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K. C. P. Warnapala*

Radicalising Shakespeare: Staging the Sri Lankan Juliet in *Julietge Bhumikawa*

Abstract: Through an analysis of the Sri Lankan film, *Julietge Bhumikawa* (1998) (Illusions of Juliet), I argue that the film radicalizes Shakespeare-inspired film through providing a bold site of enunciation to the character of Juliet. While the Sri Lankan Juliet is cast as mistress, interrogating discourses of purity surrounding not only the original source text—*Romeo and Juliet*—but the contemporary Sri Lankan society as well, *Julietge Bhumikawa* reconfigures female gender ideologies by unraveling the nexus between female madness and patriarchal culture.

Keywords: Sri Lankan film, gender, Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, "other woman."

Introduction

The Sinhala film, *Julietge Bhumikawa* (Illusions of Juliet, 1998), is a daring and unusual Shakespeare-inspired film based on *Romeo and Juliet*. Directed by Jackson Anthony who was a renowned Sri Lankan actor in cinema, theatre, and television, as well as a versatile director and producer of several other notable films such as *Aba* (2008), and *Address Ne* (2015), *Julietge Bhumikawa* constructs a compelling narrative where Juliet is transposed to the eighties in Sri Lanka. It tells the story of a woman named Anjali, a film actress, who gradually descends into madness, believing she is Juliet herself, perhaps because of an illicit love affair with a fellow actor named Devinda. While Devinda is married, Anjali is a single woman living alone. Her obsession with the Shakespearean play, *Romeo and Juliet*, comes to light when Devinda first visits her home. Not only does she have a closet full of early modern costumes from the Shakespearean play which she purchased at an auction whilst in England, which

* University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka. kcpwarnapala@gmail.com

has cost her a fortune, but she also knows the play's lines by heart. This paper argues that while the Shakespearean play invokes an adolescent love with emphasis on its purity and innocence, *Julietge Bhumikawa* is a radical representation of a Sri Lankan woman who is embroiled in a non-normative relationship, which unravels the nexus between female madness and patriarchal culture.

Shakespeare in Ceylon

While Shakespeare has been a part of the Sri Lankan stage since colonial times, with evidence to support that Shakespearean plays were performed as early as the 19th century, Shakespearean film adaptations in Sri Lankan cinema have been almost non-existent. Due to the "economic frailty of the industry" (AJ Gunawardene 3), and a civil war that dragged for nearly three decades, Sri Lankan cinema has remained a fledgling industry since its inception in the early to mid- twentieth century, despite some formidable cinematic work. A lack of resources and funding have impeded both commercial and artistic cinema at present and as Naman Ramachandran (Sri Lankan Cinema in Crisis) notes, after the end of the civil war, "film production marginally improved with 30-40 films being produced annually, but with the twin blows of COVID-19 and the economic crisis, this slowed to around 10." Roughly divided into two streams, mainstream commercial cinema has dealt with song-filled action entertainers with formulaic plotlines while art cinema has taken up more serious, social-realist themes. Both streams have captured the postcolonial realities and contradictions inherent in the culture.

A. J. Gunawardana (103) observes that the Sri Lankan film audience is a "divided audience," "openly bifurcated on linguistic lines," which consists of the Sinhala-speaking majority and the Tamil speaking minorities. Hence Gunawardana (103) rightfully notes that "when one speaks of Sri Lankan cinema, one is really referring to Sinhala-language film." The first-ever Sinhala film came out in 1947, and the "1960s stand out as the decade that assembled the most spectacular array of cinematic talent in the whole history of Sri Lankan cinema" (Ariyadasa 21). The 1970s saw the emergence of a national cinema in Sri Lanka, which depicted "social issues that agitated the minds of men and women of Sri Lanka" (Ariyadasa 22). Ariyadasa (23) argues that the 1980s became the "crisis years," due to many factors, one of which was the introduction of television to the country. Ashley Ratnavibhushana (30) argues that rules and regulations imposed by the State Film Corporation, a state-controlled body which was created to establish an independent film industry, in fact prevented "the emergence of new, creative film-makers" severely impacting an art-like cinema to flourish by the eighties.

However, Sri Lankan cinema's lack of engagement with Shakespeare is perhaps due to the transmission of Shakespeare in Sri Lankan culture. The British ruled in Sri Lanka, formerly known as Ceylon, from 1795 to 1948, and the English language was introduced through colonial education to mainly the upper and middle classes of Ceylon. Through missionary schools set up in Ceylon, English education spread through the country, though it was an "uneven spread" (Wuister 15). Willemijn Wuister further states:

> British set up schools with a Western curriculum, to produce schooled workforces. Their goal was to create a low-cost English-speaking staff to work in the lower levels of bureaucracy. The English language proved to be the factor of success. (16)

The British Governors of Ceylon insisted on the superiority of the English language over the indigenous languages. As Subathini Ramesh and Mitali P. Wong note,

> This was the beginning of an educated class of locals called the elites—the privileged group of citizens. These men had access to English education and the opportunity to taste the western culture in England. (19)

However, when Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948, the

> English language, which enjoyed the prestigious position of being the official language, the language of administration and the medium of instruction at schools, began to lose its importance gradually. (Ramesh and Wong 28)

The native languages became the language of instruction in schools, drastically decreasing its reach. While the English-educated classes would have no doubt been familiar with Shakespeare's works, Shakespeare would have become irrelevant in the native language schools.

