THE USE AND EFFECT OF TECHNOLOGY IN THE PORTRAYAL OF RAMLEELA IN DOW VILLAGE, CALIFORNIA AND PIERRE ROAD, CHARLIEVILLE FOR THE PAST 20 YEARS FROM 1997 TO 2017 WITH SPECIFIC REGARD TO STRUCTURE, PROPS AND SPECIAL EFFECTS, SOUND AND LIGHTING.
Undergraduate Coursework Accountability Statement (To be completed by student)

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Ramleela (the story of the Hindu deity Lord Ram) is a performative representation of the Hindu scripture, The Ramayan. Ramleela first took place in Trinidad from 1880 at Dow Village (Railway Road, California) and continues there to date. The study compares this to Ramleela celebration at Pierre Road (Pierre Road Recreational Ground Charlieville, Chaguanas.)

Ramleela is performed as open-air theater in a maidan (open space) in villages around the island. Today, it is seen as a tourist attraction and spectacle, which teaches the virtues and righteousness from the holy Hindu scripture the Ramayan, such as the triumph of good over evil.

Over the past 20 years, and more specifically from the year 1997 to 2017, technology has been integrated in Ramleela celebrations. The use of technology with specific regard to Space and Structure, Props, Sound and Lighting has aided in the theatrical performance and spectacle that is Ramleela. These aspects of technology have had positive effects on the more traditional portrayal of Ramleela at Dow Village, and the more modernized portrayal of Ramleela at Pierre Road. The integration of these technologies has influenced the way Ramleela is performed and perceived in our Trinbagonian society.
Introduction

According to the National Ramleela Council of Trinidad and Tobago, “Ramleela is the epic dramatization of the story of Shree Ram (a Hindu deity) taken from the Hindu scripture, The Ramayan.” “The Ramayan is an ancient Hindu scripture written in Sanskrit by sage Valmiki. It tells the story of Prince Rama of Ayodhya, whose wife, Sita, is kidnapped by an evil king, Ravan, and Rama’s struggle to reclaim her.”(Gooptar, 22) The Ramayana was later rewritten by Saint Tulsidas in the form of The Ramcharitmanas and serves as the base for Ramleela celebrations today among diaspora Hindus. According to Gooptar, this is so as “The Indian Indentured immigrants who went to live in those areas originated from North India … where that version of the Ramayan is popular.” (23)

The Ramayana in Trinidad today has been passed down to generations in two major forms: (i) via discourses, done though poetry and narratives, over a period of 3, 5, 7 and 9 days, and (ii) theatrically through the portrayal of Ramleela.

Ramleela was brought to Trinidad with the first group of indentured labourers in 1845 as maidan or open-air theater. The Indians were uprooted from their homeland in India and brought to a strange place, very different from India, which was Trinidad. In an attempt to make Trinidad their new home, the Indians recreated their culture and traditions as they remembered it. They attempted to replicate their religion, music, dance, dress, food and culture. Ramleela became one of the cultural practices they recreated in Trinidad, which is now a cultural phenomenon.
In an ever-advancing Trinidadian society, the portrayal of Ramleela continues to evolve through the use of technology. Technology, according to Fettes is “the use of practical and intellectual resources to develop products and systems that expand human possibilities, by addressing needs and realizing opportunities” (2015). The use and incorporation of technology in the portrayal of Ramleela with specific regard to Lighting, Sound, Props and Structure/Setting has heightened and elevated the artform to such an extent that it is a highly anticipated event in Trinidad and Tobago’s calendar. Through the use and implementation of various forms of technology in the above-mentioned areas, Ramleela is a major tourist attraction and garners income and exposure for the villages that host the Ramleela events.

This study aims to explore the use and effect of technology in the portrayal of Ramleela in Dow Village California and Pierre Road Felicity for the past 20 years, form the year 1997 to 2017 with specific regard to Lighting, Sound, Props and Structure/Setting. To illustrate this, two locations where Ramleela is portrayed; a small scale and traditional performance at Dow Village and a large scale and modernized performance at Pierre Road, were selected. The time frame chosen 1997-2017, (a twenty-year period) was seen as appropriate as it is believed to be extensive enough to document substantial changes in the utilization of technology in Ramleela and its effects on the artform.

To achieve this aim, qualitative research was conducted. Secondary sources of data in the form of articles were used like Derek Walcott’s Nobel Lecture: “Fragment of Epic
Memory”, *The Ramleela of Sangre Grande, The shaping of a Culture*, Primnath Gooptar (PhD), “From India to the Caribbean: The Traditional LILA Style of Ram Lila” by Pandita Dr. Indrani Rampersad and “Nidān: International Journal for the Study of Hinduism Vol 27.” Whilst these articles provide an in insight into the history and the performance style of Ramleela they were not pertinent to the specific locations chosen for this study but were used to gain an all round understanding of the artform of Ramleela.

Primary sources of data were pursued in the form of interviews to ascertain first-hand information of the use and effects of technology in Ramleela in Dow Village, California and Pierre Road, Charlieville for the past 20 years.

This researcher conducted interviews with Priscilla Bickramdass, a member of the Dow Village Ramleela Committee and Khemchand Sahadeo, the President of the Pierre Road Ramleela Committee to ascertain this information.

This researcher also visited Ramleela celebrations at Pierre Road on October 1st, 2017 and observed the use of technology in the aforementioned areas and was able to garner the audience’s response to it during the celebrations. This researcher also had the opportunity to view video recordings of the Ramleela performances at Dow Village from the years 2010 to 2017.

