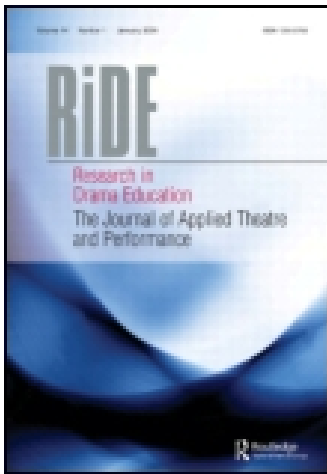


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Political conscientisation through street theatre: a study with reference to *Kalyanasaugadhikam*

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Theatre occupies a significant place in any revolutionary political strategy that has as its objective a radical transformation of society. This paper attempts to make a thematic and structural analysis of the Malayalam street play *Kalyanasaugadhikam* written by Anil Nadakavu in 2009 and performed by Manisha Theatres, Thadiyankovil, Kasaragod, Kerala, India. It is also an exploration into the politics behind the production and consumption of every cultural product in our society, with a special reference to the political implications and aesthetics offered by the street play *Kalyanasaugadhikam*.

Street theatre as a cultural artefact offers space for a democratic discourse in order to create an active public sphere in the corresponding society. This paper shows how Anil Nadakavu's (2009a) street play *Kalyanasaugadhikam*,¹ which was performed in the many rural pockets of Kasaragod district in Kerala, became an agent of political conscientisation of the masses regarding various sociopolitical issues. Using the possibility of meta-drama playwright Anil Nadakavu tries to expose the capitalist cultural industry working behind the production and representation of any work of art in our society. It illuminates the audience's thoughts by posing questions on consumerism, gender inequality, alcoholism and lack of political consciousness that prevail in current Kerala society by employing the protesting nature of street theatre for the political conscientisation of masses. Every cultural as well as material product in our society is very much part of the capitalist cultural/economic circuit. Before reaching the consumer, the product is being regulated and represented by different market-driven agencies. The market projects a glorified status of the product and creates a new identity for it. The responsibility of an artist is to make the people aware about the functioning of these agencies. This article cites the example of a street play that attempts to problematise various marketing strategies which enchant ordinary people into the habit of massive consumerism.

Street performance as a form of cultural communication is deeply rooted in almost all the ancient traditions including India. It would be wrong to claim that street theatre is a new form. Snake charmers and bear/monkey charmers on the street and acrobatic sequences at fairs by trained performers are all various forms of street performances. But they are professional artists where the primary aim is to entertain and get money from the show. In recent times this form has been used to

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propagate social and political messages and to create awareness among the masses regarding critical sociopolitical issues. Street theatre can be broadly defined as a politicised form of street performance. Street plays break the formal barriers of a proscenium theatre space and approach the people directly.

The street was a proactive space in India especially during the period of the national independence movement. Indian streets, both in village and urban spaces, were flooded with crowds who were striking against the British Government and participating in public gatherings, political meetings, rallies, processions and demonstrations. Jacob Srampickal (1994, 102) in his work *Voice to the Voiceless: The Power of People's Theatre in India* states that one of the first examples of street theatre is perhaps Gandhi's Salt March at Dandi. The actions contained in this event can be associated with street theatre. The march and picking up of salt are demonstrative theatrical actions in the open air. Also, it is a community activity that involves performers and audience where the whole action can be construed as an assertion of Indian rights against the threats of British supremacy. This element of the fight for the rights of the common man is the key factor in Indian street theatre. By the time of the Emergency in 1975–1977, street theatre had become the tool of revolutionaries, especially of leftist parties. The Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), backed by the Communist Party of India, made a great impact among the masses by raising various sociopolitical issues.

Srampickal considers *Hitler Parajayam* (Failure of Hitler), staged in rural pockets of Andhra Pradesh, as one of the pioneering Indian ventures in street theatre. The makers of the play named the theatre form as *vedhinatakam* (road play). The major feature of this play is its mix of folk art forms and street theatre techniques (Srampickal 1994, 103). During the same period, IPTA came up with a series of workshops, acting training and discussions on social issues in Delhi. Finally, IPTA produced a set of political plays like *Aaj Ka Sawaal* (The Problems of Today), *Swathantra Sangram* (Independence Struggle) and *Bhook Ki Jwaala* (The Flames of Hunger). *Charge Sheet* (1949) was one of the earliest street plays which were performed in Kolkata. *Charge Sheet* was performed at Hazra Park, Kolkata, to an audience of thousands of workers and later was repeated many times across West Bengal. In terms of form, though, early street theatre seems to have mimicked the stage, with the action often taking place in front of a wall or some other backdrop, and actors entering from and exiting into makeshift wings. A few plays like Utpal Dutt's *Din Bodoler Pala* (Pala of Changing Times, 1967) were more elaborate, stretching to three hours. The broken and random history of the street theatre movement in India coincided with periods of political unrest. When the revolutionary Naxalbari uprising in Bengal combined together with the communist revolt, street theatre entered a new and potentially dangerous phase. Performers were attacked, often by the police, which resulted in the death of two activists, Ashis Chatterjee of the Theatre Unit in 1972 and Prabir Datta of *Silhouette* in 1974. Many others were arrested, beaten up and tortured (Bharucha 1983, 130–135).

