

A Study of the Cultural Identity of the Wahakotte Catholic Community

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Wahakotte is situated in the Matale district in the Central province. Approximately 95 % of its population are Catholic, with about 650 families belonging to the parish of St. Anthony's church. The three main feasts held by the church are marked by cultural assimilation, with the use of hewisi drums in the processions bearing religious relics of importance such as the ivory Crucifix and the statue of Our Lady. The style of Pasan singing in the Wahakotte region is of significance, because it is strongly influenced by traditional harvesting songs. During Lent, prose Pasan that consist of singing and chanting are performed in an ad libitum, or free tempo style that can be heard when the group of singers visit houses and later at St. Anthony's church. Pasan verses are also sung to express grief in situations such as death. They are transmitted from generation to generation in an oral tradition, but are now known only by a few families in the Wahakotte area at present. A compilation of Prose Pasan verses can be seen in the book called "Passion of the Christ" based on the Portuguese tradition in Konkani. Traditional Pasan singing in Wahakotte is very unique because the text goes back to the time of the Kandyan Kings with the melodies becoming indigenized over the last two centuries. Differences exist between the Pasan singing style of Wahakotte and those of other regions. These include variation in the melodies and the significant influence of Buddhist Pirith chanting as well as harvesting songs. This research study focuses on ten Pasan verses in order to highlight the uniqueness of the songs of Wahakotte.

Keywords: *Pasan* chanting, Lent season, St. Anthony's Church, "Hewisi" influence.