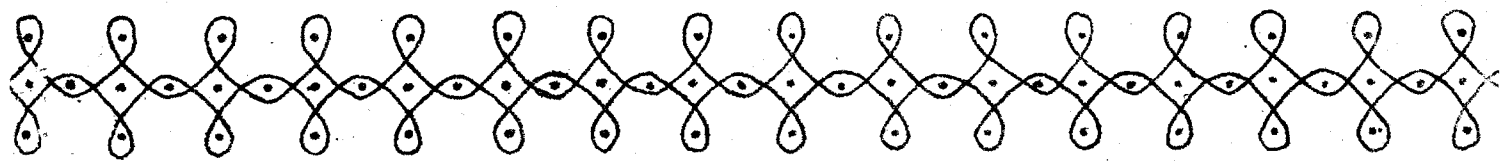


# THIRD EYE



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A Sense Of Distancing  
by  
Prof. Karthigesu Sivathamby

A journal from the English Forum of this University is in the order of things. Here in our University we have two groups of actively interested people who need a forum for their ideas and problems - (a) those who teach English to aspiring students, amidst a socio-cultural milieu in which discussion of its own socio-political problems reigns supreme and (b) those who are studying English to know more of its expressive traditions and heritage so as to enable them to relate their local experiences to a wider frame of reference.

We come to English through our historical experience as a 'colony' and subsequently English as a window to the modern world of technology and communication.

The 'colonialist' experience has been one of studying/known English in terms of its own (Anglo-Saxon) culture. But given the fact this had been & virtually the first language in our educational system, there also has been an acculturation, if not an indigenisation of English which makes it an integral part of our linguistic experience. It is not merely a question of expressing in English, it's something more, a mode of feeling/ thinking in English.

English thereby has been able to provide us with a sense of distancing (while being available to us, it's not 'ours') which enabled us to see and feel about things/events/happenings in our midst in a slightly objective manner. This has enabled us to look at our own culture rather differently. Telling/expressing things in English has enabled us to develop a keen sense of observation (and objectivity too). This is well demonstrated in our reading of those written on our culture/milieu, in English. The writings of R.K. Narayan, Kamala Markandaya, Balachandra Rajan, Alagu Subramaniam, T. Ramanathan, J. Vijayatunga and others when read by us (the indigenous reader) provide us with an objectivity of a life within which we are subjectively 'immersed'. This has been significant also for the writer, for, when he records in English what he lives through as a 'native', he is able to see this life in a better way. This is perhaps the reason why some of the English writers (by this I mean those writing in English) are able to express the agons and contradictions that are not that clear at a unilingual level. I feel that this sense of distancing and of objectivity have produced in our writers in English a depth and universality. In more than one sense, they have rediscovered our lives and us. The achievement of writers from the various African states (Nigeria, Gambia etc.) and from India amply prove this.

English has had this rich variety. Speakers of other languages when writing in English have been able to record their experiences with an incomparable sense of sensitivity. Conrad could be cited as an example.

Getting to know this tradition of English literature provides us with a

more appropriate way of studying it -- to get on to an international/universal sensibility through national/local expressions.

The contents of the THIRD EYE indicate that English is being approached in this manner i.e. we get to know the outside world through our own experiences. The idiom so to say becomes ours -- thus we have the Third Eye, in its figurative sense.

I am glad to find that the Third Eye has ~~contributions~~ contributions, creative and critical. Of the creative ones, the reproduction of T.Ramanathan's 'The Biggest Census In The World' is a very welcome one. He should be made known to a wider circle.

I am glad to find the critical ones are adopting a particular line of approach. I think we have been lacking this so far in our English writings. To what extent are the Sri Lankan English writings representative of the multi-cultural life in Sri Lanka? To ask this was to get misunderstood. But I do find Suresh Canagarajah articulating the 'other' point of view very well, the hitherto felt but unuttered.

One word about the poetry. I find S.Pathmanathan, one of our promising poets in Tamil now, rendering his Tamil one into English. On the whole the poems here make a good start in the effort towards 'universalising' experiences specific to our situation. Given the current situation in the ethnic-striven Third World countries, I am sure those who are familiar with 'Commonwealth Literature' would find many meeting points of sentiments and sufferings.

Perhaps the most agonising dilemma for the publishers is to be definitive about the target group of the THIRD EYE. There are two sets of people who would be interested in this little journal - one, those living within the Jaffna context and are interested in expressing themselves and the other, those who are interested to know what's happening here, the literary developments et. The former would insist on more creative writings and more information on the contemporary literary scene in other parts of the world and the latter would like to know about the overall development in Tamil, how it is coping up with contemporaneity creatively. For Tamil in South India, there is not much that is done to communicate these developments. What is being done is done understandably within an all-Indian context. But in the case of Sri Lankan Tamil writing, hardly anything is known to the non-Tamil speaking world. Unfortunately we do not have any Sri Lankan level efforts to provide me with a balanced account of what is happening on both sides of the (Sinhala/Tamil) ethnic divide. The role of THIRD EYE in this context is a formidable one. It has got to give at least a bird's eye view of the creative responses in literature to the agonies and sufferings that people undergo here.

The English Forum has a formidable task. With the type of guidance it has editorially (from Suresh Canagarajah), I am sure the English Forum and the editors of the THIRD EYE will live up to the expectations of its members.

( Synopsis of the talk delivered on 31.7.'94 on the occasion of the release of the second issue of the THIRD EYE - a publication of the ENGLISH FORUM of the University of Jaffna ).

## The Generations

by

A. Santhan

The task of teaching these students is two-fold, because from their first standard to the O/L or A/L classes they had been taught in the mother tongue. But when they come to tertiary educational institutions like this college, these students are expected to study in the English medium. The reasons are foreign exams and foreign employment.

