

An Examination of Sinhalese Monastic literary and Linguistic discourse in the 19th and 20th Century in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The background of this study is two historical periods—the colonial and post-colonial eras in Sri Lanka, with special attention to the latter part of the 19th century and selected personalities of the 20th century. The objective here is to examine the Sinhalese monastic *literary and Linguistic discourse* with Max Weber's theory of cultural consciousness, originally developed through his examination of the rise of capitalism in Europe and its relationship to religious traditions. Weber's central argument—that the cultural values and worldview of a community are reflected in its social, intellectual, and economic activities—provides the theoretical foundation for this inquiry. In this study, Weber's methodology is applied to examine the works of Buddhist monks who contributed to Sinhalese literary and linguistic scholarship. The finding advanced here is that cultural consciousness played a pivotal role in shaping the perspectives, priorities, and scholarly contributions of Buddhist monks in the Sinhalese literary tradition throughout these two key periods.

Keywords: Buddhist monks, colonial and post-colonial periods, cultural consciousness, Sinhalese literary discourse

1. Introduction

The arrival of the Portuguese in Ceylon marked a period of profound transformation in the country's socio-cultural and intellectual landscape. Unlike earlier South Indian invaders, the Portuguese introduced entirely new methodologies and epistemologies that reshaped local practices (Obeyesekere, 2020, pp. 35-39). The existing intellectual culture was significantly reconfigured, particularly through attempts to incorporate Latin, music, and theology into the traditional monastic curriculum (Peter, 1978, pp.72–80). In their efforts to disseminate Christian doctrine among the local population, they made use of indigenous languages, resulting in the introduction of new religious concepts into the thought and literature of the country (Balagalle, 2016, pp. 46-60). Although a small segment of the population gained access to Western educational discourse through missionary institutions, the Portuguese did not establish a comprehensive educational system for the indigenous people. They were, however, the first to introduce printed books, ink, pens, and paper into Ceylon (Arangala, 2006, p. 430).

When the Dutch took control of the coastal regions in the seventeenth century, they attempted to reorganize local education more systematically than their predecessors. They established printing presses and produced several texts designed to facilitate the study of the Sinhalese language (Arangala, 2004, pp. 6–28). In the Kandyan Kingdom, a counter-movement emerged under Velivita Saranankara Sangharaja Thero, who sought to strengthen national and religious consciousness and revive classical Sinhalese literature and language. His efforts laid the foundation for two major monastic educational institutions—Vidyodaya (1873) and Vidyalandara (1875)—which went on to shape several generations of Sinhalese intellectuals. The intellectual and cultural developments of the seventeenth century, particularly within Buddhist traditions, have been widely discussed (Blackburn, 2002).

The intellectual tradition inspired by Saranankara also influenced linguistic and cultural debates in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, this movement often displayed negative attitudes toward the Tamil language and its influence on Sinhalese literature. Despite longstanding social and cultural interactions with South India, local intellectuals lacked both the vision and institutional mechanisms to integrate Tamil into monastic education, and missionary schools also did little to foster meaningful engagement between Sinhala and Tamil cultures. For centuries, Sinhala literature was preserved on palm-leaf manuscripts housed in temples and private collections. Under colonial influence and the Buddhist revival movement of the late nineteenth century, many of these manuscripts were printed for the first

time. As Ranjini Obeyesekere observes, the introduction of printing transformed the preservation and dissemination of classical and vernacular works (Obeyesekere, 2005, p. xviii).

Colonial rule also reshaped traditional power structures. Administrative reforms introduced by European rulers reflected their own political and economic philosophies (Kannangara, 1982, pp. 96–130; Kannangara, 1982, pp. 241–276). The Colebrooke–Cameron reforms of 1833 marked a major turning point by promoting a capitalist social model and fostering the development of an educated middle class (Mendis, 1956, pp. ix–lxiv). Mendis’s extensive examination of these reforms highlights how they dismantled feudal features of the local system and contributed to the rise of a modern middle class.

