

An investigative Analysis of Sophocles' King Oedipus on Modern Sri Lankan Stage

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Introduction

Tragedies in Classical Greece had been performed in the open air theater in a festive atmosphere of dramatic competition. The audience consisted of citizens and visitors to the city. They had a prior knowledge of the story line of the myth that represented the history and religion of the Greeks. The poets, their techniques as well as the basis of interpretation given by the individual tragedians to traditional material were also known knowledge or easily understood by the audience. The theatre culture they were experiencing had prepared them to receive the messages given. Though some according to their level of intelligence saw only the superficial or the topical, others managed to seek out the universal.

A researcher finds himself confronted with the question of how and why these classical tragedies appeal, impress and influence the modern world. The difference of time, place and culture are obvious. But dramas do not enjoy the value they used to enjoy as a mode of mass communications. Modern technology had presented the world with much effective methods of communication.

To arrive at a conclusive answer it is necessary to investigate the nature and development of classical tragedies performed on the global as well as the local stage.

A short history of the development would serve as a background to the core of the investigation, which is the analysis of a popular Greek tragedy adapted for the local stage in the modern period. Critical analysis will be based on personal observation made with a critical distance, survey of interviews and critical reviews.

1.Global Perspective

- **Adaptation and translation of classical Greek Drama.**

One could never refer to a poem in the past tense. It was not. And will not be. A composition is inimitably an action that is being accomplished. The word is uttered and the thought is developed. A poem is being composed and recomposed in reading it. Therefore its reality is eternal. It lives concretely in the act of composing it. (Gentile, 1972, p. xxxii)

A poem could never lose its spirituality by becoming an absolute and a static objectivity. If it did, it would become unknowable and negate the position of the mind. There would neither be a historical reality in the past. Reality would always be in the present. When one reads the works of an author he comes alive and new life is given to him each time. Therefore every epoch, every person who reads him would create something different in the very act of thinking. Facts in the past would gain life instead of being an abstraction in the self consciousness of the reader. (Ibid, p. xxxiii)

Readers love and honor poets through their gratitude but it is through them that the poets come in to possession of their world. They would be, through them, rediscovering themselves. They would advance with each effort, elevated higher, producing more sentiments, intense and more vivid. (Ibid, p. 208)

Art becomes immortal because it expresses a subjectivity which is infinite. The subjectivity referred to would not be the mere human being but the whole of humanity itself represented by that individual. The universal reached through the particular. The soul embodied in the creation would be the immortal soul incarnate in every human work and which pulses in every man's heart. (Ibid, p. 262). A mortal body may perish with time. A manuscript could be lost or destroyed. But the soul that lives in the creation is what animates the surviving works of art and makes an impact and stirs the hearts of man, even in the future. This makes possible the resurrection of artistic individualities that are believed to be lost but yet may be brought back to life. Hence their soul with all the beauty may not be lost. A single line found from an early era could therefore inspire and instigate the soul and spirit of an interpreter. The powerful echo energized through out the years would be that of the voice and soul of the artist that once existed.

It also may be argued that although the elements of art could be mortal i.e. – the subject matter, technique and thought, it would always be immortal in the feeling that it generates. It is the feeling that gives it life. It is in the feelings that the subject matter is absorbed and transformed, as it is impossible to distinguish form from matter in a work of creative literature. (Ibid, p.263) One could never consider one was mortal and the other was not. When a person appreciates the beauty of the art, each word, thought

or technique would dissolve in to the spirit and soul of the ultimate out come. It will all join to make the ultimate impact as it is the conscience that one would seek to address.