True - it is a two-fold task, first to make them acquainted with the medium and then with the subject .....

Ragu was distracted from his thoughts by the noise of footsteps. Students were coming to the lecture hall. He got ready. The lesson for the day was on 'Damp-proofing'.

He surveyed the students and being satisfied they were ready for the lesson, he said: "Today's lesson is Damp-proofing.. " and posed the first question: "What do you understand by the term 'damp'?"

"An Anicut.. " came the reply, after a while.

"No.." Ragu smiled and continued.

"Let's look at the words 'Dam' and 'Damp' .. They are different .." he started explaining and got absorbed in the subject. What is Dampness? Why is it harmful for a building and its occupants? What are the different ways by which it can infiltrate into a building? How can it be prevented? ...

Explanations flowed. He had been delivering lectures on Building Construction for many years and therefore this seemed natural to him.

Ragu continued, "What do you mean by 'Proof'?"

He paused, waiting for an answer.

"Establishing.." the reply came in Tamil, from the student at the back.

"True, but that is not what is meant here... Anyone else? .... none .. Okay, it means 'Resistant' .... " again he started explaining what resistant meant, in this context.

Then he posed another question: "Give me an example of 'Proof' used in this sense."

He looked at his wrist watch, intending to provide a clue. It's so easy, the answer is there, probably. Water... Shock...

Four seconds passed.

"Sir.. "

"Yes..."

"Bullet- proof" came the answer.

( a transcreation )

# A WORLD IN A FISTFUL OF SAND

by

S.Vilvaratnam

My son who was playing with sand  
Came running up to me  
Unclenched my hand  
And thrusting a fistful of sand  
Into my palm  
Ran off  
Strewing the blossom of a smile.

The wet sand chilled  
My still open hand  
A world blossomed  
In the fistful of sand  
And a white embryo sprouting wings  
Began to toddle down it.

A 'mini' State in the compound  
Where proudly I reigned, my voice my sceptre,  
My forefathers rejoicing at gatherings,  
A full-blooded civilisation, a way of life  
Strode along the fistful of sand.

Today before our very eyes  
Sharded everything lies  
Gauged is the land  
We dangle in the void,  
Our laboured breath hardens,  
Sticks in the throat.  
Is such respiration life?  
The sand in the fist  
Trickles down  
In the momentary weakness of memory.

'Will everything slip out of our grasp?'  
My troubled glance  
Falls on my son  
Playing with sand.  
Once again my eyes glisten

Under a mango tree  
That has put forth new shoots  
Lovingly he kneads the sand,  
Builds a temple, worships it.  
Stoops, picks up a handful of sand  
And smears it, holy-ash-like, on his forehead.  
Straightening up he sprinkles some verses  
From the thevarams  
Much moved, transfixed I stood  
Resolved to await  
His hands' action in Time.

(Translated by J.Raj.)





It has been claimed more than once in certain circles that English learning has opened out windowson the world and widened our horizons, that it has brought about a distancing that helps us with other useful perspectives. While accepting these broad claims one istempted to make some reservations. It is reasonable to have a closer look at the other side of the coin too.

An exhaustive study of all the aspects of this question is, of course, not my present concern. I would like to lay my fingers on one or two issues in the field of Tamil writing and reading in this connection. One is the outgrowth of a certain sort of scholarship inour midst which passes for authoritative understanding and competence. This sort of scholarship seems to hold that acquaintance with anything or everything of a Eurocentric and/or occidental nature is the be all, <sup>and all of literary study</sup> and criticism. And evidently, this outgrowth is one of the side-effects of Education through the English medium.

No one disputes the healthy influence that ensues from intellectual pursuits aided by international istruments of communication. It broadens the field of vision ; it helps eliminate some impediments on the way of disinterested appreciation of qualities and values; it frees you from certain prejudices inherent in a total immersion within a singleunilingual cultural environment; in a way, you are given a chance to breathe some fresh air and enjoy a dose of direct sunshine. These, definitely, are the plus points.

When we look back on the Tamil literary scene from the beginning of this century through the fifties up to the nineties, we do come across personalities who enjoyed exposure to intellectual philosophical and cultural developments taking place beyond our immediate neighbourhood. We also note that these luminaries had the commongood at their hearts and were helpful enough in sharing these ideas with their kith and kin, with their compatriots. In this process of sharing and propagation of the somewhat unfamiliar ideas and concepts, at least two kinds of transformations had to be resortedto. One was the switch-over of language. These leaders of thought had to render into Tamil what they had gained through English, in the main or other languages, rather rarely. This switch-over itself had a host of problems to tackle. The local tongue had to develop an idiom suitable to cope with the foreign turns of phrases; modes of expressions had to be found or invented to carry the burden of things hitherto not thought of by speakers and writers in the target language.

The other kind of transformation was simplification with a view to facilitate comfortable consumption. A process of familiarisation accompanied by explanatory asides and illustrative exemplification became imperative. In some instances ideas had to be developed from first principles and defined in terms already accessible to the target group. In the absence of such a transcreation, so to speak, discourses were bound to be dismal failures. They refuse to communicate anything whatsoever and remain ineffective and futile. Thus, successful communication gained through the 'English Window' demands an equal or even better competence and mastery of the indigenous medium.

