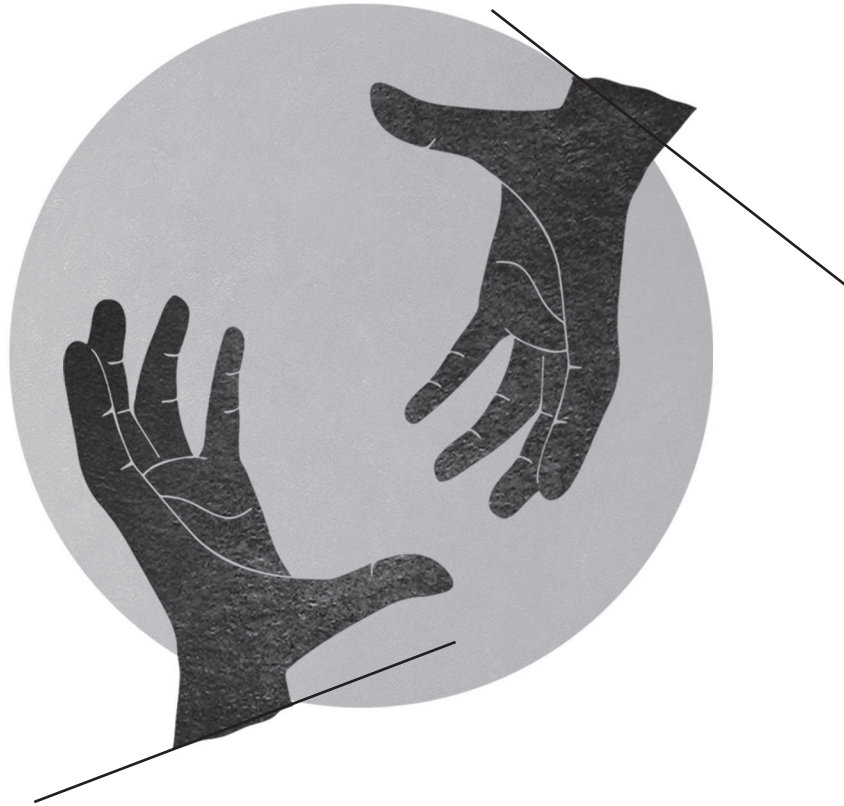




# THE THEATRE OF RECONCILIATION: POTENTIALS, TENSIONS AND PRACTICES



# **THE THEATRE OF RECONCILIATION:** POTENTIALS, TENSIONS AND PRACTICES

**The theatre of reconciliation:  
Potentials, tensions and practices**

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**© Postgraduate Institute of English  
Open University of Sri Lanka PGIE**

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**70 YEARS IN**  
**SRI LANKA**



# INTRODUCTION

This seminar represents the culmination of a year-long project funded by the British Council Sri Lanka under the “Transform” grants scheme to conduct research into a number of aspects relating to Arts and Reconciliation in the country. The importance of the arts – particularly live and performative forms of art such as theater – for fostering positive social change is often taken for granted. This is especially so in the field of conflict transformation. However, there is relatively limited empirical evidence and limited research into how the arts can contribute to progressive social change.

The research project was framed around a set of broad questions:

1. What role can the arts, and more specifically theatre, play in terms of reconciliation in post-war Sri Lanka?
2. How can socially-engaged theatre be archived and what are the conceptual and methodological challenges of such archiving?
3. What kinds of restrictions and constraints shape socially engaged theatre?

In order to explore these questions, the project focused on two theatre groups with significant histories of social engagement in the country: the *Janakaraliya* (Theatre of the People) group and the Stages Theatre Company. Given the project duration and the available resources, the research focus was limited to an in-depth study of one theatrical production from each theatre company – *Thittha Kahata* (Bitter Nectar) by *Janakaraliya* and ‘Dear Children Sincerely’ by the Stages Theater Company. These plays were chosen because they are currently in production and the research teams could study both the dynamics of their creation and also performance and audience impact. However, though these two plays were the main foci, the research project attempted to place these productions within the context of the history of the work done by the two theatre companies and also within the larger context of arts, theater and reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

The scope of the project was modest, given that only two specific productions by two theater companies were investigated, within a much larger field and history of socially committed artistic interventions in Sri Lanka. However, the intent of the research project was not to make expansive or representative claims about arts and reconciliation but to have an in-depth understanding of the two specific case studies selected and through them offer some insights into the broader questions that framed this research project. The study adopted and adapted a range of qualitative approaches to research to capture the nuances,

contradictions and vicissitudes of how theater engages with social change. A large number of interviews, field visits, observations of rehearsals and performances and interactions with audiences were carried out by the research team and this data has been collated and archived.

This seminar marks the official conclusion of the project. However, work relating to research such as analysis of collected data and the writing of research articles will continue beyond the project cycle. Through this seminar the project team hopes to share some of the insights and findings of the study and also to bring together a cross-section of artistic practitioners, funders, policymakers and academics to provoke and stimulate further discussion about the nexus between the arts and reconciliation. We believe in light of the uncertainties and challenges posed by the Easter Sunday bombings barely two months ago, these questions have a fresh urgency and hope the seminar will inspire and suggest to us new ways of thinking about and facing the challenges ahead. We welcome you to the seminar and wish you a productive, stimulating and challenging two days of intellectual and artistic engagement.





