



Praja Natya Mandali - Social Awareness, influence on Kannada Theatre

Dr.D.K.Prabhakar, Faculty in Telugu, Dept.of.Telugu, Jnana Bharathi Campus, Bangalore University, Banagalore – 56

Abstract

Praja Natya Mandali is a branch of the Indian People`s Theatre Association or IPTA. This is actually the Andhra Pradesh Branch. This was started in 1943. By 1948 it had ushered in a new cultural movement in Andhra. Praja Natya Mandali, Indian Theatre Under the leadership of Garikapati Rajarao and Koduri Atchaiah, the Praja Natya Mandali conducted district workshops and taught youngsters the performatory methods of Telugu folk forms including Burrakatha. It formed district units that took the message of anti-fascism to the public. The Praja Natya Mandali`s contribution to the enrichment of Telugu theatre is remarkable. Praja Natya Mandali in A.P. was strengthened by various poets and artists. They mainly aimed at reliving the people from the exploitation and crushing from the ruling class. The youth at that time were united by the artists towards new era and to overcome social exploitation and evils. Many poets and artists with various art forms penetrated in to the rural mass with their innovative shows. It is a well-known fact that Praja Natya Mandali aims at awakening of people towards anti social elements, exploitation of capitalists, social evils and elite aims. They have brought in awakening among people through their street plays, songs, dramas etc., which influenced the socio-political situations in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka too.

Keywords: anti-fascism, castism, burzuva system, social awareness, street plays and socio-political situations.

Introduction

Since the ages Theatre has been serving the purpose of an Artistic expression of human kind. Theatre is the most common Performing Art Form, which can be found in every culture. No society that did not have a Theatre of its own in some or other form ever existed. It is own in some or other form revolutions, social propagandas, civil debates, Religious rituals, mass education and even for its own self criticism.

After Second World War, Theatre has been appropriated for the expression of political ideology and hence shifted its emphasis from elite entertainment to common folk up holding social issues.

The Theatrical works of post world war depicts the going of the society and viewed the ordinary people that were being affected by wars. On the other hand Marxist philosophy has shown a wide impact on theatre personalities. The organizations like communist party, trade unions, student unions and many other communities / Sections of society began to communicate their views through the medium of theatre. As a result, cultural organizations like Indian People Theatre Association (IPTA), Read Theatre (China) Guerilla Theatre of Green Peace (Belgian) Berliner Ensemble(Germany) and many other organizations emerges thought the world. All there organizations tried to address



the working class against all sorts of explanation. As a result new aesthetics of processions. Hence a search for alternate platforms, alternative aesthetics and alternative performance genres were started. The hard pressed life of the working class and the exploiting nature of ruling classes become the themes for the modern theoretical performances. Theatre of third world countries started opposing all the European Theoretical models and started using their own artistic symbols, language space and genres which mostly prevailed in the cultures. Hence many folk performing art forms were adopted for the modern theatre. Theatre practitioners started understanding their own cultural roots and use them for social charges.

Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA)

IPTA is the short form for Indian People's Theatre Association. In the Hindi belt it is called Bhartiya Jan Natya Sangh, in Assam and West Bengal, Bhartiya Gan Natya Sangh and in Andhra Pradesh, Praja Natya Mandali. The mission statement of IPTA is 'People's Theatre Stars the People'.

The symbol designed by the famous painter Chitta Prasad is a Drummer (Nagara vadak), which is a reminder of one of the oldest medium of communication. IPTA was established at the national level on May 25, 1943 in Bombay (now Mumbai). The Government of India issued a commemorative stamp in 1994 on the occasion of its Golden Jubilee.

The history of IPTA runs parallel to the people's cultural movement in the country and relates to the independence and the anti fascist movements.

The origin of IPTA followed the first Progressive Writer's Association Conference in 1936, the Establishment of Youth Cultural Institute at Calcutta in 1940, and constitution of the People's Theatre at Bangalore by Anil De' Silva of Sri Lanka.

Praja Natya Mandali in Andhra Pradesh Formation

Praja Natya Mandali is a branch of the Indian People's Theatre Association or IPTA. This is actually the Andhra Pradesh Branch. This was started in 1943. By 1948 it had ushered in a new cultural movement in Andhra. Much before its emergence, the youth of Guntur and Krishna districts had trained in the arts at workshops. When its contingent of these artistes participated at the inaugural session of IPTA in Bombay, it won praise for innovative excellence.

Praja Natya Mandali, Indian Theatre Under the leadership of Garikapati Rajarao and Koduri Atchiaiah, the Praja Natya Mandali conducted district workshops and taught youngsters the performatory methods of Telugu folk forms including Burrakatha. It formed district units that took the message of anti-fascism to the public. Shaik Nazar's Burrakathas and Koganti Gopalakrishnas Hitler bhagavatam i.e. 'Hitler's Bhagavatam' as well as Simla bhagavatam i.e. 'Simla's Bhagavatam' was written on the lines of traditional Bhagavatam or Yakshagana. These were provided with modern content and thus proved immensely popular.

