THE FOLK DRAMA OF CEYLON

Sarachchandra

Since the first publication of this book in 1952, not only has the folk theatre in Ceylon been revived, but a contemporary theatre finding its inspiration and roots in the styles of the folk plays has been created and has become a vigorous and popular movement in the country. The author does not deal with this most interesting and unique phenomenon in theatre history, but for anyone wishing to understand it and appreciate its full significance, his description and analysis of the various forms of Sinhalese folk drama will provide an essential background. Sinhalese drama is shown here as it evolves from its remote beginnings in folk ritual, and the parallelism with the evolution of the drama in other countries cannot fail to interest the scholar in this field. An attempt is made here to show that the folk dramatic expressions in Ceylon, even in their rude forms, have a character and a fascination of their own, and that a study of them could enrich our experience and knowledge of the variety of dramatic expression in the world.

The author is Professor of Sinhalese Language and Literature in the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya, and is himself a playwright and producer.

" Sarachchandra's scholarly treatment of the development and present expression of the various types of Sinhalese folk plays is in several respects a work of anthropological significance. His descriptive accounts of the folk dramas, based on direct observation as well as on earlier accounts, have been placed skilfully in the historic and cultural contexts of Buddhism, folk Supernaturalism, and diverse Indian influences."

Bryce Ryan in *American Anthropologist.*

THE
FOLK DRAMA OF CEYLON

Photographs by

D. B. SURANIMALA

Assisted by

W. P. SUGATHADASA

Charcoal sketches and other drawings by

LALITHA SARACHCHANDRA

THE FOLK DRAMA OF CEYLON

by

E. R. SARACHCHANDRA

FIRST EDITION – 1952
SECOND EDITION – APRIL 1966

PUBLISHED BY THE DEPT. OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

DESIGNED AND PRINTED AT THE GOVERNMENT PRESS
CEYLON

Contents

List of Illustrations

Preface

A considerable amount of fresh interest has been evinced in the folk culture of Ceylon since the time this book was first published about fifteen years ago, and one might almost say there has been a revival largely due to State patronage of the arts. Hence the task of revising this book has been much easier than the original task of collecting the material was, because this material is now more readily available. Other factors, however, have worked against this, such as the rapid urbanization of the village, and the consequent vulgarization of its arts as a result of the influence, largely, of the cinema. These influences have crept into even the exorcistic ceremonies, particularly the dramatic interludes in them, where one sometimes finds innovations introduced into the dialogues and dances, as well as the costumes.

I must express my thanks, here to Mr. Tissa Kariyawasam, my one-time pupil and now colleague, who helped me with untiring devotion in the revision of this book. His great interest in this field of studies enabled him to sit up many nights with me, watching the ceremonies, taking down the dialogue in short-hand, and making notes of the details. I am also conscious of the contribution made by D. B. Suranimala to the task of documenting the material investigated in this book. Although a busy newspaper cameraman, he was prepared to accompany me at short notice to any village and sit up till morning taking photographs. Suranimala could be left to his own resources, to photograph the most dramatic portions of the ceremonies, while I concentrated on observing them, for he has the eye of an artist and enjoyed what he was doing.

I wish to record here the assistance and encouragement I received from Mr. U. A. Gunasekera, Lecturer in Sociology of the Vidyodaya University, and Dr. Gananath Obeysekera, Lecturer in Sociology of the University of Ceylon, both of them trained anthropologists, to whose advice and expert guidance in this field I owe much. Dr. Gananath Obeysekera was so good as to place at my disposal all the material he had collected, and often let me accompany him during his field researches.

It would not have been possible for me to undertake the revision of this book, both to do field investigations once more as well as have photographs taken, had it not been for the financial assistance given me, through the University of Ceylon, by the Asia Foundation.

I must record here my indebtedness to Devar Surya Sena without whose help I would not have been able to present in western notation the melodies found in the original edition of this book, which are being reproduced here almost in the same form. The position that Sinhalese folk music occupies in the country today is very much due to the efforts of this great pioneer and nationalist who not only undertook

systematic research in the field, but did much to make the then obscure folk melodies known and appreciated both at home as well as abroad. I should also like to thank Professor Karl H. Eschman of the Faculty of Denison University for having kindly gone through the notations and revised them for the present edition.

I cannot conclude without recording my thanks to Mr. Bernard de Silva, Government Printer, who did not regard this as a routine printing job, but went out of his way to make it an attractive publication.

Ediriweera R. Sarachchandra

Denison University,
Granville, Ohio, U. S. A.
20th February 1966.

Introduction to the First Edition

THE following brief and tentative account of the Sinhalese folk play is the result of an interest pursued sporadically and at random over a period of about fifteen years, during which time the difficulties in the way of making a systematic study of the subject became more and more apparent to me. With the rapid urbanisation of the village, most folk plays have either completely disappeared or have changed beyond recognition, so that, to get at the genuine article, one has often to go to remote places. Even in remote places, however, folk plays and similar entertainments have ceased to be a part of the regular village life. In the villages the landed gentry do not, often, have the means to patronise such entertainments, and professional players are seeking more fruitful means of earning their livelihood. The younger people, too, are cultivating different tastes and developing different interests. It is only in suburban areas, where there are a few well-to-do families of small business men who still derive pleasure from these entertainments, that they survive as a regular if not as a frequent feature of the life of the people. Hence, even where individual players still survive among the older generation, the organisation of performances at will is difficult and costly. In the alternative one has to wait till a performance is sponsored by a patron for some particular occasion.

The Sinhalese folk drama cannot, besides, be studied by confining oneself to any particular village, however representative this village may be in respect of the general outlines of its social organisation. Certain types of entertainment are found only in certain villages or certain Korales and are unknown in others. In fact, each village or Korale seems to have specialised in its own group of folk arts, and in addition to such differences there exists a broad division of the arts into those of the Pāta Raṭa (the plains) and those of the Uḍa Raṭa (the hill country). Sometimes the coastal regions appear as a distinct division within the Pāta Raṭa itself. Kōlam, for example, which is a kind of folk entertainment found in the coastal regions, is entirely unknown in the Uḍa Raṭa, and Sokari, found in the Uḍa Raṭa and the Vanniya, is unknown along the coast. Hence the student who wishes to study a particular folk art like the drama must first find out what types of drama there are, and roughly map out the various regions of the Island where they are distributed. This often cannot be done by means of second-hand information or by means of correspondence, because very few educated people, such as might be able to supply the student with reliable information, have ever suspected that there is anything worthy of serious study in the village, or have ever heard, except perhaps vaguely, of the existence of such things as Sokari or Kōlam. Hence the student must be prepared to spend a considerable proportion of his time in various parts of the Island, on the off-chance of obtaining some relevant information.

A fact that dawns clearly on the student, as he becomes more and more intimate with the various types of village drama, is that it is not a subject that can be studied in isolation. The folk drama is so closely knit up with the texture of village life, that one must understand the whole of village life before one can hope to understand the folk drama fully. The drama is only a by-product of activities seriously directed

towards the sustenance of the entire life of the community, namely the propitation of gods and demons, and the performance of magical rites which are calculated to prevent disease, ward off evil, bring plentiful crops and confer general prosperity on the village. The other arts too, are ancillary to this main purpose, and are, naturally, very intimately bound up one with the other. A detailed study of Sinhalese folk cults and the ceremonies attached to them must, therefore, precede any study of the folk drama as such. This in itself is a separate branch of research requiring an intimate knowledge of village life such as cannot be obtained by such methods as sending out questionnaires. The student ought to be in constant touch with the village, and should be equipped with first-rate apparatuses like cameras and wire-recorders, and be able to draw on a fairly substantial research endowment.

My work on the religious background of the Sinhalese folk drama has, fortunately, been greatly simplified by the work of certain European scholars who attach greater value to such studies than we have been doing so far. The most comprehensive among these is the work of Paul Wirz, entitled *Exorcismus und Heilkunde auf Ceylon*, which, being written in German, was not known to scholars in this country for several years after its publication in 1941. Wirz has covered the ground so thoroughly and so completely, in respect of the field he has chosen for himself, that I was able to depend almost entirely on the information supplied by him wherever it was relevant to my purpose. It was sufficient if I watched the ceremonies myself, whenever I got the opportunity to do so, in order to verify Wirz's information at first hand, and to select the relevant details from his systematised accounts of them. Wirz's study is confined to the folk religion obtaining in the coastal villages. Hence it was necessary for me to make independent inquiries regarding those forms of the folk religion that obtain in the Uḍa Raṭa in order to see their connection with those varieties of folk drama that belong to the same parts of the Island.

My description of the folk religion of the Sinhalese, which comprises Chapter Two of this book, is a bare outline in which I merely seek to point to its essential features and to concentrate only on those aspects of it that are of interest to the student of drama. The drama has been traced to religious origins in Greece, Europe, and to some extent, India, and the parallelism here will be noticed by those who are familiar with the subject. The Sinhalese example confirms the thesis that drama in ancient and mediaeval countries, has sprung from ritual dancing. But from the ritual dance to the fully-fledged drama is a far cry, and many elements contribute to the final development. The Indian example makes this quite clear. It is only in an indirect way that Sanskrit drama could be said to have had a religious origin. What has contributed directly to the form of the Sanskrit drama is that institution which still exists in India and is known in Bengal as Kathakatā—the dramatic recitation of episodes from the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyana* by wandering minstrels. Only the various folk spectacles, such as Rām Līlā and Rās Līlā, could be said to have directly sprung from ritual dancing. These have, no doubt, contributed certain elements to the developed Sanskrit drama.

I must mention that I was able to undertake a systematic study of the Sinhalese folk play only after the University of Ceylon granted me a sum of a thousand rupees to meet the initial expenses. This grant, although small, enabled me to make a beginning in earnest, by either having special performances arranged for my benefit, or by sponsoring performances which were expected to take place but were abandoned due to lack of patronage. The performance of a folk play, however, is rather costly, as a large number of actors take part, besides drummers and accompanying singers, and most of them are scattered in various professions and have to be trained especially for the occasion. A performance of Kōlam, for example, would entail a minimum cost of at least three hundred rupees, and that, too, if a generous host is prepared to allow the use of his compound and would provide the actors with their dinner. A ceremony like a Garā Yakuma or a Gam Maḍuva can never be arranged for the special purpose of studying it, as folk priests do not like to perform such ceremonies unless a genuine occasion has arisen, and since no single individual could bear the entire cost of such a ceremony.

During the past few years there has been a growing awareness, among the English-educated section, that the folk arts of the country must be studied and, to some extent, patronised, in order to prevent their complete extinction. With this end in view, there was formed, in 1950, the Folklore Society of Ceylon, the primary aims of which were to make documentary films and photographs of folk plays, folk ceremonies, and folk dances, to record folk songs, and to commit to writing the oral legends and beliefs of the people, in order to preserve the material on which future studies of village organisation and culture could be made. Since several societies had been formed, after Independence, for cultural purposes of one kind or another, but had achieved little besides sending to the press a report of an annual meeting embodying resolutions regarding various proposed activities, the Folklore Society decided, at the outset, not to seek publicity either as an end in itself or as a means of obtaining financial assistance, and to implement its program as best as it could with the help of the subscriptions of its members. The membership still remains very small, and the Society is hardly known outside a limited circle of interested people but its achievements, during the few years of its existence, are a credit to its prime mover and energetic secretary, Mrs. Theja Gunawardena. The Society now possesses films of Sokari, Saňdakiňduru, Manamē and Kōlam, the last in colour and a colour film of the Kaṃkāriya complete with a sound-track of the chanting and drumming accompaniment. This film of the Kankāriya was taken by the Secretary entirely at her own expense and donated by her to the Society. The Society possesses, besides, an authentic film of a Kaḷageḍi dance taken at Ruanwella, and a film depicting the costume of a Bali Ädurā.

I must acknowledge my indebtedness to the Society for the opportunities I was able to obtain, through it, of watching folk plays in various parts of Ceylon, and of studying them in detail by means of the films in its possession.

The methodology followed in the present study has, perhaps, been revealed to some extent in the above account. Any attempt to understand the Sinhalese village or to show the interconnection between its various activities and the prime motives that drive them, by means of specific inquiries conducted within a limited period of time, has often ended in failure because of the complicated nature of the forces that lie behind such activities. Hence the ethnographer who confines himself to describing what he sees without attempting to interpret anything, often meets with a greater measure of success. One must be steeped in the classical Buddhist literature as well as in the folk tradition in order to see how both have gone to make and mould the attitudes of the Sinhalese villager. Besides this, one must be able to take the standpoint of a practising Buddhist in order to see how a highly philosophical creed, inculcating individual salvation by contemplation on the vanity of life, and having no place for a belief in gods or supernatural beings, becomes reconciled with a system of cults connected with the propitiation of gods and demons, in order to suit the exigencies of day-to-day living. To call this product either idolatry or demon-worship would be to betray a gross inability to understand the mind of the Sinhalese Buddhist. The demon-cults and planetary ceremonies are treated exactly on the level of positive sciences where the performance of certain prescribed modes of action would produce particular results. Buddhists do not so much worship gods as make use of them, and Buddhism says that men are superior to gods in as much as they have greater potentialities for working out their salvation from the cycle of births and deaths. The Buddhist attitude to gods and demons is well evinced in folk ceremonies where they are propitiated. The people congregated display no reverence or awe in the presence of these supernatural beings and the folk priest performs his rituals often quite mechanically. Except when he is actually possessed of the god or the demon, his demeanor is casual. The demons are, in fact, treated to ridicule in the course of many a ceremony, and even Śakra, the king of the gods, is made fun of in an interlude like the Aṁba Vidamana.

In a field like the present one, therefore, one has both the advantages as well as the disadvantages of having living material to work upon. The method consists in the attempt to discover the authentic tradition, sometimes from first-hand, and often from second-hand and third-hand sources. This tradition changes from place to place. Hence the method of deciding upon the reliability of a tradition by seeing whether different traditions from different sources confirm one another, is not always open to the student. In the absence of written documents, he has no other check upon the authenticity of a tradition. The researcher in a subject like the present one has, therefore, to follow more the method of the ethnographer than that of the historian. He must record faithfully the traditions as they exist, with whatever variants may strike him as important. He must obtain the traditions, of course, from those sources where they are most likely to have been preserved in an authentic form, and beyond this he has no criterion for their reliability. As his familiarity with the field increases, the task of recognising and rejecting traditions that are completely spurious becomes easier. Conformity with the general body of information he has gathered would then be his best criterion.

In the instances in which I found folk plays existing as live art forms. I have described them as I have seen them actually performed. The changes that may have been introduced within, roughly, the last twenty-five years, could be gathered, with a fair amount of accuracy, by cultivating the acquaintance of some of the veteran players and leaders of troupes. Where different troupes exist in the same village there is a further check on the information, for in such cases it can be assumed that the tradition, if genuine, should not vary.

For purposes of a study of this nature it is only an actual performance that can be regarded as a first-hand source of information. Evidence gathered from different players, when they corroborate one another, and when they are likely to belong to the same tradition, could be regarded as a fairly accurate second-hand source. In the absence of either of these means one has to rely on even more remote sources such as descriptions of eye-witnesses who have been closely associated with the type of activity we are inquiring about. Written or printed documents have been the least helpful of all sources in this particular study. I do not mean the accounts given by Pertold and Wirz, but original documents such as texts. Such documents as exist today do not go back to any ancient period, and in any case, they do not contain descriptions of performances or instructions on how to perform the plays, and are therefore, of secondary importance at best.

This book suffers from the lack of an adequate number of photographs which a study of this nature must necessarily contain. Since all performances of folk plays and folk ceremonies take place at night, one needs a good camera and flashlight equipment for taking photographs. Many of the photographs reproduced here have been taken for me by my friends who very kindly accompanied me when I went out to watch a performance. Others were taken at the Colombo Plan Exhibition of 1952 by the staff photographers of the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd., and have been kindly lent to me for purposes of reproduction in this book. A large number of photographs in my possession are not fit to be reproduced here. Hence Mr. R. Candappa consented to make sketches based on them, so that an idea of some of the movements and formations could be conveyed to the reader. This book should serve as a rough guide to the student of the future who, I hope, will have the equipment necessary for making an adequate study of the subject.

I wish to add a note on the method adopted in transcribing some of the folk melodies and the dramatic music in staff notation. It is true that staff notation cannot be used for accurately transcribing oriental melodies, but in a sense it is true that no system of notation, not even that used in India and Ceylon, is completely suitable for the purpose. The music of India and Ceylon, including classical music, belongs to an oral tradition, and it has developed all its technicalities within this tradition. A singer, therefore, never renders a melody in a set manner, and seldom renders it the second time in the exact manner in which he rendered it the first time. The set melody is, therefore, a bare outline, which can vary within a prescribed time-structure and a prescribed melodic pattern. This applies to classical music and all types of music derived therefrom, such as dramatic music, and in a lesser degree to folk music

as well. The basic melody is the mere skeleton which the singer must endow with flesh and blood. It is only this skeleton melody that could be written in any type of notation, whether western or eastern.

Genuine difficulties arise only when transcribing classical Indian melodies in staff notation, for the scales used in classical music do not often correspond to the western ones, and staff notation does not have signs to represent the *śrutis* or microtones that enter into certain classical *rāgas* or melody-patterns. But, in fact, even the eastern system of notation, which corresponds to the western Tonic Solfa system, does not have any signs by which microtones could be represented. Microtones are always regarded, not as independent notes, but as variants of the pure notes, which are seven in number as in the West. The singer or performer knows which microtonic variant he should use rendering a particular *rāga*. Hence staff notation can be used for the transcription of even classical Indian music, and a high degree of accuracy could be achieved by devising certain signs to represent the microtonic variants on the lines suggested by E. Clements.[1] Methods of indicating the various Indian melody ornaments have also been suggested by Alain Daniélou.[2] Staff notation could be easily used internationally, since it does not employ the letters of any alphabet, as systems of syllabic notation do.

The transcriptions given in this book ought to convey, to the ordinary reader of staff notation, a fairly accurate idea of the melodies in outline, without, of course, the various ornaments that a competent singer would introduce into them. Some of the drama songs are based on classical *rāgas* but in rendering dramatic music singers always use the scale of pure notes, and the accompanying instrument is the tempered harmonium which cannot, in any case, produce the *śrutis*.

Sinhalese melodies are played in one or more of three speeds, fast (*druta laya*), moderate (*madhya laya*) and slow (*vilambita laya*). I have not indicated the speed in this manner, but the reader should be able to approximate the correct tempo of the pieces if he regards the crotchet as having a duration of about one hundred and forty beats a second. In writing the melodies I have taken the crotchet as equivalent to the *laghu mātrā* of our system of music. It is important to note that the time-signatures are not meant to be interpreted in the usual manner in which they would be in normal staff notation. In each time-signature, the figure below indicates the quality of the pulse or *mātrā*, and the figure above indicates the number of such pulses to a bar. The accent or beat is, except when otherwise marked, on the first note of the bar, that is, the bars have been so divided as to have one beat each. The time-signatures $\frac{6}{4}$, $\frac{6}{8}$, or $\frac{6}{16}$ do not indicate compound duple time any more than the time-signatures $\frac{3}{4}$ or $\frac{3}{8}$ indicate simple triple time. The time-signature $\frac{6}{8}$, for example, would only indicate that there are six *mātrās* of quaver duration to the bar, and the time-signature $\frac{8}{4}$ would indicate that there are eight *mātrās* of crotchet duration to the bar.

---

[1] See *The Ragas of Tanjore* (London, 1920).

[2] Northern Indian Music (London and Calcutta, 1949).

Regarding the key-signatures, I would like to mention that when the melodies are in scales corresponding to western ones, I have used the key-signatures that would normally indicate such scales. When the scales do not correspond to any that are used in western music, I have merely indicated the tonic and used accidentals throughout the piece.

I have also to draw the attention of the reader to the fact that I have recorded the songs as they exist in one particular tradition, and have not made any attempt to compare different versions of them. The *Nāḍagam* songs have been transcribed in the manner in which they are sung by Charlis Gunasingha of Balapitiya, and most of the Nurti songs follow the rendering given by Mr. Wilmot P. Wijetunge of Matara. I am aware that different versions exist, and even about recent songs such as those in the plays of John de Silva there are differences of opinion. Mr. Devar Surya Sena, for example, has a version of the Nāḍagam classic *Kovulan kiňduru nada mihiri*, which is different from mine. In such cases it is not possible to say that any particular version is the authentic one. Perhaps the research worker in folk music will one day make a standard version by comparing the various versions existing in different traditions. Until such time as several versions are compared, we have no grounds on which we can decide upon the authenticity or otherwise of a particular version.

CHAPTER ONE

THE CULTURAL BACKGROUND

The folk play and religion

The Sinhalese folk play, as it exists in the villages today, is still so closely associated with the ritualistic practices of the folk religion, that it is hardly possible to discuss the one without discussing the other. Many of the plays are still in a rudimentary stage in which the dance has not yet become drama in the strict sense of the word but one can still distinguish the play, which is performed for no other avowed purpose than that of entertainment, from the dance that is performed for ritual purposes. Some of the plays, at any rate, are so similar to the ritual dances, that it is very easy to see the process of evolution. At one end are the elaborate ceremonies connected with the worship and propitiation of the numerous deities that control diseases, bring good or bad luck to the crops, and govern natural phenomena, and at the other end are the plays approximating, in varying degrees, to drama. Between these we have a number of short interludes of a dramatic nature, performed ostensibly for entertainment, but having closer connections with the rituals than with the plays proper. These interludes are meant to provide comic relief at a time when the all-night sitters begin to nod. But, although, in parts, they do provoke a certain amount of amusement, the performers are aware, at least in the case of some interludes, of their ritualistic significance and the sanctity attached to them. It may be that some of them had no ritual purpose at all, but that others had such a motive is almost certain. These interludes provide the links between the religious ceremonies and the plays proper.

I am not suggesting that the above is a chronological order of development. That the interludes are later than the ceremonies, we may safely surmise. But it is not the case that all the folk plays emerged after the interludes, or even that they arose directly from them. In certain cases the plays seem to have sprung directly from the ceremonies themselves. The order of evolution stated above merely suggests, that, at the beginning certain integral portions of the ceremonies lost their ritual significance, and were continued to be performed for their entertainment value, and that, perhaps, other episodes began to be added to them for a similar purpose. These dramatic interludes may have provided the pattern for some of the folk plays, but it is certain that they contributed several elements to their constitution. It is due to the presence of these elements in the folk plays that we are entitled to regard the interludes as providing the links between the ceremonies and the plays.

The folk religion and Buddhism

The life of the Sinhalese village is governed, not only by Buddhism, but to a much larger extent, by the folk religion as well. Though Buddhism is the predominant faith of the people, a great part of their lives happens to be ordered by beliefs and

practices which are really not of Buddhist origin. The reason for this is that Buddhism is different from every other religion. It is anti-ritualistic and therefore, largely non-congregational. It stresses individual salvation, and inculcates no belief in God or gods. It aims at solving the ultimate problem of sorrow and the recurring evils of birth, old-age, disease and death. It is not directly concerned with helping man in the difficulties he is faced with in his material existence. Hence while Buddhism profoundly influenced the general attitude of the Sinhalese to life and its problems, giving them a characteristically different outlook on what are known as the ultimate questions, it left them more or less free to seek other help in their day-to-day business of living. Buddhism interfered little with the lay life of an individual, unlike, for example, Hinduism. The life of a Hindu would be controlled, from birth to death, by a string of obligatory ritual, presided over by the priest. Many important events in the life of the average Buddhist, on the other hand, are governed by ceremonies which are connected with folk-cults which, in their origin, could be regarded as non-Buddhistic.

The fact that Buddhism had little prescribed ritual for the lay life made it easy, and in some senses, necessary, for the folk religion to step in to fill the gap. It provided the layman with the means of solving his practical problems, that is, it gave him ceremonies for ensuring the success of his crops, it showed him how to propitiate the deities that cause disease and famine, and it opened up ways of gaining favours from the powers that control the elements. Its priests interceded between man and the unseen agencies, and performed benedictory rites for him in the crises of his daily life.

Thus there sprang up a curious relationship between Buddhism and the folk religion. The folk religion is based on a belief in supernatural beings and the efficacy of prayer and ritual. Strictly, there is no place in Buddhism for such beliefs. But Buddhism had to adapt itself, from being an individualistic and monastic creed, to a religion serving the needs of an organised lay community. What it did in Ceylon, was, therefore, to allow the people to go on with their usual practices, which they found useful to them in their daily life, and to make them turn to Buddhism for guidance in moral conduct and in matters concerning man's final destiny and the after-life. Instead of absorbing non-Buddhist beliefs and practices, and thereby tainting the original creed, as it did in most other countries, Buddhism came to a different kind of compromise with them in Ceylon. The gods and demons of the folk religion were looked upon as mere instruments whose help man could obtain in the ordinary business of day-to-day living. They were all subservient to the Buddha. In a sense, man was superior to the gods, for the gods cannot acquire "merit" (*pin*) by doing good deeds and thus obtain final salvation. They must be born as mortals once again before they can strive for Nirvana, and while remaining gods, they must depend on human beings who can "transfer" at will, to the gods, the merit they obtain by doing good deeds. The priest was a man who could exercise power over supernatural beings by virtue of his knowledge of certain rites and rituals. When these rituals are performed, these supernatural beings have merely to obey. In some cases they are even cajoled

and cheated into the service of man. The priest is employed for such purposes, and he is by no means to be confused with the holy monk of the temple who leads the higher life of contemplation, directing his energies towards the eradication of the passions. His is a life that has to be emulated. He sets the ideal, and although it may not be practicable for every one to follow his footsteps, it is everyone's ambition to do so.

Thus, although Buddhism did not come into conflict with the folk religion, we find it attempting, in a small way, to take the place of the folk religion in the lives of the people. As this had to be done carefully, and only to a degree that would not affect the true spirit of the teaching, Buddhism had to make some kind of alliance with the folk religion and to absorb some of its outward forms. The process began in India, where already Buddhism had absorbed some of the beliefs of its Hindu environment. The Gods of the Hindu Pantheon were admitted into its fold, and with these, a large part of Hindu mythology and beliefs about heaven and hell. Indra, the boastful Hindu warrior-god, became Śakra the pious defender of the Buddhist faith. Hindu beliefs about the departed became incorporated into Buddhism. The worship of the *cetiya* and the *bodhi* tree, originally beliefs belonging to the animistic stratum of Indian religion, became part of Buddhist ritual.[1]

The process that began in India continued in Ceylon as well. Dr. S. Paranavitana[2] has adduced considerable evidence to show that there were cults of an animistic nature in Ceylon, before Buddhism became the official religion of the people of this island. Judging from the similarity of some of these cults with those that existed in North India about the same time, and the identity of some of the deities, we may infer that the cults were transported here by the early Aryan immigrants to the Island. From Dr. Paranavitana we also gather the important fact that in the early days of the arrival of Buddhism in Ceylon, there was a certain amount of fusion between these animistic cults and the new religion, and that, perhaps, missionaries thought it desirable to make a deliberate amalgamation in some instances. Certain Buddhist shrines appear to have been built on spots that were previously hallowed by the presence of the deities of the older religion. An inscription of the tenth century states that the Isurumuni Vihāra was situated by the side of the Tissa Tank the waters of which formed the dwelling place of the spirit (*rakus*) who was converted by Saint Mahinda and was made to be of service to the religion as well as to the world[3]. Mahasena in the fourth century A. D. is said to have constructed a *cetiya* on the spot where stood the shrine of Yakṣa Kālavela, and the Thūpārāma itself was situated in the precincts of a shrine dedicated to the Yakṣa Maheja.[4]

The institution of *pirit* is one of the more conspicuous examples of a ceremony of a magical nature being absorbed by Buddhism. The *suttas* used for this purpose exist in the Pali canon itself, and this makes it likely that in some form, the practice of reciting them for benedictory purposes began in India. However, it seems to have been mainly in Ceylon that the practice took on the proportions of a large-scale

---

[1] Paranavitana, *Pre-Buddhist Religious Beliefs in Ceylon*, JRASCB Vol. XXXI.
[2] *ibid.*
[3] *ibid.* [4] *ibid.*

ceremony. We first hear of it as being performed at the instance of King Upatissa who lived about A.D. 400, when there was a great drought and pestilence. Priests were made to go round the city all night reciting the Ratana Sutta[5].

The institution of the recitation of *pirit* as an officialceremony is probably a result of the influence of Mahāyāna. There are Tibetan ceremonies very similar in character to *pirit*. Today it is performed as a general-purposes charm, on all important occasions in the private life of the individual or the public life of the community. The sacred thread, one end of which is held by the monks as they chant, and the other end by the listeners, would communicate the good effect from the one to the other, and the water placed in the vicinity of the chanting would acquire magical properties and confer prosperity and immunity from mishaps on those who drink it or on those who are sprinkled with it. The thread could also be tied round the arm as an amulet, like the charmed thread used in folk magic.

A few other instances may be pointed out, where Buddhism seems to have incorporated some of the rituals which appear to have belonged to the religion of the folk. In the funeral obsequies of the present day, monks are given offerings of cloth (*mataka vattha*) at the graveside. After *pansil* the relations of the dead person kneel before the monks, with the gift of cloth in their hands, and repeat thrice a Pali sentence after the monks, to the effect that the cloth is being offered to the Saṅgha in the name of the dead person. The chief monk then delivers a sermon on the transitoriness of things, after which the close relatives of the dead person pour water from a jar to a cup. In the meanwhile, the monk chants a verse from the Tiro-kuḍḍa Sutta to the effect that, just as rivers flow into the sea, and just as water reaches its level, whatever is given here on earth will reach the hungry spirits of the departed. Monks are also given alms on the seventh day after the death of a person. Regular alms-givings to monks are also held three months and a year after the death.

These ceremonies suggest that Buddhism had made some compromise, in this instance, with the cult of the dead, which existed among the beliefs of the folk. This cult, widely prevalent in India and forming a vital part of Hindu belief, was probably brought here by Aryan settlers, but, under the influence of indigenous cults, it has gathered round it a large number of rituals. There are charms intended to "bind" the spirits of the departed (known as *perētayō*, Sk. *preta*), because of the harm they work on their relatives. It is likely, therefore, that the offering of cloth and food was originally meant to be for the use of the departed, and that in the funeral ceremonies of the Buddhists, the monk was substituted for the dead men. The offerings of presents to a living person as a substitute for the dead is a phenomenon that occurs in the ceremonies of the Chinese as well, among whom there is a strong cult of the dead.

In the annual pilgrimage to Śrī Pāda too, we see the relict of an animistic practice surviving under the aegis of Buddhism. In other parts of the Buddhist world sacred mountains are honoured as a result of the belief that they have been sanctified

[5] Paranavitana, *Buddhist Festivals in Ceylon*, in *Buddhistic Studies*, ed. B. C. Law.

by the foot-print of the Buddha. Both in such cases and in our own case. in Ceylon, we probably have an instance of an original mountain-deity being "converted" to Buddhism and made the guardian of the sacred foot-print. The practice of making regular pilgrimages to holy places is a Hindu custom which Buddhism accepted very early in its history. But the pilgrimage to the top of the Peak must be made with the help of Saman Deviyo, the Guardian God, whose goodwill is necessary for the success of the undertaking. It is in this that we see the alliance between Buddhism and the cult of a mountain-deity. If Saman Deviyo could be identified with the Bodhisatva Samantabhadra as Dr. Paranavitana suggests,[6] it may have been the case that the animistic god of the mountain was fused with this Bodhisatva during the spread of Mahāyānism in this country, just as local gods like Pu Tai and Kwan Yin became identified with Bodhisatvas in China.

There are also instances where kings seem to have found it necessary, for practical purposes, to institute Buddhist ceremonies on the pattern of Hindu or Mahāyāna rituals, or to clothe non-Buddhist local rituals in a Buddhist garb. The annual ceremony of the bathing of the *bodhi* tree, and the *abhiṣeka* of *stūpas* were very porbably borrowed from the folk religion.[7] The festival of Giribhaṇḍa, which consisted of a ceremonial circumambulation of the Cetiya Pabbata, was probably connected with mountain-worship. It is also well known that a large number of Hindu rituals were incorporated into the worship of the Tooth Relic. A thing of recent occurrence is the transformation of the Perahära at Kandy into a Buddhist ceremony. Originally celebrated in honour of the local deities Nātha, Viṣṇu, Kataragama and Pattini, the Perahära consists of a group of ceremonies connected with the folk beliefs of the people. This group of ceremonies were amalgamated with Buddhism by King Kīrti Śrī Rājasinha in 1775, when he ordered the Sacred Tooth to be carried in procession along with the insignia of the gods.

The history of religions shows us that when a new religion is taken into the midst of a people with a different faith, some sort of alliance does take place between the two religions, but that such an alliance need not necessarily change the complexion of the new faith. The kind of alliance that took place between Buddhism and the local animistic cults in Ceylon, occurred when Christianity was taken to England. Sir Edmund Chambers points out that, according to tradition, the Church of St. Pancras outside the walls of Canterbury stands on the site of a fane at which Ethelbert himself worshipped, and that the Church of St. Paul's in London replaced a temple dedicated to the woodland goddess Freyja who is regarded as the equivalent of Diana. This amalgamation was thought expedient on the part of the early Christian missionaries to England, just as the Buddhist missionaries seem to have thought it here. A letter written by Gregory the Great in June 601, advises St. Augustine not to follow his earlier instructions to break down the original places of worship, but to follow a new policy. He says, " Do not, after all, pull down the fanes. Destroy the idols, purify the buildings with holy water, set relics there, and let them become

---

[6] *Mahayanism in Ceylon*, in *Ceylon Journal of Science* Vol. II.

[7] Paranavitana, *Buddhist Festivals in Ceylon*, in *Buddhistic Studies*, ed. B. C. Law.

temples of the true God. So the people will have no need to change their places of concourse, and where of old they were wont to sacrifice cattle to demons, thither let them continue to resort on the day of the saint to whom the church is dedicated, and slay their beasts no longer as a sacrifice, but for a social meal in honour of Him whom they now worship."[8] Maung Htin Aung says that a similar thing took place in his country as well. "When Buddhism in one of its purest forms," he says, "was introduced under Anawrahta, the great king realised the impossibility of attracting people suddenly to the new faith; so he compromised by recognising the *nats* as Buddhist spirits and giving them shrines in his Shwezigon Pagoda."[9]

These ceremonial accretions merely helped the religion to enter into the daily lives of the people and to integrate the society and enable kings to rule the country by means of a religio-political authority. In no wise did it affect, substantially, the character of early Buddhism, as it did in countries like Tibet and China. The degree of assimilation by Theravāda Buddhism of non-Buddhist beliefs and practices differed in each country, but the manner of assimilation was the same. The monk never became wholly priest, as he did in the Mahāyāna countries. The monk largely remained a recluse, and followed the ideal of not associating with the laity, and, although the tendency was in the opposite direction, this was checked from time to time by powerful movements and by royal edict. When it was felt even among the orthodox, that, while it was strictly in keeping with the teaching of the Buddha for the monk to live away from society, it was detrimental to the religion and to the power that it could exert on the people, the rôle of the monk was split up into that of the *ganthadhura* and that of the *vidassanādhura*. The men who took to the *ganthadhura* learned and taught the scriptures, while the others lived in lonely meditation. Although the former performed a greater service to the community, it was never forgotten that the *vidassanādhura* monks were following the true ideal of Buddhism.

In actual practice, a large number of monks gave in to the temptation to gain power over the people and to win favours from them, in spite of the warning given by the Buddha in the Brahmajāla Sutta, and notwithstanding the *katikāvatas* issued by kings from time to time. They practised medicine, and learned all the arts of sorcery and divination which were branded by the Buddha as "low" (*tiracchāna*). The instance of Śrī Rāhula is a case in point. Even to this day he is regarded as having had a remarkable command over demons, and most of the legends current about him are connected in some way with the esoteric lore which he was reputed to have possessed. Although there seem to have been powerful representatives of the opposite camp, as, for example, Śrī Rāhula's contemporary, Vīdāgama Maitreya, the tendency has been at work up to the present day. The monk in the village is very often the physician of the people. He is, often, their astrologer as well, and on many occasions he would recite *set kavi* (verses containing blessings) and *vas kavi* (verses containing curses). But even when this degeneration took place Buddhism was not affected. Orthodox opinion never confused the two rôles although they were combined in one individual.

[8] *The Mediaeval Stage*, Vol. I, pp. 95, 96.
[9] *Burmese Drama*, p. 17.

During a certain period in the history of the country, the rôle of monk and priest became one for a short while. This was during the reign of Narendrasinha, who came to the throne in 1701 A.D., when the institution of the Sangha completely disappeared, and there arose, instead, a class of secular priests who were not celibate though living in temples. They were called *gaṇinnānse*. They took over the functions of the village demon-priests, and also practised as physicians. As monks were no more, they became the learned men as well. They did not wear the orthodox robe of the Buddhist monk, but clothed themselves in white or in saffron cloth. The *gaṇinnānse*, we understand, were responsible for many of the temple paintings of the period. The *gaṇinnānse's* wife was referred to as *gaṇēgedera*, and his children as *gaṇagedḍiyo*. After the establishment of the Sangha under Saraṇaṅkara, these became terms of contempt, but the fact that efforts were made to re-institute the Sangha shows that the *gaṇinnānses* did not receive the respect or the recognition of the more orthodox. In this short-lived institution, the rôle of monk and priest came very near being combined into one. In other countries, particularly China and Tibet, Buddhism was so completely absorbed by the local religions that it lost its original character beyond recognition. The monk wholly became priest. In Tibet, for example, the rôle of the Buddhist monk and that of the Bôn priest merged into one, and resulted in the creation of the Lama. Guru Padmasambhava who carried Buddhism into Tibet, is said to have had to make several compromises with the Bôn religion on account of the strong opposition he met with. In fact, Waddell remarks of Tibetan Buddhism that it is a " priestly mixture of Saivite mysticism, magic, and Indo-Tibetan demonology, overlaid by a thin varnish of Mahāyāna Buddhism. "[10] In China, too, the Buddhist monk took over many of the functions of the earlier Confucian priest, and officiated in this capacity in a large number of rituals, although, owing to the influence of the teachings of Lao-Tse, the Chinese did not entirely lose sight of the ideal of lonely contemplation and the development of spiritual insight.

Buddhism and the arts

It would be a palpable falsehood to make a general statement to the effect that Buddhism did not encourage the arts, when we know that Ajanta, Ellora and Bagh were inspired by Buddhism, when we see the perfection of the Buddha images of the Gupta period of India and of the Anuradhapura period in Ceylon, and in view of the fact that the greater part of the culture of South-East Asia was inspired by Buddhism. Here, of course, we are dealing with two forms of Buddhism, the more puritanical and strict Theravāda Buddhism, and the broader and more accommodating Mahāyāna. Mahāyāna spread from country to country absorbing all the local cults, and making all kinds of concessions to the customs of the people, often at the expense of the spirit of early Buddhism. Theravāda Buddhism was, as we saw, very slow to make alliances with non-Buddhist practices, and preferred to keep its doctrines uncontaminated, even if that necessarily meant limiting the range of its appeal and popularity. With its ideal of individual

[10] *Buddhism in Tibet*, p. 30.

salvation, it tended more towards solitary contemplation and the attainment of insight (*vidassanā*) than towards congregational practices or participation in community life. Even the stricter forms of Buddhism, however, did not discourage those arts that seemed to conform to the ideals of a life of contemplation, those arts that did not involve the concourse of human beings (the word *samajja*, used in the condemnation of dramatic and other shows, has this meaning of 'concourse'). We know that painting, sculpture and architecture did flourish under the aegis of Theravāda Buddhism, and artists achieved their highest fulfilment in the portrayal of the likeness of the Buddha, whether in stone or on temple walls. The artistic impulses of Theravāda Buddhists flowed into the numerous stone carvings, the bas-reliefs, and exquisite architectural devices that grace the buildings, the ponds and the parks of ancient times. The solitary existence of the monk was enriched, as far as his material existence was concerned, with all that human skill could achieve in the realm of decorative art and sculpture and mural painting. The self-expression that was denied to him in the fields of music, drama, and to some extent even poetry, he sought to gain in the visual arts. He could enjoy the beauty of an image, the colour in a painting, or the workmanship in a stone frieze, without thereby rousing his emotions to a height at which they would be a danger to his spiritual stability.

Here we are able to see, perhaps, why Theravāda Buddhism encouraged certain arts, and acted as a damper to others. The visual arts would both be useful for conveying religious instruction to the people, as well as help in evoking religious sentiment such as might induce a man to give up his hankering after worldy pleasures and seek the higher fulfilment. It is not faith, in the Christian or Hindu sense, that this type of art roused in the hearts of the people, but *buddhālambana prītiya*, or joy in the contemplation of the likeness of the Buddha. The emotion thus evoked would be more of a sedative and restful type, and akin to *śānta rasa*, than the kind of violent feelings that may be aroused by a song, a play or even a forceful poem. The pictures on the temple wall would more narrate a story and win over, by good example, the man who sees them, than embody the deep emotions of the painter and evoke strong feelings in the devotee, as the church paintings of mediaeval Europe often do. Theravāda Buddhist art has, therefore, been described as a narrative art, and not an emotive art[11]. This is evident in the character of Sinhalese poetry, which has eschewed the lyrical, and also in the character of Buddhist songs, which narrate incidents from the life of the Buddha rather than attempt to evoke the sentiments of faith and awe in the listener.

Painting and scuplture, are, however, capable of a great deal of voluptuousness, and could rouse the emotions to a very dangerous extent. Hence it is not the question of the emotions that is most important in our attempt to find out why Buddhism allowed some of the arts and discouraged others. We may divide the arts broadly into two categories, those that may be called individual arts and those that may be styled the community arts. In the first category there would be included painting, sculpture and the plastic arts, which do not involve very much direct contact with people. The painter or the sculptor could, for example, pursue his art in solitude and as

[11] See Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art*, p. 168

far as he is concerned, the communication of his feelings would be over once he has completed his work of art. His products, executed privately and individually could also be enjoyed by people in this manner. But arts like those of music and drama have this essential difference, that they are mostly created by the artist from the inspiration he gets by live contact with the people, and are, in any case, always best enjoyed in groups. They also help towards the organisation of human beings in communities, and cement social life. It is the community arts that Buddhism did not directly encourage, and this can be understood in the light of Buddhism's individualistic and non-congregational tendency.

Although folk drama having religious themes, as well as music and dancing of a sort did receive the patronage of institutionalized Buddhism, in the sense that these arts were incorporated into Buddhist processionals and festivities where large numbers of the laity took part, and at times even became adjuncts to the religious service (*tēvāva*) performed regularly in the big temples like the Daḷadā Māligāva in Kandy, on the whole it may be said that Buddhism did not hold these arts in high esteem or encourage people to cultivate them. In the nature of the case song and dance could not form a part of Buddhist worship in the way in which these arts formed part of, for example, Hindu worship,[12] and as such they could not ever enter into the life of a Buddhist in the same way. Besides this, for the reasons stated earlier, Buddhism clearly enjoins on the monk as well as the layman who follows a code of higher discipline, to eschew all kinds of spectaculae (*pekkhā, visūkadassana, samajja*) in addition to music (*gīta, vādita*), dancing (*nacca*) and dramatic recitations (*akkhāna*). This would, no doubt, influence the attitude of the ordinary layman as well, who would always strive towards approaching the ideal set for the monk. The literature, besides, equates the pleasures of music, dancing and drama with the pleasures of the senses, as something leading to evil and detracting from the ideal of a life free from the passions. Hence we may say that although these arts did somehow find a place in the lives of the people, the ultimate values held up by society as a whole tended to regard them as not very elevating or ennobling influences.

In spite of this strictly orthodox Buddhist attitude, history shows us that at certain periods there was great flourishing of the arts, not only of painting, sculpture and architecture, but of music and dancing as well. We are surer about the Polonnaruva period than even of the Anurādhapura period, for we know that King Parākrama Bāhu the Great was a great patron of the arts, and instituted the famous Sarasvatī Maṇḍapaya, which was, probably an academy of the fine arts. His queen, Rūpavatī, is known to have been a dancer. Besides this, it is well known that his successor, Parakrāma Bāhu the Second, who issued an injunction to monks to refrain from poetry and drama, describing them as " despicable arts " (*kāvyanāṭakādi garhita vidyā*) was himself a poet and a man who spent his leisure in the enjoyment of the arts. Hence we are not sure whether the attitude of disparagement of these

[12] The function that music performs in Buddhist worship is quite different from its function in theistic religions. Music consisting of drumming and playing on the flute (*hēvisi horaṇā*) is played regularly in temples as a service (*tēvāva*), and on important occasions as when relics are carried in procession, or when monks are given alms. This is called a " sound-offering " (*śabda pūjāva*), and is not regarded as an accompaniment to worship or an integral part of the worship of an individual devotee.

arts is due to a puritanism which set in recently. The words for two varieties of drama (*nāḍagam, kōlam*) and even expressions like *näṭum gäyum,* which literally mean "song and dance" have acquired connotations indicating that they are frivolous pastimes, and these words may even stand for any kind of tomfoolery or buffoonery.

The culture of the village

The above discussion might show why, at times, we may be tempted to say that in the Sinhalese village there are two cultures and not one.[13] There is, on the one hand, the culture springing from the rituals of the folk religion. That is, there are the religious practices which fill the individual's domestic life, and the large-scale ceremonies which bring all the members of the community together. A general-purposes ceremony like a Gam Maḍuva or a Kankāriya, for example, harnesses every kind of skill and gives the members of every profession an opportunity of contributing to a common cause. Most of the folk arts of the village spring from these religious ceremonies. The arts of dancing, drumming, singing, and playing the *horaṇā* to the tunes sung, all had their origin in these rituals. The histrionic talents of the villager find expression in the dramatic interludes, masked dances, and plays that emanate from the rituals. The art of the sculptor and the painter, too, would arise from the necessity to have painted images of gods and planetary deities for the execution of the rituals. The carpenter would have to carve masks out of wood and paint them in the likenesses of the demons. The poetic skill of the village versifier, too, would be needed for extolling the might of the deities and relating in rhythmic language the legends concerning their lives.

On the other hand there is the culture emanating from Buddhism, and from what has been said earlier, it will be clear that this culture would be of a different sort. No dramatic art, dancing, or music would spring from it, partly because it does not have the ritual out of which such arts might arise, and partly because of the attitude it took up regarding these activities. But out of the inspiration of Buddhism there emerged the art of the temple painter, and the art of the sculptor who carved the images of the Buddha. There also arose the art of the temple architect, and the arts of the wood-carver and the carver in stone. Buddhism also gave rise to a cultivated genre of poetry and of prose writing, distinguishable from the simple ballads about local gods and legends concerning their origin, which formed the material of the folk poetry.

These two cultures sprang up independently of each other, and flourishing side by side in the village environment, continued, for the most part, to maintain their independence. The Buddhist culture drew its inspiration from a more learned and more developed tradition, and could boast of greater refinement than the culture at the folk stratum. Hence it could afford to despise the crude and less sophisticated folk culture. The temple painter and sculptor regarded the maker of demon effigies as an inferior artist. Even now, a painting is compared to a *bali* image if it lacks refinement, or if it is thought grotesque and loud. The literature took its

[13] Compare Gananath Obeysekera, *The Great Tradition and the Little in the Perspective of Sinhalese Buddhism,* in *The Journal of Asian Studies,* Feb. 1963.

tune from classical Sanskrit writings or drew its material from the religious Pali which dealt mostly with the lives of the Buddha and the Bodhisatva or contained monastic anecdotes. It more or less completely ignored the lay life of the ordinary people. Themes connected with the joys and sorrows, the passions and ties of everyday life were not sufficiently dignified for purposes of literary treatment. Hence neither the attempts of the folk poet nor those of the narrator of village tales were ever regarded as serious literature. With the difference in theme, there grew up also a difference in language between the literature of the elite and the literature of the folk, and the gulf widened in the course of time. For this reason, too, the elite began to look down upon the attempts of the folk, since they regarded these as being couched in a language that was coarse and vulgar and not in conformity with the " usage of the learned ". It is needless to point out that mutual influence was not entirely lacking, but it is certain that it was rare. In some instances, as in the case of the Jātakas, the literature of the elite permeated to the folk stratum and became an integral part of their culture, influencing profoundly their outlook upon life. In certain periods of history, the recluse elite, finding that isolation was of no benefit either to themselves or to the large majority of the folk, wrote down to the people taking stock of their beliefs and incorporating them in the philosophy of the higher religion. The art of the temple painter may have influenced the folk artist if not in the choice of subject at least in his technique and his use of paint and other materials. It has often been remarked that Sinhalese masks are not the products of simple folk artists but the result of considerably advanced technique, and here we see what is probably another influence of the temple artist on the folk artist. In more remote parts of the Island, where the temple artists could not have influenced the folk artist, the masks are still very crude and rough-hewn.

That the folk arts attempted to draw their inspiration from Buddhism is clear from other instances as well. Kandyan dancers sing and dance the Sūvisi Vivaraṇa and *vannam* celebrating events in the life of the Buddha. The words of the Turaňgā Vannama (Dance in Imitation of a Horse), for example, describe how Prince Siddhārtha went into retirement riding the horse Kanthaka. The Daḷadā Sinduva sings the praises of the Sacred Tooth to the tune of the Gajagā Vannama (Dance in Imitation of the Elephant). Folk plays began to depict Buddhist stories like the Saňdakiňduru Jātaka and the Maname Katāva. But in these instances the folk arts merely borrowed their themes and subject-matter from Buddhism, but did not receive any inspiration from it for the development of artistic form.

There is reason to believe, at least with regard to music and dancing, that when these arts came into contact with more developed forms from South India, and also began to receive the patronage of the religion and of the elite, they developed considerably, although in some cases, sporadically. The beginnings of an indigenous tradition in music took place, as far as the evidence available shows, only during the time of the Kandyan kings. The folk music, such as carters' songs, fishermen's songs, boatmen's songs and other songs associated with village toil and sport, are

elementary chants not comprising a range of more than four or five notes, and simple in their rhythmic arrangement. In this body of folk music would be included the equally simple tunes to which poetry is chanted. The *vannam*, on the other hand, do not seem to have existed very much earlier than the time of the Kandyan kings, and judging from their language, their rhythms, and the style in which they are sung, one might easily surmise that they sprang up as a result of some strong Tamil influence during that period. The *vannam*, although melodically still undeveloped, have fairly complicated and systematised rhythmic patterns. Their mode of measuring time by the stressed accent (*tit*) and not by the ordinary *mātrā* or beat, also links them with varieties of Tamil folk music and dance. At the same time, *vannam* display a sort of continuity with the earlier folk music and the poetical chant. What seems to have happened therefore, is that the Sinhalese folk music came in contact, during Kandyan times, and perhaps earlier, with the music of South India, and, deriving inspiration from it, developed on its own lines.

The growth of another body of Sinhalese music, which received the general appellation of *viraha*, a term applied in the Kandyan period to a poetic genre dealing with love and separation[14], may be traced to a similar contract with Tamil music. This music seems to have grown out of the melodies that were originally embodied in Nāḍagam songs, some of which sing of the longings of separated lovers. On their model, other love-songs were composed, based on legends popular among the people. There are a large number of songs, for example, having the Kusa and Pabāvatī theme.

The same kind of melody was also employed for the composition of *Buddha stotra*, hymns in praise of the Buddha, and songs describing incidents in the life of the Buddha. A large number of Jātakas, too, have been put into song, and these are called *varṇanā*. There are, included in this same body of music, hymns to Hindu Gods like Skandha Kumāra or Kataragama Deviyo, and generally known as *bhajanam*. These religious songs are written in a highly Sanskritized language with a large mixture of Tamil words.

Viraha music, as this body of songs is generally termed, is strikingly different from the earlier Sinhalese folk music. It arose, no doubt, as a result of the contact with the Tamil music that came through the medium of the Nāḍagama. The songs have a large melodic range, and a considerably developed structure. Their language is rough and rugged, and bears the unmistakable stamp of the folk composer, and the folk singer has introduced into them the natural linguistic and phonetic changes that would result from their being sung by those untrained in the learned tradition.

The contact with Tamil culture as well as patronage, religious and secular, brought about some interesting developments in Sinhalese music besides those we have mentioned above. For the first time we find, in the Kandy period,the beginnings of a Buddhist religious music, attached to the ritual of the Sacred Tooth. The Daḷadā Sinduva sung by Kandyan musicians to the accompaniment of cymbals (*kaitālam*),

[14] The Kandyan *viraha* consists of measured chants, the melodic structures of which are elementary. They are sung in *vannam* style and belong to the same tradition.

as they sit by the Sacred Tooth during its exposition, is perhaps the earliest example of a tuneful melody sung in praise of the Buddha. It is the same religious impulse seeking to find expression in music, that produced the later *Buddha stotra* and songs like Māra Yuddhaya, mentioned above, although they were inspired by a different tradition.

The same development seems to have taken place in Sinhalese dancing in the Kandy period. What is now known as Kandyan dancing, no doubt takes its origin from the ritual dancing that is performed in honour of the Kohoṁbā Yakā, a god, the worship of whom is confined to the hill country, It is in connection with the cult of this deity that people hold the grand ceremony known as the Kohoṁbā Kankāriya (lit. The Kohoṁbā ritual), a large part of which consists in religious dancing performed in honour of the god. The Kankāriya is a form of *tovil* or demon-dancing. But one could notice at once the great refinement and systematisation of the Kankāriya dancing, as compared with the rather decadent and undeveloped condition of the devil-dancing in ceremonies of the low-country.

It is likely that the original religious dance in Ceylon basically belonging to the same tradition in both the low country and the hill country, came in contact, probably during Kandyan times or even earlier, with some form of developed dancing from India based on the tradition of what is now styled Bharata Nāṭyam. This contact, and the fact that, with the growth of the feudal system, the Kandyan chiefs had their own dancers attached to their households, gave the native dance a great impetus towards development. There is also the fact that the dancers received the patronage of Buddhism itself. The Temple of the Tooth at Kandy employed dancers by the system of service tenure, to provide music daily at the Temple, and to take part every year in the Perahära.

The culture of the court and its circles

Unfortunately, neither the literature nor the historical records tell us very much about the cultural life of the people in the past. The difficulty with the literature is that we can never be sure whether a particular decsription is true of conditions in this country or not. The prose literature, which is largely based on Pali originals composed in North India, seldom makes any direct reference to the actual state of affairs here, while in the case of poetry, it is difficult to say with regard to any particular description, that it is true of conditions here and is not merely an exercise in poetic convention.

Even where descriptions exist, either in the literature or in the historical accounts, these say very little about the lives of the peasants and the large masses. The histories make occasional reference to the life of the king, and all we can do is to piece these together to get a picture, however inadequate, of the culture of the court. Wherever the references in literature seem to fit into this picture, therefore, we may take them as faithfully portraying conditions in this country.

With the exception of the *Sandeśa*, however, the bulk of the poetic literature does not pretend to describe the society of this country. Being based on stories which have their setting in parts of North India, they describe places and persons belonging to a different social background, and we have no right to assume that these descriptions have direct relevance to Ceylon. It is, of course, quite possible that the writers were influenced, to some extent, by what they saw around them, but the extent of that influence can never be measured.

