

Portraying immediate postcolonial life of Jaffna- Theatrical representation of the Dramatic Text of Prof.K.Kanapathippilai

Navadharshani Karunaharan

ABSTRACT: The Tamils has a long tradition of theatre performances in Sri Lanka. Kutu, Isainatakam, there are different genres and forms such as Koothu (story depicted through a series of dances), Villasam (operatic aspects with prose forms), Isai Nadakam (operatic in style) and dialogue dramas. The dialogue dramas emerged during the 19th century onwards. In the 1930s Prof.K.Kanapathippilai (1903 – 1958); linguistic and Tamil professor and the Head of the department of Tamil, University of Peradeniya from 1947 to 1965, started to write dialogue plays using colloquial Tamil language spoken in day to day life. This was a landmark attempt in the Tamil theatre history. And also his plays are theatrically, historically, socially played significant role. Though he had not labeled as postcolonial play write, the works reflect the immediate postcolonial life of the indigenus. It a descriptive analysis based on the dramatic text of Prof.K.Kanapathippilai 'Udaiyar Midduku' (1940, The supremacy of Udayar). This study concentrates on the dramatic text in its context, understand the anatomy of the text and identify the historical importance of the play. As it is a dramatic text as well as historical document written and performs it is a representation of portraying the immediate post colonial Jaffna.

KEYWORDS: Post colonial theatre, Dramatic text, and Theatrical representation.

Introduction

Theatre as an art form- artistic expression reflects many important aspects of a given society. Tamil as a language of an ethnic group has a long tradition of theatre and performances in Sri Lanka. The artistic expression in theatre is enhanced to express the values and beliefs of Tamils in different periods and also confirm the identity of that particular group of people in a given region. It is appropriate to consider the statement of Homi Bhabha, "I think we need to draw attention to the fact that the advent of Western modernity, located as it generally is in the 18th and 19th centuries, was the moment when certain master narratives of the state, the citizen, cultural value, art, science, the novel, when these major cultural discourses and identities came to define the "Enlightenment" of Western society and the critical rationality of Western personhood (Home Bhabha, 1994).

The "Modern Phase of Tamil Theatre" in Sri Lanka has developed during the 19th century, nurtured by the newly emerged Tamil middle class in Sri Lanka. The impact of colonialism has also immediately reflected in the theatre practices not only in dramatic text but in the production as well. The modern theatre was introduced throughout the English education. Especially the dialogue plays used the colloquial language. Earlier in the traditional plays verse or songs were used as texts in the Tamil Theater and in the 'Parsi' theatre tradition songs used as texts in between dialogue also used for the interlude parts. And the dialogue plays written in the early periods used classical language (classical) there also colloquial Tamil was seldom used. In contrast to the western tradition of realistic drama and acting, these traditional modes of performances are usually stylized, often incorporate dance, music and song and operate from oral rather than a literary base.

In the 1930s Prof.K.Kanapathippilai started to write dialogue plays using colloquial Tamil language spoken in day to day life. This was a landmark attempt in the Tamil theatre history. And also his plays are theatrically, historically, socially played significant role.

Prof. K. Kanapathipillai (1903-1958) who had been multi-faceted creative artist turned out to be an important personality in the modern socio-cultural history of the Tamils of Sri Lanka. His creativity is demanding requirement for the formation of multicultural aspect of the Tamil National Culture of the Tamils of Sri Lanka. Though he had not labeled himself as a Post Colonialist or the literary historian of the Tamils of Sri Lanka, the critics didn't identify him as a Post Colonial thinker and writer. Those who are familiarizing themselves with the works of Prof. K. Kanapathipillai and African writers and scholars would simply recognize the similarities between Prof. K.Kanapathipillai and the Post Colonial thinkers and writers of Africa (Jeyasankar, 2005).

It is important to mention here regarding the then English theatre at Peradeniya university. From 1930s to 1956, Professor.E.F.C Ludowyk taught and produce dramas in the Dramatic society at Peradeniya University. 'Sarachchandra who was looking for a way to begin a Sinhala drama in a country that had no Sinhala drama, went to Ludowyk. Ludowyk told him to begin by translating some European social comedies. But after certain time Sarachchandra rejected the Ludowyk's solution in using European social comedies hoping that it would lead to Sinhala writers writing Sinhala social

plays in Sinhala prose". (interview, Ernest Macintyre October 2011) But it is note that Professor.K.Kanapathippilai had been through English education in United Kingdom, conceived the idea and the concept of the dialogue plays and write in Tamil with the nature and the significance of borrowings in relation to their original cultural context.

