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Kuveni_{or}

The Curse of a Woman as a Flash Point for Music-Oriented (Re)Constructions

Martina Claus-Bachmann

Abstract: Sadness, tears and a reviled woman's curse are the flash point for this article, which focuses on Kuveni, the legendary foremother of the Sinhalese and the Veddha minority of Sri Lanka. She is an iridescent outline: due to a lack of historically-provable evidence, she can be reborn and reconstructed according to the needs and spirit of the time, or of the individual artist of drama, dance, music, or all together. The article follows a musical line of Kuveni reconstructions, beginning with Kuveni Asne, an orally-transmitted part of the protection ritual Kohomba Kankariya. The article also examines a continuation of the Kuveni motif in a postcolonial music drama by distinguished author and actor Henry Jayasena¹ and his composers Mr. Bandara and Lylie Godridge, and engages with a composition and re-interpretation of the story by award-winning composer Diliup Gabadamudalige in a world-music context. In addition to making musical observations, the article also illuminates aspects of gender in its examination of facets of the flash-point figure Kuveni, and also by reflecting on the contemporary independence of women in the socially-critical lyrics of a song by Carlo Fonseka.

Part I. Asne Kuveni: The Archaic Version



Figure 1. Dance performance (<http://www.kuveni.de/mumepage.htm>) of the Asne Kuveni segment of the Kohomba Kankariya ritual. Dance group of T. P. T. Y. Suramba, Kandy. Photograph by M. Claus-Bachmann, 2001.

Asne Kuveni (1. Textzeile+Melodie) 4mal

ko- i go - - si - - - n ko- i an - - nay

rak- - ke - - mu- - - do de - vi- ya- - - nay

a- - ho - - du- - ka - - ki - - ya - min - nay

ki- - ya - - ki- - ya - - a- - nda - min - nay

Figure 2. Transcription of the melody (by M. Claus-Bachmann) and of the Sinhala lyrics (by Nirosha Paranavitane).

Where should I go now?
How can I protect us?
Oh, I am lamenting my sadness
Grieving, mourning and crying...

(English translation by Nirosha Paranavitane.)

This part of the Kohomba Kankariya ritual is a lament of the *yakkhini*² Kuveni, who ruled Sri Lanka prior to the arrival of the Indian prince Vijaya (ca. 500 B.C.). Vijaya lived with her in order to gain power over the country. They had two children, but Vijaya's companions worked to convince him to leave Kuveni and to marry an Indian princess. After being rejected, Kuveni cursed him and all the men who came with him, and then wandered with her two children through the woods, expressing her sadness. As a result of this curse, Vijaya's successor went mad and developed the idea of being attacked by tigers. To heal him, the Kohomba Kankariya ritual was performed for the first time. The last sentences are a brief summary of the background legend, provided by my informant and translator, Ayanka Jayawardene, drawing on her former schoolbook.

The legend is mentioned in the *Mahavamsa* (6th century A.D.),³ the "Great Chronicle" of the Sri Lankan past, written by monks. It is so popular that virtually anyone in Sri Lanka can recount it, and the Internet also provides several accounts which are more or less similar in content.⁴ The following excerpt gives a more precise description of the framing ritual, the Kohomba Kankariya, of which the Kuveni Asne is a small segment. (This excerpt is taken from the Internet version of the *International Encyclopedia of Dance*; the author is Sicille Kotelawala):

The elaborate ritual known as the Kohomba Kankariya is one of the most ancient folk ceremonies in Sri Lanka. This ceremony is unique to Sri Lanka and embodies a rich tradition of pre-historic and pre-Buddhist lore. Legend says that King Panduvedeva (fifth century B.C.E.) was afflicted by an incurable disease caused by a curse. The remedy was known only to a king in India, born not of a woman but of a flower, whom the god Sakra lured to Sri Lanka. The deity Rahu assumed the form of a boar and laid waste the garden of the King of the Flower, who chased the boar as far as Sri Lanka and struck it with his golden sword, whereupon the boar turned into stone. After the king of Sri Lanka, who ruled in the ancient capital Anuradhapura, was cured by the King of the Flower, he decreed that this story be reenacted periodically to ensure prosperity to the land and freedom from disease...

...The dancers, who have bathed and ritually purified themselves and dressed in their red-and-white costumes and silver ornaments, don the *ves* headgear. Flanked by their drummers, they invoke the blessings of the gods on the owner of the premises and on any sick person within. The conch shell is blown, and ceremonial drums begin. They next invoke the blessing of the supreme gods and the gods of the Kankariya, a twelve-fold pantheon. This is followed by a series of dance sequences accompanied by purification chants and prayers: the devotional dance rhythms consecrate fire, incense, the turmeric water vessel, the shawl, coconut, betel nut, and food. Throughout the night the dancers continue singing verses honoring the gods, enacting sequences in pantomime narrating the epics of Sita, Vijaya, Panduwasdeva, and others. Short tales about the Kohomba god, Kuveni and other figures are also dramatized. Frenzied dances depict the chase of the boar by the King of the Flower.