Thiru Vi. Ka. and Rajaji were very good examples of writers and speakers adept in this respect. Thiruvārūr V. Kalyanasundara Mudaliyar, commonly referred to as Thiru Vi. Ka. was essentially a scholar rooted in traditional Tamil learning, writing in a style bordering on pedantry with an inclination for archaic modes of expression. Despite these origins heavily favouring classical rigidity, very soon he was able to develop a knack for making himself understood by the people at large. He could do this because of his dedication to a **cause directly concerned with the education of the common man in modern ideas** and instilling in him an awareness of current affairs. Being a trade unionist and a freedom activist he had the need to reach out to people equipped with meagre degrees of receptivity. Nevertheless, he accepted the challenge and proceeded to process his language for his special purpose- that is to speak direct to the people. Similar efforts came forth from leaders like C. Rajagopalachari and Sathiyamoorthy. The result was quite happy and healthy. The Tamil language which used to find mythological, religious and folk life its only homely element, ventured out into novel strains of cultural politics to vitalise itself for more lively purposes. Popular writers like 'Kalki' succeeded in wielding it as effective instruments, while V. Srinivasan Sarma, a prolific translator of modern thinking from Europe immensely helped in evolving out suitable expressions and neologisms in Tamil. Mr. P. Periasamy Thevar and T. S. Avinashalingam got active in producing the 'Kalai Kalanchiam' the first encyclopedia in Tamil. All these efforts helped a lot in the ~~task~~ task of equipping the ancient language with new vigour and efficacy even at a time when it was virtually locked out of higher educational institutions and universities.

What we have recounted here is the state of affairs more akin to popular and informal activities engendered by socio-political needs and requirements.



The men women (? of letters in the literary sphere were ironically lagging behind in sharpening their linguistic competence to meet the challenges of time. Literary Criticism which could have been a fruitful field could see only a very few writers lingeringly plodding through with reluctant indifference. (S.Chellappa with his 'Ezhutthu', a pioneer journal which sought to specialise in criticism in the early sixties suffered from an overdose of English expressions interspersed in between lines striving to convey poorly rendered ideas in impoverished and inadequate Tamil. Though brimming with a fervour and zeal rather difficult to come by, the writers of the 'Ezhutthu' and similar groups failed to pay sufficient attention to the communicative aspect of what they produced. Perhaps there is a plausible explanation for this sad state of affairs. 'These journals were practically of such limited readership that the set of readers and the set of writers were almost co-extensive. So, the whole exercise could be visualised as an interior monologue of each of the groups. That is to say, they were simply speaking to their own selves all the time. Hence the need to worry about the receptive aspect of the exercise was irrelevant. And hence do we have impossible instances of utterances which remain inert, mute and dead to those poor souls not initiated into the esoteric self indulgence of that collective ethos.

Of course, there were exceptions. One such was Si. Kanagasabapathy who later got attached to the Kamraj University, Madurai. He, for instance, has contributed to the terminological enrichment of a language better suited for intellectual discourses moving with ease through a whole series of echelons at varying degrees of abstraction. He has coined a few terms that have gained common currency and acceptance which speaks for the adequacy/efficacy of the inventions.

Similar innovations have been possible through university teachers impelled by their need to teach in the indigenous medium both in Sri Lanka and in Tamil Nadu. Sri Lankans were ahead of their Indian counterparts in this endeavour. And of course, this was due to historical reasons. An earlier entry into university teaching on the part of Sri Lankans had its reflections on the relative depth and width that could be recovered by Tamil writing. At a particular moment, we Sri Lankans could present us as far more sound and penetrating through our writing. Those were the fruits of an initial impulsive urge born out of a confidence and a sense of strength hitherto not available through our own language in isolation. Not that these potentials were non-existent earlier. They had remained latent and had to be unearthed and cultivated. The newly found potentiality was a source of accelerated activity. But this advantage on the part of Sri Lankan writing and speech was coloured by certain fallacious

conceptions regarding the possibilities and nature of translations. Many of us thought (and still think) that translations are capable of replacing in full our need to go to an original text. This is a patent overestimate of the value of translation. We seldom realise that there is a whole spectrum of texts that yields to replaceability by translation with varying degrees of authenticity. At one end of the spectrum we have technical/mathematical/scientific texts which yield themselves with relative ease to their replacement by translation. The loss suffered in these cases are nearly negligible. But, as we move further and further towards the other extreme of our spectrum, we have what we call creative writing. This is hardly translatable. In fact, Christopher Caudwell in his 'Illusion and Reality' categorically asserts that untranslatability is one of the essential attributes of poetry. May be, that is too extreme a statement. But it is not uncommon to find among ourselves persons who suffer under the wholly unjustifiable delusion that they have mastered what they call world literature. They are happily complacent to imagine that they know for sure what 'international standards' are. I recall with mild amusement the instance of a reviewer who used a phrase which amounted to "the place of 'such and such' by 'so and so' in world literature." Some of us are so simple minded as to believe that the full value of a literary work could be brought <sup>home</sup> through translations and translators. Of course, there are writings of a sort for which translators could do justice to a very great extent. They are works which are neither organically entrenched in the local milieu nor heavily dependent on linguistic idiosyncracies. But it is well worth keeping in mind, the utter futility of translation in the case of works that are idiomatically rich and highly suggestive.

Let us, for the moment, leave aside those things steeped in linguistic peculiarities and come back to matters related to discursive thinking. Advanced and original thought from any quarter is bound to be couched in strange terms, neologisms and fresh modes of expression. Very often the terms have to be specially invented. Unless successful equivalents are found and explained in the target language all efforts at amateurish and random translations become frustratingly ineffective. This is what we experience when we read certain writers who casually throw in words and terms arbitrarily and instantaneously improvised. Little thought is given to the appropriateness and propriety of such improvisations. And few people realise the necessity for any graded introduction and explication of the concepts spoken of.

The pedagogic efficacy of concrete illustrations and the methodical 'teaching' of concepts through positive and negative examples are grossly neglected.

Such neglect at the various levels and stages of understanding results in nebulous, cloudy and airy nothings, which pass for abstruse thoughts. These are also looked upon as sacrosanct and are mistakenly taken to be intrinsically valuable simply because of the obscurity which may or may not be an attribute of their original sources.