These various forms of data collection were utilized by this researcher to understand and explore the use and effects of technology in Ramleela in Dow Village California and Pierre Road Felicity for the past 20 years, from the year 1997 to 2017. This study will explore how Pierre Road Ramleela and Dow Village Ramleela have used technology in the areas of Structure/Setting, Props, Sound and Lighting, and aims to highlight the
advantages and disadvantages of the use of technology in these areas on the portrayal of Ramleela from 1997 to 2017. In Ramleela, the evolution of technology used in Structures, Props, Sound and Lighting develops its production and influences how it is perceived.
Chapter 1:

Prior to this research, this researcher came across an article by Derek Walcott entitled “Fragment of Epic Memory”. Walcott in his article stated that he believed that Ramleela was amateur when compared to other theatrical performances. He believed that Ramleela was a performance done in faith, primarily focusing on teaching the virtues of the religion and lacking professionalism in theatrics. He further stated, “I was seeing the Ramleela at Felicity as theatre when it was faith.” This researcher appreciates the point of view of Walcott and understands that this may the point of view of some persons in Trinidadian society. However, as a student of the arts, this researcher wishes to inform and sensitize all Trinbagonians and by extension the world that Ramleela is not only a display of faith, but it is an artform steeped in rich culture which utilizes key aspects of story-telling and theatre to portray the sacred story of the Hindu deity Lord Ram returning to his home after 14 years of exile.

This study aims to build on past scholarship by looking at the history of Ramleela to envisage its future with the use of technology. This study seeks to address the gap in the research done on this artform by actively exploring the two above-mentioned villages and how they have used technology in the portrayal of Ramleela and the effect of same over the past 20 years. It will focus on the two villages that represent the traditional and modern aspects of Ramleela in Trinidad and Tobago.
Chapter 2: Technology used in the main Structures/ Setting of Ramleela

Technology has been integrated into the fabrication of structures that create the main setting of the Ramleela scene for the duration of the play at both Pierre Road and Dow Village. The main structures used in Ramleela celebrations are representative of the palaces of Ayodhya (the kingdom from which Lord Ram hails) and Lanka (the land from which the evil king Ravan rules). These structures are placed on opposite sides of the maidan with the Panchavati hut (Rama and Sita’s residence during exile in the forest) at the center of the performance space.

The size of this performance space also influenced the level of complexity in these structural designs as well as how technology has been utilized in its construction.

Dow Village Ramleela, since inception in 1880 is one of the first centrally organized Ramleela presentations in Trinidad by the Dow Village Ramleela and Cultural Organization at Railway Road, California. This Dow Village maidan, seen in Figure 1, is approximately 80ft x 20ft and is relatively smaller than Pierre Road Ramleela The Pierre Road Ramleela is organized by The Pierre Road Ramleela Celebrations (PRRC) and takes place at The Pierre Road Recreational Ground. The maidan constructed there is approximately 160ft x130ft as seen in Figure 2.

According to Bickramdass, committee member from Dow Village Ramleela and Cultural Organization, closer the end of the 1990’s, the structures for the palaces and huts were constructed using a traditional method of drying and tying pieces of bamboo to form a
cuboid frame approximately 2ft x 2ft and 5ft high. Minimal draping of fabric on these frames was used to give the impression to the audience that it was the main architectural structure in the story to support and enhance the performance. Given the small size of these structures it also reflected the small space of the Dow Village maidan and how the Committee was urged to control the size of structures in order to facilitate the rest of the performance.

On the other hand, according to Sahadeo, President of Pierre Road Ramleela Committee, the palaces and huts were initially fabricated at the end of the 1990’s using metal pipes to form four corner posts, wrapped in fabric. These posts were supported with wooden strips and thatched carat palm leaves to form a roof as seen in Figure 3. This structure was approximately 5ft x 5ft and 6ft high, which is larger than that of Dow village, reflecting the larger size of the maidan used in Pierre Road. While Pierre Road was unlimited to the size of their structures, the primary aim by the committee was to provide a representation of the main structural elements, like the palaces, to support the Ramayan’s story rather than building them largely and elaborately, as this was costly at the time.

In 2017, the construction and display of these structures evolved, which sought to heighten the impact on the audience. At Dow Village, Bickramdass emphasizes that the Ramleela Committee does not have the luxury of space to expand the maidan space. As a result, the main structural props cannot drastically develop in size but the way in which it is made has changed since 1997. At Dow Village, the palaces of Ayodhya and Lanka
have remained the same dimensions; however, instead of being built of dried bamboo, it is done using metal poles at the four corners.

In addition to this, painted plywood with an arched window cutout is mounted onto the poles to form the palaces’ sides, while a pyramid shaped plywood roof is assembled and secured on top of the poles. This slight change in the structures at Dow Village was primarily for the convenience of the structure builders on the Committee, as it served the same purpose to the viewers as it did in the past; a representation of the main structures used in the play. Nonetheless, the upgrade in the structures though the use of technology, like metal poles instead of the bamboo, modernizes the theatrical production at Dow Village, which as a result captures the audience’s attention through its aesthetic and urges them to learn more about the story of Ram and the teachings of virtue involved.

On the other hand, at Pierre Road Ramleela, Sahadeo states that there is no limitation to the space that is used for the Ramleela maidan both in the past and present. He explains that as these main structures are developed and as more structures are included in the production, he has the flexibility to decide how large or small of a space he prefers to utilize which usually is around 160ft x 130ft.

