



DRUM OF A HERALD

Collection of
articles

Sivagnanam Jeyasankar

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S. Jeyasankar



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Dedicated to
my teacher and friend
Mr. S. Rajasingham



Forward

Drum of a Herald is a response to marginalization and denial. The collection of articles written in English from year 2000 to 2008 will reveal the above mentioned statement.

As a person and as a theatre person living within an environment threatening to the very existence of the life of people is forced to respond to it in a creative manner in order to strengthen the positive atmosphere of the living environment and the whole world.

The articles will reveal how art, literature, education and research activities are not apolitical. This collection will reveal how people particularly in the Sri Lankan Tamil context are being marginalized and denied spaces from within and outside.

The written articles are not the exercises of challenging or blaming others but to make aware and beware all to look beyond their barriers and borders in order to create a world for all species on the Mother Earth.

The role of artists and intellectuals are crucial in this regard and demanding commitment and conscience too.

Sivagnanam Jeyasankar

July 11, 2008

About the Author

Sivagnanam Jeyasankar was born and grew up in Jaffna, Sri Lanka, and graduated in Drama and Theatre Arts from the University of Jaffna where he was temporary assistant lecturer in these subjects for two years. He is teaching Drama and Theatre Arts as a senior lecturer at the Eastern University Sri Lanka, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.

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INTRODUCTION

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this collection of articles by S. Jeyasankar, who I would argue is one of the most important voices in a new generation of theatre scholars, practitioners and activists emerging from the Sri Lankan Tamil community. As is demonstrated here, his work crosses disciplinary borders to combine analysis of theatre, language and the position of women in what I would call examples of committed scholarship. In each article he articulates a passion for issues of justice, but from a position of equality with the communities in which he works. American activist and academic Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick recently talked about how the appropriate relationship between academics and their communities should never be one of mastery: she urged that we should place ourselves *besides* them as we conduct our work. I would argue that it is this ethics of being *beside*, connected to but not claiming superiority over, that is impressively illustrated in this collection.

My association with Jeyasankar goes back several years as someone who has been privileged to visit him in Batticaloa and witness at first hand the community-based reformulation projects in that region. My presence in that area owes a lot to the quotation that he offers from Ranjini Obeyesekere's book on 'Sri Lankan' theatre. I was originally invited to run participatory theatre courses for people working with youth affected by the conflict in Jaffna in 2000 by UNICEF. My preparation for that visit included reading Obeyesekere's book which, while very informative on southern Sri Lankan responses to the situation of the 1980s, unfortunately conspired to imply that 'because of the war' Tamil theatre 'was almost non-existent'. My experience in Jaffna, where I saw theatre by the Centre for Performing Arts,

met members of the Theatre Action Group and was introduced to the playwright Shanmugalingam quite abruptly illustrated the degree to which this view was mistaken: *because of the war and in spite of the war* the theatre community in Jaffna was energetic and very much 'existent'. These examples of theatre practice, discussed in detail in the articles here by Jeyasankar, showed that what exists is very much a product of who has the ability and power to distribute the knowledge about it. In many ways Jeyasankar's collection is the necessary riposte to the view that theatre had not survived the war.

But this is not what took me to the east of Sri Lanka specifically. Jeyasankar's strength in this edition is to make a perceptive critique of the inequality of how information is transferred and how knowledge becomes a tool for maintaining dependency on colonial forms of power. The very fact that UNICEF had invited me to run those workshops in Jaffna is very much part of the inequality and part of the global system of knowledge control that Jeyasankar is criticising. The international 'expert' is viewed as having knowledge to pass onto the 'local' in a form of education transmission that fails to recognise the knowledge that already exists within different communities. So my presence in Jaffna in 2000 in one sense demonstrated how wrong Obeyesekere was, but also how wrong UNICEF and I were in assuming that there was a knowledge deficit to be overcome. I was invited to teach participants about theatre with youth in an area that had one of the strongest and most sophisticated children's theatre traditions in South Asia. There is an English expression 'taking coals to Newcastle' meaning taking something to a place where it already exists in abundance (taking mangoes to Jaffna, taking prawns to Batticaloa might be equivalents) and in my first visit to Jaffna I can be accused of being the proverbial coal. The experience in that setting indicated that my interest in Sri Lanka should be more about me as pupil not as teacher: there was a tradition of practice that I wanted to learn more about. And the news of Jeyasankar's work, from Professor Sivathamby in Colombo, Professor Mounaguru from Eastern University and different colleagues in Jaffna, inspired me to go and

learn – and eventually took me to Batticaloa where Jeyasankar and colleagues from the Third Eye Local Knowledge and Skill Activists Group generously demonstrated their practice and shared their experiences.

Jeyasankar's writing in these articles covers a range of diverse topics and themes. He writes forcefully about discrimination against women, and how men escape the censorious rumour mongering that seeks to prevent women taking an active role in public life. The news that one woman committed suicide as a result of these attacks, indicates the seriousness of these insults and the hypocrisy of those that claim they are seeking to protect some version of honour. Jeyasankar rightly condemns this as part of the wider picture of violence against women. The commitment to the struggle against discrimination is also evident in other pieces in the collection – from the negative impact of a rigid form of education to the politics of translation. Each cleverly shows how what on the surface might appear to be benign activities have injustices and inequalities structured through them. Teaching is not a neutral form that might have political content – but the actual form is political. The way teaching, research and translation are conducted all have implications for who participates in what Obeyesekere called the 'permitted space' and widening the framework for who has that permission to participate is central to Jeyasankar's analysis and practice.

The reformulation of kooththu is mentioned in different places across this edition. I believe that it is in this area especially that Jeyasankar has made a major contribution to the development of what he calls the 'establishment of a community-based applied theatre tradition among the Tamils of Sri Lanka' or elsewhere an 'organic form of community theatre'. The impressive nature of this programme is that it is both rooted in a traditional form of practice, but does not reify that practice as fixed or pure. His is an engagement with a tradition seeking to understand it as subject to change and as a performance form that is focused on process and not solely on product. Kooththu is both strengthened and reinvigorated during reformulation and also it becomes an important means via which crucial issues within

communities in eastern Sri Lanka are debated. In all this work, Jeyasankar does not position himself as a person from the university studying the practice of others – but he places himself beside communities struggling to create performances that are intimately connected and relevant to their lives. This edition is an excellent testimony to that practice and to that vision.

- James Thompson

Centre for Applied Theatre Research
University of Manchester

VADAMODY KOOTHTHU AND REFORMULATING BATTICALOA'S COMMUNITY THEATRE

Kooththu is the traditional theatre of the Thamils of Sri Lanka and is currently practiced in different strata of the society. Though the war affected people much at the community level, which is the bastion of *kooththu*, the dance form survives with its traditions unharmed.

The modernization process has shifted the *kooththu* to be used for different social functions. At one level, *kooththu* is being used as a showpiece in cultural festivals (luckily it is not extended to shopping complexes and five star hotels and tourist resorts as in Sinhala culture). War in the northeast had functioned as a barrier for the commodification of cultures and cultural artifacts.

In another level, *kooththu* is being modified to fit it into a new context or framework, which is conditioned and constructed by modern political and artistic concepts like modernization, national identity and cultural identity etc.

In the background of the post-colonial concept of hybridization, the blending of the traditional and the modern elements to counter the colonial hegemony in the cultural and in the political spheres is regarded as a political act in national politics.

But the politics of hybridization has been criticized as an appropriation of the pre-colonial space to fit into the colonial space. Colonialism is not a “POST” or “PAST”, it’s continuous process in different ways in different times. At present it’s in the name of globalization of the market forces.

The concept of post-colonialism was replaced by the concepts of decolonization and reformulation. Instead of creating a hybridized world of 'Thirisanku,' re-inventing the pre-colonial space and reformulating it into a people-oriented space to counter the globalization process of the market forces are the politics of decolonization and reformulation.

The decolonization and the reformulation processes also have a global aspect. It is the globalization of integrated forces, which experienced colonialism and experience neo-colonialism that is the globalization of the market forces.

The inventions of modern technologies are the electrifying forces of imperialism and neo-imperialism. Industrialization paved the way for imperialism and information technologies paved the way for neo-imperialism. These two conquering ideologies have differences in a single aspect that is geography. Imperialism has geographical demarcation but not neo-imperialism. The protests against the globalization of the market forces in the countries, which function as the womb of the globalization of the market forces, are the clear evidences of the difference. Because of this difference the concept of decolonization has been surpassed by the concept of reformulation.

The modern concepts of development and technology are machine oriented and those who control the machines will rule the world. Invention of technologies shifted the power from the people to a group of people who control or who own the machine. And the concept of development was constructed according to that rule. Profit-making is the ultimate motto of this trend. People and the environment become the resources of this modern technology-oriented development process.

The popularization and implementation of new forms of development programs under the banners of "Development with a Human Face" and "Sustainable Development" are the proof of its limitations and disadvantages.

Re-inventing the people-centered functionalism from machine-centered industrialization and computerization is the politics of reformulation. Redefining or reinventing the concepts of development and technology is the pre-requisite for this process. It is basically

liberating the human beings from the domination of machines and re-connects them with Nature.

Fundamentally human beings are also elements of nature but not the element of nature, with the power of modern technology to control nature or the whole universe for its own benefits. But modern man with his electrifying powers created the world for a few and gave destructions to the rest, even to the pest.

The concept of reformulation is a process to unbind the man from mechanization and make him a human being to live in a world of equality where differences are being celebrated. This will be achieved through different ways and means in different levels.

The process of *kooththu* could function as one of the means to formulate a people-oriented activity in the creation of a world of equality where the differences are celebrated.



Kooththu is not only the art of the individual artist in the modern sense, but also reflects processes within a community. The basic process in *kooththu* is learning by doing it collectively, and the primary source for the performance is in collective memory. These aspects make the *kooththu* process primarily a practice-oriented one.

Modernization and commercialisation of *kooththu* alienates the people who own it and have been practicing it for generations. Traditionally *kooththu* was considered crude, unsophisticated, primitive and the art of the illiterate and drunks. This was because those who were involved in the *kooththu* process in the community were not educated in colonial institutions nor did they consume imported spirits.

The politics and aesthetics of modernization played a vital role in the construction of *kooththu* in modern times. This construction made the 'educated' to think of *kooththu* as *medai kooththu* (*kooththu* on the proscenium arch stage). *kooththu* was dislocated from its original space and appropriated to a new space introduced by the colonial powers. A community-oriented performance art was reduced

to performance-oriented art for an audience in a colonial building and made to appear modern.

In the initial stage of my career in theatre, I perceived *kooththu* as a modern art form. Theatre education at the advanced level and at the university, as well as knowledge and experience of modern *kooththu* gave me that perception. But my relationship with the *kooththu* community and the *kooththu* performances in traditional spaces made me think differently.

My story will reveal this clearly.

My interest and engagement in modern drama led to my contact with *kooththu*. The writings on the modernization of *kooththu*, the debate on the formation of a national theatre and incorporating elements of *kooththu* into modern drama are popular topics in modern Tamil theatre studies. My experience in modern Tamil theatre and the influence of the debate to which I was a contributor constructed my perception.

But the view of Sinnathamby Master alias Peking Sinnathamby was different. He believed that *kooththu* did not only involve dances and music set for performance, but that it was integrally connected to the performers and the community too. The dialogue with Sinnathamby Master opened up another door in my search.

I learnt the dances songs and techniques of *Vadamody kooththu* in detail from Professor S. Mounaguru and my relationship with the Vaddukoddai performers began under the guidance of Sinnathamby Master. This relationship spread gradually towards the *kooththu* performers in the north, east, up-country and now it extends towards southern Sri Lanka as well.

With this background, I began to involve myself very actively in the debates and work connected with the modernization of *kooththu*. It taught me two things: elements of *kooththu* are suitable for incorporation into modern drama (Tamil and English) for easy communication; sustainability of *kooththu* is only possible with changes in the community that had been performing it for generations.

The reformulation of *kooththu* becomes complete and whole through changes in the thinking of the community that practices and

preserves the art. In my belief, the ideological and social change in the community that preserves and performs the art is very necessary in the reformulation process of *kooththu*.

Therefore, the duty of the theatre people does not end with the introduction of *kooththu* with its shortened version suited for urban elite audiences, or by bringing in new interpretations and new spaces. Their duty extends beyond these limits.

What is required at present is to struggle with traditional ideology, grapple with new situations and to make efforts to understand whether traditional theatre has the capacity to carry forward changes. It is also to think about the possibilities of expressing the present experience fully and in a practical manner in order to ensure this process continues. This process does not relate only to theatre but also involves the whole community against the background of contemporary global trends.

The ways to confront such situations also differ. We have to integrate closely with the community that performs *kooththu*, relate to the performers with friendship, share ideas and objectives with them and extend respect to each other as equal partners. This is vital to move forward towards the next phase in this effort.

These processes take place in the traditional *kooththu* environment and gradually expand to other areas. These experiences will provide a hitherto unknown dimension to the new or 'modern' drama too. They will enable us to firmly root ourselves in the past and aim at the future by bringing together our contemporary experiences and developing the concept of localization.



Annaviar
Nahamanipodi

Up to now, whenever *kooththu* served as a source of research, *kooththu* performers were used only as providers of information – as informants. Further, the output of the research did not reach the performers. Dialogue with performers of *kooththu* will serve remedy this shortcoming.

Views of the community of *kooththu* performers – especially the *annaaviar* and others associated with the staging of performances –

were not taken into account in the debate on the modernization of *kooththu*. The academic work available in the past 50 years on *kooththu* and the modification of *kooththu* serves to underscore my argument.

On the second day of the conference we broke out of the auditorium and traveled to Seelamunai, the village where Jeyasankar was working with locals to develop Kooththu. Aside from papers, there were local performances and theatre workshops presented underneath palm trees in the village square. Not only did the village 'sponsor' the event by providing the venue (their square) and sumptuous meals, but they got involved with the discussions and workshops, and presented a stunning six hour Kooththu performance that went on early into the morning. For many delegates, the day was one of the most distinctive and memorable highlights of the conference Freed from the constraints of the lecture hall, it was possible to see the significance of the work in its context.

The strength of feeling demonstrated by the speakers at the conference was matched by practitioners in the villages. S.Jeyasankar, an academic at the Eastern University of Sri Lanka and skilled Kooththu performer, is conducting a practice as research project in Seelamunai, a village near Batticaloa. Jeyasankar argued that conventional research methods confine knowledge to the academy, and fail to involve the local performers in the village. As a response, he has developed research methods which aim to dismantle this authoritarian approach to knowledge and actively to engage the subjects of the research-in this case the Kooththu performers-in the debates. The success of this innovative methodology was demonstrated most clearly in the village itself, where performers argued passionately about the integrity of the form. One performer summed up the significance of Kooththu as a 'powerful weapon against mass media'.

