Superficially the Oresteian Trilogy is a violent story of primitive family feud. But it is much more than a tale of vengeance. Aspect after aspect reveals itself when searched deeper. The subject matter handled by Aeschylus is very near to the core of human feeling. It is near the central experience of life. But the reader might be compelled to turn aside, once to history or prehistory, or then to philosophy and theology, or may be ethics and again to the development of drama as an art. But at all times the central unifying element would be the author’s poetic conception.

Peter D. Arnott compares a great play to an onion. The further we penetrate, the more layers of meaning one reveals. According to him impressive works of art could be appreciated at many levels. Each generation examining them in the light of its own culture and beliefs finds something to admire.

The story involved in the first play of the Oresteian Trilogy, the Agamemnon is the dramatic and victorious homecoming of king Agamemnon after the capture of Troy. Agamemnon had been the commander of the Greek confederacy that sailed against Troy. But before sailing it so happens that he has to appease the gods by sacrificing a virgin. He makes a choice between his duty to the state and his family. The choice is that he sacrifices his own daughter to appease the gods and lead the assembled joint army to war.

His wife Clytemnestra, while ruling the country in his absence, awaits his return. For she feels according to the old form of justice, invoked no doubt by her love for the daughter and her sense of betrayal, that she should to punish Agamemnon. The old form of justice meant ‘eye for eye and tooth for tooth form of justice. Therefore one murder would inevitably lead to another. Though the background story and situation is revealed through many a choral ode, the story starts with the announcement of victory and the home coming and ends with the murder of her husband. Clytemnestra, the wife kills her husband the king, in revenge for the killing of the daughter. The reason is that according to the old form of justice the killer had to be killed by the nearest and the dearest. In the Oresteian Trilogy the three plays deal with three forms of Justice. The first play is the old form of Justice. This is where the killer had to be killed. And the punishment had to be carried out by the nearest kin. The second play deals with the intermediate stage where after purification the guilty is forgiven. The Third is where the homicide is tried under a court system. An Independent Jury is selected and both sides are provided an opportunity to present their case.

As Bowra points out ancient tragedy was deeply concerned with current problems. Aeschylus considered that what was correct for their...
The above stated, somewhat brief background information lies as evidence to the formidable challenge that would be confronted by any modern dramatist when producing Agamemnon of Aeschylus.

The foremost facts that have to be noticed are the changes in the time-period of production. Then the place, the country, the society, the people and their knowledge is important. The relavancy to the social and political atmosphere counts as well. Even the conditions of the theatre poses challenges. The theatrical conditions and atmosphere comes next.

Despite the above mentioned problems concerning the actual production, the 21st century Sri Lankan stage seems to find the Greek Classics quite interesting. If so in what manner had the modern local playwrights presented the Greek Dramas to the Sri Lankan audiences? What changes have they introduced? And how fair would be the adaptations to the original? These are the questions proposed to investigate through an analysis of Gayan Randeeras production of The Agamemnon of Aeschylus.

The first comment that one is compelled to make regarding the production is that the total effect was electrifying. The united tension in the audience was almost tangible. The play was performed indoors. The modern dramatist had not made use of the traditional masks of the Greeks. Since the masks were needed mainly for the visual effect this omission could hardly be noticed. But the ability to see the facial expressions added a positive impact, and provided a greater scope for the dramatist.

Since the intention of the study is to focus on the innovations, the first change from the Greek play the spectator confronts is the scene depicting Clytemnestra’s lone figure on stage while the chorus sings a string of odes. Being the first of classical dramatists whose works have survived, Aeschylus uses the chorus to the utmost. The odes are of various descriptions or dramatizations, depicting the background situation, state of the mind of characters or commenting of the action itself. They vary in subject matter as well as the moods generated. Hence they sing songs relating to the siege of Troy, the action of the war, patriotism, potents and their interpretations leading to the requirement of human sacrifice, the state of Agamemnons mind before the decision is taken and the dramatic portrayal of the sacrifice itself in words. There is also the reference to the old form of Justice. The queen, Clytemnestra is shown on stage, a silent formidable figure rigidly turning her back to the chorus and the audience. Aeschylus had used this dramatic device in a very expressive manner. It signifies:

* The isolation she would have felt during the course of events. The betrayal.
* Her disregard for public opinion which failed her once at the time of need.
* Reveals a considerable amount of her character. She is proud, strong, nursing a burning resentment and hostility. Is arrogant and aloof.
* She disregards all. She is self assured and has the strength and mind to stand against all.
* She stands tall and strong - outstanding among the many. She is definitely superior to the chorus. The chorus plays as a foil to highlight her royalty.

