

THEKOOTHU: A TRADITIONAL SOUTH INDIAN DANCE DRAMA  
FORM AS MANIFEST IN NATAL SINCE 1860.

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## Introduction

### 1.1 Scope of study

It would appear that there has been no indepth study into the evolution of local dance dramas, variety concerts or popular theatrical performances amongst the Indians in South Africa. This is possibly due to the sporadic and fragmented spurts of theatrical activity amongst the Indian community since their arrival in South Africa in 1860.

Theatrical forms such as Therukoothu and the 'Drama' remained for a period of time the only examples of 'Indian Theatre', until the inception of the more loosely structured, episodic variety concerts of the early 1900's and their continuation into the 1990's. This latter development had the effect of robbing theatre researchers of the ability to compare local Indian theatre development with the Western model. The unique local development where Therukoothu began to give way to films and other popular Indian theatrical forms is the intended field of my dissertation. The theatrical nature of Indian dance dramas especially that of the South Indian Therukoothu, with it's multi-dimensional nature (which will be

examined in chapter two) has proved and continues to prove, a logical source for exploration by theatre enthusiasts within and outside the Indian continent. (see appendix M) This practice however, has never been the case in the past amongst South African Indians for reasons peculiar to the society.

The area of study is both pertinent and of academic concern to South African theatre and cultural analysts who are presently attempting to determine how cultural forms from another society interact with an adopted society, and how new forms emerge. Besides its 'theatre' relevance, it is also a means of locating the social and cultural interactions of the Indians in Natal through their dramatic practice.

## 1.2 Socio-Historical Framework

Due to the nature of the Indenture System and the subsequent socio-economic circumstances that underpinned the lives of the early Indians in South Africa not much has happened between 1860 and 1900, especially in the area of socio-cultural

upliftment (discussed in chapter one). The prime intention of the Indentured System was to extract maximum work-hours to develop the sugar industry.

The long working hours and the stringent conditions of service left the Indians with very little time to pursue extra-curricular goals. These circumstances prevailed right up to the early 1900's, effectively rendering the social lives of the Indians barren (see chapter one). The sparse activity regarding the arts and culture that occurred just prior to and after the 1900's will therefore receive brief mention, without an analytical study, just so as to place it in its specific socio-historical context.

The freeing of the Indians from their indentured contracts in 1911 heralded the beginning of the socio-economic, cultural and the socio-political development of the community. It is around this time that theatrical and general cultural activity began to take root. This activity was linked inextricably to the religious rituals and festivals (see pp.51-52) that became popular around this time.

Theatrical forms such as Therukoothu were not individually pursued but were a communal interaction that took place during specific times in the year and were inevitably linked to 'sacred periods' in the Hindu calendar. (see p.52) Two such festivals, the Isipingo Mariamman Temple Festival and the Mount Edgecombe Shree Emperumal Temple Festival are known to have drawn thousands of devotees and members of the public.

The inception of the Festival in the late 1800's heralded the beginning of activities amongst the Indians in Natal. Mount Edgecombe was therefore at the forefront of cultural activity amongst the indentured Indian community. It is against the background of these festivals and their related activities that the researcher has selected the Mount Edgecombe area as the primary source area for collection of material pertaining to the early dramatic activity, with specific reference to the South Indian Dance Drama form, Therukoothu. Mount Edgecombe was one of the prime Indian settlements that thrived on a successful sugar industry, with each becoming reliant on the other for its survival (see chapter one). The area can be seen as

a microcosm of the broader settlement of Indians in Natal and the subsequent processes and dynamics that came to operate within this community. Early theatrical activity in South Africa and especially the Therukoothu dance drama have evolved according to the dynamics that operated in the Natal coastal villages. In South India the form thrived mainly in the traditional villages and after being brought out to South Africa found a similar environment in the village of Mount Edgecombe. The destabilization of this area and the many other settlement areas which was caused by the redistribution of people of colour in the 1850's, effectively removed the traditional art forms from their traditional settings and placed them in urban, industrialized ones, which were totally unsuitable for their continued survival.

The early 1900's saw valiant efforts by certain community organizations such as the Hindu Young Men's Association, the Arya Yuvuk Sabha and the Tamil Vedic Society to inject the kind of stimulation the community required. Numerous fund-raising concerts were undertaken by these organizations to subsidize the vernacular and

English education projects. (see pp.46-47) These self-help schemes were usually centred around theatrical entertainment which in some cases developed fairly successfully. A case in point is Tommy Lalbahadur, who under the auspices of the Arya Yuvuk Sabha wrote and directed a number of successful plays.

Concerning the traditional art form of Therukoothu in South Africa, recent years have seen it's bastardization to such an extent that it is necessary to provide a descriptive definition in terms of it's proper context. A trip by the author to South India and an effort to locate an authentic troupe was also considered necessary in order to validate the descriptive definition. The researcher was also able to ascertain the sociological implications of the form in recent times, the effect of urbanization and modernization and also note the influence of this form on other developing forms such as those presented by the researcher, namely, The Battle of Mayal Ravanan and Three Hand Six Foot.

The staging of the The Battle of Mayal Ravanan in the Asoka Theatre was a necessary exercise to test the strengths and weaknesses of the Therukoothu form, especially the theatrical elements in terms of them being adaptable to modernization, both technologically and sociologically. Three Hand Six Foot on the other hand was far removed from the 'traditional performance' in that it is an original piece of work, written and directed by the researcher which sought to explore new ground both technologically and sociologically and also draw attention to the form and structure of the dramatic piece itself. (discussed in chapter three)

### 1.3 Methodology

This is basically an indepth descriptive study of Therukoothu in terms of it's historical development, structural form and application to the changing circumstances facing the South African Indian community. Chapter three deals specifically with a semiotic study of the two productions, The Battle of Mayal Ravanan and Three Hand Six Foot. Extensive field interviews with knowledgeable persons, actors, performers, directors and

musicians associated with the form were undertaken both locally and abroad. An extensive survey of literature in the field was undertaken both in South India and South Africa relating to the socio-historical development of the South African Indian community and the art form itself.

#### 1.4 Organization of material

The first chapter deals with two very distinct sections, the first pertaining to the early Indians and the Indentured System which maps out systematically the socio-economic conditions as a prime cause of the social and cultural stagnation of this immigrant community. The second section deals in the main with the early theatrical activity in the Mount Edgecombe area around the 1900's.

The second chapter attempts to define descriptively the Indian dance drama form, Therukoothu, as found in South India and especially in the rural areas of North Arcot, namely, Purisai. Form and structure are dealt with in order to give the reader a fairly concise descriptive definition of the dance drama form.

The third chapter deals with two productions directed in the Asoka Theatre namely, The Battle of Mayal Ravanan and Three Hand Six Foot. Both the productions are dealt with in detail and give a first hand account of the dynamics and processes involved in mounting the same. The chapter also considers the sociological and technological phenomena prevalent in the latter part of twentieth century in Natal.

#### 1.5 General Problems

The two major problem areas encountered were:

- (a) The lack of published material in the researcher's spoken language.
- (b) The age group of the researcher's informants.

While there may be sufficient published material on the early Indians and the Indenture system in South Africa, information pertaining to their social and cultural lives is virtually non-existent. Theoretical and historical research in South India was equally problematic in that most works are written in one or the other vernacular language.

The average age group of most of the researcher's informants was sixty. A sizable number were in fact over the age of sixty. This created a problem of accessing and verifying information as the fragile memories of most of these people were often called into question. The researcher therefore had to spend a considerable amount of time with actors and dancers, interviewing and attending performances, and eventually directing most of these same gentlemen in The Battle of Mayal Ravanan. The researcher's participation in the production tended to alleviate many of the problems.

## Chapter One

### 2.1 Socio-Economic Status of the Indentured Indians in South Africa

The history of the Indians in South Africa has been documented by such people as Surendra Bhana, Joy Brain, Hilda Kuper, Maureen Swan, E.H. Brookes, Hugh Tinker and many other authors, all of considerable repute. It may be pertinent however to trace briefly in this dissertation the historical development of the community in order to contextualize the proceeding content and to highlight conditions of existence which may have influenced the state of the creative and artistic contributions of the early Indian settler community. This chapter will be divided into two parts. The first, will deal with the Indian Indenture System and the socio-economic conditions affecting those indentured up to 1911 and the second part will deal more specifically with their socio-cultural development and contributions after 1911.

The initial statistical section concerning the arrival of Indian immigrants in Natal, especially between the period 1860 and 1911 is based on a

study by Surendra Bhana, previously head of the Department of History at the University of Durban, Westville. (Bhana, S. 1987) The dissertation will deal in the main with peoples originating from South India or the province referred to as Madras Presidency and attempts further to deal with a dance-drama type peculiar to the Indians from the Indian sub-continent who have settled in South Africa since 1860.

Migration from India began around the time of Gautama Buddha (circa 500 BC) when there was a great cultural and trade expansion towards the south east of Asia, and also along the east coast of Africa as far as Zanzibar. (1) The intensification of migration by the British in the nineteenth century under the Indenture System served as an alternative to slavery and provided the workers with certain limited safeguards. (2) Most of the researcher's sources have revealed that the arrival of Indians in Natal in 1860 was primarily the result of Britain's attempt to secure a cheap and viable labour system for its industrial programme in its various colonies. A brief overview of the

conditions in Natal prior to 1860 is necessary so as to ascertain the extent to which these conditions necessitated Britain's elaborate system of importing labour.

According to Palmer (1957.p.2) it was because of the Boer Native Policy that Britain eventually decided to annex Natal in 1843. Although Natal was said to have large numbers of 'kaffirs', approximately two million in 1880, they did not provide the kind of labour that was required by the colonists.(3) The colonists required a workable system which provided consistent and efficient labour. The native population consisted of essentially pastoral people who worked well as domestic servants. They engaged in small-scale agricultural activities, done mainly by the womenfolk. The menfolk were more involved in hunting, hut-building and fighting. The natives of the country were considered unskilled and unreliable for the following reasons:

- (a) They were not accustomed to regular and steady work.
- (b) They often deserted their employers and

returned to their kraals without prior notification.(4)

(c) They had no concept of a labour contract.(5)

It has been shown that Shepstone's Native Policy effectively blocked off any attempts to introduce harsh measures to get the natives to operate under any oppressive system. His introduction of tribal reserves helped to retain their traditional methods of subsistence.(6) His understanding of the African peoples and his influence in the British government presented him with sufficient clout to introduce policies safeguarding their interests.

The ban on slavery in 1807 and the emancipation of slaves in 1834 further added to the sensitive nature of attempting to use native labour. In any case the freed slaves refused to work under any system.(7) Mauritius, which was another of Britain's sugar producing colonies was also experiencing the same problems as Natal. Britain soon realized the gravity of her labour problems.(8)

In Natal the planters felt that their labour grievances were sufficiently valid for certain industrial experiments and programmes were already well under way as the following report would suggest:

The sugarcane is now being cultivated to a considerable extent within the colony, and as the requisite machinery for it's production into sugar will, no doubt soon be forthcoming... and probably at no distant day an actual export of this necessity of life may confidently be looked for.(9)

Experiments with coffee and arrowroot were only relatively successful.(10) Maize could be grown but Natal lacked a railway system. It became more and more apparent that Natal was most suitable for cane growing. In any case milling stations were already in use from the 1850's, a development which stemmed from Edmund Morewood's introduction of cane plants from Mauritius in 1847.(11)

When the idea of using Indian labour was first mooted it met with stiff opposition in Britain because of its connections with the slave-trade only a few years earlier. A commission of inquiry

was immediately set up to evaluate the system. Although initially meeting with opposition, the Indenture Labour System was mooted and endorsed, but with comprehensive proposals to safeguard the immigrants. A lengthy negotiation process resumed between the Indian government and Britain to map out the most suitable system within which the scheme could operate.(12)

The conditions set out for the immigration scheme differed for each receiving colony while the following may be said to be the ones applicable to Natal alone:

- (a) Each receiving colony had to enter into a separate agreement with the government of India.
- (b) Wages and rations for immigrants were to be specified.
- (c) Immigrants were to receive proper medical treatment in times of illness.
- (d) Terms of indentured service were to be laid down.
- (e) A Protector of Immigrants was to be appointed to see that the terms of the agreement were carried out, and who would remedy any legitimate grievances of the immigrants.(13)

The flow of indentured Indians into Natal can be divided into two sections, those arriving between 1860 and 1866 and those arriving between 1874 and 1911. The Indenture System was temporarily halted between 1866 and 1874 when the Indian Government received complaints from Indian labourers of ill-treatment by the colonists. Analysis of ship lists show that 152 184 indentured Indians came to Natal between 1860 and 1911.(14) Analysis of the period 1860 to 1866 reveals that 5 456 Indians arrived from Madras, and 990 arrived from Calcutta, while from 1860 to 1911, 59 662 had arrived from Madras and 35 720 from Calcutta.(15) Details of the flow of Indians from the ports of Madras Presidency reveal that approximately sixty percent of the indentured labourers had embarked from ports in this province.(16)

The Tamil and Telegu speaking immigrants hailed mainly from Madras Presidency which, until 1954, included the Telegu state of Andra Pradesh.(17) Captain Christopher Bidon, the Protector at Madras produced a paper indicating the flow of

immigrants from South India. He reported that the main flow came from the 'over-populated Tamil districts', whilst the Untouchables featured most prominently in his recruiting lists.(18) The early indentured labourers were clearly dominated by Tamil-speakers as the following quotation shows:

There was a heavy flow of labours from three districts in Madras: North and South Arcot and Chingleput. These three Tamil-language districts produced nearly sixty percent of the South Indian migrants to Natal, which may offer an explanation for the vitality of the ex-indentured Tamil community in Natal.(19)

Statistics show that up to 1911 South Indians of the Hindu sect hailed mainly from the following districts; North and South Arcot, Chingleput, Vizagapatam, and Godavari. These districts together with Nellore and Salem which were also districts supplying Indian labour, collectively averaged ninety five percent of Hindus in 1901. The South Indian districts of Coimbatore, Gangam, Kistna, Tanjore, Tinnevelly and Trichnopoly are minor sources of Natal immigrants. Analysis of ship lists between the period 1860 and 1902 for Madras indicated that there existed a ratio of twenty

eight percent females to sixty five percent males.(20)

The passenger Indians were mainly Gujarati speaking Moslems and Hindus from Kathiawar, Surat, and Marathis also from the northern province. The Moslems who stayed in Durban are predominantly Meman and Bohra and belong to the Sunni sect. Other passengers from the north included a few Parsees from Bombay and a few Jains from Gujarat who inevitably went into small business. All these passenger Indians embarked at Bombay and were labelled 'Bombayees'.(21)

Reports of conditions on the two ships, the Belvedere and the Truro, leaving Calcutta and Madras in October 1860 and on subsequent voyages seem to have set the scene that was to prevail in the next fifty three years till the termination of the Indenture Labour System in 1913. Ship's records reveal the deaths of one hundred and eighty labourers on board during the period 1860 and 1866 and sixty seven between 1881 and 1882. Diseases were rampant and crime ranged from indecent assault to rape of the female immigrants.(22)

As group after group of labourers arrived they were 'herded' together and escorted to unfinished barracks and left to fend for themselves. No arrangements had been made for disembarking, for housing or feeding the labourers pending assignment to their 'masters'.(23) The meagre amenities and squalor conditions aggravated the plight of the settlers and within days of landing many of them perished.(24) The labourers were essentially blocked from establishing any kind of community life. The shacks which initially had afforded the labourers an opportunity to cultivate patches of land around them were replaced by barracks which were utterly inadequate as official observation suggests:

there is much rubbish about the Coolie huts together with human excrement. I found the roads, paths, banks of the river even the river bed itself close to the place where the Coolies drink in a very filthy state. The stench on many parts of the estate, especially just before sunrise and toward sundown was sufficient to cause serious illness. I found this defilement close to the buildings...(25)

After sampling water from three streams and wells analysts reported that:

Water highly impure, containing much organic matter of animal origin, and exposed to direct sewerage contamination, quite unsafe for use.(26)

The unhygienic living conditions inevitably gave rise to a high degree of disease and illness which often could not be contained due to the inadequate and sometimes total absence of medical care on the estates. An interesting phenomena was the existence of what was referred to as 'sham sickness', a phrase probably coined by those in authority, an obvious reference to illness that is supposedly feigned by the labourers. The fact of the matter was that planters did not accept that 'coolies could fall ill.' They could only pretend to be ill.(27) Fining workers the equivalent of three days pay for one days absence due to illness was the general rule. Flogging, beatings and jailing became the order of the day as the following excerpt suggests:

Kuran Pillay complained that he was ill and could not work. They did not believe him, and when he collapsed during work, the guard assumed that he was malingering and kicked him so that he fell into the water. He died a few hours later. He had in fact, been suffering from a serious heart condition.(28)

A planter reported the following:

He said he had dysentery and that is why I locked him up. I have sometime locked up other men in the hospital, sometimes eight or ten who are shamming.(29)

Although the labourers were often punished for shamming when they were in actual fact not shamming there were many who admitted feigning illness, 'to enable them to attend to their own affairs.' (30) In any fair labour system this attitude of the employers would of course not be acceptable.

The varied times and conditions stipulated by the planters were not in accordance with specific conditions of work that had been agreed upon by the British and Indian Governments. This left the labourers with little or no time to pursue social or cultural activities. They were expected to

work six days in the week from sunrise to sunset. Unscrupulous planters demanded longer hours or 'stole time' on Sundays as shown below:

I complain that my cousins and other relatives are not allowed to visit me. I work from 5 am to 8 pm daily including Sundays...

I complain that I am not given a pass to go out on Sundays. I am made to work from 4 in the morning till 9 0' clock at night including Sundays...(31)

Labourers were generally afraid to voice their opinions to the district magistrate for fear of being reprimanded by their employers on their return, although on occasion the Protector of Immigrants took their case:

On several estates the week's rations are given out on the Sunday forenoon. This they complain of, as keeping them at home when they want to visit their friends.(32)

Although sparse, evidence does suggest that the indentured labourer yearned to practice his culture as he may have done in his 'motherland.' A Hotel-keeper, Rangasamy reports to a commission as follows:

I am glad to have an opportunity of telling what we Coolies want in Natal. We want temples wherein to worship. We should like the Government to establish a Coolie location and let us build a shrine there. They will nominate the holidays when the temple is built, as the law of the colony allows. Whatever ceremonies, according to the calendar, are fixed, the free Coolies would celebrate the feast for ten days; in those days there are principal ones, and the assigned Coolies would take leave to attend for those three days; this is for Hindoos.(33)

Labourers on certain estates were occasionally more privileged than their fellow comrades on neighbouring estates. Many employers were more lenient, allowing the labourers greater freedom to pursue activities of their individual choice. Such situations are inevitably reported in a favourable light as follows:

The Coolies at Riet Valley call the Manager their father; and have built a Hindoo temple where they celebrate their own feast days.(34)

Estates were also reported to make provisions for festive occasions by storing extra food on the estate.(35) Both the Coolie and Wragg Commission

reports contain references to large numbers of incidents connected directly or indirectly to drunkenness, dagga smoking and prostitution. To focus on these factors in any detail is not within the scope of this dissertation but the causes of the above may well be the socio-economic conditions of the Indentured labourer as already outlined in the preceding pages. Similar conditions had undoubtedly also affected the caste system which operated in India at the time. Kuper (1960.p.18) describes the phenomenon as the most important traditional social characteristic of India.

From the time of embarkation the traditional caste relationships of the indentured Indian were affected. The conditions under which they travelled to South Africa, as already mentioned, made it virtually impossible for them to maintain a social distance, and a blurring of caste distinctions became inevitable. Members of all varna had no option but to cram together in the same boat which journeyed anything from three weeks to three months, during which time they were

also compelled to eat food from a common kitchen.

(36) On arrival there were numerous factors as outlined below which forced the labourers to abandon the caste system:

- (a) They were housed in barracks roughly ten feet by twelve feet in size.
- (b) The barrack dwellings did not cater for unmarried women.
- (c) There was no privacy for the married.
- (d) The traditional division of villages according to caste lines became irrelevant.
- (e) There was a high ratio of men to women.
- (f) The restraining influence of the caste elders was absent. (37)

Law 20 of 1874 which provided for the establishment of The Indian Immigration Trust Board eventually put importation and repatriation of labour on a sound basis but the system was doomed to fail for reasons in large measure already discussed:

1. The laws were disregarded in many ways by the employers.
2. The employees could not read English hence they did not understand the law.

3. The Indian labourers did not enjoy even-handed access to the law.(38)
4. Magistrates seldom visited the plantations.
5. There was no person to control activities on plantations after hours.
6. The labourers were often afraid to report to the magistrates, hence the flood of complaints in India by returning labourers.

In 1866 between forty five and fifty percent of Indian immigrants returned to India. Complaints of flogging, inadequate medical facilities, wage disputes and the general treatment meted out by the Colonists are amply reported in the Coolie Commission of 1874. The response of the Indian Government to halt the Indenture Scheme in 1871 and its subsequent insistence for new measures gave rise to the Immigrations Trust Board in 1874, which introduced to the Indenture system the Protector of Immigrants. This Board saw to recruitment repatriation, employment and the general welfare of Immigrants. It also tackled the complaints concerning medical facilities. By the passing of Law 12 the Protector was appointed to see that

medical facilities were provided, and to ensure that a wage book was kept to prevent the wage disputes. The power of the Protector was extended to that of the district magistrate. With these changes the Indian Government felt secure and allowed the indenture schemes to continue. On 25 June 1874 the Jason arrived with indentured labourers once again.(39)

The similarities in the reports of both the Coolie Commission of 1874 and the Wragg Commission of 1885 indicate very strongly that the circumstances of the Indians over the period had not changed much. The System was doomed to fail. Although the Indenture System continued right up to 1911, the latter part of the 1870's saw the first changes in developing trends. Indians were refusing to re-indenture and stay on the plantations because they were able to earn better income on the free labour market. The change in status from the, indentured labourer to that of 'Indian settler' came when Indians had completed their five year contracts and had become 'free' according to the labour contract ratified by the labour legislation in

Natal, namely, Laws 13,14 and 15. On completion of a discharge certificate they were allowed to purchase or rent property, or to set themselves up in business, trade or agriculture.(40)

Free Indians quickly took an interest in the general economy. Because the Indentured labourers belonged originally to the agricultural classes many ventured into farming while others got involved in a variety of occupations. The 'free Indians' proved to be an enterprising group, that in 1877 a Protector was able to report thus:

All the fishing and nearly all the market-gardening and hawking of fruit and vegetables are in the hands of Indians. The annual acreage held by Indian agriculturalists increased steadily from 11721 acres under crops in 1896 to 42 000 acres in 1909. Cultivators extended their cultivations of maize, tobacco and beans throughout the colony. Other enterprising Indians rented plots of land and acquired their own animals.(41)

While the indentured labourer strived in all directions to better living standards the merchant class who came as 'Passenger Indians' especially

from North India were steadily beginning to constitute a middle class. These Indians had strong links in both Bombay and Mauritius and quickly set themselves up as traders, selling items that could not be obtained locally. As the class barriers became more and more distinct the Indentured Indian, stripped of traditional leadership was desired as a labourer and fitted into this status of 'menial and inferior with limited opportunity for personal development'.

(42) This division of economic interest groups in early Indian politics was only marginally narrowed with the arrival of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi who initially visited the country to settle a business dispute for a Gujarati client.

The 'political elite' was a reference by Kuper (1960.p.45) to the merchant class who were steadily facing opposition by white traders who could not stand up to the competition that the Indian traders set up. The government took up the cudgels 'tightening the scene on further Indian immigration.' Act 25 of 1891 withdrew the grant of crown lands to time-experienced Indian labourers. Act 17 of 1895 introduced the Indian Immigration

Law Amendment Bill which stipulated the following :

- (a) After his first five years of indenture, the Indian had to reindenture (maximum salary being one pound per month); or
- (b) If he desired to remain in the colony, he had to pay a 'penalty', of three pound per annum in addition to an annual one pound tax for males. Professor Gokhule later described it as a penalty upon residence.(43)

The introduction of the three pound tax proved to be the single most devastating law imposed on the Indentured Indians. The stringent measures served the government well. Most families could not afford to pay the tax. Men began to desert their families while women were forced to survive by 'immoral' means. Crime also became rife. Soon certain individuals like Henry Polak took up the cause of the Indians. In 1909 Polak was sent by the Indians to India to motivate for the abolition of the indentured labour system. On 25 February 1910 Professor G.K.Gokhule mooted a resolution in parliament which was approved and effectively put a stop to the system as from 1st April 1911.(44)

The plight of the majority of the indentured labourers in Natal for over fifty years remained unaltered. It was only after Indians had completed their periods of indenture that they were able to pursue goals of their individual choice. These initiatives were received with mixed feelings by the colonists and the British Government, who eventually opted for the protection of the whites and a clamping down on the Indians.

The passing of the Franchise Law Amendment Bill (1894), the Indian Immigration Law Amendment Bill (1895) and the Dealers Licences Amendment Bill (1897) were all directed to suppress the Indian community which had up till then showed all the signs of being able to thrive under the most arduous conditions.(45)

It was through the efforts of people like Henry Polak and Professor Gokhule that the case of the Indians was publicized and the system abolished. As Free Indians the ex-indentured made great strides economically, eventually proving to the Natal Government that they were indispensable to its economy. Unfortunately the effort spent on socio-

economic upliftment took up so much time that any attempts at developing one's cultural identity would have met only with limited success. The merchant or trader class on the other hand developed independently although some interdependence through trade did occur. The merchant class eventually made up the 'political elite' and got more and more involved politically. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in his twenty years stay in South Africa did much for the merchant classes with only occasional 'gestures' in the direction of the lower classes.(46) Gandhi and his non-violent struggle has little bearing on this dissertation and will therefore not be pursued.

## 2.2 Historical and Geographical background of Mount Edgecombe

Early dramatic activity in Natal is inevitably connected to temples, temple rituals and temple festivals.(47) This 'divine connection' is in keeping with the concept of Hindu philosophy that we live ritual lives. One cannot distinguish the arts from life or from the divine.(48) They are inextricably one, a whole. This oneness can be

seen in most of the traditional arts of India. The situation in Natal therefore provides the researcher with the opportunity easily to identify the Indian arts with the 'divine', which are subjects of Hindu rituals and festivals. The second chapter deals in some detail with a similar concept, namely, the link between Brahma and Bharata and so on. Shiva in the form of the Nataraja is seen by all Hindus as the first dancer/actor of the universe. (49) It would seem that the first and foremost thought in the minds of the indentured labourers was to build a temple 'wherein to worship' and only then could 'real development' of this community begin.(50) Mount Edgecombe had clearly taken the lead in this area, propelled by a vibrant community. Neighbouring areas only then followed suit.

Mount Edgecombe is one of the few Indian settlement areas that has consistently fought off the onslaught of Westernization and managed to retain its strong cultural and religious practices . This area with its sizeable Indian population managed to create for it's inhabitants a sort of comaradarie

that effectively united them in the 1900's.(51) With the hardships that pervaded the population the community seemed to achieve a group solidarity to ensure its survival and continued existence. A number of temples were built with the entire Hindu community assisting .(52) Festivals were organised, again with the entire Hindu community participating. Effective working committees were formed that became proficient in organising these festivals. The employers of the sugar industry realized that by assisting it's employees by way of donations and encouragement, they were actually creating the kind of relationship whereby both groups would benefit. This arrangement further assisted the Indians in Mount Edgecombe in making great strides in cultural, religious, educational and social advancement.(53)

As village life was gradually eroded in the 1970's to give way to urbanization we see the gradual breakdown of a community that had stood together for over hundred years. This is not to say that all was lost, for right up to the late 1980's cultural activities continued and still do up to today, but the energy and zest are

not the same. The causative factors contributing to this state of affairs run parallel to the state of the Indian traditional arts, a section that will be dealt with later on in this chapter.

The village of Mount Edgecombe was named after Sir Richard Edgecombe in the 1850's by William Smerdon, an English sea-captain.(54) The village (barracks) ceased to exist when workers resettled in neighbouring estates. The 1900's saw Indian settlers dispersed all along the Natal Coast with the concentration of settlers being greater in areas such as Mount Edgecombe, Verulam, Tongaat etcetera. This trend was determined by the successful establishment of the sugar estates and sugar mills which attracted indentured labourers according to their size and success rate. Brook points out:

The sugar mills might indeed be regarded as the beginning of industrial activity, apart from them, there are no factories worthy of the name in the Natal of 1887.(55)

The sugar estate in Mount Edgecombe was established in 1889 by Captain William Smerdon who went on to build a mill two years later.(56) The mill was

later to change hands from Smerdon to Jules Langlois, a Mauritian, and then to the Natal Central Company and renamed Natal Sugar Estates. The Natal Sugar Estates was soon to acquire most of the neighbouring estates, thereby ensuring a heavy concentration of Indian settlers in and around Mount Edgecombe. Mount Edgecombe then became one of the prime sugar villages with a large number of indentured labourers living in its barracks and working for the Natal Estates Limited.(57)

Mount Edgecombe is situated approximately thirty kilometres north of Durban and is one of the few towns that have managed to retain to a degree its traditional lifestyle. The area is considered an ideal study area as the researcher believes that it is a prime example which can give an insight into the geographical background of the immigrant community settled here and also which introduced Therukoothu to Natal. The researcher makes the above assumptions for the following reasons:

- (a) The community was close-knit, undivided by caste or other such barriers.(58)
- (b) The earliest and most successful sugar estate was established here.(59)

- (c) Mount Edgecombe boasted one of the highest settler communities.
- (d) The first two Hindu temples were built in this district.
- (e) Evidence suggests that the first 'festival' took place here, around 1890.(60)
- (f) Although sparse, evidence does suggest that there was some theatrical activity here, including the first Therukoothu performance believed to have happened around, 1891.(61)
- (g) The Festival was the only one of its kind in Natal, hosting Therukoothu performances in three languages, Tamil, Telugu and Hindi.(62)

### 2.3 The Caste System and Commuality in Mount Edgecombe

The caste system, which was the legalised division of peoples into classes in India did not seem to affect the early immigrant community in Natal. This phenomenon may have existed for the following reasons:

- (a) The British Colonists did not recognize this 'dividing line' and treated all the settlers alike. The fact that all suffered hardships alike may have created a common

community bond and spirit.

- (b) As has already been pointed out, the immigrants travelled on board the ships as a unit. No special arrangements were made for travelling separately or eating separately. Food was prepared in the same kitchen and so on. (See pp. 26-27)
- (c) The greater ratio of men to women has already been mentioned. This imbalance affected matrimonial relationships. The settler community also had to contend with prostitution. (See pp. 26-27)
- (d) The fact that immigrants were 'herded' into shacks roughly (10' by 12') made it virtually impossible to pursue a life-style which was determined by the caste system. There were no separate facilities for men or women. (63)

#### 2.4 The Sugar Estates

The sugar estates, initially opened by William Smerdon, and later taken over by the Natal Estates Limited seemed to 'control' and determine whatever happened in the early days in Mount Edgecombe. This phenomenon, of course, cannot be considered

extra-ordinary for it is common knowledge that economics alone can determine whether a community survives or not. Brook's view (1967.p.162) that the sugar mills can be regarded as the beginning of industry and that there were no other 'factories' worthy of the name in Natal in 1887 indicates the extent to which the Natal Estates affected the development of the Indian community settled in Mount Edgecombe in the 1900's.

The fact that the majority of residents living in Mount Edgecombe around the period mentioned above were in the employ of The Natal Sugar Estates and the fact that the village experienced a cultural revival around the same period, confirms that economics and socio-cultural development are linked. Captain William Smerdon is, up to present day, referred to as 'the father of Mount Edgecombe', an honorary status bestowed upon the man for naming the village, opening the first sugar estate, the first mill and who in all probability made generous sponsorships towards the cultural advancement of the Mount Edgecombe residents. The residents themselves would have been to a certain degree loyal to a company which

gave every indication that it cared about the welfare of its employees.(64) The statistics provided below would give the reader some idea of the members employed in the sugar industry around the 1900's.

THE NATAL CENTRAL SUGAR COMPANY LIMITED

DAILY RETURN OF INDIAN IMMIGRANTS - 6 MARCH 1885

	INDIAN LABOURERS					
	INDENTURED INDIANS			FREE INDIANS		
	MEN	BOYS	WOMEN	MEN	BOYS	GIRLS
TOTAL AT WORK	378	4	61	127	15	26
DESERTERS	4					
ABSENT	40	5	89	16	11	1
SICK ON ESTATE	29					
GAOL	5					
GOVERNMENT HOSPITAL	11					
TOTAL	467	9	152	143	26	27

## 2.5 Language and Education in Mount Edgecombe and Surrounding Areas in the 1900's.

It is apparent from the Indenture system itself that very little was done by the British to provide any kind of formal education for the Indian immigrants. Henning (1989.p.27) states that the poverty of early indentured Indians had also extended to the educational and cultural aspects and that except for a little religious instruction, the early schools available to Indian children were run by missionary bodies. It is ironic that the Education Committee of 1914 should report that:

the Natal-born Indian is often fairly well educated and owes this to the self-sacrifice of his lowly indentured parents.(66)

This statement by the Committee is an obvious reference to the religious and vernacular education by parent and community bodies, which pre-supposes that, according to the Committee, this education was good enough for the indentured labourers and that a formal English education system was not necessary. This kind of mentality persisted till the realization dawned that the Indians were on the verge of becoming an indispensable part of the economy,

especially in the sugar industry around the Mount Edgecombe area.

The early Indians worked within their community and made valid contributions in terms of educational facilities.(67) This private enterprize would begin by the aquisition of a suitable site. The community would then rally together to erect a school building. Once the project was completed an appeal would be made to the Provincial Educational Department for recognition. Burrows points out that:

In 1927, some 10, 000 children out of a total of 55, 000 children between 5 and 19 years of age were accomodated in 39 schools. Nine of these were Provincial schools financed and staffed by the Natal Provincial Administration. Many of the private schools depended on various sources of help; Provincial grants, subscriptions from the local community, school fees, gifts and use of other buildings, either at a sub-economic rental, or rent free.(68)

The above information makes it quite clear that it was left up to the settler community to set up educational facilities while the provincial administration did only the bare minimum.