What makes a street performance a street theatre? The vehemence of art increases only when it is anti-establishment. Theatre always holds hands with the downtrodden and raises its voice against oppressions and exploitations. Street theatre with its explosive nature stands for the marginalised sections of society. It revolutionised not only the concepts of theatrical production and presentation but also altered the dramatic action. Of course, there are arguments against the

propagandist nature of street theatre. This same tool can be used for protesting against governmental oppressions as well as for popularising the government's norms. Still, street theatre is essentially political in nature. Once the political aspect is removed it falls under the category of social theatre, which is used to propagate concepts like hygiene, family planning, AIDS awareness, etc. On the political distinctiveness of street theatre Safdar Hashmi says that:

Any play performed in a street corner cannot be passed off as street theatre; the logic perhaps was that any drama performed in the open, not actually on the street corner, can be passed off as street theatre. Now such a definition will not do. It will be as ridiculous as calling any play in which the hero dies at the end a tragedy.... Similarly, characterizing traditional plays as street theatre is mis-defining them on the one hand and street theatre on the other.... Street theatre became inevitable when the workers began organizing themselves into unions in the mid nineteenth century. Its arrival became immanent with the emergence of political demonstration in the late nineteenth and twentieth century. As such it is a twentieth century phenomenon, born out of the specific needs of the modern world. (1989, 7–9)

Street theatre is a theatre of protest which aims to express suppressed voices. The ultimate aim of street theatre is to propagate egalitarian ideas and expose the various forms of exploitation. Rather than the artistic excellence in performance, it is the intensity of issue that matters. Mostly street plays are conducted unannounced and unpublicised. The contemporariness of the issues raised in the street plays keeps the performance alive. The names of persons, places and even dialects often change from place to place in a typical street play. The flexibility makes it more appealing. Jacob Srampickal observes certain important features of Indian street theatre. The collective authorship, use of living newspaper theatre techniques, flexibility in altering the text according to the audiences, audience participation, perhaps the unchangeable linkage with Indian folk traditions that inculcate dance, music and use of rustic musical instruments like drums and bells are the major features that define Indian street theatre (Srampickal 1994, 127–129). They use fewer props and costumes. Masks are used to portray abstract characters. Sometimes dialogues are avoided and mime is also adopted. Use of satire and humour increases the acceptance of this theatre form. Essentially, Indian street theatre is highly political in nature though it adopted popular elements to reach the masses.

In Kerala, from ancient times onwards one can see political interference in the form of performances. *Porrattunatakam* is an example of this. The literal meaning of *Porrattunatakam* is 'frolicsome theatre' (Panicker 2007, 143). This is a Kerala folk theatre form widely practised in Palakkad district. Unlike most traditional forms in Kerala, *Porrattunatakam* is secular. The artists engaged in this profession belong to the Panan caste. The intermingling of questions and answers is the general pattern or structure of *Porrattunatakam*. When we look at the narrative style, and the development of plot in particular, in *Porrattunatakam* we can identify the fragments of a crude political performance. Here, the actor who is standing in the middle of the stage utters his problems. His problem signifies the problem of his entire community. There are many characters in *Porrattunatakam*, all drawn from ordinary life. The stories are woven from their rustic experiences, incorporating many situations of fun, satire and social criticism. *Porrattunatakam* shows the existence of an early form of political theatre in Kerala that drastically varies in style, form, content and

presentation from the proscenium drama. Not only *Porrattunatakam* but also other performance forms like *Kakarishinatakam*, *Prahasanam* (farce), etc. performed in public places can be considered as earlier forms of political street performances in Kerala.

During the 1970s, with the backdrop of the Emergency, there was an urge for a radical art form in Kerala also. The progressive forces, reform movements and leftist aesthetic realms resisted the deep-rooted powers of orthodoxy through their own means of artistic expression and performance in post-independence Kerala society. Before the declaration of internal Emergency in India most of the fringe political groups were under the impression that the Indian form of bourgeois democracy does not offer space for protest. In the post-Emergency period, in contrast to their sectarian past, the Naxalite groups began to field various legal and semi-legal mass organisations which reflected their new orientation. What made this group important is that they had certain progressive ideas to disseminate among the masses and were ready to accept innovative and expressive mass media like street theatre.