During the 20-year period that this study is focused, the structures at Pierre Road have greatly developed. The palaces at Ayodhya and Lanka, initially made with metal pipes and a thatched carat leaf roof were enhanced in 2007 when Sahadeo made the decision to have the main structure replaced with a wrought iron gazebo with intricate detailed
designs on its supporting columns. He attempted to maintain its traditional aesthetic by covering the roof of these wrought iron ‘palaces’ with carat leaves. This upgrade in the technology used to create the palaces, added interest to the viewers, due to its semi traditional appearance, resulting in an increase in entertainment value of Pierre Road Ramleela. Due to this, the committee further enhanced the structures to trussing structures in 2012.

In 2012, Sahadeo received an increase in sponsorship and replaced these wrought iron structures with trussing structures. These trussing structures were cuboid shaped frames at 8ft x 8ft x 8ft and placed on an elevation of 3ft. The trussing structures, still being used in 2017, also included a dome shaped frame at the back of it to emphasize the representation of the structure: a palace that is elaborately designed for royalty. In addition to the incorporation of trussing ‘palaces’, they were also embellished through the draping of fabric and beads to emphasize what this structure is representing.

Furthermore, due to the fact that Pierre Road Ramleela today is also seen as a tourist attraction, due to its scale, easily accessible location and advancement in production, this change was necessary to further develop the attraction. With this advancement, and developed attraction, there was also a growth in the audience. This growth was not limited to the Hindu, Indian community, making it necessary to have an efficient and self-explanatory ‘set’, that is easier for individuals who are unfamiliar with the Ramayana’s story to understand through visuals.
The evolution of technology from 20 years ago to today at Dow Village in the construction of the main structures was beneficial to the production and projection of the play. As the Ramleela production takes place on a smaller scale compared to Pierre Road, there is a minimal transition of technology over time. The Dow Village Ramleela Committee has replaced the use of bamboo in the structures to metal poles and plywood, which is convenient and economical to the organizers of the production. It not only serves its representational purpose, but it can also be dismantled and reused annually.

Then again, at Pierre Road, where Ramleela is seen as an attraction, there is a larger crowd comprising of a variety of cultures and faiths viewing the play. Therefore an evolution of the technologies used in constructing the main structures in the space has developed its aesthetic and greatly benefited the portrayal for a diverse crowd’s understanding. This is done through elevated trussing structures, as seen in Figure 4 and Figure 5, that facilitate the viewing of the set to a larger crowd, regardless if they are viewing from the recreational ground itself or from on the seating pavilion, while emphasizing its representation. This is advantageous to Pierre Road in order to be presented to and capture the interest and attention of a larger crowd. Similar to Dow Village, an advantage of this evolution of structural technology to trussing structures can be economic since it can be reused annually.

On the other hand, there are also disadvantages of the evolution of these structural technologies. At Dow Village, the small maidan space poses a major disadvantage. There is a limit as to how much technology or innovations can be utilized or evolved before it
starts occupying an increase in space and take away from the performance ground. However, this incremental evolution of technology involved in the making of the structure, is still beneficial to the structures overall look and its role in the performance, thus its development supports the production as a theatrical one.

Conversely, a drawback of Pierre Road’s structural advancement through the use of technology is that it promotes Ramleela as a perfect setting attendees go for more socializing purposes. Some may be more interested in meeting each other, eating the Indian delicacies that vendors are selling and thus they are distracted from the actual performance and the major positive teachings of the Ramayan. While this is prevalent at Pierre Road, at Dow Village being a more close-knit community it is opportunity for the villagers to earn an income and promote the authentic traditions native to the villages that Ramleela is being held.

In addition to the palaces and huts, the Ravan effigy, which is to be burnt on the 10<sup>th</sup> of the 11 days of Ramleela, has also been of great importance even until today. The way it is made affects how it is strategically destroyed, to emphasize the triumph of good over evil. At Dow Village Ramleela, where the maidan space is confined, the Ravan effigy is built between 30ft and 40ft, a safe size to be burnt without becoming a fire hazard to the space. According to Bickramdass, up until 2005, bursting and bending pieces of bamboo erected the effigy’s overall form. It is then covered using a papier-mâché technique of flour and water with brown paper before being hand painted to represent the costuming, as seen in Figure 6 and Figure 7.
At Pierre Road, with a larger open maidan space, the Ravan was erected approximately between 50ft to 60ft. It is constructed using bamboo for the main skeletal form, and wood from donated wooden palettes were stripped and layered on top to form the body. This form was then covered using a papier-mâché technique of flour and water, and then spray-painted to illustrate the costuming to the viewers.

At both locations at this time the fabrications of the Ravan effigy, regardless of the size and elaboration, served the same purpose. This was the burning of the effigy to signify the main message of Ramleela: the triumph of good over evil.

At Dow Village in 2017, the bamboo bending and papier-mâché technique of construction was eliminated and replaced with a steel frame for Ravan’s structure. This steel frame is supported with strips of plywood before being stuffed with paper, covered with brown paper through papier-mâché, painted and then draped with cloth to represent King Ravan’s clothing. When this effigy is burnt on the 10th day of the play, everything is burnt leaving the steel frame structure behind which is then dismantled and stored for the following year. The incorporation of this technology in the construction of the Ravan effigy at Dow Village fortifies the idea of Ramleela as a theatrical performance and not limited to a performance based of beliefs and ideologies.