The Mount Edgecombe community through the Shree Emperumal Society achieved a great measure of success in terms of establishing some sort of educational facilities. Not only did the arts flourish in this area in the mid 1900's but so did education, both in English and in the 'mother tongue'.(69)

Members of the community went to great lengths to raise funds for educational projects. Land was sought after and schools were built.(70) The completion of the Mount Edgecombe Primary School was a supreme example of self enterprize. Both English and the vernacular were promoted with vigour. A fair number of teachers, especially proficient in English and Tamil were to be found in the community itself. It should be noted that there were teachers who taught all the languages. Attempts were also made to bring educators from India. Night schools and libraries were established. Villagers studied through correspondence and achieved notable success as educators.(71) A case in point is Mr. K. M. Sarugaser who studied Tamil through correspondence and attained his degree (Vidwan in Tamil). The

Mount Edgecombe Temple Society was responsible for starting education programmes in neighbouring estates. (72)

## 2.6 Self Help Organisations and Schemes

There were various organisations which emerged in the 1900's attempting to reorganize the community in terms of its religious, social and cultural development. These attempts were a genuine endeavour to survive under extremely harsh conditions which the British Colonists had earlier subjected them to. (73) These stringent regulations had greatly subdued the creativity of the community. The 1900's which saw a gradual 'break away' from the indenture system, created a need for the community to rebuild itself from within, and this found expression in the formation of a number of clubs, societies and community organizations. The following two organizations were to some extent successful:

### 2.6.1 Sathia Gnanam Sangam:

This organisation is believed to have been the first to organize Tamil Education in the country in 1899. The organization started the first formal

Tamil school in 1905.(74)

### 2.6.2 The Hindu Young Men's Association

According to Nowbath (1960.p.177) twin branches of the Association were formed in Pietermaritzburg and Durban in 1905 by 'western educated Tamil colonials' which were the earliest effective non-passenger organisations in Natal. The Association was launched after a visit by Indian Vedic missionary, Professor Bhai Parmanand, who preached and promoted Hinduism in Natal. His philosophy and zeal steered the H.Y.M.A to organise and work within the Indian community. The aims and objectives of the association were to promote the religious, social, welfare, language and culture of the Hindus.(75) Subsequently a Tamil school was established in Pietermaritzburg in 1907 which celebrated a Diwali festival in Durban in 1909 when festivals were becoming popular in the 1900's. The Association went on to do some valuable work amongst the Hindu community as cited below:

Tamil dramas have been staged from time to time as a means of swelling the funds of the Associations. An educational trust has been formed for the purpose of providing financial assistance in the way of

bursaries to deserving Tamil students and of inviting Tamil teachers from India. The Trust was brought into existence through donations unananimously received from the public.(76)

## 2.7 The Temple

The 1900's in Mount Edgecombe saw both the business and public sectors pooling their resources for mutual gain. This concerted effort probably initiated the construction of some of the major temples in this region, the first major festival with the entire Hindu community participating, and the creation of an artistic fraternity which implanted the Therukoothu tradition into South African soil. The social needs of the settlers were thus partly taken care of.(77)

The building of a temple is considered one of the most sacred acts that any Hindu person or community could undertake. It requires careful planning, a sense of spirituality and a devotion to God if the project is to succeed and fulfill its function as the supreme symbol of a spiritual existence.(78)

The temple was supposed to act as a meeting place for all classes of people, to encourage the arts

and also to serve as a centre of learning. Temples were built throughout Natal by the Tamil and Hindi speaking settlers as indicated by the following:

The Hindus and Tamils have been responsible for the building of the majority of the temples. These are dedicated to Vishnu and Siva, under one of their numerous manifestations. In some of the temples no dividing line is drawn and both Siva and Vishnu are housed under one roof. The Tamil counterpart is the Soobramaniam Temple. Temples to Vishnu are either called Vishnu Temples or are dedicated to Rama or Radha and Krishna. Until recently the Gujaratis in Durban had no particular temple of their own. Now they have a privately built one. Many Hindus have a private shrine for family worship. In most Tamil and Telegu homes a room or a portion of a room is set aside for the Kamatchi lamp which is lit ceremonially every evening. (79)

The early settler community at Mount Edgecombe through a concerted effort built the two earliest temples found in South Africa, the Shree Emperumal Temple in 1875 and the Ganesha Temple in 1898. (80) The Ganesha Temple was rebuilt in 1925. The Shree Emperumal Temple epitomized the strivings of a community, which had eventually accepted that

they were here to stay. The fact that a 'Vishnu' temple was built, again highlighted the camaraderie of the residents. Vishnu, although a North-Indian deity was worshipped by all Hindus, the Tamils, Telegus and Hindi speaking alike. This interaction, of mixed linguistic and religious groups augured well for the future of the village and soon gave rise to what became the most popular religious get-together of the South African Indians, the Festival.(81)

The commission of physically constructing both these temples was given to a very able gentleman, Kistappa Reddy (also an indentured labourer) who happened to be well versed in the Silpa Sastras, a comprehensive handbook which deals with the finer details of temple building. Mr Reddy completed the Ganesha temple in 1898 and the elaborate re-building of the Shree Emperumal Temple in 1925, which is said to genuinely reflect the sophistication and ingenuity of the builders artistry.(82)

## 2.8 The Festival

There is ample evidence to suggest that the settlers were eager not to forget their cultural and religious practices which they carried over from India. This eagerness gave rise to the many temple festivals that began to happen wherever the Indians settled, early in the 1900's. This phenomenon has however to be analysed against the backdrop of the heavy social and economic burdens that beset the community for at least forty years. It would seem that the peculiar nature of the community in Mount Edgecombe, as discussed earlier in the chapter, created an environment conducive to such events as the festival taking place as Brookes remarks:

...after a time they felt sufficiently settled to celebrate their customary festivals.(83)

Elaborate temple festivals were held throughout Natal with the two most popular ones being hosted by the Isipingo Mariamman Temple and the Shree Emperumal Temple. Thousands of devotees and members of the public would converge on the respective temple grounds to participate in the

religious, artistic and fun-fair activities arranged by the temple committees. The fun-fair activities usually catered for the entire family. Dance-Dramas, the popular 'Wall of Death', Merry go round, doll dancers, puppet shows and fire displays were some of the common events that happened at the festivals.(84)

The Shree Emperumal Temple festival which is usually held over Chiteray (a sacred period in the Hindu calendar) is in many ways unique and will therefore take precedence for detailed discussion. The year 1990 marked the hundreth year that the festival was being held and many of the people interviewed by the author at the time, were quick to point out that all credit for this successful marathon should go to the Shree Emperumal Temple Committee.(85) The festival had inevitably outlived almost all of the original members, but the remarkable point lies in the successful administration of this mammoth project over so many decades. Thillavel,(1987.pp.47-48) in a general discussion of religion and temples, states that:

Temple administration has always suffered it's greatest weakness in that seldom if ever

are men of great calibre produced to formulate rules by which to conduct the affairs of the Temple both religious and secular.(86)

The above statement has proved itself over and over where religious organisations have crumbled either because of mis-management or the lack of it. The Clare Estate Maha Vishnu Temple is a classic example of a temple society that was for a period (approximately 1908-1980) successful in its administration and organisation of temple festivals which ultimately collapsed because of a weak administration.(87) It should be noted that the said society at one time hosted the most successful Therukoothu performances which featured well known performers.(88) The Shree Emperumal Temple Society on the other hand seemed to operate from a well structured base, where committees and sub-committees were well defined. The Drama and the Entertainment sub-committee are good examples of effective administration. That the employers of the sugar estates and mills were office bearers for certain periods of time and that they were safe-guarding their own interests may also be true, but the point of relevance in terms

of this dissertation lies more on whether or not the Temple Society had provided adequately in terms of its community's social and religious needs. To go into a detailed discussion on this subject will not, however, serve the primary purpose of this dissertation.

A universal problem that besets most temple organisations is one of finance. To host a festival the size that the Shree Emperumal Temple Society has grown use to, necessitates the collection of large sums of money. The project was on various occasions financed by the mill, by compulsory donations from the mill employees, donations from the villagers, from till collections and from the hire of stalls. Bhajan groups and entertainment groups went from door to door requesting donations. Extensive publicity through hand bills and the local newspapers was also carried out.(89)

The festival itself consists of a ten day programme, which caters for multi-linguistic and multi-religious groupings. The festival opens with the flag hoisting ceremony and is then followed throughout the ten days with a wide

variety of cultural activities. Listed below are some of the reasons why the festival is held in the month of April:

- (a) The Tamil new-year always fell in this month which is also the ideal month to invoke the God, Vishnu.
- (b) The festival was always held just before the crushing season began (April/May), thus the residents had more time and could also pray for a successful season and for the safety of their families.
- (c) The festival was also aimed at bringing the different language and religious groups together by arranging both rituals and entertainment
- (d) The festival also promoted the arts, where the community were given the opportunity to participate either actively or passively.
- (e) The festival also addressed such issues as poverty and hygiene as part of it's focus. Prior to the festival residents are urged to clean and also paint their homes. The paint or limewash was usually provided by the sugar mills.(90)

For the purpose of this dissertation it would seem that the most striking phenomenon that existed in the festival was the presentation of the 'Therukoothu dance dramas' in three languages. This practice clearly indicates the kind of dynamics that operated within the Mount Edgecombe community. The Temple was undoubtedly a centre which catered for the social, religious, cultural and multi-lingual needs of its devotees and general members. This tacit acknowledgement of 'unity in diversity' (a philosophical principle in Hinduism) is one of the hallmarks that makes Mount Edgecombe unique in Natal.(91) The Temple was inevitably seen as a symbol of devotion for all those who assisted in its erection. The researcher has already mentioned the implications of the Shree Emperumal Temple being a 'Vishnu Temple'.

Although there is evidence to suggest that the Mount Edgecombe Temple celebrated its first festival in 1890, it cannot be assumed that the dance dramas were presented in the same year. The presence of Therukoothu exponents in the community in the 1890's however, indicates that some form of dramatic presentation began somewhere in the same

'decade. It is more than likely that the Tamil Therukoothu began around this period because of the heavier concentration of Tamil immigrants still arriving from South India.(92)

According to interviews conducted in the Mount Edgecombe area it would seem that around 1960 the triple presentation of dance dramas (in three languages) were already coming to an end. The Telegu presentation however was the first to come to an end around the same period. A rare exception was the Illovu Bhajan Group which enacted an episode from the Ramayana, titled Lutchmana Morcha in the Mavishnu Temple in Illovu in 1936. The production was subsequently revived in 1941, and again much later in 1990, 1991 and 1992.(93)

The Hindi presentation is allegedly a mixture of 'The Drama' and the 'Tamil Therukoothu.' This product is referred to as 'The Drama' by some and 'Hindi Therukoothu' by others. It became a regular feature of the Mount Edgecombe Festival and remains so up to today. In the sixties a group from the North Coast called Flash Entertainers were

responsible for putting together this dramatic piece. This group later became very popular for its Chutney renditions. The eighties saw the Royal Dancing Company take over, presenting similar pieces which dramatized epics from the 'North Indian' epic, the Ramayana.(94)

The popular Therukoothu troupes in the 1970's that participated in the Festivals were The Blackburn Group, led by Morgan Archary, The Night Key Group, led by K. Subramoney, Arthi and party, led by Murugas Govender and the Hospital Group whose members were drawn from the staff of the Natal Estates.(95)

## 2.9 Other Artistic Manifestations in Mount Edgecombe and Surrounding Districts in the 1900's

### 2.9.1 Temple Society

Members of the Mount Edgecombe Temple Society certainly took the lead when it came to the arts. Most of these individuals were involved in one or another of the traditional Indian artistic forms. Listed below are those individuals from the organization who took an active interest in the

arts:

- (a) Mr. Govindarajan Nagulan (born in North Arcot, South India in 1883) who was a member of the Temple Committee for ten years, provided tuition to the Mount Edgecombe residents in both Therukoothu and Tamil. He was evidently brought to Mount Edgecombe by the father of a very prominent Therukoothu performer popularly referred to as 'Night Key'.
- (b) Mr. Poongavanum Archary (born in Chestput, South India in 1872) was rescued by the Mount Edgecombe residents (representations were made to the Colonial authorities) from being repatriated. He stayed to teach Tamil Dance Drama and recite the holy scriptures. Mr. Archary was also a wood sculptor. He continued to teach and perform the Therukoothu even after he lost his right leg. He continued with an artificial leg.
- (c) Mr. Kuppan Marimuthu Sarugaser (born in Mount Edgecombe in 1909) was a Tamil scholar of note and a keen musician who mastered the violin and harmonium.

- (d) Mr. Moonsamy Ganas Govender (born in 1923 in Mount Edgecombe) was popularly known as 'Kalaivani Ganas' because he founded the Kalaivani Orchestra in 1945. Mr. Govender was the leader of the band which won an award in 1967 and was placed first in the Natal Tamil Eisteddfod both in 1966 and 1967. The band was also involved in fund-raising activities for welfare bodies and provided tuition to young musicians. Mr. Govender was also a leading actor who played major roles in over ten plays.(96)

#### 2.9.2 The Drama

Plays using the Western staging techniques were referred to as 'The Drama'. This form of theatre began around the 1900's and declined gradually around the 1940's. This decline may be seen in conjunction with the increase in popularity of the film around the same period. (97) Actors were drawn from the community, from the 'semi-educated' to the 'illiterate'. The directors of this dramatic form especially in the earlier years were teachers invited from the Magazine Barracks. At least five

teachers are known to have turned directors in the Mount Edgecombe area to direct plays in Tamil.(98) Mr. N.C. Naidoo is known to have travelled extensively with the play, Nella Thunga, and in the process collecting a substantial amount of money for the Newcastle Tamil association.(99) These plays lasted the whole night, starting from approximately midnight and concluding around six in the morning. The reason for starting at midnight was because of the use of cinemas for these presentations. The producers had to wait for the films to end before setting up for the show. Two such venues used were the Rawats bioscope and the Royal Picture Palace in Victoria Street.(100) The earlier presentations were usually mythologically orientated, which extracted stories from both the Ramayana and the Mahabarata, while the later ones ranged from children's stories to adaptations of Shakespeare. These forms were initially performed in make-shift venues until they moved into halls built by concerted community effort in the nineteen thirties. Most of these dramatic forms followed scripts which were hand-written by learned men in the community, unlike the Therukoothu form which was improvisatory and often orally communicated.

They were however, similar to the Therukoothu in terms of males playing the role of females and the incorporation of the comedian.(101)

This phenomenon of the comedian is always seen in films, both the mythological, the later Westernized Hindi films and the Tamil and Hindi drama. Hoosain vividly describes the role of the comedian in keeping the audience attentive in an all-night performance.(102) The role of the Komali in the Therukoothu form is also very similar. The late Mr. Reddy of Merebank was a popular clown, not only in Therukoothu performances but also in a number of dramas and variety concerts.(103)

Although the plays occurred amongst the three different language groups, they were however, most popular amongst the Tamil-speaking people. The Hindi-speaking referred to this activity as 'The Drama' and 'Hindi Six Foot Dance'. The researcher has concluded from observation that the Hindi form was in all probability a derivation from a fusion of 'The Drama' and 'Six Foot Dance'. This product was often passed off as 'Hindi Six Foot Dance' during the Mount Edgecombe

## Festivals.(104)

The Tamil Drama, appears to have been most successful with many notable successes such as the early translations of children's fables, Jack and The Beanstalk and Alladin and The Magic Lamp. These were directed by teachers from the Magazine Barracks. Evidence however suggests that many of these directors were undisciplined and often did not see their tasks through to the end. A case in point is when Mr. Ganas Govender, only nineteen years old at the time, had to fill in for a sacked teacher. Mr. Govender went on to become a popular actor and director of these plays until they began to lose favour in the mid 1900's.(105)

Another case in point is that of playwright, producer and actor, Tommy Lalbahadur who with a dedicated group opened the Arya Yuvuk Bhajan Mandal in 1916 with the object of raising funds for the Arya Yuvuk Sabha. The group believed that sufficient work had been done in terms of dramatizing mythologies and opted for local plays written by Indian playwrights. This group successfully contributed to theatre for almost a

quarter of a century.(106)

### 2.9.3 The Tiger Dance

This street-dance happened in conjunction with and at the conclusion of the Moharram Festivals which attracted participants from far and wide. The festival happened in the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar and commemorated the tragic massacre of Imam Hussain, the grandson of a Muslim prophet.(107) The 'Chariots' (thaziyas or pagodas) were led by the tiger dancers who had their faces painted yellow and black (some also wore masks which displayed the stripes of the tiger). The body was also painted. These dancers were usually wrestlers invited from the community to compete with wrestlers from other districts.(108) Many Hindus were also known to take part in what was essentially a Muslim celebration. This phenomenon may have existed because of the prospering relationship between the Hindu and the Muslim in the early days. The fact that the festival was introduced by Muslims from South India may also have been a contributory factor.(109) The festival was also referred to as 'Allahsamy's

'Goonda' which is the South Indian equivalent.

(110) From Mount Edgecombe and surrounding areas the chariots would move to the Mount Edgecombe Dam where the participants would compete and be 'cleansed'. Other groups in urban areas and around Durban are known to have congregated near the Umgeni River. The late Mr. Shaik Fakir from Mount Edgecombe was known to be very active in these festivals. Mr. Fakir was a Hindu who converted to Islam after marrying a Muslim. (111)

There were other minor theatrical forms such as the Sarangi Thaal and the Natchannia which were 'semi-performance' items. These forms at various times leaned either towards the acting or the music. They did not however have any significant impact on the overall development of Indian theatre in South Africa. (112)

2.9.4 A Brief Overview of Theatre by South African Indians from the Sixties to Present Day.

The sixties saw the emergence of a new stream in theatre. Indians began to write and be involved in the kind of plays that challenged authority. This was a clear move from 'Indian Theatre to Theatre by Indians'. Popular groups in the sixties were Tecon, Mad, DATA., Club 225, Shah Theatre Academy, and The Natal Drama Foundation.(113)

While some groups presented works such as Antigone, Tecon explored social contradictions and produced works which promoted social change. This intimidated the authorities who believed that the group were out to 'stir trouble' and this subsequently led to the arrests of two prominent members of this group, viz., Saths Cooper and Strini Moodley.(114)

Professor Devi Bughwan was head of The Durban Academy of Theatrical Arts (DATA). This 'elite' group produced the kind of theatre that reflected a distinct European style. Presentations by this group were elaborate, with lavish settings and costumes. Durban playwright, Kessie Govender

speaks of the snobbish attitude that existed within this group and how if you weren't a part of this group 'tough luck on you.'(115)

The Shah Theatre Academy was formed in 1964 by Ronnie Govender and Muthal Naidoo. It's main aim was to produce plays that reflected social realities as opposed to DATA, the group they had left. After working together for a few years, Muthal Naidoo left to go to America, leaving Ronnie Govender to keep the Academy alive. From the inception of the Shah Theatre Academy Ronnie Govender has gone on to write and produce a number of plays such as, Beyond Calvary, Swami, Lahnee's Pleasure, Offside, Inside and more recently At the Edge. Out of the Shah Theatre Academy fold came many theatre personalities who were to make notable contributions to theatre in South Africa. Saths Cooper, Guru Pillay, Babs Pillay and Kessie Govender were some of these people. Strini Moodley was later to write the successful play, Black on White, while Guru Pillay answered with an equally acclaimed presentation titled Saras.(116)

The Stable Theatre Workshop was formed by playwright/actor Kessie Govender. 'The Stable', which was the name given to the theatre itself, was never in a permanent venue. The theatre opened and closed at a number of different venues and is presently stationed at the old municipale building/offices in Alice Street. K. Govender's acting career also seems to have followed a pattern that paralleled his organization. The reasons for this situation however can be partly attributed to treatment meted out to Black theatre practitioners in the early days. K.Govender's most successful plays to date are Stablexpense, On the Fence and Working Class Hero. (117)

Theatre which challenged the status quo in the sixties heralded a new direction. Theatre practitioners began to work with thematic material that was entirely new. This trend persisted throughout the sixties, seventies and eighties with each decade showing a preference for a stronger ideological content in written material.

In the nineties we see a different breed of theatre emerging, theatre which has become more conscious

of the overall social pattern, supposedly led by the National Party and the African National Congress. The beginning of the break down of Apartheid has nonetheless affected the very core of South African life. This phenomenon has introduced an awareness of racial prejudices and ushered in a degree of 'falseness' in social interactions and the arts. It has become popular to introduce the 'token Black', not only in theatre forms but in many spheres of South African life.

### Conclusion

We have seen that the period between 1860 and 1911 was dominated by socio-cultural dynamics that made it practically impossible for the indentured Indians to engage in any meaningful cultural activity. The dance or musical performances which probably took place was never recorded and cannot be commented on with any degree of certainty. The 1900's which saw the freeing of Indians from the Indenture Labour System provides a clearer account of social activity. The building of temples and the celebration of festivals were foremost in the minds of the Indians. The Shree

Emperumal Temple Society was certainly in the forefront of attempts to practice and propagate Indian culture. The sugar estates and the general community followed suit and all sorts of cultural, social and artistic aspects of the Indian community flourished.

With the advent of the film industry in the 1930's we see a gradual decline in theatrical activities. Urbanization, Westernization and modernization brought further changes. While the Therukoothu form declined, it also began to lose its rural characteristics. Theatre which challenged authority and the social order took the lead in the sixties and constantly undermined the weakening, sporadic traditional forms that struggled to survive alongside it. Contemporary theatre it seems is going through a crisis in terms of reforming past theatre practices, to keep up with a rapidly changing South Africa.

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## Chapter Two

### Descriptive Definition of Therukoothu

#### 3.1 Nature of Therukoothu

Therukoothu may be described as Traditional Indian Dance-Drama that makes use of prose, verse, music and dance, dramatizing stories from the epics of Indian literature, namely, the Bhagavata, Mahabarata and Ramayana. In South Africa, Therukoothu is popularly known as Six Foot Dance, the phrase originating from the intricate foot patterns used in it's execution. Although traditionally Therukoothu may have been performed in rural settings the dance-drama has in recent times been performed in towns and cities. A traditionally open-air dance-drama, it has also been performed in tents and marques.

While it may suffice to provide the Tamil equivalent for the term 'Theru' as street or outside, the term 'koothu' requires a little more clarification. According to Ramasamy(1987.p.26) all theatrical arts in Tamil Nadu from ancient times were named 'Koothu'. To go into a detailed analytical study of the term 'Koothu' is however not within the scope of this dissertation,

although it may suffice to say that the term is distinctly of Dravidian origin and one may reasonably assume that all Tamil dramatic performances were referred to as 'Koothu'. Ramasamy points out that all dramas enacted in theatres are called Naatakas and when they are acted in the open are called 'Koothu'. It should be noted however, that the above two terms are the most widely used terms in the Sangam anthologies that refer to dramatic performances.(1)

Therukoothu is a typical South Indian theatrical form that is practiced mostly in the rural areas. Indian performing arts can generally be seen in two distinct categories, those linked to the tribal or village peoples which are termed 'folk', and those linked to the urban areas which are termed 'classical'.(2) The form is ideally a cultural off-shoot that exists very much within a specific cultural context, adhering to certain broad principles as listed below:

- a) It exists within a ritual milieu.
- b) It is didactic.
- c) It is aesthetically relevant to the experience of the community.

- d) It cannot exist purely as an entertainment form.
- e) It has religious connotations.
- f) It follows religious and philosophical literature.
- g) It conforms to general Western theatre conventions, such as the use of suspense, conflicts, climax and so on.
- h) It is a traditional Indian art form that is governed by the following principles:
  - 1) Men play the part of women.
  - 2) Ritual behaviour is employed in performance.
  - 3) Usually performed in conjunction with temple festivities (celebration of temple deities).
  - 4) Contains music, dance and poetry.
  - 5) Operates in the 1st. and 3rd. person narrative.
- i) It adheres to the principles of the Natya Sastra.
- j) It is a product of Tamil Nadu, land of the Tamils.(3)

### 3.2 Ritual function

In the past Therukoothu performances were usually presented in conjunction with Hindu ritual Festivals.(4) While this factor alone cannot justify the ritual relevance of the form itself, it does question its prominence in what is

essentially a religious festival. Therukoothu, like other traditional art forms abound with ritual significance, yet together with its inherent entertainment value it is an ideal form for these festivals which usually happen within the precincts of temple premises. With the drama of the Gods and good triumphing over evil, myths and legends come alive in action.

Until very recently the mounting of this dramatic form for pure entertainment or as a purely theatrical presentation was rare. Research locally and abroad has however shown that in what may have started off as a ritually orientated exercise, theatrical and aesthetic factors are also present and can become dominant. To label Therukoothu as devoid of either ritual significance or aesthetic values will be tantamount to a gross misreading of the traditional Indian performing arts. Both ritual and aesthetic factors have adequately to be dealt with if one seeks to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the same. One may assume then that ritual undertones may become more dominant in a traditional setting, namely, a village, while aesthetic factors will be

strengthened in a Town or City.(5)

Again depending on the technical competence or inclinations of the performers a performance may seem to lean either way. Frasca points out that the 'event' is of central importance, an idea which is central to village folk life. Ritual and religious concerns were without doubt the main concern of the ancient Hindus.(6)

Actors who participated in this dance form were not just technically proficient in performance skills but were usually men who came from a religious background. This phenomenon further entrenched the ritualistic element inherent in the performance. A ritual is usually performed before the drama begins. This ritual occurs in the form of a prayer which asks 'the Gods to look over all the actors on stage.' During the performance the actors are also known to go into trance inciting the audience to do the same. During certain sections where characters are of the 'revered' type a camphor is lit and a little prayer is performed. This phenomenon cannot however be said to occur in all Therukoothu performances.(7)

### 3.3 Origins

It is important to examine the historical context within which South African Indian culture was moulded over the centuries, if one intends to make an objective study of its artistic forms. Therukoothu is a direct product of Tamil Nadu, the Tamil state in South India which literally means Land of the Tamils. Tamil Nadu lies in the southernmost tip of India and remained unscathed while neighbouring states began to fall prey to foreign invasions and influences. Its language and culture was fortunately untouched. Although Tamil Nadu became the capital during British occupation, its peoples and the rural nature of the land remained largely intact.(8)

According to the Sangam anthologies which are literary works of the pre-Christian era, Tamil is the earliest written language in India, the grammar of which is outlined in the Tolkappiyam, believed to have been written in the third and fourth century B.C.(9)

The languages found in the southernmost states of India are referred to as Dravidian in origin. Although there is a great amount of speculation regarding the origin of the Dravidian sect, the most popular being that of descendency from the Indus Valley which was said to have had a highly sophisticated community, clearer evidence shows that the Dravidian peoples achieved their own sophistication in isolation of Aryan control. The Aryans are said to have invaded the Indus Valley between 2300 and 1500 BC.(10)

The commercial sophistication of the South Indians throughout this period was exceptional with links in the north, south, east and west. Maritime trade also became a well developed activity. The period 500 to 900 A.D. saw three major kingdoms emerge in South India, the Chalukyas, the Pallavas and the Pandyas. These warring kingdoms soon left themselves open to Aryan influences. The influence of Jainism and Buddhism stimulated popular religious movements. Shiva and Vishnu worship flourished. Through all this Tamil flourished until after the sixteen century when empire builders became determined to establish hegemony over all of

India. The sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth, centuries saw great changes in the south, although the nineteenth century saw the Tamil language and culture prove itself sufficiently dynamic to absorb foreign intrusion.(11)

Right up to the tenth century the states of Karnataka, Kerela and Andra Pradesh fell under what was known as Madras Presidency with the official language being Tamil. With intrusions, invasions and influences of the north these states took on different characteristics and, because of this, later earned for themselves their independence. This state of affairs brought with it certain repercussions. Certain art forms inevitably underwent transformation which could be termed regional variations. A brief study of these dramatic forms has left the researcher in little doubt that they had developed from the same source. Researchers like Ramasamy (1987.pp.24-35) have also examined in detail the evolution of these forms. These are considered here as there has been confusion amongst certain theatre personalities in South Africa regarding the various levels of understanding of

these phenomena and processes.

Statements such as 'Its on the Kathakali style,' (sic) do not serve any purpose in communicating the true nature of the Therukoothu form.(12) Kathakali has become popular as a highly disciplined classical art form and has claimed a specific place in the hierachy of the Indian performing arts. It is precisely for this reason that it cannot be used as a yardstick to describe a rural art form like Therukoothu. The researcher cites two reasons why certain misconceptions may exist:

- (a) Westernization has caused Indians to be ashamed of their their indigenous art forms and therefore are ignorant of such differences in them.
- (b) The vernacular is understood by only a section of the community and therefore people may be affected more by the visual similarities.

The Therukoothu form has to be seen in a much broader context, as one that belongs to and typifies a specific culture which in turn has had a binding influence over much of the Asian continent for many centuries.(13) Therefore the close

similarities that exist between the different traditional art forms offer only subtle clues to show the differences that make each of them peculiar to their environment. Nevertheless it should be noted that all Indian performing arts belong in some way to the Natya tradition and will therefore encompass certain principles governing their presentation. It may therefore be pertinent at this stage briefly to examine the Natya Sastra, in order to link the common characteristics that may exist in certain traditional artistic forms .

### 3.3.1 Natya Sastra

The Natya Sastra is said to have been compiled in approximately the second century B.C.(14) The handbook which is made up of thirty six chapters contains minute details on the principles of performance governing the traditional arts. The aspect of Natya is said to be all-encompassing in that it is made up of all forms of creative expression; Sangita which consists of Gita, Vadya, and Nritta which means song, music and dance respectively, and all forms of dramatic presentations. It also encourages the incorporation

of certain aesthetic values which theatre should strive towards, Rasa which means enjoyment through 'experiencing' the production, Bhava, the stirring of emotions and Abhinaya which refer to the art of communication. (15)

It is abundantly clear from the above information that the traditional Indian performing artist was more often than not expected to be able to speak, dance and sing. The nature of this genre can be seen in such forms as the Therukoothu, Kathakali and Yakshagaana. These forms show a basic unity in approach although the Kathakali relies on mime. The visual aspects of these forms possess a striking similarity. The head-gear, make-up and jewellery are employed in a very similar fashion. Although with minor variations the Gatis and Darus are present. These refer to the gait and musical form employed extensively in the presentations. Another characteristic common to each of these forms is the Sutradhara who is the director of the play. He generally introduces the play. This character is equivalent to the katiakaaran found in the Therukoothu form. The employment of the hand-held screen (Tiraisilai) to

introduce major characters is also a common feature in all these forms. Another phenomenon characteristic of traditional performances generally is the exclusive use of males to portray female roles.(16) The reason for this may well be ritually connected as women were always considered 'unclean' (because of their menstruation cycles) to participate in activities that were religiously inclined. It should be noted however that, in all the readings undertaken thus far the researcher has not come across any documented proof that this has always been the case.

Ramasamy (1987.pp.12-35) provides convincing evidence that the Tamil Therukoothu found presently in Tamil Nadu is actually a prototype of the Yakshagaana form found in the state Karnataka and the Kathakali form found in the state of Kerela. The state of Andra Pradesh also has a form of Therukoothu called Viitneataka which is very similar to that found in Tamil Nadu. Andra Pradesh lies in close proximity to Tamil Nadu and was very much part of this state until it gained its independence in 1953. Present day Therukoothu in Tamil Nadu still has vestiges of the

Telugu dialect and phraseologies, a phenomenon which began when performances were done for mixed audiences ie. Telegu and Tamil speaking. Ramasamy's arguments (as cited earlier) that the Yakshagaana of Karnataka and the Kathakali of Kerela are regional variations further explains why certain misconceptions may exist.

Bharatha (1983.pp.1-5) claims that the Kathakali form is peculiar to the state of Kerela. Although one cannot effectively dispute this, there is nevertheless an abundance of visual evidence in the characteristic features to suggest that the Kathakali, Yakshagaana and Therukoothu had evolved through a 'give and take process'.(17) The above argument is however not central to this dissertation and will therefore not receive any further attention.

The Therukoothu performers that were interviewed both in South India and South Africa all pointed out that the form was passed from generation to generation, from father to son and from teacher to student.(18) Manuscripts of the dance drama are rare in South Africa and while they are available

in South India they are closely guarded by the Therukoothu masters and seldom given out freely for analysis. Their loyalty to work done by their fore-fathers and teachers is highly respected and scripts are regarded as sacred. The only instance that a script may be allowed to leave the master's hands is because of old-age or infirmity. In these cases they are handed down to respected students.(19)

It would seem that the survival of Therukoothu over several decades stemmed from an underlying ritual instinct rather than any kind of teaching and learning procedure. Its relatively stable form over many generations is evidence of the fact that although the art was informally passed down, its ritual and aesthetic values were never compromised. (20) Learning about the drama of the Gods from the great Hindu epics was a basic necessity that ritually bound the village folk. This fact further ensured the survival of the content in these dance drama forms.(21)

The interesting fact is that whilst for generations stories are told and re-told with only very slight

variations, in most cases the scripts allow for improvisation. The titles used for the dramas are usually coined by the troupe leader while some titles are known to have remained unchanged for decades.(22) Most of the South African Therukoothu performers however, claim that they learnt the art by accompanying their fathers or uncles who belonged to troupes and through constant exposure to performance, learnt both the technique and the stories.(23)

Theatre in India is supposed to have begun with the Gods. Brahma commanded the first representation. Indian theatrical activity has always been known to have started with the 'Drama of the Gods' with Brahma, the chief initiator as the following story suggests: A long time ago before the earth was created a war broke out between the Gods and the demons in which the latter were defeated. In the victory celebration the Gods were requested by Brahma to re-enact the battle for their own amusement. On observing this the demons were once again angered and attempted to halt this re-enactment. Another fight broke out and once more the demons were overpowered. Brahma then explained

to the demons that the re-enactment was for the pleasure of all. This the demons accepted and promised not to oppose the celebration. After the world was created and ordinary people wanted to imitate this drama of the Gods Brahma confided all the principles of dramaturgy to a sage called Bharata. The compilation of all these principles later came to be called The Natya Sastra.(24)

It could be gleaned from most works on the origins of theatre in India that Brahma makes up the divine origin while Bharata brings it to mortal man. The implication then becomes obvious - the beginnings of Indian theatre were dominated by the Gods and Indian mythology. The development of Indian Theatre then can be said to have been based on philosophic principles directly linked to its mythologies and divine literature. Indian tradition uniformly assumed that Bharata is the founder of Indian dramatic art while Kalidasa speaks of Bharata as the playwright and the stage-manager of the Gods in heaven.(25)

Religious education in the form of story-telling was a dominant feature of the ancient Indians.

This phenomenon however was not restricted to South India alone but was the trend that pervaded the entire Indian sub-continent. Like most other traditions the cultural and artistic development of the Indians, it would seem, evolved from what was essentially oral. This is supported by the presence of a Prasangi tradition (the recitation of mythological stories from Hindu literature), which is still current in Tamil Nadu.(26) The form uses the recitation mode of communicating stories from the great epics of Hindu literature. This Prasangi tradition by it's very nature compels one to assume that it did have some sort of influence on the Therukoothu form. Historical data are however not available to back up this hypothesis. What does however lend weight to this argument are the very similar descriptions of the evolution of Therukoothu by prominent scholars in the field. (27) The general concensus appears to be the following: rural South Africans had a lot of time to spare after the harvests which happened in April, a period in the Hindu calendar which is referred to as Thaaai Poosam. South India also experiences it's warmest months between the months of April and August, during which time little or no

work can be undertaken, making this period the ideal time for all-night gatherings. During this period religious education in the form of story-telling (katai) was pursued most fervently. Groups of simple country folk assembled to listen to the drama of the Gods being recited by learned men in the community, thus establishing a very strong Tamil Prasangi tradition. This traditional mode of presenting the Hindu epics has, as Frasca (1984.pp.52-55) points out, been used in the pattu (song), katai (story), and kuttu (dramatization) to varying degrees. It would seem plausible then that the presentational form as it existed then may have evolved into more dramatic forms later. Whilst the above hypothesis rests on the scant information available, it does provide a logical explanation for the evolution of the form.