In translation one might reduce or add to the original feelings that were intended to be imparted. Substituting one language to another would not be to substitute one feeling for another. One would use art to construct another work of art. But one is to take note that every poet has his own language and his own words inspired by his own soul. The translator would have to create a positive output that harmonizes with all the organs. Therefore it is almost impossible to represent the exact original. The feelings have to be transported through the change of language. For feelings represented in art is something that seeks unceasing rebirth. This rebirth is of spirit and it is in it and for it that it lives. (Ibid, p. 218)

The required expression would develop one step at a time through the work as it is developed, completed, transformed, fulfilled and transfigured. The words would thereby take on a new deeper meaning. It will no longer be the word it was. It will be a new word, since it had been transplanted in to a new language. When one arrives at the recognition that every translation is only a further development of the original, one may rest that it might not be lost or deteriorate the original work of art. Nor would it be a substitution of one work for another. A good translation will not hinder but provide new life to the feelings evoked. Hence the right to translate would rest on more solid ground. It would make the work universal. It would provide diversity and in traversing and completing a circle it would return from diversity to identity.

Art, even in translation provides unity. For the creation communicates to the reader the personality and emotions to the artist. In feeling one could be united though not may be in thought. It is when every possible element is interpreted and all the scattered parts are united that one may feel the life in the work and become united with it. It is through absolute transparency that one may feel the glory and the elevation it may provide. (Ibid, p. 219)

In considering modern productions of drama or performing arts in general, spectators are often separate in space, and time. They would be at times even separate from each other, since they have been trained by the modern television to enjoy art by themselves as individuals. In such instances spectators would be inactive consumers of a prepackaged product. Even in the theater spectators could become just ticket buying individuals. (Sommerstein, 2004, p.5) Though on occasions, the audience could be associated with a sub community such as a university or school, dramas are not normally

considered to be of central importance to the art of theater or to the society in which they were performed. This is in contrast to the position that dramas held in classical Greece.

Hence it becomes difficult to observe Greek drama in the perspective of modern drama. Modern drama attracted those who sought to spend leisure time for entertainment or to break away from the monotony of the daily routine. But in the performance culture that existed in the classical Greece, drama had been some thing intimate which was connected to the lives of the audience.

To modern man drama is something that he could take or leave out of his life there are also many options for entertainment. I.e. – The television, cinema, video etc. (France,1993, p.107) It is also note worthy that when considering plays a person has to be mindful that they are

- Conditioned by their environment.
 - Every age creates dramatists.
 - They represent the existing age in most cases
 - And that there is also a few who write and produce for some visionary theater of the future.
- (Arnott ,2003,p.2)

Storey and Avlence (2005, p.8) expresses the view that when considering classical drama on modern stage the distance in time and culture has to be taken in to account. At times there would also exist the problem of the loss of concrete evidence of production. The reason is that the texts that one deals with could be nearly more than two thousand and five hundred years old, far removed from the modern world. The difference in language and the feeling that the originals were produced for on audience with cultural assumptions would prove a challenge. Restrictions upon his art imposed by the nature of the space available would also test the imagination of the modern dramatis who opts to produce classical Greek drama.

1.2. Revival and implication

According to Mc Donald (1992, p.21) drama could be described and defined as a creative art that is represented through performing. The enchantment and enjoyment a spectator experiences in the theater is a direct result of the drama performed by actors on stage. While it is a collaborative mode of production the reception is also of a collective form. Hence the success of a play depends on and is

influenced by the collective effort and the collective reception. It is a joint venture that involves many a talent and temperament.

Greek drama represents the western classical world and has interested and attracted academics from a very early stage. But when investigating the reasons for these great plays to be still alive and relevant, one is led to observe the difference of values attached to it according to the various stages of aesthetic, social, political and religious dimensions. The above study is confronted with the multiple flavors Greek drama has gained by the shifting of the art from one culture to another and from one period to another without losing its original identity as a creative production. In this the practical outcome is the classics reaching over the limitations of a classroom of higher studies to a wider audience. And this enables the dramatist to revive classical drama and interpret the texts to address wider issues that concern relevant contemporary issues. (Ibid, P. 1, 2)

Greek drama stepped over the limitations with time through human intelligence and imagination. Hence they became complex artistic creations which reached the audience through aesthetic communication. This communication took place between the spectator and the totality of the stage spectacle. (Gramatas, 2002)

The ancient heritage of the west that concerns Greek drama had not been directly transported or transferred from the productions of the ancient amphitheaters to the contemporary modern stage. They had been accomplished through artistic philosophical and theatrical interpretations that had developed and expressed throughout Europe.

