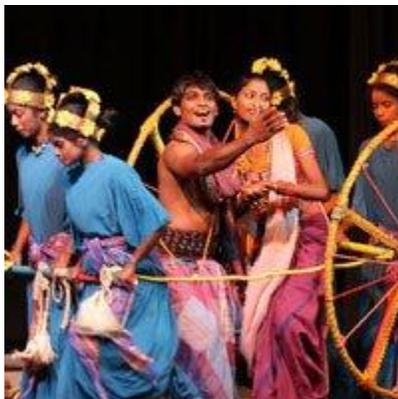


Mrichchakateeham – the Sinhala / Tamil Collaboration on a Sanskrit Play



Date: 2012-05-06 - Ceylon Today



By Thulasi Muttulingam

Pix by Sanka Vidanagama

When a young Parakrama Niriella and Sinniah Mounaguru, giants in their respective fields of Sinhala and Tamil theatres first interacted with each other in the 1970s, the atmosphere was cordial and conducive for Sinhala and Tamil theater collaborations. Having shared the same stage on several occasions, though in different plays, they might have thought that it was only a matter of time before they collaborated.

What they wouldn't have thought though was that the collaboration would come some 40 years later – and then to deliberately engender solidarity between their two races rather than celebrating an existing solidarity!

Torn apart by the war, both men nevertheless continued as artistes in their distinctive spheres until brought together again by the ending of it.

Mrichchakateeham, a Sanskrit play performed by Niriella' troupe several times in both Sinhala and Tamil went on the boards again at the Lionel Wendt on 29 April. What was different about the production was that it was free to the public, courtesy the India – Sri Lanka Foundation and most of the troupe members onstage were young Tamil students of the Swami Vipulananda Institute of Aesthetic Studies, of the Eastern University, Batticaloa.

Niriella's professional troupe Janakaraliya, had been training the Batticaloa students, under the auspices of Professor Maunaguru, for nearly an year! The proof that it was worth it was in the very polished performance by the young students. There was nothing amateur about the production although technically enacted by amateurs. The expressions, mannerisms, and general depictions of the characters were all thoroughly professional.

There was humour, there was romance, there was suspense, there were lighthearted dance and song sequences; all the elements that go towards making a great play. Except perhaps, in the several centuries since the play was written by King Sudraka, some moral values have changed.

I was thoroughly enjoying the play (the plot of which I was clueless about), until the WIFE of the Hero appeared, several scenes down the line.

Eh? It wasn't enough that a once rich but now poverty stricken man (through his own folly of too much high living with parasitic friends), is in love with a beautiful and wealthy young woman. He was portrayed as a gentle, good natured soul and I was rooting for their romance all the way. But then, he who doesn't have even enough money for oil to light lamps in the night goes and loses the cache of jewels his lover had given him for safe keeping. And while he is in despair about it, the WIFE appears to give him the only heirloom she has left from her original family wealth – her diamond necklace! And he gratefully and happily accepts this as a fitting replacement to give his lover; never mind that the wife is heartbroken at having to lose her last piece of jewellery after being deprived of everything else already, by him.

My middleclass feminist sensibilities were rankled at that point and they didn't get much better as the play progressed. The author of the play clearly meant the hero to be a sympathetic character but my perception of him from another century and culture (not to mention sex) was vastly different.

Except for that one moral hiccup (which kept irritatingly hiccoughing throughout the latter half of the play) of the hero running after a rich courtesan when he can barely provide for his young son and wife, the play was quite entertaining and

well crafted.

Which is precisely the reason Niriella and Maunaguru, the collaborating directors of the play gave as to why they had chosen this particular play.

“It is a very famous play, even internationally well known due to its unique plotting structure. It is theatrically very rich – comedy, tragedy, romance, drama, moralism – all have been very effectively crafted into it. It also stands out from other Sanskrit plays of that time period in dealing with the very real problems of men instead of mythological gods,” says Niriella.

Professor Maunaguru echoed the same sentiments but goes on to add, “I believe the famous Tamil story of Kannagi and Kovalan in the Silappadikaram was inspired by this play. While in this play there is no censure of his courting a courtesan, in the Silappadikaram, an element of censure is there. That is the main difference.”

Well, there is also the fact that the hero lives ‘happily ever after’ here though in the Silappadikaram, Kovalan dies, but no doubt that too had something to do with the evolving moral values of the authors.

All in all, it was a fairly interesting evening. The production was in Tamil, for those who couldn’t understand it, a side screen was set up with basic details of the scenes being given in Sinhala and English, and the two hour long play moved briskly without dragging. My favorite character though was neither the hero nor the heroine. It was the Brahmin sidekick of the hero with his hilarious expressions – both verbal and facial. At least he only had one wife!

‘Kalimann Vandi’ and history of Sri Lankan modern Tamil theatre

3 May 2012, 10:07 pm

by Sivagnanam Jeyasankar

A Response to the leaflet issued before the beginning of the performance of Kalimann Vandi the Tamil language stage production of “Mettikaraththaya” and to the performance itself

The “Tamil language production of Mettikaraththaya” refers to Mirhchakadikam, a Sanskrit play written in B.C. 300-400 by Chudraka. It was produced in Tamil as ‘Kaliman Vandi’ translation of the Sinhala version of Mettikaraththaya at the Swami Vipulanda Institute of Aesthetics Studies, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.

The production was a joint venture of the Drama and Theatre Department of Swami Vipulanda Institute of Aesthetics Studies and Janakaraliya Theatre Group. The program was funded by the India-Sri Lanka Foundation and HIVOS Netherlands. The play was directed by veteran Sinhala Drama and Film director Parakrama Niriella and its Executive Director was the veteran Tamil Drama director and theatre scholar Prof. S. Mounaguru.

It was said that the purpose of the production is to educate and enhance the theatre knowledge and skills of the students of the Drama Department of the Swami Vipulanda Institute of Aesthetics Studies.

The students who performed in the play did their justice to their capacity. But the question remains: to what extent does the play represent the performance tradition of Sanskrit Theatre or an innovative theatre of the modern world? The play simply looks like a failed commodified South Indian Tamil Film. The dance and music sequences of the play added to this impression.



The important issue to be discussed at this juncture is the theme of the play. It is not just an ethical one but a serious conceptual issue in the present world, where gender sensitivity and feminist perspectives are part of the ideas and ideologies of our society. Shouldn't this be included in the educational process of Drama and Theatre?

Charudhatha, the hero of the play, is willingly sent off by his wife to the "genuine" concubine. She also accepts the concubine as the real partner of her husband, because she accepts that Charudhatha will be blissful only in Vasanthasena's presence.

Who constructed the thought pattern of Charudhatha's wife? How is the theme of the play relevant not only to the Educational purposes of the particular students' community but also to the audience in common? Is it reasonable to educate people about the technicalities of a play without dealing with its theme and concepts?

Are we going to celebrate the "true love" of Charudhatha and the "genuine" concubine Vasanthasena, and the sacrifice of Charudhatha's wife? Or do we want to initiate a dialogue on the victimization of women and their exploitation by men in Art and in Society? Aren't these issues connected with the educational process in Higher Education Institutions like Swami Vipulanda Institute of Aesthetic Studies?



Most cases of domestic violence and violence against women are related to the theme of the play 'Kaliman Vandi' (Mettikaraththaya). What would have happened if Charudhatha's wife reacted to the suggestion negatively and said NO?

Anyone can find out the answer by analyzing cases of domestic violence and violence against woman in their surroundings or in the records of nearby woman's organizations or the woman's desks in island-wide police stations.

Theatre training or theatre education is not mere transmission of the knowledge and skills of theatre Arts. It has to be connected with the transformation of perspectives in the mindset of pupils or people in society. Ironically, the play has failed to deliver this transformation, which was expected from these well- experienced directors, especially in the contemporary context of activists' struggles against increased violence and discrimination against women in our society.

Three questions have to be answered in this regard. Why did both the veterans choose the play 'Kaliman Vandi' (Mettikaraththaya) to be produced in a post-war period? Why did the funders support a theme questionable in the current world, where many programs on gender sensitivity and empowerment of women are taking place with the support of governmental and non-governmental sectors? What is the position of an academic institution when its curriculum is unsuited to issues important in the contemporary world?

