



THEATRE PERFORMANCE – A VISITING CARD TO MOVIE

¹S.R. Kishore Khumar, ²Dr. Sujatha Mohan,

¹Research Scholar, ²Research Supervisor,

¹School of Music and Fine Arts,

¹VISTAS, Chennai, India

Abstract: An analysis of drama and cinema in the early days in Tamilnadu provides an overview on the transformational changes in the taste and choice of Tamilians. Primitive form of entertainment in Tamilnadu evolved into drama. The struggle for existence of drama overcoming all the hurdles and the abundant experience obtained in drama shaped the artists to dominate in cinema. The audience of that time were exposed to many other diversions in this field like Marathi drama, Western movies etc. In spite of that Tamil artists could design their own format of presentation and strategies for entertainment to update and conquer other rival media which are highlighted.

Index Terms - entertainment, koothu, drama, cinema, music.

I. INTRODUCTION

Drama the performing art on stage was deep-rooted in Indian culture – especially in Tamil Nadu, which acquired this art form right from Sangam Age [1]. In Sangam Age the kings had great fascination towards music, which they wanted to cherish. Hence they patronized the Isaivanars, the musicians. Pavai Koothu, much entertaining art was an exhilarating experience to the audience right from the kings to the remote villagers. There were two types of Pavai Koothu. One was performed by Thol Pavai or dolls made out of skin or Mara Pavai, dolls made out of wooden artifacts. The other form of Koothu were performed by persons before the audience [2].

Later Kadhai Pattu (Musical story-telling) became popular in rural areas. A narrator presented the story with some musical voice modulation. The theme of the story used to be on the (1) Epic themes, (2) Mythological themes, (3) theme on Grama Devathai's glory and miracles, (4) theme on Historical events, (5) theme on Social evils. Usually such cultural programmes would be sponsored by the temple festival organizers. This type of storytelling was later adopted in Arunachala Kavi Rayar's Ramanataka Kaviyam, Gopala Krishna Bharathi's Nandanar Charitram and Thirikoota Rasappa Kavirayar's Pallu varieties.

II. FROM KOOTHU TO DRAMA

Koothu was an improved version of Pavai Koothu or Puppet show. We may infer folk-drama as an improvised form of Koothu. There was also another form of entertainment prevailing in 17th century in Tamil Nadu, known as Nondi Natakam, enacted by a single character [3]. Another format of entertainment was Kuravanchi Natakam. The gypsy women hailing from Kurinchi (hill) landscape were well-versed in fortune telling. With the help of a metal or wooden pointer-stick, which they believe was blessed by Mountain Goddess, they start fortune-telling quite musically. After Nondi Natakam, Therukkoothu style of drama emerged. During 17th and 18th century stage dramas gained momentum among the Rasikas. The audience wanted to get relieved from the monotony of life and boredom. The easiest approachable, affordable spot was a theatre.

Social theme dramas came in 1867. Tindivanam Ramasamy Raja's "Prathapa Chandra Vilasam" in 1882 was the first Tamil Drama stuffed with lengthy dialogues throughout the play. Appavu Pillai, who introduced Hindustani Music in Tamil drama, wrote "Chitrangi Vilasam", "Harishchandra Vilasam", and "Chola Vilasam".

Sankara Das Swamigal wrote about 40 dramas, and a few noteworthy were Pavala Kodi, Alli Arjuna, Abhimanyu, Nalla Thangal, Manimekalai, Sathi Anusuya [4]. Pammal Sambanda Mudaliar established "Suguna Vilas Sabha" in 1891. Being an admirer of Kalidasa and Shakespeare, he wrote about 80 dramas and many books related to theatrical arts [5]. T.K. Shanmugam who was popularly known as Avvai Shanmugam had a drama troupe which had many artists presenting varieties of dramas. Mosur Kandasamy Mudaliar was another dramatist, who spotted out the latent talents of P.U.Chinnappa, Sahasranamam, K.P. Kamatchi, and paved their way to theatre.

T.P. Krishnasamy Pavalar was having a drama troupe in Chintadripet, at Chennai. M.G. Ramachandran, was his find-out, who became the monarchs of Tamil Cine field later. Usually the subject matter of a drama would be on Melodrama, Pantomime, Mime, Mummery, Royal play, Superstetious play, Mythological, Epic subjects, valiant heroes, Saints, tragedy subject or humour subject. The selection of subject depended on the place of performance and type of audience, so as to make the play appealing.

The capability to understand and absorb the message by audience was much limited, due to their literacy. Hence the stage artists had to present their mastery within a limited sphere, which was why the performance remained a bit crude and louder, so as to reach the grass root level rasika (viewer) in the last row seats.

Especially in Tamilnadu, which was much conservative, the very thought of watching a stage-play remained a grievous sin in those days. What would be the plight of artists? Women refrained from taking part in any play. Hence for a long time, men donned the role of women. As there was no electricity, or any special sound effect or any basic infrastructure, thundering voice of the artists balanced that lapse. Stage play meant an entertainment filled with humpty number of songs. Hence, only singing artists dominated the stage irrespective of their physical flaws. In spite of all these drawbacks, a stage play swayed the recreation sector in those days.