The transformation of literary and linguistic discourse during the nineteenth century has been widely documented. M. Y. Gooneratne’s *English Literature in Ceylon 1815–1878* (1968) illustrates how English-educated elites adopted Western epistemologies and developed new forms of literary expression. Despite the dominance of Western education, British civil servants maintained a degree of respect for Oriental traditions, often studying local languages and engaging with classical texts (Gooneratne, 1968, pp. 41–42). Among the noteworthy figures of this period was James de Alwis (1823–1878), whose translation of the *Sidath Sangarava* (1852) represented the first systematic application of Western literary criticism to Sinhalese literature (Gooneratne, 1968, p. 122). However, as Wickramasuriya (1978) notes, the British education system often disregarded indigenous values and introduced pedagogical practices alien to local traditions.

Kumari Jayawardena (2000) describes how the socioeconomic advantages of the southern aristocracy differed from those of the Jaffna elite, who more fully embraced missionary education and leveraged it to attain social mobility. Missionaries established strong educational institutions in the north, including a medical college, even before the establishment of the Ceylon Medical College in Colombo. Meanwhile, southern coastal regions such as Moratuwa and Panadura became centers of commerce, maintaining trade links with South India (Jayawardena, 2000, pp. 172–173). Despite these interactions, no sustained effort was made to integrate the Tamil language into national intellectual discourse. The marginalization of Tamil became more pronounced with the rise of the Sinhala–Buddhist revival movement.

Modern Sinhalese literature is often traced to James de Alwis’s 1851 translation of *Sidath Sangarava*, whose extensive introduction laid the first philological

framework for pre-modern literature. This intellectual shift was facilitated by the emergence of an English-educated middle class capable of synthesizing traditional Sinhalese scholarship with Western knowledge systems (Gooneratne, 1968). As Hewawasam (1966) notes, the influence of the Saranankara movement extended into the low country, inspiring new forms of creative writing and transforming traditional literary conventions. The rise of capitalist values and new notions of individuality led writers to express personal impressions and draw upon folklore rather than rigid classical narrative structures (Senavirathna, 1964, pp. iii–xix). These developments, discussed by Ediriweera Sarachchandra and K. N. O. Dharmadasa, resulted in significant changes in literary audiences and trends, particularly with the expansion of English education in the mid-twentieth century (Dharmadasa, 1999, p. 275).

The activities of the colonial powers ultimately introduced widespread change to the status and use of local languages. The linguistic contact between Sinhala, Tamil, Portuguese, Dutch, and English created conditions of multilingualism, compelling local communities to adapt to shifting cultural, administrative, and economic demands. This says that the intellectual discourse in the country can be understood and examined within that frame. Every characteristic is attributed to the expression of its historical roots.

This study addresses the contributions of Buddhist monks to Sinhalese literary discourse with keen attention to that historical background. Because of the concept of cultural consciousness, the methodology is applied to examine the discourse that is related to the historical background. The intellectual history of the country is the foundation of Sinhalese literary discourse, and the Buddhist monks are an organic part of it. The Enlightenment entrepreneur that took place after the 16th century is the background of the discourse, and the Sinhalese culture has been shaped as a result of the changes in the period. As a direct consequence of the colonial enlightenment activities, the Buddhist revivalist movement came to the stage in the 19th century. This opens the door for Western epistemology with their own insights and tries to make them in promoting the Sinhalese Buddhist new reformations. This is the end of the colonial discourse, and it conceives the intellectual seeds of the post-colonial discourse. The relationships of those two periods are subjected in this with focusing the literary discourse of Buddhist monks.

2. Literature Review

The contribution of Buddhist monks to modern literary discourse in twentieth-century Sri Lanka has received comparatively less scholarly attention than their

role in the pre-modern period. Pre-modern literary activity became an integral part of the national movement during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the examination of Buddhist literary heritage formed a central component of both national and religious revivalist efforts. Leaders of this renaissance actively participated in literary and linguistic discourse. A prominent example is Ven. Sri Sumangala (1827–1911), a pivotal figure in the *Vidyodaya* monastic tradition, who led several intellectual and religious initiatives of lasting influence.

Godakumbure’s work (1971) offers one of the earliest analyses of the engagement between Buddhist monks and European scholars. In his collection *Sahithya Lipi Hā Kathā* (Essays and Talks on Literature), the essay “Karathota Sri Dharmārāma Sthavira and the European Scholars” examines the scholarly interactions between Karathota Dharmārāma Thero and European intellectuals in the eighteenth century.