The original play has the originality of combining political and love intrigue, which together give a significant value to the play. But Chudraka the playwright has claimed that Mirhchakadikam has no precise parallel to the above-mentioned combination. 'Kaliman Vandi' (Mettikaraththaya) has left out the political, and highlighted the love between Charudhatha and Vasanthasena.

It is important to mention that in the history of modern Tamil Theatre there are no prior examples of a play like 'Kaliman Vandi' (Mettikaraththaya) that was chosen and produced before an audience. This is one of the positive aspects of the Modern Tamil Theatre of Sri Lanka.

In brief, 'Kaliman Vandi' (Mettikaraththaya) did not do justice to the original Sanskrit play, to the modern Tamil Theatre of Sri Lanka, or to the art of translating literature.

Sri Lankan Modern Tamil Theatre has a history of its own, and it is created by theatre practitioners and social activists with their own commitment and contribution and with the support of theatre and social enthusiasts.

Modern Tamil Theatre in Sri Lanka has responded to situations throughout its history for the last sixty years by innovative and inherited theories and practices of theatre. It is as important to note how traditional theatre responded in times of trouble and turbulence as the modern theatre of Sri Lankan Tamils.

Modern Tamil Theatre extended its wings beyond its proscenium theatre stage and travelled through all the nooks and corners in varied theatrical forms in order to engage people on issues including ethnicity, caste, class, gender and environment, from the nineteen seventies and nineteen eighties.

The Educational Theatre of modern Tamil Theatre is an organic form of theatrical innovation in the nineteen eighties, and reached its fullest expression in the nineteen nineties. This has to be discussed in detail for its further development and expansion, and the dissemination of information is also required to make it known to the world outside Modern Tamil Theatre.

Because scholars, researchers and theatre trainers from outside emerge into the scene of Tamil Theatre and pose as being on a mission to initiate and civilize Tamil Theatre and its practitioners and theoreticians, scholars and researchers portray Tamil Theatre as a non entity in Sri Lankan Theatre. Anthologies on Sri Lankan Theatre will reveal this fact very clearly.

It is unknown to scholars and researchers not only from outside but also to the insiders how Traditional Theatres responded and represented reality in times of war, displacement and natural disasters. The essence of the Community Theatre aspect of Traditional Theatre has had the elements of community integration and participation, and it played a vital role where Modern Theatre practitioners did not have the chance to react and respond in times of restrictions.

But the undertakers of the traditional theatres are serious in their mission to preserve the “extinct” art traditions and heritages in funded institutions, and transform community art into a commodity art.

It is interesting to note that modern scholarship has branded the “folk traditions” as “low traditions” and treated the “classical traditions” as “high traditions”.

It has celebrated the aesthetic values and heroic characteristics of the classical arts without questioning the relevance of their themes and issues to the current context, but without hesitation has branded “low traditions” and the values of those traditions as specimens for the museum and the crude practices of the uneducated and uncivilized.

The play ‘Kaliman Vandī’ is the Tamil version of Mettikaraththaya and the leaflet issued before the performance aptly represents the above-mentioned modern thought production.

Traditional Theatres are the innovations of the past by our ancestors and they have introduced innovations from time to time. Practices in Traditional Theatres are deeply connected with the

present. Practicing traditional performances is not an act of digging up buried corpses and conducting processions in madness.

It is not the practice of the uneducated or unscientific minds as mentioned by the civilized and the educated. It is an urgent need to re-educate the misinformed in order to understand the traditional and modern in a new spectrum different from the colonial one.

The leaflet of the play reflects the above-mentioned misunderstandings when it says the “Tamil-language production of Mettikaraththaya represents Sanskrit Theatre.” The leaflet takes an intriguing wrong step on the aspect of language. “Theatre needs no spoken language and it evolves sans spoken language several decades ago” says the leaflet, and in fact this is reflected in the performance as well.

The spoken language of the play has not reached a minimum acceptable standard. The translation of Kaliman Vandi (Little Clay Cart) from Mettikaraththaya also contributed to this debacle.

It is the same story with the Tamil Plays produced by Janakaraliya Theatre Group. A perfect example is the Tamil version of ‘Sekkuwa’. It is a Sinhala play badly dubbed in Tamil. The performance of the Tamil version of ‘Sekkuwa’ is yet another example that substantiates my argument.

The leaflet includes a notable statement in it that needs further discussion in detail. It mentions that there is no need for differences in Theatre in the name of language, ethnicity and region. It further states that Janakaraliya Theatre Group will stand firm on this matter against all odds and opposition.

The theatrical viability of the above-mentioned statement is questionable, and its political implications are problematic. The statement strongly aspires to eradicate differences but does not bother about discrimination. The text and sub-text of the leaflet resembles the missions of Multinational Corporations.

Flying saucer like interventions will bring diversions and distortions to practice which instead needs support from consistent practitioners of the art. This program is simply an example, but there are various flying saucers overhead and underneath the feet.

Stakeholders of a program like this must think twice before producing such backward plays, and be mindful that conscious people are aware that these kinds of missions, even though appearing to bridge the ethnic divide, resonate patriarchy and provoke violence against women.

Filed under [Current affairs](#), [Guest blogger](#)
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4 Comments

1. *radish.S* says:

[May 4, 2012 at 6:30 pm](#)

Before commenting on this article it may be good for the uninitiated to introduce S.Jaysankar, who I believe was the Lecturer at the Eastern University(EU). He has written and produced some successful plays relating to environment, and has acted in 'Ravanesan' as Ravanan, produced by Dr.Mownaguru and has also published the English Magazine 'Third Eye' through the English Forum at the E.U. for which magazine late A.J.Canagarena used to contribute a lot.

He states that the play under review was like a failed commodified South Indian Tamil film. If what he says is true then we are back to the days of late 60s, early 70s just after the South Indian Sabha type plays when the Kotahena tradition of plays were just remakes of South Indian trash films. The producers and actors of these plays absolutely had no sense of modern Theatre. But soon starting mid 70s, E.Sivanandan's 'Vidivai Nokki' (Enkal kulu), N.Suntharalingam's 'Apasuram' (Koothaadikal), an absurd play inspired by a play by Ionesco, Tarcisius, Sivapalan and others of 'Nadodikal' produced Mahakavi's 'Kodai and Sivapalan's 'Ivarkalukku Vedikkai', a play in Verse and 'an experimental play' both of which were first banned, later Mahakavi's 'Puthiyathoru Veedu', a stylised Play, Ampalaththeadikal's 'Kanthan Karunai' (N.Ragunathan) which was later produced by Tarcisius, Mownaguru and others combining the Tamil Koothu tradition and Kandiyani dancing-which incidentally was a great success, Mownaguru's 'Sankaram' were all great plays many of which were later presented in Jaffna after the 1983 riots when most of them went over to Jaffna. During the late 70s Balendra produced 'Malai' and 'Kannaadi Varpukkal', during this period Zuhair Hameed was one exception from Colombo who produced beautiful plays like 'Dial M for Murder' and Ambi's 'Vethalam sonna Kathai' again a play in verse. Ladies Weeramani a great actor and singer produced 'Salome' probably translated from the original play in English by Ana.Naana.Kandasamy. Tamil plays were really good during this period both in content and style. Tamil plays competed with Sinhalese plays in the same National Theatre festival by Ceylon Arts Council and won. Dr.Sivathamby highly commended the social content of the Tamil plays compared to Sinhala plays which were mostly adaptations. When most of these producers and actors went to Jaffna (after the 1983 pogrom against Tamils where more than 3000 Tamils were killed in Colombo) people like Kulanthai Shanmugalingam and others already producing plays joined Tarcisius's Theatre workshops and started to produce plays differently from Kalai Arasu Sornalingam School of Theatre. During the War period in Jaffna Street Plays became the vogue to teach the people of the struggle of the oppressed Tamils. Later Sithamparanathan's Theatre movement became very popular. This then was in short the history of the vibrant Tamil Theatre and if it is said that this play was to teach Theatre to Tamils and if it was a play like South Indian films then much more is desired. Further one can not agree with what the leaflet says with regard to language, ethnicity etc. because the problems of the Tamils were completely different from that of the Sinhalese (If they had one- of course they had caste differences) but Tamils certainly needed a different type of theatre. Of course Theatre should not be used to create dissension between communities but different types of Theatre are necessary depending on the problems faced by each community. Gender sensitivity is important and perhaps even a Norwegian play like Henrik Ibsen's 'Dolls House' may be staged both in Tamil and Sinhalese.

