

No drama is complete without a production of it on the stage. Thus drama becomes the literary component of a complex performing art. The tools we use either for literary analysis or ~~for~~ exclusively for a performing art may not be sufficient for analysing a 'performed' text. Since the performance involved several technical personnel, one tends to look at it as 'a scientific exposition of an artistic text'. Every author, sometimes unconsciously, is alert to the requirements of a production and every performance ~~is~~ grows out of the requirements of a given text. This 'duality' ~~is~~ ~~of~~ in the creative process is an impulsive force that conditions theatrical criticism. In the 140 and odd years since dramatic/theatrical criticism had its beginnings, it had gone through several phases of transition, the textual, performative, psychoanalytical and emotive qualities of both the content and the characters on one side and the sub-textual nuances of the performed text as evidenced by the actors' able execution and the technical skills properly executed by the back-stage specialists find an equal emphasis, though many times, the text overtakes the context, sub-text and the performance text.

The earliest specimens of dramatic criticism came from "Prefaces" provided by the playwrights to their texts or in the reviews of the play texts in literary journals. The first such "Preface" came from Vavidala Vasudeva Sastry ~~is~~ dated September 21, 1875 and this may be taken as the beginning of dramatic criticism in Telugu. ~~This~~ <sup>This</sup> preface to his translation of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar as

"Peethika"

Caesar Charitramu. He wrote a ~~Preface~~ <sup>"Peethika"</sup> in Telugu on Sept. 21, 1875 and his "Preface" in English was dated January 4, 1876 and the translation was published in 1876. Vavilala wrote such prefaces to all the three plays he penned - Caesar Charitramu, the first ~~English~~ translation of an English play into Telugu, Nandaka Rajyamu (1880), the first original social play in Telugu and Uttara Rama Charitra, ~~the~~ Bhavabhuti's Sanskrit play. His introductions to all the three are valuable ~~for~~ for ~~the~~ their historical importance. He chose the ~~Theta~~ 'theta geeti' metre for his translation of the English play and defended its use on two counts: one, that it is close to Shakespeare's iambic pentameter; and, second, that he wanted ~~to~~ not to tread the path of "prabandha" poets (a fashionable poetic genre of the late 19<sup>th</sup> c.) ~~who~~ who wrote in different metres: "The metre adopted is the Theta gita, in which each line is independent, and consists of five ganas, thus, I say, it corresponds to the Iambic Pentameter, where each line is composed of five feet, and in this metre only all the English plays are written!"

By analysing his methods of working - the language he used, the way he nativized the proper names and his choice of the metre, Vavilala became the first dramatic critic. For the next forty years, playwrights followed ~~the~~ suit and these prefaces give us ample insights into the working methodologies ~~of~~ the dramatist's creative process.

Similar prefaces by the authors themselves gave ample testimony to the fact that the popularity of the newly started dramatic troupes gained momentum. Chitlakamarti Laxminarasimham, in a 'Preface' to Parijathapaharanamu extolled the services of his dramatic team, Hindu Nataka Samajam's efforts to popularise the Telugu theatre activities by 'excellent' acting and discipline. Dharmarama Ramakrishnamacharyulu's "Preface" to the first edition of his debut Telugu play, Chitranaleeyam, goes ahead a step further by explaining to the reader his predicament ~~of~~ ~~in~~ ~~trying~~ ~~to~~ ~~write~~ ~~a~~ ~~play~~ ~~in~~ ~~Telugu~~, while all ~~his~~ his friends believed that Telugu was not the ~~an~~ appropriate medium for playwriting ~~and~~ how he proved them wrong! Dharmarama also provided us with a <sup>cast</sup> list, of ~~the~~ characters and the names - the participants in the very first production ( ) put on boards by his Sarasa Vinodini Sabha. Others whose prefaces are important either for ~~the~~ throwing light on the creative process of the playwrights or the social and theatrical conditions that prevailed at that time include Achanta Venkataraya Sambhyanu Sarva (Manorama, 1895), Nadella Purushothama Kavi (Hari'schandra, ) and Gurazada Appa Rao (Kanyasulkam, 1892/1909). Gurazada's Prefaces both to the first edition and to the later enlarged, recreated edition are, by now, well-known classic examples of how an author's creative process reflects the social and literary conditions of the day.

While the playwrights spoke about their art and craft, their reception by the readers was assessed by the magazines and journals of the day. Vavilala's ~~Book~~ Ceasaru Charitramu was reviewed in Kandukuri Venesalingam Pantulu's Viveka Bodhini in July 1876 in which the reviewer - <sup>the editor,</sup> presumably Kandukuri himself, for it was an unsigned review - pointed out to the positive and negative points in the translation. ~~Q~~ The reviewer, congratulating the translator for his sense of ~~the~~ <sup>and</sup> 'dramatic' language, the inevitability of retaining the original proper nouns, advised the author not to use a single metre throughout the play, but use different metres "to suit the occasion" - a method Kandukuri himself followed in his later translations.