On the other hand, from 1997 to 2017, the members at Pierre Road challenge themselves to creating a larger Ravan effigy every year. In recent years, the effigy was made using
tall pieces of bamboo that stand in as a skeleton, supported with pieces of 2x2, 2x4 and 4x16 pieces of wood as noted by Sahadeo. The bamboo and wood is then wrapped with wire. The effigy is done by constructing the back half of the body, then placing it on its back to work on the front. It is then covered using papier-mâché before being spray-painted and airbrushed using automotive paints. In addition to creating the form, the creators behind this Ravan effigy also fill plastic bottles of pitch oil and hang it on the inside in the structure. The base of the effigy is also infused with pitch oil to initiate the lighting of the Ravan effigy. When this initial fire starts, it incrementally sets the entire figure on fire, through minor explosions as it comes in contact with the bottles of pitch oil placed inside. This innovation by Pierre Road was not only necessary for the size of the effigy but also adds to the spectacle as it grasps the viewer’s attention and heightens the dramatic effect on the audience.

Through the evolution of technology in the construction of the Ravan effigy, both Dow Village and Pierre Road face many benefits and drawbacks. At Dow Village, the main advantage is the consistent size of the effigy every year; therefore it is an investment to the committee to build an iron frame to be reused annually to reduce the construction time and the amount of labour invested in its construction. The time and labour saved can be diverted to emphasize other elements of the Ramleela production, like lighting, sound and props to further develop the artform holistically and to make the production entertaining.
At Pierre Road, an advantage of constructing the effigy with bamboo annually as seen in Figure 7, the constructing committee has the flexibility to change the size and the position of King Ravan’s body as the production grows to keep the viewers interest annually. Sahadeo also mentioned that the evolution of materials used to make the effigy at Pierre Road resulted in a reduction of the structure collapsing before it is burnt as seen in Figure 9, thus this evolution of construction over time successfully increases the entertainment value of the production.

At Pierre Road, this use of technology in the construction of the Ravan effigy also has its drawbacks. The method of production at Pierre Road is costly, labour intensive and time consuming to create the Ravan, from accessing and prepping the bamboo, to papier-mâchéing it with the traditional flour and water as well as buying the automotive and spray paints. While there are certain drawbacks, the use of technology in creating the Ravan effigy promotes social integration within the villages by encouraging individuals to participate in the Ravan’s construction while simultaneously using the experience to gain exposure for the village.

Another structure that played an important role in Ramleela at Pierre Road was the representation of Mount Kailash, the abode of Lord Shiva, the Supreme Being in Hinduism. To Sahadeo this was seen as an important role to be included in the play as all actions in the Ramayan took place under the watch of Lord Shiva. Until 2016, the construction of this Mount Kailash was simply the placement of a pile of gravel and sand for the players representing Lord Shiva and his consort, Mother Parvati to sit nearby.
The inclusion of this element is possible at Pierre Road due to the unlimited space that the committee is allowed to use, while at Dow Village, this part of the story seems secondary to the story of Ram and the limited space is delegated to present Lord Ram’s story solely from his perspective.

Mount Kailash, at Pierre Road got its upgrade simultaneous to the upgrade of some of the structures in 2017. It was then the structure was built using trussing, including seating for the Lord Shiva and Parvati players in the performance to sit on top of Mount Kailash, as they should be. This structure was then upholstered using cloth just to hide the assemblage of the structure. This upgrade supported the theatrical aspect of the performance as it not only effectively allows the audience to envisage the importance of the Supreme Being, Lord Shiva, on the life of Lord Rama and his spirituality but it also adds to the dramatic effect on the performance.

At Pierre Road, the use of Mount Kailash is integral to Pierre road’s Ramleela and the upgrade in its fabrication is important to its representation. With the use of trussing to create this mountain, the structure is stable enough for the players to be seated at the top of it just as Lord Shiva and Parvati are depicted to be. Also, using this structure not allows it to be easily maneuvered by the players but it can be conveniently constructed and dismantled annually.

Moreover, while Mount Kailash is depicted covered in snow, the replication for the performance in Pierre Road was upholstered without considering the aesthetic of the
mountain but rather by what fabric was affordable in the quantity needed. This resulted in a poor illustration and its presence in the play is almost redundant if the characters representing Lord Shiva and Parvati are absent. On the other hand, this change in construction over time aids the theatrical aspects of Ramleela and widens the scope of the audience who attend the celebrations, not limiting it to the older Indian/Hindu community.
Chapter 3: Technology used in Props and Special effects of Ramleela

The use of props and special effects is another way in which technology is a feature in the portrayal of Ramleela. Props such as weapons as well as Special effects such as pyrotechnics are elements that greatly contribute to the performance and the portrayal of meanings in Ramleela. Since the weapons are integral to the avatars (characters) in the play, they have been included over the twenty-year period that this study researched; however, it has been developed over time. On the other hand, pyrotechnics has been utilized at both locations from 1997 however; it was initially used for aesthetic.

As stated by Bickramdass, the weapons used at Dow Village from 1997 to 2005 and earlier, were constructed using bamboo by bending the thinner tops of the bamboo and tying a shorter length of string between the ends. This created a “D” shaped bow that was then wrapped in cloth. The arrows were then made using shorter pieces of thin bamboo wrapped in foil with triangular shaped pieces of cardboard also covered in foil attached to the tip of an end. At this time, these weapons were sufficient to allow the viewers to visualize the scene and accompany the narrative being done by a pundit.

