INTRODUCTION
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If theory is a matter of general principle, what is performance? The performance exists only when audience and actor are together. The performance - audience relationship is a two - way transaction like a dialogue. Without performance-audience relationship, the aesthetic nature of theatre does not exist. Though efforts have been made in the past to separate the audience from performance by way of erecting proscenium arch and other physical hindrances, the postmodern era considered it necessary to dissolve all the hurdles - physical, mental, cultural and social- to evolve a harmonious relationship between the performer and spectator. It has a global village perspective. This thesis is a critical study of theatre performance theories. The term 'Performance Theory' was postulated during the postmodern era by Western scholarship, and it played a vital role in the avant - garde movement of theatre history. The essence of the performance theory in theatre is a phenomenon of live performances under the shades of actor - audience relationship in the theatre realm. In the postmodern and post - structuralist age, it gained maturity and was treated as intercultural and pluridisciplinary discourse. During the 1980s, it emerged as an independent discipline called 'Performance Studies'. It is a paradigm of pluridisciplinary explication of the spectacular text of the genres of performances in different cultures by utilizing various paths and criteria. But the present discourse is a slight diversion in an attempt to emphasize the theatre performance theory that had emerged as a theoretical approach in the theatre realm in the past few decades in Euro-American theatre culture.

The study goes with an analytical and empirical approach, taking into consideration the bhagavathams of Andhra Pradesh. This has been conceptualized into three major parts. One is looking at the performance theory in the postmodern and post - structural age. Second, the study extends its findings and observations of performance theory from pre-dramatic ritual to Avant - garde theatre performances that gave rise to the performance theory in the postmodern age. Finally, it examines the relevance in bhagavathams both theoretically and experimentally, taking into consideration the theatrologist and experimentalist works,
i.e., Richard Scheduler's and others who adopted the environmental theatre approach and its attitude to the postmodern age in the West.

Environmental theatre is a theatrical style in which the whole audience is included in the enactment together with the performers, and wherein both acting space and audience space is treated as a totality. It implies that performers and spectators are treated equally, akin to pre-dramatic rituals. Structurally, all the bhāgavathams of Andhra Pradesh are more similar to several aspects of environmental theatre concept, as will be observed in the course of this thesis. The theories are similar although cultural-geographical variations dominate the theatre. An extensive study of theatre performance and its interconnections with scholarly works provided many insights in order to bring out specific individual theories in the theatre realm. The attempt inevitably led to examining different theories and their phenomena, from ritual to the avant-garde movement.

OBJECTIVES

The present investigation is an attempt to understand the dimensions of several theories, which include both old and new. The following are the specific objectives of the study:

1. To understand the background of performance theory and its importance as an inter-cultural and pluridisciplinary attempt during the postmodern and post-structural era.

2. To trace out causes, going back to the essence of theatre i.e., actor-audience participation during the postmodern era and its applications in avant-garde theatrical experiments.

3. To know the origins of different theatre performance theories since the last few decades, and the necessity to study the classical theatre to avant-garde theatres to understand the creation of performance theory in postmodern age.

4. To focus the bhagavatha performance structures (folk, traditional, classical) under the
light of Western experimental theatres, and to focus its attention towards performance space, performance text, and actor-audience participation.

AREA OF STUDY

Since the area of study is mainly focused on avant-garde theatrical experimentation and its ideology, it became necessary to focus on Richard Schechner’s work with his performance group, taking into consideration performance space, text, and actor-audience transactions in the theatre. Structurally and conceptually attention has been devoted to the above linkages and parallels in the bhāgavathams of Andhra Pradesh for the specific study.

METHODOLOGY

In view of the above objectives set for the present study, the data has been collected through primary and secondary sources. Since the studies in performance is a new area, I preferred the Western performance analysis method rather than an independent one. The data collected for the study is as follows:

1. Literature survey on theatre history and theories related to analytical and empirical methods, and personal interviews conducted by Western and Indian scholars.

2. Consultation of the books, published articles and research papers of regional scholars written in Telugu for bhagavatham performances. Besides, the narrative interview technique has been adopted for better analysis of the performance structures of Kuchipudi bhāgavatham, Melattur bhāgavata mela, Toorpu bhagavatham and Chindu bhdgavataham.