. As the scripts of the plays are quite strange and incomplete objects, they can be interpreted in many ways'. It is 'read 'by the audience by contextualizing it according to their culture. Prof.K.Kanapathippilai was the pioneer of handling the colloquial language and day-today life of the ordinary people in his theatre. As he was a linguistic and Tamil professor and the Head of the department of Tamil, University of Peradeniya from 1947 to 1965, he laid a strong foundation for Tamil studies at Peradeniya and also he had the intention of documenting the different styles or pattern of the colloquial Tamil language of his native place Point Pedro, Jaffna. He believed that drama is the most appropriate form for the documentation of the languages which belong to a particular period. According to him 'Drama should reflect the real nature of life, and for the reason the performers also speak as they do in their real life' (Kanapathippilai ,1940).

Specific objectives of the study

- To realize the dramatic text in its context.
- To understand the anatomy of the text.
- To identify the historical importance of the play.

Methodology

This research is a study based on dramatic text analysis. From page to stage, a theatre production meets challenges in each step. Working on the text is the most important for all theatre artists. The culturally bound text is a challenge to work. It needs extra knowledge and guidance to understand the texts in its cultural context.(When analyzing the text)

Data was gathered from books, interviews, photographs, discussions, field work, feedback information and working as visual designer for the production 'Udayar Midduku' (2010) to analyze the text. This is a pioneer detail study of the research.

4.0 Identified issues from the research

4.1 Dramatic text as historical document

In Tamil context, the plays would be called post Colonial Dramatic texts. It documented the 1940s and 1950s Jaffna as the form of Dramatic Texts. Jaffna is located in northern peninsula of the island of Sri Lanka where Tamils mostly inhabited. The social plays can be considered as social criticism as they speak about the different layers (castes) of the society in realistic form. *Udayar midduku*, *Murugan thiruguthalam*, *Nattavan nagaravazhkai*, *Poruloporul* are the social plays. *Sankilian* is a historical play and *Thavarana ennam* and *Thurokikal* are political plays. Each of these countries has a colonial history, which profoundly affected its subsequent social, political and cultural development. His plays are realization of the social and the political transmission of Jaffna Tamils. These plays are actor centered texts. The social and political plays predicted about the social and political life of Sri Lankan Tamils. The play '*Thurokikal*' is the most important political play. As it was said "a play needs to be predictable" (Mick William and Simon Shepherd, 2002:169) the texts confirmed it.

Thus I would like to analyze, one of the well known texts '*Udayar Midduku*' as a theatrical representation portraying the immediate post colonial Jaffna. When we read all the plays, they make the reader enter into the fictional world of the play (Mick Wallis and Simon Shepered, 2002). In a performance, that fictional world is being represented by one group of real people to another.

4.2 '*Udayar midduku*' the text from page to stage

This drama has been produced in a number of occasions. Explore some of the performance and the text consisted social issues. The Play's message is easily understood by the immediate audience than at present.

Most of his texts had been produced and performed by the students of the Tamil union at Peradeniya University during the 1950s, and all of the plays were directed by Prof K.Kanapathippilai and Prof.S.Vithiyananthan. The drama was also performed in the urban areas like Colombo, Batticaloa and Jaffna. Kalaiarasu sornalingam and others produced this play in the 1960s. In November 2011, the students of Drama and theatre Arts university of Jaffna, staged this drama the University auditorium. It gives the true portrayal of the

Jaffna community in 1940s (cast system, court yard house, toddy tappers, etc). The researcher who worked as visual designer of the production faced many challenges to get samples. Because of the three decades of war, displacement and migration to foreign countries; it was very hard to preserve the heritage and the heritage properties by the Jaffna society. From the responses of the audience it was the play is not only for appreciation but visually it can be considered as a heritage property of Jaffna Tamils. The spectators who belong to the same culture wanted to see how their ancestors led their life. It creates interest in detailed accounts of historical cultures known as cultural materialism. How plays work, both on the page and on the stage itself, make audience to think powerfully about drama as a part of cultural production and impress them to feel a cultural production of our own.