Greek tragedy for the Sri Lankan audience.

In the Twenty first century Sri Lanka, the Classical Greek tragedies that have been adapted into Sinhala have become extremely popular among the audiences. Hence it is highly appropriate that an in-depth investigation of adaptations of Classical Greek tragedies (5th BCE) on modern Sri Lankan stage be carried out. The purpose would be to understand the position and extent of influence generated from them on Sri Lanka in the twenty first century. The intention of this paper is to examine a selected production and observe its impact on current society. The selection was made through the popularity the play enjoyed and criticisms it evoked from the audience. A survey of available literature, a series of interviews and personal observations provided material as evidence. The findings are as follows.

1. King Oedipus

1.1. Observations made by researcher on the staging of 'king Oedipus' on the Sri Lankan stage.

Director - Priyankara Rathnayake.

Observations and questions that arise on watching the staging of **king Oedipus** of Priyankara Rathnayake could be recognized as follows. Particularly the members who are familiar with the classics may notice these innovations.

- The **three black clad hooded figures** introduced on stage at the start and the end of the play provokes speculation. One tends to wonder who they were. To the members of the audience this innovation may not be clear enough. I.e. The questions – a) Were they fates? B) Did they represent some sort of curse or c) Were they symbolic of doom? May arise in their minds. Black in the Sri Lankan cultural context is not represented as a positive color.
- The **use of the color white for all costumes** may look strange to members who are familiar with traditional Greek dramas. Greek tragedy had specific colors for types of characters based on their state, mood and social context which were recognizable at once by the audience on their first appearance. The color of the costumes told a story in it self. The audience who were not familiar with the Greek traditional colors may have found white effective. They would have found it more striking since the color had a certain cultural significance. White to the Sri Lankan audience meant moaning, being sober, serious as well as indicative of religion symbolizing universal truth. To the Greeks gloom and distress were represented by grey, brown and black.
- Unlike in the original Greek play **King Oedipus**, the character Oedipus in the Sinhala play is shown as **being very familiar and close to the chorus of suppliants**. He is shown as moving among the crowd, sitting with them etc. almost similar to a politician in a modern day democracy seeking the ultimate vote at elections. But a question arises regarding this interpretation of the tragic hero. For in the original play

Oedipus regards himself as the father figure, the savior of the nation although he does love his citizens. He is well aware of his leadership and his position. One tends to wonder does this pose a problem to the height that the hero falls from, at the end of the tragedy?

- The scene regarding Tiresias and Creon is aptly portrayed to display the state of the king's mind. The intense anger not only as a man but as a Politician who intends to do well but is rejected and offended is beautifully portrayed. The reaction of a ruler when he feels that his position is threatened and consequently the manner he acts on the defensive is well presented. The Psychological state of the character is made to analyze by the audience since the deeper question traverses the boundaries of time and place and has a universal appeal.
- The audience is made to participate in the actions of the play through their minds. They are made to get involved with the situation and emotions. The portrayal of the character of Jocasta in the production and the shades given to her in the acting process is effective and interesting. Her character shines through not only in her relationship with her husband Orestes but with her brother Creon as well. This is done through **voice projection and tone management as well as gestures and mannerisms**. She is shown as a strong influence on both the lives of the main characters. It seems to be her love for both of them and her femininity that had control over them. She seems to be projected as superior to the men emotionally and is shown as a sensitive and a mature woman. This is well portrayed in the scene where Creon and Oedipus argue and Jocasta is compelled to intervene. The tension is built up to almost a level of physical violence but her very femaleness acts as a calming influence. The scene invites audience reaction to the utmost. The tension amounts to being tangible. This impact was observed even among an audience mainly consisting of school children with a minimum knowledge of classical studies.
- Regarding the relationship between Oedipus and Jocasta, the interpretation on stage seems to reach perfectness. The **emotional hold she has on the king** is shown through the tender, almost motherly love, sending shock waves through the audience who are aware of the truth. Even the physical contact they display through the

gestures helps to convey this feeling. Hence, to the section of the audience who do not know the story, the discovery later on may prove all the more shocking. The acting shows their intimacy and the affection shown by a mature woman to her younger lover. Although she is not the official ruler, she displays her authority and never for a moment let the audience forget her position.