As Linda Colley notes, critics tend to,

> deny that Shakespeare was ever simply an "icon of the British establishment" and insist nonetheless on the degree to which different British interest groups have found useful over time to interpret or champion his work in particular ways. (7)

While it has not been recorded whether Shakespeare was taught and disseminated through a school curriculum in colonial Ceylon, Shakespeare would have been regarded as a British cultural icon in Ceylon for certain. As Kumai Jayewardena notes in *Nobodies to Somebodies* (2000) certain British cultural elements such as dress, eating habits, living spaces and aspects of

lifestyle were adopted by the colonized elite of Ceylon. As Marshall R. Singer (1964) has noted in *The Emerging Elite: A Study of Political Leadership in Ceylon*, the graduates of prestigious schools were well versed in British history than their own, which suggests a traditionally western curriculum. As such, English literature would have certainly been a part of the scholarship and would have become a valuable element of social capital providing the Ceylonese an opportunity to demonstrate their civility, modernity, and western taste. Yet with independence in 1948, and the reintroduction of the indigenous languages, only the Anglicized elite would have had access to such an English education through elite public and private schools.

Hence, when *Julietge Bhumikawa* was released in 1998, it receives little public attention. As Anoja Weerasinghe, its main actress, has stated in an interview in 2021, the film failed to garner attention because of the public's unfamiliarity with the Shakespearean text. She suggest that the audiences' lack of acquaintance with the play may have hindered the film's receptivity. It also highlights the film's strong interrelationship with the play. What is interesting is that while *Julietge Bhumikawa* is not a straightforward adaptation of the play, the film fails to stand alone when the audience requires understanding of the play to comprehend the film and its events. Weerasinghe has been one of the most sought-after actresses in Sri Lankan cinema, especially in the eighties and nineties. The male lead is taken up by the charismatic and handsome actor, Kamal Addaraarachchi, who is also well known for his versatile roles. The rest of the cast includes well-known performers such as Wasanthi Chathurani, Mahendra Perera, Chandani Seneviratne and Sriyantha Mendis. Blending operatic, ballet, and theatrical elements, the film employs a variety of postmodern breaks with realism when it transports the audience to certain events from the Shakespearean play with renaissance props and costumes. For instance, the masked ball is staged in the film where all the actors dress in rich and colorful fabric, accented with lace, ruffles and jewels. Yet one can argue that the film surpasses its textual source especially when it opens spaces for radical critique of female sexuality in Sri Lanka.

Brief Synopsis

The film opens with Anjali watching a ballet adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* where Devinda acts as Romeo. Enthralled by his performance on stage, she contacts him, which soon leads to an affair between the couple. He, though initially a stage actor, is soon invited to act in films by Anjali, despite him being critical of their flimsy content. Devinda, in his maiden film shot with Anjali, rescues her from being drowned in a river when she slips down a rock during a dance sequence. This incident cements their bond, and the Shakespearean

story of the star-crossed young lovers is adapted into a tense relationship between an older, unmarried celebrity actress and a married actor with a pregnant wife and child. Anjali imagines herself as Juliet and lives in a fantasy world, perhaps to sublimate the fact that her reality is one of loneliness. Unlike in the Shakespearean play, there is no patriarchal agent to dictate her life although patriarchal society is nevertheless present. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet, Lady Capulet, and the nurse are all subject to the social dictates of Lord Capulet who may dispose of his daughter as he wishes. Yet in the Sri Lankan film, patriarchy is manifested in the role and status of women. When Devinda and Anjali find themselves as lovers on and off screen, rumours soon circulate about Devinda's extra marital affair which begin to intimidate Anjali more than Devinda. While Devinda's wife, Saroja, becomes aware of the fact, Anjali becomes more and more alienated, suppressed, and irretrievably lost when Devinda cannot accommodate her as expected. Anjali's only comfort is to take refuge in a delusion of female innocence which is available through the persona of Juliet in Shakespeare's play.

