Chapter -1

INTRODUCTION
Since the ages, theatre has been serving the purpose of an artistic expression of human kind. Theatre is the most common performing art form, which can be found in every culture. No society that did not have a theatre of its own in some or the other form has ever existed. Theatre is a showcase, a forum, a medium through which ideas, fashions, moralities and entertainments of the people in a society are displayed and at the same time its conflicts, dilemmas and struggles are negotiated. It is a dais for depicting political revolutions, social propaganda, civil debates, religious rituals, mass education and even for its own self-criticism.

After the Second World War, theatre has been appropriated for the expression of political ideology and hence shifted its emphasis from elite entertainment to common folk for upholding social issues. The theatrical
works of post world war depict the agony and grief in the society and viewed the ordinary people that were being affected by warfare. On the other hand, the Marxist philosophy has shown a wide impact on theatre personalities - the playwrights, directors, actors etc. The bodies like Communist party, trade unions, student community and many other sections of society began to communicate their views through the medium of theatre. As a result, cultural organisations like Indian Peoples Theatre-Assocation (IPTA), Red Theatre (China), Guerrilla Theatre of Green peace (Belgium), Berliner Ensemble (Germany) and many more emerged throughout the world. Theatre movements like Invisible theatre, modern street theatre, Guerrilla theatre, Black theatre, Community theatre and Feminist theatres were greatly influenced by Marxist ideology. All these movements tried to address the working class against all sorts of exploitation. In this process, all of them have opposed the practice of proscenium theatre and looked for an alternative space. As a result, new aesthetics were established in place of aesthetics of proscenium. Hence, a search for more alternate platforms, alternative aesthetics, and alternative performance genres were started. The hard-pressed life of the working classes and the exploiting nature of ruling classes became the themes for the modern theatrical performances. Theatre of the third world countries started opposing all the European theatrical models and started using their own artistic symbols, language, space and genres which mostly prevailed in their cultures. Hence many folk performing art forms
were adopted for the modern theatre. Theatre practitioners started identifying their own cultural roots and use them for a social change.

Now, in this thesis, an attempt is made to review the theatre of Telugu land from a subaltern point of view in order to serve the purpose of self-criticism. It tries to look at the marginalised aspects in the modern Telugu theatre and in the process to locate a new genre of theatre, which can be termed, as Theatre of the Marginalised'.

**Significance of the Study:**

This study probes into the evolution of modern Telugu theatre and analyses its different phases to discuss and question the very concept of modernity itself. A modest endeavour is made to know that how the theatre practitioners in Telugu theatre understand the concept of modernity and also how many native theatrical expressions (art forms) of people have been marginalised in the process of representation. The History of Telugu theatre says that organisations like Praja Natya Mandali and Jana Natya Mandali have championed the cause of marginalised sections of the society by using the marginalised performing art forms of the native land. In this study an attempt is made to understand the ideologies of these theatre groups, which gave a different approach in theatre practice. A thorough review has been done to know how far these theatre groups have practiced the Theatre of Marginalised'. The critical view of marginality has provided a base to understand that how different
theatre groups understood the same ideology in different perspectives in different times, and how their understanding led to different theatre practices among the same groups.

Literature Survey:

The literature consists of two broad categories; one category of literature pertains to the History of World theatre and the other is on the History of Telugu theatre.

The major category of books in literature survey pertains to the world theatre in general and theatre of the marginalised in particular. One of the important works on the evolution of world theatre is "History of Theatre", by Oscar G. Brockett that discusses major incidents and phases in the History of world theatre ever since its origin. This book deals in detail the development of theatre at specific societies and enables the reader to understand that how theatre moulds itself according to the needs of the specific society.

*The Theory of the Modern Stage*, is an introduction to modern Theatre and Drama, Edited by Eric Bentley. It is one of the foremost compilations on various ideological frame works that governed the history of theatre practice in the world. The first part of this book discusses various perspectives that shaped the modern theatre and the second part presents a historical over view of the world theatre.
Radical Street Performance\textsuperscript{ii} is another international anthology edited by Jan Cohen - Cruz, that deals with the experiences of various theatre practitioners across the world that try to see theatre as a means for bringing social change. This book gives an ideological framework of the working class and reviews the performative techniques of various groups in order to reach the people effectively even in the times of repression. The author sheds light on the relationship between the theatre and politics and holds that both the theatre and politics are inseparable in a capitalistic society.

