

## POST - INDEPENDENCE TELUGU DRAMA

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When India was fighting for its Independence, Telugu drama and theatre was trying to free itself from the shackles of a cliché - ridden, pauranic, musical drama which hindered modernism and creative ingenuity. Stories from antiquated mythological stories and legends or stories of valour of the heroes and heroines of the by-gone days dramatised with scores of metrical stanzas sung with an inconsequential momentum and elaborate end -stanza ragas ruled the stage for almost fifty years. They were called "Padya natakam-s." An urge for ushering in plays with serious social content and spoken Telugu was rendered possible with three simultaneously - started movements in 1943-44. The emergence of these three - Andhra Nataka Kala Parishath (ANKP), Praja Natya Mandali (PNM) and Andhra University Experimental Theatre (AUET) - was the immediate outcome of a larger awareness of the educated people for wider socio - linguistic changes and served to elevate socially relevant drama written in common man's language and catered to three distinctly different types of viewers so that it covered almost all the sections of theatre-going public.

### Three Pioneering Movements

The first one of these - ANKP - when started in 1929 was a forum for knowledgeable theatre and literary personalities which, annually, deliberated on the nature and function of drama in general and Telugu drama in particular. But in 1944, more devoted theatre lovers and practitioners took over the reins of the organization and decided to start competitions in play production, with an emphasis on the best playwright and best production. This prompted several youngsters to write and produce plays. Since the competition was only for social plays written in the "Vyavaharika" style, new playwrights, new dramatic associations and new writer - directors emerged. This was the beginning of a new era.

It was at this very critical time - in 1943 - this second Amateur Theatre Movement also came into existence, the second amateur movement, in fact. (The first Amateur Theatre Movement was initiated by Kandukuri Veeresalingam in 1880). It was ushered in by a band of deeply - involved theatre people - actors, directors, writers and patrons. The reasons for the New Movements's timely advent are easily explicable. Firstly, the artificiality of the musical theatre - both in terms of acting and over - all production values - vexed theatre goers. It was a natural reaction against an indisciplined theatre activity in which the star performer (who is only a star - singer) dominated. Secondly, there was an economic recession - during the war, which forced the prosperous professional theatre companies to close down because people could not afford to support them any more, and the few good stage actors migrated to the new medium of cinema. Things were conducive for a change.

ANKP ushered in the New Drama movement through several measures : its plays brought new and urgent social problems to the fore ; discussed them through socially verifiable characters and thus gave a new impetus to dramatic writing. It brought western - educated, theatre - exposed youth towards understanding and presenting contemporary, native, local problems in their plays. But, more importantly, it created an urge among the new theatre practitioners to found varied theatre groups to present the plays.

Thus emerged the several “group theatres” which steered the destinies of the Telugu theatre for the next fifty years.

### **Group Theatres**

Amatuer groups in post - independence India, which produced the great majority of important urban theatre work are called group theatres. In the place of professional companies that ruled the roost until then the groups, with amateur actors, who worked elsewhere for sustenance, rehearsed in the evening purely due to their enthusiasm, not expecting any monetary benefits.

The leaders of these major group theatres, well - knit and hard - working, that spearheaded this movement included such veterans as Acharya Atreya (Venkatagiri Amateurs), Piniseti Srirama Murthy (Adarsa Natya Mandali), D.V.Narasa Raju (Udayini and Raghava Kala Kendram), K. Gangadhara Rao (Kalavani), Prakhya Sreerama Murthy (Navya Kala Mandali) and R.V. Chalam (Andhra Dramatic & Literay Association), who, with their zeal and experetise, gave Telugu theatre a new meaning and a future.

The second movement was spearheaded by Praja Natya Mandali - the Indian People's Theatre Association's (IPTA) Andhra branch - started in 1943. It mainly catered to the rural audiences and had branches (*dalams*) almost in every district of Andhra. With its 'agit-prop' plays, socially - relevant subject matter and its clever use of the traditional folk format, Praja Natya Mandali gained enormous popularity. Its major thrust was on projecting the struggle between the rich landlords and the poor farmers and the farm labour. Stalwarts like Garikapati Raja Rao, Koduri Achaiah, Koganti Gopalakrishnaiah, Mikkilineni Radhakrishna Murthy and the inimitable Burrakatha Maestro, Sheik Nazar, actively participated in thousands of performances of plays, skits and other cultural items all over Andhra.

The third movement - the experimental theatre at Andhra University - under the able guidance of K.V.Gopalaswamy, a producer, organizer and visionary filled a long - felt gap by launching dramatic competitions among college students as a part of their cultural celebrations. It thus paved the way for tapping the talents of young artists, who, in course of time, blossomed

into committed artists. It also did some innovative experiments in stage design and lighting, as well as in playwriting. There was yet another influential organization which helped the over - all development of the theatre : the Little Theatre Movement, founded by a veteran playwright and director, Kopparapu Subba Rao (1947), whose expert advice on the technical needs of a production paved the way for well - knit productions.

