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PAPER

The Conflict between the Socio-cultural Body and the Performance Body of the Sri Lankan Female Actor

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When the freedom of the Sri Lankan female actor's performance body is maximised in support of the artistic treatment of a character, the socio-cultural body may suffer once she has left the performance. As a socio-cultural being, the female actor is consciously and/or unconsciously responsive to this condition. This responsiveness can affect her focus on the performance, and in turn, inhibit the performance body. In other words, if the female actor is overly concerned about securing the wellbeing of her socio-cultural body by taming her performance body, she may not be able to reach her potential in the artistic treatment of the character. In most cases, the female actor attempts to defend her socio-cultural body during a performance and as a result of this, generate signs that are not congruent with the role/situation.

In theatre and in film, actors need to portray human relationships and situations, and at times, enact intimate situations which involve physical exposure or physical contact with another actor. This may create uneasiness in a female actor, which, I believe, would be relatively less in a male actor. Here, it is important to remember that the Sri Lankan actor, regardless of the gender, performs to a patriarchal audience. However, in a society that is steeped in patriarchal ideologies, the female actor who appears in a 'controversial role' is likely to face criticism from her society to a greater extent than a male actor who appears in a similar role.

This dichotomy between the socio-cultural body and the performance body would vary in intensity relative to the individual's socio-cultural and demographic profile. However, attempting to eliminate the mutual awareness of both bodies in the female actor would not be productive as these bodies are 'two sides of the same coin'. Drawing from my experiences and observations in performance, this paper would proceed to analyse this dichotomy that continues to challenge the Sri Lankan female actor.