As with various radical groups in Kerala in the late 1970s, developing an authentic cultural ideology and aesthetics was also the aim of some other movements. One good example is Sastra Sahitya Parishad, a people's science movement of Kerala. Due to the proximity between the actor and the viewer in street theatre, Parishad chose it as their chief medium for conscientisation (Gramaprakash 2007, 97). In their recent history Parishad is producing propaganda plays with an aim to popularise science and a scientific outlook among the new generation. Their work helps to develop a sense of optimism in the masses, instilling in them a sense of self-confidence that they can change the world and build a better tomorrow. Their work contributed much to the growth of political street theatre in Kerala.

In India, street theatre as a medium for cultural activism was kept alive for centuries by the sincerity and creativity of thousands of artists. In recent years it has emerged as a dynamic movement in the sociocultural milieu of our everyday life. Always it has acted as the perfect weapon in the hands of revolutionaries for making changes in our society.

One could meet street play activists in the most unexpected places: behind the vegetable complex in your marketplace, during your evening walk, at the bus stop or perhaps even on the street in front of your office. They appear suddenly as a group of people, acting out a short skit or a play for anyone who might wish to stop and watch. They are not mere entertainers. For them street theatre is a means of reaching out to people of all strata and creating an awareness of events around them and also to call for a change from what they believe are the social ailments. In street theatre we have a situation where the audience has not come prepared to watch a play, and people may not have much time to spare. These limitations determine the parameters of the plays. Consequently, street plays are generally short. The exchange of ideas through dialogue is very quick, direct and immediate. So it should be more effective, and also usually louder than real-life utterance. The script and direction are always significant. In order to draw the attention of the crowd from the hectic activities of normal day-to-day life, the plays have to be humorous. Songs based on popular catchy tunes are included to add to their appeal. The play is really inexpensive because very few stage props are used. Instead of a fixed stage, the concept of a flexible acting space is used in street theatre (Vijayan 2003, 90–93). Grotovski once said that, 'It is recognized that drama can exist even though the extra

fittings in drama like costumes, settings, sound, light and a specified stage for performance got gradually suspend' (qtd. in Chithambaram 1998, 48). As the costumes and stage setting are absent, more focus is given to the street artist's performance. Badal Sircar, the noted Indian playwright, comments on the usage of props in street theatre: 'The essential tool of the trade is the human body. The potentiality of the human body, the ability to throw one's voice so that 4000 people can be reached without the aid of a mike, must be explored' (qtd. in Gramaprakash 2007, 67). Street theatre as a channel of communication is deeply rooted in Indian society. The modern form is different only in the themes enacted. The street theatre groups analyse society as it exists, visualise its future and then attempt to put the vision across.

The structure of a street play contributes much to its aesthetic embellishment. Political street theatre can be defined as an outdoor public performance which takes place where social or political transformation is envisaged. The proximity of spectators and their on-the-spot feedback and participation are some of the major qualities of street theatre. As Safdar Hashmi says:

The circular acting area, the conditions of performance, the proximity of the actor and the spectator have all demanded a new acting style, new dramatic structures, new writing skills, a new kind of training, a new use of music, verse and chorus and a new method of theatre management. Even the audience performer relationship in street theatre is something unique and new. Its demands have already led to some amount of serious work on the language, structure, grammar and aesthetics of street theatre. This new street theatre, though still in its infancy and struggling to discover itself needs to be seen against the backdrop of its phenomenal expansion. (1989, 6)

Hashmi's words show that street theatre follows a different structural pattern from other traditional theatres. An analysis of *Kalyanasaugadhikam* on the basis of these ideas on structural patterns offers a deeper understanding of street theatre as a specific performance genre. The play was written by Anil Nadakavu and staged by Manisha Theatres, Thadiyankovil, Kasaragod, Kerala, India. Manisha Theatres is a leftist progressive theatre group who constantly engages with the cultural and socio-political activities in Kannur and Kasaragod districts of Kerala which is the southernmost state in India. The play was first staged in Thadiyankovil which is a small village in Kasaragod. Between 2009 and 2010 the play was staged in about 100 venues, especially in Kannur and Kasaragod districts.

In October 2009 Manisha Theatres organised a meeting in memory of the veteran poetry maestro Shri Vayalar Ramavarma. The programme was organised under the title *Vayalar anusmaranam* (commemorating Vayalar) at Thadiyankovil, North Kerala, India. The programme included reciting Vayalar's songs, both poems and film songs, by famous playback singer V. T. Murali. Vayalar is considered as one of the earliest revolutionary poets of Kerala and also an ardent Communist sympathiser. His poems are celebrations of ordinary people's life and struggle for existence. It was immediately after this programme that the performers of Manisha Theatres managed to locate a space for staging the play. It begins with a Malayalam folk song, 'Vattachakkara thenu karibana, njan oru kothi kothiche, kombathu nilkana mavila kandu njan oru kothi kothiche'. The song announces the basic theme of the play and its inevitable link with the *Kalyanasaugadhikam* episode in the great Indian epic *Mahabharatha*. This portion in the epic narrates human being's futile pursuit of

worldly desires. The folk song is about a person who misunderstands a yellowish leaf of a mango tree as moon and madly attempts to seize it.