Invitation to Theatre\textsuperscript{IV}, by George Kernodle and Portia Kernodle gives a brief discussion on the Theatre movements in various countries. The authors analyse different aspects of theatre from theoretical perspective and distinguishes theatre into theatre of Romance, Theatre of Realism, Theatre of disruption and Liberated theatre.

Robert Cohen, Professor of theatre studies, University of California, Irvine's book "Theatre"\textsuperscript{V} is one of the comprehensive works on the past and present trends in theatre. He elaborately discussed the elements of theatre with a careful demarcation. Four separate chapters are allotted to discuss the elements like The Actor, The Playwright, Designers and Technicians and the director. Various illustrations and photographs supported all the material.
The Indian Theatre\textsuperscript{vi} by Adya Rangacharya gives a brief introduction on the origin and development of theatre in India. This book is a historical survey on the origins of theatre, Sanskrit drama, folk theatre, the development of professional theatre companies in various parts of India, evolution of urban theatre with the impact of Western education and culture and the theatre in Independent India.

Culture, ideology, hegemony\textsuperscript{vii}, a book on the intellectuals and social consciousness in colonial India, written by K.N. Panikkar, gives a great insight to understand various aspects of ideology and hegemony, both inherited and imposed. A detailed note is given on the cultural and ideological struggles in colonial India, expressed through a variety of socio-cultural movements and individual initiatives. It explores the interconnections between culture, ideology and hegemony and is an effort to explain that how Indians, under colonial subjection negotiated their past and present and envisioned a future for the society in which they lived in.

The source material in Telugu on theatre is mostly the compilations and documentation of the figures, dates, personalities and performances from the last one hundred and twenty years. A few of them are reviewed below:

P.S.R. Apparao’s work, Telugu Nataka Vikasam\textsuperscript{viii} is on the History of Telugu theatre from A.D 1880 to A.D 1960, till the decadence of Andhra Nataka Kala Parishat. This book is a historiographical critique on different
stages in the development of Telugu theatre and drama through the ages. He compiled meticulously the very details of the performers, performances, themes of theatre productions and list of the theatre-companies that are in vogue in the field.

The work *Telugu Van Janapada Kalarupalu*, Folk artforms of Telugu People, by Mikkilineni Radha Krishna Murthy is a comprehensive compilation of folk performing art forms existing in Andhra Pradesh. It deals with the cultural background of each folk art form from an outsider's perspective. He cited references from traditional literature to trace the ancestry of the folk artforms that are still in practice. The main intention of the author is to provide general information to even layperson about different types of folk artforms that are extant and continuing in Telugu land.

Jayaprabha’s *Nalugo Goda* is a work on the contemporary Telugu theatre. This work emphasizes the domination of certain forces like caste, gender, and literary and urban-rural polarities over the contemporary Telugu theatre. The writer tried to expose different dimensions of dominance. She holds that Telugu theatre imitates the contemporary film industry and is becoming a stepping-stone to enter into Cinema industry. She analysed some of the popular theatre texts from a gender's standpoint. It describes the evolution of Telugu social drama.
Nurella Telugu Natakaranagam - Samalochana edited by Modali Nagabhushana Sarma is an anthology of articles written by fourteen prominent theatre personalities of Telugu on different aspects of Telugu theatre on play writing, directing, experimentation on Telugu theatre, comparative study of different regional theatres and the evolution of performing techniques. It also provides an understanding of how the contemporary theatre personalities have viewed theatre and approached it with their own perspective. Hence it gives a clear-cut picture of different individual perspectives, which have influenced the contemporary theatre practice at large.

Twentieth Century- Telugu Drama, edited by N.Taraka Ramarao and Sadhu Syam Prasad is another anthology of different articles on Telugu theatre. It contains nine articles on nine different aspects of theatre, in which one article on Padya Natakam deals with its evolution from its origin to decadence. Another article delineates the contribution of various theatre departments in different universities of Andhra to enhance the quality of Telugu theatre. It tries to focus on the importance of theatre training to bring more professionalism in theatre practices.