The closing ceremony, toward morning, is the shooting of the banana flower with the ceremonial bow and arrow. At the conclusion, the storehouse is pulled down and set on fire to dispel all evil influences...⁵

Anonymously lost in the darkness of a mythological past are the names of the author of the simple, heart-rending lyrics, and the creator of the narrow-range three-tone melody of the Kuveni lamentation, an expression of sadness which can also readily be understood even by cultural outsiders. Today, the dance is performed synchronically by a group of women, who begin with slow sweeping movements, and

build climactically to a rapid, acrobatic *kastiram* section, all accompanied and guided by a group of *gātabere* drummers. During the slow part, the voice of a woman singing the repeating lamentation motif is heard in the background. The female dancers hold a shell in the left hand as a symbol of femininity, and a stick in the right hand, like magicians. As mentioned above, the ritual colors of the costume are white and red, and the costume also includes regionally-specific ornaments and the dance includes features of the up-country dance style of the Kandy area.⁶

In order to examine various attempts at reframing and adaptating the original source, we must first examine the source itself. Written by monks, the text reflects the spirit of the early time of its authoring. It was created during a period when the Buddhist religion was being introduced and gaining influence, and had to be sanctified by the clergy, who constructed the content of the Mahavamsa according to this concern and with the intention to show the own important role in the process of introducing a purifying religion. The authors tried to make it evident to the reader that there are clear differences between the pre-Buddhist and Buddhist periods of Sri Lankan history⁷, and that therefore it was advantageous to describe the past of Vijaya in perhaps as dark a manner as possible. Vijaya is introduced in the *Mahavamsa* as the son of an incestuous couple (brother and sister), who were themselves the children of a lion and an Indian princess. He is presented as a person with antisocial tendencies:

... Vijaya was of evil conduct and his followers were even [like himself], and many intolerable deeds of violence were done by them. Angered by this the people told the matter to the king; the king, speaking persuasively to them, severely blamed his son. But all fell out again as before, the second and yet the third time; and the angered people said to the king: "Kill thy son."

Then did the king cause Vijaya and his followers, seven hundred men, to be shaven over half the head and put them on a ship and sent them forth upon the sea, and their wives and children also. The men, women, and children sent forth separately landed separately, each [company] upon an island, and they dwelt even there. The island where the children landed was called Naggadipa and the island where the women landed Mahiladipaka. Vijaya landed at the haven called Suppāraka, but being there in danger by reason of the violence of his followers he embarked again.

The prince named Vijaya, the valiant, landed in Lanka, in the region called Tambapanni on the day that the Tathagata lay down between the two twinlike *sala* trees to pass into Nibbana...⁸

In the same way, Kuveni is described as a so-called *yakkhini*²:

...a *yakkhini* named Kuvanna sat at the foot of a tree spinning, as a woman hermit might.

When the man saw the pond and the woman-hermit sitting there, he bathed there and drank and taking young shoots of lotuses and water in louts-leaves he came forth again. And she said to him: "Stay! thou art my prey!" Then the man stood there as if fast bound. But because of the power of the magic thread she could not devour him, and though was entreated by the *yakkhini*, the man would not yield up the thread. Then the *yakkhini* seized him, and hurled him, who cried aloud, into a chasm. And there in a like manner she hurled [all] the seven hundred one by one after him.

And when they all did not return fear came upon Vijaya; armed with the five weapons he set out, and when he beheld the beautiful pond, where he saw no footstep of any man coming forth, but saw that woman-hermit there, he thought: "Surely my men have been seized by this woman." And he said to her, "Lady, hast thou not seen my men?" "What dost thou want with thy people, prince?" she answered. "Drink thou and bathe."

Then was it clear to him: "This is surely a *yakkhini*, she knows my rank," and swiftly, uttering his name, he came at her drawing his bow...⁶

The sixth chapter of the *Mahavamsa* shows for the recent observer not only the transition from a pre-Buddhist "dark" and "sodomite" era to a spiritually "more developed" one, but also the transition from matriarchal to patriarchal power. Kuveni seems to have been a kind of shaman woman who had magical power, a certain status of social independence, and also the important function of a guardian, protecting her community at the strategically weak coastal border of the island. It is clearly shown that Vijaya had no other defense strategy against her charms than the primitive power of his superior weapons.