The light and sound system employed in the former *Vayalar anusmaranam* is used in this play also. A single microphone is managed to hang in the midst of the ground. Also they place a wooden box in the middle so that the actor can stand upon it and speak aloud using the microphone. The audience, mainly villagers, men, women and children, are in equal proportion where standing in circle leaving a 20-metre diametrical space for the performer. The event seems like a process in which audience gradually become a part of the play presentation. At the end of the play audience stand up with applause for telling Jai Hind in comradeship with the play makers and performers.

The thematic analysis of *Kalyanasaugadhikam* shows the impact that a street play can have on 'the circuit of culture' (Hall 1997, i) which is the primary focus of this paper. In his work, *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, Stuart Hall coins the phrase 'the circuit of culture'. The circuit of culture consists of five moments – regulation, production, consumption, representation and identity – that work in concert to provide a shared cultural space in which meaning is created, shaped, modified and recreated. There is no beginning or end on the circuit; the moments work synergistically to create meaning. However, each moment contributes a particular piece to the whole. The moment of regulation comprises controls on cultural activity ranging from formal and legal controls such as regulations, laws and institutionalised systems, to the informal and local controls of cultural norms and expectations that form culture in the more commonly used sense of the term. The moment of production outlines the process by which creators of cultural products imbue them with meaning, a process often called encoding. Representation is the form in which the product appears. It includes mainly the physical appearance in which the product is being recognised by others. Failures often are attributed to meanings that arise during the moment of consumption, when messages are decoded by audiences. Finally, identities are meanings that accrue to all social networks, from nations to organisations to publics (Hall 1997, 37–39).

The five terms addressed in the circuit diagram, through which Hall explains how culture works in a particular society, are interconnected. There is a producer and a consumer behind every movement in our society. But soon after the production or before the product gets into the hands of a consumer it is masked to a different shape, which is its identity. This process of change from the real product to its identity is done through representation. So behind a producer a theorist can find a regulating force, which makes the consumers believe the new identity of the product is real. This act of make-believe can be considered as the ideological subjugation of the consciousness of subjects in society.

The regulating force in the circuit of culture is 'ideology' created and transmitted by various institutions. Althusser (2001, 1341) says that: 'Ideology interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects [...]. Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence'. Each individual is under certain misconceptions in understanding his or her real conditions of existence. Certain institutions in society create an imaginary world around an individual and he blindly believes and follows it. This paper looks into the institutions and forces in the play *Kalyanasaugadhikam* which interpellates an individual as subject to certain misconceptions.

Street theatre as a mode of cultural critique: an analysis of *Kalyanasaugadhikam*

Kalyanasaugadhikam portrays the life of an ordinary Malayalee (Malayalam language-speaking people) in the post-globalised world. It is presented as a 'play-within-a-play'. Narayanan Master is the central character, and he appears as a mad man in the very beginning and catches the attention of the crowd with his frantic behaviour. Later, his father Chandhankunju appears and announces the death of Narayanan Master. The father pleads to the crowd to stage a street play written by his dead son. A group of young people stage Narayanan Master's play *Kalyanasaugadhikam*, which is also the title of the main play. It is the story of Uthpalashan and his family. After his marriage with Sulochana, his life changes drastically. Upon Sulochana's request he purchases many things without considering the budget of the family. He takes loans from banks and finally becomes a bankrupt. Sulochana had a dream about an unknown flower and she compels Uthpalashan to bring it for her. Uthpalashan's efforts to find the flower are in vain. Finally in his desperation he sells himself to death.

In a conversation with the playwright and the theatre group, they communicated some of the immediate impulses that urged them to stage the play *Kalyanasaugadhikam*. Most of the villages of Kerala, especially in Kannur and Kasaragod districts, are rich in its traditional heritage and spectacular landscape. A variety of ritual forms makes these villages more rustic. With the advent of modernism, cultural unity and diversity in many of these villages was dismantled in the name of pseudo-homogeneity. The emergence of multipurpose shops in towns marked the death knell of small shops. Many of the government schools in these areas perished with the flow of students to private English-medium schools in town. Also, many of the economic surveys proved that the consuming nature of Malayalees is increasing day by day. This created a total unrest in the cultural life of these villages. People started forgetting the importance of the folk art forms and ritualistic art forms. It was in this social context that Manisha Theatres group realised its role in society as an organic intellectual (Gramsci) in order to perpetuate a social and cultural revolution. All the artists in Manisha Theatres are daily workers, farmers and local shop owners. Some of them are teachers. A very few belong to the category of professional theatre artist. So Manisha Theatres is very much a part of the social group which they are targeting to revolutionise. Rather than making a direct fight against the capitalist they preferred to educate their fellow beings in society regarding the harmful side of consumerism. To make changes in the mindset of ordinary people is a herculean task. They acted as an organic group to create homogeneity and an awareness regarding the socio-political issues for the common people in society. So they chose an art form like street theatre due to its capability to reach a vast audience.