2. *DilshanF* says:

[May 4, 2012 at 7:21 pm](#)

I guess I would be the least qualified to make any comments about the tamil theatre. However the fact that the play was staged in Bati is welcome. Would be nice to know when in bati a play like this was held last.

Best wishes to all actors actress directors and critiques.

3. *herat* says:

[May 7, 2012 at 12:10 am](#)

Even though I haven't get to see the drama mentioned in here, my understanding of the criticism is very harsh. May be the writer may not be a usual drama analyst. He instead of encouraging the young artists for doing their best to the Tamil Drama in SriLanka considering the circumstances; writer seems to be engaged in either a political row or row with an artist in the Drama. Please get over with this nonsense at least now and help develop Tamil Drama which have been taken over by LTTE political propaganda units up to recent days. At least these pundits should understand art and sending a political message are two different things. Because if you want to send a message you can even send a telegram; now a days it is much easier you can even send a SMS, you don't need Art for that.

4. *radish.S* says:

[May 8, 2012 at 3:06 pm](#)

It is a pity that both Dilshan and Herat does not seem to know much about Theatre in general and about Theatre in Sri Lanka (both Sinhala and Tamil) and more particularly about Tamil Theatre. Having followed the only Theatre Course conducted by Aquinas University College whilst being a law student and having interacted with Sinhala, Tamil and English Theatre and its personalities- I could shed some light on the topic. Incidentally Ernest McIntyre (from the English Theatre who now lives in Sydney) was our Director and Percy Collin Thome (later a Justice of the Supreme Court also from the English Theatre and also dealt with Producing a play), Iranganie Serasinghe-acting, Sugathapala de Silva,, Henry Jayasena -Hunu Wataya Kathawa an adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's 'Caucasian Chalk Circle' and filmstar too-Gamperaliya), Sugathapala de Silva (' HarimaBadu Hayak', an adaptation of Luci Pirendelo's 'Six characters in search of an Author; Vajira Chithrasena-movement on stage, Mahinda Dias-lighting, Deraniyagala-on colour sense etc. Lester James Pieris on Films and others were our Lecturers. Later Colombo University conducted a Diploma in Theatre in Tamil with Professor Sivathamby heading the panel. Many of the Tamil Theatre people went through this course. I think Dhamma Jagoda was also a lecturer. Dilshan appreciates the fact that a play was staged in Batti. However even during the war period and during the CFA period also Eastern University was producing many plays and celebrating the World Theatre Festival annually. I had been a Guest of Honour one year. Batti is a cradle of 'Koothu' and the lecturers from the aesthetic department of Eastern University (EU) like Dr. Mownaguru and Bala Sugumar were masters in their own field. As far as Herat's comment is concerned there is a world of difference between giving a message through an

SMS and through an aesthetically produced play as is very obvious. Very many famous Playwrights wrote plays based on (political) satire and Sri Lankan Sinhala Producers like Dharmasri Bandaranaike did it through his plays like 'Trojan Women' - alas again a translated play but well done and in Tamil A.Tarcicius 'Poruththathu Pothum' which won a National award, Sivapalan-, Ivarikalukku Vedikkai' Kulanthai M Sanmugalingam-'Man sumantha meniyar;, Devanand, Sithamparanathan and others did many Tamil original plays (not translations or adaptations) produced many plays in many genres.' Art is not for Art's sake alone but it should have a purpose', a social or political message but done aesthetically not a straight forward propaganda'

Some quick notes on Mr. Jayasankar's review on 'Kaliman Vandi'

14 May 2012, 11:18 pm

by Dr.Sunil Wijesiriwardena

I was puzzled and shocked by the extremely hostile review written by Mr. Jayasankar of the Tamil production of the Mirchakadikam,



I am forwarding here a quick and short response on one or two important issues rose in this article.

i) Main attack on this production by Mr. Jayasankar is based on a certain construction of the concept of Tradition. Let us look briefly at this issue. The popular perception of the arts (or language/ or behavior) tradition to which Mr. Jayasankar also seemed is sticking on, is based on the assumption that it's a sum of knowledge and skills which travel exclusively through the axis of time, started at some point of origin in past and reaching us in present and going toward future. It's sometimes perceived through the image of a water flow, a river, but again a flow strictly marked with closed banks

These banks supposed to separate and insulate the referred tradition from others. Thus this particular model of tradition is linked to the idea of purity, where other traditions, mostly are seen as possible polluters. Speaking in anthropological terms what we see here is an extremist position of Cultural Relativism (against Universalism), as we have been observing again and again, is capable to support the vicious kinds of racism. (It has been observed by progressive social anthropologists that both these positions- Universalism and Cultural Relativism- taken to extreme, on their own way become anti-humanist ideologies; Humanist position has to be derived by transcending the extremes.) Sinhala extremists in recent years have produced a huge amount of literature arguing for 'purity' of all types of 'Sinhala Traditions'.

Even in sixties there has been a discourse on Prof. Sarachchandra's work , that his work represent the ultimate embodiment of the pure Sinhala Folk theatre tradition. Of course Prof. Sarachchandra never went along with these ideas. He was talking about a Sri Lankan theatre capable of tapping rich regional resources.

In fact his important works such as Maname and Sinhabahu , have strong inter-textual connections with not only some of the South Asian theatre traditions (including certain Sri Lankan Tamil Folk traditions) but also East Asian (Beijing Opera, No and Kabuki of Japan etc.) and, yes, even with some stage music traditions of the West Europe (Passion plays of the Christian church) which travelled with Christian missionaries probably from Italy through Goa to South Indian and Sri Lankan coastal areas. So this is a classical example of 'invention of tradition' in modern Sri Lanka , if to use the term coined by Eric Hobsbawm.

The model of tradition imagined as one dimensional flow in time axis with closed banks is erroneous and ideologically dangerous ,and is supportive of racism and cultural fundamentalism.

Even if we still stick to the model of a river to illustrate a tradition, we should be able to see this river as a much more complex flow with not just one origin , but with origins, and with banks opened at many places to receive 'minor/earlier traditions', which transforms itself into the River.

However even this open river is a too poor model to understand the complex dynamics of a real tradition, because in reality tradition is not one-dimensional flow running through time, as it has a space dimension as well; It is ridiculous to imagine a tradition outside its bearers.

Traditions essentially flow through its bearers, while their lives have both time and space dimensions. This makes the possibility for bearers of traditions, especially for the best of them,

to make deep encounters with the bearers of other traditions, which pave way for sharing and enriching their own traditions. Philosophically speaking there are no separate (insulated) traditions in reality, we should see them as inter-traditions in the same way, and we humans are inter-beings who live in an interconnected universe.

ii) It is very clear that Mr. Jayasankar once again is happily ignorant about the real ideological roots of his own attack on the depiction of open-end love relationships between Charudatta, his wife and Vasanthasena.

Although he seems to believe, that he is giving a voice to feminism in his attack, unfortunately it is the historical model of the patriarchal/capitalist nuclear family speaking through him. I don't think he will be able to find any feminist who would support his ideas of 'nuclear family fundamentalism'.

Feminists were the first thinkers to offer a methodical criticism on the modern nuclear family and by their comparative study of various historical manifestations of the institution of marriage through history and in culturally diverse locations, paved way for enlightened people to accept an array of diverse types love relationships (including lesbian and gay) in their quest for a more humane, just and contented society.

We know by feminist studies that feelings of sexual jealousy among lovers also are not a 'natural thing' but have historical (structural and cultural) reasons behind it. We should understand that feelings, as against emotions, represent very complex socio-spiritual phenomena.

Mr. Jayasankar being trapped in his small idea of 'love and marriage' cannot appreciate the relationship of sisterhood being developed between Vasanthasena and Charudatta's wife. Vasanthasena is a member of a prestigious ancient institution 'Vaishya' (like Hetaera in ancient Greece and Gesha of Japan) which at its inception was related to religion and spirituality.

