Transforming Theatrical Space: Empowering Community Aesthetics in Contemporary Sri Lankan Theatre

P. De Mel

Department of Performing Arts, Sri Palee Campus, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

pujitha@spc.cmb.ac.lk

Abstract

This study examines how the *Wingfield* Family play (an adaptation of Tennessee Williams's The Glass Menagerie) transforms the conventional proscenium arch theatre space into a contemporary open-space arena based on the Sri Lankan traditional theatre space of Kamatha. Deconstructing the conventional performance space as a spatial and aesthetic intervention, the study positions the spectator as an active spec-actor rather than simply a passive observer. The research gap addresses the need to understand how alternative community theatre forms can challenge the dominance of proscenium arch theatre and develop more participatory relationships among performers, spectators, and the community. The study uses a practice-based research methodology. Qualitative data were gathered through interviews of performers & participant, audience feedback, critical reviews of the performance and discussions engagement with the community. Aline to Applied Theatre and community theatre structure acting methods are incorporating Brechtian and Boalian approaches which is explore storytelling both as an acting method and as a form of communication, allowing performers and spec-actors to engage critically with lived experiences and social contexts. The performance process further considers elements of the Indian Roots Theatre Movement; how traditional theatrical aesthetics forms converted into contemporary global theatre practices. The creative study demonstrates the transformation of performing space with a minimalist and economical structure, centralizing the actor body as the main conveyor. The interconnection of all the elements of theatre such as space, text, spectator, and emotion is linked through the actor's intervention. The findings of this study depict that the inheritances of Sri Lankan theatre can be blended within contemporary global theatre genres, reshaping the performing space and building identity in real time.

Keywords: *Kamatha, Proscenium space, Spec-actor, Applied theatre, Indian Roots Theatre.*