

Navigating a Pandemic Affected Society: A Study on *Rathu Wes Muhunu*, A Sri Lankan Adaptation of *Oedipus Rex*

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Rathu Wes Muhunu directed by Priyankara Rathnayaka and performed by the academic players at the University of Kelaniya is a Sri Lankan theatrical adaptation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. The plot revolves around the eponymous tragic hero Oedipus who tries to resolve a drastic issue in his land which leads to his imminent downfall. It is regarded as a masterpiece of the ancient Greek tragedy for its universal themes. While there have been several adaptations, Priyankara Rathnayaka uses its central theme of fate versus free will to set his interpretation in modern day society affected by a pandemic. Through this, it can be hypothesized that the playwright is making a reference to the recent Covid-19 pandemic, to bring out the violent and intense nature of man that comes to surface as a consequence of his actions. Therefore, this research aims to analyze the manner in which the director uses this chaotic phenomenon to make this tragedy relatable to a contemporary audience. Further, the study will focus on the symbolism of the title *Rathu Wes Muhunu* (translating to Red Masks), through character interpretation, costume and stage setting. Primary data for this research is based on a recent viewing of the Sri Lankan drama and an analysis of its script. This is supported by the secondary data based on E. F. Watling's 1947 translation and the Sinhala translation of the original Greek drama. The research used comparative methodology to identify the differences between the original drama and *Rathu Wes Muhunu* and also structured discussions with experts in the field.

Keywords: Greek theater, adaptation, pandemic, characters, Stage settings