This, I feel, is the sort of 'distancing' we are facing at the moment in some circles of Tamil writing on both sides of the Palk Strait. What we badly need is assimilation, assimilation on the part of our 'leaders of thought.' Those who come forward to speak to and write for us should know for sure what they are trying to tell. Let them be clear in their own minds before they venture out to impress upon others. Let some sincerity of purpose prevail.

Cries of objection may arise at this juncture. "How do you know that we are not masters of our thoughts?" Granted. The objection may quite well be valid. Thank Goodness, if it be so!

But what has happened to your proficiency in your own language? How come that you have lost your Tamilian stream of consciousness? Have you given up your practice of speaking out to your own people in your own tongue? Have you risen up to be a specialist of international repute at the cost of your relationship with your poor clientele? The whole episode sounds like a tragic paradox.

Well, be that as it may, such specialist do exist in our midst. That is only a part of our story. The other part is still more tragic. The listeners and readers are simply dazed. They are puzzled and perplexed. They are made to feel ashamed of themselves, ignorant and stupid. They convert their perplexity into amazement, into admiration for their gurus. They don't dare to confess their plight. Perhaps they do feel humiliated, meek. But they piously submit themselves to the spurious exhibition - spurious because it becomes senseless and senseless because the communication is not even one way.

If this is the dead end to which our much valued, hardly earned learning has led us, surely something has gone wrong-may be, many things have gone wrong. The 'distancing' we started with is not merely something which

liberated us from our collective subjectivity and delivered us into that blissful heaven of universality. It has also introduced a yawning gap between our scholarship and our laity. This is something rather serious.

But then, what is the answer? Let our 'leaders of thought' indulge in a bit of self appraisal. Let them see to it that they make themselves competent enough. This is a very reasonable demand from those at the receiving end. The competence should both be in what they intend to tell and how they verbalise it. Distancing should never end up in morbidity. It should never be a cause for inert opacity. It should be made positive. It should turn out to be a blessing in all respects.

R.MURUGAIYAN

### HIS OWN MOON

K.SIVAGNANAM

He felt thirsty. Then he remembered that he had drunk a lot of water only a few minutes ago. Yet he felt thirsty as though he had'nt had water for. Why was this? He could'nt understand.

As he lay looking at the moon in the sky, he felt detached from everything. He turned over, and he could still feel the thirst. Remembering something he again turned and lay on his back and looked at the moon. The moon was as usual, cool and silent. He loved coolness, especially that of the moon.

He also loved the cool water his mother brought in the Karuvu clay pot and kept under the shade of the lime tree on coconut husks firmly set in the soil. He loved to dip the chembu into the pot and drink the cool water.

Any body would say that he loved cool things. Yet he didn't like ice-cream. But he loved the cool water as he drank from the chembu listening to his mother speaking.

That was a full moon night. "The moon is so cool and gentle ..... like mother' he thought. Around the moon, in patches here and there, like a split white melon, beautiful clouds stood still. Watching the clouds, tears gathered in his eyes. He felt as though he had lost something precious. "Why do I feel so sad when I watch something I love?" he asked himself. He closed his eyes and thought ..... like a child praying to God.

He knew he had seen those clouds somewhere. He took one deep, slow breath and then remembered. "Yes, the cabbages that grew in the backyard... of our compound. .... so round..... so rotund....." "Cha.!" he sighed. This time the harvest was great. If father wore his turban and stood in this garden, it appeared so very much like this moon from a distance. Now he was angry with himself. "Why did I want to look at the moon?" He couldn't fall asleep nor could he watch the moon, for his thoughts kept darting back to the cabbage garden disturbing him.

He was around twenty four or twenty five yearsold. Anyone seeing him lying in the yard looking at the moon might take him for a poet, but they would be wrong. For him the moon was like his mother ..... cool..... that was all. Whenever there was a moon he was sure to be there in the yard, gazing up at it, but there was no poetry nor were there any stories. Then why was he looking at it? He didn't know himself. He never gave it a thought, he didn't care either. He loved the moon and the Salem Mango tree and he loved lying down there on the ground. Did he like the place because there was a good breeze? No, he didn't like the blowing very much. The sound of the blowing wind somehow annoyed him. Yet he loved the coolness of the tree. He didn't know why.

When he returned from his garden in the backyard he drank water from the clay pot until his stomach was full. Then he would lean against the Salem Mango tree. Spreading a cloth on it to rest his tired shoulders. An hour like this would refresh him and then he would go to take a bath.

He would draw big bucket-fuls from the well which had a high waterlevel. It was convenient and he loved bathing there. But ..... these past few days ..... The thought itself was so hateful that he felt irritated. He stared at the moon.

When he came in after the bath, his mother would have his lunch ready in the big plate, the plate she reserved exclusively for him. She would heap rice on it with curries and fried salted chillies. His mother loved Odial puttu, but he didn't like it much. He wouldn't have anyone chattering as he ate, not even his mother. His plate should be full of rice. He didn't like to be served a second time in between. His mother knew he was too lazy to sit cross legged on the floor, so she would have a low wooden seat ready for him, and he would sit on it and balance the plate on his hands. His mother would sit looking at him as he ate. If she wasn't there he would get up half way through the meal and go hungry.

His aunt's kitchen was right in front of him and as he became aware of it he looked away from the moon. The Salem Mango tree was not there. The lime tree, the clay water pot beneath it, the cabbage garden, his well and the huge bucket, the wooden seat and his big plate..... nothing was there. This



repulsed him and he could'nt bear to look at the moon, his moon. He was overwhelmed by a tiredness, a tiredness which he had never felt even after a hard day's work in his cabbage garden. He turned over and started at the moon again.

