



The day was Saturday 16 July. The venue was the small auditorium of the Chandler Theatre, Keysborough, a Melbourne suburb. The event was a concert of songs titled "Gayana Sithuvam." The singers, except for Rohana Karunaratne, were amateurs who have been practising to sing for some years under the guidance of Tharupathi Munasinghe. Tharupathi has left the Aussie shores but returned for this event along with the musical tracks of the songs he created for the evening. This is no attempt at a review of that concert. I enjoyed that evening, watching something new unfold with young and older talent beautifully displayed. But one song and the accompanied visual attracted me for its dramatisation of an important theme that has social and psychological concern.

it has crucial meaning for our health and wellbeing.

We are basically animal and we cannot forget that animal in us. The animal is built to warm up, to mate and to keep mating. We start dying when that instinct dies. Existential philosophers tell us that romantic life including its sexual component is an existential given or an universal. What is most unnerving about this culture of love-denial for the older is that it is precisely at their age that people badly need an invigorating bond of love and belonging. This is a stage in life when our children move out of home leaving an empty nest. Our work careers have peaked and are falling. Matters become worse when

partly explained by their frequent love life. Many older people who look younger than their chronological age are known not to have let their romantic love life fade away. Even flirtation triggers the adrenalin to flow, generates euphoria and excitement, making our cells tick. People deprived of romance in their later life become depressed, frustrated and peeved. They are angry at the world and they take refuge in religion or in 'puristic' fundamentalist movements. They cannot smile.

In many of our homes older couples sleep in different rooms. Why is that? There isn't any doubt that love and sexuality are an

its opposite. Read the Lo Weda Sangarawa. Our bodies are described as "kunu kaya." It is true our bodies decay and die; but the same is true of the beautiful roses in my garden. Yet, aren't the roses so beautiful although not everlasting? That is an incorrect interpretation of the Buddhist philosophy. Our sex drives may change in style and intensity as we get older but it is real and instinctual-an inherent part of our



SHOULD THE LIGHT OF ROMANTIC LOVE BLOW OUT AT OLDER AGES?

My focus here is not to comment on the song itself or on its singer but on the theme and its importance to the lives of people.

It was the song by Rathna Gurusinghe- a tribute to her husband, Hemal. How often do we notice tributes played to spouses, as married life stretches into older age? Often times, married life becomes mechanical upon reaching that stage. In fact, this was more than a tribute and that is what struck me; it was an expression of romantic love done over a musing of its spring days. Lyrics by Shantha Jayalath Tissera.

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The singer recalls fondly the beginning of the road they traveled together. This is my translation of the above stanza:

Upon the bloom of my virgin love
 I felt you rest your heart.
 A teacher you were
 In the poetry of love
 Beckoning me in silence.
 I nestled and composed by your side
 Gentle human, that you are.....

romance is taken out of our lives. We want to belong and romance is the process of letting our imagination play.

The fact is that our culture has killed the idea of romantic love at older ages. I have observed how people in the community frown on romancing at older age. Sri Lankans are still in the Victorian age defined by that kind of social disapproval. We are repeatedly told that our lives are closed when we age and when our kids get married. This closure is irrational. What is more, it is dangerously damaging as life keeps meandering meaninglessly without that vital spark. On the other hand, the Western World awakened many decades ago to transcend the backward Victorian ethical era. There is a lot of literature and discussion of this topic in the Western media. We must learn from all that and move ahead. Viagra was invented in the West although the art of love -making (Kama Sutra) was there since ancient times in the orient.

Romantic love is the elixir of youthfulness. The great vibrancy of youth is

imperceptible and conflated process. These two things are inseparable and that's how the human animal is biologically constructed. The pattern of sexuality changes in older years; yet the need hasn't died and the living embers live. A simple warm embrace and physical closeness may become adequate to energise us. Yet, that is sexual. So what? What's wrong in being sexual like that? Being sexual is being natural. What's demeaning about hugging our spouses on an oft in a warm and even sensual way? Our community has been wired to feel uneasy about that idea.

Our religions have partly been the culprits. Sex is sinful if engaged out of a production agenda, says the Pope. Contraceptives are evil devices designed by the Devil. The result: Dangerous diseases like AIDS proliferated in African countries where that kind of religion grows rapidly. People are dying. Catholic priests must adhere to unnatural celibacy restrictions because sexual intimacy isn't the done thing. What is the result? Observe what the ongoing Royal Commission into sexual abuse by priests has highlighted. High profile priests are abusing young boys. One doesn't find such sexual abuse so much in the other versions of Christianity because celibacy is not imperative there.

"Don't many Buddhists behave the same way? Popular Buddhist literature either condemn or play down the sex drive as though that is unnatural whereas the truth is

animal being. Yet, older folk, in particular, are told that they must wind up their lives as they get older. Christians must think of the day they will go to the arms of Jesus in heaven and Buddhists must think of their next birth. Even if there be another birth or a heaven to go to, I wouldn't be aware of that and so why would I care? One has to only state these propositions to realise how absurd this taboo on sexual behaviour has been. Bertrand Russell used to say that if one treats sex as normal behaviour, like having meals, drinking water or defecating, this dangerous hypocrisy will end and sex will receive less attention than it deserves.

The power of enduring love is real. It will last until we reach the very final days off our inevitable mortality. But let it grow and last and nourish us until then so that we can feel we have had a good deal. The book by Gabriel Garcia Márquez, Love in the Time of Cholera, is but one example of a story illustrating the power of enduring love, where a couple fall in love in their youth, go their separate ways during midlife and return to one another's arms in their old age. Sarachchandra's Pemato Jayati Soko is also about older romance. Says the aged-Uddalaka Brahmin: "Love is what makes me look all day and night At her Without flickering an eyelid." Uddalaka's students plotted to kill his beautiful Swarnatillaka.

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In the kind of society we live, romantic love is considered the preserve of the youth. Rarely have I seen a movie that brings out older love and its unique characteristics. That will not sell. A story of a young girl and boy escaping obstacles to sneak into a comfort zone and make love, sells.

That is the media world. And that is one of those stereotypes that puts us into slots. It is, however, unreal as it leaves out an unexpressed gap in human life: that older romance has not merely a legitimacy but something that has a life on its own. Besides,