The Praja Natya Mandali's contribution to the enrichment of Telugu theatre is remarkable. It presented Atreya's Parivartana i.e. 'Change' in



1945. This was a play on capitalist exploitation and very successfully. Its productions of Mundadugu i.e. `A Step Forward` in 1946 and Ma bhumi i.e. `Our Land` in 1947 created history. Written by Sunkara Satyanarayana and Vasireddi Bhaskar Rao, both were hailed for their progressive themes and chaste yet idiomatic Telugu. Mundadugu was about the farmers` fight against zamindars` atrocities. Ma bhumi, on the resistance of innocent men and women of Nalgonda district to the Nizam`s brutality, scored a thousand performances for two million people within a year, enough for it to be proscribed. By 1948, the Praja Natya Mandali`s activities were suspended after political interference. Attempts to revive it did not come to fruition, though one of the units remains active in street theatre.

Founders of Praja Natya Mandali

Artists` groups of that time were considered as the founders of Praja Natya Mandali. They were:

- The first Burra Katha group was led by Koganti Gopala Krishnaiah, Kosuri Punnaiah and Pirivi Shetti Subba Rao.
- Another Burra Katha Group led by Mikkilineni, Machineni and Daavuluri Narayana.
- Another Burra Katha group was led by Perumaalu, Ch.Kutumba Rao and Tummala Keshava Rao.
- Similarly the Bala Burra Katha group led by Purushotham and Venkateshwar Rao, women group led by Moturi Udayam, Chintala Koteswaramma, Mahankali Lakshmi propagated the stories of grate Russian women warriors and many other Burra Katha

groups lead by Manikyala Rao, Tupaakula Basavaiah of Kurnool, Raja Gopal of Nellore, Hussain Baba of Kadapa were also considered as the founders.

Contributions of Artists

- Praja Natya Mandali in A.P. was strengthened by various poets and artists. They mainly aimed at reliving the people from the exploitation and crushing from the ruling class. The youth at that time were united by the artists towards new era and to overcome social exploitation and evils. Many poets and artists with various art forms penetrated in to the rural mass with their innovative shows. Among them contribution of following legends of Praja Natya Mandali can be quoted as:
- Youth movement was started at Divi Taluq of Krishna District by late pendyala Venkateshwar Rao and Parachuri Rama Kotaiah through their patriotic Burra Kathas. Inspired by them Kosooru Punnaiah, Pirivi Shetti subba rao, propagated patriotism in local folk dialectics in a satiric way. Mainly they propagated their ideology in youth meetings and conventions.
- Contemporarily in Guntur Dist. Chintala Satyanarayana, Kakamanu Subba rao and others narrated the stories of grate women warriors like Tanya of Russia, Jhansi Lakshmi Bai of India and many others. Their show got applauds and first prize in the meeting of communist



party of India held at Bombay in 1943.

- Another group of artists Koganti Gopala Krishnaiah, Kosuri Punnaiah, T.Savitri and others participated in the Bombay Progressive Writers Association conference held at Bombay. They got first prize for their performances and were greatly honored with Silver cup. In this meeting laid foundation for Indian Peoples Theatre Association.

Vijayawada Science Congress

Vijayawada science congress held in June, 1943 prepared some more Artists. In 1943 Andhra Communist Party Maha Sabha was held at Vijayawada for this meeting many groups from Krishna and Guntur Districts have enthusiastically participated.

The group lead by Koganti Gopala Krishnaiah performed their art forms, which known to be the first People's Group before the formation of Praja Natya Mandalli. The "Kolata" group performance lead by Nazar inspired the viewers. Nazars Kolatam, Kogantis Koya Vesham (Depiction of Tribal Man) and Mikkili Nenis Hitler Veshamu were well received praised.

Hence all these different Art forms made an impression in the hearts of the people reflecting the social scenario at that time.

Praja Natya Mandali – Spreading of various Art forms

Praja Natya Mandali is known for its propagation of ideologies through different Art forms, emerged from the rural ideologies, culture, customs and

traditions. Common man based, working class oriented ideology has directly influenced the people. Among the various Art forms propagated by Praja Natya Mandali were Folklore Art Forms, Short Plays and Dramas. Some of the famous Art forms are as follows:

Folklore Art Forms:

Burra Katha, Jamukula Katha, Hari Katha, Koya Vesham, Kolatam, Chenchu, Phakir Veshalu, Golla Suddulu, Quari Songs, Boat Songs etc., were some of the famous Folklore Art Forms.

Short Plays:

Prathima, Mabbu Tera, Parishkaram, Press worker, Pragathi, Jeethagadu, Veerakunkuma were some of the famous Short Plays reflected lives of working class

Dramas:

Mundadugu, Apaninda, Maa Bhumi, Parivarthana, Kanya Shulkam, Alluri Sitha Rama Raju, Jai Bhavani were some of the famous Dramas based on the progressive ideology of Praja Natya Mandali.

