

WADA Nagara and Sankar VENKATESWARAN (India)
**“Goodbye, and good wishes for your success
 – a response to *Annihilation of Caste* – (…)”**
 Second Report: Production Process and
 Rehearsal Observation
 SHIBATA Takako

Interview: Sankar VENKATESWARAN and WADA Nagara
 (November 23, 2022)

—How did this project begin?

Venkateswaran: During the production of *Criminal Tribes Act*, I encountered AMBEDKAR’s text and wanted to take it on as an artist, but at the same time, I thought it was impossible. At that time, thanks to YAMADA Setsuko’s bridging efforts, I had the opportunity to collaborate with the Kyoto Performing Arts Center of Kyoto University of the Arts, and I thought that, in the environment of a foreign culture, it might actually be possible to stage a performance.

Wada: The trigger for me, too, was receiving a phone call from Yamada Setsuko, asking if I would like to work with Sankar. When I heard that *Annihilation of Caste* was the subject matter, I was worried because I was neither knowledgeable about India’s caste system nor Japan’s discriminatory structure. However, having worked on the play *Couvade*, in which actors who had never experienced pregnancy perform pregnancy and childbirth, I felt the potential of theater performed by people who are not participants in an event. Also, I thought that *The Water Station* directed by Sankar was entertaining, so I wanted to give it a try together.

Venkateswaran: Through a collaboration with Nagara, the meaning and perspective of the text expanded. I was surprised by the viewpoint from outside, which an Indian could not possess.

—How was your stay in India?

Wada: I was happy to meet everyone in person. Although the stay was short, Sankar’s theater was wonderful. I felt how amazing it is to maintain an independent theater in the mountains and create works while communicating with the local community. I knew, seeing THEATRE E9 KYOTO in Kyoto, that building a theater while maintaining a relationship with a specific community is extremely tough. I spent most of my time at the theater in Attappadi, but I went to the city of Thrissur, an urban area, for just one day. I noticed that men were the only ones driving cars and motorcycles, women above a certain age wore traditional clothes, and there were no other women in the bars where we could drink beer, which became an important experience connected to this creation.

—Are you interested in women in society?

Wada: Although it wasn’t central in the initial phase of the creation, I feel that the importance of women has gradually expanded within me. However, I am not an Indian woman, but a woman who has had a

fortunate life in Japan. I have come to realize in our discussions that I am in a privileged position as a woman, so I often think about the meaning of that in the creation process.

—How were the rehearsals at the theater in Kerala?

Venkateswaran: The rehearsals were led by Nagara, and everyone read aloud the speech in three languages. Each day, one person read the entire speech, and we all shared our reactions to it in discussion. Reading out Ambedkar’s speech for three to four hours straight every day revealed the different tones of the text and the three people’s respective perspectives.

—By different tones, do you mean linguistic, or the physical characteristics of the actors?

Venkateswaran: Both. We had been reading the text in online rehearsals, but reading it through was a historic moment because this text had never been read aloud before. It was deeply emotional to hear it voiced in three languages, and that itself was already three performances.

Wada: On the first day, Rudy (Anirudh NAIR) did it in English, on the second day, TAKEDA (Aki) did it in Japanese, and on the third day, Chandru (Chandra NINASAM) did it in Kannada.



Rehearsal in Kyoto

— I think it requires a lot of concentration to listen for three or four hours straight. Were the performances that intense?

Venkateswaran: They were something I wanted to make public to an audience as an open rehearsal. Perhaps, doing it in India made a big difference. In Japan, it probably wouldn't have been the same.

— What kind of staging do you have in mind at this point?

Wada: I want to make it a performance that can't help but refer to the reality of living in contemporary Japan. I'm thinking of staging something like a post-delivery talk, as a mechanism for the audience to think about this text in their own lives.

Venkateswaran: Making a post-delivery talk into the performance is a very natural and practical method. Imagining the unspoken text brings creative thinking and deliberation. I think it will plant a tiny question in the minds of the audience about their places in society. Ambedkar is addressing the issue of caste, which is unique to India, but there are hierarchical issues in every social system. The anger, exclusion, and power structures at the root of these problems are important.

— How are you thinking about the audience and theater space?

Wada: I think it's important to have an intimate distance with the audience, so we'll create a thrust stage. I hope to use of the spatial relationship between far and near on the stage and the *hanamichi** to good effect in the temporal distance between the work and the audience.

Venkateswaran: This text was written in 1936. On the other hand, the performance takes place *here and now*. In Noh, a form of Japanese theater, things come to visit, and in this performance, a text that exists as something from the past appears in the here and now. A text written about 100 years ago in India appears in a theater in Kyoto after a long journey.

* An elevated walkway running from the stage to the rear of a theater through the audience

