

Echoes of Agricultural Revolution in *Paattabakki*

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Abstract

Paattabakki by K Damodaran is the first political drama in Malayalam to spread the theory of class struggle. The play reflects the changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution in an agrarian and social way of life. *Paattabakki* is a fierce reaction to a social system in which tenants are left to fend for themselves. The play is an expression of the helplessness of the tenant who relies on the dream of the paddy, the field, and the lord's kindness. This article intends to analyze the history of drama in Malayalam Literature and to review the political and social relevance of *Paattabakki*. A discussion is made on how this play was inspirational for the agrarian struggles in Kerala. The play depicts the iniquities and social injustices that prevailed in the bygone era of Kerala society.

Key words: political drama, social system, native language, vocabulary.

History of Drama in Malayalam

Drama is a visual art that attracts a lot of ordinary people. Events taken from the complex life cater as the main themes of drama. Dialogue, emotion and presentation are more important elements of the play than the plot. Bharatamuni's *Natyashastra* is a good example of how Indians had a theatrical concept from the 4th century onwards. Indian rhetoricians give prime status to plays. Drama is defined as the ability to act. *Abhijnanashakunthalam*, translated and published by Kerala Varma Valiyakoithampuran in 1882, is considered to be the first play in Malayalam. Following this many Sanskrit plays were translated into Malayalam. *Chakkeechangaram* by Munshi Ramakkurup, *Thottaykkattu* Ikkavamma's *Subhadradhanajnyam*, Kandathil Varghese Mappila's *Ebrayakkutty* are famous works of those times. The dramas in Malayalam followed in the footsteps of English prose plays are called farces. *Chandramukhi's Address* written by CV Raman Pillai was the first to appear in Malayalam farces. The aim of such plays was to provoke social criticism through a mixture of humor and satire. Later historical dramas appeared in the history of Malayalam literature. *Seethalakshmi*, a play by TV Krishnapillai, initiated historical drama in

Malayalam. *Calvariyaile Kalpaadam* is another historical play written by Kainikkara Padmanabha Pillai based on the life story of the Jesus Christ. After historical dramas, Malayalam dramas were influenced by political dramas. Political dramas were able to present the social problems of the day. Political plays were written in the context of the peasant movement. The first political drama was *Paattabakki* by K Damodaran, which was performed at a farmers' conference in Ponnani in 1973. *Paattabakki* is a play that took its life from the Malayalam agrarian movement.

K. Damodaran

K. Damodaran is a renowned political thinker, journalist and writer. He was born in 1912 in Tirur, Malappuram district. Damodaran was a Congressman who participated in the freedom struggle and was imprisoned as a student. He was the editor of the newspaper *Munnottu* and the weekly *Navayugam*. He was one of the pioneers of the Jeeval Sahitya Movement, the first form of progressive literary movement in Kerala. Damodaran's career as a writer and journalist was part of his political career. His major works are the socio-political plays *Paattabakki*, *Raktapanam*, a collection of short stories titled *Kannuneer* and a collection of essays, *Indiyude Aathmavu*. His other works include *Bharathiya Chintha*, *Manushyanum Samuhavum*, *Indiyayude Samuhika Prasnangal*, *Naanaya Prasnangam*.

Background of writing *Paattabakki*

Paattabakki was written to be performed at the Ponnani Taluk Conference of the Karshaka Sangham, which was formally formed in Malabar in 1937. The play was written by K Damodaran with the aim of attracting more farmers to the farmers' conference. EMS Namboodiripad entrusted him with the task of writing the play. The play aims to sharpen the conflict between the landlord and the tenant and turn the peasants against the entire landlord. It also aspires to increase the relevance of socialist ideas in the society.

The existing social structure did not give humane treatment to the workers. Society gave priority to the interests of the lords. Poverty and misery were the lifeblood of a worker who did not receive social treatment and protection. The play points to the realization that the struggle against the existing social order is to regain their human dignity. The play ends with a call for a fight against the feudal capitalist powers that exploit them forever.

