

The intellectual identities of Cumaratunga and Ra. Tennakoon

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This paper attempts to discuss the methods that were formulated to edit and interpret Sinhalese messenger poetries by Ra. Tennakoon (1899-1965) and Cumaratunga Munidasa (1887-1944). The methodology is to select a few texts of the two poets focusing on the theme and compare the texts considering several points. The points can be introduced as significant features in providing interpretations for Sinhalese messenger poetry. This is textual based research and the selected texts will be examined in the author's own perspectives and reveal the insights. Cumaratunga Munidasa and Ra. Tenakoon were classical instances for Sinhalese studies in 20th century Sri Lanka. They were members of Hela Hawula, an organization founded in 1941 to enrich and enhance the Sinhalese language and identity in their own philosophy and intellectual activities. Cumaratunga was founder and leader of the organization. Cumaratunga provided interpretation for five messenger poems and they are Peacock message (Mayura Sandesa), Pigeon message (Parawi Sandesa), Starling message (Salalihini Sandesa) and Parrot message (Gira Sandesa). Tennakoon selected Swan, (It means Hansa), Parrot (Gira), Cuckoo (Kowul), Starling (Salalihini), Pigeon (Parawi) and Rooster (Sawul) messengers. In this study two texts are particularly selected. The texts are Starling and Parrot messages. These texts are compared in relation to their exegetical approaches for the texts. Attention is paid to investigate how Cumaratunga and Tennakoon have formulated the law of the etymology and linguistic elements of the words and their meanings and how they have deployed the folklore, mythologies and various social and cultural concepts in their exegetical works. As persons who came from the same school, they had their own intellectual identities. Those identities are examined referring to their philological and other ways for interpretation. The author also explores this historical background and the exegetical methodology of Cumaratunga and Tennakoon.

Keywords: Cumaratunga, Ra. Tenakoon, Messenger poetry, Intellectual identities