

**THE PERFORMING ARTISTES IN SRI LANKA: THE CONTRIBUTION TO
ETHNO-RELIGIOUS COHESION THROUGH THEIR SHAPING AND
CHALLENGING OF SOCIO-CULTURAL NORMS.**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Dedication

To my *Amma* and *Thatththa* -Mother and father

With veneration, I worship my mother's feet (*mathu padam nama maham*). She nourished me with loving kindness enabling me to lead a healthy, long life (*posesi uddikaranam- ayu digham vassasatam*) and I worship my father's feet (*pithu padam nama maham*). He taught me to keep my head held high even before kings (*raja majjam supattittam*).

To my "Guru Deva" - Professor Pauline Kollontai

Akhanda Mandalaa kaaram - Vyaaptam Yenam charaacharam

Tatpadam Darshitam Yena - Tasmai Sri Gurave Namaha.

(*Guru Gita- Skanda Purana*)

A guru can guide us to the supreme knowledge of that which pervades all the living and non-living beings in the entire Universe (namely Brahman). I salute such a guru.

To the performing artistes

Tan Jin, tan Jin, taka Jin, taka, kuda, gajin

Tarikita, gata, gata, gogonda, kuda, gajin

Takajin, gata, kunjingata, kunda, kundakjin ///

Takun, Takun

Jin Jin

Gaj Jin

(Auspicious drumming)

For their devotion to preserving Sri Lankan art.

To the memory of my brother, Indrajith Sujeewa

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Abstract

Mahāvamsa, the most widely cited historical Pali chronicle, records information about the performing arts of the *Yaksha* and *Naga* tribes who lived even before the advent of Vijaya to Sri Lanka in 543 BCE. With the introduction of Buddhism and Hinduism to Sri Lanka (250 BCE), ritual and religious based ceremonies inspired by India developed and the performing artists played a significant role in those ceremonies. Because of the subjugation of Sri Lanka to Portuguese rule in 1505, the Dutch in 1658 and the British in 1815 several changes took place in Sri Lankan art. With the Sinhalese-Buddhist policy declared in 1956, the main ethnic groups of Sinhalese and Tamil separated into two distinct groups with the result that a civil war lasting more than twenty-five years ensued. Along with this, the performing arts divorced itself from the common ethnic background and separated into two as Sinhalese and Tamil. Thus, this thesis will primarily focus its attention on the role and influence of Sinhalese-Buddhist and Tamil-Hindu artists on key issues such as caste, ethnicity and gender in ethno-religious division. Similarly, the manner in which the performing artist overcomes ethnicity and gender issues through the practice of his/her art caste, and the contribution this has made to the establishment of ethno-religious cohesion in society at large is also examined.

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Glossary

Addukku: The term is used to refer to food offered to the gods in Sri Lankan rituals. *Addukku pideema* or offering food occupies an important place in rituals.

Adura: (Edurā): The term refers to the person who conducts the ritual. Alternative terms are: *kattadiya*, *gura*, *yakadura* and *kapurala*. He must be a person well-versed in singing, music, dancing, painting, sculpture, astrology, medicine, and physiognomy.

Alarhi Ammas: Devadāsī engaged in rituals in the Kataragama *Devālaya*. in Sri Lanka are known by this name. They inherit this *Rajakariya* and they perform *alaththi bema*, the lighting of the lamps in the *Devālaya*.

Ārachchi: This refers to the chief officer of the provincial unit formed by the amalgamation of several villages. He settles disputes among villagers, maintains peace in the area, and is an influential character.

Aturaya: This term is used to refer to the sponsor of the healing ceremony and the patient.

Avesaya: The ‘possession’ of the patient and the priest by gods, demons and ghosts is referred to as *avesaya*.

Ayilaya: The temporary shelf made to deposit the gods’ ornaments and to make offerings is known by this term. The shelf is decked with banana fronds, tender coconut leaves, and areca nut flowers.

Ayurveda: This is the indigenous system of medicine. Various medical preparations are made with the leaves of trees, roots, flowers, barks, and fruit.

Badda: Badda is used to refer to *Rajakariya* and the department. Also, it is used to denote the tax due to the state.

Baliya / Bali: This is the only healing ceremony belonging to three Sinhalese-Buddhist dance traditions, upcountry, low country and Sabaragamu. This is performed to mark the dawn of a new era, and sculptures, and images play a prominent role.

Berakaraya: The term is used to refer to the drummer.

Berava / Beravaya : The term '*Berava*' is used to refer to the caste called *Berava*, and the artists are known by the term *Beravayo*.

Bhikkhu: This Pali term is used to refer to a Buddhist monk, and is written as *bhikshu* in Sanskrit.

Bodhi Puja: A Buddhist offering that is centred on the Bodhi Tree (*Ficus religiosa*). This is done as a mark of respect to the Bodhi Tree which offered Buddha shelter when he attained Enlightenment.

Chapatti: This item of food is an unleavened flatbread known also as '*roti*,' *chapati roti*. This is a popular food in South India.

Chatur Varna Dharma: This term is used to refer to the four castes in the Indian Brahman society, namely: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Sudra. Chatur (four), Varna (caste) Dharma (Concept).

Dhānya: The term is used to refer to grains such as green grams, mung, cowpea, channa dhal, and paddy.

Dandiya haramaba: This is the first exercise that a pupil of dance has to perform using *dandiya* (bar) and *saramba* (exercises). Using a bar made of wood, leg exercises are done, and this helps to keep the body straight.

Dēva /Deviyo: The term is used to refer to the gods.

Devālaya / Devāle: Deity shrine. This place dedicated to the *Dēva*(gods) is known as *Devālaya*.

Devadāsī: The name refers to women who have dedicated their entire life to worship and service in Hindu *Devālaya*. in southern as well as western India. They join the *Devālaya* when they are between the ages of 8 and 15 and they perform religious rituals, please the elite and engage in traditional bharata natyam and odissi.

Devol maduwa: This is the main healing ceremony performed for fertility in the southern dance tradition centred on God Devol, God Kataragama, and Goddess Pattini.

Divi Dosaya: In the Sinhalese society misfortunes like famine, and drought, and diseases like mumps, chicken pox, and small pox are supposed to be caused because the gods are displeased and are known as divi dosha.

Dorakada Asna: This refers to the dramatic process of dialogue between the monk and the god's messenger during the ritual called Buddhist Paritta.

Dosaya: Evils caused by gods, demons and spirits are referred to as *dosha*.

Dunu mālappuva: This is a solo dance performed by a dancer in the upcountry kohombā kankari healing ceremony. It is a ritual where a bow made of wood and covered with a piece of white cloth is held in both hands and the dance is performed turning towards the *Ayilaya*. It is an offering to *dunu devi* or *kande devi*.

Gamarala: The chief officer in the village; also known as *gama mahattaya* and *gam muhandiram*.

Gammaduwa: The *Gammaduwā* healing ceremony centred on Goddess Pattini in the Sabaragamuwa province is performed seeking to increase fertility, improve the livestock, and to protect children.

Gara Yakuma: A healing ceremony performed in the low country tradition to ward off evils caused by the eye and the mouth to ensure a rich harvest and to improve of fish resources.

Gokkola: The term refers to tender coconut leaves.

Goyam kapeema: This is a very simple, but attractive dance well-known among Sri Lankan folk dance amalgamating the acts of the preparation of the paddy field, sowing of paddy, planting, reaping the harvest, winnowing to separate chaff from the grain, and winnows.

Gurukula: A hereditary art institution to provide training in singing, music and dance.

Iguru: This refers to ginger known by the botanical name, *zingiber officinale*. This is used in ayurveda medicine and as an ingredient in cooking, and tea prepared with it is a very popular drink with Sri Lankans.

Kala eli mangallaya: This is the debut performance of a pupil who has studied singing, music and dance in the *guru gedera*. This is also known as ‘*ves mangallya*’ in the upcountry tradition.

Kalayatana: An institution maintained by the teachers of hereditary art schools for the dissemination of the arts.

Kapurala: See *Adura*.

Kattadiya: See *Adura*.

Kavi: The Sinhala term for poetry.

Kinnara: The term is used to denote the caste in the Sinhalese caste hierarchy, which engages in the making of mats, *magal*, *vatti*, and winnows, using reeds. In addition, the term is also used to refer to mermaids.

Kohombā Kankāriya: The main healing ceremony in the upcountry dance tradition, this is considered to have been used to cure King Panduvasudeva (504-474 BCE) of a disease called *divi dosha*. This healing ceremony performed by dancers in the *ves* costume with drummers is now held to invoke the god of fertility.

Kolam: This folk drama prevalent in the low country areas is marked by the fact that all characters wear masks. The term *Kolam* is used to denote the drama and the term *Kolama* to denote each character. For instance, the term police *Kolama* is used to denote a police officer.

Kolpaduva: This is performed as a solo dance in upcountry *Kohombā Kankāriya*. The dancer takes the *kolayuda* on the *Ayilaya* and the dance dedicated to a god.

Kooththu: A folk drama prevalent among the Tamils in Southern India as well as in the northern, eastern and mountainous regions of Sri Lanka. Among the *Kooththu* dances performed based on stories in the Mahabharata and Ramayana, there are various deviations such as *vadimodu* and *therukungu*.

Kulaya: In the Sri Lankan caste hierarchy each unit which performs each profession is referred to as *kulaya*. For instance, people who engage in paddy cultivation are called *govi kulaya* and those who engage in dance, music and singing are called *Berava kulaya*.

Kulu: This is the winnowing fan used to separate the chaff from the grain.

Kurtha: This is an upper garment worn by women and men in countries in the Indian sub-continent.

Kuveni: Indigenous *Yakshini* princess of Sri Lanka betrayed by King Vijaya.

Kuveni asna: This refers to the dance item based on the singing in Kuveni Asna, which is the main story in the upcountry *kohombā kankāri* healing ceremony. The artiste dance with a coconut-shell lamp in the left hand and a stick to stoke the lamp's flame in the right hand, and the entire item takes over one hour.

Madupure kavi: *Kolmura* or poetry sung for the gods in the dance called madupura or mal yakkama in the upcountry *kohombā kankāri* for goddess

Pattini and god Weeramunda are known as madupura kavi. Coconut flowers plucked from 'dedicated' trees are kept on the *yahana*, and after 'smoking' are held in the hand during dancing and singing around the *kankari* shed.

Maduva: Ritual Hall.

Mal Yahana: Main altar for the gods.

Muhandiram: The post falls within the system of native headmen prevailing in the coastal areas of Sri Lanka and the holder of the post functions as the head of *ārachchis*.

Nādagam: *Nādagam* is a distinct feature in the folk drama of Sri Lanka and is assumed to have been influenced by the *therukuttu* dramas in southern India. In the beginning English and Catholic stories were used but latterly Sinhalese and Tamil stories have been used in these dramas.

Nāga: This is the ethnic group of people who occupied Sri Lanka before the introduction of Buddhism and who worshipped the nāgas.

Natuma: Dance

Navan Panguwa: These are services called upon to be performed under the *Rajakariya* system. Whatever the caste one belongs to, the *Rajakariya* delegated must compulsorily be performed. Among the *rajakari* involved are *horane panguwa* (playing of the horanewa), *hewisi panguwa* (beating of the hevisi drum) and *badahela panguwa* (making of clay vessels).

Nindagama: These are land grants donated by the king as a commendation or honour for executing one's allotted *rajakari*.

Panchathurya: These refer to the five forms of musical instruments, namely *atata* (played only by hand), *vitata* (played with a stick), *vitatatata* (played by hand and drumstick), *ghanaya* (metal object used for timing) and *sushira* (wind instruments).

Pansaliswasa: A form of Buddhist performing arts including singing and dancing describing the manner in which the Buddha spent rainy seasons during the forty years of his life. These dances are often performed on temple premises.

Pansukula: A Buddhist religious ceremony in which, after a person has died, the bhikkhus visit the person's home and, before they are buried or cremated

their relatives are delivered a Buddhist discourse explaining the nature of death and the impermanence of life.

Parampara: The term refers to a group of people or the generation who maintain their professions from generation to generation. They are also known as *guru parampara* (teacher generations).

Parapura: See parampara.

Pattini: This is a goddess who is well known in Sinhalese-Tamil folklore and is also known as Pattini *Amma*, Pattini *Meniyo*. There are many rituals performed for her for the protection of pregnant mothers, and infants, and for the improvement of livestock.

Perahera: The *Perahera* is a popular 'procession' primarily centred on the sacred relics of the Buddha. This is a Buddhist religious activity where the sacred casket carried by a ceremonial tusker is accompanied by elephants, dancers, and musicians who roam the streets.

Pirith: Paritta (Pali) means security or protection. This is a form of recitation by Buddhist monks to ward off evil or misfortune.

Raban: The frame drum with a circumference of 10, or 14 inches is called *rabana*. There are several kinds of frame drums. The *ath rabana* (hand drum) can be played by hand and the drum with a circumference of 30-50 inches is placed on a stand and the players sit around it and play it.

Rajakariya: These were the services that were held for the state during the Sri Lankan dominion.

Rata Yakuma: A healing ceremony in the low country tradition performed for the protection of the embryo of pregnant mothers and for children. The ritual performed for the evils supposedly caused by *rata yaka* has many dramatic items.

Sandesa: This (or the Messenger poem) is a unique form of poetry in Sinhalese literature. The poem is used to send a message to a god or king through birds such as swans, parrots, cuckoos, doves, and peacocks. The description of cities, women, *Devālaya*, and temples is described in detail and the poems help to gain knowledge of contemporary society.

Sangha: A Buddhist institution passed down the centuries comprising monks and nuns. The term *Bhikkhu* is used as a synonym.

Sannas: In Sinhalese the term means royal decree or letter and in ancient times they were inscribed on copper and gold plates, rocks, and pillars.

Sanni Yakuma: A healing ceremony in the low country tradition to ward off eighteen diseases caused by eighteen demons. It is performed wearing masks, with beautiful and thrilling items providing entertainment.

Satsathiya: This a form of Buddhist performing arts with singing, music and dance centred on the first seven weeks the Buddha spent after his Enlightenment, namely under the Sri Maha Bodhi, *animisalocana pooja* (paying gratitude to the Bodhi tree looking at it with unblinking eyes), the Golden Bridge, the Jewelled Chamber, Three girls, Tanha, Rati, Raga, Mucalinda Tree and Kiripalu Tree.

Su seta abharana: This refers to the sixty-four ornaments claimed to have been worn by kings and women in the past.

Suvisi viwaranaya: A form of Buddhist performing arts with singing, music and dance denoting the manner in which the Gautama Buddha, before he reached Enlightenment, in his Bodhisattva period, received prophesies from twenty-four earlier Buddhas that he would become a Buddha.

Ura Yakkama: This is an item in the upcountry *kohombā kankāri* ritual and it depicts how a pig is slaughtered and its flesh divided according to the high or low status of castes. Here we see a scathing attack aimed at those in higher castes by the artistes of the lower caste.

Vannam: This is an art form that comes in all three traditions, namely upcountry, low country and Sabaragamu, and contains both singing and dance. *Vannam* are sung praising the gods, animals, materials and the Buddha, and they have individual rhythms and melody patterns.

Vedarala: This is used to refer to a physician in the native medical system.

Veddah: This is an aboriginal tribe living in Sri Lanka and, according to research, their history seems to go back to 10,000 BCE. There are several rituals involving singing, music and dance indigenous to them.

Vihara: Buddhist religious places or temples are known as *vihara*.

Vijaya: He is the first recorded King of Sri Lanka. According to the Mahāvamsa “Vijaya, Son of King Sinhabahu, is come to Lanka from the country of Lala together with seven hundred followers” (Geiger, 1912:55).

Yagaya: This term means offering or patterns of offering.

Yak anuma: This is the initial dance performed in the upcountry *kohombā kankāri* by the demon priests wearing the *ves* costume. The dancers carry a coconut torch in one hand, and it is an invitation to the gods.

Yaka: This term refers to demons.

Yakkama: This is an item in the upcountry *Kohombā Kankāri* containing dramatic incidents. *Naya yakkama*, *Darshana*, *Wijeraja*, *Ura yakkama* and *Sita yakkama* are quite popular among the *yakkamas*.

Chapter 01: Introduction

1.1 An overview

I think this boy's going mad. From morning to night, he goes on beating that drum which the Tamil gypsies left, and dancing. Do boys dance like this? Has anyone of our caste ever beaten a drum and danced? If things go on like this, he'll destroy the reputation of our entire generation. Before that, we must stop him beating the drum and dancing.

The tirade of my grandfather, who was the *Arachchi* (Village Headman), shook the house and frightened me, but it never made me give up my passion for drumming, dancing and singing. This outburst was a reminder to me that dancing, drumming and singing, duties of the *Berava* caste, one of the lowest castes in the Sri Lankan caste hierarchy, was considered improper for those in the high caste. On the one hand, beating the Tamil drum was improper for a Sinhalese; and, on the other, a male dancing was an affront to his generation. The art of drumming, dancing and singing performed for the last two thousand years, in association with Sinhalese-Buddhist monasteries and Hindu-Tamil *Dēvala*, always captivated me. Sometimes while standing before those sculptures seen in hydro-civilisations such as Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva, I danced emulating the movements of the sculpted figures. My spectators were the pilgrims. The outcome of my continuing interest and experience of drumming and dancing was to undertake this research in the form of a comparative study of the performing artistes in Sri Lanka and its relevance to ethno-religious harmony.

In describing the performing artistes in Sri Lanka, I undertook my research as both an insider and an outsider. As I had studied and practised as a Sri Lankan performing artiste, I had gained sufficient experience in Sri Lankan traditional dances, music, song and rituals. Similarly, as a citizen of Sri Lanka, I experienced the Sinhalese-Tamil war that lasted for over twenty-five years and was absolutely shattered by it. The war took away several of my relatives including my brother. Thus, with the war I saw the separation take place between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Therefore, my research has also been informed by my own experiences of several events such as the war, and the separation of Sinhalese and Tamil, producing new expressions of nationalism, and traditional art.

In studying Sri Lankan performing arts there are several primary sources and *Mahāvamsa* points out that its history goes back to a period even before the introduction of Buddhism to Sri Lanka in 543 BCE (Geiger, 1912:3). There is evidence in *Mahāvamsa* about dancing and music among the tribes of *Yaksha* and *Nāga*¹, before the advent of Buddhism and afterwards these arts merged with Buddhist rituals. The art also became a theme for the decoration of walls, mouldings and ceilings of Buddhist and Hindu temples. During the Polonnaruwa period (1017 CE -1255 CE) a Tamil-Hindu religious art merged with the Sinhalese-Buddhist art and became established with the South Indian Tamil administration giving birth to a performing art of mixed Sinhalese and Tamil ethnicities. An important crossroads of this society of mixed religious and national status is the emergence of colonial rule with the subjugation of Sri Lanka to the Portuguese in 1505 CE and later to the Dutch (1658 CE) and finally to the British in 1815. This directly impacted on the arts with the changes in the social, cultural, political and economic fields allied to the agrarian economy that occurred under each period of colonisation. Independence from British rule in 1948 and its consequences also had a powerful impact on art. In particular, the segregation of the Tamil community, owing to the Sinhala Only policy in 1956, seems to have led to the awakening of the Tamils and the resultant over twenty-five-years civil war.

This thesis concentrates on Sri Lankan Sinhalese Buddhist and Tamil Hindu performing artistes firstly to identify and discuss the presence and expression of caste, ethnicity and gender which have been key issues in ethno-religious division. Secondly, the thesis will analyse and discuss how some of these performing artistes have overcome issues such as caste, ethnicity and gender in their practice and how, in overcoming such obstacles, this can contribute to an improvement in ethno-religious cohesion in wider society.

There have been several studies conducted by Sri Lankan and international scholars (De Zoete, 1957; Godakumbura, 1970; Goonatilleka, 1978; Kapferer, 1983; Reed, 2010; Sarachchandra, 1952; Scott, 1958; Simpson, 1984) into Sri Lankan Sinhalese performing arts which mainly deal with dancing, music,

¹ The Buddhist monk of yore who wrote the ancient chronicles of Sri Lanka in the Pali language signified with the words '*Yakkha*', '*Raksha* (god/demon) or '*Naga*' (snake/totem, god/demon) obviously the 'non-believers', the indigenous tribes of ancient Sri Lanka who followed various non Buddhist belief (Nurnberger,1998:66).

singing, costumes, and ritual healing ceremonies. Existing research focuses on Sinhalese-Buddhist art and does not mention Tamil-Hindu art. Therefore, in this thesis Tamil-Hindu art, which has been previously overlooked, forms part of this research. This study is important in several aspects. The first is the influence that is exerted on the role of the artiste by the primary issues of caste, gender and ethnicity. In this research both terms ‘Sri Lankan Performing Arts’ and ‘artistes’ are used to represent both ethnic groups, Sinhalese and Tamil. The other is the examination of the role of performing artistes and their art in helping to build reconciliation between the Sinhalese and Tamils following the over twenty-five-years civil war.

1.2 The Research Focus and Research Design

What inspired me to conduct this research is the training I have received since childhood in both Sri Lankan and Indian dance, singing and music. I was drawn to this research topic also by the knowledge I gained on the Sri Lankan upcountry, low country and Sabaragamu dance traditions from various *guru parampara* (teacher generations) and the knowledge I gained in India in Bharatanatyam and Carnatic music. My preliminary task in this research as a Sinhalese Buddhist traditional artiste was finding participants to interview in order to discuss Sinhalese-Buddhist performing arts, and as a Bharatanatyam artiste myself to participate in Hindu-Tamil performing arts. This research was conducted from the perspective of both a performing artiste and a Buddhist monk (*Bhikkhu*) to investigate Buddhist rituals and the performance features linked to them. An opportunity was thus obtained to study the Buddhist religious offerings in temples, and the contribution made by Buddhist monks², as custodians of Buddhist offerings and rituals, to performing arts and the Buddhist rituals linked to it.

Key studies previously undertaken by other scholars on Sri Lankan performing arts and the artistes were used to inform my research, particularly, the work of Reed (2010), Simpson (1984), Goonatilleka (1978), and Godakumbura (1970) on the Sri Lankan performing artistes and the practice of art. My research builds on the previous studies by making a specific and in-depth analysis of artistes’ practice

² To obtain data needed for the research I ordained myself temporarily as a Buddhist monk and after a temporary monkhood of six weeks I disrobed according to traditional rites.

of art, in relation to issues of gender, caste and ethnicity. On the basis of initial research through literature and field surveys, my pilot project was centred on Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa for which I developed my ethnographic methodology. Accordingly, in my study three main themes, namely, social pillars of the artstes' caste, ethnicity and gender are the focus of this research through the following research questions.

- (1) What influences do performing artistes have in the construction of the socio-cultural norms of caste, ethnicity and gender?
- (2) What is the potential of Tamil-Hindu and Sinhala-Buddhist performing arts for promoting social and ethno- religious cohesion?

Therefore, in researching these two questions I formulated a method to study the socio-cultural and ethno-religious roles and influences of the Sri Lankan performing artiste.

1.3 Organisation and Structure of the Thesis

Data was obtained from field surveys in various parts of Sri Lanka to address the two main research questions. This chapter first provides an overview of this research. A brief summary of the main landmarks of the performing arts in so far as these relate to the Sri Lankan performing artiste, which is the basis of this research, is also given. Secondly, the chapter explains the focus of this research, research design, research questions and the structure of the thesis. Finally, a description of the terminology used in this research and the Sri Lankan profile is given.

Chapter two of the thesis critically examines the key literature relevant to this research. The chapter considers existing literature on the *Vamsa* tradition and Sinhala classical text culture that presents Sri Lankan performing arts and the artiste, and issues about the caste, ethnicity and gender related to the artiste. The chapter also engages with anthropological sources looking at performing arts and the artiste during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras.

Chapter three discusses the methodology used in this thesis. Methods used for filtering linguistic and visual data using mainly the ethnographic approach and their analysis are discussed. The challenges that I as the researcher encountered in identifying an appropriate research methodology and in the field, are

considered and the approaches and methods I used to respond to these challenges are given.

Chapter four primarily deals with the three Sinhalese-Buddhist dance traditions, namely, upcountry, low country and Sabaragamu, the Hindu-Tamil tradition as well as the associated main ritual healing ceremonies, music and percussion instruments. This chapter explains the influences of the singing, music and dances of the respective Sinhalese and Tamil ethnicities on the construction of socio-cultural norms. It also explains the socio-cultural as well as the ethno-religious cohesion between Sinhalese-Buddhist and Tamil-Hindu art forms.

Chapter five discusses the socio-cultural status of the Sri Lankan performing artistes, with regard to issues of caste. The *Rajakari* system based on kingship, how the caste hierarchy has influenced the artistes and their practice of art, and how it changed during the colonial era and the post-colonial era are the main focuses of this chapter.

Chapter six mainly focuses on the nationalities and ethnicity linked to the Sri Lankan performing artistes. Particularly, it deals with the manner in which Sinhalese-Buddhist and Tamil-Hindu art influence socio-cultural norms. It further examines the potential of the Sinhalese-Buddhist and Tamil-Hindu art in strengthening social and ethno-religious cohesion. How performing artistes challenge related gender norms and discriminations is also examined.

Chapter seven discusses gender issues related to the concepts of masculinity and femininity in Sri Lankan art and artistes' practice of the art. Attention is paid here to gender-stereotype participation and the related gender norms and gender discrimination implied in the performing arts.

Chapter eight concludes the thesis and presents the key and original findings of this research. Moreover, the last section draws attention to possible areas for future research.

1.4 Key Terminology

The key terminology, namely, 'performing artistes' and 'socio-cultural' used in describing the socio-cultural status of the performing artistes in this research are defined here. Many researchers including Jakubowicz point out that a performer is a person who, by his creative activity, contributes to the performance

(Jakubowicz et al., 1994:128). This concept is also seen in article 03 of the Rome Convention 1961³. Accordingly, article 03 defines the performing artiste as “any actors, singers, musicians, dancers, and other persons who act, sing, deliver, declaim, play in or otherwise perform literary or artistic work.” Thus, in the present research the term “performing artistes” refers to dancers, vocalists, instrumentalists and actors.

Similarly, the umbrella term ‘socio-cultural’ covers a broad spectrum of aspects. Among them are different groups of people in society and their habits, traditions and beliefs. This combination of social and cultural factors, or socio-cultural, focuses specifically on the way religion, caste, profession, ethnicity and gender constructed and impacted upon the position of the performing artiste. Particularly, these social and cultural factors will focus attention directly on the trinity of gender, caste and ethnicity in this research. The socio-cultural umbrella term will cover how far the Buddhist-Hindu religious and ritual process binds each other together.

For the purpose of this research, the performing artiste and the art form are divided into three eras. The first era considered is the period from the arrival of Vijaya in 543 BCE⁴ up to the subjugation of Sri Lanka by the Portuguese in 1505. This period is identified as the pre-colonial era. The period between 1505 CE up to 1948, when Sri Lanka became independent of British rule, is referred to as the colonial era. The period subsequent to 1948 is identified as the post-colonial era. Therefore, the three eras of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial are used as a time framework to examine the changes and evolution of performing arts and the artiste in this research particularly in relation to caste, ethnicity and gender.

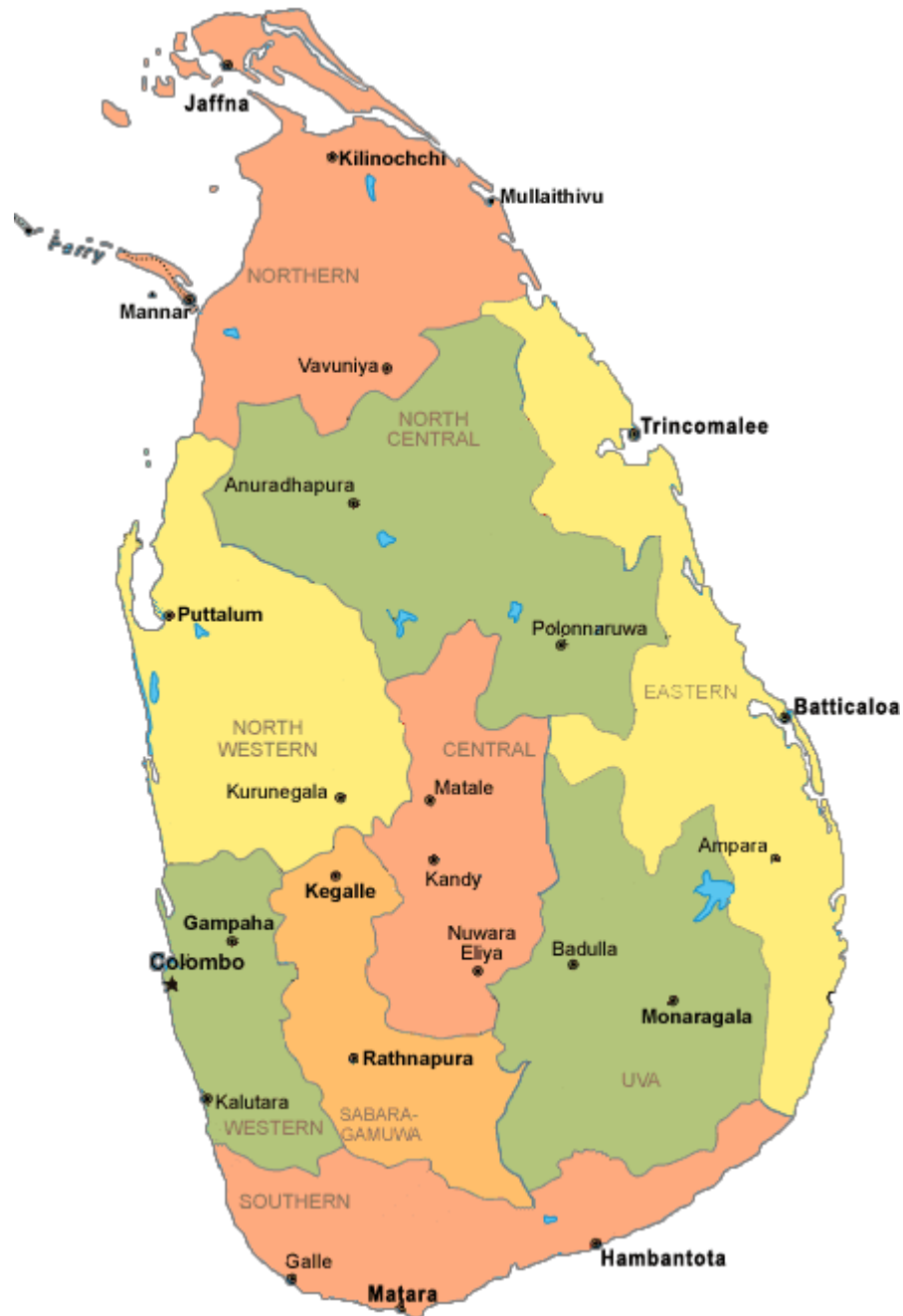
The term Sri Lankan used to describe the Sri Lankan performing artiste in this research is used to denote the two main ethnic groups Sinhalese and Tamil. In describing the Sri Lankan nationality, Reed too identifies Sinhalese and Tamil as the two main nationalities in Sri Lanka. Reed further shows that the island’s inhabitants belong to two ethnic groups that were of Indian origin; seventy-four

³ The Rome Convention for the protection of performer, producers of phonograms, and broadcasting organization.

⁴ Both *Mahāvamsa* and *Dipavamsa* explain the establishment of settlements in Sri Lanka by Vijaya and the consequent establishment of the Sinhalese race.

per cent of the population were of the majority Sinhala ethnic group and the rest originated from two minority Tamil groups (Reed, 2010:9).

1.5 Profile of Sri Lanka



Map 1: Map of Sri Lanka ⁵

⁵ Sri Lanka Foundation (2015) A new map of Sri Lanka [Internet]. Available from <https://www.srilankaoundation.org/newsfeed/a-new-map-of-sri-lanka-with-many-changes-included-will-be-released-at-the-end-of-next-month/> [Accessed 9th March 2019].

Sri Lanka (formerly known as Ceylon) is a tropical island located about twenty miles off the southern coast of India (Reed, 2010:09). Throughout its history Sri Lanka has been known by many names. During the 2nd century it was known in Ptolemy and the Mediterranean world, as the gem-bearing island known as *Taprobane* (Holt, 2011:1). In Sanskrit literature, particularly in the Avalokiteśvara-Guna-Karandavyuha Sutra in the Mahayana Buddhist literature (4th - 5th centuries CE), it is known as Simhaladvipa meaning the island of the Sinhalas. The *Mahāvamsa* and the *Dipavamsa* compiled by the *Bhikkhus* who lived in the Mahavihara monastery⁶ refer to it as *Dhammadipa* or the island of the Buddhist teaching (Holt, 2011: 1). Holt further points out that the Arabs knew this island as *Serendib* (English, Serendipity), in the Portuguese period it was known as *Ceilao* and the English used the name Ceylon (Holt, 2011:11). Although Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948 from Britain, the higher posts in the forces remained under British control and the British Air and Naval forces remained on the island in accordance with the terms of the agreement with Britain. In 1972 the Bandaranaike government officially changed the name Ceylon, which was used up to then, to Sri Lanka and since the declaration of the new constitution on 7 September 1978 it became legally known as the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

Four main ethnic groups live in Sri Lankan society, namely Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslims, and Burgher. Seventy-four per cent of the population consists of the Sinhalese, the largest ethnic group, and they speak Sinhala, which is an Indo-European language, and are predominantly Buddhists. The second largest ethnic group, the Tamils, comprises twelve per cent of the population. They are Tamil, speak a Dravidian language and are Hindus. At the beginning of the Anuradhapura period (377 BCE -1017 CE) with the arrival of Vijaya in Sri Lanka, various Aryan groups migrated to Sri Lanka and there is literary and archaeological evidence that Tamil-speaking groups arrived in Sri Lanka from South India. Indrapala, describing this period and the Tamil-Hindu evolution, observes that the evolution of the Tamil group during this period proceeded

⁶ The Mahavihara established in Anuradhapura by King Devanampiyatissa (247-207 BCE) who did yeoman service in introducing Buddhism to Sri Lanka is the main and the foremost institution of Theravada Buddhism. The Mahavihara, where establishment of the Theravada Buddhist doctrine and the writing of books for its dissemination was done, seems to have become the main Theravada University in the Asian region by the 5th Century.

through the interaction of various peoples. Similarly, among them were the Nāgas, one of the most mysterious peoples on the island. “They were the Tamils whose dominating influence in spreading not only the Tamil language but also the Saiva religion is the most significant aspect of this evolution” (Indrapala, 2011: 72). As Hoole observes, with the gradual spread of the Tamil elements in the Northern region of Sri Lanka in the Anuradhapura period, many Hindu temples, mostly of brick, were built in the Pallava style (Hoole, 2011: 84). It is obvious that these Tamil ethnic groups including their customs and manners, languages, religious rituals, dress, and food, integrated well into the Sinhalese-Buddhist cultural patterns. In addition, 7% are Muslims, 6% Indian Tamils and 1% Burghers (Reed, 2010:09, Swan, 1997:04).

Influence from the West has made a deep impression on the Sri Lankan national, religious, political and cultural institutions. Sri Lanka, which came under the control of the Portuguese in 1505, the Dutch in 1658, and the British in 1815, became a sovereign state on 4 February 1948. Emphasizing the impacts of colonial rule on the Sri Lankan society, Reed points out several important facts with regard to British colonial rule. First, British rule had an enormous impact on all aspects of Ceylonese society transforming its economic, political, religious and cultural structures. Second, when the Sri Lankan monarchy was replaced by a democratic structure of government, the system of land tenure and service gave way to a cash economy. Third, English displaced the languages of Sinhala and Tamil among the elite and the British education system established itself within Ceylon (Reed, 2000:10).

With the end of British rule, the conflict between Sinhalese and Tamils began to emerge. After British rule, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike as Prime Minister gave priority to religion, language, and culture in an exclusive Buddhist environment in 1956. And through it, “these divisions deepened as successive Sinhala Buddhist governments adopted policies that discriminated against the Tamils in the fields of education and employment” (Reed, 2010: 10). Alongside this, the Tamil people rose against the Sinhalese nationality, and in 1958, 1977, 1981 and 1983 anti-Tamil riots sprang up throughout the country. In July 1983, thirteen Sri Lankan Army soldiers were killed by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE), leading to constant clashes between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Army (Reed, 2010: 10), which finally ended in a war that lasted more than 25 years. With the Sinhalese-

Tamil clashes, in 1971 and from 1987-89, the JVP or the People's Liberation Front, a Sinhalese nationalist youth movement, clashed with the government ending in the death of over fifty thousand protestors (Reed, 2010: 10).

1.5.1 Sinhalese-Buddhist and Tamil-Hindu performing arts

In Sri Lankan history, Buddhist and Hindu performing arts occupies a foremost place. Particular mention should be made of the three Sinhala-Buddhist art traditions, namely upcountry, low country and Sabaragamu, in addition to Bharatanatyam, the Hindu performing art. The *kohombā kankāri* built around King Vijaya who colonised Sri Lanka and his local wife Kuveni is considered the main performing arts in the upcountry tradition. The Sabaragamu and low country healing ceremonies centred on Hindu religious deities Pattini, Devol, Kataragama, Mangara and the Bharatanatyam tradition allied to the Hindu *Devadāsī* concept can be seen accommodated within the Sri Lankan historical background. That the history of the Hindu-Buddhist rituals, singing, music and dance of the respective ethnic groups originates from over two thousand years ago, is clearly evidenced by the carvings, sculpture and paintings in Buddhist and Hindu religious places in the hydro-civilisations of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva. The *vamsa* literature, *Sandesa* literature, rock inscriptions, sculpture, carvings and paintings reveal that there were many styles of singing, music, and dance in the respective periods from the Anuradhapura era to the Kandy era.

In the study of the socio-cultural status of the Sri Lankan performing artiste the changes that occurred in the historical, social, religious, cultural and political fields are significant as such changes impacted greatly on the art and the artiste. Caste, ethnicity and gender that influenced the socio-cultural status of the performing artiste are discussed under the main chapters. In any discussion of Sri Lankan performing arts and the artiste, it is important to consider the literature written on the subject so far and this is carried out in the next chapter.

Chapter 02: Review of Literature

2.1 Introduction

In studying Sri Lankan Sinhalese Buddhist and Tamil Hindu performing artistes much information was obtained from both Sri Lankan and foreign academic and non-academic sources. Most of those sources focus on the Sri Lankan Sinhala-Buddhist performing arts and the artiste but pay scant attention to the Tamil-Hindu artiste. The main reason for this is the fact that most critics have only identified the three traditions of Sri Lankan performing arts; the upcountry, low country, and Sabaragamu Sinhala-Buddhist art traditions as Sri Lankan performing arts. However, in this research, the art of both Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic groups is identified as Sri Lankan performing arts. Therefore, this chapter will concentrate on a critical examination of the literature relating to the Sri Lankan performing artiste and his/her art. Hence, attention is paid here to the relationship of the artiste to the Sri Lankan performing arts and socio-cultural factors such as caste, gender and ethnicity that are bound with the artiste and his/her art.

In examining this literature, the main themes are divided into several parts. In the first part, performing arts and the artiste will be studied within the pre-colonial era based on *vamsa* literature and Sinhalese classical works. In the second part, the artiste and his/her art are studied based on anthropological studies by western researchers on art, religion and culture that were prevalent during the colonial and post-colonial eras. The next section will examine the practice of art in relation to caste, ethnicity, gender related to masculinity and feminization in addition to the concept of Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism.

2.2 *Vamsa* tradition and Sinhala Classical text culture

Accounts in Sri Lankan chronicles begin with records of events that date back to 543 BCE and they include *Mahāvamsa*, *Deepavamsa*, *Culavamsa*, *Thupavamsa*, *Dhatuvamsa*, *Dhatavamsa* and other works such as *Rasavahini*, *Saddharmalankara*, *Dampiya Atuva Getapada*, *Kuveni*, *Sihaba* and *Dambadeni*

Asna and also *Sandesa* poems. These are important literary sources in this research.

It is crucial to pay attention to the historical memory between ‘time’ and ‘event’ (Tumblety, 2013; Confino, 1997; Nora, 1989) in the information gathered from the chronicles and focus on the relationship between ‘above’ or ‘before’ memory and ‘below’ or ‘after’ memory. In studying the information and the gap between the ‘time’ as given in the chronicles, it is easy to consider ‘sites of memory’ or ‘cultural memory’ or the ‘politics of memory’ or in other words oral history, autobiography, commemorative rituals, myth and how the relationship between them are identified by historians (Klein, 2000). In particular *Mahāvamsa* written during the 5th century by *Bhikkhu* Mahanama, begins with the arrival of King Vijaya (483- 445 BCE)⁷ to Sri Lanka and ends with King Mahasena (325-352 CE)⁸. In fact, it provides information on religious, political and cultural matters in thirty-seven chapters running from 6th century BCE to 4th century CE. Although the *Mahāvamsa* was compiled in the 5th century CE, it is based on earlier works. *Bhikkhu* Mahanama compiled *Mahāvamsa* apparently because he considered the *Dipavamsa* “not good enough” and he built on this earlier work, with sections that may have been originally orally transmitted and may date prior to the Common Era. Although *Mahāvamsa* contains certain Buddhist rituals found in earlier works and events with historical truth, it is difficult to know which sections, if any, are historically accurate, which are embellished fact, and which are fiction. Therefore, in studying Sri Lankan performing arts and the artiste, it is important to be mindful of the distance between certain ‘events’ and ‘time’ as discussed in both *Dipavamsa* and *Mahāvamsa*. It is possible to fill this gap between ‘event’ and ‘time’ in the information on performing arts and the artiste given in *Dipavamsa* and *Mahāvamsa* by examining how far they are confirmed by archaeological sources especially in Buddhist and Hindu temples, sculptures, paintings, and epigraphy. It is possible to gather information through *Dipavamsa* (3rd-4th centuries CE) and *Mahāvamsa* (5th century CE) not only on political and religious matters but also on the Sri Lankan performing arts and the artiste.

⁷ Geiger,1912:XXXVI

⁸ Geiger,1912:XXXVIII

As far as my research is concerned *Dipavamsa* was useful for the information it provides on Sri Lankan dance, and instrumental and vocal music rather than the information it provides on Sri Lankan politics and religion. Information given in it about the life of the Buddha between the fourth and fifth centuries BC, the history of Buddhism, the introduction of Buddhism to Sri Lanka during the reign of King Divanampiyatissa (236-276 BCE)⁹, and the planting of the sacred *Bodhi* tree¹⁰, the guilds which accompanied the Bodhi tree and the information on instrumental music and dance is noteworthy. *Dipavamsa* states that King Bhatiya (521-549 BCE)¹¹ made offerings to the Mahatupa with dances and, instrumental and vocal music performed by artistes. The *Dipavamsa* describes the sixty-four castes that attended the *Bodhi* tree planting ceremony from India, and the arrival of a group of Brahmins in procession from Kataragama with dancers, singers, and musicians for the same festival, giving information about the Sri Lankan performing arts and the caste of the artiste, gender representation and ethnic cohesion. Particularly, from the description by *Dipavamsa* on the *Bodhi* tree planting ceremony, an understanding of the establishment of an Indian-inspired caste system and the connection of those castes with *Rajakari* duties can be gained. This information in the *Dipavamsa* greatly assists in understanding the role of the performing artiste within the caste hierarchy. Another important point is that it is possible to gather many facts relating to the ethnic groups of the Indian-Sri Lankan mix established in Sri Lanka through the migration of the Indian castes. *Dipavamsa* is useful in enabling the gathering of knowledge on the past ethnic background of the Sri Lankan Sinhalese and Tamil artiste through the Sinhalese-Buddhist ethnic and religious formation, and the formation of Hindu-Tamil as minor ethnic groups in that society.

The *Mahāvamsa* (5th century CE) is another important source which provides much information about the relationship of art and its relation to caste, gender, and the role of performing artiste in religious rituals. In particular, *Mahāvamsa* states that when Vijaya arrived in Sri Lanka he heard the sounds of music and singing in the *Yakkha* city called Sirisavatthu (Geiger, 1912:57). It is also

⁹ Geiger, 1912: XXXVII

¹⁰ Bo or Bodhi tree : *Ficus religiosa* (Chandrasekar et al., 2010)

¹¹ Geiger, 1912: XXXVII

mentioned that King Pandukabhaya (106-176 BCE)¹² sat ‘with *Yakkha* Chittaraja beside him on a seat of equal height and having gods and men to dance before him, the king took his pleasure, in joyous and merry wise (Geiger, 1912:74). King Pandukabhaya (106-176 BCE)¹³ also made sacrificial offerings to the *Yakkhas* on festival days year after year (Geiger, 1912:74). This information leads us to understand that there had been some form of performing arts in the aforesaid offerings held during the pre-Buddhist era. Therefore, these passages from *Mahāvamsa* help in visualising the performing arts prevalent in the pre-Buddhist era in Sri Lanka.

Information relating to the Sri Lankan performing arts and the practice of the artiste can also be gathered from the description of King Dutthagamani’s reign (382-406 BCE)¹⁴ in the *Mahāvamsa*. In the lengthy description on King Duttagamini¹⁵ mention is made of dance, and instrumental and vocal music of a very developed state (Geiger, 1912: 193). Descriptions are given of the performing artistes, how they dressed, and the number of participants, and which form of art they performed. The *Mahāvamsa* also describes the depositing of sacred relics in the Mahathupa and in other religious festivals in which King Dutthagamani participated. He attended the relic enshrining ceremony surrounded by dancing girls and the sounds of musical instruments played while the earth seemed as if it were rent asunder and, where the dancing women took off their head-ornaments, a hall was built called *makuta muttasala* (Geiger, 1912:227). The information given by the *Mahāvamsa* on the Buddhist rituals has been a major source for this research. The main piece of evidence is the contribution of the arts and the artiste to the coordination with the respective religious and ethnic groups. The second is that instead of the development of a masculine and feminine art form that grows independently both in the colonial and post-colonial periods, an art with the combined contribution of both genders is observable. The further important factor is that instead of introducing the artistes as Sinhalese or Tamil, they are referred to by the general term of ‘artistes’, so this makes it possible to obtain information on the “Sri Lankan arts” rather than a separated art.

¹² Geiger, 1912:XXXVI

¹³ Geiger, 1912:XXXVI

¹⁴ Geiger, 1912: XXXVII

¹⁵ Geiger, 1912: XXXVII

Vamsattappakasini and *Dambadeni Asna*¹⁶ reveal much information about the gender representation of the Sri Lankan performing artiste and the percussion arts related to it. Malalasekera points out that the *pancaturya* or the five drumming instruments as described by *Vamsattappakasini* is the first categorisation of musical instruments seen in Sri Lankan history of the time (Malalasekera,1935). This categorisation points to the masculinity concept related to the male artiste connected with that form of music. From these texts it was possible to gather information on the musical instruments used during the Anuradhapura period, and on the religious and gender concepts through these musical instruments played exclusively by the male artiste.

The commentary on the *Mahāvamsa* known as the *Vamsattappakasini* categorises musical instruments in Sri Lanka at the time into ‘*atata* (broad drum), *vitata* (long drum), *vittatha athata* (long and broad drum), *ghana* (cymbal) and *susira* (flute)’. Malalasekera points out that this is the first categorisation of Sri Lankan instrumental music (Malalasekera, 1935). The first mention of the *pancaturya* is in *Vamsattappakasini* and this provides an opportunity to compare the music in the past with that of the present.

Just as several facts about male-dominated art could be gathered from the *Vamsattappakasini*, the *Dambadeni Asna* (compiled in the Dambadeniya period (1220 CE – 1345 CE) also provides information about the religious rituals connected with that music (Gnanawimala,1960). It is stated that when Parakramabahu II made offerings to the sacred tooth relic, artistes who danced, sang and played instrumental music were employed at the four *devales*¹⁷ and there was a kind of wrestling event during the occasion. Several of the instruments¹⁸ described in *Dambadeni Asna* have now disappeared. This list of instruments shows that most of these were used in South Indian Tamil–Hindu

¹⁶ *Vamsattappakasini* is a commentary on the *Mahāvamsa*. It is compiled in 10th-11th centuries CE. *Dambadeni Asna* is written in 13th century CE which describes how King Parakramabahu II defeated the South Indian Kalinga Magha.

¹⁷ Deity shrines (Reeds, 2010:40). Deistic temples (Nurnberger,1998:15)

¹⁸ Nisana thammata, davul, lohodavul, jinadavul, thappu, talappu, mahabera, loha bera, pata bera, ekas bera, pana bera, geta bera, pokuru bera, mihingy bera, nada bera, vayana bera, burul bera, bera mihiri kuttam, maddala, manumakudam, atataya, vitataya, vitatataya, ghanaya, susiraya, horana, virandam, kombu, dara, sak, dakunat sak, sat vidiru, sak ran, sak ridee, sak kara, sak dhawala, sak jayasak, maha veena, and mayura veena (Gnanawimala,1960)

music and dance traditions. The South Indian Tamil-Hindu performing arts and instruments described in the *Dambadeni Asna* clearly depicts the Tamil-Hindu influence on the arts and the artiste by this period. Similarly, from the state-sponsored religious festivals and music as described in the *Dambadeni Asna*, several points can be discerned. Such information also provides a platform to study not only the art of music and singing but also how political movements and social changes have influenced the arts and the contribution of the artiste. This information will describe not only Sri Lankan music and dance but also how political, cultural and social issues influenced the arts.

The other literary source to consider relating to dance and the instrumental and vocal music of Sri Lanka is the body of *Sandesa* (message) poems. Important among them are the *Tisara Sandesa* written during the *Gampola* period (1341–1408), *Paravi*, *Kokila*, *Salalihini Sandesa* written during the Kotte period (1412–1597) and *Savul Sandesa* written during the Kandy period (1469–1815). *Tisara Sandesa* is considered to be the first *Sandesa* poem in Sri Lanka and the message in it is one addressed to King Parakramabahu of *Dedigampura*. The poem, consisting of 189 verses, provides much information on Sri Lankan history, political and cultural spheres and also about the Sri Lankan performing artiste and dances and instrumental music. It provides, in particular, information about South Indian dance traditions, and the instruments and how they influenced Sri Lankan dance traditions that Indian artiste performed in Sri Lankan *Devālaya* and royal palaces. Literature such as this, therefore, provides information about cultural cross currents within Sri Lankan society. The paintings, sculpture, and carvings, at Dambdeniya, Dedigama, Yapahuwa, and Gadaladeniya temples reveal that because of these cultural crosscurrents' new music, dances, items, costumes, and rituals, came into existence. It appears that the existing art acquired a new dimension as items, and musical instruments, not seen before in Sri Lanka are visible in those temple carvings.

Similarly, from *Sandesa* poems such as *parevi*, *kokila*, and *salalihini*, much information on the gender, caste, and ethnicity of the Sri Lankan performing artiste and his/her art and religious, political and social information related to the arts could be gathered. The information in *Sandesa* literature on singing, music and dancing and costumes reflects the homogeneity of the Sri Lankan arts.

The appreciation and presentation of South Indian Tamil art in these works compiled by Sinhalese authors in the Sinhala language demonstrate that a unity among the nationalities existed at the time.

Hence much information can be gathered from chronicles headed by *Mahāvamsa*, *Dipavamsa* and other historical writings on Sri Lanka's social, cultural, political and religious institutions. These sources in particular, provide information and discussion on rituals, offerings, dancing, music, and costumes related to the Sri Lankan performing arts and the artiste, which can be used in understanding how modern performing arts and the artiste have evolved.

Social, cultural, political and economic information reflected in the *vamsa* literature and the *Sandesā* poems seems to have received the attention of both local and foreign scholars. A discussion on the anthropological studies and colonial literature on the Sri Lankan performing arts and the artiste will be taken up in the next section.

2.3 Western studies, and colonial literature

During the European colonisation of Sri Lanka, first by the Portuguese (1505-1658) then the Dutch (1658-1796) and finally the British (1815-1948), which covers a period of over 400 years, the people of Sri Lanka, their behaviour, customs and other rituals came to the attention of some Western scholars particularly during British colonial rule. Bremen and Shimizu (1999) comment:

The historical focus of most papers is on the period running from the mid-19th to the mid-20th centuries. During this time much of the world was being colonized, internally or externally, directly or indirectly, by a small number of strong powers (Bremen and Shimizu, 1999:2).

Malinowski, focusing on the anthropological aspect describes many areas linked to the anthropological studies. Among them, political organisation, tribal economics, jurisprudence, land tenure, financial systems and taxations, education, population, hygiene and outlook are important (Malinowski, 1922). The rituals, dance patterns, music, and singing, in the Sri Lankan arts became rich research sources for Western scholars. In fact, ritual healing ceremonies, mask dances, drumming, Sinhalese dance customs, the caste hierarchy, the *Perahera* art, Buddhism, Hindu gods (*Dēva/ Deviyo*), *vamsa* literature and *ayurveda*, among

the Sri Lankan exotic arts, received particular attention from the foreign scholars. Ritual ceremonies discussed in these anthropological studies throw much light on the study of socio-cultural institutions of the performing arts and the artiste in the colonial period. Special mention should be made of the inspiration received by the Sri Lankan arts and the artiste in the colonial period from western art and the new trends that resulted from this in the local art. The paintings at the Telwatta Vihara of musicians, and dancers show that the western musical instruments, dance styles, costumes and colours had influenced the Sri Lankan arts.

In research conducted on the Kandyan, low-country and Sabaragamuwa dance tradition and the ritual healing ceremonies, it appears that the anthropology of dance reached a prominent place. During the last half century this area has become the subject of widespread academic debate and there has been a considerable number of new interpretations regarding human movements. Regarding this revival, Reed mentions, "In the intervening decades, the anthropology of dance has gained greater legitimacy as a field of inquiry, even as it is being reconfigured within the border framework of anthropology of human movement" (Reed, 1998:503). Elaborating on this idea Reed points out that in the 1980s based on post-colonial semiotics, phenomenology and post structural and feminist theory there was a noticeable development in the politics of dance as well as the relations between culture, body and movement and that the most prominent feature of this development was colonisation. During colonisation the Sri Lankan performing arts, ritual ceremonies or oriental arts underwent a great change and "colonial administrations often perceived indigenous dance practices as both a political and moral threat to colonial regimes" (Reed, 1998: 506).

During this period the native dancers as well as the ritual ceremonies were used by the European administrators for their entertainment. Studies into the Sri Lankan performing arts reveal that this appreciation of the ritual ceremonies in itself led to a study of the Sri Lankan performing arts. In fact, research has been directed towards the three dance traditions of Sri Lanka, the art of the mask, mask dancers, Sinhalese customs, the caste hierarchy of Sri Lanka, Buddhism and Hindu deities, *Vamsa* literature, local indigenous people (*veddah*), economic patterns and agriculture, administration, and politics. Research conducted

during this period shows how, after the colonial and post-colonial periods, the feudal Sri Lankan economic system underwent a change and how a service system with the exchange of cash replaced the existing social stratifications and the consequent changes that occurred among the performing artistes and their art.