Praja Natya Mandali – The Support for Peoples' Movement

During pre – Independence and early days of post Independence, Emergency period and today also Praja Natya Mandali is known for its catalytic role in bringing forward the peoples movement against the exploitation and anti people policies of ruling class. These movements were more active against British rule, Nizam's suppressing policies, fascist attitude of Zamindars, Jagirdars, Rich and elite people. Mainly their fight against Nizam and Razakars of Deccan plateau were ever memorable and can be



quoted with golden script in the history of Praja Natya Mandali.

Praja Natya Mandali – The Peoples’ Movement is not just constructed out of enthusiasm, profit based. But it has been constructed on the pillars of service motto, high morals, fight against exploitation and progressive society. It believes that Art is not only meant for literate and alight classes. Art can’t be owned by few people but it is the property of the people and whole society.

Praja Natya Mandali intervened during the political crisis and raised voice against the rich and ruling classes. It brought revolutionary changes in the traditional based and fascist oriented Art forms and Dramas. It has identified itself with the common people, studied their problems and suggested solutions through their Art forms.

The living legend Gaddar of Praja Natya Mandali of Andhra Pradesh influencing the youth and working classes through his songs for decades together. His contribution is significant in the present Telangana Movement. Gaddar is known for his fight against exploitation of working class and social evils.

Influence of Praja Natya Mandali on Kannada Theatre

It is a well known fact that Praja Natya Mandali aims at awakening of people towards anti social elements, exploitation of capitalists, social evils and elite aims. They have brought in awakening among people through their street plays, songs, dramas etc., which influenced the socio-political situations in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka too. During that period in 1976 a Drama/Art Association known as “Samudaya”

emerged through the amalgamation of various art associations, hence “Samudaya” means a group.

Though in Karnataka the group “Chitra Thanda” performed his first street play, could not influence the people due to existing political scenario. At this juncture Prasanna, C.G.Krishna Swamy, Siddalingaiah, K.V.Narayana and others formed an Art group “Samudaya”. Samudaya Art group toured across the state and propagated their ideologies through the famous plays like “Hosa Belikinedege (Towards New light, 1979), “Ritha Redege Jatha” (Towards Peasant Jatha 1981), “Baragala Deduru Samudaya Jatha” (Towards famine Jatha, 1988) and “Jagathina Santhi Kadege” (Towards World Peace, 1986). These Dramas mainly focused on social transformation and creating awareness among middle class people, workers and labour class people. During every fight against ruling class, they supported the working class people. Many other plays like “Mooru Bekkugalu” (Three Cats), “Horaata” (Struggle), “Chesnala”, “Appa Sangappa” (Father Sangappa), and “Heggade Devana Kote” reflected daily life problems, which attracted and influenced the viewers and people at large.

The fight made against the closing of Kolar Gold Mines by the famous Praja Natya Mandali, A.P. leader Gaddar can be considered as a mile stone in the history of peoples’ fight against the government in Karnataka State. His songs and folklore forms performed activated and inspired the Gold Mine workers.

Conclusion

Apart from Samudaya “Sri Madhusudana Pancharuki Abhinaya



Mitha Mandali” of Hubli, “Chitra Beedi Nataka Thanda”, “Chitra Kalavidaru” of Bengaluru, “Sri Mohana Chandra Ayyana Thanda” of Mangalore, “Mahilaa Samaakya” of Bijapura and many other groups in Karntaka influenced people and created awareness among public against exploitation of ruling class, castism, fascist tendencies, Burzuva system and many other social events through their awareness campaigns. Hence these groups not only part against fascist tendencies and helped the people towards social transformation.

Prajanatya Mandali Ujwala charitra. Sangheeta Nataka Academy.

10. Sriramulu Chatla. (1990). Nurella Telugu nataka ramgam. Hyderabad.

References:

1. Annaiah Gowda, H.H (Anu) (1978). Pracheena Bharathieya Nataka. Mysore: Mysore University,.
2. Achar K.V. (1976). Karnataka Rangabhoomi. Bangalore: Kannada Sahitya Parishat.
3. Anand, Malkaraj (1950).The Indian Theatre. Landon: Dennis Dabsan.
4. Gaddar (1990). Samskruthikodyama nirmana Samasyalu. Hyderabad: Srujana Publications.
5. Gupta, Chandra.B. (1954). The Indian Theatre. Banaras.
6. Tirumalarao Jayadeer (1988). Telangana Rithanga poratam – Praja sahityam.
7. Nadiraa. (1975). Burra Kathalu (Parichayam). , Hyderabad: Andhra Pradesh Sangheetha Nataka Academy.
8. Narayana Rao Velcherla (1988). Telugulo kavitha Viplavala Swaroopam. Hyderabad: Hyderabad Book Trust.
9. Radhakrishna murthy Mikkilineni. (1980). Poratala Rangasthalam: