INTRODUCTION

The present thesis A Critical Study of the Objectives of Teaching / Learning English at the Postgraduate Level in Andhra Pradesh is an attempt at pointing to some of the much-overlooked lacunae that exist in the pedagogy of English at the postgraduate level in Andhra Pradesh. From a reading of the Report of the Curriculum Development Centre in English, it could be learnt that the pedagogical scenario in most state universities of other Indian states like Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa, is very similar to what prevails in Andhra Pradesh. However the present study confines itself to the pedagogical scenario of English at the postgraduate level as it exists in the state of Andhra Pradesh alone.

The state of Andhra Pradesh has eight universities that offer M.A. English. These universities along with their constituent and affiliated colleges offer the Masters Degree in English to over seven hundred and fifty regular students. The term 'regular' is used to distinguish the students from those who pursue the course through private or distance education mode. Many a problem seems to plague the pedagogy of English at the postgraduate level in Andhra Pradesh. Though most of these problems are oft-recognized, they have remained least addressed and least attended to.

The aim of the present thesis is to critique the pedagogy of English at the postgraduate level with specific reference to the objectives of teaching / learning English. The study is concerned with the practice of teaching rather than the ideology of teaching English. This study also makes a modest attempt at suggesting measures to better the existing conditions.
The apparently vague use of the term English in the title of the thesis is deliberate as it is indicative of the vagueness prevalent in most English departments of the universities pertaining to the postgraduate course they offer. The course in most departments is simply called "M.A. in English" without spelling out the connotations of the term 'English'. Left to one's imagination, the term could be interpreted variedly to mean the English language, the English literature, literatures in English or English studies. One could even interpret the term to refer to all of these as the course contents very often comprise, in varying proportions, components of all these areas.

In fact, in the post colonial Indian context of today where the ever so many roles of "English" have come under close scrutiny, English has become a term representing not merely "Language and literature" but a divergent range of areas. English has become so large and capacious as a subject that as Prof. Narayan Chandranan in his "A Companion to English in India: Reflections on a Project, And a Proposal" points out:

... English is now generally understood not only as "Language and literature" (as it used to be) but also as the institutional and cultural practices that underpin them; literature and other arts; literature, philosophy, and the social sciences; disciplinary measures and categories that involve translation, creative writing, media and gender studies, and many more where English may be shown to mediate crucially, or it may be gainfully brokered or aligned for professional purposes.

(Chandran : 2001, p. 17)
However, the vagueness in the use of the term 'English' stops with the title itself. In the course of the thesis wherever the term appears, it is used unambiguously by spelling out clearly whatever it refers to. It should also be pointed out here that the term 'course' is used in the present thesis as a synonym of "programme" and not as a synonym of 'paper'. Therefore 'M.A. course(s)' in the thesis refers to 'M.A. programme(s)'.

The focus of the thesis is on critiquing the objectives of teaching/learning English at the postgraduate level. The most glaring deficiency in the pedagogy of English lies in the thorough mismatch of the various objectives. The incompatibility of the various objectives is manifold and is the outcome of a number of problems that lie both at the grass roots and systemic levels.

The following facts point to some of the most prominent gaps that exist in the pedagogy of English at the postgraduate level:

1. The objectives/needs of the students who opt for M.A. English after their graduation are very different from what the course actually offers them. Most students that join the course seem to join it with a view to improving their communicative skills. (This was made evident in the survey conducted.) But the course seems to do little either directly or indirectly towards realizing this particular objective of the students. This shows that the M.A. courses in English as offered by different universities of the state do not take into account even the primary objective of the students in doing the M.A. course. Further, it also shows how oblivious and indifferent the courses have remained to the practical and realistic needs of the students.
2. There seems to be little compatibility between the objectives of the students and those of the teachers. While most students expect the course to some how improve their communicative skills, most teachers teach the course with the objective of sharpening the literary sensibility and critical powers of the students.

