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LAMP IN A WINDLESS PLACE

Developing an Actor Training Methodology
through Sri Lankan Combative Art Angampora

Issue Editors: Saumya Liyanage,
Lyudmyla Honcharova, Marlon Ariyasinghe

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Lamp in a Windless Place

Developing an Actor Training Methodology through Sri Lankan Combative Art Angampora

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Lamp in a Windless Place

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Combative Art Angampora**

Issue Editors

Saumya Liyanage, Lyudmyla Honcharova, Marlon Ariyasinghe

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This special edition covers some of the writings generated through the Actors Lab and the literature review developed along with the research project. Lyudmyla Honcharova, a Ukrainian actor and a research assistant of this project, was a postgraduate student of Prof. Armando Rotondi, and this academic connection paved the way to work with Prof. Armando Rotondi and his team to realize this special edition of *Mise en Abyme*.

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¹ In order to demystify angampora martial arts and to cement its position among the other martial arts of the world (one of the main objectives of this endeavour), the Editorial Team decided not to italicize the word and to only capitalize angampora in its first usage. All subsequent references within the journal (except in titles) will be written as ‘angampora’.

early years of this project at the University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Sri Lanka. Further, the AHEAD team wishes to thank the current UVPA Vice Chancellor Senior Prof. Rohana Mahaliyanarachchi, who has a clear sense of the value of research and innovations. Further, we are indebted to OTS office Director Dr Anusha Jayasiri and her team and our international consultants: Prof. Jonathan Pitches, University of Leeds, Prof. Paul Bauman, Cardiff University and Associate Professor Tanatchaporn Kittikong, Khon Kaen University, Thailand.

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The COVID-19 pandemic was a difficult time for many theatre artistes who relied on live theatre and performance. During the second lockdown in early 2021, the Actors Lab participant Imitha Jayakodi decided to take his own life. The Actors Lab lost an emerging, talented young actor and a dear friend. All the members of the AHEAD Team would like to dedicate this special edition of *Mise en Abyme* to Imitha and his valid contribution to the development of the Actors Lab.

Issue Editors: Saumya Liyanage, Lyudmyla Honcharova and Marlon Ariyasinghe

To the memory of Imitha Jayakody

1994 – 2021



Papers

“Lamp in a Windless Place”: Developing an Actor Training Methodology through Sri Lankan Combative Art Form Angampora An Introduction

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“Where hand there eye
Where eye there mind”
-slōka 36 *Abinayadarpana* (*Mirror of Gestures*)

1. Introduction

This collection of papers published in this edition of *Mise en Abyme* draws on a new field of study, bringing together a significant compilation of papers, case studies and reflective theory across a wide variety of disciplines of performer training and arts in Sri Lanka. The journal edition welcomes a group of academics and practitioners who are well versed in the field of performing arts to explore and write on the research project awarded to Prof. Saumya Liyanage in 2019

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during his tenure as the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS), University of the Visual and Performing Arts (UVPA), Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Liyanage along with his research team, conceived a Development-Oriented Research (DOR) study titled 'Lamp in a Windless Place', aimed at developing an actor training methodology from angampora, the ancient combative art form in Sri Lanka. The objective of the research was to extricate the basic principles of bodily training from this corporeal tradition that can be used to develop an actor training system to train contemporary Sri Lankan actors.

This three-year research, funded by the Accelerating Higher Education Expansion and Development (AHEAD) project and the World Bank is a Sri Lankan government initiative that supports the higher education sector in promoting a vibrant research and innovation culture that can support economic development, especially the growth of higher-value industries and services. The project deals with studio-based enquiries that would benefit the development of a rich research culture and knowledge production in performer training and cultural economy. The key outcomes of the study are to compile a literary survey and an ethnographic field study, to develop a performer training audio-visual repository, a studio enquiry/training in angampora with actors and drafting of a method uniquely designed for the growth and training of a Sri Lankan actor/performer. The study was the first of its kind in Sri Lankan performer training research to explore an actor training methodology through a Sri Lankan combative art form. Further, this project provides two postgraduate student placements at the Faculty of Graduate Studies to undertake a Master of Philosophy degree covering all tuition and research costs.

Sri Lanka has a long-running history as a centre for intercultural discourses. Many Sri Lankan dance forms and traditional dance drama practices have been heavily influenced by the Asian corporeal arts traditions ranging from martial arts, kathakali dance drama, traditional folk theatre and many other arts and crafts. Sri Lankan modern theatre, in particular, has a direct link to the Indian subcontinent and theatre practices developed in the modern era in the early 1940s and 1950s had a strong connection to the Persi and Tamil theatre in India. However, in the development of modern Sri Lankan Tamil and Sinhala theatre, the actor training methodologies have been a neglected area where actors were not trained according to a training methodology. Unlike cinema in India or elsewhere, modern theatre was not flourishing as a rich and commercially-viable cultural industry. Developing an actor training system or establishing a scientific methodology to train actors was not a priority for the Sri Lankan modern theatre. In the early 1970s, theatre director Dhamma Jagoda and a group of theatre directors established Lionel

Wendt *Ranga Shilpa Shalika* and attempted to introduce the workshop method and other techniques to train actors (Haththotuwegama 1998). However, it was discontinued after the 1971 JVP Insurrection. In modern Sinhala theatre of the 1950s, 70s and late 80s, actor training was part of ‘on-the-job training’ where actors trained by self-learning and observing acting practices executed by their predecessors (Liyanage 2016).

2. Key questions

The key questions that need to be scrutinized in this research project are twofold: First, it focuses on how to develop bodily skills and competencies of an actor using angampora martial arts and secondly, it intends to answer some of the theoretical and philosophical questions on actor training and performance. Hence, a few of the key questions inquired by the project are: 1. How can Sri Lankan corporeal arts, especially combative arts such as angampora, be useful to develop a competent actor? 2. How can the actor be trained through angampora martial art to utilize her/his skills and creativity to cater to the contemporary need of Sri Lankan theatre and other performance arts? 3. What theoretical and philosophical premises, grounded in angampora martial art, inform the bodymind practices of acting? The six months long actor training laboratory supported by the AHEAD project intends to answer these vital questions.

This research is focused on the Sri Lankan combative art form angampora which dates back centuries. Deraniyagala postulates that angampora goes back two hundred years before Christ (Deraniyagala 1959: 2). Further, he argues that Arabs, Persians and Chinese who were “responsible for seaborne traffic of Ceylon” have appreciated this martial art referring to Abou Zeid’s records. As Deraniyagala’s research indicates, the oldest combative art form in Ceylon can now only be seen in some of the remaining sculptures, frescoes and lingual expressions to date (1959: 2-3).

The etymology of angampora explains how this name has been developed. For instance, *angam* (angé) means the body and *pora* means combat. In angampora, physical fighting is carried out either with or without weapons. However, with a clear understanding of the scope of the present angampora tradition in Sri Lanka and their various branches of practices and *gurukula* (teacher-disciple tradition), this research mainly focuses on the physical, combative movements and wrestling techniques.

As Phillip Zarrilli explains, when an actor performs, she or he enacts a “theory of acting”, a set of assumptions that guides her/his own ways of embodying the performance (Zarrilli 1996: 3). Further, these assumptions are culturally specific and related to certain philosophical and ontological meanings driven by that particular culture. In this sense, angampora and its underlying assumptions of training the human body and mind and its related ritualistic and cosmological practices correspond with key issues related to body, mind and spirit. Hence, the idea of selfhood, body, mind, emotions/feeling and the performance context also play a significant role in such an inquiry (1996: 3). The religio-philosophical foundation of angampora must be discussed in length to understand the basic principles aligned with an art form similar to Indian yoga or Japanese martial arts. In the traditional sense, the performer’s body is divided into body and mind while marginalizing the body, claiming that the mind is an ‘all knowing entity’ and the body follows what the mind wants it to do. The philosophical underpinning of the body-mind problems has been running throughout the history of performer training, and many theorists and practitioners have attempted to overcome such difficult ontological problems ingrained in Western philosophy (1996: 10-11). Rene Descartes, the father of modern philosophy, first theorized and divided the mind from the matter, and he further saw the body as the servant of the mind claiming that “I think therefore I am”: The thinking substance of the body is the mind and the body is marginalized as a non-living entity separate from the supreme mind (Yuasa 1993: 9).

3. Actor training

The actor training discourse has also been heavily subjected to dichotomous thinking in the history of theatre. Many theatre directors and actor trainers in Western and European theatre started exploring the need for an actor training method that can be used to employ the contemporary human realities on stage without marginalizing the body over mind (Barba 1985, 1988, Grotowski 1968, Artaud 1994). Many of those practitioners first turned to the Eastern traditional corporeal practices and dance drama, and some of them travelled to the far eastern corners of the world to understand the rigorous practices and training paradigms that were utilized in Eastern dance drama and combative art forms (Hodge 2010, Zarrilli 2008, 1998, 1999).

As the father of modern acting, Constantin Stanislavski first attempted to theorize and use the acting system that he has developed over decades at the Moscow Arts theatre (Carnicke 2008). Stanislavski was heavily influenced by his contemporary theories of the mind, such as Objective psychology and Naturalism (Roach 1993). Furthermore, his overarching ideas on the actor's work on a role was developed through his close reading of Indian yoga and other combative art forms (Hodge 2010). German theatre theorist and the playwright Bertolt Brecht first encountered Beijing Opera actor Mei Lang-Fang at a private party in Moscow and was inspired to develop a methodology called *verfremdung* effect (Alienation or Estrangement theory) for his highly political theatre practice. Antonin Artaud and Jerzy Grotowski also encountered Asian corporeal traditions and developed their theories based on some of the principles pertaining to Asian meditative, combative and dance drama traditions (Schechner 2001).

The idea of actor training and methodologies came into play during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century in Russia (Hodge 2010). Constantin Stanislavski first formulated the idea of training actors for the revolutionary theatre practice he was developing with the help of Nemirovich Danchenko at the Moscow Arts Theatre (Liyanage 2016). However, the idea of actor training and acting as a craft and a set of habituated skills can be traced back to the writing of Denis Diderot in the early seventeenth century. Diderot first formulated the materialistic underpinning of acting practice and argued in his book *Paradox of Acting* (*The Paradoxe sur le comédien*), that the actor's work is not a spontaneous virtuosity but a closely articulated and finely refined set of habitual actions to be demonstrated on stage (Roach 1993).

Bruce McConachie, in his book *American Theater in the Culture of the Cold War: Producing and Contesting Containment, 1947-1962* argues (McConachie 2003) that the American actor training was established in parallel to the capitalistic development of the cinema industry in Hollywood, but as a country, way away from the cultural discourse of Asia and south-east Asia, the need to develop and sustain a continual production of professional actors or actor training school was not a burning issue for theatre practitioners. Further, in *The Politics of American Actor Training* (2011), Sharon Marie Carnicke also illustrates how the pedagogy of actor training in America became a political discourse through “cultural disinformation” and cultural domination in Russia during the cold war era. In this sense, developing a system of actor training within a specific social and cultural setting is not a neutral activity but is highly charged with political and cultural underpinnings.

With this understanding of the politics of cultural practices and their implications in creative culture, this research project proposes to develop and formulate an actor training system that has been a long-running need for the Sri Lankan contemporary creative industry. As stated earlier, Sri Lankan theatre did not need to think about developing an actor training system to train theatre actors over the past five decades. However, their training happened in an ad hoc manner within theatre ensembles and under the guidance of the director. Writing the history of actor training and traditional methods of actor training in Europe, Donald C. Mullin argues that “the traditional actor’s series of attitude usually was learned by watching other actors work; his resulting style was a combination of observed mannerism and individual interpretation. Accusations of imitation were common, precisely because learning developed from live models. There were no schools other than the school of performance” (Mullin 1975: 6). A similar paradigm can be seen in the Sri Lankan modern theatre where actors learn by watching other bodies and mannerisms and correcting their bodily attitudes through constant practice and performance.

However, within the development of cultural industries and theatre pedagogy in universities and other institutions in Sri Lanka, the authors of this research have identified that theatre schools and university study programs have not particularly employed systematic training actors. Many theatre programs and actor training courses in Sri Lanka have adopted ad hoc methods and systems to train actors directly or indirectly related to Eurocentric ideologies that came into play during the modern era of Sri Lankan theatre. Furthermore, one needs to understand that many established actor training systems derived from American or Eurocentric theatre traditions have been heavily influenced by Asian cross fertilization. Intercultural actor training systems have been experimented with and employed in the late nineteenth century and twentieth-century theatre traditions directly corresponding to the Asian corporeal traditions such as Noh, Kabuki in Japan and Kathakali dance drama in India (Zarrilli 1995: 85-87).

In developing an actor training system, there are two key questions which are still validated in the practice of performer training: first it is asked whether a universal system of actor training could be achieved through existing training methodologies? The second question might be, could a fundamental technique of one acting system be applicable in the creation of any form of theatre? (Hodge 2010: xxiv). These key questions are still valid in developing an actor training system in the Sri Lankan cultural context.

4. The AHEAD Actors Lab, Sri Lanka

This Actors Lab comprises ethnographic research, literary survey, visual documentation and reflective diary studies and writing of monographs. As a complex research project which comprises various methodological approaches, this project needs an eclectic approach to methodology ranging from ethnographic approaches to semi-structured interviews and also phenomenological description of actors' experiences. As mentioned above, the first stage of this project is used to understand the combative art forms in Sri Lanka. To begin with, the research team has spent time on literary texts, both in print media and the internet, to acquire a preliminary understanding of the Sri Lankan traditional combative art forms within the context of Asian corporeal arts traditions. Notably, Asian philosophies of body and cultivation of bodily practices in various performing arts and martial arts were considered. This helped the research team to map different combative art forms in the Asian context, and identify the distinctive nature of angampora martial art.

The next stage of the research was to establish the Actors Lab to implement angampora training under a traditional master. Sixteen young actors/dancers were selected to work with the Master to learn angampora basic stances and other combative forms. The Actors Lab work started in the early months of 2021 at the *Angam Maduwa* (Training Shelter) located in Mirihana, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka. All the male, female actors/dancers were trained under Guru Karunāpāla and his disciples on a daily basis for six months. Along with the training sessions at the angam maduwa, actors were requested to maintain personal diaries where they reflected on their experiences of learning angampora under Guru Karunāpāla. These diary entries have been collected and preserved for further research. Actors' angampora training has also been documented through video and photographs, allowing the research team to gather important data for future research and writing. The data from these journals are used to understand the performers' insights, attitudes and mental as well as physical transformations during training sessions and aftermath of performance. This special edition of *Mise en Abyme* also includes some of the selected reflections extracted from those diaries that have been written by the members of the Actors Lab.

The final stage of the research project is to execute a performance project which will showcase the actors' performative skills that have been developed through the combative art form. Here, performers will showcase their acquired skills and underlying principles of a

combative art form to a public audience. After the performance, a questionnaire will be circulated to get the overall impact of the performance and the effectiveness of actors' contribution to the performance. Once these stages are completed, the research team will use the collected data to compile a research methodology/a monograph for actor training.

5. Conclusion

This special edition of *Mise en Abyme* is published in the second year of the AHEAD Actors Lab project. The latter part of the Actors Lab training sessions at the angam maduwa at Mirihana, Nugegoda were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, on several occasions, the University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Colombo, where the main Actors Lab was established, was closed due to Sri Lankan Government health regulations. Amidst this health crisis, angampora training had to be shifted to the angam maduwa at Mirihana, Nugegoda, and the actor training was continued. During the third wave of the pandemic, the Actors Lab had to be closed once more as the Government implemented an island-wide lockdown. Due to these limitations, some of the project's key activities have been on hold, and the main funding body has extended the project time period providing a six months extension for the project completion. This writing project for the special edition of *Mise en Abyme* was carried out during the third wave lockdown, and the actors' training sessions at the angam maduwa will resume once the lockdown period is over in late October 2021.

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“A Lamp in a Windless Place that Flickers not”: The Ontology of Presence and the Actors Lab in Sri Lanka

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Abstract: In 2019, a group of researchers at the University of the Visual and Performing Arts (UVPA), Colombo, Sri Lanka, established an actor training program funded by AHEAD DOR HEMS 73 (Accelerating Higher Education Expansion and Development) project. This performance research project intended to explore the usefulness of the Sri Lankan martial art form known as angampora to train contemporary actors. Sixteen amateur actors/dancers were recruited, and they were trained under the angampora Master, Guru Karunāpāla, for five months. Weekly training sessions were conducted at the angampora training centre in Mirihana, Nugegoda, and their embodied ways of learning angampora were observed and documented through personal diaries, interviews, videos and photographs. One of the key questions that was asked in this project is whether the angampora martial art was capable of developing an actor’s bodily stillness and presence on stage. This idea of presence is central to performer training discourse and is being further contested by many theorists and practitioners. Cognitive Phenomenology further explores the absent body that is always behind in bodily comportments of daily activities and extra-daily enactments. Body of presence and body of absence are the two key theoretical and philosophical premises that have been explored in relation to the performer’s presence. While arguing that an actor’s presence is a unification of inner bodymind *bhāva* – outer stillness of the flesh *chalana*, and the perception of the audience, this paper provides the preliminary survey of the idea of presence in the actor’s art and its conundrum in actor training paradigms.

Keywords: Angampora, presence, stillness, bodymind, self-cultivation, phenomenology, actor training.

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1. Introduction

The Actors Lab in Sri Lanka is a collective of actors and researchers who established an actor training laboratory in 2021 to experiment with the Sri Lankan martial art form, angampora, and its efficacy in contemporary actor training methods. The six-month actor training laboratory is supported by the AHEAD DOR HEMS 73 (Accelerating Higher Education Expansion and Development) Project funded by the Ministry of Higher Education in Sri Lanka and the World Bank.¹ At the initial stages of the proposal submission and establishment of the Actors Lab, it was aligned with the metaphor of the ‘lamp in a windless place’ which is an attempt to identify one of the key elements in an actor’s art – the self-cultivation of bodily presence. The idea of presence in acting has been a key theoretical and ontological premise in acting theory and practice. Moreover, it is an elusive concept that elevates the actor’s art into metaphysical and ideological debates.²

Building upon the notion that the paradigms of actor training are culturally determined (Zarrilli: 2002), this research explores the discourse of presence in the performance praxis. The idea of presence was a key philosophical base upon which the inception of the Actors Lab at UVPA Colombo was developed. Taking this basis as the grounding concept, this paper explores the existing debate on the actor’s presence of the body. One of the key assumptions of this Actors Lab project is that the presence of the actor is visible to the gaze of the onlooker when it is absent from the performer. Hence this paper argues that the actor’s presence is not a

¹ The establishment of actor training laboratories was somewhat common approach that the European and American actor training traditions have been practicing since early 21st century. These laboratory experimentations focused on Asia as a source of corporeal knowledge and a means of learning psychophysical training through rituals and dance dramas. Writers such as Frank Camilleri has vehemently criticized these approaches to actor training and has argued that there are marketability and commodification of bodies that are trained and developed in laboratory settings and ethical framework allow the projects to be understood as free and unique while the ideological frameworks function as myriad structures of regulations and governance of laboratory settings (Camilleri 2009: 29).

² The concepts such as ‘stillness’ and ‘presence’ have been in the actor training discourse for the last few decades and there are supporters and opponents to this idea of the body presence. Elinor Fuchs is critical to this debate about the actor’s presence or aura and argues that this debate was valid in late 60s and 70s but has lost its accountability later. Yet I am somewhat pessimistic about his argument because, though the idea of stillness or the presence has been a topic of actor training in late 1960s in the West, the concept of stillness and the presence have been in Asian theatre traditions from centuries ago (Fuchs 1986). Further this concept was very popular among avant guards in European theatre after they encountered Asian theatre. The Colonial othering has been a heated debate on how these avant guards have borrowed or adapted Asian corporeal arts within the framework of culture-savage binary. However, this idea of presence cannot be fully dismissed even if its validity is fading away in the American or European performer training traditions.

monolithic entity but, as Raina argues, a “sociopsychophysical” enactment (2015: 327) that is performed and appreciated by the audience.

The idea of bodily presence has extensively been discussed in theatre studies as well as in actor training paradigms that have been influenced by Asian corporeal arts (Barba 1988, Zarrilli 1988, Phelan 1988, Auslander 2008). Eugenio Barba, as one of the proponents of the idea of presence, argued that the performer’s effectiveness is measured through the level of pre-expressivity and is a deciding factor of being an individual and an artist. (Barba 1995: 105). Peggy Phelan has argued that presence of a performer is related to the ability to be “convincing,” “commanding,” “captivating” and trick the audience into believing the character portrayed on stage. By contrast, Phillip Auslander argued how contemporary intermedial theatre challenges the idea of presence by human-post-human embodiment of acting, particularly in post-dramatic theatre (eds Krasner, Saltz 2006: 22-131). Philosopher Jacques Derrida’s concept of *différance* challenges the pre-existence of meanings and the arbitrary signification of the actor’s presence (ibid). As Derrida posits, meanings are generated through the play of *différance* – in the context of the actor’s art, the idea of presence comes into play with the idea of absence.

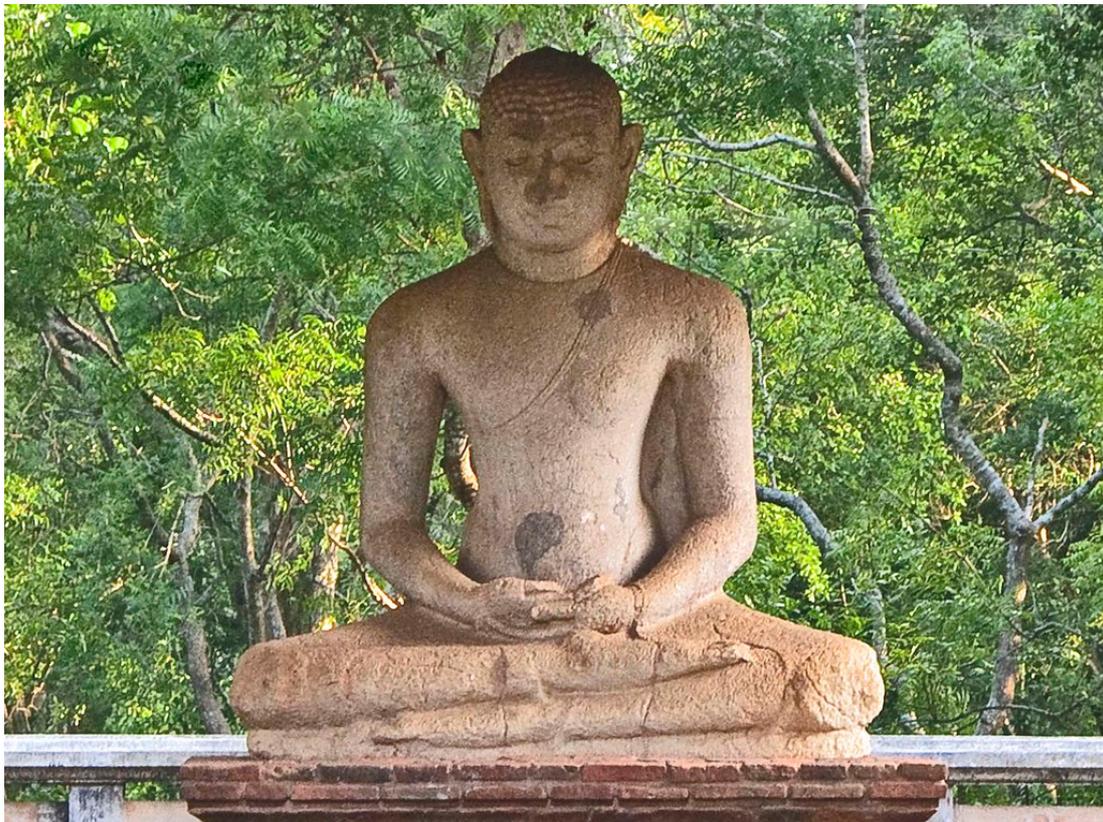


Figure 1: Seated buddha (Samadhi) at Mahamevnāwa Gardens, Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka.
Photo: <https://www.attractionsinsrilanka.com/travel-directory/samadhi-buddha-statue/>

2. Body as a burning flame

The phrase “a lamp in a windless place that flickers not” is found in the Indian classical poetry called *Bhagavad Gītā* (Arnold, 2012).³ The literary meaning of this metaphor is “burning flame without movement” and it refers to the Yogic meditator who sits and meditates while maintaining “stillness” in the upper body (Coomaraswamy 2006: 301). Writing on the origin of the Buddha figure, Coomaraswamy explains how the *Bhagavad Gītā* describes the posture of a seated yogi and the mindfulness achieved through meditation. Furthermore, he observes that a similar account can also be found in the Buddhist canonical text, *Digha Nikāya sutta* 22.⁴ The Buddha’s Samadhi statue in Sri Lanka portrays a similar posture of *dhyāna mudrā*: Buddha sits cross-legged and the palms of the hands cross over each other and relaxed on the lap. The meaning of the Samadhi posture is the “state of a complete transparent mind” that mingles the gap between mind and body (Yasuo 1993: 22).

‘Samadhi through continual sitting’ and ‘Samadhi through continual walking’ are two key methods of Buddhist self-cultivation practices that are being used both in religious and performance contexts (Yuasa 1993: 20-21). In seated meditation practices, the body is set into a still posture; the meditator’s senses and engagement with the outer environment are ceased. According to Zen Buddhist Master Eisai, “all engagements are discarded, everything is put to rest; in bodymind oneness, there is neither movement nor stillness” (1993: 21). Samadhi through continual motion is the mountain worship method known as *Kaihōgyō* (1993: 20). The Cultivator walks continually through mountains, reciting Buddhist *sūtras* (Texts) while keeping Buddha’s image in mind. As in the case of seated meditation, this state of meditation in motion attempts to achieve a highly transformed state of consciousness through training the motor movement of the bodily organs.

It should be noted that the seated yogi’s stillness of the body and the actor’s presence cultivated through the assiduous practice of martial arts such as angampora are two distinctive approaches of somatic training. A yogi’s intention is to achieve mindfulness through meditation and attain *nibbāna* or blissfulness. Yet, the actor’s intention is to cultivate her bodymind

³ *yatha dīpo nivāta-stho nengate sopama smṛiti, yogino yata-chittasya yunjato yogam atmanah*. Transl.: “Just as a lamp in a windless place does not flicker, so the disciplined mind of a yogi remains steady in meditation on the self” (B.G. 6.19).

