

## A Study On The Role Of The Director In Sri Lankan Folk Dramas

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### Abstract

When using a play script to direct, two basic parts can be identified. The first is the dialogue layer spoken by the characters trained by the actors. The dialogue layer is used to maintain verbal communication between the characters as visual artists on stage. The second layer is the directing process. Here, "directing" can be described as a non-verbal text. In it, the director explains the process to be carried out by all the visual artists and supporting artists involved in the play. These explanations include suggestions on how the backdrops should be placed on the stage, how to use lighting and their colors, as well as suggestions and ideas on how the characters should be handled on stage, explaining the relationships between the characters. All of these ideas and suggestions are used for the audiovisual creation that ultimately unfolds on stage and its basic idea. Although this directorial role is very modern, the process can be identified in folk dramas through other nominal usages without the nominal use of director. There are three main types of folk dramas in Sri Lanka. Kolam, Sokari and Kavi Nadagam are the three. In these folk dramas, the characteristics of the role of the modern director can be identified through characters such as Gura, Gurunnanse, Kariyakarwavana Rala, Sabe Vidane. This research paper discusses the role of the drama director as identified in the folk dramas of Sri Lanka through participant observation.

**Keywords** - Folk Drama in Sri Lanka , Play Director, Gurunnanse , Kariyakarwavana Rala

### Background of the Discussion

The title "director" came into use as a major professional practice in the 17th century. Before the 17th century, the role of the theater director was performed by the lead actor or the main manager of the drama. In that period, apart from theatrical training, the artistic coexistence in the drama was considered unimportant or did not have a broader idea of it. In the history of art, people who were involved in creating drama created with their own personal knowledge and it can be thought that those techniques were used with a conservatism that was unique to them. That is why even Scholastic may have been created. In this way, the role of the theater director in the East and the West has been reflected in various ways. We need to clearly identify that historical path. This paper discusses the role of the director as identified through the dramatized scenes in the Sri Lankan Folk Theatre system. There are three Folk theatre in Sri Lanka. These traditional folk plays scenes themselves last for several hours, during which the audience is entertained by dramatic representations that describe the process and history of the scene. In studying these plays in depth, the scope for identifying the role of the director in this is evaluated in this discussion.

### Discussion

Based on the role of the director, the history of the role has been used in various traditional and modern arts, and although it has changed in name, it should be noted here. In Sri

Lankan folk plays, a person holding the position of director can be identified who performs the role of the director. Known as the 'Endura', 'Gurunnanse', 'Gural', 'Kariyakaravanarala', his job is to conduct peace or a ritual at a certain place under his guidance. For this, audience participation can be identified and the peace is performed by artists who have mastered the dance. Dramatic processions can be identified in it. The main leader of this work is the "Gurunase". He performs tasks such as training the artists, performing and conducting the play, preparing the peace field, and supervising. He is the authorized person in that craft and it is his responsibility and duty to train the apprentices for it. Therefore, he is respected in rural areas even today as a "teacher". The difference between "teacher" and "he" makes it clear to us that the word "teacher" is a person who uses the meaning of respect in a multidimensional way. This idea of "teacher" has always appeared historically in the etymologies of the words about the drama director.

### **Kolam Folk Theatre**

Kolam folk play is a traditional form of theatrical folk art originating from Sri Lanka, particularly among the Sinhalese community. It is a vibrant, ritualistic, and satirical form of entertainment often performed in village settings. The term "Kolam" translates to "costume" or "mask," which is central to this art form. The Kolam drama has two parts, the prelude and the postlude, and during the prelude, the fixed castes introduce their characters and perform. In the postlude, which begins after the prelude, several stories are performed according to the above-mentioned gurukula or traditions or are prepared at that moment. Kolam dramas such as Gotaibara Kolamala Maname Kolamala Sinhavalli Kolam are among them. (Interview with Ariyaratne Kaluarachchi - 2023-08-04)

The themes usually revolve around folklore, myths, social commentary, or moral lessons. Stories might include legendary tales, local myths, or everyday village life. Kolam plays are often satirical and comedic, poking fun at social norms, human follies, and local events. They incorporate humor to convey messages, making the performances entertaining and thought-provoking.