III. EXTERNAL INFLUENCES ON TAMIL DRAMA

The influence of English dramas, movies, Marathi stage plays etc. brought out the reformation on Tamil stage play gradually. The costume, make over, musical presentation etc. had undergone stupendous, drastic changes [6]. Songs based on Classical music, folk music and other kind of musical forms also underwent transformation. Entry of Harmonium made a play more lively and at times the audience preferred individual Harmonium recital better than vocalists. Composing new tunes was made easier with Harmonium and musicians switched over to this controversial musical instrument [7]. Even today, some composers prefer Harmonium than Keyboard, as it is claimed that this handy harmonium could stimulate the latent talent of a musician instantly. For the reasons known to them and for sentimental bondage Harmonium is still used by many music performers.

Drama was intriguingly twined with acting and music. The performing artists on stage were well versant with the art of singing, especially in a louder voice. Accompanied with harmonium, dholak, mridhangam, Parai, Pambai, Urumi etc. those days stage play could present a wholesome musical treat to the taste of the then audience. Most of the actors were well trained right in Boys' Company drama, acting was moulded within their spirit and performing on stage was not a tough task for them.[8].

Pre-independence day's requirement was patriotic subject on the stage. To adroitly manipulate the sense of vigor amongst the public to attain independence the stage artists took so much of efforts. As a result of the conference held in Chennai many Sabhas, sprang out and served the purpose of sowing the seeds of independence struggle.

Refined forms of stage plays were pouring in on the stage, which superficially seemed to be social or mythological dramas, but tactfully stewed with vigor of patriotic flavor here and there, which the audience could perceive. Nationwide many stage stalwarts rejuvenated stage plays. Some noteworthy artists were Shantha Ram in Hindi, Master Vinayak in Marathi, Anil Biswas in Bengali, Adoor Gopala Krishnan in Malayalam and Gubbi Veeranna in Kannada. Vithal, who entered as child artist, became the first talkie hero in Alam Ara, in 1931. At a later date popular stage artists like Mohan Seigal, Balraj Sahni, Nazhiruddin Shah made their entry from stage to Silver screen and proved their caliber. Leela Chitnis, Nargis, Shabna Azmi were also hailed from stage only.

In Kannada filmdom, the glittering stars like B.R. Bhanthulu, Pandari Bai, M.V. Rajamma, Leelavathi also made their film entry through stage only.

IV. GROWTH IN TAMILNADU

In Tamil Nadu there were humpty number of stage artists, who made their entry into movie world. T.K. Shanmugam, Nawab Rajamanickam, T.R. Mahalingam, M.R. Radha, V.S. Raghavan, Sahasranamam, R.S. Manohar of national Theatres, K. Balachandar, Crazy Mohan, Cho.Ramasamy, S.Ve.Sekar and all hailed from theatre to filmdom. Many of them even after attaining stardom in movies continued acting on stage. Worth to mention about female artists like S.D. Subbulakshmi, T.P. Rajalakshmi, K.B. Sundarambal, G.Sakunthala, Manorama are a few to mention here who acquired sterling performance from stage [9]. How these artists adopted themselves to the changing scenario of theatrical caliber to silver screen performance to be acknowledged.

V. TOWARDS MOVIE

The theatrical stage was not that much equipped with technical gadgets. Poor lighting, no audio amplifier, in adequate backdrop sceneries had to be compromised due to the limitation of funding and other hardships. In spite of all these the stage artists could lure the audience by their sterling performance and humpty number of songs, sung by themselves without mic. Even 'Stree part' male artists had to don the role of female characters, as women of that time did not dare enter stage or film [10]. Dravidian movement by the then politicians paved way to render different experience on stage as well as on screen. Naturally the number of songs in a film got reduced from 60 to 30 to 20 and so on. The taste of audience was changing from the subject of mythology, which was almost handled by all producers invariably, catered monotony. To get relieved audience wanted something new, which was almost nearer to their real life. Hence the social subject dramas and films took the momentum. The screening of Western movies in many cities of India, dragged the attention of youngsters and there started the deterioration of stage plays.

Till then only singing artists could survive in cinema. Entry of playback singers, well refined gadgets enhanced the pleasure of audio and that paved the path to the entry of beautiful talented artists. There was a big breakthrough from the first silent Tamil Movie 'Keechaga Vatham' to first Tamil Talkie 'Kalidas' in the year 1931 [11]. Many social dramas and subsequent social films engulfed the prevailing mythological, Purana subjects, which remained an off beaten subject then. Raise in literacy level among the public and adequately educated film crew ardently transformed the concept of film. The flavor of songs with abundant Sanskrit and Telugu words in the lyrics got transformed to pure Tamil. Mostly Tamil words replaced them in songs as well as in dialogues.