⁴ And how, O monks, does a monk live, observant of the body? “Whereas, O monks, a monk, retiring to the forest, or to the foot of a tree, or to some other uninhabited spot, sits him down cross-legged, with body erect and contemplative faculty intent and training himself to be conscious of all his expirations and inspirations” (2006: 301).

apparatuses to be effectively used in performance situations. Effective in the sense that the actor should be able to cultivate the habitual body that is thematized and operated as a backdrop of her/his enactment. The ethical and ontological dimensions of these two approaches of a Yogi and an actor can be distinctively separated from one another. Yet, we can draw a vital element from the Yogic metaphor and its achievement of psychophysical equilibrium– the notion of self-cultivation that is common to all corporeal practices derived from traditional dance dramas and Yogic practices in the Asian region – to employ in actor training laboratory in enhancing the efficacy of performance of the actor.



Figura 2: Actor, Akalanka Prabhashwara preparing for the meditation session at the beginning of routine angampora training at the Actors Lab, Mirihana, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka.

Photo: AHEAD DOR HEMS 73 Project, UVPA Colombo, March 2021.

Japanese actor training in Noh theatre is based on the concept of self-cultivation developed by Japanese master, Zeami Motokyo (Ishii 1983). Zeami has written nearly 20 treatises on Noh theatre and among them, five texts directly address the notion of flower; the artificial body of the actor. Generally speaking, the amateur actor does not experience the smooth floor of psychophysical movements until he gets the full habituation of his bodymind integration. Zeami's

concept of the *hana* (flower) represents the culmination of this marriage of body and consciousness. He coined this state of being as the no-mind (*mushin*) or emptiness (*ku*)⁵ of the actor (Yasuo 1993: 27). This is further explained in a metaphor used in Noh theatre: “The center of bodily movement is the ‘stillness’ in the midst of dynamism, just as the center pin of a top spinning at full speed remains stationary” (1993: 28). It is the body that is “apparent stillness filled with tremendous motion.” (Benadetti 1973: 446). As Zarrilli argues, an accomplished actor is one who can “manifest in practice a certain (internal and external) relationship to the specific act”. The internality is manifested through the actor’s bodymind and presence. The externality is manifested through her attunement with the performance score (Zarrilli 2002: 191).

3. Stillness of the body

The idea of ‘stillness of the body’ has been widely identified by acting pedagogues as one of the key somatic qualities of the actor’s performing body. Cean Benedetti has described this particular quality as “stillness at the centre” (Benedetti 1973: 467). Using his encounters with Chinese actors in Peking Operas and his close observations on Japanese Noh and Kabuki theatre, he describes the internal energy of the Noh actor and his energy management in executing an arresting performance while maintaining less movement of the body. He further writes: “he (Asian actor) has also learned how to *move without moving*” (1973: 466). Benedetti’s main intention was to introduce some key elements of Asian performance practice and invite the younger generation of American actors to learn the power of the presence of the actor.

Pioneering Asian theatre scholar, A C. Scott argues on the validity of Zen Buddhism and its teaching on ‘action’ than ‘words’ (Scott 1975: 208). Discussing the domination of text and the role of language in Western theatre tradition, Scott contends that Asian theatre, especially Noh

⁵ “No mind” or “emptiness” (*Mushin*) in Zeami’s theory of flower (*hana*) is a very ambiguous concept. According to Yuka Amano, Zeami’s concept of flower (*hana*) is not original to him but derived from medieval Japanese poetry and literature. Along with the concept of flower, there is another key concept called “*Yugen*” which is related to the Hana. Yet these concepts according to Zeami are distinctively different. *Yugen* is the elegant beauty inherent in the actor’s body” while the beauty of the flower determined by the perceiver of the performance (Amano 2011, p. 531). In Yuasa’s Eastern body mind analysis, Zeami’s notion of “flower” is analyzed as a representation of the performer’s “self-forgetfulness” or the “bodymind oneness.” However, this does not mean that the actor is hypnotically transcends to an unconscious level. Instead, Zeami’s argument is that it is the ontological state which allows the actor to observe her bodily being while her body and mind becomes oneness. Zeami Motokyo has written nearly 20 treatises on Noh theatre and among them five texts are directly addressed on the notion of “flower.”

and Chinese theatre, manifest the domination of actors' physicality and bodily presence than the textual prominence. His argument is similar to the Artaudian concept of theatre, which critiqued the subjugation of the actor's body in performance (Artaud 1993). Scott argues that Western theatre is largely a rational theatre which emphasizes the characterization, conflict, imagery and these key elements are interlinked with the language (textual tapestry) of the play. The unity of the performance is achieved through this tapestry of language written as a play text. Yet, "The actor as the visible embodiment of unity is dispensable" (Scott, 1975: 208). As stated here, Scott has rightly identified the ongoing problematic of Western and, of course, the contemporary realistic tradition of theatre as "a domain of the mind not the senses" (1975). What he means by this is that Western theatre is largely a mind-centred phenomenon, and the Asian theatre is largely centred on the actor's body.⁶



Figure 3: Actor, Lihan Mendis and Stefan Tirimanne performing angampora ath haramba (hand combat movements) at Actors Lab, Mirihana, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka.

Photo: AHEAD DOR HEMS 73 Project, UVPA Colombo, March 2021.

⁶ Even though Scott is critical to Western mode of theatre practice that elevates the text-based theatre and the Cartesian separation of the proscenium, he has not been able to get away from the colonial gaze that sees the Western – Eastern performance making within mind and matter binary. But as discussed in this paper, Eastern understanding of the body is not merely limited to a matter or an object but rather a sentient being that is living and being in the world.

4. Stillness as presence

The idea of stillness generally refers to the performer's power of expression or pre-expressivity that radiates on the stage (Barba, Savarese 1991: 9). It is also known as a particular energy level that the performer demonstrates during performance situations. However, this power of presence of bodily stillness is not only confined to theatrical performance situations. As social scientists suggest, human bodily presence functions and can be recognized in other social situations as well. In these social situations, the notion of presence has been alternatively referred to with various terms such as grace, charisma, aura, persona, power and personality. Writers such as Susan M. Jaeger and Jon Erickson have extensively discussed the perceptual and sociological implications of human presence (Krasner, Saltz 2006). Further, it is evident that actors and directors are well aware that a good performer radiates charismatic power that has the capacity to demonstrate the actor's self on the stage and capture the audience's perception alike (Barba 1985: 369). Jaeger writes, "this sense involves both for the performer and for the audience an awareness of things uniquely coming together" (Krasner, Saltz 2006: 123).

It is widely known that Brecht's encounter with Mei Lan-Fang and Chinese opera in Moscow influenced the development of his "estrangement theory" (*verfremdung*) of acting (Liyanage 2016: 41). Stark Young writes about Fang, stating that "his gesture and movement pivot, is supple, well-knit and thoroughly disciplined" (Senelick 2013: 175). Young writes about a particular "magnetism" of Fang that captures the audience's attention "supernaturally". He argues that the power of Fang's presence is a result of his ability to respond to the immediate action around him through his "nervous co-ordination" on the stage (2013: 175).

Once the actor immigrates from her usual body-culture to a new "country of hope", as Barba says, then the actor's bodily presence begins to provide a new somatic awareness for the actor. As Crease and Lutterbie suggest, this process entails the actor's ability to change her body image, via which she begins to present a new identity (Krasner, Saltz 2006: 173). This transformation not only affects the self-awareness of the actor, but reflects the ideological stances of such a performer as well (2006: 173). In this sense, Barba's articulation of the presence of the actor is not a passive manifestation of bodily signs of the performer, but also embeds socio-cultural meanings and ideological connotations.

As most theatre visionaries do, Barba's articulation of presence is elaborated with many metaphors and terminologies in his writings. For instance, the terms such as the "body-in-life"

and “dilated body” are generally used to denote and describe the stage presence of the actor. In addition, terms and phrases such as “the invisible, transparency”, “luminosity”, “organicity”, “quality of energy”, or “the network of tensions,” are used to talk about the presence of the actor (Barba 1972, 1985, 1988, 1989, 1994). However, in most of his writings, Barba is very cautious about the ways he articulates the living nature of the body and its capacities in acting practice. He rejects the phrase ‘body as an instrument’ commonly used in performance practices by saying that “when one says that the actor ‘uses his body’, one should ask oneself ‘who is using what?’ and will then realize that the words imply a false version of reality” (Barba 1989: 311). This clearly indicates how Barba’s concern of the body is well informed by his broad understanding of the human bodily existence as a lived entity. In *The Fiction of Duality* (1989), Barba explains how the actor should relate to his body by not dividing it into a conscious subject or a body-instrument (Barba 1989). Barba posits the problem of the body and its subjective and objective duality thus: When the actor asks himself how he can refine his instrument – “use his body” – he knows very well that “his body” is not “his” at all but is *himself* (1989: 311).

Barba describes two opposing bodily existences that the actor experiences when he begins to start a transformation from everyday dualistic practices to a non-dualistic stance. He defines the problem of the actor’s perception of the body as a contradiction between the *body-object* and the *body-subject*.⁷ In the empirical world, the actor’s body is always defined as a body that belongs to the self or the “I”. Cogito “I” operates as the manipulator of the body-object that “I have”. It is to say that I am “having my body” by dividing myself and the body as separate opposites. Barba acknowledges that the actor’s want to be a fully embodied subject marks his ‘sensible desire’ to depart the “experience of separation” (1989: 11). However, similar to the Asian theory of cultivation, Barba assumes that an actor’s want to get rid of this duality is not a desire of having an ideal vision. In other words, the actor’s departure cannot be fulfilled through acquiring an intellectual understanding of such a unification of the body. It is, of course, a matter of practice, training and iteration of the body that would provide the desired target the actor wishes to achieve. In Barba’s terms, it is a “program of work” (1989: 311) that the actor needs to succumb to her bodymind.

⁷ In phenomenological sense, body-object and body-subject are referred to how a performer experiences her/his body as an object directed towards his/her consciousness and how the body is perceived as a living, sentient being in some instances as a subject or a consciousness.

As I stated, it is difficult to pin down Barba's terminology because his writing about the body and its perceptual energies are written in a lyrical and metaphorical language. While explaining the actor's "body-in-life" as the culmination of inner and outer faculties, Barba further introduces the phrase "mind-in-life" to discuss how consciousness works for the actor (Barba 1985: 374). The body-in-life is also incarnated once the actor's dualities are ceased to a non-dualistic stance in the extra-daily practices. Then the question is, what does Barba mean by this mind-in-life? Because once the duality is intact, there should not be a separate consciousness functioning again over the body: bodymind seems to be integrated. In my view, Barba's elaboration of mind-in-life designates the function of the perceptual aspects of the body, the 'subconscious' that Stanislavski and Grotowski also saw as the source of creativity and inspiration for the actor. In another sense, it can be seen as the creative mover of the process of the actor's work.

In a phenomenological sense, Merleau-Ponty does not believe in such an existence as a hidden source of energy operating beneath our bodies. Instead, he argues that "my perception does not bear upon a content of consciousness, it bears upon the object we perceive" (2002: 303). In other words, our consciousness is always conscious of *something*. Barba uses three figurative terms to talk about the idea of consciousness operation in the actor's enactment: the "ecstasy of montage", "to think the thought" and the "mind-in-life" (Barba 1985: 374). These phrases are interchangeably used to discuss the inner activities of the actor. It is too early to define whether Barba's notion of mind-in-life is actually an "inner activity" of the actor because he does not directly indicate what he really means by the notion of mind-in-life, but it is clear that, as he has stated in "The Dilated body on the Energies of Acting", that it is not a "paranormal" or an "altered state of conscious" (1985: 370). He further writes elsewhere that the "dilated body" evokes the "dilated-mind" (1985). These statements affirm that this "dilated mind" may be the conscious state he discusses as mind-in-life or the "to think the thought" state of the actor. He further notes that this state is also directly related to the "level of craftsmanship" of the actor (1985).

In order to (try to) be clear, he provides a metaphor of a pack of greyhounds running behind a prey (1985: 374). They run together towards a target, they flock around, miss the tracks, lose the target, proceed backward, spread around, and then one finds a new trail, others follow and then, they suddenly find the prey and finally accomplish the "idea". The actor's "mind-in-life", as Barba argues, works in such a dynamic way and collaborates with the dilated body to

achieve the creative target. As Barba argues, the actor's creative state (mind-in-life) is such that one cannot predict how the creative inspirations will develop? Like the greyhound, the mind-in-life makes sudden direction changes and makes unexpected discoveries.

All these stages of the actor's creative state, as Barba indicates, are directly related to the actor's bodymind and how the bodymind inhabits within a particular space and time. To think the thought, the mind-in-life, and ecstasy of montage, all these terms capture a similar meaning in Barba's articulation of the mind aspects of the performer. They represent various fragments, various images, various thoughts" but are not clearly directed towards a particular endpoint or target. Yet, they operate according to the laws of spontaneity (1985: 374-375). The dilated body as well as the dilated mind, as Barba suggests, is a dynamic equilibrium of the lived body. These two aspects of the lived body again resonate with phenomenological descriptions of the perceptual and motile functions of the body. Barba states that the actor can start either from the mental or physical. But the important thing is whether the actor is capable of migrating from "one to the other" for a reconstruction of the unity (1985: 370). The actor's movements, sudden changes of the body, unexpected connections, changing direction imply that his analysis of the dilated mind (to think the thought) works and behaves in bodily terms. These "leaps of thought" of the dilated body may change and create unexpected creative developments and transformations to the actor's work. Barba calls them "peripeteias". Peripeteias thus work through the "act of negation". In the creative process of the actor, "behaviour of thoughts" as Barba terms it, act as the actions of the body and works creating opposite, unexpected twists. This unison of opposites works not as a solitary act of negation in the actor's work but always as a "point of departure" of other individuals who are similarly being affected by it (1985: 370).



Figure 4: Lyudmyla, Thilakshini and other actors working with Guru Karunāpāla at Actors Lab, Mirihana Nugegoda, Sri Lanka, March 2021.

Photo: AHEAD DOR HEMS 73 Project, UVPA, Colombo.

5. Duality and the physical score

As an actor, most of the questions I asked myself began with the word, “how”. How to stand, how to be still, how to breathe, how to move and how to turn, are a few among them. These questions were germinated in relation to the body under scrutiny. Although this list can go on, the real issue is that the more you are conscious about your body, the more you are in trouble; the more you are in trouble, the more you are conscious about it. As Barba has once stated, this “duality body” needs to be tamed “fragment by fragment, limb by limb, function by function to re-compose that it is the ontological state which allows the actor to observe her bodily being while her body and mind becomes oneness”.

The ability to work on a score may help the actor to cultivate bodymind and further allow her to overcome the duality of bodymind. Yuasa identifies this phenomenon as the animal function consisting of sensory (eyes, ears) and motor movements (hands and legs) related to the

sensory motor nerves system of the body (Shaner et al. 1989). When the actor's body is moving and iterated within a score, her sensory and motor movements are constantly being trained. This generates the actor's upper layer of consciousness that is represented as animal function. Grotowski's main actor Richard Cieslak metaphorically explains how the actor maintains her "animal function" as inner life within a performance score:

The score is like a glass inside which the candle is burning. The glass is solid; it is there, you can depend on it. It contains and guides the flame. But it is not the flame. The flame is my inner process each night. The flame is what illuminates the score, what the spectators see through the score (Turner 2004: 130).

As Cieslak articulates, the actor's "inner life" or the "subscore" comprises the attuned bodymind that the actor experiences while performing a certain score (Turner 2004: 32-40). Therefore, the score, for the actor, is not only a physical narrative, but an internal flame that is burning as a flame of creative urge. Enacting these scores, "one *enters a certain relationship* with the form/structure through one's cultivated perceptual/sensory awareness" (Zarrilli 2008: 645). Both phenomenology and the theory of attunement agree that the human body has a fundamental modality, that prior to our conscious level, our body is already "engaged" with the world. In Nagatomo's terminology, the human body is always engaged with its "ambience"⁸ (Nagatomo 1992: 179-185). This mode of "engagement" is always "actional as well as epistemic." Merleau-Ponty also similarly states that our body is capable of understanding the world before we rationally understand it (Kwant 1976). This theory of attunement helps us to understand how the actor's body pre-rationally engages with the performance score.

The performance score is a composition which constitutes somatic narratives. It has a beginning, middle and end. Between these two ends, every subtle movement of the body is intertwined with each other and creates a tapestry of dynamic composition of movements. The actor, as both the composer and the player of this composition, animates the score. This animation allows the actor to engage with the score and attune with the body by inscribing repetition. These somatic repetitions sediment in the bodily musculature as sensory motor memory. This engagement finally unites the provisional duality of the body and mind intertwining the bodily tranquillity (Benedetti 1973) of the actor. At the beginning of the actor's

⁸ Generally speaking, Nagatomo's ideas are heavily influenced and developed through both Asian philosophy and European phenomenological tradition initiated by Edmund Husserl and later contributors such as Morris Merleau-Ponty and Jean Paul Sartre.

task, every single movement seems intentional and forceful. Once the body is repetitively inscribed by the score, then the body learns to inhabit in it. Then the gap between the intentionality and the body becomes blurred.

6. Conclusion

This paper attempted to explore the notion of presence in the actor's art and discussed its manifestations in Asian corporeal traditions. In order to explore the Sri Lankan martial art form angampora and its efficacy as a tool for train actors, the AHEAD DOR HEMS 73 project intended to establish an actor training laboratory titled Actors Lab in Colombo, Sri Lanka and practice Sri Lankan martial art form, angampora. One of the objectives of this research project is to learn angampora martial arts along with actor training methods to see how the actor's bodily presence is manifested in contemporary performance practice. As discussed in the foregoing, the actor's daily bodymind duality can be altered through an assiduous practice of corporeal art such as angampora and the actor's presence is generated through his/her inner (consciousness) and outer (corporeal score) amalgamation of bodily enactment performed through a physical score. As this project is an ongoing performance research, the project intends to explore the angampora as a tool for actor training verified by the actors' data gathered through laboratory training sessions in the coming months.⁹

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⁹ The earlier version of this paper was first presented at the Australasian Drama Theatre and Performance Studies Conference (ADSA) titled Compass Points: Locations, Landscapes and Coordinates of Identities held on 3-6 July 2012, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia. Eugenio Barba's notion of presence is also discussed in length in the PhD thesis titled 'Learning through the Bodymind: A Phenomenology of an Actor's Experience' submitted at the La Trobe University, Bundoora, Australia by the author in 2014. The author acknowledges the contribution of the AHEAD team and the performers of the Actors Lab in preparation of this paper.

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*'Helé Wadunu Yoda Sakthiya Angampora': Performing Angampora as a Sinhala Buddhist Nationalist Spectacle**

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Abstract: This paper offers a critical perspective on the relationship between the representation of angampora and the contemporary Sinhala Buddhist identity. Angampora, in this context, plays a significant role in a Sinhala Buddhist identity as the form of ancient martial art. This paper attempts to analyze how angampora has become a nationalist 'spectacle' in recent years. By following Guy Debord's concept of spectacle, this paper argues that representations of angampora have created a concrete inversion of nationalistic life for Sinhala Buddhists. By focusing on two angampora presentations in reality TV programs, Sirasa TV's *Sri Lanka's Got Talent 2018* and ITN's *Youth With Talent 2018*, this paper points out the contradiction between the nationalist identity presented in these performances and the western-oriented life of Sinhala Buddhists. The conclusion that will be arisen in this research is that the images presented in these two angampora presentations constitute a nationalist spectacle or a 'false' unity or an 'authentic' Sinhala Buddhist identity to their western-oriented fragmented lives.

Keywords: Angampora, Sinhala Buddhist identity, Guy Debord, spectacle, reality TV, *kalu sudda*.

1. Introduction

Angampora appeared in popular culture in the early 1990s with Jayantha Chandrasiri's popular teledrama, *Dandubasnamanaya*. The story was about the rivalry between two brothers who were

* Transl.: "Angampora, the giant strength that grew in the Sinhala land". A shorter version of this paper was presented in the International Conference on Intangible Cultural Heritage 2020 organized by University of Sri Jayawardenepura, Sri Lanka and to Early Career Academics Group of Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka and the comments I received in these two events helped me to develop this article.

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the only remaining angampora experts of their lineage, and this rivalry ended in the death of both brothers and their students, hence the whole angampora lineage. Setting up this story in the colonial period, Chandrasiri illustrates the 'enigmatic' nature of Sinhala Buddhist traditional martial arts and its end in the hands of the colonial state. This story was masterfully done with scores of Premasiri Kemadasa, popularly known as the maestro of Sri Lankan music. This resulted in a resurgence of angampora. There is a controversy over the authenticity of angampora in the present day among angampora practitioners where they criticize each other for corrupting angampora by mixing it with the Indian martial art, kalarippayattu, or by practicing different martial arts such as Wushu and Karate and packaging it as angampora. Nevertheless, angampora now has a strong place in the Sinhala Buddhist identity as *the* traditional Sinhala Buddhist martial art. In this context, angampora has appeared in television reality shows on few occasions and has received massive plaudits from the judges and the audience.

Before discussing further, unpacking what is meant by the Sinhala Buddhist identity at this point will be beneficial for the reader who is not familiar with Sri Lanka. According to the census report in 2012, 70% of the total population is comprised of Sinhala Buddhists, making them the largest ethnic group outnumbering Tamil and Muslim minorities who are 15% and 9% respectively. However, as argued by Nira Wickramasinghe (2006) and Nirmal Dewasiri (2000) and many others, the British colonial period, particularly the colonial techniques, have played a major role in constructing the present Sinhala Buddhist identity. Especially from the 20th century, the Sinhala Buddhist identity manifested itself as the authentic identity on the island, making other minorities foreign. In other words, under this manifestation, Sinhala Buddhist identity claimed to be native and the protector of the island for the past 2500 years, where other minorities either came as invaders or traders from India and other parts of the world. This idea of Sinhala Buddhist identity, on the other hand, legitimized the state power held by the Sinhala Buddhist nationalism in post-colonial Sri Lanka.

The main focus of this article is to critically evaluate the present Sinhala Buddhist nationalist identity in relation to angampora by analyzing the images presented in two reality television shows: one from the first round of *Sri Lanka's Got Talent* by Sirasa TV (Sirasa TV 2018) and the other from IITN *Youth with Talent* (Wenasa 2019). Generally, Sirasa TV reality shows are more glamorous in their production quality which other television stations try to emulate. The aforementioned reality shows are no exceptions to this: *Sri Lanka's Got Talent* has more glamour through its visual and audio effects and its Judge board compared to *Youth with Talent*. Also, the

performances too had a difference in quality. For *Sri Lanka's Got Talent*, a group from angampora pool of Sri Lanka Air Force participated, and for Youth with Talent, it was an angampora group from Katuwana, a remote area in the South. The Sri Lanka Air Force group was a state-sponsored group, and as a result, their performance was way ahead of the other angampora group. Apart from analyzing the images of these performances, I have also analyzed the reception these performances received from their spectators. Here, I have identified three levels of spectators. The first level is the judges who have the *words* to express their opinion about these performances. The second level is the audience of these live performances who see both the performances and judges' reactions. Third level is the viewers of these videos, which include the performance and the judges' and audiences' reactions. The words and body language of the judges, the body language of the audience and comments posted in these videos by viewers have been used to understand the way these angampora presentations have been received by the spectators as a whole.

From a theoretical perspective, I am using the idea of spectacle in *The Society of the Spectacle* by the French theorist Guy Debord (2015) to critically investigate these images. This research is organized into three parts. In the first part, the main focus is to portray how these performances have been staged. In the second part, the images of the judges will be analyzed. The final section will discuss the present-day nationalist identity by discussing the contradictions presented in the first two sections.

2. *Hele wadunu yoda shakthiya angampora, sir*

Before the performance of Katuwana angampora group on ITN Youth with Talent, a judge questions "I see an eye-pleasing personality in front of us...What are you presenting to the country today?" to which the leader reply, "*hele wadunu yoda shakthiya angampora sir*" (sir its angampora, the giant strength that grew in the Sinhalese land). And the acrobatics begin. In this section, the focus is to highlight a few characteristics in these two performances.

Both these presentations had a preview of the history of angampora and its importance to the present day. In *Sri Lanka's Got Talent*, there was a separate video clip showing the Sri Lanka Air Force group practicing angampora and in *Youth with Talent*, the master of this group was given time to express his thoughts on angampora. Also, traditional instruments such as traditional

drums and conch shells were used during these presentations to give an aura of ‘authenticity’ to their performances. Moreover, on both occasions, angampora has been described as ‘the’ ancient martial art of Sri Lanka which reclaims its value as a protector of the motherland from her enemies.

Further, both male and female performers in these two videos comply with the gender stereotypes where the masculinity of the male performers and the femininity of the female performers are preserved (Figure 1). Male performers’ bodies are covered in fewer clothes, especially exposing their upper bodies. All the male bodies are well built and look strong as a reminder to the audience of a warrior-Sinhala Buddhist identity. As the judge stated, it is an eye-pleasing personality.



Figure 1

Female bodies do not capture the attention of the audience. In a way, they are mostly hidden from the eye of the audience as a result of less screen time attributed to their performances. They appear as the opposite of the male body: most of their bodies are covered; they are physically smaller than their male performers; hence, less intimidating. Interestingly, the number of female performers is significantly lower – in *Sri Lanka’s Got Talent*, its two and *Youth with Talent*, four – in a group of 15-20 performers.

Both performances are energetic, acrobatic and also, dangerous (Figure 2). They lift each other, jump, spin and allow others to hit one another with sticks to display the flexibility, strength and endurance of their bodies. Moreover, they show the full repertoire of their martial arts by

throwing punches and kicks and also defending them, performing stick and sword fights and, tumbling back and forth. As stated earlier, the whole performance is based on the male and his masculinity.



Figure 2

To sum up this discussion, the performance from the beginning to the end glorifies the idea of Sinhala Buddhist identity. Even though one can argue that the identity projected here is 'Sri Lankan identity', all the elements which have been displayed to the audience indicate that it is Sinhala Buddhist identity because there is no single element that can be attributed to minority groups in Sri Lanka.

3. Golden buzzer!

The second section of this article analyzes the words, images and comments of the spectators. As described above, there are three layers of spectators here: the judges, the live audience and the viewers of the videos online. When analyzing the language of judges, or the first layer, the judges of both Reality tv programmes were highly impressed by the performance. It was visible in both verbal and body languages. One judge, in a proud manner, appreciated the air force troop who performed at *Sri Lanka's Got Talent* by stating "these (the presenters) are the heroes who protected Lanka from the sky" (Sirasa TV 2018, translation mine). Another judge went even further by pressing the golden buzzer, the highest accolade a contender can get in *Sri Lanka's Got*

Talent, to express his tribute to the performance. The audience of these live performances is also portrayed as a group who appreciated what they witnessed.