# JANAKARALIYA


## THEATRE OF THE PEOPLE

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Led by veteran Sri Lankan dramatist Parakrama Niriella, since 2002 *Janakaraliya* has marked its presence as an innovative and avant-garde ensemble in Sri Lankan theatre. From its outset the *Janakaraliya* project had a vision that extended beyond theater as an aesthetic practice and positioned itself as a group dedicated to social transformation through theatrical practice. Sustained in an organic manner for over two-decades *Janakaraliya* began with 25 members. Within this period the group has produced a large body of work which has transcended linguistic and cultural divisions in the country and has won critical acclaim both locally and internationally.

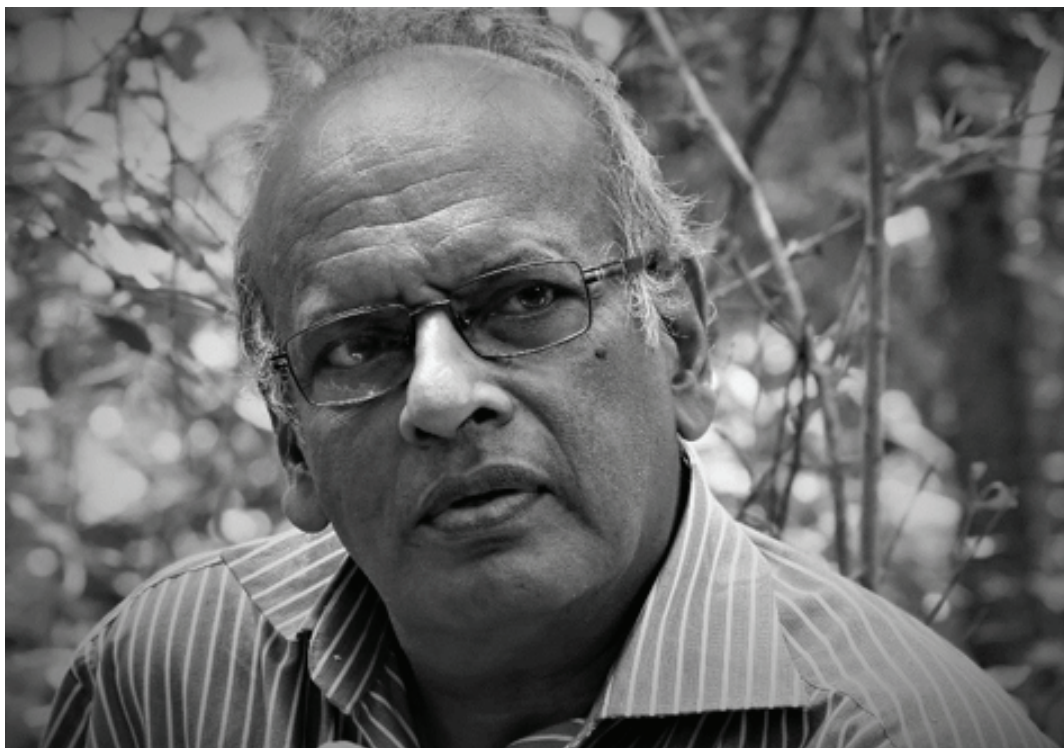
The *Janakaraliya* model offers many insights into how the arts can bring different people and communities together through the process of dramatic production itself. Over the years *Janakaraliya* has trained many theatrical practitioners from a wide cross-section of Sri Lankan society. It has been particularly successful in identifying talent from different cultural, religious, ethnic, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds and providing them with the theoretical and practical training to become theatrical practitioners on a national scale. A number of prominent contemporary film and TV personalities received their initial training through *Janakaraliya* and have evolved to become professional performers.

The success of *Janakaraliya*'s training model is also visible in the linguistic and cultural mobility of its performers who develop to become co-creators of theatrical productions. There are many stories in *Janakaraliya*'s history of actors who came from Tamil speaking backgrounds becoming fluent in Sinhala to the point where they are able to perform drama in Sinhala. This is a significant achievement in a country where the education system has struggled to mainstream multilingual education. In a largely ethnically and religiously segregated society, *Janakaraliya* provides a model of how micro-scale ventures can contribute to positive social change. The ensemble has also consistently resisted the allure of mainstream theatre practice, choosing instead to retain its avant-garde identity theatrical practice.

A key challenge that *Janakaraliya* has successfully faced is building a flexible theatrical model that incorporates elements of a proscenium based traditional theatrical style with elements of street theatre, forum theatre and other forms of non-traditional performative practice. *Janakaraliya* possesses Sri Lanka's only mobile theatre, developed with donor funding, and tours the entire country with its productions. In a country where space for theatrical performances are limited and the arts in general receive very limited support, either from the state or non-state sources, *Janakaraliya* has been successful in taking theatre to the people. Though sustainability remains a critical challenge for an ensemble of this nature, *Janakaraliya* represents a stable, dynamic and ever-evolving socially engaged theatrical model which offers many insights into how theater can promote, influence and shape social perceptions. 