(Michael Balfour, King Alfred's College, Winchester, UK; Mick Mangan, De Montfort University, UK, (2004), Reviews: International Community Theatre Conference: Batticaloa, Sri Lanka, 24-29 July 2003, in Research in Drama Education, Volume:9, Number:1, Carfax Publishing, UK, p.117).

The authority of academic institutions such as universities, which are functioning as colonial agencies, has played an important role in formulating systems of modern knowledge, especially through commissioning and sustaining research. Research is a 'scientific academic exercise' that is usually conducted by specially trained people in an academic institution. The knowledge manufactured is authorized due to the scientific component in the research exercises. This is the basis for manufacturing modern knowledge.

Designing systems, methodologies, formulas etc. and imposing them on other territories through power derived from imperial rule and making those rules 'standard and international' is the politics of the imperialism.

The colonial system of knowledge treats traditional knowledge systems as 'unscientific' and claims that only through modern research methodologies could traditional knowledge systems be appropriated and authorized as knowledge.

As I mentioned earlier, the authority of modern academic institutions and research methodology reduces people who possess traditional or pre-colonial knowledge into mere informants. Further, modern knowledge serves to dislocate people from their sources of traditional knowledge and forces them to perceive such knowledge as unscientific and the product of uneducated or illiterate peoples.

It is the same story with the modernization and research on *kooththu*. Because of this, *kooththu* earned the epithet *naaddu kooththu* (country theatre) from the intellectual community.

Deconstruction of modern knowledge and my relationship with *kooththu* performers and their community made me search for new ways and means to study and understand this art form. It led me to select this area of study for my Masters despite being aware of the impediments of doing so within a conventional university system. It was important for me to work in the selected area of study while it was equally important to work within an authorized academic structure and institution.

I thought this would provide me with first hand experience of how individual intellectuals, the intellectual community and the institutions and community 'outside' would react to the project. This was the

other side of the coin of my work. It would help to initiate the reformulation process at another level of the community.



With this in mind I started to think about making the performers as partners for my research. My reading on educational and community theatres and the writings by Brecht, Paulo Freire, Augusto Boal and the application of their techniques of theatre and close acquaintance with *kooththu* performers and the community, gave me the confidence and opportunity to take forward participatory theatre action research.

I felt strongly that conventional research methodologies were not suitable for this kind of work and searched for alternative methodologies. The internet search opened up a new path with information of the Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith's 'Indigenous research methodologies' and through an Australian scholar, Ian Hugues's website on 'Participatory action research' and other approaches and theories. However, they all united in decolonising and democratising modern knowledge and research methodologies to dismantle the authority of neo-imperialism.

In this background, the *Tharmapuththiran kooththu* (Son of *tharmam*) was reformulated into *Simmaasana por* (War for the throne) with the participation of the community of *kooththu* performers at Seelamunai, Batticaloa. The transformation of the traditional prologue reveals the character of the reformulation process.



'Annvirar' Sinnaiah Gnanasekaram of Seelamunai, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka played an important role in the Reformulation of *Kooththu* (Traditional Theatre of the Thamils of Sri Lanka) process as an organic form of

Community Theatre, which was initiated in year 2002 in Seelamunai and later developed into a continuous program by the THIRE EYE Local Knowledge and Skill Activists Group in Seelamunai and extended to other villages to counter Global Culture of the Market forces.

Traditional Prologue

*Oh, Elephant- faced god,
Your protection we implore
To sing the story of Bharatha,
The fearful war of destruction
How it was waged and fought
How it was lost and won
With the grace of God
By the princes five thus:
Sahuni, the King's counselor,
Deceitful, treacherous and full of vice,
Invited the princes five
To play a game of dice
Defeating them by sleight of hand
And disrobing the damsel in public
Banished them to jungle life
For two and ten long years
Incognito and in disguise*

Reformulated prologue

*A story depicting Pandavas as the sons of dharma
 And demeaning Gauravas as sons of adharm.*
*A story dharma and adharm told for many, many years
 But one of unjust war fought for rule over others,
 Those that are great failed to extirpate enmity
 in the hearts of youth
 Boasting the valour of the five and portraying the others as knaves.
 The nobles and the great ones, why did they remain speechless
 When the damsel stood helpless crying for justice.
 Kannan the embodiment of good, born to destroy destroyers
 How many ruses he resorted to in the name of dharma?
 It was people who became dice, people who died in the war
 Fought brutally and vainly in the name of dharma.
 We the players have come before you to sing the story
 New-created raising several thought-provoking questions.
 Protection to human beings; protection to all living things
 Protection to live on this earth in happiness, affluence and peace.*

When the process began, I was concentrating only on the performance. But as the process went on, I became conscious that *kooththu* in practice was evolving into a place of meeting of the community, a place to relax, a place to recreate, a place to remember and recall, a place for playing games and learning, a place for dialogue and a place for sleep.

Kooththu is a process that integrates many disciplines that are put forward in modern knowledge as separate entities. It is an annual event connected with the seasonal order of nature, and the livelihood of people; it is connected with the ritual ceremony of the gods and goddesses of the community.

During the three to four months it took to be put the performance together, I was able to observe and realize that the practices in the *kooththu* process were part of an organic form of community theatre of the Tamils of Sri Lanka.

The reformulation of *kooththu* and changes in the community are intertwined dialectical processes. Changes in people's lives influence change in *kooththu* and changes in *kooththu* change people. The handling of the issues such as caste, gender and other oppressive socio-cultural values is evidence for this statement. The reformulated performance at Seelamunai in Batticaloa, the innovative performances of individuals and the community of Seelamunai are evidence of the process.

Reformulation is more than an educational programme for young people in the village – it is a complex, dynamic, sophisticated and flexible system of development that develops and shares knowledge inside the community in a programme of practice and activity. Through participating in a process of discussion, creativity and performance, the participants learn about themselves, the community – and also challenge the community (and themselves) to develop new ideas, skills and capacities. The 'vibrations' that are created by the energy of discussion, rehearsal and performance have the impact of generating new ideas about the world and changing attitudes and behaviour. In the words of the 'annaviar' (director / dramaturge), "this is a very beautiful change that has come through 'kooththu'" – directly referring to the increase in confidence of the participating young people, but indirectly to the sense of renewal and refreshment brought to the community by the whole process.

Alli - story of a woman resisting the destructive power of men By: Jenny Hughes
 Source: <http://www.thirdeye2005.blogspot.com> 04.11.2006

KOOTHTHU IS ART OF A COMMUNITY, NOT MERELY PERFORMANCE

The struggle against colonial aggression and the emergence of nationalism emphasises the urgent need for the formation of a national culture as opposed to colonialism or colonial culture.

Anti-colonial struggles were the prominent socio-political activity in many colonised countries around the time of the Second World War. Countries newly liberated from direct colonial rule waged a struggle on cultural platforms for a total liberation from colonialism. But economic dependency and the colonial orientation of the education system, the media and the social construction of colonial rule restricted the establishment of a society that was totally free from colonial moorings.

This leads to a strange phase in societies where there is a clash of different oppressive worldviews – the ‘traditional’ and the ‘western construct’ – in the formation of societies. That is the revival of tradition through the western eye or a western or modern worldview.

The theatrical works of Professor E. R. Sarachchandra, especially *Maname* and *Sinhabhahu* are considered as national theatre of Sri Lanka. Politically and culturally it means the national theatre of the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka. The work of Sarachchandra represents only Sinhala identity. To what extent it represents the differences within the Sinhala communities and cultures, is another question.

These artistic works and the political and cultural implications of such activity inspired the Tamils, especially Tamil intellectuals in Sri Lankan universities. Their response was the production of

Ravanesan, Karnan Por, Vaaly Vathay and Nondy Nadaham in the 1960s, the process which they named as working for the creation of a national theatre for the Tamils of Sri Lanka.

Cultural activity coming from Sinhala and Tamil intellectuals, artists and intellectual-artists are clear examples of how they perceived the concept of a modern nation and its identity. We can observe the lack of perception in their activities. The perceptions are ethnic bounded and elite-oriented. The artistic and aesthetic theories they incorporated, the works they produced and the target audience of their works, help to establish this argument.

Professor S. Viththiananthan modified kooththu to fit the picture frame stage as Sarachchandra had done with Sinhala theatre. He shifted kooththu from an open space – *vadda kalari* (round stage) – to a controlled-space auditorium, constructed by the culture of the colonial power.

“Both the missionaries and the colonial administration used the school system to destroy the concept of the ‘empty space’ among the people by trying to capture and confine it in government-supervised urban community halls, school halls, church buildings and in actual theatre buildings with proscenium stage.” (Thiongo 1986: 37-38)

Viththiananthan’s university-based revival through modification of the kooththu program created a generation of modern theatre practitioners to associate themselves with kooththu for their own purposes. They used the elements of kooththu but worked mostly within the picture frame stage.

It is paradoxical that in a theatrical tradition which provides a variety of spaces – temple precincts, fields, streets and market squares – modern theatre, which arose during the mid-19th century in India, chose for itself the proscenium theatre. The first proscenium theatres in the region were built in Bombay and Calcutta in the 1860s, nearly 300 years after England’s first proscenium theatre (1576).

It took three centuries and colonialism for the proscenium to find a place in India. But when it came, it totally changed the traditional concept and character of theatrical space, from the point of view of both actor and spectator. It brought about separation between the two, critically affecting their traditional intimate relationship.

It also forced spectators to view performances frontally from a fixed seat and a fixed angle. Traditionally, audiences have watched performances from different angles, having a constantly changing perception of the performance. They fully realize the importance of space in shaping a performance, and the role the spectators play in such neutral and informal spaces.

But the lack of understanding the importance of space in the socio-political context made the producers of kooththu to choose such art forms only for modification or revival programs. The influence of the colonially imposed modern thinking played an important role in this selection.

Modern thinking and modern theories played a major role in the process of forming a modern nation and a national culture for its identification. 'Modern,' 'modernity' and 'modernisation' are the words and concepts, which built the thought processes of the 'educated' elite.

Traditional theatre is considered as an element in the formation of a national culture and it is so in the revival and modification of kooththu. Those in search of elements for the formation of a national culture identified kooththu as one, but did not take into consideration the connection between the people and the art form, which they seek for the formation of national culture.

Why did they consider kooththu as a strong element in building a national theatre, in the formation of national culture and the national identity? And why did they forget the people who perform it?

The approach of university-educated intellectuals alienates the art form from the people who have been performing it for generations. This is the result of modernist thinking of colonially designed intellectuals. Artistic norms, the values of aesthetics, and most importantly, the selection of the segment of society, which is the middle class spectator, leads to this shift in cultural formation.



Maybe the slogan of the program was called Return to the roots, but it was generally a program for disconnecting from the roots. Maname and Sinhabhahu are now the possessions of Sarachchandra's family or his troupe; nobody is concerned about the community who performed it for generations or the traditional performance which was the source of the new creations.

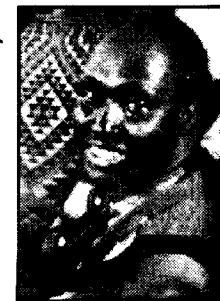
Even in modern academic and in artistic practices, culture means the culture of the ruling class that is 'high culture,' while others are considered 'folk art' meaning 'low culture.' They take peoples' art, but not the people, and make it the art of high culture. This is the politics of national culture in the modern political context.

A question raised by a colleague on this matter one day clearly reveals the dangers of one-sided intellectual exercises and insists on the importance of detailed argument and the necessity of the reformulation programs on kooththu with the participation of the kooththu community.

She asked me, "Why are you, an outsider with limited experience in kooththu, working on kooththu in the villages, when well experienced people who are insiders to the art form alienate themselves from the art in the villages and are working on it from within middle class-centred spaces with modern concepts?"

I replied to her "This is the essence of my work." Kooththu is an art of a community and not only a performance; it is a process of the people. I am concentrating on this aspect to formulate an organic form of community theatre based on kooththu. Basically, creating our own spaces by ourselves for the betterment of the society is the essence of my work.

Quotations from the works of Ngugi Wa Thiongo and Peixoto Fernando capture the essence of the relationship between national culture and cultures of people in other parts of the world.





Young Girl Playing the role of
Kaddiyankaran

The performance was based on the story of Alli from the Mahabharata, which tells of a renowned, ferocious and intelligent woman who leads a kingdom with female ambassadors and governors –

without the help of men. During the performance Arjuna falls in love with Alli and Krishna helps Arjuna trick Alli into marrying Arjuna. When she realises this she is furious and declares war on the Pandava kingdom. She is eventually captured by the Pandavas and Arjuna's wives are summoned to try and reconcile her to being Arjuna's wife. She discovers through them that she is carrying the baby of Arjuna. In the traditional story this is when Alli submits to the will of Arjuna – in order to ensure that her child is not disgraced she becomes Arjuna's wife. In the reformulated 'kooththu,' Alli continues to argue with Arjuna's wives. She refuses to marry Arjuna and states that she will raise the child by herself in her own kingdom. She does not submit and says she will resist Arjuna until she is liberated.

The Seelamunai performance was a dynamic and engaging portrayal of the story. It included powerful performances by the young women from the village of Seelamunai, including by a young woman who played Krishna. As such, the performance was radical in form as well as narrative – this was the first time in the memory of Seelamunai that a woman had played a male part in the 'kooththu' (previously the reformulation project encouraged women to perform, but until this point they had only played female parts).

The theme of the performance – women resisting the power of men – has obvious relevance to the contemporary situation not just in Batticaloa but internationally. In fact, the story of the battle between the sexes, or women's resistance to violence is a common motif in dramas about antiwar struggles. I am thinking especially here of Euripides' plays such as The Trojan Women and Iphigenia at Aulis and Aristophanes' comedy Lysistrata.

Alli - story of a woman resisting the destructive power of men
By: Jenny Hughes
Source: <http://www.thirdeye2005.blogspot.com> 04.11.2006

"It was imperialism that had stopped the free development of the national traditions of theatre rooted in the ritual and ceremonial practices of the peasantry. The real language of African theatre could only be found among the people – the peasantry in particular – in their life, history and struggles.