A landmark contribution to the study of twentieth-century Buddhist intellectuals is Martin Wickramasinghe’s essay collection *Ape Urumaya Hā Bhikshunwahanse* (Our Heritage and the Buddhist Monks), published in 1998. This volume presents the most extensive analysis of the diverse roles played by Buddhist monks in modern literary culture. Although the essays were originally published separately in Sinhala journals, their compilation provides a cohesive scholarly framework. The collection contains eighteen essays, and several monks are examined through multiple essays, demonstrating the depth of Wickramasinghe’s inquiry—for instance, *Rathmalane Dharmārāma Mahānāyaka Māhimi I and II*, and three essays on Udakandawela Saranankara Thero. Wickramasinghe’s scholarly maturity—shaped by linguistics, anthropology, cultural studies, and psychology—is visible throughout, reflecting the intellectual trajectory that began with his seminal work *Sinhala Sahitya Nagima* (The Landmark of Sinhalese Literature) in the 1940s.

In assessing the contributions of Buddhist monks, Wickramasinghe draws upon the traditional ethics and pedagogical norms of monastic epistemology. He pays close attention to writings that occupy both the national heritage and independent scholarly domains. Although he occasionally employs rhetorical language—unsurprising given that he was not a university-trained academic—his analyses reveal deep critical insight into the intellectual identities of the monks he discusses.

For example, in his essay on Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala Thero, Wickramasinghe compares the monk’s everyday letters with his scholarly writings, noting how Sumangala employed colloquial southern Sinhala in personal correspondence

while reserving classical style for academic work. He demonstrates that the monk's linguistic style reflected spoken Sinhala from the southern region (Wickramasinghe, 2004, pp. 19-20).

In *Rathmalane Dharmārāma Nayaka Mahimi I*, Wickramasinghe explains how Dharmārāma Thero mastered the commentary to the *Sidath Sangarava*, the thirteenth-century Sinhala grammar treatise (Wickramasinghe, 2004, p. 43). Wickramasinghe also examines Dharmārāma Thero's edition of the *Hansa Sandesaya* (Swan Messenger Poem), noting the scholarly features of its preface (Wickramasinghe, 2004, p. 44). He further elaborates on how his own early engagement with Dharmārāma's commentaries shaped his intellectual formation before he studied English literature (Wickramasinghe, 2004, p. 45). These personal reflections serve as methodological tools in his critical evaluation of monastic scholarship. Wickramasinghe ultimately shows that Dharmārāma Thero employed scientific methods in his editorial work and interpretations of Sinhala classics.

In the essay on Palane Siri Vajirachana Thero, Wickramasinghe explores the monk's epistemological approach, particularly the relationship between Buddhist doctrine and Buddhist literature (Wickramasinghe, 2004, pp. 81–82). His analysis of Pandit Vidurupola Piyathissa Thero highlights the value of the monk's self-written autobiographical sketch, which reveals his intellectual development from childhood (Wickramasinghe, 2004, pp. 71–73).

One of the most striking contributions in the collection is Wickramasinghe's essay on Walivitiye Soratha Thero. Here, he introduces the Sinhala term *Asssada vichchanaya*—which may be roughly translated as “the analysis of literary and linguistic appreciation.” Through this concept, he discusses taste formation, aesthetic pleasure, intellectual delight, and the ability to appreciate literary beauty. Wickramasinghe examines Soratha Thero's application of ancient Indian aesthetic theories in light of Sri Lankan Buddhist cultural and intellectual traditions (Wickramasinghe, 2004, pp. 95–96). He also analyzes which theoretical frameworks Soratha adopted or rejected in his study of pre-modern Sinhala literature, offering valuable insights into cultural consciousness. Wickramasinghe critically compares Soratha Thero's editorial methods and critical approaches with those of his contemporaries to illuminate Soratha's unique scholarly identity.