'Collective theatre' is a term which this paper proposes to distinguish street theatre from other theatrical genres. It explores a wide variety of topics that can shake the social systems of a particular geographical space. It is not proper to assign the authorship of a street play to an individual in the group. A group of passionate people, who try to address many issues, work together and compile their ideas in order to produce a street play. A street play breaks all kinds of conventions regarding the structure, duration and also the concept regarding a proper beginning, middle and end.

The street theatre is largely non-Aristotelian in form and content. The beginning in street plays is very significant. It may be a loud cry or a ringing roar that can easily catch the attention of a crowd. In *Kalyanasaugadhikam*, the play begins with an actor running into the crowd crying out 'Hide ... hide!'. This sudden cry and commotion attract the attention of people at a street corner. The play begins in the following way:

A man is introduced to the usual hurly burly of a street. He frantically searches for a place to hide, but he cannot find one. Then he tries to hide himself under his own dhoti.

Mad man: Hide ... oh hide! Everyone hide, hide ... everyone go under cover. Kalamadan² is coming, Kalamadan is coming ... Kalamadan. (Anil 2009a, 1)

The dialogues in street plays are short in length but possess the strength to criticise corruptions in society. The brevity in the dialogues helps the audience to grasp ideas with minimum effort. The most significant thing in the language of street play is the possibility for alteration according to the crowd. The performers are even allowed to edit the text during the performance. Sometimes the performer prompts the audience to utter certain dialogues. The laughter, sighing and even silence of the audience can be included in the performance text of a street play. As commented by a scholar on street theatre, 'The language of a street play is directly connected to the nature of the street. Performance place, status of audience, number of audience may influence the selection of language' (Gramaprakash 2003, 63).

When *Kalyanasaugadhikam* was performed by Manisha Theatres at Thadiyankovil in Kasaragod, the audience remained silent at Uthpalashan's questions. Sensing passivity on the part of the audience the performer immediately rises to the occasion and asks the audience: 'It is this silence of you ... which is the reason behind the absolute failure of this nation's administration' (Anil 2009b). As the dialogues are addressed to the audience directly, they hit the right spot and never leave any chance for ambiguities in the minds of the viewers. Generally an exaggerated tone is used to emphasise the ideas discussed in the play.

The number of issues which a street play can address is unpredictable as it depends on addressing, questioning, judging and passing opinions on a lot of topical political issues. *Kalyanasaugadhikam* too refers to a host of contemporary socio-political developments. The thematic study of the play is an eye-opener to the cultural life of current Kerala society.

Consumerism, a major theme of the play, is an output of many political designs formulated by the dominant class. Each product in the world market is given a separate identity or represented with more emphasis along with pseudo-ornamentation through advertisements and ideological webs. Dominant economic habits are spreading to the life and rhythm of subordinate classes. These habits make people of middle class and lower middle class forget about their available resources and run after consumer goods often imported from abroad. While this 'drama' takes place in the main stream, the rural areas face a setback in agrarian practices due to the poor market for native products. This creates scarcity for available commodities and results in the need for importing things from other countries. This economic imbalance created by the capitalist is explored in the play *Kalyanasaugadhikam*. At present we, the Keralites, need a cultural recovery, yet most of us are not aware of the need for

this recovery. This is the message of the play *Kalyanasaugadhikam*. The play looks at the transformation from consumption to undesirable consumerism in Kerala. While consumption stands for purchasing according to the need, consumerism can be observed as purchasing things without considering the economic capacity of the individual due to the compulsion from unknown external pressures.

Generally a street theatre cannot afford to discuss at length all the issues which are included in the text of the play. It is only a space for a sharp and crisp critique of social evils. The entire problem of consumerism is presented through the frantic behaviour shown by Uthpalashan, the protagonist of the play, when he runs around Sulochana, his wife, and cries out the names of various products. The following 'stage' directions reveal the shift of space and tone in performance.

Sulochana stands in the middle ... Uthpalashan runs around her in a frantic way. To signify the changes in the house, three actors appear flying colourful shawls. Rhythmically, they take a slow motion walk around the acting area.

Uthpalashan: (*Speaks in a frantic way*) Father ... you know ... I bought TV, washing machine, fridge, coat, bed, phone, mixer, grinder. (Anil 2009a, 9)

Uthpalashan's movements and utterances are very significant. He always moves in a limited space with a frantic pace. He moves in a repetitive style which often signifies his lack of choice even in purchasing consumer products. He can buy products, but the options are limited because always the provider is the same capitalist sector. The addiction for consumption created with the help of successful advertisements keeps him visiting shops repeatedly. The depiction of the father's attitude towards his daughter's marriage in the play shows the same addiction to a consumerist culture which has affected all the Malayalee families. The celebrations on all occasions are really expensive here, and it can be considered as a big economic waste for the nation. The conversation between Kunjappan and a village man after the marriage ceremony of Sulochana exactly shows this.