The two sources that seem to be the most exploited in the traditional Indian performing arts are the epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabarata. Together they have proved that their content can be appropriately utilized for dramatic presentations and religious instruction alike.(28)

### 3.3.2 The Ramayana

This piece of work is made up of about forty eight thousand verses and is considered one of the earliest compositions of Sanskrit literature, believed to have been written by Valmiki Muni. It describes the social, political, religious and economic lives of the Aryas of North India, with the two main characters being Rama and Sita. Other colourful characters in the epic are Sugreev, Hanuman, Ravana and Vibhishna.(29)

### 3.3.3 The Mahabarata

This epic of about one hundred thousand stanzas which is believed to have been written by Vyasa Muni, is considered equal in status to that of the Ramayana. It deals with a variety of themes such as injustice, oppression, greed, pride, selfishness and hypocrisy. The two protagonists are made up of the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The story of Krishna as is contained in the Bhagavad Gita is part of the Mahabarata. Other interesting characters in the epic are Bhishma Yudhishrhira, Arjuna, Vyasa, Vidur, Draupadi and Kunti. The greater part of the epic concentrates on vivid descriptions of the

battle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas.(30)

### 3.4 Dramatic content

The inherent artistic and dramatic content of the Ramayana and the Mahabarata undoubtedly provided a most suitable source for the Therukoothu performances over the centuries.(31) Stories were told and retold with only slight variations and each time it still captivated it's audiences. Both the Ramayana and the Mahabarata vividly describe the drama of the Gods in a variety of scenes, making available an inexhaustible number of episodes to be incorporated into the Therukoothu and other related forms.(32)

Vivid verbal and physical battle scenes are played out between characters like Hanuman, Ravana. Bhishma, Krishna and Arjuna. The aggressive and sometimes gentle exchanges between these characters possess all the elements of Indian theatre in terms of religious teachings and dramatic sequences. The Mahabarata is a common source for the battle scenes that occur between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. It was observed that

these sequences were generally held over ten days and are popularly known as 'The Ten Day Battle.' The majority of Therukoothu performances viewed in South Africa seem to favour an end which incorporates a battle scene where good triumphs over evil.(33)

The Therukoothu style that this study concerns itself with for comparison and analysis hails from the district of North Arcot, South India. The specific group studied for this purpose belonged to a village called Purisai and led by Mr. Kannappa Thumbiran. The choice of the area and troupe was based on the following:

- a) A significant number of Indians immigrated from this district to South Africa.
- b) The initial fieldwork (approx. two weeks) in the city of Madras showed that this troupe was in fact respected and considered reliable and would therefore be suitable as a study group.
- c) The troupe was also held in high esteem by the Delhi government who awarded them a sponsorship for training in this field.
- d) The group was used by other researchers such as Ramasamy whose findings can be used as back-up.

- e) The group was recommended by two South Indian Universities, namely, University of Madras and University of Thanjuvar.
- f) The group's teacher belonged to the 'proper caste', which is said to have had many generations of practitioners in this field. This caste was also discussed by Frasca (1984.pp.30-34) besides being confirmed in the researcher's interviews with traditional theatre enthusiasts in South India.(34)

An attempt will now be made to isolate and analyse the theatrical features of this form.

### 3.5 Theatrical Features

#### 3.5.1 The Curtain Entrance

The most striking structural feature of Therukoothu is the curtain entrance. It is a stage convention that is used most often to introduce characters into the performing area. It is the single most suspense filled moment in a Therukoothu performance. (35) Before a character enters the performing area a curtain is held across the stage by 'stage

hands' to prevent the audience from sighting the entrance prematurely. The curtain is usually white but performances in the latter part of the century have shown that preference is given to brightly coloured fabric with the troupe's name often inscribed on it.(36)

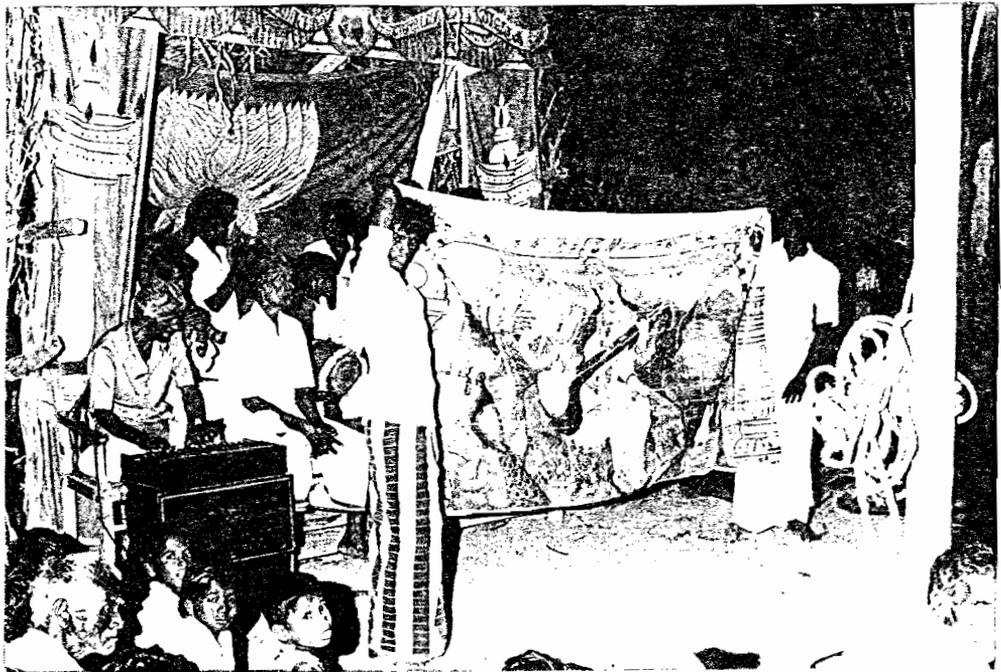


Plate 1 : Curtain Entrance

(37)

Although tradition demands that the curtain be hand-held, certain small and unprofessional troupes make use of poles and keep the curtain up for the entire duration of the performance. All the while

behind the curtain the character would reveal bits and pieces of his head gear and costume so as to create suspense and curiosity as to who he is.(38) According to Mr. James Govender, leader of the Thiru Muruga Velaasa Nadaga Sabha, a Therukoothu troupe in Chatsworth, Durban, the screen is also representative of the 'temporary boundary' that exists between the audience and the performance.(39)

The curtain entrance has the greatest influence on the structure of a Therukoothu performance. It is a theatrical device that punctuates and distinctly marks each scene. The following is the sequence of entrances for characters and development of plot of a Therukoothu performance, namely, the episode referred to as Vali Mochum:

1. Entrance of Rama, Lutchmana and Sita.

They bemoaned the fact that they have been exiled for fourteen years to the forest.

2. Entrance of Surpanaga.

She falls in love with Rama but Rama spurns this love. He sends her to Lutchmana. She

forces herself on Lutchmana who in turn disfigures her physical appearance.

3. Entrance of Ravana.

Surpanaga complains to Ravana about Lutchmana. She lies to Ravana that she found a girl whom she wanted to bring for him but while she was doing this, Lutchmana attacked her. Ravana calls for his nephew, Marishan to help him take revenge on Lutchmana.

4. Entrance of Marishan.

Ravana instructs him to turn into a buck and lure Rama and Lutchmana away from Sita whom he then manages to kidnap. When Rama and Lutchmana realise that Sita has been kidnapped they begin to look for her but instead find Hanuman.

5. Entrance of Hanuman.

Rama and Lutchmana explain to Hanuman the previous happenings. Hanuman says that if he helps them (they) Rama must help Sukribin.

6. Entrance of Sukribin.

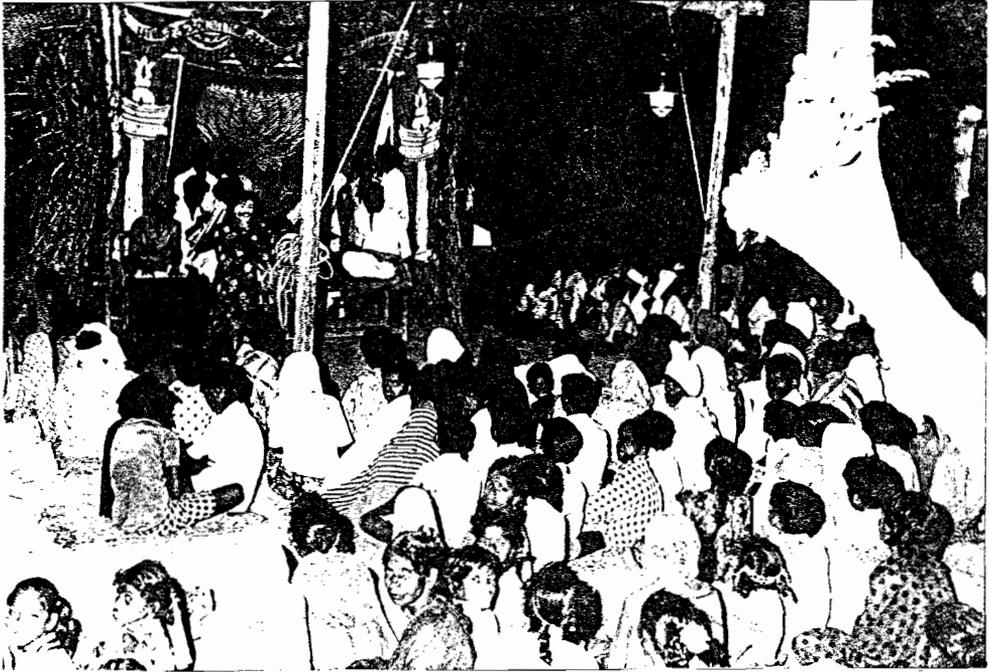
He tells Rama that Valli is taking his wife and that he needs assistance, and that Rama

must destroy him (Valli). Rama tells Sukribin that he must cause a fight with his brother during which time he (Rama) will shoot Valli from a hide out.(40)

### 3.5.2 The Kottakai (Green room)

This room which is roughly three metres square, or smaller depending on the space available, is built on stage. The positioning of this room is important in that it's purpose is multi-functional. It is used as a waiting room, to prepare for acts, costume changes, putting on make-up and as a general wing. Easy access to this room also allows for flowing exits and entrances. The room also serves other functions such as space from which actors could vocally support the chorus on stage, help with cues and assist with the overall co-ordination of the performance.(41)

Traditionally the materials used for the building of these rooms were coconut thatch and palm fronds. More recently we have seen a variety of materials being used including coloured fabric as can be seen in the following plate:



(42)

Plate 2 : Kottakai (Change-Room) (Rear of Picture)

The shape, size and materials used today are however determined by the budget or whether the performance is to occur outdoors or in a closed venue. (43)

It was observed that the positioning of the kottakai on stage was more of a practical consideration rather than an artistic one. The two popular positions were however towards the rear

of the stage or 'stage left or stage right'. Observation of the 'village' performances in South India showed that this room was preferred towards the rear of the stage.(44) 'Village performances' in South Africa however have long ceased to exist. The researcher recalls from memory that right up until fifteen or twenty years ago performances in Natal preferred an arrangement as is graphically shown below:

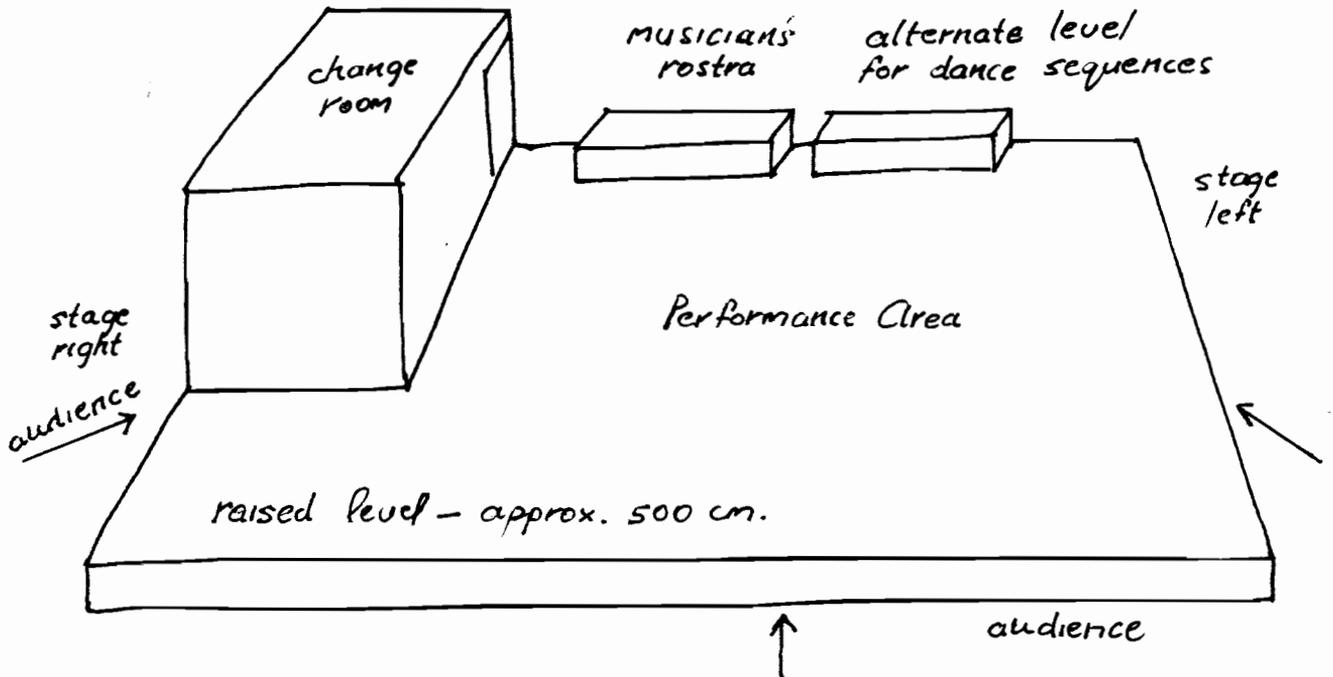


Fig. 1 : Stage Setting

The two levels or benches were also in the past a common phenomenon. The level for the musicians might have been determined by the following factors:

- (a) They remained on stage for the duration of the performance.
- (b) They had to be comfortable due to the reason cited in (a).
- (c) They underscored the dramatic action.

An extra level (towards stage left in fig.1) was usually strategically placed to provide an alternate level for the dances and aggressive fight and battle scenes. A tree in a pot was also used in certain performances. Mr. Gounden, (interview,1992) recalls a large tree (approximately six metres) once being planted into the soil through the stage to cater for an agile character. This depended on the episode that was being performed and added another dimension to the scenes which featured characters like the 'monkey God', Hanuman, who would climb the tree or pluck off fruit.(45)

### 3.6 Therukoothu Music Instruments

The most popular music instruments used for Therukoothu music both in South India and in South Africa are the mirdhangam, harmonium, mukavinai and talam. It was observed that the mukavinai is not a very popular instrument in the dance-dramas found in South Africa. The instruments are traditionally of South Indian origin with the exception of the harmonium and are used for a variety of styles but are most popular in the Classical and Carnatic styles.

The following drawings are graphic representation of the instruments used in the playing of the Therukoothu music:

#### Mirdhangam

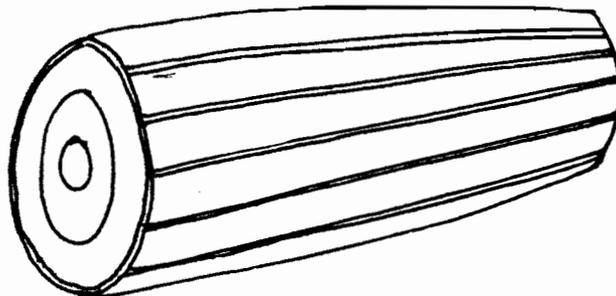


Fig. 2

Harmonium

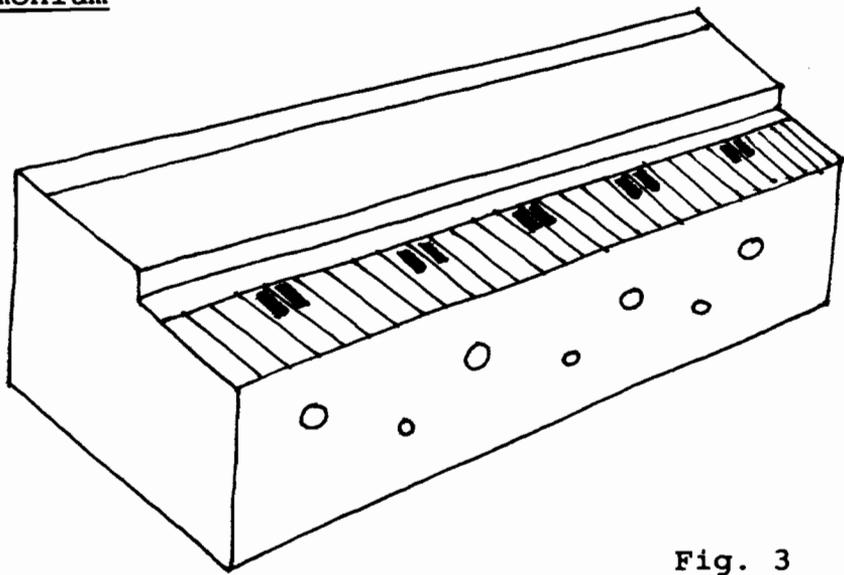


Fig. 3

Mukavinai

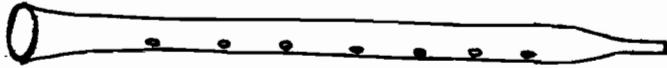


Fig. 4

Talam

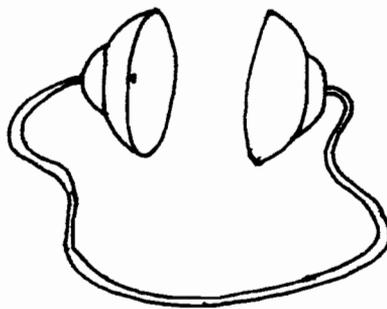


Fig. 5

### 3.6.1 The Mirdhangam

This is a long drum with two playing sides. The instrument is traditionally South Indian and is the most important and popular rhythm instrument in the playing of Classical and Carnatic music.

### 3.6.2 Harmonium

This instrument was introduced to India by Christian missionaries approximately two centuries ago. It was initially not accepted as suitable enough for the playing of Indian music but gradually became indispensable in the playing of both North and South Indian music. The instrument comprises various sets of reeds and a keyboard. It is played by compressing air into the bellows behind.

### 3.6.3 The Mukavinai

This is of folk origin. It is a wooden reed instrument very much like the Nagasvaram. It is one of the most important musical instruments used in South Indian ritual and Temple Festivals.

#### 3.6 4 The Talam

They are a type of percussive set of copper or brass cymbals with concave centres. Traditionally a ritual music instrument, they are also used as a percussion instrument for Therukoothu music. Although the talam is capable of only a few tonal variations it is nevertheless the primary instrument that is used to increase or decrease the tempo of the dance.(46)

#### 3.7 Therukoothu Music

Therukoothu music may be described as semi-classical but sung with a rural accent. It is highly probable that the music has its roots in the early classical music system of India which may have still used the raga (scale) system but in an informal manner. Frasca(1984.p.189) speaks of thirty five ragas which are used to make up the general Therukoothu music system. Research has shown that the raga system employed and the quality of the music actually depended on the proficiency of the singers.(47) Therukoothu music however is clearly distinguishable from other forms of music.

Simplicity in Therukoothu music is essential for the following reasons :

1. It complements the action.
2. At times it leads the action.
3. It is often repeated in chorus form.
4. The music has a distinct story line -it narrates and comments.
5. It has to allow for improvisation as the situation demands.
6. Depending on the singer's skill, he must be able at the drop of a hat to translate the song into a different language (eg. Telegu) if there are Telegu speaking members in the audience.(48)

The masters or teachers of Therukoothu are generally learned men. Through India's strong Prasangi tradition it's people have learnt all the legendary epics of ancient times and developed a unique and intricate raga system. Thus we have a peculiar music style, a combination of rustic folk and classical. The Therukoothu singer is capable of singing in many ragas and has a very wide vocal range. Mr. Srinivasen, an exponent of classical music who is stationed in the Saraswathi Mahal Library in Thanjavur, South India demonstrated

to the researcher very professionally how classical songs are sung in the rural areas, how a rougher style changes its ragas at liberty and allows for improvisation and interjections.(49)

### 3.7.1 Therukoothu Songs

The following are excerpts from Therukoothu songs sung by different characters, translated into English. Most of the songs are self explanatory and are integral to the performance in terms of meaning and plot. The songs also reflect the personalities of the character and punctuates the performance from beginning to end. It should be noted that the songs sung by the Komali are seldom the same because of the improvisatory nature of his role.

#### 3.7.1.1 The Invocation Song

Gananadha, Gananadha, Gananadha praise you  
 Look after us we pray to you  
 You are the first God  
 so look after us first  
 Stand forward in my speech  
 and look after us

The song is the first song or prayer that is performed before the commencement of any performance.

### 3.7.1.2 Vaaradi

Draupadi you have all my praises  
 please stay with me and help me  
 Teacher I pray to your feet  
 for educating me and teaching me this dance  
 I thank my mother and father  
 For bringing me to this stage  
 to perform this dance  
 I ask the public to forgive me  
 if there are any errors in my songs or dance  
 steps

This song is in the first person narrative and  
 performed before the actor gets into character.  
 It clearly shows the respect and humility that the  
 performers carry for the Gods and other mortal  
 figures who may be portrayed on stage.

### 3.7.1.3 Entrance Song

The whole world must shake  
 and all the mountains will shake  
 for when the flames come in his eyes  
 all the people will shiver.  
 When he brandishes all his weapons  
 like his bow and arrow and sword  
 there will be no-one to challenge him

This song is referred to as the entrance song and  
 is sung after the actor gets into character. It's  
 tempo and quality is determined by the personality  
 of the character. The lyrics of the song may well  
 be those of a character like Ravana. An important  
 point to note is that the song is sung in the

third person narrative, effectively distancing the actor from the character. The device is clearly an attempt to communicate to the audience that the actor and the role are separate and that the former is capable of wrong portrayal and should be forgiven.

#### 3.7.1.4 Character Song

Powerful Ravana came fiercely  
to shake the whole world  
When the world shakes  
the people run for cover  
When he takes his bow and arrow out  
his enemy flees for cover

This song is referred to as the character song. Besides possessing the aggressive quality of Ravana it also carries his name. It is sung in the third person narrative and happens after the character enters. The following is another example of a character song sung by Hanuman:

Just like the ground shaking  
he jumps up and comes forward  
all the Gods must also be aware of him coming  
When he comes with speed  
his two earrings shake  
He carries a mountain  
and plays with it like a ball

This song clearly reflects the strength and prowess of this popular character as opposed to the

following song:

Like a peacock dancing in the mango orchard  
 she is making her entrance  
 She's got bangles on her hands  
 and bells on her feet  
 She walke like a bird  
 but is a pretty women  
 with gentle steps

This song sung in the third person narrative is indicative of the kind of lyrics used to bring out the feminine quality.(50)

The Komali in any Therukoothu performance is at liberty to choose the songs he feels are appropriate for the occasion. This of course does not include his entrance songs, the form of which which like those of the other characters are set within specific guidelines. The Komali may take the 'mickey' out of local politicians or even poke fun at the audience as the following lines suggest:

Two and half cent tickie  
 this is my stekie  
 I'm very lucky  
 this is my bokkie

Although the lyrics may not have much depth in terms of meaning it nevertheless reflects the 'bouncier and lighter' nature of this colourful character.(51)

### 3.8 Lighting

In ancient times burning flames were used, held by helpers who moved before or behind the actor so that he was made visible to the audience. Later we find that large brass oil lamps were used. They were situated just in front of the auditorium. This type of lamp lent an added dimension to the costumes and make-up by its flickering in the night. The lamps used more recently are the petromax lamps that were fastened onto large bamboo frames. Today, depending largely on the venue of the performance it is not surprising that electricity is preferred. (52)

### 3.9 Facial Make-Up

Therukoothu make-up basically has the same colours and structural motifs as in the Kathakali dance drama and other South Indian Traditional dance forms. It is intrinsically related to the system of mask-painting found in Hindu traditional art. Therukoothu make-up then is not only used to distinguish character but also has a religious significance in the sense that characters are transformed to those depicted in the religious

scriptures.

Centuuram ( dye-vermillon ) Vellaicapeetha, Vellatuul, Aritaaram (talcum powder) are some of the powder forms used for the make-up.(53) The make-up session traditionally takes the form of a ritual although this is not always adhered to in the 'unprofessional' performances.(see appendix F) Usually a lamp is lit which is the Diipam or ceremonial light. A little pooja (prayer) is performed and then only does the make-up start. A figure of Ganesha is built with tumeric powder on which the word (aum) is painted. By this time the musicians have begun the invocation and are joined by the dances as they begin to paint their faces.(54)



Plate 3 : Ritual before applying Make-Up

(55)

The primary colours used are red, green, white and black. Most characters have a specific basic colour from the neck covering the entire face and, applied onto this, particular motifs to make the character more specific. The colour red is most frequently used in the Mahabarata cycle. Turccanum and Triyotanan are two such characters. While basic colours maybe said to have an overall meaning, in-between shades vary from character to character, depicting subtle shades of personality difference. Ultimately a character's personality in terms of make-up is determined by the colour used, the intensity of the colour and the motif painted onto this.

Green is representative of heroism, beneficence, morality, strength and power. The Mahabarata cycle has in it many characters who may be said to be eligible for the colour green, although shades may range from a very light green to a very dark green. Arjunan and Biman are two such characters who will use the basic colour of green.(56)

The sections on motifs, head and body gear, and movement and dance are adapted from Frasca

(1984.chapters five and six) and from observations made by the researcher himself.

### 3.9.1 Therukoothu Motifs

The most important motif used in Therukoothu make-up is referred to as the mal. The motif extends from one end (near the ear ) to the other end and lies just below the eyes as shown in the figure below:

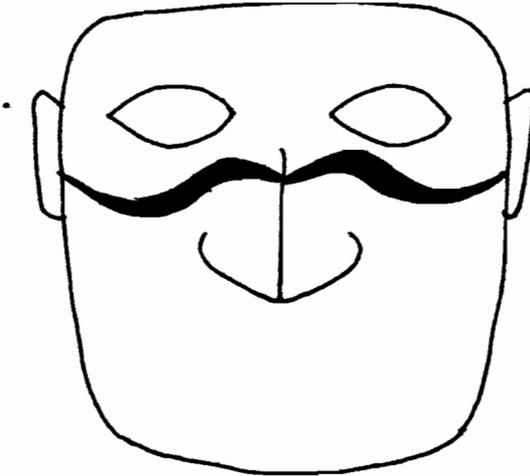


Fig. 6 : The Mal



Fig. 7 : Pattern of Mal

The general pattern and width of the mal varies according to the character being made up. Figure 7 is an example of a pattern used. (see also plate 4) The dots themselves maybe either large or small but mostly white in colour.

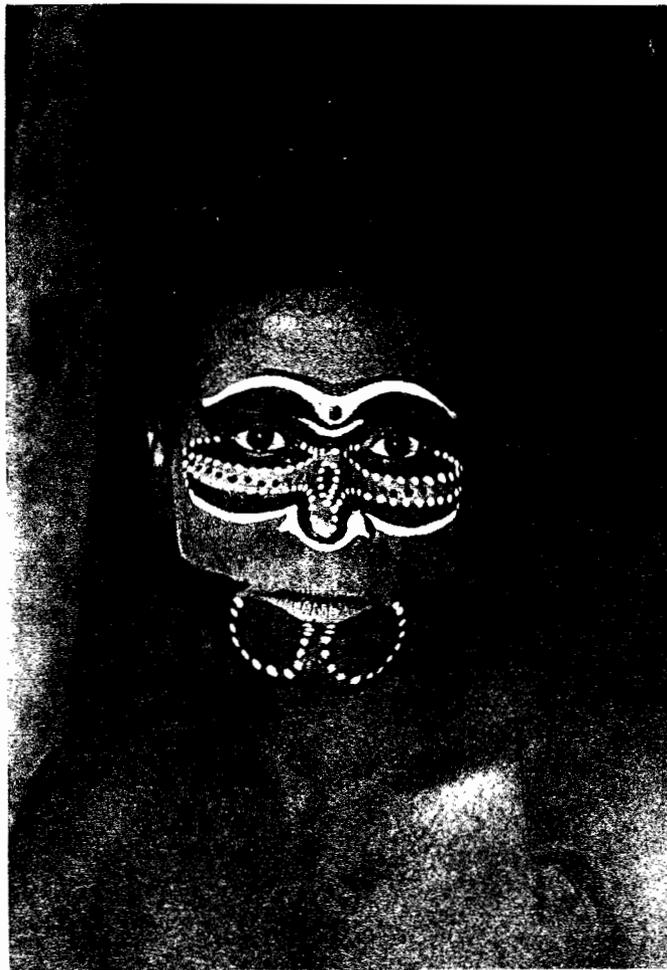


Plate 4: Motifs used in Make-Up

(57)

The following is a mal for Biman :

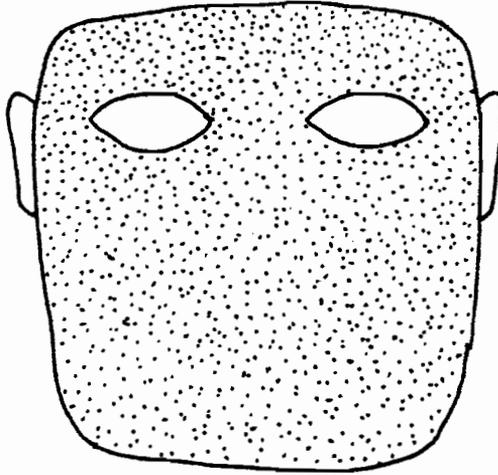


Fig. 8 : Mal for Biman

The function of the mal is primarily to accentuate the eyes which are the single most effective expressive body part used in Indian Theatre. Kathakali, Bharata Natyam, and other classical modes of Indian art make extensive use of the eyes and make-up accentuating the same.(58)

Another motif found in the lower part of the face is referred to as the Kiruta. This belongs to the warrior or evil type of character. It resembles a moustache which comes down from the side-burns and is amassed all around the lower lip and chin as shown in the figure below :

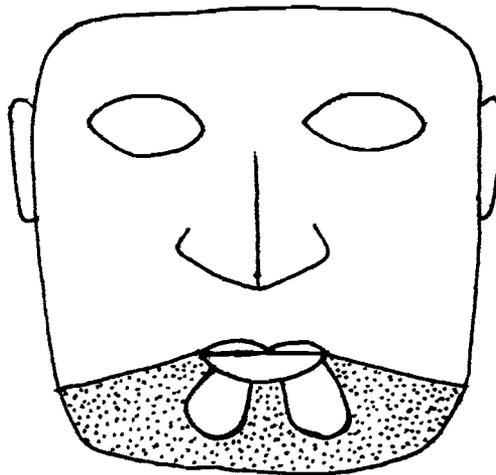


Fig. 9

Kiruta

The two portions under the lip are usually outlined with a different colour or dots:

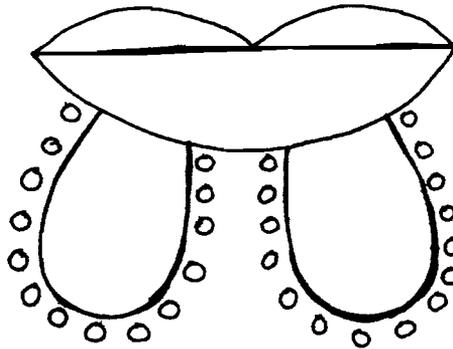


Fig. 10

Make-Upunder lip

Demonic characters usually have painted on their chins white fangs extended from the mouth. Characters who may use this kind of make-up are Hirayam and Vallarakkan.