Taken together, Wickramasinghe's essays constitute a significant and insightful contribution to the study of Buddhist monks in modern literary discourse. Another two scholarly endeavors regarding the contributions of Buddhist monks are “Religious

Activities and the Development of a New Poetical Tradition in Sinhalese 1852-1906” (2009) by Tissa Kariyaasam and the article titled “Text Editing in Sinhala: History and Methodology” (2003) by A.V.Suraweera. The first work of theirs is to examine the vast picture of Sinhalese intellectual culture in the religious activities in the latter part of the 19th century and the very beginning of the 20th century. It explores the origin and evaluation of a few sects of Buddhist monks in keeping with the context of social and cultural backgrounds. This study can be identified as an intermingling one with religious and literary activities in a selected period of the country, with special attention to the down south intelligentsia. Kariyawasm scrutinizes the contributions of the monks in his third chapter, “Religious Activities in Relation to the Literary Revival (Kariyawasam, 2009, pp. 132-185). He starts the chapter by expressing such a kind of outline: “Our main thesis is the chapter is that the development which we are witnessing now in the field of Sinhalese poetry occurred during the second part of the nineteenth century. It originated solely as a reaction to the efforts made by the Christian missionaries to disseminate Christianity. If a religious ardour of this quality had not been evinced in Ceylon, we might not be in a position to discuss what we now call literature in Sinhalese (Kariyawasam, 2009, pp. 132-133). This says that the nature of his discussion is not like Martin Wikramasinghe’s one that we mentioned earlier, Kariyawasm wanted to examine how the Christian epistemological realm has influenced the Sinhalese Buddhist literary culture with its ideological and other various apparatus. This discussion focuses on how the Buddhists convert their interests into literary creations (Kariyawasam, 2009, pp. 133) in grasping a broad intellectual environment with a new social and cultural background. In this discussion, he has partly deployed the contributions of the monks in regard to the religious dialogues between missionaries and Buddhist revivalists. This sentence says that the nature of the examination of Kariyawasam. Rev. Babarande Revata, a bhikkhu of Gotatuva Vihara, Baddegama, in September 1861, received a copy of Gogerly’s book from Rev. Gunasekara of Baddegama Mission, and after reading the book, he sent a long review of the book to his friend Rev. Gunasekara on the 9th of October 1861 (Kariyawasam, 2009, p. 139). How the monks were influenced by the missionary epistemology, and how they reacted to it by using the missionary methodologies. Sometimes in this discussion, pay attention to the poetry, considering them as a part of that conversation (Kariyawasam, 2009, p. 147). The extensive examination of Kariyawasm recovers the complexities of Buddhist wisdom that arose against the missionary propaganda in monastic tradition (Kariyawasam, 2009, pp. 170-175).

The article of AV.Suraweera, under the title “Text Editing in Sinhala: History and Methodology,” attempts to examine the exegetical works and their producing

backgrounds in pre-modern and modern linguistics discourse in the country (Suraweera, 2003, pp. 170-201). By exploring the contributions of the monks to that discourse, he has provided evaluations of some selected accounts of Buddhist monks to enrich the Sinhalese exegetical tradition. To examine the textual editing of Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala (1827-1911), Suraweera reveals that “The editor (In this context, Sri Sumangala Thero) seems to have devoted more attention to the *Sanne* than to the text. The Vidyodaya tradition of cerebral and dental *n* and *I* have been used the text (Suraweera, 2003, p. 183). This expresses the perspective of the researcher in examining the intellectual identities of Buddhist monks in providing the exegetical writings to the Sinhalese classics. By considering most of the edited texts by Sumangala and Rathmalane Darmarama, he has made his own insights into their editing methodologies and linguistic ideologies. In addition to them, Suraweera has investigated another two monks who edited the Classical Sinhalese works before and after the earlier editors, Maddugalle Siddhartha and Valivitiye Sorata, in applying the comparative reading with others (Suraweera, 2003, pp. 189-191).

Those views are included in the Sinhala literary and linguistic discourse in the first part of the 20th century, and very few in the latter part of that century. Further, most of them are not done with any theoretical approach, and the examination is based on a specific concept for making the analytical instrument. Those who have been selected as part of the discourse, and the participants have only common personalities, who played a pivotal role in the discourse. The remains that are out of the discourse represent considerable numbers and significances regarding the making the meanings in the discourse. This article aims to fill those gaps in selecting the theoretical approach and making the new framework. The contributions of a few new Buddhist monks are included here with a new theoretical approach. Otherwise, relating to the contributions of the monks in both colonial and post-colonial periods, there are dynamic relationships between their epistemological realms. In introducing new trends in post-colonial intellectual discourse, there is substantial consistency between the two periods regarding the theme. I chose the theoretical approach to examine the nature of the relationship.