Journals which encouraged reviews of plays of the day include Poondla Ramakrishnayya's Anudrita Grandha Chintamani (1887), Mysapati Subba Rao's Chintamani (1891) and Panappakam Anandacharyulu's Vyjayanti (1894). While in the first mentioned ~~journal~~ journal, the editor himself reviewed plays, in Chintamani it was Achanta Sundararamaiah, who reviewed them. ~~Q~~ Though the editor of Vyjayanti was Anandacharyulu, his son, Srinivasacharyulu, who was looking after the editorial work, was the chief reviewer. Writing under the name of P. S. Charyulu, his review of

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Chitranaleeyam and Kolachalam Srinivasa Rao's  
Sukhamanjari Parinayam, both running into several  
issues, ~~showed~~ initiated a new trend in  
dramatic criticism - ~~going~~ going through the  
entire play with a thorough critical analysis of each  
scene - thus introducing 'textual analysis' method to  
dramatic criticism as ~~well~~ well! It was he that  
warned the contemporary dramatists that a play's  
~~ultimate aim~~ ultimate aim was performance and  
"it would be better to writers of plays to keep this in mind  
while composing their plays! Vijayanti's open endorsement  
of a play's purpose marked the changing trends in dramatic  
criticism.

The first full-length article on contemporary  
theatrical scene ~~was~~ appeared in Hindu Jana Samikarini  
(March - April, 1889) in which the author of the article (unnamed)  
overviews the general apathetic condition of women's education  
in the then Madras Presidency and, while endorsing the  
feasibility of using the theatrical medium for educating  
the women folk in morals and manners, bewails the  
present ~~and~~ unethical practices that appeared common  
in dramatic associations and feared the possibility of even  
the 'educated' actors might fall into evil ways.

Except ~~for~~ the few genuine attempts to educate  
the public, the samajans and the actors ~~and~~ ~~about~~ about the  
impending dangers that might obstruct a sane growth of  
theatrical activity, all other reviews and critical articles

published in journals spent their energies in finding fault with the dramatist's use of proper language (usually a literary rival's). This mainly centred round the use of vyaakhārika or grandhika style and of different dialects for various characters appropriately (patrocchita bhasha). Eminent scholars that participated in these literary combats include Kondakuri, Kokonda Venkataratnam, Kedam Venkataraya Sastry and Kalishatta Brahmaya Sastry. These fiercely-fought duels went ~~to~~ ~~to~~ to such an extent that Venkataraya Sastry criticised Kokonda's translation of a 114-page play Andhrakrita Prasanna Raghavamu in <sup>his</sup> 338 page book, Prasanna Raghava Vimarsanam (1898)!

By ~~the~~ 1900, there was a spurt in theatre activity and almost every town was flooded with two or three samajams. In order to enable these associations to function on sound lines, some ardent lovers supplied them with the necessary do's and dont's. Kondiparti Suryanarayana Rao's Andhra Nataka Sangha Margadarsini (1910) ~~is~~ is ~~the~~ the first book written for the purpose. Simultaneously there were also strong condemnation of some of the theatrical practices followed by actor associations from none other than Panuganti Laxminarasimha Rao, a prominent playwright. In <sup>two</sup> ~~a~~ pungently satirical ~~note~~ essays published in his ~~book~~ Saakshi (1913) on these theatrical practices, he criticised the contemporary practices on singing songs modelled

on the 'Marathi' model and the practice on lengthy saga akshapana of poems, a trend that debunked the ~~theatrical~~ aesthetic needs of a proper stage presentation.

The years between 1910 and 1915 are important in the development of Telugu dramatic criticism, for it is during these years that ~~the~~ strong critical attitudes of serious-minded theatre practitioners and critics got consolidated. One trend ~~led~~ <sup>leaned</sup> towards analytical criticism, by looking at the broad sub-genres of the plays written to advise practitioners <sup>and</sup> on the need to concentrate on socially relevant issues. Tallapragada Suryanarayana Rao's "Andhra Natakamukhi" in Andhra Saraswathi Parishat Patrika (1913) and ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> Purnani Sri Sastri's essay with the same title published in Gandhalaya Saraswathi (1913) looked at the current trends of writing more mythological plays than the social ones.

The other trend ~~was~~ was to concentrate on an in-depth analysis of content and characterization on one side and ~~on~~ on the ~~comparative~~ other, performance ~~evaluation~~ evaluation, centering round acting. In 1912 Toleti Venkata Subba Rao published his critiques on Sarabavindini Sabha's (Bellary) performance of Chitsanakeyam and Juntur Hindu Nataka Samajam's Sakuntala, thus paving the way for performance evaluation. The second one is Tanikella Venkateswara's critical evaluation of the character of Chitrangi in Dharmaratnam's Kishoda Sarangadhara, a forerunner in analytical criticism.