# **WE HAVE TO CONSTANTLY ADAPT TO CHANGING REALITIES - THAT IS THE CHALLENGE OF DOING THEATRE TODAY**

## **AN INTERVIEW WITH PARAKRAMA NIRIELLA**



**Q:** You are a well-known dramatist, cinematic and artistic personality. Please tell us a little bit about your story as an artist before Janakaraliya.

**A:** I grew up in a small village outside Rathnapura under the care of in-laws. My mother passed away when I was very young and though I grew up in a 'walauwa' it was a very tough life without my parents. In the village school or later at Hunumulla Central school I did not have much exposure to theatre – though we saw a few plays and took part in class productions. It was only after I got a job in Trincomalee working as a civil employee in the Navy that I had the space and freedom, and to some extent the money, to read freely and engage with cultural life – particularly when I came to Colombo on holidays and was able to access good books and magazines.



Colombo at the time – the 1970s in particular – was alive with cultural activity. There were film screenings supported by various embassies and we were able to watch films by Roman Polanski, Jean Luc Godard, etc. High quality world cinema was readily accessible. I can recall two transformative artistic experiences in particular. One was watching the Sinhala adaptation of Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* (*Hunu Wataye Kathawa*) by Henry Jayasena. In one scene Azadak the judge says 'this is a new age, it is the age of the people' and the audience just burst into applause. Right throughout the play the audience engagement was incredible – people seemed to be following every word in every dialogue. It was a time when theatre resonated with the people and there was expectation of social change in the air. The other was Sugathapala de Silva's *Dunna Dunugamuwe* (*The Arrow is in Arrow-village*). I was transfixed by the play and felt like an arrow returning to Trincomalee – such was the palpable feeling of excitement and engagement. I then got into street theatre under Gamini Hatthotuwegama's direction and ultimately into film, where I had early success with a short film which won critical recognition from OCIC, the Catholic organization promoting audio-visual media. Thereafter, I became established in both TV and film.

**Q: Why did you form Janakaraliya? Were there any specific objectives in formulating a theatre group like this? Can you speak about both the social as well as artistic goals of Janakaraliya?**

**A:** One of the reasons for forming *Janakaraliya* lies in my early encounter with street theatre. The power of street theatre was its ability to break away from traditional performative spaces and perform in factories, street corners and even temple courtyards. In doing so we were influenced by radical ideas about alternative theatre that were gaining influence in the 1970s. However, I always felt that the overtly political nature of street theatre, its lack of finesse and its relative lack of focus on aesthetics was problematic. I debated these concerns with Gamini Hatthotuwegama but he did not see it from my perspective. I felt if we are to take theatre to the people, one of the critical challenges was communicating a full theatrical experience and by doing so raise the standards of artistic appreciation among people. I did not want the theatrical and performative aspect to be subservient to politics and devoid of aesthetics. *Janakaraliya* is an attempt to explore how theatre can be taken to people, even in spaces where there is little or no infrastructure, without diluting its aesthetic appeal.

I then moved away from street theatre and formed the Open Arts Circle with some other dramatists. I was also a member of the Movement for Interracial Justice and Equity which was founded by Father Paul Caspersz. This emerged in the aftermath of the 1977 general elections and the anti-Tamil violence that erupted with the government change. This work had a strong leftist dynamic and we wrote a number of plays which spoke to themes of economic and social justice but unfortunately though we tried hard it was very difficult to find sponsorship to stage these productions – even though all we asked for was food and traveling.

It is within this context that I began conceptualizing the idea for a mobile theatre. But securing funding was a challenge. People felt my model of maintaining a group of full time dramatists on a regular payroll will be financially unsustainable. After struggling for a long time I was able to secure funding from the HIVOS institution in Netherlands and USAID stepped in with funding to fabricate the mobile theatre. This enabled *Janakaraliya* to develop. The *Janakaraliya* model has succeeded in taking aesthetically rich theatrical experiences to people – we experiment with various forms of alternative theatre but also integrate it with aspects of conventional proscenium theatre.


**Q:** *What influences shaped Janakaraliya and how would you see the position of Janakaraliya within the context of theatre in Sri Lanka today?*

**A:** I got to know Habib Tanvir when he visited Sri Lanka and subsequently had the opportunity to visit India to witness the staging of three productions by Tanvir. I saw *Charandas Chor*, *Mitti Ki Gaadi* and *Agra Bazaar* performed in the open with minimal infrastructure – some naked electric bulbs for lighting and a speaker hung from a wire utilized as a microphone to absorb and amplify sound. The actors were often selected from traditional musicians and performers in the village and the productions were completely improvised without any written script. The productions themselves were very attractive and full of aesthetic appeal – with music, dance and other elements that made them very appealing. Here was the model I had been searching for. It had the performative flexibility and the politically subversive nature of street theatre but was also much richer as a theatrical experience.

*Janakaraliya* is significantly informed by a number of alternative theatrical movements such as devised theatre, applied theatre and legislative theatre and the work of dramatists such as Augusto Boal. Mainstream theatre in Sri Lanka is essentially shaped by an awards culture and is focused on the State Drama Festival and these alternative theatrical practices have had little impact. The strength of the *Janakaraliya* model has been its flexibility. For instance, a production like *Charandas* was produced for the traditional theatrical space, but was staged very successfully in our mobile theatre and even on open grounds in rural villages. It was also able to compete against many mainstream productions at the Drama Festival and won a large number of awards. I think this shows the potential of the *Janakaraliya* model. Also in a country with so much social division where the state has taken almost no interest in mobilizing culture to mitigate conflict, *Janakaraliya* has been a pioneer in creating a space where ethno-nationalist identities are transcended within the performative space. We have Tamils performing Sinhala roles and vice-versa.

