

THE INFLUENCE OF THE JAPANESE THEATRE ON MODERN SINHALA DRAMATURGY

KULATILAKA KUMARASINGHE

Classical Sinhala Literature from about the 9th century¹ A.D. 15th century A.D. comprised mostly prose and verse works, and very little drama. The prose and verse of classical Sinhala Literature were greatly influenced by Pali and Sanskrit Literature. But drama, one of the most developed features in Sanskrit Literature, seems to have had no noteworthy impact on early Sinhala Literature. According to "Dambadeni Kathikāvatha" (A book of Rules for Buddhist monks) which was written during the reign of king Parakramabahu II, who came to the throne in 1235 A. D., verse and drama were looked upon with disfavour and were therefore censured and discarded. Many scholars consider this as one of the reasons as to why the art of drama has not come to play an important role in Sinhala Literature. Buddhism did not encourage the art of drama (dramaturgy) as it was an art form which was to be viewed in groups; hence it was liable to hinder the sensory restraint of people. The history of drama shows that the composition of drama was based on the living dramatic art, and not on books. The absence of written dramatic literature can be attributed to the fact that most of the literary men were Buddhist monks who could not participate in dramatic arts.²

From the earliest times there has been a form of country dance pertaining to customs and rituals in the folklore or ceremonies to invoke blessings on the people, who needed them to heal certain ailments. The scholarly opinion is that those folk dramas found no place in Literature as they did not please the literary men.³

Ceremonies based on various beliefs, rites and rituals which were famous among the villagers have survived since ancient times and are in practice even today. The aim of having those ceremonies was to invoke blessings on people who were indisposed in various ways. They were not held for mere enjoyment or entertainment. Yet they had some sort of dramatic importance in their performance. It may be assumed that ceremonies and devil dances are the precursors of the modern Sinhala drama.

Further it is evident that three types of folk drama were quite popular among the villagers, that were meant basically to provide amusement, or enjoyment. They were the 'Sokari', 'Kolam' and 'Nadagam' forms of drama.

Sokari is performed as a votive offering to **patini**. Sokari is the name of