

## The Dramatics of Trojan Women on Sri Lankan Stage

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### Abstract

*The attraction of Classical Greek drama to the Sri Lankans in the twenty first century is an interesting phenomenon. Among the dramas the **Trojan Women** of Euripides had become most popular during the later period of the ethnic conflict in the country, namely the thirty years of war with the LTTE, which brought many a suffering to all Sri Lankans. In this study investigations have been made on how the production was translated, staged and received during the years of turmoil. **Trojan Kanthavo**, the adaptation of **Trojan Women** attracted many and diverse criticisms from the Sinhalese and the Tamil audiences. There was a notable difference in the reactions of the both racial communities. There were threats not only to the director but to artists who participated in the play as well. A series of interviews and critical analysis of available material from journal and newspaper articles were made in carrying out the research. Personal interviews had to be carefully scrutinized as they revealed much of audience reaction. Findings proved that Greek Drama could be staged irrespective of the difference of time and place to address contemporary problems. The flexibility of the tradition enabled modern artists to experiment based on firm foundations of the Classics. More than a decade had passed since the first staging, of **Trojan Kanthavo**, yet the drama instigated by it seems to still go on. ie the recent court case against those who led the attacks and the consequent forgiving by the injured parties.*

**Key Words:** Greek Drama, Sri Lankan Stage, Reception, Repercussions.

### 1. Classical background

There had existed in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE Greece a theater culture which gave way to the emergence of great classical tragedians such as Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. The background, circumstances and atmosphere had been constructive to involve the whole citizenship, making the products a powerful mode of mass communication. The dramas performed were viewed under a festive comradeship of citizens and visitors to the city. The spectators had a prior knowledge of the story line of the myth that represented the history and religion of the Greeks. The poets, their techniques as well as the basis of interpretation given by the individual tragedians to traditional material were also known knowledge or easily understood by the audience. The theatre culture they were experiencing had prepared their minds to receive the messages given by the poets through their dramas.

The understanding of the interpretations depended on the individual level of intelligence as it is only fair to expect. Some saw only the superficial or the topical, others managed to seek out the universal beyond the appeal of excitement and emotions evoked. Then the question of how and why these classical tragedies appeal, impress and influence the modern world arises. This involves a difference in time, place and culture, as pertaining to the twentieth century Sri Lanka. It is also a fact that in the contemporary world dramas do not enjoy the value they used to enjoy as a mode of mass communications in ancient Classical Greece. The reason for this is that modern technology had presented the world with much effective methods of communication.

### 2. Objectives and Methodology

The purpose of this study is to investigate the reception that tragedy, **The Trojan Women** of Euripides enjoyed when it was staged on modern Sri Lankan stage. (Although the production itself was in the Sinhala language, the researcher wishes to use the term 'Sri Lankan' because of the tremendous impact it had on the Tamil speaking spectators.) The concentration of analysis would be on the play **Trojan Kanthavo** of Dharmasiri Bandaranayake which is an adaptation of the above play of Euripides. The intention of this paper is to closely scrutinize the impact and reception it received under the social, political atmosphere it was staged in.

To arrive at a conclusive answer it is necessary to analyze facts based on personal observations made with a critical distance along with an objective survey of personal interviews and published reviews. These reviews are mostly taken from magazines or newspapers. Though one may interpret the views expressed as value judgments, these were of utmost importance to forming impressions on the impact on audience and the reception the play received. The persons who expressed their views were academics as well as spectators which provide a cross section of the community. A brief introduction of the position of drama in the modern world as well as Classical drama on modern stage would prove an approach to the critical analysis which will also include an investigative element.

### ***3. Position of Drama in the modern world***

In modern productions of drama or performing arts in general, spectators are often separate in space, and time. They would be at times even separate from each other, since they have been trained by the modern television to enjoy art by themselves as individuals. In such instances spectators would be inactive consumers of a prepackaged product. Even in the theater spectators could become just ticket buying individuals. (Sommerstein, 2004, p.5) Though on occasions, the audience could be associated with a sub community such as a university or school, theatricals are not normally considered to be of central importance to the art of theater or to the society in which they were performed. This is in contrast to the position that dramas held in classical Greece. Further argument is that it is difficult to observe Greek drama in the perspective of modern drama. Modern drama on most occasions attracted those who sought to spend leisure time for entertainment or to break away from the monotony of the daily routine. But in the performance culture that existed in the classical Greece, drama was something more intimate which was connected to the lives of the individuals in the audience.

### ***4. Classical Drama on Modern Stage***

Storey and Avlence (2005, p.8) expresses the view that when considering classical drama on modern stage the distance in time and culture has to be taken in to account. The reason for this is that the texts that one deals with could be nearly more than two thousand and five hundred years old, which are far, removed from the modern world. The difference in language and the feeling that the originals were produced for an audience with cultural assumptions would no doubt prove a challenge. Even the space available would challenge the imagination of the artist to a considerable degree. The argument presented (Storey and Avlence, 2005 P. 1, 2) is that Greek drama represents the western classical world and has interested and attracted academics from a very early stage. But when investigating the reasons for these great plays to be still alive and relevant one is led to observe the difference of values attached to them according to the various stages of aesthetic, social, political and religious dimensions. It is also interesting to observe how Greek drama has gained multiple flavors by the shifting of the art from one culture to another.