We have to begin, therefore, with the thin outline provided for us by the historical writings, and to fill in the details from the literature, where the latter seems to bear out the information found in the histories. Corroboration could also be sought from other sources such as sculpture, painting, and lithic records.

As it would be natural to expect, the culture of the Sinhalese court has been entirely Indian in the early period, but it is interesting to note that it seems to have continued to be so right through the centuries, the difference being that, in later times, the influences came more from South India than from the North. The fact that the kings became Buddhists and actively patronised the religion, made no change in this state of affairs, for, in his lay life the king was as free to adopt Hindu culture as the villager was free to adopt the non-Buddhist folk culture.

The king was installed as a ruler according to the Hindu custom of *abhiṣeka*, and in respect of his paraphernalia such as the White Parasol, the State Elephant, the State Carriage, the State Horse, dancing girls and harem he was similar to an Indian king. The king had a Brahmin as chaplain (*purohita*) and very probably, brahmins were responsible for at least the secular education of princes. Hindu rites were performed in the court in addition to Buddhist rites such as *pirit* and kings held up before themselves the ideals of *dasarājadhamma* and the laws of Manu.[15]

In view of occasional statements made in the *Mahāvaṃsa* it is not unlikely that Sinhalese kings, although they embraced Buddhism, continued to follow the tradition of *kṣatriya* princes in most of their non-religious activities. They enjoyed water-sports and hunting, and in some cases, celebrated Hindu festivals like the Spring Festival and the Rain Festival (*āsāḷha*). Wickremasinghe opines that the description of *kṣatriya* life found in the *Kavsiḷumiṇa* is based not so much on books as on the personal experience of the writer himself.[16] If we accept this view, on the impression of genuineness which, he says, the description leaves in the mind of the reader, we can obtain a fairly detailed picture of the life of the court of Sinhalese kings from the *Kavsiḷumiṇa*. It is not at all unlikely that just as kings enjoyed water-sports and garden-sports, they occasionally held a bacchanalia of the kind described in this poem. In other respects as well, the court-life described in the *Kavsiḷumiṇa* is Indian in character. A number of technical terms current in the practice of Indian music, are referred to in the poem. The literature of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries also makes similar reference to terms in Indian

---

[15] See M. B. Ariyapala, *The State of Society in Ceylon as depicted in the Saddharma-ratnāvaliya and other Sinhalese literature of the thirteenth century*, Chapter II.

[16] *Landmarks of Sinhalese Literature*, p. 38.

classical music. The *Mahāvaṃsa* mentions instruments like the *muḍiṅga*, the *kāhala*, *maddala* and *vīṇā* which are still in common use in various parts of India. Two exhaustive lists of musical instruments occur in the *Thūpavaṃsa* and the *Daḷadā Sirita*, which works belong to a period roughly between the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries. Most of these instruments are of Indian origin, some of the drums being identifiable with South-Indian varieties.[17]

In the period beginning with the *Sandeśa*, from the fourteenth century downwards, we are on safer ground, and the evidence gathered from these literary works corroborates the view that the cultural life of the people, at least in the cities, derived its inspiration largely from India. The *Sandeśa* describe dancing as it took place in the palaces and in the temples before the images of Hindu gods. The *Tisara Sandeśaya*,while describing the dances performed in the palace of Parākrama Bāhu the Fifth of Dedigama, refers to the eyebrows of the dancing-girls as " quivering like rows of bees ". The dancers are also described as " glancing with the corners of their eyes ". The *Säḷalihiṇi Sandeśaya* says how the nautch-girls of the Vibhīṣaṇa Devālaya at Kelaniya followed with their eyes the movements of their hands. In fact, Śrī Rāhula, in his *Parevi Sandeśaya*, uses the word *karaṇa*, a technical term of classical Indian dancing, meaning a dance-pose, in describing the movements of a nautch girl who, he says, danced with her head, her eyebrows, her neck, her hands and her fingers.

These details, though slight in themselves, lend, when considered in their totality, a high degree of probability to the view that what is described by the poets is that variety of classical Indian dancing described in the *Nāṭya Śastra*, the modern equivalent of which is called Bharata Nāṭyam in the form in which it survives in South India. In the context of this evidence, the statement often made by the poets that the dancing was performed according to the instructions of Bharata, which may otherwise be dismissed as a poetic convention, could now be taken quite literally. Moving the eyebrows and neck, rolling the eyes, and gesticulating with the hands and the fingers, constitute the *recaka* and *abhinaya* that are a special feature of classical Indian dancing. The Bharata Nāṭyam danseuse always follows her hand-movements with her eyes, unlike the Kandyan dancer, and it is only in Bharata Nāṭyam and the Malabar dance, Kathakali, that there are *recaka* and *abhinaya*. It is also significant that the dancing is described, in all cases, as being done by women. The Bharata Nāṭyam is an exclusively female dance, performed by *devadāsīs*, to whom it was taught by a hereditary class of male musicians who are known as *naṭuvanārs*. In the present day in South India, where Bharata Nāṭyam prevails, the *naṭuvanārs* never perform, and it is rarely, in fact, that a male ever dances Bharata Nāṭyam in public.

---

[17] The *elu* equivalents of the names of the three octaves (*sama, madara, tara*), and such terms as *grāma, rāga, mūrchanā*, and *laya* occur in the *Kavsiḷumiṇa*, stanzas 306, 309, 601. The *Amāvatura* refers to fifty *mūrchanā* (ed. Sorata, p. 168). The *Saddharmālaṅkāraya* makes mention of twenty one *mūrchanā* (*musan*), forty-nine *sthāna*, and twenty-two *śruti*, in addition to the names of the notes comprising the Indian octave (ed. Sārānanda, p. 682). See also *Svarṇatilakā Vastuva* in the same work for mention of the term *musan*. The *Siyabaslakara*, verse 383, mentions similar technical terms. For names of musical instruments, see *Daḷadā Sirita* (ed. Sorata), p. 49, and *Thūpavaṃsa* (ed. Hettiaratchi) p. 41. See also M. B. Ariyapala, op. cit., pp. 300–304.

Evidence from sculpture and painting strengthens the view that Bharata Nāṭyam constituted the entertainment of royalty and the lay elite of this country. In the stone friezes at Yāpahuva and Gaḍalādeṇiya, and the wood carvings at Embekke Devālaya women are represented in traditional dance poses such as are described by Bharata. The dancing figures at Yāpahuva are similar to the figures on the walls of the Hindu temple at Chidambaram, and among the dance poses one can recognise the Siva Naṭarāja, Catura, Karihasta, Gaṇḍasūci, and Nikuñcita poses. Besides this, a large number of female figures are represented, both in the sculptures as well as in the paintings of various periods, in classical dance poses. Even the female figure in the lamp recently discovered at Dedigama is represented as executing a similar classical dance pose.

There is nothing to indicate, however, that any spoken drama was acted either in the court or in the circles of the educated laity in Ceylon. In the absence of a living theatrical tradition worthy of appreciation by the elite, writers would have no impetus towards original creation and there would be no purpose in even translating the Sanskrit plays that were known to them. Just as drama, expressed in the more universal language of mime, became the entertainment of royalty and the elite in South India where the Sanskrit drama could no longer be understood, we do not know whether classical Indian dancing, depicting in mime stories from Hindu mythology, formed part of the regular entertainment of princes and nobles in the Sinhalese court. In the absence of testimony, however, we must leave this, for the present, as a speculation.

Buddhism and the drama

The fact that in other Buddhist countries like Tibet and China there grew a Buddhist drama does not upset the hypothesis suggested in the foregoing pages. On the other hand, it strengthens the view that what prevented its development here is the isolation of Buddhist culture, and its refusal to fuse completely with the folk culture so as to produce a uniform social pattern. The various elements in Tibetan religion were compounded into one final product, the Lamaist culture, which ultimately became the universally accepted culture of the people of Tibet. Hence conditions helped the growth of a drama in that country, a drama that could be called Buddhist, not in the sense that it developed out of Buddhist ritual, but in the sense that it depicted Buddhist themes and roused Buddhist sentiments. A dramatic form had already grown from the ritual of the Bôn religion, and this form had only to absorb Buddhist themes. The Tibetan Mystery play is performed, in fact, by Lamas themselves, and although its original purpose was expelling the old year and the demons of ill-luck, and ushering in the new year by propitiating certain gods and demons of the Bôn religion with human sacrifice, the theme has been modified to accord with Buddhist principles. The original human victims have been replaced by effigies of dough, and the plot has been altered so as to represent the triumph of Buddhism over the demons of the pagan faith.[18]

[18] Waddell, *Buddhism in Tibet*, p. 518.

In China, too, there grew Buddhist dramas as well as rituals of a dramatic sort. Many or all of these rituals are, in all probability, modelled on rituals that existed in China before the arrival of Buddhism, and were then, as now, connected with the Chinese cult of the dead. These "masses for the dead", as they are called are now Buddhist rituals, and the Buddhist monk officiates at them in the capacity of priest.

Among these rituals, it is particularly in the ceremony known as "Filling the Hungry Mouths" that the elements of mime and impersonation are most conspicuous. Three monks represent the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, and both by the tone of their chanting and by the expressions on their face they attempt to portray the condition of the departed in purgatory. By means of imitative hand-gestures these monks describe in detail the torments of hell, the burning of the fires and the freezing of the snows, and the interminable hunger and thirst of these unfortunate souls. The final gestures represent the feeding of the hungry spirits with rice, the sprinkling on them of holy water, and the conveying of hope and redemption to them through the power of the Buddha.[19]

A Buddhist mystery play which is described by Karl Ludwig Reichelt as one of the loveliest dramas on the Chinese stage, is that in which Mu-lien (Maudgalyāyana) one of the two chief disciples of the Buddha, is the hero.[20] Sylvain Lévi says that it is a kind of opera, like almost all the works of the Chinese stage, and that it is played especially at funerals and during festivals of the dead.[21] Mu-lien's mother has taken a vow not to eat meat, and, as a result, she falls sick of a wasting disease, and although various cures are tried, they are all in vain. One of her sons tries to persuade her to eat meat, but she vehemently refuses. He prepares a dish, therefore, which looks like a vegetarian meal, but contains a little meat, and gives it to his mother to eat. When she eats it she is completely cured. One of the servants, however, informs Mu-lien of this fact, and he conveys the information to his mother. She instantly denies it and calls upon the gods to bear witness to her innocence. " If I have eaten meat ", she says " I pray that all the gods may cast me down into the deepest hell". Immediately she is taken to hell, with blood streaming from her nose, mouth and eyes. Mu-lien is full of repentance, and after laying upon himself all kinds of torture to atone for her sins, he at last goes to hell where he finds his mother about to be dismembered and cooked in a cauldron. He undertakes to bear the torture himself in place of his mother, and thus redeems her.

There is evidence for the existence, in India, of a Buddhist drama which flourished for a while under the patronage of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The fragments of three Buddhist dramas, one of them attributed to Aśvaghoṣa, discovered by Professor Luders,[22] indicate that unlike in our country, Buddhist writers attempted this genre in India. But there is further evidence to indicate that Buddhist drama was much more of a live art-form than this. A story from the *Avadāna Śataka* says

---

[19] Karl Ludwig Reichelt, *Truth and Tradition in Chinese Buddhism*, pp. 89–92.
[20] *ibid.* pp. 80, 81.
[21] *Le Théâtre Indien*, p. 322.
[22] Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama*, p. 81.

how an actress named Kuvalayā gained " merit " as a result of associating herself with the performance of a Buddhist play, in which, we are told, the director of the troupe took the part of the Buddha and the other actors impersonated the bhikshus.[23] A Tibetan tale from an Indian source relates a very interesting incident of how a certain actor wished to dramatise the life of the Buddha, and perform the play at a feast held at Rājagriha. Both the actor as well as the multitude who had gathered at the feast were full of faith in the Buddha. He went to certain bhikshus in order to get from them authentic information regarding the life of the Buddha, so that he may write his play. They refused to give him the information, but a bhikshuni gave him an account of the life of the Buddha from an authentic source, and he composed his piece accordingly. The audience were confirmed in their faith, and the actor received many presents. In the excitement of his success, however, he thought of avenging himself on the bhikshus who had been so discourteous. He, therefore, introduced them on the stage in a farcical incident which provoked great amusement among the audience. The bhikshus were piqued at this, and, finding a play based on the life of a Bodhisatva, they themselves went to the scene of the feast, and, pitching their tents on the spot, performed the play so well that the actor thought he was seeing a divine spectacle with divine actors in it. He would have been ruined by the competition, had he not begged pardon of the bhikshus in time.[24]

Both these tales show that, under the aegis of the less puritanical Mahāyāna, there flourished a popular Buddhist drama which was also used for propagating the faith. The Mahāyāna was very liberal in its attitude, and even allowed the impersonation of the Buddha and bhikshus by human actors. Such a thing would be unheard of in a Theravāda country. Hence, nothing like a Buddhist mystery play could grow in a Theravāda country, and the only kind of material that could be used for dramatic purposes would be the lives of the Bodhisatvas. From Maung Htin Aung we learn that the prejudice against any human being acting as the Buddha, as well as other conventions that arose out of the general Buddhist attitude to dramatic activity, held back, to some extent, the growth of religious drama in Burma.[25] What made the growth of a drama possible in the instances examined above was the fact that the culture of the elite came in contact with the culture of the folk, or that the new religion completely absorbed the cults that the people previously had. The Sanskrit drama itself seems to have originated in conditions similar to those described in the instances cited above. The religious spectacles and dances connected with the worship of Krishna, Vishnu and Shiva among the folk, and performed in the Prakritic dialects, came into contact with the epic recitations of the literati, whose language was Sanskrit, and gave rise to the new genre. Among the various elements that came together to create the Sanskrit drama, pride of place, says Sylvain Lévi, should go to Krishnaism. The Vedic dialogues and recitations would have stagnated without producing a vital drama, had they not come in contact with the dramatic spectacles and dances that arose out of the religious fervour of the devotees of Krishna.[26]

---

[23] *Le Théâtre Indien*, p. 320.
[24] *ibid.*
[25] *op. cit.*, p. 20.
[26] *op. cit.*, p. 336.

The two Theravāda countries, Burma and Siam, were fortunate in the fact that both countries had a court play, based on the Dasaratha Jātaka, which, we are told, had acquired a considerable refinement of form under the influence of the Sanskrit drama. This Dasaratha Jātaka was originally performed in the Siamese court. When the Burmese conquered Siam in 1767, they took with them this Siamese play and began to act it in the Burmese court. This inspired the growth of a Burmese court drama. It was however, when the court drama left the narrow circles of the literati and reaching the people, began to absorb elements from the folk Nibhatkin and Interlude, that the ground was prepared for the growth of a truly national drama in Burma.[27]

The drama and Buddhist ritual in Ceylon

Even in an orthodox Theravāda country like Ceylon we find the beginnings of the growth of rituals out of which a Buddhist drama might have very well arisen, had not more conservative opinion been against such developments. One of these rituals is the Dorakaḍa Asna, a ceremony performed after a seven-day session of *pirit*, in which we can see, in a very elementary form, the beginnings of drama. This ceremony probably arose in Kandyan times, although tradition dates it back to the Polonnaruwa period. It affords another instance of folk beliefs being incorporated into Buddhism.

On the morning of the seventh day after a quick recitation of *Maha Pirita* (i.e. the *Karaṇīyametta, Ratana and Maṅgala Sūtra*) a monk reads what is known as the Calendar (*lita*), and announces the auspicious time and date, according to the zodiac calendar, at which the Dorakaḍa Asna ceremony is fit to be inaugurated. After this, another monk, who had been selected for the purpose at the beginning of the *pirit* session, recites the *Vihāra Asna*, a composition in rythmic prose, enumerating and mentioning by name a list of *vihāra*, and inviting all the gods resident in them and the neighbouring *devālaya* to attend the recitation of the *Maṅgala Sūtra* and the *Āṭānāṭiya Sūtra* that is to take place the same evening. During the recitation of the *Vihāra Asna*, the other monks hold the sacred thread (*pirit huya*) which is tied all round the walls of the *maṇḍapa* (pavilion). After the recitation of the *Vihāra Asna*, the monk, who read the zodiac calendar, begins to write what is known as the *devāla talapata* or the message to the *devālaya*. It is inscribed on palm leaf, and is, in effect, an injunction to the gods of all the *devālaya* situated in the vicinity of the *vihāra*, to attend the recitation of the *sūtra*. The message contains a definite command of the monks (*sanghāṇattiya*), and the gods are requested not to break this command. During the writing of the message, the other monks leave the *maṇḍapa*. Four copies of the message are made, and are sanctified by means of saffron water and incense. The palm leaves containing the message are then hung on two ends of an ornamental pingo specially constructed for the purpose. The pingo is handed over by a monk to a boy dressed in the attire of a messenger of the gods (*devadūtayā*), and attended by eight swordsmen. He carries it in procession, with the monks following, to the *devālaya*. At the *devālaya*, before the image of

[27] Maung Htin Aung, *op. cit.*, pp. 49–52.

Vishnu or Kataragama Deviyo, the monks recite a *sūtra*, usually the *Karanīyametta Sūtra*, and after the beating of ceremonial drums (*magul bera*), the boy reads out the message. At the end of the reading, lamps are lit in the *devālaya*, with the help of oil carried there in the procession, and *pirit pän* (water sanctified by the recitation of *pirit*) is sprinkled. The messages are hung in the four cardinal directions inside the *devālaya*, and the procession returns.

After the *devadūtayā* comes back, he is confined in a room guarded by the swordsmen, till the monks come in procession once more in the night for the recitation of *pirit*. Following on the procession of monks comes the *devadūtayā* in the company of the monk who is appointed to recite the blessing (*anusāsanā*). The *Maṅgala Sūtra* is now recited, and at the conclusion of it, a dialogue of this nature takes place between the monk who is to recite the blessings, and the *devadūtayā:*

Monk: Are there people to guard the four entrances of this richly-decorated *maṇḍapa* ?

Devadūtayā: O, pious lord, who art endowed with all virtues, outside this richly-decorated pavilion there are guardians.

Monk: Didst thou go to the king of the gods ?

Devadūtayā: I, the messenger who went to invite the king of the gods, have returned and do stand here.

Monk: Have the gods, too, endowed with sight and prowess, arrived ?

The *devadūtayā* now recites what is known as the *Dorakaḍa Asna*, a fairly long text, the gist of which is that the gods who guard the four quarters, and their entire train have arrived for the *pirit*, in order that they may dispel all evil and bring prosperity to everybody. At the end of this, the monk who had been selected for the purpose, recites what is known as the Anusāsanā, in which he enjoins all the gods and everybody who helped in the performance of the ceremony to rejoice in its good results.

This ceremony has very conspicuous elements of drama, both impersonation and dialogue being present in it. It survives up to the present day, and although it differs in minor details in the manner in which it is performed in different parts of the Island, in its dramatic aspects it is essentially the same.

A commoner ceremony often incorporated into Bana preaching (preaching a sermon to a gathering of devotees, by a Bhikshu) is the dramatic recital of the story of the *Ālavaka Damanaya*, which relates how the Buddha subdued and converted to Buddhism the fierce demon Ālavaka. Here the monk who preaches, begins, first, by making the congregation recite the Five Precepts, and goes on to relate the story of the Ālavaka Damanaya. That is, he relates how the king of Alav went hunting and was caught by the demon Ālavaka, and how he escaped by promising to sacrifice a child to the demon every day, how twelve years passed and it came to the king's turn to sacrifice his own son, and how on that day the Buddha arose in the morning, and, as usual, surveying the world with his all-seeing eye,

noticed the demon Ālavaka and the king's son, and knew that they both had the potentiality for spiritual insight, and how the Buddha went to the abode of the demon Ālavaka. From this point onward the story is no more narrated but depicted in dramatic form. The demon Gadrabha, who guards the abode of Ālavaka, now comes in, attired in appropriate guise, with matted hair and face blackened by soot, and carrying a sword in his hand. He walks up and down in front of the pulpit on which the monk is seated, and presently a dialogue of the following nature takes place between the two of them, with the monk narrating what the Buddha said :[28]

Gadrabha: Why did you come here, Lord, at this unusal time of day ?

The Buddha: I came here because of something very important. With your permission I would like to spend the night here.

Gadrabha: My Lord, do you not know what kind of place this is ? This is the the abode of the demon Ālavaka. If it happened to be my place, would I hesitate to ask you to spend the night here ? Can you not see how the ground is strewn with the bones of human beings and oozing with their blood ? You know what fate awaits you if you stay too long.

The Buddha: I am not interested in your harrowing tales about the demon's cruelties. I am well aware of all that. I have made up my mind to remain.

The dialogue goes on for a while, and when it is clear to Gadrabha that the Buddha is going to remain, he announces his intention to convey this information to Ālavaka and walks out of the preaching hall through the congregation seated. The monk begins once again to relate the story. He says how Gadrabha refused to open the door of Ālavaka's abode, but how the door opened of its own accord when the Buddha placed his foot on the door-step, and how the Buddha went in and sat on Ālavaka's gem-set throne. The Buddha preached a sermon to the wives of Ālavaka who stood by him in amazement and reverence. Further, the two demon chiefs, Sātagiri and Hemavata, were flying in the sky on their way to the concourse of demons which Ālavaka himself was attending, and found that they could not pass over the place where Ālavaka's abode was situated, because the Buddha was seated below, and no living being could pass over his head. The demons, therefore, descended to the spot, and finding the Buddha there, they paid homage to him, and continued on their journey. On reaching their destination, they informed Ālavaka about what was happening. Hearing this Ālavaka is beside himself with rage, and at this point the narrative once more turns to drama. The congregation hear a loud " hoo-ing " from the direction of the entrance to the preaching hall. The monk tells the congregation that it is the sound of Ālavaka returning in anger to his abode. Presently another " hoo-ing " is heard, followed by a voice thundering forth, " Woe unto that shaven-headed monk ! " In a while, after a third " hoo-ing, " the demon Ālavaka enters and stands at the door of the preaching-hall. He wears a pair of tight black pants and a red jacket, like some demons

[28] It is significant that, unlike in Mahāyāna ceremonies of a similar kind, the monk does not actually *impersonate* the Buddha, but contents himself with reciting his part. In a Theravāda social context it is regarded sinful to impersonate the Buddha, because no human being is fit enough for it.

in the folk exorcistic rituals. On his feet are jingles, and he carries a sword in his hand. Presently he enters and walks through the congregation into the presence of the monk. Behind him comes Gadrabha in humble and subservient demeanour. The demon runs wildly up and down in front of and among the congregation, miming his fury at the Buddha, and in the meantime the monk relates how the demon sought to subdue the Buddha by creating, in turn, a fierce hurricane, a great rain-storm, a rain of coals, a shower of stones and the like, and finally thick black darkness. When all these fail the demon himself comes in person and begins to ask the Buddha some questions. Here begins the dialogue that ensued between the demon and the Buddha, and the monk replies on behalf of the Buddha and translates the Pali stanzas into Sinhalese for the benefit of the congregation. When the Buddha answers all the questions put to him by the demon, the demon is converted and falls down at the Buddha's feet in worship. At this point the monk, continuing his narration, states that the night is turning to morning, and that it is time to take the child-sacrifice to the demon Ālavaka. With his words there appear at the door two men representing the ministers of the king, one of them carrying in his arms a baby (a doll is often used for this purpose). The ministers are clad in white, while the child wears royal attire. The ministers come in and hand the child over to the demon Ālavaka. The demon is now ashamed of himself. He takes the child in his arms and places it on the table in front of the monk, who proceeds to relate how the demon took the child and offered it to the Buddha. He continues the narration and says how finally the child was given the name of Hatthālaka by the Buddha, and how the demon reached the Path of Sotāpanna.

Another institution, which may be of interest to us, is that of preaching a sermon by means of question and answer, in the manner of the book known as the Questions of Milinda (*Milindapraśnaya*). This mode of preaching is very much like a dramatised presentation of the debate that is supposed to have taken place between a Graeco-Bactrian king, Milinda, and a monk Nāgasena. The king seeks to refute Buddhism, which the monk defends. A specimen of the questions and answers are given here from the text of the *Milindapraśnaya*:

King: Sir, what is your name ?

Nāgasena: O king, my name is Nāgasena. There is, of course, no person such as Nāgasena. It is merely a name, a convention.

King: O, indeed ! That is very interesting. Bear witness, all of you assembled here. Nāgasena here says that there is no such person as Nāgasena. Well, if there is no such person, who gives you robes, food, and such necessities ? Who makes use of them ? If somebody kills you, it can't be a sin, for nobody is killed, and no one kills.

Nāgasena: Your Majesty, my fellow-monks call me Nāgasena.

King: Well, then, Sir, is your hair Nāgasena ?

Nāgasena: No, your majesty.

King: Are the various parts of your body, taken severally, Nāgasena ?

Nāgasena: No.

King: Could your body or your feelings, or your consciousness be called Nāgasena ?

Nāgasena: No.

King: Then, Sir, you have used a word bereft of meaning. You have told me a lie. There is no such person as Nāgasena.

Nāgasena: Permit me, your majesty, to ask you a few questions myself. Did you come walking or in a chariot ?

King: I came in a chariot.

Nāgasena: What do you mean by the word " chariot " ? Is the wheel the chariot ?

King: No, Sir.

Nāgasena: Is the yoke the chariot ?

King: No, Sir.

Nāgasena: Can you name any part and say it is the chariot ?

King: No.

Nāgasena: Well then, your majesty, you are the ruler of the whole of India. For what reason, therefore, have you told an untruth, that you came in a chariot ? You have been using a word empty of meaning.

The debate thus proceeds, and question by question is answered by Nāgasena, until the king is finally converted.

We might also make a passing reference to the institution known as Preaching from Two Pulpits (*Āsana Dekē Baṇa*) which has, also, something of the dramatic in it. A monk seated on one pulpit reads out the text in Pali, after which the monk on the second pulpit reads out, in Sinhalese, the commentary on this text. The preaching consists, in this manner, of alternate readings of Pali text and Sinhalese commentary.

The rituals we have described above are generally looked upon as evidences of decay. It is only the *Dorakaḍa Asna* that has acquired the status of a serious Buddhist ceremony. These rituals arose mostly at a time when Buddhism began decaying, in the sense that its hold on the people began to loosen. Hence they are regarded as evidences of the corruption of the *Sāsana* or as attempts to popularize Buddhism, and are not held in high esteem by the intellectual Buddhist.

Sinhalese literature and the drama

The question as to why Sinhalese literature has no drama is quite another problem, and one that is not directly related to the problems examined so far. It has to be considered in relation to the interesting fact that no other vernacular literature in India has a drama, although there are varieties of folk drama in Bengal and in South India. The Yātrās of Bengal, the Yakṣagāna of South Karnāṭaka, the Terukkūttu of the Tamilnāḍ, and the religious Bhāgavata Mela Nāṭaka of Tanjore and the surrounding parts, are dramatic entertainments, but they survive mostly in an oral tradition. Some of these are said to be descended from the Sanskrit drama itself, referred to in South India as the Āriyakūttu. It is strange, therefore,

that these forms were not regarded as being worthy of imitation in literature, or as deserving the patronage of the literati. One can only suggest that as the Sanskrit drama lost contact more and more with the people, and became less and less suitable for acting, the drama of mime and gesture took the place of the spoken play in the entertainment of royalty and the educated classes. Hence there was nothing to inspire a written drama, nor was the need for such felt.

In respect of Ceylon, we are sometimes inclined to attribute the lack of literary drama to the fact that literary men were mostly monks to whom drama was taboo. But there are other literary forms, equally taboo, which were attempted by the monk-writers of this country. The Sanskrit drama as well as other forms of Sanskrit literature were known to Sinhalese writers, but they attempted every other form except the drama.

In the absence of an acted play and of a living dramatic tradition, there would be nothing to inspire original creation in this genre. The discovery of a new form, like the Sandeśa or the Mahā Kāvya, would inspire a writer to literary activity. But the acquaintance with a written drama that could only be read, could hardly have such an effect on a writer unless he had seen the potentialities of such work when actually produced on the stage.

AUTHORITIES

M. B. Ariyapala, *The State of Society in Ceylon, as depicted in the Saddharmaratnāvaliya and other Sinhalese literature of the thirteenth century*, (Colombo, 1956).

Maung Htin Aung, *Burmese Drama*, (Oxford University Press, 1937).

E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, (Oxford, 1902).

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art*, (Broad Campden, 1908).

A. B. Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama*, (Oxford, 1924).

Sylvain Lévi, *Le Théâtre Indien*, (Paris, 1890).

Gananath Obeysekera, *The Great Tradition and the Little in the perspective of Sinhalese Buddhism*, in *The Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Feb. 1963.

S. Paranavitana, *Mahayanism in Ceylon*, in *Ceylon Journal of Science*, Vol. II.

"*Pre-Buddhist Religious Beliefs in Ceylon*", in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch*, Vol. XXXI, No. 82.

"*Buddhist Festivals in Ceylon*", in *Buddhistic Society*, ed. B. C. Law, (Calcutta, 1931).

Karl Ludwig Reichelt, *Truth and Tradition in Chinese Buddhism*, (Shanghai, 1934)

Sir W. Ridgeway, *Dances and Dramatic Dances of non-European Races*, (Cambridge, 1924).

L. A. Waddell, *The Buddhism of Tibet*, (Cambridge, 1939).

Martin Wickramasinghe, *Landmarks of Sinhalese Literature*, (Colombo, 1963).

CHAPTER TWO

IMPERSONATION AND MIME IN THE CEREMONIES OF THE FOLK RELIGION

The folk religion

The folk religion of the Sinhalese, as it exists among the people today, consists of the belief in a number of supernatural beings (some of them indiscriminately called "god" or "demon" depending on whether one is talking of their benevolent aspects or their malevolent aspects) and a large body of rituals for their propitiation. Some of the supernatural beings now worshipped may have had an animistic origin, but it is not possible to be sure of this in all cases. The animistic religion of the early Aryan settlers has been overlaid, through the centuries, with a large number of cults more allied to the religion of the people of the South of India than to the religion of the original Aryans.

Among the favourite haunts of demons are mentioned trees, streams, groves, and hill-tops, and this belief probably retains a reminiscence of the animistic origin of at least some of the demons. But, on the other hand, the other favourite resorts of demons are cross-roads, graves and graveyards, old deserted houses, and lonely roads. Some demons can be directly connected with natural phenomena, as, for example, the demon of the *kohoṁba* tree, who is referred to either as a god (*kohoṁbā deyyo*) or as a demon (*kohoṁbā yakā*). The word *yakā* in this context probably retains part of the meaning of the older word *yakkha* or *yakṣa* which was applied at the beginning to the animistic deities of the early Aryan religion.

There are also other demons who represent various diseases, and whose appearance is described as being similar to the appearance of the people who are afflicted with these diseases. An early prototype of these demons is found in Rattakkhi or the Red-eyed Demon mentioned in the *Mahāvaṃsa* as having been responsible for the outbreak of an infectious disease in the time of Siri Saṅga Bō. Certain gods, such as the Baṇḍāras, who are worshipped in the folk religion, can also be easily traced to ancestral heroes, there being examples of the deification of chieftains in our very life-time, such as Goḍēgedara Baṇḍāra. Kataragama Deviyo, Pattini, and Aiyanāyaka are examples of deities borrowed from the religion of the people of South India. Hence the folk religion of the Sinhalese of the present day is a mixture of many cults of diverse origin.

The most prevailing concept in the folk religion is that of *vas*. *Vas*, or *vas-dos*, as it is sometimes referred to, is in its most general meaning, a mysterious evil influence or evil power that affects adversely the lives of people, preventing them from being successful in their undertakings, and bringing illness and other misfortunes on them. This malicious influence could be caused by evil eye (*äsvaha*), evil mouth (*kaṭavaha*) or the entertaining of evil thoughts (*hōvaha*). It could also result from other people uttering envious words and lamenting over one's good fortune (*aṅdō āṅḍiyā*). The evil influences could also come directly from demons, in which case it will take the

form of swoons and fits of insanity (*murtu*) and various types of hysteria accompanied by shivering and pains, trembling, shouting, running, dancing and even rolling on the ground, as in epileptic attacks.[1]

The ceremonies of the folk religion are performed, therefore, both for purposes of obtaining general immunity from evil influence as well as for healing specific ailments. The ceremonies known as Gam Maḍu or Pām Maḍu or Pūnā Maḍu (species of the same type of ritual with slight differences in each and generally referred to as Devol Maḍu), are performed for general good luck and the expelling of evil. In the Pūnā Maḍuva in particular, all the influence is collected into what is known as the *pūnāva*, an earthenware vessel having a lid the shape of a leopard's head, the mouth of which is adorned with several cobra-capelles, with lighted torches fixed all round it, and this vessel is dashed on the head of a bull at the end of the ritual. The rituals of the Garā demons as well as the ritual of the Kohoṁbā Yakā are two other ceremonies performed for the general dispelling of evil.

For purposes of propitiation the supernatural beings of the folk religion are divided into two large classes, the demons and the gods. The presiding deities of the planets, together with a number of supernatural beings who are associated with them, known as *rakusu*, form another class whose members partake of the nature of both demons as well as gods. Corresponding to these three classes there are three types of ceremonies. The priest of the demon ceremonies is known as the *kaṭṭaṅḍiyā* or *yakädurā* or *yakdessā*, while the priest who officiates in the ceremonies connected with the gods is known as the *kapuvā* or *kapurāla*, or, sometimes, as *pattini hāmi*, after the major deity who is supplicated. The priest who conducts the rituals connected with the cult of the planets and the allied deities is known as the *bali ädurā*, the *bali* being the effigy of the deity of the planet or the *rakusā* that is being invoked.

The demons are very many in number, although not more than a dozen of them figure in the major ceremonies. They are ruled over by a king named Vesamuni who exercises his sway on them through his ministers and viceroys of whom there are a large number in his employ. The favourite food of demons is human flesh and blood, and nothing is more pleasing to them. But they are forbidden by their king as well as by the Buddha to take human life. Hence they have to content themselves with substitutes, such as the blood of a cock or with food prepared for them and offered to them by mortals. They are generally supposed to be black-skinned, with eyes protruding out of their faces, their tongues hanging down, and in some cases having teeth jutting out of their mouths. They are invisible to man, although they assume various forms and show themselves on occasions. They sometimes assume the form of men, and often, that of animals. On such occasions they strike fear

[1] Demon priests refer to this whole group of phenomena in the alliterative phrase *äsvaha kaṭavaha hōvaha aṅdō āṇḍiyā turtu murtu pinum peralum ävulum vevulum*

Maha Sohonā (a traditional representation)

Sūniyam Yakā (a traditional representation)

into the hearts of human beings, and thereby cause diseases. They are able to create various appparitions (*disti*) in order to frighten men, particularly if they encounter people during the *yāmas* or the four periods during which they are mostly about. These *yāmas* are morning twilight, midday, evening twilight and midnight. There are also other situations in which an individual can expose himself to the attack of demons, such as when he has eaten roasted fish or meat.

Demons

Particular demons are believed to be capable of causing particular ailments, and it is possible, in many cases, to identify the demon who has to be propitiated in order that the sick man may be cured. The demons who most commonly cause afflictions are Rīri Yakā, Mahā Kōla Sanni Yakā, Oḍḍi Kumāra Hūniyam Yakā, Maha Sohon Yakṣayā or Maha Sohonā, Kaḷu Kumāra Yakā and Raṭā Yakā.

Rīri Yakā[2] is considered the most dreadful and powerful of the demons, and many diseases are supposed to be caused by him. As his name indicates, he is the Demon of Blood, and those diseases in which the patient suffers from a discharge of blood from his system are believed to be especially caused by him. This demon is supposed to haunt the death-beds of human beings, assuming the apparition of Death (*maru avatāraya*). He has several other manifestations, such as Avamaṅgala Rīri Yakā, Iramudun Rīri Yakā, Toṭupala Rīri Yakā, Kaḍavara Rīri Yakā, Sīpadakāriya Rīri Yakā, Sohon Rīri Yakā and Gopalu Yakā. He is represented in *bali* effigies and in drawings as having a monkey's face, and four hands in each of which he carries a parrot, a cock, a sword and a human head. He has a pig for his vehicle. Sometimes he is represented as having a pool of blood on his belly.

Maha Kōla Sanni Yakā is represented as having a blue face, red body, black feet and eight hands. He has one corpse in his mouth, two in his hands and two at his feet. In one hand he holds a cock and in the other a human victim. This demon is held to be responsible for a wide range of afflictions, and is most commonly propitiated when the disease affecting the person is not specifically known. He has eighteen apparitions, who are sometimes regarded as his attendants, each of whom inflicts a particular ailment. They are Bhūta Sanni Yakā, or the Demon of Madness, Maru Sanni Yakā or the Demon of Death, Jala Sanni Yakā or the Demon of Cholera, Vevulum Sanni Yakā or the Demon of Fits, Nāga Sanni Yakā or the Demon called Nāga Sanniya, Kaṇa Sanni Yakā or the Demon of Blindness, Kora Sanni Yakā or the Demon of Lameness, Goḷu Sanni Yakā or the Demon of Dumbness, Bihiri Sanni Yakā or the Demon of Deafness, Vāta Sanni Yakā or the Demon of diseases caused by the Wind, Pit Sanni Yakā or the Demon of diseases caused by Bile, Sem Sanni Yakā or the Demon of diseases caused by Phlegm, Demaḷa Sanni Yakā or the Demon called Demala Sanniya, Murtu Sanni Yakā or the Demon of Fainting and Swoons, Arda

[2] See Wirz, *Exorcismus und Heilkunde auf Ceylon*, pp. 35, 36, where the names, Sīri Yakā and Hīri Yakā, are mentioned as being alternative appellations of this demon. See also Barnett, *Alphabetical Guide to Sinhalese Folklore*, p. 88, for the various legends about this demon.

Sanni Yakā or the Demon of Apoplexy, Vädi Sanni Yakā or the Demon known as Vädi Sanniya, Dēva Sanni Yakā or the Demon Deva Sanniya, Ātuıa Sanni Yakā or the demon known as Ātūra Sanniya.[3]

Oḍḍi Kumāra Hūniyaṃ Yakā who is alternatively styled Huniyaṃ Dēvatāvā, Hūniyaṃ Yakā as well as Oḍḍi Yaksayā or Oḍḍisa, appears to human beings in a large number of animal apparitions. He inflicts a variety of grievous diseases upon human beings, and his influence is styled *hūniyaṃ dōsa*. Through his agency one person could cause harm to another, and the evil could be removed by the ceremony known as Hūniyaṃ Käpīma, or cutting the *hūniyam* charm. Hūniyaṃ Yakā is represented as being mounted on a horse, with cobra-capelles twisted round his body, and carrying a palm-leaf and stylus in one hand and a golden club in the other.

Maha Sohon Yakā is so called because he frequents graveyards and feeds on carcasses. He is the chief of seventy-thousand demons and is represented in *bali* effigies as having a huge body (said to be eighty-one cubits high), a bear's face, curled matted hair, with a javelin in one hand and in the other hand an elephant whose blocd he drinks. He rides on a hog. A popular story, enacted by Kōlam players as well, relates how he happened to have a bear's head. A warrior named Jayasena picked a quarrel with the famous warrior Gōṭhayimbara belonging to the retinue of King Dutugemunu. Gōṭhayimbara, without much difficulty, severed the head of Jayasena from his trunk. The planetary deity Senasurā who was watching the incident, immediately seized a bear, and tearing off its head from its body, grafted the head on to Jayasena's trunk. Jayasena arose as a live demon, having the trunk of a man and the head of a bear, and was thence known as the Maha Sohonā.

The Garā Yakku are another group of demons of whom there are twelve in number. Their names are given as Aňdun Garā, Sohon Garā, Dēsa Garā, Saňdun Garā, Puṣpa Garā, Kāṇa Garā, Umā Garā, Launa Garā, Vāta Garā, Toṭeya Garā and Kīli Garā. Each of them has as his female counterpart a Goddess named after him and styled a Giri goddess (Giri Dēvi)[4]. The chief of the Garā demons is Daḷa Rāja, born to Haṃsavatī and Siṃha Kumāra Rāja, son of Baṁbadat, king of Dantapura. An incest story is related about Daḷa Rāja. At his birth, astrologers predicted that he would marry his sister. Hence when a daughter was born to Haṃsavatī, she was hidden in a cave and thus she came to be called Giri Dēvi. Daḷa heard of his sister, and desiring her, feigned sickness, saying that he could not live unless she cooked gruel for him. She was, therefore, brought to him and he gratified his desire. Another legend states

---

[3] *Demonology and Witchcraft in Ceylon*, by Dandris de Silva Gunaratna, in *JRASCB* Vol. IV, p. 26. Paul Wirz gives us a list which is different in some details. It is as follows: Kaṇa Sanniya, the Demon of Blindness; Kora Sanniya, the Demon of Lameness; Ginijala Sanniya, the Demon who causes fever and shivering; Vädi Sanniya, the Demon of Boils and Carbuncles; Demala Sanniya, the Demon who tortures people with hallucinations and bed-dreams; Kapāla Sanniya, the Demon of Lunacy; Goḷu Sanniya, the Demon of Dumbness; Bıri Sanniya, the Demon of Deafness; Maru Sanniya, the demon who causes fits of raving mad-ness; Amuku Sanniya, the Demon who causes fits of vomitting; Gulma Sanniya, the Demon who causes worms in the stomach; Dēva Sanniya, the Demon of infectious diseases; Nāga Sanniya, the Demon who causes bad dreams such as those of snakes; Murtu Sanniya, the Demon who causes swoons and fits of unconsciousness; Kāḷa Sanniya, the Demon who causes Black Death; Pita Sanniya, the Demon of Bilious Afflictions; Vāta Sanniya, the Demon of Windy diseases; Śleṣma Sanniya, the Demon of Epileptic Fits–*cp. cit.*, pp. 53, 54.

[4] See Wirz, *op. cit.*, p. 146. Alternative names of Giri goddesses are given by Barnett, *op. cit.*, pp. 17, 18.

that Giri Dēvi was brought up in a rock-house However, her beauty was described to Daḷa by another woman, and he went out on the pretext of wanting to plough, feigned sickness and wished to see her. She was sent to him by her parents, and Daḷa seduced her.[5]

Daḷa Rāja is represented in paintings as having three cobras with swelling hoods over his head, ear-ornaments, two tusks, and a torch in each hand.

The Garā demons are not generally harmful to mankind, but assist them in the removal of various kinds of uncleanliness or evil influence.

Kaḷu Kumāra is the demon who visits sicknesses on women, causing emaciation and barrenness. He is of black complexion, and is said to lust after dark women. He is associated with the Raṭa Yakku with whom he is invoked in the ceremony known as the Raṭa Yakuma. He is represented as having four hands in which he carries two elephants and two swords, and sometimes a cock. In certain representations he carries a club, a sword, a cock and the branch of a *nā* tree in his four hands, and wears three cobra-hoods on his head.[6]

Two other demons, Vāta Kumāra and Kaḷu Yakā, belong to his retinue. Kaḷu Yakā is mounted on a buffalo, and has a serpent twined round his body. The serpent's head is in the demon's mouth. According to certain traditions, Kaḷu Kumāra appears in seven different apparitions, Vāta Kumāra being one of them. The seven apparitions are Haňdun Kumāra, Aňdun Kumāra, Mal Kumāra, Giri Kumāra, Daḷa Kumāra, Sohon Kumāra and Vāta Kumāra.

Raṭa Yakku are a group of demons who are held responsible for visiting afflictions upon women and children and, particularly, for making women barren. The chief of the Raṭa Yakku is Riddi Bisava, who is always accompanied by her seven daughters, the seven Barren Queens, whose names are given, in some traditions, as Nā Mal Kumāri, Sō Mal Kumāri, Idda Mal Kumāri, Picca Mal Kumāri, Sapu Mal Kumāri, Vada Mal Kumāri and Siddi Mal Kumāri.[7] The legends relate how Riddi Bisava came out of a great fire that broke out on the mountain Maha Mēru, out of which fire several other demons too, were produced. She wandered about from place to place until Mahā Brahma, who happened to be on earth at the time, saw her and took her to wife. After she had borne seven daughters by him, he left her and went back to Brahma Lōka, his permanent abode. Riddi Bisava, therefore, went back, with her daughters, to the demons who came out of Maha Mēru, and enlisted as the servants of Vesamuni. They obtained permission (*varaṃ*) from King Vesamuni to join Kaḷu Kumāra and harass women and children. These demons, however, did not pay heed to the restrictions that were imposed by Vesamuni, and began to abuse the permission he had given them. Vesamuni, therefore, had

---

[5] Barnett, *op. cit.*

[6] See Edward Upham, *The History and Doctrine of Budhism*, plate 35.

[7] Wirz, op. cit., p. 77 fn.

them thrown into a dungeon called *asura giri koṭuva*, where they remained twelve years, suffering the pangs of hunger, and when they were finally released they had lost their power. They appealed, therefore, to the Buddha Dīpaṅkara, and made him an offering of a garment woven by them, and asked him for a *varama*. The Buddha Dīpaṅkara granted them the power to make women barren, but only on condition that when offerings were made to them, they should also cure them of their barrenness.

Gods

The gods are invoked in order that they may pronounce blessings on all human undertakings and grant general immunity from disaster. Certain diseases are, however, attributed to this class of supernatural beings as well. Kāli Ammā, for example, who is identified in some legends with Pattini, is regarded as the goddess of chicken-pox. The ceremonies performed in connection with the cult of Pattini have the purpose, on some occasions, of driving away a pestilence or infectious disease, in addition to banishing evil influence and ensuring prosperity and good harvests.

In the rituals connected with the worship of gods, Pattini occupies the chief place. Hence the priest who officiates in these rituals receives the name Pattini Hāmi. Pattini is a goddess of South India, and the legend about her life is told in the Tamil epic, the *Cilappatikāram*. The stories current in Ceylon about her birth suggest that she was originally a vegetation deity, or a nature deity in whom are combined the deities of several natural phenomena. She was born seven times, from water, from the tusk of an elephant, from a flower, from rock, from a peak, from cloth and from a mango. Some versions substitute fire for the peak, and these seven incarnations or appearances of Pattini are called Hat Pattini or the Seven Pattinis. She is alternately addressed as Gini Pattini, Teda Patti, Aṁba Pattini, Jala Pattini, Orumāli Pattini, Mal Pattini, and Sirimā Muni Pattini, as well as by other names, some of which have reference to her various incarnations. Many stories are related about her fidelity to her fickle husband Pālaṅga or Kōvalan to whom she was married in her incarnation as Kannagi. He wasted his wealth on a courtezan who is called variously Mādēvi and Perumkāli. He even borrowed Pattini's anklet and went to sell it in Madura where he was put to death on the suspicion that he had stolen the queen's anklet. Pattini restored him to life and set fire to the city of Madura. Pattini's anklet has magic powers. On one occasion, when she had to cross a river and the ferryman would not take her across, she threw the anklet into the river, and the waters parted, making a path for her. Pattini's anklets play an important part in the rituals connected with her worship.

Along with Pattini are invoked a number of gods like Kataragama Deviyo or Kanda Kumāra, a form of the Hindu god Skandha, Vāhala Deviyo, and the Twelve Gods called collectively Doḷaha Deviyo. The names of these twelve gods are given in some places as Mānik Devi, Māvatte Devi, Kosgama Devi, Parakāsa Devi, Kumāra Devi, Mīriyabädde Devi, Vanni Baṇḍāra, Kaḷu Baṇḍāra, Bōvala Devi, Mīgahapiṭiye Devi, Miriswatte Alut Devi and Kivulegedara Alut Devi. These twelve gods are

regarded by some as attendants of Pattini. Along with these gods are also invoked a group of gods, of whom according to some versions there are three and according to others seven, who are collectively called the Devol Deviyo. These gods are supposed to be the patron deities of seamen.

The presiding deities of the planets are invoked in cases of sicknesses which have been diagnosed to be the result of their influence. The nine planetary deities are Iru, Sikuru, Guru, Budahu, Saňdu, Senasuru, Kuja, Rāhu and Kētu. The rituals in which these deities are invoked are called *bali*, and the same word is sometimes applied to the clay images of these planetary deities which are made in relief on a bamboo framework and painted in various colours, for the purposes of the exorcism.[8] There are several kinds of *bali* rites, and in some of them only the planetary gods are invoked, while in other *rākṣasa* or *rakusu* are invoked along with the planets. In those rites in which the *rākṣasa* are also invoked, the exorcist makes on a bamboo framework the image of the appropriate *rākṣasa*, and makes the images of the planetary gods on all four sides of it. Sometimes, as in Rakusu Bali, the image of several *rākṣasa* are made, and even the images of demons like Maha Sohona, Vāta Kumara, Oḍḍisa and certain Garā demons are included in the ritual. Images of Hindu gods like Śiva, Umā (Umayaňganāva) and Śrī (wife of Vishnu, called Sriyākāntāva) also find a place among the planetary deities in certain *bali* ceremonies.

There are traditional modes of representing the planetary gods and the *rakusu*, and there are certain approved *bali* figures, such as the Asura Rākṣasa Baliya, Nava Graha Baliya, and Kriṣṇarākṣasa Baliya, to be used in the appropriate ceremony.[9] The rituals consist of dancing and drumming before the *bali* figure, the chanting of verses asking for protection, and the offering of betel and flowers. The patient sits by the side of the figure, and often holds one end of a cord in his hand, the other end of which is held by the exorcist.[10]

Ceremonies

The ceremonies in which the demons and the gods described above are invoked contain rituals which involve a considerable amount of mimesis, impersonation and dialogue. The exorcist himself wears a costume which is supposed to represent that of Vesamuni, so that he might be better able to command the demons. The ceremonies begin with an invitation to the demons to be present. This invitation takes the form of chanting to the accompaniment of drums and, sometimes, the blowing of pipes. Each demon is addressed by name and asked to partake of the food offered to him. Next the priest begins to address the demons individually in prose, and to implore them

---

[8] Certain figures of gods are painted on canvas, and these are also referred to as *bali*. Sometimes the word *bali* is used to mean a sacrificial structure in which offerings such as rice, grains and flowers are made to the planetary deities. These structures are made of banana stems, so as to consist of a certain number of square compartments decorated with tender coconut leaves. Examples of these are *asūgābē mal baliya*, *navagraha mal baliya*, etc.

[9] See Upham, *op. cit.*, illustrations 28–38.

[10] See Wirz, *op. cit.* pp. 119 ff. for details of bali ceremonies.

most humbly to stop harassing the patient. The priest at first attempts to cure the patient by gaining the goodwill of the demons. He addresses each of them in endearing terms, such as *massinē*, *malliyē* (cousin, brother). Later the priest's tone changes. He no longer adopts a humble and imploring attitude. He begins to threaten the demons and to warn them that they must leave the patient in the name of the Buddha and Vesamuni. He speaks to this effect. " If it be true that demons must obey king Vesamuṇi, if it be true that king Vesamuni's power is great, if it be true that the authority of Vesamuni, of the gods, and of the Buddha still prevails in the world, then I command thee, demon, in the name of the Buddha, his priests and his doctrines, to declare who thou art, and why thou afflictest this human creature in this manner ".[11] Very often at this stage the patient becomes possessed of the demon, that is, the demon who had been harassing the patient enters him. If this does not happen during the incantations, a special ritual is performed in order to force the demon to enter the patient. An arrow (*īgaha*) is placed on the patient's head, and charms are muttered over him, till he gets possessed. Then the patient speaks, and it is believed that the demon speaks through him. A conversation like the following takes place between the priest and the demon :

Priest : Tell me, what demon has possessed you ?

Demon : Maha Sohona has possessed me. I am Maha Sohona.

Priest : Why do you cause harm to this human being ?

Demon : He ate a certain kind of food without giving me my share of it.

Priest : We are prepared to give you an offering if you will leave the patient.

Demon : I want a human victim (*nara billak*).

Priest : That is impossible. We cannot give you anything you want. You have been given permission (*varam*) by the Buddha and Vesamuni to do certain things. Have they allowed you to take human sacrifice ?

Demon : No. Well, then, give a me four-footed offering (*hatara gāte billak*).

Priest : That is also impossible.

Demon : Give me a two-footed offering (*degāte billak*).

Priest : Yes, we will give you this cock. Take it and go away. By the way, how are we to know that you have really left ?

Demon : I will break the twig of yonder tree. It will be a sign that I have gone. Or I will shout " hoo " as I go.

The priest then gives the patient a live cock, and on some occasions, when the patient is violently possessed, he wrings the neck of the bird, and drinks its blood. This, however, happens only rarely and in most cases the giving of the cock to the patient is indicative of the acceptance of the offering by the demon. It is believed that although demons are fond of blood and flesh, they cannot actually partake of it, and have to be content, in most instances, with merely looking at such offerings.

---

[11] Dandris de Silva Gunaratna, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

If the patient is in a very bad condition, it is believed that the demon will not be satisfied with anything but a human offering. Hence in such cases the exorcist has a device whereby he pretends to offer the patient to the demon, and by deceiving him makes him go away. In cases of this sort, it is believed that the demon who is chiefly responsible for the trouble is Rīri Yakā. Hence an effigy is made of straw and like materials, with proper face and hands, and this is placed inside what is known as a *därahäva*, a litter-shaped bier made of banana stem and coconut leaves, and complete with a covering made of arched fibre and leaves. The effigy is placed inside the bier, and over it are placed a number of *pidēni taṭu* (plates containing offerings to the demons, the plates themselves being made of fibre and leaves). The priest lies inside the bier by the side of the effigy and the bier is carried by a number of people wailing and weeping and chanting verses such as the following :

We will give you the flesh of the head if you want it,
We will give you the flesh of the heart if you want it,
We will take out the bones and the ligaments and give you the liver—
To the devil who has caused illness we give today a human sacrifice.

The priest too, sings verses and utters charms inside the bier. He sings :

Someone is tearing my sinews in this place,
And sucking out my very bones and ligaments,
He asks my heart, my liver and even my entrails—
The devil who has caused this illness is demanding a sacrifice.

In this manner the bier is carried to the cemetery, either at midday or at midnight, and there the priest comes out of the bier and sets fire to the effigy, after which he charms a thread and sends it to be tied to the patient's arm by another priest, while he himself goes stealthily away.

The Sanni Yakuma Ceremony

A ceremony that contains very pronounced elements of drama, such as impersonation and dialogue, which, besides being ritualistic, aims, to some extent, to entertain the audience as well, is the Sanni Yakuma, or the Ceremony for Exorcising the Disease Demons known as Sanni Yakku. Here the exorcist assumes, in turn, the guise of the various demons of this group, and wears a mask which represents the likeness of the particular demon. After the preliminary ceremonies, in which invocatory stanzas to the various demons are chanted to the accompaniment of dancing and drumming, there appears the demoness known as Sūniyaṃ Yakṣaṇī. She first enters in the guise of a beautiful young woman, next as a pregnant woman, and finally as a mother, bearing a child in her arms.