2.1. The Theoretical Approach

The theoretical framework for this research is grounded in the work of Max Weber (1864–1920), the German sociologist whose ideas were formulated in contrast to both positivist and Marxist theoretical traditions. As Uyangoda notes, Weber’s sociological theories have significantly influenced a wide range of disciplines, including history, political science, economic history, religious studies, law, and

social policy (Uyangoda, 2017, p. 125). In his methodological writings—particularly in *Methodology of the Social Sciences*—Weber argues that the social sciences should be understood as “cultural sciences,” possessing methodologies distinct from those of the natural sciences (Uyangoda, 2017, p. 127).

Uyangoda further highlights Weber’s assertion that “human actions have subjective, actor-specific meanings that also have cultural significance” (Uyangoda, 2017, p.127). This observation underscores Weber’s multidisciplinary epistemological orientation: he consistently incorporates historical and cultural perspectives to interpret social action. Within this broader intellectual framework, Weber employs the concept of cultural consciousness as a means of understanding how cultural values shape social behavior.

Weber’s influential work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904) provides a key example of this approach. In the opening chapter, he compares European societies to explain why capitalism developed more rapidly in some regions than in others. His central argument is that religious reform—particularly within Protestant traditions—played a decisive role in shaping the cultural attitudes that facilitated the rise of capitalism. In contrast, Catholic societies did not cultivate the same cultural dispositions toward rational economic activity (Weber, 1985, pp. 35–46).

This analysis demonstrates Weber’s broader claim that cultural consciousness constitutes a major force behind human action, capable of shaping the ideological orientations and historical trajectories of entire societies. The Weberian perspective on cultural consciousness thus forms one component of the theoretical foundation of this study.

3. Discussion

Western epistemology and educational practices introduced new knowledge and perspectives to Sinhalese literary discourse. The impact of modern thought on Sinhalese literature was profound, reshaping the established literary traditions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. AMG Sirimanna (1985) discusses this transformation in his article, *The Western Influence on Modern Sinhalese Poetry*. Before Western influence, Sinhalese literary discourse was strongly shaped by Pali and Sanskrit linguistic traditions: prose drew on Pali conventions, while poetry adhered to Sanskrit models. This methodology represented an established, long-standing literary convention. The introduction of English education exposed students to Western literary traditions, encouraging them to adopt certain elements

and reshape the structures of Sinhalese literature. Examination syllabi from this period reveal these transformative influences (Sirimanna, 1985, pp. 159–163). By the 1940s, Sinhalese poets had become well acquainted with Romantic and Victorian literature, marking a period of remarkable engagement with world literary currents (Field, 2017, p. 70).

During the colonial period, Buddhist monks were often sponsored by the elite to write and edit literary works. A notable example is *Hansa Sandesaya* (Swan Messenger Poetry) by Rathmalane Dharmārāma Thero, published in 1902. In the preface, Dharmārāma notes that he was invited by Simon de Silva, the government translator, to produce the commentary. Such collaborations illustrate the engagement of colonial-era monks with the new intellectual elite, continuing the medieval custom of elite patronage of literary production, which had previously been provided by kings and queens. Medieval works like *Guththila Da Kawa* and *Kavyasekara Maha Kāvya* were similarly created through elite sponsorship; in the colonial period, this role was assumed by the new social elite.

The post-colonial period witnessed an expansion of exegetical works on classical Sinhalese literature. These works differed from their colonial predecessors in language, structure, and style, yet remained deeply rooted in cultural and religious heritage. For instance, Degammada Sumanajothi Thero's 1966 edition of *Theruwanaaalaa Kāvya* (Poetic Narrative of the Triple Gems) was dedicated to the great Sanga Nayaka of the Kandyan period and his contemporaries, emphasizing respect for the legacy of earlier Buddhist scholars. Such dedications highlight the continuity of cultural consciousness among post-colonial monks, who, while operating in a modern context, remained inspired by colonial-era intellectual heritage and maintained reverence for their predecessors.

Another characteristic of post-colonial monastic literary work was the adoption of simpler language and more systematic editorial structures. A notable example is the 1958 edition of *Sada Kiduru Da Kawa* (Narrative Poetry of the Sada Kiduru Jataka Story), edited by Makuluduwa Piyarathna Thero. In his preface, Piyarathna emphasizes his attempt to employ a simple style and systematic methodology (Piyarathna, 1958, p. xix). This edition also included an invited article by Ra.Tennakoon, a prominent poet and exegete, illustrating collaboration between monastic scholars and lay intellectuals.