Actress as Transgressive

The Shakespearean Juliet is presented as pure and innocent, almost a divine being. Romeo's lines, "But soft! What light through yonder window breaks? / It is the east, and Juliet is the sun!" (2.2.2-3) creates her as a heavenly creature. When Shakespeare's play opens, Juliet is also portrayed as obedient to her parents. She agrees to meet Paris, a suitor, when her mother requests Juliet to "Read o'er the volume of a young Paris' face" (1.3.87). Juliet acquiesces, saying, "l'll look to like, if looking liking move" (1.3.103). She is also presented as chaste, and virtuous, who must be awakened into sexuality by Romeo. She is at first cautious of Romeo's intentions. Aware of female propriety, and the importance of safeguarding her station, she tells Romeo,

> If that thy bent of love be honorable,
> Thy purpose marriage, send me word tomorrow,
> By one that I'll procure to come to thee,
> Where and what time though wilt perform the rite;
> And all my fortunes at they foot I'll lay
> And follow thee my lord throughout the world. (2.2.150-155)

On the other hand, the Sri Lankan Anjali is constructed as Juliet's opposite, othered on three accounts. Anjali is actress, mistress and single, all frowned upon by conservative patriarchal culture. The stigmatization of the actress is nothing new. Women across cultures have been discouraged from entering the

profession due to its public nature. As Kirsten Pullen argues in *Actresses and Whores: On Stage and in Society* (2005), throughout history, categories of actress and whore overlap. Actresses have been seen as publicly available women who exploit their sexual attractiveness for popularity and enticement, no different to the sexual availability of the prostitute. This has certainly been the case in South Asia, where actresses have been seen as subversive agents, embroiled in vulgarity and commercialism. As Susan Seizer notes,

> In South India as throughout South Asia, moral concern over women's movement in public feeds into a dominant ideology of "the home and the world" as separate spheres of propriety for women and men respectively. Women who conduct business in the public sphere are suspect, a suspicion charged with the particular cruelty reserved for accusations of prostitution. (4)

As Vasana K. De Mel observes with reference to Sri Lanka, due to the influence of India's touring Parsi theatre, and South Asian culture, when women did appear in Colombo theatres in 1886,

> they were prostitutes, further reinforcing the notion that respectable women had no acceptance in public theatre lest they suffer the social stigma accorded prostitutes. (10)

De Mel further states that with the advent of the Sinhala nationalist movement which sought independence from the British, the nationalists moved forward with:

> rigidly fixed archetypes of ideal or flawed womanhood' on stage. The ideal woman was presented as a "Sinhala Aryan" woman who embodied respectability, and virtue, who rejected western dress and manners, in order to reinforce the ideology that Sinhala traditionalists cum nationalists were "patriotic" persons in antithesis to Western and Westernized Sri Lankans who were deemed corrupt, disrespectable traitors. (10)

Hence, actresses, to escape the label of vulgarity, had to abide by culturally acceptable practices such as being chaperoned, and adhering to dress codes.

Such a purist ideology has continued to dominate the filmic imagination of Sri Lanka where actresses have had to tread a fine line between respectability and disgrace, and admiration and condemnation. Subject to potential gossip and scandal, actresses have been under societal pressure to conform to a strict morality and safeguard their reputation against accusations of promiscuity. They have had to be extra cautious when selecting roles and have had to subject themselves to self-censorship to not transgress sexual and moral boundaries. In instances when actresses have taken up risqué subjects such as nudity and sexual

desire, they have been socially vilified and ostracized, and condemned as deviant. Since Sri Lankan cinema is largely a male dominated industry, most of the film plots have relegated the female role to predictably that of a secondary one, where the female character most often is a bystander positioned firmly within the domestic sphere. Even when women-centric films have been made to generate political and social consciousness, they have retained the model of femininity based on domestic virtues. Even off screen, actresses have had to pander to the dominant perceptions of a gendered respectability and socially acceptable female behavior.

It is pertinent, in this instance, to briefly illustrate the existing constructions of masculinity and femininity in Sri Lanka. Women have been traditionally limited to the domestic sphere of family and home and have been entrusted with the task of maintaining moral propriety especially through motherhood, which is seen as an integral part of a female's identity. Although Sri Lanka is ahead of many other South Asian countries in terms of gender equality, especially in terms of free and equal access to education and health care, hegemonic societal norms which perpetuate gender stereotypes and biases have contributed to female under representation and discrimination in the social, economic, and political spheres. Very much a patriarchal culture, Sri Lankan culture endorses fixed gender codes and an ideal femininity as the objective for upper, middle, and lower-class women across religion. While both men and women have been expected to maintain cultural continuity through marriage, men continue to be seen in the role of the breadwinner, and hence, decision-maker.

Issues of Morality

It is against such a backdrop that *Julietge Bhumikawa* manifests an unusual investment in gender. It can be presumed that Anjali, as actress, already lacks social propriety in the public eye. Further, her single status also compromises acceptable womanhood as marriage is the ideal to which women should strive. However, despite her unconventionality, her celebrity star power as actress allows her to maneuver society within those narrowly defined parameters as seen in the film. As an actress, she is seen as having moved outside society's moral and sexual boundaries and therefore her relationship with a married man does not raise eyebrows within the film community. Nor does Devinda's sexual indiscretions cause him to lose his social and professional status; traditional familial codes do not impact the male to the same extent that it does women. Hence the film, from the beginning, with its choice of male and female protagonist, provides a counter narrative to Shakespeare's play. If courtship and

marriage are the central concerns of Shakespeare's play, the film is essentially a counter narrative to that script.