In a ceremony seen at the village of Meegama, close to Alutgama, the exorcist who appeared as Sūniyaṃ Yakṣaṇī wore a white saree, one end of which he used to cover his head. He had his hair tied in a knot at the back, and wore a small female mask. In the course of a dialogue another exorcist made various

amorous innuendoes at the Yakṣaṇī and she wriggled shyly in the manner of a bashful young woman, thus provoking the laughter of the audience. Next she appeared in the same attire, but with a different mask. She had tied something round her belly so as to look as if she were pregnant, and acted as if she were in great discomfort. The dialogue this time, too, was full of ribald jokes about her state of pregnancy. She finally appeared with a doll in her arms, wearing the mask she first wore. She is lulling the baby to sleep, and says that the child has many fathers, mentioning by name several personages of the village. She sings a lullaby to rock the baby to sleep, this being the same as the lullaby used in the scene of the pregnant woman in Kōlaṃ (to be described later). At the end of it she pronounces blessings on the sick person, saying that " the three-fold apparition of Sūniyaṃ Yakṣaṇi has been thus shown " and leaves the arena.

Next enters Maruvā or the Demon of Death, who is an apparition of Rīri Yakā, the Demon of Blood. Before this, however, is the ceremony known as Pädure Däpavilla or Charming on a Mat. Here the exorcist lies on a mat on the ground, chanting all the while, and pretending that he is dead, while another exorcist prepares various offerings and places them on his chest. Presently comes the demon Death, clad in red, and wildly throwing incense on his torch so that the flames fly about in all directions. He climbs on the *vīdiya* (altar)[12] and shouts out " hoo " a number of times, all the while censing his torch. Then he jumps on to the arena, and, seeing the ' dead ' exorcist, begins to wail aloud, with his hands on his head. He has in his hand a sword made of plantain stem, and forthwith jumping on the body of the exorcist, he mimes the act of piercing him with his sword and killing him. Next he runs all round the arena, sometimes getting into a corner and beckoning a member of the gathering, thus striking fear into him. He climbs on to the *vīdiya* once more and rocks on it furiously as though he were in a rage, and jumping back again to the arena he runs to and fro. Again he laughs hideously and grins, running round the arena all the while. Finally he takes some strands made of coconut leaves and going up the place where the exorcist lies on a mat, he wraps the mat round his body and ties it with the coconut strands in the region of the chest and round the feet. He lifts the body and makes it stand on the ground in an erect position for a while, runs round it three or four times, and carrying it on his shoulders, disappears with it behind the *vīdiya*.

In this is depicted how the Demon of Death carries away a human sacrifice. After him arrive the demons Maha Sohonā and Abimāna. The sacrifice for the Abimāna Yakā is a simple one consisting of some rice and a few varieties of flowers, because it is believed that he is of religious disposition. This sacrifice is placed on a chair, and the chief exorcist chants verses of invocation, while others beat drums and play on a reed flute which produces a shrill wierd tone. He wears a white mask which has a beard and protruding teeth. On his head is a three-cornered cap of white cloth. He is robed, too, in complete white, and he carries a long walking stick. As usual, there ensues an impromptu dialogue between the demon and one of the exorcists.

[12] *Vīdiya* is probably derived from the Sanskrit *vedī* which means a sacrificial altar.

The parade of the eighteen Sanni demons, and the prelude to this parade are the most interesting parts of the Sanni Yakuma from a dramatic point of view. The first to appear are the three demon princes, Kaḷu Kumāra, Vāta Kumāra and Kaḷu Yakā. They dance, and sing the legends regarding their origin. Next several dancers step out of the altar, with their faces blackened, and wearing leaves round their waists. They represent in general the ranks of Vesamuṇi-rajjuruvo, and are the attendants of the eighteen demons who are to follow. Each of them holds a particular object in his hand, with which he dances for a while and makes way for the next. The first comes with a pan of burning coals and throws incense-powder into it while he dances. The second carries a torch and the third a pot with saffron water in it (*kaha diyara*). The fourth has a small pot with a coconut-flower in it. The fifth dances with a shawl, and the sixth with a red coconut (*tämbili*). The seventh has a small betel-box and the eighth a stick. Each one is distinguished by a peculiar costume which, in every case, is grotesque and calculated to amuse the audience. Each of them is further characterised by some idiosyncracy. One of them, for example, would behave like a circus clown, the other would amuse the public with ribald jokes, while another would laugh incessantly.

According to certain versions, the eighteen demons are preceded by two others, known as Ātura Yakā and Kaḷuvädi Sanniya, not normally included among the Sanni demons.[13] These two are supposed to prepare the way for the rest. Ātura Yakā is clad in red, and wears a black jawless mask and a garment of *burulla* leaves. The Kaḷuvädi Sanniya has a mask which consists only of a big upper and lower jaw made of wood. His task is to distribute the sacrificial cock among the eighteen Sanni demons, and is, therefore, sometimes styled Kukuḷu Sanniya. Immediately he enters the dance-ring he throws himself on the cock lying on the ground, and pretends to tear him to pieces, and bite its throat and suck its blood.

It is very seldom that all the eighteen demons appear at any single performance, since Kōla Sanniya, the leader, must appear before sun rise. The more well-known demons, such as Maru Sanniya, Amuku Sanniya, Kaṇa Sanniya, Goḷu Sanniya and Kōla Sanniya seldom fail to appear.

The Sanni demons are distinguished one from another mainly by means of their masks. Their dress is very often the same, consisting of a garment of *burulla* leaves worn at the waist, a kind of fur wrap for the upper part of the body, and a black wig and black beard.

Each demon behaves as if he is afflicted with the particular disease which he is believed to inflict upon mortals. One complains of a headache and another of diarrhoea and a desire to vomit. Kaṇa Sanniya is blind, and Goḷu Sanniya dumb. Maru Sanniya acts like a raving madman.

---

[13] Ātura Sanni is included, in some versions, among the eighteen Sanni demons, as seen above. Paul Wirz, however, refers to Ātura Yakā and Kaḷuvädi Sanniya as forerunners of the eighteen (*op. cit.*).

Each demon would enter from behind the *vīdiya* as he is addressed by name and invited. Maru Sanniya, for example, would be invited in the following manner :

> *Ōṃ hrīṃ!* Demon of Death, you who were born of the princess Asupāla to King Sankhapāla, and were wrongly taken to the cemetery and split in two, but thereafter contrived to live in the left portion, feeding on your mother's flesh ; you who were unable to get permission from Buddha, but were allowed by Vesamuṇi to cast your eye on mortals and make them fall sick, and by virtue of that permission now inflict madness, fever, headache, pains in the joints and stomach-ache in this patient, now listen to the bidding of the Buddha and come to this dance-ring, come, come, come *ē svaha.*

Maru Sanniya is the most frightful of the demons and the most feared. He is the demon of insanity, and therefore behaves like a madman in a most violent fit of frenzy. He announces his arrival by roaring aloud, and comes in shaking the *vīdiya.* He climbs from the back of it on to the crossbeam of the door where he remains seated for a while. He holds a small bow in his hand with an arrow which, at the same time, represents a three-forked torch (*dunu pandama*). He does not wear a mask, but instead, his face is completely blackened, and he has false teeth stuck in his mouth. He wears a shaggy black wig and a beard. He would draw his tongue out, shriek and attempt to run in one direction or another as if looking for prey. The priest would then begin to address him, and the dialogue would often be humorous The following is an example of the kind of dialogue that would take place :

Demon: Well, well, what's going on in this place ?

Priest: Watch how you conduct yourself here. The Buddha's influence extends to this place.

Demon: Ooh ! I feel a burning sensation.

Priest: You see what the mere mention of Buddha's name can do. So great is his *ānubhāva.*

Demon : How long is this *ānubhāva* you speak of as belonging to your Buddha ?

Priest : *Ānubhāva* is not something like a tail.

Demon : What is it then ?

Priest : It is the power of his virtues.

Demon : My dear Gurunānse, as I was reflecting on the virtues of the Buddha, and on the might of Vesamuṇi, I heard somebody saying, " My good cousin, my good, friend, come from the sky, come from the Eastern Mountain, we will give you curds, we will give you honey, we will give you a two-legged prey, a cock, instead of a four-legged prey." I could not help coming here when I heard this.

Priest : We are the people who invited you.

Demon : Why did you invited me ?

Priest : You have been inflicting a disease on a certain person. That is why we called you here.

Demon : Where is the sick person ?

Priest : Here he is. You can ask him all about it.

Demon : Well, let us see. Does your body ache, sick man ?

Priest : (replying on behalf of the sick man) *:* Yes, it does.

Demon : Do your limbs bend at every joint ?

Priest : That is the usual thing. My limbs ache at every joint.

Demon : Does your head turn ?

Priest : Yes, it does.

Demon : Is your stomach as soft as a ripe jak fruit ?

Priest : Everybody's stomach is soft. Mine is hard.

Demon : I admit, these are diseases inflicted by me. What will you give me if I cure them ?

Priest : I will give you rice (here the priest offers some rice to the demon).

Demon : My dear friend, our rice is not like this. If I go to the cemetery I can eat up a four-footed creature. I don't want rice.

Priest : Well, if you promise to cure the sick man, I will give you rice with leaves of seven colours and twenty-five curries, and also curds and honey, such as the demons were served with at the city of Visālā on the instructions of the Buddha. If you do not accept this offering, I will recite the virtues of the twenty-eight Buddhas and have you burned up on the spot.

Demon : O, please don't do that, I pray you. I promise I will cure the man of his sickness.

At the end of this dialogue, the demon accepts the offering, which has to be handed to him by the patient himself. Sometimes the demon holds his offering over the smoke emanating from a pan of coal into which resin has been thrown, and mutters an incantation, promising the patient's recovery from this illness.

Kōla Sanniya, being the leader of the eighteen demons, appears last and receives the lion's share of the offerings. He wears a crown made of palm leaves, and has a square frame made of banana stem round his waist. This frame is provided with four triangular receptacles which should hold all the various offerings made to this demon. His face is covered with a mask quite different from the rest, with bulging eyes and two cobra-hoods on top. Before he comes into the dance-ring, his face is censed. Next, two young men erect a barrier between the patient and the demon by holding two rice-pounders cross-wise before him. Kōla Sanniya then appears, and dances to the drums, and, after a while, attempts to cross the barrier in order to reach the patient. But the gate-keepers prevent him. The demon first tries force and then cunning, and even attempts to bribe the gate-keepers by offering them bananas and rice-cakes. But these attempts do not succeed. Finally he tells the guards that the Buddha has given him permission to go wherever he likes. But the guards demand the written permission, the *sannasa.* Hence Kōla Sanniya

goes to the Buddha to get permission from him, and, returning with a strip of *ola* leaf on which the *sannasa* is written, begins to read it triumphantly to the guards. But, to his disappointment, he finds that the *sannasa* gives different instructions from what he expected. He stops reading and breaks out sobbing. For it says: " Kōla Sanniya may go to the world of mortals, but only to heal people and receive the offering that is prepared for him. He must retreat before the sun rises. " The guards show malicious joy. Subdued and heartbroken, Kōla Sanniya goes to the patient and receives his offerings, which consist of fruits, rice, rice-cakes and other ingredients. All this is put into the receptacles of his belt and into his crown of leaves. The cock, too, is hung on him. Loaded with these gifts, he performs his last dance, with a burning torch in his hand, into the flames of which he throws incense-powder. The sacrificial basket, in which all the offerings made to the demons are finally placed, is brought to the centre of the dance-ring, and Kōla Sanniya dances round and round it, directing the burning resin into it, as if to burn it. When he finally stops dancing, the officiating priest carries the basket behind the house or into the bush, and Kōla Sanniya follows him. There he removes his crown, belt and other ornaments, and puts them all into the basket. The basket is then abandoned, and the ceremony ends.

Mimetic elements in the Ceremony known as Raṭa Yakuma

The ceremony known as the *Raṭa Yakuma* or *Raṭa Yakun Yāgaya* is performed for the purpose of ensuring safe delivery to pregnant women and for protecting the child in the womb, or for securing health to the infant already born, or in order to make a barren woman conceive. Along with this ceremony it is often the practice to make an effigy of the demon Kaḷu Kumāra and make an offering to him, because this demon is said to be closely associated with the group of demons known as Raṭa Yakku.

The Sacrificial Altar to the Raṭa Yakku (*raṭa yakun vīdiya*) is constructed with the help of banana stems and tender coconut leaves, somewhat in the manner of the *sanni yakun vīdiya* above. Inside it are seven small altars dedicated to the Seven Barren Queens. On these altars are placed flowers, betel, arecanut, rice, sandal, and such offerings. In a separate sacrificial altar to the demon Kalu Kumāra, there are offerings to Sūniyaṃ Yakṣayā, Kaḷu Yakā (an apparition of Kalu Kumāra), Rīri Yakā and Abimāna Yakā. Among the offerings are a separate offerings-plate of nine different kinds of flowers for the nine demons consisting of the Seven Barren Queens, Riddi Bisava and Kalu Kumāra, as well as a live cock which is a common offering to all the demons.

The ceremony begins with what is known as the *händā pidēniya* or the Evening Offering, which consists of chanting invocatory stanzas to all the demons, and finally to Kalu Yakā, Hūniyam Yakā and Rīri Yakā, accompanied by drumming, dancing, and notes produced on a reed flute, at the end of which offerings are made to these demons, that is, the exorcist takes the offerings-plate in his hand, turns it round a number of times over the patiant's head, and places it back on the altar. Next arrive three or a larger number of exorcists who represent Riddi Bisava. They

are attired in female costume with jackets into which they insert coconut shells to look like breasts, long flowing hair which they make out of strands of tender coconut leaves, bangles, necklaces, earrings, and the like, all of which are made of coconut leaves. A conversation ensues between them and the chief exorcist or a drummer, and in the course of this conversation the purpose of the ceremony that is to be held is revealed. Next the exorcists who are attired in costume relate in chanted verses, accompanied, sometimes, by mime and gesticulation, the legend about Riddi Bisava and her Seven Barren Daughters.

Next is enacted the Scene of the Canopy (*uḍuviyan pāliya*). An exorcist wraps a white cloth round his head, and after chanting for a while, spreads it on the *vīdiya* Nexthe brings a lighted torch and threws incence on it so that the flames spread about, and for a while it looks as if the entire altar is on fire. Sometimes the exorcist climbs up on the *vīdiya* and does the same thing. This is meant to be an enactment of the legend which relates how Riddi Bisava was born of the flames that arose from Mount Mēru.

What follows is the Twelvefold Ritual which depicts how Riddi Bisava and her seven daughters wove a cloth and presented it to Dīpaṅkara Buddha, and thus obtained permission (*varam*) to cause illness to human beings and get sacrificial offerings on which they could subsist. For this purpose, an exorcist or two attired in the manner described above comes into the arena. In the course of a dialogue between the chief exorcist and another, it is revealed that the purpose of the Twelve Rituals is to show how the Seven Barren Queens came to a lotus pond and bathed there in order to rid themselves of impurities. First they depict how the queens rub *nānu*[14] on their hair before bathing. The exorcist brings a small dish which is supposed to contain *nānu*, and smearing his fingers with it, depicts in mime the act of rubbing it on the hair. During this miming the drums alone beat a deep, rhythmic tatoo, and the act of miming follows the rhythm of the drum. Next they discuss among themselves that they must go to a pond in order to wash the *nānu* off their hair. The exorcist then depicts the movements of going to a pond with a pot on his waist, walking round the arena to the rhythm of the drum-beats. While thus moving round he sings verses describing the beauty of the pond. Finally he moves on to the middle of the arena, and mimes how he wades through the water, and begins to bathe, taking potfuls from the pond. After pouring some potfuls of water on his head, he depicts in similar gestures, such acts as washing the hair, cleaning the teeth, scrubbing the body, rubbing soap, and again washing. Further he mimes combing the hair, annointing it with oil, tying the hair into a knot, fixing hair-pins, wearing earrings and other ornaments like bangles and necklaces, rubbing collyrium on the eyelashes, perfuming the body with sandal-paste and all such acts of a woman's toilet. The deep and rhythmic beat of the drum is the only accompaniment to all these acts of silent miming. The twelve rituals conclude with the Queens partaking of a chew of betel as a finale to their toilet.

---

[14] A sticky lotion made by boiling lime fruits and other ingredients, used as a shampoo.

After the twelve rituals are over the exorcist depicts in mime how the Barren Queens wove a cloth to be offered to Dīpaṅkara Buddha. Before this, he takes in his hand an object cut out of banana-stem in the shape of a mirror, and sitting on a low stool, he covers his head with a white cloth, and looking at his face in the mirror, says thus to the chief exorcist:

"I can see many things in this mirror, Gurunnānse.[15] Some are happy and smiling with their children. Some are sad, having no children themselves."

The chief exorcist replies,

"Even in the days of yore, in the time of the Buddha, in the midst of sixteen thousand queens, sixty thousand nursing mothers, and five hundred princesses, there were seven barren queens whose hearts were full of grief that they had no children."

Another exorcist then says,

"Let us show the Story of the Cotton (*kapu uppattiya*) in order to dispel the sorrow of these queens."

Here the drums begin to beat, and the exorcist walks rhythmically round the arena. Presently he continues :

"This is how the barren queens of that time thought: What shall we do in order to have children? Some of them gave sacrifices, others made vows to the gods, while others thought if we pick some fresh cotton and make some thread out of it, weave a cloth and offer it to the Dīpaṅkara Buddha to be used as a robe, we will indeed get children. And when they did as they had thought, they all bore children and were happy."

The chief exorcist then says,

" If so, let us first depict how the cotton was picked." At which the exorcist who represents the seven queens, walks round the arena a number of times and says, " The field has to be ploughed before everything else, and this cannot be done without somebody's help. Besides, we must find a mat. Before that, we must pick some reeds from a good pond. We women should not go alone to a place like a pond. We must find a man for company."

At this point a man from amidst those gathered together to watch the ceremony comes forward, and the exorcist holds him by the hand and drawing him near asks,

"Will you come with me for a walk?"

He throws his arm round the man's neck and walks with him round the arena, chanting verses to the effect, "I have found a fine man, and no better man can a woman find," while the drums beat to the ryhthm of this chant. The man is unwilling and shy, while the woman is obviously making suggestions. The exorcist asks,

"Where do we go to weave the mat?"

---

[15] This word, meaning " teacher ", is used by exorcists when they address the chief exorcist.

The man does not reply, so that the exorcist himself continues, saying,

" Let us go to the pond where the sun and moon shine. "

He then puts his arm round the man's neck and goes round the arena singing the verses of the poem known as *Päduru Upata* (Origin of the Mat). Next he depicts in mime how the reeds are picked, how they are collected in a heap, placed on the head and brought. When this is over he sits on the ground, and drawing the man to his side, mimes the act of weaving a mat. After completing this, he brings a mat, and, laying it on the ground, sits on it, and makes the man, too, sit facing him. Shortly the exorcist gets up, and saying that he is going to fetch some cotton seeds, walks once or twice round the arena, and coming back to the mat, gives the seeds to the man who is seated there. The exorcist prods the man and tells him to go and till the ground, making jokes at him and telling the audience that he is a lazy man. In a while the exorcist brings a small object cut out of banana stem, representing a cotton tree, and places it on the mat. The chief exorcist now instructs him to pick the cotton from the tree, at which he walks up to the arena once more, and mimes the act of picking the cotton from a tree to the accompaniment of the drum, the rhythm of which increases gradually, with the miming keeping pace and ending in a crescendo. Next he mimes in turn the acts of drying the cotton in the sun, picking out the seeds, thinning out the cotton, forming it into rolls, making the thread out of it, wrapping it round a shuttle and finally weaving a cloth out of it. The instruments that are needed for all this, such as a device for picking out the seeds (*yantare*), a bow-like object for thinning the cotton (*rodda*), and a spindle (*vavunna*) are made in miniature, like the cotton-tree, out of banana stem, and employed during the miming.

After these acts are mimed the exorcist asks the chief priest, " Now the cloth has been woven, and what shall we do ? "

At which the chief exorcist replies,

" Now we must offer it as a holy robe (*kaṭhina cīvara*) to the Buddha, and we can expect to see a child been fondled. "

At this the exorcist brings a white cloth, and spreading it on the ground, he kneels down and recites some verses, after which he takes the cloth by its two corners and waves it up and down slowly a number of times. After this he gets up and collects all the articles that were used for depicting this scene, such as the spindle and the cotton tree, and, placing them in a basket, he goes up to the sick person and waving it over her head, pronounces blessings on her. Next he disappears behind the *vīdiya*. Presently we hear a voice lulling a baby to sleep, and in a moment the exorcist appears with an infant in his arms (he uses a doll or a puppet made of wood to represent the infant.) He sings the lullaby that often recurs in demon ceremonies, and is also used in the scene of the pregnant woman in Kōlam, which goes thus,

Like a flower that has blossomed on a tree,
Like a figure painted on a board,
My son is beautiful indeed :
Open your eyes and look at me, my child.

At the end of the lullaby a dialogue of the following sort takes place between the exorcist and the chief priest :

Exorcist : What shall I do, Gurunnānse ? This child of mine has been crying from the time I set out to come here.

Chief Exorcist : If the child is crying, you must make a vow to give alms to the Kiri Ammās.

Exorcist : Very well, then. I vow to give alms to seven Kiri Ammās. That is not the point, Gurunnānse. Why did you ask me to come here ?

Chief Exorcist : It is an age-old custom for a person who has borne a child to come and pronounce blessings on one who has not got a child. In those days in the time of the Dīpankara Buddha, when the seven barren queens who, among five hundred princesses, had no children, at last bore children they say that the joy of these queens knew no bounds. What we should ourselves do is to hand over this child you have brought to the patient for whom this ceremony is performed, and make her heart happy. After which she will certainly give us presents.

At these words the exorcist carries the child to the patient and pronounces blessings on her, and later, presenting the child to the relatives of the patient as well as the others gathered, they obtain presents from them.

In certain traditions, the exorcist comes in with the child and sits on a stool. Then a basin of water is brought and placed by his side, and he pours water on the child's head, cleans its eyes and nose, and rubs oil on its head, as is done in the case of small infants. He sings a lullaby and rocks the child to sleep only after these acts have been performed, and subsequently he presents the child to the patient and her close relatives as well as those in the gathering.

The Garā Yakuma

In the Garā Yakuma, an alaborate ceremony performed in connection with the demons of the Garā group, there is great deal of dramatic dancing, with the exorcist wearing the costumes and masks which represent the Garā Demons. In this ceremony there are twelve different rituals (*doḷaha peḷapāliya*) to be done in honour of each of twelve Garā Demons. The incident occasioning the ceremony is described thus in the traditional demon lore : Valli Amma, who was born in the vicinity of Kataragama and reared by Väddās, was betrothed to Kataragama Deviyo, and the Väddās were asked to help in the preparations for their wedding. The Väddās constructed an enormous wedding-hall (*magul maḍuva*) and killing every kind of animal they could find, hung pieces of flesh from the roof in order to decorate the hall. In a few days the flesh rotted, and the smell pervaded the quarters. The gods who wished to attend the wedding employed the Garā Demons to clean up the place. The Garā demons are supposed to have a voracious appetite, so they ate up all the rotting pieces of flesh and made the place suitable for the gods to attend.

The ceremony begins with the enactment of the scene where the gods invite the Garā demon to undertake the work of cleaning the *magul maḍuva*. The priest wears a mask and impersonates a Garā demon. The Koṭṭōruvā or Master of Ceremonies is the grandson of the Garā demon. The demon is believed to be very lazy and inactive, and is not very anxious to undertake any job. The Koṭṭōruvā chants verses asking the demon to get up from his sleep and begin the task. The demon replies that it is very cold and that he would like to sleep. He asks his grandson to make a fire so that he might warm himself. He provokes great fun by falling on the Koṭṭōruvā and embracing him, and speaking to him in terms of endearment. In the end he agrees to perform the task, as the Koṭṭōruvā says that he is being invited by the gods themselves.

The ceremony begins in what is known as the Yāgapala, a square enclosure open on one side, made of coconut leaves and slit banana trunks, the hollow inside of the banana trunks serving as a receptacle for numerous clay lamps and flowers. Six or twelve dancers appear, dressed in white cloths and white jackets and sashes, with halves of coconut-shells under their blouses so that they would look like women. These dancers represent the Giri goddesses. They wear ornaments which consist of a diadem and breast-plate of brass, bangles, and heavy anklets round their feet. After much dancing, there follow a number of scenes which depict in mime the growing up of Giri Devi, how she excelled in beauty and charm and was desired by everybody. As in the Raṭa Yakuma, the priests enact how Giri Devi bathed, powdered her face, washed and combed her hair. Other dances represent the marriage of Daḷa Kumāra with Giri Dēvi, his flight with her, and their life in the forest.

An impressive scene in the Garā Yakuma is that in which the episode of Daḷa Kumāra becoming Daḷa Rākṣasa is illustrated in dance. A pair of dancers appear dressed as before, their heads covered with a white cloth, and an ornament of coconut leaves fastened on to their head-dresses. Down the neck of each hangs a long slit braid of coconut leaves. Each of them holds a three-forked torch (*kīla pandama*) in his hand. They appear from behind the *aile*, a kind of swing made by erecting three trunks or boughs of a *goraka* tree, and climbing it, swing backwards and forwards on it, almost touching the ground while doing do. Shortly afterwards they wear two masks (the Garā masks which have tusks and big round eyes and ear-ornaments) and swing again on the *aile*, after which they climb down and run in all directions waving their torches and throwing incense into the flames. They finally climb on to the *aile* again and receive their offerings (*garā pidēni*) while seated on it, and while the offerings are being censed and brought to them there ensues a conversation between the priest and the demons, in which there is a great deal of witty repartee, of a sort that provokes mirth but is not suitable for reproduction here. There is little doubt that here we have a case of ritual obscenity meant to to drive away evil influence (*vas*).

The last ritual in the Garā Yakuma takes the shape of a dramatic episode depicting the distribution of paddy (*vī bedīma*). In this ritual the priests depict in mime all the stages from the ploughing of a field to the cutting of the corn. The

Koṭṭōruvā wears a bull's head and walks on all fours to show the treading of the field. Next the act of sowing is depicted in mime, and finally a ripened paddy field is shown with the help of coconut leaves. The corn has now to be cut and distributed among those who contributed their share of labour. Hence some paddy is actually brought and divided among the owner of the cattle, the men who ploughed, the women who cut the corn and all those who had worked in the field. All these people, however, return their shares to the owner of the field, who appropriates the entire stock of corn. The purpose of this enactment, it is said, is to ask the Garā demons to remove the evils resulting from such unjust appropriation.

AUTHORITIES

L. D. Barnett, *Alphabetical Guide to Sinhalese Folklore from Ballad Sources* [reprinted from *The Indian Antiquary*], (Bombay, 1917).

Dandris de Silva Gunaratna, *Demonology and Witchcraft in Ceylon*, in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch*, Vol. IV, No. 13.

U. A. Gunasekara, *Pūnā Maḍuva* or *The Scapegoat Idea in Ceylon*, in *Spolia Zeylanica*, Vol. 27, Part I, (Colombo, 1953).

Edward Upham, *The History and Doctrine of Budhism, popularly illustrated with notices of The Kappooism or Demon Worship and of The Bali or Planetary Incantations of Ceylon*, (London, 1829).

Paul Wirz, *Exorcismus und Heilkunde auf Ceylon*, (Bern, 1941).

CHAPTER THREE

DRAMATIC INTERLUDES ATTACHED TO THE CEREMONIES

The ceremonies of the folk religion, some of which have been described in the last chapter, begin in the early hours of the evening and go on through the entire night. It is sometimes close upon midday when they formally conclude. When audiences begin to nod, there is often enacted a dramatic interlude, with mime and comic dialogue, calculated to amuse the audience, sometimes having a ritual purpose, but sometimes only loosely connected with the ceremony as such. Sometimes these episodes are enactments of some legend connected with the particular supernatural beings that are being propitiated in the ceremony, and can be styled dramatic interludes.

Brahmins from the Port of Vaḍiga

One of the most interesting as well as popular among these interludes is that which is enacted in the course of the ceremony known as Hūniyaṃ Käpīma, a ritual intended to dispel the evil influence that could accrue on a person as a result of the group of charms known as *hūniyaṃ* which it is suspected, have been performed against him. It is called the Vaḍiga Paṭuna and can be cited as an instance of an interlude that has very little direct connection with the ceremony proper that is being performed that particular night. It depicts the arrival in Ceylon of some Brahmins who are versed in the Hūniyaṃ ritual. They see a ceremony being performed, and begin to wonder what it is. They are unable to understand Sinhalese, and therefore cannot communicate with the exorcists. This inability to understand one another causes a great deal of humour of the sort that is very common in folk ceremonies as well as folk plays. Finally it is discovered that the Brahmins speak Pali which is understood in Ceylon as well, and presently there ensues a dialogue between them and one of the exorcists, in a kind of pseudo-Pali made up impromptu, and this is indeed very amusing. At the end of this, after performing a number of dances, the Brahmins bless the patient and go away.

The Vaḍiga Paṭuna starts very dramatically, with drumming behind the *vīdiya* beginning with a deep reverberating roll and rising to a loud pitch of intensity, so that the audience is worked up to a climax of expectation. Suddenly there appear from behind the *vīdiya*, two or more actors dressed like Brahmins, in turban and *dhoti*, carrying in one hand a book and in the other hand an umbrella. They wear dark-coloured glasses, according to a convention, perhaps, which indicates that wearing glasses is a sign of learnedness. They also wear other ornaments like armlets and rosaries all of which indicate their position. They perform a gesture or two, according to the rhythm of the drum, and immediately disappear. Once again they come after a while and act as before. It is after they have appeared three times in this manner that they come out fully into the open. They dance round the arena to a series of set rhythms, performing set movements, and after the dancing is over, they

perceive the sacrificial altar, and a number of people gathered together, and feign surprise. Presently one of them asks what is happening, and an exorcist replies. They are unable to understand each other, but after a common language has been discovered, a dialogue of the following sort takes place between them[1] :

Exorcists : Why have you come here ?

Brahmins : We like to know what is happening here.

Exorcists : This is a sacrificial ritual (*yāga homa kammaṃ*).

Brahmins : For whose benefit are you doing it ?

Exorcists : For the benefit of the patient.

Brahmins : What is he suffering from ?

Exorcists : He is suffering from the effects of the evil eye, the evil mouth, and certain other charms. It is for these in general that this ritual is performed.

Brahmins : What is this structure that we see here ?

Exorcists : That is the *aṭamagala* or the *sūniyaṃ vīdiya.*[2]

Brahmins : What demon or god do you seek to appease in this ceremony ?

Exorcists : In this ceremony we seek to appease the demon Sūniyaṃ Yakṣayā, also known as Oḍḍi Sūniyaṃ Devatā, born of the king Oḍḍi Vaḍiga in the country of Oḍḍi Vaḍiga.

Brahmins : O, indeed, is that so ? We come from Vaḍiga ourselves. Would you let us, too, perform a sacrifice ?

Exorcists : Well, yes. We don't see any objection to that.

Brahmins : Are there any cats here ?

Exorcists : Yes, here is a cat.

Brahmins : O, how horrible! Then we must go away.

Exorcists : Please don't. We will get rid of the cat.

Brahmins : Will you let me see the patient ?

Exorcists : Yes, certainly. (The brahmins go up to the patient and examine his pulse).

Brahmins : Yes, we can see that he has come under the influence of a *koḍivina* (charm).

Exorcists : You seem to know the science of examining the pulse.

Brahmins : Yes, we are experts in it. We should like to perform this ritual now. But, what will you give us in return ? We must at least have some thing to cover up our travelling expenses.

---

[1] In the present day, exorcists seem to have realised the entertainment value of this interlude and they have attempted to increase its appeal. In a performance seen recently the Brahmins after concluding their dance, began to sing in very modern style, introducing themselves as learned Brahmins who have come from the place known as Vaḍiga in India.

[2] *sūniyaṃ* and *hūniyaṃ* are alternative forms.

Exorcists : What do you want travelling expenses for ? You told me that you were only passing this way.

Brahmins : We are prepared to do it only if you can give us fifty rupees.

Exorcists : No, no. We cannot give you anything. If you succeed in curing the patient, we might consider rewarding you for it.

Brahmins : We are agreeable. Well, then, let us start the ceremony.
(Here the drummer begins to beat the drum, and the brahmins dance for a while, mutter incantations over the patient, and depart).

Shooting the Mango

Two dramatic interludes that occur in the ceremony known as a Gaṃ Maḍuva, are the *Aṁba Vidamana*, the Shooting of the Mango, and *Rāma Märīma*, the Killing of Rāma. The Gaṃ Maḍuva is a collective ritual performed to propitiate several deities, and generally intended to ward off evil and bring prosperity to the crops. The ceremonies usually begin after the harvesting, when the first portion of paddy, collected from every household, is cooked, and offered at the altars of the various gods, like Däḍimuṇḍa, Kataragama, Saman, Vibhīṣana, and, of course the goddess Pattini. This initial ritual is known as *murutän pidīma*, or Offering New Rice. Then follows the set of ceremonies associated with the worship of Pattini (*Pattini Bhāge*). The priest brings the ornaments of Pattini from the *dēvālaya*, and places them on the main altar (*torana*). This is followed by group dancing, in which the chief priest as well as attendant dancers take part. The dancing ends with the priest " exhibiting the anklets ", that is, he carries the anklets in his trembling hands and walks from altar to altar in a trance, and finally deposits them in the main altar. The *Pattini Bhāge* is followed by a dance called *Telme Näṭīma*, or the Oil Service. A stand made of the pith of the banana tree (*kehel baḍa*) and tender coconut leaves (*gokkola*) is placed in the middle of the ring. It is lit up with torches (*vilakku*), and dancing goes on round it.

The next set of ceremonies is the *Vāhala Bhāge*, or the dances dedicated to the Vāhala Deviyo. A dancer, who is blindfolded, is attired in the costume of the god Vāhala, and a trance is induced in him by making him sit on a chair and fumigating the soles of his feet with incense, to the accompaniment of incantations. He suddenly gets up and begins a frenzied dance, holding, at one time, coconut flowers in his hand, and at one time, burning torches. He runs in all directions, and, throwing powdered resin on his torch, drives away the demons with the help of the incense thus produced. He is supposed to sense the various spots inhabited by the evil spirits. From time to time he falls on one or other of the altars and somebody has to free him each time.

Next comes the *Devol Bhāge* or set of ceremonies dedicated to the Devol Deviyo. It is in this that the dramatic episode of Shooting the Mango is performed. It is purported to be an enactment of the legend of the birth of Pattini from a mango. A strange mango of unusual size grows in the garden of the king of Paṅḍi. He does not know what to do with it, and orders his bowsmen to shoot it down, but they are

unable to do so. Finally Śakra comes in the guise of an old man and offers to shoot the mango down. All the people ridicule him for offering to do something which expert young bowsmen were unable to do. At the end, however, he is allowed to shoot the mango, and when the fruit splits in two, out of it emerges the goddess Pattini. The dramatisation begins with the appearance of Śakra wearing the mask of an old man and trembling in his limbs, very much in the manner in which he appears in the folk-play *Saňda kiňduru*. The drummer engages in a dialogue with him, asking him from where he came, and similar questions, and pokes fun at him. Then the drummer tells him about the strange mango in the king's garden, and the fact that nobody was able to shoot it. The old man offers to shoot it himself, but the drummer scoffs at the idea. In the end, however, the old man is given the bow belonging to the king of Paňḍi. The old man tries to shoot with it, but breaks it in the attempt. Finally he promises to shoot it with his own bow and arrows, and at this point one of the priests hands him a brass bow with a metal arrow attached to it by a chain. This bow and arrow, together with the brass mangoes, are in the possession of the priests, who keeps them in the *devālaya* together with the brass anklets (*halaṃ*) of Pattini. He shoots the mango down with his brass arrow, and the scene ends there. Impromptu prose dialogue is interspersed, throughout the performance, with the recitation of verses relating the story of the birth of Pattini from the mango. These verses belong to a ballad known as the *Aṁba Vidamana*.

Killing of Rāma

The interlude called the Killing of Rāma belongs, like the interlude described above, to the set of ceremonies performed at the termination of the Gaṃ Maḍuva, as the night wanes and the sun begins to shine. It is enacted in the following manner.[3] The performance begins with a scene in which Rāma visits a Heṭṭiya (a merchant) in order to buy cloth for his wife's funeral. Rāma and the Heṭṭiya are both seated on a mat, and since Rāma does not understand Sinhalese the Heṭṭiya cracks many jokes at his expense, examining his eyes and saying that he looks pregnant, and that his stomach is soft to the touch. The Kapurāla or some other member of his party, such as a drummer, acts as interlocutor and interpreter. The mention of Rāma's wife gives an occasion for the cracking of many ribald jokes, which the unsophisticated village audience gathered around enjoy heartily. In the end, after a great deal of haggling and many misunderstandings, which again provide opportunities for fun, Rāma buys the cloth and departs. The Heṭṭiya then goes to sleep on his mat. After a while a man wakes him and informs him that he has been robbed. He finds that all his goods are lost. The Heṭṭiya then consults the interlocutor as to the best thing he could do under the circumstances. Several ways are suggested by which he might be able to divine who is the culprit. One is by sanctifying an arecanut flower (*mala pēkaranava*). Another is the sanctification of a coconut. He decides to try each of these methods, and begins with an arecanut flower. He dances with it before the altar, chanting to the effect that the flower should, by the virtues of Pattini, indicate who was the

[3] Reported from a Gam Maḍuva seen at Meegoda on the 10th of October, 1949 and one seen at Deepangoda on the 15th of the same month.

thief. After the dancing and chanting, he throws the flower in the air, but without result. Next he tries the coconut charm, dancing, as before, with the coconut in the hand, to the accompaniment of chants, and throws the coconut. The coconut returns. He does the same thing again, and this time, too, the coconut returns to him. The third time, however, it does not return, and the Heṭṭiya goes in search of it and discovers Rāma. He brings him back and beats him till he dies, after which he dismembers him (this being done in mime).

After killing Rāma, the Heṭṭiya tries to escape, but he is caught and brought back and requested to restore Rāma back to life. The last act, so to speak, is the reviving of Rāma. The Heṭṭiya feels his body and asks him if he is really dead, to the great amusement of the village boys. He sings verses, asking him to get up, saying, in turn, that his father, brother, sister, brother-in-law and sister-in-law have come. At the end of each verse the interlocutor interrupts with the statement that Rāma is not on good terms with each of these relatives. Finally the Heṭṭiya makes an appeal to Pattini, and with her help, Rāma is brought back to life.

It is difficult to say exactly how the above enactment is connected with the legend of Pattini, or what ritual purpose it could have. The actual legend says that Pālaňga, the husband of Pattini in her birth as Kannagi, was accused of stealing an anklet belonging to the queen of Madura, and was put to death. Pattini came seeking him, and with her magic powers brought him back to life, and in her wrath set fire to the city of Madura. It is possible that the Rāma spoken of here is another name for Pālaňga, but the scene does not depict this story in all its details. There is a scene called Bringing Back to Life (*Marā Ipäddīma*) performed in other traditions of the Gaṃ Maḍuva ceremony, which is a more faithful portrayal of this legend of the Pattini-cycle. The following account is based on a description of this dramatic interlude as documented by Dr. Gananath Obeyesekara of the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya :

Bringing Back to Life

According to legend, Pālaňga is for a while infatuated with a dancer called Mādēvi (Mādhavī), and after spending all his fortunes on her, he returns to his lawful wife Pattini. But they have not the wherewithal to carry on a livelihood, and decide to go to the city of Madura, there to seek their fortunes. First is depicted how they journey to Madura, along with Pattini's slave, a woman called Kāli. For this purpose a small shed of banana-stem and tender coconut leaves is erected to represent the Velli Ambalama, a resting place close to the city of Madura. Not far from this and on the same side a few branches of the *kohoṁba* tree are hung, and Pālaňga is lying stretched on the ground under these branches with his body covered from head to foot with a white cloth. Presently there enters from the opposite side the Kapurāla attired in the guise of Pattini, and following her is the slave Kāli carrying a basket on her head. The Kapurāla describes in verses how Pālaňga and Pattini decide to leave for Madura, and how on the way, Pālaňga asks Pattini to stay back till he goes to Madura and sells her anklet and brings back some money which they are in sore need of. The verses describe how he falls at her feet and takes leave of her.

These portions are not actually depicted in the present day, but tradition says that earlier they were actually acted. The story relates how Pālaňga goes to a goldsmith to sell the anklet, and how the goldsmith takes him to the king, because at that time a search was being made throughout the city for the queen's lost anklet, and how Pālaňga is ordered to be put to death. The actual dramatic enactment takes place from here onward, in the following manner :

An actor with mask-like make-up on his face, and a set of teeth jutting out of his mouth, comes leaping into the arena from the side opposite to the place where Pālaňga is lying on the ground. He wears a garment similar to a bear's skin, and has a garland of red flowers round his neck. At this point the rhythm of the Kapurāla's chanting changes from a slow narrative style to a quick beat, extremely suited to the tenseness of the occasion. For about fifteen minutes this Demon of Death, or the Executioner, whom the actor represents, runs around the arena in a frenzy, brandishing his sword and uttering wierd cries, while the drums beat louder and louder. Next he runs towards Pālaňga, and snatches away the cloth that had been covering his body. In a moment he mimes the act of piercing Pālaňga with his sword, directing it at his body a number of times, and finally he pierces Pālaňga's stomach and pulls out the entrails smeared with blood. To make this act look very realistic the priests use rags which had been dipped in red dye. After thus depicting the killing of Pālaňga, the demon leaves the arena.

Presently Pattini and her slave decide to go in search of Pālaňga, and they move up, dancing and singing, in the direction of the Velli Ambalama, and as they approach the place, an actor attired in fearful guise, falls on the two of them with cries of " I will eat you, I will devour you," and we learn from the verses chanted, that this is a demoness who haunts Velli Ambalama. Pattini chants verses and points at the demoness with her forefinger, and the demoness falls down at her feet, shivering in her limbs, and begs pardon of her. Other incidents of the journey are depicted in partial mime accompanied by chanting, and one of these is the incident where she has to cross the river Kāveri, but the ferry-man refuses to take her across. She takes her ring and throws it into the river, and the waters part and let her cross. For this purpose, a basin of water is brought into the arena, and Pattini throws a ring into it, reciting, all the while, the powerful verses which describe this situation, from the well-known folk poem, the *Pattini Hālla.*

As Pattini and her slave continue on their journey, there come into the arena two children with books in their hands. These are supposed to be the two sons of the King of Madura, who are on their way to school, and Pattini asks them news about Pālaňga. The reply is that Pālaňga has been put to death by the king. Both the question and answer are contained in the verses sung by the Kapurāla, although tradition has it that, earlier, the children themselves used to chant the verses in reply. When the children leave the arena, Pattini draws near to the spot where Pālaňga is lying dead, and kneeling beside his body, chants the famous lamentation which is contained in the *Pattini Hālla.*

At the end of this lamentation, Śakra comes on the scene, attired in rags like a beggar, bent in two with age, and wearing a mask having a white beard on it. Verses chanted by another priest describe the miracle he is going to perform. He creates a pond full of ambrosia, and dipping his shawl in the pond, sprinkles some ambrosia on the dead man and thus brings him back to life. This is depicted by sprinkling water out of a goblet on Pālaňga's body.

Apparently the kind of interludes that there are in a Gaṃ Maḍuva varies with different places, and, particularly between the low-country and the hill-country, there are conspicuous differences. In the hill-country, a large number of local deities unknown in the coastal and other regions, are included in the worship, although Pattini takes the first place. Ceremonies connected with the cult of the Twelve Gods (*doḷaha devivaru*) are included in the ritual of the Gaṃ Maḍuva. Some of these gods are known as Baṇḍāras, who are deifications of tribal heroes. Some of them are bundled together with Pattini and regarded as her attendants.

In a Gaṃ Maḍuva seen at Badulla in September, 1946, there were many ceremonies unknown in other parts of Ceylon. One is the offering of babies to be consecrated by the deity Aňdun Kumāra Deviyo. Another is the ceremony known as *kävum oravanavā*, where seven fried cakes are thrown into a pan of boiling oil, and the priest takes them in his hand and runs round the *dēvālaya*. In the ceremony known as the Boiling of Milk (*kiri uturuvanavā*), the priest boils milk, and putting his hand into the hot liquid, rubs it on his head.

Capturing an Elephant

An interesting dramatic spisode that was witnessed in this Gaṃ Maḍuva is that known as *Ät Bandana*, or Capturing an Elephant. It had many elements which are also present in folk plays like Sokari. The elephants are represented by two boys, gaily attired in velvet jackets and turbans. The priest sings verses to the accompaniment of the *horaṇä* and tries to cross over a stile or gate represented by two pestles held crosswise on the ground. This is called a *kaḍavata*. The men who hold the pestles in position act as gate-keepers and do not allow the priest to cross. They insist that he should bring a *sannasa*, a written message from the king of Sāgala. When he brings the *sannasa*, however, he is sent back with instructions that he should carry it in the proper way. Not knowing what the correct way is, the priest brings the *sannasa* successively on his knee, his shoulder, his foot, and in his hands, until, in his seventh attempt he brings it on his head, and is allowed to cross. These attempts to cross the gate give opportunities for humorous impromptu dialogue between the priest and the gate-keepers. Finally he crosses over and captures the elephants. The priest and the two boys are now all possessed of the deity, and they are able to tell the future. The elephants are carried round the *dēvālaya* and presented to the deity, who, in this ritual, is Puñci Alut Baṇḍāra, the guardian deity of elephants, and the guardians of the gate are his servants. In this interlude we have, very probably, a ritual enacted dramatically for promoting success in hunting, of particular help, perhaps, for capturing elephants. Crossing the gate represents, symbolically, surmounting obstacles.

It is used in more than one kind of folk ceremony in Ceylon, wherever it is necessary to suggest that a difficult task has been performed or serious obstacles removed. In the fire-walking, for example, performed towards the close of a Gaṃ Maḍuva, the priest crosses seven gates before finally treading on the live coals. It would be natural to expect rituals of this sort in the Uva province, just as, along the coast, one would expect rituals intended to promote success in fishing.

In the Gaṃ Maḍuva performed in the low-country, however, the *Äṭ Bandana* is a fairly long, humorous interlude, not without ritual significance, in which is depicted in mime and dialogue, how an elephant is captured and its tusks are cut and offered to the Twelve Gods, and particularly to Mangara Deviyo, for purposes of removing evil influence (*vasdos*). It is enacted in the following manner : [4]

In a preliminary dialogue among the priests, it is revealed that they are going to embark on the capture of an elephant. Then, to the accompaniment of drums, they go dancing round the arena, singing verses such as the following :

Our Twelve Gods, so powerful,
Are not satisfied, however many spectacles we provide
To bless this sick man in his undertakings :
We'll find an elephant and tie him up for an offering.
Look towards the wilderness of Puttalan Lake !
The Veddas are scanning the forest searching,
Wandering everywhere through the forests of Māgama—
That area where the sly elephant dwells.
Stumbling at various places in the forest,
What could we do, not having seen a soul in sight ?
Everywhere we scanned, nothing in all truth I saw :
An elephant I see at last, sitting on a log thrown across a stream.

At the conclusion of the chanting, the dancing and the drumming stop, and there is, again, a piece of dialogue between the chief priest and the drummer :

Priest : Gurunnānse, an elephant ! I was going with the Koṭṭōruva, eating, drinking, and doing all manner of things, when we reached the Valave river, and the fellow told me, ' Stop. I see an elephant ' ' Where ? ' I cried. ' On the log across the stream,' he replied, and sure enough, Gurunnānse, there he was. . . . and seeing us he scampered away.

Drummer : What did he look like ?

Priest : He looked like an elephant.

---

[4] This account was supplied to me by Dr. Gananath Obeyesekare of the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya, who recorded it during his field investigations on anthropology.

Drummer : Well, what happened ?

Priest : Well, he had five legs and when he saw us he jumped ' jabak ' into the river and ' babak ' he started bubbling.

Drummer : O, you fool, It's not an elephant. An *ibbā* (tortoise) !

Priest : *Imbā* (kissed, smelt) ? I couldn't get near him, he stank fearfully.

Drummer : No, I mean that the creature you saw was an *ibbā*.

Priest : Then I was mistaken, wasn't I, Gurunnānse ? That was no elephant, but an apparition. It was a sign that the evil influence of this sick man is disappearing. (Pronouncing a blessing) In the same way as the tortoise dived into the water, may the evil influence vanish and blessings accrue.

The dialogue goes on in this manner, with the priest mistaking many creatures for an elephant, and the humour centring round this, as well as on puns. Here the priest mimics the cries of various animals very cleverly. Finally an elephant is found. At this point an actor comes in to represent an elephant. He is dressed in white, and has a white cloth wrapped turbanwise round his head. One end of the cloth is twisted in the manner of a rope and is allowed to dangle over the face and fall down up to the knees, so that it looks like the trunk of an elephant. The elephant roars and stamps and shies violently when the priest approaches it. The priest, scared, goes running up to the drummer, who teases him for his timidity and urges him to go up and catch the elephant. The capturing is depicted once again in mime which is accompanied by drumming and chanting. The elephant runs round the arena, and the priest chases him. The elephants roars, shies, runs found the arena, and does many pranks to the great amusement of the audience, and finally it is captured. The verses sung after the capturing are as follows :

Send him from the forest to our herd.
Send me the tusker, Amarapati Amma !
That all our faults may be excused
We bathe the elephant and dedicate it to the gods.
With reddish turmeric we purify its body
Cut his two teeth and offer it to the gods.
With this Capturing the Elephant
May the evil influence of the sick man vanish.

In the end the acts of cleansing, bathing and measuring the elephant are depicted in mime, comically, of course, with dialogue interspersed. The joints of the elephant are ' tapped, ' the tusks are rubbed and finally cut, and the priest says that the tusks of the elephant have been offered to the Twelve Gods and pronounces a blessing on the sick person.

Capturing a Buffalo

Mī Bandana or the Capturing of a Buffalo follows upon the *Ät Bandana* in a Gam Maḍuva, and is performed in a very similar manner. The purpose of this interlude is also to make an offering to the Twelve Gods, and particularly the god Mangara, in order that cattle and buffaloes belonging to the Donor of the Ceremony may be cured of their diseases. Here, too, the priest mistakes several animals for a buffalo, and finally comes upon one. The actor who represents the buffalo wears an improvised mask with horns and a tail made of cloth. He comes bent, with two long sticks in his hands, with the aid of which he walks as if with four feet. At the end of the Capture, the exorcists poke fun at the buffalo, and he is finally offered to the gods.

Dramatic interludes in the Kohoṁbā Kankāriya

There are similar dramatic interludes enacted in the course of the ceremony known as Kohoṁbā Kaṅkāriya or the Ritual of the God Kohoṁbā, which, like the Gam Maḍuva, is performed in order to ensure general prosperity and freedom from disease and pestilence throughout the entire village. The legends relating the origin of this ritual state that it was first performed with the intention of curing King Paṇḍuvāsudeva of an illness that afflicted him as a result of his predecessor, King Vijaya, having broken the promise he made to Kuveṇi. The King of the Gods, Śakra, expressed the view that the king could not be cured except by a person not born of woman, that is by a person born of a Flower, or the King of the Flower (*Malē Rajjuruvo*). Śakra himself suggested an expedient by which the King of the Flower could be inveigled into this island. That is, Rāhu, the chief of the Asuras, should assume the apparition of a boar, and should lay waste the garden of the King of the Flower. The King of the Flower will, in anger, pursue the boar, and thus he could be brought here. Śakra's advice was followed and the King of the Flower was brought to Ceylon, and when told the truth he agreed to cure Paṇḍuvāsudeva. The King of the Flower immediately got down four Brahmins from India, and making them assume various guises, he instructed them to perform various comic turns. When Paṇḍuvāsudeva saw these he laughed and was cured of his illness. According to some traditions, the King of the Flower was accompanied by his two brothers, Kit Siri and Saňdaliňdu, and the three together performed the acts which cured Paṇḍuvāsudeva. At the end the ritual of the Kohoṁbā Kaṅkāriya was also performed for general good luck. It is stated in some traditions that when the King of the Flower returned to India, he committed the people of Lanka to the care of twelve deities, Kohoṁbā Yakā, Irugal Baṇḍāra, Kande Baṇḍāra, Vīramuṇḍa Yakā, Meleyi Yakā, Vädi Yakā, Kaḍavara Yakā, Vali Yakā, Kuḍā Guru, Maha Guru, Aṁbarāpati and Kaḷu Kumāra. All these deities are invoked in the rituals of the Kohoṁbā Kaňkāriya.

As in the case of the other exorcistic ceremonies mentioned earlier, the ritual of the Kohoṁbā Kankāriya itself contains elements of impersonation. For example, the costume worn by the exorcist is said to be the dress of the King of the Flower who originally performed the ceremony. The exorcist, therefore, impersonates the King of the Flower when he now performs the ritual.

Among the main rituals of the Kohoṁbā Kankāriya, and coming towards the close of the entire ceremony, there are five minor rituals, known as Yakkaṃ Paha, which are actually dramatic enactments of small episodes loosely connected with the ritual purpose itself, but providing entertainment to the audience. One of the most interesting of these, from the point of view of the styles it employs as well as the influence it must have exerted on the styles of the folk drama proper, is what is known as the Nayā Yakkama, or the Ritual of the Snake. The incident depicted is how paddy is collected by contributions from the village, and how a meal is prepared to be offered as alms to a person called Sōliya Guru (his connection with the ritual is not clear). The man who carries alms to be offered to Sōliya Guru is stung by a snake on the way.

The scene begins with the priests holding a piece of cloth by its two edges and moving round to the rhythm of the drum-beat, thus miming how the paddy is collected. They sing all the while asking people to make a contribution for the alms to be given to Sōliya Guru. A third priest joins them after a while, throwing an arecanut flower and a coin on to the cloth. Presently all three sit on the ground on a mat laid for the purpose, and mime how the paddy collected is spread out on the mat to be dried. After this, a number of subsequent acts necessary for preparing the meal, such as pounding the paddy, husking it, making the fire-place, washing the rice, placing the pot on the fire and kindling the fire are all depicted in rhythmic mime as before, to the accompaniment of the drum. Sometimes, verses are sung describing the action. Various properties are used symbolically, such as a stick to represent a pestle, and the ornamental waist-band which the priests wear, to represent a winnowing-fan.

Next the priests depict how a pingo is prepared in order to carry the meal. This is done by tying a cloth to one end of a stick in suchwise as to make it hang like a bag. One of the priests places this pingo on his shoulders, and walks round the arena to rhythmic movements in order to depict the journey he makes to the house of Sōliya Guru. Suddenly the pingo falls, and the other priests rush to the spot to help lift it, but they suspect that there is a snake in the snake-hole by which the pingo fell. Presently a snake crawls out of the spot and stings the priest who was carrying the pingo, and he cries out in pain, describing in verses how he has been stung on the knee (a snake cut out of wood is used in miming these incidents). The other priests utter mock charms and dispel the snake-poison, and the priest resumes his journey. But he is stung again, this time on the chest, and the same process is repeated. He is stung again several times, on different parts on his body, and in the end the priests gather a number of wooden snakes in a cloth, and showing the snakes to the audience, go round and collect presents of money.