- The scene where Joscata and Orestes disagree with each other is quite strong in the text - even when reading it. But Priyankara had elevated the depiction to a master stroke without diverting from the **original scene by making Jocasta slap Oedipus**. The very act plays on human emotions in a very subtle manner. Immediate unanimous reaction from the audience by sucking in their breath through shock and surprise told much regarding the electricity in the atmosphere.
- The slap also indicates that this is not only a king and his queen that the poet was bringing into life. But it is a man and women married to each other and intimate enough to fight at an intimate level. The audience is made to participate emotionally and also to weigh their sympathy towards the relevant characters. The relationship however is not a relationship established for convenience. Their hearts seemed to be in involved. This is what makes the play more tragic.
- Hence the audience could well comprehend **Jocasta's reaction of turning her back to the audience at the moment the truth is revealed**. It is symbolic of her effort to turn her back on all that had taken place. She knows that she cannot revoke and amend the past. It is something that has been done and can not be taken back. What she strives at is to save Oedipus from the realization of the truth of his identity and the terrible pain that would accompany it. Even at the last moment it is her protective nature that shines through.
- **The 'Thud', 'Thud' sound after Oedipus had blinded himself** before he appears on stage fills the audience with tension and with trepedition. The **sound and its implication make the audience feel the emotion of the moment**. They are made to realize the inevitable tragic end. And one is made to ask oneself 'was this terrible

tragedy necessary?'It seems to echo the beating of the hearts of each member of the audience.

- The fact that up to the end Oedipus had not sinned knowingly makes the audience ask themselves, irrespective of time or place; can one believe even one's own integrity? It also implies, be they ancients or moderns, they were all mortals. Hence one could not be sure of anything; therefore the individuals in the audience are made to feel the desolation that fell upon Oedipus the king.
- Another observation that one may make is that at the end the **two daughters brought in were too grown for the role**. The helplessness would have been more pointed if they had been considerably young at the face of the death of their mother and the loss of their father. The realization of the fact that they were in fact the children as well as the siblings of a mighty king at one and the same time would have been more effective if they were of an age that they could not comprehend much.
- The **words uttered by Creon to the effect that the rule of Oedipus was now over and that he should now learn to obey should have been uttered when Oedipus resists for a moment, his banishment**. When he is almost driven insane with the suffering and departure and strives to cling on, knowing at the same time that he has to leave. It is then that the words should have been uttered by Creon. The effect would have been like throwing cold water to bring back sanity of mind. Then the inter play of the characters would have been perfect.

But in Priyankara's production the words are uttered when Oedipus turns around and starts walking off the stage. This meant walking out of Thebes. To make Oedipus stop, turn around and listen to the words is almost uncalled for and reflects badly on the character of Creon. It would seem inhuman to do so, something that should have not been done by a leader with humane feelings at that particular moment. The words should have been shown as the automatic reaction to the resistance and the display of Oedipus' habitual stubbornness.

The last scene where Creon is left on stage with the daughters of the unfortunate royal couple, Oedipus and Jocasta **is very effective**. One moment the darling princesses of

Royalty, the next, orphans at the mercy of their uncle. The spot light is used effectively and meaningfully. At the end of the play when the curtain was drawn, there was complete silence in the audience for a couple of minutes, as if to understand and absorb the implication. It was after this that the applauding exploded spontaneously.

The acting was effective as well. The actors had done justice to the roles they were assigned to. This applies even to the minor characters such as the messenger and Sheppard. The chorus was well used, apt and effective for setting of the mood, echoing the action and providing relevant information, becoming a go between the stage and the audience and made one feel that it was a necessary ingredient of the play. It was composed of men and women with the female section given a prominence.

