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Sinhala Stage Drama from Maname to Bava Kadathurawa

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Sinhala Dramaturgy, once again fell into an indifferent state. During the time Prof. Sarachchandra examined whether there is a local form of theatre through which the consent of the Sinhala audience could be broaden. As a result, in 1952 *Pabavathie* which was based on the Jataka Tale of *Kusa* was produced. It was not a blend of both stylistic and naturalistic dramatic characteristics. Even though it was not a successful production, Prof. Sarachchandra got some understanding how to develop the Sinhala dramaturgy after producing *Pabavathie*. Further, he understood that a local form of Sinhala Drama cannot be created within the limitations of naturalistic tradition of theatre. Therefore, with the influence of *Nadagam*, another form of Sinhala Drama which was once popular among the Sinhala audience, he produced *Maname* in 1956. *Maname* was a significant breakthrough and a turning point in the history of the Sinhala Theatre. It presented many a significant elements which needed to be a successful drama.

Maname was based on the Jathaka Tale called *Chulla Dhanuddara*. Sarachchandra identified the dramatic qualities of the Jathaka Tale and made some amendments to the basic story when writing *Maname*. He selected prince *Maname*, princess and the king of Veddha as the major characters through which to depict a meaningful interpretation on the interrelationships among the human beings. In *Maname*, the playwright, instead of being confined to the traditional concept of women's capriciousness, deeply analyzed the nature of their mentality. He depicted the conflict among the prince *Maname*, the princess and the *Veddha* King and the conflict within the mind of the princess herself. It was also explained that a drama should consist of a deeper theme which goes beyond the traditional outward appearance of audio-visual forms. It also demonstrated his capability in making use of the dance and the music of the drama in an effective manner instead of keeping them just as external elements for the amusement. The success of *Maname* was also caused by the lyrical quality of the language, stage decorations and make up which were applied in an appropriate manner. *Maname* could be appreciated not only in the dramatic view point but also in the literary view point due to its

theme which reveals a well developed contrast between barbarity and civility, craving and virtue, which contributed to the success of the drama.

After that, Sarachchandra produced many dramas based on Jataka Tales and Buddhist stories.

In the dramas, *Raththaran* (1958) and *Elova Gihin Melowa Awa* (1959), elements found in *Thovil* ceremonies were included. The Drama *Elova gihin Melowa Awa* discusses the worth of humanity. It means that the human beings cling to their own desires even for momentary self amusement. Moreover, he produced *Kadawalalu* and *Hasthikantha Manthare* in 1959 and *Vella Vahum* in 1960. The drama *Hasthikantha Manthare* had been influenced by the Sanskrit and Chinese dramaturgy. *Ekata Mata Hina Hina* which was staged in 1961 was based on *Kalagola* story of Jataka Tale *Ummagga*. It presents a conflict arises when two contrasting people work together. Furthermore, in 1968 he produced *Mahasara* and in 1969 *Pematho Jayathi Soko* which was based on the story *Swarnathilaka* in *Saddharmalankaraya*.

Sinhabahu staged in 1962 is the most successful drama during the period. It clearly depicted Sarachchandra's view towards life through this drama. The drama was based on the story of genesis of the Sinhalese which comes in the chronicle called *Mahavamsa*. The conflict between the major characters of the drama *Sinhaya*, *Suppa Devi* and *Sinhabahu* conveys a Vital message to the contemporary social life. The inevitable consequences of the generation gap were discussed in the drama. Therefore, its theme was broader and contemporary than that of *Maname*. It was due to the fact that *Sinhabahu* lacked much of dramatic elements and concentration that found in *Maname*. The characteristics of *Sinhabahu* were more of an audio poetry than of a visual poetry. Hence, the amusement by listening and reading is higher than by watching.

This drama caused to arouse evocation among the young dramatists. However, afterwards the young dramatists produced a number of dramas which were not up to that standard due to the inclusion of folk dramatic elements such as *Nadagam*, *Kolam* and *Sokari* because they might have misunderstood Prof. Sarachchandra's dramatic approach. Even the drama, *Nari bena* of Dayanada Gunawardana which was popular during that period was also not up to standard in its theme.