"Kamiriithu then was not an aberration but an attempt at reconnection with the broken roots of African civilization and its traditions of theatre. In its very location in a village within the kind of social classes described above, Kamiriithu was the answer to the question of the real substance of a national theatre. Theatre is not buildings. People make theatre. Their life is the very stuff of drama. Indeed Kamiriithu reconnected itself to the national tradition of the empty space, of language, of content and of form." (Thiongo 1986: 41-42)

"National characteristics are not abstract in theatre because a theatre is in dialog with the social changes it continuously modifies. To keep theatre forms from the past may be useful as a way of preserving a cultural heritage, but a theatre that limits itself to preservation misses participating in the dynamic transformation of society." (Fernando 1989: 60)

Works cited:

Thiongo, Ngugi Wa. (1986), *Decolonizing the Mind: the Language of African Theatre*, James Currey, London

Fernando, Peixoto. (1989), 'Brazilian theatre and national identity,' in *Theatre and Drama Review*, Vol.120, No.2

RESEARCH THROUGH IMPERIAL EYES

“Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits, which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the ‘banking’ concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. They do, it is true, and have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store. But in the last analysis, it is men themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system” (Paulo Freire 1973: 58).

The system of education in Sri Lanka today is mostly theory-oriented, didactic and problematic on several issues, namely gender, ethnicity, caste etc. and education is treated as ‘knowledge and information packages’ not as a process of identification of problems, search for solutions, or invention of solutions.

Education today could be described as a tutorial-loaded and competitive examination-oriented system, conducted in class or lecture rooms that are matchbox-like wall-bound spaces, where the teacher or lecturer stands on an elevated space in a position to ‘give’ and the students are in a position to ‘take.’ In brief, the current education system is a monologue of the teacher and not a dialogue with the students.

“In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto

others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as process of inquiry” (Paulo Freire 1973:58). The relevance of the subjects and information imparted in most formal curricula is remote from the practical life of students and to the day to day life of Sri Lankans especially the Tamils. This type of exclusion and alienation from the environment will not allow the teacher and the student to imagine, to think or to create. To make a success of the current system of education we harness ourselves like racehorses. The image of racehorses is well suited to our students who are in schools or in the universities. Preparing for the exam is a penance. Like a saint, a student must shed off all his or her connections with the outside world where he or she is living.

The purpose of the current system of education is to produce service personnel because it is not an organic system. It was a system designed and imposed directly by the colonial powers when they were ruling this country, and later by neocolonial powers indirectly through ‘loan schemes’ and ‘aid programs’ aimed at a developing country.

In Sri Lanka, though we have considerable experience in running a ‘modern’ education system and despite a number of reforms to it, acute and unresolved problems remain in every sphere of life in the country. Dependency on aid and expertise from overseas should spur us on to reflect on the crises in the system.

Most of the people in power often boast of the country’s high literacy rate but they do not connect it with the problems in this country. What do they mean by “literate?” A person who can write his or her name on a piece of paper is literate, while someone who has skill and knowledge but without letters is illiterate!

The important questions are: what are we learning? And what is happening around us? This will lead to another question - why are we learning or what is education?



“Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (Paulo Freire 1973:58).

History and our experience with education systems and reactions to education reform in Sri Lanka will reveal to what extent we are genuinely liberated from colonial and neocolonial hegemony. The statement, "we will produce nurses and develop tourism and let them send satellites" made by a top person from the Education Reform Program, guided by the World Bank, at a meeting of the community of the Eastern University, Batticaloa, is a typical example of current thinking in the country. We are totally under the control of western and now American cultural imperialism.

If we scrutinize the writings, statements and the speeches of the people in power at present, we can realize to what extent we are part of a liberated education system or in the process of creating an organic education system.

A person with only a basic degree from a university can function as an adviser to people with a long experience in their profession or field. "We will teach them" is the motto of their mission. This motto informs academic forums so pervasively that there is no space for the motto "We will learn from them" or "We will learn from them also!" We academics listen to them only when they answering our questions. This is the irony of the modern education system.

Academics in universities doing research are mostly influenced by conventional 'scientific research methodologies' without questioning their validity and applicability to particular situations; they practice it as a mere intellectual exercise. The amount of unproductive research work in university libraries and the unresolved problems of the outside world clearly reveal the relationship between creative and productive academic work and society at large.

"Disciplines are based around a framework for understanding the subject matter of the field. Students are trained in the standard way of thinking. If researchers work in a university setting, they are influenced by colleagues. If they want to publish scholarly papers, they have to get referees, who are usually established members of the field, most of whom expect research to follow the standard patterns."

"Referees and editors expect authors to be familiar with standard ideas and publications in the field, which requires a considerable

investment of effort to comprehend. All this prevents outsiders from waltzing in to make a contribution to the discipline. To use another metaphor, disciplinary expectations operate like strong tariff barriers against moving very far from one's own training and previous research output" (Martin Brian 1998).

For the intellectuals in our society, methodology is an unchangeable and eternal thing! They are bound and determined by 'international research standards' and 'requirements.' Their ultimate aim is to publish a research article in an internationally refereed journal in an international language that is, presumably, in Standard English. It's very rare to hear a voice about the usefulness of such research to society.

"Social activists often express great frustration and annoyance with academics who are in such a good position to help a cause, but do so little. A tenured academic has job security, a good salary, flexible working hours and a great deal of control over areas to research, not to mention, in many cases, specialist knowledge and considerable skills in writing and speaking. Such a person could be a tremendous asset to a hard-pressed activist group dependent on volunteers and without the capacity to carry out in-depth investigations. While quite a few academics sympathize with environmental, peace, feminist, antiracist, and other social movements, very few become heavily involved. Hence the frustration" (Martin Brian 1998).

In my considered view the faith in 'scientific research methodologies' is merely a barrier to look into matters around us in depth and to evolve solutions. This is due to the university system, the education system and research methodologies that are practiced by us being constructs of the colonial establishments; they are not organic forms or structures designed by the people who live and struggle for the betterment of their day-to-day life in their own spaces.

Colonial construction of the education system and neocolonial impositions and influences on educational reforms have led to the alienation of the people, especially the intellectual community, from their own environment. If we study the syllabuses of schools, teachers training colleges, colleges of education and the universities, we could verify the truth of this statement.

In the various aspects of research, intellectuals treat the local environment and local people merely as resource bases but not as problem-solving spaces or spaces for change. These resource bases are not the beneficiaries of conventional research or academic work and in most instances are not even aware of the final product of the research.

This is due to researchers being usually unwilling to take back the final outcome of their work to the people who are subjects of the research, or the final product is in a language that cannot be easily communicated to ordinary people. The language, the size and format of books, journals or academic papers, footnotes, references, academic jargon, quotations etc. are tedious and sometimes overwhelming for the ordinary reader to understand the work.

For example the academic work on kooththu performances in Sri Lanka has a history of at least 50 years but the people who have been performing the dance for generations have very limited knowledge of it. Any person who works or at least speaks to kooththu artistes will acknowledge the truth of this reality.

Why is the relationship between academic work and the performers or practitioners so weak? It is because if the relationship between them was strong the authority of the academics to make pronouncements on kooththu would diminish to a position equal or inferior to that of the performers. They must share their authority with the performers. How could an 'educated' person share authority with the 'uneducated' one? How could a 'literate' individual share his authority with an 'illiterate' one? These are the politics of a colonial system of education. Segregating theory from practice is the consequence of introducing theories of the conquerors or the colonialists as 'modern' theories. The introduction and influence of colonial theories of imperialist conquerors, the segregation of theory from practice, treating theory with reverence and honoring research paper oriented academic works over all others will lead to a gradual death of practices of ordinary people and the vacuum filled by colonialist practices labeled as 'modern.'

The other question is to what extent the academic works on kooththu genuinely represent or reflect the kooththu performances and the

community that performs it. A person whose familiarity with kooththu is confined to merely reading about it faces strange and incomprehensible experiences at a kooththu performance set in a kooththu community theatre. It is like the depiction of traditional doctors as witches in colonial descriptions. The politics of this kind of depiction and description is obvious – it is another type of aggression or conquest.

Imperialism works by conquering or colonizing the land first and with help of the colonial establishment conquering or colonizing the mind. Conquering or colonizing the mind will pave the way for a long rule of the conqueror or the colonizer.

The regular arrival of experts from the outside world to solve domestic problems is a clear mark of our position in our own spaces. We were designed and are being designed by colonial and neocolonial powers as subjects and consumers. A clear proof of this argument is to look at contemporary development programs planned and implemented by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank.



Linda Tuhiwai Smith identifies and critiques the intersections of imperialism, knowledge, and research. According to Tuhiwai Smith, dominant, mainstream, western cultures conceive of research as intellectual activities grounded in broader, popular and legal discourses that distort or silence other ways of knowing and being. One consequence of such research for indigenous peoples is what she calls "research through imperial eyes" – knowledge largely useless for native kinship communities and too often useful for further colonization.

In this background we have to raise questions regarding the purposes and functions of research: Why do we do research? Who benefits from it? Who uses the information we gather and what for?

A SIMPLE MIND, USING SIMPLISTIC DEFINITIONS TO ANALYSE A COMPLEX SUBJECT

Sri Lankan English Literature and the Sri Lankan People 1917-2003 by Professor D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke; pub Vijitha Yapa Publications; pp. 318; January 2005

"It is to the credit of Sri Lankan writers in English that they have confronted the so-called 'ethnic' crisis, the most difficult problem facing the country since independence, from its inception to date. The literature on the subject indicates that ex-President D. B. Wijetunga's apparently simple statement goes to the heart of matter: 'there is no ethnic problem in Sri Lanka, there is only a terrorist problem.' The literature captures or suggests the ramifications of this problem, both national and international, and its false as well as true face." (P.128)

The above piece is the essence of Professor D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke's book titled Sri Lankan English Literature and the Sri Lankan People 1917-2003. The selections, omissions and interpretations in his work are constructed according to the thesis mentioned above.

The publisher notes on the back cover of the book "... Goonetillke's inquiry is informative and penetrating. It is meant for general readers who wish to be acquainted with the English literary scene in Sri Lanka as well as those who take a specialised interest in the field.

"The history of Sri Lankan English literature is viewed in the context of the history of the Sri Lankan people and such major events as independence, the social revolution of 1956, the insurgencies of 1971 and 1988-1989, and the ethnic conflict as recorded in literature, are comprehensively examined. Literature is considered here in its widest

sense as it appears in newspapers and journals, as well as in books. While the central focus is on literature after independence, the literature from 1917 onwards is analysed to provide a complete understanding of the subject."

The contents of the book clearly expose the biases of the writer, who he is and what is in his mind about Sri Lanka, 'Sri Lankan-ness' and Sri Lankan English literature. Even though Sri Lanka is a multiethnic and multicultural country, for the author it is not so. His opinion is different.

"Dionysius Sumanasekera's 'broken English' is very much in evidence in Fifty-Fifty. In this play De Lanerolle treats pleasantly and humorously the 'ethnic' conflict (between the majority community, the Sinhalese, and the minority Tamils) which today has assumed acrimonious, even fearful and intractable proportions. To understand his satire on the (Ceylon) Tamil demand for as much representation as the Sinhalese in parliament, one needs to know the ethnic composition of the island's population. It has remained more or less the same during the last fifty years, and the 1981 census, the last national census, had it as 73.98% Sinhalese, 12.6% Tamils, 7.12% Moors, 5.56% Indian Tamils, 0.29% Malays, 0.26% Burghers (descendants of the Portuguese and the Dutch), 0.20% others. Of the 12.6% Tamils, fewer than half live in the North of Sri Lanka; the majority live among the Sinhalese and usually at peace. It is in this context that De Lanerolle is able to advocate intermarriage as his solution to ethnic problems!" (Goonetillke p.159) The above paragraph captures the author's socio-political perception of Sri Lanka and how he positions himself as an intellectual writing in English, especially writing on literature in English, or about English literature.

People who are committed to work for a peaceful and prosperous country have to think of the construction and reconstruction of the concept of Sri Lanka, 'Sri Lankan-ness,' Sri Lankan art and literature and English literature, against the background of the country's multiethnic and multicultural character.

The idea that Sri Lanka is a multiethnic and multicultural country has to be infused into Sri Lankans. The functions of education and the media should be to achieve this end. But the tragedy of this country

has been the intellectual blindness of its opinion-makers and thinkers. Sri Lankan English Literature and the Sri Lankan People 1917-2003 is a text, which is a simple and solid example of the importance of teaching this in the world of post-modern literature.

People concerned about the unity and integrity of the country talk of using English as a link language. They sometimes go beyond that and insist on bringing back English as the medium of instruction to bridge the gap between conflicting communities, believing that the conflict was created by the introduction of the mother tongue (swabasha) for administrative, legal and educational purposes in the country.

But a person who begins to read Goonetilleke's book with a commonsensical view of the Sri Lankan context would, unquestionably, be forced to freeze for a second and take a second look on the validity of the above school of thought.

It is very interesting to compare Goonetilleke's writing with that of another intellectual cum artist – Ranjini Obeyesekere – in her version of Sri Lanka. Her book on theatre, *Sri Lankan Theatre in a Time of Terror: Political Satire in a Permitted Space* also refers only marginally to Tamils.

"I wish to add that this book deals with the Sinhala theatre in Sri Lanka even though I refer to it in the title as Sri Lankan Theatre. I do so intentionally for name recognition. Sri Lanka is a very small country and though better known in the world today (sometime for unfortunate reasons) few outside the country know that Sinhala is the language of the majority population who live in Sri Lanka. Therefore although Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic society and there is a significant minority Tamil population in the island I make no reference in the book to Tamil theatre in Sri Lanka. I do so partly because it is extraneous to my central theme of Sinhala theatre and its 'permitted space' which I see as a feature strongly influenced by Sinhala Buddhist culture; but also because by the 1980s the civil war in the North and East and the tensions and disruptions it caused had made Tamil theatre almost non-existent other than in small pockets in the North and East." (Obeyesekere, p.15)

This does not come as a shock for a reader who is from the minority community, or from an oppressed community, or for the people of the periphery who are excluded from the writings and conceptualisations of intellectuals of the majority group. But this must be contested if we are to establish a country where there is equality, and celebrated difference and diversity in our society.

Goonetilleke simply discards any space for Tamils in Sri Lanka with the support of the latest census and by highlighting De Lanerolle's advocacy of intermarriage as the solution to the ethnic problem and Wijetunga's apparently simple statement, "there is no ethnic problem in Sri Lanka, there is only a terrorist problem."

Obeyesekere goes a few steps further and is very patronising as in the above-quoted passage, where she concludes stating, "... by the 1980s the civil war in the North and East and the tensions and disruptions it caused had made Tamil theatre almost non-existent other than in small pockets in the North and East." (p.15)

But to her, similar situations reflected differently in the South. "I happened to spend the summers of 1987, 1988, 1989 and 1990 in Sri Lanka and was amazed to find that in spite of sudden curfews, days of panic and nights of terror, the Sinhala theatre was more active than I had ever known it to be." (Obeyesekere, p.11)

Conceptually, bridging the gap between conflicting parties is not a matter of language, but of the mind. As a theatre activist, I have seen how people who are aware of the socio-political situation of the country, and activists from both sides who only have the help of their vernacular languages, cross barriers and raise their voices across borders in Sri Lanka.