There is one common feature that binds these varied attempts. Though non - realistic experiments occasionally found approval, the realistic play had come to stay. The Parishath competitions gave credence to them. New playwrights, responding to social needs and demands, wrote problem plays that immediately found favour with audiences, especially of the towns and cities of Andhra. In the first competition held by the Parishath, Kondamudi Gopalaraya Sarma's *Edureeta* (1945) was adjudged the best play and also the best production. The actor - director who became prominent through this competition was Acharya Atreya, the director of this play, who was also the lead actor. From the next year onwards Atreya presented his own plays which were adjudged the best birth in playwriting and production. Atreya became the pionner of the modern problem play written in the realistic mode.

### Major Playwrights

Acharya Atreya (Kilambi Venkata Narasimhacharyulu, 1921 - 1981), who led the realistic movement on the Telugu stage, was a playwright, actor, director and technical expert, all in one. His plays have become landmarks in the development of the modern Telugu theatre after independence. Atreya wrote ten plays and fifteen one - act plays between 1943 and 1963. Among his ten plays *Gautama Buddha* (1943), *Ashok Samrat* (1944), *Parivartana* (1945), *Eenadu* (1947), *N.G.O.* (1948), *Viswa Santi* (1951), *Kappalu* (1953), and *Bhayam* (1954) were the most popular.

Atreya's first extant Play, *Gautama Buddha* is a unique experiment made for total theatre. *Parivathana*, widely performed by Praja Natya Mandali, is Atreya's first attempt at dramatizing the conflict between the exploited and the exploiter. *N.G.O.* or *Gumastha*, by far the most popular of Atreya's plays, its entire action taking place in a single set, dramatizes the middle class agonies in a growing urban town. *Viswa Santhi* is Atreya's artistic credo, for it summarizes the authors' stance on class conflict, set against the threatening scenario of world peace. His next important play, *Bhaya*, is an intense study of the fear complex in human beings. Atreya is also responsible for the emergence of the one - act play as an important medium.

Atreya's contribution to modern Telugu theatre is outstanding. He initiated the theatre of protest and revolt at a time when Andhra was flooded with either romantic melodrama or inept musical play. That he had created universal types even in the protest plays prove that he never

really ceased to be a symbolic playwright. Besides, his language was crisp, pointed and dramatic. Very few prose playwrights in Andhra have the command on the language as Atreya has.

While the works of Atreya explored the middle class man's tensions in a growing urban milieu, some important writers of the period were concerned with the conflicts between the capitalist classes and the masses in rural Andhra. Praja Natya Mandali became the champion of the rural underdog. The most prominent writers who wrote for Praja Natya Mandali are the playwright - duo, Sunkara Satyanarayana and Vasireddi Bahasker Rao, whose *Mundadugu*, *Apaninda* and *Maa Bhoomi* created theatre history. The plays toured the entire state with several *dalams*. They were the first 'agit - prop' plays in Telugu and brought theatre close to the common rural people.

*Mundadugu* (1945) depicts the atrocities committed by Zamindars against the farmers. When the latter unitedly want to teach the Zamindar a lesson, he runs away and all the rich farmers who side with the Zamindar until then, slowly take the side of the poor farmers. The play is a forceful plea against oppression and was proscribed by the then British government. Their second play, *Apaninda* is a family drama set in a rural backdrop. Their other play, *Maa Bhoomi* (1947) was the most popular. The play's action is set in Telangana where the Deshmukhs behaved ruthlessly, and treated the poor villagers as slaves. The play deals with the conflict between the landlords and farm labour in the erstwhile Nizam state, with its specific locale in Nalgonda district. Divided into six scenes, the play starts and ends with the homage given by the village to the boyot of the Deshmukh's regressive activities. With the starting of a farmers' union in the village, the conflict intensifies and ends with a victory hailing workers, unity. By 1947 the play was performed by 125 *dalams* of Praja Natya Mandali to an estimated crowd of about a lakh. This play was also proscribed in 1948.

Boyi Bheemanna, a versatile poet - playwright was in fact the earliest to dramatize the condition of the rural labour. His *Paleru* (1942) and *Kuli Raju* (1943) dramatized the horrifying life of the farm labour with poignancy. Sheik Nazar, the most popular of the ballad - singers (*burra katha*), was also an actor and playwright. His play *Aasami* (1951) was popular in the rural areas for its straightforward delineation of the conflict between the landlords and the labour. It also won a first prize in the Andhra Nataka Kala Parishath's annual competitions.