Now the camera started moving, which remained static for a long time. The acting crew also understood the changing need and from theatrical, noisy dialogue utterance changed themselves in presenting the acting caliber to a subdued mode. There were tremendous changes in movie-making. To compete with thunderous North Indian wave, they resorted to big banners with big budget. Big banners like AVM Productions, Vijaya Pictures, Gemini Pictures etc. made the celluloid to a tinsel elevated class of audience.

Later the music in the films took a high focus. Tantalizing tunes to grab the attention of youth were resorted to. A special mention had to be made here about G. Ramanathan, the veteran Tamil Film music composer. He hailed from the background of Harikatha, Tamil stage for a long time. He knew the pulse of the audience, as he directly witnessed the reception of the audience right from the stage. He could shape the music in a refined way with Carnatic based songs, which captured the attention of the audience. That proved that classic al tunes given to the Rasikas in a proportion would make them to rejoice the flavor of our

traditional classic tunes. His songs made a big break through and made Rasikas not to get attracted blindly towards western or Hindustani popular numbers [12].

VI. KEY INFLUENCERS

Rational thoughts from the pen of Arignar Anna, Mu. Karunanidhi and others were thought provoking and the youngsters' perspective became widened. Realistic, sur- realistic subjects were much appreciated [13]. Stars hailed from stage now created their own mode of presentation as done by Sivaji Ganesan and M.G. Ramachandran and their own troupe of fans worshipped them. Stardom to political entry was possible then and power of cinema was rightly manipulated by them. In the same way, thought provoking dialogues and new avenues of thoughts. The younger generation film makers kindled the thoughts of youngsters by their innovative direction like P. Neelakantan, Bhim Singh, Pulliah, Ramanna, Sridhar and others took the audience to a different level by offering different plots. There was a tight healthy competition between the music composers in Tamil movies.

Music directors were in good numbers. Their genre was different. Everyone had their unique way of presenting music in films. They had very healthy competition in bringing out melodious songs. A few among them were Papanasam Sivan, G. Ramanathan, R. Sudharsanam, S. V. Venkataraman, S.V. Subbiah Naidu, T.A. Kalyanam, C.R. Subbaraman, Viswanathan Ramamurthy, K.V. Mahadevan, S. Dakshinamurthy, T.G. Nijalingappa, S. Rajeswara Rao, T. Chalapathy Rao, A.M. Raja, T.R. Papa and others

Reformative lines of many new entrant lyricist kindled the thoughts of youngsters. Papanasam Sivan, Thanjiah Ramadoss, Pattukkottai Kalyana Sundaram, Marutha Kasi, Athmanathan, Vidwan K. Lakshmanan, Kannadasan, Vaali are a few among them [14].

Technologies got refined with the available equipments like RCA recording, lighting equipments, good editing made the audience immensely happy and repeated audience for the movies started pouring in theatre box office collection. Cinema became a profitable industry as they could diagnose the pulse of audience rightly.

VII. CONCLUSION

A critical study on the strategies followed by the Tamil artists to overcome the hurdles faced by them for survival, without compromising on the quality of artistic presentation to the audience of the changing times is illustrated in this article. From the primitive form of entertainment to a refined advanced level of performance was achieved by the struggling artists. Their fervor and untiring nature to bring out the best to the audience remained constant from day one that made the drama artists to reach different heights in many other fields, as done by M.G. Ramachandran and N.T. Rama Rao in politics.

In any field, if the incumbents keep pace with the growing technologies and read the mind of the users, they could survive and flourish in their endeavour.

REFERENCES

- [1] A.K. Perumal, *Thamilzhar Kalaiyum Panpadum*, Pavai Publications, 2014, pp. 21.
- [2] Ibid, pp.32.
- [3] Ibid, pp. 51.
- [4] Randor Guy, *Starlight Starbright*, Amra Publishers, 1997, pp.1.
- [5] A.K. Perumal, *Thamilzhar Kalaiyum Panpadum*, Pavai Publications, 2014, pp. 63.
- [6] Avvai T.K. Shanmugam, *Enadu Nataka Vazhkkai*, Vanathi Pathippagam, 1986, pp. 182.
- [7] P.V. Subramaniam, *The Harmonium in Light and Semi-Classical Music*, AIR's Seminar on the Harmonium, Sangeet Natak Akademi, 1971, pp.7.
- [8] Avvai T.K. Shanmugam, *Enadu Nataka Vazhkkai*, Vanathi Pathippagam, 1986, pp. 120.
- [9] Vamanan, *Thirai Isai Alaigal*, vol.1, Manikkavasagar Pathippagam, 1999, pp.28.
- [10] A.K. Perumal, *Thamilzhar Kalaiyum Panpadum*, Pavai Publications, 2014, pp.65.
- [11] Randor Guy, *Starlight Starbright*, Amra Publishers, 1997, pp.21.
- [12] Ibid, pp.101.
- [13] Ibid, pp. 269.
- [14] S. Theodore Baskaran, *Eye of the Serpent*, East West Books (Madras) Pvt. Ltd., 1996, pp.52.