By the way great Kannada playwright and theatre/film director Girish Karnad in his famous film 'Utsav', devotes a full episode to show the admirable sisterly relationship between the two characters, devoid of any jealousy.

iii) Unfortunately I haven't seen the Tamil stage version yet, but I have seen the Sinhala stage production brought out by Jana Karaliya in Colombo. I enjoyed the work and was pleased to find that it was fine both in its artistic construction and in humanist discourse; I am sure Jana Karaliya was tapping the rich dramatic and theatre resources of the modern Brechtian tradition of epic theatre.

Jana Karaliya has carefully selected a limited amount of episodic material from the huge bag of this ancient drama to construct a tightly and harmoniously woven dramatic text which is capable of shedding modern /humanist light on the themes of social justice and rebellion, love, lust and friendship. It was not only an entertaining spectacle in many sense, but challenging too, in its radical discourse on love and marriage.

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5 Comments

1. *radish.S* says:

[May 15, 2012 at 10:49 am](#)

I think it is only fair that Jayashankar responds to this and other comments made earlier in response to his review as it seems that none of the commentators have seen the play staged in Batti in Tamil. I think he should argue as to whether this type of play is essential in the present context of the existence of Tamils when there are many related burning questions like land grabbing, war widows, Army and Navy (Retired Governors), victors and the victims. Perhaps 'Trojan Women' in Tamil may be more appropriate and not 'epic theatre, but 'absurd' plays.

2. [N.Krishna](#) says:

[May 16, 2012 at 4:03 pm](#)

The same Tamil play was performed at Lionel Wendt Theatre, Colombo on 29th April. I have seen both Sinhala and Tamil productions. Except some enhancements in music in Tamil one, there was no difference in designs of these two versions. So not necessary to witness both versions to write any comments on this drama. Redish's idea is somewhat acceptable. But, we must not consider only about the content of the play as an artwork. As I know, creators of this play have produced it as a collective effort. Though there is no depth in the story the Sinhala and Tamil young group has got together to make this creation. Sometimes working together for any kind of a creative work is much more effective than just producing or watching a drama in a hall and get out. We must appreciate their effort as they are about to produce next Tamil drama too in Batticaloa as announced by Prof. Maunaguru after the Lionel Wendt performance of Mrichchakatiham. As he said that production would be "Cocasian Chalk Circle" of Bertolt Brecht, the famous epic Play which produced by Henry Jayasena in Sinhala. We are awaiting for that. As Wigdish Finbogadottier, once the president of International Theatre Institute said "if the curtains anywhere in the world open, for any kind of a creation, we must condescendingly thankful and appreciate it"

3. *radish.S* says:

[May 18, 2012 at 3:00 am](#)

In the late sixties So. Nadarajah, son of Somasundara Pulavar has translated Brecht's Chalk Circle and the German Embassy has promised Ernst Mc Intyre to produce it in Tamil. As students of Ernest at the Theatre course in Aquinas University College Tarcisius and I were helping Ernest who now lives in Sydney in Casting and audition. German Embassy wanted us to perform in Tamil Nadu also. Ladies Weeramani the famous actor, Singer and performer of Villu pattu was to do both the characters done by Vijeratna Warakagoda (Narrator) in the first half and Azadak's role (Henry Jayasena) in the second half. Famous Tamil singer of that time Kulaseelanathan also auditioned for the Narrator's role.

Unfortunately when everything was ready Ernest migrated to Australia and the German Embassy was not ready to finance us Tarci and me who were young Law students with no proven talent in Theatre. Now at least after so many years it is good to see Brecht being produced in Tamil. They have done it in Tamil Nadu. 'Koothu Pattarai' of Chennai lead by Na.Muththusamy did it with the assistance of a German Theatre Personality some years ago.

DBSJ RESPONDS:

Brecht was done in Tamil decades ago. Balendra's Avaikaatru Kazhaghham staged Brecht's "exception and the Rule" in Tamil as "Yugadharmam". I still remember the catchy song "Valindha Kaalgal Munne Sella".....

4. *radish.S* says:

[May 18, 2012 at 8:03 am](#)

DBS, Thanks for that info. However 'Caucasian Chalk Circle' was not staged in Tamil in SL to my knowledge. The play in English was staged first at Lionel Wendt Theatre by Ernest (Karunakaran) McIntyre, an old boy of St.Patrics College, Jaffna and a Peradeniya University graduate. Later it was produced in Sinhalese (Hunu Wataya Kathawa) by Henry Jayasena and it was a huge success. He took it all over the country. Ernest also did a small role some times when it was staged in Colombo. It was even staged in Trinco under the auspices of the Lions Club at the St. Josephs College Auditorium. People like Douglas Ranasinghe acted in it in addition to Henry's wife Manel. Anyway it would be a nice play to do in Tamil even now using Koothu also. It is much closer to traditional Tamil Theatre. It has some relevance to the situation today like when Azdak says, "I take" sitting in the Judge's chair, meaning he accepts bribe. I think it is time for me to alienate myself from the Theatre world and get back to Politics again not to forget Human Rights.

5. *S.Jeyasankar* says:

[May 18, 2012 at 2:25 pm](#)

Dear Friends,

A brief note

Master pieces of Modern Drama not only from Western Europe or America but also from Africa, Middle East and Asia produced in Tamil as well as in English throughout the last 30 years without funding from Local or International agencies.

Antigone, Chalk Circle, Lower Depths, Trial of Dedan Kimanthi (Africa), Mad man on the roof (Japan), Dragon, Doll's House, The Accident (Palestinian Play), Riders to the Sea are few from the complete whole.

The Ashen Touch and Flightless Butterflies (Original Plays in English) were performed in Colombo too in the new millennium.

The above mentioned plays are performed in the auditoriums in the meantime theatre activities of the Sri Lankan Tamils are extended to different spaces in different forms and on different issues. Aesthetic value of these theatres are also varied. Art – Propaganda binaries will not suit to the new cultural environment.

The works in the field and the writings (in English too) on Reformulation of Traditional Theatre as an organic form of Community Theatre is the clear evidence of how dialogue on tradition and culture is put forwarded in Sri Lankan Tamil Theatre.

The engagement with gender and feminism is another important feature of the Sri Lankan Tamil Modern Theatre. Those who are doing theatre in the schools itself conscious of proper treatment of characters and selection of plays.

Its very important to know the realities and try not to impose imagined realities and to be the liberal “messiahs”.

Theatre lives and resist in oppressive situations but not only in theatre halls as “The Art” and “The Aesthetic”.

Jeyasankar

Preventing ‘outsiders’ from entering domain will not allow Tamil Drama to grow beyond what it is today

16 May 2012, 10:54 pm

by Parakrama Niriella

A Reply to S.Jeyasankar

“Kaliman Vandi and History of Sri Lankan Tamil Theatre” was the title given to the write up by Sivagnanam Jeyasankar of the Eastern University, on the Tamil adaptation of the Sanskrit drama “Mruchakateeham” assumed to be written by Chudrakha between 400 – 500 AD.

This was produced in Tamil with the participation of the students of Swami Vipulananda Institute of Aesthetic Studies of the Eastern University, Baticaloa.

Young Rasaiya Lohanathan, a Janakaraliya dramatist, developed the Tamil script that was accepted as worthy of production by Prof Maunaguru, who was its Executive Director, while I assisted in the production as the Director of the Sinhala version of the same drama with the “Janakaraliya” mobile drama group.



For those who are not very familiar with the “Janakaraliya” mobile theatre group, let me first make this “one line” introduction.

It is a multi ethnic, multi cultural group of youth from different districts in Sri Lanka , who, for over 09 years have been studying and producing drama in both Sinhala and Tamil, while performing in all districts in Sri Lanka for Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim audiences.

