

amphitheatre of its venue (Sydney's cavernous Town Hall), the play impressed the audience as an honest attempt to understand the travails of escape, the plight of being a refugee, the suffering caused by loss of family ties and the explosive events that shattered one family. What is also impressive was that this was Shakthi's first play!

Across the Tasman Sea to New Zealand, Sri Lankan communities are scattered over a vast area where they have domiciled. It was there that I was introduced to the delights of Sri Lankan literature by lecturer, Thissa Ekayanake. The novelist Brannavan Gnanalingam, based in Wellington, a practising lawyer stands out as having written five novels, which have won several notable local prizes. His latest, *Sodden Downstream*, of 2017, featured characters that, like him, had escaped the Sri Lankan nightmare. The protagonist in this novel is Sita, a Tamil refugee now settled in an industrial suburb of Wellington. The events in the novel occur over a day, depicting her plight as she has to rely on the comfort of strangers to navigate through a dreadful storm on her way to work. Gnanalingam has an acute ear for the nuances of Kiwi idiom and a fine sense of justice. He directs his anger at the bureaucratic inefficiencies and unfairness of those very institutions that were meant to help Sita.

Theatre in New Zealand is also a beneficiary of the Sri Lankan diaspora. A new arrival on the scene is Ahi Karunaharan, born in UK, who has worked in the arts sector for various shows. He graduated from Victoria University and Toi Whakaaari New Zealand Drama School as an actor, writer and

producer. His family have been in exile for 25 years. His drama *Tea* was staged in 2018 at the Auckland Festival. The story was "A plea to reclaim the forgotten history of the tea workers and of Sri Lanka. The erosion of their legacy and memory is a product of the violent rupture enforced by the presence of the coloniser disabling the country's capacity to regenerate". *Tea* traces the effect of that exploitation of individuals, families and communities as plantation labourers.



Ahi Karunaharan

It was an impressive debut. Karunaharan is now working on a dramatisation of Rohinton Mistry's novel, *A Fine Balance*, for production later this year.

The insurrection in the Northern Sri Lanka has been destructive and traumatising for those who suffered, including southern civilians who were targeted by LTTE suicide bombers. It has, however, been a source of inspiration to writers among the Sri Lankan diaspora. Sadly, Sri Lanka has disinherited a talent which is now earning international acclaim. For that, we can only be very grateful.