But Goonetilleke fails this test. Where or why does an international language, or an international literature, fail to liberate Goonetilleke and his ilk?

Goonetilleke is not an ordinary person. The publisher's note on the back cover of the book, which I quoted, reveals to the reader his high calibre academic achievements. "Professor Goonetilleke is the internationally recognized authority on Sri Lankan English literature. He was Foundation Visiting fellow at Clare Hall, University of

Cambridge, Henry Charles Chapman Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, and Guest Professor of English at the University of Tübingen, Germany. He was the International Chairperson of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS) and Vice-President of the Federation Internationale des Langues et Literature Moderners (FILLM)."

I am not pointing to Goonetilleke as a single individual, but simply as a representative of an ideology. From his earlier publication *Anthology of Sri Lankan English Literature* (1993) to his latest publication *Sri Lankan English Literature and the Sri Lankan People 1917-2003* (2005) Goonetilleke portrays Sri Lanka and the Sri Lankan Tamils, to reinforce his supremacist ideology.

Why am I so concerned about writings in English? Because of the colonial construction that has transformed the English language to make it appear neutral. The authoritative power of colonisation and its extension – neo-colonisation – has made English an international language and portrayed it as neutral to sustain its authoritative position from being questioned.

It is an interesting and very important to initiate a dialogue on the process of decolonising the mind. I usually have interesting conversations with my students on 'rumour' and 'news.' When I ask them whether rumour is true or false, they come out in one voice and say, "False!" When I ask them whether news is true or false, in one voice they say "True!" To the question whether the news we listen or view via the electronic media is true or false, the responses change immediately and mostly results in an answer that contradicts the earlier one. And if I question whether information we get by word of mouth is true or false, the answer is false.

It is the same story with writings in English and those in the non English mother languages. Writings in English are considered as neutral and objective but the writings in the mother languages are considered as biased. That means subjective and emotional. 'Neutrality' and 'objectivity' are the two elements that alienate 'subjectivity' which is essential for creativity. Subduing creativity is the basic requirement for colonialism and maintaining authority. In this regard we must thank

Goonetilleke and his tribe for unknowingly helping us to question and deconstruct what they are celebrating as 'neutral.'

"The International Federation of Journalists – the world's largest journalist organisation – has made a serious indictment on the Sri Lankan press and mainly the Sinhala and Tamil newspapers, accusing them of carrying one-sided, inflammatory reports on the ethnic conflict and often quoting only one source... As a direct result of this reporting, the facts and situation were misrepresented and the conflict was inflamed rather than resolved." (Daily Mirror 13 July 2005)

I'm not a defender of the one sidedness of the vast section of the vernacular media owned and controlled by the state, political parties and politicians, and business people who are connected with political parties. But I have certain reservations about defining writings in English as neutral and objective. The controlling nature of the English language and the democracy of the English speaking states have to be contested for the construction of another world not only for the human species, but also all the species on earth to live in harmony.

Terrorism, which Wijetunga refers to and Goonetilleke so heartily endorses, is not an inborn quality or feature in human beings. If it is inborn, then 'war for democracy' or 'war for peace' is meaningless. Genetic modification will be the only solution for the terrorist problems of the world.

Why does the unarmed democratic political leadership always fall prey to terrorism? Why are their leaders always surrounded by heavily armed bodyguards? Why are politics and diplomacy always connected with militarism and espionage? How can we define the politics connected with militarism and military intelligence as democracy? If it is democracy, whose democracy is it? Democracy is for whom?

It is simply democracy of the ruling class.

This is not the invention of the 21st century but we cannot go on with the age-old definitions and meanings of democracy. The definition of democracy must be liberated by deconstructing its function as the shield of the ruling class, namely the state. This will help us to liberate our perception of democracy and terrorism as being white and black.

Only the processes of dialogue on how this may be achieved will bring genuine peace to the entire world. Utilising the concept of democracy as a tool to disguise the power of the ruling class only brings chaos and more chaos. It never brings peace.

September 2005

Sivanayagam is an edttu annaviyar, or a script writer-director, from Seelamunai, an eastern village traditionally renowned for kooththu. He is among those who are passionately involved in efforts to reformulate kooththu to make it more relevant to contemporary times and avoid situations where the director blindly appeals to tradition as his guide for structuring a kooththu performance in a certain way. Sivanyagam says however that it was not only ignorance that dictates the rigidity of the script; it is also the power relationships theatrical performances such as kooththu sought to reinforce through captive audiences. He says that though the annaviyar might understand what was taking place, he was powerless to do anything about it because there were strong social sanctions against changing the script. All the annaviyar could do was to change the rhythms or the beat of the music, but not the lines, making even an independent-minded annaviyar think twice before tinkering with the script.

Kooththu is community theatre, not folk art. "Folk theatre is, ritually, intimately linked with the environment from which it springs. Kooththu is different. Its origins are in seasonal rituals in temples. I believe koothtus deliberately used the Ramayana and Mahabharata for the project of Sanskritising Tamil society," said S. Jeyasankar, a theatre activist and lecturer in drama and theatre, at the Eastern University, Batticaloa. Jeyasankar says that traditional kooththu, which might have had folk origins, was quietly displaced when the poets (pulavar) used the kooththu form but foisted on it stories from the Sanskrit epics.

Though projecting a value system and worldview of the upper castes, kooththu was degraded as uncivilised by that section of society that considered itself as refined and economically affluent. Therefore kooththu became identified as an entertainment of the lower orders and associated with drunkenness and general disorderly behaviour.

"The traditional kooththu reflected Brahminic values and referred to women and the lower castes in derogatory terms," said T. Gowriswaran, a final year student in fine arts at the Eastern University and a kooththu artiste.

Cover Story: Northeastern Monthly August 2004

SPEAKING OUT AGAINST OPPRESSION FROM PERMITTED SPACES IN MODERN THAMIL THEATRE

"....by the 1980s, the civil war in the North and East and the tensions and disruptions it caused, had made Tamil theatre almost non-existent other than in small pockets in the North and East."

(Sri Lankan Theatre in a Time of Terror: Political Satire in a Permitted Space, by Ranjini Obeyesekere, Preface, page 16)

'Kulanthai' M. Shanmuhalingam pioneered the transformation of Sri Lanka's modern Tamil theatre from an artist-centred product to a participant-oriented activity. Moved by the experiences of Tamils in this country, the veteran playwright has created different genres of plays for the contemporary stage.

He innovated and established the tradition of educational theatre with the participation of generations of Tamil theatre practitioners who were mostly his students. The special feature of educational theatre is to produce plays with the participation of students and teachers in schools through the facilitation of theatre practitioners, who are mostly teachers themselves.

Educational theatre plays the role of an alternate system of education where children can discover themselves collectively and become creators, instead of remaining crammers reproducing texts, which is the core of conventional rote-learning and the examination-oriented education system.

Educational theatre celebrates the diverse talents of the group, instead of cultivating few 'memory makers' in the classrooms. The

production becomes a festival celebrating the talents and gifts of all the students.

Shanmuhalingam popularly known as 'Kulanthai' or 'Shanner' among Tamils and as 'Shan' among the others, innovated a method in educational theatre practice where students identify and select issues related to their world directly and indirectly, and discusses the issues, thereby creating a storyline.

Based on this storyline created with the participation of students, Shan writes the initial draft of the play, which is put forward for further discussion. Through continuous interaction and improvisation, the script is developed for the production.

K. Sithamparanathan, theatre activist and co-practitioner of Shanner, has contributed to making educational theatre into an art form with his creative skills and imaginative power as a stage director.



He has not only made a significant contribution to educational theatre with Shanner, but also to the tradition of political theatre in this country, which was initiated and pioneered by Professor K. Kanapathipillai and strengthened and extended by Ampalaththadihal, a cultural group connected with the Peking wing of the Communist Party. Both Shanner and Sithamparanathan have contributed to stylised theatre as playwright and director, which has come to be popularly known as the 'modern theatre of the Tamils of Sri Lanka.' It has been imitated by different people at different levels and faces the criticism of being monotonous.

Sithamparanathan extended the aspect of participation in play-making into the process of the performance. He got himself out from the proscenium stage and auditorium to work with communities and later established and popularised participatory political theatre.

The participatory aspect which began by being practiced in educational theatre and later made inroads into political theatre has contributed to the establishment of a community-based applied theatre tradition among the Tamils of Sri Lanka.

The origins of various forms of community theatre lie in the educational theatre tradition of the Tamils of this country. It has now led to applying theatre as a research process and tool by the writer of this article. Participatory theatre action research is another fruit of the tree of educational theatre.

The concept behind reformulating traditional theatre ('kooththu') as an organic form of community theatre originated from the practices of educational theatre. Reformulation of traditional theatre such as 'kooththu,' is conceived to act as agent of integration against the disintegration of peoples and communities, which is a consequence of the imposition of modernisation.

Reformulation of traditional theatre is not to make it a showpiece or icon of cultural identity as required by national culture, or into a commodity as demanded by market culture. It is a medium of collective expression and action in the process of resistance and transformation.

Shanmuhalingam has also pioneered the tradition of children's theatre among the Tamils of Sri Lanka. He is the master craftsman of the art of children's theatre, contributing to it through his scripts and by training artists in this genre of theatre for the last 30 years. Another important contribution to Tamil children's theatre is the creations of Professor S. Mounaguru. He has created children's plays based totally on traditional Sri Lankan Tamil theatres. They are meant to be played on proscenium stages with traditional dances and music, and colourful stage décor.



Third Eye Local Knowledge and Skill Activists Group of Batticaloa is initiating children's theatre performances with the facilitation of the writer of this article within traditional theatre spaces and in traditional style. The purpose of this exercise is to build community-based theatre for children.

In traditional theatres there is a little space for children. And creating a space especially for children in traditional theatre is an act of engaging the community in the play's production process. And it could be said that the benefits of engagement are similar to the benefits when participating in the production process of adult theatre.

Shanner has been instrumental in popularising modern theatre of the Tamils of Sri Lanka. His signal contribution has been incorporating traditional and popular elements in drama. His scripts are stamped with comic wit, for which he has come to be known, in order to interpret contemporary experiences of oppression and resistance against it. His plays brought out different layers of oppression on different segments of the Tamil community dominated by ethnic subjugation. In his plays he exposes human madness by making his characters laugh at their own words and deeds. People experience the poetic beauty of day-to-day speech in his written lines.

Shanner has imbibed the essence of Chekhovian, Ibsenite, Brechtian, and absurdist theatre and digested it with the fare of local theatre and cultural idiom. The demands of contemporary existence led him to this unique creative process. He is the genuine maker of people's theatre in the proscenium stage of the Tamils of Sri Lanka and represents the voices of the people.

He is also the powerhouse of play scripts for modern, Tamil theatre. Other than his original works he translates plays of the world through English for performance. He has translated plays from all over the world and has brought in different experiences from Asia to Africa to Sri Lankan Tamil theatre audiences.

Other than script writing and translations he has also trained generations of theatre practitioners for more than 30 years. Most modern Tamil theatre practitioners, in Sri Lanka and the Diaspora, are directly or indirectly indebted to Shanner. He also teaches drama and theatre arts for students from schools and universities. He has taught the subject free for years in his house, "Thayaham" at Thirunelvely, Jaffna.

It could be said that though an individual, he has played the role of an institution in the field of modern Tamil theatre. Generations of people involved in theatre activities with social commitment from all over the world where Tamils live, are students of Shanner.

In 1978 Shanner set up the Drama and Theatre School in Jaffna in collaboration with dramatists like A. Tarcicious and began producing

modern plays with practitioners specially trained in modern theatre. They sought to establish a new theatre culture that was entertaining as well as educational and spoke the sophisticated language of the contemporary stage.

Shanner has also produced a substantial amount of reading material on theatre history, particularly on the history of world theatres, architectures of world theatres and the theory of drama in Tamil for students and practitioners. These materials have been used as a resource base in theatre studies in Tamil for more than two decades though not in printed form.

Departing from the modern fetish for diligently obtaining copyright for literary and artistic work, Shanner believes in the right to copy. Using his work freely is an unwritten practice among theatre practitioners, students and, especially, teachers of theatre. If these writings are systematically compiled, published and translated into other languages, the genuine face of the modern Tamil theatre (and even Sri Lankan theatre) will emerge; it will add to the power of South Asian theatre too.

His continuous and committed involvement in the field of theatre is not only due to his professionalism as a playwright. He is also an activist. Shun never labelled himself as an activist but leads a life against all oppressive values, while never pretending to be someone who is purged of them.

The lone and silent Kulanthai M. Shanmuhalingam has created history when war, cultural silence, blockade, inappropriate pumping of funds (mis)rule the environment. Reading Shanner is to acquire for oneself the history of Tamil socio-political life during the period of the last three decades; understanding him means confronting the power of an individual in a world full of people.

A LOOK AT THE SHIFTING USAGES OF THE THAMIL LANGUAGE IN SRI LANKA TODAY: FROM A THEATRICAL PERSPECTIVE

This paper that represents a journey through the landscape of displacement and diaspora, with especial reference throughout to usage and variations in current spoken Tamil in Sri Lanka.

The basic question in this regard is, are we going to celebrate the differences in languages, or are we willing to opt for a standard language that would relieve us of the burden of hierarchical varieties? Or shall we just leave it to market forces to restructure everything?

From Jaffna to Batticaloa is only 300 km. but in this time of war it takes three or four days and nights to cover the distance, most of the time under the surveillance of koalmoody:

'koalmoody', informers from the air, as helicopters are popularly called in the "liberated areas" occupied by the militants. If the cry of 'keli' - heli goes up among Tamils, then everyone will know there is an alert. Bomper-bomber or sahadai - a converted cargo plane, is used to drop locally made peepa kundu - barrel bombs, and in emergency, to throw human waste. Sahadai is a big, slow moving wooden vehicle used to carry gods and goddesses in Hindu temples, and the converted cargo plane is like a 'sahadai' in the sky, not because of its contents but because of its size and mobility.

It is relevant to mention a joke about a bomber and bombing at this juncture. One person says to another, "Eay- hey- look there, it's

bomping". The other one replies, "It's not bombing, 'b' is silent". The first one corrects himself "oh, its oomping" -to suck , although most derogatory this word is, perhaps regrettably, frequently used.