Artificial moustaches are also used. Made up of synthetic fabric, they are tied behind the head. Painted moustaches may also be used for the 'minor characters'. (59)

### 3.10 Head and Body Gear

These are basically made up of the crown and shoulder ornament. There are two types namely the Kiritam and Cikarek. The Kiritam is decidedly larger than the Cikarek as shown in the drawings: (See also plates 5 and 6)

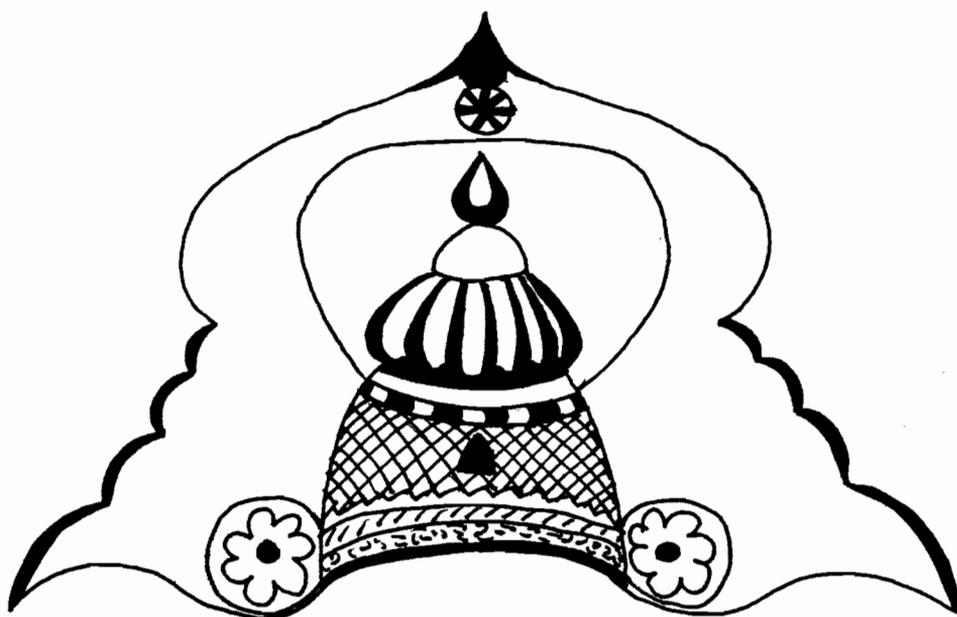


Fig. 11 : Kiritam

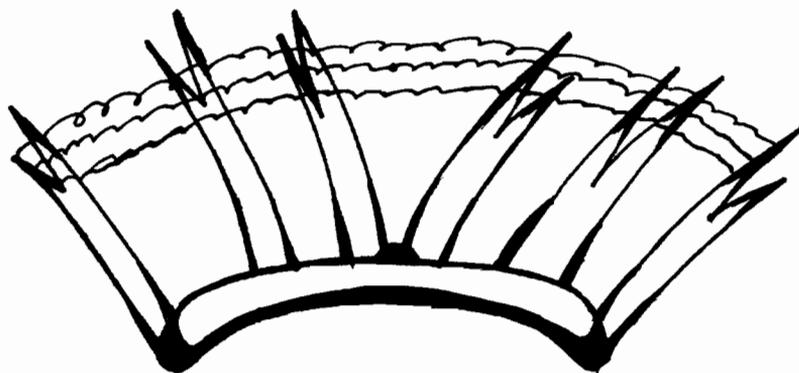


Fig. 12 : Cikarek

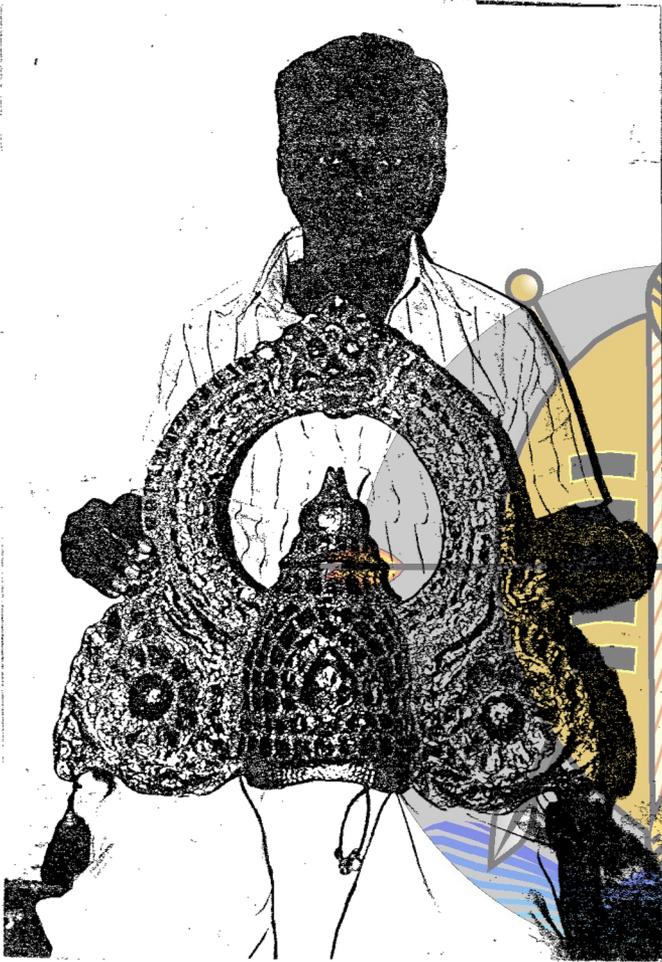


Plate 5 : Kiritam (Head Gear)



Plate 6 : Cikarek (Head Gear)

The crowns are worn according to rank of kingship. For example among the Pandavas, Taruma -raga and Biman wear Kiritams, while Arjunan wears a Cikarek. Among the Kauravas, Turiyotanan, the first in succession to their father, King Tirutarathran, wears a Kiritam while Turccacanan wears a Cikarek. The following is an example of the shoulder gear used in Therukoothu performance:

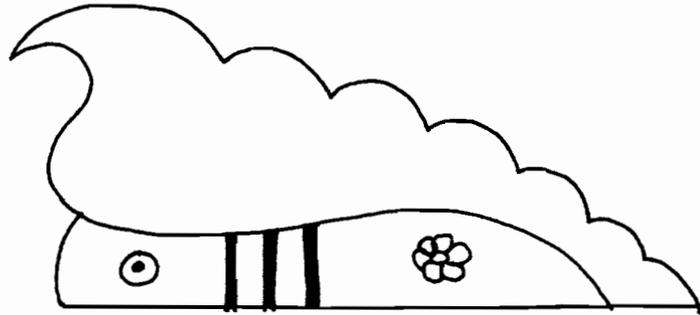


fig. 13 : Shoulder Gear (Puja Kirtti)

The Puja Kirtti is made up of the same material as the headgear ; light wood called Punnai and lavishly decorated with white and coloured mirror pieces and coloured foil. The rest of the costume is made of combinations of the following : shirt-like dress (full of pleats) pyjamas, dhotis, richly embroided velvet coats, waistcoats, jibbahs, and long loose trousers with over-skirts.

Although most of the costumes worn are elaborate, they are cleverly put together to facilitate easy movement. Dance bells (Kajai ) are worn by all the characters.

The following diagram shows the arrangement of the head and shoulder ornaments of the Therukoothu performer: (see also plate 7)

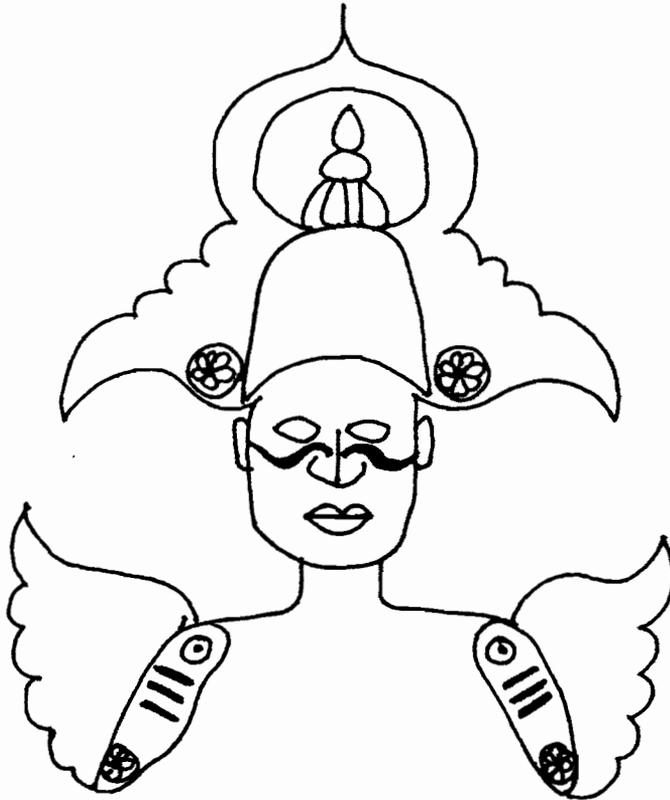


Fig. 14 : Arrangement of Head and Body Gear



Plate 7 : Arrangement of Head and Body Gear (61)

### 3.11 Movement and Dance in Therukoothu

Therukoothu dance is difficult to define in that it is not a choreographed, well rehearsed or rigid form like Bharata Natyam, which has become widely acknowledged for these very reasons by the middle and upper classes. Scholars on the subject, such as Subrahmanyam (1979.p.15) have ventured only to describe the form as a 'rustic counterpart to the classical theatre'. This claim has subsequently become a popular angle for study and research. The classical connection however is difficult to discern if one has not had some kind of training in Indian classical dance forms. Therukoothu has never been in the forefront of the Indian performing arts tradition simply because it, never gained recognition by the so called elite. It remained as part of India's folk tradition and was never acknowledged for its classical connections. An in-depth study of the classical tradition in relation to Therukoothu is unfortunately not within the scope of this dissertation. It would nonetheless be important to note that the classical tradition of India has had an influence on the Therukoothu form and is a general feature

applicable to the different elements found within a Therukoothu presentation.(62) At the same time it should be acknowledged that Therukoothu does lack the sophistication of the classical dance tradition of which the Bharata Natyam is seen as a supreme example.

Any attempt at precise naming of Therukoothu dance steps or sequences using Indian classical terminology can only be a futile exercise. Frasca (1984.pp.217-221) goes to great lengths to prove that Bharata Natyam and Therukoothu use very similiar if not the same dance steps and patterns. It has become common knowledge that most Indian traditional arts have developed from a classical base although this may have occurred to varying degrees. To use Bharata Natyam as a medium through which you describe an ancient form like Therukoothu is a gross injustice and one which may lead the reader to the misconception that the form may have originated around the same time. Although the Bharata Natyam form has been glorified as the supreme form conforming to all the principles of the Natya Sastra, it should be borne in mind that

the manual dates back to only the third century B.C. It may be a truer comparison if one refers to a broader classical background rather than a tightly knit and well developed form. Therukoothu dance sequences are governed by many factors:

- a. A number of stories enacted.
- b. Dramatization.
- c. Heavy costumes and weapons.
- d. Allowance for improvization.
- e. Many dancers on stage.
- f. Untrained dancers.
- g. Setting.
- h. First and third person narrative.

Although the above factors may give the impression of the dance form being totally improvisational, there are however certain sequences which have persisted. A popular dance pattern that happens before or after the virithum (this music piece is dicussed in the section on music) and especially by the major characters is a circular type of movement as shown below:

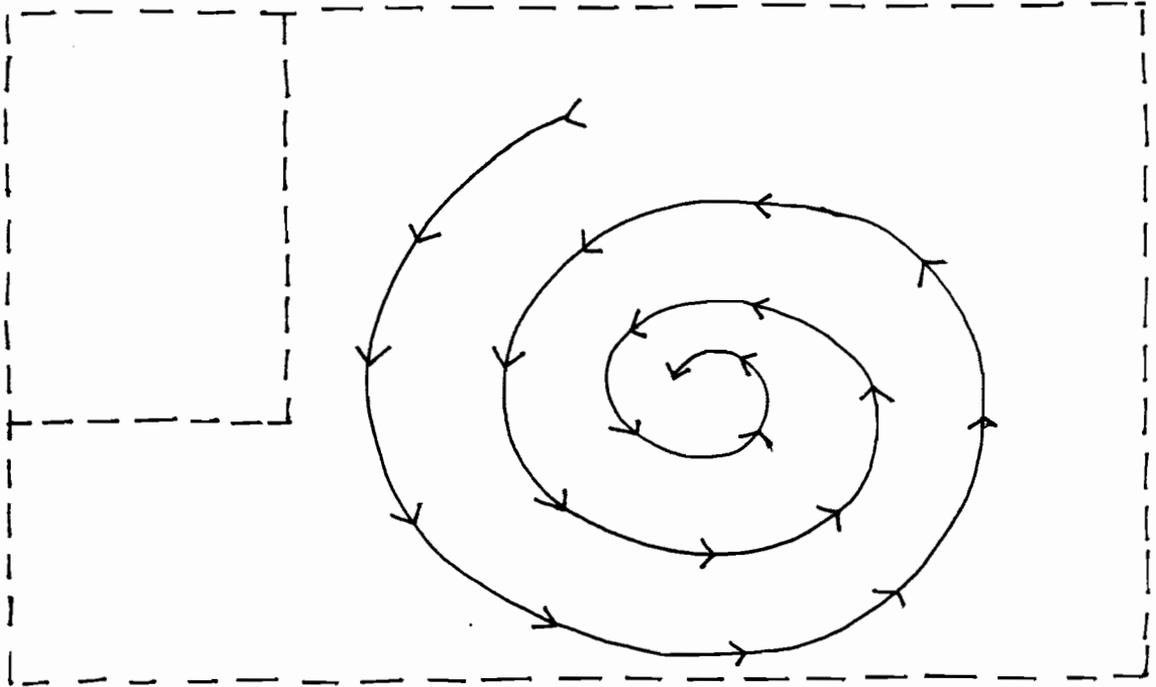


Fig. 15 : Dance Pattern (circular)

The movement pattern takes up the entire performing area and helps to establish the strength of the character. The sequence is punctuated with a vigorous, rhythmic foot pattern that is matched syllable for syllable with the beats of the drum.

The following sequence usually occurs when the dancer is either singing about his plight or communicating an important part of the story to the audience. The sequence is meant to communicate with most of the audience as can be seen by the shape of the movement pattern:

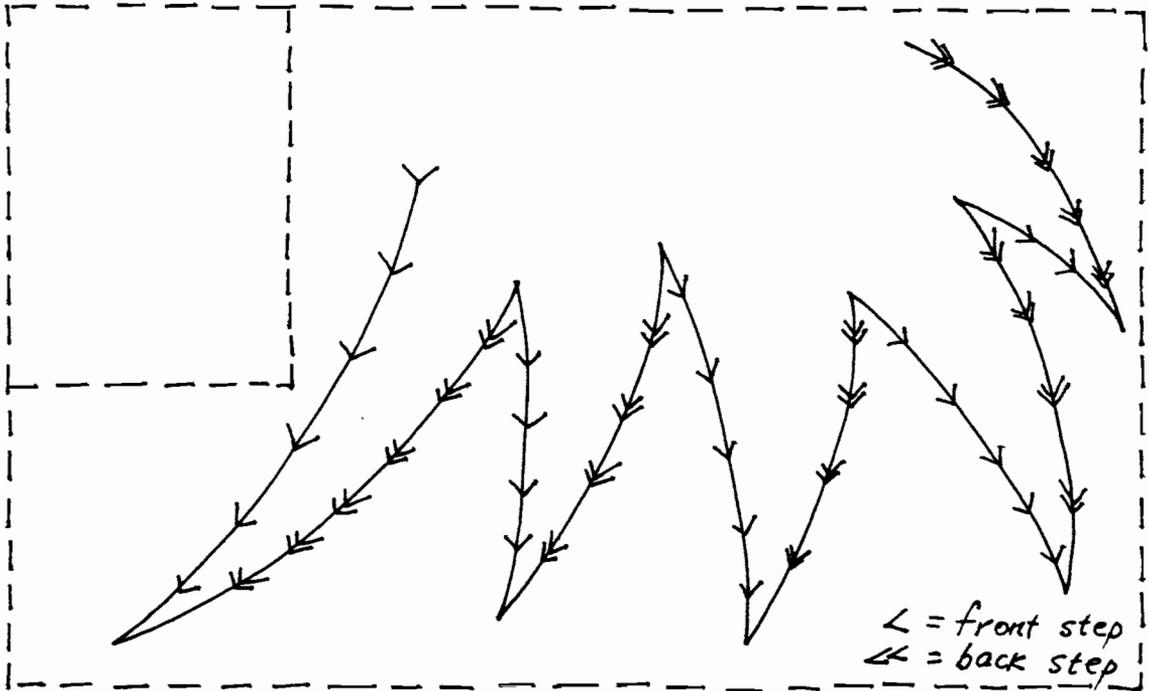


Fig. 16 : Dance Pattern (full frontal)

Most of the movement patterns and especially the two already discussed end up with the character moving straight to the front as shown below:

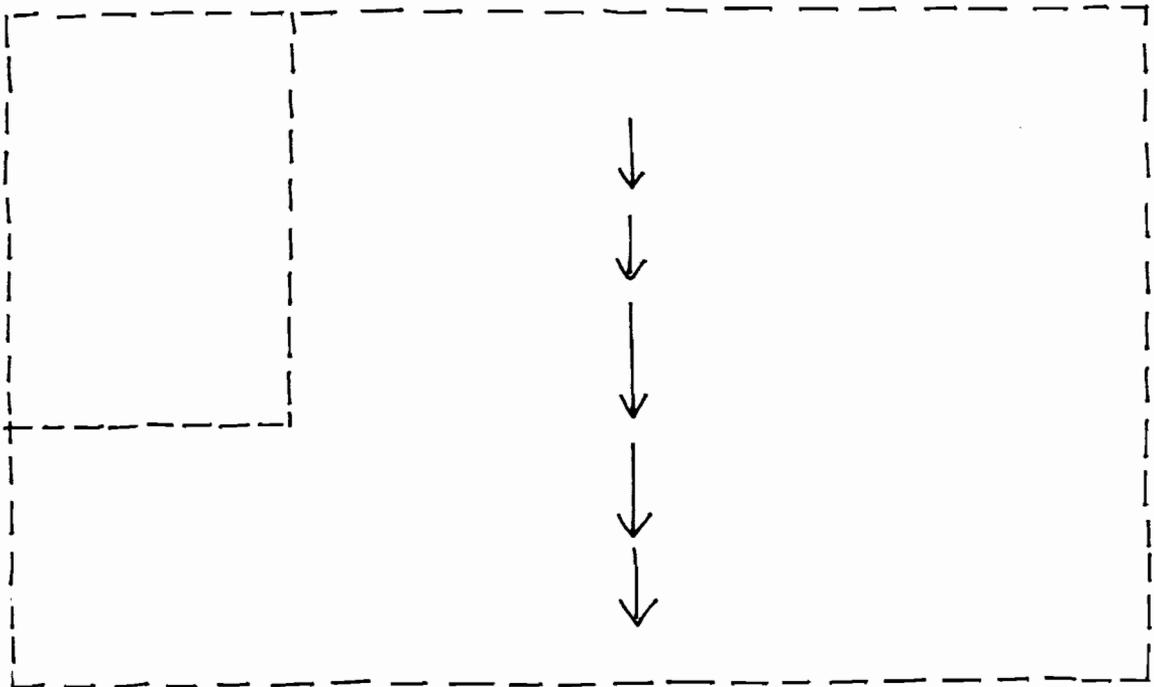


Fig. 17 : Dance Pattern (full frontal)

The researcher has observed that a common dance sequence that pervades a Therukoothu performance is a fairly simple but rhythmic three step pattern. These steps may increase or decrease in tempo depending on the lead singer and the chorus. It usually follows the music pattern of:

te tat te  
 te tat te  
 te tat te (63)

A dance pattern which is considered to have a ritual link is the Kirikki. This is a twirling dance movement that usually gathers momentum and is performed at great speed depending on the skill of the dancer. The movement pattern is usually accompanied by the same quality of music, a continuous build up of non-metrical notes that raises the tension to a crescendo. The researcher has observed especially in the performances in South India that during this movement the performer often goes into a trance-like state.(see appendix H) This movement pattern is done just after the virithum or at any other stage in the performance to assert the personality of the character. It may be done on it's own or within a broader circular

movement as shown below:

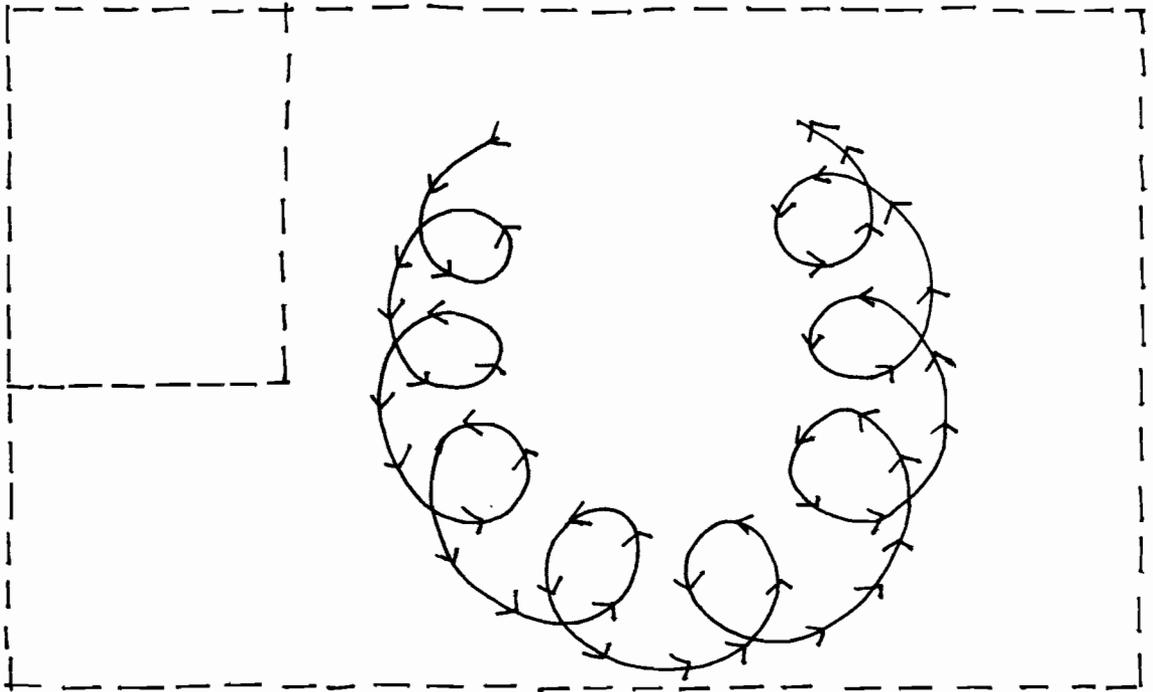


Fig. 18 : Dance Pattern (Kirikki)

### 3.12 Conclusion

Having offered a detailed definition of the Therukoothu form found in South India, it was found by comparison that the form found in Natal has certain structural differences due no doubt to certain peculiar sociological conditions.

In the area of make-up there are only a few recognizable motifs or designs by comparison with the South Indian form. Certain designs such as the white dots around the eyes (as discussed earlier in the chapter) were occasionally observed. White face-paint is most often used with occasional variations. Exponents of the form are also not able to offer satisfactory explanations for the use of certain colours, designs or motifs.

The greatest degree of compatibility lies in the costume. The head and shoulder gear are almost always present although not with the same design and sophistication as those used in South India. The same could be said of the variety of jewellery and dress ornaments that are popular accessories that completes a character's costume.

Critical discussion on how much the classical tradition has influenced the dance patterns found in Therukoothu is not uncommon, but important to this argument is that these patterns are more recognizable in the Therukoothu form in South India than in those of Natal. As in the other areas, the the dance patterns of Therukoothu have evolved

according to the environment it was nurtured in. While the sociological conditions have effected certain changes there are certain movement patterns which still have a close resemblance to the South Indian model. The three step pattern, 'te tat te' like the kirikki, the twirling dance movement (as discussed earlier in the chapter) seem to have persisted unaffected and variations of these and others are performed according to the skill of the dancer.

Notes

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- 28 Brandon, J.R. 1967. Theatre in Southeast Asia.  
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- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Govender, J. Interview, 1989.
- 34 It was important for the researcher to locate  
an authentic troupe that could be used as  
an example.
- 35 Gargi, Op. cit. p.135.
- 36 This observation was made in a number of  
performances that the researcher has  
viewed over the years.
- 37 Photograph of Therukoothu Performance in  
South India, showing curtain entrance.  
Author's collection.
- 38 Gargi, Op. cit. p.135.
- 39 Govender, J. Interview, 1989.
- 40 The researcher enlisted the assistance of  
Govender, J. in the translation of this  
episode.
- 41 A number of interviews and observations have  
indicated that this space is used in a number  
of ways.
- 42 Photograph of Therukoothu performance in South  
India, showing materials used in the building  
of the kottakai. Author's collection.
- 43 Govender, J. Interview, 1989.
- 44 The researcher observed that the change-room  
was preferred in the rear of the acting  
space in performances viewed in the Purisai  
Village, North Arcot, South India.
- 45 This information was extracted from memory  
of the performances done in the Clare Estate  
Maha Vishnu Temple approximately fifteen  
years ago.
- 46 It was observed that not all of the  
instruments are used all of the time.  
Different combinations are preferred by  
certain troupes. It is often that many  
talams are used to keep a strong tempo of  
music. The researcher is familiar with the  
instruments as he is a keen musician.
- 47 Frasca, Op. cit., p.189.
- 48 Gargi, Op. cit., p.140.

- 49 This demonstration made very clear to the researcher how the flexible form of the Therukoothu music is employed to complement the Therukoothu style of drama.
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- 52 Ramasamy, Op. cit. p.28.
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- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Photograph showing the ritual that is carried out prior to putting on make-up. Author's collection.
- 56 Frasca, Op. cit. pp. 235-240.
- 57 Photograph showing the motifs used in Therukoothu make-up. Author's collection.
- 58 Frasca, Op. cit. p.243.
- 59 Ibid., p. 248.
- 60 Photographs of head-gear used in South Indian Therukoothu performances. Author's collection.
- 61 Photograph showing arrangement of head and shoulder gear. Author's collection.
- 62 Gargi, Op. cit. p.133.
- 63 It should be noted that the sections on Make-Up, Motifs, Head and Shoulder Gear and Movement and Dance were mainly adapted from Frasca(1984) and from observations of performances both in South India and South Africa.

## Chapter Three

### 4.0 Introduction

Having traced the general history of Indian theatre in Natal in chapter one and having provided a descriptive definition of Therukoothu in chapter two, the focus now shifts to a consideration of the state of the form found in Natal and to the experiments that were carried out that attempted to explore a shift from ritual to secular performance; it being the thesis of this dissertation that by popularizing Therukoothu in a secular form, it may be possible to resuscitate and preserve it for the future.

### 4.1 The State of Therukoothu in Natal

The Indian immigrants arrived in Natal with the express intention of working in the cane-fields. They were placed in an environment similar to the one they had left. Although they initially were unable to practice their traditional arts because of the time constraints caused by the Indenture System, the freeing of Indians in 1911, and the relaxing of the rules a while before, made it possible for them to pursue cultural activities to a certain degree. The advent of

urbanization, Westernization and modernization however, brought about certain changes. The system of education, being based on a Western model created a bias in the fields of language, art and culture. Indians, especially the younger generation, began to shun their native heritage and adopt a European lifestyle. Traditional theatre forms such as Therukoothu therefore began to steadily lose the support base they once enjoyed in the villages, such as, Mount Edgecombe, Verulam and Stanger.

By 1985 many of the last surviving Therukoothu troupes began showing signs of disintegrating. The introduction of the Group Areas Act (1950) led to the dispersion of the Indian Community as far afield as Chatsworth and Phoenix. Many of the Therukoothu performers found themselves in these areas and often too far away from other members of the troupe to be actively involved in theatrical activity. Even before the dispersion for many the practicing of this art form had become merely a past-time and the inconvenience and expense of travelling was not worth their while. Many of these performers had decided to 'pack it up!'

The situation described above left many of the Therukoothu troupes with only a few members, making it impossible to continue as fully fledged troupes. A new phenomenon was thus created whereby performers began to 'freelance' and they refused to accept allegiance to any one troupe, while others combined to form a single troupe. Three troupes which were affected in the above manner and which are presently interacting very closely in the Chatsworth area are the Motala Farm Venotha Nadaga Sabha, the Thiru Muruga Velaasa Nadaga Sabha and the Coedmore Valiba Nadaga Sabha. In the Mount Edgecombe area the following troupes were most recently in existence, the Blackburn Group, the Night Key Group, and Arthi and Party. Investigations into the availability of individual dancers showed that more were available from the Chatsworth area. This phenomenon probably existed because of the geographical distribution of Indians. Chatsworth was created primarily to house many of the displaced Indian families from the one-time rural areas and those evicted through the Group Areas Act. The concentration of Indians here is therefore much greater.

Given the social, economic, religious and political processes that effectively shaped the Indian community in contemporary times, it would seem that certain traditional aspects of this group of peoples were considered to be of lesser importance. It was further noted that:

- (a) Only a very small sector of the public was interested in any way in traditional forms such as Therukoothu. These individuals consisted mainly of the elderly and the pious.
- (b) The majority of the Indian people who had become Westernized tended to appreciate forms which were derived from the Western culture.
- (c) The fact that traditional Indian theatre forms made use of the vernacular rendered the form accessible only to a selected section of the community.

Whilst the above is true for the South African situation the picture is entirely different in the Indian continent. In recent years the Delhi Government has shown some interest and pledged financial support to build schools which could teach and promote this art form. At the time of

this investigation (1989), financial support had already been received by certain troupes, namely, the Purisai Duraisamy Kannappa Thambiran Therukoothu Manram to teach youngsters the art form. The Koothu Pattarai Drama Group in Madras, South India which works in close liason with this group uses elements of traditional Indian theatre and modern Western theatre to create new forms. (see appendix M) What began as an experiment has turned out to be a viable form of theatre catering for a fast growing theatre-going public. This situation then provides for a modified version of theatre to cater for the urban public while forms such as the Therukoothu are being given the financial boost they require to survive in the rural areas.

It seemed to the researcher that similar encouragement as cited above for the art form in South Africa might very well be possible.

#### 4.2 The First Experiment

The complexities and dynamics affecting the theatre scene as discussed above prompted the researcher to consider reforming the dance-drama, Therukoothu, in terms of it being more accessible to modern audiences. Sociological, architectural and geographical aspects had to be considered in terms of the performance venue. The researcher had to familiarize himself with a host of ramifications that had sensitively to be handled in order to create a balanced presentation. The challenge for the researcher was the novelty of the presentation. An art-form that was essentially traditional was being performed for the first time in a venue that was relatively modern.

After considering the various processes and phenomena that operated within and without the Indian community in contemporary times it was decided that the experiment should be carried out, with a view to determining the effects of these changing circumstances on the development of Indian theatre in Natal. The following factors

were observed in the first experiment:

- (a) The effect of minimal modifications on the traditional art form, Therukoothu.
- (b) The popularity of traditional performance modes, namely Therukoothu in modern times.

The implications of the first experiment were identified as follows:

- (a) To select an episode from the Ramayana or Mahabarata that was simple, yet dramatic, structurally effective and adaptable for a new audience.
- (b) To locate a Therukoothu troupe that was operational and would accept the challenge.
- (c) To move the Therukoothu form from its traditional performance environment to a formal eurocentric theatre venue.
- (d) To address the language barrier - most South African Indians did not understand the vernacular. Therukoothu is strictly speaking an art-form which employs mainly the Tamil-language.
- (e) To render the form more accessible to modern audiences through minor modifications.

- (f) To isolate extraneous elements and find ways of making these more meaningful to modern audiences.

#### 4.2.1 The Choice of Episode

The researcher cites the following reasons for selecting the episode referred to as The Battle of Mayal Ravanan:

- (a) The appropriateness of the pace of the plot.
- (b) The simplicity of the storyline.
- (c) The dramatic structure which concludes with a fitting battle scene between the two main characters, Mayal Ravanan and Hanuman.
- (d) The popularity of this section which is used also in other dramatic presentations. It was hoped that it would be easily recognisable especially by the older generation.
- (e) The episode lent itself to structural changes, especially in terms of adjusting the time frame.

The following shows the structural divisions and plot development of the episode discussed above:

### Scene One

The Katiakaaran enters, introduces himself in dialogue song and dance. Ravana enters lamenting the death of his son Inderjith and his inability to overpower the forces of Rama and Lutchmana. He is advised by the Katiakaaran to seek help from his brother Mayal Ravanan who is a magician and king of the underworld. Ravana accepts the advice and asks the Katiakaaran to fetch Mayal Ravanan.

### Scene Two

Mayal Ravanan enters, introduces himself in dialogue, song and dance. He asks Ravana to explain in detail the cause of his predicament. Ravana's account of his son's death and his losses in the battlefield angers Mayal Ravanan who proposes that Rama and Lutchman be sacrificed to Kali (Goddess of Sacrifice) with the use of his magic. Ravana gladly accepts his brother's suggestion. Mayal Ravanan then asks the Katiakaaran to call his wife Thevarnamalai.

### Scene Three

Thevarnamalai enters and asks Mayal Ravanan why she was sent for. Mayal Ravanan explains to Thevarnamalai the plight of Ravana and his proposed plan to get rid of Rama and Lutchmana. Thevarnamalai says that it is wrong to attempt to destroy Rama and Lutchmana because of their strength and Godly status. Any attempts to destroy them would most definitely fail. Thevarnamalai's wavering faith in her husband's prowess infuriates Mayal Ravanan who beats her and kicks her off-stage.

Scene Four

Vibushna enters looking for Hanuman to warn him of Mayal Ravana's plot to destroy Rama and Lutchmana. Hanuman enters and is infuriated when he hears of Mayal Ravana's evil plot. He builds a little house and keeps Rama and Lutchmana locked inside while he sits on top of it, his tail coiled around the house. In the meantime Vibushna (Ravana's good brother) has gone off on a journey. Mayal Ravana finds this an opportune moment to disguise himself as Vibushna and he approaches Hanuman. When Hanuman expresses a doubt that the person in front of him is Vibushna, Mayal Ravana again uses his magic by blowing a kind of sleeping powder on Hanuman and takes Rama and Lutchmana (after he has shrunk them) away in a box. Only when the real Vibushna returns from his journey does Hanuman realize that Rama and Lutchmana have been taken away. Vibushna then gives Hanuman directions on how to seek out Mayal Ravana.

Scene Five

Macha Karpisen enters and finds Hanuman trying to seek out his king, Mayal Ravana. He tells Hanuman that he cannot pass him without a duel. A fight ensues but Hanuman finds it difficult to overpower Macha Karpisen. On enquiry he learns that he is actually the father of Macha Karpisen (unfortunately the story of Macha Karpisen's birth cannot be elaborated upon here). Father and son then plot together and decide that Macha Karpisen should fake being beaten, to allow Hanuman to get to Mayal Ravana.

Scene Six

While Mayal Ravana calls for his sister Dhurdhandigay and asks her to fetch fresh water for the sacrifice of Rama and Lutchmana, Hanuman manages to seek out Kali and convince him that Rama and Lutchmana should not be accepted for sacrifice and then goes after Mayal Ravana.

### Scene Seven

Hanuman confronts Mayal Ravana and the final battle begins and ends with Good triumphing over Evil. Mayal Ravana is however accepted in heaven when he 'prays' to Hanuman for forgiveness.

#### 4.2.2 The Time-Frame

Therukoothu performers are able to enact a number of stories from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Over the years these episodes have become structured according to the needs of the community. The need was generally a full night's entertainment so that villagers could return home the next day. It became customary then to perform all night, using episodes from the Ramayana and / or Mahabharata. This situation presented the researcher with certain practical problems. The urban Indian would not be particularly receptive to an all-night performance for two particular reasons. Most Indians, especially those belonging to the younger generation do not understand the vernacular and, the average duration of urban entertainment is two and a half hours.

The trimming of the time frame in this particular instance was therefore considered an appropriate

modification besides the fact that it now effectively concentrated the action and plot and eliminated much of the repetition which otherwise would have been present. The time frame also provided an acceptable guide to the regular patrons of the Asoka Theatre who are accustomed to shorter presentations.

#### 4.2.3 Choice of Troupe

In terms of locating a suitable troupe the researcher found that there were limited possibilities if the selection was based on the following aspects:

- a). Dramatic skills.
- b). Availability.
- c). Age-group.

It was also not possible to train a group because of time constraints. The Motala Farm Venotha Nadaga Sabha was eventually selected to perform in the Asoka Theatre. All the members of this troupe were over the age of sixty which qualified them as traditional performers. The researcher

cites the following reasons for selecting this group:

- (a) Members of the troupe had worked together previously.
- (b) Members lived relatively close to each other, an aspect affecting transportation.
- (c) The troupe was the only one active at the time that performed all along the North and South Coast regions.

#### 4.2.4 The Asoka Theatre

The Asoka Theatre is situated between two middle-class suburbs, Westville, which was until recently a White group area, and Reservoir Hills an Indian residential area. The theatre stands approximately fifteen kilometres from the city centre and approximately thirty to forty kilometres from such areas as Chatsworth and Phoenix which housed the lower income groups removed from their 'traditional settlement areas' to make way for industrialization and also because of so called 'rationalization policies' of the government (example, the Group Areas Act of 1950). The theatre was built as part of the Drama Department, an academic orientated

department of the University of Durban - Westville. The building is situated on the campus in block K. Structurally the Theatre is considered by the researcher as one of the few suitable theatre venues in Durban in which a Therukoothu performance could be mounted. This was considered so especially because of the thrust stage which provided for three sided viewing as in the traditional performances. The auditorium provides for a raked seating arrangement which accomodates approximately two hundred seated patrons. The stage is approximately ten by six metres with a thrust tapering to approximately five metres.

Until the 1980's the theatre hosted works generally termed eurocentric and attracted audiences more inclined to this type of theatre. This trend has however changed recently with a wide range of works being performed in the venue. The Battle of Mayal Ravanan was the first rural art-form of the Indians to be performed in this theatre venue.

