

SUB THEME 08

Machine Learning and Machine Translation for Cross-Cultural Communication

An Analysis of Foreign Influences on Indigenous Drama During the Medieval Period

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Introduction

A detailed examination of the origins of indigenous drama, which cannot be confined to rural theater alone, reveals that its roots extend to the prehistoric era. Historical evidence suggests that, during the Anuradhapura period, indigenous drama developed significantly as a royal art form under the patronage of the monarchy. By the medieval period, experiences of foreign invasions, influences from Sanskrit literature, and close interactions with South Indian dynasties led to a significant cultural amalgamation that became a central theme in the study of the history of Sinhala drama. The form of indigenous drama during this period was notably shaped by these foreign cultural characteristics. Despite the establishment and spread of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, it is evident, as argued by Professor M.B. Ariyapala, that traditions similar to those among the Indian Kshatriya states were present among local rulers. He highlights that the kings indulged in various arts, such as hunting games, festivals, water sports, and performances of music and dance. (Ariyapala 1966:38-45). However, Sarachchandra posits that, although dance and music were prominent, there is no evidence that drama was performed in royal palaces or in gatherings of lay scholars. He argues that the absence of playwrights and the lack of adaptations of known dramas may have prevented drama from becoming a royal form of entertainment (Sarachchandra 1956 :38). This perspective, which aligns with that of many scholars, suggests that the origin of indigenous drama has been largely confined to rural theater, limiting the study of its historical form. This research seeks to explore the origins of ancient indigenous drama and to study the impact of foreign influences on its development.

Research Question

What were the foreign influences on indigenous drama during the medieval period?

Research Objectives

- To identify the characteristics of indigenous drama during the medieval period.
- To examine the foreign influences on changes in indigenous drama after the Anuradhapura period.
- To investigate whether the foreign influences contributed to the development of indigenous drama.

Methodology

The research methodology was developed through data collection based on archaeological and literary sources, with an emphasis on corroborating archaeological evidence with primary literary sources.

Results and Discussion

An analysis of the arts in the historical context reveals that migrations, invasions, and warfare significantly impacted the artistic expressions of the island. The refined and simple arts of the Anuradhapura period became subject to variations during the Polonnaruwa period, influenced by the South Indian Chola invasions. The influence of South Indian culture on the local social structure is evident during and after the Polonnaruwa era. The Chola rulers, such as Rajaraja and Rajendra Chola, not only invaded Sri Lanka but also attempted to establish their cultural features, including the temple tradition, on the island. The establishment of Hindu temples and the consequent development of dance and drama are notable. Inscriptions such as the Polonnaruwa Pillar Inscription reveal that Hindu temple dancers performed at these temples. The chronicles also indicate that King Parakramabahu I was knowledgeable in dance and drama and used artists to gather intelligence during his campaigns. The Mahavamsa refers to a chief named Agradishwara among the new artists. The mention of Navanaluru Rasa in the Bharata Muni's Natyashastra suggests that contemporary Sanskrit drama had been introduced to Sri Lanka. Furthermore, evidence from works such as the Sasadavata, which exhibits characteristics of dramatic expression, and the Balavamyia of the

Dharmapradipika, which includes a verse from Harsha's Ratnavali, reveals that Sinhala authors maintained a close relationship with Sanskrit dramatic texts by the twelfth century. The visual sources, such as the sculptures of performers at Yapahuwa and the wooden carvings at Embekka Devalaya, indicate the presence of Bharatanatyam dance traditions on the island. These evidences highlight the influence of Indian performing arts on local culture during the medieval period. It is also suggested that King Narendra Singha invited Alagu Naidu, a musician from South India, along with his troupe to perform the play *Harishchandra*, which is considered foundational to the local Nadagam tradition. This underscores the significant influence of South Indian culture on the development of indigenous drama during the medieval period.

Conclusion

The research identifies that by the medieval period, there was a notable influence of classical Sanskrit drama and later Indian dance and drama traditions such as Bharatanatyam and Kathak on indigenous drama in Sri Lanka. The influence of South Indian culture played a crucial role in the development of the Nadagam tradition. Therefore, as suggested by scholars like Sarachchandra, it is evident that the origin of indigenous drama cannot be limited to rural theater alone.

Keywords: *Drama, Natyashastra, Bharatanatyam, Medieval Period, Sanskrit Drama*

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