Moreover, the YouTube viewers who saw the performance and the reactions of the judges and the audience were also mesmerized. A YouTube viewer had commented: “Wow wow wow! Really seeing this, boils [my] Sinhala blood. Well done! How worthy it would be if all Sinhala boys and girls could learn this martial art. Well done! May the blessing of Buddha be with you!” (Sirasa TV 2018, translation mine). One appraises the performance: “ten headed Ravana, the king who inherited a martial art like this to Lankapura 5000 years ago and for Sinhala *yakka* armies who dance to the *yak* drum. You are the only god I worship” (Sirasa TV 2018, translation mine). Another sees the perils of present Sri Lanka and the lost ancient glory of the past: “Actually [my] mind became really proud about Sri Lanka while watching this. A lot of our people do not understand the value of our history... [we should not] allow angam martial art to be extinct. This is the essence of our country you people!!!” (Sirasa TV 2018, translation mine).



Figure 3

However, when looking at the judges' appearance, it is difficult to omit the western orientations these judges portray (Figure 3). For instance, the bodies of these judges represent Victorian sexualities where masculinity and femininity are visible clearly. At the same time, the styles they have used are closer to the western than to the so-called Sinhala Buddhist nationalist identity. Also, through the way they used Sinhala language, it is evident that these judges do not command a level of Sinhala proficiency as their presenters. For instance, the following statements

from the judges can be highlighted to illustrate this point. One judge used a mixed language consisting of both Sinhala and English words: “*oyagollo* present *karana kota* truly proud to be Sri Lankan *kīyala [apita]* message *ekak awa. Ithin* congratulations. *Api* verdict *eka denawada?*” (When you are presenting, [we] received the message of proud to be Sri Lankan. So congratulations! Shall we give the verdict?). Also, another said a comment in Sinhala which had no meaning: “*idiripath karanna obe nimathiya mage ratata*” (present your perplexity to my country). Here, he used the word *nimathiya* (perplexity) which completely distorts the meaning of that sentence. One commented in English with a Sinhala touch: “amazing *aa!* Very refreshing’ (It is amazing. Very refreshing)”. In the popular mindset, using Sinhala in this manner – corrupting it with English words, saying without knowing the meaning of words, and speaking in English to a Sinhala audience (in this case, the presenters) – is considered as anti-nationalist. Differently put, according to the popular understanding of Anagarika Dharmapala, the nationalist who preached during the first part of the 20th century, this kind of behaviour was condemned as the behaviour of *kalu sudda* (dark white man). *Kalu sudda* refers to a man who “abandons his Sinhala heritage to adopt Western attitudes and customs” (Berkwitz 2008: 101).

When we look at these images and words of the judges, we can argue that there are elements that contradict the very image of Sinhala Buddhist nationalist identity projected in these angampora presentations. However, this tension of authenticity of Sinhala Buddhist identity between the performers and judges does not appear in these videos. In other words, this tension created by these judges’ distance from the ‘authentic’ Sinhala Buddhist identity does not exclude the spectators from aligning them with the projection of Sinhala Buddhist identity through angampora. On the contrary, it can be suggested that both the performers and spectators are united.

4. A nationalist spectacle

As we saw, there is a significant gap between the identity presented on stage and the identity of the spectator. Yet, without addressing this gap, both the presenters and the spectators have been able to relate to each other. The final section of this article discusses how to understand this merge between Sinhala Buddhist identity of the presentations and the western orientations of the spectators.

The Sinhala Buddhist identity does not imply a single, static identity. From a historical point of view, it is evident that the Sinhala Buddhist identity has been subjected to a number of changes and is still in the process of changing. Also, due to the complexities of modern society, it is difficult to categorize each individual into a single identity. It is because “[t]he main acquisition of the modern individual was the autonomous, self-constituted subject” (Abrudan 2011:24). As a result, the modern individual identity, as we witnessed in our analysis of the identities of the judges, varies from each other. However, the problem remains how does an autonomous individual acquire an identity which is constantly in the move?

In this context, Guy Debord’s conceptualization of the spectacle, where he discusses the relationship among market economy, technology and everyday experiences (Debord 2015), may shed light on this question. As he begins his book, “[i]n societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*” (Debord 2015: 7). In these spectacles, every aspect of life is reduced to an image where the unity of life can no longer be recovered. Nevertheless, these images or “*Fragmented* views of reality regroup themselves into a new unity as a *separate pseudo-world* that can only be looked at” (Debord 2015: 7). This creates an autonomous world of images “where even the deceivers are deceived” (Debord 2015: 7). In other words, the world created by these fragmented images or the spectacle gives a false unity to the life. Finally, “the spectacle is a concrete inversion of life, an autonomous movement of the nonliving” (Debord 2015: 7). In this age of technology and capitalist economic production, people lack a number of things and “[e]verything life lacks is to be found within the spectacle, conceived of as an ensemble of independent representations (Jappe 1996: 6).

This theoretical backdrop opens up a way to understand the contradiction between the spectators and the angampora performances. As we witnessed, people can no longer adhere to an ‘authentic’ Sinhala Buddhist identity in their day-to-day practices. Due to the colonial influences and modern technological advances, the Western lifestyle has immensely influenced the present-day Sinhala Buddhists. In other words, it creates a lack in their lives. In this context, these angampora presentations create a spectacle that fulfils the need for a Sinhala Buddhist identity. In other words, the images presented in these two angampora presentations constitute a nationalist spectacle or a ‘false’ unity for the Sinhala Buddhist community that merely aggregates a collection of isolated and contradictory elements. The identity presented in the spectacle is a static, singular identity that allows anyone to be connected with it.

5. Conclusion

As we saw, the images presented in these angampora performances in two reality TV programs cannot be considered only as performances in a competition. Instead, the function of these performances goes beyond its purpose of winning the competition to a terrain where they fulfil the void of identity created due to the daily realities of their lives. Here, these performances function as spectacles where they give a false unity, or an 'authentic' Sinhala Buddhist identity, to their fragmented lives.

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Angampora Martial Art: Revaluation of Bodymind in Sri Lankan and European Actor Training Traditions

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Abstract: Actor training methodologies are in the process of evolution since performers needs are changing depending on the demands of the performing industry. However, the gaps regarding actors' urgencies exist in the present. Contemporary actors lack the knowledge of sustainable bodymind state of being due to performing stress-related issues. Therefore, the study aims to reevaluate bodymind in Sri Lankan and European Actor Training traditions through angampora martial art of Sri Lanka. Angampora as martial art promotes unity of bodymind as well as tools of healthy and prompt physical and mental conditions. Weiler suggests a rethink approach towards present actor training methodologies (Weiler cited in Zarrilli 2019). The paper gives an account that revaluation of actor training methodologies is feasible through angampora as the practical side of the research has been done through AHEAD-DOR HEMS (Accelerating Higher Education and Expansion-Development Oriented Research) Actors Lab. Therefore, it was observed that the new approach and methods of actor training suggested by Weiler could be reached through interweaving angampora and actor training techniques. The data for the paper is collected based on the AHEAD DOR HEMS and the Actors Lab established for the research. Further, the paper investigates theatre traditions of Sri Lanka and Europe, identifying the needs of the actors. Following the leads on already established actor training practices based on martial arts angampora has been scrutinized. The research shows positive side and at the same time it points out the possible negative side of applying angampora as a method for revaluation of actor training methodologies.

Keywords: Angampora, actor training traditions, martial arts, bodymind, Sri Lankan theatre, Western theatre.

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1. Introduction

The nature of acting is interchangeable as it has been evolving throughout centuries according to the needs of society and culture. Even rigorous Asian traditional performing arts forms have undergone slight alterations. Thus, actor training traditions have gone through different aesthetics based on society cravings and political tendencies. Admittedly, theatre and other performing arts are created to satisfy the needs of the audience whether it is entertainment or educational. Therefore, the paradigm shifts in actor training traditions were affected according to what the audience and society required. However, the question is whether the actors' needs and demands were considered while those actor traditions were established. The actor could be viewed as one of the key persons in performing traditions. In fact, they are the ones who are directly affected by the side effects of performing craft. Especially, it is visible in the actors' physical and mental state. Only recently, academics and theatre practitioners started to raise questions about the post-performance actor recovery process. Most of the time, actors' bodies and minds cross reflect the emotional state of the characters they portray:

There is a cause-effect relationship between the actor's body reaction and the roles they perform. More simply, the actor's body goes through important imbalances when expiring a wide range of emotions. In other words, the performer is exposed to high stress. And the measured parameters did not return to normal neither during post-performance relaxation exercises (Matei 2018: 2).

In performance actors' bodymind are put under lots of pressure and stress. It is probable that such an issue would not exist if actor traditions focused on the needs of actors as it is done in martial arts in which fighters are considered a main and crucial component of the fight. That is why all attention is brought upon them. Thus, when fighters go through their martial training, the emphasis is on their physical and mental state of health. Most martial arts practitioners possess knowledge of basic self-care aspects such as bodymind recovery techniques, healing, mental awareness and reducing stress levels. Most martial art training, especially from Asia, is based on a holistic approach of body and mind which assist in keeping mental and physical health in balance. Angampora is one of those martial arts that promotes the unity of physical and mental self as well as connection with outside world. Guru Karunāpāla one of the most respected masters of angampora in Sri Lanka says that:

Angampora philosophy is about connectivity between the human being and the universe. People who practice angampora believe that they have a connection, that the human being has a connection to the universe. That is the philosophical basis of angampora as he described (Karunāpāla 2020, pers. comm., 20 September).

It is necessary to clarify that angampora is not only a form of combative art, it is a philosophy which is meticulously followed by angampora practitioners. As mentioned, an acting career might affect the actor's day-to-day life, the same does for angampora. Guru Karunāpāla states that people who practice angampora are less angry. Initial observations suggest that there might be a link between the angampora footwork (which is practiced on the clay ground with small stones) and anger control. Humans' feet have pressure points connected to the nervous system. It is called reflexology which is according to Nicola Hall is a form of complete healing that detect and correct energy imbalance and restore balance to the body to different points on the feet and the hands (Hall 2013: 2). Thus, massaging those certain points result in reducing stress and anger level. This will be further discussed in the following section of the paper. Angampora provides more positive features than negative to the daily routine life, whereas an acting career has some adverse outcomes specified earlier. This study incorporates the Sri Lankan martial art angampora and its utilization of self-care, holistic bodymind approach, physical and mental growth, awareness, and positive attitude to day-to-day life in its philosophy and training to reevaluate European and Sri Lankan actor training traditions.

Even though, theatre practitioners have been developing actor training methodologies for actors, actors' personal needs and growth have not been prioritized. Certainly, key exponents of actor training systems such as Stanislavski, Barba, Lecoq, Grotowski, Zarrilli, Meyerhold and others have focused on developing a particular theatre aesthetics and requirements of vital acting skills and tools. Jerzy Grotowski required actors to strip their souls and be honest with themselves. Moreover, the first question that actors were supposed to find out before working on the characters was *who am I?*. "The experience of life is the question, and the response is simply through true creation. It begins from the effort not to hide oneself and not to lie" (Grotowski cited in Hodge 2009: 202). Grotowski made attempt to understand actors' personalities and true selves, however it was done in order to develop his theatre culture not for sake of actors physical and mental health. Christel Weiler holds a view that actor training education should be revisited through different concepts:

Maybe a different kind of education would be an option, a different concept of acting-culture, one that in an admittedly old-fashioned sense – provides the person with more than skills and information. This would allow the person to conceive of himself constantly (Weiler cited in Zarrilli 2019: 172).

Weiler suggests rethinking the approach towards actor training methodologies, emphasizing on the constant learning process of oneself. Therefore, an actor's personal development, physical and mental wellbeing could be prioritized in a new concept of acting culture. Angampora could serve such an aim if introduced to actor training systematically. Further, Weiler holds the view that “the optimal way of teaching and practice would be to leave the outcome and result open to the practitioner's curiosity and capability for a lifelong learning” (Weiler cited in Zarrilli 2019: 170). While it is still not clear whether angampora would successfully fill the gaps in the modern actor training traditions of Sri Lanka and Europe. At the current stage of AHEAD DOR HEMS 73 research, angampora certainly can satisfy the psychophysical needs of the contemporary actor. Consequently, the paper aims to identify the needs of the modern actor by analyzing traditional western and non-western actor training systems.

2. Western actor training traditions

Research into western actor traditions has a long history. Most scholars trace Western theatre tradition back to ancient Greek performances, which is considered as the beginning of European theatre culture. However, it is incorrect to perceive European actor training and theatre traditions as something separated from the Asian theatre culture. Wiles and David suggest in their studies that Greece was a point where East and West interweaved. They also state that Greek civilization is close to the Indian and Japanese regarding its attitudes towards harmony between body and mind (Wiles, David 2000: 2):

Geographically Greece is a place where East meets West and it is not today a hegemonic power like the land of Shakespeare, so the drama of Greece is well placed to become a shared cultural possession, a vehicle of communication (Wiles, David 2000: 2).

In the same vein, Sarachchandra (1971), in the interview *The Uses of Traditions* notes “Greek theatre has many affinities with Sri Lankan theatre. The Greeks used chants, masks,

stylized movements, broad gestures” (Gunawardana, Sarachchandra 1971: 2). Therefore, since the beginning theatre traditions of the West have been built on a cross-cultural approach which is the main trigger of a paradigm shift in actor training methodologies. Traditionally, it has been argued that interweaving of theatre approaches has happened during the end of 19th and beginning of 20th centuries when Stanislavski and other theatre practitioners started to introduce Asian somatic practices to their actor training methodology. Moreover, the holistic approach of body and mind was only introduced to acting systems during that time. However, as we can see, the studies of Wiles and David show that intercrossing of cultural experiences and the attitude towards harmony of body and mind has been shared between West and Asia back to Ancient Greek times. Yet, Western theatre culture got far away from the unity of mind and body, and as was mentioned above, it was reestablished in the end of 19th – beginning of the 20th century. For example, during the 15th century, in theatre, body and mind were separated due to Diderot’s concept of dualism, which caused the delay towards the holistic bodymind approach for centuries. His view was that emotions are separated from physical activity, and according to Kemp, Diderot proposed two possible acting approaches. “Diderot defined the two possible approaches available to an actor as “sensibility” or the use of technique” (Kemp 2012: 1). For a long period of time actors have been using dualistic approach towards acting:

Approaches of acting that are based on dualistic concept reduce the potential of the actor rather than expanding it and narrow the possible scope of meaning in performance. An approach that acknowledges the holistic and interrelated nature of meaning supports the actor in integrating all cognitive and expressive feature of the bodymind (Kemp 2012: xiii).

The dualistic approach caused some adverse effects on actors since such methodologies triggered an imbalance between the mind and body. Consequently, actors have struggled to keep their mind and body in healthy mental and physical state during and after performance phases. If the holistic approach and attitude towards body and mind would not be shaded since Ancient Greece times, most likely that actors would have a prominent actor training system that would satisfy their needs nowadays. However, it is well known that there are no easy ways, and as the best-written drama suggests that obstacles must be on the way as only overcoming them will bring rewards in the end. Notably, actor training methodologies are still evolving and fulfilling the requirements of contemporary actors.

The end of the 19th and the beginning of 20th century is considered as the most thriving period in western theatre traditions in terms of development of actor training methodologies. Hodge (2010) notes that “conceptual roots of early European actor training can partly be traced to early nineteenth-century France following to Stanislavski system” (Hodge 2010: 19). Actor training practitioners during this time were actively experimenting with the field of actor training. All of them had various goals in their actor training. However, the thing that united all of them was an experiment and research regards actor training and its means. Importantly, new positions in theatre were introduced, such as theatre director. According to Hodge (2010), “the relatively recent rise of the specialist role of theatre ‘director’ brought about a seismic shift in the process of theatre-making” (Hodge 2010: 21). As a major achievement, theatre practitioners of that time managed to establish theatre and theatre-related professions as an independent art field which could be considered as a starting point of separation from a text-based tradition which was a notable indicator of western theatre culture or centuries.

The text was dominant in Western theatre and was the main reference point for actors. On the contrary, if to look at non-Western theatre cultures, it can be seen that they were not as dependent on the text. Commenting on the non-western source of knowledge, Kennedy and Dennis argue that “source of knowledge and authority in most non-western performance lies, not with the text, but with actor and his image of performing a particular style transmitted across generations” (Kennedy, Dennis 2016: 6). Non-text-based approaches provide more artistic freedom and open more means of stage expressiveness. It might be said that distancing from the text assisted in the development or shift towards the physical aspect of training, which led to the understanding of a holistic approach between body and mind. For many years, actors were not taught to pay attention to their bodies. Antonin Artaud stated that the Western theatre style of speech and dependence on the text should be abandoned and instead, the concrete ‘Oriental’ style of speech that integrates mind and body should be adopted (Haney ii 2006: 9). Artaud referred to ‘Oriental’ performance as a role model for reconsidering Western theatre culture, which again shows the dependence of two theatre traditions since Ancient Greek times. According to many in the field, the introduction of Asian theatre practices to Western theatre resulted in the revaluation of the acting system. It can be seen in the examples of actor training methodologies of such theatre practitioners as Stanislavski, Grotowski, Meyerhold, Artaud, Lecoq, Barba, Zarrilli. They tried, in their own way, to renew a harmony between body and mind in order to make actors more receptive to an environment and find new means of bodymind

expressiveness. The role of the actor's body became central for many actor training methodologies which allowed a paradigm and made the actor central in the theatre. In fact, the neuroscientific perspectives offered by Kemp show the importance of body and mind for acting. "The understanding that cognitive science offers us is one that acknowledges the central role of the body and helps us to better understand the relationship between thought and expression, a subject that is hazily expressed at best in most theories" (Kemp 2012: 15).

Although, the attention was focused on actors in training. Actors are still perceived just as instruments for the performance, which could be perceived as unethical. In these training methodologies, the meaning of the actor and his/her personal issues are neglected which creates a gap in actor training methodologies. According to Stanislavski, an actor is at the same time raw material and an instrument (Benedetti 2007:123). Thus, the instrument is prepared only for performance purposes and is put aside after performance. However, at present, researchers attempt to bring awareness to the post-performance stage, which leads to the constant evolution of actor training methodologies. Therefore, the contemporary perception of the actor as a tool for performance should be shifted towards the perception of the actor as a vulnerable and essential propulsor. Schechner claims that "your body is not your instrument, your body is you" (Schechner cited in Zarrilli 2002: 14). Thus, attention towards actors physical and mental health should be brought to light.

At present, Western actor training traditions thrive by its versatility of approaches and theatre genres. Immersive theatre, physical theatre, musical theatre, drama theatre, performance, experimental theatre, and other theatre genres represent the modern theatre of the 21st century. Theatre has become a diverse field that requires multi skillful actors. Not to mention the competitive atmosphere in the field. Therefore, contemporary actors must stay in a constant learning process and in good shape to fit into the industry, which is a challenging task. However, we should not forget that actors and their bodies are different from each other and their personalities. Thus, they cannot be put under one certain stereotypical scheme. An actor's bodymind, or their psychophysical system, is fragile. Therefore, damage could be easily done if they undergo the wrong approach of actor training: "There are so many types actor's body and as many different kinds of acting as there are different forms of theatre. Within different kinds of theatre there are different kinds of actors" (McCaw 2020: 1).

As a result, actor training approaches that consider those differences could be acknowledged as the most appropriate ones. Thus, the stress level of actors could be lessened if

they go through the type of actor training that covers their mental and physical needs. Western actor training traditions need a reevaluation to keep up with a hectic theatre field and demands on actors. The theatre world is always changing. Thus, actor training methodologies should too. According to Kemp, contemporary theatre is in a historically unique place with multiple styles that jostle with one another and are increasingly combined or juxtaposed in performance (Kemp 2012: xiii). Actors are required to fulfil the needs of the industry, even though, it might cause damage to their day-to-day life and mental and physical being. Therefore, extra care for actors should be implemented.

3. Sri Lankan actor training traditions

There is a little published data on Sri Lankan actor training traditions in the English Language. Therefore, one of the ways to understand the acting culture is to draw a parallel with the theatre traditions of the country. Historically, the beginning of theatre and performance is associated with ritual ceremonies, and Sri Lankan theatre is not an exception. For example, Sri Lankan Sinhala folk healing rituals are considered one of the oldest forms of performance on the island. In fact, it consists of dancing, singing and acting which are the elements of contemporary performances (Wijesiri 2020: 1). According to Wijesiri Sri Lankan theatre culture has been historically divided into three categories which are ritual drama, folk drama, and modern Sinhala theatre (Wijesiri 2020: 1). It could be said that actor training in Sri Lanka could be distinguished under those three historical periods as well. Obeyseekere claims that until the 19th century, the theatre tradition in Sri Lanka existed mainly in the form of ritual performances and folk drama (Obeysekere 1992: 127). As with any other theatre in Asia, Ceylon theatre is rigorously structured. Therefore, actors follow a certain way of performance and undergo special performer training. However, some forms have a loose structure which gives an actor freedom of creativeness. For instance, in *Kolam* (Sri Lankan folk theatre), performing groups can innovate and add their own elements to their characters. Therefore, Sri Lankan performer training does not only give a structure to an actor. It also teaches improvisation and develops actors' imaginations. After the 19th century, the interest in theatre in the modern sense began. The influence of English and continental drama is evident at that time (Obeysekere 1992: 129). Meanwhile, folk ritual performances such as *Kolam* have started to disappear due to the spread of Buddhism as the main

religion on the island. However, such forms of theatre are still present in the Sri Lankan theatre, mainly mixed with other modern forms of theatre. Theatre practitioner Ediriweera Sarachchandra was leading the experimental theatre movement in Sri Lanka. He blended elements of folk ritual, dance-drama traditions with western theatre techniques (Obeyesekere 1992: 129). Notably, colonial era left an imprint on a Sri Lankan theatre. However, Sarachchandra's plays attempted to carve out an identity to Sinhala theatre. He was the first to 'decolonize' Sinhala theatre. Nevertheless, Sri Lankan theatre aimed to preserve traditional styles, Western theatre culture interfered. Contemporary Sri Lankan actors are trained in the traditional forms as well as in the Western actor training system. The presence and adaptation of Western methodologies by Sri Lankan theatre practitioners have led to the decline of indigenous theatre forms. Additionally, Sarachchandra doubted that theatre in the West is as much an actor's art as it is in the East (Gunawardana, Sarachchandra 1971: 3). That means that if actors emphasize western techniques, they will lose their unique way of actor's expression. In Asia, the actor separates himself/herself from the role he/she is playing, whereas Western actors apply personal experience to their performance. Moreover, Western naturalistic theatre manner reduces the ability of the actor's imagination. As noted by Sarachchandra, the actor is freer in non-naturalistic theatre. "The actor can work out his role in a poetic way, through rhythm, song and dance" (Gunawadana, Sarachchandra 1971: 4). Admittedly, Sri Lankan actor training traditions could weaken if further shifts towards the naturalistic approach are made.

Currently, Sri Lankan actor training system requires more competent acting methodologies as well as teachers. Several obstacles have been identified by Saumya Liyanage in contemporary Sri Lankan actor training methodologies. He claims that one of the major obstacles is a less competent academics who teach arts and traditional practices of dance and drama. According to Liyanage, they are not ready to take new initiatives and challenges to change and integrate new subject content (Liyanage 2020: 2). Also, distancing from the traditional art forms negatively affects contemporary actor training traditions. "Many of the fine arts departments in Sri Lankan University sector are merely focusing on studying the history of arts and preserving traditional forms" (Liyanage 2020: 2).

In fact, one of the reasons why actors joined AHEAD DOR 73 Acting Training Laboratory is the lack of additional actor training in the country. It is not surprising that once performers graduate from the universities, they are not provided with opportunities for further professional training. It is no doubt that actors gain professional experience from performing.

However, it might not be enough for their professional growth. Similarly, to Western actors, Sri Lankan actors are not taught to manage a contemporary acting life with its financial instability and work-related anxiety. Thus, actors are facing similar issues regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Moreover, contemporary Sri Lankan actors have lost the ritualistic aspects of performance and consistent preparation process before the performance. In Asian theatre traditions, actors start to prepare mentally and physically get in the character a day before performance. Such a preparation process could be considered as a ritualistic act, however at the same time it helps smoothly transition from day-to-day life to performance mode. Indeed, a smooth transition is beneficial for the mental health of an actor. It is understandable that with the current hectic rhythm of life, it is much harder to follow such preparation procedures since the acting craft is more than in the past. However, it would be useful to appropriate performance preparation elements from the past to the contemporary way of theatre life. Obviously, colonization's impact on Sri Lankan theatre is undeniable since it westernized the theatre industry to some extent. However, we observe a paradox since western countries used Asian indigenous art forms to innovate actor training methodologies whereas non-Western cultures started to depart from it. "In the West, an attempt is being made to capture this connection between theatre and ritual, but it would appear that in the East it is gradually being lost" (Gunawardana, Sarachchandra 1971:3). Therefore, the East is losing the vital indigenous elements of actor training, which help to balance stage and day to day life as well as elements of creativeness.

4. Angampora and actor training traditions

Martial arts have been used as a tool of a paradigm shift in actor training in the past. Previous researchers have established the beneficial impact of martial arts on actor training methodologies. The way in which martial arts have been introduced to actor training was studied intensively by Scott, Zarrilli, Elizabeth de Rosa, Kapsali and others. For example, Scott successfully incorporated Thai Chi Chuan into his unique actor training methodologies, which resulted in beneficial effects on the bodymind state of the actor (video Street 1980). Another theatre practitioner and academic Philip Zarrilli used Indian martial arts Kalarippayattu as a preparatory body tool which develops kinesthetic awareness (De Roza, Hiher: video article 2017). Using this approach, theatre practitioners have been able to achieve a drastic change in terms of bodymind

development in actor training. However, the gaps in methodologies which blend martial arts with existing actor training methodologies. The most common issue is that martial arts philosophy and methods are partially incorporated into actor training, which separates the two art forms. Thus, actors might find it challenging to use valuable aspects of martial arts in their actor training. This view is supported by Kemp, who writes that actor-students lack the knowledge of synthesizing corporeal practices and actor training:

While many training programs include movement classes, or activities such as Alexander technique, yoga, or dance these are generally separated from “Acting” classes, and offer the student little information on how synthesize the two (Kemp 2012: 15).

Therefore, to reevaluate contemporary actor training methodologies, a new concept of appropriation of martial arts to actor training should be done. Of course, following the leads of previous practitioners that have been working in the field, since their experience and experimentations cannot be neglected. Additionally, the focus on actors is required which will assist their smooth *on* and *off* stage transitions. In fact, angampora has not been used in actor training methodologies in the past. Thus, it gives the opportunity to freshly reconsider the use of martial arts in actor training and prioritize the actor as a person in the training system.

