs like Jajanakari Janarai, Empillado Eldam Vastava, Yantrametla
Nadustuvundante, and Vatannadostannadu were written and composed by him were so popular in the cultural movement of Andhra\textsuperscript{42}. Later some of his songs appeared in movies also. His play Bhoomi Bhagotam was adaptation of Veedhi Bhagavatam of Srikakulam region and received a wide response.

The Perception of Politics made all the difference:

Jana Natya Mandali continued the tradition of Parma Natya Mandali that made sincere efforts to address the masses with their own art forms. Even though both the organisations had the same ideological commitment, their approaches were differ. The parties heading these organisations have two different understandings on class struggle in India that found reflected in their cultural expressions. Hence, their cultural activities are different from that of the previous Praja Natya Mandali. Specifically JNM's understanding of theatre is different from Praja Natya Mandali's, the latter was interested in attracting the urban middle class audiences into cultural movement, for most its leadership of hails from the same class. Even though there were many performers in PNM, like Nazar, they remained as they are as artists but did not become the leaders of the movement. But since Jana Natya Mandali did not pay interest on middle class audiences since its leadership was not from the same class. It believed that the revolution comes with armed struggle, that to from the interior rural areas. Hence the party suggested the cadre of the party to go to the villages. As a result Jana Natya Mandali adopted
traditional art forms like *Voggu Katha and Jalari Bhagotham*. Though Praja Natya Mandali followed traditional style of folk art forms in the beginning, later it leaned towards proscenium plays. Where as Jana Natya Mandali never had any kind of interest on proscenium. As a result it developed it's own theatre form with a strong traditional base. All the performances Jana Natya Mandali were aimed at the rural audiences. The songs, tunes, instruments and the forms were designed to attract the rural masses at large. This ideological clarity of Jana Natya Mandali itself is a revolutionary cultural movement in Andhra.

**Arunodaya & Jana Sahithi Samskrutika Samakya:**

In the same period when Jana Natya Mandali was active another two Leftist cultural groups by names Arunodaya and Jana Sahithi Samskrutika Samakhya also formed and worked in the cultural field. These two groups represent the split in the CPI (M.L) after A.D1970s. Their activities mainly reproduce old classics of Praja Natya Mandali and develop small art forms and songs that represent contemporary political struggles. Their role in influencing the cultural movement of Andhra was negligible. Arunodaya took up *Simla Bhagavatam*, an old classic performance of Praja Natya Mandali and developed in the form of *Yakshaganam* a folk art form under the directorship of Kanuri Venkateswarrao. Another play produced by Arunodaya was *Naandi* written by G.Venkata Konda Reddy, a member of VIRASAM (Viplava Rachiyetala Sangham). The theme of the play was the peasant community of Telengana fighting against the
landlords. Around hundred performances were given at Nalgonda, Kurnool and Nijamabad districts. It also dramatised the long poetic narrative of K.G. Satya Murthy's *Chelli Chandramma*. They also took up the *Bhoomi Bhagavatam* of Vangapandu and gave number of performances. Some of the major plays of Arunodaya and Jana Sahiti were given below.

**Table: Eleven**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLAY</th>
<th>WRITER</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maahoomi</td>
<td>Sunkara, Vasireddy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mundadugu</td>
<td>Sunkara, Vasireddy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chairman</td>
<td>Kodali Gopalrao.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Potugadda</td>
<td>Sunkara, Vasireddy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pragathi</td>
<td>Kanuri Venkateswarao</td>
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<tr>
<td>Naandi</td>
<td>G.Venkata Kondareddy</td>
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<td>Janam kadilindi</td>
<td>Ganasekhar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jalaga</td>
<td>R.V.Raju</td>
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<td>Velugubata</td>
<td>R.V.Raju</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manuvu-Maanudhi</td>
<td>Unknwon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Athi Chowka <strong>Mamsam</strong></td>
<td>Nikhileswar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appula <strong>Bharatam</strong></td>
<td>Divikumar, Lakshmayya, Ramarao</td>
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</tbody>
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Though they adopted folk art forms and style of Jana Natya Mandali as a medium for the dissemination of their political ideology, they did not contribute much for the emergence of any specific style of its own. The
public meetings were organised with simple introductory and concluding songs that represent their party philosophy. Hence their contribution to art and theatre is not remarkable.