Someone: Hey Kunjappan, was this *naadaswaram*³ programme a necessary one? I think it is a luxury.

Kunjappan: It's a necessity man ... today is my daughter's marriage. I wished to celebrate it with pomp and circumstance. (Anil 2009a, 8)

The play offers some scope to lament that, in the wake of modernisation and modern thinking, the orthodox and ritualistic nature of society vanishes. This can be taken both positively and negatively. Definitely, on the one hand, modern culture dismantled a considerable amount of superstitions and blind beliefs, but, on the other hand, its effect has led to the loss of the political, cultural and social orthodoxy in the state. Consumerism creates a mind which motivates one to pursue one's own interests as the almost exclusive objective of life. Human relationships come to be subordinated to things like a car, a video player, 'cereal substitutes' and money. The buyer fails to think about whether the thing he bought is useful and is affordable to his family budget (Sooryamoorthy 1997, 2). Uthpalashan belongs to this category. The play uses the word 'Englittirias' as a symbol of any consumer products or ideology which a normal human being is forced to follow. At a moment of suffocation Uthpalashan says, 'Do you have Englittirias flowers? ... I want Englittirias

flower. I need it, I want it' (Anil 2009a, 15). He buys things only to fulfil the wish of his wife Sulochana who is considered as a victim of consumerism. She is always being controlled by the *western* way of buying things. She is a slave of the advertisements of multinational companies. In fact, thousands of Sulochanas from Kerala are the real target of multinational companies. Moreover, Keralites opted for consumption either to enhance or retain their social prestige.

As an ideology, consumerism shapes up as values, ethics and other behavioural norms; it also creates a mental climate in which the individual becomes increasingly so passive to broader questions which should normally concern the mind of a social being (Sooryamoorthy 1997, 3). This is another important social issue the play discusses. The increasing consumerism is now changing the biological and mental state of a person. Twenty years back a middle-class housewife used home appliances like *ammikallu*, *urakallu*, which gave her immense exercise for her body. But nowadays these ancient tools are replaced by grinders which can be operated without any physical exercise. Uthpalashan's life changes amazingly after his marriage. In every society invaded by consumerism, more and more people take to different forms of moral and social habits.

Women are the prime targets of most of the advertising campaigns unleashed by multinational corporate companies. The following statement certifies this:

As the social and political structures exclude the female sex from the power centres, [capitalism] appropriates femininity for capital gains in the market economy. The mainstream development paradigms based on capitalist relations of production thrive on opportunities created by gender relations for power and profit. (Connell 1987, 104)

Connell's comment shows that for capital gains in the market economy, women are always marginalised. In the play the central female character, Sulochana, is depicted as a negative force that compels Uthpalashan to overspend money. But when we read the play from a feminist perspective, it is understood that there are a set of ideologies that work behind her strange behaviour. She is a woman who lives inside the home and whose access to the outside world is only through television and newspapers. As Barthes (1972, 37) says in his essay 'Soap Powder and Detergents', the products in the market are promoted by creating certain myths around them by the media and some external forces. The following dialogue by Sulochana to her husband during her first night illustrates this.

Sulochana: Yes, I need the same beddings which were shown in the TV Advt. Without that I will not sleep here. Besides, I don't like the brands of soap, comb, powder, nail polish ... and everything in this home. I don't use local products. I use only branded products. You should replace all. (Anil 2009a, 8)

Here the play is an intervention into the concept of circuit of culture by showing the five moments of a cultural production separately through effective dialogues and satirising the victims, i.e. the poor consumers. This satire is not a teasing of the victimised but an active criticism towards the authorities, social leaders and politicians for not making the people of their nation aware about the harm which an external interferer can bring to the nation. The play offers an example of the destruction of the stability and moral discipline of Malayalee due to the external interference to their cultural hemisphere through different media like TV, radio, the

Internet and so on. At one critical moment in Sulochana's life, when her father and mother ask her to break the relation with her husband and go back home, her innocent but intellectually polluted reply shows her addictions to the external interference.

