

When Kōlam Rebecomes:

**A performative exploration of form,
philosophy and contemporary relevance of
a Sinhalese traditional performance practice**

Subasinghe Arachchige Anasuya Subasinghe

College of Arts and Education

Victoria University Melbourne Australia

**An Exegesis Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of
the degree of**

Doctor of Philosophy (Performance Studies)

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore the performative potential of the Sinhalese Kōlam tradition beyond its 'fixed' repertoire, to have contemporary relevance in the present socio-political context. In recognising the ideologies of preservation that define the current Kōlam practice as traditional knowledge, which manifests in its rarity on the one hand, and its common usages in the urban economic context on the other, this exploration attempts to contextualise the performance genre from a different point of entry.

The perception that Kōlam is a comprehensive performance system, informed by the ontological and epistemological sensibilities of the performance maker, that in turn manifest in its aesthetic and narrative expression, is the key driver behind the research. This premodern practice, characterised by its parallel evolution to the changing social and political framework, is performed today as a 'fixed' repertoire with its fundamental purpose defined as preservation. Today, the presence of Kōlam in Sri Lanka is three-fold: that is, the traditional practice that continues along its ancestral ownership to traditional knowledge; the generic cultural ownership manifested in the work of scholars, theatre practitioners, the performing arts pedagogy and the presence of Kōlam in cultural commodification. However, there remains a gap in the interpretation of Kōlam as a 'living' evolving performance practice striving to be relevant in the contemporary socio-political and economic context.

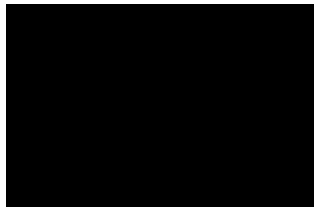
This research looks for ways of addressing this gap and is presented in the form of dramatic text and performance titled *My Sweet Rotten Heritage*, and an exegetical component. The creative element comprises 60% of the thesis and the exegesis,

40%. As a way of critically evaluating the ethical responsibilities and limitations of exploring a traditional performance system, the researcher positions her performance in a para-traditional premise, both facilitating and problematising the performance process.

DECLARATION

I, Anasuya Subasinghe, declare that the PhD exegesis entitled *When Kōlam Rebecomes: Reimagining Sinhalese Kōlam Performance in a Contemporary Socio-political Context* is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This exegesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this exegesis is my own work”.

Signature



Date: 07/02/2018

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DEDICATION

For

Amma, Thaththa and Nangi

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis, both the creative and exegetical components, is an analysis of performance-based research that concerns itself with Kōlam, a dance-theatre tradition of Sri Lanka, and in particular, the Southern littoral of the Island, with its vibrant and distinct cultural identity. The overarching question that will be addressed in this research is, how can the Kōlam tradition be textually and performatively extended beyond its 'fixed' repertoire to have contemporary relevance? This question was explored through a dramatic text, and a performance titled *My Sweet Rotten Heritage* (also *Heritage* from here onwards) that investigates Kōlam as a comprehensive performance system through which, my present socio-political, cultural and religious context is interpreted. Kōlam can be defined as a communal, creative process, representing the complexities of the Sinhalese social, political and religious systems, interwoven with strands of artistic imagination to which, several generations of performance practitioners contributed. The performer community in question are Sinhalese Buddhists, specifically of the Berava and Karāva castes, who may have invented Kōlam as an extension of a Hindu ritual, but soon found its long-term relevance as a secular performance practice. There appears to be an organic development in the premodern context when practitioners were actively engaged in cultivating Kōlam as a living and evolving performance practice responding to religious beliefs and changing socio-political dynamics. To be specific, I conceptualise my approach to Kōlam as a performance system founded upon the Sinhalese Buddhist cosmic ontology and the premodern Sinhalese social organisation. In other words, I suggest that Kōlam depicts an aesthetic interpretation of the cultural-specific ontology of premodern Sinhalese Buddhist

people. It is through these ontological and epistemological groundings that the Kōlam practitioner attempted to answer questions such as, “who are we?” and “why are we here?”

In the modern context, and possibly since the late colonial period, the creative evolution of Kōlam has been at a standstill. The performances one may witness today, are rare in the traditional arena and more common on the urban stage, in cultural events and tourist hotels. While traditional practitioners attempt to continue customary all-night performances, the other executions often materialise as appropriations, abbreviations and modifications of the source tradition. Although there is an implicit and explicit ideology that Kōlam must be preserved as a ‘fixed’ tradition, functionally, it has adapted to social, political and economic change, as does any performance tradition. I do not entirely disagree with the expectations of this ideology, but where I deviate from this thought of preservation is that it fails to acknowledge the ongoing performance practice as a living art form. The expectation that premodern performance practices should be preserved in ‘fixity’, is itself a modern standpoint and to which one was introduced when colonial influence, followed by post-independent nationalism, changed the landscape of theatre in Sri Lanka.

There is no record, even before colonial presence, of Kōlam receiving state patronage. However, as a communal performance practice, it may have had a wide audience in an agrarian society, where members of the higher, ruling castes within the community attended such events. During the colonial period, there was a decline in Kōlam as other popular musical

theatre traditions such as Nādagam¹, Puppetry and Nūrti² offered entertainment corresponding to the changing social and economic context. It was with Nādagam that women were first introduced to the stage and audiences gradually began to abandon the Kōlam arena for entertainment of shorter duration, performed on a stage incorporating backdrops and sets. Through colonial influence, European dialogue plays, mostly comedies, were introduced to the elitist urban stage and universities in the early nineteenth century. But the post-independence cultural revival called for a different theatre, and Sri Lankan scholar and dramatist Ediriweera Sarachchandra was the first to abandon Moliere and Chekov, finding inspiration in what he called “folk” genres and narratives. However, the trend that this set in motion was of little benefit to the traditional performing arts, and the new urban audience was further distanced from the rural artists, who were, by then, possibly confused by the new urban economy and its implications on their performance practice.

In 1956, with the S. W. R. D Bandaranaike government being elected, the nationalist revival trickled down to the so-called ‘folk’ arts of Sri Lanka. The Ministry of Cultural Affairs was established to uphold and restore the arts and the artists in question. However, this was a pro tempore exercise proving to be neither a long-term policy nor an informed interest in sustaining traditional arts beyond their worth as a cultural commodity. With the open-door economy mandated by J. R. Jayewardene in

¹ Nādagam, which originated through Hindu settlers, was a popular form of entertainment in Colonial days and permeated the Western coastal strip from Chilaw to Tangalle. It was a principal performance practice of Tamil culture and was adapted by the Sinhalese in the early nineteenth century (See Raghavan, 1961, pp. 132-135; Sarachchandra, 1968, pp. 137-171).

² Nūrti is an urban musical theatre practice that was introduced by travelling troupes of Parsees from India. It is the product of a fusion between Indian and Western cultures, which Sinhalese dramatists took for modern theatre and appropriated the form in modifying existing Nādagam plays (Sarachchandra, 1968, pp. 182-198).

1977, Sri Lanka's tourist market began to expand, and with it, a demand for saleable culture. As a result, Kōlam practitioners, who were struggling to survive in the new urban economy, found a commercial worth in the eyes of the tourist. This cultural renewal also spurred the interest of scholars and theatre practitioners, who in 'returning to their roots', found a wealth of resources, which they then appropriated for their middle-class audiences and the urban stage. Despite this, traditional Kōlam performances continued to diminish in importance, and today, a Kōlam *maduwa*³ performed from dusk till dawn in an outdoor arena presenting an extensive repertoire of masks, is indeed a rare occurrence.

The question then is, by classifying Kōlam as traditional practice and by giving the repertoire a fixed place in performance, have Kōlam practitioners been bound by an ideological expectation to preserve Kōlam in its historical image? Why have they accepted fixity in a performance system that once evolved in response to its surroundings? In other words, why has the interpretation of their existence escaped the traditional practitioners in their present performance practice? It is with such questions that I commenced this investigation.

This research is, first and foremost, grounded in Performance Studies dedicated to exploring the interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary variables embodied in Kōlam in both theory and practice. The exegesis will predominantly demonstrate the investigation leading up to the performance component, which included the writing of a dramatic text which was then developed into a performance. The Introduction will provide a brief

³ *Kōlam maduwa* or *madu* (plural) would connote the event as a whole. For ease of identification, I will associate *maduwa* with a traditional, unabbreviated performance taking place in an outdoor space from dusk till dawn.

description of Kōlam and its historical context. A closer look at the Sinhalese social organisation and Sinhalese Buddhism will be taken with the aim of understanding the insights and interpretations embodied in Kōlam. The Introduction will conclude with the proposition to set aside the reiterated theory that Kōlam was once a pregnancy ritual, and reevaluate it as a performance tradition that addressed the needs of the community as a whole.

My focus will dwell on two timeframes within the history of Kōlam practice. I will primarily look at premodern Kōlam in the context of its socio-political and religious influences, in order to understand the ontology of the early Kōlam practitioners and the purpose with which the performance system was engendered. I will refer to the performance practice in its historical context which characterises its evolution over several centuries with an expanding repertoire of masks and narrative content, as *premodern Kōlam*. The ‘fixed’ repertoire performed today with the intention of preservation, that is in the hands of practitioners who have inherited Kōlam through bloodline or a *gurukula* (school), will be referred to as *traditional Kōlam* and their performers, as *traditional practitioners*. *Modern Kōlam* will denote the performance of the ‘fixed’ repertoire and/or appropriations of it, that have functionally altered in response to today’s urban socio-economic context. Modern Kōlam practices may also embody Kōlam performed as part of a dance or theatre education curriculum, or within the paradigms of cultural tourism. Performers of Modern Kōlam, include those within and outside the community of traditional performers.

In what follows, Chapter 1 which is presented in two parts; Part 1 first looks at the body of literature including Kōlam texts and works of scholars that informed this research. Several gaps in these studies and their relevance to the present research will be

identified. These include the (mis)representation of women in Kōlam narratives and the absence of the women in the performance practice. Another area that is rarely discussed in previous literature is the critically reflective approach to using traditional knowledge. Further, there is an absence of practice-oriented research in Kōlam. In response to Part 1, the concept of para-traditional performance is introduced in Part 2, as an approach to positioning my performance. Then, the historical, socio-political and religious context that informed the ontology of premodern practitioners is formulated into a conceptual framework. Based on this framework, I will explain how an autoethnography methodology was used to identify and interpret my ontological perceptions in the dramatic text.

Chapter 2 embodies a discussion on the dramatic text using tools from interpretive and performative autoethnography, and the textual and conceptual negotiations made in the shift from the tradition to the para-tradition. Linguistic challenges in writing a Kōlam dramatic text in English has been addressed as a form of 'cultural translation', while bilingualism is approached as hybrid textualisation, that insists upon the assertion of cultural identity. In Chapter 3, I will provide an analysis of auto-ethnographic field notes, summarising the socio-political background of my Kōlam characters and their significance in the para-traditional arena. These summaries will demonstrate how personal narratives are embodied in a wider socio-political context. Chapter 4 will describe the production process, focusing on performative interpretations of my dramatic text within the Kōlam performance system. Female representation, the embodiment of masks, the design of masks, dance, music and other elements will be discussed here. The Conclusion takes an antithetical turn, extending on the premise of para-traditional performance as an acceptance of the 'failure' to represent traditional Kōlam.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three groups which include traditional practitioners of the Ambalangoda, Mirissa Udupila and Raigama traditions⁴, scholars whose work has focused explicitly on Kōlam, and theatre practitioners who have appropriated Kōlam in their plays. Their responses will be evaluated where it is relevant. A Web Link to the video recording of the performance is provided with this exegesis (See Appendix A, p. 192).

An Introduction to Kōlam

The Sinhala use of the word *Kōlam* as an adjective and plural noun, and *Kōlama* as a singular noun has multiple meanings. These may denote the performance system, the character mask or the character embodied by the performer. Colloquially, the term denotes horseplay or a subject of ridicule. Kōlam is a performance system that is identified first and foremost by its repertoire of masks. These are archetypal stock masks and character masks that embody human, animal and supernatural beings. They are detailed and expressive full masks, carved from wood and painted accordingly. Of equal significance is *pahatarata* (low-country) dance, that embodies the 'laws' of the form and physical expression and is unique to the dance and ritual traditions in the south of Sri Lanka. The steps or sequences are defined as *pada* and played on the *yak beraya* (devil drum), the principal instrument of *pahatarata* dance, which in Kōlam is accompanied by the *horanāva* (a reed instrument not dissimilar to the oboe). A Kōlam performance, in its traditional context, begins at nightfall and continues till the early hours of the

⁴ Mirissa Udupila, Ambalangoda and Raigama traditions are distinguished by their geographical locations in the western and southern parts of the Island as well as variations in form within the *pahatarata* (low-country) dance tradition. In addition to this, there are both subtle and some distinctive differences in their Kōlam practice between the repertoires of masks and the narratives presented.

morning. It is presented in an outdoor, circular arena known as *sabaya*, *karaliya* (stage/arena) or *tānāyam pola* (inn), and the audience gathers on three sides of the space which can be defined in performance terms as a thrust setting.

Essentially, Kōlam has a non-linear narrative structure and is generally classified into four segments. Firstly, the performance opens with a *pūrva rangaya* (prologue) paying tribute to deities and the Three Refuges of Buddhism⁵ with a series of chants, followed by the *yahan dækma* dance sequence and *magul bera*, which is a ceremonial drum overture. This opening segment is followed by verses unfolding the origin myth of Kōlam, sung by the Narrator, who also introduces the characters and engages with them in dialogue, or watches the scenarios from the side as a spectator. A small chorus often joins him in singing. The verse text is always fixed, but improvisation is allowed where the characters speak. The following description of the narrative structure is a general formula, where the number and order of scenarios and characters presented can vary within the performance.

The first set of masked acts is a cycle of individual scenarios known as *Panivuda Kōlam*⁶, which are archetypal human masks representing various members of the premodern community defined by caste and/or their services to the king. These masks enter the arena to carry out a specific duty prior to the arrival of the royal party. Many of these scenarios extend into satirical metanarratives when the characters are joined by other masks.

⁵ Buddha, Dhamma (the doctrine), and Sangha (the monastic order).

⁶ *Panivuda* as in messages and *Panivuda Kōlam*, who come bearing the news or messages from the royal palace. They arrive with orders to announce that the King and his royal party will be arriving soon to witness Kōlam. Their duties entail the preparation of the venue and ensuring that necessary protocols are followed.

For example, *Hēva Kōlama* is a group of lascarins⁷ whose faces (masks) are lacerated and infested with blood sucking leeches. They explain how they were injured in the battle of Gampola, and how during the long journey home, they attracted leeches, which they find comforting⁸. Their role is to ensure that the arena is in good order and to control the crowd. In John Callaway's (1829) book (see also pp. 28, 29), this scenario is extended through a meta-narrative that includes the wife of a *lascar*. Claiming she does not recognise the maimed soldier as her husband, a quarrel breaks out between the two (pp. 40-41). Disfigurement, parasites and the wife's inability to recognise her husband, at once become metaphors for the damaged post-war soldier. Other *Panivuda Kōlam* scenarios include *Anabera Kōlama/Panikkalē*, an old town-crier, who is joined by his aged wife *Nonchi* and their children, *Pēndi/Jasa Kōlama* (a washerman) and his young wife *Lenchinā*, *Mudali* (village headman), his assistant *Henchappu/Liyanappu*, and *Polis Kōlama* (a group of corrupt policemen) to name a few. Following the *Panivuda Kōlam*, *Raja* (king) and *Bisawa* (queen) enter. These are large and ornate masks, whose weight often prevent much movement. They sit in the arena to witness the rest of the performance.

The second segment is mainly composed of dance acts of supernatural beings and animals. It is here that *Rākshasa* (demon/ogre) and deity masks are displayed⁹, and these non-speaking characters are always introduced in verse. Full-length narratives, such as *Gama Katāva* and *Gon Koti Katāva* that

⁷ Lascarins are natives, who fought as colonial soldiers (See de Silva Jayasuriya, 2006, p. 298).

⁸ They allude to leeches as *saneepa kurullo* or 'soothing birds', which is probably an insight from the use of leeches in ayurvedic medicine to treat infections.

⁹ The *Rakshasa* or *Raksa* and *Yaksa* demon masks are great in number and inspired by Sinhalese exorcism rituals. Deities and benevolent supernatural beings and demons in *Kōlam* are not subjected to satire.

depict rural life and speaking characters are also performed in this segment¹⁰. The third segment is *Jataka Stories* that capture narratives extracted from the *Pansiya Panas Jataka Pota*¹¹. These depict an account of the previous lives of the Buddha and are always presented towards the end of a Kōlam performance. In between these segments, or as an interlude to a full-length narrative, dance acts outside the narrative are inserted depicting various archetypes from premodern Sinhalese society¹².

Pahatarata dance, drumming, masking and masks carving, singing, stylised acting, improvisation, an episodic structure, narratives and meta-narratives, social and political satire, ritual, the outdoor arena, and elaborate costumes, are among the vital aesthetic constituents based on which, Kōlam can be defined as a comprehensive performance system.

The Origin of Sinhalese Kōlam

No chronological evidence exists of the origin of Kōlam. Apart from a single mention of the word “Kōlam” in a verse of *Lōvadasangarāva* written by the Buddhist monk Vīdāgama Maitrī during the Kotte Period (1412-1597), early Sinhalese literature provides no recorded dates of the performance

¹⁰ Gama *Katāva* (village story) and Gon Koti *Katāva* (story of cattle and leopards) are inspired by ordeals experienced in village life. Sometimes characters are extracted from these narratives and performed as isolated dance acts.

¹¹ Pansiya Panas Jātaka Pota or the book of five-hundred and fifty stories is a body of semi-canonical Theravada literature capturing accounts of the past lives of Bodhisatava (the one who is destined for Buddhahood) in the form of parables.

¹² In addition to these, Demala Kōlama (Tamil man and woman), Marakkala Kōlam (the Moor), who may have been extracted from *Gon Koti Katāva*, Badadaru Kōlam (the pregnant woman often accompanied by the husband), Aththa-Muththa Kōlam (an old man and his wife) were presented as individual acts. With the arrival of the Portuguese, Dutch, British and other ethnicities, such as Malays, Moors and African soldiers, new masks were introduced to parody the characters of the changing socio-political landscape.

tradition (Goonatilleka, 1964). M. D. Raghavan (1964) (traces back the etymology to south Indian *Kōlam Tullal*, which “literally means “disguised dances”, weird dances by the devil-dancers of rural Malabar in a ritual ceremony against evil influences”, (p. 125). Otaker Pertold (1930/1973) also refers *Tulu Kola* as “devil-dance” of South Indian origin (p. 64). Even today, this protection ritual is performed as part of the *Padayani* in the temples of Goddess Badrakali in Kerala, (Goonatilleka, 2007; Swart, 2000) and has dancers wearing masks made by drawing images on spathes of areca nut palm. In addition to these etymological parallels, Swart (2000) in her study of Padayani of Kerala, India, states that “[m]asks are made to represent a number of different figures, or *Kōlams* (this word has multiple meanings and refers to a figure or character, a mask, and the dance of the character)” (p. 66). Similarly, multiple meanings of the word *Kōlam*, as mentioned earlier, are also present in Sinhala usage.

Swart (2000) observes that “[d]ances with *Kōlams* are really at the heart of *padayani*... *Kōlams* represent spirits both evil and beneficial, as well as personages of mythology and history” (p. 67). Another segment of Padayani that is strikingly similar in concept to Sinhalese *Kōlam* is *Vinodam* (happy/merry). Swarts explains,

These skits are intended to be thought-provoking and to raise consciousness about social issues like caste. They are also a way of presenting some of the faults of the villagers in a teasing way. The range of these skits manages to cover various castes, from Brahmins to Pulayas, as well as Christians and Muslims. (2000, p. 82)

A verse in the palm-leaf manuscripts on Kōlam archived at the National Museum of Colombo¹³, and in *Mirissa Udupila Eksath Kalā Mandalayē Vesmuhunu Vistharaya Saha Kōlam Kavi Potha*¹⁴ (Senaratne, M. P., 1966) alludes to Kōlam originating from the “Dravidian religion”, which has been translated to the Sinhala language (see Goonatilleka, 2007, p. 48). However, this strong possibility that Kōlam may have originated from a south Indian ritual (Goonatilleka, 2007; Raghavan, 1964) leads us to the migrants with whom this rite may have arrived on the Island and the natives who adapted the ritual to create Sinhalese Kōlam. There are two Sinhalese castes, who even today claim ancestral ownership to the Kōlam. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that Sinhalese Kōlam is born of an interdisciplinary marriage between the Karāva and Berava castes.

The Premodern Kōlam Practitioner and His Socio-Religious Ontology

Previous studies on Kōlam have made references to the influence of Buddhism and the socio-political backdrop that shaped the Kōlam repertoire. However, I believe a closer look at Sinhalese Buddhism and the premodern Sinhalese social organisation is necessary to contextualise the ontology, that engendered Kōlam as a performance tradition. In this light, I deviate from identifying Kōlam as rural theatre, as this terminology becomes relevant only in comparison to the urban economy and the post-independent resurgence of middle-class Sri Lankan theatre in the 1950s and onwards. As discussed in the Conceptual Framework, Kōlam was practised in the larger agrarian society defined by the Sinhalese caste system, and it

¹³ *Kōlam Natanava* : AC 14-A (1898) and *Yakun Natanava saha Kōlam Natanava* : 7/K-5 (1898).

¹⁴ *Mirissa Udupila Eksath Kala Mandalayē Vesmuhunu Vistharaya saha Kōlam Kavi Potha* [Masks and Kōlam verses of Mirissa Udupila United Arts Association], hereafter referred to as *Handbook of Mirissa Udupila*. A copy of this handwritten manuscript was sourced from M. P. Senaratne who in 1966 transcribed the verses performed by the Mirissa Udupila Kōlam practitioners (See also pp. 26, 28).

is, therefore, essential to contextualise the early performers and their performance practice within the socio-political frame of the time (see discussion pp. 55-57).

According to lore, the caste system of the Sinhalese is described as an institution that came into being in response to an unbalanced, chaotic society where humans were overtaken by greed and loathing. The people then identified the most intelligent and able-bodied man among them and appointed him as their ruler. Pieris (1956) explains that as illustrated in the *Nīti Niganduawa*¹⁵, the mythological King Mahāsammata (the great appointee) was chosen by the people, and as a result, the caste system was engendered to provide “a workable *modus vivendi* defined and legitimated by the custom and law, morality and sentiment” (p. 169). The caste system took a functional approach, devolving service tenures, where the people commit to the Rājākāriya or duties to the King in the form of service, money or kind in exchange for the land they occupy (Peiris, 1956, pp. 95-102). The legitimation of caste in premodern Sri Lanka is, therefore, ‘a secular function mainly in the hands of the political authority of the king’, (Malalgoda, 1976, p. 46) and the myth is then implemented as a “reality”, that defines the social and moral consciousness of the community (p. 169). The Indian four-fold caste classification of Brahmins (priests), Kshatriya (warriors), Vaishya (farmers) and Sūdra (low caste) were substituted for Sinhalese Goigama (cultivators) as the chief caste. A majority of castes was defined by inherited professions. However, when a service was no longer required, it was not uncommon for a caste to be assigned to another occupation (Peiris, 1956, p. 186). This caused shifts in the hierarchy amongst the lower castes and their status within the Rājākari Kramaya or “King’s Duty”. Within the Rājākari system were

¹⁵ The treatise defining the Sinhalese Law, compiled during the Kandyan Period (1469-1815).

included the grain tax to the king, wartime services, and duties to the king or representative landholder “by way of personal service and/or dues in money or kind” (Peiris, 1956, p. 95). The entire social system was essentially held together by each caste contributing a service to its community.

British colonists disapproved of the caste system, and with post-independence and the establishment of the Sri Lankan government, the caste system was dissolved, so it no longer had a hold on social mobility. However, caste still has a latent presence in modern society, resurfacing in varied intensities and contexts ranging from matrimony to presidential candidacy. In relation to traditional knowledge, caste is still relevant in establishing roots and ancestral ownership. All three traditional practitioners I interviewed mentioned their caste roots as a means of contextualising the history of the performance culture and the expertise of their forefathers’ performance practice.

Kōlam and its roots in the Karāva and Berava Castes

This exegesis can only provide a foundational discussion on the caste system of Sri Lanka. Caste stratification was integral to the shaping of the Sinhalese social organisation, and therefore, the cosmic ontology of the Kōlam practitioner. The following description of Karāva and Berava, the two castes associated with the premodern Kōlam practice, aims to provide an impression of the closely interrelated and inseparable constituents ensuing from a caste-oriented society. Immigration, caste and occupation corresponding with social status, religious belief and political transformation, which includes colonial rule and ecology, are some key factors taken into consideration.

Karāva Caste in the Sinhalese Social Organisation

Raghavan (1961) in his study of Karāva caste in Sri Lanka, explains that the long-term practice of Sinhalese kings using Indian mercenaries, especially in the eleventh, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, shedding light on the immigration of the Karāva military in Sri Lanka. When the Portuguese arrived in the fifteenth century during the Kotte dynasty, Karāva people were already present in the Sinhalese social organisation (Raghavan, 1961, pp. 5-15).

When they were no longer required in military service, a majority of Karāva people on the western coast of the Island was driven by their ecology into maritime pursuits. Hence, deep sea fishing and boat building became the principal occupation of the caste (See Raghavan, 1961, pp. 114-122). The Karāva remained loyal to their Hindu faith, or over time became Buddhist, and later, many embraced Catholicism as a result of Portuguese occupation. While the Hindu rituals of the Karāva, such as Kōlam Tullal, undoubtedly inspired the origin of Kōlam in Sri Lanka, their skill in carpentry may also have contributed to the art of mask carving, as wooden masks replaced the temporary masks made of areca nut sheaths in Tullal. Gradually the ritual performed to Goddess Kali may have transformed to a secular practice, that included a larger pantheon of Sinhalese deities and Buddhist ideals. It is essential to consider the caste background of Kōlam practitioners in the context of this research to contextualise their cosmic ontology. The status of Karāva as fisherfolk was paradoxical. In the Buddhist perspective, the killing of fish was sinful, and therefore, the Karāva were situated among the inferior castes. However, in the Kandyan period and the *Rājakāri Kramaya* or service tenure, the Karāva people were raised in their social status as suppliers of dried fish to the King.

The hardships and risks of seafaring, the Buddhist perception of fisherfolk as a community engaged in *prāna gātha akusala*, or the sinful act of killing, and the ecological bearings of living in proximity to the ocean, have persuaded Karāva people to rely on deities and rituals that are closely entwined with their life experiences. In the *Garā Yakuma* for instance, twelve *Garā* (male) and *Giri* (female) demons are presented in a ritual to cast off evil and bless the village with an abundant harvest at sea. It is, therefore, no surprise that several *Garā* demons and *Giri Devi* have been incorporated into the Kōlam repertoire. Although the origin of Kōlam can be attributed to the religious practices of the Karāva, it is evident that the Berava caste, whose occupation was drumming and conducting various rituals and Buddhist ceremonies, were integrated into ceremonies of the immigrant community.

Berava Caste in the Sinhalese Social Organisation

Although the Berava caste is scattered around the Sinhalese dominant regions of the Island, like the Karāva, there was a concentration of the Berava in the coastal south. They played the drums for various Buddhist and communal rites including *Bali-tovil* exorcism and healing rituals for the community. They were the intermediaries between deities and humans, providing a much-needed service in maintaining the balance of Sinhalese society. While humans could propitiate local gods on a daily basis without an intermediary, they rarely wished to deal with demons, and this task was relegated entirely to the Berava clan. The caste is also known as *Nækati*, signifying their role as astrologers or those who prepare auspicious times (*nækæt*). But as artists and shamans of the community, the Berava occupied a lower status in the caste system (Simpson, 1984). Their ontology was founded upon Sinhalese Buddhism, which is an

amalgam of Theravada Buddhism with pre-existing the animistic practices of the native people. The Berava provided a much needed service to the community as ritual practitioners and entertainers. In their essay on the caste roots of Kōlam, Jayantha Amarasinghe and Saman M. Kariyakarawana (2014) claim that while the Karāva carved masks, it was the performers of Berava caste who composed text, music and dance in performing Kōlam. Although previous studies on Kōlam have paid little attention to the relevance of caste in the invention and evolution of Kōlam, it is evident that the expected skills and social perceptions defined in caste stratification have had a significant influence on the creative imagination of the Kōlam practitioner.

The Kōlam Practitioner and Some Perceptions of Sinhalese Buddhism

It is not possible to define the ideologies of the Sinhalese religious system and its presence in the lives of premodern Kōlam artists, in this exegesis. However, the ontology of the premodern practitioner is grounded in Sinhalese Buddhism, and therefore, a brief introduction is necessary to contextualise Kōlam and values that were central to their spiritual, social and political ethos. The third century BC saw the advent of Theravada Buddhism on the Island, which soon became a decisive constituent in the legitimation of political power. While Theravada is the doctrinal philosophy associated with scriptures and the community of monks and intellectuals, Sinhalese Buddhism which is the religion of the agrarian society, incorporates a polytheistic pantheon and animistic practices, while being simultaneously linked to Theravada Buddhism (Gombrich, 1988; Obeyesekere, 1966). Obeyesekere (1963) points out several contact points where Theravada and

Sinhalese Buddhism intersect, and I will borrow from his 'Sinhalese Buddhist theory of causality' to explain the interdependent elements of this structure. Sinhalese Buddhists attribute the events of their life to the forces of planetary positions, demonology and divine intervention. The pantheon is a hierarchical structure housing the Buddha at its pinnacle. Immediately beneath the Buddha is the deity Sakra, the protector of the *Sasanaya* (Buddhist order). Next in rank are the powerful guardian deities, followed by district deities, then the lesser gods. Demons (*yaksha*) occupy the lower strata, followed by spirits (*bhuta*, *preta*, *avatara*) (De Silva Wijeyeratne, 2014; Obeyesekere, 1966). Apart from gods from the Theravada scriptures, both local and foreign deities have also been fused into the pantheon (Obeyesekere, 1963, p. 142). From a doctrinal perspective, Buddha's continued existence presents a paradox. In attaining nirvana, he no longer participates in the affairs of the world. In contrast, Sinhalese Buddhism suggests that Buddha's presence is represented in his relics. It is this perception of the 'presence' that secures order in the pantheon. Buddha embodies pure good and compassion for all beings. However, as deities may act as both benevolent and harmful entities, while demons and spirits remain irrational and evil, rituals are employed to appease these supernatural beings (Obeyesekere, 1966).

On the other hand, the karmic theory, derived from Theravada, asserts one's own actions, thoughts and words are responsible for the results they produce in the form of merits (*pin*) and demerits (*pau*), which in turn can impact on one's existence.

The frames of reference are mutually inclusive. The astrological situation makes it possible for demons or deities to cause good or bad fortune; but the astrological influence is, in turn, dependent on karma. Ego was born under such and such a planetary constellation because of his bad or good karma. Ultimately all acts of fortune can be explained as products of

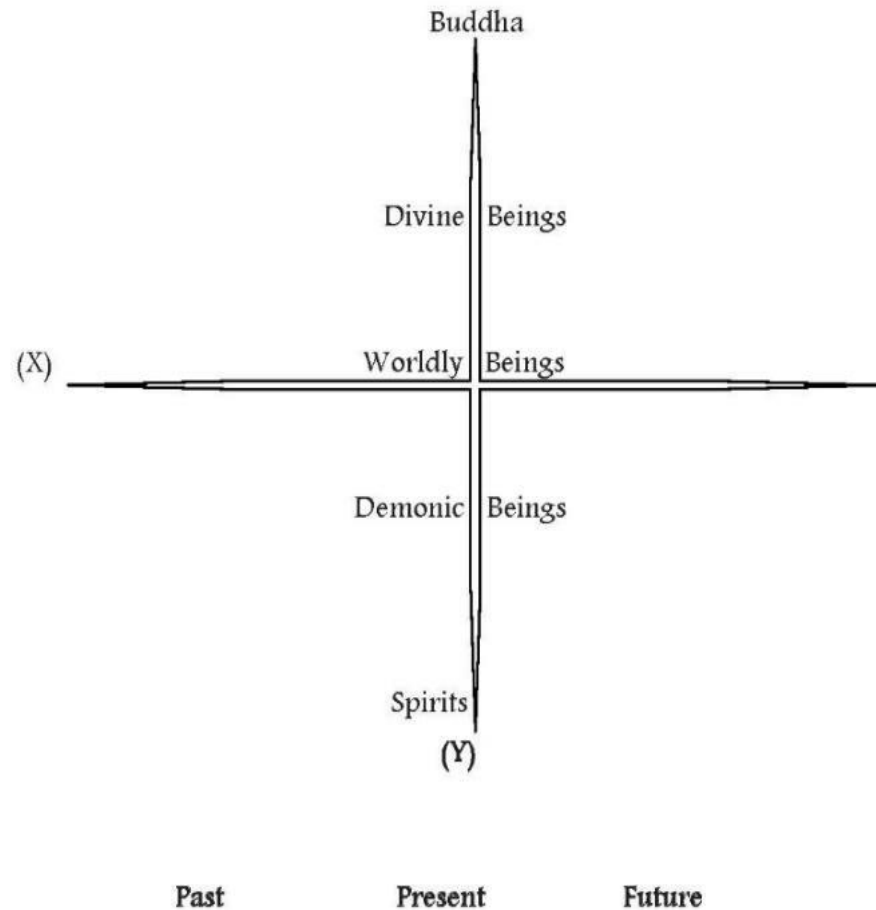
karma. This interdependence of various theories of causality probably represented an incorporation of "non-Buddhist" concepts historically into a "Buddhistic" framework (Obeyesekere, 1963, p. 148).

Merit (*punya karma*) earned through moral discipline can only be accrued and passed on by humans. Deities are beings that have accumulated more merit than humans, and can, therefore, enjoy the benefits of supernatural existence. However, their *punya karma* is exhaustive, and humans must grant merit for deities to maintain their position in the pantheon. Humans can also offer merits to help salvage spirits from their state of misery. Sinhalese Buddhists believe that for humans, shifting up (or down) in the pantheon is possible only through 'rebirth' into the samsara.

Samsaric wondering or "perpetual wandering", (Nyanatiloka, 2011, p. 187) by means of transmigration (*punabbhava*) or "re-becoming", (Nyanatiloka, p. 171) comes from the pessimistic view of one's attachment to all things mundane. According to Buddhist thought, existence in the continuous cycle of *transmigration* is suffering (*dukkha*), and by renouncing attachments to the mundane world, one may end suffering and thus end the cycle of samsara. When one ceases transmigration, this state of non-existence, and therefore non-suffering, is *nirvana*. By being the constant entity governing the pantheon, Buddha also symbolises the ever-present truth of salvation or the possibility of ending samsaric suffering.

When considering the principle functions of Theravada Buddhism and the polytheistic pantheon, it can be surmised that the former served as the doctrine of samsaric salvation, while the latter is concerned with immediate goals and the wellbeing of worldly existence. Inspired by the Sinhalese Buddhist pantheon illustrated by Obeyesekere (1966), I use the following diagram to explain the framework of cosmo-samsaric existence

and the changing and unchanging elements that govern the existence of all its beings.



X = Samsara (transmigratory)

Y = Transhistorical

I use this diagram to point out key aspects of Sinhalese Buddhism as perceived by the premodern Kōlam practitioner, which in turn reflects in the narrative content of Kōlam. The Y axis has a *transhistorical* presence, where the structure is consistent, while the beings that occupy it may shift positions dependent upon good or bad karma. Y also symbolises the coexistence of both worldly and other-worldly beings occupying different spaces at any given time. The X-axis embodies the

transmigration of Samsara, which all beings in the Y-axis endure. Therefore, in a spatiotemporal context, X symbolises the temporal movement of Y, and Y indicates the occupation of a moral space on X. Both X and Y interconnect through the karmic mechanism. There is also an awareness of sharing the cosmos with other living beings who all share the samsaric journey. The recognition of coexistence within the moral hierarchy reflects in the repertoire of masks presented in the Kōlam arena, while perceptions of transhistorical and transmigratory continua are present most noticeably in *Jataka stories* depicting the past lives of Buddha. Overall, the karmic mechanism is recalled through grotesquery and the inclusion of human ordeals into the narrative.

Myths of Origin: Kōlam as a ‘Ritual’ Appeasing Communal Cravings

Previous scholars have advanced various theories on the origin and aims of a Kōlam performance. A principal claim is that Kōlam may have originated as a gestation ritual, but has gradually lost its original purpose. This is a premise I find debatable, due to the lack of evidence produced by its advocates. Instead, I would suggest that any ritual elements identifiable in Kōlam be read as having the objective of healing the community using three potent ingredients: entertainment, social-criticism and the Sinhalese Buddhist worldview.

A particular origin myth is indeed presented in verse (*upath kavi*) during the prologue of every Kōlam performance, as follows: in the prologue of every Kōlam performance¹⁶. Queen Mænikpāla is with child and ails from an insatiable *dola-duka* (*craving or*

¹⁶ Verses in manuscript *Or 4995 : Hugh Nevill Collection* (n.d.) at the *British Library* (see p.28) omit any reference to the Queen’s pregnancy, but state that Kōlam was devised upon the instruction of King Mahāsammatā (Amarasekera, 2002b, p. 34; also see Wijesekera, 1982).

longing) to witness a masked dance. The King summons artists from all corners of the land to perform before her, but none amuse the Queen, and the King's advisers know of no solution. Soon it is decided that artisans be summoned and ordered to carve masks to be presented in the form of a masked dance. On witnessing the performance, the Queen is delighted and her *dola-duka* cured. In Callaway's (1829) translation of Kōlam verses, God Sakra¹⁷ sends the *god of curiosities* to conjure up masks in the royal garden, along with a manuscript with instructions for performing Kōlam (see pp. 38).

Based on this origin myth and on the presence of *Badadaru Kōlama* (pregnant woman) amongst common Kōlam scenarios¹⁸ Otakar Pertold (1930/1973) first claimed that Kōlam might have begun as a pregnancy ritual. This statement was strongly endorsed by M. H. Goonatilleka (2007) and Gamini Dela Bandara (2000). Relying on Goonatilleka's findings, Nandadeva Wijesekera (1987) and K. G. Amarasekera (2002b) also agree with this view. However, Ediriweera Sarachchandra (1968) claims that Pertold produces insufficient evidence to support the theory of a pregnancy rite as the origin of Kōlam. Goonatilleka (2007) attempts to show that the *Pancha-nārī-gætaya* (five women knot) of Mirissa Udupila tradition, symbolises fertility, and *Giri Dēvi*, *Ananga Bhairava* and *Kavarāksha* are masks embodying sensuality (pp. 165-172). However, like *Pancha-nārī*, nearly all female masks in Kōlam symbolise sexuality, sensuality or ideologies of femininity – in other words, male-centric representations of the female form and hardly exclusive to Kōlam. Indeed, Coomaraswamy (1956) identifies the *Pancha-nārī-gætaya* as a decorative use of the human figure found in

¹⁷ Sakra or Indra in the Buddhist pantheon is the lord of all gods.

¹⁸ In this scenario of *Badadaru Kōlama*, a pregnant woman claims to be in labour. Her husband goes to fetch the midwife; the woman gives birth, nurses the infant and sings lullabies. Dela Bandara interprets this as a full-length Kōlam play (See Dela Bandara, 2000, pp. 213-220).

temple carvings¹⁹. It is entirely possible that mask carvers, who also engaged in mural painting and sculpting, were inspired by the aesthetics of visual arts when interpreting mythical characters for the Kōlam repertoire. Therefore, the presence of such masks alone provides little support for the notion that Kōlam originated as a pregnancy ritual. This is especially the case given the existence of other rituals such as the Sinhalese *Rata Yakuma* ritual, which is explicitly performed for women, including expectant women. In the *Sanni Yakuma* ritual, the scenario featuring *Sūniyam Yakshani* (demoness of sorcery), also shares some similarities with that of *Badadaru Kōlama*, whereas amongst the several dozen masks in a Kōlam repertoire, *Badadaru Kōlama* is the only act that directly relates to pregnancy²⁰. While it is possible that Kōlam was initiated as a gestation ritual, but lost its purpose with time, I would argue for the greater likelihood of its myths of origin being a myth indeed, with the appearances of masks such as *Badadaru Kōlama* influenced by borrowings from other sources, and to the recognition by premodern low country artists of the need for a theatrical performance genre removed from the strictly sacred premise of existing rituals.

Why then might a myth of origin sourced to a pregnant woman have been invoked for a secular performance genre? The Queen's *dola-duka* that causes a psychophysical deterioration suggests an imbalance in the cosmology: Kōlam facilitates the reconciliation process by 'generating laughter'. With her longing is satisfied, order is restored, and the cycle of reproduction and balance of life continues as expected. This principle can also

¹⁹ Coomaraswamy (1956) gives examples of *Pancha-nārī-ghætaya* found in stone and ivory carvings at the Temple of the Tooth Relic in Kandy and in Ridī Vihāra, a temple in Hanguanranketa (p. 91). Similarly, there is a *Nari-latā* mask in the Kōlam repertoire inspired by "a mythical climbing vine, of which the flower has the appearance of a woman" (p. 92) and is said to shake the resolve of Hermits that meditate in the Himalayas.

²⁰ However, portrayals of *Sūniyam Yakshanī* indicate that her intention is to entice men; often declaring a male spectator as the father of the child.

apply to a community experiencing an imbalance that can rupture the social organisation from within. It is my view that the Queen's *dola-duka* symbolises a communal craving: cultural perceptions of the obligation to satisfy a pregnant woman symbolically express the dire necessity to address the imbalances of the community (Turner, 1969).

Bloomfield points out that in Hindu fiction, *dola-duka* "is employed constantly as a start motif, which initiates a chain of unusual happenings, or as a progressive motif in the course of stories" (1920, p. 5). It is a literary device used to disrupt the equilibrium and give momentum to the ensuing change of affairs. However, Obeyesekere (1963) in his anthropological analysis of rural women in Laggala, Sri Lanka, elaborates more convincingly on the cultural specificity of the *dola-duka*, by reasoning that it is "a well defined and clearly marked out cultural complex, importantly related to the social structure of the village and the female personality problems it fosters" (p. 323). In other words, there is an acute awareness in the Sinhalese rural community that *dola-duka* is not a condition to be ignored.