Military boarders, check posts and check points have to be crossed so often that chekin is a popular term for "checking" among Tamils in Sri Lanka. There are sooniya pirathesangal- no-man's lands, areas with warning boards saying kannivedi kavanam, "beware of landmines". People say ulavaalikal kavanam-beware of spys and I or eye for intelligence is also very commonly used. During the practice of parading suspects in front of mundams- persons already arrested, or informers used by the security forces to identify 'terrorists' The mundams cover their heads with sacks or cloths to hide their identity and are called Mundam which means body without head, commonly used to denote people doing unintelligent things. In domestic life mundam is often used by a husband to his wife and is frequently to servants too. This already oppressive word now gains tremendous flavour; it terrifies people, even in their dreams. mundam varuthu- mundam is coming; mundam/mundankal kidakkutha- there are bodies without heads over there, is an oft heard remark these days.

Tamils mostly live in the north and in the east-northeastern provinces of Sri Lanka: malaiyaha makal ,upcountry Tamils in the central province, melaha makkal , Colombo Tamils in the western province, and a dense population of Tamil speaking Muslims in the east, in the north, and all over Sri Lanka. These are the people who are responsible for the spread of the Tamil language to every corner of Sri Lanka.

The Burgher community, particularly in the eastern province, and the Memon/Malay communities in the western province are the most minor among the minorities. Another interesting feature is that modern Sri Lankan politics, based on those of ancient Ceylon, divide the Veddha people into Sinhala Veddhas and Tamil Veddahas.

The name Sri Lanka itself has to do with the politics of the Tamil language in Sri Lanka: the constitutional change of 1972 brought not

only a new face to the country but a new name to it too. Even the labels of popular Ceylon tea were reprinted to read Sri Lankan tea. But in Tamil, Ilangai remains unchanged. All official documents are in English in Sri Lanka and if something is in Tamil it's Ilangai: this may be a minor practice in our daily life but the politics hidden in it are not minor.

There are a variety of dialects among Sri Lankan Tamils. The dialects of the Northeastern province differ from one another according to region, such as Jaffna, Kilinochi, Mullaitivu, Mannar and Vavuniya in the north, and Batticaloa, Trincomalle and Ampara in the east.

Colombo and Negombo in the western province, Kandy, Matale and Nuwara Eliya in the central province, Baddulle in the Uva province and Puttlam in the northwestern province, are comparatively densely populated with Tamils and experience the inter- and intra-regional differences of Tamil dialects.

A few glimpses of words and meanings should be enough to portray the differences, and the hierarchical nature, of dialects among the Tamils of Sri Lanka. The varieties in tone, style and body language in communication is beyond the capacity of the written texts to record.

Pachchathanniyil paniyaram suduthal- toasting sweets in water, is a saying popular among the Tamils of Jaffna, but when it was used in a theatre workshop Batticaloa in the east, the usage made the participants uneasy. It was a terrible shock to the director to find that paniyaram is used in the villages of the area to denote the sexual organ of women.

Tamils in the north ridicule easterners for using the word kiruhi/ kiruhu - turn around or to turn, and, in the same way, easterners ridicule northerners for using pennthu to mean later, when for easterners it means, to ease; they also laugh at avai and uvai -they, as popularly used by Jaffna Tamils.

The popular usage of avai, ivai and uvai among Jaffna Tamils, to express different hierarchial and distancing nuances of the word, they, exposes the exclusive nature of Jaffna society; these same words are used by people of other regions to humiliate Jaffna people.

The words nee, neer and neengal – you, in different shades of meaning are in frequent use among Jaffna Tamils, but the word neer is adroitly used to maintain a middle path in communication between informal and formal.

Tamil soldiers of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) made a positive impression on Sri Lankan Tamils, but their casual use of the word nee – you, made people so addressed uneasy and irritated because it is used for inferiors, whether of lower caste or in lower grade positions. The familiar Hindi expression challo challo, which was frequently used by the IPKF soldiers when hitting or chasing people, was in popular use during that period among Tamils, both in earnest and jokingly.

The variety of the upcountry Tamils is another unique feature we have to look into. Upcountry Tamils who were brought to Ceylon by the East Indian Company as cheap labour on the tea estates, have about three hundred years of history in Sri Lanka. Their dialect is regarded as the language of servants; not only were they enslaved by the East Indian Company but they were also used as low paid servants by high caste Tamils of Jaffna.

In popular drama, their dialect is used for servants and comic characters, eg: aamanka iya, varenka iya -with slavish body language. But at the same time creative writers are using that dialect in works published in Tamil Nadu, and Sri Lanka, where South Indian Tamils reigned over the editorial policies of the print media during the 1950s and 60s.

The political emergence of the minorities-within-minorities has liberated them to a certain extent. A particular achievement of the Tamils of Indian origin is the establishment of the name “upcountry Tamils” instead of their traditional label, thoaddakaaddaar- those who work on the tea estates.

People from other regions call Jaffna people, yarlpaaani, yarlpaaanam being the Tamil version of Jaffna. Paani-syrup, and panagkoddai- palmyra seed, denote narrow mindedness or the ‘frog in the well’ mentality, whereas panai - the palmyra tree, emerged as

the symbol of resistance in the war and is an important symbol in art and literary works about the war.

Attempts, such as those already mentioned, to establish superiority over others, go on even within a region. In Batticaloa, the people from Ealuvan Karai –where the sun rises, call people of Paduvaan Karai-where the sun sets, kaaddaankal-foresters. In Jaffna, the people of the islands are called theevar - inferior to others. All the groupings within communities have their own terms for expressing their own superiority and the inferiority of others. Education, the media, and migration itself, are helping to direct the younger generation away from this kind of labeling which is part of a tradition which education is making attempts at ameliorating.

In order that the Sinhala language be prevented from swamping Sri Lanka, where all government initiatives have Sinhala names, e.g. grama sevaka -legal administrative heads of villages, there has to be resistance. The reflection of that resistance in language may be seen in, for instance, the way the very popular terms laksala and salusala – a type of controlled price store, are ridiculed by moderate Tamil politicians who call them malasala.

War, part and parcel of the daily life for the Sri Lankan Tamils, brings new terms and terminologies, many of them politically loaded, and these are nowadays used casually in ordinary conversation. Kompumuri, for example, is a traditional ritualized game of the Tamils of eastern Sri Lankan communities, full of secret rituals and techniques: the community is divided into two zones, vada seri- north zone and then seri- south zone, and both zones prepare for the ritual game in secret ways for many days. Keeping the secrets during this period is so important that there will be fights between married partners over it but somehow the secrets will be kept. Even husband and wife are divided and fight each other during this period. The word recce, from reconnaissance, is used for finding out the other side's secrets; even very old people use this word which was originally used in military circles for secret missions.

Significantly, the concepts of thiyahi –martyr - and thurohi – traitor, are also familiar to all. Firing, round-up, chekin-checking, pistol,

claymore, shell, multibarrel, gunpoint, convoy, inquiry, kidnap, pass landmine, blast: these are some of the terms *taken from English, in everyday use by Sri Lankan Tamils.

So much vocabulary coined from the horrors of war has not nudged out the variations that are appearing in all spoken languages connected with modern systems and technology. Terms such as sisu uthana, pathuma vimana, vanitha vasana-fortunate ladies, and ithuru mithuru, kantha ran ginum-gold quest of women: these names of banks's savings and loans schemes, give evidence of the influence of Sinhala on Tamil in Sri Lanka.

Continuous displacement has meant that many people live for long periods as refugees in welfare centers where different communities are all mixed together. New life patterns and unfamiliar activities bring new usages onto the scene. The words "queue" and "relief" are very widely used as Tamil words, for the lives of the people are lived with reference to these two words. Sandai – war, idampeyaru – displacement, and nivaranam- relief, are three Tamil words, intertwined, not only as terms, but as living experiences too. The development of the term, enjeeoh –NGO, is then logical, both in word and fact. The words pathivu – registration and identi – identity card, have become part of the body and soul of the Tamils of Sri Lanka; someone without pathivu and identi is equal to a dead person. Identi eaduthiya?, Identi enga?, identi konduvanthiya?, pathivuv vaichatha? or pathinchatha/ pathinchacha? Pathivu and identi are very directly connected with the life and death of Sri Lankan Tamils, since these are the two basic things they need for their safety and relief.

"Identi enke?", identi edu, identi iruka, ID edu: the authoritative, sinhaled, demands of security personnel have become familiar over more than three decades. Then there is tax, vati in Tamil, the subject of many humorous oral stories. Vaddi-interest, another term much used amongst Tamils over a long period has now become civilized to "interest", "interest in Tamil rate", "interest free". And then, amongst all these developments, there is that of the internet by which Tamils may connect with each other in their mother tongue.

Any survey of Tamil dialects in Sri Lanka must give prominence to Tamil speaking Muslims, whose role in the development of Tamil in its written and spoken forms has been extremely influential. In Tamil, they are respectfully referred to as Muslim but the term *sony* will be used when the expression is of hostility; the Muslims of course have their own terms for responding to this.

Another group worthy of attention for different reasons is the Burghers, who are living among Tamils, particularly in Batticola, and who are willing to maintain their identity but not really their language, Portukis. The elite amongst them prefer English but the ordinary people speak Tamil. Tamils are disparaging about Burghers, calling them 'Paranki'; once again, the Burghers have their own ways of disparaging Tamils.

It is very much to be regretted that most people in Tamil Nadu, where large numbers of Sri Lankan Tamils are living as refugees, are still unaware that there are Tamils living in Sri Lanka; so the first questions are, *neengal Sri Lankava/Ceylona?* and *nalla tamil pesariyale?* - are you Sri Lankan? and, you speak good Tamil! The Tamils of Tamil Nadu identify Sri Lankan Tamils with Keralites, *neengal keralava?*

Under these circumstances, miscommunication is rampant. Take for example, the usage of *kathaitthal* and *pesuthal* for, to speak, by Sri Lankan and South Indian Tamils respectively. Another miscommunication arose in a theatre workshop at Madurai, Tamil Nadu when the participants were asked, *irunka* -to sit, and didn't, even when the request was repeated. *Irunka* means sit for Sri Lankan Tamils but for Tamils in Tamilnadu it means, wait. For the participants to have sat, the term should have been *ukkarunka*. In Sri Lanka *nillunka* means, wait, *nillunka vaaran*- wait, I will come.

Man made and natural disasters play havoc with the lives of Tamils in Sri Lanka, uproot them and scatter them to mix with strangers from other regions, speaking Tamil certainly, but often in very unfamiliar ways. People's thought processes are affected by these experiences and, over time, there will be deterioration of local culture and local skills will be forgotten. The vital question is: how are we going to liberate ourselves from alienation and avoid disintegration?

Good theatre dialogue requires a clear understanding of the ground realities of all the varieties of point of view, so concentrating on the language usage of people of different states and from different castes and classes is essential in understanding all these realities.

At this point a dialogue from a school play by Kulanthai M. Shanmukalingam, from the mid 80s comes to mind. A female character, a refugee from 1983 riots in Colombo, is talking about the sufferings of refugees at the hands of thugs and of how Perera Uncle saved them.

She says: '*kaadaiyariddai irinthu Perera Uncle than engalai kapatinavar*' -Perera Uncle is the person who saved us from thugs

Another character exclaims: '*Perera enda Sinkalavanallo*' - Perera is a Sinhalese isn't he?

There is always a burst of laughter as a reaction to this dialogue which has an inter-related, two-pronged meaning: it refers to the innocence of the character and to the awareness of the audience that all Sinhalese are not Kaadaiyar-thugs. The play cleverly liberates the audience from stereotypes, which are mostly used as comic and negative elements, and instead deals with actual conflict.

Modern Tamil theatre is being employed in Sri Lanka as alternative education and therefore concerns itself with the condition of education today and with ways of improving it and of releasing students from constrictive and wasteful systems.

The role of the theatre, in this context, is to stimulate people to connect themselves in a positive way and to create multi-dimensional societies. Theatre must engage itself as an alternative to the media and to conventional education, and in Sri Lanka it must do that in a war torn land amongst people who are in a state of disassociation.

Language will always be a primary tool in theatre work, whether the language being used reflects that of the actual period depicted or not. Today, moves are being made towards a more faithful representation of spoken language in literature and drama. Those who work in theatre are necessarily alert to the way language is used; every tour of the native land is a journey through language and expression...

CHALLENGES AND IMPORTANCE OF IDENTIFYING AND ESTABLISHING A TRADITION FOR WRITING IN ENGLISH BY THE THAMILS OF SRI LANKA

"I do not want to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my houses as freely as possible. But refuse to live in another people's houses as interloper, a beggar or as a slave".

: Mahatma Gandhi

Identifying the creative writings in English by the Thamils, and establishing it as a tradition is a scholarly work but a neglected part in the history of the literary tradition of the Thamils in Sri Lanka.

When I think about creative writing in English as a tradition, it is an irony that a society with popularly known silver - tongued orators in English has not thought about or were not aware about a creative tradition as a resistance against colonial systems as in India or in African countries because we had limited experiences in the national liberation struggle against colonialism and can identify its impact on our political and intellectual tradition right from independence.

After independence, politicians and intellectuals representing the community took the language issue as a medium to gain power to rule their people in place of the colonizers. Decolonizing the minds of the

people was not their concern. The unchanged existence of the colonial education system will reveal this matter very clearly.

Thomas Macaulay's "**Minute on Indian Education**" portrays the colonial construct. It says, "It is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be the interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals, and in intellect" ¹

The above statement is also appropriate to the elite of the Sri Lankan Tamil Community. At the same time we can identify the efforts of movement like National Youth Congress to awaken national consciousness among the Tamil community throughout history. Even though it was not very strong, and faced difficulties in Sri Lankan politics and had limitations to meet the challenges of the contemporary world, it nevertheless had the power to resist colonialism.

Prime Minister Ms Sirimavo Bandaranayaka's conversation with the former commonwealth Secretary - General Mr. Sridath Ramphal will reveal the truth that from the time of independence we haven't had a proper language policy to meet our future as an independent nation.

Sridath Ramphal, "Shortly after I become Secretary - General of the Common Wealth in 1975. I met Prime Minister Srimavo Bandaranayaka in Colombo and we talked of ways in which the Commonwealth Secretariat could help Sri Lanka. Her response was immediate and specific: "**Send us people to train our teachers to teach English as foreign language**". My amazement must have showed, for the Prime Minister went on to explain that the policies of her husband put in place twenty years earlier to promote Sinhala as the official language had succeeded so well that in the process Sri Lanka, so long the pearl of the English speaking world in Asia - had in fact lost English, even as a second Language save for the most educated Sri Lankans. Her concern was development. Farmers in the field, she told me, could not read the instructions on bags of imported fertilizer and manufacturers in the global market were not likely to

print them in Sinhala. Sri Lanka was losing its access to the world language of English. We did respond. I believe that today English is doing better as the second language in Sri Lanka".²

Colonially constructed state and education system will not deliver goods in favour of the natives' aspirations. So, the reason behind the difficulty in identifying creative writing in English as a tradition is crystal clear.