There is an intrinsic link between women's domestic labour with capital accumulation. Eleanor Leacock, a twentieth-century feminist critique, further elaborates the same point:

The inequalities between men and women could not be understood in isolation from polarizing tendencies of the capitalist mode of production which places the 'peripheral' countries of the Third World in a relationship of dependency with the metropolitan centers of the First World. Within an egalitarian world order, so called development could not release women from oppressive social, economic and political institutions; it merely defines 'new conditions of constraints. (Leacock and Lee 1982, 320)

Kalyanasaugadhikam does not open a discussion upon gender inequalities directly, but points out a reason for the subordination of women. From the studies of Leacock we understand that each woman, especially housewives from Third-World countries, is the target of multinational companies and metropolitan centres of the First World. Indian rural women are unaware about anything else than Ujala to wash clothes. Ujala is the brand name of only one detergent product. But nowadays Ujala has become a common name of all such products. This can be considered as a mask of the pseudo-ornamentation by the cultural industry. Culture industry is a term coined by critical theorists Theodor Adorno (1903–1969) and Max Horkheimer (1895–1973), in the final chapter of their book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception'. The rationale behind the culture industry is a form of domination, foreshadowing what will happen elsewhere. They create the regression of enlightenment to ideology. Enlightenment consists of the calculation of effectiveness and of the techniques of production and distribution. What the cultural industry does is that before the people get enlightenment about the circuit of culture, their rationale is being transformed to ideological prejudices to each product of the society (Adorno and Horkheimer 2001, 1111–1112).

The play *Kalyanasaugadhikam* also offers an extensive discussion of the alcohol addiction of Keralites. Many families are under the threat of destruction both economically and morally due to the aggressive alcoholic addition of wage-earning members of the family. It affects the physical standards of the human body. Here is an official document on the level of alcoholism in India. Releasing the manual 'Alcoholic Atlas of India' prepared by the Indian Alcohol Policy Alliance, the then Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare, Dr. Anbumani Ramadoss, asked the media to create awareness about the adverse social, economic and medical effects of alcohol abuse among the masses. He said the reach of media has multiplied, and this issue should form an important agenda of the media. In the case of street plays that converse with the audience directly, these can have far-reaching effects ('Alcohol Atlas of India Released' 2008). Here, a purely satirical narrative tone is used to show how many ill-effects alcohol has among the masses. Sulabhan Kathirupaadam, a new-generation dramatist, is very much conscious about the presence of two or three drunkards in the play.

Sulabhan: Mmm ... No drunkard? A play without a drunkard is unthinkable for our audience! Do you know it? (Anil 2009a, 4)

Kunjappan and Kuttappan are the two major drunkards in the play. The age of Kuttappan is also significant; he is only 28. The playwright introduces Kuttappan in a very satirical manner. In his first appearance, Kuttappan is shown in such a state that he could not recognise his own house and even mistook his father for a stranger who is laying claim over his house. Nowadays liquor is considered as significant and unavoidable drink during all kinds of celebrations including marriage. Each function is becoming an excuse for drinking. When the small family of Uthpalashan realises that soon the family will be blessed with a child, the immediate response of Kunjappan is an example for this tendency in all society.

Kunjappan: Is it? Then we must celebrate it. Ulpaa, Let's buy a *full* ... and also a 2 kg duck. (Anil 2009a, 10)

Generation of awareness about the bad social, economic and medical effects of alcohol abuse among the masses is an immediate success of the play.

Economic debt is a serious issue as far as Indian villages are concerned. We can read this as an after-effect of the modernised consumerist world. When one part of the world witnesses tremendous economic growth, 'the other' is under the threat of economic dependence. Colourful advertisements proposed by the consumerist world prompt the common man to buy things without planning. He buys things with loans taken from private banking facilities and ends up in severe debt by paying unbearable interest. Our hero Narayanan Master (Uthpalashan) belongs to that category.

Mad man: Hey, hey, look ... can you see that car, that white Maruti Alto, K.L. 7 1471. It was I who sold it to Mahesh for half of its cost. You know, I bought it out of my wife's request. Then, the computer in Sudhamani teacher's house, you know they took it from my home. Then that cane cradle in the Varandha of Kaniyan Bhaskar ... it is also mine. It was only on my wife's request that I bought all these things. (Anil 2009a, 2)

He buys things to satisfy his wife's wish by taking loans. Later, when he fails to refund it in time the money lenders take his property back with force. When we probe into things we can understand that actually he is satisfying the capitalist Gods.

When a man feels that he is defeated in life, he loses his mental stability which results in frustration or even madness. *Kalyanasaugadhikam* also addresses this problem, where man becomes a puppet in the hands of some external forces unknown to him. The madness which occurs due to failure in life is different from other kinds of mental disorders. May be this will be a shield for him to escape from the questions of society.