The episode known as Ūru Yakkama or Ūrā Vidamana, Shooting a Boar, is also interesting both for its witty dialogue and typical village satire, as well as for the mimetic devices it uses. The scene begins with the two priests walking side by side in the space between the two altars set up opposite to each other for the Kohoṁbā Kankāriya, and discussing with each other how they should find the boar that laid waste the rice-fields of the King of the Flower (compare the legend of the origin of

the Kohoṁbā Kankāriya). Much of the wit in this dialogue depends, as in may folk ceremonies and plays, on the deliberate misunderstanding of words and on puns with words that sound similar. It is suggested that one of them goes to the astrologer in order to ask him for some " signs " (*nimiti*) for this purpose, and eventually the priest describes how he went in search of the boar according to the instructions given by the astrologer, but was not successful in finding the animal. Here, as in the interlude known as Capturing the Elephant in the Gam Maḍuva, the priest mistakes several animals for a boar, and this makes humorous dialogue. Finally he discovers an actual boar, and at this point the Master of Ceremonies (called here *atōrakāraya*) brings in a small object cut out of banana-stem in the shape of a boar, with four pieces of stick fixed on to it to represent the animal's legs, and places it on the ground. The priests stand round the boar and ask one another how they are to proceed to shoot it. It is suggested that they should employ a buffalo as decoy for the purpose, and the Master of Ceremonies offers to act as a buffalo, which he does by bending his back and resting the weight of the upper part of his body on his knees by means of his outstretched hands, that is, by placing his open palms on his knees. The priests then mime the act of trying to capture the decoy buffalo by throwing a noose at him (this they make by rolling a piece of cloth into the shape of a rope). After several attempts the buffalo is caught, and next is mimed the act of capturing the boar by using the buffalo as decoy. This is done in the following way : one of the priests takes a small bow and arrow, and aiming at the boar, walks round it several times to the rhythm of the drum-beat concealing himself behind the man who acts as decoy buffalo, all the while miming the act of shooting the boar. Sometimes cymbals are used to beat the rhythm of this imitative movement. After a while the man who impersonates the buffalo, takes the arrow from the hand of the priest, and pierces the boar several times with it, until it is completely dismembered.

The final act of this episode consists in depicting how portions of the dead boar's flesh are distributed among the villagers according to their various professions and the social position they occupy. As each portion is distributed, the exorcist chants humorous verses which poke fun at the recipients, particularly if they belong to the class holding land and power.

The Vädi Yakkama also known as Väddan Givissīma, or Initiating the Hunter, depicts in dramatic form how Väddās from different parts of the Island are invited to the ceremony of Kohoṁbā Kankāriya and their co-operation obtained for making the occasion a success. This, too, is treated in a light and humorous vein. The scene opens with a Väddā (impersonated by the Master of Ceremonies) being chased by a priest round a mat laid on the floor. Having run round the mat three or four times, the Väddā sits on a log of wood that has been placed on it for the purpose. The priest too, sits facing the Väddā on the mat. Presently a conversation ensues between the priest and a drummer, in which various jokes are made about the Väddā and the Väddā's uncleanliness is hinted at. Between them they agree that the Väddā is impure and must be purified before he could be allowed to take part in the ceremony. It is decided that the Väddā should be cleansed with boiled lime. Thenceforth a series of actions beginning with cutting the lime fruit, putting the cut lime into a pot,

filling it with water, and placing the pot on the fire to boil, bringing firewood and kindling the fire, are depicted in silent mime to the accompaniment of the drum, each separate act being preceded by a piece of explanatory dialogue. Next the priest depicts in mime how the Väddā's ornaments are removed and lime is rubbed all over his body from head to foot, after which he is bathed, and his ornaments put on him once more. At the end of this the priest and drummer converse with each other and decide that the Väddā has to be fed. The priest now opens the lid of a vessel in which there have been placed various kinds of vegetables and bananas, and taking a banana from it, he peels it and after teasing the Väddā a great deal, pushes it into the mouth of the Väddā who has to gobble it down with difficulty, to the great amusement of those watching. Finally he is given betel leaves with the request that he go away dispelling evil influence. The scene ends with the priest once more chasing the Väddā round the mat a number of times and uttering benedictions with the word *āyibēvā* repeated thrice.

Before the final ritual act of the Kankāriya, which consists in the shooting of a Banana Flower, there is enacted the *Gabaḍā Kollaya* or Plundering the Stores. Here the chief exorcist, accompanied by the others, break into a chamber in which is stored all the contributions made towards the Kankāriya, such as rice and coconuts, and bringing out whatever is left of them, distributes them among all those who took part in the rituals. In the end he dances a certain number of set steps, and collecting together some straw in a heap, sets fire to it, the meanwhile uttering three loud cries of " hoo ". The ritual meaning of this is said to be the expulsion of evil (*vasdos*) that may have accrued during the ceremony.

The Interludes and Folk Drama Proper

Whereas the actual folk ceremonies we have described in the last chapter have only dramatic elements or dramatic features, and cannot be said to be drama in the full sense of the word, the interludes we have spoken of above can be described as actual dramatic pieces, in which the ritual purpose has been subordinated to that of entertainment. In some cases, as in the Vaḍiga Patuna, we see that the ritual connection is very slight, this being achieved by the contrivance of merely making the Brahmins to bless the sick person at the end of the scene. In most other pieces, we are reminded of the ritual significance when the exorcist says " by virtue of the episode we have just enacted, may the evil influence vanish.".

These interludes are an intermediary stage between the rituals and the folk plays proper which we shall proceed to describe in the future chapters. One feature that distinguishes the interludes from the plays proper is that in the latter there is no attempt at all even to impute any ritual significance to them, except that, sometimes at the end of the performance, some rite is performed in order to dispel any evil influences that could have accrued on the actors or audience as a result of a mistake or an act of irreverence done inadvertently. In fact, it is felt safer to perform such a rite after doing anything whatsoever, because evil influences do accrue mysteriously. In the interludes, further, the dispelling of evil influence is concentrated round the sick man, who is the main reference, as well, of the ritualistic ceremony

to which the interlude belongs. No ceremonies will ever be performed unless it be to cure a sich person, and no interludes will be done in isolation. The plays have no such reference, and all that is needed is an audience to enjoy them.

It will be interesting to see, as we proceed with our description, how the folk plays are indebted to the interludes for much of their material as well as their style. Not only is the dialogue pattern and the humour of the same sort, but the interludes are taken as a model whenever similar material has to be dealt with in the plays. To mention only a few examples, we see how the scene depicting the drying of paddy, pounding and winnowing it in Sokari is modelled on the Nayā Yakkama in the Kohoṁbā Kankāriya, and how the episode of Parayā having to pass the gates before he could meet the Doctor in the same play is modelled on the Crossing of the Gates in the *Ät Bandana* (Capturing an Elephant). The manner in which Śakra is portrayed, as well as his costume and mask, in the folk play *Saṅdakiṅduru*, are strongly reminiscent of the manner in which this god appears in the scene of the Shooting of the Mango in the Gam Maḍuva. These and many more could be cited, but they will doubtless be noticed by the reader in the course of the accounts that follow. Of course, there are instances in which the folk plays borrow directly from the ritualistic ceremonies themselves, but this happens when the particular scenes in the ceremonies look very much like dramatic interludes. The scene where an infant is brought and lulled to sleep in the presence of the audience, is similar in the ritual of the Raṭa Yakuma, as well as in Kōlaṃ and Sokari both.

AUTHORITIES

L. D. Barnett, *Alphabetical Guide to Sinhalese Folklore from Ballad Sources* (Reprinted from *The Indian Antiquary*, Bombay, 1917).

Sir J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, abridged ed., (London, 1924).

Dandris de Silva Gunaratna, *Demonology and Witchcraft in Ceylon*, in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch*, Vol., IV No. 13.

Albert Grünwedel, *Sinhalesische Masken*, (Int. Arch. f. Ethnsgr. VI, 1893).

Edward Upham, *The History and Doctrine of Budhism, popularly illustrated with notices of The Kappooism or Demon Worship and of the Bali or Planetary Incantations of Ceylon*, (London, 1829).

Paul Wirz, *Exorcismus und Heilkunde auf Ceylon*, (Bern. 1941).

CHAPTER FOUR

KŌLAM OR MASKED PLAYS

Kōlam is a kind of dramatic performance which survives today, chiefly, in coastal townships in the south of Ceylon, such as Weligama (Mirissa), Ambalangoda and Bentara. It is chiefly distinguished by the fact that the actors wear masks that are elaborately carved out of some kind of light wood like *kaduru* or *ruk attana* and painted in bright colours. The performance begins at about nine o'clock at night, with the presentation of an array of masked dancers representing characters drawn from various sources and not connected with any particular story, and ends with the enactment of a story or two in the form of a play, through the medium of song and spoken dialogue, the latter being, for the most part, impromptu. Of these plays there are at least half a dozen in the repertoire of Kōlam performers. A season of Kōlam usually lasts about a week, and each night's performance begins with the preliminary presentation of characters and ends with one or more plays.

Extant Texts and Descriptions of Kōlam

There is reason to believe that the form of Kōlam we have now differs from the original. We may make a plausible surmise regarding the shape of the original Kōlam, but we have no direct evidence in support of our conjectures. We do not have, for example, the testimony of a reliable eye-witness, and none of the texts we possess goes back to ancient times. Among the Kōlam manuscripts, there is one in the Colombo Museum (AC 14) written on palm leaf, and another in the British Museum (Or. 4995), written on paper. The oldest printed text is that which is found in the Colombo Museum Library, edited in 1895 by A. G. Perera. Two other printed texts are also available, one edited by Don Juvanis Appuhamy in 1938, and the other included in *Folk Songs of the Sinhalese*, edited in 1935 by W. A. de Silva and Malalasekera. All these versions are structurally the same. They differ from one another only in the number of characters described, or in the order in which they are presented.

The only detailed study of Kōlam we have is that made by Professor O. Pertold of Prague. The results of his researches were published in 1930 in the *Archiv Orientalni*[1] in a series of articles entitled " The Ceremonial Dances of the Sinhalese." Although these articles appear to contain an account of one who has actually witnessed Kōlam at least thirty five years ago, it is doubtful whether we could consider his description as a faithful record of the manner in which Kōlam was performed about that time. Pertold claims to have seen Kōlam more than once, but his study is based on an examination of masks and manuscripts as he found them in museums in Europe and England, aided, no doubt, by his recollections of the performances he watched when he was in Ceylon. Hence we should be cautious about taking his description as the account of an eye-witness.

---

[1] Vol. II, Nos. 1, 2 and 3, pp. 224 ff.

By far the most reliable source we have for the reconstruction of Kōlam is a translation of one hundred and eighty-five verses from what purports to be a Kōlam text, made by John Callaway and published as far back as 1829[2]. Here again we have no description of an actual performance, and, in fact, there is nothing to indicate that Callaway had ever been to a Kōlam. He says that he sketched the masks from collections belonging to the " chief of the Galle tong-tong beaters at Tallapittea. " There is little doubt, however, of the authenticity of his text. Although its exact Sinhalese original has not yet been found, a large number of the extant manuscripts and printed texts contain several verses which can be easily recognised to be the originals of Callaway's translation.

What is important however, is to find out whether Callaway has given us a translation of the entire text of Kōlam as it existed in his day, or whether he has translated only a part of it. To all intents and purposes he is translating the complete text. It is hardly likely that he would have omitted to mention the fact if it had been otherwise. It is, of course, quite possible that he came into possession of only a partial text, and that he was himself unaware of this fact. This is a matter we cannot verify. But there is other evidence which fits in with the view that Callaway has given us a translation of the complete text of Kōlam as it was in use in his time.

Of the mode of performance, Callaway tells us very little. " A regular masquerade," he says, " is said to begin with the night and end with the dawn. A tong-tong beater in the court attached to the house announces that the maskers are come, and that the people must be ready to witness the performance. After reading the prologue, the actors advance, while two chanters, accompanied by torches, stand up, and, as the performers act their respective parts, repeat the legend, chanting alternately, two verses each. "

This description, although brief, gives us information on one important point. The dancers did not themselves sing. They merely depicted the movements while the singing was done by different people. The text itself lends credence to this description. The verses describe the characters in the third person, and are sometimes addressed to the audience in order to draw their attention to the dancers, in such sentences as " Behold how the tong-tong beater comes, " or " See how the thief comes. " One exception to this is the case of the lascoreen and his wife who, apparently, address each other. The pregnant woman who sings a lullaby is the other exception. It is quite possible, however, that the verses assigned to the lascoreen and his wife were recited by the two chanters while the dancers mimed the movements. In the case of the pregnant woman she was, very likely, an unmasked character. No mask of a pregnant woman has been discovered in any collection so far.

During Pertold's time, that is about 1925, Kōlam seems to have changed considerably in this important respect. Even if we regard the lascoreen and his wife as having actually chanted their parts in Callaway's time, it was more the exception

---

[2] *Yakkun Nattanawa and Kolan Nattanawa*

than the rule for Kōlam characters to sing. According to Pertold, however, most of them seem to have sung. These are the words in which Pertold describes Kōlam performances in general :

" Those dancing ceremonies which I have seen in Sinhalese villages as *Kōlam-nāṭīma* are a rather simple performance, more or less tedious for a European spectator even if he is interested in Ceylonese folk-lore. It is performed, like every Sinhalese dancing ceremony, at night. A clean place is prepared and adorned with arches of palm leaves as are used in Ceylon at every festive occasion. The place is well lighted. Kitson's lamps were used in both cases on which my description is based, but besides them, there were several old-fashioned oil lamps, even some made of coconut-shells, and also torches were carried in the hands of a number of performers. The performance is started by a masked tom-tom beater who represents the king's crier, *ana-bera-karaya*, and in a kind of sing-song tells the story of an Indian king whose pregnant wife has been attacked by a *dola-duk*, i.e., an unnatural craving, in this case longing to see a masked dance, a performance unknown in her country. In the morning grand masks appeared in the garden as a gift of the god Indra, and the crier points to these masks which are exhibited round the dancing place. Then he announces that a warrior is coming. The dancer representing a warrior is coming, tells a story about his experiences in campaigns in which he took part and points to the many wounds on his face (i.e., on the mask). Then his wife comes, who cannot recognise her husband and a dialogue between them develops ending in a quarrel. Then appear other characters, a king, queen, prince, minister, a *Naga* princess, and the original story loses connection more and more with the words sung by the dancers. Several dancers are now on the scene, making their evolutions and singing verses, which are apparently parts from various stories of quite different tradition and from different origin. The scene becomes still more confused when the fabulous bird *Gurula*, i.e., the Indian *Garuda*, appears, probably in pursuit of the *Naga* princess. Probably to help her several serpent-devils, *Naga-rassaya* and other demons appear, the *Purnaka Yaka* with torches in his hands comes on the scene and even various animals are introduced on the stage. A wild mêlée results during which some of the dramatis personae disappear and other new ones again appear on the stage, so that the unaccustomed spectator is unable to follow the connection of the various, seemingly disconnected scenes. The performance ends after several hours of wild dancing in a peaceful scene where a god (or in the other case several gods) appears together with the king, queen and minister and pronounces a blessing over the people present. "

Though Pertold has, apparently, been unable to follow the details of the performance, there is no need to doubt the statement that the characters sang as they danced. This tendency for the dancers to sing as well as engage in spoken dialogue seems to have been gradually growing, for there is a great deal of it in modern performances. It has also completely altered the nature of Kōlam, turning some parts of it from a dumb masked dance to an operatic performance.

Another important respect in which Callaway's translation differs from all extant versions of Kōlam is that, according to it, the performance ends with the presentation of a series of characters very little connected with one another or with the original

motif of *doḷa duka*. According to all the available texts, there are two stories enacted in the course of the performance, and these follow upon the preliminary presentation. The stories in the texts are the *Saňdakiňduru Jātakaya* and the *Maname Katāva*. These stories are enacted in the form of plays, with the characters addressing one another in chanted verses and sometimes in spoken dialogue. At the end of these two plays, more characters are presented, and the performance comes to a close. Players of the present day have other stories in their repertoire, besides *Saňdakiňduru* and *Maname*, and these, as mentioned earlier, are performed on successive nights after the prelude is over. Although Pertold does not make the matter very clear, we may infer from his account that some of these stories, at least, were included in Kōlam performances during his time as well. We do not know which of these plays were actually performed in his time, but we may gather, from his enumeration of the masks, which, evidently belonged to early collections, that at least the two original plays, *Saňdakiňduru* and *Maname* were included in the Kōlam of his day. Evidently he refers to the plays when he speaks of the dancers as " making their evolutions and singing verses, which are apparently parts from various stories of quite different tradition and from different origin. "

Callaway's translation contains, besides, a number of verses describing scenes and characters that are not presented today. The originals of some of these verses are not found in any extant manuscript, but certain players are still able to remember them. The most unusual of these scenes is what Callaway calls " a woman consisting of five women ", which, according to the tradition existing among Kōlam players, was named the *Pañcanāri Kōlama*. The following verses taken from Callaway's translation describe this scene :

" Five Women link themselves together, and bear a pot on the top of their head

" Their bodies shine like gold and precious stones. In this form the woman consisting of five women comes quickly.

" Their paps are like goslings; their persons are dressed in all sorts of habiliments ; and without fail they will attract the heart of every man. Come forward, you group of women.

" Now comes a woman consisting of five women, whose golden body shines She is dressed in variety, and thereby pleases the heart. See a flower-pot on the head, and women stand within ; their hands and legs entwine like embroidery. The beautiful woman consisting of five came down to this assembly, and she will get presents from everyone that sees her dance.

" They are adorned with golden chains and splendid garments. Their paps, like golden dishes or goslings, are trembling. Whoever beholds the handsomeness of this woman resembling a golden image, their hearts will be agitated, and they will be subject to a great evil.

" These five women embrace perfectly in a flower-pot.

" They shine in beauty surpassing an image of gold. Their hearts are not backward in animal affection ; and the gazing gallant is affected and distracted.

" Behold these women so formed that their whole bodies shine beyond the beautiful island of Ceylon. How could the gallants turn away without surveying the paps which project on their breasts ?

" The pleasing persons of these women display the utmost sexual affection. Therefore how can those who love, and stand here, depart without giving presents to them ?

" Their faces shine like a full moon—their bodies tremble—their paps are like golden cups ; and those gallants that saw them will desire them. If they have golden coin, they will be disposed to give heaps of it[3]. "

This scene seems to have been enacted in Pertold's time although it is usually omitted in present-day performances. Regarding it he says, " At present they (i.e. the five women) are represented by male dancers dressed like Sinhalese women with gay skirts and white jackets, ... No masks of the five women are known . . . . At present dancers representing the five women never, as far as I know, use any masks. This scene is nowadays very popular with the Sinhalese, and I have seen it performed and did not know that it is in reality a part of *kōlam-nāṭīma.* "

As a matter of fact there is a very rare mask belonging to the Udupila Kalā Sangamaya of Mirissa, which appears to be a mask of the *Pañcanāri Kōlama*, and the tradition surviving among this troupe is that a single male dancer wore this mask and represented this scene. We are not sure, therefore, whether Pertold is describing a different tradition or whether he is making a mistake in regard to this.

Another unusual scene in Callaway's version is that in which a pregnant woman appears, together with her husband. Presently she is afflicted with the pains of child-birth and the husband rushes off to bring a midwife. In the meantime she is delivered, and there are a number of verses in which she lulls the child to sleep:

" The beauty of the child I have now got is like a flower. His prattle will be pleasant, and he will like much to chew betel. He is like a flower that blossoms on a branch. He is like a picture painted on a board. Certainly you will open your eyes and look upon my son.

" The child requires the midwife's services. Cry not, my precious son, which god gave me[4].

" He is my fine son. Take and dandle him lovingly. Kindly induce him to eat rice. May he grow favourably[5]. "

This scene, too, is omitted in present-day performances of Kōlam, but the verses are found in the British Museum manuscript, and are also known to modern players although they do not sing them any more. The scene is referred to by Kōlam players as the *Baḍadaru Kōlama*, or the Masked Dance of the Pregnant Woman.

---

[3] vv. 40–48. [4] vv. 157–159. [5] v. 163.

Callaway's text gives, in the form of an introduction, the story regarding the origin of Kōlam, and the occasion on which it was first performed. All versions agree with Callaway's in stating that the performance was occasioned by the desire of the queen, who was pregnant, to watch a masquerade. Recent versions say that the king thereupon ordered dancers from all corners of the globe to perform in the presence of the queen but that she was not pleased with any of these performances. Finally the king ordered that masks be cut out of wood, and that a Kōlam be performed. When the queen saw the Kōlam she was greatly pleased. Callaway's translation and the other extant texts slightly vary on this point. According to the texts, it was Viśvakarma, the architect of the gods, who made the masks on Śakra's instructions, and left them, with a book of directions, in the king's garden. The book and the masks were discovered by the king's gardener, and the king immediately ordered the masquerade to be performed according to the directions in the book.

Callaway's translation introduces, in order, a lascoreen, his wife, a drummer, five women in a pot, a moor, an old man and a woman, a pregnant woman, and " a foreign beggar, a pilgrim " among human characters ; a " virgin of the snakes ", a *guruḷā*, a giant, the demon Pūrṇaka, the demon Ratnakūṭayā, the demon Nīla Giri and the goddess Giri Devi, the demon Nanda Giri, " an apparition of cobra capelles ", the demon Māraka, the demon Asurāya, the demon Nāta Giri, the demon Daḷa Rāssayā, and the demon Garā among mythological characters ; and a bullock, a tiger, a lion, a wolf, and a paddy-bird among animal and bird characters.

His translation ends rather abruptly with the entry of a character called by him " a foreign beggar, a pilgrim. " He is probably a brahmin, although he is represented as being drunk. According to Pertold, an ascetic or a blind beggar appears at the end of the Kōlam, and pronounces the blessing by which the queen is relieved of her pregnancy-craving. He identifies the " pilgrim " of Callaway's text with this character.

Kōlam according to the British Museum Manuscript

Of all the extant versions of Kōlam the most authentic appears to be the version found in the British museum. It is certainly not the original manuscript from which Callaway gives us his translation, but it contains many verses which seem to have been in Callaway's manuscript. It also describes a large number of characters who are not mentioned in any other manuscripts or printed texts, and who are not present in Kōlam performances of today. Nor are there, in any local collection, masks corresponding to some of the characters described in this manuscript. A brief resumé of the main features of this manuscript is, therefore, given below. The manuscript begins with the usual invocatory stanzas, found in all the printed versions and in the manuscripts possessed by players of today. Next it goes on to say that there was, in ancient times, a king called Maha Sammata, and that a Kōlam performance was arranged for his benefit. A description ensues of how the Kōlam hall was built, and several verses are devoted to a brief enumeration of the various

kōlam that were going to be shown to the king. The king is finally summoned to the richly-decorated hall, and the performance begins. This manuscript omits all mention of a queen or of her pregnancy desires.

The characters are presented in the following order :

(1) The Crier (*Aṇabera Kōlama*).

(2) The Soldier (*Hēvā Rāḷa*).

(3) The Āratchi (*Āracci Kōlama*).

(4) The Mudaliyar (*Mudali Kōlama*).

(5) The King.

(6) Nāga Maiden (*Nāga Kanyā*) also referred to as Giri (*Giri Laňda*)

(7) Umā or the wife of Śiva (*Umayaṅganāva*).

(8) The Demon in Charge of the World (*Lōkādipati Yakā*).

(9) The Nāga Demon (*Nāga Rāssayā*).

(10) The Demon Ratna Kūṭa.

(11) The Demon Asura (*Asura Yakā*).

(12) The Demon Nīla Giri.

(13) Two Āňḍi beggars (*Āňḍi Guru*) with peacock feathers in their hands.

(14) Two Goddesses.

(15) Bahirava Kōlama (the mask is described as having the figure of a god in the middle and two female figures on either side). Also called Ananga Bahirava.

(16) The Demon Nāga Maru (*Nāga Maru Rāssayā*).

(17) A Demon named Anganādi.

(18) The Demon Garuḍa (*Garuḍa Rāssayā*).

(19) The Demon Pūrṇaka.

(20) A King of Lions (*Siṃharāja*).

(21) Two Bears.

(22) A Tradesman bringing a bullock with him. He is called a Moor (*Marakkalayā*). The bullock dances. Next enters :

(23) An old Woman who claims the bullock, and warns the tradesman that there are leopards in the vicinity. Then enters :

(24) A Leopard, who immediately attacks the bull and kills it. Here there is a brief mention of a Gamarāḷa, and it is not clear whether the old woman complains to him. But next comes on the scene :

(25) A Soldier (*Hēvārāḷa*) who shoots the leopard. Here ends what appears to have been a brief dramatic episode.

(26) A Dog.

(27) A Jackal.

(28) The Kiňdurā and Kiňduri. What follows next is a presentation of the *Saňdakiňduru Jātaka*, in verses which are, more or less, identical with those found in the printed versions.

(29) The Dhoby (known as *Pēḍi* or *Radā Kōlama*).

(30) Two characters who are called Appuvaru, and also referred to as Kumatēru Appu.

(31) An European woman called Nōnā, followed by

(32) An European man both of whom dance together and drink. The man is called Siňňo. After a while the woman climbs up on the man's back, and they dance in this manner. This is described as the *Karapiṭa Kōlama*.

(33) The Bird Garuḍa (*Guruḷu Kōlama*)

(34) An Old Man, who is described as a Foolish Villager (*mōḍa gamayek*) enters trembling and begs for some opium.

(35) He is followed by a Village Woman (*gama mahagē*).

(36) A Teacher, who is the Disāpāmok Ācariya of the Maname story, which now follows.

(37) The Demon Dēva Giri (*Dēvagiri Rāssayā*).

(38) A Pregnant Woman (*Baḍadaru Kōlama*).

(39) A Pattini (?) The manuscript is not clear at this point.

(40) A Midwife. This is followed by several verses describing a new-born babe who is being rocked to sleep by her mother, and presented, in turn, to members of the audience. Presumably the pregnant woman gives birth to this babe.

(41) Next enters a Fisherman who is, apparently, going to the river to fish. Mention is also made of a crocodile, but it is difficult to say what exactly happens here.

(42) Goṭhayimbara. Here the story of Goṭhayimbara and Jayasena, known also as Maha Sohonā, is narrated.

(43) A Tamil Woman in the company of a man who is named Kadirā.

(44) A Crane, called *Päsbara Kokā*, and *Kok Kōlama*.

(45) An Old Man and his Wife.

(46) Here is described a character called Bahirava Yakā, who, from the description of the mask, may be the same as the Bahirava Kōlama described earlier. Perhaps the verses are in the wrong place.

(47) An Old Brahmin with a Dog.

(48) Two Giri Dēvīs.

(49) A Goddess (*Dēvakanyā*).

(50) A Demon named Vīrabaddana (*Vīrabaddana Rakusā*).

(51) The Demon Death (*Maruva*).

(52) Two Kīla Garā demons.

(53) The Demon Daḷa (*Daḷa Rakusā*).

Kōlam Today

It would be interesting to compare, with these accounts, Kōlam as it is performed today in the south of Ceylon. This study is based on the tradition that exists at Ambalangoda. Ambalangoda is one of the few places in which Kōlam still survives as a living form of entertainment. It is performed at least once a year by one of the two troupes of the place, one led by Gunadasa of Maha Ambalangoda, and the other led by Ariyapala of Hirewatta. Both seem to be in possession of an authentic tradition, for their masks are extremely well executed and bear a very close similarity to the photographs of masks reproduced by Pertold from collections in Europeon museums, which were probably taken from here while the Kōlam tradition was still alive in many parts of the Island. The following is a description of Kōlam as it is performed by Gunadasa's troupe :

The performance takes place, as usual, in the courtyard of a house, in a circular arena, round which the audience gathers. This is the simple Kōlam stage. But sometimes Kōlam players erect a structure made out of coconut leaves, very much in the manner of an *aile*, inside the circular enclosure and close to the entrance. Some of the characters, mainly those of the demon group, like the Maru Rāssayā, Guruḷu Rāssayā and Nāga Rāssayā climb the *aile* from behind it and jump into the enclosure in front of the audience, thus making a very dramatic and impressive entrance. This is very reminiscent of the Garā Yakuma, where the priest climbs the *aile* and swings up and down on it, wearing the mask of the Garā Yakā. There are usually two drummers, and a *horaṇā* player who plays, occasionally, the tune that is being sung by the narrator and his chorus. The narrator sings a line and the chorus repeats it.

After singing the invocatory stanzas, written in a highly sankritised diction, in which homage is paid to the gods, the narrator sings verses of homage to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, in the manner of any verse composition. Next he describes the occasion on which Kōlam was first performed. In the kingdom of the king Maha Sammata there were clever Kōlam players. In their repertoire there were many *kōlam* (in the sense of characters of a masquerade), and here follows an enumeration of various characters all of whom are not actually presented in the performance that follows. Below is given in rough translation the substance of the verses enumerating the *kōlam :*

A crier with his drum
And a soldier accompanying him,
Two warriors coming from battle,
A Dutch (*landēsi*, i.e. Hollander) couple ;

Characters like Brahmas (gods),
A character representing the king of gods,
Dancers in the form of leopards and bears
And hunters (*väddō*) and bulls ;

Characters like Āňḍis (people of Andra),
Nāga and Guruḷu representations,
The character of Death (*Maruvā*).
And the lion,
One riding on another's shoulders (*karapiṭa kōlama*)
The dancing *kiňduru* maidens
And the leopards dancing with the bull.
Attired like Gara Yakā
With no kindness in his heart,
As if sucking everybody's blood—
The Garā Yak Kōlam is very impressive.

Next the narrator goes on to describe how a hall was constructed for the king and his party to watch Kōlam. The king entered in state with his ministers, and gave the players permission to start. The players paid obeisance to the king, and two drummers began bearing a " deafening tattoo. " This was followed by the players arriving in various costumes, wearing masks and dancing to the delight of the king.

At this point the narrative starts again, but with another incident. It states that the queen was with child, and that she had no desire for food. She wished to see " dances and amusements ". Although every dance in the world was performed in her presence, she was not satisfied. The king therefore, summoned his ministers and ordered a Kōlam to be performed. Carpenters got busy, cutting masks out of wood, and finally the queen was shown a Kōlam, which pleased her beyond measure.

The story about the origin of Kōlam, therefore, seems to have been confused in these later versions. We may take it, quite safely, that the Callaway version preserves the original account concerning the occasion for the first performance of Kōlam. The point, however, is not of much importance.

The first scene in Kōlam is the appearance of two or three characters, (the number may be greater or smaller,) who are collectively termed Sabhāpati. This is the equivalent of the prologue in modern plays. They sing an invocation to Buddha and the gods, a welcome to the patron of the show, and a few verses addressed to

the audience, craving their indulgence for the shortcomings of the performance. The Sabhāpati is usually unmasked, although sometimes the characters wear odd masks. There are no Kōlam masks as such, meant for this Sabhāpati scene. Kōlam actually begins after this, for now the characters are first introduced to the audience by means of stanzas describing them, and at the end of the description the characters appear. The first group of characters to be thus introduced are the Policemen. This scene is well known as the Polis Kōlama. The men come attired like police constables of the present day, with red caps attached to their masks. The narrator describes them thus :

Attired in black clothes
And wearing red caps on their heads,
With batons tied on their waists,
Policemen now come into the presence of the audience.

Next appears the Vidāne Āracci, a village official, who is accompanied by his Secretary or Clerk (*lēkam*). The clerk carries a palm-leaf umbrella over the Vidāne Āracci's head, and also has a stylus in his hand. These characters are attired in modern dress. The Vidāne wears a sarong and a coat, and has a comb fixed to his hair. In the next scene there appear a number of Soldiers (*hēvāyo*). According to the text, this scene seems to have consisted of the appearance of only one soldier. He is the character whom Callaway calls the Lascoreen. Verses 1 and 2 in Callaway's translation are found in the text used by this troupe, but there are many more. The number of verses describing the characters seems to have multiplied with time, just as the number of characters presented was increased. The soldier is nicknamed *baḍajala* (gourmand). He has a most hideous appearance, his face being disfigured by wounds and besmeared with blood. He suffers from catarrh, and has a broken nose.

It is interesting to note, before we proceed further, that there are two sets of verses in respect of each character. In one set, the characters are described before their appearance on the stage. These verses are in the meter popularly known as *koṭa kavi*. After the characters have appeared, the meter changes into a rhymed quatrain, not always of the same kind, with a different rhythm each time. It is to the accompaniment of this verse that the character performs his dance.

The next character to appear on the scene is the king's Crier also known as Panikkala Rāḷa, and here, too, there may be one or more. He is described as an old man, trembling in his limbs, carrying a walking stick in one hand, and wearing a turban. A drum hangs by a string which goes round his neck. He wears a red sash (*paccavaḍama*) round his waist, and he is pot-bellied. This character is also known as the Aňḍabera Kōlama.

Panikkala Rāla or King's Crier in Kōlam

The king's Crier is followed by his wife, Noñci, described in mocking terms as an old woman whose skin is wrinkled and cheeks gone in, but who still harbours lustful thoughts about men. They both dance before making their exit. The character who comes in next is the Washerman, known as the Pēḍi Vidāne. He is referred to as

The Dance of Noñci Akkā

Jasaya in the verses, although this name has probably been given to him later. The Washerman is thus described by the narrator :

Pacing the ground slowly with his swollen feet
And looking around him, slightly stooping,
His loin-cloth hardly reaching up to his knee,
Watch how he comes and dances before the spectators.

The entry of his wife, Leñcinā, immediately sets the scene for the usual kind of comic interlude, a quarrel between a wife and husband, in this case the wife being young and flightly and the husband old and condemned to a life of hard work. Leñcinā comes in, " making eyes at members of the audience. " She sings verses describing her own beauty and noble birth, and deplores the fact that she has been palmed off, by her parents, on an old washerman.

The next character in the order of appearance is the Mudali (Mudaliyar) with his attendant. He is attired in the usual costume of mudaliyars of today. After he leaves the arena there enters the King together with his retinue, which usually consists of his minister and the crown prince (*yuvaraja*), and accompanied by his Chief Queen. The masks of the king and queen are the largest of all and it is with difficulty that these characters perform their initial perambulations. The leader of the troupe usually conducts them round, and finally shows them to their seats. They watch what goes on afterwards.

Next in order there appear the *rāssa* or demon characters, the Nāga Rāssaya, (he is also called Ratna Kūṭa), Guruḷu Rāssayā, Pūrṇaka Rāssaya, Kava Rāssayā and Maru Rāssayā. Kava Rāssayā is apparently the same as Nīla Giri, as he is referred to by this name in the verses, some of which appear to be identical with the verses describing this demon in Callaway's translation.

The last character of the prelude is Āňḍi Guru, the man from Āndra Desa, a character drawn from life. The Āňḍi Guru is the familiar Indian astrologer-cum-snake-charmer who wanders about from village to village, and who is the hero of a village play performed in the hill-country, and known as Sokari. Indians who go round collecting money in order to visit Kataragama are also classed among Āňḍis. In the Kōlam verses, the Āňḍi Guru is referred to as carrying peacock feathers in order to look like a holy man, and collecting money from people, under all kinds of pretexts, for the purpose of hoarding it up.

Next follows what is known as the *Gon Koṭi Katāva*, the story of the Bull and the Leopard. It is more a part of the prelude than a separate play, the story being merely an excuse to present some animal characters. It is performed more or less in mime, in the manner of the prelude, with occasional dialogue. After chanting a few introductory verses in which the narrator tells us that he intends relating a story regarding the life of people who wander about from place to place carrying their goods in caravans, he presents two travelling merchants who are looking for pasture land where they may feed their oxen and rest for a while before

resuming their journey. They spy a grass field and order their servants to lead their oxen in. The servants come in, driving the oxen before them. While these

Actors wearing the masks and costume of the King and the Queen

promenade before the audience, there enters a leopard of frightful mien, who instils fear into the hearts of the merchants, their servants and the oxen. There is pandemonium, and the scene ends with the oxen and the men being chased by the leopard.

The plays proper follow after this, the most popular among them being the *Saňdakiňduru Katāva.*

The Saňdakiňduru Katāva

The *Saňdakiňduru Katāva* is the well-known Jātaka story known as *Saňdakiňduru Jātaka.* The Kiňdurās are mythical beings, half man and half bird, who dance and sing and play the *vīṇā.* In the upper part of their bodies they resemble human beings. The Kiňduri, the female of the Kiňdurā, is supposed to be of exceeding beauty. The story introduces us to a Kiňdurā and a Kiňduri, a couple of lovers, living together happily and dancing and singing in the forest. While they thus sport in each other's company, exchanging loving words, the king of Benaras, Brahmadatta by name, who happens to be out hunting, comes their way. He spies the Kiňduri, and is struck by her beauty. In order to get possession of her, therefore, he kills the Kiňdurā, and makes advances to the Kiňduri. The Kiňduri however, rejects the king's proposals and laments the loss of her beloved mate. The king promises her wealth and position and many other attractive things, but she consistently refuses all these gifts and continues to weep by the side of the Kiňdurā. The king in his wrath is almost on the point of killing the Kiňduri, when Śakra comes on the scene and rescues her. He brings back her lover to life, and leaves them after pronouncing a homily on the virtues of fidelity.

The structure of the play is interesting. After a few introductory verses, the Kiňdurā and Kiňduri come into the enclosure and dance for a while to the accompaniment of rhythmic song. Next the Kiňdurā and Kiňduri address each other in songs describing the beauty of the forest and their love for each other. Next the Narrator introduces king Brahmadatta, who comes in and shoots the Kiňdurā. The Kiňduri then sings her lament, and there ensues a conversation between the king and the Kiňduri, all in song, in which the king proposes to her and she refuses him. The king even addresses her in a few prose portions. The god Śakra appears in the end, and his homily to the couple is in prose.

The Gōṭhayimbara Katāva

The *Gōṭhayimbara Katāva,* another play in Gunadasa's repertoire, is of the same structure. It is a story connected with one of Dutugemunu's warriors, Gōṭhayimbara, which has crept into the demon lore of the people. While Gōṭhayimbara is once out with his wife, she has a desire to bathe in a pond. So she leaves Gōṭhayimbara, and goes with her attendants to a pond where she bathes for a while. As she is bathing, the demon Maha Sohonā, also called Jayasena, sees her and falls in love with her, and she falls ill. Immediately the attendants fetch Gōṭhayimbara who challenges the demon that possessed his wife to come out into the open. Jayasena comes out and they exchange angry words. In the end, Gōṭhayimbara invites

Dance of the Kiňdurā and Kiňduri

Jayasena to a duel in the plain of Dumbara. In spite of the entreaties of his wife, and the warning given him by a forest deity while he was on his way to meet Jayasena on the appointed day, Gōṭhayimbara meets him on the Dumbara plain, and a fierce duel ensues. Gōṭhayimbara severs Jayasena's head from his body with one blow of his sword. But Jayasena is helped by his demon host, who, on every occasion on which he is killed, join up his head and his body and restore him to life. In the end, however, Gōṭhayimbara wins, chiefy through the intervention of the forest deity who warned him earlier. Senasurā, the demon, comes at the end of the duel and attaches a bear's head to Jayasena's severed trunk, and thus he is reborn as the demon Maha Sohonā who has the head of a bear.

The Maname Katāva

Another play in Gunadasa's repertoire is *Maname Katāva*, which together with *Saňdakiňduru*, form two of the most popular plays among Kōlam performers. The story is that of a prince, Maname, who goes to Taksalā (*Takṣaśilā*) for his studies, and, being the best pupil, is given the teacher's daughter in marriage. On their way back the prince and his young wife have to pass through a forest where they encounter a hunter-king and his train. The prince is hungry and he asks his wife to beg some meat which he sees the hunters eating. The hunter-king falls in love with the princess, and requests her to leave the prince and come with him. The princess brings her husband some of the meat, but he is unable to eat it as it is raw. He, therefore, asks her to throw it back to the hunters. The hunters are cross at this insult, and challenge the prince to fight. Maname succeeds in vanquishing the entire host of hunters, and finally prepares to meet the hunter-king in a duel. In the course of the duel, however, Prince Maname's sword drops, and the princess hands it over to the hunter-king who immediately kills Maname with it. The princess now expects the hunter-king to take her along with him. He requests her to remove her ornaments, saying that he would leave them on the other side of the river and come back for her. But the hunter-king takes her ornaments, and saying that if she aided him to kill the husband who was so devoted to her, his own fate will not be very different, walks away with the ornaments. While the princess is bemoaning her fate, Śakra comes to the bank of the river in the guise of jackal, carrying a piece of meat in its mouth. The jackal sees a fish in the river, and desiring the fish, leaves the piece of meat on the bank and tries to catch the fish. In the meantime, a hawk swoops down and snatches the piece of meat. The fish too, escapes downstream. The princess on seeing this incident, addresses the jackal in the following verses :

Greedy for a fish he saw when crossing o'er the stream,
The jackal left the chunk of meat he carried in his mouth.
A gliding hawk swept down at once and snatched the meat away :
He should have known much better than to act so foolishly.

The jackal replies :

Although she was the chief queen of the king of Maname
She lost her heart to a jungle king in the forest born and bred.
She let her precious jewels all be taken across the stream :
More foolish act than mine indeed was what the princess did.

The Gama Katāva

There is popular play in Ariyapala's repertoire called a *Gama Katāva*, which is, indeed, a clever burlesque of village life and village characters. The story is about two men, both brothers, who wander about in search of a place to settle down in, since their own village had been wiped out by a flood. They succeed in getting a piece of land for themselves, and begin to build a house thereon. In all these

undertakings they act so foolishly and without practical wisdom that they find themselves in very amusing situations. The elder brother takes a woman to wife. The men must now go at night to watch the fields, leaving the woman behind. In their absence, the woman's paramour visits her, and one night he is nearly discovered in the house by her husband who happens to return early. The play comes to an end with the confusion resulting in the woman's attempt to hide her lover and the unenviable though mirth-provoking situations into which the lover falls in the process.

This play is done entirely in dialogue, and is one of the few performed in this manner. It is likely to be a recent development of Kōlam. There are no special masks to represent the characters of this play, and the dancers use the stock masks like those of the Pēḍi Vidāne.

The Probable Origin of Kōlam

It may be suggested here that Callaway's translation preserves the original form of Kōlam, in which it consisted of the presentation of isolated characters picked out at random from a number of demon ceremonies or modelled on their pattern, as well as characters representing the familiar figures of village life. The meaning of the word *kōlam* itself, as applied to this type of masquerade, goes to support this view. It is a word borrowed from Tamil, and in its original meaning it stood for " costume, appropriate dress or attire as worn by an actor[6] ".

In Sinhalese the word *kōlam* means, like the word *ves*, either an appearance or an impersonation or an assumed guise, usually one that is comic and exaggerated so as to provoke amusement. It is plural in form, and would refer to a series of such appearances, each character being referred to as a *kōlama*. These characters are burlesqued for the amusement of the audience, the purpose of the presentation, therefore, being nothing more than entertainment.

From the legend told by the Narrator at the beginning of the performance, giving the occasion on which Kōlam was first done, Pertold draws the conclusion that it was originally a pregnancy rite. He also draws attention to the other scenes in Kōlam, such as the scene of the pregnant woman (Baḍadaru Kōlama) and the scene of the " five women in one " (Pañcanāri Kōlama) which appear to be survivals of magical rituals connected with fertility. Pertold is probably correct in his surmise regarding the original significance of these two scenes. But they are isolated episodes in a whole performance which consists of several such episodes equally unconnected with one another. Hence we should be reluctant to draw conclusions about the whole Kōlam from such scenes alone. On the other hand, we know that there is a special exorcistic ritual which is meant to protect the child in the womb and to ensure safe delivery to the pregnant woman. This is the ceremony known as the Raṭa Yakuma, some of the rites of which have been described earlier.

With regard to the scene of the five women, we may be reading too much into it if we attach any magical significance to it. It may be no more than an attempt to represent in dance form the traditional design known as the *pañca-nāri-ghaṭa*,

[6] See The Tamil Lexicon published under the authority of the University of Madras, (Madras, 1924).

literally," five-women-pot," wrongly translated by Ananda Coomaraswamy as " five-women-knot[7] ". There is a representation of this design on a door at Ridi Vihāra, which makes the meaning quite clear. Other varieties of designs composed of women are mentioned by Coomaraswamy. They are formed of four, seven, eight, or nine women, associated with some object or animal : *catur-nāri-pallakkiya* (four-women-palanquin), *sat-nāri-toraṇa* (seven-women-arch), *sapta-nāri-turaṅga* (seven-women-horse), *aṣṭa-nāri-ratha* (eight-women-chariot), and *nava-nāri kuñjara* (nine-women-elephant)[8].

In explanation of these designs Coomaraswamy says, " in some of these the figure of Ananga, the Indian God of Love, is also introduced, and it appears possible that the whole series was once symbolical, associated, perhaps, with some Krishna cult[9] ".

The *pañca-nāri-ghaṭa* symbol may have had a fertility significance, but it need not be the case that its representation in dance form had any motive besides that of entertainment. Even if such a representation was originally employed in some other ceremony, for magical purposes, we may infer on the analogy of the lullaby scene and other scenes drawn from demon ceremonies that its use in Kōlam has no ritual purpose. In fact, Kōlam is indebted to several ceremonies of the exorcistic kind for its characters and its masks. Guruḷu Rāssayā, for example is the mythological Garuḍa, whose prey is the cobra (*nāga*). Pūrṇaka is the commander of the demon hordes, the *Yak Senevi*, who is invoked in a large number of demon rituals. Ratna Kūṭa is probably Ratna Giri, who, together with Nanda Giri, Nīla Giri and Giri Devi, belong to the cult of Daḷa Rāja, and are invoked in the Garā Yakuma. Other Kōlam characters who may have been patterned on the Garā ceremony are Giri Devi and Daḷa Rāja. According to the Callaway version and the British Museum manuscript, both these characters belong to Kōlam. Maru Rāssayā and Nāga Rāssaya of the Kōlam may be compared to Maru Sanniya and Nāga Sanniya of the Sanni Yakum ceremony. To the same ceremony, where Mohinī Yakṣanī appears first as a pregnant woman, and later as a woman lulling a baby to sleep, may be traced the Baḍadaru Kōlama, and the Bahirava Kōlama may owe its origin to the Bahirava Yakā often referred to in demon ceremonies.

The exorcistic ceremony to which Kōlam is most closely allied appears to be the Sanni Yakuma, which has been described in an earlier chapter. In fact, the similarities are so great that we may suggest that Kōlam has been derived from this ceremony, although it has no doubt been influenced by other demon rituals as well. In the Sanni Yakuma all the characters wear masks or disguise themselves by means of make-up and each character is introduced by chanted verses which describe his appearance and give something of his life and history. After the description the demon appears on the arena and dances to the accompaniment of drums. In the intervals of the dancing, one of the drummers would ask him questions, and he would reply.

It would be quite easy for a dramatic dance like the Kōlam to be patterned on the model of the Sanni Yakuma, but, unlike it, to have no ritualistic significance.

---

[7] Mediaeval Sinhalese Art, p. 91.
[8] *loc cit.* [9] *loc cit.*

The Sanni Yakuma itself seems to have acquired a considerable amount of entertainment value, and, even now, is one of the most popular of exorcistic ceremonies. But owing to the serious purpose of the ceremony, it cannot be performed for mere entertainment. Hence Kōlam would have been created for this purpose. The priest who recites the verses in the Sanni Yakuma survives as the Narrator of the Kōlam (Pertold calls him the *toraturu katā kārayā* and Callaway the Reader).[10] The drummers are there as usual, and the *horaṇä* player was probably introduced in order to increase the entertainment value of the performance. The dancers in Kōlam dance in the same style as the folk priest in the Sanni Yakuma and the allied ceremonies. They do the same basic steps and perform the same *aḍavvas*. The demon characters of the Kōlam always do the twirling of the upper part of the body described as *ves pānava* which is so characteristic of frenzied religious dancing. Impromptu dialogue takes place as in the Sanni Yakuma, between a drummer or some member of the troupe, who may even be the Narrator, and each character.

The story about the origin of Kōlam, given at the beginning of the text, would be easily understandable in the light of this hypothesis. There is a story attached to every demon ceremony, giving the legendary origin of the ceremony and the occasion on which it was first performed. The names of kings and characters in folklore are often associated with such legends. The Kankāriya, for example, was performed in order to cure King Paṅḍuvasdev of the evil effects of a curse (*divi dos*). Thus, the story of the occasion for the performance of a ceremony becomes part of a literary form, and sets the pattern for the performance itself. The priest begins the ceremony by chanting this story. It would be natural, therefore, to have a similar story chanted at the beginning of Kōlam as well, merely to preserve the form, if not for anything else. The *dola duka* motif, being a common one, would be ready to hand. It would provide as plausible an occasion for the performance of Kōlam as anything else. Hence we need not attach any ritual significance to it.

Kōlam, therefore, began with the presentation of isolated characters and scenes, in the style of the Sanni Yakuma, and into this scheme were added, in the course of time, characters from village life and popular legend. The addition of characters or scenes did not, at first, alter the nature of the performance. As each character was presented, the Reader described him and told the audience, in verses, something of his history. The character concerned came into the arena and danced or made a rhythmic promenade (*gamana*). Thus any number of characters could be added without changing the nature of the performance. The characters were also interviewed by the Narrator, and the dialogue interest thus added could be increased or decreased at will. The performance could either be lengthened or shortened according as the audience enjoyed the dialogue or not. The whole dance ended with the presentation of demon characters whose function seems to have been, according to the text, that of dispelling evil.[11]

---

[10] A parallel may be cited in the relationship between the leader of the mediaeval European *carole* and his companions who sang the refrain. Chambers suggests that the leader "represents the Keltic or Teutonic priest at the head of his band of worshippers"—*The Mediaeval Stage* Vol. 1, p. 169.

[11] Kōlam usually ends now with the Garā Yakā swinging on the *aile* in order to dispel evil. This is done at the conclusion of a number of ceremonies, the purpose being to dispel evil (*vas dos*).

At a later stage one notices a change in the structure of the Kōlam. There is a tendency to knit the characters together by means of a story. In this process the dialogue is increased, and the characters themselves are given verses to be chanted. The *Gon Koṭi Katāva* seems to represent an intermediary stage in this process. The animal characters of the original Kōlam, who did not seem to have any relation to one other, as well as such characters as the Moorman (the character who becomes a Merchant in later versions) get incorporated in a story.

We may surmise that even the *Saňdakiňduru Jātaka* and *Maname Katāva* developed into their present form in the same manner. Characters like the Kiňdurās and the Vädda king were originally included as mere dancers. In later versions they were made to sing, and the stories began to be enacted in dramatic form. The number of verses meant to be sung by each character increased, until these became more or less different plays, done in a different style from the prelude.

This view receives additional confirmation from the nature of the Kōlam masks as well. At any performance of Kōlam today, it becomes obvious to the onlooker that the masks are being used for a purpose they were not originally intended for. This is clearly noticeable in the dramatic portions, where the characters sing. Kōlam masks do not seem to have been made for singing through, or even for speaking through. The Sanni masks, on the other hand, are different. Several of them are designed with upper and lower portions which are separately tied on the face, and some of them are not complete masks but parts of the face, like eyes, teeth, and tongues which the actors wear in order to assume the guise of a particular devil. These masks do not obstruct speech as do the Kōlam masks. Hence it is not likely that in the original Kōlam any of the masked characters sang, and probably, there was very little speech as well.

Kavi Nāḍagam

The changes in Kōlam that we noticed above, led to a result that we might call a natural culmination. The masks, being found to be an unnecessary encumbrance and a hindrance to the development of the dialogue, came to be dropped entirely. The original prelude, in which isolated characters were presented, was also dispensed with, and there finally emerged a type of play which, because of its similarity to the Nāḍagama, began to be styled Kavi Nāḍagam.

Kavi Nāḍagam emerged as a kind of folk play only in recent times, that is, within the last hundred years, and the influence of the Nāḍagama on its growth cannot be entirely discounted. For, although the masks were already being felt to be obsolete, the idea of an unmasked play would have been first suggested only by the Nāḍagama. The Nāḍagama would have also hinted at the possibility of depicting an entire story in the medium of recitative dialogue. The Nāḍagam style itself, being a product of the folk culture of South India, which is closely allied to the folk culture of Ceylon, was in many respects similar to the style of Kōlam. The manner of presenting a character, for example, by describing him in recitative song, and interviewing him in dialogue, is common both to the South-Indian Nāḍagam as well as

to demon ceremonies of Ceylon. To adapt the Kōlam style to that of Nāḍagam, therefore, would be easy, as it would only mean taking a step forward in a direction already indicated by natural developments in the Kōlam itself.

The first Kavi Nāḍagam were apparently composed out of the stories *Saňdakiňduru* and *Maname*, which had already assumed an operatic character in the Kōlam. The author or authors of the Saňdakiňduru Kavi Nāḍagama seem to have consulted the poem known as the *Saňdakiňduru-dā Kava*, written by Vilgammula Sangharājā in the thirteenth century. Performers of Saňdakiňduru Kavi Nāḍagama sing a number of verses from this poem. Verses common to the *Saňdakiňduru-dā Kava* are found, however, in early texts of Kōlam as well,[12] so that it is difficult to say whether the Kavi Nāḍagam players borrowed them directly from the classical poem or from Kōlam. Other plays were added to the repertoire of Kavi Nāḍagam performers, and among these may be mentioned *Maha Paduma Jātaka, Culla Paduma Jātaka, Jñānamantri Katāva, Kāpiri Katāva* and *Svarṇatilakāvata.*

It is strange that, although Kavi Nāḍagam originated in the South, it survives today mostly in the interior parts of Ceylon and in the Kandyan country. It seems to have been carried to these parts by people of the South who went to reside in the hill country for purposes of plying a trade. The drum still used is the *yak berē* or the drum used in the exorcistic ceremonies of the South.

In a performance at Dippitiya in the Kegalle district, two drums of this variety were placed on the ground, one touching the other horizontally, and the drummers sat facing each other as is done in the Nāḍagama. A Narrator sang a few introductory verses, after which the Kiňdurā and Kiňduri entered dancing. They performed their movements in a circle, with a simple step improvised out of the steps of the demon dance. They wore tight-fitting trousers, a frilled skirt similar to that worn by devil dancers, a jacket to cover the upper part of their bodies, and two wings and a feather at their waists. After dancing a while the Kiňdura and Kiňduri sang a song, addressing the audience and promising the play *Saňdakiňduru.* After this, they both danced once more for a while, with the rhythm changing twice or thrice, and in the end the Kiňdurā and Kiňduri began conversing with each other in verses describing the beauty of the forest and their love for each other. At this point the king was introduced by the Narrator. He wore a costume consisting of doublet, hose, and mantle very much modelled on that worn by kings in Nāḍagam to represent European kings. He entered and shot the Kiňdurā dead, at which the Kiňduri began to lament in song. There ensued a conversation between the king and the Kiňduri, in which the king entreated the Kiňduri to come with him and be his queen. She rejected his offer, and the king threatened, in a prose passage, to have her torn up by his dogs. In the end the king left the place, being unsuccessful in winning the Kiňduri's heart, and the Narrator then introduced Śakra who came, as usual, in the guise of an old man. He addressed the Kiňduri

[12] cf. vv. 379, 385, 386, 387, 388, of the 1931 edition of Sk-d Kava of Walane Dhammananda, with vv. 1072, 1075, 1079, 1080 and 1082 respectively, of the Kōlam text in *Folk Songs of the Sinhalese.*

At a later stage one notices a change in the structure of the Kōlam. There is a tendency to knit the characters together by means of a story. In this process the dialogue is increased, and the characters themselves are given verses to be chanted. The *Gon Koṭi Katāva* seems to represent an intermediary stage in this process. The animal characters of the original Kōlam, who did not seem to have any relation to one other, as well as such characters as the Moorman (the character who becomes a Merchant in later versions) get incorporated in a story.