I would not discuss about their guest performances on invitations in Kyrgyzstan , New Delhi , Pondicherry and Purisei in , for now. For more, one could visit the web site – <http://janakaraliya.org>

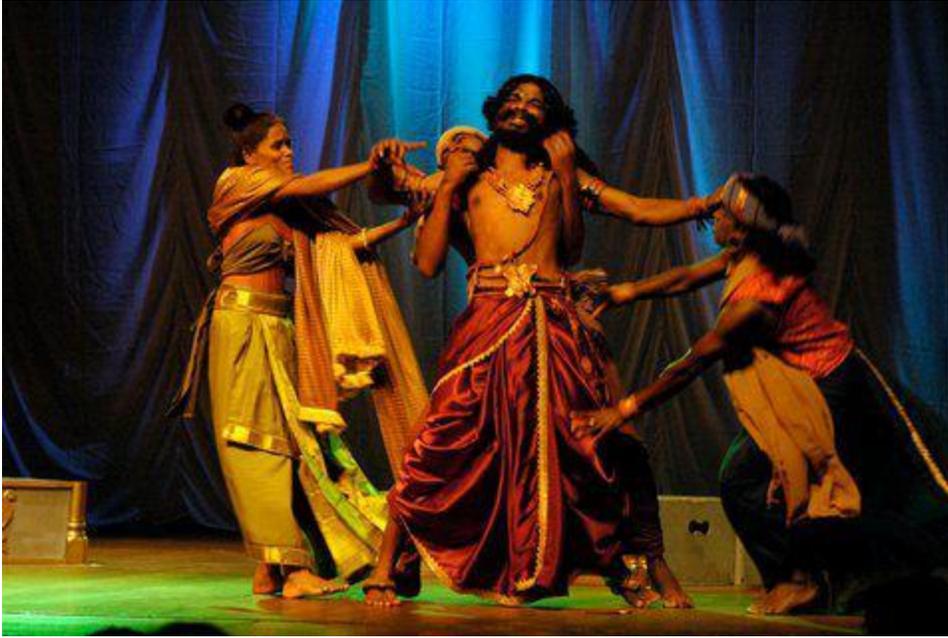
Getting back to Jeyasankar’s write up, I think the first that needs to be said is, all what he notes as from the leaflet distributed at the first performance of the play in Batticoloa, are total fabrications and distortions. There were no such mention of what he uses as “quotes” in that leaflet and it does not fit an academic to stoop that low, in trying to fix his own argument. I would therefore not comment any more on that. That said; let me now answer the few main issues he has raised in his write up, posted in DBS’s blog.

First the language in translation. I am no authority to contest Jeyasankar’s claim that the translation into Tamil itself is of very poor quality. I was nevertheless cross checking the translation with two others, while Lohanathan was at it, to see it remained true to the original version, “as a script”.



What I could vouch for, without any hesitation and doubt is that Prof Maunaguru's knowledge of the Tamil language, accepts the Tamil script as very good, unless Jeyasankar discards Prof Maunaguru's Tamil language proficiency. Even if he does, the Tamil audience and the university staff in Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu, had no problems with the Tamil language of other translated plays of Janakaraliya, also done by Lohanathan, which goes to prove that Lohanathan by himself is a good translator.

The rest is left to all the Tamil people who came to see the play, "Mruchakateeham", not only in Batticaloa, but also at the Lionel Wendt, Colombo and never complained about its Tamil dialogue. And in passing, let me also note here, the stubborn insistence of Jeyasankar all through his write up to call the play, "Kaliman Vandi" when it was introduced in all leaflets and in public forums as "Mruchakateeham", proves he is nourishing a selfish resentment, which he cannot publicly express.

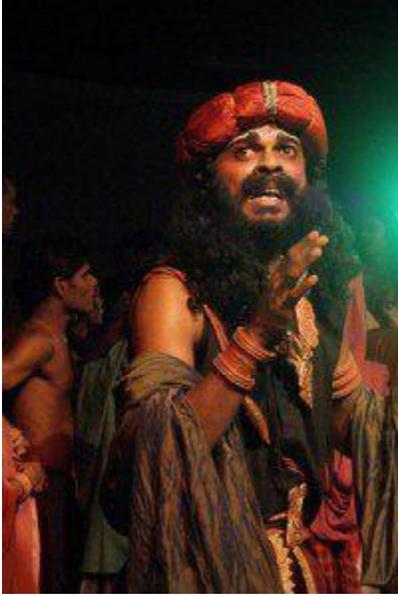


Before I come to the most important issue of modern theatre and the “Sri Lankan Tamil Theatre”, let me also ask Jeyasankar, what brand of “feminism” he is talking of, when he accuses this play “Mruchakateeham” had been adopted without gender sensitivity and feminist perspectives. Unfortunately for Jeyasankar, his gender sensitivity and feminist perspective does not go beyond a well knit, patriarchy disciplined family where “beating the wife” at home is not the norm.



Jeyasankar therefore goes on to say, “Most cases of domestic violence and violence against women are related to the theme of the play ‘Kaliman Vandhi’ (Mettikaraththaya).” For

Jeyasankar, Charudhatta's relationship with Vasanathasena is an unacceptable "extra marital" relationship that should lead to domestic violence.



Therefore he poses the question, "What would have happened if Charudhatta's wife reacted to the suggestion negatively and said NO?" Jeyasankar is well within the puritanical "Victorian" concept of marriage, while Chudrakha, 1600 years ago, was discussing the "emancipated woman" who was able to develop another open, sisterly relationship within her marriage.

It is this qualitatively higher human relationship within marriage that "Mruchakateeham" brings on stage, for dialogue.

What Jeyasankar also fails to understand is that, even in the original Sanskrit play, "politics" is no main plot. The main plot is what we have dealt with around this triangular relationship. The "royalty", what Jeyasankar perhaps reads as "politics" comes in only to create the added props to the "love and marriage" discourse.

I would suggest he reads the original Sanskrit play, published in the book titled 'Maniyal Siru Ther' translated in the year 1933 by a veteran Tamil scholar named Mahamahopathyaya Pandithamani Kathiresachcheddiyar. For readers' information, this book had been reviewed as an excellent literary work and the foreword to it was written by the prominent Sri Lankan Pundit, Swami Vipulananda.

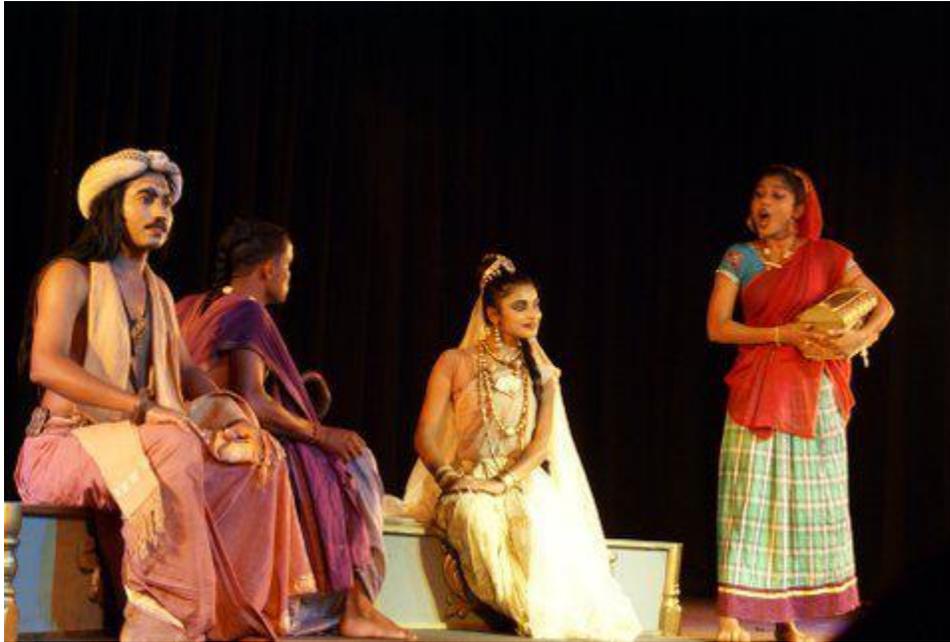


Finally about the history of Tamil drama, no one disputes that there were ancient traditions. What is disputed is Jeyasankar's dogma that they have to be carried through without any cultural interchanges and sharing. His mutely voiced protest that "outsiders" who enter into the domain of Tamil drama, pollutes Tamil tradition is in fact an extremist, fundamentalist approach that would never allow Tamil drama to grow beyond what it is today.