Angampora is an indigenous martial art of Sri Lanka which is closely linked to the Buddhist religion. Admittedly, it is not solely a combat art form. Foremost, angampora has its own philosophy, healing practices, physical and mental preparatory exercises which makes this form of martial art appropriate for actor training use. One of the main angampora principles is the connection between human and the universe. It might be said that unity between humans and the surrounding is a crucial element of angampora. The actor’s task is to be present in the moment and connect with the surrounding. However, in actor training, the connection between actor and surrounding is crucial only when the actor is on stage. The actor training systems do not give guidelines about the unity with the environment after the performance. Therefore, the actor loses the connection with the outside world after the performance which negatively affects his/her mental health. On the contrary, angampora practitioners do not face such a problem, as they follow angampora principles in their day-to-day life. Even after leaving angampora training space, the philosophy and principles stay with them. If the art is taught and perceived as philosophy, then it is not separated from life. Thus, angampora could be a guide of how to apply philosophical principles which would be helpful to actors and actor training. Angampora

practitioner Asanke claims that after practicing angampora for nine years, he can control his emotional state and remain calm (Asanke 2020, pers. comm., 20 September). Practising angampora have shown that the level of stress is reduced, especially anger. A positive effect to the mental and emotional state is linked to bare feet work on the ground with sand and small stones. Notably, our feet are sensitive and pressure points are located there which are connected to other parts of the body. Therefore, by relaxation and massaging of feet during angampora L-shape feet routine the mind and emotional state is affected. Actors who have been practicing angampora in AHEAD DOR HEMS 73 actor training laboratory have observed that their mindset became calmer and present in the moment when performing angampora movements. Even when some movements are not ideal, and they strived to improve, anger was never expressed. However, it is vital to know how to preserve such state of mind outside the training space. Interestingly, people who practice angampora for a long period are able to transmit the state of calmness to their daily routine. Therefore, it shows that actors who would be going through the actor training which is based on angampora principles, would be able to keep mindfulness and be less stressed in the post-performance phase.

One question that needs to be asked, however, is whether there might be negative sides of incorporating angampora to actor training methodologies. Obviously, as in any actor training system, there are pros and cons. For instance, when Yoga was introduced to actor training methodologies, Grotowski suggested his concerns. “Yoga develops a kind of introspective concentration that destroys all expressions” (Kapsali 2013: 12). Accordingly, there is a risk that angampora might have a similar effect. Observations have shown that actors, when practising angam movement combinations, have empty facial expressions. However, Maria Kapsali challenged Grotowski argument by concentrating on the positive aspect of the effect of Yoga on actors. Kapsali points out that “the cultivation of passivity does not “destroy” the actor’s expression, but rather enables the actor to embody an alternative acting paradigm” (Kapsali 2013: 12). Therefore, the side effects of corporeal practices in actor training might be transformed in the positive aspects if properly analyzed and used. There is a risk that blending angampora with actor training might cause some other negative effects. Thus, it is vital to have a mindful approach towards acting and martial arts. Indeed, evaluation of risks and benefits is the priority of the study. It is believed that a healthy view of angampora in actor training should be applied. It means that angampora should not be perceived as a solution to all acting issues. Following Weiler’s way of principles of applying taijiquan to actor training:

I am far from suggesting that practising Taijiquan would solve all problems, it should not be burdened with such a heavy load. I would rather like to take it as one example, one possibility to think through a different model of intercultural acting training on the one hand, supports the actor-to-be on various levels and on the other hand could be a signpost for their life in general i.e something that keeps its value after graduating from drama school. (Weiler cited in Zarilli 2019: 176)

5. Conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to determine the revaluation of bodymind in Western and Sri Lankan actor training traditions through angampora. Gaps exist in the development of actor training methodologies in the West and in Sri Lanka. Indeed, actor training is a mix of various forms of arts as well as cultures. Currently, it is hard to say that Western or Sri Lankan methodologies are pure in their forms as the cross-cultural exchange has been happening since Ancient Greek times. Thus, the paradigm shift is made through the appropriation of new forms and interweaving of cultures to already existent acting systems which assist in satisfying the requirements of the contemporary actor. However, even if the needs of acting training systems are covered, the needs of actors have been neglected to some extent. It has been observed that both Western and Sri Lankan actors struggle from mental and physical disorders caused by performing craft.

On the contrary, people who have been practising angampora have transformed the knowledge gained during the training into day-to-day life, which positively influenced their mental and physical stability. The findings of the study suggest that angampora is a suitable form of martial art in order to reconsider the needs of contemporary actors if approached properly. Moreover, according to Weiler a new way of education in acting is required. angampora could serve this purpose as it is based on the connectivity of the human and surroundings during and after the training. Importantly, angampora philosophy and not just its elements should be introduced and blended with already existent actor training technique. Therefore, actors would gain knowledge such bodymind recovery, mindfulness, control of anger and anxiety which will assist them as in professional and day to day life. The 21st century is a unique and progressive time in terms of performance development. Thus, actor training methodologies must further

evolve and promote a balanced bodymind actor training which would reduce the negative impacts of the acting profession on actors.

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Angampora and Dance: Some Historical and Kinesthetic Connections

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Abstract: One can see different types of connections between the Sri Lankan martial art form angampora and dance. This essay examines the historical and kinesthetic connection between angampora and dance, primarily focusing on the Kandyan dance form of Sri Lanka. Historical sources, interviews, and my experience as a dancer and a martial arts practitioner aided me in this study. What we call angampora and Kandyan dance today has a historical connection to the pre-colonial Kandyan kingdom of Sri Lanka. This essay mainly focuses on the kinesthetic connections between the two forms. I elaborate on kinesthetic learning in both angampora and Kandyan dance and assert that both forms try to develop mastery through a pedagogical method I articulate as kinesthetic habituation that encompasses habits and practice. This process includes a vital component called haramba, which is a set of physical exercises done repetitively.

Keywords: Angampora, dance, Kandyan dance, kinesthetic learning, kinesthetic habituation, haramba, repetitive movements, Sri Lanka.

1. Introduction

At the age of 12, I was learning both Kandyan dance and karate, Budokan style. After learning mindful movement practices like *Tai Chi* in my late thirties, I began to reflect on the history of my bodily training and was critical about the repetitiveness, rigidity and rigorous training in dance and martial art. I felt that it imprisoned me in certain movements and limited my bodily expressions as a performer. However, studying the kinesthetic connection between angampora and Kandyan dance provided me with a different perspective about bodily art and training. As in

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most other Asian bodily practices, angampora and Kandyan dance develop a particular type of bodily discipline that I articulate in this essay as kinesthetic habituation. A close examination of kinesthetic habituation in these two movement practices will provide valuable insights for training in performing arts.

Although their purposes are different, both angampora and Kandyan dance can be characterized as performances. According to Richard Schechner, one of the pioneers of performance theory, “any behavior, event, action, or thing can be studied ‘as’ performance” (Schechner 2013: 41). Since angampora and Kandyan dance are movement practices, they can be easily categorized as performances. Describing the emergence of “the concept of performance” in the 1960s, theatre scholar Marvin Carlson asserts that:

If theatre is to be considered as a particular kind of human activity found in many cultures, it needs to be considered in a very wide variety of manifestations, and in relation to other related cultural activities, such as rituals, festivals, civic demonstrations, dances, puppet shows, circuses, and storytelling (Carlson 2014: 79).

Both angampora and Kandyan dance are physical activities, and they contain ritualistic components as well. Therefore, in the performance studies framework, both of these movement practices can be identified as performances.

2. Kandyan dance

The Kandyan kingdom was the last native Sinhalese kingdom in Sri Lanka before the British established colonial order, which lasted for 132 years from 1815 onwards. Therefore, if someone is searching for pre-colonial cultural practices, Kandy is a site that contains rich evidence. The dance form that is primarily practiced in the central highlands of Sri Lanka is called Kandyan dance. It should be noted that the Kandyan dance itself has evolved into its current form through various historical political manoeuvres, during the British colonial period (Mantillake 2018) and after the independence during the nation-building process (Reed 2010). The current outlook of both angampora and Kandyan dance came to the popular consciousness of Sri Lankans between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. However, as evidence suggests, there was a historical connection between these two bodily practices since the pre-colonial era.

Today, when we hear the term “Kandyan dance,” it reminds us of a particular dance repertoire, a set of costumes, and instruments. Kandyan dance includes *ves* dance¹, *panteru* dance², *udekki* dance³, *nayyadi* dance⁴, and certain female dance repertoires. The term Kandyan dance is further associated with the costumes of the dances mentioned above and musical instruments such as *geta beraya*⁵, *panteruma*⁶, *udekkiya*⁷, and *talampota*⁸. Although the repertoire of Kandyan dance was solidified in the twentieth century, before the British colonial era,⁹ the dances mentioned above were practiced in rituals, processions, and in the royal court of the Kandyan kingdom.

3. Historical connections

It is difficult to find the exact origins of both angampora and Kandyan dance. However, we can try to map the historical connections between these two performance practices through existing historical evidence. We began to see more evidence of these, particularly after the 14th century in Sri Lankan history. Images of angampora practitioners and dancers are depicted in the wood carvings of the *Embekke* Devalaya near Kandy, which was built in the 14th century. Angampora has been used in various battles and wars in Sri Lanka, particularly against European invaders (Weerasooria 2004: 28) between the 16th and 19th centuries. The Kings in the Kandyan kingdom had a special relationship with angampora. According to historian P.E.P. Deraniyagala, angampora was a vital practice of the Kandyan kingdom, particularly among elites and the King’s court (1959). Since this was a combative practice used in battles and wars, angampora was kept under the control and close association of the Kandyan kings and aristocrats. It was practiced by Kandyan kings, aristocrats, and community leaders who were loyal to the kingdom.

¹ A sacred dance with a glamorous costume.

² Dance with a tambourine.

³ Dance with hourglass shaped drum.

⁴ A dance with a similar costume as in *ves* dance, without some major ornaments such as the glittering headdress and puffed frills.

⁵ A drum that keeps horizontally and play with both hands.

⁶ Tambourine.

⁷ Hourglass shaped drum.

⁸ Small metal instrument played like a small cymbal.

⁹ British colonial rule in Sri Lanka can be marked between 1815-1948

In the Kandyan kingdom, attached to the King's court, there were two major types of performance spaces – *ilangama* and *maduwa*. According to the chronicle *rajāvaliya*, *ilangama* was where various physical activities like swordsmanship were taught (Sorata 2009: 163). As anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere asserts, *ilangamas* are “training schools for soldiers in the martial arts, especially fencing”; however, as he speculates, they might also include “dancing associated with paeans of victory” (Obeyesekere 2017: 377). Historical evidence suggests that various types of performances took place in *ilangamas* and the *maduwa*. There were two *ilangamas* and one *maduwa* in the last Kandyan kingdom as *natum ilangama* (performance space for dance), *wābala ilangama* (performance space for acrobats, games), and *kavikāra maduwa* (performance space for singing and poetry) (Davy 1821: 139). As evidence suggests, there were blood sports at the court of King Raja Sinha II (1581) (Deraniyagala 1959: 2–3). While there were these three spaces, the Kings appointed elite officers called *mohandiram nilames* as leaders and individuals responsible for those spaces and performances in the King's court. For example, there were officers responsible for fencers (angampora fighters), dance, acrobatics, poetry singing, musicians, drummers (Davy 1821: 155–56). Therefore, *ilangamas* and *maduwa* were spaces where all kinds of performances took place in the Kandyan kingdom. In those spaces, some played war drums, some fighters performed, some danced, and some sang eulogies and war poetry. Since both of these practices were performed and exhibited under the auspicious of Kandyan kings and elite officers, there is a strong possibility that knowledge about these performances were transferred to other officers and performers.

The term *ilangam* has a connection to hereditary dance families and to the space where dance training happened.¹⁰ Tittapajjala Sumanaweera is a hereditary Kandyan dance practitioner and ritualist who is 69 years old and lives near Kandy. His father is a famous ritual dancer, Tittapajjala Surambā. Their traditional dance school, which opened in Tittapajjala village in 1931, is arguably the first ever academy of art established during the colonial government in Sri Lanka. When they first opened, their academy was named “*ilangam haramba sālāwa*” (movement training hall) (Sumanaweera 2021). According to Sumanaweera, the word “*ilangam*” was a part of his grandfather's surname. His grandfather's name was “*Ilangam Karunādhpati Brāhmana Ganita Gedara Siuranga Ganitasāra*” (Sumanaweera 2021). In the Kandyan kingdom, citizens' names

¹⁰ A type of dance exercises called “*ilangam haramba*” are used in Ruhunu dance tradition that is popular in western and southern coastal areas.

were directly connected to their service to the King and the kingdom.¹¹ Therefore, based on Sumanaweera's family history, we can speculate that both angampora and Kandyan dance were performed in one space called the *ilangama*.

4. Kinesthetic connection

One of the primary connections between angampora and dance is kinesthetics. Movement is absolutely primary for both angampora and dance. In her book *The Primacy of Movement*, meditating on various movements in nature and the body, American philosopher Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (2011) asserts that movement is primarily crucial on two levels. On one level, it allows us to be kinetically aware of ourselves in everyday happenings. On the other level, it exemplifies for ourselves or makes us self-evident about kinesthetic consciousness or kinesthesia. Based on the experiences described by dancers such as Merce Cunningham and Doris Humphrey, Sheets-Johnstone emphasizes the need to pay attention to movers' kinesthesia, that is, the "first-person experiences of movement" (2015: xvi). Both angampora practitioners and Kandyan dancers are movers. Therefore, in this section, I attempt to draw the kinesthetic connection between angampora and dance paying attention to the bodily awareness and training in these movement practices.

In terms of movement quality, angampora and dance come closer in the spectrum of different movement practices. One of the qualities of movements is that it flows forth with a certain intensity, spatial and temporal contours, and that movement creates a qualitative space-time-force dynamic (Sheets Johnstone 2015: xxiii). Different movement practices have different qualitative space-time-force dynamics. It is a spectrum of possible qualitative movement dynamics. In this spectrum, you can find various physical movements such as sports, martial arts, gymnastics, military drills, rice pounding, sexual acts, and dance. Even within the category of martial arts, different practices like Karate, Aikido, Capoeira, and angampora carry different space-time-force qualities. Therefore, if we compare angampora to the larger spectrum of movement practices, one could argue that angampora is closer to dance. However, considering the quality of movement and the use of music, we could argue that the Brazilian martial art Capoeira is closer to dance than angampora. Both angampora and Kandyan dance have their own qualitative space-time-force dynamics because the purpose of these two practices is primarily

¹¹ This system was called *najakariya* (duty to the King).

different. While one has been developed as a combative practice, the other has been developed mainly as a ritual dance. However, when it comes to the training of these two movement practices, we notice a common kinesthetic connection.

5. Kinesthesia and movement training

Although we all talk about the human body, physicality, consciousness, and movement through terms such as kinetic, kinesiology, kinesthetic and kinesthesia, different disciplines approach human movements in a variety of ways. Kinesiology is a [scientific] study of human body movement. The Oxford Dictionary of Dance defines kinesiology as “the study of human movement, from the point of view of both mechanical action and anatomical structure” (Craine and Mackrell 2002: 271). While this mechanical and anatomical definition of human movement has been used in western dance, medicine, and physiology, several scholars expanded the understanding of human movements. Dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster asserts that pervasive mistrust of the body in academia has “resulted in a paucity of activities that promotes awareness of the body’s position and motion, or the degree of tension in its muscles” (Foster 2011: 19). Dance scholar Deidre Sklar further claims that kinesthesia has been omitted from the western sensorium (Sklar 2008: 87). Scholars have begun to hasten towards non-western perceptions of the human body and movements to understand their complex connections.

Foster defines kinesthesia as “a designated way of experiencing physicality and movement that, in turn, summons other bodies into a specific way of feeling towards it” (Foster 2011: 15). Drawing from various non-western movement practices, Sklar argues that kinetic vitality is connected with cultural patterns, and those cultural patterns are embodied in movement practices as movement knowledge (Sklar 2008). She describes how “body consciousness” in American and western Europe refers to an “image” of the body often enhanced by cosmetics, fashions, and body-shaping classes (88). She contrasts this type of visual body consciousness with somatic awareness in Buddhist mindfulness practices, and Asian “in-body” disciplines, based on the writings of Gil Fronsdal and Phillip Zarrilli respectively (Sklar 2008: 105). Sri Lanka is a country with a strong Buddhist influence and a country with various in-body movement practices. Here, I compare the selected aspects of kinesthesia in angampora and Kandyan dance. While doing so, I

also demonstrate that the kinesthesia of bodily training of these movement practices is engraved into the teaching and learning culture.

6. Developing kinesthetic habituation

In the training process, primarily the amateur, angampora and Kandyan dance contain rigorous bodily training. Why is rigorous bodily training included in both these movement practices? Here, I pay attention to the overall training process, particularly their rigorous kinesthetic learning process that emphasizes kinesthetic habits.

The training process in both angampora and Kandyan dance can be theorized as developing kinesthetic habituation. Merleau-Ponty describes dance as a “motor habit” (Merleau-Ponty 1990:126–30). Sheets-Johnstone, not entirely agreeing with Merleau-Ponty, argues that there is a kinesthetic element in dance movement and habits. Therefore, she articulates the process of dance and movement as “kinesthetic memory” (Sheets, Johnstone 2003: 90). From my analysis of both angampora and Kandyan dance, I identify the importance of both the habitual and kinesthetic aspects of movement training. Therefore, I articulate it as kinesthetic habituation. Kinesthetic habituation includes the first-person experience of the body, awareness of the qualitative dynamics of movements, physicality, and cultural memory and knowledge related to the body and movements. Both angampora and Kandyan dance masters achieve their mastery in their bodily training through kinesthetic habituation. In the training process, the amateur needs to go through a rigorous training process that also includes learning other systems of knowledge related to the movement practices. For example, while angampora practitioners learn massage and traditional medicine (Liyanaage, Honcharova 2020: 10), Kandyan dancers learn astrology, drumming, and ritual recitations. Therefore, kinesthetic habituation includes a holistic, continuous learning process.

When it comes to training both angampora and Kandyan dance, a concept called *purudda*, a kinesthetic habituation among Sinhalese people, becomes highly important. *Purudda* in Sinhalese holds two primary meanings. It denotes both “habit” and “training.” As we can see, habituation and training are connected in angampora and Kandyan dance. Therefore, in both practices, “to train” or “to practice” means “to habituate” or “to make it a habit.” Practitioners habituate certain movements and knowledge. Therefore, in order to master angampora and Kandyan

dance, both practitioners go through a “kinesthetic habituation” called *purudda*. Japanese avant-garde theatre practitioner and theorist Tadashi Suzuki further emphasizes a similar aspect of bodily training for actors when he describes “creating physical continuity” in his acting method (Suzuki 2015:53–54). When he distinguishes amateur vs professional, artisan vs artist, he describes an amateur as a “momentary flower” and a professional who has gone through continuous training as a “flower that never withers” (54). According to Suzuki, practitioners need to lead “a life committed to developing certain qualities” (54) to achieve professional mastery in theatre. This requires long training and maintaining a lifelong physical continuity.

Purudda, in both senses, habit and practice, is a vital part of the learning process in traditional physical skills in Sri Lanka. *Purudda* has been highlighted in Kandyan dance training. According to Waidyawathie Rajapaksa, a scholar of traditional dance, and the daughter of the famous dance family of Amunugama,¹² there are four *puruddas* in dance training. These are four practices embodied by dancers in a pedagogical method called the *gurukula* (teacher-centred lineage) tradition. She asserts that they are *pera purudda* (practice and habits that come from earlier life), *deka purudda* (practice by seeing), *aba purudda* (practice by listening), and *kara purudda* (practice by doing) (Aluthge, Rajapaksa 2021:11). A similar teacher-centred pedagogical method, *guru-shishya* (teacher-disciple) has been used in angampora (Liyanage and Honcharova 2020: 6).

The *Gurukula* and *guru-shishya* pedagogical methods are connected. According to angampora practitioners, *purudda* is highly important for their training (L¹³ 2021).¹⁴ Hence, kinesthetic habituation is vital for both movement practices.

One of the questions we can ask from both angampora and Kandyan dance practitioners is, what do you practice? Or what *purudda* do you maintain? What kinesthetic habits do you maintain? Kinesthetic habituation directly connects with the psychophysical stamina of the practitioner developed through repetitive movement exercises. One of the ways angampora and dance practitioners attain mastery is through the repetition of movement sequences or a set of exercises called *haramba*. In various physical activities like dance and martial arts, *haramba* means repetitive physical exercises. Continuously practicing these exercises helps practitioners to develop their stamina, memory, and mastery. When talking about physical exercises, Polish

¹² Amunugama dance family shows their connection to pre-colonial Kandyan kingdom.

¹³ “L” is a symbolic letter assigned by the author to identify one of the senior students of Angampora master Karunāpāla. “L” does not want to identify himself.

¹⁴ L 2021, Telephone Interview on Haramba: 29 Septmeber

theatre director and theorist Jerzy Grotowski elaborates on a somewhat similar idea on kinesthetic learning and repetition. According to Grotowski:

The body itself functions like a brain; it can record and later recall movement patterns and emotion in a seemingly instinctive way when stimuli are given. Learning kinesthetically incorporates both the physical precision and the emotional quality of the action... The student also learns through observing and following the teacher, repeating the voice or movement sequence many times. Repetition is another basic principle of kinesthetic learning through which the body will internalize the physical experience. Repetition may lead to a mechanical quality, but a student is instructed to find the life of the action in each repetition (Wolford, Schechner 2001: 323–24).

This shows the vitality of embodied memory in theatre, dance, and other physical expressions. It also reinforces the psychophysical training in physical expressions. Therefore, haramba in both angampora and Kandyan dance help to internalize the physical experience. According to Sumanaweera, “doing haramba repetitively is a difficult task; therefore, it develops practitioner’s stamina” and recalling his memory as an amateur, he claims, “we did one haramba for a long time. It needs to be a habit (*purudda*) because you cannot get tired when dancing a whole night ritual” (2021). Physical stamina develops through habituation of haramba. Practicing haramba, develops both angampora and dance practitioners’ memory, stamina and helps to achieve mastery.

In angampora, we can find ath haramba (hand exercises) and polu haramba (stick exercises), while in Kandyan dance, we find pa haramba (leg exercises)¹⁵ and goda haramba (exercise with both legs and hands).¹⁶ The repetitive aspect of kinesthetic learning is highly prominent in haramba in both angampora and Kandyan dance. According to Sumanaweera, training haramba is absolutely important for dance training, and different *gurukulas* had different harambas; this also carried the identity of each *gurukula* (Sumanaweera 2021). Veteran angampora teacher Karunāpāla who has his training center in the vicinity of the capital city of Colombo, is believed to be one of the experienced masters in the field. Mr. L,¹⁷ one of Karunāpāla’s senior students who does not wish to disclose his identity, vigorously stressed the vitality of haramba in angampora. According to him, “haramba is angampora, and angampora is haramba”. This

¹⁵ Traditionally these exercises were done using a horizontal bar on which dancers keep their hands and practice leg movements. In some dance schools they used to have a trench where dancers keep their legs and practice the exercises.

¹⁶ These are not the only *harambas* found in both angampora and Kandyan dance. I mention these to highlight some.

¹⁷ L 2021, Telephone Interview on Haramba: 29 September.

statement proves the kinesthetic habituation in bodily training. Observations of the participants in AHEAD Actors Lab also verify that the kinesthetic habituation occurs in angampora training. Marlon Ariysinghe, one of the actors who learned angampora, emphasizes the difficulty of controlling the body, concentration, discipline, and mathematical way of doing the footwork, and felt that “angampora demanded that awareness and that precision (like in dancing)” and he felt it as a combative choreography (quoted in Liyanage, Honcharova 2020: 17). As performance researchers Liyanage and Honcharova observed, in angampora, ath haramba affects the practitioners’ facial expressions as it connects with their inner energy and intention (ibid: 11–12). This portrays that both in angampora and Kandyan dance, haramba are not just physical drills but contribute to the kinesthetic expression expected in performance practice.

In conclusion, today, performing artists and researchers can learn important lessons from the kinesthetic learning methods used in angampora and Kandyan dance. As in most other Asian bodily practices, angampora and Kandyan dance training involve a pedagogical method, a discipline that can be defined as kinesthetic habituation, involving rigorous bodily training. On one level, this can be seen as limiting the freedom of the performer. However, a close examination of kinesthetic habituation in angampora and Kandyan dance will provide valuable insights for performing artists and researchers. Kinesthetic habituation is being developed through rigid movement sequences, repetitive movement exercises, rigorous training, and habits. We can try to understand this through classical binary craft vs art. Some of the general assumptions are that art is more important than craft; art is the final destination, and craft is the means to get there; art is hierarchically superior to craft. However, kinesthetic learning in angampora and Kandyan dance challenges these assumptions in the craft vs art binary. In these two performance practices, craft and art function as a continuum. Therefore, both in angampora and Kandyan dance, the craft is the art, and the art is the craft.

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Can we know the *Dancer* from the *Dance*? Embodied Metaphors in Angampora

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Abstract: “How can we know the dancer from the dance?” is Yeats’ concluding rumination in his poem “Among School Children”. However, is this really a question? Can we separate the dancer from the dance? Or the actor from the act? Or the angampora (Sri Lankan martial arts) *baramba* from the angampora artist? In the dance and the dancer, Yeats had found a quintessential act of embodiment. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, in *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (1999), posit that “the mind is inherently embodied. Thought is mostly unconscious. Abstract concepts are largely metaphorical” (Lakoff, Johnson 1999: 3). Theories of embodiment, imagination, and embodied cognition in the fields of neuroscience, psychology, and linguistics have provided meaningful tools and epistemology to have a broader, holistic understanding of the inner mechanics of the body, the mind, corporeality, and imagination. Does a shift to a holistic understanding support concepts and practices that view the integrated, psychophysical nature of the performing arts and martial arts, which were previously thought to be firmly situated in the physical realm? Further, can the concept of ‘embodied metaphor’ help us understand the psychophysical nature of angampora and shed light on some of the challenges I encountered during angampora training? Drawing upon personal performance experiences, journal entries from the Actors Lab: the AHEAD-DOR HEMS 73 project, leading contemporary theories of cognitive science on embodiment, and academic scholarship that amalgamates cognitive perspectives on acting, this study will explore the cognitive processes or the ‘embodied metaphors’ in angampora.

Keywords: Angampora, acting, embodied cognition, embodied metaphors, neuroscience, Sri Lankan theatre.