They also moved from one period to another without losing their original identity as creative productions. In this, the practical outcome is the classics reaching over the limitations of a classroom of higher studies to a wider audience. And this enabled the dramatist to revive classical drama and interpret the texts to address wider issues that concern relevant contemporary issues. Another observation (Gramatas, 2002) is that Greek drama had stepped over the above limitations with time and through human intelligence and imagination. They have become complex artistic creations which reached the audience through aesthetic communication. This communication took place between the spectator and the totality of the stage spectacle. The significance is that Greek drama had not been directly transported or transferred from the productions of the ancient amphitheaters to the contemporary modern stage. They had been accomplished through artistic philosophical and theatrical interpretations that had developed and expressed throughout Europe.

With time, artists began to realize that what one was used to call wisdom from the past must be looked at in a different angle. (McDonald, 1992, p. 5). Foley (1974) observes that the Classicists as well as those who came in confrontation with the works had to indulge in a great deal of careful soul searching about the relevance of the field as well as the interest to an increasingly diverse modern audience. The above interest is facilitated by the Greek tradition itself. Myths were not considered by the ancient Greeks as sacred scripture that did not change. These stories changed and were constantly remade to please a changing and a diverse audience. Contemporary poets engage in a continuous conversation with an imagined heroic past. And they turn to the Greek tragic plots to reflect on the modern reality and the irrecoverable past.

Hence the original plot may hover in the background as a reference point while it is simultaneously shattered, interrupted and reconstructed. The poets also may deliberately eliminate certain points of the drama if they decide that it was not relevant to the present. M. Mc Donald (1992, p.6) claims that the modern playwrights do what is required of them. They are compelled to depict the world of the modern day in their plays. However, close observation proves that the world they depict is fragmented. But argument runs that it is more or less a littering of the stage with the debris of modern life. However it remains as a fact that what they try to depict through their tragedies is something fundamental and surpass the boundaries of time. Hence no one could claim that it is only the same tears that flowed down the faces of ancient Greeks that flow down the cheeks of modern audiences. It is and it is not. (M. Mc Donald (1992 P. 7).

The dramas would be emotional commentaries. And this commentary would share a strong link with the interpretation the poets had provided to the Classic. The acting, staging and the production itself would be an incarnation of the text. The exceptional significance to take note of is that the text is not static. It would move. It is an integration of past with the present. It is not through purely the emotional reaction that a modern adaptation is judged. For all great poetry gives an illusion of a view of life. (M. McDonald, 1992, P. 8). Art cannot be alienated from its historical or political context. An interpreter could translate some of the messages with reference to the original as well as he could do so in the present context. Furthermore he could also locate them in a present frame work. But this could be an extremely dangerous experiment. The barriers that had to be crossed could be classified as language, culture and time. The Greek dramas are compared to a foreign country that had to be understood, respected and admired for its unique characteristics. It is history that provided salt to season the production. (M. McDonald, 1992, p. 11). Adaptations of the classics involved two historical and cultural contexts.

- 1) The past – in which the dramas were written.
- 2) The present – where they were performed.

Each had to inform and help the other. The content had to commit, transcend, generate and compel the repetition and change across time. In doing so they would allow the modern individual to see the demonic forces in play. And these demons may be none other than he himself. Since the classics involve human conflict, questioning becomes vital in a tragedy. These questions may not be actually answered within the production. But it is important that the fore said questions are asked and given a prominence. The modern adaptations question the present in terms of the past. Hence through them new insights could be generated. They would also connect with issues that are vital to a modern audience. (M. McDonald, 1992, p. 13) People listen when they are affected. The ultimate test would be further survival of the productions. Impact of tragedy could vary from time to time. It would depend on the needs of a people particular in a place and period. Hence the modern poets should recognize the truth of tragedy and be able to present it in an appealing and forceful manner. It is through this that he will be able to touch the hearts and minds of the modern audience. The perceptions peculiar to ancient writers can only then be shared by modern audiences. (M. McDonald, 1992, p. 21)

## ***5. Trojan Women on Sri Lankan Stage***

### **5.1.Social Political Background –War and Violence**

One among many ideas expressed on the social and political background of war and violence that prevailed at the time are the following. To quote one of the interpretations of the period , M.Palihapitiya, (2011, p.74),a leading conflict resolution activist, the Sinhala and Tamil speaking people, who were the two major communities in Sri Lanka felt that there had been injustice performed against them by the other. It is believed that under the ‘divide and rule’ policy of the British, the Sinhalese people were bitter against the special status given to the Tamils. And the Tamils in return had felt that the Sinhalese majority rule was discriminatory against them. The 1956 the ‘Sinhala only act’ which made Sinhala the only official language in Sri Lanka increased the sense of marginalization and oppression. It was accused that the state used strength to control through fear. His argument runs that the inevitable result of this situation was that Tamil militant groups emerged in the North and the East, where majority of Tamil speaking people resided. And the first step taken by these militant groups were to eliminate Tamil political moderates, which in turn instilled terror among the Tamil civilians. Their objective was to gain a separate state. The anti – Tamil riots in 1983 became a blessing and consequently strengthened the justification of those seeking a separate Tamil state. Palihapitiya also observes that meanwhile there came to emerge several groups instigating fear and instability in common man.

According to him they are -

- 1) The Tamil separatists
- 2) The government forces
- 3) Government sponsored armed gangs.

The targets of these groups were often men and women who refused to accept their authority.