In the origin myth, it is not food the Queen craves; it is entertainment and laughter. She wishes to experience a performance that is unlike anything she has witnessed before. No other performance satisfies the queen, which presents a lacuna in premodern Sinhalese performing arts calling for a new genre; a novel form of entertainment unlike any other. Attaching the origin of Kōlam to the mythical king and queen – the symbols of universal wisdom and beauty – is, in my view, a way of integrating Kōlam into Sinhalese performing arts. God Sakra's intervention goes further to incorporate the pantheon to the narrative. Cosmic ontology not only feeds the imagining of a vibrant origin story but also illustrates a strong motive for accepting the Kōlam form as a superior performance tradition. It may have been necessary for the premodern practitioner to

establish his work this way, as the masked theatre was not commissioned by the royal court and functioned only as a performance practice of the popular masses. Regardless of whether Kōlam began as a fertility ritual or not, the circumstances presented by the Kōlam practitioner in the origin story is a compelling justification for the invention and continuance of the Kōlam tradition.

As a metaphor, the queen's *dola-duka* embodies the 'cravings' of the community, that would suffer and deteriorate in the absence of an outlet to release social tensions. Today's Sri Lankan society has easy access to entertainment through various media, and the absence of Kōlam is no longer felt. However, a lack of exposure to socially and politically incisive arts, and its replacement with mindless engagement with commercial and sentimental modes of entertainment, has become the staple of the masses. So, in many ways, this journey aims to investigate whether Kōlam can once again provide the socially incisive entertainment that once satisfied the 'cravings' of its community.

CHAPTER 1

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

This chapter is divided into two parts to illustrate how this research is informed by the existing body of literary and modern performances, as well as concepts that were instrumental in the development of the creative component. Part 1 is a commentary on Kōlam texts obtained from first and secondary sources, which includes copies of early manuscripts, collections of verses sourced from manuscripts, excerpts of handbooks published by various scholars, and the *Handbook of Mirissa Udupila* (Senaratne, 1966). The study of these texts was instrumental in my understanding of premodern Kōlam texts, as evolving works continuously drawing from their socio-political backdrop to maintain an immediate relevance. The repertoire is also axiomatic of the performance tradition's philosophy founded upon the Kōlam practitioner's cosmic ontology. Anthropological and performance-based research on Kōlam will be discussed along with three recent Sri Lankan theatre productions used as examples of how Kōlam has been adapted to the modern stage. Lastly, I will address some significant gaps that have been identified from a performance studies context. This discussion includes the lack of performance-based research in Kōlam, modernisation and the ethics of performing tradition, and female (mis)representation in the arena. Where necessary, I will refer to insights gathered from personal communication collected with traditional practitioners, scholars and theatre practitioners where appropriate.

In Part 2 of this Chapter, I examine how the insights gained from scholarly works and the present Kōlam practice, were instrumental in locating my performance in a critically reflexive negotiation between tradition and modernism. The concept of

Para-traditional performance will be introduced as a premise for performative experimentation with a preserved performance tradition while problematising the performance making process through critically reflexivity. The term will appear throughout the next few chapters, as I discuss the complexities and negotiations made during the course of this work. I will then look at the Conceptual Framework upon which I theorise the cosmic ontology of the Kōlam practitioner, shaped predominantly by the Sinhalese social organisation and the Sinhalese Buddhist cosmos. Based on this conceptual framework, a methodological approach is introduced, applying tools of interpretive autoethnography to investigate my cosmic ontology, which in turn, manifests in the para-traditional Kōlam text developed for the performance.

PART 1

Premodern and Modern Kōlam Texts

Historical documentation of Kōlam is scarce, and premodern texts have been preserved as palm-leaf manuscripts²¹ or published as a collection of verses. No directions or spoken text is included the content. Schechter (2013) in his book on Popular Theatre provides a fitting explanation for this.

The artists kept their work alive by performing it and passed scenarios to future generations through oral transmission or apprenticeship. Their arts lived in bodies and voices, in their memories and stage acts, and those of people who know them; their repertoire reposes in people, and in that sense among others their theatre is popular. (p. 3)

²¹ Dried palm leaves were a common medium used in Sri Lanka prior to the introduction of paper.

This is true of premodern Kōlam and its oral tradition, where written texts of were limited to the verses handed down through the generations. Neither the speech text nor the dance sequences were written down, while the repertoire of masks can be interpreted as a form of fixed text, guiding the performer. Among the earliest remaining premodern texts, is a transcript made by the British missionary, John Callaway (1829). It has 185 stanzas translated from Sinhala to English. In addition to this, *Or 4995: Hugh Nevill Collection* at the British Library²² (hereafter referred to as *British Library Manuscript*) carries 664 verses transcribed and published by Nandadeva Wijesekera (1982). Two palm-leaf manuscripts²³ dating back to 1898 have been archived at the National Museum of Colombo under *Kōlam Natanava: AC 14-A* and *Yakun Natanava Saha Kōlam Natanava: 7/K-5*. *Purana Kōlam Kavi Pota*²⁴ compiled by Nelum Veragala (not dated) could be a copy or revision of D. P. Wettasingha's (1956) listing of verses under the same title²⁵. The *Handbook of Mirissa Udupila* (Senaratne, 1966) contains a brief history of the Kōlam company with a list of past and present custodians of the mask collection and the list of seventy-five masks they own. The text contains verses of thirty-two masks²⁶, including both the verses and spoken texts of three Jātaka Stories²⁷. In addition to this, some anthropological works containing verses (Amarasekera, 2002b; Dela Bandara, 2000;

²² *Or 4995 : The Hugh Nevill collection* (n.d.) at the British Library (See also pp. 21, 35, 38), is a manuscript which includes about 664 Kōlam verses. Although the document itself is not dated, its date of purchase is stated as 1895. Transcripts of verses have been published in *Ves muhuṇu hā kōlam nāṭima* (Wijesekera, 1982).

²³ Verses from the manuscripts have been printed in several scholarly publications (See Amarasekera, 2002a; 2002b; Goonatilleka, 2007; Wijesekera, 1982).

²⁴ Translates as *The Book of Ancient Kōlam Verses*.

²⁵ Unfortunately, I had no access to Wettasingha's copy to compare the content.

²⁶ Here, I refer to *kota kavi* (short verses) that introduce masks and *diga kavi* (long verses) that are sung by characters.

²⁷ *Maname Kathāva, Chatrapānī Kathāva* and *Andhabhūta Jātakaya*

Goonatilleka, 2007; Kaluarachchi, 2006) sourced from early manuscripts, as well as excerpts from handbooks in possession of traditional practitioners, have been published by scholars. The content and descriptions in these publications often overlap.

Callaway (1829) has based his study on the mask collection owned by Don Nicholas Perera, a chief drummer in Thalpitiya, Galle. The source of the text used for his translation has not been specified, and it is not clear if the writer has witnessed a Kōlam performance during his investigations (Callaway, 1829, p. xvii), as he provides little description of the performance. But Callaway's prologue is noteworthy, as it includes the intervention of the God Sakra (Sekkraia) and other deities in the origin myth, which is a detail that is absent in other texts (1829, pp. 37-39). As there is no mention of improvised speech, there is a consensus among practitioners and scholars that spoken text may not have been introduced to the performance at this time. This theory is further supported by the presence of full masks, some of which come with a closed mouth²⁸. However, as early verse texts did not include spoken text, and some masks do have a gaping mouth, the above assumption must be left as conjecture. By the time Pertold (1930/1973) conducted his research, the Kōlam arena was no longer unfamiliar with speech among masked characters. Today, traditional practitioners too, have transcribed speech text into their handbooks. Although improvised speech is a characteristic of Kōlam, with live performances being rare, these records prove to be useful for studying the form.

Indeed, between the above mentioned Kōlam texts, both old and more recent, there are variations in the list of characters, the

²⁸It is possible, however, that verses written in the first and second person may have been sung by the masked characters even at the time. See Heva Kōlama (Lascorine) and his wife (1829, pp 40-41) and the pregnant woman and her husband in Badadaru Kōlama. (1829, 57-59)

order of appearances and the phraseology of verses. Although improvisation was incorporated into fixed scenarios, there are familiar speech segments reoccurring within the improvisations. Also, the spontaneous repartee would vary depending on the performer's skill and experience. Colloquial speech was commonly used by masked characters, but in *Jataka stories*, characters may switch to somewhat formal vernacular, especially when characters of higher social or moral status spoke, or when the narrative happened to be trans-historical. Closer scrutiny shows various peculiarities between these texts that are too vast to cover here.

What was identified while perusing these texts was that the differences were as significant as the similarities. Kōlam practitioners had freedom within the main narrative structure to shift components and add or deduct from them within the principles of the performance system. By knowing this system well, they became experts at conforming to or altering the rules. The fact is, there are many versions of the text, and they have evolved with the Kōlam community over several generations. In more recent decades, traditional dancers outside the Kōlam community, scholars and theatre practitioners to name a few, have also contributed to this evolution. It is based on this perspective that I began to imagine my Kōlam script. The question was, how far could one venture without departing from the many versions of traditional texts? This question will be addressed through the concept of *para-traditional performance* introduced later in this chapter. Where I continue, extend or depart from the narrative content of extant texts in my Kōlam script, it will be discussed in the next chapter.

I will now move on to the corpus of scholarly work that focuses on Kōlam, identifying some of the commonalities, differences and gaps in existing research.

Scholarly Literature on Kōlam

Otakar Pertold (1930/1973), Ediriweera Sarachchandra (1968), M. H. Goonatilleka (1970a, 1995; 2007), Nandadeva Wijesekera (1982; 1987), Gamini Dela Bandara (2000), K. G. Amarasekare (2002a, 2002b), Ariyaratne Kaluarachchi (2006) and Jayasena Kottegoda (2006) are among the noteworthy scholars, who have carried out investigations into Kōlam. While a majority of these scholarly works take an anthropological approach to the subject, Sarachchandra (1968), Goonatilleka (2007) and Kaluarachchi (2006) have also experimented by appropriating Kōlam in performance. Kaluarachchi's work appears to be the only published handbook on Kōlam. It incorporates a hybrid text with traditional verses from diverse sources, and spoken text from both traditional handbooks and his improvisations within the traditional repertoire. In fact, Kottegoda (2006) observes that very little has been written on Kōlam from a performance perspective that explicitly investigates dance, music and singing in Kōlam (p. 75).

Pertold (1930/1973) is among the first scholars to investigate Kōlam and ritual performance traditions in Sri Lanka. However, commenting on a Kōlam performance he witnessed, Pertold remarks,

Nonsensical as it is, this performance cannot be the original Kōlam - natima, as all the other Sinhalese dances have their inner sense and purpose, and have a kind of logical development in the whole performance, which is absolutely missing in the ceremony described. (p. 67)

The absence of "inner sense and purpose", in Pertold's commentary here, is a product of an outsider's ethnographic view of the Kōlam performer and the Sinhalese Buddhist community – a perception that led him to interpret the content and the segmented narrative style as a loosely structured and

incoherent assimilation of scenarios. However, it was Pertold (1930/1973), who first speculates that owing to the origin myth, Badadaru Kōlam (a pregnant woman) the sensuous Naga Kanya (Serpent Virgin) and a few other characters, that Kōlam might have evolved from a pregnancy ritual. His comment on the scarcity of Kōlam performances, the shorter duration and fewer narrative segments he witnessed at the time, are all indicative of the decline of Kōlam performances, even in the early 1900s (pp. 55-66).

Sarachchandra (1968) examined the Kōlam practices of Ariyapala Gurunanse and Gunadasa Gurunanse of the Ambalangoda traditions, and is of the opinion that the Sanni Yakuma ritual has significantly influenced Kōlam. He attributes the segmented narrative structure, the use of masks, dialogic exchanges between characters and the ritual conductor²⁹ and the comic interplay, as common characteristics in the two genres. He also draws comparisons between Kōlam and characters presented in *Rata Yakuma*, *Garā Yakuma* and other *yak-tovi*³⁰ rituals (pp. 105-108). The aforementioned Sri Lankan scholars, however, have dismissed Sarachchandra's theory by proposing that rituals other than *Sanni Yakuma* have more commonalities with Kōlam. Further, they claim that although some Kōlam characters share similar eponyms as those in *yak-tovil*, they are brought into the Kōlam arena with different character qualities (Amarasekara, 2002b; Dela Bandara, 2000; Kottegoda, 2006 & Goonatilleka, 2007). Sarachchandra concludes that Kōlam was merely a mode of entertainment for village communities. In my view, unlike *Sanni demons* that personify illnesses, demons and *Rakshasas* in the Kōlam repertoire are not presented as immediate threats to the community. In other words, the Kōlam *maduwa* aims to

²⁹ The ritual conductor is referred to as *Gurunanse*.

³⁰ A generic term used for Sinhalese exorcism and healing rituals.

acknowledge their presence in the cosmos, rather than to exorcise them from the human habitat. What is significant is the seamless integration of ritual characters and narratives into the Kōlam performance system, and how this integration represents the cosmic ontology of the practitioner.

Kaluarachchi (2006) wrote a modern handbook on Kōlam that has proven to be a useful resource for students. He does not descend from a family of traditional practitioners, but as a *pahatarata* dancer with a particular interest in Kōlam performance, he has approached his work from a performer's perspective. He has trained students and gathered experienced dancers from various backgrounds to perform traditional Kōlam for urban audiences and university communities. As a choreographer, he has collaborated with theatre directors such as Sarachchandra and fused various elements of Kōlam into theatre. He is also known for his appropriation of the genre in musical acts and light entertainment - often abandoning the mask and incorporating women without a mask in his adaptations of traditional scenarios.

M. H. Goonatilleka (1970) carried out a sizable anthropological work on Kōlam, identifying various schools of practitioners, Kōlam texts and repertoires of masks. Expanding on Sarachchandra's claim that Kōlam is closely related to the *Sanni Yakuma* and other rituals, he shows the similarities Kōlam characters, verses and masks styles share with rituals and ritual narratives. He cites a practitioner in Kamburugamuwa, who affirmed that while the dance sequences of the two genres may seem different, a dancer who is unfamiliar with *Tovil* dance will be inhibited when executing the dance sequences in Kōlam (Goonatilleka, 2007, p. 160). Goonatilleka then concludes it is still not possible to claim that the one performance practice influenced the other (2007, p. 165). However, he leans towards Pertold's theory, affirming that Kōlam embodies palpable

characteristics of fertility rites. He concludes that the evolution of the repertoire and narrative material, as well as the effective use of social satire, made the performances both contemporary and socially incisive.

Amarasekara's (2002a, 2002b) writing, largely overlaps in content and commentary with the work of previous scholars. However, in his descriptions of various Kōlam schools, Amarasekara provides an insight into female performances in the traditional practice. He cites two occasions in 2001 where the Olaboduwa Kōlam troupe has women performing in the traditional arena. In some of these acts the female performers do not don a mask (2002a, pp. 75, 141, 146, 149). Amarasekara claims that this practice is uncharacteristic of the traditional arena and is a product of modernisation.

Dela Bandara (2000) is of the opinion that Kōlam has both entertainment as well as ritual qualities, that are manifest in the demonic characters that have been extracted from Sinhalese rituals (pp. 77-80). However, he opposes Sarachchandra's theory that the *Sanni Yakuma* was instrumental in the development of the narrative structure and proposes that other 'folk' performance practices such as *Sokari*, *Nādagam* and the *Kohombā Yak Kankāriya*³¹ ritual appear to have inspired the Kōlam practitioner. His argument is based on the view that Kōlam has evolved from a classical Sinhalese theatre practice that uses the principles of Bharatamuni's *Nāṭyashāstra* and its definitions seen in classical Indian theatre. Dela Bandara proposes that isolated characters that do not appear to be interconnected, are in fact, remnants of a full-length play, and on investigating the British Library Manuscript (*Or 4995*), identifies at least seven such plays, including the Jātaka stories in the repertoire (p. 72). Similarly, he claims that isolated characters

³¹ However, both *Kohombā Yak Kankāriya* and *Sokari* belong to the Udarata (up-country) dance and ritual tradition.

may have belonged to short plays and were later extracted from their original context. In justifying the presence of supernatural characters, he claims that such acts were used as a mode of requesting donations or 'gifts' (*thægi*)³² from the audience.

Taking Dela Bandara's view further, Kottegoda (2006) claims that Kōlam cannot and must not be classified as a rural or 'folk' theatre practice, as it embodies advance narratives, verse structure, dance techniques and a mask making system that is closely related to the classical performing arts. Both scholars assert that Kōlam has emerged from the literate monks and court performances of the time, rather than a peasant community. The problem here appears to be in Kottegoda's interpretation of 'folk' practices and its traditional anthropological reading as 'primitive' arts. While Kottegoda's knowledge of Sinhalese traditional dance and rituals is extensive, he appears to be interpreting traditional performance practices through the lens of classical forms, in an attempt to 'elevate' the traditional to the classical paradigm.

These scholars have unyoked the widely available historical and socio-political data and multidisciplinary skills of premodern artists, to focus on limited data, which may suggest that premodern Sri Lanka had a classical theatre practice. However, the Ambalangoda ancestry is known for their proficiency in temple art and carving. In order to paint Jataka stories, they were also familiar with Buddhist literature (J. M. Wijesuriya, personal communication, December 26, 2015). The Berava/Nækati caste have been astrologers for many generations (P. Rupathilaka,

³² Requesting donations (*thægi*) after certain acts is not an unusual practice in Sinhalese rituals. Dela Bandara (2000) states this was also common among South Indian puppetry and Nādagam troupes, who travelled to the Island at the time. (pp. 86-90) Requests for 'gifts' are included in verses of *Yak* (demon) characters such as *Lokādipati*, *Ratnakūta*, *Asura*, *Neelagiri* and *Virabaddana* and deities, including *Giri Dēvi*, *Nāga Kanya* and *Badadaru Kōlama*. (See Dela Bandara, 2000, pp. 82-84).

personal communication, January 31, 2015). The Berava caste were also masters of *yak-tovil* rituals and traditional music. These men memorised a great number of verses that were chanted all night and wove complex metaphors within Sinhalese *yak-tovil* and *bali* ritual narratives. It is evident that in the migration of performance cultures from the South of India, Sanskrit *shlokas*, narratives, ritual practices and mask systems were absorbed into Sinhalese Kōlam and became a communal process. Also, had the literate monastic community participated in this creative endeavour, it is difficult to believe they would not have made a written record of it. To put it in Habib Tanvir's words,

It is not true that there is, on the one hand, sophisticated society and on the other hand a rural society which is totally unsophisticated. It is just two different sets of sophistications. (Cited in Katyal, 2012, p. 108).

Once again it is necessary to return to the purpose of Kōlam and for whom it was created. There are no records of state patronage or Kōlam performances in the royal court. The question then is, what purpose it serves to dislocate a performance genre devised by the premodern agrarian society, from its socio-political context, in order to elevate its artistic worth? For example, there appear to be recurring comparisons made between Sinhalese traditional performing arts and Indian classical theatre and dance by some scholars (Dela Bandara, 2000; Kottegoda, 2006). To disprove Sarachchandra's theory, Dela Bandara claims that the influence of the *Sanni Yakuma* on Kōlam is unconvincing due to the inferiority of performance skills in the said ritual. My view is that ritual performers have created a holistic performance system embodying multidisciplinary and multisensorial performance techniques, metaphors and aesthetics, that can have a cathartic psychophysical effect on the spectator –

qualities that modern Sinhalese performing arts are yet to meet so efficiently.

Wijesekera (1987) has also carried out an anthropological study on Kōlam, focusing primarily on the *British Library Manuscript (Or 4995)* and its repertoire. In his analysis of Sinhalese masks, he makes some useful comments on the presence of demons in the ritual serving a somewhat different purpose to those in Kōlam.

[I]n Kōlam dancing, this [the ritual's] tense atmosphere is absent even when masked demons and devils appear on the stage. Here the existence of supernatural beings is felt but not the act of exorcism to drive him out. The story emphasises the fact that all spirits like *rakshasas*, *yakshas*, *nagas*, *garudas* and divine beings are waiting eagerly to receive offerings and listen to the dhamma. The purpose in the end is didactic and the masks help make believe in the supernatural. This is the same as the method for using fable and story to interest children and in folk drama to educate and entertain rural folk. (p. 260)

Expanding on the above thought, I want to draw attention to an essay by Wolfgang Mey (2008), who studied the Ambalangoda Bandu Wijesuriya tradition. He points out that there are contradictory interpretations made by previous anthropologists, and attempts to resolve this by introducing a theory that embodies the philosophy and aesthetics that frame the entire Kōlam repertoire. Alluding to the mask of Mahasammata, Mey explains that the aesthetics of the mask “almost mirrors enlightenment”, and its proportional balance reflects the personal balance of the craftsman, while the dance expresses the “meaning and message of each Kōlam piece” (p. 5). The use of satire is viewed as an inversion – an “expression of overarching and culturally well-founded strategies of describing

or avoiding conflicts in Sinhalese society” (p. 6). So, the achievement of equilibrium is presented as the principal goal of Kōlam, and the repertoire is framed by the Buddhist perception the Four Noble Truths³³. According to Mey, suffering caused by attachment to worldly things is presented through the human and many other characters, whose desire for alcohol, sex and power dominate their existence. The cause of suffering is “egotistic desire”, and the cessation of suffering was portrayed through Jataka stories. So, it is in a spiritual and balanced approach to life that salvation or nirvana can be reached. He adds,

This form of art follows two demands. It voices the critique of the oppressed ones and it offers a long-term, action-oriented solution for structural contradictions in a society as far as individuals are concerned. The Kōlam Dances, which had been said to be anything between a fertility rite and unrelated series of funny items for the entertainment of the simple village folk turn eventually out to be a danced exegesis of the Four Noble Truths. (p. 7)

Subsequent to Pertold’s postulation that Kōlam may have originated as a pregnancy ceremony, Wijesekera (1987) and most importantly Mey (2008) have attempted to theorise the purpose of the segmented acts, which the other scholars have failed to effectively analyse. There are three areas, however, that I feel none of the above scholars have addressed with clarity. The first is the question of ethics when associating and appropriating traditional knowledge in research and practice. Secondly, the absence of a discourse on female representation in the Kōlam repertoire and thirdly, the absence of performance-based research in the Kōlam practice.

³³ Succinctly put, these are the truths of *suffering, cause for suffering, ending the suffering and the path to ending the suffering*.

Gaps in Research and Practice

One of the criticisms outside communities have of traditional artists is their reluctance to share knowledge. The *gurukula* system ensures that traditional knowledge remains within the bloodlines. In premodern society, it ensured that the skill remained within the boundaries of the caste. It was not only a premodern solution to protecting intellectual property but also a mechanism for safeguarding the livelihood of the successor. In traditional dance, “*vahala kiyala denava*” (to conceal and teach) is an expression commonly used to describe the restraint with which some traditional practitioners share their knowledge or technique. In contrast, an urban capitalist society trained to purchase knowledge may condemn *guru-mushtiya* (withholding knowledge) and even cite it as a reason for the tradition’s gradual disappearance. However, this holding back might be necessary for a context where traditional knowledge received little recognition outside cultural commodification. It ensures that a student must make a long-term commitment to acquiring that knowledge.

In his conclusion to the chapter on Kōlam, Sarachchandra (1968) claims that Kōlam should be elevated from a ‘folk’ art form to a national art form (1968). Amarasekare (2002a) laments the exploitation of traditional practitioners and the hegemonic intervention of individuals outside the Kōlam community, calling for an ethical approach to associating and protecting traditional knowledge (pp. 132-135). Today, traditional and ritual performing arts in Sri Lanka are considered cultural property, rather than the intellectual property of a specific group of people. Kōlam is borrowed, appropriated, adapted and dislocated from its source context as within the multifaceted needs of cultural representation. *Pahatarata* dance entering the school and university curricula, and cultural tourism taking a hold on traditional performance, has further blurred the boundaries of

who owns traditional knowledge and to what capacity. Beginning with Sarachchandra, Sinhalese theatre practitioners, who appropriate Kōlam in their work, often consider the source content as cultural knowledge and iconography that is culturally owned.

Dela Bandara believes that traditional Kōlam may not survive beyond the present generation. Judging by the lack of public interest in Sri Lankan theatre, he feels there is no devoted audience for traditional Kōlam. The expense of organising an event is another concern raised by the interviewee. Without support from the State, the burden of maintaining the tradition has fallen entirely upon the practitioners. In his view preservation may not be possible beyond research and publications, and that the survival of Kōlam outside of academia appears to be bleak (G. Dela Bandara, personal communication, December 11, 2014). While the dilemmas confronting traditional artists are very real, I am of the view that universities cannot continue a performance tradition, or become the hub of traditional knowledge.

Most importantly, considering the knowledge system, the resources required, such as an extensive repertoire of masks and costumes, as well as the collective and communal nature of a traditional arena, it is difficult to conceive of Kōlam in practice outside the ancestral community. Also, as a theatre practitioner, I feel that a performance tradition must not be limited to literary research. Its visibility in practice is essential to encouraging reflective public dialogue on the intra-cultural theatre and the appropriation of tradition in contemporary performance practice. Most importantly, an ethical reevaluation of scholarly research must take place, where the Sri Lankan pedagogy first recognises that in studies based in traditional knowledge, it is almost always the researcher that relies on indigenous knowledge, while such knowledge systems can exist without researchers.

I commenced this project as neither a member of the Kōlam community nor a traditional dancer, and from inception, I was acutely aware of my otherness, even within my cultural context. This consciousness has, in turn, influenced my writing and performance. As a result, I introduce the *para-traditional* premise for situating the dramatic text and performance. However, perceptions of ethical practice leave much to be critically considered in the context of Kōlam, as well as other performance traditions in Sri Lanka, and is a subject that requires attention well beyond the present work.

Another aspect that has barely received attention from the above scholars, is female representation in the Kōlam repertoire. The rare and recent instances, when female performers were present, have been dismissed by purists, as an adverse outcome of modernisation. This view was strongly corroborated by the traditional practitioner L. H. Kularathna (personal communication, December 14, 2015) and scholar Dela Bandara (December 11, 2014). Further, (mis)representation of women in the repertoire and the overarching presence of male-centric interpretations of the female form have been entirely overlooked, while cross-dressing is only discussed in the context of the male actor's skill, leaving a conspicuous gap in a feminist perspective of performance and research.

In practice, the definition of preserving Kōlam as a 'fixed' tradition appears to have ambiguous boundaries. Kōlam manifests on the urban stage, as abbreviated versions, appropriated by middle-class theatre productions, or in the form of cultural commodification. In the present education system, female students may learn to perform Kōlam, but this knowledge is not encouraged to be applied in traditional practice. The 'formal' or professional Kōlam arena would not incorporate women, as this inclusion would undermine the 'seriousness' of the performance,

whereas mimicking the female body continues to be the accepted norm.

However, there are exceptions. As mentioned earlier, the Olaboduwa troupe has incorporated women into the arena. In addition to this, the Ambalangoda Ariyapala tradition is managed by the daughters of Bandu Wijesuriya, who in the absence of a male successor, have taken on the responsibility of continuing their father's practice, and challenging the norm by introducing female-to-male cross-dressing³⁴ (J. M. Wijesuriya, personal communication, January 28, 2015). This is an instance where, owing to necessity and lineage, practitioners have driven the tradition towards change. But such change does not go uncriticised, especially by puritans, who believe it intervenes with the ideology of a preserved tradition. The reality is, Kōlam has survived thus far largely because it adapted to the changes of the modern urban economy.

It is also important to look at how the female form is represented in the arena. For example, the Olaboduwa³⁵ troupe employs female performers for what can be identified as 'feminine' characters that embody sensuality. These women often do not wear a mask, as masked performance is perceived as a tool for cross-dressing. Amarasekera (2002b) claims that *Nonchi*, (the old woman) is never played by women, as performing grotesquery and sexual innuendo is culturally unacceptable for women (p. 55). Problematising male centrality in the Kōlam practice opens an opportunity to approach female representation not merely as a cultural limitation, but as a *choice* in contemporary Kōlam performance.

³⁴ J. K. Wijesuriya cross-dresses as *Ārachchi Kōlama*, and the sisters have successfully presented several traditional Kōlam *madu* performances.

³⁵ Olaboduwa is town a located in southwestern Sri Lanka.

In Chapter 4, I will draw upon Rob Baum's concept of *female absence* and Lesley Ferris on cross-dressing, and discuss some significant decisions that were made in my performance based on the female practitioner's perspective. By opening the space equally to the female performer, this research chooses to position female presence in the Kōlam, as a necessary tool for presenting (not merely representing or mimicking) women in the Sinhalese Buddhist cosmos. In addition to this performative approach, the play text is rooted in a female perspective of the cosmos. Female presence in the arena is conceptually and physically explored as a significant component of the para-traditional practice. The aim was to distance the female performer from traditional patriarchal interpretations and motives for using the female form while alerting the audience to a strong female presence in the arena.

Finally, the lack of performance-based research in Kōlam has resulted in a significant gap in the debate of intra-cultural theatre practices. Appropriation of Kōlam continues to take place in the urban theatre with little or no effect on the traditional practice. As seen through the history of adaptations and appropriations of traditional performance genres in the Sri Lankan theatre, this process mostly benefits the new creation rather than the old, and therefore, becomes a celebration of the urban theatre practitioner rather than the traditional artiste.

The Appropriation of Kōlam in Modern Sri Lankan Theatre

In practice, Sarachchandra drew from traditional performance genres and folklore in making his mark on the middle-class urban theatre with *Maname* in 1956. This was a much-needed shift from translated Western plays that were dominating the urban theatre at the time. Although Sarachchandra was primarily inspired by Nādagam, traces of Kōlam were manifest in *Manamē*

and many of his subsequent plays. Of these, Rattaran (*Gold*, 1958/1991) is noteworthy for its appropriation of *Nonchi Kōlama* and the use of masks for some characters. Sarachchandra's theatre became a theatre culture in its own right and was celebrated as the paradigm of modern Sinhalese classical theatre. Embracing Sarachchandra's precedence, several theatre practitioners turned to traditional performance genres for inspiration. Of these, Galappatti's *Sandakinduru*, (1957) Gunawardene's *Jasaya saha Lenchina* (1965) and *Madhura Javanika* (Melodious Acts 1983) Goonatilleka's *Sakkāya Ditti*, (Self View, 1966) Dandeniya's *Parassa* (1980) are noteworthy for their appropriation of various elements of Kōlam.

Three recent theatre productions that have been inspired by Kōlam will be discussed with the aim of outlining how the performance tradition has been appropriated in each of these works. The views expressed are based on my own subjective interpretation of the performances.

In 2012, I witnessed *Karaliye Kōlam* [Kōlam on stage] a selection of Kōlam acts compiled and directed by Kanchana Wijesuriya of the Ambalangoda tradition and staged in Colombo. The performance was advertised as a piece of theatre backed by seven generations of experience in Kōlam. It was a presentation of several *Panivuda Kōlam* adapted for the proscenium theatre, and was clearly an effort by Wijesuriya (dir. 2012) to adjust the form to suit urban economic conditions. The Narrator was played by a male performer, who was frequently joined by K. Wijesuriya in singing the verses. She was present without claiming total authority. However, far more significant to the discourse of female presence is the female-to-male cross-dressing in *Ārachchi Kōlama* (village chief) introduced by the Wijesuriya sisters to their traditional Kōlam arena, although this was not the case in their modernised performance.

Gotaimbara Kōlama is a recent play by Denis Perera (dir. 2015) inspired by Kōlam and the Sinhalese ritual. The source narrative, *Godimbara Kathava* (the story of Gotaimbara/Godimbara) is a Jataka story performed in the third segments of a premodern Kōlam *maduwa*. Instead of aiming to present a Kōlam *maduwa* or a ritual, the play appropriates Kōlam and ritual genres to present a modern narrative. Several characters appeared in masks as contemporary Kōlam characters. There was also an attempt to insert improvised speech to echo the verbal play in Kōlam and rituals. Perera took verses from rituals and incorporated them into the main narrative. Among other things, the director aimed to contest the building-based proscenium theatre, by utilising an outdoor space. He sought to recreate what he calls the ‘psychedelic’ nature of the Sinhalese ritual, which he believes is absent in the contemporary urban theatre. Although *Gotaimbara Kōlama* can be construed as a modern interpretation of a Jataka story, it is not situated in a single performance system, and therefore, cannot be identified as a Kōlam performance. Having said this, it was a commendable and politically incisive exploration of an amalgam of Sinhalese traditional performance genres.

In his play *Makarata* [The Dragon’s Country], playwright and director Chamika Hathlawaththa (dir. 2015) appears to have used Kōlam with insight into its structural qualities. He incorporates a prologue as an introduction to the main narrative of his play with a narrator presenting several characters who appear as archetypes of the contemporary political context. These characters don’t speak as they are silenced by the system in which they exist, and the masks they wear are inspired by western Larval Masks. Hathlawaththa says he is interested in elements of epic theatre recognisable in Kōlam. However, he also believes that Sri Lankan urban audiences are more interested in the dialogue play, and especially political theatre.

Hathlawaththa said, “When the play uses stylised forms, there’s a tendency to believe it’s not serious theatre” (C. Hathlawaththa, personal communication, December 15, 2014). I agree with the dramatist on this observation. When asked if audiences identified elements of Kōlam in his play, he responded that “they were largely indifferent to it” (December 15, 2014). Although Hathlawaththa’s use of Kōlam is insightful, the form is applied symbolically, only as a short vignette, while the main narrative adopts a heightened naturalistic style of acting. The audience’s ‘indifference’ is perhaps axiomatic of how ‘ordinary’ the appropriation of traditional theatre on the urban stage has become.

I will open Part 2 of this Chapter, with a brief analysis of the insights gained from personal communication with three traditional practitioners. These insights will be infused into the shaping and positioning of my research as a para-traditional performance practice. I will then explain the conceptual framework and my approach to creating the play text through an autoethnographic perspective.

Part 2

Practitioners and Perceptions of Tradition

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with Juwanwadu Manoshika Wijesuriya of the Ambalangoda Ariyapala tradition, (December 26, 2014) L. H. Kularathna of the Mirissa Udupila tradition (December 14, 2015) and Prasanna Rupathilaka of the Raigama tradition (January 31, 2015). Insights from these communications have been used to understand why the traditional practice remains as a ‘fixed’ practice.

When asked how often they perform a traditional Kōlam *maduwa*, all three practitioners stated that difficulties in funding

the event had caused a lag in performances over the years. State support was scarce, and when there was some interest from authorities, it was superficial, temporary and inconsistent. Their loyalty to the ancestral links within the performance culture gave them a sense of pride. But they felt isolated and considered their efforts in conserving the practice as a personal responsibility they could not abandon. Each *gurukula* wished to function independently of the others as they identified disparities between the form and the orientation of their lineage. However, I gained the impression they were willing to adapt their performances to meet the varied requirements of external organisers, be it outdoor or indoor performances, demonstrations of popular masks of the repertoire, cultural events organised by a university or a village association, or a television programme featuring traditional performing arts. However, more serious consideration would be given to an outdoor Kōlam *maduwa*, as it was considered the ‘sacred’ version requiring all elements of a Kōlam performance to assimilate in the spirit of a traditional performance (P. Rupathilaka, personal communication, January 3, 2015). All three practitioners disclosed that their knowledge of the performance practice was not up to the standard of their ancestors.

Updating the repertoire with new masks drawn from the present socio-political backdrop has not been considered by any of the traditional practitioners interviewed. Other than modernising the existing narrative to some extent, the repertoire has remained fixed. So, what once used to be their ancestors’ vehicle for performatively interpreting their socio-political and religious views, has now become a reiteration of that historical context. In the perspective of my research, what interested me was that the traditional practitioners no longer viewed Kōlam as an evolving performative narrative. The dichotomy, if there is one, in which

traditional practitioners find themselves, appears to be contained within the parameters of preservation while adapting to modern social and economic conditions by making functional alterations to the practice. They do this by limiting the performance duration or locating the performance on an urban stage. While such shifts in tradition are accepted, modifications to the repertoire would be viewed as a distortion of tradition.

This brings me back to the questions I asked earlier in the chapter: Why are traditional practitioners reluctant to represent their views on present socio-political conditions in their current practice? In preserving the tradition, are they missing an opportunity to present entertaining and socially incisive performances to their community? I believe there may be an answer to this in the identification of how they are placed in the cosmic ontology of their ancestors? In other words, the question should not be why traditional practitioners resist modernising the repertoire in response to their cosmic ontology, but how the existing repertoire of their ancestors' cosmic ontology continues to define them. Their role as the keepers of their traditional knowledge and the significance that responsibility has on their identity, is in fact, the more significant component of their ontology.

The concept of providing a social service to the community was an inherent characteristic of the premodern Kōlam culture. However, in an urban, capitalist context, these ideologies can place the traditional practitioner in a very realistic dichotomy, which then defines their role as negotiators between tradition and modernity.

Defining a Para-traditional Performance

During the course of this research, I searched for ways of positioning my performance between the corpus of traditional knowledge and its extensions within the paradigms of ethical practice. One way of examining my orientation within this was to identify the 'intracultural dimension' of my research and performance. However, I was wary of the dangers of homogenising Kōlam performance as ready-to-use cultural property, as has been the general perception of Sri Lankan theatre practitioners thus far. Commenting on cultural tourism in India, theatre practitioner and scholar Rustom Bharucha (1990) raises the issue that traditional performance, having no "copyright", are therefore exploited from within and outside its culture. So, it is while gaining awareness of my 'intrusion' into traditional Kōlam that I continue this exercise. At the same time, as a theatre practitioner, who sees the performative potential in Kōlam, and who shares the socio-cultural, political, religious and historic space with the present generation of traditional practitioners, Kōlam performance is closer to me than a performance culture of another culture. Thus far, in the appropriation of Kōlam, the form has been dismantled and de-contextualised to serve the needs of urban theatre production. So, I aimed to assimilate and contextualise my performance within the Kōlam performance system and philosophy. However, the limitations of this exercise will be critically evaluated within this exegesis.

I have avoided the term, 'reinvention', as I do not believe a performance practice that still exists can or should be reinvented. Ironically, a scholarly approach to a project of this nature also becomes problematic when determining where the performance sits between tradition and modernity. Instead of the organic evolution, that took place in the Kōlam community over many generations, I trained myself in low-country dance and

studied the Kōlam performance culture from the outside. Bharucha (1993b) states,

Whatever the nature of one's work—whether it is intercultural or intracultural or both—the point is that one cannot separate a reflection of its modalities from the particular contradictions of the historical context in which the work is placed. (p. 243)

The historical context of traditional Kōlam is a continuum of its past and present practice, content and aesthetic expressions, and its evolution will continue within the 'fixed' premise into the future. The present research is neither an extension of premodern and modern Kōlam nor is it the future of the existing Kōlam tradition. So, while the approach to my performance hinges upon the past and present of Kōlam, it exists both parallel to and within the performance canon.

I coined the term *para-tradition* to problematise the textual and performative outcome of the project. The prefix *para* is often used to connote several terms, including *alongside*, *side by side*, *near*, *resembling*, *beyond*, *apart from* and *beyond*. The term can also come under, but is not limited to Postmodern Theatre, which in the context of traditional theatre, Catherine Diamond (2012) describes as,

Often combining visual and dramatic elements, postmodern theatre is typically more affiliated with global trends than local developments. It employs an aesthetic of flattening hierarchical cultural values found in the traditional, classical and folk arts, and radically juxtaposes their images and concepts in postmodern performance, transgresses previous theatre conventions, discredits the linear, modern narrative and often foregoes the need for text altogether. (p. 13)

What is important to recognise here was that the formula of the performance was contained within the performance system of Kōlam and its philosophy. All other external elements, including my otherness and intervention as a female theatre practitioner, the present socio-political environment, the ethical responsibility of associating traditional knowledge and various other constituents, would be creating both tensions and meanings within this investigation. So, para-traditional performance defines both the point of convergence and the point of departure between traditional Kōlam and my experimental performance. Put another way, a para-traditional performance is both not-traditional and not-not-traditional, and therefore, moves along with and beside the source tradition; it can neither extract itself nor exist within it.

A para-traditional Kōlam performance is perceived as a Kōlam performance, but is not a repetition of its fixed content. In other words, it is first and foremost recognisable and analysed from within a specific performance tradition, even though it may contain characteristics of different performance cultures and disciplines of performance studies; not dissimilar to the presence of ritual and other traditional theatre genres within the Kōlam. It does not conform to the hierarchical and culturally stipulated 'fixity' with which its historical worth is sustained. Instead, para-tradition exists alongside the prevailing traditional (and meta-traditional) practices and aims to make room for investigations into Kōlam by accepting the transformations, that are both organic and inevitable in traditional performance practices.

The term para-tradition has not been merely used as a convenient umbrella for exploiting a traditional performance system. It is in the act of reflectively thinking about avoiding possibilities of such exploitation, that the term has come into being. It was the problem of defining traditional Kōlam, the illusory nature and the non-fixedness of a 'fixed-tradition' that

called for positioning my performance both within and without the tradition in a liminal space. Susan Broadhurst (1999) in her book, *Liminal acts: A critical overview of contemporary performance and theory*, states that,

All liminal works confront, offend or unsettle. However,...the liminal does not set itself up as an opposing structure to dominant ideologies. In fact, it appears at times to be complicit with mainstream trends. Nevertheless, it does display a parodic, questioning, deconstructive mode which presents a resistance.... The liminal performs to the edge of the possible, a scene of immediate aesthetic intervention with an indirect effect on the political. As such, a liminal mirrors and is an experimental extension of our contemporary social and cultural ethos. (p. 186)

Para-tradition constantly finds itself in a liminal space, and in its in-betweenness endeavours to resist, while remaining within the traditional performance system. In its rootedness in the traditional and its resistance to fixity, a para-traditional performance attempts to make meaning of how tradition can be reinterpreted from within, and how this interpretation can be made politically relevant to an audience today. By this, I do not intimate traditional Kōlam performances lack political relevance in today's context. The existing content is still rich in insights applicable to the modern human condition. However, the immediacy of socio-political resonance was important to the premodern Kōlam practitioner, and hence the expansion and evolution of the repertoire. The absence of this immediacy may perhaps be among the reasons distancing the spectator from Kōlam today.