Another important playwright who wrote plays with themes pertaining to village problems is Pinisetty Sreerama Murthy who is a typical 'native' genius. He was a playwright, actor, director, founder of a theatre organization and later a successful writer for films. With a strong sense of the native idiom, this playwright, who had no formal education, had written eight plays

and an equal number of one - act plays, which always bagged prizes at the competitions. His plays *Kulam Leni Pilla*, *Anna - Chellelu* and *Palle Paduchu* - dramatized the struggle for supremacy of power latent among the rich landlords in the villages of Andhra immediately after India's independence and the resultant suffering of the poor and the innocent. His *Palle Paduchu* has the unique distinction of having been produced to full houses, where villagers bought tickets to see the play ! His one - act plays *Aadadi* and *Rikshaavadu* were very popular and there was no amateur theatre association which did not perform them. The Andhra Nataka Kala Parishath's influential competitions also brought several adaptations into the forefront. D.V.Narasa Raju, whose comic genius was revealed in his early one - act adaptations like *Vaapus* (1950) and *Antarvani* (1949), wrote *Naatakam* (1951), which was adapted from P.G.Wodehouse's *The Play is the Thing*, which itself was an adaptation of Molnar's Belgian play. A misunderstanding that threatened the relationship between two lovers was successfully solved by a playwright-uncle of the boy who wrote and rehearsed a play overnight to prove the gullible villain's melodramatic outbursts of love for the girl and what the boy overheard were only dialogues from a play that was being rehearsed ! The play brought the best playwright award for Narasa Raju which took him into a successful film career. His other play *Veelunama* (1955) was an adaptation of Sean O' Cassey's *Juno and the Paycock* and was successfully staged by Andhra Pradesh Natya Sangh. Anisetty Subba Rao, a poet turned playwright, had two plays to his credit : *Maavuru*, a play on class conflict in a rural milieu and *Gali Medalu* a dream play concerned with a middle class youth's dreams about future and the realities that shatter them.

Mention must be made of another important play of the period - *Aatmavanchana* (1951) by Buchibabu (pen name of Sivaraju Venkata Subba Rao). The play's importance lies in its expert handling of the psychological conflict between a rich high - browed woman and a young Railway officer who studied with the monetary assistance given by the woman. The play offers a sensitive portrayal of a man caught between personal loyalty and professional and societal obligations and ends with his self denial and consequent suicide.

This decade (1943-53) is remarkable in many ways. It ushered in a new age of realism and has established the prose problem play. Plays are mainly concerned with the conflict between the haves and the have - nots, the have - nots often becoming victims of the former. But they do not yield without a bitter fight. It also led to a single unit set. Atreya had set the 2-act drama as the norm and many others followed this dictum without questioning. It is also to be said to the credit of this decade that the one - act play has become an accepted form, though it started much earlier. All the important writers wielded the short play with equal facility. Atreya, Pinisetty, and Narasa Raju wrote in this medium also and wrote trend- setting playlets.

Some important translations appeared during this time. Sri Sri and Varada translated Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* and Srinivasa Chakravathi Maxim Gorky's *Lower Depths* as *Patita Jeevulu* (1952) Sivam, A.S. Avadhani and Koganti Radhakrishna Murthy translated Oscar Wilde and Ibsen. Though these plays were not performed, they were popular with the readers.

### A.P. Natya Sangh

The next-decade (1954-63) offers a mixed fare : on one side, new experimental plays and the classics got a boost thanks to a new theatre organization, the Natya Sangh, and, on the other, the quantitative growth of social problem plays. The emergence of a strong theatre movement under the auspices of Andhra Pradesh Natya Sangham inspired the all - round development of Telug theatre in the next two decades... Blessed by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, the chairman of the Bharatiya Natya Sangh, its Andhra branch had the fortunate leadership of a conscientious and devoted theatre director and poet, Abburi Ramkrishna Rao. Added to this are the organizational abilities of A.R.Kishna who was its secretary for a decade and later its president. Started on October 1, 1954 the Natya Sangh was responsible for planning an alternate theatre movement. It started a training school under the able stewardship of Abburi and involved several young and talented teachers and performers. It founded a Repertory and produced classics like *Kanyasulkam*, and *Mrichakatika* directed by Abburi; *Prataparudriyam*, *Aasa*, a poetic play, *Asa Khareedu Ana*, *Keelubommalu*, *Veelunama* etc. directed by A.R.Krishna. Later, Krishna put up a mammoth production of *Malapalli*, a classic novel on the discrimination against the Harijans in the villages of Andhra in the early nineteenth century, dramatized by a well - known poet, Nagnamuni.

Simultaneously, amateur theatre movement (it means the competitions), spread to the small towns, largely due to the prominence and recognition that plays and actors were getting if they got a prize in Parishad competitions. The already prize - winning writers and directors started dramatic associations of their own. Youngsters, with the inspiration of the Andhra University festivals, joined the seniors. By 1960 the competitions reached an inviolable stage of importance.