If one may analyze these categories objectively and impartially,

1) The 'Tamil Separatists' later on came to be referred to as 'Terrorists' due to the actions they carried against innocents, of both Sinhala and Tamil communities. Atrocities committed on impartial Tamil civilians who refused to join or support them, child conscription and robbing of government sponsored food and medical supplies could be taken as some of the many examples. The argument was that terrorists gradually moved away from representing the common cause of Tamils.

2) The purpose of the government forces, though later were accused of war crimes, was to bring order and peace to the area they were posted to. It is also a fact that these personal were individual human beings, and among many of them opposition to atrocities along with racism would have run high. Those Tamils who did not know better than to believe in what the militants had drilled in to their minds would also have conceived the SL army as a force of evil.

3) The accusation against 'government sponsored gangs' seems to controversial. The reason to this being that one could not substantiate it through concrete evidence as would be in many such occasions. But it is also a fact that the civilians were equally terrorized of what evil they could instigate. The incapacity on the part of the government to curb the crimes would have led people to make assumptions.

Palihapitiya (2011, p.74) significantly points out that the danger of the situation had been increased by the limitation of the freedom of the Press. According to him, both the government and the private media were free to celebrate the good deeds of the government but not their negative actions. Medium of posters were used but this amounted to serving the needs of one party or other. The argument that could be provided against this accusation was that it had been a time was war and the necessity to keep of the moral of the forces and civilians. Hence if not a government censorship, a self-censorship was necessary. But accurate truth not reaching the public made havoc seekers more active and the news they spread more 'dramatic' than truth. The media on the other hand seemed to fear consequences if they exercised their freedom without limits. It is in this atmosphere of censorship and fear that the theatre continued to be an oasis for expression. Theatre became one of the few available outlets for open expression and discussion. Many plays criticized public policies and political leaders or had empathy 'with the other side.' (Palihapitiya, 2011, p 75).

In most dramas performed political leaders in the south were brought to ridicule. Some playwrights were even bold enough to bring on stage contemporary politicians such as President Premadasa and J.R. Jayawardana, who were presidents of the country at the time, the LTTE leader Prabhakaran and Ms. Sirimovo Bandaranayaka (Palihapitiya 2011, p.75) much to the amusement of the audience. The plays and the characters no doubt provided a cathartic impact to the audience. The performers made a fool of these characters delighting the audience and making them responded with jeers and shouted insults. But there were no records of violence against the performers. The audience who enjoyed would have felt empowered to criticize, even if it was only limited to the confines of the theatre. The sense of power was symbolic and temporary. But it also made them realize that things could and should be different from what they were. It is in this atmosphere that the artists who were conscious of a social responsibility began to think of theatre as a tool for peace building.

## **5.2. Dharmasiri Bandaranayake, the Director.**

Productions of Dharmasiri Bandaranayake show that he had a firm belief in art as a vehicle of expression or a platform for social change and tolerance. He strongly held the view that it was not through guns or bombs that an ethnic harmony could be brought about. The people in all communities had to understand their cultural difference as well as the cultural similarity to coexist in harmony with each other. Recognition and through it acceptance had to be practically put in force to bring about peace and end the war that claimed may lives. (Dharmasiri Bandaranayake, 2008). What Dharmasiri Banranayake had wanted was to take a drama in Sinhala among the Tamil audience. Sinhala was despised by the Tamils in the war ravaged areas. His intention was to stage his play in Tamil speaking areas such as Jaffna, Batticoloar, Vavuniya, Trincomalee and Ampara when and where the actual fighting was taking place between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan army.

(Vivekshankar, K, 2010) Dramas of Dharmasiri Bandaranayake produced in the days of terror had proved to be quite popular as they provided opportunity to the audience to -

- 1) bear witness to
- 2) discuss
- 3) mourn
- 4) and defy the horrors they were facing

While they provided

- 1) Legitimizing resistance to violence, corruption and repression.
- 2) They also challenged the ethnocentric propaganda.
- 3) Made aware of the commonalities between the cultures of the Sinhalese and the Tamils.

The method Bandaranayake used for this is to use Western plays to criticize the contemporary Sri Lankan situation. Therefore he did not face any repression. Since the attractions were metaphorical he was not found guilty. (Palihapitiya, 2011, P .82)

### 5.3. Dharmasiri Bandaranayake and ‘Trojan Kanthavo’.

The reason for Dharmasiri Bandaranayake to adapt *Trojan Women* of Euripides on to the Sri Lankan stage would have been the war situation in contemporary Sri Lanka. Both parties suffered due to the war. Almost all people were forced to live in fear. Some fell victim to violence. Others escaped and migrated though their thoughts could not be rid of the situation back at home. The Tamil people were helpless. They were trapped between the forces of the LTTE and the Government. Therefore they became increasingly bitter at the hopeless situation they were living in. The resulting reaction was not positive as one could be expect. And it is the women and children who suffered most. Surprisingly both the LTTE and the government ‘permitted’ theatre though they did seem to realize it as a mode of political expression. But they were not offended. The reason for this, though investigated, could not be found. (Palihapitiya, 2011, p.77, 78) However the theatre provided civilians and artists with a kind of an oasis but not without a limit.

Dharmasiri Bandaranayake claims that he had always hated war and racism. And he had always used the medium of art to educate the populace on these lines. The selection of *Trojan Women* of Euripides is his contribution to the efforts to end the ongoing war in Sri Lanka. According to Bandaranayake (2008), even after twenty five centuries since the play was originally staged in Athens it is regarded by many and remain one and the foremost anti-war plays produced in the modern theatre. The selection of the play itself shows that the director had a deep understanding of not only the ancient theater and its impact but also of the available opportunities in Sri Lanka to address the audience and its ability to influence it.