Davit Scott's (1958) work *Formations of Ritual, Colonial and Anthropological Discourse in the Sinhala Yak Thovil* focusing on the consideration of theoretical issues involved in the representation of Buddhism and Buddhist identity in modern Sri Lanka may be used in studying the Sri Lankan performing arts and the connected *thovil* ceremonies and healing ceremonies and how they, without coming into conflict with Buddhism, developed independently. In particular, the matters discussed in the first chapter namely '*situating yakku*', '*varama and Sinhala Buddhist cosmology*', '*yakku and dosa*' (troubles) help one to look at *thovil* (devil dancing) and healing ceremonies belonging to all the three dance traditions of Sri Lanka from a new perspective. Scott shows in *Colonial Discourses* in part two of his book and *Reconstructing Anthropological Objects* in part three how the colonial understanding of '*yak thovil*' as demonism has influenced modern anthropological representations of Sinhala Buddhist identity. The classical theories provided in these studies helped me as a researcher to understand the colonial perspective about *yak thovil* of Sri Lanka and the psychological, phenomenological and other elements inherent in them. Scott's research was fundamental to understanding the practice of the arts by the performing artiste engaged in *yak thovil* ceremonies during the colonial era. Scott's work questions certain metaphors used by Kapferer regarding Sri Lankan *thovil* ceremonies which leads to the identification and description of the colonial discourse on *yak thovil*. Kapferer (1983) in his *Celebrations of Demons* attempts to combine philosophical and theoretical concerns with ethnography. Similarly, in his view, it can be seen as transitional to a more phenomenological orientation (Kapferer, 1983: XVIII). Kapferer discusses a wide spectrum of aspects such as exorcism, class and change in urban Sri Lanka, demonic illness and diagnosis and social context, the symbolic identity of women, demons and the cosmic hierarchy, event and structure in major exorcisms, music dance and trance. Also, his work questions the metaphors used by Kapferer of exorcism, demons, and possession and his notion of a demonic experience among Sinhalese. Scott states, "I will

suggest that this conception of his reproduces in a fundamental way, aspects of a demonological problem of colonial discourse of the Sinhalese” (Scott, 1958:113). Scott offers a broad convincing argument about Sri Lankan Buddhism and demonism. He adds that the element of *yak thovil* in non-Buddhist Sinhala practice was

The darker underside of Buddhism, a constant, more primeval and obtruding force exciting in the Sinhalese what one colonial authority described as ‘a deeper and more reverential awe’ than the official but largely ‘ineffectual religion Buddhism’ (Scott,1958: 112).

From the Western point of view of demonism put forward by Kapferer and Scott, it is possible to build a more objective perspective about Sri Lankan Buddhism, *yak thovil* and demons and the interrelation between them. As a performing artiste in a western colony, the western viewpoint expressed by Kapferer and Scott provides a new perspective to consider the respective art as a researcher. This was of immense help in this research in describing *yak thovil* and the artiste in the colonial and post-colonial era.

These changes in the anthropology of dance influenced Sri Lankan art too in the colonial period, which brought about notable changes in the masculinity and femininity aspects linked to the Sri Lankan performing artiste. The Sri Lankan performing artiste is not merely an artiste but also becomes a physician who cures diseases caused by the evil effects of demons, spirits and deities as evident in these anthropological studies. A striking example is given in the discussion by Paul Wirz on Sri Lankan healing exorcism. Paul Wirz (1954), in his work entitled *Exorcism and the Art of Healing in Ceylon* covering a wide scope, has discussed the Sinhalese viewpoint on the origin of ailments and diseases, the realm of the art of healing, exorcism and the people’s priest, *Mahasohon Samayama, Sanni Yakuma, Riddi Yagaya or Rata yakuma, Bali* ceremonies, *Gara Yakuma*, Buddhism and the Art of Healing. The most important aspect of Wirz’s study is his discussion of the medical scientific theories inherent in the background of those healing ceremonies and *Ayurveda*. Subsequently, several researchers (Kottegoda,2003; Dissanayake,1994) focussing their attention on these medical scientific theories have discussed the masks, singing and patterns of dancing, the prototype of costumes and the healing process but Wirz undoubtedly deserves the

credit for preparing the background for such discussion. Before discussing Sinhalese healing ceremonies and their special features Wirz gives in summarised form the link between the Sinhalese lifestyle and ailments and diseases and the responses involved. Wirz emphasises the fact that although the Sinhalese were inspired by centuries of Indian experience recorded in numerous documents, the practice of magic, astrological knowledge, rituals, and exorcism they nevertheless have an indigenous methodology and uniqueness. Wirz seems to succeed in putting forward a new medical scientific viewpoint on the *Sanniyakuma* healing ceremony (Mask dancing) and the Sri Lankan diseases connected with invisible forces:

1. *Kana Sanniya* – blindness
2. *Kora Sanniya* – lameness
3. *Gini-yala Sanniya* fever and ague
4. *Vedda Sanniya* bubonic plague
5. *Demala Sanniya* hallucinations or bad dreams
6. *Kapala Sanniya* insanity
7. *Golu Sanniya* dumbness
8. *Biri Sanniya* deafness
9. *Maru Sanniya* delirium
10. *Amukku Sanniya* continuous vomiting
11. *Gulma Sanniya* parasitic worms
12. *Deva Sanniya* – smallpox, cholera, fever and other epidemic diseases
13. *Nāga Sanniya* evil dreams
14. *Murta Sanniya* unconsciousness
15. *Kala Sanniya* black death
16. *Pita Sanniya* bile
17. *Vata Sanniya* flatulence
18. *Slesma Sanniya* mucus

The *Daha-ata sanniya* described by Wirz in particular can be made use of to study not only the performing arts but also the carving of the masks used in the ceremony and the caste hierarchy linked to it is important for this research. By studying the art of mask carving by only those of the *Berava* and *Karava* castes and the masculinity concept linked to the art of mask carving and dancing wearing those masks, much knowledge could be gained. Similarly, the concepts of purity and impurity could be identified and examined.

The work entitled *Dance and Magic Drama in Ceylon* written by the well-known British dance critic De Zoete (1957) is also important as an anthropological study on the Sri Lankan performing arts and the performing artiste and art institutes, rituals and healing ceremonies during the post-colonial period. In this description by De Zoete, written after having visited Ceylon and speaking and working with the performing artistes, it is possible to glean several important facts about the performing arts. The first is the information that could be obtained about the arts as they existed during the colonial period in Sri Lanka. Some facts about the Sri Lankan arts and the artiste are revealed in the description of De Zoete of the *kohombā kankāri* performed during the colonial period. A noteworthy fact is that the financial assistance by the state was so considerable that 80 to 100 dancers were required to participate. The other is that because of the *rajakari* ritual linked to the caste system, the performing artiste directly participated in the performing arts. However, these financial and *rajakari* rituals do seem to undergo a change as regards the arts and the artiste in latter times as shown by Reed. Describing the holding of the *kankāriya* in the 1980s to 1990s Reed says, 'In the 1980s and 1990s the number of performances in a *kankariya* ranged from a minimum of twelve (six dancers and six drummers) to twenty or more, depending on economic factors' (Reed, 2010: 27). Several facts emerge in the discussion of the *kohombā kankāri* in the colonial period by de Zoete and the ritual of *kohombā kanakāri* in the 1980s and 1990s in terms of the socio-cultural status of the Sri Lankan performing arts and the artiste. The replacement of agro-economy by an import-oriented economic system, and the fixing of a price on the artiste and his service owing to the transaction of cash, made it difficult for the state to support the arts financially. It was possible during my research to understand, through the accounts of both De Zoete and Reed, the socio-cultural changes that occurred

during colonial and post-colonial periods. This is strong evidence to help assess how art in the colonial era as shown by De Zoete had changed by modern times. In this description of Sri Lankan art by De Zoete several important facts could be gathered about the upcountry *Vannam* and their use. Commenting on *vannam* De Zoete states:

Wannam are eighteen, mostly referring to some animal, horse, snake, elephant etc. The subject for each wannam is very faintly adumbrated in the dance. There are certain snake-like movements, suggesting mudras with the hands; also, an elephant-step, with trunk movements, resembling kathakali (De Zoete, 1957:26).

This description by De Zoete is important in view of the variety of the performing arts that took place during British colonial rule (1815-1948), particularly, the emergence of traditional art onto the modern stage and how it changed during this period. It is possible to understand the changes that took place from the British colonial period up to the present in the influence of western body movements on *vannam*, a Sri Lankan performing art form, and the structural changes in the productions of the artists during both colonial and post-colonial periods by the account given by Reed. As pointed out by Reed describing *vannam*, this was the first time that a description of how those *vannam* blended with mimetic movements. So, this is important in understanding the development of Sri Lankan *vannam* up to its present state. What could be surmised from Reed's comment is that "mimetic movements" (Reed, 2010:88) as described by Reed, which are not included in the traditional dance, may have had their origin during this period, particularly the popular animal *vannam* like Gajaga(elephant) and Mayura (peacock) (Reed, 2010: 88-89).

The other important aspect of De Zoete's work is about art in the British colonial era given in her discussion of the *Perahera* art, especially how the *Perahera* that was combined with Buddhist religious rituals was used to fulfil the aims of the British colonial administrators. In "Sequel to the 'out of season' Perahara" of 1935 (De Zoete, 1957: 24) she describes how it is used, out of its traditional objectives, for entertainment during the colonial era. Reed commenting on De Zoete's observation says: "This kind of 'out of season' perahara put on expressly as a show for the colonial rulers perhaps set a precedent for others to follow including

the 1935 perahara marking the silver jubilee of George V” (Reed, 2010:103). De Zoete describes how this traditional art form was used for the entertainment of the British colonial authorities and the socio-economic pressure to which the artiste was subjected:

He told me that the Kandyan dancers who were taken by Hagenbeck to Hamburg were billed as wild men of Ceylon when, while rehearsing one of them lost his cloth for a moment, it produced such prodigious applause that the losing had to become a regular part of the programme. They were so badly paid, said Fogl, that they used to go around the grounds after the show was over and collect butt ends of cigarettes, which they rolled again and sold the next day (De Zoete, 1957:65).

Particularly, De Zoete points out that the Kandyan dancers by 1884 were known by the Europeans as the “wild men of Ceylon” (De Zoete, 1957: 65). De Zoete’s research can be considered a rare literary source for the study of the socio-cultural change of the performing artiste because it informs us how the performing artiste was treated during the British colonial period and illustrates how an art form like *Kohombā Kankāriya*, which has ritual significance, acquires a commercial value and a fixed price within the western world and how, under the *Rajakariya* system, it becomes a service to be bought instead of a service to be exchanged.

2.4 Performing Artiste and Caste (*Kulaya*)

The low caste people believed that the caste was inexorably ordained in primeval times and it was their obligation (*Rajakariya*) to serve those of the higher castes (Pieris, 1964: 185).

These *Rajakari* duties seem to influence the practice of art by the respective artiste and influenced his/her recognition in society. The *Rajakariya* is a service-oriented system centred on the king. The *Rajakari* authority and its duties are dependent on the respective caste (*Kulaya*), so the caste one belonged to seemed to be a decisive factor in determining one’s occupation. Here, special attention is paid to the caste hierarchy of the performing artiste centred on the *Berava*, *Nekati Kulaya* or caste to which the artiste, who engaged in drumming, dancing,

conducting healing ceremonies, and astrology, belonged because it is a noteworthy factor within the performing arts.

An important study is that of Ralph Pieris (1964) for his pioneering research into the caste hierarchy in Sri Lankan society which is based on a sociological viewpoint. This research is important in many respects. The first of these is the identification of a unique Sinhalese culture which is a blend of various cultural traits such as pre-Aryan, Arya-Dravida and the study of this culture as it was found during the Kandyan period. The second aspect is the existence of local as well as foreign research based on the basic social structure as shown by Ralph Pieris. It is therefore possible to identify the relationship between the Sinhalese social institutions and the *Berava* or *Naketi* castes. Pieris points out that many studies written about the Sinhalese society in ancient times had been based on the idea that the ancient social system was the best system that could be followed and that they had been written with a somewhat over anxious admiration of the ancient culture. Although Pieris has provided information on the Sinhalese social organisation in the Kandyan period and the *Berava* caste people, a shortcoming is that no attention has been paid to the social institutions and the caste hierarchy during nearly 1900 years from the Anuradhapura period up to the Kandyan period. So, several questions relating to the origin of the description and information pertaining to the Kandyan period as described by Pieris, what happened to the social caste hierarchy of the artiste who performed amidst South Indian and Western aggressions during various periods, and the evolution of the caste hierarchy up to the Kandyan period remain unanswered. It is therefore my task in this research to examine through literary and archaeological sources the social position of Sinhalese–Buddhist performing artistes during this long period of history and provide new insights into this.

Another important source of information about the caste system is the work by William H. Gilbert (1953) on *The Sinhalese Caste System of Central and Southern Ceylon during the colonial period*. Gilbert does not give a description of the evolution of the caste hierarchy from the inception of Sinhalese society. He points out that the caste hierarchy established in Sri Lanka is different from the Indian civilisation and his description of the related ecological factors is most interesting. In particular, he describes the principal varieties of environment seen

in Sri Lanka and specific living modes connected with such environmental types and the caste that were connected to such types. This is particularly noteworthy because although much research has been done on the Sri Lankan caste hierarchy, this is the most important discussion which deals with the relationship between ecological factors and the activities belonging to the various castes.

The cultivated areas were mainly inhabited by the govigamas and their allies. The upland areas included terrace cultivation of rice while the lowland cultivation was in the river basins near the sea. In upland the govigamas cultivated cocoa, tea, rubber and coffee in modern times. The occasional broad and marshy plains of grass were not much used in cultivation. In the upland, the kitul palm furnished the jaggary or palm sugar extracted by hakuru caste, the grasslands material for the grass-cutter caste and for the mat weavers, potter caste. The cinnamon tree flourished in the low lands and furnished a basis for subsistence to the chalia or cinnamon peeler caste. In this area also occurred the coconut palm, the basis of toddy and the subsistence of the toddy-drawer caste. Finally, on the coastal or maritime area proper were the karava caste fishermen, carpenters, and handymen of the caste (Gilbert, 1953: 303-304).

Thus, Gilbert describes how the Sri Lankan caste system developed mixed with environmental types by paying special attention to the respective caste, and although there were various chaotic and confusing practices within those caste traditions he shows that there was also an acceptable coordination when they are studied as a whole. He points out that the Sri Lankan caste tradition was primarily connected with the *Rajakari* system or the fixed economic system. In other words, the *Rajakariya* belonging to the respective caste had to be performed for the King, the landlord, or the proprietary temple. Another matter that is highlighted is that 'a pattern of exploitation of the natural environment becomes apparent in the various caste divisions' (Gilbert, 1953: 338). This concept of pollution shown by Gilbert is further analysed by him to show how it played a major role in the division of the Sri Lankan people. As described by Gilbert the duties of *Rajakari* decide the 'high' or 'low' status of the respective caste. It is possible to get information on the *Rajakari* duties of the performing artists belonging to *Kinnara*, *Oli*, *Parraiyyar* and *Nattuvar* castes headed by the *Berava*

caste within that economic system. Gilbert's description indicates the manner of the contribution of the performing artiste within the Sri Lankan economic system as far as his ritualistic functions were concerned.

The relationship between the ritualistic functions and the caste system as identified by Gilbert agrees with the ideas expressed by Hocart (1958). He points out that caste is linked with the concept of sacrifice and that the social hierarchy is based on this right to sacrifice. From the sociological perspective highlighted by Hocart's *Caste: a comparative study*, it is possible to understand the relationship between the Sri Lankan caste hierarchies. Hocart, analysing certain activities belonging to the *Berava* caste, observes that certain practices belonging to those castes are considered high or low according to the actual practice.

Not every man who drums is a drummer: in Ceylon you can often see women of good caste sitting around a big drum (*Rabana*), and whiling away the idleness of a festive day with varying rhythms; but neither their sex nor their caste would officiate as public drummers at a temple, a wedding, or a funeral (Hocart, 1958:2).

Although Hocart points out the essentially meagre freedom available to the respective caste in the practice of its activities a matter of special interest is that the *Berava* caste enjoyed the sole right to criticise any social, political or economic misconduct seen in other castes. *Ura Yakkama*, an episode seen in the Kandyan ritual healing ceremony known as the *Kohombā Kankāriya*, shows that they could criticise groups of higher castes under the shield of their vocation. The part of the boar given to the respective caste depends on the power enjoyed by the respective caste and the verses and the dialogues employed in the episode show in no uncertain terms the censure made against the higher castes.

Drummer: *Gurunnanse*, now we have to cut up the carcass but there is a hitch, you know. That limping *Muhandiram* is demanding all the four legs of the pig.

Priest: It would be great if we could escape by giving him all the four legs but he is asking for five legs.

Drummer: Five legs? A pig has only four legs, you devil.

Priest: Don't worry; I know how we could give five legs to the limping *Muhandiram*.

Drummer: How could you do that *Gurunnanse*? Are you trying to create another leg for the pig?

Priest: No no, I will ask the Muhandiram to come to the washer man house to see the girl there. When he comes in the dark on the sly and just as he puts his leg out of the stile I would cut his leg with the rice harvesting knife and with that leg I will give him five legs.

Drummer: (laughs). Five legs to the Muhandiram! (Again, laughs aloud)¹⁹.

In analysing Indian society Hocart expresses the view that there was a 'central caste' and that all other castes performed the necessary religious and economic functions for it. For doing this, the central caste paid them in cash, crops or land. This view may be useful to some extent in analysing Sinhalese society, but the special features of the Sinhala society must be borne in mind. In Sinhalese villages the central caste is powerful in the manner Hocart points out, but it plays a secondary role in religious affairs particularly, in the *kankāriya*, because, in performing the ritual, the main role is played by the secondary caste. The sarcastic episodes discussed above can be divided into two groups. One is that a certain group which does not enjoy economic and caste power expresses their dissatisfaction through ritual. The second is that although power is denied in the caste structure it is transferred to the lower caste during religious rituals. In fact, Hocart failed to discuss this second aspect which is the transfer of power. Although social power centres on the right to sacrifice, the transfer of power to the lower caste in performing religious rituals has not received due attention. Therefore, in studying the Sri Lankan performing artiste it is necessary to study the power enjoyed by the lower caste during religious rituals which remains active though not expressly stated in the 'highness' or 'lowness' of the caste hierarchy.

Although Gilbert and Hocart did not identify this special feature relating to the power enjoyed by Sri Lankan castes, they have attempted to explain the deviation of the Sri Lankan caste hierarchy from the Indian system. Accordingly, Gilbert discusses the difference between the Sri Lankan and Indian caste system by pinpointing several outstanding features. The Sinhalese, being a uniform race and religion, do not have the complexity of the Indian caste system because there is a notable amalgamation of tribes, races and religious orders. Also, Sinhalese

¹⁹ Live Performance (PER/SRI/WAR/01)

castes are notably similar in language, dress and customs perhaps with a few exceptions but there is a greater difference in the Indian castes in the above said aspects. The third is that the influence of Buddhism, particularly in its sense of tolerance in matters related to caste, has done away in Sri Lanka with the technical religious sanctions and complicated rules as found in India. Some other important facts Gilbert points out are that when compared to Indian caste customs and habits, the Sri Lankan caste system emphasises duty, Brahmans are not found in the Sinhalese caste system, and religious sanction is also missing. It is therefore essential to keep these differences between the two societies in mind in studying the Sri Lankan caste system.

Simpson (1984) in his work entitled *Ritual – Traditions and Performance: The Berava Caste of Southern Sri Lanka* is useful as a study into the performing artiste and his *Berava* caste keeping the above special features of the Sri Lankan caste system in mind. In particular, Simpson discusses the *Beravayo* who perform in the healing rituals of south Sri Lanka and the way the various traditions of knowledge and skill make such performances possible. He also discusses the specific rituals such as *Bali* and *Tovil* in which the *Beravayo* take part and how the traditional arts and ritual organisations have undergone a change in the face of tourism and the new market for cultural artefacts. He also points out how such traditions and creativity evolved in the changing circumstances. Hence, this research seems to be the first which examines the *Rajakari* functions freeing themselves from the *Berava* caste owing to various circumstances and entering the market as a source of income. Simpson says that the Sri Lankan caste tradition and its structure operates a ‘society-wide system of economic and symbolic interdependence, a very particular expression of the division of labour’ (Simpson, 1984:22). Similarly, he points out that the caste system which operates within the framework of a special economy, means that:

The *Berava* caste still fulfils a critical role as the ones who deal with the inexorable facts of life, taking upon themselves the consequences of disorder and pollution, symbolically restoring and maintaining order through their actions whenever the negative forces at work in the cosmos threaten to disrupt the world of men (Simpson, 1984: 23).

This reality about the caste seems to be a criterion that can be utilised to examine and discuss the artiste's socio-cultural status. During the post-colonial era, the caste and the structure of *rajakari* changes and those engaged in those *rajakari* functions take up other employment opportunities, a factor pointed out by Simpson, which is useful to assess how far the caste of the person makes him subject to social pressure.

It is true to say that *Caste in Modern Ceylon* written by Ryan (1953), which was the source of Simpson's research, is a major study on the Sri Lankan institution of caste. It is apparent that Ryan is successful in studying the caste system of Sinhalese society objectively moving away from the East-West conflict and the present existence and evolution of the caste hierarchy, which was the subject matter of many western researchers. Ryan lists about twenty-five castes belonging to the caste hierarchy in contemporary society and most of them in the list are so small in number one may wonder whether they could be regarded as a caste. Ryan seems to pay careful attention to the Sri Lankan caste traditions and the evolving social backgrounds and more importantly, he has identified the reorientation of institutions and states that the identifiable features of those caste traditions still continue. He observes, "If the modern transition is towards the disorganisation of the caste hierarchy, it is not so clearly towards the disorganisation of caste as structural entities in society" (Ryan, 1953:341). In his analysis he highlights the fact that, among the people affected by commercialisation and urbanisation in Colombo and the suburbs, the idea of caste among them seems to gradually decline but he nevertheless points out that in areas like marriage, marrying into the same caste is considered important. How caste becomes a positive factor in marriage as pointed out by Ryan can be made use of in describing the social relationships of the performing artiste. Although the *Rajakari* functions of the caste have been ignored in commercialisation and urbanisation, this opens the door to discussions about how far caste is a positive factor in the artiste's practice of art, marriage, and the continuation of the art. In analysing caste tradition within Sri Lankan society, Ryan reveals an important fact which is that inter-caste conflict is more often apparent in day-to-day activities than in traditional rituals. He adds that "The caste status hierarchy can be most clearly determined from the patterns of permissible eating" (Ryan, 1953, 159). Simpson also expresses a similar idea on the hierarchy of the Sinhala caste

system in eating when he says, “in the normal course of events a *Berava* person will not be allowed near a high caste table” (Simpson, 1984:35). He also points out “high caste people frequently visit *Berava* households in the course of business or pleasure; it is rare that they will accept anything more than light refreshment” (Simpson, 1984:36). Here, we should focus our attention on certain episodes like those in the *Kohombā Kankariyā* which were referred to earlier where the low caste people enjoy a certain power over others in such rituals. For instance, the cooking and serving of food (*Addukku*), and *Dhānya* to the spectators and the deities are done by a male of the *Berava* caste. This is done on the instruction of the chief demon-priest. On the day of the *kankāriya*, the food for the deities (*Addukku pideema, multan Danaya*) is prepared by male assistants (*atorakarayas*); women are not allowed to assist or even observe the cooking (Reed, 2010:60). A portion of the food is given to the patient (*Aturaya*) first and then all those present are invited to partake of the rest (Dissanayake, 1994:48). This ‘caste hierarchy’ is not seen in the cooking and eating of the food prepared by the *Berava* people. All people belonging to various castes regardless of low or high, partake of the food offered by the *Berava* people. Therefore, it must be borne in mind that the act of preparing food in daily life and its relation to the caste hierarchy takes an entirely different turn when it comes to traditional rituals and the activities of the *Berava* caste in connection with others. This is more so because although power is enjoyed by the high caste people within the inter-caste activities of the Sinhalese society, it is transferred to the *Berava* people during the performance of rituals. There is much information on the socio-cultural environment of the Sri Lankan performing artiste in the discussion by Ryan (1953) on the taking of meals between the castes. The main fact is how the artiste creates for himself, through his caste, an authoritative power. Taking of meals along with the *Berava* caste is not done in normal human associations, the main reason being the ‘impurity’ associated with those castes. But, as described by both Reed (2010) and Dissanayaka (1994), those in the higher castes are made to partake of the meals cooked by the *Berava* caste in certain ritual items of the *Kohombā Kankāriya* healing ceremony. So, it is apparent that instead of social harassment and discrimination by society against the artiste, a ‘performing arts authority’ is created for the artiste. The other notable fact is that cooking of meals during the *Kohombā Kankāriya* performance is mainly a male-dominated act. The idea that

there is 'impurity' in women (see section 7.3) tends to introduce a male-dominated practice into the performing arts as regards the cooking of meals and the conduct of rituals. So, in describing the contribution of the performing artiste caste-wise and gender-wise, the practice of cooking and the relationship between the castes, as shown by Ryan, are important to this research because through that one may gather a good understanding of caste and male-centred rituals operative in the Sri Lankan healing ceremonies.

Reed's study, *Dance and the Nation: Performance, Ritual, and Politics in Sri Lanka* (2010), is perhaps the first time that the issues of caste and gender related to Sri Lankan performing arts and the artiste have been taken up for discussion, at least to some extent. Reed discusses how far those in the *Berava* caste entered national politics through youth uprisings in 1956, 1984, and 1989 and the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict, and the changes in the *Berava* caste consequent to educational and political changes. In particular, Reed who focuses on to the *Berava* caste connected with the Kandyan dance tradition, shows "the way in which the ideology of middle-class respectability promoted by the state has impacted the traditional community of *Berava* dancers" (Reed, 2010:16). She also discusses obstacles the *Berava* people faced in this task and the nationalist appropriation of their practices. Although certain study papers (Simpson, 1984; Ryan, 1953; Hocart, 1935) highlight the social oppression on the *Berava* caste, Reed shows that from 1930 up to 1960 the Kandyan dance tradition in which the *Berava* caste was involved received sufficient elite patrons. Such cooperation definitely helped to establish the Kandyan dance 'legitimate art form' and there were cultural and political motivations. Reed makes an important analysis regarding the new society that emerged and the problems the *Berava* caste had to face as a result of this. From that point onwards, the *Berava* groups who had been engaged for thousands of years in ritual ceremonies found a new status in society. Reed observes;

Particularly in the early decades, the low caste of the dancers and the behaviour associated with it such as extreme deference and shyness to speak, the presence of 'village habits' (chewing betel, wearing sarongs), and the lack of formal education created a situation in which the *Berava* dancers were clearly 'out of place' (Reed, 2010:156).

Reed's discussion is particularly important regarding the change in the *Berava* caste in the British colonial era because this is the first time that the change in the *Berava* caste in the colonial period had been discussed. Even though there are descriptions of the Sri Lankan caste system and the special features of the *Berava* caste in other studies, Reed deserves credit for discussing the evolution of the *Berava* caste through the modern political-economic-educational framework. Although Reed neglected to comment on the low country and Sabaragamuwa dance traditions because of her focus on the Kandyan dance tradition, her viewpoint on the Kandyan dance tradition may also provide a theoretical perspective to study both the low country and the Sabaragamuwa dance traditions. Reed's work *Dance and the Nation* addresses a wide audience and much light is thrown on the evolution of Sri Lankan up-country dance and the *Berava* caste. But it must be noted that it is not possible to discuss the Kandyan dance form and the *Berava* caste in isolation. It is particularly so because even among the low country and Sabaragamuwa dance forms there are many instances of a caste hierarchy and women's participation. In particular, there are several *Mahagela parapura* in the Sabaragamuwa tradition and a *lasya*²⁰ woman's dance form coming down from the past known as *digge*²¹. In the low country area, it can be seen how even today *alatti ammas*²² perform offerings at the Kataragama *Devālaya*. However, Reed does not examine the relationship between the Kandyan dance form and the other low country dance forms in Sri Lanka. Reed did not focus on the caste hierarchy in the low country dance form or its relationship or otherwise to the Kandyan dance form. Perhaps a shortcoming in this study is the failure of the author to study the changes in the above two dance forms in relation to the Kandyan dance form.

Another source to study the Kandyan dance tradition and caste is *the Rituals of the Kandyan State* (1978) written on the Kandyan dance by H.L. Seneviratne. He attempted to generate a discourse using the small number of sources available between 1500 CE-1800 CE. Viewed as a whole, attention has been paid to several aspects such as the birth of the caste and its basic conceptual theories, the elite viewpoints, *Rajakari* obligations connected with the caste, the caste and social

²⁰ See 7.1 Masculinity, Femininity & Lasya and Tandava

²¹ See 3.2.3 Sabaragamuwa Dance Tradition

²² See 7.4.2.1 Alarathi-ammas

economic trends and the 'globalisation' of the caste. However, certain areas can be identified which have not received adequate treatment. A matter for primary concern here is the lack of attention regarding the caste and the authority in ritual duties. All research demonstrates the authority due to the respective caste according to the *rajakari* relevant to the caste. However, no mention is made about this authority within the ritual process. In particular, the authority to criticise the higher castes in the Sri Lankan caste hierarchy is enjoyed only by the *Berava* caste, and that is through the performance of rituals. So, the caste and ritual authority enjoyed by them within the performing arts has been ignored in research discussions. However, in this research, an account is given about how the *Rajakari* authority that the performing artiste holds encounters social authority.

The other matter here is the discussion concerning the kind of influence on caste and the performing arts the Buddhist or Hindu religion commands. The dogma on caste is rejected in Buddhist philosophy but how it continues and affects the performing arts does not seem to have been taken up in research discussions. Thus, how far caste is a decisive factor in religious rituals, an aspect not so far discussed in previous studies, is taken up for discussion in the present research.

2.5 Sinhala Buddhist performing arts and rituals

During the last several decades research has been directed towards the Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and ethnicity and the Sinhala Buddhist ritual ceremonies based on them. Much attention in this respect has been paid to Sri Lankan dance traditions and the rituals connected with them (Nurnberger, 1998; Reed, 2010; Disanayake, 1994). The interest in research regarding dance tradition and nationalism spread throughout the 19th century. Reed discusses this for the period from the latter half of the 19th century up to the beginning of the 20th century, and examines how the dance, amidst the cultural nationalism which came to the fore within Europe and its colonies, caused the birth of multi-ethnic and national cultures (Reed, 2010:5). This cultural nationalism which spread throughout the world influenced Sri Lankan art, particularly the Sri Lankan arts of dance. In this context, it may be noted that the concept of national dance spread in the 1950s and accordingly Sinhala Buddhist Art was established and the 'national revolution' regarding this Sinhala Buddhist Art received the attention of Reed:

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries the concept of “national dance” continues to be salient in many postcolonial nation-states, and the “national” remains a central organizing principle of dance performances for both local and global audiences (Reed, 2010:8).

Elaborating on this further, she points out that this national dance spread as ‘traditional’, ‘folk’ and ‘classical’ dances and a modern or ‘fusion’ dance tradition came into contact with the above tradition and finally transformed itself into a national art form (Reed, 2010:8). Her discussion of the art of the Sri Lankan *Berava* caste is focused on the revolution that took place in Sri Lankan politics in 1956. This is particularly, the ‘Sinhala Buddhist nationalist’ concept introduced and promoted by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike from the Sri Lankan Freedom Party, who became the Prime Minister. The concept explained by Reed can be seen as special when considering the current research conducted into the performing arts of Sri Lanka in Sri Lankan society. ‘Sinhalese dance art’, ‘Sinhalese instrumental music’, ‘Sinhalese ritual healing ceremony literature’, ‘Sinhalese music’, ‘Sinhalese Buddhist deities’, ‘Sinhalese Buddhist rituals’, and ‘dresses and ornaments of the Sinhalese’, began to be seen in a new light because of this ‘Sinhalese Buddhist’ nationalist concept which extended so far into Sri Lankan society that Reed observed that it was a great threat to the minority ethnic groups like Tamils and also an injustice to them.

The policies of the Sinhala state led to protests by Tamils, which in turn led to anti-Tamil riots in 1958, 1977, 1981 and 1983. July 1983 was the worst of these instances of mass violence (Reed, 2010:10).

Therefore, the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict referred to by Reed needs to be considered when the Sri Lankan performing arts, or the artiste are discussed. This seems to be a good foundation to build up “Sri Lankan Arts”, free from Sinhalese or Tamil and Buddhist or Hindu labels. The present research takes up the question of how far the separation of nationalities affected the performing arts and the artiste. (For further details see chapter 6 on Ethnicity).

The credit for taking up the discussion on the ‘Sinhalese-Buddhist’ folk drama goes to Sarachchandra. Sarachchandra for the first time begins to point out that *Sinhalese folk drama* is a clear illustration of the cultural nationalism which

began in the 19th Century and influenced Sri Lankan society. Particularly, *Sokari*, *Kolam*, and *Nádagamā*, which are identified as Sinhalese Buddhist folk plays, and impersonation and mime in the ceremonies of the folk religion and dramatic interludes attached to the ceremonies, are clearly highlighted. In this discussion, Sarachchandra highlights how certain rituals in the folk religion were assimilated by the Sinhalese-Buddhist society.

Thus, there sprang up a curious relationship between Buddhism and the folk religion. The folk religion is based on a belief in supernatural beings and the efficacy of prayer and ritual. Strictly, there is no place in Buddhism for such beliefs. But Buddhism had to adapt itself, from being an individualistic and monastic creed, to a religion serving the needs of an organised lay community (Sarachchandra, 1952:2).

Another noteworthy aspect Sarachchandra draws attention to in this article on folk drama is his inquiry into the relationship between Buddhism and the arts. He destroys the myth that Buddhism does not support the arts and produces valid reasons showing the connection between Buddhism and the arts. Specifically, his analysis of *Dorakada asna* connected with the chanting of *Pirith* in his discussion of ritual and drama is a noteworthy passage.

Even in an orthodox Theravada country like Ceylon we find the beginnings of the growth of rituals out of which a Buddhist drama might have very well arisen, had not more conservative opinion been against such developments. One of these rituals is the 'dorakada asna', a ceremony performed after a seven-day session of 'pirith', in which we can see, in a very elementary form, the beginnings of drama (Sarachchandra, 1952:19).

The other most important point made by Sarachchandra is the relationship between Buddhism and the performing arts. He builds up a broad dialogue on the mutual relationship between the performing arts conducted by the artists of the *Berava* caste and Buddhism. The precept "*naccagita vadita visukadassana*" (abstaining from dancing, singing, music and unseemly shows) is meant for the layman who observes the eight precepts, and not for the ordinary lay Buddhist. Sarachchandra emphasises that this point must be kept in mind when considering Sri Lankan performing arts. Sarachchandra extends this discussion

and points out how Buddhism maintains a close relationship between *Kolam*, *Sokari* and *Nādagama*. In particular, his explanation of the dramatic situations in the folk drama and special Sri Lankan features in them had not been the subject of discussion by any other researcher before him. In *The Folk Drama of Ceylon*, he discusses Kandyan, low country, Sabaragamu dance traditions and folk drama and also the Roman Catholic Passion Play and modern theatre. But it is unfortunate that he lost sight of the fact that there is a precious folk drama tradition related to the culture of the Tamil people living in the north and east. The fact that the term Sri Lankan or Ceylon includes not only the Sinhala-Buddhist people but also the minority races and their cultural traditions, should not be forgotten. Therefore, it would have been better if attention had also been paid to the *kuttu* drama tradition connected with the Tamil people and their religious activities living in the north and east regions. So, instead of describing only a Sinhalese-Buddhist art as Sri Lankan folk drama, this research recognises folk dramas of both Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic groups.

To obtain information on the visual arts such as sculpture, carvings, and paintings, associated with the Sri Lankan hydro-civilisations, *Sinhala Dance and Music* written by Godakumbure is helpful. He primarily focuses on the Sinhalese dance and music as depicted in archaeological and literary sources and the Buddhist inspiration regarding their subject matter. He points out that the Sinhalese, from the very earliest times, used dance, songs and music during their festivals connected with religion and that it was not opposed by Buddhism. The information concerning the performing arts as related to the layman, as pointed out by Sarachchandra, seems to have been taken as the basis of Godakumbure's discussion regarding the relationship between Buddhism and the arts. Accordingly, Godakumbure discusses:

It is true that to the Buddhist the observance of the eight or the ten precepts included the eschewing of enjoyments such as dance, songs and music and that this code of discipline was also imposed on the ordained, but there was no impediment to the enjoyment of dance and music by lay devotees who observed only five precepts (Godakumbure, 1970:17).

Elaborating on this, Godakumbure points out that the Sinhalese *Bhikkhus* viewed dance and songs with equanimity and did not reject such art forms and

even allowed the decoration of sacred places with such visual art and paintings. An important fact mentioned by Godakumbure is that this artwork was perhaps done by the *Bhikkhus*. He cites the cases of artefacts found at Ruvanweliseya and Lovamahapaya which show that *Bhikkhus* had acted as the artists or the sculptors (Godakumbure, 1970:17). Thus, as pointed out by Godakumbure, the Buddhist *upasaka-upasika* were given the opportunity to continue without any opposition from Buddhism. The Sinhalese dance, songs and music and the art work completed by such groups in the ancient temples provide an opportunity to identify a form of Sri Lankan performing art. He points out “The sculptures and drawings of musicians and dancers from various parts of the country give us a few valuable clues regarding the nature and manner of the dances, the shape of the instruments, and how they were played (Godakumbure, 1970:17). To confirm this view Godakumbure points out several instances of dance, songs and music, and musical instruments mentioned in the *vamsa* literature and in classical Sinhala texts and also paintings, sculptures, and carvings found in Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Yapahuwa, and Kandy. It is true to say that Godakumbure’s work is an important source for any research on Sri Lankan Sinhalese dance and music. Without any discussion relating to the artist portrayed by such examples, his social background, cross-cultural influence and contemporary Hindu religious dance and music compared to his Sri Lankan counterpart, Godakumbure seems to be satisfied with the mere provision of source material. This description by Godakumbure is used as a basis for the discussion of Buddhist performing arts in this research.

In describing the relationship between Sinhalese performing arts and Theravada Buddhism, and the relationship of this art form with popular Buddhism and Buddhist spirituality, the compilation *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka* by Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988) is important. Their discussion regarding Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka and its interpretation throws much light on the present face of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Primarily, their attention is directed towards the main features of Sinhala Buddhism as traditionally practised and how they relate to the doctrines of the scriptures. Their discussion focuses on two major facts. The first is the ‘spirit religion’ or the religious practices in daily life. The concept of spirit religion or daily religious practices in their discussion can be adapted for this research. They point out that although

Theravada Buddhism derived its authority from the teachings of the Buddha as given in the Pali Canon, within it there are unseen beliefs and actions. Among these beliefs and actions are the worship of gods and the propitiation of demons, and belief in an attempted manipulation of supernormal powers (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 3). It is important to discover how far these rituals and performing arts practices in Buddhist society linked to the concept of spirit religion, as pointed out by them, could be employed in the present research. As far as the Sinhalese performing arts is concerned *madu*, *thovil*, and *Bali* found there connected with the demon and deity concepts are the most important aspects. The rituals or spirit religion that can be seen in Sinhala-Buddhist society are Hindu gods revered by Hindu-Tamil society. These Hindu gods in the Sri Lankan spirit religion seem to have been adapted to suit the Sinhala-Buddhist society:

Sinhala spirit religion has also affected Buddhism. The Bōdhi pūja, a recently invented Buddhist ritual, is infused with a devotional spirit. Contrary to the intention of the monk who found it, it is now on the one hand being adopted to the spirit religion and on the other being used to express Sinhala political solidarity. The political strain comes out even more strongly in the new myths being developed at Kataragama to claim the shrine as exclusively Sinhala cultural property and to assert that its God is not Hindu but pure Buddhist (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: XII).

Therefore, in the Sri Lankan performing arts, the presence of Hindu-Tamil gods within Sinhala-Buddhist ritual is important in several respects. The main point to note is the ethno-religious goodwill. In religious places such as Kataragama, Bellanwila, Munneshwaram, and Koneshwaram, both Sinhala and Tamil ethnic groups participate in the religious rituals on an equal footing without any religious or ethnic bias. The best example of this is the Kataragama *Perahera*. There, both Sinhalese and Tamil artists participate in the rituals without any discrimination. Therefore, the ethno-religious unity, as pointed out by Gombrich and Obeyesekere, may be made use of in this research as a powerful means to describe the ethnicity and religious background of the Sri Lankan performing arts and the artists.

The work *Masks and Mask Systems of Sri Lanka* compiled by Goonatilleka (1978) on the use of the mask, a special item in the folk drama which operates within a Sinhalese nationalist and religious background, is useful in several respects to understand the Sri Lankan performing artiste, the *Rajakariya* function and the caste hierarchy. Goonatilleka's compilation has informed the current research in terms of investigating how masks are used in criticising various influential village characters such as the *Arachchi*, *Gamarala*, *Vedarala*, and the policeman in the *Sokari* and *Kolam* folk drama and how the performing artiste uses a mask as an outlet for his social and political oppression. Goonatilleka's work therefore helps in the study of the 'ritualistic power' and 'social power' enjoyed by the performing artiste in criticising the socio-political environment using the protection of the mask. The most important point here is that this is the first time that a systematic and detailed description of the mask and ritual art has been discussed. Another important factor is that for the first time several special features regarding the ritual behind mask carving and its iconography has been compiled as a result of diligent inquiry. Goonatilleka reveals some important facts on the masks used in Sri Lankan folk art like *Sokari* and *Kolam* and rituals such as *Thovil* and *Sanni*. Primarily Goonatilleka focuses on the symbolical value of the mask art form.

A mask is a covering worn over the face of the dancer, a showman or an actor. Its main objective is to transform the viewer into a specific character in a ritual or dance – drama. The effect of the mask is highly complex; it acts visually, theatrically and symbolically. The impact of the ritual performances and dramatic episodes is not only tremendously heightened by the effects of the masks worn by the principal performers and the use of the masks, with their varying iconography also makes possible the instant recognition of character and gives an intensely focused and highly concrete form to the structure of belief and experience that surrounds the performance (Goonatilleka, 1978:9).

Goonatilleka's work shows that the Sri Lankan mask exists in three distinctive contexts. The first refers to the mask found in the *Sanni* dance ceremonies of exorcist or curative rituals in *Thovil* ceremonies and also in *Devol madu* and *Gam madu* ceremonies made as offerings to gods. The second is the mask used in

ceremonial dances or dance-dramas. They can be identified in two forms as *Sokari* and *Kolam*. The third factor in Goonatilleka's mask system is the variety and motives behind the use of the mask. There is, however, one aspect which has not received Goonatilleka's attention. Although Goonatilleka offers a lengthy description of the classification of the Sri Lankan mask, folk religion and iconography, he makes no comment on the social and political motives achieved by the performing artists using such masks.

Therefore, it is possible to gather a great deal of knowledge of folk drama, mask dance, *Madu*, *Tovil*, *Bali*, in the Sinhalese performing arts through the writings of researchers such as Reed (2010), Sarachchandra (1968), Godakumbure (1978), Gombrich & Obeyesekere (1988) and Goonatilleka (1978). These writings also throw light on the Buddhist practices linked with such healing ceremonies and the relationship with folk religion and Sinhalese ethnicity.

2.6 Performing Artistes and Gender

The concept of gender in which femininity or masculinity or both are included has been only minimally discussed in terms of Sri Lankan performing arts. There seem to be several reasons for this. One reason may be that within the Sinhalese-Buddhist agro-society, the discussion of subjects such as gender, femininity and masculinity is taboo. However, the present research attempts to fill this gap. In particular, the manner in which the idea of purity and impurity influences the ritual space, what the masculine and feminine rituals in the performing arts are and what the gender norms are is discussed. This provides valuable guidelines for examining the influence which performing artistes have in the construction of socio-cultural norms as regards gender.

The word 'sex' is certainly still used in everyday language to refer to one's sexual identity (one's sex) as well as to the sexual (Beasley, 2005:1). Beasley further states that with the development in academic debate, the term 'sex' is rarely used as a blanket term, but it can be used in academic discussions relating to gender and sexuality. Sex and power could primarily be divided into two components namely gender and sexuality, and gender can be further extended to cover both femininity and masculinity (Beasley, 2005:2). Most modern writers describe

femininity and masculinity as social identities (Cranny-Francis, 2003:1-4). According to the works of certain researchers (Beasley, 2005; Cranny-Francis, 2003) these two Western concepts of masculinity and femininity are defined as *tandava* and *lasya* particularly in the Indian subcontinent (Reed, 2010; Vatsyayana, 1967). Although there has been considerable discussion among researchers about sexuality in connection with the *Devadāsī* concept found in Bharata Natyam in the Indian dance and music tradition, no such discussion seems to have taken place regarding the Sri Lankan arts. Although certain passing remarks have been made about the use of gender (Reed, 2010; Nurnberger, 1998; Kapferer, 1983), no in-depth research seems to have been done into this issue.

Some reference, albeit minimal, is made to masculinity and feminisation as regards Sri Lankan arts in chapter seven entitled, *Between Purity and Respectability* of Reed's (2010) work on *Dance and the Nation*. Reed discusses the concepts of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' discussed in western research basing her discussion on the *tandava* and *lasya* concepts pointed out by Bharata Muni in his Natya Sastra. "In general, dancers in contemporary Sri Lanka equate *tandava* with 'masculine' and *lasya* with 'feminine', and among stage performers it is widely assumed that men should dance in the *tandava* style and women in the *lasya* style' (Reed, 2010: 35). Accordingly, Reed adapts the western concepts of masculinity and femininity to suit eastern theories. These gender concepts seen in Sri Lankan dance as shown by Reed could best be understood by examining the ritual healing ceremony known as the *Kohombā Kankāriya*. The *tandava* style of dance, as performed by the Kandyan dancer, can be seen in such items as *Yak anuma*, *Kopaduva*, and *Dunu mālappuva* in the *Kohombā Kankāriya*. In certain folk dances such as *Goyam kapeema*, *Kulu*, and *Raban*, the *lasya* style of dance primarily showing feminine gracefulness can also be seen (Reed, 2010; 213). Therefore, although the words 'gender' or 'masculine' or 'feminine' are not used in Sri Lankan performing arts, she points out that the concepts of *tandava* and *lasya*, are given a similar meaning to 'masculine' and 'feminine'.

As far as the Sri Lankan performing arts is concerned, participation in it, provision of music, performing of rituals and even provision of training were predominantly male-centred. Reed (2010) describes how this male-centred art

form has transformed into a female-centred art form breaking its traditional socio-cultural norms. Reed points out that with the introduction of dance into schools since the late 1940s and 1950s, women became a visible presence in the dance world and a majority of these dance students became professional dance teachers (Reed, 2010: 198). This development is also discussed by Nurnberger. Here her main attention is focused on Vajira Chitrasena, the female dancer who contributed much to the development of female dance in the Sri Lankan performing arts. She points out how Vajira initiated the introduction of a feminine style to the traditional Sri Lankan art. Here Nurnberger points out, “Vajira was the first to try the foundation for the creation of the *lasya*, the feminine form of the Sinhalese upcountry dance (Nurnberger, 1998: 139-140).

Reed points out a significant feature about the gender concept linked to the Sri Lankan performing arts and the artiste; that is how a male-centred art form linked to a divinity concept transforms into a mixed-gender group art form and how this new form of art strongly suggests sexual movements. She points out how a sacred dance designed to please gods has been transformed into a process of pleasing the modern spectator with its sexual evocation. She observes: “In the 1980s and 1990s some dances by women and by mixed-gender groups were becoming increasingly more sexual in their movements, costuming and themes” (Reed, 2010: 212). Several points emerge from this transformation of a male-centred art form into a mixed-gender sexual discipline. The foremost is the manner in which a socially accepted male-centred art form becomes a female-centred art form with sexual connotations. Commenting on the socialisation of a female-centred art with sexual connotations, Guss observes that it is not a gender shift exclusive to Sri Lanka but is a global trend (Guss, 2000: 205).

As far as this new socio-cultural trend is concerned, it is important to discover how far the female body becomes a sexual display within the performing arts. The female body as described by Adair in detail could be adapted in the case of Sri Lankan art to study how it becomes a sexual display in the art of dance. As she points out:

However, women in dance have to combat the frequently made connection between sexuality and dance if they wish to convey their own message. Sexual display and meanings are evident both in ballet and contemporary

dance when for example, women are presented as desirable. Such meanings fit in very well with society's demand for a perfect body (Adair, 1992:26).

In describing the gender contribution of the Sri Lankan performing artiste, the ideas expressed by Obeysekere (1984) as well as Kapferer (1983) about the society in which the artiste functions are important. They both point out that Sri Lankan art functions in a strictly male-dominated society and that the art too is male-centred. Obeysekere commenting on this male-dominated practice, states that Sinhalese culture places a high premium on male greatness and super-ordination (Obeysekere, 1984). From Obeysekere's description of Sinhalese society, an idea about the male-centred social setting could be formed. Discussing the minimal contribution of women in socio-political institutions in the Sinhalese society Kapferer points out:

Why women are subordinated to men or appear to play a less active role in the economic and the political lives of many societies has to do with historical processes which have placed them in a particular economic and political position within an ongoing structuring of relations, which is also occupied by men (Kapferer , 1983: 141).

The ideas expressed by Obeysekere and Kapferer provide insights into the nature of gender power that operates within the performing arts in a male-dominated society.

The other important concept that emerges out of gender linked with the practice of the Sri Lankan performing artiste and socio-cultural status is the concept of cross dressing. As far as Sri Lankan society is concerned 'cross dressing' is not only frowned upon and ridiculed but is also considered to be a blemish on the 'maleness' of the artiste. The only instance where this cross dressing, which is so ridiculed, is allowed by society is if it takes place within the shed where the ritual is performed. In particular, the transformation of the male artiste into a female character as *Riddi Bissau* in the riddi performance of the *Rata yakuma*, as goddess Pattini in the *Gam maduwa* healing ceremony, and *Sokari* and *Lenchina* in folk drama are not only approved by society but are also viewed with great faith in god. Commenting on this process Nurnberger observes, "the exorcistic

dancer dresses himself up in women's garments for the climax of the ceremony" (Nurnberger, 1998: 46). This provides insights as to how a male artiste dressing up as a female is rejected within socio-cultural norms but turns into a divine, sacred act in rituals.

2.7 Conclusion

At the commencement of the review of literature, an introduction was given to the performing arts that emerged through the *vamsa* traditions and classical text culture. That discussion primarily emphasised how caste, ethnicity and gender could be observed in the Sri Lankan performing arts. Further, how western and colonial literature looked at Sri Lankan art was examined, and the interpretations of western researchers of gender, caste and ethnicity linked to Sri Lankan rituals were also discussed. In addition, a description was given concerning concepts of gender, caste and ethnicity linked to Sinhalese-Buddhist and Tamil-Hindu art. Through identification of literature by separating these subjects there was an opportunity to closely identify the sources linked to the Sri Lankan performing art, which provided an excellent guide to my research.

Chapter 03: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

As a child, whenever I went on a pilgrimage to Buddhist temples in ancient cities like Anuradhapura, and Polonnaruva, hanging onto my mother's hand, my attention was invariably focused on the skills of the artistes dancing, singing and playing musical instruments depicted in the paintings, carvings, and sculptures. Since childhood I aspired not only to look at but also to study those wonderful illustrations of the singing, dance and music of the performing artiste. I was so impressed by those figures, I began to attend the *guru gedera* (tutor's residence) to study Sri Lankan Kandyan dancing and drumming even at the tender age of five. It was this early experience that inspired me to study performing arts for my first degree and I worked as a university lecturer in the same field. I found that not sufficient attention had been paid to the arts and the Sri Lankan performing artistes by the researchers. It was possible through the literary review to discover many aspects such as the artiste and the *Rajakariya*, the performing arts and the division of the castes, performing arts and the higher education practice, the performing artiste and gender representation, and ethnicity and the performing artiste. To undertake more in-depth research about the themes that arose from the literature review, an ethnographic methodology was adopted to collect data. For the collection of this research data, many collection methods such as observation, participant observation, interviews, focus groups, documentary evidence, and oral history, were employed. Emic, or insider, as well as etic, or outsider, perspectives were helpful for me to identify and analyse data obtained through several means. Thus, I was able to collect and interpret the data as an insider and also as an outsider which can be a feature of "Ethnographic Research" (see Wolcott, 2005; Pole and Morrison, 2003; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Atkinson et al, 2001; Arya, 2017).

3.2 Finding the path: an ethnographic approach

Ethnography, deriving from "ethno" (people) and "graphy" (describing), traditionally covers all aspects of a culture's material existence, social phenomena,

and collective beliefs and experiences (Lindlof, 1995:20). In the 20th century, ethnography was employed by social scientists (see for example Marcus and Fischer, 1999; Murchison, 2010) and Lindlof points out an excellent example in the research conducted by Bronislaw Malinowski on the Trobriand Islanders in the 1920s. In that research he pinpointed the “value of sustained, first-hand experience of a group’s environment, language, rituals, social customs, relationships and experiences in the production of a truthful, authentic, and comprehensive account of that culture” (Cramer and McDevitt, 2004:128). Ethnography is connected with anthropology (see for example Berger et al, 1966; Van Maanen, 1988) and as the Hutchins Commission points out, it is, “projection of a representative picture of the constituent groups in the society” and also the “inner truth of the life of a particular group” (Hutchins, 1947:26- 27). According to Murchison, this ethnographic methodology leads to an “understanding of race, ethnicity and gender” (Murchison, 2010:5). Therefore, as pointed out by both Hutchins (1947) and Murchison (2010), ethnography can be used as a tool to examine these issues. Murchison states that this methodology “exposes human systems that are taken for granted and offers implicit or explicit critiques of dominance systems and understandings” (Murchison, 2010:5). An ethnographic method was used in this thesis as a framework to analyse caste, ethnicity, gender and the socio-cultural relationship of the performing artiste.