C.Velupillai

Even though there are writings in English From C.Velupillai, Poet Tambimuttu, Alagu. Subramaniam, S.J.K Crowther, T. Ramanathan, Raja Proctor, Heather Loyala, Saraswathi Roackwood. Guy Amirthanayagam, T. Somasundaram, V. Ariyanayagam, Shaym Selvadurai, Bamini Selvadurai, Valan, Indran Amirthanayagam, Rohini Hensman, E.C.T Candappa, A. Shanthan, Parvathi Arasanayagam, S. Pathmanathan, S. Thillainathan, Pon Ganesan and several others, they weren't continued and constructed as a tradition. But intellectuals are regularly presenting academic papers in English, because of the requirements of the Universities to publish articles in international journals for which they gain points in the academic system. But they don't seem to concentrate or involve themselves in creative writing because they are not awarded points for such works.

The reason behind it is very simple. There is no space for creativity in the education system. This is the politics of the colonial education systems. "**Masks of Conquest**" a book by Gauri Viswanathan is about the origin and ideology of English Studies in India, wherein she argues that English Literature was introduced as a subject in India even before it became a subject in England.

"This was because it was believed that Indians who learnt English Literature would be convinced that Europeans possessed a humanistic and Christian tradition of literature that was far superior to anything which existed in the Indian languages. In other words, the study of literature created an ideal colonial subject who would accept and appreciate the British "**Civilizing Mission**." It is under this colonial mesmerism that we are functioning."³

Education is one of the most powerful media of colonialism and neocolonialism. It's a powerful weapon of social control. Although Sri Lanka has been independent for fifty years, the values and patterns of British colonial education continues to persist.

Education in Gramsci's terms is "**dominant by consent**." "This domination by consent is achieved through what is taught to the colonized, how it is taught and the emplacement of the educated subject as a part of the continuing imperial apparatus - a knowledge of English literature, for instance, was required for entry into the civil service and the legal profession. Education is thus a conquest of another kind of territory - it is the foundation of the colonialist power and consolidates this power through legal and administrative apparatus"⁴ Now it has shifted from literature to business, English for Business purposes and it has lead to the slogan "**without English there is no future**".

So the process of identifying and establishing a tradition for creative writing in English among the Tamils of Sri Lanka is a part of the decolonization of Thamilian minds. As Mulk Raj Anand said, "No apology is necessary to bring truthful to the echoes of one's mother tongue and the imaginative communication for those vibrations which are in the nerves of the people not born of English mothers"⁵

In Thamil there is a myth called "**Heaven of Thirisangu**" or "**World of Thirisangu**" It is a world in space between earth and heaven. Thirisangu wants to go to heaven but heaven rejects him and he doesn't want to return to the earth, so he is in a world of his own between earth and heaven. The life in this world had constructed a state of mind which will not accept the native order and can not achieve the order acceptable to the colonial standard. This is the world of imitation, constructed by the colonial rule and its education system which leads to form of fear in the minds and functions as a mental block to in creative activities. I have had discussions with people are well-versed in English literature who had attempted creative writing in English and were involved in creative writing in Thamil but had given up creative writing in English after a few attempts of this fear and lack of recognition.

But A.J. Canagaratna said "One of the reasons may be that apart from lack of encouragement and outlets for production, the Standard

English taught in schools and its emphasis on grammar and British models may have inhibited creativity. I remember Alagu Subramaniam telling me when I asked him why the language is some of his stories sounded artificial and stilted, that the English man thought that the 'native' could write only "**Babu English**" (an insulting reference to the English of the Indian 'native') they had to prove they could write English the way English man wrote it".⁶

The view of Mulk aj Anand is different.

"I began writing earlier than he (Tambimuttu) and in prose. My novels are about the poor and disinherited of Asia. Naturally I was abused and misunderstood, except in the third world, and the world of the poor of Europe. But the Literati thought that I was a communist stooge. I am saying this because one, important lapse on Tamibis part was not to remember he came from the disinherited society."⁷

Ngugi wrote in his book 'Decolonizing the mind.' "In my view language was the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation."⁸

So if we want to live in a world of creation with creative imagination, we have to identify and establish a tradition determined by our socio - cultural context which will erase our fear and break our mental block and bring forth people with creative imagination to face the challenges of neo-colonialism.

The socio political history of the Thamils of Sri Lanka and the history of the literary tradition in English reveal that importance is given to English as a medium of instruction in business and not as a medium of creative expression. But the generation of the last decades of the 20th century had different opinions. They too are the products of the mother tongue but the experience of the liberation struggle and the Diasporas of the Thamils have opened - up new frontiers and new thinking.

The thinking of the importance of creative imagination as the major factor in the current intellectual and creative tradition of the Thamils of Sri Lanka. They are willing to express their feelings, experiences

and thinking in a creative way. They express their creativity in their new world as originals or as trans-creations or as translation. The Thamils in exile express their creative imagination not only in their adopted countries. They are also actively involved in translating original works from the language of their adopted countries into their mother tongue.

It is shell shock for the conventional intellectual community because most of the people engaged in this process are not familiar with English and do not have a University background. The interesting thing is the part played by the Universities in the North and East in this process which is questionable and always criticized by the intellectual community outside the Universities.

The emergence of the "**Third Eye**" a little magazine in English first published in 1993 to bring out original works, critical works, translations and trans-creations from Tamil writing and the reproductions of the works of pioneers and the thinking of creative tradition in English is a part of the above process and is not the contribution of the English medium educated. Prof. Sures Canagarajah's writing on theatre will clarify this situation.

In an article titled "**Experiment and controversy in the Jaffna English Theatre**" which appeared in the "**Third Eye**" he says, "The English theatre scene has taken as experimental turn in the past couple of years. A series of plays staged here (James Thurber's Ostrich. And Jamal Banoura's "Accused" staged on 30th August 1991: Abjit Sicar's Child's play staged on 19th July 1991 and 30th August 1991: Bernard B. Dardee's "The cillage staged on 02 and 15th February 1992 and on 10th June 1993; Alagu Subramaniam's short story "Professional Mourners" adopted by A.J. Canagaratna "Wake up my beloved" staged in February 1993 and on 10 June 1993) have been quite controversial in their reception".⁹

"Though all this is repulsive for many brought up in the classical tradition, most of the school students and University producers involved are fortunately influenced by the vibrant Tamil theatrical tradition. The Tamil Theatre is also primarily a school level or educational theatre. The younger generation is now able to connect the Tamil and English theatrical traditions. It is true that hitherto, the Tamil

theatre borrowed Ibsen, Chekov and Beckett through English. But now the tables are turned: The English Theatre is borrowing local themes, indigenous music, acting and directorial skills from the Tamil tradition, promising interesting new departures for the Jaffna English theatrical scene".¹⁰

Contrary to this, most of the Tamils who were the doyen of the English literature do not know or have the least familiarity with Tamil language, literature and their experiences are limited to the four walls of their gardens. But this is different from those who are writing in French, German, Norwegian, etc. They have direct experience in the liberation struggle and are not from the elite. So their perspectives and purposes are different. This is strange but true, in a sense a revolution in a society dominated by conservative ideas.

After we started to publish "The Third Eye" our search for original manuscripts, translations, trans-creations and rare publications of the pioneers began. In this search we faced strange experiences. We have collected manuscripts from writers who are adamant to write again. The root cause is frustration. Now "The Third Eye" has given a momentum to the process of identifying and establishing a tradition for creative writing in English, by the Tamils of Sri Lanka.

The emergence of the '**English Forum**' with the support and guidance of Prof. S. Canaganayagam, Prof. Suresh Canagarajah, Mr. A.J. Canagaratna, Mr. S. Rajasingam and the involvement of Mr. T. Somasundaram gave the moral boost at the initiation and the development of the process of identifying and establishing a tradition for the writing in English by the Tamils of Sri Lanka.

The current intellectual traditions of the Tamils of Sri Lanka are not one dimensional determined by the English tradition as in the earlier period; it is multi dimensional and is directly open to various intellectual traditions of the world. The liberation struggle and the writings of expatriate Tamils have given an additional impetus to this new dimension. The Tamils of Sri Lanka now have access to the world through various channels and are in a position to select material in consonance with their accepted views. This is the major change of perspective in the intellectual traditions of the Tamil Community.

In this background, identifying and establishing a tradition for creative writing in English parallel to the other tradition will create a different perception among the international community as opposed to the world constructed by the mass media in this information age.

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August 2000

SANS STATE SUPPORT, TAMILS RELY ON TRANSLATIONS INTERNET FOR GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE

Tamil knowledge systems readily acknowledge the importance of translations. In the past, there have been many voices articulating the value of translation in order that knowledge and information posited in languages other than Tamil is made accessible to Tamil language speakers.

However, effective translation of knowledge from one language to others is limited. This is due to the mindset of communities or people who transmit and receive knowledge through translations.

Translating knowledge is connected not only with sharing of knowledge and information but also with power. Power of the English language and its central role in the dissemination of information all over the world are simply because of the colonial and neo-colonial domination by the English-speaking nations and their systematic arrangements to maintain hegemonic control in the world.

On the other hand, contemporary developments in the Tamil language in Sri Lanka are solely connected with, and depend upon, the power of so-called "ordinary people." The Tamil language has little institutional support and the role of the Sri Lankan state is limited to mere rhetoric on popular platforms.

Similarly, translations too have a story or history that is solely dependent on the spirit of committed individuals and/or small groups who more or less sacrifice their very existence to work on translating texts, than to institutional support.



K. Ganesh

Though acknowledging the importance of translations, the tragedy of the Tamil intellectual tradition is its unawareness of the importance and centrality of translators for the expansion of knowledge. Translation is conceived of as an act of mechanical copying, and the cerebral input by translators is rarely taken into account. Translators are not considered artists or intellectuals, they are perceived as mere copyists.

The art of translation, or the practice of translation, is basically connected with a single word: "why" The power and meaning of the single word "why" is enormous. It is connected with existing systems of knowledge and social construction. It is a questioning of the existing environment for its limitations and its powerlessness.

In principle, translation is an act of sharing knowledge, information and socio-cultural values. Knowledge, information and values can be transmitted outside a group that subscribes to the same language only through translation. Since knowledge is power, translations empower those who would not have had the benefit of that knowledge because access to it was restricted by barriers of language.

At the same time, translation can be exploited by those in power for their own sectarian ends. A critical eye on the world news pages of the vernacular media reveals the politics of translation and its construction, and how it subtly navigates the reader to control thought and behaviour.

Therefore the art of translation makes an immense contribution to the manufacture of knowledge in order to control. But at the same time, this art could be used to liberate and emancipate a community from the shackles of oppression by strengthening and vitalising knowledge systems that support such progressive endeavours.

As mentioned above, the contemporary history of translation in the Tamil context is mainly the story of committed individuals and small groups. Those who are involved in the art are motivated by the importance of transferring information or knowledge, thereby empowering and enriching their own knowledge systems, while exposing theirs to world outside. Basically, translations into and from Tamil is an unrecognised act by invisible persons.

Despite their invisibility, these groups and circles are aware of the importance of translation and consciously regard it as a form of political expression. The role of the left movement in the 1960s and 1970s in this regard is commendable. Translations of Marxian and Maoist literatures on political and cultural issues, particularly literary works, novels, short stories and drama, from Soviet Russia and China were very influential in expanding Tamil speakers knowledge of the world outside.

The upsurge of political nationalism among the Sri Lankan Tamils in the late 1970s and 1980s provided a boost to translations. The demand by Tamil readers for the artistic and political literatures of other groups resisting oppression gave a fillip to translations. Thus the political and cultural works of Palestinian, African and the other oppressed nations and communities were translated into Tamil.

The emergence of feminist activism in 1980s among the Tamils resulted in the translation of a considerable amount of literatures and influenced the transformation of the perspectives of the Tamil community.

From the 1990s, the rise of movements within civil society and resistance by small groups and individuals to globalization paved the way for influential translations of texts on political, social and environmental issues into Tamil.

Most translations were not directly of original works. They were translations of English translations. But a reasonable number of translations were made from the Russian language with the support of the Soviet government. Though very few, there are direct translations from other languages too.

English has become the platform for the transfer of global information and knowledge in "alternative media" spaces too. But it has its own politics, despite being the most accessible and easily available route for global communication. However, the political question is to whom it is available and remains an easy path of communication. It is an issue that must be addressed when looking at different agents of oppression.

Another major influence on translation in the Tamil context is the emigration of Sri Lankan Tamils overseas in the late 1980s and 1990s

and their reaction to its cause. The emigration of politically active youth and their life overseas in alien environments yielded new and strange experiences that are entering the Tamil knowledge system.

These youth, who are essentially non-native-speakers of English with hardly any formal, tertiary level education, are migrants to countries outside the English-speaking world. They have responded to their relocation in new environments by bringing into the Tamil knowledge system translations from the French, German or Dutch. Their compilation of dictionaries is an important feature of this practice. Once again, this too is a commitment by individuals and small groups who are mostly living marginalised existences in Tamil Diasporas.

The problem with such endeavours is that they are ad hoc and unsystematic. From time to time, social movements raise their voices in favor of institutionalised translation programmes, but such projects have not really got going.

A new feature in the field of translation is that of translation studies gradually entering the curricula of academic institutions, particularly institutions of higher education. The point to ponder is of course its attachment to departments teaching English, and English Language Teaching Units (ELTUs) in a variety of Sri Lankan universities. It is rarely that translation studies are attached to departments teaching Tamil.

This is the product of a lack of understanding of the uniqueness of translation studies. Translations are interpreted as being from English, to English, or through English. In actual fact however, translation is matter of knowing any two languages and the art of rendering effectively what is in one language in the other. Basically a person who has mastered at least two languages could be a translator.

Conceptualisation of translation as a part of other specialised fields in academics such as the teaching of English literature or language, and institutionalising it as a sub-unit of departments teaching English in academic institutions, will only lead to a distortion of translation studies. It will help strengthen English-centric knowledge construction and the dissemination of the colonial master plan, which still influences and controls academic programmes in post-colonial nations.

Distortion of the goal of translation studies also occurs due to a popular notion among first language speakers that they have nothing to learn in their mother tongue other than for formal examination purposes. The same fallacy has infected the minds of the intellectual community in academic institutions as well.

The lack of actual involvement by governments of newly-independent countries other than manufacturing political rhetoric on official language policy is a direct reflection of the actual state of politics in countries emerging from colonial rule.

The status of a language spoken by people relates directly to the economic position of the community speaking that language within a state, or a state within the international system. Economic dependency will result in mental dependence and limit the discussion of the use of native languages to rhetoric on political platforms.