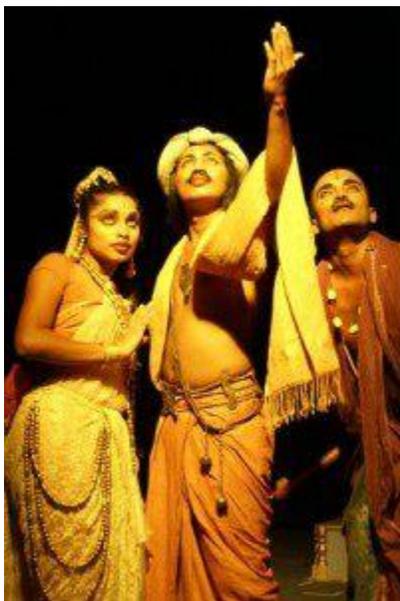


In fact Tamil drama did not grow into an aesthetic experience of visual performance in front of a "free and debating" audience. Tamil drama instead was turned into "agit – prop" skits for over 30 years that tried using old tradition as a medium propagating "Tamil nationalism" politically.

No cultural and literary medium grows creatively in a politically suppressed society that allows only a straight jacketed ideology. There are efforts in poetry and prose literature that gives dissent a voice, in such politically moulded, dominating ideologies.



Often theatre and drama finds it extremely difficult to give such dissent a stage, for very practical reasons. Often such dissent is culturally carried in Diasporic life and not within the society itself. For over 30 years, such was the plight of Tamil drama that had no space for growth within the Sri Lankan Tamil society.



What Jeyasankar seems to represent is this undemocratic trend in Tamil culture and literature as history of Tamil drama. One that tries keeping Tamil drama chained to old traditions and applied

for his political needs. Unfortunately, such application can exist, but would not allow Tamil drama to evolve into a new tradition of aesthetic experience that could transcend language and reach the world.

What is nevertheless important is, Jeyasankar in his own limited way, has provided a platform for a much broader discourse that others could join. For that opportunity, I am thankful to Jeyasankar as a colleague.

Filed under [Current affairs](#), [Guest blogger](#), [Pictorial Comment \(RSS\)](#) | [Trackback](#) | [Permalink](#)

5 Comments

1. *Desh* says:

[May 17, 2012 at 6:25 am](#)

My, you've come a long way haven't you???? 😊 Or are you pretending to be a "moderate"?

2. *anbu* says:

[May 17, 2012 at 9:32 am](#)

This is great that there has been soo much written about by three people on this website on Tamil drama.

Yes – i agree we need to make tamil drama reflecting our realities at present- militarisation of Tamil society, war widows etc.

But it is also true that the stale politics of tamil activism, academia and arts need to be reinvigprated too.

This includes accepting our sanskritic past and present, negating colonial reading of caste as opposed to looking at jati being a tool for diversity of practices and reality in SOutth india and Sri lanka(jati oppression is bad but is jati bad in itself?), outgrown Darvidian politics, over simplifies understanding of feminisms etc.

As the writer notes(about Victoria npuritanism) we seem to have accepted missonary scholarship as our own without any real reflection of ground realities.

Also i want to see a considered n thoughtful joy, love, and a passion for life in SL thatre. Now, that will be radical than lamenting all the time.

3. *radish.S* says:

[May 17, 2012 at 11:13 am](#)

I don't want to get into the polemics of Jeya and Prakrama except to dispute the latter when he says, 'In fact Tamil Drama did not grow into an aesthetic experience of visual performance in front of a "free

and debating” audience’. In fact ‘kodai’ and ‘Puthiyathoru Veedu’(Scripted by the famous Tamil poet Mahakavi(Rudramoorthy)-father of the currently famous Poet and Prof.Cheran- both plays produced by ‘Nadodikal’ Theatre and Literary group were aesthetically satisfying plays and ‘Kodai’ was staged(revived) after almost 25 years of its first performance even at the ‘Lionel Wendt’, not a traditional place for Tamil plays and at ‘Jayasinghe Hall’ in Dehiwela(both under my direction). Plays by Dr.Mownaguru (Sangaram) created lot of debate between many academics(like Prof.Shanmugaratnem)in both Tamil and even English media. Further when ‘Trojan Women’ was staged at the Trincomalee Vivekananda College Auditorium in Sinhalese among a predominantly Tamil audience during the so called ‘Peace Time’ after the CFA was signed between the protagonists of the war,it was welcomed enthusiastically.

4. *S.Jeyasankar* says:

[May 17, 2012 at 1:19 pm](#)

Dear Mr. Parakrama,

My humble request is, please read the leaflet again and forward a scanned copy to Transcurrents.com too. It will give an opportunity for the people to think and decide the truth. I am also puzzled that the director of the play is not sure about the quality of the translation. If possible pl publish the translated script too.

Its also interesting to note how veteran dramatists reflects life and art particularly theatre art of the last thirty years among the Tamils of Sri Lanka.(also see:Ceylon Today-2012-05-07 Professor Maunaguru; Icon of Indigenous Tamil Culture)These reflections shows the unwillingness or the lack of knowledge on Theatre activities in times of oppressions and suppression on and among the Tamils of Sri Lanka.

Please try to understand the real role played by the thespians of Tamil theatre in the last thirty to forty years. In my opinion it must be the pre-requisite for collaborative or integrative work.

I will respond in detail for the responses made by Mr. Parakrama and Dr. Sunil in a single article because it seems similar and contribute each other.

Branding the opponents as fundamentalist, traitors and terrorists is the last refuge of the politicians but not the trick of the artists and academics.

Thanks
jeyasankar

5. *Anonymous* says:

[May 17, 2012 at 2:30 pm](#)

Parakrama Niriella, It depends who this ‘outsiders’ entering and with what motive, when the minority culture in its vulnerable state.

We need freedom to create with and for everybody living in Sri Lanka

18 May 2012, 10:30 pm



By Rasaiah Loganandan

Mr. Jeyasankar says that there has been a statement in the leaflets like this, distributed at the premier of the drama “Theatre needs no spoken language and it evolves sans spoken language several decades ago” says the leaflet”

There are no such baseless lies in that leaflet. As the Tamil translator of it I can take the full responsibility of it. This is the section of the leaflet (in English) which Mr. Jayasankar pointing out:

“In an art there could be inherent characteristics of an artist that creates the work of art but creative art cannot be restricted to a nation, language, tradition or a country. We, at Janakaraliya respect ancient traditions and styles. But we do not attempt to stop the watch or turn it backward getting ourselves restricted by conservative traditions or old styles.

Because we know that it is not creative pursuit. We associate them (traditions) and explore new dimensions in theatre arts. The task of protecting traditions and endowing them for the future generation is an assignment for cultural social service. It is not creative arts. Remarkable, distinguished works of arts are born or created only by transgressing all the olden attitudes, postures traditional barriers

Theatre art is considered as an arts form which includes all other forms of arts. Basically it's a spectrum based performing art. It's also a visual art. Vocal language is only a segment of theatre arts. Although it's given some consideration in the orient, vocal language is limited to vocal gesticulation out of four gesticulations namely Vachika, Aangika, Saathvika and Ahaarya.

The international theatre arts have abstained from classification of theatre arts on the languages used by the performers several decades ago. But, in our country, the impudent practice of

classification of theatre arts not only based on language but also on race and provinces still prevails. We, at Janakaraliya, desists that impertinent practice and continue our independent creative processes regardless of opposition or aversion by any individual or clan.”

The above statement of our leaflet is the gospel truth according to the universal theatre arts today and we do affirm it again and again with earnest responsibility. If anyone wants to ensure the correctness of this statement or to check whether it is true or false, participating at annual drama festivals in our neighbouring country at New Delhi or Tishur, Kerala is quite sufficient.

In order to prove this statement further, I submit below the statement given by Dr.Kulanthai Shanmugalingam, the most accomplished Tamil dramatist in Sri Lanka today, in an interview in ‘Desathiya’ Magazine: “Tradition is our identity. We must produce our creations preserving our traditions or identities. Protecting tradition does not mean getting caged by the tradition and producing the same thing time and again. If we get totally obsessed or subservient to traditions we will get into a particular isolation. If we get ourselves locked up in our traditions we will be compelled to do stereotype creations missing out opportunities to do aesthetic and eminent works of art. While caring for our traditions we must endeavor to create distinguished works of art in par with eminent international creations.