Anjali occupies the position of mistress in the film, a position that is not only clearly in defiance of society's moral norms, but also one which forecloses possibilities of marriage. The fact that Devinda has a child further exacerbates the moral condemnation surrounding Anjali's status. It is apt in this instance to also consider Buddhist notions of gender in Sri Lankan culture. While Buddhist doctrine at its core does not differentiate between men and women based upon gender, certain Buddhist practices and traditions have been discriminatory and misogynistic towards women. As L.S. Dewaraja (1994) argues,

> [c]onflicting with the Buddhist ethos and negating its effects in varying degrees is the universal ideology of masculine superiority. So that in all three societies—Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma—there is an ambivalence in the attitudes towards women. (para. 19)

As such, in practice, women were often relegated to a secondary position, and their sexual nature viewed with suspicion. Celine Grunhagen (102) argues that in Buddhism, "the attitude towards the human body is ambivalent" and the body is "considered a hindrance that binds us to the world and to suffering." Within such a context, "ascetic practice and especially the abstention from sexual pleasures" are advocated:

> woman as both the object of the male's lust and as an allegedly cunning temptress personifies the aspects of life and the world that the ascetic has to renounce. (Grunhagen 105)

Further, Buddhist doctrine, regardless of gender, emphasizes fidelity, and treats adultery as a transgression. It is in fact highlighted as the third of the five fundamental precepts of Buddhism. Hence, if Shakespeare's Juliet evokes wholesome femininity embodied through her childlike innocence and sexual vulnerability, Anjali's relationship with Devinda creates her as oppositional to Juliet. The chaste and virtuous Juliet is overtly sexualized in the film as mistress. Several scenes in the film highlight Anjali's insatiable thirst for sexual fulfilment. Yet it is precisely this unlikely juxtaposition of Shakespeare's Juliet against the Sri Lankan Anjali which helps open new sites of sexual desire and identity, and rupture and rearticulate some of the gender ideologies prevalent in the play.

The film casts Anjali as a mysterious and solitary woman who purchases a colonial styled bungalow with wooden staircases and balustrades in the countryside, in addition to her house in the city of Colombo where she lives. The character of Juliet's nurse who is also Juliet's ally and surrogate mother in

the Shakespearean play, is a man servant called Lawrence in the film, who Anjali laughingly identifies as the friar from the play. While women living alone, not assisted by either a female relative, companion or a maid servant is unusual in the Sri Lankan context, her chaperone is in fact a male, a man names Supun who is seemingly feminized and queered in the film, who stands for both Tybalt and the nurse. Hence, parent-less, and relative-less, Anjali's propriety is at stake, further constructing her as the "other" in the film.

Anjali is depicted as secretive, giddy, erratic, and capricious, essentially inhabiting a divided and fragile self. While her performative self as actress reveals a bubbly character, her actual self is reserved, quiet and brooding, subject to deep and habitual depression. The film depicts several scenes where she seems to be psychologically disengaged from her surroundings. For instance, she is shown sharing a drink with Supun, all whilst preoccupied with herself. To what extent she is true to her actual self even with Devinda is questionable when he becomes a proxy figure for Romeo. Devinda transports her to the fantasy realm of Juliet. When both, in jest, enact the iconic balcony scene from the play, Devinda symbolizes for Anjali the Shakespearean lover who represents passion, romance and adventure. Her romantic fantasy of being Juliet cannot be fulfilled without a Romeo, whom she finds in Devinda.

The Sri Lankan Romeo

In Shakespeare's play, the love shared by Romeo and Juliet is ecstatic and overpowering, leading both to defy other loyalties and values. While Juliet rebels against parental authority through her alliance with a Montague, Romeo too breaks rules by entering a forbidden alliance with a Capulet. Likewise, Anjali's and Devinda's relationship too cannot exist within the confines and expectations of Sri Lankan society. Yet while Romeo and Juliet match in their passionate commitment to each other, to what extent Devinda is equally invested in the relationship is in question. It is evident in the film that it is Anjali who initiates the relationship, while Devinda merely acquiesces. For instance, in one scene, immediately after a romantic film song shoot, Anjali, in an unabashedly spirited and lively fashion, leads Devinda onto a misty hill, where they share a moment of intimacy. Both are dressed in white, reminiscent of Romeo and Juliet who often appear in white costumes. The scene is quite significant as Devinda wishes to admire the picturesque scene ahead while Anjali invites his gaze towards her, making explicit her desire for him. Even when Devinda visits her at home for the first time, she insists that he stay longer. Devinda seems more intrigued with the unconventionality of Anjali while Anjali yearns to experience the passion firsthand which Juliet experiences through Romeo. Anjali

seems oblivious to the fact that Devinda is married, precisely because his unavailability helps her to construct herself as the tragic heroine of the play.