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1. Introduction

*O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?*¹

It is an evening in late March. Torrential rain is battering the roof of the *angam maduwa*², and I am revising the five angampora (Sri Lankan martial arts) haramaba with other actors of the Actors Lab³. With ease, the movements of the first haramaba come to me, quite unlike my blundering self a month back. I get to the third haramaba. I forward kick with my right leg and drag it back in one swift movement, and place it at the back of my body. I hear a clicking of the tongue and an emphatic “Stop!” from behind me. I turn to see Guru Karunāpāla⁴ shaking his head in disapproval. He points towards my right leg, which is placed behind me. I immediately become conscious of my faux-pas, literally. I had mixed up the fourth haramaba with the third (see figure 1). In the third haramaba, the right leg is placed in front of your body and not back. I tried the third haramaba again, and the right leg instinctively went back. I then realized the ‘problem’. For the last two weeks, I had exclusively focused on the fourth haramaba, which led to my body ‘memorising’ this particular movement.

It also dawned on me that the angampora haramaba recycled similar movements (kicks, jumps, turns and punches) for different haramaba. The forward right kick in the third and fourth haramaba was the same, and my subsequent placing of the right foot was imprinted in my body memory, and it felt natural for me to place it at the back after the forward kick. From then on, while performing the third haramaba, it required me to consciously pull my right foot forward and to the back in the fourth haramaba. This ordeal made me reflect on similar incidents over the years on stage where I made many faux-pas mixing up my own and other actors’ physical and verbal cues. These ‘mistakes’ are often caused by a lapse in the unity of cognition, physicality, and

¹ W. B. Yeats, “Among School Children” *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (1989).

² The angampora training space (See Figures 2 and 3).

³ The Actors Lab is a part of the Accelerating Higher Education Expansion and Development or AHEAD-DOR HEMS 73 project, funded by the World Bank, that aims to develop an actor-training methodology through Sri Lankan martial art angampora under the supervision of Prof. Saumya Liyanage and team.

⁴ Guru Karunapala is an 80-year-old angampora master who trains students at his *angam maduwa*, located in Mirihana, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka.

emotions. I realized that in my approach to learning angampora, I had neglected to see through, what theoretical neuroscientist and authority on brain imaging Karl Friston calls, the “eyes of our muscles” (2018: online), thereby not identifying angampora’s psychophysical nature. Theories of embodiment, imagination, and embodied cognition in neuroscience, psychology, and linguistics have provided meaningful tools and epistemology to have a broader, holistic understanding of the inner mechanics of the body, the mind, corporeality, and imagination. This study employs personal performance experiences, my training at the Actors Lab, and literary and scientific theories to illuminate the cognitive processes in angampora and explore the ‘embodied metaphors’ in angampora. This study will engage with the following questions: Does a shift to a holistic understanding support concepts and practices that view the integrated, psychophysical nature of the performing arts and martial arts, which were previously thought to be firmly situated in the physical realm? Further, can the concept of ‘embodied metaphor’ help us understand the psychophysical nature of angampora and shed light on some of the challenges I encountered during angampora training?



Figure 1: Actors Lab participant and AHEAD team member Banduka Premawardhana performing right leg positioning in the third and the fourth angampora haramba. Photo: Banduka Premawardhana, 2021.

In terms of methodology, in this paper, I will draw upon journal entries – which were kept during my time at the Actors Lab, leading contemporary theories of cognitive science on embodiment, and academic scholarship that amalgamate cognitive perspectives on acting.

2. Beyond the mind-body dichotomy

The centre of my approach to theatre is the collective exploration of systematized psychophysical acts and building cohesion between text, image, speech, and performance. I have over 10 years of experience in theatre as an actor, workshop coordinator, and director in Sri Lanka and Switzerland. As a master's student in English Literature, I have studied dramaturgy, classical Greek and Roman theatre, Shakespearean theatre, and contemporary theatre and have presented papers on Shakespearean theatre. I seek to explore more experimental ground through the creative adaptations of non-theatrical literary sources and studying actor training methodologies. The Actors Lab in the AHEAD project offered me an opportunity to work and share knowledge with actors, academics and researchers.

In my early years as an actor and a director, though I incorporated physical exercises and 'games' in rehearsals and workshops, I was largely ignorant of their impact on acting. Coming from a background of literary analysis, I leaned more towards the close reading of scripts and lines while pontificating on the psyche of the characters I played and interacted with. Only later, with my exposure to studies that acknowledged the holistic nature between the mind and the body, I began to see the body as more than an instrument to be manipulated and the fundamental necessity of marrying corporeality with the mind. My understanding is echoed by Sonia Moore in her work *Training an Actor: The Stanislavski System in Class* (1979). Moore integrated the 'Stanislavski System' in her workshops. She states that "an actor's control over his body should be as complete as that of a dancer" (Moore 1979: 16).

In a general study of cognition, Wilson and Foglia define embodied cognition in the following terms: "Cognition is embodied when it is deeply dependent upon features of the physical body of an agent, that is, when aspects of the agent's body beyond the brain play a significant causal or physically constitutive role in cognitive processing" (Wilson, Foglia, 2017: online).

Moreover, the embodied nature of the mind is presented by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their influential study, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*. Lakoff and Johnson propose three ‘major findings’ of cognitive science: “The mind is inherently embodied. Thought is mostly unconscious. Abstract concepts are largely metaphorical” (Lakoff, Johnson 1999: 3). Lakoff and Johnson argue that their findings or “empirical discoveries”— especially on the embodied mind in the interest of this study, challenge the “philosophical assumptions” that dominated Western philosophy from its origins (1999: 3), in particular the Cartesian mind-body dichotomy. Further, they posit that the primary consequence of these discoveries is that “we can never go back to a priori philosophizing about mind and language or to philosophical ideas of what a person is that are inconsistent with what we are learning about the mind” (1999: 7).

These studies help us understand the embodied nature of our mind and provide a framework for interpreting the embodied nature of performing arts. Rick Kemp, in *What neuroscience tells us about performance* (2012), incorporates the scholarship of embodied cognition of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. Kemp emphasizes the need for holistic approaches and theories of performance to unlock the embodied nature of acting. Kemp asserts that cognitive



Figure 2: Angampora training at the Actors Lab, Mirihana Nugegoda, Sri Lanka under the purview of Guru Karunapala. Photo: Marlon Ariyasinghe, 2021.

studies have much to offer in effecting a “conceptual shift” in the conservative “inside-out” or “outside-in” approaches to acting since cognitive studies have debunked the conceptual separation between mind and body (Kemp 2012: xv). For Kemp, “all acting is embodied. The actor’s bodymind experiences, formulates, and communicates meaning” (2012: xvi).

As mentioned in the introduction, in the “dance and the dancer” in Yeats’ poem ‘Among School Children’, he found a quintessential act of embodiment; one that cannot be separated. Dance is a psychophysical, embodied act. It is a physical action, a bodily movement, while also a work of art. But just as we cannot separate the dancer from the dance, or the actor from the act, the angampora movements cannot be separated from the angampora performer, and from the angam maduwa (the space).

3. Embodied metaphors in angampora

In my first journal entry in the Actors Lab, I had noted my excitement and reservations about taking part in the angampora lessons. Suffering from a chronic knee issue for over a decade, I was aware of my physical limitations. The first day was quite challenging, and at the end of the lesson, I had not fully grasped the first haramba:

By the third hour, it was quite exhausting. Yet, I wanted to keep going. Repeating a physical act sometimes can be quite meditative, where your entire focus is on getting the movements right. This required concentration and intense focus. In the end, I still was not satisfied with my progress over the three hours. The session ended, and I was determined to go home and practice the footwork.⁵

However, even at this early stage, I had already made associations between angampora and theatre: the intense concentration and discipline, attention to detail, rehearsed choreographic movements, being conscious of one’s body, and having control. While I had noted that my first day was quite challenging, I had marked the embodied nature of angampora and how it was similar to dancing:

The other aspect that I remarked on was how conscious we have to be of our own body. For example, the footwork/movements are very precise, almost mathematical. So, I became aware of how my left leg was placed as opposed to the right. They need to move in tandem (along with

⁵ Marlon Ariyasinghe 2021, Actors Lab Journal Entry: 17 February

arms and the rest of my body) in order for the choreography to work...I felt that angampora demanded that awareness and that precision (like in dancing).⁶

In my fourth journal entry, I cite how a session began with meditation, “The session started with a brief meditation (which I felt was missing in the earlier sessions and some gruelling exercises... It lasted for about 30 minutes.”⁷ In the same entry, I have noted how the meditation had impacted the overall productivity of the session:

I started practicing the second haramba on my own and realized that somehow the spin kick, which was giving me so much trouble in the previous session, was slightly easier. It felt good because I was no longer afraid of twisting my knee. Somehow, the movement was internalized... I felt good; it was as if the movement came to me naturally.⁸

This illustrates how angampora training combines both meditation and physical exercises embracing this “reflexive, integrated” relationship between the body and the mind and how it positively impacts the learning of the haramba (Kemp 2012: xv).

Moreover, angampora employs imagination as a tool in training. From the first lesson onwards, we were asked to use our imagination when performing different haramba. I had ended my first journal entry with the following statement:

What I did not like was the constant references to violence and invisible enemies that should be imagined when performing the choreography [angampora haramba]. The angampora Master made quite a few references to how certain moves can even be fatal.⁹

The angampora performer needs to imagine fictitious enemies. As the journal entry suggests, this embedded violence was quite distasteful to me. However, I had utilized imagination in other modes of performance in the past, especially when portraying characters on stage.

The role of imagination in acting derives primarily from Stanislavski’s concept of the “magic if” (Stanislavski 1946: 65), which states that the actor must transport oneself into an imaginary situation when building a character by asking the question: What would I do if I were in those circumstances? This supposition helps actors to imagine things that they have not experienced in real life. Stanislavski presents the concept of *if* as a “powerful stimulus to

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Marlon Ariyasinghe 2021, Actors Lab Journal Entry: 28 February

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Marlon Ariyasinghe 2021, Actors Lab Journal Entry: 17 February.

imagination, thought, and logical action” (Moore 1960: 36). An actor must use the most appropriate circumstances created out of imagination to take a character in a given scene forward which “transforms the character’s aim into the actor’s aim” and becomes “a strong stimulus to inner and physical actions” (1960: 36). Lakoff and Johnson propose the cognitive aspect of the magic if in their concepts of “advisory projection” and “empathetic projection” (Lakoff, Johnson 1999: 254) through which people identify and relate to another person and fictitious situations. However, Kemp states that contemporary practitioners of the Stanislavski system have changed “the concept to ‘what would I do if I were the character in the situation?’” (Kemp 2012: 109), which echoes Lakoff and Johnson’s “emphatic projection” in which an actor projects/imagines values of the fictitious character in addition to the fictitious circumstances.

While popular culture has consistently fed the narrative that martial arts are for self-defence, there are no such scruples in angampora. As the previous journal entry points out, the consistent reiteration of how certain moves can maim and cause serious injury was part of the angampora training. Contrary to Moore’s instructions to her actors in her workshops to “think, think and make your body project what is in your mind” (Moore 1979: 42), from my first angampora training session onwards, I refrained from visualizing combat scenes; punches and kicks from imaginary enemies and defending or performing counter attacks on them.

While my progression through angampora haramba was satisfactory, in my seventh week of training, I hit a roadblock – mentioned above in the first paragraph. In the training sessions, we would repeat the haramba one after another, and I was struggling. The trainer attributed my mistakes to a lack of concentration and lapses in memory.

The possible explanation for my predicament is found in Gallese and Lakoff’s paper *The Brain’s Concepts: The Role of the Sensory-motor System in Conceptual Knowledge*. The study states that while we conceive of imagination and mental imagery as being purely psychological or “abstract”, all metaphors are embodied and are grounded on the physical, sensorimotor domain: “We now know that *visual and motor imagery are embodied*” (Gallese, Lakoff 2005: 463, emphasis mine). Therefore, the training of angampora haramba that involves imagination of attackers and specific circumstances point towards the utilization of embodied metaphors which help to learn the angampora haramba.

The concept of embodied metaphor aptly describes some of my personal experiences in performing angampora movements and haramba. In my dismay for what I perceived to be the embedded violence of angampora, I had ignored its embodied nature and the quintessential role

of imagination when training the angampora haramba. My body had memorized the movements without the necessary mental imagery for every movement in each haramba. Theatre practitioners often emphasise the significance of purpose in each movement: “In the theatre, making a movement is never a mechanical act but must always be a gesture that is justified. Its justification may consist in an indication or an action, or even an inward state” (Lecoq 2000: 69). In the same vein, each angampora movement, whether an attack, defence, or counter, has a purpose and accompanies a mental image of an imagined attacker. After understanding the necessity of the embodied metaphors in angampora, I did not confuse different movements from different haramba. I was able to complete haramba from one to five in the ascending, descending, and even mixed order.

Gallese and Lakoff, using multiple research on cognition, explain that the act and the perception of the concept of grasping use the same neural networks: “Our ability to imagine grasping makes use of the same neural substrate as performing and perceiving grasping.” (2005: 456). Through everyday examples such as grasping, these studies, specifically that of Gallese and Lakoff, show how we use embodied metaphors, first in the conception and then in the performance of any physical act.

In my ninth journal entry, I note my struggles with learning the sixth haramba, which involved movements using a staff:

He [Guru Karunāpāla] went over the movements of how to manoeuvre the staff a couple of times. I tried following them but failed miserably. A trainer also came to help and realized I had trouble handling the staff. I found this particular movement where I had to twist the staff from left to right in a swift movement quite difficult.¹⁰

My main challenge with the sixth haramba was embodying the pole/staff by treating it as an extension of my body: “I found this particular haramba quite difficult to grasp, unlike the other haramba that focused on the body. It requires a lot of concentration, and I assume the pole has to be considered an extension of your arm.”¹¹ In my training of the sixth haramba, I had neglected the embodied nature of imagination as proposed by Gallese and Lakoff: “Imagination, like perceiving and doing, is embodied, that is, structured by our constant encounter and interaction with the world via our bodies and brains” (Gallese and Lakoff 2005: 455).

¹⁰Marlon Ariyasinghe 2021, Actors Lab Journal Entry: 31 March

¹¹ Marlon Ariyasinghe 2021, Actors Lab Journal Entry: 4 April 2021.

I had run into the same issue as I had with the third and the fourth haramba – overlooking the significance of mental imagery or the embodied metaphors in angampora training. Each movement must be accompanied by a mental image of countering, defending, or attacking an imagined enemy. Once the embodied metaphors were incorporated into the training of the movements, it became much easier, as I note in a later entry referring to the sixth haramba: “The entire session, except for the last 30 minutes, was devoted to this haramba. By the end, I think I was at a satisfactory level.”¹²

4. Concluding remarks

The theories of cognition, embodiment, and embodied cognition enrich our understanding of performative arts, and they hold the key to a broader understanding of the embodied nature of angampora. The studies referred to in this paper help us understand the embodied nature of our mind and the relationship between metaphors, mental images, and imagination with our physical actions. They provide a framework for interpreting the embodied nature of the performing arts.



Figure 3: Cognition extends beyond our mental faculties and our body to the environment.
Photo: AHEAD DOR HEMS 73 project, University of the Visual and Performing Arts, 2021.

¹² Marlon Ariyasinghe 2021, Actors Lab Journal Entry: 7 April 2021.

There holds promise for future studies of incorporating theories of extended cognition, primarily by principal exponents such as Andy Clark, to angampora: the scholarship that argues the extension of cognition beyond our mental faculties and our body to the environment. Thus, the question posed in the title is not rhetorical. Knowing the dancer from the dance is to understand that the dance is holistic, a marriage of corporeality and cognition. This, in turn, sheds light on the embodied, psychophysical nature of the dancer, the actor, and the angampora artist and the need to explore and understand embodied metaphors in the performing arts.

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An Actor Adapts: Understanding Acting through Digitalization and Psychophysical Training

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Abstract: Art changes and grows with technology. Film is such an artform that has emerged through evolution in technology. The role of the actor in the viewing process of a film production differs from their role in a theatre production. Though a theoretical analysis of the actor from the position of a film vs theatre debate would place the film actor and theatre actor far apart, the roles that theatre and film play in the work of the actor are quite similar. It might be argued that the 'point of performance' is the same. The demands that theatre and film make of the actor might be observed not only through differences in medium, but also through an exploration of acting style. Psychophysical training explores and re-invents the point of performance, expanding the reach and potential of the actor through an understanding of space and energy. These trainings develop understandings of movement and physicality through which style too can be explored. In this paper, discussions into acting for theatre and acting for film were conducted with actors and directors in the Sri Lankan acting industry, and observations into psychophysical training were made with the actors of the AHEAD Actors Lab, that develops an actor training methodology through angampora.

Keywords: Angampora, acting, psychophysical training, theatre vs film, bodymind awareness, stylization.

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1. Introduction

Art is in a state of constant change. From the point of birth of the motion picture, debates and arguments that question and assert the place that film holds as an art form among poetry and painting have been countless. This is particularly the case concerning the relationship between film and theatre. Is film an evolution of theatre? Is film a replacement for theatre? Is theatre a dying form of art? Are film and theatre not even remotely connected? These questions cannot be answered. They can only be explored, unpacked, analyzed through discussion and debate.

This paper explores the primary element that links the two art forms – the actor – or rather discusses the similarities, dissimilarities and influences between theatre and film. Beginning with a theoretical exploration of theatre and film and then progressing into research conducted through interviews and questionnaires with Sri Lankan film actors, this paper will examine the actor's view on acting in the two mediums – film and theatre. Interviews were carried out with actors Mahendra Perera (*Machan* 2008, *Davena Vihangun* 2016, *Gini Avi Saba Gini Keli* 1998), Nimmi Harasgama (*Ira Madiyama* 2003, *Funny Boy* 2020, *The Good Karma Hospital* 2017 onwards), Bimsara Premarathne (*According to Matthew* 2018, *Sons and Fathers* 2017) and director Sumathy Sivamohan (*Sons and Fathers* 2017, *The Single Tumbler* 2021). Thereon, this paper will look into the role that psychophysical training plays in the development of the craft of the actor. How important is awareness and development of the bodymind for performance?

Psychophysical training will be explored through the ancient Lankan martial art angampora. The meaning of the word 'angampora' is to fight with the body. The purpose of the AHEAD Actors Lab is to develop an actor training methodology by extracting the body-training techniques that angampora offers to practitioners.

2. Theoretical supplements

Acting theory today, primarily Western-centric acting theory, leans heavily on the work of Konstantin Stanislavsky as the bedrock for acting theory and actor training methodology. Branching away from the work of Stanislavsky and his students (but never completely departing from it), actors, directors and film theorists alike have developed and altered Stanislavskian methodologies to cater specifically to the new intermediary between the actor and the audience –

the camera. Walter Benjamin sees the interruption of the camera as a loss of the aura of the actor; an interruption of the actor-audience relationship that can never be salvaged, leading to a destruction of the cult value of live theatre:

One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced. These two processes lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition (Benjamin 1969: 4)

Benjamin sees the camera almost as a villain victimizing the actor and taking away their very selves in a merciless digitalization of the body. Though not entirely untrue, it is not as horrible as it may seem. Siegfried Kracauer views this as the ability of the camera to objectively capture physical space in which the actor is now only a component. To Kracauer, the actor has moved away from being the sole carrier of language and narrative (as is the case in theatre) to being an object located in a broader physical context. Could this be considered a ‘demotion’ of sorts? Certainly, the title of the ‘most valuable’ (in the case of film) now falls to the camera. However, the physical context in which the film actor is located and objectively observed also allows them to portray much closer to ‘truth’ than theatre could ever allow. This might be considered an immense luxury by some. Kracauer discusses the ability of the film actor to now solidly illustrate “the many, often imperceptible details that makes up the physical side of his impersonation” (Kracauer 1960: 93) which in theatre, “cannot cross the unbridgeable distance between stage and spectator” (Kracauer 1960: 93).

The discussion of the camera as a viewer of *objects* (rather than *events*) brings an interesting angle to the theatre-film debate. The understanding of the camera as an objective gatherer of data and the theatre audience member as a subjective beholder of language highlights a primary difference between film and theatre. Susan Sontag takes this difference to the extent of identifying cinema as an ‘object’. While a theatre performance is alive, active, and engages with the audience (thereby satisfying Benjamin’s demand for aura), a cinema object is passive, inanimate, and void of agency until the viewer activates it through interpretation. Film is still, while theatre is dynamic. Theatre retains the prestigious title of ‘performance’:

The object aspect of film, the performance aspect of theatre are merely means-means to the experience, which is not only “of” but “through” the film and the theatre-event. Each subject of an aesthetic experience shapes it to his own measure. With respect to any single experience, it

hardly matters that a film is usually identical from one projection of it to another while theatre performances are highly mutable (Sontag 1966: 31).

The stillness of film brings with it a unique quality which theatre cannot offer – the quality of timelessness. The body of the film actor moves through time and is unapologetically unaffected by the context within which it is viewed, be it on the day that it is released, or a century from then. On the other hand, the theatre actor will always be located within the context of the performance. For instance, video renditions of Shakespeare's *Othello* portraying the bodies of Anthony Hopkins and Lawrence Olivier in blackface are enjoyed even today. In contrast, a theatre production casting a white actor painted black as Othello would not see the light of day in the 21st Century.

From this perspective, one can argue that theatre can then only be *renewed* and never *revisited*. A film, however, never changes. The stage actor and the film actor are now as far apart as life and death itself. They are completely antithetical when observed from this theoretical point of view. Are theatre and film as antithetical to the actor, as they are to the theorist? Some would argue that that acting for theatre and acting for film do not carry any primary differences. Others say that style depends not on the medium but on the artist.

Discussions with local film and theatre actors and directors revolved around acting for film and acting for theatre based on their experiences functioning in the two mediums. Their points of view are brought into three topics of discussion: challenges in catering for theatre and film, the question of style, and the role that physical training plays in the development of the body and mind of the actor.

3. Challenges in catering to film and theatre

The most apparent difference between theatre and film to the actor is the actor's physical *target*. In the case of theatre, the actor portrays to a physical, distanced, live audience. The theatre actor must put in work to project a visual and auditory representation to a physically present, yet distanced audience. The camera captures the body of the film actor and brings it to the viewer, eliminating the distance factor that plays into a stage portrayal:

Cinema is something that is projected from the screen itself. It captures your portrayal through the lens, which means that the camera can even come right up to your eyes. This means that the most complicated moments of your performance are captured (M Perera 2021, pers. comm., 29 September: Translation mine).

The ability of the camera to capture and present details in the body of the actor might be understood as an ability to bring the viewer closer to the ‘real’. Much like how Kracauer puts it, the body of the actor is now part of the reality of the objects that surround it. However, while Kracauer sees the body of the actor as an *object* in film, Sivamohan sees the object on film as an actor. “There’s a coffee cup, there’s a phone. You are also one of those things. But they are not objects. The phone is alive, the coffee cup is speaking in a film; in a *mise en scene*” (S Sivamohan 2021, pers. comm., 21 September). Theatre, as Sivamohan points out, relies heavily on the actor as the carrier of meaning and narrative. When the actor is charged with the burden of projecting one’s body to the audience member, intricacies and nuances are lost in translation, detaching theatre from objective realism. The stage actor faces the demand for an ‘outward projection’, while the film actor portrays more ‘inwardly’. Why then, is theatre often called ‘fresh’ and ‘alive’ and ‘closer to the heart’ than film?

Let us say that the play starts at 6:30 and continues till 9:30. Within that time, we will definitely be with that character. Even if we go into the makeup room, the way we rehearsed the character, that print on our mind will be there with us throughout. The performance takes place in the proper order of the scenes (M Perera 2021, pers. comm., 29 September: Translation mine).

In a theatre production, the actor is free to commit completely to the role and immerse one’s mind and body in the narrative, the intentions and objectives of one’s character, which often results in a smoother and ‘deeper’ portrayal by the actor. “I think [on the] third or the fourth day, soon after, I found it very difficult to get out of character... And Ruwanthi was like ‘the performance was great, but you are not yourself’... here it was more like a trance” (B Premarathne 2021, pers. comm., 22 September) says Premarathne in reference to a character she deeply connected with in a theatre production. When asked whether she might have found difficulty in connecting as closely with her character if she were acting on camera, her response was: “Had there been interruptions, I may have not found it as difficult as that to get out of it” (B Premarathne 2021, pers. comm., 22 September).

On camera, one must always be prepared to be brought back to reality, to the super-objectives of the camera, a machine of many needs. The film actor must be prepared for various interruptions based on what the camera wishes to see and reproduce. We must note the sacrifice the actor makes for the purpose of continuity. It is assumed that the loss of continuity in the actor's performance is made up for by continuity in objective realism. But is that always a profitable give-and-take? One may adapt to this situation by lengthening the duration of a take or by documenting the body of the actor in real time from the required points of view. These approaches bring with them their unique challenges. The matter of continuity will challenge the actor through the needs of the production.

How can psychophysical training help the film actor adapt to, and overcome the challenge of continuity? Can the actor develop focus and concentration to maintain a high level of performance amidst interruptions? These are the questions that the AHEAD Actors Lab explores.

4. Acting to style? Or acting for a medium?

In understanding the actor as wanting to be 'in character', we come to an observation that changes the course of this paper from the goal it initially set out for itself. It is the understanding of the 'point of performance'. Though we initially identified theatre acting as 'outward' and film acting as 'inward', Sivamohan sees acting – be it theatre or film – as something coming from the 'same place' despite the medium. Perera maintains a similar point of view, pointing out that though the viewing of the two mediums might be different, the point of origin for the portrayal is the same. The style of acting would differ based on the nature in which the performance is viewed. Harasgama takes this discussion further. She maintains that the difference in style is not at all based on differences between theatre and film, but rather on the Super Objective (Stanislavsky 1964:271-280) itself. What is the view of the director? What is the genre of production? What is the objective of the writer? What style does the actor themselves wish to bring in? To Harasgama, it is these things and not the medium that factor in determining the style of the performance. 'Inward' and 'outward' are not adaptations to medium:

If you're looking at physical theatre, then that is completely different to acting on film. But then if you're looking at a play by Harold Pinter, that is a very internalized form of acting which is very similar to the cinematic style. So, you're looking at different styles of playwrights as well then, aren't you? So, you can't black-and-white say that theatre and film there's a difference, because you're looking at different styles of film. You're looking at action movies. You're looking at film-noir, a musical film like *Moulin Rouge*. They all have different styles and it's how the actor approaches it with the director in the end that makes that particular film or that particular piece of theatre (N Harasgama 2021, pers. comm., 24 September).

From the actors' standpoint, portrayals in theatre and film are different. Frustratingly, they are the same as well. They differ based on style, but this style may not necessarily be based on medium. We learn here that regardless of medium, the element of life does not change at the point of performance. The character on the movie screen and the character on stage are both representations, and this representation takes place through the control and manipulation of the mind and the body of the actor. It is not then a question of the medium in which the actor performs, but one on the style in which they perform. How important is it that the actor can manipulate varying styles? What is the role that psychophysical development plays in being able to manipulate acting styles based on objectives? These matters are explored through discussions into psychophysical training and its influence on the development of the actor.