The person who conducts the Kolam dance or Kolam drama is called the "Kariyakaravanarala". The "Kariyakaravanarala" seen in Kolam dances is also known as the caretaker of the inn where the Kolam is performed, the "caretaker of the Kariyakaravana" and the "Sabevidane". (Dissanayake. 2001) He handles the entire process of the drama presented in front of the audience and plays a leading role in training the apprentices who wish to master the art. He decides on the "Kolam drama" suitable for the day, place and time of the drama to be performed. In traditional situations, everyone follows his orders, taking the place of the teacher, and there is always a sense of respect in this rather than a rigid dictator. In the training of this drama genre belonging to the Low-Country dance (*Pahatharata Narthanaya*) tradition, the Sabe Vidane or the innkeeper is an expert in that art. He trains the dancers in the rhythms, shapes and rhythms of the dance and character elements over a period of time.

The role of the performer in the performance can be seen to vary in certain situations. The entire Kolam group performing the Kolam is called a "Kolam Kuttama" and the

person in charge of the Kolam Kuttama creates this Kolam drama. In this, the person in charge of the Kolam Kuttama gets someone else to perform the role of the Kolam conductor or the role of the Kariyakaravanarala. An expert craftsman is trained by the Kolam Kuttama custodian for this. Each Kolam performing group presents a character called Sabevidane, who handles the Kolam differently depending on their technical skills. (Dissanayake, 2001)

The role of the director in this Folk drama is performed by the aforementioned "Kariyakarawanarala". Supervision and training can be identified as a major part of his work.

### **Sokar Folk Theare**

"Sokari" drama is a traditional Folk drama limited to the Kandyan Vanni and Satara Korala regions of Sri Lanka. Historically, every village had a Sokari group and they had their own Sokari book. Here, "Sokari book" is referred to as the "drama script" used in today's usage. This Sokari drama is performed based on fertility after sharing the resources of the village. It is known that the same group performed Sokari continuously for many days, in the yard of one house tonight and in the yard of another house tomorrow. (Karunathilaka, 1993)

When examining the history of Sokari drama, there was a person who performed that creative work. The historical story that led to the performance of the "Sokari" drama is told in various ways by different groups. It has also been composed and performed as. According to Ediriweera Sarachchandra, one Sokari book was originally composed and the original Sokari book has been adapted and performed by people of various talents from time to time. (Sarachchandra, 1968, p. 130)

The script of the Sokari play has changed from time to time, and since each group did not get along with each other, different artists have formed different groups and used talented artists to dance and play. This makes it clear that there was an artist who was trained in the creation of this "Sokari" play. While the old Sokari group was still in existence, a resident of "Tharana" named "Selan Appu" wrote a new Sokari book, trained another group and began performing it. (Karunathilaka. 1993. p. 12)

In Sokari dramas, the personal title "Guru" is used and Mudiyanse Dissanayake (Dissanayake, 2001) is of the opinion that the "teacher" who teaches the craft, the drummer, the leader of a group or the drummer is called by this name. In folk dramas like Sokari, the "Guru" is the person who "directs" the drama and in some traditional Gurukuls, the main character of the "Sokari" drama is also the same person who plays the main character. In such cases, the drama is prepared from the script and another person is trained to play the role of "Guruhami". (Dissanayake, 2001)

Sri Lankan traditional schools of art have been passing down this art tradition from generation to generation. Therefore, it can be pointed out that the leadership of folk artists is being used in the term "Gurunasee". This practice can be identified in the three types of art, namely Shanthikarma, Kolam, and Sokari.