On the other hand, at Pierre Road, the bows and arrows used by Lord Rama and his brother Lakshman from 1997 to 2008 was created using the same method as Dow village except thin pieces of PVC was used instead of bamboo, and it was also covered in fabric or flower garlands as seen in Figure 10. Much like Dow Village at this time, the primary
purpose of these props was to support the play and the character’s actions that correlate with the pundit’s narrative and for the audience’s visualization.

Today, at Dow Village, the construction of these weapons is done differently with the introduction of technology that is accessible to Ramleela now than it was in the past. These weapons have evolved into sheets of cedar wood that has been cut by a jigsaw in the shape of a bow, elaborated with scrolls and curls in the design, similar to the bows seen on Ramanand Sagar’s film adaption of the Ramayan. This is illustrated in Figure 11. This change was done for the durability of the bows, as well as for the audience to make an association to the film adaptation, allowing them to envision the players as the characters themselves thus adding to the believability and spectacle of the Ramleela production.

Conversely, while Dow Village has evolved, at Pierre Road, the bows and arrows are still constructed today through the bending of thin pieces of PVC before being wrapped and embellished with fabric, braids and tassels. According to Sahadeo, this is the most effective method to create the bows as its lightweight keeps the players from getting tired and allows them to perform of a better standard for the audience. On the other hand, some of the other weapons have evolved, similar to that of Dow Village. The swords used by King Ravan, his brothers and sons were cut from ply board with a jigsaw, before being spray-painted and covered in metallic laminate as seen in Figures 12 and 13. This allowed the design of the sword to be more angular pointy edges to represent the hostile and evil nature of Ravan in comparison to the gentle and godly nature of Lord Ram,
represented through the clean and gentle sloping shape of his bow. In doing so, and improving the look of the weapon to aid in authenticity, the artform becomes more real and believable to the audience looking on, allowing them to have a vivid picture of what the events that took place in the Ramayan and making the experience more relatable and acceptable to them.

The transition from bamboo weapon props to cedar wood weapons at Dow Village and PVC to cedar wood weapons at Pierre Road, has been advantageous since the cut cedar wood weapons are not only durable, making it an investment to the production but also the precise shapes of them are associated with the role and traits of the different Gods, allowing the audience to make these connections and understand their roles in the play more efficiently.

In contrast, the weapons at Pierre Road, made of bamboo and PVC pipes are not durable and fully representational. According to Sahadeo, The bent bamboo and PVC bows have been broken from its forced ‘D’ shape over time and sometimes during performances after being reused for a few years and hastily during a performance. However, through its use and incorporation into the production, together with structures, lighting and costuming, the audience is able to view the performance as a well-coordinated production and not just as a religious event limited to Hindu/Indians but a production for everyone. Together with the use of props, both Dow Village and Pierre Road used Special effects like pyrotechnics in the Ramleela display. From 1997 until present, both locations celebrate the triumph of good over evil with the use of firework displays after the Ravan
effigy is burnt as seen in Figure 14. Since fireworks are usually used for celebratory purposes, the audience’s emotions are heightened and are urged to celebrate in the death of King Ravan. Thus making the use of modern technology very pivotal and impactful.

Presently, Pierre Road Ramleela also stood apart from Dow Village through the use of Roman Candles, a small stick-like pyrotechnic that fires shots of fireworks or even disperses coloured smoke. This is illustrated in Figure 15. It was attached to the end of the PVC arrows and was lit during the battle scenes between Lord Rama and Ravan. These were used to represent the cosmic battle between divine entities and intended for the audience to grasp the magnitude of the battle and the strength of these characters. The use of this not only adds interest to the play but it aids the theatrical aspect of Ramleela. Pyrotechnics underscores and promotes the spectacle that is a Ramleela production and garners interest and excites the audience. It encourages a wider audience as it adds an air of excitement and drama not limiting the Ramleela production to just the older Indian and Hindu community but to people of different races, different religious backgrounds and persons of every social standing.

By exploring the various types of pyrotechnics and utilizing them in the production also prompted the audience to follow what was happening in the play. As mentioned by Mahabir and Chand in Nidān, “As the story accelerates to a climax, the battle intensifies with more vigour and aggression” (11; vol. 27, nos 1&2) The authors further state that as the scene progresses, “the audience is excited as they witness the triumph of Rama over the defeat of Ravana and his army.” (11; vol. 27, nos 1&2). The use of pyrotechnics like
Roman candles add to this excitement, grasps the audience’s interest in the production, and urges them to follow the storyline of the play and essentially learn more about the story of Ram and his teachings. From the past, when Roman candles was not included, and the arrows were shot in the nighttime, it was difficult for the audience to follow the actions taking place, creating gaps in the understanding of the minds of the viewer. The use of roman candles not only made this possible for the viewer to follow the play but also to increases their educational value by learning about the story of Ram and ideal values taught in the Ramayana such as the triumph good over evil and always stand by what is right.

On the contrary, the increasing use of pyrotechnics at both locations is an added expense to the Ramleela committee, as it cannot be reused annually and would be an investment every year. At Dow village, the Ramleela committee is also faced with the issue of a limited use of pyrotechnics as its maidan space is relatively smaller and an excessive use of pyrotechnics becomes a hazard. At Pierre Road, pyrotechnics can be used limitlessly; however, since its use excites the audience, it may divert their attention. Nonetheless, through its use, the idea of Ramleela as a theatrical performance is also reinforced while portraying the teachings of Ramleela in an entertaining way.