...He caught the *yakkhini* in the noose about the neck, and seizing her hair with his left hand he lifted his sword in the right and cried: "Slave! give me back my men, or I slay thee!" Then tormented by fear the *yakkhini* prayed him for her life. "Spare my life, sir, I will give thee a kingdom and do thee a woman's service and other services as thou wilt."...⁹

Vijaya is therefore a banished criminal who claims hegemony over an island through the crude power of his sword. And he is unscrupulous enough to abuse the promised services of Kuveni, assured under the threat of death. His only interest is the expansion of his hegemony, and for this purpose the marriage with an Indian princess is profitable and his former relationship with Kuveni is obstructive, despite the fact that they have two children.

...Vijaya had one son and one daughter by the *yakkhini*; when he now heard that the princess had arrived he said to the *yakkhini*: "Go thou now, dear one, leaving the two children behind; men are ever in fear of superhuman beings."

But when she heard this she was seized with fear of the *yakkhas*; then he said [again] to the *yakkhini*: "Delay not! I will bestow on thee an offering by [spending] a thousand [pieces of money]." When she had again and again besought him [in vain] she took her two children and departed for Lankapura, though fearing that evil should come of it.

She set the children down outside and went, herself, into that city. When the *yakkhas* in the city recognized the *yakkhini*, in their terror they took her for a spy and there was great stir among them; but one who was violent killed the *yakkhini*, with a single blow of his fist.

But her uncle, on the mother's side, a *yakkha*, went forth from the city and when he saw the children he asked them:

"Whose children are you?" and hearing that they were Kuvanna's he said: "Here has your mother been slain, and slay you also if they see you: [therefore] flee swiftly!"...⁸

He wants to dispose of Kuveni as quickly as possible and his only argument is: "...men are ever in fear of superhuman beings."⁸ This exemplifies a very well-known argument in the history of female suppression; such an argument can be found in the European witch trials, where millions of innocent women were killed, or in the stylized representations of the woman as either a holy, sacrosanct virgin, or as a whore who is committed to the disposal of every man. The image of an independent, powerful woman who has important responsibilities for others and abilities which are not transparently understood by men seems to be the worst threat to men's desire to take and hold control over humankind.

Kuveni Asne, the oldest traditional musical interpretation of the figure Kuveni, shows in lyrics and melody nothing more than a desperate woman, banished and left alone by a cruel, selfish calculating partner. The act of humiliation is worsened by the fact that Kuveni abdicated from her leadership of the island for Vijaya's benefit under the threat of his sword, and that they had two children, which indicates that they had a love relationship and the responsibilities of parents. The climax of Kuveni's seclusion and desperation is represented impressively through the reduced, archaic style of expression in the song and its kinetic performance as dance.

Part II. Kuveni: A Postcolonial Musical Drama






Figure 3. Kuveni meets Vijaya in a beach forest. (Kuveni is played by Henry Jayasena's wife Manel, and this image is from a televised film version of the drama.)


The musical drama *Kuveni*, written by Henry Jayasena,¹ was performed for the first time in 1963, fifteen years after the the country gained independence. In 2000 Dr. Lakshmi de Silva¹⁰ published her English translation, to which this article refers. The author Henry Jayasena himself sent me the text, the music on audio-cod and two vcDs with film versions of the play. Additional information was provided through an email-interview with the author. According to this interview, two composers are responsible for the musical parts. One was Lylie Godridge, a famous singer, vocal teacher and leader of the Philharmonic Choir Colombo, who died in 1998. He wrote the music for the performance of *Kuveni* in English language. The other composer, also deceased, was H. H. Bandara, who provided the music for the original Sinhala version. This article refers specifically to his music.

The following table gives a general overview of the drama and the distribution of text and music sections, based on the televised film version:

Table 1: Sequence of the scenes with analytic parameters in the vcd version.¹¹

act	scene-parts	persons	music	type of lyrics	presentation of lyrics		studio-stage TV-screen actions	duration
					spoken	sung		
	pre lude	-	instrumental, accentuated rhythm	-	-	-	credits	2m
1	1	narrator appears in trees	very dark, solemn	lyrical	 <p>Fig. 4.</p>	male voice slow and measured	forest; cross fading of the person	4m
	2	choir (3 males 3 females)	unison violin accompanied by a dominant drum	lyrical	between spoken and sung	declamation	choir with hand-gestures	1m
	3	hunter, son, daughter of Kuveni	-	epic	spoken dialogue	-	forest	5m
	4	choir (3 males 3 females)	unison violin accompanied by a dominant drum	lyrical	between spoken and sung	declamation	choir with hand-gestures	1m
	5	hunter, son, daughter of Kuveni	-	epic	spoken dialogue	-	forest	1m
	6	Disala (daughter) Jeevahattha (son)	unison violin accompanied by a dominant drum very plangent	lyrical	-	Solo and duet, 8 verses	hand gestures	3m
	7	hunter, son, daughter of Kuveni	-	epic	spoken dialogue	-	forest	2m
	8	choir (3 males 3 females)	unison violin accompanied by a dominant drum	lyrical	between spoken and sung	declamation	choir with hand-gestures	1m
	9	Disala	drum roll	epic	one sentence	-	-	
	10	choir (3 males 3 females)	unison violin accompanied by a dominant drum, fast	lyrical	-	sung verse	choir with hand-gestures	1m
	11	hunter, son, daughter of Kuveni	-	epic	spoken dialogue	-	forest	3m
	inter lude	-	instrumental, accentuated rhythm	-	-	-	changing stage scenery	2m
	12	Kuveni + female choir	unison violin dominant drumming	lyrical	-	song=title-melody (choir repeats the verses)	on shore, hand gestures symbolize the lyrics	3m
	13	first meeting of Kuveni + Vijaya	Indian sitar sound is increasingly used, but also further drumming	lyrical	dialogue	between sung melody and declamation	on shore, hand gestures symbolize the lyrics	3m
	14	hunter, son,	-	epic	spoken dialogue	-	forest	2m

		daughter of Kuveni						
	15	choir	unison violin sound + drumming	lyrical		declamation of the curse	forest	3m
	16	hunter, son, daughter of Kuveni	-	epic	spoken dialogue	-	forest	1m
	17	Disala, Jeevahattha	sitar sound, violin drumming	lyrical	dialogue	sung	forest	2m
	18	Kuveni	unison violin and drum	lyrical		lamentation	Vijaya stands in dimmed light in the background	3m
	19	narrator	violin+sitar sound	lyrical	-	declamation + reverb	forest; cross fading of the person	2m
2	1	narrator	violin+sitar sound	lyrical	-	declamation + reverb	forest; cross fading of the person	2m
	2	choir (invisible) transitional, menacing sound motif	fast, rhythmic	lyrical	-	declamation	cut, cold modern blue room without anything; Kuveni, two lawyers and a judge are shown at the courts	1m
	3	judge and two lawyers ; the lawyers give their statements concerning the person and the case of Kuveni	some short musical accentuations of phrases at key points	epic but in verses	spoken		court scenery	10
	4	narrator's scene is cut	interlude like above	-	-	-	-	-
3	1	hunter, son, daughter of Kuveni	-	epic	spoken dialogue	-	forest	3m
	2	choir	two voices in unison accompanied by violin+cello+ a dominant drum	lyrical	between spoken and sung	declamation	choir with hand-gestures	1m
	3	hunter, son, daughter of Kuveni	-	epic	spoken dialogue	-	forest	3m
	4	choir only 3 females	unison accompanied by violin and a dominant drum	lyrical	between spoken and sung	declamation	choir with hand-gestures	2m
	5	son, daughter of Kuveni	violin and <i>shruti pettiya</i>	-	-	-	falling asleep	1m
	6	choir Kuveni approaches the sleeping	unison accompanied by violin and a dominant drum	lyrical	between spoken and sung	declamation	choir with hand-gestures	2m

		children						
	7	Kuveni, son, daughter	-	epic	spoken dialogue		forest	2m
	8	choir, Kuveni leaves the place with her children	unison accompanied by violin and a dominant drum	lyrical	between spoken and sung	declamation	choir with hand-gestures	2m
epi	logue	narrator and later, choir	unison accompanied by violin and a dominant drum	lyrical	between spoken and sung	declamation	choir with hand-gestures	$\frac{2m}{75m}$

Brief summary:

Act one introduces the people and the source of the conflict, and gives a short historical overview of the case.

Act two moves the case to a modern postcolonial court. Two lawyers build up the two extreme perspectives of Kuveni: as a menacing, magical, shamanic woman capable of witchcraft; and as a wretched mother and loving wife who was left alone with two children from a cruel, egotistical husband.

Act three seeks a connection of the past to the present, of the realm of fantasy to the realm of facts. Kuveni meets her children in the present day, and they are reunited. The end is open; the audience is left in a kind of contemplative situation and mood:

No truth the eye can see
In a world that darkness fills
Unreal was the past –
Can the future bring truths at last?
In the darkness that prevails
The eye can only see
Dreams and drifting delusions
Caught in the net of illusion
Our eyes are tricked by its veils
Which mold only magical visions.

