

The Island Leisure LAND

Monday 18th May, 2009

by **Jayantha Anandappa**
(Sydney, Australia)

It is with sadness that I open these lines on Tissa Abeysekera who departed so suddenly and unexpectedly and in my opinion with his mission not really accomplished. When I heard about his death, I felt as if I had lost someone close and dear to me.

Although mainly acknowledged as the best script writer for cinema, Tissa's contributions to art spread across many spheres. As a bilingual writer, he probably surpassed even the great Martin Wickremasinghe who sounded somewhat laboured in English.

Surely Tissa will be remembered as an iconic figure in the contemporary cultural landscape just as Lester James Peiris, Martin Wickremasinghe, Amaradeva or Sarathchandra.

Tissa had no vested interest in any specific camp, group or an academy. To me, that was one of his most endearing qualities as an artist/critic. He was very much like an outsider to the art field like his illustrious mentor, Lester.

His fearless independence and his vast knowledge in varied fields were mirrored in his writings. His sharp critical mind and the refusal to accept any established view without critically assessing it and his willingness to always back his views with reason was his hallmark. He spoke both in Sinhala and English from his heart with eloquence and flair - as if he had two mother tongues and I must confess that I generally savoured whatever he wrote, particularly in English.

His peers would have envied his versatility. I would not blame them for Tissa was three years ahead of his peers, including the university dons when it came to language, oration and criticism in either language.

It is needless to say it is with his artistic creativity that he reached the heartbeat of the people and it is for this that people would like to remember him. His abundant creative talents and eloquence were an adornment to his knowledge. Perhaps the reverse may be truer.

I think it is Tissa's wandering mind that traversed across various domains ranging from literature, music, history, cinema and art that made that unique fascinating personality that he was.

What drew me to have a personal contact with Tissa was the role he played as a musicologist or a music critic and his in-depth knowledge of Sunil Santha's works - a composer, vocalist and a man who had fascinated me endlessly. I wanted to know more about this musician who was unfairly victimized by the establishment. Hearing that Tissa was planning to write a book on the great musician, I continued to talk to him and wrote to him urging him to start this task without postponing. The book never emerged, unfortunately.

It is this common interest on Sunil Santha initially and my insatiable passion for literature and art films that made me continue with my interactions with Tissa. It is through these conversations - though short, random and sometimes far apart - that I found the most fascinating and intriguing facets of this

truly great man.

It amazed me how Tissa kept on stubbornly refusing to acknowledge his own masterpiece 'Viragaya' as his best work and always referred to 'Mahagedara' as his best cinematic creation - a film with a theme that drew heavily from melodramatic stock. When I disagreed, he provided a flimsy counter argument that 'Mahagedara' was his own story but 'Viragaya' was not. I always thought there was a touch of hypocrisy in this assessment.

From his subsequent writings and from his lack of interest to correct this position as evident from his silence on the subject when the whole world had voiced a contrary view, it was clear that Tissa was inclined to maintain his position for reasons unknown until his death.

Even more intriguing was the position that he maintained through the Sinhala newspaper columns from the early '90s about the length of the film ('Viragaya') and that the full length movie was shown only at the Regal in the first two weeks of the first round of screening.

In his writings, he had implied that whilst the film was running, its producer had visited the film theatres and had cut and chopped the film - her own production! When I told him that I saw the film in Nugegoda which ran for over three hours and it looked in perfect order, he was quick to distract me by saying that he shot the film originally for four hours. It was evident that the theatre owners were the culprits who had skipped reels willy-nilly, due to the excessive length of the film.

Tissa was aware of this, though he chose to always blame the producer.

It is well documented that Tissa always lamented that he could not complete one of his previous films 'Mung Mula Wael' which the producer Munidasa de Silva of Linton fame aborted after shooting was complete. This was a much talked about topic in the early '80s. Perhaps Tissa was not an easy person to work with.

With 'Viragaya', which is a miracle of art and a sublimely beautiful transcript of Martin Wickremasinghe's celebrated novel, quite surprisingly Tissa could not find a producer. Though during the post-Viragaya period he produced some noteworthy art work in the form of teledramas ('Pitagamkarayo', probably the best teledrama made in Sinhala, 'Vana Sarana' an absorbing drama based on Spittel's famous novel), he was drifting away from cinema, certainly as a film maker.

I am sure this deeply hurt his ego and troubled him, because quite rightly, Tissa knew that he belonged to the cinema, not teledrama - that too as a director. He knew that he could have surpassed 'Viragaya'.