**Q: Reminiscing about your journey as an artist, you spoke movingly of a time in the 1970s when Colombo, for instance, was a culturally rich environment – capable of attracting youth like you to a life of artistic engagement. Hasn't this context changed significantly? How do you see the future of theatre and of the arts in general?**

**A:** I believe there is a cultural crisis in the country today. When we initially called for applications to form the original *Janakaraliya* team in 2003 there were over a thousand Sinhala applicants, though the number of Tamil applicants was low – this was due to the war and the iniquities it had created between the north and the south. But when we advertised again in 2009 we only received something like ninety applications from the south. This made us realize that something had drastically changed. The liberalization of the economy in 1977 and how it fundamentally altered the social value accorded to the arts and culture had become an acute crisis by the 2000s. Particularly within education the aesthetic arts had become mere subjects – studied only to pass examinations. There is no true engagement with art or culture today. We toured Sri Lanka to form four regional teams – Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Chillaw and Jaffna. In all three locations in the south of the country there was hardly any interest – even though we were offering free training, with lodging and food. But ironically the Jaffna context was different – possibly because the war shielded it from the worst of the capitalist transformation that has swept the rest of the country. *Janakaraliya* is a small entity and it cannot change the tide of society as a whole – this is not just about theatre but about social change on a broader scale. When many domains of society have changed – education, religion, politics, economics, etc., – it is inevitable that people's orientation towards culture and art will also change.

So I think the future for theatre is very challenging. But the survival of theatre, as in the case of any form of art, lies in its ability to evolve and adapt to changing realities. I believe we have to give up our notions of conventional theatre and think of ways in which theatre can directly engage with people's lived lives. I think the future lies in applied theatre and to some extent in forgetting our conventional notion of theatre as performance. Our success or failure will lie in our adaptability. 

## JANAKAKARLIYA A THEATRICAL JOURNEY

2004 - *Andaramal (Sinhala)* / *Erikkalam Poo (Tamil)*: The first *Janakaraliya* production based on a true story about a dancing teacher and poor children in a village. To-date there have been more a thousand Sinhala and Tamil productions in villages, schools and mainstream venues,



2004 - *Seethambarpata (Sinhala)* / *Mayappattadai (Tamil)*: Second *Janakaraliya* production based on the story of the emperor's new clothes. More than a thousand performances across the country in a diverse range of venues.



2005 - *Charandas (Sinhala and Tamil productions)*: A political satire based on "Charandas Chor" by Habib Tanvir, a prominent Indian playwright. Performed at the New Delhi International Theatre Festival in 2008 and in Chennai, University of Poduchery and at the Thambiran Theatre Village in Purisai. Winner of Best Play Award with 9 other awards and more than 1500 performances across the country.







2005 - *Makararaksha*: A political play based on the Russian play by Yevgini Swarths. *Makararaksha* was designed specially for the Janakaraliya Mobile Theatre.



2007- *Soru Evilla (Sinhala) / Thirudan Vanthan (Tamil)*: A children's play based on a gluttonous bear and a fox who try to rob honey from a hive and the lesson they learn from bees. It won 5 awards including best play and direction at the Children's Drama Festival in 2005. The script is by Sumith Samarasinghe and the play was performed in the Mobile Theatre and schools as well.



2008 - *Thaham (Tamil)*: An experimental piece based on a Buddhist Jathaka story, the *Nalapana* incorporating the traditional 'Kaman Kooththu' style of Tamil plantation labour communities. Sinhala dancing styles are blended with Kooththu styles and Buddhist temple drumming is mixed with Thavil drumming.



**2009 - *Sekkuwa* (Sinhala) / *Chekku* (Tamil):** This was Parakrama Niriella's first play script in 1976 which won 7 awards at the National Theatre Festival in 1977. *Sekkuwa* is a satire depicting continuous economic exploitation throughout history within the prevailing political system. The oil press or 'Sekkuwa' is representative of a system of ownership and labour that is exploitative. It integrates stylistic aspects of folk theater and *Sokari* and *Kolam*. *Sekkuwa* was the curtain raiser of the Bahuroopi International Theatre Festival in Mysore, India in 2017.



**2009 and 2018 - *Hiru Negenathuru*:** This is the Sinhala translation of the Tamil "EnthaumThaum" by Dr. M. Shammugalingam. Parents allow their children to migrate to avoid war, but this results in the creation of an elderly community who lead lonely lives. Both Sinhala and Tamil artists of *Janakaraliya* perform this play.



**2010 - *Meti Karaththya* (Sinhala) and 2012 - *Mrichchakatiham* (Tamil):** A 400 AD Sanskrit play by King Shudraka produced first with *Janakaraliya* team in 2010 in Sinhala and then in Tamil with the students of the Swami Vipulananda Institute of Aesthetic Studies in Batticaloa in 2012. The Sinhala production *Meti Karaththaya* was performed in the Mobile Theatre and other mainstream venues many times. The Tamil version, *Mrichchakatiham* was a workshop production carried out for second and third year Eastern University students as theatre training.





