

Sri Lanka's Janakaraliya (People' s Theatre) festival in January 2010

December 20, 2009 — Dilshani Samaraweera

The [Janakaraliya \(People's Theatre\)](#) drama festival will come to the Lionel Wendt theatre from January 12 – 15, 2010, with a new generation of young bilingual actors and a string of stage drama's crafted to overcome communal and language differences in Sri Lanka.

On December 18, Janakaraliya staged / Meti Karaththaya (clay cart), at the Lionel Wendt theatre to a star studded audience, ahead of the drama festival.



Photo shows the 2 main characters, Vasantha :
the city of Udeni () and Charudatta (), a po
stage drama Meti-Karaththaya () . Photo prov
Niriella. All photographs and text a

True to its promise of bringing 'quality theatre' to Sri Lanka's war-weary populations, Janakaraliya's Meti Karaththaya displayed excellent theatre craft, including well trained young actors (even up to the single child actor), entertaining play acting, creative stage

props, and beautiful costumes.

Typical of Janakaraliya plays the Meti Karaththaya cast is made up of both Sinhala and Tamil young people.

This means suddenly hearing a decided Tamil accent in some parts of the the Sinhala play, and vise versa. Although a little distracting at first, this technique actually adds to the richness of the overall production.



Photo shows Vasantha Sena (), the beautiful courtesan of Udeni () and Charudatta (), the nobleman, from Meti-Karaththaya (). Photo provided by Janakaraliya/Mr Parakrama Niriella. All photographs and text are copyright protected.

Overall, the theatre craft and acting makes it possible to overlook the two and half hour duration of the play and its dubious morals that come coupled with a hint of Hindi-film melodrama .



Picture shows the beautiful courtesan Vasantha S
, with Shakara (), the villain of the play, Me
Karaththaya (). Photo provided by Janakarali
Parakrama Niriella. All photographs and text
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In fact, the ending of the play takes an
unexpected turn and makes one wonder
about serial killers in our past.

(Reminiscent of a popular theory on Jack the
Ripper, with its links to the British royal
family).



Picture shows Vasantha Sena () and Shakara rejected lover, from Meti-Karaththaya (). Photo by Janakaraliya/Mr Parakrama Niriella. All photo and text are copyright protected.

One wonders whether the ancient author of this play wanted to transmit a warning message into the future through his play - about rare cases of serial murderers, because traditional Sri Lankan/Indian society does not officially acknowledge the existence of this tendency.

Meti Karaththaya itself, is an ancient play (AD 400), supposed to have been written in Sanskrit, under a different name, by a King called Shudraka (). But it may have been written even earlier (AD 300) by a scholar called Bhasa () .

It was translated into Sinhala by Mr Piyadasa Nishshanka and crafted into the current play, Meti Karaththaya, by veteran dramatist and founder of Janakaraliya, Parakrama Niriella.

New life

Sri Lanka's arts, including theatre craft, paid dearly for the country's 3 decades of war.

As many artistes have pointed out, with so many years of war and its unending hardships, Sri Lankans lost the ability to appreciate art and beauty (or just could not afford it).

Quality productions were rare and a good script, even if it could find financing, found it hard to attract talent and particularly young talent.

So Sri Lanka's Sinhala theatre, once so vibrant, was at death's door at the start of the 21 century.

Janakaraliya's greatest achievement is here.

The theatre group kept Sri Lankan theatre alive in the face of an uncertain future.

It resuscitated theatre by taking its 'mobile theatres' to remote places of Sri Lanka that do not have theatres or even halls to perform in, and it taught people to appreciate good theatre craft.

It also built up a base of young, trained, talent for Sri Lanka's Sinhala and Tamil theatre.

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