'Udayar Midduku'- anatomy of the text

The play 'Udayar midduku' (1940, The supremacy of *Udayar*) speak about the power of the colonial representative (*Udayar*). He used his power towards the society in traditional manner without recognizing the reality of that the society has been changed gradually, due to the impact of colonialism. For that reason he struggled with the society as well as his own family itself. As it is a social criticism trying to present in realistic mode with the flavour of satire this play handles the situation describing the emergence of a middle class society by the impact of English education. The other layers of the society also struggled in between their traditional values and modern ideology. The dual nature of life described; the conflicts inside the *Udayar* family and the conflicts between the power structure of the society are well portrayed using a plot which is not complicated.

The main story line is about *Udayar* refusing her daughter to get married to her lover *Sundarami*; a lawyer not of the same class (poor family) of *Udayar*, but in the same caste. Some other small story lines related to the main story such as Barber's story, event in Palmyra groove etc.

The whole play is divided into *Uruppu* (act) and *kalam* (scene). Stage directions are seldom indicated. The changes of location make feel the audience like travelling through a Village in Jaffna. The divisions are given below.

<i>Uruppu</i> (Act)	<i>Kalam</i> (Scene)	Lacation	Time
1	1	Colombo- <i>Sundarm's</i> house	
	2	Jaffna- <i>Udayr's</i> residence	Morning
	3	Jaffna- <i>Udayr's</i> residence	5 pm
2	1	Jaffna- <i>Udayr's</i> residence	Day time
	2	Jaffna- <i>Udayr's</i> residence	Day time
	3	Jaffna- <i>sundaram's</i> house	Evening
3	1	Jaffna- <i>Annapakiyam's</i> residence, veranda	Evening
	2	Jaffna- a lonely Palmyra groove	Night
	3	Jaffna- <i>Udayr's</i> residence	Night
	4	Jaffna- <i>Udayr's</i> residence	Daytime

Unlike the western realistic texts, the divisions are short and not given a detailed description of the locations. As a dramatic text, it is difficult to visualize the play without knowing the culture and its context.

First half of the play portrays outward life of the people and the rest of the play expresses the inward life of the people or in other words first half shows the open space of a residence and the second half shows personal areas, stated like 'seeing inwardness from the outside (Hormi Barba,2007).

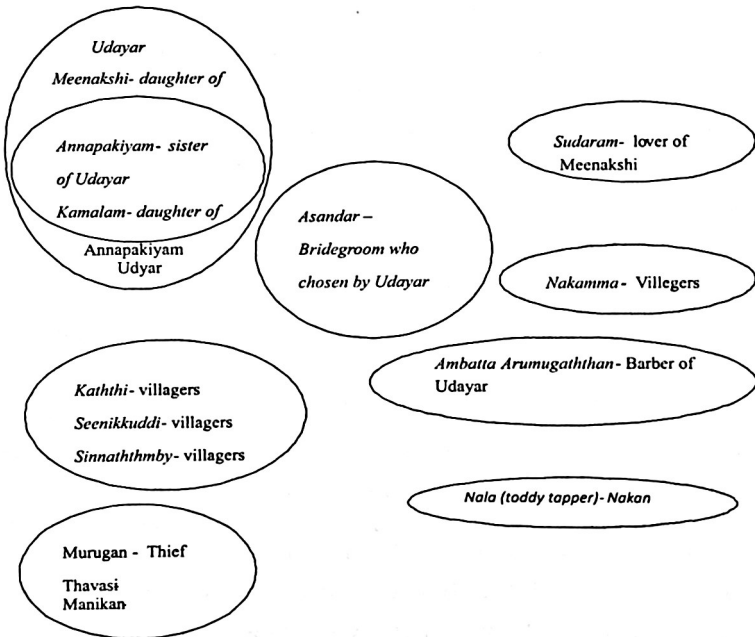
4-4 Visualization of the Text

As indicated in the table, the play is located mainly in mainly Jaffna and Colombo and the events set in to the different locations in different times of the day. The change of locations and mentioning the times of the day are the key factors to create atmosphere in the play as if establishing shots in a film. Sketching the set is into different locations maintain gender space. Out-of-doors is very strictly prohibited for women (Kanapathippilai, 2003). The physicality and the Jaffna cultural heritage reflect through the dialogues rather than giving separate descriptions. Even though the play was written for proscenium arch stage the whole text escape from the physical constrains. Because of the reality in the proscenium stage is just an indoor theatre with square flat form stage, it is not built to create illusion or the concept of fourth wall. Therefore the aspects of visualization are more suggestive in nature like traditional Tamil theatres. It is confirmed that there is no indication about opening or closing the scenes and the

