

A Critique of Mass Conscience and Social Consciousness
In Greek Drama of the Classical Period.

Indira Kamani Jayasekera

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Abstract

The intention of this study is to critically examine the significance of Greek tragedy to human beings, who are its audience. Hence it is an analytical exercise regarding the interplay of social consciousness of the individual dramatists. The introduction to the study is an inquiry in to the origin of the birth of the god of drama, Dionysius.. The theories regarding origin of drama, the connecting element of the religious ceremonies held in honor of god Dionysius and dramatic festivals were critically surveyed. An analytical study of dramatic festivals as born and nurtured in Greek society led to a deeper understanding of the nature and function of drama and its impact on individuals and society.

The three prominent classical tragedians, their work and their success, the method and message of their work, the position they enjoyed in society and the power of their art as a mode of mass communication were examined. An analytical study of selected dramas from each tragedian led to evaluate their message, technique and their impact. The social, political and historical context in which the plays were staged in was examined as they were reflected in the plays. The selected plays served as representative examples.

An study of the criteria used by classical literary theorists in evaluating literature was necessary. A brief study of classical Greek tragedies reproduced and adapted in the world and Greek drama staged in Sri Lanka led up to an examination of the reception as well as the contemporary relevance of the classical themes. The conclusion examines the question as to why classical Greek tragedies have transcended the boundaries of time, place and culture. The final findings of the research was that though the form and presentation had undergone changes according to the requirements of the time, the impact and outcome had been most effective and had remained an echo of the social consciousness of the poet and addresses the conscience of its audience.

The methodology consists of an analysis of available literary and archeological evidence, religious records and classical texts. Review of dramas staged, analysis of personal observations and interviews provided extensive material for the concluding chapter.

Key words – Greek Drama, Social conscience, Social consciousness, impact, Relevance, Sri Lankan Stage