I acknowledge the significance of preserving historical and cultural perceptions of tradition, and that Kōlam will continue to evolve organically according to the cosmology of its current

practitioners, as all traditional performance practices inevitably do over time. All performance systems exist within evolving socio-political and economic environments and cannot be isolated from the transformations of this environment. That evolution cannot be reversed. Para-traditional Kōlam, however, frames the approach of the present work, while it sprouts from tradition, deviates from those whose aim is merely to preserve the form, defining tradition through cultural hierarchies.

So, what is the outcome expected from a para-traditional Kōlam performance? I return to the proposition shared in the Introduction to this exegesis, that Kōlam served as a ritual that appeased and satisfied the ‘cravings’ of the community. The metaphor of craving or *dola-duka* is manifest in a society that is pregnant with desires, *dukkha* or suffering and dissatisfactions. The tools used in this process are satirical and generate laughter while alerting spectators to their socio-political condition. Awareness can activate humans to act and change their circumstances. Although such ideologies and expectations may appear wishful in the present context, I do believe that Kōlam as a performance tradition survived over several centuries precisely because it served this purpose.

Conceptual Framework

In the Introduction (pp. 12-21), I provided a brief background to Sinhalese Buddhism and the Sinhalese social organisation shaping the ontology of the premodern Kōlam practitioner. In addition to historical contextualisation of ‘being-in-the-world’, Sinhalese Buddhists perceive their existence in a trans-historical continuum simultaneously connecting the present life to past and future lives in the *samsara*. Mey’s (2008) framing of Kōlam philosophy appeals to me as a cohesive construct of the Kōlam philosophy, which he believes is founded upon the central

Buddhist concept of *Chaturārya Satya* (four noble truths). What Mey doesn't mention in his essay, is that these states of truth can be applied to the interpretation of any given moment of Sinhalese Buddhist existence. Therefore, Mey's theory is both applicable and universal to Sinhalese Buddhist ontology.

My conceptual framework both affirms and extends Mey's theory, by suggesting that Kōlam is a dramatisation of the cosmo-samsaric ontology of Sinhalese Buddhists, which embodies the hierarchical and trans-historical principles of coexistence. The constituents of which the cosmo-samsaric ontology of coexistence are composed, are the Sinhalese Buddhist cosmos embodying the pantheonic hierarchy and samsaric existence (spiritual ontology), and the perceptions of the Sinhalese social organisation embodying the caste system (mundane ontology). These components inform and are informed by each other.

Sinhalese Buddhist Cosmos

I have previously explained that the spiritual existence of premodern Sinhalese was shaped by an amalgam of the great and little traditions of Buddhism. Sinhalese Buddhism was not only an integral part of mundane practices of the premodern Sinhalese life, but also an explanation of other-worldly existence (Mallikarachchi, 1998). Further, mythology was a very real component of the history of the Sinhalese, and the origin of supernatural beings and ritual practices was non-conflictingly interlaced with historical human actions or events. The hierarchy of the pantheon is a moral axiom of all living beings. Kōlam practitioners used this ideology to interpret and incorporate human, animal and supernatural characters into their performances.

Samsaric Existence

According to the Buddhist doctrine, the existence of all beings is not limited to a single mundane life. Rather, they travel through samsara, the “round of rebirth” or “perpetual wandering”, (Nyanatiloka, 2011, p. 187) by means of punabbhava or “re-becoming” (Nyanatiloka, p. 171). Samsara has a moral-causal significance that bears the karmic-genealogy of the past, present and future of one’s existence. The Ego, in *rebecoming*, passes from one existence to the next. In the Samsara, the self takes many forms. In other words, humans can elevate themselves to a higher position in the pantheon or demote themselves to a lesser being based on *punya karma* and *akusala karma* or good and bad merit. Obeyesekere’s definition of the causal theory, (previously discussed), contextualises how premodern Sinhalese Buddhists perceived their existence through immediate cosmic interventions, (planetary and pantheonic), as well as through the karmic mechanism they had inherited through the samsara.

Caste system and the Sinhalese Social Organisation

As discussed above (pp. 12-13), the premodern Sinhalese social organisation was composed of a socio-political hierarchy with the king at its apex. All other citizens belonged to the strata of the caste system, which was designed in relation to services offered to the King and his realm. Each profession was defined by the caste to which one was born, and this, in turn, determined both their status in the social hierarchy and how they contributed to the maintenance of the social structure. The Sinhalese caste system was both a political stratagem that institutionalised society and an agent for self-sufficiency and interdependent coexistence. At the same time, the skills that were associated with the caste were instrumental in the aesthetic interpretation

that went into Kōlam performance. The perception that one's status, privileges, and deprivations are a consequence of good or bad karma, (or the other causal factors), interweave the ontologies of the mundane world into the spiritual. Samsaric existence was, therefore, the shared knowledge of a community on being-in-the-world as a trans-historical and transmigratory continuum transcending quotidian time-space and place.

Of course, this interweaving and overlapping are far more complex, as is the ontological dynamics of any society. So, it is important to say that I have merely foregrounded the background that frames the theory, which in turn contextualises the ontology that informed the Kōlam practitioner. This leaves room for a more compound analysis of this concept. I propose an ontological framing for the philosophy that is embodied both conceptually and performatively in Kōlam. As artists, traditional Kōlam practitioners viewed themselves as contributors to the communal arts³⁶. *Coexistence* signifies the acceptance of all beings in both the immediate social structure as well as the expanse of the cosmic structure. Further, within the samsaric past, present and future, this coexistence is mutually inclusive of the multi-temporal existence of all living beings. That all beings can either rise or descend in moral status defined by the pantheonic hierarchy, also indicates that in the past and future of the samsara, one's Ego has occupied and can occupy any strata of the pantheon. The constant factor in this complex ontological logic would be the Buddha, who in both enlightenment (occupying the highest state of virtue and

³⁶ This reflects in the thoughts that were shared by traditional practitioners in personal communication. Also, there are reoccurring allusions to pleasing the audience (*sabhava sathutu karanava*) made by the Narrator in a traditional arena.

wisdom) and nirvana (occupying the highest realm of salvation) remains at the apex of the hierarchy. Trans-historically, the Buddha's existence is idolised by illustrating the sacrifices made by Bodhisattva in the pursuit of salvation, which as Mey (2008) points out is didactically presented through Jataka stories in the Kōlam repertoire. Ensuring the spectator is channelled towards the *truth of renouncing suffering*, through entertainment and social satire, is indeed a compelling argument and one that encapsulates the *universal sympathy* transmitted by the Kōlam practitioner towards his community through his art practice.

METHODOLOGY

In the Conceptual Framework (pp. 53-57), I explained how the ontological framework of premodern Sinhalese people was interpreted as a cosmo-samsaric perception of coexistence, and how this perception reflects in the Kōlam philosophy and practice. As a communal practice, to which many generations of practitioners located in the littoral west of the Island contributed, the conceptual framing and the performance system at large, has remained unchanged. Premodern performance practitioners appear to have had a profound understanding of the conceptual architecture and purpose of Kōlam and used it to continue to introduce masks to the repertoire. To create a para-traditional performance, my task was to transpose that framework and performance system into a repertoire with contemporary relevance. To do so, the ontological model of the premodern practitioner would be replaced with my own cosmic ontology.

Methodologically, I used autoethnography or [auto]ethnography to identify pathways and insights into the investigation of my perception of being-in-the-world. An autoethnographic approach was especially taken in collecting field notes and designing a para-traditional Kōlam repertoire, providing an ontological and

epistemological grounding for the dramatic text and performance. Through the placement of Self within the conceptual framework, I looked for the broader cultural, social and political context in which I existed, introducing narratives and typological masks previously not represented in traditional Kōlam. As autoethnography is a widely used methodology in qualitative research, it is necessary to look at some of its key characteristics and strategies, and identify some of the scholars, who have contributed to defining it as a research tool.

Autoethnography as a method enables the researcher to place equal emphasis on intellect/knowledge and aesthetics/artistic craft (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2015). Key points are made by Adams et al. (2015) as common denominators of an autoethnographic work. These include foregrounding personal experience in research and writing; illustrating sense-making processes; using and showing reflexivity and illustrating insider knowledge of cultural phenomenon/experience and describing and critiquing cultural norms, experience and practices (p. 26). Ellis and Bochner (2000) finds that,

Autoethnographers vary in their emphasis on the research process (graphy), on culture (ethno), and on self (auto) [while] [d]ifferent exemplar of autoethnography fall at different places along the continuum of each of these three axes. (p. 740)

In situating the method, Norman K. Denzin (2014; 2016) approaches autoethnography as a “critical, performative practice,... that begins with the biography of the writer and moves outward to culture, discourse, history, and ideology” (2016, p. 105). By taking the researcher’s life in its immediate particularities, interpretive autoethnography “grounds the life in its historical moment” (2016, p. 105). He defines the significance of performance [auto]ethnography as,

[T]he merger of critical pedagogy, performance ethnography and cultural politics; the creation of texts that move from epiphanies to the sting of memory, the personal to the political, the autobiographical to the cultural, the local to the historical. A response to the successive crises of democracy and capitalism that shape daily life; showing how these formations repressively enter into and shape the stories and performances persons share with one another. (2013, p. 106)

Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson (2016) finds that autoethnography serves a similar purpose by connecting “the personal to the social, the cultural and the political, and locates self/selves, however shifting, transient and fragmentary and others within the social context” (p. 245). I recognise a similar process taking place within the conceptual framework derived from ontological perceptions of the Kōlam practitioner and his/her sensitivities to the broader cosmological context.

Within the [auto]ethnographic methodology, I used interpretive and performative strategies, relying on memory and both narrative of Self and Other to find reoccurring themes, that signified the stories I wanted to tell in the para-traditional Kōlam arena. My approach to the dramatic text took both a personal and political (or personal and therefore political) turn, and was interpreted as a satire composed of metanarratives addressing various interrelated issues within a complex ontological network. As a female writer/performer using this methodology, my writing concentrated on the presence of the female voice and body, that for so long had been (mis)represented by male-centric interpretations of the female in traditional Kōlam. I began my stories or Kōlam scenarios by starting *where I was* at the time the work began - situating myself in my own story and experience, as well as stories told by others (Adams et al., 2015). Various sources were used to collect the field notes that

informed the narratives, ranging from personal memories, documents, blogs, newspaper articles, photographs and conversations to name a few. These will be discussed and analysed in Chapter 3 to describe each para-traditional Kōlam character. In positioning the dramatic text and the performance as para-traditional Kōlam, both components are identified as interpretations of the textual and performative elements within and against the ideologies of traditional Kōlam. The dramatic text will merge historical and fictional/aesthetic truths, (Denzin, 2014) not dissimilar to the oral and ontological truths engendered in the Kōlam framework. In developing the repertoire of characters, I drew on five Kōlam masks to represent narratives of Self and Other.

To conclude, in this chapter I have discussed the corpus of Kōlam texts and scholarly work that informed my research, and identified several areas that have been overlooked or have received little attention in previous studies. By evaluating the ethical and conceptual paradigms of borrowing from traditional knowledge, I have introduced the concept of para-traditional performance, explicitly addressing the positioning of my performance as a work sitting beside/within/outside the tradition. This concept asserts that traditional Kōlam will continue to evolve organically, while experimental or research-based works (which there can be more of) should take an ethical and critically reflexive stance that problematises misrepresentations of the tradition. The conceptual framework captures the ontology informing the philosophical and aesthetic interpretations of Kōlam. To methodologically transpose this framework into my Kōlam performance, I used an interpretive and performative autoethnography to write and perform my story of cosmo-samsaric coexistence.

The next chapter focuses on the development of the dramatic text with an emphasis on two areas. First, the use of

[auto]ethnography as a tool for locating narratives and characters, and the structural choices made to present those narratives. Second, I address the translational negotiations of writing and performing a Kōlam text in English.

CHAPTER 2

Conceptualising a Para-traditional Dramatic Text

In this chapter, I will discuss my approach to developing a para-traditional play text, embodying the theoretical and aesthetic codifications of premodern Kōlam performance, and the key considerations that shaped this writing process. In the previous chapter, I analysed the conceptual framework embodying the spatiotemporal and hierarchical cosmic ontology of the premodern Sinhalese Buddhist community and its incorporation into the Kōlam repertoire. Based on this framework, I will describe the formulation of my cosmic ontology using interpretive and performative ethnography/autoethnography as the method, which would then be applied to extending the existing repertoire. I refer to tenets offered by Denzin (2003; 2014; 2016) on interpretive autoethnography, views of Giorgio (2016) on writing through memory, the perspectives of Allen-Collinson (2016) on autoethnography as the engagement of Self/Politics and Spry's (2011, 2016) insights into performative autoethnography. I will move onto explaining how writing about a historical, socio-political and cultural Self becomes a simultaneous commentary on the historical, socio-political and cultural Other. Finally, the significance of writing the Kōlam text in English will be discussed in relation to the 'translation' of the Kōlam performance culture, and intercultural and intracultural negotiations between my culture and that of the multicultural audience.

Verses chanted in the opening segment will be collectively termed as the *prologue*; verses that introduce and describe each mask will be *introductory verses* and *Self-sung verses* will be sung by masked characters. Had the verses been repeated by the chorus – not dissimilar to the Narrator repeating dialogues of

masks, which is a common practice in Kōlam and Sinhalese rituals performed today – there is an equally credible argument (See Goonetilleke 1964, p. 107) that dialogues may have been included in early premodern performances, and especially when Kōlam gradually abstracted from the ritual. One can argue, that as often practised in oral performance traditions, dialogues were improvised and therefore were omitted from the early manuscripts. As there are hundreds of verses written in short and long quatrains, that conformed to metrical units and rhythmic patterns, it is understandable why premodern practitioners, who relied on memory and the oral tradition, were later compelled to preserve the verses in writing.

Today's Kōlam performances appear to rely primarily on previously improvised speech segments that have been transcribed and wholly or partly memorised. Nevertheless, on examining existing texts, I felt it necessary to write the entire script of my Kōlam performance, which would include verses, dialogues and where appropriate, instructions for the performer. In other words, for the purpose of this research, my dramatic text will take the structure of a conventional modern play text. Problematising the absence of improvisation in my performance and the acceptance of failure and misrepresentation of the traditional text, will be discussed in the Conclusion of this thesis.

To transpose the premodern Kōlam repertoire structured on a conceptual framework, I formulated my cosmic ontology using interpretive and performative autoethnography. Deconstructing the hierarchical structure of the premodern social system, the King and Queen are omitted from the para-traditional repertoire. *Panivuda Kōlam* in traditional Kōlam, are brought into the arena with the objective of serving the King. The super-objective, however, often differs, as the characters proceed to represent malfunctions of state and society. In my interpretation of the

para-traditional repertoire, I abandon the personification of this political hierarchy and introduce masked characters acting on personal objectives, but with narratives profoundly intertwined in social and political critique. The scenarios are held together by metanarratives aligned with the modern cosmopolitan human condition. I have also disengaged the para-traditional arena from the overarching presence of the pantheon, by abandoning their acknowledgement in the rites of the prologue. However, the pantheon and associated religious practices, though transformed in some aspects (Bastin, 2002), are undoubtedly present in contemporary Sinhalese Buddhism, and this social and religious consciousness is addressed through the masked characters.

The Premodern Kōlam Practitioner and the Performative Interpretation of his Ontology

By reading textual evidence of the Kōlam narrative, the list of masks and the lyrical content, one begins to understand how the premodern Kōlam practitioner perceived and interpreted questions such as, *what it is to be*; what things exist; and where the self and the other belonged in this cosmic framework. This was an act of self and social reflexivity. A way of seeing the Self and Other in the culture and performatively interpreting “society’s deepest values” and “most radical scepticism” (Turner, 1986, p. 102). Not dissimilar to Turner’s views on social drama, this performative “plural reflexivity” can be surmised as,

A condition in which a sociocultural group, or its most perceptive members acting representatively, turn, bend or reflect back upon themselves, upon the relations, actions, symbols, meanings, codes, roles, statuses, social structures, ethical and legal rules, and other sociocultural

components which make up their public “selves.” (1986, p. 24)

As a transgenerational performance practice, knowledge systems between generations are exposed to transitions in the socio-political, economic and cultural landscape. However, to the Sinhalese Buddhist, the core concepts of cosmic ontology remained unchanged; Buddha continued to govern the spiritual hierarchy; the king headed the social organisation; and the historical and Samsaric existence of all living beings continued to flow, even under the weight of colonial invasion. It is perhaps this fixity of the cosmic ontology that allowed subsequent generations of premodern practitioners to continue the extension of the repertoire, which in turn reflected the continuous expansion and transition of the cosmos.

Of course, the Kōlam practitioner was not absorbed in methodology or the mission to establish an equilibrium between knowledge and practice. These, however, took place, tacitly, within the ontological and epistemic grounding of traditional knowledge and performance. The fundamental aim of Kōlam performance, like rituals, was to heal the Self and the community. Generations of premodern Kōlam practitioners were equipped to identify and apply the performative tools and theory of Kōlam and thereby nurture the evolution of the tradition. It is an affirmation that there is much to be learnt from traditional performance practitioners. Their perception of ‘presence’ in performance was not the mirroring of life as is, but in representation of Self and Other with a philosophical stance and a stylised aesthetic expressivity.

My approach to writing a para-traditional Kōlam repertoire was triggered by this concept of a continuing ‘performative ontology’. I believe it is impossible for a performer, who is outside the

bloodline of premodern practitioners, to enact a traditional Kōlam *maduwa*. It is understandable then, that descendants of premodern performers wish to preserve the form, the narratives and the performance culture that was once their ancestor's *way of being in the cosmos*. To them, experimenting with tradition in a postmodern capitalist context would threaten the continuity of that tradition, and breach their accountability to preserve an ontological and epistemic inheritance. On the other hand, the recognition and survival of traditional practitioners, hinge upon the preservation of premodern practices.

From a Communal Cosmos to an Individual Cosmos: Autoethnography as Method

This exercise engages the interpretation of *my cosmos* by using a self-reflexive writing process to develop a para-traditional Kōlam dramatic text. As a Sinhalese Buddhist, who has lived most of my years in Sri Lanka, there is a cultural, socio-political, religious and historical homogeneity that I share with traditional Kōlam practitioners. Unfortunately, the class system has extended beyond the caste system and re-established socio-economic disparities, while the modern education system and access to knowledge have overtaken traditional knowledge systems. Having said that, the fundamental perception of a cosmic ontology amongst Sinhalese Buddhist people remains mostly unchanged. By this, I neither propose a homogeneous cosmic ontology in the present Sinhalese Buddhist society or between premodern Kōlam practitioners and modern performance practitioners. What I do suggest is that there are consistencies in the perception of a cosmic ontology within this heterogeneous, intracultural context, which do not vary significantly from the premodern cosmic ontology. Meanwhile, heterogeneity in the perception of the Sinhalese Buddhist

cosmic ontology contributes to the expansion and the complexities within this cosmic framework.

Based on this proposition, a methodological approach to creating a para-traditional Kōlam performance was suggested. The process would involve the interpretation of my cosmic ontology while drawing upon the complex layers and the constantly expanding horizons of that cosmic ontology. As an individual performance practitioner/researcher, the cosmic ontology most accessible to me is my own. The Self in auto-ethnography is always connected to the Other, “representing the interrelations and negotiations between selves and others in cultural context” (Spry, 2011, p. 52). But where should I begin a reflexive enquiry of Self/Other? How would I interpret, map and perform my ontology within the limitations of this research? What ‘standards of truth’ (Denzin, 2014, pp. 13-15) should I put on the page? How would I ensure that *mystory* was “directly linking the micro level with the macro-cultural and structural levels in exciting ways”? (Allen-Collinson, 2016, p. 233) How would I ensure that the text was performable within the performance theory of Kōlam?

By explaining the significance of performative autoethnography, Spry (2011) invites the researcher/performer to ask questions such as, “Whose world is it? Who defines it, its norms, values, traditions and when and where? Or do we experience many worlds/cultures/societies at once, inhabit many social identities at once?” (p. 51) My reflective writing began with an ‘epiphany’, or “a sting of childhood memory” of an event or moment that was “woven through the multiple strands” (Denzin, 2016, p. 106) of my life. The bodies of two women, young, brown-skinned, bound together by their black hair, lifeless, adrift in a river. People, mostly men, look down from a bridge but refrain from saying much. In the absence of their voices, I had, without realising it,

taken the *we* preposition, and the following words were the first to appear on paper:

Sisters, though we did not share a womb, bonded in life by the red of youth, and in death by the brown river. Black serpents on our head tighten their coils, as the samsara unravels in many hues. Through it, we flow, as sisters, mothers, daughters, wives; in all shades of woman-ness.

A recollection of the JVP insurgency, it is uncertain if, as a child, I had witnessed this moment; perhaps it was a newspaper caption, or an eye witness's account that was overheard in a conversation amongst adults. Perhaps I visualised this memory at once, or the image became increasingly vivid over time. In writing this piece, I realised I had not only picked up a fragmented piece of the past, but that the memory revisited me many times, troubling my thoughts in my adult years. There is visceral propinquity between my brown body and the two women in the river. In Denzin's words, "The life story becomes an invention, a re-presentation, a historical object often ripped or torn out of its contexts and recontextualised in the spaces and understandings of the story" (Denzin, 2016, p. 106). This was how *Gandhabba Kōlama* came into being.

The first of two daughters born to middle-class parents, I was brought up and schooled with what I am awkwardly compelled to call moderate comforts in a privileged environment. My parents came from rural middle-class families, graduated from university, got married and settled down in Colombo. They were hardworking, nurturing, artistically inclined and had a gentleness and simplicity about them, which they have carried into their ageing years. Education was always a priority in the family, but interestingly, although we were habitually counselled on the importance of hard work and earning an honest living, my sister

and I with our average grades were never pressured into performing better. Not dissimilar to most Sri Lankan middle-class urban-dwelling children we knew, we learnt elocution, music, dancing and swimming. I was too young to comprehend the gravity of *Black July* in 1983, but now recall the shock and deep remorse that my father endured after his close friend and colleague *Mr A* was brutally murdered in Colombo by a Sinhalese mob. Then came the second leftist insurgency (1988-91) of the People's Liberation Front (JVP) to which the Sri Lankan government responded with torture, death and detainment. The Tamil-Sinhalese ethnic conflict and civil war between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the State military centred in the north and northeast of the Island was the cause of continued violence extending over thirty years. My family and I experienced a narrow escape in 1991 when the LTTE planted a bomb in Colombo, assassinating the Sri Lankan Minister of Defense. Although death and violence were rampant, it also often remained at the periphery of my privileged existence.

On completing my university education overseas, I returned to live with my parents - which was culturally typical of a Sri Lankan single woman. By this time, my perceptions of the 'privileged' middle-class life had begun to alter. It was a transformation that was fueled by a combination of impoverished undergraduate years in New Zealand, my encounters in the theatre; studying Brecht, Fo, Pinter, Barba, Grotowski, Lecoq, Mnouchkine, Brook, Wilson and so on, and the unmistakable political discourse that underpinned the modern Sinhalese theatre. It wasn't until my young adult years, that the presence of violence and its realities began to close in and years later before I was able to recognise my part in it. Suddenly, my inaction and my political literacy, or the lack of it, could not be confronted without critically reflecting on my 'privileged body'.

If the source of the memory of bodies in the river is unascertainable, it also prompts questions of how or where the Self is located in one's memory. Giorgio (2016) states that "[a]utoethnography allows one to bear witness to memories that [we] may not even have within oneself, but through others, one knows of through family stories, memories, artefacts, even memories housed in remaining family members' bodies" (p. 350). Further, "[c]ultural memories are shared reflections of events past; wars, genocide, mass rapes, uprisings, occupations, for instance, are cultural memories societies may bear" (Giorgio, 2016, p. 351). My female body identified with the bodies in the river, and it was this imagined moment of the Other overlapping with the Self, where the empathy is deepest, and the memory is strongest. It is here that "we inhabit the space of another's past,... [and] in doing so, we can make sense of the past and its effects on the present" (Giorgio, 2013, p. 350). As Spry (2011) elaborates, "through performative autoethnography we write ourselves into a deeper critical understanding with others of the ways in which our lives intersect with larger sociocultural pains and privileges" (p. 51).

During the process of writing Self/Other context into a performable text, I made a list of significant people, memories, experiences, metaphors and images, that would help define the multilayered network of knowledge (and ignorance,) that had influenced my perception of the cosmos. It was an exercise where experience, discourse and self-understanding met with larger cultural perceptions concerning race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, class and age. There is an emphasis on the concept of *coexistence* which cannot be removed from a Kōlam repertoire, whether it is devised by a collective, as in traditional Kōlam, or devised by an individual as in the context of this research.

I now move on to the beginning of another autoethnographic

journey in search of a Kōlam *mask*. At the early stages of conceptualising the dramatic text, I happened to be visiting a friend, who was hosting a dinner for several mutual friends of the Sinhalese diaspora in south-eastern Melbourne. The conversation led to Sri Lankan asylum seekers in Australia, who were awaiting the outcome of their visa applications. Soon the discussion moved to a specific Sinhalese asylum seeker, who a few people at the gathering had encountered and characterised as an 'economic refugee'. At the local community market, the man routinely approached members of the diaspora asking for work, which mainly involved physical labour. I was told that he was from the South of Sri Lanka, from a fishing village near the coast, and claimed he left because he 'had nothing to lose'. My host, who had run into the man on several occasions, claimed he was a prolific storyteller and that his stories of crossing the ocean oscillated between fact and fiction. We hear my host's version of the asylum seeker's story, and for a brief moment, fear, uncertainty and the circumstances that led to the journey dissolved against a canvas of a lone boat marooned on a white sandbar surrounded by deep water patrolled by curious sharks. Spotlighted by the moon, its passengers wait patiently for the rise of the tide, so they can continue their journey. Magic realism with which Yann Martell's (2001) maps the journey of *Pi*, overlapped with the narrative of this man journey.

Multiple narratives of belonging and not belonging, as well as my own liminality in temporary settlement, have remained with me, resurfacing in moments of sometimes feeling like an 'outcast', in my own culture, and in being a woman in a patriarchal society. Denzin (2016) explains that once 'the sting of memory' is located, "this moment is then surrounded by those cultural representations and voices that define the experience in question" (p. 108). I turn to Sinhalese mythology for narratives and metanarratives that resonate themes of migration, belonging

and alienation. The myth of *Devol Deyyo* (God Devol) and his transformation from demon to deity upon his arrival in Lanka. In mythology, devils are unwelcomed beings occupying the fringes of the human realm, and when they cross over, they become aliens, imposters and disruptors threatening the equilibrium of human civilisation. The ritual negotiates their return to the demonic realm or the liminal spaces to which they have been marginalised. I have juxtaposed and interwoven Sinhalese Buddhist mythology and assumptions of migration, belonging, liminality, politics of geography and ethno-racial hierarchy into the interpretation of *Læli Kōlama*, the devil that crosses the ocean seeking deification.

It is necessary here to mention how autoethnography and self-reflexive writing influenced my interpretation of the cosmos. In premodern cosmic ontology, as in the Kōlam repertoire, gods are superior to humans and demons. Whereas, in my cosmic ontology, and subsequently in the para-traditional repertoire, this hierarchy is challenged, if not rejected. Polytheism was not overtly present in my Buddhist upbringing. Yet, despite being a non-believer, polytheism is manifest in diverse tacit forms in the everyday life of a Sinhalese Buddhist, and therefore present in my socio-political and cultural consciousness. In fact, it is this consciousness that is allegorised in *Mantis Kōlama*.

I have used my written text as a liminal 'permitted space' where the self can "collide, and commune with others in the body politic in ways alternate to hegemonic cultural expectations" (Spry, 2011, p. 56). This is reflected not only in the socio-political interpretation of characters, but also in the way that an alternative to the traditional cosmic hierarchy is implied. For instance, in the prologue (See Appendix A, pp.194-200) of my dramatic text alters the canon to establish my dislocation from the Sinhalese Buddhist pantheon. The traditional prologue

begins with incantations to Brahma, god of creation in the Vedic/Hindu pantheon, followed by other Hindu-Sinhalese deities and the Three Refuges. This is replaced in my text with an invocation of the Refuges to signpost my Buddhist consciousness and the deities above, that are only alluded to as beings revered by the old Kōlam masters (See Appendix, p.195). In the first segment of premodern Kōlam, the purpose of *Panivuda Kōlam* is first and foremost defined by service to the king. This, in turn, defines their purpose in the social system. In my dramatic text, although the narrative structure is informed by *Panivuda Kōlam*, the para-traditional *masks* bring to the arena their own objectives and expectations, and their socio-political conditions emerge from within their struggle to reach these objectives. While omitting a personified physical presence of the State, its all-encompassing presence is established in the critical commentary throughout the narrative.

I will now explain the narrative structure appropriated from the premodern repertoire, and why this narrative formula was considered to be effective in the composition of my para-traditional text.

Narrative Pathways: The Structure of the Dramatic Text

A premodern Kōlam performance carried adequate narrative content to present through a night, and perhaps over several nights. However, as the Narrator repeatedly reminds the audience of *Heritance*, long stories must be kept short, for “time is money” (Appendix A, p. 247) and “we don’t have all night” (Appendix A, p. 218). Scaling down the text and the performance was a negotiation that had to be made to meet the requirements of this research and stay within the given timespan. However, writing and performing para-traditional Kōlam is an ongoing

process, and this prospect will be discussed in the conclusion of this exegesis.

It is important to note I have used a single character formula, where the Narrator and Ensemble interact with a single character. These characters are not joined by other masks, where the narrative develops into metanarratives. The decision to engage one mask at a time, which I will refer to as *single-mask scenarios*, was based on three factors, of which the first is *agency*. Traditional *Panivuda Kōlam* characters enter the arena to provide a service to the king, and a metanarrative develops when they are joined by the other characters. However, in removing the initial objective from the context, each character is written as single scenarios or narratives with multiple metanarratives woven into them. This provides sufficient narrative content for a dramatic exchange between the Masks and the Narrator. Secondly, the simplicity of the single-mask scenario - which is already used in several *Panivuda Kōlam* in the traditional arena - appeared to be an effective tool at this early stage of experimentation with Kōlam. Thirdly, para-traditional Kōlam calls for a minimum number of performers, as this is believed to be an effective means continuing a performance practice in the modern capitalist context.

As time and resources limit the proposed para-traditional Kōlam performance, it was decided that the narrative structure of the first segment of *Panivuda Kōlam* would be used as the primary narrative format of *Heritance*. In other words, by excluding individual dance acts, conventional full-length narratives and *Jataka Stories*, the play text would contain a collection of short individual acts as its narrative structure. The premodern repertoire of this segment is generally exclusive to human masks, which was not a limitation I desired in my repertoire or the interpretation of my cosmos. So, in this instance, the

conceptualisation of new masks was open to both human and non-human characters. Some consideration also went into having two or more masks interacting with each other. However, when the repertoire began to develop on paper, there was already a strong interaction between the *mask* and the Narrator. This was because, in autoethnographic writing, my voice was embodied in the Narrator's voice, and my dialogue with the *mask* was following a reflexive inner dialogue dominating the overall narrative. As the para-traditional text took shape, I was increasingly convinced that a narrative formula engendering a powerful and clear exchange between the Narrator and each *mask* was effective in communicating ideas, without compromising the performative aims of the research.

Given the condensed prologue in *Heritance*, instead of the incantation to deities, I included verses paying tribute to early Kōlam practitioners, then proceeded to provide a brief introduction to the cosmo-samsaric presence manifest in the Kōlam arena. Instead of taking a didactic approach, the spectator is invited to a 'shared space' where cultural and ontological negotiations can take place.

*Tonight, you will come face to face,
With yourself and your other in a maze,
The cosmos is a web of umbilical cords,
Some you see and some you don't.* (See Appendix A,
p.196)

It is now the spectator's turn to find their own space for exchange and to both recognise and differentiate between Self and Other during this cultural, if not ontological negotiation.

Writing a ‘Sinhalese Kōlam Text’ in English – A Reflexive Approach to ‘Translation’

The exercise of writing and performing Kōlam in English is, at a glance, the appropriation of a Western and colonial linguistic expression by a non-western, traditional performance system. On the other hand, it is a ‘translation’ of the performance system that is explicitly and implicitly rooted in cultural gestures, logos, and philology. In this section, I will draw upon the views of David Johnson (2010) and Marvin Carlson (2006) to discuss some key choices and negotiations made during the exercise of writing *Heritance* in English, and the bilingual interventions that followed.

Several aspects defined the audience of *Heritance*, the most discernible of which was the necessity to meet the criteria of a live performance in the geographic location of the research. In this context, English was the common language choice for the researcher and the audience. However, in ‘translating’ the Kōlam performance system from Sinhalese to English, there arise tensions and complexities within this linguistic homogeneity that engender multiple levels of ‘otherness’. But before I discuss the presence of ‘otherness’ in the text of *Heritance*, it is important to consider the audience for whom I was prompted to write the playtext in English, and the context in which I incorporated Sinhala to arrive at a bilingual performance.

‘Translation’ as an Intercultural and Intracultural Negotiation with the Audience

Marvin Carlson (2006) states that, “[t]he greater majority of the world’s drama has been created by dramatists who were working with a specific audience in mind”, and that playwrights not only shared a common language with their audience, but also “a variety of “languages of the stage” to semiotically communicate

with the audience (p. 3). He continues to affirm that presenting a work in the 'common language' makes an audience attending a theatre event generally "less heterogeneous than the society that surrounds them" (p. 3).

From the inception of this research, it was decided that the creative project would be a live, public performance, presented to a multicultural audience in Melbourne, (determined to some extent by my own location at the time). Encouraged by the diversity of theatre audiences I encountered as a theatregoer in Melbourne, I believed this provided some indication of the possible spectatorship I could expect to attract to *Heritance*. An analysis of the type of audience that would engage with a performance of this nature is a complex process of its own, and one I would not attempt to explore here. However, it is impossible not to imagine an audience from the inception of a creative process. Also, as the work develops, a more vivid and somewhat specific idea of that potential audience begins to emerge.

During the conceptualisation and writing process of *Heritance*, my target audience was the multicultural community of Melbourne, who have an interest in performances based in cultures outside of their own. Multiculturalism is frequently described as the coexistence of many ethnic groups, with their own socio-national culture, all sharing a specific geographical location. I had also imagined this to be an audience willing to experience performances in alternative sites, and engage with works outside the mainstream, building-based performing arts. Included in this wider multicultural audience was the Sri Lankan diaspora, whose interest in the performance might be heavily influenced by cultural representation and identification. This group could contain spectators, who had either witnessed a traditional Kōlam arena or a Kōlam in fragments. Young, second and third generation migrants, who had never witnessed Kōlam, could be sharing the auditorium with a small number of older

migrants experienced and or knowledgeable in Sinhalese traditional dance, theatre and performance practices. Overall, a diasporic audience has its own heterogeneous characteristics, as does a multicultural audience and it is impossible to accurately comprehend the diversity within these spectator categories. Although Carlson suggests that a common language brings some unity to the medium of verbal communication, justifying my decision to write the text in English, it also opens another spectrum of 'otherness' among the diasporic audience.

An English text, on the one hand, has access to a broader audience, and on the other, distances itself from the audience of its source culture. By performing in Melbourne to a diaspora that is mostly bilingual in various degrees, helped lessen this distance to some extent, but not without resistance from some members of the Sri Lankan community. This reluctance to attend the performance was predominantly due to Sinhala being the familiar and preferred language of Sri Lankan Sinhalese arts events held in Melbourne. I later learnt that *Heritance* attracted several members of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, who were encouraged by the prospect of viewing a Sri Lankan play in a "common language".

It can be argued that a 'global audience' is a utopian ideology, and it is only in identifying a specific audience or its closest definition, that a broader contextual understanding of a text and its performability can take place. However, provided that the spectator makes a conscious decision to attend the performance, varying degrees of cultural awareness had to be negotiated in that liminal space, where cultural differences are debated and confronted. I draw from David Johnson's (2010) interpretation of translation as a reflective practice where he comments that,

Translation, of course, already straddles the apparently competing imperatives of explaining the other to the self while, at the same time, protecting the other from assimilation by the self, an enablement of two-way traffic that is implicit in translation's self-selected metaphors of bridges, doorways, portals and windows, a looking into and a looking outwards from the heart of the cultural matrix. (p. 12)

Both the audience and the performer exist in this negotiated space, defined by complex temporal, conceptual and geographical boundaries. Throughout the writing and performance process, I endeavoured to remain critically reflexive to my cultural body being written into the para-traditional text, whilst ensuring the cultural bodies of Kōlam practitioners were also represented in this intracultural and intercultural negotiation. To do this as ethically as possible was, on the one hand, the most significant challenge of this entire project. On the other hand, framing a para-traditional text provided the space, where this negotiation could take place in a conscious, cognitive and aesthetic exploration, adapting to the innate capacity of premodern Kōlam to evolve within and by means of its own philosophical and performable strengths. Similarly, writing and performing Kōlam in English was, on the one hand, a primary and ongoing linguistic and cultural challenge, and on the other, an exploration of the potential of Kōlam to be textually and performatively shared and negotiated in an intracultural and intercultural space.

After Johnston (2010) in "every act or event that is generated by a translator, there is a double consciousness, a decentredness or lack of fixity that prompts,... [an] 'aterritoriality' in which the translation takes place" (p. 13). *Heritance* is a continuum of negotiations and tensions between tradition, para-tradition, writer/director, performer and audience. It is therefore situated in

a liminal space of cultural, linguistic, semiotic and geographic ‘translations’.

Although the structure of Kōlam verses is made up of quatrains of rhyming stanzas, I chose to refrain from such conformity and use open versus. Also, in place of relatively unambiguous descriptions of characters given in traditional verses, I attempt to weave in metaphors that add to the meta-narrative of the characters. When adapting Kōlam melodies and Sinhala traditional or ‘folk’ (*jana kavi*) melodies to sing these verses, a monolingual audience, for instance, may experience a sense of otherness stimulated by the familiar language being vocalised in unfamiliar melodies. A similar experience occurs when English is spoken in a ‘Sinhala accent’. On the other hand, the diasporic audience experiences otherness in hearing familiar melodic compositions that are associated with their cultural identity in a foreign language. Such instances, where the text fails to conform to premodern Kōlam, are also loud expressions of the shift from tradition to para-tradition.

Bilingual Extensions of the Playtext

The insertion of Sinhala expressions into *Heritance* took place during the rehearsal process, and was an attempt to steer away from the hegemonic cosmopolitanism of a Kōlam dramatic text written entirely in English. When the actors became increasingly familiar with the English text and bolder in their improvisation, I began to insert Sinhala dialogues and the actors quickly grasped the expressions and rhythms that were beginning to emerge.

Inserting the native language into English language conversation and “code switching” (Carlson, 2006) is not an unusual occurrence among bilingual speakers such as myself, and it was a similar principle that I applied to this process. It was done mindfully and selectively while contextualising the performance

in a multicultural space, ensuring the meaning would not be lost to the non-Sinhala speaker. In other words, Sinhala was used as a supplement to the English text and the cultural identity of the performance. For the performers and I, moving the text from English to bilingual was symbolic of a reclamation of identity. From the perspective of the audience, the bilingual spectator may have experienced a sense of inclusion or belonging in recognising cultural and contextual nuances linking them to the performers. On the other hand, as Christina Marinetti (2013) explains, for the monolingual English speaker,

Foreignness and non-understanding then function in a performative sense, which goes beyond verbal communication, and makes audiences experience a moment of cultural translation which may (or may not) make them question their own cultural and linguistic identity. (p. 36)

Bilingualising the performance also positioned the para-traditional arena in a middle ground within and outside of the tradition in a negotiation of linguistic and cultural boundaries. There, para-traditional Kōlam remains linguistically flexible, but not completely removed of its source language.

To conclude, this chapter has looked at the application of auto/ethnography and its tools, such as memory and epiphanies, to identify starting points or triggers for textualising experiences and perceptions that are tightly interwoven into my ontology. What is discovered in this process, is the cultural and political turn these narratives have taken and the interconnected and overlapping nature of these stories and events that are both informed by and informing each other. During this process, I have identified seeds of characters or mask types that I will explore further using field notes from diverse sources. I have also discussed issues to do with writing a Kōlam text in English

as a cultural and linguistic translation. The next chapter provides an analysis of field notes in relation to each conceptualised character and the process of writing the dramatic text. This discussion does not always take place chronologically; the emphasis between self and culture, practice and the written word varies according to the stage reached in the auto-ethno-graphic research process.

CHAPTER 3

Contextualising Kōlam Masks in the Para-traditional Dramatic Text

In the previous chapter, I emphasised the aspect of *auto* in auto-ethno-graphy and discussed how personal experiences, memories and conversations informing my ontology were instrumental in identifying reoccurring themes reflected in the stories I wanted to tell in the Kōlam arena. In this chapter, while still maintaining connections to the Self (auto), I extend the focus to the cultural and historical (ethno) assumptions informing the narrative content. This exercise will illustrate how the conceptualisation of the dramatic text and the contextual significance of the narrative content places emphasis on the research process (graphy). Field notes were collected from diverse sources, including but not limited to cultural knowledge, scholarly literature from various disciplines, poetry, novels, films, visual arts, blogs, newspapers, photographs, social media and everyday experiences. Reoccurring themes were identified in the analysis of these field notes which were then transformed into a creative interpretation of narratives and characters. The telos of assimilating and interpreting the following data was to develop a dramatic text reflective of the theoretical and aesthetic values of Kōlam. The data was analysed with each character in focus. It is important to emphasise here, as signalled in the Methodology in Chapter 1, there are limitations in analysing complex cultural, personal and historical accounts and therefore, I will be selective in the content discussed here. This chapter will conclude with some thoughts on the title of the performance and signals the presence of my ontology in the dramatic text and performance.