We may surmise that even the *Saňdakiňduru Jātaka* and *Maname Katāva* developed into their present form in the same manner. Characters like the Kiňdurās and the Vädda king were originally included as mere dancers. In later versions they were made to sing, and the stories began to be enacted in dramatic form. The number of verses meant to be sung by each character increased, until these became more or less different plays, done in a different style from the prelude.

This view receives additional confirmation from the nature of the Kōlam masks as well. At any performance of Kōlam today, it becomes obvious to the onlooker that the masks are being used for a purpose they were not originally intended for. This is clearly noticeable in the dramatic portions, where the characters sing. Kōlam masks do not seem to have been made for singing through, or even for speaking through. The Sanni masks, on the other hand, are different. Several of them are designed with upper and lower portions which are separately tied on the face, and some of them are not complete masks but parts of the face, like eyes, teeth, and tongues which the actors wear in order to assume the guise of a particular devil. These masks do not obstruct speech as do the Kōlam masks. Hence it is not likely that in the original Kōlam any of the masked characters sang, and probably, there was very little speech as well.

Kavi Nāḍagam

The changes in Kōlam that we noticed above, led to a result that we might call a natural culmination. The masks, being found to be an unnecessary encumbrance and a hindrance to the development of the dialogue, came to be dropped entirely. The original prelude, in which isolated characters were presented, was also dispensed with, and there finally emerged a type of play which, because of its similarity to the Nāḍagama, began to be styled Kavi Nāḍagam.

Kavi Nāḍagam emerged as a kind of folk play only in recent times, that is, within the last hundred years, and the influence of the Nāḍagama on its growth cannot be entirely discounted. For, although the masks were already being felt to be obsolete, the idea of an unmasked play would have been first suggested only by the Nāḍagama. The Nāḍagama would have also hinted at the possibility of depicting an entire story in the medium of recitative dialogue. The Nāḍagam style itself, being a product of the folk culture of South India, which is closely allied to the folk culture of Ceylon, was in many respects similar to the style of Kōlam. The manner of presenting a character, for example, by describing him in recitative song, and interviewing him in dialogue, is common both to the South-Indian Nāḍagam as well as

to demon ceremonies of Ceylon. To adapt the Kōlam style to that of Nāḍagam, therefore, would be easy, as it would only mean taking a step forward in a direction already indicated by natural developments in the Kōlam itself.

The first Kavi Nāḍagam were apparently composed out of the stories *Saňdakiňduru* and *Maname*, which had already assumed an operatic character in the Kōlam. The author or authors of the Saňdakiňduru Kavi Nāḍagama seem to have consulted the poem known as the *Saňdakiňduru-dā Kava*, written by Vilgammula Sangharājā in the thirteenth century. Performers of Saňdakiňduru Kavi Nāḍagama sing a number of verses from this poem. Verses common to the *Saňdakiňduru-dā Kava* are found, however, in early texts of Kōlam as well,[12] so that it is difficult to say whether the Kavi Nāḍagam players borrowed them directly from the classical poem or from Kōlam. Other plays were added to the repertoire of Kavi Nāḍagam performers, and among these may be mentioned *Maha Paduma Jātaka, Culla Paduma Jātaka, Jñānamantri Katāva, Kāpiri Katāva* and *Svarṇatilakāvata.*

It is strange that, although Kavi Nāḍagam originated in the South, it survives today mostly in the interior parts of Ceylon and in the Kandyan country. It seems to have been carried to these parts by people of the South who went to reside in the hill country for purposes of plying a trade. The drum still used is the *yak berē* or the drum used in the exorcistic ceremonies of the South.

In a performance at Dippitiya in the Kegalle district, two drums of this variety were placed on the ground, one touching the other horizontally, and the drummers sat facing each other as is done in the Nāḍagama. A Narrator sang a few introductory verses, after which the Kiňdurā and Kiňduri entered dancing. They performed their movements in a circle, with a simple step improvised out of the steps of the demon dance. They wore tight-fitting trousers, a frilled skirt similar to that worn by devil dancers, a jacket to cover the upper part of their bodies, and two wings and a feather at their waists. After dancing a while the Kiňdura and Kiňduri sang a song, addressing the audience and promising the play *Saňdakiňduru.* After this, they both danced once more for a while, with the rhythm changing twice or thrice, and in the end the Kiňdurā and Kiňduri began conversing with each other in verses describing the beauty of the forest and their love for each other. At this point the king was introduced by the Narrator. He wore a costume consisting of doublet, hose, and mantle very much modelled on that worn by kings in Nāḍagam to represent European kings. He entered and shot the Kiňdurā dead, at which the Kiňduri began to lament in song. There ensued a conversation between the king and the Kiňduri, in which the king entreated the Kiňduri to come with him and be his queen. She rejected his offer, and the king threatened, in a prose passage, to have her torn up by his dogs. In the end the king left the place, being unsuccessful in winning the Kiňduri's heart, and the Narrator then introduced Śakra who came, as usual, in the guise of an old man. He addressed the Kiňduri

[12] cf. vv. 379, 385, 386, 387, 388, of the 1931 edition of Sk-d Kava of Walane Dhammananda, with vv. 1072, 1075, 1079, 1080 and 1082 respectively, of the Kōlam text in *Folk Songs of the Sinhalese.*

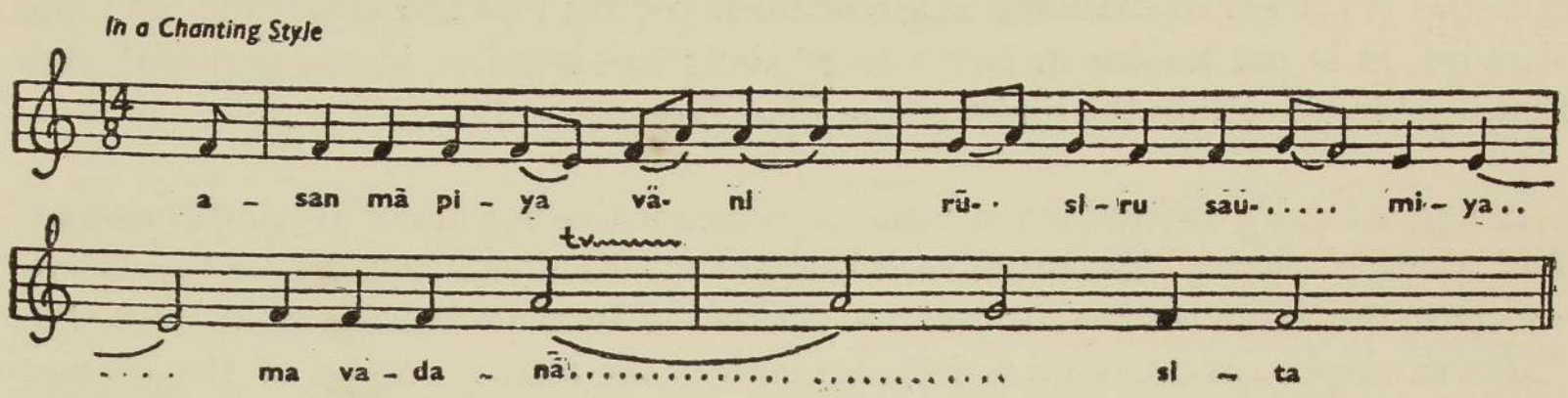
in song, asking her what had happened, and when she told him of her plight, restored the Kiňdurā to life. The play ended with Śakra delivering a homily to the Kiňdurā and Kiňduri on the virtues of fidelity, the homily being entirely in prose.

In the *Maname Katāva*, also performed at Dippitiya in 1949, there was a considerable amount of impromptu dialogue and clever acting in the first part of the play, where the scene was set in the institute of Taksalā (*Takṣaśilā*). The play opened with a classroom where the boys were amusing themselves till the arrival of the teacher. One of them was seated in the teacher's chair and conducting a mock lesson. When the teacher arrived they fled in fear and were all punished for their misbehaviour. The teacher began his lesson, and all except Prince Maname proved to be unintelligent pupils. This scene gave cause for a great deal of humour, with the pupils pretending not to understand their teacher and repeating the wrong things after him. The teacher's daughter, according to the practice of ancient times, was offered to the best pupil, Maname, and here a Brahmin entered and recited the Jayamaṅgala Gāthā (note the localisation). Then the prince and princess set out for their own country, and the prescribed verses of the text began to be chanted only when they encountered the Väddās (hunters) in the forest through which they had to pass. The Narrator often broke in with a verse to explain what was happening, but the greater part of the plot was unfolded by means of the songs sung by the various characters. Occasionally a prose sentence was interpolated. The fight between the Väddās and Maname, and between the Vädda king and Maname was done by means of stylised movements similar to the movements of the traditional sword-dance.

Between the plays, or even at intervals during their performance, two characters, Jasayā and Leñcinā, entertain the audience with their quips and cranks. They perform the function of the Bahubūtayā of the Nāḍagama, and this could be regarded as another instance of the influence of the Nāḍagama on this type of folk play. These characters can be identified with the Pēḍi Vidāne and his wife in Kōlam, in modern versions of which, as pointed out earlier, they had already received the name of Jasayā and Leñcinā. This couple usually enact a domestic scene in which their amours, their secret infidelities, and their jealousies are treated in a sort of crude burlesque.

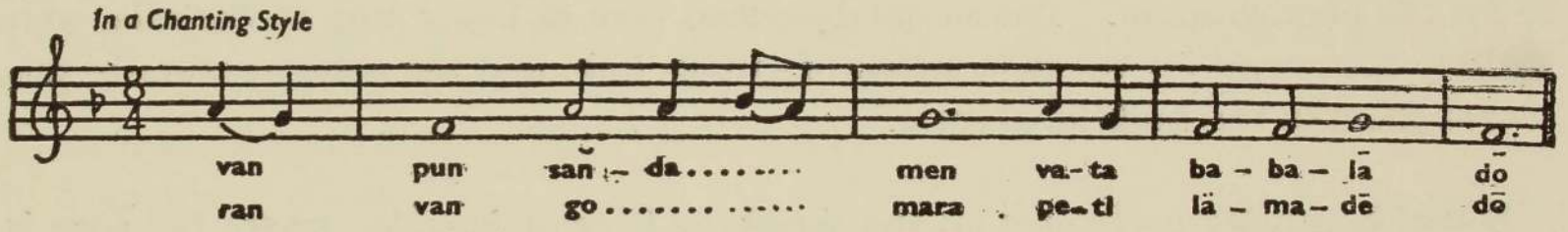
In conclusion, some observations must be made on the songs sung in Kōlam and in the plays. There have often been references to " verses " being " sung. " Actually the texts comprise verses written in a number of meters, which could be more correctly described as being chanted than as being sung, because of the very limited range of the melodies. The Narrator's introductory verses, as each character comes in, are always chanted in the manner of the chanting at devil ceremonies. The differences in the songs are more often differences in rhythm, and this is a characteristic of a large body of Sinhalese folk music. It is further noticeable that the melodic patterns, even in their simplicity, are unprescribed, whereas the rhythmic patterns are fixed by the beat of the drum (*padē*). A singer is at liberty to vary the melody, although he often does so more from a lack of melodic sense than with conscious attempt at improvising. However, there is

one tune sung everywhere in the same manner, in a number of Kōlam performances, and at performances of *Saňdakiňduru* and *Maname* in different parts of the Island. It was also heard being reproduced perfectly by a *horaṇā* player at a Kōlam performance, although the singers were often out of tune. This tune is given below, with a specimen verse :



asan ma paṇa väni rusiru saumiya ma vadanā—sita
lesin mehi ma väsa nek rasa palaväla budiminā
mevan pähäya äti me väli talaya mata nidigenā—pasu
gaman karamu api saňdagiri pavvaṭa satuṭinā

Another tune that was heard quite clearly on the *horanā* is the following :



van pun saňda men—vata babalā dō
ranvan gōmara—peti lämadē dō
man dän kī kavi—rāga asā dō
in api näṭumaṭa—tāgi nedē dō

AUTHORITIES

JOHN CALLAWAY, *Yakkun Nattanawa and Kōlam Nattanawa*, (London, 1829).

W. A. DE SILVA and G. P. MALALASEKERA, *Folk Songs of the Sinhalese*, (Colombo, 1935).

O. PERTOLD, *The Ceremonial Dances of the Sinhalese*, in *Archiv Orientalni*, Vol. II, (Praha, 1930).

CHAPTER FIVE

SOKARI

Sokari is a form of dramatic entertainment confined to the Uḍa Raṭa and the Vanniya. It is not known in any village along the coast or in any part of Ceylon that is included within the limits of the Pāta Raṭa.

Sokari is a story enacted in the form of mime, with some, if not all, of the characters wearing masks. The drum used is either the Kandyan *gäṭa berē*, or the *davula* except in the Vanni where they use an *uḍäkki*. The play Sokari varies with the different versions of the story, in different parts of the Island. Some of the characters, too, have different names. Sokari is still performed in the villages round Kandy, although in these shows the tendency is to modernise the story into an ordinary elopement theme. The author has seen performances at Hanguranketa, Dippitiya, and Badulla. Of these performances, the troupe at Badulla appeared to be performing an authentic version. The play as presented by them had many features which the other troupes appear to have glossed over, because they feared, apparently, that the frankness with which certain events were depicted in the original version might shock sophisticated audiences. This is particularly the case when shows are arranged for the special benefit of the interested student or for the photographer. The shows described here as being seen at Badulla, were entirely performed for the delectation of village folk, and the actors naturally presented them in the traditional style.

Sokari is usually performed on the threshing floor or *kamata*, where the corn is gathered and stacked up during the harvesting season. The circular threshing floor provides villagers with a very convenient stage, and the ribald humour drives away their sleepiness through the long hours of the night. In this manner it is still performed in remote villages, the play serving no purpose except that of entertainment.

The troupe that performed at Badulla, however, attached a religious significance to the performance of Sokari. The play had become connected, somehow, with the cult of the goddess Pattini and the god Kataragama. Every actor, or at least the man who takes the part of the hero, Guru Hāmi, makes a vow to these two deities before beginning a Sokari season, which usually commences after the Sinhalese New Year, in the months of Vesak and Poson. There are seven performances on seven successive nights, and seven more at regular intervals, to complete the season. After the season is over, Sokari will not be performed till the following year. At the end of the season Pattini-ceremonies are conducted by a priest, and alms are given in honour of Pattini. The religious rites culminate in the procession known as *Sokari Perahära*, which takes place on the full-moon day of the month of Nikini (September).

It is difficult to say how far this tradition is an ancient one. The ceremonies also seek alliance with Buddhism, and this, at any rate, appears to be a recent occurrence. One of the performances, during the season, is done in the *maḷuva* of the Mutiyangana Vihāra, and the Sokari Perahära is loosely connected with the bringing of the relics to Ceylon by Hemamāli and Dantakumāra.

The story and some of its versions

The commonest version of the Sokari story is as follows : In the country of Kāsi there lived a man called Āňḍi Gurā, also named Guru Hāmi, of the race of Āňḍis, who are supposed to be great entertainers, knowing, as they do, dancing and allied arts. He marries a beautiful woman named Sokari, and takes a man of the Parayā caste as his servant. They wander about from place to place without finding a means of livelihood, and in the end it is proposed that they should leave their country in search of employment. Guru Hāmi suggests coming to Ceylon. At a lucky hour they start on their journey and arrive here, after crossing the seas. Guru Hāmi first goes to Śrī Pāda, where he pays obeisance to the sacred foot-print and then looks for a place in which to settle down. He does not know Sinhalese, and as a result, finds himself in difficult situations. They go to a village called Taṁbarāviṭa, where they buy a piece of land and put up a small house of wattle and daub, and they make the floor smooth by plastering it with cowdung. Guru Hāmi goes out to bring rice for a meal, but is unable to make himself understood. He is, however, able to bring back some rice and he asks Sokari to cook a meal with it. She needs water, however, and Guru Hāmi has to go again to the village. On his way there, he is bitten by a dog who belongs to the village physician. The Parayā, thinking that Guru Hāmi is dead, takes the opportunity to make advances to Sokari who rejects him, and asks him to fetch the doctor. The doctor refuses to come unless personally requested by Sokari. When Sokari herself goes to him, he visits Guru Hāmi, and prescribes a medicine. He attends on Guru Hāmi throughout the night, and in the early hours of the morning, elopes with Sokari. Guru Hāmi, in his grief, prays to god Kataragama and makes offerings to him. In the end, the god tells Guru Hāmi the whereabouts of Sokari. He goes in search of her according to the directions given by god Kataragama, and finds her in the house of the doctor. Guru Hāmi brings her back and beats her, but she pleads innocence and is pardoned. Guru Hāmi asks the Parayā to look after her well in the future.

Most printed versions give this story, and attach two sets of verses at the end. One set describes how Guru Hāmi dances and feels tired and wishes to lie down on a mat. Sokari says that the mat they brought is torn. So they both go, accompanied by the Parayā, to a near-by field where they pick rushes and bring them back and weave a mat to lie on. The second set of verses is a lullaby which Sokari is said to sing, carrying a baby in her arms. The verses end, pronouncing a blessing on the audience, invoking the favours of the gods, and praying for prosperity in cattle and crops.

In this form the poem is known as *Guru Haṭana,* the term *haṭana* being given to poetic compositions of the ballad variety, in some of which the love-element predominates. The poem is also alternatively known as *Guru Upata.* Our version, however, does not present a connected story, but with the help of other versions, we can piece out the narrative into a more consistent whole. Barnett says that in one version the Āňḍi Guru travelled with his wife, the Parayā servant, and a doctor as well. Sokari was with child. Hence to ensure safe delivery Gini Pattini was invoked and a child was born to her. One day Sokari eloped with the doctor. In another version, Sokari falls in love with the Parayā. Guru Hāmi has to fetch various kinds of food that Sokari has a desire to eat, since she is with child. Sokari suffers greatly in childbirth, and Guru Hāmi has to consult a doctor and an astrologer. She bears a son, and says that the doctor is the father.[1] In the plays most widely performed today, Guru Hāmi, Sokari, and the Parayā come to Ceylon, where they look for a place in which to settle down. At Taňbarāviṭa, a doctor gives them a piece of land, and they build a house there and occupy it. Guru Hāmi is one day bitten by a dog. The doctor is summoned to attend on Guru Hāmi, and he elopes with Sokari. In the end Sokari is found, and they are reconciled.

The performance at Badulla (June, 1946) appears to combine all these various fragments into a consistent story. Hence it probably is the original unexpurgated version. Guru Hāmi and Sokari come to Ceylon from Kāsi, in order to make a prayer to the god Kataragama to grant them the gift of a child, Sokari having been without a child all the years of their married life. They are accompanied by their servant, Parayā, and his wife, Kāli Ammā. In Ceylon, they take their abode in a village called Taňbarāviṭa. In the course of their various adventures, Guru Hāmi is bitten by a dog, and although several remedies are resorted to, including a devil ceremony, he is not cured. At last they fetch the doctor, who finally cures him, and stays with the family for a time. Sokari bears a child by the doctor.

Description of the Play

In a performance of Sokari at Badulla in 1946, the cast consisted of the following : Guru Hāmi, Sokari Ammā, Parayā, Kāli Ammā, Vedarāḷa (doctor), Sottāna, (the doctor's nephew), Heṭṭiyā (a merchant), Vaḍurāḷa (a carpenter) and a Kapurāḷa (a folk-priest). The stage was an open place, and the audience sat round it leaving a circular space for the acting. In the middle of this arena there was a mortar on which a lantern was placed. On one side stood the Presenter, with a Kitson's lamp by him to enable him to read the text, and with him there stood a *horaṇā* player, a man with a *tālam poṭa* to beat the rhythm, the drummer, and a few others to join in the refrain. The Presenter would sing a line and the chorus would repeat it after him.

The play began with the presentation of the *dramatis personae,* who entered the arena, one by one, as they were being introduced, and danced round the mortar. Three of the characters, the Vedarāḷa, Sottāna and Parayā, wore masks, two of which

[1] *op. cit.,* pp. 100, 101.

were made of cardboard, and painted over. The Parayā's mask was made of wood. Sokari masks are generally made out of *eramudu* wood, and there is a mask in the Kandy Museum, supposed to be the Parayā's mask. They are sometimes improvised out of *kolapat*.[2] The costumes were those of the present day representatives of the original characters. The Vedarāḷa wore a cloth and coat, with a mask of a bearded face. As most of the characters were burlesqued the costumes were designed to make them look comical. A pillow tied on the Vedarāḷa's back made him look hunched. The Sottānā was made to appear pot-bellied, by a similar device. Two men, dressed in Kandyan *osari*, took the parts of Sokari and Kāli Ammā.

In the first scene, the characters danced around as comically as possible, while the Presenter described them. The dancers did not appear to be performing definite steps or movements, except that they kept to the rhythm of the verses sung by the chorus. The manner in which they placed their legs and kept their arms lifted at the level of their shoulders was similar to the position taken up by Kandyan dancers. Here is a verse introducing the Doctor :

First dances the Doctor, coming before the audience :

His body shakes to the rhythm of the song.

The audience is in roars of laughter as he rocks from side to side

And stretches his hands out to receive presents.

The Sottānā or Sokkā (Nincompoop), as he is sometimes called, is introduced thus :

Next comes Sokkā, dancing dances :

If you see his capers you will surely enjoy them.

He says there is none in the world who can dance like him.

But see, he knows only to roll on the ground.

The Parayā is described in the following manner :

Now I introduce the third dancer :

It is Parayā who comes looking around him all the while.

He mumbles nonsense, and stumbles every time.

He cackles aloud and makes eyes at Sokari.

Sokari is an attractive damsel with winsome ways :

Here comes Sokari and salutes the gathering.

She dances to the drum-beat and sings melodiously.

Her breasts move up and down as she does the steps,

And in the mirror which she carries she looks at her face.

---

[2] A bark-like material that covers the lower part of the stem of the arecanut branch.

After this introduction, the characters begin to converse among themselves, the dialogue being impromptu, and tell the audience what they propose to do. Guru Hāmi, Sokari, and Parayā decide to go to Ceylon. They have to get a ship

Parayā

made for this purpose. Hence they must find a carpenter. The carpenter is brought on the scene and they all go out to fell a tree. Actions like the felling of the tree, bringing it from the forest, making the ship, are depicted by means of imitative movements performed by the actors as they move rhythmically round the mortar. During these movements, the Presenter sings the relevant verses. After each movement, there follows dialogue, by means of which the plot moves on. The dialogue, for example, tells us that the ship is now ready, and that Guru Hāmi and his family are about to set sail. Next there follows a dance in which Guru Hāmi, Sokari and Parayā go round and round, with a hand-movement imitative of the rowing of a boat. They rock their bodies from side to side, showing that the boat is on the high seas, while the Presenter sings :

The boat has come to the Great Sea, friends,
On the Great Sea it is now.
The boat has come to the Deep Sea, friends,
On the Deep Sea it is now.
The boat has come to the White Sea, friends,
On the White Sea it is now.
The boat has come to the Red Sea, friends,
On the Red Sea it is now.
The boat has come to the Black Sea, friends,
On the Black Sea it is now.
The boat has come to the Salt Sea friends,
On the Salt Sea it is now.

Various properties are brought in to give the scenes a realistic effect. In one performance, a paper ship, made out of a framework of bamboo, was brought in and pushed along by one of the actors, while the others did the imitative dance. In a performance witnessed at Hanguranketa, the actors brought in a boat made of coconut leaves, and holding it by its two sides, they danced, throwing it up and down to represent the ship being tossed about by the waves. On the arrival of the three of them in Ceylon, Guru Hāmi finds it difficult to make himself understood, and Parayā acts as the chief interpreter. A great deal of amusement is caused by the mistakes made by Guru Hāmi in his attempt to make himself understood. In several scenes beginning after their arrival in Ceylon, Parayā, addressed by Guru Hāmi as Paccamīrā, acts as the chief interlocutor and as a liaison between Guru Hāmi and the audience. He talks Sinhalese with a strong Tamil accent, and his speech provokes much amusement. Parayā addresses Guru Hāmi as Svāmiguru. The Parayā performs the function, to a large extent, of the conventional clown. He makes eyes at Sokari, and often beats the Doctor with a stick for looking lovingly at Sokari. The old Doctor's lustful desire for Sokari provides great fun. Besides the Parayā, the characters who come from India speak with a Tamil accent.

Guruhāmi and Sokari Ammā in a typical dance pose

After their arrival in Ceylon, Guru Hāmi and his party look for a place to stay in, and after buying a piece of land from a merchant (heṭṭiya) they ultimately build a house. These events are enacted in great detail, some of them, like smoothing the floor with dung, being depicted by means of imitative dances. When Guru Hāmi is bitten by a dog, a priest (*Kapurāḷa*) is summoned and he performs an exorcising ceremony, dancing himself into a frenzy. However, this does not cure Guru Hāmi, and in the end Parayā has to go to fetch the Doctor, and this is another scene that receives detailed treatment. The Parayā cannot go to the Doctor's place without passing through seven gates. The gates are represented by two pestles placed cross-wise on the ground and held by two people. Each time the Parayā gets to the gate, he is intercepted by the gate-keeper who prevents him from getting across. Parayā has to placate the gate-keeper by means of cakes and bananas. These occasions provide the opportunity for witty dialogue and rough humour.

After a number of occasions on which Parayā tries to get across the gates, the gate-keeper asks him to bring a letter (*sannasa*) from the king of Sāgala. When the letter is brought, it is proved to be forged. The scene of the crossing of the gate is thus repeated seven times.

The Doctor is then introduced with Sokkā or Sottā, his nephew. Sokkā, as the name implies, is an useless fellow, or a nit-wit. A great deal of laughter is provoked by the attempts of the Doctor to teach him the alphabet.

A number of scenes are now played in which medicines of various sorts are fetched, ground, boiled and elaborately concocted for Guru Hāmi. When Guru Hāmi is finally cured of the dog-bite, Sokari prepares meals for everybody. Pounding paddy, washing and cooking are again represented in detail after which they look for mats to sleep on, and finding none, decide to go to the fields to bring some rushes. Here again, the details, from the beginning, are depicted through mime.

After the mats are woven, everybody goes to sleep. Now Parayā cracks many jokes of a dubious character, making allusions to the doctor's love for Sokari Ammā. He asks the doctor not to elope with Sokari, or to make love to her in the hours of the night.

In the next scene, presumably representing a time several months later, it is discovered that Sokari is with child. Then follows a scene in which a midwife is summoned, as Sokari is in labour, and a curtain is drawn round her. She gives birth to a child. The play ends with Sokari carrying a swaddled puppet in her arms and going round to members of the audience who give her presents of money. She fondles her baby, rocking it to sleep with a lullaby and invokes the gods to bestow blessings on the audience.

The story, it will be seen, is capable of several variations in the mode of presentation. The order of the incidents could be changed, and the duration of certain scenes lengthened or shortened. In a performance at Hanguranketa on 23rd March, 1947, the troupe spent a great deal of time in enacting the scenes that take place in India before Guru Hāmi and his party decide to come to Ceylon. For example, they depict the marriage ceremony of Guru Hāmi and Sokari at Delhi, and also their subsequent journey to Kāsi, after which only they make up their minds to come to Ceylon. Before the building of the ship, tools have to be made, and even this is elaborately mimed. A snake-charmer is introduced in one scene, and in another merchants bring goods on the back of oxen for Guru Hāmi and his party who wish to give alms to Pattini after they have built a house and settled down in it.

Even the elopement is not essential to what seems to be the kernel of the plot, and some versions do not give it. But most versions today attach importance to the elopement, and omit the last scene in which a child is born to Sokari. The play ends with the reconciliation, all the characters assisting in weaving mats. The cast, too, varies with different versions, and as long as the characters essential to the original story are retained, their number could be reduced or increased. In a

performance done at Nikaweratiya about thirty years ago, the cast consisted of characters, each of whom came from different parts of India, unlike in the other versions where they all came either from Kāsi Deśa or from Delhi. Guru Hāmi, also known as Sivanātha Gurusāmi, came from Paṭṭalidesa (Pāṭali ?). He was accompanied by a man called Heṭṭilā, the equivalent of Parayā, who is supposed to be from Bangali Deśa. The exorcist (called *vināyaka* or *hūniyakakkāraya*) who was brought in to cure Guru Hāmi of dog-bite was from Madura Deśa. There were two girls, both known as Sokaris, who came from Malayāla Deśa. One of them was the wife of Guru Hāmi. There was, also, more than one doctor, and they were from Sinhala Deśa, that is, Ceylon. Sokari eloped with the Doctor, as in most versions, and after she was found, and everybody was reconciled, the play ended with the birth of a child to Sokari.

Sokari, as played by the Kinnarayās of Henavala, a tribe of mat-weavers of Pāta Dumbara, is essentially the same as the foregoing, according to a description given by Mr. M. D. Raghavan of the National Museums of Ceylon.[3] Only two characters, the Vedarāḷa and his son, seem to wear masks, and Guru Hāmi's servant is called Rāma. The Vedarāḷa's attraction for Sokari Ammā is the central theme of the rambling narrative, and is constantly hinted at from the beginning of the performance. The play, however, does not end with the birth of a child to Sokari, and there is no mat-weaving at the end. Sokari elopes with the Vedarāḷa during Guru Hāmi's illness, and there are clear suggestions of sexual union between them having taken place. "In the midst of this episode", says Mr. Raghavan, meaning, thereby, the episode in which Guru Hāmi is bitten by a dog and various attempts are made to cure him, "Sokari and the Vedarāḷa run away. The Guru is distracted with grief, a search ensues and Sokari is traced and brought back. He gives vent to his suspicions in a series of questions—such as, how her hair is dishevelled, breasts scratched, and her garment torn thin; to all of which she gives clever replies."[4]

Suggestions regarding the origin of Sokari

Sokari bears the stamp of being one of the earliest folk plays that we have. Its humour, which is always produced by the deliberate misunderstanding of words and by a repetition of the same action, the long-drawn-out miming, and its innocence of any king of dramatic unity give it an unmistakably rustic character. In some basic features, Sokari is similar to the Tamil *kūttu*, but this similarity is noticeable in Kōlam as well and points only to the close connection that seems to have existed, even from early times, between the Sinhalese folk-culture and the folk-culture of the Tamils.

One is tempted to suggest that Sokari was originally a ritual drama enacted for purposes of promoting fertility and general prosperity for crops and cattle. This suggestion would look highly plausible if the kernel of the story, in spite of the fact that it has been glossed over in several local variants, really deals with the theme of a barren woman being brought to bear a child. The fact that the play, in the version

---

[3] *The Kinnaraya—the Tribe of Mat Weavers, pp. 245 ff.*

[4] *ibid.*, p. 247.

which we have regarded as authentic, ends with the presentation of the babe to the audience, would strengthen the view that this is, in fact, the theme. The concluding verses of the play, which Sokari sings while carrying a swaddled puppet in her arms, invoke the blessings of the gods on all those gathered together, and, in particular, prosperity in cattle (*gava sampat*), plentiful crops (*gahakoḷa paladā*), and protection from animals who may harm these, such as elephants and wild buffaloes.

The name *Sokari*, however, is strange, and we can only surmise that it is a recent appellation given to a play that was probably performed in the Ceylon villages from very early times. One may suggest that the word *sokari* is a localised form of the Hindustani word *chokaḍī* or *chokarī* which means a girl. But we would be happier if we could trace it to some Tamil word rather than the more remote Hindustani.

Borrowings from religious rituals

Sokari has some elements which are direct borrowings from rituals, particularly those performed in the hill country. One of these is the scene where Parayā has to cross the gates to meet the Doctor. This is performed in the same manner as in the interlude known as Capturing an Elephant, in the ritual of the Gam Maḍuva. A similar kind of " gate " is improvised with two pestles in ceremonies of the low-country as well, as in the Sanni Yakuma, when the demon Kōla Sanniya appears. Even in the ritual of the Treading of the Fire (*gini pāganavā*), the priest has to cross a gate improvised likewise, before he can come to the fire.

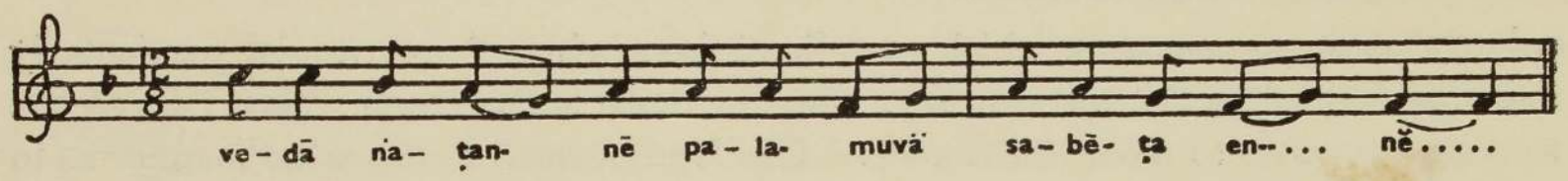
The scene of the snake-charmer, which occurs in certain versions of Sokari, is probably borrowed from the Nayā Yakkama of the Kankāriya. The Sokari players have, among their properties, an artificial snake which they use in this scene, similar to the snake which the exorcists use in the Nayā Yakkama. The snake-charmer plays no integral part in Sokari except in those versions in which a snake is disturbed in the course of preparing the ground to build a house for Guru Hāmi and his wife.

In the mat-weaving, we probably have a symbolic representation of amity, reconciliation, or union. A trace of this symbolism is preserved in a folk ballad called the *Päduru Mālaya*, in which a woman has a discussion with her mother-in-law regarding the age-long rivalry between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law. The daughter wishes to make up their differences and live in peace, but the mother-in-law is all the time at cross-purposes with her. In the end they decide to test each other's skill by weaving mats. The daughter-in-law proves to be an expert at weaving mats with animal designs on them, and in the end the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law make friends with each other and vow life-long amity. The daughter-in-law wishes to regard her mother-in-law in future as her mother, and both pray that they be born in the next life as sisters. This symbolism of amity may have been extended to represent sexual union, as suggested by the fact that mat-weaving is one of the rituals in the Raṭa Yakuma, one of the purposes of which is to promote fertility in barren women. In certain versions of Sokari, where there is no elopement and final reconciliation, the mat-weaving may well suggest the union between Sokari and the Doctor. In other versions, where the mat-weaving takes place after Sokari has been lost and found by Guru Hāmi, it may be symbolic of the reunion and reconciliation of husband and wife.

The verses which accompany the mat-weaving scene are different from those of the *Päduru Mālaya*, but they are identical with the verses of another collection known as the *Päduru Upata* describing how a mat is made beginning with the cutting of reeds in a pond. The same verses are sung in the Raṭa Yakuma and in other ceremonies, where a mat is used.

Melodies used in Sokari

There is only one distinct melody that one could discern in performances of Sokari, and a very large number of verses in any of the printed texts (most performers now use the printed text) are sung according to it. One does not notice, in Sokari, the wide variety of rhythms of Kōlam. Since the dancing is unsystematised, the actors merely jump up and down to a lilting rhythm :



AUTHORITIES

L. D. Barnett, *Alphabetical Guide to Sinhalese Folklore from Ballad Sources*, (Bombay, 1917).

F. M. Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, (London, 1914).

Sir J. G. Frazer, *The Magic Art*, (London, 1917).

M. D. Raghavan. *The Kinnaraya—the tribe of Mat Weavers*, from *Spolia Zeylanica*, Vol. 26, Pt. II (1951).

CHAPTER SIX

THE NĀḌAGAMA OR THE FOLK OPERA

The Nāḍagama is a form of dramatic entertainment that appears to have come into vogue about the beginning of the nineteenth century. Nāḍagamas have been popular mostly in villages and townships along the western coast, from Chilaw in the North, right down to places like Tangalla in the South. They never seem to have penetrated into the interior or into the hills. Nāḍagamas are still performed sometimes in Roman Catholic villages, during festive seasons. Present-day audiences do not have the patience to go through an all-night performance, which the Nāḍagama often is. Hence the traditional Nāḍagama almost completely disappeared, until it was revived, in a modernised form, on the contemporary stage about ten years ago.

Nāḍagam could be termed folk operas, in the sense that they are enacted almost entirely in the medium of song. But in the Nāḍagama there is, besides, a certain element of dance. The stock characters dance in a particular manner, and all the other characters have a set movement to perform upon entry. Stylised movement is also used to depict certain actions, and there is a Narrator who describes incidents that cannot be brought on the stage.

The Nāḍagam literature

The earliest Nāḍagamas are attributed to a man known as Pilippu Siñño, of whom very little is known. Apart from this, the authors of most Nāḍagamas are unknown, and only the names of a few producers are preserved in the oral tradition. Oral tradition attributes a large number of extant Nāḍagamas to the authorship of Pilippu Siñño, who is believed to have been a blacksmith born in Colombo. He is regarded as the first writer and producer of Nāḍagamas in the Sinhalese language, this type of play having existed earlier in Tamil.

In an edition of the Nāḍagama entitled *Ähälapoḷa* or *Siṃhalē Nāḍagama* published in 1899, D. P. D. Alwis records that Pilippu Siñño was born about the year 1770, and that, although a blacksmith by profession, he earned a reputation as a versifier of considerable ability. When walking about the streets, he would recite impromptu verses about what he saw. He could also recite *vas kavi* or maledictory verses having a magical effect. Besides this he is reputed to have been a good singer, and it is said that he vied with many a singer from India, and earned their respect. The plays traditionally attributed to him according to Alwis, are the following : *Ähälapoḷa, Mātalan, Sēnagappu, Siṃhavalli, Jusēput, Susevu, Helēnā, Viśvakarma, Varthagam, Sannikulā, Raja Tunkaṭṭuva, Sulaṁbāvatī,* and *Hunukoṭuve.*

We cannot, however, be sure of the authenticity of this list. There are two tendencies in the sphere of this largely anonymous Nāḍagam literature, which make it difficult to determine the authorship of any particular work. On account of the legendary halo that gathered round the name of Pilippu Siñño as the father of the Sinhalese Nāḍagama, there was a tendency to attribute to him almost any play whose author was unknown or whose author did not become a famous personage. Besides this there was a tendency for more than one person to write plays based on the same story. In the absence of several of the texts referred to above, therefore, we are unable to verify the authenticity of the list.

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Edmund Peiris, Bishop of Chilaw, attributes a play entitled *Raja Tunkaṭṭuva* (see above list) to a man named Gabriel Fernando of Chilaw[1]. He says that Gabriel Fernando wrote the play in the first decade of the last century, which would be about the time that Pilippu Siñño's plays were staged. The *Raja Tunkaṭṭuva*, which the Bishop describes as a " Sinhalese nativity play, " is written in the style of a Nāḍagama. This probably indicates the unreliability of our list. On the other hand, it is also possible that Pilippu Siñño wrote another *Raja Tunkaṭṭuva*. Tradition records that Pilippu Siñño lived up to the age of seventy years, and it is possible that during his long life he wrote his own Nativity Play.

W. A. de Silva records the legend, also given by Alwis in the essay referred to above, that Pilippu Siñño wrote the *Ähälapoḷa Nāḍagama* by scribbling the verses with the help of a piece of charcoal, on the wall of his smithy, as they occurred to him during his work. W. A. de Silva also gives us the same list as the one quoted above, and it is likely that he found it, himself, in Alwis's edition of *Ähälapoḷa Nāḍagama*[2].

We may also infer that Pilippu Siñño was a Roman Catholic. We could gather this from the fact that the invocatory stanzas in *Ähälapoḷa Nāḍagama* as well as the *Sthākki Nāḍagama*, not included in the above list, but attributed to him in the printed text edited by Muhandiram Thomis Gomis Appuhamy (1881), contain addresses to the Holy Trinity. Many of the early Nāḍagam writers appear to have been, like Pilippu Siñño, Roman Catholics. The Christian stories and the Christian sentiments expressed in the plays indicate this with sufficient certainty.

Some of the more popular Nāḍagamas are *Iyujin* (Eugene), *Bälasanta Nāḍagama* or *Orison saha Pālenten*, and *Brampōrḍ* (Brumford), all three attributed to V. Christian Perera, *Dinatara Nāḍagama*, attributed to Liňdamulagē Stephen Silva Wickramasinghe Jayawardena of Moratuwa, *The Merchant of Venice* or *Pōrsiyā* (Portia), *Hariccandra*, of unknown authorship, and *Selestinā Nāḍagama* by Charles de Abrew. To this list may be added two other Roman Catholic Nāḍagamas, *Jňānasaundarī* and *Katarinā Katāva* by Juan Pinto.

---

[1] *A Sinhalese Nativity Play*, in *The Ceylon Fortnightly Review*, X'mas Number, 1949.

[2] *Dramatic poetry and literature of the Sinhalese* in *JRASCB*, Vol. XVIII, No. 45

The oldest printed Nāḍagam text available is that of the *Sthākki Nāḍagama* of which mention has already been made. In the introductory verse the author tells us that the work existed originally as a Tamil play and that he is translating it into Sinhalese. The story is that of a Roman Emperor, called in the text Tiriyan (Tiberius ?), a man of Jewish faith, who had as chief minister a man named Pilāsi. The people of his kingdom complain that they are being harassed by wild animals. The king, therefore, sends his chief minister Pilāsi, with an army of Väddās (forest-dwelling hunters) to kill the animals. When the hunters see the beasts they run away in fright, leaving Pilāsi alone in the forest. Pilāsi sees a deer and follows it in order to shoot it, but suddenly, he notices the sign of the cross on the deer's horns, and falls down in a faint. An angel then appears to him and tells him about Jesus Christ, and directs him to an " ascetic " living in a forest. The king goes to the ascetic, together with his wife and two children, and they all accept the Christian faith. The minister is warned by the devil, who appears to him immediately after the angel, that much misery awaits him if he accepted the Christian faith. When he returns from the ascetic he learns that all his belongings have been stolen, and that he is reduced to poverty. He sets out, therefore, with his wife and children, to another land in search of better fortune. The captain of a ship offers to take them free of charge to a land beyond the seas. The captain, however, falls in love with the minister's wife, and when they reach the shores of another country, demands the fare, or the minister's wife as hostage. The minister, who is called Sthākki in the latter portion of the play, this being, perhaps, the name he assumed after conversion to Christianity, sets out with his two children, leaving his wife as hostage, in order that he may beg money to be able to pay their fare and rescue his wife. In the meanwhile, the ship's captain makes certain proposals to Sthākki's wife, which she rejects. As a result, she is left to find her way as best as she can, and the captain sails away. Sthākki loses his two children who are carried away by wild animals, but they are rescued later and brought up by shepherds. Thus the members of the family wander about, separated from one another until it happens that the king of Egypt, Tarkīnu (Tarquin ?) by name, who was paying tribute to the Emperor Tiriyan, refuses to pay tribute any more and declares war on him. The emperor sends for his prime minister, Sthākki, and learns that he has left the country. He sends men, therefore, to look for him, and they find him employed as a gardener in a certain rich man's house. The minister returns, and the emperor wins the war. In the end, Sthākki's wife and the two children are found, and the family is united. But the emperor, being old, wishes to hand over his kingdom to a king named Adiriyānu (Adrian ?). King Adiriyānu, on accepting the emperorship, instructs the prime minister Sthākki to offer one-third of the total taxes of the kingdom to the temple of their faith (apparently the Judaic faith). The minister refuses and declares his faith in Christianity. He is ordered, therefore, to be put to death, together with his wife and children, by being thrown before the lions. The lions, however, refuse to harm him, and he is set free.

The play *Iyujin* has the following story : Prince Milan, son of King Belāḍin, goes to the court of King Lambert of Denmark in order to be instructed in royal duties, and there he meets the princess Eugene with whom he falls in love. They

secretly pledge their troth and the prince returns home. In the meantime, Milan's friend Linṭan, also a member of the court circle, learns of the beauty of Eugene, and wishes to obtain her hand in marriage himself. He sends a slave to Eugene, with a forged letter purporting to come from Milan, asking her to set out secretly and meet him in the forest, since her father had refused to allow her to be married to him. She sets out and is met in the forest by Linṭan. She refuses his advances, and is left stranded in the forest, where she is found by a feudal lord in whose abode she lives. When Milan goes to the court of King Lambert to make a formal request for the hand of Eugene, he is arrested on a charge of having abducted Eugene, and is ordered to be put to death. But the hangman, being convinced of his innocence, sets him free. In the meantime, the feudal lord's son, Girinlan (Greenland ?) falls in love with Eugene. After many adventures, Milan finds Eugene, and takes her away. He is intercepted by Girinlan whom he kills in a duel. They both go back and live happily.

Bälasanta Nāḍagama is the story of princess Bälasanta, sister of Pepäyin, king of Prankara, who marries Alisandara (Alexander), King of Constantinople. A young man named Redara, who had been brought up by the king in his palace, seeks to seduce the queen Bälasanta, and unable to gain his ends, tells the king a false story about Bälasanta's infidelity, The king believes him and banishes his queen to the wood Orlin (Orleans ?) in the company of her old servant named Bländamäyin, who accompanied her from her home to the court of Alisandara on the occasion of her marriage. In the forest she gives birth to twins, one of whom is taken away immediately after birth by a wolf who rears it. The other child is found by Pepäyin who gives it to his daughter, Engeltinā. He grows up and is named Pālenten. The child reared by the wolf, Orison by name, grows up in a forest environment, and in time, becomes a dread to the people. Pālenten decides to go out and fight him. He captures him in the forest and brings him back to the city. In the end the brothers recognise each other, and the various members of the family unite after many adventures. Pālenten marries a princess called Iskalramondu, and Orison a princess named Pēsōnā.

Brampōrḍ Nāḍagama tells the story of Volilanḍ, described as a young man of noble birth, who has been betrothed in secret, from his young days, to princess Engalinā, the daughter of Brampōrḍ, King of Scotland. Prince Monrō (Monroe ?) of France, however, hears of the beauty of Engalinā, and goes to Scotland to propose marriage to her. In spite of her parent's persuasions, Engalinā refuses the hand of Monrō. But Monrō plots with the help of a seamstress attached to the palace, to give Engalinā a sleeping-draught that would make her seem to be dead, so that, when she is buried he could carry her away to his kingdom. Engalinā is buried in the belief that she is dead, and Volilanḍ who hears of her death, visits the grave in the night to have a last look at her, accompanied by a friend of his who is a doctor. When they exhume the body, the doctor finds that she is still alive, and together, they manage to revive her. The lovers are thus united.

Selestinā Nāḍagama is another play from a foreign source. A king named Mordiyanta goes to the forest on a hunting expedition, entrusting the kingdom to his ministers, and asking his queen Selestinā to look after herself. On his return, he finds Selestinā in another's arms and, in grief and anger, orders both the queen and her lover to be put to death. The queen pleads for pardon, on the ground that she is with child. The hangmen take pity on her, and let her go into the forest without killing her. She bears a daughter in the forest and dies. An ascetic sees the child and brings her up, and when she is of age, leaves her in a cave, guarded by a serpent, and goes his way. She is discovered by a prince who happens to pass through the forest in the course of his wanderings. He marries her in the end, not, however, without overcoming several obstacles.

These are some of the more famous earlier Nāḍagamas. One does not know of any printed collection, whether European or Oriental, from which the stories could have been drawn. They mirror a Roman Catholic social setting, and one can only surmise that they formed part of the current lore among the people of the west coast of Ceylon, north of Colombo, where Roman Catholicism is still the principal religion.

Two other well-known Nāḍagamas, where the background is not Roman Catholic, are the *Kāpiri Nāḍagama* and the *Dinatara*. The *Kāpiri Nāḍagama* is a story from an oriental source into which certain elements from western fairy tales seem to have entered. King Citraṅga has sixteen queens, all of whom were barren for a long time. At last the chief queen bears a child, and the rest, through jealousy, get the child smuggled away, through the help of the midwife, and order it to be thrown into a lotus pond. The child, however, climbs on to a lotus and escapes death. The next day the midwife notices the child in the pond, and reports the matter to the queens. The queens determine to put it to death, and pretend that they have a pregnancy-desire [3] to have the particular pond churned by an elephant, and to drink the water thus made muddy. But Śakra instructs the elephant to take the child away before the pond is churned. The elephant hands the child over to a potter who looks after it with love and care. When the child grows into a young man, the queens hear of his existence. This time they pretend that they have a pregnancy-desire to get the potter's hut burned, and to bathe while standing on the ashes. Śakra again informs the prince, but although the prince warns the potter, he does not take heed. The prince, however, flees secretly and in the night the house is burned with the potter in it. The prince wanders about until he comes to a forest, and, while passing through it, he meets the young ones of a she-ogre living in the forest. The young ones warn him to make his escape before their mother comes, for she is sure to eat him up. The prince pleads that he has nowhere to go, upon which the young ones offer to hide him. When the mother-ogre comes, she smells human flesh, and inquires who has come. The young ones tell her about the presence of the human stranger, and agree to show him if she promises not to eat him up. The prince is brought out of his hiding-place, but on account of his well-grown

[3] Known as *doḷa duka*. When a woman in pregnancy expresses any desire, however fantastic it may be, the husband attempts to satisfy it. This is particularly so in the case of queens.

body, the she-ogre finds it difficult to restrain herself. So she covers him in a well-fitting garment made of negro-skin, so that no part of his natural body is visible. Thus the prince lives some time, and finally decides to go away in search of fresh adventures. He goes to another country where he meets an old woman in whose house he takes up his abode. The king of that country has seven daughters, six of whom are married. The youngest princess is named Nīlaṅga. They desire to see the face of a negro every morning, and the king sends his criers to announce the fact and promises a reward to anyone who could find them a negro. The old woman at once takes the prince to the palace. and he is given a house opposite, and instructed to visit the palace every morning so that the members of the royal household could set their eyes on him. One day, when the princesses were out bathing, the prince meets them and begs them for some sandle-wood paste. They all refuse, except the youngest who gives him her share. Another day he asks them for shampoo (*nānu*), another day for betel, and on all occasions, the youngest princess grants his request. Her sisters begin to tease her, and when the news is carried to the king, he in anger, orders her to be married to the black prince.

As the couple thus live, war breaks out, and the husband of the six princesses get ready to go out to meet the enemy. They give the black prince, too, a broken old sword, and let him accompany them. The black prince goes to a forest, removes his black skin and wishes for a suit of armour and a horse. Both these appear before him. He dons the suit of armour and rides to the battle-field in great glory. He kills the rival kings, and cutting out their tongues, presents the heads to the six princes. He then goes back to the forest, where he gets back into his negro skin, leaves the tongues in a safe spot, and goes home, carrying the carcass of a serpent as the only conquest he made in battle. The princes go back to their kingdom with the heads of the rival kings, and prepare to make great feast. They go hunting to bring game for the feast, and again the black prince accompanies them with his old sword, and, assuming once more his natural form as before, kills a large number of animals, cuts their ears and gives the carcasses to the six princes. He hides the ears, and goes back with a miserable viper dangling on the edge of his sword. Before the feast, however, he appears before everybody in his natural glory, and establishes his identity with the help of the tongues and the ears. In the end he is made king of that country.

The *Dinatara Nāḍagama* is based on a story from an unknown source. A king named Abitara has a daughter named Suvinītā and when she reaches the age of sixteen years he wishes to give her in marriage to a suitable prince. She proposes, however, that since there were many desiring her hand, she would stay in a secret tower, and would agree to marry the prince who could find her and make her talk three words. Several princes come from far-off lands, but they are unable to find her abode. Lastly comes Dinatara and his minister, both possessed of miraculous powers. Dinatara finds her by throwing up a charmed arecanut which goes in the direction of her abode. It is a seven-storied building. He finds her, but she does not speak a word. By his magic power, he invests with life three inanimate objects, the canopy of the princess's bed, the lamp-stand, and the betel-stand, and asks three questions of them, which they are unable to answer. The princess loses

her patience and answers the questions. Dinatara goes back to his kingdom with the princess Suviniṭā and his minister. The minister falls in love with Suviniṭā. While they are on their way, Dinatara desires a mango, and asks his minister to climb a tree and pluck one for him. The minister refuses. Dinatara, who spies a dead parrot under the tree, enters its carcass by means of his magic power, and, leaving his own body lying bereft of life on the ground, flies up to the tree to get the fruit. Dinatara's minister, who also possesses magic powers, enters Dinatara's body, and severs the head from his own body. In the body of Dinatara, he attempts to make love to the princess Suvinītā, but she rejects him. The prince Dinatara has no body to enter into now, and is forced to remain as a parrot. The princess Suvinītā and Dinatara's minister now enter into a pact that each of them train two rams for a fight, and if Suvinītā's ram is conquered by the minister's she would accept him as her lover. On the appointed day, the minister, instead of training a ram for the fight, enters into the carcass of a dead ram and comes to meet the princess's ram. Dinatara, who hovers about in the parrot's body, sees his own body thus temporarily released by his minister, and immediately takes the opportunity to enter it, and kills the ram into which the minister entered. He is thus united with Suvinītā.

The earliest Nāḍagamas, we may infer from the evidence of the texts themselves, as well as from the existence of prototypes in the Tamil language, were translated into Sinhalese from Tamil originals. The Tamil prototype of the *Sthākki Nāḍagama* is the Roman Catholic play known as *Sthākkiār*, which is said to have been acted before Christian audiences in Jaffna some years ago, and the Tamil original of *Ähälapoḷa* is said to be a play called *Kaṇḍi Rāja Nāṭakam* which is still popular in the villages near Batticaloa. One cannot say to what extent Pilippu Siñño's work are a literal translation from the Tamil Nāḍagamas. His language shows a considerable amount of Tamil influence, but we cannot conclude anything without a comparison of the actual texts.

It is only later that writers of Nāḍagamas began to draw their themes from sources nearer home. The stories describing seductions, elopements, and love-makings, offended the taste of the more conservative, and they looked for themes which they considered more elevating. The play *Hariccandra*, published in 1901 by W. G. M. J. de Silva, himself not the author, is an attempt to revive a Nāḍagama with a nobler moral than was contained in most Nāḍagamas current. " Certain plays ", says de Silva, " are lust-provoking, and are not suitable to be seen and heard by women. This play, on the other hand, is one of the finest ever written. It is free from ignoble passion-provoking qualities, and one can, therefore, go to see it in the company of one's brothers and sisters or one's children. It has all the nine dramatic sentiments, and it holds before people an ideal of truth and purity of character. "

According to de Silva's introduction, *Hariccandra Nāḍagama* existed in Sinhalese almost a century before its present publication, having been translated from the Tamil play written by Narasinha of Kumbakonam. He publishes it in order to revive interest in it, and to suggest a substitute for the " vulgar " plays current in his time.