I also analysed the data that emerged from both an “insider” or “emic” perspective and “outsider” or “etic” perspective (see 3.4 “Hanging out” or “Hanging about”: as an Ethnographer). In conducting this research, I used qualitative research methods and in this data collection I included audio-video recordings, interviews, observations, and field notes (Chiener, 2002; Robben et al., 2012; Emerson et al., 2001). To collect, analyse and interpret the data obtained from field visits²³the Buddhist and Hindu visual arts had to be viewed within a “visual ethnographic” framework (see 3.6.1.1 Visual Ethnography Framework). Similarly, a linguistic ethnographic framework (see 3.6.1.2 Linguistic Ethnography Framework) was used to analyse dialogues, singing, and *gatha* used

²³ Hindu Temples in Jaffna, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Katharagama, Kandy, Nuwaraelliya, and Buddhist monasteries in Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Yapahuwa, Kandy, Kurunegala, Katharagama, Colombo, MulKirigala, Mirissa, and Dodanduwa.

in interviews. Many researchers have successfully addressed the issue of using the visual arts as a research method (Bateson et al, 1942; Becker, 1974; Byers, 1964; Collier, 1967; Caldarola, 1985) in order to understand the life of the common person in the period in which they were created, and this provides the opportunity to analyse what they portray. Therefore, to understand the performing arts and the artiste in the Buddhist and Hindu visual arts in the Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Yapahuwa, Dambadeniya, and Kandy periods, a “visual ethnography” framework was employed. To analyse the basic themes that emerge through the dance tradition in the Sri Lankan performing arts, folk drama, recitations, and drumming²⁴, discourse analysis in a linguistic ethnographic framework was used.

3.3 An ethical practitioner: ethical considerations and approval

When conducting ethnographic research, it is necessary to live within the research area and gain first-hand experience (Atkinson, 1988). As Pole and Morrison point out, “Ethnography is, therefore, a human process which relies on first-hand experience of other people’s lives” (Pole and Morrison, 2003:144). However, to engage in this type of work the ethnographer has to be aware of the impact of his or her narrative on those being studied. The main focus of an ethnographer is about being an “ethical practitioner” (Quinlan, 2011:72). In being an ethical practitioner, formal, open and acknowledged critical engagement with ethical standards and behaviour are required and it is also necessary to pay attention to the basic values of “do no harm”, “integrity”, “no plagiarism”, “validity”, “power” and “transparency” (Quinlan, 2011: 74-75). As regards my research, by “being there” to obtain the first-hand experience of participants in the research milieu, the “critical engagement” was “formalised through ethical reflection” (Quinlan, 2011: 72). Therefore, it is important to examine how my research ethics and ethical reflections “played out in practice” (Quinlan, 2011: 73).

Before any field research was undertaken, the approval of the Faculty and the University Ethics Committee was obtained for the research. As I represent myself and my institution in the research, my primary concern was to maintain the

²⁴ The drumming in Sri Lankan performing arts not only provides rhythm for the dancing or singing but is also an “akshara” communication system which is observable in “athya” drumming.

highest ethical standards. To confirm the clarity and transparency of this research, all participants were asked to fill in an Informed Consent Form, which explained the nature and intent of the research and their contribution. Thus, they were given the opportunity to understand what was expected of them in this research as a participant. They were also informed that they could at any time withdraw from the research without any question or consequence. The Consent Form was made available in Sinhala, Tamil and English and the contents were also explained orally so they could read and understand the nature of the research and for those who could not read it was explained orally (see Appendix 1: Consent Form). Similarly, the participants were informed that their confidentiality and anonymity would be protected and that because of such confidentiality, data provided by them could be accessed only by me and my supervisor, and because of anonymity, they would not be identified at any stage during the research. They were also informed that they would not be identified in any written or spoken account of the research.

In addition, written permission was obtained from the Department of Archaeology (See Appendix 2 : Permission letter from the Department of Archaeology) and the Project Managers and Hindu Priests in charge of admission to the religious monuments under their jurisdiction. This was required in order to photograph and video stone inscriptions, carvings, murals, and paintings, at those sites. In order to avoid data being lost or stolen, it was stored and transmitted on portable encrypted devices thus maintaining its safety and security when gathering, storing and analysing it. A password protection procedure was adopted to avoid unauthorised access, and to protect and to store back-ups, a Datashur Encrypted USB provided by the Information Learning Services of the University (ILS) was used, and in the entire process the identity of participants was kept anonymous. For this purpose, the participants were given code names which could be accessed only by me and my supervisor. Therefore, I was able to undertake the research as an ethical practitioner as specified by Quinlan and actually experience how the 'ethics play out in practice' (Quinlan, 2011).

3.4 “Hanging out” or “Hanging about”: as an Ethnographer

The research process involved field work totalling nearly five months in Sri Lankan Buddhist and Hindu temples and engaging in creative activities connected with the performing arts. Powdermaker, referring to field work, points out, “Field work is the study of people and of their culture in their natural habitat” (Powdermaker, 1968:418). I explored several aspects of the performing artiste in different settings, namely, traditional dance, drumming, teacher lineages, traditional *kalayatana*, traditional rituals, live performances, and Buddhist and Hindu ritual practices.

My pilot study in relation to the Buddhist monuments was undertaken in Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva, and monuments in Tamil and Muslim cities of the north east such as Jaffna, Batticaloa, and Trincomallee. Two main factors were considered in selecting these locations. First, Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva were the first hydro-civilisations in Sri Lanka, and the sculpture, carvings and paintings relevant to the performing arts in sacred places with links to Buddhism and Hinduism running back over two thousand years were available in these locations. Second, the selection of main towns in the northern and eastern provinces, such as Jaffna, Trincommalee and Batticaloa, was because they are inhabited mainly by the Tamil-Hindu community, and many Hindu historical, sacred places and the performance of singing, music, and dance are found in these provinces.

The priests in the Buddhist and Hindu temples and the performing artiste who practise their art in those towns and cities were approached to be involved in this research. In addition, temples, carvings, murals and sculpture from the Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva periods were photographed there. It was possible to discover several aspects through these carvings, murals and sculpture about the performing arts in the pre-colonial period. Among these were the gender participation in the performing arts, the art items of the Sinhala and Tamil ethnicities, the performing arts and the Sinhala and Tamil cohesion, and the contribution of the performing artiste in religious rituals. The data obtained from such extensive discussions was compared with the art works available in these temples and with the themes that had emerged from the literature review. This aspect of the research made it possible to develop an understanding about the

performing artiste's historical socio-cultural relationship. I also participated as an artiste in Kandyan, low country, Sabaragamuwa and Bharatanatyam art forms, spoke with dance and music teachers at universities and other *Kalayathana* engaged in teaching the performing arts as well as students, and had discussions with them, as part of the data collection process. My aim was to come to an "in-depth understanding of cultural preferences" (Zhu et al., 2013:382) from an "insider" or "emic" perspective and to be aware and understand the "insider" and "outsider" perspectives (Geertz, 1998; Mullings, 1999) which I employed in my research.

3.4.1 Insider – an emic perspective

Sources on the emic perspective by Mullings (1999), Brannick and Coughlan (2007), and Arya (2017) were considered in relation to this research. The emic perspective or the insiderness is bound to the researcher in many respects. Among these are gender, caste, class, ethnicity, age, family identity, organisation and occupation. Examining this "insiderness", Zhu points out that the emic approach mainly depends on findings from ethnographic immersion and observation and focuses on the richness of detailed descriptions (Zhu, 2013:382). Therefore, my socio-cultural background was a great asset in studying the Sri Lankan performing artiste as an insider in my research. In particular, my research participants are similar to me in many socio-cultural aspects. The main feature of this bond within the 'insiderness' is my being a Sinhalese Buddhist by birth and my ability to speak both the Sinhala and Tamil languages. The other is my connection with the singing, music and dancing in the four dance traditions – namely, upcountry, low country, Sabaragamu and Bharatanatyam. Although as a Sinhalese-Buddhist performing artiste I am an outsider in so far as the Tamil-Hindu arts are concerned, I became an insider as a result of my studying Bharatanatyam in Bangalore in India on a fellowship offered by the Indian government and as a practising artiste and a teacher of Bharatanatyam dance. Therefore, as Brannick Coughlan points out, within my research field I had first-hand experience which enabled me to interact with the environment, language, rituals, and social relationships of performing artiste (Brannick and Coughlan, 2007: 64-65) from my being an insider. As an insider, I had a greater awareness of information relating to the performing artiste, such as where they live, places where rituals are held, religious places and the *rajakari* families participating in them.

Similarly, I had the opportunity to build up a relationship with the groups participating in performing arts rituals by being privy to more informal discussion than an outsider would (Dobson, 2009: 184). This insiderness also enabled me to access and identify critical events as an artiste in the *Kohombā Kankāriya* healing ritual and *Devol madu* tradition of the low country. As Dobson points out, because of the rapport built up between the researcher and the research participants, it is possible to obtain certain in-depth and revealing data. He adds that those being researched may consider the researcher's identity an indicator of trust and credibility (Dobson, 2009: 184). Within the that particular Sri Lankan ambiance, particularly within ritual methodology and performing arts, I was able to use my insider or emic perspective to “seek out participation, engender trust and build up a rapport” (Arya, 2017:3), and I also had the opportunity of “participating”, which an outsider would find more challenging to achieve.

As an insider it was possible to identify and analyse, in both rituals and folk drama, words with double meanings, insinuations, criticisms of various characters in society, jargon, and dialects used by certain rural folk (Labaree, 2002; Fuller and Petch, 1995; Dobson, 2009). The valuable and rare opportunity I had as an insider was to be able study the Sanskrit and Pali palm leaf manuscripts that are deposited securely in Buddhist monasteries. As a Sri Lankan who is conversant in five languages namely, Sinhala, Tamil, Pali, Sanskrit, and English, I had the chance to examine texts and other works relevant to my research in those five languages because of my linguistic knowledge. As defined by Saville-Troike in the study of one's own culture “ethnographers are able to use themselves as sources of information and interpretation” (Saville-Troike, 2003:89). Here, my insiderness made a positive contribution to my role as an ethnographer.

3.4.2 Outsider – an etic perspective

During the research process, the ethnographer needs to “participate in the life of a group at various levels, either as a complete participant, a participant as observer, and an observer as participant or as a complete observer” (Cramer and McDevitt, 2004:4-15). Therefore, in this research I had an outsider perspective and I contributed both as a participant as observer and an observer as participant.

I refer to non-membership and being an outsider because of the geographical location of myself and my participants for a number of years. Of specific importance is the fact of my coming to England to pursue my higher education after my period in Sri Lankan universities. Integration into that culture and receiving its membership led to the remoteness between me and my participants which was an important aspect in my “outsider” identity. This was further confirmed by the answers to my questions and the hospitality extended to me. On many occasions when my research participants acted as host to me and during interviews, I could understand the value and sometimes the barrier my outsider identity caused. I was told, “You’ll not be able to know these in your country,” “If you were in Sri Lanka,” “Here it’s quite different from your environment,” and “Sri Lankans would never think like you do”. These comments revealed that the participants had identified my “geographical otherness.” Regarding this “otherness” or “outsider” perspective Blommaert and Jie point out, “as a fieldworker you never belong ‘naturally’ or ‘normally’ to the field you investigate, you are always a foreign body which causes ripples on the surface of smooth routinized processes” (Blommaert and Jie, 2010:26). Another important issue was the relationship between my non-memberships and the *Berava* caste. In particular, during interviews interviewees directly inquired about my caste and at times they indirectly asked me about my family name. In this way they had the opportunity to find out my caste.

Customarily, the Sri Lankan performing artiste belongs to *Berava*, *Kinnara* or *Karava* caste but I was an artiste who did not belong to any of those castes but to the highest caste *Govigama*; hence my non-membership was distinct within that caste hierarchy.

In researching the Tamil-Hindu artiste I am an ‘outsider’ because by birth I am a Sinhalese Buddhist. I am also an ‘outsider’ because I was born in the Sinhalese – Buddhist upcountry region outside the north-east geographical zone where Tamil-Hindu people live. In my normal daily life, I speak Sinhala, an Indo Aryan language; so, I am an outsider from the Hindu-Tamil group who speak a Dravidian language.

Another important aspect of my research role was as a “participant observer.” Wogan defines this ‘participant observation’ as deep hanging out (Wogan,

2004:129-39). During the participant observation I was a participant in the action and recorded their observations of the action. In the rituals, and performance, many things were learned through listening, smelling, touching and tasting (Murchinson, 2010). Murchinson's observation that a "researcher can learn from anyone" became a reality here because in certain rituals I learnt a lot from the young performing artistes (age 6, 7, 8). They taught me the melodies of traditional songs. At other times they taught me drumming beats and drills; they also taught me how to bring the *ayilaya* and divine ornaments to the ritual and deposit them.

3.5 The Participants

The research participants comprised performing artistes – namely, dancers, drummers, musicians, theatre practitioners and also *Bhikkhus* (Buddhist monks) and *Sami* (Hindu priests), the Sri Lankan government army soldiers, and former members of the LTTE (The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam). The reason for this selection was that the Sinhalese folk dramas *Sokari*, and *Kolam* and the Tamil-Hindu folk drama *Kooththu*, promote Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism and "Hindu –Tamil" nationalism and were used by the Sri Lankan government army soldiers and the ex-L.T.T.E. members in rehabilitation camps during the civil war. At the start of *Kankāriya* and *Madu* over five hundred people participated in the rituals and other performances and forty-five were selected for the research interviews, for the sake of feasibility. With the forty-five participants selected solo interviews were conducted and focus groups were also held with them. Therefore, it was the same selected group who took part in both the solo interviews and the focus groups. In the selection, ethnicity, gender and participation in the performing arts were taken into account. The people selected belonged to the Woe ethnic groups of Sinhalese and Tamil who were proficient in either Sinhala or Tamil, or bilingual using both languages or were multilingual using Sinhala, Tamil, Pali, Sanskrit and English. Selecting the participants on the basis of language was particularly important to discover how far knowledge of the language of one's ethnic group and knowledge of other languages is conducive to the study of an art of another ethnic group outside one's own. The other important factor that was considered in selecting these participants was their religious background. It was necessary to take into account the Buddhist-Hindu religious background because of the relationship of the upcountry, low country and

Sabaragamu dance traditions with Buddhism and the Bharatanatyam and *Kooththu* with Hinduism.

Another important factor that was considered in the selection of interview participants was gender. It was necessary that the participant group should consist of both males and females to get a better understanding of the gender contribution and relationship between the genders in rituals, the playing of instruments, dance and singing, in Sinhalese-Buddhist or Tamil-Hindu performances. Of the forty-five participants selected, half were women. It is important to note that all those who participated in this research were Sri Lankan citizens over 18 years of age. The primary reason for such selection was that they had the legal right to take independent decisions as adults.

3.6 Data Collection: Methods and Methodological Approach

3.6.1 Introduction

Associating with the Sri Lankan performing artistes and their use of the arts, an ethnographic methodology was adopted in order to study the artistes' socio-cultural relationship across socio-cultural phenomena with regard to caste, gender and ethnicity. The ethnographic methodology provided the procedures to obtain reliable and objective knowledge (Brewer, 2000:2) relating to gender, caste and ethnicity as part of the socio-cultural relationship of the performing artiste.

3.6.1.1 Visual Ethnography Framework

Visual ethnography was used successfully as a framework within my ethnographic research. In this visual ethnography framework, an important contribution is made by photography, videos, images, hypermedia or the cultural context (see Bateson and Mead, 1942; Collier, 1967; Crawford and Hafsteinsson, 1996; Pink, 2005; Pink, 2007; Murdock and Pink, 2005; Da Silva and Pink, 2004).

Visual ethnography was useful in describing how the Sri Lankan performing arts and the artiste are represented in the visual culture through photography, video and images. It was immensely useful in determining how the dance items, music and gender contribution had undergone changes from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial period. I was able to study the socio-cultural relationship of the Sinhala-Tamil or Buddhist-Hindu performing artiste through the visual images employed

in this research. Therefore, a visual ethnographic framework was employed to study the images employed in the research process and to analyse their representations for data analysis.

Several challenges arose in the process. One was the ethical problem involved in taking photographs during rituals in which about 500 people participated. Therefore, it was necessary to obtain verbal permission from each of the participants. Before the rituals started their verbal permission was sought to photograph and video the rituals. If there was any dissent they were allowed to express, it by raising their hands. The other problem was that the nearly 1500-2000-year-old sculptures, paintings and carvings in the ancient cities were damaged beyond recognition; but repeated and close study of them led to a reconstruction of the said artefacts. Exposed to the rain and the sun for over two thousand years these specimens of visual art are so faded that they are sometimes unrecognisable. Particularly in sculpture that shows groups of musicians performing, it is impossible to identify the gender of the figures and the instruments in their hands. Repeated comparative studies of those group performances granted me the opportunity to speculate about the figures and at times to definitely identify them.

3.6.1.1.1. Filming and Photography Approaches

Among the methodologies adopted in this research process for data collection filming and photography (Banks and Zeitlyn, 2015) was an important tool because as Paul and Morrison comment, it 'offers the ethnographer a different medium with which to represent social reality' (Paul and Morrison, 2003:63). In this way, it was possible to photograph the manner in which the Sinhala-Tamil artiste expressed his ethnicity and art, the manner in which *Rajakari* obligations related to caste are expressed within society, and the portrayal of gender within the performing arts. Before filming and photography was done, permission was obtained from the respective places and the research participants. Photographs were taken of paintings, carvings and sculptures found in Buddhist as well as Hindu temples from ancient kingdoms like Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Yapahuwa, Kandy, and also photographs taken during the performances of Sinhala – Tamil performing arts were used for data analysis.

Video recordings were taken of ritual healing ceremonies including dances, music and songs seen in Kandyan, low country, Sabaragamu and Hindu traditions and other religious ritual ceremonies. Events were videoed and through careful analysis of such videos, it was possible to note certain significant features which were not observed during the actual ceremonies. In particular, parading figures of deities and costumes for the *Kataragama perahara*, and the lighting of lamps by *Alartha ammas* are not allowed to be witnessed by outsiders, only by the officiating priests. The rituals in the upcountry, low country, Sabaragamu traditions and those performed in association with *Dēvala* and Buddhist temples were recorded and by repeatedly replaying them, it was possible to analyse them. As Dant observes, ‘The flow and pattern of life as it is lived is recorded and retained in the moving picture with sound to become available for close study and multiple replays’ (Dant, 2004:41).

In every ritual, offering, and procession, two video cameras were used, one placed at the front and the other placed from behind. The use of two cameras enabled the watching of the rituals in the arena and the dialogues, discussions, dances and music that took place behind giving the possibility to analyse them. The advantage of using two cameras is explained by Ferrándiz as follows: using two cameras offers “completely different visual itineraries of the same place” (Ferrándiz, 1998:27). So, in this research the camera shots from behind and at the front of the arena showed how performing artistes line up according to the caste hierarchy and ethnicity in the *Perahera* ritual, and the manner in which the performing arts items are presented in the Buddhist and Hindu religious context. This provided knowledge of how, within the same ritual, different visual itineraries took place.

3.6.1.2 Linguistic Ethnography Framework

In order to obtain data in this research process, singing (*Kavi*), music, dancing, dialogue and plays in the Sri Lankan performing arts as well as interviews with the respective artiste, focus groups and observations were used. One method employed for data analysis was discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003; Georgakopoulou and Goutsos, 1997). I selected this method because it focuses on “general principles of interpretation by which people normally make sense of

what they hear and read” (Brown and Yule, 1983). Jorgensen points out that primarily it is “a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (Jorgensen, 2002:2). It was possible through singing and dialogues used in the Sri Lankan performing arts, and interviews and discussions with the performing artistes, to gain knowledge about “social relations that involve unequal relations of power” between the artiste and society (Jorgensen, 2002: 63). This discourse analysis became the basis for studying how the performing artiste uses singing, dialogues, drama and masks to release their humiliation by society within the Sri Lankan caste hierarchy. Therefore, discourse analysis was used under the linguistic ethnography framework to analyse dialogues, discussions, singing, *gathas*, and dramatic situations in this research.

Jorgensen (2002) points out that critical discourse covers not only written and spoken language but also visual images, which show the special characteristics of visual semiotics and the relationship between language and images. In critical discourse analysis it is possible to analyse the pictures in the texts (Machin and Mayr, 2012), for example, in palm-leaf manuscripts and other traditional manuscripts on *Bali*, *Thovil*, *Madupure kavi*, carving masks and painting, drumming, and the making of drums. In addition, it is also possible to analyse the use of art by the artiste belonging to those teacher-generations and the specific technical methodology belonging to those generations.

3.6.2 Data and method of collection

Ethnography explains and focuses on the understanding of social interaction and also enquires into individual agency and social structures. In this process various measures are adopted to obtain data and through that “different kinds of data may be characterised in different ways” (Pole and Morrison, 2003:47). Such data have been classified by researchers as “secondary” or “primary” (Quinlan, 2011; Pole and Morrison, 2003; Mason, 1996) and “active” and “passive” (Pole and Lampard, 2002; Mason, 1996). How to present an authoritative account of the research and guide their effective use in ethnography (Atkinson, 1992; Pole and Morrison, 2003) are important considerations regarding data that emerges from primary sources such as documents, diaries, photographs, interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, all kinds of research data, original manuscripts and folk

tales (Quinlan, 2011:244). The focus here is mainly on methods used to obtain primary or secondary data for this research.

3.6.2.1 Fieldwork and Field Notes

I developed early contacts with performing artistes, universities and certain communities. I was interested in finding out what research may be possible within the constraints of access, time, mobility and money available for fieldwork and to undertake methodological, theoretical and linguistic preparations accordingly (Crang and Cook, 2007: 17-18).

Before fieldwork commenced, contacts were made with governmental and non-governmental organisations, performing arts institutions (*kalayatana*) and such groups, religious institutions and organisations through e-mail, Skype, telephone calls and letters and it was immensely helpful because it provided me with knowledge of the groups, places, and rituals I could potentially access. As a Sri Lankan, I had a good knowledge of official and unofficial procedures, people and institutions to be contacted, and of the geographical field within which the research would be undertaken. In addition, my linguistic abilities (knowing over five languages) were also of significant benefit to my research. Before visiting Sri Lanka to conduct the research, performing artistes were contacted through e-mail and telephone, and setting apart dates and times for discussions. This enabled good management of the research. With the link built up by this network, fieldwork was started in the geographical zones of Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Jaffna, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Kandy, and Colombo.

From the beginning of this research procedure, “field notes” or writing and recording in my research diary was done on a regular basis. Murchison points out that this is “crucial for the ethnographer” (Murchison, 2010:68). Sometimes writing certain things seems rather funny but Murchison adds, “you are creating an important research record, the process of writing notes can be an important part of the analytical process as you evaluate what is important and what it might mean (Murchison, 2010:70). As a participant observer I was able to collect, and record data captured by my five senses, namely smell, sound, touch, sight, and taste. Within the ritual process I observed how the participants sit, dress, eat and how *Madu* are built for the ritual process, its participants and how they bathe in the river and cleanse themselves. Moreover, non-verbal hand gestures, facial

expressions and body language employed in rituals and other folk drama were instantly recorded before they disappeared from memory. As regards this process of recording, Murchison observes, “ethnographic data is fleeting, and the ethnographer’s job is to record it before it disappears or dissipates” (Murchison, 2010:70). Therefore, sensory experiences such as sights, smell, and words, collected through participant observation, were instantly recorded and in commenting on the importance of this procedure, Murchison states that it is imperative to note that “audio recorders do not record any accompanying information about body language, movement, physical interaction, smell or visual stimuli.” (Murchison, 2010: 72-73). In my field notes I employed not only the data from the five senses but also non-verbal behaviours I observed in discussing with participants and some of the problems I encountered. For instance, I observed that in certain Hindu rituals and performing arts the males participated with their upper body bare, female contribution was zero and when Hindu female artistes answered my questions, they avoided eye contact. All these were noted in my diary, and in the field notebook. This diary and field notebook were always kept in my bag so that others could not gain access to them. At the end of each day the information was entered in a password protected file in the computer and at the end of the field research it was destroyed. Similarly, all such information was treated with complete confidentiality.

It was thus necessary to use various approaches for the field notes because I came across certain rituals and individuals quite unexpectedly. In particular, during a visit from one city to another it was by chance possible to both watch religious rituals as well as perform in rituals, and in order to store such information, the resources at hand were used. There were innumerable instances when I noted in my scratch notes and diary how when I had discussions with former LTTE members during the Sinhalese-Hindu New Year, they panicked when fire crackers were lighted for the New Year and how the agony, they suffered during the war showed in their faces. The data obtained through the field notes and the diary were compared with the visual and linguistic data and this confirmed the accuracy of my understanding of the findings (Geertz, 1973). Atkinson states, “The field is produced (not discovered) through the social transactions engaged in by the ethnographer. The boundaries of the field are not ‘given’. They are the outcome of what the ethnographer may encompass in his/her gaze; what he or she

may negotiate with hosts and informants; and what the ethnographer omits and overlooks as much as what the ethnographer writes (Atkinson, 1992:201) and this is what I set out to achieve with my field research.

3.6.2.2 Participant Observations and being a participant

Look, listen, ask questions, take part, learn the language, learn and record any specialised kind of language or argot, make inferences from what people say, locate informants, develop relationships, become friends, and experience different ways of life (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:120).

As the above quotation points out, an ethnographer has the opportunity to look, listen and observe reactions and record them within special settings and timeframes. Therefore, through participant observation, “The researcher engages in observation in order to gather data on the phenomenon under investigation” (Quinlan, 2011:221). Particularly in this research process, several ways of how observations were carried out can be seen. Basing my approach on ‘what to observe’ and ‘where to observe’ I visited the areas in which the research was carried out several times and finally decided ‘which action(s)’ or ‘what parts of the action(s)’ (Quinlan, 2011:265) should be observed. Such informal observations or preliminary visits were useful because as Quinlan points out, in terms of the researchers, such visits “help them design the formal observation and to alert them to anything in the field that might interfere with, obstruct or delay it” (Quinlan, 2011:265). Here, according to the observations noted, my data collection took three forms. The first stage was ‘Unstructured Observation’ (Quinlan, 2011:221). In my visits to the North-Eastern and the Southern regions of Sri Lanka, I fortuitously had the opportunity to observe *Kohombā Kankāriya*, *Devol Madu* and *Sokari*, but here, I had no deep knowledge as to what should be observed in rituals, and what questions should be asked. However, I was able to record them, take field notes and to study the rituals in order to get a more informed and in-depth understanding of their meaning and purpose.

The semi-structured observation methodology (Cassell, 1998) was developed in this research, which opened up a path to investigate the relationship between the performing arts and the artistes with regards to gender, caste and ethnicity. I made a basic list as to what action should be observed to bring to light these themes. The list contained the artiste’s gender participation, caste contribution,

and the cohesion and division of ethnicities. This list contained items such as, who is taking part, the number of ritual participants, location, time, resources, how they undertake the rituals or performances, participants' interaction and this opened a pathway towards what I should observe.

In addition to 'non-participant observations' I also observed things 'as a participant'. In the performances of rituals, I participated as a dancer, singer and drummer at various stages of the performances. Quinlan states, "While the researcher participates in the action, he/she observes the action and records their observation on the action" (Quinlan, 2011:221). In this observation, an important factor was the technology used. Before these observations were begun the permission of the participants was obtained in writing and at times verbally. Decisions had to be taken about whether fixed or moving cameras or recorders would be used, how the recordings would be made and whether to use close focus or the panorama method because this would ultimately affect the data obtained in this process. In recording very subtle movements or rituals, adopting a close focus approach was necessary because it provides for a keener examination. The recorded data thus obtained were entered in a password protected file on the computer and the data in the cameras and recorders were subsequently deleted.

Through this observation it was possible to detect very subtle points such as what people say and do and identify that particular social process and classify it according to themes under sub themes in order to analyse them.

3.6.2.3 Interviewing

During interviews, collection of data took place in three stages, namely, pre-interviewing, interviewing and post interviewing (Pole and Morrison, 2003: 29). A discussion took place with the performing artiste by telephone, Skype and face-to-face about the dates and times of meeting and the dates when rituals are held. Before each interview a written explanation of the research was provided, and the written approval of the interviewees was obtained. The second phase was the interviewing of the participants. On the day of each interview I dressed in such a way as to minimise the 'distance' between the interviewee and myself. In meeting Hindu Tamil artistes and entering sacred places I dressed in a *Kurtha* shirt and in meeting Sinhalese Buddhist artiste and entering temples I dressed in the

Sinhalese national dress. This helped not only to eliminate the ‘distance’ but was also an ‘ice-breaker exercise’.

Each interviewee was allotted a period of one hour. Allocation of one hour was sufficient in a single interview and during the period, rapport was established, and a range of issues was discussed, and this period of time was suitable for most interviewees (Crang and Cook, 2007:63). The other important factor that was considered was when and where these interviews would be held because location is critical, “It must be suitable, it must be comfortable, quiet, and reasonably private and if possible free from interruptions” (Quinlan, 2011:294). Therefore, the location was selected depending on what was most suitable for individual interviewees. Therefore, in interviewing members of the clergy, their places of worship were visited, in interviewing former LTTE members, visits were made to the prisons and in meeting soldiers of the Sri Lankan Army, their bunkers were visited. Carefully selecting the location of interviews is vital as it can provide insights into the connection between people’s identities and locations, “It is important to understand how various facets of people’s identities are very much immersed in between the different spaces and places of their lives” (Crang and Cook, 2007:63).

Before each interview, information about the research, its purpose and outcome was explained. This enabled the participants to decide whether they should participate in my research process or not. As discussed previously, the participants’ anonymity was guaranteed to protect their confidentiality and to avoid any harm or disadvantage that may arise from their participation. Each interviewee was also informed that at any point during the interview they could decide if they did not wish to continue and even some time after the interview had taken place, and before the final writing up of the data, that they could request that the data they provided not be used.

To examine the socio-cultural relationship of the performing artiste through ancient visual arts and textual traditions, primary research questions were formulated. In order to address these research questions, semi-structured interview questions were employed, which primarily helped with flexibility during the interview and provided both the participants and the researcher with ‘an approach to the research encounter’ (Quinlan, 2011:303). Pole and Morrison

point out that semi-structured has become a kind of “catch-all half-way” house between structured and unstructured interviewing, that commonly allows the interviewer greater flexibility to introduce ‘probes’ for expanding, developing and clarifying informants’ responses (Pole and Morrison, 2003:30). Therefore, the semi-structured interview questions were primarily designed to obtain insights into the main research questions covering the issues of Gender, Ethnicity and Caste (see Appendix 3 : Semi-structured interview questions). Therefore, these ‘open-ended’ questions provided the participants with the opportunity for unlimited possible answers. Particular mention should be made of the fact that whenever caste or war were discussed the participants were found to be sensitive to such questions and, when such reactions were observed, the discussion was diverted in another direction. Sometimes during such occasions in order to deflect the sensitivity of the moment I shifted the discussion to the home-made *chapatti* or *Iguru* tea that was usually offered to me during interviews.

At the conclusion of interviews, the interviewees were asked whether they had anything more to say or whether anything already said needed to be deleted. In the final moments of the interview, interviewees summed up their thinking on the phenomenon being investigated in a clear, succinct and useful manner.

In the final stages of the interviewing, attention was paid to the security of the data and their management. Therefore, as discussed under ‘An ethical practitioner,’ a password protection process was adopted and also a data Shure encrypted USB was used to prevent unauthorised access to data.

After the interviews, I maintained further contact with individuals through telephone calls, e-mail, and post cards as such contacts were helpful in arranging follow-up interviews to review or ask additional questions.

3.6.2.4 Focus Groups

During the research twelve focus groups were held and five to seven members participated in them. Focus group work in this research was important because it provided the opportunity to illustrate and explore the inter-subjective dynamics of thought, speech and understanding regarding the performing artiste and his art (Crang and Cook, 2007: 91). I facilitated focus groups in the hope of obtaining new insights and information to investigate the phenomena of gender, caste and

ethnicity related to the performing artiste. In this research people who were experts in the performing arts, the Sinhala and Tamil social organisations, were invited to participate. Accordingly, LTTE members, members of dance and orchestral troops in the Sri Lankan armed forces, artistes who are engaged in Hindu Tamil arts in the Northern–Eastern regions, artistes engaged in Buddhist Sinhala dance forms, artistes performing Tamil art forms associated with the tea estates of Sri Lanka, Buddhist monks and Hindu priests, teachers at universities and other higher educational institutions engaged in performing arts were invited for focus group discussions.

Attention was paid to several matters before beginning focus groups. As regards focus groups, a factor that emerged was ‘mixed-gender’ and the responsibilities, both of a social and family nature, belonging to such gender roles. It was seen that while males expressed their ideas regarding caste and gender very strongly, females opted to express their ideas during one-to-one chats. Similarly, it was noticed that certain young people were rather reluctant to express their ideas in front of their mothers, fathers and adult relatives. These young people were of 18 years of age and over. One main reason for this is that within Sinhalese culture the expression of ideas directly in front of adults is interpreted as insolence. In discussing a mixed gender group Crang and Cook point out, ‘mixed groups can offer the chance to show up such gender relations, as they might not arise in single gender groups’ (Crang and Cook, 2007:92) In describing sensitive aspects like caste and ethnicity in a society which was a colony for several centuries and affected by a over twenty-five years civil war, action was taken to select people of similar backgrounds and I found that as Crang and Cook point out, ‘age, ethnic and other differences within a group can affect the openness of discussion’ (Crang and Cook, 2007:92).

The time period that would be allocated for the focus group work was also an important consideration. In organising the focus group, the size of the group was considered, and the number was fixed at 6-8 at any given time, which enabled easy conduct of group discussions and better interaction with each member. Although the group size of 6-8 was small, it nevertheless provided the opportunity for lively and active participation (Crang and Cook, 2007: 94). The location where

the focus group was held varied; sometimes it was under a *kumbuk* tree²⁵ on the left bank of Kalaveva tank in Anuradhapura. At another time it was on the threshing floor of a paddy field and, at other times, in the main worshipping hall of a Buddhist temple or Hindu kovil. At each of these sites, a circular setting was arranged in order to encourage the participation of each member of the group. This enabled all members to approach everyone in the group and helped them to feel able to talk about the matter in hand (Crang and Cook, 2007: 93).

First, the discussions of the focus groups were audio recorded and then they were transcribed and alongside this I also made a written record of my observations and impressions, which were used as supplementary data in transcripts. I had to face several challenges in setting up and managing the focus groups. One was that within a mixed-ethnic group and also a mixed-gender group, some participants tended to express ideas strongly about each other's ethnic group as well as gender group. When such a situation arose, I had to stop the discussion and divert it towards another subject. When such a situation emerged, a recent ritual in the region or a performing arts event was discussed going beyond the relevant subject. It was thus possible to avoid any conflict of opinion that may have arisen. There were several other challenges such as finding a suitable location to hold such focus groups, finding a date and a time convenient for everybody to attend and other issues caused by rain and drought. These were issues which confronted other aspects of my research and are discussed later in this chapter

3.6.2.5 Translation and Transcription

The process of translation took two forms. The first stage was the translation of palm leaf manuscripts belonging to the Sri Lankan performing artists or traditional ritual practitioners. Through these palm leaf manuscripts, it was possible to discover modes of singing, music and dances used in the Sri Lankan performing arts involving several generations of traditional artists. Discovery of this information at the first stage statistically manipulated in order to access

²⁵ Terminalia Arjuna. Fernando, M. J. (no date) [Internet] Available from <https://www.dilmahconservation.org/arboretum/plants-and-trees/kumbuk--8f7b1d3e871d074682a49defd50ed202.html> [Accessed 19th July 2015].

many palm leaf manuscripts brought to Britain during the colonial period, which were not available in Sri Lanka. The arts that existed in Sri Lanka before the colonial period and theoretical information relating to them could be discovered through them, which was an asset in terms of understanding the Sri Lankan arts and the artiste.

The second stage of translation was of the data obtained through recordings in interviews, focus groups and other Buddhist and Hindu rituals. In collecting data for this research primarily five languages were used, namely Sinhala, Tamil, Sanskrit, Pali and English. Conversational data in Sinhala and Tamil used in interviews were translated into English. In translating interviews conducted in Pali and Tamil, the assistance of two Buddhist monks competent in the Pali and Sanskrit languages and two university teachers with competence in the Tamil language was obtained.

In analysing the conversational data, the transcription method was used. These transcripts helped immensely in analysing data obtained in the research. As defined in discourse analysis both the interpretive and descriptive methods were used. This is further explained under data analysis. In listening to the conversational data obtained from focus groups and Hindu Sinhala rituals, steps were taken to remove external sounds such as drum beating, conversation and interruptions caused by rain. The translation copies received later were compared with the actual recorded dialogues, along with the translators, which provided the opportunity to make any required corrections or amendments. A written statement from the university teachers who functioned as translators was obtained stating that the information would not be discussed with anyone and that the participants' confidentiality would be protected. In the translation process two fonts were used for the two main languages, namely Sinhalese and Tamil. Courier New was used for the Sinhala language and the Gunsun font was used for the Tamil language. This enabled easy identification of interviews and focus groups in the respective languages. Those transcripts also provided me with quick access to a wide range of interactional episodes that could be inspected for comparative purposes (Have, 2007: 96). In fact, these transcripts contributed to an accessible data archive (Have, 2007: 96). In order to analyse and identify the transcriptions thus obtained, all transcriptions were categorised using symbols

and coding to provide the data for analysis. This will be described in the coding section.

3.6.2.6 Managing Data and Data Analysis

During this research, use was made of data coding, categorising and data casting. In terms of coding in a research process, Coffey and Atkinson state that the segmenting and coding of data are often taken for granted in parts of the qualitative research process and segmenting and coding data always play an important role in a qualitative research process (Wolcott, 1994; Saldana, 2013; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996:26).

In each interview and focus group, numbering was used to identify them easily when they were transcribed. For example, the focus group held in Anuradhapura was numbered as 'FG/A/1'. The fourth focus group held in Kandy was numbered 'FG/K/4'. Further, in order to protect the anonymity of the participants in this research, all names of the participants were removed and were replaced with a coded identity. For example:

Segment A : FG / A /6 (Focus group – 6 Anuradhapura).

845 M1: What is important is not caste. What is important is what we actually do. As for me, I would not think twice about getting into a bus carrying my drum. I am proud of that.

846 M4: Yes, I would agree with you. But, although we are not concerned, society takes a different view.

847 F1: Yes. The first question raised by the bridegroom who came to see my sister was what caste we belong to.

If you take the above dialogue which took place during a discussion in Anuradhapura the four women and the four men who participated in focus group – 6 were given coding such as female 1 (F1), male 4 (M4). Their actual identities were securely stored and could be accessed only by me or my supervisor. Similarly, the participants were given a code name and subsequent interview transcripts were done under numbers such as 845, 846, and 847 and under segment A as mentioned.

Further, the other important element along with this numbering and coding was the adding of category coding to follow the main themes that emerged through such transcripts. For example,

Segment B: IN /J /6 (Interview -06 Jaffna)

0001 412 F1: Not that we do not like Sinhalese dancing, but the language is a problem for us to train for Sinhalese dances.

Segment C: IN/ C / 3 (Interview - 03 Colombo)

0002 841 M2: We need not worry about whether we are males or females. I think just like the female body even the male body is beautiful. In most of my creations in choreography as well as creating costumes I think mostly about the beauty of the male body.

Segment D: IN / A / 3 (Interview - 03 Anuradhapura)

0003 224 F1: My friend belongs to a high caste. I have never told him about my caste. It's very likely he would not dislike the fact that I belong to the *Berava* caste if ever he comes to know it. I don't think about it so much. How many things in life are changed by caste?

The reply given under 0001 of segment B was primarily employed to identify 'ethnicity' and the category code 0002 under segment C was employed to identify 'gender' and code 0003 under segment D was used to identify 'caste'. As such, with the introduction of these four-digit category codes (i.e. 0001, 0002, and 0003) it was possible to identify the themes easily and categorise and analyse them. The next stage was to analyse data with the help of the coding numbers.

For this research process data management through to data analysis was done with the use of the NVIVO software programme. The reason for using the NVIVO software programme in this research process was that it provided a useful tool for qualitative data analysis. Through the use of NVIVO, primary themes can be named 'parent node' and sub-themes as 'child nodes' and I used these in my research (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013:101). Data was organised under the primary themes, namely caste, ethnicity and gender, and thematic analysis was used to analyse them. This thematic analysis provided me with a wide variety of types of

data in a systematic manner that increased their accuracy and through it, understanding and interpreting observations about performing artistes, rituals, situations and organisations was possible (Boyatzis, 1998:05). Explaining the benefits of using thematic analysis for research Boyatzis points out, 'It allows a researcher using a qualitative method to more easily communicate his or her observations, interpretations of meanings to others who are using different methods' (Boyatzis, 1998: 6). The benefits of thematic analysis is recognised and many researchers working in areas such as biology, chemistry, economics, political science, history, physics, astronomy, art and literature have regularly used thematic analysis (see for example Silverman, 1993; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Wolcott, 1994; Mason, 1996; Boyatzis, 1998). However, thematic analysis has never been used by any researcher to analyse performing arts, especially Sri Lankan performing arts. Similarly, management or interpretation of data through NVIVO has also not been done previously in this research area.

3.6.2.7 Field of Screams: Challenges

In describing the challenges in the collection of data within ethnographic research methodology, Pole and Morrison point out, 'Data collection involves many personal and professional challenges for the first-time ethnographer' (Pole and Morrison, 2003:18). Discussing this process further Blommaert and Jie point out, 'since most of us are only human, field work is often a period of deep frustration, disappointment and confusion, sometimes even of bitter tears' (Blommaert and Jie, 2010:24). Moreover, in working with people in a real fieldwork context it is necessary to be 'aware' of the fact that every aspect of fieldwork can go completely wrong, even if it is based on the most meticulously prepared and detailed plan (Blommaert and Jie, 2010:22).

During my first field visit, the most unexpected event I had to face in this research process related to the participants. A dance and music artistes, who helped me to meet relevant artiste and took me to witness rituals, had to leave this world as a result of the great landslide that displaced over three lakhs of people and causing the disappearance of over a hundred more. Moreover, most of the families I interviewed in focus groups lost all their property and were forced to go to refugee camps; thus, the mental agony caused to me in my research process as a result of the displacement of over twenty of the participants was indeed considerable. The

result of this was that I found new participants and continued with the research. Reflective practice (Jasper, 2013; Johns, 2010; Rolfe and Freshwater, 2011) was very helpful in facing the personal and professional challenges encountered during this research. Discussing this reflective practice process, Jasper states that we learn about things that have happened to us and look at them in a different way, which enables us to take some kind of action (Jasper, 2013:3). Through the recall used within these reflective processes and describing the experience and analysing it, we form some ideas or theories about it. Eventually, as a result of these reflections, we come to a deeper understanding of what has happened and therefore develop our own concepts about it (Jasper, 2013:3). Thus, reflective practice was a basic asset in facing the challenges that occurred in this field.

The next most difficult challenge I had to face in this research was during my second field visit. The situation in the dust-laden Vanni region, which had had no rains for over seven months, was a bitter experience. Because of the severe drought, it was extremely difficult to conduct focus groups and interviews during the daytime. Therefore, I had to adapt my programme of research which meant that some interviews and focus groups were conducted even as early as 5.30 in the morning because some of the participants had to leave for work. As shown by Dewey, “we learn by doing and realising what came of what we did” (Dewey, 1938: 34) proved to be a reality in this connection. In describing, analysing, interpreting all the experiences related to these challenges, the opportunity arose to take alternative steps.

The next challenge that I encountered was the lack of electricity, which affected the watching and recording of certain rituals and healing ceremonies in areas in the north-east regions of Sri Lanka. Villages that had been destroyed by the war had not yet been properly rehabilitated and recording rituals in the darkness of the night meant charging the video cameras for overnight rituals and there were numerous occasions when I had to go to the nearest city to buy extra batteries to charge them.

The month I spent as a Buddhist monk living in the most arduous circumstances in a forest and becoming used to a lifestyle where food cannot be eaten after 12 noon, forced me to face particular challenges, which included meditating in front

of a decaying dead body, spending the night alone in my *Kutiya* (cubicle), suffering attacks from mosquitoes, going to villages begging for food and also participating in most sensitive events like the *pansukula*.

My visit to the northern and Jaffna regions in search of Hindu-Tamil performing artistes for the collection of data brought back my own personal bitter memories of the civil war between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan army which lasted for nearly three decades. This was the first time in fifteen years I had visited the region since bringing back the dead body of my brother, a soldier who died of gunshot wounds. With the memory of my brother fresh in my mind, many were the sleepless nights I spent in the northern and eastern provinces. Gibbs's reflective framework was supportive in overcoming this challenge (Gibbs, 1988). In the first half, it was possible to evaluate 'What happened?' as well as 'What were you feeling and thinking?' Later it was possible to overcome the challenge by asking 'What sense can you make of the situation?' and 'What else could you have done?' In this way, through analysing the situation as a researcher, I was able to overcome the mental stress I suffered as an insider.

To overcome these challenges, the training I received as a Buddhist monk and the Buddhist religious inspiration I have had since my childhood was a great support. I endured all these mental miseries and treated them with equanimity as the Buddha declared, *'labo-alabo, ayaso-yasoca, ninda-pasansaca, sukhanca-dukkan, ethe anicca manujesu dhamma assassatha viparinama dhamma'*²⁶ (the eight laws relating to the vicissitudes of life, namely profit and loss, fame and disgrace, insult and praise, happiness and sorrow). The challenges that can be expected during field visits are highlighted by Blommaert and Jie. 'Field work itself is humanly demanding as a field worker will need to give proof of all the qualities of life: patience, endurance, stamina, perseverance, flexibility, adaptability, empathy, tolerance, the willingness to lose a battle in order to win a war, creativity, humour and wit, diplomacy, and being happy about very small achievements' (Blommaert and Jie, 2010:24).

²⁶ *Paṭhama Lokadhamma Sutta* Anguttara nikāya (Kiribathgoda, 2017).

3.7 Conclusion

In my field research, ethnographic methodology was used as the primary methodology. A linguistic framework was used in the case of songs and dialogues in interviews, focus groups and rituals and a visual framework was used in the case of recordings and photographs of ancient visual arts, paintings, carvings, sculpture and rituals in Sri Lankan dance and music art forms. The interactional data observations such as interviews, focus groups and field notes were subjected first to analysis through NVIVO software. During the data analysis, thematic analysis was used to examine the themes of caste, gender and ethnicity.

Primarily I had to face several challenges during this research and how I overcame them is demonstrated in this chapter. My attributes as both an insider and outsider helped me to successfully conduct this research. This thesis has attempted to give a new interpretation of the artiste and his practice of art within the Sinhalese-Tamil ethnic and religious struggle that lasted for over twenty-five years in Sri Lanka. Similarly, this is the first research occasion when the Sri Lankan Sinhalese-Tamil artiste and his caste, gender and ethnicity are described and investigated.

Chapter 04: Sri Lankan performing arts

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss how the performing arts are bound up with caste, ethnicity and gender. As mentioned in chapter two, most researchers studying the Sri Lankan performing arts concentrate on Buddhist rituals connected with Sinhalese ethnicity. Apart from describing Sri Lankan arts as Sinhalese-Buddhist arts no attention to date has been paid to the Tamil-Hindu arts. The studies concentrate on the three Sinhalese-Buddhist traditions, namely upcountry, low country and Sabaragamu but not on the Hindu-Tamil rituals or Bharatanatyam. So, in this thesis Hindu-Tamil arts are also identified as a 'fourth tradition'. This identification hopefully paves the way for cohesion between the two main ethnicities, thereby helping to overcome the conflict that has occurred between them

4.2 Sri Lankan dance traditions

Sri Lankan performing arts are entirely identified as a Buddhist art process related to the Sinhalese ethnicity. In this identification, three main art traditions namely, upcountry, low country and Sabaragamu are observable. In addition to this, the Bharatanatyam tradition linked to Tamil-Hindu ethnicity could be identified as a fourth tradition. This research will also inquire into how far the *guru parampara*, dances, music, gesture, the art of mask making, singing and folk drama are linked to the gender, caste and ethnicity of the performing artiste.

4.2.1 Kandyan Dance Tradition

Kandyan dance or "upcountry dance" (Reed, 2010:10; Nurnberger,1998: XXIII; Sederaman,1962:5; Dissanayake,1994:35), which is one tradition of the Sri Lankan dance traditions, is the dance form prevalent in the area called upcountry of Sri Lanka, namely Mahanuwara, Udunuwara, Yatinuwara, Sat Korale, Satara Korale, Dumbara and Harispattuwa (Dissanayake, 1994:35). Reed comments that Kandyan dance is the most prominent among the Sinhala dance forms, and while its roots are in the Kandyan region, the dance is now identified as a "national" dance, as it is performed and practised throughout the Sinhala-

dominated regions of the country (Reed, 2010:11). According to Reed, this dance form has surpassed all others and has been accepted by Sri Lankan society as the “national” dance form.

This national dance is entirely bound up with Sinhalese ethnicity and Buddhism and its concept is observable in the *Kohombā kankāri*²⁷, which is the main healing ceremony of the tradition. Here, the founder king of the Sinhalese race, according to *Mahāvamsa*, is directly bound with this ritual, especially the chasing of Kuveni by Sinhala King Vijaya, and the curse pronounced by her upon Vijaya is passed on to King Panduvasudeva who succeeded King Vijaya (Geiger, 1912: 57- 62). The *Mahāvamsa* states that *Kohombā kankāri* was performed to cure of a disease called *Divi Dosaya*). However, both Reed and Nurnberger point out that it is a ritual performed more for the protection of agriculture than merely as an art form with a Sinhalese ethnic base. Therefore, we can identify a more practical necessity for its performance than a mere ritual connected with the father of the Sinhalese nation as *Mahāvamsa* points out. Thus, it would seem that the modern objective in performing the *Kohombā Kankāriya* is primarily for success in agriculture and the warding off of illness.

The upcountry dance tradition is wholly male-centred, which is evident not only in the dance itself but also in the costumes used, the exercise (*Dandiya haramaba*), methods of ritual, and the teaching of the dance. In fact, females are not allowed to even touch let alone wear the main costume used in the *Kohombā Kankāriya* (Appendix 4: Ves costumem). The costume comprises 64 parts or *su seta abharana* (Nurnberger, 1998:43, Reed, 2010:40, Gunawardhana, 1977:173, Dissanayake, 1994:84) and it can be worn only by a male pupil who has mastered the techniques of the dance and after the *ves tabeema*²⁸ or the “investiture ceremony” (Nurnberger, 1998:42). The most important detail that Reed points out in this discussion is the “*Guru-sisya paramparava*” or teacher-student lineage,

²⁷ What could be identified as the main repository of the Kandyan dance tradition is *Kohombā Kankāriya*. The ceremony known as *Kohombā Kankāriya*, which is performed with the objective of improving wealth, safeguarding cattle and crop resources and also the curing of various ailments, was originally performed to cure an ailment caused by *dividosha* (‘leopard-ailment’) that affected the Sinhala King Panduvasudeva. The *Kohombā Kankāriya* is performed for the triad of Sinhalese deities (Deva/ Deviyo) known as Alut Kohombā, Parana Kohombā and Maha Kohombā.

²⁸ See 7.4.1.4 Ves or kalaeli mangallya

which operates within this process namely “Kohomba Kankariya was passed down from generation to generation through these lineages” (Reed, 2010:83). Therefore, through this teacher-pupil practice, the artistes of the *Berava* caste pass on this art of the Kandyan dance and the allied practices and customs to the next generation, which helps them to stamp this art form with their own identity and maintain it on a long-term basis.²⁹

4.2.2 Low Country Dance Tradition

The low country dance tradition could be identified within the performing arts as an art hereditary to the *Berava* caste. The low country dance tradition is the other Sri Lankan dance tradition that is deeply bound with Sinhalese-Buddhist rituals. The low country dance tradition which is considered to be a main tradition of the classical dance traditions of Sri Lanka (Reed, 2010:10; Nurnberger, 1998: XXXIII; Suraweera, 2009:2; Dissanayake, 1994:123) is prevalent in the southern and western provinces of Sri Lanka (Suraweera, 2009:1; Dissanayake, 1989:123; Reed, 2010:11). According to Suraweera three sub-traditions of the dance can be recognised, which he classifies as “Raigama”, “Bentara” and “Matara” (Suraweera, 2009:2). However, according to Dissanayake those traditions are classified as “Bentara”, “Matara” and “Colombo” (Dissanayake, 1993:145-146). The main reason for the sub-traditions seen in the low country tradition is the regionally-based teacher generations and the customs related to caste held by those generations. This dance tradition is also referred to as “*pahatarata*” (Reed, 2010:10), “*pahatarata netuma*” (Nurnberer, 1998: XXIII), and “*Ruhunu*” (Reed, 2010:10). Because of the diversity of the caste generations connected to this tradition and the competition between generations, each tradition is eager to exhibit the best performing items, which assures better entertainment. A noticeable feature in the low country tradition is the technical expertise of the respective castes in the areas of singing, music and dance. This expertise solely possessed by the *Berava* caste cannot be learnt by an outsider. The transmission of this expertise is from generation to generation and is considered to be the responsibility of that caste. What is noteworthy here is that only a male of six years of age can aspire to join as an amateur artiste. Several scholars have

²⁹ A description about this is given under 5.3.2.1 Caste and occupation.

focused their attention on the path of an apprentice hoping to become an “exorcist dancer” or an “edura” (Adura) (Wirz, 1954: 1822; Nurnberger, 1998:112-114; Kapferer, 1983:5267, Suraweera, 2009:86-93). Quoting from a discussion Nurnberger had with a low country dancer she states, “apprenticeship to a whole series of dancing masters is necessary in order to obtain an overall view of the entire field of knowledge that is required for the performance of a demon-dance (*yak natuma*) or a healing ritual (*Tovil*)” (Nurnberger, 1998:112). Thus, to acquire an overall knowledge in dance, music and singing (*Kavi*) it is necessary to receive the necessary training. Such an apprentice would sooner or later become a specialist and to become a specialist it is necessary to acquire skills in drumming, ritual decoration, acrobatic dances and exceptional recitation of texts and also to possess psychic powers. To become such a specialist, Wirz states, “It is not difficult, but takes a long time to become an *edura*” (Wirz,1954:18). In terms of the apprentice who studies the art, Kapferer observes, “*Berava* exorcists vary widely in the skills they bring to the several arts of exorcism” (Kapferer, 1983: 56). Becoming an ‘exorcist dancer’ within the low country dance tradition is an exceptional achievement because the dancer must possess the necessary experience to conduct all the rituals within it and be an expert in singing, music and dance. In this process, maintaining the traditional art and bequeathing it to the next generation is an onerous task belonging to the respective generations of artiste. Healing ceremonies conducted by males without ‘pollution’ is the other special feature in the low country tradition. Women, who are supposed to be contaminated with ‘pollution’ caused by monthly menstruation, giving birth to children, and attaining puberty, are never allowed to participate in these ceremonies. Males appear even in the female character roles in the ceremony. It is compulsory for males who participate in these ceremonies not to associate with women for seven successive days beforehand. Thus, the low country dance tradition is entirely male-centred and it seems to be a traditional practice linked to the *Berava* caste.