The Battle of Mayal Ravanan however introduced certain dynamics that were 'foreign' to the general pattern of theatrical presentations in this

theatre. The researcher and director of this production were aware that additional methods and devices had to be incorporated if the exercise was going to be a meaningful and worthwhile one for both the performers and the audience. In this regard the researcher introduced two non-performance concepts, both new in the overall context of the presentational scheme. The one concerned the performers and the other concerned the audience while both were meant to extend the meaning and relevance of the production.

#### 4.2.5 The Foyer Exhibition

The foyer space is generally used for patrons waiting for the theatre doors to open so that they can take their seats and ready themselves for the performance. The following were considered when setting up the foyer exhibition:

- (a) The form of the space.
- (b) The light music one listens to.
- (c) The past productions that one may have seen in the venue.
- (d) The dress and style of the other patrons.

The researcher considered the above dynamics to be detrimental to the production and therefore considered the idea of re-utilisation of the space in terms of readying the audience for the production.

The foyer exhibition according to the brochure (see appendix A) was meant to exhibit works that were relevant to the production so that patrons would have the opportunity of absorbing vital information that could be used either to extend, complement or make clear the meaning of the different aspects of the theatre presentation. Various items such as the head and shoulder gear, costumes, the kottakai (change-room), pictures of various traditional dance forms and artistic impressions of all of the above were displayed. (see appendix C) Details of history, origin, significance and general comments were also displayed. The entire story and plot of the Battle of Mayal Ravana was displayed at various points in the foyer and patrons were urged to absorb this information before viewing the performance.

#### 4.2.6 The Production Team

The idea of the 'Production Team' is an obvious Western concept formulated to exert control over a production. It is however not pertinent in this dissertation to argue the merits and demerits of this concept per se but the significance of the inclusion of this concept into the said production will be considered.

To Drama students and others of approximately this age-group the concept of traditional theatre is in all probability a vague one. On the other hand traditional performers themselves have an equally vague notion of modern theatre practices, such as the concept of a production team. The Therukoothu performers themselves fulfill the duties of this team. Members of the troupe are expected to carry out the various technical duties in the different areas of concern as listed below:

- a). Stage-management
- b). Make-up
- c). Costume designing
- d). Set designing and building

Besides the above areas of work, each member of the production team was entrusted with the task of interviewing the performers informally and of accessing information related to the exercise. This was done through interviews and informal discussions. In addition a number of lectures were given to the team, together with printed material (books and articles on Therukoothu) to promote a better understanding of the nature of traditional Therukoothu. The dynamics that operated within the entire production team was that of an 'exchange programme' whereby meaning and information was passed both ways. The production team had to research and gain information whilst the performers had to work within the structure of a formal theatre and with a production team. Rehearsals and rehearsal schedules were a new phenomenon to the actors who began to unlearn the 'traditional style' and to substitute this with a conventional Western one.

#### 4.2.7 Spatial Challenge

Although the Asoka Theatre has its advantages in terms of its thrust stage and three sided viewing possibilities it finds itself still in the categories of design which effectively divides the audience from the performance. This phenomenon is not an architectural flaw but more the faithful adherence to Western convention which says that an audience has to 'view 'a production. In this regard the researcher was faced with limited possibilities. The clear distinction of the stage and auditorium had to be de-emphasized. To draw the audience into the action was considered essential if the function of the ritual action of the Therukoothu form was to be effective. It was anticipated that the ritual aspects that were retained were going to affect only those that could extract some meaning from it.

The device that was employed to 'break the barrier' between the audience and the performance was the use of the stage itself. A section of the stage closest to the audience was used to seat a section of the patrons. These patrons sat on floor mats

and were seen to affect the performance in two ways. The audience furthest away from the action would have seen the section of audience on stage as part of the general audience depending on their knowledge of Therukoothu presentations and related processes. The audience closest to the actions (not the audience on stage) would have been affected or 'infected' by the responses of the audience on stage. This device came into operation in such sections as those of the Komali where the 'audience' seemed to participate more. The audience furthest from the action may view this 'united performance' as a 'play within a play.' The researcher acknowledges that whilst the device employed may successfully have drawn a part of the audience across the barrier it may also have alienated another section of the audience.

Another related issue was the attempt at creating a feeling of 'openness.' The symmetrical lines of the Asoka had also to be de-emphasized if one hoped to achieve any degree of success in this direction. This kind of forced separation of the actors and audience compelled the latter to 'view' the performance from it's designated space. The

situation tended to place undue emphasis upon the visual aspects of performance. The 'traditional performance space' and the 'traditional set' used for the presentation of this art form was always part of a wider natural environment that created a feel of extension into a wider space. The Asoka Theatre by its very nature makes one conscious of the boundaries that exist within a Western theatre setting. After considering the dynamics that operated within the existing theatre space it was decided that a 'peep into the past' kind of setting be constructed whereby 'a sugarcane plantation' feel is created at the rear of the stage and a functional set used in front of this. Particular attention was paid to the choice of materials used in the construction of the two sections in the stage set, to create the quality and feel that exists in a 'traditional environment.' Likewise bamboo and banana leaves were used to construct the change-room and also to create the backdrop against which the action occurred. It was hoped that the creation of this kind of backdrop using natural materials would create the feeling of extension and openness as can be seen on plates 8 and 9.

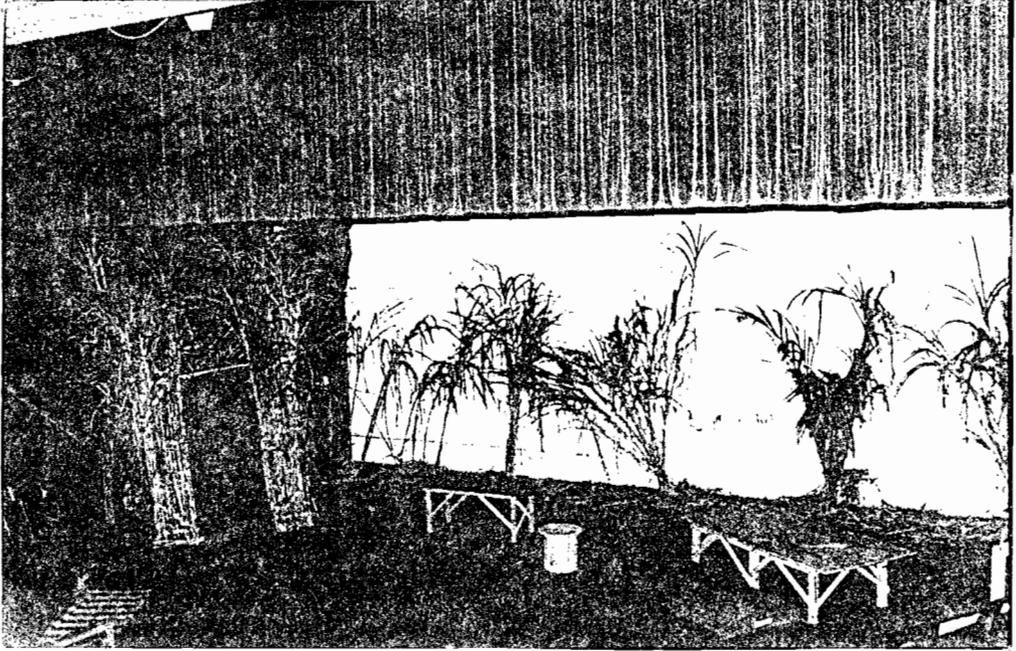


Plate 8 : Stage Setting

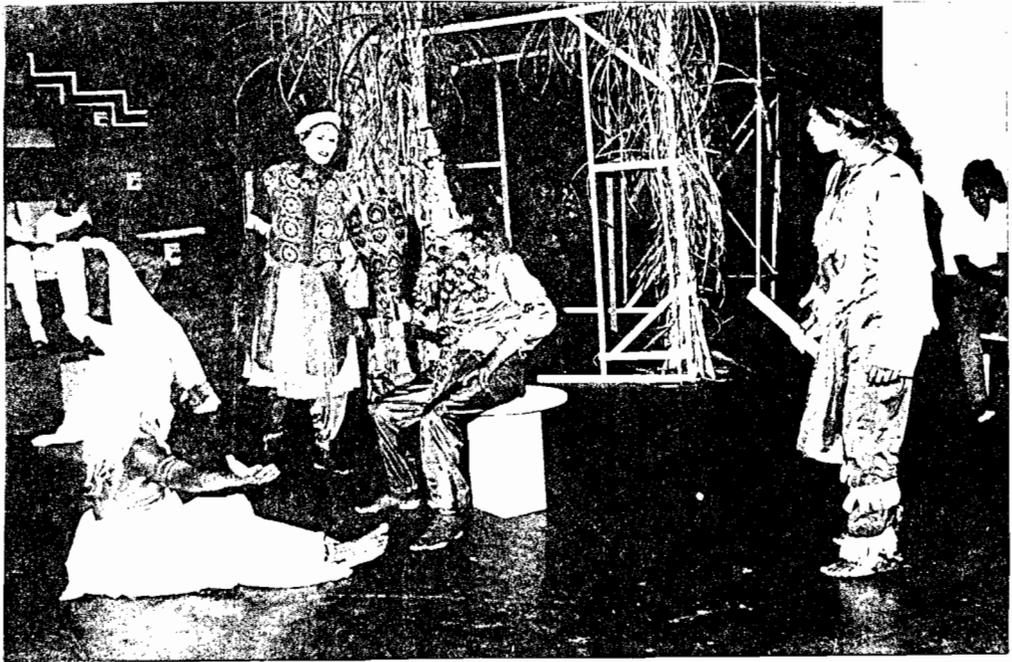


Plate 9 : Stage Setting with Kottakai

Source : Author's collection

The sharp rake of the auditorium necessitated the use of wooden rostra for the musicians and as an alternate level for some of the action, especially the 'leaps' and 'jumps' and the 'dance-fight' sequences. It was hoped that this set would be recognisable as the kind of set used when presentations occurred in marques with built wooden raised stages.

The theatrical phenomenon of having the musicians on stage is not peculiar to traditional Indian drama. Greek, Asian and Western theatre employ this device to varying degrees in certain performance modes. In this instance the music is intrinsic to the development of the performance and therefore the musicians and performers need to be in sight of each other, for together they determine the pace of the action. In a traditional setting the informal manner in which the musicians are presented does not alter the communication process between the performers and the audience as the following shows:

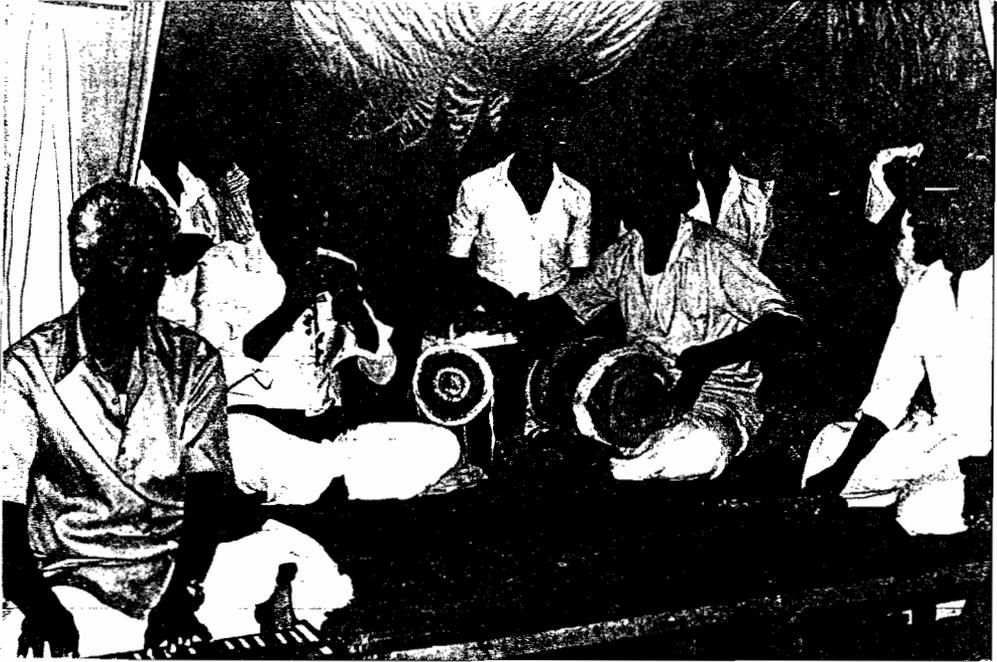


Plate 10 : Musicians on Stage

Source : author's collection

In the Asoka Theatre however, the seating arrangement for the musicians was determined by the architectural layout of the building. The musicians had to be arranged in a manner so as not to unduly distract the audience. This however, had the effect of the musicians looking as though they were part of the set.(see appendix E)

The nature of the setting and style of the presentations in the open allows for a certain amount of 'improvizational exchanges' between the musicians and the performers, a phenomenon which is both acceptable and intrinsic in these forms. The interactions that occur between the musicians and performers exist on one plane while the audience and the 'total happening' on stage exist on another. At various times however the audience relates to the musicians and the performers as separate groups. This usually happens when the musicians are rendering an interlinking piece or when the performers are involved in dialogue, independent of music backing.

#### 4.2.7.1 The Kottakai (Change-Room)

Special mention should be made concerning this aspect of the Therukoothu form. In the traditional presentation this room served a specific function in that it was used for applying make-up, changing into costumes and for general preparation for entrances. The kottakai has it's equivalent in any modern theatre, although the above also carried with it a ritual significance. In the Asoka Theatre

it's 'traditional function' was not entirely necessary, while its physical presence was considered necessary to complete the 'set' and link the 'traditional spaces' which are essential to the structural movement of the presentation. The character usually prepares in the change-room, makes his 'semi-appearance' from the change-room to just behind the curtain, during which time the audience catches glimpses of his head-gear, thus creating suspense as to who the character may be.

The retention of the kottakai was considered necessary, as its omission would have resulted in a gross misrepresentation of the form. Many of these features however were inevitably affected by certain technological devices present and utilized in the Asoka Theatre.

#### 4.2.8 Lighting

To make use of any special lighting effects would inevitably have altered the intended meaning. Using a general lighting design which evenly distributed white light was considered sufficient for the performance. The introduction of lighting

although minimal in terms of 'high tech' lighting concepts does alter the status of the performance to quite a considerable extent. A traditional performance in the open which uses the oil or petromax lamps does not distribute light evenly nor does it always cover the entire acting area. The advantages of this set-up however lies in the effect of inconstant or flickering light on bright and shiny body-gear costumes and jewellery. While these factors were often determined by a number of different factors, the use of general lighting in the presentation became a matter of necessity if the performance was to be visible. This inevitably affected the overall reception of the presentation.

The lighting design employed in the Asoka Theatre was purely functional in that the acting areas in relation to the set, action, the actors, the costumes and make-up were of fundamental importance. The lighting design was meant to light up sufficiently the above aspects so as to make them clearly visible to the audience. Although the lighting design was basic it nevertheless still brought out the brightness and shiny effects of the

costumes, jewellery and body gear worn. It remained nevertheless in stark contrast to the 'traditional lighting system' offered in the 'traditional performances' an aspect crucial but impracticable to achieve in the modern theatre setting as the nearest effect to the inconstant lighting source would have been to 'scintillate' the lighting in an ultra fast strobe. This would however have been extremely distracting and irritating as a constant effect throughout the performance.

#### 4.2.9 Acoustics

The fact that the Asoka Theatre is a relatively small theatre and acoustically sound there were no problems for audibility. It could be noted indeed that the speaking and singing voices and instrumental sounds were positively enhanced. In the 'traditional setting' the voice had to carry not only long distances but also compete with the elements. The performers in the Asoka Theatre production recognised the fact that they did not have to project as much as they would have done 'outside.'

#### 4.2.10 The Concept of the Komali

In terms of staging technique the trickiest section happened to be the problem of language because the Therukoothu form of drama was intrinsically part of the South Indian tradition which necessitated the use of the vernacular. To alleviate this problem the researcher attempted to isolate the Komali as a structural device that could be used to render the production more meaningful for the audience as this character could speak in English.

The researcher was aware that this would have the effect of removing the character from his 'traditional role' but this assisted to a certain degree with the problem of the communication barrier. The presence of the vernacular was considered essential to keep the feel of the drama and drastic changes in this regard would have adversely affected the intention of this exercise.

In the traditional Therukoothu form the Komali usually has the task of prompting the storyline through repetitions, playing question and answer games, and creating a sub-plot which is not

seriously followed to the end. This idea was extended when the researcher became directly involved in playing this character. This was considered appropriate for the following reasons:

- (a) He could speak and understand the vernacular.
- (b) He could act as the medium through which the audience could follow the storyline and plot.
- (c) His 'action' could be modified and structured.

The function of the Komali was also extended to that of the Katiakaaran who is the equivalent of the Sutradhara which means 'director' in Sanskrit. The characteristics of the Komali which are usually improvisational and those of the Katiakaaran then created pivotal roles for communication between the audience and the performance. To this end the researcher as Komali also employed the device of using a whistle to control the action. It was sometimes difficult to hear the interjections of the Komali through all the action and singing and this is where the whistle became an effective device which effectively stopped the action. The Komali was then able to direct the drama from within.

If one were to analyse the significance of the Komali's role one could see this as mediator, director and interpreter all rolled into one. The Komali stood somewhere in the middle of the traditional and the modern. The 'modern' element demanded that the performance adhere to certain Western conventions while the traditional possessed rules of its own.

#### 4.2.11 Conclusion

It was made abundantly clear from the response to the presentation of The Battle of Mayal Ravanan that the local Indian community has become far too removed from their 'Indianness' or traditional habits to appreciate Therukoothu in its pure form. The Battle of Mayal Ravanan played for one week in the Asoka Theatre to capacity houses and standing ovations, yet one could sense a feeling of loss rather than of a revival. No doubt many had come to witness a performance that was to them 'a pillar of the past.' They had come to reminisce about 'the good old days'. The Battle of Mayal Ravanan was taken out of the 'archives' for a temporary exhibition before the community moves into the future.

The time and energy spent in transforming the exercise into a more meaningful one for the audience became irrelevant as an important sector of the public that it had hoped to attract were absent. The younger generation it would seem have been for some time totally lost to the arts of their fathers and fore-fathers. Those who attended were overwhelmingly those who had been exposed to this art form at some time earlier in their lives. The only positive aspect for the researcher was that the troupe of performers may have been the only ones in South Africa to have had the opportunity of presenting material of this nature in a formal theatre venue. With the dynamics that are operating on the social front, presentations of this nature cannot last indefinitely nor, it would seem, can the last few exponents of this form. The Battle of Mayal Ravanan has nonetheless served to emphasize that traditional Indian Theatre is in need of urgent review if it is ever to make a lasting contribution to our developing culture in this country.

### 4.3 The Second Experiment

It was clear from the outset that the second experiment was going to effect drastic changes in the traditional form. The 'traditional audience' always knew in part what to expect from the theatre they supported. Epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabarata are in most cases recognisable stories. Characters such as Krishna, Hanuman, Arjuna etcetera, are colourful characters who are integral to the dramatic action of the epics and are also ritually connected in the sense that they are revered Hindu deities. This phenomenon usually rendered the audience less critical of presentational aspects of performance. Western theatre operates on a totally different level in that the audience least knows what to expect. The most it may be aware of is the title, and what the critics may have to say. This situation makes the western audience more critical in that every production viewed is totally different.

Traditional theatre conveys messages through dance, music, acting style, make-up and costume, which with the philosophical content are culture

specific. Audiences will therefore understand these codes to varying degrees. An older audience would appreciate traditional theatre because of the knowledge gained or because similar codes have been encountered before. The communication is therefore dependent on knowledge and experience.

The following factors were observed in the second experiment:

- (a) The effect of fusing traditional and modern theatre modes.
- (b) The popularity of productions that fuse the traditional with the modern.

The implications of the second production, written and directed by the researcher, were markedly different from the first. They were as follows:

- (a) To put together a cast that was versatile in terms of acting, dancing and singing, aspects modified in themselves to reflect on contemporary society.
- (b) To isolate structural elements from the traditional and the modern theatre modes that that would be compatible and aesthetically congruent.

- (c) To isolate themes and issues from the traditional and the modern theatre modes that could be used together to create an artistic whole relevant to modern audiences.

Three Hand Six Foot is a play that was meant to capture the ethos of contemporary society. It is a product of the dynamics and processes that operate within the social, religious, economic, political and cultural milieu of a contemporary Indian community in South Africa. The researcher consciously welded together aspects of the traditional and that of the modern to create a new form that may be more in keeping with current South African theatre trends.

#### 4.3.1 The Title of the Play

The title was on various occasions misspelt, misread or misunderstood. The Post Natal referred to the production as 'Three Hander Six Foot' which implies explicitly that the play was to be performed by three people. Newspapers referred to the dance as Six Foot Dance which, besides being incorrect, points to the strong connection with Therukoothu in the minds of many people.

This kind of publicity most certainly provided some sort of guide to the public in terms of what the production was all about. Many people came to the theatre to watch a Six Foot Dance, which is a popular Natal Indian term for Therukoothu. Audience attendance or non attendance depended on how the title was read. The researcher was aware that this may constitute a problem but believes that the correct sign was incorrectly read. The play was never advertised as Six Foot Dance. The researcher further believes that the misconception lies in the failure of the public to read new signs, which may have been caused by the scarcity of experimental work in theatre forms which reflect the changing sociological pattern of South African life. This problem reflects the overall dramatic pattern especially amongst the Indian community which otherwise could have facilitated a more flexible reading.

The researcher believes that an imaginative, creative theatre-going public would have read the title as follows: Three Hand Six Foot. This may be seen to imply that only half of the traditional Therukoothu form existed in this play, that it is a

modified version of the traditional form, and that it uses only certain elements of the traditional form. The title further implies that many theatrical devices were used, not just the 'Foot' as in 'Six Foot' which is the primary body part used in the Therukoothu form.

#### 4.3.2 Characters

The researcher placed emphasis on the selection of characters. The following major characters are used in the play:

- a) Samiaar
- b) Komali
- c) Cooliekaaran
- d) Peru
- e) Kantha
- f) Mr. Gopaul

It should be noted that the characters in this play were meant to be 'stock characters' in that they were put into the play with very specific intentions and messages, example, Samiaar, who is symbolic of the past, Peru, who is a product of apartheid and so on.

The word Samiaar in Tamil means God. In the play Samiaar does not play God but merely exerts a Godly presence. His character name does not imply that he belongs to the religious scriptures, but above and beyond them. His costume is that of a Therukoothu dancer, bright and glittery. As a figure on stage he stands out as being much bigger than the other characters. He is much louder and creates an aura around himself. He can be seen as a 'misfit' or intrusion which is what he is meant to be. He is an intrusion from the past. From the older generation, from the Therukoothu generation. He may be a character from the Ramayana or Mahabarata. His dance steps are that of a Therukoothu dancer and so are his gait, songs and speech. Samiaar only communicates in Tamil for the major part of the play. He only uses English once in the play when he says: 'You people are going to drive me crazy.'

The Komali is very much like the character of the Samiaar in that he belongs to the Therukoothu tradition. He is dressed in brightly coloured garments and is active throughout the play, making jokes and singing 'funny songs' in different

languages. He has however, an added dimension in that he functions as a link between the audience and the Samiaar. He functions as an interpreter to make the audience understand what the Samiaar is saying. His interaction with the other characters, the audience and the Samiaar makes him the link that connects all these characters. He is the central element that fuses the traditional and the modern and presents this to the audience. Cooliekaaran was derived from the term Coolie which was a commonly used term to refer to the Indian labourer and 'Kaaran which is a reference to a male person. The term Coolie is still used today but in a derogatory sense. This character epitomizes the Indians that were 'lured' into coming to South Africa. He shows how his hopes and dreams were shattered when he arrived and his strivings in this land under harsh economic conditions. The character is not included to reflect individual concerns but is clearly a representative of a class or group.

The character named Peru is derived from the name Perumal, as in Perumalsamy, a Hindu deity.

Shortened names of this nature usually are adopted by the individual affected by modernization and westernization, especially the younger generation. He has become ashamed of his cultural heritage. This character is very much a part of today's 'middle generation' and preoccupied with matters of money and progress. The character is semi-literate and turns to religion only when he is in a spot of trouble.

The character name of Kantha is derived from Kantharuby or Kanthamoney which were popular names in the Indian community. She is similar to Peru with only minimal variations in characteristics.

The character name Gopaul is the anglicized version of the name Gopal or Gopalan with 'a' as in 'car.' He is a social worker and an intellectual. Mr. Gopaul is the kind of person who supports 'christian principles' but still has some sort of interest in the Indian community from an intellectual point of view. He belongs to the 'middle generation' who is desperately trying to come to grips with the world. Mr. Gopaul is

clearly the symbol of sense and logic. He says what the playwright feels about today's society, about violence etcetera.

#### 4.3.3. Dramatic Plot/Story

##### Scene One

This happens in the change-room or kottakai where taped Therukoothu music is playing. Matters of a general nature are casually discussed to create the informal feel that exists prior to a Therukoothu performance. All this is clearly heard by the audience.

##### Scene Two

The Komali enters singing the traditional Therukoothu opening song. He announces what the play is all about and sets it in motion.

##### Scene Three

The scene gives us a slight indication of the conditions that prevailed prior to the Indians coming to South Africa and the feelings of the community about leaving their land.

##### Scene Four

This is a short scene, made up of a single telephone call by a coolie agent in India to a British officer concerning the 'collecting of coolies'.

### Scene Five

This scene concerns the arrival of Indians in South Africa, their initial treatment at the hands of the British officers and the planters.

### Scene Six

This section is made up of a mime dance sequence showing the hardships that the Indian Indentured labourers had to go through, working long hours with no time to pursue any other activities.

### Scene Seven

The Komali fills this scene to bridge the gap between the previous and the next. The 'freeing' of the Indians and their subsequent moves in the direction of economic upliftment, naming some of the professions they sought.

### Scene Eight

Thumbadoo, the fruit-seller takes up this scene. He speaks of an ill-omen that may have befallen the community when the temple peacock dies. He reminisces about the past, about how well the Indian community was progressing culturally and that it had now abandoned culture in the pursuit of financial gain. He speaks of the Festivals and the all-night Therukoothu performances etcetera.

### Scene Nine

This scene marks the arrival of the Samiaar, a traditional Therukoothu performer who engages in a lively discussion with the Komali concerning the state of the community and the impending extinction of the traditional arts. Agreement is eventually

reached that there has to be compromises between the 'traditional and the modern', 'the old and the new' if there is to be a balance in society, and for people to support the arts and culture in general.

#### Scene Ten

This scene between Peru and Kantha stands out from the rest of the play as a 'play within a play'. It deals with a theme that is new and relevant. Whilst it takes up the compromises spoken of in the previous scene it also introduces a character of African origin to emphasize the issue of racial intolerance. Although Peru and Kantha are stock characters like the others in the play, the audience identifies with them easily as they are contemporary. The issues spoken of and played out prompt the final scene.

#### Scene Eleven

This scene is the final 'acceptance scene' which is prompted by a 'realistic scene' of violence in the previous scene. Samiaar accepts that 'real issues' have to be dealt with if the Indian community is going to progress in any way. The final song and dance are symbolic of this acceptance.

#### 4.3.4. The Dramatic Action

The first scene serves to create the atmosphere that one may identify as belonging to that of a Therukoothu production. Taped Therukoothu music is playing and very casual talking is heard in the 'change-room.' Reference is made to the musicians not being ready and partaking of alcohol etcetera. This device was employed as an attempt at reminding audiences of Therukoothu performances of the past. It readies the audience for the impending action and also helps to cast the mind back to traditional performances where there were no rules concerning noise levels. The acoustics in open-air performances are of one order, those of the Asoka Theatre on the other hand are of quite another. This 'noise' in the 'change-room,' resounding in the auditorium can be quite jarring but appeared to be effective.

The dramatic entrance of the Komali marks the beginning of the play. Traditional Therukoothu operates in very much the same manner. His function here is very similar to the Therukoothu performances, to create an early report with the

audience. This figure is easily recognisable as belonging to the Therukoothu tradition. He is quite comfortable speaking to a single member of the audience who demands 'action' not 'only songs.' This character is at liberty to improvise with the audience. His presence in the play is two fold; whilst he is a recognizable character from the traditional performances, he is also an active catalyst to the audience understanding in Three Hand Six Foot. The character is therefore pivotal in the sense that he is meant to be seen by the audience to be the link between the past and present.

The entire section concerning the arrival of Indians is meant to serve as a reminder of the conditions that prevailed when the Indians arrived in 1860 and the hardships that the community had to overcome till they were able to set themselves up as effective members of society. The constant harassment by the colonists is portrayed throughout the section. The play then deals with the cultural revival of the Indian community in a striking scene which is in contrast to those presented earlier. The first half concludes with

talk of an 'ill omen'. This is aptly interpreted as meaning 'all is not well' and that the 'Indians are only thinking of money'. This 'omen' constitutes a major threat to the community and signals the beginning of the cultural disintegration.

The Thumbadoo scene marks the middle of the play. He is an honest hawker who sells fruit on school premises during the lunch breaks. A man who is able to see into the future, a man who dreams about the future, a man who can readily look into the past and remind us about 'our fathers and forefathers' and the Therukoothu performances that used to happen when 'people sat on floor mats' and 'watched for the whole night.'

The second section is marked by the entrance of the Samiaar. His costume, make-up, head and shoulder gear resemble that of a God or king. His introduction provides the first concrete link to the 'drama of the Gods' as found in the epics, the Ramayana and Mahabarata. At this point the audience encounters for the first time in the play a scene that resembles that of the Therukoothu form. This scene also marks the first encounter

between the only two 'Therukoothu characters' in the play, the Samiaar and the Komali. The exchange between these two characters becomes a significant signpost for the audience. The Komali is clearly on the side of the audience when he explains why he is speaking in English and not in Tamil or Hindi. The Komali says 'if I spoke Tamil or Hindi, nobody will come and see me perform.' This echoes the audience's attitude towards such a performance. They will only attend if they are able to understand at least a substantial portion of the language being used.

This scene is very similar to those belonging to the previous production directed by the researcher, The Battle of Mayal Ravanan. In both the productions the Komali translates the vernacular sections into English for the benefit of the audience. This device is an attempt to win the favour of those who do not understand the vernacular by giving them an insight into the play through a medium that is accessible to them. The playwright also uses the scene to draw attention to the problem of the use of the vernacular in the traditional performing arts, in terms of it

not being accessible to modern audiences. He is clearly propagating, through the Komali, the use of traditional aspects but in a modified version so that people can understand. We also have the case where the new generation is asking the old to come together and 'create a perfect balance'.

The introduction of Samiaar is also linked to the omen that Thumbadoo speaks of in the first half of the play. The community has undergone a drastic change which is cause for concern. After his exchange with Samiaar the Komali sings a song in English and Tamil concerning the 'the state of our people.' Samiaar is then asked to 'please sit and see for yourself.' This line is directed to both Samiaar and the audience. At this point, both Samiaar and Komali sit to watch, the lights change and we have the entrance on a new section of the stage of two new characters.

The scene involving Peru and Kantha acts as a play within a play. It is totally modern with the 'traditional characters,' the set, the change-room etcetera, in the background. Lights completely demarcate the section of the stage on which the

action occurs. The style of the scene is markedly different in that for the first time we have two 'real' people on stage; contemporary characters that the audience can readily identify with.

The introduction of Peru and Kantha in the second section heralds the beginning of the climax of the storyline. The pinnacle in the development of the Indians in South Africa is the community of today caught in the rapidly changing country. The issues that Peru and Kantha attempt to deal with reflect a community that has failed to come to terms with the processes that have changed the codes of co-existence amongst the different cultures in this country. The old morals, values, customs and traditions are not strictly applicable any more. The couple are befuddled by the happenings at the university and this causes anxiety about their daughter who is ready to go to this very institution. Their discussion with Mr Gopaul about the general violence in the country and the specific violence within Indian families reflects the same confusion that they are caught up in. Each time Peru goes to God for assistance but even here he is irrational in his speech. He

eventually gives vent to his feelings by violently abusing his wife.

The play concludes with Samiaar's 'interference' and 'acceptance' that the old generation could have helped instead of concentrating on subjects that were removed from our real society. His telling line in the 'communal dance' where, instead of the Therukoothu dance, he is doing a 'rock and roll' dance is 'you people are going to drive me crazy.' This line shows an underlying acceptance of the new generation by the old and the amount of work that needs to be undertaken to bridge the gap between 'the old and the new.'

#### 4.3.5 The First Section

This section is very much a statement to the audience, which says 'this is what happened'. It documents the arrival of the Indians. Historical data is systematically presented. The high and low points which are expected as in a play that follows Western conventions are not present. This linear documentation immediately has implications for the audience. Those who are ignorant of the history of

the Indians of South Africa may find this section interesting and absorbing in the sense that an wholistic view is given of the development of the South African Indians from 1860 to present day.

#### 4.3.6. The Second Section

This section can be seen as a play on its own. It consists of three very distinct parts:

- (a) The exchange between Samiaar and the Komali which introduces the problems and conflicts.
- (b) The problems and conflicts as presented by Peru and Kantha.
- (c) The resolution epitomized by Samiaar's acceptance of his shortcomings and his speaking English for the first time.

The second section is easily recognizable as following the Western tradition of the 'well made play' which shows development of plot, structure and character. Pivotal to this development are the two traditional characters assisting each other to 'accept change or be doomed'. The audience are invited to engage in a similar discussion with themselves.

Kantha and Peru 'play out' the violence in a tightly choreographed sequence that threatens to continue until Samiaar interrupts. This scene is intensely physical and does not necessarily fit into the general style of the play. The violence was meant to look stark and real.

The introduction of Patrick as the person of African origin who may have an interest in his daughter drives Peru almost insane. The presentation of these sequences are dream-like to suggest that it may be a figment of Peru's imagination. The African is portrayed as an intelligent and logical person who is prepared to stand for his rights, not aggressively but in a 'love will conquer' kind of attitude, thus giving the audience a glimpse of what is to be expected in 'a new South Africa'

The final scene is that of a 'communal disco', 'rock and roll concert', 'bharata natyam', 'gumboot dancing' all rolled into one and to music which reflects the same unity in diversity. The audience is invited to join in. This epitomizes what the playwright sees as the 'coming together' and

acceptance especially within the Indian community, the dynamics that will have to operate in the move towards a new 'South African Culture'.

#### 4.3.7 The Three Dimensions

The second section of the play comprises three dimensions or represents three generations of thought:

(a) Samiaar belongs to the first generation which is inextricably linked to the past. He reflects the aspirations of his generation, to uphold culture which is embodied in the Therukoothu form. He however accepts the change mooted by the Komali to make his act socially relevant.

(b) Kantha and Peru belong to the second generation who are trapped between the past and the future. Peru's traditional values are mostly embodied in the rituals he performs without realizing the essence or meaning of his performance. He seeks solace in religion when he is confronted by the future example, the prospect of his daughter marrying an African. This affects him to such an extent that he violently abuses his family.

(c) The images or dreams that come to Peru's mind represent the third generation; Peru's daughter who has 'a mind of her own', and Patrick who is 'honestly in love' and cannot understand Peru's view of human relationships. This generation proposes tolerance and acceptance of other race groups. It proposes equality in all spheres of life.

