



INFLUENCE OF SPECTATOR ESSAYS ON SAKSHI ESSAYS

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Abstract

The Sakshi essays of Panuganti Lakshmi Narsimha Rao and Spectator essays of Joseph Addison reflect their contemporary societies. Both in the Spectator and Sakshi there are many common subjects dealt with by the authors. For instance, women, civilization, religion, education, behavior, culture are the common themes, which were treated from an analytical, statistical and humorous perspective.

The Spectator essays of Joseph Addison is the original on which the Sakshi essays of Panuganti Lakshmi Narsimha Rao are modelled. Spectator was the central figure in the spectator club while Sakshi the leader of the Sakshi, Panuganti almost imitated the Spectator essays. He often quoted Addison in many places. In fact the very title “ Sakshi” itself is almost a translation of the word “Spectator”.

Key words: Spectator, Sakshi, Contemporary societies, Common subjects.

Introduction

The Sakshi essays made a novel contribution to modern Telugu literature. The style and diction in these essays were greatly influenced by the Spectator essays written by Joseph Addison and Richard Steel. The publication of Sakshi essays is a significant event in the history of Telugu literature under the impact of English literature. The series of essays written by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele (1672-1719) are very well known. The Spectator is the source of inspiration for the series of essays written by Panuganti under the collective title of the Sakshi.

Although the term Sakshi is a Telugu translation for the English term Spectator it cannot be said that the Sakshi essays are translations of the Spectator essays; nor can they be taken as an adaptation. The Spectator was a daily. It was not a periodical in the beginning. A fictitious character Spectator observes human behavior and comments on the follies and foibles therein and tries to bring in reform by depicting the human faults and weaknesses in an ironical manner. In this endeavor Addison was assisted by some of his friends.

The Sakshi essays also originated in similar circumstances for a similar purpose. As in the Spectator where the writer uses the first person, the writer in the Sakshi also is a fictitious character and he has some friends. But Sakshi did not bring out a daily or journal himself. At first he sent his essays to Suvarnalekha Patrika and later to the literary supplement of the widely circulated daily Andhra Patrika where they were published periodically

Spectator was the central figure in the Spectator club while Sakshi was the leader of the Sakshi society. Thus there is a great similarity between the two. Both had established their clubs, and worked with lofty ideals. Both have profundity of vision, and were humorists and well meaning conversationalists with self-restraint.

Methodology

The material for the present study is drawn from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include the Spectator essays in English and Sakshi essays in Telugu. However, the number of essays in both literatures being very large, a judicious selection has made on the basis of thematic comparability. The secondary sources include the critical and historical works in English on the



evolution of the essay in modern English literature and those in Telugu on the evaluation of essay in modern Telugu literature. A comparative study has been made on various themes which reflects the influence of Spectator essays on Sakshi essays.

Members of the Club

The members of the Spectator and the Sakshi clubs are imaginary. They were created by the authors and represent all sections of the society. The first members of the Spectator club was Sir Roger and in Sakshi club it was Kalacharyudu, who are bachelors. Sir Roger was disappointed in love. Kalacharyudu was like a 'bull dog'. So no woman ever dared to marry him. Like Sir Roger he was also a gentleman and well acquainted with religious traditions and scriptures. Andrew Freeport the third member of the club and Borraiah, the fourth member of the Sakshi club were both merchants. Both know the secrets of their trade. They have made fortunes themselves. Like Janghala Sastry, William Honeycomb knows history widely and he is well informed about things and fashions.

Like Spectator, Sakshi also does not reveal his personal details to the readers. Either thinks that he is not competent enough to give an estimate of himself. Both are modest about knowledge. Spectator says that his club meets only on Tuesday and Thursday. Sakshi also says that they meet once or twice a week.

The aim of Spectator and Sakshi is the same. Both endeavored to reform their respective societies. They discussed almost all social problems of the day.

Contemporary Theatre

Both Spectator and Sakshi were dissatisfied with the state of contemporary theatre. Spectator ridicules the artificiality of the stage by taking an Italian opera for an example. As he was walking in the streets, he met one of the actors who he was carrying sparrows on his shoulders. The actor said that he had been buying sparrows for an opera. On being asked about artificial devices, he said that he had insured his house, before he let it out to the company of players. In the essay "Trunk maker" Spectator says that the theatre-going public had no taste of judgment of their own. They needed someone to draw their attention to certain scenes and situations. He ridicules the ignorance and thick headedness of the theatre-goers of his time.