My field notes were used to identify the interconnecting and overlapping threads, that informed each narrative from various personal and outsider perspectives. These were incorporated to find deeper meanings, filling the gaps and contextualising the knowledge and content within both the personal and the wider interconnected spaces of culture, sociology, politics, gender, history, mythology, religion and various other layers that inform and are informed by each other. In Denzin's (2003) view,

The ethnographer's performance tale is always allegorical, a symbolic tale, a parable that is not just a record of human experience. This tale is a means of experience, a method of empowerment. It is a vehicle for readers to discover moral truths about themselves....The ethnographer discovers the multiple "truths" that operate in the social world, the stories people tell one another about the things that matter to them. (p. 118)

Incorporating females into the performance was also an objective of this project. As the *masks* and the narratives began to develop gradually, more research from external sources was incorporated, moving the content from the personal to a broader socio-political space. The context and relevance of these *masks* will be explained shortly.

In my view, the Kōlam arena is not only a space for satire and didactic storytelling; it is also a celebration of all cosmic beings, in spite of, and at times because of their imperfections – this notion had to reflect in *Heritance*. However, a socially and politically incisive stance was adopted as the overall attitude of the performance, gleaning,

[A]esthetic values [through] performance narratives that reflexively go against the grain and attack the dominant cultural ideologies connected to nation, race, class, family,

and gender [exposing] cracks in the ideological scams in these dominant cultural mythologies. (Denzin, 2014, p. 73)

I will now proceed to provide a background to the characters and their significance in my cosmos. As the social, political, historical, mythological, gender-based, cultural, religious and diverse other layers of each *mask* are complex, this description will only provide a general insight into the most significant aspects of the content.

Narrator

Although scholars often introduced the Narrator as a vital role, their commentary is brief and limited to a mere description of his duties in the arena. Pertold mentions that the Narrator is ‘clad in the usual Sinhalese festival garments’ and is “no actor of the story, but an outsider, like the rest of the public’. (Pertold, 1930/1973, p. 76). M. H. Goonatilleka (2007), Dela Bandara (2000), Amarasekare (2002b) and others revisit comments made by previous scholars but fail to expand on the character of the Narrator beyond a rudimentary description. We gather from these that the *Narrator* is known by several Sinhalese titles³⁷; does not don a mask; conducts the initiation ceremony and chants verses to invoke the gods and receive blessings of the triple refuge. He also welcomes the audience and introduces the *masks* in verse accompanied by the chorus. When dialogues were gradually introduced to premodern acts, such as *Panivuda Kōlam*, the Narrator interacted with *masks*, revealing the

³⁷ *Sabhē Vidānē* and *Kāriya Karavana-rala* which translate as master of ceremonies; *Thorathuru Kathākāraya* or “Interpreter of Affairs” (Pertold, 1930/1973, p. 76); and *Thānāyam-karu/-arachchi* or *Thanayampala Muladeniya* (Amarasekera, 2002a, p. 14)

purpose of their presence, and often contributing to the action that developed in the playlets incorporating several *masks*.

Full-masks of Kōlam often restrict the clarity and audibility of dialogues, a technical strain further heightened by the outdoor setting of the arena. So, repeating, rephrasing, and disambiguating dialogues delivered by *masks*, is a performance technique that Kōlam shares with other Sinhalese folk theatre traditions and with rituals such as *Sanni Yakuma*. The Narrator may also repeat dialogues of *masks* for comic emphasis and to straighten lexical mix-ups and bawdy double entendre. Likewise, repeating or rephrasing dialogues sets a rhythm that in turn prescribes a tempo for the action.

Consistent use of masculine nouns (*vidāne*, *muladēniya*, *rāla*, etc.) in naming the Narrator, makes it evident, both historically and in today's practice, that the Narrator's role has invariably remained with the male performer. It must be restated that the patriarchal nature of Kōlam has not been considered problematic by scholars, and their commentaries based on past and present data have not veered towards a feminist perspective of the practice. On the other hand, preservation of the form is deemed more valuable by practitioners than challenging its cultural and patriarchal norms. So, even in undergraduate performances of Kōlam, where female students cross-dress in male masks, the Narrator has been consistently performed by a male. In my view, the Narrator is the most versatile character that can transcend gendering in a Kōlam performance, and it is indeed noteworthy, that this possibility has not previously been explored in performance.

I also believe the Narrator represents both the world in the arena and the world of the spectator. It is this complexity that allows the Narrator to step into an act as an intermediary between *mask* and spectator; or enter a character in the plot alongside the

masks; or witness an act between *masks* without becoming a character in the plot. In the premodern arena, the Narrator would also invite *masks* to entertain spectators (*sabhāva sathutu kirīma*), with a dance. The audience is encouraged to make coin donations (*thāgi/thutu-panduru dīma*) to performers, and the Narrator facilitated this casual transaction, ensuring that the performers were rewarded for their contribution to the arena. This practice discontinued when performances were brought to the urban stage with fixed seating and ticket sales. When the Kōlam narrative stopped evolving alongside post-independent conditions and modern economic transitions, the performance material of the Narrator was also limited to the fixed *masks* and narrative content of the past. If the Narrator of premodern Kōlam represented his community, then that representation is now only historically relevant to modern Sinhalese society. To conceptualise a repertoire of masks in a contemporary socio-political and cultural context, it is vital to reimagine the role of the Narrator with relevance to the new repertoire or the contemporary Kōlam world, and the world of the contemporary Kōlam spectator.

There is little analytical commentary by scholars on the character of the Narrator, whom they view merely as a facilitator in the arena. Comparatively, there is significantly more data on the *masks* and their contribution to the performance. This is understandable, as Kōlam is first and foremost distinguished by its masks and the variety that each brings into the arena. During early conceptualisation of the play text, the *masks* demanded the most attention as they were devised from scratch. It was in writing the interactions between the *masks* and the Narrator, that the nuances and complexities of the character began to materialise. In *Heritance*, the Narrator is the only character written as an extension of a premodern role. She is also a

concrete example of the continuum between the premodern and contemporary Kōlam arena.

As in the premodern arena, it was necessary to make the Narrator susceptible to criticism. This was achieved in two ways. Firstly, she was used when needed as a representative of the spectator or as a representative of the Sinhalese Buddhist people. Within the political discourse of the text, this approach allowed for the portrayal of the Narrator as a critique of the status quo, as well as a contributor to that status quo. Secondly, critical reflections of the research process itself were inserted into dialogues between the Kōlam masks and the Narrator. The complexity of the Narrator is therefore in her capacity to *represent the researcher* or *perform the Self* - from an autobiographical perspective, and also perform *the Other*. It is a negotiation between *not-me* and *not-not-me*. Further, the spectator (Other) and the Narrator (Self) are also symbolically present in the masks, and hence there is an opportunity for satire.

Læli Kōlama: The Asylum Seeker

I arrived in Australia as an international student on 19 July 2013. It was on this day the Regional resettlement arrangement between Australia and Papua New Guinea ("Regional resettlement", 2013) was signed, and Labour Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced, "asylum seekers who come here by boat without a visa will never be settled in Australia." ("Asylum seekers arriving," 2013). Then Foreign Minister Bob Carr stated in an interview that a majority of asylum seekers are "not people fleeing persecution. They're coming from majority religious or ethnic groups in the countries they're fleeing, they're coming here as economic migrants" ("*No evidence to support,*" 2013). According Australian Government Statistics the total number of

boat arrivals between January 1976 and June 2015 was 69,602 with eighty-one percent found to be refugees ("Economic migrants or refugees?" 2016). As of October 2016, maritime arrivals were the second largest detainee population held at off-shore facilities, with 5.3% comprising of Sri Lankan men ("Immigration Detention and Community," 2016. p. 8).

In 2010, the civil war in Sri Lanka had officially ended. However, following the counterinsurgency against the LTTE, both local and international human rights watchdogs criticised president Mahinda Rajapaksa for the deaths of Tamil civilians, especially during the last phase of the war. Adding to the violence and tensions were 'white-van' abductions synonymous with the Rajapaksa regime, the killing and disappearance of journalists and civilians, as well as post-conflict tensions in the north and north-east, which continued to be occupied by the military (Ganguly-Scrase, Lahiri-Dutt, 2012) Further, a post-war resurgence of nationalism has continued to delay the potential for long-term reconciliation (De Silva Wijeyeratne, 2014)

The continuing cycle of violence and political unrest, which included the JVP (People's Liberation Front) insurrection, corruption in the two major governing political parties and economic strains have encouraged Sri Lankans of all ethnic groups to seek settlement in so-called developed countries. Unhealthy economic conditions can bleed into boundaries that differentiate asylum seekers, who are escaping persecution, and economic refugees, who are fleeing poverty (Ganguly-Scrase & Lahiri-Dutt, 2013). Also, Rajapaksa governed post-war infrastructural developments reinforced by foreign economic interest in the Island, were concentrated in the south with little benefit to the war-battered Tamils of the north and northeast (Bastin, 2013). Whether it is the impact of war, the impact of poverty or both that compel Sri Lankan Tamils and Sinhalese to

take that life-risking voyage in an ill-equipped boat, it is fair to say that the act itself is one that arises from extreme desperation.

Both historically and globally, the relocation of people across borders has resulted in the host communities feeling threatened, where idioms such as 'boat people', 'queue jumpers', 'illegals', and 'bogus claimants' are attached to fear and suspicions. In the Sri Lankan context, through history, the inevitable impact of the Indian subcontinent, over three centuries of colonial influence and the influx of regional merchants shaped the social, political and economic landscape of Sri Lanka, contributing to nativism and persistent fear of disruption in monocultural interests among the Sinhalese majority. John Higham (1963) defines nativism as,

[A]n intense opposition to an internal minority on the grounds of its foreign... connections. Specific nativist antagonisms may and do vary widely in response to the changing character of minority irritants and the shifting conditions of the day; but through each separate hostility runs the connecting, energizing force of modern nationalism. (p. 4).

According to rural Sinhalese Buddhist belief, demons cross over to the human realm causing disease, famine and social imbalance. Therefore, the ritual intervenes to expel the 'intruder' and to protect and reconcile the community³⁸.

³⁸ Parallels between political and social stability and the Sinhalese pantheon is evident in the Sri Lankan healing and exorcism rituals. For example, *Sanni Yakuma* personifies eighteen illnesses or conditions through with demons. 'Tamilness' is represented as *Demala Sanniya* parallel to physical and mental conditions, and one of its deformities appears to be the inability to speak fluent Sinhala. Similarly, *Vedi Sanniya* personifies the *Vedda* or aboriginal people of the Island, who according to the *Mahāwamsa*, descended from the indigenous *Yasksha* clan, expelled by Vijay at the inception of the Sinhalese civilisation.

As Deborah Winslow (1984) explains, demons or *yakku* and spirits are believed to frequent unclaimed spaces of the human world including road junctions (that indicate non-specificity of direction), riverbanks representing an uninhabitable space between land and water and cemeteries symbolising a liminal space between life and death (1984, p. 275). In my interpretation, I draw metaphorical parallels between the exiled *yakka* as the asylum seeker and his detention in Manus and Nauru as the occupation of liminal and marginalised spaces.

Suvendrini Perera (2009) recounts the story of Tamil asylum seekers arriving off the coast of Coral Bay, “dressed in their finest, ready to present their best face to their new home. They stand at the hostile and alien threshold of this destination, inappropriate, vulnerable figures, diminished by the ominous forces that loom over” (p. 2). *Læli Kōlama* was conceived from insights on the plight of the Sri Lankan asylum seeker. *Læli* (Sinhala for wooden plank), carries with him the plank of wood that kept him afloat when his boat capsised off the coast of Australia. But this plank, he says, is one handed down by his ancestor, who was shipwrecked during his voyage from India to Lanka. *Læli Kōlama* claims he is the great-great-grandson of God Devol, and like his ancestor, he has crossed the ocean with the hope of becoming a god.

According to J. F. Bierlein (1994), people living in traditional cultures find little distinction between myth and history. Therefore, the events that take place in one’s life are a ‘replay of events that took place in the myths’ (p. 32). He claims that ‘all human experience in the past derived its value from myth, which was perceived as infinitely more significant than the life of an individual’ (p. 18). In order to understand myth, Bierlein suggests that history must be viewed from two different angles, that is, the linear and the cyclical.

We live in a generally linear concept of history: It begins at a fixed point and progresses in a straight line towards the present day.... Viewed cyclically, however, history is merely a precession of identical cycles. There are endless, eternal, endlessly repeating principles. (1994, p. 33)

Using the concept of cyclical history, and taking myth as the ‘story preserved in popular memory of a past event and transcends the limits of the external objective world’ (Bierlein, 1994, p. 31), I draw upon the Sinhalese Buddhist pantheon and the myth of *Devol Deyyo*. A deity of lower order, Devol who has a following in the south of the Island, has an origin story that manifests as cosmic and geographic territorialism, and the integration of the ‘alien’ into the community (See Gananath Obeyesekere, 1984, pp. 308-319).

Devol Deyyo: The Deified Immigrant

If *Lāli Kōlama* characterises the asylum seeker, then God Devol is the metaphor for the migrant with the capacity to prove his eligibility to enter a territory. The origin story of Devol has several versions, which is not unusual in mythopoeia and narratives of oral tradition. In some versions, Devol is the eldest of seven brothers, while in others, Devol Princes are a collective of seven or twelve brothers (*Devol Kumara Sath Kattuva, Dolaha Deyyo*). The number varies in textual and oral versions, and their names may differ from region to region (Dharamadasa, 1994, pp. 255-260). According to one legend, Devol was the son of an Indian king, who banishes his sons on account of their unruly behaviour. Upon exile, Devol and his brothers set sail for Lanka and are denied entry by local deities at seven locations around the Island (Dharamadasa, 1994, p. 51). When their ship capsizes off the southern coast, they drift towards Sīnigama, where the Goddess Pattini creates seven mountains of fire to

prevent their entry into her territory. Devol overcomes these obstacles³⁹ demonstrating his prowess and Pattini grants him permission to accept offerings in the *Gammaduwa/Devol Maduwa*, that is held in favour of the Goddess. Another version of the narrative has it that Devol, who arrives as a *yakka*, conquered the mountains of fire because he and Pattini were siblings in their previous birth. In doing so, he transforms from demon to deity (Bastin, 2002, p. 159). While *Kōlmura Kavi* (accounts of deities in verse) suggest that South Indian merchants who settled in Lanka introduced firewalking and gave rise to the cult of Devol. Several sources indicate that these merchants practised medicine and sorcery (Dharamadasa, 1994, pp. 54, 58-59).

Devol personifies the fine line between god and demon with two shrines dedicated to the demon and the deity in Sīnigama believed to deliver *hāskam* (miracles or potencies). The shrine of the demon is situated on a small rock enclave immediately off the coast, while the temple of the deity remains on adjacent land. What is noteworthy here is that *Devol Deyyo* is both challenged and integrated into the existing pantheon by Pattini, who herself is a migrant deity. Her authority is legitimised as she holds the position of a principal deity pantheon. This makes her territorialism and initial hostility towards *Devol* all the more political.

There is a comic scene in *Devol Maduwa* ritual depicting the ordeals of the shipwrecked foreigners, who claim to have ‘hugged’ *Læli* (planks) and swam ashore. An association with

³⁹ The cosmic protocol of having to overcome an obstacle based on moral grounds can be observed in ‘*kadavata taranaya*’ or the cross over from one realm to another. It manifests in many forms in the ritual. For instance, in the Sanni Yakuma ritual two deities prevent *Kola Sanniya* from entering the city. It is only when the demon accepts the moral rules prescribed by Buddha that it is allowed to make the cross over (Obeyesekere, R., 1990).

this plank is made in *Læli Kōlama*, who has crossed the ocean with the “Ancestral Plank” that he had inherited from Devol. While moving between mytho-history and the present conditions of migration, metaphorical parallels have been drawn between past and present legitimations of human migration and cosmic politics. The hierarchy of the pantheon is juxtaposed with white supremacy, and utopian ideology of living and belonging to a developed country. Like his ancestor, *Læli Kōlama* claims that he too has been given an island by the gods, where to his surprise, he meets other demons waiting to be deified. Allusions are made to refugees setting themselves alight and Devol conquering the mountains of fire. Before he exits the arena *Læli Kōlama* declares that the present gods themselves were once demons, and he will, therefore, remain hopeful of becoming a “superior being” in the near future. (See Appendix A, p. 211).

Garā Yakuma: Embracing the Demon

In the final act in *Heritance*, *Læli Kōlama* reappears with a broom. He is still a demon but is hopeful he may fulfil his dream by borrowing a mask of a god. The Narrator explains that her Kōlam repertoire, which is new, does not possess the masks of a deity. However, she offers *Læli Kōlama* the task of performing *Garā Yakuma* (ritual of the Garā demon) as his new prop, the mop, befits the role. *Garā Yakuma*, which has been borrowed from the *Maha Garā Maduwa* (the great ritual of Garā), is a customary performance at the conclusion of Sinhalese low country rituals and Kōlam, and is practised by southern fishing communities. Its purpose is to cleanse and restore balance by warding off illness and evil and blessing those present.

Dala Kumāra (the tusked prince) and his sister Giri Devi fall in love, and the shame of incest drives Giri Devi to suicide by hanging herself. Dala storms through the jungle in search of her,

and on discovering her corpse, his anguish transforms him into a demon, growing tusks and consuming all things in his path. The origin of a demon is always hinged upon an imbalance in moral ideologies of the cosmos. Goddess Pattini employs the voracious demon to cleanse the nuptial ceremony of *Valli* (a woman of the indigenous *Vadda* tribe) and God Kataragama. *Garā* scavenges on scraps of meat thrown down by the *Vadda* people; then continues to eat everything around him, eventually threatening to swallow the house itself. Pattini makes the demon, but not before agreeing to accept oblations (*dola pidēni*) from humans without ever afflicting them (Wijesekera, 1987). The rite of *Garā* symbolises the cleansing of the space, followed by blessings conferred upon attendees at the end of a performance.

Globally, refugees can find themselves in low-skilled work and at risk of underpaid employment and exploitation by employers (Berg, 2016). When *Læli Kōlama*, returns to the arena with a mop, he is not offered a mask of a god, but is asked to take on the role of *Garā*, the demon who cleanses the arena. There is an ambiguity in this act, when the Narrator convinces *Læli Kōlama* to remain a demon, while in accepting the demon in him, *he* rises to the occasion culminating in a celebration of the demon. Whether the Narrator acts with goodwill or takes advantage of *Læli*, or works in favour of the system, remains unstated. However, as *Garā* performs *ves pæma* (revelation of the mask) and climbs the *ailē*⁴⁰ while odes are sung to him, the act, in fact, culminates into a celebration of the demon.

To conclude, in perceiving mytho-history as a cyclical movement that draws a link between the past, the present and the future, *Læli Kōlama* is juxtaposed with certain accounts of Devol, that

⁴⁰ A tall structure made out of areca tree and fronds. The tradition is that *Garā* climbs the *ailē* and sways back and forth until it breaks; signifying the elimination of *vas-dos* or misfortune and evil.

resonate contemporary ambiguities and complexities surrounding territorialism, suspicion and 'diabolification' of outsiders attempting to enter a community. The integration of the outsider into the community takes place after they are presented with obstacles, for instance, rejection by regional gods, the shipwreck and the mountains of fire created by Pattini. For *Læli Kōlama*, the capsised boat, deterrence from entering the mainland and his relocation on an Island, is the story of his ancestor repeating in a cyclical pattern. He alludes to self-emulation of refugees at detention camps in Nauru as an attempt to dance in the fire in order to prove themselves eligible for deification. The metaphor of deification, for *Læli Kōlama*, is never achieved, but he is eventually celebrated for the 'demon' that he is.

Diyasēna Kōlama

The earliest chronicles of Sri Lanka, including the *Mahāwamsa*, provide insight into Buddhist historiography and the inseparable relationship between the state and the Buddhist institution. Written by Buddhist monks, the establishment of Buddhist ideologies and the import of the monarch's obligation to the propagation and continuance of Buddhism is recorded through mytho-historical accounts that legitimise the marriage between state and religion. Bardwell Smith claims that,

[I]t is a sacred history of a people destined with a sacred mission, namely to maintain the purity of the Dhamma in a world of impermanence and self-seeking.... The primary intent is twofold: to provide a paradigmatic model for the present and the future and to engage in anamnesis or cultic reawakening of the people to the high points in its past and present destiny. (as cited in Scheible, 2016, p. 125)

The *Mahāwamsa* is a mytho-historical chronicle of Sri Lanka that continues to be developed within a chronological framework reaching back over 2500 years. It includes the accounts of Gautama Buddha's visits to the Island of Lanka, his foretelling of the beginning of the Sinhalese race with the arrival of the Indian prince Vijaya on the day of the *parinirvana* (passing into nirvana) of Buddha, and the sanctioning of race and land as the guardians of the Dhamma. The concept of *dhammadeepa* (land of dhamma), is textually legitimised, and remained in communal consciousness, reflected in the presence of the *sangha* and the *sāsana* in matters of the state and political unity. In the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries, this communal consciousness was "reimagined" and put to "new uses" with the rise of Sinhalese nationalism (Kemper, 1991, p. 53).

According to the *Mahāwamsa*, the union between an Indian princess and a lion commences with the 'lion blooded' lineage of Prince Vijaya, who upon banishment, arrives in Lanka with seven hundred followers. He banishes the native Yakshas (demons) and makes himself the King of all Lanka. Similarly, Dutugemunu drives his army to war with the blessings of the *sangha* and defeats the Dravidian king Elāra, to gain a unitary state. Later Parakumbhahu VI achieves a similar victory uniting both land and the monastic community.

Prince Diyasēna manifests in *Perakum Sirita*, a eulogy written by the monk, Veedhagama Maithrea, paying tribute to the Sinhalese King Perakumbhahu VI (1412-68) of Kotte, who was the last Sinhalese king to unify the Island. The following is my translation of a verse in the eulogy that reveals a dialogue between the poet and a pilgrim:

Say, pilgrim, whence you arrive, did you visit the Mountain
of Butterflies?

None goes there, for it is the realm of God Sumana Saman,

In two and a half thousand years, a ruler will arrive on this land,
I was told, this day, he will be known as the Great King
Diyasēna.⁴¹

(Translation my own)

The advent of a saviour has been well established through the mytho-history of the Island and through the influence of Buddhist canon depicting the destined Bōdhisatva striving for Buddhahood through the samsara (Malalgoda, 1970, pp. 438-439). Just as the Bodhisattvas are destined to be Buddhas in the remote future, King Parakramabahu is destined to be a *Diyana* (leader of the world) (Malalgoda, 1970, p. 438).

Diyasēna Kōlama is a modern archetype of those who have been chosen or appoint themselves as guardians of the Sinhalese nation. For instance, post-independent Sri Lanka has seen claimants, who have come forward as the rightful ruler or saviour, and who, in a 'stereotypical pattern', gathered a following and led them to fight foreign invaders (Malalgoda, 1970). They were descendants of royal bloodlines or members of the aristocracy, whose activities, according to communal knowledge, were endorsed by a historical tradition reaching back to the ideology of *dhammadeepa* (land of Dhamma). Similar to historiography in the chronicles, the concept of Prince Diyasēna was addressed to an audience that was already convinced. However, with colonial influence, the chronicles fell under

⁴¹ “කියග මගිය එනු කොහි සිට? දද සමනොළ ගොසිනා

නොය කියමුකු එදිග? බමුණ සුමණ සුරිදු විසිනා

ගිය කල දෙදහස් පන්සිය රජෙකු එතැයි දියනා

කියැ විනි - තන් වැසිය එනම්? දියසෙන් රජු මෙදිනා” (Thotagamuwe Sri Rahula, circa 1460 / 1922).

scrutiny, being appreciated by some scholars for its historical worth, while being denied its credibility as a historical record by others. The centralisation of colonial administration distanced the state from Buddhism, and the cosmic unity that existed between the sovereign and the faith was thus shaken. This provided a space for revaluation and Buddhist reform, that emerged as 'modernised' Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism, capturing 'expanding areas of social, cultural and religious life for the nationalist cause' in a movement led predominantly by the Sinhalese bourgeoisie (De Silva Wijeyeratne, 2014, p. 85).

With D. S. Senanayake's resettlement of Sinhalese in the North Central province with the vision of agricultural reformation, there continued to develop an increasing propensity towards Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism, which progressed from Dharmapala's legacy and kept in motion by the Buddhist monk fraternity. The slogan, 'Not for Kingdom, but for Buddhism', employed by Dutugemunu in his war against the Tamil king Elara, kept reemerging parallel to tensions between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities. While contemporary nationalists were aligned with the Sinhalese King, the obligation to rescue race and faith were shifted from the individual to a Sinhalese communal responsibility (Kemper, 1991, p. 132). Rising Buddhist sentiments and comparisons of contemporary leaders to medieval kings aided their popularity among the Sinhalese majority. Following ethnic violence in 1983, the J. R. Jayawardene government attempted to distance itself from the allusions it had thus far made to Dutugemunu. However, the King has remained 'ubiquitous' (Kemper, 1991, p. 134) in the Sinhalese communal consciousness and political ideology. Steven Kemper (1991) suggests that "nationalism needs to be seen as a conversation that the present holds with the past" (p. 7). While Dutugemunu is the ideology of the Sinhalese Buddhist leadership that once was, Prince Diyasēna is the saviour who is

yet to arrive. Further, the prospect of a 'saviour' is a common coping mechanism in communities that experience insecurity.

It is this communal consciousness that *Diyasēna Kōlama* embodies. In the Sri Lankan context, nationalistic ideals have been nurtured for over 2000 years with the influx of foreigners and foreign influences, and the ongoing negotiation of cultural differences (Kemper, 1991, p. 8). Not only has Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism served to separate the self and one's community from the other, but nationalists also act as the vigilantes of the race and religion, and the voices driving the continuance of that race and religion.

With the dissolution of the conflict in 2009 following Mahinda Rajapakse's 'victory' over the Tamil rebellion, no initiative was taken towards reconciliation, and the post-war sentiments among the Sinhalese majority served to further strengthen the Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist hegemony. As Wijeyeratne (2014) puts it,

The epistemic register they occupy (which privileges a distinct way of seeing-the-world) is one grounded in a cosmology that, although diverse, privileges its hierarchical aspect. It provides a coherent logical scheme to distinct historical moments separated by thousands of years. So, it is that the present is subject to a radical remythologisation: a Theravada consciousness drawing a virtual genealogy between the past, the present and an envisaged future, one in which an encompassing hierarchical Sinhalese Buddhist state is restored, having vanquished any devolutionary impulses. (p. 168)

Whenever the autonomy of the Rajapakse regime was questioned, ideas of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism, already sanctioned by patriarchal post-war aggression, were imparted at varying degrees, and in the form of small, yet discernible

movements that raised concern over a subsequent uprising of Tamil rebellion. These movements, often led by Buddhist monks, have also recently gained further momentum as anti-Islamic operations. Despite losing the presidential election in 2015, the nationalist drive that remained an innate characteristic of previous governments has continued to thrive. To many, Rajapakse was *Diyasēna* incarnate. The coalition government of Maithripala Sirisena and Ranil Wickramasinghe, who initially showed interest in the welfare of the minorities, have since become cautious of losing the Sinhalese electorates.

Ironically, in their attachment to the imaginary cosmic order, Sinhalese Buddhists and the nation can never achieve the 'absolute harmony' they continuously seek (De Silva Wijeyeratne, 2014, p. 192).

A significant characteristic of post-war Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism differentiating it from the post-colonial nationalist movement, is its estrangement from the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, and its momentous popularity among the lower middle and working classes. Electronic media and social networks provide easy access for the public to share views, influence dormant sentiments and popular ideologies. In such participation, there is little restriction or censorship. Spearheading the post-war nationalist movement are Buddhist clergy, Buddhist fundamentalist groups and individuals, who have previously had little or no significance in the public political sphere. For legitimacy, they have aligned themselves with their medieval and pre-historic heroes and mythology, attaching idioms such as *Senava*, *Balakaaya* (battalion, force) and '*Sinhale*' (blood of the lion) to their identity. Rationalisation of violence and intimidation projected towards Tamil and Islamic minorities is similar to the justification of violence that was unleashed by Dutugemunu. Further, ongoing persuasions from international

human rights activists and organisations to investigate war crimes, have revived anti-imperialist rhetoric.

Diyasēna Kōlama is a lumpenproletariat, who has discovered overnight his greater purpose in the cosmos. He legitimises his designation as ‘saviour of the Sinhalese race’, by claiming that he was appointed by God Sakra, who according to rural Sinhalese Buddhist lore, is the first guardian of the Buddhist realm, appointed by Buddha himself. *Diyasēna* is conscious his physical appearance is not compatible with the ideological physique of a great leader. Buddha is said to have embodied *maha purusha lakshana* or 32 signs of a noble man (Britannica, 2016), and significant Sinhalese kings in the Mahāwamsa are described with attention to physical characteristics that exude their male prowess.

Diyasēna smuggles away the Tooth Relic in hope of protecting it from everyone and anyone who is ‘the Other’. In the physical and samsaric absence of the Buddha, his presence is established in the mundane world by relics that are deposited mainly in monasteries. Of these, the Temple of the Tooth Relic (Dalada Maligava) in Kandy, Sri Lanka, is most significant. According to the chronicled history of Lanka, the relic was smuggled into the Island in 313 AD. As the possession of the Relic symbolised the rightful succession to the throne, it has been in the best interest of Sinhalese kings to ensure its safety. The Mahāwamsa details that Dutugamunu placed the Tooth Relic on his spear for protection and to offer assurance to his army, as they set off on the *dharma yuddha* (holy war) (De Silva Wijeyeratne, 2014). With the movement of kingdoms, the Relic was also relocated until it was permanently enshrined in Kandy which was also the last medieval Kingdom of the Island.

Diyasēna seeks the Narrator’s help to identify a safe location for the Relic. This endeavour culminates with *Diyasēna* announcing

that the Relic must, in fact, be deposited amongst the enemy. As logic, he uses the aphorism ‘to hide something from a thief, hide it in the thief’s house’ (See Appendix A, p. 227). Employed as a clerk at the Ministry of Cultural Affairs⁴², *Diyasēna Kōlama*’s boredom and discontent make him act on impulse. He is driven by popular Nationalist rhetoric and romantic nostalgia. However, in the era of reality star culture, his desire to become a hero overnight overrides his mission. Although *Diyasēna* represents a comparatively mild caricature of the Sinhalese religio-political agenda, the metaphor of the Tooth Relic can be perceived as controversial, even by the more moderate Buddhists. I see the comic elements in the scenario functioning as a catalyst while creating an unexpected confrontation with Sinhalese Buddhist ideology, and its effect can be far more significant when *Diyasēna Kōlama* is performed within its very own cultural context.

Attamma Kōlama

On her recent visit to Australia, my mother confided that it could be her last. She felt that she and my father couldn’t travel as they used to, as they were beginning to “feel the years”. Ageing tends to invoke Buddhist thoughts: there is reminiscence about the impermanence of life, and the expectation to liberate one’s self from worldly attachments. However, my parents’ attachment to their grandchildren was such that they had already surmised “their samsara has extended.” So, despite her scepticism, I am convinced that her strong bond with her children, and still more, her grandchildren, are incentives to give her the will and strength for more journeys.

⁴² The aims of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in Sri Lanka are axiomatic of the Sinhalese Buddhist cultural hegemony and lack of state driven empathy towards minority cultures and for the Island’s multicultural identity.

Attamma Kōlama is a narrative about women, who have been absent in the traditional Kōlam repertoire. It is also a narrative that investigates perceptions of ‘presence’ and ‘absence’ in the Sinhalese socio-cultural context through several metanarratives. The incorporation of *Attamma*, one of several Sinhalese terms for grandmother, into my Kōlam repertoire was primarily inspired by my mother, and then my grandmother. Amma (mother) is a 70-year-old retired teacher, who travels from Sri Lanka to fulfil her role as a grandmother to my sister’s children. My observations of my mother’s journey as a grandparent, and her unconditional altruism towards her children and grandchildren, had me reflecting on the lives of other Sri Lankan grandmothers, whose roles in the family are both diverse and underrepresented in the larger socio-economic context. In addition to taking care of her grandchildren, there is pleasure and self-worth in assisting them with their schoolwork, cooking and helping with household chores; being the transmitter of cultural knowledge and the consultant on matters related to the place of origin. To my mother, it is a dual process of applying long years of experience and wisdom gained as a mother, and relearning new methods of caregiving without the added pressures of a career and the overall responsibility of raising children.

Some of the most enduring memories of my childhood are associated with my grandparents and their homes, where most of my school vacations were spent. My grandparental homes away from the city, were not only the epicentres of family reunions, but also a place of escape from urban life and a touchpoint with nature. *Āchchi* (synonym for *Attamma*), my maternal grandmother and a mother of four, was a housemaker and matriarch, who was looked up to by her family and extended family. When she visited us in the city, the children in my neighbourhood, who also called her *Āchchi*”, squealed with delight, for she had treats for all. When her youngest son

married, she half-jokingly stated: “Now that all my duties are done, I can die in peace.” Although this self-giving attitude appears to be influenced by Sinhalese Buddhist thoughts of death and letting go of material life, it was a time when culturally too, a woman measured her life by the duties of a wife and a mother. *Āchchi*’s death was my first experience of losing someone close, and her absence shook the equilibrium in the family. For my grandfather, it seemed, being a grandparent without his spouse was an ‘incomplete’ experience. As we grew older, my vacations with the grandparents first grew shorter, then became less frequent. Now, my observations of my mother are a constant reminder of my grandmother, and over time I have become increasingly receptive to senior women across various socio-economic sectors in Sri Lankan culture and dedicating their aged years to their grandchildren. However, the strong cultural obligation attached to grandparenting means that their contribution to the broader socio-economic context goes unnoticed.

I have also narrowed down *Attamma Kōlama* further to a Sinhalese Buddhist context embodying cultural specific nuances associated with ageing women in this community. Despite the differences in education, living conditions, career, lifestyle, health and other demographic factors that separate my mother’s generation from my grandmother’s, their value system with regard to grand-parenting has retained more similarities than differences. It is both socially and culturally expected that married Sri Lankan adults produce offspring. Although education and employment have delayed the age at which women enter marriage and have children, and the number of children in modern Sri Lankan families has declined, the socio-cultural expectation of continuing the bloodline often assures that ageing parents in Sri Lanka have a higher chance of becoming grandparents. Extended life expectancy also contributes to the

ageing population spending an increasing number of years as grandparents.

While further research is required to understand how grandparents of different economic groups, who also act as secondary caregivers of their grandchildren, differ in their experiences. It can be surmised that lower income groups burdened by poor health facilities, nutrition, education and lower overall well-being may find it more difficult to enjoy their role as grandmothers, or enjoy equal choices in how involved they wish to be in their capacity to care for young children. In ideal situations, the exchange of caregiving from parent to children to grandchildren is reciprocal and rewarding for all three generations and facilitates the passing of traditions and responsibilities from one generation to the next.

Grandparenting in Sri Lanka is a complex phenomenon immersed in cultural intricacies. The presence of grandparents in the lives of children and grandchildren is significant for a Sinhalese family on a personal level. However, grandparenting appears to be what Sylvia Clavan (1978) calls a “roleless role”, which is overlooked due to ambiguities that accompany its unspecified norms, rights and responsibilities. With a considerable increase in the ageing population on the Island since the 1960s, and changing urban socio-economic conditions in Sri Lanka, grandparenting has become an even more complex social arrangement expanding beyond its traditional classifications. A study conducted by K. D. M. S. Kaluthantiri (2014) reveals that although cultural attitudes about three generations living together are changing in Sri Lanka due to rapid transitions from extended to nuclear family, children acting as caregivers to elderly parents still remain the norm. Also, a majority of elderly women who co-reside with their children act as a caregiver to young grandchildren (Kaluarachchi, 2006).

Poverty, the death of a spouse, illness, migration and divorce are some other circumstances that result in three generations co-residing, and for grandparents to take on additional responsibilities as caregivers. Having said that, intergenerational caregiving is so deeply ingrained into the filial establishment in Sri Lanka, that aged care facilities are frowned upon and perceived as a sign of a decline in socio-cultural values. Similarly, childcare facilities are a relatively new concept to the Island, where grandparents or an extended family member are preferred as caregivers in the absence of parents, even in economically stable families.

However, parents of first-generation urban dwellers, when compelled to leave their rural homes and move to the city, often find it difficult in adjusting to urban living conditions. I have encountered elderly men and women who say they feel 'suffocated' by high walls and small spaces. Despite their desire to be with the second and third generations, grandparents, who move from the village to the city, may have hesitations about leaving the rural lifestyle to which they are accustomed.

Although *Attamma Kōlama* is engendered through personal experiences, I have enlarged her characteristics to accommodate a more comprehensive demographic representation of Sinhalese Buddhist grandmothers. She is an archetype of the senior woman, who devotes her entire ageing years to taking care of the third generation. She is physically feeble making her capacity to manage the number of children in her care phenomenal. She does not question what is expected of her role, for "it's what grandmothers do", yet she is aware of the immediate circumstances that have led to her overburdened existence. She cannot perceive a different lifestyle, as her views of being-in-the-world are already shaped by the cultural knowledge that ties her to that role. *Attamma* knows each child and their likes and dislikes, she feeds them, plays with them and

is anxious for their future. She doesn't complain about her grandchildren, but she does have grievances about the absence and parenting habits of her children and their spouses.

Sinhalese Buddhist consciousness materialises as a heightened spiritual orientation for the elderly population, as they prepare for their next life by increasing the time and effort invested in religious activities, that can contribute to the accrual of good karma. What is interesting though, is that caring for the elderly is perceived as a merit-making deed, whereas the elderly taking care of the young is not construed as a contributor to spiritual advancement. Culturally and physiologically, detachment from children is more difficult for a woman, which in turn, can make a woman's samsaric journey longer. This thought also relates to the patriarchal notion that a woman can never become a Buddha.

Attamma's altruism for the young extends beyond filial bonds, as she takes care of her neighbour's son, whose mother is a migrant domestic worker in the Middle East. In the absence of his mother, the child has developed a strong attachment to *Attamma*, who considers it her prerogative to ensure the child's wellbeing. Perceptions of gender-based social roles make the absence of a mother far more unfavourable for the family than the absence of a father (Gamburd, 2000). Low-skilled labour export is the second highest foreign exchange earner of Sri Lanka. Low-skilled workers leave their families behind, and most often children remain in the care of the father or the grandmother, or in some instances, a close relative (Gamburd, 2000; Senaratne, Perera, & Fonseka, 2011). Sri Lankan domestic workers are among the lowest paid migrant workers in the Middle East, risking exploitation and abuse by both recruitment agents and employers. However, the risk of breakdown within the family unit due to the absence of women has been significant and is believed to result in long-term

repercussions for Sri Lankan society (Eelens, Schampers, & Speckmann, 1992). Although women become more empowered as income earners, there are both risks and benefits involved, depending on how the income is spent, especially where alcoholism in husbands are interrelated with the absence of women (Gamburd, 2000). Gender defined ideologies in Sinhalese society are a recurrent theme in *Attamma Kōlama*, that also manifests in the story of the king and queen that *Attamma* tells us.

A Son Fit for the Robe

An old Sinhalese folk ballad sung by rural women during pilgrimages translates as:

Give me a face that contests the full moon,
Give me bangles for my wrists and cloths for my waist,
Give me long tresses dark and cascading,
And bless me with a son, to be ordained.

(Translation my own)

Sri Lanka has a long tradition of child ordination, yet the norm has also prevented robust discourse in the Sinhalese Buddhist culture. In rural Sri Lanka, it was and still is common for a child's natal chart to be prepared and read by the chief monk of the temple, and in Sinhalese Buddhist perception, individuals born into an astral incidence that has a negative impact on the family (*hatara kēndare pālu*) are believed to be suited for ordination.

Despite her piety, *Attamma* is uncertain about the monk's proposition to ordain the neighbour's son. In Sri Lanka, entrusting young boys to the temple is propelled mainly by poverty. The child is offered free education, food and shelter within a culturally acceptable arrangement of 'adoption'. The

Sinhalese Buddhist perception also endorses this that good merits accumulated by offering a child to the *sāsana* can advance seven generations of his family towards nirvana. In 2010, amidst the post-war nationalist revival, Prime Minister DM Jayaratne issued a bill encouraging the ordination of 2600 monks to coincide with the twenty-sixth millennium of Buddha's enlightenment, as well as a measure for lifting young lives out of poverty. However, a social and political debate on the long-term psychological effects of child ordination and the safety of children, primarily from lower income sectors, has been long overdue.

Goni-Billa: The Menacing Presence

Various metaphors of absence and presence manifest in *Attamma's* narrative, in the game of hide-and-seek she plays with the children, and the story of her son, who went missing during the JVP insurrection. *Goni-billa* (sack-man) embodies the constant threat that she fears would take her children and grandchildren away from her. Disciplining or controlling a child using an imaginary evil entity is a cross-cultural phenomenon. In 2015, there were two incidents of abduction, rape and murder of a five-year-old Sinhalese girl and a seventeen-year-old Tamil woman that shocked the nation. Although these two incidents are not directly linked, it is also not possible to isolate them from the history of violence and post-war ideologies that have redefined the values of the socio-cultural fabric. Marina Warner (1999) claims that the concept of the bogeyman "reflects in one aspect intergenerational fears: and the link between ogres and fathers, between parents and children, between rulers and subjects and between authority figures and subordinates" (p. 47). While *goni-billa* embodies the known and the unknown menaces that loom in everyday life of *Attamma's* grandchildren, her fears also rise from the loss of her youngest son during the

JVP insurgency. The years 1988-1991 was a time of terror that re-contextualised the phenomenon of *goni-billa*. When insurgents abducted by the military were forced to identify fellow insurgents, a gunny sack with holes cut in it for visibility was placed over the informer's head. As *Attamma* exists in search of *Mustard Seed*, she sings to the children, warning them to remain unseen by the elusive "nice uncle with a sack on his back".

