

M. H. GOONATILLEKA, *Masks and Mask Systems of Sri Lanka*. Tamarind Books, Colombo, 1975, 93 pages. Rs. 235/-

Dr. M. H. Goonatilleka, Head of the Fine Arts Department of Kelaniya University is a recognized authority on Sinhalese masks. He has at last produced a definitive volume in which he shares his knowledge with the English-speaking world. His text is handsomely complemented by 142 plates, a dozen of them in colour; the majority of the photographs have been taken by Rohan de Soysa and Chandrasiri Palliyaguruge. There is a comprehensive bibliography compiled by Manel Fonseka, and a list of important collections of masks both in Sri Lanka and abroad. The book is well produced; my only complaint is that the colour plates have been pasted in with an inadequate glue: most of those in my copy have already come loose.

After an introductory chapter, which mainly discusses the historical origins of the masks and describes how they are made, the division of chapters follows the three main contexts in which masks are worn: the *lowi* and *sawai* rituals; *kōlam*; *sokari*. The longest chapter, with the widest variety of masks, is that on *kōlam*. Each section begins with an account of the relevant ceremony; this material somewhat overlaps with Sarachchandra's classic book, *The Folk Drama of Ceylon* (2nd ed. 1966), but since Dr. Goonatilleka naturally wished his own work to be self-contained this could hardly have been avoided.

I am no expert on masks; I can only marvel at Dr. Goonatilleka's erudition and am in no position to criticize his facts. Despite some trifling idiosyncrasies, such as frequent use of the German noun *kapille* for cobra hood—has this become an English loanword?—the text reads well. The author is not at his best near Pattini: the *Rāma-māyilā* is surely not another name for the *Māva-ippāddima* (p. 44) but a comic inversion of that dramatic ritual which was originally used to relieve the tension created by the serious story of how Pattini resurrected her husband (who had nothing to do with Rāma). I do not follow the suggestion (p. 81) that the story of *sokari* resembles that of Pattini: surely the main point about Pattini is that she is completely chaste, in fact a virgin, and fiercely loyal to her husband, whereas *Sokari* is a wanton woman who ends the play with a baby of dubious paternity.

Dr. Goonatilleka is apparently unfamiliar with Obeyesekere's long article on the *sawai yakuma*.¹ Obeyesekere's discussion of the ayurvedic background of the *sawai* demons and their probable diffusion from Kerala would have lent added coherence to Dr. Goonatilleka's presentation. The chief of these demons is of course the Great Kōla Sanniya. Sarachchandra (*op. cit.*, p. 78) convincingly argued that *kōlam* was derived, at least in part, from the *sawai yakuma*; even he missed the point, perhaps trivial, that the very nomenclature suggests this link. Although Dr. Goonatilleka briefly speculates about the origin of the term *kōlam* (p. 48) he does not mention Sarachchandra's theory or link *kōlam* with Kōla Sanniya in any way.

There is something strange here. Words which do not occur in the index include "India", "Tamil" and "Malayalam"; nor is India once mentioned in the Introduction. In its opening paragraph we read (p. 9) that "the wearing of masks in many regions of Asia is well known, from China, Tibet and Nepal to Indonesia, Thailand and Japan". No India. Yet in nearby Kerala, which has supplied so much of the ritual vocabulary of S. W. Sri Lanka, there is the masked dance-drama called Krishnattam. In his search for the historical origins of Sinhalese masks, Dr. Goonatilleka tells us (p. 11) that none extant can be more than 200 years old; and in fact there is no firm date either for masks or for any of the masked performances described in this book before the nineteenth century. Yet we know that Krishnattam was staged in 1632.²