#### 4.3.8 Conclusion

The researcher believes that Three Hand Six Foot reflected the sociological trends of contemporary Indian Society. The modifications undertaken in this piece cannot be termed minimal as in the first experiment. Three Hand Six Foot was an original piece which was structured according to the 'guidelines' set up by the socio-economic religious, cultural and political milieu that the South African Indian society finds itself in. The issues that emerged were issues that affected Indian society.

Of particular significance is that the piece succeeded in welding the form of the traditional

and that of the modern while the content moves quickly away from documenting the history of the Indians to more pertinent issues that beset the present Indian community. The subtle introduction of the traditional did not seem particularly to affect the audience who were made up of mixed age-groups.

While the play 'spoke to the audience', it simultaneously employed devices of a traditional nature. This fusion then extended the conveyed messages or codes as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Three Hand Six Foot achieved one of the most important goals of Theatre in that it succeeded in stimulating critical discussion and responses from a wide audience. This phenomenon may be attributed to the extension of meaning in terms of providing a 'total theatre' of music, dance, modern philosophy, modern acting styles, make up and costumes.

## 5. Conclusion

Brandon (1967) points out in his preface that the amount of space devoted to a theatre genre determines the degree of importance it holds in a given society. As an art form Therukoothu in its traditional setting enjoyed a solid support base. It's existence depended on the survival of the village, the pious, simple folk which made up its audiences, traditional performers who knew the vernacular, the scriptures and the rules and rituals of the Indian performing arts.

The indentured labourers in South Africa were not in a position to determine their own 'space'. The long working hours and stringent regulations imposed by unscrupulous employers made it virtually impossible for them to indulge in any 'extra-curricular' activities whatsoever. Every ounce of work done had to be related to the economy. The dissatisfaction at the treatment meted out by the plantation owners and the stifling of freedom of expression is adequately exemplified in reports of both the Coolie and Wragg Commissions as commented upon in the main body of this dissertation.

In its day Mount Edgecombe was certainly the hub of theatre and general cultural activity, its rural nature providing an ideal setting to practice the various Indian artistic forms. The Shree Emperumal Temple Festival and the Moharram Festival took the lead with each culminating in the Therukoothu performances and the Tiger dances respectively. 'The Dramas' also flourished during this period before they declined in the 1930's to give way to films. As urbanization, Westernization and modernization became a social reality, theatre forms with religious themes became less important and were reserved for special occasions, usually hosted by religious organizations. Apartheid legislation including the Group Areas Act effectively robbed Therukoothu troupes of a common meeting place by displacing members and relocating them in different areas. Rural areas such as Mount Edgecombe have been reduced dramatically in size, making way for such townships as Phoenix which supposedly provided low economic housing for the Indian community. The remnants of Mount Edgecombe as a village town are however still partially recognizable.

Although the present Mount Edgecombe Temple Society is still faithfully pressing on with its annual festival the feeling is not the same as in the past. Community entertainment has been scaled down to a minimum. The same occurred with the annual Marriamman Festival held by the Mariamman Temple in Isipingo, a south coast town just outside Durban. Therukoothu performances at these festivals are a thing of the past, and if they do happen at all performers have to be brought together from far and wide. Over the last twenty years we have seen the gradual decline of this form with only occasional performances by certain die-hards in the community.

A new trend in the theatre of the sixties reflected a protest against the repressive measures enforced by the state to silence those who challenged its authority. Wholesale bannings and detentions, typified by the imprisonment of Strini Moodley and Saths Cooper, became the order of the day. South African Indian writers took their cue from the socio-political conditions of the day and wrote accordingly. This trend could be seen throughout the sixties, seventies and eighties although no notable South African Indian writers emerged during

this period. It would seem those who gained recognition did so only because they were part of the very few who were challenging apartheid legislation or the social order.

The trend reflected in the previous paragraph developed independently of other forms of theatre, which used religious, moral and domestic themes. Presentations were however influenced by audience appeal which in turn determined their commercial value.

With the 'rubicon speech' of the State president F.W. de Klerk on 20 february 1990, South Africa has undergone irreversible changes with the release of African National Congress president Nelson Mandela and a host of other 'far reaching reforms'. While the politicians are locked in battles concerning whether the government took the initiative or whether the African National Congress had pressured it's opponent into taking such steps the individual in the street has a battle coming to terms with this rapid change. In terms of developmental trends a lot has happened over a short period of time.

With the entire community grappling to keep abreast of the 'ebb and flow', theatre has been caught napping. Napac, the state subsidized home of eurocentric works announces the launch of its Community Theatre Projects, Anness Ramklown is taken on as an actor in the Loft Theatre Company and in the community Patrick Ngcobo becomes a firm favourite amongst guests at Hindu weddings. The University of Durban - Westville answers with Linda Gwala doing the 'South African Cultural Dance' and saying 'I am not a token Black'. (Looking For Muruga, a play written and directed by Kriben Pillay) Many of these devices are however too contrived and this is in essence a reflection of the insecurities being experienced by many of the contemporary South African Indian writers.

The centenary festival of the Shree Emperumal Temple in Mount Edgecombe in 1990 succinctly encapsulated and epitomized the evolution and dynamics that operated during the early days, that shaped and reshaped the Indian community a hundred times over. The one common link that connected the festival of 1990 to the one celebrated in 1890 was the presentation of such forms as the

Therukoothu. The fact that the Therukoothu troupe engaged to perform for the centenary celebrations hailed from Chatsworth and not the hometown is reflective of the societal and legislative changes and pressures. The more important factor however is that this performing art has remained virtually stable in form and content against almost insurmountable odds. To write off this traditional dance drama after such a history of survival may be a gross miscalculation, which therefore points to an exercise which would clearly determine the status of this form in our contemporary society.

The Battle of Mayal Ravanaan in the Asoka Theatre in March 1990 should be seen in the context of the researchers aims and intentions. It was not meant to prescribe to the Indian community but merely sought to test it's strength and weaknesses in terms of it's standing in the future. That the form still has a support base is unquestionable but how long this can last can only be determined by those attending the performance and the performers themselves. That the form is heading towards extinction cannot be denied or avoided. A useful exercise perhaps is to seek ways

and means of using certain elements of this form in an entirely new exercise that would be pertinent in terms of encapsulating the true spirit of modern times; an exercise that could contribute to the so called new South African culture.

Given the sociological trends of the Indian community today the researcher believes that Three Hand Six Foot (directed in the Asoka Theatre in June this year) fulfills a dire need at least in part to reform attitudes towards the arts, especially the performing arts. This view follows the premise that contemporary art should be reflective, relevant and truly representative of the dynamics that are in operation in our present society. It should be noted that the experiment was not meant to create an absolute 'recipe' but carried out merely to make certain observations of changes in meaning in the general pattern of development of South African Indian theatre in the current sociological milieu. The Battle of Mayal Ravanan and Three Hand Six Foot are just two experiments in this regard and could possibly represent the beginning of this new trend.

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 Kossi K.  
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 Chinnappan K.  
 Strinivasan N.  
 Seeralan M.  
 Ramaswamy M.  
 Parthasarathi I.  
 Thumbiran K.  
 Thumbiran N.

Interviews

South Africa

Govender J.  
Archery R.  
Anthony V.  
Naidoo M.  
Reddy M.  
Munsamy C.  
Ramasamy A.  
Thumbiran B.  
Govender S.  
Henning C.G.  
Subramoney D.  
Moonsamy G.G.

UNIVERSITY OF DURBAN-WESTVILLE  
Drama Department

HERUKOOTHU  
*Six Foot  
Dance*



**BATTLE OF MAYAL RAVANAN**



*Produced by*  
**SATCHU ANNAMALAI**

**ASOKA THEATRE**  
19 – 24 March 1990

It is my earnest wish that this brochure also serves as a useful source of information for those who want to know more about Therukoothu. It should be noted however that a brochure of this nature has its limitations and cannot contain any more detail than that which I have already included. Further the colour and splendour of Therukoothu cannot sufficiently be communicated in a low-budget brochure, it should therefore be used in conjunction with the live performance.

N.B. Much of the information used in this brochure has been extracted from my unpublished thesis.

*S. Anandalai*



## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Indian Theatre was always a vibrant form brought over by our great, great grandparents and practiced wherever they settled. Therukoothu or Six Foot Dance has only very recently received some sort of recognition and only from Theatre enthusiasts. This rich and colourful theatrical form never gained the popularity it deserved for a number of reasons, but most of all because of its rural nature. It was always more fashionable to be associated with a classical form like the Bharata Natyam. My purpose in this production is to share with you the knowledge that I have accumulated locally and abroad and create an opportunity for you to witness and judge for yourself the artistic merits inherent in Traditional Indian Theatre. My dancers are the few left in Natal and are all over the age of sixty which means, that Therukoothu may well be extinct in the next few years. My fervent hope is that you grasp this opportunity, to witness a presentation which is not traditionally associated with mainstream theatre and keep alive for a while longer this treasure from our dear motherland.

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A single concept is of utmost importance if our production is going to succeed. A concept of a composite form which views Indian Theatre as being essentially 'a mood' intrinsic in Indian life, where we are involved with music, dance, poetry, playing with Gods and tasty food. It would be foolhardy to consider this approach to a concept of theatre as flippant. It will not fail if it embodies the bare essentials of truth and honesty. In the common feeling for a viable 'process' we forget ourselves and the development of our personalities starts.

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It is my intention in this note to give full credit to our production crew and cast who have given me every indication that they have grasped the production concept, who worked efficiently and consistently from our first meeting, and wish to thank them for the eagerness to strip themselves of past prejudices and join hands in the painstaking process of our work. The drill sessions, the lectures and research, the recording of every detail of this production, bears testimony to our success.

THERUKOOTHU OR SIX FOOT DANCE  
THE BATTLE OF MAYAL RAVANAN

DIRECTED BY  
SATCHU ANNAMALAI

PERFORMED BY:

James Govender	-	Mayal Ravanaan
Chinnakollindhe Munsamy	-	Macha Karippen
Robert Archery	-	Ten Head Ravana/Hanuman
Vragappen Anthony	-	Vibushna/Dhurhandigay
Moon Naidoo	-	Thevarnamalai
Marie Reddy	-	Katiakaan
Satchu Annamalai	-	Komali/Narrator

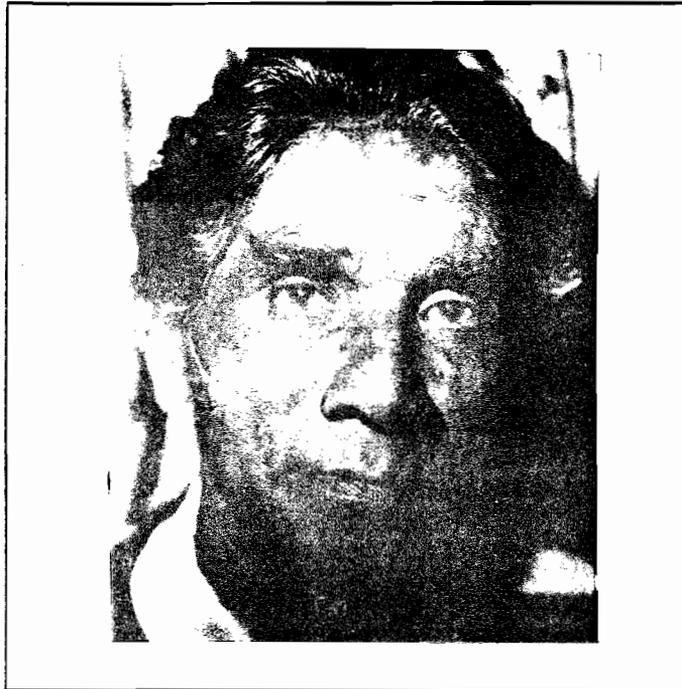
MUSIC BY:

Ganson Munsamy	-	Mirdhingum
Patrick Anthony	-	Lead Back up Singer
Soobrya Pillay	-	Cymbals and Back up Singer
Lingum Govender	-	Cymbals and Back up Singer
Paul Naidoo	-	Cymbals and Back up Singer



JAMES GOVENDER (60 years)

Was the 1st Indian fitter for Dunlop and has been working for the company for the past 24 years. Although popular as an officiating priest Mr Govender has always been active in Theatrical activities around Durban. His active involvement in Therukoothu was prompted by his belief that the Therukoothu mode of presentation was ideal to impart the teachings of the Hindu scriptures. Mr Govender is emphatic that his health and high energy level is due to his participation in Therukoothu and he is therefore able to dance for an entire night and still be at work on time and fit to fulfil his duties there. Mr Govender's friendly manner and his willingness to assist in community projects has made him a popular figure in Durban. His fervent wish is that the Therukoothu form of dance never dies.



ROBERT ARCHERY (62 years)

Although soft-spoken Mr Archery is a very humorous man. He is always ready and willing to speak on any aspect of Indian Theatre, the first love in his life. Mr Archery hails from the South Coast in Natal and has travelled widely performing the Therukoothu Dance Drama. Although Mr Archery suffers from arthritis which he says affects him in his every day activities, he has no problems when he dances. He believes that God takes care of him when he is on stage. Mr Archery's performances are always well received and his most notable role is that of Hanuman. Mr Archery's skill and agility on stage can be seen as testimony of his religious beliefs.



VIAGAPPEN ANTHONY (60 years)

Mr Anthony is presently employed in the laundry trade as a maintenance fitter. He began his dancing career at the age of ten and has been active ever since. Mr Anthony has performed throughout Natal as a freelance dancer. He has also been involved in the Tiger Dance, a traditional dance form which is not performed any more. Mr Anthony's biggest dream is to train a group of dancers who could carry on the tradition of the Therukoothu form. Mr Anthony is acutely aware that the art-form is dying and he has made it a rule that his children accompany him wherever he is performing so that they could pick up pointers and maybe one day continue this tradition which is so close his heart.



MOON NAIDOO (62 years)

Mr Naidoo has achieved a great deal of fame for his portrayal of female characters in dance dramas. He is always ready to give full credit to his father who has taught him all he knows. Mr Naidoo's father was also popular for his portrayal of female characters. Mr Naidoo places emphasis on the religious aspects of Therukoothu and believes that this is what religion should inspire the Therukoothu artist. Mr Naidoo considers himself a professional exponent of the form but says that presently it is not something that one can make a living from. Mr Naidoo however, is optimistic that Therukoothu will one day be revived professionally.



**MARIE REDDY** (68 years)

Mr Reddy has a natural flair for comedy. Although actively involved in playing the role of Katiakaaran (clown \ narrator ) in Therukoothu dance dramas, he still finds the time to play the comedian in Eastern Variety Shows. Mr Reddy has travelled throughout Natal, performing as a freelance Katiakaaran and comedian. Mr Reddys' role demands that he be on stage throughout the performance which usually lasts for an entire night and Mr Reddys' execution of the character has made him very popular as a freelancing performer. A talkative gentleman, Mr Reddy is always willing to assist in community work. He has been active for a number of years as an Indian music teacher and runs a Bhajan group in Merebank.



CHINNAKOLLINDHE MUNSAMY (77 years)

Mr Munsamy or "Mighty Chin" as he is popularly known has a most interesting past. Born in Ottawa, Natal in 1913 he began his wrestling career at a very early age and went on to become the undefeated South African lightweight wrestling champion. In 1948 he ended his wrestling career after having won the title. Mr Munsamy's father, Mr Nattar seems to have had a great influence on his son. A practising priest in the Malayalum Temple in South India Mr Nattar came to South Africa with the first batch of Indian settlers in 1860. Mr Nattar was himself a popular exponent of the Therukoothu form and taught his son all he knew. After his dad's death Mr Munsamy has carried on the family tradition in both priestly and dramatic activities. Mr Munsamy's fervent wish is that his children will also do the same.

## SATCHU ANNAMALAI

Mr Annamalai is employed as a Theatre Technician in the Drama Department of the University of Durban-Westville. He is also a masters student who has chosen Indian Theatre as his field of research. Mr Annamalai has been actively involved for a number of years in writing, directing, acting and promoting plays within and outside the Drama Department. Mr Annamalai has recently returned from South India where he has done extensive research on Therukoothu and believes that the art-form has a great deal of merit and is worthy of revival. Mr Annamalai was recently awarded a four year scholarship by the Merebank Tamil School Society to study in India. Mr Annamalai possesses a strong commitment to promoting Indian Art and believes that its propagation is essential in the formation of a "South African Culture". His most recent contributions, amongst others, were Double Trouble which he directed, Fish Curry, which he wrote and directed and Mr Bansi is Dead in which he played the title role.

MUSICIANS



From Left: Lingum Govender, Ganson Munsamy, Colin Archery, and Patrick Anthony.

Absent: Soobrya Pillay, and Paul Naidoo.

These young musicians learnt the art of Therukoothu music through active involvement. Their commitment to this art form stems from their belonging to an environment which puts "popular teenage pastimes" as secondary to that of Indian Culture. Their dedication is most gratifying and is worthy of high praise and encouragement.

## SYNOPSIS

### The Battle of Mayal Ravanaan:

Prayer: (To ask the Gods for forgiveness if the performance is offensive in any way.)

Introductory Music: To announce the start of the dance.

N.B. New characters are introduced into the story in very much the same way. A screen is held up before each entrance and the individual prayer and introductory song are performed.

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### SCENE ONE

The Katiakaaran enters, introduces himself in dialogue song and dance. Ravana enters lamenting the death of his son Inderjith and his inability to overpower the forces of Rama and Lutchmana. He is advised by the Katiakaaran to seek help from his brother Mayal Ravanaan who is a magician and king of the underworld. Ravana accepts the advice and asks the Katiakaaran to fetch Mayal Ravanaan.

### SCENE TWO

Mayal Ravanaan enters, introduces himself in dialogue, song and dance. He asks Ravana to explain in detail the cause of his predicament. Ravana's account of his son's death and his losses in the battlefield angers Mayal Ravanaan who proposes that Rama and Lutchmana be sacrificed to Kali (Goddess of sacrifice) with the use of his magic. Ravana gladly accepts his brother's suggestion. Mayal Ravanaan then asks the Katiakaaran to call his wife Thevarnamalai.

### SCENE THREE

Thevarnamalai enters and asks Mayal Ravanaan why she was sent for. Mayal Ravanaan explains to Thevarnamalai the plight of Ravana and his proposed plan to get rid of Rama and Lutchmana. Thevarnamalai says that it is wrong to attempt to destroy Rama and Lutchmana because of their strength and Godly status. Any attempts to destroy them would most definitely fail. Thevarnamalai's wavering faith in her husband's prowess infuriates Mayal Ravanaan who beats her and kicks her off-stage.

INTERVAL (15 MINUTES)

#### SCENE FOUR

Vibushna enters looking for Hanuman to warn him of Mayal Ravana's plot to destroy Rama and Lutchumana. Hanuman enters and is infuriated when he hears of Mayal Ravana's evil plot. He builds a little house and keeps Rama and Lutchmana locked inside while he sits on top of it, his tail coiled around the house. In the meantime Vibushna (Ravana's good brother) has gone off on a journey. Mayal Ravana finds this an opportune moment to disguise himself as Vibushna and he approaches Hanuman. When Hanuman expresses a doubt that the person in front of him is Vibushna, Mayal Ravana again uses his magic by blowing a kind of sleeping powder on Hanuman and takes Rama and Lutchmana (after he has shrunk them) away in a box. Only when the real Vibushna returns from his journey does Hanuman realize that Rama and Lutchmana have been taken away. Vibushna then gives Hanuman directions on how to seek out Mayal Ravana.

#### Scene Five

Macha Karpippen enters and finds Hanuman trying to seek out his king, Mayal Ravana. He tells Hanuman that he cannot pass him without a duel. A fight ensues but Hanuman finds it difficult to overpower Macha Karpippen. On enquiry he learns that he is actually the father of Macha Karpippen (unfortunately the story of Macha Karpippen's birth cannot be elaborated on here). Father and son then plot together and decide that Macha Karpippen should fake being beaten, to allow Hanuman to get to Mayal Ravana.

#### Scene Six

While Mayal Ravana calls for his sister Dhurdhandigay and asks her to fetch fresh water for the sacrifice of Rama and Lutchmana, Hanuman manages to seek out Kali and convince him that Rama and Lutchmana should not be accepted for sacrifice and then goes after Mayal Ravana.

#### Scene Seven

Hanuman confronts Mayal Ravana and the final battle begins and ends with Good triumphing over Evil. Mayal Ravana is however accepted in heaven when he 'prays' to Hanuman for forgiveness.

## WHAT IS THERUKOOTHU?

Rural South Indians had a lot of time to spare after the harvests which usually happened in April, the period which is also referred to as Thaaï Poosam in the Hindu calendar. South India also experiences its hottest months between April and August, during which time little or no work can be done, making this period the ideal time for all-night entertainment.

During this period which otherwise would be a "lull" in the lives of the Indians, religious education in the form of story-telling was pursued most fervently. Groups of people often assembled to listen to the drama of the Gods being recited by learned men of the Community. These men were highly respected and sometimes even worshipped. It would seem that this form rapidly evolved into more dramatic recitations and anyone's guess would be as good as mine as to its middle evolutionary period till the present refined form. It would seem that these 'Gurus' (teachers) were solely responsible for imparting their knowledge of the Vedic scriptures and also for guiding its evolution - it all points to the fact that these men must have been extremely proficient in music ragas and in general dramatic skills. The Natya Sastra (handbook which outlines the principles of India performing arts - dated approximately 3 AD) by Bharata Muni may have had an influence only much later.

The fascination for me after witnessing traditional dance dramas being performed in the motherland and then in an adopted country, and its existence over many decades, is the commitment to its inherent form. Minor changes have occurred and these are crucial to the nature of the dance. Regional variations are acceptable as they enable a given community to identify and connect with their immediate surroundings. The Komali, a popular clown figure in the dance drama has the task of improvisatory interjection and localizing the comic sections.

This cultural practice, enacting the drama of the Gods, vividly depicted in religious scriptures, is known by the names "Six Foot Dance" or Therukoothu. The phrase "Six Foot" was possibly coined out of the dazzling footwork of the dances and Therukoothu is actually the Tamil equivalent of Street Dance, or open-air dance, the name which befitted the ancient Indian practice of dancing on the street corners.

SATCHU ANNAMALAI

## MUSIC

The music of Therukoothu on first examination can be traced to the classical mode of music of the South Indians which is based on ragas. Classical music proper is more refined and controlled which requires a great amount of skill and professional voice and raga training, while the rural version is much more spontaneous and less strict in its delivery. It sounds almost colloquial which allows for ad-libbing when the need arises. With the change in geographical locale other languages maybe used in order to provide comic effect and to aid understanding. An example is the South African Indian Therukoothu which is done in the vernacular but uses English interjections such as "Two and half cent tikkie, this is my stekkie, I'm very lucky, that is my bokkie". These lyrics are simple and are appropriately rhythmic for the komali (clown).

.....

## DANCE MOVEMENT

Dance movements are arranged to various dance timings or talas and are often embellished by means of sudden, irregular dance patterns. Both the dance and the music have been extracted from the rural and the classical art forms to combine into a unique art form. Often one is treated to breathtaking interplays when rhythmic drum syllables coincide exactly syllable for syllable, with work syllables which are recited by the musicians and echoed by the foot rhythms of the dancer. Here is an example of a foot rhythm - word syllable piece in the Kuchipudi School that resembles quite closely those that are used in the other dance drama styles:

Dhigu tangu taka, tang takita taka,  
Dhi talangu taka, talangu dhi taka,  
Nam kita kita taka, tari kita kita taka,  
Tham kita kita taka, tari kita kita taka,  
Ta dinginatom, ta dinginatom.

## MAKE UP

Therukoothu make-up has the same essential basic colours and structural motifs as not only that of the Kathakali dance drama form but also many other traditional Indian dance drama forms. It has, however, its very own unique style, intrinsically related to the system of ritual mask painting prevalent in Tamilnadu, South India. The make-up not only symbolizes the quality of the characters but also ritually charges the performers and performance. This transformation to a ritual space links the characters to the episodes in the epics. The make-up used in the South African Therukoothu has become vague and uncertain over the decades while the make-up presently used in Therukoothu performances in South India still remains sophisticated. The important colours used are red, green, white, rose and black with each colour denoting a specific quality. Shown below is a typical design of Therukoothu make-up in South India.



COSTUMES

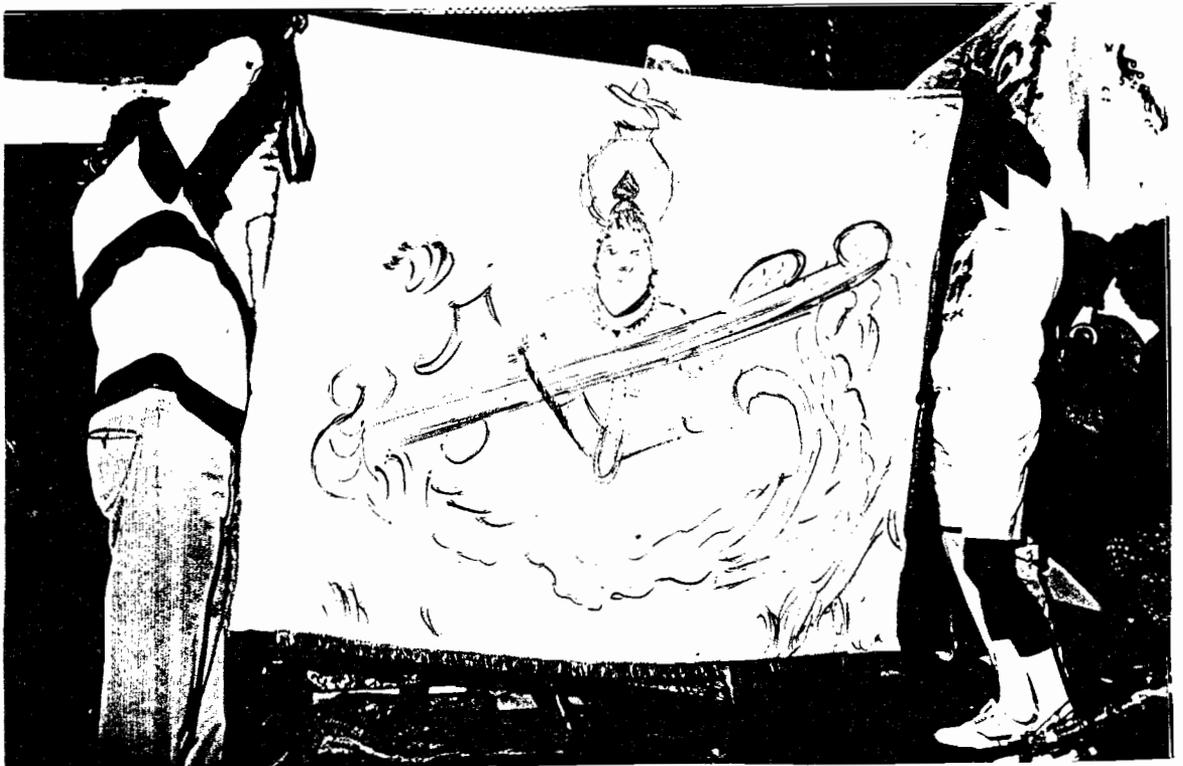
Therukoothu costumes are always elaborate and colourful, yet carefully put together to enhance the fine qualities of the character. Appropriate colours are used for the blouse-like tops, skirts and pants and the design for each character varies. It is essential that the materials used, are light as the dancers will not be able to contend with burdensome heavy costumes for an entire night. The head and shoulder gear form an important part of the costume. They are usually designed and made by the dancers themselves. The Katiakaaran and Komali usually have a free reign to design their own costumes as they are not directly involved with the story line. The "female" characters in Therukoothu dance dramas are always played by men and generally require an "extra touch" to make the characters as real as possible. The traditional Indian sari and blouse is generally preferred. Elaborate jewellery almost always completes a Therukoothu costume.



## ENTRANCES

The deliberate entrances of new characters are an important phenomenon in Therukoothu performances. The character remains behind a hand-held screen while he sings a praise song to his God and his teacher. He then literally bursts through the screen with an introductory song, announcing his entrance into the story. The entrances are usually the most forceful part of Therukoothu performances. While the character remains behind the screen his headgear is revealed bit by bit, a theatrical device which creates a great deal of suspense and speculation on who the next character may be. The screen is also representative of the "temporary boundary" that exists between audience and performance. The dramatic burst through the screen has the effect of "sucking" the audience into action.

The photograph below shows the screen being held in readiness for the entrance of a new character.



## THE CLOWN - KOMALI/KATIAKAARAN

### Katiakaaran/Komali

The katiakaaran usually has the combined task of stage managing, conductor and that of buffoon. He remains on stage throughout the performance and provides comic-relief when the need arises, and simultaneously gives the dancers breathing space. His songs are simple and funny, like the Komali (clown) he has a free hand at improvising at certain sections in the dance. He is at liberty to take the "mickey" out of local politicians or even delve into social issues. The importance of the Katiakaaran and Komali cannot however be sufficiently stressed here.

PRODUCTION CREW



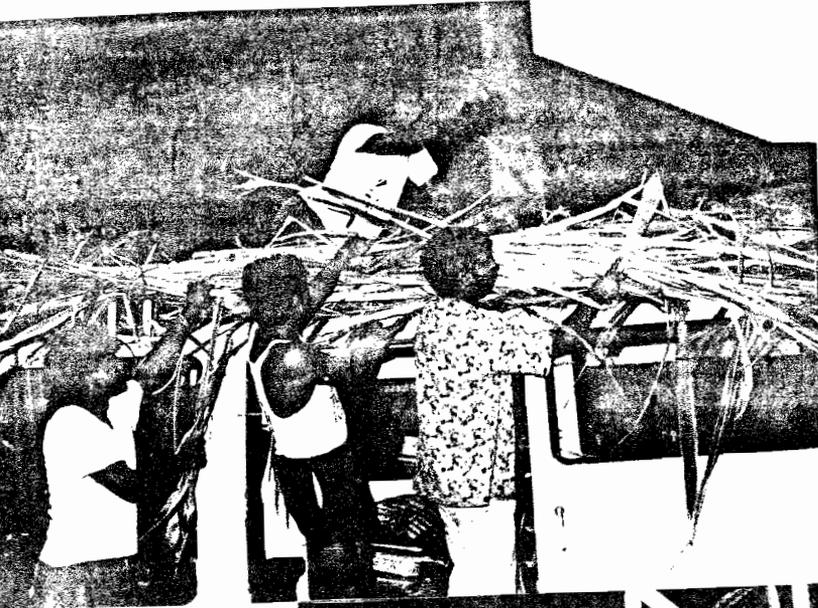
Back Row - from left: Yugan Naidoo, Logan Shunmugam, Anness Ramklown, Renika Royath, Visham Panday, Malthi Balcharan.

Seated - from left: Satchu Annamalai, Michelle Chetty, Pranitha Singh, Leka Jado.

Absent: Karnagie Pillay, Shalini Nursingh, Avirusa Rambally, Ashrina Ishwarlal, Uma Naidoo,

The crew has undoubtedly learnt that working together for a common purpose has the compelling effect of creating a sense of belonging and of identifying the elements of which we are made. Therukoothu or Six Foot Dance was just a name until it began to take shape from the consistent and dedicated input by every member of the crew. Indian art never alienates its producers, but knits them into a family of love, and it is this love that shines through the product.

THE PRODUCTION CREW WORKED QUICKLY AND EFFICIENTLY.



INTEREST AND CONFUSION



Therukoothu has only recently been receiving widespread attention from the media and Theatre enthusiasts. The photographs above show the dancers being interviewed by the media. There is still however, widespread confusion about what Therukoothu is. The following are observations of the general public on Therukoothu.

"Isn't it like Natchanya?"

"I've seen a lot of it! I used to go to all the Nagara jolls."

### CREDITS

Production Manager	-	Annesh Ramklown
Production Secretary	-	Yugan Naidoo
Stage Mananger	-	Franitha Singh
Lighting Design	-	Pat Pillai
Lighting Operating	-	Ushama Ross Jerrier
Set Construction	-	Logan Shunmugam/ Visham Panday
Poster and Programme Lay-Out	-	Public Relations Department
Publicity	-	Bashni Naidoo
Photographers	-	Fiona Clyde / Navan Chetty
Seamstress	-	Pushpavathie Govender
Exhibition Paintings	-	Navan Chetty
Exhibition Design and Lay-Out	-	Navan Chetty / Siva Devar / Linda Gwala

### THE CREW

Michelle Chetty, Karnagie Pillay, Malthie Balcharan, Shalini Nursingh, Avirusa Rambally, Ashrina Ishwarlall, Renika Royath, Leka Jado, Uma Naidu.

### SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Public Relations UDW, UDW Printing, Audiovisual Media Centre, Lynn Sadhabiriss, Mr Kerrit c/o Popatlal Kara, Mr John Pillay, Dr Henning, The ladies and gentlemen of the Media.

### PATRONS PLEASE NOTE:

Your seat will be held for up to 15 minutes before the performance.

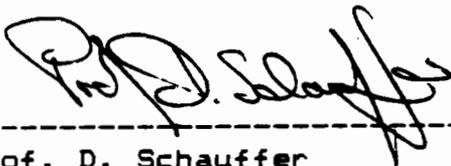
No children under the age of five will be admitted to the theatre.

No patron will be allowed to enter the auditorium once the performance has begun.

NOTE FROM THE HEAD OF DRAMA DEPT.

(PROFESSOR D. SCHAUFFER)

The Drama Department's work is fifty percent theory and fifty percent practical and all the practical work forms part of our on-going research into the field. In the past a fairly large proportion of what was presented derived from the European tradition. Of late the focus has shifted more and more towards Afrocentric works. Whilst Indocentric material was never neglected totally it does seem regrettable that not more is attempted in this category. It is the more regrettable when one considers that of all the University Drama Departments we are still, despite formidable and highly desirable recent changes in our admission policy, best placed to undertake research into this aspect of our developing common culture. I am therefore delighted that this production has been mounted and look forward to it being written up as a research project of some significance.



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Prof. D. Schaffer  
HEAD OF DRAMA DEPT.

