



ISSN :2456-821X
Peer-Reviewed Journal
PUTHIYA AVAIYAM
புதிய அவையம்
UGC Care Listed Journal
(2023 onwards)
(Sacred Heart Research Publication, Sacred Heart College,
Tirubattur-635601. Tamilnadu. India)



Gleam Over Tamil Drama and Parsi Theater: Multiple Levels from Colonial Madras to Modern India

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Abstract:

Tamil Drama set an indelible mark on visual and performing literature by entertaining public of late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. The theatrical vibration from Parsi theatre companies can be generated through the spectators of Bombay and Madras. The transparent connection between Tamil drama¹ and Parsi theatre² is visualized at multiple levels like role and character, atmosphere, interest in audiences, song, troupe organization and proper use of stage. The people of Madras received Parsi theatre very well, was not a foregone conclusion, justified the popular quote, "Variety and Unit of India³." We looked over Parsi company performances whereby it crossed urban Madras in process to pursue cultural activities for public. It makes an immense light over dark section of society, known as various names of social evils-behavior and treatment of young people, immigration and intolerance, communalism and poverty, illiteracy,

open defection, malnourishment. We shall analyze one and all multiple levels, journey starts from colonial Madras.

Keywords: Tamil drama, Parsi theatre, Visible multiple levels, Dramatic practice, Theatre troupes

Introduction:

This paper attempts to light upon literature in the form of Drama interlinked many approaches to the topic. We have a preliminary idea that isai natakam and Parsi theatre are connected with conceptualized discussion. To show this connection presents that theatrical Parsi did indeed influence on Tamil isai natakam and its arts relevance. For example, the impact of Parsi theatre is clearly seen in many sections as translating forms of dramas, establishment of theatres in depiction of characters, performed with melodic ways of instrumental accompaniment. The proliferation of drama companies in Tamil-language grew in regional and metropolis places.

We observe day-to-day activities of Parsi theatre troupes in the region of Tamil, specifically in urban Madras. We try to cover first eight years of Parsi theatre companies, performed in Southern city. During that time when sun of British rule was at the height, theatrical activities by the companies were only for providing benefit to public, printed all in English language newspapers, namely *The Madras Mail* and *The Times of India*. Parsi theatre made an interstitial bridge between English theatre under British residence and Tamil drama. We also make light of Parsi theatre that acquires the popularity in local areas. The followers of certain social groups were obviously from Madras. Nawabs of Arcot were the great lover of art participated as sponsorship for performance. Parsi dramas became more elevated in Madras society when a senior lady of the royal family sponsored the theatrical events. To contribute to Parsi theatre by such constituencies made an inroad in Madras with amazing performance of art as isai natakam.

During the last decades of 19th century Madras Presidency flocked audiences to Tamil-language, shown the production of musical drama in theatre troupes as commercial purpose. Tamil drama companies began to expand from few to good numbers, depicted by thousands- professional actors and musicians. The result of all influences could be seen in live stage entertainment and the Tamil drama maintained its popularity very well into 20th century by using technology as motion pictures. Around 1870s drama companies in India directed by Parsis theatre staged from Bombay to different and distant parts of South and Southeast Asia. Its charm especially as melodrama spread with Indian stories, poetry, and song as well as European stagecraft. The gleam of Parsi theatre troupes spread on South India as well. Tamil thinkers and scholars acknowledge that Tamil drama was developed by an immense contribution of Parsi theatre. Whereas we have no idea of Tamil theatrical development due to some reason existed in literary world such as place and time to performance. The genealogy of Christian drama (isai natakam) is considered as compelling reasons for cultural historians, traditional practitioner and literary critics. It was the Tamil Musical stage of non-Brahmin without its cultural production. It maintained its intensity in twentieth in reinventing neoclassical mode of music and dance by well energetic reformists. Tamil Drama Company was succeeding in reaching across all levels of society into countryside - Devadasis, non-Brahmins and Muslims were marginalized in group. Ballads and devotional songs of the previous two centuries added more impactful popularity in Tamil Drama, showed a distant connection to nondi natakam, kuravanci and pallu.



