

**In search of culture: the dilemma of
the early Sinhala fiction (1866 – 1906)**

**Title – In Search of Culture: the dilemma of the early
Sinhala Fiction (1866 – 1906)**

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12th June 2003.

Certification

I hereby certify that Mr. Waragodage Manoj Ariyaratne has incorporated the comments of the examiners made at the viva held on 28th May 2003 at the Faculty of Graduate Studies, and has revised the thesis. I therefore recommend that this thesis is suitable for submission for the MA degree to the University of Sri Jayewardenepura.


.....

Senior Professor Tissa Kariyawasam.

11/6/03

Declaration

I hereby declare that I have incorporated the comments of the examiners made at he viva held on 28th May 2003 at the Faculty of Graduate Studies, and revised the thesis.


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Certification

I hereby certify that this is an independent research done under my supervision.


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Senior Professor Tissa Kariyawasam.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this is an independent research done by me under the supervision of Senior Professor Tissa Kariyawasam in the Department of Sinhala and Mass Communication, University of Sri Jayewardenepure.


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Waragodage Manoj Ariyaratne.

Dedication

To My

Father & Mother

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CONTENTS

Dedication

Acknowledgement

Contents

Introduction

CHAPTER 1

1.0. Social and Cultural Milieu in the Period from 1866 to 1906.	1 – 19
1.1. Economic changes (Introduction of plantation economy	2 – 6
1.1.2. Roads and Railways	6 – 7
1.1.3. Arrack renting	7 – 8
1.2. Caste and Class	9-15
1.3. Christianization and Cultural Assimilation	15 – 19

CHAPTER 2

2.0. Establishment of a new education system and the development of the Print Media.	20 - 47
2.1. The new education system and the cultural dilemma.	20 – 38
2.2. Development of Print Media as a way of cultural propagation.	39 – 47

CHAPTER 3

3.0. The religious revival and the cultural identity	48 – 65
3.1. The role of Anagarika Dharmapala in search of cultural identity	59 – 63

CHAPTER 4

4.0. Christian Propagandist Fiction and the cultural dilemma	66 – 84
4.1. Happy and Miserable Families (වාසනාවන්ත හා කාලකණ්ණි පවුල් 1866 - 1888)	66 – 73
4.2. Grama Pravrtthiyak (ග්‍රාම ප්‍රවෘත්තියක් 1878) By Rev. H. Kannangara	74 – 76
4.3. Experience of a Convert from Buddhism to Christianity (බුද්ධාගමෙන් ක්‍රිස්තියානි ආගමට හැරුණා වූ කෙනෙකුගේ ජීවිත කතාව)	77 – 78
4.4. Ara Kollange Haeti (අර කොල්ලගෙ හැටි) (1886)	79 – 81
4.5. A brief talks between Thomas de Silva and Ranharmy (තෝමස් හා රංහාමි අතරේ ආගම ගැන ලුහුඬු කථාවකි)	82 - 84

CHAPTER 5

5.0. Religio – Nationalistic Propagandist Fictions and the cultural dilemma	85 – 99
5.1 Vesak Dootaya (වෙසක් දූතයා) by Albert de Silva	85 – 88
5.2 Jayatissa Saha Rosalin (ජයතිස්ස සහ රොසලින්) by Piyadasa Sirisena	88 – 96
5.3 Meena (මීනා) by A. Simon de Silva	96 – 99
Conclusion	100 – 103
Bibliography	104 – 109
Index	110 – 113

Introduction

The present investigation is a study in search of cultural dilemma of the early *Sinhalese fiction* (1866-1906). Culture is one of the most dominant concept of anthropological thought. Especially, it becomes a subject that is dealt with by sociologists as well as anthropologists and social scientists of all kinds, as well as literary theorists critics and analysts of varying persuasions.

This concept of culture is used by different people in different ways. For an example anthropologists see culture as the central organizing concept in their discipline. For them, culture refers to the pattern of beliefs and values, reflected in artifacts, objects, and institutions, that is passed on from generation to generation.¹

Culture is defined in the dictionary of Sociology as "A collective name for all behavior patterns socially acquired and transmitted by means of symbols; hence a name for all the distinctive achievements of human groups, including not only such items as language, too making, industry, art, science, law, government, morals and religion, but also the material instruments or aircraft in which cultural achievements are embodied and by which intellectual cultural features are given practical effect, such as buildings, tools, machines, communication devices, art objects..... As culture is transmitted by processes of teaching and learning, whether formal and informal, by what is called " inter learning" the essential part of culture is to be found in patterns embodied in the social tradition of the group,

that is, the knowledge, ideas, beliefs, values, standards and sentiments prevalent in the group" ¹

In his book *Cultural Anthropology* Conrad Philip Kottak (1967) offers a similar definition of culture as follows. "Culture encompasses rule- governed, shared symbol based, learned behavior and beliefs transmitted across the generations. Everyone is cultured, not just people with elite education. The genus *Homo* as the capacity for culture (in a general sense), but people live in specific cultures where they are raised according to different culture. Culture rests on human capacity for cultural learning, use of language and symbols. Culture refers to customary beliefs and a behavior and the rules for conduct internalized in human being through education². "Culture is that complex whole which include knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals and any other capabilities acquired by a man as a member of society"³ The above definitions give us a good sense of how anthropologists interpret the term 'culture' and point out that everyone has culture though there are considerable differences in the cultures found in. Hence, there is an inseparable connection between culture and society.