4.2.3 Sabaragamu Dance Tradition

The Sabaragamu dance tradition, which is considered to be one of the main Sri Lankan dance traditions (Reed, 2010; Nurnberger, 1998; Dissanayake, 1993; Delgoda, 1959), belongs to the region called “Sabaragamu” (Dissanayake, 1994:202) and is primarily prevalent in Ratnapura, Pelmadulla, Balangoda,

Kalawana and Godakawela. Among Sinhalese-Buddhist dance traditions the Sabaragamu tradition holds an important place because it is the only tradition where there is direct female participation. This is evident in the *Digge* dance in the *Digge* (long hall) of the Saman *Devālaya* where god Saman dwells. Dissanayake explains that the females dance with a lamp in one hand without turning their back to the god and that the players of instruments do so in keeping with the singing and dancing without looking at the female dancers (Dissanayake, 1994:205-206). Nurnberger expresses a similar view about these females who dance to the accompaniment of drums and songs as described by Dissanayake. In this regard Nurnberger remarks:

The text contents of these performances were mainly concerned with the heroic deeds of the gods. The males sang and played the cymbals, drums and other instruments while the females danced (Nurnberger, 1998:17).

It must be noted that females who participate in the *Digge* dance derive hereditary authority. This is an important dance in the Sri Lankan tradition because it displays how the gender contribution of the artiste and the hereditary right are connected to the performing arts. Dissanayaka points out that the artiste who perform this dance belong to several caste hierarchies. According to him, the performers belong to caste groups including *manikya mahage*, *egoda kuttame manikya mahage*, *hunuwala manikya mahage*, and *kirikandeniya manikya mahage* (Dissanayaka, 1994: 205-206). It should be noted that only those from these castes can perform the *Digge* dance.

4.2.4 Bharatanatyam

Bharathanatyam is an Indian dance form. Indians do Bharathanatyam. We have nothing to do with Bharathanatyam. Instead our focus is on our dance, Sri Lanka's dance called Kandyan dance. I am curious as to why you are working on Bharathanatyam. Wouldn't you go to India to study that? (Satkumaratnam, 2009:58).

In terms of identifying the Bharatanatyam dance form and its application, the above extract from Satkumaratnam provides an opening to define it as a Sri Lankan dance form. Identification of the Bharatanatyam dance form as a Sri Lankan art form and the study of its "Lankanisation" have escaped the research

eye. As an explanation, Satkumaratnam states that it has been identified as an Indian identity distinct from a Sri Lankan art form. She adds that Bharathanatyam has an exclusive Indian identity and labels the dance form's predominantly female practitioners "Indian" (Satkumaratnam, 2009:58). It is therefore necessary to investigate how the Bharatanatyam dance form of Indian origin came to be established as a Sri Lankan dance form and what its use is.

Recognised as one of the Indian traditional dance forms (Reed, 2010; Nurnberger, 1998; Devi, 1998; Satkumaratnam, 2009; O'Shea, 2007; Gaston, 1996), researchers point out that it has developed from a female-centred temple dancing tradition known as *Devadāsī* (Satkumaratnam, 2009:11; Katrak, 2011:26; Devi, 1998: 442). Satkumaratnam points out, "The *Devadāsī* who were married to the Hindu temple deity yet permitted to keep discreet relationships with a king or priest were considered jewels of the temple and court and epitomised freedom for women outside of castes" (Satkumaratnam, 2009:12). The institutionalisation and extension of the *Devadāsī* dance in its shift from the middle class to the upper class needs to be investigated because, as a result of this institutionalisation, this traditional dance seems to extend beyond India. In India this institutionalisation of Bharatanatyam began to be increasingly studied and performed by individuals who did not necessarily hail from the hereditary classes and the newly-educated middle classes began to show more and more interest in this art form. The Kalakshetra launched by Rukmani Devi paved the way for the Bharatanatyam, which was indigenous to India, to find its way to the outside world (Meduri, 2004:15). As Meduri points out, because of the Bharatanatyam becoming globalised, the Sri Lankan female artistes too were given the opportunity to study it.

With regard to the arrival of this dance form and its establishment in Sri Lanka, some researchers express the view that in the process it acquired a more "Tamil" or "Indian" or "Hindu" identity than a Sri Lankan identity (Satkumaratnam, 2009:61). This Bharatanatyam form, which is bound with Tamil culture, seems to have been "Lankanised" through, as Satkumaratnam states, "cultural preservation" (Satkumaratnam, 2009:50). Nurnberger has discussed the influence Bharatanatyam has had on the Sri Lankan performing arts, which is indeed immense, and how it has affected the Sri Lankan arts. Her main concern

here is the new items that were added to the Sri Lankan performing arts. “The dancers brought with them from India not only various mythical ideas connected with dance but also aesthetic categories and dance techniques” (Nurnberger, 1998:87). Joining the discussion Reed states that in addition to the new items being added to the Sri Lankan arts, the Bharatanatyam provided stimulation to the “Sinhalese” arts of Sri Lankan society and Buddhist women. Reed observes “That Bharathanatyam has largely been the model for feminine Kandyan dance has served as a primary resource and inspiration for its transformation into a suitable feminine form for the middle and upper classes” (Reed, 2010:212). Elaborating on this she adds that the stimulation was such that “expressive facial gestures” and “smiles and movements of the eyes and hips,” which were feminine, modified the Kandyan dance which was until then “masculine.” Moreover, this modification can primarily be recognised “as the influence of the emotionally expressive and feminine Tamil form, *bharata natyam*, which is popular among both Sinhala and Tamil elites in Colombo” (Reed, 2010:203).

Bharatanatyam bound with Tamil ethnicity and Hinduism influenced Sri Lankan arts in several respects. A most important factor is the stimulus that the women received with the introduction of a female-centred art form instead of the prevalent male-centred art form. This led the way for not only Tamil-Hindu women but also for Sinhalese-Buddhist women to study this Tamil art. This trend also marks the beginning of a feminine art form with *lasya* features instead of the predominant masculine features of the Sri Lankan arts. Therefore, Bharatanatyam is a rich source in the study of the gender contribution of the Sri Lankan performing artiste.

4.3 Sri Lankan folk theatre

The three Sinhalese-Buddhist folk dramas *Sokari*, *Kolam* and *Nādagam* and *Kooththu*, with Tamil-Hindu inspiration could be identified as Sri Lankan folk drama. These folk dramas provide the opportunity to study the beliefs, customs and manners in Sri Lankan society and the castes and *Rajakari* obligations associated with them, Ethnic integration, and how art is used as a tool for social criticism can also be examined. Most researchers identify the three folk dramas as being associated with Sinhalese-Buddhism, just as they do in the case of Sri

Lankan dance and tend to overlook the existence of the folk drama of the Tamil-Hindu group. As Sri Lankan folk drama consists of not only Sinhalese-Buddhist art but also of the Tamil-Hindu art the present research concentrates also on Tamil-Hindu art.

4.3.1 *Sokari*

The *Sokari* drama could be regarded as an instance where domestic squabbles, the manner in which authority derived from caste is used to expose social discrimination, and sexuality and women are directly discussed. The performing artiste seems to be given the chance through the *Sokari* drama to discuss how married women are persuaded to commit sexual transgressions and subject the elite in society to ruthless criticism using his authority derived for his/her caste.

The *Sokari* folk drama, which is indigenous to the Kandyan region and the Vanni (Dissanayake, 1994:278; Sarachchandra, 1956:84; Raghavan, 1967:158), is, according to certain researchers, (Sarachchandra, 1952; Dissanayake, 1994) the most ancient folk drama in Sri Lanka. In the *Sokari* dance, primary place is given to music and dance and the drama itself centres on the character *Sokari*. The story revolves around three main characters – namely, a husband, his wife and their servant. *Sokari* is a drama, which depicts the attempts made by a Tamil family that has migrated to Sri Lanka from South India, to adjust to Sinhalese society (Appendix 5: *Sokari* Drama). Therefore, there is a certain discourse about ethnic integration as it shows how Sinhalese and Tamil ethnicities attempt to live together. The other noticeable factor here is the relationship of the *Kinnara* caste to *Sokari*. One of the lowest castes in the Sri Lankan caste hierarchy, the *Kinnara* caste, uses the character of the *vedarala* (physician) to criticise the wrongdoings of the elite in society. Thus, the *Sokari* drama is important in determining the place the artiste enjoys in the caste hierarchy and showing how the authority the artiste derives from the performing arts is used as a tool for social criticism.

The other important factor here is the religious coexistence that is displayed. *Sokari* is performed on a *Poya* day³⁰ seeking the blessings of the Tamil-Hindu gods *Deva/ Deviyo* as well as the blessings of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha,

³⁰ The *Poya* is a very important day for Buddhists when they refrain from partaking of meat and engage in religious observances including the observance of the ten precepts, which is the highest religious observance that a lay person can observe.

the Triple Gem. Sarachchandra points out the *Sokari* drama performed on behalf of Goddess Pattini and God Kataragama is held for seven days consecutively in the months of May and June after the Sinhalese New Year. The *Sokari* drama is not performed again until the next year and usually the festival ends with a *Sokari* perahara held on the full-moon (*Poya*) day of September (Sarachchandra 1952:84-85).

Finally, the other important feature of *Sokari* within the Sri Lankan performing arts is the ethnic cohesion implicit in it. Describing the *Sokari* drama, Sarachchandra points out its Indian connections. He states that there is a similarity between *Sokari* drama and the Tamil Kuththu (Kooththu) (Sarachchandra, 1952:92). Although Sarachchandra points out a similarity between *Sokari* and *Kooththu* in the general structure of the dramas, what is more important is that it centres on an emigrant family from South India (Raghavan, 1967:158). Although *Sokari* is introduced as a Sinhalese folk drama it would not be incorrect to say that it reflects more Tamil identity rather than Sinhalese nationality because the Sinhalese society has completely appropriated an Indian family, its life story and also Hindu gods like Kataragama and Pattini. Therefore, an Indian story and an Indian dramatic structure has been established in Sri Lanka as a process of receiving blessings of Hindu but 'Lankanised' gods. Consequently, it is more appropriate to introduce *Sokari* drama as a folk drama with a Sri Lankan identity rather than a mere Sinhalese or Tamil drama. Perhaps it could be said that 'the symbolism of the reunion and reconciliation of a husband and wife' (Sarachchandra, 1952:93) as shown by Sarachchandra is actually a reunion and reconciliation between the two major ethnic groups, the Sinhalese and Tamils. Therefore, in considering *Sokari* drama it is correct to say that it depicts a religious as well as ethnic relationship between Buddhist and Hindu and Sinhalese and Tamil, irrespective of the objective of the performance of the drama or the caste that performs it.

4.3.2 *Kolam*

There is perhaps nothing more hilarious and joyous in the whole range of Sinhalese folk arts than the *Kolam*, the masquerade of the South-West (Raghavan, 1967:77).

Kolam is a sarcastic folk drama in which the artistes employ the authority derived from their caste in order to criticise the wrongdoings of various personalities of the elite in society. Many scholars have traced the origin of *Kolam* to the Indian state of Tamil Nadu (Raghavan, 1967:78; Nurnberger, 1998:116; Dissanayake, 1994:286; Sarachchandra, 1952:61). Interpreting the meaning of the word *Kolam*, Nurnberger says that in South Indian languages the word means disguise or dress but not in the sense of a 'mask' (Nurnberger, 1998:116). She adds that the art of *Kolam* is related to '*Kolam thullal*,' which is a Kerala mask demon dance (Nurnberger, 1998:116). This idea expressed by Nurnberger is implied in the comments made concerning *Kolam thullal* by Raghavan, "In Kerala, nevertheless, it never developed into a play for amusement, nor did it inspire the rich lines in art of mask-making that it developed into, in Ceylon" (Raghavan, 1967:79). In so far as the origin of *Kolam* is concerned, it shows an Indo-Sri Lankan base and Sinhalese-Tamil ethnic cohesion. So, within the Sri Lankan performing arts, the *Kolam* is an art form that constitutes a Sinhalese-Tamil ethnic base. On the other hand, it is used as a tool for social criticism where the wrongdoings of various personalities in high society are exposed. All characters that come on the stage line up in order of the highest to the lowest in the caste hierarchy. Each character wears a mask, the carving and wearing of which is the sole prerogative of the *karava* caste. So, the presentation of characters, the carving of masks, music and singing and acting revolve around the *karava* caste. Characters in *Kolam* appear on the stage in a most attractive manner for which there is a prescribed traditional style.

Accordingly, the first part of the drama consists of 'the preparations prior to the arrival of the royal dignitaries'; the second part comprises 'the various dances of human and animal characters'; and the third is 'dealing with the enactment of a story – usually a story dealing with the life of Buddha – through song, speech, verse dialogue and mimicry (Goonatilleka, 1978:162-163). Joining this discourse, Manukulasooriya, in analysing the mask worn by the various characters entering onto the *Kolam* stage, and states that they can be divided into various groups (See Appendix 6: *Kolam* mask – Characters). In this division, he bases his analysis on the power granted to them by their 'caste' in society. Accordingly, the first group is the highest consisting of royalty and personages attached to the royal entourage whose characters are the king, queen, minister, clerk, policeman and soldier. The

second group consists of the drummer, washer man, drummer's wife, peasants, money lender, Negro woman, king's dhoby and lower down in the social order are other human beings. He then analyses the number of characters such as *raksha*, *sanni* and *gara* in the demon mask of *Kolam* (Manukulasooriya, 2005:11).

Describing the present situation of the *Kolam* tradition, Amarasinghe and Kariyakarawana point out a distinct feature. They observe that although the authority for the performance of *Kolam* and the carving of the *Kolam* mask is vested with the *Karava* caste, at present it is being sustained in a wider social framework. "Namely the origin of mask drama cannot be traced by means of one particular caste. It is a mixture of multi-ethnic and multi-religious cultural elements" (Amarasinghe and Kariyakarawana, 2014:56). Therefore, as they point out, *Kolam* may be taken as an instance where multi-ethnic and multi-religious as well as caste-linked performing practices are found in one place. Therefore, it may be surmised that this folk mask drama is not confined to Sinhalese-Buddhist or Sinhalese-*Karava* but is a Sri Lankan folk drama and represents various religious, ethnic and cultural features.

4.3.3 *Nādagam*

Once a woman belonging to one of the most respectable of the village wished to take two or three relatives who had come from Colombo to see a *Nādagama*, and sought her husband's permission. 'It is shameful that women should go to the *Nādagampola* which even gentlemen do not frequent' was his response (Goonatilleka, 1984:2).

Quoting the above passage from *Apegama* by Martin Wickremasinghe (1960), Goonatilleka, observes that *Nādagam* was loosely and erroneously associated with simple comedy and farce, a kind of opera buffet and therefore looked down upon as being not socially respectable (Goonatilleka, 1984:2). This opens the door for a discussion concerning the origin of the performing art form called *Nādagam*, its structural features and the changes that occurred to it because of its cross-cultural association. In the area of Sri Lankan performing arts, the *Nādagam* tradition may be introduced as the only art form where, apart from Sinhalese-Buddhist and Tamil-Hindu influences, Roman Catholic and western traditions too have contributed to the development of the tradition. The other notable factor here is that the concept of caste that is seen in other dances and folk drama is

absent in the *Nādagam* tradition. In fact, it becomes an art form where not only *Berava*, *kinnara* or *karava* caste members, but also any other social group, can participate. The plots, costumes, themes and also musical instruments used reveal that it has come under heavy western influence. As *Nādagam* was created and sponsored particularly by the Roman Catholic churches, the art form that existed up to then, which was centred on the caste system, seems to have undergone a change embracing people belonging to all castes and speaking various languages.

It seems that *Nādagama* has been a bridge between the traditional Sri Lankan drama and the modern stage (Goonatilleka, 1984; Sarachchandra, 1952). Goonatilleka points out that the *Nādagam*, which developed during the 18th and 19th centuries had acquired a “distinctive form” and “structure” by the 20th century (Goonatilleka, 1984:4). In this regard, he comments that it could be regarded as the country’s first fully fledged Sinhalese theatre.

Joining this discussion Nurnberger points out that the traditional *Nādagam* came to Sri Lanka from Bombay in the 19th century and embodied Indian or Arabian sources in Parsee theatre troops and Shakespearian themes like *Othello* or *Romeo and Juliet* and backdrops attractively coloured, entered onto the stage or *Nurtiya* (new theatre) (Nurnberger, 1998:154). Nurnberger, commenting on the evolution of *Nādagama* from tradition to the modern stage, observes that in the thirties in Colombo, a growing middle class had established itself and turned towards the urban theatre with an increasing thirst for entertainment (Nurnberger, 1998:154). Therefore, it appears that, in the process of conversion from a traditional drama to a contemporary practice, the *Nādagama* is actually the turning point by which the traditional features of folk drama have been assimilated and developed into urban theatre.

Another important feature in the *Nādagam* tradition is that it has become a Sri Lankan drama without any distinction such as Sinhalese, Tamil, European or Buddhist, Hindu or Christian. Most of the researchers who have studied the *Nādagama* tradition are of the view that the influence of European missionary activity and the Buddhist *Jataka* tales are prominent. In discussing the origin of *Nādagama*, almost all researchers such as Nurnberger (1998), Sarachchandra (1952), Goonatilleka (1984), state that it has been inspired by the South Indian

folk drama. Particularly, Goonatilleka, discussing both the literary and the philological aspect of the word, observes the Tamil word for theatre, *Natakam* (*Nādagam*), is cognate with the Sinhala word *Nādagam*. It has been pointed out that *Natakam* is a Tamilicised expression for the Sanskrit word *Nataka* (Goonatilleka, 1984:7). Sarachchandra adds that the Sinhalese *Nādagam* appears to have been modelled originally, on a variety of South-Indian folk plays known as *Terukkuttu* in the Tamil Nadu and as *Vithi Nataka* in Andhra (Sarachchandra, 1952:116). Nurnberger expresses a view that the drama is very close to the idea of the South Indian *Kuthu* (Kooththu) and Andhra folk drama as pointed out by Sarachchandra, who states that the origin of the *Nādagama* can be traced back to the South Indian dance theatre *Bhagvata Mela* or *Yakshagana* in the Telegu region. She adds, “It did not come directly from one of these sources to Sri Lanka. The actual origin of the Sinhalese *Nādagama* goes back to the theatre form of the *Nattu Kuthu* (Tamil: ‘dance theatre)” (Nurnberger, 1998:153). Therefore, the Indian Tamil-Hindu influence is noticeable in *Nādagam*.

In addition to this South Indian Tamil cultural affiliation, the other important view expressed by scholars is its relationship to Christian missionary activity. In this connection, Goonatilleka mentions that the origins of the *Nādagama* theatre in Sri Lanka is meaningfully related to the activities of the Christian missionaries who visited the island in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries (Goonatilleka, 1984:26). Analysing this relationship between *Nādagama* and Christian missionary activity, Nurnberger points out the relationship between the *Nādagama* and Catholic Church *Pasku* Drama (passion play). She notes that the *Nādagama* has initially a Catholic character and resembles a passion play. The passion plays of the Sri Lankan Roman Catholic Church are called *pasku* (Nurnberger, 1998:154). So, we can see that while the *Nādagama* tradition has been inspired by South Indian tradition it also assimilated Catholic inspiration during the colonial period particularly from the Portuguese, Dutch and English and was a medium for the dissemination of that religion. Therefore, the entertainment aspect of this dance form is, in fact, a dance form based on faith during the colonial period and it can also be seen that its custody has been shifted to the Church.

In addition to the Tamil and European inspiration, Dissanayake points out that a Sinhalese-Buddhist complexion has also been added to the drama. Dissanayaka

points out that there are among them Buddhist Jataka tales such as *Vessantara*, *Sandakinduru* and also Sinhalese national stories such as *Parakramabahu*, *Buvanekabahu* and *Sinha Seevali* promoting the Sinhalese nationality (Dissanayake, 1993: 294). Goonatilleka too expresses a view similar to Dissanayaka's that the *Nādagama* has a connection with Buddhism and the Sinhalese nation. He also points out that *Nādagama* has in its repertoire the Buddhist *Jataka* tales such as *Vessantara*, *Vidura* and stories with a Sinhalese national fervour as *Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe*, and Prince Weerasena (Goonatilleka, 1984: 64). So, *Kolam* may be identified as an art form in the Sri Lankan performing arts that developed as a result of Sinhalese, Tamil as well as western cultural influences and Buddhist, Hindu and Catholic religious influences. Apart from depicting national and religious cohesion it also stands out as an art form which allows participation of all in society irrespective of their ethnicity or caste.

4.3.4 Kooththu (Kutthu, Kuththu)

In the Sri Lankan performing arts, *Kooththu* drama is the only folk drama that is related to Tamil ethnicity as evidenced by the manner in which it was made use of during the over twenty-five-years civil war to boost Tamil morale. This fact will be explored in more detail later in this thesis.

Kutthu, '*Kooththu*' (Thompson, 2005:14) or '*Koothu*' (Iyer, 1966:14) used in various ways has the meaning 'play' (Iyer, 1966:14). The *Kooththu* folk drama, when used and performed regionally, seems to take various forms. Thompson points out that this drama is known as '*Tenmodi Kooththu*' in the Southern region and as '*Vadamodi Kooththu*' in the Northern region (Thompson, 2005:76). In addition to the *Tenmodi* and *Vadamodi kooththu* drama pointed out by Thompson there is also a kind of street drama known as *Teru Kooththu* (Iyer, 1966: 13) or *Terukuttu* (Frasca, 1990: 50). This street drama which originated in Tamil Nadu, as Frasca points out, contains several regional categories. These divisions are known as '*Vatapanku*' or the Northern style and '*Tenpanku*' or the Southern style (Frasca, 1990:50). Although there are regional differences in *kooththu* drama, the performers are careful not to change its main structure.

Another important feature of this drama is its relationship with Hinduism in addition to Tamil ethnicity. This is evident in the origin of this dance form, in terms of the stories selected for the performance, the location of the performance, the characters and the drama's main objectives. On my visit to the north-eastern regions of the country regarding this research, the *kooththu* drama I watched contained plots and characters from Hindu religious epics such as Mahabharata, Ramayana, and Bhagavad-Gita. Commenting on *Kooththu* drama and its relation to Hinduism, Iyer observes that these folk plays were not intended to be mere pleasant entertainment (Iyer, 1966:13). Similarly, they were not performed in a particular season connected with local temple festivals and had a religious and ethical purpose behind them. This shows that there is a moral purpose too in performing this drama.

As observed by Thompson, the *Kooththu* was useful in passing on knowledge, particularly on moral or religious topics. Thompson states "Clearly the stories of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are thick with value judgements which it is less than clear that this group would support" (Thompson, 2005:74). In addition to these religious and moral aspects, Thompson points out the significant issue of how far this *kooththu* art form is a factor regarding a matter like marriage. Thompson underlines a factor on the *Kooththu* drama similar to that described by Reed (2010) about the relationship of the upcountry dance with the marriage market:

It was for enjoyment; people came together. It was an opportunity for creativity, and taking a role gave them special status in the village. The point they most wanted to make was that good male performers were liked by women. A *Kooththu* rehearsal period starts with the question 'How many marriages will come out of this?' (Thompson, 2005:74).

Particularly during the post-colonial period, social themes were embodied into the religious basis of *Kooththu* and it was diverted towards new pathways. As a result of the civil war between the Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan government, a new pathway appears to have opened up. The Tamil Tigers attacked the mythic fountainhead of Sinhala domination (Thompson, 2005:32) and the *Kooththu* drama was used to support the demand to create a separate Tamil Elam state. As Thompson observes, the army and the LTTE did not interfere in *Kooththu*

rehearsals. Nevertheless, they did create a social *Kooththu* for the Tigers involved in the battle for the A9 (Thompson, 2005:85). However, this art dropped the Hindu stories taken from Hindu epics such as Mahabharata and Ramayana during the war and focused on contemporary themes such as ‘Tamil nationalism’, ‘Elam state’ and anti-Sinhalese attitudes³¹. What is noteworthy here is that the artistes have used the *Kooththu* tradition to discuss contemporary social themes and transmit them to Hindu-Tamil society without harming the *Kooththu* structure.

Thus, the *Kooththu* drama bound with Tamil ethnicity makes a valuable contribution in political, religious and social fields and the entertainment needs of society in the Sri Lankan performing arts. The information provided by it is a rich source in terms of understanding the socio-cultural status of the Sri Lankan performing artiste.

4.4 Sri Lankan Performing arts and Percussion Art

The percussion art holds an important place as regards the Sri Lankan performing arts and the artiste because it is directly linked to the performing artiste’s caste, gender and ethnicity, which provides a way to describe the socio-cultural status of the performing artiste. So, the relationship between percussion art and the social concepts of caste, gender and ethnicity are taken up for discussion here.

Sri Lankan percussion art is performed by the male artiste of the *Berava*, *Kinnara*, *Karava*, *Paraiyar* and *Nattuvar* castes in both Sinhalese and Tamil ethnicities. These artistes who contribute to daily religious practices in Buddhist temples and Tamil-Hindu temples (*kovi*) also directly participate in *kankari*, *Bali*, and *thovil* rituals. The art of percussion is entirely linked to the concept of masculinity (See, 7.4.1.3 Drumming). The teaching of drumming, playing the drum, making it and carrying it are done without the participation of females.

In the four Sri Lankan Sinhalese and Tamil dance and percussion traditions the drum is used as *Geta bera* (see Appendix 7: Geta beraya (Kandyan drum) in the upcountry tradition, *Yak bera* (see Appendix 08: Yak beraya (low country drum) in the low country tradition, *Davula* (see Appendix 09: Davula) in the Sabaragamu tradition and *Mridangam* (see Appendix 10: Mridangam) and in

³¹ Focus groups (FG/SR/JAF/03/M1)

Bharatanatyam. The technical expertise required in the making and playing of these drums belongs exclusively to the artiste of the drumming castes.

In the art of drumming in the upcountry tradition percussion is manifestly linked to Buddhist temple rituals and the income of the drummer's family is derived from the fees obtained from the performance of such rituals. In addition, as a mark of recognition of his services, he is granted *Nindagama* by the State. Thus, in the upcountry dance tradition the art of percussion is directly linked to Buddhist temple rituals and the maintenance of the art is accomplished under the auspices of Buddhist temples. The other important factor to note is that the *Geta beraya* of the upcountry tradition and the expertise required to play it belong to the Sinhalese-Buddhist *Berava* caste male artiste. Through the remarkable technical skill required in the selection of the tree to make the drum, the preparation of the drum and the skill of playing it, the performer succeeds in developing an identity and a performing authority within the caste hierarchy.

The low country drummer too seems to possess a technical skill comparable to that of the upcountry drummer. The low country drum, known also as *Goshaka*, *Ruhunu* or *Yak*, requires special skill and experience to play it. The drum is made of the stomach skin of an ox and needs special care in playing and the hands need to be deftly controlled. If not, the drum face may burst. The playing of the drum has an identity that belongs exclusively to the *Berava* caste and shows the technical cleverness of the performer.

Another notable feature of the Sri Lankan percussion art is the *Hevisi* performance (see Appendix 11: Hevisi Drumming) with *Davula*³² and *Tammattama*³³ (see Appendix 12: Tammattama) used exclusively in Buddhist temple ceremonies. This *hevisi* playing or “announcing music” is used also for Hindu *kovil* within Buddhist temples in addition to Buddhist *Perahera*, *Katina*

³² About the traits of the *Davula*, Nurnberger observes, “A short cylindrical drum beaten on one side with a stick and on the other with the hand, on which the basic rhythm is played” (Nurnberger, 1998:90). She adds that when compared with the low country drum it is “wider” and “shorter” (Nurnberger, 1998:190). Suraweera points out that the drumheads of the *davula* played with a *kaddappuva* (carved stick) and hand are covered with goatskins and that each drumhead is 12-14 inches (36-37 cm) long and the length of the drum is 15-17 inches (38-43 cm) (Suraweera, 2009:46).

³³ *Tammattama* or *pokuru beraya* is an instrument bound together and played using a pair of specially made cane sticks (*kaddippu*) with curved, circular ends (Suraweera 2009: 46).

offerings, the bringing of divine ornaments, and the offering of *murutan* or food to the gods. Thus, it is seen that *hevisi* playing is bound up with religious practices and playing it is the exclusive right of the male performer of the *Berava* caste.

The main duty of drummers was to serve other castes and temples by singing and playing. Nurnberger makes an important point in this connection. She adds that the service of these dancers and drummers is connected with Buddhist temples and deistic shrines (*devale*) and the performance of *hevisi* playing is a sort of “announcing music.” She adds that the rhythms used in the offerings to deities are known as *puja hevisi*, rhythms played on special days as “*keemmura hevisi*,” (rhythm of the auspicious), the rhythms of processions and parades as “*gaman hevisi*,” and the daily *thevava* (playing in temples as a routine offering) as “*shabda puja*” (Nurnberger, 1998: 91). Therefore, the *tammattama* and *davula* are used in all three traditions and are the main drums used in both Buddhist and Hindu rituals.

Among the special instruments in Sri Lankan drumming, *Udakki*³⁴(see Appendix 13: Udakkiya) is remarkable because it is used not only for drumming as an art form in itself but also for dance. *Udakki* playing is an art within the Sri Lankan percussion arts that occupies a special place in religious, national and caste activities. Especially important is the religious concord it provides and its falling into the hands of those in the higher castes in the hierarchy. Commenting on the *Udakki* dance and playing in the first half of the 20th century, Reed observes, “Udakki dances are rarely mentioned in performances of the 1940s and 1950s and were virtually nonexistent in stage performances of the 1980s and 1990s. The performers of udakki were traditionally high-caste males” (Reed, 2010:238 n.27). This statement relating to *Udakki* playing and dance shows that persons of high caste participated in drumming and dance, despite this being the exclusive right and responsibility of those of the *Berava* caste. Thus, the playing of the *Udakki* moves away from the *Berava* caste to a higher caste and it could be played without any caste distinction. A special feature in the playing of the *Udakki* is the religious concord it provides, especially the playing which is done by both Buddhist and Hindu performing artistes. Similarly, Sadie refers to the co-

³⁴ The hourglass drum (Nurnberger, 1998: 96,190), an hourglass shaped drum (Reed, 2010: 114).

relationship between *Udakki* playing and dance and Buddhism and Hinduism. He states that the *Udakki* or the hourglass drum reflects broadly the religious and musical influences of Theravada Buddhism (Sadie and Tyrrell, 2001: 232). Referring to the Hindu religious relationship, Sheeran adds, “The udakki (also damaru) is an hourglass drum identified both with Siva and Buddhist Tantric practice” (Sheeran, 2000:966). Thus, it could be presumed that the *Udakki* playing and dance was conjoined with both Buddhist and Hindu religious practices.

Raban (see Appendix 14: Rabana) playing and raban dance is another art form within Sri Lankan drumming (Nurnberger, 1998:97; Sheeran, 2000:964; Dissanayake, 1994:99; Sederaman, 1978:46). The *Rabana* is described as a “hand-held frame drum.” Nurnberger describes two examples of *Rabanas* as a “small framed drum” and a “large-framed drum” (Nurnberger, 1998:97). Although Sri Lankan percussion art is solely the task of the male performer, female participation is seen in the art of *Raban* playing. The main reason for this trend is that it is a domestic art, which provides the freedom for women to play it. It is evident that *Rabana* both for playing and dance is used particularly by women (Nurnberger, 1998:97; Sederaman, 1978:46). Therefore, in the Sri Lankan performing arts *Rabana* could be identified as the only percussion instrument that women could play without gender discrimination.

Mridangam is a special form of drum that is related to the Tamil community. A percussion art that is strictly bound with Tamil ethnicity and Hinduism, it is played only by the male performer. *Mridangam* as a percussion instrument occupies an important place in both Tamil dance and Carnatic music. There are several examples in ancient visual arts and literature relating to the art of playing the *Mridangam* (Krishnamurthy, 2008; Krishnaswami, 1971; Godakumbure, 1970; Dissanayaka, 1994). Using archaeological evidence of the *Mridangam*, Krishnamurthy observes, “The barrel-shaped mridangam has been described in ancient Hindu Scriptures and depicted in cave paintings and temple sculptures” (Krishnamurthy, 2008:4). Therefore, the *Mridangam* has been used from the past in Hindu performing arts and it is “perhaps the most highly developed and the most ancient of all percussion instruments” (Krishnaswami, 1971: 36). In the past, the playing of the *Mridangam* was bound up with the caste

system but now young people play it without such differences and it is considered by them as something that shows the “Tamil national identity³⁵.” Thus, the *Mridangam* could be identified in Sri Lankan art as a symbol of Tamil nationality.

4.5 What influence do the Sri Lankan performing arts have on Sri Lankan society?

During the last decade there have been reports by government bodies and other organisations across the world that identify the arts as making a positive contribution to various aspects of society (Kollontai, 2015: 57).

Kollontai’s point about the contribution made by art to various aspects of society opens a path towards the objective of this section. This idea could be used in discussing the impact of the Sri Lankan performing arts on Sri Lankan society. So, attention is focused here mainly on what impact singing, music, dance and folk drama have on Sri Lankan social, cultural, religious, economic and political institutions. In examining the influence of the arts and the artistes on society, it is important to pay attention to Herbert Marcuse’s view on the role of the arts in raising awareness in the viewers’ minds of the need for change. The artiste experiences the gap between the ideal and reality. Similarly, this ability to entertain an ideal form of existence for humanity, while at the same time living in far less than ideal conditions, produces a sense of alienation in the artiste, and this may be transmitted to the viewer. Recognition of this alienation can become the catalyst for social change. As Marcuse points out, “art is committed to that perception of the world which alienates individuals from their functional existence and performance in society; it is committed to an emancipation of sensibility, imagination and reason in all spheres of subjectivity and objectivity (Marcuse, 1979: 9). This view of Marcuse is taken into consideration when discussing the influence of the Sri Lankan performing arts and the artiste on society.

³⁵ Interview (INT/SRI/BAT/FE1)

4.5.1 Influence of Arts on the reconciliation of Sinhalese and Tamil nationalities

As far as Sri Lankan society is concerned, the Sinhalese-Buddhist group could be regarded as the major ethnic group and the Tamil-Hindu group as the second ethnic group in the country. The most dominant challenge is the building up of a Sri Lankan nationalism beyond the separation of the nation into major race and minor race. What kind of support the arts can potentially provide in bringing about reconciliation between these main ethnic groups will be discussed. Kollontai, describing how far the arts and art-linked projects influence the building of reconciliation and peace, points out that those arts activities “help victims of conflict, both individually and collectively, in shaping a political process which enables a more profound understanding of each other with the aim of reconciliation and building a future where a break-down of societies into violence is less likely to occur” (Kollontai, 2015: 57). It is important to examine in what manner the arts have been used to help build peace and reconciliation between the Sinhalese and Tamils with the aim of creating a future in Sri Lankan society devoid of war.

4.5.2 Influence on religious institutions

In almost all Sri Lankan ritual ceremonies, offerings are made to Hindu gods, chief among them are Nātha, Vishnu, Kataragama, Pattini, and Kali. Moreover, the origin of healing ceremonies using dance and music traditions in all cases is of Indian origin. All stories such as Malaya in *Kohombā Kankāriya*, Pattini of *Devol Maduwa*, and Mangara of *Pahan Maduwa*, and of the folk dramas *Sokari* and *Kolam* and *Nādagama* are linked to the South Indian Dravidian culture. Thus, the Sri Lankan performing arts described as Sinhalese-Buddhist do in actual fact reflect aspects of the Hindu-Tamil culture. Syllabuses designed by universities and higher seats of learning give pride of place to themes that give equal status to both ethnic groups and to promoting reconciliation between them. So, through the reconciliation linked to the performing arts, tolerance between the ethnic groups is increased and it also enhances the ability to work with each ethnic group and community. Guetzkow points out that the arts build community

identity and pride that leads to positive community norms such as diversity, tolerance and free expression (Guetzkow, 2002: 3).

In addition, the Sri Lankan performing arts can provide a platform for the artistes and audiences to develop their understanding of each other's religion and culture. Particularly dance, singing and music art forms and sculpture, carvings and paintings associated with Buddhist as well as Hindu religious rituals seem to illuminate Buddhist and Hindu religious themes. Referring to the process whereby Buddhist themes are presented to society through dance, music and folk drama, Sarachchandra observes, "Kandyan dancers sing and dance the *suvisi vivarana* and *vannam* celebrating events in the life of the Buddha. The *Dalada Sinduva* sings the praises of the Sacred Tooth to the tune of the *Gajaga Vannama*" (Sarachchandra, 1952: 11). He adds that folk plays began to depict Buddhist stories like the *Sandakinduru Jataka* and *Maname Katava*. In addition to describing the impact of the performing arts on Buddhism, he also describes how Roman Catholicism was introduced to society. He shows that in the Roman Catholic Passion play, "Pasku" characters such as Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, Saint John and Veronica are portrayed, and Christian church music is used for the purpose (Sarachchandra, 1952: 125-126). Gaston, referring to the connection between art and religion in the South of Sri Lanka and South Asia, points out "Religious dance can range from spontaneous individual movement, to highly formalised symbolic movements that appear in ritual and ceremony as part of structured religious services" (Gaston et al., 2014: 02).

4.5.3 Influence on cultural institutions

When considered culturally, the Sri Lankan performing arts may be seen as a medium that maintains both Sinhalese and Tamil culture. Guetzkow points out that through the arts a sense of collective identity and efficacy increases (Guetzkow, 2002: 3) and adds that through it, community image and status are improved. As he points out, several examples can be seen regarding collective identity and efficacy in Sri Lankan society. In fact, all ritual systems of dance, singing and music of the upcountry, low country, Sabaragamu and Hindu traditions happen on collective participation of each group. Describing this collective participation Sarachchandra points out that when a *Gam Maduwa* or *kankāriya* is performed the talent and co-operation of all in society are focused

on one objective. He adds that the people who join together to achieve this one objective perform in one place tasks such as dance, singing, music, drama, and the carving and painting of masks (Sarachchandra, 1952: 33-34). Just as in maintaining the culture of each group, this collective effort is obvious in the manner in which *Kula parampara* (caste generations) take the lead in maintaining such art forms. Here, an artiste who participated in the research observed:

As those belonging to the *Berava* caste we do not dance or play the drum as a *Rajakari*. It's more an obligation of ours than a *Rajakari*. We are duty bound to maintain the culture, which our ancestors bequeathed to us, for the future.³⁶

Thus, it is evident that the artistes across generations are concerned with the preservation, maintenance and the handing over of the dance modes, music patterns, costumes, carvings, invocations, and singing modes to the next generation.

4.5.4 Influence on economic institutions

In addition, the Sri Lankan performing arts exert a direct positive impact on the Sri Lankan economy. The performing arts release themselves from the function of religious rituals and transform themselves into an art form to entertain tourists. What is important in this instance is that within the tourist industry the production of a mixed form of art without a division between Sinhalese and Tamil exists. This is evident particularly in the Kataragama and Kandy *perahera*. Upcountry *ves* dance, Hindu Bharatanatyam, low country mask dance, drumming and fire dance have become quite popular among the tourists and places of dance such as Kandy, Bentota, Galle, Kataragama, Jaffna and Hikkaduwa, have become popular tourist destinations. The arts seem to work as a sort of medium to draw foreign exchange. Commenting on the arts and its impact on the economy, Guetzkow describes it as an 'export industry.' He adds that because of the tourists visiting a community for art events, they directly pay money for these and "may also shop, eat at a local restaurant and stay in a hotel in the local community". Therefore, "the dollars brought into the community for

³⁶ Interview (INT/KEG/03/M1)

an arts event will have indirect multiplier effects on the local economy” (Guetzkow, 2002: 8). This process as shown by Guetzkow is evident at the *Perahera* sponsored by the Kandy Tooth Relic Temple and *Perahera* sponsored by the Kataragama *Devālaya*. There is an increase in the arrival of tourists during the *Perahera* season, and trade in the relevant towns, temporary boutiques, the leasing of houses and the booking of places for watching the *Perahera*, seem to increase. This ‘export industry’ brings in money from outside the local economy. Here a direct positive impact is received by the town’s economy and “indirectly, this spending has what is called a ‘multiplier effect’ to the extent that those dollars re-circulate in the local economy as a result of spending on local goods and services by the festival and other business” (Guetzkow, 2002: 09). Thus, it may be concluded that the art of the *Berava*, *Kinnara*, *Karava* castes has a direct as well as indirect impact on the Sri Lankan economy.

4.5.5 Influence of arts on the political institutions

In describing the impact of the Sri Lankan performing arts on Sri Lankan society, it is also important to study the impact it has had on aspects of the Sri Lankan political process. In particular, a new ‘social drama’ seems to have emerged, based on the Sri Lankan folk plays *Sokari*, *Kolam*, *Nādagama* and *Kooththu*, which analyses economic and political problems. Describing the politicisation of indigenous drama that took place in the early 1960s and in post-independent Sri Lanka, Fernando observes, “In the early 1960s, several young playwrights attempted to bring social problems to the stage, paving the way for the politicization of the comparatively young modern Sinhala theatre” (Fernando, 1999: 65). The unrest that the young had to face subsequent to the political and social changes that took place in the 1960s seems to have been expressed through the performing arts. The plays were based on hopeless conditions in society and the oppression in private boarding houses such as Henry Jayasena’s *Janelaya* (1961) and Sugathapala de Silva’s *Boardingkarayo* (1962) and bring social problems to the stage for the first time. Through the *veedi natya* (street plays), similar in form to the Tamil *Kooththu* drama tradition, the dramatist seems to take the lead in analysing social problems.

Fernando points out that foremost among the themes that the young playwrights of the new generation tackled were problems related to students, slum dwellers, those created by the open economy, the impact of the tourist industry on traditional society, unemployment, state and other forms of terrorism, the abuse of women and ethnic issues (Fernando, 1999: 67). With youth unrest in 1971 and 1989 and the conflict with the state, thousands of young lives were destroyed and the use of drama, dance, singing and drums to protest against the state was perceptible. In fact, the works of the artistes of the new generation had as their main objective agitation and propaganda (Fernando, 1999:71). Just as the arts have been used to analyse and criticise modern political and social problems, folk plays such as *Sokari*, *Kolam* and healing ceremonies such as *Ura Yakkama* were used to analyse and criticise administrative systems, corruption and fraud in the Sinhalese society in the pre-colonial and colonial periods. The *kankari* performer who saw through the society used his performance as an opportunity to protest against caste discrimination, the gap between the haves and have-nots, and various injustices committed against ordinary people by the ruling classes (Dissanayaka, 1994: 37). Even the *Sokari* play depicts this injustice committed by the ruling classes against society. Some verses in the play refer to *Sokari* who went to a physician to get treatment for her husband *Guruhamy* who had been bitten by a dog; the physician takes her to some place and sexually assaults her.

“His mind is with *Sokari*.”

“She’s now in the physician’s house

Taken there by force”³⁷

Thus, art seems to expose corruption committed in the fields of politics and administration through political power.

4.5.6 Influence of the arts as psychiatric therapy

Performing arts seem to act as a panacea that gives mental relief. People believe that the evil effects of deities, and other spirits can be warded off through rituals in the upcountry, low country and Sabaragamu and Tamil traditions. The *daha*

³⁷ *Sokari drama* (2015). Conducted by Gunasiri Ranawaka. Mahena Public sports ground [22nd April].

ata sanniya in the low country tradition deals with eighteen kinds of diseases and their cures. Several methods similar to those used in western science such as psychotherapy, grouptherapy, Gestalttherapy, psychodrama and hypnotherapy³⁸ seem to be operative within this healing ceremony. The healing ceremony priest creates full positive attitudes and confidence in the patient (*atura*). People believe that the priest has the power to subjugate demons and spirits. Particularly in the *kalu kumara yakuma* performed to obviate delays in conception, the dialogue in the ceremony suggests that the priest wards off all evils and blesses the woman to enable her to have children.

Priest dressed up as woman: Well, gurunnanse, I came on your invitation. So, why did you call me?

Gurunnanse: Blessing a woman who has no children is something that comes down from the time of Dipankara Buddha. Five hundred princesses who were in grief for not having children were so overjoyed when they got them that their delight was beyond words. Even today we are doing the same healing ceremony that was done for the childless princesses. So we called you to give the child you brought to this lady, receive rewards, and grant a child to the lady and bless her. From today you must ensure that no trouble would fall on her.³⁹

Thus, the patient believes that the demon priest is a person of intelligence, solicitous qualities, and an expert in singing, music and dance, who is able to subjugate demons. This kind of generation of positive attitudes in the patient's mind and self-confidence is compatible with cognitive behaviour therapy and Gestalt therapy in modern psychiatry. Further, this art seems to act as a group therapy for women suffering similar illnesses among the spectators.

Particularly, within the Sri Lankan post-conflict society, the performing arts seem to function as a form of therapy in appeasing the hate between the ethnic groups. Dramas, songs and dance, displaying the war and the devastation caused

³⁸ *Common types of psychotherapy* [Internet]. Available from <https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/about-psychotherapy/types/> [Accessed 10th January 2018].

³⁹ *Rata Yakuma* (2015). Conducted by Ashoka Palleguru. Tholangamuwa Buddhist Vihara [8th December].

by it are designed to promote the co-existence between the relevant ethnic groups. As Kollontai points out, “The importance of visually seeing the human reality of events such as war, conflict and genocide is that they illustrate as well as corroborate atrocities that otherwise can sometimes be incomprehensible and underestimated in terms of the human cost” (Kollontai, 2015: 74). Liebmann points out “Drama is the most obvious art form working with conflict as it provides the opportunity to enact and re-enact a particular situation” (Liebmann, 1996: 3). In universities students who study Sinhalese dance, music and art are given the opportunity to study Tamil dance and music while Tamil students are given the opportunity to study Sinhalese dance and music. This cross-cultural work “aims to help people of different views and backgrounds to understand each other better” (Liebmann, 1996: 5). Thus, it is evident that Sri Lankan performing arts is not only a form of psychiatric therapy warding off sickness but also a process that works for the reconciliation of ethnic groups divided by an unfortunate war.

Thus, it is evident that healing ceremonies of Sinhalese-Tamil ethnic and Buddhist-Hindu religious groups linked to dance, singing, music and folk plays, make a great impact on various social institutions. It is obvious that the Sri Lankan performing arts exert a great influence on the well-being of Sri Lankan society by working towards Sinhalese-Tamil ethno-religious integration, reconciliation, social integration, the maintenance of culture, the improvement of religious functions, the contribution to the economy through the tourist industry, the exposing of social corruption, and as a physical and mental therapy.

4.7 Conclusion

Through the traditions of the Sri Lankan performing arts, much information can be gathered relating to the Sri Lankan performing artiste’s caste, gender, ethnicity and religious adherence. A study into the Sri Lankan performing arts traditions also reveals the influence the performing artiste has on such social concepts as caste, gender and ethnicity linked to socio-cultural norms. A Buddhist-Hindu art form associated with Sinhalese-Tamil ethnicities has

developed and is performed without any conflict. So, this art form becomes a medium for social and ethno-religious cohesion. The next chapter will investigate how far caste is a factor that influences the artiste and the art within dance, singing, music and folk drama of the Sri Lankan traditions of upcountry, lowcountry, Sabaragamu and Bharatanatyam.

Chapter 05: Caste

5.1 Introduction

For over 3000 years ‘caste’ was a system used to identify the layers of society (Bayly, 1999) and was also considered a tool to identify complex social phenomena such as social, religious, cultural, historical and political characteristics. This chapter will firstly consider the function of caste within Sri Lankan society and its relationship to the performing arts and artistes. This will be followed by an exploration of how the caste system present in Sri Lanka was established based on the Indian *Chatur or Varna Dharma*⁴⁰ and how this caste system affected social separation through the inherited *Rajakariya*⁴¹ system and the social standing of the performing artiste within Sri Lanka. Finally, the issue of how this traditional Sri Lankan social system changed under colonisation and the changes that occurred in the particular social layer to which the traditional performing artiste belonged will be discussed. Similarly, whether caste continues to be considered important to Sri Lankan society and the performing arts and how perhaps the experience of caste status amongst Sinhalese and Tamil artistes is seen as a shared experience which can contribute to better ethno-religious relations will also be examined. This chapter further studies how the caste of the performing artiste influences the construction of socio-cultural norms.

5.2 What is Caste?

The criteria used in identifying the social differences among people within the caste system in the South Asian social system are class, tribe, language, profession and gender. Defining this particular aspect or caste, Hutton points out, “A collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name; claiming a common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine; professing to follow the same hereditary calling; and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community” (Hutton, 1946:47). Bogle, describing the structure of the caste states that the caste system classifies society into hereditary groups and that within those castes three elements can be identified – namely, repulsion, heredity and the hierarchy among those castes

⁴⁰ See Section 5.3.1.1

⁴¹ See Section 5.3.2.4

(Bougle, 1971:9). Describing this aspect pointed out by Hutton (1946) and Bougle (1971), Mill discusses the following matters about 'hereditary' calling or profession within those castes by arguing that:

The classification and distribution of the members of a community into certain classes or orders, for the performance of certain functions, with the enjoyment of certain privileges, or the endurance of certain burdens, and the establishment of hereditary performance in these orders, the son being ordained to perform the functions, to enjoy the privileges, or sustain the burden of the father, and to marry only in his own tribe, without mixture of the classes, in regular succession, through all ages (Mill, 1824:647).

Therefore, in maintaining the inheritance they must bear the privileges integral to it as well as the accompanying social pressure. In continuing the inherited professions, they must contract marriages from equal castes and the profession passes from father to son. Commenting on the perspective of Guizot, who gives a broad analysis of the profession with hereditary potentials and caste, Bougle states it, "is essentially hereditary; it is the transmission of the same situation and potentialities from father to son. Where there is no hereditary, there is no caste" (Bougle, 1971:9). As Bougle points out the hereditary concept connected with caste is very important in the case of Sri Lankan society because art is linked to the hereditary specialisation. The influence of the performing arts and artists of the *Berava* caste on cultural norms and the 'Ceylonisation'⁴² of the Indian caste system are discussed here.

5.3 Caste in the Indian Subcontinent

In defining the caste system established within the Sri Lankan social system, it is not advisable to study it only within a Sri Lankan social framework. This is because in Sri Lankan civilisation, the Indian subcontinent has influenced most of the social, cultural, economic, political, and religious dimensions of Sri Lankan life. This will be discussed further in the section entitled Caste System in Sri

⁴² According to most research the term "Ceylonisation" has been used to mean that things have been adapted to suit local conditions. The main reason for this is that it was known as Ceylon until 1972, and the religious, economic, political and cultural influence and its adaptation was known as "Ceylonisation".

Lanka⁴³ to enable an understanding of the influence brought upon the socio-cultural norms by the *Kinnara, Oli, Karava, Paraiyar* and *Nattuvarc* castes headed by the *Berava* caste to which the performing artistes belong. This will also aid the understanding of how the social status of the performing artiste is determined by the caste system.

5.3.1 Caste system in India: Varna Dharma and Jati

On the Indian subcontinent, the ‘caste’ and the connected ‘occupational practices’ can be identified as the basic foundation of society. Society and the concept of a caste hierarchy created by Maha Brahma are based primarily on the ‘*Chatur Varna Dharma*’, namely Brahmin (priest or teacher), the Kshatriyas (warriors/leaders), the Vaishyas (merchants/traders) and the Kshudras (labourers/artisans) (Dutt, 1931; Risley, 1908; Buhler, 2008; Collins, 2001). Within this concept of hereditary endogamous – hierarchical social layers, the status of the layers determined how the particular castes used power and wealth. Accordingly, societies were separated into ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ castes. This is explained in 49 section 9 of the explanatory notes on the UK’s Equality Act 2010 namely⁴⁴ :

The term ‘caste’ denotes a hereditary, endogamous (marrying within the group) community associated with a traditional occupation and ranked accordingly on a perceived scale of ritual purity. It is generally (but not exclusively) associated with South Asia, particularly India, and its diaspora. It can encompass the four classes (Varnas) of Hindu tradition (the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra communities); the thousands of regional Hindu, Sikh, Christian, Muslim or other religious groups known as Jatis; and groups among South Asian Muslims called Biradaris. Some Jatis regarded as below the Varna hierarchy (once termed ‘untouchable’) are known as ‘Dalit’.⁴⁵

⁴³ See section 5.3.2 Caste system in Sri Lanka: Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism

⁴⁴ The UK’s Equality Act 2010 explanatory notes 2010:11)

⁴⁵ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/notes/division/3/2/1/6/1?view=plain>

The above extract shows the verity within the social system. Within the Indian caste system, people are hierarchically divided into four castes or *Varna Dharma*. Among them the Brahmin or the priest caste is held to be the highest, and the other castes revolve round it. Smith describing the Brahmin caste, points out “The Brahmin class is essentially defined by its supposed priority (as the class created first by the creator God), by knowledge of the Veda, and by the monopoly this class holds on the operation of sacrifice”. He adds that these traits justify the social position of the class vis-à-vis others: “they are predominant because they are prior, and they claim to stand outside of the power relations that govern social life for others because of their superior knowledge and sole possession of the ultimate ‘weapons’, sacrificial techniques” (Smith, 1994:48).

Afterwards, Kshatriyas (warriors and rulers), Vaishyas (traders) and Kshudras (labourers) are established. The three first castes are introduced as (twice born) or Dvija caste. This means that they are eligible for the ‘*upanayana*’ practice which is considered their second birth.⁴⁶ In terms of the origin of this *Varna Dharma*, researchers put forward various opinions, and some researchers connect them to the Mohenjodara – Harappa pre-historic Indo valley civilisation (Malik, 1968).

To indicate sub-caste, which do not belong to this ‘*Varna*’ scheme, the word ‘*Jati*’ is used in the Indian social setup. There are a number of local and regional sub-castes based on the ‘twice born’ main caste system within Indian society and a clear description about this is given in *People of India – Anthropological Survey of India*. “We were able to put together about 6748 communities in the list. This list was taken to the field, tested and checked, and finally 4635 communities were identified and studied”⁴⁷. As Arya Comments “In the classical literature of India, caste was represented as *Varna* and for two thousand years, when Hindus wrote about it, they did so characteristically in the idiom of *Varna*. This is no longer the case and caste is now represented much more typically as *Jati*, or its equivalent in the regional language” (Arya, 2017:4). Medway explaining the specialities in

⁴⁶ If someone is born a boy in the (within the three twice born castes) he will have the opportunity of ‘*upanayana*’ or formal Hindu education. In this practice the boy is decked with ‘*yajnopaveetam*’, which is the sacred thread. It represents the social status conferred on one through the Brahmin-hood rather than religious or educational status.