'Why thambi, come in and lie down will you, What will people say if they see you lying in the yard. The front room is yours and there is a bed and a good mattras for you' his aunt called him. He felt sorry for her. 'Poor woman'. He did'nt deny the fact that she was very hospitable. Yet her call only made him want to run away from there. He got up looking at his mother and went in without a word. He fell on his bed and shut his eyes tightly. The memories of his home, the well, the garden and the mango tree and himself beneath it and the moon above still haunted him... Only sleep refused to oblige him.

'Are you asleep, thambi? There's a letter from your brother' said his mother coming in. She had been awaiting that letter for sometime and she had told him the news twice or thrice already. She started reading the letter aloud and then her voice faltered.

".....Amma, there is trouble here also. Swiss has decided to follow the example of India and send back the refugees. People here are wondering what to do. I'll try to come before we are sent. The thought of coming home makes me want to start immediately. The Puliady junction, the Arasady bridge and the tank by the side, the sowing, the keeping watch and the hunting ..... I remember all ..... whatever said and done Amma, nothing as good as our own country. Be that as it may. I understand you people have been displaced and are now living with Aunty. I hope all facilities ....." his mother's voice drolled on, but nothing entered his ears.

"Every man should have a right to his own home and country. As long as no one claims such things all to himself ....." as his thoughts ran on these lines he suddenly wanted to look at the moon. He came out and looked up.

Translated by

Lukshmi Shanmugam



Puram 379

(New Version)

I didn't go for Nathan's funeral. The body couldn't be found, it was part of the blood-muddied earth at Kilaly. In fact his whole group had entered the Hero's Paradise, and what was left of their bodies, were mere names. I could sit and watch the people going to the funeral. The mother would be sitting in the corner of the parlour, the hut. The people enter for their gossips.

She would remember them all, but wouldn't care for them any more. She had heard them as they talked about her family. Two sons dead in the war, the father arrested by the Indian Army and shot dead. The Indians had mercilessly aimed bombs or was it 'Lalith Athulath Mudali whose Chinese bombers dropped those barrel bombs local version of the Vietnam war Napalm. Nathan had fought with his group and only he was gravely injured, his intestines had come out and he was rushed off to the hospital. It was then the people had said. "It is the god's revenge on the family". She was going to Our Lady's church. It was her real parlour. She was mostly there specially as she saw the list of the family members on earth decreasing. The daughter, a young girl, also had died. There was no consolation for her. The boys had gone, one by one and joined the freedom fighters. Even the last one had gone off to fight for the land. Her husband was a poor farmer. Now there were no more members at home. She was alone, nearly starving.

I was on the way to the church, she came running to me and said "daughter is what this people say true?" I asked "what are they saying?" That Nathan was too hard on the people. He had not allowed any fellings of illegal Timber. "So what," I said, "these trees are our resources, for the security of the land, the rains, oxygen. Nathan is right". But the "timber agents are without a job". "They can collect honey, hunt for roots and berries." You can do it without destroying our national defence fence.

"I don't understand", she said, "They are cursing me behind my back". I am going to pour it out to the Lord. "We fell silent and entered the church. We said the first ten HailMary's ..... The 2nd sorrowful mystery "The scourging of the Lord Jesus at the Pillar" "How about the tortures of those enemies of the movement?" she asked. "Well I too heard may be he was a bit too much on that, a christian can't kill, torture, or main"

"But he is a good Catholic boy, you knew him, you taught his younger brother"

"Yes! they are good Christian boys, but the was - it brutalizes, makes people hard, cruel beast-like"

"Yes! she said "I noticed his feelings towards me had changed. The last time he came in the jeep. He stopped to talk to me at home. I said father was dead, sister, the other brothers I was starving, and had no means to live, couldn't you help?"

"He said, I have not joined the fighters to earn for the family. You manage, you don't need much"

"Why some other fighters families have allowances"

"You don't go begging around, we have our dignity. We must give, not receive" say your prayers well "Lord make me an instrument of your peace, where there is hatred, let me sow love, ..... It is in giving that we receive .....that was the only thing left of his boy's days."

"It is in dying that we are born to Eternal life ....." she was murmuring it now. It was all finished. Now she didn't care for what they said, what they gossiped. He was gone.....

Some people were preparing coffee and serving it around.

She was alone, in a way free, just free from everything except the weight of this land soaked with the blood of her sons and daughters. She didn't hate anyone, not even the invaders of this land. There was peace in her, she sat there surrounded by it and she heard the Tiger radio announcing Lieutenant Nathan "Nares", now major, fought heroically and died gallantly at Kilali, The Voice of the Tigers Salutes the fallen Heroes."

She wasn't exactly listening as there was a new solution singing in her ..... Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee". The vibrations were clear and she could hear within herself a response.....

"Pray for us sinners now and at the the hour of our death." Amen, she said. Yes. /On

Valan

Tamil and English Theatrical Traditions in Jaffna-  
A Biased Comparison

(Text of the Chief Guest's address at the Prize Giving of Tamil and English Drama competitions held by Rotaract Club on 12.07-1994)

Although school level drama competitions in Tamil are quite common in the peninsula, I think this is the first time an organisation has conducted English drama competitions. This is perhaps a rare phenomenon in the whole island (at least we in Jaffna haven't heard of the well known island-wide Shakespeare drama competitions for some years now). If Rotaract is interested in continuing this bold venture, then it must do some serious reflections on the English theatrical scene in Jaffna in order to get some sense of direction. I propose to outline the challenges ahead by comparing the Tamil and English theatrical traditions in the peninsula. I must confess that this is a highly generalized and biased comparison. My argument is that those involved in the English scene have much to learn from the developments in the Tamil scene if they are to build an aesthetically rich, socially responsible, culturally relevant English theatrical tradition in Jaffna-today.