Dealing with language issues in a practical way is directly connected to the questioning of existing systems, particularly in education and economics. Movements which raise the language issue for social liberation usually concentrate and celebrate its dignity in the past. In this, to some extent at least, they are engaged in a journey of linguistic reversal to an idealised past, which emphasise notions of the language's purity.

It is rare indeed to encounter or recall prominence given to translation studies in such linguistic-based liberation movements. But translations have a major role to play not only in the enrichment of a particular language, but also in transforming the perspective of its native speakers by restructuring their knowledge systems.

Modern knowledge systems of the Tamils are colonial construction and English-centric. They are fundamentally the brain child of Thomas B. Macaulay the master craftsman of the Minutes on Indian Education.

Construction of the "modern" world is basically the creation of western colonialism. Though the colonisers might have physically departed from the shores of their former possessions, they continue to maintain hegemony over our minds, with our consent. This is in reality the politics of "independent" states or the postcolonial states.

Postcolonial states are busily engaged in number of conflicts, internal wars, liberation struggles, campaigns against international terrorism etc. Tamils in different parts of the world, but particularly Tamils of Sri Lanka, have become enmeshed in this web of postcolonial reality.

The most visible consequence of this reality has been overseas displacement and emigration of Tamils and their settlement in different parts of the world. It is these groups that form the Tamil Diaspora that are writing and translating literatures of the countries in which they live.

An important aspect of individuals and groups operating in the Tamil Diaspora is their independence. Their work is not an imposition by a superior force. It is decided and determined by the Tamils for the Tamils. The internet in Tamil, the small-circulation magazines and the mainstream media play an important role in this movement.

Tamils through the Tamil language are electronically connected to their brethren in every nook and corner of the world now. And these linkages are being used progressively too. The songs of popular Tamil cinema for instance are a bridge of the "Tamil koorum nal ulahu." It has bonded children in non-Tamil-speaking lands who are unfamiliar with the Tamil language.

The electronic medium that is globally interconnected is already in operation. With Tamil language-users connected through cyberspace, Tamils are experiencing the advantages of this global interconnectedness and access through the Tamil language to information and knowledge.

The crucial question is how Tamils are going to organise themselves to use this situation to achieve a positive space for members of that community living scattered around the world. How is the favourable atmosphere going to be exploited effectively to connect Tamils all over the world through the Tamil language? How is a generation of Tamils unfamiliar with their mother tongue going to be connected through the support of the Tamil internet?

Finally it will determine how we are going to manipulate cyberspace to transform Tamil knowledge systems to achieve a world in which all Tamils can live in freedom, unbound by the shackles of caste and creed and political affiliations.

GENDER: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WHAT IT MEANS IN A SOCIETY STRUGGLING FOR FREEDOM



Painting of
Kamala Vasuki

Statistics reveal that violence against women at home is much higher than what is experienced by them at their places of work, or out on the streets. But when concerned people, mostly women, start to speak out on violence against women at home, or domestic violence, there is a loud outcry by men that women are creating chaos within the home and breaking-up families by interfering in matters that are, essentially, between husband and wife, or at most within the extended family.

No one says women should get out of their homes because of domestic violence perpetrated by men, particularly husbands or fathers. But at the same time, the home is not a torture chamber for women. It should be a place where there is love, peace and understanding. Raising the issue of domestic violence is to make the home become a place of love for all members of the family.

It should be the same story when it comes to places of work. Work places are not only for men but also for women. If anyone is harassed or experiences violence in their work place, the perpetrators must be held accountable. Meanwhile, gender balance of the work place must also be maintained.

The question is: when women face harassment and abuse – especially sexual harassment at the work place – is it reasonable to ask them to leave the place of employment for their own safety or

dignity? The answer should be no. On the contrary, the perpetrators should be dealt with and the security and dignity of the victim restored. But restitution, which is a common rule applied whenever injustice is committed, has become an exception for women.

This is the theme of the saga involving the infamous CD with pornographic material that was circulating in the Batticaloa and Ampara districts around the time of the Sinhala and Tamil New Year and sensationalised by the media with palpable glee.

The girl who had allegedly appeared in the porn CD was identified as a native of Sri Lanka's east and located as working in an NGO or INGO. A story was then fabricated and disseminated with the ingredient of a death threat included, based on the 'information.' This was apparently done to safeguard the dignity of the women working in NGOs and INGOs.

But the whole thing boomeranged when it made working women in the NGO sector easy targets in the hands of their own brethren in every sphere of their day-to-day existence – particularly during the Tamil New Year.

The situation took an ugly turn when personal grudges began to be played out under cover of the death threat and the accompanying humiliation. Some individuals identified certain women workers as "the girl" in the porn CD and concocted stories. These rumours gained currency and began to haunt the families of many young girls working in NGOs and INGOs. Thus the misplaced attempt at preserving female 'virtue' led to a tragedy in the lives of working women in this sector.

A girl committed suicide, and there was talk of other girls too contemplating taking their own lives. Whatever it might be, it is undeniable that all the working women and their families in the Batticaloa and Amparai districts who are working in the NGO sector have suffered deep mental distress.

Mothers of young working women in the NGOs and INGOs have also become victims. Mothers not only feel ashamed and humiliated because of the gossip, but fear death threats on their daughters could be carried out. What is more, they fear for their future in societies

where even a hint of scandal could lead problems in finding husbands.

Ironically, working women in the NGOs and INGOs did not experience humiliation in the hands of 'enemies.' The usual forces resisting enemy atrocities kept silent and treated the issue as a private matter only concerning women.

The character assassination campaign against individual working women in NGOs and INGOs was a way to humiliate them and bring them to disrepute. The representation of these women as 'loose' puts their safety and security into question. Apparently, a society's conventional understanding of safety and security of the individual does not apply to the security of working women in relation to the perpetrators of cultural violence.

Even though the cry of cultural degeneration brought about by the 'misbehaviour' of women working in NGOs and INGOs are very loud, no one is bothered about the true identity of the girl or spare a moment of sympathy for the predicament in which she is now. Nor does anyone care about the man who appeared in that particular pornographic CD, or what motivated the perpetrators to do what they did. Instead the incident was brutally exploited to demoralise working women in the NGO sector so as to 'domesticate' them.

It is very important to discuss why the working women in the NGOs and INGOs are targeted. It's a very bad symptom of a dangerous sickness and the community must be raise its concerns about it.

Is society nervous about the smart and self-reliant, independent women?

The other important issue is the silence of the males – especially the top brass of NGOs and INGOs despite all these organisations claiming to be gender sensitive and concerned about gender components in their programmes.

It is also interesting to note that important social and political issues in Batticaloa and Amparai raise a host of responses based on ethnic, religious, caste and other differences. On this occasion however, all social groups appeared united in banishing women back to the kitchen.

Because of the strong NGOisation of gender, modern and progressive male intellectuals and male artists usually claim that the issue of gender and feminism are imported (but not modernism or Marxism or nationalism).

Role of print media in this regard is very critical. The print media came out as one sided and authorised and legitimised the manipulation of the invisible hand which affected the dignity of working women in the NGO sector. It is very sad to note the role played by the print media in that it failed to take into account the suffering of the victims of the 'information manipulation.'

The interesting side of the story is how the print media in English, which carried articles on the problem regularly, mostly on their front pages, represented the issue. Not a single media institution was concerned about the vulnerable situation of working women in the NGO sector. Nor were they interested in applying rigorous standards of investigative journalism that they apply to politics or in relation to political killings.

The collective violence waged against women working in NGOs and INGOs in the Batticaloa and Amparai districts is a serious issue and has to be dealt with. And it has to be dealt with as the problem per se and not on how it affects the political and ideological persuasions of the various actors – individual and collective (and mostly male) – who have been using such issues for selfish ends. The manner in which it is dealt would also be a good yardstick to evaluate the true nature of a society which has been involved in a freedom struggle for more than three decades.

Elegy for Thamil New Year 2006

*Mothers mourn silently
In fear and in shame
On the eve of
The Thamil New Year 2006
For the fate of their
Working daughters
In the NGOs and INGOs*

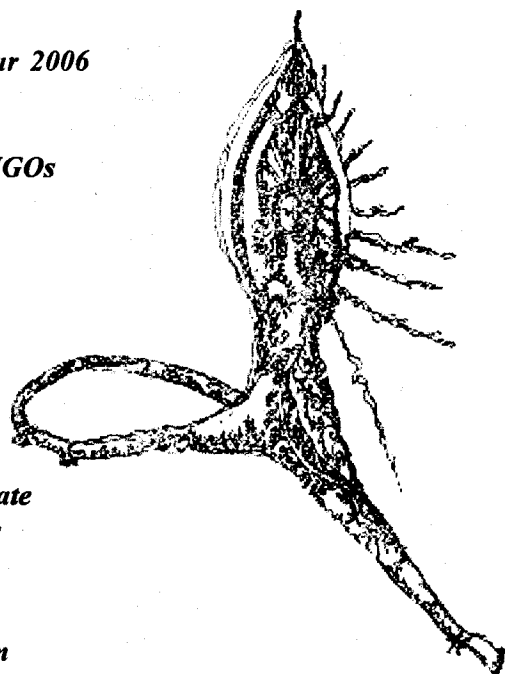
*Not because of
The atrocities
Of the aggressors*

*But because of their
Very own and
Invisible sons*

*Innocents victimized
In order to domesticate
And the perpetrators
Silently harboured*

*The new version
Of an age old custom
Manipulated invisibly
But celebrated harshly*

June 2006



Painting of
Kamala Vasuki

ALOSIOUS JEYARAJ CANAGARATNA

The Power of A.J. Canagaratne

A Great Scholar of the Thamils of Sri Lanka Mr. A.J. Canagaratne was passed away on the early hours of 11th of October 2006 in his early seventies. He was a person who had functioned like an alternative Institution for generations of scholars who are marginalized by the "powerful people" within the ultimate higher institutions among the Thamils of Sri Lanka.



A.J. Canagaratne never posed himself as an utmost Intellectual but generations of intellectuals and artists not only from Thamils of Sri Lanka or all the other nationals of Sri Lanka but also from people outside Sri Lanka will always respect his caliber.

The power and beauty of AJ is his genuine intellectual characteristic. He is always conscious of his words and the correctness of the information. He took much effort to share authentic information.

AJ is very strong enough to share new things to others and push them to new frontiers to bring fruits of knowledge and skill to the people who nourished the intellectuals with their hard earned money for the free education system.

The sharp and subtle arguments and interpretations of AJ are the fruits of his deep knowledge.

AJ is an intellectual of the people but he seldom uses the word people.

Brevity is the essence of AJ but he is an epic!

07.11.2006

AJ: The Deep Spring of Knowledge

*There are no waves
There are no roars
There are no hard blows of winds*

But

*A spring
A deep and deep
Spring of knowledge*

AJ

The Nilavarai of intellectualism
The spring nourishes
The field of intellectualism
And yields flowers and fruits
Of hearts
With the love of humanity*

Now, now

*It remains and remains
Only in the hearts and minds*

*It's always in the hearts and minds
Of spirits that urges
For the evergreen of the intellectualism
For the love of Humanity*

*Oh the generation of the future
Come, come and visit
The silent and deep Nilavarai
The spring of resource
And think of our Great AJ*

16.10.2006

*Nilavaray – A bottomless and ever filled well in the northern part of Jaffna peninsula.

MULTIFACETED PROFESSOR K. KANAPATHIPILLAI!!!

Prof. K. Kanapathipillai is an important personality in the modern socio-cultural history of the Tamils of Sri Lanka. Understanding Prof. K. Kanapathipillai, the multi-faceted intellectual and creative artist is a demanding requirement for the formation of multicultural aspect of the Tamil National Culture of the Tamils of Sri Lanka.



The way he treated the issues and his perspectives are great learning for intellectuals, artists and especially for activists who have committed themselves to create a world where people can celebrate differences of cultures and enjoy the pleasures of equality.

Those who are aware of the socio-cultural discourses of the pre and post independent Africa in the 1950's and 1960's will simply realize the great value of Prof. K. Kanapathipillai of Sri Lanka.

Though he had not labeled himself as a Post Colonialist or a post colonial literary activist, the creative and academic works of Prof. Kanapathipillai firmly establishes him as a pioneer post colonialist parallel to the African counterparts.

C. Velupillai of Up-country is another socio- cultural personality not recognized for his contribution of indigenizing English language in his novels which depicts life and sufferings of the Up country Tamils.

Tamils of Sri Lanka did not understand or identify or valued both the personalities as Post Colonial thinkers or writers but those who are familiarizing themselves with the works of these two personalities

will simply recognize the similarities between Post Colonial thinkers and writers of Africa and other post colonial countries.

Prof. K. Kanapathipillai had negated the authoritatively constructed demarcating lines of "low culture" and "High Culture" and "centre" and "periphery." He pioneered the portrayal of women characters as powerful personalities in his plays in 1940's and 1950's.

The creative skill of his handling of dialects of the people is the built in energetic element of the language of his theatre. The plays of Prof. S. Kanapathipillai would be genuine pioneering evidences of Post Colonial Theatre of the Thamils of Sri Lanka.

It's a great learning for the youngsters to inherit the blend of creative skill and the analytical power of a genuine intellectual or an artist from Prof. K. Kanapathipillai.

The power of Prof. K. Kanapathipillai was rediscovered in early 1990's by the new generation of artists and intellectuals and activists.

The daunting question is how and why he was lost in the modern socie-cultural history of the Thamils of Sri Lanka for the last forty years?

Is it not an irreparable loss to the socio cultural history of the Thamils particularly the Thamils of Sri Lanka?

Both Prof. K Kanapathipillai and C.Vellupillai were not only art and literary figures they are socio-cultural activists too. It's an important message to the younger generation of artists and intellectuals.

February 2007

PLAYING WITH PARAI ARAIVON (HERALD) IN KOOTHTHU (TRADITIONAL THEATRE) OF THE THAMILS OF SRI LANKA

**From Tradition to Reformulation:
A Journey through Participatory Action Research.**

Parai (Drum) is the ancient percussion instrument of the Thamils but the people who are playing the musical instrument Parai being considered as outcastes of the hierarchical community of the Thamils of Sri Lanka. The word used in Tamil for Parai Araivon was 'Valluvan'. Etymology of Va'lluvan is from the root Va'l, which in old Tamil meaning 'big sound' and also note that the word Vi'lluthal means expression. Va'lluva Muthumakan is another phrase used for a Paraiyar in old literatures.

The phrase used in Jaffna until recent times for the Paraiyar chieftain who was also the Government herald was 'Pirasiththa Mooppan' or 'Mooppanaar'. Pirasiththam means announcing. Traditionally 'Mooppan' does the 'pirasitham' on behalf of the community and later his services were introduced into Government practices too. But this has not produced any positive status to the community of the 'Paraiyar' but it has only been an extension of the traditional status.