3. The held objectives of the students and those of the teachers seem to be different from their operational objectives. While most students hold that improving their communicative skills is their main objective in joining the course, in actuality, their objective is to pass the examination. The objective of passing the examination sidelines the held objective of the students.

Similarly, most teachers hold that inculcating a critical taste for literature is their main objective in teaching the course. But in the execution of the course this objective is sidelined by the objective of completing the syllabus.

Thus there is a wide gap between the held and the operational objectives of students as well as of teachers.

4. Many a time the course does not seem to have any explicitly stated objectives, the absence of which renders the existing evaluatory practices meaningless.

5. Admissions to M.A. English are made open to all graduates irrespective of their group and medium at the undergraduate level. Consequently, the disparate needs of the students coming from heterogeneous academic backgrounds are not taken care of by the course.
Teaching complex literary texts and their complex literary aspects to students, a majority of whom are not equipped even with the basics of the English language renders the whole teaching enterprise a self defeating one and an exercise in futility. It will not be out of place here to allude to what Dr. Lathrop says in Kipling's story "The Enlightenment of Pagett, M.P.":

They (Indian women) need many things more urgently than votes. Why, it's like giving a bread pill for a broken leg.

(Marathe : 1995, p. 128)

The quotation, though figures in a completely unrelated context, succinctly sums up the scenario of teaching English at the postgraduate level in Andhra Pradesh. What the P.G. courses in English in the state offer to the students is very much like giving a pill for a broken leg. No matter how lofty the ideals of teaching literature are, that a majority of the students are linguistically too ill-equipped to appreciate literature and the complexity of interpreting "overdetermined" texts is too overwhelming a fact to be brushed under the carpet.

One normally comes across arguments like improvement of linguistic skills should be taken care of at the undergraduate level itself and no time and effort should be wasted at the postgraduate level in trying to improve the linguistic skills of the students; a postgraduate course is not necessary to teach them mere communicative skills and so on. Even the UCG Model Curriculum released in 2001 unequivocally states that students who do not possess certain level of proficiency in the English language must be dissuaded from opting for the M.A. programme in English. Teaching of the basics of the English language should not be a formal part of the curriculum at the masters level:
It is assumed that students taking up an Honours or M.A programme in English will have sufficient working proficiency in the English language. Training in basic language skills - as opposed to advanced linguistic or functional skills - should not be a formal component of Honours or M.A programmes. If such students still require basic language training, it should be provided in the Compulsory English classes, or through remedial or bridge courses.

Needless to say, students in need of such training should be counselled intensively before admission to an Honours or M.A programme in English. They should not be encouraged to take up the programme unless there is overriding evidence of their motivation and potential for improvement. It is also recommended that the basic language skills of Honours and MA students should be tested at or near the beginning of their course, and their further progress monitored accordingly.

(UGC Model Curriculum : 2001, p.14)
Such arguments are well justifiable in an ideal condition wherein admissions to the M.A. course are restricted only to those students that have acquired a certain level of proficiency in the English language. But in reality admissions to the M.A. English course are thrown open to all graduates who have secured a stipulated percentage of marks in General English irrespective of their proficiency in English. Ironically, the marks secured in General English are least indicative of the proficiency of the students.

A random sample of five scripts written by the first year M.A. Students (1999 - 2000) on their first-day in the class which are given in appendix - 1 testifies to their level of proficiency in English on joining the course. These scripts are answers to the question "What prompted you to opt for M.A. English? ".

Since there is no continuous/ formative evaluation, the students do not get opportunities to write and to learn from their mistakes. In the entire two - year programme, students take just five examinations at the end of each academic year. Even these ten examinations during the course of the two-year study are conducted only with the sole purpose of awarding marks/degrees. The students do not get any feedback of their performance. They are never shown their scripts and are never appraised of the mistakes/errors in their writing. Without giving the students any kind of practice in facing the examinations, they are made to take once for all the final examinations. This is a strong disadvantage to students, who do not have separate component
in the course to cater to their writing needs. Consequently, the writing skills of the students do not show any considerable improvement even by the end of the two-year programme.