⁴⁷ (no date) *Anthropological Survey of India* [Internet] Available from <https://ansi.gov.in/people-of-india/> [Accessed 25th May 2016].

this *Jati* system states, “*Jati* stands as a social hierarchy in their own right, and that hierarchy beyond the limitations of the ‘*Varna*’ scheme to encompass the whole of Indian society” and the hierarchy of the ‘*Jati*’ is dynamic and flexible, unlike the more rigid arrangement of the *varnas* (Medway, 1998:32). Therefore, the Hindu social system was based on the ‘*Varna*’ scheme, and later, ‘*Jati*’ came into existence. This caste system began to influence not only Indian society but also other areas on the Indian sub-continent.

5.3.2 Caste system in Sri Lanka: Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism

Respecting the effect of caste in general on society, it is extremely difficult to form a correct estimate, and to determine whether the evil or the advantages that result from them, in a hot climate, preponderate (Davy, 1821:133).

There is much evidence to show that the caste system with *chatur dharma* established within Indian society found its way to Sri Lankan society because of Hindu Aryan arrivals (Geiger, 1912; Oldenberg, 1879; Paranavitana, 1970; Pfaffenberger, 1982). The caste system was transmitted to Sri Lanka with some of its features being adapted to the Sri Lankan context with relation to aspects such as the religious, economic and *Rajakari* system. This will be discussed further in the following section. This section will also show how changes occurred in the caste system because of the colonial administrations of the Portuguese, Dutch and the English and how the feudal system in Sri Lanka collapsed with the establishment of the colonial economy and capitalism. (Jayawardena, 2000: XV-XXX). With this collapse of feudalism, the caste and caste practices changed with a result that the relationship between caste and the arts also changed. In studying the Sri Lankan caste system, it is also necessary to pay attention to how the caste system in Sri Lanka underwent changes owing to Buddhist disciplines such as ‘equality’ ‘mutual co-existence’, and ‘respecting each other’. Because of this concept of equality, a caste system that is quite liberal established itself in Sri Lanka instead of the rigid caste system of the Brahmins in India. Through this the arts and the artiste became an essential part of daily religious and ritual offerings in Sri Lanka.

Therefore, this section attempts to study primarily the establishment of the caste system in Sri Lanka and its historical background, and to identify the religious and ethnic inspirations.

Geiger shows that there were two tribes namely *Yaksha* and *Nāga* in Sri Lanka before the advent of Buddhism and, because of migrants who arrived from time to time and Indian invasions subsequent to the arrival of Vijaya a caste hierarchy based on the *Rajakari* system gradually evolved (Geiger, 1912). Geiger's concept is corroborated by the Brahimi rock inscriptions which were found to date back to the 3rd century BCE to 1st century CE. It is possible to understand the *Rajakari* bound to the caste system through these inscriptions in stone caves that describe the people who donated the caves for the *Bhikkhus*. Due to the information given by Paranavitana on the *Inscriptions of Ceylon* (Paranavitana, 1970), details about these professions could be gathered.

Place and Serial number	Brahimi Inscriptions in caves	English translation	Occupation and profession
22. <u>Mintale</u> (EZ.V,210 ff) Anuradhapura District	<u>Badakari[ka-paru] maka-Tiśś-putha</u> <u>badakarika-parumaka-Magaha lene śagaśa</u>	The cave of the Chief <u>Māgha</u> , the treasure, son of the chief <u>Tissa</u> , [is given]to the <u>Saṅgha</u>	The treasure
74. <u>Mintale</u> (EZ.V,210 ff) Anuradhapura District	(1) <u>Manikara-Mulaguttha</u> (2) <u>padagad[ini]</u>	The Steps of the lapidary <u>Mūlagutta</u>	The lapidary
80. <u>Vessagiri</u> (EZ.1,) Anuradhapura District	<u>Taladara-Nagaya-puth-Devaha lene</u> <u>aḡata-anagatacatu diśa śagaśa</u>	The cave of Deva, son of Nagaya the Gold smith , [is given] to the Sangha of the four quarters, present and absent.	The Gold Smith
84. <u>Vessagiri</u> (ASCAR)	<u>Upaśaka-vamakaraka-Tiśaha lene</u>	The cave of the lay- devotee <u>Tissa</u> , The Armourer	The Armourer
161. <u>Vessagiri</u> (EZ.1,)	<u>Parumaka-śagayamataha lene</u>	The cave of the chief <u>Sagaya</u> , The minister	The minister
161 d <u>Vessagiri</u> (EZ.1,)	<u>Kabara-Puśaha Malaha</u>	Of <u>Phussa</u> , the ironsmith , and of Mala	The ironsmith
165 <u>Diyatitta-vava</u>	<u>Gamika-Abaya -jḡita upaśika-śumanaya lene</u>	The cave of the female lay-devotee <u>Sumana</u> , daughter of the village -Councillor Abhaya	The village - Councillor
301 <u>Muthugala (CALR, III)</u>	<u>Todika Banagamika śiva-putha</u> <u>gamika-sonaha lene aḡata-anagatha-śagasa dine</u>	The cave of the village -councillor Sona ,the son of the village -councillor <u>Siva</u> , the ferry-keeper of <u>Banagama</u> , [is given] to the Sangha, present and absent	1.The village -councillor 2.The ferry-keeper
350 <u>Muthugala (CALR, III)</u>	<u>Tabakara-Tiśa-puta Ronigutaśa lene</u>	The cave of <u>Rohinigutta</u> , son of <u>Tissa</u> , the copper -Smith	The copper - Smith

Figure 1 : Occupation and profession. (Paranavitana, 1970)

This reveals the fact that the social system, which was established according to tribes, had been established by the 1st century CE. This Ceylonisation of the caste system has received the attention of many researchers. Writing about this caste system, Davy describes a two-way system instead of the Hindu four-way system. Accordingly, people belonging to the *Govi Vansaya* (Cultivators) corresponded to ‘*Nilamakkara*’ or ‘*Pattiya*’ (Shepherds) and belonged to the Vaishya group; all others were considered low caste – namely, fishermen, toddy drawers, smiths, tailors, potters, barbers, washer men, jaggery makers, lime burners and grass cutters, and they were commonly grouped together and known as Kshudras (Davy, 1821:112). In terms of this adaptation and how it differed from the Indian system, Gilbert makes the following comment: “The Sinhalese, being of a homogeneous race and religion, do not have the complexity of Indian castes, with their mingling of tribes, races, and religious orders” (Gilbert, 1953:297). Similarly, he points out that the caste of Brahmin is not seen in the Sri Lankan caste system and that “their place is taken by the comparatively autocratic central government in the native kingdom” (Gilbert, 1953:298) and the Sinhalese castes are more or less alike in language, dress and customs with a few notable exceptions whereas the Indian castes differ greatly in these respects. (Gilbert, 1953:298). In the establishment of the Indian caste system in Sri Lanka as shown by Davy (1821) and Gilbert (1953), a noteworthy feature is that instead of the Brahmin caste system two factors have influenced the institution of an indigenous caste system. The main factor is that as Buddhism rejected the Brahmin *Varna* dharma there was no room for the establishment of Brahmin systems within Buddhist culture. The second factor is that the Sri Lankan society was not based on a system of professions proclaimed by Maha Brahma as in India. In identifying the caste system in Sri Lanka, as different from that of India as shown by Gilbert, another important factor must receive our consideration which is the social and economic evolution within Sri Lankan society, particularly from 1500 to 1948, when Sri Lanka was under various European administrations. During that colonial period, the ‘plantation economy’ had a powerful impact on the traditional social and economic aspects of Sri Lankan society. Jayawardene commenting on this social change observes:

Plantation agriculture, beginning with the cultivation of coffee in the 1830s, did not, as is commonly supposed, represent any deep-seated structural change putting an end to the economy's underdeveloped character, nor did it bring about a complete capitalist transformation. All the same, there were perceivable changes in economic and social life, which were significant in comparison with the relative stagnation that had existed before. It was in this phase of Sri Lanka's history that the bourgeoisie made a swift ascent, enriching itself from the opportunities which economic changes opened up (Jayawardene, 2000: XV-XVI).

Discussing this plantation agriculture, De Silva expresses a view similar to that of Jayawardene. He points out that "In Sri Lanka itself, one of the most significant consequences was in the old Kandyan kingdom where the highlands were profoundly transformed, socially and economically, under coffee production" (De Silva, 2011:138).

Changes in society during the colonial period appear to have made a powerful impact on all social institutions including the arts. The traditional forms of art entered a new phase, a 'new history,' a 'new structure,' and a 'new ownership' inspired by the West. Commenting on this change Nissan observes, "The Colonial period appears to have been one of extraordinary flux in colonized societies, as new institutions, new histories, and new collectivities were created through the imposition and institutionalization of the colonizer's meanings onto the colonized" (Nissan, 1997:24). In terms of the new trends that developed during the colonial period, Sabaratnam (2001) points out, "During British rule, the norms, roles, and values of major social institutions such as labour, marriage and family, law, education and social control changed deeply" (Sabaratnam ,2001: 82).

Therefore, in studying the establishment of caste in Sri Lanka and its historical background, what is evident is that the development of its caste system happened in several stages. Focusing on this aspect, Ryan describes the progression according to three stages, the first of which is "Largely occurring in the distant past, and hence obscured in the haze of the legend, is that of the transplantation of the caste concept from the Indian mainland" (Ryan, 1953:337). Within this period, the Indian caste system mixed with Sri Lankan tribes and became established. "The second stage is how it developed under a feudal system". Ryan states that this development was "The feudal crystallization of a caste hierarchy

under the aegis of both secular and religious authorities” (Ryan, 1953: 337). The third stage concerns how changes occurred in this caste system during the colonial period and the later contemporary period. Explaining this Reed observes:

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a critical period in the formation of the Kandyan dance. The imposition of a cash-based economy by the British led to the breakdown of the traditional Kandyan system of land tenure and the weakening – and ultimately demise – of the patronage relationships that had sustained the hereditary dancers and drummers (Reed, 2010:98).

Thus, in a study of the caste system in Sri Lankan society, its establishment and evaluation, several positive factors can be observed. The caste system not only determines the position of the individual within society but also his economic, political, religious and cultural institutions. Therefore, caste and the *rajakari* system connected with it became a powerful factor in determining the social position of the particular individual and therefore it is important to study caste and the elite *Rajakari* practices⁴⁸.

5.3.2.1 Caste and occupation

The primary basis of the division of castes in Sri Lanka is the '*Rajakariya*' or the service performed for the King (Pieris, 1956; Gilbert, 1953; Coomaraswamy, 1970). A study of this *Rajakari* system shows that because of the belief among the people that caste was binding them, the low caste people tacitly accepted that working for the higher caste people was an obligation of theirs (Pieris, 1956:185). Hocart gives an idea similar to that of Pieris cited above. He points out these *Rajakari* practices in the Sri Lankan caste system was a concept, an order made by the mythical King Mahasammata. "The Sinhalese villagers who described the function of the drummers say it was the mythical King Mahasammata who decreed that only certain persons were to carry out the demon ceremonies" (Hocart, 1958:51). Therefore, the caste system in Sri Lanka seems to be a system centred on the King and the services supplied to him. In this connection, the discussion of Gilbert is most important. In describing the special features of the

⁴⁸ See Section 5.3.2.4

Sri Lankan caste system, he states, “Sinhalese caste emphasises duties” (Gilbert, 1953:298) and describing such duties, he adds, *Rajakariya*, in which royal authority was employed to allocate the different occupations of the realm among the available labour supply. An example would be of an artiste in the *Berava* caste, who still agrees with the *Rajakari* system and, agrees that his function is to participate in ceremonial occasions or in temples. Gombrich (1971) comments on this:

Drummers, however, perform a service which is principally required for the Buddha, and is therefore in continued demand. Any temple of some age – say fifty years – is almost certain to hold land, and some of this land is probably leased to drummers in return for their professional services. Although drumming is not the only caste bound profession services. Although drumming is not the only caste-bound profession – laundering is another – it is the only one, at least in the area where I worked, which is regularly associated with service tenures, and this to such an extent that the term *rājakāriyō*, literally ‘workers for the King’, which used to designate all feudal villains, is now widely taken to refer to drummers living off temple lands (Gombrich, 1971:148-149).

Thus, according to the ‘impurity’ or ‘purity’ of the service performed in keeping with the use of land each caste was placed in keeping with the service performed. Generally, the highest position was enjoyed by the Govigama caste within the Sri Lankan social system and the *Berava* caste, into which the performing artiste belongs, occupies the lowest position.

In the case of the performing artiste, the *Rajakari* belonging to him seems to have been legalised under ‘*Navan Panguwa*’. Describing the *Navan Panguwa* belonging to the *Berava* caste, Sanjeewa points out “they had to perform the activities belonging to the *Navan Panguwa*. They were legalised as *Horane panguwa, Hevisi Panguwa, Hittara Panguwa, Malumura Panguwa, Sudu hakuru dena Panguwa, Pidavili Panguwa and Badahela Panguwa*” (Sanjeewa, 2006:67). Through a central government administrative system, the institution called caste was allied with *Rajakariya* and was given a legal form (*Badda*). For example, Government directives indicate that villagers must get their work done through the blacksmith appointed to their village and that a blacksmith who performs

work belonging to another blacksmith would have to pay damages to the respective blacksmith (Pieris, 1956:193).

It may be noted here that the King could change the *Rajakariya* and caste of a person and had the power to downgrade any high caste family or villagers to a lower caste. Such downgraded villagers are seen even today (Pieris, 1956:193). An example of this was provided by one of the interviewees for this research:

To be quite frank, although we play the drum and perform dances belonging to the *Berava Kulaya*, we are actually not *Berava* people. My great-great-grandfather was a former village headman. Somehow, he has had a relationship with my great-great-grandmother who belongs to the *Berava* caste and in that house, he had eaten rice with beef. This had been conveyed to the King and consequently the King had downgraded him to the *Berava Kulaya*. Since then, we belong to the *Berava* caste. All people in this region are descendants of our great-great-grandfather.⁴⁹

An idea quite similar to the idea expressed by the artiste belonging to the *Berava* caste is seen in the 59th Jataka story the *Berivada Jataka* in the *Jataka Atuva Getapadaya*, a work originating in the 11th century. In the commentary to the *Berivada Jataka*, it defines the *Berava* caste as those people who eat beef and who play the drum (Vimalakiththi, 1961:17). Among the ancient Sinhalese the eating of beef was considered a most despicable act (Knox, 1681:87) and anyone who did so was downgraded to the *Berava* caste and this membership of the *Berava* caste was considered a disgrace on their entire generation.

5.4 Performing artiste and caste

5.4.1 Introduction

In the case of both the Sri Lankan Sinhalese performing artiste and the Hindu performing artiste, the caste he/she belongs to plays an important role in their art. This is because of the performing of *Rajakari* and practices connected with caste. Attention is paid here to the *Berava*, *Karava* and *Oli* caste to which the Sinhalese performing artistes belong and the *Paraiyan* caste into which the Tamil

⁴⁹ Interview (INT/AN/8/M).

artistes belong. The *Gurukula* names, family names and *Rajakari* obligations and status in society arising out of caste and generation will be discussed here and, at the end of the section, the role of the performing artiste in pre-colonial as well as post-colonial Sri Lankan society will be studied. Therefore, the main objective in studying the performing artiste and caste is to inquire how far caste is a positive factor as regards the performing artiste's socio-cultural relationship.

5.4.2 The Berava in Sinhala society

The *Berava* caste comprises entirely Sinhalese-Buddhist performing artistes. In studying the caste to which a performing artiste belongs, the *Berava* caste earns a prominent place because the majority of the performing artistes belong to this caste. In this connection, Reed comments, "the berava (drummer) caste, the largest of Lanka's low "service" castes" of the Kandyan Sinhalese (Reed, 2010:12). The term *Berava* seems to be derived from *Bera* (drum) and 'Va' from *vadanaya* meaning play⁵⁰. Most Western research refers to the artiste of the *Berava* caste as a tom-tom beater. Ryan, describing this literary meaning of the term says, "The descriptive English phrases are actually more meaningful for they are renderings of the chief identifying feature, where one exists in the eyes of the Sinhalese. Frequently, in fact, caste names are dispensed with and the caste is referred to by some particular feature, usually its functional monopoly. Thus, the *Berava* are more often called simply *tom-tom beaters*" (Ryan, 1953:91). Therefore, it is seen that several terms like *Berava*, *Beravaya*, *Nakati* and tom-tom beater are used by Sri Lankan society to refer to this performing artiste.

In Sinhalese society the people who belong to the *Berava* caste had to engage in traditional singing, playing and drumming in *Devālaya* and temples and for domestic healing ceremonies. The account of the *Berava* performing artiste given by Knox, who was a prisoner for 19 years (1660-1679) in the Kandyan kingdom in the reign of King Rajasinghe II, gives a clear picture of the *Berava* artiste.

Who beside their trade, which is weaving cloths are astrologers, and tell the people good days and good seasons: and at the birth of a child write for them an account of the day, time and planet, it was born in and under. These accounts they keep with great care all their lifetime: by which they know their age, and what success or evil shall befall them. These people

⁵⁰ Interview (INT/KA/04/M)

also beat drums, and play on pipes, and dance in the temples of their Gods, and at their sacrifices; they eat and carry away all such victuals as are offered to their idols (Knox, 1681:69).

Ribeiro (1641-1658), who served in Sri Lanka before the arrival of Knox describes the performing artistes within the Sri Lankan caste system as, ‘These which follow are the lowest castes; the tom-tom beaters go in war to beat their drums and they come back with their own company’ (Ribeiro, 1847:89-91).

The social status of the *Berava* artiste is determined by the kind of drumming he performs. Those who play the drum in *Thovil* ceremonies occupy a lower rank compared with those who perform at Buddhist temple rituals. Hocart describing these kinds of drumming, points out “Drummers specialised in two directions: there are those who beat the demon (*Yaka*) drum and those who beat the temple drum” (Hocart, 1958: 8). Describing the manner in which the social status of an artiste is determined, a performer of the *Berava* caste commented:

We are Kandyan drummers. We have nothing to do with devils, demons or spirits. We play only for the Buddha. They too belong to our own caste but we do not engage in low-country healing ceremonies where sacrifices are made. It is a sin. What a merit that we play the drum for offerings made to the Buddha, morning, noon and evening. That is our traditional *Berava*. If we do not do it, we cannot even sleep at night. It is so much mixed with our blood.⁵¹

Yalman, describing these styles of drumming prevalent in the *Berava* caste, points out two aspects of it as ‘public’ and ‘private’. The following table gives further details of this.

⁵¹ Interview (INT/AN/06/M3)

Badde Services (Tom-Tom Beaters)

	Public	Private
	Annual festivals of the <i>devale</i> : <i>An-keliya</i> and <i>Gam Maduwa</i>	
Occasion:	<i>Vihara</i> ceremonies: Annual: <i>Katina Pinkama</i> (offering of new saffron robe to the priest); birthday of the Buddha. Others: <i>Bana</i> (preaching), <i>Pirit</i> (chanting).	Illnesses—ritual healing and exorcism
Duty:	A few members of the community provide the ceremonial drumming during rituals. Also all public announcements are made by drummers.	Act as dancers, exorcists, astrologers
Reward:	Payment by the Temple Society for <i>Vihara</i> service.	Payment (depending on status and wealth of patron), from Rs. 5 up per night per Tom-Tom Beater

Figure 2 : *Berava* caste (Yalman,1967:67)

Although the tasks belonging to the *Berava* caste could generally be classified in that manner, the way in which such tasks are performed within the caste points to the existence of sub-castes. So, within the *Berava* caste two sub-castes known as *Gahala Berava* and *Bathgama Berava* can be identified.

5.4.2.1 Gahala and Batgama Berava Caste and funeral drummers

Just as a Sinhalese performing artiste occupies a low position in the caste hierarchy so does a *Berava* artiste occupy a higher or lower position within the caste, depending on the purpose for which he performs. The best examples of this are the *Gahala Berava* and *Batgama Berava* levels within the *Berava* castes and the drumming art connected with them.

The lowest layer of the *Berava* caste is the *Gahala Berava* people. The reason why they are considered to belong to the lowest layer is that they play the drum only for funerals. Davy, describing the *Gahala Beravayo*, observes, “even of this

degraded race one set is considered lower than the other, and is held in contempt for eating beef” (Davy, 1821:128).

According to Davy, the task of the *Gahala Berava* is similar to the duties of the *Rodee* caste, which is the lowest layer in the Sri Lankan caste system, and those of the *Parayahs* mentioned in the description regarding the Tamil performing artiste (see section 5.4.6 The Performing Artiste of the *Parayah* Caste). During interviews held in the Kandy and Matale districts, several matters were highlighted by the people belonging to the *Gahala Berava*. The first was the concept that they were inspired by Indians. The elderly performing artiste in the village where people belonging to this caste lived stated:

Although we have been isolated as *Gahala Berava*, we belong to the *Berava* caste. Our great-grandfather told us that the lowest caste people in India did burying dead bodies, playing the drum and scavenging. Therefore, during ancient times, we have been influenced by that and we who perform the same task are treated as those belonging to the lowest layer. Whatever it is, we belong to the *Berava* caste. There is no distinction as high and low anymore. We only do our duty.⁵²

Another matter that was revealed during the discussions with interviewees is their relationships with the annual *perahara* at the Kandy Temple of the Tooth. They spoke about the *Rajakari* practices they are expected to perform.

Dalada *perahara* is the most esteemed festival for the Sinhalese. When this *perahara* is performed, we clean the roads so that the sacred tooth relic could come along the streets. Similarly, we also clean things dropped during the *perahara* like *copra*, and elephant droppings. Sometimes, we get the opportunity to assist in drumming.⁵³

So, even in the case of the *Berava* caste the occasion for which they do the drumming becomes a chief factor that determines their social status.

The percentage of people in the *Batgama Berava* caste was higher compared with the *Gahala Berava* people I met during the present research in Kandy, Matale, Anuradhapura, Kegalle and Kurunegala. These *Batgama Berava* people are also

⁵² Interview (INT/MA/02/M)

⁵³ Interview (INT/MA/01/M)

a sub-caste of the *Berava* caste and, according to Ryan, they are a branch of the *Gahala Berava* “funeral drummers” (Ryan, 1953:125). The term ‘batgam’ means ‘the villages where rice is produced’ and according to Peiris what is meant by this term is a village in which low-caste (*padu*) people have taken up residence (Peiris, 1956:375). As far as *Rajakari* is concerned, these people also perform funeral drumming.

This art of drumming and the *Rajakari* rituals connected with agriculture of the *Berava* artiste seemed to undergo a vast change during the post-colonial period. Because of the substitution of capitalism for the agro-economic pattern, the artiste seemed to have been given the opportunity of engaging in other professions in place of drumming for funerals. The artiste, mentioned above, of the *Berava* caste pointed out:

With time, the *Rajakari* obligations connected with caste have changed. Instead of the social hierarchy there is a high class and a middle class. Today we have a society where doctors and engineers are made through universities and higher education institutes. Although we played the drum earlier our children now study in foreign countries. They do big jobs. Now the *Rajakari* obligations of the caste have disappeared and all could take part in them.⁵⁴

So, this art of drumming of the *Berava* caste according to its purpose becomes a positive factor in determining the socio-cultural status of the performing artiste.

5.4.3 Karava and Mask dance

In the relationship between the Sri Lankan performing arts and caste, those of the *Karava* caste hold a special place. The artiste of the *Karava* caste have this exclusive right because they directly contribute in Sri Lankan healing ceremonies as well as in carving masks used in folk drama, painting them and participating in ceremonies wearing them. In describing the *Karava* caste Ryan points out the Indian origin of the caste:

The ‘fishing caste’ of the Sinhalese probably represents a rather late invasion from South India. While there are isolated villages to be found in the highlands, this is exceptional. They are heavily concentrated in the

⁵⁴ Interview (INT/THO/06/M)

coastal areas from Chilaw to Hambantota. Evidence of their late Tamil origins is certainly present in the mixed usage of Tamil and Sinhalese languages among Sinhalese fishermen in the Chilaw and Negombo areas and in their unique marriage customs probably of Indian origin (Ryan, 1953:103-104).

Describing this relationship with South India, Amarasinghe and Kariyakarawana point out that the commencement of mask drama in Sri Lanka is associated with the *Karava* caste army brought from Kanchipuram, Kilakkare, Kaveri Pattanam when Puttalam was seized by Mukkaras, a group of invaders in the reign of King Parakramabahu VI of Kotte (1412 CE–1467 CE). These people were believers in the Goddess Kali and at that time even the local people were already performing a variety of dancing by way of offerings to demon and deities (Amarasinghe and Kariyakarawana, 2014:56). Therefore, the *Karava* caste connected with the *Kolam* folk drama shows its link with South Indian ethnicity and the Hindu religion.

An important idea regarding this South Indian association emerges from what Ryan, Amarasinghe and Kariyakarawana agree about how a particular meeting point is forged where multi-national, multi-religious and multi-caste factors meet. Therefore, the *Kolam* drama, which is performed by the performing artistes of the *Karava* caste, becomes an art form where caste, race, and religion amalgamate. Amarasinghe and Kariyakarawana, describing this amalgamation of multi-ethnic, and multi-religious cultural elements, point out, the *Berava* (tom-tom beaters) caste in Bentota, who contributed singing, playing, verse and words to the mask drama. Though in the past people belonging to different castes performed just the particular duty entrusted to them, in time, they began to undertake many other trades without distinction. Accordingly, those who belonged to the *Karava* caste took part in singing and playing, whereas that of *Berava* caste practised carving masks (Amarasinghe and Kariyakarawana, 2014:56) (see Appendix 15: Mask making).

The contribution of the *Karava* caste shows a connection not only with the carving of masks but also with the *Garayakuma* found in the low-country dance tradition. “The Maha *Garayakuma* is performed when the sea is rough and fish scarce. The objective is the expectation of an abundant supply of fish” (Sarachchandra, 1952:67). In this *Garayakuma*, the artiste of the *Karava* caste is entitled to take

the main role. In this research, when I participated in a Garayakuma as an observer, an artiste pointed out:

The Sea is our life. We feel everything that happens in the sea. We are fishermen ‘in normal Sinhalese parlance the Karava caste is referred to as fishermen’. So, we live because of the sea. Every year we get fish, we perform a Garayakuma like this. This shows the unity and the strength of our people The Karava caste⁵⁵.

Thus, the artiste of the *Karava* caste connected with the *Kolam* folk drama seems to institute ethno-religious cohesion within the Sri Lankan performing art.

5.4.4 *Kinnara* caste and *Sokari*

One example to show how the relationship between the performing arts and the caste affects the socio-cultural status of the performing artiste is the *Sokari* folk drama connected with the *Kinnara* caste. The artiste of the *Kinnara* caste has the exclusive right to perform this drama, which depicts both inter-ethnic and inter-religious cohesion. The artiste of the *Kinnara* caste contributes in many ways in *Sokari* such as preliminary preparations, acting in the play, and the supply of mats and other equipment. Explaining this relationship between the *Kinnara* caste and the *Sokari* drama Nurnberger states, “In the popular Sinhalese folk-play of the mat-weaver caste (*Kinnaraya*) which is known as ‘*Sokari*’” (Nurnberger, 1998:85) the main task of the *Kinnara* caste is the weaving of mats, kalala, baskets, trays etc. using reeds. Therefore, they are also referred to as “*Pannakara*”⁵⁶ (Upham, 1833:350). The weaving of mats, *kalala*, and cane baskets, and the *Rajakari* services of the *Kinnara* caste, connect directly with the *Sokari* folk drama. A striking example is the weaving of mats, which is an episode in the *Sokari* dance. In fact, when *Sokari* is weaving the mats, the cutting of reeds, drying them, dyeing them, weaving with patterns and selling them by going to the village fair are graphically shown. The above example is further confirmed by a few verses from a *Sokari* drama I witnessed in Matale and Kandy:

Sister, why are you looking?

Find out where there are reeds

⁵⁵ Interview (INT/HAT/01/M1)

⁵⁶ Meaning people working with reeds

The people say that they in the pond

Let's go together to the pond

Uproot the reeds and bring them to the bank

Cut them with pleasant mind

Bundle them carefully into skeins

and then wash the mud off your hand and feet

What shall we do with the reeds brought home?

Put them in the sun in two rows

When dried up remove them

And tear each leaf into the three strips

I shall weave a mat with a lotus motif at the head

I shall weave a mat with a lotus motif at the foot

I shall weave a pattern in the centre

I shall weave a mat for my aunt to see⁵⁷

The other outstanding feature in the *Sokari* folk drama is the Sinhalese-Tamil or the inter-ethnic and inter-religious cohesion that is expressed in it. *Sokari*, which comes from India, depicts how the *Andiguru* and *Paraya* assimilate with the Sinhalese-Buddhist society and how the Hindu deities, such as Pattini and Kataragama co-exist with Buddhism without any conflict whatever. So, the *Sokari* artiste of the *Kinnara* caste provides not only entertainment but also the idea of socio-ethno-religious integration.

5.4.5 Oli caste

Although falling into the lowest rung of the caste hierarchy, the *Oli* caste can be identified as a group of artistes who create a performing arts authority in society through performing art practices. The *Oli* caste or the 'caste of astrologers, exorcists, and occult practitioners are found in both the upcountry and low

⁵⁷ *Sokari* Drama. Performance (PER/MAT/01) & (PER/KAN/02)

country, and especially in the southern parts of the country (Hussein, 2013:200). The caste also known as *Oli*, *Oliya*, *Olee*, *Olia* (Ryan, 1953:71) is described by Upham. "Because they appear with masked face, make gestures, etc. they are called Uhulyyo; and by permutation of characters the same word is turned into Oliyo, that is disguised actors or comedians" (Upham, 1833:350). Therefore, as Hussein and Upham point out, the people in the *Oli* caste are important in Sri Lankan performing arts because they perform activities such as offerings to evil spirits, mystic rituals and acting, which are ceremonial roles that constitute the performing arts. There are several noteworthy features connected with this caste in regard to the performing arts. The foremost is the relationship they have with the rituals and performing dance, singing and music. These artistes have the exclusive right to maintain their *Rajakari* or art and its offering, which means that they are pioneers in preserving the performing arts and the others of the *Berava* caste. Secondly, they have become social reformers in the sense that they expose, through their art, the exploitation and corruption of the elite in society. They use the mask dance for this purpose and thus become entitled to claim a right to it along with the *Karava* caste.

The other important factor to be noted here is the *Gara yakuma* healing ceremony performed by the artiste of the *Oli* caste wearing the demon mask (Gilbert, 1953: 318). This healing ceremony, which is hereditary to the particular artiste by caste, is performed for the wellbeing of not only the Sinhalese-Buddhist society but also for the Tamil-Hindu people in coastal areas. Therefore, it becomes a medium for the encouragement of peaceful co-existence between the Sinhalese-Buddhist and Tamil-Hindu people living in the coastal areas who engage in the fish industry.

5.4.6 Paraiyar/Parayah

In describing the Sri Lankan performing artiste and the socio-cultural status to which he is entitled, we may cite the case of the *Paraiyar* caste which occupies the lowest rung in the caste hierarchy of the Tamils (Banks, 1971). In doing so, it also reveals the features of the Tamil caste hierarchy and the place the artiste is entitled to within it and information relating to the arts connected with it. The *Paraiyar* caste can be identified as a minority among the Tamil people widely present in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka. According to the

ancient Tamil language, the word 'Parai' means 'drum'. Thus, the word '*Paraiyar*' means 'the drummer'. Hussein points out, "The Paraiyar comprise a much-shunned untouchable caste group in both Southern India and Northern Sri Lanka who have since time immemorial engaged in drumming, though they are also known to have been engaged as scavengers" (Hussein, 2013:359).

In the Tamil caste hierarchy, the performing artist of the *Paraiyar* caste occupies a very low place. Just as the *Gahala Berava* caste occupies the lowest rung in Sinhalese society, as a performing artiste within the Tamil caste hierarchy the *Paraiyar* or the 'players of the funeral drum' have a similar status. The reason is that both groups, because they play funeral drums, fall into the untouchable caste. Commenting on an extract on the funeral drummer of the *Paraiyar* caste, Hussein points out, "A sort of musician, particularly for mournful occasions, and they accompany the corpses to the burning or burial ground, sounding the tom-tom" (Hussein, 2013:359). This artist of the *Paraiyar* caste provides music even for the Sinhalese-Buddhist people living in the north and east regions where the majority are Tamils. This act of providing funeral music for the Sinhalese-Buddhist people in a society divided by ethnic considerations could be regarded as a process that builds up unity between the respective ethnic groups. Just as the place the performing artiste occupies in the Sinhalese ethnic caste hierarchy was determined in relation to the *Berava*, *Kinnara*, *Karava* and *Oli* castes so could the social status of the Tamil performing artiste be ascertained in relation to the performing artiste of the *Paraiyar* caste.

5.4.7 The Nattuvar

As regards the artiste of the Nattuvar caste and arts there seems to be harmony between the Hindu-Tamil artiste and the Sinhalese arts. They seem to contribute directly to not only Hindu-Tamil art but also to Sinhalese-Buddhist art. The *Nattuvar* caste is a group of people engaged in drumming and found on the Jaffna peninsula of Sri Lanka. Although they participate as musicians in domestic, social and religious functions, they do not render their services for funerals. They appear to gain social recognition and a higher position in the social stratification because they do not engage in funeral drumming and engage only in playing for Hindu *kovil* offerings for gods.

Although these people are called *Nattuvar* in the Jaffna region, they are referred to as *Melakkarar* in the eastern region. During this research the people of this caste whom I met in the Sathurukondan, Jayanthipuram, and Panichchaladi in the Batticaloa region played the ‘Tavil drum’, ‘Nagaswaram’ and ‘Thalam’. Describing the *Melakkarar* group of people and their use of the arts McGilvray points out, “The *Melakkarars*, who are often employed as musicians in the major Colombo and Jaffna temples, play the melam, a heavier double-headed drum, as well as ‘nakacuram’, which is the ebony double-reed wind instrument of South Indian classical temple music” (McGilvray, 2008:252). The drumming artiste occupies the highest position in the Tamil performing arts and they charge the highest fees for playing (McGilvray, 2008:252). This artiste who participates in both the Hindu-Tamil and in the Sinhalese-Buddhist performing arts seems to generate ethnic integration between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. The artiste of the *Nattuvar* caste demonstrates how he gains economic stability and social status within the Sri Lankan performing arts through *Rajakari* services inherent to his caste. At the same time, the social norm of underestimating the economic and social status of the artiste in lower castes does not seem to be a reality in the case of the artiste of the *Nattuvar* caste.

5.5 The caste of the performing artiste: its evolution during the Pre-colonial, Colonial and the Post-colonial periods.

It is true to say that the *Rajakari* belonging to the artiste’s caste was a main factor in determining his social status in the Sri Lankan caste hierarchy and that remains the case even today to some extent. Therefore, attention will be chiefly focused here on how far the artiste’s caste influences his socio-cultural status during the pre-colonial, postcolonial and colonial periods. The reason for this categorisation is that both during the period under colonialism and the period after it, the structure of the caste and the other institutions linked to the caste such as *Rajakariya*, artiste generations, marriage, social status, education, and economic and political aspects have undergone a positive change. Therefore, in this section the discussion focuses on the performing artiste and the evaluation of the caste, into which he/she belongs within those three colonial periods.

5.5.1 The Colonial Encounter and Expansion

Although the Sri Lankan Chronicles describe South Indian aggression against the hydro civilisations of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa and the consequent

collapse of the respective kingdoms, no record is made of Sri Lanka coming entirely under the control of foreigners until 1505 CE. Subsequently, the administrative control of Sri Lanka fell into the hands of the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British in turn and this continued until Sri Lanka became independent from British on 4th February 1948. Commenting on this colonisation of Sri Lanka, Holt points out that, “The arrival of the first Portuguese ships in 1505 or 1506 inaugurated an encounter with Western political powers that continues to this day. From this date until 1948, Sri Lanka was a venue for European colonization strategies; first by the Portuguese (1505 – 1658), then the Dutch (1658 – 1796), and finally the British (1796 – 1948)” (Holt, 2011:133).

As a result of this subordination to the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British, Sri Lanka underwent many changes not only political but also social, economic, cultural and religious. Because of Sri Lankan society’s contact with the Western world some striking changes took place in the fields of language, religion, dress, food, art, social layers and caste. Wickremasinghe highlights the fact that the colonial impact had a major influence on Ceylonese social and economic structures and Ceylon encountered modernity in a gradual but haphazard way. He further stresses that “the depth of the colonial imprint must not be overestimated: family structures, the caste system and Buddhism were maintained, especially in the centre of the island where foreign domination was resisted for three centuries” (Wickremasinghe, 2006: 43). In terms of this colonial influence that Wickremasinghe describes, a noteworthy fact is that the system of professions attached to the caste hierarchy underwent modification, which brought about a change even in the professions linked to the performing arts castes. This enabled the performers to engage in other professions without solely depending on the ritual practices. Thus, with the fall of feudalism the professions linked to the castes underwent a change together with the relationship between the performing arts and caste.

The *Rajakari* system, which existed until that point, collapsed as a consequence of the plantation economy and the import-export economy. Describing this situation Holt observes, “As the British were leaving Ceylon, they built and donated to the country the sprawling campus of the University of Ceylon in upcountry Peradeniya, near Kandy. This university eventually named the University of Peradeniya became the foundation for the education and training of

generations of Sri Lankans following independence. The university system has spread from this auspicious origin to distant regions of the island” (Holt, 2011 a:134). With the establishment of university education in Sri Lankan society, the arts that were traditionally linked to the *Gurugedera* freed itself from that heritage and became part of the education system, which led to degrees and post-graduate degrees in the performing arts. This will be discussed in detail in a subsequent section.

5.5.2 Pre colonial Era: the Caste of the Performing Artiste

One of the main sources used in order to understand the caste hierarchy of the performing artiste and the social layers before colonialism is the *vamsa* tradition, namely the Sinhala classical texts and the stone inscriptions in the early Brahimi script, as discussed in the review of literature. Although there may be no direct reference to the caste, some understanding can be obtained about the profession and social status of the performing artiste. As observed earlier, the inscriptions in early Brahimi script belonging to the Anuradhapura period provide enough evidence to establish the social status of the performing artiste. The inscriptions in caves donated to the Bhikkhus by the *Upasakas* and *Upasikas* show occasions when such donations were made by the performing artistes. This is made clear by the comment made by Paranavitana on the Brahimi inscriptions. Accordingly, inscription number 642 found in Veherakema mentions as follows, “The gift of the lay-devotee Tissa, the actor, son of the house holder Ojhaka Tissa of Totagami, has been established for the Sangha” (Paranavitana, 1970:48). Similarly, number 1010 stone inscription at Sasseruwa mentions as follows:

The cave of the actor Cula, grandson of Kamina, the foremost among the ornamental ones, (is given) to the Sangha of the four quarters, present and absent of Samudda, daughter of the actor Cula, and wife of the actor Dhamma (Paranavitana, 1970: 79).

Several factors about the caste of the performing artiste can be identified from the above inscriptions. The first is that instead of introducing the caste of the performing artiste, the focus is on his profession. Instead of introducing him as *Berava*, *Karava*, *Kinnara*, *Oli*, *Paraiyar* or *Nattuvar* he is introduced as ‘actor Tissa’, ‘actor Cula’, ‘actor Dhamma’. An important factor that is seen between 1

st century BCE and 1 st century CE is that they are introduced by their personal names.

The second factor is that there is an idea of an artiste generation in maintaining the art. Stone inscription number 1010 of Sasseruva (Paranavitana, 1970: 79) further exemplifies this.

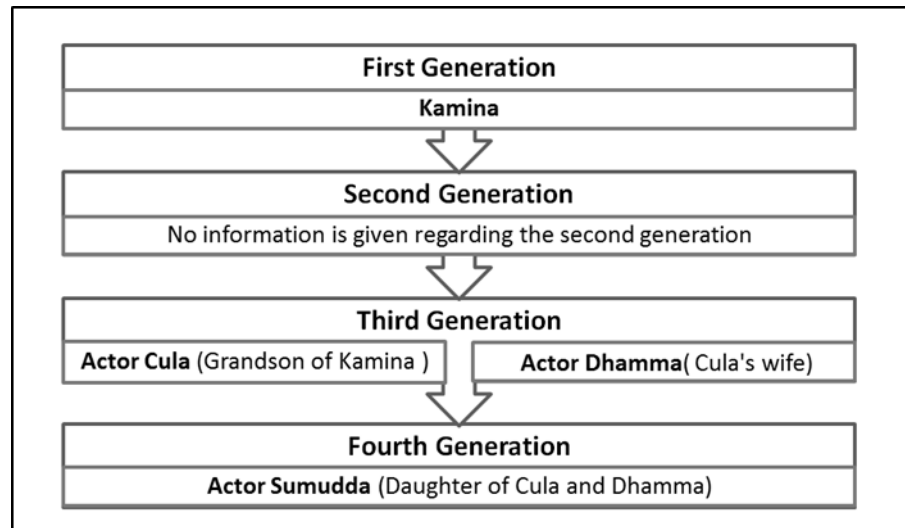


Figure 3 : This figure was created based on Paranavitana’s *Inscriptions of Ceylon* (Paranavitana, 1970).

Accordingly, maintenance of the art is a traditional obligation made on them and in the case of marriage; they were bound to marry a person belonging to their own generation. This is seen by the fact that actor Cula marries actor Dhamma. The other important factor seen here is their economic strength as pointed out by Sanjeewa: “The social revelation in these stone inscriptions is most important. Those who practised dance enjoyed an important place in society and were economically strong as to donate those caves” (Sanjeewa, 2006:63). In describing the caste of the performing artistes in later times the researchers have pointed out (see 5.4 performing artiste and caste) that the economic strength of the artiste was low but in the above particular instance as shown by Sanjeewa they were economically strong enough to donate caves. In the early period no definite view about ‘caste’ could be obtained but some idea about the performing artiste

maintaining the caste as an obligation made upon him by his generation can be identified.

5.5.3 Colonial Period: the Caste of the Performing Artiste

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the agriculture-based economy, including the *Rajakariya* system centred on Kingship, underwent a change under Western colonial administration. This change began during the Portuguese colonial power and further developed during the Dutch and the British periods. Substitution of cash payments for *Rajakariya* and the decision of obligatory service linked to the caste as well as the rituals becoming an 'exotic' system free from its usual ritualistic framework and becoming a mode of entertainment, are factors that can be identified during this period. Discussing this change within the colonial society, Nissan points out "The colonial period appears to have been one of extraordinary flux in colonized societies as new institutions, new histories, and new collectivities were created through the imposition and institutionalization of the colonizer's meanings onto the colonized" (Nissan, 1997:24).

Discussing the Kandyan dance with respect to the above changes, Reed points out that the artiste of the *Berava* caste becomes an 'exotic article' to entertain the Western world. Reed points out, in the late nineteenth century, European entrepreneurs and British colonial administrators began to employ *Berava* dancers and drummers in a range of contexts. As an example, she cites, "In the 1880s Carl Hagenbeck, a famous German animal trainer and exhibitor of 'exotic' peoples, hired Kandyan dancers and drummers along with scores of other Sinhala villagers, to perform in his living ethnological exhibit, 'Sinhalese Caravan', which toured the major cities of Europe" (Reed, 2010:96). She further adds that British colonial officials employed Kandyan dancers in processions and in shows to honour and entertain British nobility, officials and foreign visitors (Reed, 2010:96). Thus, the artiste of the *Berava* caste, who performed *Rajakari* services linked to healing ceremonies and religious rituals, seemed to come out of that frame and became part of a group which entertains nobility and visitors.

It is thus seen that the traditional services provided by the *Berava* caste disappear and the art becomes, as Reed shows, an 'animal trainer and exhibitor episode' used as a marketable product. The atmosphere in the colonial period

could be well understood by a statement made by a 89-year-old artiste of the *Berava* caste whom I met during this research. He observed:

I was born in 1927. I could clearly see what happened and what will happen to our art, to the people of our caste, and future generations. I was then about 12 years of age. I went with my *appochcha* (father) and *attha thaththa* (grandfather) to each festival, *kankāriya*, and *Bali* performance. Most of the time the *sudu mahaththuru* (white gentlemen) and those of the walawwa class (the elite) treated us as the most impure people (*Apirisidu minissu*). When we visit a house, we are allowed entrance through the rear door. To sit we are given a chair whose height is below knee-level. Tea is given in a cracked cup. When we go to a *Bali* or thovil performance we are asked to sleep in firewood shed (*Dara maduwa*). Actually, we were treated just as a parched skin that is used in making a drum.⁵⁸

It may be noted that this art freed itself from the traditional framework, and due to the new economic system, the Sri Lankan art and the artistes were directed towards a new course. As Reed points out, “The imposition of a cash-based economy by the British led to the breakdown of the traditional Kandyan system of land tenure that has sustained the hereditary dancers and drummers. The dance itself was recontextualized, taken out of the *Kankariya Maduva* and performed for a variety of new purposes” (Reed, 2010:96).

Similarly, until the attainment of independence in 1948, the caste hierarchy and the art to which the performing artistes belonged was shifted in a new direction and its audience broadly expanded. Reed points out that this audience included the European public, British colonial elites, American dancers, Indian nationalists, the Kandyan *radala* aristocrats as well as the Ceylonese urban elite (Reed, 2010:97).

Two important aspects emerge in this connection. The first matter to be noted here is the freeing of art from caste to some extent though not totally. Because of this, the artiste was given the opportunity to engage in other professions, which

⁵⁸ Interview (INT/KEG/07/M1)

helped in the improvement of ethnic and religious harmony. Secondly, the customs and techniques held by the traditional art generations disappeared in the face of these new trends. This also caused a crisis in continuing the traditional performing arts.

5.5.4 Post colonial Period: the Caste of the Performing Artiste

In studying the caste of the performing artiste during the post-colonial period, it is possible to identify its diversity in several respects. The opportunity for *Berava* artistes to enter schools and universities established under the British education system is the first reason and through it they had the opportunity to take the arts to the English-speaking higher social classes. Consequently, those groups tended to appreciate these Sri Lankan performing arts or even study them. Nurnberger discusses the case of the dancer Chitrasena who came from the higher social class but because of his love for the arts learnt the art of the *Berava* caste. As Nurnberger observes, a part of his life's work was to break through the contemporary social contempt towards the traditional dancer and drummer caste (*Beravayo*) and the indigenous dance culture. Describing the artiste Chitrasena who came forward to demolish the traditional views on caste and the performing arts, Nurnberger points out "Chitrasena, together with a few likeminded artistes and art connoisseurs of his time made the Sinhalese dance 'socially acceptable' and attracted for it an urban, middle-class public" (Nurnberger, 1998:119).

The second notable factor is that the *Berava* people were able to access higher education. Instead of the *Gurukula* or *paramparika* education system, which was based on the traditional class and caste, the *Berava* people and also those of other castes had the opportunity to study and teach the arts in higher education institutes. Although in certain cases opportunities for higher education were not available, competent artistes who studied their art through traditional systems found the opportunity to work as university and school teachers. Discussing this matter Reed says. "In the 1940s and 1950s many of the impoverished *Berava* dancers and drummers appear to have eagerly embraced their new-found status as prime bearers of Sinhala culture. For many of these dancers, becoming a teacher in a public school as a civil servant was an enormous boost for their esteem and status" (Reed,2010:156).

In an interview for this research, an artiste of the *Berava* caste who is now working as a Professor in a Sri Lankan university observed the social power and the economic strength they gained because of the above educational opportunity. He commented;

I saw the amount of suffering my father and grandfather underwent because they belonged to the *Berava* caste. They were treated as if they were demons. We are from the coastal belt, so we went to church daily. I could go to the boys' school in the church. Thanks to it, I was able to enter the University. Today, I do not face any difficulties. My daughter is studying for her medical degree in Australia. My son is in the final year in the Engineering faculty. People who treated us as animals earlier now treat us as gods. They even borrow money from us. The funny thing here is that I bought the *Walawwa* (the residence of a member of the elite) which was in front of our house. Today there is no *Walawwa* class, but we as people of the *Berava* caste maintain the art. We are proud of our caste. In fact, it was that which gave us the strength to come so far.⁵⁹

Therefore, it can be seen that school and university education made an immense impact on the caste of the artistes during the postcolonial period.

The noticeable factor here is that the groups of *Berava*, *Kinnara*, and *Karava* castes who engage in performing arts do so not as rituals but have turned it into a "Tourist Market" to earn money from tourists. With the performing arts *Rajakari* linked to the caste freeing themselves from tradition and entering the tourist market, several factors emerge. Foremost among them is that as it was difficult to earn a living before the modern economy by engaging solely in rituals, those of the *Berava* caste resorted to other sources of income. This led to the disappearance of traditional customs and practices and the art became a source of income, encouraging enterprise. Secondly, singing, music and dance linked to the *Berava* caste and religious practices and rituals became a medium for entertaining foreigners. This trend is important in the sense that it helped to demolish the social and caste discriminations among the people. In terms of this tendency, Simpson observes, "In the context of performance, a dancer must bring together in himself many skills and techniques: singing, recitation, knowledge of

⁵⁹ Interview (INT/CO/08/M1)

drumming and rhythm and extensive knowledge of the theory and practice of exorcism transposed into a 'cultural performance' for a tourist audience a good deal of knowledge and skill is rendered redundant" (Simpson, 1984:434). Concerning this issue, some positive factors emerged in a discussion with a performing artiste who is engaged in the tourist industry in the southern province of Sri Lanka. He explained:

We belong to the Karava caste. If we do a ritual performance, we get only a nominal amount (*sochchamai*). But if we perform one item for the tourist accompanied with drumming, we are paid in pounds and dollars. That is enough for us to live for a month. If we try to work to perform the obligations of our caste, we would starve all the time. We are sorry about this, but you must swim with the tide. The other thing is not only the persons of the Karava caste, but others of higher castes too study our art. They do so to earn money. Therefore, you cannot find a thing called caste. There is only an art. ⁶⁰

The above conversation shows there is not only a turning away from traditional ritual performances but also there is a tendency for people of other castes to join them with the intention of earning money through the tourist industry. The other important factor is that now, it is not possible to find a specific caste to which an art form belongs.

5.6 Conclusion

In studying the Sri Lankan performing artiste over generations and the various art traditions, it was observed that the social institution called caste was a great stimulant for the maintenance of traditional art. So far as the Sinhalese performing artiste is concerned, caste divisions such as *Berava*, *Karava*, *Kinnara*, and *Oli* could be seen while as regards the Tamil performing artiste *Paraiyar* and *Nattuvar* divisions were apparent. This is further divided into several sub-castes.

The caste hierarchy into which the Sinhalese and Tamil performing artistes belong turned in a new direction with the colonisation of Sri Lanka and it also took a new form. Owing to the western education system, Christianisation, the import-export trade economy, the tourist industry and opportunities for higher

⁶⁰ Focus group (FG/HIK/01/M4)

education, the caste, and the traditional rituals linked to it, freed itself and turned towards the modern stage. Moreover, instead of the traditional generations linked to the caste performing the art, opportunities were provided for people of other castes also to perform the art connected with the particular caste.

Traditional art came under various social pressures during the pre-colonial, the colonial and the postcolonial period. An important fact here is that the new generation came forward to study the traditional arts, to improve national unity through art and to break down caste discrimination. Reed, commenting on this trend, points out, “The new dancers are those more inherently respectable: the middle-to-upper-class dancers, educated, preferably English speaking, who are coming to embody the classicized tradition of Kandyan dance” (Reed, 2010:173). Thus, art is now a field for all to join irrespective of its traditional *Rajakari* practices. Just as this chapter described the connection and diversity between the performing artiste and the caste, the next chapter will describe the connection between the artiste and ethnicity.

Chapter 06: Ethnicity

6.0 Introduction

This chapter describes how far Sinhalese and Tamil ethnicity influences the performing arts and the artiste's practice. Here a further description will be given about the particular changes that took place regarding ethnicity during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods and how such changes affected the artiste. Attention is paid to the separate establishment of ethnic groups such as Sinhalese and Tamil across the plantation economy during the British colonial period and how the Sinhalese and Tamil political divisions influenced the artiste and the arts. The most important event is the civil war that continued for over twenty-five years. This chapter will also explore how far the modern artistes belonging to both ethnic groups have transcended those obstacles to create an art form.

6.1 Ethnicity, race, and nationalism

Problems and themes linked to ethnicity, race and nationalism are the main subjects in academic discussions of Sri Lanka (Olzak, 1989; Yinger, 1985; Harrison, 1995; Kohl, 1998; Friedland, 2001). There is an inter-relationship among ethnicity, race and nationalism and a cross-fertilisation between the performing arts, sociology, anthropology and history and other disciplines such as language, economy, religion, caste, and gender. Therefore, how ethnicity, race and nationalism linked to Sinhalese-Buddhists and Tamil-Hindus are integrated will be discussed.

There is much debate about the definition of ethnicity (Yinger, 1958). According to De Lima, ethnicity is defined primarily as "An alternative means of conceptualising human diversity which is more rooted in the social and/or cultural" (De Lima, 2008:29). Commenting on this definition, Wan examines it in two ways, "ethnicity is a function of deeply rooted and durable affiliation based on kingship, shared territory and tradition" and also "ethnicity as amorphous and malleable, constantly adapting to changing climates and circumstances, not

limited to a particular race, genealogy, or ecology” (Wan, 2000:197-198). This interpretation given by Wan is particularly relevant to Sri Lankan society in terms of defining ethnicity. What is noticeable here is the strong relationship between the Sinhalese and Tamil ethnicity with kinship and the allied traditions. The best example of this was the escalation of Sinhalese ethnicity under a Sinhalese-Buddhist ruler (377 BCE -1017 CE) while there was an escalation in Tamil ethnicity under a Tamil-Hindu ruler (1017 CE-1255 CE). In examining Sri Lankan ethnicity, the concept of boundaries as presented by Barth is useful to consider:

Critical focus of investigation from this point of view becomes the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses. The boundaries to which we must give our attention are of course social boundaries; though they may have territorial counterparts. If a group maintains its identity when members interact with others, this entails criteria for determining membership and ways of signalling membership and exclusion. Ethnic groups are not merely or necessarily based on the occupation of exclusive territories; and the different ways in which they are maintained, not only by a once – and – for – all recruitment but by continual expression and validation, need to be analysed (Barth, 1969:15).