**2011 - *Payanihal*:** *Payanihal* is the Tamil translation of *Kora Saha Andhya* by Dharamasena Pathiraja. It was translated into Tamil by Rasaiah Lohanathan and Directed by Selvaraj Leelawathy and Ronika Chamalee of the *Janakaraliya* team. It received 7 awards including best play and direction at the state and youth theatre festival in 2013. *Payanihal* represented Sri Lanka at 4 Indian International Theatre Festivals including Bharath Rang Mahotsav of New Delhi in 2014, 2015 and 2016. It was performed in Kyrgyzstan in 2014 at the Youth Theatre at Bishkek.



**2011 - *Porisadaya*:** The Sinhala version of Anton Chekov's "The Boor" (The Bear) translated by Tissa Kariyawasam. Directed by Palitha Abeylall of the *Janakaraliya* team and won 7 awards at the Youth Theatre Festival in 2012. It represented Sri Lanka at the Brayajon International Theatre Festival, Kolkata in 2015.

**2013 – *Hunuwataya*:** Sinhala translation of Berthold Brecht’s “Caucasian Chalk Circle”. *Janakaraliya* re-produced this well-known drama within the post-war social context of Sri Lanka. The production spoke to the social and political upheaval of the post-war context and to the complexities of the law in a situation of this nature. The production won five awards including best drama and best direction at the 2014 State Drama Festival.



**2015 – *Wata Oluvo saha UI Oluvo*:** Sinhala translation of Brecht’s “Round heads and pointed heads.” A commentary on how rulers manipulate social divisions with implications for Sri Lanka’s ethno-nationalist conflict. This play was directed by two senior members of *Janakaraliya*, Sumudu Mallawarachchi and Rasaiah Loganathan.



**2015 – *Wenkatti Wattam*:** Tamil translation of Bertolt Brecht’s “Caucasian Chalk Circle” by Kulaidai M. Shammugalingam. A co-production which involved training a group of Tamil actors in Jaffna who performed with Sinhala actors from *Janakaraliya*. Produced with the Assistance of the International Fund for Promotion of Culture of UNESCO and was staged at various locations in the north and south of the Island.





## THE JANAKARALIYA TEAM

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Kumari Welagedara (CEO)



Rasaiah Loganathan



Selvaraj Leelawathy



Murugesu Ajanthan Shanthakumar



Arosha Tharangani



Dewran Sri Livera



Inoka Lankapura



Madeera Udishani





Thilini Nimesha



Ruwini Dilanthi



Sumudu Mallawarachchi



Sarath Banagala



**Wijitha Hettige**




**Praneeth Jeewantha**

# STAGES THEATRE GROUP

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“Stages” was established in 2000 and is led by Ruwanthie de Chickera, who is Artistic Director of the ensemble. In a largely linguistically and culturally segregated theatre space, Stages has successfully bridged the Sinhala-English divide and is now actively moving towards a tri-lingual theatrical practice. Historically, though there have been some limited moments of collaboration, English and Sinhala theatres have been largely separate worlds – a separation that characterizes not only theater production but the viewership as well.

Stages has built a name for itself as an innovative theatrical group which is thematically and methodologically daring. Blending various theatrical and performative styles with a political commitment to socially engaged theatre, their practice is informed by the work of the Brazilian dramatist Augusto Boal. One of the key methodological innovations of the group is a consistent use of devised theatrical practices and engagement in detailed long term research and curation leading to a theatrical production. Many Stages productions arise out of long term research and co-creation processes which in turn lead to multiple theatrical outputs. For instance, the ‘Cast as Mother’ project saw a large number of prominent female theatrical personalities in the country gather over an extended period to critically reflect on motherhood, its impact on their professional theatrical roles and how motherhood in general frames notions of femininity and female identity in Sri Lanka. While ‘Cast as Mother’ was staged as a separate theatrical production, this in turn led to *Kalumaali* which took a darkly humorous look at female identity in contemporary Sri Lanka and was staged as two separate productions in Sinhala and Tamil with the same cast.

Stages also utilizes the visual and performative power of theatre to transcend linguistic and cultural limitations, as in the production ‘Walking Path’ – a non-verbal production that critically explored the culture of urban gentrification in post war Sri Lanka, within an increasingly authoritarian political culture. Stages also works with multiple groups at various levels to professionalize and uplift theatrical craft in the country. The archiving of theater, maintaining records of production and documenting the theatrical process are a passionate concern for the ensemble. The Stages vision is to contribute to the professionalization of theatre in the country by building the skills and knowledge base of young practitioners and to this end the group holds workshops and training programs for youth and children and has also collaborated with overseas theatrical groups and staged its productions in multiple countries and at numerous international theater festivals. The work of Stages has been critically acclaimed in Sri Lanka and internationally and the group continues to build new collaborations and partnerships both locally and overseas. 

# THEATRE, CREATIVITY AND THE CHALLENGES OF INSTRUMENTAL THINKING

## AN INTERVIEW WITH RUWANTHIE DE CHICKERA



**Q:** Tell us about your journey as an artist – what compulsions drove and drive you and what inspired you to form a collective like Stages?