The observation made of the **stage management** is that although the play was staged in an indoor theater, multiple exits and entrances were used by the actors. This reminded one of the facilities available in classical Greece where the acting area included the two sides of the stage, the stairs on both sides of the front of the stage as well as the passages in the auditorium as well.

Props were used to the minimum. The stage setting was seldom changed and was quite simple. Thus the properties do not disturb the concentration. The play was so effective that one would not even notice the set up. The **music and lighting although contributory, were not used to stand out or shine over and above the actions of the play.**

The director had kept faithful to the Greek tradition of non violence on stage. Characters were made to describe what went outside the stage. This made the audience participate in mind without being repulsed at the violence. (*observations made by the researcher at 1st hand on 12th of May 2011*)

Deductions made from the comments by members of the audience

The following information was gathered through interviews made with members of the audience.

A school teacher who was not familiar with the Greek Classics commented that what struck her most was that the whole play struck her as an **undisturbed unity**. She observed that in the particular play there were **no situations, incidents or scenes developed in the modern sense**. The **plot was intense and rapidly developed**. The **concentration of the audience was kept on the action and the dialogue**. **Their minds were kept alert** since they had to follow the rapid movement of the plot. It also **appealed to the heart** as she brought attention to the ability of the play to **command attention of an audience**.

Several members commented regarding the **silence that followed the end of the play**. The silence showed the **tension as well as the impact** it made on the audience, both in heart and mind. They observed this as a positive outcome.

An interesting comment was made by a member **regarding the eyes of Thumindu Dodenthanna the actor who played Oedipus in the particular production**. The actor's **eyes were enormous**. The fact not only enhanced the character but he had also **used them to optimum use**. **The expressions and emotions he had conveyed through them were very touching**. And the fact is highlighted, when he, at the end blinded himself. This is an **advantage that the modern production had over the original**. For in the original masks had been used for visibility purpose of the large audience. The modern play had been staged in an indoor theater where the people seated in the audience could see the expressions on the faces of actors.

The acting of the characters was praised but some comments were made on the stature of Oedipus in two separate occasions where different actors were made to play the role. Some commented that the taller suited the character of the king better. These were mainly comments of the audience who knew their Classics and were disappointed when the character failed to meet the stature that existed in their imagination. A comment by a student of Classical Culture was that she had in her imagination believed a Jocasta bossier. And an Oedipus more distant, arrogant and stately.

Many comments were received regarding the costumes in respect to the choice of color. All costumes were in white. Those who were familiar with the traditional Greek tragedies were confused.

But an individual who was not familiar with classical drama commented that the argument regarding color does not have much ground since many of the locals in the audience were not even aware that such a tradition existed. One even went on to argue that it was more effective. The modern production was not staged in the out side under the sun, but inside in a darkened theater hall. And the impact one receives by the white seems more effective and ceases to be a distraction to the all demanding plot unlike in an open air theater.

Ideas expressed by an art teacher however were a little different. According to her the costumes of the mourning citizens in distress should have been in brown, grey or black. These colors according to her were universally accepted colors that expressed distress. These colors would have been indicative and the visual addition would not have disturbed the serenity of the white. It would add a harmony of a sober variety.

An accountant who was not familiar with Greek myths commented that she was sorry that she could not bring along her daughter who was studying Psychology in her A/L class. For she was made aware by the play that the 'Oedipus Complex' that was discussed in the psychology class was a misinterpretation of king Oedipus which did not do justice to him. The term had been coined and used throughout generations giving an unfair picture Oedipus. This play, reproduced centuries later, in a different land, in a different language had proved an apology to Oedipus. The **King Oedipus** that had obviously been the origin of the term had in it, proved to later audiences the unfairness of it all. A modern theater goer thereby understands that the king has had no desire to bed with his mother.

The universal value of the play had been understood by many. Many appreciated the impact and the message. The following were brought to notice -

1/ How a person with power is tested trough a crisis.