scene changes on any other technical aspects. The instructions given within brackets are considered to be followed by the actors and not for the other artists. But exceptionally the Palmyra groove scene which is depicted elaborately, shows the different layers of the society (kanapathippilai: 2003) The leaves of the fan palm skillfully folded to make a beaker for toddy. *Kaathy* describes the jeweleries which were used during early days (Kanapathypilai:1940).

4.5 characterization of the Characters

Mapping the characters show the social structure in its hierarchy order. The author insists his creative vision in each character. The characters are arch type and have no psychological depth but the character conception is cultural and social prejudice and they are extremely different characters in their nature. The author's intention is also to document the different usage of colloquial language in the Jaffna society, particularly in *Vadamaradchchi*. Some of the characters are named with their cast identity (Eg: *Nala Nakan* (toddy tapers), *Ampatta* (barber) Arumugam). Grouping the characters of the play clearly shows the different layers of the Jaffna society.



4.5.1 Udayar: Title bearing kin or chief head man (Perinpanayakam,1982. P.11) *Udayar* is the main and dominant character of the play like in the society itself. As described by Robert Holmas about Jaffna man.'....Penuriousness, long established usage of custom, passion in religion, tenaciousness, patiently analysing matters, generally educated, believe in metempsychosis, ironic personality, suspicious creature, ever fighting, emotional, mixed with people specialist in knowing/ studying about others, always want to others, having cast consciousness, believe in superstition..... (Holmes-Jaffna 1980-Jaffna -1980), *Udayar* is one of the peculiar model. He is not ready to accept the changes and values of the present society என்ன பெண்டுகள், சமையல் எல்லாம் முடிஞ்சு போச்சோ? ஆறத்தேற இருக்கிறியள். அவங்கள் அம்பினையள் இருந்து கதைக் கேக்கை நீங்கள் என்ன வாய்பாத்துக் கொண்டிருக்கிறியளோ?... ஆம்பினையளும் பொம்பினையளும் கூட்டங்கூடி கலந்து பெசிக் கொண்டிருக்கிறது எங்கத்தையில் வழக்கம்?... (Kanapathippillai, 2003)

Power and the hierarchy obviously expressed in the occasion when the Barber shave to *Udayar* காலம் மாறிக்கொண்டுது. அல்லாவிட்டால் உன்னைப் பணையோட கட்டிச் சவுக்காலை அடிப்பன். (Kanapathippilai 2003: 9) During the marriage proposal of his daughter he himself makes decisions without having any discussion with his daughter *Meenashi*. *Udayar* confirm about the dowry giving as cash at the same time he requested the broker, (Kanapathippilai 2003 P23) not to ask *Meenashi* to come in front of the bride groom before the marriage. At the very end of the play *Udayar* realizes the past life and agrees to the marriage of *Meenashi* and her lover *Sundaram*. The love marriages within the same cast is not very much appreciated even at present days.(Sivathamby: 2000)

4.5.2 Menakshi- *Udayar*'s daughter. She is educated and falls in love with *Sundaram*. The character is introduced even before entering the stage as other characters often speak about *Meenashi*'s marriage. She is always silent without words but we can 'hear' the words. Even though she is one of the main characters, she speaks only a few lines. It clearly depicts the life of a woman and her freedom of expression in the 1940s. *Anapakiyamn* (*Udayar*'s sister) mediates *Meenashi*'s marriage, It clearly shows that there was no place for *Menashi*'s opinion on her marriage confirm through உடையார் இவனைக் கொற கொற எண்டு இழுத்துக் கொண்டு போய் அவன்ற கையில் குடுத்து விடறன். விருப்ப மெண்டால் என்ன விருப்பமில்லாவிட்டால் என்ன. என்ன கோழியைக் கேட்டோ ஆணம் காச்சிறது? (kannapathippilai:1940) (I will drag her with force and handover to him whether she likes or not. Do we make chicken curry with the wish of hen?)