In like manner the models of contemporary British drama were imitated in Indian vernaculars. A number of plays were written and enacted. Theatres with temporary structures began to rise. Coquetties and flirtation with fellow artists became very criticized contemporary drama. He asserted that there should not play. Similarly Spectator had also believed that music must be limited in a play. Further, Sakshi did not recommend pigeons, parallel to Spectator's sparrows. One pigeon fly on the stage, the actors sing songs. As the translation of the opera into English gave an absurd sense, Sakshi too gave a reference of an awkward translation from a Sanskrit sloka to colloquial Telugu. Both Sakshi and Spectator insisted on prose which they considered to be the proper medium of drama.

Supernatural Elements

Not only in India but also in British, in those days, people had belief in supernatural elements. Both Spectator and Sakshi dealt with (supernatural elements) superstitions, prevailing in their contemporary societies, They lampooned at people's irrational and blind beliefs. Sir Roger had often told Spectator that when he inherited his estate he found three parts of his house locked up because the various rooms in that portion of the house were believed to be haunted. Sir Roger who did not believe in ghosts and spirits had got all the rooms opened and had dispelled the superstitious fear on the part of his servants. There was a sentiment in those days that some people were scared of 'Thursday' and another sect of people feared the numeral 'thirteen'. Spectator felt that this was due to the concoction of idle brains of fools.

Likewise, there was hardly a village in India in which people did not believe in the existence of ghosts, fairies, and apparitions. They had no clear idea about planets. In those days there was



treatment through black magic to cure people of the ailments caused by ghosts and evil powers. A number of odd and exotic materials were used by a sorcerer in the course of his treatment. Sakshi dismisses this hallucination caused by superstition about the harmful impact of solar and lunar eclipses, particularly on pregnant women. Sakshi reports that 'There was a woman in a village on who 5th month of her pregnancy, a lizard happened to fall on the shoulder, when the women gave birth to a child, the sign of the lizard was seen on the shoulder of the child' and dismisses this belief as an absolute superstition.

Female World

Spectator says that there are none to whom these essays will be more useful than the female world. Spectator's intention was to soften the rough edges of life by raising the general standards of morality. Spectator says that he will endeavor to enliven morality with wit and to temper wit with morality. In the essay female orators Spectator narrates the nature of women selves with furs and feathers, pearls and diamonds, and silks ... every part of nature furnish out its share towards the embellishment of a feminine that is the most consummate work of it. Spectator says that 'Toilet is their great scene of business and the right adjusting of their hair the principal enjoyment of their lives. The sorting of a suit of ribbons is reckoned a very good morning's work.

Influence of Western culture

Panuganti describes the influence of the western culture on Telugu people. People began to imitate their British rulers in all fashions, head dresses, behavior and other habits. Under the influence of English culture, Telugu women started wearing headdresses. He criticized the wearing of artificial flowers instead of natural flowers. He was against frocks, falling collars, safety pins, shoes, cuffs, ties and belts, tea or coffee, smoking, the English language and English education. The women of the day totally abandoned the application of sandalwood, scared vermilion, and taking basil water. He questioned woman why they had not applied katuka (mascara) to the eyes. Panuganti questioned people who were pretending as if they did not know Telugu. He criticized all kinds of alien fashions. He warned women not to spoil the natural beauty of their faces with cosmetics, powders and puffs. He extolled the natural charm of the human face without any artificial decorations.

Love of Mother Tongue

Both Spectator and Sakshi, expressed their deep love of their languages. Addison condemned the impact of French on English. Sakshi also ridiculed people who learned English and who wanted to speak English instead of their mother tongue, pretending as if they had forgotten their native language. Spectator says that the sounds of English words are like those of string music, whereas those of other languages were like the notes of wind instruments. Similarly Panuganti quotes an instance where the chairman of a meeting started delivering a lecture in English as if he did not know Telugu. He asks:

Is there any cat that can't mew?

Have you seen any money that can't gibber?

Is there any frog in any country that can't swim?

He makes fun of his speech in an ironical way and warns such people to be careful about foreign influences on their speech.

Envy and Feeling of Jealousy

Envy and feeling of jealousy are common basic impulses. People are envious of other's happiness and their property, riches and good name and virtues. They start gossiping with others. Addison and Panuganti condemned this vice.



