

Masculinity in Kandyan Dance

S. Mantillake

Department of Fine Arts, Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya

Introduction

Today Kandyan dance is performed by both males and females widely in Sri Lanka, even though it was originally performed only by males. Due to the social development of the country Kandyan dance was opened to females. This happened as a result of many important socio-political and economic changes in Sri Lankan society.

Although Kandyan dance is now performed widely by both males and females, the dance form itself takes a masculine form since it has been dominated by males. Kapferer (1983) and Obeyesekere (1984) have discussed the masculine condition in Theatre art of Sri Lanka, while Nürnberger (1998) has particularly examined the masculine condition of Kandyan dance.

The objective of this research is to explore the masculine characteristics of Kandyan dance. Especial attention is paid to performing art characteristics of Kandyan dance.

Methodology

For this research live Kandyan dance performances were observed and visual media such as video clips and images documenting Kandyan dance performances were analyzed.

Literature on the subject matter was referred and traditional dance masters as well as prominent female exponents in the field were interviewed where necessary.

In addition the author's personal experience of more than fifteen years in Kandyan dance provided subjective unpublished data.

Results

Research data have been analyzed from a semiotic point of view and the theory of four *Abhinayas* (*Āngika*, *Vācika*, *Sātvika* and *Āhārya*) was used to interpret the data. According to the results, all elements examined in traditional Kandyan dance were masculine. Apart from a few exceptions, all other elements

examined in contemporary Kandyan dance were also masculine.

Discussion

As mentioned earlier it was revealed that almost all elements and features examined in Kandyan dance were masculine, drawing us to decide that Kandyan dance is a masculine dance form. *Sātvika abhinaya* that deals with human emotions is hardly seen in Kandyan dance. But the other three *Abhinayas* helped to explore the masculine characteristics of Kandyan dance.

When considering *Āngika abhinaya*, the expression through the dancer's body, *Tāndava* and *Lāsya* movements are significant. Kandyan dance is filled with *Tāndava* movements, the frenetic movements of dance especially referred in Indian classical dancing. *Lāsya* is described as a feminine dance form in traditional Indian performing art theories. But in Kandyan dance virtually no *Lāsya* movements are found. Even female dancers use *Tāndava* movements when they perform Kandyan dance.

Vācika abhinaya which consists of oral accompaniments is also used in Kandyan dance. In contemporary Kandyan dance, vocal components to be sung during dance events are used by both male and female dancers since character representation is ignored. But in traditional Kandyan dance there are dialogues between characters and they are composed for males to deliver, since almost all those dialogues were created from a male point of view.

The main element that can be discussed under *Āhārya abhinaya* in Kandyan dance is the costume. In traditional Kandyan dance all dance costumes including the costume of the drum player, have been designed for males but not for females. Some new costumes have been introduced for females in contemporary Kandyan dance. Even today females are culturally not allowed to wear many traditional dance costumes designed for males. According to traditional dance masters the dance costume

is sacred and not to be worn by females. Treating females as impure creatures by traditional artistes is the basis of this idea. Restrictions and criticisms have been made by traditional dance masters against attempts by females to wear traditional Kandyan dance costumes.

Conclusions

In this research some features of Kandyan dance have been analyzed in order to explore the masculine characteristics of Kandyan dance. It also included a discussion as to how this dance form can be determined as a

masculine dance form. Treating females as impure creatures by traditional artistes was one of the main reasons that kept females away from Kandyan dance.

References

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