First, let me begin by observing two contrasts related to themes or subject matter.

The Tamil tradition is rooted in our soil, the English hangs rebulcously in the air. It is clear that the Tamil theatredramatizes the issues of our daily life; the English theatre dramatizes themes that are removed from the local people's daily life experiences. The Tamil theatre is so open to the varying socio-political realities of our context. <sup>that it has captured each</sup> ~~that it has captured each~~ changing major issue of our society with sensitivity. Man sumanta meeniyar dramatized the militarization of the ethnic conflict, Entayum Paayum dramatized the loneliness of the elderly in Jaffna when children leave as refugees abroad, and Annai iTTa tee discusses the psychological costs of the war for individuals in the society. Since the English theatre stages mainly drama of Shakespeare and others in the European realist tradition (i.e., Ibsen, Chekhov, Shaw) the subjects are related to their society and culture. Part of the problem is of course that while the Tamil tradition has cultivated local playwrights of considerable merit who can capture the experiences of the society on stage, the English theatre hasn't. Hence the English theatre is unable to dramatize the experiences of the local community.

A second difference relates to the function of both theatres. The Tamil theatre is dominantly socio-political, the English theatre is entertainment-oriented. Formerly, Tamil plays which were socio-political used to carry a subtitle- Samooka naaTakam. But this sub-title is now redundant and therefore obsolete as all major plays are anyway "social drama". The primary purpose of these plays seems to be the conscientization of the masses. Since man SumanTa meeniyar the Tamil stage has attempted to educate the people about the political dilemmas facing the people and to mobilize them for the struggle for their rights. Such "politicization" of the theatre is resented by those involved in the English scene. Not to have any "purposes" seems to be positively desired. Providing an imaginary experience by transporting audiences to alien lands and people is the main expectation. This is not to say that Tamil theatre has no entertainment value. In fact the Tamil scene has effectively integrated entertainment and instruction, aesthetics and politics.

The next set of contrasts relates to form. To begin with, Tamil theatre is influenced by the concept of drama as theatre, while the English tradition considers drama as dialogue. As we might know, drama means "action" in the Greek root, and theatre means "Spectacle". Tamil theatre has creatively used body, space, sound, lights etc. to enact, its plots on the stage. This has produced an aesthetically enriching experience as multiple media are exploited for dramatization. The English theatre, on the other hand, depends primarily on the spoken word. Hence much effort is taken to enunciate the "lines" correctly- that is, by sticking to the original script by being phonetically accurate, and enunciating it as trained by the director/teacher.

The next difference is related to the use of the stage. We must note here that the picture frame stage or proscenium stage is of a particular period in the West and is only one type of stage among many. This stage, associated with the realist tradition, is influenced by the ideologies of the 19th century bourgeois social groups. The commodification of aesthetic experience and the objectifying of perception is reflected by this stage convention which makes a clear cut difference between the actors and the viewers. While the English theatrical tradition is stuck in this stage convention, the Tamil theatre has been creatively experimenting with newer stage conventions to suit its own unique ideologies. So eNtayum taayum which dramatizes the loneliness of an old man forgotten by his children. Who have all emigrated is acted out in the courtyard of a four square-renovated traditional Tamil house. The audience is usually seated on all four sides inside the house; for this reason each performance is usually limited to around 150 people who can be seated inside the house. The effect is quite apt- we get the impression of witnessing the frustrations of such elderly people inside our own houses.

The fifth and sixth differences relate to theatrical influences.

The Tamil theatre is paradoxically more open to western (and international) theatrical influences than the English theatre. While we might expect English theatre to be more influenced by developments in the western tradition, this is not so. English theatre has limited itself primarily to the influences from the Realist tradition of 19th century. A whole array of other developments in the West are ignored. So, for example, Brecht's alienation effect which has almost become a fashion in Tamil theatre after man sumanta meeniyar, is unheard of in English theatre. Similarly, many other theatrical traditions of the West have entered The Tamil scene already. while the English stage here is ignorant of them. Tennessee Williams' 'Glass Menagerie' was presented in translation in the early eighties; similarly theatre of the Absurd was introduced through the play Apasuram.

On the other hand, the Tamil theatre is also open to the indigenous traditions of the Tamil past, while English theatre is alienated from them. In contemporary Tamil drama we often come across dance forms, tunes, lyrics, and conventions such as the narrator borrowed from the indigenous naatttu koottu (i.e, folk dance drama). But for the English tradition any association with the indigenous tradition is embarrassing. Not only is Tamil drama enriching itself by association with the indigenous tradition, but also giving a fresh lease of life to the indigenous theatre. However, not all English theatrical traditions are ignorant of the indigenous tradition for instance the drama of Nobel-prizewinning Wole Soyinka of Nigeria uses dances, masks, and folk songs from the indigenous theatrical traditions of Africa.

Finally, the seventh difference is related to the use of language. The English theatre very strictly limits itself to "standard" English. There is the belief that only a particular type of language is appropriate for theatre. The Tamil theatre on the other hand accommodates a whole range of dialects as they suit the differing situations and characters. But the English tradition sticks strictly to the standard English spoken in Britain. All characters, ranging from the royalty to the beggars are expected to use this English. This language is used also irrespective of geographical differences - plays set in Ireland or America also use this dialect; so is this used in translated Russian and Norwegian plays! To realize the richness with which languages can be employed for dramatic purposes we can again observe Soyinka's example. In Death and the King's Horseman the colonial administrator and his wife speak a British dialect close to the 'standard'. The next rung of educated African characters speak an indigenous English dialect; much from the standard. The uneducated lower rung speak an even more Africanized dialect that is interspersed with many Africanisms and vernacular vocabulary. The masses on the other hand speak no



English <sup>/at</sup> all; they talk only the vernacular. Such use of language fulfills its <sup>/appropriateness</sup> dramatic <sup>it is also realistic and aesthetically effective.</sup>

To sum up these seven differences I have presented the Tamil theatrical tradition in Jaffna as politically committed, socially conscious,, aesthetically creative, culturally progressive, and thus theatrically enriched. The English tradition has been presented as ~~as~~ conservative, non-committal, mechanical, non-experimental and thus stultified.. There are of course very clear historical and sociological reasons for this state of affairs. Realizing such bases on which these differing traditions are built up is important to engineer changes in the English traditions.