It should be noted that Barth’s ‘determining membership’ and ‘signalling membership’ contains cultural features and “they should not be confused with a supposedly, theoretical set of unchanging, inalienable essence of that particular culture” (Wan, 2000:198). Thus, cultural features of the respective ethnicities and the ethnic boundaries as described by Barth can inform an understanding of Sinhalese and Tamil ethnicity in Sri Lankan society.

The other two aspects that need consideration are ‘race’ and ‘nationalism’ (Ghosh, 2003) in relation to the present Sri Lankan social system. In defining ‘race’ in relation to Sri Lankan society, Little points out that “Beliefs about racial superiority, which gained prominence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the West, undergirded the attitude of the colonial government and the missionaries and eventually had a profound, if complex, effect on the self – understanding of the Sri Lankan people” (Little, 1994:15). Stewart and Strathern express a similar view. “The classification of the Sinhalese language as Indo-

European or Aryan was seized upon by Sinhalese nationalists as a mark of their superiority to Tamils” (Stewart and Strathern, 2002:143). An important factor emerges from this concept of “racial superiority” referred to by Little. With the migration of South Indian Tamil labour to work on the tea plantations during the colonial era, the Sinhalese became the majority and the Tamils became the minority, which resulted in a perception of “racial superiority” within Sri Lanka. The other important factor is the emergence of the Aryan concept and the background regarding the allied Aryan language. While admitting that the Sinhala language is derived from the Indian Aryan language, Little emphasises the fact that “the Sinhala people, along with the North Indians from whom they were believed to be descended, counted as Aryans” (Little, 1994:16). Therefore, on the basis that the Sinhala language is an Aryan language, a perception has developed that Sinhalese people who speak Sinhala are superior to the Tamils. Moreover, according to this Aryan language concept, the Sinhalese race is provided with a “prestigious pedigree which could be used to good advantage in competition with other Sri Lankan groups, such as the Tamils” (Little, 1994:16). Renan also states that language plays a dominant role within race. “Language is thus almost completely substituted for race in the division of humanity into groups, or rather the word “race” changes meaning. Language, religion, laws, mores brought the race into being much more than blood did” (Renan, 1887:32).

With reference to Sri Lanka, the idea of “linguistic races” as shown by Renan is more important than biological races because a “racial superiority” emerges in Sri Lanka according to the language spoken, whether it is Sinhala, the Aryan language, or Tamil, the Dravidian language. The culmination of this situation was the “Sinhala Only Policy” in 1956 and the marginalisation of the Tamils, their language, culture and traditions.

The other factor important to this discussion is nationalism. Spencer, describing nationalism, points out that “Each nationalism is based upon the assumption that people are naturally divisible into different kinds – known as nations and ideally each kind should have the responsibility for its own governance” (Spencer, 1990: 283). Whereas Spencer discusses how people become naturally divided into different kinds within nationalism, Gellner shows how boundaries operate within

it. According to Gellner nationalism is not only a theory of political legitimacy but also “(it) requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones, and, in particular, that ethnic boundaries within a given state - a contingency already formally excluded by the principle in its general formulation - should not separate the power-holders from the rest” (Gellner, 1997: 1). The separation of ethnicity and the boundaries within it as described by Spencer and Gellner are important in discussing Sri Lankan nationalism. In discussing Sinhalese and Tamil nationalism and its disputes, the separation of Sinhalese and Tamils and the boundaries that came into being are important because it eventually led to the over twenty-five-years civil war between the two nations. Discussing this Sinhalese and Tamil nationalism Little states, “There is an agreement that it concerns a dispute between the Sinhala and Tamil about nationalism, in that it concerns a dispute between the two ethnic communities over the political and cultural control of a given territory, but the claim is that it must be a case of ‘ethnic’ or ‘linguistic’ nationalism, not ‘religious nationalism” (Little, 1999: 41). The ethnic and linguistic nationalism presented by Little is distinctly manifest in several ways within Sri Lankan society. The Tamil nation becoming the second-class nation because of the “Sinhala Only Policy” in 1956, the Sinhalese nation becoming the privileged major race, and the ethnic conflict between the two nations are the result of the marginalisation of the Tamils which eventually led to war. The most important point Little identifies is the role of religious nationalism within this separation. Although the conflict between the Sinhalese and Tamils was visible linguistically and ethnically, a peaceful coexistence was seen within ‘religious nationalism’ (Friedland, 2001). This could be observed in the way each group negotiates rituals in Hindu-Buddhist religious places. Hindu gods become Sinhalese Buddhist gods to whom homage is paid by the Sinhalese, and at the Hindu shrine at Kataragama, where both groups participate in the same rituals.

6.2 Sri Lankan Ethnic Background and its Evolution

6.2.1 Pre-Colonial Era: Stabilisation of Sinhalese and Tamil Ethnicity and its influence on the Performing Arts

In any discussion concerning the performing arts in the colonial era, it is important to pay attention to the suppression of the local people and the colonisation and stabilisation of the Tamil identity which happened with the South Indian aggression that took place during the period. Concerning the colonisation of Sri Lanka, *Mahāvamsa* notes that there were two tribes namely *Yaksha* and *Nāga*, and Vijaya, having defeated them, established his authority within Tambapanni. Describing the colonisation *Mahāvamsa* states:

When those who were commanded by Vijaya landed from their ship, they sat down wearied, resting their hands upon the ground – and since their hands were reddened by touching the dust of the red earth that region and also the island were (named) Tambapanni. But the King Sinhabahu, since he had slain the lion (was called) Sinhala and, by reason of the ties between him and them, all those (followers of Vijaya) were also (called) Sinhala (Geiger, 1912:58).

The concept of “the people of the lion” as shown by the compiler of *Mahāvamsa* becomes a major factor in not only the subsequent nationalist struggle between the Sinhalese and Tamils but also in the division of the performing arts into Sinhalese arts and Tamil arts. This has marginalised Tamil-Hindu ethnicity and its arts. Discussing this “lion people” concept, Rotberg points out a significant issue:

Vijaya, reputedly the offspring of a lion and human female, designates the Sinhala as ‘the people of the lion’, whose primary obligation ever after is to preserve Buddhism, by violent means if necessary. Accordingly, the special honour and dignity of the Sinhala in comparison with other people is sanctified together with their right to political and military authority in Sri Lanka (Rotberg, 1999:43-44).

Because the Sinhalese nation received this special ‘honour’, the Tamil nation became marginalised which led later to conflict with the Sinhalese nation that eventually resulted in civil war in the 20th century. In discussing Sinhalese and Tamil ethnicity in the pre-colonial era, a significant landmark is the stabilisation

of Tamil ethnicity as a result of the South Indian aggression. With the South Indian aggression, the Sinhalese-Buddhist Anuradhapura Kingdom broke down, and an administration with Tamil ethnicity was begun in the Polonnaruwa period (1017 CE -1255 CE). This fall of the Sinhalese-Buddhist administration and the stabilisation of the South Indian administration is discussed in detail by Holt. He further points out that the aggression of the South Indian Cola Empire caused almost total demolition of Anuradhapura's civic and monastic infrastructure. He adds that the South Indian Cola power established itself in Sri Lanka and that "The Colas maintained their position for many decades into the eleventh century, before the Sinhalese captured Polonnaruwa and turned it into their own capital" (Holt, 2011:11).

In the description of the South Indian aggression, the compiler of the *Mahāvamsa* seems to show singular affection for the Sinhalese Dutthagamini probably because the compiler of the *Mahāvamsa* was a Sinhalese Buddhist monk. The Sinhalese-Tamil or Dutthagamini-Elara war is described by the *Mahāvamsa* as an 'ordinary incident' but De Silva argues that it was a decisive factor in the subsequent struggle between the Sinhalese and Tamil nations, "It is likely that the authors of *Mahāvamsa*, living and writing at a time when Sinhala-Tamil tensions were high, had re-interpreted the story of Dutthagamini in the light of contemporary events" (De Silva, 1987:27). The civil war that developed as a result of Sinhalese-Tamil tensions, as pointed out by De Silva, created a division between the Sinhalese-Tamil nations and this is reflected also in Sinhalese-Tamil arts. Moreover, the "Sinhala lion" consciousness that originated as a result of this stabilisation and the Sinhalese-Tamil struggle for power as described by *Mahāvamsa* became the main factor in the nationalist struggle in modern Sri Lanka.

The relationship between this stabilisation of nations, ethnicities and the performing arts has a very special significance, especially the influence of Indian arts on Sri Lanka after this period of Indian colonisation and aggression. *Mahāvamsa* mentions that several guilds of artisans accompanied Theri

Sanghamitta⁶¹ when she brought the Bodhi tree to Sri Lanka. So, it appears that the guilds of artisans mentioned in the *Mahāvamsa* included dancers, singers and musicians. The carvings, sculpture and paintings of the relevant Anuradhapura period, produced by local artistes, depicted dancers, singers and musicians and reveal gestures (mudra), musical instruments and dance styles of Indian origin. Similarly, the Shiva *Devālaya*, Nissankalatamandapa, Sarasvati Pavilion, and Vatadage, in the Polonnaruva kingdom (1017 CE-1255 CE) that was established after South Indian aggression clearly show the South Indian influence in their construction. Thus, two significant incidents occurred in Sri Lankan society with the establishment of the administration following Indian colonisation and aggression. Sinhalese-Tamil and Buddhist-Hindu influences - cultural, political, social and economic institutions were established in Sri Lanka. In the case of the art, Sinhalese-Buddhist art with Buddhist religious rituals and Tamil art with Hindu religious influences were established, giving rise to a Sinhalese-Tamil fusion art. This cultural reconciliation is clearly seen in carvings, sculpture, and paintings, in Buddhist temples inspired by Tamil art and the works of art in Hindu sacred places inspired by Sinhalese art.

6.2.1.1 Performing Arts in the pre-colonial era and nationalist representation

As mentioned in the previous chapter, stone inscriptions, chronicles, carvings, paintings and sculpture provide much valuable source material. In studying these, several significant facts emerge. Before the founding of arts linked to Sinhalese and Tamil ethnicity in Sri Lanka there are several factors that suggest the existence of an earlier art linked to the *Yaksha* and *Nāga* tribes. Evidence of this is provided by *Mahāvamsa*:

Year by year he had sacrificial offerings made to them and other (Yakkha); but on festival days he sat with Cittaraja beside him on a seat of equal height, and having gods and men to dance before him, the king took his pleasure, in joyous and merry wide (Geiger, 1912:74).

⁶¹ Regarding the establishment of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and the bhikkhuni sasana Theri Sanghamitta occupies an important place. King Asoka who lived in the third century BCE had two children, Mahinda a son and Sanghamitta a daughter. Within the king's dharma vijaya policy his son and daughter entered the Order and Thera Mahinda introduced Buddhism to Sri Lanka. Theri Sanghamitta established the bhikkhuni sasana within Sri Lanka and brought the right branch of the Sri Maha Bodhi to Sri Lanka (Geiger,1912).

Particularly in the description of a festival with dance and music conducted by King Pandukabhaya and Chittaraja, art linked to the local population is revealed. In the sacrificial offerings and in the description of the arrival of Vijaya to Sri Lanka as mentioned in *Mahāvamsa*, there is information about a form of performing arts that existed among the *Yaksha* tribes. As shown by *Mahāvamsa*:

As the night went on he heard the sound of music and singing and asked *Yakkhini*, who was lying near him: "What means this noise?" And the *yakkhim* thought: 'I will bestow kingship on my lord and all the *yakkhas* must be slain, for (else) the *yakkhas* will slay me, for it was through me that men have taken up their dwelling (in Lanka).' And she said to the prince: ' Here there is a *yakkha*-city called *Sirisavatthu*; the daughter of the chief of the *yakkhas* who dwells in the city of Lanka has been brought hither, and her mother too is come. And for the wedding there is high festival, lasting seven days; therefore there is this noise, for a great multitude is gathered together (Geiger, 1912:57).

A significant factor is that with the arrival of Buddhism to Sri Lanka the performing arts of the tribes *Yaksha* and *Nāga* began to take a new direction. The performing arts as well as the artiste were seen as directly linked with Buddhist ritual art. In the descriptions of certain religious rituals described in the chronicles *Mahāvamsa* and *Dipavamsa*, the description in *Mahāvamsa* of the building of the Maha Thupa by King Dutthagamini, a close association of the performing arts with Buddhism is noticeable.

And moreover, urged by faith, he ordered year by year perpetually a great festival (for the renewing) of the plasterwork; and festivals also of the great Bodhi-tree (in honour) of the watering of the Bodhi-tree, and furthermore twenty – eight great Vesakha – festivals, and also divers mimic dances and concerts, with the playing of all kind of instruments of music (in honour) of the Great Thupa (Geiger, 1912:242).

The performing arts linked to the Sinhalese-Buddhist religious background as shown by the *Mahāvamsa*, however, is totally replaced by an art with a Tamil-Hindu religious background by the beginning of the Polonnaruva period. This is a consequence of the fall of the Anuradhapura kingdom, which was subject to South Indian aggression in its last phase, and the establishment of a South Indian

administration with Tamil ethnicity in the Polonnaruva kingdom. Across this Tamil ethnic stabilisation, the influence of South Indian art was also visible within their performing arts. Several musical instruments belonging to the Bharatanatyam dance tradition such as *mridangam*, *daburu*, flutes, *natuvangam*, and hand gestures (mudra) like *alapadma*, *katakamukha*, and *Dolahasta*, are revealed in the visual sources such as paintings, murals and carvings, in the Hindu buildings erected during the period. Verification of the Tamil-Hindu art that stabilised in the Polonnaruva period can be obtained from such archaeological evidence as the dancing girls in the Dedigama *eth pahana*⁶², figures in the vatadage in Polonnaruva, and the image of a dancing God Shiva in the Polonnaruva museum.

The other significant factor that could be seen during the pre-colonial era is the co-operation of Sinhalese and Tamil nations and ethnicity in the performing arts. The signs of Hindu art in Sinhalese Buddhist temples and the signs of a Sinhalese art seen in Hindu temples bear testimony to this co-operation. Holt points out that a Sinhalese-Buddhist and Tamil-Hindu national and religious blend is also seen in the art found in buildings of the fourteenth century.

The increased mixing of Hindu and Buddhist elements seen, for example, in the architecture and ritual practices of the Gadaladeniya and Lankatilaka temple complexes constructed during the Gampola (near Kandy) period of the fourteenth century (Holt, 2011: 12).

Thus, as shown by Holt and through archaeological evidence⁶³ it is seen that artistic expressions emerged showing Sinhalese-Tamil co-operation during the Polonnaruva period but alongside this the separate existence of the art of the local tribes, *Yaksha* and *Nāga* continued.

6.2.2 Colonial Era: Stabilisation of European Hegemony, Freedom Struggle and Special Characteristics of Performing Arts

Following the hydro civilisations of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva, the sixteenth century saw Sri Lanka come under western hegemony through Portuguese rule (1505-1658) followed by Dutch rule (1640 -1796), and English

⁶² The lamp resembles the figure of an elephant.

⁶³ Such as stone inscriptions, pillar inscriptions, copper plates, sannas or offerings to temples.

rule (1815 – 1948). Under the subjection of Sri Lanka to European hegemony, several changes occurred in Sri Lankan society, including its culture. “In Sri Lanka the colonial experience has had a profound impact on its culture, its traditions and its development and indeed on its national identity” (De Silva, 2011:135). De Silva highlights the impact based on ethnicity and art during the colonial era, in other words, the considerable impact which colonial hegemony had on the development of behaviour, dress, language, rituals, and food.

Other social changes also occurred within Sri Lankan society under the hegemony of the three European powers. During the Portuguese period, Roman Catholicism was introduced by the missionaries, which resulted in the building of a large number of churches throughout Sri Lanka, and such Portuguese surnames as de Alwis (Alves), de Mel, de Saram, Corea, de Zoysa, de Fonseka, Gomes, Mendis, Perera, Rodrigo, etc. were adopted by the Ceylonese. The Portuguese language spread through the country and several Portuguese words were added to the Ceylonese language. A notable feature that happened in the performing arts was the introduction of ‘Baila’ (rhythmic instrumental dance music) which even today is a most popular item in Sri Lankan music. Even during the Dutch period Roman Catholicism was further consolidated and the most significant feature during the period was the introduction of the Roman-Dutch Law, which streamlined the Ceylonese law. In addition, Dutch architecture was introduced to the country and a large number of buildings in the Dutch style were built throughout the country, which added a new dimension to Sri Lankan architecture. During the British regime the plantation economy was introduced and plantations growing tea, rubber and cinnamon were most common. Road and rail networks were laid for the transportation of the produce of those plantations and additional labour was brought in from India. In addition, schools and universities were built that imparted education in the English medium which added a new dimension to Ceylonese education. Thus, many aspects with Portuguese, Dutch and English hegemony were introduced to Ceylonese society.

On the one hand, western colonialism and Christianisation took place within Sinhalese-Buddhist and Hindu-Tamil society and on the other a Sinhalese and Tamil ethnicity revolted against it. Among these forces lining up against western colonialism, the Uva-Vellassa rebellion (1817-1818) takes prominent place. Herath describes this rebellion, a freedom struggle, launched by Kandyan

Sinhalese, Buddhist leaders who fought together with the rebels. “As the rebellion gained momentum, a few Kandyan traditional chiefs, including Keppetipola and Madugalle, broke ranks with the British and joined the rebels” (Herath, 2002:29). After the Uva-Vellassa rebellion, the British government took action against the Sinhalese nation and Buddhism, “It conceded that there was an obligation to initiate and supervise the performance of specified legal functions, especially with regard to the Buddhist temporalities” (De Silva, 1981:281). After the Uva-Vellassa rebellion, the action taken by the British government mainly affected Buddhist temples and *Devālaya* and the Christianisation that occurred was another factor which led to Sinhalese Buddhist forces lining up against the European administration. “The Buddhist revival movement at the time was primarily designed to counteract the Christian missionary threat to Buddhism, especially in the areas where the Christian missionaries were most active” (Herath, 2002:34). In this struggle against European hegemony not only Sinhalese-Buddhist but also Tamil-Hindu nationalist and religious groups joined together:

From about 1890 there had been harmony among these leaders. Their words and action had shown a sense of common commitment to bring all the people of the country under one banner within the context of one nation, a Ceylonese (Sri Lankan) nation. They evolved a concept that Sinhalese (Kandyans and Low-Country Sinhalese together) and Tamil were ‘two majority communities’ in the country and appeared to have looked forward to a future where both Sinhalese and Tamils would embrace and cherish one single national identity (Herath, 2002:42).

With the declaration of the two main ethnic groups expressing a single Sri Lankan national identity, not as Sinhalese or Tamil, Sri Lanka obtained independence from Britain in 1948. The Sinhalese-Buddhist forces which revolted against western hegemony received the support of Tamil-Hindu nationalist and religious groups that eventually led to the formation of a national united front. As discussed in this section several cultural, political and economic changes occurred in Sri Lankan society during the colonial era. As will be shown in the next section the colonial era also contributed to changes in the performing arts.

6.2.2.1 The performing artiste, Ethnicity and the Colonial era

There were many changes in art and ethnicity during the colonial period. The main feature is how the performing arts separated into “Sinhalese Art” and “Tamil Art.” Sri Lankan performing arts, or an art linked to the national-religious unity that existed during the pre-colonial era separated during the colonial era into “Sinhalese” and “Tamil” art. The reason for this separation is the bringing of South Indian labour to Sri Lanka in 1847 to work on the tea estates (Peebles, 2006:59), and their settlement and the subsequent “major race” and “minor race” attitude was created. Although there was a united front consisting of Sinhalese and Tamil nationalists in the freedom struggle, De Silva (1998) describes the separation between the “major race” and the “minor race” that had taken place by 1922. Through this creation of “major race” and “minor race” communities, art also seemed to separate and develop independently as Sinhalese and Tamil. Both groups seemed to try to develop and present traditional and authentic arts. Commenting on this, Reed observes “This general movement towards the construction of an ethnic identity by both Sinhalese and Tamils set the stage for the cultivation and presentation of ‘traditional’ and ‘authentic’ arts” (Reed, 2010:131). In the stabilisation and presentation of traditional art within this “major race” and “minor race” separation, Reed points out that the Tamil nation played a greater role than the Sinhalese (Reed, 2010:131). With regard to the emergence of Tamil art over Sinhalese art in the first half of the 1930s, Russell points out “The one aspect of their culture to which Ceylon Tamils seems particularly attached, and which played an important part in the renaissance of Tamil culture in Ceylon, was the puranic Tamil forms of music and dance” (Russell, 1982:120). To develop art linked to Tamil ethnicity several arts societies such as the Jaffna Oriental Studies and the Jaffna Oriental Music Society were inaugurated (Russell, 1982: 121), which pioneered the development of Tamil literature, music, dance and drama.

During the hegemony of the three European powers, western influence deeply impacted the Ceylonese society through Catholic conversion and education, which affected even the arts. This influence, is obvious in dancing, singing and music, carvings, sculpture and painting. The paintings and sculptures in the Buddhist temple named Purvarama at Ahangama bear testimony to this (see

Appendix 16: Kathaluwa Purvaramaya). There are several striking examples such as British soldiers, people carrying the insignia of Britain and colonial parasols in the Buddhist *Perahera*, women and children dressed in the fashion of the Victorian era, social get-togethers and the playing of drums and harps at those gatherings, and men dressed in western clothes playing musical instruments. Through these paintings, it is possible to gain knowledge of the modes of practice of the performing arts and the western influence on the instruments played and ritual practices in the contemporary colonial era.

The other development in the performing arts was the addition of Dutch stories into the *Kolam* folk drama during Dutch colonialism. Among important items are the ‘police *kolama*’ and the ‘Dutch couple’. Dela Bandara, referring to the Dutch couple ‘Nona’ and ‘Singho’ who come on the stage wearing masks, hypothesises that during the period when the Dutch held sway in the coastal areas, they entered the field of folk drama. Thus, the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English nations have directly influenced the Sinhalese and Tamil performing arts as there are several western characters included and masks were for the Singho couple, Singho and Nona, and the Policeman *Kolama*⁶⁴ (see Appendix 17: The Policeman *Kolama*). Dela Bandara, commenting on this folk drama *Kolam* states, “Another *Kolama* introduced later is the police *Kolama*. Police was a public service established during the English rule and the police *Kolama* may have been a role added lastly to this tradition” (Dela Bandara, 2000: 75).

6.2.3 Post-Colonial Era: The Sinhala Only Policy, and the marginalisation of Tamil ethnicity

In studying the performing arts and ethnicity during the post-colonial era⁶⁵, it is necessary to pay attention to the ethnic separation between the two major races and the factors that led to it, particularly because the impact this separation had on the Sri Lankan arts was immense. The main objective here is to find the main causes that led to the ethnic separation and how it affected the arts and ethnicity.

⁶⁴ Singular: *Kolama*. Plural: *Kolam*

⁶⁵ Post-colonial era refers to the period from 04th February 1948 when Sri Lanka gained independence from British rule up to the present time.

The Sinhala Only Policy of Bandaranaike played a key role in the separation of the two ethnic groups of Sinhalese and Tamil. However, Herath (2002) points out that this separation was an inheritance from the colonial period. This language problem was not merely something that developed after independence but, according to Herath, was a dark shadow inherited from the colonial period.

Language was one of the important issues in focus in all the communities, as both Sinhala and Tamil speaking people had suffered under the English language during the time of the British. Even at the time of independence, only about one percent of the population could speak and write in English. Yet no one could send a telegram in Sinhala or Tamil, even at a time of an emergency. In the case of Indian Tamils, the issue of impending disfranchisement had not been settled. Unlike in some other colonies, the British did not accept them as their own citizens at the time of granting independence. Instead, the British washed their hands of the problem and asked the independent Sri Lankan government to find a solution. Thus, the challenges that lay ahead at the time of independence were diverse and complex in nature (Herath, 2002:45).

The climax of this process culminated in the political revolution in 1956 and the political policies of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike. In fact, the year 1956 is a noteworthy one in the island-nation's history (Satkunaratnam, 2009:86) with the Sinhala language becoming the official language (The Sinhala Only Policy). Bandaranaike was successful in gaining power by defeating the United National Party and obtaining the support of 'bhikkhus-farmers-Ayurveda-physicians-labourers' (Sangha, guru, govi, veda, kamkaru). Commenting on this, Manor points out that in 1956, Bandaranaike had attracted the votes of underprivileged castes that had rarely before participated in elections (Manor, 2011:600). It is apparent that because of this Sinhala Only Policy Bandaranaike came to power but various problems arose regarding the representation of minorities. Commenting on this situation, Peebles points out that 'hartal' protests were staged in Tamil areas on 5th June 1956 when the Sinhala Only Policy was introduced and that the Sinhalese mobs then attacked the Tamils in Colombo; violence broke out in Trincomalee and Jaffna. The worst incident occurred in the Gal Oya Colonisation

Scheme when Sinhalese thugs annihilated between 100 to 150 Tamils (Peebles, 2006: 110). This ethnic struggle continued and commenting on this clash Wijetunga et al. observe, “The Official Languages Act in particular triggered a series of events that culminated in the communal riots of 1958” (Wijetunga et al., 2004: 387). The eventual result of these riots was the formation of the largest, most powerful and wealthiest of the guerrilla groups, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam or LTTE, who were seeking a separate homeland within the Sinhalese state (Rajanayagam, 1994: 171). This led to the war between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Government that lasted for over twenty-five years and the resultant damage to life and property was incalculable. Describing this damage and the clash between the Sinhalese and the Tamils, Reed observes, “In May 2009, after more than twenty-five years’ conflict, the government of Sri Lanka defeated the LTTE. The death toll from the war is estimated at nearly 100,000; the suffering engulfed millions” (Reed, 2010:10). Therefore, it is important to examine what effect the war which raged between the Sinhalese and Tamils for nearly three decades had on the performing arts.

6.2.3.1 Performing arts in the post-colonial era and the activity of ethnicity that affected it

There are several special features that can be identified in the performing arts in the post-colonial era and the ethnicity expressed within it. The main among them is the negotiation between the Sinhalese-Tamil arts as part of the attempt to rebuild the nation.

One method to identify the respective ethnic identities in Sri Lanka is to examine the different geographical zones in which respective ethnic groups are separated (Holt, 2011; Sabaratnam, 2001; Reed, 2010; Peebles, 2006). People of these particular ethnic groups “live in the Northern and Eastern provinces, and the rest are concentrated in the Central highlands and the urban areas outside the Northern and Eastern Provinces” (Herath, 2002:1). The Tamil people who live concentrated in the Central highlands “have separate identities as Indian Tamils” (Herath, 2002:1). The main reason for the Tamil ethnic group in the Central highlands acquiring an Indian cultural framework is the development of the state economy during the British colonial administration. In obtaining employees for

the state industry, “The planters imported Tamil labourers, not from Jaffna but from South India” (Sabaratnam, 2001:86). In terms of this expansion of the Tamil ethnicity and its establishment in urban areas, Sabaratnam points out the ‘occupational mobility’ which took place. “The growth of a public and the recruitment of native Ceylonese to various jobs resulted in a Tamil migratory pattern that could be called an internal brain-drain. There was less to be earned in Jaffna, while the skills were in demand in other parts of the colony. Thus, Tamils moved to Sinhala areas within a colonial ambit” (Sabaratnam, 2001:112). Thus, with the establishment of Tamil ethnicity in the North Eastern Central highlands and Colombo and its suburbs, an art connected with that nationalism began to grow. By the mid-1930s an example of this is that “The study of occidental music and dance had been replaced by Carnatic music and Bharata Natyam dance in the curricular of most colleges in the (Jaffna) peninsula” (Russell, 1982:122). The relationship between Tamil nationalism and Tamil artistes enjoys a prominent place in society. Russell’s view of these artistes and the Tamil social system suggests that “The long, arduous and rigid self-discipline necessary to acquire an expertise in Carnatic music and Bharata Natyam dance endow the artiste in these mediums with an immense respect and renown” (Russell, 1982:121). This expansion of Tamil nationalism and the establishment of the art that emerged reflects Tamil nationalism and its identity to such an extent in the middle-upper class in Colombo that studies of Bharatanatyam and Carnatic music was considered to be important. Moreover, studying this music was, “considered essential for a young Tamil woman making her Arangetram (debut) into Tamil society” (Wilson, 2000:36).

Just as the establishment of the Tamil-Hindu art was connected with Tamil nationalism and ethnicity, a Sinhala-Buddhist art was established. The Sinhalese art, particularly the Kandyan dance, became a “well-established subject on the school curriculum, and is taught in almost every school in the Sinhala-dominated southern and central regions of the country” (Reed, 2010:128). Similarly, for the study of that art and “to meet the demand for Kandyan dance teachers, a number of aesthetic teacher training institutes have been established” (Reed, 2010:128). Within this expansion of Sinhala nationalism three forms of Sinhalese art emerged in relation to the Kandyan tradition based in Kandy, Satkorala and Satarakorala, namely the low country tradition based on Matara, Hambantota in

the Southern province and the Sabaragamu tradition based in Ratnapura and Kahawatta. Quite apart from the representation of Sinhala arts, the Kandyan dance tradition “is preeminent among the Sinhala dance forms, and while its roots are in the Kandyan region, the dance is now identified as a “national” dance” (Reed, 2010:11). This concept of a national dance, and the awakening of a Sinhala nationalist identity in 1956, was established as Sinhala-Buddhist art. Here, Sri Lanka was not only considered a ‘land of the Sinhalese’ but as Reed points out, “Myth and ritual trace the origins of the dance to the colonization of the island by the Sinhala people and even the name of the dance, evoking the royal city of the last of Lanka’s kings, suggests links to the country’s dominant ethnic group” (Reed, 2010:11).

The division of art into Sinhalese and Tamil arts seems to have been a great impediment to the formation of a Sri Lankan art. This was expressed by one of the interviewees:

I am a *pahatharata* (Low country) dancer. This is our art. This is our culture. This is one method by which we can show our ‘Sinhaleseness’. Our ‘Sinhaleseness’ has been preserved with this art. Tamil arts have come from outside. How could you reckon them as Sinhalese art?⁶⁶

The definition of the performing arts as Sinhalese art or ‘only a Sinhalese country’ and to ‘build up a road towards a Tamil state’ seems to prevail during the period:

North and East are our own motherland. Since the past this land is ‘Tamil-Hindu- ours’. We went into a war to win over this land. Our Kuttu drama, Bharatanatyam and Mrdanga show that there was a Tamil culture in this country. During the period, we were engaged in the war this art was a support for us to show Tamil strength.⁶⁷

It is evident that the provincial separation of ethnicity and nationalist art seems to be an important factor. Although this separation could be seen only provincially, in the religious ritual system, a national conciliation seemed to take the place of that separation.

⁶⁶ Interview (INT/HB/01/M)

⁶⁷ Interview (INT/JF/08/M)

Although much information was gathered in areas where either only Sinhalese or Tamils are living, the situation in Colombo and the suburbs is different. In this research in eleven out of the fifteen interviews held in Colombo and the suburbs, the artistes were studying and practising arts connected with both Sinhala and Tamil nationalism. They pointed out that Sinhala or Tamil nationalism was not an impediment to art:

In this institution of mine both Bharatanatyam and Sinhala dance are taught. The fact that it is Sinhala or Tamil is not a problem to me. Due to the separation of Sinhala and Tamil, animosity develop between them. What we have to do now is to find a solution for that disaster even through art. I have no consideration on nationalism in my art.⁶⁸

Although this national negotiation is observable in art centred in the main cities such as Colombo and Kandy, it takes a different form in the north-east where Tamils mostly live and the south where the Sinhalese live. This concept of an art with ethnic cohesion seems not to exist except in the cities. In fact, the data gained during the research confirmed this as in the following example. During an arts festival at Jaffna University (16th July 2016), the Sinhalese students who presented a *ves* dance were assaulted by Tamil students and this illustrates that the opportunity to present a Sinhalese-Buddhist performance in a Tamil-Hindu university is indeed limited. What happens to Hindu art in an environment of Sinhalese-Buddhist art was described by one of the interviewees:

No, no. We don't want to include Tamil dances into this (dance performance). How many were killed by them in our country? Destroyed? They turned the beautiful north into a land of landmines. What they want is to separate this small country. So, we can certainly manage without those Tamil dances. I'll never include any dance by them into this⁶⁹.

This rejection of Sinhalese ethnicity by the Tamils in the north and the rejection of the Tamil ethnicity by the Sinhalese in the south has led to the rejection of a Sri Lankan art that signifies unity.

⁶⁸ Interview (INT/COL/09/M)

⁶⁹ Interview (INT/ANU/12/M1)

The other important factor to be noted is that the Sinhalese-Tamil arts linked to rituals frees itself from the rituals and transforms itself into an 'exhibition art' or a form of popular entertainment. In this situation, instead of particularised ethnic features, such as Sinhalese or Tamil, a concept of a Sri Lankan art seems to emerge; that is, the emergence of a Sinhala Tamil mixed national art form to entertain foreigners and foreign tours. One of the artistes points out that the main reason for this is the social demand for such things:

When persons asked me for dance items they never say to give them either Sinhala or Tamil dances. What they say is whether what I present could be watched by the spectators without feeling bored. Every dance item of mine is a Sinhala-Tamil mixed production. Within that, there is no racial or religious basis. My art is for all. The present stage demands art free from petty national and religious frameworks ⁷⁰

This Sinhala Tamil mixed national art which has emerged is found active not only in 'exhibition art' but also in universities and teacher training institutions where the concept of 'national unity through mixed forms of art' is adopted in teaching and creating.

One of the main objectives of our university courses is to refer students to an art where there is Sinhala Tamil unity. We always try to create a unified Sri Lankan art form without a gap between languages, ethnic and religious barriers. If we do not do this just as we suffered from a war that spread 30 years our future generations too would suffer the same fate. Our ideal is towards a Sri Lankan art there is neither Sinhala nor Tamil within that. ⁷¹

Therefore, although in exclusively Sinhalese or Tamil rural areas art grew as a separate entity, in the cities it has become a Sinhalese-Tamil mixed art. Thus, Sinhalese or Tamil ethnicity has become a major factor in the Sri Lankan performing arts, but it is also a major issue affecting ethno-religious harmony. What is obvious during the postcolonial period, in this tragic land separated into

⁷⁰ Interview (INT/COL/06/FM)

⁷¹ Interview (INT/COL/02/M)

Sinhala and Tamil, is the attempt made by some performing artistes for unification using the arts as a bridge.

6.3 Negotiating Identity

Taj jom taka jom – tadjom – diri diri tam – diri diri tam

Taj jom taka jom – tadjom – diri diri tam – diri diri tam.

That was the melodious singing of a Tamil female singer. It was 14.04.2016, an important date for me because I got an invitation to participate in the World Tea Day organised by the Catholic Church in Kandy. Over one thousand labourers and planters, both Sinhalese and Tamil, from the Nuwaraeliya, Matale and Kandy areas participated. On one side was a Hindu singer singing to the Hindu Carnatic music. On the other side was a Hindu *Mridangam* player playing his instrument without transcending the sweet melody of the singer. There were Bharatanatyam female artistes dancing on the stage with flowers in their hands to the *Mridangam* as well as the *Ntuwanar* beat. This was the dance performance called '*Pushpanjali*', the offering of flowers to the God. In the middle of the dance, the music unexpectedly stopped and then the sound of *Gatabera* belonging to the Kandyan tradition was heard on the stage. Four *Ves* dancers with coconut flowers in their hands entered onto the stage with four drummers. They were performing the *Malpadaya*⁷² dance belonging to the *Kohombā Kankāri* healing ritual. On one side of the stage there were Tamil Hindu girls and on the other side the Sinhala Buddhist *Ves* dancers. The first dance item offering flowers to the God was thus staged with the participation of the artistes in Kandy.

The opening dance created for the World Tea Day was the first step in rebuilding the lost Sinhalese-Tamil cohesion. This ethno-religious integration that happens provincially is seen even on a national scale in Sri Lankan society. Therefore, this section will discuss how each ethnic group uses its art to achieve ethno-religious integration within Sri Lankan society. This discussion will centre on Sri Lankan

⁷² *Mal padaya* or *Mal hat padaya*, 'the seven flower dances', are performed with coconut flowers (*pol mal*) in the hands to honour the god Viramunda (Nurnberger, 1998:63).

art rather than a Sinhala or Tamil art. Attention will be paid here to the *Perahera* and *teva* connected with the Kataragama *Devālaya*, the Esala *Perahera* held in association with the Kandy Tooth Relic Palace in July and August and the annual performing arts exhibitions held by Sri Lankan universities.

6.3.1 Kataragama Devālaya and the rituals associated with it

A notable factor about religious places in Sri Lanka is that the *Ruhunu Maha Kataragama Devālaya* in the southern province is the only place where all ethnic groups of Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims can worship. The main reason for this is that God Kataragama is worshipped by all ethnic and religious groups irrespective of ethnic and religious bias. Crowds visit the Kataragama *Devālaya* without any ethnic or religious tensions. “Traditional Tamil Hindu devotees might shave their heads or roll in the hot dust around the God’s shrine; both they and Sinhala Buddhists might bring offerings” (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988:164). Although there are rituals connected with a Hindu Tamil God variously called ‘Skanda’ or ‘Kadira’ or ‘Kataragama’, any study about the Kataragama *Devālaya* or its rituals, both ritualistic and performing, cannot be discussed without including the Kataragama Buddhist *Kirivehera*. Devotees normally first pay their respects to the Buddhist *Kirivehera* before they worship the Kataragama God: “Kataragama has become a great melting pot of Sri Lankan society. It is one place where all the religions of the nation – Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant – meet and manually influence one another” (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988:169). This inter-religious and inter-ethnic relationship between the Kataragama *Devālaya* and the Kataragama Buddhist *Kirivehera* is demonstrated during the annual *Perahera* held for the Sinhala Tamil New Year in April and during the annual festival held in July and August. My attention was drawn to the *Perahera* of the Kataragam *Devālaya*, held on April 13th and 14th which is considered to be the Sinhalese Tamil New Year, and the rituals connected with it. Various customs such as the participation of the *alatti ammas*, the water-cutting ceremony, fire-walking and self-penance could be watched on the same day, the day of the *Devālaya* in the New Year.

The first aspect of these rituals is the Sinhala–Buddhist acceptance of the Kataragama *Devālaya*, which is connected with a Hindu–Tamil God. Here, it must be noted how Hindu Gods, namely the ‘four guardian gods of the polity Nātha, Viṣṇu, Skanda (Kataragama), and the Goddess Pattini’ became Sinhala

Gods (Tambiah, 1986:60). God Skanda became the ‘most popular national deity’ (Tambiah, 1986:60). Moreover, “The main annual ritual of Kataragama has always been in Sinhala hands; the priests of the main shrine have been Sinhala, as have the lay trustee (Basnayake Nilame) and the managers of the extensive properties owned by the temple” (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988:183).

It is important to note here that those Hindu Gods become Sinhala Gods and certain Hindu rituals became mixed with Buddhist rituals. As pointed out by Gombrich and Obeyesekere, “As Sinhala Buddhist monks have taken control of the sacred areas, the Sinhala Buddhist laity has adopted Tamil ritual forms” (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988:187). The adoption of these rituals by the Sinhalese has manifested in ritual forms such as the piercing of the cheeks and the tongue, devotees being hung from hooks in their back and carried in vehicles, fire walking and the *kavadi* dance.

The other important feature is that both Sinhalese and Tamil art forms have been included in the *Dēvala Perahara*, for example Sinhalese drum playing, Ves dances, *Panteru*, *paturu* folk dances and low-country mask dances and also the Hanuman dance wearing the mask of Hanuman, kavadi, Maura alias the peacock dance, the kohomba pitcher, tea plucking, fire wheel revolving, all Tamil dance forms were included in this. Another important feature was that the Sinhala–Buddhist performing artistes contributed towards the Hindu Tamil dances and the Tamil–Hindu performing artistes contributed towards the Sinhala–Buddhist dances. Therefore, although there was a division between the North East and the Sinhalese South, in these rituals connected with the Kataragama *Devālaya*, conciliation between these two ethnic groups was evident. Discussing this aspect one of the interviewees, a Sinhala performing artiste who performed the Hanuman dance, stated:

There is no ethnicity in the Kataragama *Perahera*. There you get national conciliation. I am a Sinhalese but I dance the Hanuman Tamil dance. This is my friend Ganesh. He is a Tamil. He plays the Sinhalese drum. There is only one deity and that is Kataragama. ⁷³

⁷³ Focus groups (FG/KA/05/M1)

Therefore, in the ritual offerings at Kataragama the adoption by the Sinhalese of the Hindu rituals and the conciliation between the Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic groups can be seen.

6.3.2 The Performing Grammar and The Kandy Esela *Perahera*⁷⁴

Within Buddhist Sinhalese culture, the Sacred Tooth Relic Temple in Kandy occupies a prominent place. Holt describes it as “The most important ritual and pilgrimage site for Sinhala Buddhists” (Holt, 2011:395). The *Esala Perahera* held under the sponsorship of the *Maligawa* (Sacred Tooth Relic Palace) is significant in the sense that it not only represents the Sinhalese Buddhist performing arts but also the dances, music and singing of the four Hindu temples, namely, Kataragama, Pattini, Nātha and Vishnu.

This ritual was continuously performed by various rulers⁷⁵ during their reigns and during the Kandyan reign it was permanently featured as a ritual by the Sacred Tooth Relic Temple in Kandy. Since that time:

His presence, or more precisely his legacy, lived on in the hill country palace, was feasted every day, enjoyed musical orchestrations, and gave audience to his reverently devoted, some of whom had come from quite far. Once a year, during the July/ August Esala Perehara, his relic was mounted on the royal animal par excellence, the elephant, and paraded around his city attended by a vast retinue of officials and array of entertainers including enthusiastic Kandyan dancers, in the process symbolizing his spiritual and temporal lordship over the kingdom (Holt, 2011:401).

The Esela *Perahera* conducted during July and August, takes a prominent place from the point of view of being a Sri Lankan religious, artistic, national, and social event. Here, what is seen clearly is that the *Govigama* caste, play a central role with Sinhala Buddhist authority. The Hindu Tamil deities as seen in the rituals connected with Kataragama *Devālaya* are adopted as Sinhala deities and take a prominent place in this Sinhala Buddhist ritual. This ‘National Transaction’ is

⁷⁴ According to the Culavamsa during the ninth year of the reign of King Sirimegavanna (352-379 CE), a Brahmin woman brought the Buddha’s tooth relic to Anuradhapura from Kalinga in India (Geiger 1929: 7-8).

⁷⁵ See *Mahāvamsa*

clearly seen in the four *Devālaya* namely, Vishnu, Nātha, Pattini and Kataragama on the four directions of the Tooth Relic premises and their relationship to the annual *Perahera* of the Tooth Relic in Kandy. Gombrich and Obeyesekere point out why the adoption of these deities as Buddhist deities is connected with the concept of Bodhisattva. “In fact, there is a structural reason why all Four Warrant Gods should be Bodhisattvas: they guard the Buddha’s Tooth Relic in Kandy and thus also the welfare and stability of all Buddhists in Sri Lanka” (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988:30). During the field research in 2015, I observed how the Nātha, Pattini, Vishnu and Kataragama *Devālaya* have become a reality in national reconciliation. The *Perahera* that roams the streets for a period of 10 days was beautified by the elephant carrying the Tooth Relic on his back and thousands of Sinhalese dance and take part in orchestral performances. With this *Perahera* joined first the Nātha *Devālaya Perahera* carrying the ornaments of God Nātha and then the Vishnu *Devālaya Perahera*, the Kataragama *Devālaya Perahera* and finally the Pattini *Devālaya Perahera*. In the *Perahera*, carrying the Sacred Tooth Relic the prominent place is given to the Kandyan *Ves* dancers and *panchathurya* playing but in the four *Peraheras* not only Sinhala Buddhist dancers but also *kavadi*, *kala*, *kulu*, *pattini*, fire dance and *salu*, *raban*, and *paturu* Sinhala Tamil folk dancers can be seen. Therefore, Sinhala and Tamil people who visit the four *Devālaya* contribute to the Kandy Tooth Relic *Perahera* and it becomes a ‘Sri Lankan cultural festival’ rather than a Sinhala Buddhist or Tamil Hindu festival. In a discussion which took place during this research, the following fact was revealed about this attempt at reconciliation:

There is a grammar to the Kandy *Perahera* and this is something institutionalised within the Sri Lankan society. We cannot isolate the Maligawa *Perahera* from the processions of the four other *Devālaya*. What you see is a grammar constituting a lining up of Sinhala, Tamil, Buddhist, Hindu aspects. What we recognised as the Kandy *Perahera* is not there so the Kandy *Perahera* is a performing arts grammar combining a culture of all of us, Sinhala–Tamil.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ This idea was posed by a performing artiste in charge of the perahera in connection with a discussion held on the Kandy Tooth Relic Perahera and its rituals. Interview (INT/KA/01/M)

As far as Sri Lankan society is concerned this *Perahera* is important in several respects. The foremost is that it is more an art that represents the Sinhalese-Tamil ethnic cohesion than a mere art linked solely to Sinhalese ethnicity. Secondly, it depicts the inter-connection between the dances, singing and music wound round the Kataragama, Nātha, Pattini and Vishnu Hindu temples and the Buddhist rituals. Thus, it represents an ethno-religious co-existence that joins the Sri Lankan performing arts and the artiste both as Sinhalese-Tamil as well as Buddhist-Hindu.

6.3.3 Curriculum of Higher Education Institutions and Performing arts Exhibitions

In studying the ethnicity of the Sri Lankan performing artistes and the performing arts, the curricula devised by the universities and the allied institutions take a prominent place. A significant factor here is the substitution of a higher education system for the teaching of the arts at the *Berava* artiste's house. In 1939, the government introduced Kandyan dance to government schools for the development of the arts and Kandyan teachers were appointed to teach it. Similarly, the organisation called '*Gandharva Sabha*' was instituted for the development of the arts and the *Gandharva Sabha* Certificate Examination was introduced that became the basic qualification for the teaching of Kandyan dance. With regard to this examination method that was introduced to teach the Sri Lankan arts, Reed observes, "The introduction of these formal tiered exams marks a major shift in Kandyan dance training, away from the personalized guru-sisya system and towards abstract "standards" " (Reed, 2010: 116). According to Reed, a system of "elevation of theory over practice" was instituted regarding the Sri Lankan arts. Discussing the substitution of theory for practical arts that was centred on the *guru gedera*, Reed further points out "The development of the curriculum for the O and A levels and the BFA degree, much greater emphasis has been put on theory – topics such as dance and music history, literature, aesthetics, and rhythmic systems" (Reed, 2010: 162-163). We must make note of the fact that traditional performing arts had entered the education system of schools and universities by 1950:

Berava dancers by the hundreds were hired to teach in the government schools, the system of Kalayatana was established, and the government

college of Fine Arts at Heywood added dancing and music to its curriculum (Reed, 2010:133).

But within this education system an art with minority representation did not find a place. The main cause for this appears to have been the Sinhala-only policy that spread during the 1950s. “The Sinhala – Only Policy is considered one of the most significant factors in the genesis of the ethnic conflict between Sinhalese and Tamils” (Reed, 2010:134). Currently it can be seen that the school and university education system is making some effort to build a bridge for communication between the ethnic groups. The most important example is the University of Visual and Performing Arts in Colombo, its curriculum and the faculties that allow the study of recommended subjects. Here, equal opportunities are provided to study Sinhala Buddhist performing arts as well as Hindu Tamil performing arts. An opportunity has been provided to read for a special degree in Hindu Tamil Bharatanatyam dance tradition and Carnatic music through The Department of Indian and Asian Dance and Faculty of Music under The Faculty of Dance and Drama:

This degree programme has been designed to raise awareness of the ethnic integration, providing an overview of diverse ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. Since Sri Lankan society is multi-cultural and multi-ethnic in nature, the undergraduates will be able to gain an in-depth knowledge of Carnatic music as well as the culture of the Tamil community.⁷⁷

Because of this recognition, the students of those courses “are capable of interacting with and appreciating Sinhalese as well as Tamil cultures while being conversant with both cultures.”⁷⁸

Observations and interviews during this research at The University of the Visual and Performing Arts in Colombo, Jaffna University, Eastern University, and the Kandy Heywood Institution showed that Sinhala and Tamil performing arts forms were presented in combination. In the dance, music and song items presented by the students of these educational institutions, a fusion of Sinhalese

⁷⁷ <https://www.vpa.ac.lk/index.php/component/content/article?id=257>

⁷⁸ <https://www.vpa.ac.lk/index.php/component/content/article?id=257>

and Tamil performing arts traditions were apparent. This ethnic transaction will make a positive contribution to the creation of Sri Lankan arts.

6.3.4 Print Media and Currency Notes

This research explored the use of performing arts through print media both locally and abroad. Reed, focusing on the Sri Lankan performing arts, particularly the dance artistes of the *Berava* caste, describes the Sinhala Buddhist artiste as a national symbol through the print media. Describing the Sinhala Buddhist artiste Reed says:

Indeed, the image of the Ves dancer has become a kind of floating signifier of Sinhala tradition, reproduced on post cards, lottery tickets, billboards, currency notes, stamps, batik note cards, papier-mache statuettes, and advertisements for businesses. Alongside the Sri Lankan lion flag and the Buddhist flag, the Kandyan Ves dancer is one of the most popular visual symbols of Sri Lanka (Reed, 2010:12).

Although the up country dance seems to come to the fore as a “national art form” the Sri Lankan government seems to promote the arts of minority ethnicities also as national symbols. For example, on the hundred rupee note issued by the Sri Lankan Central Bank in 2010, prominence was given to an artiste playing the Mridangam and a Bharatanatyam female dancer dancing to that particular beat (See Appendix 23: The Hundred Rupee Note issued by the Sri Lankan Central Bank). This becomes the first time in Sri Lanka’s history that a monetary note of the state has on it a minority dance. As Kaelberer points out, “money has not only served economic functions but has also operated as a symbol of place, locality, and power” (Kaelberer, 2004:162). Therefore, the Sinhala Tamil art shown in the monetary note emphasises the Sri Lankan state and Sri Lankan identities and removes the issue of separate ethnicities. Kaelberer argues that, “the monopoly of issuing and regulating money is in order to increase the power of the state and to create greater national integration and societal cohesion” (Kaelberer, 2004:163). The other important factor is that as Reed (2010) discusses regarding monetary notes and the Kandyan *Ves* dancer, in the representation of this new national cooperation on post cards, lottery tickets, billboards, advertisements, state web pages, web pages of national institutions and brochures, an attempt is being made to develop this new ethnic cooperation. In the field it was observed that, in

addition to the portrayal of the Sinhalese-Buddhist artiste there were also handouts, stamps, postcards, T-shirts, banners, and commercial advertisements, representing the Hindu-Tamil artiste. This trend, which was not seen over the twenty-five-years war, appeared after the war ended in 2009.

During this research, it was also possible to witness the performing arts used as a medium to develop the cohesion between nations instead of the pure secular national concept of Sinhala only or Tamil only. This new trend is described in the Sri Lankan national anthem:

As children of the same mother
let's move forward without delay
With love and eradicating all divisions

which is personified within the cohesion of the performing arts and nationalism.

6.4 'Sri Lankan' Performing Arts and Artistes

Uniting as a Sri Lankan ethnic group and the emergence of a Sri Lankan arts which is free from Sinhala and Tamil complexion is a dream that should be realised and towards which both ethnic groups must work. It is clear that, the artiste can use art as a medium to resuscitate the Sinhalese-Tamil ethnic harmony that disappeared with the war. In fact, an interviewee during this research pointed out how this ethno-religious integration could be made use of as a medium to rebuild peace:

As artistes we are responsible for the society. If our art is exclusively religious, ethnic, or fundamental, it cannot be called an art. Art always tries to bring together the Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic groups divided by the war. This is the social responsibility that is cast on us as performing artistes.⁷⁹

Quite apart from the responsibility of the performing artiste to encourage this integration, certain problems do exist. A Tamil performing artiste pointed out that the language gap between races, the division between people belonging to

⁷⁹ Interview (INT/SR/COL/11/SM)

the majority race or minority race and the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities within the races are deciding factors:

There is a responsibility within art. This is true. But there are many problems in taking art before society. One is language. I am Tamil, I do not know Sinhala, and the Sinhalese do not know Tamil. Now this is a great obstacle to enjoy a Tamil or Sinhalese art production. Similarly, the division into a major race and minor race is an obstacle to build up integration and enjoy the others' art. The other is the unequal division of resources. We, who live in the North, do not get the recognition that the Southerners get and consequently resources are not available. So, how can we within such limitations think of the others' art? ⁸⁰

Steps taken for the creation of a Sri Lankan nation after the war seemed to bring the idea of Sri Lankan performing arts closer. As mentioned earlier in the Negotiating Identity Section, it is evident that the arts could be made use of to bring together the ethnic groups that divided as a result of the war and to identify Sri Lankan arts rather than a Sinhalese-Tamil art. During one interview I was told:

My daughter attends Tamil classes. She studies Bharatanatyam in weekends. We are Sinhalese Buddhists. I am a *Kandyan* dancer. We were destroyed because we divided ourselves into different groups. We must now unite ourselves and arise. There must be legal provisions for every citizen to learn the language and art of the other ethnic groups. Then this barren mentality of living as separate groups will be eliminated and the people will begin to think as a Sri Lankan nation. That could be the foundation of a Sri Lankan performing art. It may not have a Sinhalese or Tamil complexion. It will only be Sri Lankan.⁸¹

Although this goal may not be achieved immediately, the fact that it is already happening in Sri Lankan society is a positive feature.

⁸⁰ Interview (INT/SR/JAF/04/TF)

⁸¹ Interview (INT/SRI/COL/14/F)

6.5 Conclusions

During the field research in Sri Lanka I witnessed some Tamil-Hindu groups dancing ‘*Tiruvalla*’ going from house to house. In certain places, ‘*Villupattu*’ singing was done under torch light. In yet another place, people were dancing and singing ‘*Kuravanji*’ songs. In another place, a group was dancing ‘*Hanuman Attam*’. In the same Tamil-Hindu village, there was a Buddhist seven-week offering with the participation of the above groups. In another place, there was a Buddhist ‘*Pirith*’ chanting ceremony. On the *Poya* day Buddhist *hevisi* drums were played. Amidst all these Hindu-Buddhist religious offerings, the Sinhalese - Tamil integration is gradually growing. An art, which was undivided as Sinhala -Tamil even during the South Indian aggression during the last phase of the Anuradhapura kingdom (377 BCE - 1017 CE) separated into a majority and minority race under Western Colonialism. This further increased with the introduction of the Sinhala-Only policy in the 1950s and the oppression caused by this came to the fore through the LTTE organisation and led to the civil war that continued for several years. Not only the race, ethnicity and religion but also the art was separated in that process. The Sri Lankan arts, which were divided into Sinhalese arts and Tamil arts, were working in unity within certain religious rituals. A fine example is the *Perahera* in Kataragama and Kandy and even the syllabuses for higher education that emphasise this integration.