2/ The inner, in depth desire of an adapted child to find his/her real parents.

It is the latter that had foiled the emotions of many. The observation was that political prudence had been suppressed if not replaced by the personal quest, which proved tragic. And the emotions were not super imposed or misplaced but tragic. The audience became aware that the play ultimately was concerned with the predicament of man in the universe. This may be concerned with a deep religious message for the Greeks. The religions of modern Sri Lankans are different. Many are unaware that the Olympian Religion excited in the early West. But the very fact that the problems dealt with were universal makes them appreciate what underlies the tragedy.

A young lecturer of a different discipline brought attention to the cultural difference of past and the present in the East and West. In the ancient East although stories involving subjects such as incest and adultery did exist they were not direct but coated with flowery language and a moral purpose. This is quite in contrast to the West at the time. Motherhood i.e. was treated with utmost veneration. Behavior out of the norm did exist but were handled delicately by the poets. I.e. **Theri Gee** dealt with such problems but were highlighted in a different manner with a different purpose. It is not until the modern times Sri Lankan literature had taken bold steps to openly talk about such problems. In this sense **King Oedipus** proves quite modern to them.

The multiple layers of interpretation were commented on as well. Some of those who were interviewed quite later from the viewing of the play said that some parts of the production kept surfacing in mind, making them ponder repeatedly.

A conclusion of impressions and expressions of the actors involved in the production, based on interviews

a) **Sampath Perera**, the actor who played the character of king Oedipus in 2003 in the production of Priyankara Rathnayake's **King Oedipus**. (Sampath Perera, 2012, pers.comm. 21. June)

Sampath Perera did possess knowledge of the text and the classical background. He had studied Greek and Roman drama as a unit for the first year at the university. On being introduced to the subject, he had developed a passion to find more information. He was encouraged to self-study, to seek more information. This had helped him considerably. The unit was offered by the department of Western Classical Culture. But their main interest had been Drama and Theatre.

Director of the drama Priyankara Rathnayake , who was also their lecturer had produced the drama with his students who specialized in the subject Drama and Theater. This had started as a practical project.

Priyankara's interpretation of **King Oedipus** was that the actors **should bring out the humane aspect in the king**. They should not portray the character of Oedipus as being obstinate through arrogance. The reason for this is their experience with an earlier production in which king Oedipus was a character unreachable and therefore out of proportion. What Priyankara wanted from him was to portray a leader who was compassionate. Not only a ruler who loves his people but a good husband and a father as well. These are the dimensions that he wanted highlighted. He wanted the audience to love and respect the king with no hostile feeling. Hence one is led to consider as his weak point where he gets unreasonably angry was to be portrayed as a result of his affection. His anger should be aroused because his deep love was not recognized, understood or appreciated by the recipients. He felt that the people were unreceptive. He was a ruler who had been disappointed by his people, since to him the citizens were his children. It was through love he expected to be obeyed.

The relationship with Jocasta was obviously only as a wife. As in many religions of the East, may be, at times, a wife is like a mother protective towards her husband. The impact on the audience would be according to their prior knowledge of the myth. But the disclosure of truth could be equally felt by the individuals sitting in the theater.

- a) An ironical state to the people with prior knowledge.
 - b) A shock to those who did not know.
- The character of Oedipus was depicted in a continuing process. The development involved the audience as well.

As an actor Sampath had felt inadequate physically when he was selected for the part. He even joined a gym and indulged in regular exercises to obtain a stature, mentally as well as physically. He had felt that this was necessary to enter the character in spirit. It is through such a process that he had built up his self confidence. He needed to be ready for the part. The development involved the interaction with the audience as well.

The link he had observed with the modern world was not a 'cheap link of the politics or that of the politicians'. It was not far beyond the limitations, it was something that reached the fundamental, universal human relationships. Politics came secondary. It was the philosophical truth that was appreciated, i.e. the universal.

Although Oedipus was engaged in a power struggle he was also a private individual. This is where his heart was involved in. Hence the resulting tragedy.