In fact, Devinda displays a fragile masculinity which is somewhat like that of Romeo in the Shakespearean play. Robert Appelbaum notes that although masculinity in the play is closely tied to masculine aggression, the play dramatizes,

> an attempt to exalt [heterosexual love], an attempt to overcome patterns of violence and aggression through an engagement with what the two main characters take to be the joyful "bounty" … their mutual desire. (254)

Although Romeo activates a violent masculinity towards the end of the play, he displays a softness throughout the play. As Sasha Roberts (54) rightly notes, "Romeo's denial of the conventional codes of aggressive, feuding, masculine honour makes him what a woman should supposedly be: submissive." Devinda, likewise, is also projected as weak, in relation to Anjali, not merely in temperament. While Shakespeare's play pits the Montagues and the Capulets as equal in social position, the film notes a clear social class distinction between the two Sri Lankan lovers. Devinda's modest house to which he moves in is only still half paid for, while Anjali is a rich woman who owns two houses, hinting at their respective backgrounds. Anjali is also the more senior actress, who has taken up the aspiring Devinda as her male lead.

Devinda, the Sri Lankan Romeo, is located securely within marriage, and is shown seemingly tied to Sri Lankan custom and ritual. This is evident through certain scenes such as when he ceremonially moves into a new house accompanied by his wife and family. Saroja, his wife, is shown clad in *osari*, a traditional and more conservative form of dress, with her hair neatly tied back. If a woman's dress and demeanor are indicative of her morality and national values, Saroja is certainly whitewashed as morally pure in the film. In fact, the film emphasizes the physical and sexual difference between the two women. While Anjali is depicted as a westernized woman, Saroja, is depicted as the opposite. She is determined to carry through with her marriage despite rumors of her husband's affair with Anjali, highlighting her supposed moral superiority and selfless devotion for the greater good of the family. Saroja signals female duty and sacrifice while Anjali strongly represents the transgressive woman who is in bold pursuit of love and sexual passion. However, the film resists utilizing Saroja's moral purity as a foil to construct Anjali as the infamous anti-heroine of the film. Anjali, despite her non normativity, remains central to the film.

Believing herself a tragic heroine, her irrational belief in the love of Juliet leads Anjali to become increasingly more detached and ungrounded especially when Devinda cannot meet her passionate expectations. His moral obligations towards his pregnant wife and child lead him away from Anjali. Her

inability to distinguish between reality and fantasy, and failure to find her identity beyond Juliet aggravates her condition. In her search for an ideal, she gradually loses grip with reality and spirals into depression. Being an actress, she is further vulnerable to the division of self. As an actress, she transitions in and out of character. However, what is intriguing about Anjali is that, in both her professional and personal life, she takes on fictional persona, for survival. While she adopts many characters as actress, she occupies the subject position of Juliet in her personal life.

Demystifying Romantic Love

The film seems to express a deep cynicism towards romantic love through Anjali's devotion to the play. Her preoccupation with the character of Juliet, though seemingly juvenile, suggests a fantasy for the world of romance created by Shakespeare. She tells Devinda that Juliet has always been her "dream," suggesting a strong identification with the doomed Shakespearean character. One particular scene stands out. Anjalie, clad in a white gown, reminiscent of Juliet's white dress, stands outside her balcony, professing her love to Devinda who has propped himself on a window outside, declaring his love, like Romeo. Anjali's investment in romantic love, and Juliet, is suggestive of a spiritual void within her. She seems invested in the idealistic young love depicted in the Shakespearean play. The play projects the lovers and their passion as beautiful and unsullied. As Mera J. Flaumenhaft (545) notes, the play "remains the paradigmatic depiction of pure and passionate love, ruined by a meaningless feud and unsympathetic opponents." The Sri Lankan film deviates from this motif of heightened love through a depiction of mature love, not young love. Instead of a thirteen-year-old Juliet—the youngest of Shakespeare's heroines—and her teenage lover, a not-so-innocent couple in their early to mid-thirties, make a twist in the Shakespearean plot. If the Shakespearean Juliet is a victim of a repressive social order, Anjali's predicament is far more complex. What the film reveals is an alternative context, a couple embroiled in the complexities of a troubled relationship.

To what extent Anjali's all-consuming fantasy of being Juliet is a compensatory mechanism needs to be examined. Rosemary Jackson contends that fantasy is not escapist but subversive, a mechanism to engage with the repressed, which amounts to the transgression and rejection of the symbolic order of things. Jackson argues,

> in expressing desire, fantasy can operate in two ways…it can *tell of*, manifest or show desire … or it can *expel* desire, when this desire is a disturbing element which threatens cultural order and continuity. (2)

Jackson further notes that fantasy is:

> not to do with inventing another non-human world: it Is not transcendental. It has to do with inverting elements of this world, re-combining its constitutive features in new relations to produce something strange, unfamiliar and apparently "new," absolutely "other" and different. (5)

Hence, it can be argued that Anjali consciously cultivates fantasies to create a counter-reality which is far more fulfilling than her socially constructed reality.