Since the critiques criticized such stylized dramas, young dramatists once again paid their attention on the naturalized dramas. They were mostly guided by *Muhudu Puththu* written by Gunasena Galappaththi and Mahagamasekara. *Muhudu Puththu*, semi stylized drama was an adaptation of Yerma of the Spanish playwright, Garcia Lorca. It is a story about a woman who had a keen interest in having a child and its subject matter is much more similar to the story of *Yerma*. Galappaththi's *Muhudu Puththu*

was a more successful drama. Galappaththi had been already well known by the audience and the critics for his *Sanda Kinduru Natakaya* in 1957 which was lightened by the style called *kavi Nadagama*. Even though his later productions *Devatha Eli* (1963) and *Desa Nisa* (1964) were not successful, *Liyathambara* (1967) was a successful drama attained the public attention.

Henry Jayasena First came to known from his drama *Janelaya* in 1961. Although his stylized drama *kuveni* (1963) was based on a legendary story, the subject matters of his later productions were contemporary social issues such as youth unrest, unemployment and labour problems. For example, *Thawath Udasanak* (1964), *Manaranjana Veda Varjana* and *Apata Putha Magak Nethe* (1968) were significant. His *Ahas Maliga* staged in 1966 was based on a drama *Glass Menagerie* of the American playwright, Tennessee Williams. Later he produced *Hunu Wataye Kathawa* and *Diriya Mawa saha Ege Daruwo* with reference to Bertold Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *Mother Courage and Her Children* respectively. He utilized naturalistic dramatic style in both these dramas casting the style used by Brecht.

Sugathapala de Silva's dramas which were based on work of European playwrights as well as self-experience were popular among the public. He discussed the matters such as labour problems, livelihood problems of the law middle class and the social life of the slums through his own works; for example, *Bodinkarayo* (1962) *Thattu Geval* (1964), *Hele Negga Doon Putha* (1966), *Nilkatrol Mal* (1967), *Hitha Honda Ammandi* (1969), *Harima Badu Hayak* (1965), *Dunna Dunugamuwe* (1972), and *Thuranga Sanniya* (1975) can be mentioned. *Kelani Palama* of R.R. Samarakoon which was popular among the contemporary audience, discussed the problems faced by the people live on the banks of *Kelani* River due to floods. Even though it was a popular drama, due to the inclusion of two-edged words, its dramatic quality decreased and on the other hand it influenced dreadfully to the later dramas.

Suba saha Yasa of Saimon Navagaththegana which was based on a historical story caused for arousing a keen interest in naturalistic dramaturgy among the Sinhala spectators. Compared to the naturalistic drama in the first epoch, the significance of the drama in the second epoch is that the stories had been woven around purposive and complex issues encountered within the society. This quality could even be found in translated and adapted dramas.

It seemed that whilst the naturalistic dramas were staged on, Some dramatists turned to wards the theatre of absurd which was popular in Europe. Moreover, some of them produced dramas with the translated and adapted stories and also some produced their own dramas. The approach of the absurd drama in the Sinhala theatre was with the

production of *Godo Enakan* by J. Selwadorei in 1967. It was an adaptation of 'Waiting for Godot' written by the French playwright, Samuel Beckett. After that, several young dramatists produced dramas out of translations, adaptations and also their own creations utilizing the absurd style. Among those, *Kora saha Andaya* by Dharmasena Pathiraja was more popular. This drama which was woven around an incident come across in the Sinhala literature was produced by Dhamma Jagoda. Many dramas performed in early 70s were lightened by the absurd style. Sinhala audience experienced the dramatic style of Bertold Brecht through his popular drama called *Three Penny Opera* which was produced under the name *Pensa Thune Kathawa* by Vijitha Gunarathne in 1982.