The contribution of Buddhist monks to twentieth-century modern literary discourse has been less studied than their pre-modern contributions. Pre-modern

literary activity was closely linked to the national and religious revival of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Leaders of this movement, such as Ven. Sri Sumangala (1827–1911), played pivotal roles both nationally and internationally. The Vidyodaya and Vidyalkara monastic traditions fostered an academic culture that integrated national heritage with Western epistemology and practices, contributing to the development of modern Sinhalese literary culture (Gombrich & Obeyesekere, 1988; Amunugama, 1985, pp. 697–730).

Monastic institutions were central to twentieth-century intellectual life. Providing exegetical works on pre-modern literature remained a key scholarly activity, and some monks produced teaching-oriented texts for their students. Ananda W. P. Guruge (1984) details the founding of Vidyodaya Pirivena at Maligakanda, Colombo, in 1873 by Ven. Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala Nayaka Mahathera. This institution revived a system of education that encompassed not only Buddhist teachings but also history, philosophy, literature, and other subjects, facilitating engagement with international intellectual culture (Guruge, 1984, p. 351). Similarly, Vidyalkara Pirivena maintained close ties with the Indian intellectual tradition, fostering national and international scholarly networks (Hewawithanagamage, 2008, pp. 81–89; Uyangoda, 2011).

Among the monks seeking to contribute to modern literary discourse was Yakkaduwe Pannarama Thero, a radical representative of the Vidyalkara school. His 1943 work *Wana Katha* (The Story of the Jungle) adapted classical Sanskrit narratives from the *Panchatantra* and *Hitopadesa* for common Sinhalese readers. Using a simple prose-and-verse style, he incorporated his own insights and contextualized terms such as “Amathi” (Minister) with contemporary political meaning. This reinterpretation reflected his political and ideological radicalism and sharp criticism of contemporary monastic culture. And it clearly expressed the concept that the “common people” (It means in Sinhalese “Podu Janaya” and in this context says that the language and literary usages of them) was earnestly considered as a major concept arising among the new intellectual discourse in Vidyalkara monastic school. The political climate of 1930s–1940s Ceylon, with the rise of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (1935) and the Communist Party (1945), further contextualized this focus on the common people.

Four major trends shaped the rapid development of twentieth-century Sinhalese literature. First, Western influence encouraged literature to move beyond monastic ideology, creating an independent secular literary sphere. Second, this secularization generated a dialogue between historical religious and cultural thought and modern

experiential perspectives. Third, some monastic intellectuals engaged actively with modern literature, addressing secular and rational readers for the first time. Monastic schools, which began admitting lay students in the 1940s, increasingly required new texts to meet these demands. Fourth, post-colonial monastic publications, such as Kotahena Prachchakeerthee's *Sahithya Hā Samajaya* (Literature and Society), employed semi-modern approaches that combined exegetical tradition with contemporary literary criticism.

Most Sinhalese writers of this period were journalists or members of the press, with many poets and creative writers emerging from monastic or Hela traditions. Martin Wickramasinghe, though outside monastic networks, highlighted the cultural consciousness of the common people in his writings, applying psychoanalytic and anthropological methods to pre-modern literature. He emphasized the accessibility of Sinhalese *Jātaka* stories to common people, contrasting them with elite Sanskrit narratives (Wickramasinghe, 2024, pp. 73–77). In analyzing Rathmalane Dharmārāma Thero's exegetical works, Wickramasinghe notes how the monk preserved cultural roots through careful textual editing:

As a result of the expansion of monastic education, several successive generations of schools adhered to traditional norms. W. F. Gunawardhana did not belong to any of these schools. The critical approach he applied in his editions of Sinhalese classical poetry became authoritative through Cumarathunga. Although D. B. Jayatilaka was an independent critic on religion, literature, and culture, he remained within the norms of Ven. Dharmārāma's school (Wickramasinghe, 1962, p. 36).

Here, the term “norms” reflects the concept of cultural consciousness, illustrating how Dharmārāma Thero's intellectual legacy shaped colonial- and post-colonial monastic scholarship.