Because of its particularity in time and place, a fiction or a novel owes a considerable allegiance to social reporting and social history. A fiction or a novel cannot be emancipated from the necessities of time and social circumstances.

¹ Berger, Arthur Asa, *Cultural Criticism, A primer of key concept*, SAGE publication New Delhi, 1995, P. 136.

¹ Fairchild, H.P., (ed), *Dictionary of Sociology and related terms*. Totowa, NJ Littlefield, Adams 1967, P.80.

² Kottak, C.P. *Cultural Anthropology* (4th ed) New York, 1987, P.35.

³ Tylor, E.B. *Primitive Society*, 2 vols, 1958, Originally published in 1971, P.1.

The cultural dilemma depicted in early *Sinhalese* fiction written from 1866 to 1906 cannot be discussed in isolate without understanding the socio-cultural milieu of the relevant period.

As far as Sri Lanka is concerned, being Buddhist is inseparable from being *Sinhalese*, which is Sri Lanka's major ethnic group. With the advent of Europeans, this cultural identity was scattered into contrastive sets. The people in that society therefore were in a cultural dilemma of being between two cultures; traditional Sinhala Buddhist culture and that of Western. This cultural dilemma in that society is depicted in contemporary *Sinhalese* fiction.

This study is presented in five chapters. First three chapters provide information pertaining to the socio-cultural background necessary for a proper understanding of the cultural dilemma in the contemporary society and the depiction of it in early Sinhala fiction.

In the first chapter, the greater attention is focused on society and culture while chapter two emphasizes the establishment of new education system and the development of print media, which contributed as a way of cultural propagation. In chapter three, the religious revival and the cultural identity, which is essential in understanding the cultural dilemma of the society, is emphasized. The chapter four deals with the Christian propagandist fiction and the cultural dilemma while chapter five emphasizes the religion nationalistic propagandist fiction and the cultural dilemma. At the end a conclusion and a bibliography are included.

The pioneering works in the field of *Sinhalese fiction* which were written in English medium were Professor *E.R Sarathchandra's* "*The Sinhalese novel*" and

Professor B.S.S.A Wickramasooriya's "The Sinhalese Prose narrative and the emergence of Novel 1860-1910", A thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Sri Lanka. In the book "*The Sinhalese Novel*" *Sarathchandra* provides information of the history of the *Sinhalese* fiction up to 1950. He outlines the major development in prose fiction in earliest phase. *Professor Wickramasooriya* has studied deeply, for the first time, the narrative prose works published in newspapers during the later part of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. *Professor U.P Meddegama's* "The language of *Sinhalese fiction* (1860-1970), Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of London, 1973 is dealing with the language of the early *Sinhalese fiction*.

"*Siyawasaka Peraliya Ha Sinhalanawakathave Padanama*" of *Professor Miniwan P Thilakaratne*, *Professor Tissa Kariyawasam's* "*Sinhala Prabandekathave Vikasanaya*" and "*Prose Literature in 19th century*" of *Professor Ariyaratnajaruna* are written in Sinhala medium about the history and the development of *Sinhalese Fiction*. All these studies provided guidelines for my study.

But in these works, the cultural dilemma of the contemporary society and the depiction of it in early *Sinhalese fiction* were not especially studied. The unique feature of my study is that the special attention is focused on the cultural dilemma of the contemporary Sri Lankan Society and the extent of depiction of them in *Sinhalese fiction* (1866-1906).

CHAPTER 01

1.0. Social and Cultural milieu in the period from 1866 to 1906.

Introduction: This chapter is designed with the contention of discussing the socio-cultural changes in 19th century without which the cultural dilemma as depicted in fictions cannot be discussed because of its utmost relevance to the society.

From 1866 to 1906 covers the period of massive changes in all facets of society, namely the economy and culture of Sri Lanka. When Britain replaced the Dutch East India Company at the end of the 18th century, Ceylon was divided into the vestiges of the ancient Sinhalese Kingdom in the hill country of the Island and a ring of European commercial stations along the coast. Local chieftains controlled much of the territory between the two. “The Britain, after several raids on the kingdom of Kandy, completed their subjugation of the entire Island in 1818. Throughout the period the British required the allegiance of powerful groups within the society to carry on their administration”¹. The Colonial rulers made it clear that their appointment to offices usually held by elites reflected traditional criteria for such office and particularly favoured their wealth and social status². By recruiting bureaucrats who already had held high esteem they achieved social control along with the performance of necessary administrative functions.

Furthermore, office holding was its own reward as long as it remained an exclusive privilege of a favored few; the clients pointed to their official status as

¹ Peebles, Patrick, *Social changes in Nineteenth century Ceylon*, Navarang book sellers and Publishers, New Delhi, 1995, p.4.

² see, *ibid*, p.4.