PRESS RELEASE

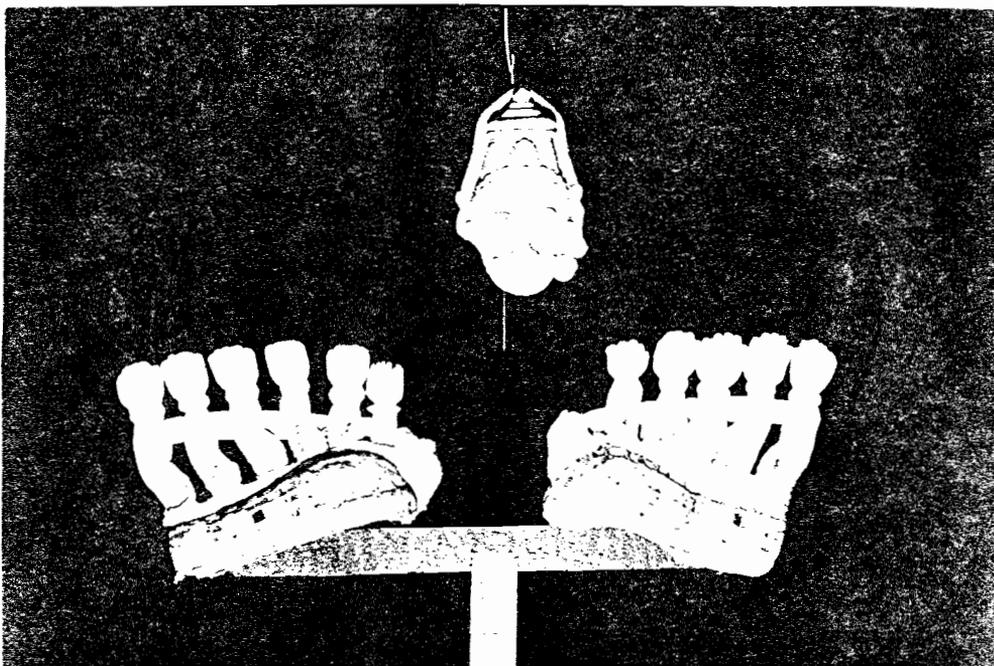
The Drama Department, University of Durban-Westville has notched up another first, this time with the 1st of its kind in South Africa, a Therukoothu or Six Foot Dance, produced by Satchu Annamalai. Mr Annamalai has recently returned from South India where he has done extensive research on Traditional Indian Dance Drama forms that might have influenced the forms found in South Africa from the 1860's. Mr Annamalai's research forms a major part of his study for his Master's Degree but this has also culminated in the 1st major attempt of bringing what has been essentially "open-air theatre" into a formal venue. The product, Mr Annamalai says "should prove most interesting". Therukoothu or Six Foot Dance, a phrase coined most probably because of the dazzling footwork of the dancers is a dying art-form and the remaining dancers left in Natal are all over the age of sixty.

The story to be enacted is from the Ramayana and is titled, The Battle of Mayal Ravana, a popular section of the epic, used in most Indian Dance dramas. Although the language medium used in the Dance Drama is tamil, Mr Annamalai has found ways and means of making the production more accessible to the public. One of the devices to be used is for the narration to be done in English.

An exhibition of works done by various artists and general items that are relevant to Therukoothu will also be on display at the Department's Refectory and Foyer. The Dance Drama opens in the Asoka Theatre of the University on Monday 19 March and closes on Friday, 23 March. Patrons are urged to reserve seats early by calling 820 2626 during office hours.

P.S. An appeal is made to persons who may have items or information that can be incorporated into this production to please call the Drama Department of the University.

FOYER EXHIBITION : THE BATTLE OF MAYAL RAVANAN



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FEMALE CHARACTERS

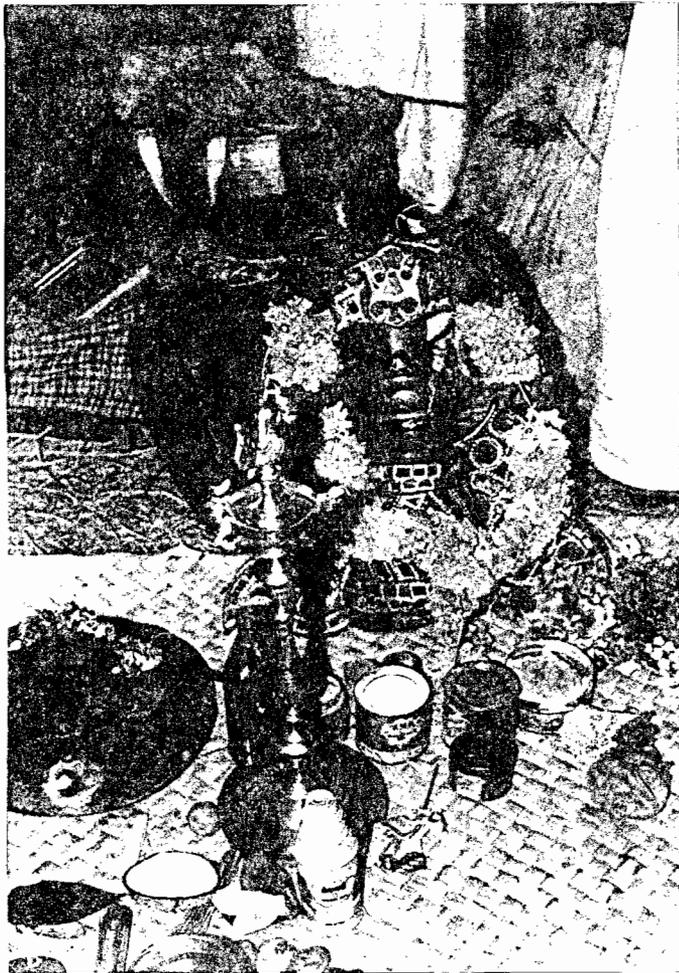
IN THERUKOOTHU



MUSICIANS ON SET : THE BATTLE OF MAYAL RAVANAN



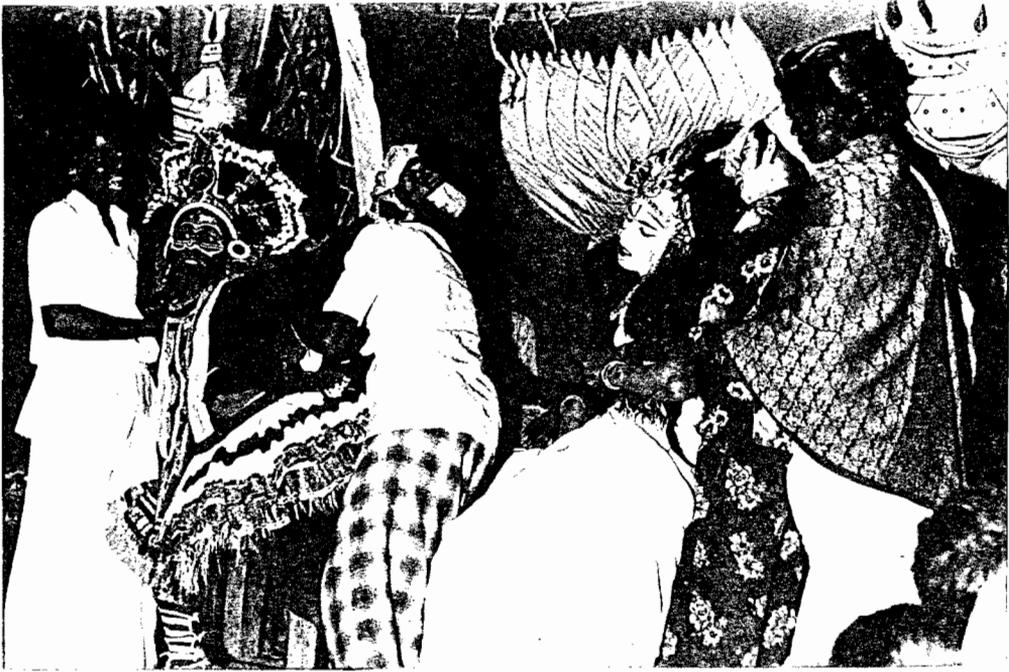
SCENE OF PRAYER BEFORE THERUKOOTHU PERFORMANCE





THE KOMALI  
IN THERUKOOTHU





TRANCE IN THERUKOOTHU



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*presents*

# THE RUKOOTHU

*Six  
Foot  
Dance*



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# BATTLE OF MAYAL RAVANAN



*produced by*  
**SATCHU ANNAMALAI**  
**ASOKA THEATRE**  
**19 – 24 March 1990.**

**UNIVERSITY OF DURBAN-WESTVILLE**  
**Drama Department**

*presents*

*1st of its kind  
 in South Africa*

**THERUKOOTHU  
 SIX FOOT  
 DANCE**



**BATTLE OF MAYAL RAVANAN**

*performed by dancers over the age of 60*

**VENUE** : ASOKA THEATRE – U.D.W.

**DATE** : 19–24 March, 1990 at 7.30 p.m.

**Bookings** : Office hours, tel. 820-2626

**Admission** : R4.00, Students R3.00

**N.B.** *An exhibition of relevant works will also  
 be on display*

★ **ENTERTAINMENT**

Ramayana  
dance drama  
for Asoka

**TONIGHT Reporter**

DURBAN/Westville will present an Indian dance drama entitled *The Battle of Mayal Ravanan* in the Asoka Theatre from Monday to Friday next week nightly at 8.

The story to be enacted is from the epic Ramayana and will be produced by Satchu Annamalai.

Annamalai has recently returned from south India where he has done extensive research on traditional Indian dance drama forms that might have influenced the forms found in South Africa from the 1860s.

His research forms a major part of his study for his Master's degree and included in his dance drama will be the *Therukoothu* or *Six Foot Dance*, which is a dying art-form as the remaining dancers left in Natal are all over the age of 60.

An exhibition of works by various artists and general items relevant to the *Therukoothu* will also be on display at the Department's refectory and foyer from 7 pm.

Those interested are asked to reserve seats early, on telephone number 820 2626, as the theatre can accommodate only 198 persons.

The Daily News - Tonight  
Wednesday March 14 1990  
Page 2  
Cols 1-2

# Wonderful revival of lost dance



## REVIEW : VARSITY VOICE

IN MY PERSONAL and private capacity as Chairman of a Unit of the worldwide Sathya Sai Movement and Chairman of the Shri Vishnu Temple of Reservoir Hills, I take this opportunity of complementing Mr. Satchu Annamalai of the Drama Department on his mammoth task of reviving and re-introducing "Therikoothu" or "Six Foot" Dance to the Indian community.

The opening performance on the night of the 18 March was well received. Such performances disappeared some 40 years ago, as was evidenced from the ages of the actors who seem to have emerged suddenly from the cultural and dramatic archives of a past era.

Whether or not "Therukoothu" will become popular again will depend entirely on Mr Annamalai's efforts and his grooming of a new generation of young actors to whom such performances, at the moment, are totally foreign and unintelligible.

Performances such as these require rural settings, rural background and rural audiences. Most of today's Indian community are now urbanised with the result that there will always be a distinct gap between audiences and promoters of such drama.

A cross-section of the audience on that night revealed that there were hardly any third-generation people present. This is a pity as the play would have brought back happy memories of a past which was colourful, alive and active.

At the close of the drama the actors received a standing ovation which continued long after they retired to their dressing room. The question to be asked here is: whether the audience's appreciation was for superb acting, for revival of a long-lost art or for the seniority of the actors who in their old age have found some solace in re-living the early 30's and 40's.

For Mr Annamalai to succeed in his venture the seeds of many defunct cultural arts will have to be re-sown and communicated to the younger generation.

**G K THUMBIRAN**  
(Campus Services)

U.D.W.  
1990



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# MEREBANK ANDHRA CULTURAL GROUP

PRESENTS

## FIRST TELEGU "SIX FOOT DANCE" IN DURBAN

TITLE : LUTCHMANA MORCHA

FEATURING : THE ILLOVO BHAJAN GROUPS

DATE : 21st MARCH 1992

VENUE : SHRI PARASATHIE ALAYAM HALL  
2 BARRACKPUR ROAD, MEREBANK

TIME : 8.00 P.M.



SOUVENIR BROCHURE

## CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

MY NAMASICARAMU TO ONE AND ALL. ALLOW ME TO TELL YOU A LITTLE ABOUT THE MEREBANK ANDHRA CULTURAL GROUP. BEING ESTABLISHED IN SEPTEMBER 1987. THE MACG IS AN INDEPENDENT BODY WHICH IS NOT AFFILIATED TO ANY OTHER BODY. IT'S MAIN OBJECTIVE IS TO PROMOTE, PROPAGATE AND PRESERVE THE ANDHRA LANGUAGE AND CULTURE. WEEKLY SERVICES ARE HELD EVERY TUESDAY AFTERNOONS AT 6.15 P.M AT THE SHRI SIVA SOOBRAMDNIAR ALAYUM, 21 BIDAR ROAD, MEREBANK. WE ALSO RESPOND TO REQUESTS FOR OUTDOOR SERVICES, CEREMONIES, CHRISTENING PARTIES ECT. SINCE ITS INCEPTION THE MACG HAS HELD CELEBRATIONS EVERY YEAR IN RECOGNITION OF 'UGAADI'- (THE TELEGU NEW YEAR)- OTHER FESTIVALS SUCH AS SIVARATHIE AND KRISHNA JAYANTHIE TO NAME A FEW ARE ALSO OBSERVED. THE SERVICES WE OFFER ARE FREE. THE ONLY SOURCES OF REVENUE IS BY VIRTUE OF VOLUNTARY DONATIONS

AS YOU ALL KNOW, ESPECIALLY HERE IN SOUTH AFRICA, THE FUTURE IS VERY MUCH UNKNOWN. WE ARE ALWAYS BEING CHALLENGED BY WESTERNATION. THEREFORE, IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT WE AS PARENTS PRESERVE OUR IDENTITY AS INDIANS. INDIANS IN GENERAL ARE COMMONLY IDENTIFIED BY THEIR LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND DRESSING. LOSE ALL THREE OF THESE AND WHAT HAVE YOU LEFT TO LAY CLAIMS OF BEING AN INDIAN. INDIAN CULTURE IS A RICH INHERITAGE WHICH HAS FASCINATED EVEN THE WHITE MAN TO THE EXTENT THAT SOME HAVE JOINED OUR GROUPS, TO LEARN MORE ABOUT US INDIANS. LOOK AT THE NUMBER OF WHITES THAT HAVED JOINED THE HARI KRISHNA MOVEMENT. IF THEY CAN RESEARCH OUR LANGUAGE AND CULTURE , WHY SHOULDN'T WE. WE HAVE SO OFTEN HEARD GREAT SPEAKERS PRONOUNCE THE SWEETNESS OF THE ANDHRA SONGS, THE GRACEFUL MOVEMENTS OF OUR DANCERS. WE SHOULD FOLLOW IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR GREAT FOREFATHERS WHO HAVE GONE TO GREAT LENGHTS TO PRESERVE OUR MOTHER TONGUE. LET US BE PROUD OF IT AND DISCIPLINE OURSELVES AND CHILDREN BY ATTENDING TO OUR VERNACULAR SERVICES IN OUR DISTRICTS AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE FURTHERNESS OF OUR LANGUAGE AND CULTURE.

TONIGHTS PRESENTATION BY THE MEREBANK ANDHRA CULTURAL GROUP IS THE RESULT OF UNRELENTING AND DIRE AMBITION OF THE MACG. IT HAS TAKEN 2 YEARS OF NEGOTIATIONS AND CONSTANT VISITS TO ILLOVO TO FINALLY PERSUADE THE ILLOVO BHAJAN GROUP TO MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR US TO BRING THIS

(Sponsored by: MR L.M. NAIDOO - 40 Pardy Road, Isipingo Hills)

UNIQUE DANCE TO YOU- 'LUTCHMANA MORCHA IN TELEGU.' A LOT OF HARD WORK HAS BEEN PUT INTO THIS DANCE TO MAKE THE PRESENTATION TO YOU AS PROFESSIONALLY AS POSSIBLE SO THAT YOU WILL GO HOME SATISFIED AND ALSO APPRECIATE MY EARLIER SENTIMENTS OF FOSTERING THE ANDHRA LANGUAGE AND CULTURE.

IN CONCLUSION I WISH TO THANK EVERYONE FOR THEIR SUPPORT CONTRIBUTIONS (CASH AND KIND) . WELL WISHERS ETC. ETC. SIT BACK AND ENJOY THE DANCE. GOD BLESS.

MR V.M. NAIDOO  
(Chairman)

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

### SYNOPSIS

BASICALLY THE STORY IS ABOUT THE BATTLE BETWEEN LORD RAMA AND RAVANA. HAVING LEARNED THAT SEETHA WAS BEING HELD CAPTIVE BY RAVANA IN LANKA LORD RAMA AND HIS BROTHER LUTCHMANA AND THEIR TROUP SET OUT TO SEEK AND DESTROY RAVANA AND LANKA. RAVANA IS ADAMANT IN HIS ATTITUDE OF WANTING TO DESTROY RAMA AND LUTCHMANA AS WELL MONODOTHARIE WIFE OF RAVANA PLEADS WITH HUSBAND BUT RAVANA WOULD NOT LISTEN AND EVENTUALLY KICKS MONODOTHARIE ASIDE. VIBUSHNA THE GOOD BROTHER OF RAVANA WHO JOINED LORD RAMA'S TROUP ASKS LORD RAMA PERMISSION TO FIGHT HIS BROTHER RAVANA. VIBUSHNA CONFRONTS RAVANA AND A FIGHT ENSUES. VIBUSHNA STRIKES RAVANA BUT FINDS RAVANA TO BE POWERFUL AND BECOMES AWARE OF THE BARNUM RELEASED BY RAVANA. VIBUSHNA GOES BACK TO REPORT AND WARN LORD RAMA. NOT WANTING ANYTHING TO HAPPEN TO HIS BIG BROTHER LUTCHMANA PLEADS WITH LORD RAMA TO ALLOW HIM TO TAKE UP THE FIGHT. THE ENSUING BATTLE BETWEEN RAVANA AND LUTCHMANA LEAVES LUTCHMANA WOUNDED. RAMA FINDS LUTCHMANA LYING WOUNDED AND IS STRUCK BY EMOTION. LORD RAMA THEN ASKS SUSHANA (ONE OF HIS TROUPE) TO EXAMINE LUTCHMANA. THE KNOWLEDGEABLE SUSHANA REPORTS TO LORD RAMA THAT LUTCHMANA CAN ONLY BE HEALED WITH THE SANGIVI. LORD RAMA THEN SUMMONS HIS OTHER TROUPES TO FIND HANUMAN SO THAT HANUMAN CAN FETCH THE SANGIVI. HANUMAN ENTERS AND LEARNS FROM LORD RAMA ON WHAT HAS HAPPENED. HANUMAN BECOMES FURIOUS AND ASKS SUSHANA DIRECTIONS TO DHONADHRIE TO FETCH THE SANGIVI. ON HIS WAY TO DHONADHRIE HANUMAN ENCOUNTERS IN THE FORMS OF KALANIEMANIE AND MALIVANTHU. OVERCOMING THEM HANUMAN GETS TO DHONADHRIE AND GETS THE

(Sponsored by: MR STANLEY NAIDOO - 10 Howrah Road, Merebank)

SANGIVI. ON HIS WAY BACK TO LORD RAMA AND LUTCHMANA,  
HANUMAN MEETS RAVANA. IN THE FIGHT HANUMAN KILLS RAVANA.  
HANUMAN FINALLY HANDS OVER THE SANGIVI TO SUSHANA WHO  
HEALS LUTCHMANA.

MR. K. MUNSAMY  
(Hon. Secretary)

\*\*\*\*\*

**CAST**

RAMA	JACK C. CHINNIAH
LUTCHMANA	BALA K. CHINNIAH
SUSHANA	JAYA P. SATHIAH
VIBUSHNA	L. RAMALINGUM
SURGIVA	LOGAN S. TAGAT
ANGATHUDO	RAJEN A. SATHIAH
NALADO	TERRENCE P. SATHIAH
NEELODO	RONALD A. SATHIAH
MONODOTHARIE	GOPI S. TAGAT
RAVANA	ALVIN S. TAGAT
RAVANA'S MUNTHREE	SUBBA S. SEETHIAH
HANUMAN	GANDI C. A. TAGAT
KALANIEMANIE	MAYER A. SEETHIAH
DHANIEMALAGIE	R. GOVENDEN
MALIVANTHU	JACK S. TAGAT
COMEDIANS:	(1) PERCY CHINNA
	(2) R. GOVENDEN
	(3) CHRISTY MUNSAMY
CHORUS BY:	N. NAGOOR - L.M. DADDY -
	C.M. PILLAY AND DAN MADURAI
DRUMS:	DAVID V. SEETHIAH
	P.N. CHETTY (MACG)
DRESSING BY:	MRS. ROBERT ACHARY -
	V.S. SUNNY AND DAN MADURAI

**PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY MR. GANDHI C.A. TAGAT**  
**TUTORED BY MR. JACK S. TAGAT**

*( Sponsored by: Mr B.S GOVENDER -*

*c/o M.S. GOVENDER'S BUTCHERY)*

## PROGRAMME

1. PRAYER - MEREBANK ANDHRA CULTURAL GROUP
2. CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME - MR V.M. NAIDOO
3. SYNOPSIS AND VOTE OF THANKS - MR K. MUNSAMY
4. OPENING PRAYER - MR GANDHI C.A. TAGAT
5. LUTCHMANA MORCHA - ILLOVO BHAJAN GROUPS
6. CLOSING PRAYER - ILLOVO BHAJAN GROUPS

\*\*\*\*\*

## RE-BIRTH OF LUTCHMANA MORCHA

THE VERY FIRST LUTCHMANA MORCHA WAS STAGED AT THE MA VISHNU TEMPLE IN ILLOVO IN 1936. THE SECOND LUTCHMANA MORCHA WAS STAGED IN 1941 AND THE THIRD IN 1947 AT THE ILLOVO VILLAGE. THE 1st, 2nd, AND 3rd LUTCHMANA MORCHA SIX FOOT DANCES WERE PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY THE LATE MR. TAGAT CHINNAPANAH. THE LATE MR TAGAT CHINNAPANAH LEFT BEHIND SCRIPTURES IN PEN CARBON BOOKS. DECADES PASSED ON AND THE DESIRE TO PERFORM THE SIX FOOT DANCE KEPT NAGGING THE CONCIOUS OF CERTAIN MEMBERS OF THE ILLOVO BHAJAN GROUPS. SO MUCH SO, THAT MR T.C.A. GANDHI READ THROUGH THE SCRIPTURES HE HAD MANAGED TO FIND, COMPILED THEM TOGETHER AND WITH HIS INHERITED KNOWLEDGE BEGAN TO RE-WRITE THE STORY OF LUTCHMANA MORCHA. THE ACTORS, SINGERS AND MUSICIANS YOU WILL SEE TODAY HAS BEEN TUTORED BY MR SATHIA JACK TAGAT. THE DANCE BEING PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY MR T.C.A. GANDHI. IT HAS TAKEN THE ILLOVO BHAJAN GROUPS YEARS OF DEDICATED PRACTICE AND SINCE 1987 HAVE BEEN TRYING TO STAGE "LUTCHMANA MORCHA". UNFORTUNATELY DEATH OF FAMILY MEMBERS HAS PUT OFF THE SHOW IN 1988 AND 1989. FINALLY IN 1990 AND AGAIN IN 1991, LUTCHMANA MORCHA WAS PERFORMED AT ILLOVO AFTER AN ABSENCE OF ABOUT 43 YEARS.

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## THANKS AND APPRECIATION

1. ILLOVO BHAJAN GROUPS
2. COMMITTEE OF SHRI PARASATHIE ALAYAM HALL
3. KATHREE'S SOUND AND LIGHTING
4. RADIO LOTUS
5. SUNDAY TRIBUNE HERALD, POST AND THE DAILY NEWS
6. REGGIE NAIDOO - VIDEO AND PHOTOS
7. MR. MIKE GOVENDER - PRINTING OF HAND BILLS
8. S.A.P. (WENTWORTH BRANCH) - SECURITY
9. SHRI WOONATHIE SABHA - PARKING FACILITIES
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11. MEMBERS OF MACG
12. ALL OUR GENEROUS SPONSORS, DONORS AND WELL WISHERS

PLEASE ACCEPT OUR SINCERE APOLOGIES FOR ANY OMISSIONS,  
ERRORS OR SHORT COMINGS IN THIS BROCHURE - BEFORE,  
DURING OR AFTER THE DANCE. IF SUCH A SITUATION BECOMES  
EVIDENT, I ASSURE YOU IT COULD ONLY BE CAUSED UNWITTINGLY

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reviewed on national network from June 5, following numerous requests from viewers.

Quiz Time had all the ingredients of an interesting quiz show, including short, well-thought-out questions, variety, good sets and an able compere who could link the rounds with the minimum of histrionics. No wonder the programme notched up the highest viewership figures for any English programme.

It is very likely that Sid-dharth Basu may not be the quizmaster in the new Quiz Time as he has already quit ITV. One hopes that he would have a good replacement.

## Dragging to sleep

**R**AMAYAN has been at the receiving end many a time. The most common criticism was about slowing down the pace of the serial. The last few episodes of the epic amply prove that Ramanand Sagar is either losing his grip or stretching the



Ramanand Sagar

story for further extensions.

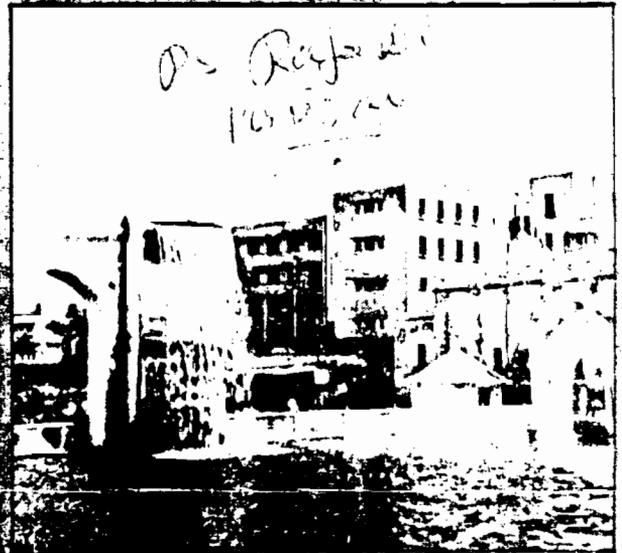
Sagar thought it fit to devote two entire episodes to the waking of Kumbh-karna, Ravana's brother. Kumbh-karna who sleeps for six months in a year cannot be woken up even with swords. Ravana's men finally succeed by using the aroma of rich food. The Sagar, however, took such a long time to wake him up that by the end of the episode when Kumbh-karna opens his eyes most viewers had either switched off their sets or fallen asleep!

This lack of 'tightness' in Ramayan has been evident throughout, and at one point Doordarshan's director-general, Bhaskar Ghosh, had threatened to replace Sagar if he did not quicken the pace. But the warning seems to have fallen on deaf ears and Sagar is back to his old tricks.

The serial, expected to wind up by August, will have to be extended if Sagar continues his 'tricks'. Doordarshan has made it amply clear that no further extension will be given. One reason for this tough stand is the poor production quality of the serial; the second is the fact that the other epic Mahabharata is already under production and will be launched only after Ramayan folds up. Under present circumstances, it looks like Doordarshan will be forced to end Ramayan abruptly.

—SCANTENNA

## TAKING WATER TO A WATERFALL



**T**HE 800-year-old water-works complex popularly known as the Panchakki at Aurangabad, the Deccan, is a marvellous achievement of medieval engineering which is still in perfect working condition. The main unit of the complex is an artificial waterfall which has rarely stopped during the past three centuries.

It is a remarkable feat: the water is first transported over a distance of four miles and then lifted up without any mechanical device, over a tall rectangular masonry pillar. The source of water is a well four miles away, near the confluence of two rivers. Water is carried to the site through underground clay pipes. Near the reservoir the pipes are worked into siphons of increasing heights to make the water rise up to the height of the pillar from where it cascades down into the cistern below. Admirably, the entire system is still in a good working condition. Equally admirable are the other factors like the manufacture of clay pipes, which have lasted centuries, and locating a water source which never seems to go dry even under severe drought conditions in the region.

The Panchakki complex, consisting of the artificial waterfall, two large reservoirs and a water-mill (which actually lends its name to the complex), is located in the monastery of Baba Musalim (d. 1714 AD) who himself is believed to have designed the unique waterfall and the water-mill.



# A breath of Brecht shockingly familiar

Intellectuals will not pardon me, says the director

and at the same time a standing reminder of the questionable values on which society is based. If he sees danger in maintaining any principle, he gives it up immediately. He sets no store by his actions, and this is what makes him the most fascinating character in the play—insulting and generous, preposterous and humble, ignorant and wise, blasphemous and pious. And as the song of the narrator suggests, "and so he broke the laws, as he broke bread that it might feed them..." There is in Ayyasamy the scandalous, the gnome, the cynical, something immensely disturbing and provocative as well as attractive. He denies all the virtues, mocks at repentance and charity, ridicules courage and gets all our attention.

Ayyasamy was played to perfection by Kannappa Sambandham. "I gave him no



Convolutd justice. Artists rehearse

**T**HE play was written in 1948 in Germany. But the Tamil adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, presented by Max Mueller Bhavan and the Koothu Pattaral of Tamil Nadu as *Yellai Vatkam*, was crudely shocking in its contemporaneity. The similarities between Brecht's socio-political references and today's Tamil Nadu politics were not deliberate. But it was there for the audience to lap up. Which they did vigorously.

Take for instance, the lead role Ayyasamy (Brecht called him Asdak). Ayyasamy is a thief, a time-server, a coward, who by a lucky accident is raised to a position of authority. As a judge he is corrupt, licentious, contemptuous of law and order, a licks-pittle. He willingly allows himself to be clothed in judicial robes and goes off on a rampaging procession through the countryside, delivering sentences that completely reverse accepted standards of justice. He accepts bribes, but only as an indication of the wealth of litigants, which stands in his eyes in inverse proportion to their rights. When a young woman accuses a farmhand of rape, he considers her luxurious gait and the shape of her buttocks and finds her guilty of assault and goes off with her to "examine the sceptre of the crime"

Ayyasamy is a standing affront



Highly artful. Guruvamma singing to the baby

*P.S. Rajendran*

When the group started rehearsing, the cast had no idea that the play would turn out to be a commentary on the Tamil Nadu political scene.

direction, no hints, no instruction: we only discussed the role," says K.S. Rajendran, the young director of the play. He also adapted the play into Tamil and swears he has not added anything to the original script. In fact when the group started rehearsing the play, the cast had no idea the political scene in Tamil Nadu would turn out as it is depicted in it.

The play is actually the story of a young girl who saves the infant child of a tyrannical governor during an

insurrection, and brings up the boy until the day his real mother disputes possession on him before the "good, bad judge" Ayyasamy and who finally, through the unorthodox wisdom of the judge, is allowed to retain the child. Guruvamma, the girl, shows considerable artfulness, a ready wit, honesty, stubborn insistence and an unshakable moral probity. She allows herself to be married, for convenience sake to a man who will be at least a nominal



A court scene in *Vellai Vattam*

The koothu artistes had few inhibitions and seemed to possess some of the little-known techniques developed in the

W/SB

Kannappan Thambiran himself there to sing the link songs in the koothu style. The scenes of people's escape, Guruvamma's marriage and crossing of the bridge, etc., made a loosely strung narrative in the fashion of 'ethnic' theatre. The interest was sustained not so much by the thin plot as by the detailed interactions of the characters and by the beauty of the portrayal. There is both detachment in the abstract introduction of the opulent governor and his wife, and attachment in the portrayal of tender love.

The sets also evoked an astringent delight. The simple multipurpose platform centre stage sharpened the narrative in its simplicity of props brought in a sense of unity that was comic, sympathetic and had a symmetry of its own. The use of



Wide experience. *Maver* and *Rajendran*



Experimenting. *Guruvamma* crossing the bridge

father for the child she has reared. When her lover to whom she is betrothed returns from the war, she allows him to suspect her of infidelity rather than betray the child to its enemies. Subtly and contiguously, Rajendran persuades us to accept her as a creation of art.

The formality of his presentation reaches its climax in the scene where her lover returns and speaks with her across a river that separates them. They address each other in an

impersonal manner drawing on common tradition. It is only by reflection that the deep personal relationship between them is felt. In the climactic moment of the scene, neither speaks and it is left to the song to reveal what each "thought but did not say".

The production was based on folk theatre of Tamil Nadu, Therukoothu. Most of the artistes were from traditional Therukoothu families. There was the grand old man Purtsai

earthy bang of the Therukoothu and also a modern ring. There were quite a few lyrical moments.

The style of narration had a clear-cut, unsentimental matter-of-factness with considerable surprises for those who looked for consistency. Rajendran used Guruvamma and Ayyasamy as the spill of narration, sometimes emphasising the loneliness and sometimes taking the audience along in the restless exploration.



P. Rajendran  
P. V. S. S. S.

The use of music for narration had the earthy bang of the Therukoothu and also a modern ring. There were quite a few lyrical moments in the play.

The good bad judge. *Avasany* Kannappa Sambandham in a captivating pose



Quick to learn. Folk artistes at Mayer's workshop

The production was the result of a monthlong workshop in theatre techniques given to the koothu artistes by Ingeborg Mayer of West Germany. Mayer worked on the traditional koothu actors and the urban amateurs at different levels and conducted body and voice training.

These exercises had the 'Chalk circle' in mind. The koothu artistes, of course, had very little inhibitions and seemed to possess spontaneously some of the little-known techniques developed by theatre styles in the US and Europe. The city-bred actors had to be literally worked on. It was voice

culture exercises that the koothu artists found most useful. They were screaming from the throat to be heard but Mayer's exercises taught them to get sound across with little effort. Ingeborg Mayer has travelled all over the world, and studied techniques of many forms of theatres and has formed a style of her own. Yet she always feels amazed at the existence of similar basic elements of drama techniques in remote corners of the world.

*The Caucasian Chalk Circle* was chosen as it has elements of Indian folk theatre in it. Rajendran had found it culturally very relevant to Tamil Nadu. But Rajendran's (the works for Sangeet Natak Akademi in New Delhi) visit to Madras to direct this play was also to rouse what he calls "the hopelessness of the Tamil intellectuals who have done nothing for Tamil theatre".

Rajendran confesses, "I discovered Brecht while working with the folk artistes. Brecht wrote his play for them perhaps. Anyone who knows the condition of Tamil theatre today will perhaps appreciate me for taking up this venture, while the pundits, scholars, critics and intellectuals who have read Brecht will not pardon me."  
—V.R. DEVIKA

UNIVERSITY OF DURBAN-WESTVILLE  
DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA

*presents*

# Three Hand Six Foot

Written and Directed  
SATCHU ANNAMALAI



*in the*

**ASOKA THEATRE**

01 JUNE •• 06 JUNE 1992

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### *DIRECTORS NOTE*

It was always my wish to create a piece that was modern whilst retaining elements of the traditional. **Three Hand Six Foot** is an attempt to do the same. Throughout my research into the Therukoothu form of dance-drama, I constantly saw the merits of using some of its features in an exercise which comments on current issues, especially pertaining to the "Indian Community" in the so-called New South Africa. I hope that this present exercise creates in the audience the same enthusiasm that I have developed as a result of my on-going research into this dynamic art form.

#### **N.B.**

The Director has taken precautions to ensure that the venacular used in the presentation does not hinder the overall meaning intended, but merely serves to enhance its quality.

# **Three Hand Six Foot is performed by:**

- Marcus Narsigan : Peru**
- Sumagy Kesavan : Kantha/Romilla**
- Patrick Ngcobo : Thumbadoo/Cooliakaran**
- Navan Chetty : English  
Colonist/Officer/Gokul**
- James Govender : Samiaar**
- Satchu Annamalai : Komali**

## **Music By :**

- Pregalathan Singaram : Tabla/Mirdhangum**
- Chris Murugan : Harmonium/Sax/Violin**



## James Govender (62 years)

Was the 1st Indian fitter for Dunlop and has been working for the company for the past 24 years. Although popular as an officiating priest, Mr. Govender has always been active in theatrical activities around Durban. His active involvement in Therukoothu was prompted by his belief that the Therukoothu mode of presentation was ideal to impart the teachings of the Hindu scriptures. Mr. Govender is emphatic that his health and high energy level is due to his participation in this dance drama, and he is therefore able to dance for an entire night and still fulfill his duties as a priest in the local temple. Mr Govender's friendly manner and his willingness to assist in community projects has made him a popular figure in Durban. His fervent wish is that he remains healthy for a while yet, so that he may be able to teach youngsters the art he has mastered.

