

**ROLE OF TAMIL STAGE IN THE POLITICS
OF TAMIL NADU (1920-1967)**

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SYNOPSIS

Term Defined

Tamil Nadu is one of the federal states of India covering the southeast corner of the country. During the administration of the British, this was called the Presidency of Madras. The presidency of Madras had some territories, which at present in the states such as Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Orissa and Kerala. For the present study the word Tamil Nadu denotes the Presidency of Madras from 1920 to 1947 and the State of Madras from 1947 to 1967. The year 1920 has been taken as the starting point of the present study as it was the year when dyarchy was introduced and the Justice Party formed Government in this Presidency and in which year drama became very popular. The year 1967 marks the end of the period under the study as that was the year in which the Congress party lost power to the D.M.K, due to whose initiative the composite Madras State was rechristened as Tamil Nadu.

The term, 'Stage' stands for drama, a popular medium of art which held sway over vast masses before cinema came early into the picture. In the early history of Tamil Nadu its place was taken by another folk art form called 'koothu', which

combined dialogue, lyrics and action. Later plays were used to propagate religious stories among the masses.

In the absence of cinema and television, drama was a significant medium. It was an entertainment easily available to the common people. It reached thousands of people with its messages. There were several drama companies engaged in staging dramas at different places. The troupes needed no permanent theatres. They erected stage covered with thatched shed and on most of the occasions the audience were seated on the floor in the open ground. The messages of the drama easily reached the masses as they were minced with lyrics and music. In almost all the provinces of India, drama played an important role affecting the life of the people. In Tamil Nadu, drama and music enjoyed an honoured place in the life of the people.

In the first quarter of the twentieth century the drama stages in Tamil Nadu were used for political purposes. The nationalists used the stage to propagate ideas of nationalism and to inspire the masses. Nationalism is a matter of sentiment. The people are to be kindled with emotions. This could not be easily done through journals and books, as a vast majority of the people had no formal education. Even illiterates could be educated through dramas. The dramas had understandable dialogues to convey ideas and sweet songs to arouse the sentiments of the people. The nationalist leaders understood the utility of drama as an instrument of

propagation. The present study intends to study the influence of drama in the politics of Tamil Nadu. An attempt is made to describe the efforts of the nationalists to use this medium for their political purpose of promoting the struggle for independence.

After independence, the politics of Tamil nadu got a new dimension. The D.M.K emerged as a political force, chiefly by popularizing the cult of sub-nationalism called Dravidianism. It also effectively countered the policies of the ruling party which the D.M.K considered anti-people or anti-Dravidian. The leaders of D.M.K were effective speakers and writers. They had flair to speak and write attractively in Tamil. Their artistic and literary talents were used by them to strengthen their party and to propagate their ideas. C.N. Annadurai the chief of the party himself was a prolific writer and an actor. He acted in plays to propagate and highlight the principles of his party. M. Karunanidhi, a leader of the second rank, was also a man of artistic and literary talents. His dialogues were very inspiring and also satirical about the activities of the ruling Congress.

Drama has certainly been one of the effective instruments used by the D.M.K to come to power. The present study aims to assess the role played by the Tamil stage in the politics of Tamil Nadu with particular reference to the Dravidian political parties and pressure groups. This work also discusses the various governmental measures taken to help the artists after independence.

Hypotheses

The undermentioned are the working hypotheses of the present study.

- i) In the absence of the other modern mass media, dramas were considered to be a powerful medium of communication, reaching out the masses easily.**
- ii) The nationalists successfully used this medium to infuse the masses with nationalistic and patriotic fervour.**
- iii) The British Government quickly understood the impact of this powerful medium. It took several measures to prevent stage performances of the nationalists by passing legislations and executive orders. But the nationalists cleverly tackled the problem.**
- iv) After dawn of independence, the Dravidian parties successfully adopted this medium not only for spreading their ideals but also for mobilising funds to meet party expenses.**
- v) The stage undeniably helped D.M.K to catch power in the electoral politics in as much as the theatres did later.**

Sources

Source materials related to this topic are available in abundance in Tamil Nadu State Archives. There are many plays staged during the period of the present study (1920-1967). Many of them have been published in book form. These are helpful to make scene by scene study of them. They contain vital data such as the name of the story, dialogue writer, important actors and actress. They also depict a historical background in which the play was originally staged. Some of the actors have written their own experiences in the form of autobiographies, which possess contemporary value and authenticity, which a primary source enjoys. Pammal Sambanda Mudaliar was one of the leading playwrights who wrote *Nataka Medai Ninaivugal*, *Enn Suyaritham* and *Naan Kanda Kalaignargal*, which provide first hand information. T. K. Shanmugam was a prominent drama actor who wrote *Enathu Nataka Vazhkkai*, *Nataka Kalai* and *Nataka Sinthanaikal* reminiscing his nostalgic experiences. S.V. Sahasranamam, a famous drama actor wrote *Thirupiparkkiran*, which provides valuable information. M. Karunanidhi is a famous story and dialogue writer and is the leader of the D.M.K even today. His *Nenjukku Neethi* throws light on matters concerning the present study. They all serve as important and valuable primary sources.

