

Contributory Factors for the Passion Play Genre 'Nurthi' to Transcend 'Nadagam'

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Abstract

'Nadagam' and 'Nurthi' are two outstanding drama styles in the Sri Lankan passion play tradition. Nonetheless, "nadagam" of Dravidian origin and 'nurthi' of North Indian have no antecedence among Sri Lankan theatres. The arrival of 'nurthi' at the declining period of 'nadagam' has made a definite change in society. Being in a modern time where these passion plays are dissolving away from society, this study discusses different aspects of the two plays to answer the question, what caused 'nurthi' to surpass the 'nadagam' tradition, and what were the outcomes after this process. This study is mainly based on literature and interviews with resource personnel. The collected data were thematically analyzed and made a comparative study. Moreover, the findings show that the whole creation of 'nurthi,' mainly the dramatic elements and its features, has caused popularity over 'nadagam.' Specially 'nurthi' has brought the novel experience of watching the plays sitting inside a playhouse in a setting improved with dramatic techniques. Further, the 'nurthi' plays were mostly based on Indian story plots and had used North Indian classical music and musical instruments. Dialogues were in spoken form, and both males and females had performed while singing themselves. Advanced technology on stage management decorated with attractive backdrops, lighting systems, colourful costumes, and makeup are the highlighted factors in 'nurthi.' Further, the convenience due to short duration was one reason for more popularity. In conclusion, following almost contrasting features, 'nurthi' has created a new tradition in Sri Lankan living art genre, transcending 'nadagam.' Later, with the popularity and the patronage of the jet class of those days, 'nurthi' has influenced the local music industry related to light songs, gramophone records, and film songs. Thus, 'nurthi' has also influenced the emergence of another novel passion play tradition called 'Nava Naatya' in Sri Lankan drama culture

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