Advocates

Advocates, or lawyers, instead of serving society by rendering truthful service exploit the situation to their advantage. Most of the clients are ignorant of law. Both Spectator and Sakshi considered this as a professional vice on the part of the advocates. Addison says that lawyers were too many in number, that like Virgil's army, many of them had no need to use their weapons. Panuganti says that lawyers tutored their witnesses to tell lies and to make them present wrong versions. They encouraged disputes between brothers, fathers and sons, and close kith and kin.

Good Health

Spectator and Sakshi wanted their people to be aware of the importance of good health. Spectator says that fears, melancholy, apprehensions and imaginary distempers create anxiety in human beings that leads to ill-health. Likewise Sakshi gives certain hygienic principles to be followed. He recommends Yoga early in the morning prayer because Yoga, according to him, is the panacea for all disease. He warns people not to take coffee, tea and other stimulants.

Tombs and Monuments

Spectator and Sakshi were interested in tombs and monuments. Spectator recorded his experiences in the essay entitled 'Westminster Abbey'. In the abbey he found several monuments which are raised in every quarter of that ancient churchyard. He found there were some for whom no monuments were raised.

In like manner Sakshi is also interested in ancient and monumental building. For example he describes his visit to Renade Library. The library was kept in a ruined condition and the mastered manuscripts were not kept in a proper order. Reference to an epitaph is also seen in the essay Renada Granthalayam. Real beauty is another theme which drew the attention of Spectator and Sakshi. Spectator observes that real beauty commands esteem and love, whereas excessive decoration elicits a sense of disgust and disrespect. A similar note on the graces of natural beauty versus artificiality can be found in Sakshi essays. Sakshi says that the real beauty lies in good behavior, virtuous qualities but not in an artificial make up.

Visiting Places for Knowledge

Both Spectator and Sakshi were interested in visiting distant places with an urge for knowledge. This is evident in the two essays "Grand Cairo Visit" and 'Himavannagara Prantham' (from the Spectator and Sakshi respectively), wherein the authors describe their visions. When Spectator was lost in imagination, he discovered one shepherd with a small musical instrument. He played the flute softly. Spectator fell down at his feet. He lifted him up from the ground and showed him many places like vale of Misery – Tide of Eternity – and Bridge of Human Life. Spectator saw many other places with pleasure and revelation.

Sakshi also narrates events of a dream in which he had been woken up by a stranger. The stranger wanted to show his miracles to Sakshi. He showed some important places in the Himalayas. Those places included the river Dhavala, Devalaghattam and the ruins of a royal palace.

This illustrates the visionary nature of the two authors and their philosophy of life. It implies that man should rise above the mundane level and attain the glimpses of spiritual world so that he will evolve into a complete and noble being.

Atheism

Spectator and Sakshi were dismayed at the spread of atheism and the total surrender of man to material pursuits. Spectator supported theism but condemned exploitation in the name of religion. He further stated that malice in the name of religion leads to division of mankind, human persecution and fanaticism. Religion gives us faith and morality. Panuganti also condemns disputes between



Vaishnavaites and Saivites, and animal sacrifices to satisfy gods and goddesses. He insisted on spiritual education and recommended Sandhya vandanam (morning prayer) and Yoga.

Vulgarity

Vulgarity was conspicuous in paintings and other arts during the days of the Spectator and Sakshi. Spectator comments that “admirable skills were exhibited to the basest and most unworthy ends”. Sakshi wonders how painters produce obscene pictures, and sculptors, idols. On some of the idols the breasts were not covered, and nude paintings were plentiful in number. Such pictures and idols never give delight except agony and they distress our virtue and morality.

Bad Poets

Both Spectator and Sakshi referred to bad poets in their times. Spectators stated that poets indulged in worse rivalry than common people. They could not tolerate name or fame of others. He condemns critics who are dogmatic and also insisted that certain qualification are required for the critic.

Conclusion

Other themes which are handled by the two essayists are cruelty of husbands, suspecting nature of some husbands, vulgar conversation in the railway compartment, foolish monks, falsehood and vice, and masquerades.

Expression views in the form of letters, narration dreams and telling short stories and anecdotes etc., are common techniques employed by both the essayists.

Both Addison and Panuganti in their essays successfully endeavored to awaken their societies to the individual and social faults which emanating the very vitality of their native cultures under the unwanted impact of alien influences. Further, they reasserted the virtues of their native societies and condemned superstitions and irrational practices. If the essay was the literary form of their purpose, rational thought was its soul.

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