We should pay our special attention on the two dramas i.e. *Vessanthara* and *Lomahansa* produced by Prof. Ediriweera Sarachchandra in 1980s. *Vessanthara* was staged in 1980 and it was based on the Jataka Tale Known as *Vessanthara*. Prof. Sarachchandra tried to uplift altruism which is in need today and to boycott the egoism. Further, he boosted up the idea that *Vessanthara* is also a human being even though he gave up not only his wealth but his wife and children also by donating them as alms giving. In Order to bring out this idea, he prepared the Jataka Tale in a dramatic form. According to the Jataka Tale, he gave up everything in order to achieve the perfection in endowment, but in the drama he opened the royal treasury due to his condolence seeing the livelihood problems and grievances of the people. However it was not a long term solution for the problems faced by the people because they soon fell into the same miserable situation.

Even though the audience watching *Vessanthara* Jataka Tale deeply sympathizes, they did not do so watching prof. Sarachchandra's *Vessanthara*, A Story gradually becomes a drama due to its dramatic incidents. Yet, in *Vessanthara*, the sole dramatic scene could be found in the occasion where the *Jujaka Bamuana* meets king *Vessanthara*. However, neither the conflict between the two nor the conflict within the king *Vessanthara* himself had been effectively built. The effective character representation of *Mandri Devi* who is with the qualities of unblemished chastity and deep rooted affection towards the children found in the Jataka Tale had become a vain and futile character in the drama. *Mandri Devi's* confront with the King *Vessanthara* soon after the children were given to *Jujaka Bamuana* was an emotional scene. Yet, in the drama *Vessanthara* this scene has also been presented in an ineffective manner. *Vessanthara* is low in its standard which depicts Sarachchandra's feeble intellectuality.

In 1985, *Kiri Muttiya Gange Giya* which was a naturalistic drama was produced by Sarachchandra. It was based on a theme subject to several recently produced dramas. It is about a family which breaks up as a

result of flying Middle East for the purpose of future betterment of the life. The beginning of the drama as well as representation of some centralized scenes bound with the progression of the drama seemed unnatural.

Weak Points found in the script had caused to weaken the artistic quality as well as to reduce the worth of the drama. The dramatist was unable to avoid the defects of the script because the production is weaker too. It was clearly depicted through the characters of the drama due to the fact that the unity of a rural family and the inter-relationship among the family members were not exposed either through characters or scenes.

His drama *Loma Hansa* was based on the Jataka Tale *Maha Paduma Jatakaya*. The dramatic representation was brought out though the characters *king Brahmadaththa*, his second queen and the son of the first queen. Once when the king was out of the royal palace, the queen tried to induce the prince for an illicit relationship. Since her attempt failed, She aspersed on the prince. The King, being disgusted by the Queen's words, killed the son. Then, distraught Queen due to the death of the Prince committed suicide. Through this drama, Sarachchandra directs our attention towards the woman's temperament. It can be mentioned that the other subordinate characters i.e. king and the prince were used to bring out this message. The Queen's character had been developed according to the principles of the Buddhist concepts on the psychology. It also evidently depicts that defilements of the human beings drag them towards the destruction. Even though *Vessanthara* is a weaker production, it seems that *Loma Hansa* is a more successful work.

Bava Kadathurawa could be considered Ediriweera Sarachchandra's final significant drama. It was first produced in 1990. This drama was based on the Jataka Tale *Swarna Hansa*. It describes the lost chance that was to be obtained the golden leaves due to the excessive avarice. It discusses how the excessive avarice causes for the destruction of the human being. However, without being confined to the role of adviser, the dramatist's effort to depict a humanitarian issue in a deep and complex manner was successful. It is also admirable the way he has presented the behaviour of the Brahmin woman.

