

My recollections on Tamil Drama in Colombo!

Written by - K.S. Sivakumaran -

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These're the comments expressed by the literary critic K.S.Sivakumaran on my face book post on K. Balendra's 'Kannadi Vaarppukal' (Tennessee Williams' Glass Menagerie's Tamil adaptation) - VNG-

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In the 1960s and 1970s, I was a keen drama critic. Having seen the Colombo North cine-dramas and Rajaratnam's Colombo South comedies. I wrote a column called "Manathirai" in Tamil in the Thinakaran Vaara Manjari. I criticized all the slapstick presentations that went by the name Tamil Drama. This was because I read many books in English about Drama and Theatre and understood that what we witnessed were recreating Indian Tamil film sequences and using colloquial Yaalpaaana speech comedies. In 1953 or 1954, the TKS Brothers visited Colombo and staged a professional drama presentation. There was a semblance of theatricality in their presentation. I also witnessed one or two plays of the doyen of Lankan Tamil Drama-Sornalingam.

It must be 1961 or 1962, I saw a play called Mathamarram written by the late A N Kanthasamy, a writer and a Marxist thinker. When I saw that I was baffled. It was a different cup of tea for me.

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It was like a Shavian play. It was provoking and feast for thinking. I wrote a review of it in Tribune, now defunct.

In the meantime, playwrights like Robert, Anthony Jeeva, Matale Karthigesu and a few others rallied around me accepting me as a drama critic. Since I was interested in Drama & Theatre, I visited theatre halls which presented English and Sinhala plays. I noticed that in these languages a variety of plays were staged. I urged my readers to see the plays in Sinhala.

ENGLISH - not so much in Tamil produced by others in various parts of Colombo.

I also suggested that they may attempt to translate foreign plays so that they will have a grip of the structure of drama and theatre,

A former Ceylon Civil Service scholar and producer of theatre in English, Vernon Abeysekera was compiling and presenting a weekly programme called "Arts This Week" over the English National Service of Radio Ceylon. He invited me to appear in his programme with distinguished people in the calibre of Regi Siriwardene, Yasmin Goonaratne, Donald Abeysinhe, C R Hensman and others. I was asked to cover the Tamil artistic scene. I did that. That is a different story. Vernon was GA in Yaalpaanam. He produced Ibsen's Dolls House, translated by Yaalpaanam Devan.. I couldn't see that play.

I have good impressions already on K Balendra's plays. I will stop here.

More on Tamil Drama, specifically what a produced up the end of 1970s, can be gathered from my published articles in English and Tamil.

Thank you VNG for appreciating my contribution towards Tamil Drama in Colombo. May I suggest you put the above comments in your Pathivuhal website as a piece of record. கள்ள மெளனம் சாதிப்பவர்களும், கண்டு கொள்மையைக் கடப்பிடிப்பவர்களும் இனியாகுதல் என்ன ஏளனமாகப் பார்க்கமாட்டார்கள் என்று நம்புவோமாக.

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