Fig. 1.1. Tamil Drama

Nondi Natakam and other narrative performances are Tamil dance forms, shown in fig. 1.1. & 1.2.

Fig. 1.2. Tamil Drama

An example of 1851 produced, that Kashi Vishvanath Mudaliar issued Dambacari Vilasam. This is based on true story available in four editions that a dancer, who ensnares an arrogant young man. Around 1875, Christian Drama comprised its repertoire on every level of society, religion, history, etc. It was noted that an impact of Tamil musical theatre was over the playhouses of coming generations



Fig. 1.3

Viswanatha Mudaliyar wrote the Dambachari Vilasham based on the story of a Dambachari who spent his life in experiencing the societal people. (web. source)

Instrument and Practice:

The practice of Tamil Drama was vocal music of singing actors. To prepare Drama was the medium of recording of early theatres. Gramophone records the voices of artists, placed privately whereby the voices can be heard over and over again. Public became boosted to watch live drama that was definitely enthralling entertainment to them as theatre was only medium to entertain without any other availability. S. G. Kittappa, K. B. Sundarambal, and N. S. Shanmugam, all were top singers in that time by practicing dramatic instruments. A potent connection to Tamil cinema, Drama Company and Dravidian politics formed living

literary world. Skillful art from one role to another, i.e. film stars to politicians could be learnt in theatre initial at school. The political part “Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam” took an office in Tamilnadu in the 1960s, definitely an inspirational formation of theatrical actors. For example, C.N. Annadurai. M. Karunanidhi, both were founder of party as well as actors in M. R. Radha’s Social Reform Company contributed in it by writing plays. It is more interesting and impressive to know about M.G. Ramachandran, who worked at Tamilnadu State as Chief Minister from 1977 to 1987. At the age of six, he entered in *Madurai Original Boys Company* and started his stage career; thereafter it became an impressive medium of making career for one and all.

Although the members in theatrical company are much reduced, the group of Parsis had a prominent feature as dominant command over Madras in India. They were 6% in the population of Bombay around 1881 and sturdy believers in pre-Islamic religion Zoroastrianism. Iran was their birth-place and became newcomers of Gujarat a thousand years earlier. Elphinstone College Bombay was newly source to theatre as well as Young Parsi got this opportunity as joining the dramatics. Amateur clubs were formed to experiment play-acting and singing thereafter. Parsis ushered in the era of modern theatre in South Asia. As a matter of fact the Parsis showed valuable guidance to the era of modern theatre in South Asia.

Conclusion:

This study has focused upon three keywords of the title such as Tamil Drama, Parsi Theatre and Colonial Madras performed not only to entertainment for audiences but also to enhance the people in their skills. To make a light upon their performances in play-titles, character-depiction and song practice was a collective effort in Tamil and Indian literature. Parsi theatre inserted manners for characters that learnt first and acted their dramatic arts. The players in Parsi theatre acted their roles as an inspiration to many people in society. The troupes visited south India, i.e, Marathi, Kannada, Telugu from Bombay Mysore, Bangalore,

and Bellary were majorly included in the category. Further the contribution by outsider-theatres assesses the impact that Parsi theatre has already existed itself with all norms of dramatic powers. All local practices such as legends, songs, ritual concerns, and variation in depictions enriched Tamil drama that spread its art and culture over provinces of India.

Glossary:

1. A manifestation of art and culture in Tamil literature.
2. It flourished between 1850 and 1930 whereby Tamil drama received a platform of dramatic activities, owned by Parsis community, developed into multiple travelling theatre companies.
3. “The Variety and Unity of India,” is a chapter in Nehru’s renowned book *The Variety and Unity of India*, shown in Indian societies of different cultural people.

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