Henry Jayasena's play shows very well the postmodern character of seeing truth, which is deconstructed of the pretension of absoluteness, shown as process-oriented, and constructed through heterogeneous perspectives and interests. For this purpose, the misty, mythical framework serves advantageously as a pool of fantasy for several notions of reconstruction. The musical form of Jayasena's drama is clearly functional. It helps to structure the story line, characterizes scenes and their atmosphere and seeks to accentuate the contents of the words. Jayasena uses the choir in the sense of the epic theatre of Berthold Brecht, to whom he clearly refers, not only with his Sinhala version of "Der Kaukasische Kreidekreis." The choir, in combination with the declamation of the words and the musical accompaniment of unison-played violin and accentuating drum, has a clarifying function, to guide the audience with the help of estrangement or alienation effects. These dramatic methods were developed by Brecht for the specific purposes of hindering the

audience to identify with the content, and to thereby help the spectators to dissociate from the action and find a balance between reflection and emotion. This process was in deliberate opposition to the theatre of Aristotle and his followers, where the compassion and, in the end, the catharsis of the audience is the aim of all dramatic efforts. The choir in “Kuveni” appears at key moments, disrupting and preventing the audience from beginning to identify with the characters and their actions on stage. The choir participates visibly in the drama (except during the second act), but it is not integrated into the action: instead, the words and gestures offer commentary on the story line, conclude important lyrics, and offer various possible perspectives. One interesting fact is that Henry Jayasena chooses to give the lyrics of the curse of Kuveni to the choir. In the above-mentioned interview, he himself indicates that he has some doubts about this curse:

Claus-Bachmann:

How is Kuveni's curse reconstructed in recent times by the people? Have you any experience with the opinion of people who see a connection of recent events to this mythical curse?

H. Jayasena:

Some people, especially poor people may still believe in Kuveni's curse. There are folk tales and folk poems of Kuveni's curse. Sri Lanka has never had long and sustained periods of peace and prosperity. Our history is repeatedly jarred by internal disputes, royal as well as other coups, invasions by foreign forces (mostly Indian) etc.

Personally I don't believe that Kuveni cursed. I believe she was simply shown the door and she obeyed. I wish she had cursed!. Perhaps she did. It is all in the hazy past. I used Kuveni for my concept of "eternal" woman.

Despite these doubts, the musical, textual and also, on the stage, the kinetic construction of this curse is perhaps in this combination unique in the Sinhala cultural repertoire. Also, according to research on the cursing practise in Sri Lanka as a “channel for keeping physical violence in control” (Brill 1997), it is interesting to reflect on this as an energetic construction or reconstruction of the—perhaps also “eternal”—expression of disappointment between men and women.



Figures 9. and 10. The choir's declamation (<http://www.kuveni.de/mumepage.htm>) of Kuveni's curse (image and transcription of the notes in the pitch of the television version).

Table 2: the formal micro-structure of the composition (figures 11a-c).

transcription of the syllabic melody line/ Fig. 11a-t		component
 <p>po- lo- va u- su- la- na de- vi- ya- ne mu- hu- de u- su- la- na de- vi- ya- ne</p>		A
 <p>a- ha- sa u- su- la- na de- vi- ya- ne nae- ge- na i- ra san- da de- vi- ya- ne</p>		B :II
 <p>a- gni a- sa- ni- ya de- - vi ya- - - ne</p>		C
 <p>vae- hi va- la- ha- ka de- vi- ya- ne</p>		D
 <p>me- gha gar- ja- na de- vi- ya- ne</p>		A'
 <p>ba- la- n ma- ta ka- la me- - vi- ne</p>		B
<p>interlude violin</p> 		IL1
 <p>po- lo pu- pu- ra pae- li- - ya- - n sa- yu- ru kae- lmbi sae- li- - ya- - n</p>		E
 <p>a- ha- s gi- ni- ge- na dae- vi- - yan nae- ge- na i- ra han- da vae- ti- - yan</p>		F:II
<p>interlude</p> 		IL2
 <p>ta- ba- na ta- ba- na pa- ya gin- nen dae- vi- yan u- - pan u- - pan ku- ma-ru ma- tu nae- si- yan</p>		G
<p>interlude</p> 		IL3
 <p>va- hi- na va- hi- na vae- hi a- ha- se dae- vi- yan di- yen--- go- din- - gi- ni- - ja- la mae- vi- yan</p>		G
<p>interlude</p> 		IL4