Sri Lankan ethnicity and the Sri Lankan performing arts, which were divided during different periods for various reasons, are not easy to reunite. However, realising this dream, that is the development of Sri Lankan performing arts by the government and the educational institutes does not seem to be too far away. The realisation of this dream depends on the understanding of each other’s language and culture, the building up of the concept of equal ethnicity instead of the division of majority race and minority race, the equal distribution of resources and opportunities that will lead to the realisation of this dream of a Sri Lankan nation. The following verse by a performing artiste shows that their only hope is of Sri Lankan performing arts instead of petty divisions.

The day the sound of *Getabera*
in the shade of the Palmyra trees

the sound of *Maddala*
near the Point of Dondra
are heard
are played
we could say
we are the same people
not Tamil nor Sinhalese.⁸²

The next chapter will discuss how the gender of the performing artiste and the gender issue affects the arts, ethno-religious co-existence and the society at large.

⁸² Field notes (INT/SRI/JAF/02/M)

Chapter 07: Gender

7.0 Introduction

This chapter will primarily question how the concept of gender affects the artiste and his art and ethno-religious cohesion. In the first section the concepts of masculinity and femininity in western art and the concepts of *lasya* and *tandava* in eastern art is discussed. Then, a historical perspective is provided on gender-typed participation during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras. This will provide an understanding of gender as it relates to Sri Lankan Buddhist and Hindu art and the artiste. The influence of concepts of purity and impurity related to the gender of the performing artiste in the areas of performing space and ritual performing and the resultant gender stereotype participation is then discussed.

7.1 Masculinity, Femininity and Tandava, Lasya

There are many new expressions in the field of gender studies such as gender bias, gender difference, gender discrimination, gender identity (Butler, 1990; Senelick, 1992; Colebrook, 2004). The researchers who examine masculinity and femininity give various interpretations and there seems to be no consensus; as Senelick argues, “whatever biological imperative may order sexual differentiation, whatever linguistic patterns may undergird it, it is outward behaviour that calibrates the long scale of masculinity and femininity in social relations” (Senelick, 1992: IX). Therefore, gender connected with masculinity and femininity is a “way of referring to the social organisation of the relationship between the sexes” (Scott, 1996: 1053). The social-rooted connection is discussed by Stets and Burke who argue that femininity and masculinity are rooted in the social (one’s gender) rather than in the biological (one’s sex). Similarly, “societal members decide what being male or female means (e.g. dominant or passive, brave or emotional), and males will generally respond by defining themselves as masculine while females will generally define themselves as feminine”. However, as Stets and Burke argue, “Because these are social definitions, however, it is possible for one to be female and see herself as masculine or male and see himself as feminine” (Stets and Burke, 2000:997). Therefore, it is important to inquire how far this social organisation between the sexes as pointed out by Scott is applicable to art and the use of art by the artiste. The gender of the artiste determines the opportunity of engaging in ritual performance, the opportunity to

visit the religious places where such rituals are held and the opportunity to train in dance and music in the performing arts. Therefore, this chapter first examines the gender power operative within the masculinity and femininity of the Sri Lankan performing artists.

The concepts of masculinity and femininity discussed in relation to gender in the western world are seen also in the eastern world when discussing the performing arts. Important among them are the concepts of *Lasya*, and *tandava*⁸³ (Vatsyayan, 1967; Sharma, 2015; Reed, 2010). Particularly in the Indian dance tradition the word *tandava* is used for masculinity and the word *Lasya* for femininity. These *Lasya* and *tandava* concepts, are discussed by Reed in relation to the Sri Lankan performing arts.

Dances performed in the *tandava* style are vigorous, bold, and heroic, while dances performed in the *lasya* style are graceful, gentle, and tender. In general, dancers in contemporary Sri Lanka equate *tandava* with “masculine” and *lasya* with “feminine”, and among stage performers it is widely assumed that men should dance in the *tandava* style and women in the *lasya* style (Reed, 2010: 35).

So as Reed points out, male Sri Lankan artists in their *ves* dance, *daha ata sannii*, *devol*, and *telme* in the upcountry, low country and Sabaragamju traditions, present a vigorous, bold and heroic *tandava* dance while the female artists present a graceful, gentle and tender dance through folk dances such as *kulu*, *kalagedi*, and *raban* which will be discussed later. In Sri Lankan society a woman is always regarded as a symbol of gentleness. According to the *Selalihini Sandesa* composed by the Buddhist monk Sri Rahula Thera in the fifteenth century, the dancing girl is described as a quiet gentle creature shaken like a lamp-flame by the wind:

Flickering lamp-flames they seem these dancers in array,
On whose broad hips hang the heavy waist folds that ripple and flare,
Who shoot sidelong glances at their arms as they rise, and they fall,
Transfigured their forms in the glare that beats from their jewels,

⁸³ See section 7.1 Masculinity, Femininity & Lasya, Tandava

(Holt, 2011:1280)

In particular, the woman engaging in dance is seen as a 'beauty' as an interviewee explained:

When a woman dances it's a beautiful sight. When a woman dances she has quite a different rhythm and movement than when a man dances. The spectator enjoys the gracefulness of the woman.⁸⁴

Thus, it seems that when a woman dances, it is her responsibility to see that she is graceful, gentle and tender (Reed, 2010: 35).

Another important concept is "*ardhanarishvara*"; which depicts an individual as half male and half female. *Ardhanarishvara* represents the synthesis of the masculine and feminine energies of the universe" (Sharma, 2015: 185). The right half is usually the male Shiva. This concept of *ardhanarishvara* must be considered when discussing gender within the Sri Lankan arts and the artiste's performance because of cross-dressing in the Sri Lankan ritual process or Hindu and Buddhist folk drama, and this is examined in more depth later in the chapter.

7.2 Historical perspective of gender typed participation in the performing arts

In this section, the discussion firstly focuses on how the concepts of divinity and masculinity, as presented by the performing artiste in the pre-colonial era, evolved during colonialism and after independence. Attention is also paid to how the performing arts freed themselves from the concepts of divinity and masculinity in the colonial era and allied themselves with the concepts of femininity and sexualisation and how, by the post-colonial era, without being divided into 'masculine' or 'feminine', they integrated with gender negotiation.

7.2.1 Pre-Colonial Era: Divinity and Ritual Performer

What is evident when studying the use of gender within the performing arts during the pre-colonial era is that the male artiste becomes a 'divine icon' as a matter of course. In this transformation, as a 'divine icon' there forms a natural bond between the masculine identity and power. This is evident particularly in paintings and sculpture of the Anuradhapura (377 BCE-1017 CE) and

⁸⁴ Interview (INT/SR/MA /11/SM)

Polonnaruva (1017 CE -1255 CE) periods depicting figures of dancing, singing, and instrument-playing individuals. Here the artiste is depicted as a well-built, strong person and as a masculine icon with a bare upper body. These visual art sources in the early period depict the artiste mostly as a male figure. These male figures become ideal models of masculinity with divine status within the visual representation. The costumes and gestures are depicted in such a manner as to suggest a king or a deity. This masculinity and divine status are more clearly visible in the costumes used by the Kandyan dancer. Primarily, the costume is made to resemble that of the king born of a flower in the *kohombā kankāri* ritual.

The archetypal Kandyan dancer is a male dancer adorned in the spectacular Kankariya dress known as the *ves* costume. The costume consists of a gleaming silver head dress decked with shimmering bo leaves, silver armbands and anklets, a beaded harness, and a lower garment of voluminous white cloth overlaid with a wide, ornamented belt. The ornaments of the ritual dancer (*yakdessa*), especially the ritual crown (*ves tattuva*), were traditionally the most important symbols of a dancer's status as a skilled ritual performer. The ornaments of the ves costume are considered to be half of those worn by the healer king Malaya, whose curing of the ancient Sri Lankan king Panduvas in the fifth century BCE is the culmination of the Myth of the Kankariya (Reed, 2010: 11-12).

Thus, not only in *kankari* rituals but also in visual arts originating from the Anuradhapura (377 BCE -1017 CE) and Polonnaruva (1055 CE -1255 CE) periods, the divine icon of the artiste attired in costumes and ornaments as described above is depicted and a sense of majesty is presented representing the unique power enjoyed by kingship. This divine status belonging to the *ves* costume designed to suit a masculine body is clearly seen in the verses (*sahali*) sung when deities are invited to attend the audience (*aile yadeema*) during the *kohombā kankāri* ritual, namely the suggestion that the deity lives in every place of that costume, and is therefore all-powerful:

This invitation is to the deity living in the golden headdress of His Royal Highness King Male; this invitation is to the deity living in the golden *sikhabandana* of his Royal Highness; this invitation is to the deity living

in the golden *nettimala* of His Royal Highness; this invitation is to the deity living in the golden *payimpata* of His Royal Highness.⁸⁵

However, there seems to be a difference in depicting the femininity and divinity of the female performing artiste in literary sources. The main reason for depicting the woman in literary sources in the Anuradhapura, Polonnaruva periods and later in the Dambadeniya, Gampola, Kotte and Kandy may have been the attraction that the woman's gentleness provides. A Professor in Sinhalese who discussed this aspect pointed out:

Not only in Sinhalese literature but also in world literature the woman becomes a main theme in poetry, novel, song and the cinema. The main reason is that the woman is a symbol of beauty or her breasts, hips, and face are symbols of sexuality. So, the woman performing artiste rather than the male artiste is given preference in literature such as *Sandesa poetry*, and chronicles.⁸⁶

Descriptions of the performing arts and the artiste in *Dipavamsa*, *Mahāvamsa* and *Sandesa* poems (messenger poems) seem to express the emergence of femininity replete with the emotion of sexual love (*srangara*) instead of a masculine, divine icon. The dancing girls in the *Salalihini Sandesa* are described as follows:

Stand and gaze at the dancing girls in the dance arena,
Whose hair knots are bound with scented confusion of flowers full-blown,
Their pretty ears decked with shining gold leaves;
Their long, dark eyes painted with finely made salve.
Flickering lamp-flames they seem these dancers in array,
On whose broad hips hang the heavy waist folds that ripple and flare,
Who shoot sidelong glances at their arms as they rise, and they fall.
Transfigured their forms in the glare that beats from their jewels.
Drinking in the charms of these women who dance,
Stamping feet of lotus to beaten-out rhythms

⁸⁵ Kohombā Kankāriya ritual (PER/KOH/ANU/01/2015)

⁸⁶ Interview (INT/SL/PER /03/M1)

To swing the girdles that are swathed around their lovely wide flanks,
And their anklets hung with bells that wake into sound.

(Holt, 2011:128)

The author of the *Kokila Sandesa* too expresses a view like that of the author of *Salalihini Sandesa*, who describes the dancing girls as extremely beautiful. Accordingly, the author of the *Kokila Sandesa* describes the breasts of dancing girls as:

Bandimin sudupata rasinada nava sandavan nalale
Salasin ran rasunen nad adevamin pakamale
Anga ran tana tatamin leladee ina mini mevule
Angan dena ranga dutu kanam situ noele

(Gunawardena, 1962 :244).

Here the poet describes the breasts of dancing girls as *kinihiri*⁸⁷ flower buds, their necks garlanded with fragrant jasmine, moving hands decked with golden bracelets rhythmically, moving their feet decked with tinkling bells and wonders who will not be fascinated by them. So, instead of the male body imposed with divinity in the visual arts there emerges through literary sources the female body replete with *srangara* (love or beauty). More information is revealed about the female performing artiste in the *Sandesa* poetry and the chronicles. Many *Sandesa* poets have described how the elegance of the female body suits the act of dancing. One of the interviewees for this research describing this tendency pointed out that:

In any case, the female body is rather more appropriate in literary description than the male figure. Their eyes, eyebrows, lips, breasts, and hips attract literary imagination. Creative writing always prefers the description of female gracefulness rather than the robust male figure. The other important factor is that all these works have been written by male authors. So, it is not a matter for surprise that they tended to describe the opposite gender. Thus, it is seen that the use of gender of the artiste

⁸⁷ Scientific name : *Cochlospermum religiosum* (Pandhure et al., 2013). *Kinihiri* or □□□□□□□□ (in Sinhala) is a flowering plant from the tropical region of South Asia.

depends on the gender of the person who creates the relevant works of art.⁸⁸

Therefore, it is seen that in the case of dance, music and singing portrayals in literary sources give attention primarily to the female body. Thus, the gracefulness of woman in the performing arts in the respective periods seems to have stimulated the poet in his creations. The other notable feature is that these female artistes directly contribute to Buddhist religious rituals. As Buddhism rejects caste, divine concepts and that the woman is 'polluted' because she menstruates, women participated freely and directly in rituals performed in Buddhist temples. A clear illustration of this is the description in the *Mahāvamsa* of King Dutthagamini attending the Buddhist religious ceremony launching the Maha Thupa accompanied by dancing girls:

The king supported, in order of their rank, by many ministers, richly clothed as befitted their office, surrounded by many dancers richly clothed like to celestial nymphs (Geiger, 1912: 192-193).

Both *Mahāvamsa* and *Dipavamsa* describing Buddhist religious rituals point out on several occasions that those female performing artistes directly took part in some religious rituals. However, no evidence is available that female performing artistes took part in such rituals as *Kohombā Kankāriya*. This appears to have been due to the issue of *kili* (impurity) which is connected with females. It may be presumed that the idea of *kili* was not considered in Buddhist religious activities which did not involve the worship of deities. (see 7.3.2 Vihara: Buddhist temple). One of the interviewees describing the male and female contribution in the performing arts, as depicted in archaeological evidence, thought that the non-participation of women was due mainly to the concept of 'impurity' mentioned above and the contemporary male-centred social system. He stated:

What is seen mostly in the Buddhist and Hindu temples in the Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva periods are the male, strong bodies with bare upper bodies. The main reason for this may have been kingship and male-centred social environment. With the concept of 'purity' in religious places, it may be that the males were given pride of place. The other reason

⁸⁸ Interview (INT/SL/COL/05/M1)

is that the strength needed for dancing and singing was portrayed through the male body in painting and sculpture⁸⁹.

It may, therefore, be argued that during the pre-colonial era, the idea of ‘purity’ was a decisive factor in the participation of women in the performing arts. The reason for this may be the relationship with religious rituals involving the worship of deities (see 7.3.3. Dēvale: Hindu Shrines).

The evidence available in archaeological and literary sources about both female and male performing artistes during the pre-colonial era takes diverse forms. In archaeological evidence of carvings, paintings, and sculpture the subject is mostly male, and it appears that the reason may be the idea of divinity being identified with man and maleness. However, by the Polonnaruva period (1055 CE -1255 CE), this trend seems to have undergone a change. In visual art sources, there are many examples of female artistes inspired by Indian dance traditions and its methods. The South Indian influence after the Polonnaruva kingdom (1055 CE - 1255 CE) seems to have influenced the emergence of the concept of femininity in art. Because of the South Indian Tamil, Chola, Pallava and Hindu religious and ethnic influence, the *Devadāsī* dance tradition in the Hindu culture seems to have found a place within the Sri Lankan arts. In most of the carvings, paintings and sculpture found after the Polonnaruva period (1055 CE -1255 CE), graceful female performing artiste could be seen instead of the robust male performing artiste. This is clearly illustrated in the *eth pahana* (elephant lamp) of Dedigama (see Appendix 18: The eth pahana (elephant lamp) , the figures in the Mihinthale temple (see Appendix 19: The figures in Mihinthale), paintings in the Mulkirigala temple (see Appendix 20: The Mulkirigala temple), carvings in the Yapahuwa palace (see Appendix 21: The Yapahuwa palace), and the carvings in the moulding of the Gadaladeniya temple (see Appendix 22: The Gadaladeniya temple). These paintings, carvings and sculpture clearly show that the *Devadāsī* concept to Hinduism that becomes established at the end of the Anuradhapura period and the Polonnaruva period had an impact on their art and changed it.

7.2.2 Colonial artiste: changing constructs and perspectives

The divine and masculine concept related to the male artiste and the religious rituals related to the female artiste seemed to undergo a change during the

⁸⁹ Interview (INT/SL/COL/05/M1)

colonial period. When investigating the gender representation in the performing arts during the colonial era, several significant factors were identified. The first is that the concept of femininity comes to the fore during the Portuguese, Dutch and British administrations, over the concept of masculinity as represented in the visual arts. In paintings, carvings and sculpture completed in the Portuguese as well as the Dutch periods, the female performing artiste is given pride of place including the western female performing artiste, which is amply demonstrated by their costumes, bodily complexion and dance styles. Several factors seemed to have caused this change

The European romantic ideal that spread in the 1800s began to be reflected in art and literature and it had its impact on colonial administrations like Sri Lanka. What happened was that before the feminine qualities that were invested within the romantic ideal, the masculine ego was undermined.⁹⁰

It is seen that the 'ego'⁹¹ of the masculine performing arts is undermined during the colonial era and the females increasingly participated in religious rituals and performances on the public stage. According to literary sources on art during the Kandyan kingdom (1594 CE–1815 CE), women participated in dancing. Certain contemporary reports by overseas visitors throw light on this female representation seen in the visual arts. The Dutch visitor Spillbergen comments, beautiful girls dance pleasingly in the Kandy *Perahera*. Their upper body was bare, and the under body was covered with decked cloth (De Villiers, 1906). Knox, expressing a view similar to this, points out that women had to go naked from their waist upwards and that their dress must end above the knee (Knox, 1681:67). So, during the Dutch and British rule increasing numbers of women participated in the performing arts. So, by the end of the colonial era male-centred visual representation is seen gradually transmuting into the representation of the female body.

Although much information is found in literary sources⁹² about the female artiste and her practice of art, there seem to be some differences in the practical

⁹⁰ Interview (INT/SL/COL/05/M1)

⁹¹ Interview (INT/SL/COL/05/M1)

⁹² Dipavamsa, *Mahāvamsa* and sandesa poems

performance of art in society. Reed points out that the woman faced several challenges in dance performance. It is the question of 'honour' that the female performer faces: "Prior to the 1940s, Sinhala women with the exception of the performer of *digge natun* did not dance. Dancing as a profession was considered immoral, 'a trade fit for harlots'" (Reed, 2010:198).

In colonial Sri Lankan society where dancing by women was looked down upon as prostitution the performing arts seem to have been entirely male dominated. Nurnberger points out that the female artiste Vajira⁹³ together with Chitrasena⁹⁴ pioneered a change in this situation, and she adds "She became the first fully professional female dancer of the Sinhalese dance, above all of the Kandyan style, at a time when the traditional dance forms of the Island were dominated exclusively by male" (Nurnberger, 1998:137). A view like Nurnberger's about the male dominant dance tradition and the female performing artiste was also expressed by one of the interviewees:

Although the female dancer's body is attractively depicted in murals, sculpture and literature it never became a reality in practice. I joined on my own because I like to dance. One thing is that we belong to the *goigama* caste and so we are forbidden to dance. The other thing is I am a woman. That also prevents me from dancing. At the start, it was not easy to overcome both these obstacles. About 65 years ago, when I left the stage after a performance, I was shouted at as a 'harlot.' The day I got married, my aunt told my husband to check whether I was a virgin. I very well remember her telling, "how do we know what has happened to her while dancing in those groups"?⁹⁵

The discrimination suffered by the female performing artistes in the colonial period as pointed out by this interviewee seems to have continued up to the present day.

⁹³ Vajira Dias, the spouse of Chitrasena, who for the first time broke the ban and opened for women and girls the domain of the dance (Nurnberger, 1998:97).

⁹⁴ Chitrasena is the most important founder of the modern Sinhalese stage dance theatre and the founder of the first totally professional school of dance -The Chitrasena school (Nurnberger, 1998:119).

⁹⁵ Interview (INT/SL/COL/03/FM1)

During the three colonial periods, women of the Sinhalese-Tamil society seemed to enter the field of art slowly but surely (Reed, 2010). The main reason for this change was the British missionary education established in Sri Lankan society. With the opportunity for education without gender discrimination, women too could participate in the traditional arts. Even after independence from British rule, the Sinhalese-Buddhist government continued this system of education without gender discrimination and selected women for posts in the field of education, which provided the opportunity for women to engage in the practice of art. Because of the introduction of dance into schools in the 1940s and 1950s women have become an increasingly visible presence in the dance world, and the vast majority of dance students who aspire to become professional dance teachers are female, as Reed points out. (Reed, 2010: 198). Therefore, the traditional, male-centred *kankari* dance frees itself from the conservative perspective and finds a place in school concerts, private dance classes, governmental ceremonials, religious and secular processions, weddings and Buddhist temples (Reed, 2010:198). Hence, by the second half of the British colonial era male dominance in the traditional arts seems to have moved towards female artistes and the female dominance within the performing arts emerged.

7.2.3 The gender shift, gender synthesis and the post-colonial performing artiste

There are many important features in studying the performing arts and the artiste during the post-colonial era. The main feature with regards to gender is the breaking down of the conventional views on women and their direct participation in the performing arts. During the post-colonial era, while women asserted their dominance in the field of art there also arose social criticism against them in the sense that “Virginity is highly valued and unmarried women who live alone or away from their families arouse immense anxiety” (Reed, 2010:200).

So, the woman coming out of the conventional framework and participating in the arts amounted according to some sections of society, to her losing her virginity:

A woman dancing in those days meant wilful destruction of her character. It amounted to the demolition of accepted Sri Lankan tradition. It's a disgrace not only to oneself but also to the entire generation.⁹⁶

This became a key aspect of social criticism and it continues up to the present day as was illustrated in the comments of a person I interviewed. Of six women artistes who participated in the focus group five agreed with this view but one put forward a different view:

In society different opinions are held not only on women but on all matters. We cannot say one particular opinion is right. It's only a certain group who claim that women's character is spoiled by dancing. But they have forgotten that in our civilization women had been dancing since the Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa periods and that kings espoused it. So, it's a lie to say that women didn't dance because of such fairy-tale views. Women do dance since the past up to present times. Virginitly is there to prove one's purity to one's husband, not to make a public exhibition.⁹⁷

Accordingly, there is apparently no consensus in society on the female artiste and her virginitly. Reed points out that even by the 1990s the opinion of dancing women was not favourable. She argues that the taboo on wearing the traditional ves costume by women and taking part in the *Kohombā Kankāriya* that was prevalent in the 1980s continued up to the 1990s and women participating in *Kuveni Asna* and other *kankari* rituals was frowned upon by the artistes of the *Berava* caste (Reed, 2010: 201). In addition to the bringing of traditional *kankari* items onto the stage, the establishment of a powerful feminine performing arts tradition was an indirect result that took place during the post-colonial era.

This is seen in the colonial period, when the female dance artistes such as Chandralekha⁹⁸, and Vajira enthusiastically brought onto the stage a new art full of traditional feminine items instead of the ballroom dancing that was confined to the English-speaking women of the elite. Nurnberger is of the view that Chandralekha is the best example of this trend:

⁹⁶ Interview (INT/SL/COL/03/FM1)

⁹⁷ Interview (INT/SL/COL/03/FM5)

⁹⁸ The first female dancer who performed the Sinhalese dances on the stage, was J.D.A Perera with the stage name of Chandra Lekha (Nurnberger, 1998:121).

She had the courage altogether to break through the gender barriers, which barred the Sinhalese women from dance performance in front of the greater public. Ladies of her social class used to do ballroom dancing in the European style in Colombo, but stage dancing and Sinhalese ritual dancing styles were worlds apart in their social acceptability (Nurnberger, 1998:138).

The opportunity arose for women to create new forms of art to suit themselves while dances like the *Puja Natuma* and *Yuga Natuma* cast women in submissive and domestic roles that conformed to notions of the conventional feminine ideal (Reed, 2010:204). The post-colonial female artiste seems to have created a new trend to replace the traditional art. This tendency in the performing arts caused a clash between “modest womanhood” and the traditional “image of woman” and as Reed observes, “As they expand their spheres of influence within the field of dance, women must constantly negotiate their practice in relation to ideas of respectability and ritual purity” (Reed, 2010: 200). It is through this tendency that Chandralekha, Cecilia Kotelawala and Vajira Chitrasena pioneered the continuance of Sri Lankan up country dance, which was indeed a revolution in the Sri Lankan performing arts. They were able to maintain social acceptability and attract women from the urban and middle-class sectors. Nurnberger comments, “under the guidance of Chitrasena, (Vajira) grew up to be the founder and the first female interpreter of female style, that of the *lasya* of the Sinhalese up-country dance form (Nurnberger, 1998: 137). Therefore, it is seen that women directly engaged in the performing arts and contributed towards it, which up to then had been male-dominated. An important fact discernible here is that female performing artistes are used in advertising as a sexual object through the media:

With the arrival of the television, woman’s body has become a commercial article that supplies sexual satisfaction. In such trade advertisements, where the woman’s body is displayed, her breasts, hips, etc. are highlighted. And through that the female dancer becomes willy-nilly an article in the sex market with a price.⁹⁹

Therefore, it is seen that the female dancer inevitably becomes, through the modern media, a source that provides pleasure and sensuality. Because of the

⁹⁹ Interview (INT/SRI/NUG 01/FM1)

sexualisation of the dance through leisure culture, the practising female dancer receives a high price. Within this consumer culture the female body acquires a new cultural meaning and this “new interpretation” seems to be becoming established within Sri Lankan society:

Now concert organisers always ask me for the same kind of items. ‘The item where the girls danced wearing short sleeve jackets and short skirt.’ ‘The song sung by those beautiful girls.’ ‘I would like if you would give us the dance with the dress for belly dance style.’¹⁰⁰

So, the market seems to be attracted by the female body. How sexualisation has replaced the traditional female image can be seen in the frequent performances of salsa, ballroom and Bollywood dance, on the modern stage instead of the traditional upcountry, low country and Sabaragamu traditions. The description of ballroom dancing in western society as described by Rust that it is a “socially licensed sublimated promiscuity” (Rust, 1969: 125) and is seen in the case of Sri Lankan dance too:

The dance that was performed in the past seeking blessings of god has now become a sexual activity. In night clubs or dinner dances the female dance sells for a high price. There is very high competition. Which dance group enjoys the highest popularity among men? Who are the female dancers most suitable for clubs and night shows? Although this trend cannot be justified within Sri Lankan culture, it is unofficially accepted as a socially recognised phenomenon.¹⁰¹

But we must not forget the female artiste who contribute to this new performing trend while at the same time preserving the traditional art form. There are those who participate in upcountry, low country and Sabaragamu traditions and preserve traditional dance through schools, universities and *kalayatanas* while at the same time preserving the female image. According to Reed this art “has given women wide scope for interpretation and transformation” (Reed, 2010: 21). Hence, women have succeeded in performing the dances in the madu ceremonies, which were up to then limited to men, showing that there were skills that they too could perform, and they have also become the *Guru* (teacher) who transmits

¹⁰⁰ Interview (INT/SRI/NUG 01/FM1)

¹⁰¹ Interview (INT/SRI/NUG 05/M1)

that skill. This paves the way to attract learned, middle-class women of high caste to engage in the art, which was up to then limited to those of the *Berava* caste. Through this process, women now play a key role in the dance and through the mass media, have become a visual sexual icon.

An important fact regarding art in the post-colonial period is its sexualisation. An art with sexual orientation has come into existence replacing the traditional art, and “in the 1980s and 1990s some dances by women and by mixed-gender groups were becoming increasingly more sexual in their movements, costuming, and the themes”(Reed, 2010:212). The art that swiftly became sexualised was not confined to one gender, but both genders seem to have contributed towards the process:

There is a price for everything in the market. The price is determined on the value and the demand for it. Why does my performance receive a higher place in society? Look at the children in my dance group. They, both males and females, engage daily in body building exercises. They are boys and girls with beautiful bodies. Both groups put on make-up when they get on the stage. Both groups are attractive. I do my choreography to highlight their gracefulness. In short, I try to bring both groups on the stage in a sexy appearance. Actually, the demand is for this sexiness.¹⁰²

Reed’s description of this sexualisation in the Sri Lankan arts is significant, showing how far the traditional art has been sexualised. Reed points out those scholars of performance have noted while the number of women artistes has increased during the period, the sexualisation of dance often accompanies the transition from ritual to stage (Reed, 2010: 213).

The other important aspect of this sexualisation process is the emergence of the respective art as a positive factor in marriage. This is an aspect common to both Sinhalese and Tamil art. Describing the *arangetram* (the debut performance) of Bharatanatyam connected with the Tamil ethnic group, one of the interviewees a Bharata female dancer, observed:

The young woman who comes on the stage adorned with beautiful ornaments and catchy make-up looks truly like a goddess. The dance is appealing. Parents with young sons who attend these *arangetram* bring

¹⁰² Interview (INT/SL/COL/06/M)

marriage proposals to her. The reason is that in our culture one qualification for marriage is the competence in this dance. So, the *arangetram* is, in a way, like offering her skills before the marriage market. Quite often, the wealthiest young man becomes her husband.¹⁰³

This feature is clearly seen not only in Tamil-Hindu Bharatanatyam but also in Sinhalese-Buddhist art. Discussing this in relation to the marriage market, Reed describes the *kalaeli magallaya* (debut dance) as an occasion to announce a girl's availability and to display her for marriage (Reed, 2010: 212). Hence, art became freed within the colonial era from its ritual framework and came onto the modern stage as a popular form of art and it became a feature of the newly created marriage market.

In summary, during the pre-colonial era, the male artiste represented masculinity and divinity while the female artiste participated solely in religious rituals. This system changed during the colonial era with the shifting of the ritual art, which was up to then a male monopoly, to the females. This ritual art underwent several changes during the post-colonial era. A distinct feature of this change was that the ritual dance that was confined only to the males was now performed on the modern stage by females. Thus, it is seen that the male-dominant ritual art directly shifted towards the females. With this shift the women's contribution to the performing arts became further established and art also became sexualised. Within this sexualisation, the most important factor is how art had become a positive factor within the marriage market. Although there are several features noticeable about females, in the case of males it takes a different form. Particularly on the modern stage the contribution of the female artiste seems to have increased with the concomitant, social pressure on the male artiste deriving mainly from the 'homosexual' label attached to him. Thus, the masculine and divinity concept that was manifest during the pre-colonial era has changed into a system of sexualisation bound with femininity by the post-colonial period.

¹⁰³ Interview (INT/SL/BAT /01/FM)

7.3 Purity, impurity and ritual space.

The concepts of purity and impurity are important aspects in relation to gender in the Sri Lankan performing arts. The fact of the artiste being a male or a female becomes a powerful criterion not only in deciding purity or impurity but also in the actual participation in the performing arts. This concept of purity is seen within Sri Lankan society in a 'holy' or 'unholy' context. As Coward et al. state, the Sanskrit term *suddha* means purity (Coward et al., 1989: 9). This concept of purity is directly connected with the human body. It refers to the ideal condition of the human body or the most desired state of being (Coward et al., 1989:9). The body condition or the most desired state of being is important because the same factors apply in the case of the Sri Lankan performing arts. The monthly menstruation of a woman, having a child and attaining puberty are factors determining the participation in the performing arts and even visiting a place where such performances are carried out:

If a woman had visited a house where a girl has attained age, or she is having monthly periods, is within three months of giving birth to a child or had visited a funeral house, she cannot even enter a *maduwa*. All those things are having *kili* (are tainted with impurity) or else germs. There is no purity there. Earlier in our house there was a separate room to keep drums and *ves* boxes. Even my mother never entered that room. We are people dancing for gods. Only if we keep god's instruments, costumes, etc. pure we will receive his blessing.¹⁰⁴

In particular the concept of purity occupies an important place in Sri Lankan Hindu society. Just as the idea of 'purity' here relates to the individual and their body, it also applies even in the case of certain raw materials used in religious rituals. A similar idea of 'purity' seems to be present even in Indian Hindu society as described by Coward et al. One interviewee explained:

This female dancer bathes and cleanses herself before stepping onto the stage. Similarly, all things on the stage such as milk, sweets, flowers,

¹⁰⁴ Interview (INT/SL/BEN /02/M3)

lamps, and joss sticks, are extremely pure. Using such pure things is a blessing on the female dancer as well.¹⁰⁵

This idea of ‘purity’ and ‘impurity’ was transmitted to Sri Lankan society through the South Indian rule that established itself in Sri Lanka during the Polonnaruwa period. The Hindu religious influence and other means such as *Devadāsī*, and Siva belief, contributed towards this infiltration of the idea of ‘purity’ into the Sri Lankan arts. Certain features described by Madan (1985) regarding the *suddha* concept as it applies to Hindu society are also seen in the Sri Lankan arts and concerning the artiste:

Suddha and its opposite *asuddha* are attributes of animate beings, inanimate object and places with which a human being comes into contact in the course of everyday life. For example, prepubescent unmarried girl (*kanya*), water from Holy River, unboiled milk, ghee and temple are *suddha*. On the other hand, contact with certain kinds of human beings, animals, objects, food, substances (discharges from a human body) and place (cremation ground) etc. causes Brahmans and other upper caste Hindus to become polluted (Madan, 1985: 17).

Although many concepts like these seem to apply to female performing artiste, only limited concepts of ‘purity’ could be observed regarding male performing artiste. Hence, a male body could turn from a ‘pure’ state to an ‘impure’ state by the association with an ‘impure’ woman. The idea of ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ expressed by Coward regarding Hindu society is important. He points out how the low spiritual value of women becomes a key factor in determining ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ states. One of the artistes interviewed for this research points out:

There is no *kili* (impurity) in the male body if you hadn’t slept with a menstruating woman, haven’t been to a house where a childbirth has occurred, haven’t been to a house where a girl has attained age, haven’t been to a funeral house, that’s all.¹⁰⁶

This concept of purity which is of limited application in the case of the male body seems to apply strictly and broadly in the case of women.

¹⁰⁵ Interview (INT/SL/JAF/PER /01/M1)

¹⁰⁶ Interview (INT/SL/BEN /02/M3)

During menstruation, childbirth, and widowhood they are a major source of pollution, comparable perhaps with that associated with untouchables. In this light, women are seen as of a low spiritual value and little social worth (Coward et al., 1989: 20).

Therefore, an important point for discussion is how far the physical activity that is bound up with the gender of the Sri Lankan performing artiste affects their practice of art.

The concept of purity within gender discussed above is a powerful factor in ritual practice and it even determines the ability to visit a place where a ritual is performed. Paying attention to this aspect, Reed points out that despite Buddhism rejecting the notion of purity and impurity it has nevertheless taken root in the Sinhalese society. She adds that impure persons such as menstruating women and the families of those who have been touched by death are welcome in Buddhist temples but not in Hindu shrines or ceremonies for the gods. These impure women, adds Reed, have traditionally been prohibited from wearing ves headdress and participating in *Kohombā Kankāriya* (Reed, 2010: 201). It is therefore necessary to inquire as to how having a male or a female body and its purity determines access to places where rituals are performed.

7.3.1 Madu Ritual

In all three Sri Lankan traditions, namely Kandyan, low country, and Sabaragamu, the conduct of rituals, and participation and representation in them are centred on the male artiste. It was possible to participate in over twenty rituals of all three Sinhala dance traditions, namely, upcountry, low country and Sabaragamu during this research and no female artiste participated in them. Regarding this idea of impurity or pollution, Obeysekere points out that “pollution theory in Sri Lanka has obviously had to adapt itself to the ethos of Sinhala Buddhist Village Society” (Obeysekere, 1984: 15). The idea of ‘pollution’ in the Sinhalese-Buddhist village society is clearly seen in *madu* rituals. A *madu* artiste interviewed for this research pointed out that:

When we perform a *maduwa*, *kankāriya* or thovil ceremony we must abstain from eating fish and meat, drinking alcohol, and having sex with

women. Otherwise we have no right to perform the above. It will subject us to god's wrath.¹⁰⁷

A similar view is expressed by Obeysekera in his description of rituals. He draws attention to sexual intercourse and the taboos connected with it.

The prohibition on intercourse is a technicality easily observed, since these rituals rarely last more than thirty-six hours, during which time the priests are actively participating in the rituals. The chief priest is expected to, and probably does, abstain from intercourse for a long period (Obeysekere, 1984: 15).

These prohibitions are applicable to the male artiste or the *kapurala* conducting the ritual and women are not allowed to enter the *maduwa* or move with the priests. Although they can be near the *maduwa* as spectators, they are denied even that if they are menstruating, coming from a funeral house, or have recently had a child. Tender coconut leaves or mango leaves are hung around the *maduwa* or where the ritual is held to mark the boundary and only those free from pollutions can enter. The performing of rituals with such pollutions is considered disastrous. Obeysekere commenting on this concept says that all seriously believe in these *deva dosha* (diseases caused by gods) and that participating in rituals in an impure state would subject the person to *vas* (evil consequences), and would result in illness, accidents and disaster (Obeysekere, 1984:16). During the interviews a female dancer commented on this pollution (*kili*):

I don't have the chance to participate in the *kohombā kankāri* because of the main three reasons that I have a female body, I have my periods, and had given birth to a child recently. Moreover, as my husband is participating in the *kohombā kankāri*, he is living in his uncle's house away from us for the last seven days because he might otherwise be polluted. This pollution is the cause of many diseases from gods. Therefore, I am not allowed to go to the *madu* area although I like to do so.¹⁰⁸

Thus, it is seen that participating, viewing, dancing and singing, in a Sri Lankan *madu* ritual, continues to be a male-dominated art. Hence, the bodily functions of

¹⁰⁷ Interview (INT/SRI/WAR/PER/M1)

¹⁰⁸ Interview (INT/SRI/PER/MAH05/FE1)

a woman as discussed determine not only the participation of women in rituals but also the participation of men in rituals. Although this idea of gods and the connected idea of 'purity' is strictly followed in *kankari* rituals the position regarding Buddhist temples is quite different, and this will be discussed in the next section.

7.3.2 Vihara: Buddhist Temple

In studying the practice of art in Buddhist rituals, two striking features are noticeable, which are concerned with the performing of the arts and the opportunity provided to view it.

Both men and women participate in Buddhist rituals in temples. Various forms of *kili* (pollutions) such as menstruation, childbirth, and attending funeral houses, are not recognised in Buddhist temples. Women as well as men well as can attend Buddhist places of worship. A Buddhist monk highlighting this aspect pointed out:

In Buddhism there are no external *kili* (pollutions). External impurity in people, giving birth to a child, monthly menstruation, or death does not bar anyone from engaging in Buddhist rituals. *Kili* is in your mind. If one's mind is impure one has no refuge. All thoughts begin in the mind. Mind is supreme and all thoughts begin in the mind. If one acts or speaks with impure mind pain follows him like the wheel the hoof of the ox. So, what should be pure is the mind, not the body. No one is barred from visiting this place. There is no *kili* about the Buddha.¹⁰⁹

Therefore, in rituals held in Buddhist monasteries what is considered more important is not the 'impurity' or 'purity' of the body but the 'purity' in the mind of the person. Although there is no prohibition against women artistes it is mostly male artistes who take part in the performing arts held in Buddhist temples. In dancing and singing ceremonies such as *Satsathiya*, *Pansaliswasa*, *Suvisi viwaranaya* and in offerings and *pirith*, mostly male artiste can be seen taking part. In the field research, six out of such performances in Buddhist temples were done by males and in two, mixed groups of males and females participated in

¹⁰⁹ Interview (INT/SRI/ANU05/BHM 1)

items such as *pantheru*, *udekki* and *vannam*. In a discussion with a female interviewee it was revealed:

I am both a dancer and a musician. We are not prohibited at all in dancing, singing and visiting a Buddhist temple. There is nothing called *kili*. Unlike visiting a devale (deity-shrine) we can go anytime to worship the Buddha. But only a few women participate in such events because most of the offerings to the Buddha are held at night. So, a woman is unable to go for dancing and singing at night alone. Our culture does not approve visits by women at night. Otherwise, there is no prohibition as such by anyone against dancing and singing by women.¹¹⁰

Hence, in rituals held in Buddhist temples both men and women participate and what is considered more important than the concept of *kili* (pollution) in terms of participation, are certain practical problems. Important among these are women not getting permission from the family to venture out during the night or noon as such outings are sometimes fraught with risks. Therefore, even though gender does not seem to be an obstacle in the case of performing in Buddhist temples, it was observed that the percentage of male participants singing, and dancing was more than women. The main reason for this is the practical problems associated with participating in Buddhist rituals which begin at night and continue into the following morning. There is no obstacle at all for women to participate in them except that they are barred from such participation at night.

7.3.3 *Devālaya/Devāle*: Hindu Shrines

It is important to study how far physical phenomena like menstruation, sexual intercourse, childbirth, puberty and social activities such as attending funeral houses, and a puberty house, affect visiting *Devālaya* or participating in rituals held in them. Here, two divisions are noticeable such as Nātha, Vishnu, Kataragama, and Pattini, located within Buddhist temples and those located outside Buddhist temples such as Hindu temples. The accommodation of these *Devālaya* within Buddhist viharas was caused by Hindu devotionalism that came with the South Indian invasions. Describing this blend of Hinduism with the

¹¹⁰ Interview (INT/SRI/ANU08/FE01)

Sinhalese Buddhist religion Gombrich and Obeysekere observe, that “Hindu theistic devotionism (which is known by the Sanskrit term *bhakti*) has interacted with the Sinhala religion in the past” (Gombrich and Obeysekere, 1988:11). With the blend of this devotionism with the Sri Lankan Buddhism, there emerged a system of paying obeisance to Hindu deities within Buddhist temples: “All temples except one had installed in the shrine at least the four gods of this region; Vishnu, Saman, Vibhisana, and Kataragama. This indicates that after the temples were built, the monks made concessions to lay needs but in a way that stuck to tradition” (Gombrich and Obeysekere, 1988:103). So, across Hindu devotionism *Dēvālayas* for Nātha, Vishnu, Kataragama and Pattini were established in the Buddhist temples. In the case of the four *Dēvālayas* in association with Buddhist temples, Reed points out that although menstruating women and family members can visit a Buddhist temple “they are prohibited from attending deity shrines or ceremonies for the gods” (Reed, 2010:201). These *Devālaya* can be visited only after a certain time after the *kili* (pollution). Obeysekere points out that the pollution caused by *mas killa* (menstruation) remains for three days, *malvara killa* (menarche) for fourteen days *vadum killa* (childbirth) for thirty days and *marana killa* (death) for ninety days, and he adds that during this time those who have been in contact with pollution cannot participate in deva rituals (Obeysekere, 1984: 15).

After this period of prohibition both males and females can participate in rituals in *Devālaya* but only males can participate in the singing and dancing. A *kapurala* in charge of a *Devālaya* in a Buddhist temple pointed out:

This is a practice that comes down from the past. Only males can enter this *deva* house. Only males participate in singing, dancing and making *thevava* because there is no *kili* in them. But they must be careful at home, they must not get in contact with monthly periods.¹¹¹

Obeysekere discusses this fact where menstruating women are not even allowed to enter Hindu *Devālaya* in Buddhist temple premises let alone participate in the rituals. Special attention is paid to ‘*kili*’ caused by menstruation in women in activities in Hindu *Devālaya* located in Buddhist monastery premises and

¹¹¹ Interview (INT/SRI/WAR06/M 01)

subsequently only men participate in dance in such locations. However, this takes a different form in the case of Hindu *Devālayas* outside Buddhist monasteries.

In the Hindu *Devālaya* outside Buddhist temples the emphasis is on singing rather than dancing. Males play musical instruments and the women sing. The males play the mridangam and the flute and the thanksgiving songs for gods are mainly sung by women. However, in acts such as fire-walking, *kavadi* dancing, *kohomba kalaya* dancing, and seems to be common to both males and females. Even in these performances they must take care to avoid contact with *kili*. As one of the interviewees noted:

When we dance *kavadi* we dedicate ourselves to it (*pe venava*) for several days. We eat neither fish nor meat. We don't have sexual relations. We won't go home; and we dedicate ourselves to the offerings at the *Devālaya*. Then only do we dance *kavadi*. Even though we have it on our shoulders for several hours we don't feel it. That is because we have dedicated ourselves to it well.¹¹²

Thus, they engage in rituals without *kili* (defilements) as they have not engaged in any impure activities because they have abstained for several days.

Similarly, on the *Devālaya* premises all males engaging in rituals must perform with their upper body unclothed and in the process of ritual performance males must be on one side and the females on the other side of the stage. When the Chief Priest of the *Devālaya* was questioned on this, he explained that there is a code of convention connected with it:

Particularly, males who cleanse themselves by bathing and coming to the *Devale* must be with bare upper bodies is a convention. There are many reasons for it. One is equality. Dress is a symbol of affluence. When it is not there, all are equal. The second reason is that there is nothing to hide from gods. Then, by the way the *Devale* is built positive energy is absorbed through a naked body. That is why males always come with their upper body bare.¹¹³

¹¹² Interview (INT/SRI/KAT02/M1)

¹¹³ Interview (INT/SRI/JAF03/M1)

Though the males should participate with their upper bodies bare in Hindu *Devālaya*, the women should deck their hair with flowers and wear saris. Describing this, a female artiste who participated in singing in a Hindu *Devālaya* observed that:

We must be clean when we come to the *Devālaya* in a manner that deities would appreciate. We must also behave well. That's why we wear the sari covering our body. Decking the hair with flowers gives a sense of purity and fragrance. When you visit the *Devālaya* that self-control, fragrance and purity are necessary.¹¹⁴

Thus, a system is adopted regarding the dress of both males and females and it is the responsibility of both groups to participate without *kili*.

7.4 Gender Stereotypes related to participation in performing arts

Currently in the Sri Lankan performing arts several features of gender-stereotypes in participation are present in both Sinhalese and Hindu cultures. There are various traditions in dancing, singing and playing musical instruments which are bound with sometimes masculinity and at other times with femininity. It is proposed to discuss here the masculinity and femininity stereotypes in participation in various traditions connected to the respective Hindu and Buddhist groups.

7.4.1 Masculinity and performance

Here attention will be focused on how far various performing arts dominated by male artistes contribute to Tamil-Hindu cohesion. Accordingly, emphasis will be put on the *yakdessa* who conducts the rituals and his role, the mask dance, the drumming and the *ves magallaya* or *dorata vadeema* linked to the up country dance.

¹¹⁴ Interview (INT/SRI/JAF04/FM1)

7.4.1.1 The Yakdessa, Edurā, Kapurala and Sāmi

An item that distinctly points out the cohesion between Sinhalese and Tamils in the Sri Lankan performing arts is the role of the *yakdessa*, *Edurā*, *kapurala* or *Sāmi* because he is the person who conducts all rituals whether they are Sinhalese or Tamil. He helps in supporting anyone who comes to him seeking his protection irrespective of their ethnicity and he is also an intermediary linking the Sinhalese and Tamil ethnicities. In fact, one yakdessa observed:

We are devoted to the gods. Whether the person who comes to us is Sinhalese or Tamil is irrelevant. We succour everyone. Gods do not make any discrimination as Sinhalese or Tamil. We all are human.¹¹⁵

In the performance of rituals connected with the Sri Lankan performing arts the roles of *yakdessa*, *Edurā*, *kapurala* and *sāmi* enjoy a special place. Yakdessa and Kapurala conduct Sinhalese-Buddhist rituals while *sāmi* conducts Hindu rituals. Their entitlement for conducting the rituals and being addressed as *yakdessa* or *kapurala* is mainly bound with caste. Describing *kapurala* or *kapuva*, Gombrich and Obeyesekere point out:

There is some correspondence between the spiritual hierarchy and the human caste hierarchy of the specialists who act as their intermediaries. The *kapurala*, the priest for the ‘godlings’ comes from the dominant caste (in Kandyan areas normally the goigama) (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988:21).

However, *yakdessa* or *kattadirala*, the priest for the demons, is usually low caste (typically *Berava*). In ritual art, the character *Sāmi* or *Meniyo* is also significant. Sami is the Tamil form of the familiar Sanskrit word Svami and “The Sinhala Sami is a kind of urbanized, self-recruited priest” (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988:38). Female priests are also seen and they use the term *kapu-meniyo*, *kapu amma*. These “female priests are a novelty” and “the term is so new that to many Sinhala people it is still completely unfamiliar” (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988:38). Describing these exorcists, Kapferer states that they begin as apprentices at the age of six or seven under male supervision: “most frequently

¹¹⁵ Interview (INT/SRI/BEN O7 /M1)

they join the exorcist group (*kattiya*, *iyalle*) of their father or another close male relative for instruction” (Kapferer, 1983:60).

In Sri Lankan rituals, “the exorcists have always been male” (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988:13). This maleness is believed to be a power sufficiently forceful to drive away the demons. “Exorcists are male, and it is the power of their maleness which enables them to control the demonic” (Kapferer, 1983:140). In Sri Lankan ritual, maleness or masculinity is not only a qualification to conduct rituals but it has also given rise to a belief in Sri Lankan society that it commands authority to drive away the demons and grant redress to the patient. In discussing this aspect of masculinity and its authority the chief demon-priest of the *Devol madu* healing ritual observed:

Somehow, the demons possess women more than males. Now most of our healing ceremonies are for women. So, the group to cure diseases of women are males. Male *kattadi* (*yakdessu*) are not afraid of demons because demons always try to possess those of the opposite sex. So, from the past, males are the group who control demons and pray for gods.¹¹⁶

Thus, the maleness or the possession of a male body seems to provide the facility to control an unseen power and through it the authority to conduct rituals. Thus, this role of the *yakdessa* linked to masculinity is not only a ritual for males but also serves as an intermediary for cohesion between Sinhalese and Tamils.

7.4.1.2 Mask Dance

The Mask dance in Sri Lankan society seems to link itself with *Kolam*, *Sokari*, *Nādagama* or low country healing ceremonies. However, it must be kept in mind that in addition to this, Sinhalese-Buddhist performing arts, masks are used in *kooththu* plays and Tamil dance, which are the Hindu-Tamil performing arts. In the Sri Lankan Buddhist performing arts, the “Mask Dance” is identified as a dance exclusively for *Berava* or *Karava* men. Among such mask dance forms, *Sokari* of the Kandyan dance tradition, *Kolam*, *Nādagama* and *sanni yakuma* of the low country tradition (Callaway, 1829; Halverson, 1971) are the foremost. A notable feature here is that the *yakdessa* and *kapurala* or priest becomes not only

¹¹⁶ Interview (INT/SRI/BEN 07/M1)

the exorcist but also the one who dances in the ritual. Describing this aspect, Gombrich and Obeysekere observe:

The first part is characterised by seriousness, and during this period the priest wears his priestly garb and plays his role as priest. The latter part is full of humorous, dramatic episodes and the priest wears masks or the attire of the demon whom he represents (Gombrich and Obeysekere, 1988:181).

Many reasons were identified during the present research for why the mask dance was meant entirely for males within the Sri Lankan arts. It was found that the mask dance was included within the *madu* healing ceremonies and that only males participated in them.

Although the mask is very light, dancing for hours on end wearing it in *madu* healing ceremonies is no easy task. You must have the stamina for *Avesaya*. It's a symbol showing maleness. At the end of the *madu*, the *brerava* caste dancer becomes quite popular among village girls and becomes a youngster with the highest demand.¹¹⁷

The physical capability to bear the weight of the mask is a reason for the dance being exclusively for males. Having a male body and the lack of *kili* in the body are considered essential not only in participating in the mask dance but also in carving masks. So, the main reason for the males to engage in the mask dance and the carving of masks is that their body is free from *kili*. A mask carver describing this stated:

All tasks from the carving of masks up to dancing have to be done with complete dedication. You can't come into contact with *kili*. The carving of a mask to a body that is not visible to the eyes of gods and demons is no easy task. It is easy for us males because there is no *kili*. You must dedicate yourself to it. It's child's play to a person who has a pure body and mind.¹¹⁸

Therefore, it is evident that from the carving of the mask to the dance performance, the mask dance is bound up with the sense of 'purity' and is exclusive to men. The mask dance can be seen being performed in the

¹¹⁷ Interview (INT/SRI/HOR 01/M1)

¹¹⁸ Interview (INT/SRI/HOR 01/M1)

Kataragama *perahera* by both Sinhalese and Tamil artistes without any discrimination. Young Sinhalese and Tamil artistes participated in the *Nagaraksha* and Hanuman dances in the *perahera*. As one artiste commented:

I am Tamil. But I was brought up among the Sinhalese. Just as I learnt Tamil dances, I could also dance the *nagaraksha*. This is what that ought to happen in our country. We must learn to appreciate the other ethnic group and learn about their customs and manners. Then there wouldn't be any Sinhalese-Tamil problems.¹¹⁹

Thus, it is seen that the art of the mask dance is a powerful symbol of masculinity and purity and a performing arts that helps the process of cohesion between Sinhalese and Tamils.

7.4.1.3 Drumming

The art of percussion within the Sri Lankan performing arts is a process linked to masculinity but is also an art form that points towards Sinhalese-Tamil ethnic integration. This is firmly bound up with Buddhist-Hindu rituals and is practised without any ethno-religious discrimination. The art of drumming takes a distinct place in the context of the 'masculinity' of the artiste within the Sri Lankan Hindu and Buddhist performing arts. This is not only because the playing of the drum is a duty delegated to men but also because of the suitability of the drum for the male body. As Suraweera (2009) states, the dimensions of the longer drums (i.e. *yak beraya* and *geta beraya*) were traditionally measured at three *viyat*¹²⁰ and three *angul*¹²¹ in length, and one *viyat* at the diameter of the drumhead. Measuring the dimensions to such a scale and according to the individual, for whom it was intended, ensured that the drum perfectly suited the musician's body type and individualised the musician-instrument relationship (Suraweera, 2009:52-53). Moreover, the drum, which becomes individualised with the drummer (*Berakaraya*), is for use not only by him but also, after him, by his son and by future generations of drummers. Suraweera further discusses how this individualised drum is passed onto the next generation.

¹¹⁹ Interview (INT/SRI/KAR 05/M1)

¹²⁰ A *viyat* is the length from the thumb to the little finger (Suraweera, 2009:52).

¹²¹ An *aṅgul* is the length from the first joint above the palm, to the end of the index finger. (Suraweera, 2009:52).

The connection between the musician and their instrument still remains individualized and pervasively strong, even in contemporary times. An older musician, M.K. Babanis from the Sabaragamuwa tradition revealed to me that he sleeps next to his *davula* that he inherited from his father out of respect (Suraweera, 2009:53).