Folk performing arts of Andhra Pradesh, by M. Nagabhushana Sarma, is a brief introduction to sixty folk performing art forms of Andhra. It deals with the various forms in a categorical way as narratives, dances, and theatre on the basis of their functional and performative qualities.
The other works, which provide major information about the contribution of Praja Natya Mandali and Jana Natya Mandali, were the journals of *Praja Sahithi*. Particularly two special issues of this journal published during 1985 and 2002, gives the conceptual frameworks of the leftist cultural groups' in relation to the folk adaptations to the modern audiences. Apart from discussing the need for the adaptations, the journals aimed to explore the basic ideology, which influenced those organisations to do so.

All most all the works quoted above followed the evolutionary premise in their approach. Their evolutionary approach consists of three stages: the origin (*arambha*), the development (*vikasa*) and the decline (*patana*) of Telugu theatre. The authors when dealing with the first stage, the origin of Telugu theatre, simply undermined the distinction between the drama and theatre. The literary works are quoted as theatre works therefore the origins were conveniently traced back to early historical times starting from the dynastic rule of the Sathavahanas. Thus the writings on Telugu theatre by and large are descriptive and subjective. The analysis leading to concrete conclusions either on the origin, development or decline lacks critical objective evaluation of the authors. Therefore the interpretation of Telugu theatre from a scientific approach warrants an immediate attention as it is done in the Western theatre.
Aims & Objectives

From the literature survey, it is observed that no work has come out so far exclusively on the various aspects of marginality in theatre history and all the theatre criticism of the past got failed to locate the problem of Telugu Theatre. This led to study the history of Telugu Theatre form a marginalised standpoint. The aims and objectives of the study are mentioned below:

1. How the history of World Theatre evolved? Is it a study of various incidents and performances in a sequential order or does it have a base of any ideological understanding?

2. If at all, there is some ideological base for it, what are the ideologies that governed the history of World theatre?

3. How the history of Telugu theatre is being written? Does it develop through any ideological frame works or is it a History of various performances?

4. What are the marginalised aspects in the practice of Telugu Theatre? And does anyone made efforts to break the existing hegemony in the history of Telugu Theatre?

5. How various cultural organisations like Praja Natya Mandali and Jana Natya Mandali represented the marginality in theatre? How
they cut across the boundaries created by the main stream Telugu Theatre?

6. Why Theatre needs an ideological base to reach people at large? How some attempts based on ideology were successful in reaching the people? How many attempts were proven to be failures?

Area of Study:

To pursue the above-mentioned aims and objectives, after conducting the preliminary surveys, the area of study is fixed keeping in view the convenience and feasibility. The area of study can be conceived at two levels. One at the physical or geographical level; the other at the mentalistic or conceptual level. At the geographical level, the entire area of Andhra Pradesh is being taken as area of study. All the theatre activities that are taken place in the nook and corner of Andhra Pradesh were taken into consideration. Though there is considerable theatre activity in both Telangana and Rayalaseema regions of Andhra Pradesh, most of the activity is based on the Coastal belt of Andhra, ranging from Vijayanagaram District to Nellore District. Though the performances of Praja Natya Mandali were on the problems of region, most of the activity took place in the border areas, fall into the boundaries of Andhra region legally due to the ban by the Government.

At the conceptual level two strands of cultural levels are taken, i.e. the traditional and mainstream. As per the ‘traditional' is concerned, the
folk performances in general and those adopted for a specific cause by the elite in particular is taken for study. At the mainstream level, mainly the theatrical devices of the left political organisations are taken as the area of study. Though the Leftist cultural groups like Praia Natya Mandali and Jana Natya Mandali championed the usage of folk performing arts, the other stream of organisations who broadly fall under the category of Right wing cultural group, were also taken for analysis.