The dramatic literature produced during this decade catered more to the demands of the Parishaths — the competitions - holding organizations. Two important qualities dominated; the dominant realistic format of the play with melodramatic overtones, single locale without scene changes and a minimum number of characters. This naturally led to the writing of single - plot plays, with a straightforward narrative. Unlike the playwrights (1943-1954) writing in several styles to bring a new theatrical idiom in the wake of the Realistic movement - the playwrights of

this decade (1954-1963) moved towards theatricality - both in their writing technique as well as in presentation. Single set plays have become common, bringing all situations into the drawing room or the courtyard.

The second obvious quality is that plays of the decade always contained few or no female roles as women actors were (and are) rare. The hitherto - popular actresses belonged to the musical theatre. They could sing; but could not fit into the dialogue - dominated prose play. This anomaly, perhaps one of the most hampering causes of the present state of Telugu theatre, forced playwrights to have only one female lead. Mothers have no place in the plays. There are fathers (often widowers) to take their place.

Under these pressing conditions, playwrights wrote plays which, more or less, conformed to the same realistic format. But to overcome the limitations of the form, the playwrights chose new themes, new types of plays, new adaptations, etc. Four important playwrights dominated the scene during this decade: Bellamkonda Ramadas, Avasarala Surya Rao, Prakhya Srirama Murthy and Bhamidipati Radhakrishna.

Bellamkonda Ramadas, a poet - turned - dramatist started writing plays mainly for the competitions, he wrote specifically to well - organized theatre groups whose acting potential had a proven track record. His first play, *Masterji (1954)* set the tone for the new melodramatic play. The story of an impostor, whose wise cracks and crafty manipulations take the audience into confidence, the play ends with the revelation of the true colours of the impostor. Questioned as to why he turned to be a cheat, he gives a long lecture on his neglected childhood, distressed youth and at the height of the lecture, remembers his innocent past and collapses. The part played by the veteran actor K. Venkateswara Rao won for him several awards.

Ramadas's famous play is *Punarjanma (1955)*. It portrays life of a fallen woman with sympathetic understanding. A noble doctor, who comes across the woman, marries her, All of a sudden a man who knew the woman in her earlier life, who also happened to be a childhood friend of the doctor, enters into their life and creates misunderstandings. The woman, vexed with the suspecting behaviour of her husband, is about to leave her husband, when, suddenly, the doctor comes to know of the duplicity of the man and turns him out. Due to the doctor's persistent requests, the woman agrees to stay back. This is the first realistic treatment of the life of a fallen woman who found a new life after going through social ostracism. It was a great hit on the stage when Nirmala, one of the finest products of the age, acted the woman's role with great understanding and mastery.

Another play that is in the same genre is Avasarala Surya Rao's *Panjaram* (1956), which also deals with the social discrimination of the fallen woman. Less talented than Ramadas as a dramatist, Surya Rao mainly depended on long lectures to establish both the atrocities against the fallen woman and her later retribution.

Besides the problem play, adaptations from western plays were also popular during the period. The main criterion for adaptation was certainly not its classical position, but its adaptability to the Telugu situation and its melodramatic content. Prakhya Srirama Murthy specialized in adaptations, especially of detective plays. He successfully rendered into Telugu Howard Irving's *The Hack Island* as *Kalarathri* (1954) and Frederick Knot's *Dial M for Murder* as *Phani* (1957). Both the plays, written for Navya Kala Mandali of Srikakulam, featured J.V.Somayajulu and J.V.Ramana Murthy who also popularised a modern, edited version of *Kanayasulkam*. Gogol's *Inspector General* inspired quite a few adaptations, the most important ones being Rentala Gopala Krishna's "*Inspector General*" (1956) and Bellamkonda Ramadas's *Aakaasa Raamanna* (1957). Mention must be made of Durbha Rama Murthy's *Rajyakanksha* (1957), a careful adaptation and easily presentable version of *Macbeth*.

Somanchi Yagnanna Sastry is known both for his situational comedies and for his wide variety of translations from English - *Nyayam* (1955), *Viswam Pelli*, *Kalayani* (1958) and many others. More importantly, he wrote burlesque pieces on the Telugu theatre practices in his *Rangasthalam* (1957) and *Andhra Nataka Ranganiki jai* (1959). He has a flair for comedy and wrote meaningful and socially relevant plays like *Pedda Manushulu* (1954) and *O Manishi Noothilo Padithe* (1955). Some of the other notable translations of the period include Somasundar's *Mandee-Manishi (Masses and the Machine, 1960)* and Sivam's *Neramu - Siksha (Crime and Punishment, 1959)*. One important translation of the period is from Tamil, *Rakta Kanneeru* (1956), by Palagummi Padmaraju, a well-known short story writer and was given hundreds of successful presentations by the veteran stage and film actor, C.Nagabhushanam. Korrapati Gangadhara Rao, who was to become famous as a major playwright in the next decade started writing prize-winning one-act plays during this time. His *Naababu* (1954), *Telugu Kopam* (1954) and *Bangaru Sankellu* (1954) were conversational pieces with short and crisp comic dialogue, with an eye on queer and native characterization. Because of their stage worthiness with less number of characters and sometimes with no female role at all, the plays were popular with all the amateur theatre groups.