Another technology that was implemented at both Dow Village and Pierre Road was the use of strip LED lights that were wrapped around the bows and arrows held by Lord Ram and Latchman. Both Sahadeo and Bickramdass stated that the use of this technology in their Ramleela’s was intentional and represented the power of the weapons that belong to
these avatars of God. While the intent was similar, the way it is perceived at both locations was different.

At Dow Village, where the audience entailed of a lot of villagers, which was smaller and familiar with the Ramleela story, these viewers understood the power that these weapons had and made the association with the lighting when these Gods used them. On the other hand, at Pierre Road, while the larger audience acknowledged Sahadeo’s intent, the LED lights on the Bows and Arrows became a part of the spectacle to entice the crowd, grasping their interest and then exposing them to the details of the Hindu/Indian culture within the play. While it provides entertainment, Rampersad notes that it is “educational and devotional at the core.”

The benefits of using LED lights on these props at both locations is the fact that it can be mechanized to be lit when the props are being used and are in motion in comparison to it being unlit when it is not used, drawing the viewers attention to its purpose and its abilities in the hands of these powerful Hindu Gods, when they are using them. This also endorses the main storyline of the play as the Ramleela concludes with the killing of king Ravan, the triumph of good over evil through the use of these weapons, more specifically Lord Ram’s bow and arrow.

On the other hand, at Pierre Road in particular, the use of LED lights on the weapons are intended to add to the spirituality of the Ramleela production; however, due to a larger diverse crowd, not everyone understands its meaning and the use of it stimulates the
audience, thus adding to the play being viewed as a spectacle. On the other hand, this spectacle heightens the dramatic effect on the audience, peeking the viewer’s interest and encouraging them to learn more of the Religion and its teachings.

Another special effect that is used in Pierre Road Ramleela that allows it to stand out from Dow Village is the incorporation of fire blowing in the scene where Lord Hanuman enters Lanka and sets it on fire. This is shown in Figures 16 and 17. In doing so, Sahadeo ensures that the audience fully experiences the story, not only through the use of actual fire in the scene but also when the viewers to feel the warmth from the flames as they view it; the experience in transformed into a holistic one.

Today, Ramleela productions at both Dow Village and Pierre Road have incorporated the use of additional special effects as it became popular in the last decade. For instance, at Dow Village Ramleela, the coordinators behind the production implemented a zip line like system in 2016 to suspend and “zip” one of the characters, Jatayu, (a vulture) from one end of the maidan to the other end as he attempted to save Sita from Ravan as he attempted to kidnap her. As stated by Bickramdass, the development of this innovation was purely out of emphasis on the characters abilities in the story and it was an effective way to display this to the audience.

The use of the Jatayu zip line is beneficial to the production at Dow Village as it adds more to the character, seeing that Jatayu is a bird and it is a bird’s nature to fly. Its use adds more meaning to the character compared to that of Pierre Road where Jatayu walks
around the playing field and the abilities of his character is not fully developed. This
technique at Dow Village allows the audience to envisage the character and his role in the
play; however, the mechanics of this special effect was ineffectively done, as it required
an individual to pull it along the zip line across the set. The aid of the individual takes
away from Jatayu’s role of protecting Sita from Ravan in that scene as the audience
views not only views Jatayu “flying across the set” but also an individual running through
the maidan without a role in the story. Moreover, its use emphasizes Ramleela as a
performance and reinforces it as a theatrical performance and not limiting it to a portrayal
based on faith.
Chapter 4: Technology used in Sound in Ramleela

Sound is another element utilized in the production of Ramleela for the audience’s understanding. The main method used to disperse the sounds used in Ramleela was through funnel microphones. Dow Village Ramleela used Funnel microphones to disperse the sounds used in the play from 1997 to 2008. Similarly, Pierre Road Ramleela also used Funnel microphones from 1997 to 2007. According to Sahadeo, the use of these funnel microphones were within the budget for Ramleela celebrations and served its primary purpose of allowing a large and growing audience to efficiently hear the narration of the play in such a large maidan.

At present, these technologies used to project sound have been enhanced at both locations. At both Dow Village and Pierre Road, funnel microphones have been replaced with a fully equipped sound system including the use of Speaker boxes and microphones. At Dow Village, this change was implemented, as simplified technology became available and more popular; however, at Pierre Road, this change was necessary for a larger maidan space and a larger audience.

At both Dow Village and Pierre Road, replacing the use of funnel microphones to complete sound systems using speaker boxes has been a major advantage to both locations. The Speaker boxes project the sound illustrations much clearer and vibrant to that of the funnel microphones. This plays a major role at both locations so that the audience is able to clearly hear the different tone of each Chaupai or Doha that would
reflect the tone of what is occurring in the performance at the time. For instance, there is a vigorous tone in the Chaupai or Doha when Lord Ram battles Ravan in comparison to a gentle tone when he is with Sita or interacting with Lord Hanuman. The use of this sound technology increases the entertainment value of the production and keeps the audience’s interest to follow the production and retain its teachings of virtues.