Street theatre:

Street theatre emerged an outcome of anti theatrical form to the proscenium theatre. Badal Sircar, in his book *The Third Theatre* explains the fundamental differences between a street and proscenium performances. According to him, proscenium theatre has only two types of relationships, one is between the actors and the second is between the actors to audience. The proscenium keeps the audiences in dark and expects them to be silent/dummy through out the performance. Where as in street theatre, a relation exists between the audiences and the actors. They can talk and react to the incidents that are taking place in the arena. As it has become a strong weapon of political propagation around the world, street theatre played a crucial role in political and cultural fields of Andhra.

Having been inspired by Badal Sircar’s style, the National School of Drama organised an acting workshop in collaboration with Department of Theatre Arts, Andhra University in A.D.1973 at Visakhapatnam. In this workshop, Attiti Padma Vathi Krishna translated the *Julus* of Badal Sircar into Telugu by name *Uregimpu*. M.K. Raina, from N.S. D directed it. Later, Attiti Krishnarao wrote and directed another street play by name
Jantar *Mantar Mamullu*. His play *Tomy-Tomy-Tomy* received a wide response both as street performance and stage performance. The trend of street theatre became wide popular with *Pedda Balasiksha* written by Akella Satyanarayana in A.D.1982. Later another play *Gograhanam* written by T.Bharani was performed all over Andhra for around sixty times by the same group. Later, this play was performed by many amateur groups and widely popularised it. T. Sundaram was the director of the play.

P. Purna Chandrarao of Ethnic Art Center had also produced number of street plays for different Non-Governmental Organisations. Though his productions received wide response from them, the performances did not show any impact on either mainstream or political theatre. In A.D. 1990, Safdar Hashmi was killed while performing a street play at the outskirts of New Delhi. His death provoked many left based cultural groups to make street theatre much more nearer to masses. In Andhra, Praja Natya Mandali popularised the form of street theatre and produced number of performances on different political issues. Though the performances of street theatre started by A.D.1979, it was considered as an experiment. By A.D.1990 it became popular and most of the urban areas were covered with some performance or the other of street theatre. Praja Natya Mandali turned it into a movement. Hundreds of rural agricultural labours were trained in acting, developing script, conducted workshops for writers, artists and directors. T.J. Ramanadham is the popular director of street theatre performances of Praja Natya Mandali.
He designed plays like *Hallobol*, *Mana Charitra*, *Raitu*, *Telengana*, and *Alluri Seetaramaraju*. Under the banner of Praja Natya Mandali, Ramanadham stood for the ideological commitment of Marxism. According to Santharao, General Secretary to the state committee of Praja Natya Mandali mentioned that by the end of A.D.2000, Praja Natya Mandali has produced around fifty street plays on different issues. It has been organising a street theatre festival every year in the memory of Safdar Hashmi, by the name SHOT (Safdar Hashmi Open-air Theatre) in different parts of Andhra. After noticing the wide response for street plays, all other political parties and non-Governmental Agencies have been using the same form for the propagation of their agendas. The Department of Information, Govt. of Andhra Pradesh employed a group of artists to give performances on several issues like AIDS, anti-arrack and primary education.

The Contemporary Scenario:

Presently, India has many Communist parties. Though only C.P.I and C.P.I. (M) have got recognition as national parties, its other parties are strong in many states. The membership in the parties has gone up. Left parties have got their own establishments in most of the states. Major left parties have their own buildings, newspapers, cadre, full time workers, funds and every thing equivalent to the mainstream political parties. Though their growth is nominal when compared to other political parties, certainly they show a considerable growth over a period of time. C.P.I
(M.L) People's War, which is active in Andhra, Orissa and bordering areas of Karnataka, has an annual budget of one hundred crore. This budget is used to buy the weaponry and for the establishment of party. But they are not able to build up a cultural movement, which they successfully did in A.D1940 despite a strong oppression in those lines. This situation is the result of the failure of the Praja Natya Mandali in developing a strong discourse related to people's art forms and their importance in building up a cultural movement in the society.

The same is the case with Jana Natya Mandali also. Because of many splits in the CPI (M L), there was no one to really concentrate on the cultural lives. Gaddar became a stereotype to himself, as a result his impact on the masses has been diminishing. The other organisations like Arunodaya, Jana Sahithi lost their organisational strengths. At present a few individuals run them. Any of them have no clarity or theoretical understanding in building up an alternative cultural movement. The mistakes, which were taken place in A.D1940s, same mistakes were repeated even in A.D2002. For instance there was a heavy discussion on the relation between party and cultural organisation in 1940s itself. Even though the Communist Party has full control over Praja Natya Mandali, most of its artists felt that there must be a visible distinction between the two. But even in 2002 Andhra Praja Natya Mandali organised a weeklong folk festival on the occasion of the CPM's national conference at Hyderabad. Even though the festival was well received, people received it
as a general strategy of the party to attract the masses. Hence the purpose of the festival was lost.