Another significant approach of post-colonial monks was the editing of classical texts with interpretive introductions that emphasized scholarly insight over purely exegetical aims. For instance, Henapitigedara Piyananda Thero's 1954 edition of *Kaha Kurulu Sandesha* (Yellow Bird Messenger Poetry) critiqued the selective canonization of texts for monastic examinations and sought to publish neglected works (Piyananda, 1954). Similarly, Tennakoon (1964) analyzed *messenger poetry* using the analogy of irrigation systems, distinguishing grand canonical works from minor texts, thus demonstrating a nuanced understanding of literary tradition.

Gatare Dhammapala further advanced Sinhalese literary studies by applying Western epistemology and methodology to the Polonnaru period. His work, *A Comparative Study of Sinhala Literature (Polonnaru Period)*, combined analysis of literary works with exploration of cultural, religious, and intellectual movements, illustrating the integration of modern academic approaches with the study of traditional literature (Dhammapala, n.d. p. xv). This represents a clear departure from purely exegetical scholarship, reflecting the evolution of Sinhalese literary discourse in the twentieth century.

4. Conclusion

This paper has examined how the concept of cultural consciousness is deeply embedded in the literary and linguistic debates of Sinhalese literature, particularly among Buddhist monks during the colonial and post-colonial periods in Sri Lanka. The study focused on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a remarkable period in which national and cultural awareness—especially among Buddhist communities—emerged prominently in the public sphere. Nationalist and leftist movements actively engaged the common people, and political and cultural struggles reached the peak of ideological contention in the country.

The introduction of British education in 1833 fostered a new English-educated middle class, which was strongly influenced by nationalist ideology and leftist thought from the 1930s onward, challenging the authority of the traditional elite. In this context, nineteenth-century critics such as James de Alwis, who was shaped by Anglican culture, were able to rediscover and engage with indigenous cultural roots. Using the Occidental epistemology imparted through missionary education, he applied this framework to examine pre-modern Sinhalese literary discourse.

Following him, W. F. Gunawardhana (1907) produced an extended critical introduction to *Guththila Kawya Warnana* (Commentary on the Guththila Poem), employing rhetorical theory—one of the major principles of classical Indian aesthetic epistemology. Both contributions significantly influenced the monastic tradition and the scholarly activities of Buddhist monks. In parallel, radical monks of the Vidyalkara monastic tradition, such as Yakkaduwe Pannarama Thero, employed colloquial styles and sarcasm to critique contemporary political positions and monastic bureaucracy, demonstrating the application of cultural consciousness to engage the common people.

The concept of cultural consciousness can be examined as a concept that explores how cultural behavior is shaping social wisdom and the various perspectives

of the intellectual discourse. As we have pointed out in the sub-section under the title theoretical approach, referring to Max Weber, the concept constitutes a major force behind human action, capable of shaping ideological orientations. The contributions of the monks to the Sinhalese literary discourse in both colonial and post-colonial periods are a big part of the human activities in the discourse. It has been shaping the ideology in literary and linguistic spheres for years, and it has been related to directing the concept of cultural consciousness. The contributions of the monks are considered an integral part of the Sinhala-Buddhist cultural world. The popular intellectual discourse in the country says “the heritage of the Sinhalese nation” is an organic sub-layer in literary and linguistic discourse in the country. Simultaneously, the concept of cultural consciousness has come to this discourse as an essential part of it. The concept is shaping literary and linguistic debates in Sinhalese literature, and it influences both pre-modern and modern intellectual practices among Buddhist monks.

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Chinthaka Ranasinha obtained his BA in Sinhala from the University of Colombo in 2003. In 2013, he was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship and pursued MPhil-level training at the Department of South Asian Studies, Cornell University. He subsequently obtained his MPhil from the University of Colombo and an MA in Linguistics from the University of Kelaniya. He began his professional career as a journalist, working for *Dinamina*, and *Silumina*, leading newspapers in Sinhala in Sri Lanka. Since 2009, he has been serving in the Department of Sinhala at the University of Kelaniya. In addition, he has contributed to several other universities in Sri Lanka in temporary and visiting academic positions. Ranasinha has published extensively in Sinhala and has been actively involved in diverse research projects, which he has presented both in Sri Lanka and internationally.