Anjali's flight into an imagined Shakespearean world of ideal love and sacrifice denotes a profound dissatisfaction with romance which is unavailable. It is critical at this juncture to discuss Anjali's role as an actress. As evident in the film song sequence which features Anjali and Devinda, the scripts Anjali is given are romantic. As Laleen Jayamanne (100) notes, the Sri Lankan formulaic film is a "boy-meets-girl narrative of seduction and resistance." She (100) suggests that such films define "female sexuality in terms of romantic love" as illustrated through love songs shot in picturesque locations, which "forecloses the possibility of articulating a female desire which cuts across traditional definitions of femininity." Such idealistic films which feed unrealistic expectations contrast with Anjali's own narrative of insatiable desire. Anjali points out that the media hounds her for details of her personal life. Yet she maintains a distance from such intrusion. The need to pry into the physical realities of the actress suggests the relationship between the actress and the characters she plays. In a culture which insists on female respectability, it is not unusual for the actress to be pressurized to fit the image of the dignified woman. Hence the actresses' private lives are supposed to remain in sync with the idealized roles they are asked to perform on screen. Hence, the moral standards imposed on Anjali by her profession are contrary to her subjectivity.

It is also necessary to discuss what Juliet, through tragedy, manifests as a character. The deadly feud between the two families brings forth a crisis where the lovers must pledge their loyalty to one another through death. Ruth Nevo (243) argues that the play is a "'tragedy of chance' rather than a 'tragedy of character'", and that "random events press towards evil while the willed actions of the protagonists are radically innocent." Jagriti V. Desai (15), however, notes that the character flaw in Juliet is "impetuosity", and that Romeo too displays the same, in his haste. Regarding the Sri Lankan lovers, impetuosity is not a luxury both can afford. The nature of their relationship is such that attainment of desire is not possible. Anjali can only ruminate as desires and dreams are distant, and she cannot achieve a sense of symbolic fulfilment which the Shakespearean lovers achieve in death. If the strength of Shakespeare's play is more in its tragedy than in its romance, Anjali's desire for such heightened emotions leads to self-delusion. Overpowered by loneliness and emotional vulnerability, she falls prey to internalization, when she believes that she is none

other than Juliet, awaiting her lover. Anjali's idealistic notions about a daring love shared between Romeo and Juliet, clearly absent in her own life, result in her incarceration in a psychiatric ward, which undermines the romantic plot.

Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy which does not end in marriage, as most Sri Lankan formulaic films do. However, as a tragedy, the play's theatricality and emotional intensity fails to be cathartic for Anjali. She gradually begins to exhibit delusional tendencies and loses her own voice. Her loss of belief in her own fantasy of ideal and incandescent love which is resistant to reality leads her to madness. It is unclear to what extent the Shakespearean play allows Anjali to contextualize her own experiences, since the narrative is largely reticent about what may have impelled Anjali to seek self- identification with Juliet. She refers to a large inheritance in the bank and calls it her "cursed inheritance" which will be used for her "tomb." Such obscurity about Anjali's character and past suggests the film's disinterest in simplifying the nature of Anjali's illness.

Unraveling the "Other Woman"

The film, instead of embroiling Anjali in a narrative of shame, reveals the instabilities and tensions of a patriarchal social order. The film takes up the debate of the "other woman" through Anjali's predicament. Aware of the stereotypical and patriarchal framework of society, the film certainly brings up questions of sexuality and gender, through Anjali's relationship with Devinda. The film is a complex narrative which explores the gendered nature of the plot of infidelity and its double standard. Carol Chillington Rutter claims:

> In tragedy, Shakespeare habitually uses the woman's body to proxy the crisis of masculine self-representation that is the play's narrative focus. What Hamlet or Lear or Othello finally understands about himself is achieved through his catastrophic misunderstanding, misconstruction of Ophelia, Cordelia, Gertrude, Juliet, Desdemona. (251)

In the Sri Lankan film, the body of Anjali is utilized to expose the male sexual ideology regarding the "other woman." Jayamanne observes that Sri Lankan cinema has had rare instances of exonerating the adulterous wife, as in *Duhulu Malak* (floating flower) which was screened as early as 1976. As Jayamanne (98) states, it is, "perhaps the first Sri Lankan film to represent adultery in a manner that makes it seem visually pleasurable" and that, "the fact that the adulterous wife is not punished by the narrative can be considered an advance on the previous moralistic resolutions." However, women who stray away from men and marriage, yet seek fulfilment outside of such a patriarchal framework, are often castigated despite their social and professional standing. Though powerful and important in her professional life, Anjali is placed in an ambiguous

position in relation to Devinda, unsure of her footing. As Kim Snowden (14) notes, the other woman is "somewhat of a paradox-unable to exist without marriage but never allowed completely within it." Victoria Griffin too suggests:

> on the one hand the mistress seeks to live outside and undermine the institution of marriage; on the other, she is as subject to the institution as the wife, being defined by it. (19)

Snowden further states that the other woman is "disposed of in some way in the female adultery plot, again through death, suicide or extreme remorse or distress that borders on insanity" (14). However, in the film, Anjali resists such easy dismissal.