Mantis Kōlama

My father kept a small figurine of a seated Buddha on his bookshelf and it would often disappear behind the stack of books and documents to be relocated to its rightful place when he occasionally rearranged the shelf. In 2012, he was confined with an illness that caused him debilitating pain over a period of several months. The second month into his illness, Thaththa had a small shrine organised in the corner of his room, with the aforesaid figurine of Buddha in the centre, and images of several deities behind him. He began to light a lamp and some incense in the morning and evening and listen to *pirit*⁴³ on the radio late into the night. This practice, unusual in my household, continued over the period of my father's recovery, and nearly half a year went by before the Buddha statue was returned to its previous position on the bookshelf and the deities permanently expelled from the house.

The iconic gesture of bringing the palms together signifies both cultural and sacred ideals for the Sinhalese. With its origins possibly reaching back to ancient Vedic ritual practices, the

⁴³ Also, *paritta* (Pali) are stūtras from Buddhist scriptures chanted for protection.

*namaskara mudra*⁴⁴ held close to the chest, and when pertinent, coupled with the verbal salutation “*āyubōwan*”, wishing long life upon the other, is the traditional Sinhalese gesture of greeting. Palms are brought together and often held close to the forehead in Buddhist prayer and the worship of relics, the sacred bo-tree and statues of Buddha, as well as in the worship of deities. The gesture is also performed before elders and monks, as well as objects worthy of reverence. A driver performing this ritual believes he transfers boons to the vehicle by touching the steering wheel before he/she sets off on a journey. Similarly, students offer respect to their books, farmers to their tools, musicians to their instruments, and even actors to the stage. Therefore, the *namaskaraya* is an everyday religious and cultural rite of Sinhalese Buddhist people.

There is a constant presence of religious iconography in Sri Lanka. One often encounters roadside structures containing Buddha statues in urban areas and junctions are commonly utilised as locations for these mini shrines. When one stops on a road to ask for directions, these shrines are often used as signposts that lead one to the destination. Buses often display images and effigies of Buddha, and the higher gods of the pantheon, lined up on or above the dashboard; the words “may Buddha’s blessing be with this vehicle⁴⁵” can often be seen on heavy vehicles.

When perceived as a ritual, the act of *namaskara* can be identified as a representation of communal values. All things sacred are given their place on a higher plane in the cosmos through the gesture of *namaskara*. In the light of a cosmological

⁴⁴ Hand position called mudra in Sanskrit play, an important part in Buddhist ritual and art.

⁴⁵ In Sinhala: “Me ratayata budu saranai”

existence, this knowledge provides Sinhalese Buddhists with a justification to appease the good and fear the evil. With the presence of the sacred, there is also the constant presence of the profane, and therefore, a continuous demand for the sacred. For Sinhalese Buddhists, worship of the animate and the inanimate and the seen and the unseen, are a collective coping mechanism for their everyday anxieties. Sinhalese Buddhist rituals have also transformed into cultural practices, extending beyond the Sinhalese Buddhist community. For example, people of all faiths would drop a coin into the till when passing certain Buddhist temples, as they are believed to be protected by local deities. From *bodhi pooja* (the ritual of bathing the bo-tree) to *bhāra* (vows made to deities) (Goonasekera, 2006), there is a constant effort to manage both individual and communal anxieties of cosmic existence.

An excerpt from the unpublished Sinhala play *Rahas Udaviya* (The Secretive People) by Sri Lankan playwright Piya Kariyawasam, undoubtedly inspired *Mantis Kōlama*. It is translated here as follows:

A Buddhist believes the mantis prays to Srī Pāda⁴⁶,
 A Christian, that it prays to Bethlehem,
 Muslims believe it turns towards Mecca in prayer.
 I once asked the Mantis in which direction he plays,
 “I pray out of habit, for I know of nothing else”,
 The Mantis replied with a smile.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ According to the chronicles, Sri Pada (The Sacred Footprint) or *Samanala Kanda* (Mountain of Butterflies) is one of three locations that Gautama Buddha consecrated on his visit to Lanka. Hindus believe it is the footprint of Shiva, Muslims, the footprint of the Prophet and the British colonists named it Adam’s Peak, alluding to it as the location where Adam and Eve were placed after banishment, as it closely resembled paradise.

⁴⁷ “වන්දා වඳින්නේ සිරිපාදය දෙසට බව බොධියාට පෙනෙයි.

වන්දා වැද වැටෙන්නේ මක්කම දෙසට බව මුස්ලිම් ජාතිකයාට පෙනෙයි.

Mantis Kōlama embodies traditions of worship in Sinhalese Buddhist society. However, he claims that the habit is, in fact, a survival strategy. In a sack, he carries effigies of numerous deities he worships without discrimination to protect him in his time of need. Mantis was present throughout the chronicled history of Lanka and adapted to change by adopting all religions and religious practices, that were introduced to the Island. When the Narrator questions him on his ethics of worship, Mantis explains that there are many celestial egos to please in the pantheon, as there are in the world, and whichever direction he turns, there is someone to receive his worship. He points out that the Kōlam Arena and Narrator herself are not impartial to accepting worship as they too represent the hierarchy.

In the end, *Mantis* relates an account of a group of Sri Lankan actors, who appear in Spielberg's 1980s blockbuster, *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. The film was first set to be shot in India. However, when the Indian authorities held back the license for the project to proceed unless specific revisions were made to the screenplay, the Hollywood team opted to film it in the central hills of Sri Lanka. They were also successful in casting Sri Lankan actors as extras. The film contains strong imperialist ideals that attached 'primitive' representations of Indian people and culture. However, *Mantis Kōlama* points out that unlike the Indians, it was not by resisting, but by 'worshipping' that Sri Lankan actors procured roles in a Hollywood film, which was considered a privilege. Before exiting,

වනදා වැඳ වැටෙන්නේ බෙන්ලෙහෙම දිහාට බව කිතුනු හක්කිකයාට පෙනෙයි.

ඇත්තටම වැඳ වැටෙන්නේ කුමන දිශාවටදැයි මම වරක් වන්දාගෙන් අසිමි.

වදින්නේ පුරුද්දට බවත්, වැදීම හැර වන දෙයක් නොදන්නා නිසා හතර අතට වදින බවත්, වනදා සිනාසි කිවේය". (Kariyawasam, 2012)

he asks if it is right to judge those who worship when the system itself is made to accept worship readily.

Gandhabba Kōlama

Mrs W, a 67-year-old woman of small stature and the mother of three daughters, is a close friend of my family. She is always seen dressed in white, the colour of mourning in Sinhalese Buddhist tradition. One September morning in 1989, her husband went to work and never returned home. Aunty W, as I call her endearingly, once confided, “they must have broken every bone in his body; his death, I can endure; but not his suffering.” Like the women in *The Widows* (Dorfman & Kushner, 2015), that *waiting* in Mrs W and her daughters, as with thousands who have experienced similar disappearances of a loved one, never ends. The following excerpt from the play is brought to mind:

My country? Does it matter? Do I really have to name that country? Among all the countries – the ones you see on television and the many you don't – where a few men decide the life and the death of the rest of the people, a few men decide that one man shall disappear, that another man shall go into exile and never see his children again. Do I really have to name it? Just like the country where a river flows and an old woman waits – do you really need me to name that country? (Act 1, Scene 2)

Violence has permeated post-independent Sri Lanka since the early 1950s. Political assassinations, ethnic violence, election violence, the left-wing insurgencies in 1971 and 1988/91 and the civil war between the LTTE Tamil militants and the State military have contributed to the cycle of violence on the Island. It presents a paradox in a country; whose principal religion is

synonymous with the practice of non-violence. In 1982, the Indemnity Act 20⁴⁸ of the constitution established a legal framework to protect individuals, who practised violence on behalf of the state, against those who threatened the state. Extending beyond the timeline of the amendment, the act itself engendered an attitude of impunity for those who surpassed the law in pursuit of power. Legitimation of violence by the State was an instrument for the control and elimination of opposing forces. The transaction of violence in the 88/91JVP armed struggle and the LTTE in their advanced military tactics further institutionalised violence as the means of acquiring equality and social justice. The JVP intimidated and attacked civil society, threatening members of the police forces and the military and their families, making the motives for violence personal for those threatened.

As for the JVP, the government struck back using maximum and brutal force, employing the police, the military and para-military and implementing Emergency Regulations to systematically arrest, incarcerate and eliminate insurgents and those suspected of supporting the JVP movement. All without the need of a warrant. Although it affected the socio-economic functions of the entire country, the JVP movement was largely concentrated in the suburban and rural south of the Island. Gunshots heard in the middle of the night made it known that towns and villages were losing their young men. Bodies were disposed of without post-mortem or inquest. Corpses were found

⁴⁸ No action or other legal proceedings whatsoever, whether civil or criminal, shall be instituted in a court of law for or on account of or in respect of any act, matter or thing, legal or otherwise, done or purported to be done with a view to restoring law and order during the period August 1st 1977 to August 31st 1977, if done in good faith by a minister, deputy minister or a person holding office under or employed in the service of the government of Sri Lanka in any capacity... . (Perera, 2009, p.25).

on roadsides, often set ablaze on tyres, buried in mass graves or thrown into rivers. The public was apprehensive of giving the dead proper burials as this would suggest sympathy towards the insurgency. The JVP also prohibited proper funeral rites to be performed by the families of those they killed.

Stemming from the institutionalisation of violence in Sri Lanka, involuntary disappearance left hundreds of families waiting for the missing to return. Although mass graves have been discovered, these deaths and disappearances remain unresolved to date. In 2016 the cabinet passed the legislation that allows for an Office of Missing Persons (OMP) to be established. Its purpose is mainly to ascertain whether those who have disappeared are still alive and to seek out other pertinent information surrounding those disappearances. However, it is too early to comment on the efficacy of the OMP, and many complications must be addressed, especially about ongoing debates on whether the military, who have been protected as war heroes, should face prosecution.

Gandhabba in the Pali language is an existence 'between-lives' as a being waits to take its next existence. It is a state of limbo after death and *rebecoming* in the cyclical course of the *samsara*. There are several other definitions to this term, but I will be using it in relation to the above interpretation. *Gandhabba Kōlama* is two murdered women militants returned from the river, where they were shot and their bodies were disposed. They are bound together by their hair, a method used by the military to communicate these were deliberate killings. *Gandhabba* brings with them, a namelist of missing persons, who like them, either never received a burial or were buried without funeral rites. They seek someone responsible, who would take the list and find the missing; whether they are dead or alive, they seek closure on behalf of those awaiting their return.

There is also a reference made to *Kalu Kumara* (Dark Prince), a demon of lust who 'casts his eyes' (bælma) upon young women. *Kalu Kumara* frequents desolate, 'in-between places' of human habitation (Wijesekera, 1987, p. 50). In the Sinhalese village, women of marriageable age are cautioned against wandering or bathing alone at the river or the well, especially at noon or twilight, as the lustful demon is said to frequent such places at such hours. The myth embodies the patriarchal repression of women and female sexuality, but to *Gandhabba* the dark demons exist in the real world and are responsible for their death and the disappearance of many others like them.

Female representation in the JVP has received very little attention in post-insurrection, and a comprehensive study of the experiences of female cadres is yet to be recorded (De Mel, 2001). In Sri Lanka, revolutions have and still continue to take a patriarchal bent, and the role of the woman within movements have been constrained to patriarchal ideologies. This brings me to the reason for representing the insurrection through the female perspective. Voices of surviving women of the revolution have been silenced due to social stigma. As Neloufer De Mel (2001) claims, '[t]here silence was in the service of preserving notions of women's chastity and virginity" (p. 220) and JVP male leaders have gone to great lengths to deny any incidents of sexual violations of living female insurgents at the hands of the military. However, De Mel points out that the JVP was not restrained in making icons of women, who were killed, as with the case of Premavathie Manamperi, who was raped and killed by the military in 1971 (p. 220). The 'absence' of women in the revolution and the traditional Kōlam arena are juxtaposed and integrated into *Gandhabba*, who identifies herself with 'witches, whores, freaks and feminist', who have had their own struggle against patriarchy.

Naming the Performance: *My Sweet Rotten Heritage*

A traditional Kōlam performance is identified by the place, which distinguishes the tradition and its location and the name of the chief practitioner or *gurunnanse*. This is axiomatic of the significance of ancestry in the traditional practice. In the absence of ancestral roots to Kōlam, and in the context of the performance as a research component, I resolved to search for a title for my performance in the autoethnographic interpretation embodied in the dramatic text.

A grandmother who has been searching for her missing son for many years plays hide and seek with her grandchildren and fears that they too would be taken from her; a man sets off on a mission to save his race and religion, and trapping himself in his own conspiracy; two women return from their watery grave with a list of persons who have been disappeared since the time of the mythical king *Mahāsammata*; a mantis prays out of habit, and prays for survival; and a devil crosses the ocean in the hope of becoming a god. I see in the Kōlam arena, a space for resistant and reflection; a space where we collectively laugh at ourselves and celebrate our ‘small’ existence; and most importantly, it is a space where hope is kept alive by utopian ideologies of a better existence. *My Sweet Rotten Heritage* is an expression of the personal and the political, aiming at historical and cultural sensibilities that define my perceptions of being-in-this-world.

To conclude, this chapter provides an analysis of the field notes drawn from personal and external sources, grounding my presence in the narratives as personal experiences and socio-political views that I hope to share through my performance practice. Each narrative responds to one another, at times overlapping each other within the themes. Chapter 4 offers a description of the translation of the dramatic text into performance. An explanation of key performative and technical

elements will be given with attention to the shifts made between the traditional performance system and the para-traditional performance.

CHAPTER 4

Stepping into the Arena: Negotiating the shift from

Tradition to Para-tradition

In this chapter, I will outline the transition of the para-traditional dramatic text into performance, an evolution that took place predominantly over a three-month production process in Sri Lanka. This process is informed by the traditional Kōlam performance system and engages in a reflexive evaluation of the shift from the source system to a para-traditional performance. I look at the 'absence' and '(mis)representation' of the female or woman performer in the premodern and modern Kōlam arena, putting forth the claim for the presence of women as a vital intervention of the para-traditional arena. This will be followed by the rehearsal process of three main stages of *Heritance* – the prologue, masked acts and the conclusion – highlighting my interventions in making transgressions or acts of nonconformity from the shift from the traditional to the para-traditional. The production process will then extend into the design concepts, which includes masks, music, costumes, set and props, defining how these lay the grounds for a para-traditional interpretation of tradition.

Premodern Kōlam was performed under the guidance of a *gurunnanse*, who curated the event by bringing together apprentices as well as experienced dancers and drummers from his community. He owned the *Kōlam kuttama*, the collection of masks possibly inherited and expanded with his own interpretation of archetypes. It is also possible the mask makers interpreted and made masks, which were then presented to the *gurunnanse*. It was common for a mask to be assigned to a specific actor in the community, who earned a reputation for their nuanced embodiment of it.

I found alternate avenues to study the performance system, training in low-country dance, consulting with senior low country dancers, studying Kōlam texts, and viewing live urban performances and video recordings of Kōlam *madu*, and envisioning traditional performances through descriptions in literature and Sinhalese rituals of the low country tradition. The chosen actors were familiar with Kōlam to varying degrees, but most importantly, they met the required skills to perform the dramatic text. Each actor's individual performance technique also determined the casting. Although the cast of *Heritance*, including myself possessed a similar range of skills, the levels of experience in each of those skill categories varied.

Although the performers of *Heritance* were sourced from Sri Lanka, none had roots in the Kōlam tradition. Based on my cultural understanding of the traditional Kōlam community and data gathered from interviews with traditional practitioners, I can outline four fundamental reasons for working with performers outside the traditional Kōlam community. Firstly, where traditional knowledge is epistemologically hierarchised, situating the researcher as a secondary source of that knowledge. In a transdisciplinary context combining research, traditional performance knowledge, theatre and intercultural exchange, to name a few, the complexities of my performance project made it a culturally and ethically sensitive site for engaging with traditional artists. As a researcher relatively new to Kōlam performance, I found it inappropriate to invite veteran Kōlam practitioners, whose knowledge and ideologies of preservation I deeply respect, to perform in my experimental project. Secondly, the participation of traditional practitioners is not a requirement as the para-traditional exists parallel to, and not within, traditional and meta-traditional performance practices. Thirdly, traditional performers are accustomed to a long-term training process of mastering the dance, which they then apply to Kōlam over the

years. In the traditional practice, aspects of the interdisciplinary *dance-mime-mask-music* amalgamation are learnt under the guidance of a *gurunnanse*. But observing and understudying experienced dancers in the arena was also a method of instruction for novice performers.

Once trained, experienced Kōlam performers seldom rehearsed their acts prior to each performance. They primarily relied on their body-mind memory and years of practice to dance fixed steps or improvise with skilled drummers and other dancers. So, the preparation methods of an experienced traditional dancer can somewhat differ from conventional rehearsal methods in the theatre. Therefore, it was crucial to select performers whose rehearsal methods were compatible with mine. Fourthly, traditional Kōlam performers are low country dance practitioners, whereas my area of expertise is theatre. Although Kōlam is an interdisciplinary performance system, dance is the root source of the Kōlam system and thus privileges the dancer. My approach to the para-tradition, on the other hand, shifts Kōlam from an interdisciplinary performance to a transdisciplinary location. While not underestimating the dance or the dancer, my interpretation of the Kōlam system privileges theatre and all the components that contribute to the theatre experience.

Having access to the Sri Lankan theatre community, where actors with varying degrees of interdisciplinary skills, as well as some English proficiency, could be invited to work on the project was a bonus. The Sri Lankan Sinhalese diaspora in Melbourne engages in the form of inter-diasporic Sinhalese theatre, consisting of various groups of individuals ranging from experienced artists to amateur performers, and from children to the elderly, who collaborate on a voluntary basis for short-term theatre projects. These productions rarely reach an audience outside the diaspora. Several attempts to cast actors from this small theatre community proved to be unsuccessful, so I moved

the search to Sri Lanka. Although this had significant implications on the logistical and financial aspects of the production, there were also considerable benefits. For example, it allowed me to have the masks made by a carver of the Ambalangoda tradition - a collaboration that could not take place outside Sri Lanka. It also unlocked opportunities to collaborate with experienced performers, visual artists and a dedicated production team establishing a robust support mechanism for the project. This multidisciplinary collaboration was beneficial in providing greater scope for the exploration of dramatic text in performance.

In a para-traditional performance, it is not only the aesthetic and technical skills of the actors and the design team that are challenged in this process, but also their perceptions of traditional and experimental work. Further, it is not only the performer but also the spectator, who must be willing to receive these shifts from the traditional to the para-traditional. The actors and the design team of *Heritance* also contributed to making these shifts. At times, they made suggestions, either vocalising them or demonstrating them in a gesture, a *pahatarata* step, an improvisation with an instrument, an insertion of a Sinhala dialogue, or by sharing a visual concept. Some of these ideas were immediately used, while some became seeds, germinating into other ideas.

Female Absence and (mis)representation: Negotiating the shift from Traditional to Para-traditional

I have explained that the origin story of Kōlam is founded on a *dola-duka*, the insatiable craving of the expectant Queen Maenikpāla, which was the first and foremost indication for scholars and practitioners to believe it was performed as a pregnancy ritual before gradually transforming into a theatre

practice. In this sense, Kōlam was a healing ritual devised and performed by men to heal women of a 'longing' that was impossible to subdue and therefore, needed satiation. In the Introduction, I suggested a somewhat different interpretation of *dola-duka* and its bearing as a communal longing. However, having considered the origin story and its immediate bearing on women, there has been little said by previous scholars about the representation of women from a feminist perspective and the absence of female performers in the Kōlam arena. Existing scholarship has also not paid attention to cross-dressing – failing to problematise the (mis)representation of women in this patriarchal theatrical canon.

It must be said that no ontology or epistemology exists outside cultural, socio-political, religious and gender paradigms. Patriarchal dominance in a spiritual and social hierarchy governed by Buddha on the one hand and the king on the other, underpin the historical and cultural ideologies of gender. While it is necessary to consider the socio-political context, which engendered the Kōlam tradition, the ideologies that reinforced the 'absence' and (mis)interpretation of women can no longer remain unchallenged in a para-traditional performance. The moment a woman conceptualises and writes a Kōlam text, the moment her auto/ethnographic body becomes the point of contact for her ontological and epistemological perceptions, the performance has already begun its journey towards a gender-inclusive narrative. However, the patriarchal ideology that once shaped the premodern Kōlam arena is still present in my socio-political and cultural context, and it is by critically reflecting on these conditions, that a shift in the future of the female presence in Kōlam can be perceived

Some insight into patriarchal (mis)representations of women in the repertoire, is necessary to move this discussion forward. My analysis of prominent female masks in Kōlam belong to four

types – the whore, the hag, the mother and the virgin. There is a morally and sexually encoded patriarchal view that either rewards or punishes the woman for her actions within the narrative. For example, *Lenchina* and *Nonchi* are portrayed as licentious women; *Nonchi* being old is also the grotesque ‘hag’. In satirising the ‘whore’, sexual desires in women are ridiculed. *Lenchina* is a seductress, who possesses guiles (*māyam*), making her irresistible to unsuspecting males, while *Nonchi* being old, is grotesque in her sexual advances.

In *Manamē Katāva*⁴⁹, *Vaedi Raja* (King of the Vaedda tribe) desires the Princess, which initiates conflict between the Tribal King and the Prince. But the moral implications are borne entirely by the woman. After she is vilified and abandoned by *Vedi Raja*, she is further humiliated when the *Jackal* urinates in her mouth, and she finally succumbs to death. Baum (2003) claims that “the female body is conditioned to withstand the manifold violence of patriarchal culture” (p. 249). By choosing such narratives for the Kōlam arena, the artist demonstrates his inclination to establish patriarchal ideologies through his performance practice. This is substantiated by the Buddhist view of renouncing all desires to reach a higher spiritual status. The ‘virgin’ portrayed through supernatural masks are also praised in verse for their physical beauty. Paradoxically, while one is condemned and the other praised for chastity, both the ‘whore’ and ‘virgin’ are objectified through the male gaze. While the ‘hag’ is ridiculed for her sagging breast, the ‘mother’ is portrayed through women of

⁴⁹ Vedda (singular) or the Vedi people are a minority indigenous population of Sri Lanka. Here the band of thieves in the source Jataka narrative has been replaced by Veddhas. In *Maname Kathāva*, *Vedi Raja* (King of Veddhas) wishes to possess the Princess and in the ensuing combat between the men, the Princess hesitates to pass the sword to the Prince, and *Vedi Raja* taking advantage of this, slays the Prince. The Princess is later vilified for betraying her husband and abandoned by *Vedi Raja*.

higher social stature such as the Queen, who arrives at the Kōlam arena and is praised for her compassion as well as her physical aesthetics.

On the urban stage today, but less in the traditional arena where female performers are incorporated, women often do not wear a mask. Therefore, the interpretation of the mask as an identifiable type is removed and replaced by the performer's face that physicalises the characteristics of the mask. Based on this logic, women are allocated roles of young females such as *Lenchina*, *Puransina*, and *Suramba Valliya*, while *Nonchi* the old woman with sagging breasts and sexual gestures is perceived to be inappropriate for the female performer (Amarasekera, 2002a). There is another aspect that must be taken into account here, and that is, that all of the above mentioned 'types' of female representation are performed by men. So, while women are once made absent and (mis)represented through male ontological interpretations, she becomes twice absent and (mis)represented through the male form.

As the point of contact for the para-traditional is the source tradition, the absence and (mis)representation of women in the historical and present practices cannot be rewritten or unperformed in para-traditional Kōlam. Ontologically, it is not possible to interpret patriarchal ideologies that dominate my presence in the cosmos. What was possible within the scope and this research aimed to acknowledge this female absence and (mis)performance and to introduce the female through alternate narratives, while physically locating the female performer in the arena.

My resistance to the physical and metaphorical absence of women is demonstrated through female masks with agency and a resistance to sexualisation. *Gandhabba* and *Attamma* were written as individual personae, and not as supporting characters

to a male counterpart, as it so happens to be in the premodern repertoire. However, Baum claims that “contemporary attempts to claim the arena of female identity do not alter past manufacture or the form in which viewers accept it. Female presence does not infer male absence” (Baum, 2003, p. 29).

This is true of the female characters I bring into the arena. As I wrote the role of the Narrator, for instance, I was aware of the character’s strong historical male presence and how it has remained unchanged to date. Spectators acquainted with the Kōlam tradition may still perceive female performers as the ‘alter egos’ of the male actors, and as temporary replacements to the permanent presence of male actors. Both *Attamma* and *Gandhabba* project male presence through their narratives, whether it is in the cultural expectation of the female role as grandmother, or the patriarchal revolution of which the females were often victims of male-driven violence.

I attempted to construct characters with agency and voices that resisted or challenged these norms, making them more complex and incisive in their views, even within the oppressive patriarchal context. Within the metanarrative, male interpretations in the Kōlam canon are brought to attention when *Attamma* is resistant to being addressed in the traditional manner, and the Narrator declares that “It’s the first time in a Kōlam arena that a woman has been happy to be called Granny” (See Appendix A, p. 227). Instances of historical and continuing violations of the female body, and the perception of female presence as an ‘abnormality’ in the male ontology are alluded to when the Narrator asks *Gandhabba* to reveal her identity (See Appendix A, p.244-245).

The Narrator who takes on multiple voices of the Self and the Other, assumes that *Gandhabba* seeks a husband. When convinced otherwise, she expresses her relief by stating that “some of our male friends here may find it frightening enough to

be married to a woman with one head” (See Appendix A, p. 246). Not even the Narrator is free of male-centric views that have shaped her thinking and immediately spring forth as sexist witticism. In *Gandhabba Kōlama*, it is evident the women died in a man’s revolution and that violence continues to be inflicted on the female body. The ‘whore’ who was restrained in the premodern socio-political context is now “Che Guevara’s whore”, (See Appendix A, p. 249) who like the woman in the Manamē narrative, deserves to die for her actions. However, in *Heritance*, the interpretation of the woman is a reminder of the violence and a resistance to oppression, rather than an endorsement of it.

It was decided during the writing process that *Gandhabba* would be performed by a woman as the voice of the woman has not been sufficiently heard in post-insurrection and post-war Sri Lanka (See De Mel, 2001, pp. 218-227). I wanted to avoid the cliché where the female revolutionary is stereotyped through masculine gestures. At the same time, I tried to avoid gestures used in traditional Kōlam to embody male ideologies of the feminine. There is always a challenge in identifying gestures that are not defined by gender, specially when the actor is trained in traditional dance calling for the accentuation of femininity, and her culturally constructed body has been trained within gendered definitions. Therefore, I began to work with the gestures produced by the female actor, and then we looked for other versions of that same gesture. They had to be identifiable to the spectator but also points of departure from the objectified female character in the traditional arena.

Here, I can identify elements of the Brechtian theory of *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation-effect), which in this case, materialises in the effort to defamiliarise the female form from its traditional physical interpretation. “A-effect consists in turning [the] object... from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible into something peculiar, striking, and unexpected”

(Willett, 1978, pp. 143-144). In physicalising *Gandhabba*, the performer adopted a way of walking with a semi *mandiya*⁵⁰, or slightly bent knees, and gestures not conforming to the feminised (*lāsya*) expressions used in the interpretation of ‘virgins’ and seductresses. To establish *Gandhabba* as a character with agency and to be taken seriously, I had the Narrator initially refer to her as “specimen”, “lady” and “conjoined twins from Ceylon”. A similar initial interaction takes place between *Attamma* and the Narrator. But in both these instances, the character quickly establishes itself, not as a female body to be ‘read’ at first sight, but a voice to heard and a presence to be acknowledged. Both female characters were written with the expectation that the spectator engaged in the dialectic that takes place through the characters.

When asked for his views on women performing Kōlam, traditional practitioner Prasanna Ruapathilaka shared that,

Traditionally, men crossdressing in Kōlam is considered as no easy task. The dance is *lāsya*.⁵¹ He has to be dressed accordingly, with attention to hair or *pita varala*, earrings, the costumes, makeup, the buttocks are enhanced to acquire the form... these come naturally to a woman but take greater effort for a male performer... this practice also contributes to the identity of the performance tradition.... A man can perform a woman somehow, but it is doubtful if a woman can crossdress successfully in a male role; this is because of her form, her hip movement, the way she places the foot... which come to her naturally.... If she can overcome these

⁵⁰ *Mandiya* is the first foot position in low country dance. The feet are placed a foot-width apart with toes turned to either side, and the knees bent approximately at a 45-degree angle.

⁵¹ *Lāsya* is a ‘feminine’ and flowing rendition of the dance. Its opposite is *tāndava*, which is considered to express ‘masculine’ and ‘powerful’ qualities.

habits, then there should be no restrictions to perform. (P. Rupathilaka, personal communication, 31 January, 2015, translation my own).

I want to shift the focus now to cross-dressing and its implications in the traditional arena. As Lesley Ferris (1993) points out, the above assertion by Ruapthilaka,

Underscores a way of seeing women in performance.... [where one sees] only the "real" woman, who unfortunately always brings her "personal qualities" to the role.... [and is] blind to her creativity as an actress while simultaneously celebrating the creative powers of men whose universality as "man" gives them a prodigious, prolific inventiveness (p. 55)

"Cross-dressing in performance is riddled with dissension and ambiguity" (Ferris, 1993, p. 9), and when men cross-dressed, they performed to a patriarchal community and returned to their male identities when they left the arena (Ferris, 1993, p. 13). My argument is that in a para-traditional arena that re-evaluates how women should be represented, women instead of men alone should be allowed to cross-dress as a performance/political choice, rather than the norm. Such plasticity opens a more elaborate discourse with the potential for reconsidering gender hierarchies in the para-traditional arena. However, within the limitation of five characters written into the dramatic text, combined with the limited resource of actors available for the performance, I could only explore the potential of women performers cross-dressing in the present performance. I view this as a missed opportunity to further establish the female presence. Having said that, cross-dressing a male performer as *Attamma* was a conscious effort to interpret a non-sexualised female through the male body.

Baum (2003) asks the reader to accept the female absence in the theatre to configure new ways of thinking about her. To take an analogy from photography, it is in the negative that the positive exists, and this idea can also be extended to the concept of para-tradition. On the other hand, the presence of a female Narrator is a powerful statement on its own and challenges the absence of women thus far. In the Ambalangoda Wijesuriya family, the two daughters train performers and participate in the Kōlam *maduwa*, with one of the sisters cross-dressing as *Ārachchi Kōlama* (J. M. Wijesuriya, personal communication, 26 December, 2014). *Ārachchi* is the village headman, often played by a male performer with a sturdy physique. J. M. Wijesuriya claimed that her sister Kanchana is has a “masculine build”, and is therefore well-suited for the role. Once again, this characterisation is viewed through patriarchal ideologies of the male form. In the same arena, however, the Narrator, who initiates all activities, continues to be played by a male actor. There appears to be some reluctance towards changing this tradition, possibly the fear of losing their grip on the tradition they are endeavouring to preserve. Therefore, the woman performer’s embodiment of the Narrator is an instance where *Heritance* asserts a clear distinction in the shift from traditional to para-traditional ideologies.

Language: Negotiating the shift from Tradition to Para-tradition

I have stated in Chapter 2 that the dramatic text was written in English due to the location of the research in Australia and even though this linguistic intervention was not required in the shift from tradition to para-tradition, writing Kōlam in English set the grounds for critical reflection on writing a Kōlam text for a multicultural audience. Then, as the text translated to speech,

language proved to be an additional challenge in the performance.

In the classifications of Sinhala and English language theatres of Sri Lanka, the Sinhala theatre enjoys broader participation in its artist and audience base and is recognised, although insufficiently, by the state. On the other hand, the English language theatre has been centred in Colombo, with a higher proportion of its audience comprising the urban middle and upper-middle classes. Involvement in the Sri Lankan 'English theatre' during my early years in the field, soon led to disenchantment owing to its mainstream goals and class representation, which in turn drew me to the Sinhala theatre, where I had been actively engaged for over a decade. During my inquiries into the 'English speaking' actor community, I learnt that there was a shortage of actors, who were well versed in traditional dance. This is also an indication of Sri Lanka's urban English speaking community being inclined towards the cultural identity of the West while seeing the local performing arts from a 'touristic' point of view. Comparatively, I found that actors in the Sinhala theatre, acquainted with or possessing considerable knowledge in traditional dance and ritual practices, could add more value to *Heritance* through their familiarity with these genres.

The challenge was to identify a handful of bilingual actors from among this cohort. In this context, I succeeded in finding male actors who met the criteria, but took longer to identify suitable female actors. I had hoped to find female actors, who also played traditional drums, which is usually a male-centric practice. But the few female traditional dancers, who also played the drums, possessed little or no experience in acting and/or the minimal language skills to perform the play within the given time frame. Four months before the rehearsal process, I had identified four male actors, including a dancer/musician conversant in both Sri

Lankan traditional music and Western music. However, it was only on arriving in Sri Lanka that a female actor could be auditioned and selected.

The text was initially read using a Skype communication between myself in Melbourne and the actors in Colombo. Their first language of performance had thus far been Sinhala, so some not only had the vocabulary and the pronunciation to master, but also had the syntactic complexities to comprehend and remember. At the initial stages of reading, they would playfully distort certain English words or phrases into Sinhala homophones. However, beneath this humour were spirited and responsible performers, who were negotiating linguistic boundaries and exploring the performability of the text. Towards the final stage of the reading process, I had allocated specific *masks* to the actors so that the exercise could be moved forward with a focus on the actor in each respective character.

Performing the Mask: Negotiating the shift from Tradition to Para-tradition

While there is substantial literature describing the mask making process and the appearance of traditional Kōlam masks, little attention has been given to performing these masks in the context of characterisation and techniques were used by traditional practitioners to express their complexities. This is not uncommon in a performance culture relying predominantly on the oral tradition. In light of this research and from a theatre practitioner's point of view, I will discuss some important concepts used in mask improvisation and the interpretation of the masks through *pahatarata* dance. Negotiations in the shift from the traditional to the para-traditional will be the overall focus here.

Training in low country dance is the foundation of the Kōlam performer, and while Sinhalese mask traditions do not impart systematic coaching techniques, it can be purported that in generations of practice, novices received instructions from their *gurunnanse*, while regularly observing experienced players in the arena. Also, according to the traditional practitioners (L. H. Kularatna, personal communication, 14 December, 2015; P. Rupathilaka 31 January, 2015; personal communication, J. M. Wijesuriya, personal communication 26 December, 2015), individuals in the village community who had the physical appearance to portray specific characters were also given the opportunity to learn the role and participate in the Kōlam *maduwa*⁵².

Although I have been trained in a few Kōlam masks by low-country dancers, my early training in masks has been predominantly based on Western techniques, which I was invariably inclined to use in the rehearsals of *Heritance*. Parallel to rehearsals, the designs of the para-traditional Kōlam masks (also Character Masks from here onwards) were developed, carved and painted, which meant they were ready for use no more than a month prior to the final performance. So, it was vital to explore alternate ways of preparing the actors for their masked performances. I avoided using existing Kōlam masks in rehearsals, as these were already perceived with fixed characterisation. Instead, we drew inspiration from the style and

⁵² According to J. M. Wijesuriya of the Ambalangoda Ariyapala ancestry, her father Ariyapala Gurunnanse would describe the act and give a structure of the dialogue. Then in rehearsal the dancer having learnt fixed verse and dance sequences, would improvise dialogues. She found that with young performers today, improvisation was less successful and more unpredictable due to lack of experience. At times this led to minor conflicts in the group (Personal communication, 26 December, 2014).

techniques used to physicalise existing masks, and contextualised these when devising the para-traditional masks. Improvisation was done in three stages, first working with Neutral Masks, then with Rudimentary Character Masks and finally arriving at Character Masks or para-traditional Kōlam masks.

Neutral Mask exercises were a tool for “sensitising” the actor to their bodies, helping them “discover idiosyncrasies in personal and habitual movement patterns, so they could be employed or eliminated in developing characterisation” (Eldredge, 1996, p. 22). Identifying these habits was also significant to my evaluation of how these bodies would “carry” or assimilate with Character Masks. John Wright commenting on Lecoq’s work states that one of the actor’s initial discoveries in the neutral mask is that “the same mask looks so different on each person.... [and that] It is not the mask that is different but the individual the mask reveals” (Yarrow & Chamberlain, 2002, p. 75).

Much of this work involved the actors observing each other and reading into the asymmetrical bodies and movement ‘playing against’ the symmetrical Neutral Masks (Eldredge, 1996, p. 52). The actors were encouraged to coordinate breath with corporeal expression and to conduct ‘bodyscans’ on themselves (See Eldredge, 1996, pp. 53 - 55). Although this was only a brief encounter with Neutral Masks, it was the first step into stimulating psychophysical awareness, which would be beneficial when Character Masks are introduced later.

Heritance relies heavily on the text and therein one could find the masks whose bodies the actor must ‘inhabit’. Given the timeframe, we had to work quickly and efficiently, not losing sight of the Kōlam arena where all the characters are situated. At first, due to the linguistic challenges with which the actors grappled, I

did not want them simultaneously attempting maskwork. Only when the actors appeared less restrained by the language did I introduced Rudimentary Character Masks as extensions of the Neutral Mask. Eldredge (1996) works with Rudimentary Character Masks before entering Character Masks. These are extensions of the Neutral Mask with universal expressions signifying various emotions. Elements of *rasa theory* in the *Natya Shastra* inspire these various states and work as a guide to creating characters, “[n]ot from emotion, but from action” (Eldredge, 1996, p. 86). I borrowed from this thought, but also drew from the concept of Larval Masks, which are halfway into becoming Character Masks. By identifying the most significant facial feature of the new Kōlam masks, I enlarged those elements to create Rudimentary Character Masks⁵³.

Unlike the Neutral Mask that has no story, “no prior knowledge of the world” (Yarrow & Chamberlain, 2002, p. 76), the Rudimentary Character Masks have the stories beginning to form through a specific facial feature requiring the most attention in playing that character. The focus then, was to work with the text and the emphasised facial feature, which could be either expressing an emotional state, as well as a technical aspect such as the position of the eyes requiring the actor to direct their gaze at a specific angle. For example, *Attamma* was a mask with a wide toothless smile; *Diyasēna* was a half mask that allowed the actor to freely move his jaw; Mantis had the eye of the mask positioned higher up on the forehead of the mask above the actor’s eye-level; *Læli* wore a full, elongated mask with round eyes and a rectangular opening for the mouth; two full-masks were attached to approximate the mask of *Gandhabba*. The aim was to experiment and find these masks, to embody their

⁵³ I use this term in place of Eldredge’s Beginning Character Masks, as I designed them specifically with the Kōlam Character Masks in mind.

nuances, and apply them to the act. At this stage, I gave instructions and stood back to observe the actors at work; side coaching and making suggestions when necessary, but also allowing them to work viscerally⁵⁴. They had to retain the *pahatarata* form, stylised gestures and heightened vocal expression, but also find their own physical expression in the mask. When these exaggerated facial features lead the mask, I could see the emergence of a para-traditional repertoire, and this exercise also informed the finetuning of Character Mask designs before the drawings reached the mask-maker⁵⁵.

When the para-traditional Kōlam masks arrived at the rehearsal space from the workshop, the actors were able to make a total commitment to the character. The physical and emotional journey of the mask is both the challenge and the inspiration the actors must engage with, to be truthful in the mask. First, they had to accept the wooden masks as solid, unpliable objects that required time to put on. Their weight, texture and technical mechanisms differed from the cardboard Rudimentary Masks with which they had been working previously. The challenge now was to understand both the limitations and new possibilities of the para-traditional mask. At first, several technical adjustments had to be made to the transformational mask of *Læli Kōlama* to enhance its performability. *Diyasēna*'s movable jaw was another aspect the actor had to incorporate into his mask work. The proportions of the Mantis mask also required the actor to adjust to its shape and size by enlarging his physicalisation. It was only when the actors began to accept these masks that the masks

⁵⁴ Working in warm, humid conditions meant these cardboard masks had to be replaced often. However, they were light and easy to put on and remove and therefore, flexible to use in rehearsals.

⁵⁵ Using wood as the medium for the masks limited the adjustments that could be made once the carving was complete.

began to accept the actor. Initially, I had the actors observe each other and comment, so they could start to recognise the ambiguities sculpted into the masks, and what little or more movement is needed for the mask to reveal its many states.

I now want to draw attention to the character that never dons a mask in the Kōlam arena⁵⁶. As the mediator between the characters and the audience or the Kōlam world and the mundane world, the Narrator in the traditional arena has the task of repeating or clarifying the speech of masked characters. This was necessary especially with masks with a closed mouth. However, the extent of spoken text in *Heritance* had a significant impact on the design of the masks allowing little repetition to aid verbal clarity. Compared to the temporally relaxed nature of an all-night traditional performance, the shorter duration of *Heritance* demanded that the momentum of the performance be managed economically. This was another factor in calling for less repetition. However, in some instances, I incorporated the style of repetition as a characteristic of speech and allowed a rhythmic pattern to develop in the exchange of dialogues. The absence of a mask on the Narrator served another purpose in the context of *Heritance* – that is in its relevance to performative autoethnography. Presenting the Self as the researcher while representing the arena as a female Narrator, heightened the autoethnographic presence of the self in the performance context. However, the Narrator is also a character, who switches between the storyteller and the authority in the arena. At times she is as ignorant as the spectator, who is witnessing the performance for the first time. Not dissimilar to the traditional interpretation of the character, the Narrator in *Heritance* assumes a realistic acting style bordering on stylisation.

⁵⁶ The only other unmasked character in the traditional Kōlam is *Sabapati Kōlama*, often played by two performers, and is a later addition inspired by the Nādagam tradition.

Stylisation is heightened in the opening act and where the Narrator steps into the world of the masked character, such as the moment when *Diyasēna* re-enacts the night of divine intervention, or Mantis recounts his historical legacy of survival. The aim was to make the Narrator's constant movement between the narrative and the metanarrative, and the performance and the metaperformance, flow effortlessly from one moment to the next. Of course, it is not necessary that the para-traditional *Narrator* should be an autoethnographic presence. But in this instance, I was able to appear in the first person and make allusions to the performance in its research context (See Appendix A, p. 235-234), questioning my eligibility as a Kōlam practitioner. So, the researcher performing the Narrator's role as Self, directly applies to performative autoethnography, which I believe is heightened by the unmasked face.