But the Clytemnestrathat the Sinhala modern production faces the chorus and the audience. Since masks are not used one also is able to watch the facial expression. One tends to wonder if the director had surpassed a chance to exploit the situation for dramatic effect. For the question stands, could any person express emotions evoked at the above mentioned incidents effectively? May be if the character expressed no emotions at all and no facial expressions it would have had a better effect. This may be a subjective observation. But one does also notice that the actress playing the part wears a slight smile on her face, while listening to the odes. Irrespective of the above observations the scene seems to be quite effective on the audience.

The next observation stands quite controversial. This is the manner Iphigenia, the daughter that was to be sacrificed is brought on to stage
The decision to sacrifice his own daughter was not easy for Agamemnon. He is shocked and appalled at the suggestion at first. It was later, in the same stanza that he decides that he must yield. The poet brings out the shock, the grief, the refusal and then the struggle before the ultimate decision within a single stanza.-

'What can I say?
Disaster follows if I obey;
Surely yet worse disaster if I yield.
And slaughter my own child,
my homes delight,
In her young innocence and
stain my hand
With blaspheous unnatural cruelty
Bathed in the blood I
fathered!'15

And then,
earn the deserter's badge -
abandon my command,
There must be sacrifice, a
maid must bleed -
Their chafing rage demands
it - they are right?16

The difficulty of making the
decision is not emphasized in the
modern version. If it had been
emphasized, his ultimate fate
would have been more pathetic
and would have appealed to the audience more.

The handling of the chorus had been done with delicacy. The
dramatist had retained its part as an integral part of the play as in the
original version. The innovation made in the adaptation is that the odes
have been modified to a certain extent. Modern theatre provides many
theatrical devices that makes certain descriptions etc. unnecessary.

The entrance of Agamemnon is quite effective. Special
concentration had been given to the dramatic electricity in the interplay
of the dialogue. The dialogue had retained its forceful yet subtle irony in
the translation. The rapid dialogue persuading Agamemnon to tread on
the crimson carpet against all sound judgment is powerfully presented.
However, the triumphant cry that escapes Clytemnestra’s mouth at the
moment he treads on the crimson carpet ensuring her victory is not used
by the translator. It may be that a suitable word or sound could not be
found in the Sinhala vocabulary or contemporary use. But it should be
noted that Aeschylus uses the sound on other occasions as well to
indicate triumph. In this scene however it may be interpreted as a blood
curdling sound that would have made the audience uneasy. The two other occasions in which this cry is used are:

1. When she heard of Agamemnon’s return and
2. After the killing of Agamemnon.

On watching the modern production another observation that one might make is the entrance of Cassenda, the Trojan princess and priestess of Apollo. In the Greek tragedy, Aeschylus dramatized this event with the use of visual media. Cassenda is brought in with the rest of the spoils in a chariot. Since theater provisions did not allow this in the modern era some other device could have been employed to highlight the pathos. Aeschylus had even used the scene as symbolic of the splendor of Troy now brought in as spoils. If at least her costume was in the traditional color of a virgin priestess of Apollo indicating femininity, youth and innocence it might have added much to the occasion, i.e.,

Traditional yellow with black patches to indicate the pristes, me of trimer girl, the fall. Her dress to indicate the priestess, the girl and the fall of Troy. In the modern version her dress is of a dull green shade. Furthermore, the casual entrusting of Cassenda to Clytemnestra is missing from the modern version. But this incident had throughout the years been a basis for the argument resting on double standards for men and women in the ancient world. But this again is a debate applicable even to the modern day in a more subtle sense, irrespective of culture and self-acknowledged equality of sexes. It seems perfectly acceptable socially for the victorious general to bring back a concubine among other spoils and entrust her to his wife. The effect of this on Clytemnestra however could be seen in her cold attitude to the newly acquired slave.

