INTRODUCTION
-THE HYPOTHESIS
'Opera' is a special kind of theatre with music. The form 'Opera', is very popular in Western countries and they use the term 'Opera' to denote any drama which is set to music. But 'Opera' in South India is entirely different from the Western Opera. In this thesis, the word 'Opera' is used to denote the type of musical forms of South India which contains a story, set with songs in classical carnatic music and verses, with intermittent prose passages or 'vachana' in a 'dramatic' way, by using conversational style besides indirect passages.

One of the great musicologists of South India, Professor P. Sambamoorthy introduced the word 'Opera' to denote these types of musical forms of South India and the vernacular terms for this type of musical form as 'Sangeeta Natakan', 'Gayanatakan' and 'Isaacnatakan' and he used all these terms in his book 'History of South Indian Music' and in a paper entitled 'A History of South Indian Music'. As music is the integral part in this type of musical form, it is aptly named as Sangeeta natakan, Gaya natakan or Isai natakan which means musical play. The composers have not used these terms for their musical forms as Sangeetanatakan, or Gayanatakan or Isaccnatakan. They have used the terms 'Nataka', 'Charithram' or 'Koortana'. 
Why they did not use the word Sangeeta Natakam, Gyanatatakam or Isainatatakam for their works has to be first before dealing with the study of Opera in South India. It is found that at that time when they lived there was no necessity to classify a play or 'Natakam' into 'Gyanatatakam' or musical play, 'Nruthyanatakam' or dance-drama and 'Natakam' or a Drama with prose dialogues alone. The dramas which were in vogue before 20th Century were operatic in character and music was indispensable in their plays. The great veteran and authority on dramas Mr. P. Sambanda Mudaliar remarks that:

It can be said therefore, that is why Arunachala Kavirayar, Saint Thyagaraja, and Gopalakrishna Bharathiya called their works 'Natakam' and not Geya or Sanḡeta, or Isai natakam. The term 'Charithram' is used in some of the works because the story element predominates more in
these works. The word 'Keertanai' denotes that it is set with songs.

The evolution of opera in South India can be traced from the 'Uparupakas'. In these Sanskrit forms, music and dance predominate and they do not have mostly any prose passage. These, Uparupakas paved the way for 'Sangeetanatakam' and Keertaniya Natak which in turn gave rise to vernacular provincial theatres with full of music and dance. These traditional provincial theatres are either of religious type connected with the rituals in temples or folk type concerned with manas. Karnatic music is used in the provincial theatres of South India but with folk or religious type. The treatment of Karnatic ragas or the style of music will be either religious or folk type in these plays.

The provincial vernacular theatres of South India paved the way for the later classical opera compositions in South India. Saint Thyagaraja, Gopalakrishna Bharathiyar and others have used Karnatic music in its classical style in their works and made them rank as Sangeetanatakam or Opera. The distinguishing factors of South Indian Operas from the provincial vernacular theatres of South India are the treatment of music, the use of mere 'Abhinaya' or mime, and the absence of vidushaka or clown, in the plays. As the music is of classical type in Opera compositions, the songs from these operas are sung in vocal concert and performed
in instrumental concerts even today in South India. We learn that they were intended to be produced on the stage as a play from the term 'Natakam' which is used by the composers in their works. The theme is based upon Puranic stories with little modification on the original text. The Bhakthi rasa permeates the Operas of South India. Operas make use of both musical forms such as Darus and Kaértanas and literary forms such as verses - Sēesa padhyam, Kanda padhyam Aasiriyappa, Sloka etc. The introduction of literary forms is an unique feature of South Indian Operas.

A study on the Opera in the West reveals that Western Operas are entirely different from the Operas of South India. In the West, the Opera is a Drama set to music wherein importance is given equally to both drama and music. But in South India, importance is given more to the music and it is not a mere drama set to music. It has got a story which is set to music with intermittent verses and prose passages in conversational and indirect speech. It can be produced in the stage and also it can be read as a piece of literature or can be sung by a single person or group of persons as a musical composition.

Nowadays Dramas in South India aim at reality. Hence prose passages are used for dialogues and songs
are not used by characters. This change came in South India at the middle of the 20th Century. Production of Operatic plays became very rare. Therefore efforts to produce the classical Operas on the stage must be taken by the experts on theatres. On these days, when Operatic plays were produced on the stage, the classical opera 'Nandanar charithram' of Gopalkrishna Bharathiyar was staged as 'Nandanar' and Ramanatakam' of Arunachala Kavirayar was also staged.

Production of Operas on the stage requires performers who can sing and act on the stage and a good Orchestra. Orchestra does not mean Harmonic orchestra alone which is the western orchestra. It means also melodic orchestra or Indian orchestra which is in our languages known as 'vadyabrunda' or 'vadyagoshti'. This type of melodic orchestra was prevalent even from the time of Bharata, and Bharata uses the term 'Kutapa' for orchestra. This orchestra was used in the plays of Bharata. Simultaneous playing of a composition by many instruments such as Veena, Violin and Sakk Gottuvadyam, Flute, Clarionet etc. will be the orchestral accompaniment for South Indian Operas.

In this present thesis, a research study is made on the structure of South Indian Opera and definition of the term 'Opera' as we understand in South India. Evolution of Opera in South India, role of music in vernacular provincial theatres of South India.
a Critical Study on the dramatic, musical and aesthetic aspects in South Indian Operas, a brief account of the western opera to differentiate the Opera in South India which is completely different from the Western opera and lastly requirements to produce an Opera of South India on the stage successfully in future.

This topic has not been studied so far and there is such a lot of confusion in using the terms 'Opera' and 'dance drama' in South India. The demarcation line between these two is of course very subtle. Opera uses 'Abhinaya' whereas Dance-drama uses 'Nruthya' and 'Abhinaya' is again very little. The former uses the 'Mudras' or 'set gestures' to express an idea with a little foot-work or 'Nrutta' whereas 'Abhinaya' is mime and it is freelance gestures without any sort of foot-work or 'Nrutta'. Again, when the term 'Opera' is used, people think of Western Opera. This study is aimed at to clarify that Opera in South India is somewhat very different from Western Opera. The South Indian Operas are works which can be staged, though they can be enjoyed by merely singing the compositions or by just reading the work.

The material for the present research work has been gathered from many literary works, dramatic and musical works apart from consulting the experts' experiences.