**A:** What drives me as an artist in Sri Lanka is the idea of the artists' collective. It's very different from having an individual career as an artist. I think an individual career as an artist – though difficult to forge – would have been much easier to be consistently positive about. The real frustration, the real blocks, the real challenges and defeats come when you are trying to build a culture, a community – something larger than yourself – something that will generate enough energy and knowhow to grow without your input. This is very difficult in an environment that gives you virtually nothing in terms of support. I can manage my own personal risk when it comes to the arts. But it becomes very difficult to be responsible for the risk of other artists as well – who depend on me. This is very difficult indeed.

**Q:** What do you see as the role of the arts in general and theatre specifically in a society like contemporary Sri Lanka? Can you also reflect on what specific local conditions shape your art and the art of Stages as a collective?

Theatre has incredible depth, wealth and breadth to offer Sri Lankans – especially young people. From the experience of collective viewing of live performance, to participation in workshops and engaging in collective learning – that is critical and creative – these are essentially huge skills in a society that has no place for things that are seen as not having a utility value. I see theatre as a powerful medium through which to engage with youth in particular and to offer them a richer and more nuanced sensibility and orientation towards life – our education, media and general social discourse provides very little enrichment for youth.

In addition to the performative power of theatre I also see working as an ensemble as a means to promote certain values and certain kinds of social awareness. Working on the values of an ensemble - values of trust, collective decision making, critical self-reflection, responsibility rather than ownership and a truer sense of one's self within the collective. Leadership needs to be seen as not permanent but rather as organic – all these are vital things for society.

I also think theatre in a society like Sri Lanka, which is not at ease with itself, offers a critical and introspective space in which people can reflect and engage with a range of social issues that rarely get attention. Other audio-visual mediums like TV do not really offer the live engagement that theatre does. There is an evolving and ever-changing dynamic between the audience and the performers during a live performance – the two play against each other and this offers powerful moments of connection and collective awareness.

**Q: What is the creative process and the model of production followed by Stages? How does it differ from "mainstream" theatre?**

**A:** We largely follow the ensemble method and the devised method of creating theatre. This is different to mainstream theatre in that it is a much more organic, unpredictable and democratic way of making theatre. Often we go into a process of rehearsals without really knowing what we are going to create – or how we are going to create it. Or sometimes we know what and we don't know how. Sometimes we know how and we don't know what. Sometimes we know who by and that is all. In devising there is a great advantage in developing the confidence to be patient enough to wait for content, form and structure to come together in the most perfect manner.

The collective dynamic of this kind of theatre-making leads to surprising insights and the incorporation of a wide variety of perspectives in contrast to the singular vision in a play-script written by a single writer. It also makes it particularly suited to reflect on and talk about intractable social issues given their complex and contradictory nature. Many of the recent productions of Stages has benefitted from this approach to theatre.




**Q: What are the challenges you face in producing and sustaining theatre in Sri Lanka? Could you say something about "hard" practical challenges such as funding, institutional support, etc., but also "softer" ideological and conceptual challenges?**

**A:** Lack of funding, interference, lack of training, instrumentalisation of artists, all these are very real and huge problems. These determine the other challenges. So in a situation of no funding, it's difficult to insist on consistency and commitment from artists – this, in turn leads to chaotic and unpredictable lifestyles. Lack of training/education results in a limited worldview, discipline etc., – again this leads to a certain life style that is not conducive to creativity. Instrumentalisation leads to a lack of dignity and exploration – this can have very damaging results. Within all these challenges I still hold that I meet the most incredible people – with unbelievable integrity and outlook to life. Young people who actively opt to dedicate their lives to the pursuit of creativity and truth rather than the pursuit of jobs and money. But our system wears them down. It sometimes takes years but they get worn down. But I am telling you – that it is our loss, more than theirs. I have seen potential like you would not believe and I have seen it lost as well. It's a great pity. It is very much our combined tragedy.

**Q: This is a somewhat unfair question to ask an artist but do you think art has a social impact and if so what forms does such impact take? Funders often ask for "evidence" of impact – is this a fair ask from an artist?**

**A:** Let me put that back to you. Pick any of these streams of study – Science, Medicine, Maths, Engineering, Literature – now let's ask ourselves that same question. Do you think science has a social impact? What is the evidence of the impact? Does Maths have an impact? What is the evidence of the impact? Does Literature have an impact and what is the evidence of it? Or, for that matter does exercise or boating or cricket have a social impact, and what is the evidence of it?

The scale of the impact is directly linked to the investment in the genre. Scientists work for a lifetime with no 'impact' – surrounded by failed experiments, and fortified by huge funding. Sometimes all a scientist will do is to prepare the knowledge for the breakthrough that will come after him. We never stop to ask about the impact of these endeavours. We understand the importance of supporting human endeavour, inquiry, pursuit – even if it leads us to failure and wastage because we value the good that we know it can bring us. The problem with the arts is not the lack of evidence of impact; it is the limitations set on it by prejudice. If you change the prejudice, you will see the space for the impact created. This is what is lacking. 