The actor had found his studies on the subject very helpful. But he had also read Eastern drama for his degree. This made him compare certain situations and feelings. Hence he had felt that the Western Classics were so flexible and open that he too could contribute to the production in his own way.

1.3.b) Thumindu Dodantanne.

The role of Creon in 2003.

The role Oedipus in 2006.

Deductions from interview. (Thumindu Dodanthanne, 2012, pers.comm., 12.June)

He too possessed an in-depth knowledge of Greek drama. He had studied both Greek tragedy and comedy. The knowledge was obtained through in class university education.

Two translations were available in Sinhala apart from the English translations.

Most of all Thumindu had respected the interpretation of the director in playing both the roles of Oedipus and Creon. He was convinced that both characters share the humane sympathetic nature, though under different circumstances.

When acting the part of Creon the feeling of a humane character was applied in many different ways. This is especially at the end of the tragedy. At the end the attention is focused on Creon as

the possible next leader i.e. - the next leader of the nation. The change of mood and situation was stressed. I.e. – Accepting responsibility of the nation as well as the royal children. It was a role and duty that Creon had not wanted .

He was playing the role of Oedipus after four years of the production. In those years he had seen Sampath giving life to the character. It was a challenge. And he welcomed the challenge. Although the periods of rehearsals were short, by that time he was teaching the text at university level. Hence he was able to get in to the character and the passions portaged. He had felt the atmosphere was just correct for him to enter the character.

He also had felt that irrespective of the boundaries and limitations of the period and time, the character could be projected to the audience effectively. Hence the success of the role.

The problems in human relationships within the family had a special dimension and impact an on the contemporary audience. The fact that the Sri Lankans valued family ties with reverence had made them feel to the utmost when they were so shockingly disrupted.

Concentration as a king was only at the very first entrance. I.e. use Creon power to help his people.

He had felt that Oedipus had the right to be angry. That he was acting out the power he had for the good of the people.

Thumindu had found the relationship with Jocasta a bit difficult to portray. He as the actor playing the part had been conscious of the myth, the story. She was supposed to be his mother, though Oedipus had been ignorant of the fact at the time. Hence he felt a certain shock running through him like a current, each time he had to make physical contact with her. He had to constantly remind himself that it was his wife and not the mother at that time according to the knowledge of Oedipus. The actress who played Jocasta of course played a very supportive role as the wife.

The play had been adjusted so that it caters to the requirement of the Sri Lankan modern audience. i.e.

1/ Long choral odes and monologues were shortened.

2/ Curtailed where there was repetition.

They were aware that the Sri Lankan modern stage was different from that of the Greek. The stage looks like a picture frame in the eyes of the audience. So the concentration had to be focused on the picture shown – the visual aspect as well. The theater geography had to be arranged accordingly.

The Flexibility of Greek drama was appreciated to the extreme when adjusting according to the topical atmosphere.

3.1.3. Deductions arrived at through interviews with the Director, Priyankara Rathnayake. (Priyankara Rathnayake, 2012, pers. comm. 25 June)

The director is Priyankara Rathnayake, a senior lecturer in dramatic art at the University of Kelaniya and a popular actor and a director of drama. He possesses knowledge of Greek drama although he is not attached to the department of Western Classical Culture. The reason for selecting the particular drama had been a continuous discussion among students who displayed an enthusiasm for Greek drama. They had been highly attracted by Sophocles' **king Oedipus**. Among them were actors who had taken part in stage plays: - They were studying not only ancient and modern western drama but were equipped with knowledge of the dramatic traditions of the east. The initial intention had been to experiment as to how one could produce a Greek drama on Sri Lankan stage. They wanted to go beyond the academic purpose and reach success as a dramatic production. It is during the rehearsals that they realized that the tragedy could in fact impress a Sri Lankan audience. The manner of reaching this goal became the challenge.

The members of the particular group as well as Priyankara himself had seen an earlier production of the play in Sinhala and had not been much impressed. One of the major problems detected was the stylized acting that went with the language. There was no doubt that the language contained a poetic element. But the group had opted for a naturalistic style in acting. Hence they retained the poetic element in language while they acted naturally which made it easier to reach across to the audience.