A random sample of five answers written by the final year students (1999-2000) on their last day in the university substantiates the above mentioned observation. These answers are taken from the answer scripts of the paper "Literary criticism - History and Twentieth century Criticism" These scripts are given in appendix - 2 and they are answers to the compulsory question, What, according to Aristotle, are the salient features of a tragedy?

The thesis does not stop with the mere critiquing of the status quo, for as Marathe, et al. argue in their introduction to Provocations (1993) one's job is not over if one has merely found fault with the status quo. Identifying the problems of a system has no value, unless it leads to measures of remediation:

Some people think that their job is over if they have raised questions about the existing order.

By simply saying that what exists is no good or even harmful, they imagine that they have demolished it and repaired the damage. Nothing can be more naive.

(Marathe : 1993, p. 7)

Therefore, in addition to critiquing the existing scenario of teaching English at the postgraduate level, the thesis also makes a modest attempt at suggesting measures to better the status quo. The suggested measures are based not on theoretical speculation but on practical experience and the prolonged experiments conducted in the M.A. English class at Sri Padamavati Mahila Visva Vidyalayam over a period of five years.
The thesis has been organized into seven chapters. The first chapter entitled The M.A. Course in English vis-a-vis the universities in Andhra Pradesh gives a cursory outline of the history of English studies in India and describes, in detail, the M.A. course in English as it is being executed in different universities of the state.

The second chapter entitled Objectives vis-avis the M.A. Courses in English describes in its first part the sense in which the term 'Objectives' is used in the course of the thesis by presenting some of the confusion that shrouds the description and the definition of the term. In its second part, this chapter outlines the objectives of the M.A. course in English as they could be drawn from different sources. In most cases there have been no explicitly stated objectives as such. The objectives in such cases have been derived based on the syllabi and the oral responses of the teachers who are instrumental in designing the courses.

The third chapter, entitled The objectives of the Students describes the survey conducted to learn the views of teachers and students about the M.A. courses in English. This chapter outlines the twofold survey conducted in order to learn the learning objectives of the students. The survey includes a vertical as well as a horizontal sample of the students. It examines and analyses in detail the data collected.

Centrally placed as it is, the fourth chapter entitled The Objectives of the Teachers presents the objectives of the teachers and compares them with those of the students and the M.A. courses. It also points to the incompatibility of the various objectives.

The fifth chapter, entitled The Experiment in the M.A. Class and its Theoretical Underpinnings details the experiment conducted in the M.A. final year class over a period of two academic years. The experiment involved the conduct of two proficiency tests to two batches of students. The first batch was a
control group who took two proficiency tests – one at the beginning of the final year and the other at the end. Between the tests they received no additional instruction over and above the regular instruction.

Two similar proficiency tests were conducted for a second batch which constituted the experimental group of the experiment. Unlike the preceding batch, this batch of students were given fifty hours of additional instruction between the two tests over and above the regular instruction. The additional instruction based largely on the communicative framework of language teaching involved doing in the class many language oriented and literary activities by the students.

The sixth chapter entitled The Experiment Per Se enumerates class-wise the activities the fifty hour instruction included in it and also the findings of the experiment. The performance of the control group in the second test improved only marginally while that of the experimental group improved significantly. If a mere fifty hour instruction based largely on the framework of CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) could bring about such significant improvement in the linguistic and also to some extent the communicative competence of the students, surely, an exclusive paper with in the course to improve the communicative competence of the students would be of immense help to students who want and need to improve their proficiency in the English language. This chapter also outlines the theoretical underpinnings of the experiment.

Conclusive as it is, the seventh chapter of the thesis entitled conclusion emphasises the conspicuous incompatibility of the various objectives of teaching/learning English. It presents a summary and also the findings of the study. The thesis concludes by offering suggestions for further research.