In addition to the method used to display sounds, another element of the Ramleela production is the sound effects and music to accompany the play. In terms of the sound effects that are projected, Bickramdass states that at Dow Village, the majority of the sound effects used in the past, until 2005, have remained the same presently as they were done live by an individual on a microphone. From 2005 to present at Dow Village, sound effects are still being done by an individual on the microphone, except songs and instrumentals from Ramanand Sagar’s Ramayan series are now incorporated to accompany the live and traditional singing of Dohas and Chaupais with the use of instrumentals. By incorporating present sound technologies with the techniques used in the past, the broad-based audience is exposed to both traditional and contemporary Indian and Hindu culture.

At Pierre Road Ramleela, sound effects were done similarly in the past except it had to be adapted to a larger crowd in a larger maidan space. While individuals made the sound effects and sang the Dohas and Chaupais, it was done on a microphone and projected to the audience through Funnel microphones.
On the other hand, at Pierre Road presently in 2017, Sahadeo states that he has the asset of a sound engineer volunteer, who retrieves sound effects like rustling trees, women screaming, birds squawking and suitable instrumentals to accompany the Dohas and Chaupais, infused into narrative done by the pundit. While the pundit’s role is to “sing dohas, choupais and sothas directly from the sacred text, *The Ramcharitramas*” the use of these sound effects within his narrative adds to the entertainment value of the production, easily grasping the attention of the audience. One’s senses are thus enticed when these sound effects accompany the performance and costuming allowing the audience to fully immerse themselves into the play.

The greater development of sound effects at Pierre Road in comparison to Dow Village impacts the performance immensely. The sound engineer at Pierre Road accesses accurate sounds to support to play and coordinates it’s timing with the play. This supports the actions of the play and allows the audience to have added support to the visuals in the performance, making it easier to imagine the play, taking place in an actual palace or forest rather than in an open maidan space. On the other hand, the live sound effects that take place at Dow village are a drawback to their performance. While at Pierre road, the sound effects can still support the play through equipment if the sound engineer is absent, at Dow Village, if the individuals are absent, the sounds to support the play will have to be improvised and may not effectively aid the visuals of the play. Moreover, the use of the sound effects together with lighting, structures and props combined with the teachings of the Ramayan, the spectacle reinforces the fact that it is a theatrical performance and not just faith-based production.
Chapter 5: Lighting Technology used in Ramleela

Lighting is another main element to the Ramleela process over the last 20 years. This is due to the fact that as the Trinidadian society developed, the individuals involved in Ramleela, had other commitments like work or school and the performance timing had to be adjusted to suit. As mentioned by Balkaransingh, “The initial performance timings were from 3:30pm to 6:00pm but these had to be readjusted to suit the changing socio economic realities of both performers and audience” (76). This change was only possible through the development of lighting.

From the start of the period that this research paper studied, the Ramleela timing had been adjusted and was made possible through the use of fluorescent lights. At Dow Village, with a smaller maidan space, 2 rectangular floodlights were used on either end of the maidan space. Similarly, at Pierre Road, each end of the recreational ground had lighting posts with 4 florescent security lights. The use of these lights at the time was primarily for the facilitation of the change of the Ramleela time for the audience and players to continue production in the nighttime.

Today, at Dow Village, no other lighting has been included beside the main floodlights over the maidan space, as it was used in the past as illustrated in Figure 18. Nevertheless, at Pierre Road, Sahadeo and the Pierre Road Ramleela Committee incorporated the use of string lights to enhance the space, structures and props. In 2017, with the upgrade of the main structures, Sahadeo mentioned that he incorporated the use of string lights around
the top edges of the trussing frame/ the entrance into the playing field, as seen in Figure 19. The reasoning behind this was to make individuals in the audience and players know that by using that main entrance into the field, they are going to experience and enter into a godly and powerful space where everything that happens on the playing field is as a result of cosmic wars and divine energies between the characters. As mentioned by Rampersad, Ramleela displayed in an open maidan much like Dow Village and Pierre Road, “the performers, audiences and all are a part of the greater cosmic setting with the various lokas, devis and devtas (celestial beings in the Ramayan) easily accessible - it is a cosmic experience.”(2008). The use of this technology in this sense thus increases the educational value of the audience by prompting them to learn more about the story of Lord Ram and supports the value teachings from his story.

The benefit of using floodlights at both locations is primarily the facilitation of the Ramleela viewing in the nighttime in an open space. At Dow Village, this was seen as sufficient incorporation of lighting as the maidan space is smaller and the floodlights over the space lights the entire space at once.

At Pierre Road, while the use of floodlights also lights up the space in the nighttime, they are disadvantaged as multiple actions take place in the larger maidan space simultaneously and the white flood lights washes out the bold colours in the entire maidan preventing Sahadeo from incorporating spot lights to guide the viewers eyes to focus on the main scene at any particular time in the play. However, as a tourist attraction, the use of floodlights is beneficial as it enlivens the maidan space at the time
Ramleela takes place, further presenting and enhancing the structures, props and costuming together with sound, resulting in the Ramleela production being presented as a full theatrical performance while promoting the teachings of righteousness, good values and morals.
Conclusion

Technology, utilized in Ramleela, particularly in the areas of structures/setting, props, sound and lighting, develops the art form into a theatrical presentation to aid in how its performed and perceived by the audience. The evolution of innovations over the past 20 years, from 1997-2017 played an influential role at both a traditional Dow Village and a modernized Pierre Road today. Its use enhanced the performance at both locations but on different scales. At Dow Village, the performance space and audience is smaller than that of Pierre Road and thus more technology is utilized at Pierre Road. As a result of this technology integration, the fabrication of the palaces in the play, the Ravan effigy and Mount Kailash has been done to be more convenient and provide the audience with a visual of the Ramayan’s setting.