The years 1960-1964 were like a melting pot in which all the trends mentioned above were simultaneously present. Two plays that stand out during the early 60's are *Keerthiseshulu* (1960) and *Raga Ragini* (1960), representing two strands of dramatic writing - the popular satirical melodrama and the well-knit adaptation. *Keerthiseshulu* by Bhamidipati Radhakrishna

is a trend - setter in that it brought out forcefully the travails of artists and poets in the post - independence era and the attitude of the society to arts. Two brothers, Murari and Vaninatham struggle hard to make both ends meet. The elder one is an actor and the younger a poet. The local bigwigs come to know that Murari died and so they plan to make his life size statue for which donations on a large scale are collected. Ultimately, when they come to know that he is alive, they threaten him and his family with dire consequences if he doesn't die. A pulsating satire on human ignominy, the play earned an unprecedented response, as some of the comments in the play have become 'quotable quotes'. The play is garbed in a melodramatic mould and in it one finds the trend of melodramas of the decade in their stageable best. Bhamidipati is capable of writing good comedy as well, as is evidenced by his one - act plays *Mansthatvalu* (1958) and *Bhajantrreelu* (1959) and his full length comedy *Idemiti* (1961).

Another notable playwright of the early 1960's is Gollapudi Maruthi Rao, whose adaptation of Eugene O' Neill's *Beyond the Horizon* as *Raga Ragini* had a rousing reception at the parishath's competitions. Technically innovative with interior and exterior sets, the play is well nativized. Most of Maruthi Rao's plays belong to this decade, written from 1960 to 70. *Raga Ragini* describes how conflicting ideas and mutually - opposed ideals play havoc in a family and lead to its destruction. The two brothers - the protagonists - become victims of their strong beliefs and of the force of circumstances over which they have no control. Veteran actors like K. Venkateswara Rao, M.S.R. Murthy and Vanibala acted in the play, winning awards. Maruthi Rao's *Satyam Gari Illekkada* (1976) is based on Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*. However, his original play, *Karunichani Devatalu* (1970) is on the attitudinal differences between two generations of people in a family leading to conflict and final destruction. *Lavalo Erra Gulabi* (1975) is a play that has brought back an invalid's early life to comment upon the present with fine evocative images of the past.

Two types of plays were popular during this period - those that treat the frustrated lives of the individuals and adaptations from western plays which have potential theatrical qualities. The other genre, the social problem play, remained a powerful tool to criticize the social codes of good and bad. One such trend-setting play is *Nijam* by Rachakonda Viswanath Sastry. A novelist - turned playwright and a lawyer by profession, Sastry wielded his pen with great alacrity and utmost commitment to the wronged and the depressed. *Nijam* (1962) is a pointed attack on the judicial system. Sarvabhowma Rao, a Member of Parliament and an industrialist wants to save his son, who inadvertently committed a murder, in a drunken state. Due to the father's influence an innocent young man is implicated in the murder case. With the help of false witnesses the young man is finally sent to the gallows. The final scene is a court scene in which Sastry's true mastery is revealed. No court scene in modern Telugu drama has the same kind of punch as in this play.

## Parishaths and Competitions

The two decades between 1960 and 1980 saw a proliferation of Parishaths conducting competitions even in villages and the concurrent proliferation of theatre groups. The "group theatres" that launched the realistic problem play were replaced by actor - centred associations, formed solely for the purpose of participating in competitions, and more often than not, dissolved after the competition. Besides ANKP, other competition - holding organizations came into active operation, the major ones being Raghava Natakotsavalu at Vizinagaram and Rayalaseema Kala Parishath at Tirupathi. By 1970 there were 100 Organizations that offered competitions annually.

However major groups started earlier became stronger and thrived in the changed environment. One significant change that can be seen is the quality of the plays that emerged during this time. While majority of the plays are social, realistic, problem plays, often with a dose of theatricality and melodrama, some of the writers chose to write plays either on a new aspect of a social problem with an emphasis on psychological character study or with class or caste struggle as its theme.

Noteworthy among the writers of the period include N.R.Nandi whose *Aarani* and *Maro Mohenjodaro* earned laurels both for the writer and the association that performed them, Vidyanagar Cultural Association (VCA). Directed by Chatla Sreeramulu and produced by J.L. Narasimha Rao, the VCA's production of the latter play created a new impetus for its symbolic presentation of a rather simple story of the exploitation of the poor by the rich. The VCA also successfully put on boards Maruti Rao's *Satyam Gari Illekkada ?* and Lava Lo Erra *Gulubi*. It also presented Brecht's *The Exception and the Rule* translated into Telugu by D. Prabhakar as *La Vokkintayu Ledu*.