Kōlam masks 'come into being' through the aesthetics of low-country dance, and the rhythm of a mask is embodied in the drum score. As M. H. Goonatilleka (1995) states, these masks are "fully meaningful in the dynamic context of the dance and the dance drama" (p. 110). In other words, when dance and its stylistic actions are removed from the mask, it is no longer a Kōlam performance, but a performance that has adopted a Kōlam mask. So, in establishing the para-traditional masks within the Kōlam performance system, the improvisation of masks took their stylistic cues from *pahatarata* dance.

Dance sequences of traditional Kōlam were choreographed by expert dancers with extensive knowledge in the form and performance experience in Sinhalese *yak-tovil* exorcism and healing rituals. Bera pada or drum beats always accompany the dance of a masked character. The steps or *adi* of a Kōlam

character often include *gaman tāla*, which is a rhythmic walk that incorporates gestures and pauses in a repetitive sequence and an *irattiya*, which is an arrangement of steps and corresponding hand movements⁵⁷. Between Bentara, Ambalangoda and Matara, for instance, there are distinctions in the form that can be recognised through various characteristics, including the placing of the foot, the positioning of the hand, the arranging of steps and the overall aesthetics and techniques of the form. However, in *Heritance*, I made no effort to conform to a specific school in style. The dancers had received their training from various sources, and in the context of para-traditional practice, one of the aims is to open the Kōlam arena to a mix of regional *pahatarata* traditions and a wide range of performers with varied skill levels in low-country dance.

As an extension of my *pahatarata* training and my research interest in Kōlam, I had learnt to perform several Kōlam characters and was familiar with the fixed drum sequences that accompanied the rhythmic walk and actions of several masks commonly performed today. The actors too were acquainted with dance sequences and the physicalisation of several traditional archetypes, and this provided a good starting point for physicalising the para-traditional masks. One actor, in particular, had extensive knowledge of classical dance and drumming and was incorporated into the choreographic component. My approach was to identify compelling and amusing ways of expressing the masks through dance. I was less concerned with the simplicity or complexity of the dance sequences and was more interested in how the dance helped the character to tell their stories, and how these expressions contributed to making theatre in the arena.

⁵⁷ There are exceptions to this. Some characters do not dance the *irattiya*.

The drum was incorporated in improvisation to explore and establish specific rhythmic movement patterns, such as the stylised walk and various gestures, to punctuate speech or a physical reaction and to choreograph the dance sequences of characters. Harmonising the body with the drum brings physical clarity and sets the rhythm and tempo of the character.

I will give a brief analysis of the psychophysical and emotional expressivity the actors were encouraged to discover in their mask. The children on the old woman's back are both her physical and metaphysical burden, as well as her emotional reprieve. On the other hand, she is emotionally weighed down by ageing, anxiety and the loss of her son, but becomes blithely animated when it's time to tell a story or play a game of hide-and-seek. She embodies both culturally specific yet universally readable gestures and speech patterns. These psychophysical dynamics must be played through the 'fixed' smile on the mask, the voice of the mask, the stylised movement and the music score accompanying the character. The actor's interaction with the puppets and the Narrator define her archetypal presence in the social and cultural context. The mask relies on stylisation for its survival. In the absence of human facial expressions, the actor must enlarge a sigh or a turn of the head; indicate realisation or recognition with a second's pause before a reaction, and incorporate the audience into her story with a glance or an *aside*.

Sears A. Eldredge (1996) states that "[i]f the mask is the text, then the counter mask is the subtext" (p. 99), and that "[d]ealing with these complementary or contradictory 'faces' promotes a tension – both internal and external – for the character, for the audience and for the actor as well" (p. 99). While *Attamma's* wide, toothless smile is instantly amiable, *she* continues to smile as she shares her sympathy for the neighbour's son, snidely

disapproves of her daughter-in-law's acting career, fears for the safety of her grandchildren and grieves for her missing son. The mask/countermask moves between many emotional and complex states. Eldredge (1996) explains that the countermask introduces ambiguity to a character with "the possibility of a private inner life that is different from the face that registers harmony with the visible mask" (p. 102). It is worth reminding that para-traditional masks draw from or aimed to move as an extension of traditional archetypes. So, *Attamma Kōlama* was to explore the female Kōlam character with non-sexualised traits, evolving from the grotesque old woman *Nonchi*, of the traditional repertoire. The para-traditional old woman demands the actor readdress the psychophysical complexities of performing the old woman mask, and calls on the audience to reconsider the ambiguities of both old and new Kōlam masks from a different point of view.

A double mask, such as that of *Gandhabba*, does not exist in the traditional repertoire, which means performance techniques used for this mask differ from the extent masks. This required precision of movement and coordination of the voices belonging to each *Gandhabba*. The analogy for this is two people with two sets of oars taking alternate turns at paddling a canoe towards the shore. The left and right of the actor's body belonged to the two women, and this definition had to be physicalised to match their characteristics. From *pahatarata* gestures, we borrowed the pincer fingers mudra⁵⁸ for the mask on the right and a clenched

⁵⁸ The thumb and the index finger touch as the other fingers are held straight. This *mudra* or gesture known as Vitarka Mudra (the gesture of discussion) or Vyākhyāna mudrā (gesture of explanation), is recurrent in Buddhist and Hindu murals and sculpture (See Bunce, 2005). Although the gesture may have originated from religious iconography, the straight fingers are held slightly apart in the *pahatarata* mudra which adds to the aesthetics of the hand movement.

fist either on the hip or by the side for the mask on the left. The actor walked and stood with her knees bent and feet angled out maintaining a slight *mændiya*. I wanted the body to have visible asymmetrical lines and signs of physical damage, so we incorporated a slight limp to her walk. The dance sequence was choreographed with a *ves pæma*⁵⁹ (revelation of masks) to evoke mystery and gestures signalling her drenched attire.

Ves pæma is traditionally performed in *Raskasa* dances. To put it in the context of Bharata Muni's *rasa* theory, the expected effect is to evoke *bhayanaka rasa* (fear) and *adbhuta rasa* (awe) in the spectator. The revelation is a dramatic moment held in suspension. It is, therefore, not customary for the donning of a traditional mask to be carried out in full view of the audience. However, I use this moment to make a political statement, turning the transition of *Læli Kōlama* to *Garā*, into a rite of passage that takes place in the arena. The performer stands to face the *ves atta*⁶⁰ with his back to the spectators. In the form of a ceremony, female performers assist *Læli Kōlama* by opening the outer mask and attaching the *pita varala*⁶¹. Here, female participation is a conscious decision to confront the absence of the woman in ritual duties. The traditional *ves pæma* then follows this sequence.

⁵⁹ *Ves paema* is the dance sequence that reveals or unveils the mask. The masked character (often a demon) turns its back to the audience and twists around to either side revealing the mask to the audience.

⁶⁰ *Ves atta* is the partition that separates the *sabaya* (arena) from the *andum maduwa* (costume hut). It is from behind the *ves atta* that performers appear in their mask (See M. H. Goonatilleka, 2007, p. 87).

⁶¹ *Pita varala* is made of trails of *gok kola* or young coconut fronds that are attached to the masks to resemble long hair. *Gok* crafts are used in the set, prop and costumes of *Kōlam* and Sinhalese rituals and ceremonial rites. The ephemeral nature of this material means each traditional performance requires a fresh set constructions and prop making, which is part of the preparation process leading to the performance.

Although *Mantis* is an animal mask, the character is an allegory for a human archetype. This is not dissimilar in concept to Commedia masks with animal motifs that Lecoq designed with Sartori, such as a cat-like Arlecchino and El Capitano, who embodies the characteristics of a cockerel (Yarrow & Chamberlain, 2002, p. 79). However, instead of a human mask with animal qualities, *Mantis* is an animal mask with human attributes. In the premodern arena, animal masks were dance acts or non-speaking characters in full-length narratives. So, *Mantis* enters a new genre of allegorical characters in the Kōlam repertoire. We studied images and video footage of the creature to decode the physicalisation of the mask. What is stimulating about working within the *pahatarata* form is that there is a complete movement system to tap into when interpreting masks. We identified several iconographic gestures and postures with explicit and implicit cultural and religious meanings expressed through the praying hands, whether it be a traditional greeting, an ostentatious genuflection, reverence, habitual subservience, or a plea for mercy. The anthropomorphic nature of the mask also permitted extensive use of physical action that fluctuated between animal and human gestures.

Diyasēna Kōlama is an allegory of Sinhalese Buddhist neo-nationalist bravado visibly present in today's socio-political context. Numerous references inspired the character, extending from historical to recent post-war political and religious figures. *Diyasēna Kōlama* is also recognisable as the boastful bully with a childish temperament. The mask shifts between anxiety and self-assured aggression, naiveté and inflated arrogance. The movable mouth with exposed teeth and asymmetrical pupils contribute to the constant 'movement' of the mask. Unruly hair and thick brows add to its heightened energy and the conflict it embodied, both externally and internally, was brought into the

physicalisation. *Diyasēna* is both mask and countermask – the mask is aggressive and defensive, while the countermask hinges on his fears and childlike ingenuities. He is a genius but not a clever one, and the caricature is a reminder that behind such ludicrousness and this ‘comic’ aggression in the real world there lurks real danger.

All five para-traditional masks are loud, energetic and quick on their feet. They break into song and dance, interact with the audience and are unafraid to reveal themselves to us. There is a common element of mischief that is maintained in the physicalisation, and the vocalisation is paused only where the text calls for a moment of sobriety. It is in creating a para-traditional repertoire and fitting together the constituents of the Kōlam performance system, that one begins to experience at first hand, the level of discipline and perseverance required to compose an entire repertoire. In other words, in ‘doing’ para-traditional Kōlam, one develops a deeper appreciation for the aesthetic, technical and philosophical genius of traditional Kōlam.

Prologue: Negotiating the shift from Tradition to Para-tradition

Heritance is composed of three main segments: the prologue, the mask acts and the closing ceremony. I will proceed to describe how the para-traditional performance was shaped, defining instances where a noteworthy shift has taken place in the transition from tradition to para-tradition. In the traditional *Poorva-rangaya* or the prologue, where ceremonial rites are observed, *yahan dækma* is danced in favour of the principal deities, and is a sacred act lasting at least an hour or longer. Danced collectively, often by all who participate in the arena on

the night, this segment also serves as a warm-up for the performers and offers an opportunity to demonstrate their skills. As they dance to delight the gods, their human spectators are invariably entertained. After that, the Narrator accompanied by the musicians and the chorus sing the *Kōlam Upatha* (origin).

My interpretation of the prologue was based on representation rather than replication. Although the duration of a para-traditional arena is not limited and can vary according to the repertoire and narrative content, its aim is also to recognise practical and flexible approaches to performing Kōlam in today's socio-economic context. I also propose that in para-traditional Kōlam practice, resources are economised at every possible stage of performance making. Actors must have the capacity to perform several masks if necessary, and understudy each other to avoid fixity in casting within a group. A minimalist cast also meant that the actors were themselves the musicians and the chorus, leaving the arena only to don a mask and return as a *Kōlama*.

The prologue symbolically represents the traditional ceremony and introduces the cultural, historical and religious context of the performance to the audience. So in this context, it was also necessary to facilitate the spectator's transition from the outside world into the Kōlam world. Instead of the customary siren alerting the audience to the commencement of the performance, the conch, which is a ceremonial instrument in Sinhalese ritual, was sounded. The spectator hears the performers approaching the arena from the ring of brass *silambu* worn on their ankles. While the musicians casually tune their instruments, others light incense and lamps at the altars, and the audience is given a moment to adjust to the atmosphere of the arena. In place of shloka, the triple gem is acknowledged in Sinhala verses which are often chanted at rituals. The Narrator and the Ensemble introduce Kōlam, making references to the cosmos, the samsara, and the seen and unseen "umbilical cords" that keep

its living beings connected one another. This segment is sung to the audience, revealing the ontology upon which the Kōlam narrative is built.

Yahan dækma was compressed to ten minutes, and the ‘Origin of Kōlam’ that is traditionally sung by the Narrator accompanied by the chorus was converted to an ensemble performance that incorporates storytelling, song and dance. This is also the first instance that the music shifts from traditional to fusion and the atmosphere of the arena transforms from ‘sacred’ to ‘secular’. Another intervention that deviates from the traditional narrative is the use of the “*Kōlam pettiya*”⁶², to signal the historical and present state of the Kōlam practice, setting the scene for the introduction of “new faces”. Overall, the Prologue serves as a mechanism for setting a historical, cultural, religious and mythological backdrop for the performance, while introducing the para-traditional arena as a permitted space for reinterpreting traditional Kōlam.

Epilogue: Negotiating the shift from Tradition to Para-tradition

A traditional arena would conclude with a *Garā* Yakuma or the devil dance of *Garā* which is common practice in low-country rituals. This is followed by a drum recital known as *Pin Bera*. *Heritance* incorporates *Garā* Yakuma into the narrative through the character of *Læli Kōlama* which is an interpretation that differs from the act of *Garā* that is brought in as a separate segment in the traditional arena. Here the performer adopts the traditional dance sequence as I have explained earlier in this

⁶² Although “pettiya” connotes a box, *Kōlam pettiya* is large chests used by traditional practitioners to store their masks. This concept was used symbolically, and several traditional masks are produced from the box to dramatize the narrative.

chapter. While *aile pædīma* or swaying on the *aile* evokes the canon, it is incorporated into *Heritance* as a political expression for empowering the demon.

In the context of *Heritance*, *Garā Yaka* emerges through *Læli Kōlama*, or was always embodied in *Læli Kōlama*, and can therefore, be interpreted through the narratives of both characters, and as the meeting point of the traditional and para-traditional arenas. Symbolically, this narrative underscores the visible and invisible ‘umbilical cords’ that connect the past to the present. I return to its source using the verses of *Keela Garā* in the *Maha Garā Maduva* ritual. Although Kōlam texts contain verses written to *Garā yaka*, these portray the demon’s negative characteristics. In the context of *Heritance*, the celebratory verses from the said ritual were more compatible with the narrative.

The *Pin Bera* recital is performed at the conclusion of a Kōlam performance conveying gratitude to the three refuges and offering merit to deities, teachers and parents of the performers. From a theatrical perspective, *Pin Bera* functions as the epilogue, by returning the hyperenergetic climax of the *Garā Yakuma* to an audio-visual equilibrium. *Magul Bera* in the prologue and *Pin Bera* at the conclusion also mark the completion of a cycle in the journey of the Kōlam arena.

Kōlam Kuttama: Negotiating the Shift from Tradition to Para-tradition

Traditionally, a *Kōlam kuttama* is the set the masks used in Kōlam performance. During the three-month production process of *Heritance*, it was necessary to have the conceptualised mask designs developed, the masks carved, fitted and alterations made. Carved masks were moved back and forth from the

rehearsal space, the mask maker's workshop and the artists' studio where modifications, painting and final touches were executed. Ideas for mask designs emerged while writing the dramatic text. Using images and technical descriptions of Kōlam masks (See Benthara, 2015; Lucas, 1958) each para-traditional mask was compiled as a collage, taking facial features from various existing masks. Kōlam masks have distinct characteristics setting them apart from the masks of other cultures, and this exercise of collaging was done to ensure the iconography of traditional masks was retained in the para-traditional Kōlam kuttama. Where I was unable to locate facial features or a specific expression, I referred to photographs of human faces and expressions, which were then transposed onto the mask. These elements were assimilated into drawings which were developed over several months, including the first four weeks of the rehearsal process.

I will briefly illustrate the mask-making process using the mask of *Læli Kōlama*. While the masks of *Heritance* follow traditional motifs and iconography, the characters are not a repetition of the existing repertoire. On considering both the past and present contexts of traditional masks, it was decided that some nonconformities from traditional designs must be permitted in order to signify an aesthetic and functional evolution between then and now. For example, all para-traditional masks were designed and carved with an open mouth facilitating the performability of the dramatic text. An instance illustrating a deviation from the scheme of traditional design is the mask of *Læli Kōlama*. I had envisioned the transition of *Læli Kōlama* to *Garā yaka* in the final act as a ritualistic passage from one state of being to another. However, both *Læli* and *Garā* are embodied in each other and replacing one mask with the other would connote a switch of identity, rather than the emergence of a suppressed persona. The *transformation mask*, which

incorporates a mechanism where the outer mask opens to reveal a second mask within, is a concept commonly found in Native American masks of the northwest coast and Alaska (Kleiner, 2015, pp. 1095-1096). It is, however, not a type that is encountered in Sinhalese masks. There are technical complexities in a transformation mask, such as its size, weight, visibility for the performer, voice projection and the performability of the rigorous *Garā* dance in an opened mask following the transformation. This is where working with the visual artists and the mask maker proved to be productive. The entire traditional *Garā* mask with three hoods of cobras at its crown was carved to the measurement of the source mask and fitted within the newly designed *Lāli* mask. *Karna-patra* or the circular earpieces of the demon were painted into the inner walls of the two opening panels of the outer mask (See Appendix B, p. 267).

Music: Negotiating the Shift from Tradition to Para-tradition

The musical score of a Kōlam character is composed of four principal components – *padaya* or drum sequence, *thānama* which is the melody of *kota kavi* sung by the Narrator and the Chorus to invite masked characters to the arena, *diga kavi* (long verses) sung by the characters and *irattiya* which is the drum sequence that accompanies the long verses (M. H. Goonatilleka, 2007). Kōlam melodies and drum sequences appear to have been influenced by low-country rituals. On the other hand, premodern practitioners borrowed from genres introduced to the Island by migrants and colonists. For example, the melody of the *Karapita Kōlama*, where the Dutch wife dances with her husband upon her shoulders, is inspired by *kaffrigna* music of African (Kaffirs) ancestry. Nādagam is another music genre that manifests in the Kōlam score.

All melodies were, however, played on the *horanāva*, interpreting identity in Kōlam. However, the *horanāva*, which is a Sinhalese reed instrument not dissimilar to the Oboe, has a high penetrating sound intended to be heard from a distance. Although the *horanāva* is used in *Heritance*, I also wanted to incorporate the classical guitar, an instrument that was both versatile and with which I was familiar. This was indeed, a departure from the sounds heard in a Kōlam arena, and invariably brought a western characteristic to the music. Because the guitar in this instance has the opposite effect of a *horanāva* playing other genres, I attempted to introduce a balance by retaining traditional melodies or contextually varying these melodies throughout the music score. My preference to use various non-electronic instruments in previous performance pieces, also had an influence on *Heritance*. In this light, a variety of small instruments were used in the sound score with the principal instruments being the *yak bera*, *horanāva*, and the guitar. A list of all instruments used has been included in the (See Appendix B, p. 284).

The music of *Heritance* was based on or extended from Kōlam and ritual melodies. For the musician and I, this was an exercise of many negotiations between traditional and fusion elements, while expressing meanings in the context of each segment and each character in *Heritance*. The *Introduction to Kōlam* conforms to a traditional melody as this establishes the source genre of music before moving onto “The Origin Myth” which is an entirely new melody underscored by a traditional *tānama* (sung in variations of *na* sound). The aim was to use the music to define each character and its context. So, the expression of each melody was carefully thought through, and at times different genres were fused with the traditional to contextualise the text.

Costume Design: Negotiating the Shift from Tradition to Para-tradition

Costuming in the traditional arena ranged from the everyday attire of the period for human characters to elaborate and intricately worked pieces for both humans of high status and supernatural characters. *Rakshasa* demon costumes were made of contrasting colours, with a layered *ina hædaya* or skirt-like piece with frills to enlarge the character's presence and movement visually. By observing a fully costumed traditional Kōlam performer, one can see the colours, shapes, textures and detail in the costume are an extension or an echo of the mask. So, the first rule was that the masks and the costumes corresponded with each other. References of existing costumes, photographs relating to each character and my own sketches were shared with the costume designer. Then, a list was made with contextual and aesthetic elements that would inform the costumes and correspond with the new masks.

Similar to the mask designs, my aim with the costumes was to illustrate a passage between the traditional and para-traditional without conforming to textbook representations of the past. Based on the white sarong, white long-sleeved baniyan and red *pachchavadama*⁶³ that is worn as a general costume in the low-country ritual, a similar grouping of attire was chosen for the Narrator and Ensemble. However, I opted for grey as a neutral thematic colour, while vivid colours were incorporated to match the para-traditional masks. The *pachchavadama*, as well as borders and frills, were used across the range of costumes to resonate traditional motifs.

⁶³ *Pachchavadama* is a long piece of (usually red) fabric wrapped around the torso and the waist of the dancer which serves as both lumbar support and as a decorative piece of costume.

Cultural and political motifs such as the traditional Kandyan jacket with a *manthe*⁶⁴, paired with a sarong worn over striped shorts in the colours of the American flag composed the costume of *Diyasēna*. Red dominated the *Gandhabba* costume, resonating political themes and the presence of blood in its diverse manifestation. *Attamma Kōlama* was a familiar archetype, whose costume was drawn directly from the present socio-cultural context. However, the technical complications of attaching the puppets to the costume required experimentation and numerous trials. The anthropomorphic Mantis was inspired by various images of the insect and its distinct segmented physiological form and colouration. Interpreting the Sri Lankan asylum seeker, *Læli Kōlama* was dressed in an orange 'life jacket' and large pants, with the traditional *pachchavadama* around the waist. However, the colours of the costume resonate the inner mask of *Garā Yaka*, which come into harmony when the mask is revealed. Consistent with the principles of economy in the para-traditional arena, we attempted to retain a piece of clothing worn by the Ensemble, over which the costume of masked characters could be layered.

While costumes are an illustration of a meeting point between the traditional and para-traditional arenas, I was aware that specific cultural and historical motifs might not consistently signify expected meanings to a multicultural audience. In such instances, I worked with the assumption that the spectator would differentiate between culturally specific and universal symbols in an intercultural negotiation of meaning-making.

⁶⁴ The frilled collar that is iconographic of aristocratic attire in the Kandyan period. This was combined with the Kandyan jacket to resonate the political significance of the attire and its historical associations with the Kandyan Buddhist aristocracy and modern-day socio-political connotations of this traditional attire.

Set Design: Negotiating the Shift from Tradition to Para-tradition

When the Kōlam arena is moved from an outdoor space into a building with fixed seating, perceptions of spatial politics shift for both the spectator and the performer. In ritual performances and traditional Kōlam, the ceremony is drawn out in order to allow the spectators to arrive gradually; mingle; drink tea and chew betel leaf; take in the sound of drums and chanting; inhale the scent of burning coconut oil, incense and camphor; nurse infants; and choose a position from where they would experience the performance, often seated on the ground or standing. This casual setting is impossible to achieve in an indoor space defined by middle-class social codes. On the other hand, the para-traditional arena allows one to reimagine the Kōlam arena, locating it in spaces outside the traditional setting and calling for the need to adapt to modern performance conditions by distancing the self from utopian attachment to tradition. It also calls for a reusable and transportable set that can help economise time and labour.

In designing the set of *Heritance*, I took a minimalist approach symbolising the principal elements of the traditional set design. The *ves-atta*⁶⁵ is built with locally available plant-based material and functions as a screen separating the performance space from the actors' dressing area. In *Heritance*, this concept was shifted to meet the symbolic and material demands of the para-traditional arena. Therefore, the traditional structure, which is newly constructed for each performance, is replaced by a reusable canvas screen with a painting representing the

⁶⁵ Kōlam practitioners built the *ves-atta* using *goraka* (*Garcinia cambogia*) trunks, strips of areca nut bark and stalks. The *ves-atta* can also function as the *ailaya*, or the two structures can be erected separately (See M. H. Goonatilleka, 2007, p. 87; Kaluarachchi, 2006, p. 227).

cosmological interpretation of the Kōlam arena. Collaborating with an established artist in Sri Lanka, with whose genre of work I was already familiar, presented the ideal conditions for this endeavour. We were able to take one of his existing paintings and transform its interpretation by adding new elements and details to tell a story pertinent to *Heritance* (See Appendix B, p. 295). The artwork is composed of the *Kalpavruksha*, the wish-granting mythological tree, with its canopy extending beyond the limits of the canvas. The tree rises from a boat carrying a plush seat. I had this element incorporated as a symbol of the constant migration between geographic landscapes, metaphysical boundaries and the Buddhist concepts of Samsaric transmigration between existences and states of mind. Gables rising into the sky were incorporated to symbolise tiers of material or spiritual advancement. The flower in bloom is the destination that one seeks to reach in the vertical axis of cosmic existence, while the boat represents the journey of transmigration through time.

The *ailaya* (also *aile*) is the next element borrowed from the traditional arena. In an outdoor setting, this would be constructed by erecting two areca nut trunks planted several feet into the ground. It is covered with foliage to resemble the habitat of the demon. The complexity of building the swaying structure in an indoor space was overcome with the expertise of set constructor, who designed and built a mechanism with springs attached to the pillars.

Other elements, such as *mal yahan* or altars for offering flowers and a rostrum for seating the Ensemble completed the set. I used the upper and lower levels of the auditorium to position four *mal yahan*, as this extended the performance space from the arena to the farthest end of the seating area. The aim was to redefine the performance space by blurring the fixed boundaries between the auditorium and the arena. The musical instruments

were placed on a *dumbara pædura*⁶⁶, obtained from my late grandmother's reed mat collection, visible to the audience and easily accessible to the performers.

Puppets: Negotiating the shift from Tradition to Para-tradition

There are very few instances where puppets are used in the Kōlam arena, and one such example is *Karapita Kōlama* – the Dutch woman carrying her husband on the shoulders – which is a costume/puppet, with the performer embodying both masks (Amarasekera, 2002b, p. 152). *Attamma Kōlama* with her multiple detachable puppets attached to the costume, and handheld puppets, to my knowledge, are a new addition to the Kōlam (See Appendix B, p. 289).

The traditional repertoire does not represent young children. So, when designing the faces of the grandchildren, I found inspiration in *Sanni* demon masks that carry various expressions of ailments. As the masks would be small in size, the variety of 'loud' expressions embodying comic and grotesque elements, was what persuaded me to adapt these for the faces of the children. From the eighteen *Sanni* masks, I chose six and had them carved with the noses slightly rounded, and the ridge of the brow softened (See Appendix B, p 270). The body of the puppet was made of cloth with a stable neck that could support the wooden mask. Wooden hands and feet added to the weight and free movement of the limbs. *Mustard Seed* was designed with rounded, subtle features, wide open eyes and mouth slightly open capturing her gazing up at the stars. However, making and working with puppets requires extensive trial and rehearsal, and

⁶⁶ *Dumbara*, is a style of patterns that are hand woven into reed pæduru or mats. These mats are commonly used in rural households.

this is one area I intend to explore further within the performance. Having said that, the complexity and theatricality in Kōlam rely mainly on the actor and the mask, giving little significance to external and technical devices. For this reason, the presence of the masks and the metaphoric image of the children clinging to *Attamma*, and coming to life on specific occasions was more organic and in coherence with the performance genre.

To conclude this chapter, the production process was a complex and multidisciplinary exercise impossible to fully record within the scope of this exegesis. While the performance component involved a creative mechanism as well as logistical and financial arrangements, this chapter only looks at some key considerations and challenges influencing the decision-making process within the creative mechanism once the dramatic text was translated into performance. The performance stands as a work in progress and the negotiations from tradition to para-tradition must be re-evaluated critically as an ongoing exercise within the context of research and performance. As the first step to this evaluation, I move to the Conclusion of this exegesis where I take an antithetical turn to para-traditional performance as a textual and performative misrepresentation of traditional Kōlam performance.

CONCLUSION

This research has been organised around three areas: the theorisation of traditional Kōlam in its evolving premodern context and its 'fixed' modern context, transposing this theory into my ontological interpretation in a dramatic text, and the translation of this dramatic text into the Kōlam performance system. I began with the hope of extending the 'fixed' repertoire of traditional Kōlam to a performance of contemporary relevance. However, this investigation became most engaging and enlightening with the recognition of ideologies that define Sinhalese Kōlam and the epistemological and ethical paradigms that defined my path as a researcher and performance practitioner. Against this background, both the dramatic text and the performance was positioned within the Kōlam performance system and philosophy, while recognising its dislocation from the traditional practice defined by its historical and epistemological context.

To address this concern, I present the para-traditional model as a pedagogical and performance-oriented approach to performing Kōlam within contemporary praxis. A para-traditional Kōlam performance begins with the critical view that traditional Kōlam cannot be represented, re-presented or reinvented. In other words, para-traditional performance is faced with the paradoxical postulation that one performs Kōlam parallel to its traditional premise while being conscious that it is failing to represent the tradition. This can apply to the commercial practice as well as when the performance takes place in an academic capacity. In this light, I hope to conclude this exegesis by proposing that my dramatic text and performance are, in fact, a misrepresentation of the canon.

According to Bailes (2010) failure can be viewed “not simply as the evaluative judgement of an outcome... but rather as a constituent feature of the existential condition that makes expression possible even as it forecloses” (2010, p. 1). So, why this research and what are its implications on the failure to represent Kōlam? It is in this context I posit that para-traditional performance fails to represent the tradition, and therefore – not despite it – provides a space for pedagogical discourse.

Therefore, while misrepresenting attentiveness to misrepresentation is the focal point of para-traditional performance, the premise provides a space, where experimental performances grounded in traditional performance genres can exist. So, when one situates her/his performance in a para-traditional premise, one is measuring its failure rather than its success. Having said this, it is not all pessimistic and bleak, and the researcher must not render the performance unsuccessful.

I take the Sinhalese Buddhist perception of samsaric existence as an analogy to illustrate attentiveness to failure. Buddhists perceive their existence as suffering, which can only be seized when one takes the path along the Four Noble Truths. If existence is the analogy for the presence of para-traditional or experimental performance, then the recognition of failure (suffering), becomes the first noble truth of the performance practice. Just as attentiveness to suffering becomes the first step to enquiring as to the cause of suffering, an enquiry into the cause of failure becomes the point of entry into making a pedagogical enquiry.

When I (mis)represent Kōlam, I must also resist the ownership to Kōlam as a readily accessible performance genre open to research and practice. I must insist upon the evaluation of limitations and realities with which the researcher/performer is

confronted when engaging with traditional knowledge. In other words, this research begins by failing to perform the tradition, and this failure calls for critical reflexivity of the performance. In my view, failures in their diverse forms are a common and accepted occurrence in live performance (Bailes, 2010), and can manifest in the miss of a cue, the forgetting or inaudibility of a line and unexpected incidences, both human and technological. Similarly, failure can also occur in the spectator and in the exchange of semiotically complex communication.

This misperformance extends beyond the prior mentioned dislocation from the traditional Kōlam community. Structurally and content-wise, choosing six Kōlam characters and devising the narratives based on *Panivuda Kōlam*, I decided to omit other narrative structures within the traditional repertoire.

Writing a Kōlam text, let alone writing it in English, and transforming the playtext to a bilingual performance, can have both opportunities and pitfalls. To begin with, what are the implications of writing a 'fixed' Kōlam text? What are the implications of writing the text in English? What are some dissimilarities that set the traditional text apart from *Heritance*, and how does this raise questions about the legitimacy of *Heritance* to be recognised as a Kōlam text? The few instances, where the actors do speak their own version of the text is in some of the improvised Sinhala dialogues and expressions that were inserted during rehearsals. The move from largely communal authorship to independent authorship establishes the limitation of the text/performance and is an example of misrepresenting the premodern Kōlam text.

In order to problematise a fully scripted Kōlam performance, I used the brutally honest *Mantis*. When the Narrator asks the *Mantis* to "stick to the script", the mask retaliates, stating that "in

the old Kōlam arena they were allowed to improvise” (See Appendix A, p. 235). Ironically, these dialogues are also written into the text. It is also *Mantis*, who points out that there is humour in the Narrator trying to be a Kōlam practitioner (See Appendix A, p.234). This way, the spectator too, is alerted to this possibility of misrepresentation.

It is with great pains and apprehensions that one must tamper with a performance tradition, a process motivated by perceptions of ethical practice. Kōlam is a performance practice that speaks in the voices and shows through the eyes of the traditional practitioners. When conceptualising and writing the dramatic text and in the multidisciplinary exercise of preparing for and making the performance, I began to truly grapple with the impossibility of presenting a traditional Kōlam performance outside its history. As I have stated in Chapter 1, traditional knowledge has and can continue to exist without the intervention of researchers.

I consider *Heritance* to be a work in progress. Since the performance, the meta-narratives of the existing dramatic text have undergone several changes⁶⁷, and I also see the repertoire expanding over time. But also, there is a possibility of incorporating the ontologies of others in a collaborative auto/ethnographic exploration. To fully evaluate the potential of a para-traditional arena, *Heritance* must be performed in Sri Lanka. Also, a Sinhala translation is essential in order to access a wider audience, and most importantly, to reach a rural audience, whose spectatorship is vital for a political satire of this nature. It is only in putting the performance to the test that I can begin to recognise how Sri Lankan audiences receive this interpretation of a traditional performance practice. There will be

⁶⁷ These changes have not been incorporated into the text included in this exegesis.

religious and cultural sensitivities towards the interpretation of *Diyasēna* Kōlama, that may manifest in various forms of resistance. Through the nation's history, Sinhalese Buddhist devotion to Buddha's Relic has remained mostly consistent. My previous experience in the theatre has demonstrated that Sinhalese audiences can be versatile, and it is only by testing the performance in such contexts that responses can be gauged.

Concluding this exegesis, I am compelled to return to the Self and its ontological journey prompted by the premodern Kōlam practitioner's perception of being-in-the-world. It has, in turn, been a journey redefining me as a performance practitioner and my role as a Sri Lankan female performer. This research attempts to address a long-standing gap in research-based performance grounded in Sinhalese Kōlam. It is hoped that this invites a new perspective into Kōlam performance and its philosophical and aesthetic sensibilities.

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APPENDIX A

WEBLINK TO VIDEO

My Sweet Rotten Heritage

Part 1: <https://vimeo.com/254472109>

Part 2: <https://vimeo.com/254483035>

Password: MSRH2018

Playtext

My Sweet Rotten Heritance

නොමළ කෝලම්

A Para-traditional Kōlam Performance
by Anasuya Subasinghe

Doctor of Philosophy - Performance Component
Victoria University Melbourne Australia

Prologue – The Ceremony

Blue and amber lighting define the dimly lit performance space. A canvas backdrop depicting the kalpavruksha⁶⁸(wish-granting tree) is positioned upstage-centre, replacing the traditional ves-atta. Beneath it is a wooden chest (Kōlam Pettiya); to its left, is the ailē, and to the right, a bench for the Ensemble. A reed mat is laid out with various small percussion instruments. Two yak bera and a guitar are placed next to the bench. In the four corners of the arena, there stand four pahan paela. Three rounds of the conch will be played before the actors enter. The Drummer tunes the drums while others approach the pahan paela to light incense and oil lamps. All actors return to the arena. A verse in old Sinhala and a pāli Buddhist prayer are chanted, followed by the introduction to Kōlam.

Invocation

මේරුම් විරාජිත සමං

විය බුද්ධ රාජං

ශ්‍රී දන්ත සාගර සමං

විය ධම්ම රාජං

සත්කුල පබ්බත සමං

විය සංඝ රාජං

ශ්‍රී බුද්ධ ධම්ම ගුණ සංඝ

සිරසා නමාමි⁶⁹

⁶⁸ *Kalpavruksha*, is a divine wish-granting tree, found in Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist cosmology. In the backdrop, the tree appears to rise from a boat that is afloat in the ocean. At the foot of the tree, there is a plush seat that is sheltered by a roof. Its canopy is surrounded by various symbolic and abstract elements that scatter out into the cosmos.

⁶⁹ The verses essentially extol the Three Refuges.

Mērum virājita samaṇ
Viya Buddha rājaṇ
Srī danta sāgara samaṇ
Viya Dhamma rājaṇ

Satkūla pabbhata samaṇ
Viya Sangha rājaṇ
Sri Bhuddha Dhamma guna Sangha
Sirasā nanāmī

බුද්ධං සරණං ගච්ඡාමි
ධම්මං සරණං ගච්ඡාමි
සංඝං සරණං ගච්ඡාමි⁷⁰

Buddhaṇ saranaṇ gachchāmi
Dhammaṇ saranaṇ gachchāmi
Sandhaṇ saranaṇ gachchāmi

Introduction to Kōlam

Our masters of Kōlam since bygone years
Have summoned the gods well revered
Brahma, Vishnu and Pattini esteemed
Kataragama, Nāta, Hūniyam supreme ⁷¹

Those masters of Kōlam since bygone years
Welcomed all beings from worlds far and near
The Kōlam showground is for beast and man
In this circle demons and gods will dance

⁷⁰ The Pāli Buddhist prayer translates as “I take refuge in Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha”.

⁷¹ These are Sinhalese Buddhist deities.

Beings that are named and beings unnamed
Beings that are seen and beings unseen
Beings that are heard and beings unheard
The known and unknown are welcome here

Tonight, you may come face to face
With yourself and your other in a maze
The cosmos is a web of umbilical cords
Some you see and some you don't

Roaming the samsara through the ages
Life after life dressed in different faces
Letting go of one life, another we reach
Desire, they say, is what greases this wheel

Tonight, the past will embrace the present
At a destination, we desire to reach
Taste ye a cup of the cosmic ocean
The sweet salts of which this life is made

Actors perform a concise version of yahan dækma, the traditional opening dance (This may include namaskāraya, ārambhaka padaya, yahanvalata avasara genīma, yahan dakina padaya pirīma, bara pada natīma, irattiya, vandum atha, padaya, alankāra nāṭīma, irattiya, vændum atha, kadinam natīma, irattiya, avasan vændum atha). Yahan dækma is followed by magul bera, the ceremonial drum overture accompanied by horanæ (traditional reed instrument) and conch.

Narrator: Welcome one, welcome all! May you live well, may you live long! This arena is yours as much as it's ours. Should we stumble, do pardon our flaws. For to err is human; and it's human to forgive. Welcome all, live well, live long!

Origin of Kōlam

Verses sung accompanied by drum and guitar.

From a land of milk and honey long ago,
Comes a story recounted time and again,
Pleasing the eyes of the young and the old,
The birth of Kōlam we now unveil.

The king of the land was Mahāsammata⁷²
Of sublime beauty was queen Maenikpāla⁷³
Order and beauty wove a cloth of harmony
That cradled the land of milk and honey

When with child the Queen's belly weighed,
Her nipples grew green, and her laughter waned,
No feast or pleasures of the palace could satiate,
For a rare and mirthful mascaraed she craved

⁷² Mahāsammata or the "Great Elect" is the first mythical king who was elected by the people.

⁷³ Maenikpāla is the queen of Mahāsammata. It is to satisfy a craving that occurs during her pregnancy, that Kōlam is invented.

That unbending creature called Yearning
Sat silently eclipsed in her feeble heart
Conspiring in whispers with melancholy
They feasted upon her flesh and blood

Actors, dancers, and music makers,
Jugglers, jesters, and trapeze walkers,
Dancers, jesters, and trapeze walkers,
Jugglers, actors, and music makers,

Arrived from afar with tricks up their sleeve,
But her ailing heart they could not ease.

Seeing his Queen so aggrieved
The king from the wisest did counsel seek
With much debate, it was agreed,
A night of theatre must be conceived

Send at once for the masters of woodwork,
Go now, carve out those splendid faces
Dance you men, let the drums play on
Sing songs of creatures on earth and beyond

Narrator: Laughter returned to the queen's heart;
rewards were due for the Kōlam dance.

Actors set the Kōlam Pettiya (chest of masks) in the centre of the arena; from it, the Narrator produces Kōlam masks of the traditional repertoire.

What is this delightful art of Kōlam?

Mask after mask making magic and mayhem,

What strange work is this actor's craft,

That fulfils a woman's craving heart?

A town-crier, an old hag and her wailing children,

A lord, a lion and a woman expectant,

Ethereal beings from worlds enchanted,

Kings, their queens, and snake-crested demons.

Mythical birds and maidens entangled,

A farmer, a moor, and a posse of policemen,

The king of savages, a stork, and a leopard,

Maimed warriors and death as a devil.

An inebriate Signor upon his wife's shoulders,

An African, a white man, and a pair of soothsayers

Tales of the Enlightened One in many lives past

All these and more played from dusk until dawn.

Actors return masks to the chest.

Narrator: Alas no more does that glory persist,
Wooden faces on walls now long to meet
flesh,
The old Kōlam masters, they've been laid to
rest,
Silencing tales of man, beast, and myth.

Narrator: Ladies and gentlemen, this age-old tradition of
mask and theatre has begun its gradual
departure. Tonight, to that repertoire of
hundreds of masks and chronicle, we
introduce some new faces. You may find them
strange or familiar; perhaps, perhaps even
strangely familiar.

LÆLI⁷⁴ KŌLAMA (MAN BEARING A PLANK)

Drum intro Narrator sings and repeats verse with Ensemble.

ලලලා ලල ලැලි නමිහ,
ලැලි නමිහ, ලැලි නමිහ,
ලැලි එනා, ලැලි ළමා...

⁷⁴ *Læli* is Sinhalese is wooden plank/s.

La la lā – la la Læli nalinga,
Læli nalinga, Læli nalinga,
Læli enā, Læli lamā...⁷⁵ (repeat)

Suddenly, Læli Kōlama enters hurriedly, interrupting the singing. He is accompanied by the drum as he runs around the arena hugging a wooden plank. His unexpected appearance baffles Narrator and Ensemble. Narrator shouts and attempts to stop Læli Kōlama but then he dodges her; vigorous drumming continues as he makes two or three rounds in the arena before squatting in the centre, hugging the plank. He looks away disregarding all present.

Narrator: Hold it right there, you devil! Don't move!
(calling backstage) Oy! Who's in charge
backstage? He's not supposed to be here yet!

Ensemble 1: I presume they couldn't hold him back, what
with him being a devil and al

Narrator: Didn't let us introduce him to these people, the
fiend.

Ensemble 2: Well at least we know he's a devil.

Narrator: These days, it's hard to know the difference
between man and devil. But this, I assure you,
ladies and gentlemen, is a devil. Or as we
Sinhalese call it, a Yakā⁷⁶. Look at him.