Additionally, through the development of technologies used in the props like the bows and arrows as well as the special effects like Pyrotechnics, there is an increase in the entertainment value of the play, making it more understanding and resulting in the expansion the audience dynamics beyond Hindus, Indians and elder individuals.

Moreover, the advancement of Sounds and Sound effects is also beneficial to the Ramleela production today as the size of the audience is continuously growing. The use of speaker boxes and sound systems aid the audience in understanding the story through the conveyance of the narration and sounds. In addition the use of sound effects, the audience has a holistic experience with the play also contributing to their understand of the story and its teachings.
Lastly, the evolution of lighting, like the use of floodlights, not only makes the night performance possible, but the use of it together with string lights around the maidan space, enhances the performance as a cosmic experience for the audience.
Appendix:

Interview for Bickramdass: 16 December 2017

1. What is your full name and relationship to Dow Village Ramleela?
2. How long have you been involved with Dow Village Ramleela?
3. When was Dow Village Ramleela established and by whom?
4. Where was Dow Village Ramleela initially performed/ presented?
5. How has this changed today?
6. In what ways is Dow Village Ramleela still traditional?
7. In what ways has technology be included in the production of Ramleela?
8. How has this use of technology affected the presentation?
9. How has this use of technology affect the audience?

Interview for Sahadeo: 18 November 2017

1. What is your full name and relationship to Pierre Road Ramleela?
2. How long have you been involved with Pierre Road Ramleela?
3. When was Pierre Road Ramleela established and by whom?
4. Where was Pierre Road Ramleela initially performed/ presented?
5. How has this changed today?
6. In what ways is Pierre Road Ramleela still traditional?
7. In what ways has technology be included in the production of Ramleela?
8. How has this use of technology affected the presentation?
9. How has this use of technology affect the audience?
Interview for Bickramdass 6 February 2018 and Sahadeo 24 January 2018

1. How is technology used today in the construction of the Palaces used in the Ramleela performance?
2. How has this been constructed between 1997 and 2007?
3. What brought about the change in its construction from 2007 to 2017?
4. What are the responses by the audience to this change in construction from the past to present?
5. How is technology used in the construction of the Ravan effigy used in the Ramleela performance?
6. How has it been constructed between 1997 and 2007?
7. How has it changed between 2007 and 2017?
8. How does the audience respond to this change in construction?
9. What other structures are incorporated in the Ramleela productions?
10. When have they been included?
11. How have they been constructed?
12. How has the weapons used by the Gods in the play been constructed in the past?
13. How has the construction changed to what it is today?
14. How has pyrotechnics been included in the Ramleela production today?
15. How has this been included in the Ramleela production previously?
16. How does the audience respond to its inclusion into the production?
17. What other special effects are incorporated into Ramleela today?
18. How has this been used differently in comparison to the past?
19. How is sound projected to the audience today?
20. How was this done previously?

21. How did the audience respond to this change?

22. How were sound effects done in the past?

23. How is it done today?

24. What encouraged the change in how it is done?

25. What has the response been like to this change?

26. How is Lighting used at the Ramleela celebration?

27. How has this been done before?

28. How is it representational?

29. How has the audience respond to lighting in the performance?
Images:

Figure 1: The Maidan Space at Dow Village in 2017
Photo retrieved from Priscilla Bickramdass

Figure 2: The Maidan Space at Pierre Road in 2017
Photo retrieved from Khemchand Sahadeo
Figure 3: Palace structure using metal poles and thatched carat leaves

Photo credit: Roger Seepersad
Figure 4: The use of trussing structures as Palaces at Pierre Road in 2012

Photo Credit: Roger Seepersad
Figure 5: The use of trussing structures as Palaces at Pierre Road in 2012
Photo Credit: Roger Seepersad

Figure 6: The Ravan effigy at Dow Village in 2013
Photo retrieved from Priscilla Bickramdass
Figure 7: The Ravan Effigy at Dow Village in 2012
Photo retrieved by Priscilla Bickramdass

Figure 8: The Ravan effigy’s construction at Pierre Road using Bamboo
Photo credit: Khemchand Sahadeo
Figure 9: The Ravan effigy breaking as its being assembled due to the use of donated palettes that has been

Photo Credit: Khemchand Sahadeo

Figure 10: The construction of Rama’s Bow through the bending of PVC pipes and further embellished with flower garlands

Photo credit: Roger Seepersad
Figure 11: Cut plywood weapons being used at DV

Photo credit: Priscilla Bickramdass
Figure 12: Sword cut out of ply.
Photo credit: Roger Seepersad

Figure 13: Bow cut out of ply
Photo credit: Roger Seepersad
Figure 14: Fireworks Display at Ramleela in 2017 to represent the celebration of Ravan’s death

Photo Credit: Roger Seepersad
Figure 15: The use of Roman Candles at Pierre Road

Photo credit: Roger Seepersad
Figure 16: the Burning of Lanka with the use of the fire blowing technique

Photo credit: Roger Seepersad

Figure 17: the Burning of Lanka with the use of the fire blowing technique

Photo credit: Roger Seepersad
Figure 18: The use of Floodlights at Dow Village in 2016

Photo credit: Priscilla Bickramdass
Figure 19: The use of lighting at the entrance into the maidan space at Pierre Road.

Photo Credit: Khemchand Sahadeo
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