*Trojan Women* (415 BCE) had been considered an innovative dramatic production concerning the Trojan War. (18 Cen BCE) The play is also believed to reflect the barbaric behavior of his own people in his own city, which is Athens in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE when it entered a war situation. The problem of violence against women and children are circumstances any people would face in a war situation, be it in the ancient or the modern. Hence the play is believed to have disturbed the more sensitive contemporaries of Euripides. The play also depicts something fundamental that is felt by man in such circumstances i.e. the relative helplessness and the tragedy engulfing him. The play is most powerful and memorable. It also provides man with the inevitable truth regarding the contradictions of war. In a war situation man does not hesitate to commit crimes that he himself dislikes being a victim to. This in particular applies to their women and children. (Wijegunasinghe, 2000).

A characteristic of Bandaranayake dramas is that they are always connected with a contemporary issue, a topical crisis that had moved him emotionally. (Rathnayake, 2003, p.217) The interpretation of *Trojan Women* by Bandaranayake shows that he had been greatly affected by the atrocities of war in contemporary Sri Lanka.

The adaptation *Trojan Kanthavo* was produced in the year 2000 just after the LTTE had signed a cease fire agreement with the Sri Lankan Government. Hence this came to be a breathing space and a period of hope all concerned parties. It was a pause in the fighting and provided Bandaranayake an opportunity to address the Sinhala majority as well as the Tamil minority. Both communities were tired of the war and the suffering war had brought them.

#### 5.4. The Production, *Trojan Kanthavo*

The observation made by Rathnayake (2003, p. 217) is that the production of *Trojan Kanthavo* had reached mega heights. It was obvious that there had been a lot of money spent and a tremendous effort put in. There were many persons in the cast and the actors were selected from among those who were very talented and popular. It was an attractive production that had not neglected the entertaining part. The production also had won many awards at the state Drama festival. The awards it won are as many as twelve altogether. According to Bandaranayake he had concentrated on the type of Epic Theatre and not the Greek traditional production. The impact he wanted to create was the agitation and pathos of 'Destroying the city'. This had been the central theme of his adaptation and interpretation. All else was brought out under this concept. (Dharmasiri Bandaranayake, 2012, pers.comm., 10 August, Colombo).

Many artists in the modern world had adapted *Trojan Women* to comment indirectly on their contemporary context. This had been the case with Euripides as well. He had used the Trojan War and its impact to open the eyes of citizens in Athens in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. He wanted the Athenians to realize as to what evil they were engaged in at the time the play was produced. Since the play was around an incident in ancient history one could not find fault or penalize the dramatist. But at the same time the audience would be automatically and unconsciously compelled to observe the similarity of situation. Even the rulers could say that this is not about us and allow the production to continue to be staged. And the audience in return would see that it speaks not about the contemporary and yet at the same time it is. Palihapitita (2011, P. 84) also points out that the play seems to be set in Brechtian critical distance where the audience could keep a distance between themselves and the characters on the stage. Yet at the same time they would also observe what was going on around them reflected on stage. If the scenes depicted had been too familiar, the minds of the audience would have automatically been on the defensive, thinking that the playwright was trying to influence them. This would result in losing the impact and believing that it was nothing but propaganda.

The Tamil community because of their limited exposure had been used to associating Sinhala language and culture with the oppressive. But a production like this, put across by a Sinhala director and Sinhala actors in the Sinhala language showed them that Sinhalese were not enemies. The message they managed to convey was that there were Sinhala people who sympathized with what the Tamils were experiencing. (Palihapitita, 2011.p.85) At the same time Bandaranayake had wanted to show to the Sinhalese that sympathy with the Tamil cause could never prove to be a threat to them. They should not feel insecure of establishing ties and acknowledging them as a part of Sri Lanka community. In Tamil speaking areas pamphlets in Tamil had to be distributed among the audience before the play was staged. And many discussions and evaluations had followed the actual staging.

Some critics such as Priyankara Rathnayake (2003, p. 217) of the south were of the view that the very mixture of the Western and Eastern techniques used in the drama has resulted in a negative outcome. i.e. – The music producer being a popular hit among the young crowd had made the music so impressive that one feels that it had managed to create a different impact than the tragic effect that should be aimed at through the tragedy. This criticism is also leveled against the brilliant acting of the cast. The argument runs that each individual had managed to outshine the other so much that they had managed to surpass the direction and the meaning of the play. (Rathnayake, 2003, p218)

The fact that the production had been costly and the largeness of the tragedy had also impaired the basic impact the director would have intended to imprint. A possible excuse for this is that it just may be an attempt on the part of the director to highlight the theme of war and disaster. May is this was what had made him opt for a colossal production. But the criticism is that the attempt had lessened the impact that he would have desired to create in the audience. It becomes questionable whether he had been able to make a lasting imprint on the conscience of the society he was addressing. But at the same time the artist had not made many changes in the script. The innovations he had done are regarding technique. (Rathnayake, 2003, p, 218). Some critics such as Chandrarathne (2006) oppose this point of view. They are of the opinion that the play in practice had been a spell binding performance and a 'magnum opus' in its own right. They maintain that it is one of the most impressive and moving antiwar dramas on the Sri Lankan stage. They predict that it would remain an enduring work of art just as its original had survived for centuries. In this they particularly refer to the universal message of the play as well as the techniques used in its production.