Vying with Vidyanagar Cultural Association's acumen for presenting parishath - oriented plays is "Kalaradhana", another important association with Bhanu Prakash, an actor with a considerable command on speech and diction as director and R. V.S. Ramaswamy as playwright. Their plays like *Galivana*, *Keratalu* and *Velluva* won prizes in the Andhra Nataka Kala Parishath competitions. "Navodaya Arts" with D.S.N. Murthy as the director has also had some creditworthy productions to its credit. Their maiden production of *Yadha Praja Tadha Raja* by Korrapti Gangadhara Rao, won laurels in the competitions and received critical acclaim. Another front - ranking association is Sri Kala Niketan with N.Taraka Rama Rao as its guiding spirit, which specialized in performing his own plays. Among its noteworthy productions is *Janamejayam*, a play based on the Mahabharata story with an obvious referential pointer towards arms race in the present - day world and its consequential disasters. Rao specialized in using myths for his themes in his later plays as is evidenced from *Bakasuara* and *Yagnaseni*.

The work of "Murali Kala Nilayam", first under an ace actor Rallapalli and then under T.Sundaram and "Adarsa Yuva Bharati" under Amarendra, Vaidyasagar and Ramana is also commendable. Meanwhile some Public Institutions also developed interest in theatricals. The A.P. Road Transport Recreation Club with Sarath as the central actor has done some worthy plays which won awards in competitions. The High Court Cultural Association with M.S.K. Prabhu as the chief actor needs a special mention. Bhoomika is another important organization founded by Udaya Bhanu and is engaged in meaningful experimental work. His adaptation of *Charan Das Chor* is a commendable work. The association that has come into prominence in the last decade is B.P. Prasad's "Vamsee Niranjan Kala Kendram", which specializes in producing Prasad's own plays including *Pratispandana* and *Punadi* which won the prestigious Nandi awards. Prasad has an edge over others because he is often the author of the play and its chief actor. The association was guided by late Sri T.Sivaramakrishna Rao himself a noteworthy director and technical expert.

The other major playwrights of this decade - 1960-70 - include Ravi Venkata Chalam - whose *Virajaji*, a psychological play dealing with the sensitive yet intense working of a woman's psyche and *Idi Natakan Kadu*, a play modelled on *Six Characters in search of an Author* have been well received by urban audiences. R.V.S. Ramaswamy's *Galivana*, *Velliua*, *Valayan* and *Kalaradhana* which won prizes and awards in parishaths and directed by Bhanu Prakash, an veteran actor - director deal with the conflicts in human situations which demand strong physical action. Kanvasri's *Ida Praparcham* and Modukuri Johnson's *Natanalayam* dealt with decaying human values in an altogether materialistic world where everyone works for selfish ends.

The decade between 1970-80 really portrays multiple strands of subjects dealing with human relations. The foremost among them is Ganesh Patro who gave some very telling tales about the people of the North - Eastern parts of Andhra, especially the fishermen. The dialect drama has come of age with his plays. With his mastery of their dialect and careful study of the men and the women of the costal belt he weaved some unforgettable characters with a rare sense of identity. His plays such as *Tarangalu* and *Asura Sandhya* and his one - act plays like *Pavala* and *Koduku Puttala* probe into human aspirations and failures with acute intensity and authenticity.

A writer whose plays on class conflicts in lowly lives in villages and the exploitation of the have - notes by the rich in such short plays like *Urummadi Bathukulu*, *Ippudu Veestunna Gali* is C.S.Rao whose vibrant idiom - both in dialect and non - dialect usage - won for him critical applause and ordinary playgoer's appreciation.

M.V.S. Haranatha Rao's *Ksheera Sagara Mathanam* and K.S.T. Sayee's *Sangham Chekkina Silpam* have won awards in major competitions and both of them are masters of not only the literary idiom but also proved their worth on the stage as imaginative directors..

Besides the competitions, this period, 1970-80, saw two commendable experiments : one, A.R. Krishna's presentation of *Malapalli*, a dramatized version of Unnava Laxminarayana's epoch - making novel of the same name and the other, Chatla Sreeramulu's directorial venture of a workshop production of Abburi Gopala Krishna's *Trijaki Yamadarasanam*. The former one, set on multiple stages where action takes place simultaneously is called "Jeeva natakam" by Krishna and ever since hailed as a major experiment. His other Naatya Sangh productions include *Keelubommu*, dramatized version of G.V.Krishna Rao's novel, *Vidushakuni Atmahatya*, *Asa*, a poetic play by Kundurthi Anjaneyulu and *Aasa Khareedu Ana*, a radio plays by Gora Sastry. All these play were received well by the audience, though originally written for different media - a sure indication that if a director is imaginative and creative he can transform the linguistic images into aesthetic visuals. The latter play, *Trijaki Yama Darsanam*, makes use of the Yakshagana style and a traditional format to dramatize, symbolically, the conflicts between the rulers and the ruled.