⁷⁵ *La-la-la... by the name of Læli - here he comes - that 'child' called Læli .*

⁷⁶ *Yakā* (demon) is the noun, and *Yakō*, the pronoun. This style of call out borrowed from the Sinhalese ritual *Sanni Yakuma*, is used by the *gurunnanse* or ritual conductor attract the attention of a demon who has just entered the arena.

Bulging eyes, acne-ridden face, protruding teeth...

Ensemble 1: Protruding cheekbones, callused hands, and boils on his legs, and would you look at those gnarled toes.

Narrator: As black as the night. You know a devil when you see one.

Ensemble 2: Come to think of it, I have never seen a white devil in the Kōlam arena.

Narrator: And I will tell you why. It's black devils and golden deities; green savages and ivory toned kings and queens that rule over brown-faced peasants. That's how our Kōlam masters wore their masks and we're merely continuing that tradition.

Ensemble 2: Tell you what, let's talk to him.

Narrator: Anna hari, katha karalama balamu⁷⁷. (*To Læli*) Yakō⁷⁸!

Læli Kōlama continues to look away. Narrator calls again, this time loud and long.

Narrator: Ahunnadda koheda⁷⁹

⁷⁷ *Anna hari... katākarala balamu* translates as "That's right. Let's talk to him".

⁷⁸ *Yakō* is derived from the noun *yaka* or (demon).

⁷⁹ *Ahunnaedda koheda* translates as "Don't think (he) heard me".

Ensemble agrees and encourages Narrator to speak louder.
Kōlama

Narrator: Yakō...!

Leli: *(Still looking away)* Did someone say something, or is it the great ocean sloshing around in my ears?

Narrator goes closer and yells even louder and longer in Læli Kōlama's ear.

Narrator: YAKŌ.....!

Læli: *(Indicating to where Narrator stands)*
Someone could be standing right here. But how would I see, with all this sand in my eyes?

Drummer: Poor devil is deaf *and* blind.

Læli: I am lucky that way.

Narrator: Tell us your name Devil.

Læli: I have two daughters, both are girls.

Narrator: *(Emphasising each word)* I said, who are you?
What's your name? Me... Narrator... you...?

Læli: You can marry them, but don't expect a dowry.

Narrator: Now he thinks I want to marry his daughters.

Drummer: At least tell us what it is you are hugging there.

Lǣli: You can hug them. But first, you have to marry them. But don't expect a dowry.

Narrator: You're testing my patience, devil.

Lǣli: Devil? Who said I am a devil?

Narrator: You certainly look like one.

Lǣli: I am not actually dark. This is an all-over birthmark.

Narrator: And you're not actually deaf either, are you?

Lǣli: Actually, I have selective hearing. I'm lucky that way.

Narrator: So, what do we call you now?

Lǣli: I am Lǣli Kōlama, the man with the plank.

Narrator: And what's with the plank?

Lǣli: This is no ordinary plank; it is an incestuous plank!

Narrator: An incestuous plank?

Lǣli: Yes, very old and important. A family heirloom.

Narrator: *(To audience)* Only a devil would accept a plank as an heirloom. *(To Læli Kōlama)* I think the word is ancestral... an ancestral plank.

Læli: Yes, yes. That too. Almighty Plank has been in the family since it saved my great-great-grandfather's life.

Narrator: A lifesaving plank? And who is your great-great-grandfather?

Læli: Remember the notorious prince of India who was banished by his father?

Narrator: There were many notorious princes of India banished by their fathers.

Læli: Aiyo...⁸⁰ I'm talking about the prince who was exiled for hunting anything on four legs, shooting down birds in flight; murdering men and raping their women!

As he speaks, Læli Kōlama acts out stabbing an imaginary person with the plank, then puts the plank between his thighs and moves his hips back and forth. Narrator rushes over to conceal this from the audience.

Narrator: *Makkaranavada!*⁸¹ There are children in the audience! Besides, that used to be standard behaviour for a prince. In fact, I think it still is. I'm afraid you have to be a little more specific.

⁸⁰ "Aiyo" is a common Sinhalese expression used here to convey frustration.

⁸¹ Makkaranavada is (rural) colloquial for 'what are you doing?'

Læli: Aiyo... I'm talking about the exiled prince who sailed to Lanka!

Narrator: How many exiled Indian princes ended up in Lanka? Ladies and gentlemen, believe me when I tell you this. Those spoilt ruffians had such an easy life, that made them too lazy to continue their voyage beyond the nearest foreign shore. Some didn't even make it that far; they were shipwrecked halfway and brought in by the tide.

Læli: They were lucky that way.

Narrator: I say let's hear another clue, shall we?

Læli: Another clue? Aiyo... In Lanka, my great-great-grandfather was made a god.

Narrator: Cheh! That's hardly a clue. You know why? Because we are experts at making gods and kings out of flotsam!

Læli: Aiyo! One last clue and then to hell with you! *Onna kiuva ehenang!*⁸² Goddess Pattini made seven fiery pyres and my great-great-grandfather danced in the flames. The goddess was so impressed, she said, "*Mē*"⁸³,

⁸² *Onna kiuva ehenang* can be translated as "here I go, then".

⁸³ "*Mē* used here to connote 'hey' or 'listen'. In this instance, Paththini's coquetry is uncharacteristic of the deity who is considered a symbol of chastity.

you can have your own island to put up a temple”.

Narrator: Now that rings many bells. I think I have it;
*Sīnigama Dēvālē*⁸⁴!

Lāli: That’s right, you devil! Sorry!

Narrator: Sīnigama, the temple on the isle... where coconuts are smashed in the hope of toppling governments, and firewalkers pay homage to... Wait a minute! You can’t be the great-great-grandson of God *Devol*?

Lāli: In the flesh!

Narrator: Who would have guessed it. Sir, it’s an honour to meet you.

Ensemble: An honour indeed.

Narrator: Welcome to the arena.

Lāli: Oh, thank you.

Narrator: May we know what brings you to here, Sir?

Lāli: It’s a long story, which I will keep short, as I can’t stay all night. It has always been my dream to be a god like my great-grandfather.

⁸⁴ Dēvālē, is a temple for deities that stand independently or within the premise of a Buddhist temple. In Sīnigama, southwest of Sri Lanka, there is a temple located on the seashore for God Devol and a shrine for *Devol Yakā* (demon) on the rock outcrop about 150 metres into the Ocean.

So, I decided to follow in my great ancestor's footsteps.

Narrator: Fascinating.

Lāeli: I packed Ancestral Plank and set sail. To cross the seven seas and arrive in a place that would turn me into a god. When the boat capsized off the coast of Australia... I held onto Ancestral Plank and waited for history to repeat.

Narrator: Hari-vaedēnē...īta passē?⁸⁵

Lāeli: Ah! That's when gods in blue surrounded me. They blessed me with a life jacket, and I told them that my great great grandfather is God *Devo!* They were impressed.

Narrator: You're lucky that way.

Lāeli: Then they escorted me to an island and said, "this is where you will be, mate!"

Narrator: Just like the island offered to God *Devo!*

Lāeli: Mine's bigger.

Narrator: You are lucky that way.

Lāeli: The problem is, there are many devotees there, and like me, they all want to be a god.

⁸⁵ *Hari-vaedēnē...īta passē* translates as "My word, what happened next?"

Narrator: But with your ancestry, you can be a god in no me. You are lucky that way.

Læli: Not really.

Narrator: Why not?

Læli: You see, this is where my luck begins to run out. I am told I can't be a god because the rules of defecation in Lanka don't apply here.

Narrator: Rules of defecation? You mean the switch from water to paper?

Læli: No, you devil, the rules of defecation... I am told I can't be a god because there is already an excess of superior beings here.

Narrator: You mean the switch from squatting to sitting?

Læli: No, you devil, defecation! They can't make me a god because all vacancies for celestial positions are already taken. See what I mean *(Indicating the audience)*

Narrator: I think the word is deification.

Drummer: Ah....! Deification!

Læli: Yes, that too.

Narrator: Perhaps you should prove your eligibility. Why don't you perform a miracle? Dance in the flames; walk on fire; do as your great-great-

grandfather did to amaze Goddess Pattini!
You will be made a god under the, drumroll
please, distinguished talent visa category!

Læli: (*Howls*) Disgusting talent visa!

Narrator: No, no, distinguished talents!

Læli: (*Howls again*) I don't think that's a good idea.

Narrator: Anē,⁸⁶ why not?

Læli: You see, a woman on my island danced in the
flames hoping she would be made a goddess.
But she didn't make it out of the fire.

Narrator: Poor woman.

Læli: Poor me. Now I'm terrified of fire. But if I don't
perform a miracle, what would become of me?
What would become of my incestuous legacy?

Narrator: *Ancestral* legacy.

Læli: Yes, that too.

Narrator: Well, what will you do now?

Læli: Do now? (*Suddenly panics*) I must hurry back
to my Island. If the gods catch me here, I am
sure to be exorcised.

⁸⁶ *Anē* used here to connote "oh dear".

Læli Kōlama first runs hither and thither, unable to locate the exit; then, as he disappears behind the backdrop, Narrator calls him back.

Narrator: But what about your dream of becoming a god?

Læli: Ah yes, I haven't given up on that. Before I go, I will tell you a dirty little secret.

Narrator: Oh, how I love hearing dirty little secrets

Læli: It's not my secret; it's a secret kept by the gods.

Narrator: A celestial secret? Even better!

Læli: The other devils on the island say that the gods were not gods when they first came here. That they too were devils like us.

Narrator: Really?

Læli: Really. Really? Then with time, they rose higher and higher up in the Pantheon until they transformed into gods. So, there's hope for me yet.

Narrator: You're lucky that way.

Læli: From the fire to the frying pan; from the frying pan to the chopping block; from chopping

black to the Chicken pen; that's how a devil goes up in life. I am lucky that way. *Ennaṇ!*⁸⁷

Narrator: *(To audience)* Well, I hear the samsara gives us all a chance at playing man, beast, god or demon. So, there is hope for us yet, and we are lucky that way.

DIYASĒNA KŌLAMA

Enter Diyasēna Kōlama amidst introductory verses sung by Narrator and Ensemble. He cautiously carries an object with both hands. The object is covered with a white cloth.

Here comes a fellow, long-awaited hero,
A prince without a crown, but he's the chosen one,
His blood curdles and aches, for his race they say,
When he roars, you will know, the lion has risen.

Popeyed and hot-tempered, lion's blood in his veins,
If I ask what he hides?
He will spit in your face.
Beating his chest, grinding his teeth,
When he glares, you will know, the lion has risen.

Narrator: Welcome...

Diyasēna: *Ammata-hudu!*⁸⁸

⁸⁷ *Ennaṇ* translates as "until next time".

⁸⁸ *Ammata-hudu*, it is a Sinhalese (derogatory) expression that conveys astonishment.

Narrator:to the arena! Sorry, I didn't mean to startle you!

Diyasēna: You didn't! The blood of the lion runs in my veins. Nothing startles me.

Narrator: A brave man. May we know your name?

Diyasēna: Prince Diyasēna. The great saviour of Sinhalese people. The lion. Roar!

Narrator: Ah the man, the myth, the legend. We have been expecting you.

Diyasēna: We? Who's we?

Narrator: Oh, you know, the Sinhalese race in general. But you have arrived a few decades behind schedule...

Diyasēna: Yet, here I am, just as it was prophesied.

Narrator: Yes... yes... here you are. But you're not the first to make that claim.

Diyasēna: I'm not the first? To make that claim? Let me ask you a question. Are you Sinhalese?

Narrator: I am.

Diyasēna: A Buddhist?

Narrator: That too.

Diyasēna: Then how dare you question my authenticity!

Narrator: (Here, here) In this Kōlam arena, mister, we are allowed to speak our mind.

Diyasēna: In that case let me give you a piece of my mind.

*(Sings ad-lib to a Nādagam style traditional melody,
accompanied by drum)*

The great acetic Maithrea
In his tribute to King Perakum,
Wrote the words of a pilgrim
In whose ear God Sumana Saman whispered,
That with the passing of 2500 years
As of the birth of the enlightened one,
The great king will return as Prince Diyasēna
No true Sinhalese denies this prophecy
No true Buddhist denies his legacy

Narrator: Very nice.

Diyasēna: I know.

Narrator: It's also, nice to know that the samsara
blesses us with recycled leaders. However,
when I look at you I feel that you're not...

Diyasēna: Not what? Am I not tall enough for greatness?
Tell me this!

(Sings accompanied by drum)

Was the great Alexander tall?
Tell me was Napoleon tall?
Winston Churchill, was he tall?
Aduma-gānē⁸⁹ was Gandhi tall?

⁸⁹ *Aduma-gānē* translates as 'at least'.

Narrator: These days it's great leaders that are in short supply. Not the other way around. Still, when I look at you, I can't help thinking that....

Diyasēna: That what...?

(Sings accompanied by drum)

Diyasēna: Is my chest not broad enough?

Ensemble: No, your chest is broad enough!

Diyasēna: Is my voice not deep enough?

Ensemble: No, your voice is deep enough!

Diyasēna: Are my looks not good enough?

Narrator: No, no, it's none of that!

Diyasēna: Then what is it, *mala hat-ilawuwē*⁹⁰?

Narrator: It's just that, I get this feeling that you are hiding something from us.

Diyasēna: *(Hiding the object behind him)* Hiding? Who me?

Narrator: Yes, you. Behind your back. This is my Kōlam arena and I have every right to know.

Diyasēna: A right to know? Did you say a right to know? I knew it and it's just as I suspected!

Narrator: Suspected?

Diyasēna: You are an artist, am I right?

Narrator: Well, yes...

⁹⁰ *Mala-hat-ilawuwē* or *hat-ilawuwē* is a light-hearted Sinhala rural expression that translates at 'seven funerals', and is further exaggerated here by *mala* or dead/death. The term is used in a variety of contexts.

Diyasēna: You are all traitors! Traitors cleverly disguised as artists, leftists, liberalists, nihilists, activists, feminists, tourists, dentists, typists, chemists, (to guitarist) tō⁹¹ guitarist, (to drummer) tō... drummer! Servants of western conspiracy! May you be struck down by lightning! May you be struck down by (pause) another lighting!

Narrator: Such compassion. Fine, if you can't say what you are 'not hiding', at least tell us how you came to know that you are the true Price Diyasēna.

Diyasēna: The gods said so!

Narrator: The gods? They spoke to you?

Diyasēna: All 330 million of them!

Narrator: No wonder it took him 2500 years to get here.

Diyasēna: Well, now that I am here, do you want to hear the story or not?

Narrator: Yes, do tell, but please keep it short. We don't have all night.

Diyasēna: Night! Last night there was nothing good to see on television, so I went to bed early. But as sleep wasn't coming my way, I tuned into *pirith*⁹² on the radio.

Diyasēna mimes the tuning of a radio. After some effort, he manages to find a frequency. Diyasēna takes on the voice of a Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) news reader.

⁹¹ *Tō* is 'you', used here to derogatively to refer to the guitarist and drummer in the Ensemble.

⁹² *Paritta* (Pali) or *pirit* in Sinhalese is the Buddhist practice of reciting *sutra* or scriptures, which are believed to protect and ward off evil-eye.

Diyasēna: මෙන්න ප්‍රවානි ප්‍රකාශය, තිස්ස ජයවර්ධනගෙන්.
මීනොටමුල්ල කුණු කන්ද නැරඹීම සඳහා අගමැතිවරයා
මුකවාඩමක් පැළඳ පැමිනෙයි.⁹³

Diyasēna changes the frequency. We hear a Sinhalese song exalting the tooth relic of Buddha. The soprano voice is mimicked by Narrator.

Narrator: සාදු දන්ත දා... වදිම් සාර ශාන්ති ශ්‍රී පතාල...⁹⁴

Diyasēna changes the frequency once again and mimics another news reading.

Diyasēna: In breaking news, US president Donald Trump's relatives have been found in Russia.

Irritated, Diyasēna tunes the radio once more, then mimics the chanting of pirit. This time he is pleased with himself. The Ensemble continue the chanting while Diyasēna tried to sleep, but he becomes restless.

Narrator: What's the problem now?

Diyasēna: Aiyo... still no sleep. So, I took a selfie and put it on Facebook. (He types) "Feeling relaxed with *pirith*".

Narrator: Oh look, all your friends have 'liked' it!

Diyasēna: That's when I began to drift into a peaceful slumber. Suddenly, the bedroom began to fill up with flashes of light, and I knew it!

Narrator: You knew what?

⁹³ Translation: "Here are the news headlines. I'm your host Tissa Jayawardene. The Prime Minister wears a protective mask during his visit to the disaster site of Mīthotamulla Garbage Dump."

⁹⁴ This song by Sri Lankan singer Sujatha Attanayake exalts the Tooth Relic of Buddha.

Diyasēna: Aiyo, that a miracle was about to occur! That's when the gods began to appear before me. One by one, they made their celestial selves present. There were dozens, then hundreds, then thousands, then millions! In the end, the roof cracked open, and with a blinding light, almighty Sakra⁹⁵ appeared!

Narrator: My god!

Diyasēna: That's what I said. I jumped out of bed and worshipped all the gods.

Narrator: All of them?

Diyasēna: All of them! Then, almighty Sakra spoke to me in a gentle yet charismatic voice.

Diyasēna mimics the clichéd eco of god's voice and Narrator joins him.

Diyasēna: "My son, it is time to fulfil your destiny. The Sinhalese nation is in peril. The Buddhist realm is in peril. You must rescue them from the conspirators". "What must I do to rescue my race, my god?" "Go, save the sacred tooth from the enemy". "But how?" "Think and you will have your answer". "But, but... ." "No buts!" As I sat on my butt thinking, the gods began to disappear one by one. And as the last god vanished into thin air, I knew what I had to do!

Narrator: And what's that?

⁹⁵ According to Sinhalese rural Buddhism, Sakra is the guardian deity of Buddhism, a responsibility conferred by Buddha himself, and is positioned immediately beneath Buddha in the pantheon.

Diyasēna: I had to find a sacred place to hide the secret tooth.

Narrator: Don't you mean a secret place to hide the sacred tooth?

Diyasēna: That's what I said.

Narrator: But isn't the tooth already safe in the temple?

Diyasēna: Safe? Safe? Every tourist handbook tells you where to find it! And you think it's safe?

Narrator: But to protect the tooth, you'd have to steal it first; and you won't be allowed anywhere near it.

Diyasēna: Oh, but I was!

Narrator: But you'll never be able to lay your hands on it.

Diyasēna: Oh, but I did!

Narrator: *Hat-ilawuwa!*⁹⁶ You stole Buddha's left canine from Daladā Māligawa⁹⁷?

Diyasēna: Shshshshsh! Keep it down my precious! The conspirators will hear you!

Narrator: *(Pointing to the object that Diyasēna holds)*
Hathilauwe! Is that it?

Diyasēna: Yes, it is.

Narrator instantly puts his hands together in veneration.

⁹⁶ *Hat-ilawuwa* is a Sinhalese rural expression denoting astonishment.

⁹⁷ Temple of the Tooth Relic situated in Kandy, Sri Lanka.

Diyasēna: Now don't panic my precious. The tooth has been in the temple for centuries and everyone assumes it's always there.

Narrator: But sooner or later they will find out that the relic has disappeared. And if they find you, here, with me, we will also be disappeared!

Diyasēna: That's why we must find a place to hide it.

Narrator: We? What makes you think that I will play a part in this felony? I am no relic thief I am only an artist!

Diyasēna: Then as an artist, use your creative imagination to save your life. Now think, what is the best hiding place for a secret relic?

Narrator: I'm afraid I am not that creative.

Diyasēna: But if you're a true Sinhalese Buddhist artiste...

Narrator: This is outrageous!

Diyasēna: You're either with me or with the conspirators.

Narrator: Either way, I am doomed, aren't I? Alright, alright, let me think.

Diyasēna: Well, hurry up. As you said earlier, we don't have all night.

Narrator: Adē, I think I have it.

Diyasēna: You're a genius!

Narrator: Drum roll! America!

Diyasēna: America?

Narrator: America! Listen, when you want to hide something from a thief, you must think like a

thief. What's the last place that a thief would loot?

Diyasēna: His own house!

Narrator: What's the last place the western conspirators would look, if they came for the relic?

Diyasēna: America. Ammatahodu⁹⁸! America!

Narrator: See, you're a genius.

Diyasēna: I am! My father, anē, may he attain nirvana⁹⁹, used to say "ma puthā¹⁰⁰, you're a genius"! Now off to America, we go! The song of the hero who crosses the seven seas.

Diyaasena sings accompanied by Ensemble.

From the Great Ocean, comes now the ship,

On the Great Ocean sails now the ship,

From the Sea of Silence comes now the ship,

On the Sea of Silence sails now the ship.

Narrator: (Interrupting) Silene, silence... I suggest you leave perilous seafaring to asylum seekers. I was thinking more in the lines of flying there. You know, in an aeroplane.

⁹⁸ *Ammata-hudu*, it is a Sinhalese (derogatory) expression that conveys astonishment.

⁹⁹ Wishing that someone attains nirvana or Buddhahood is considered the highest blessing by Sinhalese Buddhists. While *nirvana* can be wished upon both the dead and the living, there is an indication here that Diyaasena's father is deceased.

¹⁰⁰ Ma puthā : (rural) colloquial for "my son".

Diyasēna: Ah yes, aeroplanes! You see, we Sinhalese know all about flying. It was great King Ravāna of Lanka who invented the first flying machine, and it was in that magnificent *dandumonara*, that he abducted the beautiful Seetha.

Narrator: But our white friends here think that those larcenous Wright brothers were the finest thing that happened to aero technology since Icarus.

Diyasēna: It's all a part of the conspiracy. Now, let me tell you a thing or two about King Rāvana...

Narrator: Anē, I'm afraid we must save that story for another arena.

Diyasēna: Anē, why not now?

Narrator: Anē, because you must go now.

Diyasēna: Anē... (pause) What? You're not coming with me?

Narrator: Anē, I'm afraid my work is here, in the Kōlam arena. Please, you really must go now.

Diyasēna: But, but, but... I have never been on a plane before, and, and, and... I'm terrified of heights!

Narrator: You are the great Prince Diyasēna. You fear nothing.

Diyasēna: I fear nothing?

Narrator: You fear nothing! Now, off to America, you go!

Diyasēna: But, but, but as a lion blooded sister from another mister, can you lend me some money for the airfare to America?

Narrator: Aiyo, I'm a bankrupt actor, not a prince born into an inheritance.

Diyasēna: Ado¹⁰¹! You think I was born a prince? With an inheritance? I thought patriotism was enough to fulfil this task.

Narrator: But you can't abandon your mission. Not now.

Diyasēna: Anē, where will I find so much money?

Narrator: I'm afraid I have none to lend.

Diyasēna: *(Turns to Ensemble)* You fellows back there, can you lend me some money.

Ensemble explains they have none and Diyasēna curses them.

Narrator: We only have this Kōlam arena, and we have already offered it to you.

Diyasēna: *(Turning to audience)* You fellows in the audience, can you lend me some money? Can I see your wallet? Where's your credit card? Then I'll take your debit card?

Diyasēna moves around the audience and improvises. Narrator apologises to audience and ushers Diyasēna back to the arena

Narrator: These good people have already paid \$25 to see you in the arena. So, you shouldn't ask for more.

Diyasēna: \$25? Okay then how about \$10? No? Then \$5?

¹⁰¹ *Adō* is a Sinhalese expression similar to "oy" used here to express vexation.

Narrator: Prince Diyasēna, no!

Diyasēna: But don't you have anything of value I could sell or pawn?

Narrator: I don't! *(Pause)* Well, I don't, but *you* do.

Diyasēna: I do? What? Where?

They both look at the relic.

Diyasēna: Genius! I will pawn the tooth relic!

Narrator: And?

Diyasēna: Buy a ticket....

Narrator: And?

Diyasēna: Fly to America...

Narrator: And?

Diyasēna: Protect the tooth relic from imperial conspirators.

Narrator: But where would you pawn the tooth?

Diyasēna: I have another idea. I will pawn it to an American pawn shop!

Narrator: Genius! They wouldn't have a clue that the Buddha's left canine sits right under their noses.

Diyasēna: Genius!

(Pause)

Narrator: But... why again are you pawning the relic?

Diyasēna: To go to America.

Narrator: Why are you going to America?

Diyasēna: To protect the relic.

Narrator: But how would you get the tooth back from the Americans?

Diyasēna: I don't have to. America is the perfect sacred place for the secret tooth! My father, Anē, may he attain nirvana, once said to me, that the best place to hide something from a thief, is to hide it in his own house.

Narrator: Shah! Your very own conspiracy to defeat the western conspiracy.

Diyasēna: Genius!

Diyasēna dances accompanied by drum, and exists with the relic.

ATTAMMA (GRANDMOTHER) KŌLAMA

Attamma's voice is heard off the arena.

Attamma: Puthē....!¹⁰²

Narrator sings introductory verses accompanied by the Ensemble.

The weight of each step she takes is heavy,

A pantheon of gods sits upon her shoulders,

¹⁰² *Putē* in Sinhalese is son, but is also used as a non-gendered term for child.

Take care old woman, back bent like a bow,
If you miss a step, the next generation falls.

Your bosom is heavy with honey and milk,
To nurture your children and their children then,
For you, old woman, the Samsara is long,
Bless this grandmother for she is your own.

Attamma Kōlama enters with six children. They are masked puppets piggybacking, sitting on her shoulders, clinging to her hips and legs, and a puppet whose feet are attached to Attamma's feet. She props it up by holding a hand, and has a plate in her other hand. Suddenly, the little boy on his feet begins to run around the arena and Attamma tries to keep up with him. Both he and Attamma stop in front of Narrator. Attamma observes Narrator and then hands her the plate. Immediately after, she hands over a child (William the Silent) and takes back the plate. Baffled by these actions, Narrator strikes up a conversation.

Narrator: Hello young lady!

Attamma: Young lady? You must be as blind as a bat!

Narrator: Oh, I am very sorry aunty...

Attamma: Aunty? You must be burning up. Come here, let me feel your head. (Pinching Narrator's ear) Do I look like an aunty to you?

Narrator: Sorry, sorry, sorry...Attamma! Attamma!

Attamma: *(Let's go of her)* See how a little pain can make you come to your senses? Such is life.

Narrator: *(Rubbing her ear)* How was I to know... this is the first time in a Kōlam arena, that a woman has been happy to be called Granny.

Attamma: I'll be happier if you hold onto that one while I feed the others. Now be quiet for a moment, this nice aunty is trying to talk to me.

Narrator: Whose children are these, Attamma?

Attamma: Mine!

Narrator: Yours? Quite a feat considering your age, isn't it?

Attamma: Dirty devil, they are my grandchildren. This is my elder son's boy; his father is abroad. This shy girlie is my elder daughter's; these days she's writing a Master's thesis in child psychology. This one is my second son's; his mother is an actress,

Narrator: Like me?

Attamma: And god knows where she is today, *(to audience, alluding to Narrator)* like her! Ah, the twins are my youngest daughters; she's pregnant again; again, with twins. Such is life. This 'William the Silent' is my neighbour's boy, he had just turned two when his mother left for the middle-east as a housemaid, poor thing. They haven't heard from her in months. Such is life.

Narrator: Such is life.

Attamma: He follows me everywhere I go. Everywhere. The chief monk at the temple is very fond of him. Puts him on his lap and feeds him sweets. He read the boy's horoscope and said he's destined for the robe. I said, 'but Loku Hāmuduruwane¹⁰³, the boy only sleeps next to me. His father takes him home in the evening, but the boy howls and howls, then turns up at my doorstep, holding his dingdong in one hand, and his blanket in the other. Loku Hāmuduruvo says not to worry; the boy can sleep in *his* chamber.

Attam & Narr: Such is life.

Attamma: Children, say hello to this nice aunty.

Children hide their faces.

Attamma: They are a little shy at first, but once they take a liking to you they will eat you alive.

Narrator: Oh, that's fine. I am not good with children, anyway.

Attamma: Nonsense, it's all in your head.

Narrator: No, I'm serious, Attamma, I can manage a Kōlam arena. But children... I don't know how you do it.

Attamma: *Anē puthē*¹⁰⁴, it's what grandmothers do. Ah! Time for a story!

¹⁰³ *Anē*Loku-hāmuduruwanē in Sinhalese is a form of addressing the *chief monk*. Loku hamuduruvo (noun) is *chief monk*.

¹⁰⁴ *Anē*Anē putē, translates as "oh, child".

Narrator brings a chair for Attamma.

Attamma: Once upon a time there was a king and queen who had a little prince. Like you... One day, seeing the king exasperated with matters of the state, the queen challenged him. "Look after our son for a day", she said, "it will make those state affairs seem like child's play." The king was enraged. "How dare you insult the crown! How dare you insult me! Off with your head!" "What is your last wish, wretch?" The Queen smiled. "My husband, accept my challenge, and if you survive the day, I shall willingly go to the gallows". "Well, to cut a long story short, the king barely made it halfway through the day. The queen kept her head; and they lived happily ever after.

Narrator: Ladies and gentlemen, no arena is complete without a story told by a grandmother. So, Attamma, tell us where you're taking these children?

Attamma: Taking them? Oh no, no, no... I am not taking them anywhere; they are taking *me* everywhere.

At that moment, the boy on his feet runs off again, and Attamma runs after him. The boy runs to the drummer and taps the drum. Attamma apologises to the drummer.

Narrator: Quite a handful, aren't they?

Attamma: It's what grandmothers do. Now, open wide, here comes a little birdie. You don't want it?

Now, what do I tell your father when he asks me if you ate? Do you want to stay this size for the rest of your life? When all the other children in the street climb trees and play cricket, you will be this size forever. Is that what you want? Say aaaaa! *(The child still refuses to eat).*

Narrator: Do you know how many children out there starve to death every day? Listen to your grandmother! Open up and eat!

Attamma: *(Slaps Narrator's arm)* Don't upset him, you fool! If he starts crying, he'll throw up what little he has in his belly.

Dubbed by Narrator, William the Silent begins to cry, and throws up on the floor.

Attamma: See what I mean?

Narrator: *(Calling backstage)* Someone grab a mop. This one just threw up on the floor.

Child in Attamma's arms whispers in her ear.

Attamma: What's that? He wants to know if you saw Mustard Seed.

Narrator: Mustard seed? Who is that?

Attamma: His little sister.

Narrator: No, I'm afraid I haven't seen any children around here. Is she missing?

Attamma: We play a little game of hide-and-seek at mealtimes, these scallywags and I. They hide and when I find them, they must eat a ball of rice. Ah, time to play!

Attamma covers her eyes with a hand and begins to count. Narrator and Ensemble take the children from her and hide them in various places.

Attamma: Ten... nine.. eight... three... two... one. Ready or not here I come, my scallywags!

Attamma goes around the arena seeking out the children one by one. She knows where to look.

Attamma: This little piggie likes to hide under the *kulla* basket; this little piggie, in his mother's closet; these little piggies in the mango tree. This little piggie can never decide where to hide. And this little piggie thinks we can't see him when he can't see us.

When they are found, Ensemble and Narrator attach the puppets back on Attamma.

Attamma: But my Mustard Seed, I can never predict. She finds a new hiding place every time, and sometimes I don't find her until nightfall. Once, I tied her to a chair, but she still disappeared. Later that night, I found her on the roof, sitting in that chair, counting stars. Counting stars. My little mustard seed. Her father smacked her so hard, I cried all night. I never smacked my children.

Narrator: Well, if she has vanished again it looks like she still hasn't learnt her lesson.

Attamma: But I learnt my lesson. Now I let her hide wherever she likes, and don't utter a word to my son.

Narrator: You should tell her that the *goni-billa*¹⁰⁵ will get her. As a child, the idea of a sack man used to keep me up at night, and out of mischief at daytime.

Attamma: I would never put fear in her. Never! But I do worry... what if a *gōni-billa* finds her before I do? I used to tell my children that a man with a sack will take them away if they misbehave. Then many years ago, men in iron boots picked up my youngest at the library. They took him and lined him up in the middle of the field, with a dozen other boys. Then the *gōni-billa*¹⁰⁶ stood in front of my son and nodded his head. He was no rebel, my boy. All he wanted was to read. But they took him from me, and I have been searching for him since.

Narrator: I hope you find Mustard Seed tonight.

Attamma: I sometimes wonder if she is safer in her hiding place, than out here. Such is life. Come, my scallywags, say goodbye to this nice aunty and let's go find your sister.

Attamma sings, accompanied by Ensemble and Narrator.

¹⁰⁵ *Gōni-billa* is Sinhalese equivalent of sack-man or bogeyman.

¹⁰⁶ During the 1988/89 insurgency in Sri Lanka, the term *goni-billa* was used to refer to an arrested insurgent who would act as an informer to the military. The face of the informer would be covered with a gunnie sack with holes to see through. The informer would then identify (with a nod of the head) other members of the movement in a line-up.

Come out come out wherever you are,
From the roof or underground,
Grandma will give you kisses and sweets,
Come out come out wherever you are.

Stay, stay where ever you are,
Where darkness is safer than daylight,
If you see a nice uncle with a sack on his back,
Run, run, and hide, run, run, and hide,
Run, run, and hide wherever you are.

As Attamma exits and we hear her off the arena.

Attamma: Puthē...!

At that moment, Mustard Seed peeps out from behind the backdrop, and Narrator carries the puppet to the chair and sits her down. Mustard Seed looks up at the stars.

MANTIS KŌLAMA

Mantis reveals himself gradually to the audience. He carries a bag on his shoulder. His dance is abundant with gestures that signify praying. Narrator responds by bringing her hands together in salutation. Mantis repeats the gesture and Narrator responds. This exchange takes place several times until Narrator breaks it off.

Narrator: I'm sure we have greeted each other quite sufficiently. Welcome to the arena, Mantis!

Mantis: Grateful, privileged, honoured to be here!

Bows repeatedly, and the Narrator bows in response. This is repeated several times until Narrator breaks it off again.

Narrator: Please, please, that's enough. Say, why do you do that?

Mantis: (Still bowing) Do what?

Narrator: That!

Mantis: All praying mantids do what I do, and we do it because it's what we have always done.

Narrator: But why do you pray to me?

Mantis: I didn't. I simply greeted you.

Narrator: Then you should be called a greeting mantis?

Mantis: Is that a joke? I'll tell you a joke; it's you, trying to be a Kōlam practitioner.

Narrator: Ey!¹⁰⁷ That's uncalled for. I'm only trying to...

Mantis: Experiment with an age-old tradition?

Narrator: I will justify my argument in the thesis, Mantis. Now kindly stick to script.

Mantis: In the *old* Kōlam arena, they were allowed to improvise, like this!

Mantis enters the audience, interacts, and improvises. He hands over his bag to an audience member for safe keeping.

Narrator: Mantis.

¹⁰⁷ Same as "Oy".

Mantis: Narrator.

Narrator: That's enough, Mantis. Get your praying hands down here.

Mantis: Did I offend you? Profuse apologies. Do forgive me. Please...

Mantis bows frantically.

Narrator: You're doing it again.

Mantis: But this time I'm begging your forgiveness.

Narrator: Alright, alright. I forgive you.

Mantis: Much obliged (*Bows again*).

Narrator: There you go again. Tell me, who taught you to do that?

Mantis: Do what?

Narrator: Do that! (indicating praying hands)

Mantis: My parents, grandparents, great grandparents...

Mantis sings ad-lib accompanied by drum. Narrator and Ensemble join in.

Mantis: *Aunts, uncles, girlfriends, neighbours,
Temple, kovil, mosque, church,
Primary teacher, secondary teacher, varsity
professor,
Shopkeeper, bus driver, government officer,*

Narrator: *Etakota¹⁰⁸, police commissioner!*

Mantis: *Every full moon, every crossroad,
Roundabout and tree that has a shrine.*

Ensem: *Every full moon, every crossroad.
Roundabout and tree that has a shrine.*

Mantis: *Natural disasters, unnatural disaster,
Every election, interrogation room,
torture chamber,
Death, birth and even from you, my dear Narrator.*

Narrator: Me?

Mantis: Yes, you and this Kōlam arena.

Mantis puts his hands together and circles the arena. On reaching the Ensemble, he rests his elbow on the shoulder of an actor and strikes up a conversation.

Mantis: See *machang*¹⁰⁹, how can I resist it, when everyone and everything around me reminds me to pray?

The actor shows disapproval at Mantis's casualness and Mantis immediately fumbles and apologises.

Narrator: Well, you seem to be quite happy to pray to anyone and anything?

Mantis: Ay yes, there's a reason for that, and that's my little secret!

¹⁰⁸ එතකොට pronounces *etha-kota* is used here in lieu of 'how about' or 'not forgetting'.

¹⁰⁹ මම. pronounced *mah-chung*, is a Sinhalese colloquial term for addressing a friend, and is the equivalent of "mate" or "buddy".

Narrator: Secret? I love secrets. Do tell!

Mantis: When it's a secret how can I tell you?

Narrator: But here in the Kōlam arena Mantis, we keep no secrets.

Mantis: So, you prove with your silent flatulence (*waves hand in front of face*).

Narrator: Mantis!

Mantis: Narrator?

Narrator: I will not tolerate insults in my arena.

Mantis: Your arena? Didn't you say a little while ago that this arena belongs to everyone?

Narrator: I did. It does. But as the boss of this place, I shall not put up with insolence.

Mantis: Insolence? Never! I detest the word itself. In fact, you will find that if you are ever to encounter a creature so obliging, that would be me. I have offended you yet again! Forgive me, please (*bows repeatedly*).

Narrator: I will forgive you...

Mantis: Much indebted... (*bows again*)

Narrator: ... if you tell us your secret.

Mantis: Ah yes, you humans always know how to put a 'give' in forgive. Fine, I'm not precious with information. My secret is simple. My genuflection says to you that you are superior, that I pose no threat to you. By making *you* feel safe, *I* feel safe.

Narrator: That's it?

Mantis: That's it. The art of survival and the way to a risk-free life.

Narrator: Do you mean to say that you bowed your way through life?

Mantis: And through history. Listen, when the notorious outlawed Indian prince *Vijaya* arrived on the Island with his army of 700, I genuflected. I survived while the native *Yakshas* were massacred. When the Cholas came looking for wealth, I genuflected. Villages went up in flames and kings went into hiding. But not me, I thrived. Then the Portuguese arrived eating mouthfuls of quartz and drinking casks of blood...

Narrator: And you genuflected?

Mantis: And they offered you their bread and wine! Then came the Dutch and the British!

Narrator: You genuflected!

Mantis: When they cried freedom in 1948...

Narrator: You genuflected!

Mantis: When they cried tyranny...

Narrator: You I genuflected!

Mantis: Ah, now we're on the same page of the script.

Narrator: But, why do you genuflect when there is no one in front of you?

Mantis: With a world population of seven billion people, and a pantheon of 330 million gods, I'm sure none of my genuflection goes to waste. I genuflect and whoever crosses my

path receives it. No one is neglected and all egos are satisfied. Are you satisfied?

Mantis enters audience improvising and enquiring if they are satisfied. He takes his bag and thanks the person for looking after it.

Narrator: Mantis, tell me, was there ever a mantis that refused to genuflect? Who wanted more from existence than to pray for survival?

Mantis: There were. There were many.

Mantis returns to the arena.

Narrator: And, where are *they*?

Mantis: They didn't make it.

Narrator: So, they are no more?

Mantis: They exist in legends and chronicles. Interesting, isn't it? Those who yielded to a mantis code of existence, survived. Those who refused, found their way into heroic tales that are read to our larvae at bedtime.

Narrator: (*Seeing mantis's knapsack*) What's in the bag?

Mantis: Everyone who is someone.

Narrator: Everyone?

Mantis: This my friend, is another trick in my book of survival.

From his bag, Mantis takes out framed images and statuettes of the Buddha, Jesus, Indian deities, and Sinhalese deities.

Narrator: But why do you take these everywhere you go?

Mantis: One can never know which one of them will come to your rescue when your life's in peril. When the Tsunami came, I prayed to them all and I was washed atop a coconut tree. All those who didn't make it must have prayed to the wrong god.

Narrator: It's true. One can never know whose powers can solve your everyday problems.

Mantis: Precisely! (*Mantis begins to pile the figurines back in his bag*). So, I bring them all with me, and when I'm in a vulnerable place, I put this sack in front of me and pray.

Narrator: Don't you wish you could leave the Mantis life and live more freely, like me?

Mantis: What makes you think that I could have a better life than this? Let me tell you a little story. I once saw some Sri Lankan actors worshipping Harrison Ford.

Narrator: I know that movie! Indiana Jones!

Mantis: Indiana Jones finds himself in a pitiful Indian village where Sinhalese speaking men and women put their hands together and beg the hero to save them from the evil maharajah. The whip-wielding hero throws himself amidst cannibals to bring peace to the destitute.

Narrator: What a movie that was!

Mantis: Now, had those Sri Lankan actors asked Mr Spielberg...

Here, a roleplay takes place. Narrator plays Spielberg and Mantis first plays an elderly man, then a young woman.

Mantis: (As an elderly man) “Mr Spielberg, may I ask... why do these villagers place their destiny in the hands of a strange white man?”

Narrator as ‘Spielberg’ struggles to find an answer.

Mantis: (As coquettish woman) Mr Spielberg, how come they speak Sinhalese in an Indian village?

Narrator as ‘Spielberg’ is irritated.

Mantis: Now had they such questions, they would never have had a role in a big Hollywood blockbuster.

Narrator: Attane...!¹¹⁰ I would worship anyone to be in a Hollywood movie.

Mantis: Precisely! And to answer your question, why should I bother to change anything? Genuflection is more in demand now than it was ever before. Everyone wants to be worshipped by someone; even you, my dear Narrator. And even you, my dear Audience. And where there is demand...?

¹¹⁰ ඇත්තෙන් pronounced *atta-nē*-, this translates as “true that”.

Narrator: There is supply.

Mantis genuflects to audience and all in the arena, dances and exits.

Narrator: (To Audience) Is he a better man who yearns worship than he who readily offers it?

GANDHABBA (BETWEEN-LIVES) KŌLAMA

Gandhabba Kōlama is two female heads sharing one body. Their long hair is bound together in a single knot. Gandhabba carries a long list, rolled up and attached to her hip. She dances in the arena and it is revealed with gestures that her hair and dress are completely drenched. Ensemble and Narrator sing accompanied by drum and guitar.