3. Use of interview guide technique, and personal observation of the live performances in different places and at different contexts. Extensive field work and personal interviews with renowned scholars and artists, connoisseurs, technical persons and spectators of the performances who participated in live performances in the environmental space.
Data was collected by personal observations of performances at different locales on different occasions by interaction with performers and spectators. The secondary sources are profusely used, if found authentic, to supplement primary data. Therefore the arguments are enlarged on the basis of available data. During this exercise, maximum care has been taken to verify their authenticity for analysis. On the whole, the current data collected from different sources is used in this appraisal.

THE PROCESS OF DATA COLLECTION

The primary data for the present study was collected from August 1992 to June 1994. During this period, extensive travel was carried out at different places both in Andhra Pradesh and other states in India. The tour covered both collecting literature i.e., books, research articles, documentations of different Western theatrical performances gathered by different research libraries throughout the country, and also personal observations of live performances at different places in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu (Melattur) many times. Field work had been done on different levels at different intervals in the villages. Pilot investigation helped to standardize the mode of conducting interviews. First, it was thought to use a tape-recorder to record information from the performing troupes, but with minor exceptions all the respondents refused the use of taping, hence it was dropped in the final investigation. A period of ten to fifteen days was spent in each village to interact with different performing troupes and spectators. This helped to finalize and standardize the interviews schedule in a logical order and pose the questions in the dialect of the respondents. The final investigation has been developed according to the primary sources of the performers (recent) to collate with the literature.

OUTLINES OF THE DOCUMENTATION

The present study is a traditional and intercultural discourse, local usages are properly used to develop arguments, and these are also underlined. Special attention is given to photo and video documentation for getting reliable and accurate visual information. Only
few performances were documented by the researcher due to financial constrains. Though the documentation of the live performances of the traditional artists are recently done, the analysis encompasses all traditional performances. Photographs were taken in all specified bhāgavathams according to subject specifications to prove my hypothesis.

OUTLINES OF THE PRESENTATION

The present thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter deals with the background of performance theory and its development with other schools. Various postmodern ideologies and arguments are briefly discussed. Various performance studies of Western scholars and their work and connections to treat performance as a multidisciplinary matrix and Schechner’s theatre performance theory and his environmental theatre ideas are presented. Indian traditional theatrical performances are discussed in this context. Spheres of performances genres, i.e., folk, traditional and classical theatre is brought out.

The second chapter deals purely with the investigation of theatrical performance changes that occurred in theatre realm from ritual performances to avant-garde theatre in order to understand the theories that have arisen during the postmodern age. Thus the chapter explicates the ritual theatre, Greek theatre, Roman theatre, Renaissance theatre, modern theatre and avant-garde theatres. Emphasis has been given to the changes that occurred sociologically and culturally thorough the ages. It also throws light on performance space, text and actor-audience participation metamorphosis. At the end, the chapter concentrates on the necessity of actor-audience transaction in the avant-garde theatre of Schechner and his experimentation in Western society. The entire chapter tries to make a preliminary investigation of the similarities and parallelisms between theory and practice in the Western theatre (specifically avant-garde experimental theatre).

The third chapter contains a brief profile of the bhāgavathams study area and its origin, performance structure, compositions, and other aspects of traditional importance. This chapter also discusses the background of the bhāgavatha cult, inscriptional evidences, and
other aspects of traditional importance.

The fourth chapter explicates the topoanalysis and text of the environmental experimental theatre and examines the shades of *bhagavathams* of Andhra Pradesh. This chapter covers the limitations of drama as a literary piece and dramatic text, replacement of performance text for dramatic text in the postmodern age, confronting the text of environmental theatre concept and spatial importance to look into the —it bhagavathams. This chapter also covers topography and its ideology, anti-illusionistic space, and bharata's spatial concept in *Natya Sastra*, proxemics and spatial concept in *bhagavathams*.

The fifth chapter explicates the different theories of actor-audience participation, relationships and transactions of actor and spectator in experimental theatre of the West. This chapter enumerates postmodern theatreological ideology on actor-audience participation; and actor-audience participation in *bhāgavathams*, audience qualification, spectatorship, theory of rasa, communication vehicle in *bhagavathams*, participation through physical structure of theatre and hasya rasa and Sringara rasa, theatrical relationship, Schechner's exploration of audience participation, and Western theories of actor-audience participation.

In the concluding chapter a summary of findings of all the chapters is given. This thesis maintains a perspective of theatre in the postmodern era, conceptually and structurally, with focus on the *bhagavathams* of Andhra Pradesh.