“You too, Cassandra, this palace bears you no ill will; You shall stand near our sovereign altar, and partake With many other slaves, the cleansing ritual”.14

“Then leave that chariot: do not be proud. They say Heracles was once sold and learnt to eat slaves’ bread?15

In the Agamemnon of Aeschylus the king is killed off stage, according to tradition of not depicting violence on stage. It is through the reaction of the chorus to the sounds coming from within the palace that the audience is made to mentally recreate the scene. But in the adaptation Agamemnon is killed on the stage itself. But the scene is handled in such a manner that as feared by the ancient Greek critics it does not become repulsive to the finer sentiments of the audience. The director had used contemporary modern theatre techniques boldly to enhance the tragic effect. The scene is powerfully presented by the actress playing the part of Clytemnestra. The gender theme is powerfully highlighted where the ultimate act of the killing itself is similar to the sexual union with the woman on top and the king underneath her. The hatred the lady had nursed for so many years is visibly seen and made to realize in the manner she carries out the murder. Even in the conversation she immediately has with the chorus after the killing, with the blood spattered clothes she displays the strength of her character. It is with deep conviction that she justifies herself and rejoices in her accomplishment.

In the original play, although Aegisthus boasts of planning the deed Aeschylus indicates that it is Clytemnestra that is stronger. She has the personality to face the criticisms of the chorus and answer them boldly through logic. She seems to be quite collected after she had attained what she wanted. But Aegisthus exhibits his weakness in threatening the chorus. The famous words of the chorus that Aegisthus is like a ‘cock
that struts before its hen" that strikes a piognent note has not been included in the translation. If it had been it would have illustrated in a nutshell the shallowness of Aegisthus as against that of Clytemnestra.

The translation also indicates that it is Aegisthus who becomes the ruler. But in the original, according to Clytemnestra, it is a joint rule she establishes.

‘You and I
Joint rulers, will enforce due reverence for our throne.’

But the portrayal of the two characters show who really was the superior.

Irrespective of some of the criticisms made, it stands as a fact that the challenge the Sri Lankan director had undertaken was a colossal one. Production of a Classical Greek tragedy is not an insignificant venture. Adopting it for the local audience while being faithful to the original is no small task either. Gayan Randeera had met and surmounted this challenge. Attempts of this nature should be commended and encouraged. The beauty of the venture is that the classics surpass in its appeal, the boundaries and limitations imposed by time and place. So it is with this play, irrespective even of the difference in the motive and circumstance of the production, the new director had reached over to touch the hearts of the theatre goers. He has done justice to the original.

Endnotes:

1. Pausanian, Description of Greece, 1.21.1
3. The Oresteian Trilogy, Translation by Philip Vellacott, Penguin Classics, 1979, introduction
General adaptation syndrome is a three-stage response that the body has to stress. But what do the different stages involve and what examples are there of GAS in action? Stress is sometimes thought of as a mental pressure, but it also has a physical effect on the body. Understanding the stages the body goes through when exposed to stress helps people become more aware of these physical signs of stress when they occur. This article explores what general adaption syndrome (GAS) is, its different stages, and when it may occur. It also considers how people can better manage their response to stress. This survey is hosted in collaboration with the Ambedkar International Mission, Ambedkar Association of North America, and the Dalit American Women’s Association. As communities who face the brunt of caste oppression, we are asking South Asians from all over the diasporas to sign up and take this survey. Record of Bihari immigrant to Mauritius. Caste practices are not specific to Hindus. This survey aims to get an initial round of data to reveal in the diasporas- the present caste distribution of South Asians, how past and present class status or political leanings are connected to caste, how caste behaviors have changed post-immigration and to what extent caste discrimination is practiced in schools, places of employment or place of worship. There are allegations that war crimes were committed by the Sri Lankan military and the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (Tamil Tigers) during the Sri Lankan Civil War, particularly during the final months of the Eelam War IV phase in 2009. The alleged war crimes include attacks on civilians and civilian buildings by both sides; executions of combatants and prisoners by both sides; enforced disappearances by the Sri Lankan military and paramilitary groups backed by them; acute shortages of food.