This relationship between the *davula* and the drummer cited by Suraweera is a striking example that shows the relationship between the drummer and his drum. In discussions with students studying the art of drumming for their degree several factors came to light. A singular feature was that all of the students studying drumming were males. The reasons for this were identified as “traditionally drumming was a task reserved for males”¹²², “drumming came from *madu* and *kankari* where only males took part”¹²³ and “the strength of the male body and the stamina needed for drumming were linked with the art of drumming.”¹²⁴ In a discussion with a group of female university students studying dance one of them commented:

I come from a traditional drumming generation. My father and my grandfather play the drum. But I opted for dancing because we cannot go for a *madu* or *kankari* to play the drum. It’s a task for men. The drum is not for us.¹²⁵

Viewed from this perspective, it is seen that drumming within all religious rituals and healing ceremonies in the Kandyan, low-country, Sabaragamu and Bharatanatyam traditions has been established solely as a task reserved for men. The main cause of this seems to be that “the rough male hand takes out the correct tone in the drum while the soft female hand finds it difficult to do so”.¹²⁶

7.4.1.4 Ves or Kala eli mangallaya – Investiture Ceremony

A two-fold description can be given about the *ves mangallaya in* connection with the upcountry dance. First, it is a masculine art linked to purity; and second, it is a process showing the adaptation of Hindu rituals and characters disclosing a

¹²² Interview (INT/SRI/COL 08/M1)

¹²³ Interview (INT/SRI/COL 09/F2)

¹²⁴ Interview (INT/SRI/COL 08/M1)

¹²⁵ Interview (INT/SRI/COL 09/FM2)

¹²⁶ Interview (INT/SRI/COL 08/M1)

blend of Sinhalese and Tamil ethnicities. The Sri Lankan *madu* healing ceremonies are also mainly male-centred. “It was specially the art of dancing that was reserved for the members of the male gender” (Nurnberger, 1998: 32). Describing the *ves bandima* and the initiation ceremony of the dancer and his ves costume Reed observes, “Traditionally, dancers were not permitted to wear the full ves costume until they had completed several years of training and had undergone the ceremony of the dancer’s initiation, known as ves bandima or tying of the ves” (Reed, 2010:42). This process of *ves bandima* happens only among male artiste mainly because it is a process considered sacred and free from *kili*.

The costume, specially the head-dress of the up-country dance priest is considered to be sacred and to possess magical powers and it therefore sanctifies before every performance (Nurnberger, 1998: 72).

What Nurnberger highlights here is the sacredness and the concept of purity relating to the process. The apprentice must keep himself away from women for seven days and he sometimes selects the temple or the *kalayatana* of his teacher for this purpose. Nurnberger observes, “On the seven days preceding the actual ceremony the candidate must keep himself away from the defilements (*kili*). This means that he shall not engage in sexual intercourse, shall avoid polluting occasions such as births, puberty rites of girls or funeral obsequies” (Nurnberger, 1998: 46). The *Jatava*¹²⁷ will be placed on the head of the apprentice, who observes these rites well, by his teacher in a Buddhist temple unseen by women. Later, the apprentice, decked with the *ves* dress and covered with a white cloth (*piruvata*), is led by his teacher to the temporary shed in the open known as *Ayilaya or Mal Yahana*:

He gazes into a bowl to see his reflection and washes his face. He then gazes at a lactiferous tree, and the teacher removes the white covering. The student then returns to the altars to worship while the teacher recites auspicious verses and invocations to the god (Reed, 2010: 42).

This process is like the puberty rites of a girl. In a discussion during the field research, the head teacher of a *ves mangallaya* revealed that a puberty rites ceremony is the second birth of a woman. “It’s a statement that she is ready to be

¹²⁷ A lacquered, wooden crown-piece in the shape of a *dagoba*, or Buddhist reliquary (Reed, 2010:41).

a wife, a mother. The *ves managallya* is like it because it's the second birth of the apprentice. It's an occasion that shows that he is ready to be a teacher, carry forward the art".¹²⁸ Therefore, the *ves mangallaya* of the apprentice is referred to as the "dance of displaying the light" (Nurnberger, 1998: 48) and can be identified as a special rites ceremony solely connected to the male artiste.

Breaking the traditional convention that a woman cannot even touch the *ves* costume, Chandralekha donned the *ves* costume and danced in 1941. This was the first occasion in Sri Lankan history that a woman had performed the *ves* dance. This was considered a hideous act by a Sri Lankan society that believed that a woman doing the *ves* dance would be subjected to the curse of the gods. People pointed out that her death after the particular performance was caused by the curse of the gods. Reed commenting on this adds "some told me she died on stage or shortly after performing on stage in the *ves* costume" (Reed, 2010: 239). Therefore, even in the modern day, the donning of the *ves* costume, using it, and dancing in it is confined to the male. One of the interviewees said "Anyone who ignores these customs will be subject to god's wrath because this is the dress of god Malaya".¹²⁹ Therefore, in the upcountry *kohombā kankāri* healing ritual, the donning of the related *ves* costume and dancing with it is exclusively a function for the male artiste and women are not only barred from wearing it but also from even touching it. This *ves thabeema* is done in a Buddhist temple and the Hindu and Vishnu temples located in the Buddhist temple are also drawn into it. Fruit is offered to God Vishnu and his benediction is sought, which clearly indicates the unity between the Sinhalese and Tamils. The chief dancer pointed out that some rituals included there were borrowed from the Hindu tradition by Sri Lankan society:

Most of the items in the *ves bandeema* are found in Tamil traditions. The plot is entirely bound with Malaya who is a Hindu king. Even the costume is borrowed from the Hindu society. Moreover, the coming out of the artiste with his head covered, looking at an ox, and breaking the pitcher, are entirely Hindu ritual systems.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Interview (INT/SRI/WAR 05/M1)

¹²⁹ Interview (INT/SRI/WAR 05/M1)

¹³⁰ Interview (INT/SRI/WAR 01/M1)

Thus, this *ves bandeema* in the *kohombā kankāri* ceremony implies masculinity and purity and it also reveals the Tamil-Hindu identity linked to Sinhalese-Buddhist rituals and also integration.

7.4.2 Feminine performing arts events and their contribution to Sinhalese-Tamil conciliation

All *kankāri* rituals in the Sri Lankan performing arts are male-centred but there appears to be a performing art related to women in certain religious rituals and on the modern stage. This next part of the chapter will discuss how conciliation is built up between Sinhalese-Tamil and Buddhist-Hindu through rituals performed at the Kataragama *Devālaya*, folk dances, *kanakari* dances and folk drama. Here attention is primarily paid to the *alatthi ammas* of the *Kataragama Devālaya*, and dance items such as *kuveni asna*, *bulat padaya*, the *Devadāsī* dance, and Bharatanatyam.

7.4.2.1 Alarathi/ Alaththi-ammās

Alarathi Ammas in Sri Lankan rituals could be taken as an instance where the cohesion between Sinhalese-Buddhist and Tamil-Hindu is apparent. Therefore, attention will be focused here on the role of *Alarathi Ammas* and the ethnic integration implied through them. Within both Buddhist and Hindu religious rituals, the God Kataragama and related rites and customs occupy an important place. On the one hand, it is an occasion which displays the conciliation between Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic groups, and on the other, the significance of the connected performing arts. In this context, *Alarathi ammas* occupy a significant role (see Appendix 24: *Alarathi Amma*). These *Alarathi ammas*, who can be seen at the Kataragama *Devālaya*, remind us of Indians. They have dedicated their life to God Kataragama. In the discussions held at the Kataragama *Devālaya*, it was possible to gather important information about the *Alarathi ammas* and their duties within the Kataragama *Devālaya*. In discussing the origin and evolution of the *Alatthi ammas*, an *Alatthi amma* participating in the relevant offerings said, “*Alarathi* is a Tamil word. Its meaning is love, blessing. God Kataragama had got *Alarathi ammas* as a gift. They have come to attend on Valli Amma when god Kataragama married her. Since that day, we are bound with the Kataragama *Devālaya*. Only women participate in this”.¹³¹ These *Alarathi ammas* and the

¹³¹ Interview (INT/SRI/KAR 02/FM1)

customs they follow at the Kataragama *Devālaya* are intriguing because the events are not open to the public. Explaining why these rites are not publicly performed, the chief *kapurala* pointed out:

Alarathi ammas have a special dress that consists of a short cloth to cover the breasts and checked white cloth to cover the lower body. The *kapurala* gives the lamp to *Alarathi ammas* who go to the *Devālaya* for offerings. There is a special rite they follow in that process. This system and its meaning are a secret from the past up to now. We cannot disclose it to anyone. Nor can we ask about it.¹³²

Hence it is not possible to see certain offerings made by *Alarathi ammas* within the Kataragama *Devālaya* which are exclusively performed by individuals of their clan. The *Alarathi ammas*, who are bound by this special rite, have a close relationship with the Kataragama *Perahera*. In the field research, on the Kataragama *Perahera*, I observed the following during one of these offering rituals:

The *Perahera* was about to start. Twelve *Alarathi ammas*, with their eyes lowered, appeared. They stood in a line in front of the *Perahera*. And with that the *Perahera* started. When *Alarathi ammas* were questioned as to why the *Perahera* was waiting for their arrival, they said, “Taking the tree cut from the jungle in the *Perahera* and bringing water from the Menik Ganga in the *nanumura mangallaya* is a task for us. All the *Alarathi ammas* join this *Devālaya Perahera*. You cannot hold the *Perahera* without *Alarathi ammas*. It starts only after their arrival. That is a custom coming down from the past. All twelve of us join this *Perahera*”.¹³³

In this activity, it is essential they must be clean when they participate in the *Perahera* and *Devālaya* rites. Otherwise they lose the entitlement to participate in the rites.

We normally do not attend funeral houses. *Kili* in childbirth houses is bad. It's the same with puberty *kili*. If we meet such *kili* we do not go to the *Devālaya* for three months. When we go to the *dev Devālaya* ala after the

¹³² Interview (INT/SRI/KAR 01/M1)

¹³³ Field notes. Katharagama Perehera (2016). Katharagama, Sri Lanka, [14th April]

lapse of three months we do so after cleaning the house and sprinkling saffron water. The reason is that we women are susceptible for *kili* all the time. We must be careful every month¹³⁴

So, as discussed in *Devālaya* (Hindu Shrines), *Alatthi ammas* too must ensure that they are free from *kili* when entering the Hindu *Devālaya* and participating in offerings. Although women are barred from performing religious rites in Hindu *Devālaya*, the situation is different in the Kataragama *Devālaya*, where the *Alarathi ammas* directly join in the religious rites. What is noteworthy here is the dedicated, life-long service rendered by Sinhalese-Buddhist women in a Tamil-Hindu temple. This is not a mere religious service but a performing act combining Buddhist and Hindu religiousness. They may, therefore, be described as a group that demonstrates ethno-religious unity breaking down ethno-religious barriers in a society separated by ethnic divisions. Among the men who perform rituals in the *Devālaya*, the contribution made by the *Alarathi ammas* can be considered a significant phenomenon in Sri Lankan performing arts.

7.4.2.2 Folk Dance

The act of *kolattam* performed by the Hindu-Tamil group in the north of Sri Lanka and *lee keli* performed by the Sinhalese-Buddhist group in the south (with sticks in hand) is the same dance. What is performed as *kummi* in the north and *kala gedi* in the south is also the same dance with pitchers in hand. So, within the Sri Lankan arts, folk dance is an art form that exhibits both femininity and ethnic harmony.

In describing femininity and the female performing arts attention is paid more and more in modern times to the traditional art as well as the folk dance and the allied sexualisation. Moreover, the performance of these folk dances seems to have become an exclusive function of the female artistes.

*Kulu netum and Goyam kapeema*¹³⁵, and *Kalagedi*¹³⁶, all these rural dances are bound with the grace of the woman. Can you imagine these arts

¹³⁴ Interview (INT/SRI/KAR 04/FM1)

¹³⁵ Harvest dance

¹³⁶ Pot dance

with male body? This art harmonises well with the woman's body and it also has stabilised itself by now as an art inherited by woman.¹³⁷

Quite apart from these folk dances being recognised as 'connected with women' Reed points out, "In the 1980s and 1990s, sexual themes and movements were often an aspect of staged Sri Lankan folk dances such as the Harvest Dance (Kulu Netuma), the Pot Dance (Kalagedi Netuma) and the Stick Dance (Li-keli Netuma)" (Reed, 2010: 213). The presence of sexual themes in this art has been the reason for it to be established as an art form belonging to women.

The charm that a woman displays, her coquettish smiles and movement of hips, have harmonised with the *kalagedi*, *Goyam kapeema* and *kulu* dances. The dance movements in those dances are meant solely for women. We males cannot do them. Because of their romantic nature only they can perform those dances.¹³⁸

Thus, within Sri Lankan performing arts, the folk dances *kalagedi*, *kulu*, and *li-keli*, developed to express sexual themes and have come to be recognised as art forms predominantly linked with women. Although these folk drama items are performed by women mostly during the Sinhalese and Tamil New Year in April, most media networks seem to present such items at any time of year with the aim of entertaining the viewers. A notable feature that came to light while doing this research is that a form of folk play with a fusion of Sinhalese and Tamil identities was quite popular. Particularly during the Sinhalese and Tamil New Year almost all television channels telecast Sinhalese and Tamil folk dances jointly presented by Sinhalese and Tamil women artistes. It transmits quite a valuable message to society about the Sinhalese and Tamil national unity.

7.4.2.3 Devadāsī : Divine bride who consecrates herself with dance

Although the *Devadāsī* system in Bharatanatyam is bound up with the Hindu-Tamil tradition, in modern Sri Lankan society it is not considered exclusive to it but has become an art that depicts Tamil-Hindu and Buddhist-Sinhalese ethno-religious co-existence. The Hindu Bharatanatyam adapted to Sri Lankan

¹³⁷ Interview (INT/SRI/MAH 02/FM1)

¹³⁸ Interview (INT/SRI/MAH 03/M1)

conditions, and the Sabaragamu *diggei* tradition have come under South Indian influence. As Dissanayaka points out:

The Polonnaruva period in Sri Lankan history is considered as a period where there was the most Hindu influence. The Hindu temples built during the period bear testimony for it. Perhaps, it was during this period that the *Devadāsī* dance styles performed in Indian Hindu temples (including Bharata Natya) proliferated (Dissanayaka, 1994: 309).

With this Indian inspiration, the Bharatanatyam established itself within Sri Lankan arts and Godakumbure comments on this trend as follows: “The *Sandesa* poems of the 15th century contain some details of dances conducted at temples dedicated to Hindu gods as well as in the Royal presence. The Savul *Sandesa* informs us that the dancers who performed at the Isvara Kovil were well-versed in the Bharata Sastra” (Godakumbure, 1970: 19). The dance and art discussed by Godakumbure and the relationship with women occupies a significant place in Bharatanatyam.

This dance with female contribution is not confined only to Hindu temples, and as Sircar points out, this process joined with Buddhist religious practice too. “Worship is here offered to the most worshipful always three times a day, by means of instrumental music in the highest key (pancamagata) together with Rambha-like Bhavanis¹³⁹ and Cetis dancing round wonderfully” (Sircar, 1971: 204). However, this *Devadāsī* system combined with the religious practice seems to move towards a new direction by the colonial era. Describing this new shift, Soneji points out,

Modernity of devadasis social and aesthetic lives not as “temple women”, but instead as professional artiste in a shifting colonial sexual economy, exceeding the trope of devadasis as essentially religious subjects (Soneji, 2012: 10).

Not only did this art that was confined to devadāsī combined with traditional religion enter a new path but as Soneji points out, the twentieth-century movement to transform devadāsī dance into Bharatanatyam involved the

¹³⁹ Bhavanis are the dancing girls attached to temples. Cetis are male-servants belonging to temples who perform certain menial services as well as join with the Bhavanis in singing (Sircar, 1971: 204-205).

recruitment to the art of non-hereditary (mostly Brahmin) women (Soneji, 2012: 54). The shift in art from devadāsīs to a non-hereditary class could be seen in Sri Lankan Tamil ethnicity by about 1930. Therefore, the dance combined with the devadāsī system confined only to women within the Hindu religious rituals occupies a special place in the Sri Lankan performing arts. The dance combined with the devadāsī system has turned into an item of entertainment, rather than a religious performance, on the public stage. The Bharatanatyam tradition linked to the devadāsī dance limited only to Tamil-Hindu women is now studied and practised also by Sinhalese-Buddhist women. In this instance, this art seems to have become a medium that brings together the Sinhalese-Tamil tradition and the Buddhist-Hindu tradition.

7.4.3 Sri Lankan Performing Artiste and the concept of Cross Dressing: Goddess and Rural Women

Within the Sri Lankan performing arts, Hindu-Tamil stories and characters have been adapted to suit the Sinhalese-Buddhists and the concept of cross-dressing may be taken as an example of ethno-religious unity. Hence, what is described here are the characters and performing art presentations made by Hindu-Tamil and Sinhalese-Buddhists, male artistes dressed as women and the ethno-religious unity that emerges.

In Sri Lankan performing arts there are several masculine and feminine items and there is clear information about the art of cross dressing. In describing this concept, the description given by Barrett regarding Drag Queen Performances in the west is particularly vital, “Drag queens differ from male-to-female transsexuals in that they do not identify themselves as women but as men who adopt feminine gender characteristics for the sake of performance” (Barrett, 2009: 250). This is applicable in the case of Sri Lankan art. The traditional male performing artistes dancing as goddess Pattini or Riddi Bisau in rituals dress as women and assume feminine characteristics in dancing as when portraying characters such as *Sokari*, *Lenchina* and the village damsels.

The matter that needs attention is the concept of “transportation” that occurs when a man disguises himself as a woman; in other words, the “temporary change” process connected with the characters. In the process of performing the rituals a

made-up, temporary characterisation change occurs and according to Schechner it is only for that moment:

In transportation, a person can fall into a trance, speak in tongues, handle snakes, “get happy” with the spirit or perform many other actions that result in experiencing overwhelmingly powerful emotions. But no matter how strong the experience, sooner or later most people return to their ordinary selves (Schechner, 2013: 72).

It is important to keep in mind the gender of the character the artiste is portraying and the temporary change he assumes rather than his biological gender. In studying this aspect, it is important to pay attention to the role of Pattini in *Devol madu* in the low country dance tradition, the seven Riddi bisau who appear in the *Rata yakuma* and the characters of *Sokari* and *Lenchina*.

7.4.3.1 Rata Yakuma and Riddi Bisau

Rata yakuma or the *Riddi yaga* in the low country dance tradition is a significant art in the Sri Lankan performing arts that depicts ethno-religious unity. This healing ceremony is held to enable women who do not have children to have them (*Dosaya*) and to protect pregnant women from the Demon Kalu Kumara and the seven female demons. The most attractive item in this healing ceremony is the “*Dolaha Pelapaliya*” or *Nanumura*.¹⁴⁰ Here, one of two demon priests’ dresses as *Riddi bisau* and comes to the stage and the *Nanumura*, or bathing in the river and afterwards getting dressed, is depicted in mime. Referring to the male-to-female transformation within this *Nanumura pelapaliya* or *Doloha pelapaliya*, Kapferer observes:

The dancer’s hair tresses are then combed out, oil applied, and a hair pin and comb set in place. Earrings and necklace are then worn, and bracelets placed on the arms. Eye shadow is applied, and the body is perfumed with sandalwood. The dancer stands up, places a diadem on his head, and tightly winds a white dress at his waist. The mime is completed by the actor taking a chew of betel and proudly admiring himself in a mirror (Kapferer, 1983: 227).

¹⁴⁰ Vide Chapter three, 3.3 Sri Lankan healing ceremonies

The male artiste imitates the role of *Riddi bisau* and he brings to the dance the grace of a woman. The *Nanumura* I observed in both the *Devol madu* healing ceremonies in the southern province of Sri Lanka were quite similar. Although at times there were differences in the dress, its colour and ornaments and the recitation of verses, the mime was identical. Reading the exorcistic dancer dressing himself in a woman's garments with *Gokkola* in the *Doloha pelapaliya*, Nurnberger speaks about its sacral and divine relationship. "Ritual gender transformation is also to be found in the dance rituals of the low-country where the exorcistic dancer dresses himself up in women's garments for the climax of the ceremony. All over the world, this ritual transcending of the gender differences is one of the methods to draw near to the ritual sphere of the sacral and the divine (Nurnberger, 1998: 46-47).

In my discussions with performing artistes about public responses to male artistes dressing as females and its influence on the practice of art by the artistes, the sacral and divine relationship was significant:

In the *madu* we dress up as a divine woman. Or goddess Pattini who was born in this world seven times. It's not all who can dress up like that. We must dedicate ourselves in body, limbs and mind. That's power; it's an honour for us. But when we dress up like that as women, do our dance and go home, the next day the children come home from school and begin to cry that they were booted by other children because I had danced in the *kankari* item dressed up as a woman. The present generation has no idea at all about its power, sanctity and glory.¹⁴¹

Although the male artistes dressing as women was considered an act of honour and sanctity in the past, in modern society the male to female transformation becomes a mere activity connected with sexualisation because the audience has failed to appreciate the main objective of the rituals. Apart from these artistes being the objects of mockery for cross-dressing, or being labelled homosexual, the idea that this cross-dressing performance of the ritual is meant to bless and protect the people seems to have been overlooked by the audience. In Sri Lankan performing arts the *Rata yakuma* and the *Riddi bisau* dance is significant in several respects. One is that it is a rare instance where a male artiste is allowed

¹⁴¹ Interview (INT/SRI/MAR 03/M1)

to dress up as a woman and act. The other is the importance given to an Indian Hindu story within the *madu* rituals thereby laying a foundation for Hindu-Buddhist cohesion. Thus, the *Riddi* ritual with the *Riddi bisau* may be defined as an art that depicts the ethnic cohesion within the Sinhalese-Tamil society rather than a mere ritual.

7.4.3.2 *Madu* healing ceremonies and Pattini dance

The other performing art item that may be taken as depicting Tamil-Hindu cohesion is the Pattini dance in the *Gammaduawa* healing ceremony. Among the Buddhist and Hindu deities in Sri Lanka, the Goddess Pattini is one of the most popular (Obeysekere, 1984; Sarachchandra, 1952). Obeysekere points out that the worship of the Goddess Pattini is most popular in the coastal regions of the western and southern provinces and in the province of Sabaragamuwa (Obeysekere, 1984:3). In field surveys centred on the Sabaragamuwa province where, according to Obeysekere, worship of Goddess Pattini is prevalent, I had several opportunities to view the *Gammaduawa* healing ceremony that included the worship of Goddess Pattini. As Obeysekere describes, “there were two major ritual expressions of the Pattini cult in this region. The most important ceremony performed by the Pattini priests was the “*Gammaduawa*” (Obeysekere, 1984: 3). In these *Gammaduawa* healing ceremonies, and *Devol madu* healing ceremonies in the low-country tradition, certain episodes related to Goddess Pattini’s life are depicted dramatically. Special mention may be made of episodes like *Amba vidamana*, and *Mara ippeddima*. With the *Pattini pada* or drum beats, seven artistes come onto the stage dressed as Goddess Pattini (see Appendix 25: Paththini Dance). The reason for the seven performers appearing in the Devil madu ceremony is that “Goddess Pattini was born into the world seven times.¹⁴² To depict those seven births, seven performers dress as Goddess Pattini. This is quite well depicted in the “pattini verses” and the “*Pattini Pada*” (drum beats) presented on the stage.

¹⁴² “First [She was] born from the *singural plant of the god Om*.

The flower, from the tear of the cobra, from the shoulder shawl[*uramala*], from lightning,

She said *namo*["hail"], worshiped the Buddha, and obtained permission [*vivarana*] from him

Come quickly Pattini, mother, lady, to the golden flower throne [*mal asana*]”.
(Obeysekere, 1984:81).

First from the tear of the cobra

From the dewdrop, from the mango

By the power of her journey in the boat

By the power enter O seven Pattini (Obeyesekere, 1984:123)

The performers who appear on the stage reciting such verses walk under canopies and on white cloth (piruvata) laid on the floor, which is meant to show her purity. Obeyesekere referring to the purity of Goddess Pattini says, “Pattini is a pure being, and the closest female human approximation of this idea is a virgin” (Obeyesekere, 1984: 456). The performer who depicts episodes from Goddess Pattini’s life wears such attractive ornaments as to protect Goddess Pattini’s supremacy and purity and exercises utmost restraint in the dance.

In his description of the *Gammaduwa* healing ceremony, Raghavan focuses his attention mainly on the procedure of performers dressing as women. As he points out:

The dominating figure in the entire ceremonial is the pattinihami, the kapurala, the priest in the outfit of a woman, a frilled sari, one end of which is thrown over the shoulder and a jacket. A white scarf covers the head. The feminine apparel is possibly reminiscent of the early days, when a real priestess conducted the ceremonials of the cult of the great goddess of feminine virtue and chastity. The pattinihami has a number of boy attendants dressed in white, a red sash round the waist and white wrapper on the head (Raghavan, 1967: 126).

It is not easy to mime the character of Pattini in this manner, which requires dedication and being free from kili. An artiste who played the role of Goddess Pattini in the *Devol madu* explained:

We can’t just come into the maduwa as Goddess Pattini. You cannot come into contact with any *kili* (pollution) for seven days. We must first take a vow for it. Otherwise, we’ll be subject to evil influences (*vas vadinava*). The day that you come to the maduwa as pattini devi you must dedicate

yourself by bathing with water mixed with saffron and lime. This must be done most respectfully.¹⁴³

It is thus obvious that in certain offerings and dances in both *Gammaduawa* and *Devol madu* healing ceremonies, the male performer dresses as Pattini *devi* with the utmost respect and it is noteworthy in Sri Lankan performing arts for several reasons. One is that it is a rare opportunity for the performer to act as a female character in the *madu* and *kankari* ceremonies dominated by male authority. This is important in the performing arts sphere as it is the one of the ritual occasions that the Sri Lankan society approves of a male dressing up as a woman.

7.4.3.3 *Sokari* and Lenchina: Portrayal of female characters in Sri Lankan Folk Drama

The Sri Lankan folk dramas such as *Sokari* and *Kolam* may be regarded as instances when an Indian story became established within the Sinhalese-Buddhist society, its 'Ceylonisation' took place and the depiction of Buddhist-Hindu cohesion. A special feature in *Sokari*, *Kolam*, *Nādagama* and *kuttu* drama (see Folk Drama section.), which are considered folk dramas, is the female characters portrayed in them. The male performer who comes onto the stage does so dressed up as a woman according to the characters described in the accompanying verses. The character of *Sokari* in the *Sokari* drama prevalent in the upcountry and the character of Lenchina in *Kolam* in the low country seem to occupy a prominent place in Sri Lankan folk drama (Sarachchandra, 1952; Goonatilleka, 1984; Goonatilleka, 1978). *Sokari* in the *Sokari* drama comes onto the stage dressed in a beautiful *osariya*¹⁴⁴ with ornaments. Moreover, the performer who dresses up as *Sokari* performs very attractively even the act of lulling the baby done after childbirth. Within the act *Sokari* performs in the arena, there is the intention of attracting young men towards her (Dissanayaka, 1994: 282). Spectators hurl jokes tainted with sexual nuances at the performers, who are dressed as women. I observed this in a *Kolam* dance in the Hambantota area:

On one side, there were over twenty young men between the ages of 16-25. They tell various things to Lenchina; whistle at her. Some among them invite her to their home. Lenchina winks at them. Again, the young men

¹⁴³ Interview (INT/SRI/AMB 04/M1)

¹⁴⁴ The *Osariya* is the national costume of Sinhala women.

hoot. It appeared that the drowsiness among the crowd was removed by Lenchina. Over thousands of people who were gathered around the *maduwa* seem to have got a new energy. Lenchina seems to have awakened the sleepy young men and revitalised them and taken the *Kolam maduwa* to a new ambience ¹⁴⁵

Characters like *Sokari* and Lenchina seem to become sexual objects on the stage. The reactions of the audience to them are full of sexual nuances. The performer continues to portray the character as a woman without a pause encouraging the audience. Regarding the male performer transforming himself into a female character, Butler's comments on Drag Practice may be adapted to suit the Sri Lankan performance. "Drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity" (Butler, 1990: 186). There are two main noteworthy facts regarding the characters of *Sokari* and *Lenchina*. The first is the 'imitation' or 'outer gender' expression of male artistes who take on the role of female characters. The second is the 'original' or 'outer gender' expression of the male artiste although he acts in the role of female characters (Butler, 1990:187). It was possible to get a clearer idea about this dual "outer" or "inner" or "imitation" or "original" gender of the performing artiste during the field research.

Sri Lankan society is male-centred. In short, male dominated. The gender in Sri Lankan society is male. So, in that male society, a male dressing up as a woman is a serious offence against social convention that is never condoned. But the only place where that offence is forgiven is the *kankari maduwa* or the *Kolam maduwa*. Here the masculine male body turns into a feminine female body. Although he becomes a woman, he has a male body. It's not an obstruction for his heterosexuality. Even the spectators approve of it. So, the real body of the female character of *Sokari* or Lenchina on the stage belongs to a male body. He portrays her with his body. It's not an obstacle to 'his' concept of 'himself'. What really happens there is an imitation by 'him' of 'her.'¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Field notes (Hambantota *Kolam Maduwa* (2015). Hambantota, Sri Lanka, [23rd April]).

¹⁴⁶ Interview (INT/SRI/THO1 /M1)

This characterisation is an instance where a practice not approved of by Sri Lankan society is accepted within the performing arts. The *kankāri maduwa* or the *Kolam maduwa* has transformed the act of dressing up by a man as a woman, not generally accepted by Sri Lankan society, as an approved or sacred activity.

7.5 When men dance vs when women dance

Just as heavy responsibility is cast on the male artiste in Sri Lankan traditional rituals and the performing arts process, he is ridiculed on the modern performing arts stage. How the Sinhalese and Tamil male artistes join hands in overcoming this negative attitude and how through it the ethno-religious unity is forged is obvious. Hence, what is described here are the challenges that they have to face due to gender norms and how they overcome them. There were many challenges I had to face as a male performer who, as a young boy of five years of age, went to the *guru gedera* to learn upcountry, low country and Sabaragamu dance traditions, drum beating, and the Tamil dance tradition Bharatanatyam in India and who, to date, still undertakes training in those fields. The present theme of 'when men dance' is looked at from my own personal experiences and the data I have gathered during this research. An attempt is made here to examine the gender norms existing in the Sri Lankan performing arts, and the challenges male as well as female artistes must face regarding gender within those performances.

7.5.1 Gender norms: When men dance

"What are you doing, Stephen?" asked his mother. "I am pliéing like Theresa does to dance classes." "You don't want to do that," she said. Stephen was puzzled. I do, he thought. "Mum, can I go to dance classes?" His mother's mouth opened wide. "Certainly not. Real boys don't go to dance classes" (Magorian, 2002: 6).

Stephen's wish to become a ballet dancer in "Jump", the children's story by Michelle Magorian, is rejected by his mother due to her conventional viewpoint that real boys do not dance. Describing this gender complex, Carbett points out, "It is impossible to speak about masculinity in one voice, no matter how polyvocal.

Boys are always more than the category that is masculinity. Gender is rarely, if ever, totalizing” (Corbett, 2009: 15). Therefore, the male body, bound with the concept of “masculinity,” engaging in dance, seems to be a challenge to the concept of “masculinity” attracting intense social pressure. This is because dance becomes an obstacle to the ideal of a “real man” (Risner, 2009: 61), namely “Unchecked traditional values of masculinity” meaning “emotional detachment, suppression of feelings, feigned bravado and self-confidence, dominance, aggression and valorized individual achievement” (Risner, 2009:6). The rejection of the practice of performing art or dance conforms to the ideal of a ‘real man’ “Avoiding all that is feminine, homosexual or unmasculine to any degree” (Risner, 2009: 62). This also applies within the Sri Lankan context:

What I wanted was to become a good dancer. But my parents wanted to make me a doctor. Instead of sending me to a dancing class they sent me for training in rugby or cricket. So, my dream of becoming a dancer temporarily faded. But after becoming a doctor I began to dance.¹⁴⁷

Therefore, masculinity bound up with dance and the male dancer seems to play a radical role in the Sri Lankan socio-cultural discourse. Burt, in discussing this relationship between dance and the radical role, argues that “Dance is an area through which, as embodied beings, we negotiate the social and cultural discourse through which gender and sexuality is maintained” (Burt, 2009: 150). Describing the gender and sexuality linked with dance, Burt observes “the way normative gender ideologies maintain inequalities between the sexes by reinforcing the idea that masculinity, but not femininity, is an unproblematic norm” (Burt, 2009: 150). There are two noticeable factors regarding the Sri Lankan arts. The main factor is the major contribution of females in the dances, outside the *kankari* rituals, and the concept of femininity. The second is the strong concept of masculinity connected with the traditional arts. As a traditional *kankari* dancer, a male performer enjoys respect from society (This is further discussed in 7.4.1.1 yakdessa). Thus, it is seen that “male dances” in *kankari* or the male-dominated *ves natum*, *telme* and *devol*, promote a masculine ideology and the *ves natuma* in the upcountry tradition is identified as a *tandava* or “hyper-masculine” dance. In addition to this up country *tandava* or hyper-masculine dance, the male artistes

¹⁴⁷ Interview (INT/SRI/COL 12/M1)

present Bharatanatyam, which is *laysa* in form, in a hyper-masculine manner. Male artistes of both Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic groups seem to perform this *tandava* dance of Hindu-Tamil origin.

Certain Sinhalese-Buddhist and Tamil-Hindu male performers within Sri Lankan society in particular seem to blend this traditional dance with the modern western dance and create a new masculine Bharatanatyam dance tradition. One performing artiste pointed out:

A male who dances in modern society is looked down upon. We all, Sinhalese and Tamil, have joined together to belie this opinion. Bharatanatyam is branded as a dance to be performed only by women. It is because the origin, dance movements and make-up emphasize femininity. But we have given a new interpretation to this beautiful dance. We have created a new form by adding vitality for the dance movements or a style that is compatible with a male body. This has been created in such a way as to emphasize its '*tandava*' form. Look at this dance troupe; all are males. We are Buddhist and Hindu. We are Sinhalese and Tamil. But we have given a new interpretation to the Bharatanatyam.¹⁴⁸

So, the femininity concept in the Bharatanatyam dance has been given a new interpretation as "hyper-masculine" and the male artiste has successfully propagated the idea that it is appropriate for him to study and practise it.

Thus, Sinhalese-Buddhist and Hindu-Tamil artistes have joined together and engaged in art to disprove the myth that dance is primarily a female art form (Risner, 2009: 58). Similarly, they have succeeded in meeting this challenge and through it have achieved Sinhalese-Tamil and Buddhist-Hindu ethno-religious unity. And this ethno-religious integration seems to be a source of strength to them to face the negative mind-set in society.

¹⁴⁸ Interview (INT/SRI/COL 06 /M1)

7.6 Conclusion

In terms of gender categorisation in the performing arts of Sri Lanka, there are several forms that could be categorised as either masculine or feminine. Just as it is obvious that the performing arts consist of unmistakable features and dances and music that could be termed masculine or feminine, they also seem to contribute directly towards ethno-religious cohesion between Sinhalese and Tamils. Traditional arts including the *madu* ritual with dance and music are centred on the male performer while folk dance and other dance modalities on the modern stage are mainly centred on female performers. Similarly, the male artistes can be seen acting the roles of rural women and goddesses within the ritual system and this is the only instance where Sri Lankan society allows a male artiste to dress up as a woman. The only reason for this is that all ritual systems are recognised as a process with divine power for protecting agriculture, and livestock, in the rural society. Similarly, public beliefs around the male performer or the female performer, depending on whether the performance is traditional or modern, seem to be an important factor in terms of gender in the presentation. Therefore, in the present day, the male-dominated performing art is turning into a female-centred art. Another important factor to note is that the male artistes seem to turn towards a modern art stream rather than the traditional art. Hence, a genderless art that goes beyond the traditional gender image or gender division seems to be emerging.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to show how the findings in this research add an original contribution to the existing knowledge. At the same time, the limitations that were experienced in this research and further avenues for research are also discussed.

The main objective of this research was to examine the role and influence of Sinhalese-Buddhist and Tamil-Hindu artistes on key issues such as caste, ethnicity and gender in ethno-religious division. As shown in Chapter One, the following research questions were formulated based on caste, ethnicity and gender.

(1) Research **Question one:** What influences do performing artistes have in the construction of the socio-cultural norms of caste, ethnicity and gender?

(2) Research **Question two:** What is the potential of Tamil-Hindu and Sinhala-Buddhist performing arts for promoting social and ethno- religious cohesion?

To find answers to these research questions, an ethnographic method was adopted for interviews, focus groups, recorded performing rituals, and participation in rituals as a performer, and observer, using both insider and outsider perspectives. To analyse the data obtained, a ‘thematic analysis methodology’ was used, and a summary of the key findings obtained is discussed hereafter.

8.2 Key findings

The first of these key findings is the performing power hierarchy in the performing arts that derives from the caste of the artiste. According to the Sri Lankan caste hierarchy, the performing artistes’ castes, namely, *Berava*, *Kinnara*, *Karava*, *Paraiyar*, and *Nattuvar*, are the lowest. But they derive performing power in the performance of rituals.

Particularly in Sri Lankan society, the artiste seems to come under social, cultural, economic and political oppression because of their caste. So, they employ art connected with their caste as an outlet for that pressure. The ritual art practice enables the artiste to harshly criticise the injustices committed by the

officers of the higher castes in Sinhalese society. Through the *kohombā kankāri* healing ceremony or through folk drama such as *Kolam*, and *Sokari*, the performing artiste of the oppressed classes can scoff at such officers of the Sri Lankan ruling class such as the *Arachchi*, *Vidane*, policemen, and physician in their presence. Therefore, in Sri Lankan religious rituals, the performing artiste becomes not only a social crusader but also seems to regain through his/her art the social power, which he/she has been denied.

The second key finding that emerged in this research is the release of the performing arts from hereditary castes such as *Berava*, and *Kinnara*, which offers an opportunity for those of other castes as well to study and perform it. Especially, performance of rituals such as dancing, singing, and music, was a *rajakari* system exclusive to castes such as *Kinnara*, *Oli*, *Karava*, *Paraiyar*, and *Nattuvār* headed by the *Berava* caste. A person of a caste outside the above performing such *rajakari* offerings would make him vulnerable either to ostracisation from his caste or to be pushed down to a lower caste, which was the case until the Kandyan period. However, this social system underwent a change during the colonial period owing to social, economic and political changes and those in the higher castes too now seem to participate in such traditional art forms. Particularly, Chitrasena, a Sinhala-Buddhist artiste of the *govigama* caste breaks the prevalent social ideology of the caste-linked art and pioneers the study, performance and teaching of such traditional art forms. Thus, traditional art exclusively performed by the low castes opens its doors to other castes as well and through school and university education, it becomes accessible to all social groups.

The other key finding is the emergence of a discourse about a fourth art tradition. In studies of the Sri Lankan performing arts, three Sinhala-Buddhist traditions, namely upcountry, low country and Sabaragamu, are usually identified. But the fact that there is a Tamil-Hindu art tradition has been lost sight of. However, within the Sri Lankan performing arts, the contribution made by the Tamil-Hindu arts to the Sri Lankan arts is in no way negligible. This influence of Tamil-Hindu arts on Sinhala-Buddhist arts and rituals is evident in the costumes, singing, music, make-up, patterns of beliefs, modes of offerings, and dance styles. So, this research identifies the Tamil-Hindu arts as a significant fourth art tradition along with the upcountry, low country and Sabaragamu traditions.

This research identifies the arts related to the Tamil-Hindu nationality as one of the main representations of the Sri Lankan performing arts. Therefore, one of the main findings of this research is that the Sri Lankan performing arts consist not only of Sinhalese arts, but performing arts born out of a Sinhalese-Tamil synthesis. As discussed in Chapter 6 there is diversity between art of respective ethnic groups in rural and urban areas. In rural areas it is observable that Tamil art is given the cold shoulder by the Sinhalese and Sinhalese art by the Tamils. However, in urban areas there seems to be reconciliation between Sinhalese and Tamil art. The presence of this perception in urban areas instead of the rejection of each others' art in rural areas is significant because it opens a door towards uniting the respective ethnic groups. Therefore, instead of categorising arts as Sinhala-Buddhist or Tamil-Hindu, this research identifies a Sri Lankan art tradition. The identification of an art that is free from ethnic labels such as Sinhalese or Tamil is vital in the context of reunification of the two ethnic groups of Sinhalese and Tamil, who were separated by a over twenty-five years civil war, and to promote social, religious, and ethnic cohesion. It is also obvious that the contribution made by women artistes to this social, religious and ethnic cohesion is substantial. The role of women artistes to adopt the performing arts as a medium to strengthen 'Sri Lankan arts' without a Sinhalese and Tamil distinction is indeed commendable.

The final key finding that emerged from this research is the shifting of the traditional gender power in performing arts. All religious rituals in Sri Lankan performing arts are male dominated. The person, who conducts and participates in *madu* ceremonies such as *kohombā kankāri*, *devol madu*, and *pahan madu*, must be a male performer. The ritual gender power wielded by the male artiste seems to shift entirely into a female power in the performing arts performed on the modern stage. The dancing, singing and music items like *bulat padaya*, *kuveni asna*, *pattini*, *yahan dekma*, and drumming, which are related to the *madu* rituals, are being brought onto the modern stage by women. As well as bringing the art, which was exclusive to the male artiste onto the modern stage, they also seem to contribute in teaching the traditional arts. The entire monopoly of the performing arts presented on the modern stage, traditionally by men, seems to have fallen to the female artiste. Thus, two streams of Sri Lankan performing arts, especially the monopoly of the *madu* rituals like *kankari*, traditionally

performed by the male artiste, and the performing arts presented on the modern stage, are now performed by the female artiste.

8.3 Limitations of the study

In this research process, there were certain challenges and limitations. The first was the difficulty in identifying the visual arts or the figures of dancers, singers and musicians in the Buddhist and Hindu monuments, which have borne the ravages of sun and rain for over two thousand years, and are decaying. Some of them were so badly damaged that they were beyond recognition. So only those sculptures, paintings and carvings that could be identified were utilised for the present research. As neither the Sri Lankan Department of Archaeology nor the Cultural Department had any information pertaining to the damaged monuments, only the available resources were used in the research.

The second challenge was the deciphering of stone inscriptions, pillar inscriptions, and *sannas* that could be used for the identification of the socio-cultural relationship of the performing arts and artiste. In particular, as most stone inscriptions belonging to the Anuradhapura period were written in Prakrit, I did not have the opportunity of reading them personally. Therefore, I had to depend on Buddhist monks proficient in Prakrit as translators.

A further limitation was the difficulty in the collection of resources such as manuals, and palm-leaf books, regarding the Sri Lankan performing arts. In visiting Sri Lanka to conduct the research, I was able to stay no more than a month at a time in Sri Lanka on visa. Therefore, only a limited number of palm-leaf books were used in this research. And although it was possible to compare those palm-leaf books on Sri Lankan performing arts with those available in museums in England, it should be stated that there are many palm-leaf books with teacher lineages that could not be used in this research.

In Sri Lankan society subjects such as gender, and caste, are not openly discussed and are considered quite sensitive issues. In particular, a woman is barred from discussing subjects such as gender, caste, and ethnicity, with a man and it is well-nigh impossible to encourage them to participate in such a discussion. However, as a performing artiste and a dance teacher at university level, it was possible for

me to discuss such issues with them most successfully. As such, they treated me more as a performing arts teacher than a researcher. Consequently, the difficulty in getting the participation of female artistes was resolved.

8:4 Possible areas for future research

Attention is given here to certain research areas that could be further developed. The first is the possibility for second or third generation Sri Lankans following the war to undertake research on Sri Lankan arts. As a Sri Lankan citizen, I experienced the civil war that dragged on for over twenty-five years and witnessed the way that Sri Lankans separated into two groups as Sinhalese and Tamil and fought each other. I saw with my own eyes how people were killed by bombs or gunfire. I also saw how, as a result of that civil war, the arts separated into two groups: Sinhalese and Tamil. Although this ‘first person experience’ helped me in this research, the war experiences or information relating to the separated Sri Lankan society is but a remote experience or a mere ‘historical story’ for the second or third generation. Thus, it seems possible that they will be able to view that time with a new perspective with regard to gender, ethnicity, and caste, within Sri Lankan performing arts.

Another important field of research for future researchers would be the performing arts linked to the Sri Lankan diaspora. As no research has been done hitherto on the performing arts of the diaspora, future researchers would have the opportunity to look into aspects of gender, caste and ethnicity in the arts. It would also provide the opportunity to compare the arts of the diaspora with homeland arts. A possibility quite evident in this connection is the research on “glocal” (Kraidy, 1999) arts that originates from the link between the global influences of the diaspora arts with the homeland arts.

Therefore, several key findings were possible through this research and it was also possible to mitigate the limitations and challenges involved. This contributes to what Sri Lankan arts are doing in relation to the shaping of the socio-cultural norms relating to caste, ethnicity and gender.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Consent Form

Dear Participants,

Research Project Title: A comparative study of the performing artiste in Sri Lanka and its relevance to ethno- religious harmony.

Researcher's Contact Details: **Winojith Sanjeewa,**

Doctoral Researcher,
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First, I thank you for agreeing to contribute to this research. This Consent Form will help you to understand the objective of this research and me to ensure that you will contribute to it. Please read the information in the Form carefully and sign it as a mark of confirming the information therein.

1. **The main objective of the Research:**

The main objective deals with the Sinhalese-Buddhist and Tamil-Hindu performing artiste and it will define how caste, ethnicity and gender become key issues in the ethno-religious division. Secondly, how the performing artiste overcomes caste, ethnicity and gender issues through their practice will be discussed and how in overcoming such obstacles it could contribute to improved ethno-religious cohesion in the wider Sri Lankan society.

2. **Eligibility and Requirements of Participants:**

- It is necessary to identify you as belonging to the Sinhalese or Tamil ethnic group and as belonging to Buddhist or Hindu religious group.
- You must be a person conversant with Sri Lankan performing arts and religious rituals.

In this research a few questions regarding caste, ethnicity and gender linked to Sri Lankan performing arts will be referred to you and it is expected that you will answer them truthfully according to your understanding and experience. However, you have the full right to avoid answering them if you are unable to do so. Similarly, audio recordings, video recordings, and photographing will be done with your prior approval and will be done so as not to reveal any personal information or your identity. These will be kept most securely and only my supervisor and I will have access to them. Each dialogue will last for about one or one and a half hours and you may stop at anytime if you desire.

Within this research there are no risk factors whatever and even your identity will be removed from the data. Accordingly, you will remain anonymous throughout.

I thank you once again for expressing your willingness to voluntarily participate in the research. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Winojith Sanjeewa

Date:

For participants:

I have read the contents in this Form carefully and understood them and I approve /do not approve the following matters.

- (1) I have read carefully and understood the contents of the Form and I agree to participate in this research voluntarily.
- (2) My participation is purely voluntary, and I do not expect any payment or reward.
- (3) Similarly, I have the right to withdraw at any time without giving any reasons whatever.
- (4) I was fully explained why photographs, videoing, and voice recordings used in this research are taken.

(5) I am aware that the information given by me is deposited very carefully and that my identity will not be revealed in the process and that such data will be used exclusively for this research and publication.

(6) The interviews, focus groups, video recordings, audio recordings and photographs, etc. used for collecting data for this research are quite transparent and I hereby express my consent and put my signature in approval thereto.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

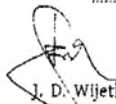
Appendix 2 : Permission letter from the Department of Archaeology

<p>12/09/2017 09:11am</p> <p>දුරකථන අංකය Telephone No. 011-2695255</p> <p>සන්නිවේදන අංකය Director-General's Fax 011-2695253</p> <p>E-mail: www.archaeology.gov.lk</p> <p>Web site: www.archaeology.gov.lk</p> <p>දුරකථන Telegrams: Piravid.</p>	 <p>පුරාවිද්‍යා දෙපාර්තමේන්තුව දෙපාර්තමේන්තුව DEPARTMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGY Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka</p>	<p>#539 Page 01</p> <p>අයදුම් අංකය M. No. <u>D.Arch/No/Pro/Permit</u></p> <p>දිනය Date <u>2017.09.17</u></p> <p>පිටුව Page</p>
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Permission for Movie & Still Photographs

With reference to your letter 09/08/2017,
 I hereby authorized to Kanishk Sanjivana Doctoral Researcher,
GA MA AFHEA York St York University and Mowat Walk York.
 to film - video/ photographs the archaeological sites from stated below
 under the following conditions.

1. The Pictures are taken in the presence of an authorized department officer and subject of restrictions he may impose in the public interest.
2. No persons in disrespectful attitudes are included in the pictures.
3. No damages of any sort to the monuments in the course of being filming.
4. Not allowed to film in the Archaeological museum.
5. No pictures are taken of places where excavation and conversation work proceeding.
6. The authority is generally governed by the restrictions imposed on the regulation No. 45, 46, 47 & 48 under the Antiquities Ordinance, No. 09 or 1940.
7. The pictures and films which are taken under this permit are not authorized to use any publication or any commercial purpose until our approval is obtained.
8. A copy of the final production of the above programme under this permit should be submitted to this department for observation.
9. When filming a protected monument you should get permission from its owner.
10. In case of filming by aircraft on the above site/ sites do not allow flying below 500m. from the ground level.
11. The director General empowers to withdrawn this permission at any time and you are not liable to claim.
12. This permission is valid from September 2017 to April 2018
13.


J. D. Wijethillake
 Acting Director (Promotions)
 For Director General of Archaeology

sites
 Anuradhapura
 Polonnaruwa
 Yapahuwa
 Lankathilaka
 Ambekka
 Kandy
 Colombo
 Site in South, East and West

- Copies :**
- i. Regional Deputy Director - f.n.a. pl.
 - ii. Officer in Charge (Archaeology) - f.n.a. pl.
 - iii. Central Cultural Fund - f.n.a. pl.
 - iv. Galle Heritage Foundation - f.n.a. pl

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Appendix 3 : Semi-structured interview questions

1. First, can you tell me about your ethnic, religious and performing arts background?
2. What do you think about Sri Lankan ethnic and religious concepts?
3. What do you think about ‘Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism’ and ‘Tamil-Hindu nationalism’?
4. What is your opinion about the Sri Lankan caste hierarchy?
5. To which tradition does your dance tradition belong?
6. What do you think about rajakari linked to performing arts and caste?
7. Is there any hereditary connection with your dance/drumming?
8. What do you think about the traditional guru parampara educational process and university syllabuses on performing arts?
9. What is your opinion about ‘Sinhalese-Buddhist’ performing art/ ‘Tamil-Hindu’ performing arts or ‘Sri Lankan performing art’?
10. Why did you decide to study only Sinhalese/Buddhist or Tamil/Hindu art? Are you aware of the arts of other nationalities?
11. What do you think about inter-religious and inter-ethnic interactions in performing arts? Have you any experience of that?
12. What do you think about Sri Lankan performing arts and gender contribution?
13. Whom would you introduce as ‘Sri Lankan performing artiste’? Males or females or both?
14. What do you think about ‘purity’, ritual dance and female contribution?

15. How do you see Sinhalese-Tamil /Buddhist-Hindu rituals and gender contribution?
16. What do you think about modern stage performing arts and gender contribution?
17. What do you think are the obstacles to introducing Sri Lankan performing arts as Sri Lankan performing arts rather than as Hindu or Buddhist and Tamil or Sinhalese art?
18. What are the obstacles in society relating to caste and ethnicity linked to Sri Lankan performing art?
19. How do you interpret the concept of 'Sri Lankan performing art'?

Appendix 4: Ves costume

All photographs are by the author unless otherwise stated



Photography taken by Ian Scales.

Appendix 5: *Sokari* Drama



Photography taken by Sampath Wickramasinghe.

Appendix 6: *Kolam* mask – Characters



Appendix 7: Geta beraya (Kandyan drum)



Appendix 08: Yak beraya (low country drum)



Appendix 09: Davula



Appendix 10: Mridangam



Appendix 11: Hevisi Drumming



Photography taken by Sampath Wickramasinghe.

Appendix 12: Tammattama



Appendix 13: Udakkiya



Appendix 14: Rabana



Appendix 15: Mask making



Appendix 16: Kathaluwa Purvaramaya



Appendix 17: The Policeman *Kolama*



Appendix 18: The eth pahana (elephant lamp)



Appendix 19: The figures in Mihinthale



Appendix 20: The Mulkirigala temple



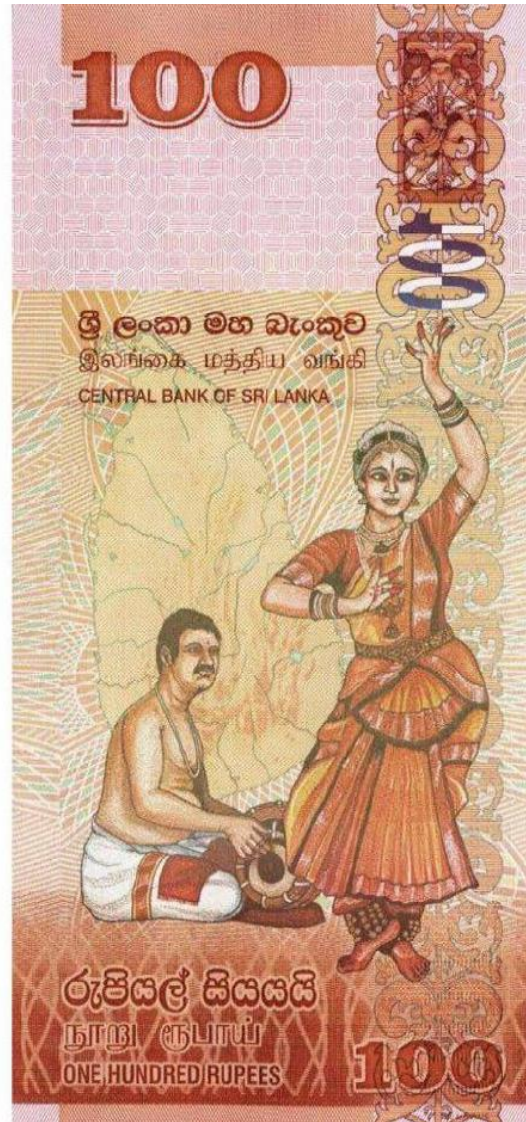
Appendix 21: The Yapahuwa palace



Appendix 22: The Gadaladeniya temple



Appendix 23: The Hundred Rupee Note issued by the Sri Lankan Central Bank



Appendix 24: Alarthi Amma



Appendix 25: Paththini Dance



Photography taken by Sampath Wickramasinghe.