5. Psychophysical actor training methodologies

Recent explorations into psychophysical training for the actor have taken place through Indian martial arts and dance forms *Kalarippayattu* and *Kathakali*. Phillip. B. Zarrilli discusses the influence that he felt when studying these art forms from an actor's perspective. He describes it as an "internal energy" (Zarrilli 2002: 184) which he can control, through consciousness of his bodymind. It is a strange yet exciting discovery; something that the AHEAD Actors Lab wishes to further:

I was able to enter a state of heightened awareness of and sensitivity to both my bodymind/breath in action, as well as the immediate environment. I was simultaneously beginning to discover how not to stand still, while standing still (Zarrilli, 2002, p. 184).

The actor, consciously or unconsciously, is in constant pursuit of the 'internal energy' that fuels a portrayal. How are we to access this?

There has never been an academic training for the performing that I do. But where the training has come, I think is – I did classical ballet when I was quite small. I started singing, so various other art forms gave the discipline to performing... and this is unconscious. Only now, when I reflect on it, that I know that some of the discipline has come from there (B Premarathne 2021, pers. comm., 22 September).

The discussion on physical training was approached from the subjects of space and energy. Premarathne credits her success as an actor in film, theatre, and voice to her strong foundation in performance through ballet, ballroom, and Kandyan dance. Much like Zarrilli, Premarathne discusses internal energy, identifying it as something given and taken through an understanding of Self and Other: “What I call it is an exchange of energy. What you do as a performer is that you channel your energy... So that energy, on the one hand, you need to create within you... so you need to have that awareness of how you are going to use your body. So protecting that internal energy is important” (B Premarathne 2021, pers. comm., 22 September).

Sivamohan discusses the idea of Self and Other through body and space. As actors, we must identify, observe and interact with our own bodies and the bodies of others. This is a renewed understanding of language; a discussion, conversation through one’s entire being; a unique sense that must be cultivated to portray the otherwise subconscious. This is psychophysical:

Where I would say physical development is important is, to merge with and identify space... when you go from one space to another, you claim it outwardly, but you also claim your body... a lot of our people, they are not used to touching. We are not allowed to touch our bodies. And touch other people’s bodies. At least, not in allowable ways. How do you share? How do you touch? So, you define your space through others, it is not a self – centered thing (S Sivamohan 2021, pers. comm., 21 September).

The challenge of coming into contact with other bodies, relating it to self, giving and receiving energies are overcome through psychophysical training and angampora. The angampora artist performs in close physical proximity with other bodies. They interact with others through various mental and physical exercises. The importance of psychophysical training has been downplayed in popular actor training methodologies. Theatre practitioner and AHEAD Actors Lab participant, Lihan Mendis had this to say about the role that physical development plays in actor training:

I believe we often fail to realize just how important physical training is to an art where the body is the primary vessel of expression. As Archilochus says, “We don’t rise to the level of our expectations- we fall to the level of our training”. Applied to performance, I believe this quote reflects the truth that training is the key to opening doors of opportunity and, on a deeper level, connects us to who we are- to a higher level of consciousness which is a gift that keeps on giving (L Mendis 2021, pers. comm., 28 September).

The understanding of acting as something more than a subjection of the body to the will of the mind is apparent through the discussions that have taken place so far. Developing awareness of the self, energy and a feeling for space are crucial in a performance regardless of the medium of performance. We are yet to discover ‘how not to stand still, while standing still’. Through the work of the Actors Lab, perhaps we have discovered that we can. The current developments with regard to psychophysical training are explored with the actors who are a part of the Actors Lab. Pradeep Ramawickrama had this to say when discussing the tools he used for his latest role, which he performed to the camera:

Something that was very important to me is angampora. It’s not that I used angampora for that role, but my mind was exercised through angampora. For my physical reactions, my emotions, for my printing power, imagination, creativity. Doors that were shut for a long time were quickly opened up through these exercises (P Ramawickrama 2021, pers. comm., 29 September: Translation mine).

The development of one’s focus is something that all performers experienced through angampora. Something extremely noteworthy is how actors find it challenging to articulate their experiences. Much like Ramawickrama’s, most explanations took place through similes and images. Referring to her angampora training, contemporary dancer Kanchana Malshani says: “How do we keep our mind in one place? How do we listen to our bodies? These are the things that I learnt the most from that place” (K Malshani 2021, pers comm., 30 September: Translation mine).

The AHEAD Actors Lab explores the relationship between the body and the mind and aims to carry the actor to a higher level of consciousness, a deeper understanding of the actor/character Self. It explores the relationship between body and space, body and energy. It explores the development of “single minded determination and purpose of spirit” (Bowman 2019: 3) for the embodiment of character and the development of portrayal:

As a theatre practitioner, I made associations between angampora and theatre: the intense concentration and discipline, attention to detail, rehearsed choreographic movements, being conscious of one's body and having control (M Ariyasinghe 2021, pers. comm., 29 September).

Using energy to train angam movements was a good incentive for my performance. I think training built my body-mind awareness, that is why I felt that incentive feeling... once, I [did] selected movements of katas at the Payagala beach. At that time, I felt how my body-mind work together with the music of the sea and how sound affected my being. As Stanislavski has mentioned, that this moment of experiencing the body-mind consciousness is a rare asset and a "happy moment" for the actor (C Darshika 2021, pers. comm., 30 September).

Though Sontag, Benjamin and Kracauer might discuss vast differences between theatre and film, our discussions point out that the point of performance is, despite differences in technicalities, quite the same. As Harasgama points out, the divisions in methods of acting might begin not with a discussion of film and theatre, but rather with a discussion of styles. This is a subtle but important difference, when some styles such as *Nob* acting being very 'outward' and dynamic, while other styles might be more 'inward' and far more subtle. The functions of the two mediums point out that one medium may find a certain style of acting more appealing than another. How then, is the actor to develop a command of style? To manoeuvre between and cater to the demands they face in their profession? The AHEAD Actors Lab, through the development of a psychophysical form of actor training, brings the actor to a deeper state of consciousness of one's self. It contests current dualistic perceptions of the body and mind as two separate entities and explores the development of a single psychophysical unit through corporeal training. Who knows what continued exploration might offer?

The understanding of the role that art plays in our lives changes continuously. Its influence on life is infinite, and its influence on our lives continues to grow. Film as an art form is in constant motion and development in adapting to a world growing closer together and also larger than ever before. The actor, earlier defined solely through theatre is now redefined through the camera stressing on greater need for variability in style. The actor adapts, the actor changes, the actor grows. The actor evolves further with the union of body and mind to elevated levels of performance, and will continue to portray ever-changing life that begins and ends with art.

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F(r)ight: Angampora as a Method to Fight Stage Fright

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Abstract: Stage fright is a common condition experienced by actors during a performance. Bella Merlin, while exploring her own experience, emphasizes the importance of confidence, awareness and dual consciousness for actors to cope with stage fright in *When Consciousness Fragments: A Personal Encounter with Stage Fright in Performance*. Since martial arts have been used as a technique to develop confidence and awareness, this research explores whether angampora, the Sri Lankan martial art training, can be used as a method for actors to manage stage fright. The main objective of this research is to explore the capacity of angampora in developing awareness and confidence. This research employs a mix method. It studies the written literature to identify the characteristics of stage fright and angampora. Moreover, taking the AHEAD DOR Actors Lab as a case study, this research examines the lived experience of three actors who underwent angampora training at the Actors Lab and testimonials of Guru Karunāpāla, the angampora master. These reflections are analyzed through ‘state of readiness’ by Phillip B. Zarrilli and the suggestions proposed by Bella Merlin to overcome stage fright. The reflections of the actors claim that they have encountered a transformation of their confidence levels and awareness after practising angampora and how it has affected their performance practice. After analyzing the capacity of angampora in developing ‘readiness’, sense of the surrounding, dual consciousness and the nature of playing with an imaginary ‘other’, this study suggests that angampora training could support actors as a method to fight stage fright.

Keywords: Angampora, actor, dual consciousness, confidence, readiness, stage fright.

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1. Introduction

In 2015, I was in the middle of a solo performance named *Black*.¹ The play was going smoothly, but at the climax of the play, I missed a line. I stopped. Everything slowed down. I could see everyone in the audience, even the person in the last row of the balcony despite the darkness. I collapsed. Everything went literally ‘black’... I wanted to run away from the stage. I said, “Sorry” to the audience and left the stage.

This is a true incident which happened to me when I was in the third year of my BA of Performing Arts at the University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Sri Lanka². I had never experienced something like it before, and later I learned that the condition is called ‘stage fright’. Though many performers claim the need for tension to execute a good performance, Steptoe states that it is a misconception and the condition of stage fright is different to this ‘tension’ (1982: 538). Awareness, confidence building and activating dual consciousness are considered key elements of managing stage fright (Merlin 2013, Zakaira, Musib, Shariff 2013). Since martial arts have been used to develop confidence and awareness, this study discusses the capacity of angampora, a Sri Lankan traditional martial art practice to reduce stage fright. The main objective of this research is to explore the capability of angampora in developing awareness and confidence. Further, this study aims to examine the characteristics of stage fright and study the use of angampora martial art practices in acting.

This research employs a mix method. First, it studies the written sources to explore the characteristics of stage fright, the use of martial arts in actor training systems and angampora. Then, taking the AHEAD Actors Lab as a case study, this research examines the lived experiences of three actors through interviews and journal entries. Further, this research gathers the testimonials of Guru Karunāpāla, the angampora master to study the training system at the Actors Lab. The reflections are analyzed by the concept ‘state of readiness’ of Philip B. Zarrilli and methods proposed by Bella Merlin to manage stage fright.

¹ This play is a monologue, written and directed by Rithmika Wanniarachchi in 2015.

² This particular incident happened when the play was showcasing at Academic Thespian Theatre Festival organized by the University of the Visual Performing Arts, Sri Lanka

2. Stage fright: A brief overview

According to psychoanalysis, stage fright “is a universal human experience that occurs with varying intensity in everyone who stands before an audience” (Gobbard 1979: 390). It especially affects individuals in various endeavours, such as public speaking, sport, and the performing arts in dancing, acting, and music making (Studer et al. 2011: 3). This condition is also known as “performance anxiety” (Top Doctors n.d, Studer et al. 2011, Hinckley 2008, APA 2020, Powel 2004). In line with Freudian distinctions between “fear”, “fright” and “anxiety”, Glen O. Gobbard³ mentions that the term “stage fright” misinterprets the phenomenon of this particular experience. Instead, he suggests the “stage anxiety” as the accurate term to describe this condition (Ridout 2006: 56). Also, when stage fright is associated with both psychological and physiological symptoms, it is known as somatic anxiety (Kenny 2011: 10). According to clinical psychologists, one-third of the individuals with performance anxiety or stage fright are comorbid with other disorders such as depression or dealing with psychological conflicts (Powel 2004: 803). Several studies define stage fright as a characteristic of social phobia and social anxiety (Powel 2004, Anxiety and Depression Association of America 2016). But Powel (2004) negates this argument by presenting the difference of characteristics of social phobia and performance anxiety. For instance, in social phobia, self-expectation is very low, while self-expectation is high in performance anxiety.

However, stage fright is very common among student or amateur actors, and the following symptoms can appear in stage fright during a live performance: 1) Physiological changes that take place within the body, including increased heart rate, sweating, shortness of breath, shaking, numb fingers, clammy hands, dry mouth, upset stomach, headache, dizziness, nausea, and diarrhoea. (2) Psychological/emotional conditions such as intensified apprehension, fear of failure, irritability, and panic. (3) Cognitive problems include loss of confidence, lack of concentration because of interfering thoughts about the performing situation, memory lapses and interference in the creative process. (4) Behavioral changes include neck and shoulder lifting, trembling of knees and hands, and muscle tension (McGrath cited in Hague 2016: 25).

In *Stage fright, Animals and Theatrical Problems* (2006), Nicolas Ridout argues that stage fright is a phenomenon of modernity (40). He draws upon the ideas depicted in *The Metropolis and*

³ An American psychiatrist and a psychoanalyst (Gobbard 2015).

Mental Life by Georg Simmel to explore the influence of modernity on stage fright. He emphasizes the following: 1. Development of acting as a career; 2. Rise of an audience who buy a ticket to watch performances; 3. Emergence of naturalism; 4. Technology as facts that affect the growth of stage fright within performers. Further, he mentions that unconsciousness, theatrical naturalism and electric lights are the three main aspects of modernity which influenced theatrical productions. For 'life-like' theatre, the proscenium arch stages were promoted, and the experience of theatrical productions was like observing the general day-to-day life through the 'fourth wall'. Electric lights are a fundamental element in creating this illusion, and it differentiates the space from public and the performance. Thus, this illusion of realistic theatre demanded actors 'becoming' characters or 'live-in-the-part' rather than representing or portraying characters.

In the West, Konstantin Stanislavski was the prominent actor trainer and theorist who emphasized the need of awakening the subconsciousness and brought the concept of 'experiencing' to acting. In his book, *An Actor Prepares*, Stanislavski explains an experience of a student actor who went through an accidental moment of stage fright during a live performance (Stanislavski 2016: 9). The incident took place as he stepped into the electric lights from the darkness of wings. The lights have blinded him, and that blindness had created a boundary between the auditorium and himself. When his eyes adapted to the lights, he started seeing the audience through the darkness and felt the audience's attraction towards him, which escalated his fear and tension. According to Stanislavski's comprehensive description, the performer has experienced his face and hands turning into stone, throats becoming constricted, sound moving to high notes and hands, feet, gestures and speech becoming violent during a moment of stage fright (ibid). Further, Stanislavski states that though the actor is public surrounded by people, at the same time actor is in solitude because the actor is placed in a small circle of attention (Stanislavski 2016: 72). This is what he calls "solitude in public". In addition, he says "during a performance, before an audience of thousands, you can always enclose yourself in this circle like a snail in its shell" (ibid). Accordingly, the performer is more secure within her/his sphere of "solitude in public" and what the performer experience as stage fright is more like the feeling of vulnerability, insecurity and discomfort of a snail coming out of the shell or out of its comfort zone.

While describing the same experience, in *When Consciousness Fragments: A Personal Encounter with Stage Fright in Performance* (2013), Bella Merlin describes that her consciousness fragmented

into thousand pieces when she found that she was looking straight into the eyes of a man in the audience. In the light of Antonio Damasio's definition on 'consciousness'; the sense of self in the act of knowing, Merlin assumes that she was filled with a sense of herself caught in the act of knowing the actual reality of the communal presence of actor and audience, rather than the fictive circumstances of the character (2013: 59).

Merlin identifies three moments in fragmented consciousness: 1. Dislocation of actor and character, 2. Producing new inner monologues; 3. Experience of deluge of survival instincts (Merlin 2013: 60). Wilson and Roland also mention that the alarm reactions that occur at this moment would enhance survival if we were confronted with a Tiger in a jungle (2002: 48). On the other hand, this statement highlights the resemblance between the feeling of confronting the audience and confronting a predator. At that moment, the performer comes out of the theatrical reality into the actual 'reality'. The performer starts to feel the audience as a threat. That moment draws back the performer into human primitive survival instincts, which signal the body to escape from the situation. But this threat is not a physical attack. Rather it threatens human pride and increases the fear of humiliation and disgrace (ibid). Similarly, Kaplan claims that 'materialization of the piece of reality' begins stage fright (1969: 62). Further, he argues that the performers "fantasy of an audience' and the feeling of 'interacting as an exhibitor to onlookers" (Kaplan 1969) cause stage fright.

In light of these notions of stage fright, the presence of an audience and the identification of the reality can be identified as significant aspects of provoking stage fright. Merlin proposes that an actor should have a balance in 'dual consciousness' or develop two senses of awareness, the sense of being on stage and the sense of being in a fictional/dramatic situation, to overcome stage fright (2013: 61). On the other hand, Zakaira, Musib and Sharif state that confidence building and strengthening the mental state is needed to cope with stage fright (2013: 233). Thus, enhancing confidence to face the audience and building awareness of being on stage are key factors to reduce stage fright.

3. Use of martial arts in acting

Martial arts have been used not only as combative arts, rather as an exercise to build confidence and self-esteem. For instance, karate is a sport for building self-confidence, balance, coordination,

discipline and social skills. Further, karate has the ability to make the trainee stronger from the inside out (Christensen 2020: online). Adam M. Croom discusses the influence of martial arts in positive emotions, engagement, relationship and meaning (2014).

Theatre practitioners, such as Philip B Zarrilli, A. C. Scotts and Jacques Copeau, have incorporated martial arts, especially Asian martial arts training, in their actor training methods (Zarrilli 1995). In the article titled *On the edge of the breath, looking* (1995), Philip B. Zarrilli discusses cultivating the bodymind of the actor through martial arts (181-199). Further, he discusses how meditation and martial arts carry a practitioner towards the psychophysical state of 'readiness' and how readiness is applied in acting. The term, 'readiness' refers to "being dropped in, being centred, being available, being ready to whatever is called for, being aware, being open" (Creely 2010: 219). According to Cole and Chinoy, it is a state of "repose, calm, relaxation, detente, silence, or simplicity" (cited in Zarrilli 1995: 185). Additionally, in 2012, Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe, Sreenath Nair and Deborah Claire Procter have designed a model including an Indian martial art training called *Tattu Marma* to reduce stage fright among actors (2012). That study proves that martial arts have the capacity to reduce fear and develop the confidence of the actors through testing heart rates and behavioural patterns.

There's a lack of written sources about angampora. Traditional angampora masters maintain the knowledge and the practice from generation to generation. Yet, the novel angampora schools have published writeups on angampora on their official websites. It should be mentioned that these internet sources contain a commercial value rather than an educational value.

Angampora is a traditional Sri Lankan Martial Art form. The etymological breakdown of the term angampora is hand-to-hand (*angam*) combat (*pora*). Due to the lack of literature on angampora, the origin of the form is not clear. Nevertheless, it is believed that this form is an indigenous combative art which was originated from *Yaksha* (Demon) tribe in Sri Lanka thousands of years ago. (Tale of Ceylon n.d; Lakpura 2021, Angam 2020). Opposing this idea of 'indigenous', P. Soma Palan (2019) argues that the term angampora is an adaptation of the Tamil term *Angampor* and it has a South Indian and Hinduism influence.

However, angampora is not only a martial art practice but a combination of self-defence techniques, sports, exercise, meditation techniques and spiritual practice, ayurvedic healing element and astrology (Lakpura 2021; Tale of Ceylon 2020; Mudalige and Dewapura 2021). This

art of combat was famous during *Uva-Wellassa* uprising⁴ and was banned by the British Governor, Robert Brownrigg, during the colonial period in Sri Lanka (Tale of Ceylon 2021: online, Liyanage *et al.* 2021). The ban was only lifted in 2019 (Tale of Ceylon 2021: online), and with the establishment of angampora schools and the emergence of TV shows and films based on angampora training/warriors, this martial art became popular among Sri Lankan youth. According to Mudalige and Dewapura (2021), the emerging nationalism among the present young generation of Sri Lanka is the reason behind this huge attraction towards angampora (Dewapura 2021: 394).

The website www.angampora.com states that angampora teaches how to live and encounter each moment with open eyes, open mind, posture and tenacity. Further, it claims that angampora has the capacity to expand the sensory awareness of the practitioner and re-pattern the dysfunctional and habitual physical and emotional reaction to threat, stress, fear and anger.

4. Actors Lab (AHEAD DOR HEMS 73 Project): Case Study

Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Sri Lanka, launched a research project funded by AHEAD DOR HEMS 73, titled, 'Lamp in a windless place' in 2019. The research project aims to produce a novel actor training method inspired by the angampora traditional combative arts in Sri Lanka. Under this project, 16 young emerging performers are training angampora to test the capacity of angampora to develop a new actor training method. This team consists of theatre and cinema actors, mime artists, and traditional and contemporary dancers. Both female and male performers learn angampora at the Actors Lab under the veteran angampora master in Sri Lanka, Guru Karunāpāla. Most of the artists have not practised angampora before. During this training session, each trainee had to engage in a rigorous process twice a week and trained the twelve preliminary hand and foot movements *ath haramba* and *paa haramba* of angampora, including two elbow cicks (*cholle pahara*), two punches (*digguti pahara*), two slaps (*kane pahara*), two hand kicks (*ath dandu pahara*), two leg kicks (*paa pahara*) and two side-kicks (*pathi pahara*). The collective movements of these foot and hand movements are called *sellam*. All the movements are individual activities, and these movements consist of attacks, defence and counter attacks.

⁴ A revolution for freedom conducted by natives of Kandy, Sri Lanka against the British colony in 1815.

According to Guru Karunāpāla, ‘patience’ is the key to this combative art form. Each practitioner has to have commitment and faith towards angampora. He mentioned that angampora is a single unit of Buddhism, meditation practice, astrology, architecture, ayurvedic medicine and combative art. Each training session starts after worshipping Buddhā⁵, God *Vishnu*⁶, God *Katharagama*⁷ and King *Rāvana*⁸. Then, the practitioners meditate for a while. Guru Karunāpāla asserts that these activities help calm the body and the angampora maduwa and bring the practitioner’s focus into the present moment. Further, he talked about how confident he is about his own capacity, practice and teaching. He mentioned that angampora could enhance the capability of reading the surrounding and others’ bodies. He explained how each movement in angampora sellam is interconnected with the balance of the body.



Figure 1: Guru Karunāpāla demonstrates basic warm up exercises at Actors Lab, Mirihana, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka.
Photo: AHEAD DOR HEMS 73 Project: March 2021.

⁵ It is believed that angampora practitioner has to be a Buddhist person.

⁶ Though God *Vishnu* is a Hindu god, Sri Lankan Buddhists worship him as a god. It is mentioned that Lord Buddhā gave responsibility to God *Vishnu* to protect Sri Lanka before his death.

⁷ Also known as *Murugan* in Hinduism. In Sri Lanka the same god is known as *Katharagama*.

⁸ King *Rāvana* is Sri Lankan mythical king who lived 30000 years ago. He is considered as the founder of angampora. Moreover, he is a famous character in *Mahabharath* in India as a villain who stole Queen *Seetha* from *Raama*. But for Sri Lankans, this king is a hero who had special powers which includes having ten heads.

For this particular research, three actors: including two male actors and one female actor, among the practitioners at the Actors Lab, were interviewed about their experience of training angampora. These three actors: Biyanka Amarasinghe, Antoinette Thilakshini and Stefan Tirimanne, were selected based on the purposive sampling method. All the three actors are in 30-33 age range and emerging young actors working in Sri Lankan stage, TV and Cinema. They were asked about how the training affected them and how they used angampora in their performances to develop their confidence and awareness. In the journals that they maintained during the sessions and interviews, they mentioned that they encountered a difference in their focus, awareness, energy, stamina and body language. Further, they claimed that they had built confidence compared to the first days of their training process of angampora at Actors Lab.

Actor, Biyanka Amarasinghe said,

In angampora sessions, we were asked to do very challenging movements that we have never done before and I was very frightened to do those things at first. For instance, the Master asked us to jump over a pole. Every day he raised the pole higher a bit than the last day. Later, I noticed that I have gained the confidence to jump over that pole by challenging my fright... I am not much of a religious person. But I felt that meditating expanded my sense of the space (Biyanka Amarasinghe 2021, pers. comm. 8 September).

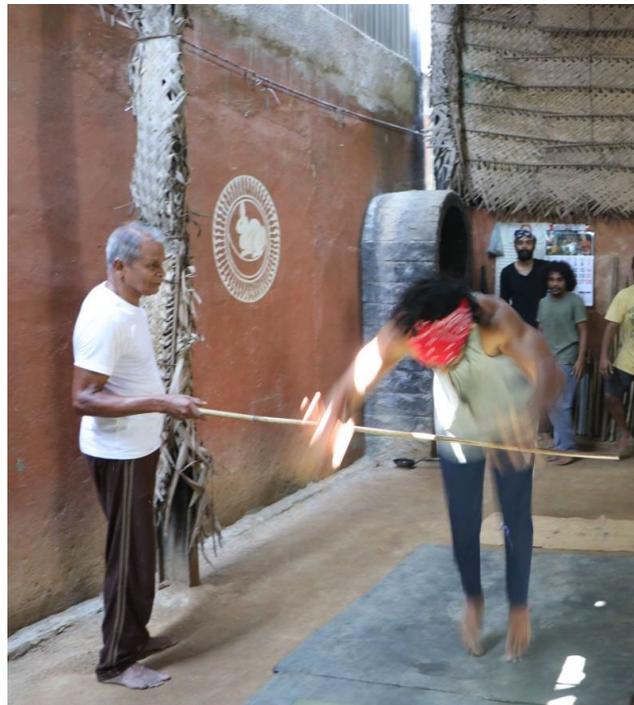


Figure 2: Biyanka, trying to jump over the pole at Actors Lab, Mirihana, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka.
Photo: AHEAD DOR HEMS 73 Project, March 2021.

Since stage fright occurs due to a lack of confidence in facing the audience, strengthening the confidence level is highly important. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, ‘confidence’ refers to a ‘feeling or consciousness of one’s power or of reliance on one’s circumstances’ (“Confidence” n.d). Also, it is not an innate and fixed characteristic but an ability that can be improved over time (Psychology Today 2021). With the statement of Biyanka, it is clear that angampora training has forced him to do what he was scared of and has improved his confidence levels and sense of space by repeating the same challenge.

Actor Antoinette Thilakshini reflected,

I love the fact that I am learning angampora. It has lifted my spirit into a better place and has given me confidence...one day during a shoot I had to perform an argument followed by some physical fights with my co-actor, who played the role of my husband, according to the story. During that fight, my co-actor pushed me to the ground and I suddenly got on to my feet without having any time to breathe. My right hand automatically grabbed a fist full of sand while I got up and I threw it on my co-actor’s face... When I rethink the incident, I feel my body remembered the second sellama from angampora, it defended itself without my conscious decision (Antoinette Thilakshini 2021, pers. comm. 10 September).



Figure 3: Thilakshani practicing punch at the Actors Lab, Mirihana, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka.
Photo: AHEAD DOR HEMS 73 Project, March 2021.

Quoting Jacques Copeau, Zarrilli states that developed bodies become capable of adjusting themselves and giving themselves over to any action they may undertake (1995: 185). Similarly, angampora training produces a disciplined body with techniques and methods to either attack or defend in any circumstance. Thilakshini didn't know what her co-actor would do. But after his unexpected action, Thilakshini's trained body has performed the second sellama/haramba immediately without getting nervous. This case indicates that angampora training has trained her body to react immediately without getting anxious or panicking. Since stage fright is provoked in an unexpected moment, this 'promptness' is an essential quality to deal with it. As Merlin explains, the first thing that happens during a stage fright is disconnection from the character. Thus, the actor needs to act immediately to fix the problem and continue with the play.