Father and daughter never 'converse' directly; even though *Meenachi* is educated she is not allowed to make any decision as an individual, not encouraged to express views, she is not even involved in her own family matters, always she is ready to follow her father's instruction without any question. Women are separated from the public world/space and also Gender space was maintained very strictly even within the house compound itself.

4.5.3 Barber- Different occupational role In the caste system, Barber cast was categorized under domestic servant. (Perinpanayakam:1982). The Barber's name is *Arumugam*, he is introduced by the author as 'Ambatta' (Baber) *Arumugam* (In the early days in Jaffna, people were called by their caste name in addition to their names). Barber serves shave to *Udayar* in his house but these traditional occupations gradually disappear will not be existed in future. The social transmission was clearly indicated by the statement of Barbar, என்ன நடக்கப்போகுதோ தெரியாது. எல்லாரும் ஒவ்வொரு சலூன் இப்ப இப்ப போடுகினம்" ... (what is going to happen....now all are building saloon..) (Kanapathippilai:1940)

4.5.4 Annapakiyam is a typical gossip characteristic of Jaffna village women. Particularly inquisitive in nature and make every a small matter a public event known by all. She visits the houses in the village and gossip with the other women. This is the most possible way of giving publicity to personal event.

4.5.5 Kaliyarnaththarakar (Marriage broker): Marriage broker was a new profession introduced during the emergence of Tamil middle class society. There were no marriage brokers in the previous dramatic texts of Kanapathipillai. In the early days marriages were arranged among close relatives, after the emergence of middle class the broker became mediator of marriages. Family consciousness is very important aspect in Jaffna society (Sivathamby: 2000), every aspect in life is strictly bound with marriages. Therefore the brokers role is also very important to form a family. In this text the Broker (Kalyanaththarakar) character depicted as a money motive character.

4.5.6 Kaaththi, Seenikkuddi, Sinnaththmby- These are collective characters. The villagers reside under the dominance of *Udayar* in the same village. They complain to *Udayar* about Kathi's daughter's love marriage. *Udayar* suggestes him to accept the marriage; there is a contradiction of the decision made by *udayer* because he refused the love marriage of his own daughter and force

Kaathy to accept the marriage. Thus power and domination are clearly shown between the dominant cast and others.

4.5.7 Sundaram and Thanikasalam. These characters represent the transformation period. Both had English education and layers by profession. They accept the modern changes and refuse the unwanted aspects in the traditional society. Both accept love marriage and disagree with *Udayar*. These characters reflect the progressive transformation of the society.

The author also wants to establish and create the characters as models of the Jaffna inhabitants who have lived in the native territory throughout the colonial culture, lived in the native territory. The function of both characters can be considered as narrators of the play.

4.4 Language

'Speak a language is to take on a world, a culture' (Brain Crow, 1996). It indicates the relationship between the culture and language. The author also has the intention to document the language patterns in different situations through the medium of theatre. Especially the pattern and the language belong to the author's native place Point Pedro in Jaffna. In a dramatic text the words are designed to become a performance.

The most of the dialogue spoken by *Udayar*, reflect his superiority in the society. In a theatrical communication dialogue plays an important role to the stage, as it is designed to be heard by the audience. (Studying plays, 2002). Each character in 'Udayar Midduku' has dynamic expression in the language which he speaks. The language shows the social status and the cast identity of the character. For example the cast category of domestic servants *Ambatta Arumugam* (Barber) (Kannapathippilai, 1940) speaks in third person while speak directly to *Udayar* (dominant caste)

The dialogues are more informative than any other element in the text. For example: Palmyra groove scene; chicken fray in the *Kudalai* (bowl made by Palmyra leaf). Toddy mud pot, knife (*palaikkathi*; specially used for toddy taping), description about the different variety of toddy and toddy preservation mode.

The toddy tapers and the customers have conversation about *Udayar's* hidden personality. This is where they planned a robbery from *Udayars'*. And the most important feature in this scene is that the persons belong to different casts get together for toddy in a friendly manner. This was not explicitly accepted by the society. But this is the place where all can get together as equal. This scene describes the natural village life of Jaffna which is not much spoken or documented even in present dramatic texts.