Mad man: Oh I'm safe! Now I am enjoying my life. I can flee from anyone. It is easy to live without convictions. Yea, it is a pleasure to be insane ... ha ha ha. (Anil 2009a, 2)

At the peak of this insanity or extreme frustration man even thinks of suicide as final escape from this world. We can see these suicides as the general picture of Kerala's life. The hero in the play Narayanan Master also selects the same path. However, to

mark his protest on the ways of the world he wanted to convert his suicide into a visual spectacle. His father reports Narayanan Master's suicide:

Old man: (*To the people*) ... you know he is dead now? ... less chance to know it ... but he died ... committed suicide ... He used to say, he wants to tie a rope in the blue sky and to hang on it ... finally he did so ... in an electric past! ... on his own dhoti on a high noon you know how pleasurable to see it. To see my son Narayanan hanging in the blue sky as dark black body. (Anil 2009a, 16)

The play *Kalyanasaugadhikam* can be considered as an instance of meta-theatre where the very concept of theatre itself is problematised through a play within a play. The inner play is a dramatic representation of various social and political issues in Kerala. It shows how pathetic death is. Uthpalashan's self-submission to death before the dark hands of capitalism makes the play more attractive and socially significant. He is trapped by the witches of consumerism just as Marlowe's Dr Faustus was trapped to hell by the devils. The end scene clearly establishes such a parallel.

Despite his efforts to escape the three, he gets caught in the clutches of the masked, devils of consumerism. Overpowering him, the three ravage ruthlessly on his entity. Then they present the motionless wasted Uthpalashan to death. And death hangs him on a rope dangling from heaven. (Anil 2009a, 16)

Industrialisation causes many serious ecological threats. For constructing heavy industrial facilities, at many places our rich greenery is destroyed. In literature there is a separate genre for discussing ecological problems called eco-criticism. Eco-criticism investigates the relation between humans and the natural world in literature. The ways in which environmental issues, cultural issues concerning the environment and attitudes towards nature are presented in literature are analysed in eco-criticism. One of the main goals in eco-criticism is to study how individuals in society behave and react in relation to nature and ecological aspects (Garrard 2007, i). Though *Kalyanasaugadhikam* is not a typical eco-critical work, it addresses ecological problems also with greater attention. The play offers a crisp but bitter critique of some of the environmental issues in Kerala. Here our protagonist through the following dialogue implies the blind levelling of small hills for construction purposes using big machines like the land movers.

Mad Man: Oh hide, everyone hide, hide ... Kalamadan is coming, Kalamadan is coming ... Kalamadan ... Alas, but where can I hide? Every green cover is cleared up, every hill is levelled. (Anil 2009a, 1)

These are efforts of street performers to educate their community regarding various social evils in society.

Anil Nadakavu, in a personal conversation, talks about the responses from the audience towards the performance of the play. Many people responded that they had seen themselves in the play. The play was well received in about 100 venues. Anil Nadakavu never claims that his play created an immediate social revolution. But it created an awareness regarding the negative impacts of overconsumerism, alcoholism, dowry system and many other sociopolitical issues. These kinds of movements organised by various theatre groups and progressive societies together

formulated certain changes in society. For instance, the small-scale industries owned by Kudumbasthri units are a significant change. Kudumbasthri units are small groups formed by women, mainly unemployed women, for making them economically independent and also as a social service. They used to make good quality products like food materials, coir products, ornaments, decorative products, etc. and sell in their village and neighbouring villages, thereby creating a new market system in villages. Some other important changes occurred in the educational sector of Kerala. Nowadays people are giving more importance to government schools as they realise the burden of the huge fee structure followed in private schools. Using the government funds and parent-teacher association funds people renovate the old government schools. Now, these government schools are offering good academic facilities also. Though these changes are not always palpably clear, it could be considered as an output of interference on the part of artists and activists.

To conclude, political and social conscientisation is the primary aim of street theatre. Through conscientisation, a street activist is making the people aware of the need for revolution. 'Guerrilla' is a Spanish word for 'a little war'. In theatre, Guerrilla is a style of street theatre which describes the act of spontaneous, surprise performances in unlikely public spaces to an unsuspecting audience. It is a little war from the darkness. Each street activist is like a guerrilla warrior. He hides behind the trees, buildings, walls, etc. where corruption and exploitation take place. His sword is his own words. His shield is his acting. He appears like thunder in the streets. He not only says the truth, but also highlights the wrongs in society. Street plays and street activists who share the major part in the sociopolitical life of a nation are now facing the threat of the ruling and dominant class in society. They are being banned from the street and from their genuine urge to protest. The reason behind this exclusion will possibly be the hidden agenda of the dominant powers as they realise the threat of a street play that can interrogate their corrupt practices. While the 1980s and 1990s witnessed the suppression of street theatres and street activists through repressive apparatus like police and the law, the present suppression is an ideological one. The dominant class spread an ideology among the masses that street theatre possesses a high amount of violence which can disturb the peace and integrity of the nation.

Keywords: conscientisation; street theatre; consumerism; discourse; culture industry

Notes

1. Imaginary flower signifies human desire portrayed in *Mahabharata*.
2. Colloquial word for *yemara* (death).
3. One of the most popular classical instruments of Tamil Nadu and the world's loudest non-brass acoustic instrument.

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