Actor Stefan Tirimanne mentioned:

While I was practising angampora at Actors Lab, I was engaging in a stage play named *Antique Kadayaka Maranayak* (2021) (Death at an Antique Shop). I am the first actor who appears in the play, and the play starts with my narration. It is a huge narration explainin' the play's back story, which runs for about seven minutes straight. Thus, I am responsible for the grip of the audience and the tempo of the play. Narrating the story without losing lines while maintaining the tempo of the play was very challenging to me, and it made me so nervous. Therefore, each day before the play, after I got into my costume and makeup, I started practising angampora *sellam* while reading my lines. I challenged myself to be conscious of lines while allowing the body to move in another movement pattern. It brought me some kind of a focus, relax and confidence within me' (Stefan Tirimanne, Pers. Comm. 24.08.2021).



Figure 4: Stefan training angampora at Actors Lab, Mirihana, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka.
Photo, AHEAD DOR HEMS 73 Project, March 2021.

Stefan has modulated his angampora practice into a warm-up exercise, and he used it parallel to his line memorization. Then he moves his body according to the haramba and his mind recites his lines at once. Then he needs to unify the body and mind and be conscious about both the movement and lines. This ability to work within two parallel yet separate conscious entities is called dual consciousness.

5. Discussion

Zarrilli states that Asian martial arts practice develops the awareness of the physical and mental presence and relation to the other and the surrounding (1995: 279). Similarly, angampora, the traditional Sri Lankan martial art, empowers the practitioner with physical sense and with the practice, the practitioner begins to trust her/his intuitions while gaining the ability to read the physical energy, emotional states and the intension of those around her/him (Angam 2020). Biyanka's testimonial reflects that angampora has expanded his confidence level of facing challenges while expanding his sense of space. Thilakshini's experience shows that her embodied practice has driven her to take prompt actions to defend herself without panicking. This is what Zarrilli calls the state of 'readiness' (1995). Stefan has used angampora training not only as martial art training but as an exercise to open up his awareness during the performance. His expression denotes that he has tried to separate his consciousness into two regimes: lines and body. He has tried to activate the dual consciousness while forcing the consciousness to focus on the lines of the play and angampora haramba simultaneously, which are in two different contexts. As Bella Merlin mentioned, developing confidence and activating dual consciousness are techniques of managing stage fright. This dual consciousness provides the actor with the ability to be in reality while being in the fictive moment. Accordingly, these reflections of actors prove that angampora training can expand the awareness and confidence of the actors.

According to the characteristics, the presence of the audience is a major aspect of provoking stage fright. Thus, Bella Merlin also proposes rehearsing with the audience as a technique to defend stage fright. It implies the need of anticipating the nature of the audience. In angampora training, the practitioner uses her/his both hands when doing the exercises. But always, the left hand acts as the opponents' particular body part. For instance, during a *ath dandu pabara* or a punch, the practitioner punches her/his own left hand, and the left hand is imagined

as the jaw of the opponent (see Figure 3). Thus, angampora practitioner always imagines the presence of an enemy or an opponent in front of her/himself. Although the exercises are individual activities, the practitioner trains her/himself with an imaginary 'other'. In the context of acting, the audience becomes the 'other' of the actor. Hence, the actors who train haramba have already played in front of an imaginary audience. As Richard Schechner says, 'preparations are a constant state of training so that when a situation arises one will be ready to "do something appropriate"' (cited in Zarrilli 1995: 189). Therefore, by preparing with an imaginary 'other' or an audience through angampora training, the actors could 'do something appropriate' if they encounter fear in front of an actual audience.

6. Conclusion

Stage fright occurs when a performer senses the audiences' presence. Then, according to Bella Merlin, the performer dislocates from the character and gets panicked after being conscious of the actual reality. She/he starts to feel the need of getting away from the stage after feeling survival instincts. Merlin claims the need of activating 'dual consciousness': being aware of both fictive and real circumstances at once. Further, she proposes that the actor should develop confidence and improve the awareness to overcome stage fright. Philip B. Zarrilli argues that martial arts expand the state of 'readiness'. According to the actors' reflections at the AHEAD Actors Lab, angampora training has developed the confidence, energy, promptness, readiness and supports to activate the dual consciousness. Guru Karunāpāla debates about how angampora training helps the performer to achieve the sense of self and surrounding by training continuously. In line with these testimonies, this research emphasizes the capacity of angampora training to improve the qualities needed to challenge stage fright. Further, it argues that the nature of angampora, practicing in front of an imaginary 'other', could support reducing the fear of facing the actual audience during a performance. Hence, this study suggests that angampora training could be used by actors as a technique to fight the performers' stage fright.

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Essays

Guru Karunāpāla, his Teaching and the AHEAD Actors Lab: A Brief Encounter

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Abstract: This paper discusses an ancient Sri Lankan combative arts tradition: angampora, Guru Karunāpāla and how angampora is taught. Guru Karunāpāla is one of the oldest angampora masters in Sri Lanka who engages in passing down this martial arts form he has inherited from his grandfathers to the future generation, in his angam maduwa. Based on the observations made during the three months in Guru Karunāpāla's angampora school located in Mirihana, Sri Lanka, this paper aims to analyze how angampora is taught and how the sixteen emerging actors and dancers selected for the AHEAD Actors Laboratory learn this martial arts form. This further examines the difficulties the participants encountered and the strategies they have followed in overcoming them. The participants selected for this study thus are the sixteen actors and the dancers of the AHEAD Actors Lab. Using a participatory observation method, the analysis was done with the data gathered from the observations, interviews held with the Master and the participants during the training sessions and the journal entries of the actors. The analysis of the study thus sheds light on the methods employed in teaching and learning of angampora as well as the difficulties that can be encountered and the strategies that can be used to overcome them.

Keywords: Angampora, Guru Karunāpāla, AHEAD Actors Lab, angam maduwa.

1. Introduction

Angampora is an indigenous martial arts form in Sri Lanka with a long history that dates back to the era of the *Yakkha* tribe¹ some 5000 years ago (Joseph 2019: online). This combative art form

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¹ Yakkha Tribe is one of the four tribes that inhabited Sri Lanka and is said to have ruled the country before Prince Vijaya and his settlers arrived in the country.

has gained popularity over the past couple of years, especially after being demonstrated in the Sri Lankan movies and tv series that were woven around historical stories. Now in different areas in the country, angampora is taught by different masters who have either inherited it from their forefathers or have mastered this martial art for a long time. This paper discusses how angampora is taught by Guru Karunāpāla, one of oldest angampora masters in Sri Lanka, who conducts angampora classes in his Mirihana *Angam Maduwa*.² This paper further aims to address how the sixteen actors selected for the AHEAD Actors Lab³ worked under Guru Karunāpāla, learning the basic forms of angampora, and the difficulties they encountered as well as the strategies they have followed in overcoming them. The data is gathered from the observations made from February to April, during which the angampora training was conducted at the angam maduwa, the interviews I had with the Master and the participants during the sessions and the actors' journal entries are employed in analyzing the methods used in teaching and learning this corporeal art form.

2. Histories

According to Deraniyagala (1959), the origin of this martial art dates back to two hundred years before Christ (cited in Liyanage-Honcharova 2021: 5). Though it is difficult to place the exact period of its inception, angampora is known to every Sri Lankan as an ancient Sri Lankan combative art that has been used in wars and battles against the invaders to the country like the Dutch and the Portuguese. One such instance is the Battle of *Mulleriyawa*, in which the entire army of Portuguese was wiped out by the Kandyan guerilla warfare known as angampora (Marshall 2020: Online). The growth of interest in Ceylonese youth to practice angampora during the colonial period was so intense that the British realizing it a threat, took extreme measures like burning down the angam madu in the country and shooting the angam masters below the knee to prevent its expansion. Though Governor Robert Brownrigg banned angampora in 1817 (cited in Liyanage-Honcharova 2021: 5), this martial art survived within a few families and has now become part of the Sri Lankan culture and intangible heritage.

² Angam maduwa is the place where Guru Karunapāla conducts his weekly classes. It is a hut built with coconut thatch on the roof and the floor is covered with refined mud.

³ An Actors Laboratory developed by the AHEAD DOR HEMS 73 (Accelerating Higher Education and Expansion-Development Oriented Research) project funded by the World Bank and the Ministry of Higher Education for the research project 'Lamp in a windless place'.

The term angampora is created by combining the two Sinhala terms *anga* which means body and *pora* which means fight or attack. This term, therefore, carries the meaning of unarmed combat. Even though prominence is given to unarmed combative techniques and movements, weapons are also used in angampora. As Guru Karunāpāla explains, there are 64 types of weapons used in angampora which include staff, swords, daggers, belt sword and spear and they are only used by experienced and well-trained angam fighters. These weapons, according to Guru Karunāpāla, cannot be bought from any shop, but have to be made by a blacksmith. Apart from the unarmed fighting techniques like locks, grips, strikes and blocks and the use of weapons, meditation and ayurvedic knowledge on healing have also been integral subareas in angampora. Another unique feature in angampora is the nerve point attacks, can paralyze or even kill an opponent when administered properly. However, it takes rigorous training of many years to learn and master the nerve point attacks, and only the best disciples of the master or the close relatives like the sons or nephews are taught all these nerve point attacks.

This ancient indigenous martial arts form has been passed down from generation to generation through the teacher-disciple system or *gurukul*⁴ system. Though the combative art is imparted from generation to generation orally, the indigenous medicinal facts, knowledge on the nerve point attacks have been preserved in palm leaf manuscripts. The training back in the day took place at the master's residence. The students resided in the master's house and learned this martial art while helping the master with his other chores as a way of showing devotion to the master. The students treated the master with utmost veneration, and the master was closer to them more than their own families (Liyanage-Honcharova 2020). Angampora was so connected to the Buddhist religion and the Sinhalese culture that according to Guru Piyumal (Joseph 2019: online) in the early days, before enlisting an apprentice for training the angam masters to read their horoscope to make sure they have the skill to learn this martial art. However, these customs have now changed, as today, anyone who is willing to learn angampora can train under a master, and the students do not have to reside at the master's place to learn angampora.

⁴ A pedagogical approach in which students permanently stay at the master's home, serving him and supporting his daily routine while learning the art during leisure time.



Figure 1: Guru Karunāpāla teaches ath haramba for Actors Lab member Lyudmyla Honcharova at angam maduwa, Mirihana, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka.
Photo: AHEAD DOR HEMS 73, March 2021.

The seniority or the level of expertise in angampora trainees is decided on how long and how dexterously a student trains under the master. Unlike in other martial arts found in the West, in angampora there is no belt system or badges to denote the hierarchy among the students. As common to the Sinhalese culture, all the seniors, the students with a longer period of training experience, are treated with respect by the novice students. Even the relationship between the master and the senior students become close and devotional. Once the most prominent students win the master's trust, they are permitted to conduct the training under the master's supervision.

3. Guru Karunāpāla

Guru Karunāpāla is an 80-year-old angampora master who has been teaching this combative art for more than five decades in his Mirihana angam maduwa. He inherited angampora from his paternal and maternal grandfathers, who were angampora masters of the Kotte tradition. Since

the age of six, Guru Karunāpāla has trained under many angampora masters for more than 50 years. He conducts angampora classes in his Mirihana angam maduwa every day for different groups of students. Not only locals, but some international students also train angampora under him. His knowledge of angampora and indigenous medicine is passed down to his son, grandson and a few loyal students. However, according to Guru Karunāpāla certain advanced *haramba*⁵ like *Walas Sellama*⁶ in which the movement of a bear is adapted into a form of angampora are not taught to every student in fear of the students using them for different purposes other than self-defence. It is also a way of preserving the indigenous arts within a particular culture. Apart from this training place in Mirihana, he has permitted his prominent students to teach angampora in the Kurunegala area as well, where he makes several visits within a year.

As angampora incorporates Ayurvedic healing methods, the angampora masters had the knowledge of indigenous medicinal practices as well. Guru Karunāpāla has also learnt these healing methods, which he applies when his students get minor injuries like sprains during the training. During the three months of close observations at the angam maduwa I have witnessed several times him treating the students who get minor injuries by applying some medicinal ointment and massaging the injured area pressing the nerve points. According to the students, these remedies have actually helped reduce the pain and gain quick recovery. He would also recommend using other simple indigenous herbs later on at home as remedies for the injuries.

4. How angampora is taught

Based on the observations made during the three months the training sessions were conducted in Mirihana angam maduwa this section discusses how angampora is taught by Guru Karunāpāla. Before starting the training sessions, Guru Karunāpāla lights an oil lamp and incense in a Buddhist altar built at a corner inside the angam maduwa. The floor and the walls in this training space is clay with a roof that is thatched with woven coconut leaves. Angam maduwa, where this combative art is learnt, is considered a sacred place. Therefore, anyone who enters the angam maduwa should remove their footwear, and every student enters the maduwa should worship it as a way of showing their respect to the place. This is also done with the hope that the students

⁵ Harmaba are detailed patterns of body movements practiced alone or in pairs

⁶ Walas Sellama is a haramba used in angampora which is formed by adapting the movements of a bear.

would not face any injuries during the training session. They would first worship Lord Buddha and then Guru Karunāpāla seeking his blessing before training. According to Guru Karunāpāla's explanation, these rituals are followed at angam maduwa because "angampora as a martial art is tightly linked with religious aspects since the original purpose of this martial art practice was to protect the Buddhist religion and land" (Liyanage-Honcharova 2021: 8).

One of the most important essences of angampora training according to Guru Karunāpāla is the mind and the ability to be conscious of one's own body and mind. The training thus starts with a meditation session including breathing exercises followed by a round of warm-up exercises. The ability to keep the concentration throughout the training, therefore, is essential in grasping the body movements easily. It also helps to memorize the different forms and movements in angampora. The breathing exercises thus are done at the beginning of the training with the intention of enhancing the concentration of the learners. Guru Karunāpāla explains:

The main thing in meditation is bringing your mind to one place. That is the main thing. If your mind is everywhere, you cannot learn anything, nor can you do anything". He further explains how meditation is done before starting the training: "When we say meditation, we sit on the ground, and meditate for at least 8-10 minutes. We think, may I remember the things that I learnt here, may I not forget, I think of all my teachers when I meditate. When we do this, we receive protection, and also, we very rarely forget what we learn when we meditate (cited in Honcharova 2020: 3).

Further, it helps in enhancing the patience of whoever learns angampora. As Guru Karunāpāla explains, patience is an important trait to be improved in a person. While angampora trains a person to improve this trait, one who has developed this can have the strength they did not possess earlier (Honcharova 2020: 3). Therefore, through angampora one can develop the right amount of patience which is beneficial for mastering martial art as well as for their daily life.

The round of warm-up exercises that follows the breathing exercise session includes running in circles, different acrobatics in a circle and stretching exercises done alone, in pairs or in fours. These stretching exercises include a form called *Dandukanda Puuttuwa* which is done in fours, where four trainees are asked to sit in a circle on the floor, stretching their legs in front of each other into the circle. Their legs are then put on each other's legs in a way that they all get locked, and they are asked to hold the hands of the person next to each other. Then they are asked to lean back, stretching the legs away from the block. This particular stretching exercise, as explained by Guru Karunāpāla, enhances core strength, coordination and helps the proper blood circulation in the veins of the legs. Then the main session of the training starts, and the students

follow the routine. A novice student at the angam maduwa is first taught the ath haramba⁷ which includes various hand coordination and body movements. In angampora special attention is given to the footwork. The feet are moved in the shape of a square in dragging movements. The trainees are instructed to imagine the square in their minds and consciously move the feet in a square without looking at them. Until these basic feet movements are learnt precisely the next steps or the forms are not taught to the students. Therefore, the method of repetition which helps to internalize the movements in the learners' memory and in their habits is heavily used in teaching this combative art form.



Figure 2: Actors performing dandukande puttuwa at angam maduwa, Mirihana, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka.
Photo: AHEAD DOR HEMS 73 project, March 2021.

The training sessions are carried out by the well-trained senior students of Guru Karunāpāla under his close supervision. The exercises and other haramba in angampora are first demonstrated by the trainers and while the students follow them, Guru Karunāpāla observes each student closely. Whenever a student makes mistakes, he mediates and demonstrates the correct form and instructs how the mistakes should be corrected. He would also explain to the

⁷ Ath haramba is a set of exercises that a novice should learn in the beginning of angampora martial art training. According to Guru Karunapala, there are nearly 25 ath haramba practices currently been taught at the angampora maduwa by himself.

students the purpose of moving the legs and hands in different forms. Once the explanations on the forms and the movements are given to the students, most students identify their mistakes immediately and consciously try to correct them. As the five haramba I observed during the three-month training period have similarities, I believe explaining the purposes of each movement in each form can help to reduce the students getting confused about the movements.

The training ends with a cooling down session, though there are no specific exercises used in angampora as cooling down exercises. As observed, in some instances, there are mutual massage systems that students use after finishing their daily routines of angam sessions. Student helps each other to massage their bodies. However, as the Master explains, there is no particular cooling down method in angampora training. After finishing their session, they have a small break, drink water and walk about the angam maduwa. This walking in a relaxed manner provides cooling down for the body. As Guru Karunāpāla emphasizes, the most important thing is to absorb what you learn during the training sessions and not allowing your mind to roam here and there (Guru Karunāpāla 2021, pers.comm., 8 March).

5. AHEAD Actors Lab

The AHEAD Actors Lab comprises sixteen emerging actors and dancers who were selected to train angampora via an interview. They have been learning angampora under Guru Karunāpāla at his Mirhana angam maduwa for three months from February during which the sessions were conducted thrice a week. These participants were taught five basic haramba, one form with the staff (*Polu* haramba) and twelve attacks and twelve blocks during the three months they trained at the angam maduwa. During this period, close observations were made on how the actors work at the Actors Lab, particularly the difficulties and the challenges the participants encountered while learning angampora.

As explained in the previous section, the first few weeks of the session were dedicated to learning the footwork and the basic ath haramba which was repeated several days until the majority of the actors grasped the techniques correctly. Even though most of the participants could learn and perform the movements after a repetitive session, there were still slow learners who had to be taught and corrected individually. The reasons behind this, as I have observed were having previous injuries with chronic pains that hinders performing certain movements, lack

of concentration paid during the training, low attendance, or low kinesthetic ability in learning corporeal arts. They all, however were enthusiastic and interested in learning the techniques and performing them without any errors.

The mistakes any participant made during the sessions never escaped the scrutinizing eyes of the Master, who would then ask the participant to execute the form and point out their mistakes. These slow learners were instructed to practice the form alone while being observed and corrected by either the Master or a trainer until they performed it precisely. The struggling participants would repetitively practice the movements alone until they could memorize and execute the movements correctly. While observing them, I have always noticed a comparatively more focused and conscious mood in them than when practising with the other more competent participants. As some of the slow learners have mentioned in their journals, training with the other actors make them lose their concentration and they tend to get all the steps confused:

The last hour was completely devoted to doing the third form as a group. It was helpful but at the same time detrimental. I kept being distracted by the movements of the other actors since each would do the same form at different paces. We would start together and continue the first movements together, but then it would change. I found this to be quite difficult since the moment I would spot another actor; my own movements were disrupted (M Ariyasinghe 2021, Actor's Journal: 7 March).

While observing the actors, I noticed that the participants who have learnt either traditional Kandyan dancing or another martial arts form were able to easily learn and memorize the movements, the forms and the exercises compared to the actors with no such experience. Among them was an actor and a dancer who had learnt the Kerala based martial art, *Kalaripayattu*. He seemed to learn and memorize the forms, the techniques, and the blocks and attacks taught during the three months faster than the other participants. When all the actors were asked to perform the forms together, he would perform them without any mistake. A sense of confidence and focus was always visible in him, thus he tended to stand out among the others. Towards the end of the three months, progress in all the actors who participated in the training sessions regularly could be observed.

6. Conclusion

As mentioned in the above sections, the Sri Lankan martial art, angampora, amidst the obstacles posed by the British, was preserved through generations by a few angampora masters to the present day. Guru Karunāpāla is among the few who has inherited this martial art from his forefathers and has dedicated his life to preserving this indigenous martial art. As described above, this 80-year-old master spends his day in his Mirihana angam maduwa teaching this combative arts form to his students with the sole purpose of passing this tradition to the future generation. His devotion to angampora, which has become a major part of his lifestyle could be witnessed during the three months I spent observing how Guru Karunāpāla teaches this martial art to the sixteen actors and the dancers in the AHEAD Actor Lab. Further, the participants' effort into learning a few selected basic haramba, exercises, blocks and attacks during angampora training was observed, and the challenges they encountered were discussed in the above sections. Based on the observations, interviews with the Master and the participants and the journal entries of the participants, I could identify that the actors who participated in the training regularly with a proper intention of learning angampora improved over time, overcoming the difficulties they encountered at the beginning, compared to the participants who were less focused and less regular in attendance.

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A Conversation with my Body

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1. Preamble

I started my artistic journey learning Sri Lankan traditional dance styles when I was 10 years old. Later, I continued my education and practice as a performing arts student at the University of Colombo (undergraduate studies) and at the prestigious Chitrasena Dance Academy. The Academy's intense physical and theoretical training helped me to become a professional Kandyan dancer. While at the Academy in 2017, I had the opportunity to join a choreography camp held by the Goethe Institute in Sri Lanka. This was a turning point in my professional life as I stepped into the world of Butoh and contemporary dance for the first time. This experience was transformative as it helped me to change my understanding of the concept of dance and my body.

2. Codified body

When I was at choreography camp, I started questioning the norms and rigidity of my traditional dance training. The rules and routines were restrictive, and I wanted to break free to truly push the limits of my physical self and creative mind. It was about freedom. Freedom as a creator of movement and the power to shape the ineffable. I struggled as my body resisted to unshackle itself from over a decade of the rigorous conformity and cultural uniformity of Sri Lankan traditional dance. As I pushed myself to break away from this reality, something unique started to

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happen. I was listening to my body. I was talking to it. I was having a conversation with my body. It was beautiful. The space I was in did not matter – whether it was big or small – I could move in it like a bird released from a cage. It was a rebirth. I felt light as a feather.

As a traditional dancer, I wanted to look beautiful and have perfect technique. I wanted to entertain. But I was not seeing my body from within. I wasn't one with my body. I was going through the motions taught by someone else. I was a puppet. I found this lack of self-discovery in traditional dance troubling, and the choreography camp ignited a spark that propelled me on the path to enlightenment as a contemporary dancer. For the first time in my life, I asked, 'Who am I?'. I was also beginning to explore the relationship between body and space. Improvisation was meditative, and this newfound freedom as a performer fueled my creative self in delightful ways.



Figure 1: Kanchana Malshani, performing a piece titled 'See you don't see me and its double' in an empty apartment in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Photo: Harry A. Haller, 26th August 2021.

For 17 years, my body and I have been held prisoner by the many years old cultural bulwark known as Sri Lankan traditional dance. Kandyan dance tradition is one of the most important dance traditions in Sri Lanka. Proper posture and its technique are the hallmarks of that dance tradition. I have always maintained the inherent form in Kandyan dance tradition, and my body has been trained in that form since I was a child. In traditional dance, my body has always represented the tradition of dance. My soul was confined to traditional dance

and overwhelmed my soul. As I began my journey as a contemporary dancer, I spoke to my soul. My body no longer became the agent of traditional dance but the agent of my self-expression. That is, I no longer had to dance for tradition but for myself and freedom. It is not the freedom of metaphysical existence; it is about the freedom of my life. I no longer wanted to think about how my body would represent the audience and the correct posture technique. I carried my body all over the space through my life experiences, joys, and pains. I don't want to represent dance. I want to represent what I understand as Dance. Contemporary dance and its inherent improvisational aspects set me free.

3. Angampora and my body

Studying the ancient Sri Lankan martial art form known as angampora reminded me of my previous life as a Kandyan dancer. Having been trained in Kandyan dance for a long time, I realized that angampora movements which were familiar to my body, embraced my body very lovingly. Every time I practiced angampora forms, my body was able to repeat the shapes and techniques without any strangeness. Some of the formal, linear, straight movements of the feet in angampora forms, like in Kandyan dance, were very close to the body. The basic foot movement in angampora is called *Adiya*, which is used to move in the space. Maintaining the straightness and linearity of the foot movements is one of the hallmarks of angampora, similar to Kandyan dance. All the hand movements in angampora are also based on the foot movement called *adiya*. Some of the linear features of angampora's hand movements were also no stranger to my body. In angampora training, I realized that the Kandyan dancer who lived in my body in the past is still alive, even though she is not involved in traditional dance today.

There are many similarities between the two forms of physical movement. Angampora was developed by men to be used in combat and as a form of exercise and general physical wellbeing. But primarily, angampora was for self-defense. Its focus is on the complete and total physical submission of an opponent. But as in Kandyan dance, the science and movement encompassed in angampora are graceful and purposeful.

Like in Kandyan dance, angampora has physical beauty, and considering angampora is a martial art, a sense of lethal beauty. angampora is not always modelled on the body of the fighter but on the location of the main organs of the opponent's body. In combat with the opponent,

the body should always be kept active, and the body should be open in all directions. During attacks and counterattacks, several simultaneous movements are released from the body in different directions and have to move not only into the fighter's space but also into the opponent's space. Opening the body to cover not only in one direction but in all directions, very fast foot and hand movements are energetically released from the fighter's body into space, and the movement patterns of those hand and foot movements travel across space and create various patterns throughout the body. Often no definite clarity can be seen in these movements, and the same ambiguity reveals the deadly and mysterious nature of angampora. Especially when engaging in martial arts, one should pay full attention to one's body, space, and all movements, and all the actions that take place there affect one's life. The combat martial art form angampora is not for entertainment but for protecting one's life from the opponent. The energy released through angampora takes on a very lethal nature as well as it provides a different definition of beauty in a way that is a sense of lethal beauty.

Like Kandyan dance, angampora has a structural basis and a rhythm. Because angampora is a form of lethal combat, it is essential for the practitioner to have a wide degree of freedom of movement and the skill to improvise, which is not possible in Kandyan dance. In combat, your opponent and his strategy will be unpredictable, and your survival depends on your skills, or more specifically, on your skills to break away from the framework of the foundational movements and improvise. For an angampora fighter to be successful, they need to harness the energy within themselves and release it outwards in one powerful and graceful motion. But traditional dancers are trained to gather the energy outside of one's physical self and channel it inside their bodies. Angampora trains the practitioner to be aware of his surroundings while intensely focusing on the situation at hand and productively harnessing the energy within to overcome a potentially deadly situation.