## STAGES

### THE STORY OF AN ENSEMBLE

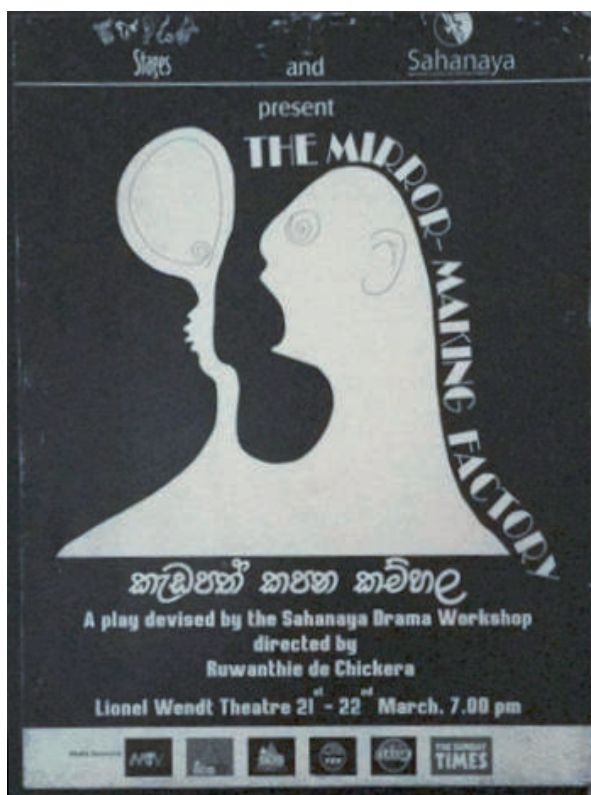
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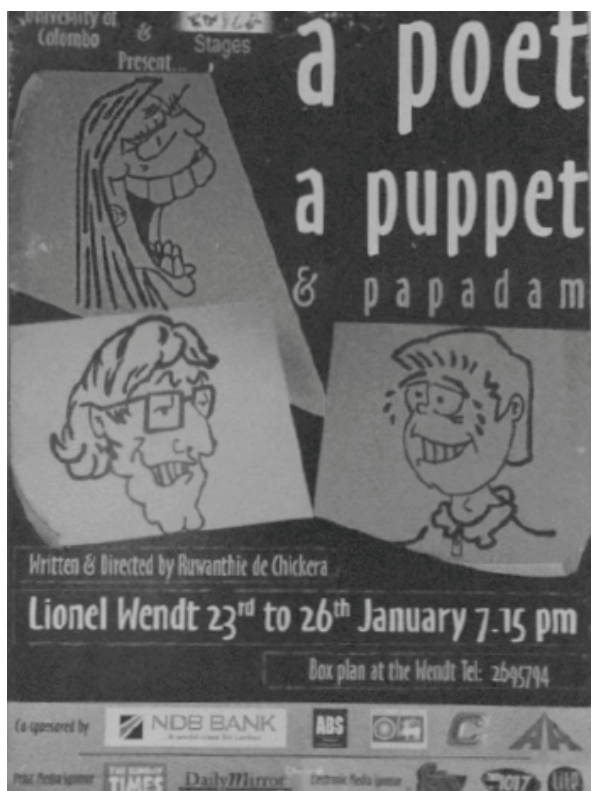
2002 - '*Two Times Two is Two*': An absurd play which examines the workings of the subconscious. This play was performed in Colombo and later invited for performance in Delhi for the 2003 Bharatrang Festival of the National School of Drama.



2001 - *Last Bus Eke Kathawa*: A one-man-show – originally in Sinhala written by Dhananjaya Karunaratne – which examines the late 80s 'Reign of Terror' in Sri Lanka. This show has been showcased in Colombo, Kandy, Tokyo, Delhi, Chennai, Calcutta and Manchester



2003 - '*The Mirror Making Factory*': A play devised through a year-long series of workshops with the clients of the Institute for Mental Health in Sri Lanka. This satirical play looked at the impact of social conditioning against the stigma against mental patients within Sri Lankan society.



2005 - '*A Poet, A Puppet, and Pappadam*': Two plays based on the works of Indian writer, Mahasweta Devi, performed by the students of the University of Colombo, in Colombo. The plays look at the life giving but destructive relationship between an artist and his work of art.



2007 - *'Checkpoint: Three Strangely Normal Plays'*: 'Checkpoint' is an evolving production that captures the strange political realities of current life in Sri Lanka. 'Checkpoint' comprises three short plays. A one-man show, verbatim theatre and forum theatre. It was first performed in Colombo in 2001. It was re-created for performance in Colombo in 2006. It has also been toured to the following cities in India - Delhi, Calcutta, Lucknow, Varanasi, Bhubaneswar and Mysore, in 2006. 'Checkpoint' was selected for performance at the National School of Drama in Delhi, 2006 and the MetroFest international theatre festival organised by 'The Hindu' (the newspaper), in Chennai, 2007.



2012 - *'Cast as Mother'*: Thirteen actresses from the English and Sinhala stage read and performed pieces on the subject of being an artist mother. Performed in May 2012, in Colombo.



2012 - *Kalumaali*: A play which looks at the experience parenting in the modern world, through the telling of modern fairy tales. *Kalumaali* opened in Colombo in September 2012. The same cast performed this play in English and in Sinhala.