Chandrarathne (2006) further argues that Bandaranayake is admired for the brave fact that he had contrived to put on local stage a classical tragedy that from the begging to the end, does not contain the traditional ingredients of climax, anti – climax or a sequential end to keep the attention of the audience which bound them emotionally to the unfolding tragedy. Yet he had managed to put on stage a mega production that did reach the audience to an extreme degree. The above observations made on the production of *Trojan Kanthavo* could be looked upon by some as subjective. But the reasons argued out seem to be reasonable though one may find it unfair to come to conclusions on value judgments. But persons who belong to another category, namely the Tamil academia who are closely connected with and have roots in the culture would claim an understanding beyond the comprehension of detached personal from the south of the country. These arguments seem to contain and be built upon more firm ground. Academics of Jaffna interviewed on the play *Trojan Kanthavo* agrees to the claim that it did reach the audience to an extreme degree.

Dr. Ravidaran's (Dr. Ravidaran2012,pers.comm.,2 August, University of Jaffna) explanation is that the entertainment quality Bandaranayake had aimed at proves that he had understood the minds and tastes of the common Tamil community. It had been a good target he had aimed at. To reach out to the people in the circumstances was more important than the actual story or message. To approach them, one had to entertain them with performance. Their culture was a performance based entertainment culture. Exaggeration and mega productions would cater to their tastes and what they had been accustomed to. And this he feels Bandaranayake had achieved perfectly. The aesthetic element had to be used effectively in order to capture the attention of the audience. The aesthetic element that their culture appreciates is may be somewhat different to the tastes of some in the south. His argument runs that it is secondly that the impressions should be departed. Furthermore the situation and atmosphere required impression to be more important than the message. The message is compared by Dr. Ravidaran to the skeleton and the entertainment, the blood and flesh of the production. This is also one of the reasons for language to be no hindrance in understanding and appreciating the drama.

## 5.5. Innovations

### 5.5.1. Props

The following are some aspects brought to attention and commented by observers. The comments are presented as they may also reflect on the reception of the play on most of its spectators. Comments from the researcher seem unnecessary since the above observations manage to speak for themselves.

- ❖ Several blue satin reams of cloth were drawn across the stage so that they may be moved to make ripples to indicate visually, the sea. A blue light was set on the moving, rippling sheets. This had been most effective. (Mr. Chandrasiri Bogamuwa, 2012, pers.comm.7 August, University of Kelaniya and Dr. Sri Ravidaran,2012,pers.comm.,2 August, University of Jaffna)
- ❖ A military tank was brought on stage. And this visual device is criticized by many, though it may be symbolic in reference to the contemporary situation. The tank is referred to by many saying that it only entertains the audience at a mega entertainment level. (Chinthaka Ranasinghe,2012,pers.comm., 7 September, Priyankara Rathnayake,2012,pers.comm.25 June at University of Kelaniya and Prof Maunaguru,2012,pers.comm.30, July, University of Jaffna) According to the Tamil professor in Jaffna, Prof. Maunaguru and Dr. Shanmugalingam, (2012, pers. comm., 30 June, University of Jaffna) the Tamil audience at the time were so oppressed that they would have immediately identified themselves with the situation in the play even without the army tank on stage. According to them it was quite an unnecessary and glaring devise.
- ❖ Dr. Ravidaran (2012, pers. comm., 2 August, University of Jaffna) agrees that the words and action would have been sufficient for the feelings to be communicated even without the obvious symbol of a tank. The audience would have grasped and felt the emotion even if they were not familiar with the language. The spectators need not possess extraordinary intelligence to comprehend the message; identification of situation would have been immediate.
- ❖ Only a minimum of props in the form of a few Greek columns had been used to indicate that the action was taking place in Greece. This was approved by almost all the observers.

### 5.5.2. Costumes

- ❖ Modern guns in the hands of the army are also considered by many as unnecessary equipment. As mentioned earlier the similarity of the situation and universal suffering reflected in the play was quite obvious and glaring. War to the audience was a personal experience.
- ❖ The same criticism is leveled at soldiers in modern army uniforms. One accusation was that the Tamil audience at would have at once recognized them as the Sri Lankan army. The question posed was, if so, could one perceive the director as an impartial entity? The answer to this according to Bandaranayake, he had used the camouflage uniform as an international symbol of war.
- ❖ The soldiers act as a part of the Greek army who harass the women prisoners. The prisoners, while justifiably denouncing the invaders, also highly praise the merits of laying down one's life for the sake of one's motherland. Wijegunasinghe (Wijegunasinghe,2000) points out that the fact that Bandaranayake had stationed soldiers among the audience recognized as wearing Sri Lankan army uniforms, can all too easily be interpreted as a defense of national separatism!
- ❖ She at the same time points out that within the government controlled areas Tamils could not at the period criticize the army. But Bandaranayake, as a Sinhalese was permitted to do so. She also expresses opinion that this (maybe) was with reference to the relationship that the dramatist had with the then government. This is a fact worthy of notice. If facts are so, why do some speculate an affiliation with the LTTE?

### 5.5.3. Technology

- ❖ The smoke machine had been also used for visual impact. This also would have added to the entertainment quality of the tragedy while creating an appropriate atmosphere. Smoke and fire was not something that was alien to the Sinhalese as well as the Tamils, when strategically placed bombs by the LTTE went off destroying many a life in the south and fighting ravaged the north.