Two important playwrights who wrote earlier in the realistic mode while dramatizing the socio - political situation wrote their best plays during this period. Korrapati Gangadhara Rao, whose earlier plays are either adaptations from English or light comedies, wrote his best play, *Yadha Praja Tadha Raja* highlighting the power of the common people against powerful political bosses. Kodali Gopala Rao, who was also a prolific playwright like Korrapati, wrote *Chairman*, both plays being strong indictments of village politics.

### **The One - Act Play**

One - act play started dominating the field since Competitions in short plays have increased. All the major playwrights wrote in this genre, the most noteworthy being Maruthi Rao's *Kallu*, Harnatha Rao's *Yakshaganam*, C.S.Rao's *Prama Khareedu* and *Urummadi Bratukulu*, Kasi Viswanath's *Meeraite Yem Chestaru ?*. Diwakar Babu's *Yevvaniche Janinchu* and Yandamuri Veerendranath's *Kukka* and *Rudra Veena*. All these show masterly craftsmanship with expertise in dramatic writing and prove the belief that the Telugu one - act play is no less in potential than any other in India.

Paruchuri Venkateswara Rao's *Samadhi Kadutunnam Chandaliivvandi*, a satire on human nature which scorns an intellectual while alive, but tries to commemorate him after his death. Pusala's *Manduva Logili* and L.B. Sriram's *Onteddu Bandi* on middle class struggles where selfishness dominates. Ravi Kondal Rao's humorous portraiture of familial characters

in odd situations and Isukapalli Mohana Rao's *O Boothu Natakam* and *Dear Audience ! Sincerely Yours* are some of the important plays that found favour with audience.

In the next two decades - (1980 - 2000) - Telugu drama has diversified itself into many new avenues and experiments. Several factors contributed to this diversification. The parishath plays occupied even now a central place and more incisive plays on diverse political and social issues occupied the attention of the writers. The one - act play continued to hold its sway, though sizeable number of full - length plays also appeared due to new openings.

### Theatre Education

Early in the 1980's theatre education received a boost when Osmania University started a special Department of Theatre Arts. Then followed the Hyderabad Central University with the opening of Sarjaini Naidu School. The third one to quickly follow was the Telugu University's Theatre Arts department. The first one offered a two year post Graduate Diploma, operating its classes in the evening with an eye on opening educational resources to employees. While the HCU offered a P.G Course in English medium, the Telugu University offered a similar Course in Telugu Medium. Twenty years earlier, in 1961, Andhra University started a one year diploma course in Theatre Arts with the ace actor K.Venkateswara Rao as the Head. With four departments offering different courses in the subject, they produced a wide variety of plays to suit their curriculum. M.Nagabhushana Sarma, who headed the Osmania Department at first shifted to HCU as Proffer and Head with Chatla Sreeramulu, Raja Ramdas and a handful of experts to teach various subjects.

Under the aegis of the three Universities translations from Western, Sanskrit and Modern Indian Languages dominated, but equal importance was given to original plays as well. *Raja Oedipus*, *Silence the Court is in Session* and *Viswasanthi* directed by Nagabhushana Sarma, *Twelve Angry Men*, *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* and *Neeli Deepalu* by Chatla were considered to have created the right academic need. In HCU A.R.Krishna of the guest faculty did *Sakuntalam* and Nagabhushana Sarma *Kayitan Puli* with great success. One - acts, both by faculty members and senior students were creditable. Telugu University followed suit soon. Sarma's *Dora! Nee Saavu Moodindi*, a free adaptation of Eugene O'Neill's *Emperor Jones* is considered a major experiment of this period. Andhra University's productions of Attili Krishna Rao's *Toorpu Rekharu* using the folk form Jamukula Katha is a poignant portrayal of the plight of the tribal people.

The Parishath competitions offered a mixed fare, mainly containing realistic plays. Deen Badru's *Uri Siksha Kaadu*, K.Chirajeevi's *Neeli Deepalu*, Patibandla Ananada Rao's *Nishiddhashri*, Viriyala Laxmipathi's *Panchama vedam* presented the depressed classes, new

awareness of reality. All these may be termed as “Angry young plays” of a new generation of writers who protested vehemently about inequalities in societies and pleaded for revolt. Akella is a new writer that entered the fray with telling tales of human frailties. His early plays like *Kaki Engili* and *Cross Roads* are about human relations in a family milieu.