**2014 - ‘Walking Path - A Play without Words’:**

A non-verbal, devised play about the widespread urban beautification drive in post-war Sri Lanka. This play was conceptualised with Jayampathi Guruge. It was performed at the Lionel Wendt Theatre in July 2014, re-run in November 2014 and performed at THESPO, in Mumbai in December 2014 – where it won several awards.



**2014 – Grease Yaka:** A devised play created with students of a leading state boys’ school, which looks at the creation, manipulation and spread of social phobia through the strange Sri Lankan phenomenon, the infamous *Grease Yaka* (Grease Daemon). This play was performed at the Lionel Wendt Theatre in August 2014.



**2016 - ‘Dear Children Sincerely... Seven Decades of Sri Lanka’:** An international theatre project initiated in Sri Lanka which aims at interviewing senior citizens over the age of 80 and transferring the content of these interviews into a collection of short performance pieces.





*2016 - 'Dear Children Sincerely... Monologues':* Created under the 'Dear Children Sincerely' project, the Monologues were scripted around intensely personal and profoundly powerful stories of individuals born in the 1930s. The monologues were directed by Tracy Holsinger and were performed in Colombo, January 2016, in Dublin, September 2015, in Belfast, May 2016, Colombo November 2016, Kigali July 2016.



*2018 - 'Thought Curfew':* A lyrical play about unforeseen violence. 'Thought Curfew' was created and co-directed by Ruwanthie De Chickera (Stages Theatre Group Sri Lanka) and British Visual Artist David Cotterell from Sheffield-Hallam University UK.



*2018 - 'Love and Other Objects':* 'Love and Other Objects' was an experimental and research based performance on the dying art of letter writing, specifically the art of writing love letters.

## THE STAGES TEAM



Jayampathi Guruge



Piumi Wijesundara



Akalanka Prabashwara



Nipuni Sharada



Pramila Samarakoon



Dinushika Seneviratne



Pathum Dharmaratne



Sanjaya Ekneligoda



Ransaka Galmangoda

## PROJECT TEAM ADVISORY COMMITTEE

### DR. HARINI AMARASURIYA

Harini Amarasuriya is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Social Studies, of the Open University of Sri Lanka. Her research interests include state society relations, political movements, dissent and activism. Harini was a member of the Public Representations Committee on Constitutional Reform and also served in various positions in the Federation of University Teachers Associations.

### RUWANTHI DE CHICKERA

Ruwanthi de Chickera is a playwright, screenwriter, theatre director and cultural activist. De Chickera has a strong belief in the practice, politics and philosophy of 'devising' – a theatre approach of collective creativity and leadership that challenges existing structures of authorship, power-sharing and change.

Her award-winning film "Machan" has been screened in over 50 countries. De Chickera is an Eisenhower Fellow and artistic director of Stages Theatre Group, an ensemble theatre company that produces socially and politically conscious original Sri Lankan Theatre.

### PROF. NELOUFER DE MEL

Prof. Neloufer de Mel is Senior Professor of English (Chair) at the Dept. of English, University of Colombo. The author of two books, *Militarizing Sri Lanka: Popular Culture, Memory and Narrative in the Armed Conflict*, and *Women and the Nation's Narrative: Gender and Nationalism in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Sri Lanka*, her recent publications have been on contemporary Sri Lanka with perspectives from cultural, gender, performance and literature studies. Prof. de Mel contributed to the Advisory Committee on a volunteer basis.

### DR. SREEMALI HERATH

Dr. Sreemali Herath is a Senior Lecturer at the Postgraduate Institute for English. Prior to that she taught at the York University, Canada. Her research interests include arts based approaches to identity research, narrative inquiry, practitioner lead research and education and reconciliation. She is currently involved in a research project carried out by the University of Toronto that looks at faculty perspectives on the academic writing skills of graduate students and supports for writing.

### DR. DINITHI KARUNANAYAKE

Dr Dinithi Karunanayake is a Senior Lecturer in English attached to the Department of English, University of Colombo.



## **PROF. HARSHANA RAMBUKWELLA**

Prof. Harshana Rambukwella is Director and Professor in English at the Postgraduate Institute of English, Open University of Sri Lanka. He is the author of the *Politics and Poetics of Authenticity: A Cultural Genealogy of Sinhala Nationalism* (2018) UCL Press and has served on a number of national literary and arts bodies as a jurist and committee member.

## **PROJECT MANAGER**

### **KASUN PATHIRAJA**

Kasun Pathiraja is a Senior Program Officer at the International Centre for Ethnic Studies. He holds long term experience in managing projects related to reconciliation and peacebuilding in Sri Lanka. He has contributed to a number of research studies on inter-religious conflicts. Kasun has also specialized as a trainer and contributed to a number of training programs on human rights and peacebuilding targeted government officials, religious leaders, civil society and international students.

## **RESEARCH ASSISTANTS**

### **APARNA HETTIARACHCHI**

Aparna Hettiarachchi is a Temporary Lecturer attached to the Department of English, University of Kelaniya whose main research interests include Sri Lankan English literature, theatre studies and conflict transformation.

### **THRISARA WICKRAMASINGHE**

Thrisara Wickramasinghe is a Ph.D. candidate attached to University of Moratuwa and currently serving as a visiting lecturer at Colombo International Nautical and Engineering College, Nugegoda.