### **Kavi Nadagam Folk Play**

Although the Nadagam tradition is no longer in practical use today, it can be considered a complete visual poetry rather than a residual genre of Folk drama. Folk theatre such

as Kolam and Sokari contain elements of ritual as well as rituals, Nadagam has a necessary poetic form that is present in a complete drama. Gamini Dela Bandara, who points out that there is evidence that this "Nadagam" comes historically with this formative nature, says that the "Sinhala Kavi Naluwa" or this Nadagam drama itself has been introduced with the synonymous terms "Kivi Ranga", "Kavi Ranga" or "Kavi Nalu". (Dela Bandarala 2005)

Nissanka Diddeniya (2014), who has practical experience with the "Sinhala Sindhu Nadagam" tradition, says that since there was no theoretical institutional pattern in the art of this country, an acceptable systematic structure cannot be seen even in Nadagam.

"A drama tradition that can be considered a classical genre or the theoretical and organic environment required to maintain such a drama culture is formed only if a professional or non-professional organized institutional pattern has been established in a country regarding the main elements associated with the elements of drama writing, production or direction, role playing, etc. that affect the existence of a living theater. Until the creation of the play 'Maname' by Mahaduru Sarachchandra in 1956, no evidence has been found that a single artistic drama series that was accepted by the civilized world was written with such an institutional pattern. Similarly, no acceptable strong information has been found that demonstrates the main elements and characteristics of theater such as the cast, direction, stage use or theater technique."(Diddeniya, 2014, pp. 25-26)

Gamini Dela Bandara, who comments on the Nadagama art tradition, is of the opinion that the history or origin of this Nadagama art dates back to the reign of Bhuvanekabahu (1272 - 1284 AD). Information and evidence regarding this is a note in a papyrus book called "Vanni Puwata" which is kept in the British Museum library. According to this, a group of princes came to Sri Lanka during the reign of Bhuvanekabahu in the 13th century. A "Nadagama Guru" also came with those princes. (Diddeniya, 2014)

Here, it can be assumed that the term "Nadagam Guru" is a person who knows the art of Nadagam or has the ability to do it. This view can be reached by interpreting the term "Guruva" as synonymous with the terms "Guruvaraya, Guru, Gurunanse".

The play begins or is introduced by the teacher of the book. Nissanka Diddeniya, who studied the Nadagam theatre and its characters and form, conducted interviews with Austin Kurera (1992), Lionel Silva Loku Kapu of Wennappuwa of Seenigama Devalaya (1995), and Monis Wettasinghe alias Monis Master (1996) of Katane, who studied the subject of Nadagam, revealed that the person who is referred to as the Gurunanse character in the Nadagamwala book was the "Denamuttha" who trained Nadagam. (Diddeniya, 2014, page 28) Accordingly, it is clear that in the past, the people who performed Nadagam played the role of the main conductor in the creation they created.

In the research book on the history of Sinhala drama, which provides information about the artistic progress that took place in this country during the years 1860-1911, D.V. Hapuarachchi expresses an idea by "Nadagam Guruvarayan".

"The Noorthi Theatre did not find favor with the English-speaking middle classes and the Nadagam, which was once popular in Colombo, gradually died out. It was during this transitional period that Nadagam teachers and businessmen like B. J. Perera began to patronize the art of dance."  
(Hapuarachchi, 1981, p. 268)

It seems that a term called "Nadagam Gurusvaraya" has been used in connection with the art of Nadagam. Just as the role of the teacher was discussed in Shanthikarma and Folk Theatre, it is possible that this Nadagam Guru was the one who performed and created the role in Nadagam. This shows that there was an authorized leader or chief supervisor who had mastered the subject to prepare the creation of the drama.

### Conclusion

Although the use of the title of drama director is very modern, its function has been going on since ancient times. Especially in the Sri Lankan folk dramas discussed above, it seems that this role has been played by characters such as Gurunnane, Karyakaravana Rala, Gura or Sabe Vidane. They have handled the responsibilities of the modern director very well, such as directing the characters, creating the dramatic part, and training them with meticulous attention to the drama.

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