The language of the play is the language spoken by the Tamil community during the 1940s. Some of the usages are difficult to understand with its context at present. Naming of the characters and the words spoken by them determine the particular caste of the society. Other than proverbs and phrases, colloquial speeches are also used to express the particular expression and the situations. The characters from depressed community speak differently way unlike others. When they speak each sentence end up with third person. *Kaaththy:படர்க்கை காத்தி நம்பி இருக்கிறனாக்கும் (Kathy may believe it)*. Proverbs and colloquial phrases are commonly used. For example: *இரணியன் பட்ட நேரத்தில* (at the time when Iraniyan (Asura) was killed), *பூவில்லாமல் மாலை முடிக்கிறதே?* (how does it possible to make garland without flowers).

There are no dialogues directly between male and female characters except Annapakiyam (*Udayar's* sister) and *Luxmi* (servant of *Udayar*) It reflects the gender relationship in the indigenous culture. And also it is to note that the domination of male is revealed only through use of command language when the male members of *Udayars'* converse with the females of the family. Eg: *Thanikasalam: prepare tea for me - (ordering his servant)*

Udayar: if she likes it or not I drag her out and force her to marry him....(Kannapathipillai,1940).

5.0 Conclusion

Play texts or theatre texts address its ultimate audience indirectly. In this text, as the set of instructions are designed to be interpreted by theatre makers before its own audience, the audience receives the essence of the texts in the cultural context. '*Udayar Midduku*' text and the productions of different period confirm this clearly. Whenever this play is performed it gives the experience of living in 1940s in a Jaffna village. A tradition can be invented in any number of

ways crucially related to the need for a secure cultural identity, to the achievements of self worth and self determination ((Brain Crow (Fannon) :1996). In such post but neo colonial contexts dramatists have created theatre for variety of urgent cultural functions. They have often been concerned to use the stage to define and affirm their people's cultural 'personality'-by recovering the past, freed from the biases of metropolitan (Brain Crow:1996).

When reading the play now at some considerable historical and social distance from its moment of writing, it is difficult to identify how this real context helped in making the play's original meaning. Dr Johnson's neoclassical dictum: 'A play read affects the mind like a play acted', can only be true of the reader who is able to bring the numerous explicit and implicit signs and signals inherent in the literary text to life in his imagination.

Cultural materialism at its most characteristic, is trying to use critical approaches to do more than simply reading a play. It is hoped to work with its readers to think differently about how society operates- as a first step towards changing that society for something better. And also have the possibilities of methodology of auto ethnography to be used to understand a particular society. It Declares an interest and make a aware of the cultural aspects by documenting cultural heritage through dramatic texts.

- ◆ This study should have been done with the knowledge of sociology and anthropology of the Jaffna society. It was not done because of the lack of research works done so far.
- ◆ As a dramatic text for performance, there are lacks of instructions given for visualization of the text. It should be worked separately.)

References:

- Brain Crow, Chris Banfield (1996), *An introduction to Post Colonial Theatre*, Cambridge University Press
- Gorge.W.Brandt (2003), *Modern theories of Drama*, Newyork.
- Homi Bhaba, (1994), *Location of culture*, Routledge (1st edition), London
- Jeyasankar S. (2005) *Third Eye*, Baticoloa,
- Kannapathippilai.K,(1940) '*Nanadakam*' (Four Plays), Chavakachchri Lankabimani Book Depot, Jaffna.

- Kannapathippilai.K, (2003), *Anthology of dramas of Prof.K.Kanapathippilai*, Kumaran press (Pvt) Limited, Colombo
- Mick Wallis, Simon Shepherd (2002), *Studying Plays*, New York.
- Navadharshani. K (1994), *Theatre of Prof.K.Kanapathippilai*, Dissertation, University of Jaffna, (unpublished)
- Mounaguru S (1993), *Sri Lankan Tamil theatre*, University of Jaffna, Jaffna, Sri Lanka .
- Phillip Zarrilli, Bruce Mc conachie, Gary Jay Williams, Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei (2010), *Theatre Histories*, (2nd edition), Routledge, U.K
- Perinpanayakam.S, (1982), *Karmic theatre- self, society and astrology in Jaffna*, the university of Massachusetts press, Amherst,
- Rustom Bharucha, (1993), *Theatre and the world*, Routledge London,.
- Sivathamby.K, (2000), *Jaffna- Ideology-Society- Culture Ideology*, Kumaran press (Pvt) Limited, Colombo.
- Sivathamby.K,(2002), *Being as a Tamil and Sri Lankan*, Kumaran press (Pvt) Limited, Colombo.