Even though the 'Parai' and 'Paraiyar' has literary and epigraphical evidences from ancient time, the practice of casteism and its oppressive nature has provided only a marginalized space for the art to be practiced. Because of this negative atmosphere the power of this vibrant performing arts and the caste which played the parai (drum)

for generations are not recognised as "High Culture" and "High Caste" respectively.

The people, who are talking of Cultural Identity and National Culture, boast the power of the vibrant art, the 'Parai' (Traditional Drum) and 'Parai Mela Kooththu' (Traditional Drum Dance) in their rhetoric but in practice there has been very little effort made to recognize this art form. There are strong voices to celebrate the power of National and Cultural Identity of the Tamils of Sri Lanka but the power of casteism is suppressing the art of 'Parai', 'Parai Mela Kooththu' and the Parayar caste.

The heart throbbing beats of 'Parai' with the rhythmical movements of 'Parai Mela Kooththu' are vanishing under the same roof of our cultural pride of Tamil Nationalism of the Sri Lanka Tamils.

Losing an ancient and vibrant art because of casteism and the willingness or the urge to shed the caste identities because of the oppressive nature of casteism is the biggest challenge faced by the people who are celebrating caste differences and identities in Multicultural societies.

There are socio-cultural and a political resistance throughout the years against the oppression of casteism in the socio-cultural history of the Tamils of Sri Lanka. However, the pace of transformation is being experienced in reality is limited. The wish to dislocate the caste identities from the art form which belongs to the caste which publicly identifies the people with the caste is the strong example in this regard.

Two cases which will be narrated below will bring out the real and the complicated nature of this issue, one reporting the experience of a member of the wider community hence an outsider and the other reporting the experience of a member of the 'paraiyar' community as an insider respectively.

Case one:

Most of the Gods and Goddesses of the "High Culture" of the Tamils of Sri Lanka are artists in nature but it's rare to see them playing Parai or carrying them in their hands or shoulders. It is within



this context that the painting of "Pillaiyar Parai" by Kamala Vasuki makes a stand as one of the artistic protests in the cultural history of resistance against caste oppressions.

Pillaiyar the Artist God of the Tamils came out from his Temple and plays the Parai Mela Kooththu with the traditional drum player. Scripture says that the paraiyar community is barred from entering into a Pillayar Temple.

This depiction of Pillaiyar playing the parai aroused strong reactions among those who attended the exhibition. Lord Pillaiyar is a dancer and player of Maththalam or Mirudangam the percussion instrument of the High Culture. Pillaiyar is considered to be the Master of Arts and Knowledge too. So it is not unconceivable to portray Pillaiyar playing the parai. However, there were sentiments expressed along the lines of 'How can Pillaiyar play the Parai?', "Pillayar will not play Parai" and "He can't be depicted like that". These sentiments have their roots in casteism.

Case Two:



Parasuraman of Kaluthavali, Maddakkalappu (Batticaloa), Sri Lanka is a living artist and exponent in Parai Melam and in Parai Mela Kooththu. He is clear and strong in his stand and facing challenges between two opposing and oppressive forces from within and outside.

The people who own the art want to throw it away as a shame on them but people who value the power of the art of Parai and Parai Mela Kooththu are fighting for its survival. Parasuraman is one of those who have fought to preserve the art form between the oppressions of the caste domination and the resistance against the caste oppression.

Section of the Paraiyar community banned the art from its practice and publicly requested, through pamphlets, the wider community not to invite the artists for the services of the social customs. They also declared that those who wish to preserve the art are welcomed to proceed with it while they insisted that they wanted to liberate

themselves from the cursed art of Parai. They argued that they want to liberate the paraiyar community from the intolerable cultural burden of Parai and the associations made with that caste.

Those who banned the art from practice waged violence by damaging and burning the Parai Melam and forced the practicing artists into isolation from their own community in order to achieve their purposes, leaving them in the middle of the river.

The Parai Melam players were forced to engage themselves in doing odd jobs is the outcome of it. Some of them turned to begging too. Section of the artists who were forced to give up their profession returned to their old profession sooner or later for their mere survival.

Sections of the educated people from the Government and Non Governmental sector and students from Higher Education Institutions are directly and indirectly involved in the activity of banning of playing Parai Melam.

What made them to do so? Why are they letting their own caste and creed down in a vulnerable position? What made them feel that begging is far better than playing Parai? What made them throw away the customs that was being practiced for generations? How the customs were designed to make Paraiyar and Parai into a degenerated situation?

How the people who are talking of Tamil Culture, Cultural Identity of Sri Lankan Tamils, National Culture and National Identity of Sri Lankan Tamils will respond to it? Why is an ancient art and the community forced into a crisis situation? Does this affect the community as a whole which is engaged in a national liberation struggle?

Is it a threat to the cultural status of the Sri Lankan Tamils facing existential and identity crisis within a country? How it reflects the state of cultural consciousness of the Sri Lanka Tamil community which engaged in a struggle for self determination? What is the place of a community which is being considered one of the ancient in the history of the Tamils in the cultural formation in socio-cultural politics of the modern period?

How the stake holders of the social development consider the social conflicts particular to local socio cultural contexts?

How the forces that commercialize the life of the people transform an art connected with community life into a commodity for tourist markets respond into this crisis?

Those who cannot overcome the casteism, introduces electronic Parai in Temples. Invention of electronic Parai is not simply an electronic miracle to be excited with but to debate its socio-political and cultural contrivances is unavoidable.

This article concentrates on the role and portrayal of the character of Parai Araivon (Drummer) in Kooththu, the traditional theatre of the Tamils of Sri Lanka.

The traditional portrayal of Parai Araivon is always a problematic issue in the Kooththu space. There are stories of conflicts, clashes and compromises always part and parcel of the history of Kooththu.

The Paraiyar caste is always against the traditional portrayal of Parai Araivon in Kooththu. Why the Paraiyar community is against the portrayal of Parai Araivon in Kooththu?

The understanding of the structure of performance of Parai Araivon in Kooththu performance will help us in this regard.

The arrival or appearance onto the 'kalari' (round stage), the introduction of himself to the spectators, interaction with the 'Annaviyar', his performance to the spectators around the 'kalari' and the exit are clearly exposes the politics of artistic creation of the character of Parai Araivon.

Parai Araivon is drunkard and deformed, Articulates unparliamentarily words, making obscene gestures and body languages, clothed in drags, careless with his professional instrument and finally a visible illiterate are the highlighted qualities denotes the character.

The literature composed for the Parai Araivon is the written evidence of my argument and the performance dialogue between the Mathalam playing Annaviyar and Parai Araivon is more intoxicated

than the written one and it differs to area to area. There are two texts for the character of Parai Araivon one is the written one and the other oral.

The beat systems of his dances and the notations of his songs are also set to meet the characteristics of Parai Araivon including his spoken words in the text and the improvised.

The role of Parai Araivon is not played by the person from Parayar caste but from a person particularly an experienced one from the community which is performing the kooththu will play that role. There is no place for people from other castes particularly from the oppressed.

The construction of Parai Araivon character is totally against the will of the Paraiyar community and it's also used to attack other castes too.

Why the character of Parai Araivon is constructed in a way not acceptable to the Parayar caste? Who is responsible for this type of construction and what is the purpose behind it? How are we going to reason out this act aesthetically or politically? What is the politics behind the construction of Parai Araivon?

The other question is, is it reasonable to perform the character of Parai Araivon in the traditional way? There are two sides for it. One is stick to maintain the tradition and the other is refused to accept it and demand a change on it or total rejection of that character from Kooththu.

If the Kooththu as an art form needs comic element, it is the responsibility of the artists of the communities to introduce a character free of caste negations.

There are possibilities of creating comic characters from the art and literatures of the Tamils from the historic period. 'Komali' is an appropriate replacement which is the missing element in Kooththu but a cultural feature of Sri Lankan Tamils.

There are possibilities of manipulating the Parai Araivon character in a way positive to theatre and society. The character of Parai Araivon would be utilized to create dialogues between actors and spectators in theatre.

'Mooppar' is a term to denote the chieftain of Parayar caste. The term is also denotes a person who guides the events and ceremonies from the front. 'Mooppukku Nitral' is a popular usage means "guiding from the front". 'Mooppar' is also has a negative connotation which depicts the dominating characteristics ('ivar periya mooppar'). Generally people with knowledgeable and manageable capacities are considered or recognized with this term. In brief she is Master of ceremonies.

The possibilities of transforming the character of Parai Araivon parallel to Bolian "Joker" is discussed extensively and explored. Parai Araivon could be an appropriate replacement for Bolian "Joker." It will provide a new perspective not only to the character of Parai Araivon but also to the caste issue.

Transformation of a negatively constructed character that does the part of an announcer or messenger into an animator or mediator is an important program in the process of Reformulation of Kooththu as an organic form of Community Theatre.

All the above mentioned reasons, questions, challenges, possibilities have guided to engage in the issue of Parai into a reformulation process. The importance is given to collectivity in creation and expression, direct interactions, social gatherings which are the essence of Kooththu.

Reformulation of Kooththu as an organic form of Community Theatre is an activism in order to revive these features which are lost in the e.world and the basic

The joker is the director/ master of ceremonies of a TO workshop or performance. In Forum Theatre, the joker sets up the rules of the event for the audience, facilitates the spectators' replacement of the protagonist, and sums up the essence of each solution proposed in the interventions. The term derives from the joker (or wild card) in a deck of playing cards: just as the wild card is not tied down to a specific suit or value, neither is the TO joker tied down to an allegiance to performer, spectator, or any one interpretation of events. Also used as a verb, "to joke."

(Source: Playing with Boal)

requirements for a sustainable world full of sustainable communities connected by sisterhood.

There are critiques to this stand point from the section of the Paraiyar community itself and raising the reasonable question towards Third Eye, "Why are you imposing the rejected art upon us and why not make it for others. We want to get rid of this cursed art which spoiled our generations of life. Its enough of the reward the society gave to us for generations." Third Eye is always sensitive to critiques and questions in order to make the journey on an appropriate path.

In order to meet the demands and challenges, the Reformulation process is extended to deconstruct the traditional portrayal of Parai Araivon and recreated the character with a new dimension.

The Reformulation of Parai Arivon is a continuous process but the first phase took four months to reformulate the traditional character of Parai Araivon.

Thirdeye invited traditional drummers and Annaviyars (the masters of kooththu), the traditional theatre performers from different villages and styles (vadamody and thenmody), people engaged in people's art and its politics, interested people from the University to the activist movements, men and women experts of traditional arts in the villages and the villagers of Seelamunai.

Issues were introduced to the open forum and discussed in groups, seminars organized in the open spaces under the palm trees, initiated forum theatre, enacted improvised plays, invited speakers related on the issues, interacting with different activists groups working with marginalized people, stimulate the participants to express their views other than oral communication such as articles, poems, stories, illustrations and paintings. The creative expressions were published and publicized through exhibitions and performances.

Mini libraries with fictions and non -fictions on related issues and audio visual spaces were created in the houses of Seelamunai, Batticaloa and introduced with feature and documentary film screenings followed by discussions, improvisations and forum theatre practices, elders were connected with children and youths to get the oral stories of the issues and every kind of possible ways and means were innovated to stimulate dialogues.

Special attention was paid to the position of women in the oppressed side to get their stories. These unread or unheard stories narrate the tragedies how women were affected because of the humiliation experienced by their men in the public and professional spaces and how it reflects within their huts.

The above process had provided an environment to realize the importance of deconstruction and recreation of the character of Parai Araivon. It is the key point in the process of reformulation. The question or demand for a change must arise from the participants.

The process of transformation was made in a way to achieve a positive result. The ways and means were analyzed to bringing in appropriate beat systems and movements for the new portrayal of the character. Various suggestions were put forwarded to make the positive change in the portrayal of the Parai Araivon character. One is to borrow elements from Parai Mela Kooththu and the possibilities were tried out in open forums with Parai Melam players and Annaviyars.

The possibilities of executing the instrument like in Parai Melam Dance performance also tried out and incorporated instead of symbolic beating of the drum in the traditional way. Application of this element enriches the aesthetic valour of the character and the Kooththu too. It was appreciated in the open forum and accepted that this also will give another space to preserve and exhibit the power of Parai in a different way.

In the process of the reformulation of Parai Araivon, one Annaviyar intervened with another idea and it was unanimously accepted and acted out. He said instead of bringing in elements from Parai Mela Kooththu its better just change the same beat system designed for the Parai Araivon in a fast mode. This change had brought a dignified stature to the character and the execution of the instrument to the new beat system added strength to it.

The Parai Melam exponent Parasuraman had provided with songs from their oral histories and expressed his views for the composition of songs for the transformed character of 'Mooppar'.

History and literary studies, oral stories, views of people from various strata was conceived into the process of reformulation to

transform the character Parai Araivon into 'Mooppar' The creation of "Mooppar" as character in place of Parai Araivon and character cum facilitator in Kooththu performances away from ritual spaces are the results of this Reformulation process.

It's a great opportunity to make the issue of Parai and Paraiyar in a collective space like kooththu (traditional theatre) in order to make it as a social issue. Taking up the issue of Parai Aravon and reformulate it in Kooththu space is not only an aspect of reformulation of a character. It's a medium to initiate a discourse in an artistic way and collectively on a depressive issue.

Even though the Reformulation process is an open forum but the public performances and interactions will be given an important place to assess the reflection of the people.

But it's a never ending process and a continuous journey.

Soon after the completion of the Reformulation process of Parai Araivon one of the senior Annaviyar and long term participant of the Reformulation of Kooththu process expressed his satisfaction of the Reformulation of the character but voiced his reservation on the possibilities of bringing in the character of Parai Araivon with the 'kolu', the arrival of main characters such as King, Queen, Prime Minister, Commander in Chief in a group. He exclaimed that 'people will not accept it.'

This dialogue opened up another door in the journey of Reformulation of Kooththu process. There are no evidences of Parai Arivon with the 'kolu' in Kooththu. Interviews with Annaviyars and the local experts on Kooththu and the search in literary texts provide nothing but the next phase of Reformulation process in Kooththu.

Traditional Drums of Up Country Tamil of Sri Lanka!

Thappu is the dying art of the Up Country Tamils!!!

People are shy to identify with this vibrant art which connects them with their life cycles because it's the art of the oppressed.

But few people are aware of its importance and working on it to reformulate it to connect people who are disintegrated by the electronic media culture of the Corporate World.



DRUM OF A HERALD

Collection of articles

Let's depend on our knowledge,
Let's depend on our skills.
Let's sow in our fields,
Let's live on our yields.
Let's awake by removing
Living practices that control.
Let's revive
Ways of living in harmony
With environment.

S.Jeyasankar

(Translated By: S.M Felix)



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