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(සුඛ සහ යස නාට්‍යය පිළිබඳ විග්‍රහයක්)

මහාචාර්ය මංගලිකා ජයතුංග

සයිමන් නවගත්තේගමගේ සුඛ සහ යස නාට්‍යය වේදිකාගත කරන ලද්දේ 1974 මැයි 15 වන දා ය. ඒ වෙනුවෙන් මුද්‍රණය කරන ලද සමරු කලාපයේ නාට්‍යය නිෂ්පාදනය කිරීමේ අරමුණු දෙකක් සඳහන් කළ බව නාට්‍යය කෘතියේ ගෙවන මුද්‍රණයට ඔහු විසින් සපයා ඇති පෙරවදනෙහි සඳහන් වේ. "විජ්ජවීය අවස්ථාවකින් තොර ව විජ්ජවයක් නො වන්නේ ය. සෑම විජ්ජවීය අවස්ථාවක් ම විජ්ජවයකින් කෙළවර වන්නේ ය යන සිද්ධාන්තයෙහි නිරවද්‍යතාව පිරික්සීම" එක අරමුණකි. "ඓතිහාසික අවස්ථාවේ සීමාවන් හා පුද්ගල කේන්ද්‍රීය හේතු නිසා අසාර්ථක වූ විජ්ජව ව්‍යාපාරයක් කලා නිර්මාණයකින් කෙසේ නිරූපණය කළ හැකි ද?" යන්න දෙවැනි අරමුණ යි. නාට්‍යයෙන් මෙම අරමුණු දෙක ඉෂ්ට වන්නේ කෙසේ ද? යන්නත් පොදුවේ නාට්‍යය පිළිබඳ විග්‍රහයක් කිරීමත් මෙම ලිපියෙන් අපේක්ෂා කෙරේ.

1974 දී මෙම නාට්‍යය මුල් වරට වේදිකාගත කරන විට 1971 අප්‍රේල් කැරැල්ල හටගෙන වසර තුනක් ඉක්මවා ගොස් තිබිණි. විජ්ජවීය අවස්ථාවකින් තොරවීම නැතහොත් විජ්ජවීය අවස්ථාවක් දක්වා මෝදු වීමට පදනම සැපයීමට නොහැකි වීම එම කැරැල්ලේ අසාර්ථකත්වයට තුඩු දුන් හේතු අතර මුඛ්‍යතම හේතුවක් විය. 1974 කාල වකවානුව අප්‍රේල් කැරැල්ල පිළිබඳ විවිධ සාකච්ඡා, සම්පරීක්ෂණ හා ගවේෂණ සිදුවෙමින් පැවති කාලයක් ද විය. එහෙයින් ඓතිහාසික වෘත්තාන්තයක් පසුබිම් කොට තත්කාලීන දේශපාලන වාතාවරණය විග්‍රහ කිරීම නාට්‍යකරුවාගේ සැබෑ අභිප්‍රාය වන්නට ඇත. සැබෑ විජ්ජවීය අවස්ථාවක් විජ්ජවයකින් අවසන් වේය යන්න මාක්ස් ලෙනින්වාදී සමාජ දෘෂ්ටියකි. ඒ අනුව ද ප්‍රත්‍යක්ෂ වන්නේ 71 කැරැල්ල සැබෑ විජ්ජවීය අවස්ථාවක දියත් නොකෙරුණු බව යි. 71 කැරැල්ල සහ සුඛ සහ යස නාට්‍යයේ අන්තර්ගත කැරැල්ල අතර නාට්‍යකරුවා දුටු සාමාන්‍ය කුමක් ද යි විමර්ශනය කළ යුතු ය. නාට්‍යයෙහි කැරැල්ල සාර්ථක වෙයි. කැරැල්ලෙහි සෘජු ප්‍රතිඵලයක් ලෙස නොවූණ ද කරලි නායකයාට රාජ්‍යප්‍රාප්ත වීමට අවස්ථාව පෑදේ. එහෙත් නාට්‍ය අවසන් වන්නේ පොදු මහජනයා අතර වැඩෙමින් ආ විජ්ජවීය අරමුණ සාක්ෂාත් නොවන බව පසක් කරවමිනි. එහෙයින් 71 කැරැල්ලට සාධාරණ වූ පූර්වෝක්ත සිද්ධාන්තය සුඛ සහ යස නාට්‍යයේ කැරැල්ලට ද අත්වූයේ යැයි නාට්‍යකරුවා අදහස් කළා විය හැකි ය. එසේ ද වුව සුඛ සහ යස මගින් සාක්ෂාත් වන්නේ නවගත්තේගමගේ දෙවන අරමුණ බව