### 5.5.4. Stage management

- ❖ In the play soldiers are made to march through the aisle in the auditorium from the back to the stage. And after approaching the stage they divide and ascend on to it. This indicates the capture of Troy.
- ❖ The audience hears the meaningful sounds of disaster from the depths or the back of the stage.
- ❖ A tank is rolled on to the stage. And in it were Andromache and Hector's son. The tank, one may think as unnecessary. But the two figures in it create a pathetic effect.
- ❖ At the end of the play, when the action on stage is over, the Trojan Women are taken away from their fallen city to the Greek ships as slaves through the middle of the auditorium towards its back, where the soldiers first come from. This also makes the audience sympathies and sees the significance of the movement. They could not be indifferent to the action, for they would have felt that they were a part of it.

### 5.5.5. Character Portrayal

- ❖ Characters are presented in a humane light which would attract the sympathy of the audience. The artist had wanted to highlight the differences of the characters, the plus and the negative points, when confronted under extreme crisis.

Helen herself manages to arouse deep sympathy in the modern spectator. She is shown as a young woman who engages in an honest and faithful exercise to understand herself. One is compelled to see the plight of many modern day heroines in fiction. She is shown as a woman who had been unhappy in her marriage. This is shown in the male chauvinistic and over bearing attitude of Menelaus, when she meets him. Nor has she been happy in Troy. Helen descends herself in a manner that would have been convincing to the Athenian audience that she had been compelled by the goddess Aphrodite, the god of love and lust, to elope with Paris. But Wijegunasinghe, (2000) argues that this does not prevent the modern audience of concluding that she would have fallen in love with the handsome Trojan prince, Paris. She is also accused of being instrumental in bringing destruction to Troy. Hence she is isolated. Even her attire is different to those of the other prisoners to show the difference of position and temperament. This would have led to more accusations. But she is a woman who strives to keep her head high despite the circumstances she is forced to confront.



- ❖ Portrayal of Cassandra is also noteworthy. This calls praise for the acting ability of the actress as well. She had made the challenging and exhausting role artistically sensible which demands recognition and respect. Cassandra captivates the imagination of the audience as a sexually inhibited young woman whose perceptiveness and intelligence are of an extraordinary brilliance. (Wijegunasinghe, 2000)
- ❖ Menelaus is well portrayed as a regal aristocrat who also fosters weaknesses of the character. The man's craving for his wife is not accompanied with fond affection, love or understanding. Nor does she provide the social or psychological protection she needs and strives for. (Wijegunasinghe, 2000) It is more the insult and injured pride that seems to make him seek revenge. He had been in other words robbed of one of his possessions. Hence he had been insulted. To his reasoning the feelings of his wife would not have been relevant.

### 5.5.6. Music

The director of music Rukantha Gunathilake, was a popular artist who was competent in modern western music. The songs and music included in the play are charming and captivating, with an aim to entertain the audience. But some (Chinthaka Ranasinghe, 2012, pers. communication, 7, September) are of the view that the richness of such entertainment prevents the audience from grasping the pathos of tragic emotion. Priyankara Rathnayake sees the mixture of the West and the East, as well as the new and the ancient as a disturbing quality in the play. He expresses the view that the brilliance of the music had prevented the play from achieving the tragic clement that should be highlighted and aimed at. (Rathnayake, 2003, p.218). Dr Ravi Dharan. (Ravi Dharan, 2012, pers.comm. 2 August, University of Jaffna) on the other hand maintains that this is in keeping with the culture of his people, the Tamil population. One has to reach the mind and heart in a manner of entertainment that they are used to. This shows that the dramatist had made a case study of the people he was to address, if he intended to take the play to the north. It also shows that he had cared enough to observe the behavior and reaction of the Tamil community to the mode of entertainment.

## 5.6. Response

### 5.6.1. A) the Sinhala Speaking Majority

The *Trojan Kanthavo* that Dharmasiri Bandaranayake directed in the period of war in Sri Lanka had been staged in the south where the majority was Sinhalese and the North and East where the minority of Tamil people resided. Both communities suffered due to war. According to Bandarakayake (2012, pers.comm. 10 August, Colombo) the Sinhalese majority most of the time believed that the war would ultimately bring positive results. What he believed was that these feelings were instigated by extremist Sinhalese political parties. The director had observed this war mentality even among his own cast as well. The problem had been a hurdle that he had to initially face with endless discussions. Bandaranayake had stressed on the fact that he believed his theme rested on the fact that war brought destruction to us as well as our enemies. This is why he brought to attention how cities were destroyed. Bandaranayake was dealing with a sensitive subject. – Especially during a period of war. At the period nationality, language, culture and religion were used as identities to justify one's point of sympathy. Hence accusations were made against him as being a traitor. The accusation was that he was carrying out an agenda funded by foreign non-government organizations. War as well as the suffering of women had been a topic popular among these organizations.