Methodology

Basically two methods are employed in the collection, analysis and interpretation of the data. Since the theme is on the marginality in theatre, it is imperative to understand the process of marginality and its development in the History of Telugu Theatre. For this reason observation method is employed. Various books and documents on the History of Telugu Theatre were reviewed thoroughly in order to understand the unwritten history of Theatre of the marginalised. Many performances of the contemporary theatre were witnessed in order to evaluate various elements and approaches that are employed in the theatrical productions. After having observed, another method is employed which may be called as ethnographic method to understand the performer's conceptual understanding of theatre and its purpose. To achieve this goal, unstructured interviews are conducted with the playwrights, performers, organisers and as well as the audiences with regard to the performances in general and the conceptual differences they find in the theatre practice.
This method led to the analysis of many undiscovered facets of Telugu theatre.

Sources of Study:

Major sources of study include:

- Literature survey of various books on Telugu theatre, documents, records and interviews.
- Various performances observed during the fieldwork and the audio and video documentation of the old performances.

Brief Chapterisation:

The thesis consists of seven chapters:

1. **Introduction:**

   In this chapter, a brief introduction is given to make a point of concern for the present study. This chapter also covers literature survey, aims and objectives, area of study, methodology, sources of study and brief write up on chapterisation. The main aim of this chapter is to express overtly from which perspective this thesis is written.

2. **Theatre Through the Ages: A Philosophical premise:**

   This chapter deals with the various concepts developed throughout the History of World Theatre. Starting from the Greek to the postmodern
concepts of theatre, all the movements and theatrical styles were divided into two broad categories as Idealism and Materialism. This distinction is done based on the conceptual understanding of the various inputs used in a particular theatrical expression and its relation to the society. This division is done on the ideological frameworks for a clear understanding of how ideology and theatre goes together. In other words, either consciously or unconsciously every theatre presentation represents some ideology or the other.

3. Theatre of the Marginalised: A Conceptual Frame:

This chapter provides a brief understanding of the perception of marginality. The concept of marginality is the core element in the construction of the theatre of the marginalised. So it is imperative to look into marginality in theatre. Marginality is a sociological term, used to describe the situation of groups of people who are excluded or persecuted by the dominant culture or power in a community. The concept of marginality in India can be defined from two broad viewpoints; one is 'outcaste' and the other is 'out laws'. In this thesis, the performance practices of these communities are viewed as the basis to form the theatre of the marginalized.

4. The History of Telugu Theatre - Politics of Representation:

In this chapter a thorough review of history of Telugu theatre is done from a very critical point of view. Starting from the division of the
Drama and Theatre, how the concept of ‘modernity’ is being understood in the history of Telugu Theatre. In the process, how the theatre practice of the native land is being marginalised. A review is being done on the specific theatre genre like ‘Padyanatakam’ and its traditional base. The entire activity of Theatre is widely discussed how it has come to a stage of depending upon the ‘Parishats’. A detailed review is done on how the various efforts of the individuals and organisations became futile in making Telugu theatre more realistic and more active.

5. Political theatre: the Representation of Marginality:

The attempts of organisations like Praja Natya Mandali and Jana Natya Mandali in championing the voice of the downtrodden through their own cultural expressions were discussed in this chapter. The origin of these organisations, the theoretical base that made them different in theatre, the achievements, limitations and failures were discussed. Though both the organisations represent the same ideology from two different perspectives, a review is done on how their ideological differences reflected in their understanding of theatre and its’ practice. This chapter gives an insight on how powerful the theatre of the marginalised in reaching the masses.

6. Towards the Theatre of the Marginalised¹:

In this chapter one performance of each organisation is taken for a performative analysis. The landmark plays in the History of Praja
Natyamandali’s *Maa Bhoomi* and *Bhoomi Bhagotam* of Jana Natya Mandali are analysed. The different aspects like story, dialogue, characterisation, costumes, make-up, stage, properties and relation with the audiences were keenly observed. With this an understanding is drawn on how these organisations were able to pull crowds heavily, i.e. because of the nativity of the issues, and using the traditional cultural expressions of the people.*

7. **Conclusion:**

Broad conclusions were drawn from the study how marginality in theatre effects the theatre and how one can define the theatre of the marginalized by identifying certain salient features.

References:


