



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH
(Scholarly Peer Review Publishing System)

TRACING IDENTITY OF SINHALESE WITH RESPECT TO THE TRADITIONAL AND CULTURAL ASPECTS THROUGH SRI LANKAN POEMS.

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ABSTRACT

Identity has a great value as it helps to distinguish one thing from another. Similarly, identity of a nation separates them from others in the world. Affection of the external factors decides the existence of identity in different aspects. However as a nation people should be together to keep and preserve it for the future generations. This particular study points out that how Sri Lankan poems of some selected writers stand for tracing identity of Sinhalese with respect to the traditional and cultural aspects. A few poems have been given their contribution to build the nation by keeping their identity while the author purposefully humiliates their respected nation to take them in to the correct path, because they believe that people should be avoided foolish practices though they respect the culture. However the study has conducted to show the depiction of Sinhalese identity through the pieces of Sri Lankan poems.

Keywords: Culture, Distinguish, Identity, Respect

1. INTRODUCTION

Whatever is there in the world has originated with its' identity to have a space in a particular place. So this identity plays a major role for exposing and existing. Though the taking identity is easy with the birth, it is difficult to preserve. Anyhow to live without being alienated identity is necessary. With some invasions in the history Sinhalese had to struggle to be as it is in the society as majority of the country. Keeping the heritage of Sinhalese with the influences of other nations was the most considerable thing in the past. With the invasions of English many Sinhalese wanted to become English and pretend as they are culturally bound with English. Being Sinhalese might be a thing shame for these people.

So establishing identity of Sinhalese was not an easy task under the condition of such a society. The people who wanted to keep their place in both national and international level used their pens and motivated their ideas to re-establish Sinhalese as a unique nation in the country. It was success as a campaign since they used English language to universalize their ideas. It brought their records beyond the boundaries with the selection of correct language. So among these pioneers Lakdasa Wikramasingha, Kamala Wijerathna and Alfreda de Silva was highlighted.

These writers were in a common ground to arrange their ideas in a systematic way to convey ideas regarding identity bound with traditions and the cultural aspects which were respected in that era than present. These writers' creations are significant among others since they have employed Sinhala idioms and phrases to achieve the purpose of writing while they add the cultural taste to the

pieces of writing. These writers have been devoted towards their nation to take them front as they go with the modern world. Therefore they have criticized some aspects of Sinhalese practices which are not fit with current society. It is very essential to trace out here that in the poem “The Cobra” by Lakdasa Wikkrasingha pointed out extremely foolish acceptance of Sinhalese even when they live in a technologized world. He uses the space of his poem to present that these people will good for nothing when they act worthlessly to keep the identity. In the same way all the selected poems have been tried to motivate their fellows towards the accepted world by removing expired practices while conveying a feeling of sound necessity to protect the identity of the particular ethnic group.

1.2. Objectives

- 1) To find out the way of depiction of Sinhalese identity through the poems of Sri Lankan writers.
- 2) To see the various aspects of identity that has illustrated by Sri Lankan writers.

1.3. Research Questions

- 1) What are the techniques that the writers have used to give concept of identity?
- 2) What are the various aspects of identity that the writers have traced out?

2. METHODOLOGY

This study has conducted in the form of a qualitative research that helps to explores research questions and objectives. The data were collected for the study through referring the particular text and understanding the whole content of the poems which give the support to illustrate the notion of identity with related to Sinhalese. The researcher has caught out all the possible illustrations to depict the identity of Sinhalese in the selected poems. The collected data have been analyzed and discussed by the researcher with her own perceptions and ideologies but related with the text. Here the qualitative study becomes an effective method for data collection since it makes the way to investigate the reliability of the evidences for all the readers and reviewers.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The researcher has selected five poems from Sri Lankan writers to see the depiction of Sinhalese identity with related to the tradition and culture. Selected poems have been taken from Lakdasa Wikkrasingha, Kamala Wijerathna and from Alfred de Silva. And also “From The Life Of The Folk Poet, Ysinno” and “The Cobra” from the collection of Lakdasa Wikkrasingha “A Soldier’s Wife Weeps” and “Harangue” from Kamala Wijerathna and “Ancestors” through Alfred de Silva have been taken as the selected poems for the study.

3.1. From the Life Of The Folk Poet, Ysinno

The poem “From the Life Of The Folk Poet, Ysinno” depicts a considerable cultural exposition of Sinhalese in Sri Lanka. It is aspectual that scholars identify this depiction as the feudalism through the text. In ancient Sri Lanka the society was compiled with two strata. Especially in the villages it was consisted with landlords and peasants. Landlords were concerned as the people who had the legal inheritance and the ownership of the lands. Peasants engaged with the cultivation of lords’ premises and gave them their share keeping a little for them to feed as the payment for the labour. This system of Sri Lanka bound with the lives of Sinhalese is much explicated through Lakdasa Wikkrasingha’s poem. And also the application of Sinhala idioms and phrases for his writing keeps the beauty of the Sinhalese identity within the line of culture. At the opening stanza in the poem, the poet creates a picture of the living style and the places of the people those who live in the countryside. He vividly explains the way people make their huts. The poet says that Ysinno cuts bamboo from a place called Hanikette to make his hut and struggling to gather straw for making roof. So this makes a picture of a typical village man for the readers who are not familiar with the life of the village.

“Ysinno cut the bamboo near Hanikette
and from those wattles made his hut
and had nothing to cover it with, nothing
like a hundred and sixty bales of straw”

Depicting an ideal atmosphere for readers, the poet uses his own way to present a bit about from Sinhalese cultural behavior. Without employing the words “feudalism” and “peasants” in the poem, Wikkramasinha conveys the same idea through the usage of “Walauwa” since this can give the entire notion for the readers. Walauwa is the place where feudalists live. As the powerful people of the village, when peasants tell them their deficiencies and difficulties feudalists help poor. People call the wife of headman and their daughters in walauwa as “Manike” and usually they are the people who are dealing with villagers than the headman. This system of Sinhalese has been presented in the poem as following.

“ So he made his way to the Wlauwa at Iddamalghoda

and to the Manike said how poor he was

and how from his twenties he had made those lines of song

swearing before her all his fealties”

Sometimes these people who are living in Walauwa are not kind enough and cooperative towards the indigents though they acted like they care the villagers. Helpless poor have to plead in front of them to have some help from the headmaster of the village since they use their power on these peasants. However while some writers conceal the truth behind head people of the village to keep the respect of the nation, Lakdasa Wikkramasinha should be awarded for revealing the reality as it is. The poet says that after begging from these head people of the village several times only they pay their attention towards the destitute. According to the poem, the poet has shown that Manike has straw in the back side of their Walauwa, she says Ysinno to wait for the next harvest. This reflects the heartless nature of the feudalists. However even with these negative ideas, the poet has traced out some traditional aspect of Sinhalese in one era of the history.

3.2. The Cobra

A careful look at the poem “The Cobra” tells us another extremely different aspect of Sinhalese faiths and beliefs that came with the culture and the tradition. People had been used to worship and keep their faith upon absurdities to make their mind relax. It is acceptable when it comes for the wellbeing of the humans. Keeping faith on invisible things by laymen in the society was a common trend from the era that the people began civilization. However with the development of the modern technology and the science also even some people continue these observations despite the harmfulness is there next to them. So Lakdasa Wikkramasinha inscribes this type of traditional aspects of Sinhalese while humiliating it to take people to the correct path.

According to the science the cobra has identified as a venomous reptile and a sting of a cobra can be a cause to kill a person. Therefore people should not treat these types of species as friends, heroes or heavenly things that human give their respect and the faith. Though the reality and the truth are there in a side, Sri Lankans especially Buddhists and Hindus don't allow to kill cobra. They concern and respect cobra thinking as he is the representative of god who brings messages and blessings from heaven. Buddhists venerate cobra since the Lord Buddha had taken his birth as a cobra to complete Paramitas to achieve enlightenment. In the poem cobra the poet tells us such a story that reflects beliefs of Sinhalese and silently mocks these fruitless things through the usage of his language.

In the first stanza the poet attributes a magnificent look and a great respect for the cobra as people do though it is a mere venomous animal to him. Within the first stanza the arrangement of words and usage of adjectives and adverbs create a heroic picture for readers. He describes that the hood of cobra as a flag. Here the simile makes a sound notion about the faith of the people. Further he accounts that people come endlessly to watch cobra. Here the poet uses the term “watch” instead of see because he wants to tell that people purposefully come to visit cobra. In the same way they are afraid to go near him since they respect him. However the poet uses only the last two lines of the first stanza to tell what he wants and mocks. People think that the power of paramitas practiced by cobra has taken him to the heaven quickly. The poet wants to give a blow to the narrow mind set up of the person that comes with boasting which has given them through the lack of education.

“your great hood was like a flag

hung up there

in the village.

Endlessly the people came to Weragoda

Watched you (your eyes like braziers)

Standing somewhat afar.

They stood before you in obeisance. Death,

the powers of the paramitas, took you to heaven

however.

In the same way the poet uses the second stanza to make out his message for the readers while he carries them to the reality. He says that people worship serpents that kills their fellows. Further he humiliates that these ignorant people treat the serpents with heavenly respect. He wants to make a sound account that though people have their beliefs, they should lead the people towards good than carrying them to the darkness.

3.3. A Soldier's Wife Weeps

Though people live in the modern society comforting themselves through the usage of technologically well-equipped gadgets, even now they cannot make a clear distance from the invisible beliefs. Among them horoscope reading can be seen as a highlighted event with Sri Lankans especially with Sinhala Buddhists. They have been practiced to read their horoscopes before commencing special tasks. This is significant among Sinhalese in their weddings. According to the poem the poet says that the wife of the soldier has read the horoscope of her husband to check whether he has any malefic or not at that particular period.

On Wednesday when the crow cried on the dead branch

And the sky coloured over with the colour of charcoal

I had no fear, I knew you were safe

I had your horoscope read and there were no malefic

When the horoscope reader tells nothing about bad or misfortune she got relief. Unexpectedly one day she receives the message of her husband's death by making all the forecast of horoscope false. However in the poem, the poetess describes the identity of Sinhalese through horoscope reading since it is culturally bound with the people though she explicated her dislike for that type of happenings. However she keeps a successful record about that type of cultural aspect of Sinhalese for future generations.

3.4. Harangue

The poem "HARANGUE" which tells about declining of human lives through complex behavioural patterns with the modernized society by Kamala Wijerathna portrays some particular cultural even of human lives. It beautifully makes an account related with rights and rituals of Sinhalese in the occasion of attaining of puberty. The poet explains the traditional customs that people follow using idioms and phrases in Sinhala language.

I remember how in the breaking dawn

her mother led her to the spring

her head covered with a white cloth

followed by the old Ridi Nanda

Ridi Nanda poured a pot full of water on her head

and broke the pot in a thousand pieces on the rocks,

she went back with a new cloth round her waist

and gleaming gold earrings in her ears.

In addition to this the account of the poet about the customs of New Year also can be seen. When April comes women of the village ready for some special actions using Erabadu (A kind of flowers that comes in the season of New Year) flowers with the faith that it will give them the fortune. So the poet hasn't missed her chance to reflect Sinhalese identity which depicts through customs in Sri Lanka.

I remember how the women trooped down
 in the heat of April with flaming Erabadu
 on every wind-swept Erabadu tree
 and dropped mysterious packets into the water
 turned the pots round and round
 to clear the white petals and pollen
 and carried back fortune for the new year.

In the final half of the poem the poet has taken another cultural aspect of Sinhalese to represent the identity. In past some people used to bring Kattandiya to cure diseases. They bring Kattandiya from southern area of the country to have a Thovil. Kattandiya can be a man or woman who chants Mantra and dance to chase away devils those who possessed with the human body. This type of treatments is called Thovil. So in the poem, the poet tells about this identity of Sinhalese.

That was the time she brought back
 belly blocked with cancer
 her people of course said that she was charmed.
 her husband courted his brother's wife
 she being his first cousin had more right to him
 they brought a Kattandiya from the south
 and he danced and chartered with the masks bobbing up and
 Down
 But she passed off the very next day

In this way the poet has taken her space with in the text to supplement extreme traditional and cultural aspects of Sinhalese. The attempt of the writer should be admired, because of making people aware about some of the dying rituals with the particular ethnic group. Presently, people don't know about Ridi Nanda and even Kattandiya since these people are not willing to appear in the society with the very first role of their generation thinking that they are low caste occupations. And also even in villages there is no place to see Erabadu flowers. However when the condition is such a pathetic situation the attempt of the poet to rebuild the identity of Sinhalese seems very great.

3.5. Ancestors

Ancestors have fulfilled their responsibility in the history to make an identity for the nation. So the legacy that they gave for followers should be preserve by others if they want to stand alone with their own respect in the society. In the poem called "Ancestors" by Alfreda de Silva presents an ideal picture and an account about these forefathers and how they bound with the culture by depicting another traditional perspective regarding the costumes of the headmasters of the village. Though the purpose of the poet was to utter a word about the inheritance that the followers of the same generation could get from ancestors, he has added something related to the culture of real Sinhalese as mentioned in the history.

They say that the gentle faces
 Looking at me from gilt frames
 On the walls have given me
 My soft speech and baldness
 Along with their names

That to my great-grandfather
With the small white knot of hair
Tied on the nape of his neck
And the curving comb of tortoise-shell
Atop his head, I owe
Whatever there is in me of discipline:

Men belong to ethnic group of Sinhala was identified with the knot of hair tied on the nape of the neck. All the men with headmasters of the village had followed same style in past. With this style of men, others got to know that they belong to Sinhalese. Though this was common for all the men, the comb made by tortoise shell was only for the headmaster of the village. He wore this on the top of his head when he goes outside. So in the poem the poet describes these behaviours of pioneers of Sinhalese beautifully while giving the impression of the Sinhalese culture for the readers.

4. CONCLUSION

To conclude, it is possible to say that all the selected poems for the study have been traced out different aspects of Sinhalese identity related with culture and tradition. They have addressed the identity with respect to believes and faiths, customs, rights and rituals, behavioural patterns and costumes. And also in the same way it has been identified that these writers have employed idioms and phrase which are related to Sinhalese to add a sound notion about the identity of Sinhalese to the poem. In some situations the poems have humiliated a few harmful actions o particular nation that they practiced as their identity of the society. However all the acceded poems for the study finally achieved their goal of depiction Sinhalese identity through Sri Lankan poems with respect to culture and tradition.

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