Anjali is depicted as clearly dissatisfied with the label of mistress and all that it implies. One scene is significant. During a heated argument between Devinda and Anjali, Devinda reminds Anjali that he is married with a wife, child and house, and that limits need to be adhered to between a man and mistress, in an extra marital relationship. She, in turn, furiously confronts him and queries as to what the fine line is between wife and mistress. She refers to herself as the "*hora geni*," which is a term used in colloquial Sinhala to denote the "other woman." In fact, "*hora geni*," metaphorically refers to a stealthily kept woman. Hence invisibility is a prerequisite for Anjali, in the husband/wife/mistress triad. Devinda seems to suggest that there are prescribed boundaries of being mistress, and that Anjali should not resist such regulation. To encroach upon his time and commitment is seemingly off-limits for Anjali as the "other woman." Resisting certain feminine coded traits such as passivity and selflessness, Anjali fails to perform the script of the "other woman" to his satisfaction, exploiting the cultural anxiety about the potential threat of the other woman to the institution of marriage.

Hence patriarchal society's need to authorize a specific role for the "other woman," and thereby contain her within that role is challenged in the film. Societal condemnation of the affair is crystal clear when Anjali is hospitalized because of an overdose of sleeping pills, making her contentious relationship public. The film cuts across to varied sections of society from the film fraternity to tabloid journalists, to government servants to workers to the general populace who all gossip about the titillating bits of their affair, suggesting an unforgiving and judgmental society.

The film is bold to take up a category of women who have been hitherto underrepresented, and under analyzed. Anjali is a radical revision of Juliet. While Devinda, too, is sensitively depicted as a man in a helpless position caught between two women, Anjali is shown unable to negotiate the complexities surrounding their relationship. She is seen stalking Devinda when he takes his pregnant wife for her monthly medical check-up, instead of taking

Anjali shopping on a pre-planned date. This ultimately leads to a break-up between the two lovers. Continuously murmuring, "O Romeo Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo," the love-stricken Anjali experiences extreme mental anguish, which disrupts not only her mind but her body as well. A notable scene in the film is when her body acts as a sign of her ailing mind. She, after an alcoholic stupor, writhes in agony on her bed, unable to any more express her pain verbally, and the camera draws attention to her body. She is clad in a black dress, and she lies spread across a bed covered with white sheets, bringing her hyper-visible body to the forefront of the screen. Thus, the intensity of her pain is accentuated in the film.

The film also displays the visceral pain of not only the lovers but the other characters as well, especially the women. In the asylum, its patients register their mental distress through their panic-stricken bodies. The patients, both men and women, are seen frantic, pacing, moaning, hollering, and crying out. Saroja, too, as the heavily pregnant, but sane woman, displays some of the very same tendencies. She is shown in agitation, easily out of breath, shaking, trembling, and gasping. Such physical manifestation of emotions is also evident in Shakespeare's play. Love incurs a price through physical pain of the two lovers and most around them.

While Juliet defies patriarchal authority yet succumbs through death, her defiance is through the sacrifice of life. She rejects the marriage proposal by Paris, stating "He shall not make me there a joyful bride!" (3.5.118). Later, in utter despair, she tells the Friar, "Come weep with me—past hope, past cure, past help!" (4.1.46). With her hands on the potion, she cries out, "Give me, give me! O, tell me not of fear!" (4.1.123). However, Anjali's defiance is far starker and more frantic. If one is to adopt the feminist assertion of madness as rebellion, Anjali's self-abandonment, deemed as madness, becomes a refuge for the self, rather than a loss. Anjali is audacious enough to not only commit herself to a married man in a conservative society, but to finally withdraw herself into an imaginary world, into Juliet's persona, severing any contact with the external world. Anjali perhaps demonstrates a desire to move away from the claustrophobic surveillance and policing of the female self by society, into the fantasy she finds comfort in. Delusion allows Anjali self-invention. However, in her delusional retreat into the play, she seems to be held captive in a moment where she cannot access Romeo.

Female Madness and Patriarchy

The film brings up the nexus between female madness and patriarchy. Madness is a recurring theme in Shakespeare, as evident in plays such as *Hamlet* where both female and male madness are staged. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare

sees love and passion as an antidote to reason. As Sybil Truchet (17) notes, at first, Shakespeare seems to adopt a conventional notion of madness as irrational. She notes that at the beginning, his "view point of reason and folly is an orthodox one," yet later, the "tragic outcome of the love affair imposes then a new idea of reason and madness" (21). Truchet (22) argues that reason proves to be "inadequate" and is associated with "domestic and social order and the maintenance of established custom" that are detrimental to fulfilment. Truchet finds Shakespeare's play approving of "forms of irrationality as total passion and the sacrifice of the young lovers" is seen as a "higher form of reason" (23). Reason and logic result in the blood feud between the Montagues and the Capulets, which is indeed inferior, and can only be undone by the love shared between the two lovers.