 <p>ga- ha- na ga- ha- na he- na hi- sa- ma- ta vae- ti- yan le- di- n du- ki- n san- ha- ti- ya- ma- - pe- li- yan</p>	H
 <p>ja- thith bha- ve gi- ni- dæl- ma- ta dæ- vi- yan ni- ran- ta- ren ba- da- - sa- yen mæ- ri- yan</p>	I:II
<p>improvised line</p> 	IL5
 <p>po- lo pu- pu- ra aha- sa gu- gu- ra di- ya de- bæ- kara va- rel- la sak-va- lin mu- hu- din go- din a- ha sin sæ- nen to- pi va- rel- la</p>	J:II
 <p>man- tra ban- dha- na ag- ni a- sa- ni- sa lo- di- yat ge- na va- rel- la</p>	K
 <p>man- tra ma- ya an- ja- nam ka- ra me ra- ju- ta vi- na ka- ral- la</p>	L

Table 3: Translation of Kuveni's curse.

kuvéniyagé sāpaya	Kuveni's curse
<p>polova usulana deviyané ahasa usulana deviyané muhuda usulana deviyané naegena ira sañḍa deviyané agni asaniya deviyané væhi valāhaka deviyané méggha garjana deviyané balan mata kala mé viné</p> <p>polo pupurā pæliyan ahas ginigēna dæviyan sayuru kælm̐bi sæliyan nægēna irahañḍa vætīyan</p> <p>tabana tabana paya ginnen dæviyan vahina vahina væhi ahasé sindiyan gahana gahana hēna hisamata vætīyan jathith bhavé gini dælmata dæviyan upan upan kumarun matu næsiyan diyēn godin gini jālā mæviyan lēdin dukin saṅghatiyama pæliyan nirantarēn bada sāyēn mæriyan</p> <p>polo pupurā ahasa gugurā diya debæ kara varēllā sakvalin-muhudin-godin-ahasin sænen topi varēllā mantra-bandhana-agni-asanisa lōḍiyat gēna varēllā mantra-māyā anjanam kara mé rajuta vina karallā</p>	<p>O Gods who uphold the earth O Gods who uphold the skies O Gods who uphold the seas You who make moon and sun arise Gods of fire, of storm, of death, O God of clouds, you gods of rain Lightening and thunder crashing loud Look on the wrong that's done to me!</p> <p>Earth in anger, roar and crack! Skies in fury, rage and flame! Tower of sea, flood and devour! Fall, you rising moon and sun!</p> <p>May each step sear thy feet in fire May every drop of rain run dry May thunderbolts crash on each head Each body burn in scorching flames Each youth born untimely die Earth and water rise in fire Sickness and eternal pain Rack their bones till each one born Die in famine's suffering dire.</p> <p>From roaring skies, from groaning soil, divide the waters and arise From farthest space, from deepest seas, from earth and air, arise, arise With hideous powers, with torturing spells, with molten fire, arise, arise I who am wronged, I pray to you, O you great Gods on you I call With all your power to blast and bind upon this king let vengeance fall!</p> <p>Translation: Lakshmi de Silva (2000: 29/30)</p>
Transcription of the Sinhala lyrics: Nirosha Paranavitane	

The four different musical sections of the curse vary in the form of the melody lines, whose speed, volume and kinetic expression are increased gradually. The first motif refers in the sequence of the tones somewhat to the Kuveni Asne melody. But in the following sections the range of tones increases and the rhythmically-forced declamation accentuates the resolute mood of the cursing person. Still nowadays, cursing seems to be a hidden, but often-practiced strategy in Sri Lanka to express anger against someone. Brill found, in an empirical study (1997) over approximately one year, that the practice to visit a well-reputed healer, or even some Buddhist temples, in order to receive professional cursing spells functions as a kind of channel to control violent emotions of revenge, anger and jealousy. Such practice is officially taboo, but in actuality is commonly and frequently undertaken. Perhaps Kuveni's curse has, in a similar way, a collective psychological control function, as a kind of warning for the male inhabitants not to overestimate and abuse their patriarchal power: a permanent allocation of guilt, a mirror of liability. As Henry Jayasena mentions, many Sri Lankans still attribute the continually-threatened condition of the island throughout its male-dominated history to Kuveni's curse. It is possible that the desire to suspend this curse may also be a hidden mythical background or subtext for the presidency of the first woman in Asia and even in the world: Sirimavo Bandaranaike, who became Prime Minister of the postcolonial state in 1960. The reconstruction of this myth by Henry Jayasena for a postcolonial, middle-class audience and the later dissemination through the mass media has certainly contributed considerably to the revitalization of an emotional network of a precolonial cultural memory¹².