Besides the Universities and Parishaths, a new phenomenon of the period is the launching of organisations which started working for the over - all development of Telugu theatre. After the disappearance of Natya Saugh, the Sangeet Natak Academi tried to fill in the gap but it was too wide an institution to offer concentrated attention on theatre. Two associations tried to fill in this gap; Sri Kala Niketan with its annual awards and conferences and occasional seminars and presenting experimental plays mainly written by its member, N. Taraka Rama Rao. Rao, who started as a humourous playwright and later on switched over to plays based on Mahabharata stories and reflected on contemporary social, political and ethichal life. His *Janame Jayam*, *Bakasura* and *Yagnaseni Atma Katha* belong to a genre which emplizes hs on the Theatre of Roots.

### **Rasa Ranjani**

The other Organization is Rasa Ranjani. Started in 1993 it has some senior theatre practitioners on its board. Besides producing plays of all kinds, it conducts Festivals of Telugu plays from time to time to re-enthuse the audience with a presentation of the old time masterpeices of Telugu dramatic literature. Rasa Ranani is also engaged in either performing its own plays or sponsoring other important ones every month for two days, a programme that is going on for the last 22 years unhindered. They are all ticketed performances, though the tickets are priced at as low a price as Rs. 10/-. Some of its productions like *Mudrarakshasam* and *Praja Nayakudu Prakasam* (dir : Naga Bhushana Sarma), *Kanyasulkam* and *Phani* (J.V.Ramana Murthy), *Kahiradas* and *Srinadhudu* (Someswara Rao), *Dongalabandi* (Sundaram), *Puli Mallee Vastundu* (S.Mohan) and several others hve received wide acclaim.

Play productions of different types need special attention. The street theatre is popular with several notable productions. Bharani’s *Go Grahanam*, Akella Sayanarana Murthy’s *Pedda Bala Siksha*, Attili Krishna Rao’s *Tommy*, *Tommy* and scores of plays on topical subjects by Andhra Pradesh Praja Natya Mandali have won acclaim.

Similarly Documentary plays and “story plays” also found acceptance. *Mahanagaram* by D.S.N.Murthy, *Nannaya* by T.J. Ramanatham, *Viresalingam* by Prasada Murthy have justly been popular. Dramatizing short stories from Telugu literature and presenting them on stage have, of late, been popular. Rasa Ranjani’s “short story - play” series backed by HCU has set a pace for such experiments. Ajo - Vibho, an NRI Organization that conducts competitions in

Telug short plays every year has launched the. story plays, for the last five years. These plays are astonishingly fresh.

### **Nandi Festival**

A notable shift in the policy of the government of Andhra Pradesh can be seen in its undertaking to hold competitions in Padya Natakan (Musical theatre), modern social plays, social playlets and children's plays under The 'Nandi' Natakatsavalu, involving considerable amounts as incentive money. The dividends offer a mixed fare. While this has benefitted the Muscial theatre to re-find itself, not much can be said on the gains in other genres.

The years between 2001 - 2015 are too close by to be evaluated impartially. However, some trends can be ascertained. The voice of the depressed classes and dalits is heard in the recent plays. Politics in general and caste politics in particular find a dig. Family plays demanding the attention of the stake holders of women and senior citizens has become a major concern in recent plays. Patibandla Ananda Rao's *Padamati Gali*, running for 5 hours, has tried to portary the atrocities on the deperessed classes. D. Viziabhaskar's poignant study of politics of different types in plays like *Kurchi* and *Kinchit Bhogam* have won wide acclaim. Kavuri Sathyanarayana's portrayals of old age problems in middle class families, Kandimalla Sambasiva Rao's portayal of the present - day rural conflicts, Valluri Siva Prasad's insights into our education sysem expose the inadequacies in civic life with dramatic intensity.

The One - act play has gained momentum since more than sixty organizations hold competitions in this genre. Since Nandi competitions started in 1999, an estimated number of a thousand One - act plays were performed. At least 125 of them reached the final stage. Several of them stand out both for their bold themes and theatrical potential. Akella, Krishneswara Rao, Sivaprasad and scores of young writers have shown their mettle in this gene.

While this survery shows that the Telugu playwrights focussed their pen in expressing the evils of the society and portrayed them on stage with carefully designed performances, one cannot over look some of the obvious shortcomings of the general theatre scene. While so much of activity taking place each year, there is not a single play that attracted the attention at the national level. The reasons are obvious : paucity of funds for big experiments, lack of theatre facilities either in the capital or in the district towns and, above all, an amateur activity by part - time actors! Unless professional theatre, both in spirit and practice, comes in, Telgu theatre continues to be satisfied with the best play and best actor awards offered by the parishaths and plays with high - sounding rhetoric in a melodramatic mould and fail to capture the in - depth human aspirations and failures.