4. Body and metaphysics

I constantly study the relationship between mind and space. The body is a sensory object. It is the receptacle of life. I have now learned to see the outside world through this amazing organ called my body. So far, as a contemporary dancer, I have learnt to pay attention to the many millions of neurological impulses inside me and, through this process, better understand the

potential of my physical being. Humans also exist metaphysically as a collection of experiences and memories absorbed through the physical body.

When I perform improvisation or performance, I travel within myself to connect with an external reality. Here, I separate my metaphysical existence from my body. I force my mind to have no control over the movements of my limbs and the body, thereby extinguishing a formidable barrier between mind and space. I cease to exist as a human being, and I am one with the natural world. A metamorphosis from existence to nothingness.

In angampora, the metamorphosis is reversed. The martial art instils in the practitioner a heightened sense of alertness. It makes you intensely aware of a raging energy within, and you will have the power to exercise precise mental control over how that energy is channelled outside through your limbs to deadly effect. In angampora, the mind is your master, and mindfulness or living in the moment is key.

Now, the gestures and motions of angampora have become a part of my collective metaphysical existence. I feel that sometimes, angampora movements emerge from my subconscious when I am performing improvisational dance movements. The movements of angampora are a new addition to my vocabulary of motion.

5. Dance and Actors Lab

I joined the AHEAD Actors Lab as a dancer. My solo performances and creations are based on varied forms of movement. There were many other dancers and actors in the Actors Lab. They were of varying skill levels, and there were very distinctive styles and qualities of movement between career dancers and actors.

But whatever their skill level and ability, the challenge in angampora is to match the energy of the opponent and eventually overcome him. This meant that every participant inside the angampora ring had to release considerable energy during sessions. I absorbed that energy through my sensory self and used that force of nature to float as light as a piece of cotton wool amongst my fellow angampora students. I was feeding off the life force released by the others in the ring with me and translating that energy to a positive mind-altering experience that gave me freedom.

The workshops provided me with an opportunity to closely study the pressure points on the body – an integral part of angampora – and their relation vis-à-vis the senses and one's physical existence. I understood that the martial art of angampora is all about using disciplined movement to destructive effect with a single-minded purpose. And for me, this aspect is the key takeaway from the Actors Lab angampora sessions. That irrespective of your training – be it as an actor or contemporary performer – understanding the ability to harness the energy within and without is essential. All of these movements simultaneously target the structure of the opponent's physical body. There is a lethal potential in angampora movements to cause harm, injury, or even death.

As a contemporary dancer, I was always interested in intensely connecting with my body. For me, angampora is not only martial arts based on the physical body but also has a deep connection with the mind. Mental concentration is an integral part of all angampora movements, and the study of angampora has great potential to deepen our understanding of the internal connection between mind and body. In angampora training, I was constantly immersed in the deep dialogue between embodying the energy of the mind and releasing that energy into the metaphysical world. That training awakened the interior of my body even more, and I observed that, as a martial art, angampora allows one to connect, and it has a great potential to feel the whole energy in the space around us at one moment around your body. It is a meditation. It is a profound dialogue between mind and body. It is an extraordinary creation of a wonderful object called the body and the power of nature.

Actor's Day at Angampora Maduwa

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From my early childhood I always felt unknown.

Unknown to the family I was born into, unknown to the surroundings, unknown to my own body, the skin and features. This made me curious about my own existence. I often look at myself in the mirror and wonder how I have this long face, curls, long slender legs, wide hips and thin hands. Also, I've been trying to realize that why we feel about certain things in a certain way.

This realization was first introduced to me by religion. Religion and its orthodox practices led me to find the free-willed actor in me.

Acting has always something deeply personal for me. It's an engagement with myself. Even after a performance, I would spend the rest of the time acquiring, practicing skills and reading. My life has changed after I became an acting practitioner. I can never walk the way I used to. My mind was conscious of each step I took and the way my body balanced the weight in feet. An actor must practice each movement of her/his performance. It's a daily practice. As humans, we walk, sit, carry things, shake hands, and protect ourselves from harmful exterior occurrences. Yet, we don't actually practice any of those actions or movements. They are performed without a prior plan and, influenced by our surroundings.

Have you ever thought of the gestures we make while we sit, walk, kiss, eat, agree, disagree are in that particular way? Why do we do things in the way we do? These gestures are believed to be natural. But if you closely monitor each of these movements, they are determined mostly by culture, social status and profession.

Different cultures determine different body techniques, how people walk, with shoes or without shoes. Whether they shake hands on agreements or hug each other, these gestures are performed daily unconsciously without any effort in the daily context of the body. But in a

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performance, there is a different body technique. According to Barba, it is possible to distinguish between a daily technique and extra daily technique. (Barba 1995:15-16). Daily techniques are gestures we do unconsciously in our daily life. For an example, we Sri Lankans mostly eat rice for all three meals in a day. And we do not use cutlery. We eat by hand using fingers to mix the rice with curries. And it's a daily technique. Its effortless yet gives the maximum outcome. On the other hand, if we are to practice eating the rice with chopsticks as Sri Lankans, it needs more practice which is an extra daily technique. The more daily techniques are unconscious, the more functional they are. The first step in discovering what principles governing an actor's life might be lies in understanding the body's daily techniques can be replaced by extra daily techniques which do not adhere to the habitual conditions of the use of the body.

My angampora training was mainly and thoroughly focused on footwork, kicks and hand movements performing the *haramba* (exercises) in angampora. The foot is always placed on the ground. When we walk, in our day-to-day life, we do not drag our feet, but the katas in angampora require the dragging of feet for every movement.

Each day we practiced repeated the same foot movement, and the next day the hand movements at the *maduwa* (hut). Each day my body was able to step in to the right position. Once you complete an angampora movement accurately it leaves symmetrical squares drawn in the sand by our foot on the ground at maduwa.

Back then, I lived in a very urban area with multicultural surroundings. Yet we were all bound by one thing, which is the ocean. I was closer to the ocean than trees and mountains. Ocean was the whole nature to me. I observed that it produces wave after wave, doing the same thing but each time differently. You really cannot visit the same ocean twice.

I realized the elements of art through nature. The movements involved in angampora also require a lot of repetition and practice. As trainees, we had to spend a lot of time and energy practicing a simple footwork to make it smooth and precise. I often wonder, "have I spent this much time and effort on "practicing" walking as a child?" Usually, daily body techniques do not require much effort yet, we can obtain maximum results. On the contrary, extra daily techniques require maximum effort and energy for a minimal result.

At a certain point, I felt bored and wanted to do something else, a different exercise routine or something. But then again, I made up my mind, and told to myself that I should be disciplined enough to adhere to this session. I continued practicing the haramba no matter how much I wanted to do something else I kept focusing on the angampora routine.¹

Once you get that practice into the muscle memory the whole movement flows like water. But why it is so necessary to perform these movements with such accuracy? I found the answer while I was practicing the haramba at maduwa. “Those movements: they defend me”. I could either get injured or worse get killed by my opponent if I don’t perform the movements accurately. That’s the whole purpose. But when it comes to an actor who uses angampora techniques in her/his performance it’s beyond just defending yourself. It is an emotion that you try to convey to an audience through movements. The gestures we use in our daily life usually convey a message. We use those daily techniques to communicate. On the other hand, extra daily practices lead to information. It creates an artistic form out of the actor’s body.

Practicing the haramba regularly helped me to overcome my inhibitions as an actor and the resistance I had towards doing the same thing again and again. A well-trained angampora performer should be able to move on its footwork with such ease. The training has also made me a confident actor. It gives me a sense of confidence in each move I make on stage. Also, the angampora training made me more aware of the connection we build with the floor/ground.

Practicing angampora haramba with other actors created so much energy and allowed one to navigate that elevated energy to the whole movement. The energy helped us to maintain our breath. A full breath allowed us to perform the movements accurately. Unlike practicing alone, when practicing with other actors, we could correct ourselves by observing each other.

On the other hand, practicing the haramba alone required the imagining of an opponent, one outside of your body, trying to attack you. This practice allowed me to be mindful of my existence in that particular moment, to be present in my whole self, from head to toe, fingertips, hair and breathing, all coming together to perform a specific movement. The focus I gained through these techniques also improved my psychological well-being.

As actors, we talk about achieving a relaxed body and mind in order to put on a meaningful performance. Several actors and training schools have their own set of exercises to achieve body relaxation and mind relaxation. Some practice meditation, yoga, walking, swimming,

¹ Thilakshini Rathnayake 2021, Actors Lab Journal Entry: 17 February

drawing or other such activities in order to become calm and focused. The calmness and the focus of the mind have always linked with a bodily function. For an instance, if we are sad or stressed, we go for a walk or a swim or writing. The psychological ease comes when you focus your mind on a physical action.

Practicing angampora haramba as a daily practice allowed me to focus on my every step, hand movements; breathing and having an opponent imagined made it feel like a meditation. I was very conscious of each movement and breathing as well as the movements and breathing of my imaginary opponent. To better understand the behaviour of my imaginary opponent, I sometimes asked my fellow actors to attack me since imagination grows with knowledge.

Learning a combative art form will not just make you a fighter it makes you an artist and a mindful human. This is what I learnt from my time in angampora training. When you are focused enough to accept your reality you can put on any mask and get on to the stage.

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Angampora Challenges Gender Identities in Practice

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Abstract: Martial arts provide a fascinating setting for investigating the construction and performance of gender and exploring the possibility of challenging its normative manifestations. Gender difference penetrates everyday life and re-entry to the theatre gendered actors – male and female. These genderized roles in theatre is a re-establishing the binarized relation between man and woman in theatre. According to the feminist theorist Judith Butler, gender is an act that brings into being what it names: in this context, a “masculine” man or a “feminine” woman. There is no gender identity prior to language. In line with this, this paper asks, what principles can be identified and applied to overcome the ‘problem’ of gender within traditional martial arts training systems? Would it be possible to train actors using Sri Lankan martial art angampora and challenge the gender identities in practice? Drawing on comparative gender studies on mixed martial arts and theories of gender, this study will explore the place of gender in martial arts and how the training of angampora challenges gender identities. The methodology of this study consists of conducting interviews and critically analyzing the responses of actors who were part of the Actor’s Lab. This study will also incorporate my experiences as an angampora trainee in the Actors Lab. The data collected confirms that angampora training has helped to enhance the actors’ self-awareness, self-confidence and each actor could find their unique rhythm.

Keywords: Angampora, martial arts, gender, femininity, actor training.

1. Introduction

The AHEAD DOR HEMS 73 research project at the University of the Visual and Performing Arts (UVPA) aims to develop an actor training methodology derived from angampora, a Sri Lankan martial art form. The research focused on the angampora tradition which is a dominant

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martial art form in Sri Lanka. A number of UVPA alumni and Sri Lankan actors worked closely with the research team and a team of angampora trainers to learn angampora. Sixteen female and male actors were recruited to the Actors Lab. The research team organised a series of training sessions with the selected actors and artists allowing them to undergo rigorous training under the angampora master, Guru Karunāpāla.

The study outlines the relationship between two fields, namely martial arts studies and gender studies. In this paper, gender and martial arts are analyzed together to address questions about the actor training process. My participation as an angampora trainee at the Actors Lab further enriched this study. In terms of methodology, I conducted a questionnaire and interviews with five actors. Most of the actors who participated in the interviews and quizzes had no long-term training in angampora martial arts.

Etymology of angampora explains how its name was created for instance, ‘angam’ (angé) means the ‘body’ and ‘pora’ means ‘combat’. Physical fighting can occur either with or without weapons in this angampora tradition of martial arts. (Liyanage 2018: 5).

The body plays a crucial role in the construction of gendered differences, and it is through our embodiment of gender, the realities of such differences become reified. With regard to boxing, Joyce Carol Oates describes it succinctly, “a boxer is his body, and is totally identified with it” (Oates 2006: 5). What is the amount of compensation a woman is required to pay for this reason? Exactly where does the error lie here? My objective in this paper is to explore how angampora martial art challenges gender identity.

2. Martial arts and gender

What is the necessity to establish the masculine soul (Subject) and the feminine body (Object)? According to Tadashi Suzuki’s opinion, without gender identities, cultured societies are those in which the perceptual and expressive abilities of the human body are utilized to the fullest extent possible (Matsuoka 2002: 163).

Linda Tompkins’ and Michael Ian Bore’s paper “Gender Performance in Women’s Mixed Martial Arts” (MMA), attempts to fill the gap in comparative studies of women and mixed martial arts. Their paper explores how gender is constructed and performed by women who engage in MMA. Their main focus is to explore how women navigate and “perform gender” in

the patriarchal subculture of MMA. Tompkins and Bore examine three female fighter types and explore different aspects of gender performance that help signify these aspects. According to this paper, three female fighter types are “Feminine inclined female Fighters,” “Neutral female fighters,” and “Masculine inclined female fighters” (Tompkins, Borer 2014: 1). They conclude that martial art is also performative:¹

My findings show that some women take a masculine role to maintain “gender order” and that gender is “scripted” and not concrete. This suggests that gender is fluid in nature and that the symbols and characteristics of gender can be negotiated and changed (Tompkins, Borer 2014: 1).

They further suggest that gender is an “explicit performance” for many people, and there is heavy criticism against almost all women in MMA. They explore another possibility of future study through the experiences of women who assume the “dominant” or masculine role to maintain the “gender order.”

3. Butler and angam maduwa

Judith Butler collapsed the sex/gender distinction to argue that there is no sex that is not always already gender. According to her, gender is not something one is. It is something one does, an act, or more precisely, a sequence of acts, a verb rather than a noun, a “doing” rather than a “being” (Butler 2002: 33). Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being (43-44).

For Butler, there is a difference between performance and performativity. She underlines the significance of this difference in a 1993 interview. Performance presupposes a pre-existing subject; performativity contests the very notion of the subject (GP: 33).² Either a “masculine” man or a “feminine” woman. This is because gender is an act. Language constitutes gender identities, and therefore there is no gender identity prior to language. It is not that identity “does”

¹ The study that is more closely related and most often referenced is West and Zimmerman’s 1987 study on “Doing Gender.” West and Zimmerman believe that gender is performative, therefore it is a routine accomplishment in everyday life, done in and through interaction and in the presence of others. Since gender is performative, it creates differences between men and women. (Tompkins, Borer 2014: 1).

² Butler also explicitly connects her use of the concept “performativity” to the speech act theory of J. L. Austin’s *How To Do Things With Words* (1955) and Derrida’s deconstruction of Austin’s ideas in his essay *Signature Event Context* (1972) (Salih 2006: 56)

discourse or language, but that discourse and language “do” gender. During angampora training at the Actors Lab, this concept was linked to my experience. First, let me share a few notes from my actor’s journal where my research question originated:

In the Actors Lab angampora training session held on 8 March, the Master³ stated that if someone trains in angampora, whether male or female they will empower their bodies with the same ability. When I questioned: “Are there any particular differences in angampora training for male and female?”. He said “no.... the same training session for everyone” (G Karunāpāla 2021 pers. comm., 8 March).

In the training session on 10 March, Master taught a technique which helps if a girl is in trouble. He said that “if a man catches you, you can bite near his wrist and then he will be neutralized” and pointed to a spot in my hand (G Karunāpāla 2021 pers. comm., 10 March). Guru Karunāpāla told me that if I learned to fight with *Yashtiya*⁴ (staff), I can use an umbrella, in the same manner, to react if I got into trouble as a girl in a public place, and this incident reminded me that I am a woman. These guidelines were only for female practitioners and not for male practitioners. The Master taught us self-defense techniques taken from angampora. However, I wondered, with the emphasis on self-defense techniques for the female participants at the Actors Lab that if the primary reason a woman should train angampora to avoid being physically abused by men?

“Girl” was the term used by the Master to refer to female actors in training. Even the phrase *lamaya* (child) is a reference to the gender politics at work in Sri Lankan society, and how the term infantilizes women. Butler argues that,

The naming of the “girl” is transitive, that is, initiates the process by which a certain “girling” is compelled, the term or, rather, its symbolic power, governs the formation of a corporeally enacted femininity that never fully approximates the norm. (Butler 1993: 232)

Further, she argues, it is therefore not a matter of choice, but a matter of forcible citation of a norm, one whose historical complexity is inextricably bound up with normative relations of discipline, regulation, and punishment (Butler 1993: 232). All of the above indicated to me that I am often identified and named as a woman in the society in which I live. It is evident from the

³ Master is a reference to the angampora trainer Guru Karunāpāla.

⁴ *Yashtiya* (staff) is one of the major weapons in angampora.

above philosophical facts that it is a more complicated situation than the one that is often called male⁵

4. Actor's experience

I selected five actors who have undergone angampora training at the Actors Lab. My own observations and discussions, as part of the Actors Lab, have helped me to explore the connection between angampora and gender roles in martial arts practice. I conducted semi-structured interviews with actors Lyudmyla Honcharova, Bandhuka Premawardhana, Thilakshini Rathnayake, Kanchana Malshani and Pathum Dharmarathne to understand how they perceive angampora training and how this training affected their performance, body and daily lives.

The following broad questions were posed to the actors to help me to contemplate how their understanding of gender difference was being challenged in angampora training:

1. "What effects or changes have they noticed in your daily life since you/they started practising angampora?"
2. "How has this martial art training affected their social life as a woman or as a man?"

The gender/sex binary refers to the concept that gender is determined solely by sex. Therefore, different exercise routines and motivations are carried out by men and women for fitness. In general, most women exercise to keep a thin body, whereas men exercise to build muscle. These are the archetypical body images that are used in the daily commodified bodies. Market forces determine the ideal bodies for men and women through advertising and ideologies created through these discourses on body shapes, body image and well-being. However, I have observed that when angampora martial art is employed to maintain physical fitness, it can challenge gender stereotypes defined by society.

⁵ Men's bodies may be appropriated as well as women's, but appropriation is not gender neutral either. Women's bodies are appropriated more often and more completely. The appropriation of women's bodies may be equally violent, but these are differences we are only beginning to observe and can hardly articulate (Frank 1991: 95)

5. I: Physical competence

In the angampora training session held on 14 March, we started with warm-up exercises⁶. It was a heavy warm-up session. Some of the exercises were hard for me, and other female actors felt the same but the male actors seemed to be executing most of those exercises with ease. When female actors were paired up with male actors to practise combat forms, they assumed their physical strength was too much for us to handle, so most of them controlled their body energy in front of female actors.⁷ In support of the uniqueness of the practical application of angampora training, Pathum Dharmaratne, a versatile dancer trained in traditional and contemporary dance forms, said that both men and women could often be trained to fight to get rid of the “I can’t fight with men” mentality that they have developed as women (P Dharmarathne 2021, pers. comm., 4 September). Thilakshini Rathnayake. An actor based in Colombo, shared the same view as Pathum, suggested that angampora be included in the school curriculum as a practical activity and that every child should be trained in it. Because doing so provides the physical and mental circumstances for children to resist gender development education from primary education. She further argued:

I was very much afraid and I couldn’t do the jumps and rolls initially but now I can. It was like I was able to understand the technique, and I was able to go into that zone and do the roles. (T. Rathnayake 2021, pers. comm., 7 September)

Dharmaratne highlights the aspect of working with others. Working with an opponent makes a person better understand the other, especially in performative arts like acting and role playing. Similarly, angampora explores the interconnection and communion with others. (P Dharmarathne 2021, pers. comm., 4 September). Bandhuka Premawardhana, pursuing a masters through the AHEAD Project, argues that when they practice angampora at the angam maduwa, the division between male and female is blurred. However, he further identifies a distinction and a difference between bodies when a man and a woman are coupled to practice combat:

The maduwa is always full of energy and excitement, not to mention a strong sense of comradeship. The *ath sellam* seem to blur distinctions between whether someone is a guy or a girl, since it doesn’t seem to matter. But it is not completely fluid either. The energy, the feeling in

⁶ Exercises included activities such as jumps, rolls and creeps.

⁷ While I was practicing angampora fighting with Harshana Jayasinghe (one of the actors in the lab), I experienced that. But while this often happens, it cannot be concluded that it always happens that way.

doing an *ath sellam* fac to face with a guy and with a girl and different. I do not know how to describe these differences. I feel like it is part of the larger social system that we are located in (B. Premawardhana 2021, pers. comm. 9 September).

Though Premawardhana contends that the gender differences are blurred in the *angam maduwa* and the training, our gender roles defined in a social context are still be activated in the training context. Lyudmyla Honcharova is a trained actor who is pursuing a masters degree through the AHEAD Project. She has trained in various martial arts and combative training prior to her exposure to *angampora*. When asked how *angampora* influenced her social life as a woman, Honcharova states:

I could not say that *angampora* somehow affected my social life as a woman. Probably, that is because I have been practising other form of combative art forms in the past and it is a norm for me. However, I noticed that not many women are practising *angampora*. Most of the times, I practise with a group of men. But, I have never felt weaker than them as I always perform all the exercises on an equal term from my side. There should not be a gender division between fighters (L. Honcharova 2021, pers. comm. 10 September).

As Honcharova argues, she does not see a gender difference or division of physical strength between men and women when she practices *angampora* at the *angam maduwa*. As she has clearly stated, not many female combats are trained in the traditional setting of *angam maduwa*. However, in recent times, with the propagation of *angampora* in films and television, and media, female performers are encouraged to learn *angampora* as a way of strengthening their bodily presence. These female characters in television and films have often been portrayed in a masculine manner to elevate the ideology of manhood of *angampora* in the social milieu.

6. II: Self-awareness

Dharmaratne argues that his physicality has been changed through assiduous practice. He uses *angampora* warm-up exercises to keep him fit in his daily routine. Dharmaratne further argues that *angampora* training is improving his muscle memory, and an understanding is developed on the basis of where the parts of his body are located and how they are connected to each other. His muscle memory is being developed to a higher level where he can execute actions involuntarily.

Often, our perception of our bodies is also shaped by the discourses created by society. As indicated earlier, our understanding of our bodies, care, and well-being is formed and tailored through discursive mechanisms operated in different social domains. This is also true of actor training discourses. As Phillip B. Zarrilli argues, every time an actor enacts an action, she/he refers to a particular body of knowledge. As actors, we stand in front of a mirror during our training sessions, staring at our own bodies as if we were staring at something else. With this training, most actors also reveal that they feel physically and mentally wholesome. For example, Premawardhana says that “having being exposed to angampora, I am developing a greater awareness of my body” (B. Premawardhana 2021, pers. comm. 9 September).

When the actor learns angampora techniques, an imaginary opponent is always emphasized by the Master and is an ontological existence for the actor who follows certain body movements and strikes against the imaginary figure. The actor imagines her/his opponent similar to the mirror image and seeing her/his bodily presence through a mirror. The experience of being fully embodied and completeness is experienced by the actor and cultivate such awareness of her/his body and others. When a novice starts learning angampora, she/he starts with *ath haramba*, which is hand combat designed to fight with the opponents using hands strikes. Though it is called *ath haramba*, not only hands but leg movements are also coordinated in executing actions and reactions towards the opponents. As stated above, *ath haramba* is also practice and performed with imaginary opponents and Kanchana Malshani, a Colombo based dancer and choreographer, says that she had a better sense of her own strength when she started using angampora *ath sellam*. (K Malshani 2021, pers. comm. 5 September). She explained how angampora training affected her body awareness. Based on her experience, she argues that during angampora training, focusing on a specific location using her eyes, performing basic *sellam* can build her personality. During angampora training, she sharpened her eyes by avoiding being hit by someone else, punching from her hands and kicking from her feet, and training to maintain attention even if someone unexpected came behind her. She also said it increased her self-confidence.

Rathnayake describes the effects and changes she has noticed in her daily life since she started practising angampora. As human beings, a feeling of calmness and confidence is most important to our social lives. In particular, some people miss that calmness and confidence due to many social and political reasons. Because of their physical disabilities, race, ethnicity or gender. Thilakshini states:

It actually made me feel good that I know some kind of combative art form and it made me feel secure in a certain way. I don't know how to explain. It gave my body a sort of a versatility. That I was ready to do anything. Imagine if I'm walking on the road and suddenly, I have to run then my body was like ready for that (T. Rathnayake 2021, pers. comm., 7 September).

Our awareness of our own bodies is often limited. Because our acts are influenced by society, religion, and politics and we have a restricted understanding of what we can do in everyday life. But when an actor enters the performance space, she/he must recognize those limitations condensed in the body. The data collected illustrates that angampora training has helped to enhance the actors' self-awareness and self-confidence. As women, we are often challenged by these two things daily, leading to a misunderstanding of one's existence and a decline in personality. Through this training, we have also developed a better understanding of what the body is and where its boundaries lie. There has been an increasing shift from seeing the body as purely biological towards seeing it as a historical and cultural construction and a medium of social control.

7. Conclusion

Saumya Liyanage has observed that "Sri Lankan theatre and especially its performance practise are diminishing with elaborated technology and stage crafts. Further, he describes, the actor's body and its capacity are also marginalized for the sake of proscenium dialogical dramatic acts that we experience in contemporary theatre (Liyanage 2020: 03).

In angampora practice, we have identified movements that help body fitness, self-confidence and concern for one's body as well as movements that increase awareness of the others. These findings suggest that actors can also improve their skills through this training. Based on the actors' answers, we already know that angampora training can address the challenges of gender identity. From my interview with actors who underwent angampora training, I discovered that each actor had their own unique style of martial arts practice that was not based on gender. The impact of the training is to create a repertory of beings that force the performer to know his/her many potential bodies (Foley 2002: 177).

Additionally, in angampora, there is no stable rhythm, and we can play with our own choice of rhythm. I noticed at times that my movements did not match those of the others. Each actor had their own body rhythm⁸ and colours.

Martial arts are fundamentally embodied activities, so questions surrounding the body and its functions play a crucial role in understanding female challenges today. After all, the body is central to the construction of meaning attributed to gendered difference, and it is through our embodiment of gender that the realities of such differences become reified. (Channon 2018: 2). Martial arts differ in notable ways from other physical cultural pursuits⁹. Because, the symbolic proximity of martial artistry to the matter of physical violence (Ibidem).

In angampora, actors are not identified and named based on their gender identity. Simply put, naming a fighter does not happen orally. In addition, movements are not created to create a woman, a man, an animal, or any other being, but to highlight the primordial identities that exist within us.¹⁰ However, angampora training is designed to help all of us better recognize and expose our gendered bodies. According to Butler, speech (language) does not create identities as a male or female but only creates a fighter (act). This means that we all became the fighters in angampora and challenged gender identities through angampora training.

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⁸ Angampora training does not use rhythm like dance forms, so free movement is possible. it was also difficult to practice in the beginning. As the performing arts practitioners, when we start practicing angampora as the beginners, automatically most of us were counting (example 1234/1234).

⁹ Athletics, dance, fitness or team games.

¹⁰ For example, when studying Kandyan dance compositions, the body of the dancer is transformed into an animal in relation to each individual in training.

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