A partial diversion from tradition doesn’t mean destroying the tradition. For an example tradition is like the base or the foundation of a house. Each and every house has a foundation. But the houses built on foundations take different shapes, characters and appearances. If not all the houses will look the same. Then no one will be able to tell them apart. This dictum or theory is common in theatre arts too. We must endeavor to produce diverse creations while protecting our traditions. Professor Sarathchandra created the drama ‘Maname’ while preserving the identity of Sinhala rural drama. But it was a novel creation considered as a trend setter in Sinhala drama to date. Therefore we must be prepared to do experiments and novel creations while preserving our traditions.

Only then a distinguished work of art is born. Tradition too is preserved then. Since all the changes are made conforming to the tradition.”

He, who has chosen to live among his people facing oppression and hardships during trying times rejecting offers for emigration, nourished the Tamil theatre arts under numerous hardships. Considering the sufferings he had to cope with he could have turned up as a narrow minded traditionalist. But, instead of that, he built his house on the strong foundation of Tamil traditional culture as an independent artist believing in modern universal drama practices and usages.

Mr.Jayasankar is caged inside a “Police Hut” constructed on a strong and great cultural and traditional foundation. His obsessed policeman mentality has developed into such an extent he says that we wouldn’t have produced ‘Mruchchakateeham’ since there were no similar drama among previous Tamil dramas: “It is important to mention that in the history of modern Tamil Theatre there are no prior examples of a play like ‘Kaliman Vandi’ (Mettikaraththaya) that was chosen and produced before an audience. This is one of the positive aspects of the Modern Tamil Theatre of Sri Lanka.”

The reason he gives for this is that ‘since Charudatta’s wife approves the love affair between Vasantha Sena and Chardatta’ it is immoral by his point of view. If, what he says is true, Tamil students in Sri Lankan universities will never be able to gain practical experience on Sanskrit dramas by producing ‘Rathnavalee’ and ‘Abhignna Shakunthala’. Because in both dramas, considered as masterpieces universally, the main characters of the dramas love other women while having their wives.

(In ‘Rathnavali’ the queen give over her sister to her husband, the king.) ‘Oedipus’ the universally accepted Greek drama as another work of genius will also be banned from production in Tamil as the king Oedipus of that drama cohabitates with his mother resulting birth to two children. Likewise, Tamil students and people in Sri Lanka will not be able to gain experiences from the dramas appreciate by international audiences.

The ‘Mruchchakateeka’ Sanskrit drama has been used by most of the universities teaching theatre arts to produce dramas for educational requirements of the students. If Professor Rajendran, who was born in Tamilnadu, was able to produce ‘Mruchchakateeka’ to support educational requirements of National Drama School of India, (when Swami Vipulanathan has praised the drama writing the foreword for a translation of this work), why is it that the same drama cannot be produced with the participation of students of Swami Vipulananda Institute of Aesthetic Studies, a higher education institute of a University in Sri Lanka?

By his comment on the Tamil language production of the drama ‘Chekku’, ‘It is the same story with the Tamil Plays produced by Janakaraliya Theatre Group. A perfect example is the Tamil version of ‘Sekkuwa’. It is a Sinhala play badly dubbed in Tamil. The performance of the Tamil version of ‘Sekkuwa’ is yet another example that substantiates my argument’, further confirms his deceitful mind set. Not only that, he rejects all Janakaraliya dramas stating that the dialogs are inappropriate. Among the Janakaraliya dramas he thus rejects are the dramas ‘Charandas’ and ‘Payanihal’.

The Tamil drama ‘Charandas’ was highly praised by several distinguish Tamil artists including Kulandei Shanmugalingam and it was highly appreciated during the performances at ‘Purasei Drama Festival’, University of Pondicheri and several other locations in Tamilnadu, India. The drama ‘Payanihal’ has felicitated by Tamil scholars and audiences and represented Sri Lanka at the New Delhi International Drama Festival 2012. He is rejecting these dramas citing errors in dramatic language.

We have several questions related to his statements. In several occasions many drama scripts have been translated to Tamil language from English and other languages. If that is alright what’s wrong in translating a Sinhala language script into Tamil language? What form of harm it will transpire into Tamil Theatre?

Our next question is about the ‘dubbing’ he is writing about. Isn’t it possible to produce the same drama in two languages? Habeeb Thanvir has produced his drama ‘Charandas Chor’ in four languages namely Urdu, Hindi, Kannada and Bengali and performed them for the audiences talking different dialects. Charandas Chor has been produced in Assamian language also this year. According to the biographies of Badal Sarkar, he too has produced his dramas in several

dialects and performed them in different parts of India . We can cite so many examples from our neighbouring country.

In the international theatre arts there are numerous similar examples for this. “Phantom of the Opera, Le Miserable, Lion King, Cats etc” have been translated and produced in Japanese, German, Italian, Dutch, French, Spanish and South African languages using performers from those countries using the overall design of the original English version. Is Mr.Jayasankar referring to this practice as ‘dubbing’? If the above examples are taken into consideration, can he declare outright that we don’t have the right to create our drama ‘Sekkuwa’ in Tamil language to perform it for the Tamil brethren of our country? Is it a crime to produce the ‘Sekkuwa’ in Tamil language using ‘Kolam’ and ‘Sokari’ traditions of the South?

Another important fact has to be mentioned here. We have not only produced Tamil language versions of Sinhala dramas. We have translated Tamil dramas too into Sinhala language and produced them according to Tamil drama traditions in Sinhala language using both Sinhala and Tamil dramatists as actors. For examples we can cite the production of Dr. Kulanthei Shanmugalingam’s ‘Enthayum Thaham’ and performing it at the ‘Namel-Malini Punchi Theatre’ in Colombo in 2010 and producing a Buddhist Jathaka story in Kaman Kooththu style under the title ‘Thaham’ and performing it in many places. The Tamil language translation of Bertolt Brecht’s ‘Caucasian Chalk Circle’ by Dr.Kulanthei Shanmugalingam will be produced by us as a co-production with Professor Mounaguru using both Sinhala and Tamil actors.

‘Metikaraththya’ drama was awarded 6 prizes including the Best Non-Original Drama, Best Actor and Best Supporting actress. This is what Dr. Sunil Wijesiriwardhane, a veteran scholar with a consummate knowledge of theatre arts, had to say about the drama; ” I enjoyed the work and was pleased to find that it was fine both in its artistic construction and in humanist discourse; I am sure Jana Karaliya was tapping the rich dramatic and theatre resources of the modern Brechtian tradition of epic theatre. Jana Karaliya has carefully selected a limited amount of episodic material from the huge bag of this ancient drama to construct a tightly and harmoniously woven dramatic text which is capable of shedding modern /humanist light on the themes of social justice and rebellion, love, lust and friendship. It was not only an entertaining spectacle in many sense, but challenging too, in its radical discourse on love and marriage.”

This is what Mr.Shivagnam Jayashankar said about the Tamil language version, created in the same design and pattern, ‘Mruchchakateeham’ of the same drama “The play simply looks like a commodified South Indian Tamil Film. The dance and music sequences of the play added to this impression.” What is this disparity? What is the reason for a board of judges consisting of University lecturers and scholars with profound knowledge on theatre arts to appreciate the quality of Sinhala version and another scholar of the same category condemn the Tamil version of it?

We have paid special attention to study how singing and dancing were inculcated into the Indian Cinema. From the earliest Films of Thamilnadu such as “Draupadhi Vastrapaharnam”, “Lava Kusa”, “Mihi Ravana”, produced by the pioneers of South Indian Cinema during 1916 – 20, S. M. Dharmalingam Mudaliyar and Nadaraja Mudaliyar, the Thamilnadu cinema was influenced by theatre arts. This is a special and common feature of the Indian Cinema. The Indian cinema was

dramatized and enriched by addition oriental usage of dancing, singing and music and “Navanalu Rasa” superseding the naturalism of the western cinema.

While the Tamilnadu cinema developed absorbing the features of theatre arts the development of theatre arts diminished. But forceful traditional drama styles still prevail. Moreover, today in Tamilnadu, the artists engaged in Modern Theatre practices are compelled to engage in a continuous struggle with the cinema. Today Tamilnadu is a paradise of cinema fans. Cinema has become so influential the audiences tend to watch the dramas now through a cinema point of view. Sri Lankan Tamil society is also influence by the same issue. We have met judge board members of Tamil dramas of our country with the view that songs or dances should only be for cinema and not for dramas.