The story is that of King Hariccandra of Ayōdhyā, who was known for his truthfulness and piety. The gods discuss him one day, and Viśvāmitra vows that he will prove that there are no human beings of great piety and that Hariccandra is no exception. He, therefore, subjects Hariccandra to great sufferings, until the king is forced to give up his entire kingdom, and his wife and child as well, in order to keep a promise he made. His child dies, and he is about to kill his wife, which he has to do in the process of performing his duties loyally, when Śakra intervenes. He saves the life of the queen and restores life to the child.

It is more recently that Nāḍagam writers began to use Buddhist birth stories for their plays. The most popular among these has been the *Vessantara Nāḍagama*, which makes use of the story of the *Vessantara Jātaka*. Two other plays based on legends borrowed from Sinhalese literature and history are the *Siṃhavalli Nāḍagama* by J. Ratnayaka of Matara and *Sulaṁbāvatī* of unknown authorship.

The language of Nāḍagamas

The language of the Nāḍagamas deserves a certain amount of notice. Pilippu Siñño's language is peculiarly his own, and, as remarked, it shows considerable Tamil influence. In fact, his language is a peculiar mixture of Sinhalese and Tamil words, with a large proportion of pseudo-Sanskrit in it. Some of it is hardly intelligible. Although he draws a large number of words from what we may surmise was the current colloquial language, he attempts to invest his writings with a specious literary air, very often at the expense of clarity. Although a man of considerable fluency of expression, Pilippu Siñño appears to have been hardly literate. It is important to remember, however, that the Nāḍagamas represent an oral and folk tradition, and that most writers were not literary men.

Pilippu Siñño coins many words, sometimes with the purpose of adding sonorific and alliterative effects to his songs, and sometimes with the purpose of making the language look " dignified ". The following song from Sthākki Nāḍagama, would illustrate his style :

nili siki pila sē digu varalā
helā pulā vī adarī (nili siki)
madana sisārā
suguna vicārā
raṅga śriṅgāra tuṅga jōgiye helā pulā (nili)
taruna subāvī
komala karāvī
indrakäṭa sēma yuga net diliyē
helā pulāvī adarī (nili)
gigiri nadāyā
suraṅgana sēyā
man pem vaḍana anurāgayen

helā pulā vī adarī (nili)
suraṁba sabāyā saraṁba karāyā
in dän pätira suvaṅdin vihidē
helā . . . . . (nili)
kuṁbu solavālu neta naṭavālu randa pabalu väni dantaya mā
helā pulā vī adarī(nili)

The following introductory verses from the *Ähälapoḷa Nāḍagama* also illustrate Pilippu Siñño's pidgin Sanskrit, and the manner in which he jumbles together Hindu and Buddhist mythological terminology for the expression of Christian sentiments:

Gaṇatimira muḷu lovē jala venaskara sapta maha sāgarayen
viyalikara nuba deraṇatala pūrvadiga sakvalarāmbayen
suranira sav satun noyek dē mäv sarva vallaṁba devi tuman
gätu nitara adaha väṅdagatimi divi himvu tek mā räka devan.
Pūrvayen sumula suyambavu amara muru śṛṣṭikaḷa sav satun
mäti davan teda mahima tediva pirivara väjaṁbi apramāna anugrahayen
devumavum mā rakinu sihi näna dī dōṣa haḷa namō niti baktiyen
maha abdayōni upendra mahēsvara trimūrti pañcagra sarvajña bagavatun.
Kōdicca nan suran anukrōsa, driṣṭiprati patipadan, pabaṅdahaṭa anunayen
nata rästa kivi dōṣa haḷa gätuṭa saha sataṭa eka dana namäti smriti dī rakin.
paramasta pramēsvara karuṇābala palaṅdā gätuṭa bagavatum
avaṭakara sarasavi peramuva däru, timirandhayaṭa saha rajata ran.

Some of the words which appear in *Sthākki Nāḍagama*, and seem to have been coined by Pilippu Siñño are *samanuva* for husband, *sivu gātravaru* for quadrupeds, *manasijek* for angel or vision, *salila liya* for dancing-girl, *puntarā* for moon, and a host of other words of which it is difficult to guess the meaning. A large number of words of this sort occur also in the *Ähälapoḷa Nadagama* although, in this play, the language is much more intelligible than in others.

Later Nāḍagam writers, although they were no scholars, attempted to preserve the euphonic and alliterative style which seems to have been a peculiar feature of Nāḍagam language. This style, closely allied to the style of the Praśasti or Praise Poems, seems very suitable to the heroic element and the stylised acting of the Nāḍagama.

The mode of performance

A Nāḍagam performance usually begins about nine o'clock at night, and lasts, like other folk entertainments, till morning. It is acted on a raised platform, semi-circular in shape, erected at the entrance of a cadjan shed and known as the *karaliya*. The sloping roof of this shed has an over-hang which curves down in front in Kandyan fashion, and shelters the stage. The platform extends further

back into the shed, and there are two or three painted scenes hung across, separating the stage from the shed[4]. Before painted scenes came into use, the stage was separated from the shed by means of a simple cloth which served as a back-curtain. The shed is used as the tiring-room for actors, who climb on to the stage from behind, and come in through a side-entrance. No front curtain is ever used, this being superfluous for the technique of presentation. The Presenter, called the Potē Gurā (The Master of the Text, the Lector), stands near this side-entrance in a position in which he can see both the audience and the actors as they enter. One or two others stand beside him to join him at the end of each line as he sings, and to join in with the actors as they repeat each line of their songs.

On the side of the stage opposite to the Presenter are the members of the orchestra seated on the ground. There are two drummers, a man playing the *horaṇā*, and a man with cymbals. The drums are of the variety known as the *maddala*, and called *demaḷa berē* or Tamil drum by the Nāḍagam players. In more recent times the violin was introduced and still more recently the harmonium, locally termed the seraphina.

The audience sit in the open space opposite, some on the ground and some on chairs, within an enclosure covered by cadjans. Usually one has to pay for the seats, and, in the early days of the Nāḍagama, a ticket which entitled the holder to a chair cost twenty-five cents and those who were content to sit on the bare ground and watch the play had to pay only five cents.

The performance begins with the Presenter chanting the invocatory stanzas, called variously the Mūlārambhaya (Introductory Song), or Potē Kaviya (The Presenter's Verses), or Pūrṇa Viriduva. He comes attired in a long white *sanyāsi* robe, and wearing a turban on his head. After this introduction which is chanted in plainsong style, without a measured rhythm, he follows up with a song, a Cantus Mensuratus, known as the Potē Sinduva, or Pūrṇa Sinduva, or Tōḍāyama. The Potē Sinduva is really a continuation of the introductory verses. In both, the Presenter pays homage to the deities of his faith, praying to them for protection, tells the audience what play he is going to present, and craves their indulgence for any short-comings. Next the Presenter begins to introduce the stock characters of the Nāḍagama, the first of whom is the jester, known as *kōmāli*, *bahubūtayā*, *bahubūta kōlamā*, or *kōnangi*. The style of presentation is very much similar to

[4] This is only one type of Nāḍagam stage. In some parts of the Island Nāḍagamas seem to have been performed on a stage identical with that of the Jaffna and Batticaloa Kūttu. There is a circular *maṇḍapa* having a conical roof like that of the typical Kandyan Octagonal, and a floor raised by means of sand. In the centre is another circular space which is raised further from the level of the ground, and on this area are accommodated the musicians. Adjacent to this *maṇḍapa* is the cadjan shed which serves as the tiring room of the actors.

Bahubūtayā or Jester

that of the Kōlam, although more elaborate. There is, first of all, the unmeasured chant (*innise*) describing the jester before he enters the stage. Here is an example, from the *Brampōrḍ Nāḍagama*, of a verse introducing the jester :

Like a scarecrow in the rice-field, dressed in rags
With his body covered with scales,
His belly extended by excessive drinking,
Drunk to the point of shamelessness,
Staring around him with bloodshot eyes and prattling foolishly,
Here comes before the audience the Bahubūta Kōlamā
Crying out at the top of his voice.

The verses in most old Nāḍagamas recall a time when the jester apparently only wore rags and had, perhaps, a crooked cap on his head. Even Pilippu Siñño describes him as of frightful mien, like a demon, with white teeth and black face. This description probably comes from the Tamil Nāḍagama, for, in the Sinhalese Nāḍagama, the jester has always appeared attired in a costume adapted from that of the European clown, and looking more comic than frightful. He wears tight trousers and a longish jacket, with a strap going round the waist, and a conical cap very much like the conventional dunce-cap. The trousers and jacket are covered all over with rows of coloured pompons, perhaps as a substitute for the clown's motley. He wears a grey beard and moustache.

At the end of this chant the jester comes in, dancing to a tune which the Presenter strikes up after he has finished the chant. This tune is, as in the case of the introduction, in measured time. The jester does a set dance, making a circular movement on the stage, and when the Presenter has finished his song, begins singing a song himself. He sings a line and does a dance, and then sings the next line after his step. Between the dances the Presenter often asks him questions about his place of birth, his name and his parentage, with the idea of provoking mirth among the audience. Thus he alternates song and dance, and finally makes his exit, leaving the audience in roars of laughter with his antics and comic gestures, and his funny song. Here is the translation of a jester's song from the *Brampōrḍ Nāḍagama :*

Full well I know the art of honeyed speech :
No royal princess would my hand reject.
By dint of voice alone could I command
The heart of any wench upon this earth.
I can dance such dances as you've never seen :
Men watch me dancing and go back amazed.
I can drive the spotted cattle, I can play
For stakes. My mouth smells foul with smoke and drink.
I fear no dog however fierce or big :
'Tis village boys that rob me of my peace !

Sellan Lamā with his stylus and ola book

The second stock character of the Nāḍagama is Sellan Lamā, or Sellapille. He wears a bifurcated *dhoti*, with a long coat made of velvet, reaching up to the knee and buttoned in front, and a belt round the waist. On his head is a cap reminiscent of an ornamental *panāva*. He wears heavy necklaces, earrings and armlets, and has a moustache painted on his face, and a *tilaka* painted on his forehead between the brows. There are bells round his ankles, and he comes in carrying a feather stylus in one hand and an *ola* leaf in the other. As he dances, he writes on the *ola*.

The manner in which he is presented is the same as in the case of the jester. The Potē Gurā describes him in his chant, and when the song is sung, he enters dancing, and sings his own song. After he sings he is interviewed by the Potē Gurā. He is introduced as a very learned man, versed in the sixtyfour arts and sciences. The author of the *Brampōrḍ Nāḍagama* describes Sellan Lamā thus :

Now comes handsome Sellan Lamā
Delighting the minds of the audience,
Versed in all the sciences including medicine, astrology, poetry and dancing,
Learned in various languages such as Sanskrit, Pali, English and French,
In wisdom like the Teacher of the Gods (Suraguru, Bṛhaspati),
And in beauty like Ananga.

Pilippu Siñño in the *Sthākki Nāḍagama* describes him thus :

Enter Sellan Lamā, his body wafting fragrance,
Wearing soft silks and ornaments and a girdle round his waist,
A gem-set pearl necklace glistening round his neck,
Eloquent with wisdom and learning in the sixtyfour sciences,
With his writing stylus in his hand.

Next in order of appearance are two characters known as Desanāvādī, who give the audience an account of the story. They are sometimes known as the Anāgata Vaktṛ, or the Tellers of the Future. They come attired like the Presenter, in long white robe and top-knot, wearing chains of beads (*navaguṇaväla*) round their necks in the fashion of religious men and carrying a fan in the hand. They do a slow step as they come in. They give the audience, in short verses, the gist of the story which is about to be enacted. Sometimes the story is revealed in the form of a chanted dialogue between the two Desanāvādīs. The following dialogue from *Iyujin* is an illustration :

First Desanāvādī : Let me tell you something of what happened to the prince Milan, son of King Belāḍin.

Second : In the great city of Berlin, of the mighty king Belāḍin, the son Milan by name, falls in love with Iyujin, princess of Denmark, and after being betrothed to her, he comes back home.

First :	When he spoke of this matter to his friend, the son of the minister, I shall tell you what happened then.
Second :	The minister's son gets on terms with the prince's servant, and gives him a letter to be delivered to the princess as if it came from the prince, asking her to leave her kingdom and meet him in secret.
First :	The Princess believes the message to be a true one, and goes to meet the prince in the forest, but she does not comply with the wishes of the minister's son.

Thus the story is related by the two Desanāvādīs. In more recent times, these two characters seem to have been separated into a Teller of the Past (Atīta Vaktṛ) and a Teller of the Future (Anāgata Vaktṛ). The real Desanāvādī is the Teller of the Future. He comes attired in the same long robes and top-knot of the religious man. The Teller of the Past, on the other hand, comes dressed in a bifurcated *dhoti*. The upper part of his body is bare except for tinselled straps going crosswise. He wears a cap similar to the *deva*-caps and royal head-dresses one sees on Kōlam masks, with the *dāgoba*-shaped tier and the two curving side-lobes. The Teller of the Past sings a song in praise of the Buddha, describing some event in his life, like the Temptation of Māra, or merely a *stōtra* describing his power and might.

The next characters to be introduced are the drummers, Berakārayō. They are employed in the royal court. They wear the conventional dress of the drummer, the white cloth with the red waist-band (*paccavaḍama*), and the turban with the two side-pieces hanging from it over the ears, as in the Kōlam masks. They enter, and after the usual dance, make an announcement in a declamatory tone, this mode of declamation being termed *Kīrti* and sometimes *Gītuva* in the technical language. In alliterative ornate prose they announce the arrival of the king, and ask the people to be ready to make obeisance to him.

Lastly come the king's criers or heralds, the Haňḍa Dūtayō, who have no set costume. They wore a costume in keeping with that of the country from which they were supposed to come, which is, in the case of most of the earlier plays, European.

After the presentation of these stock characters, the play begins, always, at least in the traditional Nāḍagamas, with the appearance of the King, who is introduced in the same manner as the other characters. He enters while the heralds are still on the stage, and is accompanied by one or two of his ministers and royal retinue. He moves around with a dignified step and sits on the throne, while his attendants fan him, and the Presenter chants what is known as the Āsana Viriduva. The King requests his criers to summon the prime minister, who comes in now in the usual manner. The King asks his prime minister news of the kingdom and his subjects, and then the story proper begins. Every character is brought to the stage in the style described above, and each type of character has a prescribed mode of entry, and a prescribed dance to perform. Between the entry of various characters, the Presenter narrates parts of the story, explaining to the audience those incidents that have not been depicted on the stage. The characters sing

of their doings and their intentions, and sometimes declaim a prose sentence or two after they have sung. In some traditions, these prose sentences are delivered in chanting style. Sometimes there are short prose dialogues of this nature, but such dialogues occur very seldom in the course of a play. The more common thing for an actor to do is to sing a song and, at the end of it, to declaim or chant a sentence in stilted literary prose. This prose portion is styled Vacane or Vāsagam. Dialogues that are chanted or sung are known in Nāḍagam language as Targa.

Nāḍagam players usually take about a week to enact an entire play. Every night the performance begins with the presentation of the stock characters, which goes on till midnight. The story begins only after this. It is very likely that Kōlam players adopted this style from the Nāḍagama, when they began to perform a play after the masked dances.

The music of the Nāḍagama

The Nāḍagama is a lyrical play consisting largely of verses and songs. The verses are in Tamil meters, and they are chanted, as described earlier, without measured time. A large number of meters are used, the commonest among them being the Viriduva (Tamil *viruttam*). Other Tamil meters used in the Sinhalese Nāḍagama are the Innise, Kalippā, Kavi (also known as Kavirāge), Kocchakam, Venbā (Tamil *venpā*) and Paraṇi. Sometimes a verse is sung in measured time and then it is known as a Tāla Viriduva or a Tāla Innise as the case may be. Writers do not use pure *elu* in these verses, as they do when writing Sinhalese poetry in the traditional metres. They use a kind of Sanskrit-mixed style reminiscent of the style of the Praśasti poetry of the Matara and Kandy periods.

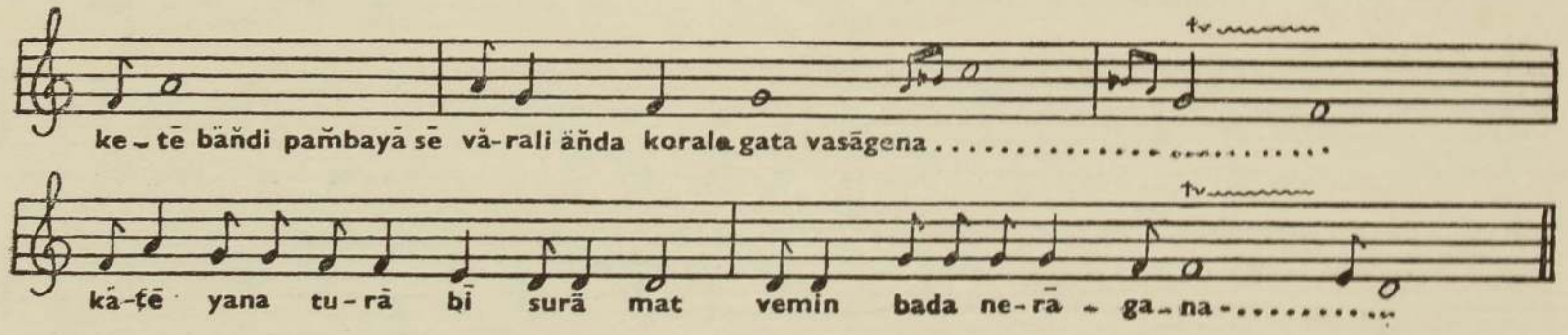
Those songs that are sung in measured time are given the general name of Sindu. Mostly all the melodies are of South-Indian origin, but Sinhalese singers drop the Tamil intonation and method of voice-production when they sing them. It is believed that a few of the melodies are borrowings from Roman Catholic church music, known locally as Kāntāru. The original Tamil tunes perhaps underwent slight changes here, and in the hands of Sinhalese musicians and poets, absorbed something of the genius of the people. It is not unlikely that some of the tunes may be, at least in part, native in inspiration, that is, they may be fresh arrangements of the same melodic patterns originally borrowed from the Tamils. According to tradition, there are, in all, nine time-measures, with two varieties of each, thus making, altogether, eighteen Tālas. The two varieties are, in each case, different rhythmic patterns within the same time-measure, and they are called the Aḍu Tāla and the Väḍi Tāla, both of which are played simultaneously by two drummers. Most Nāḍagam songs have a section rendered in double time, and this is styled the Uruṭṭu[5]. A time-measure that is fairly common in Nāḍagam music and quite characteristic of it is the six-pulse time with accents on the second and fifth pulses of a bar so

[5] In the Uruṭṭu (Tamil *uruṭṭu*, an ornament), although the actual time-duration per measure remains the same, the value of the units is halved, so that the number of pulses per bar is doubled. This effect is achieved both by means of the drum-beat as well as by the natural rhythm of the words.

that the rhythm is markedly different from that of the six-pulse time or Dādarā of North Indian music, where the accents fall on the first and fourth pulses (the pulse being regarded as equivalent to a quaver). This time-measure is called Vaḍimuḍi in the Sinhalese tradition (Tamil *vaḍamōḍi*). Other time-measures commonly met with in Nāḍagam music are the Kīrtanam or fourteen-pulse time, similar in rhythm to the North Indian Dīpacandi; the Tirlānā or six-pulse time with accents on the first and fourth pulses of a bar in the manner of the North Indian Dādarā; the Pasan (bhajan ?) or eight-pulse time, the equivalent of the North Indian Lāvanī; and Taṅgapāṭa or twelve-pulse time (the pulse being regarded as equivalent to a semi-quaver), similar in rhythm to the Hiñc of North India.

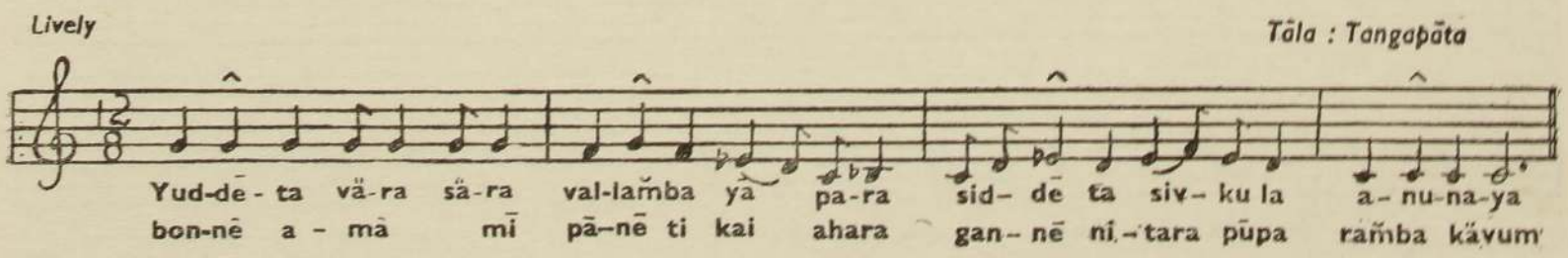
The folk music of the Sinhalese village provided a ready soil on which Nāḍagam music could grow. The unmeasured chants of the Nāḍagama were similar both in the style of singing as well as in their structure, to the folk melodies that were already in existence here and which, too, probably derived their inspiration originally from Tamil music. Besides, the Sindu, although of more intricate melodic structure, had rhythms that were familiar to the Sinhalese villager, and the notes of lengthy duration that they usually possessed made them sound very much like chants. For these reasons, Nāḍagam music fitted well into the cultural milieu of this country, and even today, never fails to evoke a note of response in the hearts of the most unmusical of village listeners.

The following is an example of an Innise sung by the Potē Gurā before the entry of the jester :

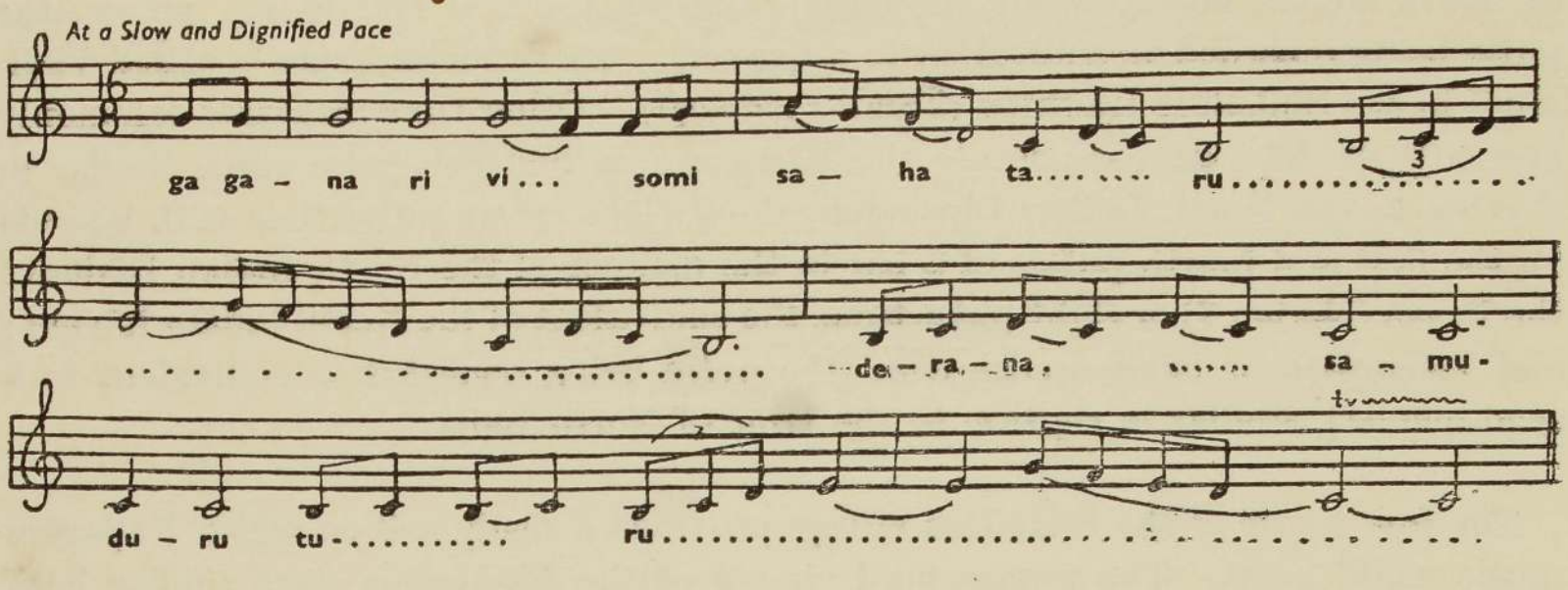


Along with the freedom from a measured time, the singer perhaps had a certain amount of freedom with the melody as well. He could introduce certain variations and ornamental additions to the basic melody.

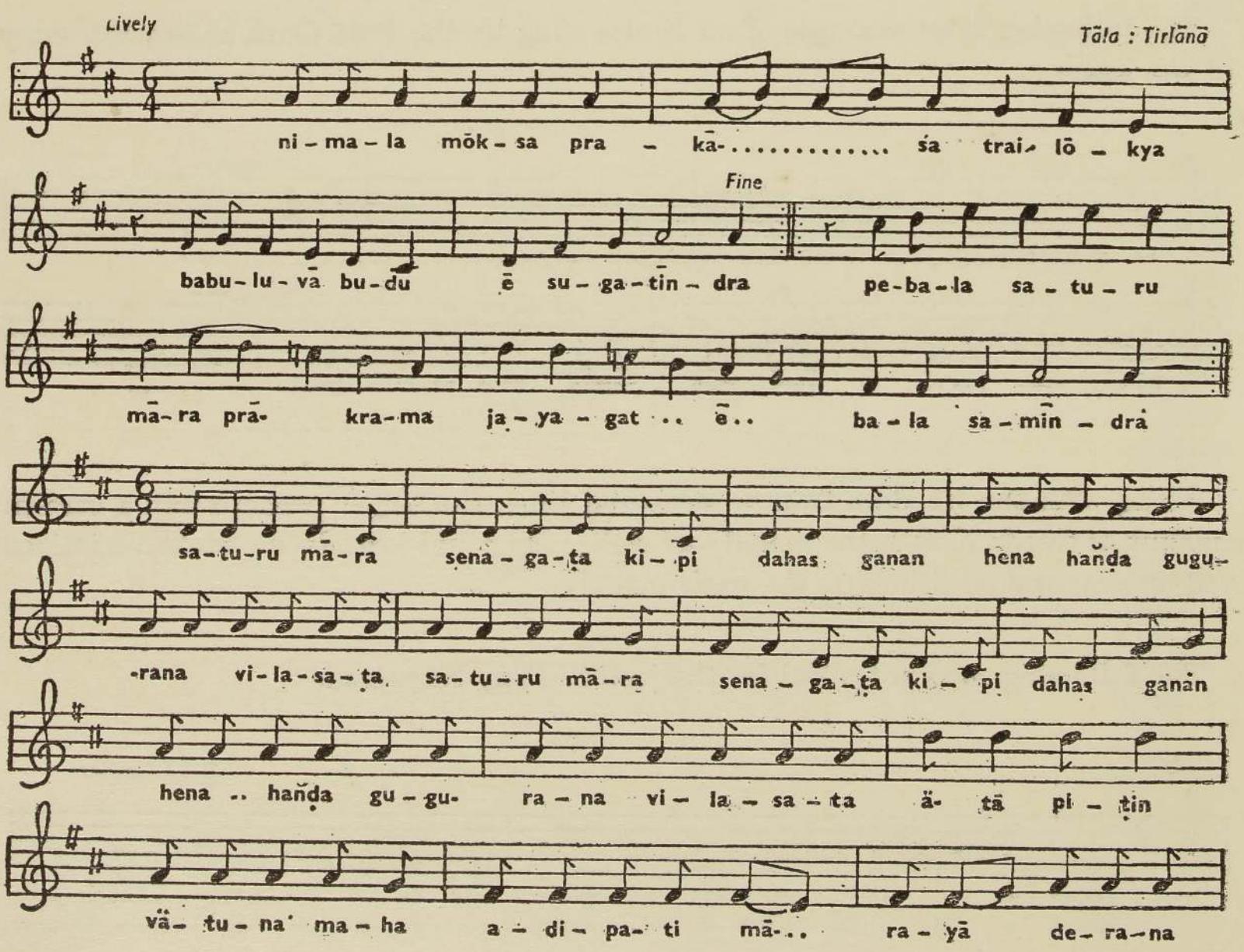
The following song is typical for the jester in any Nāḍagama :



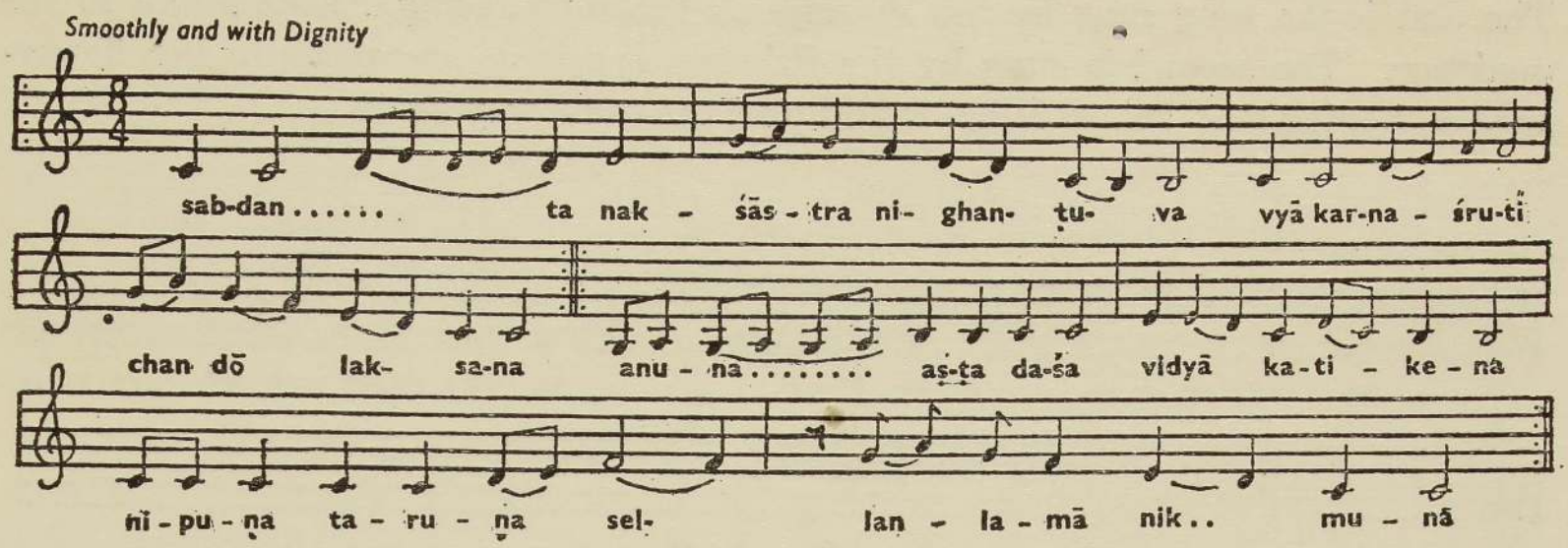
The following is the Tōḍāyam or invocatory song from the *Ähälapoḷa Nāḍagama:*



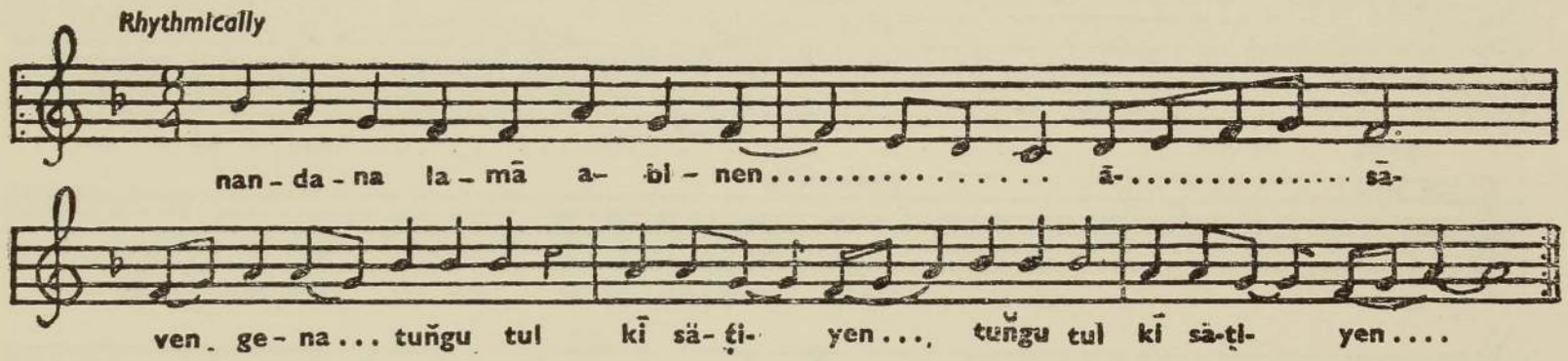
The song given below illustrates the type of devotional *stōtra* sung by the Atīta Vaktṛ who appears during the course of the performance :



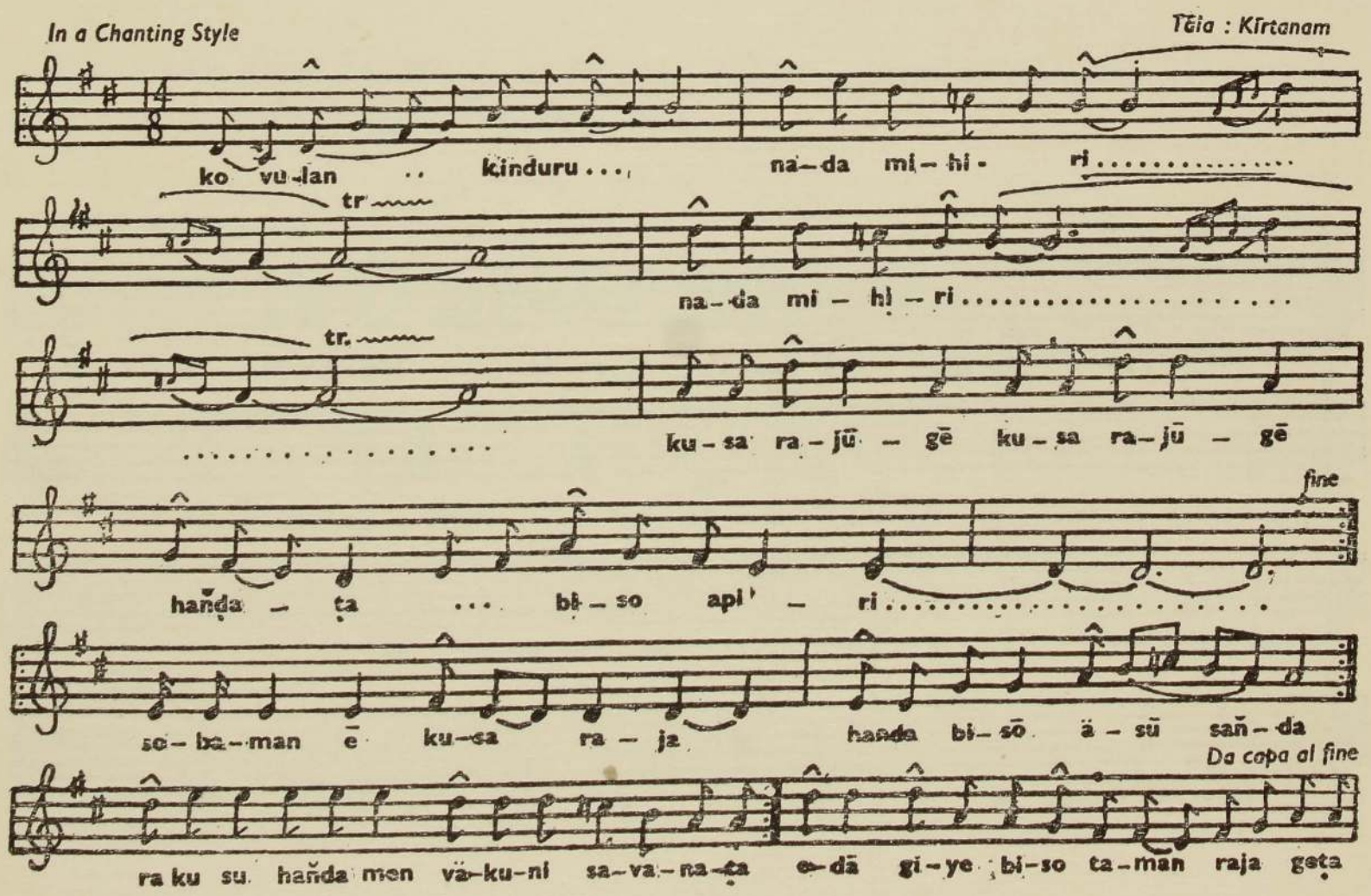
The Sellan Lamā is introduced with a dignified air sung in a slow rhythm :



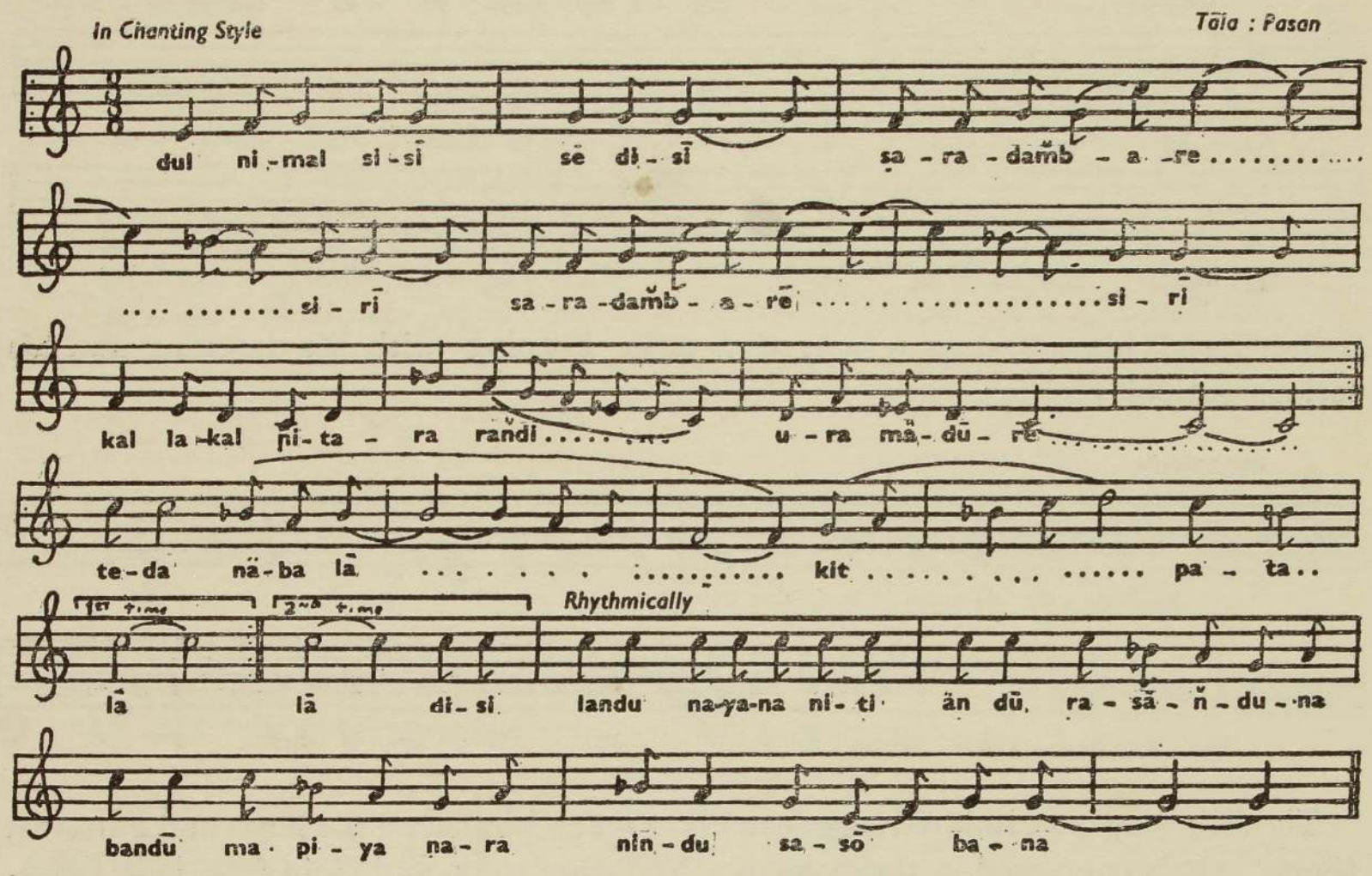
Sellan Lamā himself sings a song that is in keeping with his learning and his serious outlook on life :

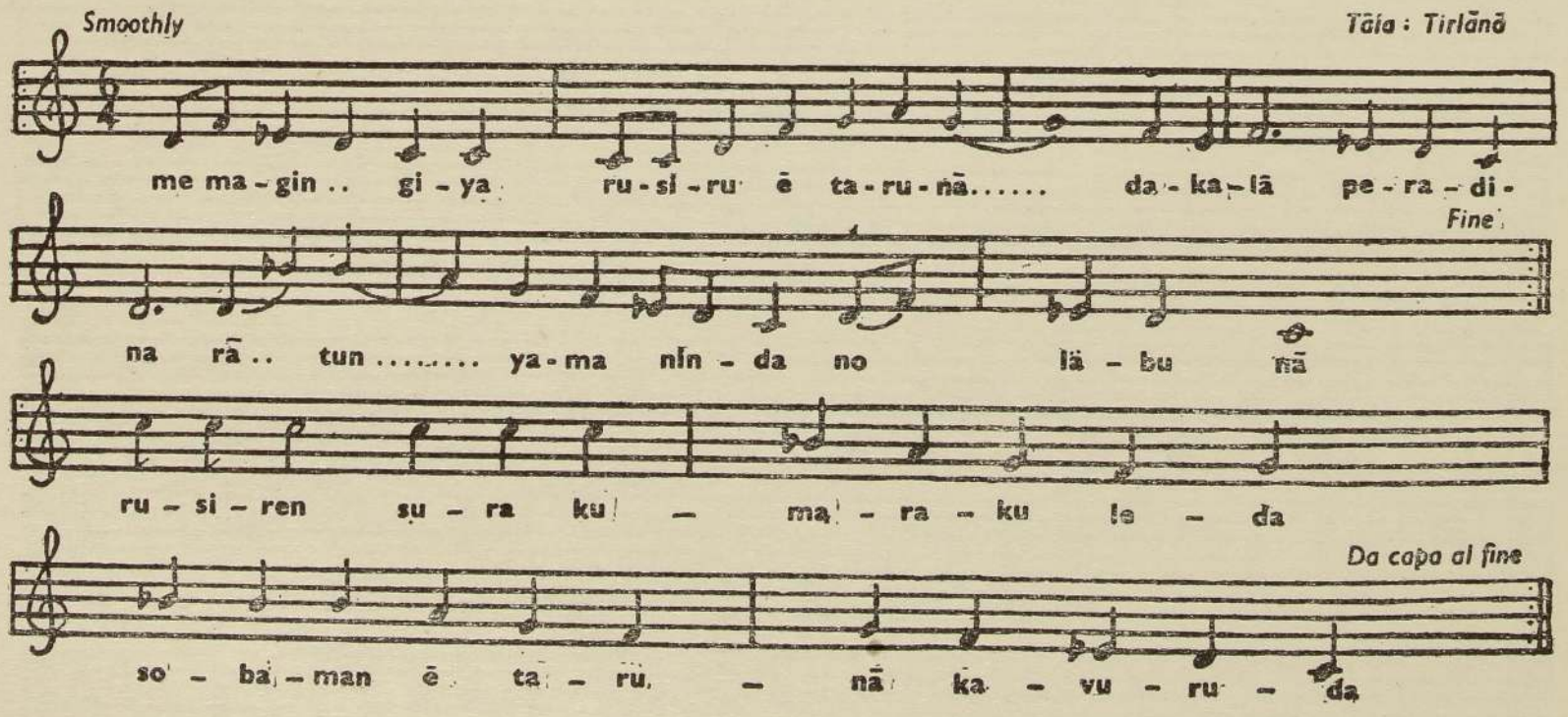


The following is an isolated song, usually called a Viraha, on the Kusa and Pabāvatī theme. It is composed in the style of a Nāḍagam song, and is, in fact, very representative of this tradition. The time-measure is called Kīrtanam by present-day Nāḍagam producers :

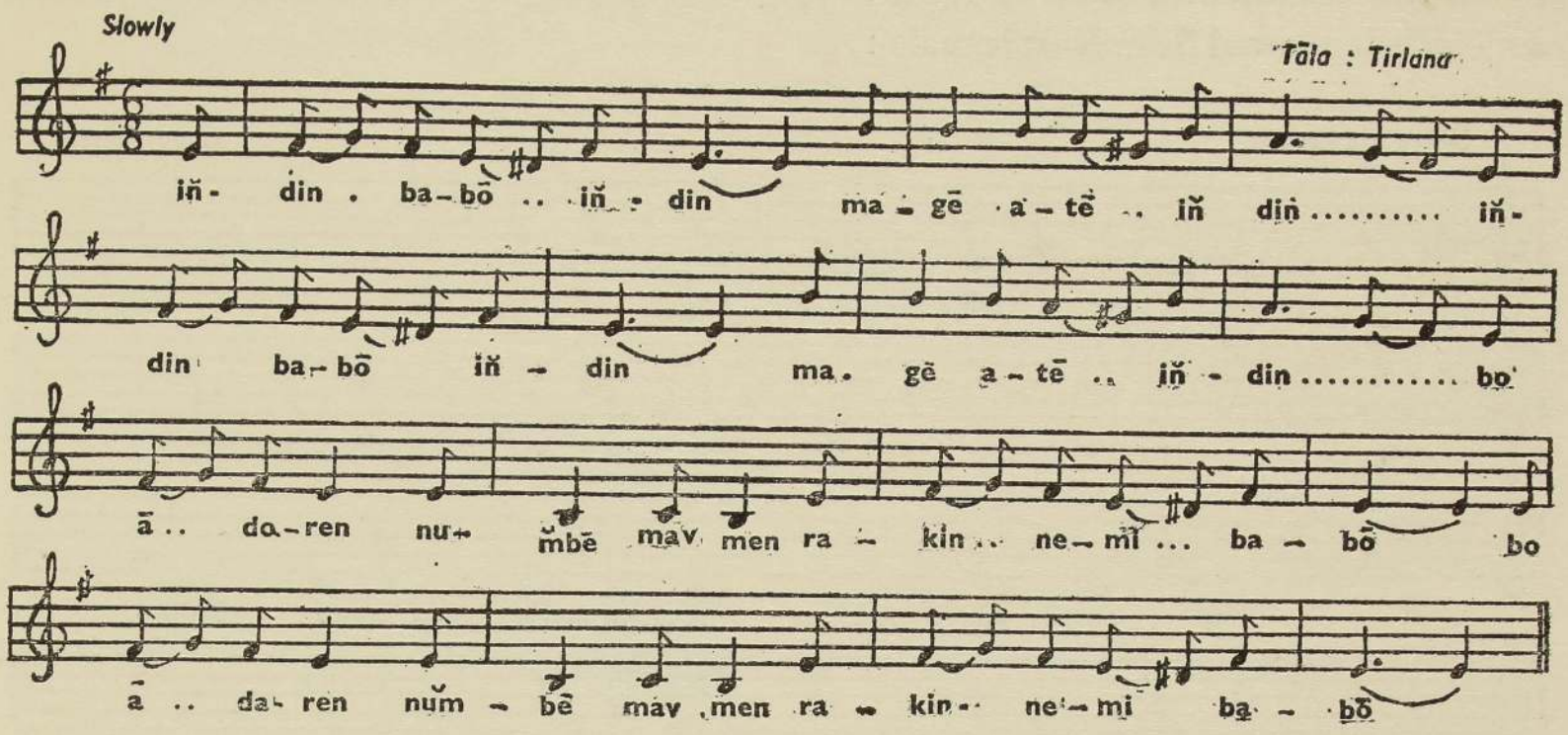


The following from *Iyujin* provide two other illustrations of Nāḍagam songs. The first is the song sung by the Presenter when introducing Prince Milan to the audience. The second is sung by the Princess Iyujin as she waits in her flower-garden, hoping that Prince Milan would pass the same way again :

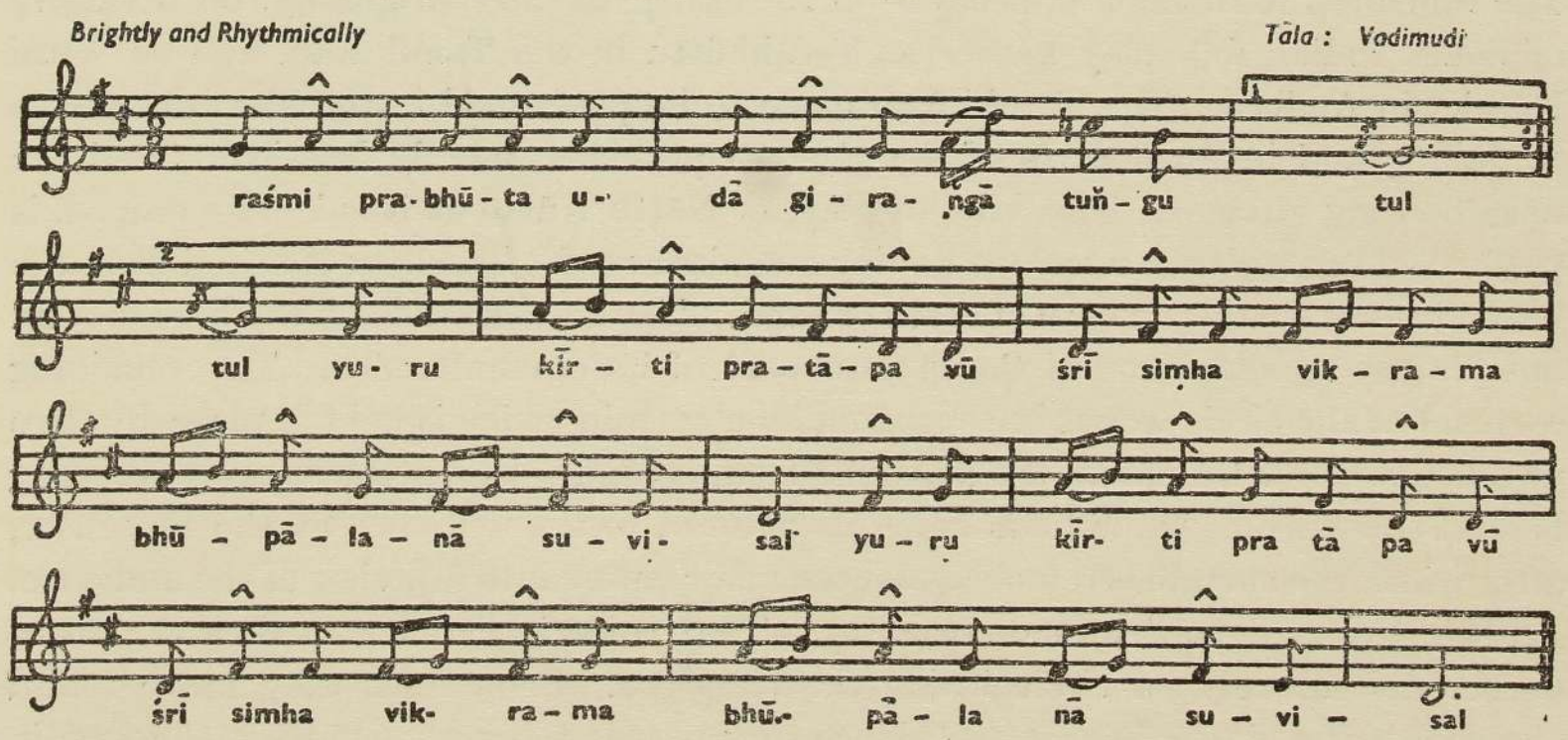




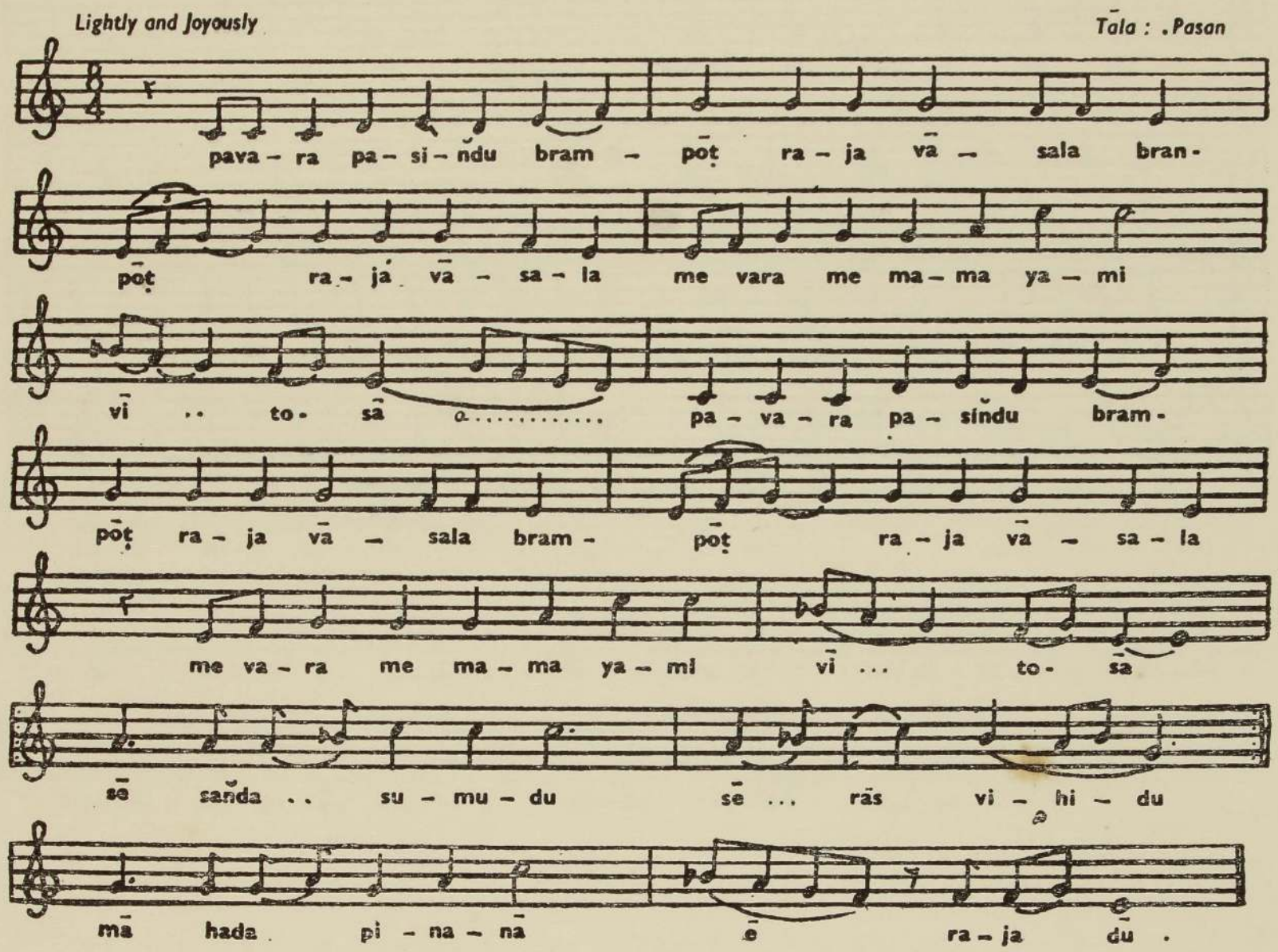
The melody of this lullaby from the *Bälasanta Nāḍagama* may very well be a borrowing from Roman Catholic Church music :



The melody given below is from Pilippu Siñño's *Ähälapoḷa Nāḍagama*. It provides an illustration of a song in Vaḍimuḍi time :



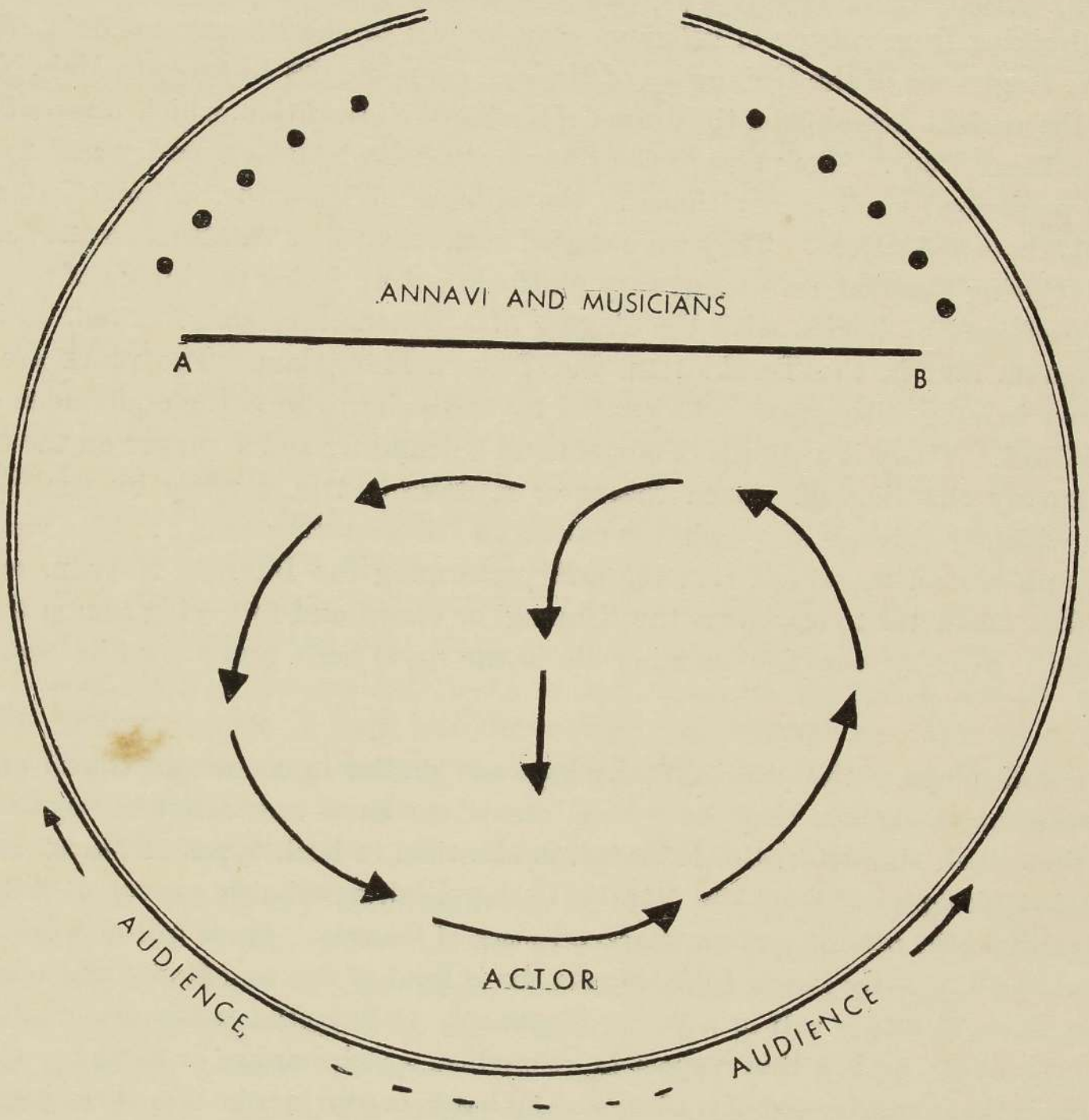
As the Nurti, with its North-Indian music, began to grow in popularity, the taste of the people changed in favour of Hindustani music, and the Nāḍagamas began to absorb Hindustani airs. The following is an example of a Nāḍagam song with a melody borrowed from Nurti music :



Connection with the Tamil folk play

The Sinhalese Nāḍagama appears to have been patterned, originally, on a variety of South-Indian folk play known as Terukkūttu in the Tamil Nāḍ, and as Vīthi Nāṭaka in Andhra. The Terukkūttu came to be performed in the Tamil language in Jaffna, and in some parts of the Eastern province, mainly Batticaloa and the neighbouring villages. This kind of play, or Nāṭṭu Kūttu as it is locally named, is performed in a circular *maṇḍapa* having a conical roof. The floor is raised from the level of the ground by means of earth or sand. The audience sits on the bare ground outside the *maṇḍapa* round the greater part of its circumference. The remaining segment of the circle would be separated by a curtain which is held in place by two people as each actor enters the *maṇḍapa* from behind. The actor remains standing behind this curtain while he is being introduced to the audience by the Presenter, after which the curtain is removed and the actor enters into full view of the audience. All the actors adopt this mode of entry. They come in dancing as they are introduced, and move in a circle inside the *maṇḍapa*. Sometimes they move round about half the circumference and dance up towards the audience from the rear in

the manner illustrated below. The Presenter, or Annāvi as he is called, stands with the singers and musicians (playing drums and *kaitālan*) close to the entrance, and often in the centre of the *maṇḍapa* :



The Nāṭṭu Kūttu, as it is performed in Jaffna and Batticaloa today, is not identical in all respects with the Sinhalese Nāḍagama. The only stock figures are the Kōnaṅgi and Kaṭṭiyakāran or king's herald. The Sellapille does not appear in the Nāṭṭu Kūttu, although there is a separate dance, in these parts of the Island, known as the Cellappillai Vacantam which may have been originally connected with the Nāṭṭu Kūttu. The costumes used to be the kind known as *vil uḍuppu*, consisting of bulging skirts stitched round large bamboo rings and hung from the actor's waist, stockings for the legs, and jackets for the upper part of the body. The themes of the plays are largely taken from episodes in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, from Tamil legend, and sometimes, as in the case of the *Kaṇḍi Rāja Nāṭakam*, from Ceylonese history. There is a considerable amount of virtuoso dancing performed by the actors in between their singing, and unconnected with the drama as such,

while some movements are executed in simple mime, such as, for example, the dance depicting the rowing of a boat, or the dance depicting a rider on a horse[6]. Objects like chariots are symbolically constructed and brought on the stage.