Part III. *First Love*: Kuveni and Vijaya as World Music Reconstruction

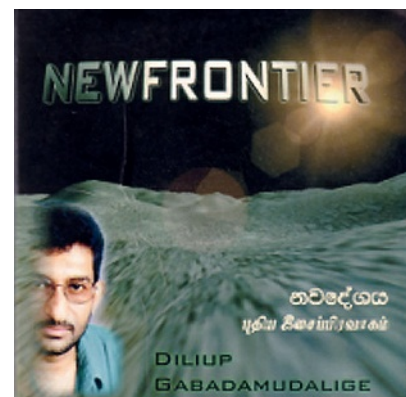


Figure 31. The composer Diliup Gabadamudalige and his album *NewFrontier:First Love of Kuveni and Vijaya* (<http://www.kuveni.de/mumepage.htm>).

Diliup Gabadamudalige is, despite his youth, also an award-winning artist.¹³ His target group is a younger generation, born after the declaration of independence and growing up with an eternal and sometimes irrational longing for western European/American styles of life. His concept CD *NewFrontier* is influenced by program music as well as by electronic sounds. The result is a style which in western categories would be called world music: a transcultural combination of pop elements,

techno sound samples, snippets of traditional music and jazz, an easy-listening structure, and programmatic titles:

First Love - Diliup Gabadamudalige 1998



Figure 32. Main musical motif of the composition, which is almost used as an ostinato throughout the piece.

Gabadamudalige refers to Kuveni and also Vijaya, but only to the sunny sides of their relationship. Erased are the disappointment, the curse, and the predicament of the children. Patriarchal power is established as self-evident; it is voluntarily accepted by the woman, and only love rules at last. It is perhaps a little too smooth and unpretentious; perhaps it reflects the imaginations and desires of a generation that is tired of unending conflict and war and of the economically grim circumstances on the island: conditions which inspire desires for fantastic illusions. The composer gives the following description on the CD insert:

The start is Vijaya's landing on the beach who is struck by beauty and the starkness of nature. He and his companions find footprints and follow them. They meet the Raksha clan and Kuveni. A mental, physical and magical battle takes place. Finally Vijaya and his group win over the tribe with Vijaya winning Kuveni's heart. Kuveni hands over the kingdom to Vijaya who becomes the first king of Sri Lanka.

The piano, acoustic bass guitar, sitar recreate the sounds of the sea, animals and the nature and the events and interactions are expressed [by] western and eastern drums.

If the Veddhas and the women are, in Jayasena's drama, a topic of detailed and controversial socio-cultural reflection, then they lose the function of a flash point in Gabadamudalige's interpretation and become lost in an uncritical mainstream of unscrutinized terms and positions. One question is whether the listener necessarily visualizes the program when listening to the music; for the listener it could perhaps be more attractive to simply follow his/her own fantasies...

Outlook: Women, Independence and Songs as a Medium of Socio-Critical Reflection

Here I return to socio-critical music creations in Sri Lanka. Carlo Fonseka is Professor Emeritus of Medicine; because of his popularity and his successful songs he became Interim Acting Director of the Institute of Aesthetic Studies, the most famous but ill-equipped state music college of Sri Lanka. He works on an honorary basis for UNESCO, and is a much-demanded orator at cultural events.

Part of the background of this song is that young people in Sri Lanka—and especially young women—live for a very long time at their parents' house. It is still common practice for marriages to be arranged by professional mediators, and young people who fall in love have very few chances to become acquainted with one another, let alone to choose their own marriage partners. (Not a small portion of the high suicide rate in Sri Lanka is attributed to heartbreak.) But especially in larger

cities, more and more young people are unimpressed by tradition. This song recounts a young woman leaving her parents' home, self-confident and courageous, to live with her friend. Many parents would not excuse this action, but the song is an appeal to the compassion and the tolerance of the parents to stand by their child even if he or she has broken the rules of tradition.

Carlo Fonseka Gold Daughter



Figure 33. The melody structure of **Carlo Fonseka's song** (<http://www.kuveni.de/mumepage.htm>).

Table 4: The translation of the song "Gold Daughter."

rattaran duwé	Gold Daughter
rattaran duwé apé rattaran duwé obay diviya arthawat kàlé giyà dā patan igilā kurulu kūduwen santōsayak næ sité.	Gold Daughter, oh Gold Daughter you are our life, which becomes brighter in your presence. Since you have left our house we have never been happy
santōsayak næ sité santōsayak næ sité giya dā patan igila kurulu kūduwen santōsayak næ sithé	we have never been happy we have never been happy since you have left our house we have never been happy
igililā giyé samugena apé kūduwen obat kūduwak thanannané igililā gosin tanapu kūduwat aran nævata ennà piyambalā duwé.	You left our nest like a bird saying goodbye to build a new nest so take your new nest and fly back to our nest
nævata ennà piyambalā duwé nævata ennà piyambalā duwé igililā gosin tanapu kūduwat aran	and fly back to our nest and fly back to our nest so take your new nest and fly back to our nest
nævata ennà piyambalā duwé hanika ennà piyambalā duwé ævit yannà ennà sudu duwé.	Come back quickly to our nest if you don't like to stay, please come for a visit ...

