



The Plight of Suppressed People: A Reading of Indira Parthasarathy's *The Legend of Nandan* and K.A. Gunasekaran's *Pali Adugal*

K. SELVAM

Research Scholar

ABSTRACT

A play is a work of storytelling in which the characters represent theme and circumstances. Unlike other genres, drama gains more importance because it is performed before spectators. Theatre is a place of experiment for playwrights and experience for audience. The tradition of writing for performance continues but the present scenario has gradually changed. The impact of society is reflected in literature and especially drama develops into a tool of protest in literature. Indian theatre has its development and representation in exhibiting the social inequalities which exists in society. This paper is an attempt to bring out how the playwrights present the predicament of the suppressed people through their plays.

KEYWORDS : Performance, Socio-political, Caste, Discrimination

Modern Indian plays are no longer the narrative forms of heroes and celestial beings. Theatre has a new dimension in revealing the social life. Moreover the nature of English drama in India was not only a representation of the Western World but it turned a typical are form in personifying the socio-political and economic status of India and its society.

In Indian writing in English, Dalits have been represented by various writers. In this order Indira Parthasarathy gains significance as a Non-Dalit writer and K. A. Gunasekaran as a Dalit writer. Indira Parthasarathy is a well known Tamil Scholar, creative writer, critic and perhaps a sociological chronicler. He is famous for his plays and novels in Tamil that have been translated into other languages. Among them *Nandan Kathai* is translated into English as *The Legend of Nandan* by C. T. Indra.

K. A. Gunasekaran on the other hand is a modern Tamil Dalit playwright. He is well known for his plays also as an artist, scholar, director and folk arts man. He founded 'Thannane Theatre Group', a community theater in which plays are performed to raise racial consciousness. *Pali Adugal* is one of his famous plays.

Though the plays are written in the same language- *Nandan Kathai* in Tamil and *Pali Adugal* (Scape Goats) in Tamil and *Nandan Kathai* is translated into English. The ultimate aim of the playwrights remains the same. Both the plays are connected with historical incidents. The plot was derived from history. *Nandan Kathai* is from the legend of Nandan, one of the saivite saints and a stone inscription is the source for *Pali Adugal*.

Nandan though a Dalit by birth wants to live a life like a Bhramin. To him Brahminism is the only way to attain God. He even tries to change his fellow men by saying: "... the God of the Bhramins is the quintessence of beauty. How does a parayan become a paarpaan? One must worship the god of the Brahmins, or else ... as our folks do ... che... che..." (4-5).

As a paraiyan, he is forbidden to enter into the temple. A dasi girl Abhirami helps him to have his darshan and later becomes his beloved. Nandan argues with his people to chance as a paarpaan, so that they can enter into the temple. Once his people were dancing happily nandan interrupts and ask them to stop:

NANDAN. For the bullock it is fine, belly is mind. But you're a man, aren't you?

MAN 2. The bullock and the paraiyan are one.

NANDAN. The bullock is superior to the paraiyan.

MAN. How?

NANDAN. The bullocks can go into the temple...but you? (11-12)

The upper caste people rise against Nandan and his doings. In order to stop his sudden growth they start exploiting Nandan as a saint. They trap him saying that god appeared in their dream and commanded them to accept Nandan as his devotee. In the end with the help of Vedic Bhramin they convince Nandan to march into the fire to merge with God. They ask him to pray for whole night so that the fields will be harvested by God's grace. Cunningly all turn against Nandan, even his fellow men dislike him turning as a spiritual man. The upper caste people inform him that God has given a command to dip into fire, so that he will get purified. Believing them Nandan accepts their words and prepares himself to dip in fire. He includes Abhirami with him to get purified.

In the end Nandan enters into the fire with Abhirami. The trap of the upper caste people becomes successful. Nandan who believes them surrender his life into fire. His ignorance makes his dedication as a genuine cause, but the social practice of suppressing Dalit people is represented by Nandan.

Pali Adugal takes place in a village, where the upper caste Hindus worried very much for the broken temple car wheel and they decide together to offer sacrifice to their Goddess Kali. They select a man named Cinnandi to offer sacrifice. However he manages to escape from the village along with his wife. But the Upper caste Hindus opts for another Dalit man named Udumban. When they decide Udumban for sacrifice, his wife bursts out and argues not to do such crime in the name of Goddess Kali. The people tried to console her by telling that, "We are not going to kill your husband. We are going to make him one among Goddess. This pride goes to your husband and to your successors too" (31). Cunningly Udumban clarifies a doubt to the Caste Hindus and tries to escape. He substitutes his wife on behalf of him to sacrifice, in the mean time villagers greed to such inhuman practice.

On the other hand Udumban's wife becomes the victim in the play. In the end his wife was killed by the priest and the people gathered around her worried that, "Always a woman is a scape goat..." (36). Dalit people are considered as marginalized people but the play depicts the truth that a Dalit women is doubly marginalized in the society.

Pali Adugal and *The Legend of Nandan* (*Nandan Kathai*) stand for the suppression of Dalit people in different context. Nandan and Udumban's wife are exploited in the name of God. The omnipotent who is believed to protect people remains a subject to question. Human being believe that God created man, but the bitter truth is that man created God according to his desire. In the name of God, man gave Varna which divided man into various stages. Even today variations are found at every level of society. Centuries have passed but discrimination exists leaving suppression in the hands of oppression.

REFERENCES

Gunasekaran, K. A. *Pali Adugal*. Chennai: Kavia Press, 1999. Print. | Parthasarathy, Indira. *The Legend of Nandan*. Trans. C. T. Indra. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003. Print. |