The South-Indian folk play is a lyrical drama having its roots in a classical tradition, and deriving from a type of religious play known as the Bhāgavata Mela Nāṭaka. Dr. V. Raghavan of the University of Madras, connects the Bhāgavata Mela Nāṭaka with the ancient Āriyakūttu, the drama of the Sanskrit tradition, which was performed in the Tamil Nāḍ[7]. The plays of the Bhāgavata Mela Nāṭaka type are said to have been performed until recent times in the villages of Merattur, Śūlamaṅgalam and Uttukāḍu near Tanjore. They were staged in the month of Vaiśākha on the occasion of the Spring Festival, on a temporary platform put up facing the image of the deity. The performance begins with the singing of a benedictory song, called, as in our Nāḍagama and in the Terukkūttu, the Tōḍaya Maṅgalam. The plays are done entirely in song with prose links recited by a Reader, who is the equivalent of our Potē Gurā. There is a chorus of singers and a drummer and a player on the *tutti* to accompany the singing. Each character is described in a verse by the Reader, after which the chorus sings what is called an " introducing song ". The character then appears on the stage, dancing and performing the Bharata Nāṭyam *mudrās*. The first character to appear is the Kōnaṅgi or clown and following him is the God Ganeśa. Next appears the chamberlain of the royal hero, and after him comes the hero.

The folk plays of the Vīthi Nāṭaka type are similar in construction and mode of presentation, although they have now ceased to have any religious significance. The first stock character, the Kōnaṅgi, is identical in both types of plays, and the second stock figure of the Vīthi Nāṭaka, Cellappillai, is probably a survival of Ganeśa. Cellappillai still retains certain characteristics of Gaṇeśa. He is full of wisdom and versed in all worldly lore. Like Gaṇeśa, he is fond of fun and frolic, and wishes to amuse himself with a calf or a young elephant[8]. Cellappillai wears fine clothes and rich ornaments, and in this respect he resembles a rich banker or Seṭṭhi. Gaṇeśa, in fact, is the favourite god of tradesmen and bankers who invoke him at the beginning of any business undertaking. Cellappillai thus, is a composite character, reminiscent of Gaṇeśa and his various associations.

The Sinhalese translation of the word *cellappillai* retains only certain of the qualities attributed to this character originally. The Tamil *cellai* means both " amusement " or " fun ", in which sense it is used in Sinhalese, as well as " wealth." *Pillai* may mean " child " as well as " man " or " person ". While the Tamil Cellappillai therefore, became, more or less, identical with the character of a Seṭṭhi, and retained only a few characteristics of the original Gaṇeśa, the Sinhalese translation of the word into *Sellan Lamā*, emphasized the playful qualities of this character, and came

---

[6] There are two varieties of Nāṭṭu Kūttu, the ancient type, known as *Tenmōḍi* or Southern Type and *Vaḍamōḍi* or Northern Type, which is more recent and akin to the modern drama. These two types are mostly distinguished by the styles of music which they employ.

[7] See *The Bhagavata Mela Nataka*, in *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Coomaraswamy Volume*, June, December, 1937.

[8] Gaṇesa is represented in some sculptures as a dancing god.

to mean something like " playful child " or " play-boy ". He sometimes comes in describing himself as a light-headed youth who makes eyes at young girls, an account which does not always tally with the description given of him by the Presenter. As a result of this change of meaning, Sellan Lamā is sometimes represented on the Sinhalese stage by two children.

Another type of South-Indian folk drama belonging to the same variety as our Nāḍagama is the Yakṣa Gāna of the Telegu country[9]. Dr. Raghavan describes a performance of Yakṣa Gāna in the following words :

" A traditional Yakṣa Gāna starts something like a Tamil Terukkoottu. There is first the worship of God Vighneśvara, remover of obstacles, within the green-room itself. A song on this God Ganapati is sung. The Karpura Nirajana shown to the God is then " taken " by the actors, the chariot and the drummers. After this Ganapati Prārthana, the chorist Bhagavatar, along with the player of the *mridanga*, comes to the open space outside the space enclosed for green room. He takes his stand at the back end of the space, and sings the praise of Lord Ganapati's brother, Subrahmanya or Subbaraya. The next item is the entrance of two boys in typical male costume and with slight dance, they recite certain Vandana Slokas or stotras from such hymns as the Krishna Karnamrita. The two female characters appear and do some " Graceful " (Sukumāra) dance (Lāsya), first from within the curtain and then outside. They retire and the Bhagavatar or the musician who sings gives us the Kathapithaka, the prologue to the coming story. The Kathapithaka is the Sanskrit Sthāpana and it mentions the drama, opens it and introduces the first characters. The play then begins. Each actor enters dancing and then exchanges a few words with the musician, who asks him who he is, and the actors who reply, thus announce themselves. The musician thus often converses with the actors. "

" The Yakṣa Gāna ", says Dr. Raghavan further, " must have originally been a very faithful form of Bharata's theatre in respect of abhinaya. As was to be seen till recently even in our Tamil Terukkoottus, abhinaya must have been present to a very large extent in the Yakṣa Gāna. . . The Yakṣa Gāna as seen today, has approached the modern drama in having a lot of prose dialogue between the actors, which the actors themselves speak. When the actors stop speech, the musical theme is sung and while it is sung, the ancient practice must have been to render every word of it through abhinaya. "

Although the Sinhalese Nāḍagama is ultimately the descendant of this type of South-Indian folk drama, it has not come to us directly from any of these sources. The immediate ancestor of our Nāḍagama is that form of the Terukkūttu which was performed in the Tamil language in certain parts of Jaffna by the Roman Catholics, and which underwent certain modifications in their hands. Although the structure of these plays was the same as that of the Tamil Kūttus, the Roman Catholics employed European themes set in a background of Christian society, expressed Christian sentiments in the invocatory stanzas and throughout the plays, and introduced fresh stock characters. A Roman Catholic Nāḍagama begins with the Annāvi

[9] See *Yakṣa Gana, Old Drama of South Karnataka* by V. Raghavan in *Sound and Shadow*, Vol. II, No. II, 1933.

(The Reader or Presenter) and his chorus chanting a verse entitled the Kāppu, from the usual place where the instrumentalists and singers sit. The Kāppu gives a brief introduction and mentions the subject of the play. Next comes a character known as the Pulasandōr, carrying a scroll in the hand, and dressed like an angel in long flowing robes, with a crown of flowers on his head. Sometimes a child or two children represent the Pulasandōr. Next in order of presentation is the Kaṭṭiyakāran or Herald. He announces the arrival of the king, who enters presently, accompanied by the Kōnaṅgi or Kōmāli. He sends the herald to fetch his chief minister, and asks him in the usual manner, news about the kingdom and his subjects. The play then begins.

This Roman Catholic play employed a large number of Tamil meters, such, as Kalippā, Kalitturai, Iṉṉicai, Kavi, Koccakam, Paraṇi, Icali, Viruttam, Veṇpā, Āciriyam, Kalveṭṭu and Cantatam, some of which are used in the Sinhalese Nāḍagamas as well. Songs were given the general appellation of *taru* (*daru*). The dialogue in chanted form was called Targam, and the spoken dialogue Vācanam. the equivalents of which are used in the Sinhalese Nāḍagama as well, The actors wore *vil-uḍuppu* costumes.

Apparently there were variations in the number of stock characters and the order in which they appeared. The above is the manner in which the Roman Catholic play was performed around the village of Atchuvelly in Jaffna, about fifty years ago. As already remarked, the earliest Sinhalese Nāḍagamas we possess appear to be direct translations from Tamil. The fact that the Roman Catholic Diocese at Jaffna extended, in the early days, right down to the Maha Oya, facilitated the migration of the Tamil play to the Sinhalese-speaking Roman Catholic areas. The Sinhalese people of the Roman Catholic coastal villages north of Colombo are, even to this day, bilingual, that is, they speak both Sinhalese and Tamil. This is an additional factor that helped in the process. Dramatic activity on these lines began, according to the Rt. Rev. Dr. Edmund Peiris,[10] as early as the seventeenth century. One of the earliest Nāḍagamas was the Nativity Play, entitled The Three Kings (*Raja Tunkaṭṭuwa*) attributed by the Rt. Rev. Dr. Peiris to Gabriel Fernando of Chilaw, and staged in that village in the first decade of that century. Gradually the Nāḍagam went into non-Catholic hands, and migrated to the South of Ceylon along the coast where it seems to have come under the influence of the Kōlam, and absorbed some characters from it.

[10] *op. cit.*,

AUTHORITIES

D. P. D. Alwis, *Ahäläpola hevat Siṃhalē Nāḍagama*, Colombo, 1899.

W. A. de Silva, *Dramatic Poetry and Literature of the Sinhalese*, in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon*, Vol. XVIII, No. 45.

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Edmund Peiris, *A Sinhalese Nativity Play*, in *The Ceylon Fortnightly Review, X'mas Number*, 1949.

V. Raghavan, *The Bhāgavata Mela Nāṭaka*, in *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Coomaraswamy Volume*, June, Dec., 1937.

Yaksa Gana, Old Drama of South Karnataka, in *Sound and Shadow*, Vol. II, No. II, 1933.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE PUPPET PLAY AND THE ROMAN CATCHOLIC PASSION PLAY

The Sinhalese puppet play, as it survives today, is a thing of very recent origin. It is unlikely that it existed in this form even a century ago. The word *rūkaḍa* itself, now used in the sense of a dramatic puppet, seems originally to have had a different significance. It stood for any figures carved out of or into wood or stone, and also meant puppets used for magical purposes. The current use of the word, therefore, is comparatively recent.

Although there is no evidence for the existence of puppet plays, the use of figures on gods and animals, animated by mechanical means, for purposes of entertainment on festive occasions, is referred to in literature. The *Cūlavaṃsa*, in describing a festival held by Parākrama Bāhu II in connection with the transfer of the sacred relics from Jambuddōṇi to Sirivaḍḍhana, says that the precincts of the monastery at Sirivaḍḍhana were decorated with " rows of figures of Brahma, that danced in lines holding white umbrellas and were beautiful because they were worked by a mechanism, with diverse-hued mechanical figures of the gods which moved to and fro with hands folded before the brows, with rows of mechanical figures of horses which ran hither and thither and possessed the grace of rows of raging waves of the sea, with elephants wearing the ornaments of elephants, which were (likewise) mechanical figures feigning to be clouds descended to the earth.[1] " The same description is repeated in the *Pūjāvaliya*[2]. The *Cūlavaṃsa* also describes how Parākrama Bāhu, when he started his system of espionage in the territory of Gajabāhu, " made such as were practised in dance and song appear as people who played with leather dolls and the like. "[3] This indicates, again that dolls were made to dance to music for purposes of entertainment.

The art of cutting figures of animals and birds and even life-size human figures out of *kaduru* wood was practised with a high degree of skill in certain villages till recent times. There is no evidence to show, however, that these figures were used for dramatic purposes.

The tradition of puppet-shows, therefore, as distinguished from puppet-plays, which survives up to the present day in carnivals, Pinkamas and Perahära amusement stalls, may be held to be fairly ancient, and the art of the village carver of figures would have been used for such purposes. The puppets, in shows of this sort, were more often flat figures, such as those used some time ago by the familiar betel-seller and not more than a foot or eighteen inches in height.

---

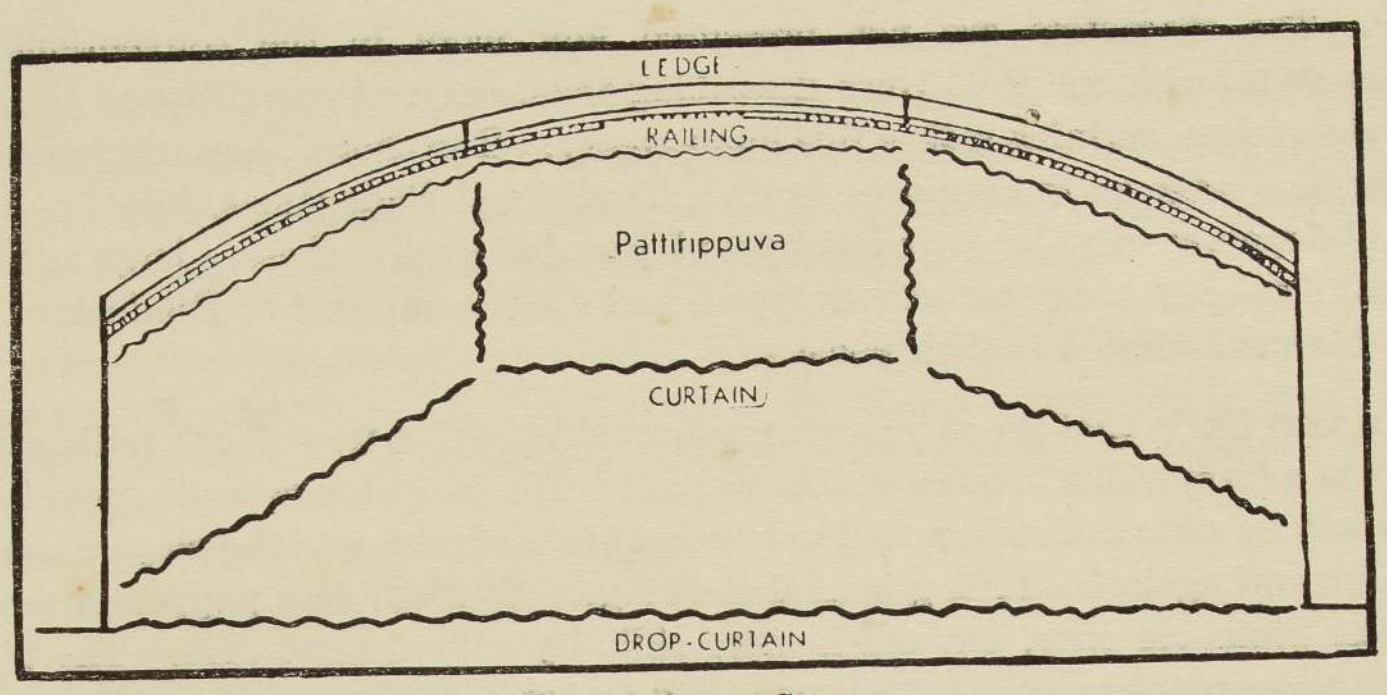
[1] Chap. 85, vv. 15–18.

[2] p. 695.

[3] Chap. 66, v. 133.

Although no date can be assigned to the contemporary puppet play, we may be sure that it is not earlier than the Nāḍagama, judging from the fact that the players use Nāḍagam texts for interpreting the movements of the puppets and from the fact that we have no evidence of any other texts which may have been used for this purpose earlier. Puppet players of the present day are, in fact, Nāḍagam players who have given up performing Nāḍagamas because of the lack of demand for this kind of entertainment. Troups of puppeteers must, of course, consist not only of these Nāḍagam players, together with their drummers, musicians and singers, but also of artists who cut the figures, and of skilled workers who manipulate the puppets. Song-writers and playwrights, too, would form a valuable addition to the troupe. Thus dramatic puppetry is an art requiring the coordination of a large number of skills, and the co-operation of several kinds of artists. In the villages, therefore, the puppet play became a very live art, and one that gave scope for self-expression to several artists who found people losing interest in their individual creations. It gave the villager, further, a form of entertainment which was fairly innocuous and free from the immorality associated with Kōlam and Nāḍagam.

There are about five troupes of puppet players in Ceylon at present, and all of them are at Ambalangoda. These troupes display great skill in the manipulation of puppets, but in the arrangement of their stage, their scenes and the costumes of the puppets, they need to reach a higher degree of refinement before city audiences can be made to take an interest in their art. Even the puppets themselves could be constructed so as to enable them to move their limbs more freely than they do now. Present-day puppets are round and from three to four feet in height. They are manipulated by means of strings tied to a plain horizontal bar or two bars fixed crosswise and held in the hands. A raised platform serves the purposes of the stage. This is divided into two wings and a centre. The wings are constructed so that they form an angle with the back of the stage, opening out towards the auditorium. The centre recedes further back forming a small cubicle. This is used as the audience-chamber of the king, where he sits in state on his throne and summons his prime minister at the beginning of each play. This cubicle is known as the *pattirippuva*. These three divisions of the stage are fitted with dark back-curtains. The proscenium arch is so constructed as to give the stage a height of not more than four feet. The *pattirippuva* and side-wings are fitted with separate drop-curtains which can be rolled up. At the back of the stage is a circular railing about six feet in height standing immediately behind the wings and the *pattirippuva*, and from this railing there projects backwards a ledge a foot high from the level of the floor of the stage :



Plan of Puppet Stage

Puppets are shown on all three divisions of the stage, but not simultaneously. While one division is being made ready, the show continues in the other. The players stand on the ledge described above, and leaning on the railing, manipulate the puppets from behind. Their hands and the strings are not seen on account of the low proscenium:

Front view of Puppet Stage

The orchestra, which nowadays consists of a seraphina-player, violinist, and *tabla*-players, sit facing the stage, with their backs to the audience They strike up a tune, and presently the curtain of one of the wings is rolled up and a puppet representing a dancing girl does a dance on the lines of the " Bombay dancing " that was once a popular feature in the Colombo theatres. Next are introduced the jester and the Sellapille of the Nāḍagama. Their dances, which were originally arranged to the rhythms of the Nāḍagam *maddala*, are now modified to suit the rhythm of the *tabla*. The puppets are dressed in the costumes which these characters originally wore in the Nāḍagama. Only these two stock figures of the Nāḍagama appear on the puppet

stage. The characters are not presented any more in the conventional Nāḍagam style, with the Potē Gurā describing them before their entry on the stage. The use of drop curtains makes this unnecessary. The chorus, however, sings from behind the stage as the puppets dance. Traditional Nāḍagamas, like *Vessantara*, and *Ähälapoḷa* are popular among puppet players, but even in these, a large number of typical Nāḍagam songs are now dropped, and songs composed to Hindustani tunes have been substituted in their place.

It is very likely that the puppet play migrated to Ceylon from South India where it exists in a form which is quite similar to ours. The puppets are manipulated in the same way by means of strings tied to bars held in the hand, and the players similarly lean forward against a railing behind the stage. South-Indian puppets are round, like the Sinhalese ones, but much more skilfully carved than ours. The players attach puppet-strings to their turbans as well, and since Sinhalese players do not wear turbans, we can well understand why this method has not been adopted here. Puppet players in South India use similar operatic plays as an accompaniment to the puppets, based on episodes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, and, very likely, adapted from the Tamil Terukkūttu.

The puppet play, although of recent origin, has acquired the position of a folk art, since puppetry already occupied a place in the village organisation. Besides, the puppet play was the one form of entertainment that was not open to the objections brought against Nāḍagam and Kōlam. Since no human beings took part, it did not receive the censure of the serious-minded, like other dances and dramatic entertainments with their buffoonery and unseemly behaviour. It could be seen, too, that manipulation of the puppets demanded a practice and skill which was not readily associated with drink and other vices. Hence the puppet play, with religious and historical themes, could be used like the dancing Brahmas and gods of Parākrama Bāhu's time, even on occasions like Pinkamas and Vesak, to call forth religious emotion in people. For all these reasons it survives as a folk entertainment to which many other entertainments have given way, and which is capable of developing into a very popular dramatic form in our country.

The Pāsku or the Roman Catholic Passion Play

The Roman Catholic Passion Play, or Pāsku, as it is called, ought to be considered together with the Sinhalese puppet play. The Pāsku originated, like the Nāḍagama, in the Catholic areas of Jaffna, and migrated in a similar way, to the Sinhalese-speaking Catholic parts along the west coast. The earliest Passion Play is said to be that performed in the Church premises at Pesalai in Mannar, from where the Jaffna tradition originated. Today the tradition is continued in the Passion Play staged in alternative years on the island of Duwa off the coast of Negombo. The Duwa Passion Play is done in Sinhalese, but in the same style as the Pāsku of Jaffna.

The Jaffna Pāsku began on Passion Sunday and lasted during the entire Holy Week. It was performed by means of life-size statues carried by people. The performance took place inside a large pavilion with a roof about twenty feet high, open in front and closed at the back, facing which the audience sat on the ground in the open air.

The lower part of the pavilion was covered from view by means of a wall made of cadjans, to the height of about six feet from the ground, so that the statues, as they are carried about by people inside the pavilion could be seen above the level of this wall, the whole having the effect of a raised stage with the cadjan wall as its base. The back wall of the pavilion was fitted with painted scenes.

The play was interpreted by a Reciter who stood in front of the pavilion, facing the audience. A man with a loud, stentorian voice was selected as the Reciter, and it is said that families often vied with one another to have this honour conferred on one of their members.

Although there was a stage of the kind described above, the entire play was not confined within its limits. A large part of the play took place without any strict delimitation of audience and actors. In fact, the entire village took part in it. People used to walk along the paddy fields, one of them carrying the figure of Christ, in order to depict the incident of Christ's carrying the cross from the Garden of Gethsemane to Calvary. The incident of the devils being let loose on the morning after the Crucifixion was enacted in a playful manner by several young boys looting the surrounding shops. The shopkeepers are prepared for this, and leave unwanted articles of no value outside.

The Pāsku migrated, like the Nāḍagama, to the Sinhalese Roman Catholic areas around Chilaw and Negombo, where it began to be performed in the precincts of several churches, with statues to represent the five main characters, Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, Saint John and Veronica, and human beings to represent the rest. There is a Passion Play of some sort or other performed on the premises of almost every church. One of the most famous of Passion Plays, after the Duwa play, is that performed in alternative years at Pitipana which boasts of an unbroken tradition of at least eighty to ninety years. These plays are done in most places in the same style. A pavilion is erected on which is built a stage about six feet above the ground. On the two sides of this pavilion are two huts, built with stages, so that altogether there are three stages that can be used for the performance, in the manner of the puppet stage described above. Although there is a stage in every Pāsku most of the scenes are enacted in the open, amidst the crowds.

It is interesting to note that at Pitipana as well as Pamunugama, there are permanent structures erected opposite the churches, of the description given above, to be used as stages for the regular performance of the Passion Play. This structure is called a *Pāsku Maḍuva.*

Pāsku begins on Palm Sunday when, after Mass, the statue of Christ riding on a donkey is taken round in procession in the Church premises or, as at Duwa, round the island, after which the priest would distribute palms to the congregation for the purpose of making crosses. The stages would be prepared between Palm Sunday and Maundy Thursday, and in the evening of Maundy Thursday the trial before Pontius Pilate is staged in one of the side huts. This scene is done through

the medium of prose dialogue, without songs. On Friday afternoon, the statue of Christ carrying the cross is taken round in procession and Christ's meeting with Mary Magdalene, the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint John is enacted in the midst of the crowds with women weeping and singing *Pasaṃ* (Passion Hymns). The statue is then carried to the centre stage, and the scene opens with Christ on the cross and the two thieves nailed to the crosses on the two side stages. The two living actors who take the part of the thieves undergo a remarkable ordeal, remaining tied to the cross for three hours. At the end of the Agony, the statue of Christ is taken down from the cross and carried round in procession with devotees singing Passion Hymns.

On Saturday morning after Mass, there used to be enacted, in some Pāskus, the scene of the devils being let loose. The village boys blacken their faces and run amok, looting vendors and playing havoc among the people. Then comes Lucifer, heralded by the sound of loud gongs, and all the devils concentrate into one of the side stages. Here Lucifer questions them about their doings and the devils begin to reveal all the clandestine affairs and private intrigues of the village folk, each devil confessing to his having been responsible for a certain number of evils. The boys took this opportunity of revealing village gossip and scandal, and altercations of a serious sort often resulted. On account of this, the scene with Lucifer and the devils was banned from Passion Plays.

These Passion Plays are semi-musical. Whenever scenes are done with the help of living actors, songs are introduced, and Christian Church Music is used, to the accompaninent of western instruments, often the organ. The earliest Passion Play of this type in Sinhalese is that at Duwa, where it is still done in the same style. The three stages are built in the same manner, with a cadjan wall in front, as in the Jaffna Pāsku. There is a space left between the wall and the stage so that, in scenes in which statues are used the statues could be carried about in this space. A loud-speaker is now used to amplify the dialogue and the songs, and more and more living actors are substituted for the statues. The part of Veronica is often played by a boy.

The most famous of Passion Plays, however is the Boralessa Passion Play, where the cast was comprised entirely of living actors. This was written and produced by K. Lawrence Perera of Boralessa (born 1890). Having been educated in Roman Catholic institutions he was able to learn European music in the course of his school career, and through his own efforts acquired a knowledge of Eastern music as well. He wrote and produced a number of religious plays in the Nurtiya style, using Rāgas for the songs and the background music. The first of these plays was *The Rosary*, staged in 1912, and some others are *Saint Sebastian*, *Saint Agnes*, and *The Hidden Gem* (1916).

From his early days, Lawrence Perera's ambition was to write and produce a really great Passion Play, with a cast entirely composed of living actors. He thought that the Passion shows done in Church premises with statues were " crude " and unworthy of so lofty a theme as the passion of Christ. In 1912, therefore, he obtained a text of the Oberammergau Passion Play, and set about writing a Sinhalese play

similar to it, on the same theme. Adopting the local dramatic traditions, he introduced songs into the play. The melodies for these were mostly taken from Rāgas. Some of the tunes were from Christian hymns, and others were composed by the author himself. All these tunes, including the Rāgas, were played on western musical instruments with orchestral accompaniment. The Rev. Fr. A. Yenveux was responsible for most of the harmonisation.

The Shridhara Boralessa Passion Play, as it was called, was first performed in 1923, with actors drawn from the unlettered village folk who wore their natural beards and hair in the manner of the actors of the play at Oberammergau. Carters, sawyers, masons, and people representing almost every profession in the village took part in the play. The female rôles were played by men, and there was, altogether, a cast of over a hundred performers. The play began in the early afternoon about three o'clock and ended the next morning about four with an interval of about an hour in between.

Every scene in the play was preceded by *tableaux vivants* illustrative of stories in the Old Testament which have some similarity to situations in the Passion, in the style of the Oberammergau play. According to a critic, these *tableaux vivants* were presented with background music, and were among the most unforgettable portions of the play. "Here was something an artist could enthuse over, the grouping, the posture, and the colour. Did you not find yourself trying to detect a movement of a limb or the flickering of an eyelid to convince yourself that these living pictures were composed of men of flesh and blood? If there is nothing else in the Boralessa Passion, the tableaux would win credit enough by themselves."[4]

The stage consisted of five sections, one in the centre, and two on either side alongside the centre stage, in the manner of the constructions used at Jaffna and other places for the performance of Pāsku. The important scenes were played on the centre stage, and the two stages immediately adjoining it were used for street scenes, while the two extreme stages were used for the trials of Jesus before Pontias Plate and Ananias. Sometimes all the stages were used simultaneously, as in the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem, with which the play began.

Painted scenes were used for the background, and, apparently, the stagecraft seems to have been of a high order. The critic quoted above says of the Way of the Cross and the Crucifixion scenes, that they were " easily the best things in the play. Apart from its impressiveness," he says, " the former, taking with it the rabble, the soldiery and the religious leaders of the Jews, provides a pageant of colour. The latter is a sublime piece that can hardly be bettered by any company in Ceylon. The Christ hanging on the cross amidst the two thieves for over thirty minutes, apparently with no support, itself a triumph of stagecraft; the jeering mob, the well-simulated upheaval in nature that accompanies the death, the taking down from the cross of a seemingly dead body in the full sight of the spectators—all constitute a scene ever to be remembered."[5]

[4] *The Ceylon Daily News*, Thursday, April 9, 1936.
[5] *Ibid.*

The play ended with the Ascension of Christ, represented in *grand tableau,*" which, with its moving clouds and colour effects and above all the statuesque figure of the Christ in the midst, brings the play to a truly triumphant close, celebrated in Alleluiahs sung to inspiring and joyous music."[6]

The Boralessa Passion Play became very popular in the course of a few years, and people flocked to see it from distant parts of the Island. Audiences were carried to the spot by special trains. Encouraged by the warm reception given to his play, Lawrence Perera went on improving it every year with new stage devices. In 1939 he caused a sensation by announcing that the female rôles were to be played by women By this he hoped to remove what he considered to be the only defect in his play, since the Oberammergau and Nancy plays, as well as several Passion plays in India had women in the cast. Hence he introduced four amateur actresses, trained from among the village folk, to play the female rôles.

It appears, however, that Lawrence Perera had not obtained the previous sanction of the Church before he did this, and the Church disapproved of the innovation on the ground that it was contrary to the traditions of the people of this country. Lawrence Perera pointed out that women were already taking part in the Passion Play at Duwa, and that, in 1936, a woman had played the part of Veronica. However, the Church believed that the introduction of women would tend to detract from the spirit of piety and devotion with which a Passion Play should be staged. Hence the play was banned the same year by order of the Archbishop of Colombo.

---

[6] *Ibid.*

CHAPTER EIGHT

BEGINNINGS OF A MODERN THEATRE

About the close of the nineteenth century the Sinhalese theatre emerged, from being a folk theatre performed on the " grassy knoll " into a modern theatre using permanent stages and auditoriums. Although, to some extent, it had its roots in the Nāḍagama, it was directly inspired by the example of Parsee musicals which came here from North India, and by amateur English theatricals. Even before the rise of the modern theatre, western stage technique had begun to exert its influence on the Nāḍagama. In the early days the Sinhalese Nāḍagama, like its Tamil counterpart, was performed, in all probability, without stage or scenery. Soon, however, a stage of some sort came into use, and, more recently, painted scenery. The modern theatre is distinguished by its more ample use of painted scenes, curtains, lighting, make-up and modern stage devices. The elaborate sets and glistening costumes that now came to be lavishly used, although made of cardboard and tinsel paper, were, to the playgoer who had been all this while treated to the raw Nāḍagama, a veritable feast of colour and splendour. Besides, plays in the new genre were not of all-night duration like the Nāḍagamas. They lasted usually for about three hours, and, just as anything longer would have bored city audiences, anything of shorter duration would have sent them home with the feeling that they had not got their money's worth.

Another great attraction in the theatre of the new type was its music. The Nāḍagamas consisted, to a large extent, of portions meant to be sung in recitative and plainsong style, and the songs, with their elaborate roulades and notes of lengthy duration, sounded more like chants, although sung in measured time. Besides, the same tunes were repeated in several Nāḍagamas, with the result that Nāḍagam music tended to be monotonous. The new theatre introduced more lively tunes with more pronounced rhythms than those of Nāḍagam songs. Although based on classical Rāgas, these songs were, for the most part, simple in structure, consisting, as they did, of only a *sthāyi* and an *antarā*. Owing to the phonetic affinities between Hindustani and Sinhalese, people found little difficulty in picking up these songs even in the original Hindustani garb in which they were introduced here at the beginning. For the same reason, it was quite easy to fit Sinhalese words into the tunes. Besides, on account of the similarities of intonation between Hindustani and Sinhalese, the North-Indian style of singing came more naturally to the Sinhalese singer than the South-Indian style of the Nāḍagam songs. Nāḍagam songs had already familiarised him with the structure of Indian classical music, which is basically the same in the North as well as in the South. For these reasons, theatre songs rapidly gained in popularity, and before long ousted Nāḍagam music.

It was with the rise of the new theatre, too, that women first came on the stage, and although this had its advantage from the point of view of dramatic art in general, it had unfortunate repercussions on the Sinhalese theatre. In the folk plays and

Nāḍagam, women's rôles were played by men. The new practice, however, instead of raising the status of an already despised art, served to bring it further into disrepute. Even singing and instrumental music had long since ceased to be regarded as accomplishments worthy of the respectable Sinhalese woman, although families who received an English education made an exception in favour of western music. If singing and instrumental music were allowed at all, it was only at the level of domestic accomplishments, and even at this level dancing was never admitted. For a woman to perform any of these arts in public even as amateurs, or to take part in the public performance of a play, was looked upon with disapproval in the days we are talking of. So that those women who acted on the stage did so at the risk of their own reputations, and unfortunately, the bad name they earned reflected further discredit on the stage. This was aggravated by the fact that the theatre offered professional careers to women, and even if the amateur actress might have barely escaped with her reputation, the professional actress had the worst of both worlds. The result was that educated middle classes in Colombo were slow to patronise the theatre, even if they liked it as a form of entertainment.

Professional actors and musicians, too, did not enjoy a very high reputation. Drink, drugs and a general tendency towards undisciplined behaviour were associated with people who took to a theatrical profession, so that the views generally held, regarding the dangers inherent in music and the allied arts, seemed to receive confirmation. It was only in the small cities outside Colombo, therefore, that the Sinhalese theatre was accepted by the educated middle class, partly because of the lack of English theatricals and other entertainments in the suburbs to compete with it, and partly because it remained largely in the hands of amateur entertainers.

The drama of the new genre received the appellation of Nurtiya (*nṛtya*) to distinguish it from the Nāḍagama. The chief characteristics of a Nu tiya, as far as its structure is concerned, are that it is divided into acts and scenes like the European play, and that the Potē Gurā or Presenter of the old Nādagama disappears. The Nurtiya, however, is of the same operatic character as the Nāḍagama, except for the fact that it has a greater proportion of prose dialogue.

The Parsees had early become adepts in modern stagecraft, and they influenced the theatre in this direction not only in North India but in the South as well. We are told that there were no less than twenty-five Parsee theatrical companies in Bombay, and that some of them toured the whole of India. The Marathi as well as the Gujerati drama is said to have been considerably influenced by the Parsees, and the modern Telegu drama is, like ours, largely patterned on the Parsee musical.[1] The Elphinstone Dramatic Company of Bombay, under the leadership of Baliwallah, came here in the eighties, and captured the imagination of the people as it did in other parts of India as well. This theatre company is said to have been particularly famous for its stage technique and its gorgeous sets. It had, in its repertoire, plays like *Alladin* and *Hariccandra*, Shakespearean plays like *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*, and plays based on stories in the *Arabian Nights Entertainments*. Baliwallah is said to have

[1] *The Indian Stage*, Vol. III and IV, by Hemendra Nath Das Gupta.

performed for over three months to packed audiences in the Floral Hall, a wooden structure in the old Racquet Court in the Pettah, the site of which is now occupied by the Chalmers Rice Granaries. An article contributed to the *Ceylon Observer* by Wilmot P. Wijetunge gives us an intelligent and knowledgeable playgoer's reactions to the new form of theatrical entertainment that the Parsees brought to this country. He says : " Gorgeous and scintillating constumes, colourful and artistic scenaries before brilliant kerosene-oil footlights, breath-taking spectacular mechanical devices (of marble palaces floating up into thin air, and of wondrous magic treasure caves), rapid dramatic sequences grasped in spite of a foreign language and, above all, the haunting airs of the music of North India—all these fascinated and captivated the onlooker accustomed to the slow-moving, bald, and unsophisticated Nāḍagama. Henceforth it was destined to yield precedence to this new dramatic form born in such fortuitous circumstances—to the Nurtiya."[2]

Prompted by the popularity of Baliwallah's tunes, Sinhalese writers began to recast the old Nāḍagamas in the new form, introducing into them the Hindustani airs that were ringing in everybody's ears. The earliest writer in this field was Kalutantirige C. Don Bastian Bandara Jayaweera, more commonly known as C. Don Bastian. Born in 1852, C. Don Bastian was a pioneer in many other fields as well, and a man of great versatility and scholarship. He was the pupil of such distinguished savants as Waskaduwe Śrī Subhūti, Weligama Sumangala, and Hikkaduwe Śrī Sumangala. He began his career as a printer and won an international award for the quality of his work. He was the first to print and publish a Sinhalese daily newspaper, and he edited books like the Sinhalese translation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* which exercised great influence on the course of the Sinhalese novel. C. Don Bastian began by recasting an old Nāḍagama entitled *Rolinā*, introducing modern songs into it. It was published in 1879. The author does away with the traditional Potē Gurā, and begins the play with an invocation to the Buddha, intended, apparently, to be chanted in the style of a Sinhalese poem. The play opens with the jester, whom the author calls *kavaṭayā*, omitting the normal appellation of *bahubūtayā* or *kōnaṅgi*. The jester sings a song in a *kapiriñña*[3] tune. The songs that follow have tunes drawn from a variety of sources, Hindustani, Tamil, and even English. In the text of the play, the first line of an existing song is given at the beginning of each song, to indicate the tune to which it has to be sung, and it is interesting to note that one song has to be sung to the tune of " Jack and Jill went up the Hill." This custom of prefixing the first line of an existing song to indicate the tune began with the adoption of Hindustani airs, and continued up to the time of John de Silva, who began to classify the tunes according to the Rāga and Tāla. Time-measures are indicated by such terms as *gazal*, *tirlānā*, *cāl*, and *hōli*. Occasionally a *targa* occurs, as in Nāḍagamas, and there are large portions in continuous prose. The structure of the play is very much the same as that of a Nāḍagama, that is, we are presented with a sequence of events without any constructed plot, and there is no division into acts and scenes. The characters appear and introduce themselves by means of songs. It is not clear whether they danced on the stage as in the

---

[2] *The Ceylon Observer*, July 9, 1944.

[3] A melody belonging to a body of music introduced here by the Portuguese.

Nāḍagama, but we may surmise that they did make some sort of unorthodox movements to the rhythms of the songs they sang. The *kapiriñña* melody of the jester, for example, is a dance tune, and, very likely, the jester cut a few capers as he came in and sang. It is clear, however, that by this time the set dances of the Nāḍagama had been dispensed with, and this would be a natural result of the change-over into a new type of music.

Rolinā is a story which the author himself says is from an English source. A prince named Härsor[4] wanders by land and sea until he arrives in an island known as Bosmäri, where he meets a princess named Rolinā and gets engaged to her. He leaves her and goes to the forest on a hunting expedition, and is captured by demon hordes. The princess waits in vain till he returns, and in the end goes out in search of him. She travels from place to place, earning her living as a dancer, serving maid, and in several other ways. A prince named Robert tries to seduce her, but she escapes by cutting off his head with his own sword. After many adventures the lovers meet.

C. Don Bastian's next play was *Romeo and Juliet* which, according to M. G. Perera[5] was staged in 1884, with D. Bartholomeusz playing the part of Romeo. Its style was entirely modelled on that of the Parsee musical, and this play can, therefore, be regarded as the first Sinhalese Nurtiya. The published version appeared in 1885, with the names of the members of the cast. It is interesting to know that the part of Juliet was played by a male actor.

In this play the author tries to observe the division into acts and scenes as in the English original. He calls an act a *sandhi* and a scene a *citravastraya*. The play itself is described as an *antekheda pañcasandhi nṛtyaya*, a literal translation of the phrase " a tragedy in five acts." It is written in prose and song, and the tunes are of Hindustani origin. C. Don Bastian does not translate from Shakespeare's original, but bases his play on an adaptation by one D. J. Wijesingha.

Two other plays, *Pränklō saha Ingerli* and *Liyonayin saha Emlin* were staged in 1885. The author calls the former " The Indian Play entitled Franclo and Ingerlee " and the latter " The Indian Play entitled Leonine and Emlin." *Pränklō saha Ingerli* is described as a comedy in two acts (*ante prīti dvisandhi nṛtyaya*). The play begins without any invocation or benediction, the curtain opening on Ingerli and her attendant picking flowers in the garden and the subsequent entry of Franclo. The songs are all meant to be sung to Hindustani tunes.

Liyonayin saha Emlin is described as a tragedy in five acts (*ante kheda pañcasandhi nṛtyaya*). The prince Liyonayin falls in love with the daughter of his teacher, and secretly elopes with her, after laying a plot to deceive her father. On the way they come to a forest where they undergo great suffering and finally fall a prey to

[4] The names are merely transliterated as they occur in the play. Mr. Wilmot P. Wijetunga suggests that these names are quasi-European, and, in most cases, coined by the writers. In the case of this play, however, the coining seems to have taken place anterior to C. Don Bastian, since they occur in the Nāḍagama of the same name.

[5] Introduction to translation of *Romeo and Juliet*.

death. The play opens directly in the palace of King Milan. A large number of tunes are drawn from current songs, like Nāḍagam songs, Viraha songs, Śiva Bhajanams, and popular Tamil airs.

Another famous play of C. Don Bastian is *Romlin*, which again he calls an " Indian play " although the principal characters bear quasi-European names like Aldreston, Power, Vinto, and Romlin itself.

Romlin is said to have been performed at Malwatta in the Pettah in 1866, by the Lokeka Nṛtya Samāgama.

Of the other plays of C. Don Bastian performed in subsequent years, we may mention *Siṃhabāhu, Sudāsa saha Sālinī, Ṣūlā, Svarṇatilakā* and *Dinatara*, the last having been adapted from the Nāḍagama of the same name. Many of these plays were staged at what was known as the Floral Hall, which was, in fact, the main locale of the Nurtiya for many years.

Other famous Nurtiyas were *Alladin, Badoura, Ali Baba, Hariccandra, Indra Sabhā, Pōrsiya* (*Portia* or *The Merchant of Venice*), *As You Like It*, and *Measure for Measure*. Some of the Nurtiyas were, probably, inspired by plays that were in the repertoire of the Parsee companies, several of which came here after Balliwallah's, while Shakespeare's plays and the translation of the *Arabian Nights Entertainments* by Albert de Silva provided themes for others.

Two of the most important personalities of the theatre world, after C. Don Bastian, were John de Silva and Charles Dias, both lawyers by profession. Of them, the man who exercised the greatest influence on the modern stage and on modern music was John de Silva. He was born in 1857 at Kotte, and received an English education in Colombo, where he trained for the teaching profession. While teaching he studied law and passed out as a proctor of the Supreme Court. However, he was not satisfied with being a lawyer, either, and tried his hand at writing plays, and one of his earliest was the *Parābhava Nāṭakaya*, a prose play which was a satire on the europeanised upper class. His aim was to rescue the Nurtiya from the position it had descended to as the vehicle of a hybrid Anglo-Oriental culture, and to make it a medium for the propagation of national and religious sentiments among the people. He drew his themes, therefore, largely from episodes in Sinhalese history and legend, and with the help of these he tried to recreate something of the splendour of the past, and to set before the people the example of kings like Siri Saṅgabō and Duṭugämuṇu, and thereby evoke emotions of piety and of respect for the ideals of our forefathers.

John de Silva, too, was inspired by the Nāḍagam tradition which, in spite of the Nurtiya, was very much alive in his time. But he attempted to break away from it more completely than C. Don Bastian. He eschewed Nāḍagam tunes completely and attempted to make Nurtiya music more systematic. Earlier writers were satisfied with drawing tunes from any source, and merely indicating the tunes by means of the first line of the original song. The tunes were more or less haphazardly chosen, and, if at all, only in accordance with lay notions of their suitability for the

various situations in the story. John de Silva decided to apply the Sanskrit theory of *rasa* or dramatic sentiment to his plays, and to employ the conventions of classical North Indian music for this purpose. He collaborated with a musician from Bombay by the name of Visvanath Lawjee, and with his help, chose for his songs the Rāga and Tāla that was regarded as most appropriate for evoking the required sentiment (*rasa*).

John de Silva also sought to follow the pattern of the Sanskrit play in some respects. In most of his plays there is an introduction, more akin to the *Prastāvanā* of the Sanskrit drama than to the *Mūlārambhaya* of the Nāḍagama. In it the audience is given the gist of the play to follow. In his later works he follows the pattern more closely and introduces, at the beginning, a Sūtradhāra (called by him *Sūtradhārī*) in the company of an actress. The Sūtradhāra sings a song and requests the actress to tell the audience what the play is about. The actress does this in a song. In *Devānampiya Tissa* the Sūtradhāra appears and chants a welcome to the audience, after which enters the jester, referred to here as *bahubūtayā*, the name by which he is known in the Nāḍagama. There ensues a conversation between the Sūtradhāra and the jester, in the course of which the audience is introduced to the subject of the play. In certain plays, the Sūtradhāra appears alone and retires after singing an introductory song, and, sometimes, after delivering himself of an introductory speech as well. Sometimes, as in *Siri Saňgabō*, the introductory song is meant to be sung by a woman actress.

John de Silva also introduces into his plays a clown who bears greater affinities to the *vidūṣaka* of the Sanskrit drama than to the *bahubūtayā* of the Nāḍagama. He is not an isolated character as in the Nāḍagama, but a member of the king's court and, sometimes, the king's companion. In each play he bears a different name. In *Siri Saňgabō*, for example, he is known as Bammannā, and in *Vihāra Mahā Devī*, as Jagatpāla. In *Śakuntalā* he is called Māḍhavya, as in Kālidāsa's play. It is only in *Devānampiya Tissa* that a clown appears at the begining of the play, but even here, the regular jester appears later and is named Piyadāsa.

The earlier plays of John de Silva are *Nalarāja Caritaya* (published in 1886), *Siri Saňgabō* (1903), *Śri Vikrama Rājasiṃha* (1906) *Devānampiya Tissa* (1914), *Vihāra Mahā Devi* (1916), and *Duṭugämuṇu*. He subsequently wrote *Rāmāyaṇa*,[6] *Śakuntalā*, *Vessantara*, *Uttara Rāmacaritaya*, *Ratnāvalī* and *Nāgānanda*. Most of these plays were staged by the Ārya Subodha Nāṭya Sabhā, at what was then known as the Public Hall, the present Empire Cinema. The Ārya Subodha Nāṭya Sabhā went out of existence by about the year 1916, since most of its members had deserted John de Silva and joined another dramatist, Charles Dias. But with the help of a wealthy patron of the drama, Mr. L. W. A. de Soysa of Colombo, John de Silva formed another troupe which he called the Vijaya Raṅga Sabhā, and staged his plays at the Gintupitiya Theatre which, too, like the old Public Hall, is now a cinema.[7]

---

[6] His earlier play bearing the same title came to be called the *Ginigat Rāmāyaṇa*, or *The Rāmāyaṇa that Caught Fire*, since on the night of its premiere, the 31st of May, 1886, the Floral Hall where it was staged was burned to the ground "by the hands of envious incendiaries". See Wilmot P. Wijetunga in *The Sinhalese Drama in Modern Times*, *Ceylon Observer*, July 16, 1944.

[7] *Ibid.*

Charles Dias was fortunate in the fact that his father-in-law, G. D. Hendrick Seneviratna, was the proprietor of the Tower Hall, Maradaṇa, which was built mainly for the purpose of staging Sinhalese plays. The new theatre (the present Tower Cinema) opened in 1910 with a play named *Paṇḍukābhaya*, written by Charles Dias. Charles Dias had as his music collaborator, W. Sathasivam, himself a lawyer of Colombo, who was well versed in North-Indian as well as South-Indian music. He followed John de Silva's style, interpersing the prose dialogue of his plays with songs based on Hindustani Rāgas. He rewrote some of the plays of John de Silva, putting new songs into them, and also recast a few of Shakespeare's plays into operatic form. His more well known works are *Śrī Vikrama Rājasiṃha, Othello, Nāgānanda, Kusa Jātaka, Bhūridatta, Vidhura, Dharmāśoka* and *Padmāvatī*. " *Chandra,* " says Wilmot P. Wijetunga, " is, perhaps, his best and most compact play. "[8]

Peter de Silva, a son of John de Silva, followed in the wake of his father, and gathering round him a troupe of actors whom he called the Vipula Raṅga Sabhā, wrote and produced " some sensational and spectacular plays, *Gōsaka, Kuveni, Manōhara* ", where, says the writer quoted above, " the spectator got much more than the value of his ticket. "[9]

More recent playwrights followed western dramatic styles and techniques more faithfully and attempted to imitate them at first hand, although they still continued writing in the operatic medium. One of them was M. G. Perera, a well-known musician. He wrote, in 1916, an adaption of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, with songs to which he set the melodies himself. This was acted with Seebert Dias in the rôle of Shylock. This was followed, in 1917, by *Nemesius*, the life-story of a Christian martyr. In 1927, M. G. Perera wrote and produced an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.