However, reason prevails in the Sri Lankan film when madness proves to be an inadequate antidote. Anjali's obligation towards Saroja for having saved her life when Saroja took her to hospital after an overdose, and Anjali's inability to un-entangle herself from the ensuing guilt placed upon her by none other than her own self, leads her to madness. Yet to what extent such madness is irrational is questioned in the film because Anjali is not indifferent to the fact that she has become a conduit in the potential victimization of another woman, Saroja, the wife. Therefore, madness is not only a form of escapism, when it allows her to entirely abandon the persona of Anjali, who accrues the label of sinner. It is also an act of selflessness when Anjali's behavior does not correspond to her self-interest. However, if Anjali has sinned against another woman, she is brought back into the fold of sisterhood through a recuperative relationship with the Psychiatrist. While many feminist scholars argue that female mental health has always been patriarchal, where norms for female behavior have been dictated by men, the film stands out in its choice of casting the psychiatrist as female. To bring Anjali back to reality, the woman doctor proposes, by way of treatment, that Anjali be allowed to strongly identify herself with Juliet. Hence, the doctor suggests that they enact scenes from the Shakespearean play to trigger Anjali's memory.

The treatment is partially successful when Anjali begins to gradually visualize the masquerade ball scene—act 1 scene 5—of the play. Yet the therapeutic exercise fails when Supun, the friend, and Lawrence, the servant, abduct Anjali from the asylum and bring her back home to her countryside bungalow. While Anjali, still severely delusional, goes to bed, Devinda arrives drunk, and violently confronts Supun and Lawrence who cannot restrain him. Taking the kitchen knife Lawrence has just used to cut meat, Devinda assumes the persona of Romeo and enters Anjali's bedroom. Seeing Anjali in bed, he enacts the deathbed scene from the play, and falls next to her, severely drunk. Anjali's ending mimics the dramatic ending of Shakespeare's Juliet. Juliet surmises that Romeo is dead and stabs herself, saying, "Then I'll be brief.

O happy dagger! / Tbis is thy sheath/there rust, and let me die" (5.3.174-175). Anjali too wakes up and finds Devinda motionless, and assuming that he, her Romeo, has killed himself, violently stabs herself in the heart, still in the guise of Juliet.

Anjali's tragic end is utilized as social critique of the position of women. The film makes it clear that women, regardless of whether they are wives or mistresses, are victims of patriarchy. Saroja, who visits the asylum, strangely enough with her husband, shares a moment of empathy with a female patient who has lost her mental balance due to a bereavement. Saroja, reaching out to the female patient exclaims, "poor women," seemingly suggesting that women, as a collective, suffer. Her comment is tied to a previous comment where she tells her concerned sister that she may be carrying a girl, and that the girl child, even as foetus, must learn to bear the brunt of being a woman. Saroja's comment is clearly tied to the Buddhist notion of female birth because of one's past negative karma. As Chand R. Sirimanne (6) points out, the belief, "that a female birth is the result of less favourable kamma than for a male birth" which arises "from the belief that only a male can even aspire to become a Buddha in Theravāda," creates bias, propagating patriarchal and misogynistic ideology and practice. Saroja's internalization of such disempowering gender codes is evident through most of her self-effacing actions. Although she is aware of her oppressive status within marriage, she is reluctant to step aside her role as wife, citing the well-being of her children. As she herself confesses to her sister, she helps save Anjali's life merely to neutralize the vicious gossip of the affair. Even when she later visits Anjali in the asylum along with Devinda, it is perhaps to lessen the damage done to her marriage.

Hence, to what extent Anjali is scapegoated by the patriarchal order is a concern when the film chooses to end not with the lovers but with Saroja giving birth. In the final shot of the film, when Devinda wakes up and realizes that Anjali has stabbed herself, he lets out a scream which overlaps with the piercing cries of Saroja during labour. The camera cuts across from the deathbed scene to Saroja giving birth in hospital. A close-up of Saroja's face comes into view, in the throes of childbirth. Saroja's screams gradually fade with the first cry of the newborn, as the camera pans out, to a matron who informs Saroja that she has given birth to a girl. The final close-up shot of the film is Saroja's face, tears trickling down, not of joy, but of apprehension, of having brought to life a female, destined for suffering, according to her opinion. If Saroja is the representative of stoic wifehood and motherhood in the film, the film is a consistent reminder that such womanhood can be accommodated by patriarchy. Further, the fact that Devinda, though visibly traumatized, has not taken his own life at the end is suggestive of the same, that errant masculinity has potential for moral and physical redemption. While Devinda, with Saroja and family, will most likely reintegrate back to normativity, Anjali, the

recalcitrant female, must die in the film. In Shakespeare's play, both Romeo and Juliet are equally invested in their love, and therefore, display a unity in death. Yet, in *Julietge Bhumikawa*, Anjali as the 'other woman' must pay the price alone. However, her self-willed and violent self-killing is symbolic. It is an ultimate expression of her commitment to the passionate Juliet. To devote herself to Juliet is to devote herself to a romantic delusion, and sever ties with reality, and seek fulfilment, if not with the Sri Lankan Romeo, at least in the finality of death.

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