Paattabakki

The play has 14 short scenes. It is centered on the family of a typical farm worker named Kittunni. The family, which includes Kittunni's mother, sister and little brother, is in dire poverty. Kittunni's salary is not even enough to pay the debt. Debtors harass him always. The family, who do not have land of their own, lease the land and start cultivating in it. They are not able to repay the rent even after giving the three - fourth of their harvest. The play begins with Kittunni who is constantly arguing with the steward of the house over this. He knocked on many doors for help but in vain. He tried to steal some rice in the miserable background of intolerance. With Kittunni being imprisoned, the landlord's henchmen try to further harass the helpless family. Kittunni's sister Kunjimalu hits the steward who tries to seduce her with the broom. As a result, they are expelled from the hut. Her mother dies in the street. She commits adultery to feed her younger brother after hearing the last words of her dying mother. On hearing the news of his sister's job, Kittunni, who was released from jail, hesitates to call her 'sister'. Kunjimalu asks if it was not to save the family that the brother was imprisoned for his theft and she was forced to become a prostitute. Kittunni realizes that they are victims of social systems based on injustice. The play therefore ends with an indirect call for the creation of a new society. Kunjimalu's remark that "it is because of these land lords that we are made to steal and become prostitutes" is an insult on the social conscience.

Analysis of Paattabakki

Paattabakki's art history and production cannot be analyzed with emphasis on national popularity. The simplicity of the plot and the authenticity of the content make *Paattabakki* one of the most successful political dramas. More than the artistic quality, it is the social relevance of the play that made the peasants folk to witness it even travelling long distances. The play gives the importance of peasant movement in the survival of the farmers. The playwright does not try to convey a tragic theatrical experience, adding more emotional flair to Kittunni's family tragedy. K Damodaran is not ready to exaggerate the ideals of Kittunni and Kunjimalu. In the character creation, he maintains the reality of the ordinary person who works under the pressure of circumstances. He embodies the power and dynamism of the vernacular of North Malabar in the dialogues. The dialogues help to illuminate the emotional pleasures of the characters. The secret of the

play's success lies in the fact that even being described by historians as a political drama, it has managed to retain all the features of a good play.

Paattabakki is not a play that depicts the life of a farmer more than the story of a farmer. The play's inability to express the productive culture of agriculture beyond the economic term of *Paattabakki* is pointed out as a shortcoming. Kittunni is not only a farmer here but a tenant in Namboothiri's backyard. The play records a much larger life context. The city appears more than the village in this play. Apart from Kittunni's house and Namboothiri's house, the play is about the city and its premises. The lord's house, jail, shop, brothel are the hallmarks of city life.

Conclusion

Paattabakki was well received by the people. Many reasons can be found for making them feel that this is their own life. First of all, this play was the work of a community. Many prominent playwrights and cultural figures of the time came to see and edit its presentation, revealing its community. The style of the play is realistic, so it easily adapted to the expectations of the community. Secondly, K Damodaran has adopted a theme that was rare at that time and has a contemporary plot setting. Seeing one's own time and story on stage has helped to create self-awareness and limit racial consciousness. The knowledge that they have theatrical potential in their own lives has made them realize their place in history and culture. The play imparts a cultural education that stands against state institutions. Thirdly, *Paattabakki* is rich with a variety of conversations. The play brilliantly presents the voices of Namboothiri, capitalism, new literature, hardships experienced by children and the petty life of women. The play is a reflection of the vision of a democratic society. Fourth, the play makes it clear that many events in history must be evaluated in terms of cultural exchanges. The play expresses the view that adultery and theft should be studied in a critical manner, not on a moral level. The play is an attempt to emphasize the universal value of morality. Fifth, many features of a unique play can be found in the *Paattabakki*. It is rich with languages, costumes, melodies and materials that the audience is always familiar with. It also adds to the agricultural background of the society. Hence this political play was powerful enough to proclaim the agricultural revolution in Kerala.