

Karunaharan, Navadharsahni
PAPER

Text, Space and Visuals of the Tamil Historical Play Productions in Sri Lanka

Navadharsahni Karunaharan, Department of Fine Arts, University of Jaffna

This study concentrates on theater visuals of the Tamil historical play productions, of the colonial period in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan Tamils have a long tradition of theatre performances in a variety of genres and styles. There are more than sixty historical Tamil dramatic texts; published and unpublished texts are available. The theatre visuals played an eminent role and its scenography creates a space for effective communication in the productions of the historical plays. The texts and music also functioned to create the 'physicality' of the performances. The descriptive passages of the texts, the verses composed in different meters and the composition of ragas for appropriate moods also contributes towards visualization of the plays.

The performance was basically composed of two different types of architectural designs of theatre spaces; arena and proscenium stages. Even though it seems to be different spaces, the utilization of the spaces is the same in the productions. Unlike the European proscenium arch, suggestive and symbolic theatre visuals were used for the performances.

This paper analyzes how the stock scene, set and costume composed for the performances contribute to effective communication. Since the historical plays were not produced in period style, how the audiences got involved in the productions and the possibilities to create a 'fictional world' through scenography of the productions is also examined. The photographs and the video clips of the theatre visuals are selected by a sampling method.

The contemporary use of sceniography; the term moves away from design as decoration of the stage and locates scenography as an integral component of theatre performance or as mode of performance itself. In this study the historical theatre visuals will be understood in such ways to lead to create effective ways of visual compositions in the theatre productions in future.