Hence according to some, speculations were made regarding the ultimate motive of the production of the *Trojan Kanthavo*, irrespective of the fact that the original play was indeed an ancient Classic (Chinthaka Ranasinghe, 2012, pers. comm., 7 September, University of Kelaniya). The main reason was that the countrymen in the south were by that time weary and suspicious of foreign interference by non-government organizations in the pretext of helping injured parties. Since the chaos of the time and situation was an extremely sensitive many were one may argue that some may find certain logic in such irrationalities. They were living a time where anything that appealed to the critical factor embedded in their innermost minds were viewed with hostility. They also would have considered the drama as a challenge and a threat to their firm convictions, and it was not without cause either. It is as a consequence of this that Bandaranayake was considered a "Terrorist". According to him he had even received several death threats during the years of 2003-2004 and was compelled to leave the country for his own safety. He had to flee the county on three occasions. (Palihapitiya, 2011, p. 80). The play had been staged for the first time in 1999 in Colombo. Thereafter it had been staged in many cities of the South. It was later that plans were carried out for the play to be taken to Tamil speaking areas in the North and the East.

According to Bandaranayake, (2012.pers.comm.10 August, Colombo) it was when these preparations were taking place that the first death threat had come to him. It was a threat given in a letter informing Bandaranayake not to stage **Trojan Kanthavo** in the North and the East or the Plantation areas in the central hills. The letter was written on behalf of the Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Elam. (LTTE) But Bandaranayake says that he had not believed it to be so. The reason he gives for this is that according to his belief the enslaved suffering of women in the play was no different from the modern day women who had become the victims of war. He was convinced that the play spoke of the suffering that they were experiencing. Hence he could not believe that it was the LTTE that sent the threats. The exact words used by Bandaranayake to voice his thoughts about the people whom he suspected were – ‘My belief is that the threats against my antiwar drama came from Sinhala chauvinist war mongers.’ (Wijesiriwardena, 2003).

Bandaranayake had also been attacked at New Town Hall, Colombo, when a festival of Tamil culture had been organized. The attackers had launched a physical attack on the audience shouting that the event was in support of terrorists. When the meeting broke up due to the commotion another gang had entered the premises and attacked the participants. It was at that time the death threats were shouted out at Bandaranayake saying that he was a ‘Sinhala Tiger’ and will be killed soon.(Wijesiriwardena,2003). Consequently the personal residence of the actress Anoja Weerasinghe was bombed and burnt. She had played the role of Hecabe in the production. Her house, her possessions of artistic and cultural value as well as the awards she had won throughout her life had been destroyed by the goon squads of ‘unscrupulous politicians’ (Wijegunasinghe, 2000). Anoja had been collecting material with the intention of forming a museum in future – all this had been lost as a result of the attack. Wijegunasinghe refers to the statement made by the actress to the press regarding this incident. -

“Why did they harass us in this way? It is simply because I am a woman. Maybe they thought that I am a single woman.” Wijegunasinghe argues that by this comment one is led to feel that the actress had a personal understanding of the Greek play.

Kumudini Hettiarachi (2000) quotes Anoja asking the question, “What wrong have I done?” had spoken for all three artists that had come under attack. She had said - “We are not criminals, we are artists!” Ms.Radhika Coomaraswamy, Kumari Jayawardena and Selvi Thiruchandran in a joint letter to the press ( 2000.Jan, 30) gives as a reason to the attack Anoja’s role in the ‘anti war play’, namely the **Trojan Kanthavo**. The music director of the play Rukantha Gunathilaka and his wife were also physically attacked. Their attackers had even poured gasoline over them. This made had made the whole family flee the country.(Sykes,2008). Although he above statements seems on the surface personal judgments built on nothing but suspicion and speculation, the culprits were later found and sentenced. They had at the time served as presidential security personal of the government.

**Trojan Kanthavo** was produced under the ‘Trikone’. This group was interested and actively engaged in the arts. They had rented a building for this purpose. The people who owned the building had no inkling of the importance of the activities taking place in this center. They were business people interested only in the rent gained through the transaction. The result of the said activities and oppositions was that the center had to leave the premises and reestablish itself in the small red car belonging to Bandaranayake himself. (Bandaranayake, 2012, pers. comm. 10 August, Colombo)

### 5.6.2. Tamil Minority

**Trojan Kanthavo** had received a very good response from the Tamil community.( All who were interviewed agreed to this as a fact) The reason for this is the war being a very much a part of their daily lives and experience at the period the play was staged. To them the war and suffering that was depicted on stage was their own experience. This was to the extent that they identified themselves as the victims who were depicted on stage. To them it was a play was not of the Greeks of a bygone era but of them, living in the twenty first century Sri Lanka. The educated made the comparison and recognized that the play dealt with a universal problem which resulted in identification. (Bandaranayake, 2012, pers. comm., 10 August, Colombo). As Dr Sri Ganeshan, (2012, pers.comm. 2 August, University of Jaffna) explains the nature of the spectators, the Tamil audience had been by tradition and culture trained to watch plays and appreciate them. Symbolic theater was not a problem for them. Hence not knowing the language posed no obstacles. They read body language, the visuals and appreciated the depth beyond the entertainment quality that attracted them. Even the pamphlets that were distributed in Tamil among the audience would not have been that necessary for them to grasp the meaning. Professor Maunaguru (2012, pers.comm.30 July,University of Jaffna) sums up the reception by the statement that the play was welcomed by all. The reason was that the experience and emotions were relevant.