The play was not broken in to scenes but ran together in a rapid speed just as in the original Greek version. But certain acts were consciously developed due to the dramatic elements and the

human interest within them. i.e. – The interaction between Oedipus and Jocasta and where Oedipus meets Tiresias.

Props and music were used only where they were absolutely necessary. The plot moved so fast that if props were used elaborately, they would have proved a hindrance to appreciation.

The reason for presenting the two daughters as grown girls was due to the fact that he had the play **Antigone** in mind.

There was reason within the text itself for Priyankara to depict Oedipus closer to his citizens. He provides several reasons for the argument.

1.Oedipus had been drinking and enjoying himself with his friends when he first heard that he was adopted. Being the son of the king of Corinth he had not refrained from mixing with others of his own age. And obviously the incident had taken place outside the palace.

2.When he left Corinth he had gone alone, as a common young man and not taken security let alone a companion on his voyage. He would not have been dressed as a prince either.

3.Oedipus would have eaten and slept on his journey with commoners. Hence there was no question about the royalty in him making a distance from the common men.

4.Laias on meeting Oedipus had not recognized him as a prince. And that is the reason for him to have shown no consideration or respect to him. This proves that Oedipus would have looked like a common man.

5.The solution of the riddle posed by sphinx could not have been solved by a person not exposed to life. The solution was through his practical knowledge.

I.e. Prince Siddhartha had been shocked into leaving home in pursuit of salvation on seeing an

1) Old man 2) A sick man and 3) A corpse, on a journey through the streets.

But Oedipus solved the riddle by his recognition of the three stages of life.

I.e. Which creature walks with 4 legs, two legs and three legs in various stages of his life?

It was Oedipus who answered the riddle as 'man'.

By mixing with the people he did not lose his royalty.

Hence it was not surprising when his citizens complained about the plague that was destroying them he would be moved enough to come forward and sit with them to console them.

The use of white for all costumes was also done with a purpose. He was well aware that the classical tragedies used color to denote, position, mood, age, character etc.

1..But the Sri Lankan audience is mostly unaware of the implication of colors in Greek tragedy. Japanese drama had used colors and so had Sanskrit drama. One color could imply different emotions in different contexts in different lands.

2. Therefore the significance of traditional colors would have been lost on the modern Sri Lankan audience.

3. In photography white is a color that absorbs all colors and a color that could generate all colors. Black is a color that absorbs all and gives out nothing. Hence white is a color that has the capacity to give color to all the characteristics of all the characters.

4. It is the character brought out in the dramatic action that should color the character. Not his costume. The actor's role should be able to imply and provide all the emotions that could be generated by the actual color of the costume.

5. The cultural context in the use of white is also important. White holds an important position in Sri Lankan culture. It has religious and moral implications. White is used for important personal and cultural occasions. I.e. white is worn by brides and it is used for auspicious occasions and is believed to indicate purity. People wear white to a Buddhist temple indicating that it applies to moral purity as well.

Likewise the integrity of Oedipus is pure. He is confident that he is correct. He had not sinned knowingly.

6. The use of white also makes it easier to concentrate on the fast moving plot. The plot seeks utmost attention and any sort of distraction would prove disastrous.

7. Priyankara interprets the movement of the plot and what it indicates as inviting an inner experience. The play not only has a story with a moral like the Jathaka Stories but something that makes the audience undergo an inner experience. Hence for this, color white is the most suitable.

The explanation for the black clad figures introduced at the start as well as the end is that they had been introduced with a purpose. They were used to indicate a warning. I.e. that black, a color that represents a negative, could lurk among the white which is a positive force. Black represents the approaching doom, death and sorrow. This is the nature of the world that man is placed in. No one can escape this fate. Life is therefore unpredictable. And it is this message that surpasses the boundaries of time, place and culture along with its people. The universal aspect of Greek drama that one is led to appreciate.

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