*They come from the river like ethereal beings,
Lips painted red, bloody shoe-flower red,
Their flesh is tattooed blue and green,
Eyes wide open though they are dead,
Weave, weave the moonlight in your hair, my love,
But don't you disappear on me, my love, my love.*

Narrator: Well, well, well, what an interesting specimen we have here. Ah! Someone grab me a mop; this one is dripping everywhere. Look what you have done to my floor, lady!

Gand 1: Lady? I think you ought to use the plural of lady, lady!

Narrator: Ladies?

Gand2: Or better yet, you can call us, Comrades!

Narrator: Comrades? I didn't realise there were two of you there.

Gand 1: The more the merrier, don't you think?
(*Chuckles*)

Narrator: Ladies and gentlemen, we have for you, conjoined twins from Ceylon!

Applause from Ensemble and Narrator.

Gand 1: Well, where are they?

Narrator: Who?

Gand 2: Your conjoined twins.

Narrator: I meant you.

Gand 1: Us?

Narrator: Yes.

Gand 2: Us?

Narrator: Yes, you.

Gand 1: But we're not conjoined.

Gand 2: We are not sisters either.

Narrator: Well then, what are you doing sharing one body?

Gand 2: Is that so bad at a time of economic crisis and overpopulation?

Narrator: You confuse us.

Gand 1: You confuse yourself.

Narrator: Fine. Why don't you introduce yourself to these good people, then? Who are you? Where do you come from? What brings you here?

Gand 2: Is this is an interrogation?

Gand 1: We have no more fingernails to lose!

Narrator: This, my dear Comrades, is a Kōlam arena, and here, it's simply a protocol to introduce one's self to the audience. At least tell us this, are you woman, goddess, demon, or spirit?

Gand 2: You forgot witches...

Gand 1: Whores...

Gand 2: Freaks...

Gand 1: And Feminists.

Gand 2: Would you stone us to death?

Gand 1: Burn us at the stake?

Gand 2: Or pay a shilling to see us in the circus? (*They laugh hysterically*).

Narrator: That was long ago, Comrades. The world is far more civilised now.

Gand 2: Ah yes, your civilised world would rather put us in a reality show. Ceylonese twins in the Kōlam arena. Inspiring story.

Narrator: This, my dear Comrades, is not the time or the place to discuss the evils of capitalism. At least tell us why you are drenched from head to toe.

Gand 1: It's a long story.

Narrator: Which you will keep short, I hope. In the good old days, the Kōlam arena kept a village up all night. But tonight, we only have a couple of hours here. Time is money, dear Comrades, and therefore, brevity is the soul of wit¹¹¹.

Gand 2: I thought we were not going to speak of the evils of capitalism.

Narrator: Tick tock Comrades.

Gand 1: We come from the river.

Narrator: You went bathing at this hour? Didn't your mothers warn you about *Kalukumāra*¹¹², the dark demonic prince who lurks on desolate riverbanks, waiting to prey on young women like you?

Gand1: Our mothers didn't raise us to fear the dark...

Gand 2: Or any prince.

Gand 1: We have come from the river in search of someone.

Gand 2: Someone we have sought for many years.

Narrator: I believe you are in the right place, Comrades. See, this Kōlam arena is the playground of all cosmic beings. Tell us who you seek, and we shall find him, her, or it for you, without further ado. Let me guess, is it a prospective husband, you seek?

¹¹¹ From the phrase, "*Since brevity is the soul of wit / And tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes, I will be brief...*" in Shakespeare's Hamlet – Act 2.

¹¹² Kalukumāra translates as *dark prince*; is a demon who is believed to seduce and/or possess young women. The myth was used in rural Sri Lanka to curb sexual desires of women and prevent sexual encounters.

Both Gandhabba spit in contempt.

Narrator: (To audience) Oh good. Because some of our male friends here may find it frightening enough to be married to a woman with one head.

Gandhabba produces the list.

Gand 2: See this list here? Our quest is to find the right person to whom it can be entrusted.

Narrator: A list?

Gand 1: A very long list.

Narrator: Is it a list of rare Kōlam masks sold to foreign museums?

Gand 2: Sold, smuggled, borrowed, who knows. But no, this isn't that list.

Narrator: Is it a list of corrupt politicians?

Gand 2: No.

Narrator: A list of corrupt relatives of corrupt politicians?

Gand 1: No.

Narrator: A list of weapons required to go to war?

Gand 1: No, but the war is also responsible for this list.

Narrator: I say, how about a clue?

Gand 1: It's a list of names.

Narrator: Names of people who have lost jobs?

Gand 2: No.

Narrator: Lost their land?

Gand 1: No.

Narrator: Could it be a list of asylum seekers who made it to Australia last year?

Gand 2: Then, you'd be looking at a very short list, wouldn't you?

Narrator: The suspense is killing me!

Gand 1: Pity. That would be an uneventful death.

Narrator: Exactly. So, may I see that list in this lifetime?

Gand 2: On one condition.

Narrator: What's that?

Gand 1: Help us find that person who can take this list and do right by us.

Narrator: That depends on the list, Comrades.

Gand 2: Show it to her Comrade.

Gand 1: I don't trust her Comrade.

Gand 2: Show it!

(Gandhabba hands over the list to Narrator. It unravels to the ground)

Narrator: A list of missing persons?

Gand 1: Every man, woman and child who will never be issued a death certificate.

Narrator: Everyone?

Gand 1: Since the time of King *Mahāsammata*¹¹³.

Narrator: Wait, are your names on this list?

¹¹³ The first mythical king mentioned in the origin story of Kōlam and some Sinhalese rituals.

Gand 2: I'm thirty-four million, six hundred and seventy...

Gand 1: Yes, they are.

Narrator: Who are you?

Gand 1: We are Gandhabba Kōlama. Drifting in limbo, between death and life.

Narrator: But my dear comrades, how did you meet this terrible fate?

Gandhabbas sing, accompanied by guitar.

When I was young and alive, *Che* said to me,
"Come with me, let's paint this town red!"
Red in my blood, red in my eyes,
Red on my tongue, red on my hands.
So, I did, I painted it all red.

Narrator: You fell in love?

Gand 2: With the revolution.

Narrator: Which one?

Gand 1: It was 1971.

Gand 2: I'm quite sure it was 1988.

Gand 1: But wait, wasn't there shelling in the distance?

Narrator: That sounds like the thirty-year war.

Gand 2: I keep telling you it wasn't shelling; it was a knock on the door.

An actor in the Ensemble appears wearing a demon mask.

Demon: You must come with us.

Gand 2: Mother, mother... don't cry.

Demon: Just a few questions.

Gand 1: I'll be back I promise.

Gand 2: I told them nothing.

Gand 1: I told them everything.

Demon: Che Guevara's whore, I'd rather break your neck, than waste a bullet on you!

Gand 1: He was lef- handed.

Gand 2: They disposed their bullets into our bodies.

Gand 1: Bound us by our hair.

Gand 2: And splash.

Narrator: You have been drifting since.

Gand 2: Not everyone who disappears makes it to the river. But they all make it to this list.

Narrator: The old lady who was here a little while ago said her son...

Gand 1: He's here too.

Narrator: Was he one of you?

Gand 2: Does it matter?

Narrator: Of course not.

Gand 2: Then, would you help us.

Narrator: I can try. To begin with, we could publish that list in the Mahāwamsa. That way everyone will know who the missing are.

Gand 1: Publish this in the Mahāwamsa? You are most likely to find the names of those responsible

for our disappearances in that great chronicle of the Sinhalese.

Narrator: All right then. How about we ask the gods for help?

Gand 2: Your gods are crooked capitalists!

Narrator: No, I assure you, they are socialists.

Gandhabba looks at Narrator.

Narrator: Well, at least they used to be. It's just that they have their own share of problems and anxieties, you see, like....

Gand 1: Like the fear of vanishing from their celestial thrones in the pantheon; or being demoted to a human, or losing political patronage...

Narrator: Something like that. Right, then, the gods are out.

(Pause)

Narrator: But, there's another way to do this. You have a list of missing persons. But if we had the other list...

Gand 1: The other list?

Narrator: Yes, the list of those who made the missing disappear?

Gand 2: Oh that. That list has also disappeared.

(Pause)

Narrator: Comrades, I can't think of anyone who would want this list.

Gand 1: What about you, Narrator?

Narrator: Me?

Gand 2: Yes, you. Why don't *you* take it?

Narrator: And end up in this list like the rest of you? No thank you.

Gand 1: The problem is, the hero is dead.

Gand 2: Oh no, the problem is, the hero who slays the dragon, then gets paid to transform into a dragon, soon after the commercial break.

Narrator: I'm sorry Comrades.

Gand 1: It's been a long time since we heard an apology.

Narrator: That's because it's been a long time since anyone apologised, and that includes, you, Comrades.

(Pause)

Narrator: *(To audience)* Perhaps there's someone out there who is brave enough to help you. Is there anyone in the audience who wants this list? Anyone at all?

(Pause)

Gand 1: Do you hear that?

Gand 2: Silence.

Gand 1: Just as it is, after a disappearance.

Narrator: Perhaps another day, another arena, Comrades.

Gand 1: Perhaps?

Narrator: Perhaps.

Gand 1: Then until we find the keeper of the list, we will keep returning to the Kōlam arena.

Gandhabba takes back the list from Narrator.

Gand 2: Meanwhile, try not to be disappeared, will you?

Verses are repeated by Ensemble and Narrator as Gandhabba dances and exits.

Narrator: Ladies and gentlemen, we have come to the end of our evening of Kōlam. For lending us your eyes and ears, we are truly grateful. If we stumbled, if we faltered, do pardon our flaws; and take no offence, for there was none intended. Tonight, this arena was yours as much as it was ours. Good night my friends live well! Live long!!!

LÆLI KŌLAMA TRANSFORMS INTO GARA YAKA

As Narrator bids farewell to Audience, Læli Kōlama enters in a hurry. He carries a mop and runs around the arena mopping the floor, accompanied by drum. Narrator intervenes and stops the drum, at which point, Læli Kōlama comes to a halt.

Narrator: Ah, well, I'm glad you finally decided to turn up with a mop!

Læli: Did someone speak to me? I wouldn't know, as my ears are filled with dust.

Narrator: *(Recognising Læli Kōlama) Ade-appa¹¹⁴! Læli Kōlama, is that you?*

Læli: Even if you stand right here, I will not see you, because I am invisible.

Narrator: I know you can hear me, Læli Kōlama. And we can all see you as well as you see us. But we're about to wrap thing up here.

Læli: That's why I am here with Venerable Mop.

Narrator recoils at the foul smell of the mop.

Narrator: Venerable Mop? What happened to Ancestral Plank?

Læli: The gods took my plank and gave me this. I asked them if I can have my plank when I sail back to Lanka. They said, when I go home, I will not need the plank, because I will fly, like a god.

Narrator: That's fantastic, congratulations!

Narrator and Ensemble attempt to congratulate him, but Læli Kōlama stops them by threatening with the mop.

¹¹⁴ අමඩ අප්පා pronounced *adē-appā* is an expression of surprise.

Læli: No, no, no congratulations.

Narrator: Why not? Doesn't this mean you have been made a god?

Læli: Aiyo no, they intend to keep me as the devil that I am. That's why I am here. The only way I can become a god is if you help me.

Narrator: Me?

Læli: Yes you. I am here to ask you a favour. Can you lend me a mask of a god?

Narrator: Læli Kōlama, I'm afraid that's not possible.

Læli: Why not? I will take any god.

Narrator: No.

Læli: Any one of the 330 million.

Narrator: I said no.

Læli: Doesn't have to be a big god! I'll take a small god.

Narrator: No, no, no!

Læli: At least a tree god. I'm not fussy that way.

Narrator: Læli Kōlama, stop it! I don't have god mask in our new repertoire; at least not yet.

Læli: Then can't you sneak one out of an old collection?

Narrator: Mē balandako ¹¹⁵

Læli: I promise I won't tell anyone.

Narrator: I can't steal a mask from the old masters, Læli Kōlama!

Læli: Why not? Better on my face than on the wall of a foreign museum.

Narrator: Who told you about stolen masks in foreign museums?

Læli: The two-headed lady, back there.

Narrator: Gandhabba Kōlama?

Læli: Yes, she too. Now, can you please... please... please... lend me a god mask?

Narrator: Læli Kōlama, everyone has a role in the Kōlam arena, as in this magnificent cosmos.

Læli: Will I always be a devil, then? Will I never be a god? (*sniffs*)

¹¹⁵ Can be translated as "would you look at this?".

- Narrator:** Oya itin....¹¹⁶ Well, they say the samsara gives everyone a chance at playing man, beast, god, or demon; so, there is hope for you yet.
- Læli:** I am lucky that way. (*sniffs and begins to mop*)
- Narrator:** Well, I must say your luck certainly hasn't run out yet, my friend, for I have just the job for a devil with a mop! Ladies and Gentlemen, Garā is the demon who presents himself at the end of a Kōlam performance to cleanse the arena and bless everyone present. Tonight, I would like to hand over that privilege to our friend here. What say you, Læli Kōlama? Will you be our Garā tonight, or wait indefinitely for a god to be required in the arena?
- Læli:** So, in other words, you want me to stay as the devil that I am?
- Narrator:** I'm giving you a chance to rise up in the pantheon, my friend. Better to be a known devil than an unknown god, isn't it? From the fire to the...?
- Læli:** Frying pan; from the frying pan to the chopping block; from the chopping block to the chicken pen;
- Narrator:** Now that's how a devil goes up in life.
- Læli:** I'm lucky that way.

¹¹⁶ Can be translated as "Now, now...". to express Narrator's sympathy.

Drumming gradually accelerates as Læli Kōlama transforms into Garā. He is assisted by Narrator and another actor. This sequence is accompanied by verses.

Garā Yakuma Verses

*ඩෙන්න ඩේනා ඩේන - නා ඩේන ඩෙන්නා
නා ඩේන ඩේන ඩේන - ඩේන ඩේන ඩෙන්නා*

*දඹ රුක මුදුනේ - වාසේ කරන යකු
දඹ රුක අල්ලා - සැරේ අරින යකු
දඹ රුක සොලවා - පයේ ගසන යකු
එයි දැන් අයිලෙන් - කිල ගරා යකු*

*දරා සිරස නයි පෙන තුන - කිරුල ලෙසේ
විරාජිතව වැඩ සිටිනා - උන් මෙලෙසේ
දරා තිබෙන අයිලය - තොරණක් විලසේ
ගරා කිල දළ යකු - බැස වර පියසේ¹⁷*

¹¹⁷ Translation of Gara Yakuma Verses :

*Denna denā dena... nā dena dennā...
Nā dena dena dena... dena dena dennā*

*That demon who lives in the Damba tree,
He grips the Damba tree and lets out his rage,
He shakes the Damba tree and stamps his feet,
Behold, demon Kīla Garā descends the ailē!*

*Crested with a crown of three cobra hoods,
There, they dwell victoriously,
The ailē stands tall like a grand pandol,
Descend now, fanged demon, Kīla Garā!*

Denna denā dena... nā dena dennā...
Nā dena dena dena... dena dena dennā

Damba ruka modunē – vāse karana yaku
Damba ruka allā – sarē arina yaku
Damba ruka solavā– payē gasana yaku
Ey dan ailen – Kīla Garā Yaku

Darā sitina nai pena tuna – kirula lesē
Virājītava vaeda sitinā – un melesē
Darā tibena ailaya – toranak vilasē
Garā Kīla dala yaku – baesa vara piyasē

Garā performs Ves Pāma revealing the transformed mask to the audience. He then climbs the ailē¹¹⁸ and sways. Vigorous drumming and singing continue. He then descends and blesses the Audience and the Performers, and the dance develops to a climax before he exits.

Following this segment, two drummers play the ‘Pin Bera’¹¹⁹ sequence, at the end of which, the actors greet each other and the audience (in Namaskara Mudra) and exit the arena. Lights fade while the backdrop with the Kalpavruksha remains lit.

¹¹⁸ A structure that the devil climbs, on which he sways back and forth.

¹¹⁹ Pin Bēra is a drumming sequence that is often played at the end of ritual and Kōlam performances to acknowledge and offer merits to the teacher, the parents of the performers, and deities.

APPENDIX B

MASKS



Læli Kōlama



Læli Kōlama



Diyasēna Kōlama



Attamma Kōlama



Mantis Kōlama



Gandhabba Kōlama



Gandhabba 1



Gandhabba 2



***Læli – Garā* (Transformation Mask)**



Mask illustrations – Stage 1



Unfinished Masks

Puppets



Music Score

Introduction to Kolam

(Adlib)

Buddhang_____ saranang_____ gachcha_____ mi_____ dhammang

saranang_____ gachcha_____ mi_____ sanghang_____ saranang_____

_____ gachcha_____ mi_____

Our masters of Kolam since bygone years Have summoned the gods well revered.....

_____ d Ah_____ Brahma

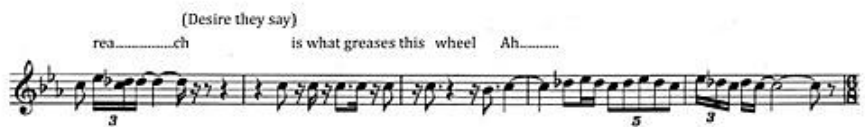
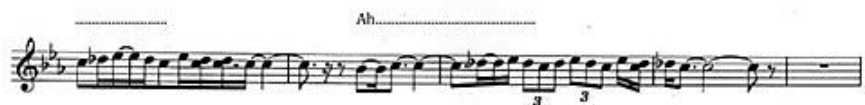
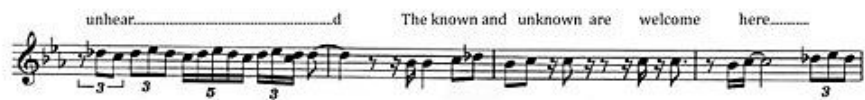
Vishnu and Pattini estee_____med Kataragama Nāta Hūniyam supre_____

_____ me Ah_____

Those masters of Kolam since bygone years_____ Welcomed all beings from worlds far

and near_____ Ah_____

The Kolam showground is for beast and man In this circle demons and gods will dance



The Origin of Kolam

From a land of milk and honey long a go... Comes a story recounted time and

again and again and again and again Pleasing the eyes of the young and the old, The

birth of Kolam we now unveil...il eh...

The king of the land was Mahā...sammata Of sublime beauty was

queen Maeni k... pā... la Order and beauty wove a cloth of harmony That

cradled the land of milk and honey...

Seeing his Queen so aggrieved The king from the wisest did counsel seek With much debate, it

was agreed a night of theatre a night of theatre must be conceived

Dance you men let the drums play on and on Sing songs of creatures on earth and beyond

72

78

Mythical birds and maidens entangled A farmer, a moor, and a posse of policemen

84

The king of savages a stork and a leopard Maimed warriors and death as a devil.

91

An inebriate Signor upon his wife's shoulders An African a white man and a pair of soothsayers

97

103

Tales of the Enlightened One in many lives pa..... st

110

All these and more played from..... dusk..... un.... til.... da (oh).....

115

..... wn.....

Laeli Kolama

1 La la lä... la la Lae..... li na min ga Laeli nam in ga Lae... li naminga..... laeli enä..... (ah)

6 laeli lama..... (ah)

12

Detailed description: The image shows three staves of musical notation for the song 'Laeli Kolama'. The first staff starts at measure 1 and ends at measure 5. The second staff starts at measure 6 and ends at measure 11. The third staff starts at measure 12 and ends at measure 15. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like '3' (triplets). The lyrics are written above the notes, with some words in Finnish and others in a phonetic script. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 3/8.

Diyasena Kolama

1

7 From a land of milk and honey long a go... Comes a story recounted time and

13 Here comes a fe.....llow.....

19 long awaited he.....ro A prince wi.....thout a crown but he's the chosen one

25 His blood cur.....dles and aches for..... his ra.....ce they say When he.....roar s you will

31 know..... the lion has risen

37 popeyed and

44 hot tempered lion's blood in his veins If I ask what he hides He will swear in your face

51 Beating his chest grinding his teeth When he gla.....res you will know.....

58 the lion has risen.



Was the Great Alexander Tall

1 Was the great Alexander tall..... Tell me was Napoleon tall

10 Wins ton Chur chill was he ta ll Aduma gā nē

18 was Gandhi tall.....

The musical score is written on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 3/8. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. The lyrics are written above the staff, with some words split across measures. The piece ends with a double bar line after the final measure.

Is my chest not broad enough

1 Is my chest not broad enough No your chest is broad enough Is my voice not deep enough

7 No..... your voice is deep enough Are my looks not good enough

11 No...no..... it's non of that

The musical score is written on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 4/4. The melody consists of quarter and eighth notes. The lyrics are written above the staff, with some words split across measures. The piece ends with a double bar line after the final measure.

To the Great Ocean

1 To the great ocea.....n comes now the ship In the great ocea.....n sails now the ship

9 To the sea of si.....le.....n.....ce comes now the ship..... In the sea of

14 si.....le.....n.....ce sails now the ship.....

The musical score is written on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 3/8. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. The lyrics are written above the staff, with some words split across measures. The piece ends with a double bar line after the final measure.

Aththamma (Theme)

1



5 Your bosom is heavy with honey and milk Your bosom is heavy with honey and milk to



9 nur..ture your children and their children then For nurture your children and their children then For



13 you old woman the Samsara i.....s long you o...ld woman the Samsara i.....s long



17 Bless this grandmother for she is your own. Bless this grandmother for she is your own.



21



24



Come out Come out

1. Come

9 out come out where.....ver you are.... From the roof or un.....der...ground Grandma will

18 give you kisses and sweets Come out come out whe.....rever you are...

27 Stay..... stay where ever you

36 are Where darkness is sa....fer tha...n day light If you see a nice uncle with a sack ..on his.. back.....

45 (Adlib) Run run and hi..... de run run and hi..... de run run and hide wher

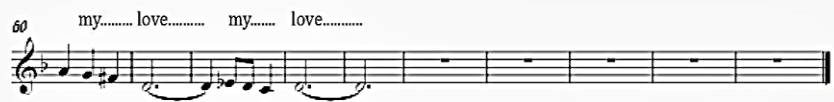
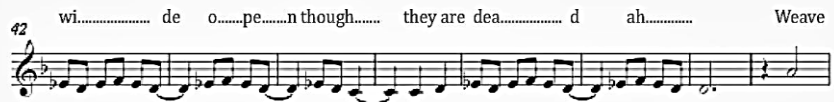
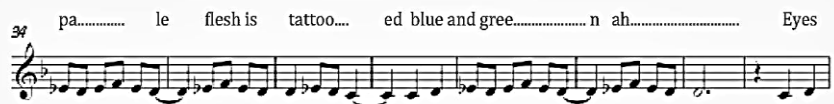
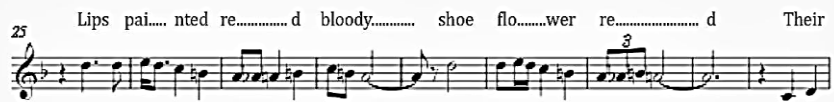
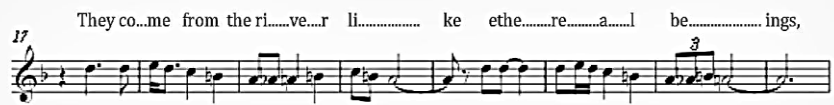
53 e.....ver you are run run and hide where...ver you are

64

72

The musical score is written on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, with some rests. The lyrics are written below the staff, aligned with the notes. The score is divided into measures by bar lines, with measure numbers 1, 9, 18, 27, 36, 45, 53, 64, and 72 indicated at the beginning of their respective lines.

Gandhabba - Introduction



Gandhabba – When I was young

1 When I was young and a.....li.....ve..... Che..... said to me..... Come

5 with me..... let's pa.....int this town re.....d..... Red in my blood

10 red in my.....eye..... S..... Red on my tongue... red on my

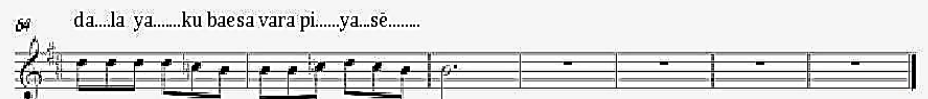
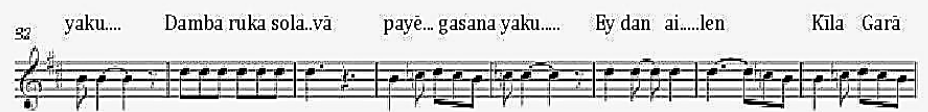
15 ha.....nds So I di.....d (yes) I pai.....nted it a..... ll

20 r.....ed

The musical score is written on five staves in 4/4 time with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The melody is composed of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together in groups. The lyrics are written above the notes, with ellipses indicating where the notes are tied to the previous line or where there are rests. The score ends with a double bar line on the fifth staff.

Laeli-Garā – Introduction

(Thanama)



Instruments used in Heritance

Yak Beraya	The 'devil drum' is a crucial instrument in low country dance.
Daekkiya	A handheld small drum of the low-country tradition but is not used in Kōlam.
Horāneva	The principal brass-wind instrument used in Kōlam.
Hak-gediya	The conch is widely used in Sinhalese ceremonial practices, but not in Kōlam.
Classical guitar	Not used in Kōlam
Thalampota	Small symbols widely used in traditional dance and music -used in Kōlam.
Gunguru bells	Worn on ankles in classical Indian and Sri Lankan dance. Not used in Kōlam.
Silambu	Brass anklets with beads inside that are part of the costume. Worn in Kōlam.
Block	Of Latin American origin; not used in Kōlam
Thunder tube	Not a local instrument and is not used in Kōlam.
Clave	Similar to wooden sticks that are used in low-country <i>lī keli</i> dance; not used in Kōlam.
Seed-pod rattle	Of Peruvian origin and is not used in Kōlam.
Brass bells	Small bells commonly used in Hindu temples; not used in Kōlam.
Bamboo flute	Widely used in Sinhalese music but not used in Kōlam.
Kazoo	Not used in Kōlam

COSTUME DESIGN



Narrator



Ensemble



Læli Kōlama



Diyasēna Kōlama



Attamma Kōlama

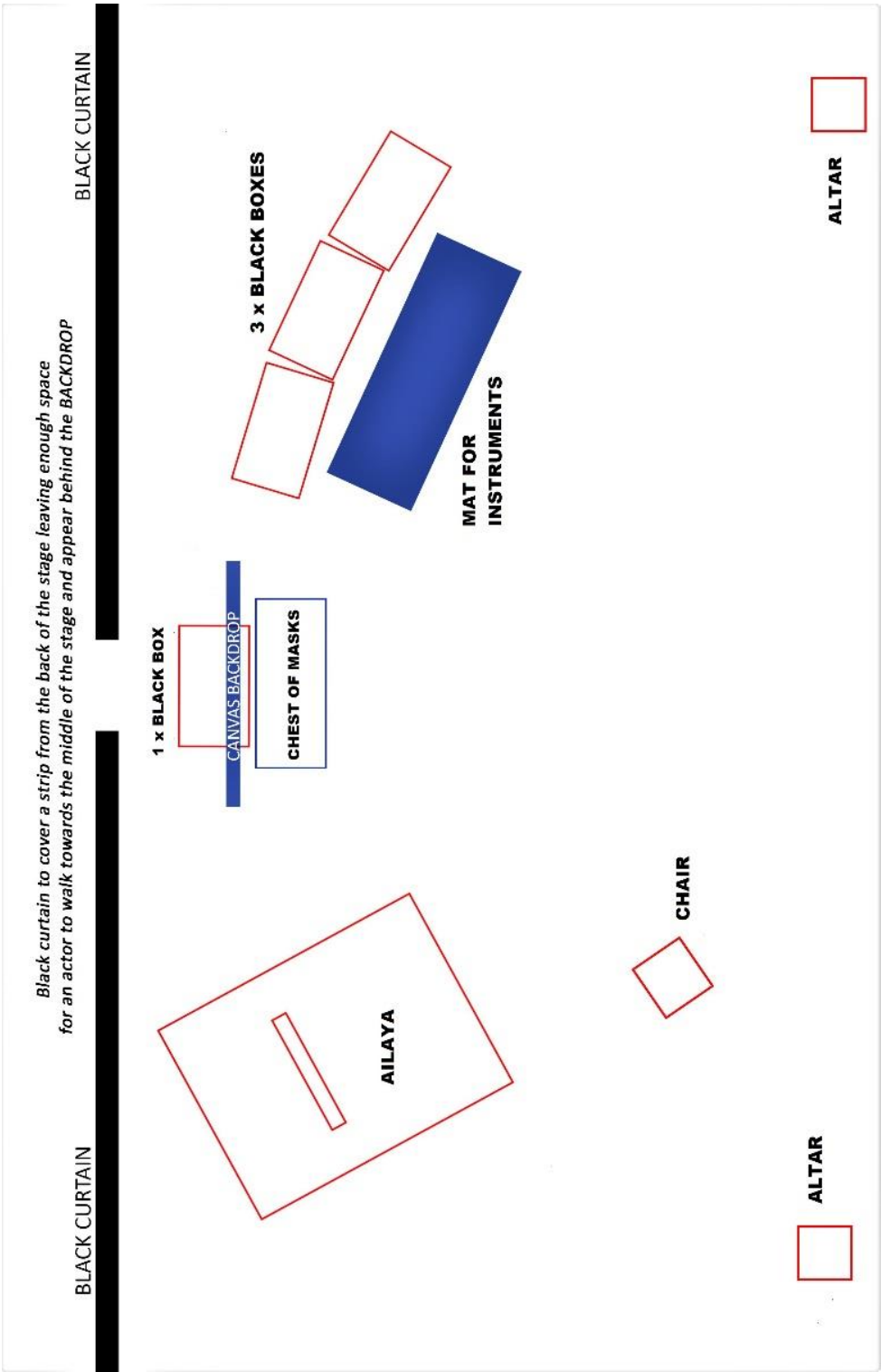


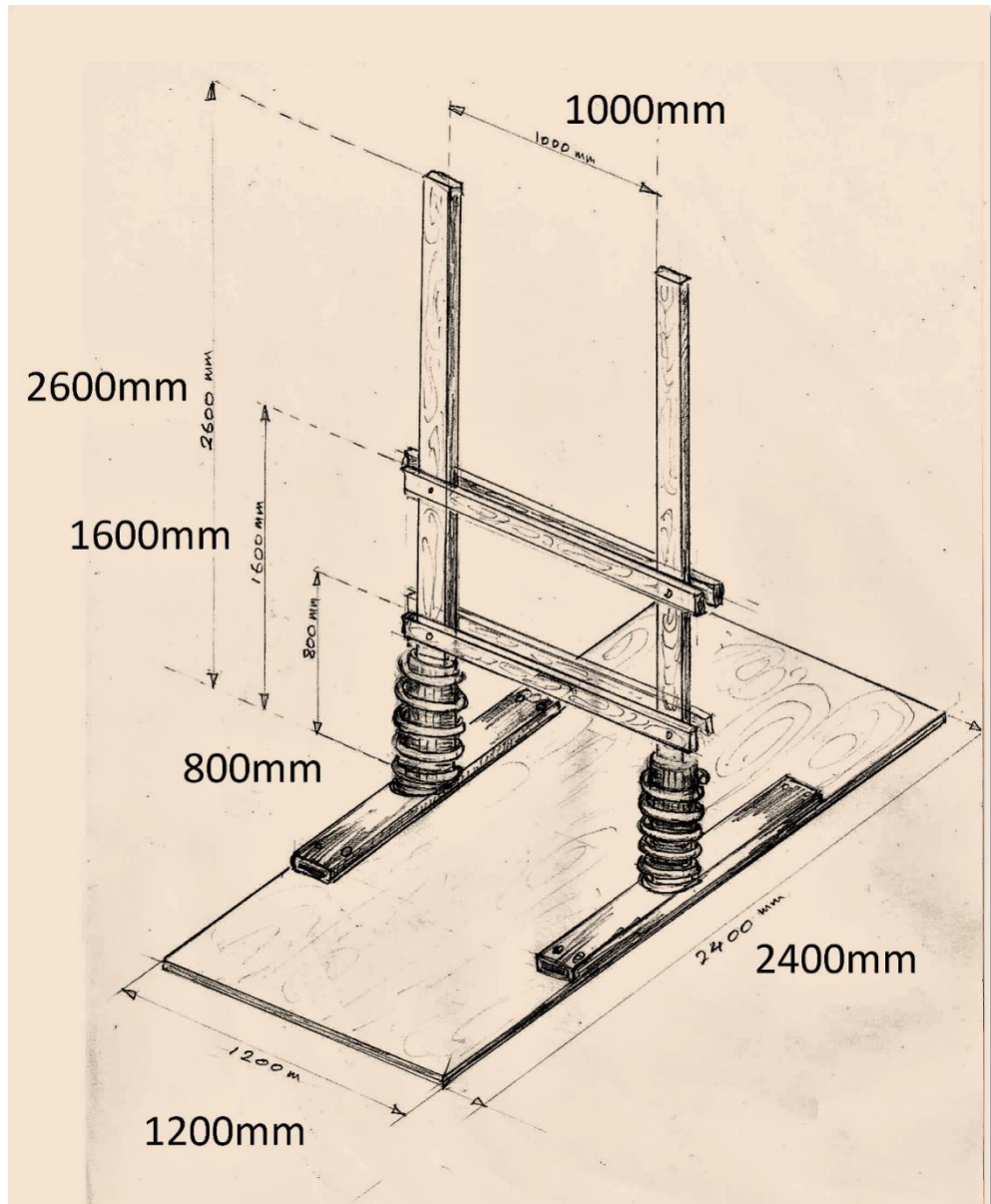
Mantis Kōlama



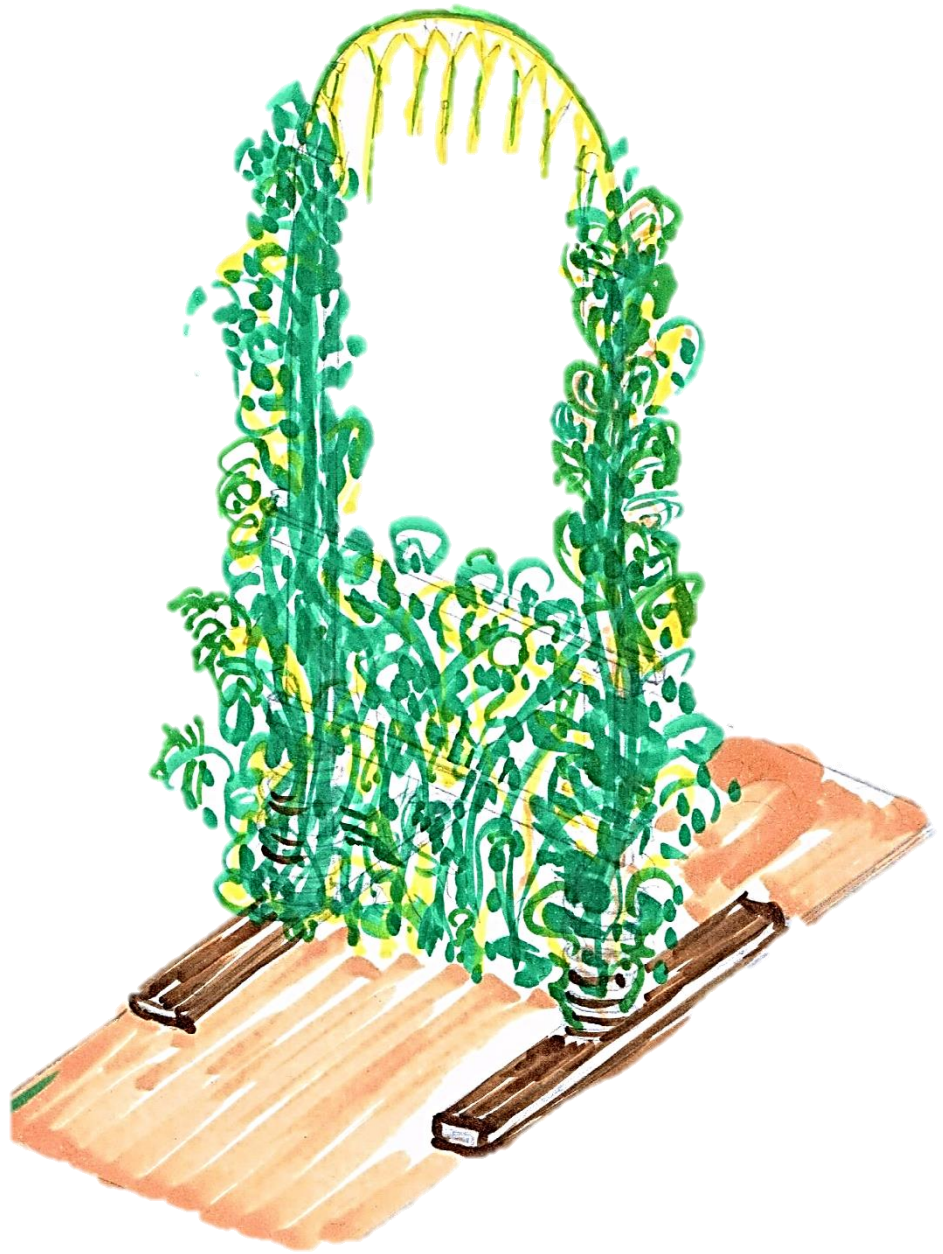
Gandhabba Kōlama

SET DESIGN





Aiyaya / Ailē (swaying contraption)



Aiyaya / Ailē dressed with foliage

Backdrop



PUBLICITY



Poster Design

Trailer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_h-L073Khl

PHOTO GALLERY

















APPENDIX C

Cast and Credits

This play is dedicated to traditional Kōlam practitioner, past and present.

RESEARCH SUPERVISORS

Dr Karina Smith

Dr Deborah Leiser-Moor

Dr Christine Babinskas

PLAYWRIGHT & DIRECTOR

Anasuya Subasinghe

CAST

Narrator

Anasuya Subasinghe

Læli Kōlama

Jithendra Vidyapathy

Diayasena Kōlama

Indika Ferdinando

Attamma Kōlama

Stefan Thirimanne

Mantis Kōlama

Stefan Thirimanne

Gandhabba Kōlama

Dinupa Kodagoda

Musician

Nadika Weligodapola

MUSIC

Nadika Weligodapola

CHOREOGRAPHY

Jithendra Vidyapathy

MASK DESIGN

Anasuya Subasinghe

MASK ILLUSTRATIONS

Trevor Stacpool

**MASK DESIGN DEVELOPMENT
& MASK PAINTING**

Sirimal Sanjeewa Kumara
Sujeewa Weerasinghe

MASK CARVING

Thuresh Manjula

BACKDROP CONCEPT

Anasuya Subasinghe

BACKDROP ART

Sirimal Sanjeewa Kumara

COSTUME DESIGN

Dinushika Senevirathne
Anasuya Subasinghe

PUPPET MASK CARVING

Sumith Jayawarnana

PUPPET MAKING

Tilaka Subasinghe

LIGHTING DESIGN

Indika Ferdinando

LIGHING TECHNITIANS

Asanka Opatha
Supin Bandara

SET DESIGN

Anasuya Subasinghe

SET CONSTRUCTION

Gamini Ranasinghe

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Malith Hegoda

CREW IN SRI LANKA

Koralage Saman
Kumudu Wickramathanthri
Keishika Koralage

CREW IN MELBOURNE

Malith Hegoda
Manjitha Chandrajith
Teshani Sabaragamukorala
Gayani Memanage

FOH CREW

Yasodha Samaranayake
Athula Samaranayake
Lochi Kumaradasa
Milanka Chandrajith
Nadira de Silva
Nadine de Silva
Chin Samarakoon

PUBLICITY

Production Trailer

Director: Malith Hegoda
DoP: Kularuwan Gamage
& Magic Lantern Pvt. Ltd.

Poster Artwork

Sirimal Sanjeewa Kumara

Printing

Guss Design and Print

VIDEO PRODUCTION

Prasad Wijayabandu and Next
Frame Studio & Productions.
Camera Crew: Harshan
Mahawithana, Niraj Perera, Dilan
Jayathilake

ORGANISERS

Waruna Savida
Yasodha Samaranayake
Athula Samaranayake
Lochi Kumaradasa
Chinthaka Samarakoon

THANKS AND APPRECIATION

Senarath and Tilaka Subasinghe
Guss Design & Print, Aayubo Tea and Performing Arts Circle
Asanka Opatha and Kanishka Gunatilaka of Animareal Theatre Company
Upa Upadasa and Senior Citizens Club of Waverley
Kusumsiri Liyanarachchi, Yashodhara Sarachchandra and Next Frame Studio
Jinadasa Nivithigala, Lahiru Liyanage, Nithya Dewduni & Ruwan Pushpakumara
Anushka Gokula
Lakshman and Dhammika Rajapakse
Mary Chan
Channa Deshapriya
Upul Chamila Bandara
Jayasri and Deepali Chandrajith
Sewwandi Abeysinghe
Prasanna Hewage Don
Pushpa Nanayakkara
Saumya Liyanage, Head of Drama Department, The University of Performing and Visual Arts
Margaret Malloch, FRSA Director of Research Training, College of Education, Victoria University
Sannasa Newspaper – Asoka Subasinghe and Jagath J Edirisinghe
Ausnews Lanka – Chandima Jayaneththi
Vishvavahini – Bandu Dissanayake and Nuwan Samarapathi
3MDR – Sinhalese Paya Dekak – Charitha Dissanayake and Shiroma Boyagama
And all who contributed to making this project a reality.

Personal Communication

Traditional Practitioners:

Kularathna, L. H. Mirissa Udupila Kōlam tradition. (2015, December 14).

Senaratne, L. P. Member of Mirissa Udupila Eksath Kala Mandalaya. (2015, December 14).

Rupathilaka, P. Raigama Kōlam tradition. (2105, January 31).

Wijesuriya, J. M. Ambalangoda Kōlam tradition. (2014, December 26).

Scholars and Theatre Practitioners:

Dela Bandara, G. (2014, December 11)

Ranaweera, B. (2014, December, 22)

Hathlawaththa, C. (2014, December 15)