Among writers who attempted to modernise the Sinhalese stage may be mentioned S. D. Stephen de Silva. He staged, in 1923, at the Public Hall, an adaptation of Wilson Barret's play *The Sign of the Cross*. The decor was in the hands of C. Don Amaradasa. Stephen de Silva's next play was an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Playwrights of a lesser calibre are P. T. T. Premachandra and Bodhipala. The former collaborated with a musician called Nawab Khan Asi. Their plays were, in most cases, only an excuse for the songs which they contained.

An Estimate of the Nurtiya

The Sinhalese musical suffered from the dual misfortune of being modelled on a hybrid product of modern Indian cities, and of never being able to count men of dramatic talent among its writers. The Parsee theatre, though based to some extent on Indian traditions, hardly represents a true development of those traditions. It is rather the result of the imperfect blending of two different traditions, that of the

---

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] *Ibid.*

European operetta or musical and that of the stylised Indian folk play. It was hardly anything more than a hotch-potch of dances, songs, melodrama and comedy. Stimulated by the glamour of the Parsee theatricals, writers in this country began to devise a kind of entertainment that would appeal to city audiences more than the rambling Nāḍagama. They also had before them examples of English plays like those of Shakespeare who was studied in the schools. But what playwrights and producers in this country did was to drop the conventions of the Nāḍagama, in the belief that they were old-fashioned, and to graft on the Nāḍagama the naturalistic conventions of the western theatre, so that the result was, as in India, an unhappy mixture of two different styles. Nāḍagam writers were folk dramatists, who employed a loose narrative mode, and were not aware of sophisticated methods of plot-construction. But they were following a body of stage-conventions which were inter-related and had a validity within the form of the Nāḍagama. There was a no need, for example, to use the front curtain for changes of scene, because any such changes were indicated by the Presenter, or could be inferred from the words of the actors themselves. Nurtiya producers began to indicate changes of scene by the use of sets and properties, and they introduced a front curtain to facilitate scene-changes. But since the new type of play still followed the open, narrative form of the Nāḍagama, the innovation led to a multiplicity of scenes, many of which were not essential to the dramatic interest, and would have been substituted, in the Nāḍagama, by the narration of the Potē Gurā. Added to this is the conspicuous defect that the songs, introduced as they are quite haphazardly, hold up what little action there is, and divert the attention of the audience to an interest of quite a different sort. In the Sanskrit drama, the songs have always a relevance to the plot, and the lyrical portions which were, probably, chanted by the actors, link up naturally with the spoken prose passages without any noticeable break in the continuity. In the Nāḍagama, it is a convention that every actor sings or chants the words. In the Nurtiya, on the other hand, neither is any convention observed, nor is there any continuity between the songs and the prose dialogue, partly because the songs often repeat what has been said previously in prose, and partly because the gap between spoken prose and song is greater than that between spoken prose and chant.

An example of how a song can be completely out of place in a particular situation can be had by a comparison of Kālidāsa's *Śakuntalā* with John de Silva's version of it. In John de Silva's play, when a bee begins to vex Śakuntalā, she sings a song in the course of which she describes the beauty of her own face. In Kālidāsa's play, however, Śakuntalā is annoyed with the bee and seeks to escape its attentions, and it is the king, who, watching her attempts to get away from the bee, describes the situation in poetic language. The song in Śakuntalā's mouth is completely out of keeping with her character, and prevents her from acting in a manner at all appropriate to the situation. Besides, in Kālidāsa's play, Duṣyanta's poetic description of Śakuntalā's encounter with the bee makes his subsequent entry into Śakuntalā's presence all the more dramatic. The song robs this situation of its dramatic value. Instances of this sort could be multiplied. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Sītā, in the midst of her excitement at seeing a lovely deer in the forest, has to sing a song describing its beauty, in a tense moment between the animal's flight and Rāma's decision to chase

it. Even in *Nāgānanda* and *Ratnāvalī*, where John de Silva follows the Sanskrit originale very closely, and, more or less, translates them, he spoils the structural unity of ths plots by throwing in songs in places where they have no relation whatever to the action. The few songs found in the Sanskrit originals are in keeping with both the characterisation as well as the unfolding of the plots.

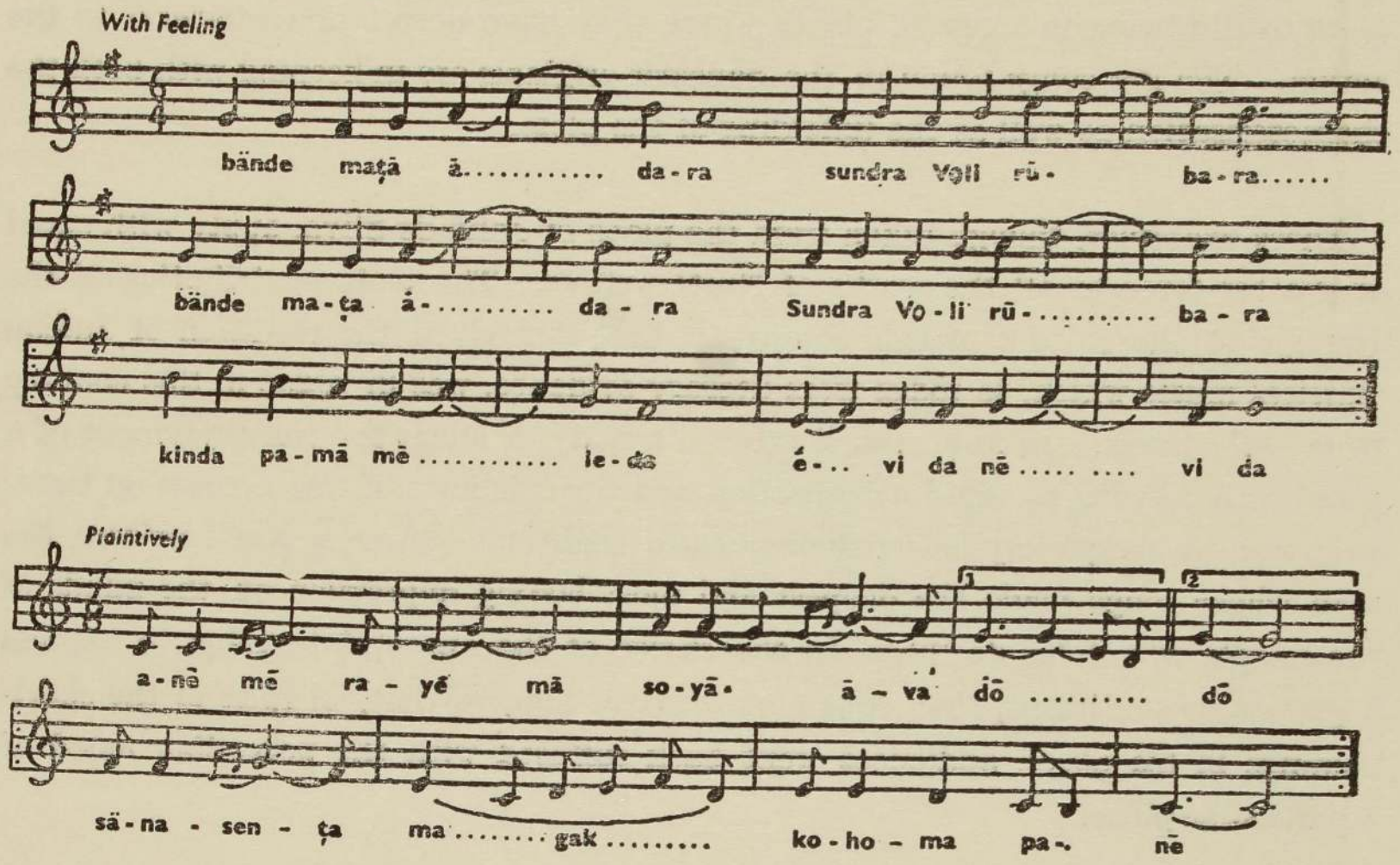
These examples, though taken from the plays of John de Silva, apply with equal or greater force to all the works of Nurti writers. The main contribution of the Nurtiya to the culture of this country is that it revived the tradition of Indian classical music which, to judge from literary evidence, was in vogue in this country from early times. In any case, it created a body of music for the enjoyment of a people who, owing to rapid urbanisation and the influence of this process on taste, were almost completely losing their musical traditions. Among Nurti writers, the man whose songs made the deepest and most lasting impression on the minds of the people was John de Silva. In the choice of the appropriate Rāga to express a particular sentiment, there was none to rival him, so that, in spite of the shortcomings in his plays, audiences went back suffused with the pervading mood of a particular piece.

Like all other national art forms in recent years, the Sinhalese theatre, too, suffered from the fact that it did not receive the patronage of the educated. The upper classes were brought up on the traditions of western music, and did not know the Sinhalese language, while even the bilingual middle class fought shy of frequenting the theatre because of its dubious reputation. Hence the Nurtiya grew in a direction in which it could only satisfy the vulgarised taste of the city lower-middle and working classes, and could not provide the foundation for the growth of a national drama. In the first two or three decades of the twentieth century it was already dying, both because it did not have the potential to rise to artistic heights, and also because it soon ceased to have any relevance to the life of the people.

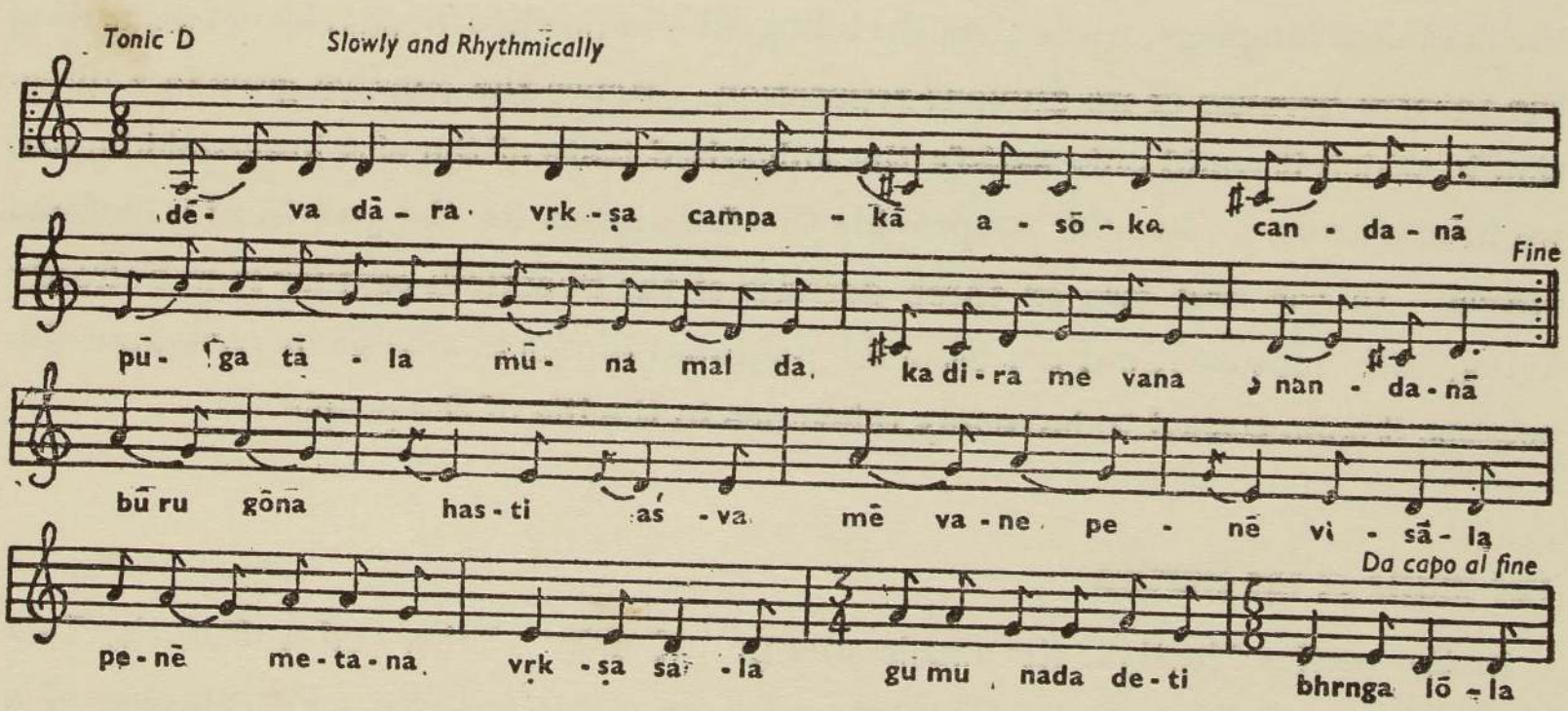
The music of the Nurtiya

In the earlier Nurtiya, the music was provided by violins and a *dhol*, the Tāla being sometimes implemented by cymbals or a metal triangle. For purpose of a drone (*śruti*) a bag-pipe made out of goat's bladder was used originally, and this was later supplanted by the harmonium. In the later period of the theatre proper, the main instrument was the harmonium, locally called the seraphina, and the *dhol* was replaced by *tablas*. The key-note was continuously sounded on the base clef, to serve as drone, and violins often played the melody on a higher octave. As

examples of characteristic Nurtiya songs are given below two melodies from the *Brampōrḍ Nurtiya :*



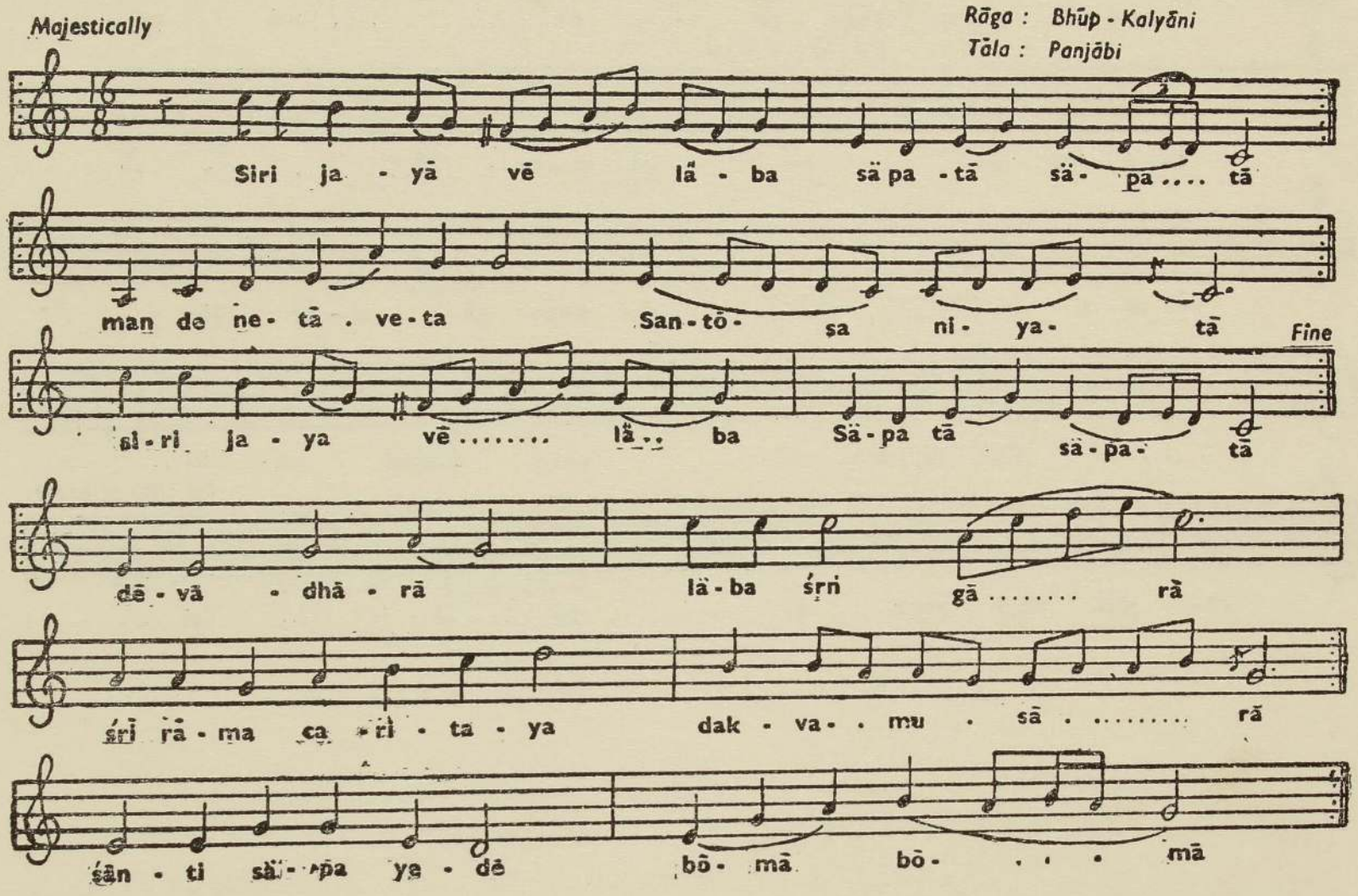
The following song is from the *Uttara Rāmacaritaya* of John de Silva. The reader may note for himself how the words match the melody and heighten its fascinating rhythm :



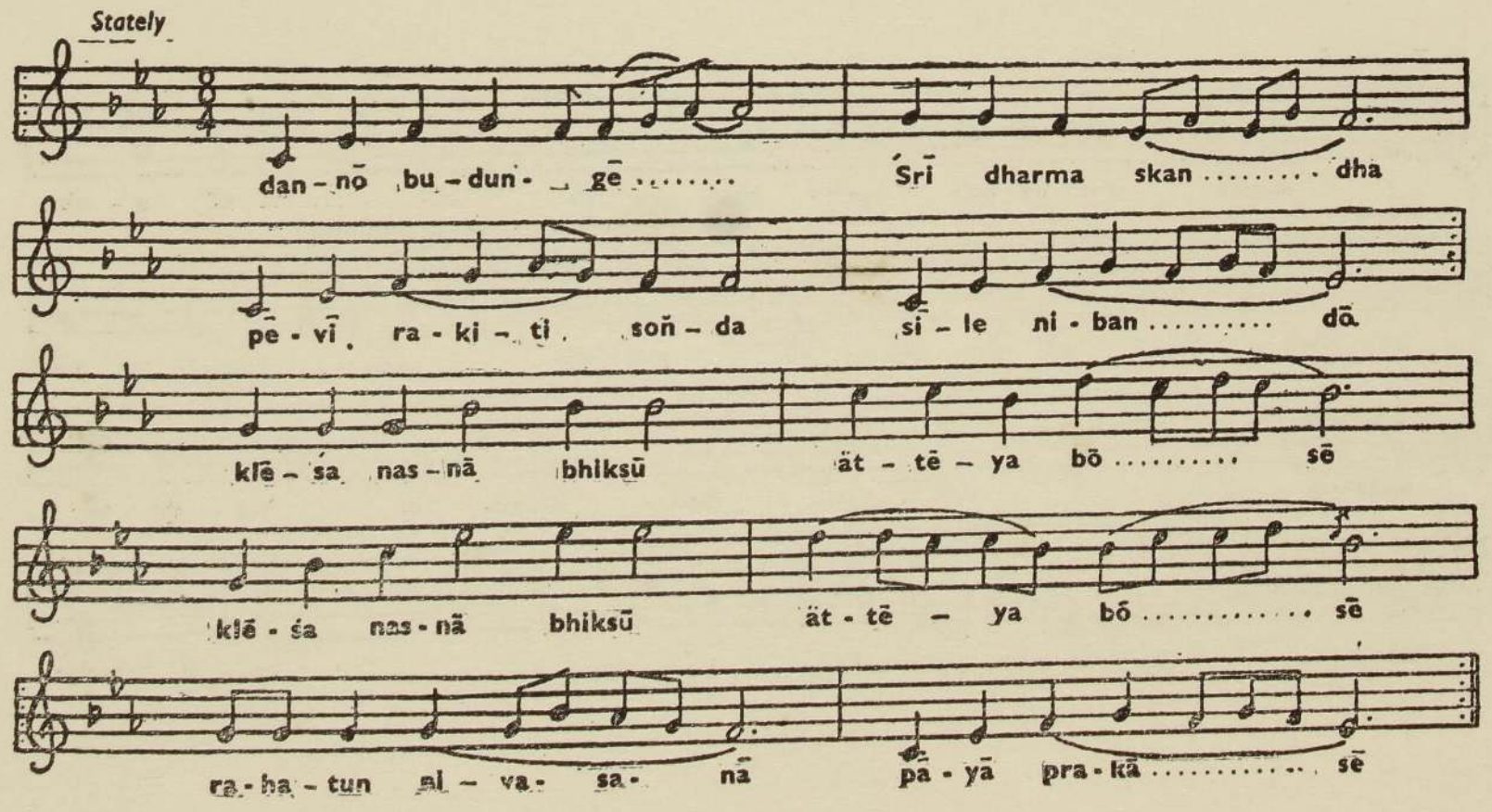
Laksmaṇa : *Dēvadāra vṛksa campakāśoka candanā*
pūga tāla mūnamal da khadira me vana nandanā
būru gōṇa hasti aśva mē vanē penet viśāla
penē metana vṛkṣa śāla gumu nada deti bhṛṅga lōla
Jānakīṭa mānsi ätivu pāṭa dän penē penē
hānsi venta mehi hoňdāya ninda yāvi mana menē

Sītā : *Puṣpa mañjarī tibē pipī latā rukē velī*
bhṛṅga nāda karṇayē sädī magē manā lolī
Vunē mānsi dänē bōma hānsi vennemī vahā ma
Māge malli mā laňgin ma vāḍivī mänā vanē
ninda yāvi bō sären ma kūddanū memā anē.

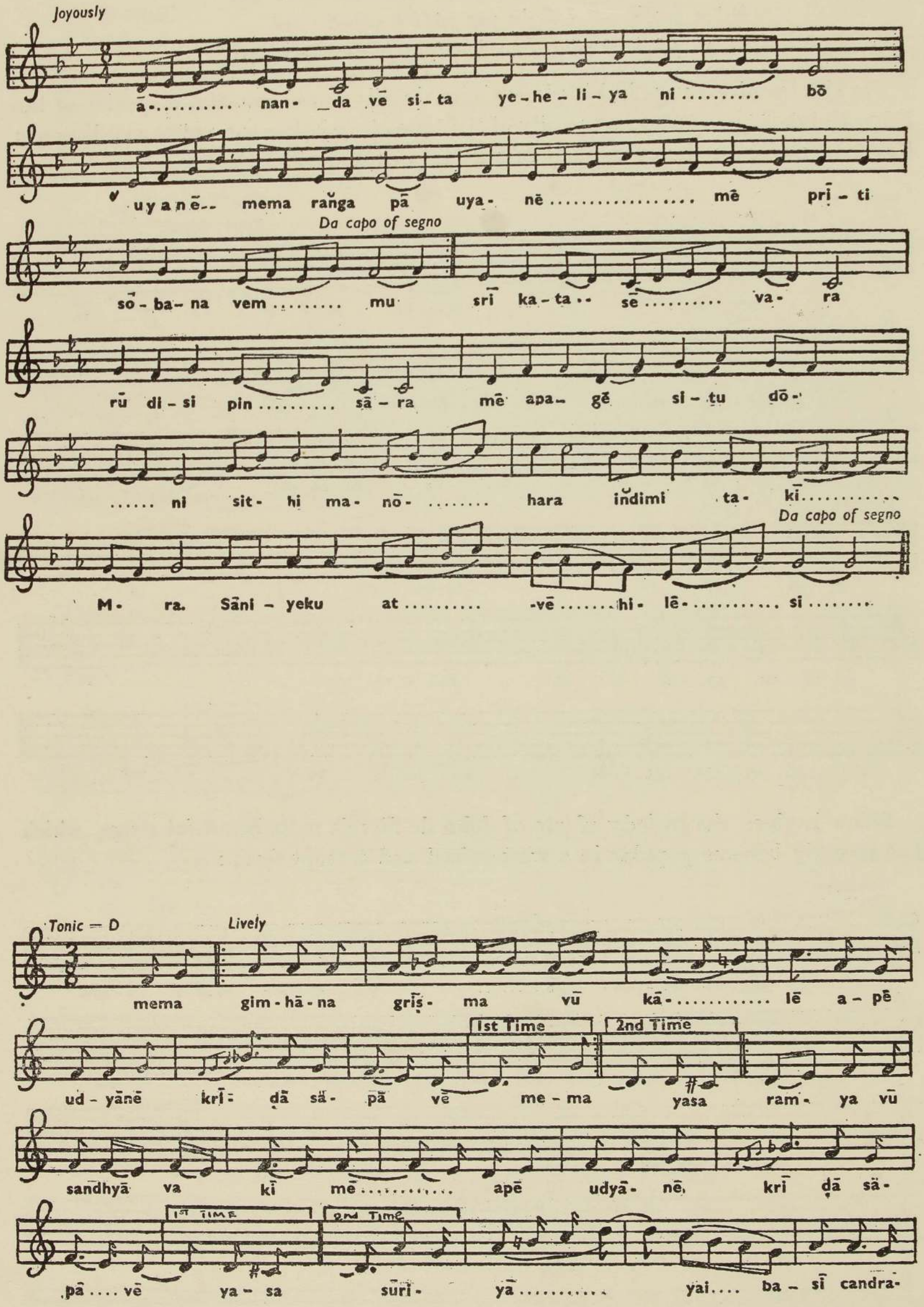
For the opening songs in his plays, John de Silva used, mostly, a species of the Rāga Kalyāna. Note how a melody of the type given below can put the audience in the right mood for the enjoyment of a literary or historical piece :

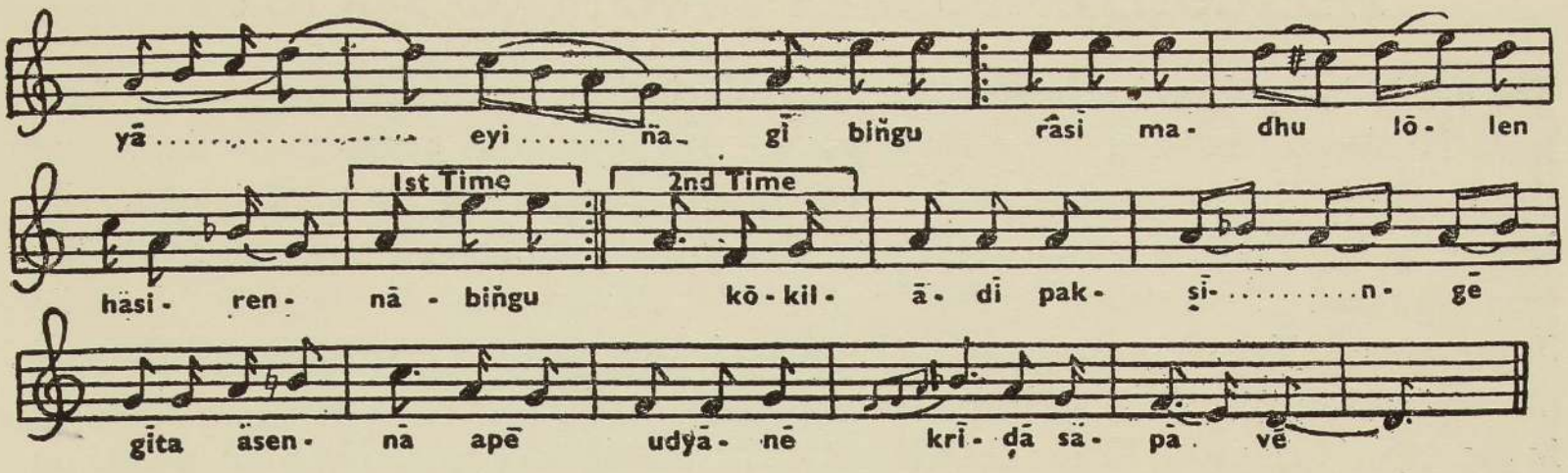


Below is given the melody of one of John de Silva's most beautiful songs, which has recently become popular in a westernised and corrupt form :

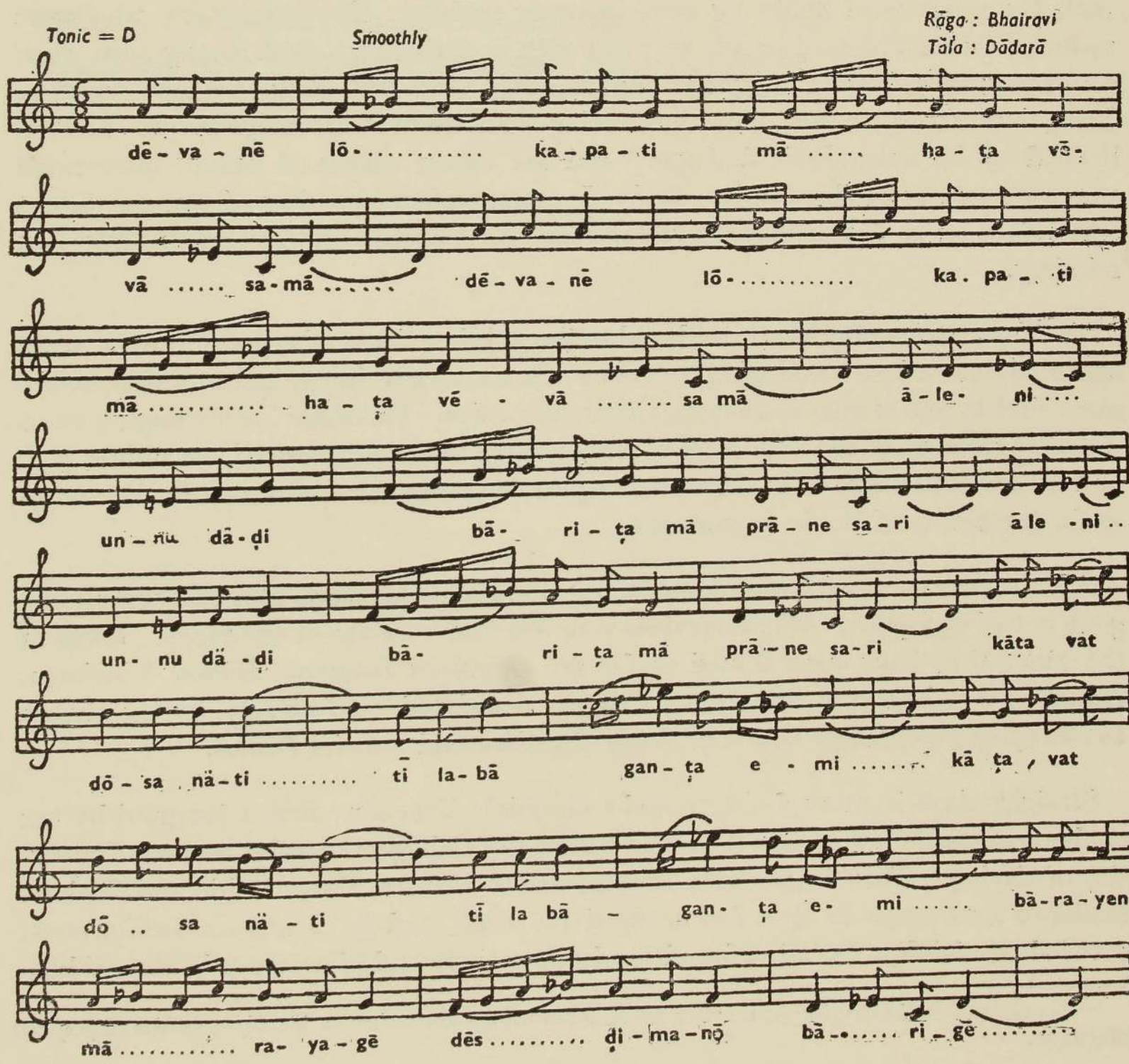


The songs in the plays of Charles Dias are equally beautiful, as the following from his *Nāgānanda* and *Vidhura* will show :





The following song from Charles Dias's *Othello* rivals in popularity any song of John de Silva :



THE CONTEMPORARY DRAMA OF SOCIETY

The musical play drew its themes from mythological and historical sources, or from material already existing in the Nāḍagamas. Its popularity began to decline about the twenties of this century, and it was finally superceded by what is generally known as the Eddie Jayamanna Play, after the name of the actor who made the plays famous. They were written by B. A. W. Jayamanna, the brother of Eddie Jayamanna. The Jayamanna plays drew their themes from contemporary life and attempted to depict men and women as they went about their normal occupations in the city of Colombo. They dealt largely with middle and upper class life, satirising it with the help of a sub-plot depicting the life of the lower classes, by comparison with which the lives of people higher up are made to look hopelessly chaotic and immoral. The plots were melodramatic and essentially the same in all plays, but, nevertheless, constructed with a better understanding of the requirements of the stage than many of the Nurtiyas.

The Jayamanna play, however, inherited some of the traditions of the Nurtiya, and this prevented it from acquiring the conventions befitting a drama that set out with the purpose of depicting contemporary society. The characters, who were meant to be the ordinary people we meet with in daily life, looked incongruous when conversing in a literary language and bursting forth into song without warning. The sub-plot was, in fact, more interesting than the rest of the play. It was enlivened by its naturalistic dialogue[10] and the clever acting of Eddie Jayamanna who appeared as the hero in it. Eddie Jayamanna is a comedian of unusual talent who brings on to the modern stage the folk-play tradition of clever burlesque and mimicry.

The Jayamanna play also introduced to the public a singer who brought refinement and modulation into her singing by virtue of a western training, and was able, at the same time to retain some eastern quality in her voice. Rukmani Devi's singing was a welcome relief after the high-pitched nasal singing that characterised the Public Hall and Tower Hall stage. The Jayamanna play is remembered as much for her songs as for the acting of Eddie Jayamanna.

After a very successful run of over ten years, the Jayamanna play has completely gone out of existence. What survives now are film versions of the plays. Some of the plays that have been filmed so far are *Peraḷena Iraṇama*, *Hadisi Viniścaya*, *Kapaṭi Ārakṣakayā* and *Säňgavunu Piḷitura*, translated, respectively, by the author as *Changing Fate*, *Hasty Decision*, *Grisly Guardian* and *Evasive Denial*.

Straight plays in prose dialogue and colloquial idiom were first attempted by the students of the Sinhalese Society of the University College, Colombo, now the University of Ceylon. They began with adaptations of Molière, Oscar Wilde and Chekov. Molière's *Le Docteur Malgré Lui* entitled *Ibē Vedā*, and *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, entitled *Mudalālige Peraḷiya* found ready situations and characters in the middle-

[10] The characters belonging to a lower social stratum spoke, as in the Nurtiya, in the colloquial language.

class society of our day, and went down with great success among English-educated audiences. Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Ernest* enabled the satirisation of the europeanised upper class, and a great deal of Wilde's wit was conveyed in Sinhalese. A prose play that went down with every kind of audience, irrespective of whether they had been familiar, hitherto, only with the type of play that had melodrama, songs and painted scenes, is *Kapuvā Kapōti*, adapted from Gogol's *Marriage*. This was presented by the Ranga Sabhā, a society composed of people closely associated with the University, and actors who had made a name for themselves on the English stage. The play was produced by E. F. C. Ludowyk, Professor of English in the University of Ceylon, who has set, in recent years, a very high standard of play-production on the local English stage and, thereby, done much towards inspiring a native dramatic tradition worthy of the intelligentsia of this country.

AUTHORITIES

Mulk Raj Anand, *The Indian Theatre*, London, 1950.

J. C. Ghosh, *Bengali Literature*, London, 1948.

Hemendra Nath Das Gupta, *The Indian Stage*, Calcutta.

The exorcist mimes how the Seven Barren Queens perform their toilet in Raṭa Yakuma—
(1) Washing the face (See p. 38 *ff.*)

(3) Preparing *nānu* (lime-shampoo) for the hair and body ▶

(2) Cleaning the teeth ▼

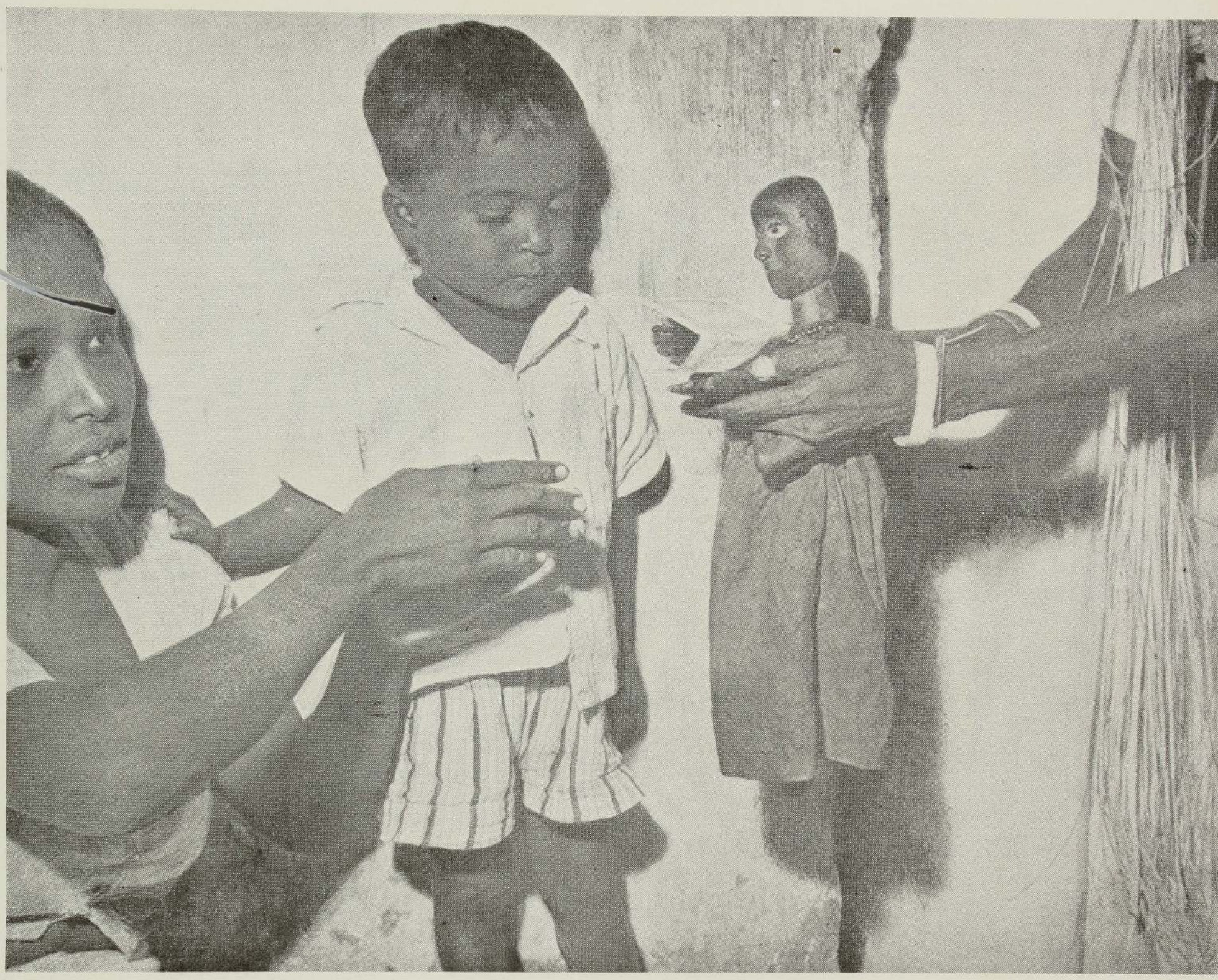
(4) Shampooing the hair

◀ (5) Combing the hair

▼ (6) Tying the hair in a knot

▲ (7) Looking at the face in a mirror

◀ (8) A child is born to the Barren Queen and she fondles it



(9) The priest presents the baby to the patient and receives presents (*paṅḍuru*)

(10) The Uḍuviyam Pāliya in Raṭa Yakuma (priest climbs on top of altar and censes it—See p. 39)

Forerunners of the eighteen demons in the Sanni Yakuma : (1) Pandam Pāliya, or the Torch-bearing Apparition (See p. 33 *ff.*)

(2) Kalas Pāliya or the Pot-bearing Apparition ▲

(3) Saḷu Pāliya or the Shawl-clad Apparition ▶

(4) Atu Pāliya or the Leaf-clad Apparition

One of the eighteen disease-demons or Sanni demons—Amuku Sanniya

◀ Maru Sanniya or the Demon of Death

▼ *Below*: Demon of Death

The demon Maha Sohona who has the head of a bear—also called Valas Pāliya or the Bear-Apparition

Two boy actors dressed up to represent buffaloes in the Twelve Rituals (Doḷaha Peḷapāliya) of the Maha Sohon Samayama Ceremony. Note the masks and the tail. (See p. 51 *ff.*)

A brahmin from the country of Vaḍiga dances in front of the Sūniyam Vīdiya in the interlude known as Vaḍiga Paṭuna (See p. 45 *ff.*)

Sometimes two Brahmins appear in the Vaḍiga Paṭuna

The brahmin pronounces a blessing on the patient, placing his wand (*īgaha*) on the patient's head, at the end of the dramatic interlude known as Vaḍiga Paṭuna

Masked exorcists representing the Garā demons climb the *aile* and rock on it in the ritual known as Garā Yakuma. Another helper is seen handing over a forked Torch (*Kīla pandama*) to one of the demons. (See p. 42 *ff.*)

A view of the lower part of the *aile*

A masked lascoreen (*hēvāyā*) in Kōlam (See p. 67 *ff.*)

• Pūrṇaka, the Commander-in-chief of the demons, as he appears in Kōlam ▶

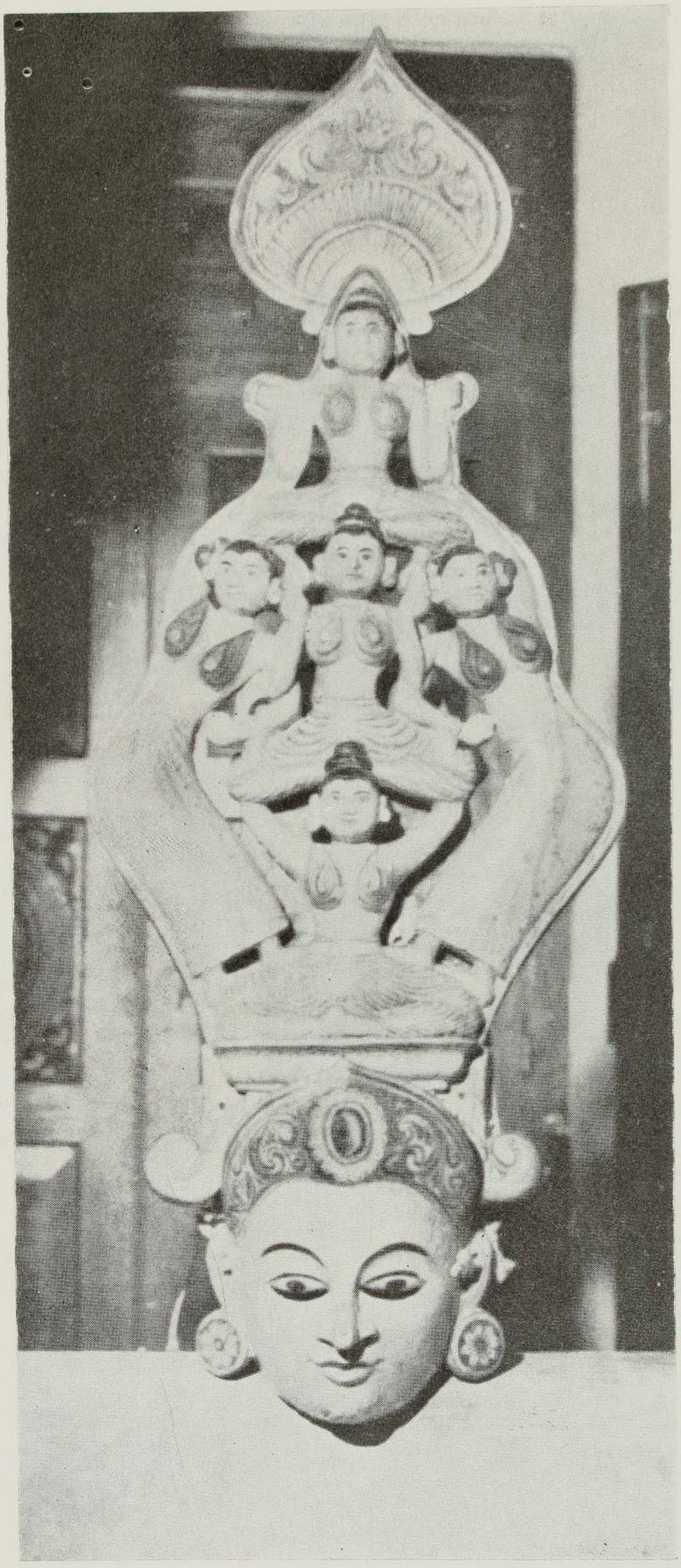
Two wandering mendicants from Āndra Dēsa, (*Āňḍi Guru*) in Kōlam ▼

Maru Rāssayā executing his dance in Kōlam

The dance of the Lion in Kōlam

Kōlam dance in mask of *Nāga Kanyā*

Dance of Giri Devi in Garā Yakuma. **Note** special head-dress and costume worn for this (See p. 43)

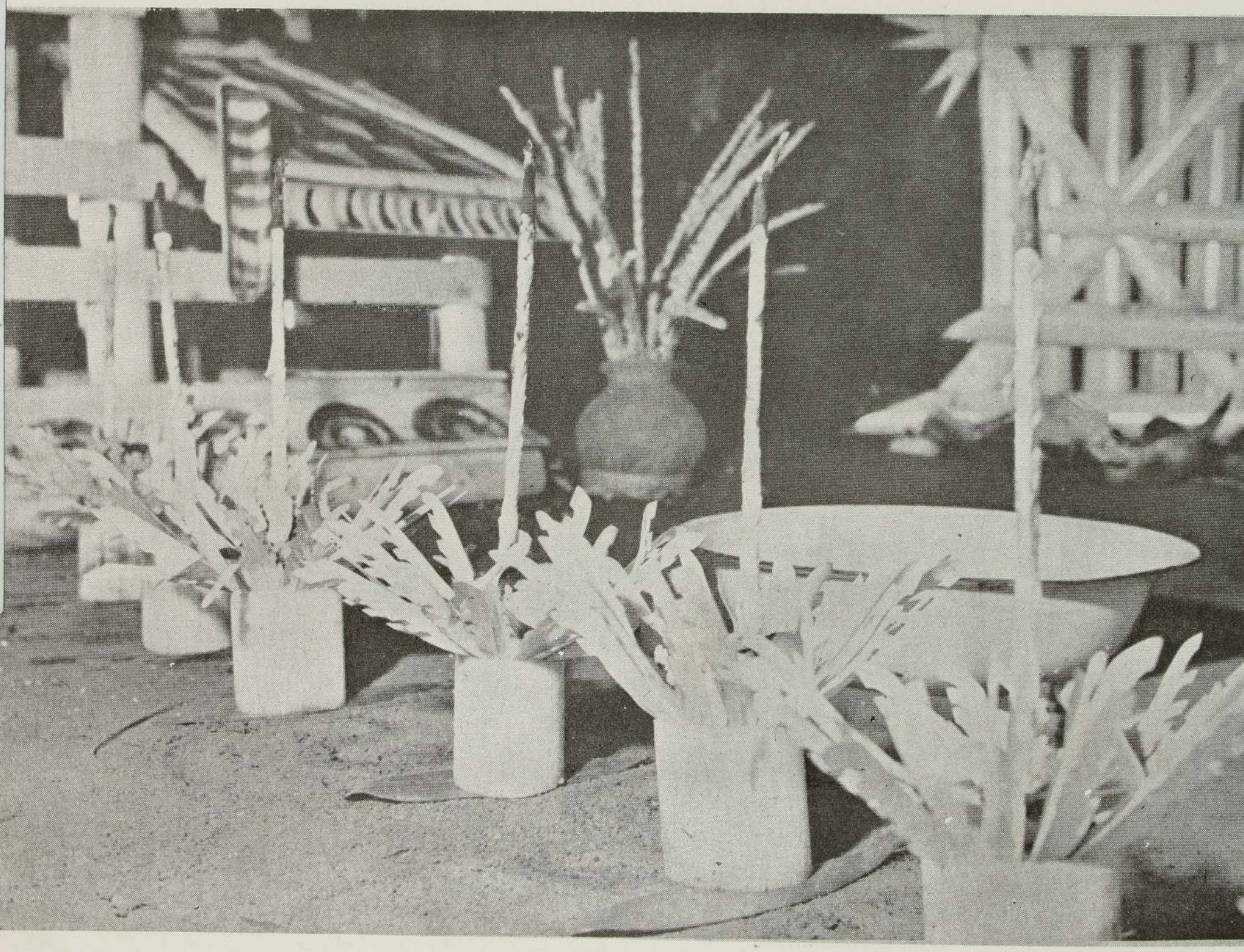


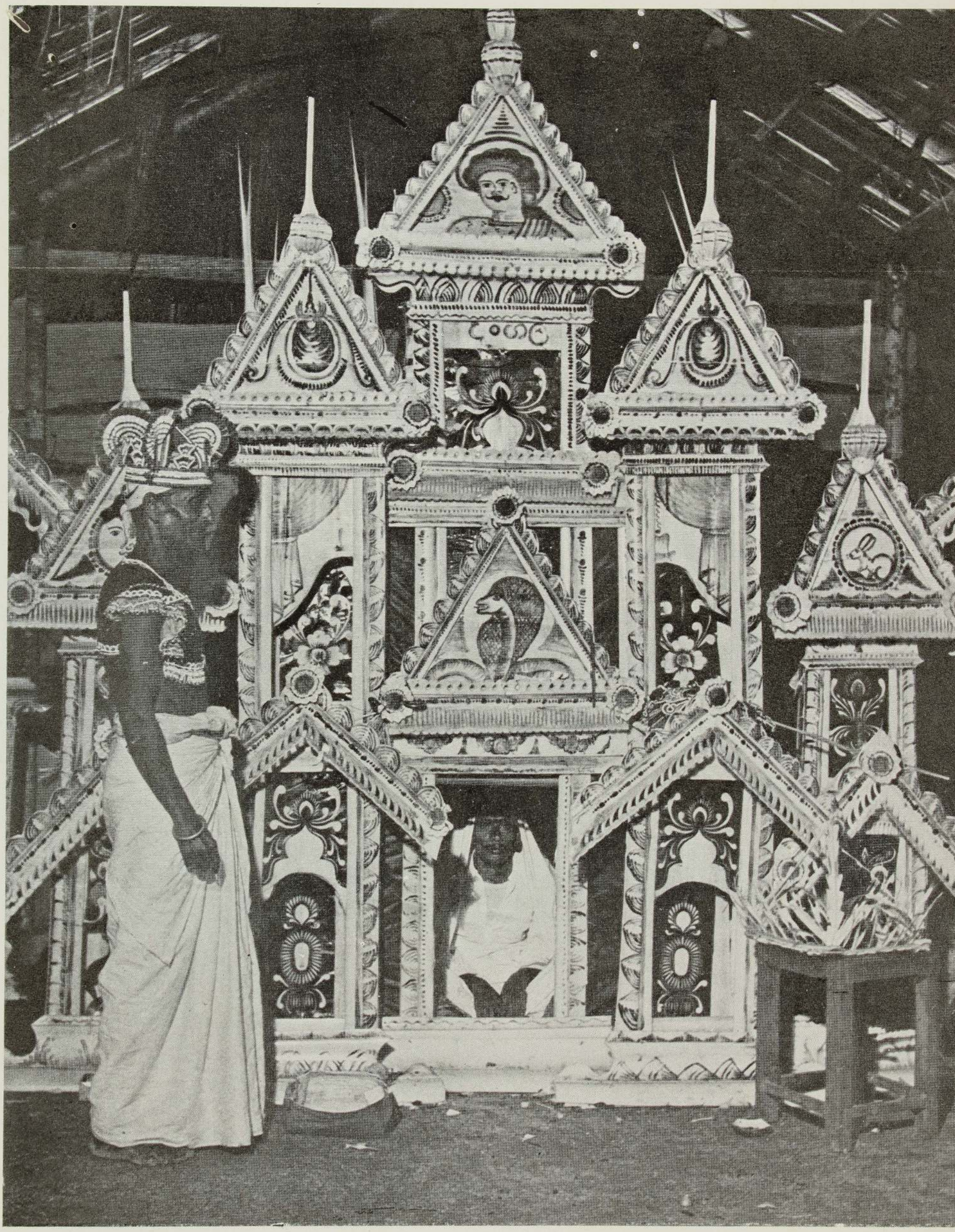
A rare mask representing the Five-Women-Pot (pañca-nāri-ghaṭa) in the possession of the Udupila Kalā Sangamaya of Mirissa (See p. 63)

The head-dress and costume of folk-priest in Hūniyam, when he performs the ceremony of Hat Aḍiya, or Seven Steps, enacting the miraculous birth of Prince Siddhartha.

A close view of the altar, called Aṭa Magala, of the Hūniyam ceremony, with the patient seated inside. Note the peculiar cap worn by the priest in certain parts of this ceremony.

The Seven Lotuses (made of banana-stem and such materials) in preparation for the Dance of the Seven Steps





The cords by which the patient is tied are cut at the end of the ceremony

The priest applies a burning fire-brand to his body in the enactment called Gini Sisila

A *mālakkan* or acrobatic dance item in a demon ceremony

INDEX

R 10423—4,000 (11/65)

"This book not only rescues a charming and highly interesting fragment of theatrical history from oblivion, but also converts the fragment into a succinct and illuminating study of acculturation."

Joseph Campbell in *Artibus Asiae.*

"A work of serious scholarship . . . which is equally open to the lay reader as much as to a person with specialised knowledge and training in the field of culture."

The Hindu.

". . . This most interesting, indeed unique, account of the many phases of drama in Ceylon, and of the fusion of village cults of exorcism and healing-magic with what is generally known as a Higher Religion—in this case Buddhism and even Roman Catholicism—. . . is so wide in scope that it must surely interest all who wish to trace the development of dramatic forms . . . A most valuable feature of this book is that it was neither hastily conceived nor written. It is, in fact, the result of many years observation . . ."

Times of London, Literary Supplement.

DESIGNED AND PRINTED
AT THE GOVERNMENT PRESS, COLOMBO, CEYLON

SKETCH ON JACKET BY LALITHA SARACHCHANDRA

PUBLISHED BY THE DEPT. OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS, CEYLON