Puranam Suri Sastri <sup>is</sup> a pioneer who paved the way for a synthesis of textual analysis and performance criticism and the years between 1916-30 can be termed as Suri Sastri's 'yugam'. In 1916 came his Andhra Nataka Namavali, ~~an~~ ~~yearly~~ ~~account~~ an account of Telugu plays divided genre-wise from 1890 to 1915. His Natyaambujam (1923), Natyaotpalam (1924) and Natya Alokam (1925) are considered authoritative works of dramatic and theatrical criticism, ~~probably~~ His performance evaluations of important actors like Bellary Raghava, Hari Prasad Rao, Nellore Nagaraja Rao, Mungituri Krishna Rao and several others stand unique for their perceptive analysis and unbiased approach.

Some well-known critics published works of importance during this period, throwing light on either of topical interest or of theatre activities of a particular region. Gollapudi Srinama Sastri's Andhra Nataka Rangam (1924) belongs to the latter type, for he discussed the role of the major theatre groups in Nellore, Chittoor and Bellary. On the other hand, Tekumalla Achyuta Rao's Andhra Natakamulu - Nataka Rangam (1926) ~~discussed~~ discussed the goals of professional and amateur theatre groups - ~~is~~ a very topical issue of the late 1920's - and suggested that both should exist side by side - he says they are complementary to each other - which advice the later-day policy-makers conveniently forgot and caused a big blow to a sane and proper development of Telugu theatre.

The movement ~~started~~ <sup>started by</sup> serious writers and critics in 1916 pervaded all over the Telugu land and the attempts influenced ~~of~~ both drama and theatre. On one side Ewei Sastri started "Andhra Nataka Pratitahaka Sangham" (1916), under the auspices of which performances by eminent Samajams were sponsored, followed by a discussion on the production. In the same year (1916), Viswanatha Keviraju, <sup>(Malladi Viswanatha Sarma)</sup> started publishing a ~~monthly~~ monthly magazine devoted exclusively to drama and theatre. In the 14 months it survived it published <sup>an</sup> seminal articles on ~~the~~ subjects which needed ~~the~~ urgent ~~and~~ attention of all theatre lovers. ~~The~~ well-known journals of the day - like Sarada, Bharati, Jayanthi, Veempe, Kala and Udayini took active part in the discussions that concerned the theatre of the day, while publishing performance reviews of important plays. The review of ~~the~~ Rama Vilasa Sabha's (Tenali) production of Kanyasulkam ~~in~~ <sup>Mythararam Company's</sup> Sarada (1925); Saktubai ~~in~~ <sup>Motevari company's,</sup> Sritrishna Tulabharani in Bharati, Sati Savitri in Rajamannar's Kala gave a boost to the respective ~~theatres~~ theatre companies. Similarly detailed analyses of Sripada Subrahmanya Sastri's Raja Raju by Viswanatha Satyanarayana, Nanduri Bangaraya's Rajyalaxmi by no less a person than Chellapilla Venkata Sastri, Viswanatha's plays by Puttaparthi Narayanaacharyulu were published in Bharati, a prestigious monthly and helped to elevate the general literary status of these <sup>classics.</sup>

During the same time, Andhra Patrika, ~~was~~ shifted its place of publication from Mumbai to Madras (now Chennai) and started publishing it as a daily newspaper (1914). The editor of the paper - Kakinadhuni Nagaswara Rao - an eminent nationalist and a political leader highly respected - was himself an actor and took great interest in theatre activities by helping theatre groups performing in Madras and publishing reviews of plays, almost on a daily basis, by eminent scholars. This gave a great fillip to theatre activities all over Andhra. This and its sister publication Bharati daily alone contained roughly ~~about~~ about 18,000 entries from 1914 to 1963 and are now being digitised by me.

Another step towards consolidating this dissemination process came from B.T. Raghavachari, who started taking classes for actors, directors and other enthusiasts in the presentation of plays (1923). ~~His~~ <sup>Seven of his</sup> lectures were later brought out in a book form which contains essential procedures in play production like directing, acting, conducting rehearsals, voice and diction and the like. This was the beginning of theatre education, which, in 70's and 80's ~~led~~ led to starting of departments of Theatre Arts in Universities.

The next decade (1930-40) saw the slow decline of professional theatre and the emergence of the contractor. However, the few professional theatre groups continued their activities. During this period came two thin, but rich volumes of theatre criticism - Radhakalli Ananta Krishna Sarma's Natakopangasamulu, which overviewed the work of some important theatre groups and Vedam Venkataraya Sastry's Bharata Bharata ~~to~~ Rupaka Mangadalu - a comparative analysis of western and Indian approaches to drama.