

# **Lack of Representation of Women in Common Human Liberation: From Henry Jayasena's Play 'Kuveni'**

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According to Whitney Chadwick, modernist art recognises a woman's intimacy with nature, that is, femininity itself, through its innate mystique, unbridled sexuality, and destructive power. The best example of these qualities is Kuveni's story in Mahawanshaya. In 1962, Henry Jayasena wrote the play Kuveni, which was inspired by this story. In his explanation of the character of Kuveni, the dramatist Henry Jayasena once interpreted her "as an eternal woman of the world". Taking the above remark as its point of departure, this research aims to determine whether Kuveni represents the concept of "an eternal woman in this world" who emblematises women's traditional ideologies. It analyses whether Kuveni has been represented as a woman seeking sympathy; or as a re-interpretation of women's potential and its possibilities. During the time in which the drama was produced, there have been advanced feminist movements in Euro-American countries, the influence of which could not be seen in Sri Lanka. For instance, the ideas popularised by the feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir who examined the role a person's intervention can play in changing the power of history of divided sex and gender, along with Judith Butler's ideas on the performativity of gender identities, exerted a significant influence upon the contemporary society. In light of those perspectives, Jayasena's Kuveni can be recognised as a reflection of the patriarchal discourses. Thus, this study investigates whether it is possible to socialise the idea of the woman depicted in this play, which is derived from a local cultural story, as the eternal woman. Thus, this study deconstructs the idea of the woman portrayed in Henry Jayasena's 'Kuveni' in its attempt to achieve this objective of the study. Therefore, it will address the dearth in popular commentary on such cultural trends in Sri Lanka, bringing it into a more dynamic and academic level.

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