The Government took some measures to halt performances of plays by passing the Dramatic Performances Act of 1876 and the Madras Dramatic performances Act of 1954. There are some Government Orders pertaining to the dramas. They banned many plays under the Dramatic Performances Act of 1876 and the Madras Dramatic Performances Act of 1954. They also serve as primary sources supplying useful data for a dialectical perception. There are actors and directors of yester years and of the present day. The researcher has the privilege of interviewing some of the eminent artists like M.N.Nambiar, R.S.Manohar, S.S.Rajendran, 'Cho' Ramasamy and Radha Ravi. They have given him first hand information of their experiences in the field of drama.

There are also many secondary sources helpful for the present study *Tamil Nataka Valarchi* by R.Kumaravela, *Nataka Medai* by P.Neelakandan, *Tamil Nataka Varalaru* by G.S.Krishnamurthy, *Tamil Natakam* by Narana Duraikannan, *Tamil Nataka Thottramum valarchiyum* by Ar.Alagappan, *Tamil Drama and Irupatham Noottrandil Tamil Natakam* by A.N.Perumal are some of the secondary sources, which deserve special mention. They throw much light on the Tamil plays. S.Theodore Baskaran has written a book called *The Message Bearers*. This is a study on the national politics and entertainment media in South India from 1920 to 1945. P.Sivgnam, a famous political leader wrote

Vidutalai Poril Tamilagam, Nataka Perasiriyar Sathavathani Krishnasamy Pavalarkkai Varalaru, which give valuable information about present study. There are many biographical works on the life of Sankaradas Swamikal, C.N.Annadurai, M.Karunanidhi, N.S.Krishnan, M.G.R, Pammal Sambanda Mudaliar and S.S.Viswanatha Dass. These books also shed light on the life sketches of these personalities. There are some magazines such as *Swadesmitran, Sudantira Sangu, Kudi Arasu, Dravida Nadu* and *Bomma*. The issues of these magazines carry articles on Tamil drama and the personalities.

Methodology

Drama were staged during the struggle for independence as well as after its achievement. The theme and other related aspects of the drama are to be described in proper context and historical background. To perform this task descriptive method is adopted, for this provides the much needed historical explanation and connecting links. To assess the impact of the plays during the period under review on the politics of Tamil Nadu a critical analysis is essential. Hence analytical method is also adopted. To trace the role of stage from 1920 to 1967, a historical method, which is evolutionary and chronological has also been followed. Thus the methodology followed in this study is a comprehensive one.

Organisation of the thesis

The Thesis has been organised into several chapters with a suitable introduction and conclusion followed by a select bibliography, indicating the range of source materials considered.

The chapter on introduction highlights the significance of the title and explains the relevance of the problem taken for study. It gives a brief history of Tamil drama. It also narrates the aims and objectives of the study, sources consulted and methodology followed. The working hypotheses also find their place in it.

The first chapter an attempt is made to discuss the role of Tamil drama during the freedom struggle. In Tamil Nadu, the dramas were used as a medium of political communication. The nationalists instilled patriotic feelings into the masses through stories, dialogues and songs based on nationalistic themes.

The D.M.K leaders were aware of the usefulness of drama as viable mass medium for propagating their ideals. After independence, the D.M.K successfully used drama as a powerful instrument of political communication. Many leaders of the D.M.K were themselves part and parcel of the dramatic field either as scriptwriters or actors. The D.M.K was able to capture power in Tamil

Nadu in 1967. Their successful efforts between 1937 and 1967 are described in the second chapter.

The third chapter deals with the efforts of non-Dravidian parties. Other political parties like Congress, Communists, Tamil Arasu Kazhgam, etc., used drama to propagate their respective ideals among the masses.

The subject matter of the fourth chapter is the life sketch of eminent dramatists. Some eminent actors, storywriters, dialogue writers and lyricists have played an important role in the politics of Tamil nadu. They contributed much for the development of their respective political parties. Their life sketch is essential to make an over all assessment of their role in a given historical context. Hence this chapter provides brief life sketches of eminent dramatists.

The concluding chapter presents a consolidated account of the major research findings of the present study. It is followed by a select bibliography. An Appendix is also added at the end. It may help the readers and scholars who want to make further research in the same field.