The historical cause first. Since the colonial period the English theatre has got associated with the purpose of English language teaching for Lankan students. Drama has been a language teaching aid. Hence the rigid emphasis on standard British English and a refusal to accommodate any other dialects or languages. Hence the emphasis on dialogue and the training in the correct enunciation of the lines. Hence the prescriptive overtones and a refusal to experiment. Hence the dependence on a narrow range of western dramatic tradition and a blindness to other wider sources of influence. This predicament of refusing to treat drama as drama and treating it as teaching aid has cost a lot to the English theatrical tradition. English theatre can develop as theatre only if it breaks off from these narrow pedagogical concerns. Interestingly, the Tamil theatrical tradition too has been considered "educational". But its education is of a wider import-- this theatre, has educated not only the school students (who primarily participate in this theatre) but even the community at large on pressing socio-political concerns that affect the community. Such pedagogical purposes are invigorating to the Tamil Theatre.

To the sociological cause next. By virtue of the currency of both languages, the English theatre is that of the westernized educated middle class while Tamil theatre is that of the masses. This affects the character and ethos of both theatres.

To the sociological cause next. By virtue of the currency of both languages, the English theatre is that of the westernized educated middle class while Tamil theatre is that of the masses. This affects the character and ethos of both theatres. Since the interests, values, life experiences, and culture of the westernized elite are different from those of the masses, the theatre too differs. The middle class Tamils are alienated from the indigenous culture and the harsher realities which affect the masses today. Among the many aspects that help them escape from the violence and tension affecting the common person are the indulgence in entertainment, western culture and education. The Tamil



theatre on the other hand has a clear socio-political function and has to address the day to day challenges affecting the ordinary people. Being in touch with the socio-economic hardships and indigenous culture has proved to be the well spring of creativity that has been aesthetically liberating for the Tamil theatre.

What are the prospects for the aesthetic radicalization and enrichment of the English theatre in Jaffna today? My references to Soyinka earlier would have indicated the different ethos of the African theatre in English. Dramatists like Soyinka and Ngugi are convinced that English theatre in the third world has to keep in touch with indigenous culture and the socio-political realities of the community for its reference, significance and aesthetic richness. Some would go to the extent of saying that the English theatre has a responsibility to develop the indigenous cultural forms and educate the western-educated local elite on the issues affecting the larger community. The ethnic-crisis in Sri Lanka has reached such critical dimensions that even the English educated elite cannot remain aloof from such problems today. The usual argument that since English is a language of the minority it cannot be of interest to the wider audience is not tenable if we consider drama as theatre. That is, if theatre is primarily a visual medium based on action then the language of the theatre should not unduly affect the reception of the drama. Therefore even the English theatre can address the issues of the local community to a wider audience and perform a political and educational function in Tamil society today.

-Dr. Suresh Canagarajah



.20/.

Certainly, in those regions  
Above three thousand feet  
Seated in air-planes hooting among clouds,  
Killers do roam about.  
In these days entrapped in  
Indefinite curfews  
And declarations of war,  
A good poem .....  
Nay, let some one else write it.  
But this is very important now.  
I toil  
In these hot days  
Struggling against strong winds  
You too work well.  
Thanks to our labours  
We had  
The lush garden ever green  
Adjoining our house,  
The palmyrah palms bearing tender fruits .....  
On a fine day vibrant with the scutherly breeze  
Our house and garden were  
Erased off ruthlessly.  
Driven out were we all.  
In the haste of our flight  
Helpless groans of our tiny pets-those kittens  
Did we continue to hear from among the debris  
In that rush, it wasn't possible  
Even to pick up the 'spees'  
Of our poor mom. with failing eye sight.  
When I relate this event  
With sorrow and ferocity  
People say  
Such things had happened to them too.  
To this very day,  
The pungent smell from the armed men  
Burns our nostrils.  
The wild shouts of the forces  
Slit our ears.  
I, simply, don't have the mind  
To stop at scolding, in fits of anger,  
Those pilots

And raising my clenched fist  
At them who fly about  
Dropping bombs at random.  
I want back my home wrested away  
That house and garden-  
I must have them back.  
Not just  
Food,  
Clothing,  
Shelter-  
Security too has become extremely essential.  
Enjoying poetry,  
Watching movies,  
Preoccupation with paintings  
All these are implied herein  
I just can't stand the groans  
of those helpless tiny kittens.

:- S Karunakaran

Translated by R.Murugaiyan

'Naatsaar Veedu' Vs. Proscenium Stage.

"Words strain,

Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,

Under the tension, slip, slide, perish

Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,

Will not stay still."

T.S. Eliot's Burnt Norton

If, as Raymond Williams suggests in his Drama In Performance, dramas are words in performance then one can understand, why — apart from all other factors — various performances of the 'same' play can seem so 'different'.

All this as a prelude to setting down my impressions of seeing two performances of Kulanthai Shanmugalingam's 'Enthaiyum Thayum' (roughly, 'My father and my mother').

The change from one physical environment ( I use this word instead of 'space', to include the audience), can lead to a 'sea change' not 'wonderful and strange' 'but something disastrous.