The musical form is clearly western-influenced, and shows the rhythmic structure of a slow waltz in D major with a clear melody structure of ABCD. The western style reinforces the content of the lyrics, which propagates a message of

accepting at least part of the western way of life, specifically concerning tolerance and freedom in love relationships. At the same time, Fonseka shows the picture of a young woman who is, despite the perceptions or imaginings of many Sinhalese parents, self-responsible and independent in the construction of her own life. This is a reconstruction of the image of the early Kuveni, who lived her life self-determined and free, neither under the control of any man nor of a patriarchal ideology.

Conclusion:

Kuveni is an iridescent figure in the cultural memory of Sri Lankans. Because knowledge of her is continually diffused through historical and mythical constructions and reconstructions, she is a flexible and expandable pattern in the creative imaginations of authors and composers. According to shifting circumstances of time and space, she can be reborn and reconstructed in a textual, kinetic and/or sonic shape as shaman, queen, witch, lover, girlfriend, beast, beauty, magician, wife, mother, homeless person, or Amazon: she is an outline for interpretations, hopes, desires, curses, condemnations, peace, love, beauty, power, and freedom; a symbolic cultural flashlight for the eyes and ears of Sri Lankans, and those who want to become familiar with the cultural forms of expression of this island.

Notes

¹ A newspaper article on a spring 2003 honoring ceremony, online at <http://www.dailynews.lk/2003/09/27/fea08.html>, accessed in 2004, gives general information on author Henry Jayasena.

² "One of a special class of powerful 'non-human' beings—sometimes kindly, sometimes murderous and cruel—corresponding roughly to the fairies and ogres of Western fairy tales. The female (*yakkhini*) is generally considered more treacherous than the male. They are demons in the lower realm, like the Ghost Realm. They are evil, malignant and violent. They live on earth or in air" ("Collected Book of Commonly-Used Buddhism Terms" by Minh Thông, 2002: <http://www.quangminh.org/tudiendoichieu/AnhViet/YZ.htm>; accessed in 2004).

³ The following webpage provides a good comparison of the *Mahavamsa* and *Dipavamsa*: <http://members.tripod.com/~hettiarachchi/dipa.html>; accessed in 2004.

⁴ Some sources are: <http://www.budsas.org/ebud/mahavamsa/chap007.html> (original text of the *Mahavamsa*, translated by Wilhelm Geiger, with English translation by Mrs. Mabel Haynes Bode, from 1912); accessed in 2004.

<http://lakdiva.org/codrington/chap01.html>; <http://members.tripod.com/~hettiarachchi/history.htm>; and <http://www.explorelanka.com/places/nc/vilpattu.htm>; accessed in 2004.

⁵ The web address is: <http://www.lankalibrary.com/rit/dance.htm>; accessed in 2004

⁶ There are three general cultural areas for dance and music in Sri Lanka: 1. The up-country region with Kandy-style music and dance; 2. the region around Ratnapura, with Sabaragamuwa style music and dance; and 3. the low-country region around Ambalangoda up to Matara in the south-west part, of the low-country style. Each has its own distinctive costumes, colors and features.

⁷ See the discussion of rating the *Mahavamsa* as a historical source at: <http://www.payer.de/mahavamsa/chronik003.htm>; accessed in 2004.

⁸ From the translation of the 6th chapter by Wilhelm Geiger: <http://www.budsas.org/ebud/mahavamsa/chap006.html>; accessed in 2004.

⁹ <http://www.budsas.org/ebud/mahavamsa/chap007.html>: seventh chapter of the *Mahavamsa*, in the translation of W. Geiger; accessed in 2004.

¹⁰ <http://www.thesundayleader.lk/20030413/review.htm>. Ms. de Silva received an award for the translation of *Kuveni* in English language; accessed in 2004.

¹¹ The vcd was recorded by Studio U, Colombo.

¹² The term "cultural memroy" refers to the perspective of Jan Assmann:
<http://www.kuveni.de/modul1h.htm>; accessed in 2004.

¹³ At the following websites, one can find an article on the awards ceremony and additional information on Gabadamudalige: <http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2003/03/30/mag09.html> and <http://origin.sundayobserver.lk/2002/06/16/mag01.html>; accessed in 2004.

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