We were amazed by a comment made by a lecturer of a fine art subject of the Eastern University participating at a discussion with the students after the performance of the premier of ‘Mruchchakateeham’. This is what he uttered in his own words in front of us and students, Professor Mauíguru and Mr.Niriella without any hesitation; ‘In that drama the actors and actresses make facial expressions just like in close-ups of films these are done only in films’ Mr.Jayashankar too is seeing the dramas through a cinema eye and cinema mentality.

If Mr.Jayashankar has watched the drama ‘Mruchchakateeham’ created by the veteran drama and theatre teacher Professor K. S. Rajendran of National Drama School , New Delhi India , in 2007 with the participation of his students, he would have claimed it as a copy of a film. It was a ‘Mruchchakateeham’ drama production so rich in dancing, singing and music and also with spectacular scenes. Similarly he would have seeing a film in Professor Sarathchandra’s ‘Mahasara’ or ‘Vessanthara’ and Lucian Bulathisinhala’s ‘Tharawo Igilethi’. Numerous international drama productions could be cited in which he will see cinema.

The Great Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein developed the ‘montage theory’ of cinema adapting drama principles. The technics of Kabuki dramas where a totally different signal is emitted from a collection of several other different signals emitted simultaneously was cited by him as ‘Monism of Ensemble’. It is amazing about Mr.Jayasankar’s knowledge of not only of the cinema but the technical aspects of dramas too. It is sad about his negligence to see or ascertain the numerous dramatic technical aspects and manures in “Mrichchakateeham”.

Today, working only with traditions of a country is not adequate for the development of any form of arts including theatre arts. All forms of arts get nourished through integration with different traditions, styles and civilizations and also through mutual influence. Mr.Jayashankar sees this as ‘a mission of multinational corporations’.

He vehemently rejects the above phenomenon and clings only to his traditions and attempts to fence or ‘cage in’ the future generation too. He is attempting to limit all creative activities of the Tamil theatre arts within a narrow frame of style and tradition while condemning and denouncing anyone not caught in his constricted frame daring to break out. This is a regulatory police work. And also it is a kind of a censorship too launched by Mr.Jayasankar.

Yes, we hope to publish the Tamil script of “Mrichchakateeham” with production notes and details of both Sinhala and Tamil versions including the dialogue going on about it in media and internet.

The writer is the Translator of “Mrichchakateeham”

Filed under [Current affairs](#), [Guest blogger](#)
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3 Comments

1. *Lankapura* says:

[May 18, 2012 at 11:48 pm](#)

The elephant in the room here is again TAMIL HINDU RACISM/EXTREMISM. Let’s call it for what it is. The authors so far have been dancing around this issue instead of pointing out the culprit. There is a section of Sri Lankan Tamil Hindus who are highly racist, caste oriented, misogynistic, and very, very insular and this attitude had been promoted by the LTTE and Tamil politicians for their own survival. These charlatans believe that they are the “protectors of Tamil Hindu culture” (whatever that means). They find it disgusting and repulsive if there has been any involvement of the Sinhalese/non-Tamils in their so-called “pure culture” and they find any sort of liberalism and inter-ethnic co-operation reprehensible. The same people were moaning when Tamil Christian children learnt Bharatanatyam claiming it is a Tamil Hindu tradition; it must be anathema for them to see Sinhalese and Tamils working together! I wonder whether this is a carry on from the pernicious Tamil Hindu caste system which views others who are “lower” as vermin? What would Kadavul think of this? Do you think he would approve of this bigotry being displayed so openly and brazenly? Spending thousands of rupees for poojas and donating gold necklaces to the local Kovil will not wipe out the hatred in one’s heart. Let the Sinhalese and the Tamil artists work together, wipe out division and live together like brothers and sisters! Not THAT would be a tribute to Tamil culture!

2. *S.Jeyasankar* says:

[May 20, 2012 at 12:53 pm](#)

Dear Friends,

Comparing the relationship of Charudhata and Vasanthasena of Mirchchakadikam with Oedipus and Jocasta of King Oedipus shows the vulnerability in understanding drama literature and this was the problem with Tamil Mirchchakadikam itself.

Instead of exploring the problem in the text and made the play relevant to current context the respondents try to create a different picture and divert the debate. But that also made them expose.

I wish to quote A.Mangai’s comment at this juncture in order to get the point clear.

mangai says:

QUESTIONS RAISED BY VASUKI HAVE TO BE ADDRESSED IN DEPTH. DO WE HAVE ALTERNATE IMAGININGS OF A FEMALE EXISTENCE? HAVE WE PRODUCED IMAGES THAT CAN HELP US BREAK THESE STEREOTYPES?

I THINK ANY TEXT CAN BE READ IN CONTEMPORARY WAYS ON STAGE / READING. ALL THAT WE NEED IS OUR PERSPECTIVE AND IDEOLOGY. HABIB TANVIR'S PRODUCTION OF MRCCHAGATIKA IN INDIA HAS BROKEN NEW GROUNDS.

Especially with so many women learning thet are for higher studies in tamil, in srilanka, which is undreamt of in tamilnadu, I wish we can have more path breaking texts, performances and directions!
Thanks Vasuki.

This comment was made by A. Mangai to Kamala Vasuki's review (Tamil) of Mirchchakadiham
April 15, 2012 at 7:21 pm (Oodaru.com)
S.Jeyasankar

3. [N.Krishna](#) says:

[May 21, 2012 at 6:20 am](#)

Dear All,

(1) As I understood Mr.Rasaiah didn't try to compare Charudaththa and Vasnathasena with Jocasta and King Oedipus. The point he raised was whether anybody could do productions of Rathnavali, Abhignana Sakunthalam Sanskrit plays or Oedipus, the Greek play in Tamil. Without replying to that Mr.Jayasankar is telling other thing.

(2) He is repeating same silly feminist issues rose in his first letter though Dr. Sunil Wijesiriwardena and Mr.Parakrama already have responded to them very clearly.

(3) Now Mr.Jayasankar is trying to hang up with Mangai's comment on Vasuki's (His wife's) review in Tamil which was published once in Thinakkural newspaper too. I have read it. Please Mr.Jayasankar, could you translate it in to English and publish in these websites. Then everybody will be able to get to know "how silly and childish" article was that filled with rubbish ideas on theatre and about her knowledge on theatre and cinema.

Dear Dr.Sunil Wijesiriwadena, Mr.Parakrama and Mr.Rasaiah – Please stop this debate with these people. The best thing is continuing with your creative work without wasting your time for these kinds of silly debates.

Mr.Parakrama and Prof.Maunaguru, please do that Tamil production of Bertolt Brecht's "Chalk Circle" in Batticaloa.

Mr.Jayasankar, please continue your work with your Great Tamil traditions.

If you all have time or will, all of you try to work together. Share your experiences without keeping hidden agendas. You all are assets to Sri Lanka. Please stop this. These kinds of debates will last with sad endings.

I am sure you all need FREEDOM TO CREATE!

N.Krishna

23 May 2012

Statement on Meti Karaththaya

The story dramatized in Meti Karaththaya took place somewhere around 400 AD, that is sixteen centuries ago. Prince Charudatta, the lead character in the play and his wife (or partner) did not treat each other as each other's private property. Hence their relationship was not marked by possessiveness, secrecy, greed, suspicion, jealousy and insecurity. It is this high quality of their relationship that makes his wife accept Vasantha Sena, the other woman depicted in the play as being close to Charudatta. Vasantha Sena led a free life, and at that point in social evolution, the women who had free relations with men were accepted by society and not stigmatized like the female sex worker of today termed 'prostitute'.

Considering the socio-historical background of the story depicted in the play, how relevant is it to apply the standards of the institution of monogamous marriage (leading to nuclear family) of today, which is an integral part of a socio-economic system founded on money, private property and profits to evaluate 'Meti Karaththaya'?

Written by Rohini Weerasinghe

President, Kantha Shakthi, (A women's Organisation)

23 May 2012