## Satchu Annamalai

Mr Annamalai is employed as a senior Theatre Technician in the Drama Department of the University of Durban-Westville. He is also a masters student who has chosen Indian Theatre as his field of research. Mr Annamalai has been actively involved for a number of years in writing, directing, acting and promoting plays within and outside the Drama Department. He has recently returned from South India where he has done extensive research on Therukoothu and believes that the art-form has a great deal of merit and is worthy of revival. Mr Annamalai was recently awarded a four year scholarship by the Merebank Tamil School Society to study in India. He possesses a strong commitment to promoting Indian Art and believes that its propagation is essential in the formation of a "South African Culture". His most recent contributions, amongst others, were **Double Trouble** which he directed, **Fish Curry**, which he wrote and directed, **Mr Bansi is Dead** in which he played the title role and **Looking for Muruga** where he played the lead.

## Patrick Ngcobo

A well known name in the 'Indian' community because of his multi-lingual singing skills, Patrick has proved that he can act as well. His present fame has much to do with the band he sings for, the popular Neelavani Orchestra. Although Patrick thoroughly enjoys his job as a fitter for Toolrite Precision, his dream is to study classical music in India under his 'guru', K.J. Yesudas. Dr. Yesudas who toured South Africa recently offered Patrick the rare opportunity of accompanying him on his tour.

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## Navan Chetty

A painter, photographer and actor has found time from his hectic schedule to join the production. Navan received his big break when he was commissioned to paint and exhibit for the production, **The Battle Of Mayal Ravan**, staged at the Asoko Theatre in 1990. He has since exhibited his paintings in New York , London and Rio de Janiero.

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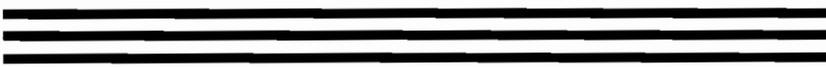
## Marcus Narsigan

A keen musician and vocalist Marcus, is no newcomer to the stage. He has featured in a number of popular productions including **Stable Expense**, **On the Fence** and **Working Class Hero**. In his spare time, Marcus listens to classical music and enjoys performing as a cabaret artist in the local nightclubs.



## Sumagy Kesevan

When first approached, Sumagy displayed a keen interest in joining the production that embodies music and dance, herself being an accomplished classical singer and dancer. She has also successfully pursued an education degree at the University Of Durban-Westville. An extremely versatile artist who has appeared in numerous student productions including **Jungle Book**, **The Shy Suitor** and **The Fantastic Voyage**.



## **PREGALATHAN SINGARAM**

Considered as one of South Africa's top percussionists, Pregalathan has performed internationally as well. He has performed with other top musicians in India, Mauritius and Brazil. Apart from his skill at the tabla, he plays the mirdhingum and is an accomplished vocalist. During his spare time which Pregalathan insists he has very little of, he manages to participate in sporting activities such as football and tennis.

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## **CHRIS MURUGAN**

Chris is a man of diverse talents, one of which lies in the field of business. He has however, taken time from his hectic business schedule to join the production. Although Chris has been around in the music arena for a long time, this is his first venture into theatre and "I love every bit of it" he says.

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## CREDITS

Stage Manager	- Shalinee Nursingh
Asst. Stage Manager	- Sarathambal Wolaganandan
Lighting Operators	- Uthica Moodley - Vishal Panday
Set Construction	- Sylvester Joseph - Kenneth Shange - Selvan Pillay
Publicity	- Niraz Rawatlal
Photographers	- Fiona Clyde - Navan Chetty
Costumes	- Shamshaad Farouk
Make-Up	- Thavaranjani Naidoo - Vanishree Pillay - Sanisha Moodley
Sound	- Malthie Balcharan - Sharon Pillay

## SPECIAL THANKS TO

Mr Rawatlal, Ravien, Pregasen Govender, Pragasan Sivalingam, Avasha Rambiritch, Bashni Naidoo, Sagren Pillay, Sesibon , Rainbow Chair and Marquee Hire, Front of House Team , Ladies and Gentlemen of the Press.

## PATRONS PLEASE NOTE

Your seat will be held for up to 15 minutes before the performance. No children under the age of twelve years will be admitted to the theatre.

No patrons will be allowed to enter the auditorium once the

**Brochure designed by : Rajan Govender & Sudesh Pursad**

THREE HAND SIX FOOT

PRODUCER/DIRECTOR - Satchu Annamalai

STAGE MANAGER - Shalinee Nursingh

CAST LIST

1. Komali - Satchu Annamalai - Ph 4232459 (H) 820 2702 (W)
2. Samiaar - James Govender - Ph 432859
3. Gokul - Navan Chetty - Ph 2626140 (H) 7053922 (W)
4. Peru - Marcus Narsigan - Ph 292256 (H) 252358 (W)
5. Patrick - Patrick Ngcobo - Ph 7642429 (H) 7644058 (W)
6. Kantha - Sumagy Kesavan - Ph 824868

MUSICIANS

1. Tabla/mirdhangum - Pregalathan Singaram  
Ph 4640024 (H) 4655111 Ext 2024 (W)
2. Harmonium/Sax/Violen - Chris Murugan  
Ph 7053946 (H) 7644058 (W)

THREE HAND SIX FOOT

P

PRODUCTION TEAM

DIRECTOR : Satchu Annamalai - Ph 423259

STAGE MANAGER : Shalinee Nursingh - Ph (0322) 333177/823593

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER : Saratha Wolaganandan - Ph 4654381

LIGHTING

1. Vanessa Baptist - Ph 4042219
2. Uthica Moodley - Ph 842065
3. Vishal Panday - Ph 2627069

SOUND

1. Malthie Balcharan - Ph 825773
2. Sharon Pillay - Ph 4041036

COSTUME

1. Vanishree Pillay - Ph 5072371
2. Shamshaad Farouk - Ph (0322) 24359

MAKE-UP

1. Sanisha Moodley - Ph 417044
2. Thevaranjani Naidoo - Ph 5022785/5023763 (Susan)
3. Vanishree Pillay - Ph 5072371

PUBLICITY

1. Niraz Rawatlal - Ph 824463
2. Thelma Naidoo - Ph 280859
3. Karen Laban - Ph 2691811
4. Avasha Rambiritch - Ph 821616
5. Reka Ramnarain - Ph 430904

SET

1. Kennethe Shange - Ph 810661
2. Pragasan Sivalingum - Ph 412657

THREE HAND SIX FOOT

Q

SATCHU ANNAMALAI

SCENE I

(Behind Curtains - tape recording of Therukoothu music)

MAN : Hey Komali, yenge nie? Where are you? What you doing man - the people are waiting for you. There's lot of white fellas in the audience too and you know they don't like us to come late. You Indian fellas are never on time eh. You better make it fast, otherwise we not going to have any audience left.

KOMALI: Hey shut up man, the people can hear you. What you carrying on like that and disgracing the Indians for. You want a shot cane... but I got no dash - hey this pants is too looseman, I don't know what this Saras aunty did with it. Its only coming down. The musicians are ready?

MAN : Awa, this fella is sending it here. We going t get a very bad reputation if we don't watch out... and you know how important this performance is for us.

KOMALI: Epo tha naan absolutely ready erekera  
Elamil  
Entha drama per - Three Hand Six Foot  
Traditional dance drama  
Therukoothu le porinthechee  
India yengel porinthe oorele vantherchee ]  
Thaysethe aatakaaran paatakaaran nengal ready seyinge  
Elamil epo naan woru English paatu paaduvan  
Please listen to the words carefully.

[THEME SONG] Wait a moment, hear this song  
it tells you everything of the right and wrong  
Is there a chance why should you dance  
in a country of your birth, not your land

Hum...

The Indians of India, the white man from  
not so far, the Africans from Africa all  
in one land!

[Music starts with a bang] (chorus)

Hey! Dhandalika Dhandale - Komali vanthana}  
Rombo wuier erekethe - " } chorus  
Avane periye mansane - " }

(Thro' curtain) Enge tha erekeraa komali sagavelai (drum beat)

Komali? Yaar avan thereyo - Therukoothu le porin-  
thaan. He came out of the Therukoothu style of  
dance drama. He is very very funny but also plays  
a very important role when narrating parts of the  
story, when reacting with the audience but most  
important he provides that comic relief during the  
very serious parts of the drama.

Komali vanthana, wuin akka magane} repeat  
Komali vanthana, wuin akka purese} chorus

(1/2 cent is a tickie) / (waiter waiter)...

NAVAN : Hey Komali, we don't want only songs and dances, we want some real action. Where's all your actor friends that use to travel around with you.

KOMALI: Oh, they all kicked the bucket a long time ago so I'm carrying on alone, but I got some very young fellas with me now.

NAVAN : Oh, so you still have a group, that good, then lets have some action and don't be rude, we have children in the audience and you know the last time how offended that aunty got.

KOMALI: Hey kanna if there's any aunty here whose going to take offence, then she better take her children out - because I'm not going to hold back. If I feel like pulling my pants down I'm going to do it.

NAVAN : Wait a minute, keep this for your troubles.

KOMALI: Thank you, thank you now you talking business. **(SUNG)**  
Therukooth le porinthana - Komali vanthaana  
Okay, okay okay, we are going to tell you a story today of the Indians in South Africa - how they making it and how they breaking it - no frill, no fancy, I'm telling everything. But first I must take you back to India, our dear mother land. You see prior to 1860 India was going through a very rough patch - famine and massive unemployment. A lot of people believed it was the ideal time for exploitation.

(Song and Dance Routine)

Cooliakaaran erenthaana  
Indiale porinthaana  
Rombo yela erenthaana  
Apo tha vanthaana

- A : What are we going to do Mr Thumbiran. My wife is ill, my children are growing.
- B : I don't know Mr Maharaj. My wife is also ill and my children are also growing.
- A : Our land is so hot and there is so little food.
- B : I haven't eaten well for many weeks now. I have become used to it.
- A : Did you hear about the strange men going around saying that they want to help our people.
- B : Oh I have seen these men. They are carrying big books and writing down names of people.
- A : And once you put your name they say you have to go with them to this far off land.
- B : Yes but they also say that there is a lot of gold and diamonds in this land.
- A : And our families won't be sick.
- B : But I am afraid of the great big sea. They say when you cross the sea you leave behind your culture, your religion and everything.

A : You are ignorant of the sea my friend. It is not a monster like you think it is. We must trust it and go. And how could you think of culture when our people are starving.

B : And my wife and children.

A : You can take them with you but I will be back some day to collect my wife and my children.

SONG REPEATED

Cooliakaaran vanthaana....

Telephone conversation between India and South Africa

Hallo hallo mister... officer... hallo hallo... is that South Africa. Officer sir we are making very good progress sir, collecting the coolies. We are collecting alot of Coolies in Madras sir, the Tamil ones, and other ones too sir. If you were here now you would see very big queus sir. You said you're only wanted the fat ones, but this place has only got the thin ones sir. Most of them are dark like chocolate brown and they have straight black hair. You will readily recognise them sir. I will be sending my first batch today, but I cannot say when you will receive them sir.... hallo hallo... officer - Ay your South African telephones are very backward sir.

KOMALI : Ayirs, Reddiars, Moonsamy Ponsamy, Moslem, Gugerathi, they all came together, packed tightly in the ships, eating, shitting and sleeping together. Many people died on the long journey which took many months. Diseases, assault, rape and everything was rife.

### SONG

Vaadaa wun cooliakaaran vaadaa  
Rombo vela erekethe enge vaada  
Karappa oor vella oor yen porindhe oor le  
vela elai wude elai vasil elai  
yena sala niena wun peche keta  
athakaage enge vanthaan vela thedre

Dhandalike Dhandale cooliakaaran vanthane  
Vellakaaran paathane cooliakaaran vanthane

### SONG

Wud elai vas elai wun peche keta  
Yen porinthe oorle vanthate wungel oorle  
Thaysethe periyeven yen vela kude  
Athakaage naan enge vanthen vela thedre

Vis : Hey Komali yaan avan

K : Avan tha Cooliakaaran. Avan India le vanthaan.

Vis : Ayo yo yo India le vanthaan. Thulle thoor athe. Ya avan enthe puthoo oor vanthaan.

K : Vela therdraan thaatha vela therdhaan. Avan nenikeraan  
saak neriye saak neriye pano kotithe enge. Ayoyo pare  
pare pare oru mooter, oru drum alle ethen vanthaan.

Vis : Pavo - ya nie apedeye pesere - Pare rombo bakthee  
erekethe avanike.

### SONG REPEATED

**Wud elai....**

ENGLISH OFFICER : Okay what do we have here - Coolie number  
one, coolie number one hundred and ten, coolie number  
nine hundred, coolie number two thousand, two hundred  
and twenty nine etc etc. Your name ... Aruna Jallum  
Moonsamy, Runganaathan Reddiar etc etc. Boarded ship  
in Madras on November 26 with wife. Wife's first name,  
Savithree. Died on ship. Whereabouts of body, mis-  
laid. Okay pick up your belongings and lets go to your  
place of work.

SONGS (A) - Kanna

(B) Down from the Liverpool

VIS : Hey Komali enthe velakaaran yare

KOMALI: Avan tha Englishkaaran, avan tha periyeven.  
Pare yepedi avan nikaraa. Avan pinale cardboard  
madri erekethe.

Vis : Pavo, ya nee apedeye pesere, nee tha keta payan

PLANTER (English) : My my what do we have here, a real Coolie, a bit skinny though, but real nonetheless. Do you speak English ... ooh.. you do, look scared and what are you doing with all that strange stuff. I'm not going to eat you up you know... I'm vegetarian (laughs) ... come on I'm only joking ... I don't see any women around, didn't you bring any. Well thats a pity. You my friend are going to have a lot of fun here, make a lot of money and be a rich man like I am. You would like that now won't you? We heard that you Coolies are good workers, unlike te Kaf-fers here, the lazy burnt bastards. You must have a lot of sun in your country too eh. Come on then lets get to work. Time lost is never regained my Coolie, friend. Remember that always and you'll be a rich man.

COOLIE : Ayo pereye vaai erekethe wunke. Nee rombo nala pesere, aana yena nee solre puriyevelai. Ya wun thol alu vela erekethe? Ratham elai wodumbele. Wun per yena..... (Dialogue to be filled in)

PLANTER : Ah - Ah - the Coolie speaks

COOLIE : Wun per yena

PLANTER : Beautiful, wonderful, you sound so good.

COOLIE : Wun per yena (deliberate)

PLANTER : Wun per yena you (this is repeated by Coolie).  
I see you have brought your drums along. Are you a musician... Do you play music, sing, dance... I can play the violin too you know. Its a pity I don't have one around. Come on come on show me something. Come on play, play don't be shy.

[A GOOD RENDITION OF MUSIC - HEAVY DRUMMING ETC]

(For a moment the Planter gets carried away and taps the beat of the drumming.... also sings an English song. When the drumming stops he comes to his senses).

That was good, very good. Do you want to know something. That sounds so much like the stuff the bushmen in this country do when they are preparing for war. The one group drums and the other group drums ... the group that drums the loudest bursts the ear - drums of the other group and wins. (Laughs... then followed by Indian)

Okay thats enough of this time wasting. You are here to work. There won't be time for your music or dancing.

(MIME SEQUENCE WITH PLANTER AND WORKER)

Komalie : And so the Indian was introduced into this country - fresh and innocent - almost 60 000 in number by the year 1911, mostly from the South Indian State of Madras. And while they came to grow the cane and cut the grass, soon some started to drink the cane and smoke the grass.

SONG AND DANCE

Drinking cane and smoking grass.  
Don't hit a miss and cut your ass...

SONG BEAT

Thak : eh thak eh themi thaai

Enthe valai padi erenthene  
yenna seyeven

padinaan, therdinaan, pesenaan, epo tha paathanaan

Velai velai sonnaan.... velai sethaan

(Raagam).... while chorus follows

SONG AND JOKE BY KOMALI

## SCENE II

(Fruit Seller enters with bamboo over his shoulder on which hangs two baskets of fruit)

### SONG - WITH DANCE

My name is Thumbadoo I come from India too  
I am selling my fruit in this land, for twenty years  
What else can I do

You see my basket here  
You see my legs here ^  
They both are my friends, for so long, for twenty years  
What else can I do.

I have been through the mill, I have been through the sea  
I have been to the mountains, but what can I see  
I am blind, but yes, still I see.

Thumbadoo : (To audience) Hallo hallo... I see I have a lot of customers today... so tell me what do you want. I have fresh apples, bananas... Hey wait now, don't rush.... I have enough for all of you.

Komali : Hey Thamboodoo... why you fooling yourself again.

Thumbadoo : Komali, you spying on me again.

Komali : For a blind man you are very sharp. Here listen to this one.... (sings) Hey Thumbadoo Thumbadoo wun peringee sarai Thumbadoo.

Thumbadoo : (After pause)  
Hey Komali Komali wun apa sarai Komali.

Komali : Hey Thumbadoo Thumbadoo wun pinale erekethe laddoo.

Thumbadoo : Hey Komali Komali wun pinale erekethe kaddoo.

Komali : Ayo Ayo... Yen pinale erekethe kaddoo. Poda yena thereyo wunke Thumbadoo.

**(They mimic a comic fight dance sequence with song)**

Thumbadoo : Komali stop fooling around. Something terrible happened today. I took the short cut when I was coming from the market this morning. It must have been about 6.0' clock. As I was walking I kicked something. I thought it was a stump of grass but it felt funny. I reached down and then I felt the feathers. As I moved my hands I touched the neck, it was wet. I screamed. Mr Ayir from the temple ran and came. At first he was quiet, I had to tell him to look down and then he started to cry... like a father for his child. I could hear him pick up the temple-peacock as he continued to cry. I was lost for words. I didn't know what to say. He thanked me for finding the peacock and walked away. The whole village knew the peacock and as I walked away I could picture the whole village in mourning. This was a bad omen.

Komali : Oh Thumbadoo I am very sorry that this had to happen to you. So that is why you are selling your fruit here today. Your usual customers most certainly won't pray today as soon as the news of the omen reaches them.

Thumbadoo : It affects me Komali, that I had to step on this wonderful bird and be the bearer of such terrible news.

Komali : You are a good man Thumbadoo. The whole village respects you. Nothing bad can befall you.

Thumbadoo : Yes but I am also having bad dreams. I get up most nights sweating, my clothes all wet. This is surely a sign that all is not well. I was speaking to Thutu Pillay the other day and he also says that he feels a great change in our community. He says people are only concentrating on making money. Their social lives are empty. There is no more that dancing and singing anymore. All the colour and splendour of the Indian race has left.

Komali : Thumbadoo don't look so down, there are things that happen that you and I can't stop. Can we stop this change that's affecting our whole community.

Thumbadoo : Maybe we can't, but I can't help thinking back about how our people must have suffered when they came, the sacrifices they made so that we could live better lives. My father used to tell me stories everynight before I went to bed... You know our forefathers lived in houses so small people almost suffocated in them. At that time people didn't worry if you were Tamil, Telegu, Hindi or anything - they all lived together and worked together. The authorities went on complaining of the filthy conditions.

People shitting in the bush, shitting in the rivers, shitting everywhere- but then what do you expect them to do when no proper facilities are provided.

### SONG

What do you do when you're not well to do  
You do it in the bush in the open veld to  
What do you do when you're not well to do  
You do it anywhere like the animals do

They had to work everyday from sunrise to sunset, even on Saturdays and Sundays. They had very little time for entertainment, but still late in the evenings you could hear the violin strings coming from the houses... and during the major festivals there was much joy and plenty of food for everyone. Dance troupes were always ready to perform. The Therukoothu dance drama was a must during the festivals. It used to go on for the whole night. People sat on floor mats and listened very carefully till they dozed off and were pleasantly awakened by people serving hot teas and bhajias and through all this the Dance drama continued... Those were the days... (...His reminiscing comes to life in the form of a Therukoothu Dance Drama.)

### SONG REPEATED

## THERUKOOTHU SCENE

(Enter Therukoothu Dancer - James Govender)

### SONG AND DANCE

- a) Vinthum
- b) Voice Beat : rhythmic match of voice syllables to drum beats.

S : Kavalkaaran where are you hiding. I know you are here somewhere. If you don't come out now I will find you and then you'll be in trouble.

K : Hey Samiaar I'm seeing you after a very very long time... and I see you have a new costume. I must say it looks very very nice... like one big butterfly. (S. responds by chasing K - stylized song and chase). I'm sorry Samiaar, I see you don't stand for jokes eh.

S : I see you still have your jokes and songs but what are you doing here. This is not Therukoothu.

K : You are right Samiaar this is not Therukoothu I don't have my old friends with me anymore so I have to try out new things with my new friends.

S : Why are you speaking in English. Did you also forget your mother tongue.

K : Samiaar if I was in India then I would have spoken in Tamil or Hindi. If I did it here whose going to understand me. So I have to speak a little bit English, a little bit Tamil, some Hindi here and there so that people could still understand me and come and see me perform.

S : Kavalkaaran I have travelled a long distance to be with you... because I know that you care about our tradition and culture. We have to work together to keep them alive.

K : That is true Samiaar, we have to come together and work together. Only by doing this can we strengthen our community and make a valid contribution towards the future.

- S : I am prepared to compromise as long as the young and the old can dance together.
- K : Of course Samiaar the young and the old will dance together and all the people will join and we will be free - but we cannot call it Therukoothu. Therukoothu should be for our children to study about. At least then Samiaar we can have a little of the old and a little of the new-a perfect balance Samiaar.
- S : Okay I am ready for suggestions you tell me how we can do it and we'll do it.
- K : Oh Samiaar you make me very happy. I didn't expect you to accept my suggestions so readily. If we can make compromises with our friends then we can surely look forward to a brighter future. Dogmatism in this day and age can only spell doom. We have to realise that there is a place for everything and that to glorify man is to glorify God.
- S : Your concern for our community really touches me, Kavalkaaran.
- K : Yes I am concerned about our community. Concerned because our people are suffering, suffering from infections spread by a sick society, and they are becoming too accustomed to this suffering. It is people like you and I that have to take charge and provide our people with some kind of direction. We have to be aware that our people are now feeling the strain of being in the middle of so many different cultures.
- S : Kavalkaaran, you are proving to be a very strong leader. I admire your understanding of our people in these modern but difficult times. Although I have

tried so hard to keep our old cultural traditions, I must admit that I have failed to keep up with the times. I will therefore accept any suggestions that you may have that can lead us out of this evil.

K : We must understand Samiaar that culture and tradition can either free us or trap us. We have to have open minds and apply ourselves to our present circumstances. The state of our people is too clear to see.

SONG (Komali walks into audience whilst singing)

Athakaalam Enthekaalam  
Rombo Thritha manse ereke enthekaalam  
Wun pinala pare kannan wun pinale pare

Not long time ago but right here and now  
There are lot of thieving fellows right here and now

I don't know what to do  
I don't know what to say  
Our people going crazy not knowing the way

(Lighting change for new scene)

K : Peru I don't know whats happening to Romilla these days. She's definitely not herself. From that day she came home early from varsity she's been behaving very differently. I don't know whats happening in that place.

P. I don't know what sin we committed. Just when our daughter is ready to go to the university they allow the Africans to fill the place. All this time they kept on saying its an Indian University. They built a big temple, they got a mosque. Someone said they even going to build a church. They should save all the money and just build a compound.

K : And to think that Romilla wanted to stay in the hostel. You know that aunty from Gulmal Crescent who works in S.A. clothing that Hindi aunty man. Her son came here on Tuesday to collect the samoosa strips. I just asked him how he's doing in varsity. Ayo he started, first he started telling me about some sarie queen contest or something they had in the varsity, but he said some other name. It told him if I knew I should take part. When I said that he started blushing. Why you think I won't make it now, Peru?

P : Ay, the judges these days are not good. There's only favouritism.

K : Anyway this fella carried out for so long telling me everything about the sarie queen contest. Only in the end he started saying that there was some trouble because only Indians was taking part. Imagine if Africans wear saries how funny they'll look. But that one White lady who came to the wedding last week, she was looking very smart. They pick up very fast but.

P : You didn't ask him anything about Romilla.

K : I wanted to, I was waiting for a nice chance but this fella was going like a train. From everything he said it looks like that place is going to the dogs. It appears they selling drink, dagga, they gambling.... and the girls, the way they behave, they drink, smoke and they even running dirty businesses. Shame the poor fella, he was so shy, but he said everything. That aunty's son is gone so big now eh.

P : But how they allowing all this violent fellas to come to a place of study I don't know. If they coming with the intention to study then never mind, but where they going to study, I don't know. Look at this fella in Natal University - Knowledge or something. Don't ask me who kept that name for him. He goes and fails all his exams and then demands the University passes him. That Laat fella did the right thing. You have to put your foot down and keep it down. The bloody buggers want to bulldoze their way into everything. The papers are full of all kinds of incidents.

K : Ya, the papers too man, they make everything look so big. Hey Peru you mustn't talk in front of the girl like that. Ayo she get so sensitive when we talk like that. The last time she brought that fella and came home. I told her how dangerous it was right - she just stared at me. I didn't say he was a rogue or something, but then we can't take any chances.

Peru : You should have been more stern with her. What you think happened in Goolam's house.

K : Which Goolam?

P : The fella that works with me. They had this maid right. This fella was always telling us how clever she was. She could speak English just like the Indians. She could cook terrific fish curry. He even brought and came to work one day. Hey I was scared to eat the thing. I'll tell you something Kanta, I always suspected something was happening with this fella and this girl.

K : Ayoo man don't be stupid - how can that fella do that. He looks like such a clean fella.

P : No... Honestly - You know at least twice a week, during our lunch times - that fella will take his car and rush home. I think the other fellas knew what was happening too. Anyway I was telling you this story. This clever girl used to bring one fella to Goolam's house every week. She used to say he was her brother - came to collect her wages and take it home to the farm. For three weeks he came to the house. The fourth week lock, stock and barrel was gone, just like that. Poor Goolam.

K : They didn't take her pass and keep.

P : Where they got pass now. They also got book of life. Anyway I don't think they took it and kept.

K : Now what made us talk about all these things. We started with Romilla and then we going in all directions. Hey, all this worry about Romilla my head is starting to spin.

P : Kantha, I must be very honest with you but I don't know if we should allow Romilla to carry on going to that university. Just now something will happen and all our dreams will be gone.

K : Peru, you still thinking of that doctor eh.

P : Some dreams always stay with you.

K : Peru stop it! Please don't get into this mood. Wait let me make some tea for you and come... Peru you mustn't take all these things and make it so big.

P : I'm okay Kantha I'm okay. (Kantha leaves).

(Peru's dream comes to life)

(He looks up and then speaks)

If there is a God then you'll be able to hear what I'm saying. I demand to know why you are sitting up there and not doing anything about this situation. You told us to pray we prayed. You told us to cut a fowl, we cut a fowl - anything you tell us to do we do it - and yet when we want something you don't give us.

Oh if everything only came right - we'll be plain - sailing now. Doctors make a lot of money. I am sure he would have bought me a nice white mercedes. I won't complain if its not the latest model - but imagine me going down the road. How the neighbours would come up to me on Sunday morning when I'm washing my car "Hey Peru, doing very well I see" - and I won't say anything - I'll just smile and carry on washing my car.

Romilla, my only baby, I wasn't angry with you when you were born. I know I told Kantha I wanted a boy, but when I saw you I loved you. The doctor told me you were a healthy baby and we should be proud.

I'm sorry I drank so much that night, but I was so happy.... and then I couldn't wait for you... to take your first steps... my little girl, dressed up all pretty, walking with her daddy.

You remember that time we went to Isipingo beach. We were all enjoying ourselves and then you fell in the water.... and you were going.... oh my baby if that aunty didn't catch you.

Your birthdays were such wonderful days. Your photographs are all there, showing you each year bigger and bigger and prettier...

**(Dance sequence between Patrick and Sumagy)**

S : Peru I got no milk - you'll have your tea black eh.  
(Peru does not hear) - (K. walks out muttering)

**(Samiaar gets up to interupt)**

K : You cannot disturb him Samiaar. His dream is his reality - he will not hear you - you are on the outside. That is the power of the dream. You see how happy he is... driving his mercedes. Come lets watch there is still lots more.

**(Just then Peru dreams, another dream)**

P : No, do not touch her - I struggled all my life to give her everything - We are religious people don't do it. Leave her alone. She's young and innocent. She doesn't know what she wants. She's been brainwashed. You cannot wreck her life just like that, after so many long years.

**(Wedding sequence between Patrick and Sumagy)**

Do you think you'll have a good life with her. That she'll feed you and take care of you.

No she won't - she's venom - she'll poison you and get rid of you like the dirt you are. She's our baby. Don't touch her damn you and stain my virgin baby.

P : It is inevitable sir. We all have to succumb... not in defeat sir but in triumph... when our senses are fully matured to realise that men are men no matter what the wicked world may have taught you. You cannot suppress the feelings your daughter has for me because even she doesn't understand it. True feelings can never be understood in your terms or mine. If I can be your kitchen boy and care for your kitchen I can surely be your son-in-law and care for your daughter.

Man : My foot.

P : What is wrong with your foot sir.

Man : Your bloody black bastard.

P : I am bloody and I am black sir but bastard I am not sir. What is wrong with me. I lived with Indians all my life. I can speak both in Tamil and Hindi. I am more Indian than a lot of people I know.

**SINGS HINDI SONG**

Man : You are not an Indian. You will never be an Indian.  
You are an African with one leg in the bush.

P : What is wrong with me sir.

Man : You are an African.

P : That I am sir.

Man : You damn bushman.

P : You cannot fight me sir no matter how much you may  
wrestle with me.

Man : I will kill you (He lunges for "Patrick", grabs him by  
the throat and throttles him).

S : (entrance) - Peru... hey Peru... your tea is ready -  
come to the kitchen... (goes closer and hold him by the  
arm) Peru you are frightening me. (Peru turns and  
looks at her and then breaks into a violent verbal  
onslaught).

P : Leave me alone you - you do not know what it is to be  
an outsider in your own home, your own country, your  
own community. We have been hijacked by people with no  
bloody brains. Dammit even if I had a mercedes, for  
how long will it stay with me before its gone again.

K : Peru, please come and have your tea. It'll will cool  
you down.

(Peru deliberately turns around and faces Kantha)

P : (He takes her by the chin) Lady look at me, stuff you, and stuff your tea (He almost throttles her and she falls to the floor)

(Mr Gokul a social worker and family friend arrives)

G : Hallo Mr Moodley, Hallo Mrs Moodley. Is everything okay.

P : Oh everything's fine. Kantha and I were just playing a little game. Comon up my love (He gives her a hand).

G : Thats really nice Mr Moodley. I am so glad that you're doing so well. There are very few couples these days who can still play games with each other. All people are doing these days are fighting and killing each other. I was dealing with a nasty case this morning. I think I may have just averted a major disaster.

P : Also, that case that I read in the week-end paper was terrible. How people can kill their own flesh and blood I do not understand. They have to be very very sick people.

G : Oh they are sick all right.

P : So what brings you here at this odd hour?

G : I had this appointment with this family down the road, but no-one seemed to be there when I arrived, so I thought I'll just pop in and see how you're doing, and I must say that I'm very pleased at what I see. With the amount of family problems I'm dealing with at the moment I am at my wits end.

- K : You must take it easy Gokul. You can't go on helping other people only, you must also take care of yourself. But why suddenly we having all these problems.
- G : Oh it is very difficult to say. Its very complex. Right now it seems to be a new trend in the Indian Community. I can't say exactly... the mind works in strange ways, and the difficult part is that you can hardly recognize the problem first hand. People are too afraid to seek professional help. Only when disaster strikes do the problems surface.
- P : It is there in the religious scriptures that there will be wholesale self - destruction in the nineties. A lot of people will commit suicide and kill their family members. Maybe it is God's way of keeping the world from over-population.
- G : I don't know, I am not a very religious man. It is my job to seek scientific explanations to all these problems.
- K : Everything is science today. I think Romilla is taking that in varsity too.
- P : What is the scientific explanation for that family killing in the week-end papers.
- G : Well I told you the problem is very complex. But at the same time if you look closely you will find that there are a lot of similarities in all the family problems we've been having recently. The family unit is no more like it used to be. While some are using culture to keep the family together, others are

stripped completely of it, and suddenly they get up and feel like aliens, and with everything happening in the country right now it becomes difficult to cope with the pressure. It makes it very difficult to pinpoint one particular problem and deal with it.

K : Almost in every house there's problems these days. Look at how much trouble they having in Selma's house. After that uncle died they having a very rough time. Everyday you see that aunty standing on the pavement and asking people for help.

G : Why, what's the problem?

K : Their son Jerry, he smokes that dagga and then goes off his head. Shame there's hardly any furniture in that house now. He broke almost everything. Instead of finding a job and settling down, he takes all these drugs and then demands money from his mother. That poor lady is really having it very bad.

G : I've come across a lot of cases like that. The parents phone the police, gets the son locked up and then pleads for the police to release him. Its really a catch 22 situation for a lot of these people. Even in cases like these, the problems are complex. Drugs are just the surface problem. You know I am getting late for my next appointment I'd better be going.

K : You must come again soon Gokul when you have some time. We must all sit and talk. At least we can learn about all these things.

G : I will most certainly come again. It was nice talking to a happy couple for a change. You can go-on with your game now... Bye.

(There is silence for a moment).

P : (imitates wife) "We must all sit and talk... so that the whole world can know our problems". You bitch.. you are just like your fucking daughter who must be right now screwing with all those black bastards.

K : What is this? Why are you behaving like a wild animal. I think we have to talk to Gokul about this. I can't take this anymore.

P : Shut up woman - shut up. Feru assaults his wife.

S : Stop, I can't go on seeing this Kavalkaaran, you have made me understand something that I have never understood before. I must take the blame for all our people. I was blinded by tradition. I was blinded by our culture. I thought it would remain pure forever. I must take the blame for not recognising the gradual breakdown of our community. I am sorry.

K : Do not cry Saamiar it is not your fault. You cannot take the entire blame for the plight of our people. In your endeavour to keep your culture pure you remained blind to the different forces working within our people. Also it is not peculiar to any one community. Our social worker friend, Gokul has already stated that the problem is complex.

S : In all the work that I have done, I have only thought of our people, of how I could help them to progress. I have read all the scriptures and I have come across on a number of occasions very similar happenings between Gods and demigods and yet I have not applied my knowledge to my people. I must admit my shortcomings.

K : Saamiar, We have to understand that an entire generation have been caught in this situation and we have failed to adjust and modify. There are many voices speaking to us. We have to listen and choose intelligently. That is our plight, we cannot run away. The voices won't go away. We cannot shut them out. They will always come back over and over.

(Tape recorder carries the above speech to the end)

FINALE MADE UP OF MUSIC AND DANCE DEPICTING A COMPROMISE BETWEEN THE TRADITIONAL AND MODERN PROTAGONISTS