My first viewing of 'Enthaiyum Thayum' was when it was staged in a 'Naatsaar Veedu' (the traditional domestic architectural pattern in Jaffna). There was a naturalness and an intimacy with the audience which seem to have been lost (inevitably?) with its transference to the proscenium stage at Chundikuli Girls' school, with a larger and different audience.

A friend who, on my recommendation, saw the play at this same 'Naatsaar Veedu', a few days later, told me that it seemed to him like a very good 'tele-drama'.

The playwright told me later that a staging in a different 'Naatsaar Veedu' but with a different, more militant audience was somewhat of a failure as 'static' seems to have disrupted communication; this re-inforces my point about the 'environment', in the wider sense I'm using here.

To come now to the Chundikuli performance, the near-perfect blend of pathos and humour which captivated me at the first viewing seems to have been lost here: there was an imbalance at the Chundikuli performance as the humour appeared to have swallowed up the pathos. A pity, I feel.

Acting-wise, there were some improvements in the Chundikuli staging. Mrs. Suntheralingam played better than earlier. Though Janam's performance as usual, was very good, his attempt to squeeze the tears from our eyes by overdoing the pathos at the end, flawed it somewhat. The behavioural relationship between the brother and the sister was decidedly an improvement on the earlier performance.

Stage-wise there were some striking contrasts; while the 'Naatsaar Veedu' allowed a naturalness, ease and freedom of movement the Chundikuli stage appeared cluttered, with a lot of realistic lumber taking up so much space that the stage looked congested. Symbolic props like the Cactus could have been more effectively employed, I feel. It may have been for better if there hadn't been any musical accompaniment. The music at the end when Janam lay 'dying' was a distraction. Silence would have been more dramatically effective. In the first performance, the theme song was first sung by the girl before a picture of the deity. The religious dimension that this gave was lost in the Chundikuli performance. When the girl sang the theme song a second time at the end of the Chundikuli performance, her voice could have quavered a little but not broken down with a grief which seemed overdone. \* In today's political context the reference to 'Vande Mataram' could have been omitted without any essential loss.

J. Raj

#### GREEN CARD

Lock!  
 The pious bridegroom dressed  
 Like a white man  
 The bride, young graduate  
 Sits  
 With crowding thoughts of her  
 Parents' struggle  
 To buy  
 This  
 CANADA GROOM  
 "Do you know his price?  
 Eight!  
 Eight lakhs in cash  
 With  
 House and property"  
 Boasted a proud relative  
 A Blunt-spoken woman  
 Inquired  
 "What is he?-"  
 "....."  
 "-CANADA?"  
 "Er.....M.....M  
 With GREEN CARD"

- Vaitheki

(Not A Performance Review)

A radical school of anti-psychiatry in the West has convincingly argued that mental illness is a myth (in the bad sense of the word); there are others of the same ilk (R.D.Laing, for example) who go so far as to say that "all of us are mad" and that there isn't a water-tight compartment between 'sane' people and 'mad' people; there are only differences of degree but not of kind between 'sanity' and 'madness'.

Those of us who are yet living in the North-East can't afford the luxury of getting involved in these largely verbal squabbles among psychiatrists in the West. But they are more than verbal wrangles too: both in the capitalist West and the (ex-) Socialist bloc, labbels like 'mad' and 'sane' came in - and do come in --- handy to stifle political dissent and preserve the status quo. Just as diplomacy is a continuation of war by other means, so too soft-sounding and soft-sell 'psychological counselling' can play the same kind of conservative, politically reactionary role, in certain contexts.

There is no doubt among commonsensical laymen that the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka ---- nowadays, a triangular one --- has brutalized everyone and has psychologically traumatized almost everyone in the North-East.

The psychological traumas caused by the ethnic war and the strategies of evasion (subtle and not so subtle) that everyone resorts to, to avoid facing the stark truth which will lead to a psychological break-down are the theme of veteran playwright Kulanthai Shanmugalingan's 'Annaiitta Thee. Eliot's lines from Burnt Norton are relevant here: "Go. go, go, said the bird: human kind cannot bear very much reality."

As a playwright, 'Kulanthai' is certainly no babe; his dramatic lineage can be ultimately traced to the ad-libbing, wise-cracking tradition introduced here, I believe, by the dramatic troupes from South India which descended on our then (improvised) Jaffna stages. In this play too, he betrays (unwittingly, of course) some of that kind of improvised dramatic exchange characteristic of that tradition. Some in the audience felt that such lines have no place in a serious drama like 'Annaiitta Thee'. I disagree: seriousness does not mean solemnity (think of Kalidasa's *Sakuntala* and quite a few of Shakespeare's tragi-comedies). But I feel a few lines of dialogue could be deleted without any essential damage to the play.



The play's the thing of course; 'Annaiitta Thee' is largely in the realistic mode. I, for one, welcome Tamil plays in the realistic mode, if only for the reason that there are so few of them around: what we do get to see are either stylised plays or so-called social plays relying heavily on derivative melodramatic South Indian Tamil films.

This play could not help but be realistic if only for the reason that the ethnic wars being waged here and now in Sri Lanka, not in the South Indian film studios. In such a context, stylisation runs the risk of being thought frivolous.

Before I wind up, a few points of dissent; apart from the appropriateness of the title which the playwright can claim (with some reason) is, as arbitrary as any other one.

Does the playwright have to structure the action in a discontinuous, non-linear narrative mode more appropriate to the cinematic medium?

Has he so little faith in the spectator's imaginative powers that he has to see to it that every bit of action already referred to in the dialogue is re-enacted on the stage? Wouldn't the play's dramatic point about the psychologically traumatizing effect of the uncertainty principle (not Heisenberg's but the UNP's) been better served by leaving certain things open-ended for the spectator to fill in the blanks?

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