After relinquishing his duties as the Chairman, Film Corporation, in response to one of my e-mails, Tissa wrote on 13 Aug. 2003 that "I have scheduled the Sunil Santha Book for next year. It requires hard work and much time. At the moment, I am trying to resurrect my career as a filmmaker; after being in the bureaucratic wasteland for two-and-a-half years trying to help others to make films."

Tissa of course could never resurrect his career as a film director. He once told



Tissa Abeysekera: The enigmatic genius

me over the phone that he is on the verge of finding a producer and is planning to embark on filming Sarathchandra's 'Malagiya Aeththo'. Remembering that the novel was based in Japan, I quickly noted that, "you may have to go to Japan to film it?" I remember him saying, "I like to do something big, something good." Knowing what he had achieved in 'Viragaya' it raised expectations sky-high. I even started to imagine how he would film some of those scenes from Sarathchandra's novel.

When I contacted Tissa again, he was writing a script for Sunil Ariyaratne ('Uppalawanna'). The finished product was a dull work, lacking intensity and human drama. Whilst Sunil Ariyaratne must take the lion share of the blame for poor direction, Tissa's script too was mediocre. The identical comment applies to his script for the teledrama based on Wickremasinghe's much under-rated 'Kaluwara Gedara'. But this does not mean that Tissa's talents were diminishing - perhaps to be permanently labelled as a mere script writer - now in teledramas - a role that he was always trying to get away from, way back from the 'Karumakkarayo' days would have been too monotonous and too stale to stimulate the creative

artist in him.

Realising that he could probably never make another feature film, his wandering mind which was always oscillating between cinema, literature, music, art, history and that apologetic unconvincing leftist - he eventually turned to English fiction - one of his true callings. He had already published 'Bringing Tony Home' a highly readable nostalgically evocative autobiographical sketch which won him the prestigious Gratian Award and established his reputation as a serious writer of fiction in English in 1996.

His 'In the Kingdom of my Sun and the Holy Peak' a collection of three unrelated stories or novels, amazingly engrossing and beautifully written - is a type of a book only a literary genius could write. I thought it is certainly a giant leap from his earlier work in English. The three stories, particularly the middle one, must hold a very high place in the contemporary English fictional writing in any country. More was to follow, I thought gleefully.

I was pleased to hear that Tissa had recently re-published in the international press 'Bringing Tony Home' and had added three more stories to this. I was swamped with mixed feelings when I read that it surpasses even his highly rated 'In the Kingdom of my Sun'.

Tissa Abeysekera had made ground breaking far-reaching changes to cinema in the art of dialogues, story and script writing. But to remember him merely as the best script writer would be to seriously undermine his value as an artist. He was a genius who could not reach the pinnacle of his career as a filmmaker as he could not find a producer to work with, since the immortal 'Viragaya'. He returned to fictional literature at twilight - probably his first love when he realised that the doors of the cinema as a director would never open for him again. But since then, he gave us two outstanding literary gems in English.

Posterity will remember Tissa with gratitude for this. When Tissa was about to embark on a long fruitful new journey and perhaps was about to break into the international literary circle, he was snatched away cruelly from us. He was probably the best gift we gave the world as a writer of English fiction who was sadly nipped in the bud.

This is where I think, I should stop and salute this great man.

(The writer is a Chartered Civil Engineer)

Beautiful people are paid more than counterparts 'because they are worth it'

Pretty women and handsome men are paid more than their less good looking counterparts because they are worth it, claim scientists.

by **Richard Alleyne**,
Science Correspondent

Researchers discovered attractive people get paid better and rise higher up the corporate ladder than less good-looking colleagues of equal ability.

But they believe it may not be simply down to bosses lusting after beautiful members of staff, it may actually be because they are easier to work with and better educated.

Psychologists think good looking employees are often more confident as a result of their attractiveness and therefore shine and stand out in the office. It also leads to them being better qualified.

Though it may lead to accusations of favouritism among jealous co-workers, the bosses handing out the rewards may be acting subconsciously.

Researchers from the University of Florida questioned nearly 200 male and female workers aged between 25 and 75 about their income, lifestyle, education and stress issues.

Each was given IQ and other tests to work out general intelligence and their pictures were shown to a separate group of people to give the original volunteers ratings on how attractive they appeared.

Analysing the results for the Journal of Applied Psychology it found those deemed to be good-looking were paid more than those with at least similar intelligence levels.

They also were more outgoing and tended to be better educated - both could also be a result of the confidence good looks can give a person.

However looks alone are no substitute for intelligence. Workers with the highest intelligence levels did the best overall - no matter how good-looking they were - suggesting that the perfect employee needs to have the right combination of brains, beauty and confidence said the Florida researchers.

The study author Professor Tim Judge said: "Little is known about why there are income disparities between the good-looking and the not-so-good-looking.

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