The present situation of the political theatre in Andhra is that it is meant only to entertain the cadre either before or at the end the Party's meeting. The performances produced by the party gradually became stereotyped in its expression of jargon in political ideology, music and also the way they approached the problems of society. Moreover, the party polices began to decide the nature of the plays and its message. An example may be cited here. Both C.P.I and C.P.M maintained a political alliance with Telugudesam party till A.D.1998. Until then both the Praja Natya Mandalis propagated the inherent danger of Hindutva forces in India and message is communicated to eliminate such fundamental forces. The theatre groups of left parties used the travel to nook and corner in the vehicles of Telugudesam Party, as it had much hold in the state. The cadre of Telugudesam used to make all the arrangements for leftist theatre groups. Later Telugudesam shifted its stand and entered into a new alliance with Bharatiya Janata Party. Then both the Communist Parties ought to withdraw their alliance with Telugudesam. Starting from the immediate election, they are forced to propagate the danger of both Telugudesam and BJP. As a result both the Praja Natya Mandalis produced songs and plays propagating the new stand of their Parties. This interdependency of parties and political theatre gave a cheap impression to the public. Hence how powerful may be the performances, people have
not responded much. Apart from producing some street plays and some emotional songs, no left organisation has a clarity or perception towards developing a cultural movement.

From the above discussion, it is evident that the political theatre used marginality as a cause to promote their power politics and gain access to the political power. For Right wing parties social evils are projected as the source for marginality by the colonial governments, especially the British which itself is an offshoot of modernism. People of India who are exposed to the modern system of education made to view certain practices and customs as the cause for marginalising the subjects in the subcontinent in the hands of British. Therefore social reform is championed as cultural renaissance and to achieve that plays were written and produced to counter the social evils.

The Left wing parties projected economic egalitarianism as fundamental tool to wipe of marginality. For them the land less and the poor are the chief indicators of marginality. To instill in them a sense of confidence, collectivism is promoted as the basis for the struggle against the laded gentry and bourgeoisie. Theatre is chiefly used by the Left wing parties to achieve their goals. Their theatre articulated the cause of marginalised and represented their marginality. By incorporating social groups that are economically back ward, socially under privileged and politically un-represented their theatre dealt with the issues related to them, which resulted the emergence of a new theatre. This is a hybridised
theatre that could adopt itself to either proscenium or street format without compromising with the textual features of the play. This feature of theatre is noteworthy for its transcendence between the realms of tradition and modernity. To represent tradition, it adopted the features of folk theatre and to represent modernity it followed the proscenium plays format of script (written plays). This combination warrants for a vivid description of the theatre of the marginalised, which is the theme of the next chapter.

References:


13. The Andhra Mahasabha was particularly active in this phase, and the majority of the *youngsters* newly politicised cadre flocked to it. A significant development that occurred around the year 1940 was that Ravi Narayan Reddy who had emerged as a major leader of the radicals in the Andhra Mahasabha and had *participated* in the state Congress Satyagraha along with B. Yellareddy, was drawn towards the Communist Party. As a result, several of the younger cadres also came under Left and communist influence, and these radical elements gradually increased in strength and pushed the Andhra Mahasabha towards more radical politics.

14. The political and sociological situation of that time saw the growth of a powerful peasant struggle in Telengana area. The communists took an active part in building up the struggles at grass root levels. "The main targets of attack were the forced grain levy, the practice of veth begar, illegal exaction's and illegal seizures of land. Clashes took place initially between the landlord's goondas and the peasants led by the Sangham (as the Andhra Mahasabha was popularly known), and later between the armed forces of the sate police and peasants armed with sticks and stones, Ibid. pp.370 - 371


37. Transcription of audio record of Gaddar’s performance at Warangal recorded during 1980s.


43. Interview with Arunodaya Ramarao at Hyderabad on 28-1-2000.

44. This table prepared basing on the information gathered from secondary sources and personal talk/interviews with various personalities of theatre and party organisations. A few of them are Arunodaya Ramarao, Divi Kumar, and Kanuri Venkateswararao. Books: *Jana Sahithi* monthly magazines, *K.Venkateswarrao’s Kalalu, Samskruthi, Anubhavalu*.


50. Interviews with T.J. Rama Nadham at Rajamundry on 6-01-2000.

51. Interview with Santharao, General Secretary, Praja Natya Mandali, at Guntur, on 27-7-1999.