They appreciated the play because the play spoke of, boldly what they could not voice in practical life. If the researcher may comment on the reception of the play by the reputed academics of the Jaffna campus, the sound of pleasure in their voices and expressions when interviewed were enough to comprehend the positive impact it had on them. According to the analysis of situation by Palihapitiya, (2011, p. 85) the play had spoken directly to the collective psyche of the people. The reason for this is, as could be speculated, that the play was neither from the Sinhalese or Tamil tradition. The fact also remains that the Tamil audience did not have to travel to see the play. Traveling to the South at the period posed many problems and was almost impossibility to common civilians. Bandaranayake had come to them, irrespective of the chaos in the land they lived in. This showed trust and the extent of his commitment to his beliefs. And since the production had spared no expense with popular artists and the entertainment, the audiences were drawn to the spectacle, for it was an experience that they had not received from any play in recent memory.

Before the play was taken to the North and the East, Bandaranayake has had to negotiate with the LTTE for them to have a public performance in the area. If not, it would have been difficult to gain an audience with the people for they were too scared and repressed by the control exercised over them. At the same time, there were also new aspirations for peace created by the 2000 peace talks and the cease fire. Bandaranayake claims that they were confident that they could cross the divides, between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities. The play was clearly antiwar, anti-violence and was working through the cultural sphere, and not the political arena. But at the same time they did have a political agenda. And that was peace. Bandaranayake boasts that it is their work and mission that had been able to protect and promote them. The fact also remains that there was also international protection for the center. One felt that the world was watching carefully one's reactions or oppositions. And no party wanted to look too bad in the eyes of the international community. It is not only them that gave them protection but the huge number of the audience and their reception. If this argument could establish itself, it is indicative of the power of collective conscience of the masses and the respect it commands, however down trodden at the period under consideration and circumstance.

The reception was such that in the year 2003 the LTTE organizing a cultural festival in Trincomalee had invited two plays to be staged from the South. And one of the plays was *Trojan kanthavo* of Bandaranayake. He argues that if they had refused to participate, it would have deeply offended them. The performance was an important part of their wider program. It was an achievement that they had invited to stage an antiwar play in their own festival. Regarding the attitude that brought success among Tamils Dr. Ravi Dharan quotes Bandaranayake— **“I am an artist speaking politics and is not a politician speaking art.”** (Dr.Ravi Dharan, 2012, pers. comm. 2, August, University of Jaffna). Dr.Sri Ganeshan (2012, pers.comm.2 August, University of Jaffna) provides another interpretation of the play regarding the social conscience and the social consciousness of the artist regarding the play. His argument is that what should be brought to notice of the public and attacked is the system that brings about the suffering and not the individuals such as party leaders. In most plays the issue underneath is not concentrated on but only the people involved are attacked.

One has to understand that the leaders, though they may be criticized and changed, the issue would continue to exist if it is not addressed in a proper way. Hence *The Trojan Kanthavo* does not expect the audience to identify leaders and recognize their shortcomings. If the play provided so, it would have given them a sense of catharsis, but not food for thought. The artist should not only be making political statements but be appealing to the common sense of the people. The truly tragic should according to him, move the public conscience and create a consciousness in the individuals participating in it as the audience. This play had managed to do. The people should be made to not only cry or sing, but act on their assumptions as well. (Dr. Sri Ganeshan2012, pers. comm., 2 August, University of Jaffna)

### 5.6.3. a) Aftermath

Bandaranayake states that it is only after the war, when the people were free form the war mentality that their vision had cleared enough to observe and review impartially. In the aftermath of war, their minds are open to appreciate the play for its own merits and demerits. Hence his experience is proudly recorded as having an audience of more than five thousand when it was staged at the University of Peradeniya. The play received open appreciation by all who attended. If there had been adverse reaction the spectators, being young undergraduates who are in a sense reported to foster their emotions close to the surface ,could and would have expressed themselves openly without reserve.

### 5.6.3. b) Conclusion to the dramatics

The attacks made on the house, property and the persons of Mr. Rukantha Gunathilake and his wife had taken place on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January, 2000. Thirteen years after the deed was done the culprits were caught and a sentence given against them. They were found guilty and therefore nine out of the ten of them who belonged to the then Presidential Security Division were sentenced for four and a half years of imprisonment. This was reported on the 1st of August 2013. But on the 14th of August, Rukantha and his wife had called a press conference to publicize their views on the subject. (Kasun, 2013) Their main purpose had been to forgive and pardon the culprits as they were only minor officers who had been carrying out orders of the higher people in power. The artists respected the verdict of justice, but felt that they would feel better if they were merciful. They also announced that they would be presenting their decision to the President of Sri Lanka. The statements made by the actress Anoja meanwhile shows that the bitterness of the experience had worn off. According to her it had been a learning experience. She now understands that things that one should treasure were not vested in one's material possessions. So the 'dramatics' of the Trojan Women staged in the year 2000 had come to a satisfactory conclusion all around. And the play still continues to win awards from all over the world.

### 4.7. Conclusion

Dharmasri Bandaranayake had selected *Trojan Women* of Euripides from the 5<sup>th</sup> cen. BCE tragedies to perform on the 21<sup>st</sup> cen. Sri Lankan stage. It is apparent he had understood the flexibility of the Classical plays to address social, political and universal humane issues of different places at different times. The particular atmosphere the drama was staged in was quite sensitive. The purpose of the above study was to examine the manner he had staged the drama to appeal to the modern audience as well as the dramatics that the performance instigated in the audience as well as the socio political field. The impact is significant as well as surprising as modern society is equipped with various modes of mass communication. The very fact that a performance could instigate such dramatics proved to be an enlightening investigation. Investigation also proved that impact and reaction were mainly based on environment and circumstance. i.e. – the period of war and the time of peace, which again proves the impact it could still make on the conscience of his audience.

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